

# 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

Researchers often ask me on the phone or through email, “What books would you suggest for historical information and research relating the Germans from Russia?” This month, I am highlighting eight books that I recommend for German-Russian introductory research. These, and others, are available at the GRHC website ([www.ndsu.edu/grhc](http://www.ndsu.edu/grhc)).

A newer quite popular book titled, “The German-Russians: In Words and Pictures,” by Dr. William Bosch, provides an excellent history of the Germans from Russia and includes many photographs. The author writes, “When I was growing up in the southern part of North Dakota, all of my relatives spoke a German dialect. None of us ever asked how this came to be.” Bosch’s book is a self-discovery, which he shares with fellow German-Russians. The story of the circumstances that propelled the German-Russian people to immigrate to the North American plains, and his description of their distinctive folkways, serves as an excellent introduction. The story is a colorful and fascinating tale filled with triumph and tragedy, which Bosch shares so well in his book.

Edna Boardman, in her review of the book, “From Catherine to Khrushchev,” by Dr. Adam Giesinger, writes, “This is the most thoroughly researched, most professionally written, of the popular books on the Germans from Russia, yet it is very interesting and absorbing to read. Giesinger traces the flow of German-Russian history from their arrival in Russia, through the Czars that succeeded Catherine, through immigration to Canada, South America, and the United States, the takeover by the communists, and the deportation of the remaining people to scattered parts of Russia.” Dr. Giesinger’s children donated his extensive private library to establish the Dr. Adam Giesinger Collection at the GRHC.

I would highly recommend three books authored by Dr. Joseph S. Height. Dr. Height was born in 1909 at Tramping Lake, SK, a son of Catholic German-Russian immigrants who immigrated to Canada in 1909, from the Black Sea colonies of Mannheim and Strassburg, Kutschurgan District. Margaret Height, his daughter, donated the Dr. Joseph S. Height Collection to the Germans

from Russia Heritage Society in 2021. In 2013, Margaret joined the Journey to the Homeland Tour to visit her ancestral villages near Odessa, Ukraine.

The first Height book recommendation is “Paradise on the Steppe: A Cultural History of the Kutschurgan, Beresan and Liebental Colonies, 1804-1972.” This particular book focuses on the Catholic colonies of South Russia by the Black Sea, today near Odessa, Ukraine. Height follows the settlers on the often disastrous journey to Russia and through the difficult years when colonists first tilled the iron-hard soil. In this book, Height writes about festivals, songs, sayings, languages, letters home, and photography. Included in the book, are town plats of Beresan, Liebental, and Kutschurgan villages.

The next recommended Height books is, “Homesteaders on the Steppe: Cultural History of the Evangelical Lutheran Colonies in the Region of Odessa, 1804-1945.” This book covers the Lutheran villages. Height describes the journey down the Danube River and life in the villages, wedding customs, games, entertainment, songs, and agriculture. The names of the original settlers for the villages are included.

The last recommended Height book is, “Memories of the Black Sea Germans: Highlights of Their History and Heritage.” This book is a fascinating collection of primary and cultural material. It answers questions that many German-Russians assumed had no answers. Height includes the report about colonization written by J. G. Kohl in 1838. Kohl reported on the hard-working people, and the gardens in which watermelon was king, though they also grew onions, cucumbers, pumpkins, potatoes, and fruits.

“The Black Sea Germans in the Dakotas,” by Rev. George Rath, re-published by GRHC, begins with a look at the original Black Sea German colony group settlements. Rath traces their immigration to the Dakotas and identifies the areas in which they settled. Later chapters focus on the role and scope of the major Protestant denominations to which German-Russians were attracted. He writes of the Germans from Russia, “Wheat raising was the object of their lives.” Rath was born in 1891 in Nesselrode, Province of Odessa.

He served in the Russian Army from 1916 to 1918. In 1922, he immigrated to the United States. An ordained minister, he served the Evangelical Synod of North America.

Another recommendation is “Russian-German Settlements in the United States,” by Richard Sallet, translated from German to English by Dr. LaVern J. Rippley and Dr. Armand Bauer. The book was originally published in German in 1931. The translation provides a well-organized historical background and an interesting socio-political interpretation of the way of life within a large group of German immigrants. Historical data and explanations provide the origin and names of many localities which were settled by Russian Germans. In the Special Chapters, the author describes in detail the customs and way of life of the immigrants, their religious institutions and their newspapers. As part of the book, Dr. Bauer included “Place Names of German Colonies in Russia and the Dobrudja.” There is also a chapter by Father William C. Sherman titled “Prairie Architecture of the Russian-German Settlements.”

“Bessarabia: German Colonists on the Black Sea,” by Dr. Ute Schmidt, translated by James T. Gessele, was published by the GRHC in 2011. Gessele is a native of Mercer, ND. Allyn Brosz writes, “The book is without question, the authoritative history of the Germans in Bessarabia.” Dr. Elvire Necker-Eberhardt, who was born in Bessarabia, shares, “The author follows the Bessarabian Germans from their origin, the beginning and development in Bessarabia, and their tragic scattering in 1940 and beyond. The different points are not only reported and documented but also aptly illustrated with many unique pictures, maps, and graphs.”

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, N.D. 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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