

In Touch with Prairie Living

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
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In May 2022, the Rauter family of Wisconsin visited the GRHC. Paul Rauter of Osseo, WI, donated the family history, "Our Life and Struggles of Our Past: The Life Story of David and Otilie Henke Rauter," published in 2002. These memories of Otilie were translated from German to English by Lydia Rauer Clements. The family's ancestry is to the village of Kulm, Bessarabia.

David and Otilie Henke Rauter were married on November 30, 1929, in Kulm, Bessarabia. Otilie writes, "He never courted me. Ours was an arranged marriage between my father and David's father in order to expand their property holdings."

The family history shares, "On June 26, 1940, Bessarabia was taken and occupied by the Russians. The Russians took over everything. The men took the horses, put the feed on the wagon and went out into the field into a ditch fearing that they would take their horses away. From that point on, we had nothing. What we harvested we had to deliver without payment for it.

On September 5, 1940, the resettlement was finalized between Hitler and the Russians. All people of German ancestry would be relocated. All of us were ready to go, as we had no other alternative. Either relocate or get sent to Siberia. The corn and grapes were still in the field.

The women and children left first on a wagon caravan from Kulm, Bessarabia. The men from the village left two weeks later. When David arrived to meet his family at Galatz, Poland, "all he had was a sack of horse harnesses and collars. He figured he could always pick up another horse somewhere. He had a ham wrapped up and stuck in the harnesses."

The Rauter family then resettled in Poland in 1941. The family arrived by wagon at Donaten, Poland, where they resettled on a Polish farm. The livestock consisted of 4 cows, 3 horses, and a couple of chickens that the Polish people had to leave behind for us when they were relocated. There were 27 families from Kulm that had resettled in Donaten. Paul was born on December 18, 1944.

"In January 1945, we made preparations throughout the night since we were to leave early in the morning along with the Germans

from neighboring villages and head in the direction of Germany. At 4 in the morning, we started out, the children were packed in featherbeds, it was a cold winter.

On May 9, 1945, the War with Russia came to an end. The church bells were ringing, then we received the news that we could go back to the villages. Our trunks and suitcases had been broken into. There was nothing to eat, nothing to buy.

In 1951, we tried to immigrate. We had a choice of applying for America, Australia, Canada, Paraguay, or Argentina, but we hoped to make it to America. We went to a refugee camp in Hanau (Germany) for a week where others were gathering. It was named the USNS General Stuart Heinzelman. We were 10 days on the water. The worst of it was the seasickness. Lilli (17-year-old daughter) worked in the kitchen. Women and children were in one part of the ship, the men were in another. The four little ones were with me."

The narrative report of the Rauter family by the Joint Committee on Resettlement of Displaced Persons, included: Rauter, David – 44, Otilie – 40, Lilli – 17, Gerhard – 13, Herta – 10, Ella – 8, Heinz Paul – 7, Lydia – 4; Nationality: Volksdeutsche (Ethnic Germans) from Romania; Religion: Congregational; Languages: Romanian, German. Further information included, "They belong to the Congregational Church group which was in Bessarabia and here they have kept a close contact with their church community which is most important thing for them. They are a sober and hard-working folk and can be highly recommended to a sponsor."

"On the 24th of March (1952) toward evening we arrived in New York. Our first sight of the Statue of Liberty against the New York Skyline was a memorable sight. We had our worldly goods with us packed in two wooden trucks. Our clothing, pictures, a galvanized tub (which we used for a bathtub for many years) and David's accordion packed amongst the clothing.

We traveled by train from New York City through Chicago to Wisconsin. The next day we arrived in Prairie-Du-Chien, Wisconsin. The train traveled along the Mississippi River. We wondered what kind of land this was that we were coming to.

It was difficult, but everything went well even though we couldn't understand the language. From there our sponsors Herman and Pauline Dorscher picked us up in two cars and took us to our new home in Hawkeye, IA.

We referred to our German-English dictionary a lot in order to communicate. I learned through the children what they learned in school. If all else failed, we talked with our hands and laughed a lot at our mistakes.

We'd butcher a hog in the basement and fry out the fat for lard. I'd use the lard and make lye soap to wash clothes with. The rind we'd fry out into cracklin's as snacks. I raised and butchered chickens and sold them and the eggs for my household income.

In June of 1962, we took our first vacation to Canada. We went to visit David's Aunt Sara Necker, who had immigrated to Medicine Hat, Alberta. It was a wonderful reunion. We had not seen them in ten years. Many other friends from Kulm (Bessarabia) have also settled there."

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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