

Before They Left Germany

by Verna Goral. This article appeared in the Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia #14 (Winter 1991) 4: 15-22. Copyright 1991 by AHSGR. Reprinted with permission.

History records that in German lands in the late 1700's conditions were ripe for mass migrations of an impoverished, oppressed people. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that Germans in the tens of thousands chose to uproot and undertake lengthy, difficult journeys to an unknown foreign frontier. That their descendants a century later repeated the risks to settle and multiply in the United States, Canada, and South America doubles the reason to study how it all began.

From the earliest times a dual nature in the German character revealed itself. Ancient and modern accounts emphasize the fierce and efficient German warrior. On the other hand, reports describe a gentle and sentimental people who even in the pre-Christian era evinced a love of nature and beauty, a respect for noble qualities and a longing for peace. The legendary Siegfried epitomizes this German character at its worst and its best.

Earlier than Siegfried, Germanic tribes filtered southward from their Baltic homeland in the first millennium B.C. and reached southern Germany by 100 B.C. Although Julius Caesar defeated a number of these tribes in 55 and 53 B.C., most of them resisted Roman domination, halting Rome's expansion north of the Rhine by 9 A.D. By the end of the fourth century, both Germans to the south and Romans were converted to Christianity, and German troops and commanders dominated the Roman armies.

There followed centuries of comparative anarchy in German lands, when the princes, including the one named by the seven electors to be Holy Roman Emperor, battled - or aligned with - the Pope in power struggles over the lands.

Expansion of territory and some efforts at unity marked the reigns of rulers like Charlemagne (Charles the Great to the Germans) who was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome in 800 by Pope Leo III. But the Empire's loose confederate ties and the introduction of feudalism joined to break up imperial power and pass the pieces to the numerous military landowners.

Occasionally the Empire grew stronger and challenged the political power of the papacy. At length Roman Catholicism also met religious opposition.

Martin Luther, after posting his Ninety-Five Theses on the university church door at Wittenberg in 1517, steered clear of politics and social questions. "Nobody should think he could change the world, which has always been evil" (Kohn, 136).

But then Luther realized that the supremacy of the Pope and the Catholic Emperor could be challenged only by the German princes, and he sought their help. He knew that at least some of them would support him and embrace Protestantism not out of religious conviction but because it provided a means of stabilizing their political power.

Meanwhile, for the peasant, in whom he saw the work of the devil, Luther preached the importance of the inner life and faith. His command was to obey the princes. No other political principle was more firmly rooted in his thought than that of absolute obedience to authority. This emphasis on obedience was reaffirmed 200 years later in the militarism of the Prussian kings.

At times the requirement of obedience became intolerable to the Germany peasants. In their 1522 and 1524 revolts, they presented articles of reform to their masters, asking to choose their own pastors; for abolition of vassalage dues except church tithes; the right to hunt, fish, and cut forest wood; rent reform; reform in the administration of justice and application of the laws; and a restoration of communal property illegally taken (Morris, 235).

But the revolts lacked strong leadership and were too violent and vengeful. Though the peasants sought the aid and sympathies of Luther, he chose not to support them. A Swabian league army led by George Truchsess of Waldburg overwhelmed the peasants in a bloody defeat that was followed by wholesale executions - a massacre in which perhaps 100,000 peasants died. The survivors returned to deeper servitude than before.

That servitude was to a class of nobles whose supremacy was entrenched in the countryside. The peasant population - scattered, unprotected, unsophisticated, totally absorbed in survival - offered far less resistance to control than the townspeople, or burghers [Bürger]. By 1660 the nobles' hold tightened as shrinking population growth brought diminishing agricultural profits. Landowners increased pressure upon the peasants, who found their rights, independence, and standards of living restricted by the appetites of their masters.

When agricultural profits recovered in the eighteenth century, the peasantry regained none of the lost ground. The growing power of the large landlords was curbed eventually by government intervention. But government aimed,

sadly, toward a redistribution of the peasant's burden in the state's favor rather than a reduction of its total weight. Most peasants suffered from these circumstances, but as usual the serfs suffered the most of all.

There is easily a confusion of terms when we consider "serfs" and "peasants". One might say that all serfs were peasants, but not all peasants were serfs. Serfs had one characteristic in common, owing dues and services to and being subject to the jurisdiction of some overlord by virtue of their birth or of holding land over which an overlord had rights. Such lowborn persons were not freed from the last vestiges of serfdom until after the Revolution of 1848.

A third word applied to the tiller of the soil in a later age - farmer - is not used here at all.

In 1660 half the peasants in Europe were serfs, the result of massive expansion of serfdom east of the Elbe River at the same time it was rapidly declining in the west. In the Rhineland and the west generally, most peasants were free men, not legally bound to someone else's soil. Yet this did not diminish economic bondage to the large proprietors, who collected rent and dues in kind - usually a few days of labor a year. Punishment meant added days of labor.

But to the east, nobles in Brandenburg, Pomerania, East Prussia, and Silesia moved from feudal tenancy, Grundherrschaft, toward estate ownership, Gutsherrschaft (Gershoy, 34). If, to make ends meet, a peasant borrowed but then fell into default, the lord foreclosed, seized his goods, and confiscated his lands. The nobles found this routine a cheap way to build estates. Especially along the Baltic, most landholding peasants became tenants or landless entirely.

There were no checks on the proprietor: he could add to his vast prerogatives, such as demanding new labor services from adults and minors. Another right permitted the landowner was Gerichtsherrschaft, the right to jurisdiction over his serfs within his own court.

Yet in East Prussia there were groups of privileged serfs who were called the K lmer and held land valued up to 20,000 taler; their sons served in the Prussian army as non-commissioned officers. The K lmer were virtually free landowners; they comprised 26 percent of the total peasantry. Some owed light dues and services. Still, they were part of the system known as Erbuntertanigkeit or hereditary subjection - serfdom (Behrens, 140).

Such peasants could not move without permission, or their lord might pursue them; it was a criminal offense for neighbors to shelter them. They could not marry without permission; their children could learn a trade or craft only with the lord's permission; at twenty-four years they were assigned to a portion of the estate, but when there was no more land, they had to go into domestic service. Except for the one boy and one girl who could stay with the parents, all children owed five years' domestic service - the most conspicuous and disliked Gesindezwangsdienst.

Even more discouraging, dues and labor sometimes were exacted by lords who did not own the land. The boss's monopolies of essential services such as milling and wine pressing were common everywhere, as were the dues in cash or in kind that were enforced in the lord's own courts.

Like the master he served, under Erbuntertanigkeit a serf could be prosperous or destitute; he could hold a small or a sizable piece of land on a hereditary basis for a period of years or months, or be subject to summary eviction. Often he held only a small plot of garden or no land at all.

Finally, those with land owed tithes to the church. In the end, the cultivators were left with less than a tenth of their product for their own use. Whether bound to the land or to the master, whether called peasant or serf, the result was the same.

According to some observers, this oppressed creature was coarse, cunning, stupid, quarrelsome, sometimes dishonest, often alcoholic. He was a product of poverty, ignorance, and life-sapping labor. He was superstitious, suspicious of his fellows and the demands of his master. His one consolation after the scourge of a failed harvest or the losses of an epidemic came through the preacher or priest. There were no healers for him, and the occasional teacher was more than likely a discharged veteran.

Because the peasant was inarticulate, the state of his mind was obscure. A Breslau professor, Christian Garve, described the t ckisch peasant, one showing a peculiar kind of obstinacy against authority, whereby he would appear totally deaf to any suggestions made by his master. Lawyers wondered at his stubbornness in clinging to preposterous ideas: was it blindness, or deliberate malice (Behrens, 149)?

As these German peoples moved out of the early shadows of history, their grinding existence changed little but was profoundly complicated in the 1600's and 1700's but the growth of militarism and the wars that raged over their lands.

Religious strife following the Reformation led to the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), in which armies marched across German lands from Bohemia to Holland. Out of this fighting grew the idea of war to support war. As deadly as the new concept was, so were the losses.

As a result of the Thirty Years' War, Europe's population fell from sixteen million to four million. More specifically, the German town of Magdeburg, with 20,000 to 26,000 people in 1618 counted only 1,464 in 1644. Brandenburg had 1,144 houses in 1618 but only 527 in 1648. Frankfurt-on-the-Oder had 13,000 people in 1618 but just over 1,000 in 1653. In the years following the war, famine and epidemics took more people; over one-third of the population of East Prussia died 1709-1710 (Behrens, 122).

One hundred years after the conclusion of this war, Friedrich the Great insisted that Prussia still had not fully recovered. But before his reign, at a time when German nobles were in a fever to copy the French ways of the court of Louis XIV, his father, Friedrich Wilhelm I, stripped the Prussian court of luxury. He demanded of himself and his subjects a regimen of order, discipline, and work. "Salvation belongs to the Lord," he proclaimed, "everything else is my business." With that he began to build a military state (Walbank, 2:90).

The Brandenburg-Prussian Army at the close of the Northern War of 1655-1660 against Sweden was 12,000 strong. In the 1680's, the numbers were 25,000 to 30,000. From 1713 to 1740 Friedrich Wilhelm I fought no wars, but his armies numbered 83,000 men. At Friedrich the Great's death in 1786, no shots had been fired for 23 years, but his armies totaled 190,000 men, nearly the same as those of France which had double the population (Doyle, 242).

Mercenaries numbered at least half the Prussian Army's strength. In 1751, of 133,000 in the military, 83,000 were volunteer mercenaries. Recruitment of these soldiers was easiest in poor or mountainous areas or overpopulated small states of Germany. Additionally, each of Prussia's cantons had to make up the numbers of a given military unit where volunteers were lacking.

In all, the armies included rootless mercenaries, jobless volunteers, pressed vagrants and criminals, and defenseless conscripts. The men's commitment and morale were vividly reflected in an astronomical rate of desertion. Between 1713 and 1740, the Prussian Army had over 30,000 deserters - and almost three times that many during the Seven Years' War (Doyle, 243).

In spite of the wholesale desertions, wherever there were no police forces, particularly during lulls in military engagements, the army became the guarantor of public order in numerous ways. It was employed to protect against peasant uprisings, to protect grain convoys, and to coerce recalcitrant subjects by billeting. Billeting was harsh on any chosen host family: compelled to discipline while on duty, soldiers were brutal and unruly at other times. And the costs of billeting were staggering.

Throughout the Seven Years' War [1745-1763], the story of Friedrich and his army is one of incessant battles against frightful odds. At that time all Europe was against him: Austria, France, Russia, and Sweden surrounded him. England alone, finally, was with him, mainly through her financial aid.

Friedrich fought the Seven Years' War by night marches, lightning thrusts, and deceptive maneuvers; his was a strategy of exhaustion. But his and others' losses were great: 9,000 French and Austrians killed, wounded, and captured in the one-half hour battle at Rossbach; 10,000 Austrians at Liegnitz; 5,000 Prussians and 12,000 Austrians in the three-hour battle at Leuthen; 21,000 Russians at Zorndorf in Brandenburg; 18,000 Prussians at Kunersdorf. In the passes of Bohemia, Friedrich lost 20,000 taken captive (Morris, 310).

When his power was at its lowest ebb in early 1762, his great enemy, the Russian Empress Elizabeth, died. Her heir, Peter III, a great admirer of Friedrich, induced Sweden to quit the war. Friedrich won further engagements against Austrian forces and for the second time in the war recovered Silesia. At last he and Austria's Empress, Maria Theresa, signed a peace treaty at Hubertusburg (Events, 1618).

Just as Saxony, Brandenburg, Pomerania, and Silesia had suffered greatly in the war, so did Hesse: the cities of Kassel and Marburg were captured and regained five times. Handicapped also by backward and greedy princes, Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Darmstadt had lost 17,000 men hired by England to fight in the American colonies' version of the Seven Years' War - the French and Indian War.

At the end a historian wrote, "Seldom have so much blood and treasure been spent on the acquisition of a territory of comparable size" (Ogg, 176).

Although Prussia now joined the ranks of the great powers, Friedrich described his land at the end of the war as resembling "a man with many wounds who has lost so much blood that he is on the point of death." He compared the ravages and devastation to those of the Thirty Years' War. He estimated that he lost 300,000 men in his campaigns; the civilian population was reduced perhaps by one-third (Ogg, 217).

The years following the war saw conditions for the peasant gradually worsen. No region in German lands was spared: Holstein, Göttingen, Chemnitz, Salzburg, Württemberg. Bavaria was infested with robbers. In the Palatinate

one out of twenty persons was a beggar, and one out of the was a domestic, a groom, or other servant. A count of Berlin's population of 142,000 in 1798 showed 4,492 lackeys and 11,443 female domestics (Brunschwig, 107).

The peace in Prussia following the war was a shaky peace, for France and Spain began challenging Friedrich at once. Austria continued small aggressions. Europe now had to face the dynamic expansionist program of Russia. Prussia stiffened, and observers watched a growing despotism there: "The military spirit has spread from Berlin into all German lands and has taken hold of all minds and all governments wherever and as far as it could" (Behrens, 36).

While Friedrich continued to maintain his large army, he now looked also to increased efficiency in governing his lands. Just as he admired the French intellectuals, Friedrich had copied the efficient French *regie*, a centrally directed excise-collection body, to support his war state. Now public revenues soared; smuggling declined. Of 14,000 public officials in Prussia by 1789, most were revenue officers.

Outsiders like John Quincy Adams admired his administration. A French writer penned, "Everything is done with the utmost economy ... everything turns on economy, legality and moderation" (Behrens, 84).

At the fringe of legality and moderation, Friedrich introduced a novel form of the lottery, which by 1776 realized 40,000 taler annually in revenue. Lottery resources were allocated to the upkeep of the army.

The press joined the intellectuals in a call for an end to the lotteries. Eventually the Duke of Württemberg renounced the game, in return for more compensation from his loyal subjects. The Palatinate, Saxony, Hesse-Kassel, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, Hildesheim, and Fulda abolished the lottery between 1780 and 1786; yet it continued in other places.

Friedrich's artificially financed, top-heavy state did not survive the test of time. With its collapse at the tip of Napoleon's boot in 1806, there was disintegration of the whole structure. Once again armies marched and plundered. Once again the peasant was plunged into misery.

As the Seven Years' War ended and the German peoples set about restoring their lands, several inter-related conditions which we shall examine affected their lives: servitude, public health, the economy, crime, and agriculture.

As always, the peasants could give only inadequate attention to their own land. They had to neglect their crops at the most crucial times; the overlord's work took priority.

But gradually from the 1760's there formed in politics, economics, and philosophy a growing condemnation of serfdom. Friedrich formally abolished serfdom in Pomerania in 1763 and after 1772 extended this abolition to newly annexed West Prussia. But nothing was done to enforce the new laws.

Elsewhere, a few small German states such as Baden and Mainz brought about reforms inspired by the political and economic discussions of the times. In the 1770's an education minister wrote to the elector of Mainz, "It is the duty of every honest sovereign to protect his people against beggary and to bring wealth and prosperity to his country He is prince for this reason, to make his people happy" (Doyle, 282).

Still the peasants' lot worsened. A strong anti-abolitionist mood among the nobles sprang up in 1789 when they received reports on the French Revolution. In fear that revolution would spread to their lands, the nobles closed ranks with their rulers and maintained a strong hold on their peasants.

Under this tight control, the economic hierarchy among the peasants was that of the landed and the landless. Among those with land, an additional clear division was between those with enough land to survive natural calamities and those without.

Well-to-do peasants owned solid, well-furnished homes with wooden floors and glass windows. The men wore homespuns and leather shoes, the women calicoes and striped cottons.

The poor, on the other hand, lived in smoky, thatched-roof hovels with no windows or floors. They had only the most necessary tools, utensils, and furniture. They could not afford to eat meat; their bread was made of barley, maize, and chestnuts, as their wheat and rye went for dues. Or, like the burghers, they bought their bread, and thus were badly affected by rises in price. As primary producers, they could see the middleman's profit. The rising price of food more than any other cause would bring about the rare - and always futile - revolt.

Landless peasant laborers might marry and raise a first child in economic success. Raising a second was difficult, and a third often meant economic ruin. However, landed peasants had large families in the hope for many strong sons to help cultivate the family plots. In some areas the killing or abandonment of female children was a well-established practice. In his *Testament Politique*, 1752, Friedrich planned orphanages for every large Prussian town in order to diminish this crime of infanticide (Ogg, 216).

The peasantry was not the only class for whom economic fortune ebbed and flowed. In the Rhineland and other south and west German lands, where the soil was of poor quality, where there was no increase in feudal dues during periods of population growth, some nobles, too, were impoverished. Many became absentee landlords as they sought to improve their situations in careers with princes. But east of the Elbe the nobles kept their prestige and hung on to their traditional status, with help from the king.

When land of impoverished peasants came on the market in Prussia, Friedrich resisted the rush of aspiring burghers to buy it, resisted land ownership by non-nobles. He sought also to keep the nobles from buying peasant land and the peasants from buying the land of the nobility. His policy tended to solidify class structure in his state.

Another of Friedrich's policies extended beyond Prussian borders. On the subject of population, some writers like Montesquieu had emphasized that danger to a state's economy lay in under-population. Friedrich was one of the European monarchs who subscribed to this theory and sought immigrants to their lands. A declining death rate hastened repopulation as much as planned immigrations and an increasing birthrate. The plague of 1760 was gone due to improvements in quarantine practices and the disappearance of the black rat with its infection-bearing fleas.

Periodic disasters still occurred, however. After the Seven Years' War, thousands perished from starvation, particularly in Saxony and Bohemia. During that was, also, armies on the march left typhus and malaria behind them. Many thousands of German peasants died of the diseases.

Sickness was just one more difficulty added to the calamitous economic conditions that most peasants faced. Many had migrated into the towns as a response to a burgeoning demand for urban labor. This movement accelerated in the 1770's as the result of a second employment factor, an oversupply of day workers in the fields and concomitant decline in real wages. Eventually the towns could not absorb the growing numbers of newcomers. The result was a spectacular rise in the number of town paupers.

In the towns and in the countryside, the people turned to meager resources, deception, and crime to survive. Their tax evasion method most often was to appear poorer than they were in order to be under-assessed. They took paid daily work; they smuggled; at the worst they became vagrants, beggars, or robbers.

In Thuringia gangs of ten to twenty formed, burned peasants' fences to cook the vegetables they stole from peasant gardens and the meat they had extorted. The peasant was forced to house and feed the beggars threatening him as well as the soldiers protecting him.

Vagrancy increased in Prussia after Friedrich's death, especially in the provinces where population growth was the greatest. In 1787 nearly five percent of the Palatine population was described as beggars. Vagrancy was recorded in Fulda, Saxe-Coburg, and Hannover. The problem of the roaming criminal bands was compounded by the disunity of Germany in its scores of small states. Prisons and workhouses proliferated. The Berlin workhouse, founded in 1774 by Friedrich, held voluntary inmates, soldiers on leave, beggars, ex-convicts, debauchees, and even children. In 1785, of 1,250 inmates, 46 were small boys and 71 were small girls. Workhouses were similar at Halle, Augsburg, Kassel, Hanau, Erlangen, Würzburg, Fürth, Göttingen, Erfurt - in fact, most German towns (Brunschwig, 111).

Finally, we look at one more component of German life - agriculture. From 1660 to 1800 the economy throughout Europe was overwhelmingly agricultural. Early in this period, agricultural inertia was a basic economic fact. The system was slow and primitive. Gradually the people developed more efficient methods of farming. They developed more efficient supplying from farther afield and cultivated high-yield staples such as maize and potatoes. [*Editor note: this previous sentence does not make sense ... but is the way the article was printed.*] A change of climate to a warmer, drier pattern of summers resulted in improved grain yields.

But after 1763 the thrust in Prussia was to change the system itself. However, the ending of open-field farming, the enclosure of arable and common land, and the introduction of convertible agriculture were resisted most tenaciously by the peasants. The nobles, moreover, were reluctant to plow their profits back into the land or spend money for improvements.

Declining productivity again complicated the Prussian people's problems. In western Europe between 1500 and 1800, a good year's grain crop was expected to yield six- or seven-fold for every seed sown. In advanced western areas the ratio was well over ten-to-one by the late 1700's. In the east, however, the ratio remained just over four-to-one (Doyle, 17).

The problems of land and production affected the peasant most directly. For the small land owner, the free peasant, bad laws of inheritance persisted and meant that heirs received plots too small for bare subsistence, let alone profit. Understandably, people were unwilling to deprive some of their dependents so that only one inherited land.

With smaller lots becoming the rule and a crop failure occurring in 1770, the potato moved from the garden to the field (Brunschwig, 60). By the end of the century, potatoes replaced cereals as the basic diet staple in many German lands. Potatoes meant larger crops per acre than grains; they sustained a greater population; their nutritional value was good.

Yet potatoes, too, exhausted the soil and encouraged the further subdivision of holdings. In bulk, potatoes tended to rot, so that they were not easy to transport to distant markets. And so in the long run, the growing of potatoes reinforced subsistence farming among the peasantry (Doyle, 32).

Hardships of eking out a living, mingled with the adversities during and after the war, left the people little in the way of creature comforts and pleasures. Certainly they had no energy or reason to develop loyalties beyond those to family, church, and in a way, their masters. Only the rulers, nobility, and others of privilege and education might begin to toy with the subtleties of unfamiliar concepts such as patriotism - loyalty to and voluntary support and defense of one's country.

In considering the existence of nationalistic zeal among the German peoples, we look back to the Middle Ages when they stood together, feeling linked not as Germans, but as heirs of the Holy Roman Empire. No national nomenclature existed then. The word Deutsch was used first in the eight and ninth centuries to designate the German language. By the eleventh century the term began to designate the people speaking the language and their land, but never with reference to a national consciousness. The first flickering of a joint interest among the masses might be said to have arisen at the time of the German peasant revolts.

But the Reformation in German lands stifled a growth in nationalism for 300 years, until the 1800's. An exception to this generality lay in Luther's translation of the Bible. His work by its use of the German language in a reformer's preference to Latin, had an indirect influence upon the growth of a German national consciousness.

Certainly in Friedrich's Prussia during the Seven Years' War, the people could not have felt a strong patriotism, for they welcomed Russian occupation. Prussian militarism, visible everywhere, was universally hated. An antipathy to the Prussian way of life was expressed over all the German lands (Kohn, 364). At the time of the migrations to Russia, then, there was no allegiance to nation, no patriotic attachment holding German back.

Decades earlier people had moved on with no thought of loyalty to place but rather in response to economic and religious needs. The Great Elector, Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia, after the Thirty Years' War sought to restore his devastated lands and repopulate the country by attracting foreign immigrants. He took in 15,000 Protestants expelled by Salzburg. Of about 200,000 Huguenots expelled from France, 30,000 immigrated into Germany and two-thirds of these into Prussia. By the end of the 1600's, Huguenots formed sixteen percent of the Prussian population.

A century later Friedrich II annoyed his neighbors by his vigorous policy of attracting immigrants. He offered subsidies and many privileges: money to discharge their debts in their former country or to pay officials there for permission to leave; money for the journey; free lodging in towns until work was allocated to them; timber to build houses; implements, seed, animals if they went to the country; tax exemptions and freedom from military service for varying periods up to three generations. Thus 250,000 to 300,000 immigrants, mostly German speaking settled in Prussia between 1740 and 1786.

The Prussian embassies abroad became labor exchanges. Transit camps were set up at Hamburg and Frankfurt am Main. After Friedrich invaded and subdued Saxony, many of its citizens were brought into Prussia by force. Numbers entering from Saxony and Bohemia in the early 1770's totaled 40,000. Prussia more than doubled its population in just 60 years, between the 1740's and the early 1800's, from 2,240,000 to 5,430,000 (Behrens, 123).

Leaders of the small German states viewed emigration of their peoples as a disaster. The movement was especially widespread in the west and south. Here the population was growing faster than available resources; the only thing was to try one's luck elsewhere. The peasant was powerless to meet the growing demand of nobles corrupted by luxury. The taste for adventure with prospects of sudden wealth and happiness induced the boldest to leave before they were completely ruined. The princes' prohibitions could not deter them, despite threatened penalties; threats were in vain against those who had nothing to lose" (Brunschwig, 103).

In Russia Catherine II's predecessor, Empress Elizabeth, had considered colonizing desert areas and had invited Serbs to immigrate (Ogg, 200). Her plans to next invite German colonization were put into effect by Catherine with the result that by 1769 over 100 colonies peopled by about 25,000 to 27,000 inhabitants were established, mainly along the middle Volga.

Catherine's immigration policy for Russia was consistent with the general principles then in practice throughout Europe. In effect, the monarchs with their grandiose offers were competing with one another for prospective immigrants.

In the late 1700's, as Germans left their homes and made the difficult journeys to Russia, Hungary, or to East Prussia, they said upon questioning that too many people were in the Palatinate, Westerwald, Switzerland, Lorraine (Brunschwig, 104). Other reasons for leaving abound in emigration records: "Scarcity of food, hard times, lack of a livelihood, poor crops, high taxes"; "can't make a living from my trade"; "... hoping for better luck"; "... opportunity to improve my livelihood" (Stumpp, 27).

In Hesse there was always damage caused to crops by wild game, low productivity of the soil, high rents, requisitioned labor service, deep debt, as well as the omnipresent high taxes. The Mennonites in West Prussia spoke repeatedly of a lack of land.

Some observers have suggested that the people often gave several general reasons or did not state their real motives for moving. Such factors as fear of officialdom; a need for secrecy based on legal, familial, or social considerations; the ease of copying others' reasons; or the inability to sort through matters no doubt affected the reasons given for emigrations. With some, true reasons might have been too esoteric or mystical to verbalize. Particularly in religious bodies in the early 1800's, a shared longing to go to the East, to the land of refuge and Biblical centering, induced entire groups to make the move to Russia.

In part, the exodus from German lands was a movement of youth and opportunity. Young couples hurried to the places they believed offered them a promising start in a life together. Between May 1763 and August 1776, 2,365 colonists arrived at Rosslau in Saxony for the trip to Russia. Of these, 215 couples married at the area churches and then made the trip. From 1764 to 1767, 238 couples married in Lübeck churches before making the journey. In 1766 in Büdingen, Hesse, 375 couples wed and moved on to Russia (Events, 21).

Another element in the motivation toward migration was the awareness that Germans had gone to Russia before. Since the time of Peter the Great, technicians, scientists, merchants, and military men had filtered into the Russian government and army. They had established German communities in cities like Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Odessa.

When Shuvalov founded the first Russian university in Moscow in 1755, most of the professors had to be brought from Germany. As for the Russian rulers themselves, between 1700 and 1909 twenty-six Russian emperors and empresses or their offspring married spouses of German origin.

Further understanding of the migration lies in a consideration of the German character. The natural inclination of the people was to be subject, to serve to the point of self-denial. Perhaps there existed in the decision to travel to Russia an element of desire to serve the German princess, now called Empress of All the Russias, to help her build her land - especially as the arrangements permitting this new service were so satisfactory.

Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-1769) wrote of the ethos and attitudes of the German middle classes, of their honesty, sentimentality, and love of quiet and idyllic comfort. Less poetically and more to the point, Prussians above the lowest economic levels - and presumably Germans of other states - showed a passion for work and frugality, efficiency, self-reliance, and thrift.

Hattie Plum Williams wrote of German characteristics: honesty, industry, frugality, high moral standards, strong religious convictions. Another writer spoke of German people who were stable, adaptive, resilient, family oriented. Another: imitation, adaptation, improvement. Another: untiring industry, universal economy. A Hays, Kansas, newspaper: strict, proud, hard-working.

While these last assessments deal with the character of the Germans coming from Russia to the United States in the past century, they might as easily apply to the German who traveled to Russia a century before that. For during the one hundred years of hard-working isolation on the steppe of Russia, the Germans in essence were frozen in time. While adopting some Russian modes of dress, survival techniques, and eating and drinking practices, they lived away from the subtle changes in styles, customs, and life patterns which marked the European environment. Their energies went first to survival and then toward carving a familiar copy of a relinquished culture. Their effort left little time for change or for progress as it evolved in the land they left behind. Choices on the steppe were minimal.

In the end, then, we might claim that the Germans who emigrated from Russia were the Germans who emigrated from Germany. There had been no major change in the basic pioneering German character. One sure thread runs through the centuries: when Germans are pressed beyond endurance, they take one of two actions. They rise up against their oppressors, as in the peasant revolts, or they move on. The early Germanic tribe invaded from the east,

traveled from the Baltic to the Mediterranean to find peaceful settlement. With Catherine's Manifesto of 1763 came a way out of oppression, poverty, and the chaos in German lands. With new beckoning from the United States, Canada, and nations of South America, as well as better transportation (such as the advent of the steamship and the completion of a rail link from Saratov to St. Petersburg in 1871), came the means for escaping a new oppression.

Select Bibliography

- Behrens, C.B.A.; "Society, Government, and the Enlightenment, The Experiences of Eighteenth-Century France and Prussia"; New York: Harper & Row, 1985.
- Brunschwig, Henri; "Enlightenment and Romanticism in Eighteenth Century Prussia"; Translated by Frank Jallinek; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Dorn, Walter L.; "The Rise of Modern Europe: Competition for Empire, 1740-1763"; New York: Harper & Row, 1940.
- Doyle, William; "The Old European Order 1660-1800"; The Short Oxford History of the Modern World; Edited by J.M. Roberts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Gershoy, Leo; "From Despotism to Revolution 1763-1789"; The Rise of Modern Europe; Edited by William L. Langer; New York: Harper & Row, 1944.
- Kochran, Miriam; "Catherine the Great"; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977.
- Kohn, Hans; "The Idea of Nationalism: a Study in Its Origins and Background"; New York: MacMillan, 1945.
- Morris, Charles; "Historical Tales: the Romance of Reality"; 8 vols.; Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1893; Denver: Tandy, Wheeler & Co., 1902.
- Ogg, David; "Europe of the Ancient Regime 1715-1783"; History of Europe; Edited by J.H. Plumb; New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Stumpp, Karl; "The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763 to 1862"; Lincoln, Nebraska: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1872.
- Troyat, Henri; "Catherine the Great"; Translated by Joan Pinkham; New York: Berkeley Books, 1983.
- Wallbank, T. Walter and Alastair M. Taylor; "Civilization - Past and Present"; 2 vols; New York: Scott, 1942.
- Williams, Hattie Plum; "The Czar's Germans"; Edited by Emma S. Haynes, Phillip B. Legler, and Gerda S. Walker; Lincoln, Nebraska: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1975.
- "The World's Greatest Events"; Vol. 4.; Edited by Esther Singleton; New York: Collier, 1904.