

In Touch with Prairie Living

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By Michael M. Miller

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Father Leonard Eckroth, a dear friend and colleague, celebrated 65 years as a priest of the Diocese of Bismarck. Growing up in Mandan, he came from a large family of 10 siblings. Two of his sisters and one brother entered religious life. Young Leonard attended high school and two years of college at St. John's University, Collegeville, MN, from 1947 to 1952.

Father Leonard served as pastor at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church at Strasburg, ND, which began in 1987 and lasted for 23 years. While at Strasburg, he was involved with Pioneer Heritage for the Welk Homestead, and the local Germans from Russia chapter.

In May 2011, Fr. Leonard and his brother, Charles, joined the Journey to the Homeland Tour to visit Germany and Odessa, Ukraine. They visited their ancestral Black Sea German village of Karlsruhe, Beresan District, near Odessa. His grandparents were Andrew and Katharina (Kopp) Eckroth, who immigrated to North Dakota in 1891.

My August column focuses on Reverend Norman C. Hoeflinger's informative paper, "The German-Russians and Dr. H.F. Kohlbruegge," 1996, Reformed Church in the United States. The complete paper is available at <http://rcus.org/recent-history>.

Rev. Hoeflinger writes about the Germans from Russia in America. "Already in 1849 one group from Odessa left Russia for the United States. Among them was Ludwig Bette and A. Scheller. Some of this group settled in Ohio. Scheller and Bette ended up on Kelley's Island in Lake Erie where they operated very successful vineyards. A German Reformed Church was organized there in 1865. Ludwig Bette anglicized his name to Lewis Beaty. He made a trip back to Russia in 1872 to visit his relatives, and talked up the advantages and opportunities of America so freely that the authorities sought to arrest him. He had to get rid of his American top hat and suit for a colonist's cap and clothing to escape detection. Bette's relatives decided for the U. S. and left in 1872. There were three groups who first came, for a total of 121 persons. These were from the Odessa area: Johannesthal, Rohrbach, and Worms.

These first groups came to Sandusky, Ohio, where there was a German population

and a Reformed Church since 1853. From there they sent scouts to the surrounding states but could not find what they were looking for: "We want to be {134} together and have our church and school." [21] So they looked further, to Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakota Territory. In this last they found what they were looking for—the land, a steppe, similar to the one in Russia. When they visited Yankton, the city of entry, "They were most pleasantly surprised for they found in ill-reputed Dakota the most pleasant spring weather," and they thought they were back in Russia. When the families arrived in April, they found deep snow lying in the fields! But they stayed anyway.

In 1873 fifty-five families of about four hundred individuals left Worms and Rohrbach for the U. S. This group was led by Johann Grosshans, who had married J. Bonekemper's widow, and Heinrich and Michael Griess and Heinrich Hoffmann. They came through Burlington, Iowa, where there were some earlier settlers from the colonies, and then on to Lincoln, Nebraska. They moved on to Sutton where twenty-two of the families bought land from the Burlington Railroad. The rest of the group decided in favor of the Dakota Territory. Yankton was the "Mother City of the Dakotas" at that time, and the German-Russians came there in 1873. However, they didn't stay there but began a settlement, which they called Odessa, southeast of present Scotland, South Dakota. The laws passed by congress enabled these immigrants to acquire homesteads cheaply in South Dakota whereas the lands owned by the railroads in Nebraska were higher priced. From then on, the German-Russians continued to pour into the countryside through Yankton....

In 1874 the first settler in Menno was Ludwig Mehlhaf. The settlers north of Menno were from Kassel, so that's what they named their settlement. When some moved from there north of Freeman that was called Klein Kassel (Little Kassel). In the Tripp area the first settlers came by ox cart from Yankton in 1875, others in {135} 1879. There were also settlements in the Marion, Delmont, and Emery areas where Reformed congregations were established.

Of the one hundred or so families in the Menno, Scotland, and Tripp area, about half were Reformed."

Rev. Hoeflinger refers to important publication, "Experiences from My Missionary Life in The Dakotas" by Reverend Peter Bauer, translated and edited from German to English by Armand and Elaine Levi Bauer. This publication is available from GRHC.

Rev. Peter Bauer, son of Johann George Bauer, was born January 19, 1855, in Neuburg, South Russia. He died May 12, 1939, and is buried at Leola, SD. Peter's wife, Dorothea (Schatz) Bauer, was born on December 19, 1857, at Johannestal, South Russia. She died February 24, 1939, and is also buried at Leola, SD. They had 14 children who were born in Waterloo and Worms, South Russia and in Eureka, SD. In 1893, Peter and Dorothea arrived with eight children at Ellis Island, New York. The Bauer family arrived by train at Eureka, SD, in the Fall of 1933.

Rev. Bauer writes, "I served the Eureka Parish from 1893 to 1902. During this time, migration into North Dakota took place in large numbers and many of our Reformed members moved to North Dakota to homestead land. And so, it occurred to our South Dakota Missionary to send a Traveling Missionary to North Dakota. I had the desire to take on the position of Traveling Missionary. They paid me an annual salary of \$800. I had to pay for my own house rent, but I had free travel in the mission fields in North Dakota."

Pastor Peter Bauer served Reformed congregations at New Salem, Beulah, Cannonball River, Goodrich, and Medina as well as visiting Stutsman, Mercer, Morton, and Bottineau counties by train. His final congregations were Zeeland, ND, 1915-1926 and Leola, SD, 1926-1936.

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