My interest in “Germans outside Germany” was first tickled as I learned about the family of my daughters’ late natural father, who was born in Salzburg, Austria, after his family had fled their German enclave village in Rumania’s Banat region just a few steps ahead of the Red Army during World War II.

Over the years, I have learned and written about the many groups of German-speaking peoples who spent anywhere from a century to half a millennium beyond the borders of today’s Germany, and what I have figured out more than anything else is how passionate these groups are about heritage — especially now that they have been scattered for a generation or more away from their former surroundings in nations in an arc from Hungary and Rumania through Ukraine and the Volga River region all the way to the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

That passion is evident in a new website called “Black Sea German Research,” which is run by a virtual group of volunteers who call themselves the “Dale Wahl Team” in memory of the man who was their mentor and whose large volume of materials have formed the core of the database on the website.

The first thing that is distinctive about this team is that they are not founding a new society or organization — so there is no membership dues or fees for anything provided on the site, including a Black Sea German database of 1.4 million names and growing. In addition, the team’s diversity is a real strength: It includes researchers from different geographic areas around the Black Sea (Crimea, Odessa, Bessarabia, Dobrudsha, and others) and different religious backgrounds (Catholic, Lutheran, and Mennonite).

Most of these Black Sea Germans began arriving from the areas of today’s Germany to the region, also known as South Russia, in the early 1800s at the invitation of Tsar Alexander I. Many lived there for almost one hundred fifty years, mostly in rural villages, fiercely holding onto their German identity. These former German villages are located in current day Ukraine, Moldova, and Rumania.

As the German population grew and additional farmland became limited, many of our ancestors left South Russia. Beginning in the 1880s, they headed to the plains of the United States and Canada, as well as to South America. Of those who remained, the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent Stalinist government resulted in many ethnic Germans being sent east to prison camps in Siberia. From 1940 to 1944, those who remained fled or were resettled — first to Poland, and then to Germany. Today, large concentrations of people with Black Sea German roots live in both American continents as well as Germany.

In addition to the large database of names, the Black Sea German Research website includes a number of other helpful features, such as:

- A “frequently asked questions” primer;
- Research aids such as village lists and German genealogical word lists;
- A key to reading the Cyrillic alphabet used in Russia;
- Maps ranging from large overviews to specific town plats;
- Contact information for already-existing German-Russian genealogy groups;

Research in this area has a number of specialized sources, and the website prepares researchers for them. One of the dialogs on the FAQ primer concerns what Black Sea German genealogists call “the Stump book.” That is short for Karl Stumpf’s The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763-1862, a one thousand eighteen-page tome of history, research, maps, and lists (emigrants, colonies, census, passports, and so on.).

The main regions covered by the Stump book are the Volga and the Black Sea areas. It also includes colonies near Petersburg (Leningrad) with an appendix list of families from Strelina. The Black Sea area includes Bessarabia, Odessa, Jekaterinoslav, Taurida, Crimea, South Caucasus, the Swabian colonies near Berdyansk, Alt Danzig, Riebensdorf, and Gnadenburg.

The website also talks about the all-important EWZ microfilms, which were application processing forms for German citizenship during World War II as Germans outside the Third Reich were repatriated during the war. EWZ stands for Einwanderungszentralstelle or Central Immigration Control Department.

Another source that the Black Sea German Research hopes to have in its database soon are indexes to the Koblenz Questionnaires, a set of Bundesarchiv films from Koblenz that are questionnaires filled out by villagers from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dobrudsha when they were brought out of Russia at the beginning of World War II. The questionnaire is a one-page form (front and back) containing vital information about the villager.

Carolyn Schott, one of the members of the “Dale Wahl Team,” says that the website has been a labor of love. “The group of us who put it together really enjoy working together. And we were all inspired by our genealogy mentor, Dale Wahl, who brought us all together,” Schott said. “He was a great researcher and an all-around good guy. Plus he had quite a way with building teams.”

Truly, it appears that these folks are fulfilling the legacy of a man who gave his information willingly. The Black Sea German Research website has garnered a terrific response in its first few months and is found at the URL, www.blackseag.org.

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