

In Touch with Prairie Living

August 2014

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

On August 15, 2014, I will be attending the Tri-County Tourism Alliance meeting at Lehr, N.D. The Alliance includes the counties of Emmons, Logan and McIntosh, in south central North Dakota, one of the most heavily settled German-Russian regions on the Northern Plains and the USA. The focus of the Alliance is to preserve and promote the heritage and culture of the Germans from Russia on the prairies of North Dakota while encouraging tourism to the region. More information is at Prairie Legacy: German-Russian Country – www.germanrussiancountry.org.

The following day on August 16, I will be a volunteer docent at the Ludwig & Christina (Schwahn) Welk Homestead near Strasburg, N.D., my hometown. The Homestead will become a State Historic Site of the State Historical Society of North Dakota effective July 1, 2015. It will be the first State Historic Site dedicated to homesteading, pioneer farming and the heritage and culture of the Germans from Russia.

While attending the 44th Annual Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention (GRHS) at Spokane, Wash., July 23-27, I attend the following presentations:

David Hecker, Seattle, Wash., shared excerpts from his book, “Strangers on the Bench: A Historical Novel” available from the GRHC – <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/strangers.html>. His novel tells the fictional story of George Schwartz, born at Mandan, N.D., who serves as a Judge in the Seattle Immigration Courts.

Dr. LaVern Rippley, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn., presented a program entitled, “Black Sea German Colonists: Subjects of Politics, Diplomacy, Popular Opinion”. According to Rippley, “Until World War I, German settlements in the

Black Sea region could be described in three key ways: 1) large population growth from high birth rates; 2) impressive economic growth in the second half of the 19th century; 3) robust expansion of German land tenure at the expense of Russian large estate owners and land-poor Russian peasants.”

Bob Ell of Saskatchewan, presented “The Story of Canada’s Germans from Russia”. Ell shares, “The Russian writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, was impressed with the Germans from Russia and their ability to adjust and settle wherever they located and in spite of their history of persecution, managed to maintain their language, customs and religious beliefs. Solzhenitsyn compared them to the branches of willow trees that so easily take root when bent and forced towards the ground.”

Allyn Brosz of Washington, D.C., a native of Tripp, S.D., presented a workshop entitled, “Return to the Homeland: Finding Germans from Russia in the U.S. Passport Application Files”. Brosz stated that, “Contrary to popular belief, Germans from Russia who came to the United States did go home again.” He shared the story of Charles Young (Karl Jung) born in 1874 who was in close contact with President Theodore Roosevelt regarding his importing of Karakul sheep to southwest Texas. Young authored a book, “Abused Russia”.

Nancy and Alex Herzog of Boulder, Colo., with special assistance from Dona Reeves-Marquardt and Lewis R. Marquardt of Austin, TX., presented “The Impact of Nazi Occupations on the Ethnic Germans Living in Ukraine, 1941-1944”. They shared quotes from the personal memoirs of ethnic Germans who lived through

the occupation. In 1944, the Nazi army evacuated some 130,000 ethnic Germans to Poland, thus ending 140 years of German village life in southwest Russia.

Dr. Eric Schmaltz of Oklahoma presented “A Historic October 2013 Tour of the Germans from Russia Settlements in Argentina”. Schmaltz shared about his experiences traveling to Argentina in 2013. The first Volga German settlement in Argentina was organized in 1878 at Hinojo near Buenos Aires. Today it is estimated there are about two million ethnic Volga Germans in Argentina.

Kathy Kovacs of Saskatchewan presented, “Sudden and Unexpected Escape from Communist Russia: The Long trek in 1943”. She shared stories of her childhood and the difficult trek from southern Ukraine to Poland and later to Germany. In 1948, she immigrated with family to Regina, Saskatchewan.

The 2015 GRHS Convention will be held at the Ramkota Hotel in Bismarck, July 15-19.

For additional information about the Ludwig & Christina (Schwahn) Welk Homestead, Friends of the GRHC, the 21st Journey to the Homeland Tour to 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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