

Chapter 6

Historical Background: Emigration to Tsarist Russia

The Lure of Emigration

Tsarist Russia offered a highly alluring prospect for escape to the beleaguered villagers in the Pfalz during the chaotic years of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Several earlier waves of emigration fever had already swept the Rhineland as a result of the great suffering this region endured during the numerous wars that have plagued German history. Several countries had opened their doors to these sturdy farmers and craftsmen and invited them in to help develop their frontier areas. Denmark, for example, invited Palatine Germans to settle in Jutland, its isolated peninsula in the far north. The USA was also a major draw for emigrants from the Pfalz in the 1700s, who became the ancestors of today's "Pennsylvania Germans."

Since the Middle Ages, most German emigrants had been drawn to Eastern Europe, where opportunities for free land had been offered by various monarchs. There is often a misconception that this movement eastwards by German settlers was the result of military conquests in the Slavic realms, the so-called *Drang nach Osten* of the Teutonic military orders. In reality, most of the German settlements to the east were the result of an orderly process of colonization at the invitation of local rulers who wanted to develop their economies by luring German farmers and tradesmen.

The Hanseatic League had founded several German commercial cities along the shore of the Baltic Sea, the most important one being the port of Danzig, which was established by the mid 14th century. Germans had also been settling in the Kingdom of Poland since the mid 12th century. Duke Heinrich of Breslau launched an intensive campaign to lure German settlers into Silesia. Settlements were established in Pomerania during the 14th century, and by the year 1500 most of the residents there were Germans. In the Czech regions, the first influx came at the invitation of King Ottokar II (1253-1278). German settlements became especially numerous in Bohemia, Moravia, and the border region known as the Sudetenland.

In Hungary, German settlements began already in 1241 at the invitation of King Bela IV. The heaviest concentration was in the *Siebenbürgen* region - hence, their descendants came to be known as the *Siebenbürger* Saxons. After the Turks were defeated at Vienna in 1683 and their advance into Europe was halted, the Imperial Habsburgs launched a campaign of vigorous economic and military expansion into the Balkans over the next 200 years. In 1687 the Hungarian nobility elected the Hapsburg, Leopold I, as their hereditary emperor, giving rise to the Austro-Hungarian "Dual Monarchy" which lasted until 1918. German

colonies were planted in a step-wise fashion to create a series of buffer zones against the Turks. In 1689, after another victory over the Turks, Germans were settled in the newly acquired regions of the Hungarian lowlands. Empress Maria Theresa of Austria-Hungary invited German farmers to settle in the former swamplands of the Banat River region, which she had recently drained. They became known over time as the "Donau Swabians" (*Schwaben*). As the political boundaries shifted over the centuries, the Donau Swabian settlements came to overlap three countries – Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania.¹

Russian monarchs also invited foreign settlers to their frontier regions, especially along the Volga River valley and along the north shore of the Black Sea. The numbers drawn to Tsarist Russia rivaled those who emigrated to the USA. In 1763 Catherine II (reigned 1762 - 1796), herself of German origin, issued her famous invitation to German immigrants to settle in colonies along the shores of the Volga River, near Saratov. Catherine had several motivations for her decree. She hoped that the German colonists would stimulate the general agricultural development of her country. In addition, the Volga colonies were intended to be a buffer zone, following the same strategy adopted by Austria-Hungary a century earlier in the Banat region. She wanted to anchor the eastern fringe of her empire against the raids by the Cossacks and other nomadic tribesmen from the steppes of central Asia, who had plagued the empire for centuries. Within four years, 27,000 Germans had accepted Catherine's offer and they founded 104 villages along both sides of the Volga River.

In the 1760s Russia also launched a series of military campaigns against the Ottoman Turks to expand its southern boundary to the Black Sea coast. The peace treaty at Kutchuk-Kainardschi in 1774 gave Russia the territory between the Bug and Dnieper Rivers, along with the right for commercial navigation on the Black Sea. In 1789 the remaining area along the north shore of the Black Sea was absorbed, including Odessa. By 1792 Catherine's dream of achieving a "natural" southern boundary was realized at the Treaty of Jassy, which allowed Russia to annex the Crimean peninsula and the Black Sea coast up to the Dniester River.

The Russian empire had acquired vast, new, largely unoccupied territories in the south and it was imperative that they be settled as soon as possible to solidify the claim to the area. The use of Russian peasants was not feasible because the great majority of them were serfs at that period of history, bound to the estates of the nobility. In 1789 Catherine extended another invitation for colonists. Many Mennonites emigrated from the Danzig region to Russia at this time. They settled in the Chortitza, near Jekaterinoslav (modern Dnepropetrovsk) and Taurida districts near the Sea of Azov.

¹ Robert A. Selig, 1999b. "Ungardland ist's Reichste Land" *German Life*, February/March, 1999, pp. 21-25.

Catherine's grandson, Tsar Alexander I, continued her policies and he planned the creation of a broad fan of German colonies along the north shore of the Black Sea (an area referred to at that time as "New Russia"). As before, the intention was to create a stable buffer zone on the lower fringe of his empire and to anchor his claim to the Black Sea trade. Alexander's Manifesto of 1804 invited settlers and offered them several specific privileges:

1. Freedom of religion in all respects.
2. Ten years freedom from taxes and other burdens.
3. After 10 years of exemption, the colonists will be treated just like the other subjects of the Empire, with the exception that they will not be required to billet troops, save those who are marching through the villages.
4. The colonists are exempt from military and from civil service. Each one, however, is free to enter the service of the Imperial Crown, but this will not exempt him from paying all his Crown debts.
5. To get established, every settler will receive an advance loan which must be repaid in the ten years following the decade of exemption.
6. Every family is permitted to bring along its movable property duty-free, plus commodities for sale not exceeding 300 *rubles* in value.
7. Craftsmen are permitted to join guilds and associations. Each one may carry on trade and commerce throughout the Empire, without any restrictions.
8. Through the magnanimity of His Imperial Majesty all serfdom has been abolished in the provinces of the Russian Empire.
9. Every family will receive from the Crown a grant of from 30 to 60 *dessjatines*² of productive land for its use. In addition to the police dues, each family will pay an annual ground tax of 15 to 20 *kopeks* per *dessjatin*, but this tax will not be payable until after the ten years of exemption have expired.
10. Any settler who desires to leave the imperial realm of Russia and return to his native land must first pay his Crown debts, plus the taxes of three years for the use of the land.³

Many of the earlier immigrants to the Volga colonies had been destitute, which required the Tsarist regime to make additional expenditures for their support during the early years. To prevent these same problems in the Black Sea colonies, the Tsar sought to attract "good, well-to-do farmers" who possessed some minimum resources to enhance their likelihood of success, and the necessary skills to serve as role models in the handicrafts and agriculture. The immigrants were supposed to provide securities or testimonials that they

² A *dessiatin* (spelled *Dessjatin* in German) is an archaic measure for land used in Tsarist Russia. It is equivalent to 2.702 English acres.

³ Joseph Height, *Memories of the Black Sea Germans*, Associated German-Russian Sponsors, 1979, p. 15.

possessed cash or goods worth at least 300 *Gulden*, which they were allowed to bring with them.⁴

The Manifesto was distributed by the Imperial Russian Colony Transportation Department in Lauingen, on April 20, 1804. Tsar Alexander was on friendly terms with Napoleon at that point, so the French allowed his agents to recruit in Germany. Emigration from the Pfalz and passage through southern Germany was not a problem because that region was unified in the Confederation of the Rhine, which was allied with Napoleon. In 1806 Maximilian Joseph also withdrew from the Imperial Federation with Austria, declared himself King of Bavaria, and joined the Confederation. In 1809 he fought for France against Austria.

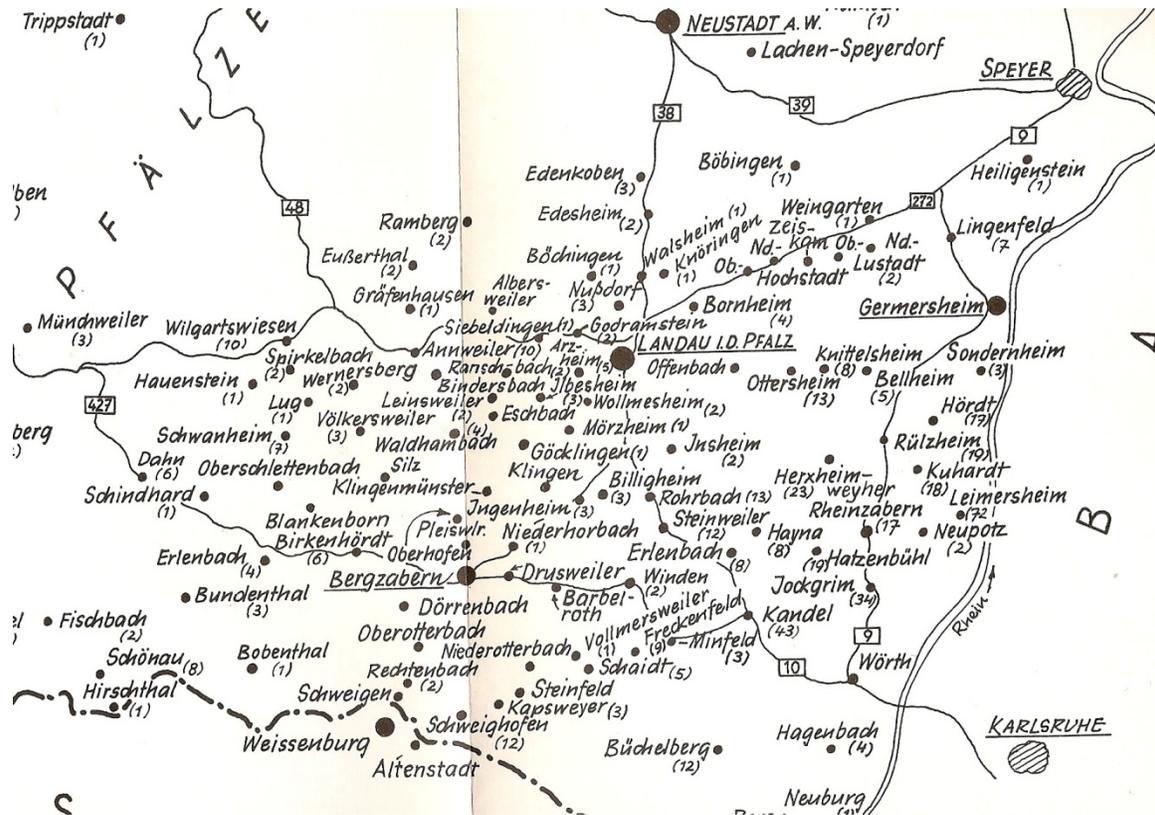
The invitation for colonists was first announced from three Russian embassies, in Ulm, Frankfurt, and Regensburg. Initially the Tsar had planned to pay the expenses for only 200 families per year; however, word of the generous immigration offer spread quickly and another mass emigration fever soon gripped the populace in the Pfalz, Baden, Württemberg and Alsace. Many families who jumped at the offer were refugees from Alsace and the neighboring Pfalz who had fled during the "Great Flight" of the French Revolution, and who had been displaced from their farms. Some 800 families responded to the offer in 1804.

This first wave of emigrants converged at Ulm, where they were transported down the Danube on river barges, known as "*Ulmer Schachtel*," to Vienna. There they were organized into wagon-trains and led by hired guides to Brody/Radzivilov on the Russian border. After a stay for quarantine, a Russian official gave the immigrants their official Tsarist citizenship papers and their first allowance of money. They then continued south to Odessa. The first colonies were founded in 1804 near Odessa, in the area that came to be known as the Liebenthal.

French officials became alarmed at the size of the exodus from Alsace and they tried to stem the outflow. Emigration was temporarily halted when the alliance between Tsar Alexander and Napoleon collapsed in 1805 and the French waged a series of military campaigns against the Russians and Austrians. After Alexander's defeat, he once again signed a treaty with Napoleon, and resumed his plans for luring immigrants. In 1808 he issued another invitation for colonists, and expanded his recruiting efforts by commissioning his agents to issue passports from his embassies in Karlsruhe and Vienna. The emigration wave of 1808-09 drew people primarily from the same areas as before -- the Pfalz, Alsace, Baden, Württemberg, and Hessen -- the areas that were hardest hit by the

⁴ Karl Stumpff, *The German-Russians, Two Centuries of Pioneering*, New York: edition Atlantic-forum, second edition, 1971, p. 11. Note the 6th stipulation in the Manifesto of 1804. In these old records, *Gulden* or "guilders" are generally regarded as equivalent to *rubles*.

turmoil and the military occupation of the French armies. The Grand Duke of Baden and the King of Württemberg tried to stem the outflow of emigrants by restricting passports and more strictly enforcing the requirement for official papers certifying that the applicant didn't have outstanding debts, but it was to no avail.⁵



**Places in Rhineland Pfalz from which Emigrants left for South Russia
1808 - 1810⁶ (Stumpp 1973)**

The Journey to South Russia in 1809

It is conservatively estimated that at least 1,000 families emigrated from the southern Pfalz in 1808-09. Wagon trains were organized in various gathering points to conduct them to central administrative centers where they were issued the necessary papers to embark on the journey to Russia. Two of the gathering

⁵ Height, 1972, p. 38.

⁶ Karl Stumpp, *The Emigration From Germany to Russia in the Years 1762 to 1862*. Lincoln, Nebraska: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1973. The map is titled, "Map of the localities in Rhineland Palatinate, from which the emigrations to South Russia (Black Sea area) occurred in the years 1808/10."

points in the southern Pfalz mentioned in the records were Berg and Insheim⁷ – which probably explains how Franz Wagner and his relatives became involved. In some villages it was reported that half of the residents packed up. In a few cases the village was left virtually empty. We don't have a list of all those who left from Insheim, but it is known that Franz Wagner, his wife Eva, their two sons, and the families of his brother-in-law Joseph Würth, Joseph Karch, and Friedrich Renner all joined the emigrant train. The map (above) developed by the researcher, Karl Stumpp, shows the number of known emigrants from villages in the south Pfalz, based on the names and places of origin of those who later appeared in the Russian records. Most were from villages below Landau. At least two emigrant families are shown per village, although these numbers are clearly understated because not all emigrants appeared in the later Russian records, and many records were lost over time. Leimersheim, for example, is shown with the largest number of emigrants (72), but a local village history reports that in the latter part of May, 1809, 110 its residents left for Russia,⁸ considerably more than what is shown on Stumpp's map. He shows only two families emigrating from Insheim, but we know that at least four families left for Russia. The broader district of Germersheim on the Rhine had at least 400 emigrant families.⁹

We don't have the passport for Franz Wagner and his family, so we're not sure which emigrant train they traveled with, but it is quite likely that they were part of the group of 71 families that departed in May, 1809, which included the family of Jacob Landeis (the ancestor on my mother's side of the family), who was from nearby Hördt. The emigrants gathered at Insheim, then went to Germersheim, where they crossed the Rhine and traveled to Frankfurt am Main. There they were issued passports (*Reisepassen*), signed by von Bethmann, the Russian consul.¹⁰ He issued hundreds of passports that year and each week a new wagon-train of emigrants embarked on the journey to the east. About 1,100 families departed between May and late November, 1809.

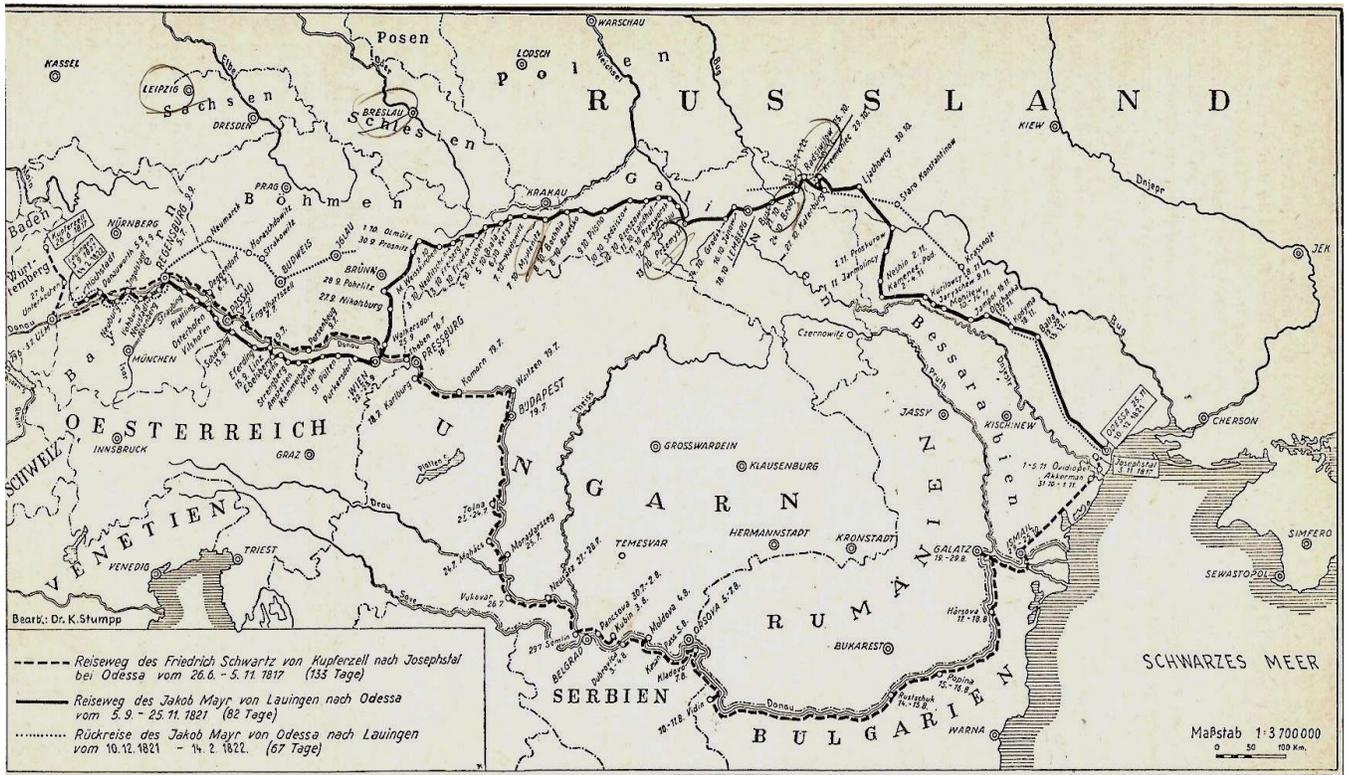
Rather than following the earlier route of 1804 along the Danube, the emigrant trains of 1808-09 followed a longer and more circuitous overland route in order to avoid the military campaigns that were being waged by Napoleon against Austria in the upper Danube valley. A series of battles took place in 1809 at Abensberg, Landshut, and Wagram. The overland route was about 1,600 miles to the Russian border, taking the emigrants through the German states of Saxony and Silesia, then through the Polish province of Galicia which was under Austrian sovereignty, and down to Odessa.

⁷ Height, 1975, p. 14.

⁸ Hodapp, no date, "*Geschichte des Ortes Leimersheim und des Weitern Heimattraumes*," pp. 145-46. It's not clear whether Stumpp is referring to families or to individuals on his map.

⁹ Height, 1972, p. 34.

¹⁰ Height, 1972, p. 13.



Emigration Routes from Germany to the Black Sea Area, Showing the Southern Danube River Route and the Northern Overland Route (Stumpff, 1973)

Jakob Landeis and his group of Pfälzers from villages below Landau departed from Frankfurt am Main on May 20, 1809. His passport shows their precise route. From Frankfurt they traveled to Erfurt in Saxony, from which they departed on May 28 to Weimar; on June 1 they departed from Leipzig toward Breslau and Brody in Silesia; on June 22 from Babice (Poland); on June 25 from Myslenice through Bochnia (Galicia); on June 26 from Bochnia to Tarnow; on July 3 from Przemysl to Lemberg (known today as Lvov); on July 5 from Lemberg through Brody to Radziwilov, which was just across the Galician border in Russia. At Radziwilov they spent about 24 days in quarantine, rested, and waited for further instructions. Height¹¹ estimates that it took another three or four weeks to travel southward from the Russian border through the Dniester steppes (yielding a total of 93 to 99 days for the entire journey). Each family usually had its own wagon, drawn by two horses. The wagons were similar in

¹¹ Joseph Height, 1979, p. 37.

style to the Conestoga wagons used in America, which had also been developed by wainwrights from the Palatinate.¹²

When the families finally arrived in the vicinity of Odessa it was too late in the year to proceed to the location where their colony was to be founded. The new immigrants were led to the enclave of colonies in the Liebenthal and Kutschurgan districts, which had been founded five years previously. They spent the first winter in Russia there, in the homes of their fellow countrymen. To their great surprise, they found that the earlier colonists were still living huddled together in primitive dwellings with reed roofs, extracting a living from the soil with great toil. This was the first indication that their dream of a lush paradise in the Ukraine was a fantasy. A letter by Anton Marius, written in 1809, elaborates on this:

“The dwellings of the colonists consist of wretched huts constructed of 12 slender stakes that are driven into the ground and connected with clay-plastered wicker-work. In these miserable huts the colonists eke out their days, for even in the most rigorous winter they have no wood for their stoves.”¹³

Most of the immigrants brought some cash with them – as was required in the government decree -- as well as clothing and other personal effects, and a few even owned their own wagons. Although they were allowed to bring 300 *Gulden*, on the average most families had about half that amount. Much of their cash had been spent during the long, difficult journey. Johann Friedrich Grosshans, a contemporary from the colony of Worms in the Black Sea region, reported that the immigrants spent their cash reserves rather quickly because they “...didn’t understand the Russian money and the rate of exchange,” and they became “victims of the Jewish money-changers and traders. As a consequence, many of them were forced to sell their clothes. Since they were not yet established and went into winter quarters in 1809, their expenditures increased all the more until some spent all the money which they had brought with them.”¹⁴ Each family was provided with 335 *rubles* as a cash-advance loan by the Tsarist government, but that was barely enough to buy the essentials. They had to pay the officials 175 *rubles* for the temporary structures that were built for them, to cover the costs for the doors, windows, and beds. The remainder was required for farm utensils, seed, and cattle. This 335 *ruble* advance also had to be repaid within 10 years.¹⁵

¹² Joseph Height, *Memories of the Black Sea Germans*. Bismarck: Germans from Russia Heritage Society, Height 1979, p. 36

¹³ Joseph Height, 1975, p. 52.

¹⁴ Cited in James Ruben Griess, *The German-Russians, Those Who Came to Sutton*. Privately published, Hastings, Nebraska, 1968, p. 157.

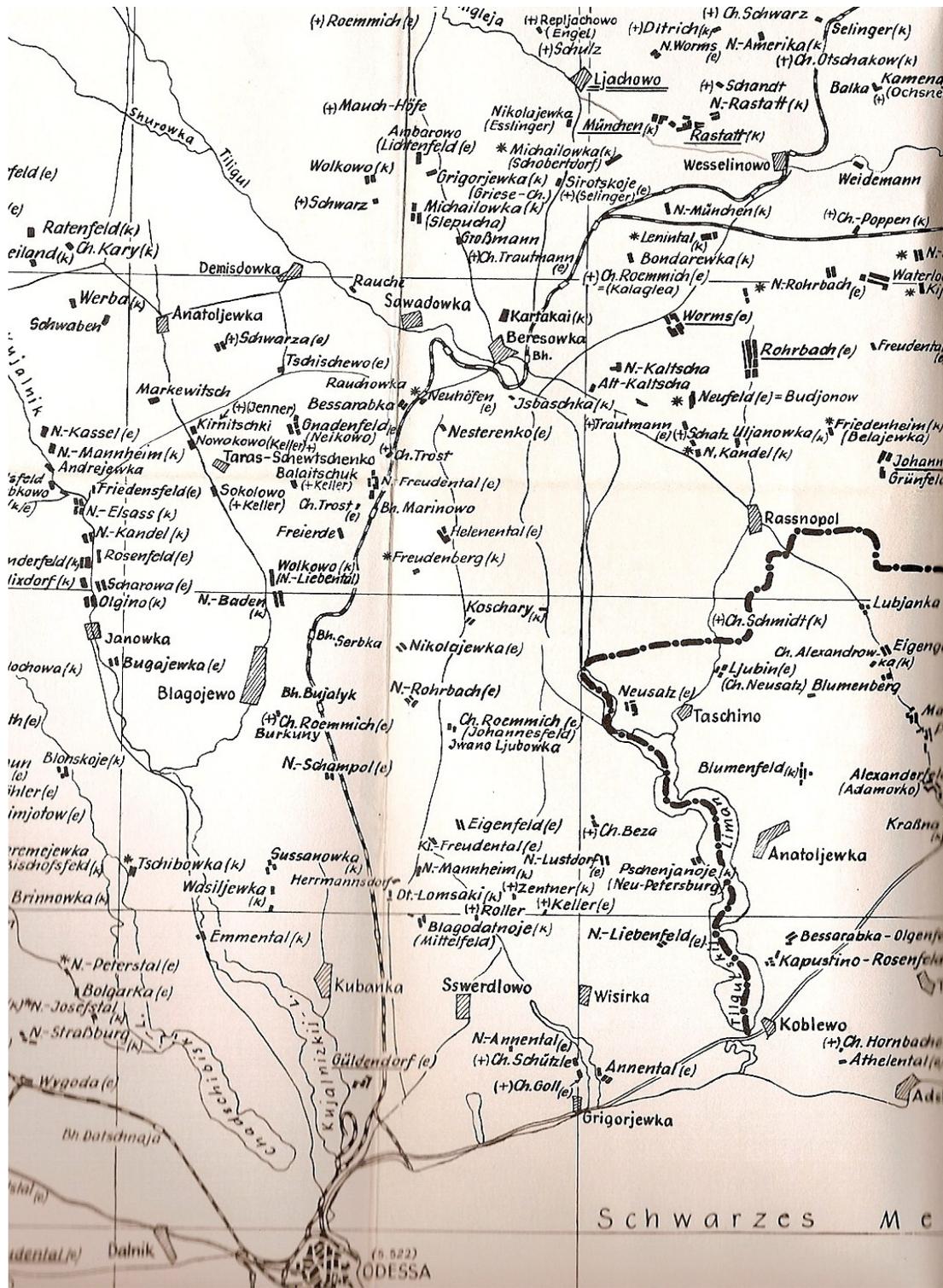
¹⁵ Hodapp, “*Geschichte des Ortes Leimersheim und des weiteren Heimattraumes*,” pp. 145-146.

Emigration waves after 1809

By 1810 Napoleon and Alexander were enemies once again, and emigration to the Black Sea area was effectively halted. However, Germans continued settling in other parts of Eastern Europe. In 1814 the colonization of Bessarabia began, which had become Russia's possession in 1812.

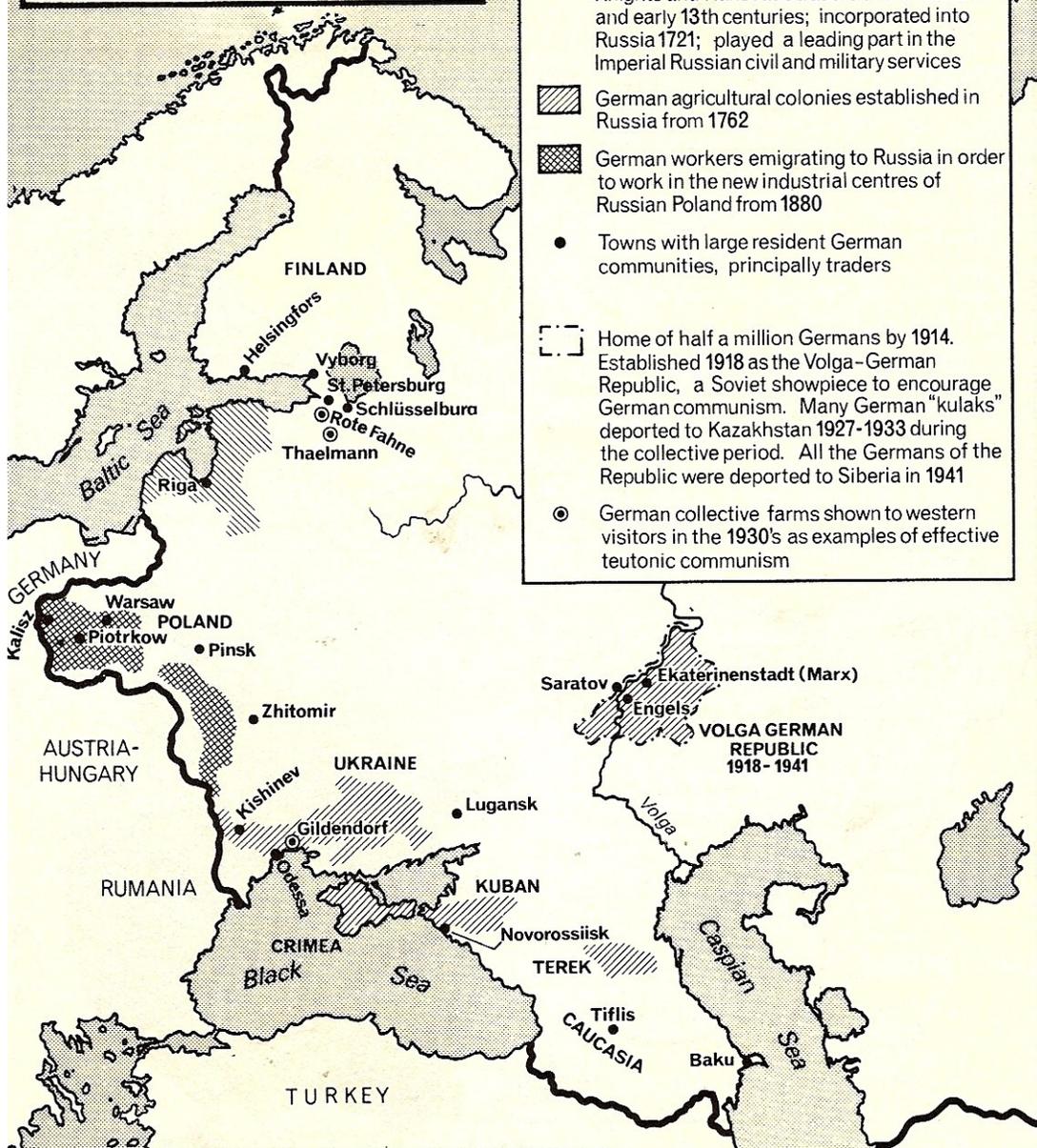
By 1820 the German settlers had founded some 300 agricultural colonies, under the supervision of the Tsarist regime. Later waves of immigrants continued to arrive in the 1860s when German settlements were established in Volhynia (currently in eastern Poland). A final influx of colonists came as late as the 1870s from Alsace and Lorraine, when the French began conscripting men for the war with Prussia. By the end of the century the population of ethnic Germans in Tsarist Russia had swelled to 1.3 million and their original colonies had branched into numerous daughter colonies.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ingeborg Fleischhauer, "The Germans' Role in Tsarist Russia: a Reappraisal," in Ingeborg Fleischhauer and Benjamin Pinkus, The Soviet Germans, Past and Present, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986, p. 13).



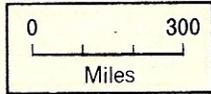
Rastadt, München, and other German Colonies
in the Black Sea area (Stumpp, 1973)

THE GERMANS OF RUSSIA 1710 - 1959



- The western boundary of Russia in 1914
- Baltic Germans, descendants of the Teutonic Knights and Hanseatic traders of the late 12th and early 13th centuries; incorporated into Russia 1721; played a leading part in the Imperial Russian civil and military services
- German agricultural colonies established in Russia from 1762
- German workers emigrating to Russia in order to work in the new industrial centres of Russian Poland from 1880
- Towns with large resident German communities, principally traders
- Home of half a million Germans by 1914. Established 1918 as the Volga-German Republic, a Soviet showpiece to encourage German communism. Many German "kulaks" deported to Kazakhstan 1927-1933 during the collective period. All the Germans of the Republic were deported to Siberia in 1941
- ⊙ German collective farms shown to western visitors in the 1930's as examples of effective teutonic communism

Russia obtained her first large German colony when Peter the Great annexed the Baltic lands in 1721. In 1762 Catherine the Great invited further German colonists to settle in Russia to stimulate agricultural development, offering them land, religious freedom and self-government. In the 1880's the industrial growth of Russian Poland led to a large influx of German industrial workers. German settlers continued to buy land in Southern Russia and on the Volga until 1914. There were over 1,771,000 Germans in Russia in 1897; 1,600,000 in 1959. The Volga Germans, deported by Stalin to Siberia, have disappeared



(Martin Gilbert, Atlas of Russian History, Dorset Press, 1972)