



AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

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Renowned Historical Fiction Writer Mark Sullivan to lead keynote presentation at 53rd Annual AHSGR Convention Arrives in Greeley, Colorado Aug. 3-5

Greeley, Colorado, April 24, 2023 – Descendants and researchers of Germans from Russia will gather this summer for the 53rd Annual American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) Convention in Greeley, Colorado, where many of their ancestors farmed the sugar beet fields when they arrived in America.

The convention's theme is, "Roots of Our Heritage," and will feature renowned historical fiction writer Mark Sullivan as the keynote speaker discussing "Historical Fiction Books and Why I Feel Compelled to Write Them." He is the author of the #1 bestseller, *Beneath a Scarlet Sky*, and his book, *The Last Green Valley*, tells the story of Emil and Adeline Martel, ethnic Germans living in the area of Ukraine at the time of WWII.

AHSGR President Karen Soeken said, "Having just finished reading Mark Sullivan's book, I'm excited about hearing his keynote address. Of course, I always learn something new from the presentations and this year is no exception. I know I'll learn more about how the colonists arrived and lived in Russia, and how the history and culture of Germans from Russia are being preserved today in Germany."

Speakers for the convention include two international guests. Olga Litzenberger of the Bavarian German Russian Cultural Center (BKDR) will speak about the center in Germany. Dr. Reinhard Nachtigal will address the Protestant Church in Tsarist and Soviet Russia and German Views on Russia's War in Ukraine - a Snapshot of the Situation in Germany. Other speakers include Kara Louise Hefner, Wayne Garman, and Dr. Kris Jones. For a full list of speakers, visit https://ahsgr.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/2023-Convention-Registration-Booklet_UPDATED-2.pdf.

Convention Committee Chairperson Sue Nakaji shared, "For the history buff, taking one of the tours of Greeley and seeing the influence of our people on the local economy would be enlightening. There will be multiple presentations on history, family history research and stories, author presentations, and tips for telling your own family story, just to hint at a few."

The AHSGR Northern Colorado Chapter host committee welcomes attendees on Thursday night at Centennial Village with dinner of krautburgers, German sausage, hot German potato salad, watermelon, German chocolate cupcakes, water, and iced tea. An ensemble of Joyce Grauberger on the accordion and Brad Dietz on the violin will perform during the meal.

Lauren Brantner hosts the Welcome program featuring three speakers: Joe Amen of Western Sugar Beet Cooperative to discuss, "Roots and Beets"; Dick Wolfe, retired State Water Engineer, to cover "Roots

and Water”; and Kristen Schmidt-Rutgers, past Colorado FFA President and past National FFA Vice President, to share “Roots & the Future of Agriculture.” The welcome night will close with Brad Fitch, “The Singing Cowboy,” covering John Denver songs.

As a local chapter member, Brantner said, “We’re excited to have the convention back in Greeley, where the first convention was held in 1970. To celebrate, playwright Rick Padden will present his “Beets” play about the Prisoner of War Camp that was located between Greeley and Windsor during World War II. German prisoners were from Rommel's failed South African campaign and some of Mussolini’s Italian soldiers. Since many Colorado farm workers served in the U.S. military overseas, prisoners were used as field farm laborers. German Russian farm families loaded these prisoners on their farm trucks and took them to the sugar beet fields to work. My family picked them up from another location in Wiggins, Colorado.” The play will be held at the LINC library.

Brantner added, “Our Colorado German Russian story is not unlike other places where our ancestors settled but it looms large in the rapid growth our stoop labor furnished in this state. Germans from Russia are the second largest ethnic minority in northern Colorado.”

The German Russian history in Colorado began in 1901 when a train from Lincoln, Nebraska under the leadership of Mr. Hoff brought nine carloads of German Russian families to spend the summer working in the sugar beet fields.

German Russian families arrived at the depot in Greeley and 500 souls spent the night in the cars then emerged the next day to be connected to the farms where they worked all summer. In 1900 the state of Colorado produced 6,000 tons of beet sugar – more than Kansas and Nebraska. By 1906 153,000 tons of beet sugar were produced making Colorado the leading beet sugar producer in the country. Not long after the first trainload of laborers arrived, more sugar factories were built, and the industry flourished. After Germans from Russian settled here, they met in their homes to start two churches that are still active in Greeley, Colorado- St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran and St Paul’s Congregational. Those two churches were founded and built in the East Side Neighborhood which was built around the sugar factory location.

The convention is the place to jump start your genealogical family history as part of the AHSGR research library will be moved to the hotel where many village coordinators, fellow researchers, volunteers, and the AHSGR staff will be on hand to assist with questions.

Soeken said, “The convention provides an opportunity to establish extended family and village ties that were so important to our ancestors. At every convention, I have met people with connections to my ancestral villages or ancestral names, so for me a convention is like ‘coming home.’ And of course, people are willing to share information they have, so whatever questions an attendee might have, he/she will find answers.”

Thursday morning features Maggie Hein and Mike Meisinger with a two-part presentation targeted for the beginning researchers who need help with Germans from Russia genealogical research. This is a must attend session to start and enhance research on your German-Russian ancestors.

“The best way to learn about research is to meet lots of people and ask questions! Everyone is eager to share what they have learned whether from or about their family, the result of visiting Russia, what they have read, presentations they have heard, or others they have spoken to. Just make sure you have a way to take notes,” said Soeken.

There will also be an on-site store where you can browse the latest merchandise and publications and pick up your next great read. AHSGR hosts a quarterly book club meeting which features books available from the store.

“One of my favorite ways to learn about ‘our people’ is to visit with the convention attendees, whether it be during one of the luncheons, or just hanging out in the lobby between sessions,” Nakaji said.

Nakaji believes that the speakers, tours, and research library are only the beginning of the benefits to attend the convention. “The best advantage to attending the in-person convention is the fellowship of the people. I have made many friends and met numerous new cousins at the conventions, it is the connections you make with people.”

At the Saturday night banquet, Dr. Ken Rock wraps up the event followed by the John Stehle Jr. Dutch Hop Band who will perform Dutch Hop and Polka music. The dance will be open for the public to attend for \$10 per person at the door. A cash bar will be available.

For convention registration details, visit <https://ahsgr.org/event/2022-convention/>.

For hotel reservations, visit <https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/dengcdt-doubletree-greeley-at-lincoln-park/>.

Join AHSGR as a member and enjoy savings on registration, store purchases plus access to exclusive members only benefits such as research discounts and free access to the library, museum and the quarterly Journal and Newsletter. Check out all the details at <https://ahsgr.org/membership/>.

AHSGR is a non-profit educational organization engaged in researching the history of German who settled in the Russian Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries. This includes areas of present-day Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Moldova, Romania, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. The convention event celebrates the attendees’ German from Russia ancestors, the brave souls who answered the call of Catherine the Great and her grandson Alexander II to relocate to Russia during the late 1700s to early 1800s, and their descendants around the world. The AHSGR headquarters are located at 631 D Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

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