

The Old Country

From the Old Country, Odessa, Russia to the New Country of America

By Bert Schall, Devils Lake, North Dakota

When Mother Schall or Grandma Schall was young in her years, she and her sisters danced the night away. We didn't know who all those guys were but they were good looking and also good dancers. There were so many, also we were good looking, too.

When we got married, we didn't go out dancing anymore. I stayed at home and raised a nice beautiful family, but once in awhile my sisters came over and we went dancing. We just loved to dance. My mother, Magdaline, was a good dancer, also. We had a good mother and a good father. We got little older, but we were still spry and so were my sisters!

"I cooked and baked," she said. "When my birthday came I had a house full with my children and grandchildren. I also baked Kuchen, Bluchenda, and made home made egg noodles," she also said.

Carolina Miller (Schall) and her sister, Annie Kirchofner grew up in Odessa, Russia in an alien land. Magdaline Miller, Mother Schall, Mother and Kathern Schoon and her son Johnny came to America. Their father came also to escape the draft into the army service in Russia.

Carolina, my mother, still remembers Odessa on the Crimean Sea in Russia. In fact, its been 95 years since the sisters came across on the Kaiser Wihelm # ship. It might be longer now.

"We used to raise grapes," mother said, "there were stone wall around the house in Odessa to keep robbers out. Our houses were built by hand. We took manure and mixed it with straw to dry it out, then we cut it into chunks. After it was rolled even by rollers dragged by horses, it was dried in the sun. It was used to make the walls for our homes. The roofs were made from grass found down by the water, and they never leaked. The homes were warm."

The floors of the old houses, she remembers, were made of manure mixed with straw and covered with fine sand. The blocks of cow manure were put into the stove for fuel to keep warm. When we made bread you pushed it in the stove. Then all you had to take out was the ashes.

The Russian government began demanding the Germans to serve in the army. We sold our land, cattle and everything to save money to come to America, otherwise, we probably never could have come to America.

My mother's mother and her five children and her husband took off for Bremen, Germany. My mother's father caught a bad cold and took sick at the hospital and died, there. We just didn't know what to do, so we had to leave my father there to get buried. We didn't get to see him at all. It was very, very hard to leave our father. We stayed in a hotel for 21 days and then we all caught the ship, Kaiser Wilhelm #, for America. We came to New York and got shipped out of there. We came to Rugby, North Dakota on a train, in God's World. We didn't know where we were taken!!

Uncle Joe Volk, always wrote us about coming to America. Otherwise, we would have never came. He said, "Come to this beautiful land of America."

We, the young Miller girls, were not very happy. We were scared and we weren't used to it. It was a very strange country. We got to Rugby, North Dakota on the 8th of December 1909, on a Holy Day, The Day of the Immaculate Conception.

We remember Rugby was just a town, there was nothing in Rugby. The sister's remember the Jacobson store and a little post office and also wooden sidewalks.

My sister Annie Kirchofner remembers the 30s were the toughest years! In 1934 and 1935, it was so bad there was nothing but thistles to feed the cattle. Wheat at that time brought a quarter (\$0.25) a bushel and oats \$0.08 per bushel. A dozen eggs brought (\$0.05) a nickle.

We used to take a can of cream into town and it would bring enough money to buy our clothes. The shoes were only \$1.50 a pair then.

We sisters became American citizens at Rugby. We took the test and passed it. They were't much for questions and we had to have witnesses too. That was one thing they said that was different from the way it is now.

The children used to listen better in the old country, there was more respect for older people and for the priest. Now days the 12 year olds are the boss. They have no respect for their fathers and mothers at all they said.

The Miller girls miss the way everybody used to sing all night on their birthdays, mostly in German.

Many, many things have changed in 95 years---it's longer now, I'm sure. Since we came to America, many times we sister's think back to our old country, Odessa.

I really don't know how my mother Magdaline Miller made it here to Rugby alone with five children by herself. She must have been a SAINT!!

With Love,

The Miller sisters from the Old Country

From Chris Burkart

Home was a little town called Holdfast, Saskatchewan, and there are many stories out of the early years and the Depression, however the adults never discussed Russia in the presence of the children. Now I feel the urgency of collecting as much information as possible before all the elders die. I am finding that they don't know very much either, unfortunately, as we are all the first generation Canadians.

My sister Jenny and I are trying to put together the stories remembered and also the names of all the immediate living relatives so that we might be able to pass on the history of these great people. I have found cousins I never knew existed, thank goodness. I wouldn't be able to put much together without them. I am looking for Burkart and Fuchs as immediate family, and then Noels, Frohlichs, Sulsbach, Tuchscherer and Meier. After that it ranges into Trenkenschuh, Essert and Bach (variations are Buck and Back. So little is known...

From Ronald J Vossler

In regard to Chris Burkart's comment, that Russia was not mentioned in the presence of the children, I wonder what other G-R descendants experience of that was. A couple of years ago, as a guest panelist at a Writers' Conference, "The Literature of Immigration", I related a similar anecdote my mother told me: how the adults in her life then, the first decades of this century, didn't speak of the old country in front of children; or, even more intriguing, that they closed the door to the living room when they did speak of the "old country" At least one noted American writer on the panel with me made light of that fact--by noting that many adults don't tell stories to their children about the country of origin. Yet, there seems more to it than that. Shame from, at the time, at least one world war against a German enemy? Wanting their children to assimilate, to become Americans? The horrific famine stories that they no doubt read about in their German newspapers? Any response or "take" on this issue would be valuable. Is it generally true that Ger-Rus didn't pass on much, directly, about the "old country", as in my family?

From Louise Norton

Like all the other first generation Canadians, My Father would not talk much about the old times and about the trip over.. He did at one time tell me that the group of people he left with did travel at night and holed up by day, much like the underground railroad in the USA.He mentioned how they would draw for their position in the line for that night as sometimes people would just dissappear from the end of the line.. In his family, only 2 boys left for Canada, one was refused as he had T.B and he went to Argentina,while Dad landed in Winnipeg. He left behind 10 brothers and one sister..which as far as I know he never heard from again...9 brothers were priests and landed in Siberria and the rest we know nothing of. His Mother and Father were murdered and their bodys were found,headless and in the Volga,not far from home..wherever that was.

As a child we all had to promise Dad that we would NEVER go back to Russia for any reason...no given reason for the promice but one we have all honored until this day. I now wonder why. It makes looking into ones own history so very difficult..I would suspect like many others he was a draft dodger as well, but he never mentioned it. How sad.