



Convention News

“Keeping our German Russian heritage alive!”

July 25, 2019



The Board of Directors and Volunteers Dinner

Looking Back and Looking Forward

“It is my privilege to welcome you to Lincoln,” said Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird to the attendees of the General Opening Session of the American Historical Society for Germans from Russia. “Congrats on reaching your 50th annual convention.” Baird continued her speech by noting that German Russians were instrumental in shaping Lincoln. “We’ve learned that immigrants make our communities rich,” Baird said, “when we open our arms to others. Thank you for sharing your culture with us.” She then declared July 24, 2019, American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Day.

The General Opening Session had begun with a presentation of colors by the Lincoln Fire & Rescue Honor Guard and a prayer by Reverend Dennis Reich. Following the welcome by Baird, there were introductions of AHSGR Board of Directors, the International Founda-

tion of the American Historical Society for Germans from Russia Board of Trustees, and AHSGR staff. After the society’s annual business meeting, the keynote speaker took the podium.

Dr. Michael Brown, a former professor and a specialist in media studies, spoke on the topic of German Russians in Siberian Kazakhstan. Starting in 2012, Brown began going to Kazakhstan as a visiting professor with the Kazakh National University. Those visits, he said, helped him understand the importance of Kazakhstan to German Russian history. In his presentation, he provided listeners with an overview of Kazakhstan and shared highlights of his travels.

Brown said Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world. It has about 17 million people but is only

about 25 years old, and so is still a young country. Brown explained that droughts in the Volga region and deportations from there sent German Russians to Kazakhstan prior to the formation of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union fell in the 1990s, thousands of German Russians left Kazakhstan but left their records behind. Brown said that right now only the Kazakhstani people can access those records, and so having contacts with the Kazakhstani people has helped him. "I view myself as very fortunate to travel to Kazakhstan and to learn this part of German Russian history."

On the heels of the General Opening Session were speaker presentations. One of those was delivered by foreign speaker Otto Pohl, whose topic supplemented Dr. Brown's. Pohl focused on the deportation of German Russians to Kazakhstan. "I've been doing a lot of research about the fate of ethnic Germans since the world wars," said Pohl. He said that a high percentage (75%) of German Russians were sent to Kazakhstan. They were loaded in cattle cars, allowed only to bring minimal supplies, and lacked housing, food, medical care, and necessities. In addition, German Russians were separated, with some being sent to Siberia and others to Kazakhstan. Pohl stressed the need to take a new approach to research. "We need to stop viewing this dark cloud as the end and see it as the start of a new chapter. It is necessary to move onto a rebirth, one that will reclaim initial heroism of German Russians. Can the wounds be healed? I think they can."

A letter shared by Dodie Rotherham captured the passion of many Germans from Russia, even those who were unable to attend the convention. Long-time member Irene Buechler Radar wrote: "How I wish I could be there in-person to help you celebrate this important event in person. Since my husband's death last year in June, I moved into a senior living facility. My health limits where I can travel and what I can do with my limited mobility. However, I will be with all those attending in thought and spirit as you welcome members from the United States, Canada, and South America. I have decorated my apartment door with an enlarged copy of the front of the convention programs I attended in the past. I have many people stopping by or commenting on the display and I have answered their questions. Good luck for a successful convention. Best wishes for a long and fruitful 50 more years for AHSGR."

Youth Have Fun

Youth programs run Wednesday through Friday. Today's program started at 1:00pm at the Immanuel Church.

About the day, Riley said, "Today was fun. We got to look at the church. We learned German words. And we had Grebbel. It was yummy."

Joe Stoddard accompanied his children. The family is attending the 50th convention because of his wife. "She's German Russian and has been studying her family history," said Stoddard. "She got excited about coming and learning more. The youth program was fun. We never had Grebbel before. It was fun to try." One of his daughter, Alice, added that she liked the city.

Thursday's youth program runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and will include a blinna demo and a German sausage demo. Friday's youth program will run from 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. and will include a tour and demonstrations of a dulcimer, dutch hop, and bunnock.



Pam Wurst helps young people make grebbel.