

In Touch with Prairie Living

June 2014

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

As I write this June column, I am traveling with our 20th Journey to the Homeland Tour group in Germany. We visited Frankfurt, Regensburg, Munich, Ulm, Stuttgart and Alsace, France. I will share more of our days in Germany in a later column.

The *Emmons County Record*, Linton, N.D. published this article in the May 1 edition, "NDSU contingent shores up the barn at Welk Homestead" by Allan Burke. Burke writes: "For a man who didn't attend high school, Lawrence Welk surely would have been proud. A contingent of 13 volunteers from North Dakota State University, including a professor, a Ph.D. candidate and 11 undergraduate students, spent the weekend repairing the barn on the farm where he was born and raised.

It's not the same barn where Welk practiced his accordion, but it's been on the farm since the 1930s and is part of the historic site that will be operated by the State Historical Society of North Dakota beginning July 1, 2015. Pioneer Heritage, Inc. and the Tri-County Tourism Alliances will manage it until then. Prof. Isern's students are taking his class, History of the Great Plains 431, and one of the options is helping with a service project.

"We found the barn to need more stabilization than we thought base on earlier visits to the site, so we got a little nervous as we started pulling things apart." Isern said, "Some of the cross beams were no longer attached to the outside walls and were floating free."

Isern said the tentative plan is to organize a work party in July or August after harvesting is completed, and local volunteers from around the state will be invited to participate as part of the state's 125th anniversary. "We're thinking about calling it 'Proving Up the Welk Homestead,' and there is talk

of having a sausage contest and polka music." Isern said.

He plans to bring another student group to the site this fall to do cleanup work. Isern said he is excited about involving students in historical preservation and other service projects. "We need to tap the power of 14,000 students to do good things in the state." Isern said.

The foreman for the project is Clarence Anthony Herz, a 1985 Linton, N.D. graduate. Herz returned to NDSU in 2009 and earned his Master's Degree in American History. He is in the first year of his Ph.D. program in Great Plains History. His Master's thesis is titled, "Petroleum Exploration History in North Dakota to 1951."

"We had a great crew at the Welk Homestead, and they accomplished a lot in a day and a half," Herz said. "I look forward to coming back to my home area to do more work at the site."

Hosting the group was the Tri-County Tourism Alliance (Emmons, Logan & McIntosh) - www.germanrussiancountry.org. At the Welk Homestead, the Alliance folks served the workers stew in an antique cast iron kettle, knoeple soup, borscht, homemade bread, sausage and dessert.

Allan Burke writes in his weekly column, *From the Heartland*, "The young men and women, who will get some benefit from their efforts, worked hard shoring up the building and installing a three-quarter-inch plywood floor in the loft that will make the area safe as a site for classes and presentations if not a good, old-fashioned square dance."

"I'm sure Lawrence Welk would have been pleased to see such hard-working college students and to know

they are helping to preserve a historic place. I forgot to ask if any of them plays the accordion. Prof. Isern and his associates deserve a big thank you from people who support the site, and we hope their hard work is a sign of more good things to come."

Information about the Ludwig and Christina (Schwan) Welk Homestead and bandleader Lawrence Welk, go to http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/lawrence_welk/index.html. For information about The Lawrence Welk Collection housed at the NDSU Archives, go to <http://library.ndsu.edu/ndsuarhives/lawrence-welk-collection>. Since 1993, the Welk Homestead is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Welk Homestead is open to visitors June, July and August, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The 44th Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention is July 23-27, 2014 at the Davenport Hotel, Spokane, Wash. For further information, go to www.grhs.org. I look forward to seeing colleagues and friends at the Spokane GRHS convention.

For additional information about the Welk Homestead, 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.

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