

Russian Colonists in Alberta

By Miriam Elston



RUSSIA is of more interest today to Canadians than at any other period of history. We open our papers night and morning to follow their story in this great war, with an interest scarcely second to our interest in the movements of Britain's army. At the tables of the reading rooms in every public library in our land we see the people bending over the English illustrated papers, gazing at the pictures of the low-browed, thatched houses in which these people live in their native land, at the Russian kiosks with their many domes and cupolas, at groups of civilians in their picturesque native costumes, at groups of Russian soldiers in their equally picturesque uniforms, and at the cross-marked graves of the Russian soldiers who fall at the battle front.

As we follow the fortunes of the Russian army since the beginning of the war we realize that though the skill of the Russian strategist has been worthy of admiration yet the victories that the Russian army has achieved have been mainly due to the extraordinary devotion, courage and hardihood of the Russian private, devotion that has made them untirable on the march, courage that has made them impetuous in attack, hardihood that has made them stubborn in defence. They have accomplished their long marches through heat and dust, through biting cold and up-piled snow, through drenching rain and almost impassable mud, and have accomplished said marches on a ration that would satisfy no other army in Europe, and with an uncomplaining that could surely never be exceeded by the Goddess of Patience herself.

The local history of the Albertan



A dwelling house in the Russian Colony

The great majority of the Canadian readers who gaze on these pictures have no idea that in our own land are large districts as distinctly Russian in appearance as though they were a bit of Russia dropped by our wayside. The groups of people one meets on the road are in the garb of the Russian peasant, the churches and chapels are like Russian kiosks planted on Canadian soil, the groups of farm buildings are low-browed, and heavily thatched, the well with its windlass and bucket is in the dooryard, and here and there one comes across the burying-ground, with its spectral group of weather-beaten wooden crosses.

When we find the peasant from any foreign land living in one of our cities we see him lacking his natural environment, and he is shorn of everything that tends to picturesqueness. But when a colony of foreigners have been deposited on the bosom of the wide and virgin plains of one of our Western provinces, and have been left almost entirely to their own devices to work out their destiny, we are rather apt to find them building up around themselves as fair an imitation of their home-land as the environments will permit. In two places in our great West have we most notable examples of this. One is the colony of Russians and Russo-Austrians in Alberta, and another the colony of the same peoples in Manitoba.

In Canada the people of these colonies have always been called Ruthenians. Both the Russians and the Russo-Austrians belong to the same race. The biggest part of these people live in the

brothers of these same Russian privates is likewise a story in which courage and hardihood plays a prominent part. As I have said before the first of these Russian settlers took up land some eighty-five miles from Edmonton. That means that it was eighty-five miles as the crow flies, but considerably further by the circuitous route they had to follow in order to encompass the frequent sloughs and patches of bush. In the first days Edmonton was their only market, and though they had little to market it was necessary to make the trip several times during the year.

There were no horses and very few oxen in the colony in those days, and the men who went on the expedition



School House in Russian Colony, Wostok, Alta.

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