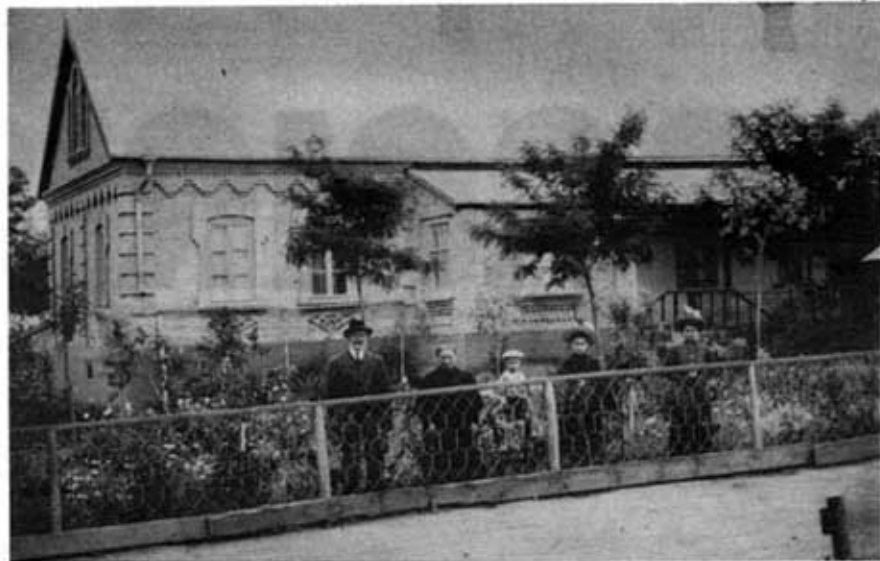


Why German-Russian settlers didn't run for public office

By William Jahraus



Many German colonists in South Russia prospered, especially when the Russian government encouraged the development of the South Russian frontier along the Black Sea. German agricultural skills were highly appreciated, especially from the Russian official point of view. Later, the government changed that attitude. An indication of one family's prosperity is shown in the above photo. The luxurious brick home was owned by Mr. and Mrs. August Koth in Postal, located near Odessa. Mrs. Koth's first husband—a Geiszler—was a big farmer. When he died after being kicked in the head by a horse, she later married the farm's foreman, Koth. Later, he successfully operated a clinic in Postal where people went to get hot steam baths. Mr. and Mrs. Koth are shown standing by the fence in the above photo.

Introduction

People of German-Russian descent make up the second largest ethnic group in the state of North Dakota. Few, however, have held high public office throughout the state's history. A possible explanation for this phenomenon may be the unique background of these people. When the first German-Russians moved into what is now North Dakota they brought with them certain customs and traditions which they had learned and practiced in Europe for generations. In North Dakota they acted according to those customs, and one result was an unwillingness to become directly involved in government beyond the local level. This thesis will attempt to show that the conservative, long-established attitudes and traditions of the first German-Russians in North Dakota broke down and changed very slowly and played a decisive role in determining the way these people thought and acted. Old habits often die hard; in the case of the first German-Russians of North Dakota this retention of habits seems to be a major factor in explaining their political behavior. The focus of this study is McIntosh County, North Dakota, because it contained within its borders the greatest concentration of German-Russians in the state for the time under consideration, 1889-1915.

Chapter I

The German-Russian Settlers of McIntosh County

German immigrants from Russia began arriving in what is now North Dakota in the 1880s. More settled in North Dakota than in any other state of the Union. They tended to concentrate their settlements in the south-central region of the state because that area was largely uninhabited and therefore a place where these clanish settlers could remain together. The first German immigrants, who had come to the United States from Russia a decade earlier, selected an area of what is now southeastern South Dakota for the same reason. Prior to that they had considered settling further east, but when they discovered that part of the country was populated and land for farming was available only in scattered localities, they decided to move on, and eventually selected an uninhabited region in Dakota Territory north of Yankton.

The greatest concentration of German-Russian settlement in North Dakota occurred in McIntosh County, located midway across the state on the South Dakota border. The population of McIntosh County in 1890 was 3,248. Of the number, 2,221 were foreign-born. It is likely that most of the foreign-born were German-Russians. The population of the

county in 1900 was 4,818 and of that number 2,200 were born in Russia. The county's population in 1910 totaled 7,251 and of that number 5,745 were either born in Russia or had parents who were born there. From all indications most of these foreign-born inhabitants of McIntosh County were Germans, not Russians. Early newspapers, government records, and memoirs substantiate extensive German settlement. The first newspapers, such as *The Ashley Tribune*, *The McIntosh Republican*, and *The Wishek News*, had large German sections—obviously printed for a German-reading public. They had no Russian sections. Government records include many German names and few, if any, Russian names. The memoirs of Nina Farley Wishek, one of the first inhabitants of the county, contain many references to German-speaking settlers and none to Russian-speaking pioneers. Evidence today suggests a pervasive German influence in the county. Many people still speak German on the streets of Ashley, Lehr, Wishek, and Zeeland. People still attend German services in the large Lutheran churches of Ashley and Wishek. Old-timers prefer to speak German rather than English. In casual English conversation among the young, German expressions are still common (e.g. "macht gut," "wie geht's"). Slang and swearing are often in German (e.g. "dummewetter," "scheisskopf"). Sentence patterns are sometimes Germanic (e.g. "run the stairs up," "drive the block around"). Pronunciation of many English words is Germanic in accent (e.g. garage = "krach," jug = "chuk").

Chapter II

Origin of The German-Russian Settlers of McIntosh County

The German immigrants who settled in McIntosh County were known as "German-Russians" because they were the descendants of Germans who had emigrated to Russia from Germany in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Most had left their homelands in southwestern Germany to escape the disruption and destruction caused by wars of Frederick the Great and Napoleon and to take advantage of the promises contained within the timely manifestos of two rulers of Russia, Catherine II and Alexander I. Both manifestos promised prospective German emigrants free land in Russia, free transportation to Russia, interest-free loans, the right of local self-government, freedom of religion, exemption from military service, and the right to leave Russia. The purposes of the manifestos were: (1) to attract skilled



The above photo was taken at the turn of the century at Byam's Studio in Ellendale, North Dakota. The photography-session was a special event, requiring the best clothes. Standing in the back is Frieda Forrest. She operated a hotel in Ashley, North Dakota. With her is Dora Iden and her two children.

craftsmen and farmers to help develop areas along the Volga River and Black Sea which Russia had recently acquired, and (2) to attract settlers who would serve as a buffer against Russia's hostile neighbors, the Asiatic tribes in the East and the Turks in the South. Other Germans left for Russia to escape persecution for their Pietistic beliefs. Others were forced out of Poland by native Poles when Napoleon had created an independent Polish state.

Whatever the motivation, nearly 100,000 Germans made their way to the barren steppes of central and southern Russia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Those who survived the long and difficult journey began the task of creating a new life for themselves in an alien environment. These German pioneers were the forefathers of the

German-Russians who later emigrated to the United States.

In Russia the German immigrants established hundreds of small, agricultural communities within which they carefully maintained their German language and culture. They did so because they felt superior to the backward Russian peasants who surrounded them and because they wanted to preserve their identity as a German people in a foreign environment. Accordingly, they learned and spoke only German; they established their own churches and schools; they celebrated their own festivals and holidays; and they ran their own communities. They had little to do with the Russians who lived nearby. As a result, the Germans in Russia developed closed, tightly-knit communities which were cut

The Dakota Territory offered marvelous possibilities of free land—or at a low price.

off from the outside world. It was within such communities that most of the people who originally settled in McIntosh County acquired the conservative beliefs and values which, to a great extent, shaped their lifestyle in North Dakota.

Chapter III

Reasons For German-Russian Emigration To The United States

Thousands of German-Russians emigrated to the United States in the late 19th century when the reforms of Tsar Alexander II and the nationalistic policies of Tsar Alexander III threatened their way of life. Others left for the United States at the same time to acquire free or inexpensive land made possible by the Homestead Act of 1862 and the land grants to American railroads in the 1870s and 1880s.

Tsar Alexander II's reform of local government (zemstvo) in 1864 triggered the first migration of German-Russians to the United States. This reform provided for a system of district and provincial assemblies in which all classes in Russian society would be represented through a process of indirect election. In 1871 Tsar Alexander II officially incorporated the German villages into the zemstvo system and, in the same decree, abolished the special rights and privileges of the German colonists. The former did not irritate the German colonists because it did not radically change their local government. (They continued to elect their own officials—as they had done before the zemstvo reform.) The latter angered the German colonists because it deprived them of the special rights they had enjoyed for many years. As a result of this reform, small groups of German-Russians began emigrating to the United States in the 1870s.

Tsar Alexander II's judicial reforms of 1864 also irritated the German colonists in Russia. Prior to this reform, the Germans had had their own village and district courts which were administered by their own local officials. Only the most severe crimes were processed in a Russian court. Alexander's judicial reform deprived the German colonists of their judicial privileges. Russian judges, as a result of the reform, were appointed for every district, including the German districts. Generally, they had little sympathy for the Germans within their jurisdiction. Small crimes against the Germans went unpenalized and even major crimes were overlooked. Consequently, the German colonists developed an attitude of distrust towards Russian judges.

Tsar Alexander II's reform of the military prompted the first significant departure of German-Russians from America in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1874 Tsar Alexander II issued a decree which declared all young men in Russia subject to military service for six years. The German-Russians correctly regarded that act as a repudiation of the promise of freedom from military service made to them by the manifestos of Catherine II and Alexander I. As a result of this reform, thousands of German-Russians emigrated to the United States. Frederick Mutchelknaus, the son of one of the first German-Russians to leave Russia, noted in his memoirs that the main reason his father left Russia was to escape military conscription. Rose Kurle of Bowdle, S.D. and John A. Shick of Eureka, S.D., children of original German-Russian immigrants to the Dakotas in the 1880s, stated in interviews that their fathers left Russia to evade service in the Russian Army. William Hoffman of Bowdle, S.D. and Henry Haber of Ashley, N.D., original German-Russian immigrants to the United States in the early 1900s, indicated in interviews that they left Russia for the same reason.

The autocratic policies of Tsar Alexander III, who succeeded in 1881, encouraged more German-Russians to pack their bags for America. In 1889 he created the position of the land captain whose primary task was to serve as his representative at the district and village

levels. Usually the land captain was selected from the district's lesser nobility by the Ministry of Interior. His duties included confirming all locally-elected officials, evaluating the decisions of the local assemblies and courts, and reporting on local developments. Adam Giesinger, an authority on the German-Russians, noted the impact the land captains had on the German-Russians:

For the German colonists the institution of the land captain had even worse consequences than it had for the Russian peasants. Up to this time the colonists had not felt too much their incorporation into the Russian local government system, because closest to home, at the village and volost level, they were governed by their own officials. Now the land captain, usually an ardent Russian nationalist determined to make these "foreigners" conform, constantly interfered in their local affairs. As a result the 1890s became a period of bitter quarrels between the colonist leaders and the local representative of the Tsar's authority. At no time since their arrival had the colonists been so harassed by Russian officialdom.

Alexander III's nationalistic policies caused great consternation within the German colonies in Russia. When Alexander III became Tsar, he announced that Russia should belong to the Russians. One of his main goals was assimilating all of his non-Russian subjects into the general Russian population—by Russifying all the schools in Russia, including the German colonists' schools. In 1892, according to Giesinger:

All schools... were placed under the jurisdiction of the Russian school inspector. He chose the teachers and enforced the program of studies laid down by the Ministry of Education. Usually a rabid nationalist, appointed to his position because he was in sympathy with government policy, he made the schools as Russian as he could, to the detriment of the German language. Except for the teaching of religion and German, Russian became the language of instruction in both the Zentralschulen and the village schools. Two-thirds of the school term was devoted to Russian even at the primary level.

The German colonists were likely irritated in 1892 when Tsar Alexander III had the names of all the German villages changed from German to Russian titles.

The Russian press was severely anti-German in the late 19th century. This was probably due to growing nationalism within Russia and Germany at that time and a breakdown in relationship between the two nations after Chancellor Bismarck's resignation in 1890. Russkii Vestnik, a monthly publication, included an article which denounced the Germans within Russia as enemies of the state who received money from the German Imperial Bank to acquire South Russia for Germany. Michael Nuss, a Reformed minister who emigrated to the United States in the 1890s, noted in his memoirs:

We probably would have remained in the Crimea for many more years if we had not seen an article in a Russian newspaper of the following text: "In order to win over the Germans, all have to be friendlier and meet them more than halfway, and let offices and honor come to them, and so forth. With such an approach it won't take long before we have them completely Russified." So I said to myself, "That is the last straw; now the days of my residence in Russia are numbered; now we are going to America."

Many German-Russians left Russia in the late 19th century because growing Russian nationalism threatened their way of life.

Many German-Russians also emigrated to the United States to take advantage of free or inexpensive land made available there by the Homestead Act of 1862 and by the land grants made to the American

railroads in the 1870s and 1880s. During the 19th century the German colonies in Russia had experienced significant population growth. "By 1870 there were 266,000 Germans in the Volga region, more than 150,000 in the Black Sea region and nearly 30,000 in the western province of Volhynia," more than four times the original number of colonists. At first this growth in population resulted in the establishment of many daughter colonies, but, as the 19th century unfolded, it became more and more difficult to obtain land for new settlements. Simultaneously, in the United States, large amounts of land became available for settlement. That news reached the German colonists by word of mouth and by the intensive advertising efforts of American railroads and land companies. Joseph S. Height, a German-Russian historian, believes that "the predominant reason that motivated the German colonists to leave Russia and seek their fortune in America was the quest for land." Marie Martin of Eureka, S.D., Rose Kurle of Bowdle, S.D., David Eisenbeiz of Bowdle, John A. Shick of Eureka, Jake Diede of Lehr, N.D. and William Schuler of Lehr, children of German-Russian immigrants to the Dakotas, stated in interviews that their fathers came to the United States primarily to acquire farmland.

Chapter IV

Officeholding and Ethnicity Of The First German-Russian Settlers of McIntosh County

The German-Russians who came to the United States brought with them distinct beliefs, values, and traditions which they had practiced in Russia for many years. After they arrived they continued to live according to these conservative values, and one result was a reluctance to become involved in government beyond their own communities.

Individuals of German-Russian descent make up the second largest ethnic group in North Dakota, but few of them have ever held high public office. According to Fr. William Sherman, only five of the state's 168 major officeholders up to 1963 had been of German-Russian origin. This infinitesimal degree of direct participation at the state level of government seems unusual for such a large ethnic group. (German-Russians made up 10 percent of the state's population in 1910.) Persons of Norwegian descent, who make up the largest ethnic group in the state (Norwegians made up 21 percent of North Dakota's population in 1910), have shown a greater willingness to participate directly in state-level politics. For example, nearly

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When the Russian press began to encourage anti-German attitudes, more than one German living in Russia said, "Now it is time to go to America!"

15 percent of the members of the North Dakota State Legislature between 1901-1915 were born in Norway. Less than one percent of the members for the same time period were born in Russia. In an effort to explain this phenomenon, this study focuses on McIntosh County because it contained the greatest concentration of German-Russians in the state between 1889-1915. The degree of officeholding by the first German-Russians in the county was determined by consulting available state, county, town, and school district records. The ethnicity of these people was determined by examining available government records, newspapers, memoirs, textbooks, and by interviewing some of the inhabitants of the county. Then an effort was made to explain German-Russian officeholding—at all levels—by relating it to the unusual background of the German-Russian people.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County showed a clear willingness to participate in local government. They held many school district, town, and county offices between 1889 and 1915. Their degree of officeholding at the local level did not correspond exactly to their population density in the county (79 percent in 1910), but it indicated a serious desire to become involved in local government. For example, there were 117 officeholders in the county between 1889 and 1915. Of that number 63 (or 54 percent) were German-Russian origin, 44 (or 37 percent) were unknown origin, nine (or eight percent) were native-born Americans, and one (or one percent) was of Norwegian ancestry. It is probable that at least 25 of the officeholders of unknown origin were German-Russians because their names are Germanic, and, at that time, only a small percentage of McIntosh County's population had been born in Germany. Adding the 25 unknown to the German-Russian category would increase the German-Russian percentage from 54 percent to 75 percent, thereby indicating significant participation.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County were nearly as involved in officeholding at the town level of government. For example, there were 60 elected officials in the town of Ashley between 1903 and 1915. Of the 60, 32 (or 53 percent) were German-Russians, 18 (or 30 percent) were of unidentifiable origin, eight (or 13 percent) were native-born Americans, and two (or three percent) were Scots.

It is likely that at least nine of the 18 unknown were German-Russians because of their Germanic names. Adding the nine unknown to the German-Russian category would increase the German-Russian degree of participation from 53 to 68 percent—again indicative of significant involvement.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County were less active in county-level officeholding than they were at the town and school district levels. For example, there were 137 county officeholders in McIntosh County between 1889-1915. Of these 56 (or 41 percent) were German-Russians, 49 (or 36 percent) were native-born Americans, eight (or six percent) were Germans, and the remaining 24 (or 17 percent) were of unknown origin. It is probable that five of the 24 county officeholders of unknown origin were German-Russians because of their Germanic names. Adding the five unknowns to the German-Russian category would increase the German-Russian participation from 41 to 45 percent.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County held a greater percentage of local government offices than all other national groups combined. Their degree of local officeholding compares quite favorably to that of members of the largest ethnic group in North Dakota, the Norwegians. The Norwegian settlers of Traill County, North Dakota (where they made up 54 percent of the population in 1910) held 84 percent of the school district offices in the Mayville-Portland area between 1889-1915; they held 70 percent of the town offices in Mayville between 1906-1915, and they held

64 percent of the county offices between 1889-1915.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County showed a definite unwillingness to participate directly in government beyond the local level. They held few state offices between 1889-1915. During those years McIntosh County was served by 44 state senators and representatives. Of these 44, only six (or 14 percent) were German-Russians, 33 (or 75 percent) were Americans, three (or seven percent) were Germans, and the remaining two (or four

percent) were of unknown origin.

This small degree of state officeholding by the first German-Russians of McIntosh County seems unusual for a county which was so densely populated by German-Russians. Traill County, North Dakota (a county of heavy Norwegian concentration), provides a vivid contrast. Between 1889 and 1915 Traill County was served by 60 state senators and representatives. Of the 60 officeholders, 35 (or 58 percent) were Norwegians, 17 (or 28 percent) were Americans, four (or seven

percent) were Canadians, and four (or seven percent) were of unknown origin.

The German-Russians' reluctance to seek high public office in North Dakota was not due to their failure to legally qualify for such positions. The qualifications for a state senator, at that time, included: resident of the state for two years, a minimum age of 25, and qualified elector of the district in which chosen. The qualifications for a state representative were the same with the exception that the minimal age was 21. In



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order to be a qualified elector in North Dakota, an individual had to be male, at least 21, and a resident of the state for one year, of a county six months, and of a precinct 90 days. One also had to be a United States citizen or had to have on file for a year a declaration of intention (or "first paper") to become a United States citizen. In actuality a greater percentage of McIntosh County German-Russians qualified for state offices than did their Norwegian counterparts in Traill County. In 1910, 83 percent of McIntosh County's foreign-born adult males (who made up nearly 75 percent of the total number of adult males in the county) were qualified as electors because they were either naturalized citizens or had taken out their "first papers." In contrast only 70 percent of Traill County's foreign-born males (who made up 55 percent of the total number of adult males in the county) qualified as electors in 1910.

An explanation for the unusual political behavior of the first German-Russians of McIntosh County is their background. When they arrived in North Dakota they brought with them certain customs and traditions which they had practiced in Russia for decades. In North Dakota they lived according to those traditions, and one outcome was an unwillingness to actively participate in government beyond the local level.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County did not actively seek political offices beyond the local level because they had no tradition of holding high public office. In Russia their role in governing terminated at the district level. Beyond that level all officials were Russians who were either selected by the national government in St. Petersburg, or, after the sensitive legislation, by the provincial assemblies. The regional and national boards which oversaw the German colonies were made up of Russians with whom the German colonists had little contact or influence. According to Gotthilf Herberg of Ashley, N.D., an original German-Russian immigrant to the United States in 1922, one reason the first German-Russians did not seek high public office in North Dakota because "they had no tradition of participating in high level politics in Russia." William Hoffman of Bowdle, S.D., another original German-Russian immigrant to the United States in 1911, stated in an interview:

In Russia the Russians were in control of the government. Here, in America, the Americans were in control. The governors were never German-Russian. The German-Russians I knew didn't care for state-level politics. They didn't want to get involved beyond their own communities.

According to Julius Werre of Lehr, N.D., the son of one of the first German-Russians to emigrate to the United States in 1873, "One reason the first German-Russians were unwilling to seek state-level political positions in North Dakota was due to the fact that those who came to North Dakota had no tradition of participating in the high Russian government." Said Mary Rathke of Eureka, S.D.: "There weren't

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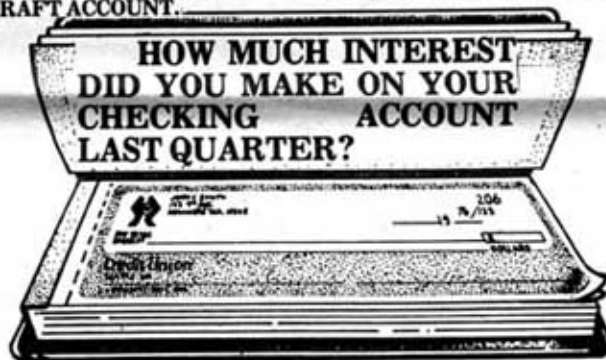
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The German-Russian colonists had a basic mistrust of high officials—a sentiment that was based on their attitudes toward officials in Russia.



The church was an important part of the early pioneers in the Dakotas. Pictured in the photo above is a confirmation class at St. John's Lutheran Church, a rural congregation southeast of Ashley, North Dakota. In the background is the parsonage.



As was to be expected because of the difficult times, education in this part of the Dakotas at the turn of the century was often limited, usually confined to just a few years of formal schooling. At left is one of the early teachers, Frances Miller. She taught in a country school—the Jewell school district, located east of Ashley, North Dakota. She was from Indiana and lived with the Ludwig Thurn family while teaching here.

Cover Photo

His humble beginning became the miracle of miracles for all who believe.

By Laurie Mehrer

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any Germans in the high government positions in Russia, the government there was run by the Russians." Rathke came to the United States in 1910.

A second reason for the German-Russians' unwillingness to seek high-level public office in North Dakota was their traditional attitude of distrust toward Russian officials. In 1889 Tsar Alexander III sent "land captains" into the German villages. These inspectors were notoriously corrupt and were despised by the German colonists. Herberg indicated that his father succeeded in keeping one of his sons out of the Russian Army by bribing the local land captain. He added that such acts were commonplace. Hoffman mentioned that the Russian inspectors came around to check on his village once a year. "They acted as big shots," Rathke stated that in 1908 Russian inspectors came into her village and took away every man's gun. "My father cried when they seized his gun," said Rathke, nearly crying herself as she recalled the incident. The German-Russians feared and despised the outside Russian officials. This attitude of suspicion towards outside officials was likely a factor which influenced their unwillingness to participate in state-level politics in North Dakota.

A third factor which prevented the first German-Russians of McIntosh County from seeking high public office was their customary concern for land and farming to the exclusion of almost everything else. Nearly all the German-Russians who lived in Russia were farmers. Many left Russia to acquire land in the United States. When they arrived many homesteaded on the sparsely-settled upper Great Plains. The land they obtained in the Dakotas was part of an open, desolate plain that often required years of backbreaking labor to make productive. The German-Russians' preoccupation with farming and making the land productive prevented many of them from participating in state-level politics. They were too busy farming. Calford Meyer of Ashley, N.D., son of German-Russian immigrants, stated: "Most of the Germans who came here were basically farmers. They were near the land. They were land-conscious. The most important thing was to build up an estate—for they had many children." According to Rose Kurle of Bowdle, S.D., daughter of original German-Russian immigrants:

Nearly all the German-Russians were farmers. They wanted land. They worked hard to make the land productive. They "dig out the rocks." They felt that the "Yankees" were a little bit lazy. The "Yankees" didn't like to work too hard. They came, took up a claim, built a shanty, lived there a short time to "prove up" the claim, then sold it for a quick profit and left.

They noted that "the first German-Russians had so much work to do that they had no time for anything else." And according to Rathke:

My husband was too busy working on the farm to take time to go to school or run for office. He was too interested in farming. He had a lot of rocks to pick, sod to break up, and crops to put in. He was an outside man. Our neighbors were like him. They, too, were busy farmers, having little education and speaking only German.

The traditional vocation of the German-Russians was farming. In Russia, most of them had been farmers. A few may have been teachers or ministers, but the overwhelming majority were farmers. When they arrived in the United States they did what they had done in Russia—they farmed. Their serious preoccupation with farming did not allow them the time or energy to develop the skills necessary for high-level politics in this country. It is likely that the Norwegian immigrants, as a group, were not as preoccupied with farming (as were the German-Russians) because among their numbers were members of Norway's

professional and business class.

A fourth factor which kept the first German-Russians of McIntosh County out of state-level politics was their attitude towards education. Most of the German-Russians who had emigrated to the United States had received a minimal education in Russia. Each German village in Russia had a school which was irregularly attended by the children of the village from ages six to 14. At first the schools were primarily German institutions. The major subjects were German and religion. Later, during the reign of Tsar Alexander III, the German schools were partially Russified. As a result, the German children were forced to learn Russian and various secular subjects; however, they continued to learn German and religion as well. These village schools were poorly equipped and staffed. Teachers were often paid one-half or one-third the salary of the community's cowherd. The Germans regarded the school as important for preserving the German language and religion; otherwise it was unimportant. Few children went on to high school after confirmation at 14. Only those who intended to become teachers or ministers went on. A vast majority graduated to work in the fields. "Few went on to high school. Most had no interest in higher education," recalled Herberg. There was no custom of higher education in Russia among the Germans who lived there. When the German-Russians arrived in North Dakota they brought along the custom of minimal education. Therefore, they and many of their children did not obtain the skills and confidence necessary to participate effectively in high political positions. Max A. Wishek of Ashley, N.D., the son of John and Nina Farley Wishek, original settlers of the county, recalled:

The German-Russians weren't too keen on education. They believed in hard work. Sometimes their children had to be forced to attend school. When their children reached eighth grade that was it. In 1918 when I went on to college there were only a few who went on to institutions of higher learning. They didn't believe in higher education. It was more important for them to work and get ahead. It was more important to buy a quarter of land than send a child to college.

According to Meyer:

My father's education was limited to the third grade. Very few of the German boys in his time got beyond the eighth grade. Most of the young people stayed home and helped on the farm. They didn't consider higher education that important. It was the English-speaking people who were concerned with higher education. Most of the Germans who came here were basically farmers. They were near the land. They were not well-educated. As a result of this handicap, they never entered high-level politics.

Concerning education, Herberg recalled, "Few went beyond the eighth grade in McIntosh County because they were not accustomed to doing so in Russia. They brought with them no tradition of higher education. They had no colleges in Russia. They established none here. The Norwegian immigrants, in contrast, established many colleges in the United States.

When questioned about the reluctance to participate in state-level politics, many first-generation inhabitants of McIntosh County expressed as reasons their lack of a good education and the inability to understand English. For example, John A. Shick, who came to the Dakotas in 1889 from Russia, stated: "I didn't run for high office because of a lack of education, the inability to speak English well enough, and because I was too busy on the farm. I didn't know much about the government. In some cases the first German-Russians didn't even send their children to elementary school. Rathke recalled: "Many of the German children, in the area where I grew up, were not sent to school. They were kept home to work." Kurle stated: "My father believed that the girls didn't need much of an education. They should learn to cook, wash, and iron and

In the 1850s in Russia, marriages between Germans and Russians were discouraged

needed no school for that." And Dorothea Herberg of Ashley, N.D., daughter of German-Russian immigrants, recalled: "My father didn't think education was important. My brothers, sisters, and I attended school no more than a month." The low regard for education among the first German-Russians prevented them and their children from obtaining the skills and knowledge necessary for high-level political involvement.

Finally, the first German-Russians in McIntosh County, North Dakota, were reluctant to participate in state-level politics because they were accustomed to keeping to themselves in Russia. In Russia they were fully aware of their minority status. They regarded their communities as tiny islands of German culture in a vast alien environment. They did all they could to preserve their German customs and traditions within their communities. Schools and churches were erected to nurture and preserve the culture that they had brought with them from Germany. As a result, the German-Russians kept to themselves, seldom intermingling with the general Russian populace which encircled them. According to Rathke, the Germans in Russia regarded their Russian neighbors as "dirty, lazy, and lousey!" A friend of hers married a Russian laborer and afterwards was forced to leave the village in disgrace. Herberg recollected the Germans' prejudice toward the Russians:

The Germans in Russia were concerned with preserving their German ways. I can't remember a case in my community in which a German married a Russian. The Germans felt superior to the Russians. Often the Russians passed through our village on their way to market. When they returned they were usually drunk. At times we were afraid of the Russians. Sometimes they would steal from us or destroy our property.

Hoffman recalled German feelings of superiority towards the Russians:

We felt we were better than the Russians. They were slower than us. They sowed, harvested, and threshed by hand. Many had no horses. Oh, they lived cheap! We had horses and machines, such as reapers, separators, and threshers. We were against mixing with the Russians because, if a German married one, their children had to go to the Russian church.

In the process of trying to maintain their identity by discouraging social intercourse with the Russian population the German-Russians developed a "colonial-consciousness," a sense of exclusivity which not only kept them apart from developments in 19th century Russia, but which ultimately contributed to keeping them out of the mainstream of North Dakota politics during the first decades—if not longer—after their arrival. This "colonial consciousness" prevented many potential German-Russian politicians from seeking public office in North Dakota beyond the local level. For here, as in Russia, the only world for the German-Russians was their community. Everything else, including state-level political positions, was regarded as part of an alien, foreign, and even threatening world, and therefore to be avoided.

The article above is part of a thesis written by William Jahraus for a master of arts degree at the University of North Dakota. Jahraus was born in Eureka, South Dakota. He is a descendant of German and German-Russian immigrants who settled in the Dakotas in the late 19th century. After graduating from Herreid, South Dakota High School in 1966, he attended Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree in history-political science in 1970. For the past eight years he has been an instructor of American and European history at the Grafton, North Dakota, Public High School. Jahraus resides on a farmstead near Ardoch, North Dakota, with his wife, Sheryl Rae (Thostenson), and their son, Max Christian.



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