

# 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**  
HERITAGE COLLECTION

The 47th Germans from Russia Heritage Society International Convention in July at Bismarck, ND, provided excellent workshops and presentations.

Monsignor James Shea, President of the University of Mary, Bismarck, was the Saturday evening keynote speaker. He is a native of Hazelton, ND, having grown up on a farm with eight siblings. President Shea began as President of University of Mary in 2009.

President Shea's presentation was heartwarming and impressive. He shared his memories of his childhood attending school with many of his classmates being Germans from Russia. Growing up in the northern part of Emmons County near the Lawrence Welk Highway, he stressed the resilience and hard work of the Germans from Russia on their farms and communities, including the historic and beautiful Catholic churches built by early German-Russian settlers in Strasburg and Hague, ND. He also commented of the artistic beauty of the wrought iron crosses in cemeteries built by local blacksmiths, noting how the Christian faith is important in the lives of the German from Russia community.

One of his quotes - important to the Germans from Russia was, "Where there is bread, there is home." He shared that homesteading on the North Dakota prairies with the Homestead Act changed the lifestyle for immigrant families from South Russia to the Dakotas because settlers were required to live on the 160 acres they received, meaning they could no longer live in villages like they did in Russia.

Growing up in German-Russian country, President Shea also reflected on the tasty ethnic foods like knoephla, kuchen, homemade sausage and noodles. He mentioned that the new University of Mary Student Center will have a

Dakota Homestyle section available. On Thursdays the menu will include knoephla soup. University of Mary has many students with German from Russia heritage.

President Shea gave high praise for the impressive new book, *Women Behind the Plow*, which includes women from Emmons, Logan and McIntosh Counties. The book is at [https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/nd\\_sd/womenbehindtheplow.html](https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/nd_sd/womenbehindtheplow.html).

He also referenced an article by longtime colleague Karen Herzog, writer for the Bismarck Tribune, *The other Germans' once filled Dakotas* - [https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history\\_culture/history/herzog11.html](https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/history/herzog11.html).

Other excellent workshop presentations that I attended included: *Growing Up German (Without Realizing it!)*, given by Merv Weiss, Saskatoon, SK; *Harper's Weekly, 1896: A Snapshot into German-Russian Cultural Customs (Eureka, SD)*, presented by Dr. Ann Braaten, Curator, Emily P. Reynolds Historic Costume Collection, NDSU; *Experiencing the History of My Ancestors in the Kutschurgan Colonies*, by Fr. Al Bitz, University of Mary, Bismarck, Napoleon, ND native.

*The Art of Making Kuchen*, demonstrated by Marlene Adolf, Steele, ND native, and *The Art of Making Plachinda*, demonstrated by Myron Fischer, McClusky, ND, native, both members of the GRHS Dakota Pioneer Chapter, Bismarck; *Demographic Patterns Among the Bessarabian Germans*, given by Dr. Burkett Huey, Chapel Hill, NC; *Believing Impossible Things: German Russian farmers in South Dakota Test Their 1st Amendment Freedoms in World War I*, presented by Allyn Brosz, Washington, D.C., Tripp, SD native; and *Letters from the Volga German families to*

*Pauline (Schlegel) Lehl, 1913-1917*, given by Eric Schmaltz, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Alva, OK.

Photographs from the July 2017 GRHS Convention are at [www.flickr.com/photos/ndsu-libraries-grhc/collections](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ndsu-libraries-grhc/collections) at Germans from Russia Heritage Society.

The Welk Homestead State Historic Site located near Strasburg, ND, is open to the public, Thursday - Sunday 10 am to 5 pm through Labor Day weekend. The grand opening was held on July 29, 2017 featuring guest speakers including State Senator Robert Erbele and Claudia Berg, director of 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](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); website: [www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc).

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