

# In Touch with Prairie Living

October 2022

By Michael M. Miller

Germans from Russia Heritage Collection  
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GERMANS FROM RUSSIA  
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My October column features a heartwarming interview with Christina (Gross) Jundt on October 14, 1998, at Rugby, ND, conducted by her first cousin, Brother Placid Gross, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, ND. Access the complete transcription here: <https://hdl.handle.net/10365/31673>.

Christina was born on November 10, 1909, and died on April 18, 2006. Her parents were Clemens and Catherine (Leier) Gross. She attended Brazil School #3 in Pierce County and completed her education at St. James Academy in Grand Forks. When Christina came home to the Gross farm, she worked in a cook car for the local farmers and did farm chores at home. Christina married Thomas P. Jundt in Balta, ND. For 22 years, she cooked at the Little Flower Catholic School at Rugby, ND.

Christina's mother, Catherine, was 12 years old when the family emigrated from South Russia to North Dakota. Christina recalled, "I remember one thing that bothered my mother the most that we did not have a nice place for swimming. She said in Russia when she grew up it was almost a sin if the children couldn't go swimming, and she missed that a lot."

"Grandpa John talked about how they had all kinds of fruit trees at home in Russia. They didn't can or freeze in those days. It wasn't fun to go and pick on your own trees, so they go to the neighbors and snatch the fruit. Yes, they had a lot of fruit trees. Then when they come to North Dakota they had nothing."

Christina shared an experience of the ship which carried the family over the Atlantic Ocean, "The ship got into an iceberg. It had a big hole in it. So, they just kind of floated along, and everybody who could hold a pail had to help bail out water. They had all received the last rites and they sang and prayed. They were all prepared to die. After about ten days, a small fishing vessel came by and said, 'We can't pull you unless you can throw over everything you can possibly spare. Make the ship as light as you can.' The passengers had to unload many valuable items in their luggage and throw into the Atlantic Ocean. The ship arrived at New York City, and they were safe."

Christina recalls speaking German as a child. "We spoke half German and half English. We didn't talk too much German because most of our neighbors were Norwegian. My mother couldn't speak Norwegian and the neighbor lady could not talk German, but the two could sit down and have a big conversation together. The neighbors were well-to-do. They did not want to have their girls to have anything better than what we had. So, before school started, the mother would come to our house with the catalogs. My mother would tell her what she was going to order us to go to school in, and then the neighbor lady would get the same clothes. They ordered from Montgomery Wards and Sears Roebuck catalogs."

While attending St. James Academy boarding school at Grand Forks, ND, Christina shared this memory. "In the spring we got rhubarb morning, noon, and supper. We got tired of it. So, one day when the nuns were in the prayer hour, we snuck out and we tore out all the rhubarb and threw it over the fence. Just a little bit on the other side at the Lutheran sister's school. They wore gray. So, when they saw the rhubarb destroyed, we had to go to the chapel and pray with the Lutheran kids because we were so mean and ruined the rhubarb."

Christina reminisced about building the Catholic church at Balta, ND, "I remember when they were building the church at Balta, my folks took down the kerosene stove. They took almost all the dishes and kettles. They fed the workers there. It was all volunteer work. That weekend we got two carloads of people from Napoleon to help. We had to go to the neighbors and borrow kettles and dishes."

"When Grandma Gross died, somebody made the coffin and it cost \$9. Grandpa Gross said, 'Don't you dare give me anything better than what Grandma had.' When Grandpa died, I think it was \$400. He would have looked funny in the \$9 coffin."

The Gross family kept in touch with the families left behind in Russia and would send much needed clothes to the families left behind in Russia. "We sent them coats and sweaters. Tom had a suit he had for many years, the suit he got married in, and said, 'Send them my suit too.' So, we got

a nice letter back, and they said the oldest son was the talk of the community because he got married in the suit we sent over. The other boys had all been getting married in patched overalls."

Christina remembers sending a big box to the relatives in Russia for Christmas. "Tom said, 'Why don't we splurge and get of boxes of Hershey bars and some walnuts and stick them in between the towels and clothes.' The relatives in Russia had a 12-year-old girl. Later the girl came to visit Gross relatives in Napoleon. I went over and asked her if she remembers that her folks once got a package from North Dakota that had walnuts and chocolate candy. She said, 'Yes, the chocolate!' I said we were the relatives who sent the package. She hugged me. She said, 'That is the greatest thing you could have done. We needed clothes and we needed food, but when we saw the chocolate, we were just thrilled.'"

"We had a creamery in Silva where they bought chickens and butchered them and shipped them out. The first year we farmed, we had a pretty nice crop. One day we got completely wiped out – hailstorm. So, all we had was about 1,000 chickens. We charged everything, the chickens, fuel, and gas from the store in Silva. Tom told the store owner, 'I'm sorry we're not going to pay our bill. But we have about 1,000 chickens. We want to keep at least 100 for wintering and butchering, and we'll give you the rest, or else five cows. We will give you every other cream check and pay you that way.' The Silva store owner said, 'No I have a different idea, you invite my wife and me out for Sunday night supper.' Tom replied, 'You can come out for supper more than once. You just come out to the farm whenever you feel like it.' We paid for what he had charged during the summer with the chickens."

Christina was a shining star in Prairie Public's award-winning documentary, "At Home in Russia, At Home on the Prairie."

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](mailto:michael.miller@ndsu.edu); or go to [library.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc).