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THE INTEGRATION OF THE VOLGA GERMANS INTO  
AMERICAN LUTHERANISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

By  
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May 2010

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## PREFACE

I was introduced to the Volga Germans through my wife, whose grandparents came from the Volga villages of Jost, Balzer, and Enders. Becoming involved in the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR), while she is primarily interested in genealogical research, I have been fascinated to learn about the history of this group of people. The annual conventions of the AHSGR have been opportunities to see and hear about trips back the Volga to see the villages and meet distant relatives who remain in Russia, to hear about the latest research, and experience some of the culture.

As I prepared for the task of writing a thesis, I wondered how these people became a part of American church history. In my seminary studies of American Lutheranism and the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I do not remember hearing about the Russian Germans. Why not? Since so many of them identified themselves as Lutheran, where did they go in the American church when they came to this country? How did they fit in?

In my initial contacts with Dr. William Schumacher to begin this study, he was cautiously supportive. As the research continued, our telephone conversations became much livelier as we discussed theories and possible avenues for further study. With his encouragement, I now present what I believe is a meaningful contribution in American church history.

I want to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Linda Neeley, Reference, Interlibrary Loan, and MeLCat Librarian for the Library of Michigan, who went out of her way to seek out and supply the many books and articles I requested and offered valuable suggestions for my research. Pam Wurst, Archivist for the AHSGR, provided invaluable assistance by bringing stacks of materials I requested to the AHSGR conventions, pointing out possible resources in the archives, and readily sending material to me through the mail. Although the translations of German text in this paper are my own, I appreciate the help of my niece, Kim Mueller, for

proofreading and editing my translations. I am also deeply grateful to many members of the AHSGR and members of church congregations of Volga German heritage across the country for supplying data for this research. I also thank my advisor, Dr. William Schumacher, for his patient support, critiques, and guidance which helped to shape the structure of this project and keep it on task. And last but not least, thank you to my wife for the encouragement to undertake this project and the patient support to see it through.

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper traces the incorporation of Lutheran Volga Germans arriving in this country between 1870 and 1910 into American Christianity and identifies factors in their affiliation with American church bodies. It analyzes whether Lutheran bodies identified the Volga Germans as a distinct ethnic group among German immigrants in America and recognized the specific challenges and adaptations necessary to work among them. Where Volga German congregations were established, the factors which decided joining one denomination over another are explored. Specific theological, ecclesiastical, and cultural issues that determined whether a group of Volga Germans aligned with one church body versus another are delineated.



## INTRODUCTION

### The Question

The Volga Germans are a significant and distinctive ethnic group. Although German in their origin and heritage, they dwelt for over a century on the steppes of Russia. They lived under the rule of the Czars and were neighbors with Russian peasants. They absorbed elements of Russian life and culture such as their style of dress, diet, terms, and idioms of language. Cut off from the influences of their first homeland, the German they spoke toward the end of that century was significantly different than the German spoken by their cousins back in Germany. Their departure from their homes in Russia was driven by motives different from those who emigrated from Germany, and their arrival in the United States was in distinct waves during a relatively brief period.

Between 1870 and 1910 tens of thousands of Volga Germans immigrated to the United States and by 1920 over one hundred thousand first and second generation Volga Germans were in this country.<sup>1</sup> The largest percentage of these people trace their religious heritage to Lutheranism brought from Germany to Russia, and many still identified themselves as Lutheran upon their arrival in America. Starting primarily in the American heartland, they spread throughout the nation from Michigan and Arkansas in the east to Washington and California in the west. Now there are over six million Volga German descendants in the United States and Canada.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fred C. Koch, *The Volga Germans: In Russia and the Americas from 1763 to the Present* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1977), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Brent A. Mai, "A Long, Fascinating Journey: The Story of the Volga Germans and How Their History is Now Preserved at Concordia," *Concordia Connection* (Summer 2009): 16.

During the past forty years there has been growing interest and research in the history, culture and genealogy of the Volga Germans as evidenced by the founding of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (A.H.S.G.R.) in 1968. The research efforts have been enhanced by the recent lifting of the “iron curtain” which has provided greater access to source materials in Russia.

In historical records and memoirs written about and by the Volga Germans, one common refrain running through their history is the role the church played in establishing a community identity in their new homeland. This influence remains a key to this day in how the descendants identify their connection with the original immigrant community. However, the histories by and about the Volga Germans look at the broad story of how they came to this country, settled throughout the western states, and established their communities. There is relatively little discussion in these sources about how the Volga Germans fit in and became a part of American churches, and particularly American Lutheranism.

At the same time, from the perspective of the history of the church in America, this group and their integration into American Christianity has little mention. The various histories of the Lutheran church in America have no reference to the Volga Germans as a group. Published memoirs of Lutheran pastors during the period in which Russian Germans were becoming established in America only vaguely refer to Russian Germans in general and rarely Volga Germans in particular. What factors determined how the Volga Germans chose to affiliate with one denomination or another once they arrived in America? Within the field of church history this topic has been little addressed. A search of academic papers finds none which specifically investigate this subject. As neither secular nor sacred histories provide an answer, this paper will explore the question by studying a representative sample of congregational records where it is known that Volga German communities and Lutheran churches correspond.

## **The Literature**

The existing literature generally falls into two categories: the history of the Volga Germans and the history of American Christianity. The histories by and about the Volga Germans will be the foundation for reviewing their origins and religious history in Russia in Part I. These sources will also outline their arrival and spread throughout the United States. The histories of American Churches reviewed below are the major works which describe the various denominations from the perspective of writers within the church. These become significant in Chapter 4, which will explore the intersection between Volga Germans and American church as seen by the church.

### **The Volga Germans**

The history and heritage of the Russian Germans including the Volga Germans has been the topic of interest and research for generations. Most of the literature until recently has been primarily in German and much of it in Germany and Russia. Within the past fifty years more information has become available in English. And since the fall of the Soviet Union the opportunity once again to research Russian libraries and state archives has resulted in the discovery of new material and documents previously inaccessible. One example is the work of Jacob Dietz.

Jacob Dietz, a respected lawyer, deputy in the state *duma*, and editor of a Russian newspaper for the Volga region, was born in 1864 in the Volga colony of Kratzke. As editor he traveled among the German colonies and wrote a number of articles which became his book *History of the Volga German Colonists* published in final form after his death in 1917. The existence of this carefully researched and documented work was known, but it was located only a few years ago in Russian state archives. It was translated from the original Russian to English and published in 2005. Dietz provides not only a history of the Volga Germans but a wonderfully detailed contemporary description of their culture, customs, and environment.

Fred Koch was born in the Volga German village of Kolb and arrived in the United States at the age of five. As a graduate of the University of Washington in journalism, he drew on years of extensive research of the writings of Volga Germans to produce *The Volga Germans: In Russia and the Americas from 1763 to the Present*. He provides a detailed and intimate look at the life of the Volga Germans in Russia and a well documented history from the time of their immigration to Russia through their immigration to the western hemisphere. He also describes the ultimate deportation to Siberia of those who remained during the Stalin regime. In addition, he provides a critically evaluated bibliography of the literature and sources in both the eastern and western hemispheres.

Koch criticizes Bonwetsch's *Geschichte der Deutschen Kolonien an der Wolga* because Bonwetsch inaccurately describes the Germans who came to Russia as, "the lowest dregs of the German population."<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, written in 1918 as the exodus from the Volga colonies was coming to an end, Bonwetsch draws on an extensive list of German and Russian sources including church and state archives published in Russia and Germany from the origin of the colonies until their decline. He provides extensive statistics and details of work life, church, and school.

J. J. Ballensky was a German Congregationalist pastor serving Russian German congregations in Nebraska, Colorado, Montana, and California during the 1920s and '30s. His publications are short summaries for a popular audience. For example his *Wolga-Deutschen an der unteren Wolga* is only thirty-one pages and was priced at twenty cents, while *Wolgadeutsche Bruderschaft* is only twenty pages in length, both produced through publishers of German American newspapers. He provides basic factual information about the Volga colonies in his first

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<sup>3</sup> Koch, 319.

volume but does not identify his sources. When he moves on to discuss the Volga Germans in America he notes he had interviewed some thirty immigrants to document their history and pieced it together to form his account.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, in his later work he has a good general history of the development of the Brotherhood, tracing it back to its origins among the Swiss pietists of the Seventeenth Century. The last six pages are devoted to the transplantation of the Brotherhood to the American continents. He provides plenty of details and numerous quotes, but gives no indication of his sources. Nevertheless, because of his proximity to the transition from the Volga to the United States, his works are worthwhile reading.

Dr. Hattie Plum Williams, historian and sociologist, served as the chair of sociology at the University of Nebraska from 1915 until 1945. Throughout her career she pursued her interest in German Russians. Envisioning a definitive work on the history and sociology of this group, she researched sources in both German and Russian including state archives in Germany and Russia prior to the First World War and the Soviet revolution. In addition, she wrote as a contemporary about the arrival of the Volga Germans to the United States and their settlement in this country and used contemporary resources. Upon her death in 1963, her manuscript was given to the archives of the Nebraska State Historical Society. Members of the A.H.S.G.R. found the manuscript and all the supporting research and edited it for publication in 1975. Written so close to the arrival of the Volga Germans to this country, and while primary sources were still readily available, *The Czar's Germans* has particular value for research.

Richard Sallet's work, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, grew originally from his work as editor of the *Dakota Freie Presse*, one of the well known German newspapers

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<sup>4</sup> J.J. Ballensky, *Die Wolga-Deutschen an der unteren Wolga und in Nord-America* (Denver, CO: Colorado Herold, 1924), 18.

formerly published in this country. In that capacity he traveled and got to know the Russian Germans throughout the country. This developed into his Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard University and the book which has been translated from its original German publication of 1931. The text is almost exclusively his original work in which he traces the various groups of Russian Germans, i.e. Volhynian, Baltic, Black Sea, etc., from their Russian homeland. He gives a brief description of their background, then provides extensive descriptions of their patterns of settlement in the United States. In his appendices he provides detailed tables of Russian German populations and communities based on the 1920 U.S. census. In his bibliography he does cite Ballensky and Williams. The translators, Rippley and Bauer, add notations throughout Sallet's text, extensive tables of Russian German communities including census data throughout Russia, and essays about place names and the architecture of Russian Germans on the prairies.

Karl Stumpp, generally considered the "father" of current Russian German research, was born in 1896 in a Black Sea German village. His lifelong efforts included serving as the director of the *Deutsches Auslandsinstitut* in Stuttgart, publishing annual editions of the *Heimatbuch der Russlanddeutschen*, and serving as chairman of the *Landsmannschaft der Russlanddeutschen*. Among his accomplishments he traced the native German towns of over 12,000 German families that had immigrated to Russia, described the social and economic history of the Russian German colonies, and produced an exhaustive bibliography of books and publications relating to this group. His small volume, *The German-Russians: Two Centuries of Pioneering*, originally published in German in 1964, traces the history of all of the major Russian German communities, presents maps of their settlements, describes their social and cultural life, and tracks their fates beginning with the Soviet Revolution. The photographs he includes provide dramatic visual documentation of every aspect of Russian German life from earliest times up until the book's publication.

Among more recent works are those of Giesinger, Long, and Walters. Giesinger's work, *From Catherine to Khrushchev*, provides a history of all Russian German regions, but focuses mostly on the Volga and is extensively researched. It relies primarily upon sources published in Germany from the beginning of the twentieth century to the beginning of World War II for its account of the Volga colonies. Giesinger includes chapters looking specifically at the Protestant, Mennonite and Roman Catholic churches. As the title indicates, Giesinger's scope includes the persecution of the Russian Germans, the dissolution of their colonies, and their deportation to Siberia and Kazakhstan. In discussing the settlement of the Volga Germans in the Americas, Giesinger turns to many works contemporary to the period.

By contrast Long's *From Privileged to Dispossessed* focuses exclusively on the history of the Volga Germans up to the Soviet Revolution. Long first discovered this group in 1975 through the Germans from Russia in Colorado Study Project at Colorado State University. In his continued research he made extensive use of Russian books and articles and investigation in Soviet archives as well as several oral interviews of Volga Germans living in the United States. The result is a detailed description of the origin of the colonies, the daily life, and the legal and political world in which they lived.

George Walters was born in Kansas in 1920 to descendants of Volga Germans from Katharinenstadt. In *Wir Wollen Deutsche Bleiben*, he provides not only an objective history of the colonies and a picture of the society, but also numerous first-hand chronicles and accounts. At least half of the book is devoted to the fate of the Volga Germans from the outbreak of World War I through the end of World War II. George reports that the bulk of his resources came from documentation captured from the Germans at the end of World War II and archived in Alexandria, Virginia. His text was edited by his son Christopher and updated by son Charles.

Kenneth W. Rock's work, *Germans from Russia in America*, is a brief monograph of

sixteen pages. Like Long, Rock was also involved in the Germans from Russia in Colorado Study Project. His paper was prepared for a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. He relied primarily upon sources already noted above, but provides a concise description of the settlement and acculturation of various Russian German groups.

### **The American Churches**

Nelson's *The Lutherans in North America* is a standard text outlining the history of Lutheranism from the earliest settlers in the Seventeenth Century. The period significant to this study is covered in chapters written by Eugene L. Fevold and Fred W. Meuser. In his section of the book, Fevold refers to a number of works on immigration to the United States during the period 1875 to 1900. With regard to the growth of Lutheran churches during this period, he relied upon such works as Dau's *Ebenezer*, Jacobs's *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, and Carl S. Meyer's *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. Meuser's section covers the period of 1900 to 1930. He also refers to Dau as well as various other histories such as George H. Trabert's *English Lutheranism in the Northwest*, and Ernst George Goos's *Pioneering for Christ in Western Canada*. He also frequently cites the official proceedings of the General Synod and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Jacobs, a professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, wrote his volume tracing Lutheranism in America back to 1624 with the arrival of Dutch settlers in New Holland, later New York. He brings the book to a close at the end of the nineteenth century when Volga Germans were arriving in this country and establishing their communities. Among his sources he relies upon the *Lutheran Year Book* and the *Lutheran Church Annual* of the 1880s and 1890s for statistical information. He also refers to Hochstetter's



*Die Geschichte der Ev.-Luth. Missouri Synod* of 1885, Gräbner's *Half a Century of Sound Lutheranism in America* of 1893, and Wolf's *The Lutherans in America* of 1889. It provides a comprehensive picture of the Lutheran church up through the beginning of the period in this study.

Rev. C. V. Sheatsley, instructor at Capital University, reported that he undertook his history of the Joint Synod at the solicitation of the Publication Board of that synod. He provides no bibliography nor notes. He reports that he relied heavily upon archives collected by a Rev. Albert Beck and upon the collections of the Capital University library. He makes it clear that his is not intended to be an exhaustive or documentary history of the Joint Synod, but to be a true account accessible to the popular reader. In his text he abundantly cites official proceedings, reports, and correspondence. This gives evidence of his earnest and extensive research and provides a sound factual foundation for his history. At the same time, he freely provides his interpretation and evaluation of events and the individuals behind those events, making it clear that his is a celebration of the centenary of the Joint Synod.

John Philipp Koehler's work, originally entitled *Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin und andern Staaten*, was requested by the Wisconsin Synod to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 1900. The work was originally published in 1925, coinciding with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the synod, and comprised the first two of what ultimately became five chapters. From 1938 until 1944 Koehler translated, revised, and completed his work. Koehler quotes a great deal of source material such as personal correspondence, articles from official church publications, and official actions. Although he provides an overview of the Wisconsin Synod's birth and growth, with some interesting anecdotes, his is primarily a history of the theology and politics of the synod both internally and in relation to other synods, with his readily evident interpretation. The editor of the current

edition provides a good insight into the reason for this: “The *History* . . . represents the interpretive analysis of the life of one institution by a man who was trying also to orient that institution in new directions.”<sup>5</sup>

*Ebenezer*, edited by W.H.T. Dau, is a collection of essays chronicling and celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Among them, Eckhardt and Pfothauer address the time period and the geographical regions relevant to this study. Pfothauer’s essay, “The Opening Up of the Great Northwest,” describes the expansion of the synod from Michigan and Minnesota, through the Dakotas, across to the Pacific Northwest and western Canada. Writing for a general audience with a broad sweep of history and geography, Dr. Pfothauer provides no bibliography or notes. However, the text draws heavily upon such sources as *Der Lutheraner* and synod and district records and convention proceedings. Rev. Eckhardt provides a brief descriptive history of mission work and growth in several Midwestern and Western states from Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska in the east to California and Oregon in the west. Like Pfothauer, he writes for a general audience. Thus, he gives some specific details of people and events in these areas but provides no bibliography or notes and little information about his sources.

In his forward to *The Building of a Great Church*, W. G. Polack clearly indicates the original purpose of his text: “When this book made its first appearance in 1926, it was intended particularly for the upper grades of our Christian schools. Its purpose was to present briefly and concisely the story of the Lutheran Church in America, especially that of our own Synod.”<sup>6</sup> He

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<sup>5</sup> John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, ed. Leigh D. Jordahl, (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970), vii.

<sup>6</sup> W. Gustave Polack, *The Building of a Great Church: A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America with Special Reference to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), vii.

begins his account with the first German miners who arrived in Venezuela in 1527 and later adopted the Augsburg Confession as their profession of faith.<sup>7</sup> The first three chapters describe the earliest history of Lutheranism in the United States. From chapter 4 on, Polack focuses on the origins and history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from the Saxon immigration to the presidency of Dr. J. W. Behnken. He provides few footnotes and his bibliography is rather brief, including Dau, Jacobs, and Sheatsley. Nevertheless, he does provide a good overview of his subject with extensive quotes and citations from various official proceedings, *Der Lutheraner*, and, the *Lutheran Witness*.

Roy A. Suelflow, a respected professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, wrote *Walking with Wise Men* in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the South Wisconsin District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He provides no bibliography. However, his endnotes show his extensive research in *Der Lutheraner*, the *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, the proceedings of the Synod, the various districts, and several other synods, as well as archives of individual congregations

August Suelflow also served as a professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and was the director of the Concordia Historical Institute for many years. His *The Heart of Missouri* was written in celebration of the centenary of the Western District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He traces the growth and expansion of the Western District into all the various districts which branched off for their origin. Many of these incorporate areas of Volga German settlement, including the Nebraska District in 1882; the California-Oregon District in 1887; the Kansas District in 1888, later subdivided with the Colorado District in 1921 and Oklahoma and Kansas Districts in 1924; and the Southern District which generated the

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<sup>7</sup> Polack, 2.

Texas District in 1906. He presents a brief history of the church's work in individual states. He also provides a description of the district's work in special missions, such as city missions and English missions. *Der Lutheraner*, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, Bewie's *Missouri in Texas*, as well as district reports of the Western District and its daughters serves as Suelflow's resources.

George Eisenach's *A History of the German Congregational Church In the United States* proves to be extremely significant in tracing the religious history of the Volga Germans. His work is based upon the archives of the Chicago Theological Seminary, German Department, and the minutes of the various conferences of the Congregational church. In addition, he sent a questionnaire to every active minister in the German Congregational Church, seeking information about the church and the pastor's ministry. He states he received a large enough number of responses to provide a representative sample, but provides no specifics. Chrystal's chapter in Zikmund's *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ* relies almost exclusively on Eisenach's work.

In addition, Eisenach's *Pietism and the Russian Germans in the United States* is well researched. He cites Ballensky, Bonwetsch, Sallet, and Stumpp. But he goes far beyond these to locate numerous primary sources including Brotherhood publications, personal memoirs and letters, and first-hand oral accounts of people involved in the Brotherhood in Russia and in America. His book is divided into three sections; the first giving the historical background of the Brotherhood among the Volga colonies, the second describing its transplantation to the United States, and the third giving a description of the organization and activities of the Brotherhood in this country. Eisenach provides abundant documentation for his work and, because of many close connections between the Brotherhood and German Congregationalism, is a critical resource for this study.

**PART I**

**THE VOLGA GERMANS**

## CHAPTER ONE

### ORIGIN OF THE VOLGA GERMANS

#### Catherine the Great

##### Her Rise to Power

The history of the Volga Germans actually begins with the history of Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia. She was born to minor Prussian nobility. Her father, Christian August Anhalt-Zerbst, served as a general in the army of King Frederick William. Her mother, Johanna Elizabeth Holstein-Gottrup, was the daughter of the impoverished bishop of Lübeck and was adopted by her godmother, the Duchess of Brunswick. The General was transferred to the garrison town of Stettin, so the newly married thirty-seven year old Christian and fifteen year old Elizabeth moved to Number 1 Grosses Domstrasse. On April 21, 1729, Sophia Augusta Frederica was born.<sup>1</sup>

From the death of Emperor Peter the Great in 1725, the throne of Russia had changed hands several times, including reigns by his widow Catherine I, his grandson Peter II, a two-month old distant nephew, and ultimately his daughter, Elizabeth (1741–1762). On New Year's Day, January 1, 1744, Johanna Anhalt-Zerbst received an invitation for Johanna and her daughter to the Russian court in St. Petersburg, written at the direction of Elizabeth. Empress Elizabeth had chosen Sophia as the bride for her nephew and successor to the throne, Grand Duke Peter of

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<sup>1</sup> George J. Walters, *Wir Wollen Deutsche Bleiben: The Story of the Volga Germans*, ed. Christopher D.

Holstein. Elizabeth knew Johanna's family, and wanted a daughter of nobility, but one not so significant as to be enmeshed in European affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Sophia immediately set to work to acclimate to her new home. She learned the language and the history of her adopted land and soon became entirely devoted to its interests.<sup>3</sup> In addition, she studied the doctrine of the Orthodox Church and converted from her native Lutheran faith. She was received into the church on June 28, 1745 and was baptized Catherine Alexeevna, the name having been chosen by the Empress in honor of her own mother, Catherine I of Russia.

The following day Catherine and Peter exchanged vows and rings in a betrothal ceremony, and Catherine was proclaimed Grand Duchess. The actual wedding was celebrated on August 21, 1745, in a ceremony conducted by the Bishop of Novgorod.<sup>4</sup>

The Empress Elizabeth died on Christmas Day, 1761. Duke Peter of Holstein was proclaimed Tsar Peter III and Catherine was now Empress Consort.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning, Peter was unpopular with his court, his army, and his church. He behaved disrespectfully, even crudely, during the funeral activities for his aunt, who had been an extremely popular sovereign. Considering himself German, he attempted to make over the army to be like the Prussian army. He made peace with Frederick II of Prussia, ending Russia's role in the Seven Years War, and attempted to enlarge and secure his duchy of Holstein. He mocked the Orthodox faith during the services, installed a Lutheran chapel in the St. Petersburg palace, and made onerous and

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Walters, rev. Charles Walters (Kansas City, MO: Halcyon House, 1993), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Walters, 21; Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev: The Story of Russia's Germans* (Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia [A.H.S.G.R.], 1974), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Giesinger, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Walters, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Walters, 26.

unpopular decrees in an attempt to “modernize” the Orthodox Church.<sup>6</sup>

In a coup d’etat on Friday, June 28, 1762, officers of the army and their troops swore allegiance to Catherine as Empress of Russia. Later in the morning, the priests of the church consecrated her and pronounced her “autocrat Catherine the Second.” Peter III was apprehended and imprisoned. Although she denied any complicity, later supporters murdered Peter, making her sole sovereign. She reigned until her death in 1796.

### **The Manifesto**

With rebellions by serfs in the central and lower Volga regions, the thought of settling German peasants on her empty lands occupied Catherine’s mind in the very first months of her reign. Severe measures were taken against the serfs, and the disturbances were quelled. But Catherine understood the dangers of the situation in this region. She decided to settle the region with quiet and reliable colonists.

Catherine had several reasons for inviting colonists from foreign countries, especially Germans, to settle in the Lower Volga. She needed them to cultivate areas of virgin land and increase agricultural production. Such settlements, she hoped, would bring industry and progress to her undeveloped frontier areas and would serve as models for the Russian peasant. She also hoped they would provide a protective wall against Asiatic tribes.

On December 4, 1762, Catherine issued a manifesto inviting colonists: “At Our ascension to the All-Russian Imperial Throne, We established for Our self the chief rule that always all Our motherly oversight and labor is for the peace and prosperity of all the wide empire entrusted to Us by God, and for the increase of its inhabitants. And because many foreigners, both equally our subjects and those foreigners separate from Russia, petition Us to allow them to settle in Our

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<sup>6</sup> Walters, 27; Giesinger, 5.



empire, We are most merciful to declare that not only foreigners of various nations, except Jews, will be favorably accepted for settlement in Russia and by the most sincere example We affirm that all who arrive for settlement in Russia will be shown mercy and thanks by Our Monarch, and even those (Russian) subjects who have escaped from their homeland We will allow to return.”<sup>7</sup>

At the same time she created the ministry-level *Kantselyaria Opekunstva Inostrantsev*, the Chancellery for the Guardianship of Foreigners, or as known by the German colonists, *Tutelkanzlei für Ausländer*. This office, which reported directly to Catherine, was directed to oversee all aspects of her proposed colonization plan. However, this 1762 invitation offered no special inducements and came at a time when the Seven Years’ War had not yet ended in Western Europe. Consequently, it attracted little attention and brought no immigrants to Russia.

After further consideration, on July 22, 1763, Catherine issued a new manifesto, a masterpiece of immigration propaganda (Appendix 1). Giesinger describes the new manifesto thus:

This famous document gave an alluring picture of Russia: large tracts of fertile land virtually uninhabited, in well-watered regions readily accessible to trade, with a wealth of minerals and ores waiting for discovery, with lucrative opportunities for the establishment of industries: a vast sparsely populated paradise waiting only for people to enjoy it. To attract the foreign settlers, generous promises were made: free transportation to Russia, freedom to settle anywhere in the country, freedom to practice any trade or profession, generous allotments of free land to those who chose agriculture, free transportation to the site of settlement, interest-free loans for ten years to establish themselves, freedom from customs duties for property brought in, freedom from taxes for from five to thirty years, depending on the site of settlement, freedom from customs an excise duties for ten years for those who set up new industries, local self-government for those who established themselves in colonies, full freedom to practice their religion, freedom from military service, all privileges to

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob Dietz, *History of the Volga Colonists*, ed. I. R. Pleve and E. R. Yerina, trans. Richard Rye (Lincoln, NE: A.H.S.G.R., 2005), 26.

be applicable also to their descendants, and, finally, freedom to leave again if they found Russia unsuitable. What more could a prospective immigrant desire?<sup>8</sup>

This, then, became the foundation for the Volga German settlements. For the next five years, thousands of Germans immigrated to Russia based upon the manifesto's promises. For the next one hundred years, their descendants relied upon it as the source of all their rights and privileges.

## The Colonies

### Delineation of Settlements

In Northern Europe the Seven Years War had just concluded. The devastation and hardship it caused throughout German states and Austria made Catherine's invitation to Russia extremely appealing. Between 1763 and 1772, 30,623 colonists arrived in Russia to settle in the Volga region.<sup>9</sup> The bulk of the migration was complete by 1768, when Germany passed laws prohibiting further exodus.<sup>10</sup> Of course the journey to the immigrants' new homeland was long and arduous. And the reality at the end of the road was not as attractive as the picture in the advertisements. Nonetheless, by 1768, one hundred four colonies were established in the Volga.

The *Tutelkanzlei* established a branch office, or *Kontor*, at Saratov to oversee the establishment of and represent the imperial government to the new colonies. Colonies were laid out according to a Russian *mir* system, in which the land was communally owned by the village. Homes were built in a central village and farmland was distributed in fields outside the village.

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<sup>8</sup> Giesinger, 5–6.

<sup>9</sup> Brent Alan Mai and Dona Reeves-Marquardt, *German Migration to the Russian Volga (1764–1767): Origins and Destinations* (Lincoln, NE: A.H.S.G.R., 2003), i.

<sup>10</sup> George J. Eisenach, *Pietism and the Russian Germans in the United States* (Berne, IN: Berne Publishers, 1948), 21–22.

Farmers would leave the village to work their fields during the day and then return to the village at night.<sup>11</sup>

***Wiesenseite vs. Bergseite.*** The Volga region south of the city of Saratov had very different topography on either side of the river. To the east the land was the flat open stretches of the Russian steppes. This was known as the *Wiesenseite* or Meadow Side, and sixty of the original colonies were established throughout this area. Because of the expanses of arable land, the *Wiesenseite* villages had a distinctly agricultural character. To the west of the Volga the land was hilly and was labeled the *Bergseite* or Mountain Side. The remaining forty-four of the one hundred four colonies were settled on the *Bergseite*. Because this region was less favorable for farming, the *Bergseite* villages tended more toward commerce and manufacturing.

**Protestant vs. Catholic.** The other major division of villages, which is more significant for this discussion, was the division by faith. On February 19, 1764, Catherine elaborated and clarified the way land for the settlements was to be allocated:

Colonists to be settled in districts, "... occupying a district resembling a circle ... (with) sufficient lands for the allocation of up to 1, 000 families. Until the number of settlers may increase, the districts may be adjusted according to the needs of the establishment, and people of each religion will be settled in special districts according to the distribution of the various religious faiths, thus negating any enmity and hatred which usually occurs among those of different faiths."<sup>12</sup>

The Saratov *Kontora* settled the immigrants<sup>13</sup> in communities based on whether they were Roman Catholic or Protestant. Of the original one hundred four villages founded, seventy-two were Protestant and thirty-two Catholic<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Walters, 58–59 .

<sup>12</sup> Dietz, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Dietz, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Giesinger, 201.

Of the Protestants, about seventy-eight percent were Lutheran, the rest Reformed (Calvinistic). On the *Bergseite* the Reformed were concentrated in seven of the thirty Protestant villages. On the *Wiesenseite* they were scattered in many villages.<sup>15</sup> Eventually the Reformed parishes, although retaining many of their distinctive practices and beliefs, were absorbed into the Lutheran Church organization of the Volga region.<sup>16</sup> (Appendix 2)

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<sup>15</sup> James W. Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed: The Volga Germans, 1860–1917* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 42.

<sup>16</sup> Giesinger, 156–57.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE VOLGA COLONIES

#### The Evangelical Church

##### Church Structure

**Chronic Shortage of Clergy.** Lutherans in the Volga faced numerous unique challenges which shaped the church's character both in Russia as well as later in its adopted home, the United States. One major factor that fashioned the Lutheran church among the Volga Germans was the lack of trained and qualified pastors. Among the original colonists only a few are known to have been pastors. Clergy from German lands could not be recruited in sufficient numbers to meet the needs to provide a pastor for every village church. Koch reports that there were six ministers to serve seventy-three Lutheran and Reformed colonies between 1764 and 1772.<sup>1</sup> Bonwetsch reports:

The evident problem in the church was the shortage of clergy for the *Wiesenseite*. In the year 1820, only four Lutheran and one Reformed pastor came to support the forty evangelical colonies with 20,500 communicants and 4,600 children between the ages of seven and fourteen years. One of them had twelve congregations to look after, thus only able to preach in each of them five times a year, not to mention grossly neglecting the duty to spiritual welfare, which was necessary for them to provide.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Koch, 111.

<sup>2</sup> "Der augenfälligste kirchliche Mißstand war de Mangel an Geistlichen auf der Wiesenseite, wo im Jahre 1820 auf vierzig evangelische Kolonien mit 20 500 Abendmahlsgenossen und 4600 Kindern zwischen sieben und vierzehn Jahren nur vier lutherische und ein reformierter Pastor kamen. Einer von ihnen hatte zwölf Gemeinden zu versorgen, konnte also in jeder von ihnen höchstens fünfmal in Jahre predigen, gar nicht zu reden von der gröblichen Vernachlässigung der seelsorgerlichen Pflichten, die notwendig damit verbunden waren." Gerhard

Giesinger notes that the number of parishes grew over the years, but so did the number of colonies and the population. In 1823, there were seventeen parishes serving those seventy-three colonies. In 1861, there were twenty-five parishes, but now serving one hundred twenty-three colonies with over 160,000 residents. By 1905, there were one hundred twenty-seven colonies divided into thirty-one parishes, with over 400,000 residents.

Seminary training was established in 1833 at the University of Dorpat, but even that did not meet the need, in part because of the difficult living conditions and because of the low pay. The consequence was that Lutheran and Reformed often worshipped together. Chrystal describes the situation well:

A chronic shortage of clergy existed from the beginning. Priests sometimes ministered to Protestants, and theological differences between Lutheran and adherents of the Reformed faith were often minimized. Although Russia German Lutherans embraced the *Kondordienbuch* (Book of Concord), as did Lutherans everywhere, one observer nonetheless noted: "The confessional status of the colonies is unclear." Provincial in many ways, Russia German Protestants heard good sermons. Sometimes, however, the sermons were read by the local schoolteacher from a *predigtbuch*, or book of sermons, because the large parishes and scarcity of pastors made it impossible for all places to have a minister to officiate each Sunday.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the result was that the Sacrament of the Altar, Baptisms, and weddings were possible only a few times a year when the pastor arrived at the village church to conduct services.

**Reformed and Lutheran.** The shortage of clergy contributed to the next significant shaping influence, the union of both Lutheran and Reformed congregations beneath one banner. As noted above, Protestant and Catholic were separated by colonies and, with the exception of Beaugard

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Bonwetsch, *Geshichte der deutschen Kolonien an der Wolga* (Stuttgart, Verlag von J. Engelhorn's Nach f., 1919), 73.

<sup>3</sup> William G. Chrystal, "German Congregationalism," in *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, Volume 1*, ed. Barbara Brown Zikmund, (New York: United Church Press, 1984), 67.

(Borgard) and Katharinenstadt (Baronsk),<sup>4</sup> were prohibited from mingling. However, as far as the Russian government was concerned, there was no essential distinction between Lutherans and other Protestant confessions.

For the most part Lutheran and Reformed were settled together in the same villages and often used the same churches. Giesinger notes there were seven predominately Reformed villages with their own congregations on the *Bergseite*, but on the *Wiesenseite* the Reformed pastor had 22 preaching stations scattered among the villages.<sup>5</sup>

Koch notes that originally the separation between Lutheran and Reformed in Volga villages was pronounced, but that this changed over time:

While members of the opposing churches lived together amicably, they remained apart ecclesiastically. For a time, it was more tolerable for some members of either group to receive the sacraments of marriage and baptism—and even Holy Communion in cases of emergency—from a Catholic priest than from a Protestant pastor of the opposing faith. This was particularly true in the Reformed faction.

The second generation of colonists began to display indications of a germinating doctrinal conciliation between the two groups. About the beginning of the nineteenth century this tendency had developed to the point where Lutheran pastors frequently consented to perform weddings and baptisms for Reformed members in their parishes. However, they still held fast to their stand on the Eucharist. Since it was the practice of the Protestants to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion only twice a year, those living in a parish not served by the minister of their faith could usually await the call of a compatible itinerant cleric ....<sup>6</sup>

Duin notes that most of the Reformed congregations were served by Lutheran pastors and were ultimately absorbed by the Lutherans, so that only three Reformed parishes remained by 1820.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Koch, 31–32.

<sup>5</sup> Giesinger, 156–57.

<sup>6</sup> Koch, 111–12.

<sup>7</sup> Edgar C. Duin, *Lutheranism Under the Tsars and the Soviets*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975), 1:236.

## **Creation of the Consistory and Standardization of Practice**

Initially the Protestant church in Russia was under the auspices of the Justice College of Spiritual Affairs, a division of the Ministry of Justice. Church order was primarily in accord with Swedish church law, used by the Baltic provinces, which did not adapt well to this Russian setting. The Justice College of Spiritual Affairs made no efforts to revise the rules to fit Russian needs. The result was a wide disparity in the conduct of worship and the introduction of various innovations within the Lutheran church, not only in the Volga region, but throughout the various regions of Russia where the church was found.

In 1804, Alexander I (1801–1825) instructed the Ministry of Justice to have the Justice College of Spiritual Affairs investigate the causes of such innovations and develop a unified ‘Order of the Liturgy’ (*Liturgische Verordnung*), which received his approval in 1805. Then in 1810 he established the Chief Directorate of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions and moved the administration of the churches from the Justice College of Spiritual Affairs.

In July, 1819, Alexander issued a decree which created an Evangelical Lutheran General Consistory in St. Petersburg. This took control of the protestant church away from the Justice College of Spiritual Affairs. Then in September a provincial Evangelical Lutheran consistory located in Saratov was also established with oversight of the Volga churches.<sup>8</sup> Later, Nicholas I (1825–1855), Alexander’s brother, moved the General Consistory from St. Petersburg to Moscow in 1832 and divided it into local consistories, and then again into parochial districts.<sup>9</sup> With that, the Saratov Consistory effectively came to an end.

The first superintendent of the Saratov Consistory was Ignatius Aurelius Feßler, a former

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<sup>8</sup> Dietz, 271–72.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Stumpp, *The German-Russians: Two Centuries of Pioneering*, 3rd ed., trans. Joseph S. Height (New



Capuchin monk and priest, and a Freemason. He was consecrated as Bishop in the Lutheran church in November, 1819, and took up the post as Superintendent of the Consistory in April, 1820.<sup>10</sup>

Feßler recognized that one of his most important tasks was to bring some uniformity and order within the Volga churches. This applied especially to the liturgy. “Liturgy,” he said, “is exclusively the work of grace; it is the enlightening, the inflaming, and the anointing of God’s Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> Dietz notes how Feßler brought a greater solemnity to the service, had parts of the liturgy chanted, emphasized the rites of communion and confirmation, and introduced images, organs, and choirs.<sup>12</sup> With this, we see his emphasis on a uniform and orthodox liturgy across all of the Protestant churches under the purview of the Consistory.

Giesinger reports:

Fessler convoked a general synod of all the Volga pastors and asked it to devise ways and means of bringing order and uniformity into the religious services in the Volga parishes. Fruit of its labors was the Volga German hymn book, a collection of 823 hymns from the Reformation tradition, which was used in the Volga parishes to the end of their existence, and a liturgical manual, acceptable to both Lutherans and Reformed, which prescribed the ceremonies and prayers for worship and communion services. Fessler was very concerned about the quarrels that had kept the Lutherans and the Reformed apart and made a determined effort to bring about sincere co-operation between them .... The common hymn book, the common liturgical manual (which allowed for minor variations to satisfy both confessions), and the common synods for the pastors of both, gradually brought the old antipathies to an end.<sup>13</sup>

Feßler presented the hymnbook, which became known as the *Volga Gesangbuch*, and the liturgy in St. Petersburg in 1827, and it was adopted as the order of service for the Lutheran

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York: Edition Atlantic – Forum, 1978), 98.

<sup>10</sup> Dietz, 275.

<sup>11</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Dietz, 275.

<sup>13</sup> Giesinger, 162–63.

church in Russia in 1832.<sup>14</sup>

Giesinger, as noted above, as well as Long<sup>15</sup>, see this as a very positive and constructive move by Feßler to bring harmony and cooperation between Lutheran and Reformed. Bonwetsch concludes, “The universal hymnal ... became one of the best means for the strengthening of the community consciousness of the evangelical parishes on the Volga.”<sup>16</sup> By sharp contrast, Eisenach describes this process as some form of imposed rigidity and formality verging on Catholicism. Eisenach blames this development on the loss of “spiritual vitality” within the church and the rise of rote formalism.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to note how the Consistory countered the impression that the changes were imposing Catholicism upon the Protestant churches. A circular was issued in 1821 ordering that on the festival of the Reformation pastors were to read the *Augustana* in church in the presence of twelve deputies as confirmation that they held to the Lutheran faith.<sup>18</sup>

Koch gives a more balanced view of the results of the synod. In general, the practice within the colonies was:

... [T]he preponderant denomination of a colony accepted the minority members in fellowship of worship and granted them the right to all sacramental ministrations.

Without relinquishing their principle precepts on the Eucharist, the two denominations admitted each other to their respective churches and altars and accepted the enrollment of children from the opposing faith in their parochial schools....

It must be made clear that religious fellowship between the two branches of Protestantism on the Volga did not destroy the intrinsic theological identity of either.... The Reformed Church made up 3 of the eventual 29 Protestant parish

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<sup>14</sup> Dietz, 280.

<sup>15</sup> Long, 45–46.

<sup>16</sup> “*Dies einheitliche Gesangbuch... wurde eines der besten Mittel zur Stärkung des Gemeinschaftsbewußtseins der evengelischen Gemeinden an der Wolga.*” Bonwetsch, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 33–35.

<sup>18</sup> Dietz, 275.

districts and continued to be an important denominational factor. However, the two bodies were brought within the administrative structure of the Lutheran consistories in 1832. Some colonies continued to be identified as Reformed communities.<sup>19</sup>

Many accounts of worship in Volga churches describe how Reformed and Lutheran attended service together. The pastor of the congregation catechized and confirmed children each according to their confession. Baptisms were administered according to the confession of each group. When Communion was celebrated, Lutherans would approach the altar and kneel to receive the sacrament. Afterward the Reformed would come forward and stand at the altar, and again, receive the sacrament in keeping with their confession.

### **Rise of the Brotherhood**

#### **Moravian Brethren in Russia**

Another group Catherine invited to immigrate to the Volga region was the Moravian Brethren from Herrnhutt, Saxony. The pietistic Moravian Brethren had been introduced to Russian Lutheranism as early as 1729 when they became established in the Baltic provinces, especially Estonia and Lithuania. Although Elizabeth had outlawed their congregations in 1743, they remained, and in 1764 Catherine restored the right of the Brethren to carry on their worship in complete freedom.<sup>20</sup>

To the south and east of the main German enclave along the Volga were several nomadic heathen tribes including the Kalmucks, Kirghiz, and Tartars. They were problematic in part because they would attack and raid settled communities, pillaging goods and livestock. Catherine invited the Moravian Brethren to settle there with the hope that they would evangelize the

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<sup>19</sup> Koch, 112–13.

<sup>20</sup> Duin, 1:161–65.

Kalmucks, who were Lamaistic Buddhists. This would not only end the raids, but also encourage the Kalmucks to settle into fixed communities and increase productivity from this fertile region

In 1765, the Moravian Brethren established the village of Sarepta, downstream and about one hundred fifty miles south of the Saratov German villages.<sup>21</sup> But the mission work was difficult because of language, religion, and the nomadic lifestyle of the Kalmucks, so that after several years the Moravians had gained only one baptized convert.<sup>22</sup> Originally, they had been forbidden to interfere with the Volga communities north of them or to proselytize among the German villages. But as the mission work among the Kalmucks failed, the Moravian craftsmen and tradesmen found their way among their countrymen.

### **Pietism in the Volga colonies**

To the north of the Sarepta colony, Rev. Janet, a reformed pastor educated among Swiss pietists, also arrived in the Volga in 1765. He served the villages of Anton and Messer and established friendly relations with the Moravian brethren, inviting them to do mission work among the Volga colonists.<sup>23</sup>

The Sarepta missionaries found a ready field among the Volga colonies. They held revivals with emotional speakers, promoting the necessity of a spiritual rebirth into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and living a pious life of humility. In 1820, Dr. Feßler abruptly terminated the Moravian mission, citing it as sectarian. But the Sarepta colonists continued to travel throughout the Volga colonies, carrying on their trades as tailors, cobblers, and merchants

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<sup>21</sup> Koch, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 37–38.

<sup>23</sup> Giesinger, 158–159.

during the day and conducting prayer meetings at night.<sup>24</sup>

The result was the growth of extra-ecclesiastic fellowship groups which held regular meetings (*Andacht*), usually in private homes. A large portion of the meetings was hymn singing, generally hymns from the *Gesangbuch* sung from memory. This would be interspersed with prayer. An elder member of the group would read some portion of Scripture and give an exposition of his understanding and interpretation. Sometimes the highlight of the session would be a personal witness of a member's conversion experience or walk in the Christian life.<sup>25</sup>

A strong element of this movement that developed into the Brotherhood was emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. These groups didn't see themselves as separate from the Church, but always as a portion of the Body of Christ, perhaps just a more "authentic" experience of it.<sup>26</sup>

This movement never seemed to take root within the Catholic villages, where it was forcefully quashed by the clergy. But within some Evangelical villages it found tolerance and sometimes even open support from clergy. Some Lutheran pastors, though, strongly opposed the movement, seeing it as an infringement upon the pastoral office and a source of division within congregations. These sought government sanction and suppression.

The church law established by the consistory in 1857 decreed:

1. That religious meetings which exceeded the bounds of family devotions may hereafter not be conducted by laymen without previously notifying the civil authorities and obtaining permission from the Consistory;
2. That in such meetings no one has the right to preach or administer the Sacraments, and that all religious exercises therein shall be limited to the reading of the Scriptures, without explanation, or to such religious

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<sup>24</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 41.

<sup>25</sup> Koch, 119.

<sup>26</sup> Long, 44–45; George Dorn, "The Brotherhood/Bruderschaft," *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (A.H.S.G.R.)* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 55.

transactions and discussion as will be permitted by the Consistory, without any additions or further explanations; and to the singing of spiritual hymns and the offering of prayer, which also must be examined and approved by the Consistory;

3. That these meetings shall not be held at the time of the regular church worship services, and that they shall in no case cause dissension within the Church, or in no wise conflict with spiritual or civil regulations.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, the prayer meetings continued, often in secret.<sup>28</sup>

### **Creation of *die Bruderschaft* (The Brotherhood)**

The pietistic movement received a significant boost from Rev. Wilhelm Stärkel. Born and reared in the Volga, he received his theological training at Basel Missionary School. In the 1860's he served as a missionary in America, serving German congregations in Wisconsin, Missouri, and Kansas. In 1869 he returned to Russia and served the parish at Eckheim until 1877.<sup>29</sup> He was then called to serve the village of Norka from 1878 to 1908.<sup>30</sup> He helped call the first convention of the organization which became known as the Brotherhood. Shumacher and Sallet suggest the first conference of the Brotherhood was held in 1873.<sup>31</sup> Koch and especially Eisenach, however, have stronger support for stating the first conference was held in Brunntal in 1871.<sup>32</sup>

That conference resulted in the creation of an organization for the pietistic movement among the Volga colonies and a system of structure, rules, guidelines, and expectations.

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<sup>27</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 44; Long, 45; Dietz, 311–12.

<sup>29</sup> Giesinger, 344.

<sup>30</sup> Long, 45.

<sup>31</sup> Ervin Schumacher, *Forward in Faith* (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1998), 29; Richard Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States* trans. Lavern J. Rippley and Arand Bauer (Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1974)

<sup>32</sup> Koch, 119; Eisenach, *Pietism*, 69.

Eisenach reports how the conference spelled out rules for prayer meetings and those attending: four meetings will be held each week; two elders shall preside; members are to be active members of their church congregation, engage in personal Bible study and family devotions, and lead a life that does not conform to the world. The Brotherhood, recognizing itself strictly as a lay organization, never assumed the administration of the sacraments. These were the authority of the ordained clergy. And because the sacraments are essential to the Christian life, the members of the Brotherhood always saw themselves as within the church. It was apparently at this conference that the oft-repeated expression was made, "*Brueder, bleibt bei der Kirche*" (Brother, remain in the church).<sup>33</sup>

Eisenach describes a "Great Revival" beginning in 1872 and lasting until about the turn of the century, during which time the Brotherhood grew in numbers and influence. He cites an estimate of over 31,000 people in the Volga who are associated with the Brotherhood by 1900.<sup>34</sup> This is despite the fact that the Church Law of 1857 specifically prohibited such organizations. As noted above, in some villages the prayer meetings continued to be tolerated or even supported by the clergy. In others, because they emphasized a conversion experience as essential to salvation, the Brotherhood faced hostile and sometimes violent persecution. Yet it continued to thrive and flourish.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 69–71.

<sup>34</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 78–81.

<sup>35</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 174–76.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE VOLGA GERMANS FIND A NEW HOME

#### Emigration

##### The Changing Social Environment

Beginning in the 1840s a number of changes took place which caused the Volga Germans to begin searching for a new homeland. First among them was the rise of pan-Slavic and strong anti-German sentiment within Russia. Since the time of Peter the Great, Germans has been prominent in the development and leadership of Russia. Koch notes that by the time of Alexander II (1855–1881), nearly all of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and nearly forty percent of the Russian army high command were German or of German extraction.<sup>1</sup> The Russian nobility resented this disproportionate influence in government and society. Thus, already during the reign of Alexander II's predecessor, Nicholas I, there was a strong urge to make "Russia for the Russians" and reverse the western innovations introduced since Peter the Great.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Russian peasants resented the special privileges enjoyed by the German colonists. The colonists had multiplied greatly in number over the previous century. They had acquired large amounts of land, establishing numerous "daughter" colonies. Their farming and industry had brought them prosperity. They were exempt from military service. They spoke their

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<sup>1</sup> Koch, 195.

<sup>2</sup> Hattie Plum Williams, *The Czar's Germans: With Particular Reference to the Volga Germans*, ed. Emma S. Haynes, Phillip B. Legler, and Gerda S. Walker (Lincoln, NE: A.H.S.G.R., 1975), 160–63.



own language and associated very little, if at all, with Russian citizens. Many Russians began to see the Germans as a dangerous alien element within their borders.<sup>3</sup> The environment was right for a general push for the russification of all foreigners.

### **The Changing Governmental Environment**

“There arose another emperor to the throne, who knew not Joseph nor wished to know him.”<sup>4</sup> When Alexander II became Tsar, he began implementing dramatic reforms which impacted the entire nation. In 1861 he emancipated the serfs. Although this did not immediately affect the Volga Germans, it created a social class with which the Germans would later be equated. In 1864 a new legal system was created which put outside oversight by a Russian official into the legal processes of the colonies for the first time.<sup>5</sup> In addition, new district and provincial assemblies, *zemstvo*, were established giving citizens indirect input into local government and oversight of such institutions as education.<sup>6</sup>

By 1871 the new *zemstvo* system had reached and included the Volga colonies. For on June 4, 1871, Alexander issued a decree which abolished the Colonial Law of 1764. The Colonial Law had provided the implementation of Catherine’s Manifesto. It stipulated the provision of land for each household and the perpetual ownership of the land by the village. With Alexander’s decree, “former colonists” were now identified as “settler-landholders” (*Ansiedler-Grundbesitzer*).<sup>7</sup>

In addition, in April, 1872, the *Tutelkanzlei für Ausländer* and the Saratov Kontor,

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<sup>3</sup> Giesinger, 223.

<sup>4</sup> “*Es kam ein anderer Kaiser auf den Thron, der nichts von Joseph wußte oder wissen wolte.*” Ballensky, *Die Wolga-Deutschen*, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, 170–71.

<sup>6</sup> Giesinger, 224–25.

responsible for oversight of all the colonies since 1766, were abolished and their responsibilities given over to the new provincial assemblies.<sup>8</sup> Now the official language of the government's interactions with the colonies was Russian, instead of German.

Catherine's Manifesto had promised that none of the colonists would be drafted into military service against their will during their entire residency. In fact, the promise extended to the children and descendants of the original settlers. Scholz notes how successive monarchs renewed and reaffirmed the laws and privileges of the colonists up until Alexander's decree.<sup>9</sup> Now, the colonists were warned that their exemption would expire in ten years or whenever a law of universal conscription was issued. During that ten year interim, all who wished to emigrate were free to do so without loss of property.<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to note that Pleve, a Russian, described this period as "when all Volga Germans had been given equal rights with the rest of the rural population."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, that was the case. However, the colonists did not perceive this as a positive development. Kloberdanz describes the Volga Germans as "a solidly homogeneous ethnic group."<sup>12</sup> Giesinger portrays the colonists' self-image thus:

They were not serfs of the Russian landowners nor even the crown itself, but free peasants with special rights and privileges guaranteed by the Manifesto .... They called themselves "colonists," not peasants, and considered themselves, as indeed

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<sup>7</sup> Bonwetsch, 108.

<sup>8</sup> Giesinger, 224.

<sup>9</sup> Harry G. Scholz, "The German Colonists in Russia: The Repeal of Russia's Law of the Colonists in 1871 and Its Effects on the German Colonists' Population," (master's thesis, Chapman College, 1969), 15–16.

<sup>10</sup> Francis S. Laing, "German-Russian Settlements in Ellis County, Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections* 11 (1909–1910): 491.

<sup>11</sup> Igor R. Pleve, "Beginning of Volga-German Emigration to America" *Journal of the A.H.S.G.R.* 20, no 3 (Fall 1997): 25.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy J. Kloberdanz, "The Volga Germans in Old Russia and in Western North America: Their Changing World View," *Anthropological Quarterly* 48 (October 1975): 214.

they were, culturally superior to the uncouth and ignorant native peasants. Their settlements were closed to outsiders and remained so almost to the end of their days. Within them were German schools and churches to preserve the culture and religion they had brought with them . . . . The German colonists took little interest in any phase of Russian life that did not affect them directly. In the first century few even bothered to learn the language of the country.<sup>13</sup>

The colonists saw this as the beginning of the end of their identity as Germans. Rumors were rampant that soon they would be required to use Russian instead of German in their schools, and they would ultimately be compelled to convert to the Russian Orthodox faith.<sup>14</sup> “The colonists soon recognized the intentions of the government, namely: to make every German into a citizen of the country in speech and custom. And the Germans simply had no wish to become Russian. The Germans had the imperial promise that they could remain German.”<sup>15</sup>

The colonists were amazed and distraught that imperial promises would now be null and void.<sup>16</sup> However, the final blow and the immediate cause of the emigration was the military law of January 1, 1874. On that date the promised ten year exemption was abolished. Alexander decreed that the German colonists were now subject to conscription. All men between the ages of sixteen and forty might be selected by lottery for service in the army.<sup>17</sup> Six men of every thousand citizens would be drafted. And military service consisted of six years active duty and nine years reserve status.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Giesinger, 47–48.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, 179–80.

<sup>15</sup> “*Die Kolonisten erkannten bald das Ziel der Regierung, nämlich: jeden Deutschen zu einem Bürger des Landes zu machen in Sprache und Sitten. Und der Deutsche wollte einfach kein Russe werden. Die Deutschen hatten ja das kaiserliche Versprechen, sie deutsch zu lassen.*” Ballensky, *Die Wolga-Deutschen*, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, 179.

<sup>17</sup> Walters, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Scholz, 36.

## **From Bad to Worse**

Systematic emigration of the Volga Germans from Russia began in 1874. From that year until about 1905 the pressures in support of leaving the colonies continued to build. Families sold off their possessions in preparation for leaving. As they did so, the general economy of the region drastically dropped.<sup>19</sup> There were a series of crop failures beginning in 1873, then again in 1879 through 1881. This was followed by drought for several years from 1882 through 1898.<sup>20</sup>

Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, and his oldest son Alexander III (1881–1894) took the throne. He reversed some of his father's reform and further pushed a policy of russification. In 1887 private ownership of land or rights of inheritance by foreigners was prohibited. As of 1892 a foreigner could not lease land unless he was in the process of becoming a Russian citizen and joining the Orthodox Church. And if a person did not request membership in the Church, the request for naturalization would be denied. In 1888, at the urging of the Orthodox Church, mixed faith marriages were prohibited. And the Minister of the Interior could remove non-Orthodox clergy from his office without consulting his superiors.<sup>21</sup>

Nicholas II took the throne in 1894 and reversed some of these policies, but the exodus was already underway. Eisenach notes that from 1898 until 1904 over 41,000 Volga Germans emigrated to the United States.<sup>22</sup> Ballensky reports, "The departure of the Volga Germans occurred in two periods; the first was 1872 until 1894 and the second was 1898 until 1913. In 1913 their emigration reached the high-point. Over one thousand Volga Germans came to America in that year; for they could foresee, that the rulers there were preparing for human

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<sup>19</sup> Walters, 120.

<sup>20</sup> Koch, 205; Williams, 202–3.

<sup>21</sup> Scholz, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 89.

slaughter.”<sup>23</sup>

## Coming to a New Land

### A Change in Scenery

The conscription law was the immediate prompt for a sizeable migration from Russia to the West. They moved not only to the United States, but also to Argentina, Brazil, and the plains provinces of Canada. The appeal of the United States, though, was especially strong.

Earlier scouts had been sent in 1874 to explore this new land and report back to the evangelical colonies. One of the primary influences on this project was Pastor Stärkel. Having lived in Kansas and Missouri, he extolled the virtues of that land and related the liberal provisions of the Homestead Act of 1862. The scouts returned and reported that Kansas and Nebraska appeared to be the most attractive locations for settling.

The Homestead Act signed by President Lincoln in 1862 promised one hundred sixty acres of free land to any immigrant who indicated a willingness to become a U.S. citizen. Vast new tracts of land had been opened by the railroad companies. Koch reports that one hundred thirty million acres were granted to western railroads between 1850 and 1871.<sup>24</sup> Luebke notes how the Union Pacific, the Santa Fe, the Burlington, and the Northern Pacific railroads were all seeking people to settle this land. Sometimes they sold large tracts at bargain prices to groups of immigrants who would establish communities and so generate business for the railroad.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Die Einwanderung der Wolgadeutschen fand statt in zwei Perioden; die ersten war 1872 bis 1894 und die zweite war 1898 bis 1913. Im Jahre 1913 erreichte ihre Einwanderung den Höhenpunkt. Ueber eintausend Wolgadeutsche kamen in dem Jahre nach Amerika; denn man ahnte, dass sich die Herrsher drüben zum Menschenschlachten vorbereiteten.” Ballensky, *Die Wolga-Deutschen*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Koch, 208.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Luebke, “Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (October 1977): 410.

At the same time that the migration was beginning, the railroad companies were also sending agents throughout Europe to recruit workers to build their systems across the west. The agents would meet the Volga Germans at their ports of embarkation along the Baltic coast as well as upon their arrival in America. "According to the accounts of their agents, the American west was a rich Garden of Eden, where it rained manna and flowed milk and honey."<sup>26</sup> Ballensky reports that the companies gave over a million dollars as enticement.<sup>27</sup>

### **Nebraska, a New Homeland**

Sallet reports that a group of the first immigrants arrived in Sutton, Nebraska. Those who had resources purchased land and established farms.<sup>28</sup> Shortly after, a number of them moved to Lincoln, Nebraska. A few families chose to settle in Arkansas where some of the first scouts had chosen to live. But very quickly, Lincoln became the central point for most evangelical Volga Germans coming to the United States. The city was a major center for the Burlington Railroad, which became a source of employment for those immigrants not able to purchase farmland. The Volga Germans settled in two distinct regions of Lincoln along river flats known as the North Bottoms and the South Bottoms. By 1914 Lincoln had 6,500 Volga German residents<sup>29</sup> from 114 different colonies.<sup>30</sup>

The first waves of immigrants were primarily farmers. They purchased tracts of land in

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<sup>26</sup> "Nach den Aussagen ihrer Agenten war der Westen Amerikas ein reiner Garten Eden, wo es Manna regnete und Milch und Honig floß." Georg Rath, "Die Rußlanddeutschen in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika: Vorbereitung zur Auswanderung," *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Rußland*, ed. Karl Stumpp, (Stuttgart: Herausgegeben von der Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Rußland, 1963), 32.

<sup>27</sup> Ballensky, *Die Wolga-Deutschen*, 19

<sup>28</sup> Sallet, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth W. Rock, *Germans From Russia in America: The First Hundred Years*, (Fort Collins, CO: Germans from Russia in Colorado Study Project, Colorado State University, 1976), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ballensky, *Die Wolga-Deutschen*, 21.

Nebraska and Kansas and cultivated hard winter wheat and corn. Initially they had hoped to set up village communities modeled after their villages on the Volga. The homestead laws, though, prevented such villages because they required the settler live on the land he was claiming. Many of the immigrants, however, did not have the financial resources to purchase a homestead, even at prices as low as \$2 per acre. For them, the expanding railroad provided thousands of jobs during the 1890s as track moved across the western United States.

Later, at the end of the century and into the first decade of the twentieth, the second wave of immigrants fleeing Russia continued to focus on Nebraska as their arrival point. By this time the sugar beet industry was developing in the western counties of Nebraska along the North Platte River. In order to be financially viable, growers were in desperate need of cheap and abundant labor to hoe and chop and harvest their crops. The Volga Germans, well acquainted with hard manual labor, soon became a dominant factor in the industry's growth. Entire families would go out to the fields. And when the family had saved enough money, they bought their own farms.<sup>31</sup>

### **Expanding Across the Country**

The first Volga Germans to settle in Kansas were Roman Catholic, establishing Ellis County as their focal point, as the Evangelicals had Lincoln. However, as early as 1876 the first Evangelicals settled not only in Nebraska but also in and around Lehigh, Kansas. Russell and Oakley Counties, Kansas, saw sizeable numbers of Evangelical settlers, again starting primarily as farmers of hard winter wheat.<sup>32</sup> By 1887, the Rock Island Railroad was building a route

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<sup>31</sup> Albert Hamburg, "A Hard Row to Hoe," *Prairie Schooner* 41 (September 1967): 246.

<sup>32</sup> Jacob Ruppenthal, "The German Element in Central Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections* 1913–1914 (1915): 525–26.

through Herington, Kansas. Workers were attracted from the farms, and new immigrants coming to the state joined the labor force. Soon a sizeable community known as “Russian town” was established in Herington.<sup>33</sup>

Crop failure in Nebraska prompted a number of families to join a wagon train along the Oregon Trail in 1881. Sheuerman and Trazfner report that every Sunday they halted their journey, gathered their wagons in a circle, and an elder of the group led worship and read the lessons in German.<sup>34</sup> They wintered in Walla Walla, then in 1882 moved to Ritzville, Washington, and established a community.<sup>35</sup> Later, in 1892, another sizeable community developed in Endicott.<sup>36</sup>

Also in the Northwest is the community that grew in Portland, Oregon. In 1882, a number of colonists left Iowa and Nebraska and traveled by train to San Francisco. From there they traveled by ship to Portland. A significant influx of new settlers arrived in Portland from 1888 through 1895, some of whom moved on in 1891 to settle in Canby, Oregon.<sup>37</sup>

One of the largest and well established communities of Volga Germans developed in Denver, Colorado. In 1880 and 1881 the same crop failures that prompted some to go by wagon train to the Northwest motivated others to look for work in Colorado on the Kansas Pacific Railroad. Between 1885 and 1887, other families moved from Nebraska and established the Globeville community in Denver. Sugar beet workers also moved to Colorado as the beet industry developed there. Sugar City owes its growth around 1900 in large part to the Volga

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<sup>33</sup> Sallet, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Richard D. Scheuerman and Clifford E. Trazfner, *The Volga Germans: Pioneers of the Northwest* (Moscow, ID: University Press of Idaho, 1980), 135.

<sup>35</sup> Koch, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Sallet, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Sallet, 47.



Germans who came to work the fields and chose to settle. And later, other families came from Nebraska to settle and work the fields in Loveland in 1901.<sup>38</sup>

In 1887 a group of Volga Germans from *Wiesenseite* villages came directly from Russia to arrive by Southern Pacific railroad in Fresno, California.<sup>39</sup> An agent in Russia had recommended the fertile land of the San Joaquin Valley. However, having little beyond the clothes they carried, these first settlers worked in factories and as farm labor in the orchards and vineyards.

More and more of their countrymen followed and settled in the southwest section of Fresno so that the region became known as “Roosian Town.”<sup>40</sup> Many eventually saved enough money to purchase their own farms, orchards, and vineyards, spreading to the east, southeast, and west. Sallet reports there were 3,000 Volga Germans in the Fresno area by 1900, and 8,000 first and second generation by 1920.<sup>41</sup>

Two different parties of immigrants arrived in America and headed for Kansas but ran out of funds. One group arriving in 1888 settled in Orange County, New York, and eventually established the town of Pine Island. Others joining them were known for the production of onions. A second group arrived in 1891 and found employment as farm and factory labor in Stuyvesant Falls, New York.<sup>42</sup>

In 1891 the Oklahoma Territory was opened for homesteading, and large numbers of Volga

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<sup>38</sup> Kenneth W. Rock, “‘Unsere Leute’: The Germans from Russia in Colorado,” *Colorado Magazine* 54 (1978): 159–69.

<sup>39</sup> G. Ray Schwabenland, Peter J. Klassen, and Noel Frodsham, “The History of the German-Russians in Fresno County,” A.H.S.G.R., *Work Paper* 14 (April 1974): 2.

<sup>40</sup> Schwabenland, et al., 7.

<sup>41</sup> Sallet, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Koch, 216.

Germans left Kansas and Nebraska to settle in this new land.<sup>43</sup> Hale and Sallet<sup>44</sup> give a detailed description of how they moved into the state and established communities throughout the panhandle and northern counties of the state, with concentrations in Shattuck, Okeene, Hooker, Enid, Cherokee, and Ingersoll. They track the Russian villages from which they came and their paths through Kansas to Oklahoma. In addition Hale identifies the various churches established by the settlers.

As the sugar beet industry expanded, Volga Germans settled in Wisconsin and Michigan. Initially they came as workers in the fields and sugar mills. Later they became employed in factories in the major cities. By the turn of the century there were communities in the metropolitan areas of Milwaukee, Sheboygan, Manitowoc, and Oshkosh, Wisconsin, as well as Flint, Saginaw, Bay City, and Port Huron, Michigan.<sup>45</sup>

The immigration from the Volga effectively came to an end with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. At that point the gateways for leaving Europe effectively closed. In Russia the anti-German sentiment reached a crescendo as the colonists in the various regions of the country were perceived as enemy aliens. Many Germans, particularly those in the Baltic region and the Volhynia Germans, were forcibly uprooted and moved further inland from the borders. All emigration was stopped.

However, for those Volga Germans who were already living in the United State the process of migration throughout the country continued as economic opportunities and the availability of new homestead land developed. By the 1920s there were established Volga German

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<sup>43</sup> Koch, 213.

<sup>44</sup> Douglas Hale, *The Germans from Russia in Oklahoma* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Sallet, 46–47.

<sup>45</sup> Koch, 216.

communities in South Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, Texas, and metropolitan cities of Chicago and Cleveland. As noted above, by that date there were an estimated 118,000 first and second generation Volga Germans living in the United States.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Koch, 3.

**PART II**

**THE VOLGA GERMANS AND THE AMERICAN CHURCH**

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE VOLGA GERMANS AND DENOMINATIONAL HISTORIES

The Volga Germans were a uniquely identifiable ethnic group when they arrived in the United States. They appeared Russian in dress, with their heavy sheepskin coats, felt boots, and babushkas.<sup>1</sup> Yet they spoke German. But it was not a German like those who came to America from Europe. The Volga Germans' dialect was a German of a century earlier, laced with adopted Russian words and phrases.<sup>2</sup> So to the English-speaking Americans, they were "dirty Rooshuns." "Our Americans had absolutely no understanding what kind of people the Volga Germans are... The Americans, in their ignorance, called everyone from Russia Russian."<sup>3</sup> To those German-speakers who came from Europe, the *Reichsdeutsch*, they were benighted country bumpkins.<sup>4</sup>

Initially these new arrivals strove to maintain their identity and heritage. Histories of their settlement speak of communities known as "Russiatown," or "Little Saratov." Even after several generations, this group strove to maintain identity as Russian Germans, with customs, language, as well as narratives of their history in this country.<sup>5</sup> Ample historical accounts exist describing

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, 218–20.

<sup>2</sup> Koch, 119.

<sup>3</sup> "Unsere Amerikaner haben absolut kein Verständnis, was für ein Volk die Wolgadeutschen sind... Die Amerikaner nennen, in ihrer Unwissenheit, alle Rußländer Russen." Ballensky, *Die Wolga-Deutschen*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Kloberdanz, 214–16.

<sup>5</sup> Hildegard Binder Johnson, "The Location of German Immigrants in the Middle West," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 41 (March 1951): 1–2.

their arrival and establishment in specific communities,<sup>6</sup> cities,<sup>7</sup> counties,<sup>8</sup> and states.<sup>9</sup> In many of these records, the critical role of the Christian faith is detailed. Worship was begun, churches were built.

Yet, curiously, when reading histories of the growth and expansion of the Christian Church, and especially the Lutheran Church, in America there is very little mention of the Volga Germans. For example, in his final chapter Jacobs describes the challenges facing the Lutheran Church at the close of the nineteenth century, but does not mention the substantial influx of German-speaking immigrants coming to the county at the time of his writing.<sup>10</sup> Fevold describes the growth and expansion of Lutheranism throughout the Midwest and refers to such small ethnic groups as the Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Slovaks scattered through the region. But when he speaks of Germans, he never acknowledges the distinction of Russian Germans.<sup>11</sup> Meuser refers to “Russia-Germans,” but, oddly, in reference to their settlement on the prairies of Western Canada.<sup>12</sup> In a footnote, Meuser makes the very odd statement, “Literature on the

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel F. Doeppers, “The Globeville Neighborhood in Denver,” *Geographical Review* 57 (Oct., 1967): 506–22; Rock, “Unsere Leute”, 159–60; Kurt E. Kinbacher, “Life in the Russian Bottoms: Community Building and Identity Transformation among Germans from Russia in Lincoln, Nebraska, 1876 to 1926.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 27–57; Dorn, 55.

<sup>7</sup> John Hoelzer, “The Earliest Volga Germans in Sutton, Nebraska and a Portion of Their History,” trans. Arthur E. Flegel. A.H.S.G.R. *Work Paper* 16 (December 1974): 16–19; Otto H. Hieb, “The Third Migration: A History of the Germans From Russia in Lodi, California,” A.H.S.G.R. *Work Paper* 15 (September 1974): 21–24.

<sup>8</sup> Laing, 489–528; Peter J. Klassen, “The Volga Germans in Fresno County,” *Fresno - Past & Present: The Journal of the Fresno City and County Historical Society* 22, no. 4 (Winter, 1980): 2–3.

<sup>9</sup> Norman E. Saul, “The Migration of the Russian-Germans to Kansas,” *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Spring 1974): 38–62; David J. Miller, “German-Russians in Colorado,” *Colorado Magazine* 21 (1944): 129–32; Rock, “Unsere Leute”, 155–83; George P. Graff, *The People of Michigan* (Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Education, 1974); Hale.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, American Church History Series IV (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1893), 522–23.

<sup>11</sup> Eugene L. Fevold, “Coming of Age: 1870–1900,” in *Lutheranism in America*, ed. by E. Clifford Nelson, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 255–78.

<sup>12</sup> Fred W. Meuser, “Facing the Twentieth Century: 1900 - 1930,” in *Lutheranism in America*, ed. by E. Clifford Nelson, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 363–65.

Russia-Germans in America is scarce.” Then he refers the reader to Joachim’s paper, “Toward an Understanding of the Russia Germans”<sup>13</sup> and an article by Alfred M. Rehwinkel in the *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* in 1965.<sup>14</sup>

Koehler says nothing about mission work by the Wisconsin Synod among Volga Germans, though he does give brief mention of work in various regions of the country. However, there is one fascinating reference which touches on the prelude to the Volga German immigration; a mention of Rev. Wilhem Stärkel:

In October 1864, having inquired of Reim and invited by him, W. Staerkel made his appearance, apparently hailing from an Illinois synod. He was assigned to Kenosha as Brenner’s successor. Two years later he moved to Wheatland and there in the winter of 1867/68 published two booklets that were unsound in regard to the doctrine of the last days. So was Staerkel’s practice, too. He avoided Synod’s action by announcing that he was going back to the Volga settlements of his native Russia.<sup>15</sup>

The work of Krause et al. recounts the history of the Washington District of the Ohio Synod and then gives a brief history of the congregations in the district, provided by their pastors. Oddly, the description of Trinity, Endicott, Washington, written by Pastor Meinecke makes no mention of its Volga German heritage,<sup>16</sup> though a descendant of a founding family, Richard Scheuerman, is a prominent scholar of the Volga Germans in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Pastor Wittrock, who describes the parish of Lind and Connell, Washington, makes the interesting comment, “The congregation in Lind consists of half Germans and half Russians, the congregation in Connell for the most part are children of older immigrants to Wisconsin,” but

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<sup>13</sup> Meuser, 363.

<sup>14</sup> Meuser, 365.

<sup>15</sup> Koehler, 104.

<sup>16</sup> A. Krause, H. Rieke, G. F. Pauschert, and P. Froschupf, *Denkschrift zum Silber-Jubiläum des Washington Distrikts der Ev. Luth. Ohio Synode, 1891-1916* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1916), 35–36.

<sup>17</sup> John R. Nyberg, “More than a Wheat Harvest,” *Lutheran Standard* (July 14, 1974): 18–20.

gives no further explanation of who these people were.<sup>18</sup> Pastor Mau writes about Evangelical Lutheran Peace Church, Tacoma, Washington, “This congregation was established in 1909 by Pastor Geo. Köhler with 61 eligible voting members. It consists of many Germans, who had been integrated in Kolb, Russia, and were originally from other congregations—some even without current congregational connection—who were brought together under the leadership of the above mentioned pastor,” again with no further explanation.<sup>19</sup> In Walla Walla, Washington, Pastor Wellsandt gives a bit more detail when he reports:

From 1906–12 Pastor E. Berthold served these congregations and worked also as missionary in several other places. Christ Church, though, was growing so significantly during this time through the influx from Russia, that the time and energy of one pastor was necessary to keep up with this alone, and they appointed the undersigned, and in September 1912 he began the office at this congregation .... The official language is German, as all the members are German immigrants from Russia.<sup>20</sup>

Sheatley recounts the development and expansion of the Joint Synod, describing the creation of districts throughout all the regions where the Volga Germans established communities and churches. Yet, there is no mention of this ethnic group, which is still fairly new to the American scene at the time of his writing.<sup>21</sup> Hellman’s book picks up the account from Krause of the history of the Pacific Northwest for the succeeding American Lutheran Church but

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<sup>18</sup> “Die Gemeinde in Lind besteht zur Hälfte aus Deutschländern und zur Hälfte aus Rußländern, die Gemeinde in Connell zum größeren Teil aus Kindern der alten Einwanderer aus Wisconsin.” Krause, et al., 44.

<sup>19</sup> “Diese Gemeinde wurde im Jahre 1909 von Pastor Geo. Köhler mit 61 stimmfähigen Gliedern gegründet. Sie besteht aus lauter, früher in Kolb, Rußland, anfähigen Deutschen, die sich hier zum Teil aus anderen Gemeinden, zum Teil ohne Gemeindeverbindung stehend, zu einer Gemeinde unter Führung obengenannten Pastors zusammenschlossen.” Krause et al., 76.

<sup>20</sup> “Von 1906-12 bediente Pastor E. Bertold diese Gemeinden und arbeitete auch als Missionar an mehreren anderen Orten. Die Christus Gemeinde aber war in dieser Zeit durch Zuzug von Rußland so gewachsen, daß sie die Zeit und Kraft eines Pastors für sich allein nötig hielt, und sie berief den Unterzeichneten, der im September 1912 sein Amt an dieser Gemeinde antrat.... Die Amtssprache is die deutsche, da alle Glieder als Deutsche von Rußland eingewandert sind.” Krause et al., 83–84.

<sup>21</sup> C. V. Sheatley, *History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States: From the Earliest Beginnings to 1919* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1919), 252–56.



with no mention of this distinct group.<sup>22</sup>

Within the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in Dau’s collection of essays Pfothauer cites the report in *Der Lutheraner* of a Pastor Doescher, missionary , or *Reiseprediger*, who refers to Black Sea Germans in South Dakota, but there is no further indication of Germans from Russia throughout the Northwest.<sup>23</sup> Eckhardt recounts work in Iowa, California, Oregon, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Oklahoma, all regions of Volga German settlement, but does not refer to them. He does not even mention the city of Lincoln in his description of Nebraska.<sup>24</sup> Later, even though Baepler refers to the mission work in New York City among the “great stream of immigrants who came to America after the Civil war” including “many German Lutherans,”<sup>25</sup> neither the histories written by Baepler nor Polack mention Germans from Russia.

On a more regional level, Kretzmann describes the mission work in California<sup>26</sup> and Montana,<sup>27</sup> but has no mention of the Volga Germans. Roy Suelflow chronicles the development of the South Wisconsin District, but does not identify this group.<sup>28</sup> Moeller recounts the establishment of the Northwest District. He describes mission work and the establishment of

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<sup>22</sup> Walter H. Hellman, ed., *Fifty Golden Years: The Story of the Northwest District of the American Lutheran Church, 189–1941* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wartburg Press, 1941).

<sup>23</sup> F. Pfothauer, “The Opening Up of the Great Northwest,” in *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century*, ed. W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1922), 339–40.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest Eckhardt, “The March toward the Pacific Coast,” in *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century*, ed. W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1922), 347–64.

<sup>25</sup> Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod, 1847 to 1947* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1947), 136–37.

<sup>26</sup> P.E. Kretzmann, “The Beginning of Lutheran Church Work in California,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 4 (April 1931): 25–31.

<sup>27</sup> P.E. Kretzmann, “The First Forty Years of Sound Lutheranism in Montana.” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 8 (1935-1936): 1–10.

<sup>28</sup> Roy A. Suelflow, *Walking with Wise Me: A History of the South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod* (Milwaukee: South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1967).

congregations in areas such as Portland, Oregon, as well as Tacoma and Endicott, Washington, during the period the Volga Germans were coming in large numbers and creating distinct communities. But, he never mentions this ethnic group.<sup>29</sup> Curiously, he quotes a portion of the mission report of circuit preacher, or *Reiseprediger* Ed. Doering, who makes a brief reference of a Black Sea German community, “Trip to Odessa, city of the Russians. Here almost everything is German.”<sup>30</sup> And August Suelflow recounts the history of growth in Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Texas, California, and Colorado. He writes of mission work to such relatively small groups as the Wends and Slovaks, yet he makes no mention of Germans from Russia.<sup>31</sup> Bewie talks about establishing congregations consisting of Wends and “Germans racially,”<sup>32</sup> but never notes that many of those Germans originally came from Russia.

A few academic works track some of the history of how Volga Germans became a part of American Christianity. Schaefer identifies one particular congregation whose origins he describes as being from the Volga.<sup>33</sup> Scheuerman takes the work of Eisenach, Sheatley, Moeller, and Hellman, and connects their chronicles with the history of individual Volga German congregations.<sup>34</sup> But such connections are not always clear or readily made. Gieseler researches the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Colorado writing about communities

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<sup>29</sup> Theodore C. Moeller, Jr., “The Development of Lutheranism in the Pacific Northwest with Specific Reference to the Northwest District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1955), 49–87.

<sup>30</sup> Moeller, 74.

<sup>31</sup> August R. Suelflow, *The Heart of Missouri: A History of the Western District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1854-1954* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1954), 46–66.

<sup>32</sup> W. H. Bewie, *Missouri in Texas: A History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Texas, 1855–1941*, (Austin, TX: Steck Company, 1952), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Lyle Loren Schaefer, “An Institutional History of the Colorado District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod From the Earliest Mission Work 1872–1968,” (PhD diss., University of Denver, 1976), 76–78.

<sup>34</sup> Richard D. Scheuerman, “The Pacific Northwest’s Volga Germans: A Historical and Religious Narrative,” (master’s thesis, Pacific Lutheran University, 1978), 145–84.

and even individual congregations where Volga Germans were present, but never refers to the Volga Germans as an identified group.<sup>35</sup>

One truly interesting exception to the histories mentioned above is the personal account of Rev. Henry T. Rauh about his work throughout the Rocky Mountain states. He reports establishing a preaching station in Sterling, Colorado, in the fall of 1888 with German Lutheran families from Western Kansas and Western Nebraska.<sup>36</sup> This happens to be the congregation mentioned by Schaefer, above, who goes on to comment:

These German-speaking families came from an interesting background. During the days when Catherine the Great was Empress of Russia, she invited a large number of her German countrymen to settle on the frontier near the Volga .... The northeastern plains of Colorado became a prime target for these new immigrants. Possibly a thousand families had settled in the vicinity of Sterling by 1910 .... This migration increased the potential for a congregation at Sterling, but most of these German Russians were able to secure few jobs other than menial tasks in the beet fields and could contribute little financial support to the work of the Church.<sup>37</sup>

Later, Rauh describes, "The rapid growth of Billings [Montana] was due principally to the fact that the Great Western Sugar Company in the year in which I arrived had erected a large sugar factory, in which sugar is made from sugar beets."<sup>38</sup> It is among the sugar beet fields that supply Great Western where he makes contact with more Volga Germans; "On Aug. 10 I began to preach in the town of Laurel, 15 miles west of Billings. At this place quite a number of German Russians, who were doing the manual labor in the sugar-beet fields near by, had purchased a tract of land, laid it out in lots, and erected small houses for their families. Some of

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<sup>35</sup> Carl A. Gieseler, "The History of the Colorado District of the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church," (PhD diss., University of Denver, 1947).

<sup>36</sup> Henry T. Rauh, "Thirty Years of Home Mission Work in the Rocky Mountain Country, 5," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 15, 1 (April 1942): 26–27.

<sup>37</sup> Schaefer, 77–78.

<sup>38</sup> Henry T. Rauh, "Thirty Years of Home Mission Work in the Rocky Mountain Country, Part 2," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 18 (1944–1945): 24.

these people, whom I had met at Billings, asked me to serve them.”<sup>39</sup> A little later, “On Sept. 28, also a Saturday, I established a preaching station at Park City, a small town eight miles west of Laurel .... I inquired ... whether there were any more Lutherans in or near Park City. He told me ... there were a few German Russians working in the sugar-beet fields.” Rev. Rauh reports that he began conducting worship services among these people “once a month for several years.”<sup>40</sup>

Another significant and extremely interesting exception is the paper by S. Joachim, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Beulah, North Dakota. At a meeting of the Western Conference of the Dakota District of the American Lutheran Church, he presented “Toward an Understanding of the Russia Germans.” His personal encounter was probably with the Black Sea Germans, though he speaks of both them and the Volga Germans and recognizes their distinctive experiences and unique social and religious characteristics.<sup>41</sup>

The one important exception in denominational histories is the account of the development and growth of the United Church of Christ, specifically of the Congregational Church. Eisenach provides a detailed description and explanation of how and why many Volga Germans were essential in the establishment of German Congregationalism in the United States.<sup>42</sup> The reasons for this development in Congregationalism will become evident later.

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<sup>39</sup> Rauh, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 18: 27.

<sup>40</sup> Rauh, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 18: 28.

<sup>41</sup> S. Joachim, “Toward An Understanding of the Russia Germans,” *Concordia College [Moorhead, Minnesota] Occasional Papers* no. 1 (August 1939).

<sup>42</sup> George J. Eisenach, *A History of the German Congregational Churches in The United States* (Yankton, South Dakota: Pioneer Press, 1938), 36–67.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE RECORD ACCORDING TO THE VOLGA GERMAN CONGREGATIONS**

It appears that the various sources identified above can provide limited insight about how and why various groups and communities of Volga Germans across the nation affiliated and aligned with various denominational bodies during the period 1870 to 1920. To get a broader understanding of the factors involved, it is necessary to explore what individual congregations report about the process.

The balance of this paper will be based upon an examination of such histories. The data is from three sources. First are histories written for booklets published by a congregation. In celebration of a significant anniversary, it is a common practice for churches to publish congregational histories that recount how they were established. Second are histories taken directly from official church records. Churches often keep a journal reporting official acts such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, and this journal sometimes includes an account of the congregation's early history. The third source is compilations and translations of official records. These are sometimes produced by persons in the process of compiling information in genealogical research. The materials used in this research came from the congregations cited, the archives of the A.H.S.G.R. or one of its chapters, or the private collections of individuals.

Data about thirty-nine congregations from these sources has been compiled for this research. These represent sixteen Lutheran congregations from three synods, and twenty-three congregations from the United Church of Christ, primarily from the Congregationalist and the Evangelical and Reformed confessions. All of the congregations included are clearly identified,

or have strong internal evidence indicating they have a distinct Volga German heritage in their origin. (Appendix 3)

By reviewing a number of such histories, it is possible to discern related themes that provide some explanation of how that particular group became a part of a particular church body. Although the survey will not be comprehensive, it is a representative sample taken from the regions of Volga German settlements where congregational histories are available.

### **Denomination Mission Work**

The first significant factor which becomes immediately apparent is that virtually all of the Lutheran churches came into being through the mission work of a Lutheran pastor. The work of the *Reiseprediger*, or circuit preachers, has already been mentioned. These were ordained Lutheran pastors assigned the task of mission work in a particular region, or state, or sometimes several states. Ofttimes one of these mission pastors came around to a community or town, gathered a group of German-speaking people, and began conducting worship. After continuing this pattern for a time, he would encourage and work with the people to establish a congregation, which usually affiliated with the synod their pastor represented. Trinity Lutheran, Arapahoe, Nebraska<sup>1</sup>, Trinity Lutheran, Bartley, Nebraska<sup>2</sup>, St. Peter's, Cornelius, Oregon<sup>3</sup> and Zion Lutheran, Goodwin, Oklahoma<sup>4</sup>, are good examples of this pattern. St. Peter's, Cornelius, traces its origin to the mission work of Rev. Edward Doering, sent by the Western District from the Chicago area to the region around Portland in 1881. In fact, Moeller refers to Doering's

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<sup>1</sup> Trinity Lutheran Church, *A Century of Blessing: 1882–1982* (Arapahoe, NE), 2–3.

<sup>2</sup> Trinity Lutheran Church, *History of Trinity Lutheran Church, School Creek Community: 1881–195* (Bartley, NE).

<sup>3</sup> St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, *One Hundred Years of God's Blessing: 1882–1982* (Cornelius, OR).

mission work in Cornelius though he makes no mention of the Volga Germans.<sup>5</sup>

Similar to the *Reisprediger* pattern, some Lutheran congregations were the result of mission work from a pastor of a nearby congregation. Emmanuel Lutheran in Fresno, California<sup>6</sup>, and St. John's Lutheran, Saginaw, Michigan<sup>7</sup>, trace their origins back to such efforts. Emmanuel actually had its formation in 1890. However, the congregation foundered with the departure of its first resident pastor shortly after. In 1892, Rev. Hoernicke accepted the call to Fresno and started the task of rebuilding the congregation. In 1894, he began mission work in West Fresno among Volga Germans. Eventually this group became a part of Emmanuel.<sup>8</sup> The pastor of St. Paul Lutheran, Saginaw, Michigan, began mission work on the other side of the city. This proved to be a distinct Volga German community that became the source of St. John's Lutheran.<sup>9</sup>

For some congregations it appears that denominational affiliations were simply the result of whichever church body was carrying out mission work in that area. For example, Peace Lutheran, Bessie, Oklahoma, was first served by a circuit rider of the Missouri Synod. But later a circuit rider from the Iowa Synod served the group and officially organized the congregation within that synod.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Edward B. Babitzke, ed., *Zion's Ev. Luth. Church, Goodwin, Oklahoma and Follett, Texas*.

<sup>5</sup> Moeller, 63–64.

<sup>6</sup> Edward J. Rudnick, ed., *Golden Anniversary of the Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fresno, California: 1890–1940*.

<sup>7</sup> St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, *Preserve Thy Word O Savior: St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church: 100 Years, A Century of Devotion* (Saginaw, MI, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Rudnick, 6.

<sup>9</sup> St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church (Saginaw, MI), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Peace Lutheran Church, *100 Anniversary, Peace Lutheran Church, Bessie, Oklahoma, 1893–1993*, 15.

## Preserving the Old Ways

An additional item of interest surrounding Peace Lutheran, Bessie, Oklahoma is a reference to their first hymnal, “For eight months the congregation was without a resident pastor, so Gottlieb Goeringer once again conducted the lay leader services. He kept the singing on key with a tuning fork and the members used half-size hymnals with no musical scores ....”<sup>11</sup> Although not explicitly identified, this hymnal fits the description of the *Volga Gesangbuch* mentioned above. This exemplifies another significant factor for church affiliation for the Volga Germans, the ability to continue worship practices as they had in Russia. First Congregational, Laurel, Montana,<sup>12</sup> and Immanuel Evangelical and Reformed Church, Fort Collins, Colorado,<sup>13</sup> specifically state that preservation of their Volga German culture was a prime objective.

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Michigan, presents a good example of this pattern:

The Volga Germans who came to the Saginaw area were predominantly [sic] of the Lutheran faith. A lesser number were of the Reformed faith. In Russia both faiths worshipped together. Lutherans and Reformed jointly participated in the sacrament of Holy Communion – each group according to its own practice. A common Order of Worship was used by the pastor, and the “*Wolga Gesangbuch*” was the standard hymnal.

Although Saginaw had numerous Protestant churches holding services in the German language, it is understandable that the Volga Germans would want to worship in a church of their own, where they would feel accepted, and where the spirit and practices conformed to their churches in Russia. A significant number of Volga Germans also desired a church that tolerated the religious activities of the Brotherhood ....

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<sup>11</sup> Peace Lutheran Church (Bessie, OK), 16.

<sup>12</sup> First Congregational Church, *Roll Call of Members* (Laurel, MT, 1951).

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Evangelical and Reformed Church, *History and Records of Immanuel Evangelical and Reformed Church, Remington and Olive, Fort Collins, Colorado: 1912–1962*.



On February 28, 1924, the Rev. Jacob Wulfmann, president of the Michigan District of the Evangelical Synod of North America, met with the congregation. At this meeting the necessary arrangements were made to begin worship services.<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting to note that though the group identified was mostly Lutheran, those individuals did not affiliate with the existing Lutheran congregations, including St. Paul and St. John's. Rather, they became a part of the Evangelical Synod, and ultimately the United Church of Christ.

Immanuel, Saginaw, illustrates another curious phenomenon of those congregations which strove to preserve their Volga heritage. These people recognized and identified a significant portion of their legacy as Lutheran, even though they never officially affiliated with a Lutheran body in the United States. Thus, they identified themselves at least in part as Lutheran in the church's name. Examples include *Erste Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Kongregationalen Ebenezer Gemeinde* (Ebenezer Lutheran), Sheboygan, Wisconsin; The German Evangelical Lutheran Reformed Congregational Church (First Congregational), Laurel, Montana; Free Evangelical Lutheran Cross Church, Fresno, California; United German Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Congregational Church (Immanuel German Congregational), Rocky Ford, Colorado; and St. Paul's German Evangelical Lutheran Congregational Church (St. Paul's Bible Church), Pine Island, New York. Ebenezer Lutheran, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, presents a curious history in that it was originally founded in 1911 as a German Congregationalist church, as indicated in its original name. But for reasons not explained, it joined The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1918.<sup>15</sup>

Another peculiar characteristic of these congregations is the accommodation of both

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<sup>14</sup> Betty Guenther, ed., *A Brief History and Records from 1924–1958 of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Maine at Elm Streets, Saginaw Michigan*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ebenezer Lutheran Church, "Hitherto Hath The Lord Helped Us," *Ebenezer Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) 15<sup>th</sup> Street and St. Clair Avenue, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, 1913–1963, 50 Years of Grace*.

Lutheran and Reformed theology and practice in the congregational life and worship. First German Congregational, Denver, Colorado, gives a good example of this:

The practice of the men and women sitting on separate sides of the sanctuary during worship services gradually disappeared during the 1930's. The initial wearing of robes by the choir caused some controversy in 1939 – 1940. Adverse comments quickly disappeared and almost everyone felt that this change should have been made years earlier.

Holy Communion was always served in both the Lutheran (wafer) and Reformed (bread) manner. For many years, only one large cup or chalice was used to serve Holy Communion, and everyone received communion at the altar. In 1936, the small individual cup was introduced. Later, communion was offered in the pews with everyone partaking of the elements at the same time.<sup>16</sup>

A longtime member of St. John's Lutheran, Saginaw, Michigan, provides a similar account, "When we took Communion in the earlier days everyone would kneel in their benches or pews and sang and prepared their hearts. Then the Lutherans kneeled by the altar and received wafers. The Reformed took bread and the wine in the big cup. Usually you went up two by two or three by three or families ...."<sup>17</sup>

The desire to preserve their identity as Volga Germans and maintain their familiar church life sometimes led groups to separate from an existing church to establish their own congregation. Walla Walla, Washington, presents excellent examples of this.

Emmanuel Lutheran Church was established somewhere between 1888 and 1890 as a member of the Ohio Synod. It appears this congregation was predominately *Reichsdeutsch* originally. According to the history of Emmanuel Lutheran, the congregation divided because the final location of the church was unsatisfactory for a group of members. "Efforts were made to bring about a reconciliation, but to no avail. On February 10, 1896, the departing families were

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<sup>16</sup> First German Congregational Church, *A Century of God's Love: 1894–1994* (Denver, CO), 6–7.

<sup>17</sup> St. John's Evangelical Lutheran (Saginaw, MI), 44.

granted a peaceful release with handshake, as the minutes of that day reveal .... In the years following repeated efforts were made at reconciliation .... But the departing families desired to organize their own congregation toward the southwestern part of the city, and soon adopted the name of Christ Lutheran.”<sup>18</sup>

Christ Lutheran Church describes its separation from Emmanuel Lutheran and its organization in 1896 in more detail:

Emmanuel Lutheran Church had been founded here in Walla Walla by the missionary pioneers of the “Washington District,” which was organized in 1891. This was their [the Volga German community in Walla Walla] church, then, for a number of years....

Due to national differences, various customs, and other factors, the two groups were not harmonious “since years before,” as Pastor Eberle writes. In order that both groups could serve God in the most efficient and blessed manner, in October 1895 twenty-seven members of Emmanuel Lutheran Church requested a peaceful dismissal in order to organize their own congregation in the south part of town. In 1895, an official of the old “Washington District” made a visitation in Walla Walla, regarding this division of Emmanuel Lutheran Church. On recommendation of this visitor, those who had requested their dismissal were advised not to organize their own congregation at that time, but to wait until the following year.

Accordingly, in the fall of 1896 the present Christ Lutheran Church was organized.<sup>19</sup>

Note the indication of cultural friction between *Reichsdeutsch* and Volga Germans leading to the separation, even though both congregations were members of the Ohio Synod.

However, the divisions were not yet finished. Peace United Church of Christ reports:

Peace Church was born when the heads of 22 families gathered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Benzel to explore how best to keep the faith of Volga forefathers. Many of them were at that moment members of Christ Lutheran Church of Walla Walla. The date was November 7, 1921 .... On January 6, 1922, the organizational meeting of Peace Church was held at the Gradwohl home. Pastor H. F. Freund, President of the Pacific Northwest Synod of the Evangelical Church guided the organization. The name selected was “Friedens (Peace) Evangelical Church of Walla

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<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, *Seventy-fifth Anniversary: 1888–1963* (Walla Walla, WA), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Christ Lutheran Church, *Christ Lutheran Church: 1896–1996* (Walla Walla, WA), 1.

Walla”, and the congregation voted at the same meeting to become part of the Evangelical Synod of North America ....<sup>20</sup>

The recorded history of St. Stephan’s Lutheran, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, presents a curious example. A pastor of the Iowa Synod, Rev. Wm. Staehling, had established a congregation, St. Andrew’s, on the south side of the city in 1901. Volga Germans who were members of a Missouri Synod congregation, Trinity Lutheran, visited St. Andrew’s and found a familiar and comfortable environment. This brought the hostility of the pastor of Trinity. However, the Volga Germans in Trinity approached Rev. Staehling to start an Iowa Synod congregation on the north side of Sheboygan. The first worship service was held on Good Friday, April 10, 1903. On Easter Sunday, April 12, 1903, a meeting was held to establish St. Stephan’s Lutheran Church. It is especially interesting to read that in 1905 Rev. Staehling took a 6 month journey to Germany and Russia, particularly the Volga region, to better understand the heritage of his flock at St. Stephan’s.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Search for Religious Freedom**

Several of the congregations mentioned that one of their primary concerns was the longing for religious freedom. First German Congregational, Lincoln, Nebraska, describes the situation thus:

The foundation of our church goes back to the year 1888. Several years before, the first German immigrants came from the Volga colonies to Lincoln. These settled together as a people, part Lutheran and part Reformed in confession and willingly worshipped with one another in one church service, as they had in the old homeland. But this freedom they didn’t find in any existing German church in Lincoln, which

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<sup>20</sup> Peace United Church of Christ, “*Mission Accomplished*”: *A Brief History of Peace United Church of Christ, 1921–1965* (Walla Walla, WA), 4–5.

<sup>21</sup> St. Stephan’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, *St. Stephan’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sheboygan, Wis.: 1903–1912*.

welcomed them, so the student Adam Traudt interrupted his studies at the Chicago Theological Seminary and came to Lincoln and looked after them spiritually for a short time. So we find regular services from March 1, 1889 in a room at Park School.<sup>22</sup>

### **The German Congregational Church**

It is at this point that it becomes necessary to describe the development of German Congregationalism in the United States. The Congregationalist Church began its work among German settlers in Iowa around the middle of the nineteenth century. But until the arrival of Germans from Russia, the movement was very small, consisting of only a few congregations. Chrystal enumerates the multitude of denominations that “wooded the Russia Germans in the United States, confusing them with competing claims.”<sup>23</sup> Sallet reports:

The American Congregational Church, too, which had been maintaining a small German contingent in Iowa since 1848, came into contact with the Russian-German settlers at an early date. In 1874, a traveling Congregational missionary, a former Prussian sergeant, established the first Congregational parish in Sutton, Nebraska, and others followed in McCook and Lincoln. Probably by way of Sutton, contact was also established with the Black Sea Germans in Dakota. The year 1884 saw the founding of five parishes at Scotland and Parkston, South Dakota, and probably at the same time, the Nebraska-Dakota District of the Congregational Church was organized.<sup>24</sup>

According to Eisenach, in 1883 a small group of pastors from Iowa and Nebraska, along with a few professors from the Chicago Theological Seminary met. “On October 3rd an

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<sup>22</sup> “Die Gründung unserer kirche geht auf das Jahr 1888 zurück. Einige Jahre zuvor kamen die ersten deutschen Aufiedler aus den Wolgakolonien nach Lincoln. Dieselben setzten sich aus Leuten zusammen, die teils im lutherischen und teils im reformierten Bekenntnis aufgewachsen waren und gerne miteinander in einer Kirche Gottesdienst gepflegt hätten, wie sie das in der alten Heimat gewohnt waren. Da sie diese Freiheit aber in keiner bestehenden deutschen Kirche in Lincoln antrafen, war es ihnen sehr willkommen, als der Student Adam Traudt seine Studien auf dem Chicago Theologishen Seminar ein Jahr lang unterbrach und nach Lincoln kam, um sie auf kurze Zeit geistlich zu versorgen. So fanden regelmäßige Gottesdienste vom 1. Mai 1888 bis März 1889 in einem Raume der hiesigen Park Schule statt”. First German Congregational Church, *Fünfzigjähriges Jubiläumsfest der Ersten Deutschen Kongregationale Gemeinde: 1888–1938* (Lincoln, NE), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Chrystal, 69.

<sup>24</sup> Sallet, 90.

organization was effected, designated as ‘*Die Allgemeine Evangelische Kirchenversammlung der Deutsched Kongregationalisten,*’ known since 1888 as the ‘General Conference of the German Congregational Churches.’<sup>25</sup> By 1885 congregations had been established in ten states in both rural and urban settings.<sup>26</sup> By 1890 Russian German pastors trained at the German department of Chicago Theological Seminary were ministering to their congregations.<sup>27</sup> By 1895 there were 110 congregations with 4,728 members;<sup>28</sup> and by 1925 there were 20,448 members.<sup>29</sup> Sallet estimates that by 1930 thirty percent of the Russia Germans belonged to the German Congregationalist Church.<sup>30</sup>

The attraction of the German Congregational Church for many Volga Germans was centered on the emphasis of spiritual regeneration and in the congregational polity. Pilgrim Congregational, originally First German Congregational, Billings, Montana, records its origin:

The decision to become aligned with the effort of the Congregational Churches was made after consultation with both the Lutheran and Congregational representatives. Lutheran policies here in the U.S. did not meet with this group’s approval. According to Paul Zeller, the decision to become a part of the Congregational Church was because of the individual church freedom and autonomy guaranteed by Congregational policy. Freedom was their reason for leaving Russia; here in the U.S.A. they had found that freedom they so much desired and wished to retain for all time, even in their spiritual lives.

The strong desire to worship as they chose in their native German language was the primary motivation for leaving Russia and settling in the U.S.A.<sup>31</sup>

Schissler, describes the formation of Immanuel German Congregational, Rocky Ford,

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<sup>25</sup> Eisenach, *History*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> Eisenach, *History*, 66–67.

<sup>27</sup> Eisenach, *History*, 80–81.

<sup>28</sup> Eisenach, *History*, 96–97.

<sup>29</sup> Eisenach, *History*, 142.

<sup>30</sup> Sallet, 90.

<sup>31</sup> Pilgrim Congregational Church, *Pilgrim Congregational Church: 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* (Billings, MT), 13–14.

Colorado, for which he served as pastor for several years. He summarizes the motivations well, noting the emphasis on independence, autonomy, equality, and pietism:

The time came when they felt the opportunity was ripe to officially organize and build a church. Even though most of them came from a Lutheran background and were deeply embedded in Lutheran theology, they hesitated to affiliate with a Lutheran church. The German Lutheran Church in Russia, to which they belonged, often opposed their devotional ideals of pietism. The spirit of freedom and democracy had taken possession of them. They had heard of the German Congregational churches, which were organizing and growing rapidly in the western states. Congregationalism recognized the equal rights of all believers and the independence and autonomy of the local church. This local group of German immigrants soon got in touch with the officials of this denomination. So the venture into the fellowship of German Congregationalism began.<sup>32</sup>

It is important to recognize that the search for religious freedom and congregational autonomy is closely interwoven with several other motives. Establishing their own churches under a congregational polity enabled the Volga Germans to separate from the discrimination felt, whether real or imagined, in churches that were predominately *Reichsdeutsch* institutions and ultimately to be served by Russia German clergy.<sup>33</sup> It provided the opportunity for them to worship in the old ways brought from Russia with their own liturgy and the *Volga Gesangbuch*, as noted above with Pilgrim Congregational. They could preserve their Volga German identity and heritage. And it allowed, even sometimes actively supported, the activity of the Brotherhood.

### **Impact of the Brotherhood**

Dorn notes that many of the immigrants from the Volga were members of the Brotherhood in their homeland and brought the movement with them when they came to the Midwest.<sup>34</sup> It was a means of preserving their spiritual life, their Russia German identity, and a way of providing

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<sup>32</sup> George Schissler, *Life and Faith of a German Congregational Church – 1943–1945*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> Chrystal, 70–71.

mutual support. Ballensky describes, “Almost without exception the first Volga immigrants were all *Brüder*. Wherever they established themselves, they held their prayer meetings. These took the same form that was well-established in the old homeland. Nothing new was added. One would judge whenever he went that one was in Russia.”<sup>35</sup> Members of the Brotherhood began holding prayer meetings in private homes following the same pattern and format as they had in Russia.<sup>36</sup> Dorn<sup>37</sup> and Schissler<sup>38</sup> provide wonderfully detailed descriptions of Brotherhood prayer meetings.

As Brotherhood groups were established in more communities, the groups determined it was desirable to establish conferences to unite their fellowship as they had done in Russia. The first conference was held in Sutton, Nebraska, in 1887.<sup>39</sup> Eisenach goes on to report, “By 1915, nine states and fourteen district conferences had been established, by 1940 the state conferences numbered thirteen and the district conferences thirty-two.”<sup>40</sup> Further, he notes that the central premises of the Brotherhood in the United States mirrored those of its origin in Russia, namely, the “Priesthood of all Believers,” the necessity of spiritual rebirth and regeneration through a conversion experience, and the commitment to living a life of Christian piety. Although, as it had in the homeland, the Brotherhood insisted upon participants maintaining membership in the

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<sup>34</sup> Dorn, 55.

<sup>35</sup> “*Fast ohne Ausnahme waren die ersten Wolga-Einwanderer all Brüder. Wo immer sie sich niederließen, hielten sie ihre Betstunden ab. Diese nahmen dieselbe Form an, wie sie in der alten Heimat gepflegt wurden. Neues kam nich hinzu. Man richtete sich immer darnach, wie man es in Rußland hatte.*” J. J. Ballensky, *Wolgadeutsche Brüderschaft: Kurze Geschichte von der Bewegung* (New Ulm, MN: Dakota Freien Presse, 1929), 15.

<sup>36</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 99–100.

<sup>37</sup> Dorn, 55–56.

<sup>38</sup> Schissler, 74–85.

<sup>39</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 100–1.

<sup>40</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 103.



church, it identified with no particular denomination or creed.<sup>41</sup>

The presence of the Brotherhood in particular communities had a tremendous impact upon denominational affiliation. In this study, of the seventeen churches from the Congregationalist background, eleven identified the Brotherhood as one of the reasons, if not the primary reason, they joined that denomination. The same is true of the six which were originally members of an Evangelical synod as well as the Free Brethren congregation of Portland, Oregon. As seen above with Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran, Saginaw, Michigan, tolerance for the Brotherhood was integrally interwoven with preserving the old ways and maintaining their Volga German identity.<sup>42</sup>

The histories of some churches suggest that the Brotherhood fellowship might have been established after the congregation was formed, such as Peace United Church of Christ, Walla Walla, Washington,<sup>43</sup> First Congregational, Loveland, Colorado,<sup>44</sup> Immanuel German Congregational, Rocky Ford, Colorado,<sup>45</sup> and Immanuel Evangelical and Reformed, Ft. Collins, Colorado. Note how this last congregation cites preservation of the old ways as the primary concern in the congregation's founding, mentioning the use of the *Volga Gesangbuch*. Yet it also emphasizes the role of the Brotherhood in the life of the congregation. As a side note, it is interesting to observe how the history refers to this as a "German-Lutheran" congregation:

On March 2, 1912, approximately 30 Volga-Germans founded Immanuel Evangelical Church, with the assistance of Reverend O. Wichmann of Laramie, Wyoming. Affiliated with the Evangelical Synod of North America, the fledgling church was

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<sup>41</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 105–6.

<sup>42</sup> Guenther, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Peace United Church of Christ (Walla Walla, WA), 6.

<sup>44</sup> First Congregational United Church of Christ, *History of First Congregational United Church of Christ*, (Loveland, CO), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Schissler, 74.

registered as Evangelische Immanuels-Gemeinde and the congregation was incorporated on August 2, 1913. The old world Volga-German culture was central to the role and function of the new church ....

It was this culture that brought the Volga-Germans together to form a church: a church that would function not only in providing religious rites, but would also supplement their children's education, provide social interaction, and act as a common focus for farming and regional news. The first songbook used by the church was called Gemeinschafts-Lieder and had been printed in Saratow, Russia. It, too, was exclusively German. Keeping their own language fostered a sense of community in the church that the outside world did not or could not share.

A lay organization was also formed in the church called the Brotherhood. This fraternity had its origins in Russia, and would meet twice a week to sing and promote spiritual growth; and several times a year all of the regional Brotherhoods would gather together for a conference. The organization faded sometime between 1940 and 1959 ....

The congregation grew from 30 members in 1912 to 123 members in 1934. By 1937, the depression and drought forced many farmers to seek better working conditions; thus membership dropped to 78. In summing up the first 25 years, there were nine pastors who served the German-Lutheran congregation.<sup>46</sup>

By contrast, St. Paul's Congregational, Greeley, Colorado, notes that the Brotherhood was holding prayer meetings three years before the congregation was formed.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Zion Congregational, Weatherford, Oklahoma, reports that in 1894, after the completion of their sod houses, the second item of importance for settlers was coming together for prayer meetings led by the Brethren. Zion was not founded until 1903.<sup>48</sup> First Reformed, Flint, Michigan, reports that the Brotherhood was holding meetings as early as 1917, though the congregation was not established until 1919.<sup>49</sup> In Lincoln, Nebraska, the Brotherhood was holding prayer meetings before Immanuel Reformed Church was established in 1891.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Immanuel Evangelical and Reformed Church (Ft. Collins, CO).

<sup>47</sup> Mary Troutd Mills, ed., *History and Church Records of St. Paul's Congregational Church, Greeley, Colorado, 1905-1991*, 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Zion Congregational, *History of Zion Church, Book II* (Weatherford, OK), 123-24.

<sup>49</sup> First Reformed Church, *Festschrift zum Zehniaehrigen Gemeindejubilaeum der Ersten Reformierten Gemeinde zu Flint, Michigan am 21 Juli 1929*, 47.

<sup>50</sup> Immanuel Reformed Church, *Sixtieth Anniversary of Immanuel Reformed Church: 1891-1951, Lincoln*,

Perhaps most significant are the histories which report that it was the Brethren who made the decision that a church should be established. The Free Evangelical Lutheran Cross Church, Fresno, California, provides one of the most distinct examples:

In 1892 there were 167 Volga-Germans in Fresno. These early immigrants conducted prayer meetings in their homes from 1887 to 1891. The Brethren would open with a song from the 'Wolga-Gesangbuch,' lead in prayer, and speak on a text from the Bible. A session of prayer was held, singing of songs from the 'Gemeinschaftsbuch' which they brought along from the old country. The need was felt to organize a church. They wrote the Rev. John Lich in Nebraska for counsel. He was the pastor of the Friend parish in Nebraska from 1884 to 1889 in the German Congregational church fellowship. The Rev. Lich encouraged these Volga-Germans to call Mr. Jacob Legler from Straub, Russia to become their spiritual leader. Mr. Legler was the parochial school teacher in the colony, and the assistant to the pastor. The invitation was accepted, and Mr. Jacob Legler arrived in Fresno on August 10, 1891.<sup>51</sup>

It appears that each of the churches in Portland, Oregon, was established at the initiative of the Brotherhood fellowships which were connected to the congregations. Baselt reports that it was the Brethren who decided to leave St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran and establish St. Paul's German Evangelical Lutheran Congregational Church, eventually St. Paul's Bible Church.<sup>52</sup>

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*Nebraska, 10<sup>th</sup> and Charleston Streets.*

<sup>51</sup> 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Free Evangelical Lutheran Cross Church of Fresno, California, 1892-1962, And 75<sup>th</sup> Diamond Jubilee of Arrival of First Immigrants, 1887-1962, December 5-9, 1962, 29.

<sup>52</sup> Fonda D. Wagner Baselt, "History of St Paul's Bible Church and Transcription of St. Paul's Cemetery Pine Island, Orange County, NY," 1994, AHSGR Library, Lincoln, NE, 1.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE VOLGA GERMANS AND AMERICAN LUTHERANISM

In the settlement of the original one hundred four Volga German colonies, seventy-two were Protestant. Of those, seventy-eight percent of the residents were identified as Lutheran. Over the next century the number of colonies and colonists increased. The great majority of those who immigrated to the United States identified themselves as Lutheran. Yet as noted above, Sallet estimates a sizeable percentage of those who settled in America joined denominations other than Lutheran:

In the 1930's in my estimation, about 30% of the Evangelical Russian-Germans belonged to the German division of the Congregational Church and 10% to the Baptist Church, 10% to the Methodist, Adventist and other churches; 5% are perhaps affiliated with the German Reformed Church, while 45% belong to the various synods of the Lutheran Church.<sup>1</sup>

The explanation appears to be the consequence of two very different influences.

For most of the Lutheran bodies, the task of establishing a new congregation was the function of the ordained clergy. Much of the history of Lutheranism's expansion from the Midwest was built on the work of circuit riders, or *Reiseprediger*. Men such as Doering and Rauh, mentioned above, traveled throughout the countryside of their region. Wherever they traveled, they gathered people together in worship and brought Word and Sacrament to them.

However, there appears to have been little awareness of possible distinctions among

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<sup>1</sup> Sallet, 90.

various peoples. Meuser makes the observation:

The basic approach of America's Lutherans to the home mission task – whether by pastors, congregations, or synods – was to search out and reach with the gospel fellow Lutherans of the same national background as themselves .... Likewise, the German circuit rider on the frontier exhibited similar sentiments with his standard inquiry upon arrival in a community, “Do any Germans live around here?”<sup>2</sup>

This impression is supported by reports of Doering<sup>3</sup> and Rauh<sup>4</sup> themselves as they entered a new area of mission work.

It is a surprise to find the Volga Germans have barely a footnote in Lutheran histories. It is interesting to speculate why this would be so. Koch attributes this to indifference from some denominations toward this group, or sometimes outright rejection for their practices.<sup>5</sup> However, it seems the reason is in Meuser's observation. Based upon the available denominational histories, it appears the operating assumption was that all German-speaking persons would have similar backgrounds, including similar religious heritages. Although it is an argument from silence, it does not look as if America Lutheran bodies recognized that this new group of immigrants to the mid-west and western states constituted a distinct ethnic population. As long as the people they approached spoke German, the language of Luther and the Reformation, their language and cultural differences from *Reichsdeutsch* Germans were generally overlooked or perhaps minimized by church officials. There was little awareness that the Volga Germans had a different ecclesiastical history and different practices.

When they arrived in this country, the Volga Germans found a drastically different religious terrain than the one they had known. Instead of one Protestant church under the central

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<sup>2</sup> Meuser, 264.

<sup>3</sup> Moeller, 63.

<sup>4</sup> Rauh, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 18: 25.

<sup>5</sup> Koch, 119.

direction of the Evangelical Lutheran General Consistory, there were many different branches of the Lutheran church and many other denominations besides. If Sallet's estimates are reasonable, most of the Volga Germans became part of one synod or another of the Lutheran church in America. In the mission work of the circuit riders and the pastors of already established congregations, these people once again came in contact with Word and Sacrament and found worship, preaching, and catechesis in harmony with the faith they had learned in Russia. Yet the establishment of new Lutheran churches appears to have been distinctly clerical work, initiated by those pastors. And with regard to the specific synod affiliation, it often appears to have been a matter of whoever got to them first won.

Concurrent with the mission work of the clergy, and in many ways flowing directly opposite to their efforts, was a strong emphasis among the Volga German laity to preserve their identity and heritage. Luebke reports, "In contrast to the Germans from Germany, the Russian Germans retained a remarkable sense of cohesion and formed tightly knit communities, highly integrated on the basis of their religion and their origin in Russia."<sup>6</sup> The Globeville community of Denver<sup>7</sup>, and the North and South Bottoms of Lincoln, Nebraska, provide good examples of this.

Focusing on Lincoln, Williams<sup>8</sup> and later Kinbacher<sup>9</sup> describe how the people who settled in the Bottoms maintained their identity as "*Volger*." Yet the distinctions broke into smaller units so that the South Bottoms became known as the *Franker Boden* and the North Bottoms as the *Norkaer Boden*, representing the predominant villages of Frank and Norka. Williams

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<sup>6</sup> Luebke, 413.

<sup>7</sup> Rock, "Unsere Leute", 159-160; Doeppers, 510.

<sup>8</sup> Hattie Plum Williams, "A Social Study of the Russian Germans," (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 1916), 148-49.

<sup>9</sup> Kinbacher, 30.

continues:

This heterogeneity of the settlements is preserved in the colloquial speech of the people, who speak of the north settlement as the “Norker bottom” and the south settlement as the “Franker bottom” and who denominate the various churches not by their confessional names of Lutheran, Reformed, or Congregational but as the “Kukkus,” “Balzer,” “Norker,” “Beideck,” or “Franker” churches. Again within the settlements the people from each village live in groups, and whole streets will be occupied by former residents of one colony, and other streets by those from another colony. This is especially true of the new immigrants, although not confined to them.<sup>10</sup>

Sallet makes a similar observation:

We usually find that the Volga Germans are separated into religious affiliations according to their former villages in Russia; for example, in Hastings, Nebraska, the colonists from Kolb almost all belong to the Lutheran Church, those from Frank to the Congregational Church, while those from Norka have their own congregation which in former years was Reformed, but later became Congregational. This is a typical case which is repeated in every larger Volga German community.<sup>11</sup>

For many people this sense of being distinctive and the desire to maintain that distinction served as the motivating force behind the factors described in the previous chapter. In many of the communities where the Volga Germans settled, such as Lincoln, Saginaw, Denver, Portland, and Fresno, Lutheran churches were present or soon came into being. However, as these congregations did not acknowledge their unique identity, the people chose to establish their own church. Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran, Saginaw, Christ Lutheran, Walla Walla, and St. Stephan’s Lutheran, Sheboygan, serve as excellent examples. It is worthwhile to note that Christ Lutheran and St. Stephan’s Lutheran are indeed Lutheran congregations. So in these instances, remaining Lutheran was important to the people, but in an environment that was comfortable with people of like heritage.

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<sup>10</sup> Williams, “A Social Study,” 149.

<sup>11</sup> Sallet, 91.

A significant element of that Volga German identity was the acceptance of and comfort with unionism. In Russia the joint worship of Lutheran and Reformed was more or less a necessity because of the circumstance. This resulted in a variety of accommodations between the faiths. Reformed infants received Baptism as a confession of faith; Lutheran infants received it as a means of grace. Reformed children were taught from the Heidelberg Catechism, Lutheran children from Luther's Small Catechism. Lutheran communicants knelt and received a wafer; Reformed stood and received a piece of bread.

However, in this nation that type of accommodation between confessions was no longer necessary. There were abundant Presbyterian communions, with whom the Reformed immigrants would probably have more closely aligned, with congregations throughout the country. The Presbyterians might have been perceived as an "English" church, but then so were the Congregationalists originally. And obviously, the Lutheran faith was being preached and taught in ever greater circles with ever greater frequency throughout the land.

Yet for many of these people, the need to affiliate with a church which preached the Gospel and administered the Sacraments in truth and purity was outweighed by the need to remain connected to "our own kind." Schumacher makes the curious statement, "In some cases in Russia, since there was a close intermingling of various denominations such as the Lutheran and Reformed congregations, one pastor would serve both Lutheran and Reformed churches. Many wanted to continue this in America but it didn't work. It only resulted in much confusion and misunderstanding."<sup>12</sup> In fact, this comment is only half right; rather than causing confusion and misunderstanding, those who wanted to maintain that "intermingling" found other denominations which would accommodate them.

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<sup>12</sup> Schumacher, 38.



Perhaps the Brotherhood represents the epitome of an emphasis on preserving identity and comfort with unionism. Ballensky's observation about the Brethren, noted above, is telling, "Wherever they established themselves, they held their prayer meetings. These took the same form that was well-established in the old homeland. Nothing new was added. One would judge whenever he went that one was in Russia." Eisenach makes the statement, "The principal purpose of the movement is the salvation of the individual soul. Herein is to be seen its distinctive feature as an organization, and the reason for its existence."<sup>13</sup> Yet this assertion glosses over the unstated purpose of the movement and its prayer meetings; to protect and maintain the culture and milieu the Brethren had known in their homeland. Various accounts describe how in any congregation, until the final demise of the organization, all Brotherhood activities were conducted in German<sup>14</sup> and relied upon the *Volga Gesangbuch*.<sup>15</sup> The description of the men wearing their shirts buttoned up but with no necktie and the women wearing black shawls harks back to their dress in their old homeland.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, unionism was inherent in the organization. Eisenach notes that at the conference of 1887 they resolved, "Brotherhood members must also be church members;" and their constitution decrees, "[I]n no case and under no circumstances may a prayer organization regard itself as being religiously self-sufficient."<sup>17</sup> But he also states, "While they have never broken away from the accredited doctrines of the orthodox Protestant church in any essential particulars, they do not emphasize the theoretical side of religion. They simply insist that

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<sup>13</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 100.

<sup>14</sup> First Congregational United Church of Christ, (Loveland, CO), 3; Schissler, 87–88; Sallet, 92.

<sup>15</sup> Dorn, 56; Schissler, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Dorn, 55; Schissler, 87.

<sup>17</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 129.

personal piety is more important than doctrinal soundness.”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps his most telling statement is:

Moreover, from the time of its inception the Brotherhood, which has no official connection with any denomination, has been free enough and spiritual enough to transcend most denominational lines. Its constitution reads that it is “a fellowship of Russian German converts of all Evangelical Protestant churches which hold to infant baptism and observe Sunday as the Lord’s Day.” Its inter-denominational character, which is one of its distinct features, gives it a wide field of influence; for in its fellowship are, among others, adherents of the Congregational, Lutheran, Reformed, Evangelical, United Brethren, and Methodist churches. Although members of these various confessions are not asked to surrender their peculiar church traditions and beliefs, denominational doctrines are not to be stressed. The spirit rather than the letter is to receive the main emphasis.<sup>19</sup>

This clearly put the Brotherhood in direct opposition with a confessional church such as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Koch makes the interesting statement, “The Brotherhood’s adherents among the immigrants were suspicious of the churches, whereas many Lutheran functionaries, or synod policy, rejected them for participating in an unrecognized religious service outside the regular church.”<sup>20</sup> Yet this is not quite accurate. The issue for churches such as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was not the “unrecognized religious service outside the regular church,” for the prayer meetings did not serve the function of the Divine Service. Instead, the issue was that these meetings with a clearly religious purpose included and readily accepted people from various other confessional backgrounds.

Brother Alex Gaus, compiling histories for a Brotherhood convention in Michigan in 1977, reports a not-uncommon interaction with the Lutheran church, in this case specifically The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod:

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<sup>18</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 108.

<sup>19</sup> Eisenach, *Pietism*, 106.

<sup>20</sup> Koch, 119.

With new converts and other families moving to Flint from out of the state, the prayer group reached about 50 families in two years. However, these families were without a church. There was a Missouri Lutheran Church on Hamilton Avenue, but the majority of Germans in the Pasadena area, where they had settled, were from a Reformed background from Messer, Huck, Norka, and other such villages in Russia. The Lutheran Church would not accept these people from the Reformed circles into their fellowship.

While serving as missionaries, we went to Pastor Anderson of the Missouri Lutheran Church and requested communion, but he informed us we would have to separate ourselves from the Reformed Germans in the prayer meeting before we could participate in the Lord's supper, which of course, we did not do.<sup>21</sup>

It is significant to note that in the study the only congregation with an active Brotherhood organization that affiliated with a Lutheran church body is St. Stephan's Lutheran, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, described above, which was originally a member of the Iowa Synod.

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<sup>21</sup> Alex Gaus, Sr., "The German Brotherhood: 254 Years of History from the Volga River in Russia, U.S.A., Canada, South America, and Siberia," 27.

## CONCLUSION

As a group the Volga Germans were significant to the history of Russia, the United States, and American Christianity. As they settled in the Volga region, they had prestige as a social class compared to Russian serfs. As a whole they were better educated, more prosperous, and had greater rights and freedoms than their neighbors. As “colonists” they were determined by both legal dictate and by their own sense of identity to remain separate and distinct from the Russians. During their first one hundred years, the colonies and colonists grew, prospered, and multiplied.

At the end of that century the political and social environment changed significantly and the Volga Germans left what had become their home by the tens of thousands. Most of them came to the Americas between 1870 and the outbreak of World War I. In the United States they settled primarily in the newly opening Western states, starting in Kansas and Nebraska. In this country they were major contributors in the development of the railway system, the cultivation of hard winter wheat, and the growth of the sugar beet industry.

As they spread throughout the Midwestern and Pacific Coast states, they carried with them their Christian faith. Wherever communities were established, the founding of churches was an integral part of the process. This study sought to identify factors which lead these Volga German congregations to affiliate with one denomination or another.

The first source to research such a question, it would seem, would be the histories written by the various church bodies. With an influx of such great numbers, it would be reasonable to expect recognition of these people and records of outreach and mission work among them. Yet, curiously, the Volga Germans appear to have had relatively little direct impact on the formal history of American Christianity, and especially the history of American Lutheranism. Reading

through official histories of church bodies, there is almost no mention of the Volga Germans as a distinct group. The significant exception to this phenomenon is the history of the Congregational Church.

Thus, to attempt to answer the question posed, it proves necessary to examine the individual histories of congregations of various denominations that have a clearly identified Volga German heritage. For this study thirty-nine representative congregational histories were collected of churches established by Volga Germans in the time frame in question. In examining their accounts of how the congregation was founded, various themes were identified.

Especially among the Lutheran congregations, the work of the traveling missionary, the circuit rider or *Reiseprediger*, appears to be the foremost factor. As they traveled throughout the countryside they gathered German-speaking people together and began conducting worship. As numbers grew and stabilized, they helped the people formally establish a congregation that then called a pastor to be their shepherd. The phenomenon of the *Reiseprediger* appears to have been part of the history of several Lutheran synods through the nineteenth century. Particularly as it relates to this study, it appears that whichever church sent forth the missionary, it was to that synod that the new congregation affiliated.

While most of the Volga Germans identified themselves as Lutheran both in Russian and upon their arrival in the United States, a significant portion of them did not join Lutheran church bodies in this country. The congregational histories cite a variety of reason, such as the search for religious freedom in contrast to the state-run church they had left. A number of congregations were established through the direct efforts or influence of the *Brüderschaft* or Brotherhood. Though the Brotherhood was a major factor for several congregations, it does not appear to be so for many others. In reality, most of the explanations given in the various congregational histories condensed into one; the desire and intention of the people themselves to preserve and maintain

their identity as Volga Germans. This meant, among other things, preserving the traditions of worship they had known.

Elements of that tradition brought from Russia included the use of the *Volga Gesangbuch* as their hymnal. For many there was also a very strong pietistic emphasis in life and worship, as exemplified by the Brotherhood. And a major constituent of that tradition was the unionistic worship of Lutheran and Reformed in one congregation. This practice had been born of necessity in Russia because of the never-ending shortage of trained clergy to serve the huge parishes of several villages and hundreds of people. In this country, however, church bodies of the different confessions existed, enabling each to worship according to one's own confession. Yet for these people it was more comfortable to make accommodation in confession and practice in order to remain together as Volga Germans.

These issues appear to have been particularly significant in relating to Lutheran synods in America. The evidence from both the histories written about the synods and that written by the Lutheran Volga German congregations suggests there was little awareness of these people as a distinct group. There does not appear to have been any specific effort at outreach to them nor any attempt to address their distinct cultural concerns. The result for those individuals for whom cultural identity was paramount was to seek out a church body which would recognize, or at least allow them to preserve that identity.

For many, though not all, that proved to be the Congregational Church. The denomination had already endeavored to minister to the Russian Germans as a distinct group. In addition, its congregational polity accommodated all of those elements which they considered critical in their identity as Volga Germans. Thus Sallet's estimate that thirty percent of the Evangelical Volga Germans became Congregationalists in this country, the largest single group of those who did not affiliate with a Lutheran church.

This study provides interesting insight into the assimilation of the Volga Germans into the American church. Yet, many additional avenues of research remain. What happened to the Lutheran pastors in the Volga colonies; did they remain in Russia or come to this country? What influences did they exert on the directions their flocks took in America? This study looked at only a small sample of churches known to have a Volga German heritage; would the results hold consistent with a larger sample? How did the experience of assimilation of those Volga Germans who were Roman Catholic compare with the Evangelical/Lutheran experience in this country? How did the experience of the Volga Germans compare to their countrymen, the Black Sea Germans, who also came to this country during the same period? How did the experience of the Volga Germans in the United States compare to their countrymen who settled in Canada, Brazil, or Argentina? These appear to be opportunities for further fruitful research.

## **APPENDIX ONE**

### **MANIFESTO OF THE EMPRESS CATHERINE II ISSUED JULY 22, 1763**

We, Catherine the second, Empress and Autocrat of all the Russians at Moscow, Kiev, Vladimir, Novgorod, Czarina of Kasan, Czarina of Astrachan, Czarina of Siberia, Lady of Pleskow and Grand Duchess of Smolensko, Duchess of Esthonia and Livland, Carelial, Twer, Yugoria, Permian, Viatka and Bulgaria and others; Lady and Grand Duchess of Novgorod in the Netherland of Chernigov, Resan, Rostov, Yaroslav, Beloosrial, Udoria, Obdoria, Condinia, and Ruler of the entire North region and Lady of the Yurish, of the Cartalinian and Grusinian czars and the Cabardinian land, of the Cherkessian and Gorsian princes and the lady of the manor and sovereign of many others. As We are sufficiently aware of the vast extent of the lands within Our Empire, We perceive, among other things, that a considerable number of regions are still uncultivated which could easily and advantageously be made available for productive use of population and settlement. Most of the lands hold hidden in their depth an inexhaustible wealth of all kinds of precious ores and metals, and because they are well provided with forests, rivers and lakes, and located close to the sea for purpose of trade, they are also most convenient for the development and growth of many kinds of manufacturing, plants, and various installations. This induced Us to issue the manifesto which was published last Dec. 4, 1762, for the benefit of all Our loyal subjects. However, inasmuch as We made only a summary announcement of Our pleasure to the foreigners who would like to settle in Our Empire, we now issue for a better understanding of Our intention the following decree which We hereby solemnly establish and order to be carried out to the full.



1.

We permit all foreigners to come into Our Empire, in order to settle in all the governments, just as each one may desire.

2.

After arrival, such foreigners can report for this purpose not only to the Guardianship Chancellery established for foreigners in Our residence, but also, if more convenient, to the governor or commanding officer in one of the border-towns of the Empire.

3.

Since those foreigners who would like to settle in Russia will also include some who do not have sufficient means to pay the required travel costs, they can report to our ministers in foreign courts, who will not only transport them to Russia at Our expense, but also provide them with travel money.

4.

As soon as these foreigners arrive in Our residence and report at the Guardianship Chancellery or in a border-town, they shall be required to state their true decision whether their real desire is to be enrolled in the guild of merchants or artisans, and become citizens, and in what city; or if they wish to settle on free, productive land in colonies and rural areas, to take up agriculture or some other useful occupation. Without delay, these people will be assigned to their destination, according to their own wishes and desires. From the following register\* it can be seen in which regions of Our Empire free and suitable lands are still available. However, besides those listed, there are many more regions and all kinds of land where We will likewise permit people to settle, just as each one chooses for his best advantage.

\*The register lists the areas where the immigrants can be settled.

5.

Upon arrival in Our Empire, each foreigner who intends to become a settler and has reported to the Guardianship Chancellery or in other border-towns of Our Empire and, as already prescribed in # 4, has declared his decision, must take the oath of allegiance in accordance with his religious rite.

6.

In order that the foreigners who desire to settle in Our Empire may realize the extent of Our benevolence to their benefit and advantage, this is Our will -- :

1. We grant to all foreigners coming into Our Empire the free and unrestricted practice of their religion according to the precepts and usage of their Church. To those, however, who intend to settle not in cities but in colonies and villages on uninhabited lands we grant the freedom to build churches and belltowers, and to maintain the necessary number of priests and church servants, but not the construction of monasteries. On the other hand, everyone is hereby warned not to persuade or induce any of the Christian co-religionists living in Russia to accept or even assent to his faith or join his religious community, under pain of incurring the severest punishment of Our law. This prohibition does not apply to the various nationalities on the borders of Our Empire who are attached to the Mahometan faith. We permit and allow everyone to win them over and make them subject to the Christian religion in a decent way.

2. None of the foreigners who have come to settle in Russia shall be required to pay the slightest taxes to Our treasury, nor be forced to render regular or extraordinary services, nor to billet troops. Indeed, everybody shall be exempt from all taxes and tribute in the following manner: those who have been settled as colonists with their families in hitherto uninhabited regions will enjoy 30 years of exemption; those who have established themselves, at their own expense, in cities as merchants and tradesmen in Our Residence St. Petersburg or in the neighboring cities of Livland, Esthonia, Ingermanland, Carelia and Finland, as well as in the

Residential city of Moscow, shall enjoy 5 years of tax-exemption. Moreover, each one who comes to Russia, not just for a short while but to establish permanent domicile, shall be granted free living quarters for half a year.

3. All foreigners who settle in Russia either to engage in agriculture and some trade, or to undertake to build factories and plants will be offered a helping hand and the necessary loans required for the construction of factories useful for the future, especially of such as have not yet been built in Russia.

4. For the building of dwellings, the purchase of livestock needed for the farmstead, the necessary equipment, materials, and tools for agriculture and industry, each settler will receive the necessary money from Our treasury in the form of an advance loan without any interest. The capital sum has to be repaid only after ten years, in equal annual installments in the following three years.

5. We leave to the discretion of the established colonies and village the internal constitution and jurisdiction, in such a way that the persons placed in authority by Us will not interfere with the internal affairs and institutions. In other respects the colonists will be liable to Our civil laws. However, in the event that the people would wish to have a special guardian or even an officer with a detachment of disciplined soldiers for the sake of security and defense, this wish would also be granted.

6. To every foreigner who wants to settle in Russia We grant complete duty-free import of his property, no matter what it is, provided, however, that such property is for personal use and need, and not intended for sale. However, any family that also brings in unneeded goods for sale will be granted free import on goods valued up to 300 rubles, provided that the family remains in Russia for at least 10 years. Failing which, it be required, upon its departure, to pay the duty both on the incoming and outgoing goods.

7. The foreigners who have settled in Russia shall not be drafted against their will into the military or the civil service during their entire stay here. Only after the lapse of the years of tax-exemption can they be required to provide labor service for the country. Whoever wishes to enter military service will receive, besides his regular pay, a gratuity of 30 rubles at the time he enrolls in the regiment.

8. As soon as the foreigners have reported to the Guardianship Chancellery or to our border towns and declared their decision to travel to the interior of the Empire and establish domicile there, they will forthwith receive food rations and free transportation to their destination.

9. Those among the foreigners in Russia who establish factories, plants, or firms, and produce goods never before manufactured in Russia, will be permitted to sell and export freely for ten years, without paying export duty or excise tax.

10. Foreign capitalists who build factories, plants, and concerns in Russia at their own expense are permitted to purchase serfs and peasants needed for the operation of the factories.

11. We also permit all foreigners who have settled in colonies or villages to establish market days and annual market fairs as they see fit, without having to pay any dues or taxes to Our treasury.

7.

All the afore-mentioned privileges shall be enjoyed not only by those who have come into our country to settle there, but also their children and descendants, even though these are born in Russia, with the provision that their years of exemption will be reckoned from the day their forebears arrived in Russia.

8.

After the lapse of the stipulated years of exemption, all the foreigners who have settled in Russia are required to pay the ordinary moderate contributions and, like our other subjects,

provide labor-service for their country. Finally, in the event that any foreigner who has settled in Our Empire and has become subject to Our authority should desire to leave the country, We shall grant him the liberty to do so, provided, however, that he is obligated to remit to Our treasury a portion of the assets he has gained in this country; that is, those who have been here from one to five years will pay one-fifth, whole those who have been here for five or more years will pay one-tenth. Thereafter each one will be permitted to depart unhindered anywhere he pleases to go.

10.

If any foreigner desiring to settle in Russia wishes for certain reasons to secure other privileges or conditions besides those already stated, he can apply in writing or in person to our Guardianship Chancellery, which will report the petition to Us. After examining the circumstances, We shall not hesitate to resolve the matter in such a way that the petitioner's confidence in Our love of justice will not be disappointed.

Given at the Court of Peter, July 22, 1763

in the Second Year of Our Reign.

The original was signed by Her Imperial Supreme Majesty's own hand.

Printed by the Senate, July 25, 1763<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://CVGS.CU-Portland.edu/History/WhyToRussia/Manifesto1763.cfm> (accessed 02/19/2008), based upon Fred C. Koch, *The Volga Germans: In Russia and the Americas from 1763 to the Present*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1977), 12 – 17.

## APPENDIX TWO

### ROSTER OF THE GERMAN COLONIES ON THE LOWER VOLGA ORIGINAL (MOTHER) COLONIES FOUNDED IN THE YEARS 1764 THROUGH 1767<sup>1</sup>

Names are those used by the colonists; alternative or Russian names are given in parentheses.

Name of Colony	Hill Side	Plains Side	Protestant	Catholic
Anton (Sevastyanovka)	x		x	
Balzer (Goloi Karamysh)	x		x	
Bangert (Samorye)		x	x	
Bauer (Karamyshevka)	x		x	
Beauregard (Borgard)		x	x	*
Beckerdorf (Ernestinendorf)		x	x	
Beideck (Talovka)	x		x	
Bettinger (Baratayevka)		x	x	
Biberstein (Glarus)		x	x	
Bohn (Hockerberg)		x	x	
Boisroux (Boaro)		x	x	
Brehnin, or Kutter and Neumann (Popovka)	x		x	
Brabander (Kasizkaya)		x		x
Caneau (Kano)		x	x	
Caesarsfeld		x	x	
Chasselouis (Chaisol)		x		x
Degott (Kamenny Ovrage)	x			x
Dehler (Berezovka)		x		x
Deutsch-Shcherbakovka	x		x	
Dinke (Tarlykovka)		x	x	
Dietel (Oleshna)	x		x	
Doennhof (Gololobovka)	x		x	
Dobrinka (Nizhnaya Dobrinka)	x		x	
Dreisnitz (Verkhaya Dobrinka)	x		x	
Eckardt (Zuerich)		x	x	
Enders (Ust Karaman)		x	x	
Fischer (Telyausa)		x	x	
Frank (Medveditskoi Krestovoi Buyerak)	x		x	
Franzosen (Rossoshi)	x		x	
Galka (Ust Kulalinka)	x		x	

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<sup>1</sup> Fred C. Koch, *The Volga Germans: In Russia and the Americas from 1763 to the Present* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1977) 307-312

Gattung (Zug)		x		x
Goebel (Ust Graesnukha)	x			x
Graf (Krutovarovka)		x		x
Grimm (Lesno Karamysh)	x		x	
Herzog (Susly)		x		x
Hildmann (Panovka)	x		x	
Holstein (Verkhnyaya Kulalinka)	x		x	
Hoelzel (Kochetnoye)		x		x
Huck (Splavnikha)	x		x	
Hummel (Brockhausen)		x	x	
Husaren (Yelshanka)	x			x
Hussenbach (Linevo Ozero)	x		x	
Jagodnaya Polyana - see Yagodnaya Polyana				
Jost (Popovkina)		x	x	
Kamenka	x		x	
Katharinenstadt (Baronsk)		x	x	*
Kauz (Vershinka)	x		x	
Keller (Krasnorynovka)		x		x
Kind (Baskakovka)		x	x	
Kolb (Peskovatka)	x		x	
Koehler (Karaulny Buyerak)	x			x
Kraft (Verkhnyaya Graesnukha)	x		x	
Krasnoyar (Krasnoyarovka)		x	x	
Kratz or Basel (Vasilyevska)		x	x	
Kratzke (Potshinnoye)	x		x	
Kukkus (Volskoye)		x	x	
Laub (Tarlyk)		x	x	
Laube or Lauwe (Yablonovka)		x	x	
Leichtling (Ilavla)	x			x
Leitsinger (Kustareva)		x		x
Louis (Otrogovka)		x		x
Meinhard (Unterwalden)		x	x	
Merkel (Makarovka)	x		x	
Messer (Ust Solicha)	x		x	
Moor (Kluchi)	x		x	
Mueller (Krestovoi Buyerak)	x		x	
Naeb (Rezanovka)		x	x	
Nieder-Monjou (Bobrovka)		x	x	
Norka	x		x	
Ober-Monjou		x		x
Orlovskaya		x	x	
Paulskoye		x	x	
Pfannenstiel, also Mariental (Tonkoshurovka)		x		x
Pfeifer (Gnilushka)	x			x
Philippfeld		x	x	
Preuss (Krasnopolye)		x		x
Reinhard (Ossinovka)		x	x	
Reinwald (Staritsa)		x	x	

Remmler (Luzern)		X		X
Rohleder (Raskaty)		X		X
Rosenheim (Podstepnoye)		X	X	
Rothammel (Pamyatnoye)	X			X
Sarepta (Krasnoarmeisk)	X		X	
Schaffhausen		X	X	
Schaefer (Lipovka)		X	X	
Schilling (Sosnovka)	X		X	
Schoenchen (Paninskoye)		X		X
Schuck (Graesnovatka)	X			X
Schulz (Lugovaya Graesnukha)		X	X	
Schwab (Buydakov Buyerak)	X		X	
Schwed (Svonarevka)		X	X	
Seelmann (Rovnoye)		X		X
Semenovka	X			X
Sewald (Verkhovye)	X			X
Stahl am Karaman (Svonarevku)		X	X	
Stahl am Tarlyk (Stepnoye)		X	X	
Stephan (Vodyaenoi Buyerak))	X		X	
Straub (Skatovka)		X	X	
Urbach (Lipov-Kut)		X	X	
Volmar (Kopenka)	X			X
Walter (Gretshinnaya Luka)	X		X	
Warenburg (Privalnoye)		X	X	
Winkelmann (Susannental)		X	X	
Wittmann (Solothurn)		X		X
Yagodnaya Polyana	X		X	

\* - Also had Catholic congregation



AMERICAN VOLGA GERMAN CONGREGATIONS BY DENOMINATION AND STATE				
	LC-MS	ELCA	WELS	UCC
<b>California</b>	Emmanuel, Fresno			Free Cross, Fresno
<b>Colorado</b>				1st German, Denver Immanuel, Brush Immanuel, Ft. Collins Immanuel, Rocky Ford First, Loveland St. Paul's, Greeley
<b>Kansas</b>	Trinity, Bender Hill			
<b>Michigan</b>		St. Johns, Saginaw	St. John, Dowagiac	Immanuel Evangelical, Saginaw 1st Reformed, Flint
<b>Montana</b>				1st Congregational, Laurel Pilgrim, Billings
<b>Nebraska</b>	Immanuel, Lincoln Trinity, Arapahoe Trinity, Bartley	Friedens, Lincoln		St. John, Lincoln 1st German, Lincoln Immanuel Reformed, Lincoln
<b>New York</b>				St. Paul's Bible, Pine Island
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Zion, Goodwin, OK & Follett, TX	Peace, Bessie		St. John's, Okeene Zion, Weatherford
<b>Oregon</b>	St. Peter's, Cornelius			Ebenezer, Portland 2nd German, Portland Zion, Portland Free Brethren, Portland St. Paul's E&R, Portland
<b>Washington</b>		Peace, Tacoma Christ, Walla Walla		Peace, Walla Walla
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Ebenezer, Sheyboygan	St. Stephen's, Sheyboygan		
<b>Wyoming</b>	St. Paul's, Riverton			

AMERICAN VOLGA GERMAN CONGREGATIONS  
BY DENOMINATION AND STATE

APPENDIX THREE

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