

BACK IN THE DAY

Underwood

COMPILED BY SHELLY WALLACE

from the Files of the Central McLean News Journal



IN TOUCH WITH PRAIRIE LIVING

BY JERRY KOPP

Germans from Russia Heritage Collection

For this month's column, Michael Miller asked me to share an update about something exciting happening at the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection. After years of dreaming, planning, designing, writing, and preparing, we are ready to celebrate the grand opening of our new permanent museum-quality exhibit, "In Search of a Homeland: The Journey of the Germans from Russia."

The grand opening celebration will take place on Wednesday, July 15, from 2 to 5 p.m. at the GRHC, located in the NDSU Main Library. The event will be open house style, and we are pleased to host it in conjunction with the Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention, taking place in Fargo July 15-18. We hope many of you will be able to join us for an afternoon of community, kuchen, coffee, and a first look at the new exhibit.

This exhibit represents a major step for the GRHC. For many years, the collection has served researchers, families, students, and visitors through books, archival materials, photographs, maps, oral histories, documentaries, outreach, and community events. Those resources remain at the heart of our work. But we also knew that visitors needed a clearer and more engaging way to encounter the larger story.

The Germans from Russia story is not simple. It crosses continents, empires, languages, religions, and generations. It includes German-speaking Europeans leaving for the Russian Empire, the building of villages in the Volga, Black Sea, Bessarabia, and other regions, and later migrations to North America, South America, and elsewhere. It is a story of promises and hardship, opportunity and loss, faith and family, work and survival.

For someone who is new to the topic, it can be difficult to know where to begin. Even for those who grew up with this heritage, there is more to discover. Our hope with this exhibit is to provide a meaningful starting point where visitors can walk through the story, find connections, and better understand how this history shaped families, communities, and the culture of North Dakota and the Northern Plains.

The exhibit journey begins by introducing visitors to life in German-speaking Europe and the reasons many families looked eastward in the 1700s and early 1800s. It then follows the journey to Russia, where German settlers established communities under the promises of land, religious freedom, and certain privileges. From there, visitors learn about village life,

faith traditions, foodways, language, work, and the strong community bonds that developed over generations.

The story then moves toward migration to the Americas. After broken promises and oppression, many families left Russia in the late 1800s and early 1900s, traveling by rail and steamship to begin again in unfamiliar places. For many, that meant the Dakota prairies. The exhibit explores the challenges of homesteading, the importance of churches and community life, music, prairie life, and the ways families preserved traditions while adapting to a new home.

Visitors will also encounter a section on foodways, which we know will feel familiar to many. Food has always been one of the strongest connections to heritage. Recipes, kitchen tools, and family traditions help tell a story that is not only historical, but personal. Visitors can take a recipe card home with them and continue that connection beyond the exhibit itself.

Another important part of the exhibit is a space called "Those Who Stayed." While much of our work naturally focuses on the Germans from Russia who came to North America, that is not the whole story. Many remained in Russia and, later, the Soviet Union. Their experiences included famine, revolution, repression, deportation, war, and displacement. This difficult history is essential to understanding the full scope of the Germans from Russia experience.

The exhibit includes interactive elements designed to help visitors engage with the story in different ways. There are opportunities to watch, listen, read, reflect, and explore. Some visitors may connect most deeply with a photograph or object. Others may be drawn to maps, video clips, family stories, or the everyday details of food, faith, and community life. We wanted the exhibit to offer more than one path into the story.

Bringing this project to life required many people. We are grateful to the donors, community members, families, researchers, students, staff, and partners who helped make it possible. We are also grateful to Upland Exhibits of Newton, Kansas, who worked with us to design and fabricate the exhibit. Their team helped transform our ideas, content, and collection materials into a space that feels welcoming, thoughtful, and worthy of the story being told.

As part of NDSU Libraries, the GRHC has a responsibility not only to preserve this history, but also to

20 years ago, July 2006

If Jason Gregoryk's dream comes true, children in Underwood will one day have a fishing pond. Gregoryk was at the June 27 special meeting of the Underwood City Commission to update them on costs and plans for financing the project.

The 50th Annual McLean County Fair gets underway July 6, in Underwood, with a full slate of events for all three days.

The Underwood City Commission met in special session on June 27 to seat the new commission. The commission adjourned halfway through the meeting and thanked commissioner Paul Johannes, who did not run for re-election, for his years of service, and reconvened to reorganize the new commission. Commissioner Roger Britton was re-elected, and Leon Weisenburger Jr. was elected to fill Johannes' position.

The water treatment plant is a work in progress and that progress has been delayed. Commissioner Mark Ness said that the water treatment plant in Riverdale is running about a month behind schedule. Ness said that it would probably be the first part of September until the water flows to Underwood.

Brittany Finneman, Heather Larson and Jerad Lehmann, all with a 4.0 GPA, were named to the president's list at MSU for the spring semester.

An organizational meeting for Friends of the Library was held. June 27. The new group is being formed to help support the Underwood Public Library through fun activities for all ages.

The team of Tyler Hotten, Tony Heidelberger and David Senski took first place in the junior golf tournament, June 29, at Westridge Golf Course. Darin Eichhorst claimed top honors for the longest drive, as well as the closest to the pin competition, and Samantha Cottingham was awarded the trophy for the longest putt.

30 years ago, July 1996

Cool temperatures and a slight breeze could foil the plans of the orange wheat blossom midge as it tries to emerge this week to devour area cheat crops. The tiny pest, about a sixth of the size of a mosquito, devastated wheat fields last year in northeastern and north central North Dakota. Its emergence has been confirmed in small numbers in some McLean County fields at this time.

Lester Zietz had another good looking garden this year and was out picking peas Monday, trying to get ahead of the birds. He said the garden could use some moisture, but so far, it's looking good.

Forty-six children participated in

the McLean County Fair sponsored Kids Pedal Tractor Pulling Contest on June 22. First place winners in each category: 4-year class, Natalie Eslinger; 5-year class, Daniel Eslinger; 6-7-year class, Jacob Hultberg; 8-year class, Sara Eslinger; 9-year class, Dallas Erickson; 10-year class, Jesse Ries; 11-year class, Cody Blotske; 12-year class, Luke Rogers.

Deb Mills has taken on the task of chief mother for the "shop kitten" at Heaven's Scent Floral. The kitten, now 5-weeks-old, has its "Playpen in the workshop of the flower shop," so Deb can bring it along to work to keep it fed. The rest of the time, it lives with the Mills family north of Underwood.

40 years ago, July 1986

Special award winners at the Underwood Golf League were Chuck Kranz, longest putt; and Hank Rasmusson, closest to the pin. Best actual scores were Chuck Kranz, 33, Curt Radke, 34, and Kevin Olson, 36.

The Underwood Women of Today are planning their sixth annual Fun Day with a pet and doll parade, coronation of Little Miss and Mr. Underwood, games and races, family bingo and more. The VFW will sponsor a street dance that evening with music by Southbound.

Former pastors returning for the 75th anniversary of the Presbyterian Church were Rev. Robert Hoyle, Rev. John Kissinger, Rev. Doug Shepler, and Rev. Phil Clark. A quilt made by the ladies of the church in 1913 was one of the items on display.

The yards of Steve and Peggy Wollmuth and Doug and Sue Miller were chosen as yards of the week.

50 years ago, July 1976

Farmers Elevator and Mercantile of Underwood are considering an expansion project, according to Marvin Eslinger, chairman of the board of directors.

A special feature of this year's McLean County Fair at Underwood is "Merchants' Day." Area cooperating merchants have been giving free tickets, which can be redeemed Friday as part payment for rides at the carnival.

Preparations are being finalized before the gigantic Underwood Bicentennial Parade, scheduled to take place here tomorrow, July 2. Lester Zietz, coordinator for the parade, said the city has given permission to rope off Lincoln Avenue from Meiny's Bar to the medical clinic building.

The Underwood High School graduating class of 1951 will celebrate their 24th year anniversary reunion July 4 and 5. Class members included Dwaine Anderson, Betty (Austin)

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 10 a.m. Tuesday – advertisements, public notices, news and area announcements