

# It's not every day you get to call the son of

**Editor's Note:** Stephen Frese knows what any historical writer quickly learns: research stretches over great periods of time and takes you to unexpected places and people. "It's hard to stop doing research once you get started," he says.

Frese is a sophomore at Marshalltown High School. In 2003, while a freshman, he began researching Khrushchev's 1959 visit to Iowa. "I'd heard that when Khrushchev came to Iowa, he thought that the grain silos were really missile silos in disguise. I wanted to know more about this, and what I learned made the Khrushchev visit to the Roswell Garst farm seem like a perfect topic for the 2004 National History Day theme, 'Exploration, Encounter, Exchange in History.'"

National History Day (NHD) is an academic program that helps students learn about historical issues, people, and events. Students in grades 6 through 12 present historical papers, documentaries, exhibits, or performances at one of 15 district events. Top projects advance to the state event, and then an elite few represent Iowa at the national event. (For details on NHD in Iowa contact Naomi Peuse, State Historical Society of Iowa, 600 E. Locust, Des Moines, IA 50319; 515-281-6860; or by e-mail: Naomi.Peuse@iowa.gov.)

Frese's project, in the Senior Historical Paper division, was selected for national participation at the state event in May 2004. Frese had secured this achievement the previous two years in the junior division, bringing home silver and gold medals. But this year he was participating in the senior division, against students older than he. In June 2004, competing against 84 others, he won first in the nation in his category. The judges marked every criteria "superior."

History Day projects require in-depth research and analysis. Researching over eleven months, Frese used some 60 sources, including books, newspaper and magazine articles, documentaries, primary sources, and interviews (see Note on Sources below). Here we asked this young historian to take us along on his journey into the Garst-Khrushchev story.

While searching the Web for Khrushchev information, I came across a CNN interview with Sergei Khrushchev, son of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. I learned from this interview that Sergei had moved to the United States and become a professor at Brown University. On the Brown University Web site I located Sergei's address and phone number, and then wrote him a letter telling him about my project and requesting an interview. He answered my letter and then we corresponded by e-mail several times before setting December 4, 2003, as the date for a phone interview. Sergei Khrushchev had accompanied his father to Iowa and it was interesting to discuss his memories of the visit. "The Americans thought that the Soviets wanted to build Communism on American soil," Sergei Khrushchev said, "and we were scared that Americans would start war to forcefully implement their way of thinking on us." He corrected one rumor that has persisted in Iowa since 1959: legend has it that Khrushchev thought all of the farm silos were missile silos. "My father knew that there were no missile silos in the United States at that time—the U.S. started building missile silos in 1962," Sergei said. "He knew that Mr. Garst's silos stored food for pigs and cows. My father was interested in pigs more than missiles."

The Roswell Garst Papers at the Iowa State University Archives in Ames were an invaluable source for my research. I examined several boxes that contained extensive correspondence, newspaper clippings from all over the country, Russian newspapers Garst gathered on his many trips (he often made news in the Soviet Union), and transcribed interviews that Garst granted following Khrushchev's visit. Garst included countless letters written by him about the importance of developing agriculture around the world in order to secure a lasting peace.

After researching the Garst Papers at Iowa State, I

#### NOTE ON SOURCES FOR "COMRADE KHRUSHCHEV AND FARMER GARST: SUMMIT IN AN IOWA CORNFIELD"

Early articles on Garst or Khrushchev included these: Curtis Harnack, "Farm Messiah from Coon Rapids," *Iowan* 4 (June–July 1956): 17–44; "Khrushchev Story: How 'Dark Horse' Took Over," *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 9, 1955; Lauren K. Soth, "If the Russians Want More Meat..." *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 10, 1955; Richard Wilson, "Khrushchev Rise Causes U.S. Concern," *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 9, 1955. During September 1959, the *Des Moines Register* provided extensive coverage of Khrushchev's visit to the U.S. and Iowa, including a series of articles by Harrison Salisbury, Richard Wilson, and George Mills. These articles (too numerous to list here) were very helpful.

Other newspaper and periodical articles covering events in 1959 include: "Astray in Hawkeyeland: A Day in the Country," *Iowan* 8 (Oct.–Nov. 1959): 49; William Clabby, "Mr. K & Corn: He'll Learn in Iowa How U.S. Lifts Output Through Acreage Drops," *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 1, 1959; Edmund K. Faltermayer, "Farmer Khrushchev: He Has Better Luck in Space Race Than with Milk and Meat," *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 10, 1959; "Global Crossroads: War and 'Peace'—As We Stand," *Newsweek*, Sept. 14, 1959: 31–36; "Great Encounter: The 'Moon Man' Cometh," *Newsweek*, Sept. 21 and 28, and Oct. 5, 1959; "Iowa Governor Opposes Visit by Khrushchev," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Aug. 23, 1959; Robert G. Kaiser, "Roswell Garst's Links with Soviet Union Being Renewed," *Des*

*Moines Tribune*, July 15, 1971; Henry A. Kissinger, "The Khrushchev Visit—Dangers and Hopes," *New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 6, 1959: 5, 44; Don Mitchell, "Mrs. K. Gardener," *Newark [N.J.] News*, Sept. 2, 1959; "Mr. Garst's Mail," *Omaha Sunday World-Herald*, Sept. 6, 1959; "National Affairs," *Time*, Sept. 28, 1959: 9–17; "Nikita Down to Earth at Iowa Farm," [Denver] *Mountain News*, Sept. 24, 1959; Richard Orr, "Iowa Farmer Bob Garst Has Much to Show Nikita," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Sept. 13, 1959; Dan Perkes, "Khrush No More Blunt Than Freethinker Garst," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Sept. 13, 1959; Neal Stanford, "Eisenhower, Khrushchev to Swap Visits," *Christian Science Monitor*, Aug. 4, 1959; "State Department Gets a Lesson," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Sept. 24, 1959; John Strohm, NEA Special Correspondent, "Why is U.S. Far Ahead of Russia in Farming? Mr. K. Seeks the Answer," *Kingsport Times*, Sept. 21, 1959; "War and 'Peace'—As We Stand," *Newsweek*, Sept. 14, 1959: 31–37; Tom Wolfe, "Official Nerves to Jangle In Salute to Khrushchev," *Washington Post*, Aug. 21, 1959.

Archival research sources included Roswell Garst Papers, Iowa State University Archives, Ames; Fagan D. Adler, "Seed Corn Genius Garst Helped to Pave Way for Historic Session at Camp David," undated newspaper clipping, Garst Papers, box 84, file 4; State Historical Society of Iowa Special Collections (Iowa City), photographs of 1955

# a former Soviet leader

■ by Stephen J. Frese

toured the farm of Roswell and Elizabeth Garst on Highway 141 near Coon Rapids. The farm is now the Garst Farm Resort and is operated by their granddaughter, Elizabeth "Liz" Garst. The tour made the history of my project come to life before my eyes. Being in the place where this historic East-West encounter occurred—even though it was now quiet and there were no reporters nesting in the trees—gave me a sense of its significance. The farmhouse has been restored, maintaining its early 1900s flavor, and is filled with photographs of Khrushchev's visit and the Garst family; memorabilia from the Garst and Thomas Seed Corn Company; gifts from Russian visitors; and hundreds of stories of the Garst family and their guests. With Liz Garst as my tour guide, it was as if the walls could talk.

While interviewing her I learned things that were not disclosed in published accounts. For instance, none of the 700 National Guardsmen activated to protect Premier Khrushchev in Iowa were given bullets for their guns because our State Department was afraid of an assassination attempt from the inside. Liz was eight years old when the visit took place, and the memories she shared with me of her childhood encounters with the Soviets (during the 1959 visit and others before and after) added another dimension to my research. While many American children were conditioned to believe that the Soviets would start a nuclear war, Liz followed Russians around her grandfather's farm, collecting medals from the Soviet visitors and spying on Khrushchev's food-tasters, hoping to find out what would happen if "one of them dropped dead."

Following my tour and interview, I watched a videotape compiled from newsreel footage from Khrushchev's visit. Newscasts showed the crowd of reporters, photographers, and curious onlookers as they crushed in around Garst and Khrushchev throughout their inspection of Garst's farming operations. I had read so many accounts

of the crowded scene, but as Khrushchev often said in quoting a Russian proverb, "It is a hundred times better to see than to hear." I enjoyed watching the chaotic scene for myself while sitting in the farmhouse at the center of the event. Looking out the dining room windows, I could almost imagine the excitement of the day. A sense of place helps bring history to life.

After my day touring and conducting research at the Garst farm I stopped at the Coon Rapids Public Library to read the local newspaper's coverage of Khrushchev's visit. The librarian set me up with the September/October 1959 roll of microfilm, and then, after asking questions about the nature of my research, returned with a crumbling scrapbook stuffed with photographs and clippings that chronicled Roswell Garst's work as a citizen diplomat. The librarian did not know who had compiled and titled the scrapbook ("Encounter with Garst: Challenger of Tradition")—she only knew that it had been in a library cupboard for years. The scrapbook was an extremely valuable source of information about Garst.

Doing research for National History Day makes you feel special. People treated me like I was a real historian, not just a high school student working on a history project. It's not every day you get to call the son of a former Soviet leader and talk to him about an important event in world history. It's kind of humbling to walk in the same places as the people you're studying. And it was great to talk to Liz Garst about her memories, to see major world news through the eyes of an eight-year-old. ❖



National History Day winner Stephen Frese and Liz Garst at the Garst farm.

Russian delegation to Iowa; "Encounter with Garst: Challenger of Tradition," scrapbook, Coon Rapids Public Library, Coon Rapids, Iowa.

On Dec. 4, 2003, I conducted a phone interview of Sergei N. Khrushchev (digitally recorded). On Feb. 11, 2004, I toured the Garst Farm Resorts (1390 Hwy. 141, Coon Rapids, Iowa), interviewed and tape-recorded Elizabeth Garst (Roswell's granddaughter), and viewed a videotape, "Film Memories: Roswell Garst."

Secondary sources include the following: Robert Conquest, "Loudmouth," *The New Yorker*, March 31, 2003: 99, 100; David Elbert, "Historical Farm Will Become Resort Site," *Des Moines Register*, May 3, 1997; Loren R. Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1993); Robert P. Grathwol and Donita M. Moorhus, *Berlin and the American Military: A Cold War Chronicle* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); "JFK: A Presidency Revealed," History Channel documentary produced by David Taylor (A&E Television Networks: 2003); Nikita S. Khrushchev, *For Victory in Peaceful Competition with Capitalism* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1960); Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev in America* (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1960); Sergei N. Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of a Superpower* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Harold Lee, *Roswell Garst: A Biography* (Ames:

Iowa State University Press, 1984); Marlene Lucas, "Garst Farm Resorts in Coon Rapids Opens Doors to Visitors," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Oct. 4, 1998; Andrew H. Malcolm, "Coon Rapids: Unchanged Since Khrushchev," *New York Times*, May 23, 1972; Don Muhm and Virginia Wadsley, "Roswell Garst," *Iowans Who Made a Difference: 150 Years of Agricultural Progress* (West Des Moines: Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, 1996), 80–82; Kenneth Pins, "FBI Saw Garst as 'Difficult,' Say Secret Files," *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 27, 1989; William David Sloan and Laird B. Anderson, eds., *Pulitzer Prize Editorials: America's Best Writing, 1917–2003*, 3rd ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2003); William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003); William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason, eds., *Nikita Khrushchev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Evan Thomas, "Cold War: Bluster Before the Fall," *Newsweek*, Sept. 15, 2003: 10; Steve Weinberg, "Iowa State Press Collects Best, History-Changing Writing," *Des Moines Register*, undated clipping; Alden Whitman, "Khrushchev's Human Dimensions Brought Him to Power and to His Downfall," obituary, *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1971.

Annotations to the original National History Day paper are held in Iowa Heritage Illustrated production files (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City).