great North Dakota substitute. Mom and
unheated V orheisl [entryway] was a
Before we had our own freezer, the
Blachenda, Kuchen, and of course we
prune-filled cookies, popcorn balls,
Date Pinwheel, Plantation Crème, and
On the table were various cookies
to munch away and make Maistub!
Well, let’s have the Christkindl visit
Eve. In our community, when company
remember having the Belznickel and the
Homer Rudolf, Richmond, Va., native
as Santa Claus brings memories of my
childhood on Christmas Eve growing
up at Strasburg, N.D. I remember the
Belznickel and the Angels arriving at
our home on Christmas Eve before the
Midnight Mass.
Jolenta Fischer Masterson, Sequim,
WA., a longtime colleague and
Strasburg, N.D., native, writes: “On
Christmas Eve, three angels would enter
our home, cold with snow on their hair.
Wearing wings and tinsel crowns, one
angel was in pink, one in blue and one
in white. After singing “Stille Nacht” in
German and “Silent Night” in English,
the angels would disappear into the
night, after bringing a special gift for
each child – from the Christkindl, we
were told. Only after that special visit
would there be a gift exchange and
feasting. It was wonderful to be a child
in those days!”

Homer Rudolf, Richmond, Va., native
of Wishek, N.D. recalls: “Some of you
remember having the Belznickel and the
Christkindl visit our homes on Christmas
Eve. In our community, when company
came to visit during the Christmas
day, the hostess in variably said:
“Well, let’s have the Christkindl visit
us.” What happened was that cookies
and hard candy were brought out, and
eyeryone gathered around the table
to munch away and make Maistub!
On the table were various cookies
including Ammonia, Pfeffermesse,
Date Pinwheel, Plantation Crème, and
prune-filled cookies, popcorn balls,
Blachenda, Kuchen, and of course we
always managed to buy some halvah.
Before we had our own freezer, the
unheated Vorheisl [entryway] was a
great North Dakota substitute. Mom and
Dad said that often the only gift they
received a Christmas was an orange.
Barbara Bohn, Toronto, Ont., who
grew up on the Saskatchewan prairies
remembers: “When I was very small,
I remember Dad taking the youngest
children up into the attic and telling us
that this was the night the Christkindl
would come and bring us presents.
We would hear sleigh bells outside
and then the front door would crash
open and a huge box full of wrapped
gifts would come flying on the front
porch along with lots of snow and
cold. I loved Christmas Eve when Dad
would hitch the horses to the open
sleigh and we would all be bundled in
warm coats, boots, hats, mittens and
scarves. Dad would have put the bells
on the horses’ harnesses and away we
would go into the snapping cold under
the black sky filled with thousands of
stars that seemed so close you could
reach out to them. It was a magical
scene - brilliant write snowdrifts
sparkling against the backdrop of dark
spruce trees and shadows creating a
mysterious and beautiful landscape.”

Dr. Jessica Clark, authored an article
published in Heritage Review, 2007,
“The German-Russian Christmas:
Oral Histories from the Northern
Plains,” based on stories collected as
part of the GRHC’s Dakota Memories
Clark writes: “For German-Russian
children growing up on the Northern
Plains, Christmas was a time of joy,
cheer and celebration. The season
began with the annual Christmas
program held at school or church.
Most Christmas programs had a play
or skit about the birth of Jesus Christ.
Born in 1922, Alma (Janke) Schott
of Gackle, N.D., remembers that
most of the community participated
in these programs. There was never
an empty seat. Alma remembers her
parents always had the schoolhouse
ornamented with student-made paper
chains.”

Dr. Clark writes: “The Christmas
celebration commonly included a
traditional character or characters. For
the second and third generation these
characters include the Belznickel and
Krist Kindel (Christ Child), Santa Claus,
or all three. Growing up during the
1930s near Devils Lake, Balzer Kurtz
remembers all three were present during
his childhood. According to Balzer, the
festivities always started two weeks
before Christmas. As he remembers
it, first there was the Belznickel. ‘He
was a mean dude,’ exclaims Balzer.
The Belznickel came to identify which
children had been naughty and which
had been nice. Balzer recalls that the
Belznickel always reeked of booze,
carried a willow whip, and dragged a
chain. Then, a few days later, the Krist
Kindel appears. Balzer always recalls
the Krist Kindel being a woman – a
woman dressed in colorful formal attire,
with a hat and veil. She was a nice
one, according to Balzer. She gave the
children candy. According to Balzer,
Christmas morning someone always
came to his house dressed up as Santa
Claus, handing out a small gift for each
child. For the young children, these
colorful characters (the Belznickel, the
Krist Kindel, and Santa Claus) were the
highlight of Christmas.”

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 and photographs),
contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU
Libraries, PO Box 6050, Dept 2080,
Fargo, ND 58108-6050 (Tel: 701-231-
8416; Email: Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu;
the GRHC website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc).