



• June 2014

# IDHR UPDATE

Hello, Friend:

Last week, I shared with you Director Claps' immigrant story. Today, I'm pleased to present you with a story sent to me by Doreen Books, Human Rights Investigator II, from our Springfield office.

*"My great-grandfather, Bernhard Geissler was born in Germany in 1863. Bernard was a deeply religious man, and at the age of 18, he and his sister emigrated to the United States which, he was told, needed pastors. He was ordained a Lutheran minister in Iowa, where he met and married a young German girl named Carolina. Bernhard was called to the Immanuel Lutheran Church near Basco, Illinois in the 1880's, where they still preached in German. He served as a minister for about 35 years, and although it was a very poorly paid profession, he raised a family of seven and taught his son Theodore (my grandfather) how to play the organ and sing for the congregation.*

*Life was good for Bernhard, but not everything was perfect. During the First World War, American sentiment turned against German-speaking people. When Rev. Geissler would ring the bells for church services,*



*townspeople would sneer and say "there must be a German victory that they are sounding the church bells for". Some also said that Bernhard was a German supporter because he only preached in German. The Immanuel church members didn't want Bernhard to stop preaching in German though, because many were not fluent in English, just like Bernhard.*



*Eventually there was a town meeting where the townspeople invited Bernhard to speak, in order to hear from him directly. His lack of fluency in English meant that he could not defend himself very well, and ultimately the meeting broke down into a mob who threatened to "string him up" for "supporting" the Germans. The situation was cooled when a good friend of Bernhard's, spoke up for him that night. Ironically, he was a Frenchman, whose country was fighting against Germany at that very moment.*

Back L to R: Max, Theodore, Paul . Front L to R: Adelheid, Rev. Bernhard, wife Carolina Wilhelmina (nee Opperman) Geissler.  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Basco, IL

*Rev. Bernhard Geissler retired soon thereafter and he and Carolina helped Theodore with his family farm for the remainder of his life."*

Thanks to Doreen for sharing with us. IDHR is full of these fascinating stories; Won't you take some time and tell us yours?

**The 2014 World Cup is here!**  
**If you're a fan of "the beautiful game," send me a picture of yourself supporting your favorite team and we'll share it in a future newsletter.**

[hector.villagrana@illinois.gov](mailto:hector.villagrana@illinois.gov)

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