

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

The mission of the Tri-County Tourism Alliance is to organize people to preserve and promote Germans from Russia heritage and culture to enhance tourism in Emmons, Logan, and McIntosh counties. These counties in south central North Dakota are the center of German-Russian country. The Tri-County Tourism Alliance is the embodiment of the names of these three counties.

The Tri-County Tourism Alliance has partnered with Talking Trail LLC, Bismarck, ND, to develop the exciting Germans from Russia Talking Trail. The user-friendly mobile app is a platform for use with your cell phone. Shared memories, photos, and voices of the rich history for sites in three counties, Emmons, Logan, and McIntosh. Get lost listening to captivating stories from German-Russian Country. Whether it is the tragic story of the Feist children, the heroic story of Wilhelmina Geiszler, or the rich history of the immigrant journey memorialized at the Lake Hoskins Settlement Marker, you will love listening to the stories of these communities.

The German-Russians are one of the most visible and vibrant ethnic immigrant culture of the Plains and Carmen Rath-Wald, President of the Tri-County Tourism Alliance, comments, "A Talking Trail in German-Russian Country allows travelers to hear stories about the people, places, and cultural traditions of Germans from Russia settlers in south central North Dakota. These authentic stories will create layers of understanding of the Real People, Real Places, and Real Things in German-Russian country."

The Talking Trail takes us to St. John the Baptist Catholic Cemetery, north of Zeeland, ND. The first sod church was built in 1888, and the earliest iron cross marks a grave from 1889. The diphtheria epidemic had a devastating impact on families in the St. John's area between 1887-1899. There were 99 deaths in the St. John's Parish. The greatest number of losses were the children. Cast iron crosses mark the graves of the children of Michael and Louisa (Elizabeth Scherrer) Feist. Deaths in this family were, Magdalena (4), Franz (6), Michael (7), twin sisters Barbara and Francisca (9), and Johannes (13). They all died during Lent,

between March 7 and April 2, 1898.

The Talking Trail also takes us to the Old St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery, west of Hague, ND. Founded in 1884, on the grounds of the of the first St. Mary's Catholic Church, the cemetery features the impressive handmade wrought-iron crosses of four blacksmiths who emigrated from South Russia to the Hague area. These names were Paul Keller, Michael Schmidt, Jacob Schneider, and his brother Deport. These handmade crosses are a symbol of the German-Russian characteristics of thrift, hard work, practicality, faith, and creativity. The iron crosses make St. Mary's one of North Dakota's most important artistic cultural sites.

Also enjoy the experience of visiting the Welk Homestead State Historic Site near Strasburg for Talking Trail stories of the blacksmith shop and sod house made with batsa bricks. Here you can see, and hear, the beautiful story of homesteading and prairie life. The Welk Homestead is open from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend, Thursdays to Sundays, 10am to 5 pm.

Call 701-566-5566 followed by the Talking Point number and the # key to experience the stories of the Germans from Russia. The Talking Trail locations in Emmons, Logan, and McIntosh counties are:

- 223# Emmons Co. Museum, Linton
- 224# Logan County Museum, Napoleon
- 225# St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery, Hague
- 226# Civic Center, Wishek
- 227# Emmons County Courthouse, Linton
- 228# McIntosh County Courthouse, Ashley
- 229# Logan County Courthouse, Napoleon
- 230# Dinosaurs on the Prairie, east of Napoleon
- 231# Schwab Sodhouse, Strasburg
- 232# Zeeland City Hall
- 233# St. John the Baptist Catholic Cemetery, Zeeland
- 234# Lehr Tabernacle
- 235# St. Andrew's Cemetery, McIntosh County
- 236# Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church, Strasburg

- 237# South-Central Threshing Grounds, Braddock
- 238# Lake Hoskins Settlement Marker, Ashley
- 239# Logan County Museum, Napoleon
- 240# McIntosh County Heritage Center, Ashley
- 241# Wilhelmina Geiszler Bust, Ashley
- 242# Burnstad Site, Wishek
- 243# St. Andrew's White Carpenter Church, McIntosh County
- 244# Welk Homestead, Strasburg
- 245# Welk Homestead, Strasburg
- 246# St. Mary's Catholic Church, Hague
- 247# St. John's Catholic Church Memorial, Zeeland
- 248# St. Andrew's Stone Church, McIntosh County
- 249# Beaver Lake State Park, Wishek
- 250# Ashley Firehall
- 251# Zeeland Arch
- 252# Elise Perras Museum, Hazelton
- 253# Keller Hotel, Strasburg
- 254# St. Luke Lutheran Church, Wishek
- 255# Zion Lutheran Church, Ashley
- 256# Gordon Hoberg Story, Wishek
- 257# Friedens Cemetery, McIntosh County

The Tri-County Alliance Germans from Russia Talking Trail is just one of many Talking Trails. These include Fargo Air Museum, Enchanted Highway, Dakota Territory Air Museum in Minot, Northern Plains National Heritage Areas, Old Red Old Ten Scenic Byway, Jamestown ND, Otter Tail County MN, New York Mills MN, Great Voices Series, Talking Zoos, and South Dakota. For further information, go to www.talkingtrail.com.

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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