

AT THE ROOT OF IT

Adolf Schroeder translated a German immigrant's memoir

ADOLF SCHROEDER MADE MANY IMPORTANT

voyages during his life, each leading to a lifetime of uncovering the past and reminding others of their cultural origins. Adolf, or "Dolf," accomplished this feat through song and written word.

Longer Than a Man's Lifetime in Missouri, a memoir by German immigrant Gert Goebel, was released by The State Historical Society of Missouri on June 1. First published in 1877, it recounts events dating back to the 1830s when one of the first waves of German immigrants settled in Missouri.

Adolf translated the memoir from German to English.

He was born in the United States in 1916. When he was 4 years old, his mother brought him to Germany to be adopted by a family who could better care for him.

In 1937, at 21, Adolf left volatile Germany for the United States to rejoin his birth family. When World War II broke out, he was drafted as an American soldier and retraced his route back to Europe on the same ship that brought him to America.

Well-versed in both German and French, Adolf was asked to teach the latter over the loudspeaker to the other soldiers on the France-bound ship.

"His French classes weren't very popular on that boat," Adolf's wife, Becky, says, her laugh rocking her petite frame.

She believes it was this journey that contributed to her husband's interest in European immigrant life.

"He loved talking to people," she says. "He enjoyed hearing where people came from."



Adolf Schroeder taught French to his fellow soldiers in WWII.

After the war, Adolf was a professor at several institutions and taught German at MU for 16 years.

During and after that time, Adolf organized several trips to Germany with the sole purpose of connecting descendants with their ancestors' histories. He also led Germans to America to see where emigrating descendants settled.

On March 29, just a few months before a note of dedication was scribed into the translation book project he had labored over, Adolf died. He was 97 years old.

With Becky editing by his side, Adolf's translation allowed Goebel's descendants and others hoping to discover Missouri's rich immigrant past to access a bit of rare history.

"It's one of the best memoirs that I know of of German immigration," co-translator Walter Kamphoefer says.

Goebel settled in an area with many frontiersmen and spent a lot of time hunting, trapping and telling stories, Kamphoefer says.

Mary Ellen Lohmann, coordinator of publications and media relations of The State Historical Society of Missouri, says the memoir helps give Missourians a better idea about the ways through which German immigration influenced Missouri culture and heritage.

"Everything from winemaking in Hermann to the way we farm can be traced back to the people who first immigrated to Missouri," she says.

Another way Adolf helped reconnect German Americans to their heritage was through folk song.

Lois Puchta, president of the Brush & Palette Club of Hermann, was a driving force behind the memoir's publication and can attest to Adolf's fascination with German folk songs.

"He was a singer," she says. "Sometimes something we were working on would remind him of a German folk song from his childhood, and then he would burst into German song. That's one of the things I remember most."

Puchta also transcribed Adolf's translations for the society to publish.

"We spent a lot of time over cups of tea and scoops of ice cream talking about the memoir," she says.

Puchta says she, Becky and Adolf poured so many cups of tea because understanding the past gives those living in the present direction for the future.

"We are what we are due to a great extent what came before us," Puchta says.

• ALAINA LANCASTER

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Family Health Center's 4th Annual Golf Tournament, August 26, 2013, will enable golfers in the Columbia region a late summer test of their golf skills. It will also give golfers an opportunity to help raise funds for a very important non-profit organization to the Columbia community.

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