

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

I write this February column having departed for Buenos Aires, Argentina. I am in Argentina and Brazil until February 28th to review plans for a new Prairie Public Television documentary on the story of the Germans from Russia in South America, and their lives today. Many of these German-Russian families have relatives in Canada and the USA. I will share my travel experiences in future columns.

An impressive new book has been published, "Selz, Russia: Home Colony" by William C. Sherman, published by the University of Mary Press, Bismarck, N.D. Early in the 1800s the Russian government invited German families to take land on the open steppe not far from Odessa on the Black Sea. Beginning with a cluster of clay houses, a village grew up along the Kutschurgan River, which took the Alsatian name of Selz. Within several generations it became a thriving town, which served as a religious, cultural and commercial center for a dozen smaller German communities. The population reached well over three thousand.

The Communist Revolution, rising Russian nationalism, and two bloody world wars gave rise to enormous resentment. The Germans were seen as intruders. Religious persecution, Siberian exile, labor camps, and deliberate starvation darkened the atmosphere. Many fortunate ones had already migrated to the Americas and became pioneers in other open plains

regions. Today in Selz, no Germans remain. The town that remains is called Limanskoye. Ukrainian refugees from war-torn villages now occupy the good solid houses built by the Germans.

This small volume details the heroic and sad moments of the German past. Only memories remain. But with the fall of Communism, some historical details have become available. For thousands of Americans and Canadians who see the name Selz in their genealogies, this book will fill in details about the world their ancestors built and what happened to their relatives who were not fortunate enough to get to the New World.

Selz, in Pierce County, north central North Dakota, was named after this village of Selz (Limanoske) about one hour from Odessa, Ukraine. The parents of famous musician Lawrence Welk, Ludiwg and Christina (Schwahn) Welk were married and immigrated from the village of Selz, Russia to a homestead near Strasburg, N.D. During our May 2012 tour, to Odessa, Ukraine, we will be visiting the village of Selz.

Also in North Dakota, in the late 1800s, Anton Vetter established a post office on his homestead land, and gave it the name Selz. The location was five miles northeast of Hague in Emmons County. In 1903, mail no longer came to this Selz post office so the local Black Sea Germans from

Russia immigrants had to travel to Hague for their mail.

"Selz, Russia: Home Colony" is available from the GRHC. The webpage is <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/homecolony.html>

For further information about the Friends of the GRHC, the 19th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany (May 16-26, 2013), 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).

Note: The Events Calendar relating to the Germans from Russia is at http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/outreach/travel_dates/index.htm.

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