

## ARCHIVAL RESOURCES IN UKRAINE

by  
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Recently I was in Zhitomir, Ukraine, in connection with a humanitarian mission organization I founded over a decade ago. While there I had opportunity to squeeze in a couple of days of archival research. Once again I was amazed at the abundance of genealogical material that is available to the average researcher like myself. The material was found in three major archival buildings: the State Archives, the former Party archives and the archives of the *Ministry of Internal Affairs*.

### Re-settlement Records

My most valuable find on this trip was in the archives of the *Ministry of Internal Affairs*. Here you will find the re-settlement records of thousands of Germans from the Zhitomir region who were scattered across the Soviet Empire during the repression in the 1930s and in 1946 after World War II. There are over 12,000 such files housed in the archives, each containing from 15 to 20 pages of long hidden information about the fate of loved ones, who for all practical purposes simply disappeared off the face of the earth.

The Germans, of course, were registered upon arrival at their new place of settlement. In addition, they were required to stay within a 20-30 km boundary from their residence and place of employment and check in with the authorities every 30 days. During their stay in these remote settlements they were under constant surveillance by the secret police. From one of the files I learned that my cousin, Willy Rentz, who had been re-settled to the North with his family in 1946, was arrested and imprisoned several times for crossing the 20-30 km boundary.

According to my source for access to these files, the Soviet government ordered that the files kept at local archives be transferred to the regional office of the *Ministry of Internal Affairs* in Zhitomir in 1956. Unfortunately, not all the archives cooperated and so there are gaps in the records. Also, the files are not open to the general public. In other words, you can't just walk in and look at the card index or order a file. However, if you are a relative of a re-settled person, you can write to the *Ministry of Internal Affairs* to see if there is a file, and if so, get information regarding the fate of that person, but you cannot access the file yourself. I was fortunate in that I had a contact who was able to access a half dozen files for me.

The files contain a wealth of information: names and births of family members, place(s) of settlement and re-settlement (settlers were often moved from place to place), occupation, date/place of imprisonment, arrest, interrogations, sentence and fate, including all sorts of other interesting information. In one file I found a reference to my uncle, Heinrich M. Mueller, who is highlighted in my recent book,

*Under Arrest* (Repression of the Russian Germans in the Zhitomir Region, Ukraine, in the 1930s). In another file, there was information that while the husband served a 10-year sentence his wife lived with another man. It even gave the name of the man. What was of special significance to me is that there were pictures of family members in virtually every file, including children who reached the age of 16 years when they were required to register on their own. Prior to that, they were registered under the covering of their parents. In one case, the file contained a copy of a letter written by a distant relative in 1992 to the *Ministry of Internal Affairs* in Zhitomir requesting information regarding her family. Since her address is given and the woman is still in her early 70s, I intend to write to her in hopes of establishing a relationship with her.

But, perhaps, the most significant information of all contained in the files is the fate of the person(s) who were re-settled. In many instances, they were arrested by secret police and accused of anti-Soviet activity and sentenced to death by shooting. That one fact alone is enough to bring closure to many people who wondered what happened to their loved ones.

A brief summary of the most important data in many of the files has been put on index cards and is housed in a special department of the former Party archives. It is hoped that the information will be made available to the general public in the next year or two. In the meantime, you can request information regarding the fate of a person who was re-settled, providing you are a relative, by writing directly to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The address is: ***Ministry of Internal Affairs, Information Center, Pavel Glemba, Stariy Bulvar 5/37, Zhitomir, Ukraine, 10000.*** Letters should be written in Russian or Ukrainian and include the name of the person being researched (including the father's name), date of birth and place of residence at the time of arrest or disappearance. I was informed that you should also provide proof of being a relative and that you should allow two to three months for a response.

## **Gulag Records**

While in the Party archives, I learned that there are a limited number of records regarding the fate of those who were sent to a Gulag, particularly those sent to the White Sea-Baltic Canal and the Volga-Moscow Canal. Those of interest to me were Beno Deblitz (Solodyri), Robert Steichert (Protowka), August Friegang (Solodyri), Reinhold Pfeiffer (Pulin) and Adolf Stahl (Ostrowka).

The file of Stahl was of special interest to me as our *Volhynian Adventure Tour* visited Ostrowka last May and saw Adolf Stahl's parental home, the only remaining German house in the village. My interest was further peaked by Dave Neumann's article about the Stahl family in the September 2004 issue of the *SGGEE Journal*. An abbreviation of the information I obtained from Stahl's file was as follows:

**Name:** Adolf Gustav Stahl.

**Date of birth and place:** 1895 in the village of Ostrowka, Pulin District.

**Nationality:** German.

**Occupation (In re-settlement):** Assistant accountant

**Family members:** Wife: Lidia (b. 1892). Children: Richard (1921), Robert (1923), Waldemar (1925), Gerry (1929) and Leo (1934).

**When and by whom arrested:** Special Department of the BBK/NKVD, December 17, 1937.

**When and by whom sentenced:** By order of the troika in the Karelia Republic on December 29, 1937 and sentenced to be shot.

**Executed:** January 21, 1938.

**Rehabilitation:** April 13, 1989.

**Source:** Archive of FSB (Russian equivalent of KGB) of the Karelia Republic. Case: p-14632.

The Gulag files are of special significance in that in many instances they contain information about the fate of the person. You can write directly to either the archive in Petrozavodsk or Moscow. You should give the same information as when writing to the *Ministry of Internal Affairs* in Zhitomir. The addresses for the archives of those who worked in the aforementioned Gulags are as follows:

Federal Security Service Department,  
Republic of Karelia  
5, Andropova Street  
Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia  
Russia 185035

Central Operative Archive,  
URAF FSB of Russia  
22 Kuznetsky Most Street  
Moscow, Russia 103607

## **Repression Records**

Over the past several years I have done extensive work in the former Party archives researching the files of a select number of Russian Germans repressed in the Zhitomir region in the 1930s. But I am always interested in additional persons. This time was no exception. As a favor to Alice Baumbach from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, whose uncle Nilolai Gustav Deblitz, disappeared and was never heard from again, I called for his file.

I learned that Deblitz, born in Solodyri, was arrested on December 24, 1937 and imprisoned in the Zhitomir prison. As was usually the case, he was accused of terrorist activity, receiving remittances from Germany and spreading false information about Stalin and Molotov. The records show that Deblitz denied all the charges made against him. When his case was presented to the *troika*

(three-man court with absolute and final power over life and death), he was sentenced to 10 years in a logging camp. He was stationed at Camp Karogabol (*author's note*: not sure about the spelling), near Arkangelsk in the North. In 1940 Deblitz wrote a letter to the Chief Prosecutor in Zhitomir asking for a reconsideration of his case. It was denied. The file also contained a letter from his daughter, Adolina, dated April 1995, in Novosibirsk, requesting information about the fate of her father. The KGB answered that he died on March 23, 1944 of unknown causes. He was rehabilitated on June 28, 1989.

Brief information of about 4,000 Germans who were repressed has been put on database and is now in the hands of SGGEE. It is anticipated that the information will be made available to the public at some time in the future. In the meantime, if you would like a qualified person to research a person and translate the findings, you may contact Alex Brzhezitsky in Zhitomir, Ukraine, at [quaki@mail.ru](mailto:quaki@mail.ru).

### **Land Seizure Records**

These are the records of German colonists whose property was seized by the government in the years 1915-1919. There are over 2,000 such files in the State Archives. Each file contains from seven to 40 pages, with information about the extent of property, location, names of neighboring colonists, indebtedness, income and expenses for the previous 10 years, and a comprehensive inventory of buildings and machinery.

A number of years ago, when I first became aware of these files, I accessed the file of my grandfather, Adolph Adam Schultz from the village of Alexufka. I was astounded by the amount of detailed information found in his file. For example, I learned that his farm was located approximately 2 km from the main road leading from Zhitomir to Novograd-Volynski and one km from the flourmill on the neighboring road to Neborovka, and that his closest neighbors were Gustav Schramm and Karl Japs. I also learned that his father had become a Russian citizen on January 1, 1880, that he was born to Adam and Julianna Hein on March 4, 1882 and that his grandparents had come from Mlotsk, Poland in 1873 and settled in Novo Goroshky, all information which was previously unknown to me.

Upon my return to the State Archives this trip, I discovered files for various colonists in the villages of Lesovshchina, Veselovka, Cholosno, Solodyri, Liski, Wydumka, Martynowka and Heimtal. These records alone are worth a trip to Zhitomir.

### **Census Records**

While in the State Archives this year I learned that the most complete census records are for the year 1858. Unfortunately, these records are of little value to

most of us, as the Germans didn't come to the Zhitomir region until 1861/62. After that date, the census information is quite limited. It is also pretty time consuming to try to access this information. Generally, it is found in huge books arranged according to regions with references to various villages. I found it quite laborious and frustrating to have to wade through this massive material with minimal results. Perhaps others have had better success.

I should say, however, that several years ago I came across a census dated 1896, comprised of about 30 single sheets in a file, for the village of Tschernjachov. As it turned out, it contained the names of my great grandparents on both sides of my family. As in the case of my grandfather, Adolph Schultz, it was totally new information to me.

There are many other records: land records, citizenship records, birth records, religious records, police surveillance records, etc. All of which is to say that there is much information available in the aforementioned archives. But I have found it requires at least three things to be successful. First, it takes time. Anyone visiting the archives, especially for the first time, should expect to spend a minimum of a week to 10 days to make it worthwhile. Second, your success will be greatly enhanced if you know someone who knows his way around the archives and has broken through the bureaucracy. Third, you need to be willing to pay for the services of such a person and the materials he uncovers. The latter may include going to someone in the archives and offering to actually pay for the materials you want.

Recently, as of September 2007, I learned that the 1915 Deportation records are located in the State Archives in Kiev. In my next visit to the archives I will see if I can locate them and what's there.