

In Touch with Prairie Living

April 2014

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

We are pleased to announce the completion of the Herb Poppke Collection. Herb Poppke, a son of German Russian immigrants, was always a fervent supporter in researching and preserving his heritage. He was a avid writer, researcher and collector; especially of maps and books. Mavis Amundson, his niece, shared, "Herb's genealogical research and his efforts to know more about German-Russians were a labor of love for him. He enjoyed every minute. He poured his heart into the research and into sharing what he learned with his family and others."

I have fond memories of visits with Herb Poppke at the Germans from Russia Heritage Society conventions. Herb leaves a living legacy of his lifelong efforts to document and preserve the rich heritage of the Germans from Russia culture.

Throughout the years, Herb Poppke collected a large volume of books relating to the Germans from Russia. Included in his donations were over 200 books. Although, the bulk of the collection is maps. Poppke was well known for researching and collecting maps. With more than 400 maps; these include Russia, Poland, Ukraine, and some of the USA. Maps are in English, German and Russian languages.

Herb's family shared, "The family of Herbert Poppke is very grateful to [the GRHC] for accepting [Herb's] archival papers and photographs and creating the Herb Poppke Collection... His findings were a treasure to his family, and we believe the information may be useful source material for future researchers seeking to understand the demographics, geography and history of Germans from Russia who immigrated to the United States."

Poppke was born in 1921 in the town of Goodrich, N.D. He was born to parents,

Theodore and Katharina (Felchle) Poppke, who had 13 children, 10 of which survived. Theodore Poppke (1887-1962) immigrated from South Russia in 1910. Katharina Felchle (1891-1932) was also a German-Russian immigrant who came to the USA in 1894. Herb graduated from Tuttle, N.D. High School in 1939. He graduated from college in 1951 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Louisville, later working for Coors Brewing Company in Colorado until his retirement in 1982.

Later, in 1993, Poppke went on an extensive trip to Ukraine where he took many photographs. The Germans from Russia Heritage Society has available the "Herb Poppke Photo albums: Volhynia, Glueckstal, Bessarabia, Libental, 1993" – www.grhs.org/store/digital-p.html.

Herb Poppke lived until age 91, passing away in August 2012. The extensive Herb Poppke Collection is available for research at the GRHC.

The finding aid (a descriptive summary) to the Herb Poppke Collection and the Poppke book listing are available at: <http://library.ndsu.edu/repository/handle/10365/21776>.

A new book available from the GRHC is "Strangers Before the Bench: A Historical Novel" by David Hecker. The book is a historical novel that demonstrates the value of studying lineage. One of the characters is George Schwartz who was born in Mandan, N.D., son of descendants of Germans from Russia. He completed his high school education in Mandan and graduated with a law degree from the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. George doesn't know the history of his lineage in South Russia during the

19th Century until he visits an uncle in Oregon, who explains his family history and gives him names and addresses of living relatives in Munich, Germany. George decides to visit Munich where he gets firsthand information from relatives who lived in South Russia under Stalin's collectivization era and World War II. They are forced to flee to Germany, but get caught by the Soviet Army in eastern Germany and are deported to forest work camps in the Ural Mountains of Siberia. Later in 1972, they are allowed to leave the Soviet Union and are accepted as citizens in Germany.

The book illustrates the importance of digging into family history. To secure this book, contact the GRHC or at <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/strangers.html>. David Hecker is also author of "Full Circle: A Journey in Search of Roots" – <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/fullcircle.html>.

For additional information about the Friends of the GRHC, the 21st Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany (May 14-24, 2015), 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

April column for North Dakota and South Dakota weekly newspapers.