

German Settlements in the Chortitza District

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[square brackets indicate translator's comment]

[Translation Begins]

Comprehensive Report Concerning the 19 German Settlements in the Chortitza District on the West Side of the Dnjepr, Dnjepropetrowsk General Region

By Dr. Karl Stumpp

The object here is to look at the 4 so-called Swedish colonies near Berislaw on the Dnjepr River –the oldest German colonies on the Black Sea Region. They were founded between 1789 and 1824. Four villages (Adelsheim, Franzfeld, Nikolaifeld and Hochfeld) originated as daughter colonies from Chortitza. The 1790 established village of Neuhorst was completely destroyed in 1919 by the Machno bandits. The inhabitants lived temporarily in the surrounding German settlements and founded in 1927, by the same name, a new German settlement 1.5 km to the south. A string of German settlements died out between 1917-1920, being filled up with Ukrainian folks settling there. These villages are indicated on the map (Table J).

The Germans from the still remaining German settlements are all of the Mennonites faith and have their heritage out of Lower Danzig. The Low-German (*plattdeutsch*) dialect is still spoken purely especially by the older generation.

Concerning the earlier history of the migration and first settlement, I am drawing from the important exposition by G. Fast, who has prepared the village report.

1. Preparation for the Emigration

Challenged by George von Trappe (a lecturer by profession and sent by the Russian Queen Katherina II) to move to Russia and settle there on the Ukrainian Steppes, many Germans from the Danzig area decided to respond to the call. They were all Mennonites. At the advice of Trappe, they sent two representatives, Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bertsch, to Russia at the end of September, 1786 to locate suitable land for settlement and to legalize the whole emigration with the Russian government and make preparations for it.

The delegation first went by sea to Riga. From there they traveled further by sled to Dubrowna in White Russia where they were recommended to the one in command, Lieutenant General Baron von Stahl, Adjutant General of Taurida (*Taurien*). From here they went to Kremenschug

and then to Kherson (*Cherson*). They traveled the length and the breadth of the surrounding territory. They spent a greater portion of the winter in Kherson.

In the Spring of 1787, on 13 May, they were introduced to the Russian Queen Katherina II in Kremenschug. They secured from her the promised privileges. They then had to accompany the queen to the Crimea. As they communicated with Baron Potemkin that they wanted to receive a written guarantee concerning the privilege granted, he replied that this was unnecessary because they had his approval on all accounts. At the comment by the deputation that Her Highness is mortal but the Crown would not die out, he did not only acquiesced, but replied, "It is good. It is good. I applaud your drive and I will have a written promise made out for you and I want to give you a few ducats as a gift. Moreover, the cost of the journey will be refunded to you by the High Crown."

From the Crimea, they traveled to Petersburg via Kremenschug.

In the meantime, the first 6 families back home had already started out for Riga. They were Hans Hamm, Kornelius Willins, Peter Rogese, Jakob Harder, Dietrich Isaak and his brother-in-law Abraham Krahn. They just could not wait for the return of the deputation. The delegation, on its way back home, met up with the 6 families in Riga, who had arrive a few days earlier. Their money had run out and they already had to sell items of clothing in order to purchase provisions. So they were immediately directed to the head office where they received a monthly payment of 25 kopek per person per day and 12 kopek for everyone under 14 years of age plus free living quarters.

From here the deputation traveled to Warsaw to inform the king of Poland, who was protector of Danzig, as to what transpired and to let him know that many Mennonite families would now want to go to Russia. Then they finally returned to Danzig. They had been away for 1 year and 11 days.

On 19 January, 1788, the first large gathering of those desiring to emigrate took place at the Russian Ambassador's palace. Here the Lord General Consul spoke with them.

On 22 March, 1788 Jakob Hoepfner brought a further 7 families of 50 souls after which they received their travel documents from the Danzig authorities and from the Russian General Consul.

2. The Emigration

On Easter Sunday, at 9 o'clock in the morning, they departed from the Lower Danzig village of Bohnsack. Many set out and accompanied them, in tears, wishing them well. By evening they came as far as the fresh lagoon of Stutthof where they stayed overnight. Here they employed sledges, loaded all wagons onto them and headed on out over the weak ice, for the weather was producing serious thawing. On the second night they had to spend the night under the open sky. Because of the heavy rains, they were not able to reach any village.

After 5 weeks, the emigrants arrived in Riga on Easter Monday of the old calendar. Here they remained for almost 4 weeks because the horses were very exhausted and had to have time to recover. On 24 June, 1788, after a 6 week journey, they arrived in Dubrowna. This place was 94 verst [1 verst=1.6 km] north of Wohilow on the Dnjepr River. Here they had to stay until the next spring because at this time Russia was at war with Turkey and it was not good to advance into the area to settle.

Always more families came so that little by little there were 228 families. Always more farmsteads were cleared for them. Here everyone was of one heart and one soul.

Three weeks after Easter, 6 families headed out on their journey with Hoepfner. The journey took them via Orscha, Kremenschug to Jekaterinoslaw.

3. The Settlement

After the return of Hoepfner, the people started out on their journey and in the beginning of July, 1789, the first group of immigrants arrived at their designated area, the valley in which the modest Chortitza makes its bed and, since time immemorial, the surge of the hardly visible Dnjepr River hurries eastward.

As the good impression, which the area shortly before Kremenschug had made on the newcomers through the previous tracts of land, came to a sudden end, so surprise and wonder would not cease as they descended the last meaningful high ground. A long wide valley, locked in by the high mountains, approached them. And then an abandoned and destroyed village of its one-time inhabitants, lying in ruin, heaps of rubbish and three or four makeshift habitable cottages still standing. Add to this, all around, far and wide, no living thing, no trees, no shrub—who, in these circumstances, would have been able to hold back from a terrifying dread?

At first there was an uproar. Hoepfner was maligned and blamed. They complained that all was for nothing since the baron had not given them the planned settlement which they had sought out because of the unrest brought about by the war.

As some reasonable persons among them thoroughly inspected the land and others then consoled each other that it is a far better land than back home and that a person would certainly be able to find his bread here, the tempers settled down a bit.

Members of the delegation, Hoepfner and Bartsch, and a few families soon arrived at the Chortitza Island, where they first of all occupied a residence that had been abandoned by the previous inhabitants. The rest made places to live in the ground.

Chortitza was founded by the Flemish during the time that the Frisians founded the village of Kronewiede on the Dnjepr River. This was the very first beginning of the German colonists on Ukrainian soil.

Always more colonists from the Reich came their way go set up one settlement after another and through hard-working German perseverance, diligence and thrift, the German colonists

transformed the desolate Ukrainian Steppe into blossoming colonies with green fields and splendid fruit orchards and made the Ukraine into Europe's number one bread basket. The land-owner, who made a livelihood through persistent perseverance up to the first world war, was no less significant than the land-owner from Great Britain.

In 1889, the descendants of the first colonists put up a memorial to remember the hundred year existence of the colony, which was then destroyed by the Bolsheviks. It was once again discovered buried on the grounds of a factory and put into safe keeping.

As in the Kronau/Orloff District, the residents of these settlements, despite the losses through starvation, banishment and deportation, increased from 11,666 in 1918 to 13,965 by the time the war broke out in 1941. The success of the German settlements in the Chortitza District is significantly greater than in the Kronau District. This mattered especially to the central administration of Chortitza which can no longer today be characterized as a German settlement since before the outbreak of the war there were 2,178 Germans living there with 11,507 Ukrainians and 402 Jews. Still more disadvantageous is the situation in **Einlage**, which, as a result of the improvement of a section [of river] lock, led to a massive increase in population of Ukrainian workers. But even the earlier pure German villages of Burwalde, Osterwick and Nieder-Chortitza are heavily mixed with Ukrainians.

In comparison to Kronau, the indicator figure on mixed marriages is significantly higher and amounts to 6.4% over against 2.2% in the Kronau District. The damages to the Germans in these 19 settlements, during the Bolshevik reign, are considerable and summarized as follows:

I. **Those Murdered due to the Machno Bandits in 1919**
 Men-127 Women-06 Youths-11 Total: 144

To this add those murdered in the obliterated communities: Eichenfeld-84, Petersdorf-08, Paulsheim-03 and Mariental-06. So that in all, in this district, 245 ethnic Germans, predominantly men, were murdered.

II. **Those who Starved to Death** (see Table A, Column 36-44):

1921/22	Men-22	Women-07	Youths-07	Total: 36
1933/34	Men-11	Women-03	Youths-08	Total: 22
			=====	
			Total:	58

The number who starved is also considerably smaller in this district than in the Kronau District.

III. **Those who were Banished 1929-41** (Table A, Column 50-53 & Table D)

Since this is dealing with a fairly wealthy district, many prominent wealthy farmers (*Kulaks*) were banished at the introduction of the collective. As in every place, 1937/38 brought about severe banishment, all due to politics.

IV. **Dragged Off in this Present War**

Men-294 Women-205 Youths-332 Total: 831

A total of 1281 were deported, of which 450 returned.

Total casualties in the 19 villages of Choritza District, with regard to German folks (right bank of the Dnjepr River), amount to this:

1. Murdered 1919 (including obliterated communities)	245
2. Starved 1921-22 & 1933/34	58
3. Banished 1929-41	1456
4. Deported in this present war	831
	=====
Total	2590

Table B provides information about the agricultural situation. Above all, it is confirmed that the Germans in this District, as it pretty much was in all others in the pre-world war times, had considerably more land than in the collectives under the Bolsheviks. Under the Bolsheviks, they worked only 13,619 hectares and add to that another 1,914 hectares for the farm-yards. Further indicators in Table B give information about cattle, average harvest yield per hectare and the pay for a work-day.

The excessive casualties from starvation, deportation, banishment and murders are noteworthy in the list of inhabitants with percentage of age groups within the population. Both segments in the age group of 5-10 and 20-25 can be traced back to the years of starvation. The casualties were especially high among the men, so much so that the age pyramid (table G & H) indicates a good picture of that. Noticeable here is that proportionately many women were deported. This holds true especially for the village of Nieder-Chortitza.

43% of the German families are without a male head of the household, without a provider. It is amazing that despite these casualties the fundamentals are good. From Table H it can be observed that the number of children from mixed marriages were steady in the graph bars. Concerning the section on the number of children per family born in the period of 1890-1922 (that is where the birth count can be determined) and 1880-1939 (that is where the children were still anticipated in that age grouping), the following tabulation of information is given:

A. Year of Marriage 1880-1922

# of Families	# Children born	# Children that died	Deaths in %	# Children per family
1,097	6,874	2,008	29.2	6.2

B. Year of Marriage 1880-1939

# of Families	# Children born	# Children that died	Deaths in %	# Children per family
2,647	11,672	2,896	25.0	4.4

The figures for the count of children for the period of 1880-1922 indicated 6.2 per family. 29.2% of children born ended up dying without being able to establish their own families.

Table L is a graph about the list of inhabitants with percentage of age groups within the population in a German and a Ukrainian settlement. Both villages have about the same number of residents. It is to be noted that the Ukrainian village was founded in 1928 and no starvation is indicated here.

The diagram of the German settlement of Nieder-Chortitza shows an enormous casualty of men through murder, starvation, banishment and deportation. A lot of women were also deported from this village. As in all the diagrams concerning the German settlements, here also the male side (marked blue) as opposed to the female (marked green) is inadequately represented. In the Ukrainian village the difference between the male and the female gender is completely insignificant. Here the number of banished is very small, the number deported narrows down in the age group of 20-40, that is for those in the age group of compulsory military service. Making these two comparisons indicates most impressively that the results in one German village cannot be compared to that of a Ukrainian village, where all adults and men of good health are preserved. In contrast, in the German villages the responsibility to be in charge rested with the wife who, moreover, had to provide for the children.

Especially impressive is the chart in the section showing that the male casualties (colored black, yellow, orange, red) in the Ukrainian village to be very small, but in the German village the figures indicate just the opposite.

Dnjepropetrowsk, on 05 November, 1942

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