

In Touch with Prairie Living

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By Michael M. Miller

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The GRHC has a new book available for purchase, *Prairie Girl Memoir: Growing Up on a Dakota Farm, Whose Family had Deep Roots in German Immigrant Grandparent's Idea and Values*, by Inez E. Dockter, who was born in 1936 in a farmhouse two miles north of Venturia, McIntosh County, North Dakota.

Dockter shares this text at the introduction: “Why am I writing this?”, I ask myself. Right now it feels like it will be a lot of hard work and I hope I will change my mind before this is finished. The main reason I am motivated is to leave something behind for my children, grand-children, and maybe great-grandchildren because whatever material goods I leave behind will not be worth much.”

“I had the opportunity to spend a little time with my paternal grandfather, Gottlieb Dockter, Jr. Also, as a young adult, I spent quite a bit of time with my maternal grandmother, Katherine (Katie) Helfenstein Esch Ritter. Because of my setting this down on paper, when I am no longer on this earth, my heirs may have answers to some of the questions they never got around to asking.”

In the Foreword, Inez Dockter writes: “While doing the research for information to put my memories into works, I became aware of some interesting parallels between my paternal grandfather Gottlieb Dockter, Jr. and Laura Ingalls Wilder, a pioneer woman and author, whose work I have read and admired for many years. They were the same age, apart by only three months. In 1883, at age seventeen, my grandfather arrived in Dakota Territory, with his parents and other siblings as German immigrants from the Ukraine village of Neudorf (Glueckstal District) in South Russia. At the same time, Laura and her family lived in DeSmet, Dakota Territory. In 1885, my grandfather

married Eva Lehr, and Laura married Almanzo Wilder. Also, at the same time my grandfather and Laura homesteaded with their spouses who settled on free prairie land only about 140 miles apart in Dakota Territory.”

In the Farm Life chapter, Dockter writes, “Farm women, including my mother, were very protective of the ‘egg money’. The eggs from laying hens would provide the necessary income for the family groceries. My mom always seemed to have a few dollars and coins in her purse from the precious egg money.”

“Farm women were usually in charge of raising poultry. My mom ordered newly hatched baby chicks from a hatchery. The chicks, about 300 to 350 of them, arrived at the Venturia train station from the hatchery. It was very critical to pick up the chicks promptly when they arrived. The chicks came in cardboard boxes of 100 to a box, with 25 chicks per section. As a child, I loved the chicks and all the activity with their arrival. I recall helping to clean the building, which we called the brooder house.”

“Another farm chore that was ever present was milking the cows. When I was growing up my parents had from 10 to 14 milk cows. All of the milking, twice a day, was done by hand. By the time I was eight, I was milking one or two cows.”

The author writes in the School Time chapter, “When I was nine years old, my younger sister Gladys and I drove to school with a four-wheeled old-fashioned buggy. The buggy was drawn by a large black work horse named Queen. What a sight we must have been! In the four years she and I went to school, with either the horse drawn buggy or sleigh, we had our share of mishaps.”

She writes, “I looked back at the

harness, to make sure that it was on Queen, the large work horse, who was hitched to a black buggy, before my five year older sister and I got in, for the two mile ride home from our rural one room school house. My formal education ended at eighth grade. Picking up dry cow (pies) manure for fuel to melt snow on the cook stove and for the family’s Saturday bath (all used the same water). Seeing buffalo wallow in the pasture while bringing cows home for milking. Picking rocks and setting up grain sheaves in the fields. Butchering hogs for winter’s meat supply. This wasn’t the later part of the 19th century...it was 1946.”

Inez Docker has authored this wonderful new book of her childhood memories. *Prairie Girl Memoir* is available on the GRHC website.

If you would like more information about the 24th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May, 2020), 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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