

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 July 29, 2017 Grand Opening at the Welk Homestead State Historic Site near Strasburg, ND, sponsored by the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND) was truly a memorable event.

The music included accordionist Harvey Schilling, accompanied by his wife Diane on the piano, of Bismarck, natives of Wishek, ND, and the impressive Matt Hodek's Dakota Dutchmen band, Lankin, ND.

Speakers included Claudia Berg, Director, SHSND; Rev. Benny Putharayil, Pastor, Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church, Strasburg; Al Jaeger, North Dakota Secretary of State; State Senator Robert Erbele, Lehr, ND; Gary Satern, former Welk Homestead curator; Adam Baumstarck, Pioneer Heritage; Diane Rogness, Site Manager, SHSND; and Michael Miller, NDSU.

State Senator Robert Erbele thanked Allan Burke, publisher emeritus of the Emmons Country Record, who was the "catalyst of really getting the ball rolling to make this a state historic site. The homestead not only depicts Lawrence Welk's life, but also the German from Russia heritage demonstrating how these settlers survived on the Plains. One generation off the boat, and Lawrence Welk becomes one of the most popular men in all the United States. Lawrence Welk exemplifies the fulfillment of the American Dream."

U.S. Senator Heidi Heitkamp wrote, "I remember my family gathered around the television for *The Lawrence Welk Show*. Lawrence Welk was a great example of a "self-made man" who had a dream, kept his promises, treated others well, and provided many hours of enjoyment to people across America for more than three decades. Not only does this site honor 'The Champagne Music Maker' but it also interprets early 20th

century agriculture and recognizes the importance of the Germans from Russia who settled in this area and made such an impact."

U.S. Senator John Hoeven shared in his letter, "Lawrence Welk was born on his family's homestead in 1903, and grew up to become a very successful musician, with several singles at or near the top of the charts. He is perhaps most remembered as host of his television show for many years. The State Historical Society's work to update the site of Welk's childhood home will serve as a tribute and educational tool about the life and influence of the famous bandleader."

Congressman Kevin Kramer commented "The Germans from Russia who settled here represent one of North Dakota's most inspiring stories. Their culture of survival against great adversity, farming and ranching, food traditions, arts, education, music and dancing have added rich dimensions to the heritage of this region. These remarkable traditions are embodied in the lives of homesteaders Ludwig and Christina (Schwahn) Welk and the musical legacy of their famous son, Lawrence. This new state historic site will serve as a showcase for this great story."

The GRHC is pleased to announce the new hardcover color *Germans from Russia* children's book, *Sophie's Grandma*, published by the Glueckstal Colonies Research Association (www.glueckstal.net). History is not always about famous rulers and military leaders. Where you live; the language(s); the foods you eat; and much more are also dependent upon decisions made by your ancestors. Sophie, as portrayed by a little bear, is introduced to her ancestral heritage by her grandmother. Sophie's grandparents and great-

grandparents came to the United States from German colonies in South Russia. Young readers and listeners of similar heritage will appreciate learning about this sweep of history during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Branden and his twin sister, Brooklyn, who will be in the fourth grade at West Fargo, ND, school wrote after reading the book, "They traveled to America on a big ship. The ship ride was really scary. The families were on top and the singles were at the bottom of the ship. People died on the way to America and some got sick. Some had babies on the ship. They had to cross the Atlantic Ocean. When they were off the ship, they were in New York. And they settled in North Dakota."

The book is written by Barbara (Geiger) Horn who was born at Bismarck, ND. *Sophie's Grandma* is dedicated to Margaret Ann (Aman/Zimmerman) Freeman, who was co-founder of the Glueckstal Colonies Research Association (GCRA) and its guiding light, conceiving and promoting many publications. She wanted a book which she could use to share her heritage to her grandchildren. *Sophie's Grandma* was written to fulfill this request. Fortunately, she was able to read the draft of this story before her untimely death in 2009. Barbara and Margaret were on the 1996 Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine. The book is available at the GRHC website.

If you would like more information about the 22nd Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May 16-26, 2018); becoming a Friend of the GRHC, or to donate (family histories and photographs), contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, PO Box 6050, Dept. 2080, Fargo, ND 58108-6050 (michael.miller@ndsu.edu - 701-231-8416); website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc.