

News**letter**

Summer 2007

vol. 10, issue 3



Sunflower Chapter
of the American
Historical Society
of Germans
from Russia



International convention

An unusual and special event for Hays

by Judy Hoffman

PERHAPS THIS WAS A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME experience. Only time will tell--but the entire population of Ellis County does not surpass, and does not even equal, the population of any previous city that has hosted an international convention for the AHSGR. Yet for those 649 people in attendance, the convention held in Hays during the week of June 10 will be one to remember.

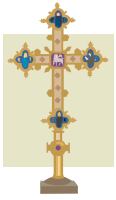
Records were broken as the attendance numbers went up each day. The final registration total surpassed those for each of the last two conventions.

Most impressive were the guest speakers from Russia, Argentina, and Germany. They shared family stories of

(continued on p. 3)

(Left) Father Clemens Werth SJ, brother of Archbishop Joseph Werth SJ, came from Novosibirsk to speak on the German Catholics of today's Russia. (Below) The official logo stating the convention's theme was designed by Sunflower Chapter members Judy Hoffman and Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA.





Lasset uns beten

On June 17, this prayer ended the international convention's ecumenical prayer service:

Our Father in heaven, through Jesus Christ your Son, you have given us everything that

is good. When our people were in sorrow, you comforted them. When they were lost

and confused, you guided them. When they needed food, water, clothing and shelter, you provided them with the means to obtain these things. May we always remember what one German mother taught her children while pointing to the door of their home: "Child, without God you cannot even cross that threshold." This we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Well, what can I say but *thank you!* Our Sunflower Chapter really pulled through in helping to make the 38th international convention a *huge* success. Many of you were able to help with the set-up, hospitality room, genealogy room, book store, computer room, registration, and the Wednesday night skit. All of this was very much appreciated, and the planning committee has heard many favorable comments that this was the best convention in years! Through this year of planning and advertising we have seen our membership grow to a total of 114! Please continue to get the word out that we are an organization intent on preserving our heritage. One thing, of many, that was mentioned at the convention was how much the German language was used during the week.

On Sunday, August 5, we will have our annual picnic starting with a social at 12:00 p.m. and lunch being served at 12:30 p.m. This is usually a time for our chapter members to get together with no organized meeting to enjoy the afternoon eating, playing cards, or spending time doing genealogy. I will bring a lot of my books to help people work on their own genealogies. I will also talk about computer software for those interested in getting started using their own computers, and I will help fill out family charts for anyone who asks. At this meeting we also would like for you to bring your family,

jokes, sayings, and anecdotes to share with the group. We usually have no formal program at the picnic, but this time we think it would be fun to hear those old-time stories about the *nushnick*, bootlegging, speaking German, and living and working on the family farm, to name just a few ideas. Our menu this year will consist of sloppy joes, grilled hot dogs, and all the trimmings. Please e-mail me or call me at 625-7356 (work) or home 625-6638 to RSVP for this meal!

I have appointed Joseph Werth, Leona Pfeifer, and Dolores Pfannenstiel to be the nominating committee for our next president and vice-president. After those willing to serve as your next officers have been determined, their names will be in the fall newsletter. A chapter vote will be held at the annual fall banquet.

September is not too far off, and our Annual Sunflower Chapter VFW Breakfast will be on Sunday, September 9. Breakfast tickets will be available at the picnic for you to check out and sell. It is through fund-raisers that we are able to sponsor our picnic and defray the cost of our newsletter without raising our local dues. And speaking of our newsletter letter, did you notice that the last issue was in color? Thanks to Marvin Rack, member and owner of Northwestern Printers, who has offered to print our newsletter for one year in color! Next time you see Marvin, please be sure to say thank you!

STRANGE BUT TRUE....

This story concerns three Sisters of St. Agnes, all of them native Kansans of Volga German heritage.

Back in the early 1970s, Sister Lambertine Gerber fell ill with terminal cancer in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Every day her niece, Sister Mary Catherine Younger, and her niece's good friend, Sister Ronald Meis, visited Sister Lambertine on her sickbed. Winter turned into spring and spring turned into summer, and the visits never stopped until the day Sister Lambertine died.

The Sunday after the funeral, Sisters Mary Catherine and Ronald cooked dinner as usual for the sisters at St. Mary's Springs High School, then retired to their respective rooms to spend the afternoon writing letters. The minute Sister Ronald entered her room, however, she noticed the strong scent of Avon Topaz Hand Lotion filling the room--Sister Lambertine's favorite. She wondered: was she imagining things? Without saying why, she called out for Sister Mary Catherine, who came to her room and immediately noticed the same scent. Because neither sister used Avon Topaz--and no other sisters had rooms in that part of the three-story building--the pair knew that Sister Lambertine was asking for their prayers. So they rushed to chapel to pray, and when they returned to their rooms an hour later, the scent was gone.

I think we will have some exciting programs at meetings this coming year, but if there is something that you would like to see or a speaker you would like to suggest, please let us know. I encourage all of you to come to all the meetings and to bring along someone new each time. We are always looking for new members. See you August 5 in Munjor!

--Kevin Rupp

OVERHEARD

--Viola Depperschmidt remembers hearing this story about the building of the Pfeifer church. It seems that one of the parishioners with a wagonload of stone at the construction site had trouble getting his mule to move. So the farmer started directing some pretty colorful language at his beast. When the parish priest overheard this, he reprimanded the man, saying, "Don't

talk like that. It was a mule that took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem." The farmer responded, "Nuh-jah, and if they'd taken *this* mule, they'd still be on the road!"

--Celly Schumacher received an unexpected offer when he took Isabel Kessler of Argentina on a little post-convention tour of Liebenthal. During a lively half-German, half-English conversation that included Celly,

Isabel, one of the planners for next year's convention in Casper, and the town postmistress, the latter quipped, "Celly, you're a widower and I'm a widow, so fill the car with gas, get a pocketful of *Geld*, and all us interpreters can head to Casper, telling jokes all the way up and down I-80!"

Wonders what an AHSGR membership can do for a guy!

International convention

(continued from p. 1)

Germans who'd settled in Russia, only to leave to escape the persecution, exile to Siberia, and tremendous loss of life that occurred the first half of the twentieth century. We learned how our ancestors braved peril, dangerous journeys, disease, and discovery by authorities as they sought freedom.

The genealogy workshops were excellent because they stressed the importance of preserving our family histories *now*, before it is too late. Isabel Kessler, Argentina, said, "People who forget their culture forget their identity." Alex Herzog, who migrated from Ukraine to Hays in 1953, urged families to write their stories, not just trace their family trees. He said, "If you can talk, you can tell your story. You'll be glad you did."

At Welcome Night ceremonies, Leona (Wasinger) Pfeifer comprised a skit to describe the establishment of the first settlements of Germans from Russia in Ellis and Rush Counties. It was a touching and nostalgic walk back into history as each town's founding was briefly described while current residents of Schoenchen, Liebenthal, Catherine, Victoria, Munjor, and Pfeifer came forward, singing German songs and dressed as our great-grandparents had appeared. The most solemn moment was the reenactment of a funeral among the early settlers, complete with a procession with a small wooden casket and the music and traditions of German immigrants from Russia. Village Night activities included Norma (Reichert) Pipkin's "Immigrant Woman" impersonation, which quickly produced a run on the sale of her DVD of the same title.

Local humor and talent abounded all week. Audiences delighted in the jokes that Celly Schumacher and Larry Werth recounted. Leonard Schoenberger, who emceed some events, wasn't shy on humorous anecdotes and puns, either. Kevin Rupp seemed to be everywhere, lending a helping hand and answering questions. His publicity efforts for the convention were outstanding.

As far as music went, a wealth of local talent was showcased, including the instrumental music of Joe Erbert, Wes Windholz, and LeRoy Herrmann. Larry Weigel Jr. had the hall packed to hear his music, his jokes, and his suggestions on how to interest youngsters in their family history. There were barbershop quartets, Hochzeit music, Galen Schmidtberger with his variety of instruments and German songs, and the St. Fidelis Church Choir from Victoria.



Chapter members from Ellis and Rush Counties reenact a traditional Volga German funeral in Leona Pfeifer's Welcome Night skit.

Unique to any convention is the table decor for the banquet dinner. Again showcasing the ingenuity of Sunflower Chapter members were Wilma and Jerry Braun and Betty Pfannenstiel, whose decorations were the talk at every table. They had made copies of old photographs and displayed them in wooden frames made by Jerry and painted and decorated by Wilma and Betty. Their work was truly a stroke of genius.

Lots of human interest stories emerged during the days of the convention. They are too numerous to mention, but if you'd like a daily report on the convention, log onto www.volgagerman.net, and click onto "Convention News and Photos."



CONVENTION IMPRESSIONS from friends everywhere

FAVORITE CONVENTION MOMENT . . .

Meeting Liz Weigel, sister of Larry Weigel. Liz is my classmate from Marian High, class of 1972. Also learning about Turkey Red winter wheat. What a story! (*Norma Pipkin, Antonino, KS*)

Hearing who won the first place in the storytelling contest. (*Karen Penner, Newton, KS*)

Tom Haas conversing intently with Mrs. Kessler in all the old German stuff with low Deutsch intensity. (*Frank Jacobs, Topeka, KS*)

Arriving at Hays after driving through a good part of Kansas. (*Jerry C. Sitzman, Undisclosed Location*)

Meeting such wonderful people, especially on the church tours. (*Anna Dalhaimer Bartkowski, Chandler, AZ*)

Meeting many people with whom I had corresponded by e-mail. (*Rosemary Larson, Mendota Heights, MN*)

Sitting at the village table surrounded by potential "relatives"--even if too dumbfounded to speak. (*Cara Foster, Flagstaff, AZ*)

MOST INTERESTING CONVENTION SOUVENIR . . .

My husband purchased one of the table decorations at the banquet. I had found that the woman in the photo was my grandma Agatha Wasinger's sister, Lizzy (Wasinger) Dechant. It is a picture of the Dechant threshing crew and my great grandfather, John H.

Wasinger, is in the photo. Quite a find for me. (*Norma Pipkin, Antonino, KS*)

AHSGR white t-shirt. (*Anna Dalhaimer Bartkowski, Chandler, AZ*)

A toss-up between the wheat treats and the soybean candies given away as samples. (*Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA, Hays, KS*)

My great-grandfather Paul Ubert's portrait from my cousin Sheila by way of cousin Gary--or the family book compiled and signed by cousin Sean--or the little limestone "fencepost" business card holders from the Ellis County Historical Society. (*Cara Foster, Flagstaff, AZ*)

MOST PLEASANT CONVENTION SURPRISE . . .

Meeting a Hagen cousin from Oregon, whom I had just discovered within the past few months through AHSGR. (*Karen Penner, Newton, KS*)

Martha Issinghoff's Russian family videos. (*Frank Jacobs, Topeka, KS*)

Excellent response to the Google Earth satellite image display of GR villages. (*Jerry C. Sitzman, Undisclosed Location*)

Enjoying the wind blowing over the grass in Kansas. (*Anna Dalhaimer Bartkowski, Chandler, AZ*)

To see some of my cousins show up. (*Rosemary Larson, Mendota Heights, MN*)

Meeting Gary and additional cousins who knew of and even remembered the Milwaukee Uberts. (*Cara Foster, Flagstaff, AZ*)

WISH FINALLY FULFILLED & NEW WISH TO TAKE ITS PLACE. . .

--Attended an AHSGR convention
--Hope to attend another one! (*Norma Pipkin, Antonino, KS*)

--To find a cousin at the convention.
--To find a new connection to our villages--or another relative. (*Karen Penner, Newton, KS*)

--I got to plug DNA research from the podium.
--That the Kloberdanzes have full recovery and are back involved in AHSGR business. They are missed. (*Frank Jacobs, Topeka, KS*)

--Making it to the 2007 convention.
--A document containing a comprehensive description of how one can access the Russian archives without actually going to Russia. (*Jerry C. Sitzman, Undisclosed Location*)

--A contact name for my Herzog side of the family!
--Learn Russian and travel to Russia. (*Anna Dalhaimer Bartkowski, Chandler, AZ*)

--Visiting the Peter Brack house in Olmitz, KS. Visiting the house in Otis where my Wilhelm grandparents had lived c. 1935-50. They had come from Schoenfeld, Russia, to Otis area in January 1908. Visiting their graves west of Otis. Seeing old AHSGR convention friends from previous conventions. That is always a lot of fun.

--No new wishes. (*Laurin Wilhelm, San Antonio, TX*)

--An AHSGR convention on my home turf.

--To have a book translated of the activities in the Volga area for the period about 1797 to 1845. (*Rosemary Larson, Mendota Heights, MN*)

--To know my family.
--To never forget again. (*Cara Foster, Flagstaff, AZ*)

REMEMBER THE PRICE OF ADMISSION

to our chapter picnic on Aug. 5

A family story from days gone by. Serious, funny, short, long--it doesn't matter. If it's good enough to hold a warm place in your heart, it's good enough for all of *unsere Leute* to hear!



This is fourth in a series of unedited reprints. The column "Liebenthal Locals" appeared in the LaCrosse Republican intermittently throughout the early 1900s.

THE LACROSSE REPUBLICAN October 1, 1914

Joseph E. Herrman traded his 80-acre timber farm west of Liebenthal for the Peter Weber farm south of town. Joe paid \$5,000 to boot. He considered his farm worth \$3,500 which makes his new place cost \$8,500. The new place is well worth the price as there are about \$4,000 worth of improvements on it. Joe is busy now hauling his farm machinery to his new location.

John Depperschmidt has purchased a Ford automobile. His son John does the driving.

John Stanley is about to finish threshing on the Zink farm.

Mary Urban will teach in district No. 26, She will take the examination in LaCrosse this month.

Jacob Herrman is nearly through threshing.

Sunday services Oct. 4 will be, High Mass at 7 a.m., Vespers at 4 p.m. This is the day set by Pope Benedict 15 and Pres. Wilson for praying for peace between the European nations who are engaged in a bloody war.

The campaign between the Democrats and Republicans will soon be on.

We note that C.E. Legleiter is our democratic candidate for twp. trustee.

We understand that Mike Shaffer will not run this year for trustee. Mike has made us a fine assessor.

I. Irish was in town on business Sunday.

Jacob Weber and his wife were here from Victoria Sunday.

We here that Mrs. Boltus Schuckman, formerly a resident here, is dead. She had many friends here.

Father Wenzel, of Schoenchen, visited a few days here with Father Stollenwerk.

Most of the farmers will complete their seeding this week.

C.P. Shaffer will leave for Omaha Sunday. His father, John Shaffer of Spearville, will accompany him.

What does it mean to you to be a German from Russia?

By Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA

WHEN FATHER ANTHONY CORCORAN SJ ended his convention address with this question, he made it clear that he was passing along the same question that Archbishop Joseph Werth himself would have asked had he been able to keep his convention speaking engagement. Unfortunately, at the last minute the archbishop's doctor in Novosibirsk had advised him not to strain his heart by making the long, strenuous trip to Kansas. In his place, therefore, the archbishop sent his vicar, Father Anthony, and his brother, Father Clemens Werth SJ.

Father Anthony, an American missionary in Russia since 1997, spoke first. He named four traits common to those Germans in Russia who had tried to keep their German culture alive: (1) strong family bonds that reach out to the entire extended family; (2) an awareness of belonging to a particular geographic locality, yet *not* belonging; (3) continued use of a German dialect; and (4) deep religious faith, whether Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, or Mennonite.

Father Anthony then showed a videotaped interview he once conducted with a German Russian grandmother born in the Saratov area but living today in the Siberian city of Nizhny Tagil. In the old woman's recounting of major incidents in her life, all four traits named by Father Anthony indeed were evident.

Next came Father Clemens' part of the presentation. Speaking in the English he learned while studying
(continued on back page)

THE ELLIS COUNTY NEWS October 14, 1910

Although German-speaking people have been a considerable element in Kansas since territorial days, there has rarely if ever been a German-speaking nominee on any state ticket until B.M. Dreiling was nominated for state treasurer this year. Among the hundreds of district judges who have sat in this state, probably only two have been able to understand and speak German. They are both on the bench now—Judge Fischer of Kansas City, and Judge Ruppenthal of this district. Both are democrats.

Presented courtesy of the
ELLIS COUNTY HISTORICAL
SOCIETY MUSEUM,
100 W. 7th, Hays, Kansas



Summer Hours:
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
Tuesday through Friday. 1 to 5 p.m., Saturday.

Admission: Adults, \$3. Children 3-12, \$1.

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What does it mean?

(continued from p. 5)

in the United States a few years ago, Father Clemens traced these significant events in the history of Russia's German Catholics:

- 1848 A diocese was formed in the city of Saratov.
- 1853 A seminary opened in Saratov.
- 1913 The diocese included 100 parishes and 179 priests.
- 1920s Tens of thousands died of hunger; thousands left Russia.
- 1934 The government closed all church schools and began other forms of religious oppression.
- 1930s As a result of hunger, imprisonment, and outright execution, 400,000-500,000 died.

1940s With Russia's entry into WWII, all citizens of German heritage--Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Mennonite--were exiled to camps in Siberia and Kazakstan.

1955 A visit by West Germany's Conrad Adenauer resulted in gradually improving conditions for the exiles.

1980s About 2 million Soviet citizens identified themselves as German for government records.

Today About 600,000 Germans remain in Russia.

Father Clemens concluded by pointing out that *everyone* suffered in the Soviet Union, not just the Germans, and today's Germans in Russia consider their ethnic Russian neighbors to be their friends, not their enemies.



SOCIAL...12:00
PICNIC...12:30

Sloppy joes and grilled hot dogs will be on the menu for our annual summer picnic. Please RSVP Kevin at 625-7356 (work) or 625-6638 (home), then come on out to Munjor's parish hall.

Plan to pick up your annual VFW Sunday breakfast fund-raiser tickets at this meeting. Also bring along a few family stories from days gone by. Our program chairs will be leading you in a storytelling session, and if you don't talk, they just might make you sing--*ins Deutsch!*

SUNFLOWER CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

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Inside *this newsletter*

- 1...2007 AHSGR Convention Notes
- 2...Lasset uns beten...President's Message...Strange But True
- 3...Overheard
- 4...Convention Impressions
- 5...Liebenthal Locals, 1914...Ellis County News, 1910...Convention Talks by Fathers Anthony Corcoran and Clemens Werth
- 6...Next Meeting

**OUR MEETINGS FOR THE REST OF 2007
ARE SET FOR AUG. 5, SEPT. 30, AND DEC. 9**