

In Touch with Prairie Living

July 2015

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

July 1st marks a new beginning for the six-acre Ludwig and Christina (Schwan) Welk Homestead, near Strasburg, N.D. For on that date the historic site, birthplace of bandleader, Lawrence Welk, will become the newest historic site managed by the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND). It will be the first site in the state to focus on the topics of agriculture, homesteading and the life of the Germans from Russia.

On June 24, the *Fargo Forum* newspaper featured an article, "Feelings bittersweet for Welk family as state prepares to take over famous bandleader's boyhood home, July 1." Lawrence Welk's niece, Evelyn Welk Schwab, who grew up on the Welk farmstead, commented, "Naturally there's bittersweet feelings, and at the same time, the time has come where we can't take care of it anymore, and this way the legacy will live on. It's hard. Sometimes I have to blink back a tear when I think about it. But we had a good 25 years (managing the historic site), and the time has come when some younger generation has to take the reins now."

The Tri-County Tourism Alliance (Emmons, Logan and McIntosh counties in south central North Dakota) is working closely with SHSND on new developments and programming at the historic site. SHSND held community conversations about the Welk Homestead on May 13, at Strasburg, and June 30 at Napoleon. The final community conversation will be at 6 p.m. on July 14, at the Shed Bar and Grill, Ashley, N.D.

Diane Rogness, SHSND Historic Sites Manager said, "These public town meetings provide a way to get local people informed and involved in this great project. We will share information

about planning for the site, and will want to hear public suggestions about how to best manage and promote this site."

SHSND Director, Claudia Berg stated, "The State Historical Society is developing interpretive and exhibit plans for the Welk Homestead that will be implemented over the next two years to showcase pioneer farming and homesteading and the Germans from Russia who settled the area, using the Welk family as an example. We won't lose Lawrence Welk in the story, but we will be giving more attention to the German-Russian culture and the agricultural story, which are both important stories and aren't addressed at any of our other (56 historic) sites. We can see over the next several years the site developing and becoming a travel destination for south-central North Dakota."

Premiering at the 45th Annual Germans from Russia Heritage Society (GRHS) International Convention in Bismarck, July 15-19, will be the following new GRHC traveling displays: 1) Preserving Architecture: Sustaining German-Russian Heritage 2) The Story of the Germans from Russia: Germans Who Journeyed First to Russia, and Then to America, Seeking Freedom and Prosperity. 3) The Hutmacher Farm, Killdeer, 4) The Welk Homestead, Strasburg, 5) St Andrews Lutheran Church, Zeeland. 3, 4, and 5 are all listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The world premiere of Prairie Public Television's documentary, *We Never (Don't) Forget – South American Germans from Russia* will be held at 7:30 p.m., Wednesday July 15, at the Heritage Center in Bismarck and is free and open to the public. The documentary will also be shown

at 8:30 p.m., Friday, July 16, for those attending GRHS Convention.

The GRHC was pleased to have a visit from Father William C. Sherman, Grand Forks, ND, on May 13, 2015. He reviewed work completed for the GRHC's "Father William C. Sherman Photograph Collection" which includes thousands of photographs and slides taken by him during his research of homestead settlements in central and western North Dakota from 1971-1979. While in Fargo, Father Sherman was interviewed at Prairie Public Television studios. That evening he attended the opening of the *American Dreams* exhibit at the Hjemkomst Center, Moorhead, Minn., which features some of his research. The collection can be found online at www.digitalhorizonsonline.org.

Father Sherman is also a well known author. His latest work, *Selz: Home Colony*, provides a history of the village of Selz, near Odessa, in what is now Ukraine. Emigrants from Selz, Ukraine, founded the town of Selz in Pierce County, N.D. Father Sherman received an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of Mary, Bismarck, in 2003 and again in 2014 from the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. The book is available at <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/homecolony.html>.

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; GRC website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc.

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