

In Touch with Prairie Living

September 2024

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA
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I was pleased to visit with many colleagues and at the Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention in Mandan in July, and at the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia Convention in Oklahoma City in August. There were many excellent workshops, displays, and presentations.

In July, Leo Rung of Munich, Germany, visited the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection to research his Hopfauf family that settled near Fallon/Flasher, south of Mandan, N.D. Leo also visited the Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Cemetery at Fallon, Morton County, N.D., and the Sebastian Hopfauf sodhouse near Flasher.

At the GRHS Convention, Leo presented, "Some Immigrated to Mandan a Century Ago but What Happened to Those Who Stayed Behind in Katharinental?" His former Black Sea ancestral village is Katharinental, Beresan District, near Odessa, Ukraine. Leo is an active member of the Historical Research Association of Germans from Eastern Europe (www.hfdr.de).

Brother Placid Gross, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, N.D., has authored an impressive new book, "Prairie Wisdom: Folklore of Germans from Russia." The book is available at the GRHS office in Bismarck.

Leona (Woezner) Neu (98) passed away on May 2, 2024, in Ashley, N.D. Leona authored two impressive articles published in the Prairies magazine published by the Ashley Tribune (Part I, Fall 1980 and Part II, Winter 1980). The title of the articles is "Humble Beginnings: Story of a German-Russian Pioneer Family." The articles feature the Woeszner family who settled near Ashley in the 1890s. Part I was shared with the June column. Part II is featured in the August column.

Prairies magazine is available online at the South Dakota Germans from Russia Cultural Center, Northern State University, Aberdeen, S.D. Original copies of Prairies magazine are available at the GRHC Archives.

Leona's parents, Jacob J. and Marie were married on November 23, 1923. On Sunday, November 11, the families of the couples assembled at the Woeszner home.

It was the practice to have prayer with the couple and their families. Before the ceremony. The bride was attired in a brown dress (above-the-knee style), low waisted with a skirt of fine pleated panels. She wore a fine net veil held with an orange blossom headpiece. The groom wore a dark suit, purchased at Straub's of Ashley.

Leona shares, "Viola Sackmann Maier says she remembers the wedding party driving through the Gottlieb Schlabsz farm on the way to the Church. The young men of the area gathered there and shot their guns in the air to salute the bride couple as they passed by.

"The bride spent many hours making linens for her hope-chest, among which were tablecloths and wide crochet edges, dresser scarfs, towels, bedding and sofa pillows. Furniture for the new home was purchased with money Marie had earned doing house work for other people.

"Grandmother Woezner kept herself busy with all kinds of crafts and needlework. She made cross-stitch rugs. She would dye material from used clothes and cut it into narrow strips. The base for her rugs were gunny sacks in which local grocery stores got walnuts. Some rugs were round, other rectangular. To keep them flat, she would put the guts under the mattress to press.

"I remember that most meals on the farm were canned sausage, cheese, bread, and jelly. Most of the time there were some molasses cookies and often some chocolate pudding left over from breakfast – that is one thing Grandmother made every morning for herself.

"In the summer time, Grandfather Woezner would come to the farm and help with work. I remember often he would come in time to hear the Bohemian Band over radio station WNAX, Yankton, S.D. He liked to hear march music as it reminded him of music in his homeland in South Russia.

"We children would see the Model T come and would run to open the farm gate for him. We were sure he'd wave as he passed by. If there was ever a kind person, it was Grandpa Woeszner. We were sure to get a treat of candy every time he came to the farm. Before he went home after a day's work, he stopped at the well and pumped water by hand to fill the water trough.

"Then came World War I and many of the young men relatives and friends were drafted into the service. One young man by the name Fischer, who was a helper in Grandfather Sackmann's shop, was also called to serve in the army. Marie remembers the time he left. It was on a Good Friday when many of the town's people gathered at the train depot. The band played while goodbyes were said. It was heartbreaking.

"Grandfather Woezner helped build the Pioneer Memorial on the south shore of Lake Hoskins. It was built of native rock and is erected to honor McIntosh County's pioneers. Into the rocks were carved the names of the early settlers. But Grandpa Jacob did not want his name carved into a rock because, as he said, 'In my life, I've had to work too hard with rocks.' The memorial was completed in 1935.

"I remember two sod houses still in use as I grew up. One was the Alfred Freigen home on a farm near our school. Mrs. Freigen had beautiful geraniums growing on the deep window sills. On The former Gottfried Maier farm was a sod house too. The Sackmann home was made of sod, but all under one roof was the granary (grain storage) and the cattle shelter (barn). The granary and cattle shelter were later removed. Only the house and lean-to were kept."

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.

September column for North Dakota and South Dakota weekly newspapers.