

In Touch with Prairie Living

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The Fall 2021 edition of the South Dakota History Journal published a valuable article, “‘Whatever our language, we have the same flag’: The Eureka Rundschau, 1915-1927,” by Istvan Gombocz Fall 2021, pages 269-287. South Dakota Historical Society Press granted permission to share this article in part.

Dr. Istvan Gombocz, an immigrant from Hungary, received his doctorate at the University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign. He was professor of German at the University of South Dakota from 1989 to 2018. As professor emeritus, his focus was the culture and literature of German minorities in Eastern Europe.

Gombocz writes, “Despite the sparse population, South Dakota and its neighbors produced an impressive number of daily and weekly German-language newspapers from 1850 to 1950. Following the waves of immigration induced by the Homestead Act of 1862, the number of German American publications increased dramatically in Dakota Territory and subsequently in North and South Dakota.

Early in the twentieth century, South Dakota’s McPherson County, and the city of Eureka, provided favorable demographic and linguistic preconditions for sustaining modern German-language newspapers. According to the U.S. Census of 1910, McPherson County had a particularly high share of German-speaking residents. Out of the total population of 6,791 in habitants, 4,858 individuals identified themselves as German nationals. An overwhelming majority of Eureka’s first- and second-generation Germans, however, did not emigrate from imperial Germany. Instead, they came from regions of the Russian Empire, especially Bessarabia, Crimea, and the Ukrainian province of Odessa, also known as Kherson.

These Eureka German-Russian immigrants welcomed a German-language newspaper. “In response to that need, in the summer of 1915, Gustave Mauser, native of Hoffnungstal in Kherson, and Otto H. Froh, an immigrant from Hamburg, Germany, founded a new German weekly titled the Eureka Rundschau (Review). Throughout its run, which ended in 1927, the Rundschau served the classic mission

of ethnic newspapers.”

Johann Bollinger and Janice Huber Stangl, authored the book, *Marienberg: Fate of a Village*, based on letters published in the Eureka Rundschau. These letters were from the settlement of Marienberg and its neighbors in the Odessa region. “These communications offer valuable insight into the daily lives of Germans in their homeland during World War I and then in the early Soviet Union under Stalin.”

Janice Huber Stangl, native of Bowdle, SD, also compiled the book, “Collectivization in the Soviet Union: German Letters to America, 1927-1932, 2012”. This book was published by GRHC in cooperation with the Glueckstal Colonies Research Association. Many of the German letters which appeared in the Eureka Rundschau and were published in this book are from Jakob Ahl. Ahl was the son of a colonist miller from Bergdorf. At the time the letters were written, Ahl was a lay pastor and teacher of the Evangelical Lutheran congregation at Neudorf, Glueckstal District.

In letters from 1927, Jakob Ahl reported on the weather and the status of the crops, as well as births, confirmations, marriages, and deaths in the villages. The letters were to inform relatives in North America of these events. In his later letters, as the political situation deteriorated, the people were fearful about seeing their family events published in the German newspapers, and Ahl turned to other information in his correspondence to the newspapers.

“The Rundschau editors consistently refrained from endorsing any denominations. By the early twentieth century, Lutheran churches in McPherson County included Eureka’s Zion Lutheran Church as well as the Hoffnungstal, Hoffnungsfeld, Sankt Petri, Friedens, and Trinity congregations. The German Congregational Church in Eureka and its six surrounding member churches, along with the German Reformed Church, brought further religious diversity to the region.

Overall, the Rundschau’s insights into daily life in the Eureka area convey the impression of a tranquil community with law-abiding citizens, occupied for the most part, with agricultural production. Immediately, after the newspaper founding,

however, developments related to World War I, which had implications for both Germany and Russia, overshadowed local events. During the war, many German-language newspapers, including the Rundschau, experienced increases in size, content, and circulation numbers.

Written in flawless German with a minimal amount of English and supplements by ample illustrations, the Rundschau successfully provided its readers in McPherson County, as well as throughout South Dakota and its neighbors more generally, with updated information on local, national, and international developments. The Rundschau was a pillar in the community, helping readers aid their endangered relatives in the Soviet Union and advocating for the preservation of the German language.

In the early twentieth century, ethnic newspapers like the Rundschau were important resources for German immigrants. Today, they are valuable resources for historians examining German immigration in the Dakotas.”

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; michael.miller@ndsu.edu or 701-231-8416.

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