History of Russian Germans: Records of the State Archives of Odessa Region (SAOR)

By Lilia G. Belousova

Lilia G. Belousova, Vice Director of the State Archives Odessa Region, helps to maintain over 100 collections containing many thousands of files about the Germans from Russia and assists hundreds of visitors from the United States to the archives. She is a graduate of Odessa State University, Department of History.

The Odessa Archives: Generations of German Records

The State Archives of Odessa Region (abbr. GAOO – Gosudarsvennyj Arhiv Odesskoj Oblasti) is one of the large-scale archives in the South of Ukraine, including 13,110 fonds (collections) holding 2.2 million files. Documents cover the period from the end of the eighteenth century to today. Some unique fonds reflect the history not only of Odessa and the Odessa Region but also of Southern Ukraine (former Novorossia, Black Sea Region). A large part of them refer to the history of Russian-Germans.

In the pre-revolutionary period, the documents of German institutions (organizations, schools, societies, etc.) weren’t concentrated in one place because there wasn’t a joint consolidated system of state archives in Russia until 1918. Some scientists and officials tried to reform that branch. Apollon Skalkowsky, the Director of the Statistic Committee of the Novorossia Region, had an idea to create a special Archives for Southern Russia so collected valuable documents and unique papers. However, the value of that project wasn’t realized at that time. After the revolution in 1918, the Decree On Reorganization and Centralization of Archives in Russia was issued and the state archival system began.

GAOO was founded in 1920 as Odessa Historical Archives. It started with 22 fonds and collections taken from various organizations, agencies, and churches who had discontinued their archival activities after the revolution. The main fonds of the pre-revolutionary period accepted were from Novorossia and Bessarabia Governor-General Administration, Odessa City Chief, Odessa City Council, Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers in Southern Russia, Odessa Office
for Foreign Settlers in South Russia, Odessa Police Office, Commercial Court, banks, Odessa port offices, customs, Novorossijsky University and other colleges and schools, cultural societies, churches, and others. German records were filed in separate parts of these fonds or within more general records.

The German section of the Odessa Archives was founded in 1931. It started collecting German fonds because there was an idea to make Odessa the Southern Ukrainian center for all German records. In 1930, it impounded fonds of German volost (district) and village offices, churches, notaries, savings banks, and colleges. In all, this included forty German fonds from the pre-revolutionary period for Gross-Liebental, Kandel, Baden, Mannheim, and Selz volost offices and village offices of Alexanderhilf, Klein-Liebental, Josephstal, Mariental, Peterstal, Franzfeld, Neuburg, Georgental, Hoffnungstal, Baden, Elsass, Kandel, Karlstal, Wilhelmstal, and others. Researchers then began to show a great interest, and a Search Room was opened in 1927 giving scientists a wide admission to documents. The first Odessa historian working with German records was Georg Leibrandt from Stuttgart, Germany.

Just before World War II, 59 fonds of German institutions of the Soviet Period were taken for state keeping—records of the volost and village revolutionary and executive committees, military offices, committees for poor peasants, land offices, the Odessa German Pedagogical Institute, and others. With the beginning of World War II and the German-Romanian occupation of Odessa in 1941, a major portion of the pre-revolutionary records were evacuated to Stalingrad (later Uralsk) in the West Kazakhstan Region. Documentation of the Soviet Period was left in Odessa, and City Chief Alexianu ordered liquidated “all Soviet garbage.” Fortunately, the Director of the Archives, Grigory Serbsky, didn’t obey and valuable documents were salvaged. Still, replacements and evacuations led to irrecoverable waste: More than 1 million files (50 percent) were lost or destroyed during the war. German fonds suffered, and some are missing forever, including fonds from Glueckstal Volost Office, four village offices (Glueckstal, Gross-Liebental, Lustdorf, and Festerovo), four fonds of the Roman-Catholic Churches (Odessa, Gross-Liebental, Mannheim, and Festerovo), Gross-Liebental Orphan Saving Bank, and others. In April 1944, the Odessa Archives renewed its work. After the war, only a few German materials were added so that is why documents on the history of Russian-Germans are some of the most valuable documents.

Archives and the Black Sea Region

Direct fonds of Russian-German history can be classified into regional and local fonds. The history of foreign colonization of the Black Sea Region is reflected in documentation of two main fonds of governmental organs: (1) the Guardian Committee for Foreign Settlers in Southern Russia (1799-1876, Fond 6) and (2) the General-Governor Administration for Novorossia and Bessarabia (1803-1874, Fond 1). These fonds contain a wealth of information, including information about
committees processing newcomers, delivery of passports, loans, and assistance in business. The records help to analyze the economical and social development of the Russian-German colonies, review legislative acts and statistical materials about the Russian-German population and its changes, understand agricultural practices (husbandry, sheep breeding, sericulture, horse breeding, growing of grapes, etc.), industrialization from individual handcrafts to the evolving larger factories and plants, and leadership roles of Germans in their communities (churches, schools, politics, etc.).

Some of these documents are interesting because of their private origin because they help us understand how the common people lived. Cases of social and family conflicts about inheritance, misconduct, scandals with fighting between neighbors, and crimes show some details of individual life, language, the relationship between people, and traditions. For example, a conflict between the Russian official Goyarin and the Mennonite Rieger resulted because of the unwillingness of Mennonite Rieger to take his hat off in respect to the official; this record shows that Rieger spoke Ukrainian.1

Another interesting aspect of these fonds is the role of higher officials, administrators, and managers (Duc de Richelieu, M. Voronzov, S. Contenius, Bekleshov, A. Rosenberg, and others) in the colonization process. Their reports and notes reflect both the state reformative policy in general and personal opinions and ideas. The first general-government of Novorossia, the French noble Duc de Richelieu, was an ardent supporter of colonization and set his hopes mainly on the German colonists. The first settlers, delivered by Zigler in 1803, were emigrants from Wurttemburg, Baden, Rein Bavaria, and Elsass; the minority were from Prussian Poland and Saxony. The plan for founding that colony was by the Duc de Richelieu and S. Contenius, who provided colonists with seeds and plants and later with well-bred sheep, established a big cloth factory (although unsuccessful), and built a church. In 1848 a new transport of newcomers (289 families, 1,086 individuals) with experienced farmers and good craftsmen arrived, and Gross-Liebental showed improved development. In 1859 an Orphan Fund was established and later the Savings Volost Bank. Richelieu’s opinion that the activity of the Germans was one of the most important factors in the economic transformation of the region is confirmed by later documents, including a statement that prosperity of the Germans was much better than the other villagers.2

The records of the Odessa Office for Foreign Settlers in Southern Russia (Fond 252, 917 files present, 144 files missing) was established in 1800 for governmental management of foreign colonies in the Odessa area (Odessa settlements) and was previously called The Office for Foreign Settlers of Odessa Area. The Odessa area included seven colonial districts with four German districts (Liebental with 10 colonies, Beresan with 14 colonies, Kutchurgan with 6 colonies, and Glueckstal with 4 colonies) and also the separate German colony of Hoffnungstal. Three other districts (Ternovka, Buyalik, and Parkani) were organized mainly by the
Bulgarians and Greeks, and there was a separate Montegrin colony of Zetin.

The Odessa Office was abolished in 1833, and its records were kept by the Guardian Committee until its abolition in 1871, later in the archives of the Governor-General Administration, and since 1921 in SAOR. When the fond was taken to the Archives, 1,061 file titles were included into three inventories (opis). Today, 917 files are present with 144 files missing during World War II. The documents of Collection 252 reflect the process of settlement and migration of foreigners in South Russia (mainly in the Odessa area) and documents about their lives and the activities of their communities in the development of 35 German colonies.3

Materials of volost and village German offices were arrived at the Odessa Archives in the 1930s. Until the revolution, the Russian Empire had a four-level administrative-territorial structure: gubernia, uyezd, volost, village. In 1826 Kherson Gubernia was divided into 10 uyezds: Odessa, Alexandraia, Ananjev, Voznesensk, Bobrinetz, Elisavetgrad, Novomirgorod, Olviopol, Tiraspol, and Kherson. Uyezds were divided into volosts. Odessa Uyezd, for example, in the beginning of the twentieth century included 34 volosts (488 villages), 13 of them with German names were settled predominantly by Russian-Germans. Only five fonds of the German volost offices were preserved and taken to SAOR.

Typical documents of village office records include orders and directions of higher authorities; economic, financial, and social states of the villages; interactions with peasants; grants and loans; inspections; business matters; health issues; taxes; use of orphan capital; compensation for losses; agricultural practices; court cases; church activities; education; departure of peasants to Siberia in 1898-1905; charitable activities; police records; and others.

Gross-Liebental Volost Office (named Mariinsky in 1896-1916, Fond 53) was the main authority since 1804 for eleven colonies: Gross-Liebental, Klein-Liebental, Alexanderhilf, Mariental, Peterstal, Freudental, Franzfeld, Neuburg, Josephthal, Guldendorf, and Lustdorf. Materials of the Gross-Liebental Volost Office were entered at the Odessa Archives in 1937. Fond 53 was inventoried before 1939; but since World War II, the fate of 173 files out of 625 is unknown.

Files from this fond include certificates that were issued to colonists from village offices when they got passports from the Gross-Liebental Volost Office and left them for safekeeping. These certificates contain a lot of individual information, and the certificate was verified with a stamp and signatures of the village headman and clerk. Files also contain passports that were delivered to colonists for some term (half year, year) to go for jobs and/or better earnings or to visit overseas relatives.

These files also contain information about orphans, including reports from village offices about the death of a settler and the decision at village meetings about the
appointment of guardians (for minor children) and trustees (for adult children) and often inventories of the property of the deceased. Some of these guardianship files for orphans related to the period from 1914 to 1919 when lots of men were killed during World War I. Other information shows recruit lists, usually in non-alphabetical order but sometimes with divisions of villages and various documents about elections, voters, and officials.

Many documents relate to migrations to Siberia and include information about allowances to landless peasants resettling to Siberia, locations of settlements and general conditions of Siberian settlements, including details about the founding of twenty new German villages. Other records give insight into general questions about the management of buildings, budgets, agricultural concerns such as methods for annihilation of locusts, land issues under changes in governments, and other decisions required in the communities.

This Fond 53 also has some interesting insights into schools and the educational process. Before 1881 communities had a right to hire teachers at their own discretion. But in 1881 communities were directed to move schools of the former German colonies with all of their properties and funds from the Department of State Domains to the Ministry of National Education. This preserved the right of clergy to oversee religious education of youth. On November 22, 1890, all Lutheran schools were subordinated to the Ministry of Education like the other Russian primary schools. From that time, teachers had to be appointed by an Inspector of public schools and approved for that post by a Director of the public schools. Changes were explained as necessary to improve the educational process based on healthy pedagogic and public Russian bases. The Inspector and police had to argue with village communities as to the necessity of accepting decisions at village meetings about the funding of schools, including teacher salaries, payment for fire and light, and insurance and repairs for school buildings. Village leaders were warned about their responsibility for “teachers accepted wrong.”

Archives reflect educational reform in terms of everyday school life, educational processes, and reactions of German communities to the state policy of russification. Most teachers in German schools were men. The fond of the Alexanderhilf (Alexeevka) village office contains annual documentation “About fining for poor attendance at church schools by pupils.” Regulations required payment of 3 kopeks from a pupil’s parents per every school day missed. The monthly recovered money entered into the Saving Bank for accrual of interest and was spent for various teaching aides. Monthly books (Registers of Truants) usually contained names of father (or mother), the number of children in the family, names of pupil-truants, and a register of the missing days. For example, in January-March 1902, 175 pupils from 93 families missed 710 school days total. Considering that there were 458 registered residents in Alexanderhilf at that time, the said statistic is significant.
The fonds even address the moral and sexual upbringing of youth. Ethics were under permanent supervision of the community from childhood. In 1895 the Gross-Liebental (Mariinsky) Volost Office made an observation to the Klein-Liebental (Alexeevka) village office that, “some settlers, in particular, the younger generation didn’t take their hats and caps off in honor of the Kherson Governor who visited the village.” It was proposed to discuss the issue at a village meeting and to hammer it home to children that it is necessary to show honor to all state officials and heads, namely, to take caps off. In case of relapse, a demonstration of disrespect, the delinquents had to be punished according to the Law.

The sexual upbringing of children also received attention. In 1891 the Gross-Liebental Volost Office directed the Klein-Liebental office to take urgent measures to exclude the usual practice of copulation of cattle and horses in the open places when children were on their way to or from school. The situation was called abnormal from a moral point of view, and the community was directed to establish fenced yards immediately. Also, there was a direction to separate water closets for girls and boys in schools and colleges. Among the documentation of the Elsass Village Office, there are files about the election of two wardens to oversee the young people during church service.

Communities emphasized the importance of donations and charitable actions. The fond of the Mariental village office contained information about donations of colonists for the good of The Main Society For Assistance Because Of Shipwrecks; annually in Russia, from 5,000 to 7,000 people died in the water. In 1895 the Kleinliebental settlers made a contribution for the building of the Orthodox Church in Libava. Kandel, for example, collected 37 rubles and 16 kopeks for the Red Cross; and from 1907 to 1908 they collected money for the population suffering from starvation in localities with bad harvests in Russia (66 rubles, 95 kopeks, and two carts of wheat). In 1910 Selz petitioned for help from the village of Kocherdyk in Orenburg Guberniya, Siberia, when Russian peasants asked for an agricultural college and donated to those who suffered under fire in the village of Parkulei in Saratov Gubernia. And the records show many more charitable contributions made by communities.

Fonds document misbehavior and criminal offenses in the communities, including police logs, criminal offenses, leaving colonies without permits, vagrancy, illegal sale of medicines (poison and potent drugs), etc. Local authorities were responsible for keeping silence and order and had duties to prevent unethical entertainment and games, drunkenness, and riots. In 1838 the colonist Franz Nazinger was punished with the rod for concubinage; in 1912 the Klein-Liebental resident Anton Martin Schoch was excluded from the community for debauchery and immoral behavior; and records contain lots of information about arresting colonists for residing out of their colonies without passports.
German colonies had insurance against fire since 1870. Insurers paid a level premium and created an insurance capital that was kept in a savings bank to receive interest. An elected insurance commission estimated properties, determined damages, and made amends. Voluntary insurance of cattle against diseases, thunderbolts, and fire was established in Odessa Uyezd in 1888.

Village meetings governed the life of the community and played a very important role. Decisions from village meetings came into force by a vote of two-thirds of the householders with voting rights. For example, in 1907 in Kandel, there were 809 householders but only 269 of the prosperous (about one-third) had voting rights. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the interests of the poor and landless peasants were represented; until then, they depended on the decisions of the rich. This status inequality was a base for confrontations inside these societies. In Klein-Liebental (Ksenievka) in 1908, a conflict flamed between the landowners and the landless peasants at a meeting for election of candidates to the volost meeting. Among 735 residents of the village, just 197 persons had voting rights while 30 peasants (the poorest without land or homesteads) could elect three representatives for participation in the village meetings. Those representatives were Johann Haag, Hieronim Wolf, and Peter Dosch. The village meeting had to elect 30 candidates for the volost meeting from landowners and four from the landless, but the vote gave unexpected results. The landless voted down “the best masters” and owners lodged a complaint to higher authorities with application to repeat the election with separate voting of owners and the poor. Their request was satisfied with 1 elected representative from every 10 owners and from every 20 peasants.18

Medical records from the archives hint of challenges, and technical records explain technical accomplishments and banking processes that tell successful accounts of many challenges met. The most dangerous medical epidemics of the nineteenth century in Russia were smallpox, cholera, plague, enteric fever, diphtheria, measles, and scarlet fever. Documentation of village meetings contain registers of the vaccinated with indication of parents, birth dates of children, and date of vaccination. Technical accomplishments evolved, including building of the Odessa-Ovidiopol railroad (1892), tracking for the electric tram on the Odessa-Lustdorf-Klein-Liebental line (1907-1912), arranging for electricity by the J. Arbeitman firm (1913), and the opening of the post and telegraph office (1909).19

The Kutchurgan Orphan Saving Bank (1898-1915, 39 files, Fond 80) archives evidence of banking transactions, including deposits, loans, and distribution of orphan funds. Notaries witnessed contracts of sale, gifts, and bartering.

SAOR has five fonds of churches and religious institutions containing information about the Russian-Germans. The Evangelical-Lutheran Confession is represented with three fonds. Fond 630 contains records for the Evangelical-Lutheran St. Paul Church (Kirsche) Parish in Odessa (1805-1920, 357 files) where the earliest document is the plan of the colony of Keiserheim (Lustdorf) near Odessa in 1805.
Religious fonds contain correspondence, materials about the activities of pastors, genealogical information, evidence of disease, use of religious materials in educational institutions, records of donations, annual debit and credit lists of church communities, savings banks maintained for orphans and widows, charitable activities, operations of orphanages, records of properties owned by members, celebrations, cultural events, practices of tradition, and much more. Fond 894 was received by SAOR lately (1999) and contains records of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church Parishes in Odessa, Kherson Guberniya, Ekaterinoslav Guberniya, and Bessarabia; and the Reformed Church in Odessa (1899-1916, 48 files). Records trace the appearance of the newly inhabited localities, the daughter colonies. The Tarutino District Evangelical-Lutheran Consistory (1829-1941, 263 files, Fond I-1184) fond contains information only in the German language.

The Roman-Catholic religion is represented with only two fonds: Fond 628 and Fond I-447. St. Peter Roman-Catholic Church Parish in Odessa (1814-1919, 5 files, Fond 628) has records written in Latin, German, and Russian. The Roman-Catholic Church in Krasna, Bessarabia (1917-1939, 22 files, Fond I-447) came to SAOR 2000 and include metrical books in Russian with duplicate names in German.

The Mennonites

A unique historical sources comes from the fond for the Molochna Mennonite Community in Berdyansk District, Tavricheskaya Guberniya - Peter Braun Archives (1804-1920, 3,015 files, Fond 89). It includes both official and private documents and has lots of the records about Russian Mennonite life with 3,015 files covering the period 1804-1920. Most of the records are penned in a neat uniform Gothic Script in the colloquial Russian Mennonite High German of that time. They also illuminate the Mennonite customs, traditions, clothes, language, a special way of life, development of educational systems, participation in Russian political life, emigration from Russia, and other topics.

The Mennonites appeared in Russia in 1789 when Emperor Pavel I invited 228 families from Prussia and got lands for them in the Chrotitza District, promising freedom of religion and no military and civil service. Every family got 65 acres of land and the privilege to not pay taxes for ten years. In 1800, 150 families resettled from Chrotitza Island to the Molochna River, and in 1804 newcomers from Prussia established the Molochna Mennonite District (48 colonies).

The first directives from the Guardian Committee to the Molochna Office dated in 1804 gives us important details regarding the initial arrangement of emigrants in Russia. The first order to ober-schulz Niklaus Wiens was about compiling a full register of the Molochna Mennonites for delivery of an allowance (8 kopeks per soul daily) and about recording cows and other properties of the Mennonites. The Head Judge of the Committee, Samuel Contenius, reported that the Mennonites refused to build their houses of grizzle (straw, loam, and water) like the local
population did. In spite of this cheaper and faster means of building, the Mennonites preferred to build more respectable European houses using bricks. The colonies themselves were also planned in a European manner with straight clean streets, big households, neat cottages, firm fences, granaries, and a green zone. Very soon the German and Mennonite colonies were named “Oasis in the Steppe” for their good accomplishments and picturesque outlook. The Braun Archives contain plans for the colonies of Johannesruh, Halbstadt, Felsental, Insel Chrotitza, and others as well as lithography of Grunau (1880).

The economic life of the Mennonite community is reflected in the documents which show both the everyday peasant’s life and the economical situation in general. This fond has meteorological notes, milk-yield records, lists of trees planted, and even Johann Klassen’s recipe of fruit wine which is very similar to champagne. It includes drawings of binders and apparatus for annihilation of locusts, model estates of Johann Cornies in Jushanlee and Johann Wiebe in Ohrloff, and correspondence between Mennonite communities about the delivery of Wittington wheat seeds and china cabbage from American to Molochna communities. There are representations of trotters from Philipp Wiebe’s stud farm at the Kahovka agricultural exhibit and participation of the best householders (P. Schneider, A. Penner, J. Dyck, P. Fast, and others) at the agricultural exhibits in St. Petersburg.

The world surrounding the Mennonites was very picturesque because more than one hundred national and ethnic groups lived nearby. P. Braun Archives gave the rare information of interaction and social partnerships between them. Those records include lots of Ukrainian peasants (Klein Russians) hired out for day-work to the Mennonite estates, Jushanlee payrolls containing names and cash dividends paid, and other documents showing that the landowners sent their peasants to the Mennonite estates for training in some agricultural branches. For example, there are certificates of young peasants of Count Komarovsky being tutored in silk culture in Ladekopp and Tiege. Also among the Mennonite documents, there is a songbook with Gypsy, Russian, and Ukrainian songs, evidence of interest by the Mennonites in the Slavonic culture.

The Mennonites also tried to comprehend the world of other cultures and established permanent economic links with Nogai and Tatars. Usually in the summer time, Mennonites contracted with Nogais as experienced shepherds. There are numerous archival evidences of great interest of the Mennonites in that nomadic people such as drawings of the Mosque, a chart of animal names in Tatar, and the original guidelines for the establishment of the model Nogai colony of Akkerman (1840). This last document is particularly interesting as an illustration of experiments on establishments of nomadic settlements according to European examples; the guidelines recommended building houses on both sides of the street and to fence them, to separate barns from dwellings, to dig cesspools, to cultivate trees, and to maintain clean streets. Mennonites also assisted in organizing the Jewish colonies in Kherson, Ekaterynoslav, and Tavrida Provinces.
Rare documents reflect Mennonite cultural life, education, and domestic relations. Records exist in the form of newspapers, library catalogs, theater programs, poems, songs, school exercises, textbooks, study and progress sheets, and educational planning documents for institutions. Mennonites did not believe in fighting in wars but organized hospitals to care for the wounded soldiers and distributed donations among families of recruits. The fond holds information genealogical interest, including a most valuable source of information from the Census of the Molochna Mennonite District for 1835 that includes 41 colonies with family entries.

Three fonds in particular include education training programs and the personal files of pupils: Gross-Liebental Russian Central College (1822-1917, 37 files, Fond 104), St. Paul Secondary School in Odessa (1858-1920, 513 files, Fond 52), and Hirsch-Bramm Private Gymnasiums for Girls in Odessa (1903-1920, 146 files, Fond 51).

Fond 2 holds records of the Odessa City Chief (Gradonachal’nik) from 1802 to 1920 and contains materials about the German Community in Odessa, the capital of Novorossia and an economic, educational, scientific, and cultural center. Colonists left their colonies for many reasons and moved to the large cosmopolitan city, including jobs, better earnings and training. Germans were the third ethnic group in Odessa after the Russians and Jews. Permits delivered to individuals for opening businesses and giving land showed that the Germans specialized in urban economics as well as cultural, national, and family traditions.

They made carts, shoes, clothes, and watches, but excelled in one business—printing. Lithography done by Gross, Munster, Braun, the printing house of Nitsche, was well known in Novorossia, and the first German weekly newspaper, Odessaer Zeitung (1860-1914), was the main news publication for the German community. Many of the Odessans of colonial origination became well-known merchants, manufacturers, and professionals (Wilhelm Zanzenbacher from Gross-Liebental, producer of soap, candles, water glass, and beer; Johann Hoehnn from Neuberg with agricultural engineering; Woldemar Johann Kundert from Gross-Liebental, an architect; and others).

Societies also stressed the importance of national representation. The German society Harmonia was founded in 1861 in Odessa, its goal to keep national traditions, contribute to youth, and make life more informative and interesting. Many received moral and monetary support for musical parties and various organized performances. Other groups were the Odessa German Club and the Mutual Society of German-Catholics in Russia and in 1909 the Odessa City Chief approved the application of University students to open the Society of “Teutoniu Euxina.” The first All-Russian Census (1897) is of great historical consequence and lists full information on each family, a total of 3,000 files.
An interesting aspect of the Odessa City Council records (1796-1920, Fonds 4 and 16) is the Russian-German trade cooperation in Odessa. These materials contain information about owners of automobiles around 1910 and the presence of German automobile firms such as Opel in Russelheim, Fahrzeugfabrik Eisenach, Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft, Stuttgart-Unterturkheim, Diti Motorenfabrik Eisenach, Mersedez-Benz, Wanderer, and others.²⁴

Novorossijsky University in Odessa records (1865-1920, Fond 45) contain valuable information regarding the intellectual part of the Russian-German community. Of interest are training programs, information on education processes, activities of student societies, and personal student files. Odessa Board for Small Business (Fond 359) lists families in small business and addresses service in the army for men.

The Soviet Period

A dramatic period of history for Russian-Germans was from 1920 to 1930. The beginning of Soviet power affected the stabilization of economic and social conditions for all of the people in Russia, but the position of the Germans was compounded by the previous discriminating state policies in connection with World War I. After the revolution in 1917, the territory of Kherson Guberniya was met with numerous administrative-territorial changes whereupon old compact national units were destroyed. In 1919 Odessa Guberniya consisted of six uyezdz: Odessa, Tiraspol, Voznesensk, Ananjev, Balta, and Pervomajsk. Odessa Uyezd was divided into 43 volosts, 23 of them were mainly of German population and had German names.

Instead of the 43 volosts, in 1920 they were integrated into only 20. Selz volost included four former ones: Kutchurgan, Baden, Selz, and Kandel. Landau volost absorbed Sulz and Landau. The population numbers of volosts were very different and varied between 5,000 and 30,000. That ineffective system was changed again between 1923 and 1925 when the old pre-revolutionary territorial division was changed finally into the three-level system of management: rayon, okrug, and center.

In Odessa Guberniya, six okrugs were created: Odessa, Nikolaev, Kherson, Balta, Elisavetgrad, and Pervomajsk; each was divided into rayons. Odessa okrug, for example, had 18 rayons. Former German volosts were absorbed into rayons along with other national units, and they lost their national independence. But then that division also appeared ineffective; and one more large reform happened in 1932 when 5 oblasts were founded in Ukraine, including Odessa Oblast with 4 cities and 46 rayons. The territory of Odessa Oblast became smaller with the forming of new territorial units: Nikolaev Oblast (1937), Kirovograd (former Elisavetgrad) Oblast (1939), Kherson Oblast (1944) and the territory Ismail Oblast liquidated in 1954.
Administrative changes were linked with global economic and social changes, and society was divided into the rich and the poor. A policy to abolish private ownership started with campaigns against prosperous farmers (*kulaks*) in 1921 and led to the full reallocation of land and taking of other possessions, *kulaks* being exiled to Siberia, starvation, closing of churches and imprisoning priests, and punishment of those who expressed discontent against the Soviet power—all of which finally destroyed the foundations of the Russian-Germans. Such processes are reflected in the documentation of state organs, through numerous complaints from peasants to prosecutor and militia offices, in decisions at peasant meetings, and in materials on collectivization and foundation of *kolkhoz* (collective farms).

On the other hand, there was a short period of new economic policy in the 1920s and materials tell about the appearance of German national administrative-territorial units (very often named in honor of the revolution), activities of national sections, commissions, and schools and colleges such as the German Pedagogical Institute in Odessa. Between 1919 and 1923 the higher organs of power and management of the territory of *volosts* and villages were revolutionary *revkom* (committees) and executive committees of the Soviet workers, peasants, and soldiers. The fond archiving documentation about *revkom* (Fond R-2106) holds information about elections, membership, and decisions made in eight German *volost* committees (Festerovo, Gross-Liebental, Hoffnungstal, Kandel, Lustdorf, Mannheim, Selz, and Strassburg) and in eight villages (Alexanderhilf, Elsass, Franzfeld, Guldendorf, Karlstal, Klein-Liebental, Neu-Lustdorf, and Strasburg). Ten fonds document records of German *volost* executive committees in Odessa *Uyezd*: Baden, Guldendorf, Selz, Kandel, Kurtovka, Gross-Liebental, Mannheim, Landau, Rohrbach, and Strassburg. Tiraspol *Uyezd* holds documents of Hoffnungstal.

Fonds of German *volost* executive committees contain directives and orders of higher *uyezd* and *guberniya* authorities such as political decisions and orders, correspondence, measures against deserters, organization of post offices, protection of forests, and collection of taxes. Also, they contain valuable information about the economic state of *volosts*, population, nationalities, minutes of committee and village meetings, monthly reports of schools, documentation regarding fulfillment of *prodrazverstka* (expropriation of grain and food by the state), and other organizational issues. Registers hold information about industrial and trade firms, about the state of trade, instruction on general labor duties, social provisions and insurance in *volosts*, distribution of food to families who suffered from starvation, statistics on arable lands, numbers of populations, registers of villages in *volosts*, church properties, and expropriation instructions of soviet authorities. Also, these records include genealogical materials, including family registers of Red Army soldiers, invalids of war, militiamen, poor and rich peasants, householders, kulaks, migrants, orphans, recruits, teachers, and others.
Sixteen fonds of village Soviets contain similar information for these villages: Baden, Guldendorf, Selz, Gross-Liebental, Josephstal, Kassel, Karlstal, Kandel, Klein-Liebental, Lustdorf, Mannheim, Neu-Lustdorf, Peterstal, Strassburg, Franzfeld, and Hoffnungstal. Records of Poor Peasants Committees (Komitet Nezamozhnykh Selyan, KNS) contain reports on their activities and lists of members in fourteen localities: Gross-Liebental District, Mannheim District, Mannheim volost, Selz volost, Karl-Marx volost, and the villages of Alexanderhilf, Gross-Liebental, Franzfeld, Freudental, Josephstal, Mannheim, Mariental, Neuburg, and Strassburg. Collective farm records are listed in two fonds of Guldendorf and Lustdorf and contain lists of farmers working in collectives. The Guldendorf (Kutuzovo) Volost Land Office fond lists estate inventories and information on elections of officials in the village.

A fond specifically for the period of temporal Romanian-German occupation of Odessa and Odessa Oblast (1941-1944) includes about 900 fonds of government organs formed in the Governorship of Transnistria, that name was given to the territory occupied between the Dniester and the South Bug Rivers taken under the jurisdiction of Royal Romania.

**Current Research Projects**

The process of declassifying the fonds of German-Romanians occupying administrative and other positions began in 1990, a full register of them prepared by archivists for publication. The archives of former Communist party members were put in SAOR in 1992 with fonds for 1920-1992. Some of these also refer to the activities of German societies, schools, and institutes from 1920 to 1940. In 1996, 120,000 files on repatriates from Germany to the Odessa Region (1946-1956) were transmitted from the Odessa Regional Security Service to the Odessa State Archives; and 30 percent of these cover the ethnic Germans. Similar documentation is in Fond 2000, Odessa Regional Executive Committee (Department of Repatriation). More than 15,000 persons requested archives for the purpose of defining damages in order to file for compensation or to confirm their German nationality. Scientific projects, publications, documentaries, exhibitions, and new collections can be found in the Odessa State Archives. From 1945 to the beginning of the 1990s, scientists didn’t provide special research on Russian-German history. In spite of the fact that German fonds weren’t secret or restricted, there simply wasn’t any information about them in the Guide to Odessa Archives published in 1961. Interest in this subject has heightened, and the foreign researchers who have worked at the Odessa Archives since 1990 represent scientific centers of the USA, Germany, Canada, and Japan. Odessa professional and historical experts in Russian-German history also made a great contribution in researching various aspects of Russian-German history using archival sources. One of the main directions of activity at the Odessa Archives lately is the study of the history of national minorities in Novorossia. Materials on Russian-German history are presented at numerous exhibits at Odessa historical and literary museums.
The complete register of fonds and collections, including the German ones, for the pre-revolutionary period was published in 2000, and the name and thematic catalogs on the Germans were also brought up to date. Some of the scientific projects on the creation of databases and documental publications that have started since 1995 with the USA and German scientific institutions:

- **Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Fresno, California, USA), Professor Paul Toews**
- **Germans from Russian Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Libraries (Fargo, North Dakota, USA), Professor Michael Miller**
- **Glueckstal Colonies Research Association, Margaret Aman Freeman (USA)**
- **Institut fur Deutschland und Osteeuropaforschung, Göttingen (Deutschland), Professor Alfred Eisfeld**

Two new books on the history of Gross-Liebental colonies, a joint project of Ovidiopol District State Administration and SAOR, will be published in 2004 as well as the separate colony of Hoffnungstal by N. Zaetz on the occasion of the 200-years jubilee of settlement. Odessa Archives, TV Company “ART,” and Kiev Public Fond “Litopys” are in the process of making a documentary about the fate of the German prisoners of war in Odessa.

The base is a new publication by the German architect, Wilhelm Lutzenberger, “Überleben im Bluck und Unglück: Kriegsende und Gefangenschaft 1944-1948.” This author was a prisoner of war in Odessa. At present, the Odessa Archives has 250 sources of document collections. These are organs of government, educational institutes, state and private industrial and agricultural enterprises, and societies; and some of these will supplement documentation on the Russian-Germans. SAOR plans to form new collections of the Odessa German Society *Wiedergeburt* and the Odessa German cultural center *Bavarian House*. The Odessa Council for Nationalities and Migration and district administrations continue to concentrate information reflecting a process for the renaissance of national traditions, arrangements of new villages for the Germans who returned from Kazakhstan to the homeland of their repressed parents near Odessa and organizing new villages (Kudryavka in Beresovka District and other villages in Ovidiopol District). These fonds will be taken to SAOR in the near future for safekeeping forever.

**Conclusions**

German fonds of the Odessa Archives are an extremely valuable resource for researching the history of Russian-Germans in the Black Sea Region and contain thousands of irreplaceable files of governments, communities, and individuals. The creation of guides and databases and the publication and distribution of these documents are very important projects for groups and individuals to undertake in order to make German fonds more known and readily available for researchers. Restoration of these archives are a critical priority; 70 percent of these German
fonds need urgent restoration to be preserved or they may be lost forever. And, finally, collections of German records must be expanded by adding new fonds based on the efforts of volunteers and staff in German societies, keepers of private family archives, researchers holding subject collections, and others willing to preserve this valuable records for future generations.

ENDNOTES

Odessa Archive abbreviations found in these endnotes are as follows:

F. Fond - a complex of documents of one organization, a collection  
Op. Opis’ - a register of file titles within a fond, an inventory  
d. or dd. Delo - a file or files  
l. or ll. List or lists, a sheet or sheets

1. State Archives of Odessa Region(GAOO), Fond 6, Op. 1, 1a, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
2. GAOO, Fond 1, Op. 192 (1840), d. 68, l.153.