

## **Russian Germans on Four Continents: Global History and Present**

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The history of Russian Germans is a history of intensive mobility across space and time. The very presence of settlers from German-speaking Central Europe in the Russian Empire was the result of sustained migration processes ever since Catherine the Great issued her Manifesto for the recruitment of settlers for the internal frontier of the expanding Russian Empire in 1763. People of different regional origins and religious denominations (mostly Protestants, but also Catholics and Mennonites), who only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would become known by the collective term “Russian Germans” (*Russlanddeutsche*), heeded the call. Subsequent movements of these colonists and their descendants in the course of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led them into Siberia, Central Asia as well as overseas to the Americas. The First World War, the Russian Revolution and the Civil War were additional catalysts for emigration.

The Germans in the Soviet Union and in Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe were irrevocably set into motion during the Second World War. After the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Nazi Germany resettled Germans from Soviet-occupied regions, and during the war also from occupied Soviet territories. Some of those “Heim ins Reich” settlers emigrated overseas after the war. Starting in August 1941, Soviet authorities rounded up their German citizens from the Volga and other regions and deported them eastward. Once they were released from collective confinement in 1955, the deportees inside the Soviet Union were on the move again. Their initial destinations were often in the Central Asian republics, later also both Germanies. With the gradual lifting of the Iron Curtain during the Perestroika years, Russian German mass emigration was set into motion. Only a minority remained in the former Soviet Union.

As a result, today the descendants of the original Russian German settlers live on four continents: predominantly in Europe (Germany), in Asia (Russia beyond the Urals and Kazakhstan), and in North and South America. Depending on when they left Russia, their identification as “Russian German” or “German from Russia” is more or less pronounced. Some of those who left the Soviet Union in the 1990s for Germany now move again, following traditional overseas migration paths to live their Mennonite or Pentecostal faith in remote areas of Canada or Bolivia, thereby creating new global entanglements and connections.

In this conference, we want to approach the global history and the global present of this particular group of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe from an interdisciplinary angle. We invite papers from historians, anthropologists, ethnographers, linguists, and scholars of other disciplines who deal with topics such as:

- Global networks of Germans from Russia
- Questions of belonging in different imperial, national, and cultural contexts

- Encounters with “indigenous” peoples on different frontiers
- Russian-German diaspora activism
- State diaspora politics of both Germany and Russia
- Contacts across the “Iron Curtain” during the Cold War
- Recent global migrations (e.g. from Germany to the Americas)
- Global religious diasporas a (e.g. Mennonites)
- Everyday material and non-material culture (language, cuisine, housing...)

Participants in the conference are expected to contribute their papers to an English-language edited volume (Lexington Books have already expressed interest). Papers should have an average length of 8,000 words and be in good draft shape by the time of the conference, so we can proceed with the publication process soon after.

Please submit proposals for papers of not more than 300 words to [globalrussiangermans@gmail.com](mailto:globalrussiangermans@gmail.com) until **15 April 2021**.

Since we do not expect a return to normal international travel by this fall, the conference will take place online!