



# **WORK RENDERS LIFE SWEET: GERMANS FROM RUSSIA IN FORT COLLINS, 1900-2000**

## **A HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Submitted to:

**Advance Planning Department  
City of Fort Collins, Colorado**

Prepared by:

**Adam Thomas  
SWCA Environmental Consultants**

State Historical Fund Project 01-02-065: Historical Survey and Context,  
Buckingham, Andersonville, and Alta Vista Neighborhoods; Deliverable 5  
SWCA Cultural Resource Report 2003-139

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### On the Cover:

A German-Russian family pauses for a photograph while harvesting sugar beets on a Fort Collins-area farm. (Courtesy, Fort Collins Public Library)

## INTRODUCTION

### *Second Hoeing, Second Look*

Hannah rejoiced as she watched Shag Town – one-room shacks with stove pipe chimneys sticking out of the flat roofs at crazy angles, their weathered sides hugging the dirt yards, sagging fences hemming in dirty faced children – slowly slide behind her. All drab, colorless, with here and there a brightly painted house, a good fence, only adding to the sordidness of the scene.

Separated from Shag Town by a dirt road were the stinking pulp pits adjoining the many-windowed, red-brick sugar factory – gray, fermenting noodles of shredded sugar beets from which all the sweetness had been taken. Beyond was a high gray smokestack and the black water tower on its four spraddling legs.

– Hope Williams Sykes, *Second Hoeing*, 1935<sup>1</sup>

From the apartment behind her husband’s filling station, Hope Williams Sykes peered out upon a foreign and intriguing landscape. To the west, the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains jutted skyward from the high prairie, reaching to the snowy summit of Longs Peak. To the east stretched sugar beet fields, seemingly infinite into the horizon. Between them, looming massive, was the sugar beet factory. From its tall, brick chimney, smoke and soot created an ever-expanding and darkening cloud. Around the refinery were mountains of beets and streams of steaming, fetid effluence. Yet in this confused terrain of awe-inspiring vistas and industrialized agriculture, Sykes was most interested in the people residing in two small settlements at the foot of the factory – like villages surrounding a medieval castle. To her and many of her fellow *Englische* in Fort Collins, the residents of Buckingham and Andersonville – the “Jungles” – were a conundrum. They spoke German but came from Russia. They maintained distinctively

German traditions while donning distinctively Russian apparel. Whether they were actually German or Russian did not matter to some of their neighbors across the Cache la Poudre River; they were all “dirty Rooshuns.” But among Fort Collins’s German-Russian community, identity was never a matter of confusion. They referred to themselves simply as *unser Lait* or *unsere Leute* – “our people.”<sup>2</sup>

Sykes chronicled her observations in the novel *Second Hoeing*. Published in 1935, the book followed the life of a fictional German-Russian family between 1924 and 1929. Set in Valley City, a pseudonym for Fort Collins, the story follows a common trend among the beet-laboring families: the rise from contract field laborers to tenant farmers to farm owners. The family’s move out of the Jungles to a rented farm represented one step in the pursuit of success. While hailed by critics, *Second Hoeing* disturbed the German-Russian community because it describes brutality in an oppressively patriarchal family.

#### A NOTE ON TERMS

The confusion between the ethnicity of Germans from Russia and their origin has led to a proliferation of terms to describe this group. Texts refer to them as German Russians, Russian Germans, Volga Germans, and Germans from Russia. The last term is perhaps the most accurate and is widely used in this document. However, for the sake of simplicity I also use German Russian on occasion, hyphenating the term only when it is used as a compound modifier. The term Volga German should be avoided as a general reference to Germans from Russia because it neglects the huge number of Germans who came to the United States from the Black Sea colonies. However, in specific references to northern Colorado I do use the term because the vast majority of Germans from Russia who settled here originated from the Volga colonies.

“*Second Hoeing* was too realistic a commentary on German-Russian family relationships and child labor practices to be taken calmly in the 1930’s,” writes Kenneth Rock, a history professor at Colorado State University. “Now...it is possible to consider Sykes’s novel a historical document.”<sup>3</sup>

Germans from Russia today comprise one of the largest ethnic groups in Colorado. Indeed, the state’s original German-Russian settlers now have over 200,000 living descendants, many of them concentrated in Larimer and Weld counties. Yet Germans from Russia have not remained isolated as they were in Russia and do not appear so foreign to Americans today. Second- and third-generation German-Russians revolted against a cycle of grueling labor, developing a sense of ambivalence toward their heritage. Their ancestors clung to their eighteenth-century traditions as they survived and prospered on the brutal steppes of Russia. Yet, within one generation in the United States, those traditions and values crumbled. Anthropologist Timothy Kloberdanz argues that the attitudes Germans cultivated while in Russia no longer held true in the New World: “Although the Volga Germans had regarded themselves as ‘privileged colonists’ and the ‘carriers of a higher culture’ in Russia, such self-concepts were of little consolation in America,” Kloberdanz writes. “Some Americans regarded the early Volga Germans as backward and illiterate Russian peasants...”<sup>4</sup> In an oral history interview Martha Krug concurred with Kloberdanz’s argument: “...I remember com-



ing to town to shop with my mother, here in Fort Collins, and she would insist on speaking German and it was very, very embarrassing to me.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet the lasting contributions of the German-Russian community to Fort Collins are far from invisible. Beyond the neighborhoods and churches, surnames and traditions, there has been a reawakening of interest in German-Russian culture in America, spawning a long-deserved second look at this community once isolated north of the Poudre or on the edges of beet farms. Their history and the history of Fort Collins intertwine. German Russians connect the legacy of Fort Collins to the distant steppes of Russia and the turmoil of the Seven Years’ War – to German princes and Russian tsars. To America they brought a rich and unique heritage, contributing to the colorful cultural tapestry of today’s Fort Collins.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1.**

Located on the corner of Vine Avenue (Sugar Factory Road) and Timberline, this structure once housed the Sykes family gas station. It was here that Hope Williams Sykes observed German-Russian families and penned *Second Hoeing*. (Photo by the author.)

This project was paid for in part by a State Historical Fund grant from the Colorado Historical Society.

## SECTION I

# Germans in Russia and the United States

### Germans in Russia

The story of Germans from Russia in Fort Collins actually begins in the small Prussian principality of Anhalt-Zerbst. There, in 1729, Sophie Friederike Auguste, daughter of Lutheran Prince Christian Auguste was born. In 1745, Empress Elizabeth of Russia selected the young girl to marry her nephew, future Tsar Peter III. Acquiring the moniker Catherine, the young girl began to absorb Russian culture and customs. In time, she mastered the language, learning to speak without a telltale German accent, and she converted to the Orthodox faith. On Christmas Day 1761, Elizabeth died and, ascending to the throne, Peter promptly ended the military conflict historians would later term the Seven Years' War (1756-63). But the armistice turned the Russian army against the tsar, already considered impotent and incompetent as symptoms of his mental illness grew more apparent. With her lover Grigori Orlov, Catherine overthrew her husband. The dethroned tsar died under mysterious circumstances eight days later.<sup>7</sup>

While Tsarina Catherine II, better known as Catherine the Great, was fluent in Russian culture, she considered many of the peoples in her expanding realm as primitive and backwards. She sought to create in St. Petersburg the splendor of the French court at Versailles and bring Western European thought and culture to Russia, pursuing the goals of Tsar

Peter I (reigned 1682-1725). As an “enlightened despot,” Catherine embarked upon an ambitious plan of reform that included settling Western European farmers on Russia’s eastern frontier. She also viewed these settlers as a human buffer between her civilized empire and Asiatic invaders. Only three weeks into her reign, Catherine issued her first manifesto, inviting all peoples (except Jews) to settle in her empire. The invitation met with little response. One year later, she issued a second manifesto that would become the basis for German settlement in the Volga River region and north of the Black Sea.<sup>8</sup> In the manifesto, Catherine promised prospective Western European settlers:

1. Permission to settle where they wished;
2. Freedom of religion;
3. Thirty-years of tax exemption for those settling in underdeveloped areas;
4. Perpetual exemption from military service;
5. Ten-year, interest-free loans to build homes and buy farming equipment;
6. The ability to buy serfs and peasants if those settlers established new kinds of factories with their own money;
7. Free transportation from embarkation to destination;
8. An unspecified amount of “board money” when they reported to the Tutelary Chancellery, which had been established by Catherine to oversee the manifesto and whose offices were in St. Petersburg and other border cities; and
9. Permission to return to their lands of

origin at any time.<sup>9</sup>

With her invitation in place, Catherine began a public relations campaign aimed at specific European states. She printed the manifesto and glowing supplements to it in a variety of languages and sent agents throughout the continent to recruit settlers. After four years, these efforts produced little interest. Catherine then turned to the poorest of her own people, peasants in the Germanic states. They had endured five generations of military conflict, beginning with the Thirty Years' War in 1618. Ruthless nobles and warlords oppressed the peasants, levying exorbitant taxes and forcing them into military service. "Poverty stricken, starving, and degraded by their rulers, these poorest of the poor heard the

golden words of the recruiters..." writes Moonyean Waag. "Compared to the untenable conditions in the German states, Russia sounded like paradise."<sup>10</sup> Heeding Catherine's call, over 27,000 German-speaking Evangelicals from Hesse and the Rhinelands settled in 104 mother colonies on either side of the Volga River in Russia. Indeed, the exodus swelled to the extent that German rulers, including Joseph II of the Holy Roman Empire, issued bans against emigration. They were ignored.<sup>11</sup>

On February 20, 1804, Alexander I (reigned 1801-1825) issued yet another manifesto inviting foreigners to settle in Russia. The manifesto coincided with Russia's

expansion into the lands around the Black Sea and followed the devastation wreaked by Napoleon's failed conquest of Europe. This second wave of immigration included German-speaking people from Baden, Alsace, Württemberg, The Palatinate, and Hesse. While, like the Volga settlers, most of these immigrants were Evangelical Protestants, there was among them a sizeable



**Map 1.** The Russian Empire during the reign of Catherine the Great (circa 1795), noting German colonies. (Based on Bently and Ziegler; and Karl Stumpp. Map by the author.)

population of Catholics. Even as late as 1884, German peasants founded more colonies north of the Black Sea and in the Crimea, Bassarabia, and the South Caucasus. However, the majority of those who came to Colorado were from the original Volga colonies.<sup>12</sup>

As the German settlers arrived on the frontier of Russia, they found a landscape utterly alien to anything they had ever experienced. The treeless, uninhabited steppes of Russia stretched forever into the horizon. Kloberdanz argues that it was this unusual topography that sculpted the unique worldview of the Germans from Russia who emerged onto the high plains of Colorado.

The sheer vastness of the steppe forced the Germans to settle in close-knit, isolated communities. Here they retained the language and customs of their forefathers while they adapted to the realities of surviving on the brutal landscape. “Separated from any semblance of their homeland, the Volga Germans stubbornly clung to their traditional ways and language of their forefathers,” Kloberdanz writes. “After more than a century of an isolated existence on the Russian steppe, the Volga Germans continue to assiduously preserve many eighteenth-century practices.”<sup>13</sup> Not only did the Germans on the Volga rarely intermarry with their Russian neighbors, they considered themselves culturally superior to the Russian peasants and Kirghiz and Tartar tribes.<sup>14</sup>

However, the landscape and outside cultures did manage to influence German colonists in limited ways. The settlers adapted the agricultural methods, architecture, and dress of their Russian neighbors, who, in turn, had adapted those practices to the environment. For instance, without trees from which to obtain the lumber for a typical German wood-framed house, Volga Germans adapted puddled-mud and mud-brick construction, very similar to adobe in the American southwest. Additionally, the colonists incorporated Russian words into their language; slept in winter on their typically Russian earthen stoves; and drank *kvas*, which is made from fermented black bread. Germans in Russia even instituted *obshchina* or *mir*, a Russian system of communal land division. Thus, when these Germans from Russia appeared in northern Colorado for the first time in the late 1880’s, their distinctively Russian clothing may have led many to conclude that they were ethnically Russian as well. They wore *Felzstiefel* (felt boots); the men donned *Belz* (long sheepskin coats); and the women cov-

ered their heads with *Halstuche* (black shawls).<sup>15</sup>

The most significant impact on the Volga-German worldview stemmed from the unprecedented amount of work required to survive on the steppes. In time, the Germans in Russia began to idealize work in their culture. “Work was such an integral part of the Volga German world view that it was sometimes recognized as a personalized presence,” Kloberdanz argues. “It was not something to be done; it was someone to be conquered.” Repeated often was the Volga German maxim “*Arbeit, komm her, ich fress dich auf!*” (Come, work, I will devour you!) or “*Arbeit macht das Leben süß*” (Work renders life sweet). In time, Germans in Russia developed a callous attitude toward physical burdens; they did not consider women or children exempt from grueling manual labor, and they saw their Russian peasant neighbors as lazy and slow.<sup>16</sup>

Despite German successes on the steppes, Catherine’s promises to the colonists were far from eternal. Even before the end of the tsarina’s reign, events began slowly eroding the liberties of all of the empire’s peasants and foreigners. In 1773, a ragtag army of disgruntled Cossacks, exiles, peasants, and serfs, led by Emelian Pugachev, mounted a rebellion in the steppes north of the Caspian Sea. The vicious attack against nobles, Orthodox priests, government officials, and the imperial army was the result of mounting taxes and government supervision, as well as enforced conscription and the inability for an individual to own land. Pugachev was captured in 1774 and brutally executed, despite Catherine’s prior reforms against capital punishment. As a result of the uprising, the tsarina further limited the rights of peasants and expanded the power of the nobility. The French Revolution in 1789 horrified mon-



archs across Europe and led Catherine to completely abandon her program of westernization. In the mid-nineteenth century, Tsar Alexander II tried again to reform Russian society, this time abolishing serfdom. (Russia was the last stronghold of this medieval system in Europe.) However, Russia suffered a humiliating defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856) while antigovernment protest and revolutionary activity increased. A terrorist's bomb killed Alexander in 1881. The attack prompted the tsarist autocracy to adopt a policy of uncompromising repression. Nicholas II (reigned 1894-1917), Russia's last tsar, radically increased police power to subdue political dissent and severely limited the autonomy of Germans in Russia.<sup>17</sup>

The first hints that Catherine's promises to German settlers would be suspended occurred in June 1871 when Alexander II suspended the colonists' right to govern themselves. In the same act, he placed German villages under the direct control of the Ministry of the Interior and ordered that all records formerly kept in German would, from that time on, be recorded in Russian. By this time, the Russian Empire had grown to include huge swaths of land and diverse peoples. Government officials in St. Petersburg feared that without forced cultural and political assimilation, the realm would crumble. In response, the tsar initiated a policy of reforms aimed at "Russification." In January 1874, Alexander proclaimed that all residents of the Russian Empire would be subjected to military service in the imperial army. "...Compulsory military service was viewed as a breach of Catherine's 'eternal' promises," writes Rock. "...The military threat to German freedoms looms large in many family memories in America to this day." The Germans in Russia were not about to surrender the customs and traditions they had strug-

gled so hard to maintain. But for those who failed to leave by 1897, Russian authorities placed all previously independent German schools under the Ministry of Education and made Russian language instruction mandatory.<sup>18</sup>

Other factors were at work on the steppes of the Volga as well. The German colonists endured declining grain prices and severe droughts in 1873 and 1875. The *mir* system resulted in reduced individual land holdings as the population increased. While male colonists received about forty-two acres of land in 1765, it decreased to five in 1914. Famines struck in 1891 and 1893, devastating Saratov and Samara, centers of German settlement.<sup>19</sup>

### Germans from Russia in the United States

While political and environmental crises pushed Germans from the steppes of Russia, economic and political developments in the United States pulled them to the Great Plains. In 1862, Congress passed the *Homestead Act*. This legislation granted a quarter section, or 160 acres, to anyone who paid a small filing fee and lived on and improved the land for five years. After residing on the quarter section for six months, the settler could buy the land for \$1.25 an acre. Like Catherine's manifesto a century earlier, the *Homestead Act* was open to noncitizens.<sup>20</sup> Railroads in the American west also desired to establish towns along their otherwise isolated rights-of-way. They sent agents to Europe, and the pledges of land for the landless proved too enticing for Germans in Russia. "No one welcomed the immigrants from Russia more than did the railway officials eager to sell land..." Rock writes.<sup>21</sup> But perhaps the strongest pull to the United States, especially after the turn of the twentieth century, arose from developments in industrial agriculture that allowed

sugar producers to increase and process the high saccharine content of sugar beets. In the early twentieth century, the impact of the sugar beet industry was so dramatic that many referred to the crop as Colorado's white gold. Germans from Russia had long grown the beet as a garden crop, processing it into a sweet, dark syrup. But Germans from Russia offered the industry more than just know-how; their tenacious work ethic and large families could provide the labor necessary to make sugar beets a worthwhile commodity.

Coincidentally, the Germans from Russia who settled on the Great Plains found government policies and a treeless terrain similar to that which their ancestors encountered in Russia a century earlier. As the republic spread across the continent, officials in Washington, like Catherine in Russia, were concerned about the vast amounts of uninhabited land and provided land grants and unprecedented independence to those willing to settle there. Also, the federal government sought a culturally superior buffer in the west to what it considered primitive natives. On the treeless prairie, German Russian's mud-brick construction, dry-farming techniques, and work ethic made them successful in a wilderness many Americans still considered a desert. Indeed, the sod house, an American icon, may well have been an innovation of the Germans from Russia.<sup>22</sup>

The first Germans from Russia who came to the United States arrived in the 1870s from the Black Sea region. From eastern port cities, they settled throughout the Midwest and West, but Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas drew the largest numbers. Those who settled in these areas brought with them hard, Turkey red wheat they had cultivated in Russia, transforming the Great American Desert into the breadbasket of the world. Particularly notable German-Russian popula-

tions evolved in Russell and Ellis counties in western Kansas. The earliest Germans from Russia to settle in Colorado arrived in 1880-81 as laborers on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and the Kansas (later Union) Pacific railroads. In the mid-1880's, a German-Russian settlement evolved in Globeville, northeast of Denver. The first German-Russian laborers arrived to work in sugar beet fields near Brighton in 1886. These communities, however, remained small until the boom of Colorado's sugar industry in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

The relationship of the sugar beet industry to Germans from Russia is critical to understanding their settlement in Colorado, especially in Fort Collins. The sugar beet industry would have been hard pressed to find the labor it required without Germans from Russia; their large families and insatiable work ethic provided cheap and dependable stoop labor. Conversely, most of the Germans from Russia who toiled in the state's beet fields needed the employment since they had arrived too late to take advantage of liberal homesteading policy and land prices were too high for the impoverished immigrants to purchase farms. Emigrating from the Volga River region of Russia, these Germans arrived nearly two decades after those from the Black Sea region. Over three-quarters of those who ultimately settled in Larimer County came from the Volga region.<sup>24</sup> Largely Protestant, these immigrants were far less willing to assimilate because of generations of isolation and the



**Figure 2.** Sugar beet. (*Great Western Sugar Company, 1916*)

successful preservation of their Germanic heritage. But the sugar beet industry provided work as well as seclusion to protect German-Russian culture. Families either isolated on the edges of fields on in their own neighborhoods. In Fort Collins, the intimate connection between the Volga Germans and the sugar beet industry manifested itself physically in the geography of the Buckingham and Andersonville neighborhoods; both developed in the shadows of the gigantic sugar factory.<sup>25</sup>

The sugar beet industry was itself the result of many developments. After the turn of the twentieth century, three interrelated events led to a dramatic increase in sugar beet production: the increase in irrigated land, the improvement of beet varieties as well as cultivation techniques, and the construction of sugar beet processing factories. An unnamed writer for the Work Progress Administration's Writer's Program (a New-Deal-era make-work project) called the sugar beet industry "the single largest enterprise based upon irrigation."<sup>26</sup> Historian LeRoy R. Hafen, however, suggests the growth of the sugar beet industry promoted the development of advanced irrigation engineering projects in Colorado. Sugar beets required irrigation in late summer when the state's rivers run at a trickle. In response, irrigation companies built reservoirs to store the high water of early spring and released it when farmers needed it for their beets.

Yet, even with the best irrigation methods and soils, traditional varieties of beets produced very little sugar. A new, national interest in the science and technology of agriculture soon changed that. Along with the *Homestead Act*, Republicans pushed through Congress in 1862 the *Morrill Act*, which created the land-grant college system. Under the act, the federal government offered states

generous subsidies to establish colleges offering instruction in agriculture, engineering, and military science. Under this plan, Colorado established its State Agricultural College in Fort Collins. To accommodate its burgeoning research work, the institution established the Colorado Agriculture Experiment Station in 1888, which concentrated much of its early work on improving the purity and percentage of usable sugar in beets. By 1892, the United States Department of Agriculture rated the beets grown in Larimer County as the best in world.<sup>27</sup>

But even the best beets were practically worthless without a plant nearby to process them into granulated sugar. While farmers clamored for processing plants, town leaders realized the potential economic boon of the industry. In November 1901, the Great Western Sugar Company completed in Loveland the first sugar factory in northern Colorado. Fort Collins gained its own factory in 1903. It first processed sugar a year later.

As more and more factories opened in towns across northern Colorado and farmers planted more and more acres of beets, the sugar industry boomed. But the sugar companies realized early that resident Colorado farmers were often unwilling to endure the grueling labor necessary to produce a healthy and profitable crop of sugar beets. Company executives found that much of the stoop labor, especially thinning beets, was better suited for shorter legs and smaller hands – children. After experimenting with labor from the resident population of teenagers, the companies decided to import labor, particularly entire families. After exhausting the supply of landless Volga German families in Kansas and Nebraska, the sugar companies began importing German families directly from Russia. In time, Great Western transplanted entire villages to Northern Colorado. Often it

brought families to the state through Canada, avoiding the immigrant quota system at Ellis Island in New York Harbor. The result was that the German-Russian families that came to Fort Collins were often far more alien to the city's residents than those who spent a period of assimilation among their more-established Black Sea brethren in Nebraska and Kansas. Their isolation on the steppes was readily apparent as they emerged from

steerage onto American docks. The *New York Herald* described a German-Russian family as they arrived in New York: "They were dressed in their primitive homespun garments, which were usually of coarse wool, and of the most primitive style. Our crack tailors would have been puzzled at the droll appearance of these ancient dresses. The women and children...had funny old handkerchiefs tied 'round their heads.'"<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 3.**

Great Western's sugar factory in Fort Collins, November 24, 1932, at the height of the beet harvest. (Courtesy, Fort Collins Public Library.)

## SECTION II

# Germans from Russia in Fort Collins

Volga Germans in large numbers first arrived in Larimer County shortly after Loveland's sugar factory opened. In the spring of 1902, special trains, sponsored by the sugar companies, brought hundreds of Volga Russian families from Nebraska and Kansas to northern Colorado. As they tended the fields, the families lived in tents or vacant shacks.<sup>29</sup> The German-Russia laborers proved to be so effective that sugar beet farmers and producers hastened to receive them the next spring. The Fort Collins Colorado Sugar Company brought forty-eight families to Fort Collins in April 1903. Farmers rushed to town to acquire the laborers. "Indeed, their employers were in town with teams waiting for them to arrive so that the newcomers could be taken to their homes without delay," proclaimed the *Fort Collins Weekly Courier*. "The arrivals are bright, intelligent looking people and will no doubt make good citizens."<sup>30</sup> Among the arrivals was a young Volga German girl who emigrated from Russia to Kansas when she was six. "My father worked in the hot wheat field during the summer,...but my mother said we should go where we could all work," remembered Mrs. Peter L. Miller in 1976. "So we came to Fort Collins in a boxcar, when the sugar factory opened. Our first home was a new granary and a tent northeast of town. ...In the winter my father got a job in the sugar factory. We came into town and lived in the

Jungles north of town."<sup>31</sup>

As the German-Russians arrived in Fort Collins with their broad caps, felt boots, and long, sheepskin coats, the reaction among residents seems to have been cautious, confused, but largely positive. That the German-Russians would live among them was a foregone conclusion for many in the community; they understood that the immigrants were here to stay. Adrienne Roncolle, wife of a Fort Collins-area farmer, aired her feelings in a letter to the *Weekly Courier* entitled "Welcome to the Russians." In it, she begs her fellow Fort Collins residents not to prejudge the German-Russian families "as strange beings to be looked upon with curiosity." Instead, she considers them "harbingers of prosperity." The German-Russians are "friends whom we can trust and esteem, since for the next few months it will be their labor, their knowledge of the soil which will cause our lands to bring forth wealth in the form of sugar beets." Yet, despite her best intentions, Roncolle commits an error in identity that would plague the German-Russian community; she refers to them simply as Russians, an insult to these proud Germans.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the ethnic confusion, many of the German-Russian beet workers who arrived in Larimer County in 1902 elected to remain in Loveland and Fort Collins at the end of the beet season rather than return to Kansas and Nebraska. Several worked in the

sugar factory in Loveland or helped to construct the new factory at Fort Collins, and the sugar company was more than willing to assist housing them. In November 1902, the Fort Collins Colorado Sugar Company constructed small dwellings on land belonging to Charles Buckingham, next to the burgeoning sugar plant. East of this settlement, Peter Anderson developed a section of his farm into another neighborhood of German-Russian sugar beet workers.

**German-Russian Neighborhoods**

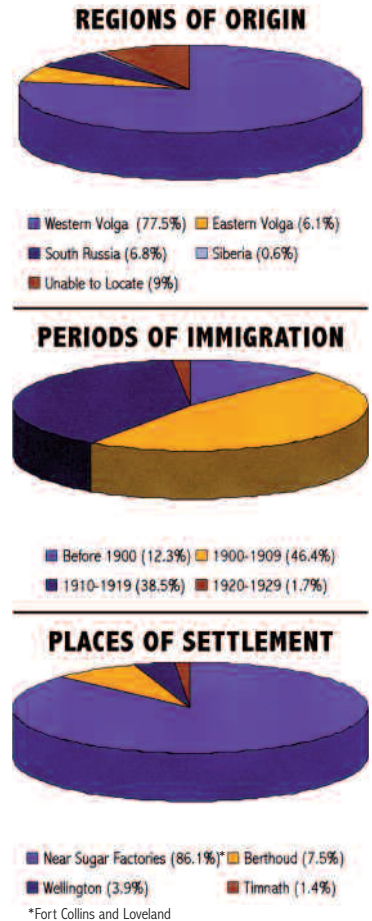
In his 1976 study of Larimer County’s Petitions for Naturalization from 1907 to 1957, Dennis Means found that more than eighty-six percent of the German-Russian petitioners settled adjacent to the sugar factories in Loveland and Fort Collins. With over three-quarters of those settlers originating from the Volga River Region, it is little wonder why residents of Fort Collins referred to the two tiny neighborhoods at the foot of the sugar factor as “Little Saratov.” Geographically and socially isolated from rest of the Fort Collins, Buckingham Place and Andersonville concealed a rich and vibrant culture often overlooked by those who dismissed the settlements as “the Jungles.”<sup>33</sup>

Sugar factory boosters and executives strategically located both neighborhoods; they were within easy walking distance of the factory and the beet fields. Secluding the neighborhoods across the river from Fort Collins would keep seditious, suspect, and unwelcomed foreign influences from seeping into more established neighborhoods. As they envisioned their plant’s location, sugar factory boosters also foresaw the villages that sprang up around it. On April 23, 1902, *The Weekly Courier* described the terrain on which the factory would be constructed, com-

menting that “the ground...is as smooth as a house floor, and the tract will afford ample room for factory, storage shed, side tracks, pulp silo *and tenement houses for employees* [emphasis added].”<sup>34</sup> The settlements stood on the broad floodplain of the Caché La Poudre River, a circumstance that would bring about tragedy early in their history (see below). Although both neighborhoods were immediately northeast of the oldest inhabited portions of Fort Collins, they remained isolated. Except for some industries, especially the sugar factory, this area remained untouched by the general pattern of development in Fort Collins as it spread south along College Avenue.

The oldest of the German-Russian neighborhoods, Buckingham Place, became a home to German-Russian sugar beet laborers even before Fort Collins’s sugar factory opened. As mentioned earlier, many of the Volga German families who came to Larimer County during the 1902 sugar beet campaign elected to remain rather than return to Kansas or Nebraska. The local sugar companies realized the benefit of retaining as much labor as possible for the next year’s campaign. As a result, the Fort Collins Colorado Sugar Company purchased a parcel of land adjacent to the sugar factory site. They named the resulting neighborhood for the land’s former owner, Charles Buckingham, a wealthy Boulder banker, investor, and real estate speculator.<sup>35</sup> The *Weekly Courier* describes the scene in late December 1902:

A new colony has been started east of town...by Russian sugar beet workers. Thirteen little box houses 20x12, with oval roofs and 4 little windows, have been put up, with sheds for horses and cows. The houses, while small, seem comfortable and new ones are being built daily.<sup>36</sup>



**Charts 1-3.** Demographics of Larimer County’s Germans from Russia, based on petitions for naturalization filed at the county courthouse, 1907 to 1957. (Charts developed from Means.)

In late 1903, another German-Russian settlement, northeast of Buckingham, evolved from an assemblage of migrant worker shacks on the Peter Anderson farm. An avid civic booster, Anderson was the leading champion of the sugar factory in Fort Collins. He purchased the quarter section east of Fort Collins in 1865 and later increased the farm to 330 acres. The Larimer County pioneer eventually amassed a small fortune running cattle and feeding lambs. He was vice president of the First National Bank of Fort Collins, president of the Wellington Bank, and owned a harness shop and hardware store. He was also one of the first farmers in Larimer County to plant sugar beets and use German-Russian labor.<sup>37</sup>

Early in their existence, the German-Russian neighborhoods acquired a wide variety of names from the *Englische* across the Poudre. In a footnote to his history of Germans from Russia in Fort Collins, Mark Spier tried to make sense of the different names:

Buckingham was known to Americans and Germans alike as “the Jungles” and birth records carry that name for many born there. Andersonville is referred to as “Saratov” by the Germans and in contemporary newspapers as “Russianville,” “New Russia,” “Russian Quarters,” “Little Russia,” and “Russiatown.” Buckingham and Andersonville are referred to as “St. Petersburg” but Buckingham receives the name most often.<sup>38</sup>

Native-born Americans often used the term the “Jungles” to describe the cacophony and engineered disorder of dangerous machines, polluting chimneys, and foreign-born laborers common to major industrial sites. This meaning of the word entered popular parlance as Progressive-era reformers targeted factory ghettos, achieving infamy in

Upton Sinclair’s 1906 novel, *The Jungle*, an exposé of Chicago’s meatpacking industry.<sup>39</sup>

As the “Jungles” increased in population, so too did they increase in notoriety. Buckingham and Andersonville drew the scorn and intrigue of Fort Collins residents in the same way slums and tenements attracted the attention of the eastern, urban upper and middle classes. Newspapers from the period are littered with sordid, tantalizing blurbs about liquor violations, “disorderly houses,” shootings, and stabbings. In reporting the creation of Andersonville, the editor of the



*Weekly Courier* could not resist a tongue-in-cheek jab at the new German-Russian settlement: “It is rumored that two saloons will soon be opened at Andersonville, the new suburb. In that event a trolley line from this city to that point would be a paying investment.”<sup>40</sup>

Yet while outsiders attempted to degrade Germans from Russia and their neighborhoods, residents within the settlements struggled to improve their lot. Keenly aware of the suspicious eyes of the *Englische* across the Poudre, Buckingham and Andersonville residents maintained tidy, safe neighborhoods. In 1904, most of the houses had lace curtains at the windows and pleasant gardens in the backyard.<sup>41</sup> By the beginning of that year, residents in Buckingham began clamoring for a town of their own. At the end of January,

### Figure 4.

This view of East Lincoln Avenue reveals the size and shape of most dwellings in Buckingham. (Photo by the author.)

residents of the neighborhood sent a petition to the Larimer County Court to incorporate as the town of East Collins. The court received the petition, however, with suspicion. It required the signatures of a majority of “qualified electors.” Those electors had to be American citizens and landowners within the area to be incorporated. While the population of Buckingham was at least 135 people at this time, it is doubtful that many, if any, of the residents of the neighborhood met those requirements.<sup>42</sup> *The Courier* was quick to point this out the following week when it reported that the court rejected the petition:

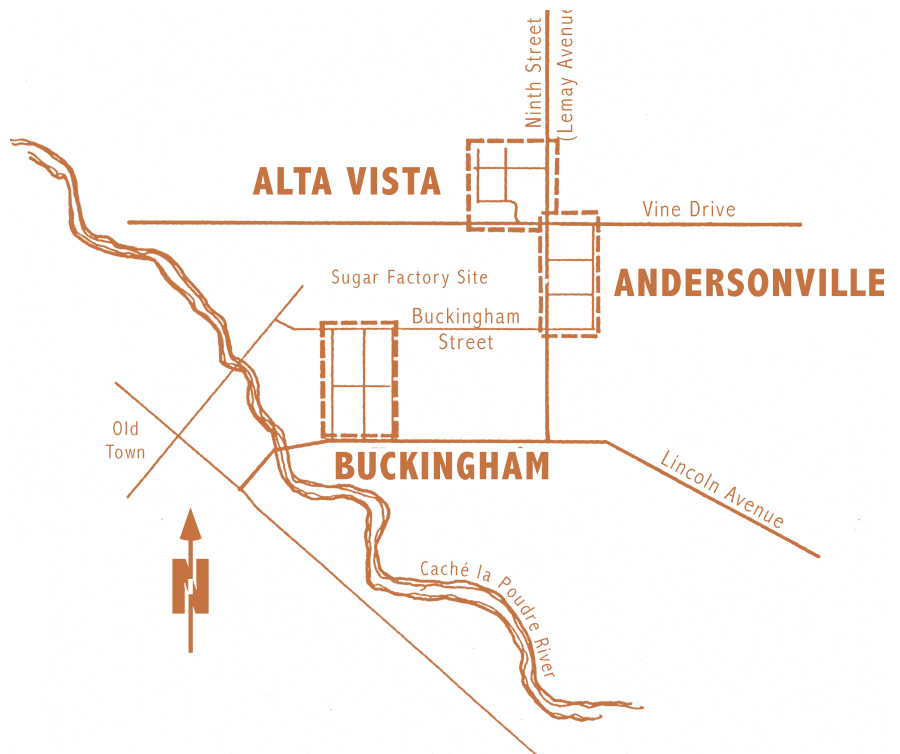
...The court had no jurisdiction to entertain the petition for the further reason that it does not state upon its face that it is signed by 30 land owners of the territory to be embraced, who are qualified electors therein. It was further more claimed that there are not 30 qualified electors with the proposed corporate limits who are land owners therein.<sup>43</sup>

Another, more powerful actor also campaigned against East Collins – the Fort Collins Colorado Sugar Company, which submitted to the court a counter petition. The company argued that it was the largest landowner in the proposed town and, as such, would be heavily and unjustifiably taxed. Executives also played up already extent concerns about Buckingham. “The petition of the sugar company charged that the town is proposed to be incorporated for the sole purpose of enabling certain evil disposed persons to procure a license from the town to sell intoxicating liquors to the employees of the petitioner.”<sup>44</sup> Litigation continued into March, when the court had to hire as an interpreter the Rev. Mr. Burckhart, a German-Russian minister, because many of the witnesses before the court could not speak English.<sup>45</sup>

However, a natural disaster disrupted efforts to incorporate Buckingham and

improve Andersonville. On May 21, 1904, in the mountains high above Fort Collins, heavy rains combined with melting snow to turn the Caché la Poudre River into a deadly deluge. At the same time, cloudbursts on the plains quickly saturated the soil. As the rush of water left the confines of Poudre Canyon, it exploded across the flood plain, bringing with it bridges, houses, and anything else unfortunate enough to be in its path – including Buckingham and Andersonville. At the site of the Strauss Cabin, southeast of Fort Collins, the river channel grew to a mile across. Photographs in the local history archives of the Fort Collins Public Library reveal the extent of destruction. In Buckingham, standing water reaches nearly to the windows of the little houses, which are scattered about at odd angles like a sea of shipwrecks. Another photo shows a house thrown from its footers while a shack beside it has been tumbled onto its roof. In Andersonville, the Poudre pours down Ninth Street as a new river chan-

**Map 2.** The sugar factory neighborhoods northeast of downtown Fort Collins. (Based on Community Services Collaborative)





nel; front-porch posts have been skewed and debris hangs in the fences. But despite the havoc, the German-Russian families survived. While newspaper accounts are unclear, the only casualty of the flood appears to have been George Robert Strauss. The longtime Fort Collins pioneer refused to leave his cabin as the flood approached, arguing that he had already survived the worst of floods on the Poudre.<sup>46</sup>

But tragedy breeds triumph, and in Fort Collins, the flood forced the *Englische* and “Rooshuns” to work for the common good. Donations poured into the Salvation Army. Residents unaffected by the flood gave what they could. The Colorado & Southern Railroad provided boxcars for temporary housing while hotels and townsfolk offered their spare rooms to the homeless. As a result, Germans from Russia in Fort Collins became intimately connected to the rest of the community in a way that did not occur in other northern Colorado towns. “When the ‘Russians’ returned to the remains of their homes across the river, they carried with them the first vestiges of Americanization – the new clothing that replaced traditional garb of the townspeople,” Spier argues. “The German Russians became more closely tied to Fort Collins by the flood and the philanthropic nature of the townspeople.”<sup>47</sup> The German-Russian families in Andersonville and Buckingham quickly rebuilt and, a little more than a year after the flood, Fort Collins annexed Buckingham. Andersonville quickly followed.<sup>48</sup>

Interestingly, the spatial arrangement of Buckingham and Andersonville would have been familiar and comfortable to even the most recent of German immigrants from Russia. Typically, thoroughfares in German settlements in Russia were oriented north-south, often without intervening cross streets.

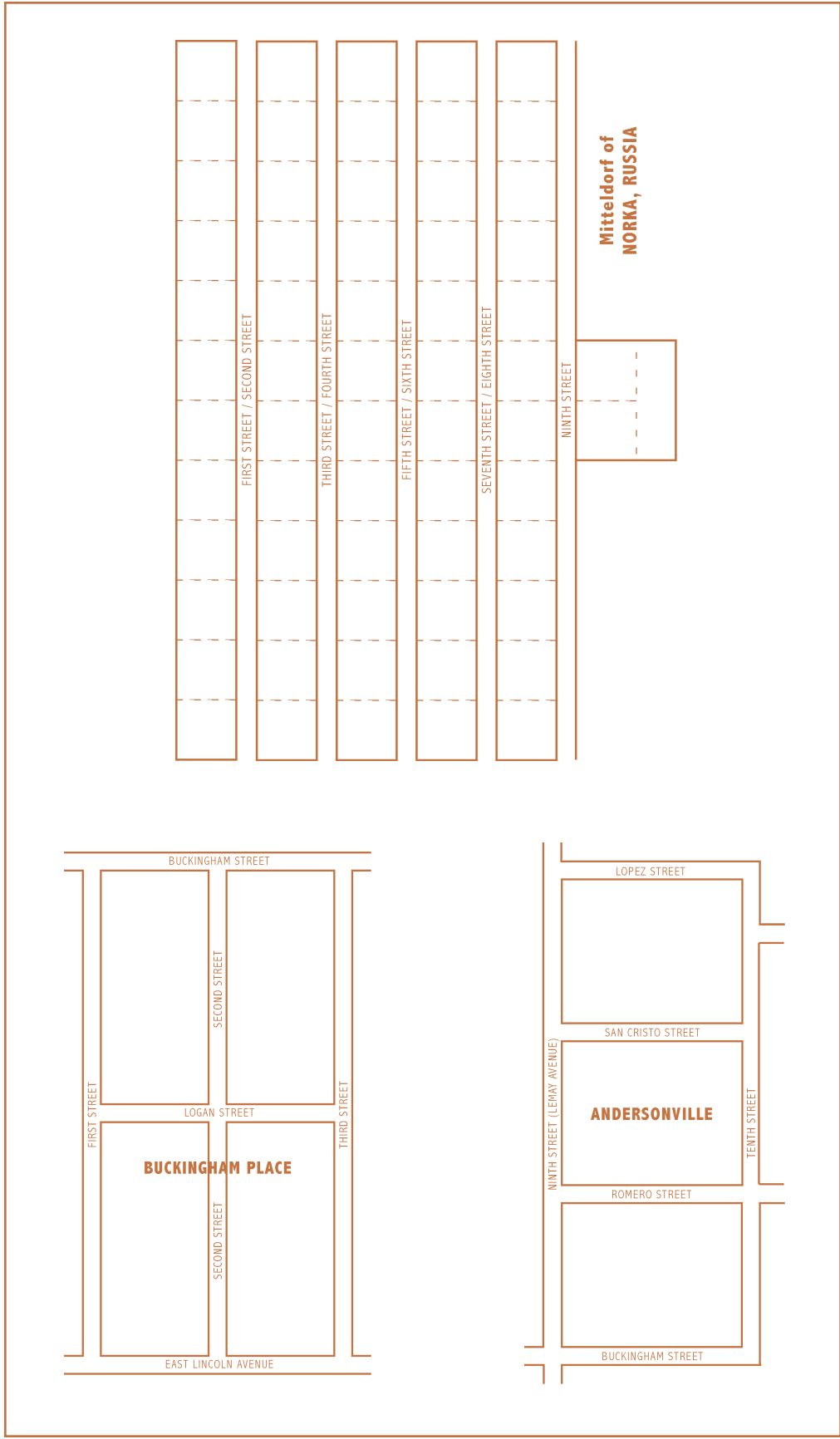
Lots were arranged in narrow, east-west bands, with the house facing the street, gardens behind it, and outbuildings at the opposite edge of the property. Figure 6 compares the street plan for the village of Norka, southeast of Saratov, Russia, to Andersonville and Buckingham. Whether by coincidence or thoughtful planning, the principal streets in both Buckingham and Andersonville run north-south with the narrow lots running east-west.<sup>49</sup> The majority of houses in Buckingham face First, Second, and Third streets, all north-south, while only a handful of houses face east-west running



Buckingham Street and Lincoln Avenue. The same is true in Andersonville, where houses face north-south Ninth and Tenth streets. More tellingly, after the flood, the pattern of reconstruction in Buckingham and Andersonville appeared to follow no prescribed grid system. “...There is no distinct pattern of development that might have been characterized by the standard housing plans or styles of a company town or by a standard setback from the street,” writes Jill Ebers in her analysis of the neighborhoods. Yet, despite this lack of a plan, the grid that later appeared as Fort Collins improved the streets

**Figure 5.**

This false-front retail structure on First Street, Buckingham, predates the 1904 flood and is the only structure of its kind in the neighborhood. (Photo by the author.)



**Figure 6.** The north-south alignment of streets in the Volga village of Norka correlates to the street alignment in Buckingham and Andersonville. Illustrations are not to scale. (Norka plan based on Olson and Reisbick; illustrations by the author.)

was rigidly oriented north-south and seemed to fit perfectly the general pattern of construction in Russia. Moreover, Alta Vista, or Spanish Colony, Great Western's hispanic labor settlement northwest of Andersonville, exhibits no such north-south arrangement.<sup>50</sup>

Ebers also points out that post-flood Buckingham and Andersonville were unique in that, unlike Alta Vista or mining towns, these neighborhoods were not true company towns. Andersonville was private enterprise, while the houses in Buckingham were a collaboration of the sugar company and beet farm owners. The neighborhoods did have some limited similarities to company towns, particularly that the factory was the focal point around which the towns were established. But there was not a company store or company-endorsed (often enforced) architectural standard.<sup>51</sup> A small, privately-owned grocery store did emerge early in Buckingham's history. The false-front, wood-frame retail structure, located near the corner of First Street and Lincoln Avenue, appears in photographs of the 1904 flood. It has survived numerous floods since then and stands today.<sup>52</sup>

### German-Russian Domestic Architecture

The dwellings of Germans from Russia in the Fort Collins area could vary as widely as an old wooden boxcar at the edge of a beet field to a handsome cottage in Andersonville. In some cases, families might have lived in a field-side shanty during the beet campaign (from March to November) and resided the rest of the year in a more sophisticated house near the sugar factory, where the found employment. The earliest dwellings in Buckingham appear to have been identical beet shacks based on a plan or kit common to northern Colorado, while Andersonville featured more high-style cottages. The 1904

flood seemed to have balanced development in both neighborhoods; modest, late Victorian and, later, simple Craftsman homes replaced the beet shacks and temporary housing.

As mentioned before, by late December 1902 Buckingham boasted thirteen houses measuring twenty-by-twelve feet with four small, square windows. The most notable feature, however, was the shallowly arched, rounded roof. The dimensions and descriptions of these shacks resemble those of simi-



**Figures 7 and 8.**

Top: A typical northern Colorado beet shanty, circa 1923. Bottom: A contemporary photograph of a beet shanty on Third Street in Buckingham. This view is to the southeast. Note the shed-roof addition to the south side and the square windows. This is most likely a survivor of the 1904 flood. (Top photo from U.S. Department of Labor; bottom photo by the author)



lar shanties throughout northern Colorado, particularly the example preserved at the Greeley Museum. This beet shanty measures twenty-four-by-fourteen feet, features five small, square windows, and has a rounded roof. The shanties in Buckingham were most likely framed with two-by-four-inch or two-by-six-inch studs spaced a foot apart. Wide, rough-hewn planks were then nailed to this frame. Tarpaper secured with vertical furring strips clad the exterior walls. Windows were almost always four-light fixed or casement and fenestration varied with the arrangement of rooms inside. Red or black felt covered the roof of the structure and provided all of the insulation. This roofing was also secured with furring strips, which ran perpendicular to the eaves. A short, round stovepipe emerged near the crest of the roof. Interestingly, a house of similar form and proportion still exists at 240 Third Avenue in Fort Collins. Photos of the 1904 flood also show side-gabled shanties of similar dimensions and identical windows. They are sheathed in vertical, board-and-batten siding.<sup>53</sup> Inside, most shanties were one or two rooms, a rather ancient hall-and-parlor division of corporate space. Larger, more permanent shanties contained an actual division between rooms, while suspended blankets dividing sleeping from living and cooking areas of smaller structures.<sup>54</sup>

The interiors of these tiny houses must have seemed inhumanly cramped to outsiders. But histories of German settlements in Russia and oral histories of those German-Russian who came to the United States reveal a long history of high-density living. Katherine Elizabeth Blehm was born in Seraco, Russia, in 1895, and spent much of her life in Fort Collins. She recalled that in Russia, thirteen people resided in her family's three-room house.<sup>55</sup> German-Russian families in Russia and the United States often

slept crossways on mattresses to economize space and conserve body heat in the poorly insulated and heated structures. Even in 1924, about seventy small structures in Buckingham housed 500 German-Russians. Each house averaged a little over seven residents.<sup>56</sup>

The situation was a bit different in Andersonville. There, the Fort Collins Colorado Sugar Company did not supply the houses. Instead, German-Russian families alone or with the help of a farm owner purchased the lots and built houses on them. These structures tended to be larger and more architecturally sophisticated than those in Buckingham. A 1904 photograph shows Ninth Street looking north from what is now San Cristo Street. Of the three houses clearly visible, two are rather complex cottages with muted, late-Victorian decorative elements. One features scroll-cut cresting on its intersecting-gable roof, and the other has a bracketed, protruding bay window. With vertical board-and-batten siding and simple, square porch supports, the third house lacks the decorative elements of the others, but it is still notably larger than the standard beet shanty in Buckingham. This may answer why Andersonville, despite having a smaller population, was the first German-Russian neighborhood to construct a church and school; the residents may have been more affluent. Also telling are the differences in architectural sophistication and house size between Andersonville and Buckingham as well as before and after the flood in both neighborhoods. Left to their own devices, Germans from Russia constructed more elaborate houses than the sugar company or farmers provided to them.<sup>57</sup>

Domestic architectural details specific to Germans from Russia are difficult to determine. In his 1970 study of German-Russian

settlement in Ellis County, Kansas, Albert Peterson found several characteristics in common to the homes of Germans from Russia. Those features were a hipped roof; two-over-two, double-hung sash windows; and mud-brick or stone construction. The most notable feature was the Volga architrave, seen most often as a window surround.<sup>58</sup> Because Andersonville and Buckingham have been home to Hispanic families since the 1920's, it is difficult to determine if the adobe construction present in them corresponds to their occupation or to the Germans from Russia. However, many of the early homes in Andersonville and those built after the flood in Buckingham had hipped roofs and usually front and back porches, according to Joan Zimmerman Anderson. The hipped-box type was ubiquitous to Colorado, but was also strongly identified with Germans in Russia and their settlements throughout the western United States. If the lot was large enough, a German-Russian family often constructed a summer kitchen apart from the main house. This tradition was also carried over from Russia, where each family compound included a courtyard with a *Sommerkuche*. But in general, most German-Russian houses in Colorado were simple and organic – added onto as the family grew or as money allowed.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the cramped living conditions, hard-packed dirt floors, the filth of the beet fields, and the stench of rotting beet pulp, Germans from Russia kept their houses – and neighborhoods – as immaculate as possible. Indeed, Sykes's *Second Hoeing* drew the most criticism from Germans from Russia for its portrayal of their families as dirty and disposed to thievery. Kloberdanz argues that the cleanliness of German-Russian homes was “an extremely touchy subject” within the community at the time of the novel’s publica-

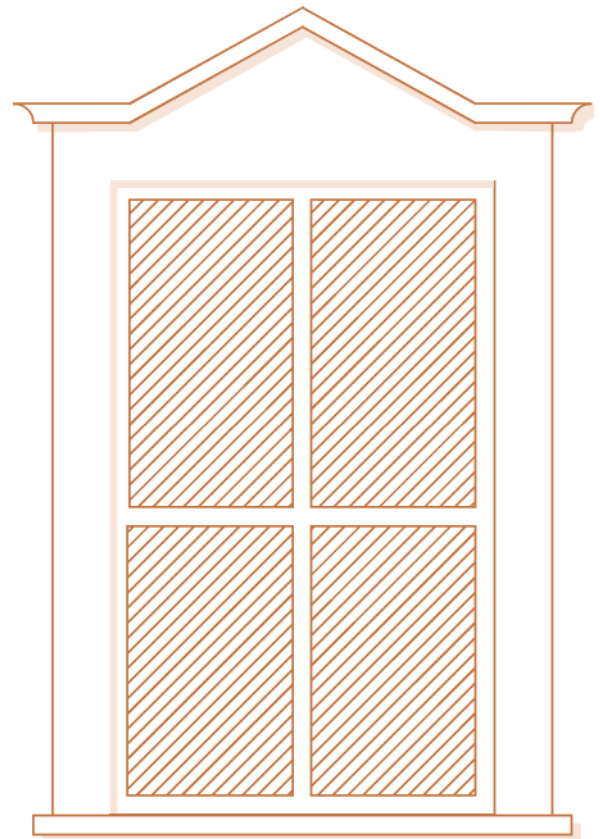
tion:

...The epithet “dirty Rooshun” frequently was hurled at self-conscious Volga-German immigrants regardless of their physical appearance. ...Within the tightly knit Volga-German communities (where ridicule was an effective means of informal social control), dirt – like theft – was anathema. The allegation that German Russians were dirty was viewed by more astute members of the group as a way for American landowners to justify the chicken coops, boxcars, and sordid tarpaper shacks that had been given large Volga-German families as living quarters.<sup>60</sup>

Even a 1923 investigation by the United States Department of Labor, seeking the most dismal of living and working conditions, admitted that German-Russian-owned houses were particularly tidy:<sup>61</sup>

The houses owned by the laborers, though seldom more than one story high and often containing only two or three rooms, were as a rule clean, well-kept little places, frequently very attractive, with good furniture, bright rugs or new linoleum, lace curtains, and plants in every corner.

However, the report found that farmer- and company-provided housing was often miserable, rating over a third of the structures “in poor condition,” lacking even basic weatherproofing.<sup>62</sup> Thus, one can conclude that not only were German-Russian-owned houses larger and more sophisticated than company-



**Figure 9.** Volga architrave as a window surround. (Illustration by the author.)

farmer-provided dwellings, but also they were far more habitable and sanitary.

**German-Russian Churches:  
The Cycle of Faith**

While Syke's depiction of filthy Volga Germans homes was exaggerated and out of context, Kloberdanz argues that the novelist's depiction of German-Russian spiritual life was accurate. The church and its ceremonies marked rites of passage for individuals, families, and the community. The spiritual life cycle of christening, confirmation, marriage, and funeral coexisted with the cycle of labor – sowing, thinning, hoeing and harvesting. Sykes follows both cycles in her novel and expertly lays one across the other. Strong faith and hard work were cornerstones of German-Russian culture and were keys to the community's survival, whether on the steppes of the Volga or on the high plains of Colorado.

One of the earliest faith-based institutions among Fort Collins's German-Russians actually came from outside of the community. In 1905, William Schureman, a local Presbyterian minister, established a mission in Buckingham. Housed in a twenty-by-forty-foot structure, the interdenominational mission offered English-language instruction, hymn sings, and limited medical care. The Akin family of Fort Collins also conducted worship services there. But, as Spier writes, the language barrier was insurmountable. The mission was short-lived.<sup>63</sup>

Churches originating from within the German-Russian community, however, were much more successful. The earliest of these churches in Fort Collins began in the parlors of houses or in other small buildings. These small congregations merged, disbanded, and reformed several times. From the disparate organizations it is difficult to determine



**Figures 10 and 11.** Top: Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church, at the corner of Whedbee and Olive streets, was constructed by German-Russian families in 1913 to 1914. It is now St. James Episcopal Church. Bottom: The cornerstone of the church, in German on one face and English on the other, is symbolic of the schism that developed between the first and second generations of Germans from Russia in Fort Collins. (Photos by the author.)



which congregations developed first. Nonetheless, the German-Russian community in Fort Collins soon identified itself with

two congregations: Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran and German Evangelical Congregational.

While Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church was officially organized on March 20, 1904, church records date back to 1902, the first year of large-scale German-Russian settlement in Fort Collins. At first Rev. Manntuefuel, an itinerant preacher, conducted services in various homes in Buckingham and Andersonville. Then, in late 1903, the Fort Collins Colorado Sugar Company offered the congregation a small outbuilding to use as a church. Peter and Cora Anderson donated to the fledgling congregation two lots, now in the 500 block of Tenth Street in Andersonville. The congregation moved the former sugar company outbuilding to the lots and, as Venita Schneider describes it, “remodeled [the building] into a church with a high pulpit approached by a winding stairs, patterned after European pulpits.”<sup>64</sup> The church survived the flood that devastated the area around it and, little more than a week after the disaster, the congregation installed Rev. W. John Siefkes as pastor.

The Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran congregation continued to grow and by 1913 required a larger church. On the corner of Whedbee and Olive Streets, men of the church began to excavate the basement of the new worship space with shovels and teams of horses. Each family was assigned to haul with horse-drawn wagons loads of limestone from the quarries at Stout (now beneath Horsetooth Reservoir) to the construction site. The old church in Andersonville was dismantled and the lumber reused for the basement ceiling and the back entrance of the new church. The structure was completed in 1914.

However, beginning in the 1930’s, a schism developed between first- and second-generation Germans from Russia. The wound

proved too deep for even their strong faith to heal. Church elders at Bethlehem insisted on conducting services and religious education in German. George K. Deins, in a 1979 oral history interview, recalled that the church also continued seating “in the Russian-style, with the men on the right and the women on the left.”<sup>65</sup> But the pastor of the church, Rev. Conrad H. Becker, and other second-generation families sought to worship in English and sit as a family. Adding to the problem was the fact that Becker, who was not a German from Russia, assisted Sykes in writing *Second Hoeing*. Its 1935 publication met with strong condemnation from the older generation of Germans from Russia who controlled the church. On June 24, 1938, Becker and forty-six families separated from Bethlehem to form the American Lutheran Church. Naming their new church “American” is a telling symbol of the second generation’s desire to assimilate into the culture around them. The new congregation conducted services at a Unitarian church on the corner of Mulberry and College. They purchased a building at Mulberry and Mathews and, most recently, moved to a new building at 301 East Stuart Street. The congregation changed its name to Trinity Lutheran Church on May 24, 1965. Bethlehem continued to conduct services in German until 1955. Six years later, the original congregation relocated again to a larger structure at 1200 South Taft Hill Road. Members of the congregation renamed themselves Shepherd of the Hills in 1962.<sup>66</sup>

The other congregation identified with the Germans from Russia began in much the same way as the Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran. Members of the German Evangelical Congregational Church met in houses and available buildings until November 1903 when Rev. Paul Buckhard

became the pastor. He conducted services in the Grand Army of the Republic Hall on Linden Street while members of the congregation began soliciting residents of Fort Collins for donations to build a more adequate worship space. This fund drive quickly created a rift in the German-Russian community as the Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran congregations was conducting its own fund drive at the same time. The Congregationalists accused the Lutherans of taking pledges from residents who thought they were contributing to the Congregationalists. Despite the allegations, the Congregationalists raised enough money to construct their new church at the corner of Oliver and Whedbee streets. They hired the most popular architect in Fort Collins at that time, Montezuma Fuller, to design the church and construction began in June 1904. Completed at the cost of \$6,000, the church was dedicated on June 18, 1905.<sup>67</sup>

Shortly after the dedication of the new church, a faction left the congregation to form the Evangelical Congregational Immanuel Church. They rejoined the German Congregational Church in November 1906 only to separate again six years later. The original parish continued to prosper and later became Plymouth Congregational Church, located today near the corner of Shields Street and Prospect Road in Fort Collins. The Evangelical Congregational Immanuel Church had more of a struggle but eventually acquired a church of its own at the corner of Remington and Olive streets.

The original German-Russian churches were poignant symbols of their congregations' rich faith and desire to acquire respect and legitimacy in Fort Collins. It is important to remember that when the Congregationalists built their first church and when the Lutherans sought to construct a

larger church they chose locations *outside* of their own neighborhoods. Certainly building the churches in Andersonville or Buckingham would have been far more convenient for the German-Russian community and, as in Russia, would have further allowed them to remain isolated. But as Klobberdanz argues, Germans from Russia could not maintain an attitude of superiority in America. Constructing the churches near the heart of Fort Collins provided a sense of legitimacy and air of respect to the German-Russian community – it gained visibility south of the Poudre. And churches may well have been

the best institutions in which the German-Russian community could exhibit their German heritage to the rest of Fort Collins. While contemporary newspapers refer to Germans from Russia almost always as Russians, they label their churches as German. Indeed, as early as 1903, the *Weekly Courier* mentions “German Lutherans” in Andersonville and later, in the same article, calls them “German Russians” rather than just Russians. Americans at this time may well have associated Russians with Eastern Orthodoxy – its prominent onion domes and Byzantine crosses. German-Russian churches may well have been too familiar to most Americans to refer to them simply as Russian. Thus, Americans considered



**Figure 12.** Designed by Montezuma Fuller in 1903-1904, this handsome edifice stands at the corner of Olive and Whedbee streets. Once home to the German Evangelical Congregational Church, it is now Mountain View Christian Center. (Photo by the author.)



Germans from Russia – at least in their spirituality – as ethnically German.<sup>68</sup>

Architecturally, both of the original German-Russian churches exhibited Gothic influences – an important connection to and statement of German heritage. Both structures were also visible manifestation of each congregation’s particular Protestant dogma. The older of the structures, the German Evangelical Congregational Church, was completed in 1904 on the southwest corner of Olive and Whedbee Streets. It was a square-plan structure with pressed-brick walls and a red sandstone foundation and surrounds. A fifty-foot tower emerged on the northeast corner of the structure. Most notable were the large, pointed-arch, stained-glass windows facing Whedbee and Oak. Rather than seating worshippers in a long nave, the church contained a bowled auditorium with semi-circular tiers of seating, better suited to Congregational services. Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church, on the other hand, was oriented along a central nave flanked by narrow, stained-glass windows between the buttresses. Despite being labeled as “severely Gothic” in contemporary newspaper accounts, this church was more Gothic in form than style. Arches were rounded rather than pointed, providing the structure with a Romanesque flavor. Particularly interesting was the wooden belfry capping the tower. It featured rounded arches with simulated keystones, pilasters, and a protruding pediment. This textbook example of classical-revival architecture suggested the reawakening of interest in Roman and Greek culture that accompanied the Protestant Reformation in Europe – the Renaissance. Belfries of this type were common to Lutheran churches and were particularly prominent on the churches at the center of German villages in the Volga region. Thus,

while Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church was initially a visual conundrum – mixing Gothic and Classical elements – it was best understood as a clear statement of German heritage mixed with Lutheran Protestantism.<sup>69</sup>

Churches hosted the most important ceremonies in the life of a German from Russia. Christening dedicated a child to Christ and welcomed him or her into the German-Russian community. Confirmation signified a transition from youth to adulthood. And funerals called the community together to mourn, to remember, and to assist grieving families. But the most elaborate and joyous ceremonies revolved around *Hochzeit* – “high time” or “wedding time” – three-day festivals celebrating the creation of a new family and household. *Englische* and German Russians alike marveled at the colorful affairs, which became a legendary part of German-Russian culture. In addition, *Hochzeit* was a rare moment when German-Russian families could leave behind the toil of the beet field and revel in their rich culture. Local historian Arlene Ahlbrandt offers this description of the 1930 wedding of Leah Rommel and John Fabricius:<sup>70</sup>

After the ceremony, the couple were paraded through town in a gaily decorated car; then about 15 autos followed them [to] the Fabricius farm. There a sumptuous chicken dinner with homemade noodles, butter-ball soup, rye bread and cake was served to over 200 guests.

Following the dinner a dance, “Dutch Hop” was held in the hay loft of the barn. It had been cleaned, heated and decorated with lights for the happy occasion. The bride wore her wedding gown during the afternoon but changed to a pink georgette dress for the dance that evening. The first dance was the groom’s dance. The next dances were the bride’s dances, and everyone who danced with her pinned dollars to her dress.<sup>71</sup>

While three-day wedding festivities have long since vanished from the German-Russian community, some traditions remain: guests still pin money to the bride's gown for the pleasure of a dance; the sound of the hammered dulcimer still leads Dutch Hops (lively polkas); and, of course, homemade noodles, butterball soup, and rye bread remain the culinary highlight of any German-Russian celebration.

### German-Russian Labor: The Cycle of Work

Built upon the cycle of faith, Sykes in *Second Hoeing* also develops the cycle of labor. The four parts of her book correspond to the four components of the beet cycle: planting, thinning, hoeing, and harvesting. She uses this cycle of labor as way to develop the story and as a metaphor for the evolution of the family and the maturation of the protagonist, Hannah Schreissmiller. Since their arrival on the steppes, Germans from Russia have developed an indomitable work ethic. Moreover, fieldwork was a family affair, sparing neither women nor children.

As the patriarch, or *Hausvater*, of a German-Russian family sought a contract with a farmer, he became part of a far larger and complex system of economics that governed the sugar beet industry. Long protected by government-imposed tariffs, sugar prices still varied greatly from season to season. The problem for Great Western was that the company had to guarantee a minimum price for sugar beets almost a year before the sugar from those beets would hit the market. Generally the profit margin on a pound of sugar was only one to one-and-a-half cents. Thus, the sugar companies had to negotiate contracts with farmers that took into consideration future market conditions – especially supply – while continuing to make it prof-

itable for those farmers to grow beets. Into this complicated system came the contract laborers, who agreed to tend a specified acreage of beets. Even as late as 1924, laborers were paid only \$21 to \$24 per acre each year. In order to survive, an individual laborer had to agree to tend far more acres that he could possibly do himself. The answer? Employ his entire family in tending the beets while keeping costs such as rent and food as low as possible. The result was a system that paid the lowest wages to those who worked the hardest. Moreover, farmers could not pay the laborers until they themselves received a check from the sugar company. To assist their contract laborers in surviving lean times, farm owners often established lines of credit for German-Russian families at local merchants.<sup>72</sup>

Beet campaigns began in late March or April with sowing and thinning and continued to November with harvesting. Because “single germ” beet seeds were not developed until the 1950s, farmers actually planted a wad of seeds that, in a few weeks, produced a patch of twisted beet plants. Laborers crawled along the rows of beets, using a hoe to “block” the beets so that plants were twelve to fourteen inches apart. Then the blocks were thinned by hand, removing the weakest plants and retaining the healthiest. Because this work required so much nimble handwork and little strenuous lifting, the sugar companies, farmers, and the patriarchs of the German-Russian families considered thinning ideal work for children. After blocking and thinning, which could take up to a month and a half depending on the acreage, the families then turned to hoeing. This involved piling soil around the beet plants while removing weeds. Accomplished in two stages – first and second hoeings – the second stage could span from mid summer to the harvest in



November. By far the most difficult and dangerous task was pulling and topping the beets for harvest. The huge beets, which often exceeded twelve pounds, were either pulled by hand or, in some cases, pulled by horses. The laborers then had to knock the clumps of soil from the beets. (The sugar companies sampled each load of beets to determine the average amount of soil on each one. They were not about to pay for anything other than the beet itself.). Topping required chopping through the toughest, most fibrous part of the beet with a long, broad knife forged into a hook at the end. It was a very menacing instrument and, considering the force required to cut through a beet, often sliced arms and especially legs. The topped beets were then lifted into a wagon and hauled to a beet dump on the railroad or at the factory. An average wagonload of beets weighed six tons.<sup>73</sup>

Days in the beet fields were long and tedious. Families often left their shanties or

homes in Buckingham and Andersonville long before sunrise and worked several hours *before* breakfast. Lunch and dinner were taken in the fields as well. Many families retired at dusk, while some lit kerosene lanterns and continued to labor at night. Temperatures during the summer on the high plains soared, but the frigidness of fall was more brutal. The U.S. Department of Labor's 1923 report on child labor includes this haunting statement from a Colorado *Hausvater*:

"Fall is the meanest time," declared one of the fathers. "Women are wet up to their waists and have ice in their laps and on their underwear. Women and children have rheumatism. Jacob [thirteen years old] is big and strong but already he feels rheumatism, so he has to kneel while topping. Can't stand all day."<sup>74</sup>

Amalie Klien, who spent her youth tending beet fields around Fort Collins with her family, remembered the agony of harvest:

**Figure 13.**

A German-Russian family pauses for this photograph while they harvest sugar beets by hand on a Fort Collins-area farm. (Courtesy, Fort Collins Public Library)

Why sure, we get up early in the morning and have breakfast by lamplight and went out to work and it was cold that year and snowed and we had to wear our felt boots out in the field and ice freeze around you and oh, how we used to work. That was tough.”<sup>75</sup>

Yet for those outside of the German-Russian community, the most egregious problem was the large number of women and children toiling in beet fields. In 1920, 1,073 children between the ages of six and sixteen worked in the beet fields of Weld and Larimer counties, and 85 percent of those children worked nine to fourteen *or more* hours a day in the thinning season.<sup>76</sup> In her 1925 study, *Children Working in the Sugar Beet Fields of Certain Districts of the South Platte Valley, Colorado*, Sara A. Brown found that forty-nine percent of beet field laborers were under the age of sixteen.<sup>77</sup> Investigators from the Department of Labor relayed many horrifying stories:

One mother helped with the thinning herself, though she was not well, because she was “sorry for Jacob” who at eight years of age worked six and a half to ten and a half hours a day for seven weeks during the beet season. ... A contract laborer with a large acreage said that his children “scream and cry” from fatigue, and another said, “The children get so tired that they don’t want to eat, and go right to bed. Beets are harder work than working in a steel mill. The children don’t get any fresh air as they have to lie in the dust and crawl on their knees all day.”<sup>78</sup>

Field labor even affected the youngest Germans from Russia. Mothers often brought their infants and toddlers to the edge of the field where the children remained for hours. In the best circumstances, they slept or played under a tent or some shelter from the sunlight and rain, but often they were exposed to the elements. Some families left their youngest

members unattended at home. Many German-Russian mothers responded in a department of labor study that “the dog takes care of the children.”<sup>79</sup>

Despite these horrors, outside observers often misunderstood the centrality of work in German-Russian culture as well as economic realities. As mentioned above, the experience of Germans on the steppes of Russia led to the development of an extremely strong work ethic that saw no one – women or children – exempt from hard physical labor. Each member of a family had to contribute for the entire family to survive. In the beet fields of northern Colorado, a contract laborer could not make enough money to survive without committing to working more acres than he could do on his own. As on the steppes, women and children had to assist the *Hausvater* of the family as he tended vast acres of beets. While Sykes places the blame for child labor on the brutality of the patriarch, other reformers in the 1920s and 1930s understood the unforgiving reality of paying stock dividends. “...The dominant motive on the part of the sugar companies is profit – making money – or dividends for stockholders,” proclaimed Thomas Mahony in his address “Industrial Relations in the Beet Fields of Colorado.” “Their primary goal has been the building up of profits rather than the wellbeing of the people upon whom the industry so largely depends upon its existence.”<sup>80</sup>

But the hours German-Russian families spent toiling in the beet fields of northern Colorado were not spent in vain. Many families quickly climbed the ladder from contract laborers, to tenant farmers, to owning their own farms. By keeping living expenses low and working as efficiently as possible, German-Russian farming families amassed considerable savings in a rather short period of time. In just two decades after they arrived,

72.7 percent of sugar beet farm owners in Windsor were Germans from Russia. In 1930, Volga Germans operated 85 percent of all beet farms but accounted for only 15 to 25 percent of contract laborers.<sup>81</sup> The concept of ascending from laborer to renter to owner was so pervasive in the German-Russian community that Sykes uses it as the premise behind *Second Hoeing*; the novel begins as the family leaves their home in Shag Town (Andersonville or Buckingham) and moves to a rented farm. “Not all of the German-Russians in Colorado or in the other states have been economically successful, but unquestionably for many immigrants and their descendants, there has been an astonishing and rapid upward mobility,” Rock writes. “Second- and third-generation German-Russians today include the leading farmers, livestock feeders, merchants, and professional people throughout the irrigated valleys of Colorado and neighboring states.”<sup>82</sup>

### Life in Fort Collins

The end of the beet campaign brought German-Russian families into Fort Collins more often than any other time of year. Farmers received their checks from the sugar company and, in turn, paid the *Hausvater*. The families could then go to downtown Fort Collins, picking up much needed supplies and perhaps a few frivolities. “The beet checks were the life blood to the German Russians,” writes Mark Spier. However, because most German-Russian families were self-sufficient “the only ‘store bought’ goods the family possessed were those that could neither be made nor grown.”<sup>83</sup>

Typically, German-Russian families came into downtown Fort Collins on Saturdays for shopping and on Sundays for church. Work ended early on Saturday and the entire family bathed in preparation for

their afternoon and evening in town. Those from farms around Fort Collins came by teams and wagons and, later, by automobile. Those in Buckingham and Andersonville often walked. While the German-Russian families may have had little to spend, merchants in Fort Collins were not about to ignore this market. As the *Fort Collins Weekly Courier* noted in April 1904, “‘Dier wird Deutsch gesprochen’ is becoming a common sign in our store windows.”<sup>84</sup> According to Spier, German-Russian families preferred to shop in stores where the shopkeepers and employees spoke German. And there were several of them: Jake Sitzman’s and Hohnstein’s bakeries on Mountain Avenue; Schulthauer’s grocery on Linden Street; and Meyer’s and Rolhling’s clothing stores on College Avenue were just a few. And on Saturday evenings, German-Russians even claimed certain areas in downtown Fort Collins for their own, especially the 1000 block of South College Avenue and on Linden Street. Often the men who gathered in these areas spoke only German, and “it must have seemed to the ‘Englischer’ that they had ventured down a street somewhere in Europe,” Spier writes.<sup>85</sup>

But for Germans from Russia during the late 1910s, public displays of their ethnic differences became increasingly dangerous. World War I evoked a popular reaction against German immigrants and culture in the United States. Many towns banned the German language, as acts of vandalism against German-Russian property increased in rural Colorado. Concerned for their safety, many Germans from Russia simply avoided downtown Fort Collins. Many families anglicized their names, changing Johann to John and Mueller to Miller. After a decade and half of trying to assert their German identity over their Russian origins, Volga Germans found

their true heritage the subject of suspicion and hatred.

The Armistice failed to ease tensions between the Volga German community and the *Englische*. The Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 and the violent “Red Summer” that followed sparked a new era of American xenophobia; anyone with connections to Russia was a “red” and a seditious anarchist. Again, the confusion of ethnicity and origin acted as a conductor for popular hatred. Yet, perhaps as a result of the close bond Germans from Russia forged with other residents during the 1904 flood, Fort Collins never experienced the level of violence that occurred in Denver and other northern Colorado communities.<sup>86</sup> While the rabidly anti-foreign Ku Klux Klan thrived in Denver during the late teens and throughout the 1920s, Fort Collins held the organization at bay. “The Ku Kluxers have had a man here the past few days trying to organize Fort Collins,” writes the editor of the *Express Courier* in 1924. “This old town is doing pretty well and feels no need of the strife, dissension and turmoil that usually follow when the Klan gets a good hold.”<sup>87</sup>

National economic downturns threatened Fort Collins’s German-Russian community as well. Many German-Russians spoke of two depressions – the first followed World War I and the second was the Great Depression. The end of the economic panics in the 1890’s through World War I was a rare golden age for the American farmer. Farm prices rose faster than other prices for two reasons. First, the international agricultural market was much stronger during this period than it had been in the 1880’s and 1890’s. Second, settlers established few new farms after 1900; most of the suitable farmland in the country had already been settled. The demand for farm commodities balanced, at least briefly,

with the supply.<sup>88</sup> But while other sectors of the economy boomed during the “roaring twenties,” agriculture first revealed the catastrophic cracks in the American economy. European recovery after World War I reduced the demand for American grains while domestic farm production remained high. Crop prices lagged behind those farmers paid for manufactured goods. In turn, those goods included new farm equipment, which increased the amount of acres available for commercial production during a time when demand was falling. “Devoting [machinery] to the production of cash crops did not benefit farmers *as a group*,” writes historian Stephan Thernstrom. “The resulting increase in supply relative to demand simply drove prices down.”<sup>89</sup> This slump in agricultural prices only worsened during the Great Depression.

But as a people conditioned to scrimping and saving, the German Russia community survived and may have even prospered during the depressions. Certainly, many German-Russians, like all Americans, lost their farms or jobs on the farm. But the relative prosperity of the sugar beet industry may have allowed farmers and laborers to survive the economic downturn. The average value of the sugar beet crop in Colorado during the Great Depression was \$25,820,000 a year. While Colorado farmers grew beets on only ten percent of all irrigated land in the sixteen leading beet-growing counties from 1929 to 1939, the average value of the crop totaled 40 percent of the value of all principal crops grown on irrigated land in the state. Moreover, the federal *Sugar Act* of 1937 reduced tariffs and substituted a more comprehensive, albeit indirect, means of regulating sugar prices, beet prices, grower-processor relationships, and wages. This redistributed beet profits in favor of farmers and field workers at the

expense of the processing companies.<sup>90</sup>

### Education and Acculturation

Isolated in beet shacks at the edge of farms or in Andersonville and Buckingham, Germans from Russia initially made little daily contact with the rest of Fort Collins. But as families became more established and a new, less traditional generation emerged, those interactions became more frequent and isolation less noticeable. For instance, as families moved up the socioeconomic ladder from laborer to renter, some of the boys were freed to work on *Englische* farms or in the sugar factory, and the girls moved into town to become housekeepers and clerks.<sup>91</sup> Day-to-day interactions increased. Through both world wars and the Great Depression, Germans from Russia shared in a common experience with the rest of their fellow Americans. At the same time, a younger generation of Volga Germans threw off the yoke of backbreaking labor as they attended public schools for longer periods of time. Schools were central to acculturation. As Randall C. Teeuwen concludes in his masters' thesis "Public Rural Education and the Americanization of the Germans from Russia in Colorado: 1900-1930":

For German-Russian children it was the sum of the various public school experiences that contributed to their Americanization. In school they learned a new language; recited Longfellow and the Pledge of Allegiance; played uniquely American sports; sang patriotic songs and saluted the flag when the band marched past. Undoubtedly they learned that, like Abraham Lincoln and other great Americans, in the United States of America ordinary people could achieve their dreams.<sup>92</sup>

The first German-Russian school in Fort Collins, excluding church-sponsored Saturday schools, was held in the original

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church building in Andersonville. The Fort Collins School Board hoped to open the elementary school there on November 28, 1904. That morning, when teacher Emma Wilkins arrived with her pupils, she found the doors bolted. Apparently, the night before, some members of the church objected to English-language instruction in their building. The conflict was resolved in January. The first day the school opened, Miss Wilkins had forty-five students. She had twenty more the next day. Despite evidence that older Germans from Russia often resisted sending their children to school, both to assist in the beet fields and avoid assimilation, this first school only continued to grow. By the end of the school year on April 1, Miss Wilkins had over a hundred students and an assistant.

In 1908, the school district constructed near Andersonville the Rockwood School – a four-classroom building for the German-Russian children. Enrollment continued to grow and, by 1921, the school board doubled the size of the building. A contemporary article includes this glowing description of the enlarged building:

The halls are wide and especially well lighted, making it one of the most pleasant grade buildings in Fort Collins. Its east windows look out over a beautiful farming country; while from its western ones a glorious view of the mountains is seen. Long's Peak is a familiar friend always in sight.<sup>93</sup>

Rockwood, later renamed Sue Barton School for one of its most beloved teachers, eventually became the center of public education for Hispanic families in the area.

With the establishment of compulsory education in Colorado, many *Hausvaters* found themselves paying multiple fines to the school district for keeping their children from the classroom. At the same time, the

American-born generation of Germans from Russia realized that English-language education was a springboard out of the grueling cycle of beet-field labor. But attendance did not improve. A 1923 report from the U.S. Department of Labor found that truancy and status in Larimer and Weld county schools were directly related. The children of beet farm owners attended 90 percent of school days each year; those who rented sent their children almost 89 percent of the time; but children of contract laborers missed a quarter of the school year. Records from Larimer County school districts reveal that the children of beet workers were absent almost five times as often as children who did not help in beet cultivation. The problem was so rampant in Larimer County that many schools offered summer programs for the children of beet workers in addition to beet “vacations” during the regular school year.<sup>94</sup>

As with child labor, those American reformers who worried about German-Russian truancy often misunderstood economic realities. “I think lots of Russian-German children are working too hard; but as things are, I don’t see any other way out of it,” a Windsor *Hausvater* told reporters from the National Child Labor Committee. “I want my children to have the education they need instead of working so hard.”<sup>95</sup> But as families increased in affluence, education became more attainable. In *Second Hoeing*, as the Schreissmiller family becomes more successful, children attend more and more years of school. The level of highest education – elementary, secondary, and college – corresponded to laborer, tenant, and owner.

Beyond the schools, Fort Collins was the center of the most tangible symbol of the Americanization of Germans from Russia. Between 1907 and 1957, in the process of acquiring American citizenship, 1,536

Germans from Russia came to the Larimer County Courthouse to renounce their allegiance to the Russian (later Soviet) government and prove their commitment to and knowledge of the government and history of the United States of America. Urged on by the second and third generations of German-Russian families, who were U.S. citizens by birth, these older members of the community had often neglected to naturalize earlier because they were so engaged in their work. Not surprisingly, the number of petitions for naturalization boomed in the 1930’s as arguments from the younger, more “American” generation became increasingly persuasive and forceful. And, as Rock argues, the younger members of the community felt that their fathers and mothers had labored hard enough to deserve the privileges of citizenship, particularly Social Security.<sup>96</sup>

Unlike the First World War, World War II incited far less ethnic discrimination. In many ways, the conflict served to further acculturate the once isolated German-Russian community; hundreds of Colorado’s Germans from Russia joined the armed forces. Postwar prosperity, and the liberal education and home-ownership policies of the G.I. Bill of Rights expanded the horizons of education for young German-Russians, making it possible for them to enter professional careers far from the beet fields and allowing them to purchase homes in new suburban developments. Even the bond that connected Germans from Russia in Fort Collins to the sugar industry dissolved. German-Russian families left contract labor positions in the beet fields at the same time America tightened its immigration policies. Great Western was forced to look elsewhere for field labor, recruiting Hispanic families from the American southwest and Mexico. Soon Hispanic families moved into Buckingham and Andersonville, and the com-



pany even assisted them in constructing a new neighborhood that is now Alta Vista. Indeed, like the Germans from Russia, Hispanics endured their own period of isolation in Fort Collins only to contribute their own thread to Fort Collins's vibrant cultural tapestry.<sup>97</sup>

As churches ended services in German and many Germans from Russia intermarried with people of other cultures, older members of the community lamented the loss of their heritage. Anthropologist Timothy Kloberdanz, who grew up in a German-Russian household in Sterling, remembers his mother telling him that his ancestors "came from over the clouds." It was not until he began studying Germans from Russia as an anthropology student at the University of Colorado that he understood the myth. It was a misunderstanding emerging from the cultural rift dividing generations of Germans from Russia:

As the women traced the winding course of the Volga River on the map of Russia one of the most baffling mysteries from my boyhood was solved.

"Our folks didn't come from over the clouds," one of the surprised women whispered, "they came from over the Volga – it was a river." The others soon realized that the phrase spoken by the older emigrants *Mir sein vun iwwer d' Wolga kumme* did not mean "we came from over the clouds," but "we came from over the Volga." To the untrained ears of American-born children, the dialect German word for clouds, *Wolga*, sounded the same as the name of Russia's most famous river.<sup>98</sup>

But in 1968, a reawakening of interest in

German-Russian heritage resulted in the creation of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR). Based in Lincoln, Nebraska, the AHSGR is an international, not-for-profit, educational organization that actively promotes scholarship into the history of Germans from Russia and publishes historical and genealogical material resulting from that scholarship. In 1975, history professor Sidney Heitman established the Germans from Russia in Colorado Study Project at Colorado State University. The project supported a multidisciplinary study of Germans from Russia and provided much of the scholarship contained in this historical context, particularly the work of Rock and Kloberdanz. The Sidney Heitman Germans from Russia Collection in the Colorado State University Archives remains an important resource for German-Russian scholarship.<sup>99</sup> In 1999-2000, the Fort Collins Museum opened an exhibit entitled *Unser Leute*, which traced the history and experiences of Germans from Russia in northern Colorado. Just as German-Russian contributions to the history of Fort Collins remain strong, so too does interest and pride in German-Russian ethnicity. In a 1977 newspaper interview, Professor Heitman emphasized the importance of Germans from Russia in Colorado, placing their heritage among the state's most beloved historical legends:

They played a vital role in Colorado's agricultural development, but only lately has their story been told and their impact recognized. It's at least as important as the cowboys, the silver kings and the mountain men.<sup>100</sup>



## SECTION III

# Source Study and Data Gaps

Despite nearly losing their unique heritage and ethnic identity in the 1950s and 1960s, Germans from Russia are now one of the best documented ethnic groups in Colorado. The amount and diversity of scholarship is astounding. There are two reasons for this plethora of research. First is the resurgence of interest in German-Russian culture that occurred in the late 1960s. Younger generations of Germans from Russia began to embrace anew the heritage and culture they or their parents once resisted. This reawakening manifested itself in the creation of AHSGR. Second is the proximity of large German-Russian populations to Colorado's major universities. Libraries in Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins contain a huge number of theses and dissertations analyzing many different aspects of this ethnic group. The highlight of these university endeavors is the Sidney Heitman Germans from Russia Collection stored in the Colorado State University Archives.

For background information, I relied on the Sidney Heitman collection. The scholarship contained in these archives is state-wide, national, and even international, providing the broadest possible context in which to develop this local narrative. However, the collection contains few sources specific to Fort Collins's Germans from Russia community. For that information, I turned to the Local History Archives at the Fort Collins

Public Library. This collection includes subject files, ephemera, manuscripts, photographs, biographies, and oral histories relating specifically to the German-Russian experience in Larimer County and Fort Collins.

Another local source is the Fort Collins Museum, which amassed a collection of German-Russian scholarship in preparation for its exhibit on this ethnic group. As well, I also consulted the Western History Collection at the Denver Public Library.

Because of the vast amount of scholarship, data gaps are few. Perhaps the most obvious problem is that after the high-water mark of German-Russian scholarship in the mid 1970s, newer research has diminished to a trickle. It is more difficult to research German-Russians from 1950 to the present than it is to do so from the wave of first immigration to the mid twentieth century.

Another data gap that exists is the lack of



**Figure 14.** Detail of an exquisite stained-glass, gothic-arched window, on the east elevation of the German Evangelical Congregational Church. Churches are the German-Russian community's most visible architectural contributions to Fort Collins. *(Photo by the author.)*

material culture – artifacts or scholarship – specific to Germans from Russia, especially in northern Colorado. While most iconic objects like German Bibles, churches, and apparel, exist in limited quantities, little has been written about German-Russian domestic architecture and art in northern Colorado. (There are several such studies about German-Russian communities in Kansas.) This problem stems from a number of factors. First, the second and third generations of Germans from Russia sought to abandon many of the vestiges of their culture as they sought to assimilate into American culture. Second, as German-Russians left the beet fields and sugar factory neighborhoods,

Hispanic migrant workers quickly replaced them. They brought with them an entirely new worldview – new concepts of art and architecture. Third, well-meaning neighborhood improvement programs in the 1970's and 1980's may have inadvertently destroyed much of the German-Russian material culture remaining in Buckingham and Andersonville. Fourth, interviews of elderly first-generation German-Russians often failed to address domesticity, consumption, gender roles, and the other factors that contribute to material culture scholarship. Nonetheless, these data gaps are small. In general, Fort Collins's Germans from Russia enjoy a rich culture and heritage well-preserved and well-researched.

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