

# INTRODUCTION

I first became interested in recording history about my German from Russia roots in 1988 and spent the first few years gathering information about my family. The book "A Search For Better Tomorrow's" the story about my grandfather Wilhelm Schmidt and his descendants was printed in 1994. A second book "The Stockburger Family" my mother's history was printed in December 1996. Since the "Stockburger Family" history has been published I have produced five more family histories and continue to research the past for eleven other families, all Germans from Russia.

My membership in the Germans from Russia Heritage Society at Bismarck, North Dakota, greatly enhanced my research capabilities. As a result of this membership, I received several requests from members of the society, living in various Canadian provinces and areas of the United States, to help find a final resting place for some relative in this area. Most times the search was fruitful but very frustrating because of a lack of records.

You could simply not go to one source to retrieve copies of burial records for the research area. A source of this type did not and does not exist. As time moved on, I found it increasingly more frustrating to try to locate records that in most cases are less than 100 years old. It seems that few cared to collect or protect all the original hand written records that could at one time be found in the rural churches or with members of the many congregations.

The more involved I became in these searches, the more I planned on making a special effort to try to locate as many cemetery records as possible for the dozens of communities in Southeast Alberta and Southwest Saskatchewan, and then publishing the records for use by the public.

During the period from 1988 to 1995 I had been collecting bits and pieces of cemetery records and started filing them into a proper format. My decision to complete this research project was made early in 1995. Most of the work was completed during a period of several months each year from 1995 to 1997.

My search started with the aid of an old hand written list of the "registered" cemeteries in southeast Alberta. Over a period of several weeks, I visited all of the sites as per the list, only to discover that some of the legal land descriptions were incorrect. Besides, while traveling around the area, I took time to visit with area residents, asking for directions, and during the visits, was informed about several other cemeteries that were not included on my list.

At some point during my travels, I decided as well, to research the area in Southwest Saskatchewan, that had been settled by Germans from Russia. In total, the research area comprises an area of more than 10,000 square miles.

As each location was visited, I took the time to record every bit of data as listed on the grave markers, took pictures of all the sites, pictures of the churches if they were still on site, and noted the current condition of each site. I was able to find a few of the former church buildings that had been moved to other locations and hence become granaries, workshops or used for other purposes.

How many final resting places are there in this area? That question is impossible to answer as many of the records for the numerous small, private, family plots were retained only in some pioneer's mind. A lot of these small plots were never registered and many were never fenced. Reading through local community history books, one will find mention of numerous deaths that are not listed in cemetery records. This leads us to believe that there are dozens of single, unmarked graves in the corner of many homesteads. Many of the pioneer families left this area during some very trying times, thus their record of burials moved with them. As a result, several of these cemeteries are now being cultivated.

During the early years of settlement in this area, many of the deaths, especially those of young children, were never registered. Therefore, we know that any record we can produce will never be complete. This lack of registration was common for most new areas of development in North America. Before the early settlers were able to establish any churches and before land was donated for use as a cemetery it was not uncommon for the family to inter their beloved family member in a corner of their homestead property, usually near the garden or along a fence line. The graves were usually marked with simple wooden crosses which have long since turned to dust. Many of the homesteaders did not have the resources with which to erect proper grave markers.

So what has happened to many of those small family plots? Through changes in land ownership, and for

various other reasons, the whereabouts of many burials has been lost, therefore we now cultivate some of the grave sites. Most churches were established shortly after the homesteaders were settled. Many of the deaths prior to this time were not registered as there was no system in place to do so. Some of the early deaths were recorded by a conscientious homesteader and these very few records have survived the ages, but in most cases there is not enough detail for us to be able to pinpoint the location of a burial.

We made a special effort to locate all known burial plots. Part of this project included the search of archives in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, old church records, and visiting with long time residents of each area. Without the help of numerous relatives of the pioneers, this record would not be near as complete.

The search for old church records turned out to be very discouraging, a lot of the records have been lost or destroyed, some were left in the abandoned church buildings and eventually mother nature took its course, and yet other records were purposefully destroyed by some disgruntled resident.

Most residents of the area were interested and several were especially helpful in finding some of the old records. We were able to make copies of almost all of the records we found. In two cases, the folks who possess original records refused to share the data with us.

A visit to the Medicine Hat Museum Archives did not help as much as was hoped for, the old records have simply not been turned over to this group. Some of the rural church records were placed with churches in Medicine Hat, Alberta, but can not be found. Some denominations have taken more care to ensure their records will be available for future generations.

Visits to Archives at Regina, Saskatchewan, and Edmonton, Alberta, failed to fill the huge gaps in these records as did visits to numerous Church headquarters.

At the time this area was first settled and before the railways were built, the Alberta Provincial Government dedicated one person in each post office district to act as the registrar for births, deaths and marriages, this person was given an official ledger in which to record this information. There is evidence that most of these folks faithfully recorded the information, the ledgers were actually inspected by a Government official at predetermined intervals. In the late twenties when the system for recording vital statistics changed, the local registers were to be forwarded to Edmonton, many of these records were never sent to headquarters, therefore we are unable to find this very important data in the archives. One of the few folks who turned their books into the office at Edmonton, Alberta, was my father John Schmidt, he was the recorder for the post office district of Eva, Alberta, located in the Sandy Point area.

We assume that some of the original records are in the hands of a relative of the last recorder, other records have been destroyed, making it impossible for researchers to determine when and where many of our ancestors died and where they are interred.

The records that exist at Edmonton are sketchy to say the least, most ledgers allowed for the recorder to enter name of deceased, date of death and the name of the informant only, vital information such as place of interment and next of kin were not entered therefore we end up with a list of persons who died in a certain area but can not determine where their final resting place might be. During the early years, many Pastors served more than one church. This created a problem with record keeping. The Pastor in most cases, properly recorded all the data we need with one exception; he failed to identify the cemetery in which the body was interred. A good percentage of the graves in the rural areas do not have a marker therefore, we do not know the final resting place for many of our pioneers.

Many of the cemeteries in Alberta were able to erect granite monuments with the financial help of their provincial government. The monuments list all the burials for a particular location. We did find a few errors with the data inscribed on some of the markers. We found names of people on monuments that are actually buried in some other location than at the location of the monument.

In many cases we were able to cross reference burial data through the use of more than one list for certain sites. We found numerous contradictions by comparing those lists. The data on many hand written lists did not match the data we collected from the markers during our site visits. We assumed that the data on the grave markers was right, so we used it as our final record.

Not all of the data contained in this work was gleaned through visits to cemeteries and searching church records. I spent hundreds of hours gathering data from my personal collection of local history books. As I found

information such as birth, marriage and death dates, place of birth, names of parents and spouses etc. this data was entered into my record and is included as part of this text.

Numerous Indian graves are scattered throughout the Wildhorse and Lost River, Alberta, areas in townships one through six and ranges one through five. We will not include their location in this record as the landowners on whose property the Indian graves are located do not want their whereabouts to be made public for obvious reasons. One would not believe what we have allowed to happen to many of the rural cemeteries. Many of the cemetery plots have shrunk to a point where they no longer contain all the graves. We found the fencing material that once enclosed some of the sites, wrapped around the few markers that managed to survive the encroachment of modern farm machines. In one case, a third generation property owner, bulldozed a few markers onto a pile so that he might farm the acre that contained the grave of his grandmother. A few of the sites have disappeared with the help of current owners. One site with seventeen graves has been continually cultivated for several years.

I was also very discouraged at finding many of these final resting places in a awful mess. We have totally forgotten about our roots and have allowed the cemeteries to become derelict, fences are fallen down and waist deep weeds are common at many sites. It is not too late to put pressure on some of our legislative groups with the hope that they might spare a few of our tax dollars so that someone can make an honest effort to restore the cemeteries to a respectable state.

I continue to add information to the text; information taken from the local papers as well as data that is passed on to me by interested parties. Some of the information contained within these pages was posted to the internet in 2001. It can be found at [cyndislist.com](http://cyndislist.com).

Contained in this work is the information from the cemeteries at Recliff, Alberta, as well as the Saamis Prairie View Cemetery at Medicine Hat, Alberta. The last 63 pages of this book list all the data we could find for the cemetery at Maple Creek, Saskatchewan. We also have a copy of all the burials current to July 1997 for Hillside Cemetery at Medicine Hat, Alberta. That book contains almost 25,000 burials for that site.

This record of more than 300 pages is by no means complete or without error or omission. I must apologize for any errors or omissions and would appreciate being notified of such errors or omissions so that corrections can be made. We were dependent on hand written records, many of which were in an old German script, many were faded and many names were misspelled. There were usually variations in the written work versus what data is engraved into the grave markers, in that case we are assuming the information on the grave marker to be correct.

### **Sources:**

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Municipality of Big Stick, Golden Prairie, Saskatchewan.  
Municipality of Fox Valley, Fox Valley, Saskatchewan.  
Municipality of Enterprise, Richmond, Saskatchewan.  
Municipality of Happyland, Leader, Saskatchewan.

Provincial Archives of Alberta.  
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### **In appreciation:**

A tremendous number of kind folks have helped the author produce the records contained in the following 300 pages plus. Without the generous assistance of dozens of area residents we could not have attempted to even begin this research project. I enjoyed visiting with many of the following and enjoyed conversing by telephone and mail with many of them as well.

The following list of people is included with the text as they are the people that went to extra lengths to help us in our search. Many other residents and former residents of the vast research area helped us in various ways as well.

I wish to thank each and every person who helped in whatever way they could, and will continue to be deeply indebted to all of them. Thank you so very much.

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