Sacred, Secular, and School Music in the Lives of Germans from Russia and Norwegians in the Dakotas: 1862-1930

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ABSTRACT

After the passing of the Homestead Act in 1862, a large wave of immigrants arrived in Dakota Territory, most of them during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Two of the largest immigrant populations in the Dakotas were the Norwegians and Germans who had spent approximately the last hundred years living in isolated rural colonies in Russia, referred to as Germans from Russia or russlanddeutschen. This document examines the role of music in the lives of these ethnic groups from the 1862 to 1930, and includes the discussion of sacred music, especially hymns, secular music such as folk songs and dance music, and music's place in the rural one-room schools that their children attended.

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Review of Literature

While the musical lives of Germans from Russia and Norwegians from the 1860s through the first half of the twentieth century in the Dakotas are not terribly well documented, there are historical associations, scholarly research, and primary sources that give glimpses into the important role that music played in these two ethnic groups' lives. Francie M. Berg's *Ethnic Heritage in North Dakota* is an invaluable resource for anyone looking for an introduction to the cultural traditions of various ethnic groups in North Dakota. The Germans from Russia and Norwegians, among many other groups, are included in the discussion and topics range from music and dancing to food and folklore.[1]

The archives at The Germans from Russia Heritage Collections (GRHC) at the North Dakota State University Library in Fargo, North Dakota, holds many scholarly books and articles on the history of the German from Russia, including information on their time in Russia and lives as immigrants in the Dakotas. Carol Just Halverson's "Unser Leute the Story of the German Russian People" (parts I and II) is a play published in article form held on the GRHC website that details the hardships and joys of the russlanddeutschen's lives in the Dakotas. The scenes of the play are interspersed with folk and sacred songs, painting a vivid picture of the lives of these immigrants while highlighting the important role that music played therein.[2]

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[1] Francie M. Berg, *Ethnic Heritage in North Dakota* (Washington, D.C.: Attiyeh Foundation, 1983), 5.

[2] Carol Just Halverson, "Unser Leute the Story of the German Russia People Part I," *Prairies* 9, no. 2 (August 19), http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/articles/magazines/articles/unser.htm; Carol Just Halverson, "Unser Leute the Story of the German Russia People Part II," *Prairies* 9, no. 3

As the title implies, *The Central Dakota Germans: Their History, Language, and Culture* by Shirley Fischer Arends gives great detail on the history and culture of Russian-Germans in the Dakotas. Included in the text is information on the role of secular folk songs and dance music in the russlanddeutschen's lives plus the important position that music held in their religious lives.[3]

The Norwegian American Heritage Association, located on the campus of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, is "dedicated to locating, collecting, preserving, and interpreting the Norwegian-American experience with accuracy, integrity and liveliness."[4] They have published over 100 scholarly books since 1925 and their website, NAHA Online, hosts the full text articles of all 33 volumes of their scholarly journal, *Norwegian-American Studies*. The rural Norwegian population in the early Dakotas was religiously homogenous, since they all ascribed to one variation or another of Lutheranism,[5] making researching the group more straightforward than the russlanddeutschen.

The most useful resources pertaining to the music of the Norwegians in the Dakotas found on the NAHA website were Gerhard M. Cartford's "Music for Youth in

(September 1985), North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, 2013. http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/articles/magazines/articles/ leute.htm.

[3] Shirley Fischer Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans: Their History, Language, and Culture,* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, (1989).

[4] "The Norwegian-American Historical Association," NAHA Online, accessed October 5, 2018, https://naha.stolaf.edu/.

[5] Berg, *Ethnic Heritage in North Dakota*, 96.

an Emerging Church" and "From *norsk religionsskole* to Parochial School in Fifty Years" by Eric Luther Williamson. Cartford's article not only details the push for and creation of English language hymnals to accommodate second and third generation Norwegians, but also references the Norwegian language hymnals commonly in use, giving the reader great insight into the musical lives of Norwegian-Lutheran congregations.[6] In his article on *norsk religionsskole* (Norwegian religion school), Williamson details the religious training of Norwegian youth and music's important role in this process.[7]

Blegen and Ruud's *Norwegian Emigrant Songs and Ballads* is an outstanding resource on the folk music of Norwegian emigrants. It includes a well-rounded introduction to the history of folk songs in Norway and their role in the lives of emigrants, as well as a sampling of folk song texts, some of which include piano harmonization.

Key in providing insights into the lives of students in one-room schools was Andrew Gulliford's *America's Country Schools,* detailing the emphasis put on moral instruction,[8] the importance of school programs for occasions such as Christmas,[9] and the

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[6] Gerhard M. Cartford, "Music for Youth in an Emerging Church," *Norwegian-American Studies* 22, (1965): 163, https://naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume22/vol22_6.html.

[7] Erik Luther Williamson, "From *norsk religionsskole* to Parochial School in Fifty Years: Norwegian Lutheran Congregational Education in North Dakota," *Norwegian-American Studies* 34, (1995): 300, https://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume34/vol_34-11.pdf.

[8] Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1984), 57.

[9] Ibid., 80.

centrality of the one-room school to the wider community's social life.[10] Confirmation was then sought through specific examples mentioned in first-hand accounts which were found in books such as *The Legacy of North Dakota's Country Schools* edited by Albers and Henke and *South Dakota Country School Days* edited by Hallstrom and Keuter.

[10] Ibid., 60.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1862 when the Homestead Act was passed by Congress, settlers were required under the Pre-emption Law to pay $1.25 per acre to purchase unsettled, federally-owned land. This law, which also required the settlers to improve upon the land either by planting crops or building a house and barn, would have resulted in a $200 bill for 160 acres of land, which few farmers had. The passing of The Homestead Act on May 20, 1862, allowed qualified settlers to claim 160 acres of land for a mere $14 filing fee. Claimants had to be twenty-one years old, single or head of a household, and had to either be a U.S. citizen or an immigrant who had filed citizenship papers. In addition, claimants were required to live on the land for at least part of the year, every year for five consecutive years. Upon fulfillment of the requirements, claimants filed papers, paying the earlier-mentioned $14 fee, a process which came to be known as "proving up" by settlers.[11]

Due in part to the American Civil War, The Homestead Act had little impact on the population of The Dakota Territory until the years of 1878-1887 which marked the period of greatest growth in population, with 1883 as the peak year for immigration.[12] Norwegians are consistently noted as the first or second-largest foreign born ethnic group in the Dakotas from 1890 through the 1950s, while Germans from Russia are cited

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[11] North Dakota Studies Program, "Homestead Act" accessed September 26, 2018, https://www.ndstudies.gov/content/homestead-act.

[12] Shebby Lee, "The Great Dakota Boom," Explore the Old West, accessed October 5, 2018, http://www.exploretheoldwest.com/the_great_dakota_boom.htm.

usually as the second or third largest ethnic group.[13] Having settled in ethnically and religiously homogenous groups, both populations were able to maintain their sacred and secular musical traditions into the late first half or early second half of the twentieth century.

[13] Berg, *Ethnic Heritage in North Dakota,* 13; Tamar C. Read, "The German-Russians in North Dakota: A Brief History," *Festival of Ethnic Musical Traditions in North Dakota*, 1983, 40-46, 49-50, http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/history/read.html.

CHAPTER 1

Music in the Lives of Germans from Russia

At the beginning of her reign in the early 1760s, Catherine the Great of Russia issued an invitation to all foreigners to come to Russia to settle land the government had recently acquired. Along with this invitation came the promise to pay for the expenses of the journey, as well as an advance in capital. Additionally, exemption from civil and military service and from all taxation for a specified amount of time was promised. Perhaps most appealing to the Germans were the additional assurances that they would be allowed to govern themselves for thirty years, and enjoy a level of religious tolerance which had been lacking during their years in Germany prior to their emigrating to Russia.[14] The vast majority of Germans from Russia in the Dakotas came from colonies in the Black Sea area, present-day Ukraine, which were reflections of their German origins: Alcase, Baden, the Palatinate, and Württemberg. In addition to being homogenous in German origin, these settlements were denominationally uniform, namely Catholic, Protestant, and Mennonite.[15]

The Empress's promises were, by and large, upheld until the ascension of Czar Alexander III in 1881. The new ruler was decidedly anti-German and gave immediate attention and resources to the "russification" of the German colonists. In 1892, the Russian government took control of their private schools and insisted that all subjects,

[14] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans: Their History, Language, and Culture,* 13.

[15] Read, "The German-Russians in North Dakota: A Brief History."

excluding religion and the German language, be conducted in Russian.[16] For a people who cherished limited government intervention and freedom from religious oppression, this posed a threat. At that time, a promising solution to their situation prospect had opened up in North America, specifically in the Dakota Territory. Along with the promise of religious freedom came the opportunity to have a hand in the government of this newly formed U.S. territory.

Beginning in the early 1860s, young German from Russia, or russlanddeutschen men, began traveling to the Dakotas to consider whether or not mass migration to this new land was a viable plan. The reports that came back were positive and the migration began.[17] In the Dakotas and throughout the Great Plains, they settled as they had in Russia: according to their Evangelical, Catholic, or Mennonite faith. Even when Germans from more than one village in Russia settled together, they tended to associate exclusively with the people of their own denomination, discouraging intermarriage between sub-groups.[18] The ability of the Germans to maintain their cultural identity while in Russia fostered their ability to do so in the United States and ensured that the Germanic sacred and secular oral-tradition music that accompanied them to the Dakotas would remain with their people well into the second half of the twentieth century.

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[16] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans: Their History, Language, and Culture,* 31.

[17] Ibid., 35.

[18] Renee M. Laegreid, "German Russians," Encyclopedia of the Great Plains, accessed October 5, 2018, http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.ea.012.

Secular Music

"Wir Singen Unsere Geschichte" (We Sing Our History)[19]

Sacred and secular music served many functions for the Germans from Russia. Singing, even four-part singing, was central in the musical lives of these people.[20] The singing of songs served many purposes from enriching special religious occasions such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals, as well as holidays, most particularly Christmas. *Liebeslieder*, or love songs, ballads, work songs, and lullabies were also a part of daily life.[21]

One especially important function of russlanddeutschen folk music was the preservation of their history. Although folk songs that provide specific details of the trek from Germany to Russia are rare, many *Abschiedslieder* (farewell songs) accompanied the first immigrants who left Germany to settle in Russia. These songs portray a sense of reminiscence and longing for their former home, and often depict the landscape of Germany which was very different from that of the flat, treeless Russian steppes:[22]

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[19] Sidney Heitman, ed. *Germans from Russia in Colorado* (Fort Collins, CO: The Western Social Science Association, 1978), 146.

[20] Ibid., 145.; Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 209.

[21] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in Colorado*, 145.

[22] Ibid., 150.

…Auf den Bachstrom hängen Weiden,	…Beside the gushing brooks the willows hang,
In den Tälern liegt der Schnee.	In the valleys patches of snow remain.
Holdes Kind, dass ich muss scheden,	Dear child, that I must go
Muss nun unsre Heimat meiden—	And leave our homeland behind—
Tief im Herzen tut mir's weh.	Pains my poor heart so![23]

Though the Germans from Russia shared many songs in common with other German ethnic groups, some songs are uniquely their own.[24] Many of these songs provide details on national, local, and world events. Songs about local events often gave accounts of criminal happenings, such as a Volga German man's murder of his child and pregnant wife, another man's laundering of money and consequent banishment to Siberia, and the details of one woman's punishment for stealing lard. Another common theme in the folk music of Germans from Russia is the meeting out of punishment in response to criminal behavior by colonists in the absence of official peace-keepers:[25]

[23] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in* Colorado, 150.

[24] Read, "German Russians in North Dakota," 42.

[25] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in Colorado,* 151-152.

"Das Fett hab ich gestohlen, Das sag ich frei heraus, Drei silber Rubel geb ich eich Ei plaudert's nur nich aus."	("Yes, I stole the lard, That I will freely admit. Three silver rubles are yours, But don't tell people what I did."
"Die Rute sollst du haben, Das ist eine grosse Schandt, Leg du dich a mal da nieder, Auf dieser schmahle Bank."	"A good whipping is what you need, It is such a disgrace, Lie down on this narrow bench, With your guilty red face."
Und als sie die erste Rute grug, Da greischt sie gleich "grahull," Die Grichtsmänner sagen "nur besser drauf, Das kommt von dein Setrug."	As she received the first whip lash She screamed "Oh no, I didn't cheat." The judges cried "whip her again, You caused this by your deceit.")[26]

Other songs centered on national events, expressing contempt for world leaders. One such song is "Wir sitzen so fröhlich beisammen" which bemoans the destruction of war, particularly Napoleon's European invasions.[27] Another song that exemplifies this sub-category, "Das Manifest der Kaiserin," appeared after Czar Alexandar's revocation of many of the promises made to the German colonists. Here the broken promise of exemption from military service is ridiculed:

…Ja, was doch durch den Neid geschicht!	(…To think what happens through envy!
Hat man das Manifest vernicht!	They [the Russians] destroyed the manifesto!
Wir stamen aus dem Deutschen Reich, Und jetzt sind wir den Russen gleich.	We come from the German Reich And now we're the equal of the Russians.)[28]

[26] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in Colorado,* 152.

[27] Read, "The German-Russians in North Dakota a Brief History," 40-46, 49-50.

[28] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in Colorado*, 153.

Having been promised by Catherine the Great the freedom to maintain their cultural identities as Germans and exemption from Russian military service, calling themselves the "equal of the Russians" was an expression of great disappointment.

After the Germans from Russia resettled in the United States, these historical songs again proved their usefulness. When asked to recount their ancestors' history, many older russlanddeutschen depended on the songs that had been passed down to them rather than their own memories.[29] One would think that the harsh conditions in the Dakotas, and elsewhere in the Midwest, would have inspired new songs, however, very few have been preserved if they existed.[30]

Other Secular Music

The German pioneers in the Dakotas were well known for encouraging their children to sing and play musical instruments, most particularly the piano and pedal organs. Younger generations not only sang the songs of their parents and grandparents, but also sang songs popular among young people of other ethnic groups in the Dakotas. This is particularly significant for the Germans from Russia as cultural amalgamation had not happened during their sojourn in Russia.[31]

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[29] Ibid., 146.

[30] Ibid., 155.

[31] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 204.

Needs other than oral history were also fulfilled by the songs of the russlanddeutschen. Included in this list are functional songs such as work songs and lullabies, as well as music for entertainment and enjoyment including *liebeslieder* (love songs), medieval ballads,[32] and *schätzelieder* (which translates literally as treasure songs).[33] Many of the *liebeslieder* and ballads are slightly altered versions of folksongs from the German homeland. Many survived with the Germans from Russia long after they had disappeared from the public's memory in the German homeland.[34]

While many songs were of a serious or melancholy nature, others were filled with joy and humor. Songs that required improvisation or that were games were also popular with the Germans from Russia, such as the Austrian "Ach du lieber Augustine" (Oh, My Beloved Augustin) which had several options for verses and left room for individuals to insert their own rhymes. In "Dreimal drei ist neune" (Three Times Three is Nine) the person whose name was inserted into the song was required sing a song, after which the group would decide whether it was satisfactory. If it was not, the person would have to sing another song until the group approved, and the game continued until everyone had sung.[35] A variation of the song and game exist today as a children's song which includes

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[32] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in* Colorado, 145.

[33] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 204.

[34] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in* Colorado, 145

[35] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 210-211.

a snow-ball effect of children in the middle of the circle picking more children to dance in each subsequent verse.[36]

Dancing also played a large part of the lives of Germans from Russia of all ages. Magdalena Miller of Knox, North Dakota, grew up russlanddeutschen in the early twentieth century and remembered attending house parties with her parents and having a wonderful time waltzing with her father.[37] Dances were also an important part of being a young russlanddeutschen, in which Saturday[38] and Sunday night dances were a common event. After the Sunday evening church service, many of the young people gathered in hay lofts to waltz and polka to the accompaniment of a harmonica or accordion.[39]

Another common setting for music and dancing was the celebration following the formal church wedding ceremony, known as the *Hochzeit*. Young and old alike danced in the afternoon. W-hile the young danced into the evening, the older folk often sang a variety of songs. Selling dances with the bride and groom also afforded a fun way for the guests to chat with the newlyweds and for the bride and groom to start off their marriage with a little extra cash.[40]

Sacred Music

[36] Liederbaum: Sechshundert Kinderlieder und Singspiele, “Es geht eine Zipfelmütz’,” http://www.labbe.de/liederbaum/index.asp?themaid=22&titelid=303.

[37] Jessica Clark, “Germans from Russia on the Northern Plains: An Oral History Project,” Doctoral Thesis, Doctoral thesis, North Dakota State University, (2010), 227.

[38] Ibid., 235.

[39] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 110.

[40] Ibid., 134.

Although immigrant children in the Dakotas attended English-language schools, the German language stayed with them for several generations, primarily because they lived in isolated rural areas surrounded by fellow Germans from Russia. These families spoke German in the home, often did not receive an education beyond grade school,[41] and attended church services and catechism classes conducted in German.[42] Although they enjoyed many forms of secular folk music, the Christian faith was essential to and enveloped much of their lives.[43]

As noted earlier, the russlanddeutschen settlements reflected their specific religious affiliations. Census records and research typically separate them into three groups: Evangelical, Catholic, and Mennonite, with Evangelicals comprised primarily of Lutherans and including small numbers of people prescribing to Reformed and Baptist theology.[44] In his book *Russian-German Settlements in the United States,* Richard Sallet estimates that the combined first and second-generation populations of Germans from Russia break down as follows:

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[41] Ibid., 118.

[42] Ibid., 209.

[43] Ibid., 118.

[44] LaVern J. Rippley, introduction to *Russian-German Settlements in the United States,* Richard Sallet, translated by LaVern J. Rippley and Armand Bauer, (Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies), 13.

TABLE 1. *Sallet's table of estimated denominational percentages among Germans from Russia in the Dakotas.*

	Black Sea Germans		Volga Germans		
	Evangelical	*Catholic*	*Evangelical*	*Catholic*	*Mennonite*
North Dakota	43,000	25,000	500	85	1,000
South Dakota	20,000	6,000	600	37	4,200

Source: Richard Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, translated by Lavern J. Rippley and Armand Bauer (Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1974), 112.

The research clearly shows that the vast majority of Germans from Russia in the Dakotas came from the Black Sea area of Russia and that they were comprised mostly of Lutherans and Catholics. Although Mennonites make up a small but significant segment of the population, their history has been studied separately from the general russlanddeutschen population.[45] Information on infant baptism also excludes the Mennonite and Baptist populations from the discussion, as they prescribed to believer's (adult) baptism. Regardless of Lutheran, Catholic, or Reformed theological affiliations, music was an essential part of every event in the Christian church from baptisms to weddings and from Easter to Christmas.

[45] Richard Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, translated by LaVern J. Rippley and Armand Bauer (Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1974), 124.

Hymnals performed several key functions during the baptism of a russlanddeutschen baby. Hymnals contained baptismal songs as well as texts for the order of worship which were often found in the hymnals of the day. Songs often sung at baptisms include "Ich bin getauft auf Deinen Namen" (I am Baptised in Your Name) which speaks confidently of their belonging to Christ, "Dir Herr sei dieses Kind empfohlen" (This Child We Dedicate to Thee) which asks God to intercede and bless the child being dedicated, and the prayerful "In Dein Reich soll ich O Vater kommen" which translates as "Into Your kingdom I shall come, O Father."[46]

Another important religious rite of passage for the children of Germans from Russia was confirmation, for which preparation began long before attendance at confirmation classes commenced. Beginning at a young age, children began learning to read, write, and study the German Bible at home. This continued until they reached twelve or thirteen years old and were deemed ready for German-language religious classes led by the pastor.[47] Another part of the spiritual training of children was the singing of hymns in the home, with or without piano, and often in four parts.[48] The confirmation ceremony was held annually and began with the confirmands processing to the accompaniment either of "Jesu geh voran"[49] (Jesus Leads the Way) or "So Nimm

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[46] Alfred Op, "Spiritual Training of German-Russian Children and Youth," Germans from Russia Heritage Collection. University Library. North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, 2013, http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture /custom_traditions/spiritual_youth.htm.

[47] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 113.

[48] Op, "Spiritual Training."

[49] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 113.

denn Meine Hände" (So Then Take My Hands).[50] Confirmation was not only celebrated because it represented a milestone in the child's faith journey, but also for its cultural significance. The completion of confirmation classes meant that the language and traditions of the Germans had, once more, survived sojourns in Russia and the United States.[51]

Weddings brought another opportunity to worship together through song. In the early days in the Dakotas, wedding celebrations often lasted as long as three days and included the singing of standard hymns including "Jesu geh voran" and "So nimm den meine Hände".[52] Not only were hymns sung at the wedding ceremony, but the days-long celebration often included the singing of folksongs and hymns.[53]

Music was especially important at the funerals of the Germans from Russia. Specific hymns were often sung for this religious milestone including "Alle Menschen müssen sterben" (All People Must Die), "Was Gott tut, das is wohlgetan" (What God Does is Well Done) and "Christus der ist mein Lebe Sterben ist mein Gewinn" (Christ is my Life, to Die is my Gain).[54] A choir usually participated in funerals and often sang songs from outside the congregation's hymnal.[55] The church service often ended with the

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[50] Carol Just Halverson, "Unser Leute the Story of the German Russia People Part I."

[51] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 113.

[52] Ibid., 133.

[53] Carol Just Halverson, "Unser Leute the Story of the German Russia People Part I."

[54] Ibid., 138.

[55] Ibid., 140.

song “Lasst mich gehen, last mich gehen” (Let Me Go, Let Me Go) and the graveside service often ended with this hymn:

Wo findet die Seele die Heimat, die Ruh’ Wer deckt sie mit schützenden Fittichen zu,	(O where is the home of the soul to be found? Who knows its true shelter where comforts abound?
Ach ietet die Welt keine Freistatt uns an, Wo Sünden nicht locken, nicht schaden mehr kann,	What city of refuge will offer a place? That sin cannot enter, the soul to disgrace?
Nein, nein, nein, nein, hier ist sie nicht, Die Heimat der Seelen ist droben im Licht.	Nowhere, nowhere do we behold On earth such a city of blessings untold.)[56]

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Children’s funerals were slightly different from that of an adult. The special music was often sung by a group of girls from the child’s class, and the song they sang was often “Ach wäre ich doch schon droben” (Ah, Were I Already There).[57]

Singing was an important part of all Christian holidays for the Germans from Russia in the Dakotas, and especially so during the Christmas season.[58] Christmas was observed with several days of church services and often a Christmas Eve program. All Christmas celebrations included songs, whether as a congregation or small solos performed by the children at the special program. The church services included favorite

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[56] Carol Just Halverson, "Unser Leute the Story of the German Russia People Part II."

[57] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 142.

[58] Ibid., 124.

Christmas songs such as “Stille Nacht” (Silent Night), Ihr Kinderlein kommet” (Oh, Come Ye Little Children), and “Oh, du Fröhliche,” (Oh, You Joyful):[59]

O du fröhliche, o du selige, Gnadenbringende Weihnachtszeit! Welt ging verloren, Christ ist geboren, Freue, freue dich, o Christenheit!	O you merry, o you blessed, Merciful Christmastide! The world was lost, Christ was born, Rejoice, rejoice o Christendom![60]

Although music was an important part of the special services held at Christmas time, their singing was not limited to the confines of a church building. Beloved Christmas songs were sung in the home, with extended family, and at community gatherings. As a result, Christmas factored strongly in the preservation of their cultural identities as Germans.[61] Despite this effort to cling to their German traditions it did not take long for American customs to be introduced. Clark recorded that many of the first generation born in the United States was the first to grow up believing in Santa Claus.[62]

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[59] Ibid., 118.

[60] About.com: German Language, “German Song Lyrics: German Christmas Carols: O Du Fröhliche, O Du Selige,” http://german.about.com/library/blmus_dufroehlich.htm.

[61] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 118.

[62] Jessica Clark, “The German-Russian Christmas: Oral Histories from the Northern Plains,” *Heritage Review* 37, no. 4 (2007): page numbers. Germans from Russia Heritage Collection. University Library. North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, 2013. http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/dakotamemories/files/gr-christmas_jclark.pdf.

Conclusion

Germans from Russia expressed their joy through song, relied on it to sustain them through difficult times, and believed in the motto, "Und habe ich wieder gesungen und alles ward wieder gut" (And I sang again and all was well again). When one considers the value that they saw in their musical traditions, it is clear that the topic deserves to be further researched so that this important part of their history can be recorded, organized, and preserved.

Due to rapid changes in technology, the small towns that had retained their specifically russlanddeutschen flavor underwent rapid changes beginning in the late 1970s. Despite this and largely thanks to having settled in groups that were homogenous in both Germanic origin and religion, many of the traditions of the Germans from Russia in the Dakotas still remain.[63] Even at the end of the twentieth century many russlanddeutschen of the Dakotas are able to both sing and play a large number of songs from their German heritage.[64] Other steps have also been taken to preserve their heritage, including the formation of the Germans from Russia Heritage Society in Bismarck, ND, and the establishment of the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at the North Dakota State University Library in Fargo.[65] One program that is especially valuable in

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[63] Emily Martwick, "Faith, Work, Resolve Mark Germans from Russian History," *North Dakota Living* (September 2011): page numbers. Germans from Russia Heritage Collection. University Library. North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, 2013. http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/articles/magazines/articles/files/faith.pdf.

[64] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans*, 205.

[65] Michael M. Miller, "*Volk auf dem Weg: Dakota's Russlanddeutschen, USA*," (Presentation at the Institute of Foreign Cultural Relations, Stuttgart, Germany, May 2001), http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/research/scholarly /meetings_conventions/dakota.html.

preserving the musical history of this group is the North Dakota Council on the Arts' Traditional Arts Apprentice Program, which pairs master traditional artists and apprentices to preserve North Dakota's diverse cultural history.[66]

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[66] Andrea Winkjer Collin, "Oldest 'Master' Teacher Knows More than 100 German Songs," *North Dakota Council on the Arts Praries Arts newsletter*, September-December 2011.

CHAPTER 2

Music in the Lives of Norwegians

The exodus of Norwegians to North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although not large in relationship to the United States' total population, is one of the largest of all time in relationship to Norway's overall population. Between 1825 and 1915, around 800,000 Norwegians arrived in America, amounting to more than eighty percent of Norway's 1801 population. The largest portion of this occurred during the last quarter of the nineteenth century when migration out of Norway equaled more than half of the country's birthrate.[67]

The early 1860s were a difficult time for Norway's rural population because of unprofitable agricultural conditions that included large scale crop failure in 1860 and high taxes. When news came of the United States' passage of the Homestead Act in 1862, many of Norway's discouraged farmers were quick to answer the call for factory workers and farmers. Although steamship lines, land companies, railroads, and the federal and State governments worked tirelessly to recruit workers,[68] perhaps the most effective advertisements in Norway were the letters from Norwegians already in America, urging family members to abandon their homes for the American West. The beginning of the largest wave of migration began in 1861 with the opening of the Dakota Territory for

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[67] Odd Sverre Løvoll, "The Bygdelag Movement," *Norwegian-American Studies* 25, (1972): 3, https://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume25/vol25_1.htm.

[68] Leola Margorie Nelson Bergmann, *Americans from Norway* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1950), 98.

settlement. The migration of immigrants peaked in 1882, when nearly thirty thousand Norwegians entered the United States.[69]

Pioneers who came to the Dakota Territory from both Norway and older Norwegian American settlements[70] looked for good farming land with readily available water and timber, settling first along rivers and streams.[71] Seventy-eight percent of America's Norwegian immigrants came from rural areas, and since rural land was all that the Dakota Territory had to offer, the percentage was likely even higher there.[72] The combination of isolated living conditions, the heightened sense of group loyalty created by Norwegian Lutheran churches, and the swell in nationalistic pride created by the emancipation of Norway from Sweden in 1905,[73] helped preserve Norwegian sacred and secular musical traditions in the rural Dakotas even after the language was lost due to assimilation.[74]

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[69] Ibid., 100.

[70] Ibid., 102.

[71] Berg, *Ethnic Heritage in North Dakota*, 94.

[72] Ibid., 95.

[73] Ibid., 96.

[74] Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People* (Minneapolis: Univeristy of Minnesota Press, 1999), 212.

Secular Music: Folk Ballads and Instrumental Music

A small but important part of Scandinavian folk music were folk ballads, which were often based on epic or mythic storylines. Printed on broadsides and transmitted orally, nearly half of the songs were being sung to the tunes of well-known Lutheran hymns by the late nineteenth century. When the Norwegian immigrants brought these oral tradition songs with them to the Dakotas, they were often transformed into immigrant ballads that gave insights into the troubles and joys of life in the New World.[75]

The movement to America from Norway also produced an entirely new literature of songs and poetry.[76] While most of the authors are unknown, these songs are valuable not for their poetry but for their history. Based on the daily lives of Norwegian men and women, some of these songs are naïve, others are amusing and clever, and others evoke feelings of melancholy.[77] A record of the Norwegian debate on emigration is even contained within these songs. All of the forces involved in human emigration are represented in these songs: argument, satire, informed opinion, ignorance, longing for change and loyalty to the homeland and family, among others. [78]

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[75] Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music – Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 211.

[76] Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music – Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 211. Theodore C. Blegen and Martin B. Ruud, *Norwegian Emigrant Songs and Ballads* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1936), 4.

[77] Ibid., 6.

[78] Ibid., 6-7.

Transplanted Scandinavian music was closely tied to popular nineteenth century dances such as the waltz and the polka.[79] Polka music is perhaps the dance music most closely linked to the northern European populations that settled in the upper Midwest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Highly popular with the rural populations of Europe in the nineteenth century, polka also includes family histories, community interactions, hard work, and foodways.[80] The rural lifestyle of the upper-Midwest tended to promote close community bonds within Norwegian American enclaves throughout the year. Summers often involved work exchanges such as barn raisings. In thhe winter when work was lighter, families gathered weekly for fellowship, food, and dancing, often lasting late into the night. One noteable exception to this tradition was the small Lutheran sect called Haugeans, who discouraged the use of the fiddle and dancing on moral grounds on moral grounds.[81]

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[79] Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music*, 211.

[80] Ibid., 212.

[81] Ibid., 214.

Sacred Music

Hymnals

In spite of the fact that there were several distinct synods,[82] the most culturally unifying organization for Norwegians in America was the Lutheran church.[83] Music was of great importance in the lives of Norwegian Lutheran churches in America. In addition to the sermon, Sunday morning services consisted mostly of congregational singing, with special emphasis placed on the quality and improvement of such vocal music. The main Norwegian Lutheran groups of the time period were the Norwegian Synod, closely related to the Norwegian State Church in the Old Country, and the two more conservative groups, the United Church and Hauge's Synod. As late as the 1920s, services were held in Norwegian. Hauge's Synod and the United Church used the Landstad's Salmebog[84] hymnal, while the Norwegian Synod used Synoden's Salmebog.[85] These influential hymns were a central part of the Lutheran service, most of which dealt with the fundamental doctrines of the faith. These sacred melodies were also viewed as a crucial

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[82] Synods within the Lutheran tradition are regional or national organizations of local congregations.

[83] Berg, *Ethnic Heritage in North Dakota*, 96.

[84] M. B. Landstad, *Salmebog for lutherske kristne i Amerika* (Minneapolis: Forenede Kirkes Forlag, 1895).

[85] Cartford, "Music for Youth in an Emerging Church," 164; Synod for the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, *Salmebog* (Decorah, Iowa: Synodens Forlag, 1903).

part of a child's Sunday School education, equipping them to participate more fully in the service.[86]

North Dakota Norwegians were still struggling to navigate the language transition as late as the 1920s. In his thesis on the Norwegian-Lutheran Church Hillesland states that "the present problems of the church are caused by the changing conditions to which it must be adjusted. The language question is probably the most difficult to solve. In order to satisfy the founders and the immigrants, as well as to care for the growing generation, the use of two languages is essential."[87] Although the United Church and the Norwegian Synod released three English hymnals in 1898, the United Church also published a Norwegian Children's hymnal, *Den lille pilegrim* (The Little Pilgrim), in 1904. The first cross-denominational English hymnals for Norwegian-American churches, *The Lutheran Hymnary* and *The Lutheran Hymnary, Junior*, were published in 1913 and 1916 respectively, [88] but the church services of the rural Norwegians of the Dakotas were still attempting to navigate the language changes into the 1920s.[89]

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[86] Ibid., 164.

[87] Anton Hillesland, "The Norwegian Lutheran Church in the Red River Valley" (master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1923), 32.

[88] Cartford, "Music for Youth in an Emerging Church," 177.

[89] Hillesland, "Norwegian Lutheran Church in the Red River Valley," 32.

The Psalmodikon

Although Norwegian Americans recognized the value of music in the church service, many pastors bemoaned the quality of their congregations' singing and urged them to improve.[90] In Norway, many teachers were trained in two-year programs that gave them a solid grounding in music. Since organs and pianos were not yet common, many employed the *psalmodikon* in their teaching.[91] The psalmodikon was a boxy, single-stringed instrument that was laid flat on a table and plucked or bowed to accompany congregations and students through hymns. The lack of organs and pianos in small, rural churches in Norway, the state church in Norway's stance against the use of violins in the church service, and the use of a special numerical system called *sifferskrift* that did not require the player to read music, all led to the popularity of this instrument in Norway.[92] This training had infiltrated Norwegian teachers' institutes by 1870 and, consequently, virtually every child in Norway was influenced by its use in hymn instruction. These children eventually became the parents of the Norwegian-American people, passing on to their children a seemingly endless number of memorized hymns. [93] These immigrants brought the psalmodikon with them to America, using it as a simple but effective way to help rural congregations navigate their way through Sunday services.

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[90] Cartford, "Music for Youth in an Emerging Church," 163.

[91] Paul Maurice Glasoe, "A Singing Church," *Norwegian-American Studies* 13, (1943): 92-107, https://naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume13/vol13_5.htm.

[92] Chuch Haga, "Sounds of A Norwegian Christmas," *Grand Forks Herald,* December 22, 2008, http://www.grandforksherald.com/news/2086874-sounds-norwegian-christmas.

[93] Glasoe, "A Singing Church."

The instrument lost favor when churches were able to afford pianos or organs, and when other instruments, such as the violin, were met with less theological suspicion.[94]

Church Choirs

The same person who led with the psalmodikon in an effort to improve the congregational singing would have naturally developed in to the choir leader. This, too, came with its challenges. The majority of young people in The Dakota Territory did not have much knowledge of sight-singing, as note-reading had not yet found its way in to the rural schools of the time. Evidence of the choir's importance in the Norwegian Lutheran churches of the early pioneer days is found in the Nowegian Conference's 1888 publication entitled *Harpen: en sangsamling med music for sondagsskolen og hjemmet* (Harp: A collection of songs with music for the Sunday School and the home).[95]

As was the case with congregational singing, the psalmodikon was often used to establish or improve accuracy of melodic and harmonic lines during church choir rehearsals. One account notes the choir leader's use of a fiddle in place of a psalmodikon, noting how much more ease he had in using it than his father did with his psalmodikon.

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[94] Haga, "Sounds of a Norwegian Christmas."

[95] Glasoe, "A Singing Church."

The account also notes that many of the congregants were about the propriety of the violin's use during preparations for church services.[96]

Town and rural congregations viewed church choirs as important institutions, both in the service of the congregation on Sunday morning and as social organizations. Rehearsals often became important community gatherings with non-members coming to listen to the choir rehearse and to be updated on the local happenings.[97]

Norsk Religionsskole (Norwegian Religion School)

Norwegian Lutheran immigrants in the Dakotas held religious summer schools, conducted in Norwegian and called *norsk religionsskole*, from the 1880s through the 1910s. These schools were conducted during the summer months, lasting several weeks[98] and included study of the Bible, Luther's Small Catechism and Norwegian literature, as well as the singing and memorization of Norwegian hymns.[99]

Once a congregation had been established, either the pastor or the parents encouraged the members to create a committee tasked with hiring a teachers and raising funds to pay them. While, in the early days, many pastors took on the job of finding these

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[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Glasoe, "A Singing Church."

[99] Williamson, "From *norsk religionsskole* to Parochial School in Fifty Years: Norwegian Lutheran Congregational Education in North Dakota."

teachers, most rural congregations were sectioned into more than one district. Therefore, a well-functioning committee was of great importance for the financial feasibility of these schools and in lightening the pastor's work load.[100]

Since music played an important role in a day of *norsk religionsskole* which began and ended with devotions and hymn singing,[101] teachers with musical skill were more sought after, respected, and better payed.[102] Most *norsk religionsskole* ended the term by hosting a picnic for the students' parents, pastors, and members of the congregation. While the students and guests enjoyed treats, the students put the summer's hard work on display by reciting bible verses and singing hymns from memory as a group.[103]

The shift from Norwegian to English was an easier transition than the shift away from *norsk religionsskole* to Sunday School. Particularly conservative congregations strove to keep these summer school programs unaltered over the course of the 1920s and 1930s.[104] By this time, many congregations had modified or discontinued these schools. It was not until 1940 that most of these schools were taught in English and called Vacation Bible School.[105] While *religionsskole* was primarily meant to train students in

[100] Ibid., 304.

[101] Ibid., 309.

[102] Ibid., 306.

[103] Ibid., 312.

[104] Ibid., 316.

[105] Ibid., 299.

religion, it was also a means to convey to students the linguistic and cultural heritage of their ancestors, including music.[106] Many students remembered music as the most lasting influence from their time in these schools and were still able to sing hours' worth of old Norwegian hymns many decades later.[107]

Conclusion

Music played an important part of the lives of Norwegians in the early Dakotas, transmitting theological and historical information as well as playing an important role in the unification of rural communities at weekly winter dances. Hymns, textbooks, and other sacred materials were not translated into English for Norwegian-Lutheran services until into the 1920s.[108] While as many as half of the second-generation Norwegian-Americans's didn't learn Norwegian between 1940 and 1960, there were still approximately 40,000 third-generation people who had learned Norwegian in 1960. Even after the Norwegian language was no longer spoken by the majority of the population, Norwegians maintained their unique cultural traditions to a greater degree than other

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[106] Ibid., 310.

[107] Ibid., 311.

[108] Hillesland, "The Norwegian Lutheran Church in the Red River Valley," 32.

Scandinavian groups,[109] due in large part to the fellowship of the Lutheran congregations.[110]

[109] Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People,* 212.

[110] Ibid., 213.

CHAPTER 3

Music in the One-Room Schools

Since many of the Germans from Russia and Norwegians in the Dakotas settled farms in isolated rural communities, their children attended one-room schools, or schools in which one teacher instructed children of varying ages and grades in a single classroom.[111] Although many of these issues will be addressed within the context of a either North or South Dakota, the two states had many strengths and weakness in common. As immigrant groups tended to settle in ethnically and religiously homogenous groups in the Dakotas, it is logical to assume that they attended schools that reflected that homogeneity.[112] Although they ascribed to different forms of Evangelicalism and Catholicism, their shared Christian conservatism led them to share many practices in common. Included in the discussion will be the issues and conditions which fostered and hindered the use of music in the classroom, teacher training, disadvantageous learning conditions, financial and time constraints, as well as the individual teacher's innate musical abilities.

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[111] Leidulf Mydland, "The Legacy of One-room Schoolhouses: A Comparative Study of the American Midwest and Norway," *European Journal of American Studies,* (September 14, 2011), 3, http://ejas.revues.org/9205 (Accessed February 23, 2013).

[112] Read, "The German-Russians in North Dakota: A Brief History;" Berg, *Ethnic Heritage in North Dakota*, 15.

Teacher Training

Many teachers who taught in the country schools of the Dakotas during the 1920s began teaching with limited advanced education. The level of education varied greatly among rural school teachers of the Dakotas, ranging from an eighth grade or high school diploma and a teaching permit, to attendance at summer courses hosted by government institutions known as normal schools which provided teacher training, to certificates and/or diplomas from normal schools or colleges.[113] The difference between the normal institute and the normal school is summed up in a 1987 article entitled *Vocal Music and the Classroom teacher* by Don Coffman:

> Early teacher-training institutions were established by states, cities, counties, and individuals, and varied considerably in standards and modes of operation. Two broad classifications of schools can be identified: institutes and colleges. The normal institute, or teachers' institute, offered a program that varied in length from two to eight weeks, but was usually four to six weeks long. These institutes taught a review of common school subjects (comparable to the present-day curriculum for grades one through eight) plus courses in teaching methods. Normal schools, a later development, were usually state-supported and had a two-year curriculum, although program duration varied in length from one to four years.[114]

Although both states had established several normal schools by the 1920s, many teachers who taught in the country schools of the Dakotas began teaching with very little training

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[113] U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, *The Educational System of South Dakota: Report of a Survey Made Under the Direction of the United States Commissioner of Education* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Government Printing Office, 2918), 213.

[114] Don Coffman, "Vocal Music and the Classroom Teacher, 1895-1905," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 35, no. 2 (Summer 1987), 93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3344985 (Accessed February 26, 2013).

or practical experience. A Nationwide survey of 1918, conducted by the Bureau of Education, showed that 54.2 percent of rural teachers began their teaching careers by way of examination, and that only 45.8 percent had “attended regular courses at normal schools.”[115]

Rural school teachers sometimes obtained certification through participation in teacher training courses offered at the end of their own high school educations. After completing and passing the course, students were awarded a teaching certificate. This certificate qualified the holder to teach in the county in which it was issues for up to three years.[116] Although many teachers began their careers with little training, they often desired to further hone their craft. These teachers either attended summer sessions at normal institutes[117] or took a hiatus from teaching in order to expand their educations at state normal schools and extend their teaching licenses to a more permanent status.[118]

Teacher certification in the Dakotas in the 1920s was split into grades. The lower-ranking certificates required a minimum age of eighteen and no previous teaching experience. These certificates were valid for up to three years and the required exam scores were lower. In the state of South Dakota, the first grade certificate required at least

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[115] U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, 213.

[116] Everett C Albers and Warren A Henke, *The Legacy of North Dakota’s Country Schools* (Bismark, ND: North Dakota Humanitites Council, 1998), 205.

[117] Lucy Elmira Byrum Sinclair, “Lucy Elmira Byrum Sinclair,” in *South Dakota Country School Days*, ed. Linda Hallstrom and Maricarrol Keuter, 194-195, (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Co, 1987), 194.

[118] Albers and Henke, 201.

fifteen months of teaching experience and a minimum age of twenty.[119] The "life diploma" was granted upon the completion of at least two years of post-high school education in either the college or normal school setting[120] and would have likely included both observational and practical classroom experience.[121]

Teachers who attended normal schools or state colleges still faced an uphill battle. This very issue is described in a 1918 survey of South Dakota's educational system, executed by the United States Bureau of Education:

> The teaching staff varies in academic and professional preparation from practically no preparation at all to college and university graduation, together with good training preparation in normal school or school of education. Public education in the State suffers, as is true of many other States, because the schools are manned largely by immature persons of meager preparation and limited professional outlook. Conditions which were bad enough before the war have become accentuated in recent months, and now call for serious consideration by lawmakers and parents.[122]

This same survey revealed that over fifty four percent of rural teachers in South Dakota chose to attain certification by taking examinations, as opposed to attending normal schools or colleges.[123]

Teachers who attended normal schools and colleges still would have had limited training in music, because the common subjects were prioritized as preparation for

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[119] Ibid., 144-145.

[120] U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, 215.

[121] Coffman, 93.

[122] U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, 15.

[123] Ibid, 213.

exams.[124] The cumulative graduation exam would have included subjects such as reading, writing and penmanship, arithmetic, history and geography, as well as physiology and hygiene.[125] It was due to this exam that those subjects were given the highest priority. A bi-product of the minimum teacher training requirements in the Dakotas was that many teachers had little to no formal training in classroom music. They were therefore dependent on their own musical experiences as children in their homes, churches, and schools. If the teacher was musically inclined, they might begin the school day with singing.[126] Another less inclined teacher who "never could sing" might encourage students to express themselves musically through group whistling,[127] while others might completely omit music making from their classroom. Some music educators felt that such emphasis should not be determined by whether or not the grade school teacher could sing. They held that the musically gifted teacher often did too much singing along with their students, hindering them from "singing for themselves." They also asserted that teachers with less musical ability were often more successful at classroom music instruction[128] because they followed the music textbooks more closely.[129]

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[124] Coffman, 4.

[125] Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1984), 51-57.

[126] Judith Oakland Payson, "Judith Oakland Payson," in *South Dakota Country School Days*, ed. Linda Hallstrom and Maricarrol Keuter, 161-162, (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Co, 1987), 161.

[127] Sinclair, 195.

[128] Coffman, 8.

[129] Ibid., 5.

Another factor that contributed to the lack of experienced country school teachers was the marriage rule. In the 1920s, teaching in the Dakotas while married was prohibited. As a result, teacher turnover was very high.[130] As with many of the rules in those days, a local school board would sometimes overlook the rule,[131] perhaps in absence of other options.

Constraints

Rural teachers in the Dakotas in the 1920s were not only limited by their own education and teaching experience. Many faced additional challenges including language and cultural barriers, lack of adequate funding, poor classroom conditions, and time constraints.

In their book, *The Legacy of North Dakota's Country Schools,* Albers and Henke analyzed several isolated years of data, including 1922-1923. Included in the study were four counties with a high percentage of citizens of Germans from Russia, as well as four counties with a high percentage of citizens of Norwegian descent.[132] According to their findings, it is clear that in the years of 1922 and 1923, more of the teachers in the Norwegian counties held normal school or college degrees and were paid higher

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[130] Laura Mueller Fluth, "Laura Mueller Fluth," in *South Dakota Coutnry School Days*, ed. Linda Hallstrom and Maricarrol Keuter, 72-73. (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Co, 1987), 73.

[131] Wilma Bonney Thomas, "Wilma Bonney Thomas," in *South Dakota Country School days*, ed. Linda Hallstrom and Maricarrol Keuter, 208-209. (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Co, 1987), 208.

[132] Albers and Henke, 48.

salaries.[133] Although the Norwegian population seemed to hold the education of their children in higher esteem than their russlanddeutschen counterparts, the rural schools of both demographic regions generally lacked teachers with adequate training. In 1923, the number of teachers with college degrees in the primarily Norwegian counties totaled nineteen while the counties with large concentrations of Germans from Russia employed only three. Not only did the russlanddeutschen employ less well-trained teachers, the statistics clearly show that they also employed more teachers who had virtually no formal training. In the primarily Norwegian counties only three teachers were employed who did not hold teaching certificates, but instead taught through a permit from the local school board or superintendent. There were, however, 128 teachers with such limited training in the russlanddeutschen counties.[134]

Albers and Henke point out that, if we take these facts as an indication of the local populations' support of education, the russlanddeutschen counties viewed the education of their children as less important.[135] Attendance statistics from the 1920s clearly conflict with this assumption, as the percentages of children ages seven to fourteen who attended school in all eight test counties were relatively consistent across the board. In other words, russlanddeutschen and Norwegian parents were equally as insistent that their children receive basic educations. While the parents of the primarily russlanddeutschen counties may have been perceived as less concerned with the education of their children,

[133] Ibid., 52.

[134] Ibid., 153.

[135] Ibid., 52.

the political climate of the 1920s sometimes elicited a different reaction from their children. In *The Legacy of North Dakota's Country Schools*, one teacher recalls a conversation with a student of russlanddeutschen heritage whom she taught in the 1920s:

> She tried to explain to me how the children all felt back in those days. It was less than 10 years after World War I had ended. She said they were ashamed and humiliated to be called Pro-German, they were ashamed of the language, and above all, they were ashamed of their German accent. They vowed to become proficient in the English language and rid themselves of it. They succeeded.[136]

The post-World War I political climate actually served as motivation for some russlanddeutschen children to assimilate.

The teacher of the one-room school house was limited by both attendance and time constraint. One-room country schools included students of all ages and grade levels, requiring teachers to plan and guide individual lessons to meet each student's individual needs.[137] These circumstances left little time for the "extras," such as music and art. Another factor that further limited the one-room school teachers' teaching time was the man-power required to run a farm at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1922, a staggering forty percent of students who took the comprehensive exam for eighth-grade graduation in South Dakota failed. Most of the failures were likely a result of older farm boys being kept home from school to help during planting and harvesting seasons. This

[136] Ibid., 55.

[137] Gulliford, 47.

left the teacher with only the winter months to prepare older male students for these comprehensive exams.[138]

A common inconvenience that may have actually encouraged music making in the one-room school was the cold winter days typical of the Dakotas. Since country schools only closed for the exceptionally bad winter storm, students and teachers often had to brave large snow drifts and blizzards to get to school.[139] Andrew Gulliford notes in his book, *America's Country Schools,* that the wise teacher would have used music for a unique purpose, stating, "During the winter, music played an especially important role; children often sang and danced as they marched around the potbellied stove in an effort to keep warm."[140]

Music's Role in the Classroom

Despite the odds, music had the potential to serve several functions in the one-room school. It could aid in the teaching of the core academic subjects, moral and ethical instruction, as well as help with the cultural assimilation process. Music also played a major part in the special programs that united many rural communities.

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[138] Ibid., 60.

[139] Wayne E Fuller, *One-Room Schools of the Middle West: An Illustrated History* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1994), 42-43.

[140] Gulliford, 60.

Students often engaged in musical games before[141] or between classes in the one-room school.[142] Although many rural educators of the 1920s still viewed music as extracurricular and/or recreational, urban music educators of the day argued for the value and necessity of music in the general classroom curriculum. In a 1924 address to the Music Supervisor's National Conference, President W. Otto Miessner spoke on the value and purpose of music in the classroom:

> Music is absolutely fundamental in a scheme of public education that aims to make of every child an intelligent, useful and moral citizen… Music contributes directly to this threefold training of the child because it, as much as, if not more than any other study, develops hand, head and heart – body, mind and soul… Music does those things more effectively than any other kind of activity.[143]

Miessner also held that elementary teachers with sufficient training in educational science possessed the skills necessary to create a unified daily curriculum that included music. Had this not been the prevailing thought among professionals, music would not have been included in the course of study at normal schools and teacher colleges.[144]

In the early Dakotas, great emphasis was placed on the teaching of morals, ethics, and often religion through all subjects. A 1907 South Dakota law exemplifies the inclusion of ethics and values as a part of the daily regimen:

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[141] Ibid., 59.

[142] Coffman, 4.

[143] W. Otto Miessner, "Music for Every Child," *Music Supervisors'* Journal 10, no. 5 (May, 1924), 2-3, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3382498 (Accessed February 23, 2013).

[144] Coffman, 3.

> Moral instruction intended to impress upon the minds of pupils the importance of truthfulness, temperance, purity, public spirit, patriotism and respect for honest labor, obedience to parents and due deference for old age, shall be given by every teacher in the public service of the state.[145]

These morals would have been taught through biographical examples and moral stories and fables, as well as biblical stories and passages.

The people of the rural Dakotas were willing to establish schools and controlled their funding, however limited, and staffing through local school boards.[146] Schoolhouses were often the first public buildings to be constructed and then functioned additionally as political, social, and religious meeting places.[147] This lack of central government intervention is reflected in the inclusion of Christianity in the schooling of their children. The following excerpt from a recommendation letter written for a prospective teacher, points to the importance of their standing within the church and community:

> I sincerely recommend Miss Jeanett E. Kones as a successful teacher. While teaching [at] our school, she was a teacher we could be proud of. A girl of splendid character, with name above reproach. She is faithful member of her church, and is in all her ways a true Christian, her faith in the Bible is very sincere and her whole attitude expresses good morals and a clean upright life. She is also a very social person and a leader in any community. I take great pleasure in recommending Miss Kones to any school board.[148]

Clearly, the individual teacher's perceived moral character was, in many cases, just as important a factor as their professional qualifications in the hiring process.

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[145] Gulliford, 57.

[146] Mydland, 14.

[147] Ibid., 3.

[148] Ibid., 74.

The moral and ethical instruction of children was not the only way that religion was woven into the life of the one-room school of the Dakotas. The inclusion of Bible stories and passages, as well as the hiring of teachers based on their standing within their communities and churches, point toward the likelihood of the singing of psalms and hymns during the school day. The separation of church and state, at least as applied to the classroom, would have been an unlikely thought to cross the minds of most Dakotans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Music could also be used to support the assimilation process. Many rural children grew up with parents and grandparents who spoke no English. School was often their first exposure to the language.[149] In 1900, 77.5% of North Dakota's and 66.1% South Dakota's populations were made up of immigrants.[150] The law requiring all children to attend school was not passed in South Dakota until 1915. This lead to the reasonable assumption that many children of immigrants grew up with parents who were born, raised, married, and had children without significant English proficiency.[151]

In an account given by Msgr. Joseph Senger, who was born and raised in the russlanddeutschen community of Orrin, North Dakota, students were allowed to speak their native tongue while on the playground, but were expected to speak English once inside the building:

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[149] Gulliford, 94.

[150] Ibid., 91.

[151] Ibid., 93.

> "Well, it was very evident when we started school because we could probably speak some words of English, but we normally and automatically spoke German. Of course in school we had to speak English. If we spoke German we were punished (had to write or stay after school). When we were out playing ball we would shout in German, but when we went into the school we would have to speak English. Thank God that the teachers had patience with us and taught us English."[152]

For students in South Dakota who spoke exclusively German, it was inconsequential if the teacher spoke German, because in 1889 the state of South Dakota amended school law, mandating all subjects were to be taught in English.[153] In early 1918, South Dakota and many other states banned the teaching of German in all public schools[154] due to tensions caused by World War I. While Germans in America were being met with suspicion, Norwegians were met with much less mistrust, despite openly celebrating both the Fourth of July and the Seventeenth of May (Norwegian Constitution Day).[155]

Despite cultural tensions, some teachers embraced and celebrated the traditions and values of their foreign students through special programs which would have included

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[152] Msgr. Joseph Senger, "Interview with Msgr. Joseph Senger," interview by Bob Dambach, *Prairie Public Collection*, August 17, 2001, https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/oral/samples/ppc26.html.

[153] Ibid., 109.

[154] "South Dakota Bars German: Teaching of Language is Forbidden Even in Universities," *Washington Post*, February 23, 1918. http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/docview/145631020 (Accessed March 23, 2013).

[155] Arlow W. Andersen, *The Norwegian-Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 136-137.

music. In the 1924 book *Helpful Hints for the Rural Teacher*, by Laura Bassett and Alice Smith, it is advised that:

> If your district is a foreign one, be sure to have one of your very earliest programs, “A Program of All Nations.” Encourage the children to have parents bring pieces of all kinds of their native handwork, lovely Hardanger embroidery, Russian needlework, Italian hand carving. Put on folk dances in costume, encourage old folks to put on costumes, sing, songs, play instruments. Let this night belong to the foreign patrons. Show your appreciation of their efforts and you admiration of their ability. Be sincere in this. The Old World has much to give us that is really worthwhile and infinitely better than much of the tawdry jazz and bunkum we accept from each other these days.[156]

Although some teachers were acutely aware of the need of immigrants to have their Old World values and traditions validated, most were more concerned with student assimilation and instilling a sense of patriotism[157] in their students, ignoring their cultural traditions altogether.[158]

One organization that played a major role in fostering patriotism in school children and integrating music into the one-room school was the Young Citizen’s League (which subsequently will be referred to as YCL.) The overall goal of the organization was to “create morally upright, socially conscious, healthy patriotic citizens experienced in participatory democracy.” Upon joining the organization, students were required to memorize the motto “Help Uncle Sam, one another, our school and our community.”[159]

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[156] Gulliford, 97.

[157] Ibid., 98.

[158] Ibid., 97.

[159] Ibid., 110.

The organization thrived primarily in rural schools in the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Colorado, and played a major role in the Americanization of rural children of immigrants.

In 1912, a bulletin entitled *Little Citizens League*, prepared by Minnesota teacher Anna Shelland Williams and issued by the Minnesota Department of Public Instruction, outlined the inner workings of an organization in which school-aged children could apply the concepts of citizenship. The bulletin ended up in the hands of Michael Miles Guhin, then superintendent of schools in Brown County, South Dakota, who asked a few of his best teachers to give their thoughts on the ideas presented. This sparked the interest of teacher Lucille Trott,[160] who later held the office of county superintendent. By the end of her term in 1923, Brown County had YCL chapters in half of their schools. By 1934, there were eight hundred and twenty five YCL chapters in South Dakota. The Young Citizen's League of North Dakota was established in February of 1927.[161] By the end of the year, the multi-state organization boasted three thousand four hundred and fifteen chapters and 60,092 members.

In 1925, South Dakota's county superintendents passed a mandate requiring all public and parochial schools to sponsor YCL chapters in order to receive state aid. The benefits of these chapters are evidenced in that South Dakota YCLs raised $83,408 in 1926 alone. Each chapter put their earnings toward projects such as the building of school libraries, art and music appreciation, the purchase of musical instruments,[162] and the

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[160] Albers and Henke, 168.

[161] Albers and Henke, 169.

[162] Gulliford, 111.

purchase of music books such as *The Golden Song Book.*[163] The book, first published in 1918 by Hal & McCreary Company, contained patriotic, folk, and nationalistic songs, as well as song about school days, childhood, and sacred songs. The foreword of the 1923 edition of this book suggested “that it be required of the children that all of the verses of ‘My Country, ‘Tis of Thee’ and “The Star Spangled Banner” be committed to memory, further exemplifying the role and importance of assimilation into American culture in rural schools”[164] Instruments purchased by YCL chapters included harmonicas for “Harmonica Bands,”[165] as well as percussion instruments to form bands.[166] Students also participated in larger bands and choruses at the yearly YCL county conventions.[167]

The more rural the community, the more central its schoolhouse was to its social life.[168] School programs were major events in the lives of rural folks both young and old.[169] The schoolhouse was often so packed for special programs that many attendees had to look on from inside the entryway, along the edges of the schoolroom, and

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[163] Leo J Neifer, “Prairie Patriots,” in *One-Room Country School Days: South Dakota Stories*, ed. Norma C Wilson and Charles L Woodard, 40-43, (Brookings, SD: South Dakota Humanities Council, 1998), 41.

[164] N H Aitch, *The Golden Book of Songs* (Chicago: Hall & McCreary Company, 1915), 3.

[165] Marvel Harrington Dwyer, “Marvel Harrington Dwyer,” in *South Dakota Country School Days*, ed. Linda Hallstrom and Maricarrol Keuter, 60-61. (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Co, 1987), 60.

[166] Esther Roehr, “Esther Roehr,” in *South Dakota Country School Days*, ed. Linda Hallstrom and Maricarrol Keuter, 178.

[167] Dwyer, 60.

[168] Gulliford, 79.

[169] Ibid., 60.

sometimes from outside an open window. An anecdote offered in *America's Country Schools* states that "At a program in Clark School… in Douglas County, SD, in the 1930s, the crowd was so large that gas lamps on the walls would not remain lit due to lack of oxygen."[170] Blizzards occasionally forced everyone to remain at the school overnight after the Christmas program. On one occasion where this happened, the students gave their program twice to help pass the time.[171] Special programs usually included recitation of texts, group as well as solo singing, and sometimes even instrumental solos.

Teaching contracts often stipulated that teachers put on at least two programs a year, but many took the opportunity to draw attention to their schools by holding programs for every occasion. Occasions meriting a school program ranged from Presidents' birthdays and Memorial Day to Valentine's Day and Christmas. The Christmas program was the central event of the year for many rural communities. Most teachers began preparing for the Christmas program in November and preparation sometimes halted lessons as much as two weeks before the program.[172] Every child took part, whether it was by participating in the reenactment of the Nativity scene, reciting poems and other texts, or singing.

[170] Gulliford, 80.

[171] Ibid., 80-81.

[172] Ibid., 80.

Although time and teacher training devoted to music were limited, music found an important place in the life of the one-room school, aiding in the assimilation process, moral instruction, and, most importantly to the community, special programs.

Conclusion

Gladys Thoe Brash, a former country school teacher, described the state of music education in the Dakotas when she said, "The main defect was lack of cultural development. Music and art were sadly neglected: many teachers lacked training, didn't have musical abilities, or didn't have enough time."[173] However inconsistent music education was in the one-room schools of the Dakotas, teachers used available time, funding, and knowledge to the best of their abilities.

While documentation of the general life of one-room schools is plentiful, documentation of music's role in the classroom is less than satisfactory. Although first-hand accounts of the music in the early one-room schools are difficult to acquire, an expansion of the research to include the 1930s through present day may help to shed light on the topic.

[173] Gladys Thoe Brash, "A Country School Teacher Remembers – Gladys Thoe Brash," in *The Legacy of North Dakota's Country Schools*, ed. Everett C Albers and Warren A Henke, 287. (Bismark, ND: North Dakota Humanities Council, 1998), 287.

Conclusion

Music played an important role in the lives of rural Germans from Russia and Norwegians in the Dakotas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Folk songs served as oral history for both ethnic groups.[174] The folk songs of the russlanddeutschen focus mainly on their homeland, Germany, and their intermittent time in Russia. Despite a rich tradition of historical folk songs, very few songs depicting life in the upper-Midwest stood the test of time, that is, if they ever existed.[175]

Norwegians in the early Dakotas also brought with them a rich heritage of oral tradition songs, including many which began with texts based on epic and mythic storylines that developed into emigrant ballads describing emotions ranging from delight and devastation of life in the New World. [176]

Music served a second important function in both groups: the passing on of faith traditions. The Germans from Russia held their church services and catechism classes in German, desiring earnestly to preserve the religious and linguistic traditions of their ancestors.[177] Hymn singing was not only an important part of their church services and

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[174] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in Colorado*, 145; Blegen and Ruud, *Norwegian Emigrant Songs and Ballads*, 6.

[175] Heitman, *Germans from Russia in Colorado*, 155.

[176] Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music – Eithnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States*, 211.

[177] Arends, *The Central Dakota Germans,* 112.

catechism classes, but was also a key element of the spiritual training of children in the home.[178]

For Lutheran Norwegians in the early Dakotas, hymn singing played a key role in the worship service, so much so that special attention was payed to the quality of singing and its improvement.[179] The learning of hymns was also considered an integral part of the training of children to participate fully in the life of the congregation.[180] Before the advent of Vacation Bible School, Norwegians in the Dakotas held to their Old World tradition of *norsk religionsskole* (Norwegian religion schools). These schools, which lasted several weeks in the summer and focused on the fundamentals of the Lutheran faith, involved the memorization of hymns,[181] leaving many students able to sing hours' worth of Norwegian hymns from memory decades later.[182]

Music also played an important role in the rural-one-room schools that many of the children of Germans from Russian and Norwegian immigrants attended. School programs were important events for young and old alike in these communities[183] and teachers' contracts often required teachers to present at least two programs per year.[184]

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[178] Op, "Spiritual Training."

[179] Cartford, "Music for Youth in an Emerging Church," 163.

[180] Ibid., 164.

[181] Williamson, "From *norsk religionsskole* to Parochial School in Fifty Years: Norwegian Lutheran Congregational Education in North Dakota," 300.

[182] Ibid., 311.

[183] Gulliford, 60.

The research clearly shows that music played an important role in the lives of both ethnic groups, helping them to maintain their unique cultural identities in their religious, school, and community lives. As two of the largest ethnic groups, the lasting impact that the Germans from Russia and Norwegians' had on the musical culture of the area is evidenced by the importance placed on maintaining music programs, even in schools on the verge of closure, and the key role that band and choir concerts still play in the rural communities of the Dakotas.

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[184] Ibid., 80.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kelsey Gross, born in Fargo, North Dakota, spent much of her childhood in Britton, South Dakota, and attended high school at Aberdeen Central High School. After graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Music from South Dakota State University, she moved to Tempe, Arizona with her husband to pursue a Master of Music in Voice Performance. Gross' research in *music in the early Dakotas* is devoted to two large ethnic groups that populated the region: Norwegians and Germans from Russia. The two groups are of special interest to her as both she and her husband are of Norwegian or German-Russian lineage.