

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 I write this June column, I am at an internet cafe in the center of Odessa, Ukraine with our 15th Journey to the Homeland Tour group. Tour members have returned from visiting their ancestral Bessarabian and Black Sea former German villages near Odessa and Kischinev, Moldova. I want to share with you some of the comments from tour members.

Sharon Dobler Vegas of Idaho and her sister, Carol Dobler Harris of North Carolina, shared "In 1884, Christian Dobler left southern Ukraine (Bessarabia) hoping to find a better life for his family. In 2009, two great-granddaughters returned to Teplitz, Bessarabia, his birthplace. We were surprised to find the town looking much the same as described in records from the 19th Century. People we met with the help of our interpreter, Galina, and driver, Vladimir, remembered German times. They helped us locate plots of land that had belonged to the Doblens. In the cemetery, we found two headstones with the Dobler name. The inscriptions were badly deteriorated but one seems to be that of Georg Adam Dobler, the father of Christian. It is exciting and moving for us who have lived the good life they sought to see where it all began."

Mary Anne Ingenthron of Davis, California said, "We arrived in the villages and were moved as we walked across the same soil that earlier Volks

walked, visited churches where they were baptized and married--churches now mere ghosts of their earlier grandeur--mostly in ruin. We were reminded of the debt we owe to the courage of our ancestors who had the courage to pack up their families and venture into the unknown of the promise of the new land in America."

The GRHC will have displays and information tables at the 125th Anniversary Quasiquicentennial at Napoleon, ND on Friday, June 12 (10 am-6 pm) and Saturday, June 13 (10 am-4 pm) at the Fire Hall. Debra Marquart, a Napoleon native, and well known author of the book, *The Horizontal World: Growing Up Wild in the Middle of Nowhere*, will be autographing her book at the GRHC tables.

We will also be at the 125th events at Leola, SD on Friday, July 3 (10 am-6 pm) and Saturday, July 4 (10 am-4 pm) at the Municipal Building on Main Street. I am looking forward to being at Napoleon and Leola for their 125th celebrations.

The radio program, *Red, White, & Blue: German Russians Remember Independence Day*, airs on Prairie Public Radio July 3 at 3 pm and 7 pm (CST).

It features stories from the narrators of the Dakota Memories Oral History Project (DMOHP). These narrators grew up on the Northern Plains,

from South Dakota to North Dakota to Saskatchewan. During their oral histories, they share memories of community celebrations and gatherings, such as the Independence Day celebration. This program features a variety of clips – clips about firecrackers, foot races, togetherness, accidents and much more. Childhood historian, Jessica Clark, has added scholarly commentary, discussing the childhood memories of holiday traditions in a larger historical framework.

The Dakota Memories Heritage Tour is scheduled for September 18-20 to Germans from Russia sites in south central North Dakota. We invite you to join us, space is limited. For further information, contact Acacia (Jonas) Stuckle at 701-231-6596 or Acacia.Stuckle@ndsu.edu. The webpage is: www.ndsu.edu/grhc/dakotamemories.

For further information about the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, the Dakota Memories Heritage Tour, the Journey to the Homeland Tour 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; the GRHC website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc).

June 2009 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers.