

In Touch with Prairie Living

November 2015

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

In preparing the November column, I am reminded of my first experience in writing the first column in November, 1996. This is the 227th monthly column in 19 years. My appreciation for the continued interest from readers.

Thanksgiving regards to you and your family. We can be grateful that our ancestors immigrated to the Dakota prairies, Canada and the USA from their former German villages of South Russia today near Odessa, Ukraine.

The GRHC's largest outreach events are the Pride of Dakota Holiday Showcases sponsored by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture. The Fargo Holiday Showcase is November 20-22, at the Scheels Arena, 5225 31st Avenue South. The Bismarck Holiday Showcase is December 4-6 at the Civic Center. The schedule of both events will be Friday, 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

At the Holiday Showcases, we will feature these new books: *The German-Russians: In Words and Pictures* by William Bosch; *The Welk Homestead: A Source Book* By Thomas Isern and Michael Miller; *Tumbleweeds Burning 2: A Novel, an Epic Saga of Grit and Courage in a Strange New World* by Milt Ost; *Prairie Barns in North Dakota* by Preservation North Dakota; *Kulak: Love and Death: A German-Russian Tragedy - Ukraine, 1938* by Cleon Ochsner.

New cookbooks at the Showcases will be *Kulm, North Dakota 125 Years Cookbook: 1892-2017* and *It's All Good* by Marge (Burlack) Horner, Napoleon, N.D.. Marge Horner is well known for her cooking demonstrations and recipes. New Prairie Public documentaries on display will be: *Hay Day: Musical Barns of North Dakota* and *We (Never) Don't Forget: Germans from Russia in South America*.

The Northern Great Plains History

Conference was held in October in Bismarck. There were impressive presentations about the Germans from Russia: *What's in a Name? Russian Germans, German Russians or Germans from Russia* by Eric J. Schmaltz, Northwestern Oklahoma State University; *Ethnic Textiles and Material Culture of the Germans from Russia* by Ann Braaten, North Dakota State University; and *Fun While It Lasted: The New German-Russian Story* by Jessica Clark, Western Wyoming Community College.

Dr. Clark reviewed the GRHC's Dakota Memories Oral History Project (2005-2009) of the 199 interviews done in North Dakota, north central South Dakota and southern Saskatchewan. In her presentation, she shared, "There needs to be more examinations by outsiders, as well as more attention paid to the descendants of these immigrants, the children's story. Detached scholars (or outsiders) bring new perspectives to the discussion and reveal experiences or narratives that inside may not."

Clark explains, "Yet, the Dakota Memories narrators reveal layers of complexity through their story telling. While these descendants root the German-Russian story in their ancestral past, their childhood experiences and present conditions also play a role in shaping it. That is to say, the story of the Germans from Russia is not static. By sharing their memories with Dakota Memories oral historians, these German-Russian memory-makers have created a new German-Russian story, a story of optimism and opportunity. The ability of these narrators to bridge their distant past, recent past, and present contributes to their success at maintaining their ethnic identity."

Additional information is at <http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/dakotamemories/>

home.html.

Dr. Braaten, curator of the Emily P. Reynolds Historic Costume Collection, NDSU, focused on German-Russian handmade shawls used by women in their home. The Collection website is at www.ndsu.edu/erhcc. Further information about the Germans from Russia textiles and clothing is at http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/textile/index.html.

Braaten shared in her presentation, "Shawls enabled Germans from Russia women to do domestic tasks and with farming during busy times. All family members worked, as evidenced by the proverb: 'He who can hold a spoon must work'. This was not considered cruel or harsh; it was seen as necessary and even healthy. Children were reared with an emphasis on conformity and proper behavior. During the 19th and 20th centuries, shawls helped Germans from Russia women function as mothers and providers for their families. Textile skills contributed to their families' self-sufficiency. Their shawls identified them as German Colonists in Russia and as Germans from Russia in the USA."

"Braaten writes, "Germans from Russia shawls outlasted the woman who first had used them. Sons inherited the land and dwellings, while daughters inherited items of sentimental value. Among the families studied, if there was only one daughter, she inherited all of her mother's shawls. With several daughters, or if a woman's sister had been close, the shawls were divided among them."

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.