

KGB FILES NOW OPEN

by
Donald N. Miller

You can now find out what happened to your loved ones who were arrested by the KGB (technically GPU and NKVD, Secret Service) in the 1930s

For many years my cousin, Sophia Schmalz, who lives in Western Siberia, wondered what happened to her father, Heinrich Michaelovich Mueller, a German Baptist preacher in Volhynia. The last time she saw him was the third week of June of 1937 when he was arrested on Andriyvska Street on the western outskirts of Zhitomir. She and her mother, Berta, came out of the house just as he was being led away by the KGB. When her father saw them, he turned, managed a half smile and said, "Don't cry." He was then pushed into a dreaded black van, dubbed by the German villagers as the "der schwarzen Vogel" (the black bird), and spirited away.

Sixteen-year old Sophia never saw her father again. In 1996, I visited Sophia in Omsk. As we sat around the kitchen table in her modest little house, she recounted this incident. When she came to the part where her father said, "Don't cry," we both cried. She told me she had been crying ever since her father disappeared and that for many years she had been looking for him, but to no avail. I told her that I, too, had been trying to get information about him. Several times, while in Zhitomir, I had gone to the KGB Archives and filed a written request for his whereabouts. Always the answer came back, "No information."



Then, ironically, three days after I returned from my trip to Siberia, I found an official-looking letter written in Russian from the Ukraine in my mailbox. When I opened it and had it translated, it read: *On June 23, 1937, Genrikh Mikhailovich Miller was arrested for the third time, and on October 18, 1937, by decision of the USSR People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs Commission and the USSR Procurator (Protocol No. 10), after accusation of anti-Soviet agitation, was sentenced to execution by firing squad. The sentence was carried out on November 21, 1937, place of burial not indicated*"

I was not surprised that my uncle was shot. I had heard of the similar fate of others. But as I continued to read, and later accessed his files, I was astonished that the KGB had kept such careful records, given the terrible atrocities that they had perpetrated on the people. Every little detail regarding his arrest, interrogation and witnesses was documented, even to the exact minute that he was executed. The record read, "*Ten minutes after 12 a.m.*" I later learned that most executions were carried out at that time.

There was a final entry, dated March 21, 1958, in which it was decreed that: *The decision of the USSR Internal Affairs Commission and the USSR Procurator, of October 18, 1937, in reference to Genrikh Michhailovich Miller, has been changed, and his case was closed due to lack of evidence for the accusation.* In other words, there was not enough evidence to convict him. He had not been given a fair trial. He had died without cause. The record also stated that the chief prosecutor had been executed because he had exceeded his power. It is difficult to know whether or not that was true.

Since *Glasnost* in the late 1980s, many people have been able to learn the truth concerning lost loved ones who were arrested during the dreaded Stalinist Reign of Terror. But they had to persist, as the information was not always forthcoming, nor was it always truthful. Sometimes when an inquiry was made regarding the fate of a loved one, the KGB simply said he died of a heart attack or of some other illness and then manufactured a date, and thus misled the inquirer. On some occasions they even instructed the Bureau of Vital Statistics to issue a death certificate after the fact with this false information. Now, for the first time in Soviet history, and that of the other former Soviet republics, this information is being freely disseminated. For example, anyone can obtain a documented account of what happened to their repressed loved ones, simply by addressing a letter to the *Department of Interior Affairs* of the Oblast in which their loved one was arrested.



This is good news. But there is more good news. Recently while doing research in a special department of the State Archives in Zhitomir on Strasse Samkowaja 3, I stumbled on to something, which will be of considerable interest to many of our readers. I was introduced to a retired colonel in the Russian Army by the name of Eugene Romanovich Timirajev. Mr. Timirajev heads up a special commission that was appointed by the first president of the Ukraine Democratic Government, Leonid Kravchuk, in 1992 to research, document and publicize the names of all those who were arrested by the Soviet Government from 1920 to 1986. The commission is comprised of four colleagues who have been working feverishly for eight years now in a back room gathering all the necessary data. The information is being drawn from three primary sources, namely, *the State Archives, the KGB Archives and the Department of Internal Affairs*. Members of the Commission have access to all archival materials.

The monumental task of transcribing the basic information from these files on to 4 x 6 index cards has already been completed. There are 56,000 cards stored in some 25 file drawers. It should be noted that this is only for the Zhitomir Oblast. The same thing is being done in all 25 oblasts, which means that no matter where in the Ukraine a family member was arrested, this information will eventually be made available to the general public. Other former Soviet Republics are doing this as well. Several books with this kind of information have already been made available in Russia.

The cards contain the following information:

Surname, first and patronymic

Date and place of birth

Nationality

Social Position

Party membership
Education
Family Members
Permanent address and place of work
When and by whom the person was arrested
Who was in charge of the investigation?
When and by what power he was sentenced
Fate of the arrested person
When and by whom he was rehabilitated
Commentary
Source of Information
Executor
Date

Three copies of this information has been tabulated, one for the State Archives in Kiev, another for the Regional Archives in Zhitomir and a final copy for the District Office in Pulin. This information, together with a number of background articles, will be published in book form in a series of five volumes, entitled "Rehabilitation of History." Only a few copies will be for sale. The rest will be placed in representative libraries around the world with an International Book Number. The projected completion date for the project is 2005-2008. The material for the first volume has already been prepared and will be printed sometime in 2003. It covers the surnames of the first three letters of the alphabet, namely, A, B and C.

A rough outline of the contents of the first volume is as follows:

Introduction

Brief articles by members of the team

Analysis of the political climate in the Zhitomir Oblast, 1920-1986

Criminal laws by which victims were accused

A series of scientific articles, including the:

Polish people



German Fascists

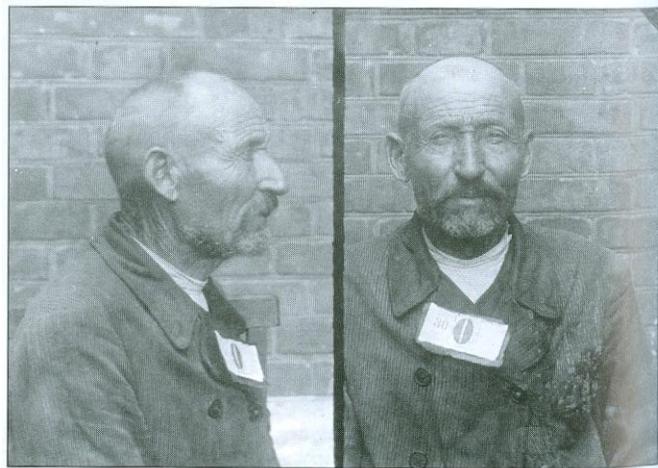
Czech citizens

Orthodox Church

Political leaders

Agricultural situation
Railroads
Various villages
Defense lawyers
KGB agents
Fate of notable persons arrested
Recollections of persons who knew the individuals arrested
Samples of official documents, i.e. orders, registration forms,
Photographs of individuals and buildings
Maps
Representative cases
Alphabetical listing and information of individuals arrested
References and sources

I found Mr. Timirajev to be very personal and passionate about his work. When I asked him what motivated him, he replied that he had family members who suffered at the hands of the Soviet Government and he wanted their fate to be known to the world. "In spite of that," he said, "I am trying to be very objective." He likewise expressed an interest in my family who suffered a similar fate and asked if I would consider writing a series of articles – stories, remembrances and recollections – about them for inclusion in one of the upcoming volumes of information. He extended the same invitation to anyone in our **Society for German Genealogy in Eastern Europe**. Before I left, Mr. Timirjaev gave me a considerable amount of information regarding various German Baptist pastors and relatives, including my uncle, Julius W. Sagert, who were arrested and shot.



• Julius W. Sagert, Tschernjachow, shot 1937.

The information regarding my uncle, Heinrich M. Miller, as it now appears on the 4 x 6 index card and will be printed in the book, "Rehabilitation of History," is as follows:

Statistical Card of the Person Subjected to Repression

Surname, first and patronymic: Miller Heinrich Michaelovich
Date and place of birth: 1893, Colony Alekseevka, Pulin district, Kiev province, USSR
Nationality: German **Social Position:** Preacher
Party membership: Non party man **Education:** primary
Family members: married, wife: Berta Adamovna, 33 years old, house keeper; daughter Sophia, 15 yearsold, studies at the 5th form
Permanent residence and place of work: Zhitomir, Andreevskaya 79; wagoner, works on private calls; in the past a Baptist preacher
When and by whom the person was arrested: June 25, 1937 under Article 54-10 of USSR Criminal Law; Regional Department of the Zhitomir NKVD (KGB)
Who was in charge of the investigation? Junior Lieutentent Bulgakov
When and by which power he was sentenced: October 18, 1937 by the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor of the USSR
Fate of the arrested person: November 21, 1937; was executed at 12:10 a.m.
When and by whom was he rehabilitated: On March 21, 1958, this case was closed because of the failure to prove accusation by the Supreme Court of the USSR
Commentary: On December 1932, he was arrested for the first time, then set free in May 1933. He was re-arrested May 4, 1934 and on May 23, 1934 sentenced to three years imprisonment in a correctional labor camp.
Source of information: Zhitomir State Archives, f. P-5013, op2, case, 6437-p
Executor: Eugene Timirajev Date: August 23, 2002

It should be noted that not all the information on my uncle's card is correct or that the facts were correctly interpreted. This should be a caution against taking any information, no matter where we find it, and regarding it as fact unless it can be collaborated from other sources. Errors creep in, as in this case, due to the fact that earlier my uncle had falsified his birth certificate to avoid being drafted into the Russian Army. One can also expect to find small errors due to assumptions, confusion of facts, or lack of them, and clerical errors.

For example, the card states that my uncle was born in 1893 in Alexseevka, near Pulin, when in fact he was born in 1900 in the colony of Korytyszczce, southwest of Novograd-Volynski. There are also two dates given in the file for his arrest, one is June 25, 1937 and the other is June 23, 1937. Mr. Timirajev considers the latter date to be the actual date of his arrest and the former date to be the official one. He assumes that my uncle was first arrested illegally, without the prosecutor's approval, and that permission was obtained only two days later.

The information from the 4 x 6 cards is also in the process of being entered into a data base. Approximately 5,000 cards have already been completed. It took one person one year working full-time to accomplish this. When I looked at the antiquated computer, a late 1980s model, I was not surprised. Their resources are extremely limited. The typewriter used to index the cards was built in 1952.

This is a most remarkable discovery. Now for the first time, anyone can read what happened to their loved ones, who were arrested by the Soviet KGB, and never heard from again.

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