

In Touch with Prairie Living

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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.

Thanksgiving regards to readers of this monthly column first published in November, 1996. We appreciate the many fine comments from readers.

My visit to Medicine Hat, Alberta, late in September for the Festival of Germans from Russia was a most rewarding experience. The festival was well-organized, well-attended and most impressive. There was a large attendance of persons with Bessarabian, Black Sea, Mennonite and Volhynian German ancestry. The Medicine Hat area, 170 miles southeast of Calgary, was mostly settled by Bessarabian German families. The next Festival of Germans from Russia will be October 13-15, 2006, Leader, Saskatchewan, and then Medicine Hat in 2007.

I met people with family names of Babitzke, Barth, Bischoff, Brost, Deis, Diegel, Dorscher, Ensminger, Fitterer, Friesz, Giesinger, Gross, Hirsch, Hofer, Huber, Janke, Kambeitz, Koch, Kopp, Kaut, Kuntz, Lang, Maser, Mildenerger, Mogck, Neubauer, Ost, Rath, Ruff, Schlinker, Schwanke, Seiler, Usselman, Weigel, Weiss and Ziegler.

The ancestors of these families immigrated from the former German villages in South Russia and Bessarabia: including Albota, Alexanderhilf, Alt Danzig, Alt Postal, Arzis, Bergdorf, Brienne, Eichendorf, Friedenstal, Freudental, Glueckstal, Gnadental, Grossliebental, Gueldendorf, Kassel, Katzbach, Kloestitz, Kleinliebental, Krasna, Kulm, Mannheim, Mariental, Neuberg, Neudorf, Paris, Selz, Speyer, Tarutino and Wittenberg.

We are pleased to announce the following public program called the Dakota Memories Oral History Project: November 13, 2005, Gackle: American Legion Hall, Main Street, 2 pm. These

programs are free and open to the general public, being sponsored by the North Dakota Humanities Council, the NDSU Development Foundation, and the NDSU Libraries, Fargo.

Presenters will be: Jessica Clark, coordinator of this 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 Streeter, 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 the Wishek and Gackle programs, we will share their childhood and other memories of the interviewees. The new book, "The Old God Still Lives: German Villagers in Czarist and Soviet Ukraine Write Their American Relatives, 1915-1924", by Ronald J. Vossler, teaching at UND, Grand Forks and a Wishek, ND native. These letters chronicle a substantial and on-going correspondence between the ethnic Germans who left Ukraine between 1873 and 1914, and who sent much money, food and clothing to those wishing that they had left South Russia also.

There is much in this new book for persons who wish to learn more about villages which were the source of one of North Dakota's most distinct, and most numerous, ethnic groups. There are 150 letters translated from the old German script to English, published in five German language newspapers in North Dakota. Families receiving these letters include: Boschee, Morlock, Wanner, Schauer, Dockter, Bender, Ketterling, Ackermann, Doerr, Kurtz, Bohlander, Schock, Mindt, Wiest, Schoepp, Schaible, Wacker, Bauer, Kessler,

Frank, Schaeffer, Rohrich, Wolf, Heinle, Stockburger, Hieb, Spitzer, Huber, Rueb, Sauter, Ammon, Schweigert, Rohrbach and Wentz.

GRHC has published, "Researcher's Guide to McPherson County, South Dakota Cemeteries", which summarizes information from over 100 family plots, gravesites and cemeteries. McPherson County between Eureka and Aberdeen was a key destination for many immigrants from South Russia to settle in the Dakotas. The book contains a historical overview, photo postcards, names and locations of cemeteries, data of individuals buried and maps to the cemetery or gravesite.

A new DVD is available combining three documentaries: Schmeckfest: Food Traditions of the Germans from Russia and Recipes from Grandma's Kitchen: Food Traditions of the Germans from Russia, Volume I and II.

The DVD documentary and performance CD, "A Soulful Sound: Music of the Germans from Russia" 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, as well as their vocal and instrumental music.

Prairie Public Broadcasting has produced a 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."

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