

A Primer on Western Canadian Settlement

**A presentation by
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**With Emphasis on How It Related to Germans
from Volga Russia Including those from the
Village of Norka**

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As early as 1870 in Volga Russia, the conditions were ripe for immigration. By 1875, that move was underway. At that time, there was no movement of Volga Germans to Western Canada. Perhaps, you have wondered why. This presentation will provide a primer on Western Canadian Settlement which should help to explain this.

How do I fit into all of this? My Volga German family is not from Norka. It is my maternal family. My maternal grandfather's family was named "Sattler." At various times, this family lived in Messer, Schilling, and Alexandertal before three related families came to Canada in 1911 and 1912. My maternal grandmother's family name was "Weber" specifically the Weber family from Dobrinka.

Recently, I have discovered that my Sattler family lived in the village of Büches near Büdingen not far from where some of the Norka families here originally came from in Germany. The Weber family is a little more complex having spent about four years in Denmark before going to Russia and perhaps but not certainly originating perhaps in Erstein, Elsass (although I have seen three very different locations suggested to date).

Our Volga German ancestors decided to move. As the Norka website notes, "Beginning in the 1870's the Russian government initiated a series of reforms to unify and modernize the sprawling Russian Empire. Oppressive taxes, forced military conscription (Catherine's Manifesto had promised exemption from military service), and the imposition of the Russian language in schools spurred another great migration, this time to Brazil, Argentina, Canada, and the United States." – The Volga Germans in Portland

The site notes that then America offered certain advantages which attracted our ancestors. "In the United States, the Homestead Act offered free land and aggressive marketing of newly opened prairie lands by railroad companies in the 1870's attracted many Germans from Russia. Many Germans from Russia settled on the Great Plains – so reminiscent of their home on the Russian steppes. As they did in Russia, the Germans from Russia settling in America desired nothing more than to transfer their old ways upon a new land." – The Volga Germans in Portland

This presentation will attempt to deal with a number of other important matters within that mandate:

1. Will define what constitutes "Western Canada."
2. Will provide a brief overview of events to 1869.
3. Explain why when migration began the Volga Germans did not come to Western Canada.
4. Will explain the importance of the year 1869.
5. Will note the preparations made to ready the lands for settlement.
6. What changed that made Western Canada a potential destination for these settlers.
7. Review aspects of settlement of our people here.
8. Will concentrate on the settling of Western Canada emphasizing the immigrations of people of German heritage especially Volga Germans to our West.

Let's begin by stating what we define to be "Western Canada." By Western Canada, we mean the area that includes our four westernmost provinces: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. This area falls between the eastern border of Minnesota and the western border of Washington, the Pacific Ocean. However, when we discuss settlement and homesteading, the area that we will discuss will be essentially the area covered by

Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta as British Columbia has a slightly different development due to its proximity to the ocean and gold. The latter resulted in an early gold rush. It also possesses a good deal of mountainous land.

So, where should we begin? Canada was home a number of First Nations People when the Europeans first began landing here with any regularity in the 16th Century. These Peoples had a well-developed culture that fitted the environment in which each lived. These People settled throughout the nation. In Western Canada, these People consisted largely of nomadic tribes who followed buffalo across the vast expanses of prairie.

Spurred on by the successes of the Spaniards, the nations of Europe were sure that great riches awaited them in these new lands. This is Martin Frobisher, an early British explorer, who found a large supply of gold ore which he loaded onto his ship and transported it back to England. Once it was assayed, it was determined that Frobisher had brought back a ship's load of worthless "Fool's Gold!"

However, there was wealth here. It was not in the forms of silver and gold as originally expected but first in fish which did little to bring people permanently to the new lands from Europe. But later, the fur particularly that of the beaver that became the basis for great wealth. For this commodity, it became necessary to settle on the land.

In 1670, a group of British nobles and merchants met to establish The Hudson Bay Company. This organization would predominate in the fur trade in British North America for nearly 200 years. Today, the HBC remains as the Bay Department Store, the HBC Northern Stores, and a bevy of diversified stores.

In the beginning, the HBC planned to limit its operations to the shore of Hudson Bay, build forts there, and simply wait for the First Nations' people to come to them to trade. However, there were flaws in this plan, and French Canadian traders began to profit from going directly to First Nations' People where they lived and worked.

One result of the fur trade was the development of a new race of people. These people were the Métis, a group of men and women who were descended from parents – one First Nations and one Caucasian. The Métis people played important roles in the fur trade but also would play a significant role in the development of the prairie provinces. The Métis men traditionally wore a colourful sash about their waist. One in which the background was predominately red signified that the wearer worked for the HBC. If the background was blue, it would signify that he worked for their short-lived rival the Northwest Company.

In the mid-1700's, the HBC decided to make representation to the tribes who lived far inland to come to the forts on Hudson Bay to trade. They sent Anthony Henday west to do this. He traveled almost to the foot of the Rocky Mountains (here in Alberta) where he presented the offer to a powerful Blackfoot chief. There is a representation of this meeting complete with a few historic inaccuracies at the Royal Alberta Museum. The Blackfoot did not come; in part because such a journey would have required them to cross the territory of their traditional enemy the Cree. Henday's travels were not forgotten and a new highway that will soon circle Edmonton bears his name.

This failure brought a drastic change in HBC policy. In the 1770's, the company began to leave the Bay, explore, and set up forts ever further inland. In 1796, the NWCo set up Fort Augustus on the west bank of the North Saskatchewan River near present-day Fort Saskatchewan, and the HBC set up a fort almost directly adjacent called Edmonton House. These forts did not stay put and were moved several times. This did on occasion cause problems for those bringing supplies down the river to the forts. This is the last site of the fort before it was torn down in 1915. That site is on the lawn near the Alberta Legislative Building in Edmonton.

There was indication that the soils were well suited as the fort produced a supply of vegetables (mainly root crops) in gardens at the fort. Here a role player from Fort Edmonton Park which includes a re-construction of the last fort works in the garden. However, this news was not publicized as settlement was not believed to be benevolent to the aims of the fur trade.

In the early 1800's, a settlement of farmers from Scotland was started near present-day Winnipeg by Lord Selkirk who received a large tract of land for farming from the Company adjacent to Fort Garry. Right from the onset there were tensions even hostilities between the two groups as agricultural settlement did not seem to be compatible with the fur trade.

By the 1850's, there was at least a sense that the order was changing. The British government (remember Canada is not independent yet) sent out a number of scientific expeditions to assess the potential of the Canadian west. From 1857 to 1861, expeditions by a party led by John Palliser performed a good deal of important research. These expeditions set the border (the Medicine Line) and evaluated the land for agriculture. Palliser felt that the southern sector was simply too arid for farming. Yet, in a period with heavy rains, settlers could see these lands as desirable as they did not demand the back-breaking work that was needed to clear lands further north. Palliser would be ignored, and this area would be settled with unfortunate results.

The beaver hat was the height of fashion. However, the process to create them was actually dangerous. Part of the process required the use of mercury. This led to many hatters becoming the victims of mercury poisoning. These victims would act mad, thus, the mad hatter such as the one in Alice in Wonderland. Also, fads and fashions are very fickle. The beaver hat went out of style. There was no longer a great demand for the furs from the HBC forts.

After the War between the states, the USA made a great purchase of land from Russia securing Alaska. Here, I must state that over the course of Canadian history the USA has caused a good deal of positive action here as Canadians at many points as we feared the long arm of Manifest Destiny. Since the US had land with a large tract of Canadian land in between that fear was aroused again and events began to transpire quickly!

Within two years, another massive property deal was made with the HBC transferring much of their land, “Rupert’s Land” to the Canadian government. Title to a piece of territory alone however would not stop it being taken. However, land that is developed and settled is less likely to be taken. But the land was a long way from being ready for settlers and settlements.

The Canadian purchase almost immediately set off a firestorm. Several aspects of the sale and its aftermath caused discontent among the Métis then the dominant population in the Fort Garry area. They had fears that their culture and way of life were threatened. Here again, the needs of a nomadic, hunting people were being compromised by potential agricultural development. As a result, an uprising known by a variety of names in which the Métis were led by Louis Riel took place. It was short-lived and Riel and his leadership were forces to flee to Montana. This event would remain a point of division between French and English Canadians. A new province Manitoba would begin to take shape from the ashes of this uprising.

It was recognized that the land needed to be settled, but a good deal needed to be done before this could become reality. The Canadian West was a wild, sparsely populated frontier region. A number of matters needed to be dealt with to make way for settlement. These included:

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| 1. Settling the Nomadic First Nations tribes. | All the matters to the left would need to be dealt with before settlers could be brought to the Canadian West and sustain themselves here. |
| 2. Policing – law and order. | |
| 3. Surveying the land. | None of these problems was anywhere near being addressed as the initial groups of Volga Germans began seeking new homes in North America. |
| 4. Governing the land and preparing for provincial status. | Western Canada was at that point wild frontier land, not at all a place for settlement and farming. |
| 5. Building a Transcontinental railway. | |
| 6. Defending the new land. | |
| 7. Bringing in settlers. | |

Circumstance largely helped in settling the First Nations Peoples. There is a large meteorite in the Royal Alberta Museum. It is not in the geological section as you might expect, but in the human history galleries as it was an article of Native spirituality known as the “Manitou Stone.” Its story is illustrative of this chapter of First Nations history. Long ago, the Stone was placed at a location sacred to the Native People. Much later, missionaries carted it away. The Native People had a prophecy that if the Manitou Stone was removed three tragedies would befall them. It appears that around 1870 they did. The Cree and Blackfoot went to war again after a long period of peace. An outbreak of smallpox decimated the tribes. Finally, the buffalo stopped coming north. The Native People were destitute and open to the help that the Treaties appeared to supply which included their restriction to reservations.

There were several treaties negotiated with several separate groups over a long period of time. As in the case of the promises made to our ancestors by the Russian monarchy, they offered hope for a positive future. Also, like the promises of Catherine, the promises of the Treaties were compromised again and again. In the end, the reality did not ever meet the initial hope. Three examples that illustrate this are: good reserve lands were swapped for poor North Battleford area, the Papaschase Reserve whose lands form much of the south end of Edmonton was sold off to developers leaving its people homeless, reservations that attempted to farm and had made the transition well had their equipment seized because local settlers could not compete, and of course there were the debilitating residential schools.

On June 1, 1873, there was a horrific massacre by wolfers in the Cypress Hills near Battle Creek (in Saskatchewan today). Twenty Natives and one wolfer died. Part of this was due to a free supply of whiskey which was readily available from traders, many coming from Fort Benton. At the time, there was no law in the area to deal with the crime. Whiskey can be vile enough under certain circumstances but here it became especially vile with the additions of extra ingredients including 100% grain alcohol cut down with water before other ingredients, such as tobacco, red ink, Jamaica ginger, pepper, and sometimes strychnine, were added. Yes, any whiskey trading was illegal, but there was no one to interfere with the whiskey traders.

The North West Mounted Police (the Mounties and later the RCMP) were formed and dispatched to the area. In 1874, 287 mounted policemen were sent on a long march westward to bring law and order to the West. The new force was outfitted in what today we would call war surplus materials. Shortly after starting near a landmark called Rock Perce, it was determined that a force of this size travelling together put a severe strain on the resources of the land. The band was split into two and followed two different routes – the southern one ending at Fort MacLeod, the northern one ending at Fort Saskatchewan near Edmonton. Now, the West had a police force to interpret and enforce the law.

Surveying the land proved problematic right from the start. It had been one of the factors that had led to the uprising at the Red River in 1869. There lands had been laid out in the traditional French Canadian river lot style. The government had sent in surveyors to re-survey the area in a township arrangement similar to that used in the USA. The basic township like that in the USA consists of 36 sections; each section divided into quarters which would become the basic homestead grant. The numbering of the sections is different in the two countries. In Canada, four specific sections were set aside in each township – two as school lands and two as HBC lands. As the survey moved westward, it would again provoke those who were already settled there.

After the uprising in the Red River was put down, many of the Métis people had moved further west into a more isolated region and re-established themselves along the banks of the North Saskatchewan River and developed a sizeable community at Batoche (northeast of present-day Saskatoon). Here, it was hoped that they could live their lives in peace. As the buffalo had vanished from the plains, many of Métis had taken up farming, maintaining the traditional river lots. When surveyors arrived tensions arose and another uprising occurred again initially with Louis Riel as leader of the Métis. Several battles occurred but this resistance was put down.

At times, the spoils of war can be very strange. Among the items taken by the victorious armies were three objects that acquired a measure of fame. The first was the bell from the church at Batoche which the locals called “Marie Antoinette.” It perhaps is natural that it would be taken as it might have been used as a signal device. For years, the bell was held in a hall in Ontario. Requests were made to have it returned. After almost a century, it was set to be returned but on the eve of that exchange, it was stolen. Finally, a few years ago, it was returned to the Batoche area. The other two articles taken are a little surprising – a pool table and a washing machine that belonged to Gabriel Dumont, the strategic leader of the Métis and his wife. The pool table was found in a storage room in a prison in Manitoba in 2008. It has been returned to the area and is on display at the Batoche National Historic Site. The washing machine I suspect was worked to death by the wife of an army veteran with a large family long ago, and it is unlikely that will ever be found.

In the early 1870’s, our Russian German ancestors saw some of the basic guarantees granted by Catherine being eroded by the Imperial Russian government. Their freedom from military service was revoked and measures to “russify” the population were particularly problematic. Many Germans from Russia began considering a move. Delegations were sent to the USA and soon large numbers of our ancestors were moving there. As all the conditions there were then favorable. Communities that consisted largely of Germans from Russia developed there. Why then did not a similar exodus to Canada take place at the time? The basic answer is that at that point in time, the land was not ready for settlement and the infrastructure needed for such settlement was not then in place. The Canadian West was still wild frontier land, largely in its natural state. Also, once communities were established in several places in the USA, later immigrants would flow to these as they made transitioning easier.

Also, Canada did not have the railway system that the USA then had making travel to the west arduous. In 1885, Canada’s transcontinental railway, an impressive feat of engineering was completed. The prairie leg had been completed and played a significant role in transporting a large number of troops from the East quickly and thereby played a significant role in putting down the resistance at Batoche. The railway paralleled the USA-Canada border for much of its length and was within a few hundred miles of it at most points. Stations along it soon had towns spring up beside them and began attracting farmers and the businesses needed to support agriculture and a town, most of this population initially came from Eastern Canada.

A territorial government was established to manage many of the internal affairs of the vast area. Its earliest capital proved to be a rather unfortunate choice. It was established near Fort Pelly near the NWMP post of Fort Livingstone. It quickly became evident that this choice was less than ideal. The problem was one of nature. The fort lay directly on the path taken by garter snakes (a benevolent breed) to and from the place where congregated in mass to hibernate for the winter. So, at those two times, the capital was over run by snakes. The capital was subsequently moved to Battleford near the confluence of the Battle and North Saskatchewan Rivers. It was housed in a building there which considering the time and place was quite massive. That building later was converted to a seminary and remained an area fixture until it was destroyed in a fire in the 1970’s.

The Northwest Territories were divided into a number of Districts. Knowing these districts can be important if you are researching family in this area between 1870 and 1905. It is important to note that these territorial boundaries did not conform to later (post September 1905) provincial boundaries. The most notable example of this is the eastern boundary of Alberta. As a territory, that border is far to the west of where the provincial boundary will be placed along the Fourth Meridian. . This means that Medicine Hat which is now in Alberta during the territorial

period was in the District of Assiniboia as were the first major German settlements to the south of it in an area then referred to as Josephburg.

Remember the Palliser Triangle, it will come into play in the case of these first German (Galician) settlements and soon have the settlers on the move! When they settled in 1888, the flat prairie offered what appeared to be an excellent farming environment. However, it quickly became evident that the area did not receive enough rain to support crops. By 1890, the group is on the move. A small group heads to German settlements further east in Saskatchewan near Neudorf. The majority head north to Edmonton. At the time, a north-south rail line extends only from Calgary to Red Deer. The rest of the journey was made by horse and wagon over rough roads. In Edmonton, the group splits along religious lines with the Reform group heading NE to the Josephburg area near Fort Saskatchewan and the Lutheran group to Huffnungsau just east of Stony Plain near present-day Spruce Grove.

So, to this point, there has been some German settlement in the west of Canada but very little. Then, along come Frederick Turner, an American historian, who in a famous thesis declared that the American frontier effectively ended in 1892. At that point, he notes that all the inexpensive but viable agricultural land had been taken up. So, those immigrating and planning to farm needed to look elsewhere for such land. By then the infrastructure for settlement had been established and it began to be considered more often as a potential destination.

As noted earlier, there were variations in the township numbering system. A land description in Canada took the form NE-24-53-1W5, read as NW quarter, section 24, township 53, range 1 west of the 5th Meridian. As noted the 4th Meridian forms the eastern border of the Province of Alberta and the 5th Meridian (114° west) runs directly through Stony Plain along Secondary Road 779 right past Hope Reform Church. The 1st Meridian West is located just west of Winnipeg.

Once the infrastructure for settlement was in place in Western Canada, little happened. However, in 1896, there was a change of national government, and a concerted effort started to attract settlers to the Canadian West. Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior established a campaign to attract new settlers to the vast western lands. "Sifton immediately hired energetic, experienced communicators and promoters to spread the word that vast areas of good prairie land were open for settlement, and 160 acres of that land were available free to every agricultural settler. The advertising campaign focussed on three major sources of agricultural immigrants: the United States, central and eastern Europe, and Britain, the over-populated "mother country" and hub of the British Empire. Sifton's timing was perfect."

So, what was needed to get a homestead in Canada?

1. An individual applied for a land claim and paid an administration fee of \$10.00.
2. After occupying the land for 3 years and making improvements, the homesteader could apply for a patent.
3. If successful: a patent or what is known today as a "certificate of title" was issued in the person's name.

An Index to the Alberta Homestead Records can be found at <http://www.abgenealogy.ca/alberta-homestead-indexes>

Homestead files are held by the provincial archives in the three Prairie Provinces.

Sifton strongly believed that sturdy European immigrants were the best settlers for the challenging Prairies, because of their familiarity with agriculture, rural lifestyles, and harsh climates. He is best known for his statement that “a stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half dozen children, is a good quality.” Sifton disliked the idea of urban populations settling the Prairies, for they would congregate in cities, instead of developing Prairie homesteads. Instead, he promoted the immigration of groups like the Ukrainians, Hungarians, and Mennonites over the more ethnically “desirable” British immigrants. Yes, and Germans from Russia, too! These people began to flow into Canada between 1896 and 1914.

These people general came in family groups. Some individuals came alone either sending for family members later or learning to live in a community already established here. At times, a group of several families might leave their village together with the intent of immigrating here. Generally, regardless of how they came, they settled with people of their own ethnicity at times from the same region or from the same village.

People who had immigrated from certain places would often settle together in settlements where the majority of people were people like themselves sharing the same language, religion, heritage, customs, and background. Such places provided the newcomers with security and a setting in which they could adapt to a new land more easily. These settlements dotted Western Canada and often took on names from the residents’ former homeland. These places were referred to as “ethnic block settlements.”

Enclaves of ethnicity also developed in areas of Western Canadian cities often near the local Immigration Hall. The most notable of these enclaves developed in Winnipeg’s North End. Here people of a number of ethnicities could be found carrying on the interactions of daily life. Some of these people would make this their permanent home. But as Winnipeg was then the Gateway to the Canadian West, others would use it as a temporary stop before moving on to a farm somewhere in Western Canada or a stepping stone in a move to the USA. Until April 1908, it was not necessary to fill out a border crossing form. Even after that when it was required, many people crossing did not fill in a form.

Why did these people go to Winnipeg’s North End? There were people from their former home there. At the time (and still today), large multi-storied houses capable of housing many families were abundant there. My Sattler grandparents lived in at least three houses there on Redwood, College, and Aberdeen Avenues in a period of less than five years. In the North End, there were people who shared your heritage. The merchants of the area were often able to carry on commerce with their customers in their native language. Work was available there. My grandfather worked as a carpenter and laborer for five years to earn enough money to care for his growing family and begin payments on a farm. The city was a transportation hub allowing further travel to the farmlands to the west or jobs south in the USA.

To the immigrant people, their religion was also very important. The North End contained many churches which carried on services in the languages of particular groups and served as a visible center for the community life of that ethnic group. Christ Lutheran Church was the German Lutheran Church in area where my family lived while in Winnipeg. A rich record of the religious rites involving family members is recorded in its church book which now is held by the Manitoba Provincial Archives. If you have German Lutheran relatives who may have lived in Winnipeg for a time, it is well worth examining this record. Similar ethnic churches existed in rural area where large numbers of a people settled. When our family moved to the farm in the summer of 1916, St. Paul's Lutheran Church served that function. Unfortunately, I do not have the rich array of records from this church as it appears that a pastor many years ago took the church book with him when he left.

Again, not all stayed in Winnipeg's North End; most were just passing through! They were headed to their dream somewhere else.

We can find Volga Germans at a number of places in Western Canada. A large number of Volga Germans remain in Winnipeg also near Gladstone and Lydiatt (cemetery listing at http://billiongraves.com/pages/cemeteries/St-Johns-Lutheran-Cemetery/273906#cemetery_id=273906&lim=0&num=25&order=asc&action=browse

In the area near Canora where I was born, Groups formed settlements in Saskatchewan near Gorlitz, Ebenezer – Rhein, Runnymede and several other communities.

Volga Germans from the villages of Dreispitz, Huck, Norka, Pobochnoye, and Shcherbakovka came to Alberta in the mid-1890s.

There are a number of places in Western Canada where large numbers of Germans from Russia settled in the same area.

These places are the Calgary area as well as west of Edmonton in Stony Plain and Glory Hills.

Other areas attracted additional immigrants in the following years in the vicinity of Bashaw, Castor, Red Deer, Trochu, Beiseker, Spruce Grove and Duffield.

Reformed Church Volga Germans also settled near Mellowdale (1897) in the Barrhead area.

Members of the Norka group settled on lands near Vegreville.

Generally in Western Canada, large settlements are rarer than in the USA. So, the Norka group that settled near Stony Plain is one of a few such groups in Western Canada.

There are many places where Germans from elsewhere in Russia and Eastern Europe settled few. There were also areas where an individual family of Volga Germans or few might settle outside of the major areas mentioned. These I characterize as “isolates” that is people who settle in such small numbers that they are not able to marshal the full range of ethnic resources that a larger settlement might. When my grandfather moved settling north of North Battleford in 1930, there were a few Volga German families, enough for religious services but for a long time not enough to support a church. To carry on commerce there a basic knowledge of English was required.

By 1892, an influx of people of German heritage from Russia and other places in Eastern Europe was under way. In 1905, Frank Oliver succeeded Sifton as Minister of the Interior. The policies enacted during his tenure appear to indicate that he was not as broad minded as Sifton in matters related to immigrants. Shortly into his tenure, efforts to attract settlers were directed to the USA instead of Europe. It was reasoned that North American farming experience would be an asset in homesteading in Canada.

Here is an excerpt from one of the promotional pieces designed to attract farmers from the USA to Canada. "Dry Atmosphere: During the winter warm woollen clothing is necessary. Because of the dryness of the inland climate, the cold is much less noticeable than a stranger might expect. Less snow falls on the prairies than in the East, and on account of the dryness of the air, it brushes off one's coat like dust.

Everywhere the appearance of snow is hailed as seasonable and beneficial. Sleighing parties of pleasure are arranged for the period of the full moon, and the sound of the sleigh bells is a merry one. The snow protects the autumn-sown wheat from the frost and aids ... the farmer in hauling his produce to market, and so contributes alike to business and pleasure." Is this indeed truth in advertising?

Many people came from the USA in response to this campaign. They were attracted by the generous terms involved in acquiring homesteads here. Some of these settlers were German immigrants from various locations in Europe who had initially gone to the USA but had arrived too late to establish themselves on land there. Good numbers of these people simply loaded their possessions onto a wagon and drove northward across the border. Others employed rail lines that ran northward from the USA.

There were also a number of land companies based in the US who had been given large tracts of land for which they were commissioned to bring in settlers from the USA. My paternal family came here from South Dakota through one such company the Scandinavian Canadian Land Company. This company offered those who came and their possessions transport to the assigned lands in their own train cars. They had agents waiting for the arrivals to take them by buckboard to the available lands so that they might select the piece of land best suited for them. When my Althaus kin arrived, this was a minimum distance of 40 miles from the rail line. Later, this distance would be reduced significantly to a minimum of 10 miles when another rail line passed through the area and the town of my birth was established along that line.

The period between 1896 and 1914 was one of massive growth in Western Canada. It infused a great number people into the area which led directly to the creation of two new provinces Alberta and Saskatchewan in September 1905. Germans from many places in Europe including settlers from Volga Russia were a significant part of this growth.

By 1911, there were 152,000 German pioneer settlers in western Canada.

Of western Canada's 152,000 German pioneer settlers by 1911, more than half came from eastern Europe.

In Alberta, immigrants of German heritage started settling here as early as 1882.

April 1889: German-speaking immigrants arrived in the Medicine Hat /Josephsberg area in April 1889 and September 1889. A total of about 400 families arrived that year. The German colony at Dunmore will soon be augmented by 64 families.

October 1890: 200 Russian-German immigrants left Russia about a week ago for the Medicine Hat district. They will take up homesteads south of Dunmore near the German colonies.

In 1891 German-Russian settlers arrived and settled several km north of the present town. In 1893, German Lutherans from Russia founded Heimthal and Lutherhort south of Edmonton.

In the years 1893-1894 five families immigrated from Norka to the United States and from there to Canada, settling in the Stony Plain district near Edmonton, Alberta. 1897 Glory Hills Volga German immigrants from Norka began arriving in the Stony Plain area in 1897.

The Volga German settlers from Norka who settled near Stony Plain beginning in 1897 built a small log church in the 1890's a half mile south of the present old church building. Salem Reform Church between Vegreville and Holden was established by settlers from Norka in 1910 .

In 1906-12, a Volga German group establishes itself in Calgary.

The Brush Hill Reformed Church was founded in 1916 by Volga German settlers from Norka.

The earliest settlements in Alberta tended to be in the southern part of the province not far from the CPR mainline. Settlement further north did not truly begin until a rail line extending from Calgary to Strathcona (now part of the south side of Edmonton) was completed in August 1891. As the line was built settlement extended northward on either side of it. This line would bring many of the people from Norka into the area and serve as their jumping off point for lands to the west. As a side note, today Edmonton's German community is centered in the Strathcona area around Trinity Lutheran Church which houses the libraries of the local chapter of the AHSGR and a local Volhynian group (Hours are limited.)

Today, the drive to Stony Plain (originally spelled "Stoney Plain") is simple and quite quick over modern highways. I can now make that journey in 30 to 40 minutes. This was not always the case. Much of the land west of Edmonton consisted of peat bogs and swampy land. This made it necessary to make a wide arc to the north to the north to bypass them. Even this could be a difficult journey with ample hazards awaiting the unwary. A journey between Edmonton and Stony Plain could take the better part of a day under ideal conditions.

As mentioned earlier, the borders were adjusted when Alberta and Saskatchewan became provinces in 1905. Manitoba once a diminutive province affectionately known as "the Postage Stamp Province" would have her territory extended several times. It is a good idea to look at two maps of the Western Province - one pre 1905 and one post 1905 to get a sense of these changes.

Stony Plain had been established while Alberta was still a territory, The community began life with the rather inglorious name of "Dog Rump Creek" which mercifully was soon abandoned. Thank goodness for our post office department who would not except names such as this as well as the same names within several provinces.

The Glory Hills are situated north of the town of Stony Plain. It would be the area where many of the Germans from the Volga village of Norka would settle.

Other groups settled to the west near Duffield and east of Edmonton both south and later north of Vegreville. I have also found a reference to a group of people from Norka settling in the Germantown area of Calgary although the members of the AHSGR Chapter in Calgary seemed to be unaware of such a group.

World War I brought about a halt to immigration from Europe to Canada which lasted nearly a decade. Before the First World War, German Canadians did not question the compatibility of their customs and traditions with Canadian life.

While Russia was an ally in the early years of the war, the age would produce long lasting effects for people of German heritage.

The war years were bad times for anyone of German or Austrian origin.

Germans became Canada's most vilified enemy aliens.

Charged with treason and sedition, although no charge was ever proven, many were economically ruined and socially ostracized.

Unruly mobs attack German-speaking people and their property in some cities here during the War.

The Wartime Elections Act of September 1917 disenfranchised all German Canadians and other "enemy aliens" naturalized after March 1902.

Clubs and associations were dissolved, German schools closed, German-language papers suppressed, and towns with such names as Berlin, Ontario, renamed.

More than 2,000 immigrants from Germany as well as 4,000 Ukrainians and smaller numbers of other "enemy aliens" were interned in 24 internment camps across Canada.

Trauma from the First World War caused many German Canadians to camouflage their identity as Dutch, Scandinavian, or Russian.

When I have asked Germans from Russia whose families were here during the period of 1914 to 1920 about their families' experiences, I have generally received the same response, "we were not affected." I have suspicions that this may be not be fully accurate or perhaps a little naïve. Further research will be needed to determine if there were any direct ramifications to individual Volga Germans or small groups of them. However, one can not deny that the culture suffered during this period. German language schools were closed, German language newspapers curtailed, the German language could not be used within group meetings. Many German inspired place names were removed from our maps and replaced by more "patriotic" ones. All that was German was vilified during this period.

During and for a time after World War I, there was very little immigration to Western Canada from Eastern Europe. By this time, the Communists had taken control of Russia and it became increasingly difficult to leave that country. Canada readmitted Germans in 1924 as "non-preferred" immigrants; this category restricted them to agricultural and domestic work. In January 1927 German nationals were promoted to the "preferred" class. Of Canada's 100,000 German immigrants from 1924 to 1930, 52% came from eastern Europe and 18% from America

In the 1920's, prices for agricultural commodities fell greatly. The higher prices for these commodities during the war had caused many farmers to take out credit to buy more land. The fall in prices plus crop failures due to climate caused a good number of farmers to lose their farms at this time. Before this was remedied, the wrath of the Great Depression again put extreme stress on family farms as both the economy and the climate conspired against them. Generally, our German ancestors buoyed up by their character forged along the Volga were more resilient than many during such periods of economic distress. They were versed in being "survivors."

The Great Depression was a seminal event in Western Canadian history. It affected people in many ways. People had to content themselves with little. Nothing was allowed to go to waste. Large numbers of farmers again lost their farms. There was widespread unemployment in the cities. Shack towns sprang up everywhere. Men began to ride the rails. There was political discontent as the governments in power were incapable of stemming the tide. Unable to afford purchase gasoline, a farmer might join a wagon tree to his car and use a horse to pull it to provide the needed power. These devices "Bennett Buggies" were name after the Prime Minister of the day. Political unrest heightened and new political parties were formed.

Every area has its local heroes. As you travel around Stony Plain in the next few days, see if you can discover the story of the wheel and chain that is situated near the entrance to the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre. The other images related to the story in one mural, a few statues, and some items on display at the visitors' centre.

The Stony Plain area is an interesting one. It is an area which has deep Germanic roots. We already know that people from Norcka settled north and west of the town. But the Stony Plain area is a mosaic of German ethnicity as a number of groups have settled in and near the town over the years. There is a group of Galician Germans who settled to the east in 1890. Another group of Galician Germans would settle to the south west of the town in the Rosenthal community. A group of Volhynians who settled to the northwest. One group of people of German heritage who had spent decades in Ontario before moving west also form a significant part of the German community here. So, when you encounter a German surname here, it does not necessarily mean that the ancestors of person bearing it necessarily came from Norcka or elsewhere along the Volga.

The numbers certainly indicate that people of German heritage including those from Volga Russia have been a sizeable force in the history of this province. As the data indicates, the greatest number of German people who migrated here are those from outside of the traditional borders of Germany. This is something that most of the non-German population of Alberta simply do not know.

So, what is the state of German heritage in Alberta today? The opinions on this very greatly.

Some believe our heritage is in peril and in fact vanishing. This quote typifies that school of thought, “It seems that ‘the Germans,’ wherever they may be from, have become an ‘invisible minority’ in the everyday cultural life of the community. Only on certain holidays and festival days do some of them get together and talk and behave “like Germans.” For them, German language and German culture have assumed the role of museum pieces to be displayed exuberantly and publicly when the occasion warrants it; at all other times, however, they take pains to show that they have been acculturated to the mainstream ‘Canadian way of life’ and to Canadian social expectations.”

Other observers offer a more positive view as stated here, “The process of losing ethnic backgrounds is pretty much over in Alberta; the process of recovering those backgrounds has begun. Young Albertans have become so remarkably alike that at least there is some consolation in knowing your grandfather was different. A regular forest of family trees is sprouting across the province.” ~ Robert Kroetsch Alberta (1993)

The key to which of these futures will occur, I believe is intrinsically tied to the ability of existing genealogical and heritage groups to engage the children and youth of their communities. By doing so, we may be sowing the seeds of interest which will ensure their involvement in the future. There is a general attitude that young people are not interested in the past. There are certainly some who are not, but there are a great many who are, especially in its relationship to their personal and family identity. The problem is generally not so much one of subject but rather of presentation.

It is important that we resist the commonly held stereotype and provide means for the young people to tap into their family past and heritage. There are positive indications that this can and does work. The AHSGR has a youth prize in its annual story writing contest. Its Calgary Chapter provides Russian German cooking classes that draw in members of the young group. At AGS, we are in the process of developing a youth membership and well on our way in creating resources to introduce the young people of the province to genealogy and family history. However, in spite of these positive signs, many opportunities to engage our youth are being passed up. Fortunately, the schools are again beginning to show an interest in family history and genealogy and incorporating aspects of it in various parts of the school curriculum at all levels.

It is our hope that sowing the seeds of interest will have a positive effect that will ensure the survival of our group for some time to come. We know the results will not be immediately apparent. It will be a little like sowing wheat in the fall. The seeds are there but you see nothing for a long time until the green sprouts beginning poking out of the earth the next spring. We need to help our children and youth enter the door to their past. To do this, we need to provide avenues to introduce them to their past in meaningful and age appropriate ways. Yes, like winter wheat, it will take a while to observe the benefits.

At the Alberta Genealogical Society, our project to introduce genealogy and family history is designed to:

- 1.To create resources for introducing genealogy to children and youth, ages 6 to 18.
- 2.To create resources that contain activities that will enjoyable and interesting to young people.

3.To provide them free of charge as pdf resources on our website.

4.To make them available to anyone interested in introducing children or youth to genealogy in schools, youth groups, or within the family.

Currently, our program is seen as involving seven resources which are in preparation. It is intended that these will be made available to any school class, youth group, or individual family who wishes to introduce genealogy and / or family history to a child or groups of children and youth . These resources will be available at no cost.

While in the Stony Plain area, take in the sites. Visit the Multicultural Heritage Centre. They have been active in collecting materials on the families of the area and other archival material including photographs and older newspapers. A database listing these resources is now being created. They have an excellent restaurant in the basement which is open limited hours and serves light lunches and pies. You will see many historic murals as you travel around the town. Some of them even feature Norka descendants. Is their a portrait of one of your kin out their beaming down on you? There are several area cemeteries that hold many of those who came here from Norka so long ago in search of a better life; a life in which their values and culture might endure and in which they and their children might prosper.

A Genealogical Guide for Those Searching for Relatives from Norka in Alberta

Here, I will provide you with what is available to assist you in doing the research related to family members here in Alberta and especially in the area near Stony Plain.

Census Records

Canada Census 1901, 1911, and 1921 <ancestry.com>

Canada Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta 1906 and 1916 <ancestry.com>

Canada Voters' Lists, 1935-1980 <ancestry.com>

Interesting Lesser Known Sources

Peels Prairie Provinces (University of Alberta Libraries, at <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/index.html>)

Under newspapers Stony Plain Sun, Stony Plain, Alta: Francis Cormack, [1920-1938?] and Rural weekly news and Rube's farm fun. Stony Plain, Alta.: A.E. Bates, [1912-1917].

Under directories Henderson Directories, major Western Canadian Cities and may include surrounding areas.

Under images assorted and varied and the last best West: Glimpses of the Prairie Provinces from the golden age of postcards

Cummins Maps for Alberta are another great resource, but have only found ones of Southern Alberta online.

Images of Prairie Towns (including a number of early Stony Plain) at <http://prairie-towns.com/>

Local Histories (Collections at SPMCHC, AGS, PAA, and Edmonton Public Library, Main Br., Heritage Room)

Along the fifth : a history of Stony Plain and District at http://www.ourfutureourpast.ca/loc_hist/toc.aspx?id=1313 OR <http://www.ourroots.ca/e/toc.aspx?id=1313>

One of Many by Rueben Bauer Hope Congregation of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (Stony Plain, Alta.)

Pioneering with a piece of chalk : the one-room country schools of Alberta, 1885-1982, by Baergen, William at <http://www.ourroots.ca/e/toc.aspx?id=14531>

Post Offices and Post Masters at <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/postal-heritage-philately/post-offices-postmasters/Pages/post-offices-postmasters.aspx>

Alberta Place Names at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/2217/20101208160315/http://www.albertasource.ca/placenames/>

Learn a little more about Alberta and her people at "Alberta Source" at <http://www.albertasource.ca/sites1.html>

Homesteads and Land

Alberta Genealogical Society Homestead Indexes (3 separate file divisions) <http://www.abgenealogy.ca/alberta-homestead-indexes>

Homestead files in each of the Western Provinces is held by the provincial archives of that province. In Alberta, only microfilm copies have been maintained.

Finding Farms in Western Canada <http://www.daveobee.com/resources/land2014.pdf>

For Alberta land records for \$\$\$, see <http://www.registrationsareus.com/land-title/>

Vital Records

Alberta regretfully has no website for births over 1900 years, etc. In addition, the cost of attaining vital records here is quite pricey.

The AGS has compiled an index in book form for vital events prior to Alberta becoming a province in 1905 titled Alberta Index to Registrations of Births, Marriages and Deaths, 1870-1905.

Many counties have birth, death, and marriage records which are available at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, but photo copies may not be made of these.

For actual BMD certificates at \$\$\$, see <https://www.servicealberta.ca/VitalStatistics.cfm>
Museums and Archives

The Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre (area resources, cemeteries, and a large collection of family histories) <http://multicentre.org/wp/>

The Glenbow Archives (focus mainly Southern Alberta) <http://www.glenbow.org/collections/>
Provincial Archives of Alberta <http://culture.alberta.ca/paa/> ALSO
<https://www.servicealberta.ca/1175.cfm>

The AHSGR and the Volhynian Heritage Group in Edmonton have a small libraries at Trinity Lutheran Church in Edmonton at 10014 81 Avenue, Contact AHSGR Edmonton Chapter Librarian Ed Retzer, 780-433-6098

Websites

Parkland County Gen Web http://ukrainiangenealogist.tripod.com/parkland/index_old.html
Cemeteries

Inga Community Cemetery <http://geneofun.on.ca/cems/AB/ABPAR0497>

St Matthew's Cemetery, Stony Plain <http://cemetery.st-matthew.com/>

Glory Hills Alliance Cemetery, formerly German Baptist Cemetery
<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=cr&CRid=2346147>

Hope Reformed Church Cemetery, Glory Hills,
<http://rootsanddirt.ca/Etched%20in%20Stone/Hope%20Christian%20Reformed%20Church%20Cemetery,%20Stony%20Plain,%20AB/Hope%20Christian%20Reformed%20Church%20Cemetery,%20Stony%20Plain,%20AB.html> OR <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=cr&CRid=2346614>

St. Matthew's Cemetery, Spruce Grove, <http://stmatthewscemetery.ca/cemetery.php>

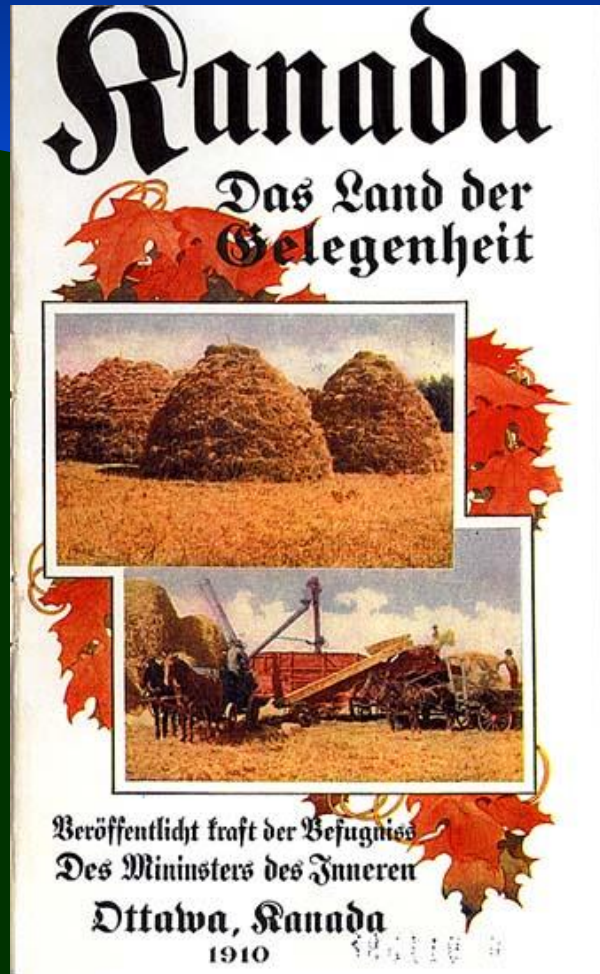
Zion Lutheran Church, Golden Spike

St. John's Lutheran Church, Golden Spike

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rosenthal, and others!

If you are having trouble locating a cemetery, grave, or individual you seek, contact either the archivist or librarian at the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre in Stony Plain or the research group of the Edmonton Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society. Both will do limited and directed research. Contact the groups for the specific details. The AGS Edmonton Branch German Special Interest Group has a newsletter which is published every two months and is available free for download to anyone interested on the Edmonton Br. website at <http://www.agsedm.edmonton.ab.ca/germansig.html> Currently, all of Volume 5 and Volume 6 to date are there and it is hoped that other archived volumes will soon be added.

A Primer on Western Canadian Settlement



“I do not care what language a man speaks, or what religion he professes, if he is honest and law-abiding, if he will go on that land and make a living for himself and his family, he is a desirable settler for the Dominion of Canada; and the people of Canada will never succeed in populating Manitoba and the North-west until we act practically on that idea.” ~ Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior