

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 Germans from Russia community has lost an important scholar and dear friend of the GRHC. Dr. Homer Rudolf, Richmond, VA, was well known for his German-Russian music research. He was a member of the 1998 Journey to the Homeland Tour to Odessa, Ukraine. Homer was the scriptwriter for the 2005 award-winning Prairie Public documentary, *A Soulful Sound: Music of the Germans from Russia*.

One of eight children growing up at Wishek, ND, Homer earned his B.A. in music education at Jamestown College, and his Ph.D. in musicology at the University of Illinois. He retired in 2000 as Professor Emeritus of Music at the University of Richmond. Homer spent many summers at Yellowstone National Park volunteering for Sierra Club projects.

Carol Just, St. Louis Park, MN, a member of the 1998 Homeland Tour, shares: "We found one of Homer's ancestral homes in the village of Kassel and the excitement and the emotion he exhibited was worth a thousand words. As Germans from Russia we tend to be a little stoic, but Homer was downright sappy for just those few moments. I will never forget the somber visit to the Kassel church ruins where Homer pointed out the balcony where the massive organ once resided (of course he had done his research), the visit to the cemetery where no German markers remained but where we sang *Gott is Die Liebe* just to honor our ancestors."

Homer's work with the Glückstal Colonies Research Association was significant. He served as editor of these two landmark books, *The Glückstalers in New Russia and North America: A Bicentennial Collection of History, Genealogy & Folklore* (2004) and *The Glückstalers in New Russia, the Soviet Union, and North America* (2008) - both books are available for order at

library.ndsu.edu/grhc/order/ at General Books.

Homer's personal library was donated to the GRHC to establish the *Dr. Homer Rudolf Collection*. The musical scores from Dr. Rudolf's personal library were donated to the University of Jamestown, ND.

The Welk Homestead State Historic Site located near Strasburg, ND, will be open to the public from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend. The site is open Thursday to Sunday, 10am to 5pm. More information is available at www.history.nd.gov/historicsites/welk. The Tri-County Tourism Alliance was formed to promote heritage tourism including the Welk Homestead - www.germanrussiancountry.org.

The State Historical Society of North Dakota provides this information: "The Welk house was built in 1899 of dried mud brick known as batsa, a common construction method of the Germans from Russia on the Russian Steppe and on the North American Plains. Additional architectural features point to the family's German-Russian heritage. The Welk Homestead includes a summer kitchen, outhouse, blacksmith shop, and granary, as well as a barn (moved on the site in 1949). The Welk family grew wheat and other crops, raised chickens to sell eggs, and kept cows to sell cream. The sixth child, Lawrence Welk, was born on March 11, 1903. He learned to play the accordion from his father and attended the local Catholic school (in Strasburg). Lawrence left the farm in 1924 to pursue a career in music. In 1955, he made his debut on national television. *The Lawrence Welk Show* was produced for twenty-six years, and reruns can still be seen on PBS stations throughout the USA."

Ludwig Welk was born in Selz, South Russia on August 24, 1864. He

married Christina Schwahn, born on March 1, 1870, of the nearby village of Strassburg. Besides being a farmer, Ludwig Welk was a blacksmith, like his father. Ludwig and Christina Welk immigrated to America with many other families arriving at Ellis Island, New York in 1893. They traveled by rail to Eureka, SD, where they acquired a wagon and team of oxen for their trek northward to Strasburg, Emmons County, ND. Ludwig and Christina lost their first child, Anton, before leaving South Russia. When they arrived in 1893, Christina was carrying their second child, John, born on July 3, 1893. There were a total of eight children born in the sodhouse. Ludwig and Christina Welk retired to Strasburg in 1928. Their youngest son, Michael, and his family operated the farm until 1965. Lawrence Welk died on May 17, 1992, in Santa Monica, CA.

In 1993, the family of Lawrence Welk selected the North Dakota State University Archives to house the *Lawrence Welk Collection*. It includes musical arrangements, photographs, memorabilia and scrapbooks. Dr. Lance Richey, University of Saint Francis, Fort Wayne, IN, is writing a new biography of Lawrence Welk in cooperation with the NDSU Press.

On May 21-22, Journey to the Homeland Tour members will visit Selz and nearby villages.

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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