

In Touch with Prairie Living

November 2021

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

Thanksgiving best regards to you and your family. Let us be grateful that our ancestors immigrated to the USA, Dakota prairies, Canada, and South America, from the former German villages in South Russia. Having visited these former Bessarabian and German villages near Odessa, Ukraine, I have seen what difficult lives the people experience today.

In preparing this column, I remember writing my first column in November 1996. This is the 300th monthly column in 25 years (1996-2021). My continued appreciation for interested readers.

The GRHC's largest outreach events are the Pride of Dakota Holiday Showcases. We will have a booth in Fargo at Scheels Arena, 5225 31st Avenue South, November 19-21. We will also have a booth in Bismarck at the Events Center, 315 South 5th Street, December 3-5. Times for both events are Friday, 4-9pm; Saturday, 9am-5pm; Sunday, 11am-4pm. We hope to see many of you there.

Featured in the booth are new books: "Big Bend Country: A Journey of Good Times, Hard Times, and Hope" by Larry Kruckenberg, "The Night We Landed on the Moon: Essays Between Exile & Belonging" by Debra Marquart, "Lehr Tabernacle: 1921-2021," "Tumbleweeds Remembered" by Milt Ost, "My Impossible Dream: Germans from Russia Immigrant Grandparents Ethnic Life Style" by Florence Dockter Scherbenske, "100 Years of Faith and Food: Lehr Tabernacle Cookbook," and a new edition of "Ewiger Saatz: Everlasting Yeast."

Other popular books available in the GRHC booth include: "The German-Russians in Words and Pictures," "Women Behind the Plow," "Hollyhocks and Grasshoppers: Growing Up German in America," "Dakota Kraut: Accent and Ancestry," "Lost Shawls and Pig Spleens," "Not Until the Combine is Paid and Other Jokes," "Prairie Girl Memoir," "Murdered Family: A Novel," "Watermelon and Thistles: Growing Up German in America," and "Still."

Also in the booth are GRHC's most popular cookbooks, which make great Christmas gifts. These include: "Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country," "Alma's Favorite Recipes:

Cooking & Memories from a German-Russian Farm Kitchen," "Cookbook for Germans from Russia," "Food 'N Customs: Recipes of the Black Sea Germans," "German-Russian Pioneer Cookbook," and "Sei Unser Gast: Be Our Guest."

"No One Dare Call Her a Liar: The Untold Story of Alma Kruckenberg's 1938 Murder," by Larry Kruckenberg, will also be available. This murder was "one of the most notorious crimes in North Dakota history and has reverberated through several generations of Larry Kruckenberg's German-Russian family."

Larry Kruckenberg dedicates the book, "For Alma Luise Kruckenberg, who as a young teenager, was murdered. Only years later, was it learned she suffered unimaginable pain prior to her death. Also, for her parents – John and Christina Kruckenberg – and their immediate family, who all struggled to cope with the tragedy, both at the time it took place and in the decades that followed."

From the back cover: "The brutal murder of 16-year-old Alma Luise Kruckenberg at the hands of her minister on August 16, 1938, was shocking enough. The subsequent confession, trial, and sentencing of her murderer took place with astonishing speed, leaving Alma's family and friends barely enough time to process the horrifying event. Lurid details of the crime have been passed down from one generation to the next, becoming distorted with each telling. In a meticulously researched retelling, the nephew Alma never knew provides a painstaking account of murder and motive, uncovering some secrets along the way. More than 80 years after the crime, the author sheds new light on what transpired, finally laying to rest a tragedy which haunted his family for decades. Through official court transcripts, archived newspaper articles, writings from the murderer, conversations with elders who still remember, and traces of Alma's diary that have been lost to time, Larry Kruckenberg tells the complete story of a crime that once captivated attention around the world, finally giving voice to the victim."

The author writes in the Prologue, "Alma Luise Kruckenberg was the aunt I never knew. I visited Alma's gravesite often

during the time I lived in North Dakota. I recall once taking my mother along when she was in her 70s. I hoped that she might open up and share more information about what happened. Instead, she got quite emotional. All she said was, "You really would have liked her." Additionally, I also had the pleasure of talking to many elders from, and who had ties to, the Krem area of Mercer County who still held memories that needed to be tapped."

Kruckenberg writes, "Alma Kruckenberg's original tombstone was constructed by her father a short time after she was buried. He built the forms and did all the fabrication himself. Members of Alma's confirmation class and their families helped purchase some of the supplies. The words on the tombstone are written in German, the English translation of which reads: "Alma Luise Kruckenberg, born 5th of March 1922; Murdered on 16th of August 1938, by Pastor H. Janssen; Rest in peace in your tomb until the Lord calls you again."

Larry Kruckenberg is a retired agency administrator. His award-winning career spans nearly 50 years with two state wildlife agencies in North Dakota and Wyoming. His first book, "Big Bend Country: A Journey of Good Times, Hard Times, and Hope," debuted in November 2020, and continues to receive high praise. In addition to writing, Kruckenberg is an accomplished photographer. Kruckenberg was born and raised in western North Dakota at Beulah and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology/Wildlife Biology from North Dakota State University.

For more information about the 24th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine, donating family histories and 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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