

**Cultivating ‘Roots’:
Towards a Diasporically Imagined Transnational Community,
The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1968-1978**

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Prior to the rise of multiculturalism in America, white ethnics faced rampant anti-ethnic hysteria. The perceived threat of hyphenated Americans, originally developed in response to German Americans during WWI, coupled with the anti-communist sentiments of the first Red Scare fueled American hyper-nationalism and immigration restriction well into the 1950s. Thus, American nationalists subscribed to nativism, demanding loyalty to the American nation, demonstrated through assimilation. This nativist approach to nationalism pressured hyphenated white ethnics – particularly with Russian or German ties – to Americanize, assimilate, and sever all affiliations with the homeland.¹ Due to their “favored nation” status, ethnic German populations, including the Germans from Russia (GR), met the demands of nativism with speed and ease.² However, the famine of 1921 provided an opportunity for them to perform their GR and American identities simultaneously. Indeed, American GRs joined forces with the American government, forming humanitarian organizations and authoring publications to facilitate a diasporic awakening and sense of shared purpose and suffering with co-ethnics in American and transnational space.³ After the famine, American GR organizations dissipated and transnational ties between American GRs and their co-ethnics abroad, particularly those in the Soviet Union, weakened. An opportunity for American GRs to rekindle relationships with co-ethnics abroad and perform their GR identity publicly emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, as the “Roots” phenomenon prompted massive genealogical quests, particularly among white ethnics. Often harboring sentiments of displacement and jealousy in post-civil rights America, white groups began extracting their ethnic pasts from the great white “melting pot” and celebrating their

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¹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 224; William G. Ross, *Forging New Freedoms: Nativism, Education, and the Constitution, 1917-1927* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 30-73; Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); Mae M. Ngai, “Nationalism, Immigration Control, and the Ethnoracial Remapping of America in the 1920s,” *OAH Magazine of History* 21 (2007): 11-15; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Ngai, “Nationalism, Immigration Control, and the Ethnoracial Remapping of America in the 1920s;” Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and The Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2004).

² Peter Roberts. Qtd in David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2005), 53.

³ This was a simultaneous process, as American GRs formed new connections with one another and their co-ethnics abroad, imagining both an American GR community and a transnational GR community.

differences. At the same time, nativism gave way to multiculturalism, as African and Mexican Americans agitated for greater participation in the nation and white ethnics began to celebrate diversity. The hyphenated Americans previously distrusted by nativists became the norm.⁴ This multicultural moment in American history from 1964-1979 created a space conducive to GR organization and mobilization, prompting American GRs to rebuild GR organizations and reestablish ties with each other and co-ethnics abroad. Through the examination of the transnational GR community, this article emphasizes the unique imaginative process involved in American GR's imitation and voluntary diasporization and the role of print capitalism and organizations in facilitating a point and space of diasporic identification and transnational communication.⁵

Like many Roots-crazed white ethnic groups, GRs began investigating their ancestry, tracing their origins to ship manifests and Ellis Island. However, the search for their ancestral past did not stop there. Tapping into the transnational networks formed in the early 1900s through familial ties, letter-writing campaigns, publications, and aid societies, GRs in the United States opened a dialogue with co-ethnics in the Fatherland and Motherland – Germany and Russia – and other new homelands – Latin America, Canada, and Kazakhstan.⁶ This discourse transpired in several culturally and socially constructed spaces, including the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) and the Society's publications: *Work Papers* and *The Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR Journal)*. Utilizing AHSGR and its publications as a case study, this article traces the evolution of AHSGR from genealogical association to architect of diaspora. In response to political and social circumstances in the United States and the Soviet Union, the Society simultaneously collected and constructed a shared historical memory and identity, created and mobilized a transnational organization network, and manufactured new spaces for marshalling and exercising diasporic identity.

Traditionally, scholars have applied the term “diaspora” to groups forcibly removed from their homeland by a violent or traumatic event, who maintain a desire to return to and/or restore the historical homeland and are perceived as outsiders by their host country – i.e., Jews. More recently, scholars like Robin Cohen, William Safran, Martin Sökefeld, and Rogers Brubaker have developed new definitions of and highlighted new approaches to the study of diaspora, improving its viability as a conceptual framework across numerous fields.⁷ Notably, Sökefeld demonstrates the constructed nature of diaspora, redefining it as a “transnationally imagined community... a transnationally dispersed collectivity that distinguishes itself by clear self-imaginings as community,” and he posits, “that the formation of diaspora is not a ‘natural’

⁴ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 2006); Anderson highlights the role of print capitalism in creating imagined national communities.

⁶ Even as GR's began to reorient their homeland functions – return and restoration – to post-territorial spaces, including AHSGR and its publications, they simultaneously maintained a sense of geographical place or places, as they romanticized the Russian and German homelands. However, many American, Canadian, and South American GRs never wanted to return to Russia or Germany on a permanent basis; rather, they opted to virtually return via readership or visit briefly. Thus, post-territorial homelands existed alongside territorial notions, and to an extent substituted for them.

⁷ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); Rogers Brubaker, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1-47; Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28 (2005): 1-19; William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1 (1991): 83-99; Martin Sökefeld, “Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora,” *Global Networks* 6 (2006): 265-284.

consequence of migration but that specific processes of mobilization have to take place for a diaspora to emerge.”⁸ In this, Sökefeld highlights the constructed, imagined, and active nature of diaspora, claiming that the process of diasporization occurs when members of the diasporic group develop connections with one another, real or imagined, and mobilize within transnational space. While a great deal of diaspora literature focuses on conditions in the homeland, Safran examines conditions in the host country, arguing that these conditions coupled with those in the homeland contribute to the long term survival or erasure of diasporic groups. Indeed, he argues that democratic pluralist structures provide an environment conducive to diasporic organization, because they promote the development and expression of minority cultures.⁹ During the height of American multiculturalism, the United States served as such a space, providing an opportunity for American GRs to organize, mobilize, and build a diaspora.

Even with recently expanded diasporic definitions and frameworks, German populations in the United States are rarely considered within a diasporic framework or as outsiders. Rather, scholars have traditionally depicted ethnic German populations in the United States as the quintessential insiders, part of the assimilated, “old stock,” Anglo-American core who set the standards of whiteness for inassimilable white ethnics. More specifically, Scholars tend to depict the GRs as desirable immigrants – industrious farmers and pioneers, eager to integrate into and contribute to American society. Indeed, until recently, even the wide body of literature on white ethnics dismissed ethnic German populations, including the GRs, in lieu of the more easily discernible Irish, Eastern European, and Mediterranean white ethnics.¹⁰

In challenging the conventional wisdom about diaspora, in which diasporic groups always remain outsiders, this case dictates a more nuanced and layered understanding of diasporic organization, in which diasporas function both within and outside of the nation-state. This case study builds upon and contributes to the theoretical debate surrounding diaspora – in which, historians, sociologists, and political theorists continue to redefine diaspora and expand its application as a framework for understanding past and present human organization. Applying Sökefeld’s social movement approach and theoretical understanding diasporas as “imagined” to the study of old stock white ethnic groups, this case study highlights the constructed and optional nature of white ethnic diasporas; thus, adding another diasporic category of analysis– white

⁸ Sökefeld, “Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora,” 267; 265.

⁹ William Safran, “Democracy, Pluralism, and Diaspora Identity: An Ambiguous Relationship,” in *Opportunity Structures in Diaspora Relations*, Gloria Totoicagüena, ed. (Reno, NE: University of Nevada, 2007), 157-186.

¹⁰ John A. Hostetler, “The Plain People and the Art of Survival,” in *Germans in America: Retrospect and Prospect*, Randall M. Miller, ed. (Philadelphia: The German Society of Pennsylvania, 1984), 110-121; Russell Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); La Vern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1976); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Andrew M. Greeley, *Why Can't They Be Like Us: America's White Ethnic Groups* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1971); Renate Bridenthal, “Germans from Russia: The Political Network of a Double Diaspora,” in *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness*. Krista O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, and Nancy Reagin, eds. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 187-218. Bridenthal did address GRs within a diasporic framework, approaching them as a double diaspora. Although, she depicted the diaspora and its organizations as led by a small group of elites, focusing on the relationships between a few GRs in America and Germany. Her elite driven narrative neglects the significant role of members and historical circumstance in the United States and Soviet Union, namely white ethnic revival and Soviet Germans agitation to immigrate out of the USSR. In addition, while she mentions the role of print and organizations briefly, she fails to really examine the processes employed by organizations and print with any detail. This article compliments and expands on Bridenthal’s arguments.

ethnic –and expanding diaspora’s application as a conceptual framework even further.¹¹ Due to the unique assimilative benefits associated with whiteness in the United States, white ethnic groups diasporatized in non-traditional ways. They maintained the option to voluntarily diasporatize and/or imitate the diasporic sentiment of their co-ethnics abroad, because white Americans have not traditionally otherized them to the extent that they have their racialized counterparts.¹² Indeed, voluntary and imitation diasporization does not always oppose assimilation. Rather, these groups work within existing national frameworks to forge ties with and better the condition of co-ethnics at home and abroad. Employing the politics of identity, they perform their outsider and insider identities separately or in conjunction in response to historical events, political climates, and nation states. Thus, these hybridized, layered, and fractured groups imagine themselves both within and outside of the national framework, developing new multilayered, multinational, and multi-placed ethnic communities – diasporically imagined transnational communities.

GRs have a complicated history as a double diaspora and a distinct ethnic identity, ethnically German and spatially Russian, that requires some explanation. While a significant German population resided in urban areas of the Russian Empire dating back to the sixteenth century, the presence of a substantial German population in the Russian Empire dates back to Catherine the Great’s July 22, 1763 royal declaration. She enticed German immigrants to settle the lower Volga regions with promises of religious and cultural freedom, tax relief, military exemption, and the right to return to their homeland at any time. Because of the generous offer, which ensured the maintenance of German identity within Russian space, German immigrants poured into the Russian Empire until the colonizing program ceased operation in the summer of 1766. In the late eighteenth century, Catherine II negotiated a similar arrangement with German immigrants willing to colonize the Black Sea region of Ukraine, and her grandson Alexander I launched a comparable plan in 1804. A large population of ethnic German Mennonites, fleeing military service in West Prussia, joined the Germans along the Volga in 1853, and a fourth migration of ethnic Germans to Volhynia, a region situated in northern Ukraine, occurred throughout the last half of the nineteenth century. Unique settlers, they established state sponsored German enclaves in all three regions. The enclaves remained isolated from the Russians, Ukrainians, and Poles around them. Moreover, communications between the distinct groups remained limited if not non-existent.

The enclaves enjoyed relative peace and prosperity until Czars Alexander II, Alexander III, and Nicholas II shattered Catherine’s promises. Throughout this period ethnic Germans were forcibly conscripted, subjected to religious intolerance and compulsory conversion, forbidden from speaking German, surrounded by anti-German hysteria, prohibited from immigrating out of Russia, threatened with expulsion, and punished with a decree mandating their involuntary deportation to Siberia. As a result, the once peaceful ethnic enclaves became victim diasporas, living in and altered by an empire dead set on eradicating their culture. They fled en masse to Canada, the United States, Brazil, and Argentina in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Now double diasporas, they settled in agricultural regions, and applied the skills they developed in the Russian Steppes. GRs in the United States faced unprecedented American Anti-German hysteria, a result of WWI and WWII paranoia. Save a few exceptions, these experiences coupled

¹¹Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Sökefeld, “Mobilizing in Transnational Space,” 265-284.

¹² The term “racialize counterparts” refers to African, Latino/Latina, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native Americans. Due to the racialization of these populations, Americans have automatically depicted and perceived them as outsiders and “others”

with the collective memories of their tarnished Russian dream, prompted the partial retreat of their unique cultural identity to the private sphere and their relative assimilation into the public sphere until the rise of multiculturalism and white ethnic revival provided a space conducive to public expressions of GR identity.¹³

Struggling with the white ethnic paradox of uniqueness and assimilation, in which white ethnic groups clung to the privileges of assimilated whiteness and ethnic distinction with equal vigor, AHSGR grappled to define itself ethnically and nationally from the onset. Indeed, the origins of the Society lay in a small group of individuals from Colorado, Oregon, and Nebraska dedicated to GR research, with particular emphasis on the contributions of GRs to the development of American society – the ad hoc German-Russian-American Research Committee.¹⁴ At the urging of David J. Miller, AHSGR's first president, the group met for the first time on September 3, 1968 in Denver, Colorado to discuss the development of a permanent organization. Indicative of their identity conflict, the Society immediately faced its first challenge – naming. Grappling with fifteen possible names, all of which contained “American,” “German,” and “Russian” in different orders, members struggled to prioritize certain aspects of their identity over others. To settle this disagreement over terminology, they employed democratic means. Using a mail out ballot, members selected “Germans from Russia,” which highlighted their Germanic origins as well as their historical presence in Russian space.¹⁵ Thus, at the October 6, 1968 meeting Society leaders recommended “Inter American Historical Society of Germans from Russia.”¹⁶ A founding member in attendance, Heinz, shared his opinion on the name, asking, “Are we not Americans first, though we are of German origin and our forbearers did come from Russia?”¹⁷ Heinz' statement exemplifies the attempts of the Society and its members to identify as both assimilated and diasporic – of American and GR decent. The Society simultaneously accommodated and transcended the paradox by operating a multinational network in transnational space for all those of GR decent, dropping “Inter,” and officially

¹³ For more on this topic see Fred C. Koch, *The Volga Germans: In Russia and the Americas from 1763 to the Present* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978); James W. Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed, The Volga Germans, 1860-1917* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); Karl Stumpp, *The German Russians: Two Centuries of Pioneering*, Joseph Height, trans. (Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1978); Hattie Plum Williams, *The Czar's Germans, with Particular Reference to the Volga Germans*, Emma S. Haynes, Phillip B. Legler and Gerda S. Walker, eds. (Denver, CO: World Press, Inc., 1975); George J. Walters, *Wir Wollen Deutsche Bleiben: The Story of the Volga Germans* (Kansas City, MO: Halcyon House, 1982); Richard H. Walth, *Auf Der Suche nach Heimat: Die Rußlandderutschen* (Dülman: Laumann-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990).

¹⁴ The ad hoc committee included roughly fifty individuals located in the United States, including Mr. and Mrs. David Miller, Mr. and Mrs. William Urbach, Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Lehr, Gerda Walker, Ruth Amen, Arthur Flegel, Emma Schwabenland Haynes and Chester Krieger. With no official capacity, this loosely organized group conducted historical and genealogical research on the GRs individually and shared it with one another. David Miller tapped into this community, which had discussed organization on several occasions, to start AHSGR.

¹⁵ David Miller, Letter to Members of Ad Hoc German-Russian-American Research Committee, 22 May 1968, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska); John H. Werner, Minutes of Organizational Meeting of Germans from Russia, 3 Sept 1968, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska); David Miller, Letter to Members and Friends of the Proposed Historical Association of German-Russian-Americans, 26 Sept 1968, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska); Name Survey, October 1968, in David Miller, Letter to Members and Friends of the Proposed Historical Association of German-Russian-Americans, 26 Sept 1968, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska).

¹⁶ John H. Werner, Minutes of Meeting, 6 Oct 1968, AHSGR Presidents Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 2.

¹⁷ Ibid.

becoming AHSGR, a society for “all the Germans from Russia now living in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and South America.”¹⁸

With this purpose in mind, the Society worked tirelessly towards the development of a trans-American network of GRs. To build this network, they actively solicited new memberships and chapters using a wide variety of approaches, including large-scale letter writing campaigns, word of mouth, self-mailing brochures, church sermons, and cold calling individuals with German surnames.¹⁹ In some cases, the board launched full-scale recruitment campaigns with slogans like “400 more in ’74,” which urged each of the one hundred board members to recruit four memberships in 1974.²⁰ These massive membership campaigns continued in AHSGR publications, which also served as recruitment spaces. Miller continuously vied for new recruits in his “Letter[s] to Members,” which appeared on the first page of each issue of *Work Papers*. He urged members to send in names, circulate AHSGR publications, and mail letters to fellow GRs. Ruth Amen, the Society’s second president, picked up where he left off in her “President’s Message[s],” which replaced the “Letter to Members.” The duo habitually encouraged members to “spread the news to others,” suggest possible recruits, and give gift memberships for anniversaries, birthdays and Christmas.²¹ Answering their call, members laid the foundations for a network, establishing an expansive web of connections that spanned the United States, and included over 4500 memberships by 1979 and twenty chapters in Canada, Germany, South America, and Italy by 1975.²²

The Society tapped into this developing network to collect primary source documents for genealogical and scholarly research, organizing a massive collection campaign at the Greeley, Colorado public library. Esther Fromm, head of the bibliography committee, spearheaded the effort, requesting documents and updating readers on the status of the collection in nearly every AHSGR publication. Fearing a permanent loss of GR memory and identity, Fromm and Miller habitually targeted elderly GRs in AHSGR publications for documents and oral histories, because they maintained closer ties to GR culture and the Russian Motherland. At the same time, the Society paid to microfilm primary source documents already stored in government archives, including Dr. Karl Stumpp’s ethnographical reports of the Black Sea region to Hitler and *Die Welt Post*, a GR newspaper in Lincoln, Nebraska from 1916 to 1970. The Society also funded the translation and publication of the “Stumpp books,” which contained detailed lists of German migrants into Russia as well as maps of the original settlements. While the Society leadership

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Chester G. Krieger, Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Directors, 1 March 1969, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 2; Chester G. Krieger, Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Directors, 18 November 1969, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 2; Mrs. Donald K. Schwartz, Membership Committee Report, June 1974, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1973-74, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 2; Chester G. Krieger, Letter to All Churches and Delegates of the Northeast Association, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974; AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska); this letter is undated; however, context implies Krieger authored the document in October 1968; Edward Schwartzkopf, Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors, November 1973, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 4; The first page of these minutes is missing; however, the content suggests they were written in November 1973; Chester G. Krieger, Minutes of Meeting of the AHSGR, 28 July 1969, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 1.

²⁰ Elsie Whittington, Minutes of AHSGR Regular Board of Directors Meeting, 15-17 August 1974, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 2.

²¹ Ruth M. Amen, “President’s Message,” *Work Paper* 14 (1964): i.

²² Membership and chapter information gleaned from “Membership Reports” and meeting minutes from 1968-1979; several memberships represent more than one individual, as households likely held only one membership.

organized these reproductions and collections, individual members did most of the work. Responding to the call, they donated a majority of the funds to purchase microfilms and publish the Stumpp books. They also donated the bulk of AHSGR's archival holdings, including letters, pictures, and other materials relating to GRs.²³ AHSGR reproduced several of these documents in its publications, helping readers to carry out their own genealogical research and imagine a GR community with a shared past.²⁴

AHSGR shaped members' understanding of the past not only through the dissemination of documents, but by promoting, publishing, and actively editing secondary works on life in Russia, the Americas, and Germany. Notably, the Society purchased Hattie Plum Williams' manuscript, "The Czar's Germans," from the Nebraska Historical Society. With the copyright secure, a founding member and active researcher, Emma Schwabenland Haynes, selected illustrations, typed and edited the manuscript, verified sources, rewrote chapter one, and added an additional chapter. After six years of work, they published the book under the title *The Czar's Germans: With Particular Reference to the Volga Germans* in 1975.²⁵ The Society also sought to underscore its legitimacy as researchers, increase scholarly attention to the GRs, and affect the ways historians understood and wrote GR history by connecting to university research and presses. They promoted the study of GRs in Canada and the United States, invited students to attend AHSGR conventions at the cost of the Society, and reviewed scholarly works in AHSGR publications.²⁶ In one case, Chet Krieger, a founding member, urged Fred C. Koch to eliminate all references of "our 'race'" and the "Germanic race" in his manuscript, "Farewell My People," and use the term "ethnic group" instead, because "the use of the term 'German Race' by Hitler has made the word emotionally charged and irritable for many."²⁷ Koch's book, published under the title *The Volga Germans: In Russia and the Americas, from 1763 to the Present*, reflected

²³ David J. Miller, "Letter to Members," in *Work Paper 2* (July 1969): i-ii; Ruth Amen, Letter to David Miller, 13 August 1973, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska); Ruth Amen, Information Related to the Agenda, November 1973, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 2; Edward Schwartzkopf, Minutes of AHSGR Regular Board of Directors Meeting, June 1975, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1975, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 6.

²⁴ See for example, Victor A. Reisig, "A Volhynia Mennonite Letter of Attestation," *Work Paper 17* (1975): 13-15; "Rocking in the Cradle and Riding on the Knee: Lullabies of the Germans from Russia," *JAHSGR 1* (1978): 33-37; Emma Schwabenland Haynes, trans., "White Paper on Human Rights of Germans in Eastern Europe," *JAHSGR 1* (1978): 55-57; Mary Koch, "Volga German Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions from the Colony of Dreispitz," *JAHSGR 2* (1979): 32-37.

²⁵ Chester G. Krieger, Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Directors, 18 November 1969, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 1-2; Marie M. Olson, Minutes of Meeting of International Board of Directors of the AHSGR, 24 March 1973, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 4; Marie M. Olson, Minutes of Meeting of the International Board of Directors, 19 June 1973, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 3; Edward Schwartzkopf, 24-26 Oct 1975, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1975, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 3; Hattie Plum Williams, *The Czar's Germans: With Particular Reference to the Volga Germans* (Denver, CO: World Press, Inc., 1975).

²⁶ Edward Schwartzkopf, Minutes of the AHSGR Regular Board of Directors Meeting, June 1975, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1975, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 9; Nancy Bernhardt Holland, Minutes of AHSGR Regular Board of Directors Meeting, 21-22 March 1975, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1975, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 6.

²⁷ Chet Krieger, Letter to Fred Koch, 29 November 1973, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska); Krieger's suggestions may also indicate the decline of scientific racism after World War II.

these changes.²⁸ Krieger's concern over Koch's use of language represents the AHSGR's greater desire to control and influence the ways in which readers understood GR historical memory and perceived the ethnic group. For similar reasons, the publications board deliberately controlled the content published in AHSGR publications.²⁹

Using secondary and primary source reproductions in AHSGR publications, the Society projected GR unity – the GRs as an integrated people. Although the Black Sea, Volhynian, Mennonite, and Volga Germans maintained isolated ethnic communities in Russia, AHSGR eroded the distinct lines between the groups in the past and present in their publications. Adam Giesinger's recurring editorial, which appeared in several AHSGR publications, presented in-depth case studies of villages in the Volhynian, Black Sea, and Volga regions. He detailed the periods of immigration, families that immigrated, religious orientations, geographical landscapes, enclaves' landholdings, industry, education levels, and culture. The reports themselves celebrated the differences between the geographically scattered and culturally diverse settlements; however, the title of the editorial served to unify the groups as GRs. Despite their differences, Giesinger portrayed all of the villages as "Villages in Which Our Forefathers Lived."³⁰ Notwithstanding the historical isolation of the groups from one another, Giesinger's use of "our" rather than religious or regional signifiers situates Volga, Volhynian, Black Sea, and Mennonite Germans within the greater identification of GR. In doing this, the society backdated the distinct groups' associations with one another to a point in space and time when they did not exist, fabricating the foundations of a shared historical past in order to unite the present. This common past forged the necessary foundation upon which AHSGR would build a unifying identity and diasporic consciousness.

The Society ardently defended this concept of GR unity. Irving Neufeld, an active member and researcher, cancelled his membership in July 1974, claiming an AHSGR officer informed him that his research pertaining to Black Sea Germans held little value for the Society dedicated to Volga Germans.³¹ Noting Neufeld did not name the Society member who dismissed his work as irrelevant, Amen defended the Society's commitment to all members of the GR community. Amen insisted Neufeld's critique did not represent the Society, which she described as "broadminded" with "officers 'bending over backwards' to include everyone."³² Indeed, Amen and her fellow officers went out of their way to create a sense of ethnic sameness, and create a space where all GRs were equally worthy of membership – AHSGR. They believed a key point of the Society's mission was to overcome the divisions, which historically plagued the GRs. Giesinger, the Society's third president, highlighted this role in his 1979 keynote address. He faulted the diverse customs, dialects, and religious practices of nineteenth century GRs for past disunity, claiming their mutual mistrust of one another led to their lack of unity that resulted in enclave mentalities in the Russian Empire. He believed AHSGR resolved this past disunity by creating a cohesive GR community, claiming, "The fact that our society exists, and is thriving, indicates that we have overcome the parochialism and distrust of each other that was traditional

²⁸ Koch, *The Volga Germans*.

²⁹ Marie M. Olson, Minutes of AHSGR Regular Board of Directors Meeting, 19 Jan 1975, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1975, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 2.

³⁰ See for example, Adam Giesinger, "Villages in Which Our Forefathers Lived," *Work Paper* 16 (December 1974): 30-33, 17 (April 1975): 33-37, and 19 (December 1975): 17-24; emphasis is mine.

³¹ Irving G. Neufeld, Letter to Ruth Amen, 18 July 1974, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska).

³² Ruth Amen, Letter to Irving G. Neufeld, 13 August 1974, AHSGR Presidents' Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 2.

among our forefathers.”³³ The Society acted as a unifying agent, engineering a space in which the historically fractured groups could reconcile their past differences and become one.

To install a sense of shared GR identity across borders and time, the Society engineered a unified past for GRs using remnants of members’ diverse pasts, which they transmitted to readers through selected AHSGR publications. Fundamental to most ethnic narratives, AHSGR constructed a “myth of origins” that linked the population to an individual rather than a single geographic location.³⁴ Due to GRs’ complex relationship with place and ethnicity – ethnically German and spatially Russian – placing their origins in either Germany or Russia would not reflect the intricate ways in which they imagined themselves. Thus, AHSGR traced the GR ethnic and diasporic genesis to Catherine the Great, depicting her as the original GR – a German transplanted in Russian Soil herself – who beckoned fellow Germans to follow and created a distinctively German place in the Russian Empire. This process required a great deal of forgetting, as AHSGR publications frequently portrayed Catherine’s 1763 manifesto as the beginning of GR history, despite her lack of involvement in the Volhynian, Mennonite, and second wave of Black Sea migrations.³⁵ She became the source of an imagined ethnic concept, which embodied the history and origins of the GRs, connected them across space and time, and validated their status as both a diaspora and a people.

Building on this shared point of origin and diasporic consciousness, AHSGR re-imagined a shared memory for all GRs rooted in mutual victimization and suffering. During the latter portion of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the Russian Czars forcibly conscripted ethnic Germans in the Russian Empire and subjected them to religious intolerance, anti-German hysteria, Russification, and deportation. These events triggered a mass exodus of GRs to the Americas. The GRs that remained in the Soviet Union disproportionately suffered two disastrous government-engineered famines, the Volga German famine of 1921 and the Holodomor. Moreover, the Stalinist regime dismantled their religious institutions, enslaved them in the *Trudarmee* (Labor Army), and deported a large portion of GRs to Siberia.³⁶ These two distinct points of mutual suffering emerged in AHSGR publications. Members virtually experienced the agony repeatedly through readership of AHSGR publications, and notions of mutual suffering at the hands of the Czars and the Soviets permanently entered into their collective historical memory.³⁷ This process involved a great deal of historical selectivity. While the ancestors of many GRs in the Americas suffered at the hands of the Czars, most of them did not experience Soviet atrocities, because they left the Russian Empire prior to the Russian

³³ Adam Giesinger, “Keynote Address: Reflections on My Year as President,” *JAHSGR* 2 (1979): 1.

³⁴ See Anthony Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2000).

³⁵ Roger L. Welsch, “The German-Russians: Two Centuries of Cultural Submergence and Resurgence,” *Work Paper* 19 (1975): 25; Barbara Alice Amen, “Through the Years with Germans from Russia: A History of the Past Two Centuries in Dialogue and Song,” *JAHSGR* 1 (1978): 44-45.

³⁶ James W. Long, “The Volga Germans and the Famine of 1921,” *Russian Review* 51 (1992): 510-25; Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers, the Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1970); Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed*; Irina Mukhina, *The Germans of the Soviet Union* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007); The *Trudarmee* was a Soviet operated involuntary unpaid labor army, composed primarily of GRs, that operated between 1941 and 1946. For more information on the *Trudarmee* see Irena Mukhina, “To be Like All But Different: Germans in Soviet *Trudarmee*,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (2001): 857-874.

³⁷ See for example, Adam Giesinger, “President’s Message,” *JAHSGR* 2 (1979): i; John B. Toews, “Flight Across the Amur into China,” *JAHSGR* 2 (1979): 7-10; Alfred Krüger, “The 1915 Deportation of the Volhynian Germans,” trans., Adam Giesinger, *JAHSGR* 2 (1979): 12-14; Roger Welsch, trans., “The Homeless: The Tragedy of Volga German Farmers,” *JAHSGR* 2 (1979): 15-17.

Revolution. Nevertheless, AHSGR claimed past experiences of co-ethnics in the Soviet Union for American GRs, diminishing the differences in actual historical experiences in lieu of a shared narrative. Soviet attacks did not just happen to GRs in Russia; all GRs suffered. This semi-fictional sharing of a history based in mutual suffering and victimization granted readers a sense of solidarity and a singular historical memory for all GRs – past and present, at home and abroad.

AHSGR also facilitated the imagination of a transnational diasporic community, as its publications served as a space for members to participate in the greater GR community without actually knowing many of their co-ethnics in Germany, Latin America, Russia, and Canada. For instance, Schwabenland Haynes' January 1969 "Report of Conference of Germans from Russia," detailed her attendance of the Landmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland's (LDR) November 1968 conference in Bad Kissingen, Germany, including full reproductions of speeches.³⁸ Through readership, AHSGR members virtually attended the conference, listening to the same speeches and having some of the same experiences as their co-ethnics in Germany. Schwabenland Haynes sent several subsequent "Report[s] from Germany," which appeared in nearly every *Work Paper*. These reports detailed the status of the GRs in Germany and the Soviet Union and included interviews with GR refugees in Germany, case studies of Germans in the Soviet Union, GR folklore, and an interview with the organizer of a German *samizdat*.³⁹ Through these articles, she provided readers numerous windows into the Soviet Union and Germany, granting them virtual participation in the same historical experiences as GRs in Germany, the Soviet Union, and a place to partake in the transnational diaspora.

Schwabenland Haynes addressed GRs persecuted by the Soviet Union at a time when American media began addressing the topic, because GRs in the Soviet Union protested outside the West German Embassy in Moscow, the Communist Party's Central Committee headquarters, and in the Red Square, demanding the right to emigrate to Germany.⁴⁰ Transcending virtual participation, AHSGR members responded to unrest and co-ethnic persecution in the Motherland using preexisting political channels in the United States. Members of the Society wrote a letter to President Nixon on June 23, 1973, demanding he advocate for the restoration of Soviet Germans' civil rights, including the right to return to Germany and access to archival records in the USSR.⁴¹ Schwabenland Haynes addressed a letter similar in nature to Henry Kissinger. Enclosing a copy of an article with the heading "Kissinger tells Soviet official treatment of Jews harms trade," comparing the plight of GRs to that of the Jewish population in the Soviet Union, she urged Kissinger to acknowledge other ethnic groups discriminated against in the Soviet

³⁸ Emma Schwabenland Haynes, "Report of Conference of Germans from Russia," *Work Paper* 1 (1969): 4-9

³⁹ See for example, Emma Schwabenland Haynes, "Report from Germany," *Work Paper* 17 (1975): 16-20, 11 (April 1973): 6-11, and 1 (January 1969):4-9.

⁴⁰ Peter Reddaway, "After the Jews, Now it's the Germans Trapped inside Russia," *The Times*, June 12, 1976; "US Journalists Held after Moscow demonstration," *The Times*, December 2, 1974, 8; "Police Break Up Demonstration Of Russian Seeking Emigration," *The Fresno Bee*, March 9, 1977, A11; "Ethnic Germans Stage Protest March in Moscow," *The Washington Post*, March 9, 1977, A13.

⁴¹ AHSGR Members, "Letter to Nixon," *Work Paper* 12 (1973): 35-36; Richard Nixon employed a "white ethnic strategy" to win over left leaning white ethnic groups alienated by civil rights and affirmative action. There is a chance the society knew about this and believed he might respond to their complaints. See Thomas J. Sugrue and John D. Skrentny, "The White Ethnic Strategy," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Union that wanted to leave, including “German citizens of the USSR.”⁴² Schwabenland Haynes criticized the Secretary of State for focusing on the Jewish population, when the USSR allowed 30,000 Jews to leave for Israel and only 3,000 of the two million GRs to migrate to Germany, when “the desire to return to Germany is a prevalent among the Soviet Germans as the desire to emigrate to Israel is among the Soviet Jews.”⁴³ In both cases, AHSGR used the shared GR identity, notions of a shared past and present, and ties to GRs across borders to mobilize members of the trans-American network on behalf of co-ethnics trapped in the Motherland.

AHSGR also used its publications to inform members of Soviet discrimination against GRs and create a sense of ethnic solidarity. Amen transmitted AHSGR’s anxiety for co-ethnics trapped in the Soviet Union to readers of AHSGR Publications in her “President’s Message,” claiming, “We *are* concerned about those of our people who are still in Russia and wish to return to their ancestral homes. As members of the American Historical Societ[y] of Germans from Russia we *are* interested in what is happening to those who would like to be repatriated to Germany.”⁴⁴ Amen accentuated the Society’s continued identification with and concern for GRs in the Soviet Union, which she claimed as “our people.” Intended to spark an emotional response in readers, her emphasis on “are” signified a clear and present concern for GRs abroad, and called readers into action.

Adam Giesinger utilized language similar to Amen’s when addressing the goals of the Society at the end of its first decade in 1978. Establishing a stronger multinational GR network topped his list. Giesinger claimed, “It is one of the ambitions of the AHSGR to re-establish closer contact among the various segments of *our* people, now scattered over many lands. We no longer have a common language. Probably a majority still understand some German, but many speak only English, only Russian, only Spanish or only Portuguese. To communicate with our kin in other lands we shall have to become linguists.”⁴⁵ Amen and Giesinger both utilized the term “our people” when referring to co-ethnics in different national spaces. They perceived those in Russia, North America, and South America as belonging to the diasporic group that AHSGR represented, despite their many differences; however, they also realized the need to reconcile the linguistic, geographical, and cultural differentiations within to form a unified multicultural, multinational GR diaspora.

To achieve this goal, the Society continued work on a multinational organization network, embodied in the relationship between AHSGR and LDR. Several AHSGR members held membership in LDR, including Schwabenland Haynes who acted as a liaison between the two associations. Each of the two societies held organization memberships in the other, and AHSGR developed a strong relationship with LDR’s leadership. Indeed, Stumpp, LDR’s founder and president, joined AHSGR and served as the Society’s honorary chairman of the board, honorary president, and research counselor. He also delivered the keynote address in German at AHSGR’s second annual convention in 1971.⁴⁶ Addressing the speech to his “amerikanischen Landsleute

⁴² Emma Schwabenland Haynes, Letter to Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, 2 October 1973, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ruth Amen, “President’s Message,” *Work Paper* 17 (1975): i; emphasis appears in original document.

⁴⁵ Adam Giesinger, “President’s Message,” *JAHSGR* 1 (1978): i; emphasis appears in original document.

⁴⁶ Chester G. Krieger, Minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Directors, 21 February 1970, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 1; Nancy Bernhardt Holland, Minutes of AHSGR Regular Board of Directors Meeting, 2-3 May 1975, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1975, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 1; David Miller, Letter to Members of Ad Hoc German-Russian-American Research Committee, 22 May 1968, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln,

und Freunde” (American countrymen and friends), Stumpp affectionately recalled the letters and conversations he shared with American GRs and AHSGR leadership and their ties to fellow compatriots in the USSR.⁴⁷ Stumpp closed his address with the Rütli oath: “We want to be a united people of brothers, never to part in need or distress.”⁴⁸ Stumpp’s speech reinforced the shared past and identification of German, Soviet and American GRs, and his desire to all of his “countrymen” across borders to form an amalgamated transnational group. AHSGR and LDR provided spaces for members to achieve this goal.

The Society also developed ties to co-ethnics and GR organizations in Latin America. Between January 23 and February 16, 1978, over sixty members traveled to Brazil and Argentina to network with Argentine GRs and share in the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the arrival of their co-ethnics in the Pampas. Barbara Amen documented the trip in detail in “AHSGR Tour Report: New Friendships in South America,” which appeared in *AHSGR Journal*.⁴⁹ Amen referred to the Latin American GRs as “our distant kin.”⁵⁰ During the visit, AHSGR developed close ties with the Parana Society of Entre Rios of the Argentinean Association of Volga Germans (AAVG). In fact, when AHSGR celebrated its first decade in June of the same year, AAVG extended “a brotherly embrace for each and every single person in your organization” in a letter published in *AHSGR Journal*.⁵¹ Through these associational ties, North and South American GRs developed close “brotherly” kinship ties to one another and an awareness of their mutual membership in the same ethnic community. AHSGR’s interactions with Latin America and Germany transcended virtual participation, concern, and political mobilization. They actively built an organizational diasporic network that functioned in transnational space.

At the close of AHSGR’s first decade in 1978, Fred Koch, a Volga German historian, commented pessimistically on the fractured state of the multilingual, multicultural, transnational GR diaspora in *The Volga Germans: In Russia and the Americas, from 1763 to the Present*, claiming:

No longer is there an existing geographic embodiment... from with can spring continuity in language, philosophy, and culture – all those things that once characterized these people who call each other *unsere Leit* (our people). ... One who looks back toward his lost ancestral land might well say “Farewell, my people!” But the farewell is not final or complete. Although the people are bereft of the tangible link with their past, the emergence of an ethnic consciousness among them in America during the past decade reveals a swelling determination to save the vestiges and lore of this minority from oblivion – from becoming lost in history and even legend. This surge of self-recognition

Nebraska), 1; Alice Amen Heinz, Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, 15 September 1970, AHSGR Presidents’ Books, 1968-1974, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 1; Bridenthal, “Germans from Russia,” 196-202.

⁴⁷ Karl Stumpp, “Begrüßungs und Dankesworte,” AHSGR Vertical Files, Speeches and Reports of Dr. Karl Stumpp, AHSGR Research Library (Lincoln, Nebraska), 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3; The Rütli oath is the pledge of mutual support and affiliation between the original three Swiss cantons taken in the thirteenth century.

⁴⁹ Barbara Amen, “AHSGR Tour Report: New Friendships in South America,” *JAHSGR* 1 (1978): 67.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Greetings from South America,” *JAHSGR* 1 (1978):36-32.

culminated in the formation of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia.⁵²

Ironically, noting the weak link between GRs and their ancestral Russian homeland, Koch seemed hopeful. Not because he believed the homeland could be reclaimed or even restored, rather he perceived GRs' ancestral homeland as "lost." In fact, as late as 1973, Koch believed GRs would become victims of dispersal, intermarriage, and assimilation, initially titling the manuscript "Farewell my People." However, Koch changed his title and tune during AHSGR's first decade, rooting his newfound hope in an "ethnic consciousness" among American GRS. Koch depicted AHSGR as the space in which this "ethnic consciousness" developed. Indeed, The Society helped to lay the groundwork for a multinational diasporic network, which strove to reconcile the geographic, linguistic, and cultural differences of its members.

While redefining the diaspora to include past and present Black Sea, Mennonite, Volhynian, and Volga Germans in the United States, Canada, Latin America, Germany, and the Soviet Union, the Society and its members grappled with notions of homeland. Many GRs no longer wished to permanently return to the Russian or German homelands, opting instead to participate virtually through organizational membership, readership, donations, or brief homeland tours.⁵³ The Russian homeland GRs romanticized, the former Russian empire, no longer existed, and the Soviet Union hardly seemed like home. Soviet Germans, far removed from the Volga, Black Sea, remained disorganized and dispersed, often clustered in the Kazakhstan and the far reaches of Siberia. GRs returning to Germany faced disappointment and isolation. Germans in the Republic literally ghettoized returnees, perceiving them as outsiders with an alien dialect and dissimilar way of life.⁵⁴ Over time, the concept of permanently returning to and reclaiming a geographical homeland, a perplexing notion for the double diaspora, became impossible. Rather the diaspora became increasingly deterritorialized, residing within new alternative and transnational spaces. The Society and its publications served as some of several alternative post-territorial homelands. They constituted new spaces to return to and places to participate – virtual homelands. In a seemingly never-ending process, AHSGR and the diaspora it represented simultaneously negotiated and validated a shared point of identification and historical memory, which they propagated to co-ethnics within these new spaces. These combined processes continuously and concurrently redefined the AHSGR and the deterritorialized diaspora they represented, and continue to represent today.

⁵² Koch, *The Volga Germans*, 297.

⁵³ American, Canadian, South American, and German GRs frequently participate in AHSGR hosted homeland tours to Russia and Ukraine. During these tours, participants visit popular tourist destinations in both regions and return to the site of the colonies, often no longer there.

⁵⁴ Andreas Heinrich, "The Integration of Ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union," in *Coming Home to Germany: The Integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic*, ed. David Rock and Stefan Wolff (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 77-86.