

# In Touch with Prairie Living

January 2001

By Michael M. Miller

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



GERMANS FROM RUSSIA  
**GRHC**  
HERITAGE COLLECTION

The Germans from Russia Heritage Collection (GRHC) at the NDSU Libraries in Fargo reaches out to prairie families and former Dakotans. In various ways, it affirms the heritage of the Germans from Russia as an important part of the northern plains culture.

On Saturday, March 3, 2001, 9:30 am-11:30 am, the NDSU Libraries, Prairie Public Broadcasting ([www.prairiepublic.org](http://www.prairiepublic.org)) and the Germans from Russia Cultural Preservation Foundation will host a special Germans from Russia program at the Civic Center Library Theater, Scottsdale, AZ. Dr. LaVern "Vern" Freeh, author of the book "Couldn't Be Better: The Russian Farm Community Project," will be the featured speaker. Dr. Freeh is a native of Harvey, ND, and an NDSU graduate. The program is free and open to the general public.

The North Dakota Picnic will be on Sunday, March 4, 2001, at Pioneer Park, Main Street, Mesa, AZ, from 10 am to 3 pm. The NDSU Libraries will have information tables at the picnic. I look forward to seeing many Dakotans at these events in Scottsdale and Mesa. We invite you to join us for these Arizona events.

We are pleased to announce publication of the book, "Couldn't Be Better: The Russian Farm Community Project: The Story of Two People, One American, One Russian, and Their Dream for Rural Russia," written by Dr. LaVern "Vern" Freeh. Dr. Freeh grew up on a farm near Harvey, ND, during the Great Depression, the son of German-Russian parents. Dr. Freeh is a graduate of NDSU and received his PhD. from Michigan State University. He served for 12 years Vice President for Public and International Affairs at Land O'Lakes. In his early career, he taught in a one-room school and at Linton, ND, where he was the football coach.

The book traces the history of a project in which the author has been involved in Russia, with joint efforts of

U.S. and Russian people, a model was created for privatizing and revitalizing rural Russian communities following the collapse of Communism.

The author takes the reader behind the scenes to see how the project came into being and how it has evolved. He highlights the role of such prominent Americans as Armand Hammer and Robert Schuller. This book is an outstanding review of what can happen when people put aside their cultural and nationalistic differences and work together for the common good of all.

The GRHC has recently published an important new book for the Germans from Russia community: "The Germans at the Black Sea Between Bug and Dniester," by John Philipps, Fallbrook, CA. The author writes: "I wanted to raise the awareness in the descendants that their fathers and forefathers were not unskilled sod busters, but rather diligent, reverent, well-to-do farmers and they have reason to be proud of their ancestors." Philipps vividly portrays historically, geographically and statistically, the former German colonies of South Russia. John Philipps was born in the village of Landau, Beresan District, today near Odessa, Ukraine. His youth was overshadowed by poverty and hunger even though he came from a well-to-do farming family. After he had conquered many difficulties, Philipps arrived finally in New York, in 1952. He moved to California in 1955, where he accepted U.S. citizenship. John Philipps experienced Stalin's destructive politics and after World War II, he came to America where he could build a new home in a new homeland.

The NDSU Library, Fargo, features, the exhibit, "Germans from Russia Wedding Traditions: From the Steppe of South Russia & Bessarabia to the Dakota Prairies" at the new Marie Rudel Portner Germans from Russia Room.

The award-winning documentary videotapes "The Germans from Russia:

Children of the Steppe, Children of the Prairie" (1999), and "Schmeckfest: Food Traditions of the Germans from Russia" (2000), continue to be well received throughout North America. To secure the videotapes, contact Prairie Public at 1-800-359-6900. The videotapes can also be secured by going to this GRHC website at "Videotape Documentary & Other Projects". The videotapes include 20-minute bonus video footage, not shown in the one-hour documentary. See many interesting pages about the documentary at the Prairie Public Broadcasting website: <http://www.prairiepublic.org>.

Because of the interest developed from the "Schmeckfest" documentary, additional cookbooks including German-Russian recipes have been added to the GRHC web at the section, "Cookbooks."

For further information about donations to the collection, including family histories, outreach programs, videotape documentaries, Journey to the Homeland Tour (May 22 to June 4, 2001) for Odessa, Ukraine and Stuttgart, Germany; North Dakota Biography Index"; German-Russian cookbooks; GRHC's publications including recent books, "Couldn't Be Better: The Russian Farm Community Project," "The Germans at the Black Sea Between Bug and Dniester," "Fond 252," "Marienberg: Fate of a Village," "Open Wound," and "The Dark Abyss of Exile: A Story of Survival"; and German-Russian heritage, contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, PO Box 5599, Fargo, ND 58105-5599 (Tel: 701-231-8416; E-mail: [Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); GRHC website: <http://library.ndsu.edu/gerrus>). January, 2001 column for North Dakota and South Dakota newspapers.

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