

**from  
Catherine  
to  
Khrushchev**

**The Story**

**of**

**Russia's Germans**



CATHERINE II

from  
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to  
**Khrushchev**

The Story  
of  
Russia's Germans

by

*Adam Giesinger*

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia  
Lincoln, Nebraska

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## PREFACE

This book deals with an "ethnic" group which exists in a great variety of guises, as well as in large numbers, all through the American middle west and in Canada's western provinces. Although the group is relatively large and has played an important part in the colonization of the prairies of North America, its history is little known or understood among us. Even the learned historians of western settlement usually dispose of it in a few vague sentences.

Considering all the circumstances, this general ignorance of the background of an important component of our population is not surprising. The group itself is not easily recognizable as such, because it lacks some of the homogeneity that one associates with an ethnic group. Moreover, it is difficult to distinguish from other groups of the same mother tongue who came to America about the same time from other parts of central Europe. It has also been a singularly silent group, one that has generally preferred anonymity, because its ethnic character brought it hostility and discrimination, especially during the two world wars. Instead of flaunting its language and its culture and making special efforts to preserve them, a large part of the group has tended to disguise its identity and, consciously or not, has sought rapid assimilation into the English-speaking majority.

Who are the members of this group? A few examples will show the variety that exists among them: Volga Germans in Nebraska and Colorado, Mennonites in Manitoba and Kansas, Black Sea Germans in the Dakotas and Saskatchewan, Hutterites in Alberta and Manitoba, Volhynian Germans in Manitoba and Michigan, Moravian Brethren in Alberta. Their immigrant fathers, grandfathers, or great-grandfathers, came to America, beginning in the 1870's, not only from the banks of the Volga, the environs of the city of Odessa or the shores of the Sea of Azov, but from Volhynia, from Bessarabia, from the Crimea, from the Caucasus and later even from Siberia. They belonged to a variety of religious faiths and brotherhoods: Lutheran, Catholic, Mennonite, Calvinist, Baptist, Separatist, Hutterite and others. Their ethnic character was from the beginning a mystery to the Canadian or American census enumerator, in whose lists one finds them called Germans, or Dutch, or Russians, or even Ukrainians, Poles or Rumanians.

What do they have in common? Two things essentially: (1) the immigrants, when they arrived on this continent, spoke a German dialect as their mother tongue; and (2) their families had been subjects of the Tsar of Russia for a century or so, more or less.

There are now several hundred thousand of these people and their descendants in Canada and the United States, and other large numbers in South America. This book tells the story of their forefathers in Russia, of their kin who are still there, as well as of those who have found new homes overseas.

My interest in this subject arose from the fact that some of my forefathers were participants in the migrations described in this book. Those on the paternal side particularly appear to have been afflicted with a compelling wanderlust. In the course of little more than a century, they migrated from Germany to France, from France to Russia, from Russia to the United States, and finally from the United States to Canada. Because of the developments in Russia in our own time, I found the Russian interlude the most intriguing and became addicted to collecting hard-to-get historical materials on the Germans in Russia. This collection has now grown to the point at which it gives an insight into the development of all the German settlements in Russia and the vicissitudes of life in these German enclaves under the old and the new regime. Since much of this material is in the German language and is as well in the "rare" category, I have been urged to make the information in it available to other interested people in Canada and the United States in the form of a book. After many hours of spare time activity over the years, here it is! May it please those friends of mine who kept urging me to finish it!

The books and periodicals which were the sources of my information are listed in the BIBLIOGRAPHY. Specific references to them are given in the NOTES. The Notes have been detailed enough to be helpful to those who wish to pursue further the study of special aspects of this history.

My sincere thanks are extended to all those who have helped me in connection with this work. From among them I must single out: (1) the library of the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen in Stuttgart, from which I obtained a wealth of materials over the years; and (2) my friend, Dr. Karl Stumpp of Tübingen, the outstanding authority on the Germans in Russia, whose "Schrifttum über das Deutschtum in Russland" helped me to find the materials that I wanted and whose labors of a lifetime in this field served as a guide and an inspiration to make me persevere in the writing of this book.

To understand some facets of the story of the Germans in Russia, I found it necessary to read extensively in Russian history. I hope that this shows through in what I have written and makes the whole more comprehensible.

WINNIPEG JANUARY 1974

—Adam Giesinger

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