



Convention News

“Keeping our German Russian heritage alive!”

July 27, 2019



Convention attendees dance to the music of The River Boys.

Dutch Hop, Kuchen, and Bunnock

My parents took me to two Dutch hops at age 11 and I got the bug,” said Bob Schmer, at the start of his presentation. On July 26, attendees of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia’s 50th convention had the opportunity to both hear about and participate in a Dutch hop. For the latter, music was played by The River Boys.

In his presentation, Schmer overviewed the history of the Dutch Hop, a type of dance and style of music that was brought to the United States by the Volga Germans. The instruments used initially for the Dutch hop were the dulcimer, fiddles, and cello. The first dulcimer appeared around 900 A.D in Europe. “It went to many countries including Russia,” said Schmer, “to be used with German Russian music.”

Around the 1940s, the accordion was also added. The first accordion was patented by a German in 1822; seven years later the accordion as we know it today was patented. Schmer told his audience, “I told dad I wanted an

accordion. He said that’s fine but if you start it you also finish it.”

When Dutch hop first started, there were no bands or organized groups, nor were there dance halls or ballrooms. Usually family and close friends played for weddings at the request of the groom’s family.

In the 1930’s, the Dutch hop underwent a transformation in name and style. Originally called the German Dance, it was renamed due to all things German being politically incorrect during World War II. In addition, community events such as church picnics and Saturday night dances began to integrate the Dutch hop.

1955 to 1970 marked the golden age of the Dutch hop: bass replaced cello, piano became prevalent, rhythm guitar made an appearance, and dulcimer took more of a lead. “We used to have over 400 dances in a year with only four weekends off,” Schmer said. He added, “You

could see money in the dulcimer board. Sometimes we made a lot of money.”

Although the Dutch hop still exists today, it is at risk of dying out. Schmer reported that there used to be over 40 bands but now there are only about five bands; bands used to play a few times a week, but now a band plays once a month; and Dutch hops used to draw 300-400 people but now 40-60 people is a good crowd.

Chris Simon of Sageland Media hopes to revive the Dutch hop. She is the director of the documentary film Dutch Hop, which convention attendees had a chance to preview on the evening of July 25. The team is working with Nebraska and Wyoming PBS to make the audio broadcast quality. Simon said to the attendees, “Hopefully this will become a beautiful presentation of your culture for the world to see.”

A second cultural event was the mid-afternoon Kuchen break. “Embassy Suites made the kuchen,” said volunteer Nancy Borrell. “The chef used my family’s recipe. I think they did an excellent job.” Borrell’s grandmother used to always make baked goods on Saturday. As an adult, Borrell uses her family’s recipe to make kuchen regularly too. She shared, “We used different toppings depending on the season. My favorite is apricot. A lot of time we had it without fruit. We had just the bread and the kribble (crumbled topping).”

Greg Gartner introduced a third cultural event, a tossing game named Bunnock that is played with the ankle bone of a horse. The object is to knock the opposing team’s line of bones down before they knock yours down.

In his presentation, Gartner overviewed the history of Bunnock. It was first played by German soldiers posted in Siberia in the 1800s. They were bored waiting for military action and created their own entertainment with bones from dead horses. The game was then brought to Canada by German Russian immigrants in the early 1900s.

According to Gartner, in the early 1960s while working at Alsask Processors, his father Joseph H. Gartner asked permission to salvage the legs of the horses in order to put together a set of Bunnock bones for his father and himself. Soon others wanted to play, and its popularity grew from there. Today Gartner carries on the family business of manufacturing and selling Bunnock games. Gartner will demonstrate the game on Saturday.

Youth Tour Memorial Stadium

A group of fifteen toured the Memorial Stadium as part of the conference’s Youth Program. Sara Holroyd, whose husband is German Russian, is attending for the first time. The family has wanted to come for a while to introduce their two boys to their heritage. “It’s important for them to know where they came from,” said Holroyd.

Both her sons enjoyed the tour. Her oldest son, Ethan, liked the Nebraska football hall of fame best. He said, “I’ve heard a lot about it and wanted to see it. I actually got to see the trophies.”



Youth visit the Memorial Stadium football field.



Ethan and Levi pose in front of The Legacy Statue.

Saturday Activities

Saturday is the last day of convention! Most activities will move to headquarters, where Heritage Day will be held. Come out for campus tours, living history stations, quilter’s demo, Bunnock, dulcimer music, and movies. A Volga boatman lunch will be available for \$5. In the evening, be sure to return to the Embassy Suites for the Golden Jubilee Banquet.