

## 99-Year-Old Fessenden Native Contributes Third \$10,000 Gift to Germans from Russia Fund at NDSU Libraries

Media Release

Marie M. Rudel Portner, born and raised on a farm near Fessenden, North Dakota, and now a resident of Las Vegas, Nevada, is becoming the benevolent angel of the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at the NDSU Libraries.

The tiny, bright-eyed widow who still lives independently in her own house, is pleased with the NDSU Libraries and Bibliographer Michael M. Miller for their work in preserving the Germans from Russia history in North Dakota. For the past three years, she has supported the collection with a \$10,000 gift each year, in memory of her parents, Simon and Dorothea Rudel.

"We are very grateful to Mrs. Portner for her generous annual donation to the NDSU Libraries," stated Libraries Development Director Charlotte Cox. "Her continued financial support is helping to preserve the heritage of all those, including the Germans from Russia, who settled the northern prairies."

Marie, whose parents immigrated from Bessarabia, South Russia, in the late 1800s to homestead on the North Dakota plains, and whose husband was the late Hal Portner of Spokane, Washington, celebrated her 99th birthday in April. She is no longer able to return to the Fessenden area to see her many Rudel family relations who still live and farm there, but she remembers her youth in Wells County and her Germans from Russia background fondly.

On a recent trip to visit North Dakota natives with German-Russian roots in the Las Vegas area, Mike Miller and Charlotte Cox found Marie eager to discuss her Dakota past. With a sharp memory and a keen wit, she reminisced about the family farmstead where she shared an upstairs bedroom with her sister, the country school where she began her education, and the life journeys that took her far afield to Washington, California, and finally Nevada.

Because of Miller's genealogical research, he has been able to inform Marie about the ancestral villages where the Rudels once lived in South Russia. (Miller's own grandparents came from neighboring villages in what is now southern Ukraine.) Over time, Mike and Marie have developed a mutual friendship based on the understanding of their common heritage and their common goal of safeguarding and sharing the Germans from Russia culture as a part of American history.

One of Marie's most prized possessions is a hand-made history of the Rudel family, carefully collected, documented, and bound together by her nephew Norman Rudel. Norman, who still lives in Fessenden and works part-time on the family farm, is the keeper of the North Dakota memories and the Germans from Russia roots that have helped to make the Rudel family what it is today.

"We're proud of Aunt Marie for taking an interest in our German-Russian heritage," said Norman. "I think it's great that she's starting to support the Libraries' preservation of North Dakota history for the next generation."

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