

In Touch with Prairie Living

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By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

As the Holiday Season approaches, I wish to extend Yuletide Best Wishes and a special “Weihnachten” greetings to you and your family.

Childhood memories growing up in a German-Russian family shares many fond thoughts. Mary Ebach, Rugby, ND, recalls, “Mother had to do all the baking and the cooking. Her baking consisted mostly of making her fabulous Ammonia Cookies. After Midnight Mass, we went home and served a meal with baked ham our mother made, that was wrapped in dough to keep it moist and then baked, her vinegar and oil potato salad, goladetz (pigs feet), head cheese and kucha.”

Mary Ebach and her sister, Clara, of Rugby, ND, appear in the award-winning Prairie Public documentary, *At Home in Russia, At Home in the Prairie* making German borscht and pumpkin plachenta. The documentary is available at <https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/tapes/kutschurgan.html>

Sue (Kasemen) Balcom, Mandan, ND, native of Gackle, ND, shares these memories, “Christmas Eve was always spent attending services at Martin Luther Church in Fredonia. Silent Night (Stille Nacht) was always sung in German. Without fail, we always spent Christmas Day visiting our grandparents. Grandma Kaseman had dried fruits and lots of nuts. When asked, she would produce a jar of her effervescent dill pickles – beyond compare. Grandma Meidinger had frosted honey cookies, homemade caramels and fruit. My mother told me once, after I said I didn’t want to take an orange home, to never say no to my grandmother’s offer again. There were not a lot of presents. We were poor, inasmuch as we just didn’t have as much stuff as others...we never noticed.”

Balcom will be featured in the

2017 Germans from Russia foodways documentary sponsored by Prairie Public Television and the Tri-County Tourism Alliance. In October 2016, she visited the Napoleon Public School where she cooked with students, teaching them to make potato bread, custard fruit kuchen and sauerkraut. Balcom is editor of the book, *Ewiger Saat: Everlasting Yeast the Food Culture of the Germans from Russia in Emmons County, Logan County, and McIntosh County*, and *Ready for School: Memories of Country Schools in North Dakota German-Russian County*.

Merv Weiss, Saskatoon, SK, writes, “We always had Christmas Mandarin oranges and often halvah. Halvah is a rich confection made from ground sesame seeds and honey or syrup, sometimes with dried fruit and nuts added. In the good-harvest years, Mom would buy an entire metal cake-pan of halvah, and would have to hide it until Christmas. For gifts, we would spend hours looking at the Eaton’s and Simpson Sears’ catalogues. We knew Dad would pick up our gifts at the Post Office or train station during the day. By the time we came home from school, they would have been well hidden.”

Chris Huber shared this story in the book, *Hollyhocks and Grasshoppers*, “As a child of immigrant South Dakota farming parents, the Depression of the 1930s remains a most vivid memory for me. A yearly high point for me was our country church’s annual children’s Christmas program, St. John’s Lutheran Church, rural Hosmer, SD, was still conducted in the German language with the children reciting many German Christmas religious folk songs. Every Wednesday evening, my parents would pack up their six children, into the unheated Ford Model A sedan and off

to practice we would go.” *Hollyhocks and Grasshoppers: Growing Up German-Russian in America* is available at <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/hollyhock.html>.

In October, Dr. David Moon, Anniversary Professor of History, University of York, Great Britain, visited the GRHC for his research. He is a distinguished scholar of rural Russia and environment history. His most recent book is *The Plough that Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia’s Grasslands, 1700-1914*. Dr. Moon gave a presentation at NDSU titled, *The Amerikan Steppes: Russian Influences on the Great Plains*. He visited the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, South Dakota State University, NDSU, and the University of Winnipeg.

Harry and Gisela Radke of Solingen, Germany, recently visited the GRHC. Harry was age 2 when his family fled from Kulm, Bessarabia, in 1940 during WWII to Poland and later fleeing in 1945 to Germany. They presented valuable historical German books of Leipzig and Bessarabia. While in North Dakota, they visited New Leipzig and Kulm, ND.

If you would like more information about the May 2018 Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine; or would like donate to the GRHC (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; website: www.ndsu.edu/GRHC.

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