

In Touch with Prairie Living

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Germans from Russia Heritage Collection
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In this month's column, the focus is Easter memories in German-Russian homes on the Dakota prairies.

Mary (Welk) Mitzel (1913-2010), who was raised on a farm near Orrin in Pierce County, ND, shared, "Mother always brought two sets of egg dye. We would do the first six colors until the water cooled, then she would make the second set of colors. We would hard boil 5 or 6 dozen eggs on Easter Saturday, spending several hours helping Easter Rabbit (Osterhase). Mother explained to us kids that the Easter Bunny had so many children to visit, especially 'poor children,' we had to help out. The fun task was a search outside to gather grass and make several nests around the house and yard for Easter Rabbit to fill with colored eggs. We had a large batch of sugar cookies decorated with colored frostings. They remained inside our house with Mother's assurance that Easter Bunny got his cookies too!"

Mary Mitzel's three daughters, Cynthia, Loretta, and Mary Lou, traveled in May 1997, to their ancestral villages of Selz and Strassburg, Kutschurgan District, near Odessa, Ukraine. They met Antonia Welk Ivanova in Selz, where Mary's parents and grandparents were born.

Allean (Mertz) Boschee, from Crookston, MN, writes, "My family went out and picked grass and if any Easter crocuses were up, we would also pick them and decorate the kettles and strainer we set out for the Easter Bunny. Us kids growing up never helped dye the eggs until we grew up and then had to help. It wasn't as exciting anymore after we found out there was no Easter Bunny. But finding all the goodies the next morning was fun. I remember Mom would boil dozens of eggs to dye and I remember they would be sitting on the kitchen table in a bowl. We would eat so many eggs until they were gone. They were fresh and from our own hens on the farm."

Allean was a member of the 2008 Journey to the Homeland Tour with her two sisters and nieces. They visited their ancestral Glueckstal District villages in Moldova, near Odessa, Ukraine. Allean attended the Glueckstal Lutheran Church in Kidder County, ND.

Lorraine Kastelen writes, "We made

nests out in the yard, close to the house for spring warmth. These were lined with moss and prepared for a few 'bunny' eggs. Onion skins were included in colored water often made from crepe paper. The onion skin helped the color to 'take.' The bunny was looked after too! Earlier in the winter, we planted wheat in an empty tobacco can, so it was a nice green grass look for the bunny to eat. And sure enough, when we checked our nests early Easter Sunday morning, we noticed one or two grass leaves had indeed been nibbled. This nest custom was a transport from the South Russia village of my mother, named Kandel near Odessa, Ukraine."

Christina (Aberle) Long, Berlin, ND, writes, "When our kids were growing up, Good Friday dinner was always potato soup and a Judas Rope. Judas Rope was a piece of dough rolled into a long roll, then shaped in the shape of a hangman's knot to remind us of the 'Judas' in all of us. Each one got just one hangman's knot. On Holy Saturday, we had Hot Cross Buns. On Easter Sunday, we had Easter Roll. It was a sweet dough rolled out in a rectangle shape, spread with beaten egg white, then added chopped dates and nuts, rolled-up, put on a cookie sheet in a circle. When baked, it was frosted and decorated with marshmallow cherries and nuts."

Mary Ebach, Rugby, ND, writes, "Holy Saturday was the time when Ma got the eggs ready to boil and dye them. Of course, they were their own eggs, picked fresh from the chicken coop and aged a day or so. Ma always coated the dyed eggs with a bit of lard to give them a nice shine. We seemed to always have ham for Easter and Ma covered it with dough before baking it. It made the meat nice and juicy and retained the flavor. Our mother had baked some bread with raisins in the dough. She then took some to church and put it on the community rail and the priest blessed the Easter food that the people brought for that reason. She also had Easter candy that she put in a basket. Easter Sunday meant the little ones always wore their prettiest dresses, but everyone wore their best clothes, including hats, for Mass. After Mass, we feasted on a large meal with ham and all other trimmings. Times and customs may change a bit, but the memories

stay on."

David Kirschenman, Omaha, NE, writes, "My German-Russian family tradition that I remember, and we still practice today, is the meal we ate on Good Friday. The meals on Good Friday were supposed to be meatless. My mother grew up at Gackle, ND, and being German-Russian, no one was a stranger to dough dishes. The meal was very simple which consisted of homemade egg noodles (they were rolled out in the morning, dried, and cut) and stewed prunes. There was no sauce or anything put on the noodles except for butter and fried crumbs for croutons. Of course, there was the usual prune humor at the end of the meal, and since the prunes had pits, the number someone ate could easily be calculated, and that person was reminded of possible consequences."

Beverly Gutenberg writes, "For Good Friday, we made egg noodles that I called 'fat noodles,' made from flour, milk, a bit of oil but no salt – similar to dumplings for stew. They were kneaded and then rolled by hand into strips and cut into pieces. My job as a child was to roll these pieces of dough which had been sprinkled with flour and made my hands itch with the friction of rolling them. They were put in two frying pans – one with onions for my father and sister and one with sauerkraut for my mother and me. One had to add the correct amount of water to have them steamed. All the water had to be evaporated in order to have the right consistency of the noodles. We loved the crusts that developed in the process. We also ate the noodles with prunes or more frequently with canned Saskatoon berries. My family came from Kandel and Strassburg in the Ukraine, lived in the area of Orrin, ND, for a few years and then in 1906 emigrated to the Saskatchewan prairies near Tramping Lake in the St. Joseph's Colony."

For more information about 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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