Germans from Russia Research Workshop in Review
by Michael M. Miller

 Coming from such places as Calgary, Waterloo, San Antonio, Seattle and Missoula, persons of German-Russian ancestry came to attend the Germans from Russia Research Workshop held at the North Dakota State University Library on July 9 and 10, 1986. Considered to be one of the few workshops ever held in the USA and Canada on the Germans from Russia, participants learned about the folklore, architecture, and history.

Participants listened to Dr. LaVern Rippley of St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN review the history of the Germans from Russia and to Dr. Kathleen Meyer of NDSU describe her work with a basic German reader for second-year German students using letters and excerpts from German-Russian materials. Timothy J. Kloberdanz of NDSU summarized some of the folklore from foods to music while Fr. William C. Sherman of Grand Forks presented slides of folk architecture in North Dakota. Gwen Fritzkau of Salt Lake City shared her knowledge on German-Russian genealogical research and how to complete a family history. Dr. Armand Bauer of Bismarck reviewed the history of the Germans from Russia Heritage Society, and Theresa Wald of Minot described her journey to the Soviet Union with a heart-warming story about meeting her uncle for the first time.

The "Germans from Russia Heritage Collection" at the Institute received heavy use including the family, county, and community histories. The Institute's Biographical Index uncovered new findings for the researchers. The dinner and tour at the Spring Prairie Hutterite Colony with 116 attending brought spontaneous singing both in English and in German from the guests. With a little coaxing, the young women of the colony sang in German with beautiful harmony; it was the first time they had ever sung to an audience not of the colony. Valentine Waldner reviewed the history of the Hutterian Brethren dating back to 1523.

Those attending the workshop included: Harris Widmer, Fargo; Robert & Dolores Schuh, Seattle, WA; Walser Wuehr, Centuria, WA; Henry & Juliet Gross, San Antonio, TX; Mary Lynn Schmalzu, Fargo; Victor Knoll, Fargo; Bev Krein, Moorhead; Barbara Handy-Marchello, Fargo; Roy Peterson, Moorhead; Sherry Buerkley, Kulm; Mary Perry, Bismarck; Ken Moos, Fargo; Sr. Leonida Schmidt, Wahpeton; Agatha Madison, Missoula, MT; Rose Wood, Richfield, MN; Lew & Dona Marquardt, Buda, TX; Jennie Haase, Casa Grande, AZ; Herb Poppke, Golden, CO; Greg & Jackie Dockter, Bismarck; Ardella Bennett, Richfield, MN; Marion Jensen, Waterloo, IA; Lonnie Brakel; Yvonne Holm, Fargo; Andrea Otto, Moorhead, Fargo; Frances Feist, Bismarck; Prof. Arnold Marzolf, Fargo; David Piel, Langdon; Doreen Yochim, Calgary, Alberta; Lorelise Bloom, Moorhead; Orville Janzen, Roseau, MN; Karen Klever and daughter Tolly, LaMoure; Gordon & Sally Rudolph, Wahpeton; Kay Feist, North Battlefield, Sask.; Sr. Barbara Schwan, Hankinson; and David Piel, a high school student who will study in West Germany during the 1986-87 academic year.

The workshop was sponsored by the North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies at the North Dakota State University Library, Fargo, and by NDSU's Division of Continuing Studies. Cassette tapes are available for the workshop speakers. For further information write to Michael M. Miller, Institute, NDSU Library, Fargo, ND 58102.
Die Alte Heimat War Zu Enge

Germans from Russia Tell Their Story in Songs

By Klaas D. Hoffman, Colorado State University

When the old homeland was confusing
And scarce became the daily bread.
Many decided to forsake it
And journey far away instead.

The golden morning was beckoning.
Its brilliant ray like a command.
And unperturbed they went to meet it.
Wanted to see the eastern land.

The lasting freedom now has ended.
Which Empress Catherine promised those.
Pack up once more and journey farther!
Which way to turn? God only knows.

Already from the Volga River
Many have come to our land.
Trust in God, in faith abiding.
Straightforward the mind and strong the hand.

The sun with all its gracious splendor
Is shining still and warming us.
Our heart rejoices every morning.
For God provides and cares for us.

For this we praise him and thank him.
With grateful hearts we him adore.
May he protect this land of ours.
And bless it, bless it evermore.

The six stanzas summarize the story of the Germans from Russia.
In the troubled times after the Seven Years War in Germany and the consequent intention of many inhabitants to emigrate; (2) the orientation of that intention toward Russia; (3) the liberties enjoyed there due to the protection of Empress Catherine, the revocation of these liberties under Caesar Alexander II causing a renewed desire to leave the resulting conditions in Russia; (4) the move from the Volga to the adopted homeland in the new world; (5) the deep faith giving thanks to God for blessings received; and (6) the strong attachment to the present homeland.

The individual stages in the historical experiences of the Germans from Russia are reflected in more detail in a variety of songs. According to Lawrence Weigel, who has contributed extensively to our knowledge about the German-Russian music, the song “Wann’s heist der Feind rueckt an!” (When they say the enemy is approaching) goes back to the Seven Years War, a time period immediately preceding the first migration of German settlers to the Volga. It mentions the excitement of riding into war and the soldier’s fate of dying there. For this first generation of emigrants, this was certainly a vivid memory, and so the song traveled with them into Russia and survived the times because of their desire to preserve their heritage in this foreign environment. While there are still people, descendants of these early immigrants, such as Lawrence Weigel, who can sing such songs to this day, it can be safely assumed that one would search in vain in Germany for anyone who remembers it and a good number of other songs which made the trip to the east and later to the New World. “A great treasure of songs emigrated with them,” Thomas Kopp states in his introduction to the Russlanddeutsches Liederbuch. And a treasure they are indeed, for without the Germans from Russia, they probably would have been lost, or at least many of them.

Among very popular songs, George Schumenmann lists “O du Deutschland, ich muss marschieren” (O my Germany, I have to march). It is really a soldier’s song again. The young man has to part from home in order to go to war. So he says goodbye to his father who can watch him leave from a high mountain, to his mother who has borne him in pain, to his sister with whom he has often been sitting together, to his brother with whom he fought a lot, and to the girl who was his first love. The melody has a light marching rhythm and is easy to sing. That would be one reason for its popularity. The other reason has to be the mood of parting and farewell which parallels the German-Russian experience of emigration though there is no reference to emigration in the song itself. A song dealing directly with the immigration into Russia is “Das Manifest” (The Manifest):

Das Manifest der Kaiserin.
Es dachte nach den Deutschen hin:
Sie sollten pfannen Brod und Wein
Und sollten sich Kolonisten sein.

Wir verlieren unser Vaterland
Und zogen in das Russland.
Die Russen warn uns sehr beneidet,
Und weil wir war so lang bedroht...

Das Manifest of the Empress.
It had the Germans in mind:
They were to plant bread and wine
And were to be colonists, too.

We left our fatherland
And moved into Russia.
The Russians envied us a lot.
Because we were exempted for so long...

After these two stanzas, the song tells of the changes in the lives of the Germans from Russia which took place a hundred years later. The exemptions mentioned are, of course, the privileges granted to the German colonists by Catherine. It is understandible that these might have created bad feelings among the Russians, though envy alone at least probably was not the reason for the change.


PHOTOS BY MICHAEL M. MILLER

Spring Prairie Hutterite Tour, Glyndon, MN

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