

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

September marks the beginning of the new academic year and a very busy time on the NDSU campus. We are pleased to have student employees working for the GRHC on various projects.

The GRHC became part of a growing social network with a new facebook page at www.facebook.com/ndsugrhc. We are already impressed with the number of "fans" who joined the GRHC facebook page.

This summer was busy beginning with the Journey to the Homeland Tour in May. In June, I attended the Napoleon, ND 125th celebration where we had the GRHC displays, and the 50th Anniversary for Brother Placid Gross at Assumption Abbey, Richardton. In July, the GRHC had displays at the 125th event at Leola, SD. I also visited the Northern State University Library Archives in Aberdeen, SD, where they are developing a Germans from Russia section.

In August, I visited the southern Manitoba Mennonite communities of Morden, Winkler and Steinbach including the Mennonite Heritage Village Pioneer Day, the Center for Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg and the James Valley Hutterite Colony near Winnipeg. It was a memorable experience to meet with John Hofer, minister, and well known Hutterite historian.

Staff of the Dakota Memories Oral History Project hosted oral history workshops at Napoleon and Richardton, ND in May. They later held public

forums in August at Richardton and Napoleon covering the experiences of the June interviews in these communities. Further information can be located on the GRHC website at "Dakota Memories".

September includes the Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention at Rapid City, SD, September 9-13 and the Dakota Memories Heritage Tour to south-central North Dakota, September 18-20.

Often I am asked the question: "What books would I suggest which provide memoirs and life in the former German villages of South Russia?" I would highly recommend three books authored by Alfred Opp of Vancouver, British Columbia, who was born in the village of Teplitz, Bessarabia, Opp's books are: 1) *How the East Was Won*; 2) *Pawns on the World Stage* and 3) *Our Roots Grow Deep in the Russian Soil*. These Alfred Opp books are available from the GRHC.

Opp lovingly recalls the life and culture he enjoyed as a child. He recounts surviving the effects of WWII as a child among strangers and the lives of everyday people caught in the war. As a 14 year old, he had to learn to survive and also protect his younger brother when both of their parents were arrested by the Red Army. When the Iron Curtain descended in 1940, the village of Teplitz, Bessarabia packed up their household goods and began the Trek back to the Fatherland.

They had no idea what awaited them.

The author writes: "You will find a collection of stories and memories that represent many aspects of my life. Most are eye-witness accounts - experiences through which I have passed. These are stories I have kept in my heart, and now I have them with you." Alfred Opp completed a three-part series of interviews with his daughter. The transcriptions can be read at the GRHC website.

The 16th Journey to the Homeland Tour is May 20-30, 2010. The tour includes May 22-26 in Odessa, Ukraine visiting the former Bessarabian, Black Sea and Crimean German villages. The tour group also travels to Stuttgart, Germany for May 26-30 including a day tour to Alsace, France, and visits to the German-Russian museums in Stuttgart. Detailed Tour information and costs is at this webpage: www.ndsu.edu/grhc at "Homeland Tours."

For further information about the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, the 2010 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).

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