

# — GERMANS FROM RUSSIA —

## Why did they come to North Dakota?

The region surrounding the Black Sea port of Odessa, Russia, figures heavily in North Dakota's history. In the early 1900s, thousands of German Russians immigrated to the U.S., with large numbers settling in the state.

It all began with German-born Catherine the Great, who married the future tsar of Russia, Peter the Third, when she was 16. When she became empress of Russia in 1762, Catherine issued a manifesto to her native Germany offering free land, financial help, and freedom from military service for Germans who would come to Russia to develop the land. Hundreds of thousands of Germans answered the call, to leave the crop failures in Germany, as well as lack of living space and high taxes.

By the end of the 1800s, the Germans had created thriving agricultural colonies. When Alexander II became tsar, he wanted Germans to become Russian. The lives of Germans living in Russia were increasingly threatened. When Germans were forced to enter the Russian military to fight their native country, a new mass migration began – this time to the United States.

Free land provided by the Homestead Act enticed many to move to the United States, especially the Great Plains states. By 1910 about 60,000 Germans from Russia (immigrants and their American-born children) lived in North Dakota. Nearly all German-Russian settlers in North Dakota came here from colonies near the Black Sea, in what is now the Ukraine. They mostly homesteaded in the central part of the state with heaviest populations in Emmons, McIntosh, and Logan counties. The Germans from Russia are the largest ethnic immigrant group in North Dakota. Their impact on the culture and landscape of the northern plains remains strong today.

Sources:

*Dakota Datebook*, Prairie Public. [prairiepublic.org/radio/](http://prairiepublic.org/radio/)

Dr. D. Jerome Tweton, "Germans from Russia Now Second Largest Immigrant Group: Hard Work Pays Off for Hardy Homesteaders," originally published as *The North Star Dakotan* student newspaper. [ndstudies.org/articles/germans](http://ndstudies.org/articles/germans)

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Explore these German-Russian Objects in the Inspiration Gallery

## ▶ NEWCOMERS AND SETTLEMENT

### **Wedding Clothing, 1892**

Black was the traditional color for wedding dresses. Wedding dresses often became a woman's "best" dress and were worn for many years. This dress was worn by Katherine Heupel for her marriage to George Martel in Kassel, Russia. The Martels settled in McIntosh County.  
SHSND 1996.9.2-.4

### **Clock, 1858**

Made in the German-Russian Mennonite colony of Molotschna, Ukraine. Owned by Peter Ensz, Burleigh Co.  
SHSND 9792

## ▶ OUR LIVES, OUR COMMUNITIES

### **Sepher torah, 1930-1939**

Part of the furnishings of the Temple Bnai Ephraim in Bismarck.  
SHSND 1991.186.12

### **Tallith, 1930-1939**

Part of the furnishings of the Temple Bnai Ephraim in Bismarck.  
SHSND 1991.186.11

## ▶ AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION

### **Stock saddle, 1898-1915**

Made by the Rattan Saddlery Company in Dickinson. Used by Joseph Kupper, Stark Co.  
SHSND 1980.46.1

## ▶ CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

### **Cabbage cutter**

SHSND 7393

### **Shot glass**

SHSND 16617.4

### **Food storage bin**

SHSND 1975.13.4

### **Kitchen spatula**

SHSND 1991.27

### **Sausage stuffer, 1900-1909**

SHSND 16757

### **Grave marker, 2013**

Made by Jeff Malm  
SHSND 2013.42.1

