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## The German-Russian Brauche

Dawn Schock

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THE GERMAN-RUSSIAN  
BRAUCHE

by  
Dawn Schock

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
University of North Dakota  
Honors Program Committee  
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### Abstract

The thesis is a study of German-Russian Brauche--an alternative system of healing which exists in south-central North Dakota. The text is divided into two sections: a history of the German-Russian people, compiled from written sources; and a description and discussion of Brauche which relies extensively on personal interviews (included in the appendix) with Mrs. Eva Iszler, a practicing Brauche in Ashley, North Dakota.

The history of the German-Russian people is characterized by two major migrations: from Germany to Russia, and from Russia to the United States. Because these migrations were en masse and because the group has had to encounter three different environments they have tended to form enclaves and have, therefore, managed to uphold old traditions.

One of these traditions is Brauche, a medicine which deals with both the spiritual and physical aspects of the patient by combining the use of physical curing agents with religious verses. Because Brauche, like many other alternative medical systems, does for the patient what he/she expects within the specific cultural context, it is successful.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT. . . . .	
TABLE OF CONTENTS . . . . .	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	3
INTRODUCTION. . . . .	4
CHAPTER I. HISTORY OF THE GERMAN-RUSSIAN PEOPLE . . . . .	6
II. THE BRAUCHE . . . . .	20
CONCLUSION. . . . .	34
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEWS WITH MRS. EVA ISZLER	
Interview #1 - March, 1979 . . . . .	35
Interview #2 - December, 1978 . . . . .	44
APPENDIX B. MRS. ISZLER'S BRAUCHE CURES . . . . .	48
APPENDIX C. MAPS	
Map of Russia . . . . .	50
Map of North Dakota . . . . .	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	52

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On February 3, 1979 Ed Odenbach, the last citizen of Greenway, South Dakota, died and with him went the legacy of a community's entire history. One week later his father--my great-grandfather--Fred Odenbach of Eureka, South Dakota passed away at ninety-seven taking with him the rich tales I heard as a child; tales that spanned a remarkable lifetime of memories--traveling across the plains in covered wagons, running from Indians as a child, playing beside the sod house. It is of little wonder that my great-grandfather was skeptical of the first moon walk, so great was the volume of drastic change he was expected to assimilate during his life. Yet the story of his life and of those of his German-Russian compatriots is one of confronting change. For, unlike most ethnic, national groups found in the United States, the German-Russians have had three homelands--Germany, Russia and the United States. In each they have found different circumstances, different environments--physical, cultural, political--in which they strove to preserve their traditions against the inevitable processes of adaptation and cultural diffusion. As a result many of the older traditions can still be found in German-Russian communities in North Dakota, but the effects of those inevitable processes are rapidly making themselves apparent.

This transition from the old to the new is heralded by some as progress long overdue. Others simply feel a nostalgic sadness at the passing of a less complicated way of life. It is important to get beyond these superficial responses, to reach a more comprehensive understanding of this, or any other, people, in order to glean from their

story those elements which may be of value to us. We have all acknowledged some of these elements in our pioneer ancestors: their courage, their devout faith, honesty and stability. To this list I also add German-Russian Brauche--a type of healing that encompasses more than just the physical patient. In these days of western movements toward a "holistic" medicine and of exploratory glances toward other cultures to find ways of broadening our medical perspectives, a study of Brauche seems particularly fitting.

## HISTORY OF THE GERMAN-RUSSIAN PEOPLE

A good deal of controversy exists among scholars and lay persons as to the proper nomenclature for the ethnic group referred to in this paper as the German-Russians. Sallet uses the term Russian-German; the group members, in their native dialects, use the term Ruszlaender--distinct from their characterization of Russians, Stock-russen (Gold 1967, p. 3). Due to the strong identification of this group with its earliest cultural milieu, i.e. that of Germany, and because of a certain amount of ire generated in some members at the dominant positioning of "Russian" in Russian-German, I have chosen to use the most commonly accepted (in my experiences) translation of Ruszlaender--German-Russian.

No doubt exists, however, concerning the recognition of this group as distinct from German or Russian immigrants. Indeed, it is necessary to spend only a small amount of time in a German-Russian community to realize the strong feelings of pride and group-consciousness held by the people. Transplanted from their native Germany to the steppes of Russia, only to move again to the United States, this group provides excellent source material for an examination of the dynamics involved in cultural adaptation and change. Always an important aspect of change, particularly in the case of the German-Russians, is a consideration of those elements which remain unchanged. These provide the key to an understanding of the basic value system of a people; to that underlying framework which permeates the lives



of individuals marking them as members of a distinct community.

One attribute commonly assigned to German-Russians in the United States is a reluctance, bordering on an inability, to be assimilated into the surrounding culture. As will be demonstrated in a later discussion of the development of a German-Russian medical system, this hasn't always been the case. In those instances where the generalization does hold true, however, it is enlightening to survey the history of this people and, in this way, come to an understanding of the dynamics involved in the instillation and maintenance of those adhered-to values which may have hindered the assimilation process.

Although the German-Russians in the United States have represented a rather small segment of the total population (305,522 in 1920) relative to the proportion represented by certain other ethnic minorities, the group itself is somewhat segmented according to historical experiences. Labeling the segments along the lines of their locations in Russia, Sallet lists eight subgroups: 1) the Baltic Germans; 2) the Lithuanian Germans; 3) the Polish and Volhynian Germans; 4) the Petersburg Germans; 5) the Volga Germans; 6) the Germans in Transcaucasia; 7) the Germans in the other parts of European and Asiatic Russia and, the focus of this study 8) the Black Sea Germans (Sallet 1974, p. 19). This last group can be divided further into the Evangelical and Catholic Black Sea Germans. The histories of these two divisions are, for the most part, similar. Wherever a discrepancy is encountered, however, I will emphasize the circumstances particular to the Evangelical segment.

Although there were previous, isolated incidents of German-Russian

migration to the United States, the mass immigration of this group didn't begin until 1872-73 (Sallet 1974, p. 22). Between that period and the years of World War I, over 300,000 German-Russians entered the United States. 96,000 of those were Black Sea colonists most of whom eventually settled in North and South Dakota (Gold 1967, p. 17). As immigrants they were not radically different from their ethnically-diverse counterparts. Subjected to the discomforts of ocean travel as it existed at that time and to the well-known horrors associated with Ellis Island, the immigrants clung to their often meager material possessions (there are cases, however, in which some German-Russian families managed to bring substantial amounts of money), to their memories of previous modes of existence, and to their dreams of transplanting those modes in their new environments. This process of transplantation was not new to the German-Russians, for they came from a people long beset by the problem of trying to create an existence, an identity in the face of confrontation with new and different cultural environments.

Four separate waves of German emigration to Russia occurred between 1533 and 1842. The first of these was initiated by Ivan the Terrible (1533-1584) for the purpose of developing the city of Moscow with the aid of trained German professionals - merchants, technicians and scholars. The second group of Germans settled in Petersburg as part of Peter the Great's (1672-1725) program of developing a Window to the West. The third and most substantial migration of Germans took place under the auspices of the German-born and raised Catherine the Great (1762-1796). In order to attract large numbers of Germans to cultivate unused land and to serve as western models for the Russian

peasants, Catherine issued two invitations to the potential immigrants: a relatively unsuccessful one in 1762 and a second Manifesto on July 22, 1763. In response to the enticing promises of the Second Manifesto, e.g. religious liberty, equality with native Russians, exemption from military service and from taxes for ten years, a significant number of Germans left for the Russian Volga region (Sallet 1974, pp. 8-10).

Following the examples of his predecessors, Alexander I (1801-1825) again adopted the idea of using German immigrants to settle the land and "civilize" the nomadic Tartars native to a region transferred from Turkish to Russian rule as a result of the Treaty of Jassy (1792). This section of land extending from Astrakhan to the Dnieper River (later extended to include the rest of Caucasus and Bessarabia) represented a potentially productive agricultural area - if only that potential could be realized (Sherman 1970, p. 24). Even upon the introduction of the "more civilized" sheep and goat herders from nearby Balkan countries the nomadic Tartars of the region failed to reach the desired production level (Voeller 1940, pp. 14-15). Alexander's plan, then, was to import experienced farmers and trained artisans from Germany. Where Catherine sought the goal of large numbers of Germans to settle the Volga region, Alexander looked for smaller quantity and higher quality of training in his future immigrants. Instead of issuing a Manifesto to the whole German population Alexander, in 1804, began employing Russian agents and ambassadors to establish recruiting stations in major German cities (Sallet 1974, p. 11). These agents offered this program to qualified Germans:

1. 162 acres to each family
2. religious freedom

3. exemption from military service
4. monetary loans and grants for expansion and improvement
5. some exemptions from taxation
6. right to establish and run their own schools
7. limited self-government
8. right to leave Russia after payment of debts
9. advance payment for ships and transport vehicles (Sallet 1974, p. 11; Sherman 1970, p. 22).

The Germans, in turn, had to meet certain minimum standards in order to qualify for the program: only families were to be accepted and then only 200 families per year; a minimum cash-property requirement of 300 guilders had to be met; families whose male heads were farmers were preferred although some tradesmen and artisans were necessary (Sallet 1974, p. 11; Sherman 1970, pp. 24,25; Voeller 1940, pp. 14,15). Several groups in Germany took advantage of Alexander's offer. Some Mennonites already located in Danzig in West Prussia continued their migration along the Dnieper River to the Black Sea area. Catholic colonies were established in the area in 1808-1809 by colonists from the Palatinate, Alsace and North Baden. Between 1804 and 1810 a substantial number of the "Auswanderer" moved from Wurttemberg to the district of Odessa to establish both Evangelical and Catholic colonies. Bessarabia was settled between 1814-1842 and the Caucasus in 1817-1818 (Sallet 1974, pp. 11-12). Alexander's plan was a success and by 1897 there were 1,790,489 Germans in Russia. In the Black Sea region this population was 45% Evangelical, 35% Catholic, and 20% Mennonite (Sallet 1974, p. 13). Yet the promises of the Russian government weren't the only incentives which led to the great "Auswanderung", to the breaking

of ties with family, friends and homeland.

Gold in her thesis, German-Russians in North Dakota, says the Germans emigrated because they had lost faith in their Fatherland (Gold 1967, p. 9). Perhaps this was the case. Those coming from the Alsace-Lorraine region certainly had historical reason enough to lose that faith in their Fatherland and even question which was their Fatherland--Germany or France. Judging, however, from the stubborn and proud adherence of the German-Russians to their German cultural background--an adherence that persists even today--it would seem that it was not a loss of faith which caused these people to move but rather the unfortunate circumstances of their historical period. The wars with Napoleon made life in southwestern Germany extremely difficult at this time. During the wars, Napoleon's soldiers had to be housed; after the wars jobs were scarce. Wartime plundering and taxation increased the poverty of the German citizens. Baden, Bavaria, Wurttemberg and Alsace were the hardest hit (Gold 1967, p. 6; Voeller 1940, p. 15). The weather in 1816 was disasterous and mice and floods took their toll on the all-important crops. In most cases, then, Alexander's decree provided much needed hope for a better future; in some cases it provided the only hope.

As can be expected, the journey from Germany to Russia was a trying one, as were the early years in the new colonies. Most of the Black Sea Germans traveled down the Danube in rafts to the Black Sea and there switched to overland routes leading to their acquired lands (Sallet 1974, p. 12). Their introduction to the vast, grassy plains of the Russian steppes was a shocking one for the German immigrants accustomed to the trees of their native southwestern Germany (Sherman

1974, p. 185). Out of their element with no wood to build homes, the immigrants turned to their Russian neighbors and government for example and assistance. For the first settlers the resulting abodes were nothing more than rough dugouts covered with branches, reeds or turf gathered along riverbanks and marshlands (Sallet 1974, p. 186; Voeller 1940, p. 30). As more settlers arrived and as those already there became more adept at dealing with the new surroundings, the dwellings came to be constructed above ground. These simple homes were still built mostly of clay although some rock, and later wood, was used for the walls. The exterior was always white-washed to lend a stucco appearance. As the lifestyles of the colonists stabilized, the houses, of course, became larger than the earlier make-shift structures designed for basic survival. Rooms were added to the permanent homes for the housing and storage of animals and grains, as well as for the comfort of the family (Sherman 1974, pp. 187, 188). These buildings mimicked exactly the type formally known by the settlers in their part of Germany (Sallet 1974, p. 14).

In the Black Sea region none of these homes were constructed in isolation. Rather, all of the families lived in villages formed along both sides of one, straight, main road about 100 yards wide (Sallet 1974, p. 13). These villages played a central economic and cultural role in the lives of the inhabitants who, in the early days of settlement, literally survived only through community effort. "Thus the village was all important and the individual had his identity through the community." (Sallet 1974, p. 7).

Village life, both physical and social, centered around the church-- often one of the first buildings erected. While the inhabitants

of the primary (mother) colonies and, more frequently of their later off-shoots-- the daughter colonies, may have represented a mixture of geographic German origins, it was rare that any one village was inter-denominational. Religious affiliation took precedence over all other considerations in the make-up of village populations (Sallet 1974, p. 12). During the first stages of village development, the minister or priest was both a figure of religious and civil authority -- encouraging improvement and often accepting the duty of educating the young. Alone in a new, strange and often-times hostile environment, it was only natural that the colonists should cling to aspects of a familiar lifestyle and culture; only natural they should wish to pass what they knew of the world on to their children. For this reason the colonists preferred only German clergymen-- a fact which both reflected and strengthened the adherence to the German way of life. All religious services were conducted in German. The schools, because they were under the control of the villages, also came to perpetuate the culture-- again, only German was heard. Only those few who extended their basic education by going on to Russian schools learned to speak any Russian. The rest of the villagers' Russian vocabulary consisted only of terms needed for business transactions with their neighbors (Voeller 1940, pp. 19-29). The songs, prayers, yarns and fairytales shared in the homes were, of course, in German. They were also the same as those sung and told at the same time in similar homes in Germany.

The German-Russians, then, attempted, first, to preserve their religion and, connected with that, their language. Out of their need for survival a community consciousness grew strong in their minds. These, however, are just a few cultural aspects which were taken from

Germany, nurtured in Russia and brought to the United States.

Others can be found in an examination of those circumstances which led to the decision to leave Russia. When asked why their families decided to leave Russia, most elderly German-Russians in North Dakota today cite three main reasons: conscription, shortage of land, and jealousy shown by their Russian neighbors.

As has been noted, one of Alexander's promises was 162 acres of land for each family. Working this land was difficult. Due to the village layout the farmers had to travel each day - often long distances - back and forth to cultivate their holdings. Initially the 162 acres proved to be too much for one man and the women and children were forced to work in the fields (Voeller 1940, p. 41). As the families grew and the lands were tamed, however, the German farmers became very successful-- more so than the neighboring Russians. This situation led to feelings of superiority within the German group and jealousy in the Russian. According to tradition, the German father bequeathed all of the land to his youngest son, purchasing new holdings for his other sons. Eventually, the Black Sea German-Russians owned over eleven-million acres of Russian land-- a fact which reflects the strong and cherished German-Russian value of independent land ownership. This situation, certainly, had no soothing effect upon the poorer Russians. These favorable circumstances began to change, however, in the early 1870's.

In 1861 Alexander abolished serfdom, creating 20,000 free Russians, hungry for jobs and land. In 1871 he removed the Germans' freedom from conscription. Russian judges took over local jurisdiction in the German districts in 1876 (Sherman 1970, pp. 31-38). Alexander



prohibited land purchasing by Germans in 1881 and thereafter no more Germans were allowed to settle in Russia. This was all part of a Russianization program, a "Russia for Russians" campaign which took hold of the nation at this time (Gold 1967, p. 16). German names were supposed to be Russianized and by 1892 the only classes still allowed to be taught in German were religion and German (Sherman 1970, p. 32). As a result of the initial feelings of superiority and the growing resentment on the part of Russians the notion of the German-Russian community as a distinct and separate enclave grew stronger. In the face of the mounting discrimination, the German-Russians sent emissaries to verify rumors of abundant new land available in other countries. By 1873 scouts had traveled to Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Australia and the United States (Gold 1967, p. 16). Their reports were favorable and substantial numbers of German-Russians began their final, mass migration (Sallet 1974, p. 6).

By the mid-1870's the picture of the Great Plains in America as a vast no-man's land suitable only for "savage" Indians was replaced by that of a flourishing garden. The first droves of settlers found this to be a myth. Familiar only with humid-climate agriculture the north-European settlements in the arid grasslands ended in failure. The Great Plains region required a people accustomed to its peculiar climate in order to satisfy its agricultural potential. That people was the German-Russians. Coincidentally, the Great Plains were also the only large areas of land left available for the late-coming immigrants (Sallet 1974, p. 5).

The extension of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul Railroad as far as Aberdeen, South Dakota was completed in 1881. In 1883 it reached

further into the territory to Ipswich, South Dakota and then Eureka, South Dakota in 1887. Eureka, the farthest point north, became the embarkation site for those venturing into North Dakota (Gold 1967, p. 19). By the end of the peak settlement years (approximately 1885-1905) the German-Russians had formed a triangle of settlement in North Dakota extending from the James River in the east to fifty miles away from Montana, with the South Dakota border serving as the base (Sherman 1970, p. 12; Voeller 1940, p. 59).

The first Black Sea colony in North Dakota was started south of Zeeland in 1885. In 1886 a group from Kulm, Bessarabia settled in present-day Kulm, North Dakota (Sallet 1974, pp. 26,27). New settlements were established in Danzig, Wishek, Lehr and Ellendale in McIntosh and Dickey counties. The movement spread northward into Logan County and beyond the Missouri River in Mercer County. By 1890 the German-Russians comprised the majority of the population in these counties: McIntosh, 63.2%; Logan 55.6%; and Mercer, 51.4%. Of the foreign-born citizens of these counties the German-Russians formed an overwhelming majority-- 92.4%, 87.0%, and 83.3%, respectively (Sallet 1974, p. 27). By 1930 McIntosh County had 6708 German-Russians-- 69% of its total population.

Once in North Dakota the German-Russians again attempted to make their life as comparable as possible to that in their former country. The homes erected were the same as those in Russia, but because of the residential requirements of homesteading, the familiar village design was ruled out. Instead the pioneers tried to homestead adjoining plots. The new settlement, then, consisted of a loose cluster of houses at the point where the plots met. Most, however,

were forced to adapt to life in isolated farmhouses. While this existence was a lonely and difficult one-- particularly in the face of the notorious North Dakota blizzards-- the settlers were well-prepared by their experiences in Russia. In the midst of hardship the pioneers turned to their church, family and culture to lend support and security. Although the Protestant church in America, unlike that in Russia, was divided into twenty-one synods and conferences most of the Evangelical Black Sea German-Russians were quickly integrated into a number of these (Sallet 1974, p. 89). In these churches they demanded services in German. In their homes they spoke little else. To replace the strong community structure that existed in Russia the German-Russians associated with the larger, ethnic whole via weekly German newspapers. The first of these, the Dakota Freie Presse (established, 1874), also provided news of the home villages in Russia (Sallet 1974, pp, 91,92). As in those villages, the settlers' survival and prestige in North Dakota depended on their land and they directed all of their energies toward its cultivation. As their hard work became more profitable, the families again began acquiring large holdings of new land. Their climb to success on the Great Plains was a rapid one, leading to Sallet's writing, "they were unquestionably the foreign element which worked its way to prosperity the fastest." (Sallet 1974, p. 79). Yet this devotion to a way of life which so aided them in conquering the steppes of Russia and the praries of North Dakota also led to isolation and, more noticeably, to misunderstanding on the part of their non-German-Russian neighbors.

The over-whelming majority of German-Russians can be classified as unaccomplished, uncultured, and uneducated. They have no art.

Their music and literature are simple and stereotyped. Songs sung and music played in Alsace, Baden and Bavaria in 1800 are still being sung and played by the great, great grandchildren of those pioneers. Stories and jokes that entertained and amused their great, great grandparents in those German provinces over a century ago are still being told and read by their descendents in North Dakota today. The prayers that consoled the Wurttembergers in 1800 are still being prayed by their descendents in North Dakota.

The German-Russian people are not only different, they are both backward and different (Voeller 1940, p. 23).

These statements, written in 1940, provide an accurate, albeit singularly strong, description of the stereotype which grew to surround the German-Russians. In all fairness to the author, Voeller, it should be realized that this excerpt, however derogatory, was written out of a genuine effort to come to an understanding of the German-Russian community in order to help its citizens with some, admittedly, very real problems. At the time of Voeller's writing, many German-Russian parents exhibited a stubborn indifference to education. As a result, few of their children entered or finished high school. Consequently, their representation in the colleges and universities as well as in the professional ranks was proportionately much lower than other ethnic national groups (Voeller 1940, pp. 65-76). Unfortunately what Voeller and others like him failed to perceive was that the tenacious clinging of this people to remnants of its German roots-- the language, the songs, the vocation-- was itself central to a unique and very rich culture, the German-Russian culture.

It is unfair to say that the German-Russians remained totally unassimilated. Some steps in the Americanization process were taken

quite rapidly. Almost all of the Black Sea Germans became American citizens soon after their arrival. They participated in the celebration of American holidays and called their new settlements their "home towns". The Jakobs, Johanns and Davids became Jakes, Johns and Daves (Sallet 1974, pp. 106,107). They adapted easily to the American political system and quickly moved into administrative positions on the city, county and state levels. In 1919 most were solidly in the camp of the Non-Partisan League (Sallet 1974, pp. 96,97).

What has resulted, then, is not a backward, stagnant culture but rather an intriguing mixture of old and new cultural elements. The traditions which have most closely reflected deep-rooted values have remained, as less important attitudes and behaviors were pushed aside by the tide of Americanization. This, after all, has been the path of all white national groups in America (Sallet 1974, p. 106).

Most of my peers and I are of the second and third generation of German-Russians born and raised in North Dakota. A few attended their first classes in one-room schoolhouses. A few more came to school speaking better German than English. Some were raised on farms situated on the original homestead lands of their forefathers; a small number have returned to those farms. When the majority of us go home for vacations from school or work our mothers prepare our favorite dumplings, struddels, or knepfles-- we don't know how to make them ourselves. As we listen intently to our parents' and grandparents' German conversations it is to no avail-- our "school" German is too unlike the local dialect we never bothered to learn. The German-Russian culture as that intriguing mixture of old and new still exists today, but I suspect not for long.

### The Brauche

Definitely one of the most intriguing and valuable aspects of the German-Russian culture which still remains is the traditional healer of the society. Although written documentation does confirm the existence of this healing in south-central North Dakota, it is difficult, at this point, to generalize its occurrence to the entire German-Russian community in the United States. What I wish to do then, in order to present a detailed account of this often neglected cultural remnant, is focus the reader's attentions on one small North Dakota community, Ashley, and on one respected member of that community, Mrs. Eva Iszler.

Ashley lies in south-central McIntosh County. It came into existence in 1888 when the forty-five inhabitants of Hoskins moved their settlement from the shores of Lake Hoskins three miles to the east to benefit from the prospective arrival of the railroad. A rural, farming community, Ashley's economic and social existence came to rest on the harvesting and transportation of the grain. It was the center of trade and socializing for the farmers in the outlying areas. On Saturdays they came to town to buy the week's groceries and to mingle with friends over "Russian peanuts" (sunflower seeds). On Sundays they came again to attend one of the churches and, after that, to visit. As time passed the original population was supplemented by the arrival of immigrants. These new-comers were solidly German-Russian and enjoyed kinship with their neighbors in Venturia, Kulm, Lehr and Zeeland. It was to this

area that Balthasar Iszler, Jr. moved in 1898 at the age of sixteen and returned in 1910 to settle with his wife, nee Eva Dockter. Eva's family, the Johann Dockters, moved to the United States from Neudorf, Bessarabia, Russia with their seven children at the suggestion of Mrs. Dockter's parents, the Fiekerts--already established in North Dakota--to claim the promise of free and ample land. Mrs. Iszler, now ninety-two, vividly recalls the eight-day ocean voyage: "in the middle that ship went up and down. In the beginning we were running around the whole ship, way down and up. And then it started jumping and I got sick." In Goodrich, North Dakota the Dockters busied themselves with the daily farm and household chores and the raising of their children (Diamond Jubilee Committee 1963, p. 202). As has already been described, the German-Russians reared their children in North Dakota according to an earlier tradition. Eva, then, conversed in German and grew to be devoutly religious. From her mother she also learned a unique system of healing which she still practices successfully in Ashley. This brand of medicine is called Brauche by the inhabitants of the area. The same term is used to refer to the healer--Mrs. Iszler is a Brauche--and the infinitive form is "to brauch."

Brauche has its roots in Germany during the time of Mrs. Iszler's mother's generation. Given that Mrs. Iszler was born in 1887 in Russia and assuming that her mother was no older than thirty when she gave birth to her daughter, that would place the beginning of Brauche roughly between 1865 and before 1887. The exact place of origin is not certain either, but Mrs. Iszler believes that her mother lived somewhere near Stuttgart. At this time the government (which level is unknown) apparently began a program to train local women to be midwives.

"They called a group of women together in a public meeting place and then screened them according to their health, heart and their hands and then made selection and then took them away and taught them to be midwives and that I learned from my mother also." (Appendix A, p. 36). Along with the training each chosen woman was also given a book--of the type that might have been used in the medical schools of the time--which Mrs. Iszler still consults today.

Eva's parents, after their marriage in Germany, moved to Neudorf, Russia. In the information compiled in Bauer's selection, Place Names of German Colonies in Russia and the Rumanian Dobrudja, obtained from Russian settlement census reports, there are listings for eight Neudorfs in the North and South Caucasus and Bessarabia regions. Of those, two were established before 1887 and three have no settlement dates (Bauer 1974, pp. 172-181). It is not certain, then, which of these was the mother colony to which Mr. and Mrs. Dockter migrated. Their daughter does recall, however, that once in Russia Johann Dockter, after receiving his acreage, either began or moved to what apparently was a daughter colony of Neudorf--Myrushka (Appendix A, p. 48). This settlement isn't listed in the census reports and I think it safe to assume that either because of small size or close proximity it was probably included in the information obtained on Neudorf. In Mrs. Iszler's mind, at least, the two are linked and she most often refers to her Russian home as Neudorf, Bessarabia.

Health care in the Russian villages is seldom, if ever, included in written histories of the German-Russian people. It can be ascertained, however, that the most common diseases were cholera, typhus, smallpox, and measles. Quarantines during epidemics were difficult to enforce due



to lack of doctors, facilities and understanding of the implications of the germ theory of disease on the part of the villagers (Voeller 1940, p. 38). For the remedying of these sick and for the tending to of everyday ailments, accidents and births the settlers relied on certain talented members of the colony, "old women (who) picked the herbs and made the remedies." (Voeller 1940, p. 38). It has also been suggested that some superstitions and magical spells were involved in the healing (Voeller 1940, p. 38). Mrs. Dockter, a trained and successful midwife who had in her possession a book describing bodily functions, certainly was regarded as one of these talented women. It can be safely speculated that out of a basic need for health care it was at this point that Mrs. Dockter expanded her medical knowledge beyond midwifery through observation, sharing of information with other healers and even trial and error. It is this expanded version of Brauche which Mrs. Iszler has practiced, handling cases ranging from childbirth to skin disorders to cancer.

### Description

Before beginning a detailed description of Mrs. Iszler's Brauche it is necessary to first confront the notion that it involves a reliance on superstition and/or magical spells. It has already been noted that these elements may have played a role in some of the healing done in Russia. Furthermore, stories also exist of a woman who lived east of Ashley and practiced this type of medicine. This woman, however, is dead and the stories which remain are vague and unconfirmed. Mrs. Iszler, on the other hand, is quite adamant in explaining that her methods involve no Hexe (magic or witchcraft). In reply to one patient's hesitancy

over the source of her powers, Mrs. Iszler stated, "Do you think I perform Hexe? If I could do that, I would live in the biggest house and have so much money I would no longer need to work. I don't have any more power than you, except I believe Jesus helps us, and that's all." (Appendix A, p. 42). Here is the belief system, then, in which Mrs. Iszler performs her Brauche. It is a medicine which deals with both the spiritual and physical aspects of the patient. Because it complies with the tenets of both the healer's and patients' world view or Weltanschauung it is a medicine which works. It is doubtful that Mrs. Dockter's Brauche differed in this respect, i.e. no use of superstition or magic, from that of her daughter's since Mrs. Iszler has stated several times that her mother also relied on and actively portrayed her religious convictions in her healing.

According to Mrs. Iszler's interpretation, Brauche literally means, "I believe in this healing." (Appendix A, p. 36). A good deal of the success of treatment depends, then, on the patient's belief that Jesus can help him/her through Brauche. It is also necessary that a certain amount of trust be placed in Mrs. Iszler's abilities. These abilities, in turn, stem from Mrs. Iszler's firm belief in Christ, from the experience and techniques which she has acquired through the years and from the special gift or talent she has received from God to successfully utilize her knowledge. The suggestion that Mrs. Iszler has received a special gift from God tends to call forth images of the trances, "power dreams", or "visions" which have been well documented as being the harbingers of successful careers for alternative healers in many societies. Such is not the nature of Mrs. Iszler's gift, however. Rather, she describes it as something "that must be in you." (Appendix A,

p. 46). The benefits of this gift are seen most particularly in her diagnostic abilities. The techniques or methods of her actual curing, to be discussed later, are relatively simple and she has shown no hesitancy in sharing them with her patients or with me. She is at somewhat of a loss, however, to explicitly describe the exact methods of her diagnosing except to say that they rely on her experiences, observations and her gift. She simply questions the patient or a relative on the circumstances surrounding the accident or illness, locates the area of pain, and from that makes her diagnosis and prescribes a treatment.

It is in the actual treatment of a case that the spiritual/physical nature of Brauche is most overtly demonstrated. In all cases Mrs. Iszler says a poem or saying (listed in Appendix B) of a distinctly religious nature and supplements this with some sort of physical curing agent--salves, ointments, teas, etc. In the earlier days of her practice Mrs. Iszler made most of these salves and ointments from herbs in the ways which her mother had taught her. She also relied heavily--as did many in the Ashley area--on a salve made by Rev. Herringer of Venturia, North Dakota (Appendix A, p. 38). In more recent times, however, Mrs. Iszler has come to substitute proprietary preparations found in any drug store for her original remedies as she is no longer able to work as hard on the preparation, and the needed herbs have become more difficult for her to grow and purchase. No written account of the type and proportion of these herbal mixtures remains and Mrs. Iszler recalls only that she used yucca and, in her words, "some little, black sticks." (Appendix A, p. 38). Apparently the only home-grown remedy which is still included among Mrs. Iszler's prescriptions is camille tea,

commonly used for colds and upset stomachs. Now she also advocates the use of Cuticura salve, Mi-31 mouthwash, various combinations of boric acid, corn starch and Arm and Hammer baking soda, and Anti-pain Oil for skin disorders and upset stomachs. Of these medicines she says, "you just can't believe how effective that is with the Brauche."  
(Appendix A, p. 37).

In order to clearly see the relationship between the spiritual and physical facets of Brauche and to understand the ways in which Mrs. Iszler applies her remedies, it is helpful to look at a concrete example (Appendix A, p. 37).

The patient was a man "covered with crusty sores--he looked so bad it made me shudder." As the symptoms were clearly obvious Mrs. Iszler made no attempt to label the ailment but proceeded instead with the treatment she uses for any general type of skin disorder. She took the man into the extra bedroom of her house which always serves as her consultation room. It is apparent that Mrs. Iszler has attempted to make this room as similar as possible to those which exist in any clinic or M.D.'s office. The bed is covered with a starched, white sheet. Beside it there is a small table, also covered with a white sheet, which holds the "implements" of her trade--containers of cotton swabs, Mi-31 mouthwash, corn starch, salves and Anti-pain Oil. For this particular case Mrs. Iszler soaked rags in Mi-31 and wrapped these around the patient. She then brauched. For skin disorders of any type she uses this saying:

Today is Friday, the Jew won't eat any pork  
and he won't drink any red wine;  
Let your gnawing and itching be.  
Let this wild fire and this yellow lump,  
and let any evil thing fly away in the wind.  
In the name of the Father,  
the Son and  
the Holy Ghost.

The patient then left with instructions to use the Mi-31 and also Cuticura salve for a few days until his skin had cleared. The cure was a successful one.

The particular saying used in this instance is an interesting one in that Mrs. Iszler uses it for many types of illnesses by substituting or including the relevant symptoms. The section, "any evil thing", also serves as a convenient catch-all. This practice is not uncommon in the Brauche, the most important things being the inclusion of all the symptoms and the ending of "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost"--"you never forget that. That helps you." (Appendix A, p. 46).

The illnesses which Mrs. Iszler has treated vary greatly according to type and severity although her practice has recently become considerably limited to skin disorders--eczema, shingles--and other minor ailments--colic, earaches, stomachaches--due to her increasing age and failing eyesight as a result of cataracts. The cases which she has eliminated from her repertoire are those which require considerable physical strength and energy on her part, e.g. maternity and bone dislocations, and those which require the ongoing use of her home as a recovery facility, e.g. maternity and taking care of the elderly. Throughout her entire career as a Brauche, though, Mrs. Iszler has shown discretion in the nature of the cases she will accept. The delineating factors here seem to be both severity and site of the symptoms. She has never attempted surgery and will, for example, treat skin cancer but not internal cancers. She seems far more confident in handling a minor, internal ailment or one identified by clearly visible symptoms. In the other instances she shows no hesitancy in referring the patients to an M.D. It is evident, then,

that Mrs. Iszler does have faith in the M.D.s' abilities to cure. She also believes, however, that in some cases she can effect a cure when they have failed (Appendix A, p. 38). It is interesting to note, too, that Mrs. Iszler has also been held in high regard by some of the M.D.s in the community. She most often and respectfully refers to Dr. Karl Oja who practiced in Ashley from 1951 to 1961 as one of those doctors (Diamond Jubilee Committee 1963, p. 40).

When Dr. Oja first arrived in Ashley he could speak neither English nor German. There was no hospital and in order to see his patients Dr. Oja requested that a member of the community either accompany him on his rounds, directing him to the houses and aiding in communication, or open his/her home to be used as a temporary hospital. It was at this time that Mrs. Iszler was most involved in her medicine, offering her house to be used as a maternity ward for two years and working full-time helping Dr. and Mrs. Oja (a nurse) with the deliveries and subsequent care of mothers and infants. Her house had room for four beds and some baby cribs. The nurses often stayed in her basement apartment and during busy times Dr. Oja would sleep on the couch while Mrs. Iszler barely slept at all (Appendix A, p. 43). Because Mrs. Iszler was used to working without convenient facilities and equipment and because she didn't consider herself qualified to, as she says, "cut" a patient she was very able to aid Dr. Oja in delivery under these early circumstances and to instruct him in methods that would save the mother unnecessary pain or stiches (Appendix A, p. 42). Mrs. Iszler remembers one instance in which her abilities were tested:

"A nurse came to my house to give me an examination to see if I was qualified for this type of work. I told her I can't read English--I can't

write it either, but you can ask me the questions. If I answer them right then its O.K. If I don't, then I don't pass. I gave her my book; she asked me many questions. When we were finished she said, 'You know more than I ever will.'" (Appendix A, p. 40).

As a Brauche Mrs. Iszler enjoys considerable respect in the community although she accepts no payment for her services. She still is actively involved in her practice and I have had to wait several times for an interview while she met with patients in the next room. At ninety-two, though, she is beginning to tire of the heavy work load. While accepting light cases she refers most of them to her one student, Mrs. Regina Schock; to regular M.D.s; or to two quite specialized alternative healers in the area--a masseuse and a man who acts as a type of chiropractor. Although she has been able to pass a portion of her knowledge of Brauche on to Mrs. Schock, she now sadly laments the fact that "No one is interested in learning it anymore." (Appendix A, p. 38).

### Discussion

For those familiar only with our western model of medicine, often the most difficult thing to accept about any alternative medical system is the fact that some of these systems are successful. Yet the wealth of literature from medical anthropology is filled with such cases. In the United States, alone, there are numerous examples-- the native American medicine men; the Mexican-American curer; faith healers; and, of course, the German-Russian Brauche. While some medical anthropologists are reluctant to speculate as to the reasons for successful healing in these groups--preferring only to document that the cures are successful--some specific explanations can be found.

Most pathological conditions are self-limiting and when they do

go into natural remission this is often attributed by the patient to the effectiveness of the healer. (For a simple example in our own culture think of the common cold. It is said that if the cold is allowed to run its own course it will take as long as ten days to disappear. If a doctor is consulted it will be cured in a little over a week). The psychosomatic basis for illness is also often cited as a reason for success, especially in those systems where the healer relies on elaborate and mysterious ritual. There is good basis to support the fact that if the patient is made particularly suggestible by the aura of power and mystery surrounding the healer then he/she will be cured through sheer strength of belief in the medicine (Alland 1970, p. 135). Again examples can be found in our culture. After all, how many of our cures by and faith in our own M.D.s stem from the idea that they are all-knowing and in possession of secrets about our bodies which are far beyond our comprehension? If a physician seems ambiguous toward us or our illnesses, if he/she doesn't represent in our minds what a "doctor" should, we are not helped by that doctor and we quickly turn to another. Obviously both of these factors contribute to successful curing to an extent which, in the western mind at least, is not yet entirely clear. A much more satisfying and encompassing explanation of the reasons for success, however, can be found in the basic premises of the discipline of medical anthropology itself.

Landy, in his introduction to Culture, Disease and Healing, goes through the following progression in defining medical anthropology. Disease is an ever-present aspect of life itself. Cultures, in part, are responses to or defenses against this threat of disease and death. In this way disease has influenced man's evolution and man's developments



and adaptations have, in turn, altered the course and history of disease, so that "there is an intimate and inexorable linkage between disease, medicine and human culture." (Landy 1977, p. 1). The study of this linkage, of "the adaptive arrangements (that is medicine and medical systems)" found in a society is medical anthropology (Landy 1977, p. 1). Any given culture, then, has a medicine, i.e. "those cultural practices, methods, techniques and substances embedded in a matrix of values, traditions, beliefs and patterns of ecological adaptation, that provide the means for maintaining health. . ."; and a medical system--"the total organization of its (the society's) social structures, technologies, and personnel that enable it to practice and maintain its medicine, and to change its medicine in response to varying intracultural and extracultural challenges." (Landy 1977, p. 131).

Every culture or cultural segment implies a certain world view--some common beliefs on the "nature of things." From this world view there stems a belief about the etiology of ever-present disease. Once notions of etiology are in-hand it is a short step to the formation of classification, diagnostic, prognostic and treatment techniques and to the selection of individuals capable of applying these techniques--a medical system. In short, if the world is inhabited by evil spirits who wish to harm human beings then disease must be caused by the action of these spirits--perhaps possession of a human body. If the spirit can be identified and removed by some powerful "other"--an exorcist or shaman, for example--the person is saved. If not, the prognosis is unfavorable. Furthermore, if through the years our powerful other happens to discover that some "magical" herb aids in the exorcism, so much the better. "Medical science, like everything else, like our

language and our mental conceptions, is the reward of long searching after light. It has been built from generation to generation by one people after another, by one man finding out the errors of a predecessor, and, a third improving upon both." (Black 1883, p. 2). The medicine of the society, like any cultural element, constantly changes as the individuals adopt new and more helpful ways and as the society as a whole encounters other cultures. The process, however, is a slow and selective one. The basic framework, that "matrix of values, traditions and beliefs" is somewhat resistant to alteration, and, until it is altered, it serves as a sieve through which only those elements not in strong dissonance with it can filter.

It is hoped that this brief survey of medical anthropology will help the reader place Brauche in a broader and more proper perspective. While Brauche cannot be viewed in a concise a linear progression as the example of the system which formed in response to the evil spirits--remembering that Brauche began as an extension of the "accepted" medicine of its time--it can be analyzed using some of the discussed principles.

First and foremost Brauche does cure people. This is attested to by the loyal following of Mrs. Iszler's patients. Mrs. Iszler, when commenting on her own success, says the only cases she has accepted which haven't resulted in cures are those involving the development of serious infections. The reasons for success are many. Mrs. Iszler, like any competent physician, is aware of her limitations so that at the outset she handles only those cases she feels she can heal--the rest she refers to other practioners. Certainly, some of the ailments she deals with go into natural remissions and these are added to her list of successful cases. Brauche, arising from western medicine and frequently interacting

With that model, also contains what some strict adherents to western medicine might call "legitimate" methods. Its transitions via observation and adaptation have added much to its success. One good example is Mrs. Iszler's cure for gout. Gout, she says, is caused by a worm situated in a nerve or vessel which pinches the nerve and causes pain. The objective, of course, is to locate the worm and then kill it by squeezing it very hard. The verse which accompanies the squeezing is:

Das gout, go out.  
Out of the nerve and  
out of the vessel.  
In the name of the Father,  
                                  the Son and  
                                  the Holy Ghost.

In our medicine gout is caused by a "salting out" of uric crystals. Often, particularly when in the ear, the accumulation of these crystals does, in fact, look like a worm. What Mrs. Iszler does, then, is break-up the crystals, allowing them to be reabsorbed in the bloodstream, thus relieving the pain (Akers 1979, interview). In other, less obvious instances, the psychosomatic nature of illnesses comes into play, but only because Brauche complies with the value structure of the culture and patient. As mentioned, an important component of Brauche is the belief in Christ and his ability to help the individual. This is an essential component as religion was one of the most important values preserved by the German-Russian culture. This linkage of religion and medicine is not unusual as "the great mystery of death (is) the most important motive in the development of the religion of mankind, the connection of religion with the art designed to meet disease, the harbinger of death, would have seemed especially natural." (Rivers 1924, p. 57). Brauche, in short, gives the patient what he/she needs and

expects within the cultural boundaries. Because it does so, it works.

Viewed in the context of its historical development, Brauche represents a legitimate and viable medicine. Mrs. Iszler, a member of the system through which that medicine is realized, is a talented and enthusiastic woman who feels a great obligation to use her abilities in helping the community. Whether good or bad, right or wrong, the fact is that Brauche is quickly disappearing and probably will not survive another generation. Our obligation lies, if not in the preservation of Brauche in toto, then in a careful examination of that system and a consideration of those aspects which might enhance our own western, scientific methods. Much has been written about the inability of the German-Russians to advance themselves because of blind adherence to an established way of life. Some of these comments are justified. But aren't we making the same mistake by chauvinistically maintaining that our ways are the true and absolute?

APPENDIX A:

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH MRS. EVA ISZLER

INTERVIEW 1: MRS. EVA ISZLER

3-11-79

E.I. - Eva Iszler

J.S. - Jeannine Schock

D.S. - Dawn Schock

E.I.: When a person has the shingles--its a nervous condition that causes eruptions on the skin. This is good for the shingles:

Today is Friday, the Jew won't eat any pork and he won't drink any red wine;

Let your gnawing and itching be.

Let this wild fire (spreading skin disorder) and this yellow (jaundiced) lump, and let any evil thing fly away in the wind.

In the name of the Father  
the Son and  
Holy Ghost. (XXX)

If somebody is bleeding:

Jesus Christ, holy blood, quiet the pain and quiet the blood.

J.S.: And you say this to the people? Where did you learn this?

E.I.: From my mother who had it written down in a book. In Germany they took her to a place where they taught them.

D.S.: You learned this from your mother then? Do you do this the same way that your mother did it?

E.I.: Ya.

D.S.: Where in Russia did you live?

E.I.: Bessarabia.

J.S.: Do a lot of people still come to you for help?

E.I.: Yes. I have to turn a lot of them away. I have to let up, because I'm getting too old.

D.S.: Have you taught anybody else?

E.I.: Ya. Mrs. Regina Schock and she has a big book full-- she wrote it all down.

J.S.: Was your mother born in Germany?

E.I.: Yes.

J.S.: Did she learn this in Germany and then teach you in Russia?

E.I.: Ya.

J.S.: Were there a lot of people that were taught this?

E.I.: They called a group of women together in a public meeting place and then they screened them according to their health and heart (attitude, stability) and their hands and then made their selection and then they took them away and taught them. They taught them to be midwives and that I learned from my mother also.

J.S.: I know that you helped deliver many babies in town.

E.I.: About that I can tell you a lot.

J.S.: Do you call this healing that you do "Brauche"?

E.I.: Ya.

D.S.: What does "Brauche" mean?

E.I.: Some people don't believe it, some people believe it. Some people consider it to be Hexe (witchcraft, magic). That's not what this is. "Brauche" means, "I believe in this healing."

J.S.: And you do healing with eczema and skin disorders?

E.I.: Ya. This is included in that little verse--  
Gnawing and itching means this eczema--it means this  
in the body.  
Have you got this gnawing and itching in your body?  
Today is Friday, etc.  
It's hard to explain to get the right connotation.

J.S.: I think we understand. Do you have any medicines that you use?

E.I.: Ya. See my ear? This is the violet. I got that from Dr. Oja when he was using my house as a maternity ward. I think my ear is sore from the shots I've been getting. I got a sore, swollen ear--it hurt so much, so I painted it.

D.S.: What other ailments do you heal?

E.I.: For shingles I use the mouthwash, Mi-31. You wash the infected area with that. A lady came to see me and she was covered with shingles and I told her to use that.

You just can't believe how effective that is with the "Brauche". Somebody came from Aberdeen and when this man came he was covered with crusty sores--he looked so bad, it made me shudder. He looked so bad--not all people have the constitution to look at things like this. I took him into the bedroom and had him stand on some rugs. I made the rags wet with Mi-31 and I wrapped him up with these wet cloths. Then I "brauched" and told him to go home and use this Mi-31 for a few days and told him he should apply Cuticura salve--that is also good for eczema. A lady was here today and I told her to get that salve.

J.S.: Do you cure ringworm?

E.I.: For ringworm you take the person's finger and hold it real tight.

Peter and Paul went out to the land,  
They plowed three furrows and  
they plowed-up three worms.

The first one is black, the second is white and the  
third is red.

I'll squeeze them all dead. XXX

Then you hold that finger so hard until your  
hand becomes numb and the patient's finger turns white.  
And that takes it away. Then use the three highest names, (XXX).

J.S.: Do you help any one with bone disorders?

E.I.: In earlier years I did a lot with bones that were dislocated. But that takes a lot of muscle. Especially a lot of schoolchildren that had dislocated arms and shoulders.

D.S.: Do you ever use plants or herbs for medicines or ointments?

E.I.: Yes.

J.S.: For instance camilla tea?

E.I.: Yes. I use that for sore stomach and for babies with colic. I also mix my own medicine for upset stomachs. I also used to use salve that was made by Rev. Herringer. You can't buy many of these things anymore, such as that Herringer salve. I'll get the bottle of Anti-Pain Oil. Mix it with syrup and water. A teaspoon for a baby. So much water and syrup and a teaspoon of Anti-Pain Oil. I don't buy it anymore because I'm quitting. I've got some mixed in my refrigerator that I use when I have a cough and a congested chest.

J.S.: What did you use in your medicines and salves?

E.I.: Earlier? Gosh, I don't remember anymore. I gave it up because I couldn't buy the ingredients. I used yucca and things that I just can't buy anymore. I used Herringer salve, some little black sticks on infected slivers and such.

J.S.: What was the name of those black sticks?

E.I.: I just can't recall. I didn't write it down and I haven't mixed my own since I've been in Ashley. When Rev. Herringer still lived in Ventura he always made salves. But now there is none of that anymore.

J.S.: Does anyone else still do this type of thing?

E.I.: No, I don't know of anyone. No one is interested in learning it anymore. And the young people, when they come with their babies they have to know everything that's in it. If you bring your child to me, you better trust my judgment, and take your baby home and if he doesn't die than you know I didn't give him anything that's harmful. These young, English people don't trust anything that doesn't come from a drug store. This medicine--I mix that and they come and get it all the time. I even have to mail some as far as California.

J.S.: Do you remember any cases where you've helped someone that other doctors have given up on?

E.I.: Well, I tell you, this Brauche is hard. Some people from Wishek wanted to take me there to the hospital to help their little girl. I can't do that--my eyes are too bad. But I recommended they get Regina Schock. Mrs. Schock called me for my advice and I told her to go in and pretend that she's visiting the patient. Regina asked what she should do for the child, she asked what the symptoms were, I told her that she keeps breaking open and bleeding. I told her all this and she wrote it down.

This healing is something you must have within you as a young person. You can't rely on a book-- that's difficult.

One night they brought this child to Regina. Then Regina called me again and told me she was full of little lumps. I said that that could be cancer already. If she's that full of lumps and they break open and bleed then I'm afraid its cancer. Now if I could have seen her earlier I would have added that to that little verse - and what I find in addition to what is mentioned in that verse;

That wild fire, the evil thing, the yellow lump  
and whatever else bad I find in addition--fly in  
the wind.

But you've had to learn the diagnosing.

That girl was in the Wishek hospital for three weeks and they couldn't help her. Now I don't know if she had cancer. I got a phone call from someone who works in the Wishek Nursing Home and a 14 yr. old girl was brought in as a patient. She's very sick and I'll bet that was that little girl.

J.S.: Have you ever helped ladies with female problems?

E.I.: Yes, that's why someone wanted to get me for a lady who had a colostomy.. The doctors said they couldn't reroute the colon until all the infection was gone. She was supposed to come back to the doctor twice



a week. I rubbed her with salves until the area was soft and the infection went away and she was able to go back and have it rerouted. The woman said, "Now I am a healthy person, thanks to Mrs. Iszler and my cancer is gone." This lady recommended me to those people from Wishek. If they had brought that girl to me before she was so far gone, I feel that I could've helped.

E.I.: That girl who has since died came here covered with yellow spots. Her skin looked as though it was baked which is also the way frost bite looks. When I mentioned frost bite her mother said she had been snow-mobiling. I recommended she go to the hospital. She was there for three weeks. She was wrapped in wet cloths to draw out the infection.

J.S.: Have you ever treated anyone for severe burns?

E.I.: Oh yes, many.

J.S.: What did you do for them?

E.I.: I burned myself with hot soup. I pulled down my stocking--I wrapped it with clothes soaked in 31 (mouthwash) and kept it wet at all times. When it healed I didn't even have a mark on my foot. Dr. Fleck had to do skin grafting on a lady when she was burned. He said it wasn't necessary to do that for me when I treated myself. I cut myself one time--it was fairly deep. I got an infection on it. My girls insisted I go to the hospital, because we were going on vacation. They finally talked me into going. When Dr. Fleck saw the cut he gasped, he admitted me. When he made his rounds the next day with his young assistant--he also gasped when he saw my cut. Then Dr. Fleck said, "Well, Eva didn't have good luck this time." I said if I'd stayed in bed with my leg propped like I'm doing here I'd have good luck with healing too. I had to delay my vacation and stay in bed until it healed.

J.S.: Did you help a lot of children with earaches and sore throats?

E.I.: Oh yes, many.

J.S.: What did you do for them?

E.I.: For earache I put drops in their ears and massaged around the ear area until it snapped. When this happens then the ear drops are absorbed more easily. Then you say:

Jesus Christ, holy blood, quiet the pain, quiet the flow.

This verse can be used many ways, substitute the words for the ailment of the patient.

J.S.: And what do you do for sore throat?

E.I.: Similar to earache remedy.

D.S.: Now there was something I didn't quite understand. You learned it in Germany--right?

E.I.: My mother learned it in Germany. I got a book that tells how to deliver babies and how to help the mother during different types of deliveries. It is written in German. I opened my house as a maternity ward before we had a hospital. I delivered babies by myself before Dr. Oja came. I worked with Dr. Oja in my house before the hospital was ready. A nurse came to my house to give me an examination to see if I was qualified for this type of work. I told her I can't read English-- I can't write it either, but you can ask me questions. If I answer them right, then it's OK. If I don't, then I don't pass. I gave her my book: she asked me many questions. When we were done she said, "You know more than I ever will."

J.S.: Do you have a book for other illnesses?

E.I.: I had a book in which I had written all those verses. One day a lady from Strasburg came and she had a little girl. The lady copied some of those verses, I didn't pay much attention to her. In the meantime another lady came for help. I went to another room with her. When the lady from Strasburg left, her little girl took that book along and ripped out all the pages. Later on I asked about it. Her mother gasped when I inquired about it. She said she is sure the little girl didn't know what it was--"so that's where all the paper came from in the car". Well, I didn't care anymore, but I was wondering where that book was. That's too bad, that should have been saved. If you can read German, Regina wrote down those things. She can read German well.

J.S.: Can you tell us from what part of Germany your ancestors came?

E.I.: Mine? I can't say for sure--I think Stuttgart. But I can ask Gottlieb, he has addresses of some of our cousins in Germany. We used to hear from some of my husband's family over there and from some of mine, but we don't hear from them anymore. But there are some living relatives of my husband's.

D.S.: You said some people don't believe in what you do, is that right? Can you heal them if they don't believe?

E.I.: You have to believe that is the one thing that is important. There is a Seventh Day Adventist, M. by name, that came here on Sunday night. I had a house full of company. There was a knock at the door--I opened it and asked them in. Then he said he wanted to ask me something and then his wife asked if they could go in another room. He had the shingles all over. Then I said it was a Sunday evening. Then I said I could do that for you. Then I told him what he should do. Then I said the best would be if he would come back on Friday or Saturday. No, said his wife, Saturday is our Sabbath. Then I got mad and I said, well this is our Sunday, our Sabbath. Then she said they would come on Sunday. Then I said no, if you can't come on Saturday--Sunday is our Sabbath and I usually have a house full of company. I mixed boric acid, corn starch and Hammer soda. I told him to wash himself with the solution I gave him and rub it into his skin real well--then use the powder mixture and keep on powdering himself with that mixture. Those little pimples caused by the shingles will disappear. Then I brauched. He came back on Friday

night, several times. Then one time his wife came, she had shingles too. But she told me right away she didn't believe in Brauche. Well, I said why didn't she just use what I told your husband to use? She said, well I did but it didn't help. Why didn't she believe? She just said, I don't believe in such things. Then I said, then I can't help you. Then I said just keep on doing what you have been, maybe it will help anyway. She left. She didn't have any of the powder I gave her husband but she used the lotion every evening, she said. She was gone for a few days--finally she came again. Then she said, do whatever you want to me. I said, well I don't believe it can help either if you don't believe. Do and say whatever you want. Do what you did to my husband, I don't care any longer--just so I get rid of it. Then it helped her. Then I said to her, "do you think I perform Hexe?" If I could do that, I would live in the biggest house and have so much money I would no longer need to work. I don't have any more power than you, except I believe Jesus helps us, and that's all.

E.I.: There was no one to help the women when labor pains started. Some women told me how good it felt when I assisted in their labor. I used a bed sheet to tie the patient's ankles and brought it around her neck--this was a substitute for stirrups. One lady said she never had such an easy labor and that she was lucky to have come to me. When Dr. Oja used my house for maternity ward--many times I delivered the babies before he arrived. Dr. Oja said that I could deliver a baby and the mother never needed stitches. Dr. Oja said when he delivered he had to stitch most of the time. I said, well I can't cut, I'm not qualified. I try to help the mother by assisting her so she won't tear. I place my hand so that I can lift the baby so it won't come too fast and tear the mother. I told Dr. Oja I learned a lot of those things from my book from my mother. He then asked to see my book and teach him a little. He learned a lot from me and I from him. He couldn't speak either German or English when he came. I couldn't speak English or his language. Once during a delivery I brought in a dish of water, then he spoke to his wife who was a nurse and assisted at times. He asked his wife--does Mrs. Iszler have another bowl? That word was familiar to me. I thought--are there two babies? For what reason do you want another bowl? Mrs. Oja said, to use for pure water. Then I got a basin of pure water. After that I knew what they meant by bowl. Ya, I learned a lot from him and he from me. They used my house for two years.

J.S.: Right here in your house?

E.I.: Yes, two years, here in my home. I had all those ladies here. Now when I think about it, I don't know how we managed. It seems so small now I can barely turn around.

J.S.: At that time it was a hospital?

E.I.: You see we didn't have a hospital then. It wasn't finished yet. When Dr. Oja came to Ashley, he didn't have a car. When he finally got one, he didn't know the people or where they lived, many were country people. So he requested that someone in town would provide a place for him to practice or he wanted me to ride with him to show him where the

people lived. I said that would be too hard for me. I'll give you a place, my home was used for that many years.

J.S.: How many patients could you accommodate?

E.I.: I had two beds in this room and one in the other room which also held the babies' cribs. Sometimes I had to put another bed in this room and many times Dr. Oja slept on the couch and I didn't sleep at all. Sometimes I had nurses staying in my basement apartment. When they would come home they would say, "Oh, I'm so tired, Mrs. Iszler, I'm going to lie down please don't wake me up." Then I would say, "Oh, I feel so sorry for you, I worked 24 hours. Then I started the next 24 hours and you worked 8 hours and you're so tired. Oh, I feel so sorry for you."

I don't know how I managed all that. That was steady work.

J.S.: You worked very hard. I remember when you took care of people younger than you were.

E.I.: Oh yes. Old lady K.

J.S.: She was younger than you, and you took care of her?

E.I.: I finally had to say no to many local people who wanted me to care for their old people. But there was a Mrs. R. from Seattle, Washington who was a very good friend of mine and who said she wanted to ask me something. I said go ahead but don't ask me to go back to Washington with you because I don't care to. Once before when she had been out here for a visit, I went back with her. I said this year I can't go because I don't have the money. Then she said no, I don't want to take you along. Then I said, well tell me if I can fulfill your wish, I will do it. She said, I know you can. Then she said, would you care for my mother? I was shocked for awhile. Then I said, well, I'll try. Boy, that really ties you down--I tell you. I couldn't leave the house, I couldn't go anywhere. That old lady would say, go over and see what the W.'s are doing across the street. She would be sitting in a chair. I would say, but you stay sitting while I'm gone. I would go over but keep an eye on the house, finally I noticed the screen door opening. Boy did I let out a yell, then I quickly returned. Then she said she wanted to see if she could go outside on her own. She would have fallen down the steps head first. I really scolded her.

J.S.: That was very hard for you.

E.I.: Yes, that was hard. I had her for thirteen months then she had a stroke. She was taken to the hospital. Then Dr. Oja or Dr. Fleck-- I don't recall which one said I couldn't take care of her anymore. She was too heavy for me to handle. She was quite a bit younger than I. She kept saying, I want to be with Eva--Then Mrs. R. said, you go to the nursing home and when you're well enough we'll get you again. Then I said, you go there and when you're able to stand alone again, we'll get you. Before we took her to the nursing home she pleaded to stop at my house to check on a house plant she had here. I told her her plant was really growing just fine. If she would have come in, she would never

have left again. One time I went along to visit her. She hung on to me and yelled. I decided I wouldn't go to visit her again--it was too hard. She said she could stand now--but she couldn't.

J.S.: I suppose you'd like to prepare your evening meal now.

E.I.: I'm going to have kuchen, sausage and a cup of coffee. Helen said she'd drop in but I suppose she went out for coffee so it will be later before she gets here.

INTERVIEW #2: MRS. EVA ISZLER

DECEMBER, 1978

D.S.: One thing I wanted to ask you that I forgot to ask you last time: What do you think causes sickness?

E.I.: Oh, I see..

D.S.: Like a germ or something?

E.I.: See like that lady that had a gout. You can look it up in the dictionary. That's a kind of worm in the blood vessel or in the nerve and that's in the inside and that kills those nerves and when it's long in the nerve it pinches-- awful pains, funny pains that go through the whole body, then relaxes a little, then goes again.

D.S.: So when you treat her for that...

E.I.: Ya see, then I hold just that nerve; hold it real tight and then I said this cure:

das gout, go out  
out of that nerve and  
out of that vessel and then, in the name of the Father,  
The Son and the Holy Ghost.

D.S.: How do you know which nerve it's in?

E.I.: Ya, well, if you feel it; if you've got the right place then you can feel it in there. In that vessel, it's a kind of knot in it too. Just hold it tight.

D.S.: Do you think that people get sick when they've been bad or mean? Do you think it's a type of punishment?

E.I.: No, it's not really a punishment but, you know, if you get just mean, everybody doesn't talk the right way so you think that if you only think for yourself-- that's a sin. If you pray not only for me and my people, my children. Help for everybody. Everyone needs help. Jesus can help for everybody, if we believe in that.

D.S.: I wanted to ask you about your mother. When she did her Brauche in Russia and Germany did she use the same sayings?

E.I.: The same, yes. Everything was in Germany. See, in Germany for fire, you know, well I say if you've got the shingles-- shingles is the name for fire. And then if you've got the shingles on your stomach or anywhere and the gelbe knopf (yellow lump) and böse Ding (bad thing), "go in the wind!" And so that's for the shingles. Or some people get a little blister over the eye-- like a sty-- the first time I go over it and I say, "I push you out," then I go softer, "I call you out - go in the wind."

D.S.: Did your mother use, "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost?"

E.I.: Ya, ya. You never forget that. That helps you. That lady, you know, if you've got that gout, if that gout is in the vessel and that "mean gout go out of that vessel" and hold that vessel real tight, until it goes dead and then it goes-- there's nothing to it. Just if you only know what it can be; if you've got a nerve or whether a muscle only-- and you have to judge that for yourself.

D.S.: And that comes from experience?

E.I.: Yes. See if people got a sore and that sore goes away and comes and goes, well that's that böse Ding, the gelbe knopf.

D.S.: Do you think God has given you a special gift?

E.I.: That must be. That must be in you. Your believing must be real strong, that helps. I told that lady if she gets those pains she should take her thumb and hold that place real tight. And if she only can say that that helps me - in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost-- that kills the gout.

D.S.: When Dr. Oja came to Ashley and you worked with him...

E.I.: I tell you, he believed a lot in me, I tell you.

D.S.: He'd let you take the patients?

E.I.: Ya. See, I showed him a lot. These doctors were used to only in the hospital deliver the babies. But in a house it's different, you know. I had four kids and the women were here. See, the Merklene, he had stirrups. Old Campbell, he took a sheet, he didn't care how much wash you got. The pain with the sheet was better than the stirrups. He didn't care, though, how much wash you got. Merklene was different, he got that wax paper and you can fold it nice and everything stays until everything was done, then you take that down and the bed and everything was nice-- Campbell, he didn't care. We got this patient, then-- well that was an instrument case-- that lady was a heavy lady. Then I took the sheet and Mrs. Oja gave the ether and I was with him. Then I said, "Well, I'll get the sheet." Then I wrapped it around her and I set her leg up and he said, "What do you want to do here?" and I said, "Well, nobody can hold her if you take the instrument and you don't get it way under, then she draws away and she could feel it. She was under the ether already, but not too much, and she said that feels so good where I took the feet up. And then the baby was born. You have to learn a lot, now in the hospital that's easier. But my daughter said, "I sooner would have my baby at home, Momma, as in the hospital." See, I hold them and I held them.

J.S.: Don't the nurses get overly-excited sometimes in baby cases?

E.I.: Oh ya. Well, see, the doctor waits so long until the baby-- you can see the baby. And the nurses, they get frightened.

D.S.: You're still very busy?

E.I.: Well, sometimes, yes. I send a lot to Mrs. Bender or to Jangula. Sometimes it's too much for me. Mrs. Bender, she can't do everything, only massage.

J.S.: Do you remember coming to the United States?

E.I.: We came over in the Spring and I was ten years old.

D.S.: You said you got sick?

E.I.: Ya.

D.S.: How long did it take?

E.I.: At that time we were eight days on the ocean. And I tell you, in the middle of that ship went up and down. In the beginning we were running around the whole ship, way down and up. And then it started jumping and I got sick.

J.S.: How many brothers and sisters came with you?

E.I.: Well, we were 3 brothers and 4 sisters. And they were all born in Russia, only I got one brother here in America.

D.S.: Do you remember living in Russia?

E.I.: Oh yes. I tell you, that was a nice place. That was real nice. It was just like you were in a big town, only that Neudorf-- that's where my grandfather was in the beginning-- see, that's like a big-- like Wishek would start-- a big settlement, you know. Then, that was Russia, and he got a big piece of land and he wanted to build a new, little town. Then he gave each one a piece of land so he can build a home and that was his own then. So then my father, he moved out and that was that village, Myrushka-- that's a real Russian name. And we built there. I tell you, those homes in Neudorf, they built the whole-- from one house to another-- like big walls and each home had a door to go in. On the outside they built a big, nice bench and in the evening the old people would sit out there and they sang. That was real nice.

J.S.: Why did you leave?

E.I.: Well, the boys they got free land and we got only so much land with the house-- like my place here-- and that other land, you got only so much and you bring the bushel like rent. And here in America, you know, and my mother's folks were over and he sent the money and we should come see and then we can get our land and our own home. And my mother's folks they already had three big boys and they had to go in the army, so they went over. He was a rich man; see, my father was poor. That was funny, you know, out in Germany if you were poor you couldn't come to a rich family to ask for a daughter from the father. And my father asked for the daughter and he said, "Hmph, you really want that! He's



got nothing!" But then he said, "He's got love." She said, "I don't care, I'll go with him and I want to work with him, I love him." That was funny, you know, everybody said, "How are you going to get along?"

J.S.: What was your mother's family name?

E.I.: Feikert. Here in Long Lake-- no, not Long Lake-- in Leola there are people named Feikert-- they're related.

J.S.: And what was your maiden name?

E.I.: Dockter. My father was John Dockter and my mother was Feikert.

J.S.: Were you related to that Dockter in Wishek that set bones?

E.I.: Ya. Those fathers were cousins.

J.S.: He set my arm once when it was broken.

E.I.: Ya. Christ Dockter. Well, Christ Dockter and I were cousins together. We were second cousins and the children, third cousins.

APPENDIX B:

MRS. ISZLER'S BRAUCHE CURES

Bleeding, hemorrhaging:

Jesus Christ, holy blood, quiet the pain and quiet the blood. XXX.

Burns:

Mi-31 mouthwash.

Earaches:

Jesus Christ, holy blood, quiet the pain, quiet the flow.  
XXX.

Supplement with:

Eardrops--massage around ear until it pops, so that the drops are absorbed more readily.

Gout:

Caused by a worm in a nerve or vessel. Squeeze the lump (worm) very hard and say:

Das gout, go out.

Out of that nerve and

Out of that vessel. XXX.

Ringworm:

Peter and Paul went out to the land,

They plowed three furrows and they plowed three worms.

The first one is black, the second is white and the third is red.

I'll squeeze them all dead. XXX.

Skin Disorders--shingles, eczema, cancer:

Today is Friday, the Jew won't eat any pork and he won't drink any red wine.

Let your gnawing and itching be.

Let this wild fire and this yellow lump, and

let any evil thing fly away in the wind. XXX.

Supplement with:

Mi-31 mouthwash, Cuticura salve, 1 Tbsp. Boric Acid

1 Tbsp. Corn Starch

2 Tbsp. Baking Soda

Stomachaches, Colic:

Camille tea, Anti-pain Oil.

Sty:

Go over the blister, firmly and say:

I push you out.

Go over it more softly and say:

I call you out--

Go in the wind. XXX. or

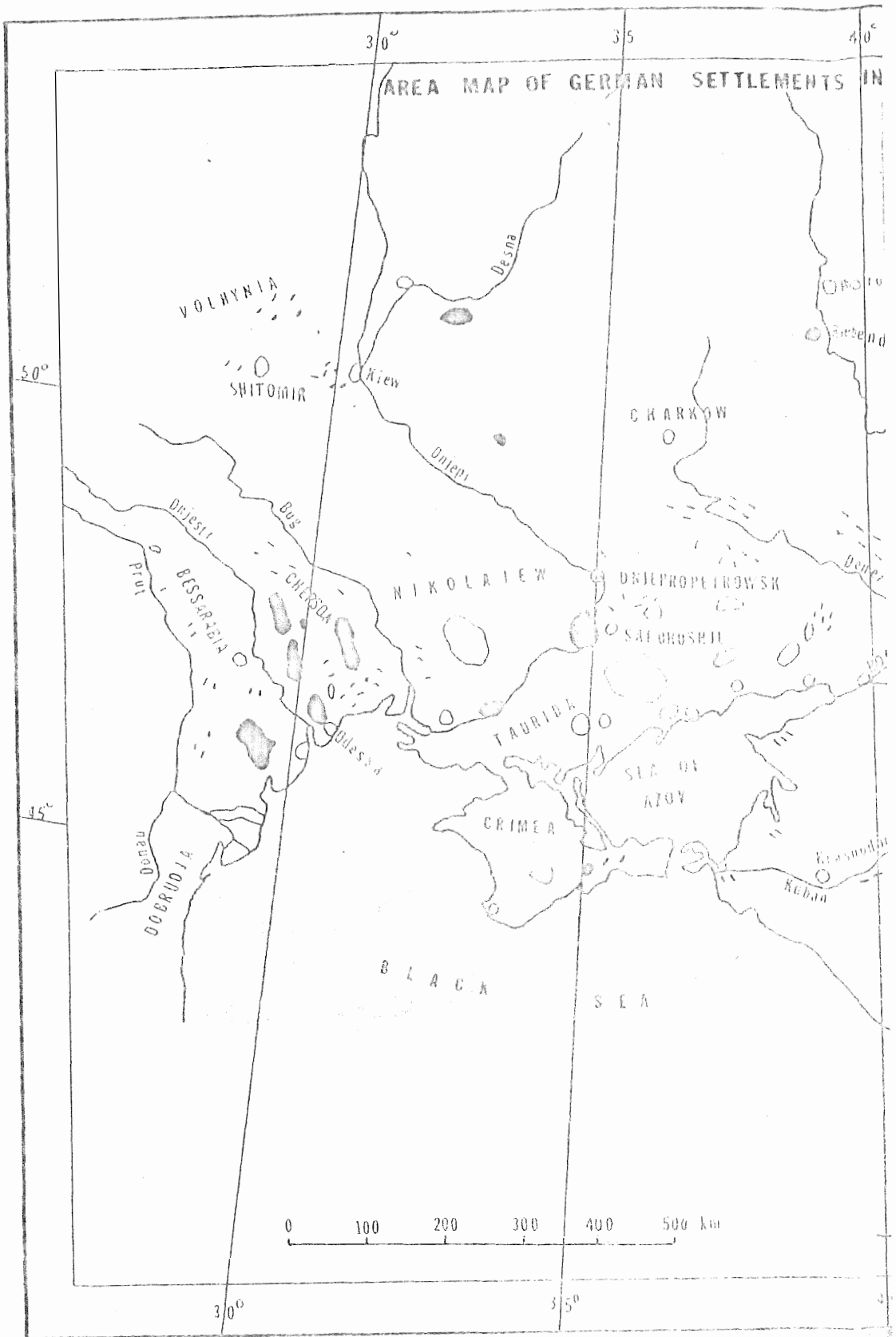
Brauch the next morning before the sun comes up. Go out to a cotton wood tree, then say to the first bird that flies over:

Take with you the jaundice and black jaundice, and consume.

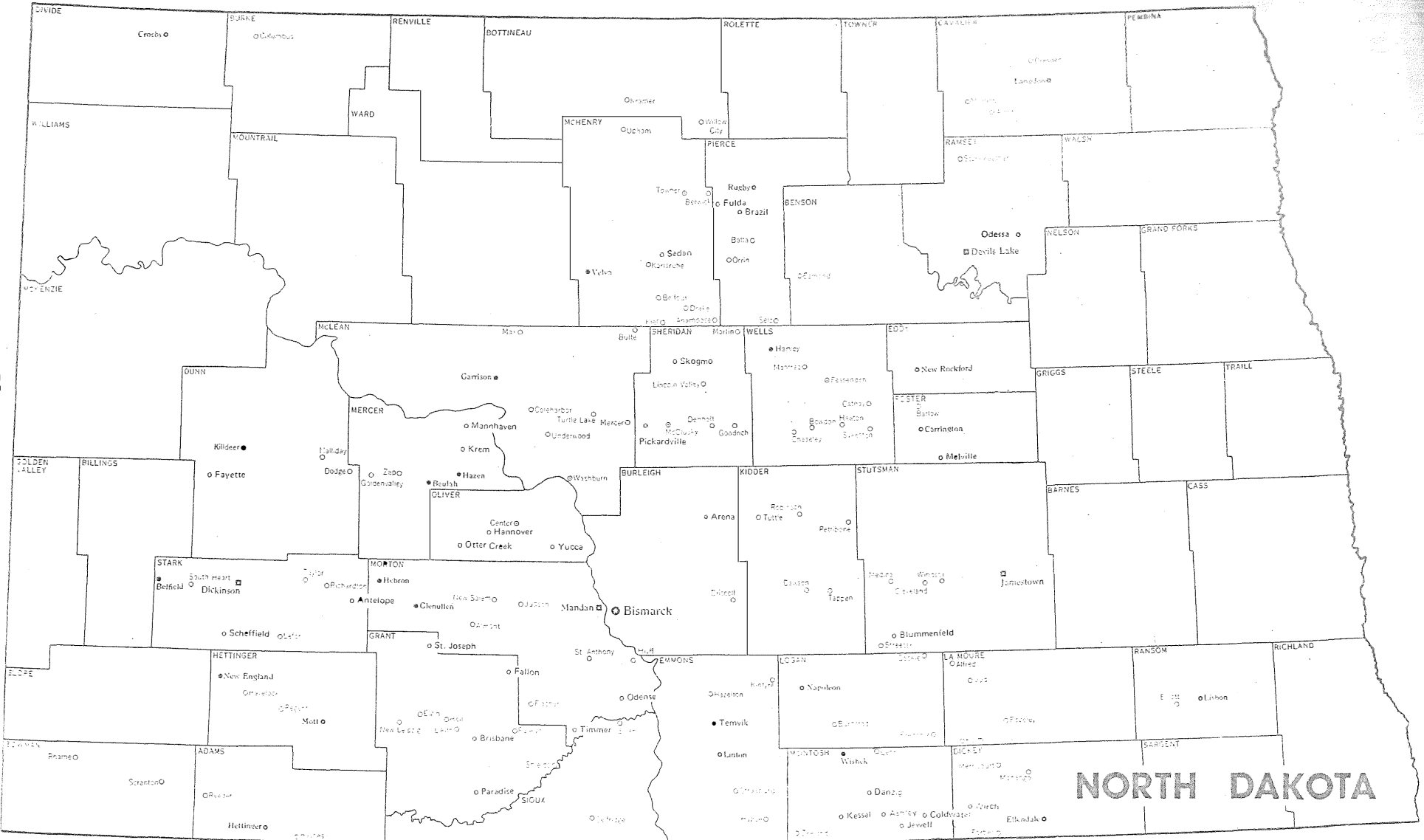
XXX.

Repeat this every morning for three days.

APPENDIX C: MAPS



51



**NORTH DAKOTA**

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