

In Touch with Prairie Living

July 2005

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.

We returned from Ukraine and Germany in June with wonderful and treasured memories. A young filmmaker, Ralph Lengler of Zurich, Switzerland, joined our tour group in Odessa, Ukraine for May 27-31, traveling and filming in the former German villages of Bergdorf, Glueckstal, Kassel and Neudorf, today in Ukraine and Moldova. Ralph's grandmother living near Munich, Germany was born in Glueckstal.

The 12th Journey to the Homeland Tour, sponsored by the NDSU Libraries is scheduled for late May/early June, 2006. The tour includes Budapest, Hungary; Odessa, Ukraine and the former German villages; Stuttgart, Germany; and Alsace, France. The tour will include attending the large gathering of the Germans from Russia called the Russlanddeutschen Bundestreffen.

The new DVD and performance CD, "A Soulful Sound: Music of the Germans from Russia" which premiered on Prairie Public TV in April, are available. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, thousands of German-speaking peoples established major German settlements in Russia, first along the Volga River in the north, and secondly along the Black Sea in South Russia and nearby Bessarabia. Eventually, many migrated yet again, this time to North and South America. Throughout their travels, these Germans - now Germans from Russia - maintained their traditional religious music, their lullabies and folk songs, their vocal and instrumental music alike.

"A Soulful Sound" blends expert commentary with performances of traditional music from regional talent including St. Andrew's Lutheran Church Centennial Choir, University of Mary

and Jamestown College concert choirs, Young People's Hutterite Singers, ALIVE Gospel Choir, Harvey area Centennial Men's Choir, and the Napoleon/Kintyre area folk singers. Singers featured included Maria Appelhans, Rosalinda Klobberdanz, John J. Gross, Tony Wangler, Robert Erbele and Ron Volk. Enjoy Marv Zander and Victor Schwahn and their bands as they perform accordion music and recreate a traditional wedding reception at the Blue Room in Strasburg, ND.

Jeff Malm, rural Kulm, ND writes about the music documentary: "You have preserved another important piece of the German-Russian culture for this generation and those to come to appreciate. We enjoyed having the opportunity to be part of this music with the ALIVE Gospel Choir. My wife, Lucinda Schmitt, is from a German-Russian family. Her father and his siblings grew up in the sacred music tradition. Her grandparents had one of those beautiful pump organs and her grandfather played it while the children sang with him. One of her cousins still has the organ."

Prairie Public has produced a music CD, "John J. Gross: Folk Songs Sung by the Germans from Russia". When John was four and five years old, his father would play the pump organ and sing folk songs while his mother was sewing clothes for their thirteen children. John would often fall asleep listening to his father. John learned to sing and play by ear, and is still performing German-Russian folk music today at the age of 80.

I am pleased to announce that I will be attending the following events: McClusky ND Centennial, City Hall, 117B Avenue East, Friday, July 8 (1-5 pm) & Saturday, July 9 (10 am-4 pm); and St. Luke Lutheran Church Centennial, Wishek, ND Civic Center, Saturday, July 16 (1-5 pm) & Sunday, July 17 (11am-3 pm). I look forward to my visits in June and July to Jamestown, Streeter, McClusky and

Wishek. Exhibits featuring photographs will be on display as well as information tables about the Germans from Russia history, culture and foodways.

Prairie Public Broadcasting has produced a new DVD which includes these two award-winning documentaries: "The Germans from Russia: Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie" and "Prairie Crosses, Prairie Voices: Iron Crosses of the Great Plains. For further information, go to library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/tapes/dualdvd.html.

The Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention is July 14-17, 2005, Ramkota Hotel, Pierre, SD (www.grhs.org). The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Convention is August 14-21, 2005, Sheraton Hotel, Oklahoma City (www.ahsgr.org). The Festival of Germans from Russia is September 23-25, 2005, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

GRHC has published the new book, "Prairie Churches of Bon Homme County, Dakota Territory: A Varicolored Tunic". Maxine Schuurmans Kinsley's work presents a valuable contribution to the historical publications for the era of Dakota Territory. Bonn Homme County, located in south central South Dakota, is important in the history and culture of the first German-Russians settlements in Dakota Territory.

For further information about Germans from Russia heritage, donations to GRHC including books, documentaries, CDs, DVDs, 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).

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