

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. Holiday greetings from the North Dakota State University campus.

GRHC has published its third new book by Ronald J. Vossler, freelance writer and a faculty member at UND, Grand Forks: "Lost Shawls and Pig Spleens: Folklore, Anecdotes, and Humor of the Germans from Russia". The book is illustrated by Andrea Trenbeath and Ron's son, Joshua, a graduate student at the University of Arizona. The book is a companion to, "Not Until the Combine is Paid and Other Jokes from the Oral Traditions of the Germans from Russia in the Dakotas", published by GRHC in 2001.

A good part of the book consists of examples of the everyday humor of Germans from Russia including "ritual" greetings, quips, proverbs, and retorts. This collection also includes narrative jokes, complete with English translated punch-lines. This collection, which gather remnants of fast disappearing oral traditions of the Germans from Russia in the Dakotas, is not only fun and informative, but also is a visual delight with the outstanding graphic images. There is much in this book that will appeal to anyone who wants to learn more about the folk beliefs, superstitions, and everyday humor of the Germans from Russia ethnic group.

Prairie Public's "Prairie Crosses, Prairie Voices: Iron Crosses of the Great Plains" is receiving a terrific response from viewers. Be watching for this third documentary of PPTV's Germans from Russia series on other PBS stations in 2003.

Iron Crosses stand as sentinels on the prairie landscape, framed by vast expanses of grass and sky. Though they stand silent, behind each cross is a story. "Prairie Crosses, Prairie Voices" evokes

these stories: memories of the Germans from Russia, a frugal and tenacious people whose blacksmiths used wagon-wheel rims and scrap metal to fashion markers for their dead.

"Prairie Crosses, Prairie Voices" explains the traditional iron art form which crossed continents and oceans, also survived famine and war - to be reborn on the Great Plains of North America.

Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz, writer and narrator, states; "The wrought iron grave crosses of the German-Russians - with their unbroken hearts of metal, brightly painted stars, endless circles, banner-waving angels, exquisitely-formed lilies, and rose blossoms that rust but never wilt - evoke the defiant spirit of their mortal makers."

The videotape, "Recipes from Grandma's Kitchen: Germans from Russia Food Traditions & Preparations", continues to be popular. The NDSU Libraries and the Germans from Russia Cultural Preservation Foundation has produced this videotape. Review the Foundation's mission and projects at: www.grculture.org.

GRHC has also published the book, "Johnny Schmidt: Son of a Dakota Pioneer" by B.A. Bose. This is a powerful memoir of growing up in a pioneering family in South Dakota. The author shares stories of the early 1900s about blizzards, country weddings, Christmas, Easter, drought years, cream separator, farming, horsepower threshing, first automobiles and telephones, and prairie fires.

Already in GRHC's fifth printing: "German Food & Folkways: Heirloom Memories from Europe, South Russia & the Great Plains", by Rose Marie Gueldner, Anamoose, ND, is available at this website: library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/cookbooks/gueldner.html or contact GRHC.

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), draw much viewer interest. Each videotape includes bonus video footage not shown in the one-hour documentary. To purchase these videotapes, contact GRHC.

Next year's Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany has been announced for May 20 - June 2, 2003. This tour includes visits to the former Bessarabian, Black Sea and Crimean German villages in southern Ukraine near the Black Sea. Dr. Harley Roth, San Jose, CA, writes of his May, 2002 tour experience: "It was a great trip. A trip that will impact my life forever. I made great friends, met wonderful people, ate great food, visited the most interesting places, formed the most endearing memories, and found my roots!"

If you wish to have your e-mail address added to the Black Sea Mail List at internet to receive current announcements and news from the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, send me an e-mail message.

For further information about Germans from Russia heritage, donations to the Collection including family histories, books, notecards, videotapes, cookbooks, and tours, 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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