

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

In tracing my ancestry, I need to go back to the Eighteenth Century. The disastrous Seven Years' War from 1756 to 1763 devastated much of the German land under Frederick the Great, King of Prussia (later named Germany). Widespread poverty and disappointment resulted. The turbulence and conflict precipitated the vast exodus of Germans who wanted to find relief from the tribulations in their homeland. They were willing to risk all and wander out into strange new worlds to seek a stable place where they could thrive and raise their families.

Catherine II, originally from Prussia, married Russian Grand Duke Peter III, grandson of Peter the Great. In July 1762, she was declared Empress of Russia. She became known as Catherine the Great and reigned over her newly adopted country until 1796. In December 1762, she issued her first manifesto for immigration. Her goal was to bring western culture and industry to Russia, and what better source was there than the industrious peasants of her native land, Germany.

Since the Seven Years' War had not yet ended, no foreigners responded to her plea. Undaunted, in July 1763, she proclaimed her second manifesto to all foreigners,

regardless of nationality and religion. To induce immigration to the uninhabited regions of Russia, she made many promises, some of which were: Free practice of religion; settlers would not be liable to serve in the military; free transportation to Russia, plus much more.

The story which was to unfold eventually supplied Russia with a German population of around two million, including villages on the Volga, along the Black Sea coast in Odessa, Bessarabia, Volhynia, the Crimea and elsewhere on the Russian land. They were all united in a common goal—the search for new land and freedom.

My ancestors followed Catherine's call and settled in the region of Volhynia in Russia.

The German settlers endured many deprivations and severe hardships. They had been promised a paradise and what awaited them was barren wasteland with the promised buildings nowhere in sight. In many instances what greeted them was a small bit of woods and withered grass. They reacted as they knew they must. They put their trust in God and went to work.

The colonists not only had to deal with the barrenness, sickness and famine in this strange new land, but they were also faced with the dangers of robber bands that attacked the villages. Eventually they prospered, despite the many setbacks that confronted them. They preserved their customs and language and did not become absorbed in the surrounding population. They intermarried only with Germans. They became master farmers and eventually the vast steppes became a fruitful region.

After 1855, after the death of Catherine the Great and her grandson Czar Alexander I, things changed under Czar Alexander II. Many of the special privileges

were taken away. Trouble continued under Czar Alexander III when the colonists were threatened with confiscation of their property and deportation. In addition, the real blow to their security was when the proclamation was issued in January 1874 that changed the military service. The law now established compulsory military service for all classes.

With the realization that they could no longer live in Russia in the manner they preferred, many colonists began to search for a new country and home.

(Some of the above excerpted from “Why you are a German from Russia” from the holdings of the American Historical Society of German from Russia in Lincoln, Nebraska)



around 1900

My Grandparents Heinrich and Luise Krebs

**What was the reason for our Ancestors left their homeland
to a strange new Land to start over?**

Translated from German 11.2 1997

Twenty thousand people left Wuertenberg in 1828-1834.

The people in all Germany were going through a very hard time. A George Michael Dorsch of Gnadental wrote in his diary in 1817. In Wuertenberg, a law was past to help the poor. We were taxed according to wealth and property we owned. The taxes kept going up and up. We could not keep up with the payments of taxes. People were dyeing of hunger. The winter of 1829 arrived early so that seed that was planted didn't come up. We had a winter like never before. The Vineyards were frozen.

A letter written in 1838 from Hahnweiler and sent to Gnadental, Russia. June 16. 1838
to his brother-in law. The following is just part of his letter.

The people of Hahnweiler would like to come to Russia. Please tell us the truth how things are over there. Hopefully, not like it is over here. We cannot work hard and long enough to pay for the taxes. City taxes and Kings taxes. We do not have enough for food and clothes for our families. We could work day and night and still it wouldn't be enough. So I am sick of living like that.

In Germany, around the 1800, the people suffered terribly. Germany was divided up in small provinces headed by dukes and princes. They made their own laws, taxing the people. At that time much of Germany was ruled by France taken by the Napoleon war.

A France General even wrote that he was ashamed of his soldiers mistreating the German people so badly. Many of the princes and dukes went along with France in enslaving the

German people. They taxes their people so much in order for them to live in high standards of luxury.

In another letter it stets that many Princes and Dukes of Germany were mistreating, tormenting, sucking out the lives of the people.

We cannot overlook another factor for the exodus of the German people and that was for religious reasons. People began leaving Germany in 1803 , heading to north America. In 1809 the state took over all the church's money, which caused great turmoil among the people. Ministers were telling the congregation to leave the church. Many did and other denominations were started. The state ordered that no other private religious services were aloud - only those who held open church meetings. This made matters even worse - the people felt very betrayed.

It is hard to say the reasons the German people left. The depressing Napoleon Wars and the downhill trend of the economy were just to much and certainly contributed to so many to leave their beloved homeland.

Russia had its reasons to entice' the German people to settle there. The Russians likewise were fighting many Wars at that time. They took over Turkey, Poland, Sweden. Russia reached from the north to the Baltic Sea and south to the Black Sea. Much of Russia was barren and sparsely populated. So the call to the West was instigated.



Kaiser (Emperor) Wilhelm II & Auguste Victoria



Kaiserin August Victoria & Tochter(Daughter) Victoria Luise



Paul von Hindenburg

German Soldiers in WW I
Deutsche Soldaten im Ersten Welt Krieg



Assaph Krebs



Emil Riske



Heinrich's brother Johnath Krebs
Johnath in the Kaiser Uniform



Johnath and wife Martha