

2004 Zeisset Reunion

The descendants of six Zeisset brothers and sisters who immigrated to Riley County from Germany between 1885 and 1893 met for their 17th reunion, in the largest and longest gathering of its kind for the family, according to reunion organizer Paul Zeisset. One hundred fifteen people attended all or part of the two-day affair, August 14 and 15, coming from as far away as Alabama, Virginia, and California.

The event started with a visit to the Riley County Historical Society Museum in Manhattan, where curator Cheryl Collins told the gathering about the founding and early history of Leonardville and nearby communities.

That afternoon, the group boarded a school bus and cars for a tour of early farmsteads of the six immigrants, with commentary by Loretta Hoerman of Topeka and Merton Zeisset of Leonardville. Only one of the original homes is still occupied, but participants got a sense of the places many had heard of but never seen. The tour ended at Leonardville United Methodist cemetery, where 5 of the 6 immigrants and many of succeeding generations are buried.

Women of the Walsburg Lutheran Church catered the Saturday evening meal at the Leonardville Community Center. During the evening program, participants shared pictures and stories of the immigrants, their families, and their lives in Kansas. Family members also discussed genealogical techniques, use of family history information in school projects, and features of the Zeisset family web site.

The group gathered at the Leonardville United Methodist church Sunday for visiting, the church service, and a dinner mixing catered and pot-luck dishes. The afternoon program featured prizes for the winners of a contest to get the autographs of people of different families, ages and experiences. Greetings were presented by attendees from other, distantly related Zeisset or Zeiset families. Elaine Baer of Riley was also present, a distant Zeisset relative, but also representing the Baer family that influenced the Zeisset immigrants to come to Riley County 119 years ago. Loretta Hoerman was the featured speaker for the afternoon, reviewing the results of her recent research on the German ancestors of the immigrants.

Riley County participants in the reunion included Gladys Llewellyn, Janet Peterson, Merlin and Marlaine Potts, Dolan and Barbara Rundquist, Una Weller, and Merton Zeisset of Leonardville; Elaine Baer, Vonda Copeland, Leo & Eileen Hageman, Addelene Jones and Bettie Hageman Nelson of Riley; and DeAnn and Wayne Bratton, Dail and Minnie Nelson, Mary Nudson, Diane Potts, and Gay and Evan Stewart of Manhattan.