

In Touch with Prairie Living

November 2018

By Michael M. Miller

Germans from Russia Heritage Collection
North Dakota State University Libraries, Fargo



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

While preparing my November 2018 column, I am reminded of the first column I wrote in November 1996. This is the 263rd monthly column in 22 years (1996-2018). My appreciation to all the continued interest from readers and for the weekly Dakota newspapers in German-Russian country publishing the column.

Thanksgiving best wishes to you and your family. We can be most grateful that our ancestors emigrated to the Dakota prairies, Canada, USA, Argentina and Brazil from the German villages of Russia. Having visited these former German villages near Odessa, Ukraine, in May 2018, I have seen the difficult lives and challenges these people of southern Ukraine experience today.

The GRHC's most important outreach event is the Pride of Dakota Holiday Showcase. We will have a booth at the Fargo Showcase at Scheels Arena, 5225 31st Avenue South, November 16-18. The Bismarck Showcase will be at the Events Center, 315 South 5th Street, November 30-December 2. The times for both events are Friday, 4-9pm; Saturday, 9am-5pm; Sunday, 11am-4 pm.

Among new items featured at the GRHC booth is *Pacing Dakota* by Thomas D. Isern, Distinguished Professor History at North Dakota State University, Fargo. *Pacing Dakota* is a collection of essays reflecting on the history and culture of the people on the prairies in North Dakota while traveling across the state to small towns, museums, county fairs, church suppers and ethnic celebrations.

Also new at the showcase is *Watermelons and Thistles: Growing Up German from Russia in America*, written by members of the North Star Chapter of Minnesota Germans from Russia who write stories in their second

anthology of essays reflecting on being children growing up on the prairies in the Dakotas. The editors write, "These stories are brought from the past and laid out in this book's pages in potluck-style. Each story is a dessert, or a full meal (meat and potatoes, wurst and dumplings), or a shot of schnapps in itself."

Also featured at the booth will be the popular cookbook, *Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country*. Mary Ann (Werre) Lehr, Lehr, ND, pictured on the front cover of the cookbook with her mother's 1950s apron, will be at the Bismarck Showcase on Saturday, December 1, to autograph the cookbook. Mary Ann was very popular at the 2017 Bismarck Holiday Showcase visiting with folks and autographing the *Gutes Essen* cookbook.

Mary Ann's Strudels recipe is in the cookbook. She states, "This was served through the year; especially during spring chicken time or perhaps a special birthday request. The most fun was Mom doing the stretching and ending up with some holes in the stretch. At first we used the old-fashioned cast iron cook stove, burning wood, coal and cow chips. Next came the kerosene stove and now a deep electric frying pan. Mom would stretch each piece the size of the table. Start at edges, also from beneath. They said until you can read the newspaper through the dough". Other recipes in the cookbook from Mary Ann are Rhubarb-Strawberry Jam and Rhubarb Dessert.

From the *Gutes Essen* cookbook: "Fred Werre, established the homestead in 1898, six miles north of Lehr, ND. He chose an ideal location; a large sloping hill overlooking a beautiful lake. The original well, dug in 1898, is being used today in 2017. The large two-story home was within 40 feet of our

beautiful summer kitchen, which is now the show place of his collections of items used at that time. This includes items that belong to my parents, the Julius Werres. Items include their first radio, a wind charger on the roof, washstand, water pails and dippers. Also, the original high chair used by all the children.

Fred Werre was interested in many phases of horticulture. Perhaps much [of this information was] learned from the old country. The entire yard is still surrounded with ash trees, junipers, lilacs, rose bushes, asparagus beds, large strawberry patches, an assortment of the red and green rhubarbs, gooseberries, a rock trail with irises on each side, apples, plums and choke cherries.

The well is directly next to the house and garden bed. I understand, that our Mom was able to grow a large vegetable garden during the 'Dirty Thirties' since the water was plentiful and close for all purposes. Now, the fourth and fifth generations continue the traditions of keeping the homestead beautiful with an additional 600-plus trees. It is indeed a pleasure to be part of such a lovely farmstead."

Mary Ann (Werre) Lehr was interviewed for the 2019 Prairie Public Broadcasting documentary, *Women Behind the Plow*. She is one of eighteen women interviewed and featured in the corresponding book, which is available from GRHC on our website.

If you would like more information about the Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine; becoming a Friend of the GRHC, or would like to 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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