

In Touch with Prairie Living

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

As the holiday season approaches, I wish to share my best regards in the spirit of the Yuletide holiday season and “Weihnachten” greetings.

My thanks to those who visited the GRHC booth at the Pride of Dakota Holiday Showcase events in Fargo and Bismarck.

My appreciation is extended to the many persons who sent cards and email messages regarding the announcement of being named the 2008 North Dakota Librarian of the Year from the North Dakota Library Association (NDLA). The citation from NDLA reads: “For his record of continued service to libraries and citizens of North Dakota and beyond for over 40 years and for his pivotal role in preserving the culture heritage of an important ethnic group in the history of North Dakota.”

My longtime library colleague and dear friend, Kathryn Hollenhorst Thomas, writes, “Due to his efforts, the heritage of the Germans from Russia in North Dakota and beyond is being preserved and recognized. This is a legacy he will leave for future generations of North Dakotans, for without Michael’s vision, the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection would not exist. Michael is known worldwide as an invaluable resource on German-Russian history and heritage. Those of us fortunate to know him personally can testify to his dedication and passion, and to his kindness and generosity.”

Alfred Opp of Vancouver, British Columbia, is author of the book available from the GRHC, *Pawns on the World Stage*. This book includes memories of his childhood living in

Teplitz, Bessarabia and experiences of his family in war-torn Europe (Poland during 1941-1945 before they fled to East Germany in 1945, and the reconstruction of West Germany of 1945-1955). Alfred Opp writes about his Christmas memories: “My childhood memory is that my parents set up a Christmas tree in our house every year in Teplitz, Bessarabia. Christmas was always a special time for us and followed the well preserved customs of the traditional fest. In our family, especially at my Grandparents’ house, Christmas time started on December 6th with the celebration of Nicolaus Tag (day). Dressed in a Bishop’s garb, Saint Nicolaus was so kind and giving. We had to recite a prayer or sing a song to please the Saint who always gave us an apple and cookies in a colorful bag. One has to remember that getting apples in December was rare, so for us this was a real treat. For us kids the weeks leading up to Christmas were wonderful as we watched mother baking Christmas treats.”

“We were not allowed to see the Christmas tree until 8 pm on Christmas Eve, when mother finally opened the door to the parlor the sight and the smell of the candles was heavenly. Mom and Dad, along with our Grandparents took a seat by the tree to sing Christmas carols. Then came ‘Pelzamerde’ with a rod to remind us kids to be brave and obedient to our parents. After the Pelzamerde left, one called ‘Christkindle’ came. She usually was played by my Aunt

Maria. She was so sweet, covered in a veil, and she gave us kids sweets to eat. After that it was time to focus on the gifts underneath the tree. Our gifts were wrapped – wealthy parents use fancy paper and poorer families might only have brown paper, but the excitement was the same in all families. We first opened up the packages that didn’t feel like socks. In our family, we didn’t have the luxury of receiving expensive gifts as there wasn’t enough money to go around. I remember getting a flashlight once.”

The radio program, *A Holiday Special: German-Russian Childhood Memories*, airs on Prairie Public Radio December 10th and 25th at 3:00 pm and 7:00 pm (CST).

The GRHC will also offer *A Holiday Special: German-Russian Childhood Memories* on CD. To pre-order your copy, contact Acacia (Jonas) Stuckle at 701-231-6596 or acacia.stuckle@ndsu.edu.

The 15th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany is May 20-30, 2009. Space is still available!

For further information about the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, the Dakota Memories Oral History Project, Journey to the Homeland Tours and donations to the GRHC (such as family histories), contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, Dept. #2070 PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050 (Telephone: 701-231-8416; Email: Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu; GRHC website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc).

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