

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.

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 by Sara Lacher (interviewer) and Jennifer Wilkie (videographer), NDSU graduate history students, in south central North Dakota. Family names for these interviews included: Bender, Boschee, Dahl, Dobler, Eberle, Eckroth, Engelhart, Eslinger, Herr, Glatt, Ketterling, Klein, Kraft, Kocher, Konrad, Mitzel,

Presler, Pressler, Rose, Sehn, Schell, Schumacher, Schwab, Schwahn, Vetter, Wagner, Wald, Weber, Welder and Zimmerman. Lacher felt this project was a great learning experience, as "the memories kept pouring out" during each interview.

Jessica Clark (interviewer) and Will Clark (videographer), NDSU doctoral students, completed more than thirty-five interviews in north-central North Dakota and Saskatchewan. The narrator family names included: Axtman, Bertsch, Black, Boechler, Brossart, Degenstein, Dukart, Ebach, Ell, Ferner, Frehlich, Herauf, Hoffart, Jahner, Johner, Keen, Kohlman, Kraft, Krismer, Kuntz, Lang, Laturnus, Leippi, Miere, Riehl, Rissling, Schall, Schneider, Sellinger, Senger, Westein, and Zeiler. Jessica Clark recalls that "everyone was truly excited about participating in this project. They welcomed us into their homes with open arms, and candidly shared their memories of growing up German Russian on the Northern Plains. They invited us to eat some tasty German meals and partake in the occasional shot of red eye or burnt whiskey."

For further information about the Dakota Memories Oral History Project, go to library.ndsu.edu/grhc/dakotamemories/index.html, or contact Jessica Clark at 701-231-8419; jessica.clark@ndsu.edu.

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 into public attention for the first time. To order this new documentary, contact GRHC.

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 June, 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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