

In Touch with Prairie Living

September 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 Germans from Russia as an important part of the northern plains culture.

I plan to attend the Canadian Festival of Germans from Russia during September 23-25, 2005 at Medicine Hat, Alberta. The Medicine Hat area today has many families of Bessarabian and Black Sea German ancestry.

We are pleased to announce the following public programs in these North Dakota communities called the Dakota Memories Oral History Project: 1) October 30, 2005, Wishek: St. Luke's Lutheran Church 107 Centennial Street South, 2 pm; 2) November 13, 2005, Gackle: American Legion Hall, Main Street, 2 pm. The programs are free and open to the general public, and are sponsored by the North Dakota Humanities Council, the NDSU Development Foundation, and the NDSU Libraries, Fargo.

Program participants will be: Jessica Clark, coordinator of the project; Tom Isern, NDSU Department of History; Kimberly Porter, UND Department of History; and Michael Miller, NDSU Libraries. For further information, go to the GRHC website at "Oral History Project".

Jessica Clark writes: "Every interview has been enlightening and full of wonderful childhood memories. I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting and visiting with everyone in the Streefer, Gackle Ashley and Wishek areas. I have learned a lot about growing up German-Russian in North Dakota through a variety of childhood memories and different perspectives."

At these programs, we will share their childhood and other memories of the interviewees.

GRHC has published Duane Stabler's new book, "Researcher's Guide to McPherson County, South Dakota Cemeteries", which summaries

information from over 100 family plots, gravesites and cemeteries. McPherson County was a key destination for many immigrants from South Russia to settle in the Dakotas. The book contains and historical overview, photo postcards, names and locations of cemeteries, data of individuals buried and maps to the cemetery or gravesite.

Stabler writes: "This book was an idea that stemmed from my visit to my Great Grandpaents gravesite at the Neudorf Cemetery, McPherson County. It was then that I realized that information about these ancestors, buried in gravesites throughout McPherson County, needed to be recorded."

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 Kloberdanz, 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.

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."

The 12th Journey to the Homeland Tour, sponsored by the NDSU Libraries is scheduled for May 23 - June 2, 2006. The tour includes Budapest, Hungary; Odessa, Ukraine and the former German villages; Stuttgart, Germany; and Alsace, France.

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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