

In Touch with Prairie Living

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

As I write this column, I am at an internet cafe in downtown Odessa, Ukraine. Tour members have visited their ancestral Bessarabian and Black Sea German villages - truly a rewarding, emotional and unforgettable experience; walking the streets where their ancestors lived as well as seeing the houses, cemeteries, churches and landscape. I want to share with you comments from tour members.

Penny Kramer Eberhardt of Sioux Falls, South Dakota with roots to Eureka, South Dakota shares her thoughts. "I better understand why our ancestors missed some parts of their life in Russia. The fertile soil, the large fields of wheat, the vineyards and fruit trees, were greatly missed when compared with the hilly rocky soil, no trees and endless wind in the Dakotas.

When I consider all the hardships our ancestors endured, first in Germany, then the long trip to Russia, the hard difficult years in Russia, the long ship ride to America, and finally the settling of the Dakota prairies, disease, childbirth complications, so forth - it is miracle that any one of us was born. I am grateful for each and everyone in my ancestral family."

Dorothy Roth Rapson of Alberta remarks, "The highlight of the trip was to visit Speier where our mother was born and lived until she was 26 years old. The good part was that the church was still there and the cemetery. My sister, Isabelle, and I sprinkled our Alberta soil at the Speier cemetery and

at the Kandel cemetery. I was moved to tears visiting Kandel and Speier as I was always close to my parents. Thank you for this great experience."

Julie Opp Burgum of Casselton, North Dakota, with roots to Napoleon, North Dakota states, "The journey to our homeland helped me to understand my heritage. Visiting in the home of Marta Kammerer in Glueckstal reminded me of my grandmother - dress, apron and kerchief. I was surprised at the primitive conditions with no hot water or indoor bathroom. This trip helped me to appreciate the strong desire of our ancestors to improve their lives."

Acacia (Jonas) Stuckle will deliver a presentation about the GRHC and the Dakota Memories Oral History Project on Friday, June 13, at 1 p.m. at the German Russian Cultural Festival in Leader, Saskatchewan.

"The presentation will inform the public on what the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection has to offer along with information about the Dakota Memories Oral History Project," Stuckle said.

According to Stuckle, many Germans from Russia left North Dakota in the early 1900s to settle in central and southern Saskatchewan including the Leader area. "I plan on sharing sample audio and video clips from interviews we have conducted," she said.

The Dakota Memories Oral History Project continues with the fourth season of interviews. We conducted interviews in Eureka, South Dakota

(May 14-23) and South-Central, North Dakota (May 27-June 5). We will visit Beulah/Hazen, North Dakota (June 9-18).

Eric Mischnick and Cassie Ptacek, interview team, share their thoughts about their experiences in Eureka.

"I have had a great experience interviewing people from Eureka. Everyone has been very inviting and made me feel welcome in the community. I have learned a great deal during the interviews from the narrators' unique experiences. Their lives are very interesting and their experiences make me appreciate many of the modern conveniences we are blessed with," Mischnick said.

Ptacek comments, "Working on this project has been such a wonderful experience for me; I've met so many fascinating people. It's amazing how these people welcome us into their homes and their lives. By the time we leave, we feel like family."

For further information, please visit www.ndsu.edu/grhc/dakotamemories.

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).

June 2008 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers.