Dutch Hop Polka Documentation Project

"History" of collection for CSU website:

Dutch Hop is a special type of polka particular to the Volga Deutsch (Germans) who emigrated from farmland in Russia to the Great Plains of the United States beginning in the latter part of the 18th century. They settled mainly in Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming, where many resumed their lives as farmers and became especially involved the production of sugar beets.*

The Dutch Hop Polka Documentary Project began in 2006 as a joint effort by three folklorists: Anne Hatch (Wyoming Arts Council), Gwen Meister (Nebraska Folklife Network), and Georgia Wier (initially working with the Colorado Council on the Arts and City of Greeley Museums and later independent). They knew that the adjoining areas of their three states shared Dutch Hop as a cultural gem, and they wanted to preserve as much as possible a written and visual record of the tradition. They began by attending the regularly scheduled dances, always taking photos and meeting musicians and dancers. They then started conducting oral history audio interviews with the Dutch Hop musicians and dancers.

Dutch Hop bands typically include four musicians who play an accordion, a bass electric piano or guitar, a trombone, and the characteristic hammered dulcimer. In earlier years, the bands featured a violin instead of an accordion as the lead instrument. Dutch Hop dancers have many different styles, but often they add a bounce to their steps and an extra little hop or a stomp to the smoother regular polka movements. Older dancers who were interviewed for this project remember the days of backbreaking work in the beet fields and speak of finding joyful release at Dutch Hop dances. Although Volga Germans today generally lead much easier lives, many of them look forward to getting together regularly for Dutch Hop dances.

In 2010-2011, the project folklorists produced a Dutch Hop symposium and other educational programs, working in conjunction with the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, the Legacy of the Plains Museum in Gering, Nebraska; the Loveland Museum/Gallery in Colorado; and the Pine Bluffs Heritage Society in Wyoming. Dancers and musicians who were involved in the regional programs advised the folklorists that the Dutch Hop community needed something more than audio and still photographic documentation to preserve a more complete record of the music and dance tradition: they needed a film. At that point, filmmaker Chris Simon and sound recordist David Silberberg joined the documentary project. Filmmaker Alan O'Hashi was also involved during the early years of film production.

The Dutch Hop Polka Documentary Project collection will join that of the related Sidney Heitman Germans from Russia in Colorado Study Project Collection, started in 1975 at this archival repository. It is particularly fitting that the two collections are associated because one of the student researchers for the Heitman Study Project, Tim Kloberdanz (now Dr. Timothy Kloberdanz), is featured as an interviewee and a topical expert in the documentary project.

The Dutch Hop Polka Documentary Project archival collection at CSU will grow gradually as the folklorists and filmmaker prepare different portions of their materials for deposit. The film footage placed online here will consist of a portion of the interview or dance that was filmed.
Eventually, the collection will include still contemporary photos, scanned historic images, unedited video footage, and a copy of a completed film.

Recorded interviews and photographs associated with the project from 2006-2013 are held by the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia in Lincoln, NE; the Wyoming Folk Arts Collection at the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming in Laramie; and the Northeast Regional Folklorist's Collection at the Greeley History Museum (Colorado).

Funders for different components of the Dutch Hop Polka Documentary Project have included the Wyoming Arts Council, National Endowment for the Arts, Humanities Nebraska, Wyoming Humanities Council, Wyoming Community Foundation, Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund, and Colorado Creative Industries.

*Another group of Germans from Russia emigrated from Russia’s Black Sea region to North and South Dakota.

**Dutch Hop Polka Documentary Movie synopsis, taken from website on November 13, 2018:**

Capturing the Dutch Hop music and dance tradition of Colorado, Nebraska and Wyoming.

Northeastern Colorado, southeastern Wyoming and western Nebraska have a secret cultural gem: Dutch Hop Polka.

Brought to the USA by Germans from Russia, Dutch Hop is among the lesser known of the many types of polka practiced in America. However, in the tri-state area where we have filmed, hammered dulcimers regularly ring and dancers fill the dance floor.

Dutch Hop won’t remain hidden for long. Filming for the Dutch Hop Documentary Movie has been completed, and the editing is well underway.

We are currently raising funds to finish the film. To support this effort, you may make a donation to our non-profit organization, Culture Conservation Corps. Learn more about donating here.

If we can quickly raise the remaining funds, we can complete the film by the end of 2017. At that point Dutch Hop will be a secret no more and the rest of us will have the chance to enjoy this very special music and dance tradition!

**The Film Team:**

**Chris Simon, Director/Director of Photography/Editor:** After receiving an MA in Folklore & Mythology from UCLA, Chris Simon spent 15 years as producer (as well as sound recordist and editor) for renowned documentary filmmaker Les Blank. She then opened Sageland Media, which specializes in telling stories from the American West. Her prizewinning independent
documentaries have shown all over the world. Her most recent film, This Ain't No Mouse Music! about roots music icon Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records, is currently on Netflix.

**Anne Hatch, Producer & Wyoming Folklorist:** Anne F. Hatch manages the Folk and traditional Arts and Health and Wellness programs for the Wyoming Arts Council. Previously, she held positions with the Utah Arts Council, the Nevada Arts Council/Las Vegas, and the Utah Humanities Council. Her media productions include Wyoming Folks: Encounters with Wyoming Folk Artists, which aired on Wyoming Public Television and received a bronze Telly. Anne has a MA in folklore (Utah State University) and a BA in anthropology (Oberlin College).

**Alan O’Hashi, Executive Producer:** Alan O'Hashi is the Executive Director of Boulder Community Media. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Boulder International Film Festival. Alan's goal with all his films and festivals is to spur audiences into discussing their commonalities and differences within the safe space of cinema. Alan graduated from Hastings College in Nebraska and learned movie making at the prestigious Hard Knocks Film School.

**Georgia Wier, Associate Producer/Colorado Folklorist:** Georgia Wier began her documentation of the Dutch Hop tradition while serving as folklorist for the Colorado Council on the Arts and City of Greeley Museums (1996-2007). She was the primary fieldworker for "Dutch Hop Polka: a Tri-State Project Documenting and Presenting a Regional Tradition," a project produced by the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia. Georgia received an MA in folklore from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a BA in Fine Arts from the University of Oregon. She operates an online gallery of folk and traditional arts from the American West. Gwen Meister, Nebraska Folklorist: Gwen Meister is the Executive Director of the Nebraska Folklife Network. Gwen holds an MA in cultural anthropology and an MBA from the University of Nebraska Lincoln. Her accomplishments include the award-winning Mexican Americans in Nebraska oral history project completed for the Nebraska State Historical Society. Gwen has strong ties within Nebraska’s German Russian community and has served as a folklore advisor to the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia.

**David Silberberg, Sound Recordist:** David records sound tracks for all kinds of television, film, and video productions, and also for live music performances. David has also produced and directed his own films about artists and music, and he worked with Les Blank, Maureen Gosling, and Chris Simon for 20 years. He recorded the sound for Chris Simon and Maureen Gosling’s This Ain’t No Mouse Music as well as Chris Simon’s I Hear What You See.

**The Musicians:**

Dutch Hop enthusiasts speak fondly of great Dutch Hop polka musicians from the past. No one who heard them will forget Adolph Lesser and Paul Weingardt from Colorado or the Polkateers (whose members lived in Nebraska and Wyoming). These musicians began playing before WWII.

A later group of Dutch Hop musicians already have retired or passed on. Included among them were Ronald Eckhart and Al Holman.
We did our filming in 2013-2014. The Dutch Hop Documentary Movie will feature four of the bands active then. There have been changes within the bands even since that time - because there's always change in living music traditions.

The Polka Nuts is a "family band" led by Mike "Papa" Gaschler.

Bob Schmer of Nebraska leads the River Boys. A few years before, the River Boys traveled to Washington, DC to perform onstage at the Library of Congress. Check out the River Boys facebook page.

Randy Eckhart led the Dutch Hop Music Makers. He took over the band from his dad Ronald Eckhart.

Everyone loved the beat of the John Fritzler Polka Band.

Since our film shooting, John has retired, but the three other band members carry on, now led by Wayne Appelhans. See www.wadutchhops.com