

In Touch with Prairie Living

November 2016

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

In October 2016, the Prairie Public Television film crew and I completed filming and interviews for the 2017 Germans from Russia foodways documentary sponsored by Prairie Public and the Tri-County Tourism Alliance. Filming included the Annual Church Fair and Dinner at Sts. Peter & Paul Church (1912-2016) in Strasburg, ND; Oktoberfest in Napoleon, ND; and Sauerkraut Day in Wishek, ND.

On October 7th, filming took place at the Napoleon Public School kitchen classroom. Sue (Kaseman) Balcom, Mandan, ND, demonstrated German-Russian bread baking and cooking with the help of local students. Balcom is well known for her German-Russian cooking classes at Bismarck State College. She is author of the books, *Ewiger Saatz: Everlasting Yeast, Food Culture of the Germans from Russia in Emmons County, Logan County and McIntosh County, North Dakota* and *Ready for School: Memories of Country Schools in North Dakota German-Russian Country, Emmons County, Logan County, McIntosh County*. The books are published by the Tri-County Tourism Alliance – www.germanrussiancountry.org.

The GRHC has published a new hardcover book, *Sunflowers & Thistles: Bessarabian Germans Speak Out*, by Elvire Bisle-Fandrich and translated German to English by James T. Gessele, Minneapolis, MN, native of Mercer, ND. The book was well received when it premiered at the 46th Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention, Rapid City, SD, in September.

The book is a collection of stories by Germans from Bessarabia about life in their homeland, resettlement to Germany in 1940, World War II, the flight from Bessarabia to Poland, expulsion and a new beginning after

1945.

Secondary school educator Elvire Bisle-Fandrich traveled about Germany, often accompanied by her father, conscientiously researching and collecting accounts, allowing her Bessarabian countrymen to have a say with their authentic stories. German critic Erwin Moritz adds, “Accompanied by a wealth of photos, the work is thrilling to read, sometimes even upsetting, particularly the drama surrounding the horrible flight during World War II and how the Bessarabian Germans had to endure it almost without exception.”

Michael M. Miller said, “This is one of the most important and informative books published for the Germans from Russia community. The book is a wonderful addition to GRHC’s published book, *Bessarabia: German Colonists on the Black Sea*. We are deeply grateful to James Gessele for volunteering to translate these books from German to English.”

Gessele comments, “Simply astounding insights into Bessarabian-German societal interactions are collected and portrayed in *Sunflowers & Thistles*. When they answered a puzzling dilemma posed by a family photo of my great-grandparents, I knew the work had to be translated.”

Allyn Brosz of Washington, DC, writes, “I thought I was quite familiar with the history of the Germans in Bessarabia, but Elvire Bisle-Fandrich has taught me so much more in her engaging look at daily life in the German villages in the 1930s. She reminds us that the ‘good old days’ had both sunlight and shadows; our ancestors were only human, after all. The book is told with humor throughout and is truly an entertaining and informative read.”

For more information to order the book, go to: <https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/general/sunflowersandthistles.html>.

The GRHC will have a booth at the 2016 Pride of Dakota Holiday Showcases sponsored by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture. The Fargo Showcase will be at Scheels Arena, 5225 31st Avenue South: November 18-20; Friday 5-9pm.; Saturday, 9am-5pm; Sunday, 11am-4pm.

The Bismarck Showcase will be at the Events Center, 315 South 5th Street, Dec. 2-4: Friday, 5-9pm; Saturday, 9am-5pm; Sunday, 11am-4pm.

New items featured at the GRHC booth include: *Sunflowers & Thistles: Bessarabian Germans Speak Out*; *Prairie Mosaic: An Ethnic Atlas of Rural North Dakota* (new edition); *Ready for School: Memories of Country Schools in North Dakota German-Russian Country: Emmons County, Logan County, McIntosh County*; *Touring German-Russian Country from Ashley, North Dakota*; *The German Settlements in Bessarabia*; and the 2017 North Dakota Horizons calendar.

If you would like more information about the May 2018 Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine; or would like 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; website: www.ndsu.edu/GRHC

November column for North Dakota and South Dakota weekly newspapers.