

In Touch with Prairie Living

November 2020

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

Thanksgiving regards to you and your family. Let us be grateful that our ancestors immigrated to the Dakota prairies, Canada, USA, and South America from Russia. In preparing the November column, this is the 288th monthly column in 24 years (1996-2020). My appreciation for continued interest from readers.

I am often asked, "What books would you suggest for background information and research about the Germans from Russia?" I would like to recommend the following books for introductory German-Russian research. These books would be excellent Christmas gifts, and are available at the GRHC website – www.ndsu.edu/grhc - Shop Online.

A popular newer book titled, *The German-Russians: In Words and Pictures*, by Dr. William Bosch, provides an excellent short history of the Germans from Russia including many photographs. The author writes, "When I was growing up in the southern part of North Dakota, all of my relatives spoke a German dialect. None of us ever asked how this came to be." Bosch's writing is of self-discovery which he shares with fellow German-Russians. His story of the circumstances that propelled the German-Russian people to the North American plains, and his description of their distinctive folkways, serves as an accessible introduction to the Germans from Russia. These people were one of the most significant ethnic settlement groups of the Great Plains of North America. Their story is a colorful and fascinating tale filled with triumph and tragedy.

Edna Boardman, in her review for the book, *From Catherine to Khrushchev*, by Dr. Adam Giesinger, writes "This is the most thoroughly researched, most professionally written, of the popular books on the Germans from Russia, yet it is very interesting and absorbing to read. Giesinger traces the flow of German-Russian history from their arrival in Russia, through the Czars that succeeded Catherine, through immigration to the United States, Canada, and South America, to the takeover of Russia by the communists, and the deportation of the remaining people to scattered parts of Russia." Dr. Adam Giesinger's children donated his extensive private library to establish the Dr. Adam

Giesinger Collection at the GRHC.

I would recommend three books by Dr. Joseph S. Height. Dr. Height was born in 1909 at Tramping Lake, SK, a son of German immigrants who came to Canada in 1900 from the Black Sea colonies of Mannheim and Strassburg, Kutschurgan District. For many years he taught German at Franklin College, IN. His daughter, Margaret Height, has donated her father's library to the Germans from Russia Heritage Society, Bismarck. In May 2013, Margaret Height joined the Journey to the Homeland Tour to visit the former German colonies of Mannheim and Strassburg near Odessa, Ukraine.

The first recommended Height book, *Paradise on the Steppe: A Cultural History of the Kutschurgan, Beresan and Liebental Colonies, 1804-1972*, focuses on the Catholic colonies of South Russia by the Black Sea, today near Odessa, Ukraine. Height follows the settlers on the often disastrous journey to Russia and through the difficult years when colonists first tilled the iron-hard soil. Height writes about festivals, songs, sayings, languages, letters home, and photographs. Included in the book, are town plats of Beresan, Liebental, and Kutschurgan villages.

Homesteaders on the Steppe: Cultural History of the Evangelical-Lutheran Colonies in the Region of Odessa, 1804-1945, by Height, covers the Lutheran villages. Height describes the journey down the Danube River and the life of the villages, wedding customs, games and entertainment, songs and agriculture. The names of the original settlers for the villages are included.

Memories of the Black Sea Germans: Highlights of Their History and Heritage, also by Joseph Height, is a fascinating collection of primary and cultural material. The book answers questions many German-Russians have assumed have no answers. Height includes the report about colonization written by J.G. Kohl in 1838. Kohl reports of hard-working people, and the gardens in which watermelon was king, though they also grow onions, cucumbers, pumpkins, potatoes, and fruits.

Rev. George Rath, another recommended author, was born in 1891 at Nesselrode, near Birsula, Province of Odessa. He served in

the Russian Army from 1916 to 1918. In 1922, Rath came to the United States. An ordained minister, he served the Evangelical Synod of North America.

The Black Sea Germans in the Dakotas, by Reverend Rath, begins with a look at the original Black Sea colony group settlements. Rath traces their immigration to the Dakotas and identifies the areas in which they settled. Later chapters focus on the role and scope of the major Protestant denominations to which German-Russians were attracted. He writes of the Germans from Russia, "Wheat raising was the object of their lives."

Bessarabia: German Colonists on the Black Sea, by Dr. Ute Schmidt, translated from German to English by James T. Gessele, was published by the GRHC. In a review, Allyn Brosz writes, "The book is without question, the authoritative history of the Germans in Bessarabia." Dr. Elvire Necker-Eberhardt, who was born in Bessarabia, shares, "The author follows the Bessarabian Germans from their origin, the beginning and development in Bessarabia, to their tragic scattering in 1940 and beyond. The different points are not only reported and documented but also aptly illustrated with many unique pictures, maps and graphs." James Gessele, Minneapolis, MN, a native of Mercer, ND, continues to provide important translation work for the GRHC.

For more information about the 24th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May 2022), donating a family history and/or photographs, or how to financially support the GRHC, contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, Dept 2080, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050. (Tel: 701-231-8416); michael.miller@ndsu.edu; or go to library.ndsu.edu/grhc.

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