



# 2023-2024 Annual Committee Reports

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## Ancestral Records Committee

Co-Chairs: Dodie Rotherham and Kevin Rupp

A newly developed Aussiedler presentation with English voice over the original German recording has been made and is now available to the general public as a “teaser” to encourage more exploration of our website – therefore expanding our outreach and connection to the GR community. Through the efforts of Michael Brown, committee member, one of the original recordings of the Aussiedler, was translated by Ute Brandenburg and voice-over was done by Pastor Ost from North Dakota. This recording has been put online under the research tab and our goal is to promote this in our weekly news broadcasts.

The following records have been translated, during the past year, and are available:

**Alt-Dönhof Family list** 1874 – 1882  
**Anton** Death Records 1820-1826  
**Anton** Marriage Records 1820 – 1826  
**Deportation List** 1941  
**Dönhof** - Family list 1882 – 1906  
**Graf** Family List 1878  
**Kukkus** Birth Records 1925

**Messer** Marriage/Engagement Records  
1804 – 1916  
**Messer** Family List 1834 - 1859  
**Norka** Family List 1846 – 1860  
**Norka** Marriage Records 1899-1919  
**Reinwald** Communion Register  
**Schönchen** Marriage Records 1861 – 1971

**Letters from Hell** – preface indexes and abstracts from Die Welt post by Albert Amen

**Letters from Hell** – 1920, 1921, 1922, 1933 many more in progress by Marcia Gienapp

The Letters from Hell – preface indexes and abstracts from Die Welt post by Albert Amen have been posted online and are available for all members free of charge. The index compiled by Albert Amen has been thoroughly researched and contains short insights with each record.

In addition, there are numerous records in process and awaiting translation.

Treffen Tuesday continues to be a successful event. 2024 speaker slots are filled and we have begun finding speakers for 2025. Several slots are filled for 2025.

This year we were able to complete and pay for the translation of Memories of Kazakhstan This book was written by Michael Wanner and colleagues in Germany and translated by Alex and Nancy Herzog.

Our committee worked with AHSGR Archivist, Karen Keehr, this past year and the following is a list of digitization for 2023-2024 to date:

Archives 505 records  
Photos 2318  
Objects 64  
Total 2887



### **Culture and Folklore Committee**

Committee Members: Sheri Ertl (Chair), Kris Jones, Sue Nakaji, Harold Penner, Cheryl Glanz

The Culture and Folklore Committee modified the Storytelling Committee. It will be a stand-alone virtual event held on October 10, 2024. We hope this will enable more people to attend and hear the wonderful stories written about the German from Russia heritage, history, and culture. A poetry division has been added. Prize amounts were also increased. Deadline for submissions is September 6, 2024. Information is available on the website at:

<https://ahsgr.org/storytelling-contest/>

In April 2024, AHSGR hosted a Writer's Workshop where writers Paula Ray and Meg Arenz taught and encouraged writers as they wrote about their families. The group now meets monthly.

The Committee is writing content for the Culture and Heritage section of the website and social media posts. Recipes continue to be shared monthly.

Book Club continues to meet quarterly via Zoom. The next meeting will be in September.

## Editorial and Publications Committee

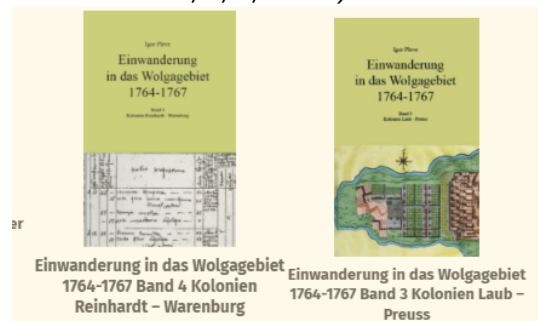
**Committee Members:** Anna Dalhaimer Bartkowski (Co-Chair), Erika Weidemann Bravo (Journal Editor), Michael Brown, Kris Jones, Elizabeth Koch (Co-Chair), Olga Litzenberger, Kevin Rupp, Delores Tippet, Alan Wambold.

### PROCEDURAL

- Updated E&P Strategic Goals for 2023-2024.
- Welcomed new Journal Editor, Erika Weidemann Bravo who expanded the reach and depth of the Journal Editorial board.
- Welcomed new Publications Coordinator, Libby Horken.

### FINALIZED PROJECTS:

- Plevé Band 3 and 4 now available for pre-order in Store. (Negotiated North and South American publishing and copyright rights to publish *Einwanderung in der Wolgagebiet Volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4*).



- Negotiated the right to publish the paperback *Die Wolgadeutschen Unsere Leute, The Store of our People, Vol. 1& 2*.
- Published new children's book *Anna's Red Purse* written by Anne Stang, illustrated by Elizabeth Koch.
- Published new monograph translated by Richard Kisling *Volga Germans Mirrored in their Customs*. Originally published by der Landmannschaft as *Der Wolgadeutsche in Siegel seines Brauchtums* by Eduard Seib .
- Published Letters from Hell 1933
- Created new cover for Aussiedler Monograph.
- Conducted excess inventory sale in December-January of books with over 100+ copies to reduce stock. Raised funds to ship these books to our partner in Buenos Aires, Argentina at the [Asociación de Descendientes de Alemanes del Volga de Gualaguaychú](#).
- Added to Store: *Die Berufer* by Georg Rauschenbach & Andreas Idt and *Historisches Ortslexikon der Wolgadeutschen, Band 3* by Olga Litzenberger.

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## **PENDING PROJECTS:**

- *The Adventures of Konrad the Kamel, Wanderlust* by Anna Dalhaimer Bartkowski and Elizabeth Koch.
- *Resumo Histórico e Genealogia dos Alemães do Volga* by Carlos Alberto Schwab introduction translation by Kristine Jones.
- In preparation for the 150-year anniversary of Germans from Russia settling in Ellis and Rush Counties in Kansas (and the 2026 convention to be held in Kansas), develop a commemorative item to be gifted or sold at that convention.

**Anna Bartkowski, Co-Chair & Elizabeth Koch, Co-Chair**



## Facility Committee

Committee Members: Philip Stuckert and Rebecca Matticks.

A summary of the work items provided below covers this calendar year.

Each year, at the October Board of Directors meeting held in Lincoln, Nebraska, the FC meet to discuss upcoming capital improvement projects for the new fiscal year. The ongoing maintenance list is long and includes many past due necessary and some safety related projects. Projects are usually but not always identified and prioritized based on safety issues, followed up by maintenance needs. Our project list consistently exceeds the amount of money budgeted for our committee.

This coming Fiscal Year, the FC along with AHSGR Staff identified maintenance priorities as their highest need. CoWol Construction was the successful contractor that submitted the lowest responsible bid for the interior repainting work. The improvements included the following work areas: Interior Re-painting of two stairwells from the second floor to the basement.

As the repainting of the interior stairwells was proceeding, staff was engaged in relocating parts of the downstairs library for categorizing and record keeping. In their duties, they found parts of the downstairs basement wall behind the bookshelves without finished drywall. An inspection and conversation among staff and the FC realized the need install new drywall where needed to restore the basement walls to a finished appearance. CoWol provided a quote to perform the additional unexpected work and it was accepted so work proceeded with this company. This work was attached to the stairwell bid and contract which extended the original contract.

A second bid was solicited from various contractors to repaint the exterior parts of the Heritage Center. CoWol was the lowest responsible bidder, so a contract was approved with them performing the work. The improvements included the following work areas:

- Exterior repainting of the Heritage Center consisting of the rake fascia board on the three gable ends of the building; the remaining longitudinal fascia boards running along the roof lines of the Center (between the gable ends); the trim boards around the windows as well as the three exterior entryway steel doors into the Center.

In addition to this work, we have solicited bids from local sign companies to replace the existing deteriorated AHSGR sign located on C Street. Funding for this project will be from donations and Lincoln Day Grant. Other work scheduled for the summer includes refurbishing the exterior doors of the Chapel on the south side of the campus.

Lastly, approximately a year ago, the AHSGR Northeast Kansas Chapter donated money to the Society for landscaping improvement surrounding the Heritage Center. This work is now complete and is in the front of the Heritage Center around the brick donation area and AHSGR Statue.



The FC continues to seek alternative methods to address repairs to the Ag Building located on the south side of the campus. The exterior siding from the ground up approximately twelve to sixteen inches shows significant deterioration along with possible impacts to the stud wall and sheathing behind the exterior siding. Building codes required the finish floor to be six to twelve inches above the surrounding ground similar conditions for the new outdoor storage shed. However, this was not addressed during its construction thus contributing to the present problem. This prevents premature rot and protects the stud walls and siding from excessive moisture from snowpack, sprinkler systems, etc.



### **Fundraising Committee**

The committee developed the fundraising pyramid that illustrates the members and external entities that have previously contributed to ASHGR. The committee met on October 11, November 13, 2023, January 24, February 15, March 19 and May 14, 2024. The committee reviewed various donor categories and ideas for potential outreach to achieve its goal of raising approximately \$230,000 this year. The fundraising categories included membership and individual donations, foundation donations, and grants. The committee continues outreach to organizations with connections to German from Russia individuals and corporations. The committee and other committees developed themes for giving campaigns, revising the annual fundraising letter and enabling automated monthly recurring donations. The committee has also highlighted opportunities to donate under the Qualified Charitable Donation from Individual Retirement Accounts.





## Genealogical Research Committee

Committee Members: Susan Nakaji, Chairperson, Sally Peterson, Roz Rockweit, Lee Macklin (resigned), Sandra Wagner, Ray Karlin, Village Coordinator liaison, Wayne Bonner, non-Board member German Origins project, Karen Keehr, Archivist, Amber Mikkelsen, Archival Research assistant, Russ Gunther.

As the Genealogical Research committee was re-established this past year, one of our first activities was to develop our mission statement and our standing rules.

The Mission of the Genealogy Research committee is to develop and implement genealogical research tools and services, enhance website support for both new and experienced genealogical researchers. To share the history and genealogical legacy of German Settlers in the Russian Empire through online and in-person resources.

### SMART Goals:

1. Review the Genealogy research page and current pricing for research services. *Completed*
2. Perform a gap analysis of web site resources. Create crosswalk of current resources on website at this time assessing what is critically missing or challenging to find or realign. *Ongoing*
3. Create how to start German from Research digital resources directed to the novice GfR learner. *Completed*

Our current Projects are the German Origins project-funding has been determined and it is being prepared for publication on the website. The VC liaison is reviewing the current program and practices and has determined revised approaches for the 2024 Convention. Our new project is the development of the interactive Germans from Russia timeline, first steps in researching timeline events has begun by committee members.

Karen Keehr and Amber Mikkelsen have made substantial contributions to the work of the committee. Amber has worked on digital resources for the beginning German from Russia researcher, completing a video: Helpful Genealogical Resources in the Library/Archives, updating the research request forms and report formats. She has also completed a number of research requests. Reports indicate an upturn in requests.

Karen has overseen the completion of many projects including Archival acquisitions, the ongoing digitization of the photo collection, reorganization of the library, including barcoding the collection and replacing the shelving. The Library added Black Sea Research records to the collection.

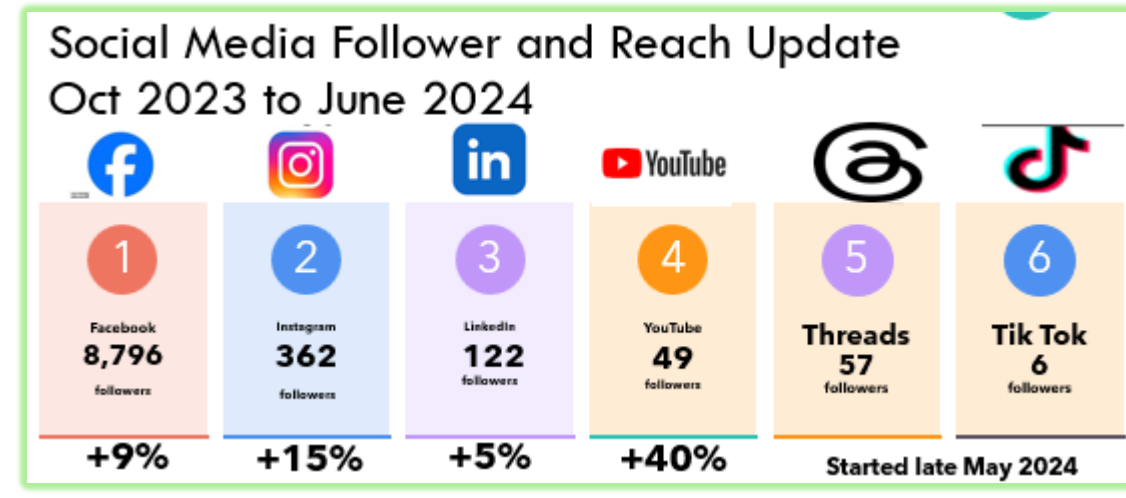
Respectfully submitted,  
Susan Nakaji, Genealogical Research Chairperson

## Marketing and Public Affairs Committee

**Committee Members:** Anna Bartkowski (Co-Chair), Diane Bates (Co-Chair) Sheri Ertl, Russ Gunther, Sally Petersen, Roz Rockweit, Kevin Rupp.

The Marketing committee set strong strategic goals for 2024 and worked closely as a team to promote AHSGR news, events, and activities to attract new members to the society.

### Social Media Presence and Results



- Created monthly and rotating posts on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube since August 2023. Created Threads and Tik Tok accounts late May 2024.
- Monthly Themes-Education, Family History Month, 25 Days of Christmas, Healing Practices, Hochzeit-Love AHSGR, Women's History Month, Convention.



- Rotating posts- featured publications and merchandise, book club, Treffen Tuesday, events, recipes, books, membership, fund raising, Jugend Zeitung, service awards, digital publications, storytelling contest, bricks.



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- Tracked engagement and impressions. The top three ways new members discovered us since Jan. 2024 was: Website 28%, Other 21%, Google Search 12%. The Google ad program grant money continues.

### **Added Marketing PowerPoint preview before each Treffen Tuesday**



**Advertising** -Paid promotion to reach our target market of families interested in genealogical research and history.

- Continued commitment to *Family Tree* Advertising digital and print magazine.
- 



**Conferences** – Outreach to genealogical communities to share our history and connect with potential new members.

- Joined the National Genealogical Society and attended their annual conference to build network and AHSGR awareness.
- Rootstech, Feb. 29-March 2, 2024 -virtual exhibitor engaging with like-minded attendees to add potential members to our database.
- Attended webinars with Arizona Genealogy Day, German Special Interest Group, International German Genealogy Partnership to network and build AHSGR awareness.

### **Additional Outreach**

- Added AHSGR site at [Great nonprofits](https://www.greatnonprofits.org), a website where donors, volunteers, and clients to review and share their personal experiences with charitable organizations, essentially providing crowdsourced information about the reputability of these organizations.
- Conducted YouTube interview with author Anne Stang and illustrator Elizabeth Koch to promote new children's book *Anna's Red Purse*.

**Anna Bartkowski and Diane Bates, Co-chairs**



## Membership Committee

Members: Diane Bates, Sue Casseday, Sheri Ertl, Raymond Karlin, Sally Petersen, Rosalind Rockweit (Chair), Phillip Stuckert.

June 2023-May 2024 Membership Status:

- Retention Rate: 71.24%
- 261 New members
- 1053 Renewed Members
- 425 Expired Members
- Reviewed 2023 membership longevity data.
- Monthly review of membership data for renewal errors

2023 Annual Membership Campaign:

- Conference sign up, three new members
- Recruit 4 new members and receive 40% off annual membership, low results.

Committee Outreach:

- Standardized timing of committee outreach to expired members two weeks after the five automated AHSGR renewal notices are sent out.
- The committee contacted 411 expired members.

Financial Stability:

- Recommended implementing universal annual auto-renewal taking into account legalities and requirements for non-profits.
- Reported an assessment of current approaches and challenges to improve dedicated donations to operating funds.

Chapter Status:

- Active Chapters: 30
- New Chapters: 1 (pending)
- Deactivated Chapters: 2

Updated Committee Policies and Procedures:

1. P&P 210: Distinguished Service Award (DSA)
2. P&P 211: Special Citation Award (SCA)
3. P&P 207: Volunteers

Member Handbook:

- Fully revised and available on the Membership web page.



### **Strategic Planning Committee**

During the October board meeting the committee reviewed the 2024 priorities and discussed each goal and what committee would take the lead and coordinate with each other committee that are supporting the key 2024 strategies. The Strategic Planning Committee has primarily focused on the 2024-2026 Goal 3, Strengthen Partnerships in the Germans from Russia Community.

The committee met on September 12, 2023, January 31, March 21, and June 4, 2024. The committee developed a partner engagement plan that identified plans to connect, cooperate and collaborate with German for Russia organizations. The committee discussed plans for engagement with Germans for Russia Heritage Society (GRHS), and organizations with a web presence including Volga German Records, Black Sea German Research (Black Sea GR), Glückstal Colonies Research Association and Odessa 3. The committee also supported outreach to Argentinian organizations and plan outreach to German, Brazilian, and Canadian organizations. The committee plans further outreach to universities that contact information on Germans from Russia including Wichita State University, Kansas State University, University of Northern Colorado, Colorado State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and North Dakota State University.

A page on the ASHGR website now provides links to various German from Russian organizations including a link to Mennonite organizations.



## Technology Committee

Committee Members: Philip Stuckert (Chair), Lee Macklin, Duane Stabler, John Spady, Jeff Stoll

The Technology Committee (TC) objectives and projects this year includes the following:

1. Transfer data from our inhouse Dell Server to a Cloud Based Server.
  - AHSGR is exploring options to migrate data currently stored on in-house servers to cloud-based storage. By moving towards a cloud-based solution, AHSGR hopes to achieve better access for those working remotely, improved security and backups, and decrease our server maintenance contract with Bizco. The inhouse server has a service life to calendar year 2026. Staff is working on a data migration plan that includes an inventory the data currently on the servers, evaluating old files using the recently approved Retention Schedule, and reorganizing the data into a new structure for improved security and access. The Archivist is also looking into Digital Asset Management (DAM) software to preserve and create access to our scans and electronic archival files. The server migration effort is led by AHSGR's Archivist, Karen Keehr.
2. Review security issues and contractual obligations with Lee Media concerning the ongoing operation of the current AHSGR Website.
  - The Host website on a private dedicated server that is managed by Rackspace Technology which encompasses Secure Hosting and Secure Socket Layer (SSL) certificates. By contractual relationship with Lee Media, Rackspace Technology provides ongoing monitoring of our cloud space for required maintenance and security update as part of their ongoing services. Rackspace Technology also provides full weekly backups and incremental daily backups along with monthly analytics reports.
3. Develop a protocol and means to broadcast AHSGR Hybrid Board Meetings via Zoom.
  - The protocol and procedures were followed and instituted at the October 2023 Board of Directors Meeting held in Lincoln, NE and Members on Zoom using a video camera, microphones set out at each table, and a Zoom Host Computer.

The headquarters staff also has replaced and purchased several pieces of technology equipment to assist them in their daily work routines.