History of Glückstal / Odesa / Russia (1848)

by Christian Rapp, Church Schoolmaster, April 25, 1848. This document was apparently written in 1848 by the Church Schoolmaster. An English translated version was received by Clyde Eisenbeis from an unknown source in the early 1980's (the text received was edited to remove typos). It is unknown who has the original German document with this information.

It is interesting that many of the names listed in this doc are the same names found in the Beulah, North Dakota area.

This document can also be found in "Homesteaders on the Steppe" by Joseph S. Height (on page 186 entitled The Chronicle of Glückstal). The text in Height's book is almost identical to the following text except for the section The Conductors of the Immigrant Treks.

One entry in the Selected Bibliography of Height's book could be the source of this article: Krüger, Otto. Chronik der Gemeinde Glückstal 1929 - 1939 - In: Bauernkalender 1939, S. 139 - 143.

The Founding of the Colony

The settlement was established at the end of 1804 by three families of Württemberg immigrants who were directed by the government officials to the small Armenian village of Grigoriopolis on the Dniester River. Other Württemberg families that had arrived at Ovidiopolis were likewise settled here in subsequent years: 67 families in 1805; 9 families from Warsaw in 1806; 24 families from Hungary in 1807; and 3 families from Germany in 1808 and 1809. At the end of 1809 the German colony at Grigoriopolis consisted of 106 families, numbering 525 souls (272 males and 253 females). In the beginning 21 of these families lived in old houses assigned to them; the others were quartered with Armenian families until they were able to move into the new houses which were constructed for them between February 1806 to May 1807.

It soon became evident that the location of the colony was very unsuitable in several respects. First, the village was situated at the extreme southern end of the colonists' land area. Secondly, the envy and national hatred of the Armenian townsmen caused discord and disunity. Thirdly, the village life exerted a harmful influence on the German colonists. For these reasons his Excellency Duke de Richelieu thought it best if the colonists of Grigoriopolis were resettled in the village of Glinoi, about 10 versts (1 verst equals about .666 miles) to the west. Accordingly, the colonists moved to Glinoi in the spring of 1809 where 118 houses of sod or wickerwork were made available to them by the administrator von Ronsenkampf. In turn the inhabitants of Glinoi were resettled in the homes of the colonists at Grigoriopolis. At Glinoi, which was now renamed Glückstahl, the colonists also obtained an old stone church and 10 wells.

In order to complete the quota of 122 families for the Glückstahl colony and to establish three additional colonies, the colonial authorities found it necessary to provide living quarters at Glückstahl for 293 families, numbering 1,304 souls. Of these, 19 families numbering 93 souls

were added to the colony of Glückstahl; 100 families numbering 490 souls were settled in the new colony of Neudorf in January of 1810; 68 families numbering 263 souls were settled the same year in the new colony of Bergdorf, and 99 families numbering 399 souls in the new colony of Kassel.

The complete settlement of Glückstahl consisted of 125 families numbering 618 souls (326 male and 292 female). These constitute the pioneer stock, which has not only doubled in size of population but also provided numerous emigrants that moved to Grusinia in 1818 and, after 1836, to Bessarabia.

The old village of Glinoi had been laid out without any plan, in irregular fashion, and the huts were small and uncomfortable, and the yards were not enclosed by fences. The colonists therefore laid out the village according to a regular plan and, as soon as possible, began to build new two-room houses made of stamped earth or sun-dried clay bricks. Many of these houses still exist, but most of them have been replaced by better, more attractive houses of stone.

The location of the Colony and its Land

The former Moldavian village of Glinoi lay 260 versts northwest of Cherson and 45 versts from the administrative center of Tiraspol, and 10 versts from the Dnieper River, which divides southern Russia from the province of Bessarabia. In 1809 this village was transformed into the German colony of Glückstahl, which at the present contains 215 attractive houses for the 231 resident families.

The village is located in a side valley of the Chornenko which takes its origin 2 versts north of the colony of Bergdorf and debouches into the Dniester Valley, near the village of Grigoriopolis. Both Neudorf and Bergdorf are also situated in the Chornenko Valley, which has several springs and also carried a considerable amount of water in the rainy season. The hills that flank the valley also furnish a sufficient supply of durable building stone for all three colonies.

The steppe land belonging to the colony covers an area of 7,034 dessiatines (1 dessiatine equals 2.7 acres) and its uneven terrain is traversed by ridges and gullies. To the south the land forms an obtuse triangle. To the north it borders on the steppe of the Russian village of Remanovka; on the south it adjoins the crown land of the village of Schippki; to the southwest and northwest lies the steppe of Grigoriopolis. The steppe of Glückstahl has one to three feet of fertile black humus with a sub-layer of clay, sand, and gravel.

On the whole, the land is of good quality and, if we exclude the years of drought, the following crops thrive best: spring and winter wheat, winter rye, maize, barley, potatoes, and several kinds of vegetables. The soil is also well suited for viniculture, and for this purpose 192 dessiatines containing 465,000 vines have been cultivated.

To the north of the colony, 60 dessiatines have been planted with oak trees, but these are only 15 to 20 feet high and too thin to be used for timber. The 30,479 fruit trees that have been planted are likewise not doing well, largely because of the unfavorable climate.

The communal sheep land lies to the southwest of the colony, between the borders of the colony and those of Grigoriopolis. Covering an area of 500 dessiatines, this pastureland extends over the Chornenko Valley, which had two springs that provide abundant water for the herd. East of this pasture are the 120 dessiatines of church land which the government has designated for the use of the local pastor.

The Naming of the Colony

When the German colonists were resettled in the village, the president of the Colonists' Welfare Committee, Associate Councillor von Rosenkampf, on seeing the advantages of the new location, was led to exclaim: "Das ist euer Glück!" (This is your good luck) and suggested that the colony be called Glückstahl.

The Origin of the Pioneer Families

The 125 families that settled here came from various countries: 67 from Württemberg, 27 from Hungary, 10 from Alsace, 9 from Baden, 3 from Palatinate (Pfalz), 3 from Saxony, 2 from Prussia, 2 from Hessen, 1 from Galicia, and 1 from Italy. The great majority were of the Evangelical Lutheran faith; the others belonged to the Reformed Church.

The Conductors of the Immigrant Treks

Those that came from Württemberg traveled in different groups which were led by the following conductors: Jakob Bauer, Jakob Götz, Michael Vögele, Heinrich Schock, Stephan Weiss, and Friedrich Rösler. Those that came from the Rheinpfalz, Alsace, and Baden were led by Heinrich Heilmann. The others had no special conductors.

All these immigrants came to Russia in view of the privileges proclaimed by His Majesty Tsar Alexander I of glorious memory. These privileges read as follows:

1. Freedom of religion in all respects.
2. Exemption from taxes and other tribute for the first ten years.
3. After the free years, the colonists will be placed on the same basis as the other subjects of the Russian Empire with the exception that they will not be required to billet troops, unless these are enroute.
4. The colonists are exempt from military and civil service, but each one is free to enter such service, though this will not exempt him from repaying his Crown debt.
5. Every settler will receive a grant to establish himself. This grant is to be repaid in the ten years following the ten free years.
6. Every family may import its movable possessions and additional saleable goods not exceeding the value of 300 rubles (1 ruble equaled $.50 before 1918).

7. The artisans are permitted to join guilds and associations. They may also engage in trade and commerce through the Russian Empire.
8. All serfdom has been abolished in the imperial states by the magnanimity of His Excellency the Tsar.
9. Every family will receive from the Crown 30 to 80 dessiatines of free land for its use.
10. The tax payable after the ten free years is the annual land tax which amounts to 15 to 20 kopeks per dessiatines (1 kopek = $.005).
11. Whoever wishes to depart from the Imperial Russian domain must first pay his Crown debt, plus the taxes for three years, for his use of the land.

The Original Condition of the Steppe assigned to the Colonists

The steppes assigned to the Glückstahl, Neudorf, and Bergdorf were originally in the possession of the Armenians and used by them to pasture their flocks, except that portion which the Moldavians in Glinoi had leased from them to produce grain.

Government Aid and Private Resources

The Crown advanced the following loans to the settlers:

1. For food rations	37,432 rubles
2. For settlement	47,282 rubles
3. For seed	2,410 rubles
In all	87,424 rubles

The personal possessions of the colonists consisted largely of clothing, bedding, household items, and, in some cases, cash funds. The value of these goods can be estimated at about 7,000 rubles. Several families also obtained an inheritance in later years, and some more recent immigrants brought about 30,000 rubles in goods or cash with them.

Events that had an Impact on the Colony

Every beginning is fraught with difficulties. This well-known saying was also true of the pioneering work that was accomplished by our forefathers. Not only those who had been artisans in their native country, and, therefore, unacquainted with agriculture, but also those that were experienced farmers needed many years before they were able to successfully cultivate the new steppe land that was given to them. They had to learn from their mistakes. Moreover, since the immigrants had come from different parts of Germany, and everybody attempted to retain his own customs and traditions, it is understandable that prejudices, abuses, and mistakes occurred which had a disturbing and harmful effect on the community spirit, both in the religious as well as in the social sphere.

From the time of settlement until 1824 the colony had no pastor who could have checked the inroads of immorality through church discipline and admonition to good behavior. The pastor who was here from 1811 to 1821 had to be removed from office because of reprehensible misconduct. Through his notorious behavior he did more harm than the good he achieved through his learned sermons.

The instruction of the young people was also deficient in the pioneer years. Since no actual teachers were available, men with only a rudimentary schooling had to be engaged for this work. But they received such poor pay that they were unable to devote themselves full-time to the task of instruction. Even so, they were only able to handle the most essential subjects. Often there was a woeful lack of instructional material, and the children's attendance at school was very irregular. It is, therefore, understandable that many completed schools without having acquired any real ability to read, write, or calculate.

The colony suffered many afflictions and losses that were caused by natural events. Earthquakes were felt here in 1812, 1829, 1834, and 1838, but thank God they caused no significant damage. There was only one major accident, namely in 1829, when lightning killed three adults (2 men and a woman) in their home.

Crop failures, in which only half the seed was harvested, occurred in 1813, 1814, 1832, and 1835. Only the seed was harvested in 1822 and 1823, and not much more in 1841 and 1845. Total crop failures occurred in 1833 and 1834.

Grasshoppers appeared in 1823 until 1827 and caused considerable damage to both grass and grain. In 1847 they destroyed grain valued at 121 silver rubles. In 1846 a plague of field mice caused crop damage of 2,684 silver rubles.

There was an outbreak of smallpox in 1829 and an epidemic of measles in 1843 that brought death to a considerable number of children. A so-called "nervous fever", which lasted from 1843 to 1845, exacted quite a few victims among the adults, mostly younger people between 20 and 30.

The community also suffered several severe losses from livestock epidemics. In 1829 such a malignant epidemic broke out among the cattle that many a farmer with 18 to 20 heads had only 2 or 4 of them left. Less malignant was the hoof-and-mouth disease of 1836 to 1837. Still another disease carried off many horses and sheep.

The hay harvest was poor in 1847, and in the long, cold winter that followed there was such a shortage of fodder that a load of straw reached the enormous price of 60 silver rubles! In four months between December and March, the lack of fodder together with the livestock epidemic carried off 119 horses, 690 cattle, and 646 sheep.

But the Lord also blessed the grievously stricken farmers with several bountiful harvests, particularly in 1816, 1818, 1836, 1837, and 1838. Through these harvests they were again able to recover and, with unfaltering confidence in God's blessings, they continued to till their fields with utmost diligence.

The Favorable Conditions of Progress

It cannot be denied that the community is now in a much better condition, that progress has been made in agriculture, and that there is more community spirit, orderliness, cleanliness,

and industry. We also gratefully acknowledge that the paternal solicitude of the Colonists' Welfare Committee has contributed much to our general welfare. In addition, the communities of this parochial district have, since 1824, been fortunate in having preachers who are deeply dedicated to the spiritual welfare of the communities and lead them along the good path through word and deed. By virtue of the church law established in 1834, the pastors, together with the local magistrates, have effectively eliminated many abuses and introduced discipline and upright behavior. The preaching of the Gospel and of pure doctrine has raised the morals of the colonists and produced fundamental improvements in both the church and the school. The pastors have been urging the colonists to engage good Christian teachers and to see to it that the children attend school regularly, in order to receive a good education. To enable even the young people that were already confirmed to continue their education, the pastors introduced Sunday School or religious instruction.

Community Buildings

To the church building taken over by the Moldavians, the colonists added a belfry and bell in 1810. A second smaller bell was purchased in 1818 at the suggestion of General von Inzow. In 1811 an attractive parsonage and school were constructed with the aid of Crown funds. However, the parsonage burned down in 1815, after Pastor Krussberg fired a careless shot in the direction of the roof (roofs were thatched). It became necessary to convert the school into a temporary residence for the pastor. In 1823, the community built a new schoolhouse of stone, which contained both a school room and an apartment for the schoolmaster. The growing number of school children and the fact that the old church, which was closed in 1832 and torn down in 1840, made it necessary to hold services in the school building, led the community, in 1832, to unite the school room with the teacher's quarters and to build him a suitable new house at a cost of 400 silver rubles.

Since the schoolhouse, though it was fitted out for religious services, still remained too small to accommodate the congregation, the need for a larger house of worship became acute. Trusting in God's gracious assistance and encouraged by Councillor of State von Hahn, the community decided to undertake the construction of a church for themselves and their posterity. The government not only approved this decision but also donated 3,000 silver rubles provided by the communal district fund, and even granted an additional loan of 1,000 silver rubles. Accordingly, on April 2, 1843, with the invocation of God's blessing, the foundation stone of this splendid project was laid.

The Lord blessed the undertaking by inspiring many hearts to participate. Soon 280 silver rubles were collected as free-will offerings. In two years, the church was completed according to the plan approved by the Colonists' Welfare Committee. The cost of the building came to 8,581 rubles, not including the free labor contributed by the community. September 30, 1845, when the attractive church was completed, was an unforgettable day of joy and elation. The choir sang hymns of praise, and Pastor Pensel delivered a moving sermon to the vast crowd that had assembled for the occasion. Provost Fletnizter performed the solemn consecration, and his Excellency State Councillor von Hahn enhanced the festive day by his presence. The three bells, of which the largest weighed 540 pounds and which the community had recently

purchased for 235 silver rubles, rang out harmoniously on the previous evening to announce the coming of the festive day.

The Graveyard

As soon as the colony was established, a graveyard was laid out near the church. At first it was surrounded by a ditch, but this was replaced, in 1819, by a stone wall. In 1842 the cemetery was enlarged and a new section of wall was added. At that time the new cemetery was officially consecrated by Pastor Pensel in a solemn service which included procession, hymns, sermon, and prayer.

Plantations

The beauty of the colony is greatly enhanced by the fine church and plantation of new trees surrounding it, and by the house of the schoolmaster and the other attractive houses of the colonists. The vineyards to the north and south of the village also present a picturesque view. The first vineyards were planted in 1820 by a few farmers, and their efforts were richly rewarded. Soon others who recognized the advantages of viniculture began to imitate the pioneers, and now there are several plantations that have proved to be a profitable enterprise. In fact, the vineyards have frequently been the economic salvation of the community in those years when the grain harvest failed.

The fruit trees that have been planted here did not produce such happy results. In most years the blossoms or the fruits were destroyed by noxious insects. As a rule, the trees remain thin and stunted in growth, and die out after 15 to 20 years. If the colonists still continue to cultivate the fruit trees, this is not because of any expected profit but because of personal predilection or the injunction of the authorities.

Community Enterprises

A communal enterprise that was started by the colonial authorities after the settlement was completed was the construction of a storage granary. In years of crop failure, this granary has again and again furnished aid to many of the poorer members of the community who would otherwise have sunk into poverty and debt.

To increase the welfare of the colony, the government also granted us the privilege, in 1828, of holding an open market every week. This market would indeed be in a flourishing state, if the Sunday bazaars, despite their prohibition by the authorities, were not held in the villages of neighboring Russian landlords.

In the spring of 1847, twenty-three local farmers built a cheese factory in order to obtain a better price for their dairy products, for there was a market for milk, and butter had to be sold very cheaply. Despite the sparse pasturage, the success of the enterprise exceeded all expectations. Over 12,960 pounds of cheese were sold at 4 silver rubles per pood (1 pood equals about 36 pounds), thereby providing a total income of 1,440 silver rubles.

In the beginning of 1847, the communities of the Liebenthal district decided to establish a common Orphans' Savings Fund, in which the accumulated capital is invested for their benefit.

As of January 1, 1848, the colony of Glückstahl owned 1,260 head of Merino and Spanish sheep. The assets of this enterprise amount to 7,797 silver rubles that are deposited in the commercial bank at Odessa and 1,839 silver rubles in cash or credit.

Glückstahl, April 25, 1848

Mayor: Philipp Flemmer
Burgomasters: Nies and Philipp Heil
Village Clerk: Heinrich Stotz
Church Schoolmaster: Christian Rapp