

In Touch with Prairie Living, May 2026

By Michael M. Miller

May 2026 marks the 30th anniversary of the first of the 23 Journey to the Homeland Tours between 1996 and 2019. This was one of the highlights of my 55 years working at NDSU. To walk the streets, prairies and farmland in the former Bessarabian, Crimean, and Black Sea German villages has truly been a lifetime experience for myself and tour members. We can truly be grateful our ancestors immigrated to the prairies of America and Canada.

Preserving the many photographs and videos taken with the tours was so important for Prairie Public's award-winning Germans from Russia documentary series. GRHC's mission includes sharing and preserving this cultural heri-

tage. Here I share memories from tour members.

Denise (Nagel) Wieser, native of Glen Ullin, N.D., and her daughter, Elise, were 2018 tour members. Denise wrote, "My most cherished day was when we traveled with four other tour members to the former Worms, Russia. This is where my Grandma Emilia (Wetzel) and Grandpa Frederich Nagel emigrated from. The road had many potholes, but we were able to enjoy the landscape and see the tethered animals. Along the way, we were amazed by the local hospitality of residents who opened their homes to us, sharing their knowledge and food (homemade bread, honey, and wine). The day wrapped up with us meeting an 80-year-old

German lady in Worms. She welcomed us into her fenced yard where the dogs, cats and chickens were free to roam. She said she doesn't have anyone to speak German with, so she sings, which she did for us. Her yard consisted of the traditional summer kitchen and root cellar, which explains why our ancestors brought those traditions with them."

Maryanne Statton of London, Ontario, 2017 tour member, wrote, "As we approached the family village of Landau, my heart raced and tears rained down. This was the village my family was instrumental in building, which Rev. Conrad Keller and Joseph S. Height had documented for future generations to appreciate the trials and tribulations they had endured. With a well-crumpled map, we located the remains

of the majestic church, still standing but in need of repair. The wide main street led us in and out just as it had for my Mueller and Schnell ancestors. As we departed Landau, my eyes gazed over the village. Time stood still."

Theresa Berg, 2007 tour member, wrote, "One of the highlights was my personalized tour of Bessarabia with my guide, Kira. We stopped at one ancestral home in Plotzk where there was a woman with her young child and a husband who seemed to be hiding in the shadows. I took a photo of the woman and her child standing in front of the summer kitchen. We stopped at another former German home that was well-maintained. We were shown family books detailing the history of the German family that once lived there. The current family took us to the grave of one of the previous German inhabitants. The descendants of the original German owners sent the current Ukrainian family money to keep up the home and the grave in good repair."

Carol Just, native of Berlin, N.D., wrote, "Sometimes opportunity falls at your feet and you know you must follow. In May 1998, I joined other members on the same journey tour. Many of us were strangers traveling from different parts of the USA, and many of us became lifelong friends after this shared experience. As we made our way to our ancestral villages in rural Moldova and Ukraine, we all found it remarkable that his rural landscape mirrored the landscapes on the Dakota prairie. For me, the most humbling and joyful experiences occurred in the villages. Walking the streets where my great grandparents lived, recognizing that many of the homes built by our ancestors were still standing and in use, and finding the very large churches, some in ruins, others repurposed."

Julie Opp Burgum, native of Streeter, N.D and 2008 tour member wrote, "The highlight for me was the three of us hosted at the home of Martha Kammerer and family in the village of Glückstal, Moldova. Martha could speak German with my mother, Esther (Mertz) Opp. She was gracious, and we used the outhouse. We discovered an area with lilac bushes which my mother said were usually planted by cemeter-

ies. Searching, we found broken pieces of tombstones with German script lettering. We had a family photo taken in that area knowing that our ancestors were buried there. We had a wonderful trip and are so grateful to Michael Miller and GRHC for organizing this journey."

Wayne and Ramona (Engel) Garman were 2018 tour members. Wayne shared, "We were fascinated to view the land from the air during our flight into Odesa. The checkerboard layout of the farmlands could be the same view flying into Saskatchewan or North Dakota. It was easy to imagine similar scenes driving in the Canadian prairies and U.S. Great Plains. Some of Ramona's fondest memories are from Odesa with connections to her paternal grandmother, Philippina Weisbeck Engel. One memory was walking along the shores of the Black Sea, including touching the water. Another was when our tour guide, Elvira, showed Ramona the building on the harbor where immigrants waited for their ship. Her grandmother wrote in her memoirs of this building and of leaving this port in Odesa to immigrate to North America. Although the building no longer exists, the harbor was a symbol of the last place her grandmother was before she left Russia for good."

Helen Knowlton, native of Olds, Alberta, a member of the 2017 tour, wrote, "My special memories included visiting the German Museum at Selz with Louisa Riesling. Louisa also served the tour group lunch with fried cheese buttons (Kase Knoephla). A memorable visit was the gravesite of Bishop Antonius Johannes Zerr in Selz. Two priests, Father Al Bitz and Father Donald Leiphon, blessed our gathering and the Bishop Zerr's resting place."

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. You may also contact me directly at michael.miller@ndsu.edu or 701-231-8416.

May column for North Dakota and South Dakota weekly newspapers.

Insurance Companies Statement of Condition

	74900
ABSTRACT OF STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2025 of the	
PartnerRe Life Reinsurance Company Of America In the state of Arkansas	
Total Assets	533,517,219
Total Liabilities	432,440,037
Aggregate write-ins for special surplus funds	0
Common Capital Stock	2,500,000
Preferred Capital Stock	0
Aggregate Write-ins for Other Than	0
Special Surplus Funds	0
Surplus Notes	0
Gross Paid in and Contributed Surplus	162,415,164
Unassigned Funds	(63,837,982)
Total Capital and Surplus	101,077,182
Total Liabilities, Capital And Surplus	533,517,219

NORTH DAKOTA BUSINESS ONLY FOR THE YEAR 2025	
Total Life and Annuity Premiums Written	0
Total Life and Annuity Direct Losses Paid	0
Total Accident and Health Direct Premiums Written	0
Total Accident and Health Direct Losses Paid	0

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF INSURANCE
I, Jon Godfread, Commissioner of Insurance of the State of North Dakota, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true Abstract of Statement, as officially filed by the Company in this office.
IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of this office at Bismarck, the first day of March A.D. 2026 (SEAL).
JON GODFREAD
Commissioner of Insurance
STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF INSURANCE COMPANY'S CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORITY
WHEREAS, the above corporation duly organized under the laws of its state or country of domicile, has filed in this office a sworn statement exhibiting its condition and business for the year ending December 31, 2025 conformable to the requirements of the laws of this State regarding the business of insurance and **WHEREAS**, the said company has filed in this office a duly certified copy of its charter with certificate of organization in compliance with the requirements of insurance law aforesaid,
NOW THEREFORE, I, JON GODFREAD, Commissioner of Insurance of the State of North Dakota, pursuant to the provisions of said laws, do hereby certify that the above named company is fully empowered through its authorized agents and representatives, to transact its appropriated business of authorized insurance in the state according to the laws thereof, until the 30th day of April, A.D. 2027.
IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal at Bismarck this first day of March, A.D., 2026 (SEAL)
JON GODFREAD
Commissioner of Insurance
(May 6, 13, 27)

	77879
ABSTRACT OF STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2025 of the	
5 Star Life Insurance Company In the state of NE	
Total Assets	319,625,218
Total Liabilities	272,563,858
Aggregate write-ins for special surplus funds	0
Common Capital Stock	2,500,050
Preferred Capital Stock	0
Aggregate Write-ins for Other Than	0
Special Surplus Funds	0
Surplus Notes	0
Gross Paid in and Contributed Surplus	39,221,049
Unassigned Funds	5,340,262
Total Capital and Surplus	47,061,361
Total Liabilities, Capital And Surplus	319,625,218

NORTH DAKOTA BUSINESS ONLY FOR THE YEAR 2025	
Total Life and Annuity Premiums Written	100,758
Total Life and Annuity Direct Losses Paid	170,692
Total Accident and Health Direct Premiums Written	59,261
Total Accident and Health Direct Losses Paid	8,203

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	82627
ABSTRACT OF STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2025 of the	
Swiss Re Life & Health America Inc. In the state of Missouri	
Total Assets	12317912953
Total Liabilities	10764195135
Aggregate write-ins for special surplus funds	0
Common Capital Stock	4000000
Preferred Capital Stock	0
Aggregate Write-ins for Other Than	0
Special Surplus Funds	0
Surplus Notes	0
Gross Paid in and Contributed Surplus	3238254849
Unassigned Funds	-1688537031
Total Capital and Surplus	1,553,717,818
Total Liabilities, Capital And Surplus	12,317,912,953

NORTH DAKOTA BUSINESS ONLY FOR THE YEAR 2025	
Total Life and Annuity Premiums Written	0
Total Life and Annuity Direct Losses Paid	0
Total Accident and Health Direct Premiums Written	0
Total Accident and Health Direct Losses Paid	0

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\$1000 1st Place Prize (based on 50 teams)
AIMs Rules ♦ Fish Anywhere in KC
2 or 3 Person Teams ♦ \$200/team
Call 391-2305 (Rhett)
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