

North Star Chapter

<http://www.northstarchapter.org>

Preserving the heritage of the Germans from Russia, in dual affiliation with the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) and the Germans from Russia Historical Society (GRHS).

Germans from Russia Oral History Project at Northern State University

**Saturday, September 19, 2015
Berea Lutheran Church**

**7538 Emerson Avenue South
Richfield, MN 55423**

1:00 p.m. - Business meeting
2:00 p.m. - Guest speaker

Robert Russell, Aberdeen, SD

Robert Russell is the Library Director and University Archivist at Northern State University in Aberdeen, SD. During his ten years on the faculty at NSU, he has overseen electronic resources and instruction along with teaching in the NSU History Department. His work experience includes serving as the Conservation Collection archivist at the Denver Public Library in Denver, CO. He holds master's degrees in history and library science.

*Robert Russell,
Library Director
and University
Archivist at
Northern State
University,
Aberdeen, South
Dakota.*



Join us in September to learn about:

NSU Germans from Russia oral history project,

along with highlighting genealogy and history resources freely available online via the NSU digitization project. Images, documents, and excerpts from oral history interviews will provide context to the presentation, along with

background of the oral history project, and the larger South Dakota Germans from Russia Cultural center.

The presentation will also highlight the process used in oral history and digitization projects, some unique interviews, and future plans for Germans from Russia historical preservation at NSU.

ABOUT NSU/THE SOUTH DAKOTA GERMANS FROM RUSSIA CULTURAL CENTER: NSU is home to a growing collection of books, images, manuscripts, and artifacts that pertain to the Germans from Russia in South Dakota. In addition to gathering items that document the Germans from Russia experience, NSU is also conducting an oral history project. Interviews have been conducted throughout South Dakota, Minnesota, and California. These interviews are intended to create primary source materials for researcher use, and to include them in exhibits to provide depth and context. A physical space is currently under construction, to include permanent and temporary exhibits.

Follow us on Facebook at: North Star Chapter of Minnesota



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Please Take Note **Snowbirds:**

If you have a **winter address**, please notify the Membership Chair, Duane Stabler.

Chapter President's Message

by Chuck Kurle

I especially like this time of year with all the fresh fruits and vegetables. My all time favorite is corn on the cob! Followed by creamy cucumbers and onions, watermelon pickles, dill pickles, and the list can go on. Our ancestors certainly knew how to prepare and preserve food.

The spring banquet "Tribute to Lawrence Welk" in April was a great success. Thank you to all the talented performers for a great show. And a special thank you to Carol Just for spending untold hours organizing and directing the entire production.

November is our annual election of officers to lead the North Star Chapter for next year. As always, we need volunteers for the Nominating Committee as well as for Chapter officers. We will be discussing this at the September meeting. Please consider volunteering to help keep this great organization alive.

Duane Stabler has done a great job as Membership Chair. All of us need to help recruit new members. Do you have any family, friends, or new acquaintances (someone you met this summer?) that might be interested in their German from Russia heritage? Invite them or better yet, bring them to a meeting so they can experience the great programming and fellowship we have.

We had excellent representation at the GRHS Convention in July. See Bernie Becker's report in this newsletter (page 5). The Black Hills Chapter is considering hosting the 2016 convention – what a beautiful location to visit while attending the convention. Dr. William Bosch, author of *"The German-Russians in Words and Pictures"* is a member of the Black Hills Chapter. This past spring I finished reading his book. What a great

condensed history of our ancestors, starting with the **Volga** migration, then the Black Sea migration, followed by the migration to America. Our library has a copy for those interested.

Enjoy the rest of the summer and see you at the September meeting.

Volga Germans special event, Mason City, Iowa: Sunday, September 13, 2015. More details of this Concordia University Seminar Series at the *Historic Park Inn* on our Facebook page, and at this link: <http://cvgs.cu-portland.edu/events/2015Sep13.cfm>

Submission Deadline for the next newsletter is 15 October 2015. Please put NEWZLETTER in the subject line, and email inputs to: NancyGertner at mac.com

**“Prairie Potholes
and Rock Piles”
with Author Merv Rennich**



Merv will discuss how he came to write **Prairie Potholes and Rock Piles**, which is a collection of memories growing up in Central North Dakota during the middle of the 20th century. Included will be background information on the area, some family history, and how things were while growing up during the 1940s and 1950s before he went off to college and to see the world.

A first generation American, Merv Rennich was born and raised in Central North Dakota. His father was born in Waterloo, Beresan District, Odessa, and his mother’s family came from Hoffnungstal, Bessarabia. A graduate of McClusky High School in 1956, Merv continued his education at the University of North Dakota where he received a degree in Mechanical Engineering. After graduating in 1960, he went to work for the Caterpillar Tractor Company. Merv wrote a book, **Beer and Diesel Fuel**, about his initial years as a field engineer in Latin America. He and his wife, Joy, and their four sons also lived for five years in Switzerland from where he traveled throughout Europe, Africa, and the Mid-East. Merv enjoyed his last eight years as manager of Caterpillar’s Technical Information Division which required world-wide travel, before retiring in 1993. During the past 22 years, he has been busy volunteering with the Boy Scouts, Habitat For Humanity, the local German American Club’s polka band and alphorn group, and at his church. Merv also enjoys doing genealogy research, writing, and traveling with Joy, especially to see their eight grandchildren.

Saturday, October 24, 2015
Berea Lutheran Church
7538 Emerson Avenue South
Richfield, MN 55423
 1:00 p.m. - Business meeting
 2:00 p.m. - Guest speaker

<p>UPCOMING EVENTS</p>	<p>November 21, 2015 Poetry and Photos: Sharon Chmielarz and Ken Smith</p>	<p>December 5, 2015 Annual Weihnachtsfest celebration</p>
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We're Related!
 by Vicki Kurle

Chuck and I discovered he is a second cousin once removed to chapter member Don Weidenbach! Don's grandpa was Johannes Bader and Chuck's great grandpa was Anton Bader and they were brothers from Wishek, ND. Don and his wife came over for a German dinner and Don brought a homemade cheese *Kuchen* he baked! It was very good and inspired us to find this family connection. Chuck and Don are both Engineers. Don's wife is Norwegian like my mom was. We had such a nice visit with them.

Library Corner

by Bernelda Becker

Picture a little girl clutching a \$5.00 bill turned loose in a candy store. That's how I felt at the GRHS convention when I was confronted by a table covered with half price books. I came home with with five new books for our North Star Library, four at half-price. Keeping the size of our budget in mind, along with the knowledge that new books we might like are in production, I used restraint. I hope you'll like these new additions to our library. Their copyrights are as recent as 2012.

NEW BOOK PURCHASES

Life Story of Dr. Karl Stumpp -- As Told to Arthur E. Flegel

A long awaited publication of Arthur Flegel's personal interview with Dr. Karl Stumpp taken from a tape recording he made with Dr. Stumpp on June 7, 1979 at Dr. Stumpp's apartment in Stuttgart, Germany. Research about your German from Russia heritage probably led you to Karl Stumpp's large book, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the years 1763 to 1862*. Perusing this 50-page booklet tells us who this man was, and how he came to gather this wonderful genealogical source of information.

How the East Was Won by Alfred Opp (C)

This is a companion book to Opp's *Our Roots Grew Deep in the Russian Soil*, already on our shelves. You'll love Mr. Opp's chatty style as he gives the reader stories about customs, spiritual life, and remembrances of life in Bessarabia to time lived in Poland, on to pro-war Germany, and eventually to Canada. You will find yourself chuckling at times as you read. An example – read about Uncle George, pages 210-211. It's worth the price of the book!

Tumbleweeds Burning -- Book 2 by Milt Ost (H)

I believe you will love Book 2 of *Tumbleweeds Burning*. It begins with the years when our parents or great grandparents lived in dugouts or sod houses, takes us through the 1920s when our

parents or grandparents were young marrieds (WWI, prohibition, times of plenty, the crash, drought, dust storms, and grasshoppers), then on through WWII and right up to the 1950s, the years when many of us were in our early adulthood. The book takes place near Beulah ND, but could have been in any Midwest farming community at that time. Thank you Mr. Ost for this well written, captivating creative non-fiction book.

Full Circle -- A Journey in Search of Roots by David A. Hacker, Ph.D. (A)

One never knows what adventures await when you begin down the road of researching your roots. David A. Hecker went 'full circle' with his genealogical research. From scant knowledge of his ethnicity to total surprise to discover German from Russia roots, he met kith and kin around the world—Germany, Ukraine, Argentina, and with total surprise, to Texas, finally leading him back to Devils Lake North Dakota where it all began.

From Refugee to Rafters -- A True Story of Flight, Freedom and Faith by Rudolf Stepper with Elsie Loewen (A)

Rudy's courage and resourcefulness was vital to his family's survival in the ruins of the post-war Germany. Would it be enough to meet the challenges of the new life he was determined to build in Canada?

THE GERMAN-RUSSIANS – IN WORDS AND PICTURES by Dr. William Bosch

Compliments of the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, ND State University Library, Fargo.

Dr. Bosch's book has been in our library since December, but few have had the opportunity to read it, thus I still consider it new. Due to conflicting workshops, I did not see the presentation at the GRHS convention, but I heard good reports from those who attended.

NOTICE:

It is time to check your shelves, end tables, and reading corners for books you checked out of our library last spring. Please return them at our September or October meetings.

GRHS Convention Report

by Bernelda Becker

GRHS 45 Convention Report

July 15-19, 2015, Bismarck, ND

Nine North Star Chapter members enjoyed mingling with some three hundred like-minded people from places far and wide. Among the many informative and interesting workshops were four led by our own Chapter members: Carol Just – “Hollyhocks and Grasshoppers, Growing up German from Russia in America;” Sharon Schmielarz - “Visibility: 10 Miles, a Prairie Memoir in Photography and Poetry;” Ron Scherbenski - “Mennonites in Belize, Central America;” and Duane Stabler - “Through Grandfather’s Eyes: The Evolution of Agriculture on the Northern Great Plains.”

Days were busy and many great workshops were presented. How does a person choose which workshops to attend? For example we had our choice of 16 workshops on Thursday, with time slots for only four. Some were scheduled twice on different days, making it possible to work one in if you have a particular interest in. But one still runs into conflicts and must make difficult choices.

The undisputed highlight of the convention was the world premier showing of “*We (Never) Don’t Forget South American Germans from Russia.*” Produced by Prairie Public Broadcasting & NDSU Libraries’ Germans from Russia, this documentary movie introduces us to Germans from Russia that settled in South America. Watch for the opportunity to see this film at a future North Star meeting. You won’t want to miss it. Beautifully filmed, and very interesting.

Annual Business Meeting:

Discussion of the need for money and expanding our membership dominated the business meeting. The GRHS headquarters faces an estimated \$60,000 special assessment for street improvements anticipated to be completed in 2016. A big thank you to chapters and individuals that have already made contributions toward this unbudgeted expense. The Black Hills and SoDak Stamm chapters found creative ways to raise extra money and presented substantial checks at the meeting.

2014 financial results show expenses per member to be \$62.27 for GRHS general and book store operations. At its October 4, 2014 meeting, the GRHS Board of Directors voted to recommend to the membership that the regular membership dues be changed from \$50.00 to \$60.00. The last regular membership vote to raise dues was in September 2009. Following considerable reasonable discussion, a motion was made and passed that the dues be raised to \$65.00. For more detailed information feel free to look at the convention book on the library table. If you want copies of any of these convention report pages, you can make them on our printer.

A big thank you to the many faithful and dedicated volunteers who put in hours without pay to take care of the many details involved in keeping these conventions running smoothly.

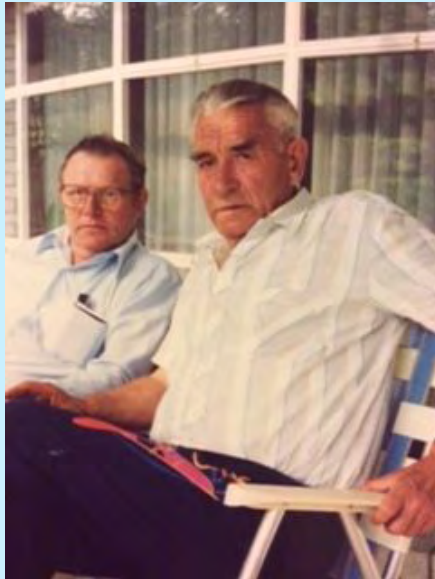
In Remembrance

Leroy H. Zeller, 79

Leroy H. Zeller 79 years old, Plymouth MN passed away March 27, 2015 in New Braunfels, TX. He was interred at Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minneapolis MN. He is survived by wife Adella, Daughters: Teresa and Tina, Son: LeRoy Jr., Grandchildren: Alexander, Bre’Anne and Jacob.

Ethnic Heritage

By Louise Regehr Wiens



“Letter from Valentina”

Photo: Viktor Regehr (left) and brother Kolja (Nicholas) Regehr (right) in 1991

My paternal grandparents, John and Elisabeth Regehr and their four children, Nickolai, Maria, Viktor and John (who died in childhood) lived in the prosperous Mennonite Molotschna Colony in Ukraine as the winds of World War II began to blow. Originally from Schonau, then moving to Halbstadt, eventually they were pillars in the village of Kleefeld in the early 1940s when rumors of an advancing Red Army against the German *Wehrmacht* came to fruition one dark night. John, a respected village leader, was led away, never to be heard from again. Our family, like millions of others during that horrible time, was instantly fragmented for all generations thereafter. Arriving at their home several days after John’s arrest was a parcel containing his personal belongings. Elisabeth had insight to tear apart the cap, whereupon she found hidden a

hastily scribbled note stating, “What they have accused me of I have not done.” More devastating loss loomed on Elisabeth’s horizon. My father, Viktor, was visiting his aunts in a nearby village as the army swept through and he was caught up in a mass deportation to Siberia. He was only thirteen years of age. At some point, Viktor’s brother Nickolai (Nick) joined the Red Army and was never heard from again.

During his forced exile in Martuk, Kazakhstan, my father worked in the fields where he eventually met and married my mother, a widow with a young son. Originally from Leipzig, Bessarabia, in 1940 she was resettled in the German Reich but fell into the hands of the Red Army and was exiled to Martuk as well. In 1955 the Soviets permitted the couple to leave and return to Germany, where my mother’s numerous siblings from Leipzig had settled after the war. The Red Cross reunited my father and his mother, whom he found living in Gronau, Germany. In 1961 my brother, my grandmother and I joined my parents in immigrating to Canada.

In childhood I shared a bedroom with *Oma* and on her dresser, next to the Bible, stood a brown, hand-hewn wooden frame with a striking photo of a young man in uniform. This was Nickolai, the “missing one.” During my daily history lessons about the war, she fondly reminisced about him and was overcome with emotion. She died in 1971, not knowing if he was alive or dead.

Fast forward to 1991. I was in my kitchen one day when my father frantically called and announced that a letter had arrived from Nickolai. He was indeed alive! A visit was quickly arranged and we were reunited with him and two of his three children, Valentina and Viktor. It was momentous as tears and laughter flowed along with the Russian language. They arrived with only the clothes on their backs and the unlimited enthusiasm to explore Canadian freedoms. *(continued on page 7)*

Ethnic Heritage (continued from page 6)

We sent them home with money, clothes, medicine and lots of love. We continued sending parcels of aid and money over the years, and I think of them every day.

Nickolai has since died, and both of my parents passed away in 2014. Viktor has kept in touch, yet Valentina vanished into the woodwork, so to speak. The siblings live thousands of miles apart. Viktor wrote to me last year that he has now retired. His employer had been unable to pay his workers for some time. In February a letter arrived at my home:

Photo: Louise Regehr Wiens (L); her brother Arthur Wiens (R); their cousin Valentina Regehr (center), 1991



Letter from Valentina

Greetings to you dear Louise, David, Adam and your daughter!

As you probably already figured out, this is Valentina from Ukraine writing this letter to you. It is unforgivable that I haven't kept in touch with you. But there has been no day in which I haven't remembered you. May of 1991, when I visited you in Canada, is the happiest month in my life. I saw then how people are meant to live. I am so grateful to Uncle Victor that he organized such an event at his own expense. When my father was still alive, we were in touch with Uncle Victor. But now I have no update on you. I am terribly ashamed of it. It is possible to communicate by internet. We have found David's profile in skype (David Wiens, Canada). But there is a language barrier which keeps us from using it. We need an interpreter. My grandson is studying English, but he is a fourth-grader and his language skills are minimal.

The Soviet Union collapsed within two months of our return from Canada. And Ukraine, which used to feed half the world, became an impoverished nation over the next twenty-three years. The rich are stealing everything, factories are shut down and there are no jobs. And now this war. Dear Louise, of course you have heard from Grandma Lis and Uncle Victor how horrifying war is. I never imagined that we would have such a terrible war. A general mobilization has been declared and all men ages twenty to sixty are under military obligation. But I have two sons forty-three and thirty-three. I am so afraid for them.

A little about me. I am already sixty-eight. I have four grandchildren, two grandsons and two granddaughters. The oldest boy is twelve, the youngest girl is one. My health is not so great, but I can get medical help, because it is so expensive and my pension is so small. But healthcare is all universal.

My boys don't have stable employment. They are temporary construction workers with no benefits and no retirement. The owner pays as he wishes. But so far we are not starving. We are living like the other people here. We have bread, which is important. We are hoping for peace, but it looks like it is going to be a long war.

Dear Louise, please write back how you are doing; how is your health?

I will be looking forward to your answer.
A kiss to you,
Valentina from Ukraine.

North Star Chapter
of Minnesota
AHSGR / GRHS Affiliated
Non-Profit Organization
PO Box 583642
Minneapolis, MN 55458



Thanks for the memories!

Cast of a Musical Tribute to Lawrence Welk at Spring Banquet in April: Front Row: Kate Schirg, Jane Plumhoff, Kae Blecha, Sharon Schmielarz, Carol Just, Glorian Anderson. Back Row: Chuck Kurle, Mel Meier, Steve Weninger, Sam Fiske, Chris Huber, Sharon and Ed Kleingartner.