

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

The Germans from Russia Heritage Society's July convention in Portland, Oregon was a wonderful success. There were 605 registrations with many new attendees from the Northwest. I met families who had left the Dakotas to settle in Oregon and Washington.

My visit to Mount Angel Abbey and the Queen of Angels Monastery at Mt. Angel near Portland was a rewarding experience. The Abbey Library has established the Father Martin Senko Germans from Russia Collection in his memory. There were many sons and daughters with North Dakota roots who joined these Benedictine Monks and Sisters.

Debra Marquart, a native of rural Napoleon, ND, and an associate professor of English at Iowa State University, Ames, has authored an impressive new book, "The Horizontal World: Growing Up Wild in the Middle of Nowhere: A Memoir". From the earliest age, Marquart knows she wanted out - out of the milking barn, out of the nearly empty nest her farmhouse home had become once her four older siblings move away, out of the harvests and the blizzards and the long dusty summer days full of nothing but hard work. But even after she got good at leaving, she kept coming back. It is this process of flight - from both the landscape and the family - and the return that Marquart writes about so exquisitely.

Whether Marquart is writing about her great-grandmother dying in childbirth, Lawrence Welk's early days, the glaciers that shaped her back yard, or her father's quiet struggle with heart disease, Marquart's sense of the absurd and her graceful poeticism combine to make "The Horizontal World" a captivating read.

Debra Marquart received the 2006 Joseph S. Height Literary Award for her article in the March, 2005 issue of Heritage Review: "The Most Famous Person from North Dakota - Lawrence Welk".

The Dakota Memories Oral History Project continues in 2006. Interviews were conducted in May in the Linton/Strasburg/Venturia area; in July at Rugby and Saskatchewan; and August in the Kulm/Lehr/Wishek area of North Dakota. The 2005 interviews are available from GRHC on DVD. They include 31 interviews, including more than 60 hours of video. For more information, go to: library.ndsu.edu/grhc/dakotamemories/order/index.html. Family names for these interviews include: Aberle, Boschee, Brosy, Buck, Dewald, Dockter, Fercho, Fischer, Hartmann, Herman, Heyne, Hoerter, Janke, Kasemen, Kauk, Kleingartner, Klundt, Long, Meidinger, Mueller, Miller, Presler, Schaffer, Schlecht, Schott, and Zimmerman.

Sarah Lacher, NDSU history graduate student and interviewer, who traveled to south central North Dakota this summer, stated: "The Dakota Memories Oral History Project has been a wonderful learning experience for me. Hearing and seeing each narrator's memories has helped me to learn about my own heritage. Narrators may have been shocked that I said the interview may be three hours, but once we were rolling the memories kept pouring out, along with the occasional shot of redbeye. Needless to say, each narrator was extremely welcoming to the videographer and me, often sharing German Russian lunches with us. Each narrator helped me to learn more about what it would have been like for my grandfather, dad, and uncle growing up near Venturia, ND. I had an amazing experience in the Linton, Strasburg, Kulm, Lehr, and Wishek area."

I am pleased to announce a new one-half hour documentary, "We'll Meet Again in Heaven" funded by

GRHC. The scholar and narrator is Ronald Vossler, UND, Grand Forks. Vossler guides the viewer from the small North Dakota town where he found the first letter, down the "blood-dark corridor of ethnic history" to former German villages in Ukraine and Moldova that were the source of numerous immigrants to the American prairie frontier.

These wrenching personal letters, along with compelling, survivor interviews, detail an odyssey of hunger and destruction in Soviet Ukraine. Based on a decade of research, including on-location footage in Ukraine and Moldova, this film draws upon hundreds of personal letters, written from German villages in Ukraine to the Dakotas, and brought in public attention for the first time. To order this new documentary, contact GRHC.

The Festival of Germans from Russia, is October 13-15, at Leader, Saskatchewan. The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Convention is June 11-16, 2007, Holiday Inn, Hays, KS (www.ahsgr.org); the Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention is July 19-22, 2007, Ramkota Hotel, Bismarck, ND (www.grhs.org).

The dates in June, 2007 for the 13th Journey to the Homeland Tour will be announced later.

For further information about Germans from Russia heritage, Dakota Memories Oral History Project, donations to GRHC including books, events, documentaries, CDs, DVDs, cookbooks and the May, 2007 tour, 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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