

In Touch with Prairie Living

September 2004

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 Germans from Russia music documentary, now in production, will premiere in March, 2005 on Prairie Public Television. Filming will be done on September 9 at the Blueroom, Strasburg, ND beginning at 9 pm: including a dance with the Marv Zander Band of Mandan and accordionist Victor Schwan of Bismarck, a Strasburg native. The dance is free and open to the public sponsored by Prairie Public Television. Prairie Public will film also during September in Colorado and Wyoming relating to the music of the Volga Germans. The concert choirs of the University of Mary, Bismarck, and Jamestown College, ND, are closely involved with the production of this fourth documentary in the "Germans from Russia Series" of Prairie Public Broadcasting.

I will be attending the Schmeckfest events at Eureka, SD, for Saturday, September 18, 10 am to 5 pm. GRHC will have displays and information tables at Eureka Schmeckfest. I recall attending the Eureka Schmeckfest in September, 1999 when we filmed for Prairie Public TV's 2000 documentary, "Schmeckfest: Food Traditions" of the Germans from Russia. The Eureka Schmeckfest weekend in September has become one of the premiere events in the Dakota celebrating the heritage and culture of the Germans from Russia. Before arriving in Eureka, I plan to visit on September 17 the Department of History, Northern State University, Aberdeen, SD, to explore cooperative ideas.

The "Life" magazine issue of August 2, 1937 states: "Eureka, S.D. was the wheat capitol of the world. With 42 grain elevators handling 4,000,000

bushels a year, Eureka became the Milwaukee's most profitable station, with earnings of \$100,000 a month. Eureka became the funnel into which the wheat fields of the Dakotas emptied. Into this prairie terminal came also trainload after trainload of Russian-born German immigrants. Of fine farm stock, intelligent, sturdy and pious, these pioneers, who for three generations had withstood the efforts of the Czar to Russianize them, found in South Dakota the freedom they coveted. They staked out their claims, build sod houses and broke the prairie soil. In their new-found freedom they thrived, grew well-to-do, raised large families, husbanded big farms. So prosperous was the community that 32 commission houses had agents there to buy in the grain crop." For the complete "Life" article including photographs, go to: library.ndsu.edu/grhc/articles/magazines/articles/life1.html.

GRHC has published a new book, "The Last Link: Dakota Territory, Logan County 1887 - Old North Dakota Memories & The Weispfenning's & Muellers: Our Early American Experiences in Dakota Territory", by Thomas G. Mueller, Jamestown, native of Napoleon, ND. Mueller shares: "While I was writing my family history story, 'The Last Link', I realized that I had hundreds of stories I could tell, especially about my time spent on my Aunt Hulda and Uncle Martin Ehmann's farm, southeast of Gackle, ND.

The author includes: 1) the clay brick house; 2) farming the old-fashioned way; 3) stacking hay on the prairie; 4) shocking oats in the 1950s; 5) receiving the German Brauche; 6) Otto & Mathilda's wedding dinner; 6) the flat white cooking rock; and 7) Gravewitching for Great Uncle Joahnn Weispfenning. "The Last Link" is available by contacting GRHC or go to library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/nd_sd/mueller.html.

GRHC has published an important new cookbook, "Cookbook for the Germans from Russia", by Nelly Daes, translated from German to English by Alex Herzog, and edited by Janice Huber Stangl who writes: "This book contains not only recipes, but also humorous and heart-wrenching anecdotes from the German Russian diaspora. It is an essential addition to every household." The new cookbook is available at: library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/cookbooks/das.html, or contact GRHC.

Three award-winning documentary videotapes are still available: "The Germans from Russia: Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie" (1999); "Schmeckfest: Food Traditions of the Germans from Russia" (2000); and "Prairie Crosses, Prairie Voices: Iron Crosses of the Great Plains" (2002). Each videotape includes bonus video footage not shown in the one-hour documentary.

The 11th Journey to the Homeland Tour, sponsored by the NDSU Libraries, to Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany is scheduled for May 26 - June 6, 2005.

For further information about Germans from Russia heritage, donations to GRHC including books, 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: library.ndsu.edu/grhc).

September, 2004 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers.