Germans from Russia: Church Records

Russia "How to" Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

February 2020

GOAL

You will be able to:

- understand Catholic and Lutheran religious jurisdictions and a brief history of Mennonites in Russia.
- use FamilySearch.org, the Odessa Digital Library, the Black Sea German Research website, published works, and village coordinators to locate Lutheran church records.
- locate Catholic church records using FamilySearch.org, the Black Sea German website, published works, and village coordinators.
- find Mennonite church records using the Russian Mennonite Genealogical Resources and Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta websites as well as published works and village coordinators.

INTRODUCTION

Catherine the Great's 1763 manifesto granted the freedom of religion and fostered the migration of German colonists of diverse religious backgrounds into the Russian Empire. Because civil records were not mandated in Russia until after the Russian Revolution, prior to the 1920s, churches were primarily responsible for recording vital events. Churches typically recorded the ordinances of baptism, marriage and burial that are typically associated with the vital events of birth, marriage and death. Many of these church records remain in Russian archives; however, there are some records available online or as published works. This guide will teach you to use online resources and published works to help you find Lutheran, Catholic, or Mennonite church records for your Germans from Russia ancestors who lived in the Black Sea and Volga regions.

For this guide to be of the most use to you, you should already know the religion of your ancestor and the parish/congregation they belonged to. To determine the location of the parish/congregation, you may want to consult the following "How to" Guide before continuing.

- [Germans from Russia: Locating the Town with Websites and Gazetteers](#)

HOW TO

Research techniques, strategies and resources vary depending upon religion and geographical area. To learn about records and resources available for your ancestor, find the heading for your ancestor's religion. Each section includes a brief history or description of religious jurisdictions followed by a source table organized by region. Instructions on how to use these sources are found in the corresponding headings in this "How to" guide. Page numbers have also been listed.

Lutheran Church Records

In 1832, Tsar Nicholas I created the General Evangelical Lutheran Consistory, which was divided into eight consistorial districts – six in the Baltics and two others: the St. Petersburg and Moscow Consistories. The St. Petersburg Consistory included the western part of the empire, extending down into the Black Sea area while the Moscow Consistory stretched eastwards into the Volga region, the Caucasus as well as Siberia and Central Asia. Each consistorial district contained individual parishes that often served multiple localities. Each parish was responsible for keeping records of baptisms, marriages and deaths. Beginning in January of 1833, parishes were also required to keep a duplicate copy of vital records to send to the consistorial headquarters. The St. Petersburg duplicate church book records are available through FamilySearch, while the location of the Moscow Consistory's duplicate church records is currently unknown.[1] See the table below to see which Lutheran resources are available for your ancestor's area.

Sources for Lutheran Germans from Russia

Black Sea Region	Volga Region
Lutheran Church Book Duplicates, 1833-1885 (FamilySearch.org); see page 3.	*Russia, Samara, Church Books 1748-1934* (FamilySearch.org); see page 4.
FamilySearch Catalog – Parish Records (FamilySearch.org); see page 5.	FamilySearch Catalog – Parish Records (FamilySearch.org); see page 5.
Black Sea German Research (blackseagr.org); see page 6.	Published Translations; see page 5.
Odessa Digital Library (odessa3.org); see page 6.	Village Coordinators; see page 7.
Published Translations; see page 5.	- -
Village Coordinators; see page 7.	- -

Catholic Church Records

Catherine the Great established the Catholic Archdiocese of Mogilev in 1772, which served all Catholics who lived within the Russian Empire. In 1848, the Diocese of Kherson was established and the boundaries of the diocese were drawn so as to include all of the German colonies. In 1852, the diocese was renamed and became the Diocese of Tiraspol.[2] Individual parishes kept church records. Original church records for the Black Sea region are available at the State Archives of the Saratov Oblast, while select Catholic records for the Volga region are available through FamilySearch.org. To research your Catholic Germans from Russia roots, please see the source table below. Instructions for how to use each of these sources can be found in the respective headings throughout this "How to" guide.

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[1] Thomas Kent Edlund, *The Lutherans of Russia* (Germanic Genealogical Society of St. Paul: St. Paul, Minnesota, 1994), xiii.

[2] Joseph Aloysius Kessler, *Geschichte der Diozese Tyraspol,* (Georg Aberle: Dickinson, North Dakota, 1930).

"The Catholic Church Records of South Russia," *Black Sea German Research,* www.blackseagr.org.

Sources for Catholic Germans from Russia

Black Sea Region	Volga Region
Black Sea German Research (blackseagr.org); see page 6.	*Russia, Samara, Church Books 1748-1934* (FamilySearch.org); see page 4.
Published Translations; see page 5.	FamilySearch Catalog – Parish Records (FamilySearch.org); see page 5.
Village Coordinators; see page 7.	Published Translations; see page 5.
- -	Village Coordinators; see page 7.

Mennonite Religious History and Church Records

In the late 1780s, approximately four-hundred Mennonite families from West Prussia emigrated to Russia. They were drawn by the promise of religious freedoms and settled just northwest of the Sea of Azov in Turkish lands recently acquired by the Russian Empire. There was also a small number of Mennonites who settled along the Tract River in the Volga region. By 1870, about 9,000 Mennonites had migrated to Russia.[3]

Sources for Mennonite Germans from Russia

Black Sea and Volga Regions
Mennonite Genealogical Resources (mennonitegenealogy.com/russia); see page 7.
Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (mennonitehistory.org/church-records); see page 7.
Published Translations; see page 5.
Village Coordinators; see page 7.

RESOURCES FOR LOCATING CHURCH RECORDS

Lutheran Church Book Duplicates, 1833-1885

Region	Black Sea
Religion	Lutheran
Index	Partial Index
Images	Yes

Duplicates of records kept by individual parishes were periodically sent to the consistorial office in St. Petersburg. These duplicate records were stored in the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg and are now partially indexed and available through FamilySearch.org in the *Russia, Lutheran Church Book Duplicates, 1833-1885* collection. To access the indexed collection, visit [familysearch.org/search/collection/1469151.](familysearch.org/search/collection/1469151) Search for your ancestor using identifying information such as first and last names, or birth, marriage and death information. This collection is only partially indexed and does not reflect all of the duplicate church book records available through FamilySearch.org. If you are unable to find your ancestor using the

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[3] "Russian Mennonites," *Germans from Russia Heritage Collection*, Fargo, ND, www.ndsu.edu/grhc.

Sue Wiebe, "From Prussia to Russia," *Low German Mennonites,* www.mennoniteeducation.weebly.com.

Norman E. Saul, "The Migration of the Russian-Germans to Kansas," *Kansas Historical Society* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1974).

FamilySearch.org indexes, try searching the alternate indexes available through the **Odessa Digital Library** or **Black Sea German Research.** See the respective headings in this guide to learn more.

To browse images, from the main collection page, scroll down to find **View Images in this Collection**, then select **Browse**. From here, select the **Province** (gubernia), **District** (uyezd) and **Town** (parish). Alternatively, you can search for duplicate church records using the FamilySearch catalog. Instructions for using the catalog are found under the heading **FamilySearch Catalog**.

Duplicate records were kept in German. For help reading German script, please see the following list of resources:

- "Germany, Handwriting," FamilySearch Wiki.
- "German Genealogical Word List," FamilySearch Wiki
- "Old German Script" FamilySearch Learning Center.
- "Reading German Handwritten Records," FamilySearch Learning Center.

Russia, Samara Church Books 1748-1934

Region	Volga
Religion	Lutheran and Catholic
Index	Partial Index
Images	Yes

Catholic records are available for select parishes in the Novouzensk and Nikolaevsk uyezdi of the Samara/Saratov guberni (Volga Region). There are also some Lutheran records available (primarily for German Lutherans in the city of Samara). Many of these records – both Catholic and Lutheran – have been indexed in the *Russia, Samara Church Books 1748-1934* collection. To access these indexes, visit https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1807365. Search for your ancestor using identifying information such as first and last names, or birth, marriage and death information. Please be aware that this collection is only partially indexed. To check to see if there are unindexed records for your ancestor's parish, please see the heading **FamilySearch Catalog** and subheading **Parish Records** in this "How to" guide.

Many records in this collection were written and are now indexed in Cyrillic. You may search using Latin search terms for names and places; however, search results will appear in Russian. Use Google Translate and websites such as https://stevemorse.org/russian/eng2rus.html to help you with translation and transliteration. For help reading the original records in Russian, please refer to the list below.

- "Russia Handwriting," FamilySearch Wiki.
- "Russian Genealogical Word List," FamilySearch Wiki.
- "The Russian Alphabet," Russia, "How to" Guide. Also see the corresponding Learning Center Class here.
- "Deciphering the Handwriting and Understanding the Grammar," Russia, "How to" Guide. Also see the corresponding Learning Center class here.
- "Reading Russian Handwritten Records," FamilySearch Learning Center.
- "Russian Alphabet, Language and Handwriting," FamilySearch Learning Center.

FamilySearch Catalog

Parish Records

To locate parish records using the FamilySearch
Catalog, go to familysearch.org/search/catalog. In the
Place box, type the name of the parish and select the
corresponding entry from the drop-down box. You
may also try using English, Russian, and German

Region	Black Sea and Volga
Religion	Lutheran and Catholic
Index	In some cases
Images	Yes

spelling variations as well as any alternate names you found in your previous research in online
sources and gazetteers. Church records will be found under the heading **Church Records**.
Click on the entry and scroll down to the section entitled **Film/Digital Notes**. In the **Note**
column, you will find a brief description of the contents of the film. Search for the year and type
of record (birth, marriage, or death) that you are looking for. The **Location, Collection/Shelf,
Film** and **DGS** columns provide information regarding location. Pay special attention to the item
number. There are often more than one type of record or time frame included on a microfilm and
the item number indicates which item your selected record begins on. The final column, **Format**,
shows availability. A camera icon indicates the record is available online, while a camera with a
key on top indicates there are special viewing restrictions. A magnifying glass shows that the
microfilm has been indexed. Finally, a microfilm or wheel icon means that the record is available
to view at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Region	Black Sea and Volga
Religion	Lutheran and Catholic
Index	Yes
Images	No
Online Availability	No

Published Translations

Many Germans from Russia church records have
been obtained by societies such as the American
Historical Society of Germans from Russia
(AHSGR) and the Germans from Russia Heritage
Society (GRHS). These records have been translated into English and published. In the
FamilySearch Catalog, published translations are also catalogued by place and will be found
under the headings **Church Records, Church Records – Indexes** or **Genealogy**. These
books are available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. If you are unable to
visit the Family History Library, check your local or university library for availability, or check to
see if the books are available through International Library Loan (ILL). Books may also be
available for purchase through AHSGR or GRHS. If you are unable to find a book for your
colony through the Family History Library, try checking ahsgr.org/store or grhs.org/pages/store
for availability.

Church record publications do not follow a specific format; however, many authors have chosen
to extract and translate the information into a table. Use the index which is typically located at
the back of the book to search for your ancestor's surname. Remember to watch for spelling
variations.

Black Sea German Research

Region	Black Sea
Religion	Lutheran
Index	Yes
Images	No

The Black Sea German Research website is an excellent resource for research in church records in the Black Sea area. To locate church record indexes, visit blackseagr.org. Under the research tab, select one of two options: **Area/town/village specific** or **Church/Parish**. An entry with a red asterisk (*) indicates that the item has recently been added to the website. The site is updated regularly, so be sure to check back often for more information. Clicking on the underlined link will open a PDF which can often be searched using the Ctrl-F feature. To use this feature, simply press the keys *Ctrl* and *F* (or *Command* and *F* for Mac users) at the same time and a search box will appear. Type what you are searching for into the box and it will locate the corresponding text on the page.

- **Area/town/village specific** is divided up into several different areas. Underneath each heading, you will find links to indexes and records available for specific towns or parishes within the area. For example, under the heading **Dobrudscha**, select **Jakobsonsthal births 1843-1879**. This is an index of birth/baptism records for the village of Jakobsonsthal.

- **Church/Parish** is a list of available church and parish registers in Germany, Russia and the United States. Look for the name of your ancestor's parish, or for select Catholic records, click on **Diocese of Tiraspol Roman Catholic Church Death Records**. This tab contains indexes of Roman Catholic church records for various locations in the Black Sea. Partial indexes to the St. Petersburg Lutheran duplicate church records can be found under the heading **St. Petersburg Church Records (Odessa area)**.

Odessa Digital Library

The Odessa Digital Library is a great website to help you with research in the Black Sea region. Visit odessa3.org and from the main page, select **Collections**. Church records can be found under the headings **Bessarabian Collection, Church Records** or **St. Petersburg Archives**. These

Region	Black Sea
Religion	Lutheran
Index	Yes
Images	No; but may include references to images on FamilySearch

collections can be browsed and searched using the *Ctrl-F* feature. You may also wish to search for your ancestor by using the **Full Text Search** option available at the top of the page. Type your search query into the box and select which data category (collection) you would like to search in. The search engine accepts a variety of wildcard searches. To learn more about getting the most out of your search on the Odessa Digital Library, please see odessa3.org/queryhelp.html.

- **The Bessarabian Collection** is a great tool for research in Bessarabia. Within the Bessarabia Collection are several folders. Click on the name of a town/parish to access indexes or try searching the **Bessarabian Index** – an index of Bessarabian church records.

- **Church Records** contains links to parish register indexes primarily in the United States;

however, there a few records from German colonies in Russia. Check to see if your locality is included in this collection.

- **St. Petersburg Archives** contains indexes from the St. Petersburg Lutheran church book duplicates. The collection is organized by region.

Mennonite Genealogical Resources Website

Region	Black Sea and Volga
Religion	Mennonite
Index	Yes
Images	No

Access the Mennonite Genealogical Resources page at mennonitegenealogy.com/russia. Aside from the **General** tab, in which you will find general resources, links are organized by colony. Locate your colony of interest and look for keywords such as church records or birth/baptism, marriage, and death/burial. Most records are indexes and can be searched using the *Ctrl-F* feature.

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Region	Black Sea and Volga
Religion	Mennonite
Index	Yes
Images	No

Some church record indexes for select areas in Russia and the Crimea have been published online by the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Records can be searched with the *Ctrl-F* feature. To access these records, visit mennonitehistory.org/church-records

Village Coordinators

Many German colonies have village coordinators, or individuals with extensive knowledge of a specific colony. Village coordinators can be located through genealogical societies (AHSGR and GRHS) or a web search. Contact your town or parish's village coordinator to see if they have any information regarding church records.

Region	Black Sea and Volga
Religion	Lutheran, Catholic, Mennonite
Index	In some cases
Images	In some cases

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this "How to" Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you've mastered the Guide! Click here to try out the Activity.