

Session Schedule and Descriptions

U.S. Central Standard Time

Monday, July 12

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., Board of Directors meeting

Tuesday, July 13

9:00-10:00 a.m. **Zoom B**

Welcome, Zoom Orientation

Mike Heil, Staff

Welcome session and Zoom help for anyone having difficulty signing on to Zoom.

10:15-11:15 a.m., **Zoom A**

Hardship to Homeland: Folktales of Pacific Northwest Germans from Russia

Opening Keynote Speaker

Richard Scheuerman

11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., **Zoom A**

The Intersecting Lives and Fates of Bishop Anton Zerr of the Tiraspol Diocese and the Schmalz Family of Kandel in South Russia

Dr. Eric J. Schmaltz

Based on available family, village, and archival records, this presentation reclaims a powerful story of hardship and perseverance of one ethnic German family, the Schmalzes, near Odessa in western Ukraine during a period of intensifying Communist oppression and terror and, eventually, brutal world war. The Schmalz family also provides a backdrop to the last troubled days of Anton Zerr (1849-1932), the former Bishop of Tiraspol in South Russia. Under harassment and on the run from Soviet authorities, the ailing and elderly bishop died in the home of the widow Barbara (Becker) Schmalz (1899-1937) and her seven children in the German Catholic village of Kandel (today Lymanske). Barbara's personal care of the bishop and the village's public funeral held in the cleric's honor each stood as acts of political defiance in the eyes of the authorities, which led to further bloodshed and loss in the coming years. The historical reconstruction of events, locations, and personalities weaves together the different personal fates of the bishop and his caretakers, not least of all that of Barbara's oldest daughter Emma (Schmalz) Rieger (1918-2008), whose own dramatic odyssey extends beyond Ukraine to Germany and North America. The rediscovery and commemoration of the bishop's nearly forgotten grave in Lymanske several years ago has only begun to help bring a sense of closure to that time of tribulations.

11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., **Zoom B**

Letters, genealogy, and emails: How the Volga Germans kept and re-established communication between cousins in the Americas, Germany, and Russia

Fabian Zubia Schultheis

This presentation will show the diverse ways that families who migrated from Germany to Russia in 1766 and later between 1875 and 1915 from Russia to the Americas continued having contacts through letters in the 20th century and emails in the last decades. And also show how the genealogical researchers re-connected members of these families across the world, from the Americas to Europe.

12:30-1:30 p.m., **Lunch**

1:30-2:30 p.m., **Zoom A**

The Black Sea German Research Website

Carolyn Schott, Gayla Aspenleiter

Looking for your Black Sea German ancestors? Come on a tour of this research website. Learn tricks for searching the database of 2.5 million individuals, finding resources for your village of interest (including photos and maps), and connecting with distant cousins. You'll leave this presentation well equipped to make use of everything the website has to offer.

1:30-2:30 p.m., **Zoom B**

What's new in Family Tree Maker

Mark Olsen

Join us for a discussion and Q and A session to answer all your questions about Family Tree Maker, the latest version, updates, features and more.

We will also talk about FTM partner products - Charting Companion and Family Book Creator - both amazing plugs-ins that can help you create amazing charts, books, and even show how you can make additional finds with your DNA test results. This class is for all levels of genealogists whether you are just getting started or very experienced.

2:45-3:45 p.m., **Zoom A**

The Road to Warenburg: Interpreting a Village with Maps and Images

Richard Kisling in collaboration with Ronald Brott

The presentation, "The Road to Warenburg: Interpreting a Village with Maps and Photos," uses visual resources to develop understanding of how the people in one colony—Warenburg on the Volga—learned to thrive in their large environment between the Volga River and the steppe. Materials include topographic maps developed by the Red Army in the 1930s, an aerial photo of the village taken by the Luftwaffe in 1942, drawings from 1898 of the pipe organ that was installed in the church balcony, and numerous historical and contemporary photographs of the church and other buildings in the village.

2:45-3:45 p.m., **Zoom B**

Growing Up German-Russian without Realizing it !

Mervin Weiss

I grew up in a predominantly German-Russian community. I knew that we were German people, but it did not feel distinct, unique or special because everyone in our circle of neighbors, friends, and relatives was also German. I did not appreciate my "Germanness" until much later in life. In fact I was 50 yrs old before I began to think about what my German identity meant to me. As I began to research my family's genealogy, I became aware that my Grandfather Weiss was the only one of his siblings to emigrate. Three brothers and three sisters remained in Russia. I began to wonder whatever happened to them, and to their descendants, and I began to search for them. I have now connected with many "cousins" in Germany, having re-located there after 1989, and I began to visit them over several years. Meeting them, and hearing their stories of life in Russia, has given me a much greater appreciation of my German identity.

4:00-5:00 p.m. **Zoom A**

A Volga German Foodways Documentary

Michael Miller & Dodie Rotherham

The presentation, "A Volga German Foodways Documentary", will share plans for filming and interviews with persons in their kitchens in Lincoln, NE, Hays, KS, and northern Colorado including traditional Volga German foods such as Grebble, Runza, pickled watermelon, Kraut and Brei and Kuchen. Filming will also be done at Volga German bakeries, meat markets, cafes, and events. Video clips will be shown from Prairie Public's popular 2017, "Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country". Ten award-winning documentaries have been produced by Prairie public of the Germans from Russia Series beginning with The Germans from Russia: Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie (1999) and the latest, "Women Behind the Plow"

(2019). Dodie Rotherham, former President of AHSGR, and Michael Miller, Executive Producer of the documentaries, will share further information.

4:00-5:00 p.m. **Zoom B**

Making Strawberry Vereneke (verenicks) from our Central California Chapter cookbook

Connie (Engelman) Coberly, Jim Deis, videographer

Close your eyes and picture yourself in your Mother or Grandmother's kitchen. What wonderful aromas are in the air. You never took the time to learn how to make some of these foods or have forgotten how. This video, filmed and edited by Jim Deis, gives good instructions for making one of these dishes, Strawberry Verenika. When you're done watching you should be able to make this German from Russia Dish.

Wednesday, July 14

9:00-10:00 a.m., **Zoom A**

Germans from Russia Traveled! Finding Germans from Russia in U.S. Passport Records

Allyn Brosz

The story of the ethnic German exodus from Russia is usually told as a story of farewell to ancestors, deep mourning, and, once they arrived in America, a keenly felt sense of "Heimweh" or homesickness for the land they would never see again. While that was true for many, another story can also be told. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Germans from Russia would travel abroad, either back to their homeland or to other far corners of the earth, relying on the aid and protection of the U.S. passports they now carried as naturalized citizens. Some would return to their home village to bring other family members to America or to claim the inheritance passed on by a departed relative. Others would serve as missionaries in China, India, and South America. This presentation will discuss the methods of finding the U.S. passport application files and evaluating the information they contain that can enrich the family story.

9:00-10:00 a.m. **Zoom B**

Researching Your Genealogy in Russian Archives

Mila Koretnikov

This presentation will focus on the availability of GR records in Russian archives today. Where are they? How to contact the archives? What to expect? I am going to share the samples of available records and recent photos of visiting the archives in Saratov, Engels and Volgograd. Current projects will be mentioned as well.

Much of the information provided is contained in the following publication: *Russian-German Genealogy: Tips for Family Research in Russian Archives* by Mila Koretnikov. Journal of AHSGR, Fall 2020. Volume 43, No. 3. Pp. 31-37.

10:15-11:15 a.m., **Zoom A**

Cultural Differences among Germans from Russia

AHSGR Annual Meeting Featured Speaker

Wilhelm G. Doos, MD

About a dozen years ago I was taking a coffee break during an AHSGR Convention and happened to be sitting near a group that was having a conversation about Volga Germans. They were discussing recipes, words, phrases, traditions, dress, etc. There was some debate, and at one occasion the debate became quite heated and almost changed to an argument about which Volga German traditions were correct. Listening to this debate it occurred to me that what they were doing is debating the cultural elements that were passed down to them within their own families, which evolved in their respective villages, which came from various regions in the German speaking area of Northern Europe, and depended on where they settled in Russia, how they interacted with the native culture, how long they lived there and finally

where they finally moved to and how they interacted with their new host culture. It occurred to me that although the Volga German diaspora, and Germans from Russia in general, was a unique group, their cultural expression was in fact somewhat variable depending on a variety of factors.

In view of this I've begun studying the cultural evolution of the Germans from Russia Diaspora with emphasis on: where they came from, where they settled, how they interacted with the host culture, how they moved around, what the forces were to assimilate or not, and where they eventually immigrated to. During this 51st AHSGR Virtual Convention I will have two presentations dealing with the Russian German Diaspora as a whole, some comment on evolution of a number of villages, and finally to focus on the individuals in the Doos family and how this entire family has evolved since 1767. Hopefully these presentations will stimulate others to do similar studies and add to or challenge the conclusions I will present.

11:30 a.m-12:30 p.m., **Zoom A**
AHSGR Annual meeting

Mike Heil

Find out what is happening at the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia. There will be information about our new website and other ongoing projects; Board of Directors elections and voting on changes to our By-Laws.

12:30-1:30 p.m., **Lunch**

1:30-2:30 p.m., **Zoom A**
Odessa! Notes on a Roots Journey to the Black Sea

Debra Marquart

My own grandfathers had no detailed memories of their childhood villages in the Kutschurgan and Glückstal regions in south Russia. They had fled their Black Sea villages to come to the Dakota Territory with their parents between 1886 and 1911. When they died, Odessa—the largest city in the region—was listed as the place of birth on their funeral cards, and as they and all their siblings died one by one through the sixties and seventies, something of the exotic went with them.

And so it is with loss: eventually all one is left with is words. So it happened that in 1998, I decided to retrace my ancestors' route from western Europe to the Black Sea in 1803, and to visit the villages they left behind near the Black Sea when they came to America. This presentation is a recounting of what turned out to be a rather disastrous roots journey to find the home-ground of my ancestors.

1:30-2:30 p.m., **Zoom B**
Cousins (DNA + Genealogy)

Lee Macklin, MBA, MIS

It can often be confusing when trying to determine how you might be related to someone. Especially when it comes to cousins who may be the result of an adoption, an ancestor having multiple marriages, or generational and geographic differences.

When you run into roadblocks using traditional genealogy methods, then DNA may provide the answer you have been looking for. DNA is a special and very powerful tool in your genealogy toolbox because it will tell you what your body is saying about your extended family relationships.

This presentation takes a deep dive into explaining the key concepts with many clear and easy to understand charts and diagrams. You will be able to determine how you are related to all

kinds of people — some of them may be a complete surprise. It is a really good feeling of satisfaction you get when you find that one person you have been searching for!!

So, you don't want to miss this presentation to learn new things about the magic of DNA.

2:45-3:45 p.m., **Zoom A**

Is My Name Schreiber or Becker?-How One Volga German Solved a Mystery and Found Their Ancestral Home in Germany.

Steve Schreiber

For years, a “brick wall” obscured the place of origin of Steve’s ancestor who migrated to Russia in 1766 and settled in the colony of Norka. Join Steve as he unravels the mystery and confronts the unsettling possibility that his family name might be Becker rather than Schreiber. This is an inspirational story that demonstrates that “brick walls” can be broken down, revealing new discoveries.

2:45-3:45 p.m., **Zoom B**

Russian German Dialects in Kansas

William Keel

Kansas was largely settled in the second half of the 19th century which occurred at the same time as the arrival of German-speaking immigrants from the Russian Empire in the US. Thousands of these Russian-German immigrants were attracted to farmland in Kansas by the transcontinental railroads being built at that time. Until the late 20th century, many of the descendants of these 19th-century immigrants continued to speak and understand the dialects brought by their ancestors to Kansas. They were joined on the Great Plains of Kansas by a new group of Russian German immigrants beginning in the late 20th century from Chihuahua, Mexico, drawn by jobs in the feedlots of southwestern Kansas. This newer group of Russian Germans continues to use their version of Low German in the home and in worship. We will explore the varieties of German dialects spoken by Russian-German immigrants ranging from Middle German dialects brought by immigrants from the Volga and Volhynia as well as the Low German dialects of several Mennonite immigrant groups and consider the future of these endangered German dialects on the Great Plains.

4:00-5:00 p.m., **Zoom A**

Mennonites in California: Beyond the Stereotypes

Kevin Enns-Rempel

“Mennonites in California”—the very idea strikes many as incongruous. The typical Californian, whose knowledge of Mennonites stops somewhere this side of Old Order Amish, are surprised to learn that such people reside in their state. Many Mennonites, whose knowledge of California stops somewhere around Hollywood, question how any fellow church member could live in such a flashy and unconventional place. Perhaps part of the reason for this mutual consternation is that such assumptions about both Mennonites and California are over-simplifications. Could it be that Mennonites are more complex than their “quiet in the land” image suggests? Could it be that California is more than the pop-culture images it projects to the rest of the world?

4:00-5:00 p.m. **Zoom B**

Storytelling Contest winners: John Herold and Wilhelm Doos

The winners for the 2021 AHSGR Storytelling Contest are:

1st Place: *Millionaires and Paupers: A German Russian Tale*, by John C. Herold;

2nd Place: *My Religious Heritage As A German from Russia*, by Wilhelm G. Doos;

and 3rd Place: *Pinch of Salt*, by Bro. Placid Gross. Two of the winners, John and Bill will share their stories in this session.

Thursday, July 15

9:00-10:00 a.m., **Zoom A**

Germans in the Towns of Tsarist Russia and the early Soviet State

Reinhard Nachtigal

A thorough discussion of the Urban Germans located in the larger cities in Russia, comparing census enumerations and other minorities found in the same cities.

9:00-10:00 a.m., **Zoom B**

The Russian German Community in World War I: A prelude to life in the Soviet Union.

Ulrich Merten

In this session, Ulrich will explore the Revocation of Special Privileges of the German Russian colonists, including the actions of Alexander II in eliminating the exemption from military service; and the actions of Alexander III; his russification policy that eliminated the German school system of the colonists. World War I, the effect on the morale of the German Russians, war service in the Russian military, primarily on the Caucasus front; the expropriation of German land in Volhynia, and further expropriation measures of German lands by the Imperial Regime Restitution.

10:15-11:15 a.m., **Zoom A**

Cultural Evolution of a Russian German family

Wilhelm G. Doos, MD

This session will focus on a study of the cultural evolution of the Germans from Russia Diaspora with emphasis on: where they came from, where they settled, how they interacted with the host culture, how they moved around, what the forces were to assimilate or not, and where they eventually immigrated to. During the second presentation I will discuss the Russian German Diaspora as a whole, some comment on evolution of a number of villages, and finally to focus on the individuals in the Doos family and how this entire family has evolved since 1767. Hopefully these presentations will stimulate others to do similar studies and add to or challenge the conclusions I will present.

10:15-11:15 a.m., **Zoom B**

Passports to Freedom - The Immigration of the Germans from Russia to America, Collections from the State Archives of Saratov

Dodie Rotherham, Nathan Harris, Sara Roberts, Mila Koretnikov, Cheryl Glanz, Kevin Rupp, Sue Nakaji

AHSGR has obtained, through the dedicated work of Mila Koretnikov and the State Archives of the Saratov Region, Russia, approximately 10,000 names of Individuals who applied for passports to leave Russia between 1877 -1912. The project will be presented to members during the "Passports to Freedom" project session during the virtual convention. The session will include information on how the passports were obtained and how members will be able to order the transcribed, translated copies of family members passports.

11:30 a.m-12:30 p.m., **Zoom A**

German Origins: Challenges and Solutions

Maggie Hein

Using examples from recent successful research, Maggie will discuss the resources you can use to locate your ancestor's German Origin location. Step-by-step examples will highlight common problems and challenges in identifying locations and accessing records. This presentation is appropriate for all levels of research experience.

11:30 a.m-12:30 p.m., **Zoom B**

Germans from Russia and the Railroads: A Continued Investigation

Bob Lettenberger, education director-National Railroad Museum

Bob will present material showing how immigrant families traveled by train, on which railroads and where further research can be conducted into those particular railroads. An additional research tool for the genealogical workbench.

12:30-1:30 p.m., **Lunch**

1:30-2:30 p.m., **Zoom A**

Identifying Volga German First Settlers in Danish and Schleswig Parish Records

Wayne H. Bonner

Although virtually all members of AHSGR have heard the story of Catharine the Great and her manifesto of 1763 inviting settlement in Russia, not everyone is aware of the population movements that occurred prior to that epic migration. Numerous Germans, primarily from the present German states of Baden-Wurttemberg and the Palatine (Pfalz), relocated to Brandenburg beginning in the 1740s where Frederick the Great was building his new capitol of Berlin and required skilled laborers. Still others, estimated to have been at least 5,000, answered the invitation of Frederick V of Denmark beginning in 1759 to settle unimproved land in the regions of Jutland and the Duchy of Schleswig

The Danish settlement movement has been studied for some time, but most of the works were written in German or Danish and not generally available to researchers in North America. However, in 2012 Drs. Alexander, Jacob and Mary Eichhorn produced a volume that will stand for years as the principle investigation of the Danish "experience" as I call it. My presentation will not delve so much into the history of this settlement, but instead will discuss the specific parish records that the Eichhorn research alludes to.

The parish records of Denmark, which at the time included much of present-day Schleswig, were researched for clues to events associated with the German "Colonists" as they were designated. During this period, children were born, marriages were performed and colonists died. By examining virtually all of the currently accessible parish records of Jutland and Schleswig for the time span between 1759 and 1766, Mike Meisinger, Herb Femling and I have been able to identify some 500 entries that can be tied to specific German-Russian settlers. Not only has this project identified these records and therefore added to the growing list of origins for many Volga settlers, but also provided important clues to some of their origins in Germany.

In this presentation, I will discuss specific examples of some of our findings. Although my effort emphasizes examples of records associated with Balzer and Moor settlers, additional parish records were identified of settlers to thirty-two other German-Russian colonies. Prior to the convention a full copy of these records has been distributed to the AHSGR village coordinator group.

1:30-2:30 p.m., **Zoom B**

Importance of Family History in Genealogy Work: Oral history: A crucial piece in family history

Rachel Trotter, Evalogue

Learn how to create a terrific family history for yourself or family members - living or dead - using oral history. This class will teach you how to prepare for the best interviews, ask the best questions and use the best materials & technology to put you on the road to recording and writing personal or family histories. We will explore how to use oral history to even capture stories of those who have passed on and how to help people to talk about the hard things in their life and why it is important. Attendees will also enjoy some interactive time to see how the process

can work and how asking questions can jog the memory quickly. Attendees will learn why oral history can be one of the most important steps to creating the best stories.

2:45-3:45 p.m., **Zoom A**

The Gemütlichkeit of Poetry

Sharon (Grenz) Chmielarz

Don't miss listening and responding to Sharon (Grenz) Chmielarz's poetry. She's read from New York to California about her heritage. In May the South Dakota Poetry Society named her the 2021 South Dakota Poet of Merit.

2:45-3:45 p.m., **Zoom B**

Carrying on the Needlework Traditions of the Volga German Women

Debbie Hearne, Shari Mehling Stone, Annette Adams, Dee Hert and Dave Hert.

Discussion and presentation will include a quilt bed turning focusing on antique quilts, family heirlooms and quilts of today made by Volga German women and descendants. Crochet work and hand embroidery will be featured done by a Volga German immigrant. Tatting and discussion of the technique will be presented that was completed by Volga German descendants.

4:00-5:00 p.m., **Zoom A**

Go North Young Man: The Remarkable story of Germans from Russia Immigration from the US to the Canadian Prairies 1896 to 1914.

Wayne Garman

Many of our Germans from Russia ancestors emigrated to Canada after their initial arrival in the United States. Today, many Germans from Russia Families have relatives on both sides of the border. Why did this pattern of immigration occur?

My presentation will tell the remarkable story of why immigration from the US to the Canadian prairies flourished during the years from 1896 to 1914. I will explain the geographic, economic, and political factors that each played a role in another immigration journey for our Canadian ancestors.

4:00-5:00 p.m., **Zoom B**

"If God Would Have Mercy": Post-WWII German-Russian Refugee Letters

Torie Jones

5:00-5:30 p.m. Awards, Prizes

Mike Heil, Cheryl Glanz, Sue Nakaji