German-Russian Move
To State Is Reviewed

(Editor's note: The following is taken from a report compiled by John E. Pfeiffer, Aberdeen, on the German-Russians and their immigration to South Dakota. In the report he explains how the Germans were enticed by Catherine the Great to migrate to Russia and the reasons they came to the United States. This excerpt tells of their migration to South Dakota. In June the North Dakota Historical Society of Germans from Russia will celebrate the centennial of the arrival of the first German-Russian pioneers in Dakota Territory at Yankton, in March of 1873. The celebration will be held in Bismarck for both North and South Dakota.)

By JOHN E. PFEIFFER

ACCORDING to the 1920 United States Census, there were 283,322 Americans of German-Russian origin living in every state and the District of Columbia. South Dakota claimed the third largest percentage with 20,037.

Of these, the overwhelming majority were from the Black Sea Colonies. Although Black Sea German-Russians had come to the United States as early as 1847 and had settled on Kelley's Island in Lake Erie near Sandusky, Ohio, it was not until 1872 that any serious and organized emigration movement from Russia began.

In that year, four families from Johannestadt near Odessa left for Sandusky, and were followed shortly thereafter by 35 more families from neighboring Black Sea colonies. Late in the year, the new arrivals sent twelve delegates out to search for land on which to settle. The scouts travelled through Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin, but could find no available lands to build the closed colonies such as they were accustomed to in Russia.

They continued on into Iowa and Nebraska, and because Yankton, the capital of Dakota Territory, was the end-station of a railroad, four of the delegates proceeded to there. Not only were the soil and the lay of the land practically identical with the stepping of their Black Sea homeland, but even contiguous homesteads were still available.

By April of 1873, all but four families arrived from Sandusky and northeast of what is now LeMasters, they had their claims surveyed. Because they had all come from colonies in the vicinity of the Black Sea port of Odessa, they named their settlement Odessa.

If you had been in Yankton at that time, you would have been witness to some strange but historic sights at the Dakota Southern R. R. Depot. In contrast to the fitted uniforms of Custer's 7th Cavalry Regt., which was then arriving there by train, were other trains discharging what appeared to be on opposing army of Cossacks. Boots, half-covered by shapeless pants, which in turn were half-covered by colorful blouses held in place by red waistbands, and heads covered by fur caps, made up what was the out-of-place dress of those early German-Russian immigrants.

Another group arrived in the Odessa settlement from Russia later that year. And in 1874, new arrivals from Russia settled the area around what is now Menno and Gaden, while others arrived to found the settlement of Kasson adjacent to a settlement of German Mennonites from Russia who had also just arrived.

In 1877 a group of twenty families settled near what is now Tripp. Immigrants from the Bessarabian Colonies settled in the area southeast of what is now Parkston. In a few years, all available homestead land in Yankton, Bon Homme, Hutchinson, and Douglas counties was for the most part claimed by Black Sea Germans from Russia.

Because the middle and northeastern sections of what is now eastern South Dakota were being settled predominantly by Scandinavians, there was only one settlement of German-Russian pioneers at age 1856, near Alpena which dated to 1883. But the homestead lands north, west, and south of what is now Pierre in very way largely unclaimed. Thus, incoming immigrants used the old settlements near Yankton as a base to travel to that area by whatever means possible, which until the railroads were built meant by ox-drawn wagon trains.

In 1884 they were homesteading the area around present day Hosmer and Eureka. Others filed claims in 1885 in the area around present day Leota, Bowdle, and Greenway. In 1889, several Black Sea families settled in the vicinity of present day Java.

By the time that Dakota Territory was divided into two states, the counties of Edmunds, McPherson, Campbell, and Walworth were well-represented by German-Russian pioneers. The settlement at Akaska dates to 1886, while the settlement communities in the vicinity of Wessington Springs, Reon Heights, Highmore, and Harrold received German-Russian settlers between 1904 and 1914.

The first Black Sea German-Russian settlement in South Dakota was west of the Missouri River was settled by immigrants from the Crimea Colonies in 1899 near Fairview in Gregory County. By 1906, other German-Russian settlements had been made in the Herrick, Gregory, Dallas, and Custer areas in Gregory County, as well as Miller, Colome, and Carter in Tripp County. In 1909, a group from Freeman and Tripp resettled near Crookston in Pennington County. The area around Isabel, Timber Lake and Landry received the last of the Russian when the Indian lands in that part of the state were opened to homesteaders in 1909.

**Trail Of The Immigrants**

This map shows the areas in South Dakota settled by German-Russian immigrants. The first German-Russian arrived at Yankton in Dakota Territory in March of 1873 and gradually settled throughout the territory as homesteads opened up. Aberdeen eventually became the "gateway" of subsequent immigration westward to the Pacific and northward into Canada.
Since the individual German colonies in Russia were originally settled with colonists of the same religious affiliation, there were no interdenominational ones in all of Russia, but only Evangelical, Catholic, or Mennonite (including Hutterites). Thus far, all of the settlements mentioned have dealt with the Evangelicals in particular, although at first the Evangelical and Catholic pioneers intermingled in their course to the United States.

Afterward, however, they came separately and remained distinct after finding their trail in America. The first Catholic families came from Rastatt near Odessa in 1873 and settled temporarily with their Evangelical and Mennonite countrymen in the Freeman area.

Another group from Strasburg, Baden, and Sch near Odessa located in the Scotland area in 1882, but then relocated for the most part on homesteads in the vicinity of the newly founded C. M. St. P. Railroad town of Ipswich in 1885. In the years following, Evangelicals and Catholics shared settlements at Roscoe, Bowdle, Hosmer, Hillsview, Leola, and Eureka.

The Catholic German-Russian settlement in Aberdeen dates to 1884, and Aberdeen became the "gateway" of subsequent immigration westward to the Pacific and northward into Canada. Catholic Black Sea German-Russians also located west of the Missouri River near Trail City, Glencross, and westward to Timber Lake and Isabel where they intermingled with their Evangelical countrymen.

The Bison, Lemmon, Faith, Lapree, and McLaughlin areas also attracted German-Russian Catholics, particularly from Aberdeen and Ipswich when the Indian lands in those areas were opened to homesteaders.

Like many other American immigrant groups, the German-Russians also felt the sting of derision and supercilious condescension. Their strange manners were subjected to ridicule. But, if they resented the resultant "dumb Rooshun" appellation, their German passion for cleanliness was deeply wounded when called a "dirty Rooshun." Exasperated by such disparagement, it is little wonder that they became suspicious of and ill-at-ease with their more "Americanized" neighbors. Nevertheless, such intolerance kept them well-aware of their identity.