

# the Heimatbrief

A Newsletter Magazine of the German-Bohemian Heritage Society

**Celebrating the GBHS' 17th Year**

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*The village of Neuhausl about 1930.*

# GBHS Officers and Board Members

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# GBHS Fall Meeting Smashing Success

## Two new board directors elected

Nearly 100 members attended the GBHS fall meeting held October 13, 2001 at Turner Hall in New Ulm, MN. The business meeting was called to order by president Paul Kretsch at 5 p.m. The treasurer report was given by treasurer George Portner who reported that the GBHS is financially sound.

President Kretsch gave an overview of society's budget. He noted the society was \$1,553 under budget for the year 2000 and for the first half of 2001 the society was \$911 under budget. He explained income is derived from book sales and having volunteers staff the State Street gate for Heritagefest. The second edition of the GBHS Cookbook is selling well and a second printing order has been received. Other books of special interest to GBHS members are sold at our spring and fall general meetings and at the picnic.

The president highlighted events of this year, starting with the spring membership meeting at which New Ulm mayor, Arnold Koelpin, gave a very informative presentation.

In August, Kurt Eisen passed away and the GBHS Singers were reunited to sing at his funeral. Eisen was a charter member of the society and on the original board of directors. He also was fluent in the Bohemian dialect, having been expelled from his native Bohemia in 1946 when all German-speaking people were forced out of that country. Eisen also was a member of the singing group a number of years. A tribute to Eisen was published in the September *Heimatbrief*.

Final item of business was election of five directors. Three directors, George Portner, Patrick Eckstein, and Gerald Gulden indicated to the nominating committee that they would run for another three-year term. Peggy Tauer and Charlotte Kastanek both declined to run for another term.

The nominating committee then placed in nomination the names of Joleen Keckstein of New Ulm and Jim Mack of Lake Crystal. There were no nominations made from the floor. Bob Paulson moved and Charles Griebel seconded to close nominations and declare these five elected to three-year terms: George Portner, Patrick Eckstein, Gerald Gulden, Joleen Keckstein and Jim Mack. President Kretsch said the next board of directors meeting will be 9 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 17, in the research library. Election of officers heads that agenda.

The evening then continued with a social hour and a wonderful meal prepared by Turner Hall. Next on the agenda was a very interesting program by Don Heinrich Tolzmann.

Dr. Tolzmann came to us with very impressive credentials; Curator of the German-Americana Collection, Director of the German-American Studies Program at the University of Cincinnati, president of the Society for German-American studies. Dr. Tolzmann has also edited and published several books about New Ulm and the Sioux Uprising.

Dr. Tolzmann's talk centered around New Ulm's early history and the effect and influence early German-Bohemians had on New Ulm's early days. It was interesting to hear that many German-Bohemians made an impact on the area in their first generation while some other ethnic groups took longer to "make it". An example of this, as noted by Dr. Tolzmann, were many young German-Bohemians owning quite large farms and others owning successful businesses.

## Thank You

To Don Heinrich Tolzmann for making the long journey to shower us with your wonderful gift of knowledge. To Robert Paulson for arranging for us to hear Dr. Tolzmann. To Colleen Kretsch of Colleen's Creations for the outstanding job decorating for the event. To Pat Kretsch and LuAnn Lindmeyer for their help with decorating. To Janice Kretsch and Nicole Eckstein for working at the reception table. To Angie Portner, Peggy Tauer, and Don Brand for working on the publicity. To George Portner for working at the sales table. To president Paul Kretsch for all his work. To Don Brand for contributing to this article. To Turner Hall for the hospitality and the wonderful food. And to all those who attended. *Ed*.

*President Paul Kretsch (left) accepting a donation to the GBHS library from Don Heinrich Tolzmann.*

## **Christmas Time Around Eisenstein**

**by Josef Pscheidl**

*(taken from Glaube und Heimat, Dezember 1993, pp. 20-22. Translated/edited by Karen Hobbs)*

All around Eisenstein there was hardly any other feast in the course of a church-year that was celebrated with as many customs and traditions as the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

Advent arrived at the time when the days grew shortest and the nights became longest. It brought the time to begin preparation for the most wonderful feast of the year, the arrival of The Lord. Were there any more peaceful and or happier times at home during the course of a year? We always sensed a certain mystery about the short days and long nights of Advent when most of our activity took place in warm rooms that were dimly lit by lantern light in the evenings.

Snow covered the open fields and the evenings were very long. The short days were not so full of work like the hot summer days, and it was easy to find the time on any weekday to meditate a little. On the feast of St. Katherine we began to think less of earthly pleasures and to concentrate more on the inner joys of the season. A familiar feeling that we knew well since childhood -- a quiet longing associated with many church festivals -- was awakened by the many folklore customs and songs associated with that season. All these festivities

reminded us of the meaning of that time of year and renewed a longing for the arrival of The Redeemer in the remote villages of our Heimat hidden in the Bohemian Forest.

We practiced the beloved hymns and carols for a long time in advance and we recalled the deceased members of our households. It was as if even they were once again among us while we did our best to celebrate the sacred customs and rites of Advent in the proper manner. It was still dark as we went to church in the mornings but all of the lanterns moving slowly along were so beautiful that they changed that snow-covered lane to a place of enchantment. The church windows, too, lit up the snow around them with the candlelight that glowed within. Often it was so cold that the men would arrive with icicles in their mustaches and the kerchiefs of the women were framed with ice crystals, but no one complained of suffering even if the church were unheated. Our deep-seated faith was all we needed to be comfortable in the church.

The community gathered at the Advent Wreath, prayed as the Advent candles were lit and sang the old Advent song, "Tauet Himmel den Gerechten! Wolken regnet ihn herab!" Sundays and all during Advent the sanctuary always had a such a distinctive atmosphere when some of these very ancient songs were sung that from time to time some Christian peasants had tried to have them banned.

The four Sundays of Advent were meant to prepare the heart for the high feast when The Son of The Father is born to us. When the faithful left the church and made their way to their homes, the red light of a new dawn in the sky was like a pledge that God's light would always show the way through the darkest hours. In a way, the quiet longing that Advent evoked led to a heart filled with a special kind of peaceful joy, anticipating the joy of Christmas.

There was excitement all through the house when Advent wreath took its place of honor in the main room and the first candle was lit. In the evenings, from the beginning of Advent the "Krippenfreundes" took their tools in hand to work on a new creche or to renew an old one. As the holidays came nearer it was also necessary to start preparing the festive foods. Farmers decided which sow must be slaughtered to make the good roasts and the spicy Brittsuppe and blood and liver sausage that everyone liked so much. Children would spend time enjoying their sleds after school -- and skiing. The axes of the wood cutters were busy in the hoar-frosted forests and soon the Christmas trees began to travel towards our homes.

Centuries-old customs with renewed meaning punctuated the quiet life in our snow-covered forest villages.

"Vorweihnacht" already began with St. Andreas feastday on November 30. That was the first "Losnacht" when all single women would kick their bedsteads in hopes of learning who and when they would marry. They would kick the bedstead and say: "Bedstead, I kick thee, St. Andreas I pray thee, show me who will be my heart's true love, what he does and how he looks and how he will go to the altar with me." The young women hoped that they would then dream of their future bridegrooms. The long dark nights before the bright lights of Christmas were always filled with whispered secrets.

Sprigs taken from cherry trees on Saint Barbara's day that blossomed in the house on Christmas eve came from a very old custom and meant that good fortune and mercy would be granted the household on Christmas day. Other beautiful customs having to do with cherry trees and other trees that bloomed in the spring cut on December 4, St. Barbara's day, and brought inside to bloom by Christmas day are known throughout the Bohemian Forest and the Egerland.

A broad spectrum of wishes were tied in former times to blossoming Barbara-sprigs during Christmastime. Farmers wished for a fertile year, and mothers saw in them a promise of peaceful times around the Christmas tree. Marriageable young girls saw a good omen in the blossoms, promising a handsome fellow in her future and the young men wished for a beautiful bride.

On the eve of December 6 (St. Nicholas feast day) a visit from St. Nicholas and the devilish-looking "Krampus" brought great excitement into the house, particularly among the little ones and lazy "goldbrickers." The saint visited from house to house to learn how the children had behaved during the past year -- whether they were always obedient, whether they went to church every Sunday, whether they said their daily morning and evening prayers, and whether they studied diligently and did their household chores. Those who had nothing to hide from St. Nicholas also had nothing to fear because he was a good friend of good children. However, there were always some children who were very much afraid of Krampus, the ugly devil who traveled with St. Nicholas. His appearance caused fear and he also made threatening gestures and leapt about when a child was not able to answer questions in the right manner. These two harbingers of the Christ Child visited every house, even the most solitary farmsteads, bringing all the children of the Bohemian Forest a reminder that they must be especially good for the rest of the year.

On December 8 we celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception and the day was also known as Advents-Frauentag. On that day the Chriskindl singers visited the houses for the first time. The young girls were very busy baking Lebzelten and all kinds of sweets.

Maids and farmer's wives had a lot of cleaning and polishing to do before Christmas because the house had to shine for such an important feast. All traces of flax and wool had to be removed from the spinning wheel or spirits might appear because the night of Christmas Eve was a "Rauhnacht" -- a night when spirits had special powers. On these Rauhnachten -- or Losnachten, as they were called in the vicinity of Eisenstein -- farmers would sprinkle holy water at many points throughout the house before he went to bed. This provided a resting place for the poor souls and prevented entry by evil spirits who were free to roam on those nights. According to folk beliefs the evil spirits could also be scared away by loud noises and shots fired as well as by observing prohibitions against doing certain kinds of work. No laundry could be done on a Losnacht, nor could any linens be hung up to dry. The manure pile could not be turned and no spinning was allowed.

The holy eve finally arrived. The children could hardly be more excited than they were in anticipation of the Christ Child and the Christmas tree. Everyone fasted until noon. After that we ate mostly Schwammerlwoika and Reiberknädel. Some people fasted until evening and ate only a few spoonfuls of peas or other vegetables after midday. In the evening all the household sat about the table in the "Lord's Corner" of the main room. The farmer said grace on this day in a most solemn manner. There would be a Zwetschgenpirtschka with rolls that were broken open, Weihnachtsstriezel, baked specialties, apples and hazelnuts. The apples must not be sliced nor should the hazelnuts be inside open shells because these were bad omens, and if one's shadow could not be seen on the wall it meant that person would soon be no longer among the living. All of the livestock and other animals in the yard received their share of the specialties baked for Christmas (Weihnachtsgebak). Nor could one ignore either earth, water, wind or fire. Farmers would strike soil in the garden with a flail three times as a fertility blessing. Wells would receive small pieces of cake tossed into them so the water would not dry up. The tablecloth with the crumbs left from the meal was taken out into the yard and shaken while someone recited a few words asking for house and yard to be protected from high winds. Crumbs from the rolls also went into the blazing stove so that no harm should come to the house from fire. In many places chicken feed was put out during the Midnight Mass to insure that there would be plenty of eggs during the coming year. In some areas, before going to midnight Mass the farmers would cut an onion in half, separate the layers, put twelve pieces on a plate and sprinkle them with salt. As many of the onion pieces that had drops of moisture on them when the family returned from Mass meant that many moist months lay ahead. Those that remained dry predicted the number of dry months.

Old folklore claims that livestock in their stalls can

speak to each other on Christmas Eve. Farmers who believed in this would take feed to the stalls hoping to learn what was in store for them and when they and their wives might die.

Children had to go to bed quite early so the adults could make all the necessary preparations. They would awaken to the tinkle of the bells rung to announce that the Christ Child was making his visits. When they saw the miracle of the Christmas tree glowing with light they would be speechless with delight. While the happy children marveled at all the decorations on the tree they could hear shots being fired outside. Some of them would become upset and cry out, "They are shooting at the Christ Child!" Outside, the boys fired guns and cracked whips to scare away demons that might try to extinguish the bright lights of the holy night. This "Christkindlanschiessen" before midnight Mass is a very old custom.

After all the excitement the little ones dozed off happily, perhaps while holding a little wooden horse carved by father or a new doll made by mother. Meanwhile people began making their way to the church -- some from quite some distance. Young and old alike moved along under the arch of a sky full of stars and frosty clouds. They followed a well-worn path to the church, lighting their way with lanterns. Every family would be represented at the midnight Mass on Christmas Eve.

Christmas Day was the holiest day of the year for the farmers of the Bohemian Forest. The only work they did was what was absolutely necessary to care for their livestock. Everywhere people greeted each other with the old custom to invoke the miracle of the mystic night, "Christ the Savior is here!" Christmas Day was held so high that no one would desecrate it by visiting a tavern or restaurant -- almost everyone stayed at home all day.

During the days that followed Christmas Day, hand-carved wooden creches were on display in the churches and in many houses. They displayed the birth of the Christ Child in an extensive and colorful diorama.

On the feast of St. Stephen all the men went out to drink "die Stark." On the feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28) old folk-beliefs required doing the laundry and baking bread but restricting work to whatever one can do while remaining in the house to watch over the children.

During the holiday afternoons, the men often took the trains to go Eisstockschiessen outdoors. That was one of the most popular winter sports in the area of Eisenstein beside skiing and no man, young or old, would let even the deepest cold temperatures keep him from taking part.

Finally December 31 -- New Year's Eve (Dezember Sylvester) -- the last day of the year arrived. During that last evening of the year the farmers went to church and with a fervent "Grosser Gout, wit loden Ditch!" (O Great God we praise Thee!) they gave thanks for the year that had passed. So ended the farmer's year. The children made extravagant new year's wishes and resolutions requiring zealous effort. The deep feelings of love and peace experienced through the holidays made young and old happy well into the new year in the villages of the Bohemian Forest.

## Letters from the Homeland

submitted by Jan Lokensgard

*My Grandmother was Margaret Marz Jordan, daughter of George Marz and Barbara Sperl. Here is their story:*

George Marz, his wife, Barbara Sperl, and their younger children came to America July 31, 1903 arriving at the port in Baltimore, Maryland They traveled on the ship, "Kamnitz " which is actually misspelled and should be Chemnitz. They soon made their way to the New Ulm area to join their two oldest daughters, Mary who had immigrated in 1891 at the age of 13 and Barbara who immigrated in 1896. Mary became the wife of Andrew Mack and Barbara the wife of Anton Lindmeier. The other children who came with George and Barbara Marz to Brown County where Frank (m. Ann Uble), Katherine (m. Joseph Rummel), Anna (m. Frank Wenisch) and Margaret (m. Ray Jordan). A son, Johann Marz (b. 8 Aug 1882) did not come with the family but stayed back in the old country to marry his sweetheart. He never saw his family again.

Johann Marz's decision to stay in Bohemia lead to many hardships with WWI and WWII. We do not know the circumstances which lead to his moving away but, by 1908 he had left his homeland and lived his remaining years in East Germany. There are several letters which he wrote to his family members in New Ulm that have survived the years. They were written in the old Gothic German dialect which is difficult to translate today.

Here are two of the letters.

### **Oberarnsdorf 30.1.32**

Dear Brother and sister-in-law,

It has been many years since we heard from one another. Much has happened in World History, but not for the better. I do not know how it is by you. From what we read in the newspaper, there is also much unemployment in America. Here by us it is already 6 Million but could soon be more. There are more and more companies closing down. It looks like everything could come to a still stand. The taxes are unbearably that the German folk have to pay, and soon will be unable to pay. Prices are down but there is no buying power. There is just no money circulating even before so many were laid off. There are many farms where it is going backward because the prices for livestock is now lower than it was before the war. The smaller farms are being sold very cheap.

Dear Brother, if someone in America were to sell his land and come back to Germany or our homeland, he could buy a very good farm and would not have to go to work somewhere. The Tschechische Krone in Boehmen is very low. This is the time to invest in land and plant a truck garden and not have to search for a job.

Dear Brother, how are you doing? Last year Barbara wrote that Mother already died. I never knew that. Is the Father still living? It has been very long since I heard from him. Write to me and let me know how things are by you and if you folks are still living!

Dear Brother and sister-in-law we are all getting old. On the 8th of August I will be 50 years old. On the 7th of April is my Silver Anniversary and I will be married for 25 years! That will be a very hard day for me. Here by us is a Silver Anniversary something very big. There will be a large celebration. Most important the relatives of my wife will all be coming. Naturally you folks would be under the first to be invited. Then the family of my wife and our children and last of all the whole village is invited. The village people decorate the house with Garlands and a silver wreath which will say. Much Luck and blessings to the Silver Pair. Then we will receive cards and telegrams from all our friends and family.

Everyone who comes will bring a present. All the presents are piled on a table and everyone will come by to see what we were given. They will see from who and what each gift is. Everyone will talk about what was given and from whom. All of the relatives or friends will bring something. For sometime now I have been worried about what to say when they ask questions about my family. So dear Brother, so you understand how ashamed I will feel in front of all my friends and my wives relatives. I know that everyone has his own

problems and no one has much extra. I just do not want people talking about my family.

So dear Brother, I have a plan. Please ask each of our brothers and sisters to give just one dollar so that my wife can tell her family that we received money from America. Then is my concern taken care of. I do not think my request is too large then I am sure everyone has one dollar. If I lived near to you and could in some way help you, I would be willing to give my last shirt.

My wife does not know I am writing this letter. Please do not write and tell her that I asked for money. That sounds as if I were rude. Two years ago I put 2 thousand Marks into our house. Two weeks ago someone stole our wash off the lines in our yard. Everything is so hard for me.

Greetings from your brother Johann. I work 4 days a weeks. For six months I did not work at all so was not paid. My job is two hours away with the bicycle.

### **Oberansdorf 25.2.48**

Dear Brother and sister-in-law!

It is a great joy to tell you that your loving package, which was send on the 17th of January, 48 from America, on the 24th of February 48 arrived in our hand. It contained: margarine, ham, real coffee, fat, chocolate, cocoa, canned beans, canned fish and sardines. There was a hole in the package and one of the cans appeared to be empty. But after careful checking I was able to see that nothing was missing, the can that appeared empty contained the cocoa! After laying everything together I saw that nothing was lost. Therefore I can give the glad report that everything is there!

Dear brother and sister-in-law we were very happy over all the wonderful things. Our joy and thanks is more then we can express. I want to say one thing only - why did you buy and send such costly things to us - for us the cheap margarine is good enough. From Katharine and Barbara I also received a nice package. Maria already wrote and a package has been send but has not arrived. All packages are checked and they try to make a hole in it. Barbara did it the smart way, they put everything in a wooden box which is not easy to get into!

How things are here in Germany I will not mention since you already know about it and we can not change things by talking about them. The main thing is that we are healthy which is the very best thing in the world. That is the way things are in the world and it must continue.

The last time I was in Unterhuetten was in the year 1916 in the 1 World War and there I saw our house and all the

old friends. Now they have all been chased away and are gone - where, I have no idea. Everywhere I was well accepted. For me it was the saddest moment in my life. I saw neighbors, friends and school friends. But one thing I did not see was father, mother and my sisters and brothers. Oh.. the hurt did go away, I did come back to Oberarnsdorf from the war to my wife and children. I started to work very hard and slowly worked my way up. Thanks to my wife, who went with me through thick and thin, we were able to insure ourselves a nice life. The 2nd World War came and took everything we had in the bank - not even one Pfennig was seen again. But we had to overcome that too. I am, thank God, healthy and life must go on again.

My dear brother and sister-in-law I wish you each health, luck and that things go well and I mention your names to my family with heartfelt thanks for the package. Our joy was great.

Please write us soon and let us know how you are doing. I hope you are all healthy -which is my heartfelt wish for you.

Johann Maerz  
Milda Maerz  
Address: Johann Maerz  
Oberansdorf Altenburg ueber Land  
Thuringen  
Deutschland 15

Submitted by Jan Jordan Lokensgard

## Our Reader Write . . .

I was so delighted to see that someone is interested in Reichenberg (*referring to the Reichenberg article in the September issue of the "Heimatbrief"*). My family came from that area in 1854 and so far I have not found anyone researching that area. I sure would like to make contact with anyone researching the Reichenberg area that has family that came from there, either early or with the permanent evacuation period.

Thanks again for the article and to Karen Hobbs for the translation.

Lee Langsted, Blaine WA  
langsted6@home.com

## GBHS Rootsweb Electronic Mailing List

*Taken from the GBHS Rootsweb Electronic Mailing list at [www.rootsweb.com/~gbhs/](http://www.rootsweb.com/~gbhs/)*

### Bohemian Census

Many noble landlords kept their own census records of the serfs and freemen who lived in their dominions. These very old records list every member of a household and often specify just what they owed the landlord (in terms of cash and produce payments or work-Robot for all serfs, taxes and rents for freemen) until 1848. There are some very good examples of this type of census in the book "Heimat im Boehmen" by Dr. Karl Stitch. There is a copy of the book at the GBHS research center in New Ulm, MN. The printed transcriptions of old handwritten records give typical "contents formulas" for understanding what these old records contain.

The first "national" Bohemian Census, called a Seelenbeschreibung, took place during the 1760s and its main purpose was to identify the men who were eligible for conscription. Local Pastors compiled the conscription rolls from parish records at first -- the only vital records kept in Bohemia and Moravia until 1938. They used what they knew about each family's circumstances before they put a man's name on the roll. The people generally cooperated with the conscription during that period because they trusted the pastors to be fair.

Government bureaucrats began to work with the pastors and slowly eased them out of the selection process. The people did not trust government bureaucrats and began to resist conscription more than they ever had in the past. In the 1780s Joseph II lifted the rule that bound serfs to the land and from that time on they could leave the area ruled by their noble landlord without his permission. By the turn of the century (1800) recruiters working with conscription rolls compiled from census data found that 20,000 men on those rolls had simply disappeared from their place of residence.

In 1770 there was a conscription census during which all houses were numbered for the first time. There were one or more re-numberings before the end of the 19th century.

Each Austrian regiment had to determine its own recruits within the rules for conscription and they had to maintain their own conscription rolls with names of eligible men in each company recruiting district. A company captain was usually responsible for gathering the information for these rolls. His recruiting team would visit the places in his company district every so often to accomplish that or they might just work from census rolls provided by district bureaucrats. A conscription lottery established in the mid-nineteenth century gave each community a recruiting quota which they could fill in any manner they wished. After they had emptied their jails and poorhouse's and gathered up their mental defectives they would give numbers to all other men on the "official" conscription rolls. A random drawing determined who else would have to serve. Men with lucky numbers would sell their numbers to the not-so-lucky and serve in their places.

Another type of census undertaken by the imperial Habsburg government were the various tax rolls compiled from time to time. These rolls did not list all of the people in a community, they only gave the family names of those who had enough property to pay taxes and the property each one owned. They are a very good quick reference for how long a given family may have lived in a certain area but they do not account for the families who were there and did not pay taxes.

The tax rolls from 1544 and 1620 are called the "Berni registriky z roku 1544 a 1620", those for 1653-54 are called Berni Ruly. (There were additional tax surveys in 1683-84, 1718, 1746 and 1792 to mention a few). A number of these books are available on microfilm from the LDS.

The books of tax rolls available at the LDS can save a lot of time and trouble because researching tax rolls from published sources means it is not necessary to deal with reading old handwriting. Many of these books are also indexed.

Searching for family surnames in old tax or census

requires recognition of sound-alike spellings. Do not expect to find a modern version of ancestral surnames in those rolls. Even nineteenth century U.S. Census records have varied spellings of the same name.

Around 1860 local county authorities were made responsible for maintaining conscription rolls and county courthouses began to maintain vital records for that purpose. These were not like the "official" vital records that were later maintained by the State of Czechoslovakia (after 1938). They were kept according to a formula established by each county for the purpose of maintaining conscription rolls.

Karen Hobbs

## Memorials In Memory of . . . .

### **Kurt Eisen**

from Marlene Domeier, Mariann Tremel,  
Sylvester & Marlys Seifert, Donald & Mertle Brand,  
Jerry & Shirleen Gulden, John & Erika Fritsche,  
Paul & Janice Kretsch, Bill & Dianne Embacher,  
George & Angie Portner, Dan & Trudy Beranek,  
Robert & Dorothy Paulson, Kurt Eisen Family

### **Leonard Portner**

from Pat & Nicole Eckstein, Bill & Dianne Embacher,  
Dan & Trudy Beranek, Paul & Janice Kretsch,  
Jerry & Shirleen Gulden, George & Angie Portner

### **Herb Tauer**

from Paul & Janice Kretsch

## Correction

For those of you keeping track of our newsletters there is a correction to the front page of the September 2001 issue. The issue number reads Vol. XII No. 2. It should read Vol. XII No. 3.

## 2002 Dues

This is a reminder that 2002 dues are due by December 31. If you have not yet paid please do so now. If you are unsure of your membership status just check the mailing label on the back page of this newsletter. Dues are \$15.00 per year. You can send a check to GBHS, P.O. Box 822, New Ulm, MN., 56073. Thank you.

## Give A Membership For Christmas

Stuck on what to give that special person for Christmas? How about a gift membership to the German-Bohemian Heritage Society. For only \$15.00 your gift will give all year long and at the same time help the GBHS continue it's crusade to preserve our very fragile German-Bohemian heritage and culture. Please think of us when you plan your Christmas giving.

## Books and Family Histories Needed

The GBHS is accepting books and family histories for the GBHS Research Library. The most wanted books are those that are relevant to the German-Bohemian history and culture including village histories, "heimat books", photo books and other printed material.

If you have done research on your family please consider sending the GBHS a copy even if your research isn't completed. Family group sheets, family pedigrees, computer printouts, etc., have proven very valuable to other researchers visiting our research library.

## Wider Is Better or In Search of Bohemian Dumplings

28 August - 10 September 1998

*by L.J. Swendner*

The Clerk motioned me to the back of the counter. "If your date is correct, you'll find the record in that book", pointing to a thick, leather-bound document holder high on a shelf. In my former career with the U.S. Government, I had frequently encountered similar rural County Recorder's Office filing configurations and knew how to proceed. I stepped behind the counter, carefully removed book, and headed towards a vacant table set up for the document examination purpose.

With shaking hands I opened the book to the Index. I followed down the list with my finger to those indicating the letter "G". And, THERE IT WAS - GAERTH! To verify, I cross-checked by the entry for the name of his spouse. It too matched! I slumped in my chair. A feeling of anti-climatic elation swept through me. I had in less than 5 minutes resolved a problem of petty bureaucratic vacillation that had created for me one of those "brick walls" encountered in genealogical researching for several years! I had attempted to secure this SAME information through the U.S. Mail and had been rebuffed by differing mail addresses and form revisions. And now I had it - my version of the Holy Grail! I had his father's name, his mother's maiden name and his birth village in Bohemia. Everything - or so I thought!

While visiting St. Paul, MN, from Auburn, CA, for a high school reunion, I decided to gamble on making the long drive to Wabash County, located in northern Wisconsin, so as to confront the office that had stalled my search for so many years. And, it was a gamble too, having as it's basis a hunch. But, having seen other documents of this nature issued by the state of Wisconsin, I knew that if successful I would gain much valuable genealogical information. The record of my paternal heritage had been lost with the death of my grandmother fifty-six years earlier

My father had narrowed it down by saying his parents had originally come from either Germany, Austria, Hungary or Bohemia! As it turned out, the sovereignty of the general area reflected his confusion and depended on the specific date being referred to. His parents shared little of their homeland details, and that which they did was in the form of verbal stories which contained merely partial facts and several misleading clues. The clues caused much confusion and resulted in years of lost

time tracing their basis.

Many years ago I had been told that my paternal grandmother had a brother who owned a bakery in the small Wisconsin town of Cumberland. I located a George Gaerth (who was a baker) on a census report living in that city which included his family members. The time frame suggested to me that he had met and married a woman from the same general area (county), and that the county records could possibly yield the vital data I disparately wanted. I was seeking marriage documents for he and his wife hoping it would lead to his birth place and that of his siblings.

My "hunch" had paid off - with limitations.

The above mentioned village location in Bohemia had finally specifically pinpointed a village name. After futilely attempting to locate the village on a map, I was introduced to the common practice of phonetically spelling by a recording clerk, or that of a word spoken by a person not having full command of the English language, and recorded it as it sounded !! In MY situation, the name "Neuhausl" was recorded as "NEWHANSEL".

I now sought out the assistance of the research section of the German-Bohemian Heritage Society, chaired by Mr. Robert Paulson. I was directed to a person living in Germany who had knowledge of this area, Mr. Robert Fröetschl. Robert used his talents to link the English recorded surname "Gaerth", to that of the German-spelled name "Garth". The family had a documented history in the Kreis (or District) of Tachau and within the village of "Neuhausl", which became "Nove Domky" under Czechoslovakian authority. At this point it should be pointed out that the village locality is defined as being within the Sudetenland, an area contiguous to the German State of Bavaria and heavily populated by ethnic Germans. All data that I had, verified this village as the birth place of my paternal grandmother and the first step was now completed. All that was left was the simple task of finding the birth village of my paternal grandfather, whom all stories suggested he had lived nearby.

The next series of events took place more than a year prior to this find and involve the application of "hunch's (and luck) , which are the result which reflects the leading of my personal life as a "straight arrow". In the initial stages of my paternal heritage search, I had employed an extreme "hunch", and established correspondence with a German Medical Doctor whose surname was an obvious variant of mine - Swendner = Gschwendtner. Doctor Gschwendtner and I exchanged letters and information for several years of fruitlessly attempting to establish a link. We routinely exchanged items that could possibly aid in our attempts to find that

link. The major fact that we did establish was that our surnames (or some variant) were of German origin, and not Bohemian/Czech. This fact lent credence to a German marriage to a Bohemian in the Sudetenland. It appeared that the pieces were beginning to fit together. All I needed was a German having a surname similar to mine who lived near Neuhausl. This seemed to be very simple just "Czech" the Archives and or Church Parishes in this immediate area for my grandfathers known birth date. NOT! Several years and many \$\$\$ later I STILL HAD NO RESULTS!

Enter another "hunch". About the time that I had began corresponding with the German Doctor, I had also begun to correspond with a woman in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I had found a wedding announcement apparently left by my mother on one of her infrequent visits to California, from Minnesota. I don't recall her ever mentioning anything about it, but it did cause me to recall some vague mention years ago about how my paternal surname may have been some possible spelling as "Gerschwender", or something similar. The woman's maiden name on the wedding announcement was "Gschwendner". In our following correspondence, she mentioned how information was exchanged between our mothers (her mother & mine). Much of it of the type that only related persons would "share". I began to suspect that our grandfathers were closely related and all I had to do was find a means to establish the relationship. "Alice" didn't have much information to share. Her grandparents were equally quiet about their origins, but she did have a marriage and birth date for her grandfather. Using this information, I requested a marriage certificate from the State of WI on that date for those individuals.

Again, the detailed records collected by the State of Wisconsin were of value. And again, the "phonetic recording" of names and places played a significant role. I was able to secure a document in which the date matched a WIDE RANGE of variant spellings of "Gschwendner". Her grandfather's birth place (in Germany) received the "phonetic recording" treatment also. As a matter mostly of habit, I forwarded a copy to Dr. Gschwendtner.

Several months before I sent this information to the Doctor in Germany, I discovered that the German-Bohemian Heritage Society had tentatively scheduled a guided tour of this area. I signed on immediately. When subsequently the tour was canceled, I had become so keyed into visiting the area that I elected to make the trip alone. After all, I knew my grandmother's birth place and possibly a visit to the area would reveal my grandfather's site. So, I purchased an airplane ticket and had begun to assemble the needed supplies for a two week visit.

Twelve days before my plane left for Europe, I received a letter from Doctor Josef Gschwendtner. The letter contained only two sheets of paper. They were written in the German language (which I am not skilled in reading). One sheet was obviously an Archive Church Record of the birth of two separate male children of the same parents. It didn't take a genius to discover that the birth date for one (Georg Gschwendtner) matched the date provided for the Wisconsin woman's grandfather, and the other matched the known date for my grandfather! His name was recorded in the Latin form as Laurentius Gschwendtner. The documents clearly provided the correct European surname spelling and provided what had been a major obstacle to all my previous search efforts. **THEY WERE BROTHERS!!!** Very interestingly, the Doctor & I shared identical surname spelling.

The Archives in Munich were relatively close to the home of the German Doctor, who lived in the suburb of Grosshesselohe. The Church Record had also listed the village where they were born and the names of the parents. The Doctor also knew that the Archives in Munich held the church records for the city shown on the wedding certificate from Wisconsin that I had sent him. He had recognized the phonetic misspelling and had corrected it. The Doctor had then taken it upon himself to make the short trip into downtown Munich and acquire copies from the Archives. The second sheet contained a Genealogical Graph of the Gschwendtner's back to the early 1700's! It contained names, dates and places. Another "Holy Grail". I now had the birth sites of both my paternal grandparents, an airplane ticket to Europe and the basis for resolving the many years of mystery surrounding my paternal heritage. It became vividly clear that the judicious use of hunch's and the pursuit of information concerning persons other than a specific ancestor would lead to destruction of the "brick wall".

The birth village of my grandfather was relatively close to the Franz Josef International Airport in Munich, Germany, where I would arrive. I began a frantic e-mail exchange with the individual Mr. Robert Paulson had introduced me to, via the "net" - Mr. Robert Fröetschl. It was finally agreed that I would meet with Robert Fröetschl and the Doctor at the airport, and we would travel by vehicle to the village of Leitzach, Bavaria where I would see and walk on the ground where my grandfather had been born over 130 years ago!

The subsequent two weeks in Europe were filled with visiting the Churches in which my grandparents had been baptized, photographing the sites of their birth places, finding and photographing the tombstone of my great grandfather in Neuhäusl and consuming a GENUINE Bohemian dumpling in Neuhäusl! I also spent time in the archives in Munich and even three days at

the Pilzn Achieves in The Republic of Czechoslovakia. During this time I additionally spent two days at a cousin's house who lived in an area contiguous to Austria, and we visited Salzburg, Austria and nearby Berchtesgaden, Germany. I also attended a two day celebration of the early Bavarians filled with song and dance of the period. The second day of the celebration included a "greetings speech" by Otto von Habsberg, grandson of the Archduke of Austria. Through Robert Fröetschl's brother, Oswald, I was introduced and shook hands with Otto! The day continued with an annual rite of the gathering of former residents of the Sudetenland, and their descendants. During this time I met another cousin!

This story of my successfully overcoming a seemingly "genealogical brick wall" can be attributed to two facets:

1) The knowledge, skill and support of the research department of the German-Bohemian Heritage Society. Through Mr. Paulson's aid, I was put in touch with an English speaking German whose skills, knowledge, experience, and the unselfish sharing of these made my "visit" one which can be truly treasured only by an individual who has spent many years in an aimless genealogical abyss!

2) The recognition that a direct search for a specific ancestor can be **WIDENED** in parameters so as to overcome dead ends! This widened search must include careful examination of common phonetic spelling errors, the use and recognition of the skills of the experienced, established researchers AND the application of judicious "hunch's"

I rest my case!

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## **Weihnachtsterien 1932**

# Weihnachtsterien 1932

## (Christmas Vacation 1932)

When I was 12 years old our teacher gave us the task to memorize all the times tables as our homework during Christmas vacation. Since I enjoyed schoolwork and I was a quick study I began to work on the task on the feast of St. Stephen. That same day father came up with a project for us.

Father was a forester in the prince's forest and entitled him to 15 square meters of firewood every year. The wood was already harvested in the forest heights above our village and only waited for enough snow so it could be transported. There was now enough snow and father had packed a track from the wood pile to the little road that led to the main village road. We hitched two cows to our big sleigh and prepared to go gather the firewood. Father explained that there was a frozen brook along the way that we would have difficulty crossing with a full load because he did not have the strength to pull the cows and the sleigh across the icy surface. He said we would have to unload some of the wood, cross the brook, unload the rest and return for the remainder. I was only a novice at driving the sleigh and the only help I could give would be to keep the reins tight and to set the brake on his signal. He eyed me seriously and explained exactly what I should do. I stared back at him, smiled and nodded but all the while I was concentrating on reciting my times tables while we were underway. Father agreed that I could recite and the matter was decided.

Mother made us a nourishing breakfast of well-buttered potato cakes and coffee and after we ate father pulled on his "Wastln" - sturdy shoes made by our shoemaker, Herr Wastl - and then drew his high snow boots over them. He tucked his heavy homespun wool and flax trousers down inside the boots. A very serviceable warm hat, mittens and vest knitted from the wool of our own sheep finished his outfit. I also put on warm clothing because the forecast was for a clear day with a hard frost.

We left home about daybreak, with a big chunk of bread in our bag. Along the route father tested me over and over again with the times tables I already know. When I started to recite the tables for 11, 12, 13 and 15 he seemed a bit confused but we continued. After about a half hour we came to a place where trees had been cut and the logs were stacked up. After that the route was all uphill. He pulled while I pushed the sleigh so the cows could move along a little easier to the end of the stacked wood. Once we stopped I helped him to load the firewood and then took a place standing on the runners at the back of the sleigh. Near the brook, he put a wide leather belt around my breast and had me pull in tandem

in front of him and the cows and with our united strength we managed to get over the embankment with the sleigh. When we arrived at the Strassl (little road) at the edge of the forest I helped to unload and then we headed back uphill again.

We made the trip to the wood pile three times that day and then trotted back home. I recited the next times table with each new trip, going over larger and larger numbers. By early afternoon we stopped hauling, stomped and brushed the snow from our clothes and went into the house. Mother set a good hot meal on the table for us. The tiled stove radiated comfortable heat and we were glad to rest and quite content. During the next five days we hauled all of the wood down to the Strassl, and I mastered all of the big-number times tables with father's help. Christmas vacation was over and school started again on January 2.

Back then I automatically assumed that my father, a simple man who had only had seven years in school, knew everything necessary to help me learn all the times tables. Today I know better. Now that I am almost 75 years old I wonder if I could still recite those tables as surely as I did back then. I think I will try it right now!!

Anna Kangler  
Glaube und Hiemat Feb 1995  
Translated/edited by Karen Hobbs

## Christmas Special

Christmas is a season of fun, family, giving, worship, food, and music. This year's GBHS Christmas special will include two of those special holiday treasures - food and music. And at a special price of only \$20.00. The Christmas special includes the "Duetsch-Böhmische Küche" First Edition cookbook, and one each of the German-Bohemian Heritage Singers cassette tapes "Preserving the Heritage" vol. 1 and 2. - all for only \$20.00 including tax and postage. That's a \$8.00 savings! To order send with a check to: GBHS, P.O. Box 822, New Ulm, MN 56073. Order as many Christmas Specials as you want. Please order early to insure delivery before Christmas.

# History For Sale

## **German-Bohemians - The Quiet**

**Immigrants** by La Vern Rippley & Robert Paulson  
A “must have” book for researchers. Over ten years in the making. Fully researched. Nine chapters describing our German-Bohemian ancestors life in the homeland, the journey to America and life in their new-found homes. Customs, traditions, music, heritage and more. Over 150 photographs. Hard cover, 279 pages . . . \$25.90

## **One Hundred Tales from Sudetenland**

Translated and Edited by Karen Hobbs  
One hundred folk tales (fairy tales) translated from the original German text *Hundert Sagen aus den Sudetenländern* by Josef Rotter, 1952. A wonderful insight into the stories our ancestors told for generations. Ghosts, goblins, magic, witches, giants, dragons, and more. The only published collection of German-Bohemian folklore in English. Soft cover, 197 pages. . . \$14.00

## **Duetsch-Böhmische Küche, First Edition**

A German-Bohemian Cookbook. Dozens of authentic German and German-Bohemian recipes.

Ring bound, soft cover, 88 pages of recipes. . . . . \$9.00

## **Duetsch-Böhmische Küche, ‘Gut Essen’**

**Cookbook, Second Edition** More authentic recipes plus a twist that you will not find in other cookbooks.

Historical memories with six Menu Suggestions, Heritage items, and Meals; Second section: Soup, Salad & Vegetables, Kraut, & Dumplings; Third section: Meat, Backereie, & Desserts. Ringbound, soft cover. . . . \$12.00

## **The Whoopee John Wilfahrt Dance Band, His Bohemian-German Roots**

by LaVern J. Rippley. . . . . \$6.00

## **German-Bohemian Immigrant Monument Book**

A souvenir booklet of the monument dedication by the GBHS with early history of the organization. . \$5.00

## Music

**“German-Bohemian Heritage Singers, Preserving the Heritage”** cassette tape. A wonderful array of German and German-Bohemian dialect songs . . . \$9.00

**“Preserving the Heritage II”** cassette tape. An encore performance features even more toe tapping and heart warming songs in the German and German-Bohemian flavor. Add it to your collection today \$10.00

All prices (U.S. Funds Only Please) include sales tax and postage . If you wish to order any of these items, send a check payable to GBHS and mail it with your request to: GBHS, P.O. Box 822, New Ulm, MN, 56073-0822

The board of directors of the GBHS wish to extend to you and your families the very best for this Holiday Season and to thank you in the most heartfelt way for your support this past year. God Bless America!

# Join Us

**Membership Form For The German-Bohemian Heritage Society  
Family Membership \$15.00 per Year in the U.S. or Foreign Countries  
(Family membership includes those living in the same household)**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone#** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please list surnames you are researching including geographical locations and/or villages. (Optional)**

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