



Germans from Russia Heritage Collection

Carol Richey highlights North Dakota State University's excellent collection of photos, family histories and much more

THEIR STORY BEGINS MORE THAN 250 YEARS AGO WHEN Catherine II, Empress of Russia, issued a proclamation in 1763 inviting foreigners to settle in Russia. With the recent end of the Seven Years War and the resulting devastation and poverty in much of Germany, many responded to the Empress' generous offer of land and interest-free government loans to help them begin their farms. With additional promises of self-rule,

bordering the Black Sea as well, which resulted in 3,000 German settlements. However, in 1871 Czar Alexander II rescinded many of the rights and privileges granted to these immigrants, and in 1874 their men were subject to being drafted into the Czar's army for the first time. In response, German-Russians began a massive exodus that would see hundreds of thousands emigrating.

Today, descendants of Germans from Russia are spread throughout the US and Canada, with the largest concentration in the Great Plains region and the Canadian Prairie provinces. If you have German-Russian heritage, luck is with you, as the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at North Dakota State University Libraries, <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>, will be an invaluable resource for learning more about your ancestors.

Established in 1978 at the NDSU Libraries and focusing on Bessarabian, Black Sea, Crimean, Dobrudscha and Volhynian Germans and their descendants in North Dakota and the Northern Plains, GRHC is one of the most comprehensive collections of German-Russian resources in the

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freedom to retain their native languages and religion, and exemption from military or civil service for them and their descendants, thousands of Germans moved to Russia.

German colonists first settled along the Volga River, and following a later invitation by Alexander I, Catherine's grandson, in the region



world. Its mission – “to collect, document, preserve, exhibit, translate, publish, promote, and make accessible resources on the culture, history, folklore, textiles and clothing, and foodways of the Germans from Russia” – means you’re likely to discover plenty of resources to further your research in all areas pertaining to your Germans from Russia heritage.

Through GRHC, you can learn about the history and culture of the Germans from Russia, their ethnic food, and even recipes. Thanks to its Dakota Memories Oral History Project, you can view the narrator profiles containing interviews, documents, photos and more of over 200 Germans from Russia in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Saskatchewan. You’ll also discover more through the many journal, newspaper, newsletter, and magazine articles online and find additional resources from its nearly exhaustive list of research links.

Among GRHC’s Special Collections is a growing collection of historic German-Russian photographs, correspondence, family research, and other publications. The unique Textile and Clothing Collection contains blankets, head coverings, shawls, and other textiles and clothing.

Of course, while much is available online, the greater part of the collection is on site only. Entering the GRHC Archives, you’ll notice shelves filled with regional and ethnic cookbooks. Take, for example, *German Food & Folkways: Heirloom Memories from Europe, South Russia & the Great Plains*. Not only does it contain 400 recipes of historic foods, but it also includes historical background and ethnic heritage. Although the cookbooks are not available online, you can use the



Strasburg School, circa 1910. (Courtesy NDSU Libraries’ Germans from Russia Heritage Collection)

Recipe Index Search to search the more than 10,000 recipes found in cookbooks available for purchase.

Next, you’ll see a wall full of family histories. You’ll also find genealogy research guides and books on immigration, textiles, folk music, folk traditions, religion, literature, and more. A large part of the collection is devoted to history, ranging from books on the pioneer colonies in the homeland and immigration to the United States, Canada, and South America, to homesteading and life on the Great Plains. In addition, the collection includes a large number of local church, community and county histories. Familiarize yourself with the collection through the library catalog online to see what else is available.

GRHC also works closely with Prairie Public Broadcasting to produce documentaries. Their most recent one, “Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country”, celebrates the food culture of the Germans from Russia who settled in south central North Dakota beginning in the 1880s (a companion cookbook is

also available). Do you dream of visiting your ancestor’s homeland? GRHC also regularly sponsors the Journey to the Homeland Tour, which includes Berlin, Germany; Odessa, Ukraine; and the former German villages, and Stuttgart, Germany.

You’ll find the GRHC staff are friendly, knowledgeable, and more than willing to help guide you with your research, provided you come prepared with first and last names, location, and dates, if possible. With its extensive collection, making a visit to the GRHC Archives will be well worth your time and effort. Located on the first floor of the North Dakota State University Libraries in Fargo, it is open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday. Due to limited staff, appointments are encouraged. For more information, check the GRHC website or follow them on social media. ©

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