

In Touch with Prairie Living

March 2008

By Michael M. Miller

Germans from Russia Heritage Collection
North Dakota State University Libraries, Fargo



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

The Prairies magazine, published from 1975 to 1986 by the Ashley Tribune, printed two articles titled "Passage to Dakota" which featured an interview with Andrew and Christina Neu who had celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary in 1982. They were married on October 1, 1907, at Delmont, SD. This March column shares some of the memorable excerpts from this taped interview. The complete interviews can be found on the GRHC website.

The following has been printed with permission from the Ashley Tribune.

Andrew Neu states: "I come from Russia, I was born in Neuburg, South Russia, on January 3, 1895. My dad, Jacob Neu, was born in Neuburg on January 23, 1828. Dad was a carpenter. He made wine barrels, butter churns and pails. Mother had ducks and geese.

"Saturday afternoons a man came from the big town of Odessa. He had a lot of candy for sale. We didn't have no money, and so we took eggs and trade them off on candy. When I was 13 years old, I had to go away from home. I worked for nothing, and I worked hard. I had to stay up to 15 years old. When I was 16 years old, I was confirmed. I don't remember what kind of suit I wore, but I didn't have any shoes. The man I worked for gave me his wife's shoes to wear. They were three inches too long and curled up at the tips.

"In October [1901], we moved away to America. The 11th of November 1901, we came to New York, four days later, we come to Menno, South Dakota. We live there till 1915, and then we moved west 30 miles. Russia is the best country there is. Nice land. You go out and plow - level ground, no rocks. Not like around here. Up the hills, flat rock. Not like around here. You take a hammer and you can make pieces of the rock to build houses. Russia was real good living as long as the Kaiser (Czar) was there.

"We worked hard when we lived in Russia. There were no threshing machines, no binders. We had a scythe to

cut wheat. Then we got a wooden fork, three-pronged, and raked the wheat into piles. When we got done harvesting, we made a bed out of black dirt, took six horses with rollers, drove around the grain, and took the grain out and put another load on, put horses around again, all day up to the night.

"We sifted the wheat with big fanning wheels, working up to midnight. Then we put the wheat in sacks and carried hundred pound sacks two or three blocks and upstairs and stored them. Five o'clock in the morning you go out again and start up again all day long. It was hard work. I didn't get much sleep in Russia.

"We had a kitchen and a stove in it. We'd butcher hogs, and hang them in the chimney above the stove to cure for two or three weeks. This was an efficient use of the smoke. The ovens, or stoves, were built inside the house. The chimney was built so wide that on the second floor of the house, there was an opening with a door. This is where they hung their hams, sausages and bacons to smoke while heating the house and cooking. But, some of the bigger boys would tie a rope around the chest of a smaller boy, put him in the chimney and rope him down so that they could steal sausages and hams. They were good hams. If there was a high chimney, usually there would be a lot of good hams. Sometimes the boys got caught.

"In Russia you can drive two or three miles, all on level ground. And it's black ground. No rocks, good crops. Can't figure out why the Russians have to buy wheat now. We raised a lot of wheat. You wouldn't believe me. You'd think I was a liar. In the morning, a guy came with a great whip to take the horses out, ones they didn't use to work, and then they'd drive them away to the pasture. Then came another man to get the cows. He'd crack his whip so that you could hear him coming. He'd bring the cows out, then the little calves, little pigs, and big pigs. In the evening, you came home and drove them in the street.

Every cow and every horse and pig went to their own barn. Always the same place every day. Never, never did they go away. I never seen little pigs run away.

"The man who had herded cattle on Easter brought a big basket full of eggs and peaches. When they returned in the evening with the cows, one of the men was sick. Since there was no doctor around, we had to bring the police, and he said, "Dietrich, you ate 50 eggs and are sick." "No that's not true," answered Dietrich. "It was only 49.""

For further information about the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, Dakota Memories Oral History Project, Journey to the Homeland Tour and donations to the GRHC (such as family histories), contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Library, PO Box 5599, Fargo, ND 58105-5599 (Telephone: 701-231-8416; Email: Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu; GRHC website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc).

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