

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 with our 16th Journey to the Homeland Tour group in Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany (May 20-30). Memories of tour members of visits to their ancestral homeland villages will be shared in the July column.

When I return to Fargo, I look forward to traveling from June 16-19 to southwestern North Dakota to the Carson, New Leipzig, Mott and Elgin areas. I will visit these communities and German-Russian historic sites including the John Stern Homestead and cemeteries with wrought iron crosses. This will be the GRHC's first outreach experience to southwestern North Dakota. We will have displays at the Elgin, N.D. Centennial on June 18-19 at the Public Library on Main Street.

Prairie Public Broadcasting has produced a new documentary, "Homesteading." In 1862, for an \$18 filing fee and five years of labor, the land-hungry of all nations lay their claim to 160 acres of virgin prairie in North Dakota. The stories of those who succeeded and those who failed are shared. "Homesteading" explores the roots of the conflict surrounding public domain land and the forces that shaped the opening of the frontier. The documentary tells of the Great Land Boom that was made possible by the railroads, the Native American tribes who lived on the Great Plains, and the catalog of challenges that pioneers faced - disease, drought, illness, death, prairie fire, isolation and loneliness.

Like many immigrants, the great-grandparents of Debra Marquart, Ames, Iowa, native of Napoleon, N.D., had very different reactions to the challenge

of homesteading the unbroken prairie. Her grandfather's excitement to have the opportunity to build something from the ground up was not reflected in her grandmother's shock and dismay at the prospect.

Carol Just, St. Louis Park, Minn., native of LaMoure, N.D., is proud to acknowledge that all her great-grandparents were homesteaders in the German-Russian triangle in south central North Dakota. Two of her great-grandmothers claimed land in their own names.

In the 1880s, Eureka, S.D., was known as the "Wheat Capital of the West." Eureka was the end of the line for the busy Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific railroad. Its trains hauled out 4,000,000 bushels of wheat a year and hauled in car after car of Germans from Russia immigrants like Mark Opp's great-grandparents. Opp lives in Eureka, S.D.

The 40th Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention is July 21-25 at the Ramkota Hotel in Bismarck, N.D. For further information go to www.grhs.org or call 701-223-6167. The "Homesteading" documentary will be shown during the GRHS Convention.

Prairie Public Television in conjunction with the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, will present the Premier Showing of the new documentary, "It's All Earth and Sky," Wednesday, July 21 at 7 p.m. in the North Dakota Heritage Center on the capitol grounds in Bismarck. This 60-minute documentary features five representative Germans from Russia who describe their German-

Russian ethnicity and their families' immigration and growth into the larger picture of "becoming" American in the 20th century. Research and guideposts for the program were provided by Drs. Don Reeves-Marquardt and Lewis R. Marquardt of Austin, Texas. Funding was provided through the generous gift of Arthur E. and Cleora Flegel, Friends of Prairie Public and the GRHC. This forthcoming documentary is part of the award-winning "Germans from Russia Series" of Prairie Public Broadcasting.

The new "It's All Earth and Sky" documentary will be shown during the American Historical Society Germans from Russia International Convention, Embassy Suites Hotel in Lincoln, Neb., August 1-8. For further information, visit www.ahsgr.org or call 402-474-3663.

Contact the GRHC to secure these new documentaries, "Homesteading" and "It's All Earth and Sky."

The 17th Journey to the Homeland Tour is scheduled for May 18-28, 2011 for Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany.

For further information about the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, the Friends of the GRHC, the September 2011 Dakota Memories Heritage Tour, the May 2011 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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