Russo-German Place-Names in Russia and in North America[1]

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IN STUDIES OF GERMAN COMMUNITIES in Russia, place-names
have always played an important and interesting part. Especially
when reliable information has not been available as to the geo-
graphic origin of the settlers has the place-name — coupled with
some definite dialectal features — been helpful in the tracing of the
provenance of the founders of a certain community.[2] With these
migratory Russo-Germans two patterns for naming may be observed:
they gave their settlements totally new place-names having no
relation at all to the colonists' origin in Germany or they used names
suggesting their German ancestry. The purpose of this paper is to
show the variety of place-names and the flexibility of their formation
among Russo-Germans in Russia and North America.

Russo-Germans in Russia were settlers with special privileges
who had been invited by the Russian Imperial government, for
reason of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century state policy, to occupy

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[1] Place-names of the reformed colonists such as the Hutterites and the Men-
nonites are not discussed in this paper. Extensive research has been done elsewhere
regarding these groups. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Herbert
Penzl, University of Michigan, and the editors and unnamed readers for their
suggestions concerning arrangements and style.

[2] Many Russo-German communities preserved the dialects of their ancestry in
Germany. Others, however, formed relatively new dialects as Germans from various
areas settled in one colony. Though there is no systematic linguistic analysis of all
the colonies available, dialect studies of note were made by the Volga German,
Georg Dinges, and the Germanist and folklorist, Victor Zhirmunski. Dinges was
director of the "Research Institute for German Dialects" on the Volga (1928), and
edited the first dialect Atlas of the Volga Germans. Zhirmunski, still the leading
Germanist in Russia, published numerous studies on the Russian German dialect
in *Teuthonista*. He is the author of *Volksmündliche Forschungen in den deutschen
Siedlungen der Sowjet Union* (Moscow, 1930). In his recent voluminous publication
Nemetskaia dialektilogia (Leningrad, 1955), Zhirmunski completely ignores the
Russo-Germans, a factor which requires no further explanation.

the wild or partially cultivated regions of Russia. From 1763 to 1840, German people of several religious denominations accepted this invitation and established 318 "mother colonies," densely populated villages on the left and right bank of the lower Volga river, in Crimea and the Black Sea area, Wolhynia, Caucasus, and in the vicinity of St. Petersburg. By the end of World War I close to 3,000 "sister colonies" (smaller settlements founded by members of the mother colonies), as well as 90,000 "khutors"[3] were established in the vicinity of these mother colonies in Siberia, Central Asia, and Northern Caucasus.[4] At present there are no longer any German settlements in European Russia. The Black Sea Germans were repatriated first to Germany during World War II and then returned partially to Asiatic Russia by the Soviet authorities. The Volga Germans, whose communities were never occupied by the German forces during World War II, were sporadically resettled by the Soviet government in 1941 as unreliable citizens in the same area. *Marx* and *Engels*, the names of two cities on the Volga, are the only remnants of the former Autonomous Republic of the Volga Germans. According to the latest Russian statistics (*Izvestia*, April 2, 1960) there is a total of 1,619,000 Russo-Germans still residing in Asiatic Russia.

In reviewing the names of some 3,000 Russo-German colonies as they existed until World War II, we find a colorful mixture of German, Russian and Russified German place-names. Most of the mother and sister colonies founded prior to 1872 had German names, such as will be subsequently mentioned. A few of the mother colonies on the Volga had names of Russian or French origin. These latter names were *Dobrinka, Galka, Iagodnaia, Kamenka, Krasnoiar, Orlovskaia, Semenovka, Beauregard, Boisroux, Caneau, Degot, Nieder-Monjou, Ober-Monjou, Louis,* and *Rossoschi.*

The French place-names should not lead one to suppose that these colonies were established by French settlers: these names were simply those of the French companies which had undertaken the task of transporting the settlers to Russia.[5] Only one settlement,

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[3] *Khutor* is a smaller settlement than a sister colony with a population of a few hundred.

[4] *Der Wanderweg der Rußlanddeutschen*, ed. by Deutsches Ausland Institut (Stuttgart, 1939), 135.

[5] Manfred Langhans-Ratzeburg, *Die Wolgadeutschen* (Berlin, 1929), 5–20.

Rossoschi, founded in 1765, later called *Franzosen*, was established by a French immigrant group. The settlers of this colony, however, were soon assimilated by the surrounding Germans.[6]

In analyzing the purely German names of colonies formerly on the Volga, one discovers that their names were German patronymics which therefore do not immediately reveal the geographic origin of the colonists. In spite of the lack of official documentation regarding the specific origin of the Volga Germans, linguistic and historic research shows that they had migrated from the areas of Hessen, The Palatinate, and Thuringia.[7]

With the exception of the few Russian and French names of mother colonies, as mentioned above, the remainder of the names of the mother colonies (a total of 130) were German family names. Thus, one found such names as *Bauer, Bettinger, Bohn, Dehler, Dietel, Dinkel, Fischer, Graf, Grimm, Hildmann, Keller, Köhler, Müller, Schäfer,* and *Winkelmann*. Occasionally first names were used which carry neither a place-name prefix nor a suffix: *Anton, Balzer,* and *Stephan*. As prospective emigrants gathered in Lübeck for transportation to Russia they were divided into numerous groups, each headed by a supervisor. Upon arrival on the Volga each group formed a colony with the name of the supervisor as the name of the colony.[8]

In the Black Sea area and in the Caucasus there were only a few mother colonies with names of Russian origin. These were usually names of members of the Imperial family with either German or Russian toponymic suffixes, such as *Alexanderdorf, Elisabethgrad,* and *Katharinenfeld*. The names of the mother colonies in Bessarabia constitute a mixture of names having no relation to the origin of the settlers. These colonies were founded soon after the Napoleonic wars, between 1815 and 1825, by settlers from Württemberg and Western Poland. The names of the majority of mother colonies such as *Arzis, Beresina, Borodino, Katzbach, Leipzig, Maloiaroslavets,* and *Paris* recall famous battle sites both of the Seven Years' and Napoleonic wars.[9]

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[6] Walter Kuhn, *Deutsche Sprachinselforschung* (Plauen, 1939), 223.

[7] Gerhard Bonwetsch, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien an der Wolga* (Stuttgart, 1919), 15—30.

[8] Langhans-Ratzeburg, *op. cit.*, 5—20.

[9] Georg Leibbrandt, *Die deutschen Kolonien in Cherson und Bessarabien* (Stuttgart, 1926).

While the names of the colonies on the Volga contained no hint of the provenance of their settlers, the names of colonies in the Black Sea reveal to a certain extent the origin of the colonists. The settlers in the Black Sea area were, predominantly, immigrants from Southwest Germany, Alsace, The Palatinate, Baden, Württemberg, Swabia, Bavaria, and even Switzerland. The place-names of the mother colonies may conveniently be divided into two categories. In the first we can include transfer or commemorative names recalling the names of larger cities in Southwest Germany: *e.g.*, *Baden, Darmstadt, Durlach, Karlsruhe, Kassel, Landau, Mannheim, München, Rastatt, Speier, Strassburg,* and *Worms.* The second group comprises names with toponymic second composition members usually reserved for designations of smaller settlements in Germany, such as *Annenfeld, Alt-Schwedendorf, Bergdorf, Blumenfeld, Friedenstal, Glückstal, Grossliebental, Helenendorf, Hoffnungstal, Johannestal, Josephstal, Kleinliebental, Klosterdorf, Kronstal, Kronsgarten, Marienfeld, Rosental, Schlangendorf, Schoenfeld,* and *Steinfeld.* Though these names seem to be descriptive, only *Klosterdorf* and *Alt-Schwedendorf* are actually so. The former was situated in the vicinity of an Orthodox monastery, and the latter near an old Swedish settlement established by prisoners from the army of Charles XII after the battle of Poltava in 1709.

The characteristic feature of the formation of place-names for sister colonies on the Volga seems to have been the extensive use of German place-name first and last composition members. These were often duplicated — a new suffix being the only means of differentiation. Examples of this type are *Fresenheim — Fresental*; *Friedenberg — Friedenfeld*; *Gnadenflur — Gnadenfeld — Gnadendorf — Gnadental*; *Marienberg — Marienburg — Marienfeld*; *Rosenberg — Rosental — Rosenfeld — Rosendamm*; and *Schoendorf — Schoenfeld — Schoental*.[10] Only a small number of sister colonies were named after their mother colonies, and whenever this was done these names usually carried the prefix *Neu-*; thus *Neu-Balzer, Neu-Bauer, Neu-Schilling,* and *Neu-Straub.* Among all the Volga colonies only *Alt-Weimar, Neu-Weimar,* and *Strassburg* were names of sister colonies reminiscent of place-names in Germany. Names of the sister colonies

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[10] For comparison see Georg J. Eisenach, *Das religiöse Leben unter den Rußlanddeutschen* (Marburg, 1950), 214—216.

in the Black Sea area are formed primarily by prefixing *Neu* to the name of the mother colony — *Neu-Karlsruhe, Neu-Baden, Neu-Arzis, Neu-Friedenstal,* and *Neu-Josephsdorf*.[11]

During the founding of the mother colonies (1763–1840) each colony received an official Russian name from the "Guardian Office"[12] in addition to its German one. Sometimes only a number was given. However, these Russian names (a few of which were of Ukrainian origin), or numbers, were not known to the colonists until 1872. At that time the Russian Government began an official, deliberate Russification process which included the renaming of those colonies which had had German names.[13] The method of renaming the mother colonies was quite simple. Only the official Russian name or the number by which the colonies were known in the Guardian Office had to be brought to light.

Sister colonies founded after 1872, *i.e.*, during the Russification process, became known by Russian names: namely, *Anilova, Pobochnaia, Valuievka* on the Volga and *Kamtshatka, Kurudshika, Maniukbeievka,* and *Pavlovka* in the Black Sea area. Also the names of the sister colonies which had been purely German until 1872 underwent a variety of changes. Most frequently the names were Russified by replacing the German toponymic suffix or prefix by a Russian one: *Marienfeld* became *Marienskoie; Neu-Mannheim, Novo-Mannheim;* and *Alexanderfeld, Alexandrovka*. In rare cases, as for instance in the Black Sea area where no Russian name was readily at hand, the name was simply translated: *Steinfeld* became *Kamenopole,* and *Silberfeld, Serebropole*.

However, names of sister colonies which commemorated the Russian Imperial family often remained unchanged in spite of their German toponymic compounding members and were usually

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[11] For detailed accounts of colonies in the Black Sea area and on the Volga see G. Beratz, *Die deutschen Kolonien an der Unteren Wolga in ihrer Entstehung und Entwicklung* (Berlin, 1928); Bonwetsch, *op.cit.; Der Wanderweg der Rußlanddeutschen;* Eisenach, *op.cit.;* Joseph Aloysius Kessler, *Die Geschichte der Diözese Tyraspol* (Dickinson, 1930); Karl Stumpp, *Die deutschen Kolonien im Schwarzmeergebiet* (Stuttgart, 1922).

[12] The "Guardian Office" was under the direct jurisdiction of the Minister of the Interior. The office was created for safeguarding the colonists' privileges. Langhans-Ratzeburg, *op.cit.,* 5–20.

[13] *Handbuch des Deutschtums im Auslande,* ed. Dietrich Reimer (Berlin, 1906), 184.

preserved until the liquidation of the colonies during World War II. Such names were often duplicated even in the same area and differed only in their suffixes or prefixes. Thus one was able to find the following names on the Volga: *Alexanderhoeh, Alexandertal, Gross-Konstantinov, Klein-Konstantinov, Konstantinovka, Gross-Romanov,* and *Klein-Romanov.* In the Black Sea area similar names were *Alexanderheim, Alexandrovsk, Katerinovka, Katerinopol, Novo Alexandrovka,* and *Nikolaital.*

Despite the insistence by the Russian Government that the Russian name be used in official transactions, the colonists themselves never really accepted the Russian names for both mother colonies and sister colonies. The renaming of their colonies was considered a violation of their privileges granted by Catherine II. In popular usage, therefore, the colonies retained their former German names. Following the insurrection of 1904–1905 the Imperial Government repealed its Russification policy and allowed the establishment of new sister colonies with German names. The mother colonies and many of the sister colonies resumed their former names. The Volga German mother colonies, however, often retained their Russian names. The printing of the German and the Russian name on maps and the usage of a double name among the Volga Germans were quite common; *e.g., Brabander (Kasickoie), Dehler (Berezovka), Husaren (Elshanka), Rothhammel (Pamiatnoie), Pfeiffer (Gnilushka), Hildmann (Panovka),* and *Schönchen (Paninskoie).*[14]

During the Soviet regime the colonies have retained their German names.[15] Only among the Volga Germans one found the names of *Marx, Engels, Luxemburg,* and *Thälmann,* but ordinarily these names together with slogans like "Vorwärts," "Rot Front," and "Arbeiter" were reserved for the newly founded collective farms. Very little information is available regarding the fate of the settlements established after World War II by the repatriated Black Sea Germans from Eastern Germany and the expelled Volga Germans — in Siberia and Central Asia. It is known, however, that many of their settlements became identified by a number, thus perpetuating

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[14] E. Gross, *ASSR Nemtsev Povolzia* (Pokrovsk, 1926); *ASSR der Wolgadeutschen* (Engels, 1938).

[15] The preservation of German names was part of the Soviet policy to foster the national culture of minority groups. Indeed it was to be a culture national in form and socialist in content.

neither personal nor group history. The renaming of colonies or the stripping them of their names was also the first act by the Russian Imperial Government when it had temporarily pursued its Russification policy in the nineteenth century.

Curtailment of the settlers' privileges in 1872 and the apparent land shortage motivated the Russo-German immigration to North America.[16] As farmers, the immigrants settled chiefly in the rural states of North and South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska and in the Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. While the Volga Germans tended to settle in the cities, the Black Sea Germans eagerly founded new farming districts. The naming of these new settlements assumed a variety of patterns; however, the majority of them were named after one of the larger mother colonies in Russia. In a few instances, however, the Black Sea Germans named their settlements after their metropolis Odessa, on the Black Sea. These settlements were established at the turn of the century in Saskatchewan, in North Dakota, and in Washington[17] and have retained their names up to the present. Only rarely do we find towns named after their founders. The origin of "Temvik" in North Dakota is indeed unique. In 1907, a Russo-German by the name of "Tempel" bought land from a Norwegian named "Larvik." With the coming of his kinsmen to this land, the Russo-German called the small settlement "Tempel." The Norwegian, however, insisted on the name "Larvik." A court decision combined the names into "Temvik." In other instances where the rural areas were already designated by the name of a river, post office, or railroad station, the name was often simply transferred to the newly founded settlement. In this manner a substantial number of Russo-

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[16] The land shortage also later in the nineteenth century caused the establishment of sister colonies in Asiatic Russia. These colonies never participated in the migration to the Americas. The figures below show the distribution of Russo-Germans according to Georg Wagner and Richard Mai, *Deutsche über Land und Meer* (Bonn, 1940), 281 — in the Americas. Canada 200,000; U.S.A. 400,000; Mexico 10,000; Paraguay 4,000; Argentina 150,000; Uruguay 2,500; Brazil 250,000.

[17] Odessa, Texas, received its name from Russian railroad workers who named a section after the city of their origin on the Black Sea. Odessa in Missouri and Ontario also has no relation to the Russo-Germans. See George Rippey Stewart, *Names on the Land* (New York, 1958), 321; G. H. Armstrong, *The Origin and Meaning of Place-Names in Canada* (Toronto, 1930), 211; and J. B. Rudnyćkyj, *Canadian Place-Names of Ukrainian Origin, Onomastica II* (Winnipeg, 1951), 56.

German settlements both in Canada and in the U.S.A. acquired English names, names totally unconnected with the origin of their inhabitants.

In North America at present only a small number of Russo-German settlements have retained their original names. At the turn of the century, the names of numerous school districts and counties both in Canada and the U.S.A. which originally were Russo-German disappeared as railroad stations or post offices with different names sprang up. These settlements were then quite often known by both the old German and the new English names, the German names remaining only as long as did the older immigrant generation. As anti-German feelings swept North America during World War I, a number of the colonies changed their German names to English ones. Between the World Wars no new settlements were established by the Russo-Germans. The following table shows the names (still in official use) of settlements, most of which were founded by settlers from corresponding colonies in Russia.[18]

YEAR FOUNDED	NAME OF SETTLEMENT	PROVINCE OR STATE	ORIGIN OF SETTLERS
1876	Catherine	Kansas	Volga
1876	Liebental	Kansas	Volga
1877	Schoenchen	Kansas	Volga
1885	Selz	North Dakota	Black Sea
1889	Strassburg	North Dakota	Black Sea
1890	Speyer	Saskatchewan	Black Sea
1898	Karlsruhe	North Dakota	Black Sea
1900	Kendal[19]	Saskatchewan	Black Sea
1901	Selman	Oklahoma	Volga
1902	Marienthal	Saskatchewan	Black Sea
1908	Krasne	Saskatchewan	Bessarabia
1910	Paris	Montana	Bessarabia
1911	Rosenheim	Alberta	Volga

[18] For detailed accounts of Russo-German colonies in Canada and the U.S.A. see the *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the year 1896*, No. 13 (Ottawa, 1897), 124–125; J. J. Ballensky, *Die Wolga-Deutschen an der unteren Wolga und in Nordamerika* (Denver, 1924); J. J. Ballensky, *Die Südrußland-Deutschen* (St. Louis, 1925); Edmund Heier, "A Study of the German Lutheran and Catholic Immigrants in Canada formerly residing in Tzarist and Soviet Russia" (unpubl. thesis, Univ. of British Columbia, 1955); Heinz Lehman, *Das Deutschtum in West-*

The loss of these German names in America meant very little to the Russo-German. While he violently rejected the renaming of the colonies with German names during the Russification process after the 1870's, he voluntarily stripped himself of his identity in America. In fact, he considered himself neither German nor Russian, and was ready to forsake his old habits and customs, chiefly for the benefit of his children. It was this attitude which made possible the peaceful and rapid assimilation of the Russo-Germans in North America.

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kanada (Berlin, 1939); Richard Sallet, "Rußland-deutsche Siedlungen in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika", *Jahrbuch der Deutsch Amerikanischen Historischen Gesellschaft von Illinois*, 31 (Chicago, 1931), 5–127; Hattie P. Williams, *A Social Study of the Russian German* (Lincoln, 1916).

[19] *Kendal* is derived from *Kandel*.