

Newsletter

Fall 2007

vol. 10, issue 4



Sunflower Chapter
of the American
Historical Society
of Germans
from Russia

Summer picnic lively and well attended



Leonard Schoenberger, shown here attending the closing banquet of June's AHSGR convention, shared one of his favorite family stories at the chapter's summer picnic.

by Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA

THE SPIRIT OF OUR SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION remained in evidence among the many new faces seen at our annual summer picnic on August 5. Among the special guests accompanying Sunflower Chapter members were Kate Fisher from Arizona and Verna (Weigel) Michellich from nearby WaKeeney.

While the food was great as ever, the moment everyone waited for was when Bernie Schumacher announced the beginning of the storytelling session. LeRoy Herrman got the ball rolling with a recollection that involved him and about 25 of his closest boyhood pals at an ol' swimming hole one fine summer's day in Liebenthal.

Soon after, Robert Schumacher was chiming in with a tall tale about an Ellis County farmer and a Texas farmer comparing notes at a farmers' convention. Then Celly Schumacher reminisced about how castor oil helped him develop an excellent school attendance record when he was young. Next came a funny truancy story that Leonard Schoenberger told on his younger brother Alvin who, as fate would have it, grew up to become a college man. Betty Leiker followed with a string of reminiscences related to growing up in Antonino.

So do you want to know any of these funny stories, just in case you missed hearing them firsthand at the picnic? You can always ask for encore performances from LeRoy, Robert, Celly, Leonard, or Betty the next time you see them. Or you can start watching for their stories in this newsletter over the course of the coming year. For LeRoy's story, see "Overheard" on page 3.



**NEW LOCATION
for meetings!
Antonino Parish Hall**

**Next
MEETING**

Sept. 30

Our annual German banquet will have many of your homemade favorites: pork ribs, brats, mashed potatoes, gravy, dumplings with sauerkraut, dumplings with *schwartzbeeren*, fresh veggies, jello salad, and banana splits for dessert. Banquet tickets are \$8 for adults and \$5 for kids. To RSVP, please call Kevin by Sept. 24 at 625-7536 or 625-5638.

Plan to be entertained by the music of Joe Ebert and Wes Windholz, while our program emcees revive memories of

cherished Volga German wedding customs. We will also conduct a drawing for several great prizes.

To get to the parish hall in Antonino, take US-183 south from Hays for 5.6 miles, then turn west onto Antonino Road and drive another 3.9 miles. Once you get to Antonino, you'll see the church on your left.

**SOCIAL...12:00
BANQUET...12:30
PROGRAM...1:30**

TO BE DECIDED
BY THE PEOPLE . . .

wonders of Kansas!

KANSAS SAMPLER FOUNDATION ®

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE. Deadline is December 31, and ballots are available at any of the 24 nominated attractions or online at www.8wonders.org. Only one entry per person is allowed, and every ballot must contain eight selections. Please remember to include in your choices St. Fidelis Catholic Church in Victoria, the only site with a connection to *unsere Leute*. Other nominees include Greensburg's Big Well, Abilene's Brookville Hotel, Abilene's Eisenhower Library and Museum, Lucas' Garden of Eden, Hutchinson's Cosmosphere, Hutchinson's Underground Salt Museum, Republic County's Pawnee Indian Museum, Chase County's Flint Hills and Tallgrass Prairie, Barber County's Gypsum Hills, Pawnee County's Fort Larned, and St. Mary's Catholic Church in Benedict.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As I write my last president's message the air has chilled and it is raining, sure signs that the seasons are ready to change. Something I'm looking forward to! Something I'm not really looking forward to is the end of my term as president of the Sunflower Chapter.

I have really enjoyed my six years as your president, and I know I could not have done it without the help and support of a fantastic board: Betty Leiker, Elmer Dreher, Judy Hoffman, Leon Wolf, Shirley Brungardt, LeRoy Herrman, Bernie Schumacher, Dolores Pfannenstiel, Sr. Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA, Leona Pfeifer, and Betty Pfannenstiel. These people have been a tremendous asset to the growth of our chapter, which now is about 114 members.

In fact, we have grown so much it is time to change our location. We will be having our next meeting, Sunday, September 30, at the Antonino church hall, which is located in the basement of the church building. You need to enter on the south side of the church, or just follow the crowd! We hope this new home will provide the larger space that we are so desperately needing in order to carry out more activities and, of course, grow comfortably.



Our next meeting will include our annual fund-raising

German banquet and a program that I'm sure will give your vocal chords and dancing shoes a work-out. Remember those wonderful old *Hochzeit* traditions? We are going to recall some of them in a way I'm sure you will enjoy. Please be sure to RSVP no later than Monday, September 24, so that the ladies will know how much to cook. Call me at 625-7356 or at 625-6638. The meal, as always, will be excellent!

I want to also remind you that at this meeting you will have the chance to renew your membership for 2008. We received an award from headquarters again this past year for early renewals. Let's try to keep this up.

The nominating committee presented this slate of nominees to the chapter board of directors at the September board meeting: Joseph Werth, President; Leonard Schoenberger, Vice-President; and Shirley Brungardt, Historian. Leona Pfeifer will present this slate at our September 30 meeting for your approval. The new officers will be installed, and then the new president will close the meeting.

Mark your calendars for the 2008 International Joint AHSGR/GRHS Convention to be held in Casper, Wyoming on July 28 – August 3. (GRHS stands for German Russian Historical Society, an organization with goals similar to the AHSGR's.) More information can be found on the convention website at www.germansfromrussia.net.

--Kevin Rupp

THE EASY WAY

Soon it will be time to renew your membership in the AHSGR (American Historical Society of Germans from Russia.) Now here's the good news: you won't have to fool around with filling out forms and remembering to mail them to Lincoln if you just give our treasurer, Elmer Dreher, your \$55 at our next chapter meeting. He'll be ready to check off your name and mail everything for you. Make your check payable to Sunflower Chapter, and remember that every dollar goes toward keeping alive our unparalleled history and heritage!

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

It seems as if it were only yesterday that Kevin Rupp was asking me to take over the newsletter because he was about to become chapter president. Then again, it seems as if it were only yesterday that Kevin's mother was calling me to babysit her tow-headed little boy weekday mornings while she worked at the El Charro. In those days Kevin and I were neighbors destined one day to become friends because of our shared interest in our Volga German heritage. Kevin has a blend of many great qualities fitting him for leadership, and I am glad I have had a chance to work with him these past few years. It was way better than babysitting him!

As you might guess, the newsletter this coming year will feature several articles that have grown out of the AHSGR convention we had in Hays this summer. I hope you enjoy them.

--Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA

OVERHEARD

Near Liebenthal, where LeRoy L. Herrman grew up, about 25 boys his age all lived on farms within about a mile of each other. As you can imagine, sometimes that was a recipe for trouble.

One hot summer day all the boys gathered at LeRoy's place for a swim in their pond. Now they always swam naked when it was

just the boys together, but on this particular day they felt especially daring and mischievous because LeRoy's folks were away. So after finishing their swim, they decided to go play in the granary without bothering to change back into their clothes, which they left strewn on the ground near the pond.

Up in the granary, a good time was had by

all, until suddenly the boys heard LeRoy's mother calling for him: "Leee-roy! LEEE-ROY!" Standing at the bottom of the ladder leading into the granary, she ordered all the boys to come down immediately, then gave each one a good swat on the behind as each passed by. To this day, LeRoy says, one of his friends always likes to remind him, "That's the only woman who ever spanked me on my naked bottom!"

Tatiana takes our questions

by Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA

The youngest speaker at the summer's AHSGR convention, Tatiana Schell was born in 1981 in Volgograd. Her family had moved back to the Volga region after their exile to Siberia during WWII. Like so many other Russians of German descent, however, the Schells later moved to Germany, where Tatiana lives today.

She explained that most German Russians her age do not care much about their ancestral history, but she is the exception to the rule. However, it was not easy to get her grandparents to talk about their family's past. She believes their reluctance came from an unwillingness to relive the horrors of their youth by talking about them. Yet she insisted they share some of their history with her, telling them, "I want to know about it because it is part of me, too."

Older folks, Tatiana said, don't understand that the least little thing—a jingle, a song, a proverb—can help fill in the picture of their heritage for younger folks. She herself deeply appreciates, for example, a little bedtime rhyme that she learned in German from her mother. Translated, it says, "Sleep, child, sleep; / Father watches sheep; / Mother watches lambs; / she will bring you a handful of flowers."

Following her brief presentation, done in fluent English, Tatiana took questions from the audience. That proved to be perhaps the best part of the time she spent with us, so here are Tatiana's answers to the questions posed to her by convention-goers.

(continued on p. 5)



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

THE LACROSSE REPUBLICAN

October 15, 1914

(too late for last week)

George Pfeifer has been quite sick.

Peter Hepp and Barbara Herman will be married soon. They have the license.

Jacob Spies of Kansas City, has been visiting relatives here.

Joseph Herrman is the owner of a new Studebaker car.

Christian Schaffer has returned to her home in Spearville.

The case of Younger vs. Schmidt was postponed until the April term of court.

John Riedel will attend the Hays Normal this year.

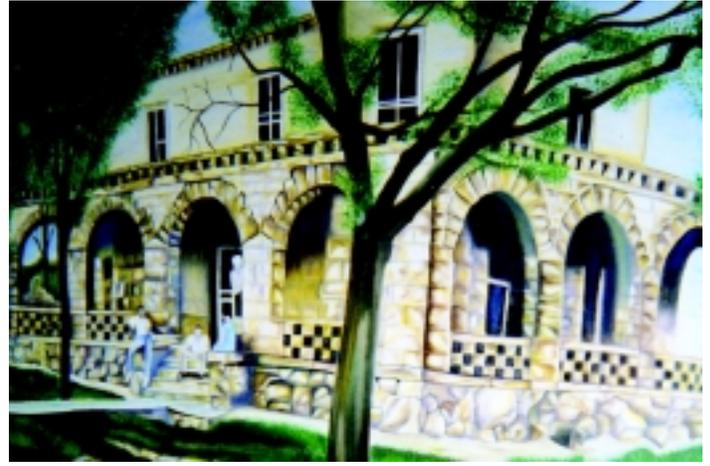
Alex Schaffer has gone to Bazine to work.

Tatiana Schell's family originally came from Seewald on the Volga. That village was obliterated during WWII, however, so their postwar return to the Volga brought them to the town of Frank. Since 1998, the Schells have lived in Germany.

Making 'the Kraus castle' connection

by Judy Hoffman

FOR CAROL SINNER, A JOURNEY FROM SAVANNAH, GEORGIA, to Hays, Kansas, for the international AHSGR convention did not end on Sunday, June 17. After poring over information in the genealogy research room and discovering that she may have distant relatives living around Hays, she soon got out the Hays phone book and started calling around. Finally she found what she had hoped for and arranged to meet with Esther (Hiffley) Kraus after the closing of the convention. Esther had a lot of history on the Kraus family and a very interesting oil painting she wanted Carol to see.



This is a portion of Diane Engel's painting of "the Kraus castle," built on a farm near Hays in 1898 but destroyed by flood in the early 1950s.

Next in order was renting a car and finding the farm. When Carol told me her good news, I offered to drive her to the farm, thinking this would perhaps be an interesting follow-up to the convention. Of course I won't mention all the trouble we had getting there. When we finally found the Kraus home, we were late and almost had the door closed on us. But we managed to persuade Esther to visit with us for awhile. After all, Carol was leaving for Savannah the next morning, and this golden opportunity would be gone.

The Kraus family saga began when the family of John Henry Kraus left Rothenberg, Germany, in 1876 for the plains of Kansas. In Germany John H. Kraus (7/23/1838-2/14/1935) had married Elizabeth Schaefer (4/23/1835-6/6/1919), who together had four sons: Louis, Ed, Frederick William, and Charlie. At first, the Kraus immigrant family lived in a dugout on their farm. As time passed, their living conditions improved, and their herd of cattle grew. Eventually they were milking 100 cows daily and selling the milk to L-K Dairy in Hays. Twice their stone barn burned down, perhaps from lightning strikes or from accidents involving kerosene lanterns or tobacco smoking. No one ever learned the cause of either fire.

Carol's connection with the Kraus family goes back to her grandmother, Lena Helzer, who married Conrad Sinner on March 1, 1888. It was Lena's sister Katie who met Lou Kraus in California. When Lou proposed to Katie, she said if he'd build her a Spanish hacienda in Kansas, she'd marry him. The hacienda was built of sandstone, and a local German stonecutter was paid \$1 a day plus lunch to help build it. Unique to the era was a windmill placed on a hill above the house, which pumped water to a large tank at the top of the tower on the hacienda. This provided running water in the house. Finished in 1898, the house

soon was called by locals "the Kraus castle."

So Louis Kraus (1868-1953) was the son who married Katie Helzer and built the Kraus castle for her. Lou and Katie had only one child, Evadna, who grew up to marry Clarence Perry. Charlie Kraus (1875-1967) was the son who left Kansas to attend MIT and become a chemist. His research led to the development of Pyrex cookware. (See www.wikipedia.org for more information on his illustrious career.)

In the 1950s the Kraus castle had to be dismantled after a devastating flood undercut the foundation. Luckily, by then a photo of it had been taken, and an art teacher from Barton Community College, Diane Engel, painted the picturesque structure. This painting hangs above the fireplace in the Kraus home we visited.



P.I. Sinner, Test Driver

Besides a family connection to the Kraus castle, Carol Sinner has another tie to the Wheat State. Her father, P.I. Sinner, was a test driver who came to Hays on May 1, 1934, to begin a "100-hour durability drive" of the new Ford V-8. Coming from Greenville, Mississippi, he didn't know much about Kansas weather until experiencing it first-hand. Upon finishing

the last leg of his trip, he told reporters in Garden City, "It is the toughest 30 hours I have ever spent behind the wheel."

At times the dust was so thick he almost had to stop his vehicle for lack of visibility. At other times he encountered patches of mud so slick he almost slid off the road--all while blinding dust from drier parts of the state

blew in through his open car windows. At one point he looked up at the sky and saw rain, sunshine, and a rainbow all at once.

Ahhhhh, Kansas!

About August 20th, Edwin W. Hill will open up in South Hays, a Cash and Carry grocery store. It is a new deal for Hays but it is being operated in other cities satisfactorily not alone to the merchant but to the customers. The goods are handily arranged on counters, the price of each article plainly marked so no one can possibly make a mistake. Take your market basket with you if you wish canned goods, butter, lard, vegetables or any other small articles, pass around the counters, select your goods and on your way out you will find the cashier whom you can pay and then go away happy. If you wish flour or heavy articles, better find a conveyance of some sort as no goods will be delivered. It is operated on the plan of a cafeteria restaurant. You are given a tray when you enter a cafeteria, you select what you want, go to a table and eat your dinner, or supper, and pay the cashier as you go out. This plan saves hiring a lot of help and the customer gets the benefit of a cheaper price for the goods he buys.

We believe a store of this sort will be appreciated in Hays. Time is money. Modern fixtures will be installed so as to handle the trade with promptness and dispatch.

Mr. Hill is an experienced grocer of years standing. He has been the trusted head clerk in A. A. Wiesner & Son's grocery department for eight years, speaks German well, and has a host of warm friends among the thousands of Hays city and Ellis county people, who habitually trade at the Wiesner store. A great many of them always asked for Hill when they wanted to buy a bill of goods. At a casual glance or a passing thought it seems remarkable how rapidly some firms or individuals acquire a large and lucrative trade, but when the matter is investigated, it is easily explained, as nothing is so successful in business as energy coupled with industry and honorable dealing. It is always pleasant and a satisfaction to deal with men that you can trust. Ed is thoroughly honest and reliable, and we believe will make a wonderful success in his new venture.

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



Winter Hours:
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
Tuesday-Friday. Closed Saturday-Monday.

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

Visit us at www.elliscountyhistoricalmuseum.org

Tatiana takes our questions

(continued from p. 3)

Q. Are there any classes in Germany today to teach the Volga German dialects? In Hannover, Kansas, a dialect class was offered and attracted 200 students of all different ages.

A. I never heard of any. All Russian German immigrants must take standard German classes by law. In Germany dialects are spoken at home, and most children don't learn them. Adults don't encourage learning dialects for fear that this knowledge will endanger their children's futures and careers. In Germany there is discrimination against Russian Germans. They can't get into the best universities, for example.

Q. Have you experienced any discrimination?

A. Not personally, but I have heard of discrimination when Russian Germans look for apartments or apply for some jobs. Germans look down on Russian Germans who do not actually speak German, which is not even their fault. Russian German history is not known to most Germans, however.

Q. Do you have Russian German friends with your same interests?

A. No. They don't understand my drive to know. I have offered to help them learn more about their ancestors, but almost all of them can't even tell me their ancestral village.

Q. What was your childhood in the Volga like?

A. Village life in Russia is different from city life. We had a huge Russian German population in our village and in all the villages around us. We felt safe. Religion was a big part of our life. Grandmothers took kids to church services and prayer meetings. But we kids felt like outsiders when the adults talked German among themselves and wouldn't translate for us. They didn't want to take the time. I remember when the Soviet Union collapsed. Then we could worship openly. American visitors started coming to Frank, too, and that brought great excitement.

Q. Why did you study English?

A. It was not my wish, but my mother's. She dragged me to English classes and I hated them. I found the language difficult to learn, but she thought I needed English to be an educated person.

Q. Are you fluent in Russian?

A. Yes, it's my native language. I went to Russian kindergarten and never started German classes at school until eighth grade.

Q. How many Germans are left in Russia today?

A. There are half a million still in Russia according to the last census, but this includes only those who have claimed their German identity. Not every German does.

BACK IN STOCK

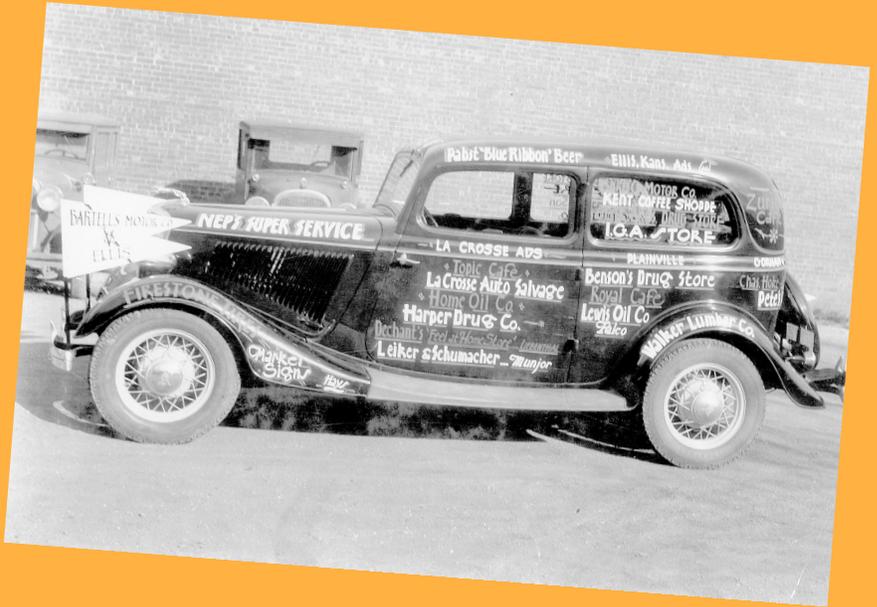
The chapter's first shipment of Larry Weigel's new CD "Opa's One-Man German Band" sold out quickly, especially after June convention-goers heard his live presentation of songs, stories, and jokes. Have no fear; the second shipment is here! Call Kevin Rupp (785-625-7356 or 785-625-6638) to order yours. Priced at \$17, this CD is a great way to introduce kids and adults alike to our Volga German heritage.

PHOTO FEATURE

This photo from AHSGR member Carol Sinner of Savannah, Georgia, shows the new Ford V-8 her father drove in a heavily advertised "100-hour durability drive" from Hays to Garden City in May 1934. Sponsoring merchants listed in a Hays Daily ad for April 26 included Bissing Electric Shop, Befort Grocery, Wiesner's Department Store, Aetna Life Insurance Agent Hillary Weigel, and D.G. Zimmerman Plumbing. Also visible in this picture of the vehicle are ads for Dechant's "Feel at Home Store" in Liebenthal and Leiker & Schumacher of Munjor.

The newspaper ad promised that the driver's hands would be handcuffed to the steering wheel of the car "so that it is impossible for him to leave at any time" during more than four days of continuous driving. The grueling drive would thereby prove the "stamina, durability, power, comfort, low oil consumption, unequalled economy, sensational ability, smoothness, and superiority of the new Ford V-8.

For more information on P.I. Sinner's test drive, see the article at the bottom of page 4.



SUNFLOWER CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

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Inside *this newsletter*

- 1...August Picnic Notes...Next Meeting
- 2...Vote for Eight Wonders/St. Fidelis...President's Message...Editor's Message...Easy Way to Pay
- 3...Overheard...Liebenthal Locals, 1914...Tatiana Schell's Convention Talk
- 4...Kraus Castle...P.I. Sinner, Test Driver
- 5...Hays Free Press, 1923...CD Back in Stock
- 6...Photo Feature

NEW LOCATION
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