

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

As I write this May 2019 column, I look forward to traveling with our 23rd Journey to the Homeland Tour group to Berlin and Stuttgart, Germany, and Odessa, Ukraine.

The Welk Homestead State Historic Site, near Strasburg, ND, opens Memorial Day Weekend to Labor Day Weekend – Thursday to Sunday, 10 am to 5 pm. Information about The Welk Homestead can be found at: www.history.nd.gov/historicsites/welk.

Researchers at the GRHC often ask what books I might suggest for family research and historical background information about the Germans from Russia. We have prepared the following list of Recommended Books for German-Russian Research. All books are available on the GRHC website at www.ndsu.edu/grhc/order.

For general historical information, these are important books: 1) *From Catherine to Khrushchev: The Story of Russia's Germans* by Adam Geisinger; 2) *Memories of the Black Sea Germans: Highlights of Their History and Heritage* by Joseph S. Height; 3) *The Black Sea Germans in the Dakotas* by George Rath; 4) *Bessarabia: German Colonists on the Black Sea* by Ute Schmidt, translated by James T. Gessele.

From Catherine to Khrushchev, by Adam Geisinger, traces the flow of German-Russian history from their arrival in Russia, through the Czars that succeeded Catherine, emigration to the USA, Canada and South America, to the takeover of Russia by the Communists and deportation of the remaining Germans to scattered parts of Russia. This book is one of the most thoroughly researched. Adam Geisinger was born in 1909 in a sod house near Holdfast, SK, Canada.

Memories of the Black Sea Germans, by Joseph Height, is a fascinating collection of primary cultural

materials. Height recounts the lives of pioneers on the Dakota prairie and the story of the settlement Catholic families in western Canada. Joseph Height was born in 1909 and grew up at Tramping Lake, Sask., the oldest of 14 children.

The Black Sea Germans in the Dakotas, by George Rath, traces emigration to the Dakotas and identifies where they settled. For some towns, he lists all of the churches. Chapters include the role of the major Protestant denominations. Rath notes the German-Russian talent for hard work and their hunger for land. Rath, born in 1891 in Nesselrode, Odessa District, was called in the Russian Army in 1916. In 1922, he came to the USA.

The GRHC published *Bessarabia: German Colonists on the Black Sea*, by Dr. Ute Schmidt, translated from German to English by James T. Gessele, native of Mercer, ND. Dr. Elvire Necker-Eberhardt, who was born in Bessarabia, comments, "We have been given an immense source of information, a reference book for any historical, economic, cultural, spiritual question of this group of Germans from Russia." Carol Just writes, "The book opens new windows to life in South Russia from early settlement to the present day. In this volume there is new information about agricultural practices, animal husbandry, vine culture, social structures, inter-ethnic communications with many other nationalities, textile and farm equipment manufacturing."

Other valuable books relating to the Black Sea colonies of South Russia (southern Ukraine) are *Homesteaders on the Steppe: Cultural History of the Evangelical-Lutheran Colonies in the Region of Odessa, 1804-1945* and *Paradise on the Steppe: A Cultural History of the Kutschurgan, Beresan, and Liebental Colonies, 1804-1972*, both books authored by Joseph S.

Height. Height provides the name of the original settlers for the colonies. He covers historical information, including; life in the villages, fashion, medicine, festivals, education, sayings, language, holiday traditions, wedding customs, religion, architecture, games and entertainment, songs, and agriculture. He also includes information about homes and food of the settlers, the geography of the area, the role of the women, and relations with the Russian neighbors. Height shares the conditions in Germany for all the people who immigrated to Russia. The books include village plat maps and church photographs.

One additional book I highly recommend is *German-Russians: In Words and Pictures*, by Dr. William Bosch, Spearfish, SD, native of Linton, ND. Bosch writes, "The German-Russian story is a colorful and fascinating tale filled with triumph and tragedy. I hope this book will help discover this saga of an amazing people and their achievements." Bosch writes in his Epilogue, "Germans who moved to North and South America did well in the US and Canada. They gradually assimilated into the English speaking populace and their respective economies. Today, it is very hard to find anyone under sixty who still speaks a German dialect that was spoken in Russia."

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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