

MARIENTAL CHASSELOIS LOUIS DAYS OF YORE

MARCH 2010

ISSUE THIRTY



**Mariental, Russia by Michael Boss
Oil on Linen – 20” x 30”
From the Collection of Signature Associates**

Topics:

Editor's Comments

Letters to the Editor

So We Will Know Them – Hopp/Hoffman

Feature Stories - Famine on the Volga –

- The Murder and Starvation of our Ancestors

Whisper (A large article for my Whisper)

GR Proverb:

You see them do that;

You do that.

My fellow Volga German friends – a few words about the terrible triple disasters going on in Japan. We as genealogists all realize the terrible losses – firstly of all of the precious lives lost, the horror of how it all happened, and the tremendous loss of all of the records of those lives lost. We may complain and worry about our small problems, but CAN YOU EVEN IMAGINE ENDURING ANYTHING LIKE THIS?

I am also quite interested in what the outcome will be of the lives of the people who are protesting and fighting for their freedom from their present rulers in the oil-rich countries.

(Some of our ancestors went through times resembling these somewhat, so I think that is why it has captured my interest. I wonder, was it like that for them?)

In fact, there is so much news going on what with the blizzards, flooding and fires in our own country, some of it just doesn't get covered very well. We know there was a huge blizzard in Montana with many vehicles stranded on the interstate, and we couldn't find any news stories on that.

Letters to the Editor:

**Hi Thelma,
Thanks for the newsletter. I always enjoy it!**

I sent you the Quint famine letters. I'm glad you were able to share them. I also sent copies of these letters to headquarters to be put in the Louis village file.

I was very sorry to read about your break-in. Some years ago, I also had a break-in and theft. It robbed me of the feeling of safety in my home for some time, as well as the possessions and disruption.

Denise

Hi Thelma ,

Thank you for sending me the newsletter. I just have a little comment. There are stories about father Peter Weigel and father Gottlieb Beratz, I think the text are translated automatic and somehow the word 'Herzog' translated as 'Wart (Duke)'" probably because 'Herzog' means 'duke' in German. Peter Weigel was born in Herzog 1893 and was executed 11/3/1937 in Sandormoch <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandarmokh> and Gottlieb Beratz served as a priest

from 1911 to 1921 when he was executed among other people from Herzog. Frohe
Weinachten! Tanja

Thelma,

You have had some wonderful newsletters, but this one was the best ever. Thank
you very much for the time you put into bring us closer with our past. I hope you
have a wonderful and Blessed Christmas! Best Regards, Gary Degenhardt

Hello Thelma.

Thank you for the great work you do in preparing the V olga-German Newsletter. I
always find something interesting and worthwhile.

As children growing up, we always used the German New Year's wish to family.
relatives and friends. Grandpa Leiker would always give us a quarter when we said
the German wish to him. A quarter had a much greater value in the 1830's and
1940's.

Blessings of peace, joy and love - Sister Mary Elise Leiker

-(Thank you for the memories of your childhood, Sister Mary Elise. We always
knew that Our Religious had great childhood memories, but we don't get to hear
about them too often.)

I have a neat memory about The House of Contemplation located in Liebenthal,
Kansas. My sister and I went there to spend a weekend retreat two or three
summers ago. The Sister who was in charge of the house was such a dear person.
named Sister Martina Stegman. She would say every so often that she was not a
good cook, but my sister and I thought she was an excellent cook. This one day as
we were dining (white tablecloth, and all) and we were talking about Swartchberra
knebble, and to our amazement, she just happened to have some swartchberra
kuchen. It was wonderful! I don't know who was the most pleased – her or us.

So We Will Know Them:

My name is Jeanette Marie (Hepp) Hoffman. My husband is Leroy Hoffman. We are both full-blooded Volga Germans descendents and we both are members of the AHSGR and Ancestry.com. Leroy is a convert to the Roman Catholic faith but his ancestors are of the Lutheran Faith, I am of the Roman Catholic Faith. We have three children, 14 grandchildren and after the new babies are born this year of 2011, our family will total 32. My three children are from my first marriage to Anthony Paul Glassman, III (deceased). I am the second born of eleven children born to Anthony John Hepp and Josephine Agatha VonFeldt. I am a retired public accountant.



Around 1990, my Godmother, Aunt Agnes (VonFeldt) Goetz approached me to help her gather her parent's descendent information for a relative doing genealogy, I agreed. Not having any experience collecting genealogy information, I began accumulating the information in an Excel spreadsheet. Then, I thought I would try accumulating the information in my accounting software... Both methods worked (BUT BOTH METHODS LACKED EFFICIENCY). With all the information coming in on the group sheets I realized I needed software..., I purchased Family Tree software and took out membership in AHSGR and years later in Ancestry.com; this is the background of how I became involved in genealogy.

My hobbies include photo restoration, genealogy, and crochet and China doll painting. I like to cook, travel, and Polka dance off and on. I like to collect music. The photo restoration hobby is a major function of my genealogy work.

My ancestors settled in the Ellis and Rush Counties of Kansas. Surnames I am currently researching are Hepp, Storm, Bieker, Rupp, VonFeldt, Graf, Riedel, and Pfeifer. Villages thus far that I have been able to link to my ancestors are Graf, Mariental, Louis, and Friedental... I am always searching for stories, photos and documents to support my genealogy work for these surnames. I intend, in pictorial format, individual booklets of each ancestor I research. Thus far, I have prepared a booklet on my great-grandmother "Katharina Pfeifer" married to Joseph Graf, Jr. It includes the names of her direct lineage ancestors, beginning with the first into Russia. In progress, and soon to be completed, is the pictorial booklet on Joseph Graf, Jr. Here is a picture of Joseph Graf Jr. and Catharina Pfeifer.



Except for three ancestors' tomb sites, we have accomplished the whereabouts and photos of the tombs of all other ancestors from Russia to America... The 3 tomb sites I'm still looking for are: 1)Johannes Adam Pfeifer born 1826 in Russia, died Mar. 11, 1881 in Victoria, KS; 2)his wife Anna Margaretha Therre whom died June 16, 1903 in Hays, KS; and 3)Johannes George VonFeldt, born in 1824, died April 21, 1885 in Victoria, KS. I would greatly appreciate any help locating their tomb sites. I have checked with the St. Fidelis Church (Cemetery office) in Victoria, KS; they were not able to determine their burial lots.

Hearsay is that my great-grandfather Johann Hepp died from a gunshot while riding on his horse... He is buried in the Liebenthal cemetery. His tomb shows he died November 18, 1893. Here too, I would greatly appreciate any help locating a newspaper article or other document on this matter.

Regarding the Hoffman genealogy, Leroy and I completed a pictorial book called: Hoffman/Eckhardt Roots... Its focus is on the lineages of Leroy's parents Jacob R. Hoffman and Katharina Eckhardt. Surnames included in the book are Hoffman (Hofmann), Eckhardt, Gettman (Gottmann), Reiter. These ancestors were all from the Village of Frank, Russia.

In great appreciation, I acknowledge you (Thelma Mills), for your very valuable information to me on the Graf's and Hepp's, and for sharing your website and therefore Newsletters. I herewith acknowledge others as well whom over the years have helped me accomplish my information, they are: Donald J. Waldschmidt for his book "The Johannes Pfeifer Family Heritage" placed at the Hays Kansas Library, and for his many direct communications with me on the Pfeifer's; also, Verna (Hoffman) Goral for so graciously sharing the Hoffman Family Tree Chart, prepared by Dr. Igor Pleve; Florine (Gettman) Horst for sharing all her genealogy work to include pictures and stories of the Gettman family containing some Hoffman and Eckhardt information; Beverly Joanne (Hoffman) Moses and Kathleen (Wright) Brethauer for their combined works on the Hoffman's and Eckhardt genealogies; Clara (Hepp) Sullivan, a Hepp relative to me with memories of facts and customs from her Volga German parents from Russia. Lastly, in great appreciation I acknowledge all those that gifted photos and other documents for our genealogies...

Featured article on The Famine On The Volga

In Russia, hunger was the enemy. [A famine](#) that had begun in the summer of 1921 in the Volga region had reached tragic proportions over the winter. In March, [the Washington Post](#) reported the following:

Tangled heaps of frozen corpses, some attacked by starved dogs, sickness, dirt, and cold in the Volga valley are described to Secretary Hoover in a nightmare picture of the famine districts of soviet Russia drawn by Dr. Thomas H. Dickinson, of the American relief administration, in a special report on conditions there...

"Losses from famine in soviet Russia,' he said, 'come under the heads of emigration, disease, and death. Emigration from the villages now rises to about 30 per cent. Houses are deserted, not a dog, cat, or pig left, with snow breaking through the roofs and windows. Smoke comes from the chimneys of not more than half the houses. Traveling on the roads, one comes across pathetic caravans, father, mother, grandparents and samovar. When camel or horse falls sick they leave him to die on the open plain. Sick persons sit on top of the sledges and are taken to town to die.

"On sidings everywhere, from Poland to the Urals, are freight cars crowded with refugees. The government has not the locomotives to carry them, so they are waiting.

"Disease is general. Swollen bellies of children are so common as to no longer excite remark...

"Diseases are well distributed between summer and winter. Last summer, cholera; this winter, typhus. Russia lost 6,000,000 dead of typhus in 1919. One city of 200,000 lost 45,000. This year will be as bad."

Famine on the Volga

Arthur Ransome
Tuesday October 11, 1921
[Guardian Unlimited](#)

We went down to the shore of the Volga, down a rough broken street, past booths where you could buy white bread, and, not a hundred yards away, found an old woman cooking horsedung in a broken saucepan. Within sight of the market was a mass of refugees, men, women, and children, with such belongings as they had

retained in their flight from starvation, still starving, listlessly waiting for the waggons to move them away to more fortunate districts. Some of them are sheltered from the rain that is coming now, too late, by the roofs of open-sided sheds. Others are sitting hopelessly in the open, not attempting to move, not even begging. I shall never forget the wizened dead face, pale green of a silently weeping little girl, whose feet were simply bones over which was stretched dry skin that looked like blue-black leather. And she was one of hundreds. A fortnight ago there were twenty thousand waiting beside the quays of Samara. Every day about 1,400 are taken off in waggons. There are, of course, no latrines. The beach was black with excreta until, as an eye-witness (not a Communist) told me, the local Communists arranged a 'Saturdaying' which deserves a place in history, and themselves removed that disgusting ordure, and, for a day or two, lessened the appalling stench that is beginning once more to rise from the beach.

In the morning of the second day we called at one of the sixty "children's houses" in Samara, so that Ercole could photograph the famine orphans, the children purposely abandoned in the streets, in the state in which they were received. The garden, a plain courtyard with a few trees, was full of children lying in the sun under the wall, staring in silent unchildlike groups, ragged, half-naked, some with nothing whatever but a shirt. All were scratching themselves. Among these children, a man and a woman were walking about, talking quietly to them, and carrying sick children into the house, bringing others out. Ercole had hardly begun to turn the handles of his machine before some of the children saw us, and, some with fright, some with interest, all scrambled to their feet, although many of them fell again, and, too weak to get up, stayed sitting on the ground where they fell. Ercole photographed them as they were. Then he picked four little boys and photographed these alone. Wishing to reward them, he gave them some chocolate before the woman looking after them had time to stop him. "You must not do it," she said; "they are too hungry." But it was already too late. All of them who had strength to move were on top of each other, fighting for the scraps of chocolate like little animals, with small, weak, animal cries.

That is only one of dozens of such scenes that we witnessed during those two days in Samara. Samara is one place of hundreds. Everywhere people are trying to save the children. Nowhere have they the means that we in other countries have to give what they should be given. And, to the shame of humanity, there are some in Western Europe who have urged that help should not be given. Outside the goods station is a huge camp of white tents, a military camp of the Red Army, handed over bodily by the army authorities for the use of the refugees. The refugees have overflowed from the tents and built more tents, and wigwams for themselves out of anything that came handy - rags, branches of trees, pieces of old iron from the railway sidings. Everywhere on the open ground outside the cemetery, whither every day fresh bodies are carried ('Thirty-five this morning,' a man told us, whose little

hut commanded the entrance to the cemetery), and along the railway line for half a mile or so, were little camp fires, and people cooking scraps of pumpkin rind, scraps of horse-dung, here and there scraps of bread and bits of cabbage. In all that vast crowd there was not one who did not look actually hungry, and for many mere hunger would be a relief. Among them from tent to tent walked an unshaven young man with a white forage cap, now nearly black, a blue shirt and breeches, and no coat. A mechanic who was carrying the camera tripod for us told me who he was. He was a German, one-time prisoner of war, now a Communist, and 'for all that,' as my man put it, 'a man of God. He has stayed since the beginning. He never leaves them. I don't believe he ever sleeps. Whatever can be got for them he gets it. He has taken and lived through all their diseases. It is owing to that one man that there is such order in this place instead of pandemonium. Thousands owe their very lives to him. If only there were a few more like that.'

I wished to speak to that young German, but, just as I was making my way to him through the crowd, a little skeleton of a boy pulled at his sleeve and pointed to a tent behind him. The young man turned aside and disappeared into the tent. As I walked by the tents, even without going into them, the smell of dysentery and sickness turned my stomach like an emetic.

A little crowd was gathered beside a couple of wooden huts in the middle of the camp. I went up there and found that it was a medical station where a couple of doctors and two heroic women lived in the camp itself fighting cholera and typhus. The crowd I had noticed were waiting their turns for vaccination. At first the people had been afraid of it, but already there was no sort of difficulty in persuading them to take at least this precaution, though seemingly nothing will ever teach them to keep clean. The two women brought out a little table covered with a cloth and the usual instruments, and the crowd already forming into a line pressed forward. I called to Ercole and he set up his camera. One of the sisters called out 'Lucky ones to-day; vaccination and having your pictures taken at the same time,' and while the camera worked, those behind urged those in front to be quick in taking their rags off, and to get on so that they too would be in time to come into the picture.

There were old men and women, girls and little ragged children. Shirt after shirt came off, showing ghastly bags of bones, spotted all over with bites and the loathsome scars of disease. And, dreadful as their condition was, almost all showed an interest in the camera, while I could not help reflecting that before the pictures are produced some at least of them will have left the camp and made their last journey into the cemetery over the way, the earth of which, as far as you could see, was raw with new-made graves.

In the siding beyond the camp was a refugee train, a sort of rolling village, inhabited by people who were for the most part in slightly better condition than the peasants

flying at random from the famine. These were part of the returning wave of that flood of miserable folk who fled eastwards before the retreating army in 1915 and 1916, and are now uprooted again and flying westwards again with the whip of hunger behind them. To understand the full difficulty of Samara's problem it is necessary to remember the existence of these people who are now being sent back to the districts or the new States to which they belong. They have prior right to transport, and, in the present condition of Russian transport, the steady shifting of these people westwards still further lessens the means available for moving the immediate victims of the drought. I walked from one end of the train to the other. It was made up of cattle trucks, but these trucks were almost like huts on wheels, for in each one was a definite group of refugees and a sort of family life. These folks had with them their belongings, beds, bedding, chests of drawers, rusty sewing machines, rag dolls. I mention just a few of the things I happened to see. In more than one of the waggons I found three or four generations of a single family - an old man and his still more ancient mother struggling back to the village which they had last seen in flames as it was set on fire by the retreating army, anxious simply, as they said, 'to die at home,' and with them a grandson, with his wife (married here) and their children. Families that had lost all else retained their samovar, the central symbol of the home, the hearth of these nomads; and I saw people lying on the platform with samovars boiling away beside them that must have come from West of Warsaw and travelled to Siberia and back.

In the doorway of one truck I found a little boy, thinner than any child in England shall ever be, I hope, and in his hand was a wooden cage, and in the cage a white mouse, fat, sleek, contented, better off than any other living thing in all that train. There were a man and his wife on the platform outside. I asked them where they were going. 'To Minsk,' said the man, 'those of us who live; the children are dying every day.' I looked back at the little boy, warming his mouse in the sun. The mouse, at least, would be alive at the journey's end.

The Murder and Starvation of our Ancestor's Relatives – Received from Gary Martens

Gary sent this e-mail to the Village Coordinators on Feb. 28,2011. I thought it was a great article and I feel that it should go out to all of our people.

Gary writes:

I don't know how many of you were VC's back in 1997, and before, but Dr. Samuel Sinner, author of the book "Open Wound - The Genocide of German Ethnic Minorities in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1915-1949 - and Beyond" was the first VC of Schilling, before me. At that time he was working on his Masters and then Ph.D at the University of Nebraska. If I recall right, his Master's thesis was on German-Russians, and I think I have that somewhere.

How many of you have Samuel's book, The Open Wound, published by the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at NDSU, Fargo?

I've been going through his book and compiling some notes on what happened to the Volga region German Russians. During what he calls "The Age of the Great Massacres, 1917-1925" he documents attacks on the following villages: Marxstadt, Schaffheusen, Dobrinka, Warenburg, Gnadendorf, Driespitz, Unterdorf, Beideck, Dehler, Kolb, Mariental, Grimm, and Graf. Between population figures in 1914-1917 and those in 1926, there was a decrease in the Volga GR population of 225,000. Between 1917-1921, 120,000 Russian Germans left for Germany and the Americas, the majority of which came from Volhynia and Poland. In 1925, only 2,000 Ukranian and Volga Germans lived in Germany.

In the section titled "The Russian Germans and the Famine of 1920-1925", Samuel documents the effect of the famine in the following villages: Mohr, Grimm, Messer, Huck, Doenhoff, Dinkel, Schilling, Norka, Balzer, Louis, and Pfeiffer. Then he documents the International Relief efforts during which time the Lenin government claimed that it was financially unable to feed its own starving citizens, while Russian archival materials reveal that at the height of the starvation crisis, the Lenin government was channeling untold amounts of gold rubles to finance revolutions abroad. A letter from Rev. Jacob Wagner, born in Frank, reveals that even after the international relief operations were under way in the Volga district, Communists continued to persecute the peasantry. Rev. Wagner called the Russian soldiers the "stupid sons of the devil."

In 1921, Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP), whereby the violent grain requisitions were to be replaced with a simple tax. At a time when Russia claimed to be financially unable to feed its own starving peasantry, the Russian government exported more grain than the international community imported.

There was a good harvest in 1922, but the bread of the peasants was simply taken away from them. In 1922, despite continuing deaths from starvation, The Volga-German region was ordered to deliver over 2 million puds of grain (a pud is about 36 pounds) to the government as a tax payment.

Samuel concludes: "The latest Russian-language study of the starvation crisis among the Volga-Germans, based on Saratov materials, reveals that no less than 150,000 in the area died of starvation in 1921-1922. This establishes the historical veracity of the Volga-German author Georg Loeb sack's figure of 166,000 famine deaths, including 60,000 children. Overall in the Soviet Union, 300,000 ethnic Germans were exterminated through forced starvation during 1920-1925. In 16 Volga-German villages alone, over 9000 died in 1921 chiefly from starvation. Thus, in only 16 villages out of over 200 at the time, about two-thirds of the official statistic is already accounted for. The official figure is obviously incomplete."

MY (rather large) WHISPER Article – from Sam Brungardt

(Sam has sent me some seeds at times when I needed to plant some fresh ones)

SCHWARTZBEEREN

The Edible nightshade of the Volga Germans

Schwartzbeeren (literally, “blackberries”) are an edible form of the common or black nightshade, *Solanum nigrum*. *Schwartzbeeren* are not the same as the garden huckleberry or wonderberry. Depending in the colony they came from, Volga Germans may also have called this crop by other names: Nachtschatten (nightshade); schwarzer Nachtschatten (black nightshade); yagoda, which means “berry” in Russian, and even Scheissbeeren (shitberries). In Russian, black nightshade is called *paslen cernyj*. This garden crop was developed as generations of gardeners saved the seed from plants whose berries were low in the alkaloids that make the species acrid tasting and somewhat poisonous. We’ll probably never know whether this selection took place in Germany or in the German colonist’s new home along the Volga River in Russia because *Solanum nigrum* is native to much of *Eurasia*. What we do know is that the Volga Germans valued these berries enough

to bring seed along when they immigrated to North America. This crop seems to have found the hot, sunny and rather dry summers of the Great Plains and Intermountain states of the West especially to its liking. Traditionally, *Schwartzbeeren* were grown as a volunteer crop. They were never intentionally planted. Instead, seedlings came up “volunteer” once the soil had been warmed in the spring from seed that had been produced and dropped to the ground the summer before. The gardener then spaced the *Schwartzbeeren* plants by hoeing out or pulling up the excess seedlings.

Schwartzbeeren plants grow 2 to 3 feet tall, depending on how far apart they are spaced, how much water they receive during the growing season, and the fertility of the soil. Since volunteer *Schwartzbeeren* come up in the garden at about the same time as volunteer tomatoes, one can conclude that conditions that are conducive for good germination of tomato seeds are the same ones that *Schwartzbeeren* seeds require – a soil temperature of 97 to 90 degrees F. Sow the seed indoors a month to six weeks before the frost-free date for your area. It will take 6 to 14 days for the seedlings to emerge. After the seedlings are large enough to handle (about the time they have their first true leaves), transplant them to small pots.

Or simply sow the seed in a sunny place in the garden a couple of weeks before the frost-free date for your area, covering it with 1/8 to 1/4 inch of soil. You may be able to identify the seedlings by the holes that sometimes develop in the leaves. Thin or transplant the seedlings to stand 2 to 3 feet apart.

Schwartzbeeren berries are about 1/4 inch in diameter and are produced in clusters of 5 to 10. They consist of a thin, purple-black skin filled with juice and many small seeds. *Schwartzbeeren* are fully ripe when the skins of the berries have turned from green to dark purplish-black and have lost their sheen. If the berries are picked before they are dead ripe, they will not be as sweet as they could be and they will have unattractive, green juice. The flavor of *Schwartzbeeren* is rather difficult to describe; the berries are sweet with a somewhat acidic flavor. To pick *Schwartzbeeren*, “tickle” them from their clusters, do not pinch or squeeze the berries or they will burst. The Volga Germans enjoyed *Schwartzbeeren* in several ways. They used the berries, mixed with sugar and flour and perhaps an egg and cream for a topping for *Schwartzbeerenkuchen*. They also used the berries, mixed with sugar and flour, to fill *Maultaschen*, a filled pasta similar to pirogi or vereniki. And sweetened *Swartzbeeren* were sometimes put over dumplings that have slathered with *Schmeltz* (a rich butter and cream sauce). Volga Germans who immigrated to North America also learned to use berries for pie, coffeecake and jam. Recipes using *Schwartzbeeren* can be found in the *Sei unser gast (Be our guest)* cookbook sold by the North Star VChapter of Minnesota of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia. Go to <http://www.northstarchapter.org/index.htm> on the internet or write to Cookbook Orders, North Star Chapter of Minnesota, PO Box 583642, Minneapolis, MN 55458-3642.

I hope you find *Schwartzbeeren* worth growing and that you enjoy eating them. Good Luck and please share your experiences with Sam and myself. (Thelma Mills) It think it would make a good “follow-up” in a future newsletter.

thelma.mills@gmail.com or Sam - sam739is@hotmail.com

(Note from Thelma Mills: I have added my recipe for my favorite dish using these berries. And I want to mention that I have been trying to raise these berries here in Arizona during my winter stay. The first year I had a wonderful “container crop” just loaded with these beautiful little berries, and they were so good. Last winter was a rather coldish winter, which required me to continually cover the Schwartzberren plants at night, needless to say, the Schwartzberren did not like it and maybe grew to only 5 inches tall for the whole winter months and hardly produced any berries. So the 2nd winter was a failure. I will try again this winter. I will plant them the last of September, and hope to have berries by Christmas or New Years. So, we shall see. Well, we had another cold winter and required much nightly covering, but !!! They took of as soon as the weather treated them better. (so far this year, my crop looks good and has blooms! – I am now holding out for Easter.)

SCHWARTZBERRA KNEBBLE

Put kettle on and boil water. Rinse the berries and drain well.

In a bowl - mix swartchberra with sugar to taste – set aside

Knebble dough

2 c flour - 2 egg - ½ teas salt

Add enough warm water to make a slightly soft dough

Drop by teaspoonfuls into hot water – boil about 20 minutes. Drain well.

Cream

Put 1 cube butter into heavy skillet (1/4 cup)

When melted, add 1 ½ c heavy cream (whipping cream)

Cook together about 5-10 minutes till slightly thickened.

Pour cream over knebble and stir well.

Pour swartchberra over knebble, and carefully mix till well blended.