

# Newsletter

Fall 2005



Sunflower Chapter  
of the American  
Historical Society  
of Germans  
from Russia

## Bitte, sprechen Sie Deutsch?

by Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA

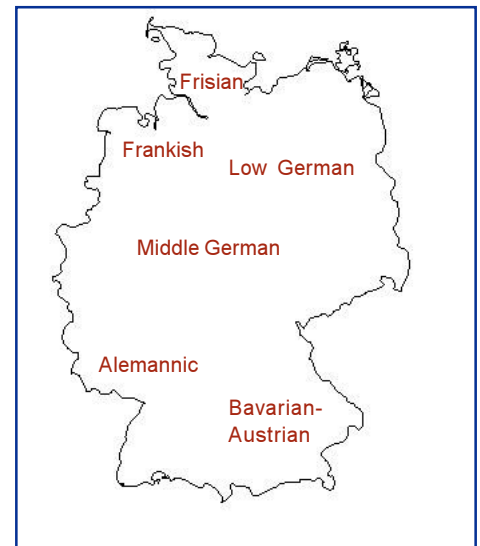
**T**HE QUESTION, "DO YOU SPEAK GERMAN?" can have many possible answers, Leona Pfeifer told us during her presentation on German dialects at the meeting June 4. Therefore, no one ever needs to think that speaking a dialect is the same thing as speaking a poor or impure variety of German. The Oxford Desk Dictionary calls a dialect "a regional form of speech." Each different German dialect is attached to a particular region of Germany and each has a correctness and pureness all its own.

Leona's explanation reminded me of an argument I once had with a Wisconsin native, who insisted I was mispronouncing the word *February*; she pronounced the first "r" in the word and I didn't. When I finally checked a dictionary, I learned that both pronunciations are considered correct, but different regions of the country tend to favor one pronunciation over the other. So neither of us was wrong in that argument. By growing up in different places, each of us had learned a different *correct* pronunciation.

To illustrate the origins of the various German dialects, Leona showed us a map of the unified Germany of today. She pointed out that Germany did not exist as a unified nation until 1871 when Bismarck and Wilhelm I of Prussia fought three wars to unite Germany. Before 1871 were various principalities ruled by kings and princes. Each was a little like one of the thirteen English colonies that existed in North America prior to *their* unification into the United States. In pre-unified Germany, each royal dictated which religion his subjects would follow, which resulted in a concentration of Catholics in the states of Bavaria, the North Rhein, Westpfalz, and Hesse. Religions prevalent in various parts of Germany today still reflect these earlier religious divisions.

The Low German dialects come from Northern Germany, where the land is generally flat and at a low elevation. Middle German dialects are spoken in Central Germany, and Bavarian-Austrian dialects, in mountainous Southern Germany. What today is called Standard High German is the form of German that is taught in the nation's schools and is used in all its media. However, Leona added, in recent years a growing desire among Germans to preserve their traditional dialects has led to a new movement to teach them again in the schools. Also, she noted, when she, Kevin Rupp, and Ed Pfannenstiel visited Cologne, Germany, some years ago, their hosts adjusted easily to their Ellis County German dialect. The Germans understood their American guests

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According to [www.About.com](http://www.About.com)., there are six main branches in the family tree of German dialects. Our local Swabian and Alsatian dialects belong to the Alemannic branch.

## Next Meeting

**SOCIAL/GENEALOGY TABLE...12:00**  
**FUND-RAISING DINNER...12:30**  
**MEETING...1:30**  
**PROGRAM...2:00**

For just \$8 a plate, a German-style banquet awaits you: turkey and dressing, meatballs, mashed potatoes, green bean dumpling soup, homemade dinner rolls, salad, and dessert. Please RSVP by Wednesday at 625-6441 (Betty) or 625-6638 (Kevin).

On the program is a documentary by the same people who brought us "Schmeckfest" and "Prairie Crosses, Prairie Voices." This one, "A Soulful Sound: Music of the Germans from Russia," blends expert commentary with fine musical performances.

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## Kevin Rupp's Genealogy Update

Here are a few notes to let you know what has become available in the genealogy department. Rosemary Larson has just completed the translation of the 1834 Kamenka census, and the book is now available for sale. I have begun working on the 1857 Luzern census and should have it done by the time of our upcoming chapter meeting. The 1857 Zug and Obermunjour censuses will be next. We are told that Igor Pleve's third book in the first settlers series will be out in time for Christmas.

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I would like to thank all those who helped with the breakfast in September, our chapter made over \$1,100, our best fund-raiser yet!

The Round-Up in Topeka at the beginning of October was a nice time to see many friends who are active in their chapters and genealogical research. Mark your calendars now for the third Saturday in October of 2006, when our chapter will host the Kansas Round-Up. We will need as many of you as possible to help with this *big* project.

Our second fund-raiser for the year is coming up on October 23--yep, this coming Saturday. The ladies will prepare our annual dinner, and you are in for a special treat this year: your president is making the chicken green bean dumpling soup! So you don't want to miss out on seeing if I can make it just like Grandma did! Tickets are \$8 a person. We do need you to RSVP no later than Wednesday, October 19. You can call Betty Pfannenstiel at 625-6441 or me at work, 625-7356, or at home, 625-6638.

I have not had too many people wanting to work on genealogy at our meetings. If this is something that you want to continue, please let me know.

Finally, please remember that if it's October, it's time to renew your dues for the new year. Make checks for \$55 payable to the Sunflower Chapter and bring them to our meeting on Saturday. Thanks!

--Kevin Rupp

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perfectly and when asked a question in a dialect, answered in that same dialect.

As we all know, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Russia was settled by Russians from all over Germany. Unlike what we previously thought, it did not happen that entire German villages relocated in Russia. This explains in part why pronunciation differences exist to this day among the descendants of Volga German immigrants living in Ellis and Rush Counties.

To illustrate some of these differences, Leona listed the different ways in which Ellis County Germans say, "I have eaten":

Munjor: *Ich hun gesse.*

Pfeifer: *Ich hen gesse.*

Victoria: *Ich han gesse.*

Catherine: *Ich hab gesse.*

She also illustrated the ways in which we blend German with English in such expressions as these:

*Ich hun getalkt.*

*Der war die Kar.*

We American descendants of Volga German immigrants are not unique with this habit, however. Leona noticed during a trip overseas that today's Germans no longer call a plane ticket a *Flugkarte*; now they call it a *Flugticket*.

Along with pronunciation differences among Ellis County Volga Germans are differences in appearance and temperament, too. These differences reach back to the original parts of Germany where our ancestors came from. For example, tall, blonde, blue-eyed people more likely have roots in Prussia or some other North German state. Darker types have roots in Bavaria or some other South German state. The ones who like everything done in an almost lockstep fashion have the typical Northern temperament. The more easygoing types have a Southern one.

Leona concluded her talk by sharing a few recent newspaper headlines. One declared, "Low German dialect gets its revival;" the story told of new efforts in Washington County, Kansas, to keep their German dialect alive. Another headline read, "Irish language enjoys renaissance at Notre Dame." Sadly, she said, only a few people in this part of Kansas still speak in a Volga German dialect brought here from Russia. She predicts that in ten years our dialects will vanish if we do not make a special effort to preserve them.

## HOW'S YOUR GERMAN?

These are expressions the children of Edmund and Amelia Meis remember hearing from their parents as they were growing up in the 1940s and 1950s. How many can you translate?

*Geh, wasch dei Haend!*

*Knee dich in die Eck.*

*Hal dei Maul.*

*Ich kann dich nicht hoere. Bet bische lauter.*

*Richt die Disch.*

*Geh naus und spiel.*

*Des Zeit fuer Wasche.*

*Kids, Zeit fuer Moelche.*

*Des ist ein schoenes Pferdye.*

*Komm mir lege uns fuer Schlafe.*

*Der schlaft immer noch.*

*Geh wech. Lasst mich zu Friede.*

## Tribute to Lawrence Weigel from his son

Part One

*When Lawrence Weigel passed away in Hays on June 19, we all knew that a giant had parted from our midst. Ironically, his son Larry had just completed a biography of his dad that was to be a Father's Day gift. To join Larry in paying tribute to a man who did so much to keep alive our Volga German language, music, and folklore, we will publish Larry's biography in installments for the next few issues of this newsletter.*

**M**YDAD, LAWRENCE A. WEIGEL, is the son of Albert J. Weigel and Gertrude (Kuhn) Weigel. He came into this world on October 26, 1916, in a farmhouse north of Hays, Kansas. His father had died October 21, 1918 during the influenza epidemic, when my dad was only one year old. The 1918 flu epidemic had spread throughout Kansas from Fort Riley and killed more than 500,000 Americans and 20 million people worldwide. Albert, the dad he never knew--and the grandpa I never knew--was born in Victoria, Kansas on October 13, 1891. Grandpa Albert had married Gertrude Kuhn on January 7, 1913, and was employed by Weber and company, a lumber and coal retailer in Victoria.

Dad gave me four original letters written by his dad, my Grandpa Albert, to Grandpa's big brother, John Weigel. My Great Uncle John lived in Salina, Kansas, at the time. In March of 1912, Grandpa Albert was dating Grandma Gertrude. He had this to say about her in his letter to John: "Believe me kid, I have a damn nice gal on the string just now. She'd go to hell with me if I asked her. Would like to come home, but the old gal says she could not do without me from Saturday night until Monday

morning. I only get to see her twice a day and three times on Sunday. So you see, you can't blame me if she objects to me leaving her for that length of time. I have traveled this wide world over 50,000 miles or more, but such a damn nice girl, I have never met before. She is the beauty of the town. I am as ever, your brother, Albert J. Weigel. Write soon."

He wrote another letter to John in September of 1918 and expressed worry about their brother Charlie. World War I was underway, and family members were being drafted into the army. Grandpa Albert said in his letter to brother John, "Charlie filled out his papers Monday, and from what the local board here says there is very little show for exemption for either one of the boys. Pa and Ma are turning gray fast, just worrying and worrying if Charlie doesn't get an exemption. The folks will just be sick and worrying. Well, I have not much time, this being Saturday, so will close hoping one of the boys will get an exemption. Your bro. and family, A.J. Weigel."

And finally, in the last letter dated October 7, 1918, just fourteen days before he died, he told his brother John, "Our little son Lawrence had an operation similar to the one your

Alvin had, and Gertrude is to have an operation next week, and a serious one at that, so I think I will not come to Salina until later on. I remain your Bro. and family, A.J. Weigel." He did not mention that he was sick with influenza. Maybe the illness was just starting to progress when he wrote this last letter. Two weeks later he died. What an awful time that must have been for my Grandma Gertrude. Dad and his sister Leona were too young to understand what was happening, but the effects of their dad's sudden passing would last a lifetime.

My Grandma Gertrude had to be devastated. She and Albert spent only five short years together. Now she was left with no income and two small children. So Dad, his sister Leona, and my grandmother moved in with my great grandfather, Nicholas Kuhn, who lived in Victoria. As I look back to my childhood, I remember that Grandma Gertrude seldom smiled. I don't think she ever recovered from this tragic event in her life.

--TO BE CONTINUED

At the Kansas Round-Up held in Topeka on October 1, Rosemary Larson and Martha Issinghoff peruse Russian census records made available to attendants.



## NATIONAL CONVENTION NOTES

There is good news to report on Sunflower Chapter achievements of the past year. At the national AHSGR convention in August, we again were recognized for our record in gaining early membership renewals. Please remember to bring your 2006 dues of \$55 to the October meeting. Make checks payable to the Sunflower Chapter.

We also won an award for outstanding efforts in attracting new members to a chapter of our size. Please consider 2006 gift memberships for your nearest and dearest.

Finally, we were recognized for our financial support of AHSGR's Bridge Building campaign. It is only through our annual fund-raising efforts that we can continue to support national projects. Please call Betty at 625-6441 or Kevin at 625-6638 to reserve your tickets for the German dinner this Saturday.

## OVERHEARD

This story, alleged to be true, was overheard in a conversation at our last chapter meeting. It seems that two men from Liebenthal once visited the wake of a mutual friend who had died in LaCrosse. Said one to the other, "He looks pretty good," to which the other replied, "Nuh, yah, he *should* look good. He just got out of the hospital."

## SUNFLOWER CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

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