

South Bottoms Historic District
Lincoln
Lancaster County
Nebraska

HABS No. NE-43

HABS,
NEB,
55-LINC,
6-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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NEB,
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
SOUTH BOTTOMS HISTORIC DISTRICT

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Lincoln
Lancaster County
Nebraska

Quad: Lincoln, Nebraska

UTM: A 14/692441/4520170
B 14/692440/4519790
C 14/693305/4519725
D 14/693332/4518810
E 14/691950/4518758
F 14/691908/4520165

Period of Significance: c.1880-1936

Present Use: Private residences, commercial,
educational, museum, religious,
park and transportation.

Significance: The South Bottoms Historic
District is significant for
its associations with German-
Russian immigrants to Lincoln,
Nebraska, the resulting Volga-
German settlement patterns and
the vernacular architecture
within the district.

Historian: Adapted from D. Murphy and
Kathleen Fimple. "South Bottoms
Historic District, Lincoln,
Lancaster County, Nebraska,"
National Register of Historic
Places--Inventory Nomination Form.
Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska State
Historical Society, 1986.

II. DESCRIPTION

The South Bottoms Historic District is located in the southwestern portion of the Original Town of Lincoln, Nebraska (1980 area bounded roughly by A Street, South Ninth Street, the alley between J and H Streets, South Second Street, the alley between M and N Streets, and Salt Creek, comprised of approximately 74 square blocks or 264 acres. The area to the north of the larger portion of the district, and east of its northern "arm," is industrial land which borders the southern edge of the westernmost major north-south city thoroughfare, forming the eastern boundary of the district. In both contemporary and historic times Ninth Street, the industrial area, the minor thoroughfare of A Street, and the natural barrier of Salt Creek have provided the approximate boundaries for the neighborhood, and now, the historic district.

The topography of the South Bottoms is influenced primarily by Salt Creek which flows northward at this point in its course and forms the western district boundary. For three city blocks to the east the elevation changes little and then rises only slightly, remaining quite flat for four more blocks. This flood plain area is quite alkaline and covers over seventy-five percent of the district. The first river terrace occurs at, and approximately parallel to, South Sixth Street where it rises significantly and levels out at South Eight Street. The existence of a hill in the terrace between D and F Streets was capitalized upon by the city's founding fathers who established the first city park at that location. The park from its early years has been an area of open space with a playground and baseball diamond. The change in society's use of parks in the twentieth century has precipitated the removal of a bandstand and addition of tennis courts.

The streets in the district are laid out in a grid pattern aligned with the cardinal directions, where numbered streets run north-south with addresses counted south from O Street, and letter streets run east-west with addresses counted east or west from First Street. East-west alleys cut through the majority of the blocks. Railroad tracks are prominent in the neighborhood, destined for the adjacent industrial district. Several lines cross First Street between H and J Streets, while a major line runs diagonally from southwest to northeast crossing F Street near First. Other tracks run along the center-lines of Third, Fourth, and Fifth Streets throughout the district.

South Bottoms is primarily a residential district composed of vernacular dwellings built during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wood frame construction predominates. Many residences are reminiscent of dwellings built by Germans in the Volga region of Russia. The majority of the houses are small and placed close together, often included garages, barns, summer kitchens and various types of sheds on these small parcels of land. A few houses and lots are larger, such as the Amen house, 601 D Street or the Tyler House, 801 D Street listed in the

National Register of Historic Places in 1977. Most of the houses are single family dwellings, with only a very few converted to apartments. A few new apartment buildings have been constructed, mostly near the northeast and southwest corners of the district.

There are seven churches and one school within the district boundaries. Park Elementary School is a 1920's structure that replaced an earlier three-story brick building. It occupies the block from F to G and 7th to 8th Streets, with playground and parking facilities located immediately west. There are six churches in active use: First German Congregational Church, 100 West F Street; Friedens Lutheran Church, 6th and D Streets; Ebenezer United Church of Christ; Quinn Chapel AME Church, 1225 So. 9th Street, and Three Hierarchs Orthodox Church, 446 E Street. A large two-story building at 735 D Street, currently vacant, originally houses Immanuel German Evangelical Lutheran Church and School, and has subsequently been the home of a benevolent society and a Baptist Church.

Commercial structures are found primarily on F Street between 2nd and 5th Streets, interspersed with residences. Some are still in use as commercial facilities often with additions and adjacent new construction. Of those not in commercial use, some have been converted to residences while others are used for storage or are vacant.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

THE CONTEXT OF GERMAN-RUSSIAN SETTLEMENT IN NEBRASKA

This section contains a brief summary of the history of Germans from Russia and their settlement in Nebraska. Unless otherwise noted, the information source is a context report prepared for and under the supervision of the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (Schafer).

In 1763 Catherine the Great of Russia issued a Manifesto offering such incentives as free land, exemption from military service, and complete local autonomy to anyone who would come to Russia to settle the steppe region. Impressed with the abilities of German farmers, she particularly sought out German settlers who, frustrated and worn-out from wars in Europe, eagerly accepted her offer. Although free to settle anywhere, the Germans favored two areas: the land around the Black Sea and the city of Odessa, and land along the Volga River.

Alexander I reiterated Catherine's policy in 1804 and Germans continued to populate the steppe, settling in agricultural villages, as was their tradition. In the Volga, land was held communally while individual title was the norm in the Black Sea region, resulting in smaller villages there. The main religious groups migrating from Germany were the Evangelical Lutherans, the Catholics, and the Mennonites, who segregated

themselves not only from the Russians, but from one another in separate villages or clusters of villages.

The Germans living in Russia maintained a peaceful co-existence in a foreign land until 1871 when Alexander II deprived them of their special status. Included in their loss was their military exemption and right to local autonomy. Many Germans left Russia immediately, emigrating to Canada for its non-compulsory military service, and to the United States and several South American countries with liberal land policies. Emigration continued well into the twentieth century as Russia became more aggressive toward other countries as well as people within her borders.

Germans from Russia who emigrated early to the United States found plentiful free land in the vast Great Plains, particularly the central portion. Those who came later purchased land from the railroads or moved into the northern plains where free land was still available. The Volga Germans, whose Russian land had been held communally, often had less money available to them with which to purchase farm land and therefore many settled in cities. The railroad played a crucial role in the German Russian settlement. Not only did it influence where the immigrants could go, but it also enticed them to stay by providing immigrant houses and jobs. In Nebraska, Volga Germans from Russia settled along the line of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad (later the Chicago Burlington and Quincy, and now, the Burlington Northern), first at Sutton, and later at Lincoln, Grand Island, Norfolk, Beatrice, Harvard, York and others. With the Burlington-built Immigrant House and the Burlington yards and shops, Lincoln became a focal point and major population center for the Germans from Russia in Nebraska.

THE CONTEXT OF GERMAN RUSSIAN SETTLEMENT IN LINCOLN

This section outlines the settlement of Germans from Russia in Lincoln, Nebraska, with emphasis on the Volga Germans in the South Bottoms. Unless otherwise noted, the information source is a context report prepared for and under the supervision of the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (Graver).

History

A small hamlet called Lancaster (approximate 1867 population: 30), was established in 1859 on the site of present-day Lincoln, Nebraska. In 1867 the site was chosen as the location for the new state capital, to be named Lincoln. By 1868 the population had jumped to 800 and in January of 1869 the new capitol building was occupied by legislators. In 1870 the town covered approximately one square mile and had grown to a population of 2,400. The following decade was one of growth, during which four railroad lines and the telegraph reached the town, gas was first used by the townspeople, a telephone exchange was

organized, the first sewers were laid, and the town was reorganized into a second class city. The central business district (CBD) centered on the intersection of 10th and O Streets, with the state capitol between 14th and 16th and H and K Streets attracting growth to the south, and the state university between 10th and 12th, and R and T Streets drawing northward expansion. The convergence of railroad tracks to the west of the CBD and the presence of a depot, Salt Creek and its lowlands and, further west, the Salt Basin, deterred city growth westward.

Lincoln shared in the prosperity of the 1880's. City, county, and state government and the numerous railroads employed many people. Immigrants, attracted to the city either as a stopping off point or a final destination, were encouraged both by the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad's Immigrant House and the jobs the railroad afforded. Germans, the largest ethnic group to settle in Nebraska, were well represented in Lincoln in the last 20 years of the century, as were the Irish and Swedes. By 1900 Russian-born immigrants were the second largest ethnic group in Lincoln, following only the Germans, many of whom came to this country via Russia (see Table 1).

Significant immigration continued well into the twentieth century and Lincoln grew to be the state's second largest city. Government, the University of Nebraska, the railroads, commercial services, and the insurance industry all contributed to the city's development.

The bottoms areas of Lincoln have always been distinguishable as separate districts because most of the land lies directly on the floodplain or river bottom of Salt Creek along most of the city's western edge. Early residents of the city attempted to settle the bottoms but soon abandoned their homes and stores because of frequent flooding of the creek. Railroads and wholesale operations then took over portions of the land. The vacant dwellings that remained were occupied by early immigrants, primarily Germans and Bohemians, and the poorest of the Americans. The first Germans from Russia arrived in Lincoln in the 1870's (documentation cites various dates from 1872 to 1876) and were attracted to the bottoms by the familiar language spoken by the Germans there and by the cost of housing. Some took up residence in abandoned dwellings that were still available while others squatted on railroad land, first south of O Street and then north of it.

In 1900 the German-Russian people comprised 13% of the total population of Lincoln. This number had risen to 43% in 1913. In her 1914 census of the bottoms areas in Lincoln, sociologist Hattie Plum Williams counted 5,985 people, 63% of whom were Germans born in Russia and 36.3% of whom were born in the United States.

Drawn to the bottoms area by the familiar German language the Germans from Russia also were attracted to people from their "home" region in Russia. The result was the creation of two "Russian" areas in Lincoln, one north of O Street occupied primarily by people from the villages of Norka, Kukkus

and Huck, and one south of O Street representing immigrants mainly from Frank, Balzer and Beideck. The physical separation of these two neighborhoods by an expanding industrial-wholesale area reinforced the already existing differences. The people within the areas referred to the north settlement as the "Norker Bottom" in which 257 German-Russian families lived according to a 1916 estimate by Williams. The south settlement was called the "Franker Bottom" and was occupied by 318 families in 1916. Each German-Russian neighborhood became an independent entity-- an "urban village"-- with its own churches, schools, social organizations and commercial district (see Settlement Significance).

Boundaries and Period of Significance

Hattie Plum Williams, who studied both the north and south neighborhoods, gave the 1916 boundaries of the South Bottoms as "from M to A streets and from Eighth street to the city limits, approximately ten blocks" (Williams: 1916, 144). The gradual eastward movement of some of the German-Russians as well as the relocation of some German churches and establishment of others in the block between 8th and 9th Streets in the decade 1910-1920, advanced the eastern boundary of the neighborhood to 9th Street. The industrial-wholesale area was encroaching upon Williams' boundaries even prior to 1916. By 1923 the zoning of the area was industrial north of J Street from 2nd to 5th Streets, and wholesale north of H Street from 5th to 9th Streets (Ertl, 2), thus establishing the general shape of the district. The area is similarly zoned today.

The German-Russians became increasingly important in the settlement of Lincoln and the South Bottoms and "from the nineties on, ...they began to form a noticeable part of the community" (Williams: 1916, 145; see also Graver). They were a close-knit group who believed in tradition and family. Thus, many chose to remain in the bottoms for their entire lives, as did many of their children. This maintained the homogeneity of the neighborhood for several decades into the twentieth century. As late as 1940 there were 2,472 people born in Russia in Lancaster County, the vast majority of whom lived in Lincoln. In 1930 there were 3,221 (see Table 1). These figures do not include all the children who were born in the United States of German-Russian parents and reared in that tradition. Thus, the ethnic character of the South Bottoms was perpetuated from 1890 well into the middle of the next century, although the neighborhood itself dates from over two decades earlier. Many extant dwellings also date to as much as 10 years earlier, resulting in a period of significance from circa 1880 to 1936.

Neighborhood Development

With the exception of the digging of a well for the city water supply in the city park on F Street, the city generally excluded the South Bottoms in its improvement programs. Paving of streets, park beautification, and public transportation were very slow to come to the neighborhood. Many Lincolniters even

dumped their garbage in the front yards of the area that came to be known by such names as "Little Russia", "Russiatown", or the "Rooshen (Russian) Bottoms".

The South Bottoms neighborhood developed over the years with additional residences, churches, schools and stores being built primarily through the efforts of the German-Russian people.

TABLE 1 Selected Foreign Born Population and Percentages of All Foreign Born, Lancaster County (adapted from Wheeler)

Place	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Germany	3943	2987	2515	1904	1631	1130
	35.8%	31.8%	21.5%	18.3%	19.2%	18.3%
Russia	368	1200	3557	3969	3221	2472
	3.5%	12.8%	30.4%	38.2%	37.9%	39.9%
Sweden	1186	1030	1066	936	758	526
	10.8%	11.0%	9.1%	9.0%	8.9%	8.5%
Ireland	1268	742	511	349	164	83
	11.5%	7.9%	4.4%	3.4%	1.9%	1.3%

Churches were particularly important to the German-Russians. They not only provided a place of worship, but also a place where traditions, such as marriage, and the baptismal and burial customs of the Germans, were perpetuated. In the churches the native tongue was spoken and understood by all, providing an important opportunity to socialize. In the Franker or South Bottoms, the first church was organized in 1876, but failed because of the scarcity of German speaking ministers. Reorganized in 1888, the Erste Duetsche Kirche (First German Church) dedicated their building on March 24, 1889. This building (not extant) was located in the 200 block of West J Street. In 1920 the congregation moved to a new building at First and F Streets. Erste Duetsche Kirche served the growing population of German-Russians, using the German language in its services, until 1900 when the congregation had reached large numbers and differences of opinion arose. It was then that the German Evangelical Congregational Zion Church was organized, building their sanctuary at 4th and F Streets (not extant - new building erected in 1924 at 9th and D Streets). The German Evangelical Lutheran Friedens Church was added to the neighborhood at 6th and D Streets in 1907, Immanuel Evangelical

Lutheran Church and School at 745 D Street in 1910, and German Ebenezer Evangelical Congregational Church at 801 B Street in 1915.

The importance of preserving the German language and religious heritage was also reflected in education. While many children did attend the English-speaking public schools, the Immanuel School, located on the first floor of the church building, sustained a large enrollment. Founded in 1910, its initial enrollment was 72 pupils. By the 1913-1914 school year enrollment had increased to 325, and was maintained at over 200 for most of the remainder of the decade (Sawyer, 252).

Some of the immigrants settling in the South Bottoms were skilled tradesmen or merchants. They established their shops and trade whenever possible in the Bottoms to serve their own people, thus perpetuating the community (see Settlement Significance). Carpenters helped build many homes and churches, while blacksmiths, tailors, shoemakers, painters and other skilled laborers worked within the neighborhood. Many retailers centered their businesses in the 200 to 500 blocks of F Street, while others chose individual sites in the neighborhood. Some of these commercial buildings are still extant. Perhaps the most influential businessman was H. J. Amen. Starting as a grocer, he used his growing financial assets and better than average command of English to help German-Russian immigrants. He purchased tickets for passage from Russia, purchased property in the South Bottoms and helped people to find housing upon their arrival, intervened when necessary with the English-speaking community, and extended credit in his store and loans for other purposes to needy Germans from Russia. His work over the years was a major contribution to the growth and perpetuation of the South Bottoms as a German-Russian neighborhood.

Since many of the Volga people had been farmers, a large percentage of the immigrants sought unskilled employment in the city. The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad provided more jobs than any other single employer. Men held positions as car repairmen, car inspectors, cleaners, oilers and general laborers. Indirectly, the Burlington provided other work. In 1885 the United States Government established its first sugar beet experiment station in Nebraska. Sugar beets did well in portions of west and central Nebraska, but required large amounts of hand labor from shortly after planting through harvest. This labor, while very low paying, could be performed by almost all family members, resulting in a reasonable income for the family as a whole. Unlike many other people, the Germans from Russia were willing to engage in this "stoop" labor and so packed entire families off to the beet fields from May to November. The Burlington provided "Beet Field Specials" to take the beet tenders and their belongings to the many stops along its lines where beet growers had contracted labor.

ETHNIC SIGNIFICANCE

The South Bottoms Historic District is significant in the area of ethnicity under Criterion A. There are two significant events: the migration of the Germans from Russia to Nebraska (see Schafer) and the settlement of Germans from the Volga region of Russia in Lincoln (see Graver).

The importance of immigrant participation in the settlement of the United States has long been recognized in the work of such people as Handlin, Jones, and more recently, Ward. The importance of ethnic groups in the settlement of both rural and urban areas of the Midwest and Great Plains has only been studied more recently but is well documented by K. Conzen for Milwaukee (1976), Chudacoff for Omaha, Ostergren for South Dakota and Minnesota (1981, 1973), and others. Nebraska historian, Frederick C. Luebke, emphasizes this role with the following figures: in 1870, 25% of the 123,000 people in Nebraska were foreign-born; in 1900, 47% of the population was either foreign-born or of foreign stock (Luebke, 405). In reference to the Germans from Russia, Luebke states that they "are especially important in the development of the Great Plains" particularly by providing "a substantial reservoir of labor for the construction and maintenance of railroads in the West, and in the early twentieth century, their labor... made sugar beet culture a success in Nebraska and Colorado" (Luebke, 414).

The South Bottoms was clearly viewed as an ethnically separate entity, both by the neighborhood residents themselves and by other Lincolniters. Due to its relationship to the creek, the railroad, and the wholesale-industrial area, it was an area considered by outsiders to be undesirable, as the garbage dumping incidents indicate. The reputation of the neighborhood as one for foreigners, and eventually strictly for "Russians", reinforced this segregation. The South Bottoms people themselves thought of their neighborhood with pride as a place where they could maintain their clean, neat homes and stores, and perpetuate their customs and traditions. Such a situation might rightly be said to apply to most urban ethnic enclaves in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. In Lincoln, the only comparable enclave was the North Bottoms, a smaller neighborhood and one composed primarily of Germans who had emigrated from a different region in Russia than the South Bottoms people (see Graver). (On the state level, the only other city large enough to support an enclave of this size was Omaha. It did indeed sustain many ethnic neighborhoods, but few were of the size or homogeneity of the South Bottoms and none were German Russian (see Settlement Significance).

SETTLEMENT SIGNIFICANCE

The South Bottoms Historic District is significant under criterion A as an excellent example of the establishment and maintenance of an urban ethnic enclave during the height of immigration to the United States.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries large numbers of immigrants arrived in the coastal cities of the United States. Many remained in the city where they debarked due to lack of funds, unfamiliarity with their new environment, or lack of skills. For the most part, these immigrants chose to live close to people of their own nationality, creating nodes of settlement each representative of a different ethnic group. These nodes were sometimes called ghettos, but were more often called by the local neighborhood name for the area, e.g., the "West End" in Boston, or "Sheelytown" in Omaha. Academicians have used the terms urban village, community, and enclave in contemporary studies of these nodes or neighborhoods.

With the passage of time, specific ethnic communities either disintegrated, maintained, expanded or were succeeded by a new ethnic group. The causes for these changes have been widely debated among scholars (Conzen, 1979). The most widely accepted theory postulates that an ethnic community must have a variety of components to survive. Sociologists list a geographic base, an ethnic or cultural homogeneity, a psychological unity, and an area of concentrated use as primary factors (Keller, 87). Historians studying specific communities suggest that the population of the enclave must be sufficiently large to provide all the needed services within the neighborhood (Conzen, 1976). Having to contact the Anglo community for goods or services increases assimilation and hastens deterioration of the enclave.

The South Bottoms possesses every component listed above. The physical environment of the river bottom and terraces provided a geographical base. The people were overwhelmingly Germans from Russia, and as such possessed a strong sense of unity. The enclave had its own area of concentrated use in the F Street business district. The number of German-Russians in the neighborhood was very large, as the Hattie Plum Williams census indicates. The people of the South Bottoms were able to provide German-language schools and churches, as well as almost every other needed service, ranging from grocers, butchers and coal dealers to tailors, carpenters and painters. The community established a strong base and expanded with increasing immigration in the twentieth century. The neighborhood's base was so strong that it is a viable community today.

As mentioned above, there are few comparable ethnic enclaves in Nebraska. Most of those established during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries disintegrated in the 1920s, 30s and 40s, or were occupied by more recent immigrant groups. One exception is the North Bottoms of Lincoln. It possesses many of the same components as the South Bottoms, although it was smaller in size and population, and had a less developed commercial structure (see Graver). The area of Czech settlement centered near 14th and William Streets in Omaha is another exception. It was a very densely settled, homogeneous community that provided many services to the Czech people (see Fimple). It was one of the Omaha enclaves that did not experience immediate deterioration or succession, but has in recent decades lost much of its cohesiveness. The South Bottoms then remains as the best example, so far identified, of an urban ethnic enclave in Nebraska.

ARCHITECTURE

The South Bottoms Historic District portrays an architectural character which has distinct and significant associations with the predominant Volga-German culture in the neighborhood. Composed of house types which are both explicit in their Old World associations and those which are culturally-based selections from "American" types, the district elicits much of the flavor of the Old World village in the New World setting.

Village Plan

One layer of significance is seen in the village-like character of the district. Laid out in 1867 as part of the Original Town of Lincoln, Nebraska, the uniform grid of streets and cross-streets was familiar to Volga Germans upon their arrival to the city. While many German-Russian villages, particularly those in the Black Sea area, were linear villages known as strassendorf, several of the Volga villages grew large enough to require a grid system to accommodate the inhabitants (Stump, 21).

Remnants of the line village concept survived however, and exist within the gridded South Bottoms district. When settlers began establishing the businesses needed to serve the village, a linear business district street was created along F Street, just nine blocks south of O Street, the center of Lincoln's main business district. Williams (1916, 149) also states that "home" villages composed of settlers from the same Russian villages were recreated along single streets within the South Bottoms grid. This concept of community, linearly arranged within the larger village, is a significant aspect of community planning and of the transference of European culture to America.

Another modification within the existing grid has substantial impact on the visual character of the South Bottoms district. Existing lots were subdivided by the Volga settlers, creating lots of narrower dimension than that established by the original plat. While this may be due in part to economic conditions (Volga settlers were generally less wealthy than Black Sea Germans), the result was the creation of an extremely compact settlement which in Lincoln exists only in the two German-Russian neighborhoods--the North and the South Bottoms. Compact settlements were the rule on the Russian steppes, where villages were the chief mechanism for maintaining a contiguous and secure occupation, which in turn insured cultural stability. Forced to settle in isolated communities in Russia and faced with the difficult task of creating a livelihood on the then desolate steppes, German-Russians clung to their German cultural identity. Although the political conditions for settlement in the United States were substantially different from those in Russia, the compact South Bottoms village facilitated a slow German-Russian assimilation into the main stream of American culture, maintaining a strong sense of ethnic identity which is evident in the group to this day.

Architectural considerations in planning reinforced the Old World character of the village. The long narrow lots facilitated the building of traditional house types. From southern Germany through Eastern Europe to the Russian settlements, houses of the linear agricultural village were oriented with their gables facing the street and with their doors opening off the farm courtyard into the side of the house. Houses had depth back into the lot. Villages with gables lining one or both sides of the street are characteristic of the Eastern European landscape. This aspect of architectural orientation, so dominant in the South Bottoms district where 75 percent of all houses are oriented longitudinally on the lot (95 percent of all houses where orientation is applicable), has also been recognized with significant associations in other German-Russian settlements, primarily in Nebraska and Kansas (Petersen, figs.4,11; Murphy: 1977, 18; not noted however for South Dakota settlements, see Koop & Ludwig).

It should be emphasized that the exceptions to the rule of longitudinal orientation in South Bottoms do not diminish the ethnic character or significance of the district. As has been noted, larger Volga German villages more commonly utilized the grid rather than the linear pattern. One result of this was a frequent orientation of houses at corners to either the cross or main streets (e.g. both longitudinal and latitudinal orientation; see Nebraska State Historical Society, Photography Collection, #U721-27). Indeed, some of the Volga villages seem to be characterized by latitudinal rather than longitudinal orientation (see Stumpp, fig. "Sarepta", 50).

Commercial Architecture

Volga German familiarity with large villages and even cities existed prior to emigration. Volga villages were often quite large (Stumpp, 21), and while settlers initially had to rely on Russian carpenters and sawyers (Williams: 1975, 147), German craftsmen and tradesmen soon emerged in the larger villages and cities (Stumpp, 52). As farmland grew scarce many sons of farmers went to the cities to learn trades. This urban experience in the Old Country assisted Volga-German adaptation to the American urban commercial environment, largely because of the importance of trades, crafts, and home industry in the Volga settlements (Kloberdanz, 63).

As indicated earlier, South Bottoms had its own main street business district centered along F Street, and numerous other businesses were scattered about the district. Many of Lincoln's prominent businesses started in South Bottoms.

The commercial architecture extant in the neighborhood represents something of an anomaly in the modern urban environment of Nebraska, where typically the earliest, wooden vernacular storefronts have long since disappeared. Such is not the case in South Bottoms, where excellent examples of pioneer-era frame

vernacular commercial buildings are extant. Architecturally the South Bottoms commercial vernacular is largely indistinguishable from the commercial architecture of the Plains frontier. Characterized by one story frame construction with large storefront windows and modest false fronts, these buildings are among the best extant contiguous examples of pioneer commercial building in Nebraska, and certainly in Lincoln.

While most date from the turn-of-the-century, the persistence of the pioneer form in this latter-day ethnic settlement is significant, both in the lateness of date and in the adoption of an American model which had more meaning than the cottage in an environment of free enterprise.

Religious Architecture

Not only did Nebraska receive a larger number of Volga settlers than did any other state, emigration data to 1920 shows that Volga settlers to Nebraska were exclusively Evangelical in religious faith (Schock, 116). No Catholic church was built in the district. The large number of churches (seven) in the South Bottoms reflects both the density of the settlement and a certain diversity in the population, such as is evident in the villages of origin which created the settlement. Church architecture in South Bottoms has qualities of design similar to houses, that is, designs were based both on Old and New World models. Even the New World models were executed in a manner which subtly distinguishes them from other American churches of the period.

Frieden's Evangelical Lutheran Church at 6th and D streets exemplifies the churches which embody explicit German-Russian design characteristics. Designed and built in 1907 by local architect-builder Jacob Rohrig, Frieden's was modeled after the third Evangelical Reformed Church in Balzer, Russia, (built 1849-51). Particular features include the restrained Neo-Classicism evident in the columned porticos and the return cornice, the particularly distinctive side porch (the Salem Congregational Church in the Scottsbluff, Nebraska, German-Russian settlement also incorporates this feature; and the multi-staged entrance steeple with rounded pyramidal roof (for the Balzar church see Nebraska State Historical Society, Photography Collection, #W727-51).

Specific associations have not been found for another, but the functional system employed in the Immanuel Lutheran Evangelical Church and School and the formal character of the building, give it a distinctive Volga-German feeling. One of the few churches recorded in Nebraska which is a combined church and school facility, and certainly the only one of its size to eschew traditional American church forms, Immanuel Lutheran has architectural significance for this distinctive form and functional system. An Old World model for its design is suggested by the overall Georgian Revival character (the closest applicable Anglo-American stylistic label), the raised basement, the two story masonry form with steeply-pitched hip roof, and the pedimented entrance portico. Its German-Russian builder (F. W.

Rische) and a congregation predominantly from the villages of Schilling, Beideck, Norka, Balzar and Saratov reinforce the suggestion. There certainly is no Anglo-American ecclesiastical model for the functional type, and Renaissance Revival styles are not particularly noted for American churches.

House Types

The construction of distinct house types by the German-Russians in South Bottoms reinforces the significance of the village settlement. Two broad categories can be identified with respect to houses. The first concerns explicit remnants of Old World culture in some pivotal houses, where either the character of the massing has an Old World flavor, or where the type itself (e.g. internal spatial arrangement) was transplanted without significant change. The second involves the selection of houses which appear superficially to be exclusively American types, but which preserve essential features of the Volga-German types. This second group is numerically superior to the first, but cultural selectivity has made them architecturally significant Volga-American houses.

The first permanent dwellings erected by Germans on the Russian steppes were one room wide houses, two or three rooms deep in plan. These *semelanka*, as they were called (the term has divergent meanings depending on context, but generally refers to a first-generation pioneer house, see Sherman, 187fn, ff; Height, 121), were typically arranged with their gables overlooking the street near the front of the lot. Construction materials varied according to what was available, but in the Volga colonies wood was preferred (Stumpp, 21, 52, 56; Williams: 1909, 58). Built according to an official plan devised by the Colonists Welfare Office (Height, 162), the characteristic *semelanka* was a two and often three room plan of one story height with a central chimney. Entrance to the house was in the eave side off the farm courtyard. The two room *semelanka* provided space for a kitchen-living area and one chamber, while the three room plan provided front and rear chambers divided by the kitchen.

The generalized form of the *semelanka* is found throughout Europe (Glassie: 1965, 175) but has particular affinities with houses in the Palatinate and Alsace, Wurttemberg, Hesse, the Rhineland, and parts of Baden (Height, 236), as well as throughout Eastern Europe. While double-pen and tripartite houses are important Anglo-American traditions (Glassie: 1968, 94-5, 103-6), the Eastern European types are distinguished from the British ones in large part by their orientation on the lot. Unlike the British types, Central and Eastern European houses orient the narrow gable end as the facade (Murphy: 1977, 20).

The distinctive, longitudinally oriented form of the *semelanka* was part of a general cultural diffusion from Germany across Eastern Europe, and then to the North American plains. The type is known to have been built by German-Russians throughout the plains states, from Kansas (Sherman, 191; Smith, 145) to

Nebraska (Voth, 36; Murphy: 1977, 22) and into the Dakotas (Aberle, 117; Sherman, 195). In the South Bottoms, several are extant.

A larger second generation dwelling, the kolonistenhaus, replaced the semelanka when economic conditions allowed on the Russian steppes. A relatively narrow but deep rectangular form, it was in most respects a larger version of the semelanka, distinguished by a two-room width. The kolonistenhaus was characteristically four to six rooms in size, being two rooms wide and two or more rooms deep, but still primarily oriented with the narrow end to the street. In the Black Sea settlements it was typically sheltered with a gable roof, but in the Volga colonies a hipped roof was common (Sherman, 188; Williams: 1975, fig. p.137). Both roof types were popular in Kansas Volga settlements (Petersen, 25-6), and both are abundant in the South Bottoms district.

The larger size of the kolonistenhaus provided for greater specialization of space. In the Old World this often meant a central vestibule and kitchen, with separate living and work areas as well as chambers on either side of the kitchen. Volga-Germans preferred the four rather than the six room plan (Sherman, 188). In America it was built throughout the larger, more isolated German-Russian communities on the plains, in both an Old World and New World character (Sherman, 191-92, 195; Voth, 43; Koop & Ludwig, 8ff). Volga Germans in Kansas built both the one and the one-and-one-half story versions of the four room plan.

South Bottoms manifestations are predominately though not exclusively of a Volga-American character. The American character of these houses is largely superficial in that the internal arrangements preserve German-Russian preferences while the external clapboarding and front porches presented the appearance of an American house. The cultural selection of these houses is significant, for they continued to be used much as they were in the Old World. Front doors and porches were rarely used before the second world war (indeed, seldom was there even a front door ball), and entrance was gained through the side or rear doors as in the Volga-German side-opening types. The "Americanized" houses were adopted, but an unconscious preference for rear doors was retained (Williams: 1916, 156-7). This was true in the Kansas Volga settlements as well (Petersen, 26).

Certain one and one-half and two story houses in the district maintain the internal ground floor arrangements associated with the traditional German-Russian model. These, because they deviate from the traditional one story height, tend to represent a more Americanized vernacular in the use of additional stories to increase size rather than a larger ground floor. Some of these were built for extended families in a transference of Old World familial traditions (see Williams: 1916, 149).

Finally, a small group of latitudinally oriented houses contribute significantly to the district as well. Some of these

are early German-Russian constructions, while others are later. Latitudinally oriented houses were not uncommon in the larger Volga villages (e.g. Balzer, see Nebraska State Historical Society, Photography Collection, #W727-70; or Kolb, see Nebraska State Historical Society, Photography collection, #U721-27).

Some examples of latitudinally oriented houses probably precede German-Russian immigration to the area. Williams (1909-92) noted that prior to German-Russian immigration there were only a few houses south of and west of 6th Streets, chiefly occupied by Empire Germans, Bohemians and poorer Americans (1916-145). Several of these houses are extant, representing prior German or Anglo-American occupation, particularly in the taller versions such as the "I-cottage" and I-house. Commonly associated with rural prosperity in Midland and Upland America, the I-house in South Bottoms is a significant early type built by non-Volga settlers of modest income. German-Russians tended to build houses to suit their own needs, and few were renters for more than a short time (Williams: 1916, 151-2).

Buildings of Domestic Agriculture

Another significant aspect of the South Bottoms village environment relates to domestic agriculture. Villages of the Russian steppes were agricultural villages, where the entrances of houses were in the eave side, oriented toward the farm courtyard. In the Old Country, the house, the barn, the granary and other agricultural outbuildings formed a distinctive closed courtyard, which was the focus of agricultural activity. Even in the larger Volga villages, where increased specialization of trades and crafts prevailed, a small enclosed courtyard facilitated a measure of domestic agricultural activity.

While the specific courtyard arrangement was not transferred to the North American landscape, a proclivity toward domestic agriculture, even in this urban setting, was continued. In South Bottoms this activity centered on the back yard, a space semi-enclosed all around by a multiplicity of outbuildings much like the Old Country courtyard--summer kitchens, little houses, garages, barns, chicken coops, and sheds. Gardens, poultry-raising and milk cows were common through the first war and were still found, in lesser numbers, through the 1920's and 30's. Milk cows were pastured daily on community and private pastures just as in the Old Country. While the number of summer kitchens has diminished drastically in recent years, several agricultural outbuildings are still extant and are significant representations of the functional aspect of the district with respect to the domestic complex and the village system of which it is part.

Summary

Traditional Volga-German house types, and Volga-American versions of those types, along with a distinctive village pattern

which was characterized by domestic agricultural complexes, a separate business district and notable public buildings, are all significantly associated with German-Russian culture in the South Bottoms district. The architecture embodies numerous distinctive features of Volga-German material culture, as well as a Volga-American vernacular which is expressed in the use of American construction materials and through the cultural selection and variation of American forms. The South Bottoms district is a significant, though subtle, architectural manifestation of a culture which has formed an important part of the history of Lincoln, Nebraska, and the Great Plains in general.

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