

In Touch with Prairie Living

September 2015

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

Prairie Public Broadcasting television's premiere of *We (Never) Don't Forget: Germans from Russia in South America* is Thursday, September 24, 7 p.m. and Sunday, September 27, 6 p.m.

The 90th Anniversary Sauerkraut Day is Wednesday, October 14, at the Civic Center and Armory in Wishek, N.D. At the Armory on October 14 (10 a.m. to 3 p.m.), the GRHC will feature the new banner displays, *Preserving Architecture: Sustaining German: Russian Heritage* and *The Story of the Germans from Russia*. The *Preserving Architecture* exhibit features three National Register of Historic Places in North Dakota: 1) Hutmacher Farm, Killdeer; 2) St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Zeeland; 3) Welk Farmstead near Strasburg. The banners will be on display at the Welk Homestead near Strasburg, N.D. in 2016.

The premiere of the new traveling exhibit, *Women behind the Plow* will be on Sauerkraut Day, October 14, at the Wishek Care Center. The exhibit is sponsored by the Tri-County Tourism Alliance. The Alliance was formed in 2011 to promote heritage tourism in Emmons, Logan and McIntosh counties in south central North Dakota, largely settled by the Germans from Russia – www.GermanRussianCountry.org. The exhibit will be on display from October 14 to November 14, 2015.

Women played a key role in the settling of German-Russian country in North Dakota and were given very little in way of recognition, land or wealth. They birthed large families and kept them fed with large gardens, food preservation, and bread – the staff of life. They assisted with butchering, raising livestock, fieldwork, cooking, and whatever else they needed to survive. How did these women learn about

providing for families, sewing clothes, and crocheting the scarce niceties in their homes? In addition to being wives and mothers, many were farm hands, healers, teachers, housekeepers and artists; keeping traditional holidays and religious customs.

Sue Balcom, exhibit curator, writes: "Photos and stories are used to create a traveling exhibit honoring the unrecognized work of women who not only tended to household chores and children, but worked elbow to elbow with their husbands. Funny how people begin to recall their life on the farm as the best time ever. Yes, the work was difficult, daily, strenuous, and sometimes dangerous; but they wouldn't trade the experience for anything. In fact, they hang on to tidbits from their past; whether photos, letters, trinkets, or even stories from an old rock pile in the middle of a field."

Kulak: Love and Death, A German-Russian Tragedy - Ukraine, 1938 is a new novel by Cleon Ochsner. The label "kulak" was broadened in 1918 to include any peasant who resisted handing over their grain to detachments from Moscow. During 1929-1933, Stalin's leadership of the total campaign meant that peasants with a couple of cows or five acres more than their neighbors were being labeled "kulaks".

The author is able to bring to life the trials and struggles experienced by his German-Russian ancestors and thousands of others during the Stalin purges. Starting in 1941, when the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) banned ethnic Germans from the Soviet military, many were sentenced to labor camps where they lost their lives in the labor army or were executed after a brief trial. These executions, which was Jakob Ochsner's fate, occurred throughout

the years of Stalin's purge in 1937-1938. The book, *Kulak: Love and Death* is available at <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/kulakbook.html>.

Visibility: Ten Miles – A Prairie Memoir in Photography and Poetry is a new book by Ken Smith, photographer and Sharon (Grenz) Chmielarz, poet. The majority of the photographs were taken in North Dakota, but also include scenes from South Dakota, Minnesota and Nebraska. The title refers to the ability to see for miles on the prairie, not city blocks or as far as the next building. The book shows the reader what might be unseen, unremembered, or even unimagined.

Author and historian Debra Marquart writes: "Sharon Chmielarz and Ken Smith cultivate what Bill Holm called the "prairie eye" – the voice of the grassland, the struggle of the trees, the complexities of Midwestern weather, and the melancholy must of roots."

Colleague Tom Isern of NDSU comments: "Poet Sharon Chmielarz and photographer Ken Smith, the contributors to *Visibility: Ten Miles*, are much alike. They have depth of field, alternating long views and close-ups. The result is something more than a fair likeness of the prairies they see and sing." The book, *Visibility: Ten Miles* is available at <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/visibility.html>.

If you would like more information or you would like to donate to the GRHC (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.

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