



Fairfield  
UNIVERSITY

For Immediate Release

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## **Celebrating 250 Years of Volga German Heritage** *Seminar Series on April 8*

**Fairfield, Connecticut** (13 March 2017) – Responding to the 1763 invitation of Catherine the Great for Western Europeans to move to the Russian Empire, more than 30,000 immigrants (mostly ethnic Germans) made the trek to the Russian Steppe between 1764 and 1772. Of significance to those whose descendants who settled in the Yellowstone Valley 130 years later, three colonies were founded in 1767: Kautz (May 20), Dietel (July 1), and Kratzke (August 7).

To celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the establishment of these colonies, the Volga German Institute at Fairfield University is hosting an all-day seminar series at Pilgrim Congregational Church in Billings, Montana, on Saturday, 8 April 2017. Early registration (before March 24) is \$30 per person; registration after that is \$40 per person. Registration includes an authentic Volga German luncheon and all sessions. The public is invited to attend.

Dr. Brent Mai, Dean of Libraries and Director of the Volga German Institute at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut, and Michael Frank from Vancouver, Washington, will be the speakers for the day.

Dr. Mai speaks world-wide on many topics related to Volga German history and culture. Dr. Mai, whose father's ancestors emigrated from the German colonies along the Volga River, grew up in Western Kansas and holds degrees from Bethany College (Kansas), George Washington University, the University of Texas at Austin, and Vanderbilt University. Dr. Mai was previously the director of the Center for Volga German Studies at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon.

On behalf of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, Mr. Frank serves as the research coordinator for the colony of Kautz. He has been a speaker on many topics related to family history. Mr. Frank continues the decades of research on the Volga German families of Montana and southeastern Washington that was begun by his aunt, Elaine Frank Davison.

Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m., with the first of six seminar sessions beginning at 9:00: (1) Introduction to the Volga Germans and their Heritage; (2) The Geography of the Volga Germans; (3) Volga German Settlement of the Yellowstone Valley; (4) History of Dietel, Kautz, and Kratzke; (5) Western European Origins of the Volga Germans; and (6) The Volga Germans Today. The day will conclude at 5:00 p.m.

Lunch is included with the cost of registration. The menu is being coordinated by Alice (Bangert) Blasdel of Vista Linda Catering in Somers, Montana, and will include cabbage rolls, potato brats with sauerkraut, kraut bierocks, butterball soup, and kuchen along with other delicious sides.

The venue for the celebration is Pilgrim Congregational Church, 409 South 36<sup>th</sup> Street in Billings. Originally called First German Congregational Church, Pilgrim was founded by Volga Germans arriving in the area to work in the sugar beet industry. Its first building was dedicated on 11 September 1910. The present facility was constructed in 1936.

For additional information about the event including online registration, parking, and accommodations, please visit the event website at: [vgi.fairfield.edu/events/2017-billings](http://vgi.fairfield.edu/events/2017-billings).

## **ABOUT THE VOLGA GERMAN INSTITUTE**

The Volga German Institute was founded at Fairfield University in 2016 to document the cultural manifestations of the German-speaking minority that lived along the Volga River in Russia from 1764 to 1941. The institute sponsors workshops and seminars world-wide in this effort to share knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of the Volga Germans and what they and their descendants have contributed to the world as it exists today. [[vgi.fairfield.edu](http://vgi.fairfield.edu)]

## **ABOUT FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY**

Fairfield University, founded by the Society of Jesus in Fairfield, Connecticut, is a coeducational institution of higher learning whose primary objectives are to develop the creative intellectual potential of its students and to foster in them ethical and religious values and a sense of social responsibility. Founded in 1942, Fairfield is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2017. The University educates approximately 4,000 students each year through its College of Arts and Sciences, Dolan School of Business, Egan School of Nursing & Health Studies, Graduate School of Education & Allied Professions, and School of Engineering. [[www.fairfield.edu](http://www.fairfield.edu)]

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