

In Touch with Prairie Living

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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.

Gisela Schilling Keller, Fargo, has presented a major financial gift to the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection. The endowment is given in memory of her late husband and is called, the Udo Gerhard Keller zu Kellerode Fund with the NDSU Development Foundation. Udo and Gisela Keller and two children immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1955. Gisela was employed at the NDSU Varsity Mart from 1967 to 1994.

Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz, NDSU, writes, "The Kellers exemplify the spirit of so many dedicated, hard-working immigrant Americans who always intended to give more to this country than they ever hoped to receive. NDSU and North Dakota are better, prouder places because of the outstanding citizens like Udo and Gisela Keller."

Gisela and Udo helped the ethnic Germans in 1941 who were coming from Bessarabia to Warthegau, Poland. Then in 1945, the Kellers had to trek for safety into Germany with 73 covered wagons, mostly German-Russians of Bessarabian and Black Sea Germans.

Gisela writes, "My husband volunteered in the resettlement of these ethnic Germans, while I helped him by visiting and comforting displaced families in an effort to lift their spirits. I empathized with them very much, not knowing I would have a similar experience four years later in 1945."

GRHC has published an important book that unfolds the tragic fate of the Germans who stayed in south Russia (today Ukraine): the famine and suffering which they experienced. *Well Meet Again in Heaven: Germans in the Soviet Union Write Their American Relatives: 1925 - 1937,* authored by

Ronald J. Vossler, shares a dramatic first-account story.

The book includes many letters translated from German to English including these family names: Boschee, Dockter, Eckman, Feigert, Goehring, Graf, Heupel, Hochhalter, Ketterling, Kirschmann, Kramer, Lang, Morlock, Opp, Rudolf, Rueb, Schauer, Speidel, Stock, Veil and Wanner. Vossler writes: The family names clearly show a direct link, one of old love and also of family ties, between the Dakota pioneers and those unfortunate family members who remained behind in Russia.

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 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>.

Reservations are now being taken for the Journey to the Homeland Tour (26 May-7 June 2002). The tour will include Odessa, Ukraine and the nearby former Bessarabian and Black Sea German villages; Stuttgart, Germany, and Alsace, France.

For further information about donations to the Collection, including family histories, outreach programs, videotape documentaries, Journey to the Homeland Tour for Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany; German-Russian cookbooks; GRHC's publications including recent books, Ron Vossler's books; 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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