

North Star Chapter

<http://www.northstarchapter.org>

Preserving the heritage of the Germans from Russia, in dual affiliation with the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) and the Germans from Russia Historical Society (GRHS).

All Aboard for Weihnachtsfest Germans from Russia Annual Food and Fellowship Celebration

Saturday, December 5 2015
Berea Lutheran Church

7538 Emerson Avenue South
Richfield, MN 55423

12:00 p.m. - Pot Luck meal served

1:00 p.m. - Fellowship time

Chapter Member Paul Maggitti will share his holiday train as a special attraction for this year's celebration. Special music by Steve Weninger on the accordion.



Bring generous portions of food and your family to our annual holiday celebration. Beverages, plates, cups, glasses and eating utensils are provided. Mark your dishes and serving spoons so they can go home with you! Electric outlets are available for crockpots.

Don't forget to be very, very good in the coming weeks! Someone may be watching.

Doors open at 11:30 AM so we can have the food all set up to serve at noon. Don't be late!

Membership Renewal for 2016:

See our website or our membership table at the November meeting for membership renewal forms.

WEIHNACHTSFEST Volunteer Opportunities! Volunteers needed for Friday setup (December 4, 10AM) and cleanup at the end of our event December 5. Sign up at our November meeting, or contact Lil Ward via email or phone. Lil's contact data is on page 2.

Follow us on Facebook at: North Star Chapter of Minnesota



North Star Chapter 2015 Officers

President

Chuck Kurle

651-437-1380

[KurleC at asme.Org](mailto:KurleC@asme.Org)

1st VP/Program Chair

Lil Ward

763-784-8626

[lilWard at comcast.Net](mailto:lilWard@comcast.Net)

2ndVP/Membership

Duane Stabler

952-447-8654

[dStabler at Mediacombb.Net](mailto:dStabler@Mediacombb.Net)

Treasurer

Ron Scherbenski

952-541-1917

[ronScherbenski at msn.Com](mailto:ronScherbenski@msn.Com)

Secretary

Glorian Anderson

763-545-1013

[RGAndersn at aol.Com](mailto:RGAndersn@aol.Com)

GRHS Chapter Rep:

Marilyn Brink

[zumplebump at yahoo.Com](mailto:zumplebump@yahoo.Com)

Newsletter Staff

Layout & Editor

Nancy Gertner

612-396-9186

[nancyGertner at mac.Com](mailto:nancyGertner@mac.Com)

Website

www.northstarchapter.org

Webmaster

Duane Stabler

952-447-8654

[dStabler at Mediacombb.Net](mailto:dStabler@Mediacombb.Net)

Please Take Note **Snowbirds:**

If you have a **winter address**, please notify the Membership Chair, Duane Stabler.

Chapter President's Message

by Chuck Kurle

Our September program featured Robert Russell, Library Director and University Archivist at Northern State University in Aberdeen, SD. Robert described the oral history project along with playing recordings of interviews with some of the many people that he interviewed, including many members from the North Star Chapter. He also described the digitization project where letters, documents, and pictures are being digitized. I am excited to visit the South Dakota Germans from Russia Cultural Center the next time we travel to Aberdeen. From what I have seen, Robert has done an excellent job with this project that will benefit all of us in preserving our Germans from Russia Heritage.

I would like to thank North Star Chapter members Duane Stabler, James Gessele, and Tom Stangl for their work and contribution to the *Families From Hoffnungstal / Bessarabia*. The primary contributors for this 1600 page document are Albert Eisenbeiß and Curt Renz. Vicki and I have been spending many hours researching through this huge document. What a gold mine! If you are interested, contact Duane Stabler for more information.

Our annual election of officers will be the focus for our November business meeting. Officers are elected for a term of one year. Nominations "from the floor" can be accepted. But the elected officers are not the only ones that keep the North Star Chapter as the "shining star" in the Germans from Russia community. We have many volunteers working every month doing things like this great newsletter, keeping our library organized, greeting everyone at the meetings, making sure coffee

and treats are ready at the meetings, and performing all the set up and clean up work. These members deserve a huge 'thank you' for all their dedication and hard work. I am looking forward to seeing everyone at the November meeting.

Election of Officers is scheduled for the November meeting. Contact President Chuck Kurle (contact data at left) to volunteer your services for one of the offices. Members are also invited to serve on committees.

Submission Deadline for the next newsletter is 15 December 2015. Please put NEWZLETTER in the subject line, and email inputs to: NancyGertner at [mac.com](mailto:nancyGertner@mac.com)

"Visibility Ten Miles "

Poetry and Photos



with Author Sharon Chmielarz
and Photographer Kenneth Smith

Saturday, November 21, 2015
Berea Lutheran Church

7538 Emerson Avenue South
Richfield, MN 55423

1:00 p.m. - Business meeting with election
of officers

2:00 p.m. - Program with Poetry and Photos

Sharon Grenz Chmielarz was born and raised in Mobridge, South Dakota. Her father was born in Fredonia, North Dakota; her mother in Juanita, ND. Sharon's nine books of poetry include: *Calling*, *The Sky Is Great*, *The Sky Is Blue*, *The Rhubarb King* and *The Other Mozart*. Her work has been a finalist in the National Poetry Series and Next Generation Indie Book Awards, and nominated several times for a Pushcart Prize. Featured in *American Life in Poetry* with individual poems translated into French and Polish, Sharon is a chapter member to be proud of. Her latest book (2015) is a collaboration with Kenneth Smith, ***Visibility: Ten Miles, a Prairie Memoir in Photography and Poetry***. Her tenth book, *The Widow's House*, is scheduled for release in November 2015.

2016 Schedule

January 23, 2016

DVD: Germans from Russia
in South America

February 20, 2016

Annual Genealogy Workshop,
with open library

Linguistics Lesson: Terms of Endearment?

by Vicki Kurle

Bernie Becker, our Chapter Librarian, got us thinking about words and expressions. James Gessele translated and corrected the spelling of these phrases Chuck and I remembered from our childhoods. These are expressions we grew up with. Read, chuckle and enjoy!

"*Habersock*" (*Hafersack*) we learned from Chuck's grandmothers, Grandma Rose Gross Kurle and Grandma Minnie Mauch Bader. We used this term of endearment with our two boys. We used it as fun-loving and thought it meant, "bag of potatoes or oats." Jim Gessele said it equates to "You little feed bag." Another saying we used was "*Snigglefritz*" (*Schnickelfritz*). We thought that meant something like, "you little honey." Jim said it is "Rascal". We use these on our seven granddaughters and they look at us and smile! Another word someone gave was "*Auch Da Lieber*" (*Ach Du Lieber*) meaning "Oh My Goodness!" We also use the Norwegian (Norwegian) saying as heard spoken in Norway: Uff Da!

Thank you Bernie! *Danke!*

Library Corner: Book Review

by Bernelda Becker

KEEPERS OF THE FAITH

By Bernie Becker

"...it is only when we embrace our past that we can find true fulfillment in our future. Today, I am filled with a deep appreciation of where I have come from and a better sense of where I'm going. The Hutterite culture has defined me in ways that can never be erased."

—Mary-Ann Kirkby

Thus ends the book, *I Am Hutterite*, the fascinating true story of author Mary-Ann Kirkby. Mary-Ann spent the first ten years of her life in the cradle of a Hutterite colony. When her parents took their children and left the colony she found herself an outsider amongst "the English" children at school and worked diligently to belong. Finally, at mid-life, she visits the colony, reconnects with former early childhood friends, and visits the graves of her grandparents in the colony cemetery where she makes the above statement before returning to her post-Hutterite life amongst "The English."

It is so true—whether we like it or not, that our religious training, ethnicity, and the culture at the time of our youth has a lifelong hold on us. We may wander away and explore the forbidden. But, again, Mary-Ann explains it best when she writes: *"The dream I used to have about losing my mother in the fabric store because I was distracted by the glitz of beautiful buttons came true. It was the sight of Grandma's skirt and the sound of our own language that led me back to safety."*

I was never a Hutterite. But I was and am a German from Russia. I was age twelve when The Great Depression years forced our family to move away from our comfortable niche amongst relatives, neighbors, spiritual and ethnic culture. We didn't settle in an "English" environment. It was Norwegian. Not a German-Russian for miles around.

My parents weren't comfortable in a Norwegian Lutheran church, so we became unchurched. My distraction wasn't glitzy buttons; I wanted to speak flawless English. I wanted education after grade school, and had to fight to get it. I was ashamed of my parents and their old-fashioned ideas. At the same time I was torn between longing to return to the familiar or to belong where I was.

Much like Mary-Ann's epiphany, mine also happened in my mid-forties. I went "back home" for a funeral. Sitting in a room with other women my age, watching them, listening to them, I realized that if I lived in my home community, I would be just like them. I'd be loud. I'd speak bluntly. I'd fit right in. Don't get me wrong. I learned a lot from my Scandinavian friends. They were and are wonderful folks. But that which was ingrained in me from early childhood is nothing to be ashamed of. Searching for my roots through genealogy, I now realize I have much to be proud of in my ethnicity, my heritage, and my faith. We are a people of strong Christian belief, as are the Norwegians, Swedes, Poles, and, believe it or not, "The English" Mary-Ann lived among.

I am thankful that because those who came before us to settle this great land brought with them their Christian beliefs—beliefs of various denominations. I am thankful that as we, their children and grandchildren have assimilated, we have learned that we can live and work together, and learn from one another without sheltering in small communities or colony living. Circumstances change, but the faith of our mothers and fathers continues from generation to generation.

...we Your people, the sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever; we will show forth and publish Your praise from generation to generation. Psalm 79:13.

NOTICE:

It is time to check your shelves, end tables, and reading corners for books you checked out of our library this year. Please return them at our November meeting.

Postcards from Nebraska

Finding my Park on the Prairie



by Nancy Gertner

Homestead National Monument, Beatrice, Nebraska

After attending the Iowa Country Schools Conference, Paul and I headed home to Minnesota via a detour west into Nebraska. Paul's first venture into the Cornhusker state found the humming combines busy husking the corn. Fresh-cut alfalfa indicated late summer rains were providing a bumper crop and an extended growing season into October.

Our destination was a place not many of us may have heard of, despite strong impact of the Homestead Act on our immigrant families. The Homestead National Monument, at Beatrice, is about 40 miles south of the capital city of Lincoln. Operated by the National Park Service since its creation in 1936, the location was chosen to highlight the first Homestead claim filed in 1863 by Daniel Feeman. Free admission.

The site includes 160 acres of restored prairie and woodland, a homestead cabin, and an 1872 stone school attended by the Freeman children.

The Heritage Center contains exhibits, a gift shop, and a theater where a 30-minute video is shown. Both the exhibits and the documentary describe the North American land use changes enacted by the homesteaders, along with the impacts on the Indigenous Peoples of North America. Computers enable people to search for Homestead documents of land homesteaded in Nebraska. Future plans include digitizing records of all 30 states where homesteading occurred.

National Parks Celebrate Centennial in 2016

The Park service encourages you to "Find Your Park" or visit findyourpark.com

93 Million Americans are descended from Homesteaders, and everyone has a story! Share yours at www.NPS.gov
"Living Homesteader Project"



Ethnic Heritage

By Louise Regehr Wiens

"The Cattle Car" A Refugee Journey

Living near the busiest border crossing between Canada and the USA, my family and I are among the thousands who cross regularly for shopping, entertainment, or travel purposes. Recently we were driving down an impeccable, busy boulevard in an upscale suburb of Detroit, Michigan, looking for a particular address, when I spotted it, a seemingly generic-looking, rather large, elongated red brick building. "Zekelman Holocaust Memorial Center" proclaimed the sign, and upon noticing it, I immediately implored my husband to pull over for a few minutes so that I could at least run in to check the hours of operation and maybe plan a visit in the near future.

It was an overcast summer's day as I entered the lofty, front lobby where an elderly woman sat at the reception desk as a young man beside her appeared immersed in his computer. When I heard the shuffling of feet behind me, I turned to see a group of well-behaved and pensive school children being escorted on an organized tour of the center. My eyes continued to roam the expansive space around me. The woman recited her rehearsed yet informative speech to me about the center, and I, in response, divulged a few details of my family history to her, which I felt appeared to take her by great surprise. Then, from the corner of my eye to the left, I saw it, in the far side of the lobby. Without my glasses, I blinked. Then blinked again. A cattle car! Parked on wooden railway ties, a sign declared its authenticity and stated that it was a featured exhibit for the month. There, with my own eyes, I saw the chipped, wooden, painted sides with the tiny slats between them. There were the large rusted bolts on the outside which ensured escape was not possible, and, which I had heard, trapped inside both those living and those already dead. As the woman continued with her rehearsed rhetoric, my tears began to flow and I quickly exited the building.

In the fall of 1945, my mother and her siblings were told that they would have to leave Germany since "they were not born there." They had already been resettled more than once since being expelled from Bessarabia in the early 1940s, and now once again they found themselves on the move. They were

crowded into creaky, wooden cattle cars which appeared to no longer even be fit enough to hold even the animals they had been built to contain. Yet this was human cargo, and along with ten other families who were also from mother's home village of Leipzig, the group made a pact to try to stay together, as they once again faced an uncertain future. As the cattle cars departed, the former Leipzigers initially held out high hopes that they were returning to Romania, and they were already sensing the anticipation of the grape harvest and tasting the sweet fruit and the succulent wine. It was not long into the journey however, as the train made a sudden unexpected turn, that some of the older men on the trek with them, who were familiar with the rail system in place at that time, shared the shocking revelation with their fellow passengers that the train was indeed heading another direction, and that it was not to their beloved homeland.

Roll call was held randomly every few days as the train groaned to a squeaky halt and the masses of people were abruptly ordered to haphazardly jump out of the rail cars and risk injury by lunging onto the rocky steppe beneath to break their fall. The terrain appeared to show no signs of civilization, past or present. The gruff uniformed Russian officer bellowed orders, seemingly oblivious to the shrieks of the frightened children who were clinging to the arms of their anxious mothers. With his starched cap perched impeccably on his head and his polished rifle by his side, the officer used intimidation tactics to try to calm his new group of prisoners. Cold and disheveled, they were starting to succumb to malnutrition and exhaustion as they tried to pull themselves together for the sake of their children.

As my mother and her three-year-old son Egon took their allotted place in line, she began to mumble under her breath to the woman beside her about this surreal scene in which they found themselves being involuntary participants. Aware that someone incredulously had the stamina to speak at the same time that he was barking instructions, the officer pivoted, pointing his rifle at my mother and her son and letting loose a string of syllables of Russian profanity. My mother was quickly silenced as the woman next to her, who understood Russian, translated that he threatened to send my mother to a place where she would never see the light of day again. "That quieted me and I knew then that I was in Russia," my mother had relayed to me many times over the years.

Ethnic Heritage *(continued on page 7)*

Ethnic Heritage *(continued from page 6)*

Anxiety and panic increased daily among the people, and scuffles between them became common, when on rare occasions the car doors would slowly creak open and a few handfuls of food would be thrown in as if one was feeding a flock of birds. The stench of excrement and human body odor of those living or those already dead was not easily absorbed by the mounds of dirty straw on which the deportees not only rested their heads but also used to garner some warmth. Sometimes the train was left abandoned on the tracks for days at a time, doors bolted from the outside, until days later the muffled distant chugs of the ancient and battered locomotive were the only indicator that the train was now on the move again. Fleeting glimpses of meager, filtered streams of light peeking through the slits on the sides of the cattle car illuminating the dust and the filth were the only indicators of the time of day or night as people crowded near them to inhale some fresh air.

Weeks later the train had reached its destination of Martuk, Kazakhstan, where the exiled villagers were quickly pushed off and instructed to line up as officials from several local collective farms gathered to fill their work quotas by choosing from this new group of recruits. Women with children were considered a liability and usually not considered a popular pick, which resulted in my mother being separated from several of her siblings. The local nomadic groups of Kazaks were seemingly nonchalant to these newcomers, having apparently seen the pattern of forcibly relocated folks coming and going for many decades.

In 1955, after ten long years of exile, my mother, her new husband, their three-year-old son Arthur, and several other family members were given permission from Moscow to return to Germany. At the eleventh hour, my mother was suddenly informed that a small

complication had arisen from her almost nine-month pregnancy. She would not be able to leave after all, she was informed, as Russia was responsible not only for her well-being, but also for that of her soon-to-be-born child. "No one ever cared if we lived or died all those years," she often told me, "yet now, they suddenly acted as if they actually cared!" On a cold December day as the Siberian winds whipped fiercely, she was commanded to lie down wrapped in blankets in the back of an ox cart while a driver took her to a local doctor for an examination to ensure she would be able to withstand the journey home. "Unsuitable to travel," came the quick verdict from the intoxicated doctor, much to my mother's dismay. Yet, undeterred, at the appointed time of the planned departure, she gathered with the others, determined not to be left behind again. Her family shoved her onto the train and hid her under a coat, as angry officials stormed the rail cars looking for the pregnant and defiant woman. As the train slowly started to move away from the station, the perception among the officials was that she was not present after all in the midst of this throng so very anxious to leave this Siberian wilderness behind, and they dejectedly exited the train. Several weeks later, the joyous home comers arrived in Friedland, Germany, where safety, warm food and lodging awaited them. After eating a banana, including part of the peeling, and drinking fresh coffee for the first time in ten years, my mother promptly went into labor, and delivered a full term healthy baby girl at the hospital in Göttingen.

So it was that on that recent overcast June day as I stood in awe in that Holocaust Museum in front of that battered cattle car, words could never adequately describe the emotions that rocked my innermost being to the core. It was as if my two worlds had suddenly collided in front of me. You see, I was that baby, born so many years ago...



North Star Chapter
of Minnesota
AHSGR / GRHS Affiliated
Non-Profit Organization
PO Box 583642
Minneapolis, MN 55458



Dakotans Telling Stories: Front Row: Sharon Schmielarz, Lil Kleingartner Ward, Don Weidenbach, Bernie Kallenberger Becker, Ron Scherbenski. Back Row: Jim Gessele, Vicki Kurle, Steve Weninger, Dayton Ward, Chris Huber, Robert Russell, Hertha Lutz, Duane Stabler, Chuck Kurle. Chapter members' stories from oral interviews with Mr. Russell, Northern State University Library Director and University Archivist, Aberdeen, South Dakota, are part of the NSU oral history collection.