

## When did the North Texas Chapter

**Form:** The North Texas Chapter is a new organization in Texas. The first gathering occurred in February 2019 in Allen, Texas where we continue to meet almost monthly.

Since February, we've become affiliated with American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (headquartered in Lincoln, NE) and Germans from Russia Heritage Society (headquartered in Bismarck, ND). We have also been recognized as a non-profit organization.

The chapter is approximately 50 members with most of the German areas in Russia represented: Black Sea, Bessarabia, Crimea, Caucasus, Volga. The chapter typically meets monthly September through April, and usually breaks during the summer, while occasionally holding a special summer event. The chapter often has speakers on various topics of interest to the German Russian community as well as planned genealogy workshops. The chapter publishes a newsletter which is sent to members four times per year.

Membership to AHSGR or GRHS is required to join the chapter and to receive the newsletter via email. The chapter library is now also forming and we hope to have materials for research very soon.



North Texas Chapter  
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Germans from Russia



## 2021 Membership Form

\_\_\_\_\_ New \_\_\_\_\_ Renew  
\_\_\_\_\_ Individual \_\_\_\_\_ Family

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip +4 \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

National Membership: \_\_\_\_\_ AHSGR  
\_\_\_\_\_ GRHS \_\_\_\_\_ Both AHSGR and GRHS

Please note that a membership directory might be provided to North Texas Chapter members that would include your Name, Address, Phone, and Email. If the chapter chooses to publish a membership directory:

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to have my name, address, phone and email in the published directory

\_\_\_\_\_ Please exclude my information from the published directory

Local dues are \$25.00 per year per household, plus membership in either AHSGR or GRHS.

AHSGR members please submit your dues directly to AHSGR

GRHS members please submit your dues directly to GRHS

Please make your check payable to North Texas Chapter and submit to:

Marilyn Steele  
752 Mission Court  
Allen, TX 75013



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**Who Are we:** The North Texas Chapter of Germans from Russia is an organization dedicated to preserving the Germans from Russia Heritage. The Germans from Russia are a unique people who emigrated from South Russia to the United States and Canada in the later part of the 19th Century. They settled in areas from Texas to North Dakota in the United States and also immigrated to Saskatchewan and Alberta in Canada. More information is available through the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) and the Germans from Russia Heritage Society (GRHS).

## A Brief History of the Germans from Russia

**How it all Began:** The story of the Germans from Russia had its beginning in 1763 while Catherine II, a former German princess of the principality of Anhalt-Zerbst, was Empress of Russia. The Czarina found herself in possession of large tracts of virgin land along the lower course of the Volga River in Russia. Catherine was determined to turn this region into productive, agricultural land as well as to populate the area as a protective barrier against the nomadic Asiatic tribes who inhabited the region.

On July 22, 1763, Catherine issued a manifesto inviting foreigners to settle in Russia, in the vast uncultivated lands of her domain. As an inducement to encourage emigration to Russia, the manifesto offered the following rights and privileges to incoming foreign settlers:

1. Free transportation to Russia.
2. The right to settle in segregated colonies.
3. Free land and the necessary tax-free loans to establish themselves.
4. Religious freedom and the right to build their own churches. (Implied in this was the right to establish their own schools).
5. Local self-government.
6. Exemption from military or civil service.
7. The right to leave Russia at any time.

Therefore, mentioned rights and privileges were guaranteed not only to incoming settlers but also to their descendants forever.

**Where did they live in Russia:** The first German-speaking colonists who responded to Catherine's manifesto were directed to lands along the Volga River in the years 1764 to 1767. Later, as Russia acquired the Ukrainian lands north of the Black Sea from Turkey, colonists were invited to settle in those areas. Similarly, when the Crimean Peninsula and Bessarabia were added to the Russian Empire at Turkey's expense, colonists settled there. These later emigrations occurred 40 to 50 years after the great Volga emigration. The Black Sea Germans responded to an invitation that was issued in 1803 by Alexander I, the grandson of Catherine. Since so many responded to the Czar's invitation, the Russian Crown feared that unsuitable immigrants might enter Russia. Accordingly, in 1804, a restrictive decree was issued that embodied the generous terms of Catherine II but required that all future immigrants must possess cash or goods worth at least 300 guilders, be skilled in farming or handicrafts, and be people with families. No single fortune hunters were desired.

The colonists of 1804-1818 had either a long and difficult overland journey or had to travel by river barge down the Danube. (Those in 1804 to 1812 could not use the Danube River because of the 1806-1812 Russo-Turkish War.) Those who traveled to Russia in 1817 went by boat down the Danube and, due to inexperience, many thousands died of disease and exposure. Approximately 300 mother colonies were founded throughout Russia during the settlement years and as the population grew, more acreage had to be acquired for the landless. Thus, numerous daughter colonies were founded. Eventually there were more than 3,000 ethnic settlements in Russia.

**Russia Breaks an Agreement:** In 1871, Czar Alexander II revoked the preferential rights and privileges given to the colonist settlers by the manifestoes of Catherine II and Alexander I. The colonists, as a result, were reduced to the level of the Russian peasants and under the same laws and obligations to which they were subject. In 1874, the colonists' sons were drafted into the Czar's army for the first time. The natural result was that the colonists were dismayed and angry, feeling that the Russian Crown was guilty of a breach of contract. As there was nothing they could do, their thoughts turned toward leaving Russia. But where could they go? To return to Germany did not enter their minds, for when their ancestors had left Germany years before, they had no intention ever to return to their native country.

**What should the Colonists Do:** During the summer of 1872, Ludwig Bette, a former colonist, who had led a party of 83 friends from the Black Sea to the United States in 1849, decided to visit relatives and friends in the Black Sea colonies. Noting the unrest and dissatisfaction among the colonists for having lost their privileged status, he extolled the virtue of the United States, urging emigration there. Shortly after his return to the United States, an emigration movement to the United States, Canada, and South America was set in motion which continued more or less unabatedly until the outbreak of World War I halted further emigration. Hesitating to make the long journey over the ocean, many colonists decided to stay in Russia in spite of the Russification policy. In actual number, perhaps more of the German colonists remained in Russia than emigrated to the countries of North America and South America.

**What is the Motive to Immigrate:** Much history including wars and oppression waged by the leaders that followed Czarina Catherine and turmoil within Russia, motivated many to immigrate to North and South America. Those in North America settled from Kansas to North Dakota and into Colorado. Descendants of Germans from Russia can also be found in other states including Ohio, Wisconsin, Washington and California. Others did stay in Russia and an estimated two million of German ethnic origin remain in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

### Requirements of the USA to new Settlers:

Because of the requirements of the U.S. Homestead Act of 1862, the German-Russians who took up homesteads in the United States were required to live on their 160-acre farms. They could not live in villages or colonies as they had in Russia. Many Volga Germans settled in cities in the Middle West of the United States, while the Black Sea Germans acquired land and homesteaded in Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas. Others settled in western Canada by purchase and/or homesteading.

The Volga Germans became closely associated with the sugar beet industry in Colorado and western Nebraska, while most Black Sea Germans became wheat growers in the Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas and in Canada; some later became orchard and grape growers in California. Today descendants of those early Germans from Russia are now living in **Texas**, Colorado, California, Kansas, Nebraska, Michigan, Illinois, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Washington, as well as Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan in western Canada.

By 1920, it was estimated that 116,539 German Russians were in the United States. The largest concentration was in North Dakota, where some 70,000 lived in 1920, coming from the Black Sea region and Bessarabia emigrated from Russia to South America.

**Not Everyone wanted to Leave:** A large number of German Russians, descendants of those who elected to remain in Russia, still live in the former Soviet Union. The census of 1959 counted over 1,600,000 Germans living in the Soviet Union and that number grew to 2,300,000 by 1983.



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