

# In Touch with Prairie Living

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

GRHC

HERITAGE COLLECTION

The Kulm, ND, 125th Celebration will be held June 23-25, 2017. The GRHC will have displays and information tables at Hometown Credit Union, 117 Main Avenue South, from 11a.m to 5p.m. on Friday, June 23rd.

The Kulm and Fredonia, ND, area was settled by Bessarabian Germans from Russia; many from the following villages: Alt Elft, Alt Postal, Arzis, Beresina, Borodino, Brienne, Dennewitz, Eigenfeld, Friedensfeld, Friedenstal, Gnadenfeld, Hoffnungstal, Johannestal, Josefsdorf, Katzbach, Kloestitz, Kulm, Leipzig, Mathlidendorf, Neu Elft, Paris, Sarata, Tarutino, Teplitz and Wittenberg. Others came from these Black Sea German villages: Glückstal, Kassel and Neudorf.

The Welk Homestead, a State Historic Site located near Strasburg, ND, will be open to the public from Memorial Day Weekend to Labor Day Weekend. The site is open Thursday to Sunday, 10a.m. to 5p.m. More information is available at <http://history.nd.gov/historicsites/welk> and [https://www.ndsu.edu/grhc/history\\_culture/lawrence\\_welk/index.html](https://www.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/lawrence_welk/index.html).

The State Historical Society of North Dakota provides this information about the Welk Homestead State Historic Site: "Ludwig and Christina (Schwahn) Welk immigrated from near Odessa, Russia in 1893 (village of Selz, Kutschurgan District). Nearly 120,000 people of German heritage left Russia for the USA between 1870 to 1920, mainly due to political pressures. Free or cheap land (Homestead Act) drew many to North Dakota, settling mainly in south central counties of Emmons, Logan and McIntosh."

"The Welk house was built in 1899 of dried mud brick known as batsa, a common construction method of the Germans from Russia on the Russian

steppe and the North American prairie. Additional architectural features also point to the families German-Russian heritage. A summer kitchen, outhouse, blacksmith shop, and granary, as well as a barn (moved onto the site about 1949) are also open seasonally. The Welk family grew wheat and other crops, raised chickens to sell eggs, and kept cows to sell cream. The sixth child, Lawrence Welk, was born on March 11, 1903. He learned to play the accordion from his father and attended the local Catholic school. Lawrence left the farm in 1924 to pursue a career in music. In 1955, he made his debut on national television. *The Lawrence Welk Show* was produced for twenty-six years, and reruns can still be seen throughout the USA."

Ludwig Welk was born in Selz, Russia on August 24, 1864. He married Christina Schwahn, who was born in the nearby colony of Strassburg on March 1, 1870. Besides being a farmer, Ludwig Welk became a blacksmith, like his father. Ludwig and Christina immigrated to America with many other families arriving in New York in 1893. They traveled by rail to Eureka, SD, where they acquired a wagon and team of oxen for their trek northward to Emmons County, ND. Ludwig and Christina lost their first child, Anton, before leaving Russia. When they arrived in 1893, Christina was carrying their second child, John, born on July 3, 1893. There were a total of eight children born in the sodhouse. Ludwig and Christina Welk retired to Strasburg in 1928. Their youngest son, Michael, and his family operated the farm until 1965. Lawrence Welk died on May 17, 1992 in Santa Monica, CA.

In 1993, the family of Lawrence Welk selected North Dakota State University Archives to house

The Lawrence Welk Collection. This collection is dedicated to the preservation and study of Lawrence Welk materials and memorabilia. It includes musical arrangements, personal items, scrapbooks, oral histories and artifacts. For further information for the Welk Collection, visit <https://library.ndsu.edu/archives/lawrence-welk-collection>.

Speaking at NDSU in 1993, on behalf of the family and Welk Group, Inc., Shirley Welk Fredricks, daughter of Lawrence Welk, stated: "There simply is no better place for this collection than in this state and at this institution, which like our father, has roots so deeply planted in its culture and heritage. We wanted a permanent site for it and NDSU recognizes the significance of his contributions to the state and the music world."

The Friends of the Welk Homestead was established in 2016. In addition to celebrating the legacy of world-famous Champagne Music Maker, Lawrence Welk, the site will also be interpreted as a pioneer farm under the Homestead Act, a focal point of the Germans from Russia who immigrated to south central North Dakota, and an example of ethnic architecture, including the only sod house (batsa) in the inventory of the State Historical Society of North Dakota. For more information on becoming a member of the Friends of the Welk Homestead, visit [www.germanrussiancountry.org](http://www.germanrussiancountry.org).

If you would like more information about the 22nd Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May, 2018); becoming a Friend of the GRHC, or would like donate (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](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); website: [www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc).