President's Message

It is time again for another Heritage Review, the final one prior to the convention. The GRHS Convention will be on July 10-11-12, 1987 at the Jamestown Civic Center. The pre-registration forms and other convention material should be coming to you in about 30 days. I urge you to make your plans to be there. It sounds like it will be a great convention.

Very important issues will be on the agenda at the annual meeting besides the election, which should always be important to all of us. The Board of Directors is recommending the following changes to our By-laws:

1. Add that a chapter Board of Directors "cannot legally conduct business unless a majority of the Board members are present.

2. Delete "A membership is limited to two votes" and recommend "A membership is entitled to one vote."

3. Raise the life membership from the present $250.00 to $400.00, respectively.

Some highlights from the January 10, 1987 Board meeting include approval to establish an Endowment Fund Foundation for our Society. Also approved guidelines for convention planning which will be used to list the book accommodations new material including a brief synopses of our books using descriptive features for tapes, records, etc. The Board also approved $200 in our 1987 Budget for continued work at the Institute for Russian Music and Dance Studies at NDSU, while approving a general Fund Budget of $55,550 for 1987.

As many of you know, "Home-grown on the Steppes" is out of print and we presently do not have publishing rights to reprint this book. We are working with Mrs. Joseph Fleck to acquire the rights, and soon will be able to make this book available. We are also sorry to report that the book "The Wanderers" is out of print and we are unable to find a source for purchasing this book. I will try to give an Annual Report of the 1986-67 activities at the Convention. Also at that time you have any questions regarding GRHS, please feel free to ask. This report will be incorporated into the annual meeting.

I hope to see all of you at the convention and take part in the annual meeting. This is your time to decide issues that affect all of us.

Curtis Schulz

German-Russian Dance Music in Transition:
Strasburg, North Dakota
by Jerry Klein

I pulled into Strasburg, North Dakota, on the 7th of October, 1983 with little confidence that I knew what I was looking for, much less what I hoped to find. In fact, I was a bit surprised to find that I knew very little about the German dances in this part of the country. We had been in Russia in 1982, by Karen T. Ackermann & Laur L. Towe; inspired by Victor Knell


Katschuran Colonies to America - Our Families, Dorsch, Roehrich, Vetter, Volk and Zerr. Compiled and donated by Patricia Ann Benson Wagner.

Bite Family History. Compiled and donated by Mr. Al M. "Doc" Koelsch (?).

The music in Transition: an essay written by me in Fargo last year. We think this should be published in the Institute for Russian Music and Dance Studies newsletter. It may be helpful for people who do research on this family.

Making the effort to send a letter, as was done by Ingrid Reule, surely indicates she has a great interest in genealogy, and, I think, also in GRHS. The Society continues to be favored with various kinds of contributions which have been contributed since the last issue of Heritage Review.

Armard Bauer
with which school students would not be unfamiliar or unduly disturbed.

I was able to record a good amount of music in the field under various conditions. The quality of the recordings varied, and the music was often played during festive occasions, which was affected by the crowd noises and physical limitations with which I was working. It was not always possible to secure a position near the band. Some of the recordings were done while we were at considerable distances, and we were relying on microphones, they having agreed to play for me in the middle of the field. The quality of these tapes is excellent. Since professional sound recordings had been done by some of the musicians I interviewed in the past, I was able to compare. They are well representative of the style that I captured on my field recordings, and are indicative of the indosso modes that are still played by the musicians of the German-Russian musical tradition. As well as changes that have occurred within the repertoire, there have been changes in instrumentation that are a direct result of musical influences that the Germans from Russia encountered here in America.

THE GERMAN FROM RUSSIA

The ancestors of those German-Russians now residing in the Strasburg, North Dakota area, immigrated to Russia in the early 1800's. Most of them came from the villages of Wilgert, Zwei, Alase, and the Rheinfall. They settled areas around the north shores of the Black Sea in new colonies. The majority of Strasburg's German-Russians area descended from colonists who settled in Bezoukovo, a group of six villages just east of the Dnieper River. A smaller percentage are descendants of colonists who settled in Bezoukovo, a group of six villages just east of the Dnieper River. A smaller percentage are descendants of colonists who settled in Bezoukovo, a group of six villages just east of the Dnieper River.

When a colony was established in Russia, it was also almost religiously homogenous. The colonies of concern were the German colonists in the Roman Catholic faith as was the region around Strasburg, North Dakota, some eighty years later. This is significant because there were and are different attitudes regarding the morality and propriety of music and dance in society among various Protestant denominations and the Catholics.

Many of the Protestant German-Russians refrained from celebrating religious holidays, weddings or other festive occasions with song and dance. Most of the Catholics however gave an important place to music and dance within the framework of their ethnic cultural tradition. Although there were Protestant German-Russians who exhibited against music and dancing, very few of their descendants settled in the Strasburg, North Dakota area and hence are not of major importance to the discussion at hand.

When these people left their homelands along the Rhine, they took with them the basic cultural accoutrements that identified them as unique people. Their dress, hair and physical appearance marked them as Germans from southwestern Europe and set them apart from their new Russian countrymen. These inherent differences were preserved throughout their stay in Russia. Although subsequent generations regarded themselves as Russian citizens and Russia as their homeland, they held steadfastly to their German identity. Marriage with Russian ethnicities supposedly was rare, the barriers of language, religion, and tradition being too great. Indeed, most German-Russian did not get to live in the Russian dance tradition during the nineteenth century, and certainly stylistic elements of Russian folk music of the nineteenth century, and certainly stylistic elements of Russian folk music were picked up by the Germans in their singing and playing, as well as their dancing.

In the few decades that the Germans in Russia kept their musical tradition essentially the way their forefathers had passed it to them. The simple chord progressions, in major keys, and lyrical melodies they are well-known today for this fact, differed greatly from the traditional folk music that isaurally. Children grew up hearing and singing the old songs of the former German homeland as well as some new ones that were created in the folk style to express feelings about life in the new homeland. Occasionally, a traveler or colonist who had lived in or visited Germany would introduce a new song into the community. But essentially they cling to the old while selectively drawing from the new. Aspiring young musicians learned by watching and listening to the older players. The prominent instruments were the accordion, clarinet and fiddle, while hand clapping or use of the drums was common.

Musically the German-Russians remained distinct. They brought with them to Russia hundreds of folk songs and dance tunes that were popular in the areas from which they came. In the United States, the migration was set to the rural prairies of the American West.

The German-Russian music was not only similar to the music of the other German groups in the area, but also served to lift their spirits in times of celebration and in sorrow. The rich repertoire of music they carried to Russia provided them with a diverse and rich musical tradition. In the countryside, at the churches, and in their homes, the colonies often lifted their voices in song. Whether they sang songs of reverence, sorrow, war, love, humor, or celebration, the lyrics gave an important place to music in everyday life.

Although the opportunity to dance did not often present itself, the German-Russian colony on the Great Plains was commonly referred to as a music town. At one time or another, one could hear music being played on a piano, organ, or guitar. However, the opportunity for dance was very limited, and dancing in public was not encouraged. The dances were held in private homes, and the music was performed by local musicians.

A NEW HOME ON THE PRAIRIE

When Czar Alexander II issued a ukase in 1871 which abolished the special rights and privileges enjoyed by the German colonists in Russia, he triggered the migration of thousands of German-Russians over the next four decades. The new policies of "Russification" in the colonies and forced military conscription for young German-Russian males brought distrust toward the government; to emigration. The first step in the process was the establishment of daughter colonies. It became increasingly difficult for the younger generations to obtain farmland, and less attractive to remain in the colonies. Many of the older generation, the forefathers. The combination of the above-mentioned factors coupled with the prospect of obtaining free land in America Warren, it was time to set sail for the new world. The Homestead Act of 1862 enabled many to attempt a new start in the United States. Land Agents advertising this opportunity presented the idea that the opportunity to emigrate was a chance to carve out a new life in the American West. The idea of a new life in the American West was in line with the Russian dream of a better life. The idea of a new life in the American West was in line with the Russian dream of a better life.

And so, small groups began to arrive in the late 1880's to the area of what is now Strasburg, North Dakota. The first group arrived on the last train from St. Petersburg, Russia, arriving on a Tuesday. The train arrived at the stopping point of Mannheim, Selz, Elsaas, Baden, Kandel, and Strasbourg. Some later arrived from the Krasna area of Bessarabia, and Rosenthal in the Crimea. These settlers came from different parts of Russia, including the province of Novgorod, as well as their common Roman Catholicism. There were some definite differences in customs, and each group spoke a different dialect. However, the German-Russian language was a common bond.

This pioneer generation came to America with virtually no knowledge of the English language nor of American ways. They really had little intention of losing their German heritage in the new country in which they hoped to live freely with the traditions they were accustomed to following. They were proud to become Americans, but they wanted to keep their German language and culture.

Their relative isolation on the prairie provided an ideal situation for this to happen. Although they shared the new town of Strasburg with a small minority of Dutch immigrants, they were isolated from them and the other rural communities.

The music of the pioneer generation who came over from Russia had very little influence from outside sources to affect them in the early years of settlement. There were simply no groups nearby with whom to exchange musical ideas. The Dutch inhabitants had a religious prohibition against celebrating with music and dance. Their musical tradition consisted mainly of Protestant Church hymns which were not sung, nor likely to be sung by the German-Speaking Catholics. The Dutch had a strong, traditional, and unmusical group who were not influenced by the immigrants. The German-Russians tended to marry and socialize within their own ethnic community. This gradually changed in later years, but initially neither the Dutch nor the German-Russians wanted to marry outside of their faith.
and coaxing a crop from their newly-tilled fields demanded much of German-Russians. If anything, though, music became even more precious to the German-Russians. It represented a rare opportunity to put aside one’s cares, and celebrate life with friends, relatives, and neighbors. festivities included music, which emerged from what they had been accustomed to on the steppes of Russia. Where in Russia everyone had lived in the village and connected to the church. In America, on the other hand, people had to live on one’s own homestead, which meant that the nearest neighbor was often quite a distance away, and trips to town were few and far between. The people themselves along family groups most of the time. And so, festive occasions such as weddings became very special. The local musician was held in high regard, for the music he produced lifted everyone’s spirits and brought the group quite likely evoked memories of the homes, friends, and family that had been left behind in Russia. And, most likely, the celebrated event gave folks a chance to catch up on the latest news and gossip. For the young adults, it represented a chance to meet and get better acquainted with a possible marriage partner. It was through such occasions that the musical traditions were perpetuated. People sang together, danced, and listened to the music. Young musicians had the opportunity to hear their established and much admired fellow musicians play tunes that they hoped to master in practice during the long winter months. In those days when people got together for a wedding celebration, it was a time to achieve a day in the life of the wedding following the ceremony, the bridal party and guests usually converged at the home of the bride’s parents for a sit-down meal. Musicians, usually an accordion, clarinet, and fiddle combination provided the traditional and prescribed music which included the Ehrenzate, a series of short waltz pieces during which parents and members of the host family danced together. The musicians received their pay in the form of donations from the guests who would request certain numbers and give some money to the musicians. When the Ehrenzate were finished, the general dancing could begin. The musicians usually played sets of three pieces for a particular donation. Apparently the music was so popular that groups would go around town dancing, and fiddle combination played for a set. Since the musicians loved to play and weren’t in the habit of turning away good pay, they just played their sets and didn’t bother with keeping a detailed account of who was paid and who wasn’t paid. 

THE SECOND GENERATION: AMERICAN-BORN
As the German-Russian community of Strasburg became established in North Dakota, so did the musical tradition. Emigrants continued to arrive from Russia un-Page Six

Music, of course, was not restricted to weddings and similar social gatherings. Church hymns were sung from the very earliest days of settlement. Franz Baumgart-ner, who was among the first pioneers, had organized an a cappella choir several years before the first church was built. He later served as the first church organist in Strasburg. The Benedictions Fathers and Ursuline Sisters eventually came to teach school and serve the parish of Saints Peter and Paul. They brought written music into the community. In 1914 the Strasburg Cornet Band was established, consisting primarily of brass instruments, clarinets, and drums. The group was a source of pride for the new community. It existed for at least twenty years and was led by a series of hired directors from outside the community. The band was discontinued sometime during the depression years, but the high average German-Russian was certainly not aware of it. Although the first World War generated some competition from other Americans for the people to be less German and more American, the military service of several young Strasburg men against the Germans on the battlefields of World War I created a new pride. But the old world loyalties lay. The Germans from Russia had become Americans in more than name only. Although they continued to retain a unique cultural identity, they were finding it much easier to adapt to and identify with other Americans and American society than had their forebears with Russians and Russian society.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION
Strasburg experienced good growth and prosperity during the twenty years after the turn of the century. But in 1929, the stock market crashed. This crash was followed by page Seven
community married "outsiders" (a local term denoting someone from outside the community). But quite a few of these bring their families to Strasburg periodically for visits. Such visits usually provide the visitors with the opportunity to hear and dance to some good "Old Time" music.

Not only was the repertoire undergoing some change and supplementation, but the instrumentation was also changing. The old standard ensemble of accordion, fiddle, and drums was rapidly becoming a thing of the past. The fiddle was the first to disappear. Most probably it could not compete with the volume of the keyboard accordions that were now available. The accordion also made it more difficult to learn to play than some other instruments. The Strasburg Cornet Band and later the High School Band placed a strong emphasis on drums and brass instrumentalists also were some of the instruments being played by jazz and other popular musicians. It logically followed that slide trombones, trumpets, and drums became important instruments in the local music. The clarinet continued to be played, probably due in part to the popularity it enjoyed in jazz music, and also because it was played in the Cornet and School bands. Most dance halls had an upright piano and most of the newer local groups utilized the piano as a rhythm instrument.

Even though Strasburg-area musicians were playing a variety of music, they tended to stick to harmonically simple and melodically "catchy" numbers. Even music that was taken from the mainstream of popular sound tended to take on characteristics of the more deeply ingrained German-Russian music. The most important ingredient in the music was that it have good popular appeal.

WORLD WAR II AND POST-WAR YEARS

The process of change continued to affect German-Russian culture during and after the war years. By this time most of the people did not identify strongly with their ancestral Russian past. Although they were still culturally and linguistically German, most, if not all contact with the people and areas of emigration in Russia had been lost. This was primarily due to the fact that Russia had undergone sweeping and dramatic change. Under Communist rule, correspondence had become virtually impossible and by the end of the war, the German colonies in Russia had ceased to exist as such altogether. The intense patriotism that accompanied the war effort in America was no less felt in Strasburg than anywhere else. Most of the young men served in the various branches of the military, and many of them served in far-away theaters of the war. Some were killed. Among these was a very talented young accordion player named Matt Schwab. Killed in battle in the Pacific, his music was silenced forever.

Many thought they would live a long life in this small prairie community. But many more went on to take up new lives all across America. For those who came back to Strasburg, one of the pleasures they returned to was the familiar sound of their hometown music. Big Band music was extremely popular and the jitterbug dance style was used extensively. But the traditional polka and waltz continued to be popular. Dancing in Strasburg was complete without the traditional wedding Marches, and the "Ehrentanz." But by this time the three-day wedding celebration had all but ceased. Very few wedding receptions were held in private homes. The Blue room in town had become much more practical and desirable a place to have a sit-down meal and dance. The wedding dance with its full-dress attire began to fade from view and the day after, the closer friends and relatives often gathered in the hall to open gifts and lunch on the previous day's leftovers. But the old three-day tradition had not faded from Strasburg. It was still the custom to have the wedding dance until the end of the evening. In addition to frequent dances put on by the proprietors of the Blue room, there were many other occasions such as anniversaries, funerals and even church socials. The namesake tradition was still practiced, and a dance was held for "Faschacterial", the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday day, when the Lenten Season commenced, and on Easter Monday, the day after Lent ended. Dances were not held during Lent. By religious tradition this was a time of fast and abstinence, and sacrifice. Dancing and festive music were not considered appropriate.

Older musicians like John Schwab, Xavier Roehrich, and Charlie Richter had passed their craft on to a younger group of musicians. John Schwab had enjoyed a particular reputation as a good player in the old style and had been in great demand to play wedding receptions, which he often did as a solo player. The piano accordions provided such versatility that players did not need single note instruments to help with the melodic line or harmony.

The 1960's brought a new technological innovation in to the American home that had far reaching impact. The television literally brought the whole world into the living rooms of countless families. North Dakotans took great pride in watching and listening to the music of Strasburg-born bandleader Lawrence Welk. He had spent years playing the circuit of dance halls and ballrooms across the midwest and had launched a highly popular television show from California. With no more than a fourth grade education, Lawrence Welk had started playing the family pump organ at a very early age. He learned the traditional German-Russian dance tunes from his father Ludwig who had played the accordion for local weddings and other dances before leaving his hometown to broaden his musical horizons. The small combos he led eventually developed into a full orchestra whose sound became popular across America. It is said that Lawrence's brother John was actually a more versatile and talented musician. But when Lawrence packed up his accordion and set out on his own, he took with him for entertaining a crowd, and a keen sense for playing what people wanted to hear. Even in later years when Welk had the assistance of talented arrangers and arrangers, it was said that his band's arrangements be kept musically accessible to the untrained public ear. First and foremost he sought to please his audience.

Other accordion musicians also made more humble but nevertheless respectable contributions to the field of music. Drummer John Klein played with the Welk band for over twenty years. In his youth he played with Max Mastel Band locally. Following a tour of duty with the U.S. Army Band, he earned his Masters Degree in music. He remains active musically in the Los Angeles area even after retiring from the Lawrence Welk Orchestra.

Mike Dosh remained in Strasburg but was well-known and popular in the midwest for his organ and accordion playing. He recorded several albums during his career. Certainly musicians like Lawrence Welk, John Klein, and Mike Dosh brought their music to a broader public than was to be found in the Strasburg area. The influence of American mainstream musical ideas had upon them is obvious. It is more difficult to judge what, if any, affect they had on their audiences. They did project a style that was learned within the context of their German-Russian heritage. This style probably received public acceptance because it was so accessible. The simplicity of form has much in common with many other folk traditions and strikes a responsive chord with people who enjoy listening and moving to music.

Gene Weisbeck, with piano accordion, is recognized as a player of "Old Time" music in the German-Russian style.

The younger Strasburg musicians who were establishing themselves musically in the community at this time still had a rich tradition to draw upon. The German language was still widely spoken, and many other cultural practices continued to exist along with traditional music. But the people also had a large selection of popular music to draw upon. As had been the case with previous generations of German-Russians, they drew from both. Pianist Larry Schwab grew up playing wedding dances with his father John. Later he teamed up with accordionist Gene Weisbeck. Larry's brother, James, began playing the trumpet in high school and was particularly fond of the Big Band Sound. He and his sister, Florence, played in a group called the Silver Six while they were in high school. She played the piano but was also performable well on the accordion, being the only female musician in Strasburg I heard of who played that instrument well. This group also had two saxophone players, Alice Wickenheiser and Dorothy Wagner. Rounding out the group were Gerald Klein on drums and Ernie Borr playing trombone. The presence of the saxophone in the ensemble was doubtless due in its use in the high school band format, and the favor it enjoyed in much of the popular music of the day.

Later, Larry and James Schwab formed a group with Gene Weisbeck and others calling the Bubbling Quinet. The group has had various combinations of members over the years, and is still in existence today. They perform in North and South Dakota and are particularly well known for their "Old Time music". They have all played quite a bit of music, but haven't kept up with developments in popular music. They are most popular among those of their own age group. However, a surprising number of younger people have enjoyed dancing to their music. There is always a demand for wedding dances. They are one of very few groups who can still play the traditional German-Russian wedding and dance music well.
The loss of certain old German tunes from the local repertoire was also evident. Gone were the certain dance steps were used less and less, or passed from the tradition altogether. The Russian Polka Mazurka is gone along with the accompanying music. Very few people in Strasburg remember the Polka Mazurka or any of the other musical traditions that one still hears that music. This type of cultural erosion was beginning to accelerate under the flood of American popular culture that has been tumbling over the German-Russian community at every turn. Television, radio, sound recordings, motion pictures, fast and efficient modes of land and air travel, better educational opportunities and the whole range of material progress were all social change were having a deep and lasting impact.

In the 1950's a new style of popular music was evolving that was to enjoy explosive popularity in America and in many foreign countries. It was a combined popular elements of Rhythm and Blues with Country and Western music, and has often been almost as controversial as it is popular. To the older German-Russian ear, the sound of Rock and Roll was and is nothing short of offensive. It is considered too loud, too raw, and too wild. But it struck a responsive chord with the younger generation. In this respect the situation in the German-Russian community paralleled that in most other communities in America. Older generations were slow to adjust, to listen to the sounds, but youth took them almost instantaneously. As had been the case with earlier styles of music, its rapid proliferation depended almost entirely on the unique technological innovations of the twentieth century. These technologies, recorded on radio stations nationwide. Sound recordings were readily available. Performers could be seen on television and live in concert. Air travel by musicians made it possible for fans to see their favorite performers. The print media also helped to bring performer and audience together. Media was using its influence to promote the music. The media to produce folk heroes and celebrity idols on an unprecedented scale. Strasburg native Lawrence Welk's image and music were packaged and marketed very effectively through the use of the above-mentioned technologies.

While the young people of the Strasburg area enjoyed the music, the older generation, the peculiar dichotomy in musical preference was evident. They still enjoyed and strongly identified with the older German-Russian musical tradition. At wedding dances it remained very popular. The rock n' Roll band would come in and the traditional polkas and polkas. The same young people who so thoroughly enjoyed dancing to the music of a traveling Rock 'n' Roll band on Friday night, might be found, enjoying the music of a German-Russian accordionist. The rock n' Roll band would play the traditional dance to the music of a German-Russian band. The attitude of this generation was symptomatic of the times. It did not embody a hostile rejection of traditional values but rather an engagement with the notion that the value of musical instruments chose the guitar, piano, or one of the instruments to be found in the high school band. The music learned was popular American music, mostly in the style of the Rock 'n' Roll music played by a local group at a wedding reception on Saturday night.

Subtle changes continued to occur in the realm of music within the Strasburg area. Often the changes were so gradual as to hardly be noticed. The increasing popularity of the guitar, piano, and drums that permitted the music of the German-Russian polka to be played without the use of the accordion. This even wider use among young, musically inclined people. The number of youngsters who were seriously learning to play piano or guitar, or who played traditional music on the clarinet were very few indeed. But there were plenty of musicians in the area to provide German-Russian, or "Old Time," music as it is called, at weddings and other special events and in local culture and was enjoyed by people of all ages. The most serious threats to its continued existence were yet to come.

THE SIXTIES ERA

The turbulence and change that tested the fabric of society whole unified State shocked and unanticipated by the 1970's also reached the prairies and the German-Russian community of Strasburg. The political assassinations, civil rights struggle, Vietnam War, Watergate, and a variety of such events had a way of tainting and souring happiness. Television brought all of these phenomena nightly into the homes of most people. The young were caught up in the atmosphere of the times and felt the same doubts, asked the same questions about our society that were being felt and asked by millions of other young people across the land. A certain identity was felt with the emerging counter-culture. The so-called "generation gap," although less evident than in some parts of the country, was nevertheless present. The long hairstyles of the youths, the freedom of some of the young people, were visible reminders of the rift that was occurring.

Rock 'n' Roll music had evolved to the point where many older German-Russians couldn't stand to hear it. It was a new kind of music that was recorded on radio stations nationwide. Sound recordings were readily available. Performers could be seen on television and live in concert. Air travel by musicians made it possible for fans to see their favorite performers. The print media also helped to bring performer and audience together. Media was using its influence to promote the music. The media to produce folk heroes and celebrity idols on an unprecedented scale. Strasburg native Lawrence Welk's image and music were packaged and marketed very effectively through the use of the above-mentioned technologies.

ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC

It has been said, and I believe with a good deal of justification, that we have become a generation of spectators. In America we want to be entertained. We like to go out and see a movie, watch a concert, go to a variety of other displays. These events and our fondness for them are not new. The advent of television however has drastically altered the patterns of our lives and entertainment. Television has done no less than capture the eyes and ears of America. No other medium has the unique ability to feed the popular appetite for unlimited variety of sights and sounds. And nothing is required of the television viewer but to sit and observe.

I'm sure that books have been written about television and its influence on music. I am not going to address that literature. However, one cannot help but notice, in a study such as this one, what causes a tradition to break down, or at the very least, to decline appreciably. In and around Strasburg, the tradition of German-Russian dance music is being lost. Along with the many other factors that bring change to a community, television hastened that process. If the adage "You are what you eat" is valid, a similar one could be phrased pertaining to TV. You are what you watch. Whether watching a skilled musician practice his instrument on television or a rock n' Roll hollering at his in-soul-in-song, does make a difference in who and what you grow up to be. If one young man in his prime began to spend all his time watching TV, instead of being present to watch Tuesday Night At The Movies, where his father's previous generation came in from the evening's milking chores to play a little accordion music before blowing out the kerosene lamp and going to bed, there's bound to be a difference in how each one looks at the world and what is considered important. I'm not making a value judgment. I am pointing out that the technology of the mid-thirties, and the consequent barrage of ideas and innovation has created a climate in which things culturally out of step with the mainstream become secondary or no importance. This pattern, I'm sure, has been observed in hundreds of subcultures across America.

The renewal of interest in German-Russian dance music traditions in the Strasburg area, the problem is not that people don't like the music any more. As was previously mentioned, it seems to have undergone a sort of eclipse during the '60's. One possible solution to the decline of German-Russian dance music may be a local radio station in nearby Wishek that devotes some of its airtime exclusively to the playing of "Old Time" music. In Strasburg the "problem" is a lack of those who practice or appreciate the German-Russian tradition. John Schwab was the youngest accordion player I encountered, and he's in his mid-twenties. He's a good player with a detailed knowledge of the repertoire. His repertoire includes polkas, waltzes, and polkas. He doesn't play weddings or dances regular, and the fact that he plays at all is somewhat unique for his generation. He plays strictly by ear, and his output is limited. The other musicians in town who carry the old
tradition are over fifty years old. Larry and Jim Schwab, Leo Liplick and his wife, and Clemens Roehrich know that tradition. Joe Schmidt, in his twenties, from the Napoleon area is an excellent accordion player who enjoys a good deal of popularity in the area. He is however a rare individual. He comes from a very musical family that plays professionally together. Joe Gross of Bismarck is an extremely gifted musician, originally from the Napoleon area, but he learned the best of the German-Russian music from his father, who in turn had learned it from musicians who had carried it with them from Russia. Joe frequently teams up with drummer Clarence Schwab of Strasburg to play in taverns or other social settings. He uses an amplified accordion, as do most all of the players nowadays, and achieves a sound that closely resembles that of an organ. He plays a wide variety of music and is recognized as one of the best players around. In his thirties, he is also one of the youngest. Because the people in Strasburg are so close to the gradual decline of their musical tradition, they are largely unaware of it. Interestingly, some of the same modern technology that has helped to erode German-Russian culture also helps to preserve it. The people can obtain recordings of German-Russian style music to listen to in their own homes. If there aren’t any local musicians available to play the music, a tape recorder makes it possible to bring one or more from Bismarck or Napoleon. At a Christmas dance in Strasburg last year, for instance, Victor Wald (accordion) and Andy Wanger (drums) from Napoleon were hired to play. They played a lot of music in the old German-Russian style and were right at home with the Strasburg crowd.

Almost without exception, the people I interviewed who were over age fifty said that German-Russian, or “Old Time,” music was their favorite. When asked to describe what made this music special, it was as if it were the first time they’d ever considered the question. Many were quick to point out that this was the music they grew up with. But more than this, they described the music as being happy. Its pep, they said. It has a beat and a feeling to it that lifts the spirit. Not a person beyond everyday cares. I observed that even among the younger people, the sound of an old polka or a fast waltz produced an enthusiasm that a crowd itself. The musicians themselves are looked upon as special individuals because of the talent they possess, but the music itself is the point from which a festive mood is born.

One would think that “Old Time” music would find little or no favor with the young because it is so dated. And yet, this is not the case. Somewhat of a paradox does exist though. Like their peers in most other regions of the country, Strasburg’s teenagers are Rock ’n Roll fans and listen to that style of music and enjoy it often. Even so, they have the older German-Russian tradition to which they are drawn. It’s hard to reconcile the two types of music, for they have very little in common. For the young, “Old Time” music is the appropriate music for a wedding dance. Many, in fact, would not want to have a reception of their own without it. If those people in their mid- to late-twenties are representative of the changes that accompany aging, it can be expected that today’s high school aged-people will gradually lose the older more timeless tradition as they lose some of their youthful interest in the ever-changing sounds of popular music.

In a written questionnaire I submitted to some forty Emmons Central High School students of Strasburg, some very interesting responses were obtained from which some conclusions may be drawn about the future of traditional German-Russian music in the community. All of the respondents were of German-Russian ancestry, at least by one parent. There were twenty boys and twenty girls ranging in age from fourteen to ten years. All stated that they liked listening to music. Rock, Country, and Pop were mentioned most often as favorite types. The girls all said that they liked to dance, however the boys were much less enthusiastic about dancing. Interestingly, when asked to identify specific dance steps that they enjoyed, the polka and waltz were mentioned most often.

Only eleven of the students said that they can play a musical instrument. And of these, none were accordion players. The desire to learn to play traditional German-Russian music was almost non-existent. Most of the students who play an instrument play by notes, and are not used to playing by ear, which is how almost all the players of German-Russian dance music traditionally learned to play.

When asked to identify groups or musicians they admired, most mentioned Pop/Rock musicians like Michael Jackson. When the same question was focused on local groups and musicians, the overwhelming majority mentioned the Bosch Band, also known as Country Roads, which plays a variety of Country, Rock, and Old-Time music. Lawrence Welk and other more traditional local musicians were not mentioned often.

Most of the students said that they enjoyed “Old Time” music and identify with it as a part of their ethnic heritage. The girls tended to have stronger and more positive feelings about this type of music, but most of the students in general seemed to associate German-Russian dance music with weddings and tradition. When asked how they would feel if the traditional music ceased to be played, most did not like the idea. It struck me that although all of these were living in a different age, in different music, their feelings about what music means to them as people are not so different from those of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES OF MUSIC

The following is a brief discussion of some representative pieces of music from the German-Russian tradition, or pieces that were taken from the American tradition and adapted to the German-Russian style by German-Russian musicians. Each piece is on tape on file at the Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND.
EXAMPLE #2 - Wenn Die Soldaten (German Folksong)
Taken from "Deutsche Lieder" (see #1 above)

This song is played and sung in a lively polka tempo. It takes a lighter look at war than the previous number, and pokes fun at the fickle nature of the sentiments of young girls.

The Young German Singers are a group of farm people, mostly married couples, from the rural parish community of St. Michael's east of Linton, N.D. They are interested in preserving the songs of their German-Russian heritage by carrying on a living tradition of singing.

Mr. Weisbeck was born in 1922 and reared on a farm southwest of Strasburg. He learned to play the accordion by ear, listening to the established players in the area. In the early 1940's he began taking lessons and learning to read notes. Because of the war however, he had to quit his lessons after a few months, return home, and help his father with farmwork. He continued to play by ear. In the late 40's he began using an amplified accordion. Today he plays regularly with the Bubbling Quintet.

The Marches have been played traditionally as the wedding party enters the reception. These tunes were brought from Russia and most likely were carried there from the ancestral homelands of Western Europe.

Each player has a unique style of playing. Consequently, the music is played a little differently by each player.

EXAMPLE #3 - Wedding Marches (Traditional)
Played by accordionist Eugene Weisbeck, 1/16/83, Bismarck, ND.

It can usually be determined from the play of the individual who had been the accordionist from whom he learned, if the listener is experienced and familiar with the various players in a given area. Mr. Weisbeck has his own style of playing and these marches reflect that. I have heard other players play the same tunes, and the differences in bass line, melodic embellishment, and even the melody itself are immediately recognizable. The key that a given song is played in also can vary from player to player.

These Marches have been a traditional part of wedding receptions in Strasburg, for nearly one hundred years. Only recently have they been played less frequently as the older musicians have passed on.

EXAMPLE #4 - Die Ehrenamtse (The Honor Dances)
Played by Gene Weisbeck, 11/16/83 - Bismarck, ND.

These traditional wedding dances, like the Wedding Marches, most likely date back at least two centuries. They are short waltz pieces that are played for members of the bridal party, including parents of the bride and groom, to which they dance with each other. The musicians play a string of Honor Dances that are tailored to the number of dancers. Sometimes individual dances are repeated in order to accommodate all the different combinations of dancers. I.e., the bride and her father, then the bride and her father-in-law, the bride and the bestman, etc.

Each waltz conforms to a definite form that is consistent throughout the entire series of Honor Dances, with little variation. The basic form, as played by Mr. Weisbeck, consists of 1 to 3 eighth note pickup notes, and an 8 measure melodic idea that repeats. The 8th measure of the repetition is slightly different from the first 8th bar because it leads into a three measure cadence. The last notes of the final cadence measure provide the pickup for the next dance, which has usually modulated to another closely related key.

In two of the six waltzes, the cadence is five measures long instead of three. And in two others the cadence is four measures long. One of the waltzes repeated the first eight bar section three times before the cadence. It is possible that these deviations from the form are simple playing errors. Mr. Weisbeck was kind enough to recall to memory these tunes that he hadn't played regularly for years.

It should be noted that the three measure cadence used by Mr. Weisbeck is probably stylistic in that it differs from the typical two measure cadence found at the end of most German-Russian waltzes, including the one he played for me in Example #5. I know, for instance, that John Normab, Sr., who played during the first half of this century used the two measure cadence when playing the Ehrenamtse. Since the tradition is learned by ear, and so few now play this particular music, it can be expected that such stylistic differences might emerge. Each player hears the music slightly differently.

Mr. Weisbeck played sixteen different waltz pieces which are the Honor Dances that he can remember. There may be some that he has forgotten. Some of the dances he plays are not played by other players. Whether these differences represent the remnants of a fragmented tradition, or regional variety dating back to Russia or even Western Europe, is uncertain. Unfortunately, so few players now even know the Ehrenamtse that it is difficult to make a comparison. The other players I heard did not play the Ehrenamtse. It would be interesting to know if they are still played in ancestral Alsace, Baden, and Pfalz, and if so, how similar or different they sound when compared with the North Dakota Ehrenamtse.

As recently as five years ago the Ehrenamtse were still commonly played at wedding receptions. Today they are a rarity. The following melodic line for the first three dances will illustrate the characteristics of the German-Russian Ehrenamtse. An example of the difference between the two and three measure cadences is also given.

Page Fourteen

Page Fifteen
The difference between the three measure cadence (above), and the two measure cadence (below), is actually due to the insertion of measure #15, marked with an asterisk. This forces the resolution to the tonic chord out of the eight bar theme. The ear of the familiar listener can pick up this slight difference immediately.

EXAMPLE #5 - Waltz (traditional)
Played by Gene Weisbeck, 11/18/83, Bismarck, ND

This piece is typical of the old German-Russian waltzes. In form it is very similar to the Ehrehtanse, having musical ideas that are stated in eight measures. This particular waltz has two themes, or melodic ideas, that are repeated several times. The sequence is as follows: AAAAAABBAABB, Cadence. Each letter represents eight measures, the first also having three pickup notes, as in the Ehrehtanse. 'A' sections are played in the key of B-flat major; 'B' sections in E-flat major. Only the I and V chords are used, which is fairly typical. It is interesting to note that the two measure cadence, as mentioned in #4 above, is used in this waltz. It is quite likely that in the days of the button accordion, clarinet and fiddle trio, the melody line was carried by the clarinet.

EXAMPLE #6 - Waltz (traditional)
Played by John Schwab, 2/7/46, Strasburg, ND

The form of this waltz differs markedly from that of the previous waltz and the Ehrehtanse. The melodic ideas are still stated in 8 measures, but there are more of them, and they vary in repetition. The cadences are also longer and different. The form sequence is: A B C B C D - 4 measure transitional cadence - A B C D - 6 measure final cadence.

Although the harmonic structure is simple, using the I, IV, and V chords, like most German-Russian pieces do, the most notable difference in this waltz from the previous ones is the character of the melody. The previous waltz melodies are built mainly on chord arpeggios. The melody in this piece is primarily diatonic with some chromatic variation. This piece is very melodic.
EXAMPLE #7 - Polka (traditional)
Played by John Schwab, 27/84, Strasburg, ND

Played in fast 2/4 time, this piece is well representative of the old German-Russian polkas. Melodic ideas, as in the waltzes, are stated in 8 measures. The piece contains two basic ideas and their respective variants. The sequence is: A A' B B' A' B B' A A' B B'. There are no cadential sections. All transitions and cadences are accomplished within the framework of the 8 measure melodic statement. A and A' sections are played in the key of C major. The B and B' sections modulate to the key of F major.

EXAMPLE #8 - The Strasbourg Waltz (traditional)
Played by Florence (Schwab) Klein, 21/85, San Juan Capistrano, CA

Florence learned to play the piano and accordion by listening to her father, John Schwab, Sr., when she was growing up on the family farm six miles northeast of Strasburg. She has not played much since moving to California in 1953, but I was able to convince her to play The Strasbourg Waltz for me. Her playing style has not changed in the last thirty years. Consequently, if stylistic changes have occurred in the Strasburg area in that time, her playing would not reflect that.

This tune most probably originated around present day Strasbourg, France. Like the Exkrenzé, it could date back more than two centuries. In typical fashion, the three melodic ideas are stated in 8 measure phrases. The form is: A B B C A A. Each melodic idea is further seen to contain two very similar 4 measure themes or sub-phrases. A and B sections are in the key of C major. C sections are in F major. The second time C is played, it drops an octave in pitch. The last repetition of the A idea incorporates the familiar cadential movement to the tonic chord. The final two bars finish the cadence by restateing the dominant to tonic chord movement.

The melody is very lyric in nature. Its light-hearted character seems to lift the spirits of German-Russian dancers as they hear the music. The song has been carried from Strasbourg, Alsace, to Strasbourg, Russia, to Strasburg, North Dakota. It remains a timeless musical heirloom for the German-Russian people.

Following is a transcription of the melody for the Strasbourg Waltz.
The trumpet then introduces a brief 8 measure melodic idea in F major, theme B, before changing to the key of B-flat major where the final 16 measures state a melodic idea which contains two similar 8 measure sub-phrases, as in C and C'...

EXAMPLE 9 - Landler (traditional)
Played by the Bubble Quintet, 1/12/83, Bismarck, ND

This is a different type of waltz. It displays a much freer and complex form and style than the previous German-Russian waltzes. With good reason too. It is not a German-Russian waltz, but rather Bohemian. Some German-Russian musicians learned a number of landler from Bohemian immigrants who settled in North Dakota. The Bohemian musicans had their own tradition which originated in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. The following discussion of the harmonic and melodic structure will illustrate how this type of waltz differs from the German-Russian waltzes.

The piece begins in the key of F major. The first 4 bars are an introductory phrase that suggests the melodic idea that is presented in the next nine bars, theme A. Then comes A' which is a slightly altered restatement 9 measures. of A. A and A' are repeated, but this time without the introductory first 4 measures. The themes are so well woven into the overall texture of the section that it is difficult to distinguish them until one looks at the music on paper and listens to the piece. The melody has been carried by the trumpet up to this point.

Gene Weinbeck's accordion takes the melody on the pickup notes at the end of the second A' section and takes the piece into the key of C major. Melodic idea B is stated in 8 measures and repeated. This brief section is more reminiscent of the German-Russian waltzes.

A and A' are reintroduced in the original key of F major (without any introduction). Here Jim Schwab again takes the melody line on trumpet.

Bill Mastel picks up the melody with his organ sound and accents for the 16 bar statement of melodic idea C, which contains two similar 8 bar sub-phrases in the key of B-flat major. The C' is taken by Gene Weinbeck's accordion. It is a close variation of the C idea.

Well's and other big bands. The German-Russian style is evident in the playing. But the blend of that style with a more American-sounding instrumentation is interesting. The sound is quite different from what one may have heard fifty years ago in the Strasburg area, but it retains a unique German-Russian flavor. How different it is from the sound of a traditional Bohemian band is difficult to say because I did not get the chance to hear one. The piece is a prime example of music from another tradition being absorbed into the German-Russian repertoire.
EXAMPLE #10 - Mike's Ori Waltz (Mike R. Dosch)
Played by The Bubbling Quintet, 11/12/83, Bismarck, ND

This waltz is unmistakably German-Russian melodie-
ly, harmonically, and in form. It differs from the previous
waltzes in that we know the identity of the composer.
Most folk music passes into a tradition anonymously. It
is played and popularized by the composer and then
copied by other musicians who like the piece and learn
to play it by ear. After several generations pass, the
song lives on, but no one knows for sure where it came from.
Such is the origin of much traditional German-Russian
dance music. Mike Dosch composed this waltz quite a
few years ago and played it in the Strasburg area. He
also recorded it for one of his albums. The Bubbling
Quintet heard the tune and liked it, and incorporated the
waltz into their repertoire. Quintet accordionist Bill
Mastel played with Dosch a number of years ago and so
was familiar with the number. Mr. Dosch still lives in
Strasburg, but can no longer play due to a stroke he suf-
ered a few years ago.

The piece has two basic melodic ideas and their
variants, that are stated in the familiar 8-measure
framework. The form is: A A A' A B B' A B B' A A' B
B' A' A. 2-bar cadence. A sections are played in the key
of F major, B sections in the key of C major. Only the
I, IV, and V chords are used. The final statement of A'
incorporates the typical cadence that we heard earlier in
the Ehrentänze and the other traditional German-
Russian waltzes. This cadence is to be found at the end
of almost every traditional German-Russian waltz one
will hear.

EXAMPLE #11 - The Liechtensteiner Polka
(Kotscher and Linds) Played by The Bubbling Quintet,
11/12/83, Bismarck, ND

This selection is included as an example of a piece of
music that was added to the German-Russian repertoire,
for at least for some musicians, in America. Lawrence Welk's
band popularized the song in the 1960's, and this arrange-
ment of the song is very similar to the one used by ac-
cordionist Myron Floren and the Welk Band.

EXAMPLE #12 - The Object Of My Affection
(Tolmun, Poe, and Green)
Played by The Bubbling Quintet, Bismarck, ND

The German-Russians were not familiar with the Two-
Step, but rather picked it up in America. Today one can
hear quite a few two-steps played by German-Russian
musicians. This style of music has been taken from the
American Mainstream of popular music and incorporated
into the German-Russian repertoire. This process started
some fifty or sixty years ago. Melodically and har-
monically many of the two-step numbers are more com-
plex than traditional German-Russian pieces, but the
musicians seemly have been eager to learn to play the
new sounds. This arrangement sounds very much like
Lawrence Welk's Champagne Music and undoubtedly
the Bubbling Quintet was heavily influenced by that
style. No wonder though, since a Strasburg native was
the driving force in the development of that style's
popularity.

EXAMPLE #13 - Gene's Polka (Eugene Weisbeck)
Played by Gene Weisbeck, 11/16/83, Bismarck, ND

Mr. Weisbeck composed this piece and has played it
for many years. The tune sounds very German-Russian
and was conceived in that style. Until now, the music has
not been written out. The composer unconsciously used
8 measure melodic ideas throughout the piece, probably
because they sounded and "felt" right. This piece has the
following form:

An 8 measure melodic idea is stated following a brief
2 measure introduction on the dominant chord. This in-
roduction serves to give the player's ear its harmonic
bearings. It can be likened to the visual aid a key
signature gives a player who is reading notes. It gives
him somewhat of an idea as to what can be expected, and
it serves to orient him.

This first 8 measure theme, which we'll call A, repeats.
Moving out of the key of F major, the 8 measure B
melodic idea is played in C major, followed by its variant,
B'. The B and then B' are repeated. The piece now moves
into the key of B-flat major where the C melodic idea is
played in 16 measures. The C follows, also in 16
measures. Both C and C can be seen to be made up of
two 8 bar sub-phrases that fit together into a very pret-
ty melody. The last two bars of C are cadential, groun-
ding the section solidly in B-Flat major. Now a restate-
ment of the A theme is played twice in the original key
of F major, followed by C and C', this time without the
B/B' section in between, again in the key of B-flat major.

The melody makes good use of chord arpeggios, par-
icularly in the B/B' section. Harmonically it is typical-
ly German-Russian, that is, uncomplicated. The I, IV and
V chords are used exclusively, with an occasional 7th add-
ed. The sub-dominant chord actually only appears in the
A sections. One notable variation from the simple har-
monic structure is the use in the E/C' section of the I to
i movement. The flattened 3rd of the tonic chord com-
pliments the melody and the change to the dominant
chord in a way that is very pleasing to the ear.
EXAMPLE #14 - The Skaters' Waltz (Emil Waldteufel)
Played by Leo Schmidt, 12/9/79, ND

Leo Schmidt passed away a couple of years ago. But those who admired his playing are fortunate to have available to them a tape he recorded for his wife in late 1979. I was able to obtain a copy of this tape.

This waltz is stylistically similar to the traditional German-Russian waltzes, however, it is harmonically little more adventurous. Mr. Schmidt had some musical training and was able to read notes, although his grounding was in the German-Russian tradition of playing by ear. The piece is a lovely example of the broadened musical horizons that some German-Russian musicians were able to explore in America.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
In the almost one hundred years since German-Russians first settled the prairie around what is now Strasburg, North Dakota, their cultural traditions have variously been changed, replaced, or simply discarded. Most often, change has been gradual, almost imperceptible to those closest to the traditions themselves. When Helen Feist fled the village of Strassburg, Russia in 1944 (see page 3) and later came to America, she found that some things had indeed changed in the fifty or more years since this country’s German-Russians had arrived on the prairie. The people here danced the waltz less gracefully, and in general, the traditional music was played slower here than in Russia. The two-step and its music were totally foreign to her. Otherwise, the music sounded the same, except for the changes in instrumentation that had occurred. Apparently the traditional trio of button accordion, clarinet, and fiddle had persisted in use in Russia right up until the German-Russians fled from their homeland and native villages in 1944. To America’s German-Russians, the changes were less noticeable because they had occurred so gradually.

And so, the process continues. Today, in Strasburg, North Dakota, German-Russian traditions run deep. Even those children now growing up are unable to speak the Franconian-Alsatian dialect, they speak English with a definitely identifiable German brogue that is different from the midwestern accent of other North Dakotans. The foods that are prepared in most Strasburg kitchens are most often uniquely German-Russian. And when one attends a wedding dance in Strasburg, the music and dances are predominantly in the German-Russian style.

The people themselves are hardly aware of these cultural traits that set them apart as a unique group. Not until they leave the area do they appreciate the fact that their way of life at home is different from the mainstream of the American experience.

Speaking generally, the German-Russians have been receptive to new things. But relative to other cultures that have been brought to America, the process of assimilation seems to have worked more slowly on the German-Russian culture around Strasburg. This process has accelerated in the last twenty-five years, due in large part to the rapid advances in technology, especially telecommunications. Priorities change, and values change. In music, the German-Russians still have a very definite link with the past. I will not speculate on exactly how long this will last. The absence of good, young musicians who are able to play traditional German-Russian music by ear makes the disappearance of the tradition all but inevitable. There is nothing I observed to indicate that this trend of cultural erosion will be stopped or reversed. The break with tradition appears to have occurred, in that an entire generation is now unable to pass on the musical tradition. However, it is a type of music that they enjoy. It has its place, and perhaps a different trend will develop, some new players may come along and learn the tradition from those remaining who still know it intimately. I’m no prophet. But stranger things have happened.