

WALLA WALLA'S GERMANTOWN

A settlement of Germans from Russia

From 1882-1920, many German families from the Volga region of Russia settled in the southwest part of Walla Walla, along with others from the Black Sea. They had fled repressive conditions in Russia and were attracted by opportunities in Eastern Washington. The largest neighborhood was west of Third Avenue and generally south of Chestnut Street, and became known as "Russaecke" (Russische Ecke—Russian Corner) by the approximately 300 Volga and Black Sea German families residing in Walla Walla. Garrison Creek runs through it and was called "the Little Volga."

The Volga Germans came primarily from an area of Lutheran villages that included Frank, Walter, Kolb, Norka, Hussenbach, and Kautz, all located southwest of Saratov, and from Jagodnaja Poljana, located north of Saratov on the Volga River.

The center of Germantown was between Third Avenue on the east, Chase Avenue on the west, Chestnut on the north, and Willard on the south. Outside of this neighborhood lived many more Germans from Russia, particularly in the southwest Walla Walla homes from Second all the way to the railroad tracks at Thirteenth Avenue, including Chestnut, Willow, Emma, Sprague, Military, Birch, Poplar, and Alder.

These immigrants built their own homes, corner grocery stores and churches. Their children attended local schools, and were also required to attend a Sabbath school on Saturdays in their churches.

German-Language Churches

German-language churches in Walla Walla included the Second German Congregational Church, established in 1882 and reorganized in 1896 at 7th & Willow as Zion Lutheran Congregational Church, and the first German Methodist church built in the Northwest, established here in 1883. In 1888 the first Lutheran services were held in Walla Walla out of which came Emmanuel Lutheran Church, also at 7th & Willow. In 1896 a split occurred in the Emmanuel congregation and several families withdrew to form Christ Lutheran Church on Maple Street. There were said to be seven German churches in the Walla Walla area in the twentieth century. English didn't replace German in most of them until World War II.



German Congregational Church, 7th & Willow



The Hill Family of Walter, Russia, taken in Walla Walla about 1902

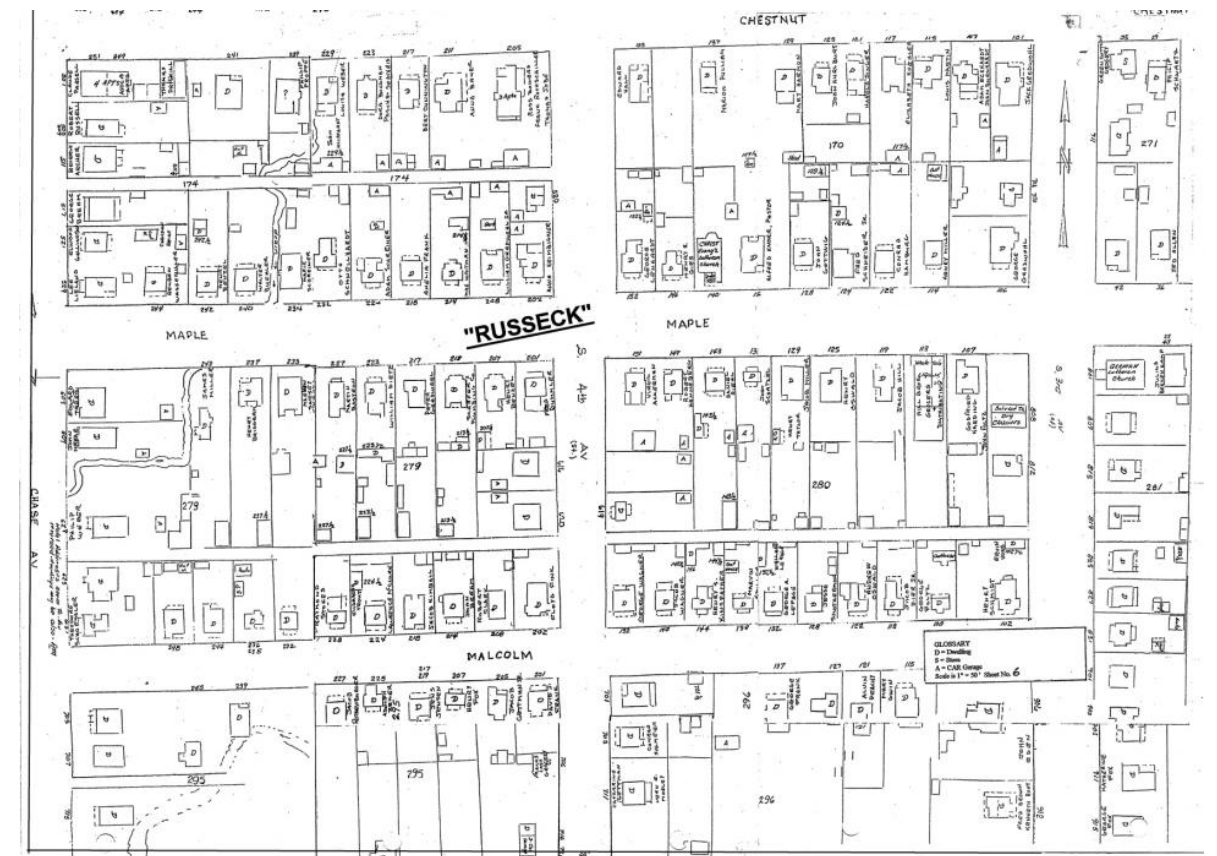
Employment

The Germans from Russia and their descendants soon became staunch members of the WW community. Most of them quickly learned English, especially the men who worked at jobs on the railroad, street maintenance, carpentry, shoemaking, cutting sugar beets, picking hops, and other farm work. The women maintained their own homes, while some worked as housekeepers and laundresses for the "English" ladies.

Some members of the community were fortunate enough to eventually open their own businesses. These included Johann Conrad Frank who in 1928 opened the Conrad Frank Construction Company and trained each of his sons to carry on his tradition of fine carpentry. The same year, John David Frank established a grocery store and meat market on South Fourth Avenue in competition with a grocery on Maple Street opened by the Hill family in about 1915.

A 1937 map of the center of Germantown is shown below with the name of each family next to their home. Maps of other Germans from Russia neighborhoods in Walla Walla are available at www.ww2020.net/historic-sites/germantown..

Most Germantown students attended Lincoln School, which was first called Paine School after it was constructed in 1883, and many also attended Jefferson School after its construction in 1916, and later Garrison School which was built in 1955, before attending high school. Paine School was renamed Lincoln School in 1902, was renamed Paine again in 1927 when a new building was erected, and has recently been changed back to Lincoln, in honor of President Abraham Lincoln. In 1862 President Lincoln approved two laws that were instrumental in attracting Germans from Russia to Eastern Washington and ultimately to this neighborhood. The first was the Homestead Act; the second was the Pacific Railroad Act which allotted land and funding for the completion of a transcontinental railroad, offering prospects of employment to many Germans from Russia and other immigrants.



1937 Map of "Russian Corner" with Family Names