Germans from Russia Immigration Populations to North America and South America

1800–1940: Population, famine and emigration

Year / period	Volga German population	Black Sea German population	Famine / demographic losses	Major emigration and destinations
1800	~40–50,000	~20–30,000	—	Very little overseas emigration
1816	~55–60,000	~30–40,000	—	—
1825	~70,000	**~50,000**	—	—
1834	~108,000	~70–80,000	—	—
1848	~145,000	**~100,000**	—	—
1850	~160,000	~105,000	—	—
1857–60	~180–215,000	~120–150,000	—	Small movements within Russian Empire
1860s	~230,000+	~150,000+	—	Beginning of significant consideration of emigration
1871	~280,000	~190,000	Russian government removes important German privileges	Emigration to Americas begins rapidly
1873–75	~290,000	~200,000+	—	**U.S.:** Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota Territory; **Canada:** beginning later; **Brazil/Argentina:** Volga Germans
1876–80	~300,000+	~210–220,000	—	**U.S., Brazil, Argentina, Canada**. Volga Germans establish South American colonies
1880s	~300,000–320,000	~220,000–250,000	—	U.S. becomes dominant destination; Black Sea Germans increasingly go to **Dakotas**
1890	~325,000	~270–300,000	—	U.S.; Canada beginning to attract Volga Germans
1891–92	~330,000	~280,000+	**Major Russian famine**	Famine stimulates additional emigration, especially Volga Germans to **North America and South America**
1897	**345,000**	~300,000+	Continuing demographic pressure	Large communities now established in U.S.; Argentina and Brazil growing
1900	~350,000+	~330,000	—	**U.S., Canada, Argentina, Brazil**
1901–10	~400–450,000	~350–400,000+	—	Large migration to **Canada**, especially Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba; U.S. remains principal destination
1911	~450,000+	**426,397** in Kherson + Taurida + Yekaterinoslav	—	Black Sea Germans concentrated in southern Ukraine; emigration continues
1914	**>500,000**	~450–500,000+	World War I stops most overseas migration	U.S., Canada, Argentina and Brazil contain large communities
1915–20	Falling	Falling/disrupted	World War I, Revolution and Civil War	**Overseas migration largely stops**

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1921–22	Major decline	Major decline	**Famine of 1921–22**; Volga German areas particularly devastated	Americans and Canadians provide relief; normal immigration is severely restricted
1926	**379,630 in Volga German ASSR**	~394,000 Germans in Ukrainian SSR	Partial recovery	U.S., Canada, Argentina and Brazil already contain established communities
1932–33	Major decline	Major decline	**Soviet famine and collectivization**	Almost no normal overseas emigration
1937	**~322,652 in Volga German ASSR**	~402,000 in Ukrainian SSR	Population losses, repression and migration	Overseas German communities increasingly separated from relatives
1939	**366,685 in Volga German ASSR**	~392,000 in Ukrainian SSR	—	U.S., Canada, Argentina and Brazil remain major diaspora centers
1940	~367,000	~390,000 in Ukraine, broadly defined	Prewar population disruption	Overseas migration essentially closed; deportations follow in 1941

The Volga German population reached **345,000 in 1897 and more than 500,000 by 1914 despite substantial emigration**.

Where did they emigrate?

The migration wasn't limited to the United States.

Destination	Volga Germans	Black Sea Germans	Approximate period of major migration
United States	**Very large**	**Very large**	1870s–1914
Canada	Large	Large	1890s–1914
Argentina	**Very large**	Moderate	1876–1914
Brazil	Several thousand	Some	1870s–1914
Australia	Small	Small	19th–early 20th century
Mexico	Small	Small	19th–20th century
Uruguay	Small	Small	19th–20th century
Paraguay	Small	Small	Mostly later
Chile	Small	Some	19th–20th century
South Africa	Small	Small	19th–20th century
Russia—Caucasus	Significant	Some	19th century
Siberia	Significant	Some	Late 19th–early 20th century
Europe/Germany	Relatively small before 1914	Some	Increasing after WWI
Kazakhstan/Central Asia	Mostly **forced migration after 1941**	Mostly forced migration	Outside your 1940 cutoff

For Volga Germans specifically, the historical record identifies **the United States, Canada, Argentina and Brazil as the principal overseas destinations**.

Volga Germans: South America is especially interesting

The South American migration began surprisingly early.

In **1876**, Volga German scouts went to Brazil. In 1877, another group went to Argentina, and approximately **850 Volga Germans arrived in Argentina in January 1878**.

The first permanent Argentine Volga German colonies were established in **1878**, including settlements in Entre Ríos, Buenos Aires and Santa Fe provinces. By the end of 1878, one source records **1,003 Volga Germans in Entre Ríos, 379 in Buenos Aires Province and 152 in Santa Fe**.

Brazil was an important early destination, but **Argentina ultimately became much more important for Volga Germans**. The Volga German historical society estimates that millions of people of Volga German ancestry eventually lived in Argentina, although that later ancestry figure should not be confused with the number of original immigrants.

Black Sea Germans

The Black Sea migration pattern was somewhat different.

Their major destinations were:

Russia/Ukraine → United States → Canada → Argentina

The first Black Sea German settlements in the United States appeared in **South Dakota in 1873**, followed by extensive settlement throughout North and South Dakota.

Canada subsequently became particularly important. Black Sea Germans moved into **Alberta and Saskatchewan**, especially around 1900–1913. Argentina also received Black Sea Germans beginning in **1898**, particularly from colonies such as **München, Speier, Rastadt, Landau, Rohrbach, Mannheim and Karlsruhe**.

Famine losses

This is where we need to be especially careful.

It is possible to document the **overall Soviet/Russian famine mortality**, but much harder to isolate deaths of *Volga Germans* or *Black Sea Germans* from the total.

For example, registered deaths in the **Lower Volga** rose from **47,949 in 1932 to 175,604 in 1933**—an increase of roughly 3.7 times. These are regional figures and **should not be interpreted as Volga-German deaths alone**.

For the 1932–34 famine, published estimates of deaths across Soviet Russia and Ukraine vary considerably. The Volga German historical society notes the substantial uncertainty in the available mortality figures.

The **1921–22 famine** is particularly important for Volga German genealogy because it caused severe losses in individual German villages. In some villages, population fell dramatically between the pre-famine and post-famine censuses. The subsequent Soviet collectivization and 1932–33 famine created another demographic shock.

The overall pattern

The demographic story can therefore be summarized:

1800
→ Volga Germans larger than Black Sea Germans

1825–1860
→ Both populations grow rapidly

1870s
→ Mass emigration begins

1873–1914
→ United States becomes the largest destination
→ Canada becomes important later
→ Argentina becomes exceptionally important for Volga Germans
→ Brazil receives an earlier but smaller Volga German migration

1891–92
→ famine accelerates Volga German emigration

1914–18
→ World War I largely shuts down migration

1921–22
→ catastrophic famine, especially in the Volga region

1926
→ substantial populations remain in Soviet Russia and Ukraine

1932–33
→ second catastrophic famine + collectivization

1937–40
→ population recovery is incomplete and Soviet repression continues

1941
→ the entire situation changes with the **deportation of the Volga Germans**.

One particularly useful point for your genealogy research is that **a family leaving a Volga German village in 1874–1914 could have gone to at least six very different destinations—U.S., Canada, Argentina, Brazil, another part of Russia, or Siberia**. The original Russian village is therefore essential for determining which migration path is likely.