

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH RECORDS OF SOUTH RUSSIA

After the annexation of large areas of Poland, thousands of Catholics became Russian citizens. In response, the Czarina Catherine the Great created the Archdiocese of Mohilev (Mogilev) in 1772. The new archdiocese was to cater to the spiritual needs of Catholics living in the Russian Empire, and so its geographical base was very large. Mohilev is a city in present-day Belarus (White Russia), but the headquarters of this large archdiocese was actually St. Petersburg throughout Imperial and Soviet times, although for much of the Soviet period there was no resident archbishop.

Thus the spiritual care of the German Catholic settlers who immigrated into the Volga and Black Sea regions of Russia fell within the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Mohilev. Before 1811, the German Catholics of Odessa district (ie. Kutschurgan and Liebental colonies) were served spiritually by the priest in Odessa, while the Beresan Catholics were assigned to the priest in Nikolaev. These priests tended to be Poles and Lithuanians, with a poor command of the German language. The Catholics of Crimea did not receive true pastoral care for many years. The first resident priests to minister to Russia's new Catholics in the Black Sea colonies were Jesuits sent from Poland in 1811.

But by 1820, under heavy pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church, Czar Alexander I ordered the Jesuits out of Russia. The spiritual care of the Catholic colonists fell again to the Polish Catholic clergy, whose command of the German language was no better than that of the Jesuits. Further it was felt that only the less capable priests were being sent to "New Russia". As the Catholic colonies grew and began to prosper, their pleas for proper pastoral care were heard in Rome. In 1847, the administrations of Pope Pius IX and Czar Nicholas I agreed to the establishment of a separate diocese for South Russia's German Catholic colonists. The new diocese would have its headquarters in the city of Kherson, and would have its own bishop, a new Cathedral and a Seminary to train native German priests.

It took until September of 1849 for the parties involved to agree on the geographical boundaries of the new diocese, which fell naturally under the administration of the Archdiocese of Mohilev. The new Diocese of Kherson would encompass the Gubernias of Kherson, Taurida, Astrakhan, and Saratov. The Bessarabia Oblast and the Trans-Caucasus regions were also included. Two German colonies, Grosswerder and Kleinwerder, were not included within the diocese, as they were considered too distant from the other colonies. (They were added at a later date.)

The directory finally established for the Diocese of Kherson included 52 parishes, each with its own church, and 40 affiliated congregations with their own church or prayer chapel. The new diocese would minister to 200,000 German Catholics and also 70,000 Catholics from Poland, Georgia and Armenia. The first bishop of the Diocese of Kherson was consecrated in the fall of 1850. He was Ferdinand Helanus Kahn. But before he could take up official residence in

Kherson and begin his work, the Russian Orthodox Church had created such an uproar in Kherson and in St. Petersburg, that Bishop Kahn was forced to look for an alternate location. By-passing Odessa, he chose the small insignificant city of Tyraspol (Tiraspol), whose remote location, he hoped, would remove it from the fanatical remonstrations of the Orthodox clergy.

But there was not even a Catholic Church in Tiraspol, nor a building suitable as a bishop's residence and headquarters. The new Bishop was forced to take up residence in St. Petersburg, while attempting to make his visitations to the vast southern territories of the new diocese. The location of Tiraspol was affirmed as the "seat" or headquarters of the Diocese of Tiraspol in September, 1852. The Crimean War prevented any progress on the establishment of a Church or Seminary in Tiraspol, and Bishop Kahn continued to live in St. Petersburg until 1856. By this time, the decision had been made to re-locate the Diocesan headquarters once again, this time to Saratov, the most prominent city within the diocese. The name "Diocese of Tiraspol" would remain, but its administration of South Russia's German Catholics would only last another sixty years.

In October, 1917, the city of Saratov fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks. Bishop Joseph Kessler, the last Bishop of Tiraspol, fled to Odessa, and later lived in exile in Germany. He left behind 125 parishes with 239 affiliated congregations serving 370,000 Catholics, the vast majority of them being German. Bishop Kessler renounced the diocese on 27 November 1929.

The Diocesan Consistory in Saratov collected and supervised the statistical records of the parishes. These records included the financial reports of all the churches, the lists of parishioners for each church, and the lists of those who were confirmed or converted into the Catholic faith. More importantly for genealogical researchers, the Diocese also collected the birth, marriage and death records for each parish in the diocese. At the beginning of each year, each parish had to submit to the Diocese Headquarters in Saratov a hand-written copy of the birth, marriage and death events which had been recorded in that parish during the previous year. The Church records were recorded in Latin until the 1840's. All the Catholic Church records after that were written in Russian Cyrillic.

These records have been preserved, and can be found today in the Russian State Archives of the Saratov Oblast in the city of Saratov. This Archive has existed since 1918, and today is one of Russia's largest local archives, containing over a million files. Parish records of the Black Sea German Catholics are found in these files:

Fond 1166, "Mogilev Roman Catholic Church Consistory", 1801 – 1853.

Fond 1167, "Kherson Roman Catholic Church Consistory", 1850 – 1853.

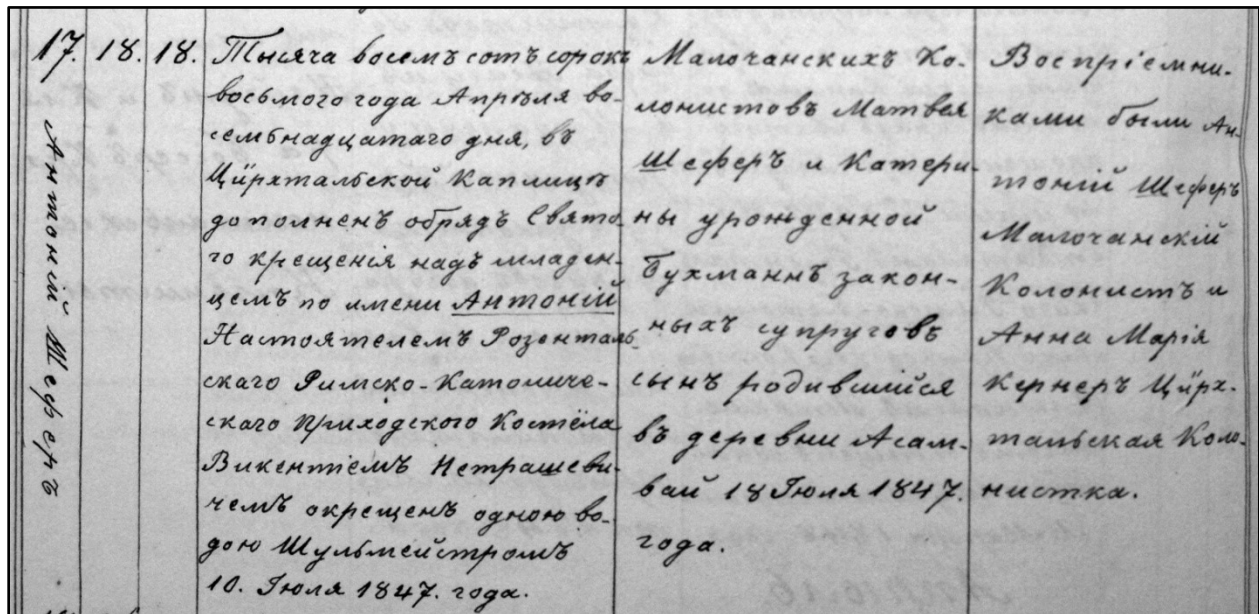
Fond 365, "Tiraspol Roman Catholic Church Consistory", 1853 – 1918.

Application can be made to the State Archives of the Saratov Oblast for digital and/or paper copies (with official archival stamp) of these parish records. Several concerted efforts have been made in the past for greater public access to these important genealogical records. Efforts by the

LDS Family History Center at Salt Lake City to microfilm the Saratov collection have so far been unsuccessful. Both AHSGR (American Historical Society of Germans from Russia) and Kansas State University have sent delegations in the past to Saratov in attempts to form information-sharing partnerships. The Saratov Archives has now begun a massive digitization program, and has made the process much easier to acquire the Diocese of Tiraspol Church records.

Because of the requirements to communicate in Russia with the Archives, and to pay the Archives in ruble currency, most researchers require the services of an agent to place the order on their behalf and to hand the transfer of money. Of course, these agents charge a fee for their services as well. But these Catholic Church records are often the only way to document one's genealogy.

Example of record-copy from Saratov Archives.



1847 Baptism / Birth record of Anton Schaffer. Rosental Catholic Parish records, Crimea.

### Catholic Parishes in South Russia (not a complete list):

(See Bishop Kessler's book for a complete list.)

- A. Bessarabia
  - 1. Krasna
  - 2. Bender, including Emmental, Balmas, Larga.

3. (There were many jurisdictional changes up to 1940, and the researcher must always consider the timeframe when studying the parishes in Bessarabia.)

#### B. Odessa District

1. Odessa, Parish of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary
2. Odessa, Parish of St. Clement
3. Mannheim, including Georgental and Johannestal.
4. Elsass, including Bischofsfeld (Jeremejewka) and Schemiott
5. Kleinliebental
6. Josefstal
7. Mariental
8. Franzfeld
9. Kandel
10. Selz
11. Baden
12. Strassburg, including Stepanovka, Andryaschovka, Mirolyubovka, Maryanovka
13. Severinovka
14. Langenburg (Ponjatowka), including Koschary, Bizilajevka, Simionovka.
15. Neu-Liebental (Wolkowo), including Neu-Baden, Kusakov, Bogunskoye, Kostkolovka.
16. Elisabethgrad (Kirovograd)

#### C. Nikolaev Region

1. Nikolaev Parish, including Neu-Karlsruhe, Laryevka, Dobraya Kerniza.
2. Kriwoj-Rog
3. Speyer
4. Katharinental
5. Karlsruhe, including Antonovka.
6. Landau
7. Schoenfeld, including Steinberg, Halbstadt, Petrovka.
8. Sulz, including Wotsche
9. Blumenfeld, including Krasna, Sebastienfeld, Wilhelmstal, Eigengut, Lubyanka, Neu-Petersburg, Kolopatino, Annovka, Kapustino.
10. Christina, including Felsenburg, Michaelovka, Novo-Alexandrovka, Kuhn.
11. Rastatt
12. Muenchen
13. Kherson, including Zaredarovka.
14. Klosterdorf
15. Kiseljevka

#### D. Crimea

1. Simferopol, including Kronental, Aschaga-Dzamin, Turasch, Agodza, Franzfeld.
2. Rosental, including Alatai, Dzhaitzchi, Pustarschi, Argin, Aila-Kaeli.
3. Perekop, including Preobrazenka, Belozerkovka, Michaelovka, Alexandrovka, Novokievka, Pavlovka, Dagmarovka, Novoalexeyevka.
4. Alexandrovka, including Zerkovitch, Mirovka, Bohemka, Nogai-Toma, Kirej-Tabor, Berty-Bulat, Kop-Kary, Attai, Baschbek and Komrat.
5. Karamin, including Dulat, Meschin.
6. Feodosia, including Sudak.
7. Kerch
8. Yalta
9. Sevastopol

#### E. Ekaterinoslav and Taurida

1. Ekaterinoslav, including Losovaya, Alexandrovsk, Grischino, Parlograd.
2. Georgsburg, including with several affiliated congregations.
3. Heidelberg, including Blumental (Molotschna colonies).
4. Jamburg, including Ekaterinovka, Rybalik, Marievka, Novoalexandrovka, Chortitzza, Zorotchino.
5. Kostheim, including Leitershausen, Marienheim, Alexanderheim, Chechograd.
6. Nikolaejevka
7. Maryanovka (Novo-Mannheim), including Neu-Landau, Neu-Kronental, Rosenfeld, Simonsfeld, Nikolaital, Michailovka.

#### F. Berdyansk region

1. Berdyansk, including Neu-Stuttgart, Neu-Hoffnungstal, Waldheim.
2. Bachmut
3. Lugansk
4. Mariupol
5. Eichwald, including Adamovka, Antonovka, Blumenfeld.
6. Goettland, including Kaiserdorf, Kampenau, Myarau, Heitschule.
7. Grosswerder
8. Bergtal, including Stepanovka, (Gruenfeld) Neu-Jamburg.
9. Taganrog
10. Gruental, including Novo-Vasilevka, Gross-Konstantinovka, Zolnzevo, Wagneropol.
11. Rostov on Don
12. Novocherkask, including Gruenfeld, Gruental, Liebental, Grosswerder, Kleinwerder.

Sources:

1. From Catherine to Khrushchev, Adam Giesinger, 1974.
2. History of the German Catholics and their Priests in Russia, Anton Bosch (Alex Herzog translation) Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland Heimatbuch 2001/2002.
3. Geschichte der Diözese Tyraspol, Joseph Aloysius Kessler, 1930.
4. Handbuch Russland-Deutsche, Ulrich Mertens, 2001.