

WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION.

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Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction
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READING LESSON
L-A-18b.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GERMAN-RUSSIANS IN RUSSIA AND COLO.
Part I. The German- Russians in Russia. (1762-1870.)

A hundred years ago the Volga District in Russia was called "The Wheat Granery of the World." Times and conditions have greatly changed since then, and now there are many large sections in the world where wheat is raised by the millions of bushels. But long before this there was a time when not a kernel of wheat was raised in the entire Volga District. Between the years 1700 and 1800 this district was nothing but a vast thinly settled part of the great Russian Empire. But since the soil was very fertile the government decided to make farming land of the tract. The question was who should do the work? The few people who lived in this region belonged to wild tribes, untrained for such an undertaking. So the Russian Government looked to foreign countries to get people who were able and willing to do the work.

In 1762 Katherine the second, was Empress of Russia. She was a German princess, but after her marriage to the Czar of Russia she became a true Russian at heart, and tried her very best to improve conditions within the Russian Empire. Thus she took ~~her hands~~ it into her hands to bring in people from other countries. On Dec. 2nd. 1762 she invited people throughout to come to Russia to make their homes. She promised the new comers free land, ~~free~~ free from taxation, and military service, and freedom of religion. This offer she made known in almost every country of Europe.

Europe had just through seven years of war. Times were hard. the people were poor, and it was hard to find enough work to make a living.

So it happened that many people, especially, from Germany, were glad of this chance to make a better and easier living, and to get a home. In her offer, Katherine, stated that the people could go to any part of Russia, and follow the same work they had been doing in their home land. But when the settlers arrived in Russia they were taken far inland to the region of the Volga River. Here they had to stay, to work or to die. Many would have returned to the home land, but had no money and no way to get out of the country.

When the settlers arrived in Russia the Government paid them about \$150.00 per family. With this money they were to buy a horse, a cow and a plow. The majority of the people had nothing to live on, so many used the Government's money for buying food. When this was reported, the Government stopped the cash payment, and furnished the horses, the cow and the plow instead. The settlers thought this help was a gift from the Government, but soon found out it was merely a loan that had to be paid back. So the history of the first German colonists in Russia is a history of hardship, misery, and death. Katherine the Second promised free land, But the land did not become the property of the settlers.

All that he got was a lease for ten years. After that period a new division of land was made. Neither buildings nor lumber were found on the land. The settlers either had to dig a hole into the ground to protect them selves against rain and cold, or to build a sod house. Five to ten persons lived in one room. The houses were not built on the land which they farmed, but in small villages. From these villages the people went each day to their land to raise the most necessary food. In addition to hard work, they lived in constant fear of the surrounding wild tribes. Often their little little crops were stolen, and here and there a settler was killed. No social gatherings, no recreation or good times, no schools no churches were to be found. Many a colonist was laid to rest before he could enjoy the fruits of his labor.

The German immigrants in Russia were an ambitious, hard working, very religious class of people. As soon as possible they built a sod house for a church, and one of the able men was elected church elder. He had to lead the small flock in songs and prayer. The sermons were from a sermon book from the home country and they would read them. A tailor or a shoe maker were elected teachers. While he was working at his trade the youth sat at his feet and were taught Bible history and the catechism. Reading, writing and Arithmetic in those days were considered subjects of higher learning. As soon as conditions permitted, a pastor from Germany was called. Also trained teachers were hired, but often times they had as many as 200 to 400 children to teach. However condition gradually became better. Better schools and churches were built, and the homes became much better than those of the natives Russian. In 1914 the number of German-Russian in Russia ~~was~~ was estimated to be about two and one half million. The Germans in Russia remained German in language, in character, in dress, in custom and in local government. Schools, Churches and town management, all were German. They had to do little with native Russian, and inter marriage was hardly known. The Russians would learn nothing from the Germans, and they would learn nothing from the Russians. So the German remained what he was when he left Germany. Progress in education, culture, and in living conditions. was very slow.

About 1850 a change in the life of the German-Russians took place. Katherine was dead. The Promises she made were forgotten. The new government started to make real Russians of the German element. The children had to learn the Russian language, and had to have Russian teachers, as well as German teachers. Boys 21 years old had to enlist in the army, and their freedom was greatly restricted. These changes ~~caused~~ caused the people to want to leave the Russia for some other country in which they could find greater freedom, and better chances to build up their homes. The United States offered them this opportunity, and in 1842 the first family of German decent came from Russia to our Country. Today there are about 400,000 Germans still living in Russia, while about 700,000 of them left the country and came to the United States, these people are a very valuable asset to the ~~were~~ economic and social life of the country.

THE GERMAN - RUSSIAN IN RUSSIA AND IN COLO.

Part II. The reasons which brought the German-Russian people from Russia to the United States of America are almost the same as those which took them from Germany to Russia. The people were looking for a country which offered chances for building up homes and making a living. This country was in much the same position as Russia in that, it needed people from foreign countries to settle upon and build up its vast tracts of land. We also needed people from other countries to make use of the rich resources such as coal and iron mines, and to carry on the work of other large industries. Without the steady flow of immigration, our country could not have reached its ~~xxx~~ present splendid state of development.

The ~~German~~ German - Russian family entered the United States in 1842, but it was not until 1870 that immigration on a large scale began. At that time the Burlington and other railroad companies began to lay their tracks through Nebraska and the West. Thousands of people were needed for work. The United States did not ~~xxxxxx~~ have them. Therefore, agents went to all European countries to encourage people to come to our shores. The German-Russians responded freely. They went to Michigan, The Dakotas and later to Nebraska. From there they found their way into Kansas and Colorado.

About 1900, the sugar ~~and~~ beet industry in Colorado was started. Sugar factories were built, first at Loveland and Fort Collins, and later in other towns, including Greeley. In order to encourage ~~fx~~ farmers to raise sugar beets, experienced and cheap labor was needed. American born people could not be found to put in hard, long hours of work for low wages. So the sugar companies agents sent to Germany, Austria and Russia to secure people who were familiar with this kind of work as beet work. These agents brought many German-Russian people to Colorado.

When these people arrived, the majority were poor and had no money to buy even small homes, so they hired themselves out, women and children. Men, women and children, all went to the beet field. They lived in so called beet shacks, some were not fit human habitation. Even today it might be well for the Government to exercise some control over the housing of the beet-laborers.

Earning and saving money was the aim of the newcomers. As the sugar industry became a success, better wages were paid and the people were able to save some of their earnings. Soon some started to buy town property, others rented farms on share of the crop. So many of them not only made a living but built their own homes. Nowadays, the majority of the German-Russian people are well situated, and live as their American neighbors. For a long time these people cared for little else than work, and getting a home. But in recent years they have taken into consideration the matter of becoming citizens of the United States. Hundred of men and women have taken advantage of the Adult Education Program. In evening schools they have learned to read and to write, and have studied the principles of our government. Many of them have passed a satisfactory examination, and have been admitted to citizenship.

The German-Russian people take good care of their homes and families.

The women are good house keepers, and most of their own cooking, & knitting and sewing. Cleanliness in the house, and especially in the kitchen is their pride. The girls are taught and trained from their childhood up, to be a good "Hausfrau".

In regards to religion before coming to this country the majority were members of the Lutheran Church. In our country we find them in all denominations.

The older generation still keep many of the customs brought from Russia. The younger generation become quickly Americanized. Those born and educated in our country favor social activities, and join clubs, lodges and other societies. On account of the handicap of their language, many of the older folk have been slow to take part in public life, but together with the younger generation, they believe thoroughly in American ideals and principles. In conclusion we may say, the German-Russian people in our country have proven to be an honest, upright, ambitious element in our national life. They stand for national welfare, social security and a democratic form of Government.