



## **Folk Farmsteads on the Frontier**





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*North Dakota Field School 2017*

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# Preface

The fieldschool that is the subject of this e-book is the result of an agreement between Brady Wind Energy Center I and II (Brady Wind) and the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND). When Brady Wind began planning for the construction of the Brady Wind I and Brady Wind II Energy Centers, two wind farms located in southern Stark County and northern Hettinger County, it became clear that the projects would each require a Certificate of Site Compatibility from the North Dakota Public Service Commission. This requirement made the projects subject to review by the SHSND under North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) 49-22 – North Dakota Energy Conversion and Transmission Facility Siting Act. Brady Wind hired Tetra Tech, Inc. to perform the cultural resources surveys required to provide the SHSND with sufficient information to understand the above ground historic resources in the vicinity of the proposed wind farms. During that process, Tetra Tech identified a number of historically important historic buildings and farmsteads generally associated with the Germans from Russia population that settled in the area at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

The SHSND reviewed the information collected by Tetra Tech about the proposed projects and the historic buildings in the area, and requested Brady Wind to undertake mitigative actions to ameliorate the effect of adding wind turbines to the historically bucolic area. After discussions involving the SHSND, Brady Wind, and Tetra Tech, the SHSND accepted the proposal from Brady Wind to fund a fieldschool for students of architectural history and the documentation of some of the historic structures within the vicinity of the proposed wind farms.

The goal of the mitigation was not only to record these buildings, a standard mitigative action, but also to better understand this collection of buildings and, most importantly, to present these findings to a wider audience than normally sees architectural documentation. By involving students in the fieldschool and producing a document aimed at the general public rather than a specialist architectural historian audience it was hoped that the mitigation might pique the curiosity of future historians about North Dakota's rich historical legacy, and provide the local residents with a better understanding of the landscape they traverse daily.

# Acknowledgements

This e-book is the result of a collaboration between Brady Wind Energy Centers (Brady Wind), Tetra Tech, Inc. (Tetra Tech), the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND), and faculty, students, and volunteers associated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW Madison).

Professor Anna Andrzejewski, the Principal Investigator (PI) for this project, oversaw the fieldwork and was mainly responsible for assembling and editing the e-book. Still, she depended heavily on the work of the students, who took charge of different aspects of the work. LauraLee Brott was responsible for the maps; Alex Leme was principally responsible for photography and video/audio edits; Laura Grotjan was responsible for drawings; and Michelle Prestholt was the principal person overseeing archival research. This e-book presents their efforts for the most part without significant changes – a testament to the value of student research.

Prof. Andrzejewski depended heavily on two volunteers who assisted with fieldwork for this project. Tom Carter, Professor Emeritus of the University of Utah, joined the team in the field, bringing to the project several decades of knowledge about fieldschools and rural architecture of the frontier West. Without Tom's energy and inspiration, we would not have conducted nearly as much work. Travis Olson, a participant in several former UW Madison-led fieldschools, drove across the country to help. His drafting skills were vital in speeding our work, and his good humor was much-needed during an intense week.

The PI also wants to thank others at UW-Madison who helped make the class and e-book possible. Troy Reeves, Oral Historian at the University of Wisconsin, helped consult about the University of Wisconsin Institutional Review Board (IRB) process as well as interviews generally. Clare Christoph and Christine Stricker of the Department of Art History helped navigate logistics for the project, especially during the field week. Steel Wagstaff of Learning Support Services gave freely of his time as we worked with the software. We also want to thank the Department of Art History for providing space and computer support as we worked on this e-book.

In the field we relied on Brady Wind and Tetra Tech for countless means of support, including arranging meetings with property owners, public meetings, and also navigating the landscape with which the Wisconsin folks were just plain unfamiliar. Much thanks goes to Richard Estabrook of Brady Wind for making this project possible and helping us set up contacts with the property owners. James Sexton of Tetra Tech brought his immense knowledge of the area to the project, and helped us identify properties to study and contacts. We are also grateful to Susan Quinnell of the North Dakota SHPO for meeting us in the field during the field week and again at the October public presentation. Her support throughout the project has been extremely helpful.

We are grateful to the researchers who came before us who laid excellent foundations on the history of Germans

from Russia in the Great Plains and on the architecture of this ethnic group (and other ethnic groups in the Dakotas). I am particularly thankful for early, helpful leads from Tom Isern (NDSU), Steve Martens (NDSU), Michael Koop (Minnesota SHPO), and David Murphy (Nebraska SHPO). All of these scholars have done research on the architecture of Germans from Russia in the region and were so generous in offering advice early on in the project. Also helpful were Michael Miller at the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at NDSU; Alison Hinman at the Dickinson Museum Center; and staff at the Germans from Russia Heritage Society in Bismarck.

Our greatest debt is to the residents of Stark and Hettinger Counties, who opened their homes and shared their knowledge with us. We enjoyed our interviews with Kevin Carvell (Mott), George Ehlis (New England), Geneva Steier (Schefield), Peter and Marie Betchner (Dickinson), and Karen Weiler (Dickinson), and appreciate the stories they shared, many of which are found in the pages of this book. We also want to thank the property owners who allowed us free access to their historic buildings, without which this book would not have been possible. We dedicate this book to them and their ancestors.

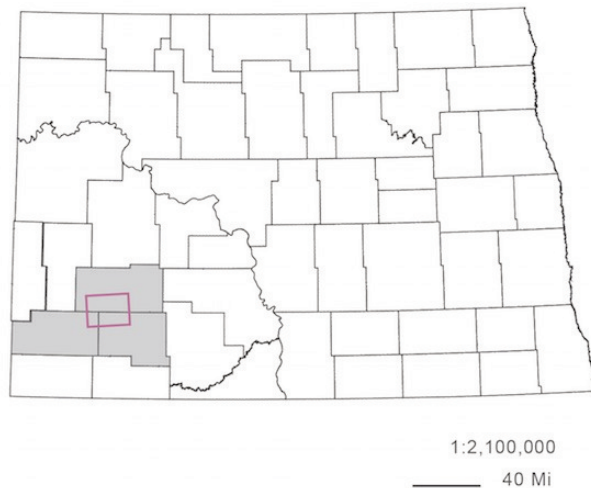




# Chapter 1: Introduction

ANNA ANDRZEJEWSKI

This e-book presents the findings of a fieldschool class held for four weeks in the summer of 2017. The basis of the class was to examine afresh a series of historic buildings in Hettinger and Stark Counties, North Dakota. The buildings examined have ties to the settlement history of the Germans from Russia, who came to the region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> This immigrant group settled throughout the American Great Plains, including in this part of southwestern North Dakota, during the first two decades of the twentieth century.



Map of North Dakota showing the project area (in purple). Drawn by LauraLee Brott.

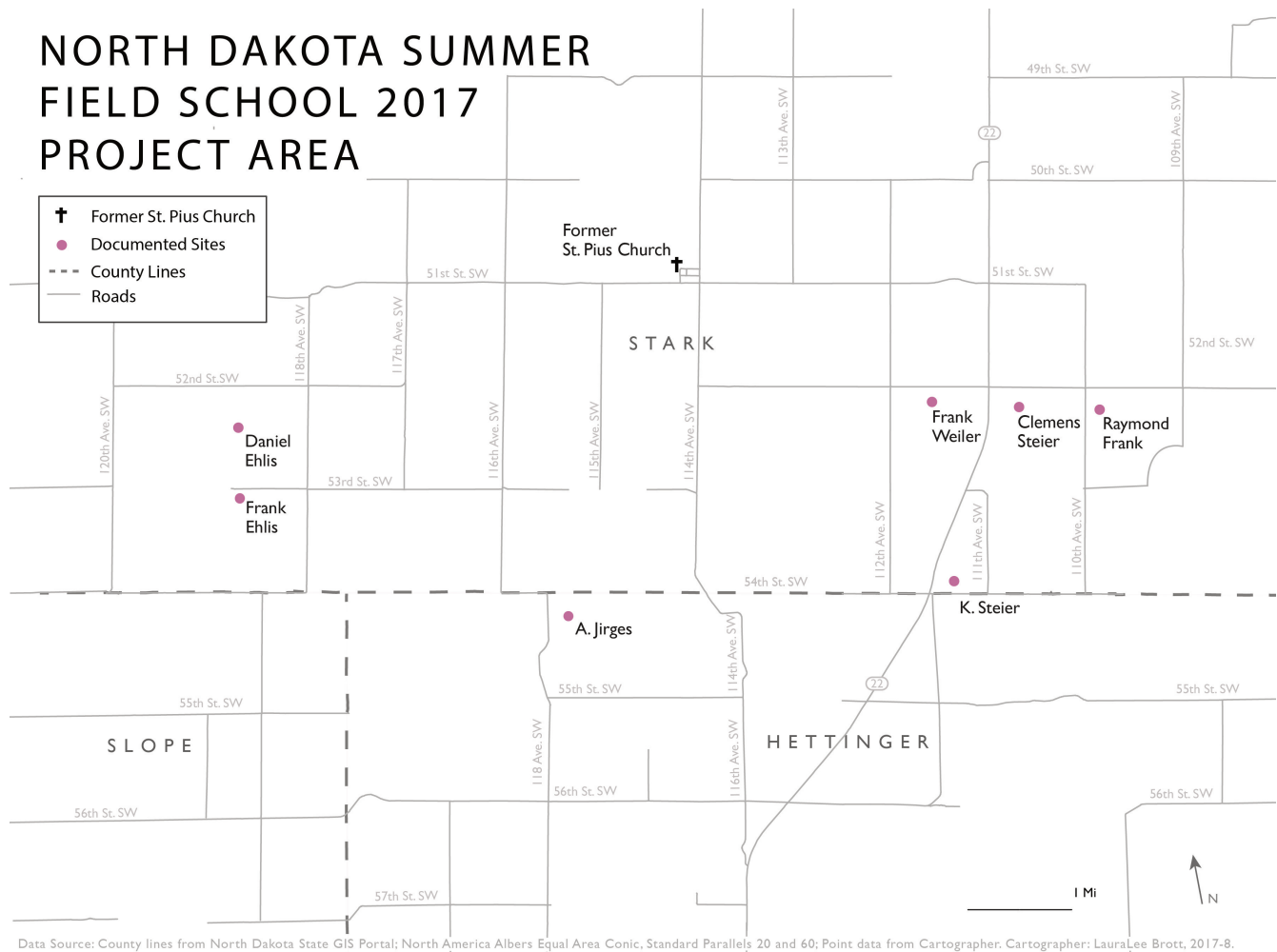
The premise behind the class was that research on these buildings would enrich the received story of the Germans from Russia in this region. Some previous preservation efforts have occurred in the vicinity of the project area (such as at the [Hutmacher Farm](#), which has been documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey of the National Park Service), and several books and articles have broadly discussed some of the important cultural contributions of the Germans from Russia in the history of North Dakota, including some findings about their architecture. However, the class aimed to yield fresh research both by documenting the history of previously unstudied historic buildings and also using information gleaned from research in the archives and through interviews with local residents to draw fresh conclusions.

The class examined seven farmsteads containing buildings built during the first quarter of the twentieth century in the vicinity of the unincorporated village of Schefield, located in Stark County just north of the boundary with Hettinger County. Although the farmsteads selected were chosen on the basis of potential ties with settlers who may have been Germans from Russia, the findings from research on these buildings and from interviews with local residents told a more nuanced tale.

1. The history of the Germans from Russia is more fully detailed in Chapter 3 of this e-book.

Instead of simply reflecting “German-Russian” ways, the farmsteads show how settlers in this area adapted to novel ways of life in the plains climate and forged a new culture over several generations of settlement.

## NORTH DAKOTA SUMMER FIELD SCHOOL 2017 PROJECT AREA



Map drawn by LauraLee Brott.

Part of the story directly relates to the prairie landscape itself. Many of the buildings were built of rock gathered from farm fields, trees being rare on the rolling grasslands encountered by the homesteaders upon their arrival in the region around 1900. Moreover, the siting of some of the farm buildings – in valleys protected by hills and with few north facing windows – relates directly to the harsh North Dakota winters, as settlers sought to shield their farmsteads from the prairie’s bone chilling winds. Other aspects of the story involve the fact that the Germans from Russia were not the only ethnic group to settle in this area. They were joined by homesteaders from other ethnic groups, including German-Hungarians, Bohemians, Ukrainians, and Poles, who, like the Germans from Russia, sought to make their home in a new land under the stipulations of the Homestead Act. Over time, these groups intermixed and intermarried, just as modern changes also affected how and what they built.

To understand the “German-Russian” ancestry of the homesteaders thus is only part of the story told in this e-book. The story that unfolds in subsequent pages is ultimately less a story of the transfer of ideas from eastern Europe to the northern Great Plains, but rather a story of adaptation to new ways of life on the prairie frontier. In these buildings we see old ways gradually giving way to the new, something also evident in our informants’ stories across the twentieth century.

In the pages that follow we tell this story in hopes of stimulating further research on these historic folk farmsteads and the history of their occupants.



View of typical landscape in project area showing relationship of buildings to the prairie. Photo by Travis Olson, June, 2017.

## Chapter 2: A Fieldschool Approach

ANNA ANDRZEJEWSKI



Students working in the field on measuring summer kitchen at the Raymond Frank Farm. Photo by Anna Andrzejewski, June 26, 2017.

The class was based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where similar fieldschools have been taught in the summers periodically since 2006.<sup>1</sup> The idea of a fieldschool is based on the notion that content is generated through “fieldwork.” Fieldwork places students in face-to-face situations with their subjects, whether that means buildings/artifacts or contemporary citizens and organizations. The idea is to gather primary research and use those findings at the basis for generating original scholarship. In short, our goal was to learn new information about the architecture and history of this area through immersive study in the local community.

The premise of this is tied to the academic discipline of *material culture studies*. This field is premised on the notion that human-made things – such as furniture, ceramics, clothing or even houses – are intertwined with our everyday lives. Because of this, it is assumed that studying these kinds of things can reveal things about culture, including things that are not in the written record. The study of common architecture – what some term *vernacular architecture* – is one subject of material culture studies.<sup>2</sup> The project team relied on approaches derived from the discipline of material culture studies to learn about these buildings and create fresh research findings.

Of course this research was not conducted in isolation. The team drew on scholarship several generations in the making about the architecture of Germans from Russia, which has long been hailed as a definitive feature of the

1. For fieldschools taught at UW-Madison and the UW-Milwaukee in previous summers, visit <https://blcprogram.weebly.com/fieldwork-archive.html>

2. For an introduction to material culture, see James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). A good introduction to the field of vernacular architecture is Camille Wells, “Old Claims and New Demands: Vernacular Architecture Studies Today,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 2 (1986): 1-10.

historic building fabric of the region as well as other parts of the Great Plains. As this chapter explains, the project team attempted to use primary data from our fieldwork to build on previous research, which offered some fresh insights and suggested potential avenues for future study.

## Previous Research

The architecture and history of the Germans from Russia has been subject to study at the international, national, regional, and local levels. Much research on this group has benefitted from robust historical organizations and collections, namely the [Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at North Dakota State University](#), the [Germans from Russia Heritage Society](#), and the [American Historical Society of Germans from Russia](#).<sup>3</sup> These organizations hold archival collections, especially genealogies, which are designed to educate descendants about their heritage. These collections are supplemented by other collections specializing in the architecture and history of the northern Great Plains. Of particular note are collections at the [State Historical Society of North Dakota](#) and a consortium of resources grouped under the collection “[Digital Horizons](#).”<sup>4</sup> Collectively these resources provide excellent background on the history of the Germans from Russia in North Dakota, the kinds of buildings and structures they lived in and used, and some information on the history of people as they migrated from parts of eastern Europe to the northern Great Plains.

The team was also indebted to scholarship conducted on buildings in the region, which includes published articles, essays, and books as well as previous reconnaissance studies, historic resource surveys, and historic contexts. Insight into understanding North Dakota’s settlement history was gleaned through *Plains Folk: North Dakota’s Ethnic History*, an edited volume with essays on diverse ethnic populations who settled in the northern plains.<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on the architecture of Germans from Russia in North Dakota is limited; it includes an unpublished paper from a conference, a short essay in an edited volume on America’s ethnic vernacular architecture, and a more in-depth published article in *Pioneer America* centered on the community of Scheffield.<sup>6</sup> Additional studies on ethnic barns and churches were helpful in understanding the broader cultural landscape.<sup>7</sup>

Previous studies done in the region for preservation planning purposes were also very helpful for background. The team made extensive use of “Ethnic Architecture in Stark County, North Dakota: A Historic Context.”<sup>8</sup> Prepared in 1992 with funding from the National Park Service, the context laid out property types associated with the different ethnic groups that settled the county while also prioritizing goals for preservation. While helpful in many ways, the study looked at a much broader area than our project. Moreover, many resources have been lost since the report’s completion, something that makes our project all the more timely. Recent survey work done as part of compliance with federal regulations was also helpful in helping the team strategize research priorities.

3. For information on the collections, visit the following websites: <https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/>; <http://www.grhs.org>; <http://www.ahsgr.org>

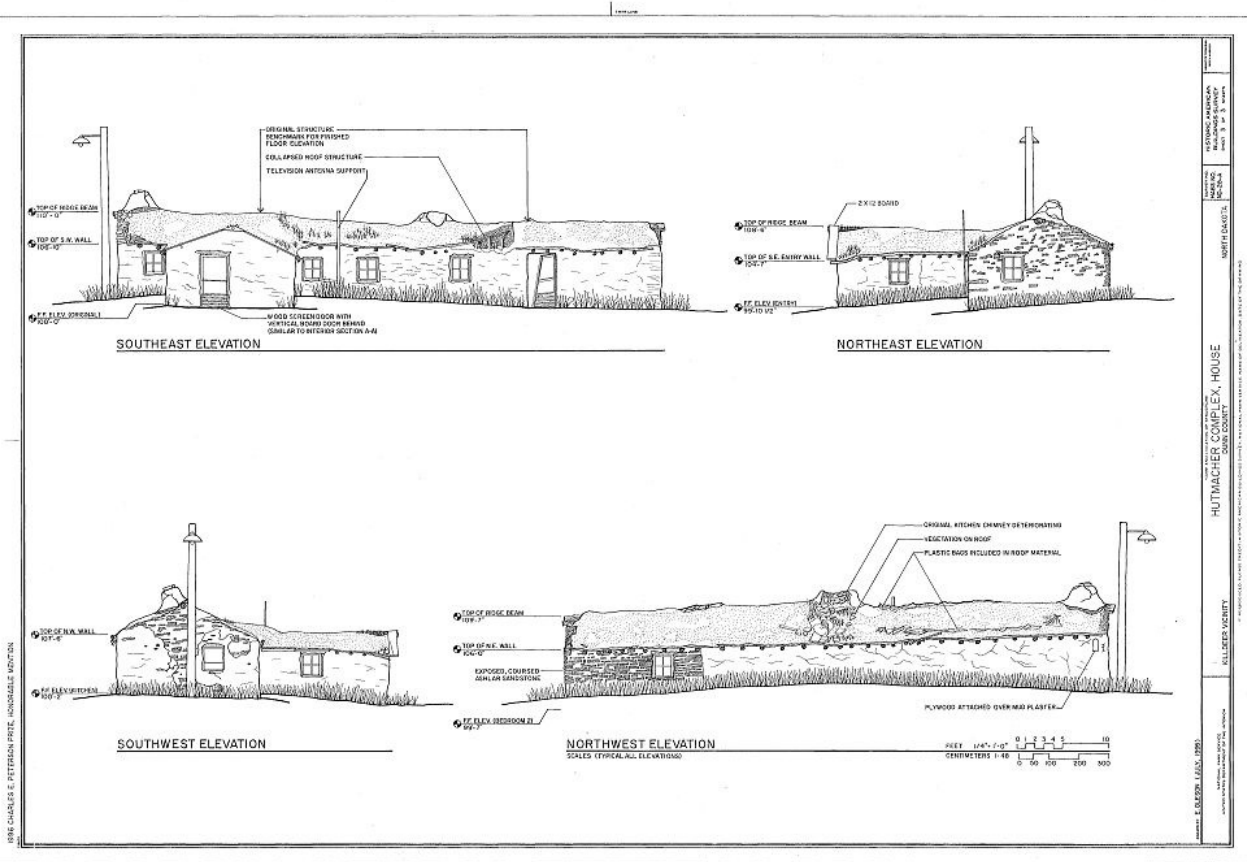
4. For information, see <http://history.nd.gov> and <http://digitalhorizonsonline.org/digital/about>.

5. William C. Sherman and Playford V. Thorson, eds., *Plains Folk: North Dakota’s Ethnic History* (Fargo, N.D. : North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies at North Dakota State University in cooperation with the North Dakota Humanities Council and the University of North Dakota, 1986).

6. Steve C. Martens and James W. Nelson, “From Dust to Dust...The Temporal and Organic German-Russian Folk Architecture of Western North Dakota’s Hutmacher Farmstead,” Unpublished paper given at the 1996 conference of the Vernacular Architecture Forum, Ottawa, Ontario; Michael Koop, “German-Russians,” in *America’s Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America*, ed. Dell Upton (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1986), 130-35; and Alvar W. Carlson, “German-Russian Houses in Western North Dakota,” *Pioneer America* 13, no. 2 (September 1981): 49-60.

7. Lauren Hardmeyer Donovan, *Prairie Churches* (Fargo: Preservation North Dakota, 2012) and *Prairie Barns of North Dakota* (Fargo: Preservation North Dakota, 2015).

8. Lon Johnson, et al., “Ethnic Architecture in Stark County, North Dakota: A Historic Context,” prepared for the Division of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, State Historical Society of North Dakota by Renewable Technologies and Michael Koop, subconsultant, 1992.



House on Hutmacher Complex, Killdeer, Dunn County, ND – HABS ND,13-KILLD.V,1 (sheet 3 of 3), Courtesy of HABS <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.nd0063/sheet.00003a>

Finally, several HABS/HAER studies and previous survey work in the surrounding region, such as at the [Hutmacher Farm](#) (Dunn County), were helpful as comparative material.<sup>9</sup>

## Project Methodology

The class was organized into a four-week session with the “field week” to occur during the second week of the course.

9. Hutmacher Complex, HABS Report, Killdeer, Dunn County, North Dakota, HABS ND,13-KILLD.V,1-.





Alex preparing for work in the field by reviewing William Sherman's online collection of historic photographs. Photo by LauraLee Brott, June, 2017.

The students spent the first week of class reviewing previous studies and scholarship, becoming familiar with research resources and developing skills in drawing and interviewing to use in the field. The second week was spent in Stark County conducting intensive field survey of seven farmsteads while also conducting five interviews with individuals knowledgeable about the history of these farms, the architecture of the Germans from Russia, and the region's settlement history. The final two weeks of class were spent in Madison processing the data collected in the field and developing content for the e-book.

The team went into the field with predetermined research questions. These research questions developed out of the students' interests as well as their knowledge of previous literature. The students were most curious about what they perceived as gaps in existing scholarship. They tried to use what they found in the field to build knowledge that they found lacking in other sources. Although the team veered from these questions in the field, they still served as a useful starting point.

## CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does the *cultural landscape* reveal patterns – within buildings (including interior space), of buildings to one another, buildings to landscape, buildings to farmstead, farmsteads to other farmsteads, farms to town, and farms to other cultural sites – and express, convey and shape cultural priorities?

What is the “homeland” to residents and how do they define and negotiate their *identity* relative to their background, ancestry, and notions of family and community?

What kinds of challenges did the plains landscape and environment pose (and continue to pose) to building and establishing community? What ideas did they bring with them? How did they translate or transform those ideas in a new environment? (*diffusion and acculturation and invention*)

How have buildings, technology, farm practices, lifestyles adapted over time and where did the ideas for innovation originate? (*modernization and change over time*)

Professor Andrzejewski identified priorities for field research based on the Historic Resources Survey conducted in Hettinger and Stark Counties by Tetra Tech in 2016. The farms chosen seemed to embody features associated with early twentieth-century German-Russian building as discussed in the existing literature and had a fairly high level of architectural integrity.



The barn on the Daniel Ehliis Farm displays a high level of architectural integrity, with most of its original features intact. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

In selecting the sites, the PI tried to prioritize farmsteads with significant numbers of outbuildings rather than sites with only one or two buildings (except in cases where those buildings had a high level of integrity—in terms of few additions or changes in terms of their material, form, setting, location, or ornament—or were otherwise significant because of their early date of construction or being of an exceptional type).

All of the farmsteads examined had buildings dating to the first quarter of the twentieth century, with most (though not all) of the farmsteads under construction by the date of publication of the local atlases in 1914 (Stark County) and 1917 (Hettinger County).<sup>10</sup> As will be shown in Chapters 5 and 6, these farms represented a

10. George A. Ogle, *Standard Atlas of Hettinger County, North Dakota* (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1917) and *Standard Atlas of Stark County, North Dakota* (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1914).



range of choices to homesteaders in the region of German-Russian background. While folk in nature, they also suggest ways that their builders and owners accommodated and acclimated to the Great Plains in terms of placement, materials and methods of construction, and building form. Collectively they show significant variety in terms of farm layout, house form and materials, and outbuilding options despite the fact they were produced for people associated with a particular ethnicity.

The day before entering the field, the field team reviewed the research questions and properties for study. Given time constraints (only a week for fieldwork) and the fact the focus was only on seven farms, the PI settled on a deductive approach for the fieldwork. The team agreed to study the farmsteads with the goal at the end of trying to tell a story through the field evidence, weighing that against the findings of previous research. The fact the property owners allowed fairly unlimited access to their farms allowed the team to ask nuanced questions of the buildings and their relationship to one another and the landscape. The team considered everything from farm layout to individual types of buildings to details of construction and compared the farms to one another.

## Methods

Although the fieldschool was building-centered, the field team relied on multiple forms of evidence as well as an assortment of research techniques.

In the field, students learned skills in building documentation through measured drawing, photography, and interviewing. Once back in Madison, students honed their skills in graphic representation through creating scaled measured drawings, designing interpretive maps, choosing representative photographs, and editing video and audio tracks.



Anna and Michelle measuring the smokehouse on the A. Jirges Farm, June, 2017. Photo by James Sexton, June, 2017.



Laura drawing at the Raymond Frank Farm. Photo by Thomas Carter, June 26, 2017.

Measured drawing had the steepest learning curve for students in the class. Using tape measures and graph paper, students learned how to recreate scaled plans, elevations, and construction details. The students drew by hand (rather than using Computer Assisted Drawing, or CAD) based on two core beliefs: first, that it would allow them to engage more directly with the buildings and notice details they might not otherwise see; and second, because the class agreed that the detailed appearance of these hand-crafted buildings would best be communicated through hand-drawing. Despite a rough initial morning, by the afternoon of the first day, students were drawing on their own, creating floor plans and elevations – and this work continued throughout the remainder of the week.

Simultaneous with drawing, certain members of the team branched off for other activities, namely photographic documentation, research, and interviewing. One of the students, Alex Leme, had extensive background in professional photography, and he was tasked with creating many of the high-resolution photographs in the e-book. Meanwhile, the PI conducted most of the interviews used in the book, peeling off other members of the team for assistance.



Anna interviewing George Ehls at the Daniel Ehls Farm. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

The interviews adhered to “best practices” in the field of [oral history](#).<sup>11</sup> Team members obtained “informed consent” and adhered to the protocol approved by the University of Wisconsin-Madison IRB. The questions asked were open-ended, but focused on the history of the Germans from Russia and their architectural legacy.

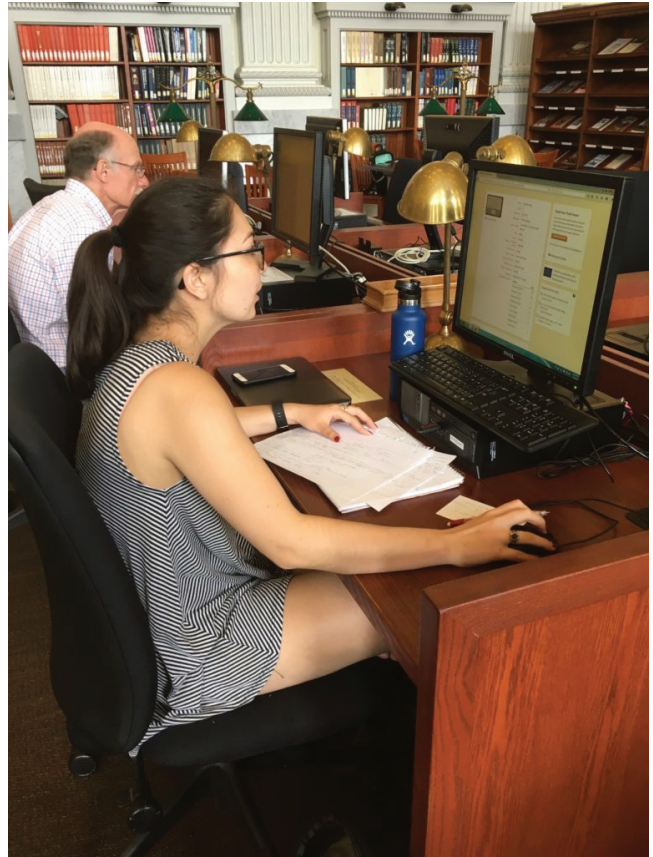
Once back in Madison, the class spent two weeks processing the data and preparing content for the e-book. Although each student participated fully in all aspects of preparing the e-book, each was given oversight over one aspect: Alex (photography and A/V editing), LauraLee (maps), Laura (drawings), and Michelle (archival research). Each student was also responsible for creating a narrative on one of the sites studied in the field. The PI

concentrated on developing the e-book platform, writing interpretive parts of the narrative, and helping put all the different contributions together in this final product.

11. See "Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History," Adopted October 2009 by the Oral History Association at <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>.

## Benefits of a Fieldschool Approach

While such a short class can hardly be expected to produce the definitive word on such a rich topic as Germans from Russia architecture on the Great Plains, the e-book suggests the value of the “fieldschool approach.” The immersive week in the field was particularly valuable in connecting the project team with local residents and the individual sites. The team was able to gather rich primary data in the form of drawings, photographs and interviews and preserve those findings for future researchers. Compiling findings into an e-book also allows the data gathered to reach a larger audience than a typical report, and the team hopes this will prompt future research in the region on this understudied architecture and this important ethnic group.



Michelle conducting research back in Madison on ancestry.com at the Wisconsin Historical Society. Photo by Anna Andrzejewski, July, 2017.

# Chapter 3: From Germany to Russia to the North Dakota Frontier

LAURALEE BROTT AND ANNA ANDRZEJEWSKI

## Introduction

The story of the migration of the German people to Russia (and parts of Eastern Europe) and eventually to North America – and North Dakota in particular – is complex. Much of scholarship about these people emphasizes how they retained aspects of their German culture as they migrated.<sup>1</sup> Less discussed are how elements of German-Russian culture came to be integrated with American culture as well as how this culture blended with that of other frontier settlers of German-Hungarian, Bohemian, Norwegian and Polish heritage. These and other ethnic backgrounds settled in the Great Plains in the same period as the Russian-Germans, which ultimately helped shape a new and distinctive regional culture on the northern plains.

This chapter traces the history of the German migration to Russia and eventually to North Dakota. Although the category “Germans from Russia” describes a large portion of the homesteaders who settled in southwestern North Dakota, they were not the only settlers in this region. In Hettinger and Stark Counties, Germanic speaking people from other parts of Eastern Europe – Hungary, for example – settled on farms that in some ways appear to resemble farms within our project area (stone construction and one-story linear form). Detailed fieldwork of the sort conducted for this e-book is one way to more accurately account for the particular and distinctive features of the architecture of the Germans from Russia.

## From Germany to Russia (and elsewhere)

The story of the Germans from Russia in North Dakota begins in Europe. Of course, Germany as we think of it today was not an organized political entity until the organization of the German Empire in 1871 under the leadership of Bismarck.<sup>2</sup> Prior to this, it was a loose agglomeration of political entities, some large and some small, vying for power and control. Religious differences also divided those claiming German ancestry, with many of

1. Richard Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, trans. Lavern J. Rippley and Armand Bauer (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1974), 3-7.

2. R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 525-27.



these differences dating back to the time of the Protestant Reformation. Wars between different political entities affected the fortunes of many Germans as much as the lingering feudal system and religious differences made life miserable for many of them. These “push factors” accounted for a nearly constant exodus of Germans to North America, other parts of Europe, and Russia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> Large numbers of Germans settled in eastern North America (Pennsylvania and the Shenandoah Valley through 1800, and parts of the Midwest afterwards), in parts of Eastern Europe (Hungary, Romania, and Bohemia), and along the Volga River and the north shore of the Black Sea in Russia.

## AREAS OF GERMAN IMMIGRATION IN EASTERN EUROPE



Sources: ESRI, Europe Albers Equal Area Conic, Central Meridian: 15.0, Standard Parallels 28.0 and 47.0. German Immigration information: <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~german/AlbertaHistory/Georigin.htm>. Cartographer: LauraLee Brott, August 2017.

Map drawn by LauraLee Brott.

The Germans migrated to Russia in several waves, all spurred by promises of jobs and land from the Tsars. The

3. Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev: The Story of Russia's Germans* (Battleford, Saskatchewan: Marian Press, 1974), 6-8.

first period of migration from Germany to Russia occurred between 1533-1584 under Ivan the Terrible, who hired a wide variety of tradesmen to build up Moscow.<sup>4</sup> The second wave of immigrants came between 1672-1725 under Tsar Peter the Great. By that time, there were 50,000 Germans living in St. Petersburg. The third wave was a result of Catherine the Great's attempt to buffer the eastern parts of the empire against Asiatic tribes.<sup>5</sup> Alexander I continued this endeavor. Germans poured into Russia between 1762 and 1796, and waves continued after that.<sup>6</sup> Many went to the Volga and Black Sea regions (see map 1). By 1897, there were almost 2 million people of German descent in Russia.<sup>7</sup>

Part of the appeal for the Germans to move to Russia is tied to conditions of their settlement as set out by Catherine the Great in 1763. According to historian Richard Sallet, for about a century after this, Germans in Russia were entitled to:

1. Religious liberty
2. Tax exemptions for ten years in cities and thirty years on the land
3. Exemption from military service or civil service, against their will, for all time
4. Cash grants for the purchase of buildings and cattle
5. Equality with native Russians
6. Exemptions on import duty for colonists up to 300 rubles per family in addition to the moveable property of each family
7. Permission of professional people to join guilds and unions in Russian empire
8. All lands allotted for the settlement of colonists were to be given for eternal time, not however as personal property but as the communal property of each colony
9. Settlers were permitted to depart at any time after payment of a portion of assets they had acquired in the Russian empire.<sup>8</sup>

Black Sea and Volga Germans both tended to build their settlements in pockets. Farmers worked on their farms on the outskirts of town during the day, and then resided within the main village at night. The villages were active, having German-speaking churches, schools, recreational places for shopping and social activities. Many villages also had their own German language newspapers. Village construction varied between the two groups. In the Volga region, villages followed a checkerboard pattern with one main street intersected with several cross and parallel streets. The Black sea settlements are "street-villages" with cluster of farms bordering on a single main road. Churches – whether Protestant or Catholic – were typically located in the center of the Russian communities.<sup>9</sup>

The houses the Germans built in Russia were typically one story in height, and usually made of sandstone, limestone or brick. The walls were stuccoed on the outside and whitewashed on the inside. The gable end of

4. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 8-9.

5. "A Brief History of the Germans from Russia," [https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history\\_culture/history/history2.html](https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/history/history2.html) (accessed November 20, 2017).

6. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 10-13.

7. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 13.

8. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 10.

9. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 14.

houses faced the straight village street, which was up to one hundred yards wide.<sup>10</sup> The Germanic people were industrious, and used their surroundings to their advantage. For example, in forest regions of the Volga, such as the Volhynian region, the buildings were largely constructed with wood.<sup>11</sup>

The distinctive features of particular settlements resulted from clusters of families coming either from particular regions in Germany, from a particular religious background, or often both. Eventually there were over three thousand distinctive Germanic settlements in Russia. While these settlements differed in terms of their religion and particularly features, the settlers shared the native German language and held on to many German customs, at least initially. By 1871, when Tsar Alexander II revoked the privileges granted to the German-Russians under Catherine the Great's charter, some accommodation to Russian language and lifeways had occurred but the swift action prompted many of Germanic descent to migrate again in search of new opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

## From Russia to North Dakota

Tsar Alexander's actions effectively ended equal treatment of German-Russians, making them essentially peasants and requiring the immediate drafting of men into the Russian army. While some endured, many German-Russians left for the United States and Canada. Like their ancestors, they were lured by similar prospects that prompted their move to Russia: the promises of free land and freedom to practice their own religion and culture.

Immigration to the U.S. began in earnest in 1872 after railroad companies distributed pamphlets throughout Europe and Russia, boasting of large tracks of affordable land in the Great Plains.<sup>13</sup> The [Homestead Act](#) of 1862 offered 160 free acres of farmland provided one improve and live on the plot for a minimum of five years. Of course, the Great Plains were not widely settled by white Americans or European immigrants until the transcontinental railroads entered the area during the last few decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The Northern Pacific Railroad entered the Dakota territory in 1872 and reached the city of Bismarck in 1873, opening up the northern Dakota territory for widespread settlement.<sup>15</sup> Settlement accelerated between 1880 and 1890 by nearly 1400% (from ~37,000 to over 190,000).<sup>16</sup> Between 1870 and 1920, 120,000 Germans poured into the U.S. from Russia.<sup>17</sup> North Dakota specifically held 23% of German-Russian population in the United States by 1920.<sup>18</sup>

Scholars have contended that the German-Russians who chose to settle in the Great Plains desired a landscape reminiscent of the Russian steppes they were used to cultivating.<sup>19</sup> It is true that Germans from Russia who came to the U.S. generally avoided urban areas, seemingly preferring the isolation of the rural landscape (though of

10. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 13.

11. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 14.

12. "A Brief History of the Germans from Russia," [https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history\\_culture/history/history2.html](https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/history/history2.html) (accessed November 20, 2017).

13. Lon Johnson, et. al., "Ethnic Architecture in Stark County, North Dakota: A Historic Context." Report prepared for the Division of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, State Historical Society of North Dakota by Renewable Technologies and Michael Koop, sub-consultant, 1992,5.

14. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 5; William C. Sherman and Playford V. Thorson, eds., *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History*, (Fargo, N.D.: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies at North Dakota State University in cooperation with the North Dakota Humanities Council and the University of North Dakota, 1986), 133-34; Stark County History, 4-6.

15. Johnson, et al., "Ethnic Architecture in Stark County," 6.

16. "North Dakota Historical Population," <https://www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/~sainieid/north-dakota-historical-population.html> (accessed November 20, 2017).

17. Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements*, 6.

18. Sherman and Thorson, *Plains Folk*, 137-138.

19. Michael Koop, "German-Russians," in *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America*, ed. Dell Upton (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1986), 130.

course assurances of free land also made this appealing). Most of them were reasonably well off, and most were farmers, as local historian Kevin Carvell explained:

Most homesteaders were poor, but they were wealthier than many....they had enough money to get out here....to get a wagon, a horse, a pick...they had a little bit of money....the German-Russians were straight off the boat, and had been farmers for 10,000 years and had endured harsh lives in Russia when they emigrated there.



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According to Richard Sallet, 95% of the Germans from Russia that settled in the Great Plains were wheat farmers.<sup>20</sup> As much as possible, the German-Russians migrated in groups and tried to settle near others of the same religion – whether Catholic, Lutheran, Mennonite, and Hutterite. The Homestead Act did not allow for settlement in rural villages; farmers had to reside on their 160 acre plots. In North Dakota, they tended to try to put their farms at the corners of the tracts of land so they lived in somewhat close proximity to one another.

The German-Russians who settled in North Dakota retained the German language in churches, schools and newspapers through at least the first World War. Before World War I, twenty-nine German newspapers were printed in North Dakota, but less than twelve survived afterwards. In general, those born in 1950 understood aspects of the German language but were not fluent speakers, suggesting a fall-off in German customs as the settlers acclimated to frontier life in the Great Plains.<sup>21</sup>

## Germans in Southwestern North Dakota

The Germans from Russia are concentrated in three areas of North Dakota: south central, north central, and the southwest quarter (across the Missouri River), making what is called the German-Russian Triangle. 68,000 Black Sea Germans lived in this triangle in 1920; even in 1965, 97% of

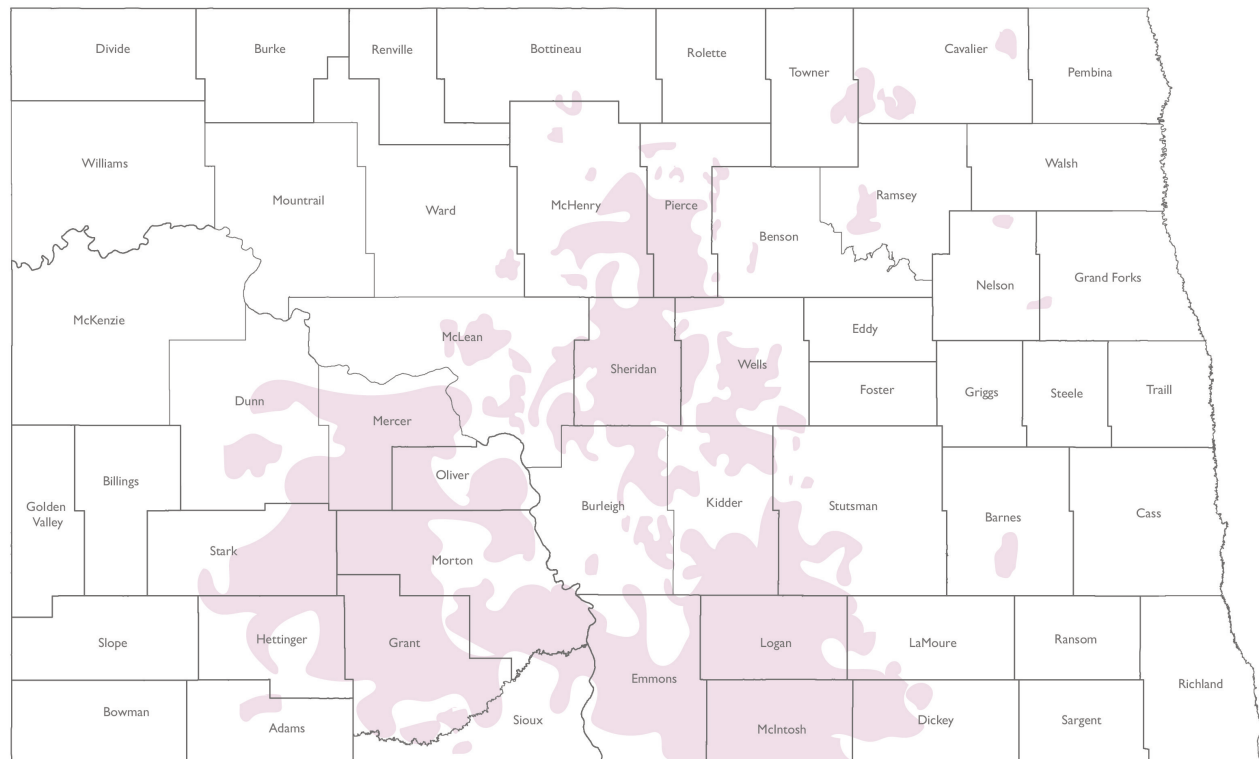
20. Sherman and Thorson, *Plains Folk*, 138, 148.

21. Sherman and Thorson, *Plains Folk*, 142.



## THE “GERMAN-RUSSIAN TRIANGLE” IN NORTH DAKOTA, C. 1920

75 Mi



1:3,200,000

Source: County lines from North Dakota State GIS Portal; WGS 1984; German-Russian Triangle information adapted from William Sherman, *Prarie Mosaic - Fargo*, North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies 1963. Cartographer: LauraLee Brott, August 2017.

Map drawn by LauraLee Brott.

households with German-Russian ties in North Dakota still lived in the triangle. Still, the Germans from Russia were far from the only ethnic group to come to this part of North Dakota in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to German-Russians, Germanic people from other parts of eastern Europe as well as elsewhere (Bohemia, Ukraine, Norway, Bulgaria, Poland and other parts of Europe and Asia) settled on the plains. As discussed by William Sherman in the Preface to *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History*, the legacy of North Dakota's diverse ethnic settlement history remains in cultural traditions that are found in pockets of settlement even today.<sup>22</sup> But while members of these different groups settled in clusters, geographic boundaries were porous and never absolute. To isolate one group from another ignores the fact all were neighbors and that intermixing always occurred, even if it accelerated over time, and eventually became associated with a *regional* (as opposed to ethnic) identity.

The area around Dickinson serves as a case in point. It was settled during the 1890s principally by German-Russians from the Beresan region on the Black Sea.<sup>23</sup> More German-Russians flocked to the area south of

22. Sherman and Thorson, *Plains Folk*, preface.

23. Alvar W. Carlson, "German-Russian Houses in Western North Dakota," *Pioneer America* 13, no. 2 (September 1981), 51; Sallet, *German-Russian Settlements*, 38-39.

Dickinson after 1900 and moved further southward into Hettinger and Slope Counties.<sup>24</sup> These German-Russians were joined by other ethnic settlement groups in Stark County, which included the German-Hungarians, Bohemians (and Crimean-Bohemians), Norwegians and Ukrainians.<sup>25</sup> Still, the German-Russians were dominant, in 1910 making up 40.6% of the county's population and 46.6% in 1920, compared with the next largest group, the German-Hungarians, at 27.5% and 23.3%, respectively.<sup>26</sup>

While census numbers convey the dominance of the German-Russians, geographic distribution of people from different ethnic groups in Stark County tells a more complicated story. If the area south of Dickinson was dominated by German-Russians, other parts of the county had concentrations of people of other ethnic groups. Lefor, for example, was settled mainly by German-Hungarians from the Banat region of Austria-Hungary. Norwegians were concentrated near Taylor (and points north of there). Ukrainians settled in South Heart and Belfield, alongside German-Russians. When religion is added to the picture, the situation becomes even more complicated. Although German-Russians in the Scheffield area were Catholic, German-Russians in Daglum were Lutheran. There were even Catholic churches for different groups which corresponded roughly to their geographic location in the county (German-Hungarians went to the church in Lefor, German-Russians to the church in Scheffield). Even amongst those who shared the German language, then, their specific ethnic background affected where they settled, how they lived, and where they worshipped.

Although most of the farms examined in this e-book appear to have ties to German-Russian settlement in Stark County, they should be understood in light of this broader story – of German migration first to Russia and then to North Dakota, as well as in terms of the broader patchwork of ethnic settlement on the Great Plains. As later chapters will show, while some of the farms we studied have features that mark them as tied to “German-Russian” culture, features changed over time as their occupants co-mingled (and eventually intermarried) with people from other ethnic groups. The process of migration (and the acculturation that comes along with it) is thus important in understanding the history of these farmsteads.

24. Johnson, et. al., “Ethnic Architecture in Stark County,” 12.

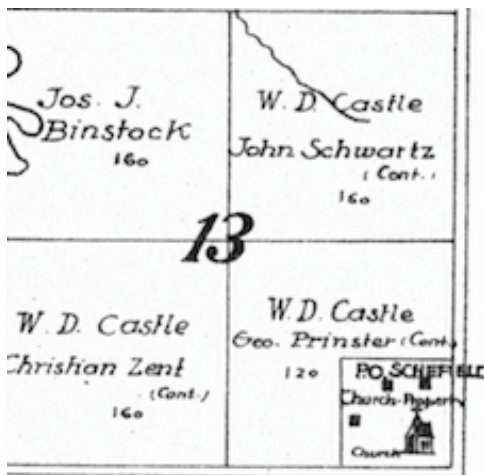
25. Johnson, et. al., “Ethnic Architecture in Stark County,” 8.

26. Johnson, et. al., “Ethnic Architecture in Stark County,” 9-11.

## Chapter 4: The Schefield Community

MICHELLE PRESTHOLT AND ANNA ANDRZEJEWSKI

Our study centered in a rural part of Stark County, near the historic Village of Schefield. Until it closed in 1990, St. Pius Catholic Church was the anchor of this tiny rural community, drawing Catholic parishioners from the surrounding farms for worship. At one time, the community also boasted a store, a Catholic school, and an active Verein hall. Today the community is a ghost of its former self, with only a few residences, the cemetery, and the Verein hall suggesting the history of this century-old village that was once the center of the German-Russian community in this part of Stark County.



Schefield community with St. Pius from 1914 Stark County Atlas (Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1914).

Because of the proximity of the farms in our study area to Schefield and given the connections of families we interviewed to St. Pius, we chose to undertake an analysis of surviving historical records in attempt to contextualize the farms we studied within the broader "Schefield community." That community proved far more diverse than we anticipated, something borne out by interviews we conducted with residents in the area. Although many of the families who attended St. Pius were, indeed, of German-Russian background, we found a much more mixed ethnic fabric in the vicinity of Schefield, consisting not only of German-Russians but also a sizable number of German-Hungarians and people of other ethnic backgrounds. Over time, this ethnic diversity became even more pronounced, and mixing occurred between people of different ethnic backgrounds. By the time St. Pius was demolished in the late 1990s, the sense of the German-Russian history of the community had been reduced to the names in the cemetery and the memories of a few

descendants of the original homesteaders.

## The History of St. Pius and Schefield

Outside of a few residences, the only historic buildings today that reflect Schefield's century-long history as a center of the German-Russian community are the former parish house, a little used Verein Hall, and the St. Pius cemetery.



Entrance to St. Pius cemetery, looking north. Photo by James Sexton, June, 2017.

Indeed, when it was built, St. Pius was an anchor within the German-Russian community in Stark County. When St. Pius parish formed in 1910, the County had just experienced its largest period of growth; the county grew from a population of 7,621 in 1900 to 12,504 in 1910.<sup>2</sup> A cursory look at the Population Census reveals much of this population growth came from immigrants from Russia, particularly German-Russians. The longtime pastor of St. Pius, Bede Dahmus (priest from 1933-90), describes the community as it formed around the church in parish records at the Bismarck diocese:

“The first settlers were German-Russians who took up homesteads from the government. When a post office was to be established at the parish house the name “Schoenfeld” was suggested, after the name of a parish or town in Russia. This was corrupted to Sheffield.”

The grave markers in the cemetery are full of German surnames, including some still common in the area, such as Binstock, Steier, Frank, Olheiser, Ehliis, and Weiler. Also notable are the numerous iron cross grave markers, a feature found in many German-Russian cemeteries in the region.<sup>1</sup> A model of the former St. Pius is located in the cemetery as if to commemorate the rural church and its German-Russian founders.



Model of the former St. Pius church now in St. Pius cemetery. Photo by Tom Carter, June, 2017.

When asked to describe the nationality of the early parishioners, Father Dahmus stated simply, “German-

1. Nicholas Vrooman, et al., *Iron Spirits: Germans from Russia Iron Crosses in North Dakota* (Fargo: North Dakota Council on the Arts, 1982) and “German-Russian Wrought-Iron Cross Sites in Central North Dakota,” Multiple Property National Register Nomination, #64500379, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AssetDetail?assetID=e3fb36b8-81f1-45bb-8c49-8dadaf9d20af>.
2. U.S. Census, Schedules of Population, Stark County, ND, 1900 and 1910.

Russian.”<sup>3</sup> Scheffield was at one time a thriving village, boasting several stores, a service station, a blacksmith shop, and more than a dozen homes.<sup>4</sup>

The modest Catholic parish succeeded in attracting a sizable congregation in its early years. Its initial membership numbered around sixty families. But according to local historian Nick Olheiser, the parish boasted over 130 families by 1933.<sup>5</sup> Initially services were held in the basement during construction of the Church in 1910-11, which was completed in 1912. It was built to house up to 320 parishioners, and measured



Undated photograph of St. Pius and congregation in possession of Geneva Steier.

49 x 110 ft in size (with a substantial steeple and stained glass windows). The Parish house, a sizable foursquare dwelling, was completed in 1914. The school building was finished in 1928, marking nearly a decade of growth after the original school had opened in the basement of the Church in 1917.<sup>6</sup>

The Catholic school had robust enrolments through World War II, and supported a high school for a time in the 1930s. Nuns from the School Sisters of Notre Dame (of Mankato, Minnesota) ran the school until 1968.<sup>7</sup> By that point enrollment had gradually dwindled; in 1976, St. Pius enrolled only 44 students. It closed in 1984 with only 19 students.<sup>8</sup>

The school's slow decline is related to that of the parish generally, whose membership also shrunk over the same time period. An undated source in the Bismarck Diocese says membership in the 1980s hovered around 35 or 40

families. The church closed its doors with a service on Sunday, April 22, 1990, which drew worshippers “coming from a long distance” and filled the Church to capacity.<sup>9</sup>

3. “Historical Record” (1945), St. Pius parish, in collection of Diocese of Bismarck, ND.

4. Linda Sailer, “Scheffield Filled with Memories,” *Dickinson Free Press*, June 3, 2012 (<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/lifestyles/1816417-scheffield-filled-memories>).

5. Sailer, “Scheffield Filled with Memories,” (<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/lifestyles/1816417-scheffield-filled-memories>).

6. For more information on the construction of the school, church, and parish house, see Nick Olheiser, “*History of St. Pius Parish, Scheffield, North Dakota, 1910-1976*,” located at the Germans from Russia Heritage Society, Bismarck, ND.

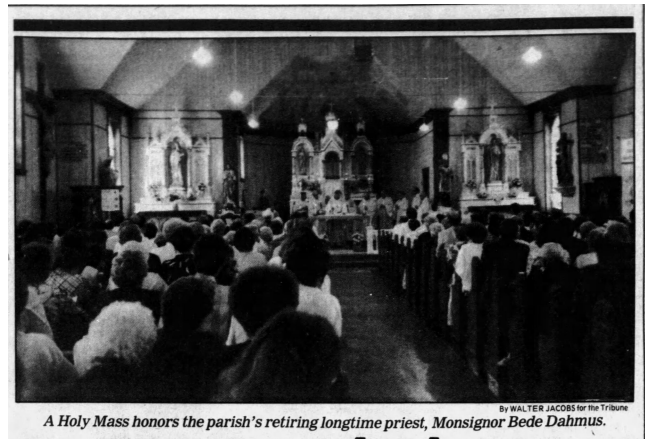
7. For more on the nuns that ran the school see <https://www.sndcentralpacific.org/explore/location/our-lady-of-good-counsel>

8. Olheiser, *History of St. Pius Parish*, and Olheiser, *History of St. Pius Parish and St. Pius School, Scheffield, North Dakota, 1910-1986*, also at the Germans from Russia Heritage Society, Bismarck, ND.

9. Walter Jacobs, “St. Pius Parish Closes,” *Bismarck Tribune*, April 27, 1990.

The church and school were demolished in 1998.<sup>10</sup> Although the Verein hall is reported to be active, we tried without success to find anyone to help us determine the membership today.

Nick Olheiser was interviewed for the *Dickinson Free Press* in 2012. Recounting the stories he knew of the Church, school, and Verein hall, Olheiser commented tellingly on the gradual decline of the community, including the moving of buildings and demolition of others: “It was a let-down, not so much for me, but the ancestors who put the effort into building them and taking care of them.” For Olheiser as well as others, the decline of Schefield represented the end of something they associated with their German-Russian roots – and yet looking to other records suggests the Schefield community was always more ethnically complex.



Last mass at St. Pius from the Bismarck Tribune, April 27, 1990.

## Delving into the Archives

In order to gauge the extent of the German-Russian nature of the Schefield community, the class spent time examining textual records, attempting to correlate information from the 1914 Atlas of Stark County, census records, and burial records at St. Pius. The analysis produced a much more complicated picture of the “Schefield community” than is generally believed. While St. Pius may have been founded, as Father Dahmus suggested, specifically for German-Russians, the surrounding community was always, to an extent, ethnically diverse, something that has continued to expand over time.

Beginning with the assumption that the “Schefield community” was partly geographical, we began with the 1914 atlas.<sup>11</sup> We decided to collect surnames within a roughly four mile radius of the church, which corresponds generally with Township 137, Ranges 97 and 96 W in the Atlas. After collecting those surnames, we cross-referenced them with the surnames in the 1910 census, Districts 0164 and 0167, which included Ranges 97 and 96 W. If the 1914 landowners were not included in the 1910 records, they were excluded from our data analysis. Overall, there were 160 surnames on the 1914 map, and census data was found on about half (72) of them. We then extracted data on gender, age, birthplace, language spoken, and literacy from the census records on the families.

Based on this data, we extrapolated some interesting data about the population of the Schefield community. 42.94% of the community was born in Russia, with the remainder being born either in North Dakota (38.04% – mainly children) and Hungary (13.54%). The linguistic picture is also fascinating. German was overwhelmingly the dominant language with 75.1% of the population speaking it. English was a distant second (20.55% of the population), and Russian third (4.35%). When we look at the household level, the majority of the households were “German from Russia,” but 14 were identified in the 1910 census as “Germans from Hungary.”<sup>12</sup>

10. Sailer, “Schefield Filled with Memories,” (<http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/lifestyles/1816417-schefield-filled-memories>).

11. George A. Ogle and Co., *Standard Atlas of Stark County, North Dakota* (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1914).

12. U.S. Census, Schedule of Population, Stark County, ND, 1910.



We further analyzed the ethnic breakdown of the ownership map using information on landowners' birthplaces gleaned from the 1910 census, as well as naturalization records, data from the 1920, 1930, and 1940 censuses, and draft cards. We felt comfortable mixing data sources since we were only trying to establish place of birth to obtain a sense of the ethnic backgrounds of the Scheffield community. We then color-coded the landowners on the map based on their birthplace in order to visualize the community geographically. Surprisingly, there was no clear division between Russian and Hungarian families. Although Germans from Russia clearly outnumbered those from Hungary, over the course of the period from 1910-1940, Germans from Hungary dispersed through the area rather than sequestered themselves in clusters.

We also attempted to cross-list the last names of the landowners from the 1914 Indexed County Land Ownership Maps with the names of individuals buried in St. Pius Cemetery using Find-a-Grave.<sup>13</sup> We did not exclude any of the landowners. Thirty-six family names were present on both the ownership maps and the St. Pius burial list. Of those 36, 94.4% were born in or related to someone born in Russia. This information suggests that the St. Pius community was dominantly made up of Germans from Russia, even if the larger Scheffield community was more diverse. More in depth analysis of the cemetery records, especially parish records, would likely nuance this finding.

## Conclusions

Our analysis of the Scheffield community using multiple data sources reveals several things. First, the community clearly has German-Russian roots. The dislocation that these immigrants felt on coming to the Dakota frontier and settling on widely dispersed farms (a sharp contrast to the clustered settlements back in Russia) was likely mitigated by the closeness they felt from the connection to St. Pius parish. And yet the Scheffield community was never solely German- Russian. These settlers came to Stark County alongside other immigrants from eastern Europe and Russia, including the German-Hungarians. Although German-Hungarians clustered their settlement in the vicinity of Lefor (and St. Elizabeth's parish), our analysis showed there was always crossover between the groups geographically.

Interviews conducted as part of this study confirms these findings. Geneva Steier talks about the blending that occurred; though Geneva and her husband were of German-Russian descent, there was always some intermixing:

Oh, I would say that most Germans married Germans and some, once in a while, there were also people around here that came from the Ukraine...my daughter is married to a fella who is Bohemian, you know. Ah, some of those intermarried, too, you know.



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Pete and Marie Betchner of Dickinson also talked about this variety in Stark County (and North Dakota more broadly):

13. On St. Pius cemetery records, see <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/636344/memorial-search?firstname=&lastname=Schoch&cemeteryname=>.

The German-Hungarians settled around Gladstone and Lefor...the German-Russians, they settled around a lot around Dickinson...and if you go north of here then you have the Bohemians and if you go twenty miles that way then you have the Ukrainians, which basically, they all live kinda by the same rules and had a lot of the same tradition but they had their own individual characters about them and some of them had their own languages, like the Ukrainians talk different.



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Even though groups lived in close geographical proximity, the boundaries between groups mattered, even as recently as fifty years ago.

Still, if the community was always diverse, the immigrants initially had much in common, not the least of which was the German language. George Ehlis recalls going to the St. Pius school as a boy, and having to learn English there:

When I started school, I couldn't speak English, and it was a Catholic school, taught by nuns, and I was put in the back of the classroom because I couldn't communicate. Which was unusual, because we lived away from that Schefield community, we were on the edge of it...certain areas had even isolated us. We spoke German, where the people who lived closer to the Schefield Community were bilingual...me and another boy that couldn't speak English and we learned how to speak English by observing.



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Just like German Hungarians who went to school in Lefor, Ehlis and his friends, of German-Russian descent, shared this in common.

Our analysis also suggested how the Schefield community has changed over time. Inevitably, as individuals



moved from country to city and the rural population dwindled, so, too, did the role of rural institutions, like the church at St. Pius. As the community has urbanized and modernized, signs of ethnic identification have given way to a more regional identity, something more “North Dakotan” than German-Russian. So, too, have the buildings, markers of ethnic settlement on the frontier, been abandoned, reduced to rubble, or demolished. Scheffield, a once thriving center of German-Russian life is a ghost of its former self, with the Verein hall and cemetery being the last reminders of the history of the community’s German-Russian homesteaders.

# Chapter 5: The Architecture and Cultural Landscape of the Schefield Community

ANNA ANDRZEJEWSKI

Schefield, and more specifically, St. Pius, served as a center for the surrounding community, particularly for the German-Russians who settled farms in the vicinity during the first few decades of the twentieth century. The church brought the community tighter, functioning as an anchor for them in the otherwise unfamiliar and barren land. If what survives today at Schefield is limited largely to the gravestones memorializing the families in the parish, historic buildings on the farms surrounding Schefield help us tell the story of the community and how it changed over time.

This chapter attempts to synthesize the findings of this year's field school and the evidence we gathered on the seven farms we studied. It considers our findings on the buildings, farmstead layouts, and the relationship between those buildings and the natural landscape alongside textual evidence (maps, census records, and newspapers) and evidence gleaned from interviews. Our analysis draws some conclusions about the farms and farm life while also suggesting avenues for future research.

Our findings in many ways raise more questions than answers. While we know that settlement patterns, for example, are tied to stipulations of the Homestead Act, the particular reasons for *why farmers settled as they did* remains somewhat of an open-ended question. Related to this is the layout of the farms themselves. A dominant pattern on the farms we observed was the widespread distribution of principal farm buildings on the farmstead – namely the farmhouse and the barn – for which we have not yet been able to explain. Finally, at the level of individual buildings, we arrived at a sense of typology and evolution over time – but how common this evolution was outside of our examples is somewhat unclear. In short, this study validated the need for further investigation of these buildings to tell the history of this fascinating period of successful settlement on the prairie.

## Settling the Prairie

One of our research questions asked what compelled Germans from Russia settlers to occupy the land as they did. Part of this related to the choices the settlers made in siting of their farms, but it also related to the specific

buildings they constructed – their form as well as their materials. It also related to choices farmers and farm families made over time, specifically the decisions they made about improving their farmsteads. In order to understand these choices, we began thinking at the largest scale – that is, where farms were settled, when, and with what materials. Also important is the relationship of buildings to the natural world, which continues to be inextricably intertwined (witness the wind farms all across the Dakotas).

As noted earlier in this e-book, widespread settlement of Stark County occurred between 1900 and 1910.<sup>1</sup> The 1914 atlas gives a good sense of the spatial distribution of the original farmsteads, which were often located at considerable distance from one another. Of course, part of this was due to provisions of the Homestead Act, which stipulated that farmers had to live on their farms for four years in order to stake claim to the land. As Kevin Carvell, a local historian, explained to us, this pattern sharply distinguished the location of farms in North Dakota from that of farms back in Russia (or Germany before):

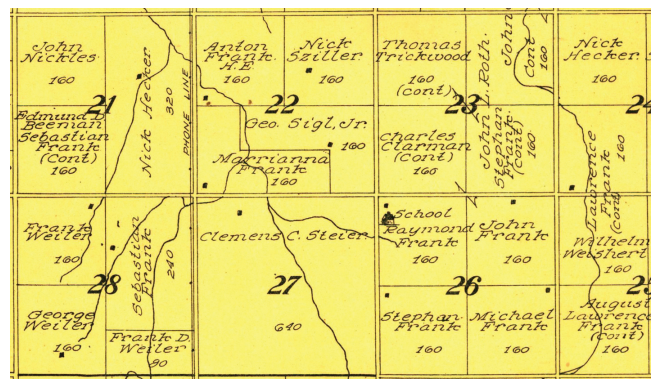
In Germany, they lived in self-contained communities...and they had recreated them identically when they went to Russia....When they came to America, they had to live on the land, on the spot, and you had to live there most of the year and have a bona-fide residence. They couldn't recreate what they had known for generations....it was a completely new lifestyle for them.



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The other notable feature to be gleaned from the 1914 atlas is the ways families settled in close proximity. A segment of the 1914 atlas shows the Frank and Weiler families settling on adjacent parcels; indeed, the Frank family settled throughout the area pictured in this segment.

It also seems that farmsteads were typically located near streams and roads. Variations from this pattern likely relates to the topography. The area around Scheffield consists of largely treeless, slightly rolling prairie. Certainly one factor that led settlers to construct permanent buildings was directly tied to the natural world, since the winters in the area are extreme.



Segment of 1914 Stark County Atlas (Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1914).

1. U.S. Census, Schedule of Population, 1900 and 1910.



Distant view of Daniel Ehlis Property, showing typical treeless prairie as well as how farms are often nestled in the lowest points of the rolling hills. Photo by Laura Grotjan, June, 2017.

As can be observed generally in the region, older farms rarely, if ever, are situated at the tops of hills where they would be subject to brutal winter gales; instead, they typically lie in relatively protected valleys or against the slopes of northern hills.

By 1914 the area appears to have been fully settled, but permanent settlement did not occur immediately. In fact, the earlier settlers in the region likely occupied temporary structures. Carvell describes these kinds of makeshift arrangements:

People arrived [and] they had no shelter at all. Sometimes they actually dug a hole in the ground, lived in a hole, or turned a wagon upside down and lived under the wagon...Imagine trying to live in a North Dakota winter under an overturned wagon!...They were pretty desperate to get into a structure...[so] they used the ingredients at hand, rock and mud, and they wanted to build it fast.



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More common were sod dugouts, which made use of the sturdy prairie sod. Sod houses themselves were not meant to last, but they lasted long enough such that homesteaders could build more sturdy structures. Some pioneers

even lived in outbuildings before they built houses. Geneva Steier recalled her husband's ancestors living in the summer kitchen while they built their residence on their 640 acre parcel.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest permanent architecture to survive in the region strongly suggests the resourcefulness of the immigrants as they sought to make their way in a new land. With timber being scarce on the prairie and towns with lumber merchants being widely distant, farmers built with what they had, which was often rock. Wood for roof framing and stock trim seems to have been purchased locally (most likely in Dickinson or New England), but given the ready availability of stone in the fields, it served as the predominant building material for first period houses and outbuildings, particularly smokehouses, summer kitchens, and barns.

While building was part of settling the prairie, it also involved creating a sustainable setting for agriculture and farm life to flourish that extended beyond the walls of farm structures themselves. Settlers had to create farmland, which meant plowing the prairie and removing the rock which they used to build. The very act of plowing the sod prompted dust storms, which led to further changes to the natural world, most notably the planting of trees to protect the farmstead. The most pronounced organized efforts in this were done as part of the shelterbelt program (1934) of the New Deal, but there were likely earlier and certainly later "windbreaks" planted to protect the farmsteads and their occupants from the harsh prairie winds. The evidence of shelterbelts is starkly evident on the landscape today; the resultant landscape is one where undulating prairie is intermittently dotted with clusters of trees signaling widely dispersed farmsteads.

## Farmstead Patterns & Features

As workplaces, farms evolve over time, and thus trying to gauge patterns of layout of first- and second-generation farms is challenging. One can estimate dates of construction of standing buildings or use historic photographs to attempt to map what a scheme might be, but given the fact farms have to (and do) change, it is difficult to reconstruct farmstead layout patterns with much precision. Yet taken collectively our study of farmsteads in the vicinity of Schefield reveal some distinct patterns, as well as raise questions about a larger regional pattern and whether it relates in any way to "old world" traditions.

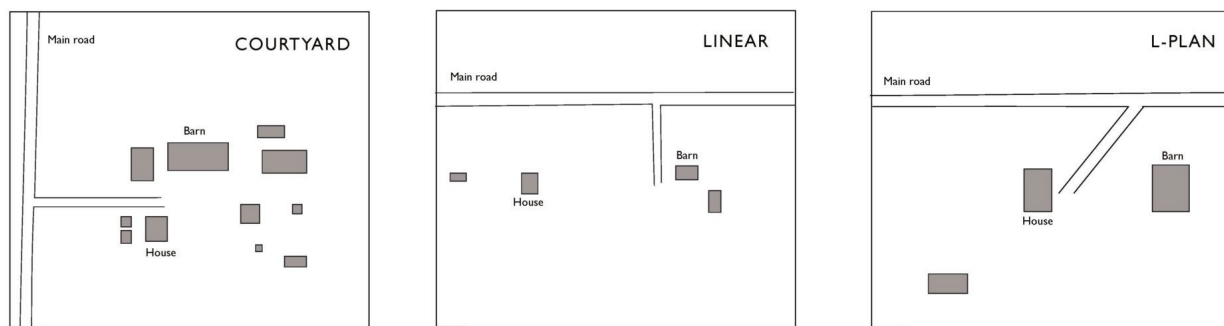
2. Geneva Steier interview with Michelle Prestholt, June 27, 2017.



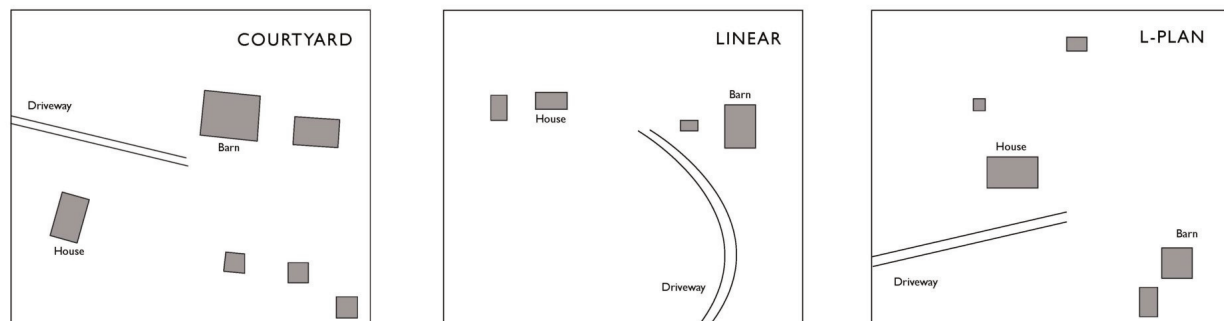
Aerial view of the Clemens Steier Farm. FSA Aerial Photography, 1957-1962. North Dakota GIS Technical Committee, State Water Commission, USDA-Aerial Photography Field Office.

The Steier Farm (discussed individually in the next chapter) is perhaps one of the more intact farmsteads we studied, containing a first-period house (dating to around 1909), an early barn, and an assortment of early twentieth-century outbuildings. The arrangement of these buildings may be described as “clustered,” without a seeming geometric logic aside from one notable feature: a *large*, open farmyard at the center of the cluster of historic buildings. This pattern is repeated throughout the farms in the study area, including the A. Jirges and Raymond Frank Farms, where wide separation occurs between the houses and barns.

#### TYPE A: FARM LOCATED OFF MAIN ROAD



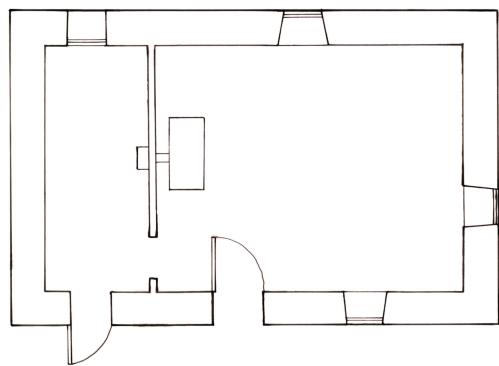
#### TYPE B: FARM NESTLED WITHIN THE PLOT



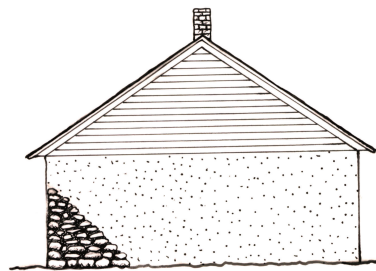
Typical farm patterns in the region. Analysis and drawings by LauraLee Brott.



This observation led us to seek to explore layout patterns across farmsteads in the wider vicinity. Using aerial photographs, a visual analysis of farm patterns was made, which revealed several interesting results. Overall there appear to be two general patterns for siting of farmsteads: first, farms near the site of the road (this pattern is suggested by the Steier and Frank farmsteads); second, farms located further off the road near the center of the plot of land (see A. Jirges and Ehlis farms). Second, there were three distinct patterns in the ways the buildings are laid out within the farmstead: linear, courtyard and L-shaped. In all three cases, it is notable that there is considerable space allocated for a “farmyard,” whether in between the house and barn or nestled within an L or courtyard (U-shaped) arrangement. What this layout means remains a vexing question, especially considering that moving between the house and the barn would have been challenging during the long plains winter.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
RAYMOND FRANK SUMMER KITCHEN



EAST ELEVATION  
RAYMOND FRANK SUMMER KITCHEN



NORTH ELEVATION  
RAYMOND FRANK SUMMER KITCHEN

RAYMOND FRANK FARM  
T137N R96W S26, STARK COUNTY, ND  
NORTH DAKOTA SUMMER FIELD SCHOOL 2017  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
DRAWN BY ALEX LEME  
JULY 2017

Summer kitchen on the Raymond Frank Farm. Drawn by Alex Leme, July, 2017.

The types of outbuildings on these farmsteads are remarkably consistent, not surprising considering the general focus in the region on cash-crop wheat farming and self-sufficient raising of livestock. In addition to large multi-purpose barns, farms we studied had early smokehouses. Based on previous windshield surveys, smokehouses and summer kitchens were common in the region. The Raymond Frank Farm had a surviving summer kitchen of the sort that probably existed on most farms during the early twentieth century. Also found on farms were granaries and windmills as well as vehicle storage buildings.

Several farms in our study area had pronounced shelterbelts. Although the dates of these are difficult to determine (the only historic aerials date to the late 1950s and 1960s), they may date to the 1930s or at least are found in the same location as those from that period. Although in each case they surround the farmstead, they do show some variation. At the Raymond Frank Farm, the shelterbelt creates a U shape around the west, south, and east of the farm (the north side being somewhat protected by an upward slope). The Clemens Steier Farm, meanwhile, has windbreaks mainly on the east and west sides. The Frank Ehlis Farm has a wide shelterbelt wrapping around on the north and west sides in a L-shape, as if to protect the farmstead from the biting northwestern winds that frequent the Dakota prairie.

Further study of farms in the region would seek to answer some of these questions about patterns of types of buildings, farmstead layout and landscape organization. Climactic factors played a clear role in terms of the placement of shelterbelts, but what role the harsh winter climate played in the layout of farm buildings is less certain. Indeed, the large farmyard separating house and barn seems counterintuitive. Further questions arise about the kinds of agriculture practiced, how that changed over time, and how that affected the organization of the farms. Were earlier outbuildings replaced as crops changed (such as the move to rapeseed)? When did the shift from horses to mechanized vehicles take place and how did that impact farm life? Where were farm animals housed (no evidence of fencing existed on the farms we studied)? Behind many of these questions lie others about ethnicity and regional identity, which are further informed by looking at features of individual buildings themselves.

## Signs of Ethnic and Regional Identity in Folk Farm Buildings

A sizable number of early twentieth-century buildings survive on these farmsteads, particularly farmhouses and first period barns. Most of these are built of masonry, although several are of wood frame construction. Documentary and oral historical evidence associate these early buildings with Germans from Russia, prompting questions about if and how this identity was manifest in these buildings. Such questions were at the forefront of our field investigations as we examined forms of the buildings, stylistic features, and methods of construction.

Five of the seven farms we examined had houses dating to the first quarter of the twentieth century. Of these five, three of the houses were rock, which is one of the forms of construction associated with Germans from Russia in the Great Plains, while the other two were built of wood frame.<sup>3</sup> While tempting to call all of these first period houses, the fact that the three stone structures are quite well built and the frame structures rather sizable suggests these were likely the second (or even third) dwellings built on these farmsteads. It is hard to confirm this, as sod structures, often the first to be built on the farms, have not survived.

The three masonry houses are all built of rough uncoursed fieldstone, likely gathered on site in fields surrounding the farmsteads. The stone was likely brought to the homesite using a “stoneboat”

3. Michael Koop, “German-Russians,” in *America’s Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America*, ed. Dell Upton (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1986), 130-35.



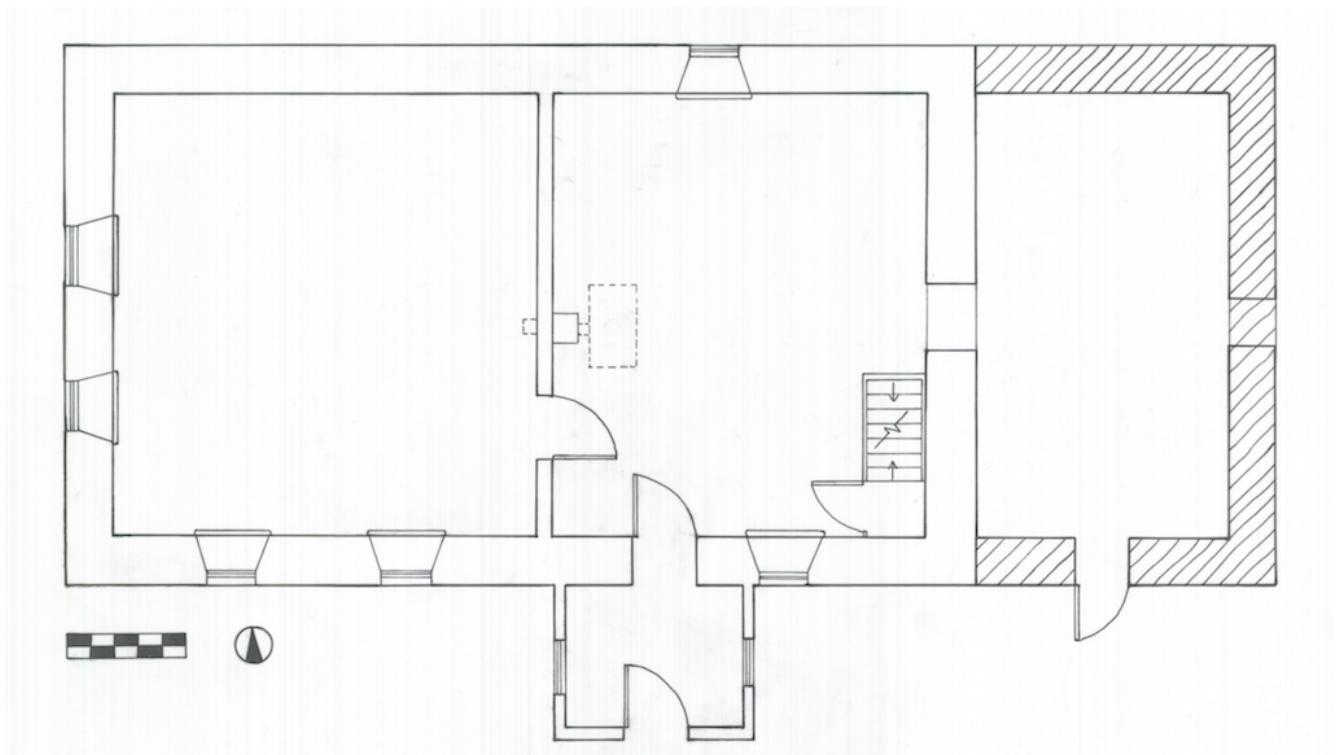


though gabled and round forms are also seen in the project area. In the case of the barn on the Clemens Steier Farm, the original roof was a gambrel roof; but when fire destroyed the barn in 1959, the stone walls were lowered and the structure was capped with a round roof.<sup>4</sup> Smokehouses on the Clemens Steier and A. Jirges Farms and the summer kitchen on the Raymond Frank Farm also exhibit similar forms of masonry construction.

Typically these were not finished to the same degree as the houses or barns; the rock smokehouse on the A. Jirges farm appears to have never been plastered.



Smokehouse on A. Jirges Property. Photo by James Sexton, March, 2016.

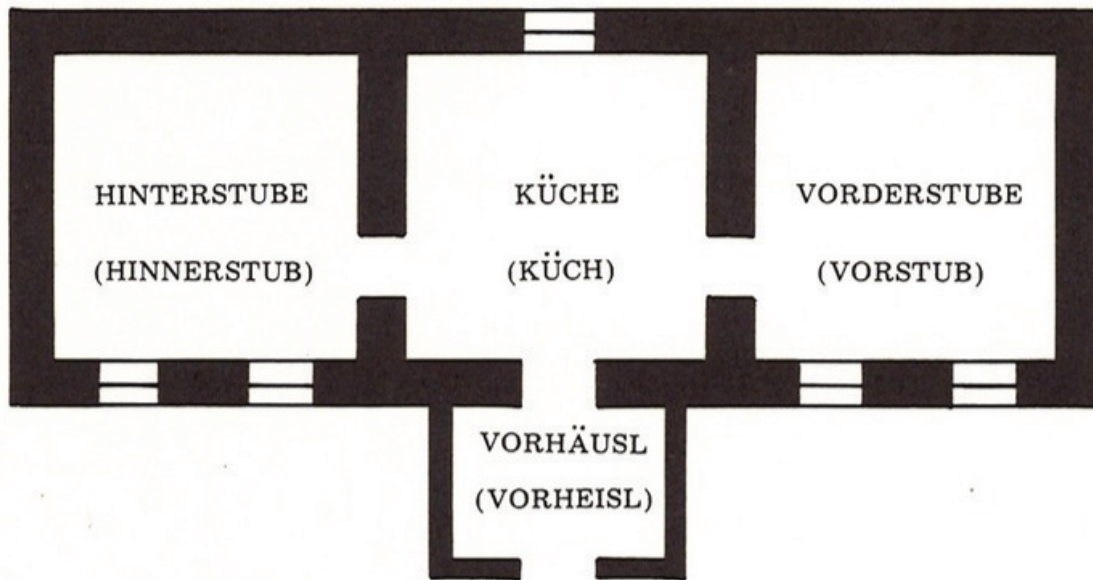


First floor plan of the house on the Raymond Frank Farm. Drawn by Alex Leme, July, 2017.

Observable patterns also appear in the form and appearance of the vernacular buildings. Three of the houses – on the Raymond Frank, Frank Ehlis, and Frank D. Weiler Farms – have one-room, one-story linear floor plans, a form is loosely associated in local imagination with a type popular among Germans from Russia. The floor plan

4. Betty Gardner and Eleanor Olson, *New England Centennial, 1886-1986: Century of Change* (Bismarck: NDSU, 1986), 548.

of the house on the Raymond Frank Farm shows the closest association with the traditional form as discussed by William Sherman in which “an elongated rectangle one room deep...divided somewhat equally into three parts with the entrance and kitchen in the middle and the parents’ room (*Vorderstube*) facing the street and the childrens’ room (*Hinterstube*) on the opposite side of the house.”<sup>5</sup> Off the kitchen was the entrance vestibule, known as a *Vorhausl*, a telltale feature of German-Russian houses in the region (as well as in Russia). The Raymond Frank House is also oriented on a strict east-west axis, another hallmark (according to Sherman) of this house form. And as typical, there was only one window in the north elevation to light the kitchen/primary living area.

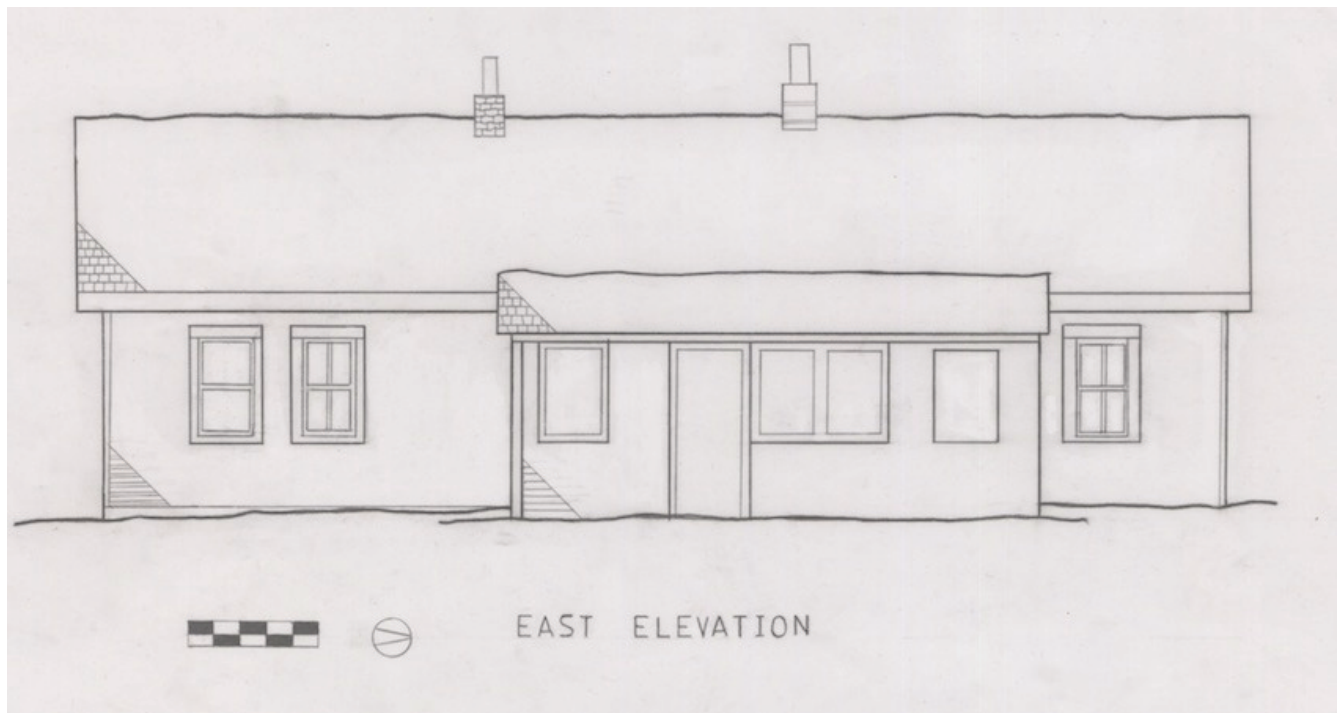


One of the typical Germans from Russia house plans. See Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*.

For all that the house on the Raymond Frank Farm would seem to share with Sherman’s “typical” Germans from Russia house form, it also exhibits notable differences, as do the other linear house forms in our study area. The easternmost room of the Frank House does not appear to have been a childrens’ sleeping area, but rather was likely used for coal storage, as a barn, or perhaps both.<sup>6</sup> The other houses displaying linear massing don’t appear to be organized the same way. The Frank Ehliis House has three rooms (with a fourth added on the north end), but the front ell is not a traditional *Vorhausl* but a kitchen (and was likely itself an addition). The periodization of this house, moreover, is not clear, as different parts were built at different times. Finally, the house on the Frank D. Weiler Farm also exhibits a linear scheme, but it is of frame construction— not rock – and also has shed-roofed additions off the long sides, obscuring to some extent its linear massing.

5. William Sherman, “Prairie Architecture of the Russian German Settlements,” in *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, ed. Richard Sallett (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1975), 187.

6. The current owner, Jeff Frank, insists it was coal storage as long as he and his parents remember, although there is some evidence this may have been used for animals with remnants of a loft.



Front elevation of the house on the Frank D. Weiler Farm. Drawn by LauraLee Brott, July, 2017.

While the sample size here is too small from which to draw widespread conclusions about regional building forms or construction techniques, enough pattern exists to point towards what a more complete study might yield. Clearly the relatively sophisticated stone masonry suggests the need to further study the network of people who may have been involved in rock construction, as the techniques do not appear to have been remotely makeshift (and the buildings are likely not self-built). Moreover, the forms of the houses and barns look patterned enough to beg the question about the relationship of these forms to the houses and barns in Russia as well as the broader region. Finally, enough variation exists within the buildings from the first quarter of the twentieth century itself to warrant further study, as it suggests that even within the first twenty years of permanent settlement, older ways made way for the new; was this a function of the prairie environment, acculturation, hybridity or a combination of factors?

## Succeeding on the North Dakota Prairie

The surviving historic buildings in the Schefield area materialize the history of their prior owners and occupants. Yet to mark them as “German-Russian” in any strict sense minimizes the rich stories they have to tell about the individuals who occupied them and the region as a whole. As much as patterns exist in the study area, there is enough variation to demand we look further and think more deeply about what that variation represents. While one could say it is simply showing ethnic ways giving way to American ones, the story instead seems to be one about “making it” over successive generations.

Taken collectively, these farms narrate stories of success – of success of individual farmers over the climate, of farmers over time, and of the community as a whole. The move to more permanent life on the plains, exemplified in masonry construction, particularly of the sizable multi-function barns, in itself is a marker of success over



the sod dugouts that the earliest pioneers likely occupied. Improvements to the farms over time – the modern structures, especially vehicle storage sheds marking the rise of mechanization as well as other improvements to the farm landscape – also support this story.

The shelterbelts, which on first glance may appear to be nothing other than ornament, actually also express a kind of success. The conquering of the prairie was not complete without the plow; but once the farmers plowed the grasses and cultivated the soil, they faced the wrath of the prairie wind, which blew the dust and wrecked havoc on everyday farm life (and even farming). The shelterbelts mounted a challenge to the elements, and as such, represent a sign of triumph of the settlers over the natural world.



Front (east) elevation of farmhouse on Clemens Steier Farm. Drawn by Laura Grotjan, July, 2017.

Improvements over time on these farms also speak of the success of individuals and individual families. The house on the Clemens Steier Farm is a telling example of this. Clemens Steier was a “first generation” German-Russian immigrant; his naturalization papers were filed in 1898. After he married in 1901, he moved into a small stone house on his farm about fifteen miles south of Dickinson – likely old world style – where he lived until 1909. At that point Clemens bought an additional full section of land on which he would erect the current house. This house, as his second, was evidence he had “made it” after a decade on the prairie. Rather than a single-pile linear house (such as the Frank House), his house *looked* modern, like the urban houses of nearby Dickinson. And yet, unlike the examples built with sawn lumber from the Sears and Roebuck catalogs, Steier’s house, while visually similar to those examples, was built using masonry techniques more akin to its German-Russian predecessors. The house, then, is a blend – of ethnic construction melding with modern American form and style.

The same story might be said as we look across farmsteads, from the earliest house in our study area – that on the Raymond Frank Farm – to the latest one on the A. Jirges farm. The house on the Frank Farm is closest to an “old world” form, with its horizontal east-west layout and stone construction, whereas the house on the A. Jirges

farm is a classic vernacular form of the American middle west, the “upright and wing,” found throughout rural America from the later nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries.



Front elevation of house on A. Jirges Farm. Photo by Tom Carter, June, 2017.

If we look at what happened from the first decade of the twentieth century – when the Frank house was built – until the third decade, we see a regional story of acculturation, or accommodation, to regional (as opposed to ethnic) ways. While it would be easy to say it was the transition of German-Russian to American, it is likely something that happened for *all* ethnic groups on the prairie across several generations.

As we move across time, then, we see a rapid shift from old world ways to something more distinctly rural American. It was not sudden, of course; the Frank family continued to live in their original farmstead for many decades, just as the Steiers have modified their farmhouse until the present day. And we know of other German-Russian cultural survivals in language and food

ways. What material culture evidence tells us that is new has to do with signaling the *complexity* of this process. As farmers became accustomed to life on the plains and accumulated wealth, they invested in *modern American* ways – be it a new house, a new kind of barn, or a shelter belt. These visual and material markers spoke of a kind of “success” to themselves as well as their neighbors, in some cases a mere generation after their ancestors first came to the prairie.

And such success is also tied to the former community of Schefield and the church of St. Pius, the social and cultural center for many of these farmers. This was, after all, where many of these families worshipped. George Ehlis went to school at St. Pius in Schefield. Others went to the Weiler Store, while others socialized at the Verein Hall. Schefield was the ultimate sign of success in this landscape – a symbol that the transplanted culture of the original German-Russian settlers had become permanent on the prairie.

And yet the extent of those who worshipped at St. Pius itself merits future study. As does whether or not the German-Hungarians, who worshipped at St. Elizabeth’s in Lefor, followed a similar trajectory as their German-Russian counterparts in marking their success in buildings and their farmsteads. As we drove the roads en route to our study area, we saw countless remains of other farm buildings, whose stories remain to be told through investigation of stone and mortar and through unraveling the stories of descendants of the original homesteaders.

## Chapter 6: Schefield Area Properties

This chapter contains research discovered by fieldschool students on five of the individual farms we investigated during the field school.<sup>1</sup> Each write-up contains a basic description of the farm along with interpretation related to the students' area of interest, whether genealogical, architectural, or otherwise. These narratives along with the accompanying illustrations suggest the value of a "fieldschool approach" in both discovering new information as well as raising questions to be explored by researchers in the future.

### Raymond Frank Farm

—Alex Leme

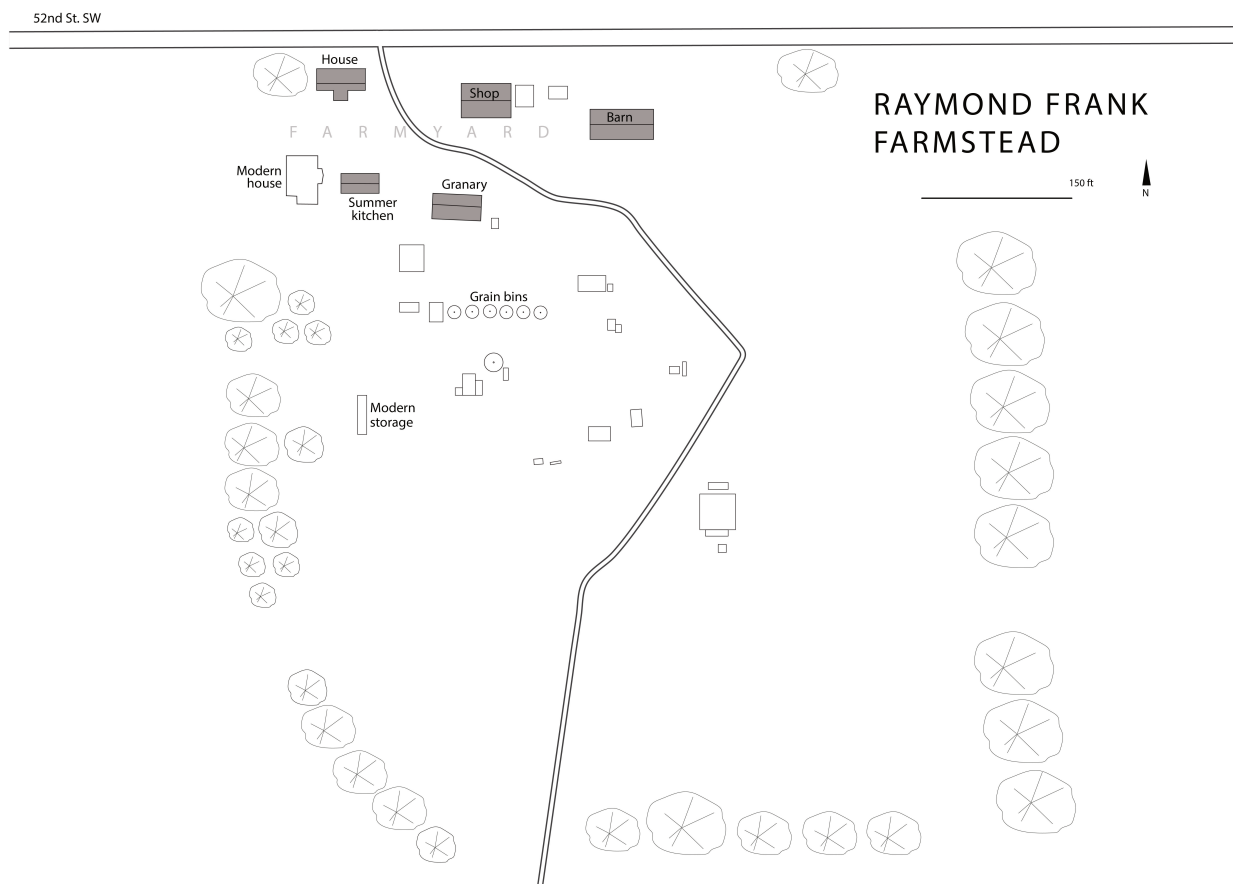


Nestled on rolling prairie, the Raymond Frank Farmstead consists of twelve buildings located on the south side of 52nd Street SW in Stark County. The farmstead comprises a historic house (built ca. 1907), a barn and a summer kitchen, and several other historic and modern outbuildings laid out in a courtyard plan.

Photo of farmstead on Raymond Frank Farm, looking southwest.  
Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

1. Two of the seven farms - the K. Steier Farm and the Daniel Ehlis Farm - were not researched in enough detail to warrant inclusion here.

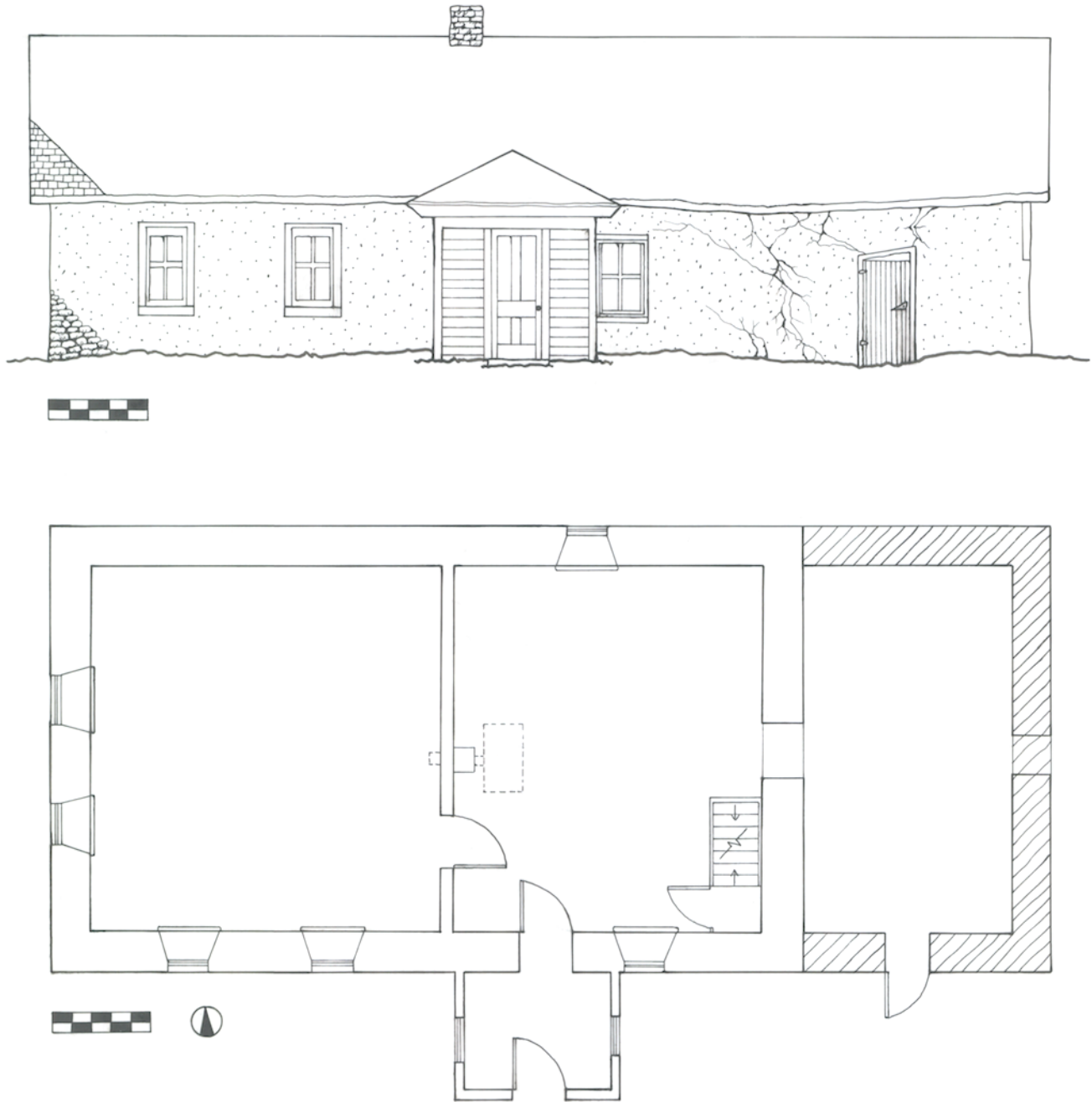




Raymond Frank Farm, Site Plan. Drawn by LauraLee Brott.

The historic house, very much in line with its Black Sea region counterparts, sits on an east-west axis, facing south away from the main road.<sup>2</sup> The single-pile, one-and-one-half story house is laid out in a linear rectangular plan, containing three rooms (also reminiscent of German-Russian vernacular domestic architecture). A coal shed makes up the eastern end of the house. A hipped-roof vestibule, or *vorhäusl*, extends off the front, or south, facade, and encloses the main entrance door.

2. William C. Sherman, "Prairie Architecture of the Russian-German Settlements in the United States," in *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, ed. Richard Sallet (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1975), 187.



Facade (south elevation) and first floor plan of house on Raymond Frank Farm. Drawn by Alex Leme, July, 2017.

The stone walls, which measure about 24 inches thick, are clad in white clay-plaster. According to William C. Sherman, the clay-plastered, white washed with lime to give a stucco effect, two-feet thick stone wall, as well as the *vorhäusl* were common features of the architecture of the German-Russian settlers.<sup>3</sup> While the stone wall on the western end of the house rises almost halfway into the gable end, the top part of the eastern wall consists of a wood-frame construction. The gabled roof is clad with wood shingles. The interior wall that separates the kitchen from the coal shed is made of stone, which suggests that the coal or storage room may have been added later.

3. Sherman, "Prairie Architecture of the Russian-German Settlements," 186.



Aside from the house itself, old toys, torn calendars, a headboard, a broken clock, and a few other objects provide a few glimpses into the lives of its previous inhabitants. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

The historic gambrel-roofed barn is located east of the house across a wide fairly open courtyard. Like the walls of the house, the ground level walls of the barn are made of uncoursed stones. The loft story, resting atop the stone walls, is wood-framed and sheathed with horizontal side boards. There are two large entry doors (on runners), one on each end of the east and west elevations of the building. There are two four-light windows and a smaller sliding door located on the west loft wall. The east loft wall has a large pair of hinged doors and a four-light window. A metal ventilator sits atop the center of the roof's ridgeline. As reported by Jacob Frank, a grandson of the original homesteader, the barn was built in 1924 with the current wood-framed gambrel roof added in 1928.<sup>5</sup>

The interior of the first floor is divided into a kitchen and a parlor-bedroom (*Vorderstube*). A narrow, steep staircase off of the kitchen connects the first story of the house to the two bedrooms upstairs. The interior walls are covered primarily in straw-clay plaster, with other walls and ceilings made of beaded board. There is no real foundation, so the walls are beginning to settle; floors are collapsing, wallpapers and paint to peel, and parts of the roof are held precariously in place. Upon moving their modern bungalow-style house from town to the farmstead site in the fall of 1965, the Frank family stopped living in the original stone house.<sup>4</sup>



Historic barn on the Raymond Frank Farm, looking east. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

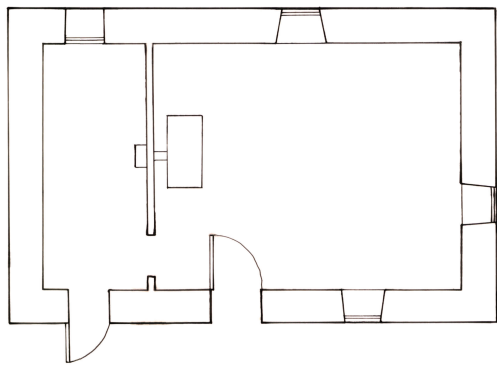
4. NDCRS Architectural Site Form, Feature #2, page 2.

5. NDCRS Architectural Site Form, Feature #9, page 2.

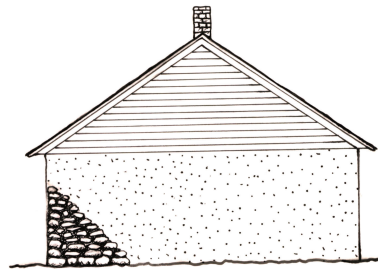


Summer kitchen on Raymond Frank Farm. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

The original summer kitchen is a two-room rectangular building, located about 75 feet southeast of the historic house. Similarly to the previous buildings, it is also built of uncoursed stone clad in plaster. A wood-framed gable roof with wood shingles rests atop the stone walls. The end gables are covered with clapboard. The kitchen does not rest on a foundation and is thus settling into the ground, making the floors uneven and the building's overall deterioration easily apparent. According to Jeff Frank, about one-foot of the original wall is now underground. Small four-light windows are located in the north, south, and west elevations (one on each side). The entry door, located on the north side, leads into the larger of two interior spaces, which is a kitchen/dining room area (west). A smaller storage room is located to the east of this space, separated from it by a board partition. This is one of the few historic summer kitchens surviving in the area and the oldest example among the properties in this study.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
RAYMOND FRANK SUMMER KITCHEN



EAST ELEVATION  
RAYMOND FRANK SUMMER KITCHEN



NORTH ELEVATION  
RAYMOND FRANK SUMMER KITCHEN

Summer kitchen on Raymond Frank Farm, drawn by Alex Leme, July, 2017.

Other notable extant historic buildings on the farm are a historic root cellar, a privy, a garage, a granary, and two sheds. Modern buildings include a bungalow-style house (current residence), modern grain bins, and a modern machine shed.

The farmstead appears to have been built by Raymond Frank before 1914, as it appears on the 1914 Stark County Atlas.<sup>6</sup> Raymond was born in Russia, but had German as his native language as listed on the 1910 Census.<sup>7</sup> Raymond likely migrated sometime between 1900 and 1910 as he first appears on the Federal Census Rolls in 1910, at which point he is listed as living in Stark County.

Frank farmed his property through the 1940s, then apparently handed the farm over to his son, Sebastian. Sebastian lived at the farm with his family of six for several decades before passing it on to his son, Jacob. Currently Jacob's widow, Florence, resides there with their son, Jeff Frank.

The Raymond Frank Farm, as one of the earliest farms we studied, offers us a nuanced insight into the folk building traditions brought by its original German-Russian settlers. The farm reflects an important moment in the history of the early twentieth century American frontier through the choices of building materials to architectural features and design. For instance, it shows how German-Russian builders applied their traditional building techniques using the materials native to North Dakota.

The relatively treeless and flat landscape of the prairie, much like what they found back in eastern Europe, meant limited access to wood building materials. Alternatively, then, builders used the resources indigenous to the area to erect their buildings. As a result, and unlike the more ephemeral sod structures commonly associated with Great Plains settlements, the historical buildings of the Frank Farm display the kind of sturdy clay and stone structures typical of the Black Sea region in Russia.<sup>8</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that they have withstood over a century against the harsh winter weather found in North Dakota.

The relatively long and narrow, rectangular-shaped, two- or three-room end-to-end buildings with gabled roofs as seen in both the summer kitchen and the historic house also match their old world correlates. The 18-24 inches thick walls constructed to increase structural strength and to balance interior temperatures were also common in German-Russian folk architecture. But it is the wood-framed vestibule, or *vorhäusl*, extending off the facade of the historic house that stands in as quintessentially German-Russian.

The historical importance of the Raymond Frank Farm is undeniable. Together, its historical buildings provide a comprehensive, nearly complete, picture of the building traditions adopted by its early settlers. They are, however, more than just records of an immigrant community arriving in the US in later nineteenth and early twentieth century, they too reveal how such community—in all its tenacity, resourcefulness, and ingenuity—came to help shape an American identity.

6. George A. Ogle and Co., *Standard Atlas of Stark County, North Dakota* (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1914).

7. Schedule of Population, U.S. Census, 1910.

8. The historic buildings on the Raymond Frank Farm are made of uncoursed stones plowed from the nearby fields and clad in white clay plaster. For further discussion, see Dell Upton, ed., *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups That Built America* (New York: John Wiley, 1995), 131.



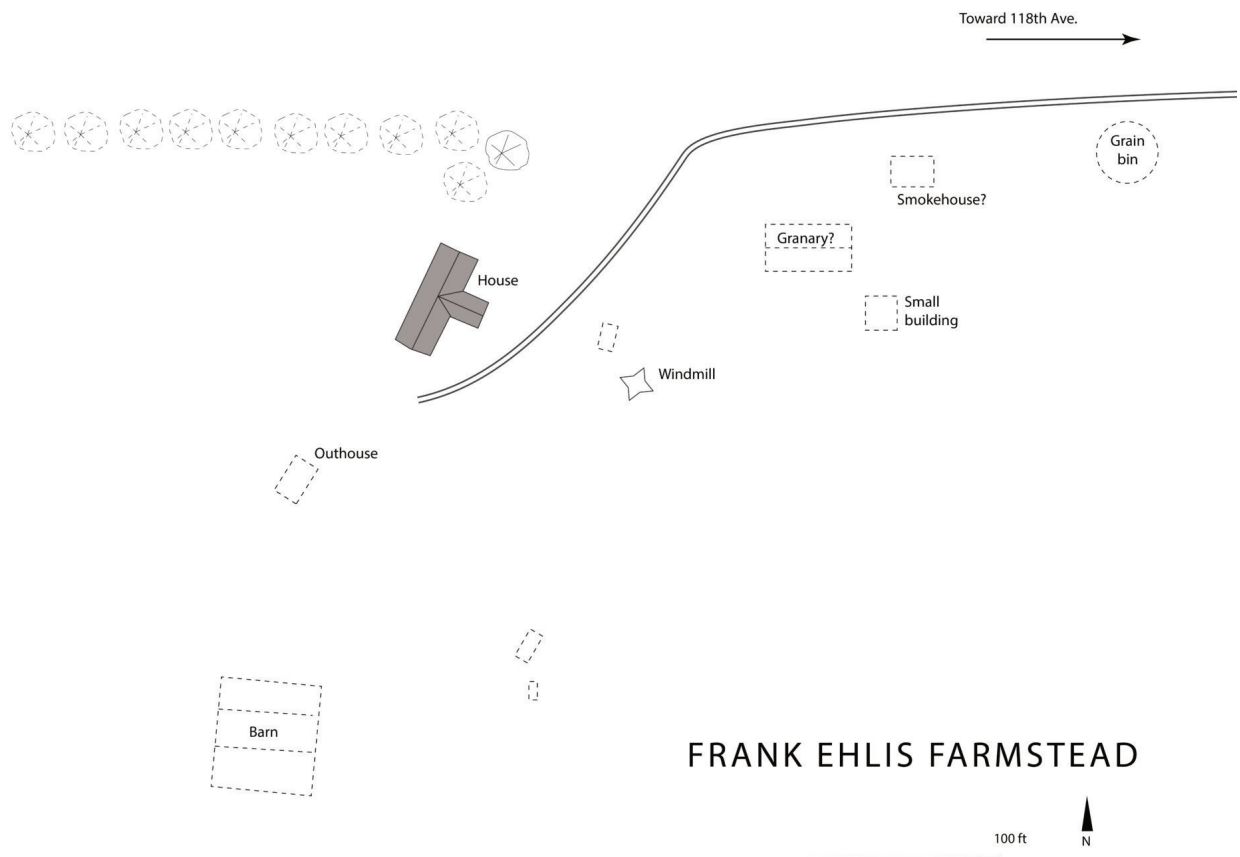
## Frank Ehlis Farm

—Laura Grotjan



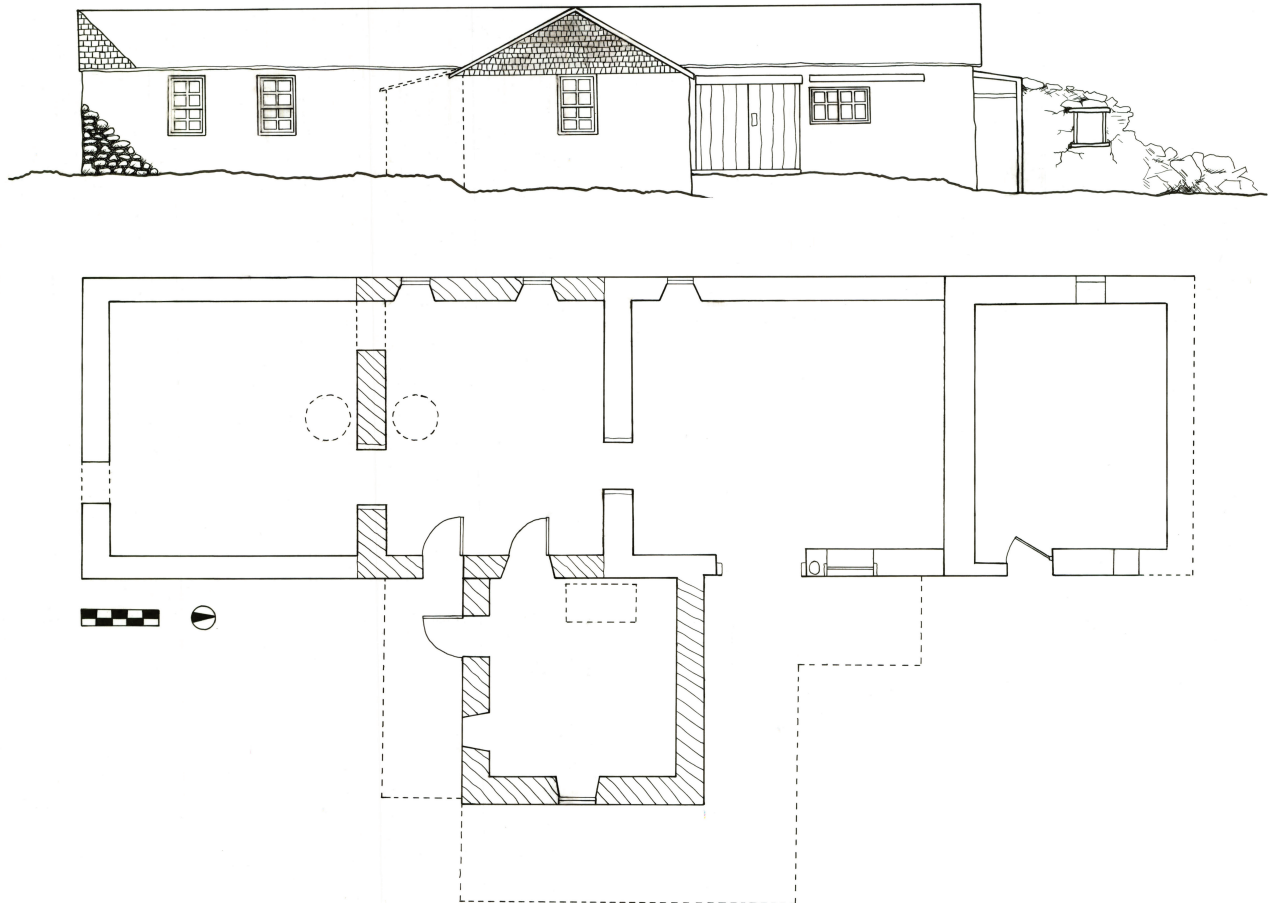
Exterior view, house on Frank Ehlis Farm, looking northwest.  
Photo by James Sexton, June, 2017.

The Frank Ehlis Farm consists of an extant farmhouse surrounded by rolling fields (currently planted in wheat) located on the west side of 118th Avenue SW, approximately 0.25 miles west of its intersection with 53rd Street SW. The farmstead was originally arranged in an L-shaped plan, and would have included numerous outbuildings, such as a barn, granary, grain bin, outhouse, windmill, and smokehouse. All that remains is the early twentieth-century house.



Site plan of Frank Ehlis Farm. Drawn by LauraLee Brott.

The one-story, gable-roofed farmhouse faces southeast. It is three rooms wide, and has an attached summer kitchen on the northeast end of the building. The summer kitchen is only accessible through an exterior door. The house includes a projecting gable ell which creates a T-shaped footprint. Exterior and interior walls are made of uncoursed rubble stone, and the interior walls are coated in stucco and were once painted red and light blue. According to George Ehlis, the room adjacent to the summer kitchen originally had a dirt floor.<sup>9</sup> The walls of the summer kitchen have mostly collapsed, although the rest of the house has been recently pointed up with cement. A significant amount of the interior has also been patched with cement. Additional contemporary updates include an asphalt shingle roof and 4/4 windows.



Elevation and floor plan, Frank Ehlis house. Drawn by Laura Grotjan, July, 2017.

The farmhouse was likely built in 1906 when the earliest owner, Frank Ehlis (1872-1928), immigrated from Russia. His native language is listed as German in the 1910 census, his occupation is recorded as farmer, and he is said to own his farm.<sup>10</sup> As of 1975, the farm is referred to as the Tony Ehlis farm, implying that Frank's son Anthony (1912-1985) must have next taken over the farm.<sup>11</sup> Presently, the house is owned by Frank Ehlis's grandson (Anthony's nephew), George Ehlis, who lives on the nearby Daniel Ehlis farmstead and whose family crops the land surrounding the Frank Ehlis house.

9. George Ehlis, Pers. Comm., June 29, 2017.

10. Schedule of Population, U.S. Census, 1910.

11. See <http://www.digitalhorizonsonline.org>.



The Frank Ehlis house shares multiple characteristics with “typical” German-Russian houses. The house follows a linear plan and has the quintessential *vorhäusl*, which complies with the Russian tradition of using an antechamber or entryway.<sup>12</sup> However, the *vorhäusl* does not function solely as an entryway in the Frank Ehlis house, but rather as a kitchen. It is possible that a partition may have been used to create an entryway within the kitchen, as William Sherman mentions was sometimes practiced.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the summer kitchen is not a separate building, as is usually the case, but is instead abutted to the northeastern end of the house.

The simplicity of the Frank Ehlis house in comparison with the neighboring Daniel Ehlis house, an early twentieth-century frame bungalow, is reflected in George Ehlis’s oral history describing their contrasting personalities. Daniel is described as a well-to-do man who valued quality and investment, while Frank had simpler taste and was more interested in occasional frivolity with his family.<sup>14</sup> The houses also reflect different ways in which the Germans from Russia adjusted to life on the American frontier, some preserving old world ways while others more quickly adapted to early twentieth-century American ideals.

## Clemens Steier Farm

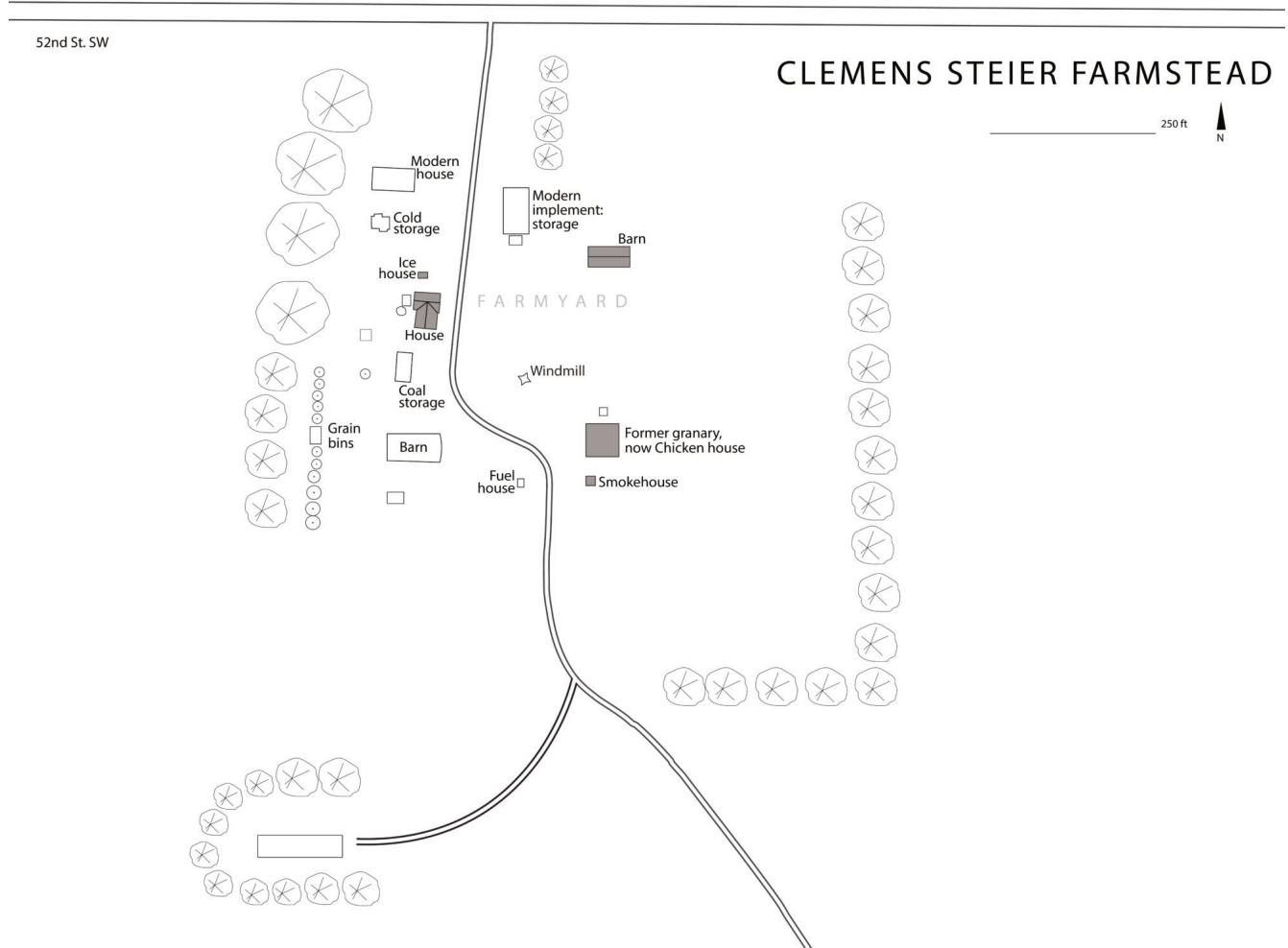
—Michelle Prestholt

The Clemens Steier Farm contains an assortment of farm buildings, both modern and historic, and is located on the south side of 52nd Street SW about one-half mile east of Highway 22. There are three historic buildings dating to around or after 1910 made from stone: a farmhouse, barn, and smokehouse, as well as numerous other farm buildings. The farmstead is arranged in a courtyard style, with a large, open farmyard between the house and the barn.

12. William C. Sherman, “Prairie Architecture of the Russian-German Settlements,” in *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, ed. Richard Sallet (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1975), 187.

13. Sherman, “Prairie Architecture of the Russian-German Settlements,” 187.

14. George Ehlis, Pers. Comm., June 29, 2017.



Site plan of Clemens Steier Farm. Drawn by LauraLee Brott.

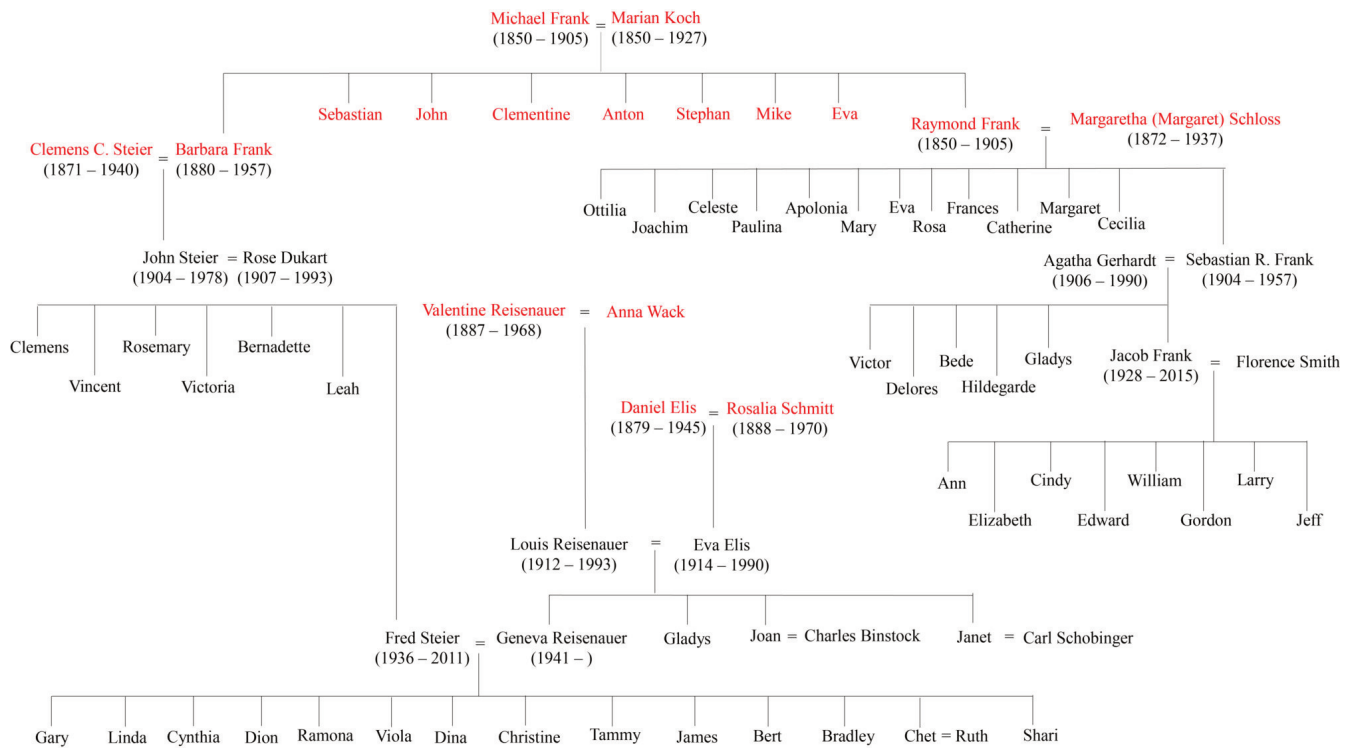
The historic buildings were constructed by Clemens C. Steier, a “German from Russia,” who immigrated from Landau, Odessa, Russia (present day Ukraine) to North Dakota in 1892. He married Barbara Frank, also from Landau, in 1901. He purchased 320 acres of land seventeen miles south of Dickinson under the 1820 land purchase act on July 18, 1910.<sup>15</sup> Two miles north of that plot, Clemens acquired 640 acres from the railroad the land on which the current farmstead is situated and referred to it as “Ranch Place.”<sup>16</sup> All of the masonry buildings on the modern farmstead were built using stones that Clemens moved from the southern plot.

Clemens and Barbara moved into Dickinson after John’s marriage to Rose Dukart in 1926. In 1963, John and Rose moved into the same house in town, leaving management of the farmstead to their youngest son, Fred, and his new wife, Geneva Reisenauer. Geneva continues to live in the stone house on the farm today, with her and Fred’s second youngest son, Chet, managing the farm.<sup>17</sup>

15. Patent Accession Number 145037, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.

16. Betty Gardner and Eleanor Olson, *New England Centennial 1886-1986: Century of Change* (New England: Richtman’s Printing, 1986), 547.

17. Geneva Steier, Pers. Comm., June 27, 2017.



Steier Family Tree, researched by Michelle Prestholt

The historic house is set back from the road on the western half of the farmstead. Built of masonry and covered in plaster, it stands two-stories in height and has a gabled roof. Family history affirms that the house was finished in 1910.<sup>18</sup>



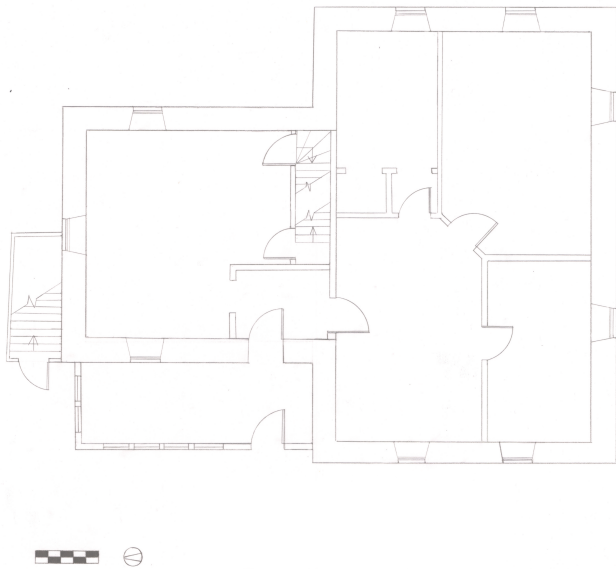
Facade (east elevation) of house on Clemens Steier Farm. Drawn by Laura Grotjan, June, 2017.

closer to 52nd Street SW.

The house has a “T-plan” and the northern wing is double pile. The kitchen wing forms the ‘T.’ Historically, there were two bedrooms on the first floor, with two sitting rooms. There were two bedrooms on the second floor, with an abundance of attic storage space. One of the bedrooms on the first floor of the historic stone home was transformed into a bathroom in 2010.<sup>19</sup> The dwelling has been continually inhabited since its construction. It was an ambitious plan for its time in the area in terms of its size and form. The porch was initially uncovered but was roofed sometime before the 1950’s. Currently there is a second home on the property located

18. Geneva Steier, Pers. Comm., June 27, 2017.

19. Geneva Steier, Pers. Comm., June 27, 2017.



First floor plan, house on Clemens Steier Farm, drawn by Michelle Prestholt, July, 2017.

The barn is located to the east of the house across an open farmyard. It is made from the same rubble stone as the home and is topped by a Gothic arched roof. It was constructed after the house was completed, sometime after 1910. The upper level is used as a hay loft. The lower level is divided into pens for livestock. The roof burned in 1959, at which time Fred and Chet lowered the walls around four feet and rebuilt the frame roof.<sup>20</sup>

Other historical buildings include a smokehouse, an icehouse, and a granary. The smokehouse is located to the southeast of the house. All of the working farm buildings are situated on the eastern part of the farmstead while the domestic spaces, including outbuildings like the root cellar and icehouse, are on the western side. The family butchered their own meat (chicken and pig) and continues to do so. The granary may have been the first building constructed on the property and used as the earliest domestic space.<sup>21</sup> According to family tradition, Clemens, Barbara, and their only surviving son, John, lived in a smaller building with a lean-to for a chicken coop during the construction of the larger home. This building became a granary upon the completion of the main house.<sup>22</sup> A windmill from the 1920s stands in the open farmyard.

The historic home has an intricate basement level as well, whose footprint is well beyond the first floor of the house. There is a furnace room, a room for cooking and cleaning, a bathroom, a canning room, and cold storage. There are two access points, one outdoors from the farmyard and one from inside the kitchen on the first floor of the home. There was a well that is still operational, but no longer in use. Modern appliances, including refrigerators and stoves, were added before the 1950's.



Barn on Clemens Steier Farm. Photo by James Sexton, 2016.

20. Gardner and Olson, *New England Centennial*, 548.

21. Geneva Steier, Pers. Comm., June 27, 2017.

22. Geneva Steier, Pers. Comm., June 27, 2017.

## A. Jirges Farm

–*LauraLee Brott (with Anna Andrzejewski)*

The A. Jirges Farm is located in Hettinger County, just south of the Stark County line. The farmstead consists of six buildings and structures of varying condition arranged in a “courtyard” layout, with the house, barn, smokehouse, cellar, and chicken coop creating a rim around fairly large open farmyard in the center. The only structure that breaks up the open space is a small windmill.<sup>23</sup>

The abandoned farmstead is nestled within the farm fields and accessed off a long driveway, which extends eastward off the main road (118th Avenue). The farmstead is situated in the lowest part of the farm, to the north of a hill that slopes upward about sixty feet. This hill provides a view of the whole farm, including the pond that is now dry that sits in the middle of a rectangular shaped shelterbelt directly to the west of the structure.<sup>24</sup>



View from top of hill on south side of A. Jirges farm, looking northwest. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

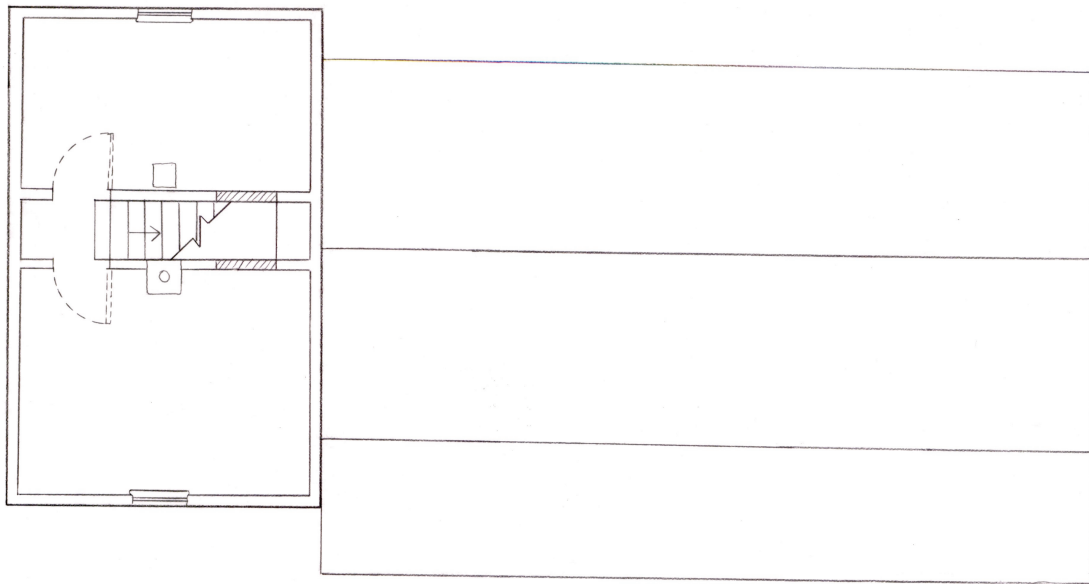


Facade (east elevation) of house on A. Jirges Farm, looking west. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

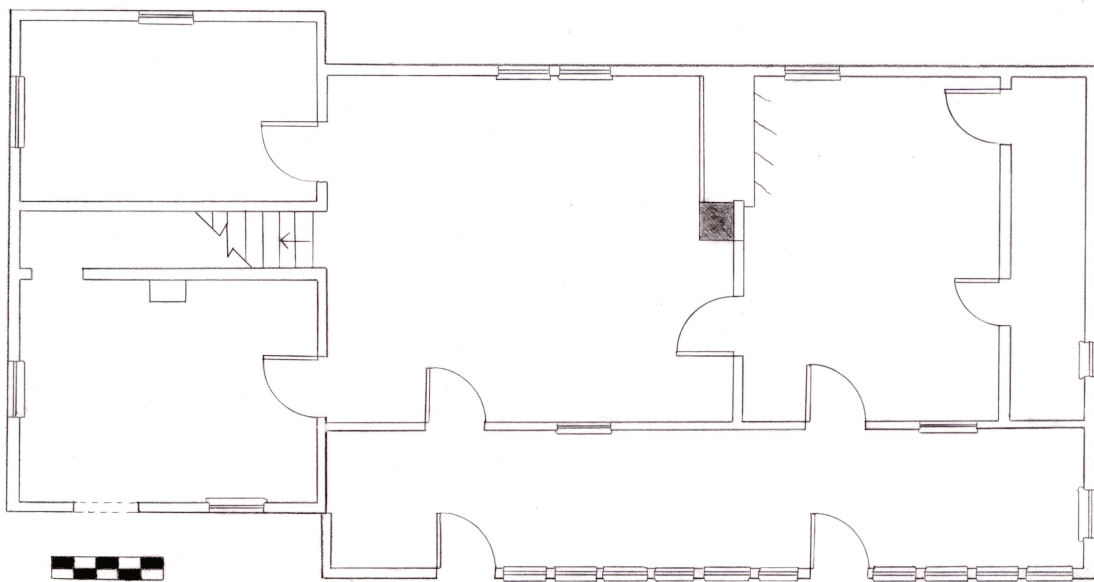
The historic house is of wood frame construction, and rests on a stone foundation. It consists of two main sections: a two-story, two-room per floor “upright” and a one-story cross wing. It is possible the upright and wing may have been built in two phases, with the upright followed shortly after by the wing. The wing is made up of a large central common room, and a kitchen (on the north side of the structure). A porch addition spans the length of the cross wing. Both the upright and wing were capped with gabled roofs; the porch has a shed roof.

23. An aerial from 1952 shows three additional structures northwest of the current farm, just north of the shelter belt that surrounds the ghost pond.

24. The pond is indicated in a topographic map from 1973.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

First and second floor plans, house on A. Jirges Farm. Drawn by Laura Grotjan, July, 2017.

Apart from a ghost door visible on the eastern façade, there are a few clues to indicate a two-phase construction sequence. The interior of the structure is more revealing in terms of building phases, specifically in the second story of the upright, or southern portion of the structure. There, two ghost doors are sealed in, the frames of which were used for the newer bedroom doors (one of the older door frames was cut at an angle that matches the roof angle which intersects with the wall). What is most peculiar about these ghost doors is that they currently lead



to a drop (the staircase runs in the opposite direction). Close inspection in the first floor closet space revealed that the stairs may have initially run the opposite direction, and at some point, were may have been switched to accommodate for the construction of the cross wing.

East of the house is a historic barn, dating to roughly the same time period as the house. The barn has fallen into disrepair, with the upper story frame section and roof collapsing, with parts scattered across the fields and barnyard.<sup>25</sup> Originally, the barn had a stone ground story and a frame gambrel roof. The smokehouse, cellar and chicken coop are smaller square planned structures. The stone smokehouse has a pyramid-hip roof, and has retained much of its original shape, but the western corner of the northern wall is crumbling. The door is in the center of the north wall. The root cellar had a front-gambrel roof, and is almost completely destroyed because it was built with a wood frame. The gambrel roofed chicken coop, also made of wood frame, is still standing. The portal is in the center of the west wall and faces the house, likely for ease of access for the home owners.



View of barn on A. Jirges Farm, looking north. Photo by Tom Carter, June, 2017.

The house post-dates 1917, as it does not appear on the Hettinger County atlas. At the time of the Atlas, the land belonged to Anna Bernauer, the widow of Jakob Bernauer.<sup>26</sup> The Bernauers immigrated to Chicago from Hungary in 1902 and to North Dakota in 1906.<sup>27</sup> Although Jakob died in 1907, Anna staked claim to the land where she lived with her daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, Joseph Hoffman.<sup>28</sup> Joseph died in 1916, after which Elizabeth married Anton Kipp in 1918. Kipp was also a German from Hungary.<sup>29</sup>

The Kipps probably built the current house on the A. Jirges Property shortly after their marriage in 1918.<sup>30</sup> This date makes sense in terms of the house type, the upright and wing, which was a popular house type from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries. This type is characterized by having a gabled two-storied section – the “upright” – adjacent to a one-story wing.<sup>31</sup> Although this house form could be built in any material, frame construction was the overwhelmingly popular choice for most examples by the 1900s. This was because by this point, dimension cut lumber was readily available and made the form easy to construct.

25. According to the current owner, the barn collapsed in a windstorm. It was intact in 2016, so the damage occurred only in the last year. A. Jirges, Pers. Comm., June, 2017.

26. George A. Ogle and Co., *Standard Atlas of Hettinger County, North Dakota*. Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1917

27. “Elizabeth Bernauer Kipp” (obituary), <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/76667288>.

28. North Dakota Naturalization Index, 1874-1963, P08, 38 (Hettinger County).

29. U.S. Census, Schedules of Population, 1910 and 1920 list Kipp’s birthplace as Hungary.

30. “Elizabeth Bernauer Kipp” (obituary), <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/76667288>. Assessment records in the Hettinger County Courthouse also reveal a jump in property value in 1918-19, which suggests improvements on the property at that time.

31. See Fred W. Peterson, *Homes in the Heartland: Balloon Frame Farmhouses of the Upper Midwest*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 30, 109-11.

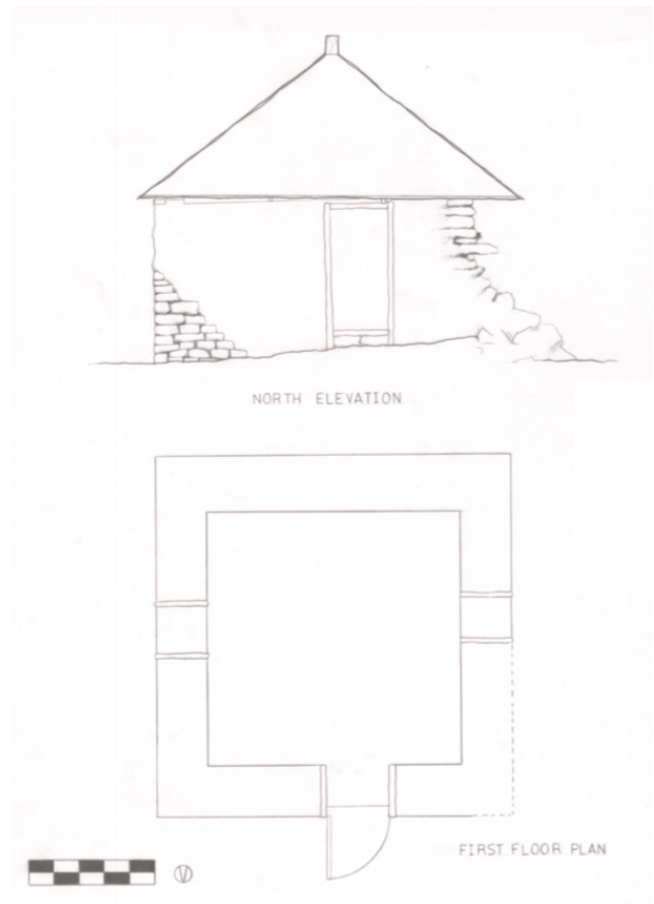


The A. Jirges Farmstead makes an interesting comparison with others in the project area. While the outbuildings compare with others built by Germans from Russia in the project area, the house is something entirely different. It is built of wood versus stone (stone being the most common building material for many of the first permanent houses of the Germans from Russia). Moreover, the house is a common American vernacular form widely found amongst many groups across the nation, especially the Midwest, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not the linear one-story vernacular form typically seen with German-Russian immigrants.

While the house material and form may be explained by the later date of the house, it also may have to do with the fact that by the time it was built, immigrants to the region were already adapting to life on the prairie. This was the *second* house built by Anton Kipp, for his second wife, Elizabeth, and their children (from previous marriages). By this point, lumber was more readily available, but more significantly, immigrants like the Bernauers, Hoffmans, and Kipps were adopting new lifestyles, of which new ways of building are one example. Old world ways were giving way to the new just as the settlers themselves were increasing their wealth such that they could buy new materials (such as lumber) rather than relying on the stone from their fields.

Yet the history of this property is also interesting as the only example with a known connection to the Germans from Hungary. As discussed in Chapter 4, Germans from Hungary were also in the vicinity of St. Pius. While they worshipped elsewhere (Elizabeth is buried at St. Mary's in New England and her father, Jakob Bernauer, is buried at St. Elizabeth's in Lefor), they lived in close proximity to their Germans from Russia neighbors. It is also intriguing that the outbuildings on this property were built and look similar to their Germans from Russia counterparts.

The A. Jirges farmstead thus raises many questions that could guide further research efforts in this area. How quickly did ethnic groups *acculturate* to life on the prairie and how is this reflected in their buildings? Also how similar were the building techniques of Germans from Russia and Germans from Hungary? And how does that relate to building practices from Europe and Russia generally?



Smokehouse on A. Jirges Farm. Drawn by Laura Grotjan, July, 2017.

## Frank D. Weiler Farm

—Travis Olson

The Frank D. Weiler Farm is located one-half mile west of the intersection of State Highway 22 and 52nd Street, approximately 2.7 miles southeast of the Town of Scheffield in Stark County, North Dakota. Historic aerials reveal that the farmstead once contained at least nine buildings arranged in a courtyard plan, but only three of these buildings remain: a dwelling, a machine shed, and the ruins of a barn.



Main facade of Frank D. Weiler House. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

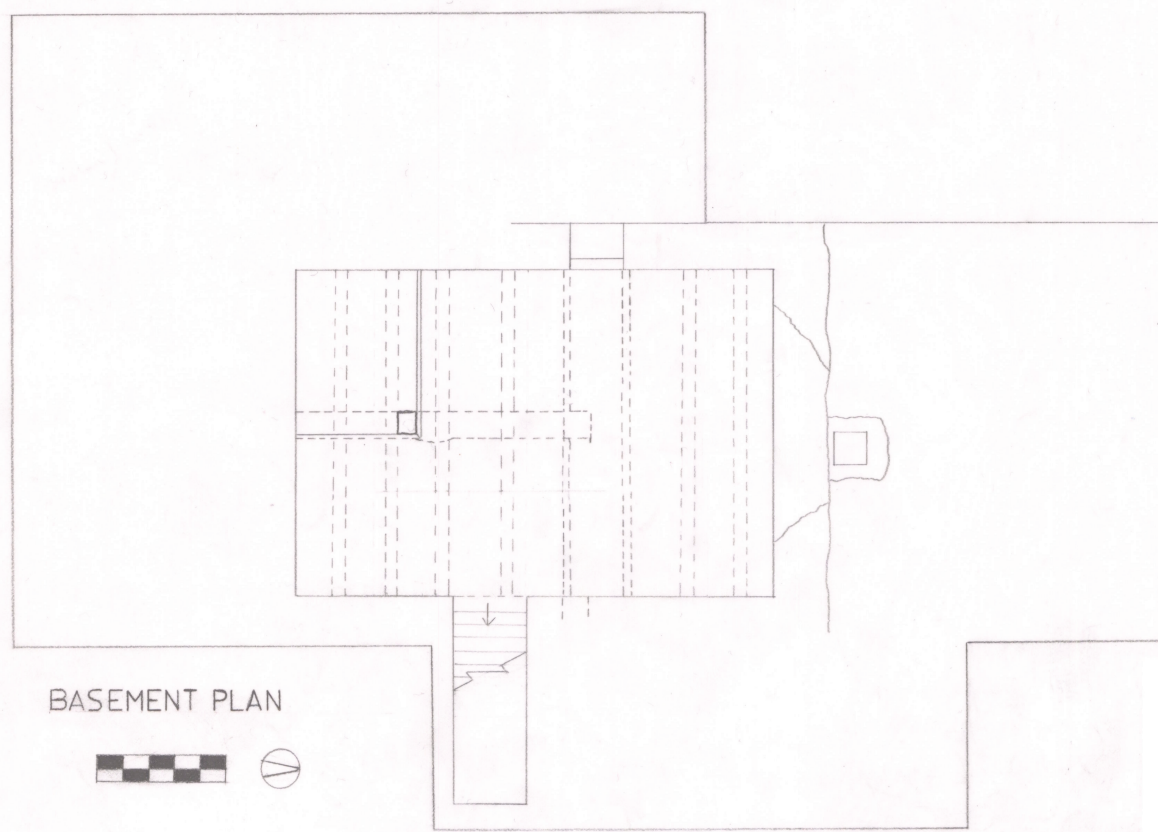
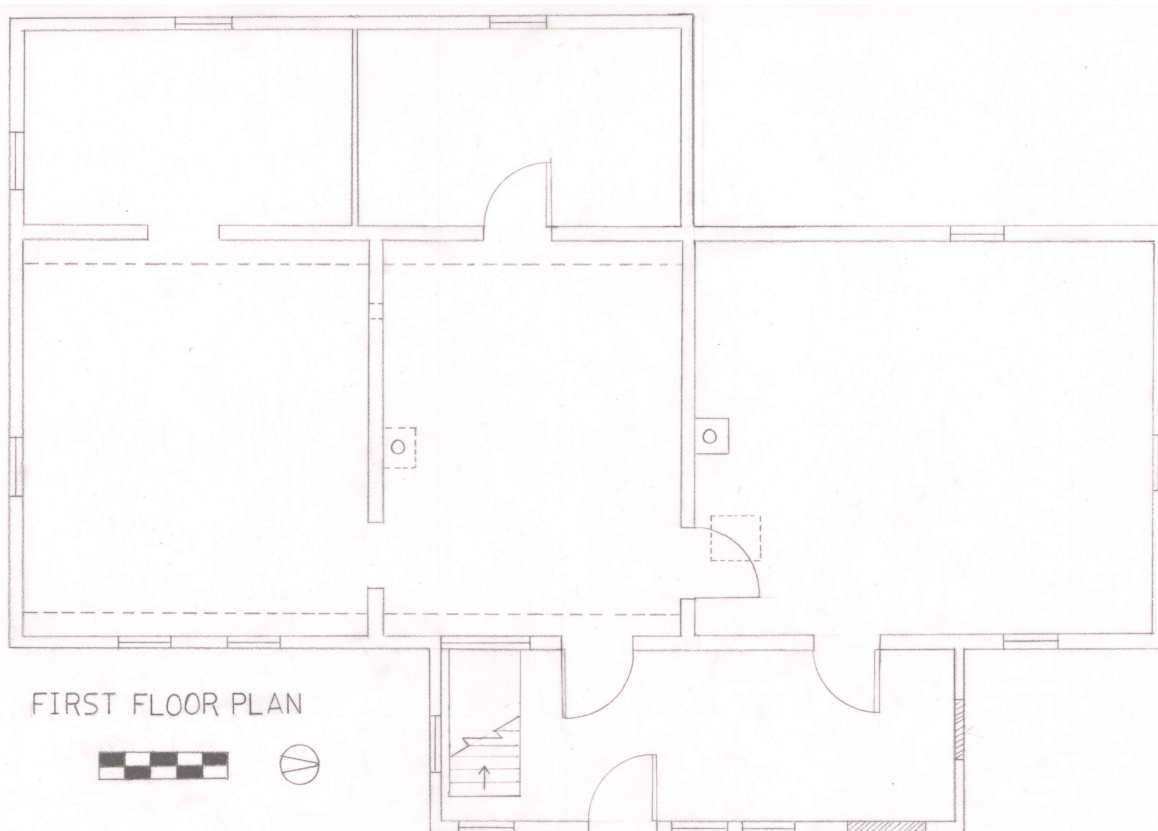
Frank Weiler was born April 12, 1886 in Katherinental, South Russia, the youngest of five children.<sup>32</sup> He came to North Dakota in 1902 where he worked as a farm hand, first on his brother-in-law, Joseph Dukart's farm and then on a farm south of New England. In 1906 he established a farm of his own.<sup>33</sup> The first house on the site was built of sod and rock, and it's possible the cellar of the current house dates to this initial construction. In 1907 Frank married Catherine Urlacher, and between 1908 and 1934 the couple had eleven children.

The current house was likely built ca. 1910 as a two-room, single-story, balloon-frame construction with a side gable roof on a stone foundation. The house has had three additions: a shed-roof addition to the rear (west)

elevation; a single-story, gabled kitchen addition to the side (north) elevation; and a shed-roof, enclosed-porch addition to the front (east) elevation. The walls of the house are covered in horizontal wood sheathing and then faced with clapboard, except the front (east) elevation where the walls were faced with drop siding and later covered with asphalt shingles patterned to look like brick. The house contained wood, two-over-two, double-hung windows throughout, but many of the windows are broken or missing. The side-gabled roof is faced with wood shingles and contains two interior chimneys; the southern chimney is made of brick and is located at the approximate center of the main wing, and the northern chimney is concrete block and marks the beginning of the northern addition.

32. Gardner and Olson, *New England Centennial*, 588.

33. Gardner and Olson, *New England Centennial*, 588.



First floor (top) and basement floor (bottom) plans of house on Frank D. Weiler Farm. Drawn by LauraLee Brott, July, 2017.

The main block of the house contains a partial basement, located under the northern of the two rooms, accessed by a bulkhead entrance incorporated into the porch addition. The basement contains a dirt floor and stone walls, and a hewn summer beam (likely the remnant of an earlier structure) runs across the ceiling. The dwelling's first floor is divided into six rooms. Of the two rooms that constitute the main block of the house, the northern room appears to have been the finer of the two. While both rooms contain wide baseboard, the northern room also retains crown molding. A stack chimney projects into the northern room, signaling the location of the stove. The rear shed addition also contains two rooms, one accessible from each room of the main block of the house. The kitchen addition contains a single room with a concrete block chimney at its southern end, and a trap door in the ceiling leading to a shallow attic. The front addition was likely built as an enclosed-porch (or vestibule) addition, and contains a single room which opens to both the northern room of the main block and the kitchen addition.

The Weiler dwelling shares many characteristics with the other German-Russian houses in the region, including the linear three-room plan, partial cellar, thick stone foundation, and enclosed entrance space (or *vorhäusl*).<sup>34</sup> However, this house is distinctive among the other extant German-Russian houses in the area because of its somewhat diminished scale, and because it is a unique example of early twentieth century German-Russian frame construction in the region.

34. William C. Sherman, "Prairie Architecture of the Russian-German Settlements," in *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, ed. Richard Sallet (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1975), 187.

# Conclusion - Preserving the Past: German-Russian Landscapes in Western North Dakota

ANNA ANDRZEJEWSKI

The fieldschool introduced our class to a fascinating cultural landscape. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this landscape were buildings associated with the Germans from Russia, many of which date to the early twentieth century and represent first- or second-period buildings of this immigrant group. Although these buildings represent fascinating examples of buildings built by the Germans from Russia, there are additional stories embedded in the regional cultural landscape that also merit further study.



Interior of house on A. Jirges farm, showing rapid deterioration of paint, flooring, and wood frame. Photo by Alex Leme, June, 2017.

To study some of these buildings is a race against time. The remnant barn on the A. Jirges Farm shows the fragility of even some of the most sturdy of the buildings in this region. Many of the buildings we documented were abandoned, either because of condition or simply because they have outlived their usefulness. Should these buildings be preserved for posterity? What is to be gained (if anything) by rehabilitation and conservation (necessary in many cases)? Are there alternatives to documenting their history if preservation is not warranted?

This final chapter explores these questions with the aim of inspiring future scholars to study this cultural landscape and to prompt preservationists to consider some of the vital questions about the future of these buildings.

## Questions for Future Study

Our sample size was limited simply because of time constraints. A week in the field yielded information on seven



farms, but certainly more time and access to other farmsteads would produce even more data that would enrich the history recounted here.

Enough remains of the first- and second-period farmsteads of Germans from Russia in the region to continue to focus on documenting and studying buildings associated with this particular ethnic group. Given the cluster of farms in Stark County, especially south of Dickinson, this in itself would make a fascinating study of individual building types. Genealogical research would be able to flesh out connections between families and perhaps prompt comparisons of the study of buildings here and in Russia. Many of these buildings are threatened; they have been abandoned and fallen into disrepair, so time is a critical question if such a study will be undertaken.

To study the buildings of Germans from Russia to the exclusion of those from other ethnic groups risks simplifying a much more complex story about ethnic settlement in southwestern North Dakota during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While this history has been documented in previous studies for the state (most notably in *Plains Folk*), the buildings themselves deserve further attention.<sup>1</sup> We were fascinated by the story of the Germans from Hungary, who settled near their Germans from Russia neighbors. Studying the cluster of farms around Lefor, for example, would be a logical next step. It would allow questions to be answered about *regional* building traditions and how those dovetailed with ethnic building traditions during the early twentieth century. The buildings on the surface look quite similar, but without detailed study, it is impossible to tell if those similarities are skin deep.

Much more remains to be studied in terms of the outbuildings on these farms. We spent time documenting several barns, but in the interests of time, did not document all of them equally well. In addition, there are patterns of survival in other building types, including smokehouses and windmills, which merit additional study.

Given how interesting these folk buildings from the first and second periods of settlement are, it is easy to overlook the changes the farmsteads experienced across the twentieth century. And yet those changes are in themselves telling about the culture of immigrant Germans from Russia in showing how successive generations adapted to frontier life over time. As discussed in Chapter 4, the house on the Clemens Steier Farm shows how changes were already underway by the second generation of settlement. Studying patterns of acculturation over time tells us a lot about the Germans from Russia; it moves us away from thinking only in terms of “survival” of ethnic traditions and instead how descendants modified their ethnic ways of life in a new landscape.

Finally, there is much more to be learned about the patterns in the landscape in terms of the choices farmers and farm families made about how to live on the prairie and in a cold climate. The seemingly inhospitable conditions of the northern Great Plains were challenged by the permanence of settlement here as well as the nature of the adaptations – ranging from plowing the sod to siting buildings against hillsides to protect their occupants from wind – all of which deserves more systematic study. This sort of “environmental history” needs to be told in relation to the buildings, as they speak of the fraught relationship of humans to nature in this place and the endless struggles residents faced as they tried to settle on the treeless landscape during the last century.

1. William C. Sherman and Playford V. Thorson, eds., *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History* (Fargo, N.D. : North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies at North Dakota State University in cooperation with the North Dakota Humanities Council and the University of North Dakota, 1986).

## Preserving the Folk Farmsteads of the Germans from Russia

Our class felt exceptionally fortunate to be able to have firsthand contact with the folk buildings of the Germans from Russia. These century-old buildings merit study as they represent unique survivals of the folk culture of this important ethnic group, and to date, these kinds of buildings have been minimally studied. Their relative rarity might seem an obvious reason to argue for their preservation – what might that look like and is there value in preserving these buildings?

We asked people we interviewed for this project about that, and received mixed responses. While our interview subjects felt the buildings were important, they also recognized that interest in them has waned with each successive generation. Peter and Marie Betchner lamented the changes, noting that deterioration and neglect are the main problems:

These barns...now the shingles are coming off or whatever, and they're not fixing them. The problem is...they're letting them go to ruin....anyway, you see it all. Pretty soon the doors are gone, then all of a sudden part of the roof, then the walls go down. That's how it happens. You see a lot of that.



An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: <https://wisc.pb.unizin.org/ndfieldschool2017/?p=65>

Karen Weiler also talked about her feelings about preservation, noting that while she knows the buildings are valuable, she recognizes change is inevitable. When her parents moved, she accepted the buildings were going into ruin:

Yeah, and I was really sad when my mom and dad left [the farm]...but as soon as they bought a home in town I realized home was where the heart is. I'm OK with it. It's weird, but once they left...yeah.





A UW-Madison Kaltura MediaSpace element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://wisc.pb.unizin.org/ndfieldschool2017/?p=65>

We acknowledge that change has always been a feature of these landscapes, and preservation is inevitably at odds with this. Most of the houses we studied were abandoned; only the house on the Clemens Steier farm remained occupied. Some of the barns were being used, but others – such as the barn on the A. Jirges farm – have been left to deteriorate. In the case of active farms such as the Raymond Frank and Steier farms, new buildings, including houses and barns, stand alongside the older ones as older lifestyles and farm practices have, inevitably, given way to new ones. And St. Pius was demolished in the late 1990s, having outlived its usefulness as the anchor of this rural community.

In the face of this, it is hard to argue to preserve these buildings for their utility, because in many ways, they have outlived their lifespan. Some certainly could be repurposed, but the ways that they were constructed, too, makes this challenging. Jeff Frank told us about how he had to saw off the entrance door to his summer kitchen as the building had “shrunk” into the ground, since the door wouldn’t open anymore.<sup>2</sup> Without foundations, these buildings have a limited lifespan, and they obviously require continual maintenance – something hard to justify unless one is making use of them.

In lieu of what preservationists terms “bricks and mortar” preservation, there are other ways that the stories of these buildings can be told before they are lost. Part of the value of a “fieldschool approach” lies in preserving a documentary record of these buildings for future scholars. The drawings we produced for the fieldschool and have reproduced here can be used to draw conclusions about room use, material, dimensions, and other things. Once a sizable body of buildings has been drawn, richer stories along the lines of those told here can be written. We also documented the buildings with photography and the interviews we recorded also revealed much about family history and use of buildings over time. Collectively this sort of “paper preservation” might serve as a useful form of preservation instead of trying to keep the buildings around.

Of course, nothing can replicate these structures, and once they are gone, they are, in fact, lost forever. But hopefully this e-book will prompt others to attempt to tell the stories embedded in this rich cultural landscape, especially the folk farmsteads, before they vanish from the prairie.

2. Jeff Frank, Pers. Comm., June 27, 2017.



## About the Contributors



Field school Team (from Left to Right): James Sexton, Anna Andrzejewski, Tom Carter, LauraLee Brott, Michelle Prestholt, Laura Grotjan, Travis Olson, and Alex Leme.

### Biographies

**Anna Andrzejewski, Principal Investigator (PI).** Anna is Professor and Chair in the Department of Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She also co-directs the Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures Program with UW-Milwaukee. Anna's research interests range from preservation of rural cultural landscapes to post World War II suburban buildings. She has taught numerous fieldschools at Madison as well as participated in numerous other field-based projects during the last 25 years.

**LauraLee Brott.** LauraLee is a Ph.D. student studying medieval art. She received her Master's degree in 2014. Her interests range from architecture and cultural landscapes to cartography. She is a BLC student with a background in studying French townscapes from the 12th century. Her dissertation research will focus on English maps from the same period.

**Thomas Carter.** Tom is Professor Emeritus University of Utah, College of Architecture and Planning. Dr. Carter was trained as a folklorist and has spent most of this career studying the vernacular architecture of the western United States.

**Laura Grotjan.** Laura is an M.A. student with an interest in American vernacular architecture. She is particularly fascinated by agricultural landscapes, and she plans to pursue a PhD after completing her MA.

**Alex Leme.** Alex is a Ph.D. student specializing in late modern and contemporary art and the transdisciplinary study of Visual Culture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Alex's research interests range from the participatory proposals emerging in Brazil in the 1960s to the history and theory of photography in the US and Europe. Alex is also a professional photographer whose works have been exhibited, collected, and published in the US, Europe, South America, and Asia.

**Travis Olson.** Travis is an architectural historian and historic preservationist currently employed by the city of Philadelphia. He research has spanned everything from seventeenth century Quaker meetinghouses to mid-twentieth century suburban development. His focus is on American cultural landscapes and the ways in which people have interacted with their natural environments throughout history.

**Michelle Prestholt.** Michelle is a Ph.D. student studying ancient Greek and Roman art and architecture. She is interested in issues of anastylosis, reconstruction, and museum display.

**James Sexton.** James has more than twenty five years' experience in the investigation and documentation of historic structures. Starting with research into the seventeenth and eighteenth century houses of coastal Connecticut, his career has included work on vernacular buildings of all types throughout the country. His responsibilities have included designing and implementing field investigations and surveys, researching and writing Historic Structure Reports for culturally and historically significant properties, preparing National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark nominations for significant historic properties and districts, and providing research for proposed Local Historic Districts.

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