Letter from the director

Writing this column, I have fond and unforgettable memories of the February days in Argentina and Brazil. I traveled with Bob Dambach, director of television, Prairie Public Broadcasting, to begin work on a new documentary of the story of the Germans from Russia in South America. We were warmly received by the Germans from Russia communities especially in the State of Entre Rios and at Coronel Suarez, south of Buenos Aires. Entre Rios has about one million people and 28% are Volga Germans. There are more than one million Volga Germans in Argentina.

In southern Brazil, we had a wonderful experience at the Mennonite German community of Witmarsum, famous for their milk products and cheese. While in Mondai, State of Santa Catarina, I shall never forget my visit speaking in the German language with Lydia (Balmer) Lehrbach (90) and her sister, Anna (Balmer) Tarsch (88), who were born in Teplitz, Bessarabia and immigrated with their parents to Brazil in 1930. In Santa Rosa, State of Rio Grand do Sul, we had a very interesting meeting with persons of Volhynian German ancestry with relatives in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

This new documentary of Prairie Public’s award-winning Germans from Russia Documentary Series is projected for completion in 2014. Prairie Public videographers, Bob Dambach and I, return to Argentina and Brazil in 2013 for final filming and interviews. Our hope is to have this new documentary produced in English, Portuguese and Spanish languages.

Prairie Public’s new 2012 documentary, “At Home in Russia, at Home on the Prairie,” previewed at the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention at the Center of Volga German Studies, Concordia University, Portland, Ore., in June and premiered at the Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention at Bismarck in July. Long-time colleagues Lewis and Dona Reeves-Marquardt of Austin, Texas are the researchers and scriptwriters. Filming and interviews include the former Black Sea German villages today near Odessa, Ukraine; North Dakota; Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Finally, you will find with this newsletter, the annual giving letter. We invite you to consider a financial donation to the NDSU Libraries’ Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, so we can further develop this important work of documenting and preserving the heritage of our people – the Germans from Russia. We encourage you to continue to be a Friend of the GRHC with your financial support.

With kind regards,

Michael M. Miller

Upcoming Events

OCTOBER 10
SAUERKRAUT DAY—
WISHEK, ND

NOVEMBER 16-18
PRIDE OF DAKOTA
HOLIDAY SHOWCASE—
FARGO, ND

NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 2
PRIDE OF DAKOTA
HOLIDAY SHOWCASE—
BISMARCK, ND

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ADDITIONAL 2012 EVENTS, VISIT:
HTTP://LIBRARY.NDSU.EDU/GRHC/OUTREACH/TRAVEL_DATES/INDEX.HTM

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NDSU is student focused and committed to its land-grant mission.
South American Germans from Russia documentary work

Michael Miller, director and bibliographer at the NDSU Libraries’ Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, and Bob Dambach, director of television at Prairie Public Broadcasting, traveled in February to Argentina and Brazil to work on a new documentary telling the story of the Germans from Russia in South America. Many German Russians immigrated to Argentina and Brazil at the end of the 20th century at the same time families were immigrating to the Dakotas, the U.S. and Canada. In Argentina, there are more than one million Volga Germans.

Miller and Dambach visited people with Black Sea, Bessarabian, Volhynian, Mennonite and Volga German ancestry as potential interviewees. They visited many locations in the state of Entre Rios and south of Buenos Aires, Argentina. In south Brazil, they visited Curitiba, the Mennonite German village at Witmarsum, as well as the states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, which have many German settlements. “The days in Argentina and Brazil were truly amazing and unforgettable,” Miller said. “I was impressed how I could speak in the German language with many people. The interviews in 2013 will be done in the Spanish, Portuguese, German and English languages. There are wonderful comparisons of the German-Russian foods and recipes including kuchen, strudels and dumplings. The cemeteries featured the beautiful wrought-iron crosses similar to what we see in central North Dakota, western Kansas and southern Saskatchewan.”

The experience also made a significant impression on Dambach. “The things that impressed me most were the people and the landscapes. The people we met in Brazil and Argentina were tremendously friendly, helpful and sincerely interested in their Germans from Russia heritage. The mingling of three or four languages seemed to be no hindrance to communication,” he said. “The landscapes in Argentina reminded me of taking a trip across North Dakota with the flatlands morphing into gentle hills as you travel west. Our route in Brazil brought back memories of traveling through central Pennsylvania with its photogenic valleys revealing themselves as we traveled westward. The people and the landscape were truly amazing.”

For further information, go to http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/outreach/documentary/sadocumentary.html and www.prairiepublic.org.

THE PEOPLE WE MET IN BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA WERE TREMENDOUSLY FRIENDLY, HELPFUL AND SINCERELY INTERESTED IN THEIR GERMANS FROM RUSSIA HERITAGE.”

BOB DAMBACH, DIRECTOR, PRAIRIE PUBLIC TELEVISION

Lydia (Balmer) Lehrbach (90) with her sister, Anna (Balmer) Tarsch (88) and Michael Miller at Mondai, State of Santa Catarina, south Brazil on February 15. Lydia and Anna were children when they immigrated in 1930 with their parents to Brazil from Teplitz, Bessarabia.

Bob Dambach and Michael Miller standing by a wrought-iron cross at the Volga German cemetery near San Jose, Argentina on February 19.
At Home in Russia, at Home on the Prairie

“At Home in Russia, at Home on the Prairie” tells the story of the Kutchurganers. The life they led in South Russia and their life after journeying to the prairies of North America. The stories are told by the descendants of these pioneers: Monsignor Joseph Senger, Christina Gross Jundt, Helen Fiest Krumm, Dr. Adam Giesinger, Father Thomas Welk, Theresa Kuntz Bachmeier, Barbara Schneider Risling, Ron Volk, Colleen Zeiler, Debra Marquart, Mary Ebach and Clara Ebach.

Germans from Russia tend to have good powers of recall as well as an often sentimental attachment to place, be it homeland, village or farm. Memory is often associated with family and the odyssey a family may have taken over a lifetime of travel or of living within a singular area. It is a complicated interplay as place frequently reinforces memory and memory place.

Family members are not just forces in life but take their shape through historical time and in geographical place.

This documentary places one’s own family story in a wider human narrative of what it means to be a German from Russia today.

The documentary serves as an audible and visual museum of one emotional and intellectual place, the Kutschurgan Valley in Russia, as the intersection of memory and place, a foundation of many shared and common memories for those of us in the Northern Plains and western Canadian prairie provinces.

To purchase the DVD or for more information, visit http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/tapes/kutschurgan.html.

GRHC’s Special Collections’ staff prepare finding aids

The Germans from Russia Heritage Collection is actively working to create, catalog and make finding aids for over 200 special collections. Finding aids are a primary search tool for researchers.

What is a finding aid? It is a descriptive guide to assist with access and understanding of the materials in a collection, such as the Dr. Adam Giesinger Collection (accessible worldwide via the internet). A finding aid clarifies a collection by including and summarizing information, such as acquisition, provenance, size, history and biography, the scope of the collection and its organization and arrangement.

The organization of any given collection is described within the finding aid, usually by box number and folder number. This allows for easy and quick access for staff and researchers.

The GRHC Special Collection finding aids are available online in electronic format and can be searched for on the GRHC website and the NDSU Libraries’ online catalog. The finding aids are contained online on the NDSU Institutional Repository.

Special Collections are available for research at the GRHC and staff is available to assist with research needs.

Processing collections and preparing finding aids take a great deal of staff time. The GRHC depends on private donations for staff to process these special collections.
The Farm at Pony Gulch

“The Farm at Pony Gulch” tells the story of Michael and Anna Sophia (Witt) Baier, who came to America in 1883 from Arzis, Bessarabia. As German-Russian immigrants, they had become disillusioned with the promises made to them by Catherine the Great and her grandson, Czar Alexander I. The Baiers first settled at Scotland, S.D., and then, in 1896, homesteaded in Pony Gulch Township near Harvey, N.D.

For the most part, “The Farm at Pony Gulch” is the memoirs of their grandson, Eddie Knalson, who helped on the Baier farm when he was young. He included much oral history told to him by his Aunt Bertha. Patsy Knalson Ramberg, Eddie’s daughter, adds insight into the family and areas where they lived.

For more information about this book or to purchase online, visit http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/ponygulch.html.

Dr. Ute Schmidt attends GRHS Convention

Dr. Ute Schmidt (Berlin, Germany), author of the hardcover book “Bessarabia: German Colonists on the Black Sea,” visited Minneapolis and North Dakota in July. She received a warm welcome and a splendid reception. While in North Dakota, she visited Fargo, Kulm, Lehr, Wishek and Linton. Ute Schmidt was a featured speaker at the 42nd Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention at Bismarck.