

# In Touch with Prairie Living

July 2013

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Germans from Russia Heritage Collection  
North Dakota State University Libraries, Fargo



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA  
**GRHC**  
HERITAGE COLLECTION

I write this July column preparing to attend the Hazen, N.D. Centennial on July 3-5 and the 43rd Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention at the Ramkota Hotel in Bismarck on July 17-21. I look forward to seeing many friends and colleagues. For more information and to register, go to [www.grhs.org](http://www.grhs.org). We had a wonderful tour group for our May tour filled with life-time memories of visiting their ancestral German villages of the Bessarabia and Black Sea today near Odessa, Ukraine. The June days at the 125th celebration at Ashley, N.D. provided a valuable outreach opportunity. Our appreciation to the Ashley community for their impressive celebration and fine hospitality.

The April days in southern Brazil were an amazing and unforgettable experience. We filmed and interviewed persons in the states of Parana, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. The interviews were mostly in the German language, with some interviews in English, and only one interview in Portuguese. I was impressed how I could communicate in the German language especially at Mondai for these interviews with Bessarabian Germans with ancestral roots to the villages of Krasna and Teplitz. These families emigrated to Santa Catarina in the 1930s.

Ben Stommes, Prairie Public videographer, shared, "The people we encountered were incredibly friendly and welcoming. It was a great pleasure to work on the project, especially in such a unique setting." "Our journey to Brazil was fantastic" writes Dave Geck, videographer, "There were times that I thought, are we in Brazil or are we back home on the prairie of Dakota? The people were genuine and welcoming, and I found it amazing that

their first language in many cases is still German. I felt right at home!"

At Santa Rosa, state of Rio Grande do Sul, near the borders of Argentina and Paraguay, there is a large community of Volhynian German families. For many of these families, German is first language, even today. I was able to communicate with various age groups with my German dialect which I learned at home growing up at Strasburg, N.D. The organization and warm reception we received at Santa Rosa was a highlight of the April journey to southern Brazil.

With the community of Mennonite Germans at Colonia Witmarsum, state of Parana, I could easily communicate with their German Platt Deutsch. I was honored to interview in the English language, Dr. Peter Pauls, a well known Mennonite German historian. He has an extensive personal collection of books. Dr. Pauls donated three important books for the GRHC archives. We also interviewed in German, Elizabeth (Neufeldt) Janzen, and her daughter, Tania Majali (Janzen) Huebner. They are operating a modern diary farm with 160 cows. We filmed at the famous bakery in the Colonia Witmarsum where they were making German pastries and Kuchen. Many persons come to purchase their cakes and smoked sausage as well as their well known cheese products. We were deeply grateful for the warm hospitality of the Mennonite German community.

Another important interview was with Estaveo Mueller, a Marist Brother, who works at the Marist University campus in Curitiba, state of Parana. Brother Estaveo, who is still working full-time, born in 1927, at age 85, has written eight books relating to the Volga Germans who emigrated to

the state of Parana, especially from the villages of Johannesdorf and Mariental where he spent his childhood. He donated his published works for the GRHC archives. Brother Estaveo and Dr. Peter Pauls are well known throughout South America as leading German-Russian historians and writers. They will be important interviewees featured in the documentary on the story of the Germans from Russia in South America, produced by Prairie Public Broadcasting.

The states of Parana, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul have large agricultural production with two growing seasons for crops mostly of soybeans and corn. We filmed the harvesting of soybeans in April with the fall season and winter months approaching which are much more mild than in the Dakotas. I was impressed with the large agricultural grain processing plants, the huge elevators, and fertilizer operations. Roberto Racho at Santa Rosa, who is a sales representative for Pioneer Seed, shared with me that Brazil is the largest producer of soybeans in the world and 40% of sales goes to China. I saw many large implement dealers and harvesting with New Holland, Massey-Ferguson, Case and John Deere.

Photographs from April in southern Brazil can be seen at this webpage - <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/outreach/documentaries/sagrdp2013.html>.

For further information about the Friends of the GRHC, the 20th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany (May 15-25, 2014), 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](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); the GRHC website: [www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc)