

# 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 February column, I am pleased to announce the publication of an outstanding and impressive book, "Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains," compiled and edited by North Dakota State University Professor Emeritus, Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz and Troyd A. Geist, Folklorist for the North Dakota Council on the Arts. The book is a groundbreaking compilation thirty years' duration which celebrates the proud folk heritage of the Northern Plains. "Sundogs and Sunflowers" is a large-size, 350+ pages fully-illustrated book with more than 1,000 examples of folklore and folk art.

A sample of German-Russian folklore and folk art includes: The ghost story that inspired the title of Chapter One, "The boy who fell into a Grave," was told by an 82 year old German-Russian storyteller from western North Dakota. Chapter Three is devoted entirely to "Blizzard Stories" and several of these narratives are from German-Russian communities: Ashley, Harvey, Lehr, Mandan and Rugby, N.D.

In Chapter Four "Weatherlore," there are different stories about the "onion ritual," which is a traditional custom done on Christmas Eve to predict the next year's rain patterns. According to one German-Russian man, "It is God's tears that make it rain." Chapter Six mentions many German-Russian folk beliefs including photographs of "water witching" with L-shaped metal rods.

Chapter Seven includes more than 90 examples of folk medicine and traditional cures. The German-Russian

tradition of "Brauche" healing is discussed and color photos of the "egg and thread ritual." Chapter Eight emphasized holiday celebrations and other folk observances including the German-Russian holiday characters "Belznickel" and "Christkindl."

"Sundogs and Sunflowers" is available by contacting the GRHC. To purchase this book, visit <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/sundogs.html>.

Carolyn Schott, Seattle, W.A., has written "Visiting Your Ancestral Town: Connecting with Your Family History" available from the GRHC. Learn from her travel experiences and enjoy the entertaining stories that will either inspire you to try it yourself or wisely inform you to take some other path. Schott has been researching her family history for more than 13 years. She has visited her own ancestral towns in North Dakota, Germany, Ukraine, Hungary and Moldova. She has a website at [www.carolynschott.com](http://www.carolynschott.com).

In 2001 and 2008, Schott visited her ancestral villages of Neu Elft, Leipzig, Gnadenfeld (Bessarabia); Freudental (Odessa Region); Rohrbach and Worms (Beresan District) which are today located near Odessa, Ukraine. She writes, "The first time, I really went with fairly low expectations. With all the genealogy research I'd done, I thought it would be interesting to see the villages. I didn't expect to have a huge revelation or experience any mystical connection with my ancestors. But that really changed

once I was there."

"I visited the school in Neu Elft, that my great-grandmother Netz might have sat in that classroom or even that desk. To see the houses and the village, the church, the school, brings my whole family history to life in a way that is not possible from simply reading village histories or looking at village maps. Suddenly the stories of how they lived and worked make sense in a way not possible without actually being in the village. And it is rather a magical moment, standing in a cemetery where your ancestors are buried, and realizing that you have a connection to this place that was just a dot on a map before. My people lived their lives there and without the experiences they had in their lives in this village, I would not be the same person I am."

Limited reservations are available for 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 Dakota Memories Heritage Tour (September 15-18, 2011), 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](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); the GRHC website: [www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc)).

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