

How One Book Led to Another

Books have always played a large part in my life. One book in particular changed my life in many ways. Quite by chance about thirty-two years ago I came across the title of the book in a short article in the San Jose Mercury newspaper. The book, "In Qlle_et of Free Land", was written by Adolph Schock, a professor of history at San Jose State College. The contents of the book caught my attention because it dealt with the lives of the German-Russian people living in the United States. Since Al, our children and I moved to California just a few years earlier, it came as a surprise to find a book about my ancestral background in a state so far from my family roots. In the part of South Dakota where I grew up, almost all of the people I knew were of German-Russian ancestry. I doubted that anyone in California had even heard of our unique heritage, so I was pleased to discover a book about my people.

I sat down immediately to order the book from the listed address. Since I was teaching at the time, my family and students took priority over other concerns, so I soon forgot about it. Several weeks later the principal of my school came into my classroom to inform me that a man was waiting outside to see me. The principal certainly never brought anyone to my room during class time unless it was something of extreme importance. Somewhat puzzled as to who it could be, I watched nervously as an older man, briefcase in hand, entered. A thought flashed through my mind. "Could this stranger be from the Internal Revenue Service?" As it turned out, it was Professor

Schock, delivering his book to me in person. He told me he liked to meet the people who were interested in his book and he wanted to find out why they ordered the book. I told him my grandparents immigrated to South Dakota from Russia in the 1890s. His own grandparents had arrived from there in the 1880s. He grew up on a homestead in North Dakota, so we felt an immediate familiarity with each other. He signed my book before departing. I now possessed a book that explained the reasons for my grandparent's migration to the United States

as well as the history of their forefather's move from Germany into Russia a century earlier. This small book helped me understand so much about my people; things I had grown up hearing about but not really understanding, things that grown-ups usually don't discuss with their children in such detail.

In 1969, I received a letter from a group in Colorado who had organized the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia to collect and preserve historical materials of the German-Russian people. I wondered how they got my name. I found out later that Mr. Schock sent them a list of people who purchased his book. My application for membership in this unique society, mailed off quickly, made me a charter member of the society. During the summer of 1969, Al and I received a postcard inviting us to the home of Art and Cleo Flegel in Menlo Park to meet Dr. Karl Stumpp of Germany. His newly published book, "The German-Russians", had been translated from German into English by Professor Joseph S. Height. The German edition had been published in Germany in 1964. About 25 people gathered at the Flegel home on a Sunday afternoon, every one interested in their German-Russian heritage. After that date, members of this original group met several times with the objective of founding a chapter in our area. In 1971 the Golden Gate Chapter of AHSGR was founded. At first we met in each others homes every other month. I was appointed membership chairman of our group and held that post for a number of years. Before long our chapter had grown too large to meet in homes. From then on we held our meetings in the Menlo Park Presbyterian Church. Later, to accomodate people who lived on the other side of the Bay, we held every other meeting in an Oakland Lutheran Church. The people I met through this society have become life-long friends. Many inter-

esting speakers helped everyone learn more about their heritage. The main emphasis of the group was on genealogy, so tracing my roots was one of my objectives. However, many in our group had difficulty in our search because the Iron Curtain in Russia prevented us from gaining access to the church and governmental records we needed.

The Society held yearly conventions in the summer. The first one I attended was in Boulder, co. I rode along with the Flegels on that trip. I remember making pocket dolls on a stick to sell to raise money for our Chapter on Village Night. They proved to be so popular, that I had them all sold before the Village Night sale was to have taken place. Meeting new people with similar backgrounds from all over the country was a special treat. Some of the same people attended the conventions every year, so it was like a homecoming for everyone. Someone at one of the conventions suggested that each chapter display a banner at the conventions. I designed the banner for the Golden Gate Chapter. It features an outline map of California on a light blue background, with the letters California running the length of the state. An outline of the Golden Gate Bridge marks the Bay area and a group of golden California poppies mark the lower half of the state. In the upper right hand corner is a circular design with the words "To Know and Preserve Our Heritage" around the outside and the words, History, Genealogy, Culture and Friendship on 4 spokes radiating from the center. Pictorial symbols depicting each of those 4 words are shown between the spokes. The letters AHSGR in Germanic script are written at the top of the banner and the words, Golden Gate Chapter and Founded in 1971 are at the bottom.

In 1977, the Golden Gate Chapter hosted the International Convention in San Francisco at the Jack Tar Hotel. It was the largest of our conventions up to that time.

In 1983 I was asked by the Professor Timothy Kloberdanz of the University of North Dakota and Chairman of German-Russian Folklore, to be a speaker at the annual convention in Lincoln, Nebraska, which had become the site of our International Headquarters. The dates of the convention were the same as the dates for the Centennial of Hoven, SD, Al's hometown. All of the Rader family would be there. Not wanting to miss that event, I declined the invitation, but promised to be a speaker the following year. In 1984 the convention was held in Regina, Canada. I had never been to Canada before, so that was an added bonus. That same year, a cousin of Al's had finished the genealogy of his maternal side of the family. Much to our surprise we learned that he had many relatives in Canada. One couple lived in Regina, so I wrote them to let them know I would of like to meet them. They met me at the airport and took me to my hotel. Since then we have corresponded yearly at Christmas time. I spent a night at their house before flying home.

My talk at the convention was about the "Folklore of German Russian Women." I dressed in a costume like the one common to German-Russian women at the height of their immigration in the late 1800's and early 1900's. There were about 500 people at the folklore session, always one of the most popular sessions at any convention, so I was just a little nervous. At the end of the talk, I took off my costume, to reveal the dress of a modern German-Russian woman, much to everyone's surprise!

After the convention was over, a group of 35 people had signed up for a post-convention 8-day bus tour of western Canada. We made stops at many places, but one that stands out in my mind was the stop in Edmonton, Alberta. The AHSGR Chapter in that city hosted a wonderful dinner for us. One family, the Roy Hiebners sat at the same table that I did. They had two young daughters, Rosie and Cyndi, with them. Before we left, the father told me that Rosie, a fifth grader, would like to write to me. Ever since that time we have written to each other. Later, when she

grew up and had other interests, her letters became fewer and fewer, but her mother wrote me several times a year. Since 1984 we have exchanged Christmas packages for the whole family every year. Also on that trip we toured the Lake Louise and Banff areas, Victoria and Vancouver, as well as Calgary during their famous rodeo week.

In 1991 the annual convention was held in Sacramento. The Golden Gate Chapter, as well as all the other California Chapters, helped with the work connected with such a big undertaking. Again I was asked to be a speaker at the Folklore Session. This time I chose "Grandma's Kitchen" for my topic. I wrote the poem "Grandma's Apron" to end my talk. Many people have asked for a copy of that poem since that time. Later I entered it in a contest held by the Villager newspaper and won second place in the poetry division.

Although I remained active in AHSGR throughout all the years since I joined, when I retired from teaching I held the 1st Vice President's post for several years. The main duty of that office is to serve as program chairman. Later I served as secretary of the group. Holding an office means one has to attend board meetings that are held in homes of the board members. Meetings are held in the months when there isn't a general chapter meeting. Nevertheless, taking of minutes and typing them up for publication in the newsletter were needed for both types of meetings. For the past 10 years our chapter has been meeting at the Redeemer Lutheran Church in Redwood City.

In 1997, the Golden Gate Chapter had the honor of hosting the International Convention in San Jose at the Hyatt Hotel. Planning for it began two years prior to the convention. A big garage sale was held to raise money to help with expenses in which almost all members took part. I helped plan some of the bus tours offered to convention goers before the general sessions began. I served as a tour guide on a trip to Santa Cruz and the Roaring Camp Train tour, the next day I was the guide on a trip to San Francisco and the third day on a tour of San Jose. Making table decorations for the final night banquet was my responsibility. I bought supplies and arranged for a day when other ladies came to my home to make centerpieces for 60 tables. We had only 1! hour to put them in place the evening of the banquet. It was a close call, but we got the work done. I also was responsible for decorations for the luncheon and breakfast meetings, but for about one-half as many tables.

In addition to all of those duties, I was asked to be a speaker again at the Folklore Session. My topic was "The Experience of the German-Russian Pioneer Women". This required much research in the months leading up to the convention, much like that done for a college term paper. Each of the talks given at the convention is published in one of our Journals, our Society's main publication.

Upon completing eight years of service as an officer in our Golden Gate Chapter, I was presented with a plaque in appreciation for outstanding and dedicated service in AHSGR.

The day I read about that one book so many years ago, I didn't realize that it would lead to so many discoveries in my life; new friends in California and from all over the United States and Canada; the history and genealogy of my family; trips to conventions in Fresno, Sacramento, Seattle, Denver (twice) and Boulder, Regina, Lincoln, Minneapolis (twice), Milwaukee and of course, San Francisco and San Jose; a chance to use my creative artistic talents, and finding out that speaking to large audiences about Folklore, a special interest of mine, was a way that I could help others in AHSGR learn about their heritage. Ultimately, it led me to a writing class to write a book about my own life story and that of my family.