

ALSATIAN EMIGRATION TO THE BLACK SEA

Abridged from *Soufflenheim Emigration to the Black Sea*, by Robert Wideen, 2017, Soufflenheim Genealogy Research and History, <https://soufflenheimgenealogy.com/>

MIGRATION FROM ALSACE

The Black Sea Germans were ethnic Germans, primarily from Wurttemberg, Palatinate, Alsace-Lorraine and Bavaria, who settled off the north coast of the Black Sea, mostly in southern Russia, including present day Ukraine. They were invited by Russia to colonize large areas following victories over the Ottoman Empire (1768-1774) and the Crimean Khanate (1783). They were granted freedom of religion, self-government, and various economic privileges.



Present day countries and German settlement areas in the 1700's & 1800's. By Mitch Roll, Roll International

Nearly all of the Alsatian emigrants settled near Odessa. Most came from the northernmost part of Alsace, and a lesser number from the district of Haguenau. The emigrants from Alsace in 1808 and 1809 were predominately Catholics who established Catholic colonies. There were two large emigrations, in 1804 and 1808, and increased emigration during the famine of 1817.

According to Professor Jean Schweitzer in *The Migration from Alsace to the Black Sea Region and the Location of the Genealogical Materials in the Homeland Area* (Strasbourg 1990):

“Only the most northern part of Alsace near the Palatinate border was concerned with the emigration to Russia. Only this extreme northern nook of Alsace was involved. Roughly speaking, the district of Weissenburg, where the population is of Franconian descent, whereas the larger part of Alsace is of Alemanic origin.

Because of its geographical location Alsace has always been a crossing country and has seen many invaders come and go during the 2,500 years of its known history. The first known invaders were the Celts, followed by the Romans who occupied Alsace for about 500 years (58 BC - ca 450 AC). The Romans were "rolled back" by Germanic tribes. The first ones were the 'Alemannen' followed by the 'Franken' in the late 5th century.

This later event will be of greater importance for Northern Alsace, where the emigrants to Russia came from, because it explains the characteristic features of this area where the political and religious parameters had been changing for centuries, and where the dialect limits were fixed over a thousand years ago. Here in this little area of Northern Alsace, the dialect is a Franconian one like in Palatinate, whereas, in all the other parts of the province, they speak the Alemanic dialect (about 85% of the population).

Nearly all the Alsatian emigrants to Russia came from the northern circle of Weissenburg, and a lesser number from the district of Haguenau.

As to the emigration itself, two years must be remembered: 1804 and 1808. Because emigration was forbidden in those days by the French government, the Alsatians had to leave secretly. When the authorities got wind of the mass exodus in 1804, they tried desperately to stop the emigration. For a while, it seemed that the Alsatian exodus had ended in a fiasco. It was only a setback. The second wave in 1808 was much more important. Many of these emigrants got their passports from the Jewish banker Bethmann in Frankfurt/Main, who was appointed the Russian consul in this big city.

Nearly all the Alsatians were settled in the Black Sea region: Beresan, Liebenthal and chiefly in the Kutchurgan district. Therefore, it is not amazing that many colonies were given Alsatian names: three of five Kutchurgan colonies had Alsatian names: Elsass, Selz, Strassburg; Kandel belongs to south Palatinate and Mannheim was taken over from Baden. And when nearly a century later their descendants came over to the new world, they brought many an Alsatian place name with them such as Strasburg and Selz in North Dakota and in Saskatchewan.

The most important historical period relating to the emigration to Russia is the French Revolution. A period of confusion, big changes and great turmoil, which caused an important emigration across the Rhine, but not yet to Russia. The fatal date was December 23, 1793 when over 20,000 people (some historians estimate even 30,000) only from Northern Alsace, the region of the future emigration to Russia, fled when Revolutionary armies invaded the territory. Its deeply religious population now feared the anti-religious revolutionary troops and the guillotine.

Upon returning home some years later, many of these exiled people were ruined because their goods had been confiscated by the new political regime. Moreover the troops too often plundered the country: the peasants had to furnish provisions and animals, give extra horses and wagons, perform enforced labor, pay war tribute, suffer the quartering of soldiers etc. There is no doubt that there was a great dissatisfaction in the country. Thousands and thousands of families felt depressed and discouraged. Another inequity was the confiscation and selling of church properties. This brought many a family a shortage of farmland. Catholic families were forbidden by the ecclesiastical authorities to buy confiscated church property, which consequently was bought cheaply by the local protestant farmers. For those Catholic farmers working mainly on rented church-owned land this meant economic ruin.

The Revolution years were followed by the conquests of Napoleon who ruled over a great part of Europe from 1805-1814. His campaigns and conquests added much to the turmoil in this region. And it is easy to imagine why many young men avoided enlisting.

These few main reasons added to many others were combined with overpopulation, which periodically causes an important emigration. It must be pointed out that these reasons, political and economical, were closely interrelated. And in many cases we may add secondary reasons, such as domestic, family or law troubles etc.

The immigration to Russia at that time was not merely an event of Alsatian history; it affected a much larger area of the Upper Rhine including South Palatinate, and Central and North Baden on the Eastern side of the Rhine as well. There has always existed relationships of many kinds with these two neighbors, such as economical, social, and even family relations. And mostly they all spoke, and still speak, the Franconia dialect which they took with them to the Black Sea region, the same as their descendants did in the late 19th century when homesteading in the New World.”

GERMAN COLONIES IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

The Colonies of Grossliebental

Grossliebental was the center of the region densely populated by Germans. It included the colonies of Kleinliebental, Franzfeld, Mariental, Josefstal, and Lustdorf. Approximately 60% of the earliest emigrants to the Colony of Kleinliebental were from Alsace. There were 49 Alsatian families by 1809. The majority came from the Wissenbourg area in northern Alsace.



Grossliebental District, Odessa, By Mitch Roll, Roll International

The Colonies of Kutschurgan

Colonies were founded along the Kutschurgan River beginning in 1808, primarily by Catholic families, of whom the majority were from Alsace. The most important colonies were Strasbourg, Baden, Seltz, Kandel, Mannheim, and Elsass.



Kutschurgan District, Cherson, South Russia. By Mitch Roll, Roll International

The Colonies of Beresan

The Beresan District was one of the largest in the Black Sea region. The founding families were comprised of 220 families from Alsace. Plus 317 from the Palatinate, 255 from Baden, 84 from Württemberg, and 79 from Poland.



Beresan District, South Russia. By Mitch Roll, Roll International

ALSATIAN EMIGRANTS TO THE BLACK SEA

Alsatian emigration to the Black Sea region is exemplified by the town of Soufflenheim. Most of the information is from *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763-1862*, by Karl Stumpff.

| Name | Wife | Year Emigrated | To | From |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Jakob Gell | Magdalena Burger | 1805 | Kleinliebental | Soufflenheim |
| Joseph Leppert | | 1805 | Kleinliebental | Soufflenheim |
| George Leppert | | 1805 | Kleinliebental | Soufflenheim |
| Ignatz Leppert | | 1805 & 1821 | Kleinliebental | Soufflenheim |
| Margaretha Leppert | | 1821 | Kleinliebental | Soufflenheim |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|------|----------|--------------|
| Johannes Behler | | 1808 | Mannheim | Soufflenheim |
| Joseph Estreicher | | 1808 | Mannheim | Soufflenheim |
| Johannes Meyer | Maria Anna Estriecker | 1808 | Mannheim | Soufflenheim |
| Joseph Schneider | Margaretha Estreicher | 1808 | Mannheim | Soufflenheim |
| Joseph Schneider (Younger) | | 1808 | Mannheim | Soufflenheim |
| Jakob Schnell | Maria Anna Uhrich | 1808 | Mannheim | Soufflenheim |
| Christian Held | | 1809 | Kandel | Soufflenheim |
| Aloisius Arquin | Elisabeth Jaeck | 1809 | Rastatt | Soufflenheim |
| Michael Stein | | 1808 | | Soufflenheim |
| Andreas Wollung | | 1808 | | Soufflenheim |
| Joseph Bürger | | 1817 | | Soufflenheim |
| Joseph Haller | | 1817 | | Soufflenheim |
| Joseph Kiefer | | 1817 | | Soufflenheim |

FAMILIES FROM THE CANTONS OF BISCHWILLER AND HAGUENAU

The number of families emigrating to the Black Sea from the Cantons of Bischwiller and Haguenau according to *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763-1862*, by Karl Stumpp. Emigration was much higher, as many records do not list a place of origin.

| Canton of Bischwiller | Families | Canton of Haguenau | Families |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Auenheim | 3 | Geudertheim | 1 |
| Bischwiller | 2 | Haguenau | 1 |
| Fort Louis | 5 | Hochstett | 1 |
| Hanhofen | 1 | Kaltenhausen | 2 |
| Leutenheim | 6 | Mariental | 3 |
| Neuheausel | 2 | Schweighausen | 4 |
| Offendorf | 1 | | |
| Roeschwoog | 7 | | |
| Rohrwiler | 4 | | |
| Roppenheim | 4 | | |
| Schirrhein | 6 | | |
| Schirrhoffen | 1 | | |
| Sessenheim | 3 | | |
| Soufflenheim | 7 | | |
| 14 Communities | 55 Families | 6 Communities | 17 Families |