



RESEARCHING OUR GERMAN ROOTS IN POLAND AND THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

SGGEE CONVENTION 2015

GATINEAU, QUEBEC, CANADA

The year 2015 is historically important for the ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe, and our convention program takes note.

It was 100 years ago that Volhynian Germans endured exile as Russia cleared its western borderlands in the World War I battles with Germany. And 70 years ago, in 1945, ethnic Germans rushed west to escape the oncoming Soviet army. Tens of thousands died in the fighting and confusion as World War II came to its end.

Here is an alphabetical listing of the SGGEE convention speakers; the schedule is provided on a separate form. We thank all our speakers for sharing their expertise with convention attendees.

◆ Edie Adam



Edie is a first-generation American who grew up hearing the stories of her immigrant family. Her father is the Volhynian connection; mother's family lived around the Baltic. And the extended family ranges as far east as the Volga and everywhere in between.

Her Adam ancestors came from Poland to Volhynia as early as the 1840s and left around the time of World War I for a German village near Bryansk in Russia. In World War II, they made the trip in reverse as the Nazis resettled ethnic Germans around Eastern Europe. The surviving family emigrated to the United States in 1952.

Edie has participated in several record extraction projects for SGGEE and currently serves on the board of directors. She works as an IT analyst for a media company after a long career as a journalist.

Program: *An Anaconda in Volhynia? Germans in South America.* While most of us are familiar with the immigration of Germans to North America, many also sought new lives in South America, particularly Argentina and Brazil.

Edie will provide a brief introduction to a new documentary about Germans from Russia that covers their experiences in South America. The film is the latest from Prairie Public Television (www.prairiepublic.org) in North Dakota, and SGGEE members were helpful in the initial research and filming.

◆ Richard Benert



A descendant of Volhynian Germans on both sides of his family, Richard Benert grew up in St. Paul, Minn., and earned his Ph.D. in history from the University of Minnesota. He taught at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania before switching gears and becoming a harpsichord builder until his retirement in 2001.

He has been a member of SGGEE since its inception and has contributed articles to the SGGEE Journal.

Program: *Remembering the Deportation of 1915.* The expulsion of ethnic Germans from the warfront zones in 1915 has raised many questions about the motivations and goals of the Russian government in carrying out this inhumane population transfer. No less compelling has been curiosity about the problems faced by the exiles in "inner Russia" and how, and to what extent, they managed to cope.

In this centennial year of the event, we pay these victims of war and hatred the respect they deserve for their suffering and their courage in finding ways to live through it, acknowledging also those who gave them help along the way.

◆ Karl Krueger



Karl is the youngest sibling and only US-born member of his family. The birthplaces of his older siblings trace a historical trail starting near Lublin, Poland, to Warthegau and then into West Germany within 20-30 kilometers of the East German border.

Prior to this all his ancestors had lived in Russian Poland since the very early 1800s and by 1870 they all had settled near Lublin. Although the action of EWZ had provided his family with much of this genealogical data, giving Karl a great head start, it was his desire to dig deeper that led him to SGGEE where Sigrid Pohl Perry and he shortly discovered they were 3rd

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cousins. Their backgrounds are so similar and the research projects they undertook naturally involved cooperation between them and other “Lublinites.” His research has also brought him in contact with previously unknown 3rd, 4th, and 5th cousins, the latter of which includes a close friend of his in Maryland since 1981, only discovering this surprising relationship about seven years ago.

Since becoming a member of SGGEE in 2003 Karl has led an EWZ extraction project for Germans in the Lublin area that is deposited in the MPD, headed the indexing of the Lublin Digital Archive and is the current SGGEE webmaster.

Karl and wife Brenda have two sons but are empty nesters living in Gaithersburg, Md. He works at the National Cancer Institute administrating programs attempting to achieve early detection of cancer.

Program: *EWZ: What is it, will it help my genealogical research, and how do I access and understand these records?* Karl will cover the origin of EWZ records, what types of information they contain, where they are currently located and how they can be accessed. If you have relatives who lived in Eastern Europe just before and during World War II, including distant relatives you may know little about, EWZ records may contain valuable information to give you new insights into their past.

This presentation will give you an understanding of who can be found in EWZ, how to interpret these records, various online database resources containing EWZ data and how you can research these records at either your FHL or the National Archives near Washington DC.

◆ Sigrid Pohl Perry



Sigrid Pohl Perry was born in Wedel, Germany, to a family whose ancestors lived in the Lublin, Poland, area for almost a century before being resettled to the Warthegau region in 1940 and Hamburg in 1945.

Her immediate family immigrated to Illinois in 1952, while other members of the clan homesteaded on the Alberta prairie or remained in Germany.

Sigrid has worked with archives and special collections at Northwestern University Library since completing her Ph.D. in medieval English literature in 1981.

A member of SGGEE since 2003, Sigrid learned Cyrillic to decipher parish records found in Lublin’s Trinity

Evangelical Church. Actively involved in the Lublin Project, she has given several presentations on deciphering Cyrillic records at SGGEE conventions.

Sigrid and husband Philip live in Evanston, Ill.; they have two adult children and extensive virtual villages.

Program: *Flight to a New Heimat: Eastern European Germans 1940-1955.* Ethnic Germans living in Poland, Volhynia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe were forced by the Nazis to leave their traditional homelands from 1940-1942. They fled from the advance of the Russian army in 1945 and found themselves treated as displaced refugees in Germany when World War II ended.

Many chose immigration to countries including Canada and the USA when help from the United Nations and various religious and social organizations made that possible between 1948 and 1952.

Sigrid will review the historical events and briefly describe the experience of these immigrants which include her immediate family.

◆ Shirley-Ann Pyefinch



Shirley-Ann Pyefinch has served since 2005 as the director of the Ottawa Ontario Stake Family History Centre for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She has researched her family history for more than 38 years and has spoken about family history research and preservation.

She co-hosts the Pyefinch family history website with her husband, and is the blogger at <http://findingourroots.ca>. She is a Records Manager for the federal government and is a graduate student at Dalhousie University’s Masters of Information Management (MIM) program.

Program: *FamilySearch.org: A Place to Research, Share, and Preserve Your Family History Legacy.* Learn how to effectively utilize all of the family history information resources available through FamilySearch. Learn how Family Tree enables an online one world collaborative tree. See how photos, stories, and documents can be stored, and attached to Family Tree. Learn how to search historical records collections, genealogies, historical books, FamilySearch Wiki, and the FamilySearch Catalogue. And learn to go mobile with recording and capturing your family information.

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◆ Mathias Schulze



Mathias Schulze is a professor of German Applied Linguistics at the University of Waterloo and the director of the Waterloo Centre for German Studies. His research interests are in (computer-assisted) language learning, but since encountering the rich German culture and history in Waterloo Region in 2001, he has been interested in issues of German-English bilingualism, migration and acculturation. He speaks German, English, and Russian. During the convention, if he can help with any linguistic issues in your genealogy projects, he'll gladly give it a try.

Program: *Behind-the-scenes: The Oral History Project.* The Waterloo Centre for German Studies (www.wcgs.ca) embarked on the multi-year-long Oral History Project (OHP) in 2013. The project was initiated by members of the German-Canadian community in Waterloo Region, Ontario, who approached the WCGS and asked whether we could find a way to preserve the rich life stories and experiences of German residents, especially those who are elderly.

The two main goals of this project are the production of a book predominantly for the community and the compilation of a research archive (electronic corpus) containing the transcripts of the interviews with German immigrants to our region. Thus far we have interviewed more than 100 mainly elderly émigrés from different areas of eastern, south-eastern, and central Europe. Currently we are in the process of transcribing the interviews, in which they tell their life stories, how they came to Canada, and how they settled in here. These transcripts will provide the main basis for telling the story of this large and heterogeneous group.

In this workshop, Mat will discuss the preparation necessary for the interviews, the techniques to recruit interviewees and how to make them comfortable to talk about their life story and stories. If the workshop participants are interested, he will also sketch the challenges in the transcription process. As examples, interviews with immigrants from today's Poland and Ukraine will be chosen.

Banquet presentation: *From Berlin to Kitchener in 215 years.* German-speaking Mennonites from Pennsylvania bought land at the Grand River in 1800 and settled in the area that is today Waterloo Region. In 1833, the

largest town in the region was called Berlin; in 1916, Berlin was renamed Kitchener. Today, the area still has the highest proportion of German speakers and people of German heritage in Canada.

Mat will tell some of the stories from the history of this German language island. He will talk about what changed and what didn't. Being a linguist, he will throw some tidbits about how the German language in Waterloo changed, was maintained and ... lost.

◆ Gary Warner



Gary has been ardently involved in genealogy since 1971 when he finally discovered that his father was not born with the surname Warner, but instead the surname Jaeger. He later discovered that his paternal grandfather used both the surname Jaeger and the surname Geiger, sometimes both in the same official document!

In July 1998, Gary went to the first meeting of many people who wanted to form the society that is now SGGEE. He volunteered for the steering committee and because he was not quick enough to volunteer for another committee position, was elected the chairman. He helped that committee form SGGEE that first year, and with his son, Matt Warner, set up the SGGEE website and acted as webmaster for the first seven years of the existence of SGGEE.

Gary was president of SGGEE from 1999 to 2000. He also has been from the beginning the SGGEE Databases Manager, and spends time almost every day in merging the Master Pedigree Database (MPD) and collating many of the other SGGEE databases.

Gary is a registered semi-retired civil engineer with his own business, Warner Engineering, in Wheatland, CA. In his extended family of siblings and cousins (including his mother's Latvian kin), he is one of only two who are actively pursuing family history, and the only one actually doing research in Europe. He has, however, trained all of his known relatives to send him updates on all births, deaths and marriages in the extended family. It seems that most people want their information written down somewhere so that they can be remembered, even if they do not want to do the recording themselves.

Programs: Gary will be giving a solo presentation on the "SGGEE Online Databases — How to Get the

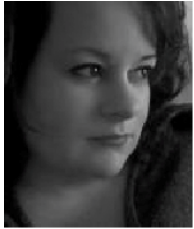
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Most Out of Them” and how to prepare your data for submission to the MPD Database.

Gary will also do a joint presentation with Sigrid Pohl Perry on “A Place by Any Other Name Won’t Merge,” which covers how to find the villages where your ancestors lived.

◆ Nicole Watier



Nicole Watier is a Genealogy Consultant at Library and Archives Canada. She started working at the National Library of Canada in the year 2000 before joining the Genealogy staff in 2006. In her free time, other than following-up on her own genealogy pursuits, she can be found creating away

in her art studio.

Program: Through the Genealogy and Family History pages on its website, Library and Archives Canada’s genealogical resources, services and research tools can be accessed in both official languages.

Nicole will introduce you to the standard Canadian genealogical sources that can be found at LAC such as immigration, census and land records, as well as some lesser-known but equally valuable sources that might assist in your family history research.

◆ Willi Wiesner



Willi Wiesner has been a member of SGGEE since 1999 (and Wandering Volhynians before that) and an amateur genealogist. In recent years he has had DNA testing done with GeneTree, 23andMe, and FTDNA as well as uploading his DNA data to GedMatch for additional exploration. One of the

primary reasons for DNA testing was to try to find a way past the many road blocks in his genealogical research. Some road blocks have been opened up, others are in the process of revealing their secrets and there have been some unexpected surprises.

He is Associate Professor of Human Resources and Management at the DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University.

Program: *Genetic Genealogy: Using DNA to Identify Distant Cousins.* A common problem in genealogical research is what to do when there is no paper trail or

when the paper trail ends. DNA testing is proving to be an invaluable tool for extending genealogical research beyond the paper trail by connecting test-takers with distant cousins they didn’t know they had. These cousins often have information that can help fill in gaps in the family tree.

However, the conservative metrics used by the testing companies to identify DNA relatives tend to miss many cousins, particularly as they become more distant. As cousins become more distant, the DNA segments they share tend to become smaller and less likely to be identified as matches. Fortunately, there are methods that can be used to identify distant cousins on the basis of matches on numerous small segments. In addition, the X-chromosome can provide a useful means of narrowing down on which part of the family tree the distant cousins are related.

This workshop will provide some very simple basics of genetics and genetic genealogy. Then we will explore some of the ways in which DNA testing can help extend our family trees. We will consider the benefits as well as cautions in using small DNA segments to identify distant cousins, the value of exploring the X-chromosome as a means of narrowing down our relationships, and the advantages of having our known relatives (particularly our parents) tested as well. Examples will be shown from the presenter’s own DNA results.

About SGGEE

Its mission: Forum for those of German origin interested in the genealogy, culture, and history of ancestors who migrated through central Poland, Volhynia and surrounding areas

Website: www.sggee.org

Membership: January through December; details at www.sggee.org/about^us/membership.html

Publication: *The Journal*, available quarterly via download to members only

Mailing list: Membership not required; details at www.sggee.org/communicate/mailling_list.html

The legal stuff: SGGEE is federally registered in Canada and operates as an international genealogy society