

In Touch with Prairie Living

June 2007

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 write this message from Wiesbaden, Germany following the Russlanddeutschen Bundestreffen (large German-Russian gathering) on May 26. We were busy at the Amerika Haus tables with many people searching for their ancestors in USA and Canada.

Individuals shared difficult and emotional experiences about leaving their German villages near Odessa, Ukraine. In 1945, they gathered in Germany. They were then sent on trains to Siberia to work in the forests and slave labor camps. In the 1950s, they re-settled in Kazakhstan and other Soviet states. Since the late 1980s, more than three million of these ethnic Germans have immigrated back to Germany with many challenges of acceptance, assimilation, employment, and language skills.

Attending this event, which is held every three years, is a lifetime experience. The next gathering will be in 2010. The Journey to the Homeland Tour group attended this gathering following their return from Odessa, Ukraine and visiting the former German villages.

On May 12, Bob Dambach, director of television, Prairie Public Broadcasting, and I attended the Ellis Island Medals of Honor event in New York City sponsored by the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations. The program was held at Ellis Island to celebrate ethnic diversity and pay tribute to outstanding American citizens. There were 100 Americans receiving this award including Arthur E. Flegel, Menlo Park, CA, who was born at New Leipzig, ND. He was recognized for his lifelong research, writing and contributions of his Germans from Russia heritage. See photos of this event at: www.ndsu.edu/grhc/outreach/friends/.

While in Manhattan, we visited Thomas and Dorothy Hoobler, well-known authors including The American Family Album Series. I assisted the Hooblers with the book, "The German American Family Album" published in 1996.

Prairie Public will broadcast a new radio series, "Voices of the Heartland," which is a collection of fascinating stories collected by the Dakota Memories Oral History Project.

"Voices of the Heartland" will begin Monday, July 30 and air until October 8 every Monday (excluding Monday, August 27) and Friday at 8:35 am, 3:55 pm, 6:30 pm, and 7:55 pm on Prairie Public Radio.

Radio broadcasts from Prairie Public Broadcasting are funded by the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection and can be heard on 90.5 fm Bismarck, 89.9 fm Dickinson, 91.9 fm Fargo, 89.3 fm Grand Forks, 91.5 fm Jamestown, 88.9 fm Minot, and 89.5 fm Williston.

The radio narratives will also be located on the Web at www.prairiepublic.org/radio. The "Voices of the Heartland Radio Series" CD will be available for purchase in the fall of 2007.

This summer the Dakota Memories Oral History Project begins its third season of interviews. Cassie Ptacek, second team interviewer, shared her thoughts on her first interviews for the project. "These first interviews have been a fascinating experience for me. I have especially enjoyed looking through photographs and hearing the stories that go with them. I did not expect to feel so close to the people I interviewed, but I did leave feeling almost like I was part of their family." Cassie Ptacek and Tyler Simonson will be in the Devils Lake/Rugby areas June 14 – June 23. Ptacek and Simonson will also visit Dickinson/Richardton in August.

Jessica and Will Clark will conduct interviews in the Edgeley/Fredonia

and Bismarck/Mandan areas in July. To contact Jessica Clark (Coordinator) call 701-231-8419 or email Jessica.Clark@ndsu.edu. Also, visit the Dakota Memories Oral History Project on the web at www.ndsu.edu/grhc/dakotamemories.

The Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention is July 19-22, 2007, Ramkota Hotel, Bismarck, ND (www.grhs.org).

For further information about the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, Dakota Memories Oral History Project, donations to GRHC including books, events, documentaries, CDs, DVDs, cookbooks and the tour, contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, PO Box 5599, Fargo, ND 58105-5599 (Tel: 701-231-8416; Email: Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu; GRHC website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc).

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