



My German Roots Meine Deutschen Wurzeln

Newsletter of the German Special Interest Group of the AGS

Volume 3 No. 2 Edmonton Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society October 2012

A Harvest Feast!

It is once again time for the annual harvest. When I think of the harvest, I almost automatically think of my Volga German grandfather who was a bit of an enigma to me. I only saw his final farm site twice, once when I was six years old and again just a few years ago. On both occasions, I concluded that this homestead was the worst piece of farmland that I had ever seen. Yet, he farmed this collection of soil plopped indiscriminately among hills, rocks, a creek and even a number of vestiges of spruce forest for over twenty year. What is even more remarkable is that he coaxed whatever meager yield he could from it without the aid of a car, a truck, or a tractor. He never owned any of these modern conveniences. I strongly suspect that he farmed much as he had farmed on the "Bergseite" on the west side of the Volga River in Russia. This is where his village of origin "Alexandertal" was situated. "Change" was not a word that appeared to be part of my grandfather's vocabulary.

Most years the crops that he had planted on that quarter yielded little. This made it necessary for him to go northward to a lumber camp and spend much of the winter hauling ties with his team of horses simply to sustain his family. Hard work was not at all foreign to him. However, such hard work does exact a toll. Now, it makes sense to me why he so gnarled and bent as an old man. What was it that drove my grandfather to stubbornly continue to attempt to exact a harvest from his desolate piece of real estate?

(continued on p.2)

There was no German SIG Meeting on October 3. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, December 5, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. in the AGS Library and Research Centre at 162, 14315 -118 Avenue. This meeting will deal with several topics of interest. Details will be provided later.

Our next newsletter will be **our December issue**. That is the month of St. Nicolaus and Christmas. I would like to do a section on **"A German Christmas Past"**. To do this, I need people to contribute **stories from you or family members** to print. Please, send these to althousejh@shaw.ca prior to November 11, 2012. Thanks!

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The answer to this lies in part in the nature and character of the people who had left Germany so long ago, two and half centuries now at the behest of Catherine the Great to take up farming on the banks of the Volga River. These people, the Volga Germans, endured hardships, yet were eventually able to prosper and thrive there. During their long residence near the Volga, they knew both abundant harvests and famine. It was these experiences both the good and the bad molded the truly unique character of these people. It was this character which directed my grandfather's approach to not only farming but all aspects of his life. This is what I needed to understand if I was to make any sense of the man who was my grandfather.

As genealogists and family historians, we are also involved in a harvest. Our harvest is not a harvest of grain but rather a harvest of good, accurate, and verifiable information. This issue of our newsletter is one from which you may gain some intellectual nourishment. This entire newsletter will deal with topics related to those Germans who left Germany in the mid 18th Century to farm in an undeveloped area of Russia along the Volga River which was largely unknown to them. This issue contains articles relating to these people -Volga Germans. May this issue provide an abundant harvest of information and resources for you!



In this issue, may you find a rich genealogical harvest!



A History of Early German Settlement in Alberta

When I began researching German settlement in and around Stony Plain, I did not expect to find the variety of origins for the people of German descent now resident in the area. The area is in fact a microcosm which contains a full array of Germanic backgrounds. It is an ideal locale for any researcher studying varied German origins and backgrounds. In this article, we will examine one more of these groups, the Volga Germans from the village of Norka.~ JHA

From Norka to the Glory Hills

In the barn which serves as part of the museum in Stony Plain, a simple, small suitcase is on display. This battered case is a testament not only to a migration which brought many German people to Stony Plain and the surrounding area, but to one specific phase of it, the journey of German residents of the **village of Norka** in Volga Russia to this area adjacent to the Fifth Meridian. Although it belonged to one such immigrant, it is a reminder, perhaps a symbol, of all who made this long trek to rich farm lands of west central Alberta.



A simple suitcase brought by a settler from Norka to the Stony Plain area near the beginning of the Twentieth Century

In many respects, the journey of these former residents of Norka is similar to all the previous migrations of Germanic people which we have examined in this series. Yet, there are a number of characteristics which make it distinct from other migrations which we have described. The first major difference here was that the people of Norka who came to area around Stony Plain did not come as a single group but rather as individual families or in small groups of one

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or two families. In addition, the arrival of these German people did not occur in a narrow frame of time but rather **over a period of roughly 30 years**. The first of the families to arrive from Norka came to Stony Plain in 1896. The last person to arrive in the area came after 1930. Through the years, it appears that roughly **240 people** traveled from Norka and settled on lush, green lands around Stony Plain.

These people were of German origin, spoke German, and observed many German cultural practices. Yet, it is essential to remember that these people had left their German homelands in 1767 in response to what appeared as generous offers of **the Manifesto of Catherine the Great**. This Manifesto offered land and a future, both of which were not readily available in Germany. It also provided guarantees to ensure that many of the cultural traits they treasured would be retained, including their language, their religion, and a freedom from performing military services. Catherine also provided these settlers with not only passage to Russia but directly to the site where their new and German village would be built. Once, the travelers who accepted Catherine's Manifesto arrived in Russia, they were be permanently cut-off from their homeland.

In their new homeland of Russia, they began making a new life for themselves using the time honored practices from Germany. However, conditions in their new Russian village caused them to adapt some of these practices and use some of the methods of the native farmers of the region or in other cases, combine their traditional German methods with those of the local to create practices more suited for the conditions of the Russian hillsides and plain.

Once the German settlers who colonized Russia were permanently detached from their homeland, they were plunged into a virtual "time warp". The German traits and cultural relics that they retained were essentially those of the decade of 1760 or earlier. Yet, there was change, and these changes were largely alien to German ways. So, at the time that migration from Norka to Stony Plain took place, the German people who participated in it were distinctly different in certain ways from those who migrated directly from Germany during the same period.

There were several reasons why these hardy farming people left the village in Russia which had been their home for nearly a century and a half. The guarantees offered by Catherine the Great had steadily eroded through the years. However, during the reign of Alexander II, new measures placed the religion, the German language, and their cultural practices in the greatest peril in Russia. In addition, military service in the Russian military was made compulsory. These measures fostered a wave of uncertainty among the Volga Germans which began an wave of emigration as early as 1872. .

As the people from Norka had been farmers for centuries, it was natural that they would seek a new homeland where they could continue working on the land. At this time, **Canada offered rich agricultural land at low prices** to those who would settle there. Here, they could establish farms of their own. In addition, their religion, language, and culture would be again secure. These factors prompted many settlers including the Germans from Norka to journey to and settle in Western Canada.

Many of the former residents from Norka who came **to Stony Plain** in the early part of the 1900's settled in the Glory Hills a short distance north of the town. Most of these "men of the soil" who came to the area took up farming. It is estimated that 75% of these men farmed. However, some men pursued other avenues and moved into Stony Plain where they became merchants or tradesmen. Often, these new settlers would work as farmhands for a time so that they might raise funds to take out their own homesteads. Once they acquired their land, they went to demanding work of converting their quarter into a productive farm and a good home for their families. As in other cases, those settlers who had already established themselves would offer support and assistance to families from Norka who would arrive later. These later arrivals were not only often known to them but in many cases were family members. This allowed these newer arrivals an opportunity to adjust to a setting and way of life which must have seemed foreign and at times even baffling.



The Glory Hills north of Stony Plain where many from Norka settled

Most of those from Norka who settled in the Stony Plain area traveled there directly from Norka. However, a number of these families of settlers did attempt to settle elsewhere before deciding to establish their home in the Stony Plain area. They had tried settling in various American states including Nebraska, Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and the Dakotas. In most such cases, these people had settled in areas where a concentrated number of Volga Germans were settled. Why they would leave these places is open to a bit of interpretation. Frederick Turner, a noted American historian, declared that the US frontier had ended in 1892. He based this claim on the fact that good agricultural land at low prices had been totally taken up by that time. Since all of the people from Norka arrived in the Stony Plain area after 1892; perhaps, they may have been attracted by the promise of land here. In other cases, it may have been strong familial ties which may have drawn others to the Alberta Parkland.

Other settlers who would eventually arrive and establish farms near Stony Plain area, settled not in the USA initially but in other parts of Canada even within Alberta.

Here, the factors that would get the later arrivals to move to the Stony Plain area from elsewhere in Alberta were slightly different from those considered by those from the USA. The former residents from Norka who settled elsewhere in Canada were often “isolates” i.e. either the only family or one of the few families of a culture, religion and way of life in an area. In such cases, it is likely that commonality and community may have influenced their decision to move. A community was necessary for security and for support in times of distress. We do note some people from Norka arriving in the Stony Plain area from elsewhere in North America during the Great Depression.

In the Stony Plain area, the people from Norka re-established their religion culture and way of life. They were adherents of the **Reformed Church**. In the autumn of **1900**, the first church building, a simple log structure was erected. The congregation built a community around their church **Hope Reform Church in the Glory Hills**. A new church building (the one which still stands on the site) was erected and **opened on 15 September 1912**. **Israel Umbach** (mentioned in an earlier issue) a member of its congregation, was the contractor for the new church building. By using labour supplied by members of the congregation, the church was constructed for about half of the anticipated cost. However, local history books suggest that life around the church was not always tranquil. Over the years, a number of disputes arose over various matters ranging from Communion to certain ministers. Some members of the congregation left to join a nearby Baptist congregation.



Hope Reformed Church, 2012



The former Glory Hill Baptist Church
Photo courtesy of Debbie Pietrkowski

The Volga Germans had a long tradition of supporting education and had schools established in the areas where they farmed. These people also were involved in work of running and maintaining these schools. However, school pictures reveal that in the early days of the community few young men stayed in school longer than legally required. Their real education and work lay on the land. Later, this trend shifted as more and more young men began remaining in the higher grades and eventually moved into work away from the farms and ultimately away from the Glory Hills area. Many of the younger generation abandoned the farm for urban life.

The heritage of hard work which these Germans had developed during their long history in the villages along the Volga River made them well suited to the rigors of life in early rural Alberta. They were able to tame the virgin Parkland and develop large and prosperous farms there. They were able to acquire riches that they would never have imagined back in Norka. However, life was hard and the costs of life in this frontier region were great. In the cemeteries of the area, one can not help but be affected by the number of markers indicating the deaths of children and youth of the area during this pioneering period. The cost of prosperity was at times a very high one at times!



Conrad Albrecht Family decked out in their Sunday best in their buggy
Photo courtesy of Debbie Pietrkowski



The life on early Western Canadian farms exacted a heavy toll

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Today, many prominent citizens of the area and of Alberta can trace their roots back to this group of 240 settlers who traveled across continents and oceans to settle, to create their homes, and to forge a way of life consistent with their values and beliefs. This legacy offered hope that the future of their children would be prosperous and full. The legacy of those from Norka who settled and made their homes in and around Stony Plain is chronicled in the pages of **One of Many** by **Reuben A. Bauer, (c. 1965)**. This local history book is essential reading for anyone who wishes to uncover that rich legacy left by a small number of German families who came from the village of Norka in Russia to find what they could not find there far from home in a strange new land.



These people of the soil did prosper. An overhead view of the Albrecht Farm

Photo courtesy of Debbie Pietrkowski



Searching for Your Volga German Ancestors

The research required to track one's German ancestors from the village along the **Lower Volga River** can be a real challenge. To begin your search you will need two piece of vital information on the family you seek. You will need:

1. the **surname of that family** and
2. the **village of origin** in Volga Russia.

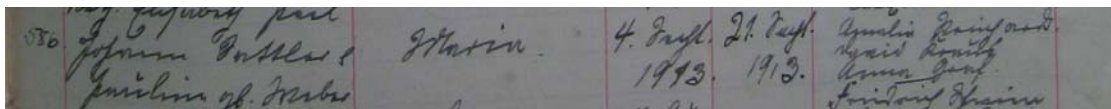
To locate these begin with your **"home sources"** that is what you possess at home including the documents, records, certificates, letters and books left behind by your ancestors. These often will contain those crucial facts.

Ship's Passenger Lists are rarely helpful when one is searching for the family of origin in Russia. In most cases, these records only recorded the country of origin or the nationality of the traveler. The notable exception to this is the **Hamburg Passenger Lists** on which the village of origin of the emigrants traveling from that port were most often recorded. **Some later Canadian Passenger Lists** often asked for the address of the closest family member in the country of origin. Often, this was the same place that the emigrant had left. Unfortunately, this practice did not begin until much of the migration from Volga Germany had ended.

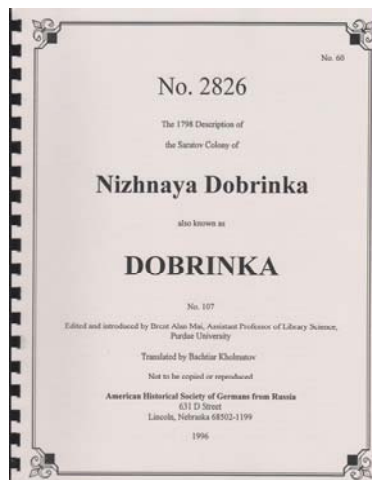
No.	Name	Age	Sex	Profession	Place of Birth
1	Weber	25	M	Farmer	Balza, Russland
2	Weber	20	F	Housewife	Balza, Russland
3	Weber	15	F	Housewife	Balza, Russland
4	Weber	10	M	Schoolboy	Balza, Russland
5	Weber	5	F	Housewife	Balza, Russland
6	Weber	1	M	Infant	Balza, Russland
7	Weber	1	F	Infant	Balza, Russland
8	Weber	1	M	Infant	Balza, Russland
9	Weber	1	F	Infant	Balza, Russland
10	Weber	1	M	Infant	Balza, Russland
11	Weber	1	F	Infant	Balza, Russland
12	Weber	1	M	Infant	Balza, Russland
13	Weber	1	F	Infant	Balza, Russland
14	Weber	1	M	Infant	Balza, Russland
15	Weber	1	F	Infant	Balza, Russland
16	Weber	1	M	Infant	Balza, Russland
17	Weber	1	F	Infant	Balza, Russland
18	Weber	1	M	Infant	Balza, Russland
19	Weber	1	F	Infant	Balza, Russland
20	Weber	1	M	Infant	Balza, Russland

Left: Part of a **Hamburg Passenger List** Entry for the **Ludwig Weber Family** of "Balza, Russland" likely "Balzer, Russia".

One collection of documents which may contain the name of the village of origin and so much more are the church records of German language churches in North America. Below is an entry from a **Kirchenbuche** (church book) of "Christ Lutheran Church" in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It records the important religious rites involving our family after they traveled to Winnipeg in 1912. The village of origin may appear as an integral part of these entries (although it does not on this record). What other important family information related to origins do these records appear to contain?



An extensive number of **village census lists** are available for purchase for those interested. These census lists have not only been transcribed but also translated into English. This is a real benefit for those of us who are not fluent in the Russian language or who are unable to travel to various archives in Russia. These records go back to the early years of these villages after their establishment around 1765. However, there is a problem as the latest census year which is currently available for most of these villages is the census of 1857 or 1859. It can be difficult or impossible to tie your family to the correct branch of the family with the available information. This is the roadblock that has stalled my research for the origins of the families of both my maternal grandfather Johann Sattler born in Alexandertal in 1879 and my maternal grandmother Paulina Weber born in Dobrinka in 1884.



Left: AHSGR
village census for the
village of **Dobrinka**
1798.

Right: Dr. Brent Mai
village census for
Dobrinka 1857.

Both types are
transcribed in
English and may be
purchased from
AHSGR store.



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1857 Dobrinka Census

Note: There are several ages that do not account for the appropriate number of years between 1850 and 1857. The ages are listed as recorded on the original document. There are also several missing pages.

Line	Household Number		Name	Head ¹	Age ²		Notes
	1850 ³	1857 ⁴			1850	1857	
1	1	1	Johannes Simon (Симонъ)	h	35	42	
2			David Reinhardt	s	4	11	
3	2	2	Georg Adam Geiss (Гейс)	h	66	†1851	
4			Heinrich	s	34	41	
5			Charlotta	dl		41	
6			Johann Georg	gs	12	19	
7			Johann Heinrich	gs	9	16	
8			Johannes	gs	6	13	
9			Elisabeth	gd		12	
10			Johann Jakob	gs	2	†1857	

Left: Top of a typical village census page as transcribed (1857 Dobrinka Census)

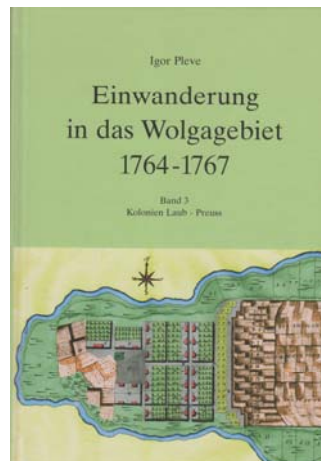
What piece of information can assist the researcher link your immigrant ancestor i.e. the first member of your direct family to arrive and settle in North America? The **names of that ancestor's parents** can be one means of doing this. In the case of my Grandmother, I have been unable to find this information. In the case of my Grandfather, I have been more fortunate as I have the names of his parents insert their full names here. My Grandfather was born in 1879 which would make it possible that his parents could have been under 20 years of age and therefore would not have appeared on the 1859 village census. I also know that my Grandfather had an older sister who also came to Canada. She was born in 1874. Family lore and memory also indicates that there was one and possible two siblings older than her. These make it unlikely that they were born after the census year. It is more likely that they would have been born before it and should appear on the Alexandertal Census of 1859.

While that knowledge appears promising, there is again a problem here. This problem comes about as the result of the narrow pool of names from which the names of children were chosen. In addition, these German people had a tendency to use either of their given names. So, this leaves me with a number of options to investigate first given name, second given name, both names as recorded, and both names but in reverse order. When I examine the village census using these variants, I end up with about a dozen people recorded on it who could be the father of my Grandfather. I need at least one piece of sound evidence which will tie my Grandfather to just one of these people. Now, the process of linking to a particular family on the village census can be easier than this. Examining the local history entries on the settlers who came to Stony Plain

from Norka, **many of these settlers were shown as being born before the 1859 census.** In some cases, a birth date was provided, and on occasion, the names of one (or both) of their parents was also provided in the local history book. In such cases, it will be much easier to establish a connection of the immigrant ancestor to a particular branch of the family. From there, it is possible to track that family through I did have a number of possible links to the Sattler Family. I knew that they had moved to the village of Alexandertal at the time of its establishment shortly after 1850. They had come there with a group of other families from the village of Schilling. In addition, I had a collection of records from Schilling showing random individuals with the surname Sattler residing there back to 1792. This was great, but at the same time, it posed a problem. Why could I not find a record of anyone named Sattler there prior to that date? The obvious answer was that they had just arrived there from their German homeland at that time. This too was problematic as the flow of immigrants to the Volga region had come to an end about 1770. I was stuck again.

It was not until I found and examined a copy of give the full and correct name of 1798 Census by Dr. Brent Mai that I found the information that I needed as to where the Sattler Family was prior to 1792. This two-volume set listed the census information which I needed. This information did not appear in the actual census records but instead in one of the appendices at the end of the book. About 1790, a widow named Sattler of the village of Messer had married Johannes Schütz and moved to Schilling where she lived with her children. Could these people from Messer be members of my family? Could this explain why the first record there with the name “Sattler” was dated 1792? Here again, I would need more information before I could be definite.

At this point, I went back to the very beginning of the Volga German villages and the establishment of Messer. This generally is contrary to the advice that is given to genealogist. In the case of my Sattler ancestors, I felt this move was not only warranted but necessary. So, I consulted **Einwanderung in das Wolgagebiet 1764 – 1767** by Igor Pleve also known as **the original settlers’ lists.**



Left: Cover of “original settlers’ list third volume including “Norka”. Right first page for Norka entries.

41. Bauer, Jacob, 28, ref., Ackerbauer aus Isenburg

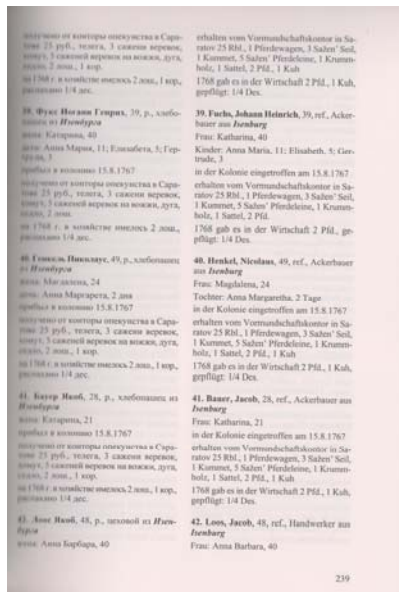
Frau: Katharina, 21

in der Kolonie eingetroffen am 15.8.1767

erhalten vom Vormundschaftskontor in Saratov 25 Rbl., 1 Pferdewagen, 3 Sažen' Seil, 1 Kummert, 5 Sažen' Pferdeleine, 1 Krummholz, 1 Sattel, 2 Pfd., 1 Kuh

1768 gab es in der Wirtschaft 2 Pfd., 1 Kuh, gepflügt: 1/4 Des.

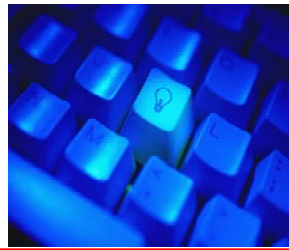
Above: the entry for the Jacob Bauer Household from the "original settlers' list" for the village of Norka.
Right: a page from the book in Russian on the left and in German on the right side of the page.



These lists are in a rather standard form which makes them easy to decipher even with those with limited or no knowledge of the German language. Follow this template:

Family No. Surname Given Name(s) Age Religion Occupation German Place of Origin
Wife Given Name(s) Age
Children (if any) Given Name(s) Age(s)
Date of establishment of colony, i.e. village
Possession or resources when he received in Saratov from the Guardian (Overseer of the Kantor i.e. Region)
1768 granted stock (type and number) and land area (see German Russian Handbook for further information on matters such as units of land measurement).

This information may provide us with the name of our German ancestor who was the original settler of a Volga German village. This only works if there was single family using the surname you seek in that village. This was the case with my Sattler ancestors. This will not be the case with Müller (Miller) ancestors from Norka as there are several such families. However, at least look! Weber is a very common German surname. My first inclination was not to look for them on the list, but when I did I was very lucky because there was a single Weber Family at Dobrinka when it was established. If you then follow the available census records to 1857 where they currently end, all people from the village named Weber including mine are descendants of that one family!



Become a Webmeister

Interesting Websites Related to German
Ancestry Research

The Norka Village Website

The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia website <http://www.ahsgr.org/> has a button entitled “Villages” right at the bottom of the list which provides links to the village pages of many of the websites devoted to individual Volga German villages. These sites vary greatly in both quality and content. One of the finest individual “village pages” is the website for the village of Norka. You may access it directly at www.volgagermans.net/norka/

Norka *a German Colony in Russia*

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Research Stories Traditions

Norka, Russia was founded on August 15, 1767 by colonists who primarily originated from the Hessen area of present day Germany. The colony was located on the unsettled Russian steppe near the west bank of the Volga River, about 65 kilometers southwest of the city of Saratov. Norka grew from a fledgling settlement to become the largest and one of the most prosperous German colonies in the Volga region.



Painting of Norka, Russia by Michael Boss

RECENT ADDITIONS

Can you help provide information about Louie and Anna Seder?

Updated Norka Surnames List



Home Page of Norka a German Colony in Russia www.volgagermans.net/norka/

The “**Home Page**” of this site is eye-catching containing a painting of the village as it was in its prime as well as an ancient photo of a family still to be identified. The page provides a **short and basic history of the village** on the left-hand side and numerous links including one to a **video** on the right. There is a good deal to discover and learn simply by clicking the various links. **One link that is excellent takes you to a pdf copy of a presentation of Norka given at the 2012 AHSGR Conference in Portland.** This is a must for anyone having an interest in Norka.

Just below the page title near the top of the “Home Page” are **sixteen word links beginning with “Home” and ending with “Religion”**. By clicking on any of these words, you can go directly to that section of the site. Like many village sites, many of these buttons **provide excellent background knowledge** on the people of Norka and the village. These include such topics as Agriculture, Education, Geography, Traditions, and Religion. Many of the linked pages not only contain valuable and interesting information but also **period photographs and maps**. One may also register to receive a complementary copy of a **newsletter on the village** of Norka by accessing “Newsletter” on the page.

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People



Notable Norkans

A list of noteworthy people with connections to Norka:

- Alexander Augustovich Klaus
- Erik and Mark Kahre
- Dr. Wilbert G. Walter
- Adam A. Walter
- Dr. Russell C. Schnell
- Friedrich Berner**
- Christoph Heinrich Bonwetsch
- Gottlieb Nathaniel Bonwetsch
- Jack Burbank
- Conrad Brill
- Johann Baptist Cattaneo
- Lucas Cattaneo
- Cleora (Reuscher) Flegel

1.

2.

This page was accessed by 1. clicking “People” and 2. clicking a name appearing in brown.

Unlike some village websites, the Norka has a **number of areas that are of particular value to those doing genealogy and family history**. The **“People”** section noted on the previous page may be of help as are the collected reminiscences of **“Stories”**. A list of the surnames of the people of Norka along with their variations can be found in pdf form under **“Families”**. On the links on the right side of **“Home”** are several links of interest including one related to **“Obituaries”**.

However, **the genealogist will receive the greatest help if he or she clicks on “Research”**. Here, one will be taken to a page listing **“Genealogical Resources”** available for researching your ancestors from Norka. This links you to people and sites that will greatly assist your search. On the right, one will find **“Guidelines for Researching Norka Families”**. This section provides one with a suggested order for one’s research. It then lists one by one the resources which one should consult to do the research on one’s ancestral family from Norka. Here again, there are links to take you directly to certain resources such as information on the **EWZ records**.

“Norka a German Colony in Russia” is a benchmark in sites of its type. It contains excellent information for learning and understanding the experience and character of the people who once lived there. In addition, it provides resources that provide meaningful direction for those doing family history research related to their Volga German ancestral families. This website is an excellent genealogical resource.

Norka *a German Colony in Russia*

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[Research](#) [Stories](#) [Traditions](#)

Genealogy Resources

Listed below are the primary resource contacts for Norka:

Steve Schreiber - Norka Village Coordinator for AHSGR and Norka Webmaster
6806 S.E. 35th Avenue Portland, OR 97202
steven.schreiber@gmail.com

Judy Curtis - Norka Database Coordinator
9026 S. Dateland Dr. Tempe, AZ, 85284
norka.judy.curtis@gmail.com

Louis Schleuger - Norka Census Records Coordinator
P. O. Box 773 Lobeco, SC 29931
chibi12@charter.net

Jerry Krieger - Norka Newsletter Editor
652 8th Street N.E. Mason City, IA 50401
norkanews@gmail.com

Bill Pickelhaupt has a list of Volga Germans baptized or confirmed in Tomsk in the 1890s. At least one person, Amalia Anna Maria Schultz was born in Norka.

The links at right are useful sources for those researching their families from Norka.

Guidelines for Researching Norka Families

Starting in the United States and Canada

The Golden Rule of genealogy is to start with what you know, and work your way back. Records of your family that were created in North American may give clues to where your family lived in Russia and when they arrived in Canada or the United States. Residents from Norka are sometimes listed as living in Norga, Norca, Norge. Often times, only the name Saratov is given. Saratov is the province in which the colony of Norka was located. Saratov can also be spelled Saratoff or Saratof (German spellings).

Use genealogy software if possible to organize your research work and always document your sources.

You may want to begin your research by checking to see if your family surname is shown in the Norka Surnames list compiled by Judy Curtis and Louis Schleuger. Be careful as surname spellings can vary greatly. There isn't necessarily one "correct" spelling of your surname. After immigrating to America, many Volga Germans changed ("Americanized") their surname to make it easier for others to pronounce or merely to feel more a part of their new home. (e.g. Schmidt to Smith, Becker to Baker, Döring to Derring). Always search for all the possible surname spellings.

Many vital records (birth, death and marriage) and census lists for ancestors who lived in the United States and Canada are available on ancestry.com.