

# In Touch with Prairie Living

July 1998

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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 as an important part of the northern plains culture. The July column focuses on our Journey to the Homeland tour to Odessa, Ukraine and to Stuttgart, Germany this spring.

Personally, I shall never forget my visit to the Crimean German villages near Simperfol, Ukraine. I was deeply touched to see some of the German cemeteries and to meet ethnic Germans who experience such a hard life today. Again my visit to southern Ukraine, reaffirmed that I was grateful my Baumgarter and Müller grandparents left South Russia from Strassburg, Kutschurgan District and from Krasna, Bessarabia then immigrating to south-central North Dakota in the 1880s. I shall always recall, "Thank God my ancestors came to America!"

The fourth NDSU Libraries-sponsored Journey to the Homeland: Germany & Ukraine Tour in late May provided many unforgettable memories. Our next tour is May 18-31, 1999 which will include visits to Odessa, Ukraine and the former Bessarabian and Black Sea German villages as well as Stuttgart and Alsace, France.

Let me share with you recollections of tour members. Merv Rennich, Dunlap, IL, writes, "My mere presence of being in the former German villages, standing in the same place where my grandparents and great-grandparents had also stood, was awesome. I now recognize from the lay of the land, why my grandmother talked so approvingly and lovingly of Hoffnungstal in Bessarabia." Rosemary Ripplinger Schwan, Devils Lake, ND writes, "I can hardly believe that there are very few German people in the villages. A small 86 year-old-woman in the village of Selz (today Limanoske near Odessa, Ukraine) recited a prayer in German. This experience had everyone spell-bound and emotionally touched

bringing tears as she prayed."

Wally Duchscher, Havre, MT, writes, "Elsass was an experience of a lifetime. We visited the school, where we were met by teachers and pupils. They were excited to see us, and visit with us, speaking fairly good English. Using an old map of the village of Strassburg near Odessa, I started walking through the old German part of the village looking for my great-grandmother Schall's residence. While visiting with one of the Ukrainian woman, she referred me to an old German lady who still lived there. We went to her home, and she showed me my great-grandmother's house. She also brought out a photo of my great-grandmother, which she inherited from her mother. She identified more old German ladies living in Strassburg (today Kutschurgan, Ukraine). Her mother's maiden name was Richter, also giving me a photo of her mother's brother and sister. This was a memorable experience to last a lifetime!"

Walter Aman, Portland, OR, writes, "For me going to the village of Landau where my forefathers lived from 1809 to 1889 was a very emotional experience. At Landau, I found one remaining German-speaking woman, Rose Raimer, who had been sent to Azerberjan for 10 years. She reported much financial hardship in the village." Walter and Irene Wahl Neuharth, Long Beach, CA, write "It was pure joy to find three ancestral homesteads in Kassel, to walk where they did, and also to see the beautiful land with crops of wheat, sunflowers and large gardens. The churches were very precious to us. In Neudorf, where the historic Lutheran church building was re-used by the Orthodox Church, we were thankful for this building being restored."

Gerald Fiechtner, Fargo, ND writes, "The Journey to the Homeland Tour that my two sons and I took this spring, will be an experience that will never be forgotten. Just walking the roads and paths where my ancestors

trod was a rare and moving privilege. The Russians destroyed most of the vestiges of any Germans living in the villages, obliterating even the cemeteries. Some of those fortunate enough to escape are now scattered somewhere that it would be very difficult to locate them. The extreme difference between our standard of living in America and that of Ukraine is almost impossible to describe. It certainly makes me happy that my forefathers decided to come to the United States. After this trip, I have the feeling that the more I learn about my forefathers, the more interested I become, and the more I want to learn."

In the August column, I will share with you my experiences attending the Wishek, ND Centennial in July. Prairie Public Television was in Wishek to film the festivities for the Germans from Russia documentary to premiere on PPTV this winter. PPTV does filming in central and western North Dakota in July to document the historical architecture of the German-Russian immigration.

For further information about the collection's resources, the Germans from Russia television documentary, the Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine in May, 1999 and German-Russian heritage, contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, PO Box 5599, Fargo, ND 58105-5599 (Tel: 701-231-8416; E-mail: Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu; GRHC website: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>).

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