

MINING FOR GEMS

IN THE HEIFER ARCHIVES

The photos from Abe Reiff's 1946 seagoing cowboy trip to Gdansk, Poland, served as the catalyst for granddaughter Peggy Reiff Miller's unintentional career.



S.S. Zona Gale



The S.S. Zona Gale awaits loading in Baltimore, Maryland, in April 1946 for a shipment of 345 heifers to France.



The seagoing cowboy crew on the SS Villanova Victory deliver 198 cattle to Kavalla, Greece, in July 1946.

THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY
TO INVEST TODAY
IN THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

American Christians...
your heifers in Germany

WILL BUILD
MORE SOLIDLY
FOR PEACE



The Heifer Project made more than 80 shipments of cows to Germany throughout the 1950s to help refugee farmers rebuild their lives.

Nearly 7,000 men took to the high seas to deliver livestock via ship on Heifer's behalf after World War II. The deliveries came about through a partnership between the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the Brethren Service Committee of the Church of the Brethren. Heifer still gives animals to families around the world, but today most of those animals are purchased in the regions where they're given.

Although the golden era of the seagoing cowboy is past, Peggy Reiff Miller, an author, historian and archivist, is keeping their stories alive through her work, which she describes for *World Ark*.

By **Peggy Reiff Miller**

REVIVING HISTORY

I never set out to become a historian or an expert, as I've been called, on seagoing cowboy and Heifer International history. All I wanted to do was write a novel.

It all started with a handful of my Grandpa Abe's photos. After he died, my father gave me an envelope of pictures from Grandpa's trip delivering horses to Poland in 1946. Years later in a writing course, I needed a topic for a young adult novel and remembered Grandpa's photos.

I thought, "Aha, a seagoing cowboy trip to Poland!" My instructor agreed it was a good idea. "Something new under the sun," she said.

Having grown up in the Church of the Brethren that birthed the Heifer Project, the topic of seagoing cowboys wasn't new to me; but I had never heard Grandpa's story and needed to know more. So in 2002, I started interviewing men who had made livestock trips like Grandpa's after World War II for the United Nations Relief and

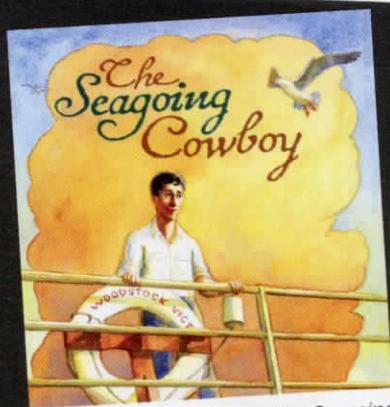


Seagoing cowboy Cletus Schrock shares the story of his trip to Poland with Peggy in a 2008 interview.

Rehabilitation Administration and the Heifer Project. One cowboy led to another and another. Their stories were so fascinating and compelling, full of adventure, danger, humor, drama and even an occasional romance, that I was hooked. When I realized these stories were just hiding away in people's minds and drawers and attics, my mission changed to documenting this piece of little-known history. And I've been researching, writing and speaking about it ever since.



Magazines have been one avenue for telling the seagoing cowboy story.



A picture book for all ages, *The Seagoing Cowboy* tells the story of a farm boy's trip to war-torn Poland after World War II.

It didn't take long to realize that I couldn't tell the history of the seagoing cowboys without also telling the related story of the Heifer Project, the early years of Heifer International. This expanded the scope of my research, such that I now have my own archive room filled with file boxes that feed my writing and speaking engagements.

My novel did get drafted, but it's resting. In the meantime, I've been sharing the seagoing cowboy story through magazine articles for adults and children, a DVD documentary, and a website and blog with twice-monthly posts (www.seagoingcowboys.com). My first book out of the chute will be a children's picture book, *The*

Seagoing Cowboy, to be released by Brethren Press in early 2016. Works in progress for adults include a book on the Heifer Project and one on the seagoing cowboys.

COWBOY CURATOR

My motivation has evolved over time. After my novel was drafted and I could have stopped researching, the cowboys themselves kept me going. To sit in their living rooms and listen to them tell about experiences that had a profound impact on their lives has had a profound impact on me. These men have entrusted me to be the caretaker of their stories, and I take it as my mission to see that their history of rebuilding a war-torn world lives on.

As I continued to interview cowboys, a second motivation for my work developed: connecting families with their own history. Like me, many grandchildren and even some children had never heard the story of their loved ones' seagoing cowboy experiences. And many cowboys themselves had not realized the scope of the program in which they had participated and its historical importance. Notes of appreciation I receive from cowboys and their children for rekindling these stories in their families make all my efforts worthwhile.

My work evolved to another, unanticipated level once my seagoing cowboy website went up in 2008. I had unwittingly become



Cornelius Queling was one of many grateful Heifer recipients of 1950. Peggy met him in Nierswalde, Germany, in September 2013.



German friend and translator Ingrid Marx, left, comments to Miller on the image of the heifer received by the family of Aloisia Werschmann, center, in 1950.



J. Olen Yoder still has the camera he used on his seagoing cowboy trip to Poland in December 1945.



Finding the Stanislaw Debert family who received a heifer from the Heifer Project and a horse from UNRRA in late 1945 was the highlight of Miller's research trip to Poland in October 2013.



Seagoing cowboys gather at the Funderburg Library of Manchester University for the unveiling of the Dan West permanent exhibit in May 2010.

a source of information, regularly fielding inquiries that came from children or grandchildren wanting to know about their loved one's cowboy experience, or from elementary through graduate students wanting information for papers they were writing, or from Heifer International staff needing answers for constituent questions. I struggle at times balancing this aspect of my work with the writing I want to be doing; but the seagoing cowboys have so graciously shared their stories and materials with me that I feel I have the responsibility of sharing them with others.

The latest evolution in my motivation has been my growing relationship with Heifer

International. The more I learn about Heifer's current work, the more excited and committed I am to be a Heifer supporter and promoter. I've realized that my work reaches many people who have never heard of Heifer. The more ways I can find to tell the seagoing cowboy story, the wider that story will travel; and the wider that story travels, the more people will be introduced to today's world-changing work of Heifer International. Thereby, history becomes a doorway to the present.

HIDDEN GEMS

With my research expeditions to a number of archives around the country, my work has been akin to mining for gems. Since 2004,

I've been up and down interstates from Indiana to Arkansas seven times to dig through historical files at Heifer headquarters in Little Rock or the vital records storage facility in nearby Maumelle or Heifer Ranch in Perryville. And I've struck gold many a time, finding nuggets that shed light on both the Heifer Project and seagoing cowboy histories.

One gem that set my heart fluttering was the seagoing cowboy card file. I knew from reports I had read that it existed, and I knew where it had once been located; but the person who had shepherded it through the years was deceased, and no one seemed to know where the card file went. Did it even still exist? I wondered.

BBC No.	State No.	Breed	Recipient
152	R 61047	Guerney	Siedlung Reichswald
158	P 108886	Holstein	Eberhard Thomas (bei Kieve)
164	01-92953	Holstein	Frau Mischke
168	R 61080	Holstein	Friedrich Behnke
175	R 35609	Holstein	Heinrich Rhode
180	R 61071	Guerney	✓ Paul Weissert
182	R 35605	Holstein	✓ Alfred M... 11523

Name Abraham Theodore Reiff
Alic F. Reiff Age 49

Address Milledgeville, Illinois

Church Affiliation Brethren

Tel. Green 130R2

Injections for: smallpox typhoid typhus tetanus

Remarks First of Sept.
Likely will come East to visit and contact us

Report

S.S.

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To

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Less: advance

travel

Amount paid

Ck. No.

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Section

For private individuals, though the State Department has ocean feed for animals to West Germany until May 1955, the Germans now take that responsibility. They assumed ocean travel just last June.

Heifers distribution in West Germany all animals are required to undergo two weeks quarantine, tests and inoculations.

Decision on distribution to individuals made by local government and church officials working in cooperation with Project representatives.

Germany, Heifer Project Incorporated requested through the Brethren Service Division of the Church of the Brethren, animals to be given through the cooperation of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Mennonite Central Committee. At present, however, only Church of Brethren representatives are active working with the project.

Coming from their "Brethren Haus" in Germany, Heifer-sent Kases in Germany. Heifer Project men confer representatives of German Catholic Protestant welfare organizations and governmental ministries from each of the Federal Republic's states to supervise selection and distribution of heifers to refugee farmers.

Selection requirements for families receiving a Heifer Incorporated animal in Germany:

- recipient must be a refugee.
- must have been a farmer and at least starting again at farming.
- must have a definite need for help to start, having no other cows.
- the farmer must sign an agreement to give the firstborn female calf to an refugee farmer at no expense to receiver.

While Heifer Incorporated has distributed some 2880 cows in West Germany since 1949, the number of descendants of those animals redistributed reflects the original gift clause in the tens of thousands.

is for Church of the Brethren work are kept only of the cows directly from the States. A map showing location of the cattle stall a wall in the Brethren Haus

A German recipient family leads their cow home after a dedication service where the heifers were distributed.

Mr. and Mrs. Alois Oelhorn receive Miss Charity, the 2,000th heifer sent to Germany by the Heifer Project, as a gift from the McPherson, Kansas, Rotary Club in May 1955.



A German refugee farmer draws a number out of a hat at an April 1952 distribution ceremony to see which heifer will be his.



The Hermann Deppe family of the Reichswald settlement stand with their beloved heifer received in 1950.

members of 11 families from the Reichswald resettlement in Germany where 42 heifers had been placed in 1950. What a phenomenal experience! Not only for me, but for them as well, as they were finally able to say thank you to someone for this gift of a heifer at a critical point in their lives.

I pass the recipients' gratitude on to those whose families were involved in donating heifers to Germany. Marianne Queling Arts summed up the difference this gift of a heifer meant to her family, which had been run out of their village in Silesia where her father had been mayor. She said, "Our heifer lifted us

There is power in story, and Heifer has a rich history that needs to be told.

from the depths of despair and gave us hope." In Poland, I heard a similar message from a family there who received a heifer in late 1945. These contacts would not have been possible without the records from the Heifer archives.

So why do I do what I do? Because this history has claimed me, and I cannot do otherwise. There is power in story, and Heifer has a rich history that needs to be told. ■



Miller spends hours poring over documents.