

In Touch with Prairie Living

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By Michael M. Miller & Jay Gage

Germans from Russia Heritage Collection
North Dakota State University Libraries, Fargo



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

The heritage of the Germans from Russia is an important part of our northern plains culture. The Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at the NDSU Libraries in Fargo reaches out to prairie families and to former Dakotans. Readers' responses for future columns are encouraged. Guest writer Jay Gage, curator of heritage exhibits, shares comments that snuggle into "comfort food" flash-backs during these chilly Dakota winter days.

Recent discussion from our computer Internet surfers ask: What floats in soup? "Suppe und Borscht on eine schtick!" (Borscht soup on a stick!). On these winter nights fragrant soup and borscht visions glow dancing in our heads while savored memories linger on our dining palates. Soup warmed us from winter chills and sniffles, comforted the sick, and readily embraced all appetites. Alas, Großmutter Ottilia's soup said so!

Chicken broth reigns universal, splendidly arrayed in egg-noodles, batter dumplings, chewy rice, ribbles, and tasty vegetables. Chicken noodle soup was distinctively spiced with exotic cinnamon, to "chanticleer" over the pfefferkraut, celery greens, chopped parsley, whole allspice and bay leaf. Traditionally, noon-time dinner was a hot meal featuring potatoes and noodles; evening supper offered hot tea for this cold meal, with perhaps hot soup in winter. "Heiss mit suppe" (hot with soup) shows a pageant of culinary prowess from our diligent housewife. Chicken noodle soup remains a perpetual favorite with cinnamon spice. Kumpst Borscht (chicken borscht) spot-lights crowing cockerel swimming in garden vegetable fanfare.

Borscht, the classic ethnic German vegetable soup, uses beef or pork stock base with a hardy fare of carrots, turnips, white cabbage, parsnips, rutabagas, celery root, and daikon radish. However, this savory soup rarely used red beets and sour cream, as does Russian Borscht. Many German cooks pride to feature tomatoes in this soup.

Green borscht celebrated a ham base with garden greens of romaine/cos lettuce, spinach, beet greens, swiss chard, green onions, green string beans, green sweet pepper, eggplant, radishes, and new potatoes. Fresh dillweed, parsley, and summer savory mint provided a sensory paradise. Pungent white vinegar and sour cream were ever-present table condiments.

Russian borscht, red root soup, featured grated red beets with sour cream or cottage cheese curd. Chopped beef brisket with flavorful soup bone joined tomatoes, carrots, parsnips, turnips and rutabagas. Dill seed or toasted caraway seed were herbal spices to schmooze with chopped onion and daikon radish. Enterprising diners slurped this soup through condiments of white vinegar and sour cream, common for many Russian tables.

Bean Soup, traditionally uses white vinegar as condiment. However, "mavericks" on the Dakota prairies can be regionally identified with distinctive addictions, from "plenteous ketchup" to Dijon mustard floating in their bean soup. Writer Ron Vossler shares such anecdotal dining at Ressler's Cafe in historic Bismarck.

Bessarabian bean soup was a more elaborate affair, using white northern beans "neutralized" from gastric distress, thanks to baking soda. The cured ham broth jump-started lentils, potatoes, carrots, chopped onion and summer savory. In Beulah, Vi Schielke researched that "pfefferkraut" (summer savory) was a special Sommerfeld family tradition for soups from Paris, Bessarabia. White vinegar, black pepper, allspice, and bay leaf provided firm flavors. A golden paste of flour and butter "roux" was toasted into a nutty taste, to provide bean soup with a finishing touch.

Historian Shirley Fischer Arends mentions further culinary diversity in her 1984 study, *The Central Dakota Germans: Their History, Language and Culture*. Eierstich Suppe is egg-drop

chicken broth. Krumele Suppe features dough crumbs dancing in chicken broth. Schupfnudeln are batter dumplings for broth soups. Knoepfla is chewy dough, scissor-cut into small triangles, boiled and saute browned for cream soups, or to garnish sauerkraut.

For other soup alternatives, Maultaschen, a Wuerttemberger 'ravioli', floating in broth soups, as well as horse-radish flavored soups (for winter health) have yet to be shared in detail.

Have you re-discovered your "comfort food" heritage? As Grossmutter Ottilia assured us young children, whenever you arrive within a German kitchen's heart, the hot soup and hospitality is already there.

Jay Gage has shared these surviving foodways. His grandfather proudly related memories of daikon radishes used in soup traditions from Leipzig, Bessarabia. His great-grandmother Gottliebina (Stolz) Kempf was Bessarabian German settling in McIntosh County. He is curator of the NDSU Libraries' traveling exhibit, "The Kempf Family: Germans from Russia Weavers on the Dakota Prairies", on display at the Pioneer Heritage Center, Icelandic State Park, at Cavalier from February 16 to March 31, 1997.

Memories are revived in two wonderful articles that appear in the 1997 winter issue of *North Dakota Horizons*: "Journey to the Homeland" by Ron Vossler and "Strasburg's Historic Church: Sts. Peter & Paul" by Jim Coomber and Sheldon Green.

Won't you tell us your childhood memories about German-Russian foods and recipes. We are a research center and your contributions will provide broader insight for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection and for future "In Touch with Prairie Living" columns. Share your memories by contacting Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, PO Box 5599, Fargo, ND 58105-5599 (Tel: 701-231-8416 E-mail: Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu).

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