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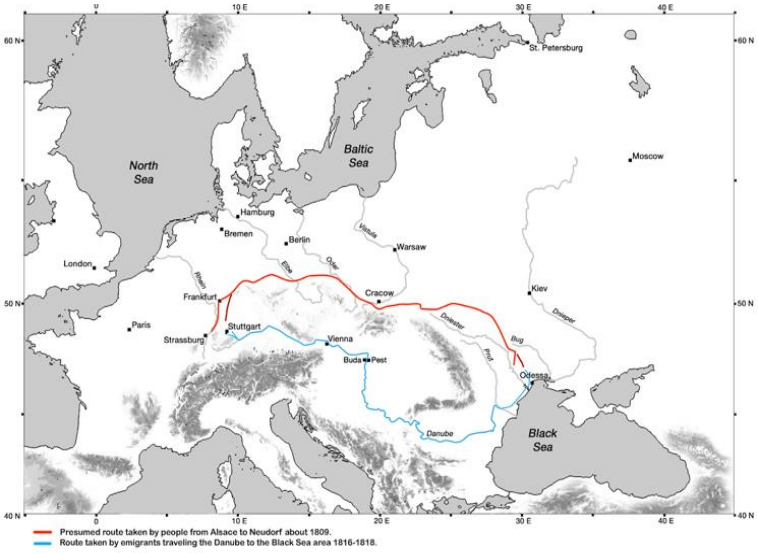
AMERICANS OF GERMANS FROM RUSSIA ANCESTRY

Stories of Three Plymouth Village Families



Boyd A. Nies, M. D

Assembly Room, A. K. Smiley Public Library

Summary

The German born Catherine the Great became Empress of Russia in 1762. The following year she issued a manifesto to encourage foreigners to move to undeveloped areas of Russia. This remarkable document is still well known today to descendants of the settlers influenced by the manifesto to move to Russia. This manifesto offered free transportation to Russia, free land to farmers, freedom for prospective settlers to practice their own religion and to establish their own local governments and schools, and freedom from having to serve in the military. The initial lands offered were along the lower Volga River. Conditions there were initially very difficult, but eventually those colonies became prosperous. In a series of wars with Turkey In the late 1700's, Russia acquired lands along the north coast of the Black Sea, the northwest coast of the Sea of Azov, and the Crimea. Catherine's grandson, Alexander I issued a similar manifesto when he became Emperor in 1804. Subsequently, large numbers of Germans, particularly from Alsace and Württemberg emigrated to the Black Sea lands near Odessa. Another major migration was that of the Mennonites from the Danzig area of Prussia to lands northwest of the Sea of Azov. The histories of the ancestors of three Plymouth Village families who settled in those Black Sea areas are included in this paper.

Background of the Author

Boyd A. Nies was born and raised in Orange, California. He graduated from Stanford University in 1956 and from the Stanford University School of Medicine in 1959. An internship and residency in internal medicine at UCLA was followed by sub-specialty training in hematology and medical oncology at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland and the Stanford University Medical Center. From 1965 to 1995, he practiced hematology and medical oncology in Redlands and San Bernardino. During periods of that time, he was Chief of the Medical Staff of St. Bernardine Hospital and was also on the clinical faculty of the UCLA Medical Center. After retirement from full-time practice, he was the Medical Director of the St. Bernardine Hospice for 2 years and later served as a medical oncology consultant for a technology company. During retirement he has been a board member, and has also served as president, of the Watchorn Lincoln Memorial Association, the Friends of A. K. Smiley Public Library, and Lifestream (formerly the Blood Bank of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties). He was married to the former Helen Salter for over 63 years prior her passing in 2020. They have 3 children and 6 grandchildren. This is Boyd's seventh Fortnightly paper.

AMERICANS OF GERMANS FROM RUSSIA ANCESTRY
Stories of Three Plymouth Village Families

For centuries after the Reformation and Renaissance transformed western Europe, Russia remained a primitive and backward country. Although previous Russian rulers had invited small numbers of western European skilled workers and intellectuals to emigrate, Peter the Great, who ruled from 1689 to 1725, was the first to attempt widespread modernization of the country. Peter traveled to western Europe, bringing back with him large numbers of experts. He moved the Russian capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg to promote contact and trade with Europe, appointed some of the German rulers of the Baltic states to important positions in the government and army, encouraged intermarriage of the Russian royalty to the families of the German principalities, and enacted other reforms. There was not widespread support from the Russian population as a whole for Peter's reforms, and further efforts to modernize were not carried out by Peter's immediate successors.

On April 21, 1729, a daughter, Sophia, was born to the rulers of the tiny, impoverished German principality of Anhalt-Zerbst. In a remarkable series of events, Sophia, now known as Catherine, was married to Peter III, the grandson of Peter the Great, and when Peter ascended the Russian throne and was later deposed, Catherine, now known as Catherine II and subsequently as Catherine the Great, became Empress of Russia.

Catherine was an intelligent, energetic, ambitious, and resourceful young woman, who, by the time she became ruler of Russia in 1762, had learned the Russian language and extensively studied Russian history. In the first year of her reign, she had already begun to made plans to bring German peasants to undeveloped areas in Russia in hopes that their industriousness and skills would bring progress and possibly also serve as a model for Russian peasants. With that in mind, she issued a manifesto in December 1762 simply inviting foreigners to settle in Russia. That manifesto was largely ignored and did not result in any significant immigration. Catherine then realized that she would have to offer inducements to attract Germans and other foreigners. On July 22, 1763, she issued a new manifesto, which is still well known today to many of the descendants of the settlers influenced to move to Russia. This remarkable document offered 1) Free transportation to Russia, 2) Freedom to settle anywhere, 3) Freedom to practice any trade or profession, 4) Free land to farmers, 5) Freedom to practice religion, 6) Freedom to set up their own local governments and schools, 7) Freedom from

taxes for variable lengths of time, and 8) Freedom from military service. These privileges were to apply to the descendants of the settlers as well.

The initial lands that Catherine made available for immigration were those along the lower Volga River. These areas were largely unoccupied except for bands of outlaws on the west side of the river and nomadic Mongol tribes on the east. Initially, Russian ambassadors spread the word of the manifesto to the capitals of the German states and later independent agents were hired to persuade the prospective settlers to move to the supposed paradise of the lower Volga lands. Most of the prospective travelers were poor. Living in the many small German city-states was not a pleasant experience for most of the people. The Rulers of these principalities taxed their subjects heavily, drafted males to fight their frequent wars, and dictated the official religion of the area. In addition, the Seven Years War between Prussia and England on one side against Austria, France, and Russia on the other, which finally came to an end in 1763, had devastated many of the German city-states. Thus, the conditions were ripe for a mass migration of thousands of German families to Russia in the years 1764-1767. Complaints from the authorities in Germany, who did not wish their peoples to leave, caused Catherine to stop recruitment in 1767.

Those that signed up were gathered at assembly points in major cities. They were then transported to Baltic Sea ports, where they boarded ships which took them to St. Petersburg or in some cases along the Volkov River to Novgorod. From there they traveled overland to their destination. The previous promises of freedom to settle anywhere and to practice any trade were largely withdrawn. Catherine and her government had decided that only farmers were needed and they were to be transported to specific areas along the lower Volga. Protestants and Catholics were separated, so that the villages subsequently established were either entirely Protestant (80% Lutheran and 20% Calvinistic) or entirely Catholic. About 70% of the settlements were Protestant, 30% Catholic.

On arrival, there were neither the promised houses, nor any lumber to build them. Settlers initially lived in caves or in mud huts. There was a shortage of food, domestic animals, and farm implements. Seed for crops often arrived late. Spring floods and hot dry summers along with the inexperience of many of the colonists made successful farming difficult. There were attacks from robber bands on the west side of the river and from the Mongol tribes on the east. Most of the settlers became disillusioned and wished to return to their homes in Germany, but upon reflection they realized that return was impossible and they would have to stay and make the best of it.

Over time, the colonists adjusted to their new circumstances and conditions slowly improved. Lumber and Russian carpenters arrived to build houses. Farming practices improved and finally, in 1775, the settlers grew enough food for themselves and their animals without help from the Russian government. The settlers armed themselves to thwart attacks from robbers, although raids from the Mongol tribes continued to be a problem. Population actually declined from 6,433 families in 1769 to 5,674 families by 1785, but then steadily increased. Schools and churches were established. Wheat and tobacco were grown in excess amounts allowing for cash sales. Crafts were sold in local markets. By 1800, most of the Volga colonies were relatively prosperous and they remained so for the next one hundred years.

In the late 1700's, Russia and Turkey fought a series of wars. Russia was ultimately victorious and as a result received lands along the north coast of the Black Sea, the northwest coast of the Sea of Azov, and the Crimea. The initial strategy was to populate these lands with Russians from the central part of the country, but this plan proved unworkable. The primary group of people who might have been available were serfs who were not allowed to migrate.

Catherine died in 1796 and was succeeded by her son, Paul I. Paul, after his murder in 1801, was succeeded by his son, Alexander I. in 1804. Alexander, like his grandmother, decided to bring German peasants to fill empty Russian lands. He, too, issued a manifesto, similar to Catherine's, which guaranteed no taxes for 10 years, freedom of religion, and freedom from the requirement for military service. In addition, each family was to receive 30-60 dessiatines of land and a loan. (One dessiatine equals 2.7 acres.)

Recruitment of potential German settlers was better organized as compared to the efforts in the 1760's. This time, invitations were extended primarily to experienced farmers and artisans with families. People came to Russia from all over Europe, but primarily from southern and southwestern Germany. The states of Alsace and Württemberg particularly were the source of many of the settlers. These areas had been crossed repeatedly by Napoleon's armies with considerable destruction of crops and confiscation of supplies. In addition, young men, many of whom subsequently died in the Russian campaign, were forced to join Napoleon's army. Under these conditions, the prospect of a better life in Russia was appealing to many families.

A frequent assembly point for travelers to Russia in southern Germany was the city of Ulm on the Danube River. There they crowded into 90 feet long boats. Many floated down the Danube all the way to Galati (Galatz) in Romania, and then traveled overland to "New Russia". Others left the Danube at Vienna and traveled overland from there. The trips took two to five months, and when the immigrants arrived at the border, they were placed in quarantine for two to four weeks, during which time they lived in primitive barracks, reed huts, or tents. Many had to continue to live there for weeks or even months while their settlements were prepared. The entire process was very difficult and the mortality rate was very high.

New colonies were established, again either entirely Protestant or entirely Catholic, many near the city of Odessa on the Black Sea which itself had been established in 1795. There were other settlements scattered throughout the Crimea and further east. The early years were difficult, although perhaps not as harsh as those experienced by the Volga settlers. By 1830, the Black Sea colonists produced enough wheat to be able to export a good portion of it. Russia's treaty with Turkey in 1829 had opened passage through the Dardanelles, thereby allowing trading ships entrance to the Black Sea from the Mediterranean Sea. Over the succeeding years, southern Russia became one of the world's greatest producer of grain, with Odessa becoming the premier port of export. The German settlers were responsible for much of the production.

A third major migration into Russia in the late 18th and 19th centuries was the journey of Mennonites from Prussia. The Mennonites were an Anabaptist sect which originated in the Netherlands, taking their name from an early leader, an ex-Catholic priest, Menno Simons. They were widely persecuted because of their religious beliefs. For that reason, many in the mid 16th century moved to what became the Danzig area of Prussia, where they enjoyed a variable degree of religious freedom. In 1786, the Prussian ruler, Frederick William II, began demanding the payment of military and state taxes, which the Mennonites refused to do. In 1796, Catherine sent a delegation to the Mennonites outlining the opportunities in Russia. Those prospects appeared sufficiently appealing that the Mennonites sent two men to Russia to investigate further. Meetings with the authorities in Saint Petersburg and Catherine resulted in the Mennonites receiving absolute guarantees of religious freedom and exemption from military service. They were also granted extensive rights to self-government in the lands which they were to receive which would be closed to outsiders. Under these favorable conditions, many of the Prussian Mennonites accepted the invitation to move to New Russia. The initial lands offered were northwest of the Sea of Azov. There the

Mennonites established their first colony at Chortitza and a later a larger colony called Molotschna. Numerous daughter colonies were formed in that area and later new colonies were established further east.

The Mennonites generally enjoyed more early success than other colonists, mainly because almost all of them were experienced farmers, whereas other colonists often include many artisans and day laborers. Under the direction of a great leader, Johan Cornies, the Mennonites were the first to practice tree planting, crop rotation, and the use of fertilizer. They also improved livestock and introduced updated farm machinery. All of these practices contributed to making the Mennonites the best farmers in southern Russia.

However, conditions began to change in the second half of the 19th century. In 1861, Alexander II emancipated the serfs. Whereas previously the German settlers had special status, in the future, the colonists saw that they might eventually be absorbed into a new class of free peasants. Also, anti-German feelings began to rise. The upper classes resented the ethnic Germans' political influence in the Baltic states, whereas the Russian peasants were jealous of the special privileges and prosperity of the colonists. The unification of Germany in 1871 ignited fears of invasion. The colonists were unfairly accused of supporting that possibility.

Subsequently, promises made by Catherine and Alexander in their manifestos were broken. After 1871, documents involving the colonists were printed in Russian, rather than German. Schools were no longer solely under the colonists' control and in 1892 Russian became the language of instruction. In 1874, the colonists lost their exemption from military service.

Another major factor influenced the settlers to move from Russia to the Americas. There was the shortage of new lands in Russia for their increasing population. By the late 19th century, many of Germans in Russia owned no land. The Homestead Act and cheap land from the railroads in the United States and the Dominion Lands Act in Canada offered the prospect of immigrants owning a significant amount of land at minimal or no cost. A secondary benefit of moving to the U.S. was the ease of becoming citizens.

Among the earlier migrants to the U.S. were the Mennonites, who, as pacifists, were particularly disturbed by the new requirement for military service in Russia. Their initial settlements were in Kansas in 1873. Later many migrated to Canada. The Volga German emigrants first settled in Nebraska and Kansas. The Black Sea Germans came to the north-central part of South Dakota and the south-central part

of North Dakota in large numbers beginning in 1884 and continuing until World War I. Smaller numbers went to Canada. Other Germans from Russian migrated to Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Overall, an estimated 300,000 German-Russians emigrated to the Americas from 1874-1914. This represented about a third of total German-Russian population.

The trip from Russia to America often began with a wagon trip to a train station. The train would take the emigrants to Bremen or Hamburg, port cities on the North Sea. There they would board a ship which would take them to New York, often with a stop in Southampton, England. Most traveled in steerage class, which entitled them to a cramped bunk and meals of picked beef, herring, bean soup and potatoes. The cost per person was about $35. They were limited in what they could take with them, usually their clothes and bedding, and perhaps a few dishes. Sea water was used for washing themselves or their clothes. The steamship trip would usually take about 10 days.

After 1886, when arriving in New York harbor, the Statue of Liberty would have greeted the Germans from Russia. Processing was done at Castle Garden prior to 1892. Subsequently processing would take place at Ellis Island. There was a railroad ticket office at the processing centers where tickets could be purchased to all parts of the United States and Canada.

Many of the Germans from Russia did take trains to the Great Plains area in hopes of obtaining land for farming. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed that any citizen (or person intending to become one) could apply for 160 Acres. Initially a small filing fee was required. A deed to the property would be issued if the applicant lived on the property for 5 years, built a dwelling and cultivated a portion of the land. Many times, suitable land was not available at the end of the railroad line and the settler and his family would have to travel on their own by wagon to find free land further west or north. Wood for house construction was not readily available, since generally there were no trees on the prairie. If lack of funds precluded purchasing building materials, settlers initially often constructed crude houses of sod. Prairie grass root structure is much thicker and tougher than the grass of a modern lawn. Before crops could be planted, numerous rocks had to be removed. Eventually, however, conditions improved. Frame houses were constructed and agricultural output soared. Children of the settlers often continued to be farmers, but in subsequent generations, more and more, took up other occupations and moved to other areas of the country.

Today the descendants of the Germans from Russia have been thoroughly assimilated into the English-speaking culture of The U.S. and Canada. Even in North Dakota, where an estimated 30% of the population has German-Russian roots, German customs have largely died out, although ethnic foods are often served one to two nights per week in many restaurants.

The decision to stay in Russia after the 1914 start of World War I was a disastrous one for the German settlers. Initially, The German language was banned in newspapers, in schools, and in church services. Many of those who objected were sent to Siberia. World War I and then the civil war were associated with lawlessness and famine. When Stalin came to power in 1927, he forced farmers onto collective farms. Those that resisted were ether shot or exiled. A severe famine resulted with the loss of millions of lives.

During World War II when Germany invaded Russia, Stalin ordered all Germans sent to Siberia or other eastern territories. Some of the German-Russians were still in their villages when the retreating German forces arrived. When the Russians retook those areas, the German-Russians fled into Germany. When the Russians arrived there, they sent a majority of those Germans to Siberia. Some escaped to other countries, including some to the U.S. Today there are practically no German-Russians in those southern Russian villages.

THE ROBERT WIENS FAMILY

The name "Wiens" suggests that an early family member may have lived in Vienna (Wien), but there is no documentation of this proposition. The earliest known Wiens ancestors lived in the Netherlands and became Mennonites. The Mennonites rejected infant baptism, believing instead, that a person should be baptized only after professing faith in Jesus Christ. This Anabaptist belief was considered a heresy by the established Church and, for that and for their strong pacifism, the Mennonites were severely persecuted. In the 16th century, groups of Mennonites began moving to the Danzig area of what was then Poland, where they enjoyed a religious freedom. They became prosperous farmers after draining the marshy areas around the Vistula River using techniques which they had previously used in the Netherlands. Over time, the Mennonites in the Danzig largely gave up their Dutch ways and began to speak German.

In 1772, this area became part of the kingdom of Prussia under Frederick the Great. Under his rule, the Mennonites continued to have freedom of worship, control of their schools, and exemption from military service, but they were required to pay a large annual tax for the military school at Culm and there was also some restriction of the acquisition of new land Things became much worse when Frederick died and his nephew, Frederick William II, became king. He denied any new land purchases and also demanded tithing to the Lutheran Church.

These conditions were unacceptable to the Mennonites and many began to move to the Russian lands opened up by Catherine the Great and Alexander I.

The first Wiens ancestor with a known name was Johann Wiensz who lived in a Mennonite village along the Vistula River. His son, Jacob Johan Wiens, born there in in 1762, in 1804 emigrated to the Molotschna colony near the Sea of Azov and settled in the village of Schoenau. He was a weaver of linen cloth as well as a farmer. His grandson, Jacob G. Wiens, active in Church affairs and a gifted preacher, moved his family to Siberia in 1901. He remained in Russia after the revolution and because of his continuing work in the Church was imprisoned in 1929 and died shortly thereafter. His son Frank Jacob Wiens, Bob's grandfather, was born in Orechowo, Russia in 1880. Land was not available for him in Russia, so he went to Siberia and purchased land near Omsk. He became interested in becoming a missionary and in 1904 moved to Switzerland for 4 years of seminary training. In 1908 he was married in Omsk, his wife having had nurses' training. A year later they were appointed as missionaries to India. Bob Wiens' father, Jacob Frank Wiens, was born 6 weeks before to move to India. After about five years of

service in Nalgonda, India, the family moved to Los Angeles. Five years later, they moved to Reedley, California, where the extended family owned fruit orchards.

Bob's father was a teacher, high school principal, and school district superintendent. Bob was born in 1935 in Hanford. California and grew up in that area. The family attended Baptist churches, since there were no Mennonite churches there. However, at age eight, Bob returned to Reedley to be baptized in the Mennonite Church. He later attended and graduated from the University of Redlands. After graduation, he went to work at Redlands Federal Savings and Loan, eventually working himself up to President and CEO. He was a long- time trustee of the University of Redlands and was also active in many community organizations. Bob met his wife, Marion at the U of R. They were married in 1956. They have three children, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Bob passed away in 2017.

THE BOYD NIES FAMILY

The Nies family lived for many generations in the southwestern part of what is now Germany prior to moving to Russia. They are thought to be descended from the Suebi, an ancient Germanic tribe, which Julius Caesar described as the most warlike of all the Germanic peoples. The first known Nies ancestor was John Andreas Nies, a cabinet maker, who was born in about 1712 in Oppenweiler, Württemberg. One of his sons, Burkhardt Nies, born in 1753 moved to Russia probably in 1804 or 1805. One of the primary reasons for Germans leaving at that time was the devastation of the area by the Napoleonic Wars. Troops crossed those lands repeatedly destroying crops. Residents were forced to billet troops and many young males were forced into the army. The ruler, Frederick I, supplied 12,000 troops to Napoleon in exchange for being named King of Württemberg. In addition, Frederick had tried to force all Protestants into one church. The Nieses and the Dollingers, my grandmother's ancestors, were staunch Lutherans and fought this edict, wishing for more religious freedom. The promise of new lands to farm was also a strong factor in moving.

The long trip to Russia for the Burkardt Nies family probably began in late 1804 with a wagon ride from a small village near Stuttgart to the city of Ulm on the Danube River. There they boarded flat bottomed barges that floated down the river as far as Galatz, Romania. Passengers had to bring their own food and bedding. They were crowded together and exposed to the elements, causing many to become ill. After about ten days, the emigrants arrived at Vienna, where they appeared before the Russian ambassador, who examined their passports and issued visas. Then, they again boarded the primitive boats and continued down to Galatz. Sometime in 1805, the Ottoman Expire closed the lower Danube. This forced the emigrants to leave the Danube at Vienna or Budapest and travel overland by wagon to Russia. After a period of quarantine, they were moved to the village of Grigoriopol on the east bank of the Dniester River, thereby avoiding the disease-ridden barracks near Odessa. Along with other settlers arriving from 1806-9 they remained there until 1809 in the Armenian village of Glinnoi which was closer to land designated for the colonists use. This settlement became Glückstal. Housing initially was inadequate and there were many deaths. Although we don't have records from those early days, a census list in 1816 revealed that there were many orphans. Burkhardt Nies died in about 1817, leaving his widow, Christina, with six children. Initially conditions were difficult for the Nies family and the colony as a whole, but then things gradually improved. As noted previously, the German farmers prospered, making southern Russia one of the great grain- growing areas of the world.

Because of the broken Russian promises and with the prospect of land of his own to farm, my great grandfather, Johan (John) Nies, decided to emigrate to the United States. In 1884, he and his family boarded the SS Elbe in Bremen, arriving in New York on September 27. After processing, they took a train to Menno in southeast Dakota Territory in hopes of obtaining land there. No free homesteads were available, but there was news that land was available further west and north in what is now McPherson County, South Dakota. A cow, a pair of oxen, a wagon, a plow, and provisions were purchased with another immigrant family and loaded on a train which took them all to the nearest railway station to McPherson County. After getting off the train, they happened on another family which had already settled in McPherson County, who were able to guide them to their destination about 60 miles away. Shortly after they arrived, land opened up for filing on November 1, 1884. Three types of claims could be filed for, each consisting of 160 acres. The timber claim did not require residency, but did require the claimant to plant trees on 25% of the acreage. The preemptive claim required a brief period of residency and then a fee of $1.25 an acre. The homestead claim required five years of residency, erection of buildings, and cultivation of the land. The 1885 harvest was good and John was able to purchase a threshing machine. In the years of 1887 to 1892, another 4,500 Germans from Russia arrived in the area. The settlers were excellent farmers and by 1895, they were able to produce three million bushels of wheat which were brought to the town of Eureka. The railroad had been extended there and as long as Eureka was the end of the line, it was one of the largest export portals for wheat in the world.

John's son, Jacob, my grandfather, also became a farmer, and his farm was located in the Edmunds County, just south of McPherson County. In 1890, he married my grandmother, Rosina Dollinger, also from Glückstal, who had arrived in the U.S. in 1889. They had seven children, all boys, and later adopted another boy. My father, Arthur, was born in 1904, the youngest of the natural children. During their time in South Dakota, the family was converted to the Seventh-Day Adventist faith. In 1907, the family moved to Oklahoma, where they homesteaded a farm, lived in a sod house, and raised wheat. Then in 1916, they moved to south central Kansas, where they stayed for good. Six of Arthur's brothers became farmers in that area. One brother graduated from Loma Linda Medical School and became a general practice physician. Arthur also wished to become a physician. After he completed his pre-medical courses at the University of Nebraska, his father died. Money was not available for medical school at that point, so he lived at home and taught in a country school for two years to raise the needed funds. In 1927 he entered Loma Linda Medical School. At one point he was assigned to the Orange County General

Hospital to observe an autopsy. There he met a microbiologist, Mary Dora Sheffer, who was there to obtain specimens for the County Health Department. They were married in December 1930 and I subsequently I was born in 1935.

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THE VIRGINIA BECKER CHAPMAN FAMILY

The Becker family had lived in Alsace for many generations. Devastation of the area by the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars induced many Alsatians to move to southern Russia, beginning in 1803. The first family member to journey to Russia was Virginia's great-great grandfather, Georg Becker. He traveled down the Danube in 1810, eventually arriving in the village of Glückstal. After his marriage in about 1820, he moved to his wife's village of Kassel, about 10 miles from Glückstal and lived there the rest of his life. Virginia's father, Emil Daniel Becker was born there in 1896. He emigrated to Alberta, Canada with his family in 1913. As an adult, he homesteaded a parcel of land in Alberta, where he raised horses, which he rented out. Several years later, Emil attended the American Baptist Seminary, German Baptist Division, in Rochester, New York. During summers, he was sent to North Dakota to sell books to churches. There he met his wife to be, who was also of German-Russia heritage. They were married in 1926 and Virginia was born in 1929.The family moved every few years as her father had several pastorates. Virginia graduated from high school in Vancouver, British Columbia. Since the age of 9, she had had a desire to become a missionary to Africa. After graduating from a teachers' college, she entered the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley. There she met her future husband, Orville Chapman. They were married in 1954. After they both graduated, they received additional missionary training in Connecticut and then a required year in Belgium. They then moved to Belgian Congo in 1957. Three years later pro-independence forces prevailed, establishing the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the time of the fighting, the Chapmans were evacuated by helicopter. After a furlough of 15 Months, they returned to the Congo. They served a total of 29 years on the ground there prior to their retirement in 1994. After retirement, they lived in Oregon and then in Santa Cruz prior to coming to Plymouth Village in 2008. Virginia and her husband have four children, the oldest of whom has carried on their legacy of missionary service in the Congo. Orville passed away early in 2020.

Virginia visited Kassel and Glückstal in 1996. The Kassel Lutheran church, which had earlier served as a movie theater and storage area by the Ukrainians was still standing. Attempts to bring the one-foot thick walls down had been unsuccessful. When Virginia was there, the roof was still partially intact, but later it collapsed. Some of the original houses built by the German settlers in Kassel were still in use, the date of construction noted under the eaves.

Visitors to Glückstal have noted that the 150 year- old church has been refurbished and is used as a performance center. The large adjoining cemetery had been bulldozed by the Russians in 1987, prior to Ukraine's independence in 1991. Part of that land now a vegetable garden. The old German hospital had been abandoned and the old German post office was now a bar.

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