

Ethan Fey

The image shows the name 'Ethan Fey' written in a bold, black, serif font. The letters are thick and have a classic, slightly decorative feel. Overlaid on the text are several thin, black arrows and lines that indicate the direction and sequence of the pen strokes used to form each letter. For 'E', the stroke starts at the top left and moves down. For 't', it starts at the top left, goes down, then curves right and up to form the crossbar. For 'h', it starts at the top left, goes down, then curves right and up to form the bowl. For 'a', it starts at the top left, goes down, then curves right and up to form the bowl. For 'n', it starts at the top left, goes down, then curves right and up to form the stem. For 'F', it starts at the top left, goes down, then curves right and up to form the top bar. For 'e', it starts at the top left, goes down, then curves right and up to form the bowl. For 'y', it starts at the top left, goes down, then curves right and up to form the bowl, and finally goes down and left to form the tail. The arrows are small and point in the direction of the stroke.

THE GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

A PEOPLE ON THE RUN,
WITH A LONG MEMORY FOR
PLACE AND CULTURE

The following is an excerpt from a full documentary paper on the Volga Germans, if you are interested the full paper can be found on my website.

BY ETHAN FEY

DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

One hundred and fifty years go by. The initial settlements in 1762 were made up of 2700 Germans across the Volga region. By 1910, there are almost two and a half million flourishing across the region.

Recognizing their significance during his rise to power, Lenin granted the Volga Germans their own statehood in 1923, which allowed them to govern

themselves under the name of the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, or VGASSR. This independence allowed them to prosper and gave them a further sense of security.

But the tide turned for this community when Stalin came to power after Lenin's death in 1924. As Stalin consolidated a more totalitarian approach to power and WWII influenced Soviet fears and priorities, by 1940 Stalin began turning against his own people in order to consolidate his power. Stalin wanted to unite the Soviet Union under one people and one banner; he wanted to purify the Soviet Union and to lead under his own vision; to do so, he needed the population of the USSR to be Soviets (formerly Russians) and the large numbers of immigrant minorities dotting the then Soviet landscape undermined his vision for a growing Communist empire.

However, for Stalin's vision of a purely Soviet empire to come true, it would be at great cost to the Volga Germans. In 1941, Stalin revoked the autonomy that Lenin had granted the Volga German community, ending

their statehood.

Stalin began to vilify these groups, conflating ethnic Germans with the Nazi regime. He went even further, saying that ethnic Germans everywhere were a racial enemy to the Soviet people. He broadcast propaganda not against the Nazis or fascists or "the enemy," but against the Germans in his country - the German Russians who had been living in Russia for over one hundred and fifty years - people who by that point had

known no other home other than Russia. Stalin pushed his anti-German campaign right to the edge, saying that the ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union were an invading force, and uniting ethnic Russians/Soviets against them with calls like "Death to the German Occupiers."

But regardless of what the NVKD had found,

Stalin wanted them out. Ethnic Germans are recorded as the largest deported nationality from the Soviet Union at this time, with around 800,000 people being removed from their homes by the NKVD and deported.

To escape this persecution, many groups of German Russians picked up what little they could carry and ran, including my own family. They primarily fled to North America and South America, with large colonies today surviving in the United States, Canada, and Argentina. Life in America posed a whole new set of challenges for these "German Russians" arriving in huge numbers. America's Homestead Act was in place by the 1920s, allowing them to claim farmland and encouraging them to help settle the West. However, there was a problem: this Homestead Act required new landholders to live on the farmland the government was giving

"STALIN'S REGIME HAD NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE CHARGE THAT THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF POTENTIAL SPIES AND SABOTEURS AMONG THE VOLGA GERMANS. IN THE MONTHS PREVIOUS TO THE DEPORTATIONS, THE NKVD (SOVIET SECRET POLICE) HAD UNEARTHED VERY FEW PEOPLE SUSPECTED OF POLITICAL DISLOYALTY AMONG THE VOLGA GERMANS."



out. In Russia, these German Russians had not lived on their farms; instead, they lived in villages together and went out to work daily on farm collectives. America's 'gift' of land ownership had the unintended consequence of straining this community's culture and ties by separating them across vast tracks of rural American farmland. As a result, their culture risked disintegrating.

Argentina took a different approach. By contrast, the Volga Germans there better preserved their culture and ties to each other because their setup in Argentina allowed them to live in their villages and travel out daily to farm collectives to earn their livelihood. Though another one hundred years have elapsed since these immigrants arrived in

Argentina, and though the German Russians have since adopted the local language and moved homesteads, there are still communities there who, three and four generations later, as Germans from Russia, remember and practice their connection to a Russian way of life with

German influences long in their past.

The story of the Volga Germans in America versus Argentina showcases the significance of how displaced people are treated when they arrive in a new country.

Although America's

Homestead Act offered the immigrants the opportunity for farmland and space, it inadvertently separated them from their culture. In contrast, Argentina's approach allowed the Volga Germans to maintain their way of life and cultural ties by allowing them to live in Villages

“THEY BUILD HOUSES THAT LOOK LIKE VOLGA GERMAN HOUSES. IF YOU SAW SOME OF THESE PLACES DOWN THERE, THERE'S A BLUE COLOR. THEY STILL PAINT THEIR HOUSES IN ARGENTINA THAT SAME COLOR, AND THAT COMES FROM RUSSIA.”

close to each other and work together, allowing their culture to live on.

This grand experiment displays the fact of the two very different possibilities for a displaced people depending on how they are treated when they arrive in a new country. If the country provides support for the immigrants to maintain cultural ties and community connections, that country can help the immigrants build new lives while preserving what they hold so dear, their unique identities.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AND TWO MAJOR MOVES LATER.

The Volga Germans, a unique diaspora with a shared history have settled across the world, and throughout America. Today, the Volga Germans are a diverse and vibrant community proud of their history and traditions. In fact, their perspective is unique precisely because of their intertwined German and Russian heritage.

“THE VOLGA GERMANS IN ARGENTINA SPEAK SPANISH, THE VOLGA GERMANS IN BRAZIL SPEAK PORTUGUESE, BUT THEY’RE STILL VOLGA GERMAN”

There are now centers designated to preserving the past, with Dr. Brent Mai leading tours to the Volga-German ancestral homes and chapters all over America led by the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia or AHSGR. Societies around the globe are connected and dedicated to preserving this precious culture.

Today, the Germans From Russia, sometimes called The Volga Germans, are Americans. They are Argentinians. They are Oregonians. They are Californians. North Dakotans. In fact - many are still Russians,

those who never left. A shared historical moment binds together this diaspora, spread out across the globe.

The Volga German perspective is unique, particularly because of their unique history. It is a German history that intertwines with Russia. It is a group of people in North America, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, and Australia, who make strawberry pasta from Germany at family gatherings, and Kulich at Orthodox Easter - sweet bread made in coffee cans that celebrate the shape of the Russian onion domes. They do this in places like - Portland, Oregon. They teach their children to make sauerkraut from scratch on their back porches. I know this because I am from a Volga German family; my mom has



made the Kulich and my grandmother has four hundred-year-old photographs of her German Russian ancestors hanging on the wall in her office.

VOLGA GERMANS DON'T STOP REMEMBERING.



MY NAME IS ETHAN FEY, AND I AM A JUNIOR AT MOUNTAIN VIEW HIGH SCHOOL.

I love playing with my two dogs, Solstice and Blaze, as well as drumming in the afternoon. In my free-time I am often playing games with my friends, reading books or listening to music.

A core value I hold in life is creativity. I believe everyone has an abundant amount of creativity in them and it just takes practice to reach. Everyone should try to be creative in their daily life, even when it comes to small things. Mix up your day just a little.

My favorite movies of all time, which are the movies I grew up with, is the Star Wars movies. I am very passionate about Star Wars and a big nerd when it comes to it. I am very opinionated about the series and could talk a while about which movies are the best. (Its Episode 5, Episode 3 and Rogue 1(in that order)). I'm even trying to build my own lightsaber for my Darth Vader costume I'm going as for the Halloween.

