



Book Review

Review by: Peter Goldade

“Life Under Tyranny”

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This important work is based on a mountain of previously unpublished material the author obtained mostly from the State Archives of Odessa Region located in Odessa, Ukraine. Almost all of the documents pertain to the German-Russian Kutschurgan Colonies, especially Selz, Elsass, Baden, Strassburg, and Kandel, but other documents concern Mannheim and little known Kutschurgan villages and khutors. Also included are some stray villages like Alexanderfeld in the Liebental Colony Group.

Chapter 1 consists of 300 pages chock full of lists of literally thousands of villagers' names, often with patronemics, frequently with birth years or birth dates. The Russian and Soviet documents in which these lists are found are presented. Every German-Russian surname in these files is included. Though Peter obtained these files to research his family history, Goldades make up significantly less than one per cent of surnames. This book is thus of value to Kutschurganers in general. I wish there was such a book for the Glückstal Colonies where my family's roots lie.

The time period covered in these records is the genealogical German-Russian “dead zone” from 1880 to 1922. There are some records of deportations in 1904-5, but the bulk of files are from 1917-1922 when the Communists were consolidating their hold on the Kutschurgan villages. A limited number of death dates and enumerations of family members can be found, but the strength of these lists is that they breathe life into those listed. Was the person poor, of average means, or a kulak? Was he a member of the Communist party? Who was elected to the Congress of Committees for Poor Villagers? How much land did the family own, what farm animals and equipment, and what was their household inventory (in some cases down to and including candlesticks)? Who was eligible and ineligible for military service, and who was killed or missing? Who worked in what occupations and how large was their shop? Also, odd things such as which potential military men played which instruments or sang in what voices. It is unlikely that anyone with forbears from the Kutschurgan Colonies will not have ancestors in these lists.

The book also gives much historical information. It begins with a brief introduction of Russian and Soviet history from the 1870s to 1941 as it applied to German-Russians. Directions for collecting “starvation rations” during the 1922 famine are given as are foodstuffs to be collected from the different categories of people. The Women's Revolt which began in Selz in 1930 is discussed. Kandel's church inventory is listed. Much of

the historical information comes from file names and information in those files which gives the reader an idea of how the Communists went about controlling the villagers.

The last two-fifths of the book consists of actual arrest, conviction, and sentencing records of four of Peter's relatives. Each is given a chapter. These pages show the reader what historical Soviet NKVD (precursor of KGB) repression documents were like. Anyone who has relatives who were sent to "special settlements" or the GULAG can obtain this type of document today if they are willing to spend the money to acquire them.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 record the arrests and false accusations in 1938 of Anton Goldade of Selz, Leonhard Migler of Alexanderfeld, and Michael Weichel of Selz, respectively. Weichel's story is unusual because he was a collaborator who joined the Communist Party and was active in its nefarious doings, but this did not prevent his being convicted when he was no longer useful to the Party.

Finally, chapter 5. This extremely important document takes up the last 100 pages of Peter's book. It is the extensive statement given to NKVD interrogators by an individual who had joined the Selz village Selbstschutz, the organization of German-Russian locals who accepted Nazi ideology and worked with and under the Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS). As such, this individual translated Soviet documents, informed on individuals, arranged for the round-up of Jews, pilfered Jewish possessions, and personally shot Jews and others to death. For unknown reasons, he freely admitted his involvement in page after page of written testimony. We like to think that none of our German-Russian relatives were involved in the Holocaust. This document gives the lie to that notion. Peter chose to expunge this person's name and all associated German-Russian surnames in the file in order not to embarrass his living relatives and to protect those few individuals mentioned who might have been innocent.

This book is somewhat difficult to read because of the nature of the files included, but I highly recommend it because it contains information that cannot currently be found anywhere else. For anyone with ties to the Kutschurgan Colonies or for those who are interested in German-Russian history in general, this book is a must.

Life Under Tyranny is available from a number of sources. Hard copies can be gotten from the Germans from Russia Heritage Society for \$30 which is inexpensive. Please support GRHS by purchasing the book from the GRHS bookstore (701-223-6167).