

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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For this column, I would like to share with you six books recommended for introductory German-Russian research. I am often asked, "What books would you suggest for background information and research about the Germans from Russia?"

From Catherine to Khrushchev by Dr. Adam Giesinger. Edna Boardman, writes in her review, "This is the most thoroughly researched, most professionally written, of the popular books on the Germans from Russia, yet it is very interesting and absorbing to read. Giesinger traces the flow of German-Russian history from their arrival in Russia, through the Czars that succeeded Catherine, through emigration to the United States, Canada and South America, to the takeover of Russia by the communists, and the deportation of the remaining people to scattered parts of Russia." Dr. Adam Giesinger's children donated his extensive private library to establish the Dr. Adam Giesinger Collection at the GRHC.

Dr. Joseph Height authored *Paradise on the Steppe: A Cultural History of the Kutschurgan, Beresan and Liebental Colonies, 1804-1972*. This book focuses on the Catholic colonies of South Russia by the Black Sea today near Odessa, Ukraine. Height follows the settlers on the often disastrous journey to Russia and through the difficult years when colonists first tilled the iron-hard soil. Height writes about festivals, songs, sayings, languages, letters home, and photographs. There are town plats of Beresan, Liebental and Kutschurgan villages.

Homesteaders on the Steppe: Cultural History of the Evangelical-Lutheran Colonies in the Region of Odessa, 1804-1945, by Height covers the Lutheran villages. Height describes the journey down the Danube River

and the life of the villages, wedding customs, games and entertainment, songs and agriculture. Included are the names of the original settlers for the villages. In the final chapter, Height tells the dissolution of the colonies under communism.

Memories of the Black Sea Germans: Highlights of Their History and Heritage, also by Joseph Height is a fascinating collection of primary and cultural material. The book will answer questions many German-Russians have assumed have no answers. Height includes the report about colonization written by J.G. Kohl in 1838. Kohl reports of hard-working people, and the gardens in which watermelon was king, though they also grow onions, cucumbers, pumpkins, potatoes and fruits.

Dr. Joseph S. Height, a son of German immigrants who came to Canada in 1900 from the Black Sea colonies of Mannheim and Strassburg, was born in 1909 at Tramping Lake, Saskatchewan. For many years he taught German at Franklin College, IN. He worked closely with Dr. Karl Stumpp of Germany providing the English version of the historical sections of the major work, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia 1773-1865*. In May 2013, his daughter, Margaret Height, joined the Journey to the Homeland Tour to visit the former German colonies of Mannheim and Strassburg near Odessa, Ukraine.

The Black Sea Germans in the Dakotas by George Rath, begins with a look at the original Black Sea settlements of the colony groups. Rath traces their emigration to the Dakotas and identifies where they settled. Additional chapters focus on the role and scope of the major Protestant denominations to which German-Russians were attracted. He writes of

the Germans from Russia, "Wheat raising was the object of their lives." Rev. George Rath was born in 1891 in Nesselrode near Birsula, Province of Odessa. He served in the Russian Army from 1916 to 1918. In 1922, Rath came to the United States. An ordained minister, he served the Evangelical Synod of North America.

Bessarabia: German Colonists on the Black Sea by Dr. Ute Schmidt, translated German to English by James T. Gessele, was published by the GRHC. In a review, Allyn Brosz writes, "The book is without question, the authoritative history of the Germans in Bessarabia." Dr. Elvire Necker-Eberhardt, who was born in Bessarabia, shares, "The author follows the Bessarabian Germans from their origin, the beginning and development in Bessarabia, to their tragic scattering in 1940 and beyond. The different points are not only reported and documented but also aptly illustrated with many unique pictures, maps and graphs."

Dr. Ute Schmidt, Berlin, Germany, has been a university lecturer at the Free University of Berlin. She has traveled extensively since 1989 to Moldova and southern Ukraine. In 2012, Dr. Schmidt visited south central North Dakota towns where many families emigrated from Bessarabia. James Gessele, Minneapolis, MN, a native of Mercer, ND, continues to provide important translation work for the GRHC.

If you would like more information about these books, 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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