

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
GRHC
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With this February column, I am pleased to announce the publication of a new edition of one of the most important ethnic studies ever published on the Northern Plains and in the USA, *Prairie Mosaic: Ethnic Atlas of North Dakota*, North Dakota State University Press, authored by a longtime colleague, Fr. William C. Sherman, Grand Forks, ND.

Sherman writes: "Sadly, it must be said that we know much more about the soil, crop, weed and water conditions of any particular Dakota township than we know of the national character of the people who reside there."

This new edition of a classic work brings back into print Sherman's study of North Dakota's ethnic groups – from Native Americans to Norwegians to Germans from Russia – a virtual mosaic of the state's ethnic settlement areas.

The first edition was published in 1983 by NDSU's Institute for Regional Studies. The 2017 new edition provides maps, tables, new photographs and commentary. The work is more than an atlas; it is a basic handbook of the ethnic fabric of North Dakota. The new book is a collaborative effort of NDSU Press and the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, NDSU Libraries, Fargo.

Included in this new book is a section of the Father William C. Sherman Photograph Collection, archived at the GRHC. These 58 photographs are part of the complete collection, which encompasses over 13,000 black and white photographs, negatives, color slides, floor plans and site survey documents completed from 1972 to 1978 in central and western North Dakota. More information about the photograph collection is available at www.digitalhorizonsonline.org.

The Sherman Photographs cover the subjects of houses, barns, sheds, and various agricultural structures. Today,

many of these structures no longer exist. Photographs included in the book are from these North Dakota counties: Stark, Grant, LaMoure, Stutsman, Williams, Dunn, Morton, Hettinger, Burleigh, McLean, McIntosh, Wells, Mercer, Billings, Emmons, McHenry, and McKenzie. The North Dakota ethnic groups in the photographs include German Russian, Hungarian German, Bohemians, Ukrainian, Jewish, Mennonite German, Belgian, Norwegian, German, Estonian, and English American.

Thomas D. Isern, Distinguished Professor of History, NDSU, writes in the Introduction to the Second Edition: "A key reason for focusing on the Germans from Russia was that Father Bill had become acquainted with, sometimes exasperated by, and eventually fond of the Germans from Russia, many of them railroad workers, who constituted about half the parish of St. Michael's Church in Grand Forks. In the course of his study of German-Russian country, he became fascinated with their ways – their festive wedding ceremonies, their Mischholz (dried manure) for home heating, and countless other homely customs."

Isern continues: "Reappraisal of *Prairie Mosaic* a generation hence confirms the positive judgements given at the time of the original issue and justifies of a new edition today. Father Bill would agree that a fundamental value of this book is regional. It documents and defines the identity of North Dakota as the most ethnic of all Great Plains States. As Father Bill frequently says, it is not just the story of the people who settled here; it's the story of who stayed."

"The ethnic atlas was the product of an energetic, persistent mentor

rallying the research efforts of a corps of student researchers. It was Father Bill's ambitious attempt to trace every landowner, establish ethnicity, and gather other pertinent local details of the settlement and persistence."

John C. Hudson, a distinguished geographer, writes in a notable review in *Minnesota History*, The Quarterly of the Minnesota Historical Society, "*Prairie Mosaic* is surely the most detailed set of ethnic maps ever produced for a large area within the United States, maps that show the ethnic background of virtually every square mile in North Dakota in 1965."

Father Sherman is a well-known and celebrated North Dakota scholar and educator. He taught Sociology of the Great Plains and Religion at NDSU from 1971 to 2001 and served at St. Michael's Catholic Church in Grand Forks from 1976 to 2003. He has been awarded two honorary doctorates, one from the University of Mary, Bismarck, and one from the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks. His work highlights the unique and complex history of North Dakota inhabitants, especially that of the Germans from Russia.

Prairie Mosaic is available at https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/nd_sd/praiiemosaic.html.

If you would like more information about the 22nd Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May 2018); 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.

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