

AGRICULTURE AS MOVABLE WORLD, PART TWELVE



Yagadnaya colonial granaries*

IN RUSSLAND

You know that feeling when you transpose yourself into a grainy photograph snapped by one of the very first cameras. You look around and see shapes asking to be seen so that you can interpret them. The feeling is *deja vu* in your hand, your finger touching the print, tracing.

She's standing on a street almost as wide as a football field is long.

On both sides a double row of trees, acacia branches shading sidewalk in front of the homesteads lining the wide thoroughfare of packed dirt. A horse pulls a wagon away from her, she sees the driver's back, she notes his cap.



Winter street in Bessarabia (No. 7 NDSU) **

The light gray of the sky in the photo paints itself large, huge, perhaps due to the perspective of standing in the middle on this widest of streets. She gets the sense that, were she to walk out of the picture past acacias and houses, this sky would make up most of the world surrounding, by far.

When she exits the 19th-century photo, Lena Lentz Hardt sits by her kitchen window, the view before her the Lentz Spelt Farms dryland on the Columbia Plateau in bright color, sharp and clear, and alive – look at the deer crossing the field of spring-growth Einkorn.

Not long ago she'd traveled to German Dörfer villages where her ancestors farmed in a landscape of forest, field, woods, moor, hillsides, and as she studies the photos of German-Russian villages in Bessarabia she realizes for how many generations her family has lived in treeless lands of steppe, prairie, arid plateau. No wonder they cared well for those acacias inside their villages in Russia.

Bessarabia. Odessa. The Crimea. Back then those were Russia, today they spread out over Moldava, Ukraine, and a recently contested and re-appropriated peninsula – they're regions with travel warnings attached. It's not safe to go there just now.

Lentz will have to sojourn to her forebears' lives in Russia by photo, book, and interview.

Karl Stumpp ranks a foremost authority on the topic *Russlanddeutsche*. Born in 1896, he grew up in a German community near Odessa. His dissertation based on research of German-Russian "colonies" of the Black Sea region earned him a PhD at Tübingen, Germany. Later he taught school in Bessarabia, then in Tübingen. From 1933 to 1938 he was business manager of the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland*, "People's Alliance for German-ness in Foreign Countries." From 1938 to 1945 he directed research at the *Deutsches Auslandsinstitut*, "German Foreign-Countries Institute" at Stuttgart. After World War Two he kept up his German-Russian research including a compilation of over 12,000 German emigrants, where they hailed from in the German territories, which route they took in what year, in which Kolonie they settled in Russia. He lectured widely and published a number of books; notably Stumpp's two tomes *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763 to 1862* (translated to English) amaze with their detail.

Credit for publishing Stumpp's books in English goes to the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, at Lincoln, Nebraska.

Stumpp begins by describing the conditions in German regions that caused rural folk to leave the lands. We've already discussed this in a previous chapter; what we learn from Stumpp are four aspects we had not yet discovered.

First, he emphasizes that the reasons to emigrate varied greatly from one territory to the next. For example, religion played no big role in the decision of Hessians to emigrate, while in Württemberg, from where most emigrants hailed, religious considerations were on top of the list.

For Hessians, military service had become unbearably onerous since some of the princes profited by placing their soldiers at the disposal of foreign powers. Did you know that 17,000 Hessians marched in America under the English King's flag? And that's only one place of many where Hessian conscripts were sent as cannon fodder by their princes who wallowed in luxury.

In contrast Württemberg, what a hornets' nest of religious contenders for the truth – as each saw it. “Only in Württemberg did religious reasons play an essential role in the emigration,” Stumpp writes. “The people of Württemberg have always had the distinction of a profound piety.” Swabian Pietism! Bengel, Oetinger, Ross and others: “...out of the cold church into the warm Stunde (hour).” Their “Stundists meetings” some German-Russians would continue in Russia until 1914, Stumpp notes. Various other “separatist” religious followers, some politically assertive, others not, also joined the fray. Stir in the Chiliasts: “... a thousand-year kingdom of peace would appear in the East either in 1833 or 1836,” Stumpp quotes.

Onward. Stumpp researched the methods of Russian agents who distributed the leaflets to lure Germans to the Volga. Essentially it was a business for these guys since they were paid premiums for each family they recruited for emigration. “One of the most prominent of these entrepreneurs was Chevalier de Canneau de Beauregard who concluded a contract with the Russian government to recruit and settle 3000 families.”

Recall that we mentioned many hasty marriages. Well, Stumpp comes up with some concrete numbers: in Büdingen (where Lentz had stayed in the castle) 375 couples were wed before departing to Russia, in 1766. In Nürnberg-Wöhrd 66 such marriages, and what's surprising here is that all this wedding went on in the Protestant church even though quite a few to-be-marrieds were Catholics.



Third, Stumpp elaborates on – what to call it? – an outlaw streak among the emigrants, or do we see them as fugitives? People sold their belongings and up and left; there must have been quite a few of those fly-by-nights, because in Stumpp’s books we find specific instructions from princes to their law enforcers to put a stop to “secret departures.”

The Kaiser himself weighed in on July 7, 1768, issuing an edict against “harmful recruiting and emigration into foreign countries which had no relations whatever with the Holy Roman Empire.”

For the Mennonites, all of whom hailed from the Gdansk (Danzig) area of Prussia, “a special agreement” was negotiated so they could emigrate.

Lastly, Stumpp clarifies that Catherine the Great was not all that picky about who immigrated, sure, she wanted farmers, but she’d also take peasants – smallholders who usually had a trade to supplement the income from their tiny farms –; she paid their way, gave them a stake and a loan once they’d arrived at the Volga. All that in addition to her promises of no taxes for 30 years, and no service, military or otherwise, plus religious freedom and self-government in the villages. Land allotments were theirs “for all time,” albeit under ownership not of individuals but of each community at large.

And, the Czaritsa kept going the immigration flow of city Germans that goes as far back as under Czar Ivan the Terrible in the mid-1500s. Russia let them in for their skills, they were tradesmen and merchants, officers and scholars.

Of rural people – the focus of Stumpp’s research – Catherine wanted lots of bodies to build Kolonien, sometimes called Harmonien, as the emigrants perceived their villages: “... the German colonists were to provide a protective wall against Asiatic tribes,” Stumpp explains.

Conversely, the later emigrants responded to the invite from Alexander I who was determined to fill up lands by the Black Sea, from Bessarabia to the Crimea to the South Caucasus, mostly lands that laid fallow after Turks had left in the wake of military defeats. But Alexander was much more discerning than his grandmother Catherine, he wanted “good, well-to-do farmers” who would serve as model agriculturists. Alexander, Stumpp writes, “was not interested in a large number (of immigrants), but in capable settlers.” To that end the Czar required his immigrants to “possess property in cash or goods worth not less than 300 guilders...”

The emigration routes varied, some groups trekked overland, others went part of the way by ship across the Baltic, and some journeyed most of the way on those rickety barges dubbed Ulmer Schachteln; Schachteln, literally: “boxes,” “cartons;” the Ulmer refers to the city of Ulm where the Schachteln started their trip down the Danube to the Black Sea. A few Württemberg groups actually emigrated to the Warsaw region of Poland first, and later trekked from there to Bessarabia.



The Danube at Ulm

Noting that many of the emigrants had to cover more than 2000 miles, Stumpp speaks of “inhuman demands” of

the journey. He quotes from several letters and it’s heart wrenching to read what those people had to endure. So many died, especially children and older people, but stout men and women, too. Dysentery, “fever red and yellow,” and typhus took a big toll. At Ismail alone 1328 German emigrant graves.

“We see two-horse wagons, one-horse carriages, hand carts, also people on foot with staff in their hands moving forward along the dusty road. They move uphill, downhill, through field and forests. Going up, they have to push, for their little horses are weak. Downhill it goes too easy; they often have to tie a bundle of brush to the rear wheels and a couple of men weigh them down, to serve as a brake.” This from an 1818 letter.

For the first generation of rural immigrants, their early years in Russia were extreme hardship also. Catherine the Great’s well-meaning plans were not administered efficiently so that immigrants faced “... a woeful lack of dwellings, farming equipment, and draught animals.” And, after a while it seems she was running out of funds for her colonies project.

Naturally there was initial bewilderment at the terroir oh-so-different from German farmlands. “The first settlers were frightened and depressed on seeing the vast treeless steppe...,” so Stumpp. Along the Black Sea the almost treeless Pontic Plateau stretched over 1000 miles.

The situation for new arrivals didn’t much improve with the decades. Professor Christian Kalmbach, whose compilations appear on the North Dakota State University

website, writes about the 1814 emigration to Bessarabia: “They set out on their long journey in small groups under their own ‘Transport’ or ‘Wanderschulz’ or in large numbers. They were led by a Russian official, on horse buggies or hand-carts or with a bundle on their backs and a pilgrim’s staff in their hands... After overcoming many difficulties and problems, suffering and deprivations, the first troops and groups arrived late in the fall of 1814 in Bessarabia. Yet in the fall (of the same year) only the founders of Tarutino experienced the end of their migration by receiving the place for settlement in the Antschokrak Valley and their new hometown.

“All other groups, who also had arrived in the fall of 1814, were accommodated in Moldavian villages around Kischinew and Bender because no shelters were yet available to them on their settlement places... many had to wait one or two years in these ‘shelters.’”

Water was a big issue. Stumpp writes that some of the mother colonies were established where the wells would run dry. All that building, and now they’d have to tear the village down and move it. Not that the very early settlements were much, consisting of “...primitive sod huts called semljanki.”

Water supply also amounted to additional chores because water had to be brought in barrels to fields as far away as 10 miles, for the four or six draft horses and the farmer who usually camped out when he worked at distance from the Kolonie.

Raids by tribesmen compounded the early immigrants’ difficulties. Three whole German-Russian villages were wiped out by Kirgiz (Kyrgyz), Stumpp notes.

Elsewhere we find reports of Emelian Ivanovich Pugachev, a Cossack who led the Rebellion of 1773-1774 when Russian peasants, runaway serfs and Tatar bands overran some of the Volga districts.

It was decades before the Kolonien grew prosperous and proud, but they did.

“But soon the wild steppe-grass disappeared and unending fields of grain waved over the broad level plain,” Stumpp tells us.

And those German-Russians made the best of it. Once they began to prosper, they built wide straight streets rather than narrow winding lanes they’d had in their former German Dörfer, and they designed their Höfe, the homesteads, more spaciously as well.

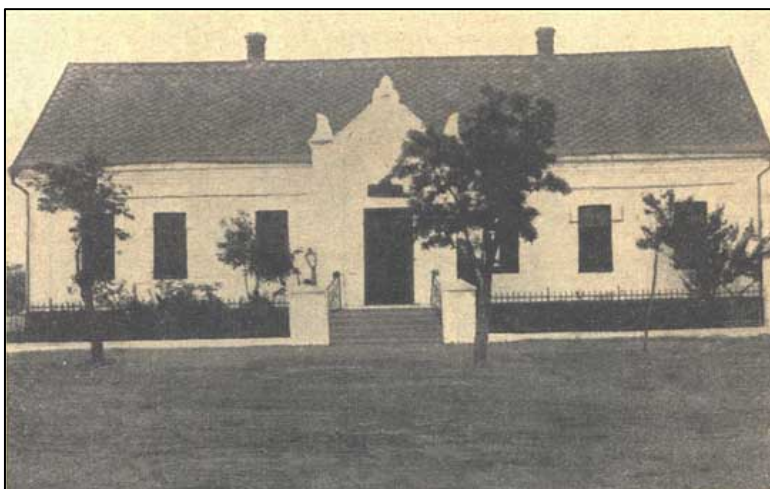
From the thoroughfare photos we can tell that the walls and gates of the homesteads presented a solid front to the street, just as in old German villages. Stumpp included some photos that show pride in their street-fronts, beautifully carved wooden gates in the Volga region.

He also offers us a ground-plan of a typical German-Russian Hof after they'd achieved prosperity, so Lentz can enter. Street-side, wall and gate were framed by the two main buildings; these were Einheitshäuser, one-unit buildings serving several purposes. One big building contained single-story living quarters by the street, a stall farther back, and still farther the shed for wagons and farm implements, all under the same roof. The well and a small herb and flower garden were located before this large building. Opposite stood the "summer kitchen" where most of the baking and much cooking was done, where butter was churned and cheese cured; added on here was a large barn, and a storage for maize at the end. Set apart from the long buildings, by the wall toward the rear of the Hof, a stall for pigs. The rest of the farmstead, in the back, was dominated by the threshing floor, because in South Russia they threshed with horses, having them drag a threshing stone around and around. Off to the side, against the wall, the dung and compost heaps. By the back wall, past the threshing floor, enormous piles of straw that in many Kolonien was used for fuel. "The wealth of a farmer could be estimated by the size of his straw stacks."

Altogether the Hof typically measured 360 feet by 120 feet.

The back wall of the Hof bordered on the Garten, a small pasture with fruit trees just as they'd had back in German regions.

They designed their villages in two ways, Stumpp writes. The Volga Germans went with the checkerboard layout, the Bessarabian Germans had "street villages," all their houses lined up along the wide thoroughfare.



As a rule the villages consisted exclusively of German residents. And some groups of villages constituted an all-German area.

Church was important to German-Russians who'd settled in a specific Kolonie according to their denomination more so than for ethnicity. "Christian instruction shaped the religious and cultural life

in all denominations,” Stumpp notes. “...the schools in the German villages were actually church schools.”

The Black Sea Germans farmed three-field and four-field systems, wheat now the predominant grain, followed by barley, oats, rye. They had to take their wheat as far as 60 miles to the nearest railroad depot or seaport: “One could then see hundreds of German farm wagons, loaded with wheat, rolling across the wide, open plain,” Stumpp sets the scene.

But this wheat was not the wheat they’d farmed in Germany, we learn in an interview at the USDA-ARS Pullman, Washington where Craig Morris was trying to determine what caused hard wheats to appear. The mutation had first occurred in what’s Iran today; the evolutionary advantage for the mutation to survive and eventually to spread, was *mus musculus* the house mouse, in that this rodent prefers soft kernels to hard ones, which Morris proved at Pullman. From Iran the hard wheats would enter Russia, whereas western Europe continued raising soft bread wheats, Morris explained.

(In America, which initially raised the Western European soft wheats, the arrival of German-Russians with their hard wheats would change the flour milling industry, Morris noted, in that the mills switched from stone-grinding to steel-roller milling.)

Also of interest is what happened to all the wheat in those “hundreds of German farm wagons.” In *Harvest Heritage* by Richard D. Scheuerman and Alexander C. McGregor we find this information: “By the mid-1800s, the Black Sea polyglot port of Odessa had become the center of Russian grain exports, as Greeks, French, English, Germans, and Italians mingled with native Slavic peoples to bargain for the region’s ample produce. In doing so they also introduced both intentionally and by accident a number of the region’s most popular wheat varieties as seed for farmers and breeders in Europe and the Western Hemisphere.”

By the late 1800s, American agronomists were convinced that, “...United States crop improvement would best benefit from crosses with Eurasian landraces like the winter-hardy and (fungal) rust-resistant Crimean Turkeys” (the best-known “Turkey Red”), Scheuerman writes. “These were a group of wheats with Slavic geonyms like Ghirka, Kharkov and Stavropol... and the spring durums Arnautka (from Taurida), Kubanka, Pererodka, and Arnautka, the Volga ‘White Turkey’ highly prized by millers for pasta.”

Lentz, reading this, finds it intriguing that some of the Russian wheats of her forebears still exist within the genetic make-up of even the most modern wheats.

Back at the farm in Russia, Stumpp describes the wheat harvests as extremely hectic. “One saw the mowing machines, drawn by two sturdy horses, move rapidly through the ripe fields of wheat or barley... The harvest had to be finished quickly, often within two weeks... At this season they often worked 20 hours a day...”



Sunflower Pressed*

We think that they were in such hurry because they were threshing in the open – “... in one day six to eight wagonloads could be threshed.”

A photo of winnowing reveals that it took three men and one boy for the operation, plus the woman who turned the crank of the machine’s fan.

It wouldn’t be long before the next tillage, Stumpp remarks: “As soon as the threshing was done and the rain had again softened

the soil, the fall plowing began. Four to six horses drew the three- or four-share plow through the stubble.”

Meanwhile, maize, watermelon, and also the pumpkins which they fed their cattle, were raised “in special gardens called bashtans.”

They built impressively large, wooden granaries, in rows; they always held back some of their grain; aside from the start-up phase of the Kolonien, “... in no year had a German ever starved. In the productive years, every German village laid up supplies of grain in the community granaries...”

Also in rows stood their six-bladed windmills; later they milled flour in elevator mills, the machinery powered by steam, wheat straw the fuel.

Their biggest pride were their horses. They fed them very well and groomed them constantly. “At threshing time, on Saturday or Sunday morning, (the farmer) rode or drove to the village dam or to the seashore to bathe the horses,” Stumpp writes.

Preferring the lighter horse because it could trot, their stallions typically were Orlov trotters, named after the Russian count Orlov.

To go with their pretty horses they built handsome wagons. These wagons became quite popular with “progressive Ukrainian peasants.”

Two different land inheritance systems existed, according to Stumpp. Along the Volga the land was divided equally among all men, which decreased farm size with every generation, from the original 42 acres per man to where the farms were too small to be economically viable; at that point the Russian government established additional land grants.

In the Black Sea region it was stipulated that land was not to be divided, so each farm was inherited by only one of the sons, usually the youngest.

In both regions the German-Russians were allowed to purchase land; Stumpp cites the Volga Germans buying about 2,700,000 acres, the Black Sea Germans 11,340,000 acres. Thus, in the four main Black Sea districts, the German-Russians made up 6 percent of the population but owned 23.5 percent of arable land.

If they expanded their lands they also grew their families, the birth rates much higher among German-Russians than those in Germany – 41 per 1000 in Russia, 19 per 1000 in Germany during the same period. The roughly 100,000 immigrants increased sevenfold in 140 years, Stumpp writes. “To the original 300 mother colonies about 3,000 were added.”

The Russians in the towns near the Kolonien liked the German-Russians to begin with, they even had a saying, “Akuraten kak njemetz – as prompt as a German,” Stumpp writes.

Alas, in the second half of the 19th century the zeitgeist changed. Just as elsewhere in Europe, in Germany, in Romania, etc., nationalism became the flavor of popular



Fyodor's Apirary*

sentiment among Russians who now held it against the German-Russians that they were not integrating – when in Russia speak Russian!, the hue and cry. The dislike

continued to sharpen; by the outbreak of World War One it would turn to hate: German-Russians had become “the enemy within.”

The watershed year was 1871 when Czar Alexander III cancelled several special rights that Catherine the Great had promised the German-Russians in perpetuity. The Kolonien lost the privilege to govern themselves; Russian now was mandated as the official language, beginning in school; worst of all, the Czar demanded military service.

A whole lot of German-Russians saw the writing on the wall. Beginning shortly before 1870, a swell of emigration to the Americas. Stumpp cites a 1940 statistic: 407,000 German-Russians in South America, 630,000 in Canada, Mexico, the United States. The Lentzes among them.

And you know what, in Harvest Heritage Scheuerman tells us, “By 1875 the United States had replaced Russia as Great Britain’s principal grain supplier...”

Karl Stumpp’s work has a strong German bias. Understandable perhaps, yet it leads us astray for the simple reason that German-Russians did not consider themselves “German” in the same sense that their relatives in Germany did. Recall that none of the emigrants hailed from “Germany” because they emigrated before the rise of nationalism. They were Hessians, Rhinelanders, Württembergers etc. who missed out on the formative stage of Germany turning itself into an empire nation. They missed out on Bismarck’s mores of Blood and Iron, they missed out on the whole set of cultural, political, economic, scientific, religious developments that would shape the German of the 20th century.

That’s according to the analysis by Gordon Iseminger (published 1992), a history professor at the University of North Dakota who asked, Are we Germans, or Russians, or Americans?, in the context of World War One. Specifically he’s looking at McIntosh County of North Dakota where rural Russlanddeutsche were the majority, about 80 percent of the population in 1910. They’d experienced culture shock upon immigrating, Iseminger remarks, in that they’d been nicely middle-class regarded in Russia but in America they were just another immigrant group.

Quoting Richard Sallet, Iseminger reminds us of the hype surrounding the run-up to America entering the war. State Councils of Defense, the American Defense Society, and other organizations strove to eradicate German language, the “Kaiser’s tongue.” “In South Dakota, concern over the loyalty of the large German population in the state

prompted the state Council for Defense to prohibit the use of German in all public conversations... German books were withdrawn from public libraries, and in Shawnee, Oklahoma, German books were burned as part of the Fourth of July celebration. In South Dakota they were thrown into the Missouri River,” Iseminger writes.

Not the best of times to be a German-Russian with a steadfast refusal to learn English. Here’s how Iseminger puts it: “German-Russians would have fought God Himself had He suggested that worship services could be conducted in a language other than German. ‘Yes,’ German-Russian parents might reassure their children, ‘Our Lord God knows everything – but He cannot understand the heathen babbling that is English.’”

Now we come up against a contradiction, in that Karl Stumpp praised the level of education and literacy of the German-Russians in the Kolonien by the Black Sea, whereas Iseminger paints a very different picture, pointing out that the German-Russians had “more interest in religion than in education.” He goes further: “Because the educated people among them – foreign priests and pastors, Russian officials, and traders – tricked and abused them, Germans in South Russia distrusted educated people and had little respect for them.”

In McIntosh County, a multifaceted man by the name of C.C. Lowe pretty much controlled the media, publishing and editing both newspapers and owning movie houses. It’s by researching the German-language portions of Lowe’s newspapers that Iseminger arrives at his conclusions.

Yes, in becoming German-Russians they adamantly retained their culture, and they stuck to that in America as well. “They clung to their language, shunned contact with other nationalities, neglected schools, and disliked free public education and compulsory attendance laws. Few German-Russian children completed the eighth grade and it was unusual for a German-Russian young person to attend high school,” Iseminger writes.

Most importantly, they could not relate to Kaiser Wilhelm II, “... nor did they appreciate his desire to secure Germany's ‘place in the sun.’” In contrast to Germans immigrating directly from Germany – Iseminger dubs them Reichsdeutsche for whom Germany was “a distinct place” –, the German-Russians in North Dakota perceived German lands as “a deeply sentimental, even mystical, ... ancient Vaterland.”

As a matter of fact, the Reichsdeutsche themselves did not regard German-Russians as Germans, and as a rule treated them with contempt, he notes.

Iseminger's compelling case of North Dakota in the teens of the 20th century demonstrates that those German-Russians had become their own ethnic group, unlike Stumpp's take that does not make that distinction.

If Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany was not a place they identified with, equally certain is that they did not align with Russia, never having integrated there; moreover, marriages with Russians had been exceedingly rare. The more surprising then that Iseminger found most German-Russians in McIntosh County intending to return to Russia. "Their clothing, foods, architecture, and agricultural practices all revealed varying degrees of Russian influence. Their German dialects were liberally sprinkled with Russian loan words."

He quotes German-Russians yearning for their Heimat – "homeland-and-its-people" – not in Germany but in Russia, and a number of them actually did go back to the Black Sea after the World War. But civil war then raged in Russia, the Bolsheviks and all that, and those horrific Russian famines occurred in the early 1920s. "Not until then did they come to realize that South Russia was no longer a 'paradise on the steppe,'" Iseminger notes. "The intense homesickness they had once felt for Russland gradually gave way to a grudging appreciation for the prairies of North Dakota."

Russia love threads through interviews and conversations we have with Richard Scheuerman, professor at Seattle Pacific University. A Wolga-Deutscher himself, he reaches back into the past of the German-Russians who were among the first to settle in the Pacific Northwest, via Nebraska and Kansas. OK, that actually sounds easier than it really was – just as Lentz didn't find out she was German-Russian until she was in her teens, so did Scheuerman run into difficulties to obtain history about Russia and life in German lands before that. "Not a lot of (German-Russian) people passed on information about Russia or Germany to their children," he acknowledges. This is understandable, Germany the culprit of two world wars, and Russia turned Soviet. In his own student days Scheuerman was steered to French rather than German as a second language. So researching the past of his extended family and German-Russians in general, meant to labor like a sleuth. Ah, but Scheuerman is a persistent fellow.

His story begins in 1766 when "eighty intrepid families from the rolling Vogelsberg district north of Frankfurt (in Hesse) anxiously gathered in the city of Büdingen to begin a momentous and perilous journey eastward."



Yagada House*

They made their way north to Lübeck where they boarded three Russian ships bound for Petersburg, 269 persons in all. A year later they'd arrived at their allotted land on the Volga and founded Yagodnaya Polyana, "Berry Meadow." There was good water and fertile black loam.

"Each family was given much less than earlier colonists. They received two horses, one cow, and fifteen rubles. Some members of this group did not

survive the first winter in the wilderness with such meager provisions. Some probably dug caves in hillsides and disassembled their wagons to fashion homes. They had no tools for cutting wood to build log houses so in the spring built adobe or sod houses with thatch roofs. In spite of the many hardships, many survived and thirty years later the colony consisted of 420 people in 97 families," Scheuerman writes.

At that point, rye, oats, sunflowers and flax were the main crops they raised; the average family owned eight horses, nine cows, seven pigs, 20 sheep, 25 chickens. Their prosperity had by then enabled them to built nice houses; all-around, they'd advanced to the middle class, Scheuerman notes.

A few family narratives came to Scheuerman's attention. For example: "Henry and Anna Litzenberger... spun marvelous tales that stretched back to the earliest days of our people's immigration to Russia — of Catherine the Great's unexpected visit to their lodging near her coastal Oranienbaum Palace near St. Petersburg, of nomadic tribes that inhabited the eastern Volga plains, and about ferocious wolves that attacked sled-bound travelers across the Russian steppe. Anna Barth Litzenberger had traveled along the Volga by camel as a young midwife..."

Keepsakes: Scheuerman writes how lacquer bowls and cedar baskets, old amber necklaces, red and black wooden spoons, multicolored embroidered headscarves are among family heirlooms that connect today's German-Russians in the Pacific Northwest with their far past, the more treasured for the fact that in leaving for America, the once-again emigrants had to choose carefully which item they'd fit into their steamer trunk.



Scheuerman strolling Russia*

In 1992, the Soviet system having collapsed, Scheuerman went to Russia “to scout things out,” and in 1996 he led a group of about 30 on a 16-day tour along the Volga. “We took a bus from Saratov to Yagodnaya Polyana, ‘Berry Meadow.’ First we went along a paved road, then we turned onto a gravel road, and the last miles we were on a muddy road... We received a warm

welcome at town hall – that used to be the church,” he recalls. “They gave us Russian bread and salt, that’s traditional. The threshing floor, you can still tell where that was. And one of the colonial granaries still stands, built out of logs.”

Up on the hill the cemetery, that was sad. “You can tell where the graves are but all the markers are gone,” Scheuerman relates.

Yagodnaya Polyana today is a village of over 1200 people. “After the fall of the Soviets about 15 German-Russian families went back there, but they were not greeted friendly, the Russians didn’t like them to come back, they didn’t want anyone making claims on the land. Today there are a half-a-dozen German-Russian families there.

“The transition to privatization was not smooth, well, you know it costs a lot of money to start farming. So now it’s a collective again, with a manager; they farm thousands of acres. Their technology is not much advanced, they still do a lot of stuff with hand-work.”

Wheat, rye and sunflowers are still the crops raised around Yagodnaya Polyana. “I’ve always gone over there in September before school starts, I’d really like to go earlier so I can see the crops before harvest,” he remarks.

Of particular interest for the traveling group was a visit to the museum in Engels. Winnowing machines, scythes, scythes with cradle, a toy cow beautifully carved, all kinds of Kolonie accouterments put everyone into their families’ Russia past.

For Scheuerman personally it was nice to spend time visiting with a granddaughter of the aforementioned Litzenbergers, Eva Litzenberger-O'Neill-Baldaree, who traveled with the group. "She was very quick-witted." She'd gone to college in the 1920s, he relates, a tad unusual not only because of her gender but also of her German-Russian background – in view of how Iseminger described the Ruslanddeutsche antipathy to public school. "Eva was a world traveler," Scheuerman says.

Not a one of the tour group felt sad that their forebears had left Russia, just the opposite. "Everyone was sure glad that they went to America," Scheuerman sums up. "We talked about letters that came from Russia (after 1915), they make you weep. Siberia, Stalin, the trains to northern Kazakhstan, it was one thing after another."



Scheuerman and Teri Hermans of Lentz Spelt Farms at the 2015 Cascadia Grain Conference*

Scheuerman has taken his inquiry of German-Russian history a step farther than most, collecting some of the wheats immigrants had brought over from Russia, and propagating them.

It was in that context that Lentz first met Scheuerman, he'd come to Lentz Spelt Farms for samples of Einkorn, Emmer, Spelt, and the hullless barley. "He's full of information," Lentz says. "He asked a few questions about my

family. We had a long conversation about our German-Russian heritage while we walked around the warehouse. I was glad to get to know him."

Last year she sat in on a lecture about heritage grains Scheuerman gave at Othello's Sandhill Crane Festival. "It was a nice turn-out," she says. "He spoke about Harvest Heritage, the first crops in the Big Bend country (Columbia Plateau), not only wheats but also fruits and vegetables. He passed around jars of the different grains, people seemed very interested. I found him pleasant to listen to, he's a very good speaker."

Scheuerman even managed to locate germ plasm of Saxonka at the USDA small grain seed bank at Aberdeen, Idaho. The German-Russians must have carried seed



Saxonka Wheat*

of that wheat from Saxony to Russia (it's a soft wheat). Saxonka, he notes, is frequently mentioned as "Colonist Wheat."

Scheuerman also went into the kitchens of his forebears, tracking recipes German-Russians enjoyed in the 1800s. Together with Maria Ellis he created *Harvest Home*, a cookbook of seasonal grain recipes alongside Old and New World culinary lore. Lentz treasures her signed copy of that.

When we left Lentz's part of German history we had her imagine who she'd be if her forefathers hadn't gone to Russia. We'll do the same here, and a sad story it was for the German-Russians who stayed. In 1915 the Laws of Liquidation were enacted against Germans and Austrians in Russia, Stumpp writes. And though these laws were not applied wholesale, thousands were "... deprived of their property... (and) under very inhuman conditions... forcibly transported into eastern regions... as far as Siberia. Almost half of them lost their lives..."

Nor was the Soviet system kind to them; further deportations of German-Russians flung them into far-east regions such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan. Some, in World War Two, fled westward and trekked to Germany but the Russian army fetched many back and stuck them into prisons. Until 1955 a lot of German-Russians slaved in those infamous gulags.

Only a fraction of German-Russians were allowed to go back to Germany, about 50,000 between 1951 and 1976.

By the 1970s, 800,000 German-Russians are living in Central Asia, the Soviets having had a similar idea as the czars – settling the wide-open spaces. Stumpp bemoans the fact that, "In 1970 only 66.8 percent of the German(-Russian)s gave the language of their ancestors as their mother tongue..."

Sounds like they're finally integrating, doesn't it.

Lentz looks at the photos again, comparing the 1800s' black-and-whites in Stumpp's book with the 1996 photos Scheuerman shares. You'd expect the newer photos to

show modern lines incorporated into the old Höfe – as she'd seen in Germany's Dörfer –, but that doesn't seem to be the case here on the Volga, above all she senses regression. A 100-year fall from glory.

It adds to Lentz's discomfort. Just as somewhere in Germany there must be far-away relations of hers, the same must be true of Russia, and knowing what those people and their recent forefathers suffered – the ones that didn't perish – shocks her.

It will be so nice to be in America in the next chapter.

Meanwhile she'll try her hand at making Barley Borscht, following the Ukrainian recipe in Scheuerman's cook book that features barley most prominently. Surely she'll use that heritage black barley she's raising.



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* Courtesy of Richard Scheuerman

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