

# In Touch with Prairie Living

January 1998

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

**GRHC**

HERITAGE COLLECTION

The Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at the NDSU Libraries in Fargo reaches out to prairie families and former Dakotans. In various ways, it affirms the heritage of the Germans from Russia in an important part of the northern plains culture. In this month's column, Betty Kuss Schumacher, Valley City, a rural Strasburg, ND native, shares her memories of how she became interested in family history and genealogy.

## Saturday was for Dusting!

As the youngest child of seven, my favorite dusting duty was an impressive organ harmonium, originally from my maternal grandfather. On its ornate shelves, a gallery of "old time" family photos were displayed. Among photos of aunts and uncles in their wedding attire, a special photograph commemorated war-hero Wendelin Volk in his naval uniform.

For many family faces whom I could not identify, my litany continued with "Who's this?" Out of curiosity I began digging through our "picture box" of loose family photos. "Mom, who is this old woman depicted with three men and a young boy?" She replied in her German folk dialect about "grossmutter," a grandma I didn't recognize.

Relatives, neighbors or the parish priest became my captive audience. My mother viewed my "hospitality" as extremely humorous, even capturing our parish priest's visit as a "Kodak moment." Pity Father Michael to endure photo after photo placed in his hand, while a seven-year-old child eyes looked up for approval. My young vanity never forget a face. These important photographs preserved memories and also provided stories of comfort.

## Photos as Memories

Years later, I had a "panic attack," when mother was giving back family photos to those who would enjoy them more. I pleaded with her not to part with

these treasures. Upon my mother's death in 1987, my concern was "the pictures." In kindly foresight, my mother had assembled photo albums for each of her children, highlighting her family heritage. Would everyone be thrilled to receive this precious gesture? Their casual response was, "We already have copies of these pictures." I quickly claimed ownership of these "original photos."

What other stories were left untold? Occupied with a full-time job and very young children, I pushed these memories aside, watching for another opportunity to return to it.

## Taking the Plunge!

That special opportunity arrived upon my purchasing a home computer. Finding inexpensive software regarding family history research, I took the plunge!

Numerous "experts" advised me to concentrate on one family lineage, or you could go crazy! However, this tracking nightmare became moot. Computer software relieves the memory headaches of remembering who is inter-related to whom. When in-putting extensive data into my computer files, correlation memory reveals many inter-marriages. In such historic communities as Strasburg, Krasna or Linton in Emmons County, ND, you discover relationships to "just about everyone."

Somehow, I knew that my husband and I were related. When dating my future husband, we met his maternal grandparents. They were so enthused that he was dating "Joseph Volk's granddaughter." Why would they care that Joseph Volk was my grand-father?

In next month's column, Betty Kuss Schumacher will reveal her "mystery" grandmother!

## A Borscht Recipe for Those Chilly Dakota Days

At the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection website, some

of the most popular home pages are those with recipes. Some of those recipes will appear in future columns. Clayton Schmitt's shares one of his many wonderful recipes.

### Beet Borscht:

2 lb. beef brisket; 1 large bunch beets; 2 medium onions; 2 tbsp sugar; 1 large clove garlic; 2 medium nugget sour salt or juice of 1 lemon; salt and pepper to taste. Simmer beef in water to cover generously. Skim to clear. Add sour salt or lemon juice, sliced and peeled onions and beets, sugar and seasoning. Mince garlic fine and add to broth. Cook until meat is tender (about 3 hours). Correct seasonings to taste, serve hot!

Help us to locate and collect German-Russian cookbooks from Dakota church groups, organizations and clubs for the GRHC archives. A new cookbook available from the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection is *Sei Unser Gast: Be Our Guest*. Write for further information or see <http://library.ndsu.edu/gerrus/books/cookbook.html>.

Information about the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection For information, contact Michael M. Miller, Germans from Russia Bibliographer, NDSU Libraries, PO Box 5599, Fargo, ND 58105-5599 (Tel: 701-231-8416; E-mail: [Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); GRHC website: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>).

*January 1998 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers.*