

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

Recently I joined Prairie Public Television (PPTV) videographers for filming and interviews for the 2019 documentary, *Women Behind the Plow*. Filming included site visits to beautiful farms in McIntosh and Logan counties, south central North Dakota. Major sponsors for the documentary are PPTV, the Tri-County Tourism Alliance, the Opp-Mertz Family, and the GRHC.

Filming took place in late May/early June at: Horner Ranch, south of Napoleon; Bauman Ranch, west of Linton including cattle branding; interviews of with Mary Ann (Werre) Lehr on her farm near Lehr; Lillian (Kleingartner) Ward, at her family home in Gackle; Scherr Family Farm near Zeeland, interviews with Joyce (Rath) Scherr and her daughter, Emilie; Lila Jane Wanner at Hazelton; Mosset Dairy & Grain Farm near Linton, interview with Rita (Jacob) Mosset including milking cows with the family; Emmons County Ag & Dairy Day, Linton; Meidinger Family Ranch near Ashley, interview with Sara Meidinger. Watch for more updates about this exciting project.

The North Star Chapter of Minnesota, Germans from Russia, has recently published a second anthology, *Watermelons and Thistles: Growing up German from Russia in America*. It is a companion volume to their 2013 anthology entitled: *Hollyhocks and Grasshoppers: Growing up German from Russia in America*.

The Editors write: "These stories are brought from the past and laid out on this book's pages potluck-style. There's no first or last in line. Each one is a dessert, or a full meal (meat and potatoes; wurst and dumplings), or a glass of water or a shot of schnapps in itself. Eat, drink the words and enjoy."

From the back cover: "Where is home when you've traveled halfway

around the world? Where is home when memories are all you have? Where is home when you find a new path? The Germans from Russia have been redefining the idea of home for over 200 years. They made home where they found themselves – among family, church, community, school and friends, whether they stayed in their small communities or ventured to cities across the globe."

Chapter members explore these themes and more in their second anthology of essays reflecting on being children of three homelands in two centuries. Their respect for the past and hopes for the future are ever-constant, and these glimpses into the spaces they call home will recall memories we all hold dear. Contributing members include: Bernelda Kallenberger Becker, William Bosch, Allyn Brosz, Sharon Chmielarz, David Delzer, James Gessele, Carol Just, Larry Kleingartner, Matt Klee, Charles Kurle, Vicki Lynn Kempf Kurle, Kristine Lamp, Duane Maas, Mel Meier, Cynthia Miller, Merv Rennich, Ron Scherbenski, Lillian Kleingartner Ward, Henrietta Weigel, Kathy Weigel and Louise Wiens.

Among the 36 stories in this anthology are these titles: *Prairie Memories; Are You German?; Draft Notice; Found! My Forty-Year Search for my Great-Great-Grandmother; Grandmas Make Good Friends; A Farm School Education; Radio: Bringing the World to the Prairie; Wash Day on the Farm; The Prairie Blacksmith; One-Room Schoolhouse; The Art of Thumping Watermelon; What We Choose to Remember*.

Carolyn Schott, author of *Visiting Your Ancestral Town*, writes, "I laughed a little. I cried a little. I reminisced, thinking, 'I remember my mom talking about that!' This collection made daily life in the German-Russian triangle of

the Dakotas come alive for me."

"As the son of a Norwegian immigrant father (and full Norwegian on my mother's sides, too), I absolutely loved reading these memories of fellow Dakotans whose ethnic German people came to the prairie from the steppes of Russia. They may have preferred halupsie or kuchen to lutefisk and lefse, but the stories of farm chores and barn dances, church and one-room school, wash days and farm auctions, fighting prairie fires and thistle all ring true as honest and warmly, wonderfully human. The frustrations of genealogy and the exhilaration of discovery, and the pride and the sadness that comes with knowing, are here and will be recognized and felt by people of all ethnic backgrounds who have searched for a better understanding of those who came before them." Writes Chuck Haga, University of North Dakota media writing instructor and former writer for the *StarTribune* (Minneapolis-St.Paul).

To secure a copy of *Watermelons or Hollyhocks* go to www.ndsu.edu/grhc.

The Welk Homestead State Historic Site, located near Strasburg, ND, is open Thursday to Sunday, 10 am to 5 pm until Labor Day. For information, go to: <http://www.history.nd.gov/historicsites/welk>. On August 9th, the Welk Homestead will host an Open House and Appreciation Day. Featured speaker is Dr. Tom Isern, NDSU, Historian in Residence in German-Russian country.

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 to donate (family histories or photographs), contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, PO Box 6050, Dept. 2080, Fargo, ND 58108-6050. (Tel: 701.306.3224); Email: michael.miller@ndsu.edu; website: www.ndsu.edu/grhc.