



Sunflower Chapter NEWSLETTER

Hays, Kansas

Winter 2019



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CHAPTER MEETING DATES



The Sunflower Chapter of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, Hays, Kansas group meets four - five times a year at Munjor, Kansas in the St. Francis of Assisi Parish Hall, unless otherwise noted in the Chapter Newsletter.

Social Time

11:30am - 12:30pm

Pot Luck Meal

12:30pm - 1:30pm

Chapter Meeting

~1:30pm

Program

2:00 - 3:30 roughly

Program and Important Dates

Sunday, March 3, 2019

Fasnacht Meeting

Sunday, June 9, 2019

Summer Picnic

Saturday, October 12, 2019

Sunflower Chapter Heritage Fest
Kennedy School Cafeteria 9:00am

Sunday, December 8, 2019

Christmas Meeting

Chapter Website

www.sunflowerchapterofahsgr.net

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Hays' Long-Time Folklorist Dies

By Kevin Rupp



Leona Wasinger Pfeifer, one of Hays' last of the old-time folklorists died, Monday, January 28, 2019, at the Methodist Nursing Home in Fort Smith, Arkansas having been a resident for just a few years.

She was one of those people like Lawrence Weigel, Francis Schippers, Rupert Pfannenstiel and others who were so involved in many activities in Ellis County to preserve the heritage of the Volga Germans who came to this area as early as 1874 up to 1921.

She was the second child of Fidelis and Theckla (Schumacher) Wasinger and was a direct descendant to Anton Wasinger, one of the 5 scouts that came to this area looking for land at the beginning of the large migration of Germans from the Russian Steps.

Leona graduated from Schoenchen, Kansas High School and received her Bachelor and Masters degrees from Fort Hays State University. On October 15, 1960 she was united in marriage to Edward W. Pfeifer at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Munjor, Kansas. He predeceased her in death on January 11, 2012. She taught at Hays High School and was German Language Professor at Fort Hays State University for many years. After retirement she taught German for a couple of years at Thomas More Prep-Marian High School in Hays. She enjoyed genealogy, gardening, bowling, spending time with her grandchildren and traveling.

Leona was involved in many projects that highlighted our local heritage. She was one of the original organizers for the annual Hays Oktoberfest when it was held on 10th street in the late 1960's and then eventually moved down to frontier park. She was a charter member of the

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Sunflower Chapter, helping to start the Chapter with Irene Rupp Leiker and a few others in 1979.

Leona was co-director of a 3 hour long pageant that was present at Gross Memorial Coliseum on the Fort Hays State University Campus in the summer of 1976 as one of the events for the 100th year anniversary of the Volga Germans arriving in Ellis County, Kansas. She organized the Hochzeitspieler's in the '80's at first to play for her and her husband's anniversary and eventually the band developed into the Ed Pfeifer band. Playing the old-time Ellis County Volga German music.

She was instrumental in organizing the



Ellis County Volga German Men's Choir, which was also organized to sing for the Pfeifer's wedding anniversary and went on to sing many wedding, Anniversary and funeral Masses. Singing the old folklore songs and hymns that were brought over from the old country. This group would eventually make their only Cassette and later CD at the time, "14 Favorites of the Volga German Men's Choir." This choir would eventually disband after many of its members were aging and no longer able to participate.

Leona served on the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia's Board of Directors for many years giving lectures at the annual Convention and local Kansas Round-Up. In fact, one of her lectures

turned into a video that was produced in Ellis County called "Eine Hochzeit in Ellis County, 1881. A detailed account of a couple becoming "engaged" and getting married with all the customs of the Germans from Russia, including the original dialect that was used in the area at the time. These customs are preserved now for all time thanks to Leona in getting the wedding skit recorded, which is still available for sale through AHSGR.

She continued to help people with their questions on the Volga Germans as well as translate letters from people who, at one time, still have relatives over in the old country still trying to find relatives. She gave many presentations for the Sunflower Chapter and remained active as long as she could until moving to Oklahoma to be close to her only child, Carol.

Leona was instrumental in having Pete Felten make a duplicate copy of his stature, the Immigrant German Family, which is located across the St. Fidelis Basilica in Victoria, Kansas. She contacted the Al Hertel family and made arrangements to have it shipped to Lincoln, Nebraska and set at the Headquarters of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia.

For those who didn't know her, she was a short woman who could hold her own with anyone. She spoke the old dialect fluently with the accent of our people. Through her, our history will be passed on to the next generation. With her death we lose another person who was the direct link to the many immigrants who came here and shared their personal stories. Stories of the old country with all the customs not being filtered through another generation, but directly from the source.

As in the words of John F. Kennedy, "The Torch has been passed from this generation to the next.....", let our generation continue to pass down the heritage to the next generation so that those who came before us will never be forgotten the folklore, the music, the cooking, the customs of Unser Leute.

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

Kevin Rupp

January arrived with the bitterness of the cold wind and snow and in the words of our faithful Ellis County Capuchins, Sister death descended once again upon our chapter and took one of our pillars. As you read in the beginning of this newsletter, Leona Pfeifer passed this January. For me, one who has known her most all my life, it was like losing a family relative. Not only that, but one of my old University teachers from back in the 1980's where I probably drove her crazy learning German. Not to turn this into another eulogy about her life as I tried to do in our main article, I will just say, we lost a dear friend who only wanted to pass on the heritage of our people.....usually on her own terms!

As we have done with a number of our deceased members we will look into purchasing a brick at AHSGR and have her name engraved on it and placed in the memorial patio that sits underneath the immigrant family. If she already has a brick then the board will come up with another way to honor our deceased member.

Plans are underway now for our Oktober Heritage Fest day on Saturday, October 12th at the old Kennedy School Building in Hays. The day long event will take the pace of our yearly Round-Up. So far, we are planning a day long event with speaker Brent Mai, with a few side speakers to add to the pot. Lunch will be on your own and the evening will conclude with a German Dinner and a dance. Watch this newsletter, www.sunflowerchapterofahsgr.net or www.volgagerman.net for more information. We hope to really promote this and build our membership.

Sunday, March 3rd is our Fasnacht meeting. Jerry Braun has offered to present that days program on the "Dolcette". If you are not familiar with this word, then you need to be sure to attend our meeting! This meeting will be potluck, so we ask all members to please bring your favorite food to share. As usual, we will open at 11:30am, with the potluck starting about noon. The regular meeting and program will follow. Bring a friend...better yet, bring a prospective member!!!

I sent out another reminder to those who have not paid their 2019 dues, so please do so ASAP to continue receiving your information. See me at the meeting if you are not sure when your membership expires since many no longer expire at the end of the year.

We really like to hear from our membership what you would like as a program. AHSGR is now a packet of DVD's from the 2018 convention with many good speakers, perhaps we could watch one of the sessions if you are interested sometime. Give us your thoughts and suggestions. AND....I am always needing ideas for this newsletter. Please share!

See you on Sunday, March 3rd!

Kevin

