

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



April / May 2006

## **Volga German Customs & Tradition, 1763 – 1976**

The program for the June meeting will be Lawrence Weigel's CD - Volga German Customs & Tradition, 1763-1976. This recording was made in 1976 by Lawrence A. Weigel, to commemorate the centennial celebration of the arrival of the Volga German settlers in Ellis and Rush counties in 1876. Lawrence traces the migration of our ancestors from Germany to Russia in 1763 and tells of the hardships they endured for a century along the Volga River before finding their freedom in America.

He demonstrated how folk songs became an integral part of the culture, and sings and plays his Hammond organ throughout his presentation. You'll hear songs about the way Volga German boys were drafted into the Russian army in 1874, migration songs, wedding songs and an old fashioned "Hochzeit" played on his keyboard organ. He concludes with holiday and wedding traditions, and stories about the impact of the folk medicine doctors.

### **Next Meeting**

Our next meeting will be June 11, 2006, at 2:00 p.m. in the basement of St. Joseph's Church, at the corner of 3rd Street and Van Buren Street, Topeka, KS. Members and guests are asked to bring one meat dish, one other dish, and their table service.

### **Bierock Sales**

Northeast Kansas chapter members began selling bierocks at the Topeka Farmers' Market on April 29. The Farmers' Market is held Saturday mornings in the parking lot on the southeast corner of Topeka & 10th streets. Several weekends, the weather has been overcast, but sales have been good. We have a lot of repeat customer. Stop by to buy a few bierocks or to help with sales. The bierocks freeze well, so they make a quick and delicious meal!

### **Northeast Kansas Chapter Brochure**

A brochure has been developed to promote membership in the Northeast Kansas chapter of AHSGR. The brochure contains a membership form for AHSGR as well as a 2006 meeting schedule for our chapter. We occasionally meet persons interested in the heritage of Germans from Russia at our bierocks booth at the Farmers' Market, and it is hoped that the brochure will encourage further contact with these individuals. Copies of the brochure have also been placed in the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library. A copy of the brochure has been attached to the newsletter. Please pass it on to a friend or family member who may be interested in joining us.

### **Golden Wheat Chapter of AHSGR**

Carol Riffel, President of the Golden Wheat chapter of AHSGR was a visitor at our last chapter meeting. If you're interested in visiting a meeting of the Golden Wheat chapter in Wichita, their meetings are from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Potluck dinner begins at 1:30 p.m., program follows. Their meetings are held at the Immanuel Lutheran Church, 909 South Market, Wichita. Their remaining 2006 meeting schedule:

12 August      Annual Picnic  
1 October      Fall Meeting with Election of Officers  
3 December    Christmas Party

### **Germanfest**

**Sacred Heart Catholic Church**, 312 NE Freeman, Topeka will hold its annual Germanfest June 3 and 4, 2006. Germanfest features homemade German foods, crafts, silent auction, games and rides for children. The Northeast Kansas Chapter will have an information booth about our chapter at Germanfest.

*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."*



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## Personal Notes

Get well wishes for a speedy recovery to Will Konrade and Henrietta Gleason. Condolences to Francis Stadler on the loss of his brother-in-law Harvey Latshaw, husband of Virginia Latshaw.

SPRING

## 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.

SPRING

## Mark Your Calendars!

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| June 11     | Next Regular Meeting                                      |
| July 30     | Chapter Picnic, Lake Shawnee, Shelter House #3, noon to 4 |
| Aug. 13     | No Meeting  |
| Aug. 14-20  | 2006 AHSGR National Convention, Lincoln, NE               |
| Sept. 16-17 | Midwest Deutsche Oktoberfest, Hays, KS                    |
| Oct. 8      | Regular Meeting & election of officers                    |
| Oct. 21     | 2006 Round-up of Kansas Chapters, Hays                    |

SPRING

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## Note of Thanks

We want to thank everyone for their concerns, prayers and cards during Henrietta's illness. They are very much appreciated and we feel sure that they will get us through this time in our lives.

Thank you,  
Jack and Henrietta Gleason

Genealogy begins as an interest,  
Becomes a hobby;  
Continues as an avocation,  
Takes over as an obsession,  
And in its last stages,  
Is an incurable disease.

--Author Unknown



Kevin Rupp, President of the AHSGR Sunflower Chapter, encourages the community to get involved with the local chapter of the AHSGR and welcomes the news of the 2007 Convention. A total of 63 people attended a conference held at Hays City Hall, announcing the selection of Hays, Kansas as the host of the 2007 AHSGR International Convention. (photo by Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer, CSA)

## National Orphan Train Celebration

June 9-10, 2006

The National Orphan Train Complex in Concordia, Kansas will be the location for the National Orphan Train Celebration June 9-10, 2006.

The mission of the National Orphan Train Complex is to collect, preserve, interpret, and disseminate knowledge about the orphan trains, the children and agents who rode them, and local railroad history.

For more information about the upcoming celebration of the National Orphan Train Complex, contact: The National Orphan Train Complex, P.O. Box 322, Concordia, KS 66901; phone 785-243-4471; e-mail [othsa@msn.com](mailto:othsa@msn.com); [www.orphantraindepot.com](http://www.orphantraindepot.com).

## SAD PAGES OF HISTORY

Written by Alexander Shpak; Translated by Irina Eccles; Submitted by Mike Grau

Sometimes even a short story told by its witnesses gives you better understanding of the event than reading about the same thing in a history textbook. And what if that story covers a period of about 20-30 years and the events described there took place more than half a century ago? Is it not a real history of the time passing by?

At the beginning of the 80s of the last century, after my grandmother passed away, my grandfather, Karl Karlovich Shmidt, left Kazakhstan and lived with us until his death, in 1987. I was lucky to have numerous heart-to-heart talks with him about how the Germans lived in the Volga region before they were evicted from there in 1941. Unfortunately, in his stories the grandfather avoided the topics of eviction and labor army. Too bad. Now there are only two of my relatives can still tell us about those remote and tragic times. One of them is Arnold Petrovich Baster, my aunt's husband. He now lives in the city of Uralsk in the Republic of Kazakhstan. While visiting us in the fall of 2005, he was very kind to share his memories with me, and I wrote down his story.

*Aleksandr Shpak*  
Srednyaya Ahtuba  
November 2005

*Note: Mr. Shpak's mother was a native of Niedermonjou, Russia. Mike Grau, Niedermonjou village coordinator and Northeast Kansas Chapter member, has been corresponding with Mr. Shpak. The article below has been published in the Russian German newspaper "Rundschau". Mr. Shpak's website is at <http://wolgadeutschen.narod.ru/>. It can be translated from Russian into English fairly successfully at <http://www.online-translator.com/>. Author's endnotes and translator's glossary follow the article.*

I  
Uncle Arnold was born in the city of Markshtadt<sup>1</sup> on August 5, 1924. He spent most of his childhood at the khutor Bosens Damm. The khutor was located in the steppe 40 kilometers away from Markshtadt. According to the 1926 census, there were 23 households at the khutor, 116 people, 69 men and 47 women. The population was exclusively German. Nobody knows when the khutor came into existence, but, according to Elizaveta Ivanovna Baster, Arnold Petrovich's mother, it was there when she was born in 1904. She was born at the same khutor and her maiden name was Nichelman. As to the name of the khutor, it is explained by the dam, around which it was built, since the German word Damm means dam, weir, or dike.



Arno, as Uncle Arnold was called when he was a child, lived at the khutor together with his mother and brother Victor, who was two years younger than him. During Soviet times and up to the eviction of the Germans from the Volga region there was a kolkhoz named after V.I.Lenin, at the khutor, where Arno's mother worked as a simple kolkhoznica. His father, Petr Andreevich Baster, worked in the city of Marksshtadt as a worker at the factory named "Krasnyi Tekstilshhik". He visited his family living at the khutor Bosens Damm from time to time, but, being busy at the factory, he spent most of his time in Marksshtadt.

Before the October Revolution of 1917 the Baster family lived in prosperity. Arnold Petrovich's grandfather, Andrei (Heinrich), owned a lot of residential and other buildings in Ekaterinenshtadt.

*"A big house with a French roof, a barn, a stable – all those buildings were located on Bebel Street in Marksshtadt and belonged to my grandfather, - recalls Uncle Arnold. - In 1920s, during the dispossession of the kulaks, all grandfather's property was taken away, and the family was evicted from their own house. When, many years later, in 1970s, I visited the city of Marks, I, of course, went to that street. The grandfather's house was still there, and the outbuildings were well-preserved, although so many years had passed."*

It is possible that Uncle Arnold's father's being descended from a wealthy family was a reason for his arrest in 1937.

*"It was late fall of 1937, - recalls Uncle Arnold. - My father came home from the city and was helping my mother with the house chores. One of the November days we, a few boys, were skating on the ice which had already set on the pond. Suddenly a next-door boy comes running to the pond and tells me:*

*Arno, hurry to the khutor, say good-bye to your father, a militiaman came to take him away.*

*I ran home. The father was already sitting on the cart. The mother was standing next to him and crying bitterly. The father told us good-bye, the red-haired nkvdeshnik<sup>2</sup> whipped the horse, and the cart was off."*

It was the last time when Uncle Arnold saw his father. Nobody knows what happened to him after that.

But we got a little too far ahead in our story.

In 1932 Uncle Arnold turned 8 years old, and, as all Soviet children, he started school.

*"As a first and a second grader I went to the school situated at our khutor, - says Uncle Arnold. - Now I don't remember the name of my teacher, but very well remember that in 1939 she was given an Order of Lenin for her teaching work."*

In 1934 Uncle Arnold left for Marksshtadt to continue his education there.

*"In Marksshtadt I attended a seven-year school in the Upper Town – Oberstadt in German<sup>1</sup>, - explains Uncle Arnold, - and stayed with my mom's sister, Anna Ivanovna Kramer. She lived on Engelsa Street in house number 88. Now the street is named after V.I.Lenin. The school where*

*I studied was located on Kirova Street. Not far from our school, in the outskirts of the city, there were orchards, and behind them – a pond which we called Kavakaberg. During school breaks I always went to the khutor Bosens Damm to visit my mother and brother, but then returned to Marksshtadt to continue my studies.*

*After I finished the fifth grade in 1937, - continues Uncle Arnold his story, - I didn't go to the city and started working at the kolkhoz as a combine operator assistant. I worked at the combine called "Stalinets". My father had been arrested, and I had to help my mother to support my brother and me. In 1937 Victor was eleven years old, but I was already thirteen! So I worked at the kolkhoz until we were evicted in 1941".*

## II

August 28, 1941, the day when the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR approved the decree "On the eviction of the Germans living in the Volga region", is a dark date in the history of Russian Germans. With a stroke of a pen lives of many thousands of Soviet Germans were changed, thousands were left without a roof over head, without any property, which, by the way, the thoughtful Soviet state still hasn't returned to its loyal citizens. So, the eviction began...

On September 13, 1941, all the residents of the khutor Bosens Damm were made sit down on carts and taken to Marksshtadt. In Marksshtadt all the people and their belongings were loaded on a barge and sent to Saratov, a city on the Volga, from where their long trip to the east of the country began.<sup>2</sup>

*"We were being carried in "cattle" cars, i.e. the cars that during the peace time were used to carry cattle, - tells Uncle Arnold. – The people from khutor Bosens Damm were being transported in a few carriages. In every carriage there were 5 to 7 families. Nobody in our carriage died in the way, everybody got to station Biysk in Altaiskii Krai all right. We arrived there on September 26, 1941. Only two times during our trip we were given some soup to eat. But we didn't eat it anyway. We were saved from death thanks to the food our mother had managed to take with us. Before departure, while still at home, we killed a pig. Mom roasted it in the oven, put the meat in buckets, and poured the grease over it. Prepared this way, the meat was well preserved during the entire trip. Besides, we had two sacks of flour. We slept on the feather-bed, which mother, also by some miracle, was able to take with us. The carriage wasn't heated, but it wasn't cold. Sometimes it was even stuffy because of the high number of people (20-30) in one carriage. We were not given any water, so we made our own supplies when the train stopped at the stations.*

*We arrived in Biysk at night. We thought that we would stay in the carriages until morning, but were told to get out. It was cold outside. We began to gather brushwood in order to make fires. So we stayed in the open air, sitting around fires, until morning. In the morning we were put on carts and taken to different neighboring villages. Our family*

was taken to the village Bochkary of Tselinnyi Region of Altaiskii Krai. Besides us, fifteen other families from khutor Bosens Damm ended up there: Shmidt, Luft, Rimer, Felenger, Karlin, Sabelfeld, Majer, and others.

Village Bochkary was located 60 kilometers from Biysk. Our carts left Biysk in the morning, and we reached Bochkary in the evening. When we got there, we were distributed among families of local residents. The settling went peacefully and quietly. I want to say that at first there were no collisions between us, Germans, and the local people. Only later, when they began to receive news about their relatives killed in battles, they started to look sideways at us, as if we were guilty in something. There were some who called us "fascists", but on the whole everybody who knew us characterized us as hardworking, honest, and punctual.

There were three collective farms in Bochkary: "Sibiryak", "Vperiod", and the collective farm named after Telman.

On the Volga, where we lived before, almost all agricultural work was mechanized. But on the Altai, where we were brought to, crops were still cut with the help of horses, and put away by hand. At the threshing-floor, where grain was taken to, nothing was mechanized either. There was manual labor everywhere. I was not accustomed to that."

No, it was not easy to feel at home in a new place. It was not enough that all our belongings and the cattle stayed on the Volga, a language problem appeared. Most of the Germans did not speak any Russian, and at first it was very difficult for them to communicate with the locals. However, the authorities did not pay much attention at all those problems, and people had to adapt to the situation somehow.

"From the very first day of our living there I worked at the collective farm, - says Uncle Arnold. - A month and a half or two months later I was sent to Burovlyanka, a timber industry farm, to lay in timber for the kolkhoz. It was the end of 1941. I was already 17 then."

On January 10, 1942, a resolution of the State Defense Committee #1123 "On mobilization of migrant Germans to labor columns" was passed. According to it, male Germans between ages 17 and 50, fit for physical work, were to be mobilized to labor columns for all the time of the war.

"After the New Year Day, - recalls Uncle Arnold, - military registration and enlistment offices started to take away German men and send them to the labor army. So, I found myself in Cotlas."

You won't find the term "labor army" in official documents. This term, "labor army", or Arbeitsfront, in German, is used on historical literature and memoirs to refer to "labor columns", which were, in fact, camouflaged concentration camps of GULAG, where German men and women were mobilized to for the time of the war. The main purpose of the "labor army" was to compel "socially dangerous German contingent" to hard, unbearable labor.

### III

From the reminiscences of Uncle Arnold:

"On February 23, 1942, I got to the city of Cotlas, Arkhangelsk oblast, to build a bridge over the Northern Dvina. More than sixty years passed since then, but it is still terrifying to even think of that time.

We worked twelve hours a day. The amount of food we were given depended on how much we did during the day. For example, if you fully fulfill the daily work quota, you get 700 grams of rye bread and a tin pot of wishy-washy soup. We ate outside, near the field kitchen. Some went to their barracks - it was freezing outside, 35-40 degrees C below zero! Not everyone could stand it. We carried our pots and spoons with us, on our belts, all the time. Of course, we did not get all 700 grams of bread in one go. It was divided into three parts - for breakfast, lunch, and supper. The rations we got were not the same size, nobody weighed them, they just cut a loaf of bread into pieces "by eye", approximately 200-250 grams each. So we received a piece of bread and soup, which was kind of cloudy water, without a drop of fat in it. One was lucky if he got a piece of fish head, turnip, or rutabaga. It was all food we had.

When we arrived at Cotlas, they didn't take us to the barracks at once. We had to stay in the train for two or three days. When we finally got to the barracks, there was awful stink there. It turned out that they had been used for storing potatoes. The smell of rot saturated not only the air, but the walls, too. It was a nightmare. The plank-beds in the barracks were arranged in three circles. It was freezing cold. There were stoves made of iron barrels in the barracks, but they offered little help to protect us from cold. We slept fully dressed. They did not give us any outfit, so we wore what we had on us when we got there. In turns we took duty to watch the fire so that it wouldn't go out. On April 1942 the barracks were enclosed with a tall fence and barbed wire was drawn over it.

The head of the camp was a German man, Yakobi. I worked in column five. Later, when I was transferred to Zheshart in Comi ASSR, where I got acquainted with my future father-in-law, Karl Karlovich Shmidt, I found out that he had also been in our camp in Cotlas. But he worked in column six and I did not know him at that time.

I mainly worked with concrete. The bridge was built like this. A big ice-hole was cut out in the ice that covered the river, and something resembling a huge metal barrel was lowered into it. Then water and wash were pumped out of the barrel, and the empty space was filled with concrete. This is how piers for the future bridge were cast. The concrete needed for construction works was brought and poured into a big hole dug in the earth, and we had to carry it in carts to the river and pour into the prepared casing. We had to do everything very fast so that the concrete wouldn't harden in the hole. Besides, it was winter, the weather was terribly cold, and the concrete literally froze in the hole. A few people were burning fires around it to prevent the cement from freezing while we

were carrying it to the river.

People died as flies because of cold and hunger. The bodies of the dead were piled right there, in the camp, and then were put on a sledge and a tractor took them somewhere away to bury in a common grave. Once the tractor that was carrying the sledge with the bodies broke down on the way, and left the sledge in the forest. In spring a team of workers from our camp working in the forest came across that sledge. There was awful stink around. A dreadful picture.

Almost all the men from our khutor Bosens Damm were in the same camp as me. I had good, friendly relations with one of them, Karl Sabelfeld. Karl lived in the next barrack and I often visited him after work. Soon my friend got so emaciated that couldn't get up off his bed. Once, when I came to see him, he gave me a small bundle and said:

- There are some clothes and a little bread here, take it.

I did not know what to do.

- Come on, take it, I won't need it anyway, and somebody else will get it here.

I think he knew that he would not live long and decided to make arrangements in regard to his stuff beforehand. He died the next day. Many years later, when I saw Karls Sabelfeld's wife in the Altai, I did not have enough courage to tell her this story.

By the end of April, 1942, the construction of the bridge over the Northern Dvina was finished. On May 1, 1942, there was a celebration of the bridge opening. A brass band was playing, and a steam-engine pulled three carriages on the railroad put on the bridge. The authorities were very happy. The bridge was put into operation just by the public holiday of the first of May – the Day of solidarity of working people. The engine-driver who drove the engine during the opening ceremony – an ordinary convict, Russian by nationality - got a ten-year reduction of his imprisonment time and sent to the battle-front. The authorities considered it the highest award for any prisoner. But he wasn't very happy to get such an award. At the front he could be killed, while in the camp he was at least protected from that. Ordinary convicts lived in better conditions than Germans in the "labor army". They received better food and warm clothes.

I don't know how I survived in that hell. I guess being young helped a lot; I was seventeen at that time. Many did not make it. I can't tell you about everybody, but see yourselves. When we were brought to Cotlas in February 1942, there were 16 thousand people in the camp. By May 1, 1942, there were no more than 5 thousand left!

After the bridge was put into operation, a commission came to the camp. It looked like the supreme authorities of the GULAG were terrified by such a high level of mortality there. After the investigation many construction and camp authorities were replaced. At the same time there was a commission working in the camp that verified

capacity to work of those who were still alive. I was so emaciated by that time that I could hardly walk. Hoping to be considered disabled and sent home I went to the commission. But they said that I was still young and could work, determined my level of disability as 50% and sent me to another camp, which was situated 15 kilometers away from Cotlas, to build a railroad. I felt worse and worse. My hair began to come out. I could hardly move.

There was a doctor in the camp, a Jew by nationality. He paid no attention at those who were half-dead as me. One day another doctor came to inspect our camp. I decided to try my luck again and dragged my feet to the dispensary. When I entered the office and saw the new doctor, I recognized him at once. It was a German, called Shpomer, he was from Marksshtadt, and I had known him when we had lived on the Volga. When our camp doctor got out of the office, I seized the opportunity and talked to Shpomer in German. I told him that I couldn't work any more; I didn't have any strength left. Not that it was necessary to explain – it was evident that I wouldn't live much longer. And I wouldn't if it were not for Shpomer.

I was sent to the infirmary in Cotlas. The patients there were under guard, and couldn't go anywhere. True, we were allowed to send letters, and those who could write (many were illiterate) corresponded with their relatives. As now I remember the line from my letter that I wrote to my mother then: "Leibe teure Mutter! Schicke mir die Posylke"<sup>3</sup>. And she did send me a parcel, where, among other things, there was a small bag with tobacco. That tobacco, I can say, saved my life. In the hospital ward where I was being treated there were a few other men. They were ready to give me their rations for a pinch of snuff. Not everybody in the infirmary recovered. Many were so emaciated that could not leave their hospital beds. I turned out to be the strongest. Every morning I walked around the ward and put a pinch of tobacco on the chest of my fellow-sufferers who were not strong enough to get up.

In the hospital I got lucky again. When I recovered and was to be sent back to the camp, a doctor took me aside during one of the rounds and said:

- I will continue diagnose you as sick and too weak, and you will work in the infirmary kitchen for that.

So I stayed in the infirmary until the spring of 1943. At night I helped the cook in the kitchen, and during the day took care of the patients in the ward.

Talking to the cook, I found out that he was also a German from Marksshtadt, his name was Sabelfeld. After I made myself more or less familiar with the situation, I started to notice that Sabelfeld disappeared from the kitchen every night for 30 or 40 minutes. I asked him about it, and, since we were in good relations, he confessed that he secretly visited his family that lived close to the infirmary.

Spring of 1943 came. They could not keep me in the hospital any longer, I was considered fully recovered and capable to work. The distribution commission sent me to Zheshart in Comi ASSR.



#### IV

From the reminiscences of Uncle Arnold:

*"In spring 1944 I arrived at the camp in Zheshart, Ust-Vymskiy region, in Comi ASSR. The barracks where members of the "labor army" lived were surrounded by barbed wire. We cut timber. When we went to work outside the camp, there were no guards with us. But, before we left the territory of the camp, we were counted, and were allowed back to the camp only after all those who left the territory in the morning gathered near the gate in the evening. We worked 12 hours a day, with no weekends or days off. In the barracks we slept on plank beds arranged in one circle. There were real stoves there with a range on the top. In that camp the amount of food we received also depended on how well we worked. Those who fulfilled the norm got 900 grams of rye bread and some wishy-washy soup which was not different from what they gave us in Cotlas. But we ate in a special building – a dining-room. As for lunch, it was brought to the lots where we worked. We did not receive any clothes and wore what we had. The footwear was so worn-out that many walked almost bare-foot. Somebody found the way to make shoes, so called "chuni", of raw horse hides. We had to sleep in them, because, if we wanted to take them off and leave them on the floor, in the morning we wouldn't find them – rats would take them away and eat them. And how many bed-bugs there were there – just terrible! They literally ate us up, and there was no way to protect ourselves from them.*

*People in the Zheshar camp didn't die in such large quantities as in Cotlas. One could feel that the situation was changing little by little. At the end of 1944 the fence around the barracks and the guards were removed, and we all went under the power of the commandant<sup>1</sup>. We still lived in the barracks and worked, but once a month we had to register ourselves at the commandant's office. Without his permission we couldn't go even to a neighboring village. At the same time we received some clothes – for the first time during my stay in the "labor army". Those were second-hand military uniforms, sheepskin coats, and valenki. And at the end of 1944 we all received new American boots. Many of my fellows gave the boots to the locals in exchange for food. I also exchanged my new American boots for some potatoes.*

*I should say that we knew nothing about what was happening in the country and at the front, or where that front was. We lived in complete ignorance. The only thing we could do was work, work, and work. But one day, on May 9, 1945, we woke up in the morning to the sounds of the brass band playing near the dining-room. Nobody could understand what was happening. We were taken outside, lined up, and told that the war had been over. On that occasion we were given a day off and a double ration of rye bread. The next day everything was as usual – work, 900 grams of bread, and some soup. Many of us were happy that the war was over and were already making plans on how we would go to our families, and then back home, to the Volga. But older men said:*

*- Wait, it's too early to make plans. They will keep us here for another ten years.*

*And so it happened. We stayed under the dominion of the commandant for ten years longer, until the end of 1955, when, at the time of Khrushhev, special settlements were abolished".*

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After the end of the war in 1945, already living in special settlements, many ex "labor army" members began to invite their families to where they lived and worked. It also became possible to create new families. In 1951 Arnold Petrovich got married to Emma Karlovna Shmidt, who, together with her brother and younger sister, had come to Comi ASSR to stay with her parents. In 1952 Aunt Emma and Uncle Arnold had a baby girl, Lidiya.

In March 1953 J. Stalin died. It was the beginning of the era of changes, but the decree "On legal status of those living in special settlements" was still in force. In spring 1954, on a special permission of the commandant, Uncle Arnold was at last able to go to the Altai and, after twelve years, see again his mother and younger brother who lived in Bochkary, where they were forced to move in 1941 after their eviction from the Volga.

On December 13, 1955, Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR approved the decree "On lifting restrictions on legal status of Germans and members of their families living in special settlements". Special settlements were abolished, but people were not allowed to go back to their native places. Article 2 of the decree said: "Lifting restrictions on Germans in special settlements does not mean returning them their property confiscated while eviction, nor they have a right to return to the places where they were evicted from". The tragedy of the German people was going on.

In March 1956, after special settlements were abolished, Uncle Arnold and his family moved to Valuevskaya experimental land-improvement station in Staropoltavskiy district of the Volgograd region, and a little later – to the settlement Posevnoi in the same region. Since 1967 Uncle Arnold and Aunt Emma have been living in the city of Uralsk (Kazakhstan Republic).

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<sup>1</sup> The city of Markshtadt (Ekaterinenshtadt) was conventionally divided into two parts – Upper town (Oberstadt) and Lower town (Understadt)

<sup>2</sup> It looks like Uncle Arnold is making a mistake here. Most likely, the dispatch was made from the Pokrovsk station (city of Engels). According to the dates of departure and arrival to the final station of Biysk, it was train #886 that left the Pokrovsk station on September 15, 1941, and arrived at the Biysk station on September 26, 1941, that corresponds to my uncle's recollections.

<sup>3</sup> Dear, beloved mother! Send me a parcel!" (a mixture of German and Russian)

<sup>4</sup> Legal status of special settlements was determined by the resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of

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the USSR of January 8, 1945, "On legal status of those living in special settlements". According to that resolution, everybody living in special settlements and able to work had to be involved in "socially useful labor" and did not have a right to "leave the limits of the settlement served by a given commandant's office without a special permission of the commandant".

## GLOSSARY

**Khutor** - separated farm, typical for southern regions of the USSR at that time. (Before the October revolution of 1917 those "khutors" were privately owned farms, and they usually belonged to relatively wealthy farmers. Those who were not rich lived in villages (so-called "derevnya" - in Russia, "selo" or "stanitsa" in the Ukraine), with many individually-owned houses. Gradually some of the "khutors" grew bigger, sometimes there were many families living here, but they still retained their name, "khutor", because they were kind of separated from the other farms and privately owned. After the revolution, however, property of the rich was expropriated and collective farms were organized where there used to be private farms. Still, many retained the name "khutor". As I wrote, the word is typical for southern regions of Russia, and especially for the Ukraine.)

**Kolkhoz** - collective farm

**Kolkhoznica** - collective farmer

**"Krasnyi Tekstilshhik"** – "Red Textile-Worker"

**Kulak** - wealthy farmer exploiting somebody else's labor

**Militiama**n – policeman

**NKVD** – People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs

**Order of Lenin** - one of the highest governmental awards of that time

**"Stalinets"** – named after Stalin, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR at that time

**GULAG** – Main Correction-Labor Camps Administration, 1930-1960

**ASSR** – Autonomic Soviet Socialist Republic, a part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic at that time

**Valenki** - kind of felt boots





## Please Join Us!

Please join us as our guest at any of our chapter meetings.

To become a member of AHSGR and the Northeast Kansas Chapter, complete and mail the membership form found on the back of this brochure along with dues, to Chapter Secretary, Ed Schwerdt,  
3043 SW Arvonia Pl.,  
Topeka, KS 66614-4404.

In return for your dues, you will receive the AHSGR quarterly journal, the quarterly newsletter, access to the national archives containing more than 6000 valuable resources, and much more.

## Northeast Kansas Chapter #15 Membership Form

For a Family Membership, please include information for both husband and wife and indicate if spouse is of German-Russian heritage.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by \_\_\_\_\_

Ancestral Village(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

Is of G-R Heritage?  Yes  No

Ancestral Village(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are included for the following membership level:

- Individual \$50 or prorated\* at \_\_\_\_\_
- Family \$50 or prorated\* at \_\_\_\_\_
- Individual or Family Life \$750 \_\_\_\_\_

*(May be paid in five installments of \$150.00)*

\*Membership dues for new members are prorated throughout the calendar year as follows:

January 1 – March 31 – \$50.00

April 1 – June 30 – \$37.50

July 1 – September 30 – \$25.00

October 1 – December 31 – \$12.50

*Membership renewals are due each January 1*

# Help Preserve Your Heritage!



## Northeast Kansas Chapter

### of the American Historical Society of Germans From Russia (AHSGR)

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."

# Help Preserve Your Heritage!

## We are the Northeast Kansas Chapter

The Northeast Kansas chapter has been a part of the Topeka community for more than thirty years, having received its charter from AHSGR on April 6, 1975.



The Northeast Kansas Chapter has an excellent collection of German-Russian books, maps, AHSGR Journals and Clues, some census records, videos and other genealogical resource books available to our membership. A chapter newsletter is published six times a year.

Kansas is home to six AHSGR chapters. In October of each year, Kansas chapters come together for a "Round-Up of Kansas Chapters" to preserve the history, folklore, music, customs, genealogy and foods of the Germans from Russia.

## Meetings

Regular meetings of the Northeast Kansas Chapter are held in the basement of St. Joseph's Catholic Church on the corner of 3rd and Van Buren streets beginning at 2:00 p.m. The agenda consists of a short business meeting, an instructional or educational program followed by a pot luck.

*Guests are always  
Welcome!*

### Meeting Schedule for 2006

Feb. 12	Regular Meeting
April 9	Regular Meeting
June 11	Regular Meeting
July 30	Chapter Picnic, Lake Shawnee, Shelter House #3, Noon to 4pm
Oct. 8	Regular Meeting
Dec. 10	Christmas Party

### Other Events

Oct. 21	2006 Round-up of Kansas Chapters, Hays, KS
Aug. 14-20	2006 AHSGR National Convention Lincoln, NE

## For more information

Visit our web site: [www.ahsgr.org/northeastern\\_kansas\\_chapter.htm](http://www.ahsgr.org/northeastern_kansas_chapter.htm)

Contact: Sheri Rose,  
Chapter Vice-President at 785-986-6308  
or Visit us at the Topeka Farmers' Market,  
10th & Topeka, Saturdays  
May through August.

**We're the people selling the bierocks!**