

Northeast Kansas Chapter of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia.



June/July 2005



Annual Chapter Picnic Sunday, August 14

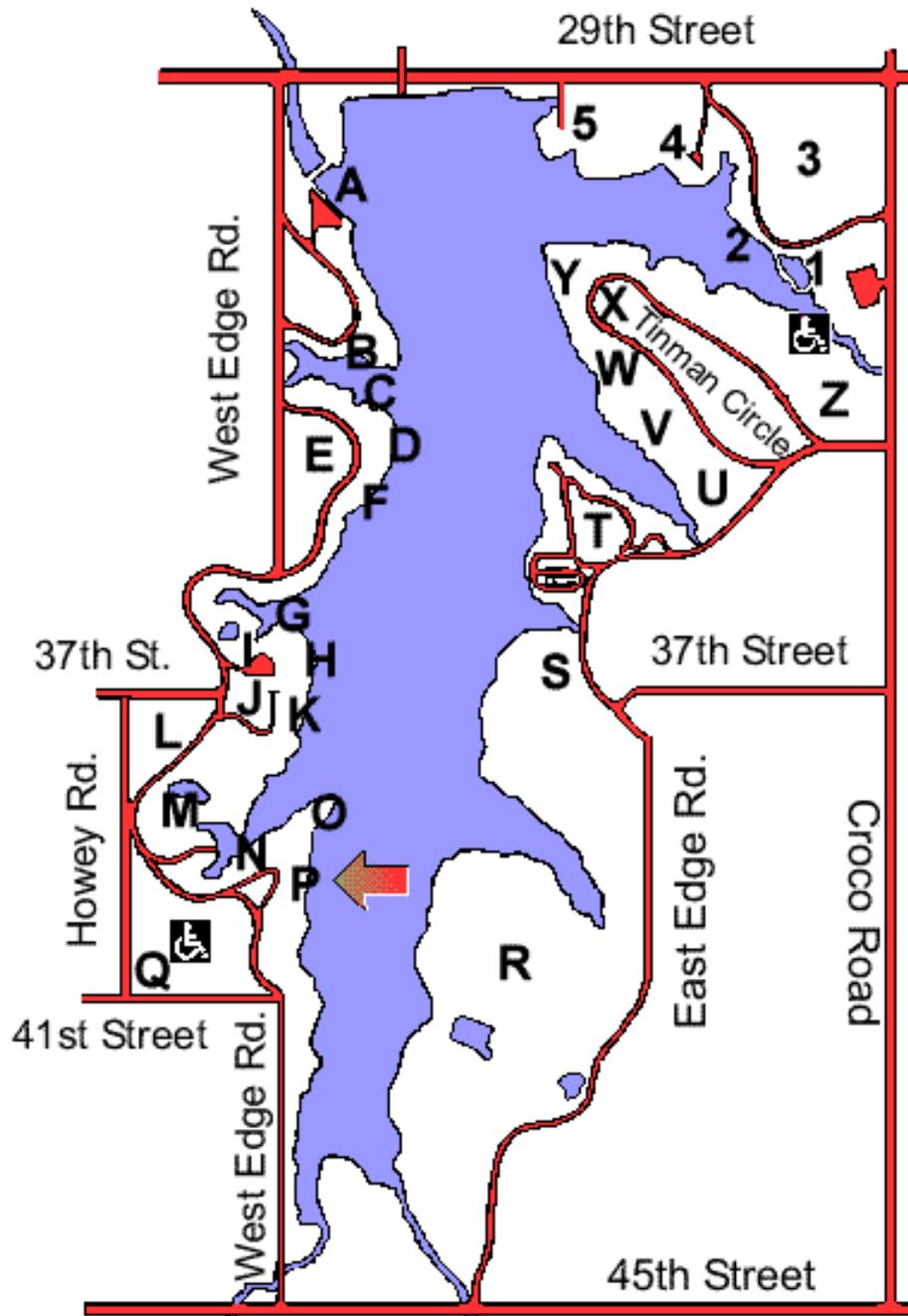
The annual picnic will be at Lake Shawnee Shelter House #3 (represented by the letter P on the map at right).

Members and guests are asked to bring one meat dish, one other dish and their table service. The chapter will furnish the refreshments.

The shelter will be available from 12 noon till 4:00 p.m. Lunch will begin at 1:00 p.m. Shelter House #3 is air-conditioned, has a rest room, kitchen and a large attached deck. *Submitted by John Reb, President*

Regular Meetings

Regular meetings are held bi-monthly at 2:00 p.m., the second Sunday of the month in the basement of St. Joseph's Church, at the corner of 3rd Street and Van Buren Street, Topeka, KS. Guests are always welcome. There is no regular meeting in August due to the picnic.



The AHSGR Mission Statement "An international organization dedicated to the discovery, collection, preservation, and dissemination of information related to the history, cultural heritage and genealogy of Germanic Settlers in the Russian Empire and their descendants."



CHAPTER OFFICERS

President

John Reb
785-235-5875

Vice-President

Sheri Rose
785-986-6308
SRose95709@aol.com

Secretary

Ed Schwerdt
785-271-2132
edschwerdt@mindspring.com

Treasurer

Bill Domme
785-234-8491
wdomme@cox.net

Newsletter Editor

Denise Grau
785-273-6849
dgrau@germansfromrussia.org

Personal Notes

Congratulations to Dean and Virginia Engroff who will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on August 6th with a mass at 5:30 pm at Sacred Heart Church. They were married August 6, 1955.



Membership

If you know someone with a Germans from Russia ancestry, encourage them to join AHSGR and our local chapter. Invite them as your guest to our next meeting.



Mark Your Calendars!

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|-------------------|---|
| Aug. 14 | Chapter Picnic, Lake Shawnee, Shelter #3 |
| Aug. 14-21 | 2005 AHSGR National Convention, Oklahoma City |
| Sept. 3-4 | Antonino Centennial Celebration |
| Sept. 30 & Oct. 1 | 2005 Round-up of Kansas Chapters, Topeka |
| Oct. 9 | Next Regular Meeting |



Library Notes

Library resources including books, videos, newsletters, audio cassettes, etc. are available for review during the meetings or may be checked out for more in-depth review. See Ike Appelhanz for more details. Donations to our library are always welcome.

CHAIRPERSONS

Chaplain

Raymond Meier
785-234-2967
dorismeier@juno.com

Membership

Ed Schwerdt
785-271-2132
edschwerdtmindspring.com

Historian/Librarian

Isadore 'Ike' Appelhanz
785-273-2595
Appelhanz@cs.com

Sick/Shut-in

All Members

Courtesy

Doris Meier
785-234-2967
dorismeier@juno.com

Computer/Genealogy

Gary Ubert
785-478-9670
ubert@cox.net

Program

JoAnn Staley
785-266-7477
topekajo@aol.com

Finance Ways & Means

Evelyn Huggins
785-246-0271
EveJoyHug01@cox.net

2005 Kansas Round-up of Chapters

Friday, September 30 and Saturday, October 1 the Northeast Kansas chapter is hosting the 2005 Kansas Round-up of Chapters at the the Holiday Inn Holidome, 605 SW Fairlawn Road, Topeka. The reservation deadline is September 9, 2005.

Members and guests are invited to an open house on Friday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Computers with genealogical data pertaining to the Germans from Russia will be available for research. Snacks and drinks will also be served.

Saturday is the business meeting and banquet. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m.; the meeting and program begin at 9:00 a.m. The featured speaker is Pete Goering, Executive Editor of the Topeka Capital-Journal. Don't forget your dancing shoes! Saturday evening's activities conclude with a polka dance.



News on the Net

1895 Graf Family List Available

Kevin Rupp, AHSGR Sunflower Chapter president, announced that the 1895 Family list of Graf is available for purchase. The date ranges cover anywhere from about 1819 up till 1910. There are about 3141 entries in this volume.

If interested please contact Kevin Rupp at 2301 Canal Blvd., Hays, Kansas 67601, or by email at krupp@ruraltel.net. The Pfeifer 1834 and Katharientstadt 1850 census list will be the next volumes to be compiled.

Census Records Available

Translations of the following census records are available. If interested in obtaining a copy, please contact Brent Mai at bmai@cu-portland.edu.

1834 Dietel
1834 Merkel
1857 Merkel
1857 Kratzke
1834 Rothammel
1857 Rothammel
1857 Sewald

Low German Radio Broadcast

The *Lawrence Journal-World* recently reported that the recent efforts in north central Kansas to preserve the Low German dialect brought to Kansas by Lutherans and Mennonites who moved from northern Germany in the late 1880s have now led to a weekly radio program.

The weekly five-minute broadcast on KNDY-1570 of Marysville features stories told first in Low German then translated to English. Other efforts to preserve the Low German dialect in the Marshall and Washington counties include free, monthly Low German classes that began in February and continue to attract about 100 people per meeting.

The full story can be found on-line at http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2005/jul/26/low_german_high/.

No Computer?

Don't have a computer at home and frustrated with the number of computer links and addresses in the recent chapter newsletters? The Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library has computers with internet access available for public use free of charge.

Never used a computer before and afraid you won't know what to do? The library also offers free computer classes for novice or more experienced users. Beginning classes include Taming Your Mouse, Beginning Windows, Internet: Topeka and Beyond, Email with Yahoo! Mail, Play It Safe on the Internet, and Look it up on the Internet.

Classes are held frequently. Contact the library at 785-580-4606 for more information or to register for classes.

Antonino Centennial Celebration

On Labor Day weekend, September 3 and 4, 2005, the Antonino community of Ellis county will celebrate its centennial anniversary with a special mass, class reunions for students of both the parochial and public schools, dancing, a traditional German meal, and games and activities for children and adults. A book on the origins and history of Antonino, complete with appendices and photographs, is scheduled for release in 2005 and will be sold at the celebration.

All parishioners of Our Lady Help of Christians—present and former, all who attended or taught school in Antonino, or who lived in the area, or who simply enjoy the culture of Ellis County's Volga-German settlements, are invited and encouraged to attend. More information can be found on-line at <http://www.heartlandparishes.org/antonino/index.html>.

Letter from Russia

By Alexander Shpak of Srednyaya Akhtuba, Russia; Submitted by Mike Grau

This article was written by me especially for the members of the Northeast Kansas Chapter of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, many of who, I suppose, are descendants of Russian-Germans, and who are interested in finding out how Germans live today in Russia. I am not a journalist or a historical scholar. In fact, I don't belong to any historical society or national social organization. I am a common/ordinary resident of Russia, one of a few representatives of the contemporary generation of Volga Germans, who either could not or chose not to go to the west and continues to reside in Russia, [placing, establishing, ???] for a few generations of Germans with a new motherland [perhaps this means the New Russia]. However, here I must make the proviso that in contrast to the majority of my fellow Germans, I, already for many years, have studied the history of the Volga Germans and I took some more or less successful steps in popularizing this history. In other words, it's my hobby.

I want to caution the readers that the proposed article is not the complete and comprehensive story about contemporary life of Russian Germans. These are separate sketches of private events, participants or witnesses who happen to relate them to me.

Speaking about Germans who live in Russia today, one has to accurately represent that the present situation/conditions surrounding Russian Germans in our country is not far from that before 1941: By comparison a completely different situation occurred in the post war period and continued up to the collapse of the Soviet Empire. In the first instance, Germans had compact settlements, living in these settlements they "stewed in their own sauce". Many researchers and travelers took note of the close-knit German settlements from those living in the vicinity of the Germans. Everything was conducive to the maximum preservation of national traditions, culture and language within the Russian German society. Even the Soviet Autonomous Region of Povolzh'ya, with all its shortcomings and negative events, was conducive to the support of the spirit of national identity. Besides that, there existed real conditions for preservation and development of a national language. The national identity [consciousness] of any Russian citizen is more the determination of his national belonging to the people who surround him, being determined in a big way by the knowledge of his national language, than the traditions of that national group, to which he attaches himself. In the second instance, that is, the Post War period, Russian Germans lost the possibility

of maintaining/supporting their national language. In places spontaneously arose in groups of Germans, the German language and it was preserved in its everyday form [This likely means: as it was spoken in its common/ordinary dialect. Or non-literary dialect]. But it [the language] gave up its position to the intra-national link, that is, the Russian language. This is how the German masses existed amongst the Russians during this period. Of course, the fact is, that in the USSR live a rather large number of people of German descent of all kinds who have become silent and are hiding. But in reality Russian Germans (then they were called "Soviet Germans") were in the USSR. And there are around 2 million.

In connection with the silent history of Russian Germans I recall this event. It is a rather sad story, which happened when I was 6 years old. It was often retold in the family circle, and thus the details are well known to me.

In 1968 our family moved to a new place of residence in a village situated not far from Volgograd. It was the first time we had lived in a multi-apartment building. In our neighborhood lived a young female history teacher. The woman was obviously younger than mama, and she, out of respect, wanted to know my mother's patronymic [middle name according to the Russian system] I must clarify, that in Russia how people are greeted or treated is determined by their age. For a long time mama did not want to divulge her patronymic and said, that and the difference in their ages made no difference in how she was addressed. But at some point in time mama "opened/showed her cards". It was such a surprise to this **history teacher** when she heard that my mother was called Lidya **Karlovna** [Her father's first name was Karl and that is not a Russian name]

"So your father was a German?" she indignantly exclaimed and looked mama in the eye, "Yes, you definitely have green eyes."

She felt mama's knees and said:

"You have sharp [bony] knees. They say that Germans have sharp knees."

After that she said all kinds of nasty things to mama and in the end declared:

“It’s possible that your father killed my father during the war with the Fascists!”

Mama was upset for a long time about this incident. But the most frightening thing about this that always disturbed us was the fact that this nonsense was spread by a person who taught history to children in school.

Our family always lived amongst Russians for whom the word “German” was associated with the word “fascist”. It stands to reason that this was always insulting to us. Obviously from this arose in me the idea to popularize the history of Russian Germans. While still a teenager, I, with pride, declared to my comrades, that before the war the Soviet Germans had their own autonomous republic. But no one would believe it because there was not one word about it in any textbook. How would one correct/prove this, of every teacher of history considered that Germans in the USSR were the descendants of the fascist Germans who fought against our country from 1941 - 45!

Today in Russia there is again a different situation. Russian Germans, former Soviet Germans, descendants of German colonists who arrived in Russia by invitation from Catherine the Great, are no longer called “fascist”. And if they are named in a joke some kind of Keller, Schmidt or Born it is not perceived as so offensive. What is offensive now is something else: almost no Germans remained in Russia. More than 200 years ago they organized to settle here and now they organize to go back to Germany - to the Vaterland [Fatherland], as it is said amongst Germans.

In the 80’s and 90’s of the twentieth century, from abroad, in the USSR and in post Soviet region sharply arose and national movement of Russian Germans. Here and there sprang up movements in society or “Revival” (Wiedergeburt), the goal of which was to restore a republic of Germans, Povolzh’ya [means, in or along the Volga region]. Obviously that was a Utopian idea even for a few politicians and society activists the idea raised a definite amount of eyebrows. When the movement for the founding of a German republic ended in a fiasco, it became a convenient cover for reasons for emigration to Germany. At that time I wrote for a few German Russian newspapers (“Neues Leben”, “Nachrichten”, “Sankt-Petersburg Zeitung”) and took a lively interest in all that was taking place. A few society activists of the German movement directly declared in the pages of publications that if the Russian government did not establish an autonomous German Republic, Povolzh’ya, then all Germans, as a sign of protest, should abandon Russia. Of course this was simply political ambition. Everyone clearly understood that a republic would not



Alexander Shpak at his home in Russia

be established, and if established, none of the Germans would go there to live. It stands to reason, that it was better to go to a united Germany, than to stay in an economically ruined country, or give up a familiar place and move to an uninhabitable steppe! At this time amongst us there existed a social opinion [consciousness] with which many citizens of the country associated themselves. In accordance with this opinion, to abandon the country for economic reasons was not proper. Most people considered the emigration as a betrayal. Because of this most Germans adopted the comfortable thesis that they were leaving the country as a sign of protest against the inaction of the government on the question of the establishment of a German republic.

Gradually all these societies of “Revival” turned into a national cultural center (NKTS) [Russian initials for National Cultural Center] which now exist in various regions of Russia. In 1998-2000, my family and I visited such a center in the town of Volzhskij (near the city of Volgograd). It was very interesting. My children even took part in amateur Christmas concerts. I was delighted to use the German books in the small library of the center.

All the activity/business of the national cultural center was conducted/supported with enthusiasm by a few middle-aged women. The financial side of the center left much to be desired and consequently all of the center’s equipment. The director of the center, Andrei Suvorov told me during our first meeting, that money for the upkeep of the center was in catastrophic demand [sorely lacking], in fact they couldn’t even pay the rent on the location. Financing has been appropriated for these centers, but the money is not

forthcoming. The center exists on the basis of donations from its members and by conducting language courses for pay. The regular members of the center are few and the basis for people going there was it was near the time when they prepared to leave for Germany, and they wanted to enter the beginning courses of German language. When I enrolled my children in such language courses, I assumed, that they would be taught the spoken German language, some kind of Volga German dialect. But, alas! The courses gave the basics of the literary German language (Hochdeutsch), because the courses were taught by a student of the advanced [upperclassman] of the Volgograd Pedagogical University. There was almost no purpose to these lessons, but there was an interest in the relations and we continued to visit the center once a week, which was located 30 kilometers away. With great regret we learned that the center, because of lack of money, had to move its headquarters. The center moved to another part of the city and is even a greater distance from us. It was necessary to stop visits to the center.

In today's situation, there is taking shape in Russia, the creation of a revival and preservation of national cultures. Even for Russian Germans there have been a few belated decisions.

Still the business of the study and popularization of the history of Russian Germans is worse. For the past 15 years there has appeared a list of serious works concerning the Volga Germans, the Germans of Siberia: there was undertaken the publication of a three volume Encyclopedia of Germans of Russia (the first volume came out in 1999). To buy this book is not easy. On the open market this book is not seen. In the bookstores of Volgograd and Volzhskij I have never encountered such literature. In this predicament there is an "out", the libraries of the centers. But not everyone can go there and each visitor to the center cannot take the book home with him. With great effort I have collected a small library of literature about the history of Russian Germans. This is what I especially busy with. That can be said about ordinary Russian citizens.

In 1999 from the newspaper, "Rundschau" (in the city of Ulyanovsk) I noticed the issue of the first volume of the Encyclopedia of Russian Germans. Naturally, I wanted to acquire this book. Through the editors of the newspaper, "Rundschau", I learned that the publication of the Encyclopedia was undertaken by the Social Science Academy of Russian Germans in Moscow. The secretary of the Academy explained that the Academy did not

undertake the distribution of the Encyclopedia, but it was possible to obtain this book in the German/Russian House in Moscow. It seems that the German Russian House could obtain even more different literature about the history and problems of Russian Germans. But even in my fanaticism, I could not allow myself the special trip to Moscow for these books. Moscow is 1000 kilometers from my home. But all the same, thanks to friends, I bought myself the first volume of the Encyclopedia of Russian Germans.

Similarly, a no less gripping story I can tell about each book about the history of Russian Germans, which stand on my bookshelf.

So 12 years ago when my brochure, The Republic of Povolzh'ye, came out, I got the desire to relate the history of Volga Germans to as large a number of people as I could. With this goal in mind, in the beginning of 2005 I registered on the internet (with a free server) my own home page. Site: WOLGADEUTSCHEN devoted to the history of Germans of the Volga region and after a short time from my personal home page grew a combined project, the development of which has drawn in people not only from Russia but even from Germany. I'm very pleased to realize that there are people who are not indifferent to the history of our people and their forefathers.

Александр Шпак
поселок Средняя Ахтуба
7 апреля 2005 год

Alexander Shpak
settlement Srednyaya Akhtuba
April, 7th, 2005

Note: Mr. Shpak's mother was a native of Nieder-monjou, Russia. Mike Grau, Nieder-monjou village co-coordinator and Northeast Kansas Chapter member, has been corresponding with Mr. Shpak.

Mr. Shpak's website is at <http://wolgadeutschen.nm.ru/>. It can be translated from Russian into English fairly successfully at <http://www.online-translator.com/>. It contains much of interest to Germans from Russia. Since writing this article, Mr. Shpak has said the second volume of the Encyclopedia "Germans of Russia" has been published in Moscow.