

ROUGH DRAFT

FIELD REPORT

Trip to Pawnee Grasslands

April 22, 1976

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Field Report: A Preliminary Investigation of Sources & Informants in the
Pawnee Grasslands Area, Northern Colorado
April 22, 1916

The purpose of this one day field trip was to learn if any Russian-Germans are presently living in the Pawnee Grasslands area. Several individuals have told me that at one time a number of Russian-German families did move to the Pawnee Grasslands area and that a German church was founded in the Pawnee Grasslands region east of the towns of Grover and Hereford. I spent all of April 22 in this area and visited the towns of both Grover and Hereford and was told by some of the townspeople there that a German church did exist east of Grover on the prairie. I went to this church which is a large white frame building and a sign outside indicated that it was the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and that this church was built in 1950. There were a number of graves in the cemetery and the names Harms, Hillman, Hopke, Klawoner, and a number of others were common in the cemetery. There were less than 25 graves there and I did not recognize any distinctly Russian-German surnames.

Where the church is located is in an area that is in full view of the Pawnee Buttes which were made famous in James Mitchner's novel Centennial. He referred to these same buttes as Rattlesnake Buttes. In order to find more about the church and about the congregation of people who live in this area I drove east of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to the farmstead of Victor Hiltman. I had a pleasant conversation with Mr. Hillman. He told me all about the Germans in that area

as well as the Germans from Russia who once lived there. Mr. Hillman told me that the original church was built in 1917, the year after Mr. Hillman was born. Presently he indicated there is a vacancy in regard to a pastor and they are served by a preacher from Kimball but the parishioners there believe that a permanent pastor from California would soon be coming. Mr. Hillman told me that most of the families in this area who settled around the Lutheran church were Germans from Germany, especially from the Hanoover area in Germany. He also indicated that some of these families had sojourned in the Wichita, Kansas area before coming to Pawnee Buttes. The congregation today has 40 to 50 people and services are held each Sunday at 10:45, as he'd indicated.

In regard to Germans from Russia Mr. Hillman said that at one time there was quite a settlement, or at least a large group of German families from Russia, that lived in the Pawnee Grasslands area. Mr. Hillman indicated that they never really belonged to the church. They never felt comfortable there and thus kept themselves apart.

Mr. Hillman described the location of the Russian-German settlement, if indeed it could be called a settlement, as follows. One mile south of the Zion Lutheran Church and then one should keep driving, there's a loop in the road and around this loop was where most of the families located. These families were sizeable families by such names as Roth, Fritzler, Klaus, Tyzer, and Buxman. I asked Mr. Hillman if the Russian-Germans ever established their own church and he believed that they did not, that they probably held services in their own homes, or possibly went as far away as Greeley for German church

services that were more to their liking. Mr. Hillman told me that there was indeed a difference as he saw it between the Germans and the Russian-Germans. These differences he did not elaborate upon, but he did emphasize that the difference did exist. It was recognized by Germans and Germans from Russia alike.

Mr. Hillman advised someone to contact Werner Dick Hopka, who lives in Fort Collins at 429 Baylor, and who knows a great deal about the early history of the Lutheran Church in the Pawnee Buttes area, and possibly knows something about the early Russian-German inhabitants, as well. Victor Hillman also told me that one of the original churches that once stood in the Pawnee Butte area now stands twelve miles west of Grover on the Harold Phillip place and it will be moved to Greeley to be placed in the Centennial Village in the summer of 1976. Information about this can be obtained from Mrs. Jim Sievers at Briggsdale, Colorado.

I asked Mr. Hillman how the German services were conducted at the Lutheran Church, if any German was used. He indicated that no, no German has been used since 1917 when the church in that area was threatened to be burned down if German services continued. Thus, since the time of World War I no German services at the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Pawnee Buttes area.

Many of the families in this area moved in the 1930's during the hard years. Mr. Hillman indicated that his family was one of those that stayed, and indeed they were fortunate. They were fortunate despite a very bad hail storm in the 1930's that pretty well leveled their field of oats. Mr. Hillman indicated that his father brought in a number of

sheep and the sheep ate the oats that had fallen on the ground after the hail storm, had been knocked to the ground. The sheep were fattened, he sold the sheep and he came out far ahead. So a number of families did stay and a number of families did make it." Mr. Hillman indicated that only one Russian-German family that he knew of still resides in the Pawnee Buttes area. He told me indeed about a Mr. L. Roth, who is a Russian-German, and who still resides in the area and lives south-west of the church several miles.

That afternoon I visited with L. Roth and at that time he was making plans to move and to sell out. He was perhaps one of the last of the Russian-Germans there. Mr. Roth was rather young, probably in his 40's or 50's, by this I mean that he was young in contrast to many others who would be able to tell us about the early history. Mr. Roth indicated that his mother, Mrs. Anna Roth, who is still living in Greeley, Colorado, could provide us with many details about the early settlement of the Germans from Russia in the Pawnee Grasslands area. He told me that she could be contacted through L's sister, Mrs. Dean A. Bayles, at 1803 23rd Avenue Court, in Greeley, Colorado, the telephone number there is 353-5630. L. Roth indicated that his mother is not 87 years old and she is still very alert, and with the proper introduction she would very probably enjoy talking about the early days in the Pawnee Grasslands area.

I spent the remainder of the day looking at some of the old homesteads in the Pawnee Buttes area and taking a number of slides, which of course will be placed in the Project Archives; slides of the Pawnee Butte area of the L. Roth farm and of that area, that loop in the road south of the church where the German families from Russia settled at one time.

The settlement of Germans from Russia in this area is really a forgotten chapter in the history of the Russian-Germans in Colorado. I think it requires further investigation and I would recommend that Mrs. Anna Roth be interviewed as soon as possible so that her recollections of the early days in the Pawnee Grasslands will be preserved. She might also be able to tell us about other individuals who would be knowledgeable about this little known settlement on the prairies of northern Colorado.

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