

This book, completed by Gottlieb Beratz in 1914, appeared in Saratov, Russia, in 1915, under the title, *Die deutschen Kolonien an der unteren Wolga in ihrer Entstehung und ersten Entwicklung*. It was re-published, after the author's death, by a group of Volga German refugees in Berlin, Germany, in 1923.

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Pugachev, a Don Cossack who pretended to be the deposed (and deceased) Peter III, raised an army in the Volga region, robbed and pillaged, among other places, in the German villages, until he was defeated and captured by Catherine's army under General Michelson.

The Kalmucks and Kirghiz, nomadic tribes who lived in the Ural river region, east of the Volga colonies, also harassed the German settlers. The Kirghiz, particularly, a warlike people, attacked the German villages, killed and robbed and carried off hundreds of people into slavery.

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The Catholic Church at Herzog, where Gottlieb Beratz served as parish priest from 1911 to 1921

## Foreword to the Translation

The author of this book, Gottlieb Beratz, was born in 1871 in Göbel on the *Bergseite* (west side of the Volga). He attended the parish school in his native village and then the Catholic seminary in Saratov, where he was educated for the priesthood. Ordained in 1894, he served as parish priest at Dehler on the *Wiesenseite* (east side of the Volga) till 1909, when he was transferred to work at the seminary in Saratov, where he served for two years. In 1911 he was appointed as parish priest at Herzog, where he served till 1921, when he was murdered by a band of Communist insurgents. His death, at the early age of 50, was mourned not only by the Catholics whom he had served as parish priest, but by all Volga Germans, Protestant and Catholic, for he was their greatest historian.

From his youth, Gottlieb Beratz had been keenly interested in the history of the Volga Germans and was ever searching for and gathering materials that threw light on this history. This was a period during which there was a great awakening of interest among the Volga Germans in their own history, largely ignored by them for a century. A variety of old writings were discovered in libraries and archives. Among these were scholarly reports by men who travelled through the Volga region in the early years of the colonies: Peter Simon Pallas, a noted German academic invited to Russia by Catherine II, who visited the Volga German villages in 1773 and again in 1793, and Karl Hablitz, a Russian official of German birth, who was sent to the Volga in 1802 to investigate complaints by the German colonists. A surprising number of memoirs written by some of the original settlers were discovered: Christian Züge, who fled from the Volga to return to Germany and then described his experiences in 1802; a long poem by Bernhard von Platen, written in 1766, describing the journey of a group of Germans to Russia and their arrival

on the Volga; other memoirs describing the recruitment in Germany, the journey to Russia, and the early years on the Volga, by Franz Josef Brabander, the first overseer of the colony of Brabander, by Heinrich Erfurth, a colonist in Orlovskaja, by S. Koliweck, a colonist in Mariental, by Kaspar Scheck of Herzog, by August Stahlbaum of Boisroux (Boaro), by Philipp Wilhelm Assmus of Katharinenstadt, and by Johann Georg Möhring of Stahl on the Karaman. Some of these were publicized around 1900 in articles in newly founded periodicals and newspapers, particularly the *Friedensbote* (Protestant) and *Klemens* (Catholic). All these materials were avidly read by Gottlieb Beratz. He had access also to Jesuit records of the years 1803-1820, kept at the seminary in Saratov, and was familiar with the works of earlier writers on the Volga Germans, particularly Ignaz Fessler, who wrote in 1851 on the religious life of the Protestant colonists; Anton Schneider, who wrote reminiscences in 1863; Alexander Klaus, who wrote a history of the colonies in the Russian language in 1869; and Gottlieb Bauer, who wrote in the 1880s but whose work was not published till 1908 by his son. In addition to acquiring information from these older writings, Beratz also spent many long hours examining church records and old documents in village and district archives, parts of which, of interest to him, he copied laboriously by hand. In some of the villages many of the old documents had been lost or allowed to deteriorate to illegibility, but he found much interesting material in the district archives at Warenburg and the village archives in Brabander, Dehler, Rohleder and Herzog on the *Wiesenseite* and in Vollmer and Semenovka on the *Bergseite*. He was also able to examine early village census lists, then still existing in archives in Saratov. References to all of these sources occur abundantly throughout the Beratz book, which is more fully documented than any of the other books on the Volga Germans.



After 20 years of research and writing, Gottlieb Beratz finished his book in March 1914, in good time for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first German settlers on the Volga. Because money had to be raised to pay the printing costs, which took some months, the book did not actually appear till 1915. By then Russia was at war with Germany and the Russian government forbade the sale of this German book. Distribution was not permitted until after the fall of the Tsar in 1917, and the supply was then rapidly sold out. In 1923, the book was republished in Berlin by a group of refugee Volga Germans. Some copies of both editions still exist in a number of libraries.

There has been for some years a demand, by Volga German descendants in the United States and Canada, for an English translation of the Beratz book. This I have discouraged, because I knew, from detailed study of the book, what a difficult task such a translation would be. It seems to me that those who are interested in the history of their Volga German forebears, should learn to read the language that they heard at their mother's or their grandmother's knees when they were children. Such a reading knowledge would enable them to read not only Beratz, but much other interesting German material on their ancestors, available in libraries. The advocates of a Beratz translation, however, won the argument. Three of my friends volunteered to produce an English version of the book. They asked me to edit their translation, which, after some hesitation, I agreed to do. The task has proved to be as difficult as I had anticipated.

There are two characteristics of the Beratz book that make the translation difficult. Firstly, because Beratz is a good historian, he quotes much documentary evidence, most of which is in the archaic German of the 18th century Russian bureaucrats or of the German colonists who had little education and a poor command of standard German.

Secondly, Beratz himself, a good historian, is not equally good as a writer; his German is quite convoluted in spots and difficult to understand. Patience and hard work, however, have now paid off. The English translation lies before you. I am grateful to my friends who did the translating and trusted me to edit their work.

In addition to Leona, LaVern and Dona, I want to thank also especially Alexander Dupper, a scholarly friend who is a master of English, German and Russian languages. He translated the Russian words, phrases, and paragraphs that occur here and there in Beratz.

Finally, I must thank those who taught me Latin so efficiently in my youth, because with a little help from a dictionary and, in one difficult paragraph, from a Jesuit friend, I was able, these many years later, to translate the Latin quotations from the Catholic church records in the Volga region that Beratz presents in several places.

In editing the translation, I had to harmonize the usage of a number of terms regarding which the translators differed. After thinking about these, while reviewing the material, I decided upon the following: (1) to retain the German words *Bergseite* and *Wiesenseite*, the colorful terms invented by the Volga pioneers to describe the regions on the two sides of the river; (2) to translate *Tutel-Kanzlei* into English as Guardianship Chancery, but retain the German word *Kontor* (French Comptoir) for the Chancery's Saratov office, which played such a large role in the life of the Volga Germans; (3) to retain the German word *Instruktion* for the regulations issued by the Guardianship Chancery; (4) to translate the German title *Oberrichter* by Chief Justice, which is its English equivalent, although his position involved much more than rendering legal judgments; and (5) to translate *Vorsteher* as overseer, an English term that describes very accurately the duties these officials performed.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, May 1991

Adam Giesinger