

# In Touch with Prairie Living

September 2013

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

As I prepare this column, I look forward to my departure on September 22 to Buenos Aires, Argentina for the final filming and interviews for the 2015 South American Germans from Russia documentary project of Prairie Public Broadcasting. We will be filming persons of Black Sea, Mennonite and Volga German heritage. The Grauberger family of Colorado will travel to the state of Entre Rios for a family reunion where we will film. Also, in the state of La Pampa, southern Argentina, we will be filming the community of Mennonite Germans. Photographs from April 2013 in southern Brazil, and February 2012 in Argentina & Brazil are at <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/outreach/documentaries/sadocumentary.html>.

We look forward to interviewing many of the people we met in February 2012 in Argentina. We found that folks were very friendly and most interested to learn of the Germans from Russia in the USA and Canada. It is springtime in September/October in Argentina with temperatures in the 60s and lower 70s.

The GRHC will have displays in cooperation with the Tri-County Tourism Alliance at the 88th Sauerkraut Day at the Wishek Civic Center on Wednesday, October 9. Find our table and displays at the Wishek Armory from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Jeremy Kopp, GRHC Special Collections Associate, will attend. The displays will feature the impressive new book, "Ewiger Saat - Everlasting Yeast: The Food Culture of the Germans from Russia in Emmons County, Logan County and McIntosh County, North Dakota", available from the GRHC - <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/cookbooks/ewiger.html>.

The Little Country Theatre at North Dakota State University will present an outstanding German-Russian play, "Handing Down the Names"

on October 10-12 and 17-20, 7:30 p.m., at Askanes Hall on the NDSU campus. Further information is at [www.ndsu.edu/finearts](http://www.ndsu.edu/finearts). We have been working closely NDSU Theatre Department. Director of the play, Lori Horvik, shared, "I'm thrilled that we have been able to partner with the GRHC in promoting this production. It's especially fulfilling to work on a theatre piece that has so many connections to our audience's personal experiences and heritage." Jordan Christie, theatre arts graduate student and Wahpeton, N.D. native, has prepared a classroom lesson plan relating to the Germans from Russia, for the NDSU performances.

The basis of the story is on the family of Steven Dietz, a northern Colorado native with Volga German heritage, and the playwright of "Handing Down the Names". The play pays homage to his family's progress from Germany through Russia to America in a montage of stories about seven generations. Dietz writes, "the play is a combination of family history, gathered stories, historical research and sheer invention." Many Germans were promised a new life in Russia, where there would be free land and many other freedoms. The play focuses on these families as they embark on a yearlong journey along the Volga River to a destination where they must find ways to overcome starvation.

Dietz said he had always wanted to make a play out of the stories he had heard "as a way of documenting, theatrically, the lives of these people who I never knew." Dietz creates a seven-generation mosaic of the Dorn family from 1766 to 1949. The play imparts the loss and pain of separations as circumstances split

family apart, the struggle for survival, and the persistence of a people with a strong will to survive. Some family members settled in America while others were forced to return or stay in Russia during the turbulent early 20th century.

Dietz said his family left Russia in the early 1900s and made their way to northern Colorado, where they, like many immigrants there, took jobs working the beet fields. Dietz thinks "Handing Down the Names" is a strong play because "it is evidence of such a profound courage and faith, the desire to hold one's family together and keep one's culture alive in the midst of enormous hardships". Presented as a montage of stories, Dietz honors his family's enduring courage and uncommon choice to leave their German homeland and travel to Russia to secure a better life for their children. They and other immigrants became known collectively as the Germans from Russia, a peasant people whose family skills enriched the barren steppes for 150 years until oppression brought many to America in the early 1900s.

For further information about the Friends of the GRHC, the 20th Anniversary 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)

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