

In Touch with Prairie Living

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Dwight Herr interviewed his father, Julius E. Herr of Wishek, ND, in June 1979. Dwight provided a transcription and donated the "Life Story of Julius E. Herr" to the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection. Julius Herr was born in Wishek on July 24, 1904. His parents were John and Christine Herr. Their ancestral village was Kassel, Glückstal District, South Russia.

Dwight Herr writes, "John Herr, dad's father was a dedicated, committed Christian. He was a deacon in the Wishek Baptist Church, and was a Sunday School Superintendent. On the Wednesday before he died, his father had been the first one out to a country church for a prayer meeting, which was about 11 miles away. He became very sick that night and on the following Sunday he died of appendicitis, then known as 'inflammation of the bowels.' At that time there was no known treatment for appendicitis. Dad recalled that the song, 'Shall We Gather at the River,' was sung at the funeral. His father was 31 years old when he died, and his mother was 29 years old with seven children under the age of nine, including Dad who was then four years old.

When his father died, his mother was left with some money in the bank. However, it was not sufficient to support the family for long, so the family had to find a way to earn money. The main support was from herding cows. Every house in Wishek had a barn, a well, an outhouse, a shed, a chicken coup, pigs, and one or more cows. When dad was six, he and his brothers and sisters began driving the cows to Uncle August Herr's pasture, which was one and half miles out of town. The cow herding to the pasture would start on the first of May when the grass started growing. They would drive the cows every day including Sunday, until the first of September. The family would earn as much as \$65 a month from cow herding. The family also sold milk to the neighbors.

During the summer, dad and his brothers would hunt gophers, which were pests for the farmers. The county would pay them a penny a tail. They shot as many as 53 gophers in one day. They would also snare them with lassos and traps. The family would also pick and sell tiger lilies, lilacs, buttercups, and other wildflowers in the spring for five cents a bundle. Dad's family, like most others,

had a vegetable garden, including potatoes, carrots, beans, and rutabagas, and they raised chickens. Every fall, Uncle Phillip Schock would give them his homemade sausages and other cuts of meat.

When dad was six years old, he was separated from his family. Aunt Mary was visiting in Wishek and told his mother that she and Uncle John Franz ought to take one of her kids with them to their home because his mother had too many children to care for. The next morning at 5 a.m., Uncle John and Aunt Mary came to their house in a pony driven buggy, and collected dad. They traveled together all day and got to the Franz home south of Kulm, ND, at 9 p.m. Kulm was a total distance of 48 miles from Wishek. The Franz home had no running water in the house. They just had a water pan for drinking. The Franz farm consisted of 640 acres. They raised mostly wheat, but also grew flax, oats, and barley. Dad went to a one-room schoolhouse with seven grades.

In school they were taught English, and they also sang spiritual songs in English. They did not dare talk German in school as it was forbidden. The country kids would speak German on the playground, but the town kids only talked English. Dad, his brothers, and sisters only talked German to their mother. Dad stated that his teachers were the greatest influence on his life besides Sunday School and church. He especially remembered Mrs. Easton, an old maid, then about 45 years old, who taught seventh and eighth grades. As part of the school subjects, she also taught morality, taught against lying, cheating, smoking, and especially drinking. For recreation, the kids would play kick the can, hide and seek, and pomp pomp pull away. The boys would swim in the railroad water tower, which was where the train got its drinking water. One time, dad and another boy took a ride to a basketball game in the neighboring town of Burnstad, about 10 miles away, on a railroad handcart with pump handles. He also recalls getting caught and punished for that escapade.

At age 15, dad was hired out to work for Gus Witt for \$125 a year plus board and room. He was at the farm from May until the end of harvest, then dad went back to live with Uncle Gottlieb and worked for farmers every summer. Uncle Gottlieb had

20 acres and six cows. Dad milked and took care of the cows and fed the pigs and chickens. Dad also took care of their eight younger kids, including diapering and bottle feeding their baby, Evelyn. Dad graduated from high school in three years by taking classes during the summer at the normal school at Ellendale. After graduating from high school, he got a teaching position in a one-room school. He taught for seven months for a salary of \$60 a month. Dad said he enjoyed teaching, but his biggest problem was to keep the kids from talking German at recess. He then went to the state normal school in Valley City, a state teacher's college for college education as a teacher.

In 1927, dad boarded a train to go to Rochester, NY, to attend the seminary. He traveled with two other young men from Wishek who were in their second year of seminary. There were about 60 in the seminary, including a number of students from Germany. During his school years at the seminary, dad would buy a car in the spring in Rochester, NY, drive to Wishek at the end of the school year, and then sell the car in the fall when he would go back to Rochester with the train. Dad's first car was a Model-T. The summer before his second year in seminary, he traveled around North Dakota selling bibles at churches. During his last year in seminary, dad and three other younger seminary students formed a men's quartet. Dad had sung in church at Wishek. It was during the depression, and any quartet would have to depend on freewill offerings. In preparation for the tour, the quartet memorized 30 songs in English and German. The quartet traveled 17,500 miles in dad's 1928 Chevrolet. They were five miles from dad's hometown of Wishek when they had their first flat tire."

The complete heartwarming life story with the transcribed oral interview of Julius Herr is located at <https://hdl.handle.net/10365/31670>.

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 or email michael.miller@ndsu.edu.