

In Touch with Prairie Living

October 2013

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

I write this column traveling in Argentina with Prairie Public Television videographers for the final filming and interviews for the 2015 South American Germans from Russia documentary project of Prairie Public Broadcasting. In a future column, I will share with you our experiences in Argentina from September and October.

The Little Country Theatre is celebrating its 100th Centennial at North Dakota State University and will present an outstanding German-Russian play, "Handing Down the Names", on October 10-12 and 17-20, 7:30 p.m. at Askanese Hall on the NDSU campus. Further information is at www.ndsu.edu/finearts. We have been working closely with the NDSU Theatre Department. Director of the play is Lori Horvik. 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 GRHC has a new book, "From Refugee to Rafters: A True Story of Flight, Freedom and Faith" authored by Rudolf Stepper with Elsie Loewen. From the back of the book, "When Russian tanks invaded Bessarabia in 1940, the simple carefree life of growing up in a farming village was over for 10-year-old Rudy Stepper. Under a looming cloud of war, his family joined 93,000 other Germans in a mass evacuation to Germany at the invitation of a charismatic new leader, Adolf Hitler. Resettled in Poland, their dreams of prosperity under a glorious Third Reich quickly turned to disillusionment and danger. Once again threatened by the advancing Russian army and faced with Germany's imminent defeat, they were forced to flee back to an uncertain future in the West. Rudy's courage and resourcefulness was vital to his family's

survival in the ruins of the post-war Germany. Would it be enough to meet the challenges of the new life he was determined to build in Canada?"

In the Foreword, Christen, a granddaughter of Rudolf Stepper writes: "I feel so privileged to have been able to hear Opi tell his stories. He has persevered through many challenges and hardship with a strong work ethic and by putting his faith in God. I admire him and appreciate everything he has done for his family. I want my children to know our history but would never be able to remember all his stories about being a refugee and building a new life for himself in Canada. This book gives me a better understanding of where he came from and how he got to where he is today. I especially remember him telling about assisting people across a frozen river to get away from the army pursuing them."

Anna Fischer once again captures us with her sequel to "Cry Out of Russia". "Looking Back" is a heartfelt passionate true story about a girl growing up under the Stalin Regime during World War II. She describes the gut-wrenching struggles of starvation and deportation of many thousands of villagers. In 1951, she immigrated to Canada trying to make it on her own in a very cruel and unforgiving world after the death of her husband. Anna reveals to us that cruelty can easily come from not only our surroundings but from people we thought would be there for us in times of sorrow and much needed support.

Anna Fischer was born in 1926 in Johannestal, (Beresan District) Ukraine, during the Stalin Regime. In 1951, she immigrated to Canada where she married Fred Fischer and lived on a farm in Horsham,

Saskatchewan, where they had four children. In 1969, Fred suddenly passed away leaving Anna no choice but to move to Medicine Hat to raise her children.

The books, "From Refugee to Rafters", "Cry Out of Russia" and "Looking Back", are available by contacting the GRHC at 701-231-6596 or by ordering online at library.ndu.edu/grhc/order/general/genbooks.html

Donations to the GRHC Special Collections include: Donna (Keller) Zeeb of Menno, S.D., who donated copied images of a sod house and barn near the Firesteel Trail in South Dakota, and four German language theology books dating from early 1880s to 1904. Dr. Elvire Necker-Eberhardt of Calgary, AB., donated school related photographs from Bessarabia in the 1920s, books and a textile. The collection dates from the 1920s to 2006. Magdalene (Leier) Riedlinger of Bismarck, N.D., donated a family Bible from Freidentental which belonged to the Riedlinger family. Molly (Koch) Speidel of Elvera, Calif., donated the book, "Compendium of History and Biography of North Dakota", published in 1900.

For additional 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 special collections, 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.