

# In Touch with Prairie Living

August 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.

Reservations are now being taken for the Journey to the Homeland Tour (21 May - 3 June 2002) sponsored by the NDSU Libraries. The tour will include Odessa, Ukraine and the nearby former Bessarabian and Black Sea German villages; Stuttgart, Germany, and Alsace, France.

Shirley Wegner Nitschke, Jamestown, ND, and native of Alfred, ND, has written a new book, "Heimat, An Epic Novel: Steppes of Russia, My Country, My Home."

Nitschke writes: "It is the story of the Germans in the nineteenth century. The Germans who chose to make the trip to Russia, and the Russian-Germans who came to America and settled in North Dakota. It is the story of hope, survival, conviction, determination, and innovation. For years, I was a member of that group, until I decided to research the people known as the Germans from Russia."

"Heimat" is a work of historical fiction that personalizes the poignant story of the Germans from Russia through the precocious Helga Baden. The book creates a compelling story as Helga's adventurous life unfolds with all its joy and sorrow.

The new book, "Loons in the Kitchen: Humorous & Poignant Short Stories from the Dakotas," by Tony Bender, Ashley, ND, is a wonderful addition to our Dakota heritage. "Loons in the Kitchen" and "Heimat" books are available from GRHC.

GRHC has published the popular book, "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, Joshua Vossler. 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, displays 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. 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 documentaries at the Prairie Public Broadcasting website: <http://www.prairiepublic.org>.

Prairie Public will produce a third documentary on the Germans from Russia wrought iron crosses, expected to premiere on PPTV in March, 2002. Filming has been done in the Dakotas, western Kansas, and Saskatchewan.

Because of the interest developed from the "Schmeckfest" videotape, additional cookbooks including German-Russian recipes have been added to the GRHC web at the section, "Order," and then "Cookbooks."

For further information about donations to the Collection, including 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](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); GRHC website: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>).

*August 2001 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers.*