



Thelma Mills Retires as Village Coordinator

Thelma filled the role as Village Coordinator for Mariental, Louis and Chasselais since 1998, and during that time created very informative web pages, published many interesting newsletters and corresponded and assisted many of you personally over the years. Thelma also published her Kinderknecht family history in two volumes in 2012: *Anton and Ottilia*. We thank her for her many years of service and wish her well!



Kevin Rupp

This past year Thelma Mills passed the torch of her villages, Mariental, Louis, and Chasselais to myself and Denise Grau. Denise and I will be co-coordinators for the village of

Mariental. I have been collecting family information on many of Catholic colonies on the Volga, those mostly pertaining to Ellis County, Kansas area, which cover many of the upper Catholic colonies on the Volga for a number of years. At this time I am VC for AHSGR for the villages of Obermunjou, Mariental, Rohleder, Witmann, Zug, Louis, Chasselais, and Luzern. I have special interest in Louis because that is where my paternal grandmother was born in 1907 and came to America in 1909. I would like to thank Thelma for allowing Denise and I to continue where she left off. I was able to move most of Thelma's website material over to my current website, www.volgagerman.net. I'm sure if any of you have any questions Denise and I will try our hardest to help you in your search.



Denise Grau

Hello! I'm excited to be Co-Village Coordinator with Kevin Rupp for Mariental, and I'm very much looking forward to meeting other Mariental researchers, and learn-

ing about your families and research efforts. My own ancestors came to the United States from the German settlements along the Volga in Russia between 1875 and 1878. From Mariental came the John and Elizabeth (Kreutzer) Rohr family in 1876 and the Joseph and Anna Catherina (Linenberger) Gassman family in 1878. I'm also descended from other Volga German immigrants who all settled in the Ellis and Rush county area in Kansas, including Seib and Niernberger from Obermonjou (via South America); Sauer and Stoecklein from Zug; Wasinger from Schoenchen, Quint from Louis; and Herrman and Schaffer from Liebental.

The Village Coordinators are a program of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR). Membership in this international organization supports these types of programs. Please consider joining AHSGR! Now is the time to take advantage of the new on-line membership application form, and you can pay through paypal. Membership ranges from \$35.00 a year up to \$100.00 a year depending on your level of membership. Life time membership is also available. Join us! Exciting things are happening!

Meet Julie Kartchner Matheson...

I grew up in the small town of St. David, Arizona (near Tombstone, AZ) with wonderful parents, 7 siblings and lots of cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents that lived both close and distant. Family ties have always been very important to me and growing up I was privileged to know both sets of great-grandparents on my mother's side of the family. One of these great-grandmothers was Regina Bernhardt Todd. I always knew her as Grandma Mickey. I started researching her family just this year and with the help of the Volga German listserv members (a special thanks to Denise Grau, Barry Bernhardt, Rosemary Larson and to Thelma Mills's website) it's been exciting to get to know her part of my family.

Regina's parents were Michael Bernhardt and Anna Marie Husch. They immigrated from Mariental, Russia to Kansas in 1908 with their first 4 children. Their last 3 children were born after their arrival in Kansas. In 1924



My grandma Mickey (Regina Bernhardt) and her siblings. This was taken in Kansas in 1917. Regina is the little one front and center.



Michael Bernhardt



Anna Marie Husch Bernhardt

they moved to St. Walburg, Canada where they lived for about 10 years before returning to the U.S. and settling in Topeka, KS. My great-grandma Regina was their youngest daughter. In December of 1941, recently divorced and with 3 young children, Regina moved to southern California. There she raised her family and eventually married Cecil Todd.

My Bernhardt ancestors originally emigrated to Russia from Hesse. I haven't yet attempted to trace their German roots further but would like to someday. They initially settled in Hockerberg. The father, Johann Friedrich Bernhardt died soon after their arrival. His widow, Sabina Barbara Bernhardt, moved the family to Orlowskaya

and remarried a Karl Darius. She died soon after and records show some of her children, including my ancestor Friedrich, living in Katherinenstadt a few years later. In the 1790's Friedrich Bernhardt moved to Mariental and married a widow, Elisabeth Zimmermann. Their oldest son, Michael, was born about 1795 and, as they say, the rest is history.

I've just started in on my Husch line and assuming that the orphan Johannes in the 1850 Mariental census is the child of Jacob (b. 1811) and Katherine (b. 1812) Husch from the 1834 census, that leads me back to Adam Husch who originally settled Chasselouis and moved to Mariental when it was destroyed in the 1780's. I've got a long way to go when it comes to putting the family puzzle pieces together and much of the fun (and sometimes frustration) is, of course, searching out the clues and figuring out how to connect them. The surnames of my direct ancestors that I've identified thus far are Bernhardt, Zimmermann, There, Husch, Rohr, Seitz, Gerber and Gerstner.

As for a little about myself, I graduated from the University of Arizona with a degree in nursing. While at the UofA, I also met my husband, Alex Matheson. We feel very blessed to be the parents of 5 wonderful children, Bradley, Carter, Lydia, Eve and Camille, and are raising them as loyal UofA Wildcat fans. We are expecting our 6th little one in January. After moving to Portland, OR for a 4 year stint and then another year in Los Angeles, CA we moved back home to Arizona and now live in Queen Creek with a little land, a cow, 3 chickens, a cat and 2 gerbils. My husband is a dentist here in town. In addition to being a mom I help out with the dental office and enjoy volunteering for school, scouts and church.

Now that we live closer to relatives, I love watching my children establish connections with their cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents. I think that is what I like best

about researching my family – getting to know and connecting with those who are a part of me. My one regret is that I didn't start sooner, when Grandma Mickey (Regina) was still here and could help me get to know her family better – their personalities, likes, dislikes, etc. I have questions such as where did the nickname Mickey come from? Family tradition is that when she was a girl there was a song about a pretty girl named Mickey. Her older brother, Anton, started calling her Mickey and the name stuck. I'd love to know the song. And recently, my 9 year old son discovered a ship's record on-line showing Regina's father Michael arriving in New York in October, 1909. Why did Michael head back across the Atlantic so soon after his initial arrival in the U.S. in 1908? I still haven't found a record of his son Anton (about 8 y.o. at the time) entering the U.S. with the rest of the family. Did they have to leave him behind in Europe and Michael returned to get him?

Over the years we have lost connections with the other branches of the Michael and Anna Marie Bernhardt family. Hopefully, at some point I'll be able to connect with other Bernhardt descendants who might be able to fill in more of that personal information. With hopes of that in mind, I'm including the information that I do I have about Regina and her siblings: Anton (Tony) Bernhardt married Mary ? and lived in California, Mary Bernhardt married Alex Herl, they lived in Kansas; Emma Bernhardt married Edward Kraisinger, they lived in Kansas; Eva Bernhardt married Burton Sanderson, they lived in Kansas; Amelia (Peggy) Bernhardt married Ira (Ike) Whitley, they lived in both Kansas & Colorado; Justine (Jeri) Bernhardt married Bernard Clark, then Ray Williams, they lived in California; and Regina (Mickey) married Al Griffin in Kansas, then Cecil Todd, they lived in California. If you do have any information about their descendants please contact me at anjmatheson@gmail.com.



The more I find out about the Volga Germans the more I admire their strength, ingenuity and perseverance. I'm grateful to have discovered this part of my heritage and especially grateful to all the researchers who make the Volga German records so accessible. A big thank you to all who have and continue to participate in that effort!

Records Filmed by Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS)

In 1993, the LDS microfilmed records at the Samara archive in Russia. The microfilm can be rented and viewed at any LDS Family History Center; however, the records are in Russian script. The film series is 2376721-2376728. Bill Pickelhaupt brought the existence of the films to the attention of the GER-VOLGA mail list in 2009. For the villages included, the records are hit and miss from years 1879 to 1917. The records are from Catholic Wiesenseite villages including Graf, Herzog, Hölzel, Katharinenstadt, Liebental, Louis, Luzern, Marienberg, Mariental, Neu-Kolonie, Obermonjou, Preuss, Rohleder, Schoenchen, Seelmann, Streckerau, Wittmann, and Zug.

For Mariental the following records were filmed:

Baptisms 1892 and 1906

Marriages 1907

Deaths 1879, 1880, 1890, 1907, and 1910

For Louis the following records were filmed:

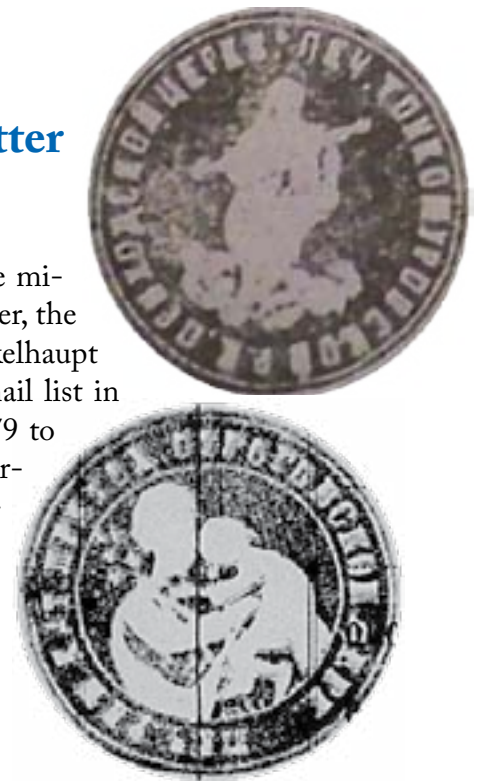
Baptisms for 1888, 1890, and 1909.

Marriages 1890, 1893, and 1906.

Deaths 1909 and 1912.

Thanks to the efforts of several volunteers, several of these records have been translated. Translators are desired for the remainder of the records. If you have the skills necessary to translate from the old Russian script, please contact Kevin Rupp or Denise Grau.

If you would like a look up or a copy from any of these records, please contact Kevin or Denise.



Seals from church books of
Tonkoshurovka (Mariental) top,
and Otrogovka (Louis) lower.

Find Us on the Web

Mariental website: <http://www.volgagerman.net/Mariental.htm>

Louis website: <http://www.volgagerman.net/Louis.htm>

Facebook page for Villages of Mariental, Louis, Chasselois, Russia: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/160243664047778/>

AHSGR website: <http://www.ahsgr.org>

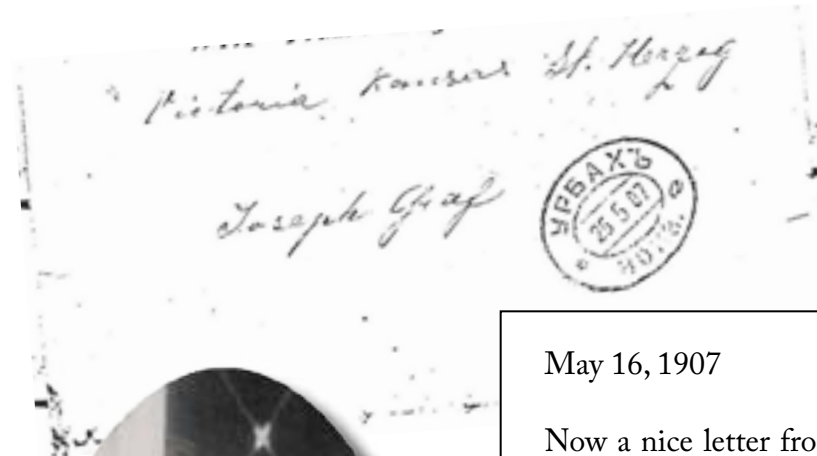
Kevin's email: krupp@ruraltel.net

Denise's email: dgrau@germansfromrussia.org

1907 Letter from Louis

This is a letter that Kevin Rupp received from a distant member of the family. The letter was sent from Johannes (John) Groff and his family to his uncle Joseph who was living in Victoria, Kansas at the time. Johannes and Katharina Groff are the great-grandparents of Kevin.

Johannes, age 42, Katharina, age 32 Maria, age 3 years, Jacob, age 3 years and Rosa, age 9 months left Louis (Ostrakovka), Russia. Boarding the S.S. Prinzess Alice in Bremen, Germany departed on May 8th 1909 and arrived at Ellis Island on May 18, 1909.



Kevin's great-grandmother,
Katherine (Kessler) Groff (Graf)

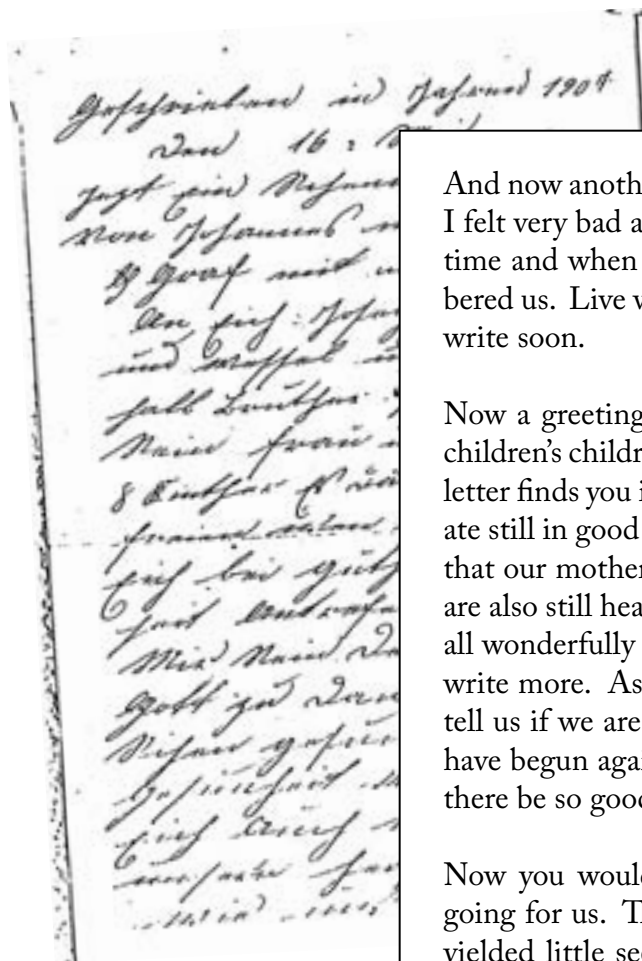
May 16, 1907

Now a nice letter from Johannes and Katharina Graf(*) and our two children, to you Uncle Joseph and Aunt, and my cousin Peter, his wife and eight children. We would be pleased if our letter finds you in good health. We thank the dear Lord that we are all still wonderfully healthy and this health we also wish for you from our hearts as we do for ourselves.

We want you to know that we safely received your letter and saw from it that you are all still in good health and that pleases us.

You wanted to know whether or not you still had brothers and sisters in Russia. Maria ? and Katharina and Joseph and Nicholas Bollig and his wife, Anton Paul and his wife Margaretha Neif, Paulin, Barbara, Margaretha and their husbands are all still in good health.

I want you to know that there is nothing more here in Russia to live for, nothing more than poverty, strife and greed and I think that here in the south it is especially bad. There is always some controversy going on and when the Vorsteher cannot solve it he calls a short recess to keep from pulling his hair out. Everyone says that everything that poverty has brought us will be put behind us. You will certainly be happy to hear who our Vorsteher is. He is Joseph Frank. His 'beiname' is Hirschen Mueller and your Joseph knows him.



And now another nice greeting from Johannes Graf to you, my dear cousin. I felt very bad about not having received any letters from you for so long a time and when your letter arrived I was very happy that you had remembered us. Live well until that joyous reunion with all our loved ones. Please write soon.

Now a greeting from Jakob and Susanne (Daut?) and their children and children's children to you Uncle Joseph and Aunt. We will be pleased if this letter finds you in good health. We have the dear Lord to thank because we ate still in good leather and wish the same for you. We want to inform you that our mother is still living but still remains ill and Peter and his people are also still healthy. We received your letter and saw from it that you were all wonderfully healthy and that things were going well for you. I want to write more. As an Uncle and nieces and nephews you should do this and tell us if we are still able to come over there or not. Here the discussions have begun again about finding a new area to live and if it is so good over there be so good as to grant my wish that you write about it.

Now you would probably like some bits of news about how things are going for us. Things are going poorly. For two years now the Steppe has yielded little seed or bread. It is bad and we still receive a lot from Red Cross donations. Last fall in Louis four cooked cows were distributed. Another minister came to us and because he said he would take care of us we lent him two Kopeks from our "Selle Geld" (Soul Money) and he took the money and left. We had lent him the money until spring and when he returned he had brought us nothing and we were also unable to get our money back.

Now a greeting from my cousin Joseph and his wife and children. I am pleased that you are still well. I thank God that we are still healthy and wish the same for you. Now be again greeted and kissed until our happy reunion, please write soon.

The image used on the top of page one of the newsletter, *Carte des colonies allemandes établies sur le Volga dans le territoire de Saratof*, is a portion of a map available for purchase through AHSGR (Map #63). It is the oldest map known of the German colonies on the Volga, drawn before the attacks by the Kirghiz on Chasselois that led to the abandonment of the colony. The map is French. As it appears on page one, Mariental, Louis, and Chasselois appear in the lower right corner, labeled as K. Tonkoschourofka, K. Otrogofka, and K. Chaisol.