

# NEWSLETTER

Affiliated with AHSGR and GRHS

**Please Visit Our**  
**[SVCGR Website](https://svcgr.org)**



## President's Message

— Lee Macklin —

The California wildfires have been devastating with two of the largest fires in history burning at the same time plus hundreds of smaller ones. I certainly hope none of our members have been seriously affected by these fires.

Regarding our website, to make it easier for regular members and affiliate members to access our website, I removed the login requirement for many of the sections. See the Home Page Updates article on page 11.

We have a chapter meeting coming up next month (October 11th) which also serves as our Oktoberfest. Given we are still under high COVID-19 restrictions, it will be held via a Zoom video conference. This may be the first time an Oktoberfest is held with no one present in person!! We will have to get creative.

Everyone please vote in the very important 2020 Election now only about a month away. If voting by mail, please return your completed ballot as soon as possible to ensure it is counted. Otherwise, vote in person.

## In This Newsletter

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**2021 Membership renewal  
period Oct 1 - Dec 31 (\$20)**



## I Owe My Life to a Watermelon

— Cindi Jones —



I owe my life to a watermelon – sweet, juicy, and vine-ripened to perfection. Although I wasn't born until 1957, the story of my existence started in 1936 at the Eisenbarth family farm stand in Torrington, WY where my 18-year-old grandmother was selling watermelons. Her customer was a handsome 22-year-old man just passing through town. Grandma told me it was love at first sight (or "bite"...I know, bad pun).

My grandmother, Margaretha Eva Eisenbarth, grew up on a farm about 4 miles from Torrington. She was the youngest of thirteen children. The last three kids were girls – not a good gender configuration to help on the family farm. Margaretha was allowed to attend school through the 8th grade, which was not uncommon at that time. But she was needed on the farm and her school attendance suffered. On her 4th grade report card, she missed 26 out of the first 60 days; in 7th grade, she missed 15 out of the first 30 days, but was able to maintain an 80 - 90% GPA.





By the time Margaretha (now known as “Marjorie”) was 18 years old, she and an older brother were the only children living at home. They helped out on the farm with the assistance of a few hired hands. Her parents - father, Carl, now 70 years old, and mother, also named Margaretha, now 66 years old – were German-Russians from the Black Sea who immigrated to the U.S. in 1902. Marjorie’s first nine siblings were born in Rohrbach, South Russia; she and her last three siblings were born in Colorado.

Marjorie wrote that she had a happy childhood. “My parents were good Christian people. They worked hard. We all worked hard and, you know, it didn’t hurt us a bit, even though I’m sure at times, we envied the City Kids!” Although the Eisenbarth family was by no means rich, Grandma told me she never felt poor because they had what they needed to get by. But, as much as she loved her parents and her siblings who all farmed nearby, she privately hoped that farming sugar beets, alfalfa, corn - and even watermelons - wasn’t in her future.

German-Russians loved watermelon and it was a staple at many social gatherings. In true German-Russian fashion, none of the fruit was wasted, including the bitter seeds and rinds. The seeds (the ones that didn’t get spit at annoying siblings) were dried and used for later plantings in both the Old Country and the U.S. The fruit and rinds were often pickled. When Winter set in, pickled watermelon was a sweet reminder of Summer.

Back to the watermelon story... My grandfather, Gilbert Christensen (aka “Gib”), a Dane, was one of nine kids in a poor farming family in Kearney County, NE and Decatur County, KS. Because Gib was needed on the farm, he was 22 years old before he finally earned his high school diploma. Shortly after graduation, he and his brother left Kansas to find work in Klamath Falls, OR. They had traveled about 350 miles of their 1,500 mile journey when they stopped in Torrington and bought the watermelon from Marjorie’s farm stand. He was the 22-year-old man just passing through town. Striking up a conversation, Gib asked Marjorie what there was to do in Torrington. She told him about the weekly Saturday dance at the Grange Hall. He went to the dance and according to Grandma, they “fell madly in love.”

Gib extended his stay in Torrington to be near Marjorie so he got a job hauling sugar beets during Torrington’s beet harvest. Gib needed to get to Klamath Falls with his brother, but he promised he’d come back for Marjorie. She wrote, “I felt like dying when he left. But he promised me when he got a job, he’d get me and, bless him, he did exactly that.”



After writing each other for a few months, he formally “proposed” in a letter postmarked January 11, 1937. The lead-up to the proposal went like this: “I really got some good news the other day. The boss asked me if I wanted a steady job. I am making \$115 now and if I stay, I’ll get a raise in the spring.” Now, for the proposal: “But I’m going to need a cook tho if you’ll be the one.” I guess that’s the way one proposes long-distance – no phones, no texts, no beating ‘round the bush!

Just as Gib promised, he returned to Torrington a few months later and they married April 18, 1937 with her family and friends in attendance. I doubt fresh watermelon was on the menu because it was too early in the season. Perhaps they had pickled watermelon instead!

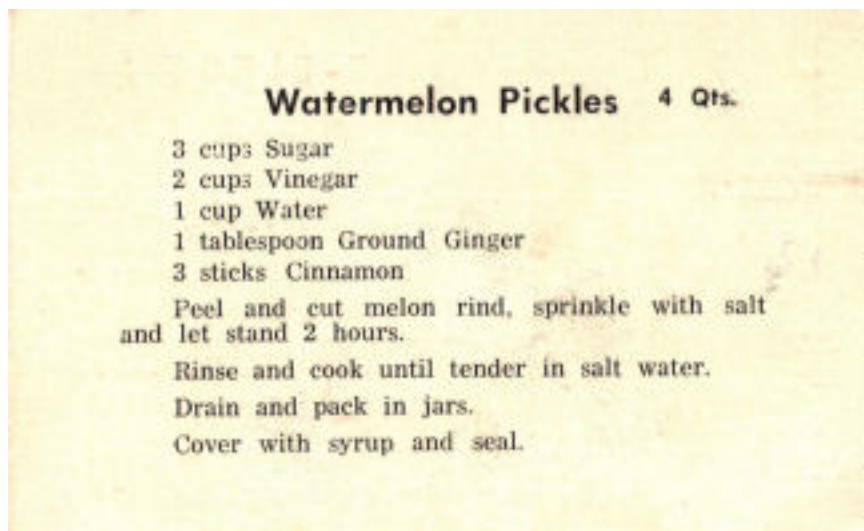
Gib and Marjorie both agreed neither wanted to farm. They moved to Klamath Falls and Portland, OR, and finally to San Jose, CA where Gib worked in the infancy of the aerospace industry.

So, I exist because of a watermelon. I can’t think of a more sweet and delicious fruit to owe my existence!

### How to Pick Out a Watermelon

Grandma could pick out a good watermelon every time! I can still hear Grandma telling me how to select the sweetest, ripest melon.

- Pick out a symmetrical watermelon that isn’t bright green – dull green is better.
- Make sure the watermelon is heavy because sugar weighs more than water.
- “Thwap it” with the palm of your hand – it should sound hollow, not dull.
- Look for a yellowish-orange spot on the watermelon. That means it was allowed to ripen on the ground longer and will be sweeter.
- Look for brown lines or spots – those are “bee stings” which means it was pollinated by the bees and it’ll be sweeter.



Grandma Marjorie and Cindi Jones circa 1988

**NOTE: There are more pictures accompanying this story on the SVCGR website including their wedding certificate, the wedding party, and a picture of Cindi with her grandma Marjorie. However, you will need a website login to view them.**

<https://www.svcgr.org/german-russian-watermelons>

## 6 Google Search Tricks for Genealogy

— Lee Macklin —

This is an excerpt from an article published on the [Family History Daily](#) website. Most of us use Google Search to look for our ancestors on a regular basis. But finding valuable data via Google Search can be hard since there are so many sites, and so many pages of data. After typing in an ancestor's name and a few details we often find that we've turned up hundreds or thousands of results, and most of them are irrelevant.

While this is true for all inquiries via search, it is especially true for family history searches because many sites have published long lists of names and dates, including family trees, transcribed book pages and records. This is great news for research, but turning up **relevant** pages is tricky. Even if you're careful to enter specific details into your searches you may not successfully limit results to the ones you want.

Luckily, Google is a pretty smart search engine and can help you reveal just what you're looking for — if you know a few tricks. Here are six of these hidden search tips. We will use an example ancestor — James Wilcox, married to Mahala and born in 1837 — to illustrate each trick.

### 1. Apply Quotation Marks

Also known as a string search, this is one of the best, and most obvious ways, to limit search results in Google will search the entire title and text of pages for those terms. They do not need to be related to each other — so you may turn up a page with James and Wilcox, but not necessarily a page where these terms appear together.

Use "James Wilcox" or Wilcox, James" to limit results (remember that many genealogy related sites place the last name first). Also apply quotations around terms like "obituary" to make them exact — otherwise Google will substitute other words like 'death' or 'died'.

Example: "wilcox, james" 1837 mahala

### 2. Use the Minus Sign

Oftentimes when we are searching for ancestors, especially those with common names, we may find that a certain person or location we're NOT looking for turns up again and again. For instance, a James Wilcox who lived in Somerset keeps coming up. He's definitely not our guy, so we'll exclude the term Somerset. Place a minus sign before a term to exclude these unwanted results.

Example: "wilcox, james" 1837 mahala -somerset

The minus sign can be placed in front of many terms to further refine results.

Example: "wilcon, james" mahala -dunbar -somerset -rootsweb

Just make sure the minus sign is placed directly before the term **with no space in between.**




### 3. Get Site Specific Results

Would you like to get search only for a specific website, such as FamilySearch? Use `site:familysearch.org` to do this. Note: we didn't place a space between `site:` and the url, and we didn't include the `'http://www'` part either.

Example: `site:familysearch.org "wilcox, james"`

**Here is a great way to search the Sacramento Valley (SVCGR) website.** For example: `site:svcgr.org "volhynia"`. Here are the actual Google results — first some Maps followed by an Event, and a Member Story that all contain Volhynia. This is only a partial results list, there are actually many more. **NOTE 1:** if you do `site:svcgr.org` WITHOUT a search parameter, then Google will display EVERY image on the website. **NOTE 2:** you CANNOT search a specific page. For example, `site:svcgr.org/web-gr-resources "prussia"` will return no results.

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site:svcgr.org "volhynia"

✕ 🔊 🔍

🔍 All

📍 Maps

📰 News

🖼️ Images

📺 Videos


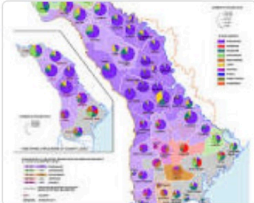


⋮ More

Settings

Tools

About 3 results (0.31 seconds)

#### Images for site:svcgr.org "volhynia"



[➔ More images for site:svcgr.org "volhynia"](#)[Report images](#)

www.svcgr.org › german-russian-maps ▼

**German/Russian Maps | SVCGR - Sacramento Valley Chapter**

Germans who immigrated to Russia mainly settled in the following areas: Bessarabia, Black Sea, Volga River, **Volhynia** and Siberia. Here are some maps of ...

www.svcgr.org › events › lee-macklins-german-from-r... ▼

**Lee Macklin's German from Russia Ancestors | SVCGR**

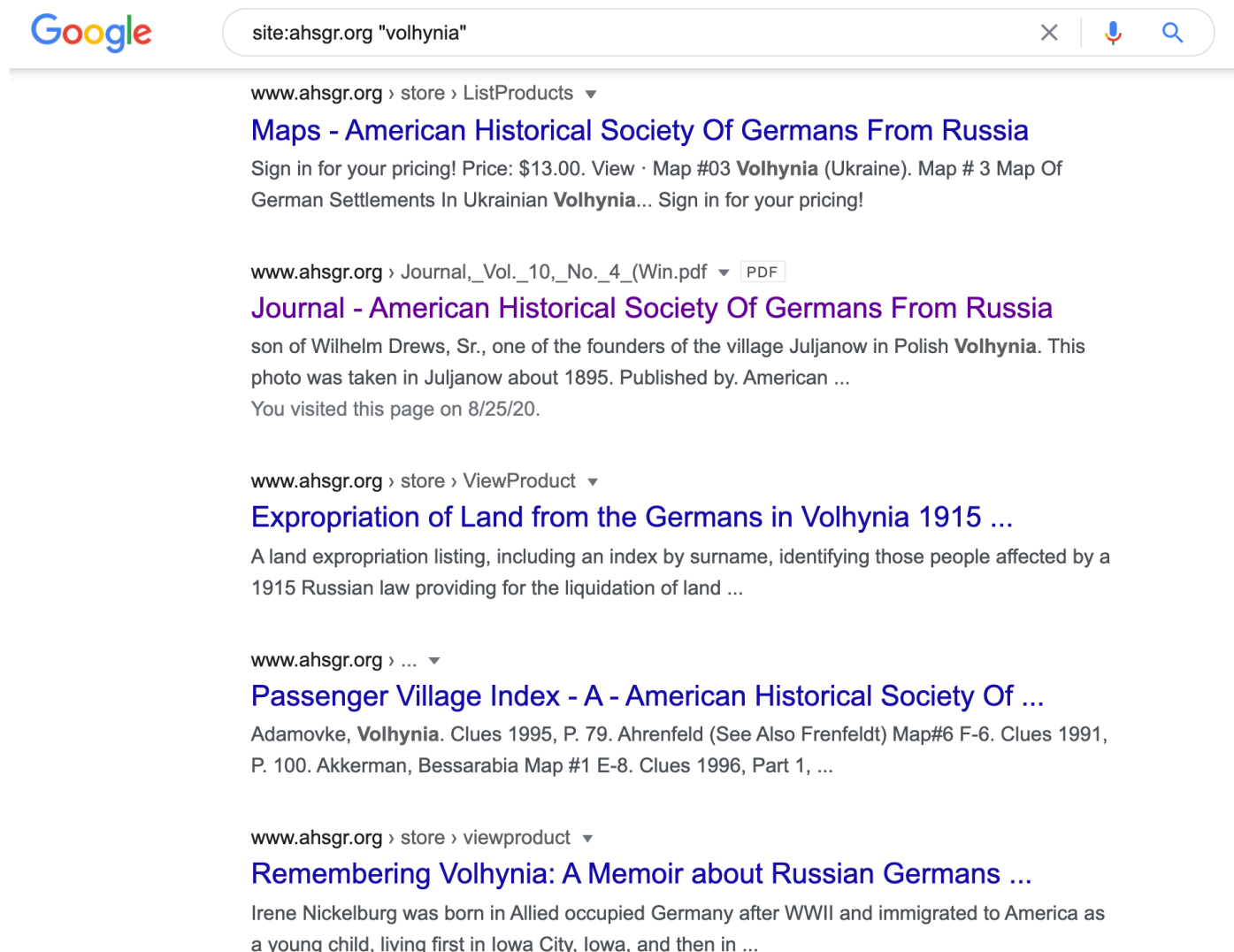
Mr. Macklin's maternal ancestors began in West Prussia, migrated to Bialystok, Poland, then to **Volhynia**, Russia where his grandmother was born, married, and ...

www.svcgr.org › lee-macklin-stories

**Lee Macklin Stories | SVCGR - Sacramento Valley Chapter**

These are my fond memories of growing up in a small town in Kansas and celebrating Christmas traditions with my **Volhynia**, Russian grandparents.

Here is the same search on the AHSGR website. Example: **site:ahsgr.org "volhynia"**. Here are the actual Google results — first some maps followed by a Journal, a Store item, and a Village Index that all contain Volhynia. This is only a partial results list, there are actually many more.



The screenshot shows a Google search interface with the query "site:ahsgr.org volhynia". The results are filtered to the website www.ahsgr.org. The first result is "Maps - American Historical Society Of Germans From Russia", which includes a link to a map of Volhynia (Ukraine) and a price of \$13.00. The second result is "Journal - American Historical Society Of Germans From Russia", which is a PDF of a journal entry about a photo taken in Juljanow in 1895. The third result is "Expropriation of Land from the Germans in Volhynia 1915 ...", which is a land expropriation listing. The fourth result is "Passenger Village Index - A - American Historical Society Of ...", which is a village index. The fifth result is "Remembering Volhynia: A Memoir about Russian Germans ...", which is a memoir about a young child who immigrated to America.

Google

site:ahsgr.org "volhynia"

www.ahsgr.org › store › ListProducts ▼

**Maps - American Historical Society Of Germans From Russia**

Sign in for your pricing! Price: \$13.00. View · Map #03 **Volhynia** (Ukraine). Map # 3 Map Of German Settlements In Ukrainian **Volhynia**... Sign in for your pricing!

www.ahsgr.org › Journal,\_Vol.\_10,\_No.\_4\_(Win.pdf ▼ PDF

**Journal - American Historical Society Of Germans From Russia**

son of Wilhelm Drews, Sr., one of the founders of the village Juljanow in Polish **Volhynia**. This photo was taken in Juljanow about 1895. Published by. American ...

You visited this page on 8/25/20.

www.ahsgr.org › store › ViewProduct ▼

**Expropriation of Land from the Germans in Volhynia 1915 ...**

A land expropriation listing, including an index by surname, identifying those people affected by a 1915 Russian law providing for the liquidation of land ...

www.ahsgr.org › ... ▼

**Passenger Village Index - A - American Historical Society Of ...**

Adamovke, **Volhynia**. Clues 1995, P. 79. Ahrenfeldt (See Also Frenfeldt) Map#6 F-6. Clues 1991, P. 100. Akkerman, Bessarabia Map #1 E-8. Clues 1996, Part 1, ...

www.ahsgr.org › store › viewproduct ▼

**Remembering Volhynia: A Memoir about Russian Germans ...**

Irene Nickenburg was born in Allied occupied Germany after WWII and immigrated to America as a young child, living first in Iowa City, Iowa, and then in ...

Here is the same search on the GRHS website. Example: **site:grhs.org "volhynia"**. Here are the actual Google results — first some Chapter information followed by Johannestal village details, a Store item, and Page details that all contain Volhynia. This is only a partial results list, there are actually many more.





site:grhs.org "volhynia"



All



Maps



News



Images



Videos



More

Settings

Tools

About 29 results (0.37 seconds)

www.grhs.org › chapters › krim › Edlund ▾ PDF

### Preface to the Lutherans of Russia Vol. 1 - Germans from ...

Petersburg, Tarida, **Volhynia** and Vologda. Detailed entries provide access to both original manuscripts and later preservation microfilming. Appendices provide.

www.grhs.org › villages › beresan › johannestal ▾

### Johannestal, Odessa - Germans from Russia Heritage Society

St. Petersburg Archives from **Volhynia** Births & Deaths (188x). The Church in Johannestal Johannestal Church 2013. The Johannestal Lutheran church with the ...

www.grhs.org › store › misc-d › item120 ▾

### Miscellaneous Items

Miscellaneous Items. MAPS - Please specify which map - Baden-Elsass, Germany - Bessarabia - Crimea - Neu South Russia - Odessa - **Volhynia** (Ukraine).

www.grhs.org › pages › areas\_leader\_prelate\_blumenfeld ▾

### Leader Prelate Blumenfeld - Germans from Russia

As early as 1889 a large Russian-German settlement of migrants from **Volhynia** and Galicia began to develop just across the border in Alberta; eventually a very ...

## 4. Search Only Page Titles (or Only Page Text)

When looking for a specific ancestor it can be very helpful to have only pages you turn up **only** be ones that focus on that individual alone. Or, when searching for a surname, to find articles centered around that specific last name. Making sure a search term appears in the title of the page is a good way to do this. This isn't always true of course, and you'll miss a lot of results this way, but when looking for discussions about a person, biographies or in-depth data it can be very helpful.

To search **only** web page **titles** use 'allintitle'.

Example: allintitle: "wilcox, james".

You can also search **only** the **text**, and exclude any titles, by using 'allintext'.

Example: allintext: "wilcox, james"

### 5. Search a Date Range

This is one of the best and most underused Google Search tips for genealogists. This super cool trick lets you search multiple dates at one time without having to enter them individually. This is hugely helpful if you are looking for birth, marriage, or death records (or any date based source) but don't know the exact date of the event.

Just add DATE..DATE to your search box to accomplish this (two periods in between the dates like 1900..1910).

Example: "wilcox, james" 1835..1839. This will bring up pages that include one or all of the dates. It will not **exclude** pages that include other dates (which you normally would not want to do). But if you did you could exclude any date by placing a minus sign in front of it.

Example "wilcox, james" 1835..1839 -1837

### 6. Search for Terms Near Each Other

One of the most frustrating things about searching for ancestors in Google, is that while the engine will search an entire page for your terms, your terms may not have any association to each other. For instance, a search for James Wilcox and 1837 turned up pages that include James Wilcox and the date 1837, but that date often applied to other people on the page.

However, there is a way to ask Google to find terms near to each other.

Example: "James Wilcox" AROUND(10) 1837. This means we want Google to look for pages where the exact name James Wilcox appears within 10 words of the date 1837.

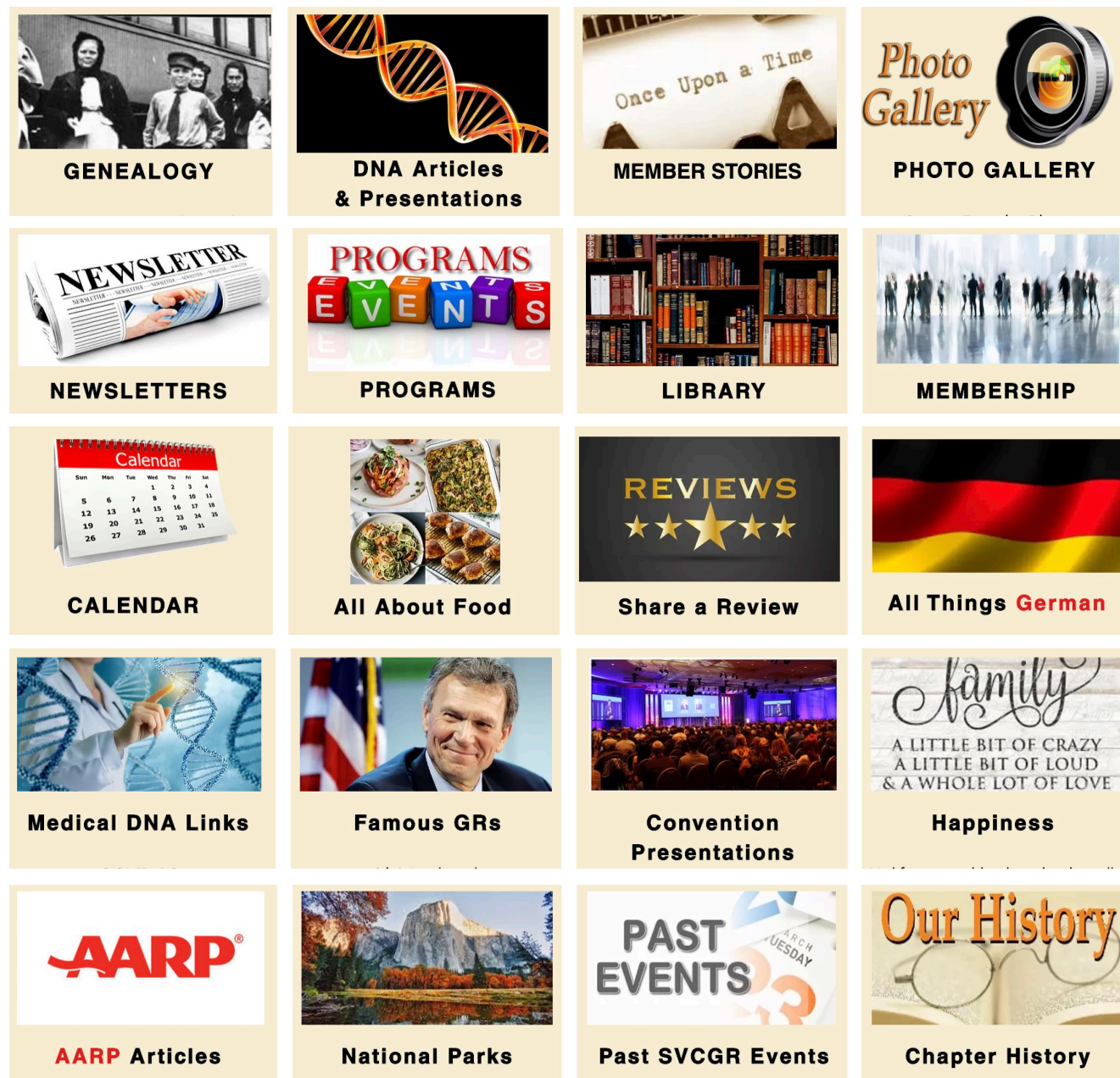
You can change the modifier to anything you want ("James Wilcox" AROUND(3) 1837, or "James Wilcox" AROUND(1) Mahala). A lower number means a closer association and thus, usually fewer results. You can combine these modifiers.

Example: "Wilcox, James" AROUND(10) Mahala AROUND(5) 1837

## SVCGR Website - Many Home Page Updates

— Lee Macklin —

In late August, the Home Page was rearranged so the most used sections are at the top working down to the lesser used sections. There are 20 sections total.





The 'Genealogy' and 'DNA Articles & Presentations' sections have been completely redesigned plus more content added. These changes are described in detail in the next section of this newsletter.

The 'All Things German' section is divided into 6 sub-sections with more content added. This will be described in detail in our next newsletter. Please check this out on our website:

Additionally, a new section 'Medical DNA Links' has been added. Here you will find links to the latest advancements in the medical side of DNA including several regarding COVID-19.

## SVCGR Website - Genealogy Section Completely Redesigned

— Lee Macklin —



Genealogy is one of the key reasons our chapter exists. So, the Genealogy section of our website has now been sub-divided into 6 major sections.

**1. SVCGR Genealogy Tools** - this new section describes the genealogy-related tools, articles, presentations, reviews, projects, maps plus other useful information.

This includes “how-to” articles, personal stories, charts and diagrams, and detailed explanations of both genealogy and DNA challenges.

A few of the key tools are briefly described here. The SVCGR Library Search engine can be a very valuable tool saving you an enormous amount of time when looking for specific information in Germans from Russia related books, AHSGR Journals, GRHS Heritage Reviews, AHSGR CLUEs, AHSGR Jugend Zeitungs, AHSGR Workpapers, and GRHS Der Stammbaums. You can enter your search criteria and search the indexes across all books, or all journals including all articles within every type of journal mentioned above. Each of the above items are being indexed 8 different ways: by Description, Photos, Maps, Documents, Surnames, Culture, Food, and Religion.

You can limit your book searches to a region, like Black Sea, Volga, Bessarabia, etc. You can also view a list of all books indexed, list of all journals indexed by journal type and journal edition, or a list of all articles indexed — across all the types of journals listed above.

Note you can use Google to search the AHSGR and GRHS websites — however, it only searches web pages and indexes. It does not look inside documents, for example Journals that were PDF'd and placed on the website nor does it look inside books. So, our SVCGR Library Search functionality doesn't compete with Google, rather it complements it and in many cases will return more precise results. Our search engine works a little different than Google, so there are some rules on how to structure your search criteria to get the desired results. These are explained on the Library Search web page as well as many search help files are provided.

Here are some direct links:

Genealogy Home page <https://www.svcgr.org/genealogy-research>

SVCGR Research Tools page <https://www.svcgr.org/svcgr-genealogy-resources>

SVCGR Library Search page <https://www.svcgr.org/library-search-inventory>

SVCGR Search Help page <https://www.svcgr.org/library-search-help>

**2. AHSGR and GRHS Resources** - all of the key features on AHSGR and GRHS websites are listed here with direct links to their pages. This makes it very easy to quickly find and access a particular area on their respective websites - right from our SVCGR website. Here is the direct link: <https://www.svcgr.org/ahsgr-grhs-resources>

**3. Web GR Resources** - there are many great Germans from Russia websites. Two of the big ones are GRHC (North Dakota State University) and Family Search. I have indexed most of the key areas of both GRHC and Family Search so you can quickly access the exact area you want right from this section on our SVCGR website. Here is the direct link: <https://www.svcgr.org/web-gr-resources>

**4. Genealogy Education, Tips & Tricks** - you can access the "Ultimate Beginner's Guide to Genealogy" which discusses a variety of public record types and how to do genealogy research for free. Here is the direct link: <https://www.svcgr.org/genealogy-education>

There are also some really good links to genealogy educational sites such as Family Search's "New to Genealogy", Genealogy.com's "Developing Your Research Skills", and New York Public Library's "Genealogy Breakthrough Tips".

**5. Web Genealogy Resources** - there are many genealogy-based websites. From this section on our website, you can access the US National Archives which is the original source for many, many types of records. You can also access 50 genealogy sites for every US State as well as county sites. Here is the direct link: <https://www.svcgr.org/web-genealogy-resources>

**6. Historic Videos** - Germans from Russia videos are briefly described in this section with direct links to the videos. Most of them were created and published by Prairie Public in North Dakota. One is from a media outlet in Germany. Here is the direct link: <https://www.svcgr.org/historic-videos>

**NOTE: Most of our website no longer requires you to log in.** Basically, only the Photo Galleries, Library Indexing, Library Checkout/Return and Members Only areas still require a login. This should make it easier for both regular and affiliate members as well as the public to take advantage of the variety of content provided on our website.

## SVCGR Library Indexing & Search Project Status

— Linda Anderson and Lee Macklin —

Since all 134 books in our library (plus 1 book in the Southern California library) have been indexed as well as all the AHSGR and GRHS journals, we continue to work on indexing the articles in all AHSGR and GRHS types of journals. To date 46 AHSGR Journals, 1 GRHS Heritage Review, and 1 AHSGR CLUE have been fully indexed including all articles within these journals. Additional AHSGR Journals and GRHS Heritage Reviews have been partially indexed. In total, about 334 Articles have currently been completed. There are about 2,500 articles total, so we have a long way to go — but we continue to make progress.

Keep in mind we are indexing all books and articles by 8 different categories: Description, Photos, Maps, Documents, Surnames, Culture, Food, and Religion. Members can type in their search criteria and our search engine will look for matching information across all books, journals, and articles and return a list of exactly where their information can be found. You can't get this by Googling, nor does any other website provide this service!!!

Many thanks to those helping with the article indexing; Bruce Schweigerdt (Lodi), Kerry Meech and Virginia Martin (Golden Gate), Linda Anderson, Freddie Nezbeth, Cindi Jones, and Mike Fritz. Recently, Kathryn John was trained. Two additional members have signed up but not committed to a training date.

Currently, 8 people have completed index training with Lee Macklin (via a one hour Zoom session). If anyone else would like to help index, please contact Lee Macklin [lmacklin@comcast.net](mailto:lmacklin@comcast.net).

If you have specific questions regarding the indexed items in our library, please contact Linda Anderson at [handerson28@comcast.net](mailto:handerson28@comcast.net) 916-993-9666 or Lee Macklin if you have questions on exactly how to use the Search Inventory functionality.



## SVCGR Membership Renewals period: Oct 1 - Dec 31

2020 has certainly been a challenging year in so many ways. For our Sacramento chapter not being able to meet in person has caused us to rethink how we stay in touch and keep our chapter alive. After all, socializing has always been something most of us looked forward to — and some food, laughter, and good programs! So, in the Spring it became obvious that probably the best two ways to keep members interested was to step up the articles in our Newsletters and dramatically expand the content on our website since neither require in-person contact. Hopefully, you have enjoyed our past several newsletter issues and the greatly expanded areas of our website. We continue to provide more things to peak your interest in our chapter, but, among other things, these things do take time and money.

Normally, we have an October meeting (Oktoberfest social) and a December meeting (Christmas Social and Annual Meeting). But these will both most likely be held via Zoom video conference this year. Since many of you pay your annual dues for the following year at one of these two meetings, this presents a significant challenge because that is just not possible via Zoom!!

So, this leaves two choices: you can pay your \$20 dues for 2021 online via our website, or you can simply drop your check in the mail.

**by Website:** Go to <https://svcgr.org> scroll down to the Membership section and **click the Renew Membership link**. This will take you to the Membership page where you can **click the Renew Membership Online button** near the top of the page. This will take you to the Update SVCGR Member Profile page where you can check your information and update it if necessary. Then, **click the Buy Now button to pay your \$20 dues for 2021 using a credit or debit card**.

**by Mail:** Fill out your membership profile form, drop it along with a check for \$20 in an envelop and mail it to our SVCGR Treasurer: Deanne Ellsworth, 4925 Arboleda Drive, Fair Oaks, CA 95628. Note: given the recent issues with the U.S. Postal system, the preferred method of dues payment is via our website.

So, beginning October 1st, we are counting on you paying your 2021 dues by one of the above methods. Your prompt dues payments will be most appreciated!!!

Don't forget to also pay your AHSGR and/or GRHS dues:

AHSGR: <https://www.ahsgr.org/page/Join>

GRHS: <https://www.grhs.org/pages/membership>

## Serve as a 2021 SVCGR Board Member

On a related note, each year at our December chapter meeting, which also serves as our Annual Meeting, we elect and install Board members for the following year. Of course in the past, this has always been done in person. However, since we will probably be holding the Decembers meeting this year via Zoom, this will be a challenge.

So, please start thinking about serving as a 2021 SVCGR Board Member. Our chapter is dependent on members stepping up and volunteering to serve — otherwise, our chapter can't exist. Here is a list of our 2020 board members:

**President:** Lee Macklin

**Vice President - Membership:** John Kreutzer

**Vice President - Programs:** Cindi Jones

**Secretary:** Freddie Nezbeth

**Treasurer:** Deanne Ellsworth

**GRHS Chapter Director:** Linda Boehm

**Librarian:** Linda Anderson (filled position temporarily as of February this year)

**Newsletter Editor:** OPEN (temporarily filled by Lee Macklin)

**Hospitality** (food & events catering): Lillie Coad

**Genealogy:** OPEN (temporarily filled by Lee Macklin)

**Sunshine** (sending cards & notes to members): Roxanne Spizzirri

**Chapter Historian:** John Kreutzer

**NOTE: ANY member (in good standing) can serve in ANY of the above positions.** So, please consider being a candidate. Just email me which position you are interested in filling — it doesn't matter if someone is currently filling the position since several of the above people would welcome a break.

In particular, I would sure like to see someone step up and handle our Newsletter as well as lead our Genealogy effort.

Based on your responses, sometime after the middle of November, I will send out a list of candidates for you to consider. Then, once we have figured out the process, you will vote for your choices

So, please let me know if you are willing to serve in any of our board positions!!! [lmacklin@comcast.net](mailto:lmacklin@comcast.net)

## GRHS Update

The [GRHS Letters Archive/Newspaper Indexes](#) has been uploaded and linked. 379 Letter files and 6 Newspaper Indexes.

The [GRHS Obits](#) have been updated.

## New publications ready for sale:

Rastadt Roman Catholic Parish Church Baptisms **1891**: Includes München and Some Chutors \$8

Rastadt Roman Catholic Parish Death Register **December 1814 - December 1850** \$20

RASTADT ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH CHURCH BAPTISMS **1815 - 1830** \$25

## AHSGR Update

### New AHSGR Publications:

1905-1913 Huck Engagement Book and Marriage Announces

1834-1842 Reinwald Russia Personal Book of the Evangelical Lutheran Church  
(Birth, Marriage, Confirmation, and Death records).

1874-1899 Rosenfeld am Nachoi Family List

1835-1858 Stahl Am Tarylk Marriage records

1795-1873 Straub Russian Birth records (Volumes 1 & 2)

### **AHSGR Periodicals:**

Fall Newsletter and Journal go to print this month.

Jugend Zeitung is in production again.

### **New Village Coordinators**

Dee Hert - Gnadau & Pilenkofeld

Jeremy Langt - Weizenfeld & Gnadendorf



## **A Lad Begins to Appreciate His History Through the Land He Inherited: The Effect of the Homestead Act of 1862 on the Fourth Generation**

— Bruce Schweigerdt —

Why did our German-Russian ancestors come to America during the later decades of the 19th through the mid-20th centuries, most arriving between the years 1885-1910? Freedom, certainly: freedom from ever increasing persecutions and to maintain their ethnic heritage, language and culture; freedom to worship as they pleased; freedom from military conscription; and freedom to prosper and thrive through unknown opportunities afforded by a nation that was rapidly expanding and sought for settlers to tame its vast frontier. A nation that offered free land to immigrants and settlers so that they could build and develop farms and a means to provide for their families turned out to be a major draw to our people as they sensed and felt the coming oppression that was rapidly becoming a repressive autocratic Russian government and a future Soviet Communist state.

The Homestead Act of 1862 was the vehicle that proved an enticing prospect and surely an answer to much prayer for most of the ethnically German folk then living in Russia who were seeking a new homeland where they could raise their families in freedom, and prosper through hard work and strong-willed persistence. Here was not only an opportunity, but also a beginning stake that the new country was offering in its invitation for immigrants to settle the land.

Most of these ancestors who came to the United States settled in the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas; and as families grew and farming and economic conditions changed through time, younger generations moved elsewhere in this immense country, with a noteworthy number coming to California. It is fair to say that sociologically, most of our people three and four generations past, arrived in their new home on the prairie dirt poor, but with a healthy determination to succeed, in the middle of nowhere.<sup>1</sup> To a land where crippling heat in the summer simmered across the loneliness of the prairie, and where during the winter, snow and ice



paralyzed life, to eventually be part of a thriving middle class within a country that would, in a few short years, become the most powerful and well-developed in the world.<sup>2</sup>

When I was a lad growing up in north-central South Dakota (Artas, Eureka, Aberdeen areas) in the 1950's, my father would often take me out to the portion of farmland that he retained from the out-growth of the original homestead when his grandfather brought the family to America from Russia in 1901.<sup>3 4</sup> At the time that land meant nothing to me; but my father – even though he no longer farmed - cherished that property and the crops it grew, and delighted in sifting a head of wheat in his hand to determine the potential yield in the upcoming harvest. A half-century later, I would begin to appreciate that land and the stories it held, as the property eventually came into my possession upon my father's passing in 2008. One could say that my father (born in South Dakota in 1916) had the land in his blood.



The author Bruce Schweigerdt, a city lad, on his father's tractor, c.1950

In total, my father had inherited two quarters (a half-section, 320 acres) of the 720-acre farmstead the family had developed upon the original homestead<sup>5</sup>. Neither the farm house nor the outbuildings were located on these quarters, as dad's older brother received that settled land so that he could continue to farm the property after the parents retired from farming and moved into town. Dad wasn't really interested in farming anyway, preferring to live a more urbane lifestyle; and work after living in Niagara Falls, New York (Bell Aircraft) during the War had spoiled the 'farmer' in him.<sup>6</sup> And even though we moved to Aberdeen, later to Ellendale, and finally Eureka, he wanted to keep the land as it seems that farming – tending the land to produce food – at some level, had a hold on him.

After the War, dad and mom did farm for a few years, and it was during that time that I was born (1945). But we moved to the city of Aberdeen when I was three years old, so the only real exposure I had to farm life was when visiting relatives who continued to farm in the area. However, as often as he could, we'd drive the hundred miles from Aberdeen back to Artas to visit relatives, and so dad could check on his land in the country as we drove by.

When we moved to California in 1959, my mother was finished with South Dakota; or she thought she was done with those foreboding prairies. She had no desire to see that forsaken country again; however, my father had that ever-present longing to go back and see his land. As a result, for most of the years following the move, dad would drive mom the eighteen hundred miles back to South Dakota to visit, and while there, he would walk through his fields of golden grains.

At first my mother's father farmed the land (dad owned the tractor and implements) until he was no longer able to do so. One of my cousins, who was the last person left to farm his family's acreage, share-cropped with my father, so the land continued to produce wheat, barley, flax, and occasionally corn. When this cousin retired there were no more kin to farm the Schweigerdt land, so my father chose to lease the land to the government as a part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

I have tried to pass along the family's land tradition to my four children, but it doesn't register with them as it does with me, and even more so as it did with my father. I did make it a point to take the kids back to South Dakota when they were youngsters, and they were able to experience something of farm life when we stayed on the cousin's farm for a few days as we traveled through and visited the area.

City dwellers (including my children) have no idea the dimensions of a quarter (or acre, or section) of land. The location of our house in Lodi, CA is ideally suited to sharing comparative sizes, since the community is laid out (as are many zoned communities) in a grid fashion, in section (square mile) proportions. In Lodi, most family dwellings sit on a lot that is about a fifth of an acre in size. But if you go to a corner of one of the main streets that run through the community you can mentally lay out a grid that will scale a quarter, a half-section (two quarters), and a full section of land. (And if you are up for some exercise, you can actually walk the 2-4 mile perimeter.) Since my house is close to the middle of an area of a section in size, it is fairly easy to consider and visualize these dimensions. As an example, the area encompassing Lodi Avenue to

Kettleman Lane down Ham Lane (south one mile), then west to Lower Sacramento Road (one mile), north to Lodi Avenue (1 mile), and east back to Ham Lane (1 mile), is one section of land, or one square mile (four miles square). And while standing in one of these urbanized and developed sections and sensing the squared pattern, one can begin to see the vast amount of land that a section, or half-section, or even a quarter of a section represents. Recall that the Homestead Act granted 160 acres (one quarter of a section) of unappropriated public lands to anyone who paid a small filing fee (\$10-\$18 plus \$2 commission and \$6 final payment) and agreed to work on the land and improve it, including building a residence, over a five-year period. We can be sure that our settler grandparents knew exactly what an acre, a quarter, and a section of land represented.

It is even easier to demonstrate a half-section (two quarters, which I now own in South Dakota), and easier to lay out a half-section from where my house sits on Mills avenue. When city-dwellers view the dimensions in this fashion, they are usually impressed by the vast size that a quarter of land represents. And when one considers that in a community like Lodi most housing units occupy a fifth of an acre, and that a quarter (160 acres) will hold 750 dwellings, and a half-section 1,500, the full perspective becomes even more impressive.

Were you to board a helicopter on our family's north quarter near Artas; and ascend a thousand feet, while hovering and circling in the same spot, you could see the four family immigrant homestead plots of all of my immigrant ancestors within a ten mile radius (The Schweigerdt,<sup>7</sup> Knoepfle, Fischer, and Schmidt families). These were the original plots of land settled between 1884 (Schmidt) to 1901 (Schweigerdt),<sup>8</sup> as these families emigrated from south Russia (Odessa area – now in Ukraine) to the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Of note: As we hover over the area, the Artas cemetery, located just below us and within the ten-mile radius, holds the remains of twelve of my immigrant ancestors, each born in Russia (Odessa area): [SCHWEIGERDT] Christian Jr. and Regina (nee Fischer) Schweigerdt; [KNOEPFLE] Jacob and Magdelina (nee Ammon) Knoepfle; Johnnes and Kathrina (nee Ehret) Knoepfle; Henry and Kathrine (Schmidt) Knoepfle; [SCHMIDT] Peter and Magdalena (nee Bossert) Schmidt; and [FISHER] George Jr. and Rosina (nee Fischer [3rd cousins]) Fischer. However, my great grandfather and great grandmother, Christian (Sr) and Elizabeth Schweigerdt are buried in the city cemetery in Plevna, Montana, since they were living there with one of their daughters and her family at the time of their passing in 1934-35 (In the 1930's there were no senior living facilities as we have today). These were the great-grandparents who originally homesteaded the land, and built the farmstead, a portion of which I own today.<sup>10</sup>

In my quest to learn more about my heritage, I focused first on the Schweigerdts, my paternal namesake family. I never met either Christian (Sr.) or Elizabeth, nor their third child (of five), Christian (Jr), my grandfather, as they died prior to my birth. I did grow to love my grandmother Schweigerdt (Regina Fischer), though she spoke only German, and I spoke only English. We communicated primarily through hand gestures, as well as that unique heart communication so much to be cherished.<sup>11</sup>

I was closer to my grandfather and grandmother Henry and Katie Knoeple, and visited with them in town on frequent occasions. My grandfather was Artas town marshal, and on occasions when I

would visit them in the summer months, he would take me with him on Saturday nights so I could see him 'enforce the law' as all the farm families in the area came to town for groceries and supplies, and most of the men would frequent the bars while the women and children shopped and socialized in a more civilized fashion. In essence, his role in this small farming village was that of roving bouncer between the two liquor establishments in town, at times needing to use his billy-club in order to maintain order for the night (there was never a town jail in Artas with a population of 300).

If you visit north-central South Dakota today, in the area around Eureka (the village of Artas has all but vanished), you will find but a handful of the original farm families that continue to tend the land that their families homesteaded. Those farms that remain are generally large, exceeding 2,000 acres – roughly three sections of land. These operating farms struggle to maintain a foreseeable future where their offspring will continue to farm the land. Most young people, as they grow and leave the home for schooling, or to work in more urban areas, don't have the desire to return to the isolated lifestyle of farming out on the prairies. Once the parents retire or are no longer able to farm the land, if the children don't carry on the tradition, then the farmstead (the house and out-buildings) is eventually abandoned, while the farm acreage is sold or leased to either remaining farmers in the area, or large farming corporations.

There is one interesting matter relating to corporations, however, that pertains to the future of farming in the Dakotas, and that relates to the Hutterite farm colonies. These folks are of the religious Anabaptist tradition of German descent, and are dedicated to farming; and they have large enough families with youth, many of whom will stay on the land when adults. The Hutterites are colonies of communal family farmers, so they prefer to acquire large plots of acreage, generally 10,000 acres or more. They live together in an area in individual houses, with a common kitchen and out-buildings, and share most possessions in a joint arrangement. Because of their large families they continually need to expand and acquire land to accommodate their growing populations.

There are also Amish and Amish-Mennonite farmers of German descent moving largely from Ohio and Indiana into the Dakotas, and although the land is of a poorer quality than they find east of the prairies, with their conservative lifestyle and innovative methods of farming they just might be able to make a go of farming in the area. And since they tend to have large families also, they are always looking for farm land to acquire. These are some developments which will be interesting to observe for the future.

So, I was not raised as a farm boy. I was fully urbanized from my early youth and never considered farming as a living. After high school in California, it was off to college, then into the professions of social work, and later teaching.

As I look back (at age 75) at my professional life I can say that it worked well for me and my family. When my father moved us to California in 1959, he went to work for the United States Air Force at McClelland AFB as a civilian aircraft mechanic, and eventually retired from that profession. He would surely say that was a good move for him, even though he still had farming in his blood – and he kept his land.



When I graduated with a major in Sociology from California State University, Sacramento, in 1968, I not only had that earned degree in my hand, but I also now had a wife, having married my high school sweetheart during our senior year at university.<sup>12</sup> We both earned Sociology degrees and were equipped to go to work as social workers for the local county government.

My wife left work four years later to stay home with a growing family of four children when our first son was born, and remained a homemaker and stay-at-home mom through their growing years. I continued working for San Joaquin County Children's Services until 1977, when I left county service to begin a counseling ministry for a group of local churches (The Lodi Family Guidance Center). After five years and further education (MPA - administration, and MA – Psychology) I turned the Center over to my colleagues, and took the family on a year-long RV adventure touring the lower 48 states, including the family farm land in South Dakota. Upon our return, I earned a teaching credential and entered the field of public education from which I eventually retired.

I retired from teaching in Lodi Unified School District at the end of 2006, and have enjoyed the 'care-free' life style over the past several years. For the first nine years following retirement my wife and I enjoyed RV traveling as often as possible. My father passed away in 2008 at age 92, and as I write this in 2020, mother is 98 years old. In April of 2016 my wife was involved in a fatal bicycle accident and I have remained alone since that time, traveling and keeping active in other ways.

I can't conclude this overview of my life without sharing how good God has been to me and my loved ones over the years. There have been trials and sufferings to be sure, but looking back from today's perspective, we are blessed in so many ways. First and foremost is the knowledge that my life is secured eternally and that I will again be with those I love at some future time. Then I think of my four children, their spouses, and my two beautiful granddaughters.

I will always cherish having been married to my beloved wife for 49 years. We had many wonderful years together and were able to live the dreams that most folks hope to have. Of course, I grieve the loss of my wife (and the children their mother) but from her testimony we are assured that she is now with our Savior where we will join her one day.

I continue to live in the house on Mills Avenue that we had built shortly after our marriage for a life-time together, and although it is not the same without her here with me, I have grown to appreciate the pleasant memories of this place. I'm not sure what the future holds (I do know Who holds my future!), but I am so blessed to have this comfortable place in which to reside.

Finally, I am blessed by those who came before me, and who had the foresight to pick up and leave their homes in that far-off land (Russia/Ukraine) and follow the opportunities and freedoms provided by the United States of America. Not only did they find an earthly paradise (eventually), but they were given land on which to build farms and raise their families in a country that afforded them all the freedoms that anyone could hope to receive. And today, I am able to retain a small portion of the farm they built as a legacy passed down to me, and hopefully, to pass on to my posterity.

I am interested to learn of other German-Russian immigrant descendants who have had passed to them land (even farmsteads) from the original homesteads of their ancestors. I suspect that this might be a relatively scant number. Currently my Campbell County, 13 South Dakota property is leased to a family who farm in the area, and are themselves direct descendants of German-Russian heritage. This family has two young sons in their thirties who are continuing the farming lifestyle for their generation and that of their posterity.<sup>14</sup>

It should also be noted that farmland has become a valuable asset in recent years. I'm sure that our forefathers would be shocked to realize that even the land of the open prairies that was either free or that cost but a few dollars for a quarter of land at the turn of the 19th century today sells for between two to three thousand dollars and more per acre. Where originally the land was a blessing so that a farmer could provide for his family, today that same land feeds the country and the world as well, and has done so for more than a century. And for descendants who are blessed to hold such land but have never been farmers, such a valuable (and profitable) asset provides a supplemental income stream to the family budget that has been passed down from generations past. It even can give reason for such a person to maintain a healthy interest in the innovative farming methods employed today that continue to make the Dakotas the Bread Basket of the World! And that just sort-of ties the whole story together for me and my extended families, before and after.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Father once told me that when his father (my grandfather Schweigerdt) died in 1937, that the only assets he had were the farmstead and \$700 which was used for his burial in the Artas Cemetery. Even this was no small feat, as this was during the height of the Great Depression, and a significant number of farm families lost their farms to foreclosure (including my maternal grandparents, the Henry Knoepfles).

<sup>2</sup> Was this a land forgotten by God and the world at the edge of civilization? In the 1980s I interviewed a distant relative by the name of Jacob Schweigert who told me that upon their arrival on the prairies in 1907 they would sit on a rock pile and cry for the rich farmland they had left behind in Russia. Because they had come to America relatively late, they had to settle (purchase) land on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation west of Campbell County and the Missouri River, near the town of McIntosh.

<sup>3</sup> My father told me that his grandfather actually purchased his 'homestead' quarter since all land in the Artas/Eureka area had already been acquired (but apparently not 'settled') by the time they arrived in 1901. County records, however, show 'Christian Schweigerdt' as the person who homesteaded ('pattened') the original quarter. In correspondence with the county registrar, it appears that the original 'squatter' on the land never actually met homesteading requirements nor legally acquired the 160 acres, but was able to sell rights to the land to someone else, and thus my great-grandfather was able to purchase it

<sup>4</sup> As one immigrant recalled in his latter years, 'All of them Russian German people were land people. They wanted land, land, and they had a chance to get a homestead.'

<sup>5</sup> The original inheritance was 320 acres, however father sold one quarter to his brother so the later could continue to work the farm with sufficient land resources. Later, during the war, in 1943, when he and mother returned to the area, he purchased another quarter from money saved while working at Bell Aircraft In New York. This quarter is actually two miles north of the original farmstead quarter.

<sup>6</sup> Father inherited his acreage in 1937 when his father died. At the time he was 21 years old and single. He and his brother (who was married) farmed together, and in April 1941 he married my mother, Lena (nee, Knoepfle). By this time World War II had started in Europe (in September 1939) and father had attended aircraft construction school in Omaha, Nebraska as the US was preparing to enter the War. Shortly after they were married, he was called as a civilian to report to Bell Aircraft in Niagara Falls, NY, and the US entered the war on December 7, 1941 (Pearl Harbor).

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the 'd' in the Schweigerdt name. It appears as if this letter 'd' was added to the Schweigert name sometime after the Christian (Sr) family arrived in America (possibly at Ellis Island). All records I have been able to gather indicate that the family name in both Germany and Russia was spelled without the 'd'. I find it interesting that Christian (Sr) Schweigerdt had the 'd' in the name, while of the three sons, only Daniel – the oldest – dropped the letter, while Andreas (Andrew) and Christian (Jr) – my grandfather - chose to retain the 'd'; and one of the daughters, Christina eliminated it, while the other, Margaret, kept the 'd'. Now since Daniel had fourteen children, with all of then spelling the name without the 'd,' and since his two brothers only had three children each (and they kept the 'd'), it would be fair to encourage succeeding generations to drop the letter if they so choose!

<sup>8</sup> My four families immigrated to the United States in this order: Peter Schmidt family (1884), Jacob Knoepfle family (1886), George (Sr.) Fischer family (1889), and Christian (Sr.) Schweigerdt family (1901).

<sup>9</sup> As it relates to the surname, 'Knoepfle,' my grandfather, Henry Knoepfle, once related to me that his grandfather (? - Jacob) was a Mollenkopf (sp?), while his grandmother was a Knoepfle (? – not Magdalena Ammon). He was not sure why the family took on the Knoepfle name rather than remain with the Russian, Malinkopf or Malinkov (sp?), name. On 5/23/1991: Mrs. Christine (Schweigerdt) Kautz – her mother was Johanna (Knoepfle) Schweigerdt (Andreas) (b 10/1887) had called Mrs. Edwin Knoepfle, Henry's sister-in-law. She says that her mother-in-law, Mrs. John (Katheryn) Knoepfle told her that 'grandpa' had been a Molkopf (sp?) but changed his name to that of his wife (Knoepfle) when he came to this country. Was this Jacob's father? Or does this refer to the move from Germany to Russia years before, and the story passed down? Could a German woman (Knoepfle) have married a Russian man (Molotov) (sp?) and they assumed her name? This could be possible, since in Russia the German and Russian communities were distinct and separate, with the Germans much better off, while the Russians were generally quite poor in comparison (consider the play/movie, 'Fiddler on the Roof,' which, by the way 'occurred' in the village of Anatefka (sp?) Russia/Ukraine (c.1905), a Jewish village in a Russian land, not far from our ancestral homeland. Interesting, there is a village by a name similar to that in south Ukraine today, and perhaps Sholem Aleichem had that settlement in mind when he authored Tevya's Daughters.

<sup>10</sup> With help from AHSGR, and in particular, Curt Renz, Harvey and Gladys Schmidt, and Duane Stabler, we are able to locate the towns/villages in Germany from which three of my four immigrant families that migrated to the Black Sea area of Russia (Ukraine) originated in the early 1800's, and then came to America between 1884 and 1901: SCHMIDT (Mossingen, Germany / Martin Schmidt, b. 1658); FISCHER (Gondelsheim, Germany / Christoph Michael Fischer, b. cir.1771); and SCHWEIGERDT (Erpfingen, Germany / Friedrich Schweigerdt, b. 1780). I am not able to do this with the KNOEPFLE family as of this writing.

<sup>11</sup> My father told me that his father – my grandfather – spoke (and I believe was literate) in English, German, and Russian.

<sup>12</sup> I am the first member of my extended family to have attended/graduated from a university. In turn, each of my four children have graduated university, and two have earned advanced degrees as well.

<sup>13</sup> The current population of Campbell County, SD is 1,377, and this number decreases each year.

<sup>14</sup> Also, of some note, the location of the Schweigerdt acreage in north-central South Dakota is within thirty miles of a point of some historical significance. In 1806 as the members of the Lewis and Clark expedition were returning from their journey from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean, they set up camp where Spring Creek enters the Missouri River, within a 'stones-throw' from the property.

<sup>15</sup> As I sit in my recliner and ponder the farm lands I own in South Dakota, I can smile and consider myself to be a 'Lazy-Boy Farmer' and read the latest edition of Successful Farmer magazine that someone so kindly subscribed for me after I acquired the acreage. Even though it is a free publication, it is a wonderful and informative publication to help keep one abreast of modern farming in America.