



# SOCIETY FOR GERMAN-AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Volume 40, Number 3  
Winter 2019

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## EDITOR'S MESSAGE

In this issue, I've included the second installment of Sue Balcom's "Women Behind the Plow." The article contains information derived from the University of North Dakota's project to document the memories of German-Russian farming women in North Dakota.

Frank Trommler has shared a short article on the German Historical Institute and the German Society of Pennsylvania's joint fellowship, accompanied by an announcement of the next fellowship. Ph.D. and M.A. students and advanced scholars are encouraged to apply for the opportunity to spend time researching at the Joseph Horner Memorial Library in Philadelphia.

Our Society's President Cora Lee Kluge introduces Georgetown, the site of our next Symposium. A reminder about submitting abstracts to the Symposium concludes this issue. As in previous years, the Society will be awarding grants to graduate students for travel and presentation of papers at the Symposium. Mentors, please encourage your students to apply. More information is found on the Society's website: <https://sgas.org/grants/>

We look forward to seeing many of you in Georgetown next April.

All the best,

Josh Brown, Ph.D.

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[SGAS.org](https://sgas.org)

## WOMEN BEHIND THE PLOW: MEMORIES

### SUE B. BALCOM

Farms and farming have become increasingly popular over the past 10 years as a new generation rediscovers "grandmother's" real-food diet. Go ahead, Google pioneer woman, homestead, farmstead, living off the land, local food, and so on, and you will find an overabundance of websites and blogs from young women living the farm life. They are more than happy to share their experiences with you.

It's glamorous to be gardening, canning, cooking, baking and telling the world about it daily. But North Dakota's first farmers lived isolated lives on a barren land filled with rocks and bitter cold. According to nearly every woman interviewed for *Women Behind the Plow*: "nowadays, they couldn't live like we did." It's probably true.

For one thing, without electricity and the Internet, women learned to cook from their moms or neighbors, mostly by observation as recorded recipes are vague. There were no written instructions for cooking, canning, and gardening. Ellen (Woods) Tuttle said, "I never made bread at home; my mother made bread every other day. After I was married, when I first learned to make bread – some of it I buried. It raised the ground. I was so afraid my husband would catch me. After awhile, I got good at it."

Along with household duties and raising families, these women worked in the fields alongside their fathers and then husbands. Not all of them were physically "behind the plow," but certainly all contributed to the success of the farm. Chores began as soon as you could carry a pail. Families with many children even sent a few extra hands to the families who didn't have children.

"Out on the farm you go," Helen (Iszler) Frisch said, "You worked on the farm until school started again. To start with we were hired as babysitters, but we never got to hold the baby. We had to feed the cattle and we had to feed the hogs and take care of the chickens and gather the eggs. We had all those kind of chores; except hold the baby. And they'd always have workers, extra farm workers, and we had a big meal to prepare."

Mary Ann (Werre) Lehr said she would help fill the drill and keep her father's trucks completely clean.

"Well, the first thing we had to do when we were little is to get the eggs," Alice (Rohrich) Kramer said. "Then, when you are strong enough, they added milk." That meant twice a day, in the barn, milking. "We milked a lot of cows already, by hand." These were chores done without electricity. There were no refrigerators, freezers, lights, or milking machines before the rural electric cooperatives provided electricity.

Ellen (Woods) Tuttle said, "There was no way to save vegetables; except if it was canned. There were lots of times, weeks, where we didn't have meat. Otherwise, vegetables – carrots and stuff like that – we could keep, and then we canned a lot. After I was married, then later when I had my family, I didn't think of going into the winter without 500 jars of food that I canned. We canned everything. Because we had no electricity, I had to can the meat and everything." Bernice (Kiefer) Nagel said, "Mom saw to it that there were 100 jars of vegetables of every kind in the root cellar. It was just a separate thing dug and that's where you kept your potatoes and vegetables and they stayed all year."

Feeding the family was a year-round challenge. How did they do it? Well, cooking was always done on the cookstove, fueled by wood and cow pies, and before electricity, probably coal. That added to the sometimes intense August heat. When the threshers were done eating they would lay in between the house and the summer kitchen in the grass. And, when the horses were watered and



Sue Balcom's grandmother Emma Meidinger with her children (l-r) Lorraine, Alma, Wilbert, Luella, Viola, and Getrude, circa 1931



*Arndt's mom, (l-r) Othelia, in the field with Emma Wolff and Othelia's sisters, Eva and Adeline. They are holding pitchforks for tossing shock bundles or hay, circa 1930s*



*As a young girl, Mary Ann (Schumacher) Gefroh needed her full weight to pull the lever on the plow. She is standing on the back of the tractor, circa 1940s*

rested, everyone would go back to work, there was never a dull moment, Mary Ann (Werre) Lehr said.

When one farm's fields were bindered, everyone moved on to the next. Machinery was scarce and often shared. Cooks had to begin preparations for feeding the crews as they moved from farm to farm, sleeping on the floor because it was too late to go to their own homes. If it rained or equipment malfunctioned, those additional hardships prolonged the long days of harvest.

LaVerna (Dockter) Kaseman said, "We had three meals a day when we were busy during bindering and threshing. Lunch was brought to the field around 3 o'clock – sandwiches mostly and water to drink."

"We always came home for lunch. They worked until

dark. They didn't have lights on their tractors. They would stop and have a sandwich or cake and then work until dark," Bernice (Kiefer) Nagel said.

"The crew moved from farm to farm, staying only a few days at one place. None of the farms were large in acreage then," Leona (Wieszner) Neu writes. "When crops were harvested, either by headering or bindering, barley and oats were threshed first. The crew would move from farm to farm until all the feed grains were harvested. A



*Waldemar Diegel's sisters working with plows. He had five sisters: Christine, Mathilda, Rosina, Amelia, Esther, Hulda, and Emma. We are not sure which one is working the plow in this photo, circa 1930s*

crew would have from five to eight farms to thresh for. After the oats and barley were harvested, another round was made. This time the wheat was threshed. The last round was for flax and millet. This way the machine didn't have to be readjusted for each grain and they didn't have to stay too long at one place; also if it rained, it gave each farmer a chance to get some of the crop into storage."

After harvest when the weather cooled, meat could be stored for winter meals. Margaret (Voller) Baumgartner said, "After threshing time, came butchering and getting the beef and pork ready for the winter. Everything was processed in the basement and the entire house reeked for days, but the sausage was standard and a delicious winter meal." Catherine Miller said, "We butchered four hogs in the fall when we needed them and made headcheese. We stored the hams in the granary. There were beams and before they put the roof on that's where Dad would hang them. The animals didn't get in. I didn't care about the mice because we had cats."

In the spring, it began again. Year after year, season after season, these women worked. Sunday visits with sisters and church socials filling in their loneliness. Many of the farms have been passed down two or even three generations by now, some no longer owned by the family, or any family for that matter – the houses melting into the sod from where at one time they came. Regardless of the difficult times and hard work, a common thread between these women was a love of farm life. That love shines through today only in their memories and the *Women Behind the Plow* interviews.

Women Behind the Plow  
Mrs. Ida (Schilling) Meidinger



Ida made her own wedding cake.

Its funny, I had a guy that liked me really well. When my sister Martha got married he went to get his girlfriend. Then he saw me through a window at my house and he took her back home. He asked me, and said, 'I love you' and that was it.



Teams of horses belonging to Gottfried and Ida were used for field work.

We had lots of cow chips and all winter they put the manure from animals in a place bigger than this room. In the summer, they put horses on it and tried to get it hard and then they put a big weight on the pile and pressed it some more - until it was good and dry. We spaded it and piled it up like crosses, or like a teepee. When they were dry, we stacked it like a loaf; and when that was dry we put it in the shed; and that was our heating.

We heated our house with that, and we used coal at night .

It was cold, but then we had potbelly hard-coal stove, but we all slept cold. We had ice on our feather beds in the morning. When the girls took water up to put up our hair, it froze until morning.





Ida and Gottlieb's farm, 1951.

We went to Zeeland to buy groceries. I remember the store, I didn't go in there until later in the years.

Zeeland was our home town. We went to work all day; washed our hair in the morning and went out in the evenings. We went to town and had a good time.

Wednesday nights we went to town and we walked the streets up and down or went to the pool hall and played pool.

The store never closed. When we didn't want to walk anymore we went to the store until the men came back from playing pool and then went home.

We had a Model T Ford.



Gottfried Meidinger and Ida Schilling were married in November of 1939 in the church. They did not have a wedding reception.



Example of an informative panel from the *Women Behind the Plow* exhibit

## EXPLORING THE GHI-GSP FELLOWSHIP IN THE HORNER LIBRARY IN PHILADELPHIA

### FRANK TROMMLER

Slavery in German-American Literature – German and Irish Americans in World War I – Pennsylvania High German – Quakers in the Transatlantic Business – Immigrant Germans after World War II – German-American Children's Literature – Peace Making in Early Pennsylvania: one expects these topics in the conference programs of the Society for German-American Studies. But they are taken from a long list of projects that have been pursued by scholars at the Horner Library of the German Society of Pennsylvania in the last thirteen years. The list contains 38 projects in the area of German-American culture and history that have been sponsored by the German Historical Institute in Washington and instituted by the German Society since 2007.

As explained in the following announcement, the "GHI- GSP Fellowship at the Horner Library" is a summer fellowship for up to four weeks, open to M. A. and doctoral students, postdocs, and advanced scholars of all fields who undertake projects for which the Horner Library can provide relevant material. As the library of the oldest German immigrant society in the country, founded in 1764, whose purpose was charity and maintenance of German culture in America, Horner reflects the needs and tastes of a large German-American community in the last two and a half centuries. In 1867 Oswald Seidensticker, professor of German at the University of Pennsylvania, added an archive to this *Volksbibliothek*, and in 1976 the library received the books and pamphlets of the Carl Schurz Memorial Association.

Highlights include the continuous minutes of the German Society since 1764, the printing culture of Philadelphia and Germantown, especially early religious literature, the publicity of the National German-American Alliance, German popular literature and science of the 19th century, and most astonishing and still not fully explored, the 70 ledger books of the so-called *Agentur* with which the Society con-

ducted its everyday assistance, charity, and *Arbeitsvermittlung* between 1847 and 1930, a trove of social data about the German immigrants and the German-American community in general.

When applying ([fellowships@ghi-dc.org](mailto:fellowships@ghi-dc.org)), it is advisable to consult the Reference Guide about Horner's material on the GHI web site:

<https://www.ghi-dc.org/publications/reference-guides.html>

that has been revised and updated by Bettina Hess, the Society's librarian, as well as the catalog on the German Society's web site:

<https://www.germansociety.org/horner-library>



## GHI-GSP FELLOWSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT

Together with the German Society of Pennsylvania, the German Historical Institute will sponsor two to four fellowships of up to four weeks for research at the Joseph Horner Memorial Library in Philadelphia between **June 1 and July 15, 2020**.

The fellowship will be awarded to Ph.D. and M.A. students and advanced scholars without restrictions in research fields or geographical provenance. The "GHI Fellowship at the Horner Library" will provide a travel subsidy and an allowance of \$1,000 to \$3,500 depending on the length of the stay and the qualifications of the fellows. Opportunities to research at other special collections in Philadelphia may be available.

The Joseph Horner Memorial Library houses 70,000 volumes and is the largest German-American collection outside of a university. The collection offers rich materials from the 17th to the 20th centuries to historians of German American immigration culture, especially in Pennsylvania, as well as historians of German fictional and non-fictional literature, including travel and popular literature.

Applications (in English or German) should be made electronically to the GHI (c/o Bryan Hart, [fellowships@ghi-dc.org](mailto:fellowships@ghi-dc.org)). They should include a project description of no more than 2,000 words, curriculum vitae, copies of academic degrees, and one letter of reference. Application **deadline is March 1, 2020**.

## 44TH ANNUAL SGAS SYMPOSIUM

### "Germans in the Americas: Social, Scientific, and Cultural Encounters"

Georgetown (Washington, D.C.)

April 23-25, 2020

A thematic focus of the Symposium will be on individuals and groups from German-speaking lands and their descendants, their contact and collaboration with others, and their resulting impact on life in the Americas, both past and present. We invite presentations concerning social and political structures, theoretical and practical science, education, religion, language, the arts, and more.

However, as is our tradition, we also accept proposals dealing with other aspects of German-American studies, including comparative topics with a German-American component.

Membership in the Society for German-American Studies is required of those whose papers are presented. Jointly authored proposals are welcome, but only the names of authors who are present at the Symposium will be listed in the program.

Please submit to Cora Lee Kluge an abstract of your proposed presentation (not more than 250 words), preferably in electronic form, by **January 2, 2020**. Include your paper title, your full name as you wish it to appear in the program, your email address, your complete mailing address, and your academic affiliation, if any.

Email address: Cora Lee Kluge <[clnollen@wisc.edu](mailto:clnollen@wisc.edu)> Please include SGAS in the subject line.

Postal address: Cora Lee Kluge, President, Society for German-American Studies, 121 South Owen Drive, Madison, WI 53705

## INTRODUCING GEORGETOWN

### CORA LEE KLUGE

Georgetown, the site of the upcoming SGAS Symposium (April 23–25, 2020), is a beautiful part of Washington, D.C., with a rich historical background. It was settled in the late 17th century and established as a town in 1751 in the British Colony of Maryland, at a place that was the northernmost navigable point on the Potomac River. It had become a thriving commercial port by 1790, when George Washington chose a nearby location along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers to be the United States capital. Though part of the federal district, it remained a separate municipality until 1871, when it was incorporated into Washington City, and it remains one of the city's distinct and distinguished neighborhoods today. It is the oldest section of Washington, D.C., and a stroll through its neighborhoods reveals a great deal of fascinating history.

Georgetown is on a hill overlooking the Potomac. Known not only for its history, it is also popular as a center for shopping and for its restaurants, bars, and entertainment. Its waterfront area is charming. The aerial photograph below, which looks south-southeast down the Potomac, will help you orient yourself in the larger landscape. In the center foreground are buildings of Georgetown University and the Key Bridge, Washington's oldest road bridge, which was named for Francis Scott Key. The Washington Monument is in the upper left; the Kennedy

Center is the large building in the middle, on the edge of the Potomac; and partly hidden behind it are both the Jefferson Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial. The large island is Roosevelt Island, where the Roosevelt Memorial – designed by the German-American architect Eric Gugler (son of the lithographer Julius Gugler of Milwaukee) – stands. To give you some idea of the distances: It is less than 3 miles from Georgetown University to the Washington Monument.

When one thinks of Georgetown, one thinks of the world-famous Georgetown University, on whose campus our symposium will be held. Founded in 1789 by Bishop John Carroll, it is Washington's oldest university and the nation's first Catholic and first Jesuit-run university. Today approximately 7500 undergraduate students choose among 48 majors, and approximately 11,500 graduate students are enrolled in the schools of Arts and Sciences, Law, Medicine, Foreign Service, Public Policy, Business, and others.

The attractions of Washington, D.C., including government buildings, monuments, museums, theaters, concert halls, the city's natural beauty, and more, make the area a much-loved tourist destination: an estimated 23.8 million tourists visited the U.S. capital in 2018. We are delighted to be meeting in April 2020 in Georgetown, and we hope to see you there!



Image ©2010, Phil Humnicky, Georgetown University

102-02-064002

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