St. Catherine Parish German Mardi Gras  
5 to 11:00 p.m. Saturday February 14  
Ellis County Fairgrounds, 1343 Fairground Rd., Hays  
For information: 785-623-3785 or 785-650-1746  
Website: www.germancapitalofkansas.com  
Email: stonehill@ruraltel.net  

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia — Fasenacht  
11:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Sunday, February 15  
For information: 785-656-0329  
Website: www.sunflowerchapterofahsgr.net  
Email: krupp@ruraltel.net  

St. Francis of Assisi Church Annual Parish Supper  
4 to 7 p.m. Sunday, March 1  
Munjor Grade School  
For information: 785-625-5314 or 785-628-1970  
Website: www.stfrancis-church.com  
Email: office@stfrancis-church.com  

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia — Spring Meeting  
11:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Sunday, April 26  
For information: 785-656-0329  
Website: www.sunflowerchapterofahsgr.net  
Email: krupp@ruraltel.net  

Fidelisfest  
Sunday, May 31 Basilica of St. Fidelis  
900 Cathedral Ave., Victoria  
For information: 785-735-2777  
Website: www.stfidelischurch.com  
Email: fidelis@ruraltel.net  

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Summer Picnic  
11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, August 9  
Munjor Parish Hall  
For information: 785-656-0329  
Website: www.sunflowershapterofahsgr.net  
Email: krupp@ruraltel.net  

Herzogfest  
Saturday & Sunday, August 14 & 15  
Honey Braun Park, Victoria  
For information: 785-735-4851  
Website: www.herzogfest.com  
Email: info@herzogfest.com  

German Feast  
4 – 7 p.m. Sunday, September 13  
St. Anthony Community Center  
290 Front, Schoenchen  
For information: 785-628-3968  
Website: www.germancapitalofkansas.com  
Email: sauerkraut@ruraltel.net
Harold Dorzweiler Cancer Memorial Fund

Polka Fest
Noon to 10 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 19 and
10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 20
Ellis County Fairgrounds
1343 Fairground Road, Hays
For information: 785-625-5256
Website: www.germancapitalofkansas.com

Hays Oktoberfest
9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday, October 2
Frontier Park, First & South Main St., Hays
Website: http://haysoktoberfest.com/

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia — Kansas Round-Up
8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday, October 3
Whiskey Creek Wood Fire Grill
For information: 785-656-0329
Website: www.sunflowerchapterofahsgr.net
Email: krupp@rualtel.net

Our Lady Help of Christians Fall Feast
4 to 7 p.m. Sunday, November 1
Help of Christian Church, Antonino
For information: 785-625-5494 or 785-623-4561
Website: www.germancapitalofkansas.com
Email: suzannemklaus@gmail.com

Lanternfest
6:00 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 7
Hays Arts Center Annex
For information: 785-259-6552
www.germancapitalofkansas.com
Email: clfenwick@mail.fhsu.edu

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia — Christmas Banquet
11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Sunday, December 13
Munjor Parish Hall
For information: 785-656-0329
Website: www.sunflowerchapterofahsgr.net
Email: krupp@rualtel.net

Little Town of Bethlehem Christmas Nativity
Noon to 5 p.m. weekends in December
St. Boniface Catholic Church, Vincent
For information: 785-735-9282 or 785-735-4836
Website: www.germancapitalofkansas.com
Email: tbrungardt86@gmail.com
Heritage

Many of the residents of Ellis County are descendants of German immigrants who came from the Volga River region of Russia. They came from Germany to Russia following the end of the Seven Years War in 1763. They were invited to immigrate to Russia by Catherine the Great, who was born in Germany and was the leader of Russia at the time.

The Empress issued two manifestos, the second with many enticements to lure potential immigrants. She promised freedom of religion, freedom from military conscription, free land and an exemption from taxation. Catherine's invitation appealed to the people in the southern provinces of Germany, who had suffered great economic stress and other problems as a result of the Seven Years War.

From 1763 to 1768, many Germans left their homeland, traveled to Russia and built villages along the Volga River. Nearly 200 towns and villages were established in Russia, and the German immigrants prospered. In 1874, the reigning czar began to remove the privileges Catherine the Great had promised the Volga-Germans. Consequently, the Volga-Germans began to search for a new homeland.

In 1875, a scouting party of five men came to America to inform themselves of the climate, soil and living conditions suitable for their farming lifestyle. These scouts found the Kansas plains similar to the steppes region of Russia, and a large number of the Volga-Germans decided to migrate to America.

In October and November of 1875, many of these immigrants left their villages along the Volga River and traveled to Saratov, Russia, to begin their journey to America.

The first Volga-Germans arrived in Hays in mid-February 1876 and traveled south to settle land along the Big Timber Creek. Liebenthal, located in Rush County, was the first community to be founded Feb. 22, 1876. A second group arrived March 1 and founded the village of Catharine. The other communities of Herzog, Pfeifer and Munjor were settled during the spring and summer of 1876.

Although they had the same religion, ethnicity and culture, immigrants continued to focus on life in their individual communities. Just as they had done in Russia, they retained their language with the various dialects that were spoken by the people of each village. Each individual village also retained traditions of food, family, religion and marriage. Being a very religious people, they expressed their creativity in the construction of the beautiful churches they built in their villages.
1. First Baptist Church, 12th and Fort, Hays
2. First Presbyterian Church, 2900 Hall, Hays
3. First United Methodist Church, 305 W. Seventh, Hays
4. Holy Cross Catholic Church, Pfeifer Avenue, Pfeifer
5. Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church, 695 210th Ave., Antonino
6. St. Andrew Episcopal Church, 2422 Hyacinth Ave., Hays
7. St. Ann Catholic Church, 1273 Walker Ave., Walker
8. St. Anthony Catholic Church, 215 W. 13th, Schoenchen
9. St. Boniface Catholic Church, Grants Villa Road and Vincent Avenue, Vincent
10. St. Catherine Catholic Church, 1681 St. Joseph, Catharine
11. St. Fidelis Catholic Church, 900 Cathedral, Victoria
12. St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 883 Moscow, Munjor
13. St. John Lutheran Church, 394 St. John-St. Andrew Road, Ellis
14. St. Joseph Catholic Church, 202 Main, Liebenthal
16. St. Mary Help of Christians Catholic Church, Loretto
17. St. Mary Catholic Church, 135 Third, Gorham
18. St. Mary Catholic Church, 703 Monroe, Ellis
19. United Methodist Church, 12th and Washington, Ellis
Bukovina Society of the Americas Museum

718 Washington, Ellis  (785) 726-3388; 726-4620  
pat6363@yahoo.com  www.bukovinasociety.org

The museum provides information about the history of the German immigrants who arrived from Bukovina, which currently is part of Romania and Ukraine. They migrated from Germany to Bukovina in the late 1700s and early 1800s. After one to two generations of living in Bukovina, land became scarce and many of the German immigrants came to the United States, as well as Canada and South America. On Dec. 10, 1988, the Bukovina Society was formed and a heritage festival was conducted July 19 to 22, 1989. A Bukovinafest now is conducted every three years. The society is international in scope and cooperates with other Bukovina organizations around the world. Its members number more than 500 from 25 countries. The museum is open daily by appointment. Free admission.

Historic Iron Crosses

Numerous iron cross grave markers are located in the cemeteries throughout Ellis County near the outskirts of the communities. The St. Fidelis Cemetery north of Victoria attracts many visitors because of the unusual iron crosses. The ornate and decorative crosses were made of steel and various pieces of iron by local Volga-German blacksmiths.

The cross represented the sacred, and the iron represented strength — attributes of the pioneers they honored. The iron crosses particularly were suited as prairie monuments. These crosses mark the gravesites of the earliest burial locations in St. Fidelis Cemetery. Iron crosses can be found in cemeteries in Antonino, Catherine, Ellis, Hays, Munjor, Pfeifer, Schoenenchen, Victoria and Walker. For more information, visit www.germancapitalofkansas.com.
Attractions

Volga German Haus
100 W. Seventh, Hays, (785) 628-2624
www.elliscountyhistoricalmuseum.org

This home is located on the grounds of the Ellis County Historical Society Museum and is a replica of the size and type of home early Volga-German settlers built. When the first immigrants arrived to establish their villages, they quickly constructed small dug-out sod shelters. The ground would be excavated to a depth of 3 feet, with the prairie sod blocks used to form the walls.

The sod shelters were used until a more permanent house of native limestone rock could be built. This house was built from information obtained through diaries and other documentation passed down to descendants, and is furnished with authentic household items. The exterior of the home is made of the native postrock limestone that was quarried in Ellis County. The interior contains two rooms: a small room containing the “mud stove” and the cooking utensils, and a large room that served as the living, dining and sleeping area.

Volga German Family
10th and Cathedral, Victoria, (785) 735-2259

Across the street from St. Fidelis Catholic Church in Victoria is a life-size statue depicting German immigrants from Russia. This piece was sculpted by Hays artist Pete Felten in 1976 and is titled “Volga German Family.” It is made of silverdale limestone that was shipped from Arkansas City. The commemoration of the statue took place in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the Volga-Germans arriving in Ellis County. Felten reviewed numerous old photographs to create a piece of art that represented the strength and solidarity of these immigrants. The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia National Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb., was so impressed with the statue it commissioned Felten to create an exact replica, which now stands outside its front entrance to welcome visitors to the facility.
History of Churches

Hays city was founded in the fall of 1867, and the first churches in Ellis County were built during the late 1870s and 1880s. The majority of these first churches were small wooden frame structures that later were replaced by larger and more impressive limestone rock churches.

Because many of the first residents were railroad workers, saloon owners, soldiers and even desperados, the early days of Ellis County were wild and dangerous. With the arrival of Volga-German settlers and other religious families in Ellis County, the community gradually quieted down as these pioneers brought with them strong religious and family beliefs. Immediately upon completion of their simple homes, the people began building churches to have worship services.

A visit to the beautiful historic Volga-German and Bukovina-German churches in the area will provide a glimpse of the area’s history and an understanding of the strong religious values of the early settlers in Ellis County. The Roman Catholic influences, artistic Gothic style and beautiful stained glass are the most dominant features, yet each church is unique in its own way.

The individual history and stories that can be learned by visiting these churches is fascinating, and it makes one appreciate their beauty even more. The foresight and hard work that went into building these churches proves they stand as a symbol of faith for early pioneers.

Join us for

- lunch Monday-Friday from 11-2
- formal dinner Thursday-Saturday from 5-9
- German food every Thursday for lunch only
- gift baskets are also available.

230 E. 8th, Hays KS 785-625-9508 785-650-4016
rosegardensteakhaus.com

“The Cathedral of the Plains”

The Basilica of St. Fidelis
900 Cathedral Avenue
Victoria, Kansas 67671
fidelis@ruraltel.net
for Mass times go to www.StFidelisChurch.com

Built through the strong faith of our Volga-German ancestors
Holy Cross  
1701 Sarratov, Pfeifer, (785) 623-0163  
www.germancapitalofkansas.com

This beautiful church is an artistic example of Romanesque Gothic-style architect and is known as the “The Cross in the Valley.” This church is actually the third church that was built by the Volga-German settlers of Pfeifer.

The church is laid out in the form of a cross. The sanctuary is the head, the transepts are the arms and the nave is the body of the cross. The main steeple rises above the wheat fields 165 feet high and is topped by a gold cross. The two side steeples are 100 feet high. The main entrance and its two single entrances were made of Bedford Stone, Gothic Arches and Florentine Pillars capped with carvings of wheat heads. The original communion railing is hand carved and features doors enhanced by carved figures of “The Manna in the Desert,” “Christ Feeding the Multitudes,” “The Death of Joseph” and “The Annunciation.”

In 1922, life-size statues carved of native wood from Munich, Germany, were procured. The altars were constructed from ordinary crate wood by local craftsman John Schlitter. The stained glass windows depict Bible scenes and two larger images tower over the balconies.
Churches

Our Lady Help Of Christians
697 210th Avenue, Antonino, (785) 623-4561/www.germancapitalofkansas.com
Farm families southwest of Hays desired their own parish and created their own community, “Saint Antonino” in 1905. Unlike the earlier settlements that experienced considerable difficulty in locating supplies, the Antonino founders received the gift of a frame building. Bishop John Cunningham dedicated the new parish, Our Lady Help of Christians, in October 1905. Overcrowding in the 1905 church became the main reason for the construction of a new church in 1951. Under the guidance of Father Flavian Meis, the parish built a much larger, Gothic-style church, using many of the materials from the original church. At a cost of slightly more than $70,000, the new church facility was dedicated May 26, 1952, by Bishop Frank Thill. The community of Antonino celebrated its 100-year centennial in 2005.

St. Anthony
Arapahoe and Church, Schoenchen
(785) 628-9214 or (785) 625-5451
/www.germancapitalofkansas.com

The first church services in Schoenchen took place in private dwellings until a structure could be built. The cornerstone of the stone church was laid April 18, 1900, and the church was dedicated June 13, 1901. Quarrying the native limestone blocks was a difficult task since the only tools they had were hand drills, wedges and sledge hammers. The church features Gothic windows, gold-capped arch, abutments and unusual crown-shaped light fixtures. St. Anthony Church was scarred by fire in the early 1920s and again in 1932.
The early Catholic villagers of Walker were members of St. Fidelis Catholic Church in Victoria. On Jan. 10, 1904, they had a meeting to discuss the building of their own church in Walker. It was decided every communicant had to quarry, haul and furnish 10 loads of stone to begin construction. Building began March 28, and on June 11, Bishop Cunningham laid the cornerstone. The church was completed in November 1905 with the dedication celebrated Thanksgiving Day. The cost of the church and contents was estimated to be $12,000. This small church has beautiful stained glass windows and impressive natural dark wood altars.

Parishioners south of Victoria wanted a church closer to their farm homes. The church was named after the great Apostle of Germany, St. Boniface.

The dedication of St. Boniface was Dec. 18, 1907, and the town site of Vincent was platted in 1910. Although the town never grew to include much more than the church, school and a grocery store, the church flourished during the 52 years Father Callistus Ractenwald served at St. Boniface. During that time, he handcrafted thousands of items for a display he called Little Town of Bethlehem.

In 1927, he began assembling the pieces for the Nativity scene, and each year, he added more pieces to create a display resembling the city of Bethlehem. Members of the parish set up the large display during December.
St. Mary
703 Monroe, Ellis
(785) 726-4522
www.stmarysofellis.org

In 1887, a large number of Austrian Germans from the Bukovina region arrived in Ellis and Trego counties. The first church they built was a small wooden structure (20-by-40) that was dedicated May 26, 1888, with Father Anselm celebrating the Mass.

Work began on the current church in 1890 with the cornerstone laid June 29. The parishioners provided much of the labor for the construction. They quarried and hauled the limestone from as far as 15 miles away.

On Oct 6, 1892, the Rev. John J. Hennessy officiated at the ceremonies of the church dedication. Church furnishings were obtained as the parishioners became more prosperous. Other items were added to make it a divine place of worship.

With arrivals of more German Catholics, a larger church was needed. On Nov. 1, 1898, the land north of Big Creek and east of Monroe Street was purchased from Union Pacific Railroad, and a second church was built.

Bishop John F. Cunningham laid the cornerstone for the present day church June 27, 1909. By August 1911, the church was ready for occupancy, and through the next 10 to 20 years, additions were made, side altars added and new stained glass windows installed. The statuary was imported from Munich, Germany, and in 1922, a magnificent pipe organ was installed.

St. Catherine
1662 Martin, Catharine
(785) 625-5091, (785) 625-5394
www.germancapitalofkansas.com

During the spring of 1876, a small group of immigrants from Katharin-enstadt, Russia, began to establish the village of Catharine. Other families continued to arrive and the first Mass was celebrated in the summer of 1876.

Work began on the current church in 1890 with the cornerstone laid June 29. The parishioners provided much of the labor for the construction. They quarried and hauled the limestone from as far as 15 miles away.
Construction of the first church, a frame building 41-by-20-feet began in the fall of 1877 and was completed in February 1878. In 1883, the church was enlarged by adding another 16 feet. During the 1880s, immigration from Russia continued and the congregation at Munjor grew.

In 1889, church members decided it was time to build a new church and construct it of native limestone. The cornerstone was laid on Passion Sunday 1889. The church was dedicated in 1890 in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi.

The church is 105 feet long, 49 feet wide and 50 feet high. The 60-foot-high tower was designed for a steeple, but due to a lack of funds, the steeple was not completed until 1906.

This church and its members were faced with a great tragedy Feb. 5, 1932, when the church burned. Many of the interior furnishings were saved by the parishioners, but the altars, organ, bells and stained glass were destroyed by the fire. The church was restored with the same appearance it had prior to the fire with the exception of the steeple, which never was replaced.
The Basilica of St. Fidelis
900 Cathedral Avenue, Victoria
(785) 735-2777
fidelis@ruraltel.net
www.stfidelischurch.com

The Basilica of St. Fidelis is the largest of the historic churches in Ellis County and was built from 1908 to 1911 of native limestone. The stone was quarried from a site 7 miles south of Victoria. Each block was dressed and faced by hand, hauled to the site by wagons and lifted atop the walls by horsepower. Almost a million pounds of cement was mixed by hand and moved in by wheelbarrows. The 18 granite pillars were brought in by rail from Vermont. Bedford limestone for the doorways, bases and capitals of the pillars came from Indiana.

This majestic church is built in the shape of a cross 220 feet long and 110 feet wide at the transepts, or lateral arms. The twin bell towers are 141 feet tall and can be seen from miles around.

The seating capacity of 1,100 made it the largest church west of the Mississippi River at the time of its dedication Aug. 27, 1911. The church was named "Cathedral of the Plains" by William Jennings Bryan when he visited during his presidential campaign July 19, 1912. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was honored as one of the 8 Wonders of Kansas on Jan. 29, 2008.

The parish celebrated its centennial from 2008 to 2011, marking the 100-year anniversary of four major milestones in the building of the church — the groundbreaking, laying of the cornerstone, first ringing of the bells and dedication. On February 21, 2014, it was declared the first minor basilica in Kansas.
The first Catholic church in Hays was a simple wooden frame church that was 42 feet long and 22 feet wide built in March 1879. Prior to this church being built, services were in the military barracks at the fort. Soon, the parish outgrew the first church and construction of a new church began in the spring of 1886. The cornerstone was laid Aug. 15, and this new stone church, which measured 72 feet long, 32 feet wide and 21 feet high, was completed by Christmas 1886. On March 6, 1887, it was dedicated by Father Anastasius, O.M. Cap., and on Sept. 4, 1887, it was consecrated. In the next decade, the church experienced rapid growth and a larger church was needed. The cornerstone of the current church was laid in November 1901 and the dedication was June 12, 1904.
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