

In Touch with Prairie Living

July 2001

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.

The website of GRHC has an attractive new design and format: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>. May I invite you to review the web pages.

From May 23-June 4, I joined tour members to Odessa, to the former German villages in southern Ukraine, and to Stuttgart, Germany. Tour members were from California, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma and Oregon. They visited villages including: Karlsruhe, Kathrimental and Landau (Beresan District); Baden, Elsass, Kandel, Mannheim, Selz and Strassburg (Kutschurgan District); Josephstal and Kleinliebental (Liebental District); and Emmental and Krasna (Bessarabia).

Tour members traveled on May 28 to visit the orphanage at Landau where they presented to the staff and children handmade quilts made by Carl and Arlene Kruckenberg Knutson, Tuttle, ND and Ervin and Vi Kruckenberg Schielke, Beulah, ND. School supplies, clothing and personal hygiene items were also given to the needy children. Photographs of the orphanage and visit can be seen at the GRHC website section "Tours."

While visiting the village of Selz, Kutschurgan District, today near Odessa, Ukraine, Father Joseph Senger, a tour member from Minot, ND offered mass within the ruins of the church of the Assumption built in 1901. The church was a basilica and also one of the largest churches in Russia. Eva Zander who is 90 years of age attended the services, prayed and sang in German. She had not attended services or communion since the early 1940s. This was an unforgettable and emotional experience with local residents including the Ukrainian Orthodox priest and major of

Selz attending the services.

On June 2, the tour group attended the large gathering of Germans from Russia called the "Bundestreffen" held every three years. Close to 25,000 persons attended where we hosted the "Amerika Haus" information tables. These ethnic Germans have immigrated in the 1990s to Germany from the former Soviet Union including Kazakhstan, Moldova, Siberia, and Ukraine. Many are trying to locate their long lost North American relatives, who they have lost contact with for the last 50 years since the 1930s and 1940s. Father Joseph Senger was one of the featured speakers sharing his May visits to Selz in southern Ukraine and Alsace, France, while growing up on a farm near Orrin, ND (formerly Kandel), not far from Selz in North Dakota.

GRHC has published "Not Until the Combine Is Paid and Other Jokes: From the Oral Traditions of the Germans from Russia in the Dakotas," by Ronald J. Vossler, illustrated by his son, Josh Vossler, a UND graduate student. In the introduction, Vossler writes: "This collection has been culled from twenty years of my own personal journals and small pocket notebooks. My hope is that readers will not only laugh, or a least smile, at some of these; but that they also come away from this small collection with a better sense of Germans from Russia, and their descendants. Someone once told me that members of this ethnic group had both a hard nature, and a strong faith in God. To those two attributes, I hope readers of this collection might add one other attribute - the strength of laughter."

The Old Post Office Museum, Devils Lake, ND, features until September 15, 2001, two of GRHC's traveling exhibits: "The Kempf Family: Germans from Russia Weavers on the Dakota Prairies" and "Germans from Russia Wedding Traditions: From the Steppe of South Russia & Bessarabia to the Dakota Prairies."

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. "Schmeckfest" was shown in March on many PBS stations. To secure the videotapes, contact Prairie Public at 1-800-359-6900. The videotapes include 20-minutes of 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>.

For further information about donations to the collection, family histories, outreach programs, videotape documentaries, Journey to the Homeland Tour (May 21-June 3, 2002) for Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany; German-Russian cookbooks; GRHC's publications including recent books, Ron Vossler's new book; Streeter, ND book; "The Germans by the Black Sea Between Bug and Dniester Rivers"; "Marienberg: Fate of a Village," 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; GRHC website: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>).

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