



Discovery Road  
Presents  
*“German Way”*

**Pioneers, POWs and a Mansion**

The Sangre De Cristo National Heritage Area (SDCNHA) and *Discovery Road* announce the release of the documentary *German Way* featuring interviews, history, and compelling stories.

“The story of German immigrants finding their place in the San Luis Valley is one of the most intriguing we have ever documented. The German influence can be found in buildings, banking, newspapers, and mining. Their contribution out here is huge!” *Discovery Road* producer James Nelson said about the new episode.

Many German emigrants made their way to America including *August Sporleder*. He came to Walsenberg in the 1860s where he opened the *Sporleder Hotel* in the small community of La Plaza de los Leones near the Spanish Peaks. Another of his early business operations was the Sporleder Feed Store which continues serving the area. If you look in the newspaper archives the Sporleder name is featured prominently in the community. It was at the *World Journal* newspaper in Walsenburg where *Discovery Road* found more of the Sporleder story. The newspaper is connected to the past and the family story including Louis B. Sporleder who was an unofficial promoter of the area. His writings and storytelling brought attention to the region and helped promote tourism. He was inspired by his Uncle August Sporleder.



**WORLD VIEW-Brian Orr and his wife Gretchen Orr Sporleder discuss story placement and photos at their newspaper office of the World Journal in Walsenburg, Colorado. Their insight to German family history is part of the *Discovery Road* documentary *German Way* produced for the Sangre De Cristo National Heritage Area. -*Discovery Road* photo**

“This is a poster that we sprung off of a pamphlet created by Louis B. Sporleder to promote the Spanish Peaks area based on the art deco style that was popular then. He was one of the first to promote the Spanish Peaks area. He had cabins in the mountains to rent out.” Brian Orr said from his newspaper office in Walsenburg, Colorado. Orr and his wife are interviewed in the documentary.

Louis B. Sporleder chronicled the comings and goings of early explorers, settlers, and legends. His Great Granddaughter Gretchen-Sporleder-Orr says he was a writer, storyteller and a very spiritual person.

“He was a real philosopher, dreamer, and very, very, learned man. He read insatiably his whole life. He was very musical. He was a very unusual man for the time.” Sporleder-Orr said in an interview with *Discovery Road*.

The Sporleder Orchestra is another of Louis B. Sporleder's endeavors. Music seemed to fit right in with literary pursuits, embracing nature and enjoying life in the west. Many descendants have picked up the violin and love for music.



**A Family Tradition – Ruth Orr plays a violin that belonged to her Great-Great Grandfather Louis B. Sporleder at a family mountain cabin in Colorado. Sporleder is featured in the *Discovery Road* documentary *German Way*. -*Discovery Road* photo**

“Music is a huge part of Huarfano County culture in general. Particularly for the Sporleders and our family. When August came out and had his hotel, and then Louis followed him out. One of the things that came from that was the Sporleder orchestra. They played at the hotel and all over town, practiced everywhere they could. They played for dances and gigs and for fun out in the streets. It was a huge thing for the whole family. Louis played the violin, his daughters played instruments and sang. It kind of got passed down.” Orr said.

Antonito, Colorado is located near the southern border in the San Luis Valley. It has that old town feeling, streets with colorful murals and a sidewalk perch of clay

pots with running water. It also is home to one of the most unique wonders in the state. The documentary gives viewers a tour of the beautiful Warshauer Mansion.

“The German mansion down in Antonito was built by and designed by Fred Warshauer in 1912. He was a rancher and a banker. He designed the entire mansion himself and had a famous architect in Denver draw up the blueprints on it. It features kind of blend of that northern European style and an American craftsman style home.” Jeff Myers, San Luis Valley Museum said.



**Warshauer Mansion – Aaron Abeyta, Mayor of Antonito, Colorado gave *Discovery Road* a tour of the historic building that serves as the city hall and community center. The opulent mansion was built by German emigrant Fred B. Warshauer in 1912. - *Discovery Road* photo**

*German Way* also tells the story of Peter Hansen who crossed the ocean to America with just one gold dollar in his pocket. Hansen was a soldier during the Civil War and became a very successful merchant and rancher.

“I think it was a lifestyle that he enjoyed. I don’t think he had originally planned on doing that, but it fit in perfectly for him. As time went on he even became a spokesman for the valley. And they ran ads in the newspapers, trying to have people come settle in the Alamosa, San Luis Valley philosopher, dreamer, and

very, very, learned man. He read insatiably his whole life. He was a major part of it in the San Luis Valley.” Julie Hansen, Great-Great Granddaughter said.

The half-hour documentary also has an intriguing segment on German WWII prisoners of war. Historians describe how the POWs were used as a labor force in the San Luis Valley. The show details how German POWs comingled with Japanese internees which resulted in an international scandal.

“So, when WWII comes around, these same German farmers were able to hire POWs out of the camp to work on their farms. They not only get to speak German with them and maybe find out what’s happening in their hometowns, the farmers, usually serve them a huge feast, a lunch. But it also established that local German community as patriotic. Because producing food for the War Department, producing for a war effort, using POWs for labor. So, they’re not tying up the few able bodied young men who are still in the neighborhood. It’s a win, win.” Kathy Kirkpatrick, historian, states in the documentary.



**MINING HISTORY – The Walsenburg Museum houses many artifacts and documents related to the German contributions in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. -Discovery Road photo**

The German-Americans made big contributions to the settlement and development of southern Colorado. Mining, agriculture, and, manufacturing, are some of the areas where they made a difference. Their customs, traditions, and beliefs also made an impact. The documentary offers great insight to some of the families and illustrates how their influences are still felt today. *German Way* is now available for broadcast through the Sangre De Cristo National Heritage Area.

“These people were real pioneers. What they did as merchants, ranchers and promoters in those early settlement years was significant. It is wonderful that some of the story can be brought forward to the public square and be appreciated.” Nelson stated about producing the *German Way* production.

#30