

## Trip to Rural Russia Overview

### Where is the Volga River located?

North of Moscow, Russia to Black Sea & Caspian Sea



### Where along the Volga River were the trips concentrated?

- Between the cities of Volgograd and Saratov
- Villages along the river on both the west and east sides; for German Russian researchers, the
  - West side was called “Bergseite” to suggest mountains, or in reality hills.
  - East side often called “Wiesenseite” describing plains or fields
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### Why did primarily Germans settle along the Volga River?

- The short answer is that between 1762 - 1767 Catherine the Great, a Prussian Princess who married the Czar of Russia came into power, and believed that Russia could be a powerhouse in the world if she had reliable farmers to settle and farm the plains. The Volga River area was not the only location German and other European immigrants took up residence.
- Catherine sent out a Manifesto to many Germanic locations, where people were living. There really was not a country of Germany at

## Trip to Rural Russia Overview, continued

- the time, and the Germanic people had suffered through numerous wars, famine and poverty.
- The Manifesto promised 67 acres of land per family, money to get started, freedom of religion, freedom from military service and much more, and the freedom to manage their individual villages as they saw fit.

### **How many colonies were there along the Volga River?**

- The original mother colonies - 104
- The original colonies plus daughter colonies - 3000

### **Why did these Volga German descendants now leave Russia after living in Russia for 150 years?**

- In the late 1800s, many of the manifesto promise ended to include land, religious freedom, freedom from military service, and there was ever-increasing taxation, and interference in village administration and even educational curriculum of their children.
- In the early 1900s, there was significant change and unrest. The Bolshevik Revolution was particularly harmful for the German Russians who were viewed as oligarchs, even if they had only one employee; there was a pandemic, a famine, WWI, the loss of autonomy, loss of use of German as primary language, and their religion.
- The changes in politics found the efficient Volga Germans starving to death because they had to give most of their produce to the government; many were murdered because they were viewed as enemies to the common Russians.

### **Why did my relatives settle in America?** The simple answer is because of the above-described reasons:

- The Lust Family destinations were divided. Two of my Great-Grandfather's siblings went to South America. By the time he immigrated, his oldest sister and her family left South America and moved to Kansas. My Grandfather was advised to come to America instead of South America
- The Bitter Family already had numerous branches of family living in North America. One family actually went to Saskatchewan where their descendants still reside. The rest, after many trials and tribulations in

### **Trip to Rural Russia Overview, continued**

Nebraska and Colorado, made their way to Central Valley of Fresno, Selma, Biola, where my memories of family began.

**Where can you find out more about the history of the German Russians? See the following reference sheet.**

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR)

- Has a website with resources and contacts
- Lists chapters throughout the U.S. and Canada
- Has books and maps for sale for specific villages
- Is a resource for more than just the Volga Germans; the society also addresses German-Russians throughout Russia

<https://www.ahsgr.org>

German-Russian Heritage Society (GRHS)

- Has a website with resources and contacts
- Lists chapters throughout the U.S. and Canada
- Has books and maps for sale for specific villages
- Is a resource for more than just the Volga Germans; actually focuses more on the Black Sea or Bessarabian Germans.

<https://www.grhs.org>

Volga German Institute, North Florida University

- Has a website showing resources and contacts (POC: Brent Mai)
- Research
- Is a resource for primarily Volga Germans, but does have more information about other German Russians

<https://www.Unf.edu.vgi>

Additional Resources:

- Using the sites above, specifically the one for University North Florida, Brent Mai and Mila Korentikov offer guided tours to rural Russia. (because of pandemic, the 2020 tours were cancelled)
- Familyserach.org has many scanned German-Russian documents from Russia. In order to see them, one has to go to Salt Lake City Family History Center. (Need to check to see if you can enter the center because of restriction due to the pandemic)
- Family History Center: Mount Vernon, Washington at 1700 Hazel Street; phone number 360-424-1700; advise that you call ahead for hours of operation as they may be closed due to the pandemic. Also ask for whether they can help with German-Russian research. Volunteers change, and therefore, knowledge of available resources.