

In Touch with Prairie Living

April 2015

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

In March 2015, I received a most interesting letter from Verna (Fischer) Green, Hastings, Minn., who is 88. Verna grew up in Hague, N.D., her parents were Karl E. and Lena (Kocher) Fischer. Her Fischer grandparents immigrated to the Hague area from the Black Sea German village of Selz, Kutschurgan District, South Russia, today near Odessa, Ukraine. I plan to visit Verna in Hastings, Minn., to complete an interview and to review her historical documents for donation to the GRHC Archives. I will also attend the North Star Chapter of Minnesota Germans from Russia spring banquet on April 25, Berea Lutheran Church, 7538 Emerson Avenue South, Richfield, Minn. The program will be a tribute to bandleader Lawrence Welk, native of Strasburg, N.D. For more information, go to www.northstarchapter.org.

Verna (Fischer) Green graduated from the Hague High School in 1943 at the age of 16. Verna began studies in music at the College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, Minn. Later she finished her three-year degree in Nursing in 1948.

With her correspondence, Verna included an original typewritten letter dated February 7, 1948, from Lawrence Welk written to her father, Karl Fischer. Lawrence Welk wrote, "We are playing at the Trianon (in Chicago) but got permission to go to Madison (Wisconsin) to play the biggest prom of the year. Everyone dressed formal and it was possibly the highest class dance I have played in years. *Look* and *Life* Magazines were there and I had some pictures taken with the Governor. The family now consists of two girls and a young boy – Shirley, Jean, Donna Lee and the youngest child is Lawrence Jr. We are closing at the Trianon tomorrow and will then be working out of Chicago before going to the Chase Hotel in St.

Louis, and then to the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City."

Verna continues, "My father was very musically talented and enjoyed playing his accordion with Lawrence Welk, who could not read notes, so he would listen to my Dad play all the "new" music especially, "fox trots" so he could play with his band at the barn dances! My Dad also had a band, "Fischer's Famous Four". After he married, he became postmaster in Hague and held that position for 36 years. He played church organ for 25 years, led the band with his trumpet and played piano at many occasions. After he retired he moved to Minneapolis where he played accordion and later drums with five different Senior Citizen's bands. He played his electric organ in his apartment almost until his death at age 97 in 2000. My dad was born September 25, 1902. My father always kept in touch at Christmas time with Lawrence Welk. I am now 88 years old. I always enjoy your articles in the *Emmons County Record!*"

Karl Fischer wrote a Letter to the Editor, *Emmons County Record* regarding driving to Strasburg to watch a baseball game, "I always looked for Lawrence Welk and we sat in an open Model T to watch the game. We did not see much of the game because we always talked about music, in German of course. When Lawrence had a job in Hague, he would come down on the train sometimes (from Roscoe, S.D). We walked down the street together to advertise the dance he was to play that evening. Some people came just to hear the accordion. After the dance, if he could not get a ride home, I invited him to stay with me. After breakfast we went into the living

room to practice on my dad's pedal organ. Lawrence always carried some sheet music with his accordion. I already had some music lessons from our Hague Brass Band lead Mr. Franz Neihartz. I played some of the sheet music with one finger. Lawrence taught me some fast waltzes. When we were tired we would pack up his accordion and walk to the train to go home. Lawrence told me to buy a set of drums and play with him. It took quite a while before I finally did buy a three piece drum set. I also had an old Model T Roadster to get around with."

"I played with Lawrence in Hague, at a Werlinger barn dance, some basket socials and in the green farm schools. Once he called me and made a deal with me. He had a job to play near the Missouri River northwest of Westfield. He came down on the train, we tied up our equipment on the back little trunk of my car and headed for Westfield. Late in the evening when Lawrence got tired playing he told me to play a number and he would play the drums. In the morning we had another session on the pedal organ. In 1920, I left Hague to go to school. Lawrence made mention of me on page 30 in his book, *Wunnerful! Wunnerful!*"

For additional information about Lawrence Welk, go to http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/lawrence_welk/index.html. The Lawrence Welk Collection housed at the NDSU Archives is at <http://library.ndsu.edu/ndsuarhives/lawrence-welk-collection>.

If you would like more information about the Friends of the GRHC or donations to the GRHC (such as 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; GRHC website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc.