

In Touch with Prairie Living

July 2017

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

In May 2017, the Germans from Russia community lost an important native son, Abbot Brian Wangler, OSB, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, ND. In 2004, he was elected the eighth abbot of Assumption Abbey.

Born Henry Wangler on October 19, 1943, he was one of 11 children born to Valentine and Mary Wangler, rural Kintyre, Logan County, ND. He attended country school through the eighth grade, and then enrolled in Assumption Abbey High School. In June 1964, as a college sophomore, he joined Assumption Abbey.

The Wangler family were members of rural St. Boniface Catholic Church, primarily a parish of Germans from Russia descendants from the Catholic Kutschurgan District villages near Odessa, Ukraine.

Father Brian worked as a college recruiter, a parish priest and within the Abbey as Prior and Novice/Master. In 1983, he was named Pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Richardton. Recent years found Father Brian involved in the renovation of the historic St. Mary's Abbey church.

Father Brian wrote, "On May 28, 2004, the monastic community elected me as its abbot. This is a capacity I now serve in. It also is a job that I enjoy. Throughout my monastic life, I have never had a job I thought I would have. They have always come to me as a surprise, but turned out to be jobs that were enriching, growthful and enjoyable. It is a pleasure to serve the Lord in the Monastic life here at Assumption Abbey."

Personally, I have lasting memories visiting with Abbot Brian at the Abbey. He was very fond and proud of his German-Russian roots. He would attend the Germans from Russia Heritage Society conventions at Bismarck for the

Sunday Memorial Services. I remember well when he would offer me a taste of the famous Assumption Abbey wine in their cellar.

St. Mary's Church at Assumption Abbey is featured in the book, *Magnificent Churches of the Prairie*. Other churches include Devils Lake, Mandan and Strasburg, ND; and Hoven, SD. The designer of the churches was Milwaukee famous architect Anton Dohmen. The book is at https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/nd_sd/coomber.html.

The World Premiere of the new documentary, *Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country*, will be July 12 at 7:30 p.m., at the Heritage Center, Bismarck, ND. The documentary is sponsored by Prairie Public – www.prairiepublic.org and the Tri-County Tourism Alliance – www.germanrussiancountry.org. The event is free and open to the public. Prairie Public Television will air the new documentary in September.

The documentary features ten women living in Emmons, Logan and McIntosh counties sharing their memories, cooking and canning. Also featured are children from 4-H clubs learning to prepare food from their mothers and grandmothers. Local businesses also demonstrate the commercial side of making of kuchen, plachenda, fleischkuechla and homemade sausage.

The 47th Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention will be July 12-16, Ramkota Hotel, Bismarck. For further information about the convention schedule and registration, go to www.grhs.org.

On June 8, I joined North Dakota State University Public History Field School students visiting the

Welk Homestead Historic Site and the St. Mary's Catholic Church and Old Cemetery at Hague, ND. Historical information for the St. Mary's Church and Cemetery are at https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/town_county/oldstmary.html.

In June, the students worked for 10 days at the Emmons County Museum, Linton, ND, doing digitization, museum work and public engagement. This included cataloging artifacts, writing exhibit preparation and digitizing photos.

Dr. Angela Smith, instructor of the Field School, writes, "In rural, sparsely populated areas of North Dakota, long-time stewards of local history are aging. They have faithfully recorded and maintained the histories of small towns throughout the state for decades. This summer field school creates an opportunity for students and communities to work together to learn and interpret the history of the state."

The Welk Homestead Historic Site located near Strasburg, ND, is open to the public through Labor Day weekend. The site is open Thursdays through Sundays, 10 am to 5 pm. On Saturday, July 29, there will be a Grand Opening of the Welk Homestead sponsored by the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

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; website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc.

July column for North Dakota and South Dakota weekly newspapers.