



55TH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE

CONVENTION REGISTRATION BOOKLET

July 30-August 1, 2025

Embassy Suites
1040 P Street, Lincoln, NE

RESEARCH/HERITAGE CENTER PANEL

WEDNESDAY 8:30 AM- 11:30 AM

Karen Keehr

Heritage Center Introduction

The AHSGR Library and Archives holds a treasure trove of German Russian Resources. When you visit the Heritage Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, you will have access to over 7,000 books and other publications, 1200 plus Volga and Black Sea village records, nearly 500 surname charts, and so much more. AHSGR also holds approximately 7,200 linear feet of archival material with nearly 400 unique collections. Karen will how to prepare for you in-person visit, what to expect when you arrive, and how she process the Archival collections for use and digitization.

Amber Mikkelsen

Heritage Center Introduction

Amber will focus on the research services provided by AHSGR and on the types of resources available on our website and on the internet.

Libby Horken

Heritage Center Introduction

AHSGR Editorial and Publications promotes the development, publication, and dissemination of publications, digital media related to the history, culture, and genealogy of Germanic Settlers in the Russian Empire and their descendants. Libby will go over the different types of publications AHSGR offers and how to access select publications online such as Journals and Newsletters.

Allyson Maughan

Solving your Picture Problems

Pictures tell a brilliant story about our ancestors. But, what do we do when pictures have problems! No writing on the back? Too many conflicting names and dates? Unfamiliar faces? Come learn the antidote to these dilemmas and finally use those pictures in your research.

Carolyn Zeisset

Sharing Your Heritage Stories

This is an interactive session with prompts for telling stories from your family heritage. Bring your cell phone to record yourself as you tell a story to one other person. Please know ahead of time how to use the record feature on your phone. You will leave with at least two stories to do with as you wish afterwards.

GERMANY PANEL

WEDNESDAY 1:30 PM- 3:00 PM

Wayne Garman

War and German Immigration to Russia 1760 to 1820

This presentation will focus on four wars and their aftermath during the time period 1760 to 1820.

They include the Napoleonic Wars, the Seven Years War, the Russo – Ottoman conflicts, and the Polish Russian War of 1792 which resulted in the partitions of Poland.

Carolyn Schott

1816: The Year Without a Summer and Its Impact on German Migration

The eruption of Mt. Tambora in Indonesia unleashed a volcanic winter that reverberated around the globe, earning the year 1816 the name “The Year Without a Summer.” Immense quantities of volcanic ash drastically altered weather patterns and created unseasonably cold temperatures that caused crop failures and food shortages. This crisis prompted many Germans to seek new opportunities abroad, both in the U.S. and in the Russian Empire, which offered both land and religious freedom. This presentation discusses the intertwined environmental, economic, and social ramifications of the Year Without a Summer, highlighting its pivotal role in the history of German emigration.

Eric Schmaltz

“The Dutch Legacy”: Russian Mennonite Diasporas on Four Continents in the Age of Empires, Revolutions, and Extremes (1786-Present)

This broad interdisciplinary overview will integrate several key themes in Russian Mennonite history. This diaspora people often has pursued socio-economic opportunities and religious freedom amid ever-changing and at times even quite challenging, if not dangerous, political landscapes worldwide (push-pull factors), from the early years of the Wars of Religion and religious persecution to the more enlightened era of European rulers and countries of mass immigration worldwide inviting them as prospective settlers, to the later terribly destructive secular conflicts of the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars (1789-1815), World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) to the November 1917 Russian Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath under Soviet Communism, and even today with Globalization.

RUSSIA PANEL PART 1

THURSDAY 8:30 AM- 10:30 AM

Sandy Schilling Payne

The Geography of German Settlement in the Russian Empire

Presented as a timeline and illustrated with maps, this session provides a sweeping survey of the locations and history of where Germans settled and migrated within the context of the territorial evolution of Imperial Russia between 1721 and 1914.

Kim Phillips

From Europe to Dreispitz: A Quest to Find Missing Generations in a Volga German Lineage

Follow a Kansas family's decades-long journey to piece together the puzzle of their German Russian heritage. Learn about the research that led to finding descendants of family members who left Germany and Sweden to settle in the lower Volga area.

Tanja Schell and Tatiana Zabolotneva

Discovering my German Russian Heritage and my Family History: A Joint Presentation by Two Volga German Women

This joint presentation by Tatiana Zabolotneva of Russia and Tanja Schell of Germany focuses on their mutual interest in family history. Coming from different generational perspectives – although both have ancestral ties to the same area, the former Frank Kanton in today's Volgograd region – they discuss their individual process of growing up and learning about their German Russian heritage while being part of a Volga German community.

Reinhard Nachtigal

Russian Germans as soldiers of the Tsarist Army, captured by German troops in 1914- 1917

Their number in German captivity, their treatment and experiences, policies of the German government towards them, and reasons for them, NOT to stay in Germany and rather return to Soviet Russia in 1918/20. Until now this question has hardly been treated in historiography.

RUSSIA PANEL PART 2

THURSDAY 1:30 PM- 5:00 PM

Wyatt Atchley and Sawyer Flynn

Those Who Stayed: German-Russians Under Russification

“Those Who Stayed” examines the experiences of ethnic Germans who remained in Russia amid intensifying Russification from 1871 through the post-World War II era. Exploring the numerous historical events that shaped their lives, including cultural repression, the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution, forced deportations, and the hardships endured during the Holodomor and World War II. Through compelling first-hand accounts and historical analysis, the presenters shed light on the resilience and struggles of the German-Russian community that stayed.

William Ridinger

The Demise of Rohrbach and the Berasan Colonies – a Personal Perspective

One family’s struggle during the years leading up to the German declaration of war against the Soviet Union in 1941, and the events during the occupation years and beyond. While under the control of the Romanian army, German Sonderkammando units were mobilized to the region to indoctrinate the local Germans, or Volksdeutsche, into Nazi society.

Lisamarie Griebel Small

The Families that Remained: Life in the Autonomous Volga German Republic

The years between the World Wars were plagued by upheaval, famine, and collectivization. For Russian Germans, especially those in the Volga Republic, it was also a time of unprecedented cultural autonomy when the German language, education, and cultural expression flourished. What was life like for those who stayed in Russia? Come and explore the highs and lows of the early Soviet years in the Russian German community that maintained close contact with their American relatives.

Carolyn Zeisset

War & Peace People: Evolving Attempts to Live Out Convictions

Wayne Garman has spoken and written about the role of war in founding the German Mennonite colony of Chortitza. This session offers examples of experiences of peace people in times of revolt and war, and evolving responses as they attempted to define and live out convictions about non-violence.

Lena Wolf

“May The Universe Be Your Home!” - A graphic novel about the Germans from the Russian Empire/Kazakhstan

My story spans multiple timelines and locations: Present-day London, where I currently live; my childhood in Soviet-era Kazakhstan; the 1941 deportations when my family was forcibly moved from Ukraine to Kazakhstan; and our eventual relocation to Germany.

AMERICA PANEL PART 1

FRIDAY 8:30 AM- 12:00 PM

André Hammann

1824-2024: 200 years of Germans in Brazil

Andre will discuss the 200 year history of Germans in Brazil. Brazil has the second largest German immigrants after the USA. He will discuss their hard beginning, hard work, education (language/ dialects), religion and other cultural aspects.

Tina (Katharina) Siemens

The migration to Chihuahua Mexico from Canada in 1922 and then to Seminole Texas in 1977

I opened the West Texas Living Heritage Museum in Seminole Texas featuring the history of Texas and the immigrations of the Mennonite, the Mennonite Brethren church that immigrated to Kansas who sent out missionary to the Commanche Nation in Oklahoma.

Bill Pickelhaupt

Kind Colony on the Volga. An in-depth look

Kind was a colony on the Meadowside of the Volga. Just before WWI about 10% of the village residents migrated to the United States; those who survived the early decades of communism were deported mainly to Mansky District in Kazakhstan.

Tanja Schell

My Family's Life in Siberia: Germans in the Soviet Union in the 1940s through the 1960s

This presentation focuses on the story of the speaker's Volga German family in post-WWII Siberia – a region they were exiled to during the 1941 Deportation – and shares some personal insights, photos and documents from the family's archive and passages from her mother's story about growing up in Siberia.

Mark Loudon

Germans from Russia and Diversity in German America

Mark will examine the acculturation patterns of Anabaptist and non-Anabaptist Germans from Russia who migrated to North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and compare them with other German American groups. He will focus on three major aspects: engagement in civic life, language maintenance and shift, and participation in public expressions/celebrations of German American identity. He will further consider post-migration patterns of confessional loyalty, mutual cultural transfer, and inter-ethnic marriage. He will show that non-Anabaptist German migrants from Russia resemble other German Americans with respect to acculturation, while among Anabaptists, the picture is more complex.

Elisabeth Litzenberger

Fairy tales, legends and epic of the Russian Germans: the story of "Kirghiz" Mikhel and beautiful Anna from the Volga

As children, we were all told wonderful fairy tales. We listened to legends and read myths. The difference between them is conventional: myths are shrouded in mystery, fairy tales – magic, and epic preserves the heroic past of the people, intertwined with historical events. As long as the epic is passed on from generation to generation, it lives in the people's memories.

AMERICA PANEL PART 2

FRIDAY 1:00 PM- 4:15 PM

Jason Phillips

Don't Forget About the Camels: How the Germans from Russia Have Retained their Heritage Across the Great Plains

America is home to immigrant groups from every corner of the globe, but few have as fascinating of a history as the Germans from Russia. Whether discussing their heritage in Russia, or subsequent immigration to the United States, the Germans from Russia have thrived. This presentation explores how the Germans from Russia, particularly those living in the Great Plains, have understood their history and heritage by exploring published memoirs, archival research, and an examination of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia's museum in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Bridgette Crosby

Stone by Stone: Volga Germans and Their Lasting Influence on Western Culture, Food, and Farming

This presentation shares story of my quest to locate, preserve, and protect my great-grandfather's millstones. Imported from France in 1874, these millstones were used in one of the first grist mills west of the Mississippi River built by my Volga German grandfather. After years of waiting, I have located the millstones. I'm now raising funds to have them assessed and relocated to a Historical Society and Museum in Kansas. My presentation will include family photographs, personal stories, and a celebration of the vital role Volga Germans played in shaping agriculture in the American West.

Olga Litzenberger

The role of religion for the Russian Germans after the deportation: interviews with contemporary witnesses, sociological and historical analyses

The struggles of some survivors will be shared as well as methods used to dig out background facts.

Richard Kisling

Journey to the Past: How Discovering the Warenburg Church Chronicle Has Revealed More Than a Forgotten Parish History

This presentation focuses on the story of the speaker's Volga German family in post-WWII Siberia – a region they were exiled to during the 1941 Deportation – and shares some personal insights, photos and documents from the family's archive and passages from her mother's story about growing up in Siberia.

Mark Loudon

Germans from Russia and Diversity in German America

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MEET THE SPEAKERS



Wyatt Atchley

Wyatt Atchley is the Special Collections Archivist for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at North Dakota State University. He earned his Master of Arts in History from NDSU in 2023 and was a Graduate Assistant for the GRHC for two years. Last year at the 2024 AHSGR convention, Wyatt presented on German Russian architecture in North Dakota.



Michael Brown

Michael Brown is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Wyoming. He grew up in Buffalo, WY, and is connected to his Volga German heritage through his grandfather (Brug) who was from the village of Bauer (Karamyshevka) in the Volga region. He received his doctorate from the University of Utah in 1994 and served as a Professor at the University of Wyoming from 1994 to 2017. He has been a member of the AHSGR Board of Directors since 2017 and served four years as the AHSGR Journal editor. Since 2012 he has traveled to Kazakhstan several times as a visiting professor at the Kazakh National University and used these opportunities to learn about German Russians there.



Bridgette Crosby

Bridgette Crosby is a remarkable individual whose diverse talents and passions have earned her recognition on multiple fronts. As a National Award Winning Poet, she has captivated audiences with her profound and evocative works.

Born to Volga German and Irish parents, Bridgette embraces her rich heritage with pride. She channels this pride into her role as a community activist and volunteer, having been recognized as Woman of the Year in Queen Creek for her tireless efforts to improve her community.



Sawyer Flynn

Sawyer Flynn is a current Master of Arts student in History at North Dakota State University. Sawyer has numerous years of service to the National Park Service, including as a U.S. Park Police Officer and a “living historian” at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site.



Wayne Garman

Wayne Garman grew up on a farm near Allan, Saskatchewan, Canada, a Germans from Russia community near Saskatoon in the central part of the province. His paternal ancestors came from the Kutschurgan colonies of Elsass and Strassburg. His maternal ancestors came from the Mennonite colony of Chortitza in the village of Neu Chortitza.

Upon semi-retirement, Wayne completed a Master of History degree from Texas State University. He splits his time between Glendale, AZ, and Saskatoon, SK. Wayne has presented at a number of GRHS and AHSGR conventions and has written articles for Germans from Russia publications. He also currently serves as president of the Arizona Sun Chapter.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



Lisamarie Griebel Small

Lisamarie Griebel Small is a PhD student in Russian History at the University of Houston. She holds a B.A. in History and Russian from Bryn Mawr College and an M.A. in Russian History from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Her dissertation research examines the lives of ethnic Germans in Kazakhstan and the emergence of a new Soviet-German identity following the deportations of 1941. During her previous studies on foreign famine relief to the Volga in 1921, she studied with Professor Arkady German at Saratov State University and worked in the Volga German archives. Her grandmother was born in the Volga village of Reinwald.



André Hammann

André Hammann is from Tres de Maio, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. He is an engineer and has been researching the migration history of his 85 German-speaking ancestors in the South American country since 2000. Hammann is an active supporter of the DAGV member GenealogiaRS a board member of the International German Genealogy Partnership (IGGP), a participant and speaker at IGGC conferences, and the author of a book about German-speaking families in Brazil.



Libby Horken

Libby Horken is the Publications, Marketing, and Exhibits Coordinator at AHSGR. She graduated from the University of Nebraska Lincoln with a BFA in Graphic Design and specializes in print and publishing design. In addition to chairing the Editorial and Publications Committee, she now coordinates the exhibits at the Heritage Center.



Karen Keehr

Karen Keehr is the Archivist at AHSGR. Karen joined the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia in June 2022 with over 25 years of experience in the Archives and Museum fields. She has specialized training in digital imaging and photograph preservation. One of her goals at AHSGR is to increase access to our unique German Russian collections through digital access and improved archival processing.



Richard Kisling

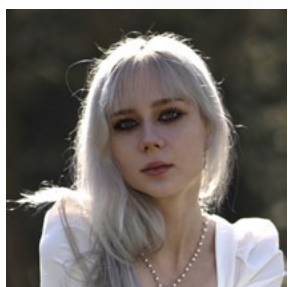
Richard Kisling grew up in a Volga German family on a cotton and wheat farm in California's San Joaquin Valley. After completing degrees in piano performance and music education at Pacific Union College in Angwin, California, he worked for ten years as a teacher in Oakland, California, and he remained active as a singer, piano accompanist, and church musician in the San Francisco Bay Area. He worked for over thirty years at the headquarters offices of Chevron Corporation, first in San Francisco and then in San Ramon, where he ended his career as an export compliance specialist and project team leader. He lives in Sonoma County in northern California. Mr. Kisling has been a member of AHSGR for many years. He has served as president of the Golden Gate Chapter.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



Olga Litzenberger

Prof. Dr. Olga Litzenberger was born in Saratov (Russia) into a family of Volga Germans. She worked as a professor and vice-rector of Saratov University. She defended two dissertations on the history of the Lutheran and Catholic Church in Russia. Since 2019 she has been working as a researcher at the Bavarian Cultural Center for Germans from Russia (Nuremberg, Germany). Olga Litzenberger is the author of about 300 scientific publications on the history and culture of Russian Germans published in Russia, Germany, the United States, Italy, Finland, and other countries.



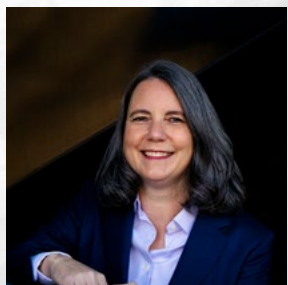
Elisabeth Litzenberger

Elisabeth Litzenberger was born in Russia in 2005 and has been living in Germany since 2017. Since childhood, she has participated in ethnographic expeditions to the Volga German colonies, and has repeatedly participated in foreign seminars and conferences on the history and culture of Russian Germans and international exchange programs.



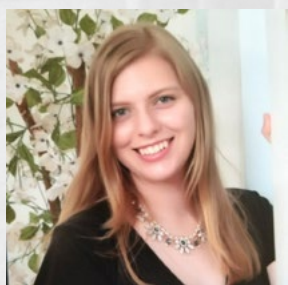
Mark Loudon

Mark Loudon is the Alfred L. Shoemaker and J. William Frey, and Don Yoder Professor of Germanic Linguistics and Director of the Max Kade Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A fluent speaker of Pennsylvania Dutch, most of his research and public outreach center on the language, faith, and culture of its main speakers, Amish and traditional Mennonites.



Allyson Maughan

Allyson is a genealogy speaker, writer, and consultant. She finished her AG in the Southwest Region in 2024. She completed Gen Proof in 2023, and ProGen 53 in 2022. She graduated from Idaho State University in 2001. She volunteers with UGA as a board member. She enjoys pictures and writing. She shares tips on rememberingrelatives.weebly.com/. She lives in SLC with her husband and three girls.



Amber Mikkelsen

Amber Mikkelsen is the Archival Research Coordinator at AHSGR. She has been with the organization since April of 2023 and has since enhanced available research services, assisted with grant writing and the digitization of audio-visual materials, as well as attended the annual convention as part of the research team.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



Reinhard Nachtigal

Reinhard Nachtigal earned his PhD in Modern and East European History in 2000 from the University of Freiburg in Germany. He is currently affiliated with the Historisches Seminar at the University of Freiburg where he researches, edits, and translates Eastern European historical work. His research includes examinations of Germans in Russia and the history of the great powers on WWI's Eastern front. Public health, transport history in Russia, and issues of International Humanitarian Law during military conflicts are also objects of his research/concern.



Jason Phillips

Jason Phillips is currently an Associate Professor of History at Peru State College. He received his PhD from the University of Arkansas in 2019. His research focuses on the history of the Northern Great Plains, particularly Kansas and Nebraska politics.



Kim Phillips

Kim is a writer and history buff who loves to share her enthusiasm for stories from the past. She grew up in western Kansas hearing about her Volga German family members and the challenges they endured. She is a military veteran with a degree in journalism which led to a career in public relations in Arizona. Later, she dropped out of the corporate world to run a country bed and breakfast along the Katy Trail in Missouri. Now retired, she lives in the Kansas City area where she is working on a historical fiction based on memoirs and audio recordings of her ancestors.



Bill Pickelhaupt

Bill Pickelhaupt is a 75-year-old descendant of a Volga German father. He went to a church founded by Volga Germans in Port Huron, Michigan, and this heavily influenced him. He is the author of *The Right Place at the Right Time* (2009) and *Kind Colony on the Volga: Coming Together, Their Lives and Diaspora* (2024).



William Ridinger

Born to a Bavarian mother and a Black Sea German father, Bill's family immigrated to the United States when he was six years old. After growing up in northeastern Colorado in a sea of Germans from Russia, he went on to earn a Master's degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Colorado. Much of his career was spent overseas, including multiple assignments in Russia and Kazakhstan, where he began to explore his German Russian roots. He is the author of *Orchards on the Steppes*, a historical fiction account of the lives of his ancestors in Rohrbach.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



Terrell Schaffer

Terrell was born in 1949 in Oakley, Kansas, and spent many weekends on his grandparents' farm in Northwest Kansas. His grandfather was a first-generation American born in Hosmer, South Dakota in 1893, shortly after his Mother arrived in the United States from Bergdorf near Ukraine in the Black Sea Region. Terrell attended Dodge City KS Jr College and Kansas State University before graduating from Wichita State University. He has 3 children and 11 grandchildren and has recently retired to enjoy ancestry research and other activities related to the history of our people.



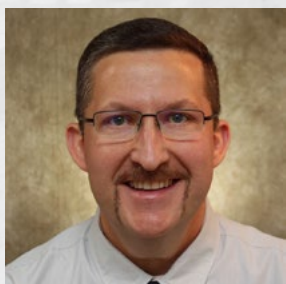
Tanja Schell

Dr. Tatjana "Tanja" Schell was born and raised in Russia. Her family originally comes from the Volga German village of Seewald where they lived until September 1941, when the entire village population was deported eastward to the region of Omsk in Siberia. In the late 1990s, her family left Russia for Germany. She has been involved with the AHSGR for twenty years and has presented to many AHSGR chapters across the country. In 2024, she helped her 97-year-old grandfather Adam Schell to present one of the AHSGR's online sessions of "Treffen Tuesday". Her ancestral villages in Russia are Seewald (family names: Schell, Arzer, Mari) and Rothammel (family name: Lechmann). Tanja holds a PhD in English from North Dakota State University and now lives in Germany with her partner and two children.



Sandy Schilling Payne

Sandy Schilling Payne is a descendant of Black Sea Germans on both sides of her family, Lutherans from the Glückstal colonies and Catholics from the Kutschurgan colonies. Her interest in genealogy began in 1994, and she has since researched her German origins in the modern-day countries of Germany, France, Switzerland, Poland, Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Canada, and the United States. She is a part of the Black Sea German Research group, the webmaster for the Glückstal Colonies Research Association, and the author of the Germans from Russia Settlement Locations project.



Eric Schmaltz

Dr. Eric J. Schmaltz is Professor of History, Departmental Chair of Social Sciences, and Co-Executive Director of the Endowed Institute for Citizenship Studies at Northwestern Oklahoma State University in Alva. He earned a Ph.D. in History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His research concentrates on Modern Germany and Modern Russia with an emphasis on ethnic and nationality issues, as well as German migration topics.

Over the past three decades, he has contributed various publications to the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, Germans from Russia Heritage Society, and North Dakota State University Libraries Germans from Russia Heritage Collection and has given numerous conference presentations and public talks both here and abroad. In addition, he served as GRHS Heritage Review editor from 2010 to 2020 and has worked on the AHSGR Journal's editorial board since 2008.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



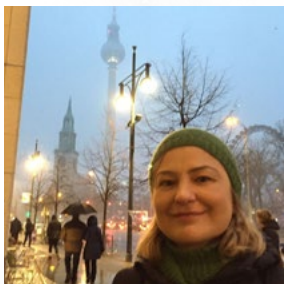
Carolyn Schott

Carolyn Schott has researched her German ancestors in Eastern Europe for 20+ years. She's one of the founders of the Black Sea German Research Community, a former board member of the Germans from Russia Heritage Society, and author of the book, "Visiting Your Ancestral Town."



Tina Siemens

Tina Rempel Siemens immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico in 1977, becoming a U.S. citizen in 1986. She married her best friend, John Siemens, on April 17, 1988. She is the proud mother of two sons, both married, and Oma to four precious grandchildren. Tina has served on various boards and Seminole, including the Chamber and the Hospital Board. In November 2015, Tina had the great honor of being named citizen of the year of Seminole, Texas. In 2024, Tina was named best author in Seminole, Texas. Hardly a day goes by that she doesn't tell someone how proud she is to be an American! She is an author of three books.



Lena Wolf

Lena Wolf was born in Latvia to ethnic German parents but grew up in Aktobe, Kazakhstan. This city became her family's home after their deportation from Ukraine in 1941. Originally, her family had settled in various regions, including Ukraine, the Planer colonies by Mariupol, and southern Russia. In 1989, Lena's family moved to Offenbach am Main, Germany. Lena's thirst for adventure led her to New Zealand, where she learned English. She pursued higher education at Goethe University in Frankfurt and Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, earning both her BA and Master's degrees. Currently, Lena calls London home. Her journey spanning Latvia, Kazakhstan, Germany, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom has given her a profound perspective on the concept of belonging, which is reflected in the title of her graphic novel, *May the Universe be Your Home!*



Tatiana Zabolotneva

Tatiana Zabolotneva grew up in the village of Frank, Russia, and now lives in Saratov. Growing up, her mother, Olga Zabolotneva (née Weingardt), helped her discover the local German Russian history. Her ancestral villages are Rothammel (family names: Weingardt/Weingart, Appelhans) and Seewald (family name: Krämer).



Carolyn Zeisset

Carolyn Zeisset's GR heritage is from Molotschna and a daughter colony. She is a life-long educator and author of the historical fiction novel *Then the Rules Changed* (2022) about immigration from South Russia to America. The forthcoming novel *Caught in the Middle* is about the home-front experiences of people with German-speaking heritage in World War I.