

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

Our Germans from Russia community has lost a shining star with the passing of Robert “Bob” Dambach. Bob was a familiar face and voice of Prairie Public as the director of television. Bob was a special colleague and a dear friend. We traveled together to film and interview to produce documentaries in Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, Ukraine, Alberta, Saskatchewan, California, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, and the Dakotas.

In 1985, Bob Dambach began his work as program director at Prairie Public and was promoted to director of television in 1996. With his passion for history and local production, Bob opened new doors for partnerships that led to dozens of award-winning local documentaries.

In May 1996, Bob Dambach and Dave Geck, Prairie Public videographer, traveled with our first Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Odessa, Ukraine. Bob and Dave also joined the 1997 and 1998 tours. Amazing filming in the former Bessarabian and Black Sea German villages of Strassburg, Kulm, Selz, and Leipzig, captured the lifestyle of the villagers, churches, bazaars, schools, gardens, canning and farming; and developed the first award-winning documentary in the Germans from Russia Series.

Bob’s 40-year partnership with myself and the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection resulted in nine, locally produced and nationally distributed, documentaries in the Germans from Russia Series: “The Germans from Russia, Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie” (1999), “Schmeckfest: Food Traditions of the Germans from Russia” (2000), “Prairie Crosses, Prairie Roses: Iron Crosses of the Great Plains” (2002), “A Soulful Sound: Music of the Germans from Russia” (2005), “It’s All Earth and Sky” (2010), “At Home in Russia, At Home on the Prairie” (2012), “We (Never) Don’t Forget: Germans from Russia in South America” (2105), “Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country” (2017), and “Women Behind the Plow” (2019).

These documentaries, and many others, won Regional Emmy Awards, numerous Telly and Aurora Awards, and local, regional, national, and international recognition. The

inaugural program of 1999, “Germans from Russia: Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie,” was seen by international audiences through a broadcast on Deutsche Welle in Germany and was a finalist at the International Film Festival, Krakow, Poland, the only American documentary to be invited to participate in the juried competition.

Barbara Gravel, producer at Prairie Public, writes, “One of the projects Bob was most passionate about was the Germans from Russia Documentary Series. This body of work encapsulates the history, the culture, and the struggles of a group of ambitious people who let nothing stand in their way of success. ‘Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country’ was a favorite of Bob’s and the entire Prairie Public Crew! Bob was adamant about showing the younger generations of German-Russian children learning about their cultural cuisine by cooking alongside adults who could teach technique and tradition. Bob loved filming a group of 4-H kids learning how to make cheese buttons at a farmhouse near Westfield, ND!

He genuinely enjoyed telling the stories of the people of the prairie region. I smile every time I think of the treasure he left as his legacy... the documentaries that will help viewers learn things they may not have known before. I watched Bob pour his heart and soul into the documentaries he produced, which is all the proof I need to know that if you love your work... it’s not work at all.”

Dr. Dona Reeves-Marquardt, Austin, TX, shares, “In June 1996, Lew and I were sitting in the airport in Vienna, Austria, anticipating our journey to Odessa, Ukraine, when we came into conversation with an articulate and informed fellow traveler loaded with photographic equipment as well as the usual baggage. Little did we realize the moment would turn into twenty-six years of deep friendship and trusted collaboration with Bob Dambach, writing three documentary scripts and long hours of exploration, gourmet as well as primitive dining, and animated conversations. His unique talent of finding the essence, the focal point of every subject guided the production of his many films. In every way

he was an artist, save in his temperament, for he remained imperturbable even when everything crashed. Let that stand as an ideal for us all. We are sorely diminished by his loss.” Dona and her late husband, Dr. Lewis Marquardt, native of Linton, ND, were script writers for three of the award-winning Germans from Russia documentaries.

Carmen Rath-Wald, President, Tri-County Tourism Alliance, shares, “Bob Dambach’s professional record is stellar and well known throughout the region. He will be missed for the work he did and the connections he made. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to work with Bob in the making of the ‘Gutes Essen’ and ‘Women Behind the Plow’ documentaries. We’ve lost a man with intellectual curiosity and talent without equal. All true. But what I will miss most is the friendship of a kind, generous, and forever optimistic man. I will miss hearing stories about his family and seeing the tender photos of him with his grandbabies. I will miss sharing a meal with him and listening to stories of his adventures. I will miss his sense of humor and his laugh. God Speed, my friend until we meet again.”

Acacia Jonas Stuckle, Emmons County Extension Agent, writes, “It was a pleasure working with Bob Dambach to produce two documentaries with the Tri-County Tourism Alliance. He always amazed me with his vision for a project. He could see it all come together before we ever started. His ability to capture personal stories through his interviews, editing hundreds of hours of video, and then produce a 60-minute masterpiece is remarkable. He leaves a legacy in all his work. I’m grateful that sharing the story of the Germans from Russia was one of them.”

You can read Bob Dambach’s obituary at www.boulgerfuneralhome.com/obituaries/bob-dambach.

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.