

# In Touch with Prairie Living

January 2023

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA  
**GRHC**  
HERITAGE COLLECTION

My deepest appreciation to our Germans from Russia community for the cards and emails, as well as financial gifts to honor my retirement for GRHC's Germans from Russia Fund. My lifelong dream has been to preserve, document, and enrich the heritage and culture of our Germans from Russia community – and it does not end with retirement. I will volunteer at GRHC with special projects and work with Prairie Public to produce the Germans from Russia Documentary Series.

Jeremy Kopp, GRHC outreach and operations coordinator, shared, "Michael has had a strong personal impact on my life and career through his support, mentorship, and friendship since 2010. He has connected me to the Germans from Russia community and colleagues throughout the world. His legacy of developing and fostering relationships is just one of many things I hope to carry forward at the GRHC and the NDSU Libraries."

Longtime friend and NDSU colleague Dr. Thomas Isern, University Distinguished Professor of History, said, "Michael Miller is a man with a mission. He has dedicated his working life to the definition, documentation, study, and organization of his people, the Germans from Russia. He has created a world-class repository here at NDSU and has led countless expeditions abroad for prairie folk to discover their old-country roots. He exemplifies what it means to be German-Russian: hard work, dedication, faith. With NDSU as his platform and base, he has become the consummate Bison, interested in all university affairs, absorbed with his accomplishments in lab and field. He is a paragon in public service."

Reflecting on my 55 years at North Dakota State University from 1967 to 2022, I would like to share some of my highlights.

Working with Bob Dambach at Prairie Public as an executive producer, we completed ten documentaries of the award-winning Germans from Russia Documentary Series: *The Germans from Russia: Children of the Steppe*, *Children of the Prairie* (1999); *Schmeckfest: Food Traditions of the Germans from Russia* (2000); *Prairie Crosses*, *Prairie Roses: Iron Crosses of the Great Plains* (2002); *A Soulful Sound: Music of the Germans from Russia* (2005); *Heaven*

*Is Our Homeland: The Glückstalers of New Russia & North America* (2005); *It's All Earth and Sky* (2010); *At Home in Russia*, *At Home on the Prairie* (2012); *We (Never) Don't Forget: Germans from Russia in South America* (2015); *Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country* (2017); *Women Behind the Plow* (2019).

Some amazing shining stars in the documentaries include: Theresa (Kuntz) Bachmeier, Rugby, ND, making Cheese Buttons (Kase Knoephla); Anne (Roesch) Larson, Aberdeen, SD, preparing Easter Buns (Kranz); Barbara (Riesling) Schneider, Scott, SK, singing; Theresa (Meier) Eissinger, Napoleon, ND, making Fleischkuechle; Mary Ann (Werre), Lehr, ND, preparing Strudels; Dr. Adam Giesinger, Winnipeg, MB, growing up near Holdfast, SK; Carolyn (Kuhn) Sperle, age 101, Napoleon, ND, making Borscht Soup; Dr. Paul Wiens, Witmarsum, Brazil, telling the story of Mennonite Germans; Roberto Racho, sharing the Volhynian German settlement in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil; Christina (Gross) Jundt, Rugby, ND, sharing about growing up in Balta; Msgr. Joseph Senger recalling growing up on a farm near Orrin, ND; Ron Volk, Harvey, ND, sharing about wedding traditions; and Sergio Keiner, Parana, Argentina, about growing up Volga German.

The twenty-three *Journey to the Homeland Tours* from 1996 to 2019 to Germany and Ukraine brought more than 700 people to walk the steps of their ancestors in the former Bessarabian, Black Sea, and Crimean German villages: Baden, Beresina, Bergdorf, Grossliebental, Hoffnungstal, Kandel, Kassel, Karlsruhe, Katharinental, Kulm, Leipzig, Neudorf, Rastatt, Rosental, Sarata, Selz, Speyer, Strassburg, Tarutino, Worms, Zurichtal, and many others.

The Dakota Memories Oral History Project from 2005 to 2009 included 199 interviews of German-Russians in central and western North Dakota, north central South Dakota, and southern Saskatchewan, all available at [www.digitalhorizonsonline.org](http://www.digitalhorizonsonline.org). Many of these interviewees are no longer living, but their life stories and legacy are shared through the Dakota Memories Oral History Project.

The Father William C. Sherman Photograph Collection includes more

than 13,000 black and white images, slides, and negatives of homesteads in central and western North Dakota. Fr. Sherman primarily focused his research and photography on East European immigrants to North Dakota – Germans from Russia, Hungarian Germans, and Ukrainians. More than 4,000 of these images are available at [www.digitalhorizonsonline.org](http://www.digitalhorizonsonline.org).

To celebrate and honor this landmark work of Father William Sherman, GRHC staff developed a new traveling exhibit, "Building Life and Home on the Prairie." The exhibit highlights the material culture of early German-Russian settlers and is a celebration of their unique culture, architecture, and experience building a life and community on the vast prairie. The exhibit helps sustain the memories of early homesteads and the families that built them. Stay tuned for more information about an upcoming event related to this project on April 18, 2023, in Fargo.

For more information about donating family histories and photographs, or how to financially support the GRHC, contact Jeremy Kopp, at [jeremy.kopp@ndsu.edu](mailto:jeremy.kopp@ndsu.edu) or 701-231-6596; mail to: NDSU Libraries, Dept. 2080, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050; or go to [www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc). You may also contact me directly at [michael.miller@ndsu.edu](mailto:michael.miller@ndsu.edu) or 701-231-8416.

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