Wayne
Lubenow

N.D. Germans
From Russia
Have New Bond

If you’re a German who lives in North Dakota, I think that’s just great. Me too.

But now, I find, if you’re a North Dakota German who came from Russia—man, there’s a society to preserve your culture.

It is called the “North Dakota Historical Society Of Germans From Russia, Inc.” The name is not too original but I suppose it beats “Busher” or “Gerruss.”

Articles of incorporation have been filed and the list of incorporators is impressive: The Honorable Ray R. Friedrich, district judge from Ruby; N.D.; Armand Bauer, 36th Ave. N., Fargo; Arthur Lenox, Bismarck; William H. Simpindenferder, Bismarck; and LaVern C. Neff, Williston.

Among the purposes: To seek to bring together those people interested in history and especially those interested in the history of the Germans from Russia; and to “aid, assist, promote, encourage and undertake the discovery, collection, preservation and publishing of biographies, genealogies, histories, newspapers, letters, etc. of those people.”

My contact in the project is Art Leno and in a day or two, Leno will furnish me with statistics on how many Germans from Russia we have here in North Dakota. The figures, friends, will be impressive.

Equally interesting is how Germans happened to migrate to Russia. Well, Russian Czar Ivan the Terrible (1533-1584) and Peter the Great started it all by calling foreign specialists into the country, especially German engineers, scientists, officers, merchants and administrative officials, to build up the cities and modernize the army.

(If that sounds familiar, just remember that it was Werner von Braun who sent up the first United State satellite and space shots.)

But it was really that old sweetheart, Catherine II (also called the Great) who really moved the people in.

Golly, in 1763 she began issuing manifests that really got the flood of Germans into Russia.

Maybe it was because she was a princess of German birth and became the wife of Peter III (whose assassination she apparently didn’t object to because it made her ruler of Russia.)

But she was a Christian, a cultured humanitarian and, above all, a top-notch politician—she undertook the task of writing a new codification of existing Russian law.

It was a liberal program. And this is what may have brought family Germans to her land in great numbers. They were guaranteed:

★ Religious freedom and toleration.

★ Possession of land as a common good forever to each colony, with privileges of purchase for individuals.

★ Freedom from taxation for 30 years. (Now there’s an offer that could draw some people to-day.)

★ Loans without interest on borrowed money for expansion.

★ Exemption from compulsory military service (a real zinger in Prussian Germany.)

★ The right to establish their own schools and churches.

★ Provisions for land from the crown.

On arrival, each person to receive 10 Kopeka, six for children as a means of subsistence. No repayment to be made.

Oh, there was more including: Privilege to leave Russia at option of individual families, but with repayment of debts to the crown.

Oh, and the immigration was on. From Hessen, the Rheinlands, southwest Germany and West Prussia they came. And they settled near Petersburg, on the Volga, around the Black Sea, in the South Caucasians and the Crimea.

World War II, of course, killed it all—although the liberal grants were ended in 1871 and blunted the immigration.

That was the year those Germans began coming over here. Actually, it was an amazing story and a cracking good one. And that is the story the new society will try to tell.

And they have a great place to start. One of the best-known North Dakota Germans from Russia: Lawrence Weik.