

MARIENTAL & LOUIS

DAYS OF YORE

APRIL 2004

ISSUE TWO



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German Russian Proverb:

An old
broom
knows the
corners
of the house.

In this issue, I just had to publish the Joseph Pfannensteil Life Story. I was very impressed with the life story of this man, so I couldn't not publish it in my newsletter, even though it appears on my Web Page, I needed to send it to the many Mariental and Louis Searchers who do not have access to the Internet. This includes my two brothers. (My sisters have the Internet.)

One of my favorite pastimes is reading the life stories of our ancestors. Sometimes my eyes can hardly bare to read the stories. What courage our people had in the face of such extremely difficult lives. I must thank my grandfather each and every day for taking his family (including my father) and immigrating to Ellis County, Kansas, in 1908.

Many thanks go to Terri Dann for the picture of Mariental shown on the front page, which was taken during her visit to the Volga area in 2001. I am so very appreciative of the pictures and articles sent to me from "Mariental Searchers".

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THE LIFE STORY OF JOSEPH "DIVELINE" PFANNENSTEIL

By: Ed Pfannensteil

Submitted by: Gerald Schmidt

Joseph "Diveline" Pfannensteil was born in Marienthal (first known as Pfannensteil), Russia, on November 14, 1919, to Joseph and Elizabeth (Gerstner) Pfannensteil. The nickname "Diveline" came about this way: Before these Pfannensteil's migrated from Germany to Russia, they lived in an area a little northwest of Munchen, near Augsburg, Germany. The family owned and operated a brewery and the name of their beer was "Diveline", thus, when they came to Russia, they were known as the "Diveline Pfannensteils" to set them apart from Pfannensteils that came from other parts of Germany.

At the age of two, in 1921, the Communists for resisting the revolution and the Communist take-over shot Joseph's father. Joseph and his mother continued farming their land with horse and camel – plowing, seeding, and harvesting to survive these difficult times.. However, at various intervals, the Communists would come and take grain and animals, and increase the taxes on their land to the point where they could not pay them – then they took the land from them. Joseph was baptized a Catholic, but in 1928, before he could receive the Sacrament Of Reconciliation and First Communion, the last priest, Father Weigel, was taken from Marienthal and imprisoned. The Catholic churches were closed and above the door was placed a sign that read, “Religion is OPIUM to the People”. Church records were boxed and stored in City Hall – but that building later burned and all the church records were destroyed. Church buildings were turned into night clubs, museums, or burned.

Hunger and starvation prevailed all throughout the Volga region. When the domestic animals were gone, fields could no longer be worked, and there was no seed for planting – the people complained – only to hear “dip into your reserves, you must have some hidden away”. But there was none.

Joseph said that one of the saddest memories he has of this point in time was when they shot the last camel out of the necessity for food. The camel was a faithful beast of burden, that he worked with, and that obeyed his every command. He would drop to his knees when Joseph needed to climb on his back, was easy to care for – would eat weeds of any kind – and only needed to be watered about three times a week. When he was shot, he still walked to the house where Joseph was and dropped dead at the doorstep.

I asked Joseph if it was true they ate cats, dogs, and any rodents they could catch – he said yes, and at one point, he even ate grass. He set traps and caught field mice, which were equivalent in size to our gophers. He skinned and cooked them and said they weren't too bad eating. By this time his mother was very weak from hunger, but could not bear to take broth from the cooked mice, so in 1932 she starved to death. But before she died, she told him in a weak voice, “Joseph, remember that you are a German and never forget that you are a Catholic”. These words, “German” and “Catholic” rang in his ears as church bells during the fourteen years he was in the Siberian death and labor camp. When his mother died, the ground was too hard to dig a grave, so he opened the grave of a friend of hers that had died several weeks before, wrapped her body in a blanket and buried her in the same grave. I asked him what they did with all of the bodies of the starved people – he said they were placed on a pile, then doused with kerosene and burned. It was impossible to bury them since they lacked equipment and the ground being so hard. He also saw where people found animals that had been dead a number of days – they cut them up, washed out the worms and cooked them to eat.

After his Mother's death, Joseph was without a home or a roof over his head and wandered all over Russia. Up to this time he had completed two years of school – first and second grade. When he was about 15 years of age, he was in an orphanage and there they put him back in school. He was too big for the third grade, so was placed in the sixth grade. When he finished the seventh grade, this was the extent of his formal

education. But due to his natural abilities, he taught History, Geography, and German at a University in later years.

In 1942, the Communists sent him to a Siberian labor (death) camp where he was held for ten years, plus another four years in minimum confinement. His uncle was also in the death camp, and on his behalf, Joseph wrote to Stalin, buttered him up with words of praise, and then asked that he be released so he could look after his family. His reply was, as a German, he was an enemy to the people of Russia and deserved what he was getting. After that, he wrote several more letters telling Stalin what a bunch of mules he and the Communists were, but he wrote them with his left hand so the letters could not be traced back to him. In prison they called him “Adolph” after Hitler.

Throughout his life in Russia, Joseph worked as a farmer, tailor, cobbler, chef, teacher, carpenter, and general handyman. He retired in 1983 @ 100 rubles a month, mainly because his legs and knees were causing him a lot of pain. He had been shot twice in the right leg between the knee and ankle and stabbed once in the left leg with a bayonet. One time his legs were bound so tight it broke the skin. Scars are still visible.

For many years he tried to obtain a VISA to visit Germany. But was always refused. The Russians told him the economy in Germany was so bad, that people were starving by the hundreds. He told them, “then what’s it to you if I go?” Finally, in 1988, he was granted a VISA to visit his cousin in Hamburg and there he started making arrangements to move his family to Germany. When he returned to Russia, they asked what it was like in Germany. He told them it was even worse than what they had said – but they knew he was kidding.

He made an application with the German government to return to Germany, and they offered to settle him and his family of ten in Borchen, a suburb of Paderborn.. Joseph sold all his possessions for a token of what they were worth – people in Russia had no money – and came to Germany with whatever they could carry. The German government gave them temporary housing and when he received a monetary settlement for what he left behind, he was able to buy a lot with an old house on it near a wooded area, only three blocks from St. Michel’s Catholic Church. The house, which had been used as an animal shelter, was gutted and completely refurbished for comfortable living. His daughter, Lisa, with husband and two children, lived on the second floor, while he and his wife, Nina, occupied the first floor. They shared the kitchen area as one family.

In 1911, Joseph’s father had wanted to come to America, but his mother, who came from a financially secure family, said if she goes anywhere, it would be back to Germany. Consequently, they didn’t go anywhere.

Joseph and his wife now receive a monthly pension from the German government, which is adequate for their needs. They have a garden behind the house and look after their grandchildren while their daughter and son-in-law work. Their son, Victor, who is employed as a bus driver in Paderborn, is presently building his own house in Borchen.

In 1990, after he was settled in Germany, Joseph received an artificial knee on the right leg, and then in February of 1993, he received one on the left leg – all at the German government expense. He can get around quite well, but with support of a cane.

Joseph's house is always open to Volga German immigrants from Russia until they can establish themselves within the community. Someone asked him why he left Russia, now that life there could be tolerated. He said, for two reasons: first, so his grandchildren would remain German". Over the years, more and more inter-marriages occurred and he was afraid they would lose their German identity. In fact, when they moved to Germany, his grandchildren could only speak Russian. Once they were in Borchon, he forbade them to speak Russian and said he would slap their mouth if they did. Now they all speak German. His second reason was, a German in Russia is only a third-class citizen. This will never change so long as the Germans hold on to their identity. He said it is acceptable for a German MAN to marry a Russian woman, but never for a German WOMEN to marry a Russian man.

The Russian government is now offering their German population more benefits in order that they might and be productive citizens again. Fertile land is offered to them along the Volga River if they would go back to farming; and television newscasts are now given in both the German and Russian language. But the Russians through their lying, cheating, and stealing, are not trusted and many Germans are starting a new life in Germany.

In 1878, Joseph's great uncle, Peter "Diveline" Pfannensteil, moved to America with his entire family. The children were: Mathias (Elizabeth Kessler); Elizabeth; John P. (Barbara Korbe); Katherine (Kasper Leiker); Peter (Clementine Dechant); Nicholas (Mary Pfannensteil); Adam (Katherine Leiker); Martin (Helen Pfannensteil – Katherine Leiker); And Rosa (Joseph Graf).

When Dr. Fanestil heard of my impending trip to Germany in the summer of 1993, he asked me to check with Joseph if his health could stand a trip to Hays, Kansas, for a ten day visit. I did, and he was delighted for such an opportunity. I knew it would be hard for him since he speaks no English, (only Russian, German, and two other languages), but I coached him – wrote him a letter he could show if he encountered any difficulty in his travel – even reserved a wheel-chair in Dallas and American Airline personnel took him to the other terminal for his flight to Wichita.

Kevin Rupp And I met his arrival in Wichita on October 5, and he was a guest in my house until October 14, when hr returned to Germany. During his stay, he met many relatives (second cousins), made many friends and saw with his own eyes what the Volga Germans that came to America in 1876 made of themselves. He was so impressed with the churches in Catherine, Herzog, Pfeifer, Liebenthal, Schoenchen, and Munjor – compared their likeness to churches he had seen in Russia along the Volga. With his camera, he took pictures of them all. He mentioned more than once, if he was 40 years younger, he would definitely move to America and buy one of the vacant houses in one of the German villages. He enjoyed our ethnic foods, especially Kartoffel und Kloz,

Kraut Fleish und Kartoffel, Kulushkies and Brat Wurst, the tender beef steaks and the green bean dumpling and cabbage/vegetable soup.

The eight days he was in Ellis County, he had a full schedule that took him through all the Volga German villages, including the churches, had a visit with Fr. Paulinus and the Sisters of the Convent, saw a Binder dairy farm and the milking operation, took in the Octoberfest, 1993, lectured two German classes at FHSU. Got a tour through Dillons on Vine, recorded a song for Lawrence Weigel, visited the cemetery at Munjor, and saw the grave of his great uncle, witnessed a cattle sale in progress at the Hays Livestock Center, went with me to Aquacise at FHSU, and even visited with an 86 year old lady whose family he knew in Mariental, Russia

He arrived back in Germany safe and sound on October 15, and will be telling his family and friends for a long time of his visit to America.

WHISPER:

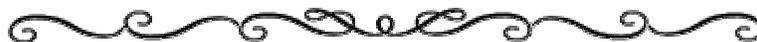
What is the origin of the term “Caucasian” for White people?

Caucasian comes from the Caucasus, the region between the Black and Caspian seas that includes the nations of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and part of south Russia. The towering ranges of the Caucasus Mountains traverse it.

Why should the Caucasus provide a name for the light skinned peoples of western Asia, North Africa and Europe as well as for their descendants around the world? The late naturalist Stephen Jay Gould tells how the term arose as a racial label in his book “I Have Landed: The End of a Beginning in Natural History”.

In 1795, Gould says, the prominent German scholar and scientist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach published a major work in which he reclassified humanity into five races: American (Native Americans), Mongolian, African, Malay and Caucasian.

Blumenbach selected this term for the lighter-skinned peoples Gould says, because he felt that the skulls of people from the Caucasus region, especially Georgians, were the most beautiful of all White peoples. European that her was, Blumenbach thought Whites were generally the most aesthetically pleasing of races in the first place. So great was his influence that Caucasian caught on and remains a synonym for White.





Janet Brake took this picture shown above, during her visit to the Saratov region of Russia in 2002. She found that the village of Louis had been incorporated into a much larger Russian city. Even so, she was able to find a few of the older type dacha-type houses in the part of town that would have been Louis. She said that she checked with one of the community centers and found there were no Germans currently living there. Her German-Russian is through her mother, whose maiden name was Peters. Her grandfather, Michael Peters, emigrated to the U.S. from Russia in about 1876.

Please contact me with any questions or requests you may have. Janet sent several pictures, which I am sure she will allow me to share.



