

The German Migration to the East

by Jerry Frank

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Jerry Frank is an amateur genealogist specializing in Germans from Russian Poland and Volhynia. His family research has broadened to include general history of their migration. He has spoken at several international conferences as well at local genealogical society meetings. His current project is a book on the migration of Lutheran Germans through Russian Poland and Volhynia (northwestern Ukraine). The book will be an historical, geographical, and genealogical resource. Included will be 32 pages of maps of Russian Poland and about 24 pages covering Volhynia, both sets at 1:300,000 scale. The maps will be fully indexed showing over 2000 villages of Germanic residence in Russian Poland and another 1000 or so in Volhynia. The book will be available in spring of 2000. Watch for an announcement at the website of the Society for German Genealogy in Eastern Europe, <http://www.sggee.org>

Introduction

I am writing this as an amateur genealogist, not a professional historian. I have taken the time in my genealogical study to re-research the movements of the German people to the east, and from there to North and South America. My ancestors did not leave any verbal or written history behind them, so I undertook this research to gain a better understanding, in a general sense, of their movements. Use of a good historical atlas in conjunction with this written text will assist the reader in following the migration patterns recorded.

Before we talk specifically about the German migration, I would like to spend a few minutes on migration in a general sense. I spend a lot of my genealogical research time on the Internet. Over and over again, I see people posting questions like, "What happened in 1850 in Prussia that would have caused my great grandparents to move to Canada?" or, "What disaster could have occurred in 1810 that would have caused my German ancestor to move from Congress Poland to Bessarabia?"

What causes people to move? We can all think of answers to this question because all of us are immigrants! We might have been a solitary migrant or we might have been part of a general movement, but regardless of the circumstance, we are all immigrants. Our reasons for moving might include:

- some military reason (war, displacement because of war, draft)
- climate or possible physical danger (too cold, too many earthquakes).
- political oppression (lack of freedom)
- a friend or relative encouraging you to follow them
- religious persecution or oppression
- promise of jobs or improved economic situation

All of us who have moved understand our own motivation for doing so. But will your great, great granddaughter understand why you migrated, when she studies her genealogy? Will she ask, "What happened in North Dakota in 1985 that caused my great grandparents to move to California?" Unless you specifically write down your reasons, the probable answer is "No."

While we may not be able to understand exactly what motivated an answer to migrate, we can at least observe migration trends that can help us in tracing our genealogy. This article consists of an overview of German migrations to Eastern Europe. You still may not discover why your ancestor moved, but hopefully you will have a better general understanding of the migration trends.

Early German-Slav Conflict

When we talk about the migration of the Germans to the east, we are talking about their movement from historically German territory to historically Slavic territory. The border between these two territories has not changed much over the centuries. It has been the same for most of recorded history. It is true that political boundaries have moved in both easterly and westerly directions. At times Germans controlled Slavic lands, while at other times the "Slavs controlled German lands; but overall, the boundary between the two is aligned with the old eastern boundary of the Holy Roman Empire of 1250 AD.

Poland for centuries was one of the most powerful of the Slavic nations. It was Poland that requested the assistance of the Germanic Teutonic Knights in protecting portions of its land holdings along the Baltic coast. These knights brought with them significant German settlement to areas that later became Prussian territory. This early move east-ward (after 1100) was motivated by military action.

Along with this early migration of Germans came the inevitable intermarriage with other ethnic groups like the Slavs and Magyars. In the process, some tribes, like the Prus (from which Prussia gets its name), were eventually wiped out. Others like the Kashubians from the region southwest of Gdansk, assimilated into both German and Polish cultures. There are very few people left today who can still speak the ancient Kashubian language. Because of the assimilation, it is important to be aware that speaking the German language and practicing German customs does not mean that our ethnic origins are purely German. This is especially true for those of you with Germanic origins in Prussia and Silesian regions (modern north and southwest Poland), and to a lesser extent Hungarian regions. On the other hand, if your surname is something like Novak, Lewandowski, Berkowski, Girschewski, etc., it is quite possible that you might have strong Germanic connections.

More peaceful migration took place because the technical skills of the Germans proved to be beneficial to the more medieval nations like Poland-Lithuania, Bohemia-Moravia, and Hungary-Croatia. These countries invited Germans in to develop agriculture and mining in their regions and later to further their industrial causes.

Development of German Law Cities

As Germans developed colonies to the east of the Holy Roman Empire between the 13th and 16th centuries, they brought with them not only models of urban layout, but also models for governmental control of their cities and towns. The distinctive characteristic of German law is that it has allowed residents to direct their economic activity and government through the election of local city councils. These city councils acted independently of political rules and religious leaders. They often had their own court system, which controlled criminal and some civil matters. Sometimes, they even had their own militia.

This system of government was known as German city law, and it was comprised of three basic types with many variants: Luebeck Law, Magdeburg Law, and Nuremberg-Vienna Law.

As Germans, primarily tradesmen, migrated to new areas in the east, they brought this law and associated privileges with them. The spread of this law into Slavic lands began in the early 13th century in three areas. The first was in territory along the Vistula River controlled by the Teutonic Knights. The second area was in the upper Oder River valley where a weakened Polish State granted them the privileges. The third area was to the southeast – Bohemia, Moravia, and Hungary/Croatia where the respective kings had initiated significant immigration.

By the 14th century, German migration to the eastern cities had spread throughout Poland, Galicia, Volhynia, and south into Transylvania. Use of Germanic law continued to spread eastward in the 15th century, though it was the government of Poland Lithuania that was introducing it, rather than the Germans. Even Russia favored it, granting the privileges of Magdeburg Law to cities like Kiev, Smolensk, Orsha, and others. This law remained in effect in different parts of Russian controlled territory as late as 1830.

While the spread of Germanic city law through the migrations of German city dwellers did not result in large numbers of migrants, it was a very important factor in the later spread of German settlement throughout the east. Many of these cities had, at least for periods of time, German mayors and judiciary, who helped to develop the law systems. Royalty and nobility in the east, the primary motivators of much of German migration, were familiar with German ideas, laws, and customs. They did not fear the Germans in these early years, and encouraged them to come to their lands.

As the migration developed in a more rural manner, the concepts of Germanic city law also trickled down to the village level.

The primary form of a German village was based on the Schulzendorf system. The landowning noble would make a deal with an enterprising person, who would

guarantee a certain amount of settlers in exchange for rights to double the amount of land that a settler would normally receive. This person would also generally gain the right to own the flour mill, brewery, and other perks.

The Mennonites who came to Poland in the early 1500s rejected this form of village government. They insisted, and were granted the right, to establish their own village laws with freedom of the individuals within the village. This form of village government, similar in nature to the German city law, was known as a Hollandry.

With ongoing settlement in Poland, other religious groups also adopted this form of village government.

The Danube Swabians

Up until about 1700, German migration was gradual and somewhat evenly spread out. It was also mostly limited to the western edge of the Slavic lands. It is only after the demise of the Ottoman Empire that we begin to see waves of migration spreading into pockets of land further to the east. One of the first migration waves comes with the movement of the Danube Swabians to the frontier regions of the Banat (a part of Hungary), Backa, and Slavonia.

Swabia is a region with its own dialect in northern Wuerttemberg, centering around Stuttgart. While this region gives its name to this migration movement, it is important to note that most of these immigrants actually came from other southern German and Austrian provinces. Three waves of settlers moved into this area of central Hungary in the years 1718-37, 1744-72, and 1782-87.

The Austrian Hapsburgs, who gained control of this region through the Treaty of Passarovitz in 1718, wanted to achieve 3 goals: fortify the land against invasion, develop the farm land, and solidify the hold of the Roman Catholic Church on those areas. To encourage settlement by Catholic Germans, they were offered free agricultural land and home sites, construction material and livestock, and exemption from taxes for a limited period of time.

Most of the people who accepted the offer were of the poor peasant class, accustomed to heavy taxation and military conscription. Reference to the Danube comes from their prime transportation route. Starting at the city of Ulm, they boarded Ulmer Schahtel, a type of boat that sailed that river. Some also traveled along the river in covered wagons.

This migration was particularly extensive. I don't have a number for the first wave, but we know that at least 15,000 of them died from either Turkish raids or from plagues. The second wave of 75,000 immigrants was, in part, brought in to replace those losses. The third wave of 60,000 immigrants built on the first two, and ended up

with reasonable economic prosperity. In all, over 1,000 villages were established in southern Hungary.

The Volga Germans

Another very large and significant German migration, the one that went farthest to the east, was that of the Volga Germans. This migration was a peaceful one that took place under the invitation of the Russian Czarina, Catherine the Great. To understand this migration, we need a bit of back-ground as to how it occurred. There are similarities to the Danube Swabian migration, but the target immigrant was much different and the perks given were more extensive.

In 1762, Russia, under Catherine II (Catherine the Great), issued a manifesto inviting foreigners to settle in Russia. While some artisans were attracted by it, it generally was not considered very successful. Russia had vast territories to the east, which it wished to settle. There were two reasons for this. The first was to encourage cultivation of the vast steppes and development of mining, commerce, and manufacturing. This was the reasoning used and promoted in the manifesto. A more subtle reason hidden in the back-ground was the development of land in a region that was causing them military problems by way of raids by Mongols on the eastern frontiers. New settlements would provide a buffer zone between the eastern hordes and the Russians.

When the first manifesto failed, Catherine introduced a second one in 1763, which included privileges that made it more attractive. The primary ones included:

1. For those who could not afford it, travel expenses would be paid for by Russia.
2. Free land was granted for tillage in certain limited areas, primarily in the Volga River region.
3. Freedom to practice their religion (assumed to be Christian) and to build churches. They were not to proselytize their religion to the Russians, but they were free to encourage Moslems on their borders to convert.
4. Freedom from paying taxes and tributes for 30 years for those colonizing uncultivated territory; for 5 years for tradesmen in certain stipulated cities; and 10 years for all other cities.
5. Free lodging for the first 6 months.
6. Interest free loans to build houses and to purchase farm equipment and cattle, repayable within 10 years.
7. Right to internal government of separately established colonies.
8. Freedom from import duties on all goods brought with them.
9. Freedom from military service.
10. Other inducements for manufacture of goods.

With these new enticements in hand, Russian representatives went abroad along with their hired agents, and began to aggressively pursue immigrants. For various

reasons, non-Germans did not respond well. Some countries that allowed free publication of the invitation were already enjoying relative prosperity, and had their own overseas colonies. For example, an English speaking colony in America would be more attractive to an Englishman than would the strange and remote land of Russia. Moslems from Turkish lands foresaw enserfment by the Russians. The Hapsburgs in Austrian controlled lands were interested in maintaining their own settlement programs in Hungarian territory and forbade emigration. Similar situations existed in other parts of Europe, with the result that active promotion could only take place in free cities and states where such laws did not exist.

The inability of some of the German states to control emigration, combined with long standing suffering from widespread poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment brought on by feudal infighting, wars, religious persecution, and the general politics of the day combined to make the German migration as extensive as it was. The extent of this migration was so great (4000 families in 1767 alone) that further migration was forbidden by the Prussian Emperor Joseph II. Migration for the Volga effectively ended within a short time but not before at least 25,000 made their way to Russia over a period of about 4 years. Most of them were from Hesse and the southwest states, but nominally from other areas, as well. The original migration resulted in the establishment of 104 villages.

Most historians have accurately stated that this invitation was open to all foreigners. However, the emphasis on the Germanic involvement by several German authors has left many people with the impression that the connection between German born Catherine and the Germans of the Volga River region was particularly significant and important. In talking to some people, one almost gets the impression that Catherine the Great personally appeared at the door of their ancestor to invite them to Russia. Furthermore, the traditional story of her invitation has been inaccurately applied to Germans in Galicia, Congress Poland, Volhynia and even Prussia. Of these four, only Volhynia was under her rule, but there the Germans did not arrive in significant numbers till well after her death.

Here is an example of how such distortions occur, quoting from an online historical document:

“Much of this (territory in the Black Sea region) became Crown land upon which Catherine wished to settle industrious farmers, whose well kept fields might serve as models for the shiftless, nomadic tribes about them. Catherine had perhaps heard of the Mennonites and their work of reclamation in the swamps of the lower Vistula, through her generals who had spent several winters in eastern Prussia during the Seven Years War. At any rate, however that may be, it was in the above year (1786) that she held out liberal inducements through her special representative at Danzig, George van Trappe, to

the Mennonites of that region to migrate to her Crown lands in South Russia”.

The writer does qualify his statement by saying, “Catherine had *perhaps* heard of the Mennonites”. The casual reader conveniently forgets the word *perhaps*, and in relating the story to his friends, conveys some form of special relationship between Catherine and the Mennonites. The story has also become slanted by the author’s reference to the special representative, George van Trappe. He was indeed a representative, but he was no more special than the other agents of the Crown who were scampering about Europe soliciting new settlers for Russia.

The simple truth is that Catharine had left behind her German heritage, marrying into Russian royalty as a young teenager. She didn’t just invite Germans. What’s more, the Germans received no privileges that other foreigners did not receive, either at the time of migration or later on.

The migration of the Mennonites requires specific mention because they are somewhat unique within the German migration context. The earliest Mennonites in the east were actually Dutch, who used their diking skills to reclaim extensive arable land from the Vistula River delta region in Prussia. They began to arrive in the early 1500s. It did not take long for them to be mixed with Flemish, German, and to a lesser extent, Swiss Mennonites. In addition, some of Polish and Swedish origin became mixed into the migration. Because of their close ties to German traditions, and their use of the Plattdeutsch dialect, they tend to all get lumped together as Germans.

The pacifistic Mennonites from Prussia were especially attracted by the promise of freedom from service in the military - a privilege that did not carry a time limit with it. Thousands of them took the challenge to migrate to the east. The most extensive settlements were on the hilly west side of the Volga. To the northeast, on the meadow or eastside of the Volga, was another large group of settlements.

By 1816, there were no new settlements but the population had almost tripled, and new colonies became essential. By 1865, there were 170 German Volga villages with a population of over 259,000. Much of this growth was simply the result of large families, but there was ongoing new migration into the area by Mennonites, Lutherans and Catholics. By 1914, they had grown to over 500,000.

Part of the population problem was eased with the establishment of daughter colonies in the Caucasus region, which attracted significant numbers of Germans away from the Volga River area.

Finally, it should be pointed out that other isolated colonies were established – some by other religious denominations than the major ones, others at the request of certain isolated land-holding nobility.

Baltic Germans

Germans had a presence in the Baltic provinces of Russia hundreds of years before the Manifestos of Catherine the Great. However, they were primarily people with specialty trades or connections to nobility or politics. This presence stemmed from the control of the Estonian, Livonian, and Kurland provinces by the Teutonic Knights.

Under the Manifesto of 1763, several smaller groups of Germans were able to establish themselves in the Baltic regions under special contract with private individuals or government agencies. Over 300 families answered the initial calls, with a 1000 or so individuals flowing later. Most settled in villages, under private contract, in relatively close proximity to St. Petersburg.

The Black Sea Areas

In the next few years after the second Manifesto, Catherine the Great expanded Russian territory dramatically by conquering Turkish controlled land to the south and Polish land to the west. Catherine again wanted Germans to help in developing her new territories, especially around the north side of the Black Sea. This time she turned to the Mennonites of West Prussia.

Mennonites, being a pacifist denomination, were concerned by the political climate of Germany in the latter half of the 18th century. Frederick William II was demanding payment of heavy fines in lieu of military service and forcing the Mennonites to pay tithes to the established Lutheran Church on earlier land purchases from Lutherans. Mennonites were particularly attracted to Russia by the offer of freedom from military service. In 1789, 228 Mennonite families arrived at Chortiza on the Dnieper River. They had been preceded to the general region by a smaller group of Lutherans. The Mennonite migration continued into the area for another 80 years with thousands more families answering the call. Thousands of other Germans followed the Mennonites.

Lutherans and Catholics began flooding into the area, especially after the Napoleonic wars (1803 through 1810). They not only came from the southwest German states but also from West Prussia, Hungary, and Poland. Hundreds of German colonies sprang up in a semi-circle around Odessa, now in the Ukraine.

In 1804, the new Czar, Alexander I, extended another invitation to settlement in this region. However, his invitation was more specific than Catherine’s. He wanted people who were particularly skilled in agriculture and handicrafts – well-to-do farmers with skills in viticulture and management and breeding of livestock. While they

received some traveling assistance, they were also expected to bring along a significant worth of cash and goods.

Travel to the Black Sea region was by two primary routes. The first was the Danube River, where they traveled right past the Danuswaben settlements on their way to their new home. Travel was conducted on boats called Zillen. They were crammed with a crew of four or five boatmen, and as many goods and passengers as could fit, even if overcrowded.

The other route was overland. Travel started on the Danube, but where it turned south, the colonists took to wagons pulled by oxen to make their way through the Carpathian mountains and then east to the Black sea, much like the wagon trains crossed the American west during the 1800s.

I was not able to find a statistical population summary for this area, but it is safe to say that, like the Volga River area, the region around Odessa and the Crimean peninsula supported hundreds of German villages and hundreds of thousands of Germans.

Bessarabia

Another war with Turkey brought Russia additional territory in the region of Bessarabia, on the west side of the Black Sea. In the meantime, Napoleon was marching through Europe, taking over vast quantities of land, including central Poland. Many Germans who had moved there after the third partition were now feeling persecuted by the Poles who were placed in power. The Russians took advantage of this by inviting them to move further east. Some went to the Black Sea region, while others moved to Bessarabia.

By 1816, over 1500 German families had moved into this area, most of them from Poland. They initially founded twelve villages, many with French names that reflected battlefields where the Russians had joined the Germans in fighting the French – Arcis, Brienne, Fere Champoise, Parish, and so on.

Migration continued slowly but steadily, with population increases coming from Baden, Württemberg, Hesse, and Alsace. By 1842, over 2000 families had settled in 24 villages. Only 114 of these were Catholic. The rest were Protestant, mostly Lutherans. As with other areas, the German population here grew rapidly. To accommodate the growth, another 80 villages were established, and many left for opportunities elsewhere. After accounting for the emigration, about 65,000 Germans remained in Bessarabia in 1905.

Several smaller areas around the Black Sea also received significant migrations of Germans throughout the 19th century, for example, the Dubrudja region of

Romania south of Bessarabia. This area was settled primarily by Germans who left Bessarabia.

Another area is Bukovina, a small region to the northwest end of Bessarabia. This area received, under the encouragement of the Austrian Emperor, an ethnical mix of migrants, among them a significant number of Germans.

To the eastside of the Black Sea, there were German settlements in the south Caucasus, and by the end of the 19th century, even Kazakhstan and Siberia were receiving German colonists.

Galicia

Galicia was a region that experienced many different cultures and political control due to inept rulers. Its population was primarily a mixture of Polish and Ukrainian, with lesser numbers of Ruthenians, and of course, Germans. Control over the years bounded back and forth between Poland, Russia, and Austria. The area came under Austrian rule in the first partition of Poland in 1771 and remained so with some border variations until World War I.

German migration started early, at least in the western regions of Galicia, with an initial wave of soldiers, artisans, and traders arriving in the 14th and 15th centuries under the protection of Magdeburg city law. Most of these Germans were assimilated into the Polish culture by the 16th century.

The second wave of settlers came in at the invitation of Austrian Emperor Joseph II between about 1781 and 1785. Over 15,000 arrived, primarily with origins in the Pfalz (Palatinate) region of the German states. These were supplemented by another 6,000 after the turn of the century. Among the settlers were significant numbers of Swiss Mennonites, who later left for settlements in Russia. The majority of settlers in this period however, was Catholic or Lutheran. While these Germans, in general, retained their cultural distinctiveness, significant numbers of the Catholic Germans did assimilate into the Polish culture.

Although there was strong Austrian political influence in the early years, the Poles eventually won semi-autonomy, to the extent that Polish even became the official language. The Germans did well in this state of relative political stability, but for some reason they did not experience the same growth in numbers that other regions did. A 1910 census indicated only 65,000 Germans living in Galicia.

This situation is in large part explained by the fact that many Germans did not, for whatever reason, set down permanent roots in Galicia. Starting with the Swiss Mennonite movement to Russia, there was a relatively constant outflow of Germans from Galicia to many other

parts of eastern Europe. Some moved northward into southeastern Poland, others east to Volhynia, Bukowina, northern Bessarabia, and the Black Sea regions. Still others turned west to Slovakia, Hungary, and even to Bosnia.

Poland

As mentioned earlier, the northern region of what is now modern Poland had a very early Germanic presence. This presence intensified with a royal marriage between a Polish king and a German princess in 960 A.D. By 1150 A.D., the Catholic Church was beginning its mission through Poland, bringing with it German monks and farmers, who settled in villages under the jurisdiction of the church cloisters. Finally, in 1230 A.D., the Teutonic Knights were invited to help control the religious Prus tribe in the northern areas. The knights brought with them the German city law which we discussed earlier. In what is modern Poland, over 250 cities and towns were established with German city law.

The Catholics of Poland provided strong resistance against the Protestant Reformation of the early 1500s, which resulted in significant anti-German sentiment among the Poles. German culture and identity were virtually eliminated during this time, either by expulsion or assimilation. This situation, however, left the Polish nobility with fewer skilled people to develop their lands with the result that they once again slowly started to invite Germans back into their country to work for them. These Germans established the villages we discussed earlier.

To further understand the influx of Germans to this region, we need to briefly look at the partitions of Poland. A weak monarchy allowed Russia, under the rule of Catherine the Great, to gain significant territories from them. Both Prussia and Austria feared this Russian expansionism, and in 1772, they agreed to take equal portions of Poland. It was at this time that all of Volhynia was taken over by Russia.

Continuing political unrest in Poland led to a second partition in 1793, with each of the three powers taking more land. The western portion, which contained most of the Hollendries and Schulzendorf, was taken over by Prussia. Finally, in 1795, the remaining land was split, and Poland ceased to exist as a nation.

Prussia established a new form of German settlement called a colony. Although the settlers invited in by the Prussians did not enjoy the same privileges as their predecessors, they did receive free travel expenses and additional assistance in building their farms. Most of the immigrants in the early years were Swabians from Württemberg. Many of them were cloth makers, who were attracted to that industry in the region surrounding Lodz.

Napoleon marched through Europe, taking over central Poland and Warsaw in 1807. He established the semi-

autonomous state of the Duchy of Warsaw. Anti-German sentiment among the Poles became common, and resulted in the massive migration of Germans to Bessarabia, discussed earlier. However, in 1814, Napoleon's reign was cut short in defeat, and in 1815, the Congress of Vienna renewed the previous partition boundaries, with the exception that Prussia lost some of the central area to Russia. This central area included the Lodz region, where large numbers of Germans lived.

This central and eastern area of modern Poland was subject to Russian rule, but was allowed to operate in a semi-autonomous fashion. The anti-German sentiment was not as strong there, so Germans continued to migrate in significant numbers to this area, now known as Congress Poland or the Kingdom of Poland. In addition to the Swabians, large numbers of Kashubian, Pommeranian, and other Germans joined the migration.

The last part of Congress Poland to receive German settlers was in the east, the region around Lublin and Chelm where some 230 colonies were established between 1850 and 1890. Many of these Germans were actually transplants from central Poland.

Most of the Germans in Congress Poland were Lutheran. There were a few Mennonites along the Vistula River, west of Warsaw. There were also some Baptists and Moravians in some areas. The larger towns had significant numbers of Catholic Germans.

It is difficult to establish an accurate count of these migrants because, they moved around often and many, as we have seen, moved on to new areas within a generation. Oscar Kossmann provides a list showing about 360,000 German members of the Lutheran Church alone in 1913. He also provides a list of villages as compared to that of other authors and researchers, it appears that there may have been as many as 2,000 German settlements.

Volhynia

Volhynia is an area located in the northwestern part of modern Ukraine. We don't know why Catherine the Great did not promote this area as a settlement region for Germans. There were a few Germans in the cities, but none in the rural areas, when Russia claimed this area for itself in 1772. It was about another 25 years before Germans started to come into Volhynia with the establishment of several villages by a group of Mennonites. They only stayed for a few years before selling their villages to some Lutherans some-time prior to 1830, and then moving on to Black Sea areas.

The first large number of Germans to arrive in Volhynia came after the first Polish rebellion in 1831. Some 4000 or so moved in during the mid-1830s, almost all from Congress Poland. With some of them moving on to Podolia, Bessarabia, and other regions, the population remained fairly constant until after the second Polish

rebellion of 1863. Many Polish nobles, who had supported this rebellion, lost their land, and the contracts, which the Germans had to work on it, were no longer valid. The need for land in Congress Poland became acute.

At the same time, in 1862, the Russians released their serfs from a lifetime of servitude to the land. These serfs flocked to the cities, leaving Polish landlords in Volhynia with no one to work their land. Most of the other areas we have discussed were settled by Germans at the invitation of royalty. In contrast to that, the Germans in Volhynia were invited there by these landlords. They received no special privileges or freedoms in exchange for their move.

This combination of lack of land in Congress Poland and ample opportunity in Volhynia resulted in a mass exodus from the former to the latter. By 1900, census figures show some 200,000 Germans living in over 800 villages in Volhynia. It is estimated that around 75-80% of these had origins in Congress Poland.

Again, most of these migrants were Lutheran Germans with some Catholic, Baptist, Moravian, and Mennonite. The Lutheran parish of Zhitomir alone, not counting the parishes of Rozichische and Heimtal, shows over 2100 baptisms per year in the early 1880s.

Conclusion

While there were a few other small areas of German settlement in the east that we have not had the time to review, this about covers the story of the German migration to the east. However, I don't think it is fitting to end at this point. Most of these Germans had come to these strange lands with peaceful intentions, but their lives were to be dramatically altered by the impact of two world wars taking place within a 27 year span. I would like to close with a brief look at what happened to them during this time.

Many of our ancestors were fortunate to have left Europe for North or South America prior to World War I. They may have envisioned future problems in Russia and other parts of Europe, but more than likely, they were attracted by specific opportunities that were available in the Americas. Those who remained behind were not so fortunate.

A general policy of ruling powers, both during and after World War II, was to reestablish political boundaries on the basis of ethnic-linguistic boundaries. Unbelievably large numbers of people, German and others, were impacted by this policy. Some 16.3 million perished during World War II due to military, political or racial policies. Another 15.1 million were displaced between 1930 and 1943, while a further 31 million were displaced between 1944 and 1948 – a staggering total of 62.4 million people.

As for the Germans, the Nazis had decided that those who lived in conquered Slavic lands should be moved to new areas in northern Poland. More than ¾ of a million people were thus moved during World War II. But the biggest wartime migration back westward for these Germans was the 5.6 million, who left both the original and the resettlement areas as the Soviet army pushed westward, starting in 1844. That count does not include those who fled from Hungary after the Red Army invaded that country.

Of those who didn't make it out of the Soviet occupied zones, some 500,000, were forcibly deported eastward into the deeper regions of the Soviet Union. After the war, another 6.5 million Germans were repatriated out of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary to both western and Soviet occupied zones of Germany. Many of the displaced Germans made their way to the Americas after the war.

Finally, hundreds of thousands of Germans remained trapped in the Soviet Union, most of them deported to nether regions of Kazakhstan and Siberia, while many of them were forced into labor camps. A few managed to stay in their home towns, mostly as the result of intermarriage with local ethnic groups. The result of all this is that most of us ethnic Germans with east European roots still have cousins in many different areas of Germany, Poland, Hungary, and especially in areas of the former Soviet Union.

The German migrations to the east have come to an end. With the fall of communism, many are now making their way back to the west, once again migrating with hope for the future – a future filled with peace and an improved life for themselves and their descendants.

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*Germans From Congress Poland and Volhynia – A
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