

# In Touch with Prairie Living

August 2015

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA  
**GRHC**  
HERITAGE COLLECTION

The July 15, 2015 World Premiere of Prairie Public's new documentary, *We (Never) Don't Forget: Germans from Russia in South America*, was well received with large audiences at the Heritage Center, the Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention in Bismarck, and the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Convention in Billings, Montana. My deepest gratitude to Lewis and Dona Reeves-Marquardt for their impressive script and to the production staff at Prairie Public Broadcasting for visually sharing an outstanding world-class documentary that vividly portrays a new story for the German-Russian global community.

Prairie Public Broadcasting will have the television premiere of *We (Never) Don't Forget: Germans from Russia* on Thursday, September 24, 7 p.m. (CDT) and Sunday, September 27, 6 p.m. (CDT). To purchase the DVD, go to – [http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/tapes/we\(never\)dontforget.html](http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/tapes/we(never)dontforget.html).

Like North America before the turn of the 1900s, South America was a land of opportunity – a magnet of immigration from Europe and Asia. Many of these immigrants were directly related to Germans from Russia in the United States and Canada. They were a mixture of Black Sea Germans, Volga Germans, Volhynian Germans, Bessarabian Germans and Mennonite Germans.

The wanderers to South America were no longer guided by the North Star in the nightly sky; rather, they found the Southern Cross and a climate exactly in reverse to what they knew. Their traditions are the traditions of North America – their culture, our culture; their music, our music.

James Gessele of Minneapolis, MN, native of Mercer, ND, who attended the

World Premiere, writes, “*We (Never) Don't Forget: Germans from Russia in South America*, is simply astounding. Its executive producers, Bob Dambach and Michael Miller along with their respective staffs and volunteers have once again crafted a first-rate video production.”

Gessele continues, “Alone, the Brazilian/Argentine landscape is riveting, and Dambach and crew have masterfully captured it and its people at work and play. Huge credit goes to Miller's staff for assembling and translating a mountain of voice recordings and written testimony into a coherent script. The collaborative result is of profound educational value with a seamless story line told in a way that is a good as it gets. South American Germans from Russia do what their North American counterparts have done and still do but instead of the North Star as their grounding force, they look upon the Southern Cross for guidance.”

On July 15, a group of us visited the Welk Farmstead. Evelyn (Welk) Schwab, Strasburg, ND, who grew up there, donated the Welk family book which includes names and birth dates of family members and a shawl belonging to Christina (Schwahn) Welk, brought from the village of Selz, Kutschurgan District, South Russia, when she immigrated to the Welk Homestead northwest of Strasburg in 1893. Evelyn's uncle was bandleader Lawrence Welk. Evelyn presented the donations to Bridget Burke, Dean of Libraries; Dr. Ann Braaten, Curator of the Emily P. Reynolds Costume Collection; and Michael Miller, NDSU.

A *Fargo Forum* editorial dated June 30, regarding the Ludwig & Christina (Schwahn) Welk Farmstead as a State Historic Site reads, “The Welk home will be a focal point that

will afford opportunities to showcase the contributions, past and present, of an ethnic group that has been as important as any to the history of North Dakota. It's future is a touchstone of the history of the German-Russian settlers in the region will be assured.”

Joining NDSU staff at the Welk Farmstead was Margaret Height, Indiana, daughter of the well-known German-Russian author, Dr. Joseph S. Height, and Kendra Heck, Pennsylvania. Margaret and Kendra were members of the 2013 NDSU Journey to the Homeland Tour. Margaret visited her ancestral village of Mannheim near Odessa, Ukraine. We also visited the impressive St. Mary's Catholic Church and cemeteries at Hague, N.D. including the historic Black Sea German wrought-iron crosses. At Strasburg, we visited the Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church.

The Hague and Strasburg churches house murals and paintings by the famous religious artist, Count Berthold von Imhoff (1858-1939). Imhoff was born in Germany had his home and studio in St. Walburg, Saskatchewan. He decorated churches in many rural villages of Saskatchewan and North Dakota. The Imhoff Museum & Art Gallery is at St. Walburg – [www.imhoffgallery.com](http://www.imhoffgallery.com).

For July 2015 photographs of the Welk Farmstead and Hague, North Dakota go to – [www.flickr.com/photos/ndsu-libraries-grhc/collections](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ndsu-libraries-grhc/collections).

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).