

# *Vittles* in the VAST LANE



## *Everlasting Yeast* the main ingredient in *Germans from Russia* food heritage book

By Andrea Winkjer Collin, Editor

A longtime dream of North Dakota's descendants of the Germans from Russia – especially those who have an appreciation for food – is about to come true. It is a cookbook that is more than a collection of recipes. It's a compilation of food customs, culture and traditions that is the first phase of a greater effort its author hopes will produce “everlasting yeast,” to a new generation of Germans from Russia.

*Ewiger Saat*, which in German means “eternal seed” or “everlasting yeast,” a common ingredient in bread dough, is the name of the cookbook. It is a commitment Sue Balcom says her generation has made to preserve the culture of her parents and grandparents.

“I grew up in Gackle as part of the Meidinger and Kase-man families of Wishek, all descendants of the Germans from Russia,” says Balcom. “It wasn't until I went to college that I realized that there were other ethnic groups in North Dakota. We all spoke German and ate German food and married into the other area families.”

Balcom, now of Mandan, has been a textile weaver and photography instructor and newspaper editor. She now promotes sustainable agriculture through FARRMS, a non-profit organization headquartered in Medina. Her current

position includes working on local food system building – a return to more locally grown food and local processing.

“There was a time when all foods came from less than 200 miles, so the connection between this growing interest in local foods and the foodways of Germans from Russia make this an exciting and informa-

tive project,” says Balcom.

Over the years, she has gained a greater appreciation for her family and their traditions. “I have also become more curious about how they prepared food without the conveniences we have today. Our mothers taught our generation how to cook, but I believe we have lost the connection between food, farms and families.”

### **Hungry for knowledge**

She believes she is part of a new generation of cooks hungry for knowledge about baking breads, kuchen and pies; the art of making strudels or dumplings, butter, sauerkraut, watermelon pickles, ice cream, special holiday sweets, dough foods, sausages, head cheese, and pickled pigs feet.

“How did they butcher a hog or chicken? How did they can meat and tomatoes without electricity? How did they garden or forage for native fruits? I had all kinds of questions,” says Balcom. “More than once, and especially after family reunions, I thought I should find the answers and write some of this down.”

Her dream began to fall into place a few years ago when she met the organizers of the newly formed Tri-County Tourism Alliance. Its purpose is to promote the cultural heritage of Logan, Emmons and McIntosh counties, known as North Dakota's Sauerkraut Triangle. They saw a cookbook project as a way to preserve the heritage of this area and raise funds for the Alliance.



Sue Balcom



Balcom and the Alliance joined forces and began their work, aided by a cultural history grant from the State Historical Society of North Dakota and donations from local individuals and businesses that includes Wishek Manufacturing, McIntosh County Bank of Ashley, Security State Bank of Wishek, the Bank of Hazelton, Heartland State Bank of Kulm, First Community Credit Union of Wishek and Napoleon and Stockgrowers Bank of Napoleon.

## Heartwarming stories

Balcom and Carmen Rath-Wald of Napoleon, who heads the Tri-County Tourism Alliance, conducted 15 video interviews and 10 oral interviews from some of the oldest citizens of the area. They also collected photographs, some literally out of trashcans, and more than 100 recipes from others. "The stories are so heartwarming," says Balcom. "More than one made me cry. And, when we wondered about something from one interview, it was often answered in the next one."

For example, when she was interviewing Benjamin and Delphine Vetter and Rose Voller Glas from Linton they talked about everlasting yeast. "Of course, they didn't have any recipes or memory of how that was started. Then a couple weeks later, I was interviewing Donna and Delbert Eszlinger from Ashley and they not only had a recipe for everlasting yeast, but it's handwritten."

It seemed almost like magic, she says. "If someone mentioned homemade soap, then a recipe would show up from another person by email the very next week. Like a puzzle, all the pieces are fitting together nicely."

## Sharing with museums

In addition to being featured in the book, copies of the interviews, photos and recipes will be shared with the museums in Logan, McIntosh and Emmons counties, the State Historical Society and the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at North Dakota State University.

*Ewiger Saatz* will be completed in time to be sold at the 125th anniversary celebration of Ashley June 21 to 23. Balcom also will talk about the book and demonstrate the art of kase kneplha at the national convention of the Germans From Russia Heritage Society July 17 to 21 in Bismarck. Pre-publication orders for the book are now being taken.

Balcom, who has been no stranger to interesting projects in her lifetime, says compiling this book has been "the most rewarding thing I have ever done. I have met some very unique and delightful individuals whose stories would likely have died with them had we not visited. So while we call this a cookbook it is no less than the stories of these peoples' lives focusing mainly on food."



### MARINATED ONIONS

Recipe from Arlys' Kitchen Secrets  
by Arlys Acherman, 2008.

#### INGREDIENTS:

1/4 cup vinegar  
1/3 cup sugar  
4-5 medium onions, sliced thin  
1/2 cup cooking oil

### NOODLE COLESLOW

Recipe submitted by Mary Rohrich, Zeeland  
A little different twist on coleslaw.

#### INGREDIENTS:

1 bag of coleslaw mix  
1 large cucumber peeled and diced  
1 green pepper diced  
1/2 red or white onion diced  
1 cup celery diced  
1 1/2 oz. box of ring macaroni

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Ashley's 125th Anniversary celebration**  
**June 21 to 23**

[www.ashley-nd.com/quasquicentennial\\_21.html](http://www.ashley-nd.com/quasquicentennial_21.html)

**Germans from Russia Heritage Society Convention**  
**Bismarck, July 17 to 21**

<http://www.grhs.org/>

**Tri-County Tourism Alliance**

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### Pre-publication orders for *Ewiger Saatz*

The Tri-County Tourism Alliance is accepting pre-publication orders for *Ewiger Saatz*. The 12-inch by 12-inch hardcover color book has 120 pages and includes interviews with area Germans from Russia descendants and more than 100 recipes.

The pre-publication price through May 30 is \$65, which includes taxes and shipping to U.S. address only. Contact the Alliance for actual shipping costs out of the country.

After May 30, the book will sell for \$75, plus \$15 tax and shipping. For anyone wishing to pick up a pre-ordered book at the Ashley 125th Celebration booth, the price is \$55, tax included. Please indicate this on the check.

Send orders to: Tri-County Tourism Alliance, Attention, Carmen Rath-Wald, NDSU Extension Service Logan County, 301 Broadway, Napoleon, ND 58561. Make checks payable to Tri-County Tourism Alliance/Book.

The books will be shipped sometime around June 21.

As is the case in many families, she wishes her grandparents would have talked more about their lives before they died. "Through this project I have grown to appreciate them even more. This is the chance for my generation of descendants of these people to now provide the everlasting yeast to keep our culture alive."

