

In Touch with Prairie Living

November 2022

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
GRHC
HERITAGE COLLECTION

The Germans from Russia Heritage Collection will have a booth at the Pride of Dakota Holiday Showcase at Scheels Arena, 5225 31st Avenue South, Fargo, ND – Friday, November 18, 12-9 p.m. and Saturday, November 19, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. We will display popular German-Russian books, cookbooks, and DVDs available for purchase.

On October 3, 2000, Paul Welder was interviewed by Betty and Chis Maier in Linton, ND. The following are excerpts from this interview.

Paul was born on April 14, 1912, on a farm near Zeeland, ND. His parents were Paul and Catharina (Weigel) Welder. Paul had eight brothers and seven sisters. He attended country school a half mile from their farm. Paul shared, “When I started going to school, I was seven years old. By the time I was in the seventh grade, I had to stay home from school. I had to be the hired man for a neighbor because they didn’t have any boys. They were just three quarters of a mile from us, and they were the Hartzes.

“Mother baked a lot of kuchen, and it was mostly raised dough. My sister, Mary, would bake bread three times a week, as high as 18 loaves at one time. Three loaves into one big pan and there were six pans. You know what they used for fuel? Cow chips in the summertime. And when it rained, it was sad, but we always had enough cow chips picked and in storage for rainy days.

“In the fall, we always had lots of cabbage on the farm. We made sauerkraut and maybe sometimes a 30-gallon barrel full of cabbage. For potatoes, a wagon load maybe 25-30 bushels went to the root cellar for the winter. Then there was a melon (Kochmelone) and pumpkin patch.

“I worked in the store in 1924. If a family got a baby they’d come and maybe buy 10 or 15 yards of flannel at 7 cents a yard. Then they would make diapers. They had striped dark flannel for every day and on Sundays had some white flannel ones. The women made their dresses at 27 cents a yard.

“The best thing I remember is a big box of corn flakes was 27 cents, a small one was 11 cents. A pound of cheese was 9 cents, a gallon of gas was 12 cents. Flannel was 7 cents a yard, and the better cotton was 11 cents. I remember getting some dress shoes,

they were nice grey shoes with a long strap, and they were \$4. Real nice overcoats were \$11, and the nails were 6 cents a pound. Eggs were 12 cents a dozen.

“When I grew older, I helped my dad run a thrashing machine and we did custom work for 23 years. But then the time came in the 1930s, I put in the crop for myself. There was no rain and no harvest.”

Paul worked on the farm until the early 1930s when he went out to the West Coast to find more work with various farmers in California and Washington. “We’d come to Stockton, and we would pick cherries. From California, we’d go to Washington, and we would work in the harvest fields. I was a field boss for two years for a big outfit that thrashed wheat. One year I had 21 horses on there to pull a combine on the hilly area.

“In Washington, when we picked apples, I picked 2600 boxes of apples, which was over three carloads. I got five cents a box, so I made \$8 a day and better. That was real good wages. The harvest fields we only got \$3 a day to pitch header box. In 1933, it was a real short crop.”

By the end of the 1930s, Paul returned to North Dakota bought his first combine in Zeeland and did custom work for area farmers. “We went up to Harvey, ND, where I worked in the harvest fields for \$2 a day. I got to run the thrashing machine and then I got \$3 a day. After that, we finished up harvesting back at Linton, ND.”

Paul remembers, “My dad brought Montana Roundup coal at \$6 a ton but lignite was cheaper. In 1940, I borrowed a truck from Greenway, SD, from the elevator. I went to haul coal for some people, and I got \$6 a ton.”

Paul shared about matchmaking and marriage arrangements at the time, “She looked him over and if she liked him, she’d say ‘yes’, and if she didn’t, she said ‘no’. Most of those people that were coupled together with those matchmakers for their marriage lasted until death. John Welk, he got married to my sister, Barbara. His brother, Gabe, got married to my sister, Mary. John and Gabe were related to Lawrence Welk.”

Paul married Phyllis Wald on November 4, 1943, at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, north of Zeeland. Paul farmed until

1960 when he became a full-time adjuster and insurance agent.

Paul also talked about his own cooking. “When my children and grandchildren come home, they want the old stuff – dampfnuedla, rahmnoodla and rivel soup. Then we have pickled watermelon, sauermelone, and homemade jams. I just went to a wedding, and I took eight pints along and give them homemade jams. I made strawberry rhubarb jam, raspberry- rhubarb, apricot, and chokeberry jam. I picked crab apples and made crab apple jam, and it’s very good.” He loved to make German-Russian noodles, garden, and canned what he grew.

Paul was interviewed in May 2006, for the Dakota Memories Oral History Project. His narrative interview and photographs are available at www.digitalhorizonsonline.org. He appears in Prairie Public’s documentary, “Recipes from Grandma’s Kitchen: Germans from Russia Food Preparations and Traditions,” demonstrating how to make baking powder noodles.

Paul Welder passed away on May 24, 2010.

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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