Alma Dobberfuhl Dobbert died in 2008. This August, she will add new books to the George R. White Library & Learning Center.

Concordia's librarian for 35 years, Alma Dobberfuhl Dobbert knew the value of books. Her tireless efforts inspired students and brought the library to life. To help expand the library's collection and resources, she created a library endowment through her estate plan. Thanks to Mrs. Dobberfuhl Dobbert and her passion for learning, Concordia's next generation of students will have the resources to reach their full potential.

What is your passion? Create your own legacy of giving that inspires others.

If you would like to contribute to the Dobberfuhl Endowment or establish one of your own, call Erinn DeGroot at 1-800-752-4736 or email luminary@cu-portland.edu. For more information, visit our website at www.cu-portland.edu/estates.
Just a Sampling. This document features an excerpt from the
Concordia Connection, Concordia University-Portland's alumni magazine,
published during the Summer of 2009. To view the entire Summer issue,
please visit www.cu-portland.edu/alumni/news/the_connection.cfm

A Long, Fascinating Journey. Learn how the unique
history of the Volga Germans has made its mark on the CU campus and
neighborhood, and get inspired to trace your own family's history.
A LONG, FASCINATING JOURNEY:

THE STORY OF THE VOLGA GERMANS AND HOW THEIR HISTORY IS NOW PRESERVED AT CONCORDIA.

by Brent Mai

At the invitation of Catherine the Great (1729-1796), more than 30,000 colonists, primarily from the central region of present-day Germany, founded 106 colonies along the unsettled Russian steppe near the banks of the Volga River between 1764 and 1772. The early settlers were drawn to the area by Catherine’s promise to rid them of the hardships that had befallen war-ravaged Central Europe for most of the preceding century. Among other things, she promised them religious freedom, exemption from military conscription, and 30 years without taxes.

The journey from Western Europe to the Volga was arduous. Of the nine existing transport lists, researchers have determined that 16.9 percent of those who started the trek in Oranienbaum, a town just west of St. Petersburg, died en route. Those who did reach the steppes along the lower Volga River found that the land was inhospitable, and many were not prepared for an agrarian lifestyle. Pugachev’s marauding bands destroyed several colonies in 1773-74, and nomadic tribes took more than 1,200 colonists into captivity.

Despite these odds, the colonies survived and flourished. They turned the Volga German region into one of the most productive in the Russian Empire. Churches and schools were built in the colonies. Colleges and seminaries were established. Factories and mills were constructed. The original colonists and their descendants were joined in 1812 by 181 mostly German soldiers...
who had been a part of Napoleon’s Army when it invaded Russia. Beginning in 1848, a group of Mennonite colonists from West Prussia also founded several villages among the extant Volga German colonies. The increasing number of Colonists outgrew the land that had originally been allotted for them. In the late 1840s they received permission to establish “Daughter Colonies” to the south and east of the original settlements.

In 1874, the colonists’ exemption from military conscription was revoked. Many, fearful for the lives of their sons, immigrated to the United States, Canada, Argentina, and Brazil seeking the same freedoms and opportunities that had driven their ancestors to immigrate to Russia more than 100 years earlier.

Those who remained in Russia suffered tremendously. As they feared, most families had to give their sons as soldiers for the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05). Severe famine struck in 1891-92. Moreover, the Volga Germans never integrated completely into Russian society. Even in 1914 as they celebrated the 150th anniversary of the establishment of Dobrinka, the first colony, descendants of the original settlers still found themselves officially categorized as “colonist” in the Russian class system.

Many of the Volga Germans prospered financially compared to other Russians, and the early communist years were not kind to them. Thousands were labeled as kulaks (affluent independent farmers who had excessive wealth by communist standards) and were sent to labor camps or simply executed. As a result of collectivization and poor political decisions during the early Soviet Years, a famine swept the land in 1921-22. In some colonies as many as one-third of the Volga Germans perished.

In an effort to stabilize the area, on February 20, 1924, the remaining Volga German communities were incorporated into the Soviet Socialist system. But poor central planning resulted in another famine in 1931-32. Nevertheless, according to the census of 1939, there were 605,500 ethnic Germans living in the Volga German Republic. When Hitler invaded Russia in 1941, Stalin proclaimed the Volga Germans to be enemies of the state. In a decree issued on August 28, 1941, they were stripped of their citizenship and the Republic was officially abolished on September 7, 1941. Within two weeks, the cities and towns along the lower Volga were emptied of their German inhabitants. They were loaded into cattle cars with whatever they could carry and shipped to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Their homes were occupied by Ukrainians and Russians fleeing the advancing Nazi Army. A culture that had taken 177 years to develop was gone in a matter of days. The Volga German colonies were no more.

Although the original Volga German colonies no longer exist as such, it has been estimated that there are more than 70,000 Volga German descendants in Brazil, another 1.5 million in Argentina, and more than six million in the United States and Canada. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, those who had been deported to Asiatic Russia in 1941 have been allowed to emigrate. Most (over four million) have gone to Germany.
So why is there a Center for Volga German Studies at Concordia University in Portland?

The first Volga Germans to immigrate to Portland numbered 17 families. They arrived from the dry, grasshopper-infested plains of Rush and Barton Counties in Kansas in 1881. Most came originally from the Volga colonies of Schönfeld and Schönthal with one each from Neu-Yagodnaya, Brunental, and Rosenfeld. They took advantage of reduced fares being offered by the Union Pacific Railroad and came by train to San Francisco. There they boarded steamers of Henry Villard’s Oregon Steamship Company for the final leg to Portland. These hearty pioneers were followed in 1882 by a group made up of 21 families who had settled in Hitchcock County, Nebraska. They came originally from the colonies of Frank, Hussenbach, Kolb, Messer, and Walter.

Many of these early settlers, having found the forested area around Portland unsuitable for farming, moved on to the Palouse Country of east-central Washington in 1883. Those who remained settled in the small town of Albina (now the Albina Neighborhood) just across the Willamette River from Portland. Between 1888 and 1890, a considerable number of Volga Germans from the colonies of Balzer and Frank moved to Albina, followed from 1890 to 1895 by an even larger number from the colony of Norka.

Concordia’s German heritage is also shared by the Volga Germans. When Concordia University was founded in 1905, its first classes were held at Trinity Lutheran Church, then located in the heart of northeast Portland’s Volga German community. Many of Trinity’s oldest families are from the Volga German colonies of Brunental and Neu-Hussenbach.

In 2003, Concordia hired Professor Brent Mai, noted Volga German historian, as Concordia’s fourth university librarian. Professor Mai has researched Volga German history for more than 30 years. When the Center was established in 2004, he became its director. He has authored numerous books and articles documenting the immigration of the Germans to Russia in the 1760s. His interest in the socio-economic migration patterns of this unique ethnic group culminated in the publication of the complete 1798 census which details the economic and agricultural activity as well as the population of the then 101 extant colonies. More recently, he has been translating the documents relating to the censuses of the Volga German colonies in 1834 and 1857.

With such a robust historical connection and academic expertise, Concordia is the proper home for the Center for Volga German Studies.
The Center for Volga German Studies at Concordia University

In 2004, Concordia University began discussions on establishing an academic entity that would focus on the study of "all things Volga German." Research on the competitive landscape identified several other organizations, groups, and institutions involved in the study of and/or preservation of Volga German culture and heritage, but it was determined that none of them had the level of academic focus toward scholarly investigation that was intended at Concordia. The Center for Volga German Studies (CVGS) was born.

The CVGS accomplishes its stated purposes through five complimentary and inter-related components: 1) collections, 2) education, 3) publishing, 4) collaboration, and 5) clearing house.

1. COLLECTIONS: The CVGS actively collects the folklore, songs, literature, objects of art and craft that illustrate and document the style and mode of life, conditions, events and activities, forms and style of worship, and government of the Volga Germans while living in Russia as well as after emigrating to the Western Hemisphere. The CVGS collection also documents the cultural, material, and aesthetic contributions of Germans from Russia and their descendants to the culture and social order of the Western Hemisphere. These materials are acquired by bequest, purchase, gift, or accepted on loan.

2. EDUCATION: To further Concordia's educational objectives, the CVGS sponsors conferences on various aspects of Volga German history, folklore, linguistics, and culture in order to educate those interested in learning more about the Volga Germans. Undergraduate seminar-style courses are taught through the History Department of the university's College of Theology, Arts, & Sciences. Conferences and courses are held at Concordia University and other locales depending upon respective curricular objectives.

3. PUBLISHING: The CVGS makes the results of its research available by publishing papers, pamphlets, books and articles, in print or electronically. Since most of the original documentation on the Volga Germans is in German or Russian, the Center seeks to provide these resources to English-language researchers through translation.

VOLGA GERMANS BY THE NUMBERS
4. **COLLABORATION:** Many unique collections of materials relating to the Volga Germans exist elsewhere, particularly in governmental and quasi-governmental facilities outside North America. Consequently, one of the important roles of the Center is to actively seek assistance from and provide assistance to other organizations in the collection, documentation, indexing, and preservation of such materials pertaining to Volga Germans.

5. **CLEARING HOUSE:** It is not a goal of the Center to recreate collections or expertise that exists elsewhere. The Center maintains a web-based clearing house to help researchers locate materials related to the Volga Germans regardless of their location and to locate experts in Volga German history and culture. Researchers, scholars, and others knowledgeable about such materials are actively solicited for contributions to this clearing house.

Much of the material acquired to-date by the CVGS has been held in storage pending the completion of its new home in the George R. White Library & Learning Center. With the opening of the new library in August, the Center for Volga German Studies will be located on the west end of the third floor and these resources will be made available for researchers.

Critical study of distinctive cultural histories and experiences can transform our understanding of society. Creative collaboration among researchers interested in the Volga Germans and their descendants will generate a deeper appreciation of how this group has contributed profoundly to history, culture, language, politics, and faith all over the world.

Visit the CVGS website for more information. [WWW.CU-PORTLAND.EDU/CVGS](http://WWW.CU-PORTLAND.EDU/CVGS)

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**177 |** years the Germans lived along the Volga River in Russia

**30,623 |** Central Europeans who settled along the Volga River

**106 |** colonies founded (1764-1772)

**500 |** number of Volga German families living in NE Portland in 1920

**600,000 |** Volga Germans deported to Siberia in 1941

**4,000,000 |** German Russians now living in Germany

**1762-1796 |** reign of Catherine the Great, 1729-1796

**July 22, 1763 |** Second Decree inviting the Germans to settle along the Volga

**June 29, 1764 |** founding of the first colony: Dobrinka

**1874 |** first Volga Germans immigrate to the United States

**1881 |** first Volga Germans arrive in Portland

**August 28, 1941 |** dissolution of the Volga German Republic

**June 29, 2009 |** 245th Anniversary of the founding of the Volga German colonies
Notable Volga Germans

Frederick Krug (1855-1930): founder of Krug Brewing Company (Omaha, Nebraska); Ancestral colony: Dietel.
Joseph Kessler (1862-1933): Bishop of Tiraspol (Russia); Ancestral colony: Louis.
Johannes Schleuning (1879-1961): Human Rights Activist; Ancestral colony: Neu-Norka.
Henry Steinfeld (1886-1940): founder of Steinfeld Pickles; Ancestral colony: Holstein.
José Weimann Schwindt (1892-1961): Bishop of the Diocese of Santiago del Estero (Argentina); Ancestral colony: Kamenka.
Willard Schmidt (1928-2007): pitcher with the St. Louis Cardinals & Cincinnati Reds; Ancestral colony: Katharinenstadt.
Philip Anschutz (1939-): owner of Los Angeles Kings; Ancestral colony: Nieder-Monjou.
George Sauer, Jr. (1943-); wide receiver with New York Jets; Ancestral colony: Norka.
Jim Geringer (1944-); Governor of Wyoming (R) 1995-2003; Ancestral colony: Lauwe.
Pipo Pescador (1946-): Argentinean actor and children's theatre director; Ancestral colony: Galka.
Ron Schueler (1948-): pitcher with Chicago White Sox; Ancestral colony: Katharinenstadt.
Sergio Denis [born Hector Hoffmann] (1949-): Argentinean pop singer; Ancestral colony: Dehler.
Doug Schmick (1949-): co-founder of McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurants; Ancestral colony: Yadgoda Polyana.
Les Dudek (1951-): American songwriter & guitarist; Ancestral colonies: Frank & Kolb.
Joseph Werth (1952-): Bishop of the Diocese of the Transfiguration (Novosibirsk, Russia); Ancestral colony: Schönchen.
Nick Binedell (1953-): Founding Director of the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria (Johannesburg, South Africa); Ancestral colony: Nieder-Monjou.
Brian Deines (1955-): Children's book illustrator; Ancestral colony: Kratzke.
Jerry Sieb (1956-): D.C. Bureau Chief for the Wall Street Journal (taken hostage in Iran in 1987); Ancestral colony: Ober-Monjou.
Steven Dietz (1958-): American playwright; Ancestral colony: Dönhof.
Pawel Blehm (1980-): International Chess Grandmaster; Ancestral colony: Kratzke.

TIPS ON TRACING YOUR FAMILY TREE

1. Gather all of the genealogy materials you have in one place, including documents, photos, letters, the family Bible, etc.
2. Interview family members. Collect stories as well as names and dates.
3. Take notes and record what you've learned on a family tree chart to easily track your progress.
4. Focus on one surname, family, or relative at a time. This will make your search more manageable.
5. Use online resources as well as public records. If possible, visit the places your family lived and search libraries, courthouses, historical societies, and cemeteries for clues.
The Center for Volga German Studies has published Concordia University’s first books, a trilogy entitled “The Volga Flows Forever.” The author, Sigrid Weidenweber, recalls firsthand the horrific aftermath of fascism and her daring escape from behind the Iron Curtain as a young woman, leaving everything behind. Catherine, the first volume, brings to life the fascinating historical character of Catherine the Great who invited her native countrymen to settle the Russian frontier. The second volume, The Volga Germans, follows Vadim and Svetlana to the German colonies along the lower Volga River and into the lives of the Meininger family and their friends, who had settled in Norka and later move to Schaffhausen. In the third volume, From Gulag to Freedom, Weidenweber weaves her story of the Volga Germans though the hardships of collectivization and deportation during the Soviet years and brings young Katharina to join the Volga Germans, who had earlier immigrated to the San Joaquin Valley of Central California.

All three volumes are available directly from Concordia, through Amazon, or a bookstore near you. If your local bookstore does not have them in stock, ask them to contact the Center at 503-493-6460.

Further Reading Lists

To learn more about the history and culture of the Volga Germans, the following books are recommended. Most are available through the online Bookstore of the CVGS (http://cvgs.cu-portland.edu/bookstore.cfm) or in your local library.


Dietz, Jacob E. History of the Volga German Colonists. [Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 2005.]


Sallet, Richard, Russian-German Settlement in the United States. [Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1974.]


Sinner, Samuel D. The Open Wound: The Genocide of German Ethnic Minorities in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1915-1949 and Beyond. [Fargo, ND: Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Libraries, 2000.]
Make your mark on Concordia.

Buy a brick for you or a loved one on the CONCORDIA LEGACY PATHWAY. It's a gift that will last for generations and commemorate your life, or the life of a family member or friend, in a meaningful and memorable way.

A Moment in History

Concordia University's George R. White Library & Learning Center is now open. The pathway that welcomes future generations of students, neighbors, and visitors to the heart of campus features customized messages on bricks, offering a unique opportunity to make a lasting impression on the university and neighborhood community.

Alumni...
Memorialize the formative years you spent on Concordia’s campus or honor a fellow alumnus with a lasting tribute. Make your legacy an enduring part of the landscape.

Parents...
Commemorate a pivotal chapter in your graduate's life with a memorable gift that will permanently honor his or her accomplishments.

Neighbors...
Celebrate this community and what it means for you to live and thrive here with a brick that shares your connection to the Concordia neighborhood with future generations.

DID YOU KNOW?

The George R. White Library & Learning Center is 74,000 sq. ft., with double the number of volumes, state-of-the-art classrooms, faculty offices, a community meeting space, six important centers of learning, and a coffee house.

Each brick you purchase will honor Concordia's history and help pave the way for the future.

To order brick(s) visit www.cu-portland.edu/bricks or call 1-800-752-4736

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Portland, Oregon