

# In Touch with Prairie Living

October 2000

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 (GRHC) 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.

In early September, I joined Bob Dambach, producer, and Dave Geck, videographer, at Prairie Public Television, and Prof. Timothy Kloberdanz, Dept. of Anthropology and Sociology, NDSU, for videotape documentary filming south of Mandan and in central North Dakota. PPTV was filming for the future documentary on the wrought-iron crosses found in the Dakotas, Saskatchewan and western Kansas. A documentary on the iron crosses will air on PPTV in the fall of 2001. Prof. Kloberdanz is the researcher, scriptwriter and narrator for the documentary. Prof. Kloberdanz was featured in PPTV's 1999 documentary, "The Germans from Russia."

The book, "Marienberg: Fate of a Village," the story of the Germans who stay in Russia was featured in a July issue of the "Grand Forks Herald." Paulette Tobin, staff writer and Eureka, SD, native, writes: "Marienberg" is the heart-breaking story of what happened to them. This book is written by Johann Bollinger, who lived in Marienberg until 1935, and by Janice Huber Stangl, a native of Bowdle, SD, whose ancestors lived there. "Fate of a Village" includes personal accounts, government records and - most moving of all - letters written by Marienbergers to their relatives in America between 1916 and 1926. Historians have called the 1920s in Russia the Starvation Decade. The letters from Marienberg, including many written by village leader Jacob Ahl to the "Eureka (SD) Rundschau" German newspaper, tell of starvation, illness and death. This book contains pitiful letters from once-proud German families in Russia begging their American relatives to send money, food or clothing. During

World War II, many Marienbergers fled to Germany before the Red Army. Some were able to stay in Germany, but many were deported and lived and died as slaves in Siberia and Asia. Today, their descendants find themselves caught between different worlds, not really accepted in Germany or Russia." The "Marienberg" book is available from the GRHC and can be found at this web page: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/bollinger.html>.

A new book has been published: "Otto Mueller: A Life between Stalin and Hitler" by Otto Mueller and Yvonne Schmidhauser (1999). Otto Mueller shares: "The history of the Second World War has influenced my life with such tremendous force." He was born in Ukraine in 1921. His wit, keen mind and faith in God helped him outlive many life-threatening situations. This book can be located at: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/mueller.html>.

GRHC's traveling exhibit, "The Kempf Family: Germans from Russia Weavers on the Dakota Prairies," continues to be shown at the Public Library, Harvey, ND, until November 1. The NDSU Library, Fargo, features the exhibit, "Germans from Russia Wedding Traditions: From the Steppe of South Russia & Bessarabia to the Dakota Prairies" at the new Marie Rudel Portner Germans from Russia Room.

The award-winning documentary videotapes "The Germans from Russia: Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie" (1999), and "Schmeckfest: Food Traditions of the Germans from Russia" (2000), continue to be well received throughout North America. To secure the videotapes, contact Prairie Public at 1-800-359-6900. The videotapes can also be secured by going to the GRHC website at "Videotape Documentary & Other Projects." The videotapes include 20-minute bonus video footage, not shown in the one-hour documentary. See many interesting

pages about the documentary at the Prairie Public Broadcasting website: <http://www.prairiepublic.org>.

Because of the interest developed from the "Schmeckfest" documentary, additional cookbooks including German-Russian recipes have been added to the GRHC website at the section, "Cookbooks."

For further information about donations to the collection, including family histories, outreach programs, videotape documentaries, Journey to the Homeland Tour (May 22 to June 4, 2001) for Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany; "North Dakota Biography Index;" German-Russian cookbooks; GRHC's publications including these books, "Otto Mueller: A Life between Stalin and Hitler," "Marienberg: Fate of a Village," "Open Wound," and "The Dark Abyss of Exile: A Story of Survival;" 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>).

*October 2000 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers.*