

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

I am pleased to share that the future of GRHC is in good hands. GRHC outreach and operations coordinator, Jeremy Kopp, has been hired as GRHC interim director. Jeremy has been at NDSU Libraries since May 2010 and has spent over a decade in his full-time role at the GRHC. Working with Jeremy and mentoring him for over a decade, he has developed valuable relationships and displays exceptional leadership, management, and research skills. Please join me in congratulating and supporting him as he steps into this role.

There is an important book published by the GRHC titled "Collectivization in the Soviet Union: German Letters in America, 1927-1932," by Janice Huber Stangl, native of Bowdle, S.D. The book is available for purchase at <https://grhc-northdakotastate-ndus.nbsstore.net/collectivization>.

In the Preface, the author writes, "This book is not a work of fiction. These translations are presented to further the reader's understanding of life in the former German villages of South Russia during the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was a period of time in which German-Russian immigrants to the New World had little or no correspondence with their relatives who remained in the Old Country. Most of the letters were written by village correspondents to German-language newspapers published in the United States. The language of the letters may not have been as revealing as the immigrants to North America might have wished because censorship by the Soviet regime had become ever more repressive."

Two of the important German-language newspapers in the Dakotas were Eureka Rundschau, originally published in Eureka, S.D., and Der-Staats Anzeiger, published in Bismarck, N.D. These newspapers published letters written by the German-Russian village correspondents to the relatives in the area.

Janice Huber Stangl writes, "Most of the letters published in this work were written by Jacob Ahl, the son of a colonist miller from Bergdorf, a German colony in Odessa Province, South Russia. Ahl became a courier of requests from area colonists who were not literate enough or physically able to write their own letters."

On January 31, 1919, Jakob Ahl writes,

"Johann Mayer, in or near Gackle, N.D., I tell you that yesterday I received the three dollars that were meant for me from your brother-in-law, George Helm of Neudorf. I thank you very much and sincerely for your love of neighbor, and I assure you that the three dollars will fall nicely on a dry place. May the money bring you rich dividends here on earth and also in heaven."

This letter by Jacob Ahl appeared in the Eureka Rundschau, February 8, 1927, from Bergdorf, south Russia: "Christian Wetzler, son of Christian, and his wife Katharina, nee Walz, sends friendly greetings to the following: brother-in-law Johann Marzolf and his wife in Ashley, N.D.; nephew G. Schauer and his wife, brother-in-law Christian Morlock and his wife, near Pettibone, N.D. To Ludwig Laemmle near Hosmer, S.D., I read Heinrich Frey's letter. I can't write to each of you personally because each letter cost 17 kopeks, paper and postage included. That cost I cannot bear.

"In three months since I have been here, I have noticed that this village, of all German villages around here, has suffered the most and is poorer than even some others. The so-called volunteers (Denikin's Army) passed through here and took whatever they pleased. A horse costs five to six times more than it did earlier, and income, on the other hand, is just that much smaller."

Jacob Ahl writes on February 12, 1928, from Neudorf, printed in Der Staats-Anzeiger, April 20, 1928, "Mr. Jakob Hieb from Marion, S.D., was here, he came from Georg Helm's. You can imagine that whenever an American comes to visit, the room is soon filled with people. Mr. Hieb immigrated to America in 1874 when he was a young man about 15 or 16 years old."

Jacob Hieb visited his home village of Neudorf and the Glueckstal District villages to investigate whether the huge bales of clothing, from the Marion Relief Association, had been received in Odessa and the villages.

Jakob Ahl writes on April 10, 1938, "I still don't have any money for stamps to send the previous letter and already I am writing the next one. I hope that the \$10 that Mr. Brandt has sent will arrive today. Perhaps one must give up writing reports altogether because the few postage stamps are ever

more difficult to gather.

"Our former countrymen who are now Americans are cold-hearted enough not to show any desire to write letters, or have not time to write from working too hard. No one hears from anyone anymore! Christian Wolf from Eureka, S.D., is silent. Also, Johannes Wolf from Bowdle, S.D., Jakob Veil from Streeter, N.D., Johann Dockter from Medina, N.D., and others."

Janice Huber Stangl, the author writes, "Ahl had not taken into account that it had been harvest time, and also that many letters from America had been 'lost' in the postal system, especially if they had cash in them."

Stangl also writes, "Besides drought conditions, which had prevailed since the early 1920s, major contributing factors to the shortage of foodstuffs and livestock feeds in the villages were the severe government requisitions which demanded great amounts of all crops, livestock, and goods as taxes from its citizens. People reaped their crops and were required to immediately take the crop to the train station. In spite of shortages of grain in Ukraine, the Soviet Government exported grain to Western Europe to gain hard currency reserves to finance industrialization in the large cities."

Janice Huber Stangl also authored "Marienberg: Fate of a Village," and edited the translation of "Cookbook for Germans from Russia." Janice appeared in the award-winning documentary, "Heaven Is Our Homeland: The Glückstalers of New Russia and North America," produced by the Glueckstal Colonies Research Association. She was closely involved with GCRA – www.glueckstal.net. Janice Huber Stangl and her husband Thomas were members of the Journey to the Homeland Tour in 1999 and 2002, visiting Germany, Moldova, and Ukraine. Janice was born in Hosmer, S.D., on October 23, 1936, and passed away on March 26, 2021.

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