

# In Touch with Prairie Living

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By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA  
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I am honored to share the life story of Beulah Margaret Duffloth White of Grapevine, Texas, born on May 5, 1908, who will celebrate her 108th birthday on May 5, 2016. Beulah is one of the oldest living persons of Germans from Russia ancestry in the USA, Canada and worldwide. Beulah (Bea) is a first generation American. She is a founding member of the Glueckstal Colonies Research Association ([www.glueckstal.net](http://www.glueckstal.net)). She authored the book, *Anamosa Stories*, essays of her childhood memories.

In a recent email to me, Beulah writes, "I often wondered who had the bright idea to name the aging years the, "Golden Years" and how long were they supposed to last? Aging sort of crept up on me and suddenly I am using a cane and then a walker, aging is hard work, so I pretend it is a handicap and learn to live with it. I play Sudoku every day to exercise my mind so I am able to use the computer, balance my checkbook, and create and enjoy life. I am honored that you are announcing my 108th birthday. Thank you for taking such good care of the Germans from Russia families."

Beulah's father, Philip, and her grandfather, John Duffloth, were born in Glueckstal, South Russia. The Duffloths were wheat farmers and the older boys worked in the fields and took care of the horses. They learned how to make horseshoes and to shoe the horses. All of the children were expected to learn to knit their own socks, and the boys learned to repair the family's shoes.

Beulah's mother, Kathleen Blanche Oliver, was born in 1886 at Gettysburg, Dakota Territory. Her mother was a teacher and her father and all four of her grandparents had a college education. The Olivers were from Ohio. Beulah's great-grandfather, Sir John Sullivan, came to Jamestown, VA. to be a tobacco farmer.

Beulah writes, "Mom was a very good cook. I used to like to watch Mom when she made strudels. She made a delicious vegetable soup using a German-Russian recipe. She boiled the soup with allspice until the meat was tender and then added the cut up vegetables and liquid to cover them. When the soup was ready to serve, she added one half cup of thick sour cream. This was the Russian touch, she said."

Beulah's paternal grandfather had decided to bring his family to America from South Russia in March 1889, homesteading in Potter County, South Dakota. He built a sod house on his 160 acres where he farmed for 18 years. In 1901, Beulah's father, Philip, was old enough to qualify for a homestead, where he built a small square frame house. In 1907, he moved the house to Tolstoy, S.D.. Beulah writes, "My father did not know how to handle money. He would make a big sale and then invite the customer to go down to the local pub to celebrate the sale and then forget to take care of the bookwork when he got back. He lost money for the business and he and Uncle Jake decided to dissolve the partnership. Dad then opened a blacksmith shop."

"We had an organ and sometimes my mother would play and we all sang. Dad always stood beside Mom when he was singing. Sometimes when I looked at him standing there, I would start to worry that he might be drafted into the Army. I was aware of the war (WWI) because our teacher taught us to know about it, and we were knitting wool scarves for the soldiers."

"I loved the feel and sound of the prevailing wind but there were times when the winds would stir up a dust storm and we would all have to go inside until it was over. I can remember watching the dust blow in through the

keyhole of our back door and form a drift on the kitchen floor. Prairie fires were even more frightening because our father would be out there with all the other men, fighting the fire. The winters in South Dakota were long and we would spend time listening to music from our gramophone. It had a big horn and the music came from round disks shaped like a beer can. We all took a turn winding it up."

Beulah shares, "I was eight years old when we moved from Tolstoy, S.D, to Anamosa, I.A. In 1916, my brother Roy was 6 years old, Dorothy was 4 and Gordon was 1. We rode on the train and I fell in love with the conductor. We arrived at night and the street lights had three big bulbs and it felt as though we were in fairyland as we walked from the train station to the hotel."

"Tolstoy was a small town founded by Germans from Russia, and we spoke German at home (except my mother). Roy and I attended a small one-room school house and he was allowed to sit with me. The school in Anamosa was so large and we were nervous and scared the first day of school. I was the only one to hold up my hand when the teacher asked for someone to recite the multiplication tables. She was pleased I rattled them off so fast and praised me."

If you would like more information about the Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May 2017); or would like to donate family histories and photographs to the GRHC, 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); website: [www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc)

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