

In Touch with Prairie Living

November 2006

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 want to extend special Thanksgiving Regards. We can be very grateful that our ancestors immigrated to America to settle on these prairies and Northern Plains.

Join us for the Pride of Dakota Holiday Showcase where we will have a booth at these events: Civic Center/Centennial Hall, 207 4th Street North, Fargo (Saturday, 10 am-5 pm & Sunday, 12 noon-5 pm, November 18-19) and the Civic Center Convention Hall, 315 South 5th Street, Bismarck (Saturday, 10 am-5 pm) & Sunday, 12 noon - 5 pm), December 2-3.

I am pleased to announce the dates for the 13th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Ukraine and Germany for May 17-28, 2007. The tour will include four days in Odessa, Ukraine visiting the former German villages, and six days in Germany. Tour members will attend the large Germans from Russia gathering called the Russlanddeutschen Bundestreffen, at Wiesbaden on May 26-27, 2007. Please contact me for further information and registration.

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.

GRHC has published the new book, "The Germans Under the Tsars, Lenin, and Hitler", by John Philipps, Merced, CA. Dr. Stephen Herzog who edited the book writes: "John Philipps's book provides a unique and important contribution: the bird's-eye view of a historical narrative coupled with the on-the-ground perspective of someone who lived his formative years in a German-Russian community." The book is available by contacting GRHC or at library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/tsars.html.

The Dakota Memories Oral History Project continued in 2006. Interviews completed in south central North Dakota were for these family names: Bender, Boschee, Dahl, Dobler, Erbele, Eckroth, Engelhart, Eslinger, Herr, Glatt, Ketterling, Klein, Kraft, Kocher, Konrad, Mitzel, Presler, Pressler, 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.

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).

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).

November, 2006 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers