

# 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  
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The month of December was truly a rewarding experience. Prairie Public's airing of *Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country* received a tremendous response from viewers.

The companion cookbook was well received at the holiday showcases in Fargo and Bismarck. Mary Ann (Werre) Lehr, who is featured on the cookbook cover, joined us on 2 December at the Bismarck Events Center. Mary Ann was wearing her mother's handmade apron of the 1950s and is interviewed in the documentary with recipes in the cookbook.

The well known book, *The Central Dakota Germans: Their History, Language and Culture* by Shirley Fischer Arends, Washington, D.C., native of Ashley, ND, has been republished.

Shirley and her mother Emma are featured in the 1999 Prairie Public award-winning documentary, *The Germans from Russia: Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie*. Emma was a folk healer (Braucher) in the Ashley area. Shirley's grandmother was also a well-known healer. Arends was fascinated by the stories that older pioneers told about their lives and struggles on the western prairies as homesteaders. Her ancestors emigrated from the Glückstal villages and Bessarabia to settle in McIntosh County, ND.

The book describes the cultural feat of these Dakota German pioneers who settled the American West, while keeping their identity and unity of their society intact. Arends presents the history, language, traditions and customs, secured through research and interviews while the culture fully existed. Beginning the project in 1961, it captured her and her research for her doctoral studies at Georgetown University.

Arends writes: "In working on

this study, I have increasingly become aware of a theme which runs through the long history of the Central Dakota Germans. For the history of these people comes alive and one begins to become aware of how they were able to maintain so solid a group identity through two migrations and nearly two centuries, through time itself, unified and one in both culture and outlook."

In her conclusion, Arends shares: "They were and are a kind, gentle people. Never militaristic, they left their homes both in Germany and in Russia to avoid war and oppression. They brought their strong value system and firm religious beliefs to this country. Here they found a home. They gained much, but they also contributed much. They suffered great hardships to preserve their values and ideals. They pioneered twice and their experience surely strengthened and supported other American pioneers. Today, when we think of the settlement of the great American prairie and of American pioneers, we must also recall those brave Germans who came from Russia."

The book chapters include: 1) Introduction; 2) Historical Background; 3) The Central Dakota German Dialect; 4) The Spiritual Language of a People; 5) The Language of Customs and Behavior; 6) Conclusion.

The appendix includes "foodlore" with detailed recipes for soups such as chicken noodle soup, borscht, riebble soup, bean soup, knephla soup, potato soup. Bread and main dough dish recipes include: strudel, schupfnudel, schlitz kuechla, cooked prunes, fleisch kuechla, kase knepfla, spaetzle, pumpkin blachenta, blagende, knepfla.

Other main dish recipes include: halupsy, sauerkraut dinner, roast

chicken, dressing, roast duck, turkey. Desserts recipes featured in the book include: kuchen doughnuts, apple fritters, sweet pancakes, stirum, molasses cookies, ammonia cookies, pfeffernuesse, homemade ice cream. Vegetable and side dishes include: malotz, baked potato slices, green peppers, hot potato salad, baked rice, cucumber salad, lettuce salad, homemade butter, horseradish, cold potato salad. Making sausage includes: homemade bratwurst, headcheese, liverwurst, ham, speck bacon, beef jerky, goose drumsticks and breast.

The author has detailed German dialect word lists such as: sharp – scharf, sarf; river – rever, fluss; grandmother – grossmutter, grosnudr; cucumber – gurke, gugumere; rooster – hahn, hanner, haner; potato – kartoffel, grumbiere; headache – koffweh, kopfve.

Mike Jacobs, former editor, Grand Forks Herald, writes: "*The Central Dakota Germans* is a significant contribution to the literature about North Dakota. It should delight anyone interested in folk life, cultural adaptations to new environment, religious practices, folk medicine, and regional history."

*The Central Dakota Germans* is available at the GRHC website at the shop online button, then click ND/SD Books.

If you would like more information about the 23rd Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May 2019); 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.

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