

## Liepe family holds reunion to celebrate 150th anniversary of kin settling in area

By **BRADEN CAMPBELL**, Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, July 10, 2013 12:01 am

Hamilton Township resident Rebecca McCourt has no shortage of relatives. The Liepe family, of which she is a member, has a long history in South Jersey, and as a student at Oakcrest High School, she has almost always been at least distantly related to someone in her classes.

On June 29, McCourt joined hundreds of family members, both local and distant, in celebrating the 150th anniversary of her great-great-great-grandparents' settling in Germania, which is now a section of Galloway Township, with a reunion held at the 4-H Fairgrounds off Route 50.

While she always knew she had a lot of family in the area, McCourt said, she nevertheless found new family members at the celebration - some of them among people she already had met.

"There are people I've met (before) I now know I'm related to," McCourt said. "I looked on the list, and it turned out, 'Hey, you're my cousin, you're my cousin. It's always a fun thing."

Heinrich Liepe, patriarch of the family, moved to the United States from Germany in 1855, and was met a year later by his wife-to-be, Antonia. The couple lived first in New Orleans and then Chicago, before moving to South Jersey to join a growing group of German expatriates.

The couple had two sons, William and George, and three daughters, Sophie, Antonia and Bertha, who married men with the surnames Schaab, Henschel and Grunow, respectively.

Now, the descendants of Heinrich and Antonia number more than 1,300. Many still live in South Jersey, mostly in Hamilton Township, Galloway Township and Egg Harbor City, while others live as far away as Utah and California.

The reunion came about because of self-appointed family historian Paul Liepe, who had given himself the task of writing a history of his family in North America. In researching the book, many of the older members of the family expressed an interest in getting the family back together for a reunion.

Sigrid Hayes, 84, of the Cologne section of Hamilton Township, was one of those who asked that a reunion be arranged. Hayes, who was 34 at the last family reunion, said she was excited to get reacquainted with family members she hadn't seen in years and to meet some of those she hadn't yet gotten the chance to know.

"I don't know three-quarters of them, because they're all younger, or they move away, so I don't know them anymore," Hayes said.

Liepe served as master of ceremonies at the reunion, kicking off the festivities with opening remarks that included a brief discussion of the family's history as well as awards for the oldest and youngest members of the family and for those who traveled the farthest and least in getting to the celebration.

Among the happiest to be reunited with the family were Carol Schaab-Gressman and Kathy Schaab-Parnell, who were moved to California as toddlers when their mother abruptly left their father, Bill Schaab, for another man. The sisters knew nothing of their paternal family until about six months ago, when Schaab-Parnell made an account on genealogy research site **ancestry.com**, finding she was part of a family tree made by Paul Liepe. She contacted him and was invited to the reunion.

Their reunion with the family may have come 50 years late, but for Schaab-Parnell, it was a fortunate coincidence, and one that was much better late than never.

"I'm in my fifties," Schaab-Parnell said. "I've got kids of my own and a grandchild, and it was a big hole. It was a big missing link. It's just ... it's incredible. It's once-in-a-lifetime and why, why this year? Why six months before the 150th reunion? God was smiling on me that day."

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