

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

“American Dreams” is an exhibit featured at the Hjemkomst Center, Moorhead, Minn., from May 13 to August 13. The NDSU Public History Museum Studies class has prepared the exhibition which features the Father William C. Sherman Photograph Collection of images from central and western North Dakota historic architecture including Germans from Russia. The Sherman Collection is part of the GRHC Special Collections. The Grand Opening is May 13, 7 pm., free and open to the public.

PRAIRIES, the monthly magazine of the Ashley Tribune, Ashley, N.D., was published by Warren and Barbara Overlie from 1975 to 1986. Many articles included the history and culture of the Germans from Russia community of south-central North Dakota. L.E. Buchholz, a monthly contributor, would write his column of “Conversations”. The May 1985 column is “Planting Corn”.

Buchholz writes, “Planting – We had a John Deere and a Case planter on our farm near Lehr, North Dakota. They were complete with a neck-yoke, pole, and team evener. Each was pulled by a team of horses, and had rope-spaced marker arms. Each planted two rows. Planters looked like light and simple machines. But they required a good driver and needed careful attention. We put the seed in 10 gallon cream cans, and set them at the fields’ ends. The cans were weather-proof, and were easy to pour from.”

Cultivating – “We used two cultivators at a time. One was an IHC and the other was a John Deere. They plowed one row at a time, and were pulled with a team of horses. These machines had had four and five handles each, together with foot guides. If one enjoyed long hours of field work,

driving through an 80-acre field three times per season, then that was the kind of work to do. At the end of the day, the shovels had to be oiled to prevent rusting.”

Hand Cultivator – “This had handles like a breaker plow. It had a front wheel, and was pulled by one horse. The leader walked in one row, the horse the other, while another man guided the machine. It would save much hoeing in the watermelon patch rows. But we still had to get down on our hands and knees to pull plant weeds.”

Binding – “The corn binder might well be called a harvesting machine. It was pulled by three horses, and cut one row at a time. The driver was seated, and the machine had a bundle carrier. This allowed the bundles to be lined in rows for shocking. We would cut 8 to 12 rows at a time and then make big shock piles. We put them up green for curing because we wanted this work done before it had any chance to be hit by frost.”

Stallioners – “From about May 15th to July 1st, draft horse stallion leaders were out with their horses on the highways and byways. In most cases, it appeared that the stallion seemed to be leading the man. In their days, these community or company stallions were ruled over with an iron hand and kept under lock and key. A breeding mad-stallion had to be kept under control. He had to perform well on strange farms.”

“Some local, historic sayings have stood the test of time in that they are still alive. It was in the turn of the century that a Swen Carlson and his family became restless in the state of Iowa. He sent some of his sons to our part of North Dakota with orders

to eye out a township of land, or 36 sections. He told them to make sure that good water and a grazing supply were in existence. The men, on arrival, found the people to be hard-working Germans, living on small tracts of land, not even interested in the vast territory which lay in virgin sod. The Iowans then sent a telegram back home, saying, “Dad, it’s endless and hopeless as far as the eye can see, and as far as a horse can be ridden, there is grass waist-high to the horses and plenty of lakes.”

“And so one of the great stock empires of our time was established, headquartered two miles west of us. But the ranch failed. In our country, the winter cometh. And it can prove deadly. Feed gives out. Water freezes over. Lakes that are four- and six-foot deep can freeze solid to the bottom.”

“Now for a closing contrast. In 1934, an uncle of mine, pulled into the yard. With great alarm and anger, he shouted: “What do you want with all this stock? There’s not a blade of grass or leaf of hay in the 40 miles separating us! Shoot them all! They are worthless!” “Take it easy,” answered my father. “Calm down. When one door closes, another will open. Those were true words my father spoke. But, believe me, things became rough. Nevertheless, we stayed on. The fact is we are still here.” The complete series of articles from the PRAIRIES magazine with permission of the Ashley Tribune appear at <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/articles/magazines/articles/index.html>.

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.