

# In Touch with Prairie Living

June 1999

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 is an important part of the northern plains culture. I want to share with you some of the comments received from viewers of the landmark videotape documentary, *The Germans from Russia: Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie*. We continue to receive wonderful messages about the documentary through letter and e-mail messages.

Sister Mary Louise Jundt, St. Francis Convent, Hankinson, ND, a native of Pierce County, ND, writes: "The documentary is a beautiful testimony of the faith, spirit, and determination of my people. I could personally relate to so many of the pictures and the accompanying text from my own childhood growing up near Rugby, ND. I believe that this program will bring about a new surge of interest and appreciation for our Germans from Russia heritage among many who share this background, and will result in new and lasting friendships."

Dr. Robert Kraft, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI, a native of Strasburg, ND, writes: "There is no other way to bind a group of people together who have a common heritage and culture than to honor their past and their ancestry. We are now two and three generations beyond those first Germans from Russia who arrived on these shores. We -- these last two generations -- are the direct beneficiaries of the hardiness and raw courage of our German ancestors from Russia. We have realized their dreams. The work of art, this documentary, is the high honor we can pay. We imprint their lives and their courage into the memories of thousands of us who follow. Now that we know who we are and where we come from, we may understand better what we can become and where we might go. Thank you for bringing this heritage into the

forefront and making it a living part of our national heritage."

Sister Denise Ressler, a member of Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, comments: "I appreciated hearing the historical progression of these people as they came from Germany into Russia and then to America, their personal stories, and the importance that faith and culture played in their lives. I found I could relate to the history because of the stories I remember hearing from my parents. My dad was seven years old when his parents came to America in 1892, and the German customs were practiced in our home. Being the youngest of fourteen children and therefore having lots of relatives, I eagerly listened for familiar names and places. I was proud to know that these are my roots. I believe this documentary will always have a place in history, as future descendants will want to know "who we are" and "where did we come from."

The documentary will be shown on Spokane PBS on May 27 at 7 p.m. and Denver PBS on June 14 at 8pm. To secure the documentary videotape, contact Prairie Public Broadcasting at 1-800-359-6900. This "Collector's Edition" of the videotape includes 20-minute bonus video footage, "Ukraine Places & Faces".

During May, I joined the Journey to the Homeland tour group to Odessa, Ukraine; Stuttgart, Germany; and Alsace, France. We visited the former Bessarabian, Black Sea, and Crimean German villages. In future columns, I will share with you memories of tour members.

The National Buffalo Museum at Jamestown, ND, features the GRHC traveling exhibit, "The Kempf Family: Germans from Russia Weavers on the Dakota Prairies", until October 15. Gottliebina Stolz designed and wove brilliant "Kanapee" (paradise blankets) for her 1883 wedding in her ancestral village of Alt-Elft, Bessarabia. Gottliebina immigrated to North Dakota

in 1901 with her husband Johannes-Georg Kempf from his ancestral village of Beresina, Bessarabia. Gottliebina preserved her textile heritage through four generations of female descendants, while homesteading near Ashley and Forbes, ND. See the GRHC website at "Outreach Programs" for Kempf family and German-Russian clothing/textile photographs: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/outreach/index.html>.

Our outreach schedule will bring GRHC displays and information materials in July to two North Dakota centennial celebrations, where these communities have German-Russian heritage: Linton, July 2-3, Craft Show, former J.C. Penny building, main street; Medina, July 2-3, American Legion Hall. Join us at the Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention at the Ramkota Inn, Aberdeen, SD, July 8-11, 1999. Contact the GRHS office in Bismarck for more information at 701-223-6167 or <http://www.grhs.org>. The documentary videotape will be available at these events.

For further information about the donations to the collection, the Kempf display, the videotape documentary, the Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany (including the large Germans from Russia gathering called the Bundestreffen), for June 6-19, 2000 tour, GRHC's latest publications, *Tender Hands: Ruth's Story of Healing and Homeland Book of the Bessarabian Germans*, 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](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); GRHC website: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>).

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