

# 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 we experience a heavy snowfall this winter on the Dakota prairies, I am reminded of an email message I received from Gary Less: "When my first cousin, Theresa (Less) Schoof, was married in January 1932, my Pa did something that I thought was neat and that I will always remember. This was a winter we had so much snow that all roads to town were blocked with drifted snow. Since we could not get to the wedding by automobile due to the closed roads, Pa borrowed a sled that was equipped with a large conventional wagon box. He put a lot of straw in the sled box, loaded the whole family of six kids plus Ma and Pa in the sled. We took off for the wedding pulled by two frisky horses. Since the roads were impassable, we went across farmers fields with the horses and sled. It was seven miles to the church in Ponca, Nebraska, and another three miles from the church to Uncle Ed Less's farm house for the reception. During the reception, neighbors and friends shivareed the couple with a loud serenade made with kettles and horns. The shivaree continued until the couple either agreed to pay them off or provide for a dance later in town. The weather was cold and crisp but it sure was a fun occasion."

Regarding wedding traditions, Lilly Buchwitz wrote: "My grandmother, Anna Horning, was married in 1938 in Leipzig, Bessarabia, to Nathanael Werner. She has told me how weddings in those days were three day affairs, with almost constant feasting and partying. It began the day before the wedding, when everyone would gather at the home of the bride or groom's family (in my grandparents' case this was next door,

so both homes were involved) where the women would prepare a large banquet-style supper for everyone. The next day, wedding day, the bride and groom walked to the church -- separately, with their entourages. After the ceremony, my grandmother describes walking through the village, giving out candy to children. I asked her if she had bridesmaids, and she replied, yes, about twenty! Every unmarried woman at the wedding was considered a bridesmaid. So it was Oma and her "bridesmaids" who paraded through town, handing out candy. Then it was back to the farm for a reception dinner. The next day there was a breakfast party, and after that everyone returned home. These people were poor, hardworking farmers, but they certainly knew how to have fun when the occasion warranted."

Carol Just of St. Louis Park, MN, a native of LaMoure, ND, wrote: "I grew up watching my father make the recipe of Wedding Schnapps (Red Eye). He taught me and I have taught the next generation. It was served at my wedding, but seemed to be a forgotten tradition until I began to teach my nieces and nephews about the history and use of Schnapps. Since then, it has been served at their weddings with a little history lesson preceding the first toast." Carol Just's Wedding Schnapps recipe can be found at this GRHC webpage: <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/foods/recipe/byhre.html>. Carol appears in Prairie Public's award-winning documentaries, *Schmeckfest: Food Traditions of the Germans from Russia*, making Wedding Schnapps, and in *The Germans from Russia:*

*Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie*, available on DVD from GRHC.

Derinda Kuehn Stickel writes: "The bride dance is a tradition here in eastern Montana among people of German-Russian descent and others, too. A tradition from my North Dakota and South Dakota relatives is for another member of the bride's or groom's family to smash a plate on the floor during the dinner or reception and declare loudly enough for everyone to hear, 'Hochzeit!' which, as you probably know, means wedding. I don't know the origins of the traditions, but I wish that I would have had it done at my wedding 30 years ago."

There is a wonderful article titled "A Wedding Celebration" about the celebration in Bessarabia including photographs at this GRHC webpage: [http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history\\_culture/custom\\_traditions/traditions/bildkal.html](http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/custom_traditions/traditions/bildkal.html).

There is still space available for the 15th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany on May 20-30, 2009. Tour members must sign up by March 1, 2009.

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, The Libraries, NDSU Dept. #2080, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050 (Telephone: 701-231-8416; Email: [Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); the GRHC website: [www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc)).

*February 2009 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers.*