



American Aid Society

of German Descendants

Vereinszeitung



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The Danube Swabians (Die Donauschwaben)



German Immigration, Aquarell, Gouache – Stefan Jäger

Historical rendition of the settlement of the Banat Swabians – on the left, new settlers approach their designated land; in the center, a group of people rest; on the right, a group stands in front of their half-finished houses. This single tri-part image depicts a trek, a rest, and an arrival.

The Danube Swabians

from Wikipedia.com

The Danube Swabians (German: Donauschwaben) is the ethnic German-speaking population, today largely extinct through emigration, which lived in the Kingdom of Hungary in east-central Europe, especially in the Danube River valley, first in the 12th century, and in greater numbers in the 17th and 18th centuries. Most were descended from earlier 18th-century Swabian settlers from Upper Swabia, the Swabian Jura, northern Lake Constance, the upper Danube, the Swabian-Franconian Forest, the Southern Black Forest and the Principality of Fürstenberg, followed by Hessians, Bavarians, Franconians and Lorrainers recruited by Austria to repopulate the area and restore agriculture after the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire. They were able to keep their language and religion and initially developed strong German communities in the region which retained the German language, customs, and folklore.

The Danube Swabians were given their German name by German ethnographers in the early 20th century. In the 21st century, they are made up of ethnic Germans from many former and present-day countries: Germans of Hungary; Satu

Mare Swabians; Germans of Croatia, Bačka, the Banat Swabians; and the Vojvodina Germans of Serbia's Vojvodina and Croatia's Slavonia, especially those in the Osijek region. However, the Carpathian Germans and Transylvanian Saxons are not included within the Danube Swabian group.

In German they called themselves *Schwowe*, and “Shwoveh” or “Shwova” (plural) and *Shwob* (singular first person) in English. In Serbo-Croatian, Danube Swabians, alongside the local populace would refer to themselves as *Švabo* (Serbo-Croatian for “of Swabia”) or *Nijemci / Nemci* (Serbo-Croatian for “Germans”), referring to their ethnic origin.

After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire following the First World War, the areas where the Danube Swabians had settled were divided into three parts by the Allied Powers. One part remained with Hungary, the second part was allocated to Romania, and the third part fell to the newly established state of Yugoslavia. In this atmosphere of ethnic nationalism, the Danube Swabians had to fight for legal equality as citizens and for the preservation of their cultural traditions. In the 1930s, Nazi Germany promoted National Socialist ideas to the Danube Swabians and claimed the right to protect them as part of its reason for expanding into eastern Europe.

The Danube Swabians faced particular challenges in the

Continued on page 10

AMERICAN AID SOCIETY of German Descendants

is a **501 (c) (3) non-profit organization** dedicated to the preservation of our German culture and heritage. All gifts and donations given to this organization are fully tax deductible.

This organization is headquartered at our clubhouse address below:

6540 N. Milwaukee Ave.
Chicago, IL 60631-1750

website: www.americanaidsocietyofgd.org
email: americanaidsocietyofgd@gmail.com

Our Mission

This organization's mission is to cultivate and maintain our German heritage by our traditions, customs, beliefs, music, dance, language, and to remember and preserve our history. To respect and accept Germans from Europe and their descendants living throughout the world. To aid other Germanic peoples in times of need such as when natural disasters occur. Also, to give support to other ethnic groups in times of crisis throughout the world. To maintain our loyalty, trust, love, and duty to the United States. And locally, to foster goodwill among all non Germans living amongst us in our community through education and entertainment.

Officers

Robert Lengfelder
President

Jenette Goecke
1st Vice President

Blanca Tilli
2nd Vice President

Matthias Wissmann
3rd Vice President

Michelle Heidrich
Recording Secretary

James Heidrich
Treasurer

Laura Casey
Communication's Secretary

Präsidentenbericht

A few words from our President



Happy Summer everyone. After a good break from meetings, our schedule quickly got busy beginning with the annual Verband meeting and the Board of Directors meeting of the Foundation the weekend of April 25-26. Chicago Donauschwaben hosted these North America meetings at their clubhouse and provided food, drink and *Gemütlichkeit* for all in attendance. The Verband der Donauschwaben President, Ray Martini, and his officers had a busy weekend of business, finance and elections. Newly-elected board members are Sue Brandelik as Treasurer (Schatzmeisterin) and Awald Langenfeld as First Vice President (1. Vizepräsident). Two of our own members were voted into Board member positions; Erika Ehrat will serve as the National Children's Director (Landeskinderleiterin) and Joey Byrom as National Records Archivist (Archivar)

The Stiftung, known as the Donau Swabian Foundation of the USA, is having a well-respected fundraiser, the proceeds from which will support the future while honoring the past. The *Heimat Glocken Fundraiser* is a call to remember, in honor of forty-two years of the foundation. Over the past forty-two years, the Danube Swabian Foundation USA has played a vital role in preserving heritage and fostering community among its members. This year, we mourn the loss of three remarkable individuals—Michael Wendl, Leopold Mayer, and Edward Palffy—who dedicated themselves to furthering our cause. In their honor and to pay tribute to all those who came before us, we are launching this new fundraiser. We invite all to contribute to this fundraiser, supporting the future of our organization while honoring the legacy of those who paved the way.

- Silver Level: \$42 donation
- Gold Level: \$420 donation
- Platinum Level: \$4200 donation

Donor Recognition

All donors who contribute to the *Heimat Glocken Fundraiser* will be acknowledged in the upcoming Foundation Newsletter. If they prefer to keep their donation confidential, they can check the designated box on the donation form, and their name will not appear in the printed list of donors. Find the attached flyer in the newsletter to support this cause which in turn supports us as an organization.

One item that I spoke of at the national yearly meeting is a reiteration of what every club says; the youth are the future. I stressed that it is important to focus on how that concept is actually supported and implemented. I suggested the model we have at my job: in order to be promoted, a person must train someone else first. Although this type of club mentorship does not come with pay and bonuses, we ask that this is done to help our club survive and thrive. *Who will do the newsletter next? Who wants to be a delegate to German Day? Who wants to be the next president?* Think of your passions and how they could benefit the club; we will make every effort to support you.

It appears that many people in the American Aid Society community are being called out on WGN specials. Last fall Dan Pilguy was featured for his work in the community with his business, *Arlington Crest Farms*; earlier this year Dr. Erika Hutz was featured; the latest celebrity is Erika Ehrat who owns *Rare Dirndl* and is the *Kindergruppeleiterin*. Please enjoy the article in this newsletter that features some background of our members. Let's see who will be next to be featured. Make sure to support Dan and Erika's businesses.

– Robert Lengfelder

PLEASE VISIT www.germanday.com FOR ADDITIONAL DETAILS

Vereinunternehmungen (Club Activities)

Versammlungen (Club Meetings)

05 Jun 26	Vorstandsversammlung (Officers' Meeting), 8 PM at our Clubhouse
10 Jun 26	Rentnertreffen (Seniors' Meeting), 9 AM at our Clubhouse
19 Jun 26	Mitgliederversammlung (Membership Meeting), 8 PM at our Clubhouse
08 Jul 26	Rentnertreffen (Seniors' Meeting), 9 AM at our Clubhouse
17 Jul 26	Mitgliederversammlung (Membership Meeting), 8 PM at our Clubhouse
07 Aug 26	Vorstandsversammlung (Officers' Meeting), 8 PM at our Clubhouse
12 Aug 26	Rentnertreffen (Seniors' Meeting), 9 AM at our Clubhouse
21 Aug 26	Mitgliederversammlung (Membership Meeting), 8 PM at our Clubhouse

Veranstaltungen (Events)

27 Jun 26 American Aid Society Golf Outing

Saturday at our German Cultural Center, 259 W. Grand Ave. in Lake Villa
 Golfing held at Renwood Golf Course
 701 E Sherwood Rd.
 Round Lake Beach, IL
 7:30 AM CHECK-IN / 8:30 AM SHOTGUN START
 scramble format / longest drive / closest to pin
 \$110 per person or \$ 440 per foursome

- Boxed lunch
- 18 holes and golf cart
- Dinner at Lake Villa fest grounds
- Open bar in Lake Villa from 1–4 PM (beer, wine, soda)

If not a golfer, join us for late lunch and drinks in Lake Villa from 1–4 PM.
 \$35 donation

Register at americanaidsoctyofgd.org by June 7th

Contact Christine O'Reilley @ 847-252-9016 or c-oreilley@comcast.net

04 Jul 26 4. Juli Picknick (July 4th Picnic)

Saturday at our German Cultural Center, 259 W. Grand Ave in Lake Villa
 Picnic grounds open at 10:00 AM.
 Food for purchase will be available from 12:00 PM.
 Programs and dance performances by our children and youth groups begin at 2:00 PM.

Cash and credit cards for all ticket sales are accepted.

Join the American Aid Society in remembering friends and relatives who have passed away.

04-06 Sep 26 Landestrachtenfest mit Jugendwettbewerb (Danube-Swabian Gathering with Youth Dance Competition)

Friday thru Sunday at our German Cultural Center, 259 W. Grand Ave in Lake Villa

REFER to our website for details:

[www.americanaidsoctyofgd.org/Landestrachtenfest mit Wettbewerb](http://www.americanaidsoctyofgd.org/Landestrachtenfest_mit_Wettbewerb)

Welcome! We are thrilled to host this year's *Landestrachtenfest mit Tanz Wettbewerb*. Get ready for a fantastic weekend filled with fun, festivities, and creating unforgettable moments. We can't wait to see everyone come together and enjoy this wonderful event.

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This Vereinszeitung (club newspaper) is published quarterly with mailings to the membership prior to **March, June, September, and December** of each year.

It is your active participation which makes this newsletter informative, educational and entertaining reading. Mail or e-mail all articles, pictures or whatever you wish to share to the address below. Pictures will not be returned unless requested.

Walter Scheffrahn
 9802 Fox Shores Dr.
 Algonquin, IL 60102
 Telephone: 224-489-7565

Publicist's email: wscheffrahn@yahoo.com

Email publicist if you wish to receive your newsletters electronically. Include NEWSLETTER in the subject line.

DO NOT wait until the last minute since late submissions will either be heavily edited or omitted entirely. Best to submit shortly after each activity or event. *Accuracy is the responsibility of each author and not the Publisher!* Second, the publicist **will NOT write articles** on your behalf.

Contribution deadline for articles is **February 1st, May 1st, August 1st, and November 1st**. This allows sufficient time to edit, proofread, layout, print, and mail the newsletters to the membership before month's end.

Laura Casey: Communication's Secretary, advertising
Margaret Wolf: Editor and proofreader
Walter Scheffrahn: Layout, printing & distribution

Membership Dues

Dues to the American Aid Society are



\$25.00 per person or \$50.00 per couple.

Anyone interested in the German culture and in its heritage is welcome to join.

Welcome New Members

Since our last issue, our organization has grown with the following new members:

MANNING, Monika
O'SHAUGHNESSY HUTZ, Reinhold & Irene
ROMAN, Michelle

We heartily welcome you to our large American Aid Society family. Your membership and your involvement in our organization will be greatly appreciated.

Rückblick seit der letzten Ausgabe

(Review since the last issue)

Fühlingsbankett

(Spring Banquet)

By Kelsey McMahan

The end of the off-season for The American Aid Society of German Descendants seems to come around quicker each year. Spring had hardly sprung and yet there was work to be done. The faithful Tuesday Crew resumed their weekly sessions in the weeks leading up to *Frühlingsbankett*. They diligently prepared the Lake Villa grounds as well as inside the hall for the first event of 2026. The hall was tidied up, tables and chairs were organized, and loyal volunteers signed up to help prepare and serve a delicious meal.

Saturday May 2nd was a quiet yet productive day. Inside the hall volunteers were in the kitchen filling, rolling and searing *Rouladen*, there was a team of ladies pounding chicken into *Schnitzel*, and another team of members working on the finishing touches in and outside of the hall. It takes more than a day's work to put together an event like *Frühlingsbankett*, luckily the volunteers work as a well-oiled machine and always get it done.

Sunday May 3rd saw seasonally appropriate weather; bright shining sun with a crisp chill in the air. Guests arrived at the hall at noon and were greeted by a stunning display of potted plants put out by the Frauengruppe for their yearly raffle. A guest and her small son were overheard admiring the flowers and plants saying "this is my kind of raffle." Across the dance floor was another delightful spread, pot-luck style hors d'oeuvres. Guests and members brought trays of canapes, dips, cut fruit, fresh veggies, meats, cheeses and perhaps every type of pickle in existence. A delicious display was the result of a communal effort. After the noon cocktail hour it was time to enjoy the entertainment.

The AAS Kinder has certainly grown recently; returning members and new faces are always a welcome addition. This group of children had quite the show prepared. Together they sang songs accompanied by some running in place and excited hops. They recited lines in well-rehearsed German. They performed a comical skit with cute rainy day accessories and they closed out their program with the sweetest dances.

The age range of the Kindergruppe is

roughly three to fourteen. A nice round of applause is certainly due to the fearless leaders who guide these cultured kids. The current Kinder leaders Erika Ehrat, Erika Hutz-Warner and Ingrid Wissmann took a moment to recognize former Kinder queen, Linda Byrom. She earned a well-deserved recognition after 20 years of service.

Rounding out the entertainment a small but joyful Jugendgruppe marched onto the dance floor. Three energetic dances left the crowd smiling. The middle dance, *Fast Windmiller*, is a longtime favorite of Jugend alumni and many could be seen clapping along in the crowd. A big *danke schön* goes to all the Kinder and Jugend who braved the stage and put on a wonderful show.

After all that excitement there was still a family-style meal to be had. The Jugend served up *Schnitzel*, *Rouladin*, red cabbage, *Spätzle*, steamed veggies and of course, tasty slices of bread. Just when guests thought they could eat nothing more, the Jugend came out with coffee and cake.

Perhaps the most anticipated activity of the afternoon was the drawing of the plant raffle. All of the wonderfully curated plants were claimed by grateful winners. As is the case with all events put on by the AAS community, a successful spring banquet would not be possible without the folks who continue to volunteer their time and efforts. Prost!



Mitglieder Meilensteine
(Member Milestones)

Verstorbene (Deaths)

One of our members passed to her eternal reward.



Katharina Naase (1926 – 2026)

It is with deep sadness that we share the passing of Katharina Naase, who left this world peacefully at the age of 100 on the morning of February 26, 2026, surrounded by her loving family and friends. She was a remarkable woman whose strength, courage, and unwavering positivity left a lasting mark on everyone who had the privilege of knowing her.

Katharina was born in Soltur, Yugoslavia on January 12, 1926, to George and Magdalena Gatsch. She married the love of her life, Max Naase, on May 28, 1949. A devoted mother to Manfred and spouse Karen, Susan, and Heidi; grandmother to Mark and spouse Jill, Matthew and spouse Marie, Corey and spouse Stephen, and great-grandmother to Josef and Andrew. Katharina lived a full and meaningful life defined by her deep love for her family, her sharp wit, and her generous heart. Throughout a century of life, her kindness, strength, and enduring love will forever guide us. We will miss her deeply but carry her spirit with us always.

Katharina was one of our oldest members. Despite not residing nearby, she maintained her membership with the American Aid Society.

We send our deepest condolences to the Naase Family.



Glückwünsche (Congratulations)

**Rheinischer Verein
Kinder Prinzenpaar**

By Elsie Anetsberger

When I was chosen to be the Kinder princess, I was very honored to have this opportunity. It took a long time for me to get prepared. I had to find a new dress and buy a crown. I was given a beautiful sash that said Princess Elsie 2026.

Prinz Philip and I also had to order some *Ordens* with our pictures. Crowning at Donau was very stressful, but I had all my family and friends there to support me. When we were about to walk out onto the stage, my shoe broke so I took very small steps the whole time. I also had prepared a speech in not just English but in German too. When I was getting crowned they put my sash on first, then Club Ordens, then the crown and last but not least the cape. Once the cape was on, I felt like a princess. They finished off by giving me flowers and introducing us as the new Kinder *Prinzenpaar*.

Now that I am the Kinder princess, I will attend as many events as I can and meet new people. I am so thankful to have this opportunity.



Komitee Bericht
(AAS Committee Report)

Tuesday Group Report

By Joe Stein

The Tuesday crew returned to work the first Tuesday in April, which was one month later than usual due to the weather, vacations and some illnesses. Since then we have been busy with putting the hall in shape – cleaning, washing the floor & windows, setting up the tables & chairs, cleaning the bathrooms, and so many other things. We had to prepare the hall and make everything ready for our Frühlingsbankett.

We all worked hard and quickly, but we managed to get things done. Every member of the Tuesday crew knows what needs to be done and in ruck-zuck things get done. A big THANK YOU goes to all the members, especially to our newest member – PETER BAPPERT – who is already in the swing of things. Thanks Peter for joining us. The hardest work was done by Hans Wissmann, who did all the necessary painting, and Walter Scheffrahn. Walter and Hans prepared the grounds which were in bad shape due to the miserable weather we had all spring. Hopefully the weather will improve so that we will get all the outside work done for the *Landesverbandtreffen* over the Labor Day weekend.

This year two European groups, from Germany and Hungary, in addition to the groups from all the *Donauschwaben Vereinen* in the USA and Canada will be at the *Landesverbandtreffen*.

Now the summer work begins as we strive to keep everything beautiful and in good working order. Hopefully, we will continue to be blessed with beautiful weather on our Tuesday workdays.



Spenden (Donations)

Donations

The following people have generously donated to our club.

Ted & Hildegard Geiger — \$100.00
in memory of Adam Sollmann

Elizabeth Walter — \$75.00
Vroni Weiner — \$30.00
in memory of Angela Stumpfoll

Eva Vollmer — \$100.00
in memory of Simon Vollmer

Annonymous — \$500.00
in memory of Rosa Lengfelder

Eddie & Brigitte Glasenhardt — \$5000.00

Matthias & Gerda Schnauer — \$200.00

Horst & Anna Wagener — \$100.00

Frank Hoog — \$100.00

Roger & Mary Erl Pretzel — \$100.00

Barbara Klett — \$50.00

Maria Petto — \$25.00
for the club

Steve & Hedy Nuspl — \$50.00
for the newsletter

Once again, a heartfelt **DANKE SCHÖN** for your generosity. Additional tax-deductible contributions in support of the club are always greatly appreciated.

Equivalent Popular Expressions

English: A piece of cake
German: *Ein Kinderspiel sein*

English: To have one's cake and eat it too
German: *Auf allen Hochzeiten tanzen wollen*

English: To be a chip off the old block
German: *Ganz der Vater sein*

English: To have a chip on one's shoulder
German: *Die beleidigte Leberwurst spielen*

English: Six of one, half dozen of the other
German: *Jacke wie Hose*

English: Small but good
German: *Klein aber fein*

Aus unseren Abteilungen
(From our Departments)

Kindergruppe

Linda Byrom – Kindergruppe Delegate
lbyrom1@yahoo.com

Frühlingsbankett Report

By Christi Mueller

On Sunday, May 3, our annual Frühlingsbankett at Lake Villa brought together members, family, and friends for a joyful afternoon celebrating the arrival of spring. With a wonderful turnout and a hall buzzing with excitement, the event was especially magical thanks to our Kindergruppe, who arrived dressed in their spring best and ready to perform.

The afternoon began with a special Kindergruppe lunch prepared by our dedicated kitchen crew. The children enjoyed Schnitzel bites, Spätzle, vegetables, and butter bread before the festivities began. A heartfelt thank you goes to Monika Bappert, Karin (Wissman) Faehnrich, and Christine Pfaffinger for generously volunteering their time to serve lunch to the children in the back room before the performance.

After lunch, and a few energetic games of tag around the hall, along with some gentle wrangling by our wonderful leaders, the Kindergruppe lined up for their much-anticipated performance. A few of our older members warmly welcomed everyone to the Frühlingsbankett before the children took the stage.

The Kindergruppe's preparation and dedication were evident from the very first song. Under the guidance of Erika Hutz-Warner, the children performed beautifully and confidently throughout the afternoon. They opened with *Häschen in der Grube*, followed by an especially heartwarming moment as our youngest participants (Stella, Theo, Harry, Marco, Owen, Walter, Conrad, Freddie, and Jakob) who recited memorized lines from the poem *Hallo Frühling!* to the delight of the audience.

The full Kindergruppe then came together to sing *Es tönen die Lieder*, before Addison, Sonja, Mila, Mathilda, Matteo, and Deklan performed the poem *Wir begrüßen den Frühling*. The

children closed the musical portion with the lively and beloved song *Ich lieb den Frühling*.

The performance continued with the charming skit *Der Frühling kommt zurück*, featuring Callen, Geneva, Emme, and Elsie portraying the return of spring through characters representing the sun, flowers, birds, and rain. Their creativity and enthusiasm brought smiles to everyone in attendance.

The audience was also treated to two lively dance performances. Our youngest dancers joined in for *Der Fröhlicher Kreis*, filling the hall with energy and joy. The second dance, *Familien Tanz*, featured the older Kindergruppe members and included an intricate woven dance pattern that the children executed with impressive confidence and skill. As the performance concluded, the pride and excitement of the leaders was unmistakable, as they jumped for joy near the stage.

The effort and dedication shown by every child were truly inspiring. Performing and reciting memorized lines in front of a large audience takes courage, and the Kindergruppe should be incredibly proud of all they accomplished that afternoon.

At the conclusion of the program, Erika (Neumayer) Ehrat and Erika Hutz-Warner invited Linda Byrom to the front for a special recognition. Linda has served as a *Kinderleiterin* for an incredible 20 years and is now stepping aside from her role. Through countless Friday night practices, performances, and behind-the-scenes preparations, Linda has made a lasting impact on our club and generations of Kindergruppe members. We extend our deepest gratitude for her years of dedication, care, and service.

As Linda and Michelle step back from leadership, they leave big shoes to fill. We are excited, however, for Erika (Neumayer) Ehrat, Erika Hutz-Warner, and Ingrid Wissmann as they take the reins and guide the future of the Kindergruppe with enthusiasm, creativity, and care.



Kulturaustausch (Cultural Exchange)

Donauschwaben Cultural Exchange

By Kathleen Martini

This Frühlingsbankett was a truly memorable celebration of community, tradition, and the joy of spring. Thank you to everyone who participated, volunteered, performed, and supported this special event.

Looking ahead, the Kindergruppe is preparing for an exciting and busy season of performances. After the Memorial Day picnic performance, they will perform at Maifest in Lincoln Square, where they will also have a special collaborative performance with the Chicago Donau Kindergruppe. The group is also eagerly anticipating this summer's Fourth of July picnic at Lake Villa, where they will help commemorate the 250th anniversary of America's birthday.

We encourage all members and families to come out and support our Kinder as they continue sharing their talents, enthusiasm, and love of tradition with our community.



As a member of the Weltdachverband der Donauschwaben, the Landesverband participates in a global cultural exchange that both sends our dance groups on performance tours of Europe (made possible through Stiftung funding, thank you!) and hosts European groups on performance tours of North America. This year we are fortunate to have two such groups traveling to various cities, and both will participate in our *Landestrachtenfest mit Jugendwettbewerb* over Labor Day weekend. A few days before Labor Day, both groups will perform in Chicago at Chicago Donauschwaben.



Banater Trachtengruppe KV Esslingen is a cultural dance group from Esslingen, Germany, who previously traveled to North America in 2013. They are bringing with them Juergen Harich, the president of the *Weltdachverband*. Their group contains all ages, and we have a longstanding relationship with them, as we have visited them and they visited us multiple times.



Németkéri Német Nemzetiségi Táncsoport is a cultural dance group from Németkér, Hungary making their first trip to the United States. They are fresh off of winning the Festival Prize from the Landesrat, the national cultural organization in Hungary, competing against dozens of groups to win the top prize. Traveling with them are Edina Bunth, *Jugendverterin* (Hungary) of the *Weltdachverband*, and Julianna Szabó, *Tanzsektionvorsitzende* of the *Landesrat*, as well as the mayor of Németkér, Erika Horváth-Gál. Their group also contains all ages, and several of our recent groups traveling in Europe have visited and been hosted by their group.



Anerkennung (Recognition)

AAS Members on WGN TV news!

By Erika Ehrat

I've been dancing, cooking, and celebrating German heritage my whole life. It's not something I do seasonally... it's just who I am. And honestly, it's everything. The AAS is where I met my best friends. It's where I met my husband. It's where my love of dirndls was born and where the idea to combine my passions into a business first took root. My kids now participate. It's not just a club... it's my whole damn life.

And lately I've been noticing something kind of wonderful. People from our community keep showing up on the WGN Channel 9 Chicago TV news!

My co-Kinderleiterin, Dr. Erika Hutz has been featured multiple times for her expertise as a physician, most recently speaking about healthy eating habits for aging. Dan Pilguy, former member of the Jugendgruppe, was spotlighted for Arlington Crest Farms, his farm in Palatine. And me... well, I manifested my way onto the evening news.

Back in January I started posting "day ## of telling my startup story until WGN TV picks it up" on TikTok and Instagram. Mostly as a joke. Mostly! I got to day 17 and got a call from Erin McElroy at WGN. Someone had printed my *Rare Dirndl* homepage and put it on her desk. I still don't know with certainty who did that.

The segment started simple enough... a woman looking for a dirndl for Oktoberfest. I asked one of my best friends, fellow AAS member and assistant *Kinderleiterin*, Ingrid Wissmann, to come to the studio that day as a customer. And as Erin McElroy started asking questions, what I kept coming back to, even as the cameras rolled, was this: we've been friends for over 30 years. My mom's mom taught me to sew, and my dad's mom sparked my love of textiles and fashion. Their love of traditional dress is one of the reasons *Rare Dirndl* exists. That's what WGN wanted to explore... the tradition, the craft, the women who pass it down. But standing there with Ingrid, I was reminded that the community piece is just as important to the story.

When Dan's Arlington Crest Farms segment made the rounds through our friend group and across social media, people were



Erika Ehrat at her studio

genuinely excited. When I shared the information about the upcoming WGN TV segment, Erin Batchelder, co-owner of Laschet's Inn on Irving Park, was so excited; she even arranged a watch party. In a world that feels divided, we're still gathering around each other's wins and still celebrating who we are and where we come from. That's something worth protecting.

Which brings me to this year's *Landestrachtenfest*, hosted right here by our club. This event doesn't happen on donations and good vibes alone. It happens because of this community, including the volunteers, the members, the people who show up. Many are the same people who circulate each other's news segments, host watch parties, and have been dancing together for decades.

If you've ever wondered why you're a member of this club, I think that's the answer. It's not just the dancing, or the food, or the traditions, as wonderful as all of that is. For me, it's the fact that thirty-plus years later, my best friend is still standing next to me. But this time, in front of a WGN TV camera.



Dr. Erika Hutz



Erika Ehrat being filmed for WGN TV



Erika Ehrat and Erin McElroy of WGN



Dr. Erika Hutz preparing to cook for a WGN segment

Anreiz
(Appeal)



WGN filming at Dan Pilguy's Arlington Crest Farms



Dan Pilguy and Erin McElroy for a WGN news segment

**Verein
Deutsche
Sprache**



Das weltweite Netz
der deutschen Sprache

Deutsch verbindet

Das ist das Motto des vor 27 Jahren gegründeten Vereins Deutsche Sprache (VDS). Der Verein ist weltweit tätig und politisch neutral, über die Hälfte seiner inzwischen 37.000 Mitglieder haben ihren Wohnsitz außerhalb der deutschen Landesgrenzen.

Das Vereinsziel ist die Stärkung des Deutschen als Sprache von Kultur und Wissenschaft, als Sprache, in der man auch in Zukunft Poesie betreiben und wissenschaftliche Entdeckungen formulieren kann. Insbesondere kämpft der VDS dafür, dass eine über hunderte von Jahren gereifte Grammatik nicht unter die Räder der Gendersprache kommt, einer Ideologie, die im Namen der Geschlechtergerechtigkeit die Anmutung und das sprachliche Gefüge unserer Sprache zu zerstören angetreten ist.

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Und eine von unserer Vereinsfreundin Edda Moser gesungene Mozartarie befindet sich gerade auf einer Silberscheibe auf dem Weg in das nächste Sonnensystem.

Wenn Sie mitmachen wollen: auf unserer Netzseite finden Sie einen Beitrittsknopf. Schon jetzt zählen wir viele Schlaraffen zu unseren Mitgliedern und freuen uns auf mehr!

Ihr Professor Dr. Walter Krämer
Gründer und 1. Vorsitzender des Vereins Deutsche Sprache e.V.

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Die Donauschwaben

(The Danube Swabians)

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Second World War, when the Axis powers, including Germany, overran many of the nations where they lived. While they were initially favored by the occupiers, some were moved from their homes. As the war progressed and Germany needed more soldiers, the men were conscripted. Many atrocities took place during and after the war, as a result of the complicated allegiances, brutality of the Nazis, and partisan reaction to it.

Toward the end of the Second World War, tens of thousands of Danube Swabians fled west ahead of the advancing Soviet army. After the war, the remaining Danube Swabians were disenfranchised, their property seized, and many were deported to labor camps in the Soviet Union. Hungary expelled half of its ethnic Germans. In Yugoslavia, the local “ethnic Germans” were collectively blamed for their involvement in the actions of Nazi Germany, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and branded as war criminals. Immediately after the end of the war, partisan troops conducted mass executions of numerous Yugoslav Danube Swabians. Survivors were later confined to labor and internment camps by the Yugoslavian authorities. Following the dissolution of the camps, the majority of the remaining Yugoslav Danube Swabians left the country, seeking refuge in Germany, other parts of Europe, the United States, and Canada.

Of the 1.4 to 1.5 million pre-war population of Danube Swabians, the overwhelming majority of the survivors resettled in German-speaking countries: about 660,000 in Germany and about 150,000 in Austria. Danube Swabians also resettled in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, and Australia. The greatest concentrations of Danube Swabians in the United States were in New York, Rochester, Trenton, Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Akron, Mansfield, Philadelphia, Detroit, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Los Angeles. The diaspora communities of Danube Swabians maintain their language and customs in numerous societies and clubs. The number of organizations is shrinking as the generations that lived in the Danube Swabian homelands die.

History

Danube Swabian men's Tracht, from the historic house of the parents of Stefan Jäger, Hatzfeld (Jimbolia), Romanian Banat.



Origins

Beginning in the 12th century, German merchants and miners began to settle in the Kingdom of Hungary at the invitation of the Hungarian monarch. Although there were significant colonies of Carpathian Germans in the Spiš mountains and Transylvanian Saxons in Transylvania, German settlement throughout the rest of the kingdom had not been extensive until this time.

During the 17th–18th centuries, warfare between the Habsburg monarchy and the Ottoman Empire devastated and depopulated much of the lands of the Danube valley, referred to geographically as the Pannonian plain. The Habsburgs, ruling Austria and Hungary at the time, resettled the land with Germanic settlers from Swabia, Hesse, especially Fulda (district), Palatinate, Baden, Franconia, Bavaria, Austria,

Alsace-Lorraine and the Rhön Mountains, and Hunsrück. Despite differing origins, the new immigrants were all referred to as Swabians by their neighbor Croats, Serbs, Hungarians, and Romanians, because the majority of the first settlers were Swabians. The Bačka settlers called themselves *Shwoveh*, the plural of *Shwobe* in the polyglot language that evolved there. The majority of them boarded boats in Ulm, Swabia, and traveled to their new destinations down the Danube River in boats called Ulmer Schachteln. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had given them funds to build their boats for transport. The total number of German settlers who emigrated from different parts of Germany to Hungary between 1686 and 1829 is estimated at 150,000. The official name Danube Swabians has been used for this population group since 1922.

DNA Test examples of Danube Swabians from Hungary show their German ancestry.

Settlement

Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria and Hungary, ruler of the Habsburg Monarchy from 1740–1780.



The first wave of invited resettlement came after the Ottoman Turks were gradually being forced back after their defeat at the Battle of Vienna in 1683. The settlement was encouraged by nobility, whose lands had been devastated through warfare, and by military officers including Prince Eugene of Savoy and Claudius Mercy. Many Germans settled in the Bakony (*Bakonywald*) and Vértes (*Schildgebirge*) mountains north and west of Lake Balaton (*Plattensee*), as well as around the capital city, Buda (*Ofen*), now part of Budapest. The area of heaviest German colonization during this period was in the Swabian Turkey (*Schwäbische Türkei*), a triangular region between the Danube River, Lake Balaton, and the Drava (*Drau*) River. Other areas settled during this time by Germans were Pécs (*Fünfkirchen*), Satu Mare (*Sathmar*), and south of Mukachevo (*Munkatsch*).

After the Habsburgs annexed the Banat area from the Ottomans in the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718), the government made plans to resettle the region to restore farming. It became known as the Banat of Temesvár (*Temeschwar/Temeschburg*), as well as the Bačka (Batschka) region between the Danube and Tisza (*Theiss*) rivers. Fledgling settlements were destroyed during another Austrian-Turkish war (1737–1739), but extensive colonization continued after the suspension of hostilities.

The Stifoller or Stiffolder, practitioners of Folk Catholicism, settled on the Danube in some 25–30 Villages at Baranya County and four villages in Tolna County of southwest Hungary between 1717 and 1804, mostly in 1720. Their ancestors once came from the Diocese of Fulda at Fulda and the surrounding Rhön Mountains in Germany.

After Maria Theresa of Austria assumed the thrones of Queen of Hungary, Archduchess of Austria, and Queen of Bohemia in 1740, she encouraged vigorous colonization on Hungarian crown lands, especially between Timisoara and the Tisza. The Crown agreed to permit the Germans to retain their language and religion, generally Roman Catholic.

The German farmers steadily redeveloped the land: drained marshes near the Danube and the Tisza, rebuilt farms, and constructed roads and canals. Many Danube Swabians served on Austria's Military Frontier (*Militärgrenze*) against the Ottomans. Between 1740 and 1790, more than 100,000 Germans immigrated to the Kingdom of Hungary. Under the reign of Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor, Lutheran Germans, mainly from Hesse, Palatinate and Lower Saxony, were also allowed to settle in Hungary and other parts of the Habsburg Empire. In the various Danube Swabian dialects they were locally referred to as *Lutherische* (Lutheran). Late 18th-century resettlement was accomplished through private and state initiatives.

The Napoleonic Wars ended the large-scale movement of Germans to the Hungarian lands, although the colonial population increased steadily and was self-sustaining through natural increase. Small daughter-colonies developed in Slavonia and Bosnia. After the creation of Austria-Hungary in 1867, Hungary established a policy of Magyarization whereby minorities, including the Danube Swabians, were induced by political and economic means to adopt the Magyar language and culture.

Beginning in 1893, Banat Swabians began to move to Bulgaria, where they settled in the village of Bardarski Geran, Vratsa Province, founded by Banat Bulgarians several years prior to that. Their number later exceeded 90 families. They built a separate Roman Catholic church in 1929 due to conflicts with the Bulgarian Catholics. Some of these Germans later moved to Tsarev Brod, Shumen Province, together with a handful of Banat Bulgarian families, as well as to another Banat Bulgarian village, Gostilya, Pleven Province.

After the treaties of Saint-Germain (1919) and Trianon (1920) following World War I, the Banat was divided between Romania, Yugoslavia, and Hungary; Bačka was divided between Yugoslavia and Hungary; and Satu Mare went to Romania. Before World War II, the biggest populations of Germans were in the Vojvodina were at Hodschag, Werbass, and Apatin.

There were approximately two million ethnic Danube Swabians in the region before World War II. In Romania, the census of 1930 recorded 745,421 Germans; Hungarian Census of 1933 recorded 477,153; and the Yugoslavian Census of 1921, 513,472. German estimations from the interwar period place those estimations at 850,000; 600,000 and 620,000 for Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia respectively.



Traditional Swabian house in Hungary

World War II, expulsion, and post-war

Institute for Danube Swabian history and geography, Tübingen, Germany



In 1941, much of Yugoslavia was invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany as part of the Second World War in the German-occupied

Banat, they granted the Swabian minority superior status over the other ethnic groups in the Yugoslav population. The Baranja and Bačka Swabians reverted to Hungary. The Danube Swabians were already under heavy Nazi influence by that time and served as the Axis fifth column during the invasion of Yugoslavia, although many served in the royal Yugoslav army in the brief war against the Nazis in April 1941. The Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945), a fascist puppet state created within Axis-occupied Yugoslavia, was home to 182,000 Danube Swabian ethnic Germans (who were called *Folksdojčeri* in Croatian). In addition, the Danube Swabian minority were granted the separate autonomous region of Banat within German-occupied Serbia. In Bačke in 1941, Danube Swabians formed around 20% of the population. Yugoslav Danube Swabians supplied more than 60,000 troops for German military formations, some voluntarily but many more under duress. They actively participated in the sometimes brutal repression of Yugoslav Partisans and their suspected sympathizers, including 69,000 Jews living in Yugoslavia.

The local collaborationist authorities were forced to make it illegal to draft Danube Swabians. However, of the approximately 500,000-strong Danube Swabian minority in occupied Yugoslavia (182,000 in the NDH, 350,000 in Vojvodina), 500,000 in Romania and 500,000 in Hungary, approximately 100,000 eventually entered service in various German and Axis military organizations, most notably in the two locally formed Waffen-SS volunteer divisions, the 7th SS Volunteer Mountain Division *Prinz Eugen*, and the 22nd SS Volunteer Cavalry Division (which was made-up of Hungarian Danube Swabians).

Although these military units were initially formed as volunteer units, SS officials ultimately imposed conscription under the dubious legal pretext that occupied Serbia was *deutsches Hoheitsgebiet*, and the archaic *Tiroler Landsturmordnung* (Tyrol General Levy Act) of 1872 was invoked. Guenther Reinecke, chief of the *Hauptamt SS-Gericht* (SS legal office) wrote to Himmler that the Prinz Eugen was “no longer an organization of volunteers, that on the contrary, the ethnic Germans from Serbian Banat were drafted, to a large extent under threat of punishment by the local German leadership, and later by the SS *Ergänzungsamt*.” At the end of the war, all POWs captured by the Yugoslav Army considered Yugoslav citizens collaborating with the enemy and killed. In 2010, a mass grave of 2,000 executed prisoners from the 7th SS Prinz Eugen was discovered near the Slovenian village of Brežice.

Die Donauschwaben

(The Danube Swabians)

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Between 1941 and 1943, a total of 2,150 ethnic German Bulgarian citizens were transferred to Germany as part of Adolf Hitler's *Heim ins Reich* policy. These included 164 Banat Swabians from Bardarski Geran and 33 from Gostilya. From 1945 to 1948, many ethnic Germans in Hungary were dispossessed and expelled to allied-occupied Germany under the Potsdam agreement. In the Bačka, which had been part of Hungary from 1941, Shwovish villages were emptied forcibly in March 1945.

In 1944, a joint advance of the Yugoslav Partisans, and the Soviet Red Army saw the liberation of northern areas of German-occupied Yugoslavia, which were home to the Danube Swabian minority. In Yugoslavia in particular, with many exceptions, the Danube Swabian minority "collaborated . . . with the occupation". Consequently, on November 21, 1944, the Presidium of the AVNOJ (the Yugoslav parliament) declared the ethnic German minority in Yugoslavia collectively hostile to the Yugoslav state. The AVNOJ Presidium issued a decree that ordered the government confiscation of all property of Nazi Germany and its citizens in Yugoslavia, persons of ethnic German nationality (regardless of citizenship), and collaborators. The decision acquired the force of law on February 6, 1945. The reasons for this announcement are still debated by historians, but revenge against the ethnic German minority and the expropriation of Swabian agricultural lands to facilitate collectivization in Yugoslavia appear to have been the prime reasons. In addition, approximately 30,000 Danube Swabians, the majority being women, were deported to Donbas in the Soviet Union as forced laborers in the coal mines of that region. It is estimated that 16% died due to the harsh conditions they faced.

In Yugoslavia in 1945, most ethnic Germans had their land confiscated and some were stripped of their citizenship by the new communist government. The old and the young were imprisoned in camps in several villages of Vojvodina (in modern Serbia) including Gakovo, Kruševlje, Rudolfsgnad (Kničanin), Molidorf (Molin), Bački Jarak, and Sremska Mitrovica, and two villages in the Slavonia region of Yugoslavia (now part of Croatia), Krndija, Valpovo. Those able to work were used as slave labor throughout the countryside. On March 1, 1946, there was a proposal to expel 130,388 interned Yugoslav ethnic Germans under the Potsdam Agreement. This proposal was turned down but provides a good estimate of the number of Shwovish internees. In addition, 35,000–40,000 Swabian children under age sixteen were separated from their parents and forced into prison camps and re-education orphanages. Many were adopted by Serbian Partisan families.

Of a pre-war population of about 350,000 ethnic Germans in the Vojvodina, the 1958 census revealed 32,000 left. Officially, Yugoslavia denied the forcible starvation and killing of their Shwovish populations, but reconstruction of the death camps reveals that of the 170,000 Danube Swabians interned from 1944 to 1948, about 50,000 died of mistreatment. Men between the ages of 16 and 65 were executed while women, children, and the elderly were interned, many succumbing to fatal diseases and malnutrition in Yugoslavia. Some of the Germans in Romania were deported, others were dispersed within Romania. Austrian historian Arnold Suppan considers the destruction of the Danube Swabians to be genocide.

Emigration

At the beginning of the 20th century (c. 1900–1914),

Danube Swabians were settled predominantly in the Hungarian half of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, especially in the regions of the Banat (divided after 1918 between present-day western Romania, northern Serbia, and a small part of Hungary), Bačka (now in northern Serbia and southern Hungary), and Slavonia (eastern Croatia). These communities were largely agrarian, organized in established rural settlements. Between approximately 1880 and 1914, limited but continuous emigration occurred, primarily to the United States (notably the Midwest, including Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan) and Canada (especially Ontario), driven by population growth and land scarcity.

Following the dissolution of Austria-Hungary in 1918–1920, formalized by the Treaties of Saint-Germain (1919) and Trianon (1920), Danube Swabian settlement areas were partitioned among Hungary, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929). As a result, Danube Swabians became ethnic minorities within these states. During the interwar period (1918–1939), land reforms implemented in Romania (notably after 1921) and Yugoslavia redistributed agricultural land, often to the detriment of established German-speaking farmers. State policies promoting national integration contributed to varying degrees of linguistic and cultural assimilation. Economic instability during the global depression (1929–1933) further stimulated modest emigration.

The decisive demographic rupture occurred during the final phase of the Second World War and its aftermath (1944–1948). In 1944, as Soviet forces advanced into Southeastern Europe, large segments of the Danube Swabian population fled from regions such as the Banat, Bačka, and Slavonia toward Austria and southern Germany. Those who remained were subjected to postwar reprisals. Between 1944 and 1948, in Yugoslavia (particularly in Vojvodina), the majority of the remaining German population was interned in labor and detention camps or expelled. In Hungary, deportations occurred between 1946 and 1948, when approximately 200,000 ethnic Germans were transferred to occupied Germany. In Romania, beginning in January 1945, tens of thousands were deported to forced labor in the Soviet Union, and additional internal displacements followed.

The broader framework for these population transfers was established by the Potsdam Agreement (August 1945), which sanctioned the organized transfer of German populations from Eastern Europe. Although primarily directed at Poland and Czechoslovakia, comparable expulsions and deportations were implemented across Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia. By the late 1940s, these measures had resulted in the near-complete dissolution of Danube Swabian settlement areas in Southeastern Europe.

Between 1945 and the early 1950s, displaced Danube Swabians were resettled chiefly in occupied Germany and Austria. In what became the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany, established 1949) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany, established 1949), they were distributed across regions including Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hesse, and Lower Saxony. In Austria, settlement occurred particularly in Upper Austria, Lower Austria, and Vienna, which also functioned as a transit zone for onward migration. Classified as Vertriebene (expellees), they initially encountered housing shortages, economic dislocation, and integration challenges.

From approximately 1947 to 1960, a significant proportion emigrated overseas under displaced persons and refugee

resettlement programs. In the United States, settlement concentrated in industrial regions of the Midwest (Illinois, Ohio, Michigan) and in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In Canada, communities developed in Ontario and the Prairie provinces, including Saskatchewan. In Brazil, settlement was directed toward the southern states of Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul, often in agricultural colonies. In Australia, arrivals between 1949 and the mid-1950s settled primarily in Victoria and New South Wales, particularly in Melbourne. Smaller communities emerged in Argentina, especially in Buenos Aires Province.

Some of them, descending from French-speaking or linguistically mixed families from Lorraine, had maintained the French language for some generations, as well as an ethnic identity, later referred to as Banat French, Français du Banat. They were resettled in France around 1950.

In these host countries, Danube Swabians established cultural associations, churches, and mutual aid societies, frequently organized according to regions of origin such as the Banat or Bačka. These institutions played a central role in maintaining linguistic, cultural, and historical continuity within diaspora settings.

By the late 20th century (1960s–1990s), the Danube Swabian population had become predominantly diasporic, with only small German-speaking minorities remaining in Hungary and Romania. Following the end of the Cold War (1989–1991), renewed contact between diaspora communities and ancestral regions intensified through travel, cultural exchange, and heritage preservation initiatives.

The cumulative outcome of these processes between c. 1880 and 1960 was the transformation of the Danube Swabians from a territorially cohesive agrarian population into a globally distributed diaspora, characterized by both cultural persistence and adaptation across multiple national contexts.

Since 1990

Museum of Danube Swabians, Sremski Karlovci, Serbia



Many people left Romania for West Germany between 1970 and 1990, and this trend increased in 1990. Many were literally sold to the Federal Republic of Germany, from the 70s until 1990. Since the fall of communism and the formation of new nations with new borders, the forces for movement of people among European nations have changed. Hungary joined the European Union and travel between nations became simpler. From 2001 to 2011, the number of those identifying as German in Hungary increased sharply, comparing the census tables from the two years. Explanations for the increase seem complex, including the willingness of citizens to claim the ethnic identity.

Culture

Danube Swabian women's Tracht, from the historic house of the parents of Stefan Jäger, Hatzfeld (Jimbolia), Romanian Banat.



Prior to the First World War, the Swabians were the largest ethnic group to assimilate into Hungarian society, seconded by the Galician Jews and the Slovaks. They were first and foremost Catholics, peasants thereafter, and thirdly loyal subjects to Kaiser Franz Joseph. But a distinct Hungarian Swabian ethno-national consciousness didn't develop until the spread of Romantic Nationalism in the late nineteenth century.

For the greater portion of their history, the Danube Swabian did not share a cultural identity. The term Swabian has its roots in the first wave of German-speaking immigrants from Swabia to re-settle southern Hungary after the expulsion of the Ottomans in 1689. However, it came to encompass all German-speaking people who followed in migrations from across the Holy Roman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The term Swabian was not originally a self-proclaimed identity of a singular people but a term ascribed by Magyar lords to refer to German-speaking Catholic peasants, tavern keepers, and poor artisans. For the most part Swabians lived in villages, had few privileges, and no developed intellectual layer. In 1930-Hungary 55.4% of the total Swabian population were engaged in agriculture; 28.8% in industry, crafts, commerce, or transport; and 3.1% were in state administration. The rest were employed in the service sector.

The Danube Swabian culture is a melting pot of southern German regional customs, with a small degree of Hungarian-Croatian influence. This is especially true of the food, where paprika is heavily employed, which led to the German nickname for Danube Swabians as *Paprikadeutsche*. The architecture is neither Southern German nor Balkan but is unique to itself. The houses, often made of stamped mud and straw walls or mud bricks, are ubiquitous throughout the Vojvodina region. Georg Weifert was responsible for developing one of the most famous beers in the Serbia/Yugoslavia region and later became an important banker and politician in Belgrad; his image is currently featured on the Serbian 1000 dinar bill.



Georg Weifert on the 1000 Serbian dinar bill.

Die Donauschwaben

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Language

The Danube Swabian language is only nominally Swabian (*Shwovish*, as it was referred to locally). In reality, it contains elements or many dialects of the original German settlers, mainly Swabian, East Franconian, Bavarian, Pfälzisch, Alsatian, and Alemannic, as well as Austro-Hungarian administrative and military jargon. Loanwords from Hungarian, Serbian, or Romanian are especially common regionally regarding cuisine and agriculture, but also regarding dress, politics, place names, and sports. Other cultures of influence include Serbian, Croatian, Russian (for communist concepts), Romanian, Turkish (Hambar), English (for football), and general Balkan and South Slavic loanwords like *Kukuruts* (corn). The plural of loanwords is in most cases formed in the Shwovish way. Conjunctions and adverbs from the respective contact languages may be integrated as well.

In Baranya, the Stiffoleerish Shwovish is its own dialect.

Many German words used by speakers of Danube Swabian dialects may sound archaic. To the ear of a standard German speaker, the Danube Swabian dialect sounds like what it is: a mix of southwestern German dialects from the 18th century with many strange words from other languages. Due to relative isolation and differing proximities to nearby German speakers (Austrians and Transylvanian Saxons), the language varies considerably, with speakers able to distinguish inhabitants of neighboring villages by the words they use for such things as marmalade (*Leckwaar* and *Schleckle* being two variants), or by how many (usually Hungarian) loanwords they employ. This even applied to verb conjugations. For example, the German verb “haben” was conjugated as “han” in Sankt Hubert and as “hava” in Mramorak, although both were in Banat. Herman Ruediger, a German sociologist, reports that in his trips throughout the Bačka in the 1920s, he noted that Danube Swabians from widely separated villages had to use standard high German to communicate with each other because their speech was so different. This was particularly true for towns like Esseg (Osijek) where *Shwoveh* were thoroughly mixed with majority Croats. For instance, the ethnic Germans of Esseg were so thoroughly assimilated with Croats that their Shwovish or ‘Essekerish’ could only be understood by those who also spoke Croatian or Serbian.

Sepp Stumper grew up in Ravni Topolovac and wrote numerous poems in dialect about the life of the Danube Swabians. In 2006, the poems were recorded in order to preserve the language for future generations.

Cuisine

Danube Swabian cuisine (*Donauschwäbische Küche*) denotes the composite culinary system of the Danube Swabians (*Donauschwaben*), a German-speaking settler population established in the middle and lower Danube basin in the 18th century. It reflects the stratification of southwestern German foodways with subsequent influences from Hungarian, Austrian, Serbian, Croatian, and Romanian (particularly Banat) culinary traditions, producing a regionally differentiated but structurally coherent cuisine.

The foundational layer derives from the rural cuisines of Swabia, Alsace, and the Rhineland, characterized by cereal-based subsistence, pork butchery, and preservation techniques. Staple preparations included breads (*Brot*) and dumplings (*Knödel*), alongside porridges (*Breie*). Pork (*Sch-*

weinefleisch) functioned as the principal protein, processed as fresh cuts, sausages, and preserved products (*Räucherwaren*, *Pökelwaren*), with rendered fat (*Schmalz*) serving as a primary cooking medium. Vegetables such as cabbage (*Kohl*), potatoes (*Kartoffeln*), and turnips (*Rüben*) were central, often preserved through lactic fermentation as sauerkraut. Soups and one-pot stews (*Eintöpfe*) include legumes (*Hülsenfrüchte*) and secondary cuts, which require prolonged simmering for extraction and concentration. Preservation methods including curing (*Pökeln*), smoking, and drying were integral to this system.

Following settlement in the Danube regions, this culinary base underwent significant transformation through intercultural exchange. Hungarian influence is particularly evident in the widespread adoption of paprika as a dominant spice, reshaping the flavor profile of braised and stewed dishes. Preparations similar to *Gulasch* and *Pörkölt* were incorporated, combining German thickening techniques with Hungarian spices.

From Serbian and Croatian culinary traditions, stuffed vegetable preparations were adopted, including stuffed cabbage and stuffed peppers, typically composed of minced meat and rice fillings. Romanian influences contributed to the integration of maize (*Mais*) in dishes comparable to polenta (Polenta, regional *Maisbrei*), as well as expanded use of souring agents and herbs.

Austrian and broader Austro-Hungarian influences are most evident in baking and pastries. Techniques such as stretched dough (*Strudelteig*) produced strudels, while enriched yeast doughs (*Hefeteig*) yielded sweet and savory baked goods. Layered cakes and filled pastries reflect Viennese confectionery traditions.

Ingredient adaptation also reflects environmental conditions, including the increased use of rice and maize, along with regional variations in spices and agricultural products. Despite local differentiation, the cuisine retains structural continuity through its reliance on pork (*Schweinefleisch*), fermented vegetables, dumpling forms (*Knödelgerichte*), and slow-cooked composite dishes.

In the post-Second World War diaspora, particularly in Germany, Austria, and North America, these culinary practices were preserved through intergenerational transmission and community organization. Techniques such as sausage production, fermentation, and dough preparation remained central, while ingredient substitution reflected local availability. Traditional dishes, especially those associated with religious and seasonal observances, continued to structure communal identity.

Danube Swabian cuisine thus represents a syncretic culinary system integrating German, Hungarian, South Slavic, Romanian, and Austrian elements, shaped by processes of migration, adaptation, and cultural exchange, and maintained as a durable marker of ethnic and historical identity.

Naming

As is the custom in Hungary (as well as southern Germany), Danube Swabians often put the surname first, especially when writing, for example *Butscher Jakob* (see photo of memorial). Danube Swabian villages tend to have relatively few family names as the villagers stem from only a few families, but usually the same family name does not appear in more than a couple of villages, meaning that there are many Danube Swabian family names. The names come from areas throughout southern Germany, from assimilated Hungarians, and occasionally from Balkan and Italian origins. There are usually no

middle names, but often double first names, if a distinction can be made. The variety of first names is few, since children were usually named after grandparents or godparents. Popular names for women include: Anna, Barbara, Christina, Elisabeth, Eva, Katharina, Magdalena, Maria, Sophia, Theresia, and many two-name combinations thereof. Popular names for men include: Adam, Anton, Christian, Franz, Friedrich, Georg, Gottfried, Heinrich, Jakob, Johann, Konrad, Ludwig, Mathias, Martin, Michael, Nikolaus, Peter, Philipp (or Filipp), and Stefan (or Stephan). With so few names in villages, other modifiers or nicknames were almost always used to distinguish people. The modifiers were often size related (e.g., “Kleinjohann” or “Little Johann”), occupation related (“Tischler Stefan” or the “carpenter Stefan”), or location related (usually by prefixing the streetname).

Coat of arms

Coat of arms of the Banat Swabians created by Hans Diplich in 1950.



A coat of arms designed in 1950 by Hans Diplich has been adopted by many Danube Swabian cultural organizations. Its blazon is “Parti per fess wavy 1 Or, an eagle displayed couped Sable langued Gules; 2 parti per fess Argent and Vert, a fortress Argent roofed and turreted Gules surmounted with Sun and Crescent waning Or; chief wavy Azure”.

It depicts:

- A black eagle representing the protection of the Emperor of Austria;
- A blue ribbon representing the Danube River;
- A crescent moon representing the waning of Islamic influence through the withdrawal of the Ottoman Turks;
- the Sun representing both Prince Eugene of Savoy and the light of Christianity; and
- A fortress representing the fortified city of Temeschburg (Timisoara).

Memorial in German for soldiers who died in World War I in Lovćenac, Serbia.



Resources for genealogical research

Germany

- Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen Stuttgart; (institute of foreign relations); church records (microfilm) of villages in the banat

Austria

- Theresianischer Kataster, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv; Austrian archive

Luxembourg

- Institut Grand-Ducal, *Section de Linguistique, d’Ethnologie et d’Onomastique*, village chronics and family records
- *Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines*
- Nationalarchiv Luxemburg, Microfilms, notary records, church records.

Familienforschung
(Family Research)

Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands Website
Contents from ChatGPT

The website Donauschwaben Villages Helping Hands (DVHH) (dvvh.org) is a long-standing nonprofit, volunteer-driven online resource dedicated to preserving, documenting, and sharing the history, culture, and genealogy of the Danube Swabians (Donauschwaben). Established in 2003 and formally recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2007, it serves as a central digital archive and collaboration hub for descendants worldwide.

Overview and Purpose

DVHH’s stated mission is to collect, preserve, and disseminate historical and genealogical information about Danube Swabian communities, particularly those originating in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The organization emphasizes:

- Reconnecting descendants with their ancestral villages
- Documenting cultural traditions and lived experiences
- Maintaining a global network of researchers and families
- “Keeping the Danube Swabian legacy alive”

The website is entirely volunteer-supported and free to access, with contributions coming from historians, genealogists, and community members worldwide.

Core Content and Structure

1. Historical Settlement Areas

A central feature of the site is its focus on the major Danube Swabian settlement regions, including:

- Banat
- Batschka
- Hungarian Highlands
- Sathmar
- Slavonia and Syrmia
- Swabian Turkey
- Additional areas such as Bulgaria

Each region is tied to individual villages, many of which have dedicated pages containing historical summaries, maps, and family records.

2. Genealogy and Research Resources

Genealogy is one of the most important components of dvvh.org. The site provides:

- Village-based genealogical data and family registries
- Connections to Familienbücher / Ortsfamilienbücher (family books)
- Lookup guides and volunteer researchers
- A large searchable email archive dating back to 2003
- “Cousin connections” linking descendants globally

These resources make DVHH a key platform for individuals tracing Danube Swabian ancestry.

Familienforschung

(Family Research)

Continued from the previous page

3. Historical Documentation and Articles

The website contains extensive written content on:

- Migration and settlement history
- Daily life, customs, and occupations
- Religion, festivals, and traditions
- Displacement after World War II
- Documented atrocities and expulsions
- Immigration to the Americas

Articles are often contributed by community members and edited for publication.

4. Culture and Lifestyle

DVHH also preserves intangible heritage through sections such as:

- Cooking Donauschwaben Style (traditional recipes)
- Folk customs, clothing (Tracht), and celebrations
- Music, dance, and literature
- Superstitions and village traditions

This content reflects the blending of German roots with Central and Southeastern European influences.

5. Community and Collaboration Features

The site functions as a living community platform with interactive elements:

- Membership and volunteer opportunities
- Email list (hundreds of subscribers worldwide)
- Facebook group with thousands of members
- Guestbook and archival messages
- Bulletin boards and news updates

It encourages users to contribute stories, documents, and research findings.

6. Organizational Structure and Contributors

DVHH is managed by a volunteer board and an extensive network of coordinators, including:

- Regional coordinators for each settlement area
- Village coordinators
- Genealogy directors and lookup guides
- Editorial staff, translators, and archivists

This decentralized structure allows the site to cover a wide range of villages and topics.

7. Archives and Specialized Content

Additional sections include:

- Obituaries and memorials
- Displaced persons camp documentation
- Interviews (“Movers & Shakers”)
- Community archives and historical images
- Events and reunions
- “Destination: The Americas” (immigration stories)

Key Characteristics of the Website

- Comprehensive but grassroots: Built over decades by volunteers rather than academic institutions
- Genealogy-focused: One of the most detailed online resources for Danube Swabian family history
- Community-driven: Relies heavily on user submissions and collaboration
- Archival in nature: Contains legacy material dating back to the early 2000s
- Global scope: Connects descendants across Europe, North America, and beyond

Summary

The DVHH website is best understood as a hybrid digital archive, genealogy database, and community network dedicated to the Danube Swabian people. It combines historical scholarship, personal memory, and collaborative research into a single platform that documents both the origins and diaspora of this ethnic group.

Its greatest value lies in its village-level detail and global genealogical connections, making it a cornerstone resource for anyone researching Donauschwaben heritage.

Tracing Your German Ancestry: A Guide for Americans

By Sven Grewel



Starting Your Search: Gather Clues and Decipher Records

For Americans exploring German roots, the first step is to collect every available clue from your family's past. Family photographs, heirlooms, letters, ship manifests, naturalization papers, or even old bibles may hold critical information. A single name, an approximate date, or a vague mention of a village can become the key

to unlocking your ancestry. Start by interviewing older relatives, recording their stories, and documenting every detail—no matter how insignificant it may seem. With over 44 million Americans claiming German heritage, you are part of the largest ancestral group in the United States. Many German immigrants arrived with few possessions, but their footprints often remain in church records, local archives, and community organizations across America. One of the first hurdles you may face is deciphering the handwriting in historical German documents. Until the mid-20th century, records were often written in *Kurrentschrift* or *Sütterlin*, scripts that can appear almost indecipherable to modern eyes. Fortunately, these scripts follow consistent rules, and with practice, you can learn to read them. Free online tutorials, printable alphabet guides, and handwriting recognition tools can assist you, but exercise caution: AI tools frequently misread names, dates, or places due to faded ink or poor handwriting. Always cross-check automated transcriptions with the original documents. If you hit a wall, German genealogy societies, local history clubs, or Facebook groups dedicated to German ancestry research are excellent places to seek help from experienced volunteers. For particularly challenging documents, hiring a professional genealogist who specializes in German records can save you time and frustration.

Navigating German and U.S. Archives

Once you have gathered names, dates, and possible locations, German archives become your next step. For records prior to 1876 and the onset of civil registration in Germany, church records (such as baptismal, marriage, and burial registers), are often the only way to trace your ancestors. Access to these records varies: baptismal records are typically restricted for 110 years, marriage records for 80 years, and death records become accessible after 30 years. Many of these records are still held by local parishes or regional archives. A polite, well-phrased inquiry in German can often secure copies for a small fee. For instance, Evangelical and Catholic church archives across Germany hold vast collections that may include your ancestors. If your family has Jewish roots, the Arolsen Archives or the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem may provide essential documents. For records after 1876 and the onset of civil registration in Germany, records kept by the *Standesamt* (civil registry office) are the primary source for births, marriages, and deaths. These records are more standardized but still subject to privacy laws. Death certificates, in particular, often include precise birthplaces, which can help you trace your family's origins further back in time. Requesting copies is usually straightforward: you can contact the *Standesamt* in the town where the event was recorded. Many German states now offer online request forms, and civil records frequently include additional details like occupations, residences, and parents' names, all of which can open new avenues for research. However, unlike in the U.S., only a fraction of German records are digitized and available online. This means you may need to write letters, send emails, or even hire a local researcher to access the documents you need.

For Americans, U.S. Immigration and Ship Passenger Lists Are Invaluable

German immigrants arrived in the United States in several waves, often through major ports like New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New Orleans. Many came from regions such as Hamburg, Bremen, or Pomerania, while others were part of religious groups like the Palatines, who settled in Pennsylvania, or Lutheran missionaries who established communities in the Midwest and South. Ship passenger lists and U.S. naturalization records are invaluable resources, as they often include names, occupations, places of origin, and even the names of family members who traveled together. However, it's important to note that not all passenger lists have survived, particularly from the early 19th century. National archives or museums—both in the U.S. and Germany—can hold these records, and it's often helpful to inquire directly with the cities where your ancestors arrived or to search online databases. Naturalization papers, which immigrants filed upon becoming U.S. citizens, can also provide critical clues, including exact birthplaces in Germany. Another powerful resource is the *Ortsfamilienbuch*, or local family book, which compiles genealogical data for entire villages or towns. Not every German community has one, but if your ancestors' village does, it can save you months of research. These books are often available through regional German archives or genealogical societies, with some collections accessible online. If your ancestors hailed from Prussia, Bavaria, or Württemberg, be sure to explore the archives in those regions. For those with roots in East Prussia, which is now part of modern-day Poland and Russia, specialized organizations can help you navigate the complexities of researching in areas where borders and place names have changed over time.

Exploring Indirect Migration Paths

While many German immigrants came directly to the U.S., others may have first settled in countries like England, Canada, or even Russia before making their way to America. If your research reaches a dead end, consider exploring records from these intermediate locations. For example, many Germans migrated to England in the early 1700s before eventually moving on to the American colonies. Others spent time in Canadian communities or Russian settlements along the Volga River before arriving in the U.S. If your ancestors followed one of these indirect routes, records from English ports, Canadian border crossings, or Russian-German communities might hold the missing pieces of your family's story.

Overcoming Common Challenges

Genealogy is a patient and methodical process, and researching German ancestry comes with unique challenges. Germany trails behind the U.S. and other countries in terms of online record accessibility, so you will likely need to make direct inquiries to local parishes, regional archives, or state archives in Germany. If you don't speak German, translation tools or professional translators can help you craft polite, clear requests for records. Local German-American clubs, state historical societies, or professional genealogists who specialize in German research can also provide guidance, especially if you encounter language barriers or bureaucratic hurdles. In recent years, DNA testing has become a popular tool for uncovering ancestral connections. Services like AncestryDNA, 23andMe, or MyHeritage can help you identify living relatives, confirm suspected family links, and even pinpoint the regions in Germany where your ancestors may have lived. While DNA tests can't replace traditional research, they can offer new leads and help you connect with distant cousins who may have additional information about your shared heritage.

How do I get started

If anyone needs my help, this is my usual routine:

1. I start with having a look at all the details you can provide me with, this includes names, dates, locations, documents, pictures. Whatever you think can be of help. Sometimes it is even the tiniest hint that can lead to a new source.
2. After having had a look at all of the above, I will check if there are any sources available where I can start the search.
3. After that, I will estimate the time for the research.
4. Then, I will send you an offer with an overview over the estimated hours and costs.
5. If you agree, you just send me an email as confirmation.
6. Once you have confirmed my offer, I will start with the research. All work is held confidential.
7. My hourly fee is 60 EUR.

This should help. If there are any further questions, just email at sven@ahnenkontor.de, look me up at www.ahnenkontor.de

My mailing address is: Sven Grewel
Drachenbahn 20, App. 10.01
24159 Kiel,
Germany

Also, have a look at **Instagram**: @ahnenkontor
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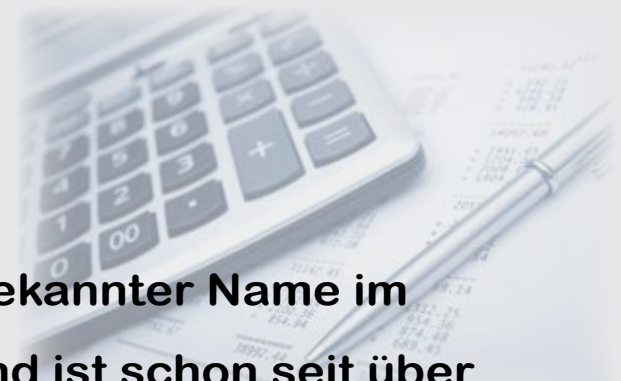
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George S Rieg VI
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10449 S. Hamilton Avenue
Chicago, IL 60643
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grieg@chicagobooth.edu



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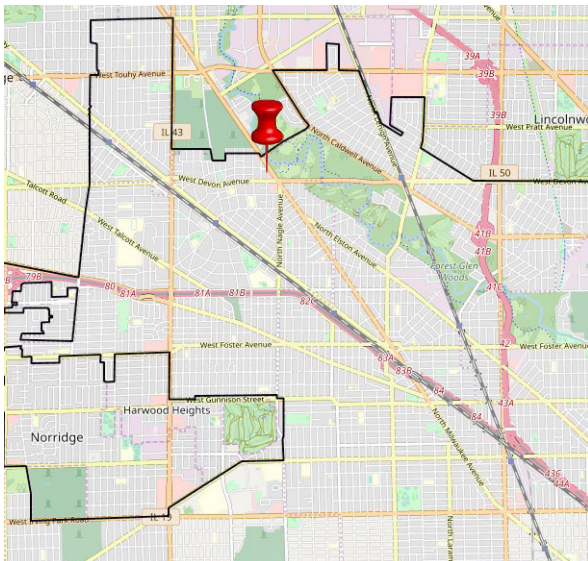
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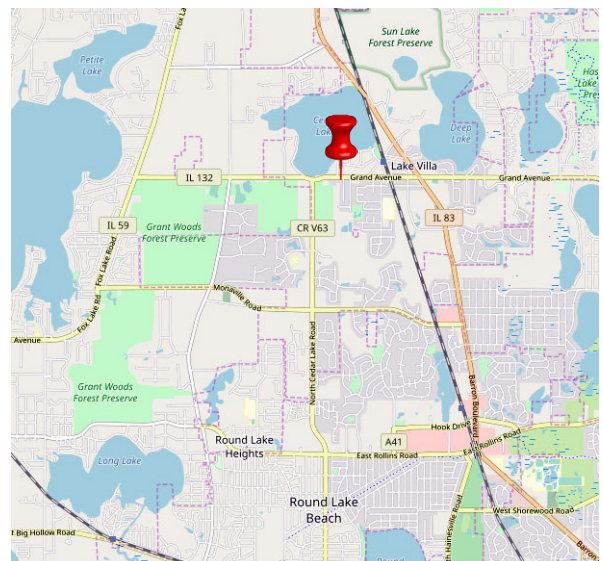
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