

# In Touch with Prairie Living

June 2015

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA  
**GRHC**  
HERITAGE COLLECTION

The Ludwig & Christina (Schwahn) Welk Homestead, birthplace of Bandleader Lawrence Welk, near Strasburg, North Dakota, is open for visitors Thursdays to Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. until Labor Day, September 7, 2015. The Homestead becomes a State Historic Site effective July 1, 2015. Further information is at [http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history\\_culture/lawrence\\_welk/pioneer.html](http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/lawrence_welk/pioneer.html).

The World Premiere of Prairie Public's new 60-minute documentary, *We (Never) Don't Forget – South American Germans from Russia* is Wednesday, July 15, 2015, 7:30 p.m., at the Heritage Center on the capitol grounds, Bismarck, ND. This documentary is the 8th of the award-winning Germans from Russia Series. The World Premiere is free and open to the general public. Broadcast of the documentary will be on Prairie Public in the fall of 2015, and PBS stations in 2016.

South America, similar to North America before the turn of the 1900s, was a land of opportunity; a magnet of immigration from Europe and Asia. One of the groups seeking a new life from their home were Germans from Russia - Volga Germans, Germans from the Black Sea, from Volhynia and Bessarabia, Mennonites as well - all began to seek new homelands as early as the 1870s. Many went to Canada and the USA and settled in the Great Plains to become wheat farmers as they had been in Russia. Others heard of opportunities in South America. When the first settlers arrived in South America in 1877-1878, they found an environment quite unfamiliar to what they had experienced in Russia. Over the next forty years, many more immigrants would follow.

Argentina offered more favorable land for planting wheat, gently rolling

farmland as in Russia, but not as cold. Daniel Beros of Buenos Aires tells in German, "Argentina was a land of immigrants from all over the world and there were also many German nationals here. German-Russians had a funny dialect and funny clothes, were treated as Russians by these Germans. This caused an identity crisis in a land of so many ethnic groups." Daniel grew up in the state of Entre Rios with a large population of Volga Germans.

Florentina (Mueller) Grukke, of Mondai, Santa Catarina, southern Brazil, speaks in her German interview, "They would have liked to have gone back to Bessarabia because everything was jungle here, there was no work. They hadn't imagined how it would be. They would like to have returned if they could have, but there was no money, not anything at all and so they just had to start over here in the jungle." Florentina's parents, immigrated to the State of San Catarina, in the 1930s from Krasna, Bessarabia. Her father, Nikodemus Mueller, is also interviewed in the documentary.

Fabian Deilhoff, from the state of Entre Rios, Argentina, shares in Spanish, "I am of Argentinian and Volga German blood. What we have learned from our parents we follow by transmitting to our children. We are who we are because of all the things our ancestors have left us. Our pride is a way to honor our ancestors for everything they have passed on to us. Argentinians are the people who opened the door for us."

Roberto Racho, Santa Rosa, Rio Grande du Sul, southern Brazil, tells in his interview, "Knowing the past opens doors in the future. If I didn't know the stories of my grandpa,

I wouldn't be able to talk to people in Canada." Santa Rosa was settled by Volhynian Germans. Roberto has relatives in Saskatchewan.

The 45th Annual Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention is July 15-19, 2015, Ramkota Hotel, Bismarck. Further information at [www.grhs.org](http://www.grhs.org). I look forward to joining the GRHS Convention bus tour on July 15 visiting the Ludwig and Christina (Schwahn) Welk Homestead near Strasburg, and touring the St. Mary's Catholic Church and Cemetery at Hague and the St. John the Baptist Catholic Cemetery, near Zeeland.

The exhibit, *American Dreams: Immigrants Carved Out Their Place on the North Dakota Plains*, is on display until September 30, 2015, at the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County (Hjemkomst Center), Moorhead, Minnesota. The exhibit features the GRHC's Father William C. Sherman Photograph Collection of images from central and western North Dakota focusing on early immigrant homesteads. The Sherman Collection can be viewed at [www.digitalhorizonsonline.org](http://www.digitalhorizonsonline.org). See the *American Dreams* exhibit at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ndsu-libraries-grhc/albums>.

If you would like more information about the GRHC or if you would be willing to donate 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](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); GRHC website: [www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc).

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