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IN THE LAND OF INYAN WOSLATA

PLAINS INDIAN INFLUENCES ON RESERVATION WHITES

TIMOTHY J. KLOBERDANZ

If one climbs the high grassy hill that overlooks the town of Fort Yates on the Standing Rock Reservation in south-central North Dakota, the scene that gradually unfolds is an engaging one. Fort Yates is bordered on practically all sides by the expansive waters of Lake Oahe. Except for the fact that the community resembles a veritable island, it looks much like other Great Plains towns, with an assortment of generously spaced old and new structures. From the top of the hill to the north, one can see for miles across the lake and the Missouri River to the rolling prairie lands that stretch beyond to the east.

Directly beneath the hill, a modern, tipi-shaped Catholic church can be seen, as well as the church cemetery. The sprawling graveyard is itself something of a popular attraction since it contains a large granite shaft that honors the memory of five Sioux policemen who lie buried there. The Indian officers who rest beneath the

monument were killed during the ill-fated arrest of Sitting Bull in December of 1890.

The Catholic cemetery at Fort Yates represents much more than a historical site of local and national significance. St. Peter's cemetery is a sacred place where families and friends continue to mourn and remember their dead. Here, Indian and non-Indian graves are intermixed with little regard to ethnic differences. Hand-lettered wooden crosses mark the final resting places of both. Tombstones and blacksmith-made iron crosses stand above the graves of Euro-Americans and Native Americans. Within the confines of St. Peter's cemetery lie the remains of Sioux Indians who were a direct link to the pre-reservation past of their people and, also, the remains of German-speaking immigrants whose cradles once rocked thousands of miles away on the Black Sea steppes of South Russia. The surnames on some of the grave markers reflect the backgrounds of two different peoples who call the land of *Inyan Woslata* (Standing Rock) their home: Brought Plenty, Fireheart, Loans Arrow, Pretends Eagle; Jundt, Schneider, Silbernagel, and Volk.

This article deals with the experiences of German-Russian families living in the North

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Dakota portion of the Standing Rock Reservation during the years 1909–1960. Of primary interest are the various ways in which the German Russians were influenced by their Sioux Indian hosts. Particular attention will be directed to the oral, customary, and material folkways of German Russians who resided on the reservation and how these traditions differed from those of their kinsmen living in more homogeneous areas of ethnic settlement.

The scholarly literature that relates to Euro-Americans living on or near Indian reservations in the Northern Great Plains region is sparse in comparison to studies of the Indian residents.¹ When one considers the large number of non-Indians who have made their homes on reservations, the paucity of relevant information is truly surprising. Studies of Indian-white interaction in the reservation setting have the potential to illuminate our understanding of the reservation experience in its broadest sense. In addition, researchers might be able to obtain a more complete picture of the acculturation process, as it affected both reservation Indians and reservation whites alike. Such research is of particular value when one remembers that certain Old World immigrants on the American prairies first became acquainted with the ways of their new country while living on Indian reservations. In a few cases, the second language that the struggling immigrants learned was not English but an indigenous language such as Lakota.

My data are drawn primarily from approximately thirty interviews that I conducted between 1982 and 1986. The majority of my informants included German Russians who once resided or still live in Sioux County, North Dakota (which encompasses the upper portion of the Standing Rock Reservation). For comparative insights, I also interviewed German Russians who live directly opposite the reservation (in Emmons County, one of the oldest and most densely populated German-Russian settlement areas in North Dakota). Additional interviews were conducted with Native Americans, government workers,

and clergymen who were familiar with the history and ethnic composition of Sioux County.

THE STANDING ROCK RESERVATION

In 1889, the U.S. Government drastically reduced the Great Sioux Reservation of the American West into separate and considerably smaller entities. As a result of this new administrative arrangement, the government took more than 11,000,000 acres of land that had been promised the Sioux by treaty in 1868. The most northern of the new divisions created in 1889 was known as the Standing Rock Reservation. Situated primarily in northwestern South Dakota and extending into south-central North Dakota, the new reservation included 2,462,000 acres of rolling prairie and butte country. Although most of the reservation land was located in South Dakota, the tribal center was the military garrison of Fort Yates, North Dakota. Not until 1903 did the U.S. Army withdraw its troops from the reservation. The community of Fort Yates, however, continued to serve as the reservation's administrative headquarters.²

When it was officially created in 1889, Standing Rock became the home reservation of the Hunkpapa and Sihasapa (Blackfeet) bands of Teton Sioux, as well as of a significant number of Yanktonai Sioux. Living conditions on the reservation during the 1890s were deplorable, according to reports filed by early Indian agents and travelers. The Standing Rock Sioux had been compelled to make a sudden and difficult transition, one that forced them from a nomadic, buffalo-hunting way of life into a settled, government-run existence. At the same time that the Sioux tried to withstand the physically debilitating forces of disease and malnutrition, the Indians were weakened psychologically and emotionally by missionization and other types of directed culture change.

To add to their problems, new pieces of national legislation were enacted that served only to erode the already dwindling Plains

Indian land base. The General Allotment Act of 1887 adversely affected the Standing Rock Sioux, particularly when huge amounts of "surplus" reservation land were made available to white homesteaders. Rather than set aside allotments of land for future generations of the tribe, the government all too often designated choice parcels of reservation land for Euro-American farmers. In 1909, the Great Sioux Reservation Information Bureau in St. Paul, Minnesota, circulated numerous posters and pamphlets that advertised the availability of three million acres of homestead land on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Reservations. Ironically, many of the promotional flyers bore a likeness of Sitting Bull, the slain Hunkpapa Sioux leader who had been an outspoken critic of white encroachment (fig. 1).

By 1915, the Standing Rock Indian Reservation was teeming with land-hungry homesteaders. Additional Sioux acreage was purchased from individual Indians who had obtained fee patent allotments. In 1917, many Standing Rock Sioux adults were made citizens of the United States in special ceremonies held on the reservation. A few weeks after gaining citizenship, the Indians received tax statements in the mail. Unable to pay, many of the new citizens lost their land holdings.³

Euro-Americans continued to settle on the Standing Rock Reservation during the 1920s. This trend was not reversed until the Depression years, when many non-Indians on the reservation migrated west. During the 1940s and 1950s, as the remaining white landowners on the reservation slowly recouped their losses, Indian trust land again became attractive to buyers. Also, 56,000 acres of rich bottom land along the Missouri River were lost to the Standing Rock Sioux when the Oahe Dam was completed in 1962. According to one researcher, the dam "caused more damage to Indian land than any other public works project in America. The Standing Rock Sioux suffered the worst effects of the Pick-Sloan Plan while receiving few of its supposed benefits."⁴

In recent years, attempts have been made by the Standing Rock Tribe gradually to

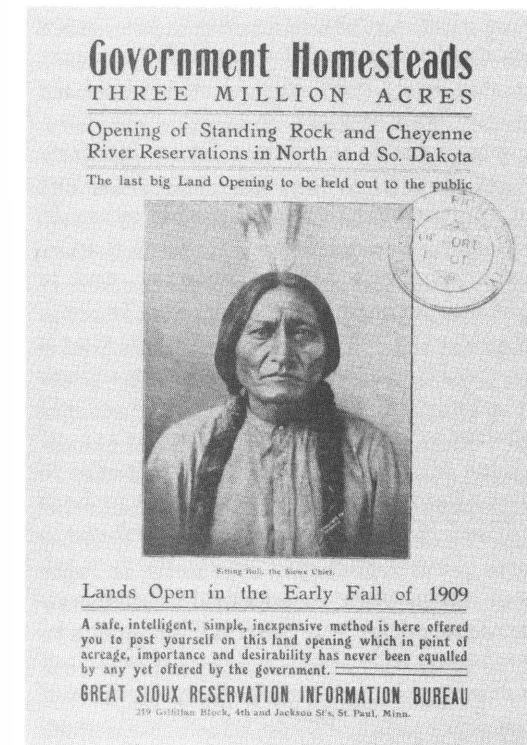


FIG. 1. In 1909, the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Indian Reservations were opened to white homesteaders. Courtesy State Historical Society of North Dakota.

restore its greatly diminished land base. A few small gains have been made but the challenges ahead are enormous. Today, out of a tract of nearly 2,500,000 acres, less than 34 percent of the Standing Rock Reservation is Indian owned.⁵

THE GERMAN RUSSIANS

The largest non-Indian group on the North Dakota portion of the Standing Rock Reservation (Sioux County) is comprised of German Russians. The numbers of German-Russian people on the reservation (past and present) are difficult to ascertain because census takers failed to differentiate German Russians from other respondents who also claimed German ancestry. In addition, German Russians have been known to be quite flexible in emphasizing

either their Germanic or Slavic ties during periods of international turmoil (for example, the two world wars with Germany and the cold war with Russia).

The available population figures for Sioux County over the past seventy years show that non-Indians often formed a sizable group. In 1920, Euro-Americans made up more than 60 percent of Sioux County residents, and in 1930 they accounted for 70 percent. In 1940, the percentage fell to 61 and since that time it has steadily declined. By 1980, non-Indians comprised only 35 percent of Sioux County's population.

One of the largest foreign-born groups in Sioux County has included individuals born in Russia. In 1930, Russian-born inhabitants in Sioux County numbered nearly 300 persons. Since there are no identifiable Russian or Ukrainian enclaves in Sioux County, the vast majority of those born in the U.S.S.R. undoubtedly were German-speaking immigrants from Russia. In a 1965 survey of rural households in North Dakota, sociologist William C. Sherman found that most of the non-Indian households in Sioux County were of German-Russian background. Other non-Indian ethnic groups represented in the county included smaller numbers of Anglo-Americans, German-Americans, and Norwegians.⁶

The German Russians who settled in Sioux County during the early 1900s are more specifically known as the *Schwarzmeerdeutsche* or Black Sea Germans. Their ancestors had established agrarian colonies in South Russia following the issuance of a special manifesto by Tsar Alexander I in February of 1804. The manifesto, according to one German-Russian informant in Sioux County, was "just like the early treaties our government made with the Indians . . . it promised land and certain rights to be enjoyed for all time." Among the privileges granted the German colonists were self-government, religious freedom, and exemption from military conscription. Yet on the Russian steppes—as on the American plains—eternal promises were broken. In June of 1871, Tsar Alexander II revoked the rights

and privileges granted the German-Russian colonists. A stream of immigration to the New World immediately began that ebbed and flowed until the First World War.⁷

Not all of the German immigrants who left Russia came to America in feverish pursuit of *Freiheit* (freedom). The folk history of many modern-day German Russians would have us believe they came to the New World to obtain the cherished liberties that had been denied them in Russia. In actuality, most German Russians—and particularly those from the Black Sea region—came in search of land.⁸

The first German Russians who settled in what is now North Dakota were Black Sea German immigrants who took up homesteads in 1884. German-Russian land acquisition and expansion continued in the state until their settlements dotted a huge portion of North Dakota that is still referred to as the "German-Russian Triangle." This area extends 300 miles from the southeastern North Dakota town of Oakes west to the Badlands. The apex of the triangle is the north-central town of Bottineau, North Dakota, located only a dozen miles from the Canadian border.⁹

GERMAN-RUSSIAN SETTLEMENT IN SIOUX COUNTY

During the early 1900s, when Indian land in Sioux County became available to homesteaders and buyers, sizable pockets of German-Russian settlers were living on all sides of the reservation's upper boundaries. Nonetheless, the earliest Euro-American settlers on the reservation included mostly Anglo-American and Norwegian families who claimed much of the so-called surplus land on the western end of North Dakota's Standing Rock Reservation. The German Russians who settled in Sioux County between 1909 and 1930 usually bought or leased land in the eastern half of the reservation. This portion of the reservation was populated primarily by tribal members, most of whom lived in homes bordering the Missouri River. Indeed, the two major Indian communities on the reservation (Fort Yates

and Cannon Ball) were located adjacent to the Missouri, while the predominantly non-Indian settlements on the reservation (Selfridge and Solen) were established further inland (fig. 2).

The German Russians who made their homes in Sioux County were not members of a truly homogeneous ethnic group in terms of a shared identity, dialect, and folkways. The German-Russian settlers on the Standing Rock Reservation included individuals who traced their ancestry to one of three regional groups: (1) *Beresaner* ("Parasaner"), Black Sea Germans who had lived in the Beresan Valley of South Russia and originally immigrated to Morton County, North Dakota, due north of the reservation; (2) *Kutschurganer* ("Alt Kolonista" or "Ka'nischta"), Black Sea Germans who once lived in the Kutschurgan district of South Russia and initially took up homesteads in Emmons County, directly across the Missouri River from the reservation; and (3) *Bessaraber*, ("Grassna" or "Lichiga"), Black Sea Germans who had lived in Krasna, Bessarabia, and settled first in Emmons and Grant Counties, North Dakota.¹⁰

While the German Russians of Sioux

County were divided by old country regional loyalties and dialect differences, they were united by the important fact that the overwhelming majority of the settlers were Roman Catholic. In the early years of settlement on the reservation, the three groups tended to retain their distinct regional differences, but these gradually became less salient as a result of common religious beliefs, increased social contact, and intermarriage. Indeed, the German Russians of Sioux County became something of a group apart and were jokingly referred to by other German Russians as *die deutsche Indianer* (the German Indians)!

The largest German-Russian group to settle on the reservation were the *Kutschurganer*, many of whom simply loaded up their belongings and drove their wagons across the frozen waters of the Missouri River. During the spring and summer, a ferry was utilized by the settlers. These land seekers moved onto the reservation from their home base in the southern half of Emmons County, a German-Russian Catholic settlement area that was one of the oldest in North Dakota. The German-Russian communities in Emmons County were

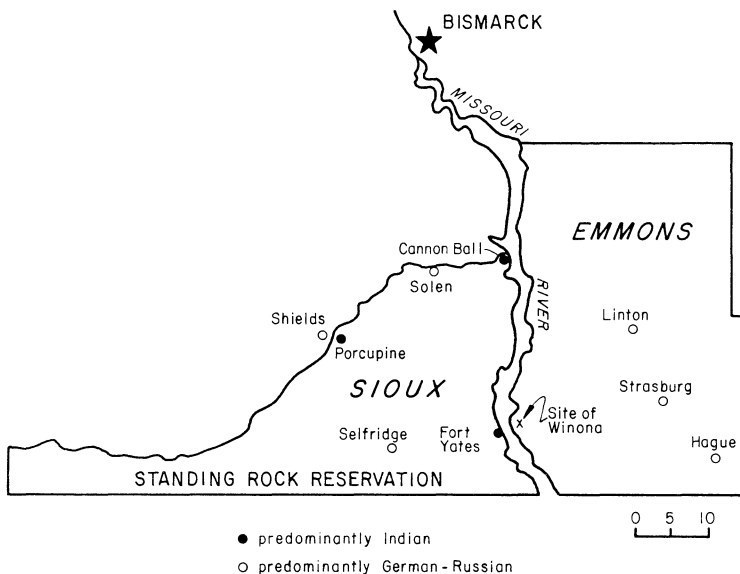


FIG. 2. Sioux County in south-central North Dakota encompasses the upper portion of the Standing Rock Reservation. Emmons County, located on the east side of the Missouri River, is one of the oldest German-Russian settlement areas in the state.

known because of their homogeneous character and strong reliance on the German language to be exceptionally conservative.

The hunger for land was so strong among some German Russians that in order to obtain it they were willing to make their homes in a predominantly Plains Indian setting. This is all the more surprising when one remembers that the German Russians' perception of Indians was largely a negative one, shaped by two events that occurred in the latter nineteenth century: the so-called Indian Scare of 1890 and the Spicer Tragedy of 1897.

The Indian Scare of 1890 was precipitated by a rumor among the German Russians and other settlers in Dakota Territory that Sitting Bull and a number of armed Sioux had crossed the Missouri to attack white families. The rumor reflected the anxiety of many settlers who were concerned about Sioux involvement in the Ghost Dance movement. On 20 November 1890, reports of the pending massacre forced hundreds of German-Russian families to bundle up their children, arm themselves with pitchforks and hammers, and flee by wagon and on foot to Eureka and other settlements. Although the rumor was unsubstantiated, German Russians kept memories of the incident alive in numerous family stories that persist to the present day.¹¹

In February 1897, six members of the Thomas Spicer family were found murdered at their farmstead near the prairie town of Winona in Emmons County. Although the Spicers were Anglo-American, many German Russians in the surrounding area reacted to the incident as if the victims were their own. The site of the Spicer tragedy was located directly opposite the Standing Rock Reservation headquarters of Fort Yates. Five young Indian men stood accused of the crime but due to the tense climate of the time, the defendants were unable to receive a fair trial. In November 1897, three of the men were dragged from their jail cells and hanged by an angry mob of white citizens. The Spicer tragedy and the lynchings served as unfortunate symbols of strained Indian-white relations in south-central North

Dakota for decades.¹²

Memories of the Indian Scare of 1890 and the Spicer incident were still fresh in the minds of many German Russians when settlers first moved onto the Standing Rock Reservation in the early 1900s. According to informants, the farewell parties for early German Russians who moved into the Sioux country from nearby settlements resembled the tearful affairs that characterized the great immigration to *Amerika* itself. Even though the miles that separated the Sioux County German Russians from their kinsmen often were few, the decision to settle on an Indian reservation was not always supported by all family members. In some cases, German Russians immigrated to Sioux County directly from Russia, especially after other relatives had established themselves on or near the reservation.

The German Russians' first encounter with the Indians on the Standing Rock Reservation was typically a memorable and a pleasant one. After having heard so many negative things about the Indians, the German Russians were astonished to find that the Sioux were gracious and generous hosts. Quite often, these initial encounters were the beginnings of warm and life-long relationships between the older Indians and the German-Russian immigrants. Although neither group was likely to be able to converse in English upon first meeting, they nonetheless managed to communicate via gestures and respectful lapses of silence.

The Indians who first looked upon the German Russians must have been puzzled by these latest land seekers. The German-Russian men wore long, fur-lined coats and high Cossack-style boots while the women were seldom seen without their black head shawls and embroidered aprons. To the Sioux, the German-Russian settlers clearly were different from most other *was'icun* (whites) in aspects other than just their appearance. Many Sioux called the German-speaking immigrants *Eyasi-ca* (literally Bad Talkers), perhaps in reference to their strange and harsh-sounding patterns of speech. Eventually, the Indians referred to the Germans from Russia and their descen-

dants as "Rooshuns."

SIOUX INFLUENCES ON THE GERMAN RUSSIANS

A number of writers have argued that the German Russians, because of the privileged status and closed colony existence they enjoyed in pre-Revolution Russia, were able to cultivate and preserve a pure German culture.¹³ It is indeed remarkable how much Germanic language and folklore the German Russians held onto while living for generations as a minority group in Russia. Yet it is quite erroneous to assume that the German Russians were able to keep their culture free of outside influences. Indeed, the foodways, dialects, and material folk culture of the German Russians reflect an ample share of Russian, Ukrainian, Moldavian, and Tatar influence.

In similar fashion, the German Russians who settled in the New World were influenced by the various settings in which they found themselves, ranging from the bush country of west-central Saskatchewan to the subtropical pampas of Argentina. Everywhere they settled, the German Russians borrowed freely in an attempt to better adapt to their physical and sociocultural surroundings. The Black Sea Germans who put down roots on the Standing Rock Reservation were certainly no exception.

The degree of Plains Indian influence on the German-Russian settlers in Sioux County is difficult to assess for two reasons. First, the German Russians who made their homes on the reservation were determined to retain their ethnic identity just as they had in Russia and in the more homogeneous settlements of North Dakota. They were not a self-selected or romantically-inclined group who, dissatisfied with their own heritage, readily sought to embrace another culture. Even when Indian influences were evident, many German Russians tended to brush them off as superficial or unimportant. Second, the degree to which German Russians were influenced by their Sioux hosts varied enormously from individual

to individual. Those German Russians who settled in predominantly non-Indian communities on the reservation (for example, Solen and Selfridge) generally were less exposed to the surrounding Sioux culture. Other German Russians, who lived or worked with Indian people daily, obviously were much more influenced by Sioux ways. Thus, the acculturative extremes ranged from German Russians who spoke fluent Lakota (or Dakota) to others who were unusually xenophobic and resisted social contact with tribal members. Those German Russians who became intimately familiar with the Indians invariably served as cultural brokers. These individuals, who underwent a secondary enculturation of sorts, served a key role in interpreting not only the Sioux language but various aspects of Sioux culture itself.

Many German Russians who settled on the reservation were largely unfamiliar with American norms and values. Having come directly from either Russia or solidly German-Russian communities in North Dakota, the settlers struggled to learn the strange ways of their adopted country. In Sioux County, early German Russians soon discovered that the local government and few places of business were dominated by a small but powerful Anglo-American minority. Like the older Indians, many German Russians had to point to various food items upon entering a store and quite often both "Long Hairs" and "dumb Rooshuns" were the targets of local jokes. Such an informal social hierarchy did much to strengthen the friendships that existed between early German Russians and Sioux Indians.

One institution that was of crucial importance in continually bringing together German-Russian and Indian people on the reservation was the Catholic Church. For the German Russians, the church simultaneously had reinforced both their ethnic and religious identity. In Russia, Roman Catholicism accentuated the religious differences that separated Black Sea German Catholics from Protestant German-speaking colonists, Orthodox Russian

peasants, and Muslim Tatars. But in Sioux County, the Catholic church proved to be a mutual meeting ground for different cultures. Due to the influence of the church, many Catholic German Russians and Sioux Indians worshipped together, celebrated important religious feast days, and mourned each other's dead.

Two of the most noteworthy figures in the early Catholic history of the Standing Rock Reservation were Fathers Bernard Strassmaier (1861–1940) and Francis Gerschwyler (1859–1946) (fig.3).¹⁴ Both priests were European-born, Benedictine missionaries who were fluent not only in German but in the Sioux language. According to a few grizzled Sioux County settlers, the priests were instrumental in encouraging many Catholic German-Russian families to settle on the reservation. The religious services that the two Benedictines conducted on the reservation are vividly remembered by many Sioux County individu-

als who grew up before the Second World War. One German Russian recalled:

Oh, I'll never forget Fr. Bernard and the way he said Mass. Of course it was all in Latin in those days. But when it came time for the sermon, he preached in English and in German and in Sioux. We sat there for more than three hours until Mass got over! Oh, it was something. And then there was always a lot of [hymn] singing in the Indian language. It was great. I always thought German singing was nice but Indian singing was even prettier.

While many Sioux Indians who attended Catholic services in the early 1900s were still undergoing active missionization, German Russians were scarcely immune to clerical criticism regarding their failure fully to embrace official religion. Indeed, German-Russian Catholics in North Dakota were some-



FIG. 3. Father Bernard Strassmaier (middle row, left) poses with a group of Sioux and German-Russian parishioners at Fort Yates, North Dakota, circa 1930. Courtesy Frank Fiske Collection and State Historical Society of North Dakota.

times subject to such extreme measures as excommunication and even interdict. In 1909, when a priest's home was riddled with bullets and another Catholic clergyman, north of the Standing Rock Reservation, was left without fuel by his "devoted" German-Russian parishioners, the Irish-American bishop in Fargo angrily responded in a public statement. The prelate denounced the belligerent German Russian of the western prairies as an "ignorant hoodlum" with "strange, barbaric notions" whose "voice in Russia was as low as the angleworm's whistle to its mate, who in the presence of his 250-pound wife is humbler than Uriah Heep, and . . . [who] is a despicable cur, so vile that all the dictionaries of all the languages spoken in North Dakota have no words to describe him."¹⁵ Needless to say, the hotly worded statement did little to assure the bishop an equally warm place in the hearts of Catholic German Russians on the northern plains.

Due to the tricultural nature of the Catholic church in early day Sioux County, many German Russians became familiar with basic prayers and hymns in Lakota as well as in German and English. The settlers took such linguistic diversity for granted since it was reflected in so many other aspects of daily life on the reservation. Even among those German Russians who were unable to converse in the Sioux language, the use of certain Indian expressions and terms became relatively common. Lakota and Dakota loan words that were picked up by German-Russians on the Standing Rock Reservation included: *waste* (good); *śica* (bad); *kola* (friend); *mniskuya* (salt); *yamnumnuġapi* (pepper); *mazaska* (money); *witko* (foolish); *canteskuya* (sweetheart); *canli'iyopemni* (cigarette); *mazopiye* (store); *winakanye* (threshing machine); *ieska* (an individual of mixed blood), and many others.¹⁶ Sioux nicknames occasionally were given individual German Russians, and the recipients took special pride in their new appellations, no matter how unflattering they might be. ("You didn't get an Indian name unless you were liked," one informant observed.) A German Russian who

built a cellar, for example, was seen digging in his yard and thereafter was known as "Pispiza" (Prairie Dog). A Black Sea German woman on the reservation who was of slender build was called "Capunka" (Mosquito). And a German-Russian craftsman who fashioned wrought-iron cemetery crosses and other metal items was known as "Mazakaġa" (Makes Iron or Blacksmith).

Just as the German Russians added Sioux words to their trilingual vocabulary, they also coined German language expressions and proverbs that dealt with Indian-white relations on the reservation. Of the older Indians who had befriended them, the German-Russian immigrants often said "*Die Indianer sin' so erlich wie der Dag lang is*" (The Indians are as true as the day is long). Friendships among Indians and whites cemented ties not only between individuals but between peoples, as attested to by the saying "*Wenn ein Indianer dein' Freind is', dann sin' alle Indianer deine Freinde*" (When one Indian is your friend, all Indians are your friends).

The material folk culture of the Sioux County German Russians also was influenced by their Indian neighbors. Log buildings were erected by some Black Sea German families who constructed them in the style of the low-roofed dwellings inhabited by so many Sioux residents. The structures usually were built of peeled logs hauled from the river bottoms which were later chinked with a native clay and straw mixture. While not always used as the family's central living quarters, log buildings were utilized for many purposes by the settlers. Log construction was entirely new to the Black Sea Germans, a people who traditionally erected *Batse* (sun-dried clay brick) structures both in Russia and on the American prairies.¹⁷

German-Russian foodways on the Standing Rock Reservation incorporated a number of Sioux practices. Instead of stashing squash and pumpkins in their granaries for winter use, some German Russians dried these garden products much as they had watched Plains Indian women do. Corn was preserved in a

similar manner. According to a few "old timers" in Sioux County, it was not uncommon to see *wastunkala* (ears of corn) hanging out to dry in front of German-Russian homes. Many wild food stuffs were harvested by the settlers, including various plants and tubers that generally were unappreciated by non-Indians. German Russians learned how to dig and prepare *tinpsila* (wild turnips) and these proved of particular value during the lean years. To their astonishment, the German Russians and the Sioux discovered that besides their mutual fondness for massive amounts of black coffee, they shared two ethnic dishes that were strikingly similar in taste and appearance: Indian "fry bread" and *Kiechla*, as well as *wojapi* and *Mus* (stewed fruit).

A few native plants were used by German Russians on the reservation to treat health disorders. Whether or not these were originally introduced by the Sioux to the early settlers remains uncertain. Most German Russians, particularly those of the immigrant generation, preferred to doctor themselves rather than to seek professional help. Yet, since they came from the steppes of South Russia, the settlers lacked the knowledge of native plant life that the Indians so richly possessed. Some German-Russian families on the reservation prepared teas made from cedar and chokecherry bark to treat colds and congestion, remedies that are not known among Germans from Russia elsewhere. A few informants commented that many efficacious plants grew along the banks of the Missouri (for example, certain varieties of "blackweed" and wild mint) but that these were destroyed by the Oahe Reservoir in the 1960s. No evidence was found that German Russians took advantage of Sioux supernatural healing practices. One reason for this may be that most German Russians had access to their own secret body of occult folk medicine (an ancient form of healing by incantation called "Brauche").¹⁸ Midwifery was an important skill known to both groups and there were instances of German-Russian children delivered by Sioux midwives and vice versa.

The recreational habits of the German

Russians who lived on the Standing Rock Reservation were very different from those of their ethnic kinsmen living in other areas of the Great Plains. Many young German Russians learned how to play *tabkapsicapi* (the Sioux version of shinny), usually from their Indian playmates. Because the German Russians who settled in Sioux County had to adapt to a diversified farming economy, a dependence on livestock and part-time ranching developed. As a result of this new adaptive strategy, German Russians became familiar with many facets of the equestrian subculture. Both Indians and German Russians competed in neighborhood saddle bronc contests and community rodeos. During the long winter months, it was not uncommon for Indians and whites to gather periodically for informal get-togethers. German Russians and Sioux Indians learned how to perform the intricate routines of the square dance, and individuals from both groups sometimes served as callers. German Russians taught the tribal members how to waltz and polka, and the Indians reciprocated by teaching Black Sea Germans the *kahomni wacipi* and *maštinca wacipi* (Sioux social dances). German-Russian families frequently went to local powwows on the Standing Rock Reservation and in some instances they acted as more than interested spectators. A few German Russians, particularly those better acquainted with Sioux traditions, participated in "giveaways" and honoring dances (fig. 4).

German Russians and Sioux Indians also celebrated important holidays and religious feast days together. At times, the festivities included a diverse mixture of Indian, old country, and Anglo-American elements. Christmas, New Year's, and the Fourth of July were key examples of celebrations that sometimes had tricultural characteristics. Memorial Day was new to the German Russians and the lavish way in which it was celebrated by the early Sioux undoubtedly influenced the folkways of the watchful immigrants. Early German Russians were impressed by the beautiful paper flowers, beadwork pieces, and food offerings that were displayed on Sioux



FIG. 4. Indians and non-Indians gather for a celebrative dance outside the "Big Store" in Fort Yates, North Dakota, circa 1910. Courtesy Frank Fiske Collection and State Historical Society of North Dakota.

graves. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that in the opinion of visiting Black Sea Germans, their relatives in Sioux County "went way out" in colorfully decorating family grave sites on Memorial Day.

The influence that the Standing Rock Sioux exerted on the value system and ideational culture of the German Russians is especially difficult to determine. Yet several German-Russian informants felt the ways of their immigrant parents and grandparents were influenced by the Sioux, especially in regard to generosity. "If you were a friend, an Indian would never hesitate to give the shirt off his back to you," one observer commented. Countless stories are told of Sioux acts of kindness towards local German Russians, especially during the devastating Depression years. German Russians living in neighboring Emmons County were puzzled by their kinsmen on the reservation who, while often

much poorer, were always willing to share the meager resources they had. Among Sioux County German Russians, the word *geizig* (stingy) ranked at the top of undesirable personal traits.

In their social relations with the Indians, the German Russians noted that Sioux acquaintances "did not spend a lot of their time talking about other people." German Russians also were surprised by the loving, respectful manner in which Sioux elders treated the very young. One German-Russian informant, who claimed that Indian child-rearing had influenced the way in which he dealt with his own offspring, said:

The whites was in their glory when they could beat one of their kids up! At least my old man was. And [the German Russians were awful bad] when it came to beating up their children. . . . You never saw the Indi-

ans spank their kids. They talked real nice to 'em, real polite. And their kids grew up that way.

The cultural gap between early German-Russian immigrants and the Sioux Indians was bridged somewhat by the mutual sense of a tragic past the two groups possessed. Both peoples discovered that Russian manifestoes and U.S. treaties were only as good as the governments that honored them. And both groups could relate to war and suffering in intensely personal ways. "We had our massacres, too," an embittered German-Russian patriarch explained to me in 1982, and he then proceeded to recite lines from a long poem by Black Sea German poet Georg Rath. The piece dealt with a 1919 incident in Selz, Russia (the ancestral colony of several Sioux County German-Russian families), in which eighty-

seven unarmed Black Sea Germans and their parish priest were machine-gunned by the Bolsheviks and then thrown into a mass grave.¹⁹

Among those German Russians who learned the Lakota language, tribal legends often were heard and appreciated in the original vernacular. These narratives ranged from accounts about Indian-white conflicts during the late 1800s to stories that were tied to important landmarks. One Lakota-speaking German Russian, in commenting on the sacred rock formation at Fort Yates that gave the reservation its name, explained:

The old Indians, they said that a long time ago there was this woman who wasn't getting along with her husband. When the Indians moved camp, she refused to go with them. She just stayed sitting there. The



FIG. 5. Sioux Catholics pose in front of the Inyan Woslata (Standing Rock) monument, Fort Yates, North Dakota, 1933. Courtesy Frank Fiske Collection and State Historical Society of North Dakota.

Indians went on but they came back for her a little later. The woman had turned to stone . . . completely to stone. Yah, that's what the old Indians said. They claimed it was a fact.²⁰

Perhaps the story of *Inyan Woslata* was one the German Russians could easily relate to because it paralleled the biblical episode about Lot's disobedient wife. Or maybe the story reminded the Sioux County German Russians that—like the Indian woman who became the Standing Rock—they also had severed ties with their people and were forever changed.

The outstanding difference, however, that always stood between the German-Russian immigrants and the early Sioux was in their attitude toward land. To the Germans from Russia, the European steppes and the American prairies were of little use unless they were periodically turned upside down and carpeted with wheat. No matter how many times Standing Rock Sioux individuals tried to inculcate in the German Russians some understanding of the sanctity of land, such efforts were inevitably futile. During the Dust Bowl era, as determined German-Russian families struggled to hold onto their prairie farmsteads, a realization of the fragile land/human relationship did emerge, but it came too late. The black winds of the 1930s claimed whole families and dreams as well as precious topsoil.

CONCLUSION

For those German Russians who remained in Sioux County following the harsh Depression years, there were innumerable changes. German Russians and other whites on the reservation faced a steady population decline. By the early 1950s, Fathers Bernard and Francis were gone, as were many of the original German-Russian settlers and the older Indians who had befriended them. Instead of looking to their Sioux neighbors for guidance, most German Russians in the land of *Inyan Woslata* drew increasingly inward, deriving moral and emotional support primarily from

one another. Nonetheless, in 1961, a white resident of a primarily German-Russian town on the reservation would write of its history: "The Sioux have exerted a strong influence on many facets of living in our community. It will continue to be so, for each race has much to teach the other."²¹

The German Russians who settled on the Standing Rock Reservation during the early 1900s provide an illustrative example of Indian-white interaction within one narrowly defined area. Yet the influence of Plains Indian culture on reservation whites and other Euro-Americans is a subject that sorely requires more investigation and in-depth, systematic research. Contemporary scholars might do well to remember the words of Blue Thunder, a Sioux spokesman, who told a missionary on the Standing Rock Reservation in 1918:

The white people have become a great people in this island and in all the world because they were wise enough not to throw away the native plants and foods that were made by Holy Mother Earth especially for this island. . . . The white people have built this great nation on good ground prepared by Indians before the white people came, and this nation cannot be considered separate from the old Indian customs.²²

NOTES

The author gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of his informants, many of whom requested anonymity. Their insights and recollections proved of inestimable value. Mary Louise Defender Wilson and Raymond J. DeMallie deserve special thanks for their help in clarifying certain Lakota/Dakota terms. This essay is dedicated to the memory of "Mazakağa" (Louis Snider, 1901–1987).

1. For noteworthy exceptions, see John W. Bennett, *Northern Plainsmen: Adaptive Strategy and Agrarian Life* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: AHM Pub. Co., 1969); Niels Winther Braroe, *Indian and White: Self-Image and Interaction in a Canadian Plains Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); and David H. Stymiest, *Ethnics and Indians: Social Relations in a Northwestern Ontario Town* (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1975).

2. Background sources on Fort Yates and the Standing Rock Reservation include Edward W. Milligan, *Dakota Twilight: The Standing Rock Sioux, 1874-1890* (Hicksville, N.Y.: Exposition Press, 1976); Darrell DeLong, "A History of Fort Yates," (Masters Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1956); Emma Jean Blue Earth, et al., *Iyan Woslate Wo'oyake: A Standing Rock History* (Fort Yates, N.D.: Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, 1977); and U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Fact Sheet on Standing Rock Reservation* (Aberdeen, S.D., 1970).
3. See, for example, May E. Hinton, *South of the Cannonball: A History of Sioux, the War Bonnet County* (Grand Forks, N.D.: Washburn Printing, n.d.), p. 40.
4. Michael L. Lawson, "The Oahe Dam and the Standing Rock Sioux," *South Dakota History* 6 (Spring 1976): 227-228. Also, see Lawson's *Dammed Indians: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944-1980* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982).
5. "Standing Rock Sioux: Trying to Build a New Way of Life on [the] Reservation," *Bismarck Tribune*, 23 October 1981, p. 7.
6. William C. Sherman, *Prairie Mosaic: An Ethnic Atlas of Rural North Dakota* (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1983), pp. 9-22.
7. George Rath, *The Black Sea Germans in the Dakotas* (Freeman, S.D.: Pine Hill Press, 1977), pp. 52-57.
8. Joseph S. Height, *Paradise on the Steppe* (Bismarck: North Dakota Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1972), p. 245. Also see Adolph Schock, *In Quest of Free Land* (San Jose, Calif.: San Jose State College, 1965).
9. Richard Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, trans. by LaVern J. Rippley and Armand Bauer (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1974), pp. 26-28, 36-40.
10. The background of the various German-speaking settlement areas in Russia is discussed in detail by Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev: The Story of Russia's Germans* (Battleford, Saskatchewan: Marian Press, 1974), pp. 112-121.
11. See Walter Essig, "A German from Russia Concept of the Sioux Indian: The Indian Scare of 1890," *Heritage Review* 14 (May 1984): 4-11.
12. See Ellen Woods and Euvagh Wenzel, eds., *Emmons County History* (Linton, N.D.: Emmons County Historical Society, 1976), pp. 25-27.
13. See, for example, George P. Aberle, *From the Steppes to the Prairies* (Bismarck, N.D.: Bismarck Tribune Company, 1963), p. 11.
14. The two priests are briefly discussed by Louis Pfaller, ed., in *The Catholic Church in Western North Dakota* (Mandan, N.D.: Crescent Printing, 1960), pp. 25-27.
15. Bishop James Shanley, *Bulletin of the Diocese of Fargo* 1 (April 1909), p. 18. Also see Louis Pfaller, "Bishop Wehrle and the German Immigrants in North Dakota," *North Dakota History* 29 (Summer 1961), pp. 93-97.
16. Generally, my spelling of Sioux terms conforms to Eugene Buechel, S. J., *A Dictionary of the Teton Dakota Sioux Language: Lakota-English, English-Lakota*, edited by Paul Manhart, S. J. (Pine Ridge, S.D.: Red Cloud Indian School, 1970). For a pronunciation guide to Lakota orthography and diacritics, as used by Buechel, see pp. 16-22.
17. See, for example, William C. Sherman, "Prairie Architecture of the Russian-German Settlers, in Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, pp. 185-195.
18. See Timothy J. Klobdanz, "The Tradition of Brauche: Facts versus Fallacies," *Heritage Review* 15 (September 1985): 3-5.
19. Rath's 176-line poem is entitled "Der Tod der Selzer," and appears in his *Klaenge der Seele* (Omaha, Neb.: Tribune Publishing, 1960), pp. 99-103. An English translation of the poem is provided in Joseph S. Height's *Memories of the Black Sea Germans* (Chelsea, Mich.: Associated German-Russian Sponsors, 1979), pp. 236-240.
20. For a Standing Rock Sioux version of this well-known folk narrative, see Marie L. McLaughlin, *Myths and Legends of the Sioux* (1916; rpt. Bismarck, N.D.: Tumbleweed Press, 1974), pp. 40-41. Also see Blue Earth, *Iyan Woslate Wo'oyake*, p. 78.
21. May Hinton, "Early Indian Residents," in Rose Kraft, et al., *Selfridge, North Dakota, 1911-1961* (Selfridge, N.D., 1961), p. 20.
22. Blue Thunder's speech was recorded by Rev. Aaron McGaffey Beede, "The Dakota Victory-Dance," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* 9 (April 1942), p. 169.