

Newsletter

Spring 2006

vol. 9, issue 2



Sunflower Chapter
of the American
Historical Society
of Germans
from Russia



Karfreitag always called for using the *Klapper*.



SOCIAL...12:30
MEETING...1:00
PROGRAM...1:30

For the program we will have a German lesson from Leona Pfeifer and a brief genealogical presentation from Kevin Rupp on the Plevé genealogy charts. We will also sing a couple of German folk songs and celebrate the arrival of warm weather with ice cream and cake.

Come alone or bring a guest! We always meet in Munjor's old limestone schoolhouse. To get to Munjor, take Old Highway 40 east from Hays and turn right after passing the airport and just before reaching Toulon Road.

The Lenten journey between *Fasenacht* and *Ostersonntag*

by Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA

WHETHER YOU CALL IT *FASENACHT* OR *FASTNACHT*, it refers to the same thing, Leona Pfeifer said at the chapter's February meeting. It is the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, a day that our German ancestors celebrated as "the big blowout" before Lent. It was a day full of eating and fun.

Because Volga German *Fasenacht* and Lenten customs varied from village to village, Leona focused her talk on the customs familiar to her. In her home, for example, the foods that were consumed all throughout Lent were simpler than those eaten during the rest of the year. The Wasingers ate no meat on Wednesdays and Fridays, which made cold egg sandwiches the mainstay of her bag lunches taken to school on those days. Every Lent Leona tried to give up candy, but she remembers keeping a "perfect Lent" only one year in her childhood. "The idea," she said, "was to do something really hard." Only at noon on Holy Saturday--no sooner--was the time right to break one's Lenten penance. That was the magic moment when Leona could again begin eating her candy guilt-free.

Leona noted that the Lenten customs observed in her husband Edward's childhood home were stricter than those kept in hers. Throughout Lent his family abstained from dancing, listening to music, and even singing or humming around the house.

The Catholic parishes in all the local villages celebrated no wedding Masses during Lent. Fridays brought people to church to pray the Stations of the Cross. On *Karfreitag*, Good Friday, it was customary for every store and business to close for three hours so that people could attend church services. Usually there was standing room only in the church. Because no ringing of bells was permitted until the end of Lent, servers went about town calling people to Good Friday services with wooden clappers while reciting the rhyme, "*Klabber, klabber Eier aus, oder schlag ich Loch im Haus.*" The rhyme literally meant, "Bring me your eggs or I'll knock a hole in your house!" because the custom was to give the altar boys dyed Easter eggs on that day. At that point in her explanation, Leona invited chapter member Paul Deines to explain what Lutherans always did to call people to church on Good Friday. Perfectly on cue, his answer drew a big laugh: "The Lutherans *knew* when to go to church!"

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OKTOBERFEST SNEAK PEEK

On September 16, 2006, at the Midwest Deutsche Oktoberfest in Hays, Frank Jacobs, George Schifelbein, and Leo Dorzweiler will show their film from their February 2006 trip to the Volga German colonies of Entre Rios and Coronel Suarez, Argentina. The film includes the consolidated Wiesenseite villages, which became Valle Maria, Argentina, and the various Bergeseite villages focused on Pfeifer and Kamenka people in Coronel Suarez. The film contains considerable Volga German dialogue between Leo and the local gentry, many of the Volga German organizers in Argentina, a dance in Valle Maria, old-time in-home harmonizing, various agricultural practices, a tour of a grain mill, general views of the countryside, and visits to noteworthy cemeteries and many churches.

Fasenacht and Ostersonntag

(continued from page 1)

When the subject of Holy Thursday came up, Leona said she had never uncovered in her research why *unsere Leute* always called it *Gruenedonnerstag*, "Green Thursday." Father Gilmery Tallman OFM Cap. noted that Italian Catholics traditionally decorate their churches with freshly sprouting green wheat on that day. I added that I had once spoken with a German grandmother in the Catholic parish of Chelyabinsk, Russia, who had grown up on the Volga and remembered that her mother always planted wheat seeds in a box indoors at the beginning of Lent. Then on Easter Sunday, the Easter Bunny laid its colored eggs on the green bed of wheat springing up in the box.

From there the conversation drifted to other topics. "Remember the *tennebrae* services during Holy Week?" someone asked. Father Gilmery noted that these were evenings of parish prayer that included recitation of Old Testament psalms and extinguishing of candles one by one as each psalm was completed.

Someone else remembered that there were no flowers decorating the church during the forty days of Lent, and all the statues were covered with purple cloths. The priest's vestments were purple, too.

On *Ostersonntag*, Easter Sunday, families always brought baskets of special Easter foods to be blessed at the end of Mass. The custom is still observed at St. Joseph's Church in Hays, where Father Gilmery estimated that about 20-25 families in the parish participate. At Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, people bring for an Easter blessing bottles of wine and loaves of homemade bread.

Leona also gave another folklore segment as part of the day's program. This time she spoke about Volga German folk medicine, including the famous cure for a "dislocated navel."

During the business meeting, publicity chair Jeremy Dannebohm was invited to speak. He shared his conviction that the next two months will be crucial for new membership recruitment, in view of the big events ahead for the Sunflower Chapter: hosting the Kansas Round-Up of Chapters in fall of this year and the International AHSGR Convention in summer of next.

Especially important will be reaching out to high school and college students. Jeremy reminded the group that while chapter members know the Volga German heritage very well, many people in Ellis County do not. Jeremy, Kevin, and the rest of the board do all they can to bring new attention to our organization and its purposes, but clearly it is the responsibility of every member to help with community outreach and invite new people to join us.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope most of you will find the time to come to our next meeting on Sunday, May 7, in Munjor. Our last meeting was excellent and we had a good time. We did miss those who for one reason or another were not able to attend.

This next meeting should prove to be fun and entertaining. It will consist of a German lesson, an explanation of the Pleve genealogical charts, and time to learn or relearn some old-time Volga German folk songs. We want to welcome especially the Hays High German students to this meeting. They have already offered the chapter their much-needed help for the upcoming convention. I also want to thank personally all the students and chapter members who attended our recent press conference.

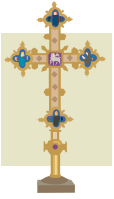
Keep watching our website (www.volgagerman.net) as well as the newspapers for more information about the chapter's upcoming activities.

--Kevin Rupp

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

My special thanks go to these contributors to the current issue: Frank Jacobs, LeRoy L. Herrman, Larry Weigel, Bob Schumacher, and Dennis Zitterkopf. If any of you want to contribute something to the ongoing short features *How's Your German?*, *Overheard*, *Photo Feature*, and *Strange But True*, please let me know at the next chapter meeting. Thanks.

--Sister Alice Ann Pfeifer CSA



Lasset uns beten

A few of you have asked that we print German prayers from time to time. Here is the Apostles' Creed (*Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis*).

Ich glaube an Gott den Vater, den allmaechtigen Schoepfer des Himmels und der Erde, und an Jesum Christum, seiner eingeborenen Sohn, unsern Herrn, der empfangen ist vom Heiligen Geiste, geboren aus Maria, der Jungfrau, gelitten unter Pontius Pilatus, gekreuzigt, gestorben und begraben, abgestiegen zu der Hoelle, am dritten Tage wieder auferstanden von den Toten; aufgefahren in den Himmel, sitzt er

zur Rechten Gottes, des allmaechtigen Vaters, von dannen er kommen wird, zu richten die Lebendigen und die Toten. Ich glaube an den heiligen Geist, eine heilige, katholische Kirche, Gemeinschaft der heiligen, Nachlass der Suenden, Auferstehung des Fleisches, und ein ewiges Leben. Amen.

Tribute to Lawrence Weigel from his son

Part Four

Lawrence Weigel Jr. wrote this biography as a gift to his father while Lawrence Sr. was still alive. In Part Three, published in the last issue, we learned of Lawrence's return home from the seminary in order to support his widowed mother who no longer had a place to live. The two of them rented a simple home together, and he worked on WPA projects until financially he was able to return to high school.

HE WENT BACK TO VICTORIA HIGH AND GOT HIS DIPLOMA as a member of the class of 1935. He also met his high school sweetheart, Elizabeth Rohleder (my mom), the same year. Dad said she was very popular and well liked, and finally agreed to have a date with him. Dad wrote, "I thought she was the most beautiful and wonderful girl in the world, and I knew someday I would want to marry her, but we had to wait because there were no jobs and I had to take care of my mother." Mom and Dad continued to date during a five-year period. Mom worked at the Duckwall store in Hays.

In 1935, Dad began his adult life as a nineteen-year-old kid who loved to sing the first bass part in the church choir at Victoria's Cathedral of the Plains. At that time his musical training from the seminary was about to surface. His first gig as a musician was with a group of old-time fiddlers in 1935, when they let him play trumpet in their group. Soon he was playing the trumpet with other dance bands in the area and joined the Jake Weingardt Band, which was one of the most popular bands in Western Kansas. In addition to playing dances, he joined the band every Sunday when they played live on KVG B

Radio in Great Bend, Kansas. Dad went on to play dances for 30 years and spent seventeen with the popular Charlie Staab Orchestra. Dad said that during that long span he probably played more than 3000 dances.

In 1936, Dad got his first job at the K-State Agricultural Experiment Station in Hays for \$75 per month. He worked for the Soil Conservation Service in crop research. The K-State professors gave him a quick crash course in the study of grasses and agricultural research. Soon he was teaching Fort Hays College students how to identify grasses when they came to the station on their field trips. He said his boss, Mr. A.L. Hallstead, influenced his life as one of the finest Christian men he had ever known. Dad was a hard worker outdoors, but his bosses learned of his office skills and moved him to an inside office job at the experiment station.

These were happy times for Dad because he was still a bachelor and enjoyed stopping at Joe Dreiling's place in Victoria where he and his buddies would hang out in the evenings, visit, play cards, and eat sunflower seeds. One of his best friends, Louie Dreiling, played the guitar while Dad and his buddies sang songs well into the night.

In 1938, Dad traded in his old 1929 Chevy and bought a deluxe Chevy for \$330. He said, "That night I proudly drove to town and showed my friends that I had a car with two tail lights. How excited I was with that car."

Dad was dating other girls but had his eye on Elizabeth. Soon he was starting to see her more and more after she got off work at Duckwall's. Elizabeth lived with her sister Clara and brother-in-law Florian Engel and their family on East 14th Street in Hays. Mom and Dad became engaged to be married in 1938, but had to wait two more years because her dad (my Grandpa Rohleder) died in 1939.

Dad said in those days girls did not continue to work after they were married. Duckwall's employed only single girls. Fortunately, Dad's Grandpa Kuhn removed some of the financial pressures from Dad's shoulders when Great Grandpa gave Dad's mom (my grandmother) a house in Victoria. Now Dad didn't have to worry about finding a place for her to live. Dad said there were few jobs then, and his mother could not find work. Thanks to Great Grandpa Kuhn's gift, Dad could now think about his future with the love of his life, my mom.

--TO BE CONTINUED

OVERHEARD

Some of the funniest stories told among old-timers concern the corporal punishments they remember receiving in childhood. Now, some form of corporal punishment was typical in a Volga German household, and teachers in village schools were expected to maintain discipline with methods similar to those used at home.

Bob Schumacher tells of a time when a boy decided to outwit a Sister of St. Agnes who was known for administering the occasional spanking with a wooden cane. He went to school that day with his back pockets full of rocks. The minute he got in trouble and bent over for his spanking, the bewildered sister's cane cracked apart upon contact.

A story told about Bob Pfeifer of Liebenthal goes like this. One day his mother instructed him to go look in their tree-filled yard for a good stick she could use for the spanking he had just earned. No dummy, young Bob returned with a dried sunflower stalk.



SOAR Project and Eagle Communications

A match made in heaven

By Dennis Zitterkopf

ON APRIL 19 KEVIN RUPP, LEONA PFEIFER, AND I WERE TREATED to a tour of Eagle Communications' "server farm" in Hays. Our guides were Travis Kohlrus, Director of Operations, and Jim Gall, Technical Engineer. I was particularly interested in this opportunity because Eagle is the internet facility that hosts data and webpages for the AHSGR SOAR project (Saving Our Ancestral Records) at www.ahsgrsoar.org. The only description I had previously been given was that it was "a small facility in the middle of a corn field." This turned out to be far from a true representation, and we were shown far more than a server farm!

Eagle is actually a significant internet service provider (ISP) and provides cable or wireless internet service to several cities and localities in Kansas as well as Oklahoma. We who have worked in the SOAR project have been very pleased with the reliability and responsiveness of the Eagle site, but until now I hadn't realized what a jewel exists in Hays. The building we toured contains the transmitter equipment for Eagle's radio stations, television channels, and internet and server facilities.

The building is dwarfed by a 500-foot radio tower next to it, but inside is a dream facility for any budding communication engineer or technician. We first viewed the actual server room that

contains four racks of server equipment (a server can be thought of as a specialized, fast, data-processing computer with a large hard drive storage capability). The SOAR server is, as expected, only one of many servers for the various Eagle customers. Jim Gall discussed the interface Eagle has with the internet--several racks of equipment that allow them to communicate with the data "pipes" (fiber optic cables) for the rest of the internet world.

As television technology has evolved, Eagle has always updated, and continues to update, equipment used to serve their customers' needs. We were shown several large racks of equipment that provide normal analog television channels. Next we saw a few smaller racks that are used for digital television channels, and we learned that the smaller size provided more channels than the larger size used for the analog channels. This means that their high-definition channel equipment is quite compact although it produces higher-resolution images.

We also were shown the equipment that allows Eagle to receive major television network signals, which they then rebroadcast with their transmitters. Because they also provide five AM and FM radio stations, several racks of equipment are dedicated to this service only.

All of Eagle's equipment is designed with



Travis Kohlrus, Leona Pfeifer, Dennis Zitterkopf, and Jim Gall are a picture of the working partnership that exists between Eagle Communications and AHSGR's SOAR project.

redundancy so that if one item fails, there is minimal loss of functionality. Of course, loss of belectrical power is a single point of a failure that can adversely affect the performance of the entire station. To counter this problem--and with Kansas weather conditions a power loss is not unusual--the station includes a massive battery backup power system for short duration outages and a motor generator set that automatically turns on when there is a threat of loss of power for longer periods. I asked if they had ever experienced a total loss of power, then operated without a degradation of performance during the length of the problem. Gall said, "Very definitely" and explained that a bird had recently shorted out a power line near them, causing the explosion of a transformer along with a loss of power to the station.

AHSGR doesn't often embark on a new project like SOAR, but the choice of Eagle Communications as a host was definitely a good one for the society and the project. For a retired "techie," the Eagle tour was an unexpected treat in a busy day I spent in Hays on other AHSGR business.

Future Chapter Meetings

MAY 7, 2006 * Spring Meeting
AUG. 6, 2006 * Summer Picnic
OCT. 8, 2006 * Fall Meeting & Annual Banquet
DEC. 3, 2006 * Weihnachten Meeting
FEB. 4, 2007 * Fasnacht Meeting

Hays to be site of international AHSGR convention in 2007

CITY HALL IN HAYS ON APRIL 19 WAS THE GATHERING PLACE for a variety of persons and groups rarely seen together in one room: the city mayor; representatives from the Hays Convention and Visitors' Bureau and the local Holiday Inn; various officers and members of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) and its local chapter; German students and teachers from city schools; cameramen and news reporters; and other invited guests. The occasion bringing them all together was the Sunflower Chapter's announcement that Hays, for the first time ever, would be the location for the AHSGR's 2007 international convention.

"I've attended any number of conventions in my life," commented 2007 Convention Co-Chair Leona Pfeifer, "but this one is special because it is on my home turf." Telling the students in the room that having this event nearby would give them the opportunity of a lifetime, she echoed the belief of several other speakers that student involvement will be vital not only to the convention's success, but also to the organization's long-term goal of preserving the local heritage of Germans from Russia.

Convention Co-Chair Leonard Schoenberger promised a good time for all who plan to attend. He said there will be at least two or three dances during the week with live music supplied by area polka bands, plus other forms of entertainment every day of the convention. (Get ready for some good music on the hammered dulcimer, too.)

Janet Kuhn of the Hays Convention and Visitors' Bureau promised to assist the Sunflower Chapter in four specific ways over the coming months: (1) working closely with the youth director of the convention; (2) organizing local tours for convention participants; (3) keeping the local media informed; and (4) personally attending this year's AHSGR convention being held in Lincoln, Nebraska. "I am delighted to be a part of history in the making," she concluded.

Tim Cossart, manager of the local Holiday Inn, assured the assembly that the hotel is doing all it can to prepare for the 800-1000 AHSGR guests expected to arrive in Hays in June 2007. That includes seeing to it that hotel chefs learn some of the culinary secrets of local Volga German cooks. After the press conference concluded, he invited everyone present to sample the fresh *kuchen* that hotel personnel had prepared.

STRANGE BUT TRUE

This is a true story LeRoy L. Herrman tells about August Wolf. One day in the late 1920s, despite feeling unwell, August hitched his horse to the wagon and drove to town for supplies. Although August managed to finish all his errands and head home again, by the time his wagon reached the farm, he was dead. His horse had found its own way home.



At the end of the 2:00 press conference, some 60 attendants mill around the room exchanging contact information and enjoying refreshments from the Hays Holiday Inn.



Hays Mayor Wayne Billinger responds to Jeremy Dannebohm's comment that sometimes dating in high school was hard for him because he had so many Volga German relatives in town. "I had trouble dating in high school, too," his honor joked, "but not because I was related to everyone!"

Student Memberships Explained

Why does the AHSGR have a special membership program just for high school and college students? Because young people bring curiosity, vitality, and inspiration wherever they go!

If you are between the ages of 15 and 24, the AHSGR Student Membership Program is for *you*. At the reduced rate of \$20, you can enjoy all the benefits that other members enjoy at less than half the price.

Immediately upon joining, you will receive a membership card and packet, plus a coupon for \$5 off any purchase from the society's bookstore in Lincoln, Nebraska. Throughout the coming year you will receive four quarterly issues of the AHSGR *Newsletter*, four quarterly issues of the AHSGR *Journal*, and five issues of the Sunflower Chapter Newsletter.

You will also be able to enjoy the many fun and educational experiences that the Sunflower Chapter provides its members throughout the year.

If you are:

- proud of your German Russian heritage and want to know more about it
- studying the German language
- thinking of majoring in history and/or German in college
- simply a curious person

then you will want to join us in this very special year of preparations for

the Kansas Round-Up of Chapters to be held in Hays in fall 2006 and the International AHSGR Convention to be held here in summer 2007.

To join today, please fill out the following form and return it with \$20 to:

ELMER DREHER, TREASURER
1319 MACARTHUR RD.
HAYS, KS 67601

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP

E-MAIL

PHONE

SUNFLOWER CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

1703 Henry Drive, Apt. B
Hays, KS 67601

e-mail: rossiya@ruraltel.net
website: www.volgagerman.net



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