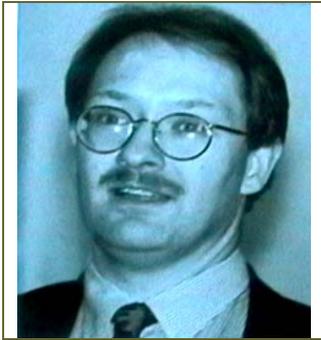


Gammalsvenskby

The true story of the Swedish settlement in the Ukraine



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The people of Gammalsvenskby in the Ukraine, a summary

In the year 1781 one thousand Swedish peasants from Dagö in Estonia were transported to southern Ukraine, where Catherine II (the Great), Empress of Russia, gave them new land. After an eight-month journey through Russia, during which half of them lost their lives the Swedes reached their destination. Instead of the houses and the cultivated land they had been promised an empty plain met them. Suffering extreme hardships and often tormented by bandit raids, famine and diseases, they built a settlement that was called Gammalsvenskby. It is not difficult to be fascinated by Gammalsvenskby and the destiny of its inhabitants. Here we meet Swedes who could witness history change the world, Swedes who, although being tormented by famine and diseases, worked hard and broke new soil in a cosmopolitan and unstable corner of Europe. This part of the world was the scene of events of international and domestic significance: the Crimean War 1853-56, World War 1, the October-revolution, bandit-raids during the said revolution, the Civil war between the White and the Red armies. This was followed by the Collectivization of the farmers, Stalin's terror during the thirties, the Second World War and the German occupation in 1941-44, which for the people of Gammalsvenskby ended with a transportation to camps in Germany. Later in 1945 this led to the deportation to labor camps in Siberia.

Treachery and exploitation runs all through their history: 17th- and 18th- century Swedish landlords on Dagö, who infringed their rights, betrayed them. Then the Russians betrayed them. The first time in 1782, in their new home district, when they were led to believe that new houses and cultivated land were waiting for them. The second time when in 1804-05 land was taken from them and given to German colonists and the third time at the end of the 19th century when they were forced to serve in the Czar's army although promised otherwise. The promise of a village with farms of their own made them emigrate to Sweden in 1929, where they were betrayed yet another time, by Swedish authorities which in a patriarchal way dispersed the families and relocated them as maids and cheap hired labor. The Swedish parties were after the so-called Cossack election in 1928 only too anxious to use the people of Gammalsvenskby for their own purposes, namely as weapons in the political debate. When some of them, frustrated and driven by homesickness, went back to their native village, they were once again exploited. This time as members of a collective, where the state irrespective of the harvest decided how much each and everyone should get paid. For years they suffered under the terror of Stalin when neighbors were informing on each other. Many of them were arrested and never to be seen again.

In 1941 the German troops were first greeted as liberators, that is true, but the authoritarian and anti religious attitude and arrogance of the Germans soon ended that loyalty. The hateful collectives were not dissolved because they were much too important for the German army. The biggest German treachery, though, was the deportation of villagers in 1943 to different camps in and outside Germany. The people from Gammalsvenskby were once again dispersed and those who could not flee to Sweden in 1945 were

transported to the notorious prison camps near Syktyvkar in what is commonly known as the GULAG. This was yet another betrayal because the villagers had been assured of a safe transport back home. It is not strange that the Svenskyborna in the Ukraine look much older than their Swedish kinsmen do at the same age.

The Swedes on the island of Dagö/Hiiumaa

The ancestors of the Gammalsvenskyby-people lived during several decades on the island of Dagö off the Estonian coast. The Swedish settlement there was mostly concentrated to two tax areas on the northern part of the island. These Swedes most probably had come from the part of Finland called Nyland. The similarity of the dialects, the traditional garments, the wooden calendars and so on all indicates an actual migration of Finnish-Swedish peasants to the Estonian coasts during the period of 1250 - 1400. During that time a Swedish population settled on the islands of Dagö, Ormsö, Nuckö, Odensholm, Stora and Lilla Rågö, Nargö, Runö as well as along the coast between Rågerviken and the town of Hapsal. The Swedes in the Hanseatic town of Reval (nowadays: Tallinn) have been estimated to 25 percent of the whole population.

The German-Danish authorities, merchants in the Hanseatic League, the bishops of Curonia, the towns of Reval and Riga, as well as the Danish crown and later on the German Order, all had an interest in seeing the coast next to the important shipping lanes being populated with loyal and thoroughly christianized inhabitants. The earliest duties of Estonian Swedes were duties such as piloting ships, assisting at possible shipwrecks and providing the church with the fish that was so essential during the fasting periods. The island of Dagö was deserted in 1228 but 26 years later there were some Estonian villages there. The immigration of the Estonian population mostly came from the south, from the bigger neighboring island of Ösel. Dagö and Ösel were both going to be split between the German Order and the bishop of Ösel-Wiek. A Swedish immigration probably came in the years following the rebellion of Estonian farmers in 1343. The first time the Swedes on Dagö are mentioned is in an official document in 1470 when the master of the German Order let them off from the duty of daily labor against an annual fee of 20 Riga marks per tax area.

There are three indications that suggest that the Swedish immigration came to Dagö from the north, from the district of Nyland in Finland. 1. The dialect spoken in the heart of the Estonian-Swedish region (Dagö-Ormsö-Nuckö) is similar to the Swedish dialect that is spoken in the eastern part of Nyland. 2. The garments of Dagö and Nuckö have had strong similarities with the garments found in Nyland. 3. Finally the fact that weighs the most: the rune calendar follows the saint's calendar, which the bishop of Åbo/Turku had established for his bishopric.

The Swedish villagers used a rune calendar to measure time. Andreas Kristiansson Knutas carved the one in 1821. That calendar is somewhat simplified, only the row with a rune sign for each day is carved all the way. The days of the saints that were put on the top row are not complete. The golden numbers are missing completely. The calendar was donated to "Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt in Gothenburg in 1929. The rune calendar from which one piece is shown on the picture below was carved on Dagö in 1766 and was brought to the Ukraine in 1781-82 by people from Röicks. It is made of eight 28-cm long wooden plates. Here the so-called golden numbers are forged into the wood. They are numbered from 1 to 19, which since the 10th century have been used to mark the changes of the moon that every ninth year returns on the same date. The golden numbers are marked with rune signs with the sixteen letters of the "futhark" (the younger rune-system) as well as with three spare squares. The days of the Saints are carved in the top row and the day runes on the middle row. Rev. Kristoffer Hoas donated the calendar in 1900 to the Nordic Museum in Stockholm.

Only in the bishopric of Åbo the second Christmas day and St Henriks day were celebrated on December 15 and January 20 from about 1400 and onwards. This exact placing of the holidays is found on the rune calendars from Dagö. There are statements from Dagöswedes themselves as well. On August 20, 1673 the reverend in Röicks Georg-Johann Gilläus gave the owner of the farm complex on Dagö, count Axel-Julius De la Gardie, the following certificate:

During the time of the old Master of the German Order these farmers were to have come from Sweden or Finland and settled on the northern coast of Dagö and thereafter provided themselves with a Charter from the Master of the Order according to which they were allowed to live there and make a living as fishermen. /.../ As they found a lot of unused land on the coast, they had started to cultivate that land in addition to

the fishing and started commerce with the products they harvested from their land and took from the forest so that they in no way had worse living conditions than the Estonian farmers.

Here is another statement about the origin of the Swedes of Dagö. The title is: "A writing from the judge in the district of Insular-Wiek, J H Lilienfeldt, to the Estonian General-Governor concerning the origin of the Swedish peasants on Dagö. This document is written on December 15, 1746:

According to what their oldest and in these matters most knowledgeable men said and not least through the announcement of several old, although copied and not entirely authentic documents, I have the following to tell you:

1. *That the named Swedish farmers on Dagö originate from the Finnish Nylandic Swedes or from Kapellskär in Sweden. Those colonies were sent as fishermen to Dagö, to guard the beach and to pilot ships as well as to help in case of shipwrecks.*
2. *That the colonies mentioned above, which were few in the beginning, because of the above shown causes - when they were not yet allotted land of today's size also had to do less what concerns work and obligations.*

The tax regions were called "vackor" which is an Estonian expression. Taxes were collected twice a year. These collection days were made into a kind of feast with a lot of food and beer. The one who collected the taxes from the Swedes was the deputy sheriff of the German Order. He had his residence at Pühaleps manor on the southern part of Dagö. This deputy sheriff answered to the sheriff of the German Order at the castle of Soneburg on northern Ösel. Besides the 20 silver marks issued in Riga, which the Dagöswedes had to pay in order to avoid the daily labor, they were apparently also obliged to send soldiers for the defense of the German Order. They had not been set free from that duty in 1470. During the disturbances in Estonia between 1559 and 1560 the sheriff on Ösel raised a force ready to defend the country. That force was made of 22 mounted noblemen, 15 infantry soldiers, as well as 700 Estonian and 100 Swedish soldiers (apparently from Dagö) from the domains of the Order. The Swedish "vackor" on Dagö were named after their main villages: Röicks and Kertell. The names are probably Swedish; Röicks (Dagöswedish: Räike) hints at the old name for farm - "rök" - the smoke, and Kertell is a German version of the Swedish name Kärrdal (in Estonian-Swedish dialects spoken with a hard k), which means: the marsh valley. In the year 1563 when the rule of the German Order collapsed and the district of Wiek was conquered by Swedish troops - the island of Dagö was put under Swedish tax rule as well. The island was going to remain under Swedish rule until the year 1710, when the Russians invaded the Baltic region.

In 1564 the Swedish settlement on Dagö consisted of 58 farm on 23 5/8 hakar (the German word Haken was a very imprecise unit of land. It is perhaps equivalent to about 10 acres), 6 halvpundenikar and 39 enfötlingar (both a kind of reclaiming farmers) as well as 33 lösmän(crofters). In addition to these Swedes dispersed over the island. In 1565 there were 106 grown men, whereof 89 were married and 17 single, in Röicks vacka. Men normally make up a third of the entire population so this would mean that Röicks' vacka had about 320 inhabitants that year. In Kertell the number of men was 102, whereof 63 were married and 39 single. In the same manner as above the number of people living in Kertell's vacka in that year can be estimated to about 310. That gives a total population of about 630 in both the Swedish vackor on Dagö, but remember that several men probably served in the defense-forces of the Order so the number of Swedes could be higher. The Dagöswedes made up about a seventh of the total population of the island. The sheriffs of the Swedish crown and their clerks made immediately after their conquest a list of all taxable farmers, Swedish as well as Estonian. This kept on through the centuries. That is why it is possible to follow the Dagöswedes generation after generation, all the way down to our own times. We know from the tax-lengths that these people were living as farmers and fishermen. A typical farmer had a farm with some three acres of arable land, one horse, two oxen, three cows, one cow-calf, two calves, and in the minor villages: some goats as well. (The figures are from the year 1688). For several weeks in spring and in the autumn the men were then out fishing off the coast of Estonia where the Dagöpeople had the right to catch small-herring - especially in the Matzall-bay where they built small fisher huts. They were also hunting seal and sea birds. Furthermore they were burning tar and limestone to sell.

The time of the dispute over justice

In the beginning the sheriffs of the Swedish crown respected the privileges of the Estonian Swedish farmers. Several Swedish kings and queens issued new charters and protection. In the beginning of the 18th century the relations between the landlord and his peasants started to get strained. The wars against Denmark, Poland and Russia, which had been victorious for Sweden, had for the most part been fought with borrowed means. The Royal Swedish crown was in dept to a lot of military commanders. All that pay

was now about to be cashed in and this was done mostly through selling conquered land, or through giving it, to noblemen in Swedish service. The Estonian Swedes were struck very hard through those settlements. In contrast to the Estonians, who had been driven into serfdom after 1343, they had until that time managed to keep their personal freedom and live in a certain amount of wealth.

The Swedes could cultivate their lands and fish as well as deal with tar and lime in order to make a living. In fact the farmers made the lime and tar themselves and so they were able to get a good price for their finished products. With boats made with their own hands they brought their goods to the towns of Reval, Hapsal and Pernau and even all the way to Riga. From 1590 till 1630 these free Estonian Swedish farmers came under German and Swedish feudal landlords who had no interest at all in respecting the privileges of the Swedes. Several ancient Swedish villages were destroyed because a nobleman wanted to build a manor consistent with his high class on the spot where the land was the most fertile and the need for water was covered as well. Several Swedish farmers ran away during that time. In 1649 three farmers from Dagö were forced to move to the manor of Jakobsdahl (nowadays called Ulriksdal) the castle the De la Gardie family had built outside Stockholm.

In 1651 the following was written in a letter to the administration of De la Gardie's manor:

These last two years twelve peasants have run away, as also others, young and elderly men to a sum of 60 - without the numbers of maidens counted who have also run away.

The count Jakob De la Gardie was given Dagö as an enfeoffment in 1620. King Gustavus II Adolphus then sold him the island in 1624 to keep as an eternal fief. The 30.000 Riksdaler that De la Gardie already had lent the crown in advance was taken as payment. During the time of Jakob De la Gardie the taxes were to be raised time after time. During the 1640's and 50's the farmers started to protest that the taxes and labor duties were heavier than they could carry and they tried once again to make the count acknowledge their rights. That of course did not succeed. In the beginning of the 1620's the Estonian farmers from the village Kõrgessaare south of Rõicks' vacka were evicted and on that land the architects of Jakob De la Gardie built the manor of Hohenholm. That was the manor that the Dagöswedes now belonged to, where they should pay their taxes and do their daily labor. The situation of the Dagöswedes worsened even more when Axel-Julius De la Gardie inherited Dagö from his father. In 1659 the new landlord forbade the Dagöswedes to trade freely with lime and cattle. The trade was to be made with the officials of the Count to set prices. Those prices lay below the prices on the free market, which was unacceptable to the Swedes. Now started a lengthy lawsuit that actually did not end until the Dagöswedes left Dagö in August 1781. The farmer Kitas-Irja (alias Jöran Jakobsson from the village of Kiddas) acted as representative of the Dagöswedes. For a period of thirty years, during which he went more than ten times to Stockholm, he defended the rights of the Dagöswedes in different courts. Karl XI, known for his friendly attitude toward farmers, appointed after many quarrels a commission, which was placed in Reval. That commission was to take a closer look at the complaints of the Swedish farmers in Estonia and ascertain their legal substance. The partial lawsuit ended with a compromise. Axel-Julius De la Gardie managed to divide the Swedish farmers into two groups. The charters which originally were valid for the Swedes in Rõicks and Kertells vackor had through an unfortunate writing in one of the documents been written in such a way that they were valid only for Swedes living in the villages of Rõicks and Kertell. It is stated in a resolution from October 7, 1685 that the people living in the main villages can only use the charters. The rest (about 1/3 of the Dagöswedes) were to be on an equal footing with the Estonian serfs or they were to be allowed to move to Sweden. In the end Kitas-Irja had to give his life in the fight for freedom. First he was sentenced to running the gauntlet while being beaten by 300 men. Because of his age he only managed to do this three times. After that a horse dragged him more than six times through the streets. Incredibly enough he survived this but was made an outlaw. He then lived for several years hidden in the forests of Dagö. In 1692 his son Bertel writes that he no longer knows whether his father is alive or not. Now the situation was to change again when the Reduction of estates to the Royal crown took part in the 1690's.

The main part of the Estonian-Swedish areas including Dagö then belonged once again to the Swedish crown. The crown appointed leaseholders and they made no difference between different groups of people on the farms. Swedes and Estonians, poor and well to do farmers from Rõicks and Kertell - they were all considered equal. Attempts from the Swedish farmers to cope with the unsatisfactory state of things led nowhere. They even had to serve as boatswains in the Swedish navy when the Great Northern War broke out in 1700. As time went by Swedes were also drafted as soldiers in order to mobilize the regiments that were to defend the provinces in the Baltic area as the Russians gained the upper hand starting in the year 1704. In 1710 the Swedish troops surrendered in the Baltic's and were allowed to be transported back to their homeland. The war was over. The German knighthood immediately acknowledged the Russian

authorities and in return they were given far-reaching provincial home-rule over the so-called German Baltic provinces. The Baltic provinces actually did not become officially Russian until the peace in Nystad in 1721. For a couple of years Dagö was under the direct rule of the High-admiral Apraxin when he built up the Russian Baltic fleet with the goal of conquering Sweden from the Baltic Sea. When the Russian fleet looted and burned the Swedish eastern coast from Gävle in the north to Norrköping in the south in 1719, some of the Russian ships had come from the harbor of Diupham on Dagö. Together with the usual torments this war brought a terrible plague. It ravaged during 1710 and 1711. The plague started in the Baltic provinces and followed the Swedish soldiers to Sweden.

Altogether about a third of the Dagöswedes died because of the plague. In other regions it was much worse. In some Estonian mainland areas south of Hapsal about 90% of the population died. The plague hit the Dagöswedes villages in the following way: Röicks - 130 died and 192 survived. The inhabitants of five of the 51 farms were wiped out totally. In Kertell - 194 were dead and 99 had survived. In the small villages only four people were reported dead and 156 survived. None of the 31 farms had been wiped out. Pühalep's church book speaks for itself: when the reverend Bernhard Johann Göthe finally reached Kertell's chapel and burial ground on September 7, 1712 the corpses lay piled upon each other. Altogether 219 persons were buried that day. Especially children and old people had to suffer the most. Maybe that is why the effects of this terrible epidemic turned out to be favorable for those who survived. The farms could for example be joined together in bigger cultivation units. Since the cattle were not infected stray animals could be collected and be cared for by the survivors. The last but no less important effect of the plague was that the farm owners had to treat their people with a certain care to discourage them from going to other parts of the country. That is why the taxes and the daily labor were somewhat eased.

The simple census of population that was conducted in 1726 shows that several Dagöswedish families moved to the mainland. Normally they preferred to move to other Estonian-Swedish villages, most often to Nuckö and to the region of Rickholz where the farms had been lain waste. Yet many people from Dagö can be found on a large number of estates mostly in the districts of Wiek and Harrien in the northwestern part of Estonia. In the year 1721, after the peace settlement, the Dagöswedes requested that Czar Peter would confirm their old privileges. They received no reply. In 1726 this request was repeated and now the matter was given to the Restitution commission that had been founded by the empress Catherine I personally. The task of the committee was to give the land that was taken by Karl XI during the Reduction in the 1690's back to the Swedish noblemen who now wanted to become Russian subjects. While waiting to hear from a descendant of Axel-Julius De la Gardie the commission did not make any decisions. The Swedes did not receive an answer. During that time the small villages were treated just like the villages of Röicks and Kärrdal. This means that Dagö now belonged to the Russian crown, which leased the island for shorter periods to officers and noblemen. The new leaseholders respected the exceptional position of the Swedes regarding their personal freedom, but concerning their workload and taxes they should be treated just like the Estonians. The Senate made an important statement in 1740 when the Estonian peasants were declared to be personal property of their landlords. A landlord's peasants were equal to animals and tools: they could be bought and sold or be traded away. In the same time one inheritor of the De La Gardie family contacted the Commission of restitution and demanded that the estates be given back to their original owners. It was strictly speaking too late to make those demands now, but the granddaughter of Axel-Julius De la Gardie - Ebba Margareta, married countess of Stenbock, had good personal connections with the Russian royal family. In 1744 the commission suggested that the Dagöswedes were to be transferred to an estate of the crown on the island of Ösel. That proposal was actually meant to protect the Dagöswedes but they saw it as banishment. They begged to be able to stay on their home-island because their women and children did not speak any Estonian and they did not have any contacts with the Estonians. A migration on a large scale did not occur this time either. In 1755 the estates on Dagö were returned to the family of De la Gardie-Stenbock. For some reason the Swedish village of Kertell, belonging to the Pardas crown-estate, was left out. Soon the new landlords started to treat their subjects like serfs irrespective of nationality. Also the Dagöswedes were now sold, given or traded against horses and hunting dogs. Those Swedish subjects could also be forced to settle on another of Stenbock's estates where there was lack of working people. This happened even more often when Count Karl Magnus Stenbock inherited the properties on Dagö from his mother in 1776. At times, though, the conditions on Dagö seemed to have been almost idyllic. One example is when Röicks Mats Jöransson's (the manor-sheriff, or kubjas in Estonian) baby boy was going to be baptized on July 30, 1763 and the following impressive party became the boy's godfathers and godmothers:

Count Friedrich Stenbock, lieutenant Von Hellwig, the secretary Heitzig, the farmers Bertel Jöransson and Greis Jacobsson (both from Röicks), countess Ebba Margareta Stenbock, Miss A E Von Hellwig, Miss S M

Von Hellwig and the parish clerk and organist Jöran Simonssons's wife Kirsti. You might think that the count and countess with company wanted enjoy themselves with a little summer excursion and by that giving the baptizing of the son of their deputy manor-sheriff in Röicks church a golden lining. Now these were not totally isolated events. Already in February 1758 had the Count Friedrich Stenbock honored the farmer Tönnis Hindriksson from Koidma village by becoming godfather to Tönnis' son. No wondering that the boy was named Friedrich Mats (Hinas). It seems as if Tönnis Hindriksson from Röicks village (who in 1753 had married a widow from Koidma village and moved there) earlier had served on the manor of Hohenholm.

A church-revival

The German count Nicolaus Ludwig Von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) founded in 1727 the first Evangelical brotherhood in Germany. The movement was called the Herrnhuters after Zinzendorf's manor, Herrnhut. This revivalism spread very quickly in northern Europe. In Germany the movement was to found it's own Free Church but in Scandinavia and in the Baltic region it was mainly going to be a revivalism within the church. The revived came together in extra gatherings after the services. Already in 1726 had the Count Von Zinzendorf visited Reval and preached to a packed cathedral on the subject "The Crucified Christ". Ten years later Zinzendorf visited Estonia again. Already before that many Baltic ministers had studied at the University of Halle in Germany and there been influenced by the pietism. Those priests had later founded biblical study groups amongst the people. Amongst the Swedes in Estonia one of the leading advocates was reverend C F Hasselblad who first was active on Nuckö (1722-1728) and then in Röicks on Dagö (1728-1730) where he died. His successor in Röicks was reverend and later dean Jonas Glansström (1704-62). Glansström studied in Halle as well. He gathered interested members of the community to extra meetings with celebrations of the Holy Communion every fourteenth day. In addition, extra meetings were often held after the ordinary services on Sundays. A difference was made between accepted and not accepted members in the community. On Dagö the work among the Swedish peasants was lead by Rabbas Johan Mårtensson from Röicks village. Often services were held in his home. In 1742 a Herrnhutic worker named Johann Ludwig Seldenslo arrived from Germany. He was going to work on Dagö among Estonians and Swedes for several years to come. In 1743 the movement was forbidden in the Baltic region by a royal decree. According to statements brought to the empress Elisabeth I the movement had caused great uneasiness within the Lutheran Church. Maybe the authorities also feared the social consequences, which the brotherhood that had been made very stringent, might bring. The law concerning feudalism could be undermined by such a message. Now this prohibition was not going to be so important. The work was continued at the same and the leading ministers like reverend Glansström could verify that the church worked in a way that was acceptable to the authorities. In 1756 the Swedish brotherhood in Röicks had 50 members while the Estonian brotherhood, which was mostly active in Köpu and in Emmaste (southwest and south of the Swedish settlement), had more than 500 members. In 1769 the Swedish group had 53 members and the Estonian had increased till more than 600. In the program of the Herrnhuters there were also goals set up for the education of the peasants. Reverend Hasselblad had founded a bible study group already in 1728. Several teachers were educated among the people. One of them was the young farmer's son Mats Magnusson, born in 1756 on Irja's farm in the village of Kotst. He was working as a schoolteacher some years before the migration in 1781 and later he would be the only surviving spiritual leader among the Dagöswedes in Ukraine from 1783 and onwards until his death in 1839. The social unrest made it hard, though, for the Herrnhuters to continue their work and the district-manager of the district Wiek, Jens Bloch writes in his reports of 1779:

The unfortunate lawsuits the peasants are involved in have an influence on our work that is too negative. /.../ The labor conditions are now such that the people seldom, with exceptions of the manor-workers, are able to attend our meetings! (Jens Bloch: Reports of the year 1779.)

The Herrnhutic co-worker Rabbas Johan Mårtensson and the others of the Herrnhutic movement went along with the rest of the emigrants to the Ukraine in 1781. Mårtensson himself died on his way through Russia, but the interest the people of Gammalsvenskby always had in revival movements within the Lutheran church may be a reminiscence of their last days on Dagö. When Emma Skarstedt came to Gammalsvenskby in 1899, sent out by the Society of Female Missionary worker (KMA) in Sweden, she was received very openly and a certain revival took place.

The last big battle

In the summer of 1779 the Swedish peasants on Dagö started their action for total freedom. They hired a

skilful German lawyer, Heinrich Ernst Stoecker, to be their solicitor. In the beginning of July this year four representatives of the Swedes went to Reval to bring the case to trial before the Board of the Estonian province. On July 18 Count Karl Magnus Stenbock answered to the court the following that he:

1. 1. */.../ Because of his love of peace and because he wanted to save the poor peasants from unnecessary loss's of money and working-time, not wanted to appear as an opponent of the freedom of the peasants. Then he declared that he, being high-minded and generous, now gave the Swedish peasants their personal freedom back, without a need to investigate the matter more closely. The Dagöswedes had won the first skirmish!*
2. 2. On September 5 in order to get rid of the people who had caused him so much trouble, Count Stenbock sent 117 farmers and 8 crofters - all mentioned by name - notice to quit within six months. The Swedes appealed against this immediately and then the matter was brought to court in Reval again. The verdict came in the beginning of December 1779: the Swedes were free people, but then the landlord also had the right to give them notice. Through their solicitor the Swedes now declared that they were not satisfied with this verdict and furthermore: the court itself was not impartial, since both the defendant and the members of the jury were landlords and had the same interests to protect! The peasants appealed immediately again, and now on solicitor Stoecker's advice they carried the case to a higher court: The College of Justice in St. Petersburg.

On January 17 1780 a temporary agreement was closed here between Count Stenbock and his subjects. It stated the following:

1. 1. *Count Stenbock recognizes the freedom of the Swedes.*
2. 2. *The Count undertakes to buy back the Swedes that had been sold or handed away by him or his mother.*
3. 3. *The peasants shall pay all the debts they are in, to the Count.*
4. 4. *Both sides shall give up all other claims on one another.*
5. 5. *The notice for the peasants to leave their farms is taken back and the peasants are given the right to stay on their farms until March 1781, after which the matter shall be looked into again.*
6. 6. *Both parties are given the right of six months' noticing hereafter.*
7. 7. *The Dagöswedish peasants' right to their personal freedom shall be officially stated in all the churches in the country.*
8. 8. *The Board of the General-province in Reval shall sanction this agreement.*
9. .

Soon the situation was tense again between Count Stenbock and the Swedes. In October Stenbock claims that he wants the peasants to move and he gives them notice to leave before June 6 1781. Again the peasants appealed to the College of Justice in St. Petersburg. From there the matter was sent back to the Board of the General-province in Reval with instructions for them to hold on to the legal proceedings. Now Karl Magnus Stenbock acted quickly. He probably had heard that the whole matter could turn against him and only four days after the statement from the College of Justice he sells his properties on Dagö to Baron Otto Reinhold Ludwig Von Ungern-Sternberg for an amount of 55.000 Silver Rubles. There seems to have been some kind of secret agreement between the two noblemen that included the right for Stenbock to buy the properties back later, but that was not an agreement that Ungern-Sternberg intended to stick to.

On March 2 Baron Ungern-Sternberg announced in Reval that he had bought the manors on Dagö and that he now had replaced Stenbock in the legal matters concerning the rights of the Dagöswedes. He wanted them to leave he stated. The College of Justice in St. Petersburg demanded (as they got to know of the affair) that the new landowner should stick to the agreement of January 17 and give the peasants a six-month's notice. Since the peasants saw no other way out they immediately sent a delegation to Baron Ungern-Sternberg and humbly asked for permission to stay. On March 9 Baron Ungern-Sternberg finally agreed to grant them this, with exception of some of their leaders who immediately should be driven out of their homes! Everything should thus be as it had been before for both the peasants and their new landlord.

However, in reality matters turned out to be a bit different. In St. Petersburg there was a reaction from Prince Potemkin who had been given the responsibility to colonize those provinces north of the Black Sea that had recently been conquered from Turkey. He now saw more than 1000 possible colonists who could be sent to the New-Russian provinces. He pledged Empress Catherine II to issue a Ukase (a law) that forced the Dagöswedes to move to New-Russia as Ukraine was called at that time. This law was stated on March 8 - the day before the settlement between Ungern-Sternberg and the Swedes. When the news had

spread to Reval everybody was confused - could the Swedes stay or did they have to move? Prince Potemkin thought that the peasants could be persuaded to move if they were informed about the circumstances. He sent his spokesman colonel Ivan Maximovitj Sinelnikov to Dagö, where he arrived on July 10. Sinelnikov gathered the peasants outside the church the next Sunday, after Reverend Karl Forsman's sermon was delivered, and loudly read to them the conditions for the migration to the Black Sea area. The terms were as follows:

1. 1. *The Swedish peasants shall receive a large and fertile area with a size of 60 Desiatins of land (65 hectares = 160.6 acres) per family. There are 200 families.*
2. 2. *They shall receive four years of total exemption from taxes and after that only have to pay four coins a year per Desiatin in taxes.*
3. 3. *They shall receive wood from the Crown for houses and furniture and as a contribution to their settlement receive 12 rubles per family.*
4. 4. *They shall receive seed for sowing, grain and food supplies for one year in advance.*
5. 5. *They shall be given the opportunity to form their own colony, separated from others, and also have access to a church and a minister of their own.*
6. 6. *During the transportation to their new dwelling they shall receive all kinds of help.*

The date for the emigration was fixed to August 20, 1781. The number of colonists was in July estimated to be 935 people (men, women and children). According to the tradition among the people in Gammalsvenskby and to a statement from the vicar on the neighbor-island Ormsö at that time, the real number of emigrants should have been 1207 people. A bit earlier the peasants themselves state in writing that they are 1159 people. A list made by Colonel Sinelnikov on August 26 a few days after the departure finally gives the names of 967 people who left Dagö. There were 482 male colonists and 485 female, 615 adults and 352 children under the age of 15 years old. The emigrants received travel-money: 4 rubles per adult and 15 kopecks per child. The number of households was 127, but if younger brothers (with families) who now were working as farm hands for their elder brothers could form their own households, the number would be 200. Totally Colonel Sinelnikov gave out 3968 rubles and 55 kopecks in travel-money for the emigrants. According to the list the Dagöswedes brought totally 321 horses and 115 oxen along with their 260 carriages. There was a hurry to settle everything before the day of the departure. Everything that could not be carried along had now to be sold. These were days of good bargains for the people who stayed behind. The buyers were Estonian peasants, the ten farms, which belonged to the vicarage of Röicks, and some other Swedes who for some reasons were allowed to stay behind and the 35 Swedish farmers from the village of Kertell (that still belonged to the crown). All these people could buy good equipment at a very low cost. 12 oxen, 82 cows, 54 bulls and 49 bullocks were sold to a total amount of only 213 rubles and 60 kopecks. 12 goats were sold for 2 rubles and 40 kopecks, one horse for 5 rubles, 77 ells of rough homespun cloth for 8 rubles and 78 kopecks and 8.5 kilograms of seal-fat for 50 kopecks and so on.

Baron Von Ungern-Sternberg was not satisfied at all with the way things had turned out. He claimed that the farmhouses of the peasants were his property and that he would not have enough workers for the harvest to come. This was a breach of the agreement between him and the peasantry and now they should pay him for the losses they caused him. Because of this the peasants should at least have to finish the autumn sowing before they left. In advance Colonel Sinelnikov arranged with the transportation of the carriages and the draft animals from Heltermåa on Dagö to the port of Rohuküla on the mainland. Already on August 2 a landlord on the mainland complains that the cattle of the Dagöswedes invade his dry pasture. On August 20, Rev. Karl Forsman from the parish of Röicks on Dagö followed his former parishioners to the eastern border of his parish, to a place called Korsbacka/Ristimägi. There he had a simple wooden cross put up and held a short moment of prayers with the emigrants. He then went home to his vicarage and the emigrants set off for a new chapter in their lives.

One could always wonder what the Swedes from Dagö thought about this emigration. Especially as it has been often classified as expulsion. It should not be forgotten, though that from now on they would forever be free from the hated German noblemen who had been oppressing them for centuries. And if what had been promised them down in the Ukraine only to some extent should meet their expectations, they could not believe otherwise than that they had made the right choice to leave. Not until afterwards when we can see the disastrous outcome of the whole project we can pity them. The fact that the trek set off as late as

in August meant that the Swedes would have to face a long winter, mostly on the road. Thus the circumstances were not the best. One proof of the high expectations the peasants on Dagö had for the project is that in September 1781 the inhabitants of the village of Kertell applied for permission to emigrate as well (which was denied).

According to the tradition in Gammalsvenskby they looked upon the emigration as if they were banned from Dagö, but it is possible that this view is colored by the final outcome.

The Baltic-German landlords' point of view can be illustrated by what Baron Stackelberg on Ormsö wrote in 1778 about his Swedish peasants:

I utterly despise this brood and I will use all my power to totally wipe them out, but in the meantime I will provide them with a leaseholder, who for their own benefit will hit their williness out of them.

A relative of the baron Ungern-Sternberg on Dagö - Baron Gustav Von Ungern-Sternberg to the manor of Birkas - stated in a letter to the vicar on Nuckö, Rev. Gustav Carlblom, in October 1793 how the transportation of the Dagöswedes to the Ukraine was looked upon afterwards by these landlords.

And provided that they (the Estonian Swedes) at last all should be declared free, they will at once get noticed to leave by me - because I will not tolerate any free peasants on my estates. What good does it do them in the end everything they have achieved, if they are declared free and then immediately get transported to Kherson or to another similar place? In truth a large gain that I for sure would not like to share with them.

The way to the river Dnepr

On August 20, 1781 a large number of Swedes had left their home-island Dagö for good. According to Colonel Sinelnikov there were 967 individuals of both sexes from 127 different families - or actually households. In the meantime Prince Potemkin had given the following order to the governor of the province of New-Russia (Ukraine) Nikolaj Danilovitj Jazykov:

1. *Parcel out land to the Swedes at the river Dnepr north of the town of Kizi-Kirmen (in 1784 renamed Berislav) on grounds that belong to the town and survey to every household that consists of four people 60 Desiatins of land. Add woodlands that are sufficient for their common use on the nearest islets in the Dnepr.*
2. *Buy at the Crown's expense seed for sowing and gather in the Zaporogian (Cossack) villages oxen and plows and then plow the surveyed land also at the Crown's expense and have 315 liters of seed sown for every household during the autumn of 1781.*
3. *Since the colonists will not arrive at their new home until very late in the autumn, Captain Makareto, after he has selected a suitable village, has to place the colonists there for the winter and to supply them with the needed quantities of provisions from the storage of the Crown.*

The timing for the emigration was not the best. Starting in August meant as Potemkin stated above that the emigrants would have to spend the winter somewhere in Russia. An elderly retired captain in the army, Jegor Timofejevitj Makareto, and an unknown number of soldiers had the responsibility to guarantee the safety of the emigrants (- and to watch over them so that no one actually escaped on the way). The journey went through Estonia to Pskov where Colonel Sinelnikov handed over the authority to Captain Makareto and traveled in advance. From Pskov the party continued through Byelorussia and in to the Ukraine. As a winter-camp Makareto chose the large village of Resjetilovka, situated some 25 km west of Poltava, between Krementjug and Polevoj. To this chosen place the party arrived on November 26. In a written report from Colonel Sinelnikov (based upon facts given by Captain Makareto) sent to Prince Potemkin on December 9, it is stated that the transportation had been carried out under tolerable circumstances. Then Sinelnikov continues in the typical way of a Russian official report:

"... only the minor children have had a rough time due to the smallpox, a disease which they still suffer from in the camp. Otherwise the colonists are quite satisfied when they see all the charitable deeds from Your Excellency, in the shape of the abundance of food and land they shall be given - all of which is promising them a happy life."

The emigrants received food for themselves and feed for the horses (to the number of 326) and oxen until

the date of April 16, when they should continue their journey to the place where they should settle down. Sinelnikov also writes that the colonists are longing for a clergyman and he asks Prince Potemkin to send one to the colony.

The clergyman who accepted an offer from Prince Potemkin was a clergyman from Finland, Johan Adolph Europaeus. Potemkin offered him the following conditions:

1. 1. *I decide that your salary shall be of 400 Rubles a year. To your settling there will be 200 rubles paid in advance, a sum which will then be deducted from your salary during the two years to come.*
2. 2. *The salary is paid from the day of your departure from here to your new dwelling. On arrival you will receive, both in the Swedish colony as in Krementjug, a home suitable for your position and then the land that has been surveyed on behalf of the church.*
3. 3. *I also declare myself willing to give you 1000 Desiatins of land to be your personal property with the right for your heirs to inherit it for all times, this according to the approved plan for estates here.*
4. 4. *I give you the unreserved right to collect all kinds of financial benefits that the Swedish immigrants may give you of their own free will and according to old customs.*
5. 5. *After five years of duty you will have the right to leave your employment if you no longer wish to stay. You should inform the governor or me in advance. At last: your trip down there shall be paid without any obligations of repayment.*

On April 8 Rev. Europaeus received several utensils for the church (a chalice, a plate for the communion wafers and so on) which should be built in the Swedish colony and then began his voyage to the lower part of the river Dnepr.

Governor Jazykov wrote to Prince Potemkin on January 24, 1782 and reported that 30 adults among the Swedes had died most of them because of infirmity. Then 56 children altogether had died of smallpox. 880 people are reported to be alive after the winter in Resjetilovka. On April 16 the party broke up and headed for the Kizi-Kirmen-area.

The arrival

On May 1 in the year 1782 535 people finally arrived at the place for their new homes. Regardless of their number when they left Dagö in August 1781, and the number of deaths that occurred on the way down to the winter-camp, we can establish the fact that at least 345 people had died since January 24. We also know that only 50% (or less) of the emigrants from Dagö really reached their destination at the river Dnepr. The group with their guiding military unit and their parish clerk Peter Jöransson held a short prayer meeting on the prairie outside the colony. According to the tradition their first words as they saw the new dwelling were:

“Nu våra ve rätt narrander!” - Now we were really fooled!

The houses that were supposed to be ready and the fields that should have been sown were nowhere to be found. Only a Cossack-fortress on the hill that later should be called Stadsbackan was to be seen. Nor could they find the wood that was used to build the kind of houses that they were used to from Dagö. The village-tradition tells us that the colonist had to dig caves in the earth (in Russian: a Zemljanka) under supervision of an old Cossack to find some shelter at all the first time. An area of 12.000 Desiatins (about 13.000 hectares or 32.123.000 acres) had been measured in a long and narrow strip up from the river and towards the prairie. 60 Desiatins of land were to be given to every one of the 200 households that was estimated from the beginning. In reality there no longer existed that many families, but for the surviving families there were now building sites in a size of 25 x 50 meters in a village that was situated on a height on the right shore of the river. The center of the nameless village was to be found in the exact spot that we know as Gammalsvenskby. Swedes built primitive dwellings in what was later to be Mühlhausendorf in the south and Klosterdorf in the north as well. Especially on the location of the future Klosterdorf the caves that the Swedes had dug out existed long after the Germans had arrived in the area in 1804. The first Germans who arrived in 1787 were to be lodged in these caves. In July Rev. Europaeus arrived and then a nice vicarage was built on a building site just north of the village-center, towards the prairie. Timber for the roofs of the houses is said to have been brought from the crown-owned storage-yard in Kokovskij. The colonists got some material for free and the rest on ten years' installment. At the beginning sermons were held in the large drawing room of the vicarage, but in 1787 the first wooden-church was built. The cross-shaped small church was according to tradition built by Ukrainian master-builders. The location of the

church was to be almost opposite the vicarage towards the river.

In the midst of July 1782 Rev. Europaeus established the first church-records. Then there were 484 people alive. In a period between July 1782 and March 1783 the angel of death ravaged severely - 336 people died in a year that threatened to waste the whole group of colonists. The corpses were buried just south of the church - in what later was the yard of Rev. Hoas. Later on, on the order of the Russian authorities, a separate graveyard was established on the southwest side of the village. The causes of death are noted in the church-book: "Diaphragm-disease" - 124 people, ague - 48 people, typhus fever - 46 people and so on. According to the church-records only 135 people were still alive in March 1783!

The first neighbors

The same year the Swedish village was founded two Russian colonies were established in the area. People who had been deported to New-Russia founded the large village of Somove across the river. In the same way that the English used Australia as a place to which people were deported - New-Russia (and later Siberia) was used as deportation-area by the Russian czar-regime. More important to the Swedes was the establishing of a monastery by the name of Grigorijevskij Bizjukov Monastyr situated some 25 kilometers north of the Swedish village. Nowadays the place is called Majak (the Lighthouse). In May 1782 Prince Potemkin allotted the monastery some 3.000 Desiatins, which later was added with 22.000 more Desiatins. Soon high churches were constructed here, good buildings for the monks and large gardens. This outpost of the Russian-Orthodox church played an important part in spreading the Russian-Orthodox belief and the Russian culture in the district. The largest monastery-church at the ravine called Propasjnaja Balka was constructed already before the ending of 1782. It is also worth mentioning that the monastery was built on a place where the wild Zaporogian-Kosacks had had their bandit-nest. The Swedish missionary Wilhelm Sarwe visited the monastery on one of his travels in Russia and described it like this:

This holy monastery became a spiritual and cultural guardian, which, better than whole regiments of warriors kept even the most brutal bands of bandits at a distance. The relations between the monastery and Gammalsvenskby have always been good.

Later, in the end of the 19th century, when a shortage of land appeared among the Swedes they also got the opportunity to lease fertile land from the monastery under extremely good conditions. At years of bad harvests it could happen that the abbot decided that the leaseholders did not have to pay any rent at all. The contact with the monastery meant only something positive to the Swedish settlement. The small town of Kizi-Kirmen (Berislav) about 10 kilometers south of the village and the former Tartar-fortress of Islam-Kirmen (later called Kachovka) on the opposite shore of the river were also inhabited by Russians and people of other nationalities at that time. A larger town was Kherson, which was situated 80 kilometers to the south. As early as in 1778 (the whole area was conquered from the Turks in 1774) Prince Potemkin had initialized the construction of large shipyards here and the town was appointed capital of the province (General-province) of Jekaterinoslav in 1784. In 1787 the Empress Catherine visited the town on her grand visitation-tour. She made her entrance through a triumphal arch and was crowned the Empress of Tauria and visited the four different parts of the town: the military-suburb, the merchants' part of the town, the town at the harbor and the fortress - a town of itself as well.

The first years as settlers

To build a Swedish colony at the river Dnepr was not easy. Farming and fishing as the Swedes were used to from Dagö did not work out here. The conditions at the riverside were completely different from those at the Baltic Sea. The climate was different: a moist tropical heat in combination with the long drought in the summer and then often cold winters (even colder than in Estonia) where snow was rather common. The fishing, however, became the salvation of the village-people. From the Cossacks they learned new methods of fishing when the old did not work anymore and like this life went on. With hoop nets, long line and fish-spears they caught both carp and sturgeon together with other more common fishes. The farming-system and cattle-raising of the Swedes were hardly developed at all at first, even though the horses and oxen they had brought down with them still were alive and could be used as drafters at the plows. It took time to test new crops and to get suitable seeds to sow. The village also changed in appearance during the first five to ten years: the settlement shrank in size. The areas that had been measured south and north of the village-center near the church were abandoned at the same time as the population decreased. The inhabited areas consisted of the blocks that were called Taknegårda (the farms of the people from the village of Takne) and Nealinja (the lower line).

In the years 1787-89 a large group of newcomers arrived. They were mostly Germans coming from Danzig - 362 people in all (189 men and 173 women). They were one their way down to the district of Tauria (east of the Dnepr). The group was then divided and one half was accommodated in the village and they seemed to want to stay on. It most likely that these people gave the name to the village it's name: "das Schwedendorf" (the Swedish village) and as this was the oldest village in the area it then got the name Alt-Swedendorf (Gammalsvenskby, the Old-Swedish village). 14 families stayed and moved in and took over the 40 houses that were deserted. The Russian authorities gave them their support and stated that the houses had been built at the Crowns expense and then of course was state property. The situation became hostile. The Swedes wanted the Germans to leave and most of them did after a few years. At least one of the Swedish families followed this group as they went further to the north and joined the others from Danzig who had settled and formed a new colony near Jekaterinoslav which they gave the name: (Alt-) Danzig. But several of the Germans stayed among the Swedes: Gustav Herman, his son Karl and his young daughter Constantia (who later married Mats Norberg), Kristof Sergis with his son Johann and Johann's young wife Barbara, Frantz Maskewitz with his wife Natalia and their son Andreas and then at last - Johann Schilling with family. In 1789 Reverend Europaeus had had enough and left the village for good. The conditions had turned out to be rather different from what he had expected. During the next 40 years to come the work of the church was kept up by vicars from the towns around who came on yearly visits to the village. Between the years of 1788 and 1834 Mats Magnusson (Kotz) carried out the work as an organist, parish clerk and schoolteacher. In 1790 31 Swedish prisoners of war came to the village. They had been captured in the war that King Gustavus III had started against Russia in 1788. At first they had been brought to a prison camp in Feodosia on Crimea, but now they were released on condition that they would settle in the Swedish village. In 1795 there were only five of them left in Gammalsvenskby, the others had left. But: Anders Vesterberg, Anders Hernberg, Mats Norberg, Kristian Barkvall and Johan Lövberg (who died later this year) stayed and married Swedish women from Dagö and raised their families here. Only the families of Hernberg and Norberg have male descendants today.

The rise of the German neighboring villages

The member of the Royal Council of Colonist-affairs Samuel Contentius (1748-1830) had in 1799 been appointed superior-judge at the newly founded "Fürsorgekomitee der Südrussischen Kolonisten" (The board of provision for the colonists in South-Russia). This was a kind of guardian authority for the German colonist-villages. While visiting the Swedish district in his first year of duty he could see for himself that this area that was meant for more than one thousand colonists was inhabited by around a tenth of that amount of people. He and the other members of the board did not take any notice of the nationality of the colonists living there. In his report of 1799 Contentius states that the emigrants from Danzig - 14 families - now had received the same status as the other colonists (the Swedes), but only two of those families (Herman and Schilling) distinguished themselves from the others from Danzig by diligence, working capacity and prosperity. The low number of inhabitants in this district was negative for both the state and the colonists. For a start Contentius proclaimed a law in 1802 that stated that all the grown-up bachelors here had to marry before the end of the year or they should be banned to live on the prairie for one year. This punishment should then continue one year at a time until the sinner had repented. As this did not raise the number of colonists fast enough, Contentius must have got the idea to let other newly arrived colonists from Germany settle down here. At least 75% of the Swedish district was in fact wasteland and could be used. Several groups of immigrants were actually already on their way to the Kherson-area and they might as well be placed here. In the years 1804 and 1805 three different groups of German colonists came to what from now on was called "The Swedish district".

Mühlhausendorf

In 1804 a party of 16 German Lutheran families came here. Their origin was, with the exception of one family from Bohemia, Austria and Württemberg. They had gathered in the Byelorussian town of Grodno and there chosen the colonist Karl Waser to be their leader on the trek. Via Jekaterinoslav they came to Berislav on September 1. During the first days of September they reached Gammalsvenskby and were sheltered there for about a year. In 1806 their village was ready at the foot of a hill on the western bank of the Dnepr (- immediately south of the Swedish village). On this spot there was a mill and a small house that belonged to the colonist Karl Herman, who now was the village-elder, and who was the one who had built them. Samuel Contentius and his Russian associate Sjikov then gave the new village the name Mühlhausendorf (the Mill-cottage-village). Southwest of the village the river flowed through a deep rift and where several minor islets were to be found. On these islets grass and several different kinds of trees were growing. The fields of the village stretched 10 Versts (12 kilometers) up in the northeast direction and they were one Verst wide at the village itself, but two Versts further out towards the prairie. The soil was of

the same kind here as in the neighboring villages: the yellow sand-mixed clay soil that only gave a good harvest when it was sparsely sown and when the rainfall was high. People in Mühlhausendorf had a tendency of coming and going, so that there was a rotation among the inhabitants, more than in the other villages. This village is separated from Gammalsvenskby by a rather deep rift, just behind the Swedish graveyard (seen from the Swedish side).

Schlangendorf

Just south of Mühlhausendorf there was a new village founded in 1806. In the east it borders on land belonging to Mühlhausendorf and in the south the tributary Konka (actually one arm of the Dnepr) formed a natural limit. In the west a small Russian-Ukrainian village by the name of Dremajlovka later was founded. There were then only a few kilometers to the Jewish settlement of Neu-Berislav - just outside the town of Berislav. The only road from the monastery Bizjukov in the north to Berislav ran through all these small villages. When Judge Sjikov arrived for inspection in the autumn of 1806 he saw that the new colonists here had built their homes only in two rows along the road and he then said:

You have built your village like a winding snake, all the houses side by side, thus the village shall be called Schlangendorf (Zmejevka, the Snake-village).

Obviously the colonists had not been working according to the master plan which had been sent to them from Jekaterinoslav. Of the 19 families that arrived here 15 came from Prussia, three from Pomerania and one from Silesia. The immigrants had gathered in Jekaterinoslav at the new-year of 1805 and the Fürsorgekomitee chose the secretary Peter Schmidt to be the guide. On their way down the party fell victim to an accident. Most of their belongings were destroyed as several wagons caught fire and an elderly couple died of their injuries. Via Berislav this group also came to Gammalsvenskby, miserably and without their belongings, but they just stayed the year out and then started to build their own village. The soil in Schlangendorf was better than that of the other German villages and therefore the inhabitants also soon reached a higher standard of living than their neighbors. Because of this they looked upon themselves as a bit better than the others.

Klosterdorf

In May 1805 the last group arrived. It consisted of some 30 Catholic families who had followed the river Danube towards Romania and then gone eastwards into the Ukraine. Out of these eight had their origin in Bohemia, seven in Mainz on the Rhine, eight in Baden and seven in the Palatinates. They were gathered as a group in Jekaterinoslav, got their instructions there and then continued to the Swedish district under the personal supervision of both Contenius and Sjikov. They first had to stay in the deserted cave-houses north of Gammalsvenskby that had been built by now deceased Swedish colonists. They soon separated this village from Gammalsvenskby and built more cottages to the north. Because of the monastery situated just north of the village it got the name Klosterdorf (the Monastery-village). With them these immigrants brought a large number of horses. Almost every man had his own horse and the wealthier had two or even more. The inhabitants of Klosterdorf were never that wealthy as their neighbors in the south. The Swedes also always remembered that Swedes had built a part of Klosterdorf and even if the Swedes later (until 1872) claimed the right to all the land of the Swedish district, they especially wanted to get rid of the Catholics.

Gammalsvenskby in the yearly 1800's

In the year 1804 the total population in Gammalsvenskby was 188: 97 men and 91 women. Together they owned 80 horses, 612 cattle, 692 sheep, 233 pigs, 23 plows, 33 harrows, 37 wagons, 30 spinning wheels and 21 looms. There were 32 farms in 1805 and the masters were:

1. Mats Hansson (Koppers), 2. Anna Christansdotter (Mutas), 3. Anna Nilsson (should be Hindriksdotter, Annas), 4. Mathias Nilsson (Buskas), 5. Hindrik Christiansson (Utas), 6. Andreas Christiansson (Buskas 1), 7. Johan Mickelsson (Tinis), 8. Andreas Vesterberg, 9. Lars Mathisson (Martis), 10. Christian Johansson (Röicks), 11. Marten Tönisson (Röicks), 12. Christian Christiansson (Knutas), 13. Mathias Jöransson (Röicks), 14. Mats Magnusson (Kotz), 15. Greis Matsson (Hinas), 16. Mathias Jakobsson (Röicks), 17. Greis Bertelsson (Takne), 18. Mathias Andersson (Kitas), 19. Mickel Greisson (Albers), 20. Simon Magnusson (Kitas), 21. Simon Mathiasson (Hoas), 22. Mickel Mathiasson (Takne), 23. Peter Simonsson (Larsas), 24. Johan Magnusson (Takne), 25. Johann Sergis, 26. Karl Herman, 27. Grigorij Grisckewitsch, 28. Sophie Solugaewa, 29. Frantz-Benedikt Maskewitsch, 30. Wassilij Rotakow, 31. Martin Morewitsch and No 32 Johann Schilling. (From: Jan Utas, Svenskbyborna page 286-87.)

Gammalsvenskby had 140 inhabitants in 1795, 188 in 1804, 200 in 1808, 200 in 1816, 204 in 1821, 239 in

1834, 304 in 1850, 326 in 1864, 456 in 1870, 565 in 1882, 710 in 1904, 809 in 1918, 895 in 1927 and 946 in 1929.

The biggest problem with the new-founded villages was that there was no space for enlarging any of the villages. The whole area that had been donated to the Swedes in 1781/82 had been to a size of 12.000 Desiatins. 8.700 of these were arable land and 2.588 pastureland. 430 Desiatins of land was given for the use of the church and the school. (The 1000 Desiatins that was personally donated to Rev. Europaeus are not counted.) In 1805 the land was measured again and now divided among the four villages. Gammalsvenskby got only 2.701 Desiatins of arable land and 545 Desiatins of pastureland and the area of the village was now limited to a strip that was 1½ Verst wide and 12 Verst long, stretching itself from the river and westwards up towards the prairie. This means that the Swedes after 1805 only had access to a quarter of the land they had been given from the beginning. They had received three German villages of almost the same size as their own as neighbors for better or worse. It was only a few decades before the shortage of land among the Swedes began to be a real problem. What was positive, though, was that together they could fight the bandits that used to ride in now and then and plunder and threaten the colonists. They could also assist each other in times of drought, bad harvest and famine.

Until 1828 the Swedish Lutheran district was without clergymen. Ministers who came traveling to the district took care of the weddings, but baptisms and funerals had to take place under supervision of the local organist and schoolteacher (in one person) of the different villages. The clergymen who arrived then acknowledged the acts. Between 1789 and 1800 Reverend Hiob Adolph Kirschmann from Josefstal near Jekaterinoslav was the one who was responsible for this and between 1800 and 1828 it was Reverend Biller from the same place. In 1828 the district of Alt-Schwedendorf was then organized as an annex-congregation to the church in Josefstal. From now on the vicar there, Reverend Laurentz Steinmann had to visit the three Lutheran villages at least 8 to 14 days a year. For this he should be paid 97 Rubles and 14 Kopecks - an amount that was quite high for the colonists.

In the beginning of the 1830's only 50 of the 220 inhabitants in Gammalsvenskby were born in the 18th century, that is to say more than 30 years old. The average age was in fact very low and the memories of Dagö and the life there vanished soon, as did the traditions and the way to dress. More and more the Swedes looked and behaved like the Germans in the neighboring villages.

The one who served the most as a symbol of the distant island of Dagö and the life there was the old organist and schoolteacher Mats Magnusson (born in 1756). Another old man in the village was Mats Nilsson (Buskas) who was born in Röicks in 1761. His mother was one of the few Estonians who were married to a Swede, Aet (daughter of the Estonian farmer Issapello Jaak) from the village of Issapello, south of the Swedish area on Dagö. Then Mickel Greisson (Albers) who was born in 1765 in the village of Muddas was one of few who became quite old. Among the women there were Maria Matsdotter (Mutas, born in 1761) and Margareta Larsdotter (Larsas, born in 1767) who were the oldest. The old life was still very much present in the language, the furnishing of the homes, the songs and the folk-music and the ways to celebrate the yearly high festivals as also the traditions connected with the baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funerals who all were the same as on Dagö. Furthermore a number of tales, legends, myths, proverbs and games were kept in remembrance, especially a number of stories about the freedom fighter from the 17th century, Kitas-Irja. In Gammalsvenskby they were telling each other about how Kitas-Irja made a trip on foot to St. Petersburg to seek the rights at the court of the Empress Katherine II. According to the folk-tradition Kitas-Irja should have been living just before the time of the emigration. In reality he was one hundred years older, but the memory of the great freedom fighter lived on. The story goes that the men of Count Stenbock attacked Kitas-Irja on his way back from St. Petersburg. He was robbed of the charter, beaten up and then outlawed by the court. He thereafter had to live in the woods so long that he actually turned into a wolf. In the shape of a wolf Kitas-Irja roved the woods and was a danger to all living creatures. But, if whoever met the wolf could say in Swedish that he recognized him as Kitas-Irja, the wolf-man would not harm him or her. As a story used in order to frighten the children it worked well, although the historical facts were a bit mixed up. The story showed the brutality of the nobility in a correct way - and this was perhaps that what was the most important thing.

In the early 19th century the teaching of the children took place in the teacher's home. The school was compulsory to all children between 10 and 16 years of age. The children learned to read Swedish, some geography, some German and Russian and to know the Lutheran catechism by heart. The knowledge of writing was bad, in the 1850's only three of the men in the village were known to be able to write. The job as a schoolmaster (and parish clerk and organist as well) was inherited within the Kotz-family. Between

1782 and 1817 Mats Magnusson (1756-1839) was the schoolteacher (which he had been already on Dagö), then his son Kristian Matsson (1793-1855) was the teacher between 1817 and 1852) and then his grandson Hindrik Kristiansson (1816-1887) worked as a teacher between 1854 and 1857. Later a nephew of Hindrik Kotz, Simon Simonsson Kotz (1862-1946), was working as the parish clerk and organist and also as a schoolteacher some periods. The members of this family along with the Sigalet-family (especially: Andreas Hindriksson 1844-1913) were those who also were the most gifted musicians in the village.

The first contacts with other Swedish-speaking people

In 1835 a Swedish speaking pharmacist had attended a job in Kherson and from there he got in contact with the inhabitants of Gammalsvenskby. He writes a report for a Swedish newspaper in Finland that describes the colony. There were 40 families at that time and totally 208 adult inhabitant in the village. Pharmacist Nymann did not know where the Swedes came from and thus he assumed that they had come from Finland. He then invited a group of the Gammalsvenskby-people to come to Kherson. Three men and two women came and the pharmacist arranged a prayer meeting in his home. They sang hymns and prayed together and then the Swedes went home to their village. It is possible that Nymann was the one who made arrangements for the Swedish village to get hymnbooks and bibles as well as some spelling-books from Finland. After this 13 years elapsed before the Swedes had resumed contact with the Swedish-speaking world outside. A Baltic-German scientist, Carl Russwurm from Hapsal, was working on a major book on the subject of Estonian Swedes when he got on the track of the "lost" Swedes in the Ukraine. No one in Estonia had heard anything from these Swedes in 60 years. Via German preachers in the Ukraine Russwurm found out that the Swedes had survived the emigration and that their colony still existed in the Kherson-area. In 1848 Russwurm wrote a letter in Swedish with some questions to the Swedes. A whole year passed before the answer came. It was a long account of the situation in the colony and a request for help. Carl Russwurm sent the letter to a newspaper in Finland, Helsingfors Tidningar, where it was published on October 12, 1850. Two years later an associate professor of history from Finland, Wilhelm Lagus, visited Gammalsvenskby. He found out that the inhabitants here spoke Russian and German fluently and therefore he waited to expose his own nationality. He wanted to listen to the old dialect they spoke among themselves before he let them know that he understood them. He then waited until he was alone with the mother of the village-elder Simon Andreasson Hoas (1816-1900), the old Maria Matsdotter (Kitas, born in 1795). She got a real shock as the fine guest suddenly spoke to her in Swedish. As her daughter-in-law came in the leading people in the village were called to the house: the schoolteacher Kristian Matsson Kotz and both the vestrymen, Mats Greisson Hinas and Petter Kristiansson Knutas. Lagus wrote a long report for Swedish newspapers in Finland and an article which was printed in 1852 in a book that was published in Sweden by the editor of the newspaper Aftonbladet, August Sohlman. The title of the book was: "Om lemningar af swänsk nationalitet i Ehstland" (About reminiscences of Swedish nationality in Estonia). After this the ice was broken and the inhabitants of Gammalsvenskby stayed in regular contact with other Swedish-speaking people, both in Finland and Sweden.

The Crimean War 1853-1856

In October the year after Wilhelm Lagus' visit to Gammalsvenskby, the Crimean War broke out. In July 1853 Russia had annexed the small principalities of Moldavia and Valakia that were under Turkish sovereignty. The Turks then attacked the Russian troops, but they were defeated. In March 1854 France and Great Britain went in as Turkish partners to maintain the balance of power in the area. Also the kingdom of Sardinia sided with Turkey. In April 1854 the allied powers tried to invade Russia through the peninsula of Crimea. Despite several victories in the battles of Alma, Balaklava and Inkerman the Allied could not use their superiority to conquer Russia because of their internal problems. In September 1855 they could however take the Russian stronghold of Sevastopol after almost a year of siege. After this the Russian army was on constant retreat and in the peace-treaty of Paris of 1856 Russia was forced to return the annexed principalities to Turkey. The Russian Emperor Nikolai I had died in 1855, which made the negotiations a bit easier. This war was one of the first modern kinds of war. Heavy artillery had proved itself to be more efficient than the cavalry-attacks of the old type. Steam-driven warships with long-range guns were also commonly used and field-reporters and cameramen followed into the footsteps of the armies. Florence Nightingale became famous as the one who introduced a new kind of wartime nursing. Gammalsvenskby was situated not more than 20 Swedish miles (200 km) from the front and the heavy fighting and the village was immediately affected by the war. The Russian authorities that turned it into a military-hospital that was constantly full immediately seized the new big school building that had been built

in 1854. Then there was the billeting of soldiers. Only during the heavy fighting during the period of March to May 1855 as many as 22.443 soldiers were billeted in the Swedish district. In almost every home there were groups of up to 30 soldiers lodged. These soldiers came to rest a few days, before they were sent back to the front again. 260 wagons were requisitioned by the military and the men of the Swedish district had to work as charioteers of these wagons to the front-area and back. The wounded soldiers in the cramped hospital of Gammalsvenskby were easy victims of different diseases. As usual in these days there were more soldiers that died of diseases than who actually got killed in action. It was obvious that the diseases would soon spread to the civilian population. Between June 5 and July 13 thirteen Swedes died of cholera. The next disease to be spread was a typhoid fever that killed its first victim November 3, 1855. Until April 25 the following year all together 36 people in the village of Gammalsvenskby alone died of this disease. This typhoid fever killed people of all ages and totally wiped out some families. Almost 50 people died in a village that in the year 1850 did not have more than 304 inhabitants! After the Russian defeat at Eupatoria in February of 1855 there were plans made by the Russian Government to evacuate the colonies along the lower part of the river Dnepr. These measures were never taken but the plan was to reappear more than once in the history of Gammalsvenskby.

As Wilhelm Lagus also had reported in 1852 there were already plans made to change the structure of Gammalsvenskby. In 1848 the superior-mayor of the district, Wilhelm Tomm from Schlangendorf, had forced the Swedes to give some of their collective land to the closest neighboring villages.

Representatives from the "Fürsorge-Kommittee" had also drawn up a new plan for the village. In the spring of 1853 Inspector Kornies showed up to lead the reform locally. The plan was to make the streets of Taknegårda and Nealinia wider and at the same time move every second farm from the sites on these streets. Northbound from the church there had earlier been a narrow and winding village-road. This road was also widened now and on both sides up to the borderline against Klosterdorf there were new sites measured and the area was called Nibien (The new village). The sites here were made as wide as the ones at Taknegårda and Nealinia. The narrow street that used to lead directly from the church square to the point that was called "Donses-spitsen" vanished totally except for a short bit at the school-building. The conservative farmers of Gammalsvenskby did not approve of these changes in the beginning.

The village had partly burned down in 1835 and the buildings were now in good condition and the fruit-trees that had been planted were now actually starting to bear fruit. They stayed silent as inspector Kornies asked for their permission to re-arrange the village. According to the village-tradition it was the old drunkard Peter Matsson Kotz who alone made the decision of the village by answering: YES!?, in the wrong moment. The Crimean War was to postpone the change, but in a period of five years after the war the village was totally re-built. There were now three wide streets like boulevards in the village and some minor streets crossed these. Especially Taknegårda had now turned into a 40-meter-wide boulevard with newly planted trees (acacias) on both sides. In 1856 there were 34 farms sites with the size of 128 x 64 meters in the village. At the riverside of Nealinia the crofters' cottages were still scattered here and there.

This eventful year the obligation of every family to have a family name was pronounced by a decree of the authorities. It was quite easy to arrange in Gammalsvenskby, since many of the families had preserved their old naming since the times in Dagö. In everyday use people were still called after their village, part of village or farm-name on their former home-island. The people of Gammalsvenskby took the following family names in 1856:

- Albers 1 : the descendants of Simon Kristiansson from Röicks on Dagö.
- Albers 2 : the descendants of Mickel Greisson from Muddas village on Dagö.
- Annas : the descendants of the widow Anna Hindriksdotter from Kiddas (+ Röicks Christian Greisson.).
- Buskas : the descendants of Mats Nilsson from Röicks; the part called Buskas-haken.
- Hansas : the descendants of Hans Jakobsson from the village of Koidma on Dagö.
- Herman : the descendants of Karl Herman from Danzig in Prussia.
- Hernberg : the descendants of the soldier Anders Andersson Hörnberg from Sweden.
- Hinas : the descendants of Greis Matsson from Koidma on Dagö.
- Hoas 1 : the descendants of Simon Matsson from Röicks on Dagö.
- Hoas 2: : the descendants of Jakob Kristiansson from Röicks on Dagö.
- Knutas : the descendants of Kristian Kristiansson from Muddas/Åkernäs on Dagö.
- Koppers : the descendants of Mats Hansson from Koidma on Dagö.
- Kotz : the descendants of Mats Magnusson from Kotst on Dagö.

Larsas : the descendants of the widow Margareta Larsdotter from Röicks on Dagö.
 Malmas : the descendants of Anders Hansson from Tarris on Dagö.
 Martis : the descendants of Lars Mathisson from Kaust on Dagö.
 Maskewitz: the descendants of Frantz Maskewitz from Danzig in Prussia.
 Mutas : the descendants of Mickel Jöransson from Kiddas on Dagö.
 Norberg : the descendants of the soldier Mats Karlsson Norberg from Sweden.
 Schilling : the descendants of Johann Schilling from Danzig in Prussia.
 Sergis : the descendants of Kristof Sergis from Danzig in Prussia.
 Sigalet 1 : the descendants of Anders Jöransson from Röicks on Dagö.
 Sigalet 2 : the descendants of Hindrik Petersson from the village of Sigalet on Dagö.
 Takne : the descendants of Christian Mickelsson from Röicks on Dagö.
 Tinis : the descendants of the widow Maria Tönnisdotter from Röicks on Dagö.
 Utas 1 : the descendants of Hindrik Kristiansson from Röicks on Dagö.
 Utas 2 : the descendants of Peter Pavelsson from Röicks (and Kotst) on Dagö.
 Vesterberg: the descendants of the soldier Anders Vesterberg from Västerås in Sweden.

The descendants of the Swedish soldiers and the colonists from Danzig, who all had family names before 1856, naturally kept these names. To these families mentioned above later came some German families who through marriage became a part of the Swedish community: Dickhaut, Portje and Ulrich.

One of the biggest problems to the villages at this time was the water supply on the higher ground above the river. Most of the fields were situated up here. As late as in 1857 there were only one well on the pastureland out in the prairie. In 1847 an attempt had been made to introduce sheep raising on a large scale. A specialist from Germany was hired and this man, Christian Heidelmann, married Elisabeth Karlsdotter Herman and settled down in Gammalsvenskby. This first attempt did not last long and in the early 1850's the villages leased out the land to the farmer Wilhelm Eiswirth from Klosterdorf. Eiswirth rented the 300 Desiatins at a rate of 138 Rubles and 57 ½ Kopecks for the coming period of 12 years. Eiswirth became a wealthy man, which caused a good deal of jealousy, and after the 12 years had elapsed he was not allowed to continue. The sheep-farm was divided into small parts of 12 Desiatins each and these parts were handed out to the landless people of the villages. The crofters of Gammalsvenskby received 15 of the 25 parcels and the rest were given to Germans. This did not solve the problem of the growing number of landless people. In 1860 there were already 92 landless families in the district with a total number of 394 family members. These people without farmland could make a living as farm hands or as craftsmen of different kinds in the villages.

New contacts with the world outside

In the summer of 1858 Gammalsvenskby got a strange visit. A man by the name of Sylvander came to the village. He presented himself as a schoolteacher from Finland who had read about the village in the newspaper and got interested. Sylvander claimed that he had been a teacher and a parish clerk in his home country and that he now wanted to help the inhabitants here. The village council immediately employed him as such and Hindrik Kotz had to step aside. Reverend Steinmann confirmed the decision on his next visit to the village. At a joyful and wet night at the inn of Gammalsvenskby owned by the Sigalet family the confession suddenly came: Sylvander had been a reverend in Finland but had been sacked because of his heavy drinking. How convenient that there was a need for a schoolteacher with an academic record here. Hindrik Kotz was in fact only happy to be able to retire to the fishing that he liked the best. After a while though, the drinking habits of Sylvander became a problem in Gammalsvenskby too. Not because him not doing his job, no he was in fact a brilliant teacher, but he demanded a raise in order to pay his debts to the innkeeper. The village council was not against this, but in return for this raise they demanded that Sylvander should get married and settle properly in the village. Obviously Sylvander thought that this was too much to ask of him and one morning soon afterwards his rented room was found empty and the man was gone. In the autumn of 1859 Hindrik Kotz was back again as a teacher.

The year 1860 turned out to be an eventful one for the people of Gammalsvenskby. Their struggle for their rights to the land that had been given to the first colonists of 1782 started again. The reason was that the shortage of land had become worse. Almost a hundred families in the district were without land, and the number of farmers who owned a whole farm of 60 Desiatins was getting smaller and smaller. In Gammalsvenskby they especially tried to get rid of the people of Klosterdorf. Swedes had partly built this village and there was no natural borderline between the two villages. The worst antagonists of the Swedes were to be found in Schlangendorf though, where the people openly declared that the Swedes would have vanished totally without the assistance of the culturally more advanced Germans. This year the Lutheran

Consistory made the decision that the Lutheran inhabitants of the district were numerous enough to form a parish of their own. The first vicar, Adam Moritz Strauss, arrived in December. His parish consisted of the German villages of Mühlhausendorf (340 inhabitants) and Schlangendorf (283 inhabitants), the Swedish village of Gammalsvenskby (326 inhabitants) and then some Lutheran inhabitants of other (Catholic) villages (142 persons). In all there were 1.091 members of the Lutheran congregation in Alt-Schwedendorf. Reverend Strauss immediately began to build a new vicarage, situated right between the villages of Mühlhausendorf and Schlangendorf. Then he tried to encourage his parishioners to build a new church. In the German villages there were the schoolhouses to preach in and in Gammalsvenskby there was the old wooden church still in use. In Gammalsvenskby Rev. Strauss preached every third Sunday - in German of course, because he did not speak Swedish at all. Strauss recommended that the new church should be built near the vicarage. The Swedes did not approve of this, since they thought that the old center of the district was Gammalsvenskby. Then Strauss sacked Hindrik Kotz and hired a German schoolteacher by the name of Gruschewsky. Gruschewsky worked as a teacher here between 1862 and 1866, in spite of the protests from the Swedes that the teaching was conducted solely in German. Because of Strauss' dominant personality several disagreements led to his resignation in 1866. Hindrik Kotz was then again hired as teacher in Gammalsvenskby. One year the district was without a reverend. The Consistory in St.Petersburg then recommended Rev. Julius Alexander Nordgren as the new vicar. Nordgren came from Estonia and was born on Ormsö, the neighboring island to Dagö. Nordgren could also promise that he would preach in Swedish to them every Sunday, if they desired. Nordgren was elected vicar and was well received in the district. After a while he became more and more unpopular among the Swedes. At first he wanted the Swedes to assist in the construction of the new church next to the vicarage because he was serving them in Swedish.

The old church in Gammalsvenskby would then be demolished. The Swedes responded that there was no guarantee that his successors would be able to preach in Swedish, and that they then risked losing their church if they complied with his request. In 1868 Hindrik Kotz was sidestepped once more and the trained German teacher Adolf Ey was hired. The general atmosphere between the Swedes and the Germans was quite bad after this. The high-mayor of the district had been a German since 1805 and the present one was Johann Wöhrle from Mühlhausendorf. Wöhrle was born in 1813 in Friedenthal on the Crimean peninsula and was the son of a German Lutheran colonist from Württemberg. Wöhrle was overtly anti-Swedish and he was the one who was behind the reorganization of the land that belonged to the villages. It was the mayor of Gammalsvenskby, Kristian Hindriksson Utas, who came up with an idea that would make the influence of the German Lutherans less dominant. He suggested that the Swedes would form an alliance with the Catholics of Klosterdorf. If the people of Gammalsvenskby and Klosterdorf voted together they could overthrow the present mayor. In 1869 his Swedish-German coalition voted for Wilhelm Eiswirth (the former sheep keeper) from Klosterdorf to be the new high-mayor. He was excellent at his job as the Swedes saw it. The German Lutherans however spoke about treason against the right religion.

In October 1869 Reverend Nordgren had had enough and as the post as vicar on Ormsö was vacant he decided to return to Estonia. After this the congregation was without a vicar again for a period of three years. During the summer of 1871 a new vicar was at last appointed: Reverend Julius Nikolaus Peters. His Swedish was not good, but at least he was able to read in Swedish every sixth Sunday - on his other visits to Gammalsvenskby (he came every third Sunday) he preached in German. After several German schoolteachers, the young Mats Pettersson Annas (born in 1845) attended the post as teacher between 1872 and 1873. Mats Annas had been the most gifted pupil of Sylvander during his short stay and Mats was very talented. Unfortunately he was also very sensitive and was hard of hearing. He took an argument about his salary as a vote of no confidence against him personally and then resigned.

The Russification

In 1871 the Russian authorities replaced the Fürsorge-arrangement with the institution of "Zemstvo" - the Russian community. The Russian government wanted to get rid of the State within the State that the Germans had established. The Russians then replaced German as administrative language with the Russian language. The system with one Oberschultz (High-mayor) for the district and Schultzen (mayors) for the villages was also replaced by the Russian equivalents of "Starsjina" and "Starost". Furthermore the system with the village as owner of the land and the farmers as partners who had shares of different size was abandoned. The farmers now became owners of a certain piece of surveyed land, which they could do what they wanted with - sell it or put up as security on loans etc. The Government sent out new documents of ownership and the Swedes now saw their last chance to change of influencing the ownership of the land in the district. The Swedes had received a donation of their land through a Ukase and this Ukase could only be revoked by a new Ukase. To get rid of the Germans would however require

legal actions, which would be quite expensive for the Swedes. There had been bad times for the farmers of Gammalsvenskby, so they decided to wait until better times. During this hesitation the German farmers of the neighboring villages got the papers that stated that they were the true owners of their farmland! The inhabitants of Mühlhausendorf and Schlangendorf then started to quarrel about the ownership of one of the small islets in the river. This conflict was dragged into court and the people of Schlangendorf were sentenced to pay 1.498 Rubles in damages for illegal use of the islet during the past years. The inhabitants of the both villages, many of whom were related, by this lost their lust to cooperate in the construction of a new church.

Gammalsvenskby had 40 farmers with a full-size farm (60 Desiatins) and 17 farmers (or actually crofters) with minor farms (Russian: Burlak, German: Freiwirth). The crofters lived mainly by the riverside of the two streets of Nealinia and Nibigatna. A Burlak had 12 Desiatins of land. Soon after this a division of the full-size farms into two parts started. Re-measuring of the land should be made every tenth year and this could easily be turned into a real partition of the land.

In 1874 the Russian government decided that the foreign colonists also had to provide recruits to the Russian army since they were now landowners. The role model was the Prussian army that had conquered France in the war of 1870-71. The first Swedes from Gammalsvenskby who were drafted into the army were Johan Pettersson Utas and Petter Irjasson Buskas. They both had to serve as soldiers in the war between Russia and Turkey in 1877-78 and were both awarded medals for their excellent services. The duty in the army was six years in active service and nine in the reserve. During the period of reserve duty you would be called in to obtain further training a few months every year, but you could stay at home in between these periods. The Germans and the Swedes looked upon this military duty as a violation against the rights, which they had been given as colonists. They had been granted a hundred years of exemption from such duty. Now young men started to emigrate from Russia to North America with their families to avoid life as a soldier. The first Swede to emigrate from Gammalsvenskby to Canada, was Hindrik Kristiansson Utas with family in 1886.

In 1879 reverend Peters got tired of traveling around in his parish, which had expanded with some Lutheran settlements in the west. His salary was lousy - only 171 Rubles a year. He moved to a German Lutheran congregation in Bessarabia and Alt-Schwedendorf was without a vicar for eight years. Reverend Guido Pingoud from Kronau visited the parish for a week during 1879, and from 1880 Reverend Hugo Plohmann from Nikolajev visited the parish a week once a year. It did happen though that young couples who wanted to get married, traveled the 300 kilometers to Nikolajev and back to let Plohmann marry them instead of waiting until the minister came on his yearly visit to the district in the autumn. From 1883 to 1885 Reverend Johannes Von Törne from Kronau made these yearly visits to the district of Alt-Schwedendorf. Maybe it was to catch the interest of a new vicar that the idea to build a new church was brought up again. Both the Swedes and the Germans raised some money for this purpose. It now turned into some kind of competition. In 1880 the Germans had 6.353 Rubles in their construction fund and the Swedes had 5.532. Both parts knew that this was not enough, but they thought that the nationality of the vicar might be relying on whose church was to be built the first. In the summer of 1881 the Germans could lay down the first cornerstone of their church, but after three years they ran out of money and the construction stopped. Thanks to help from abroad the Swedes could continue and they even managed to get the master-builder Simeon Sokolan to leave the German project and attend theirs. In 1881 Gammalsvenskby got a visit from Finland. The scholar Herman Albert Vendell from Helsingfors stayed for quite a period to work on his book on the dialects spoken among the Swedes of Finland and Estonia. The next year Vendell sent a student of his, Konstatin Reinhold Wahlbeck, to work two years as a teacher in the village. After this Vendell's younger brother came down to continue this work for yet another year. Thanks to Vendell's good connections more than 20.000 Rubles were raised among Swedes in Finland and Sweden to help the people in Gammalsvenskby build a church of their own! At Midsummer 1885 the new church, the church of John the Baptist, was ready. In 1887 the German church between Schlangendorf and Mühlhausendorf was ready as well and was named the Church of Saint Peter and Paul. In 1887 Johann Eduard Schwindt from the formerly Swedish province of Ingermanland became the new vicar. Schwindt was German, but had some knowledge of Swedish. Schwindt stayed for two years and was then succeeded by Theodor Wilhelm Hermann Von Törne, who was also born in the Baltic region. Von Törne stayed for fifteen years - a rather long period at this time! The coming period of 30 years was the best ever in the history of Gammalsvenskby. Peace and wealth were at hand. A good connection with Finland and Sweden brought the help that was needed to maintain the teaching in the Swedish language and gave the people the feeling that they were no longer living at the outback of the civilization. The farmers had good times and could rebuild their houses and even put tiled roofs or tin roofs on their

houses. A number of new houses were also constructed and the outlook of the village was very nice.

The early Canadian pioneers from Gammalsvenskby

The only clouds on the horizon, for the people in Gammalsvenskby at the end of the 19th century, were the military service for the boys and the shortage of land to cultivate. People started to leave the Ukraine for Canada in the 1880's because of these reasons. In 1886 Hindrik Kristiansson Utas (born in 1854) emigrated with his German wife Beata and their five children. Hindrik Utas settled down in the town of Wetaskiwin in Alberta and worked as a craftsman there at first. Others of these early settlers were:

2. Kristian Pettersson Albers (born in 1838) with wife and 7 adult children - to Alberta in 1890.
3. Mats Jakobsson Hansas (born in 1863) with wife and 4 children - to Vancouver in 1891.
4. Johannes Andreasson Malmas (born in 1863) with wife and 6 children - to Alberta in 1889.
5. 5. Andreas Hindriksson Sigalet (born in 1844) with wife and 7 adult children - to Vernon B.C. in 1889.
6. 6. Johan Kristiansson Tinis (born in 1861) with wife and 3 children - to Alberta in 1890. Son-in-law of no. 2.
7. 7. Johan Pettersson Utas (born in 1862) with his wife - to Vernon B.C. in 1889.
8. 8. Josef Pettersson Utas (born in 1850) with wife and 7 children - to Alberta in 1889. Brother-in-law of no. 1.
9. no. 1.

At this time there was free land (70 ha) to get in the district of Assibinoia, between Saskatchewan and Alberta. Andreas Sigalet and his adult sons found their way along the newly constructed railroad down towards the US. Hindrik Utas later moved northwards, but his sons stayed in Wetaskiwin and got themselves farms in Bears Hill. Here came Josef Utas, Johan Malmas, Johan Tinis, Mats Hansas and Kristian Albers also to settle down. There was a close contact between the families of these early settlers. After some ten years others followed in their tracks:

9. 9. Mats Pettersson Albers (b in 1853) with wife and 9 children - to British Columbia in 1897. Brother of no. 2.
10. 10. Johan Hindriksson Sigalet (b in 1847) with wife, child and stepdaughter - to B.C. in 1899. Brother of no. 5.
11. 11. Johan Simonsson Sigalet (born in 1862) with wife and four children - to British Columbia in 1899.
12. 12. Hindrik Simonsson Sigalet (born in 1866) with wife and a daughter - to B.C. in 1899. Brother of no. 11.
13. 13. Petter Andreasson Albers (born in 1883) - to Los Angeles, USA in 1900.
14. 14. Mats Andreasson Utas (born in 1873) with his wife - to N.Y. in USA in 1900, died there in 1901.
15. 15. Johan Andreasson Utas (born in 1880) as a widower - to British Columbia in 1902.
16. 16. Julius Matsson Annas (born in 1882) with his sister Anna - to British Columbia in 1904.
17. 17. Gustav Johansson Annas (born in 1892) - to British Columbia in 1904.
18. 18. Mats Matsson Knutas (born in 1870) - to British Columbia in 1904.
19. 19. Mats Greisson Norberg (born in 1880) with his wife - to British Columbia in 1905.
20. 20. Teodor Andreasson Malmas (born in 1873) with wife and two children - to Alta B.C. in 1910.
21. 21. Jakob Mickelsson Mutas (born in 1880) with wife and four children - British Columbia in 1912.
22. 22. Anders Kristiansson Buskas (born in 1885) with sister, wife and daughter - to Alberta in 1912.
23. 23. Johannes Kristiansson Buskas (born in 1887) - to Alberta in 1912 with his brother (married there).
24. 24. Johan Andersson Annas (born in 1862) with wife and three children - to British Columbia in 1913.
25. 25. Simon Andersson Hernberg (born in 1877) with wife and two daughters - to Alberta 1913.
26. 26. Kristian, son of Kristina Hernberg (born in 1875) - to Alberta in 1913.
27. 27. Johannes Simonsson Hoas (born in 1895) - to Vancouver, B.C. in 1913 (married there).
28. 28. Anders Matsson Utas (Barkvall, born in 1884) with a daughter and his sister Walba - to Toronto in 1926.

The Sigalet brothers found the way as far as to British Columbia, where they settled in the Okanagan valley. There was also free land to get at the beautiful Shuswapriver and around the lake of Mabel, where Mats Albers and Johan H. Sigalet settled down. Many of the immigrants to Canada stayed in touch with their relatives in Gammalsvenskby, which also led to an interest in 1929 for the rest of the people from Gammalsvenskby to move to Canada from Sweden. The family of Johan Tinis (no. 6 above) had for

example a close contact with their relatives in the Ukraine through letters.

Gammalsvenskby around 1900

In Gammalsvenskby this emigration eased the pressure on the land that should feed the rest of the inhabitants. New farming methods were also introduced (new types of plows, locomobiles etc.) here. Some new wells were dug out which made it possible to water the drylands out on the prairie. In 1890 the crayfish in Dnepr got the plague and crawled up on the shores and died in thousands. To this moment these crayfish had served as food for both people and animals during the famines, so the plague caused a serious problem. Some farmers now started to grow sweet corn. This crop gave a rather good harvest even during dry periods and the straw could be used as cattle-food. In the summer of 1895 the farmer's son Kristoffer Thomasson Hoas returned from the German training college for clergymen and schoolteachers in Sarata in Bessarabia (Moldavia) where he had been studying for four years. He was immediately chosen to be teacher, parish clerk and organist as well as village-clerk. Kristoffer Hoas had started his work in the village, which would make him the leader of Svenskyborna for the rest of his life. He had studied Russian and German and he used both languages excellent both in reading and writing. He was also good at Swedish, geography and history. Kristoffer Hoas had also started to write to people in Finland and Sweden who became his close pen friends during the years to come. In the summer of 1899 it was possible for Kristoffer Hoas and the wealthy farmer Petter Irjasson Buskas to visit Sweden. It turned out to be a useful trip for both men who studied farming and gardening and attended some courses at a so-called folk high school. In the autumn of the same year the needlework mistress and nurse Emma Skarstedt from Malmö in Sweden arrived in Gammalsvenskby to help out. She was sent by the Society of Female Mission workers (KMA) in Sweden who also paid her a small salary. In 1897 the farmers had started to plant fruit-trees. The growing plants and trees now surrounded the houses. Along the ravine towards the graveyard vines were planted. The vineyards of the district could a year with a good harvest produce as much as 40.000 liters of wine. Hoas' and Buskas' visit to Sweden had brought some new ideas of improvement in the farming to the village as well. The coalition with Klosterdorf gave Gammalsvenskby its first high-mayor of the district in 1899, as Mats Irjasson Buskas was elected. Mats Buskas kept this position until 1907, when he retired and handed over the position to his brother Petter Irjasson Buskas. In 1899, 1900 and 1901 there were years of bad crops. The Swedes now got an opportunity to lease land from the monastery of Bisjukov (600 ha), but the crops failed here too. However the abbot then showed mercy did not collect the money for this leasing - 15.000 Rubles! It was worse for the 55 farmers who leased land from a Russian state-owned manor. Their debt, 20.569 Rubles, had to be paid. Several farmers had to get bank loans that carried 10-12% interest. The village as a collective had to pay the 1.000 Rubles that the leaseholders were not able to raise. Then there was a fire in the village! In 1903 a fire broke out at the farm of Mats Irjasson Buskas at the lower part of Taknegårda and several houses at this part of Taknegårda and the opposite street of Nealinia turned into ashes. The insurance covered a loss of 1.000 Rubles, but the people estimated the losses to be worth at least 14.000 Rubles. The rebuilding of these farms cost a great deal as well in efforts as in real money to the people of Gammalsvenskby. The teacher of Schlangendorf, Wilhelm Isert, published a booklet about the Swedish district in 1904. Here are some facts about the four villages in the district:

1. **Gammalsvenskby:** 710 inhabitants. 2.710 Desiatins of cultivable land and 545 of uncultivable land. 501 horses, 556 cattle, 309 pigs, 75 plows, 150 harrows, 60 threshing machines and 150 wagons.
2. **Schlangendorf:** 534 inhabitants on 41 farms. 2.710 Desiatins of land. 500 horses, 400 cattle, 300 pigs, 85 plows, 120 harrows, 45 threshers, 50 steam-mills and 130 wagons.
3. **Mühlhausendorf:** 639 inhabitants on 41 farms. 2.685 Desiatins of land. 268 horses, 194 cattle, 107 pigs, 60 plows, 90 harrows, 55 threshers, 50 steam-mills and 90 wagons.
4. **Klosterdorf:** 540 inhabitants on 42 farms. 3.156 Desiatins of land. 583 horses, 421 cattle, 125 pigs, 85 plows, 140 harrows, 50 threshers, 45 steam-mills and 160 wagons.

The four villages had about the same standard of living, but there was one big difference: in the German villages they had been able to afford to get steam-mills. In Gammalsvenskby they still had to use the old windmills owned by the Knutas and the Hinas families. The population grew quite quickly in the first years of the 20th century, in spite of the fact that so many families had left for Canada.

The emigration to Siberia

Land was given out for free for colonists who wanted to move to Siberia. Some families from Gammalsvenskby had as early as in 1898 left for Siberia. In what was called the Russian Central-Asian province, between the Caspian Sea and Tashkent, there were in 1914 as many as 50.160 German colonists to be found who cultivated 332.100 Desiatins of land. Through a Ukase of June 16, 1904 the

provinces of Omsk and Tomsk were opened for colonization. In 1914 the provinces of Omsk and Tomsk in Siberia already had 44.838 German settlers who cultivated 371.000 Desiatins of land. Reverend Herman Neander from Sweden who visited Gammalsvenskby in 1911 wrote the following about the people who had left for Siberia:

In the year 1898 4 families left for Siberia, in 1907 another 4, in 1908 one, in 1909 four and in 1910 three, or all together 16 families, or as many as those who have left for America. From this country nobody has returned. Some of them have even reached certain prosperity. But, those who live in Siberia are in need despite the fact that they have got their land for nothing from the state - because the crops so often fail. It is also hard for them to find a market for their products if they get good crops. It is a long way to the towns, in many districts there are no roads and if there are any, they are in bad shape. One could now say that the emigration to Siberia has ended. Three families have returned completely ruined and they serve as a terrible warning. "Why do we have to go as far as to Siberia to die, they say, when you can die here in Gammalsvenskby?" And even though they do not own any land here, they are better off than those who have settled in Siberia are. Everyone can see how hard it is for the Swedish colony. In the year 1897 there were 70 landowners, and now there are 105. But the land is the same, the 3.246 Desiatins, and it is divided in smaller and smaller strips. Often a farmer does not have more land than he needs to support himself, but then this piece of land may have to be divided among many sons. That is why the farmers are forced to emigrate. The emigration to Siberia is the saddest one, not only because of the general sufferings they have to endure, but most of all because every family who goes there will soon lose its Swedish identity. Surrounded by foreigners, mostly by German colonists, they sooner or later become one with the foreign elements.

Among the emigrants to Siberia the following families can be mentioned:

1. 1. Petter Matsson Buskas (born in 1876) with wife and children - to Omsk before 1912.
2. 2. Simon Kristiansson Hoas (born in 1865) with wife and children - to Omsk before 1912.
3. 3. Simon Matsson Knutas (born in 1867) with wife and children - to Omsk before 1910.
4. 4. Petter Simonsson Knutas (born in 1859) with wife and children - to Privalnoye before 1912.
5. 5. Mickel Simonsson Knutas (born in 1868) with wife and children - to Privalnoye before 1912.
6. 6. Gustav Pettersson Knutas (born in 1891) and his brother Teodor (born in 1897) - to Semipalatinsk in 1911.
7. 7. Anders Matsson Knutas (born in 1876) with wife and children - to Omsk 1910.
8. 8. Kristian Johansson Koppers (born in 1877), family? - to Omsk before 1910.
9. 9. Andreas Johansson Koppers (born in 1879), family? - to Omsk before 1910.
10. 10. Johan Andreasson Mutas (born in 1866) with wife and children - to Semipalatinsk before 1910.
11. 11. Greis Andreasson Mutas (born in 1876), family? - to Semipalatinsk before 1910.
12. 12. Johan Mickelsson Mutas (born in 1867) with wife and children - to Kusnetsovo before 1910.
13. 13. Johan Mickelsson Sigalet (born in 1879), family? - to Omsk before 1910.
14. 14. Johan Johansson Tinis (born in 1879) with wife and children - to Semipalatinsk before 1910.
15. 15. Andreas Johansson Tinis (born in 1888) with wife and children - to Semipalatinsk before 1910.
16. 16. The widow Rosalia Josefsdotter Utas (born Steinhauer in 1859) with children - to Pavlodar in 1910.
17. 17. Andreas Pettersson Utas (born in 1865) with wife and children - to Semipalatinsk in 1908.
18. 18. Petter Johansson Hansas (born in 1885), family? - to Omsk in 1907.

Wars and revolutions

In 1904 a war broke out between Russia and Japan. The war was about the eastern part of China, called the Manchuria. Fifteen young men were drafted and sent to the front. The war was a disaster to the Russians, both at sea and on the battlefields a shore. The Russian fleet that had been sent all the way from the Baltic Sea was demolished in one battle in the Japanese Sea. The well-drilled Japanese armies then crushed the unorganized

and badly motivated Russian troops. In the great battle of Mukden in Manchuria Petter Andreasson Utas was killed, but the others from Gammalsvenskby managed to survive, even though several were wounded. Hindrik Kotz wrote a letter to his brother Simon from his sickbed in the field hospital near Kharbin on March 1, 1905. There were those who claimed that Hindrik Kotz only survived thanks to his religious protection letter (in German: "Himmelsbrief") that he carried on him during the fighting. The Russian defeat was officially blamed on several Russian generals of German nationality. The fact that so many Germans belonged to the nobility, and that so many of the German colonists were quite conservative and pro-

Czarist, also caused the Russians to regard them more and more seen as tools for the Czar's oppression. The situation for the colonists seemed a bit frightening. The widespread Russian hate against the foreigners grew stronger all the time. The wealthy German villages could be an easy target for Russian plundering expeditions. The idea of an armed defense among the colonists awoke.

In 1897 there had been 70 landowning farmers in Gammalsvenskby, but in 1905 there were already nearly a hundred. Only a few had full-size farms, the rest had a half-size farm with 30 Desiatins of land or less. There were also some 20 families that had no land at all. The village now had as many as 710 inhabitants. The troubled situation among the landless people did not only result in emigration - these people also began to demand a total redistribution of the land. Until now the traditional Nordic custom had been that only the oldest son inherited the farm undivided when a farmer died. The time was not ready yet for a total change of status here. In 1908 Kristoffer Hoas and Petter Buskas managed to get the village-council to vote for a parceling of the land. The farmers demanded, though, that every farmer should have all his land at one place. There was a drawing of lots and if a farmer was unlucky he got all his land out on the prairie - about 20 kilometers from the village. Discontent with this system led to it being revised in 1912 with new drawing of lots. The distance to the village was compensated in a sense since the soil was better the more further out on the prairie one got - at least as long as there was water enough. Some farmers began to build stables and barns on their distant land, but World War 1 and the following Revolution that followed interrupted it all. In 1907 Emma Skarstedt returned from Sweden where she had spent three years to cure the malaria she had got. On June 28 she then married Kristoffer Hoas who had become a widower while she was in Sweden. Together should these, the cultural elite of the village, would pilot the destiny of the village in the future. There was a rather great desire for learning in Gammalsvenskby. Besides Kristoffer Hoas, Petter Simonsson Malmas had also studied to be a teacher. Hindrik Andreasson Utas and Gustav Pettersson Utas had both studied to be clerks. Several children from the village were also sent to the Swedish school in St. Petersburg. Julia Johansdotter Buskas (born in 1900), Julius Andreasson Buskas (born in 1895), Anna-Maria Kristoffersdotter Hoas (born in 1899), Jakob Josefsson Knutas (born in 1902), Anna Andreasdotter Norberg (born in 1902) and Maria Pettersdotter Utas (born in 1902) all attended this school. Anna-Maria Hoas went there in 1914-17 and the others in 1915-17.

In 1905 the district got a new Lutheran vicar, Fritiof Slöör from Ingermanland, who was Swedish-speaking. He stayed until 1913. Then again the district was without a vicar for five years until 1918 when Gustav Witt was employed. Reverend Johannes Jundt from Kronau visited the congregation during the war but he was not very popular in Gammalsvenskby.

During the summer of 1914 the international crisis that had developed from the situation on the Balkan-peninsula and the tug-of-war there between Russia and Austria-Hungary became worse. Alliances were formed: Great Britain-France-Russia against Austria-Hungary and their allies Germany and Turkey.

In the autumn of 1914 a total mobilization of the armed forces in Russia was made. 1.5 million recruits of German (Dutch, Swiss and Swedish included) nationality were drafted into the army. The anti-German feelings grew stronger and even though the liberal newspapers tried to make a difference between the foreign Germans from Germany (Germantsij) and the native Germans in Russia (Nasji-nemtsij), all foreigners in Russia felt the pressure. In August 1914 St. Petersburg had to change its German-sounding name to Petrograd. In September a new law stated that German was prohibited to use as official language in Russia. That meant that the German schools had to close. The children should best be taught in Russian. In Gammalsvenskby it did not matter that much, since the teacher himself, Kristoffer Hoas, was drafted to the army - and so the teacher in Russian was the only one left to teach at all.

Kristoffer Hoas and many with him were sent to the Turkish front, probably because being foreigners they were not considered trustworthy enough to be sent against the Austrians. Several Swedes complained about this and were then allowed to serve at the Russian Western front. Woldemar Wilhelmsson Utas and others served in the cavalry and were sent against the Hungarians. Others fought against Germans and Austrians in Galizia. As many as 60% of the whole male population between 19 and 60 years old were drafted among the Russian Germans (to which the Swedes belonged).

Some 300.000 of the total amount of 13.7 million soldiers who were fighting for the Russian army were of German nationality. 9.2 % of the officers in the Russian general staff were Protestants, which then was a equal to being German.

In the beginning of the war the Russians were successful on their western front. The attacks on the

German province of East Prussia and against the Austrians in Galizia went smoothly. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the German army had their strength concentrated on their thrust westwards - via Belgium against the heart of France. As the western front was well established the German Superior command transferred troops to the eastern front. The joint armies of Germany and Austria could then march across the border in the direction of the Ukraine. Some men from Gammalsvenskby, for instance Greis Mickelsson Albers, were taken prisoners here. These prisoners were kept in prison camps and were treated quite badly. The Germans and the Austrians were very successful now. In the autumn of 1916 the people from Gammalsvenskby who were harvesting far out on the prairie west of the village could hear the distant roaring of canons from the frontline. The Russians managed nevertheless to force the Germans to retreat during the winter of 1916-17.

Politically a great change was to come in Russia. In March 1917 the Czar Nikolai II abdicated in favor of his younger brother Michail. However Michail refused to succeed his brother and the governing of the country became a task for the Permanent Committee of the Russian Duma (the Parliament). This Committee formed a kind of provisional government led by Prince Lvov. The most dominant man of this government was the liberal lawyer Aleksandr Kerenskij. In March he was appointed Minister of Justice, later Commissar of war and on July 25 he became Head of government. The Russian economy was a disaster. The situation for the army was very bad - in fact it was bankrupt both with regard to its equipment and to its fighting morale. Kerenskij's government did not manage to reestablish law and order in the country and it also failed to change the fortunes of war. In October (according to the old calendar) the next revolution occurred. It was a coup d'etat led by representatives of the small Bolshevik party. On November 7 (October 25 according to the old calendar) a group of leading Bolsheviks and also some representatives of the Socialist-revolutionary party formed the new government. Russia had become the Soviet Union. The chairman of this government, which was called "The Council of the People's Commissars" was Lenin. Trotsky became Commissar of foreign affairs and the young Josef Stalin became Commissar of Matters concerning the countries many nationalities. To secure the power the new government then declared the "Dictatorship of the proletariat" in defense of the revolution against attacks by counter-revolutionaries. Censorship was introduced and other parties and newspapers than the Bolshevik ones were banned. The property that belonged to the church was also confiscated by the state.

A truce with Germany and Austria-Hungary was established in the beginning of December 1917. Early in 1918 the war continued. Most of the recruits were sent home late in the spring of 1917. Some of those who returned home were attracted to the new message of Socialism they had been told about in the Councils of soldiers formed on the regiments. Fifteen soldiers from Gammalsvenskby had been killed in the war and the Bolsheviks had executed Andreas Hoas. The Germans started to negotiate with the independent state of Ukraine that had been formed on November 20 1917. This free state of Ukraine was not universally recognized. During the spring of 1918 German troops marched into the Ukraine to help the new state protect itself against the Bolsheviks in the north.

A group of landless in Gammalsvenskby led by Andreas Mickelsson Albers (born in 1859), Kristian Greisson Knutas (born in 1869) and Andreas Johansson Knutas ("Schillings-Anders", born in 1889) formed what was called "The Red Tribunal" in Gammalsvenskby. On their agenda they had a redistribution of land and also reprisals against those who were seen as representatives of the old conservative regime. One member of the Tribunal who later defected reported on their plans to assassinate the village-clerk Andreas Andreasson Utas, Kristoffer Hoas and some of the wealthy farmers in the village (especially some members of the Buskas family). Nothing of this ever happened. Perhaps the family ties stopped the plans. Andreas Albers' brother was for example married to a sister of Andreas Utas and this Simon Albers raised one of Andreas Utas' many sons as a stepson.

In March 1918 a Bolshevik corps had arrived in the district. Under their pressure the village-council elected Kristian Greisson Knutas as elder of the village. As the Bolsheviks left the most impetuous among the anti-Bolsheviks in the village wanted to overthrow the Reds (in the village). During a terrible scene, threatened by lynching, Kristian Greisson Knutas, Woldemar Wilhelmsson Utas and Petter Hindriksson Knutas were severely beaten. The Revolutionary Committee was then overthrown for now. Soon after this another Bolshevik corps raided Gammalsvenskby. Earlier the people of Gammalsvenskby had executed a band of Socialists and bank robbers under the command of a man called Smoltjanov. As an act of revenge the villages were now plundered and 13 men were kidnapped and then murdered at the monastery of Bizjukov. On April 8 the Red corps suddenly vanished. On the next day the first division of a joint German-Austrian army marched into the district from the south. They were generally greeted as liberators. The German Commandant in Schlangendorf then had the local Red leaders imprisoned. From

Gammalsvenskby Andreas Albers and Kristian Knutas were brought to the prison of Berislav. They were not that badly treated there and were allowed to return to their homes in the autumn. The German military behaved well here after all. They bought all their supplies from local farmers and they paid well - and always in cash. They mainly used the local Lutheran vicar, Rev. Gustav Witt, as their middle-hand in the contacts with the inhabitants here. Because of this the communists saw Rev. Witt as a collaborator with the German army.

In the late summer of 1918 the German troops received an order to return back to Germany. World War 1 was over. The retreat of the armies here should be ended before the turn of November and December. The local German Commandant promised the German settlers to leave enough weapons behind for them to be able to defend themselves. He also recommended them to establish a common strategy of defense if they were to be under attack. In the end the German army left about one hundred German rifles (Mausers), two small machine-guns and ammunition for these weapons, which were, however, not sufficient for a large battle. South of Schlangendorf and north of Klosterdorf there were small fortifications built of stones taken from the stone fences at the boundaries. These fire trenches and machine-gun nests were built at strategic places along the border of the district, especially to protect the main road from the south (Berislav) to the north (Bizjukov). There were several veterans from the war that could lead the villagers in the defense against any aggressors. This year, in 1918, a census was conducted in the district. Schlangendorf had 712 inhabitants, Möhlhausendorf 773, Gammalsvenskby 809 inhabitants and Klosterdorf 734. Together there were 3008 people living here in the so-called Swedish district.

The battles for the Altschwedendorf-district

Not long after the German troops had left the villages they were actually attacked. The first one to try to plunder the district was the notorious anarchist and robber chief "Father" Machno.

Nestor Ivanovitj Machno was born in the Ukraine. He was raised in a small village in Tauria (east of Dnepr), about 40 km east of the Molotjna district. His parents were poor crofters and as a child he had to work hard as a hired shepherd at the farms of wealthy German farmers. In the summer of 1918 Machno formed an army of anarchists and social-revolutionaries. His men were called "The Blacks". His goal was to pillage the wealthy German villages in the districts of Halbstadt and Chortitsa in the north and from there further down to the south of the Ukraine.

In the autumn of 1918 a minor army of Machno's attacked the Swedish district. They came via Berislav on the road through Dremajlovka. At midnight of September 10 the attack came. Before entering Schlangendorf the aggressors had to pass a 300-meter-long open field between the villages. The defenders could sweep over the field with their machine-guns from their strongholds along the borderline. As the attackers were put under this heavy fire they retreated after only a few efforts to cross. They had sustained some casualties and therefore decided to go for another target somewhere else - a target that may be easier to take than this. Especially Andreas Kristiansson Sigalet here proved to be a very good gunner. Peace was thus established again for a while. In the beginning of 1919 two Swedes from Sweden arrived in Gammalsvenskby. One of them, the agronomist Anders Nilsson, had already visited the village before the war and now he returned to see how people were. He stayed only for a week and then returned to the estate he was running. The other, the dairyman Rudolf Rasmusson from Skåne, had been stranded in Russia and had not been able to return to Sweden after the Revolution. Rasmusson was here to stay for five years.

At the end of 1918 rumors began to spread that Machno's Black anarchists had become allies of the Red Bolshevik army. In January and February 1919 the Red army made a drive towards the south. As people had feared Machno and his men were joining them. At the end of February 1919 some people from Klosterdorf went to the monastery of Bizjukov in order to visit the marketplace there. At that moment a Russian bandit chief and Socialist by the name of Dorozjenko and his gang attacked. Only one man from Klosterdorf managed to escape but all the others were captured. A united council of the four villages decided to attack the Red bandits when they were still in Bizjukov. The man who escaped had also told the others that Dorozjenko's gang was not that strong. During the night the joint German-Swedish group surrounded the monastery. After a short battle Dorozjenko and his men fled in the morning from the monastery down towards the frozen river. On the riverbank Rudolf Rasmusson and others from Gammalsvenskby had prepared an ambush. They let the Russians run out on the ice and then they opened fire with the two machine-guns. Many of Dorozjenko's men were killed and a heavy machine-gun was conquered. Dorozjenko himself, however, managed to escape to the other side of the river and rumors now had it that he had promised to take a bloody revenge. As the German-Swedish troop made their way into the monastery they found not only many dead Russians but also the dead bodies of all the

men from Klosterdorf. Afterwards not everybody in Gammalsvenskby was totally convinced that the actions had been justified. Would Dorozjenko really have murdered his hostages if he had not been surrounded and attacked? Furthermore: was the ambush down at the river really necessary? Among those who were killed were many farmhands from villages like Michailovka on the other side of the river and their relatives would now perhaps ask for revenge?

On March 7 the answer to these questions came. The United Third Taurian Red Freecorps under the command of Dorozjenko and a former Ukrainian student by the name of Pavlovskij assembled in Dremajlovka! In the middle of the night of March 8 the attackers tried to move into Schlangendorf the same way Machno had come. If they had attacked from different directions at the same time there would have been a general massacre of the colonists. Now they came spread all over the open field as the others had done. The defense command of the villages had the three machine-guns to move between 12 strongholds at the borderline. Because of this the attackers believed that they had to face many more machine-guns than these three. At dawn the attackers suddenly pulled back. The defenders were now desperately short of ammunition. Since these four villages were almost the last ones to be plundered in the Ukraine the inhabitants knew that the attackers would not give up thus easily. Then there was the matter of revenge as well. They also knew that their ammunition would not last another night of fighting and decided to send out three men to negotiate with the enemy under a white flag. Kristoffer Hoas, Fredrik Malmas (who was the elder of the village) and Fredrik's brother Petter Malmas (the teacher) were volunteers.

In spite of the danger they dared to walk over to the camp of Dorozjenko and Pavlovskij waving with a white flag all the time. They arrived there safely and were received by Commandant Pavlovskij personally. They told the astonished Pavlovskij that they were Swedes and not Germans. Kristoffer Hoas then made a long speech about the Swedish King Charles XII and the Ukrainian Hetman Mazepa, about Poltava and about the Swedish-Ukrainian friendship during centuries. Pavlovskij became very impressed and promised that his men would let the inhabitants of the villages live because of this - but he also demanded that they should be allowed to plunder for 24 hours. Furthermore Pavlovskij showed a list with names of those who had been sentenced to death by a Red tribunal because of anti-revolutionary activities. Among these people the following mentioned: Rev. Witt in Schlangendorf, the schoolteacher Kristoffer Hoas himself and the village clerk Andreas Utas along with the people who were considered by the Reds to be responsible for the killings at the monastery. Pavlovskij agreed to spare the lives of the three top names of the list. At first Fredrik Malmas was allowed to return to his home and then later in the evening Kristoffer Hoas and Petter Malmas too. As they were passing through Schlangendorf they could see how the bandits were killing, raping and plundering there. The 24 hours of plundering turned into two days and three nights. The four villages were totally plundered and everything that was worth taking was carried away. When the bandits left everyone feared the sight they would meet as they dared to come out of their hideouts. Not those many had been killed, as they feared at first. In Gammalsvenskby the village-elder Simon Martis, the farmer Andreas Norberg and a young man by the name of Petter Knutas had been killed. Petter Knutas was killed by mistake. He was shot instead of another man by the same name. In Mühlhausendorf 11 people had been killed. Schlangendorf had been plundered the most and here six men and one woman were murdered. Three men had been killed in Klosterdorf. It was a terrible thing that had happened but at least not that many people had been killed and after all the inhabitants thought they had been lucky. After this event the villages were left in peace - there was really nothing left to take!

During the spring and in the beginning of the summer of 1919 the White (Bourgeois) General Anton Denikin took control of a large part of the Ukraine. Among his soldiers were several thousands of German colonists, defending their homes, and also some Swedish boys from Gammalsvenskby. On May 20 General Denikin had driven the Red army back to the western shore of the river Dnepr. The Red army now had taken their position on the Gammalsvenskby-side of the river and the White army stood on the opposite Taurian side. The frontline remained here from May 20 until August 6. In August the Red army made a strong counter-attack against Denikin and forced him to retreat in the north. The anger of the Red army towards the German colonists had further increased now that they had seen which side the colonists favored. Up in the north a great many Germans were slaughtered. The Latvian so-called "Red marksmen" were greatly feared. These elite-groups consisted of fanatic Communists who would not miss a chance to get even with the "class-enemy". In Gammalsvenskby the Red army had placed a battery of cannons right in the center of the village. Before the inhabitants could persuade the commanding officer to move the guns everyone in the village risked their lives. In the White army Julius Hindriksson Knutas from Gammalsvenskby could point out the Red cannons and instruct the White gunners how they should fire to destroy these. As the Red army moved its artillery the duel with cannons continued but this time at a safe distance from the village. At the end of the summer of 1919 the Red army stationed some German so-called "Spartakists" (German communists) here. During this period the local Revolutionary Committee

again ruled Gammalsvenskby. They were quite moderate, though. Andreas Albers had died in March and the others under the command of Andreas Knutas ("Schillings Anders") treated their fellow inhabitants well. Andreas Knutas, Kristian Knutas and some crofters were members of this Committee. Andreas Knutas died already in January 1921.

For a while General Denikin was victorious but during the winter of 1920 most of his army was destroyed up in the north and the rest fled to the south. Another White General, Count Pjotr Wrangel, then assembled another army and received help from England and France. He got cannons, ammunition and some airplanes from these allies of his. From April till October some 70.000 Red soldiers were placed in the Swedish district and they took everything that could serve as food. The farmers of Gammalsvenskby tried to hide some cattle on the islets of Dnepr but a group of Red army scouts discovered the Swedish cattle tenders, caught them and brought them to Berislav on a charge of anti-revolutionary activities. Kristian Hinas managed to escape but Johannes Annas was sentenced to death and was shot on the graveyard at Berislav. In the autumn the Red army attacked the enemy on the right side of the river and forced them to withdraw. The Red army left the area and left only 63 skinny horses and some 70 head of cattle alive. In 1921 the district suffered from worst drought ever in history. From January until May 80 people from Gammalsvenskby died of starvation or different diseases caused by malnutrition. It was not politically correct to write to Sweden for help but Kristoffer Hoas sent a letter to the Swedish archbishop Nathan Söderblom and quoted some parts of the Bible. Luke 8:24 stated: Help us Master - we perish! In Sweden people understood the message and 10.000 Swedish crowns was used for buying supplies. The Red Cross and other charitable societies also collected money to buy medicine, food-supplies, blankets and clothing. On Christmas day 1921 the representative of the Red Cross, Gösta Cedergren, arrived with three railway-wagons filled with supplies. Some 10 people had died of starvation the days before Cedergren arrived. In February 1922 two additional wagons with rye arrived and a small amount of money for everyone in the village. In March the storage-rooms were empty again and starvation seemed to be near. In the German villages where the help had not been sufficient some 10 people died every day. At Easter 1922 the situation was really bad. Typhoid fever and dysentery were common and several elderly single people died of starvation. From Klosterdorf there is a report with the names of 90 people who died of starvation during the winter and spring of 1922. In Mühlhausendorf 11 people starved to death. There are no figures from Schlangendorf but in the city of Kherson 6.479 people died of starvation from the middle of January till the middle of April. In the early morning of Easter day the people of Gammalsvenskby were gathered out on the graveyard according to the old tradition, as they suddenly saw a wonderful sight. A white steamboat with the Swedish flag and the flag of the Red Cross in the bow came slowly upstream. After a short moment of thanksgiving everyone hurried down to the river. The missionary Wilhelm Sarwe from Degerfors in Sweden who had been selected by the Red Cross to lead the expedition had arrived with the necessary help. The people of Gammalsvenskby were rescued at last!

In the summer a new aid-expedition arrived on December 5 and the biggest one arrived. This time two representatives of the Swedish Red Cross came along, Gösta Cedergren (his second visit) and his brother-in-law Walter Hebbel. They had received the instructions to stay in the village until the inhabitants were well enough to manage on their own. Cedergren and Hebbel brought three church-bells from Sweden with them. These bells officially remained as the property of the Red Cross. The Soviet Union had nationalized the churches and their properties already in 1921 so this was in fact the best way to arrange it. Agrarian experts in Sweden had made a plan for the development of Gammalsvenskby. It stated that only 150 Desiatins of land should be cultivated in the spring of 1923. Then in the autumn another 500 Desiatins should be used and the campaign should then continue in 1924. According to the plan at least some 20 families should then settle down on the prairie and build up a new village - Nysvenskby (The New Swedish village). It was also decided that the inhabitants of Gammalsvenskby during these hard times should share all crops - if any - in solidarity. This could also be seen as an introduction to collective farming.

The Soviet society from a village point of view

In 1921-22 the more permanent so-called Executive Committees replaced the Revolutionary Committees. The government at this time also initialized a campaign against the wealthy farmers, the so-called Kulaks. Kulaks were farmers who had hired labor at their service. The Kulaks should be destroyed as a class - Kulaks should be banned from their villages and sent away to be "politically re-educated". This was going to take place in mines, at the construction of new railroads and at labor camps in Siberia. The Ukraine had been violently forced into the Soviet Union in 1922 and this is where the largest number of Kulaks was to be found. In Gammalsvenskby more than 40 farmers were classified as Kulaks. These Kulaks were disfranchised everyone of them - but to the others in the village it was made compulsory to vote at the

same time. It was also instructed that the Chairman of the local Executive Committee should always be elected among the crofters or the working people in the village. These people were often less educated than the others. The Committee Secretary of the village then held the real power in the villages. In Gammalsvenskby in the 20's this person was Johannes Beer who had a Swedish mother and was able to communicate in Swedish. He was accepted and popular in all various political camps and he managed to tone down the pressure on the village that appeared through all the odd new decrees - and counter-decrees - which arrived from authorities on different levels.

In 1923 a decree stated that the land had to be surveyed again and now it should be done according to the need of the people and not according to wealth. In the Ukraine all the estates owned by the nobility were nationalized and turned into state-owned collective farms (a "Sovkhoz"). The villages were instructed that it was in their best interest to form collective farms (a so-called "Kolkhos"). If they did not agree to this the land was to be handed over to farmers who had the right of use and enjoyment of the land although the state was the real owner. In southern Ukraine the standard was 2 7/8 of a Desiatin for each member of a family. In reality a few wealthy farmers had possessed 60 Desiatins of land with only a few exceptions. The family of Andreas Pettersson Buskas for instance had 60 Desiatins before but now received only 18 Desiatins. An owner of a middle-sized farm like Andreas Andreasson Utas (the village-clerk) had 30 Desiatins before and now received 33. According to the son Viktor (born in 1913) the family was quite satisfied with this. A crofter like Petter Kristiansson Utas (called "Bucken") got as many as 27 Desiatins instead of the 12 Desiatins he had before. The farmhand Gottlieb Pettersson Utas who had no land at all now received 9 Desiatins. Cedergren and Hebbel were still in the village as the land reform was to be put into practice. Then the first conflicts arose. Petter Hindriksson Knutas who had received more land than before was just going to cultivate this land. At this moment the former owner Johan Pettersson Buskas showed up and picked a real quarrel with him. Walter Hebbel was a witness of this and he walked up to the men to talk some sense into them and Petter Knutas thought fit to leave. But there was no possibility to abolish the decree this way. Petter Hindriksson Knutas was forced to cultivate the land he had been given. Tax had to be paid according to access to the land whether it was cultivated or not. Now that they were forced to it the farmers of Gammalsvenskby slowly accepted this new order. Because of incidents like these settlers began to move to Nysvenskby on the prairie on a large scale. There was more space out there after all. The burden of taxation on cultivated land was also increased during the following years and it seemed better to start all over again in a new settlement.

Nysvenskby

In 1923 55 settlers had begun to build their new homes here. Nysvenskby was situated almost 18 km west of Gammalsvenskby. During the following years another 55 settlers intended to establish a third new settlement. It was going to be called Svenskåker and be situated on the pastureland of Gammalsvenskby some 12 to 13 km out on the prairie towards Nysvenskby. The establishing of these villages was necessary so that the Swedes would not lose the 1.000 Desiatins of land that each new settlement like this received. The people of Schlangendorf and Mühlhausendorf formed their subsidiary colony at the same time. It was called Friedenheim. The people of Klosterdorf also founded their new village - Neuklosterdorf. The village of Nysvenskby was established with all the farms in a row along both sides of the village-street, from northwest to southeast. The fields of the village were situated on both sides of the road that went from Gammalsvenskby over the prairie to the remote villages in the west. The fields were to be found both towards Gammalsvenskby and further out on the prairie. Immediately east of the village there was the village-well, some 70 meters deep. In the center of the village was a square, a market place that was meant for official buildings like the school, the church and the town hall. The school house and parish house were never completed. A bell tower with the small bell of the Red Cross marked the place where the parish house should be built. The Sunday sermons had to be held in the living room of Krisoffer and Peter Annas. Jakob Andreasson Hoas read out loud from a book of sermons every Sunday. The farmhouse of Viktor and Krisitna Hoas was used as a school where the young woman Julia Johansdotter Buskas served as a teacher. She usually had 10 to 15 pupils of different ages. The sites of the farms were somewhat larger than in Gammalsvenskby. At first barns and stables were built. Then small houses were built out of clay and straw to live in. These one-story buildings had thick walls and a roof made of straw or reed. Some people dug out a typical Russian Zemljanka like the first settlers in Gammalsvenskby had done in 1782. There was an advantage in living so close to the land the farmers were cultivating. This village had all the necessary qualities to become a permanent settlement. In 1926 there were about 200 inhabitants. Gustav Simonsson Hoas was elected spokesman of the village.

In Svenskåker some five-km to the east people had not really started to settle down before 1929. Some barns and shacks had been built but there were no people living there on a regular basis. People stayed

there during the harvest but most of the time they stayed in Gammalsvenskby. Andreas Kristiansson Sigalet was elected spokesman for the settlers.

Gammalsvenskby in the 1920's

Taxes were very high in the 20's. Everyone had to pay 15-35 rubles per Desiatin regardless of the result of the harvest. Cultivated and uncultivated land were taxed the same. The following taxes were added: tax on income of a horse (30 rubles a year), tax on income of a cow (25 rubles a year) and so on. 20 rubles per member of the family was then deducted from the total sum before the final taxes were fixed. Taxes on income were then counted progressively. 7 rubles to pay in tax for the first 100 rubles that you earned. Then 21 rubles for the next 100 and 42 rubles for the third 100. A person with the total income of 300 rubles had to pay taxes to an amount of 70 rubles - an effective tax of 23 %. One year the chairman of the village council, Petter Johansson Knutas ("Schillings-Petter") had to pay tax for the land he had cultivated spite of the fact that there had been nothing to harvest because of the drought. Petter was forced to pay 65 rubles in tax for the land and the privilege of having one skinny cow.

The most dedicated communists were to be found in Mühlhausendorf: Doctor Feingold (chief of the district hospital), the schoolteacher Klara Ivanovna Nevronis and the chairman of the village council in Mühlhausendorf Alfred Eichhorst. Klara Ivanovna had become a communist already in Latvia where she was born and she had been a member of the Latvian Red Marksmen (where also women could take part) during the Civil war in Russia. She founded the first Komsomol (the young communists) group in the district. She even taught the children in her group to turn in their own parents if anything that could be classified as anti-Communist was said or done in their homes. The children were also told that there was no God. Freedom of religion in the Soviet Union was meant to be freedom from a religious belief rather than freedom to believe in a religion. The anger of the parents and the children grew against the schoolteachers who also had to teach scientific atheism to the children. The salary of a teacher at this time was exactly 30 rubles a month. The teachers were now mocked because of this and people told them that they had sold their souls like Judas did for 30 pieces of silver. This statement was quite unfair as far as the Swedish teachers were concerned - Julia Buskas, Petter Malmas and Kristoffer Hoas. If Gammalsvenskby had had fanatic communist teachers like those in Mühlhausendorf there could have been spies and informers among the children of Gammalsvenskby as well. In fact the teachers of Gammalsvenskby did their village of real favor in being so moderate by mitigating the commands of the state.

In 1922 Kristoffer Hoas accompanied the missionary Wilhelm Sarwe to Sweden. On September 15 he was ordained to be a minister by the archbishop of Uppsala, Nathan Söderblom. He then returned to the Ukraine and Gammalsvenskby to form a Swedish Lutheran congregation. The first years after the journey from Dagö - 1782-89 - and then in 1922-29 were the only years in the history of Gammalsvenskby when they had a minister of their own. Being a minister was not easy. As a minister Kristoffer Hoas was deprived of his human rights and considered to be "an enemy of the people". He lost his right to vote, his land, his ration card and so on. He received a small salary from Sweden though - 3.000 Swedish crowns a year. As long as he received this money he and his family did not have to starve. The worst thing was, though, that the government tried to stop the congregation's work. The rent that had to be paid for the church and the vicarage was raised every year. The confirmation groups could not consist of more than three youngsters at a time. Despite the fact that Hoas was watched by the GPU (the Security police, later called the KGB) he managed to avoid their surveillance. He was in danger though. The reports of one single informer would have been enough to have him banned from the village. The contacts between the local church and the so-called class enemies in the capitalist state of Sweden were thoroughly noted by the GPU. The police did not only open letters sent from or to Sweden, they also forced their way into the church during Sunday sermons. They wanted to check if any under-aged persons (under 15 years old) were attending the services.

On August 27 1927 the village received a large group of unwanted visitors from the GPU. They wanted to question the teachers about religious activities in the village among the children and their parents. The young schoolteacher of Nysvenskby, Julia Johansdotter Buskas, admitted that she herself had visited the sermons at the church. Immediately she was declared incompetent of being in charge of the education of children in the USSR. She was dismissed from her job as a schoolteacher at once. The poor crofters and workers of the village were next in line to be threatened by the GPU. They were being charged with lacking the proper proletarian consciousness and they were asked why they had not taken over the power in the village a long time ago. As these people complained about their material needs and said that they were living on the brink of starvation, the answer came promptly: *"You have to help yourselves! Go to the rich ones in your village and take the bread from them! That is the way of active communism!"*

The GPU then left for this time. The only result their visit had achieved was that the poor people were more and more convinced there was no help to get from the Soviet authorities. Everybody knew that there was hardly anything left to take from the so-called "rich ones" in the village any longer. This year the village had to sell 200 head of cattle in order to get money to pay the taxes. These were animals that were desperately needed to provide the inhabitants with meat and milk.

On September 1, 1927 136 farmers from Gammalsvenskby signed a petition addressed to "The people of Sweden, Finland and America". They wanted, as they wrote, to be reunited with people of their own nationality and they stated three reasons why they wanted to leave the country:

1. The bad harvests and famines that threatened their entire food supplies.
2. The threats against their religious worship and against their Swedish culture.
3. The problems they had adopting the communist way of life and their fear of the coming collectivization of the farms of which they had been notified by the government.

They had also sent complaints to the Swedish envoy in Moscow, Carl Gustav von Heidenstam, as early as in 1925 with no result. Heidenstam expressed his opinion concerning this matter clearly in a letter of June 25, 1925 to the Swedish Ministry of foreign affairs in Stockholm: *"Since the people of Gammalsvenskby are Soviet citizens they have to comply with the regulations according to the existing law here like everybody else in the country."* In another letter from the Swedish embassy in Moscow the following was written: *"They [the people of Gammalsvenskby] have now got used to receiving help from Sweden and in cases like this the appetite usually is in the habit of growing and not of decreasing."*

On June 30, 1928 a village council was held in Gammalsvenskby. Every one of the 492 members of the council who were entitled to vote was there. The so-called Kulaks were of course excluded. All the people present signed a resolution that stated that the people of Gammalsvenskby with support from "The law of the rights of self determination of the national minorities of the USSR" hereby demanded to be given the right to emigrate. The council elected three representatives - one each of the three Swedish settlements. The three were Johan Pettersson Buskas (a Kulak) to represent Gammalsvenskby, Gustav Simonsson Hoas to represent Nysvenskby and Andreas Kristiansson Sigalet for Svenskåker. Hoas and Sigalet had already served some years as spokesmen for their settlements. These three turned out to be excellent negotiators in the following bargaining with the Soviet authorities on different levels.

On July 5 the three representatives (together with Kristoffer Hoas) put together and signed a petition in which they demanded the right for the Swedes to emigrate. They did it on behalf of the 240 families who wanted to leave the USSR. The petition was handed over July 13 in Charkov to Comrade Slinko, the Vice-Commissar of foreign affairs in the Ukrainian SSR. After this the village received several visits where both the local and central authorities tried to persuade the Swedes to stay. After some weeks a group from the GPU in Moscow arrived. They first met with the three representatives of the Swedes and this meeting did not end until 03.00. As these three refused to withdraw the petition the GPU-men turned to the crofters and workers of the village. The GPU wanted at least them to sign a paper that they would stay, even if the others left. Three farmers, the brothers' Johan and Woldemar Vilhelmsson Utas and their brother-in-law Petter Hindriksson Knutas, signed this paper. Furthermore the brother-in-law of Woldemar, the blacksmith Alexander Kristiansson Knutas and the carpenter Greis Mickelsson Albers also stated that they wanted to stay after all. A third brother Utas, Kristian Vilhelmsson, had already before this made it clear to everyone that he himself would never go to Sweden.

After this the village received many more visits from important representatives like the Commissar Slinko himself and others. Nothing seemed to help - the Swedes still wanted to leave the Soviet Union. As time went by and nothing seemed to happen, Kristoffer Hoas decided to try to go to Sweden. He and Johan Irjasson Buskas had been invited by Professor Herman Geijer to come to Sweden and demonstrate their ancient Swedish dialect. The problem was how to get passports. It was so difficult to get passports in the Ukraine that the two men decided to go to Moscow and try to get their passports there. They succeeded in this and managed to get across the border to Finland before the alarm went off. In the Ukraine the authorities described it as an escape and they admitted that they had tried to make sure that Hoas not would be able to leave the country. Afterwards a party member in Berislav said that they had been prepared to kill Hoas if they had discovered that he was trying to leave. Already before Christmas 1928 Hoas and Buskas arrived in Sweden. Their goal was to get the Swedish authorities to bring the matter of the emigration of the people from Gammalsvenskby up with the Soviet government. At first, though, they wanted to get some sort of assurance from Sweden that the people from Gammalsvenskby would be

permitted to settle down in Sweden. They succeeded in this. On February 22, 1929 the Swedish parliament made the decision to grant the people of Gammalsvenskby the right to come to Sweden. On March 8 the Swedish government declared that Sweden was ready to receive them. Now what remained was to get the permit for them to leave the Soviet Union!

The main problem was that the fee for a passport was as high as 250 rubles. Furthermore there was no guarantee from the Soviet government that the farmers would get paid for their houses. And if they did not get paid, they would not have enough money for their passports. The representatives of Gammalsvenskby made contact with the American-Jewish organization called the Agro-Joint. Sponsored by American Jews, Jews in Russia bought land in the Ukraine to cultivate. The head of Agro-Joint in the Ukraine, Ljubarskij, declared that his organization was more than willing to take over the village. Then the settlers of Friedenheim also said that they would love to move to Gammalsvenskby.

In the winter and spring of 1929 everything was settled:

1. February 25 - the head of the Council of the people's commissars in the Ukrainian SSR, Comrade Javorskij, sent a message telling the Swedes that they had been granted permission to leave the USSR.
2. April 26- the Swedish government granted permission to the people of Gammalsvenskby to come to Sweden.
3. June 12 - Moscow finally gives exit permits to the Swedes and promises them to be able to travel all on the same passport free of charge. A special commission will estimate the value of the farms and Agro-Joint hereby receives the right to buy them. Everything concerning this matter must be settled before July 5.
4. June 14 - the Swedish envoy von Heidenstam informs the Swedish Ministry of foreign affairs that Moscow has unofficially confirmed that the inhabitants of Gammalsvenskby will be allowed to take with them together an amount of 200.000 Rubles out of the USSR.

At the beginning of the summer of 1929 most of the people in Gammalsvenskby made themselves ready to leave. Some people of Swedish nationality were not given permission to leave because they were actually not living in Gammalsvenskby. Among these were Wilhelm Knutas from Hoffenthal with his family, Otto Maskewitz from Zürichthal with his family, Gustav Tinis and his family in Mühlhausendorf and the families of Schmidtke, Glubrecht and Gerock - all from Mühlhausendorf as well, who applied to be regarded as Swedes. Three boys who were in the army as recruits were not allowed to leave either. They were Alexander Irjasson Buskas (born in 1906), Teodor Kristiansson Knutas (born in 1905) and Andreas Andreasson Utas born in 1906. Buskas and Knutas were stationed in the Ukraine while Utas was serving in Turkestan. Some people however did not want to leave. Among these were the following: Kristian Vilhelmsson Utas and his woman Maria Derenina, the family of Johan Johansson Knutas ("Schillings-Johan"), the sisters Elisabeth and Paulina Pettersdotter Utas with their sons, the mother of these sisters - Augustina Danielsdotter Utas, Paulina Matsdotter Annas and Johannes Pettersson Annas. A man called Johannes Norberg and some members of the family Hernberg had settled down in Kachovka and they stayed too. None of the Swedes who had left for Siberia before World War 1 had any chance of coming to Sweden - they did not even know what was going on.

Going to Canada or Sweden?

From 1885 till 1926 several Swedish families had already emigrated to Canada. Most of them had settled in British Columbia or in Alberta. In 1924 Reverend Hoas had the first contact with The Swedish Lutheran Aid Association in Canada and its representative Rev. O H Miller. They discussed the possibility of establishing a Swedish village in Canada for the people from Gammalsvenskby. In a letter of May 24, 1928 Rev. Miller writes that he can guarantee that there will be enough land for the Swedes and there will be help from the Canadian government for them to settle. The Soviet government in Moscow did not approve of this plan, though. They thought that this might cause a precedent and then a lot of German, Polish and Ukrainian farmers would also like to emigrate to Canada. If the people of Gammalsvenskby would like to go to Sweden that, but only that, could be arranged. In 1929 it did not seem possible to establish a village of their own for the people of Gammalsvenskby in Sweden. Therefore Kristoffer Hoas and Johan Buskas wanted to investigate the possibility for their people to go to Canada after their arrival in Sweden. As the matter was brought up in Swedish newspapers in the summer of 1929 there was a heated discussion. Some newspapers wrote that these people from the Ukraine were only using Swedish hospitality for their own egoistic purposes. Others agreed with the Swedish archbishop Nathan Söderblom as he stated that: "... the plan for the people from Gammalsvenskby to continue to Canada is not at all that

stupid. The best thing for these people is to stick together.“ Anyway it was now decided that almost every one of the more than 900 inhabitants of Gammalsvenskby would go to Sweden. The matter of going to Canada was not brought up again before they arrived in Sweden.

The Swedish Red Cross organization made the necessary arrangements for the transportation of the people from Gammalsvenskby. A steamship was rented in Turkey that would bring them from Kherson to Constantza in Romania. Before this two riverboats would have brought them from Gammalsvenskby to Kherson.

At dawn of July 22, 1929 people gathered down by the river in Gammalsvenskby. Their belongings were stored on board and the people were called by name and family after family went on board the riverboats. As they sailed away a group of friends and relatives, many of whom had not been granted permission to emigrate, stood waving and singing on the riverbank. Many people, both from the group that left and those who stayed behind were grieving. Jewish settlers were already beginning to take possession of the houses in Gammalsvenskby. On the arrival of the two riverboats in Kherson one woman by the name of Maria Annas was very ill. She died on July 23 and was buried in Kherson in the morning of July 24. In the afternoon of July 24 the Gammalsvenskby people embarked on the steamship the “Firuzan” in Kherson and set off for Romania. On July 26 they arrived at Constantza and then the journey went on by train via Hungary, Austria and Germany to Sweden. On August 1, 1929 885 people from Gammalsvenskby set foot on Swedish ground in Trelleborg in the south of Sweden. A large crowd of people met them. Prince Karl, the chairman of the Swedish Red Cross, was standing in the front row along with Kristoffer Hoas and Johan Buskas.

“At home” in Sweden?

The people of Gammalsvenskby were transported by train via the city of Lund to the city of Jönköping where they were billeted in the barracks of a closed regiment. There was no talk of going to Canada now. A committee was put together by the Swedish government to handle the affairs of the Svenskbyborna. A national fundraising started after a week in order to raise money for the settlement of the people from Gammalsvenskby. The aim was to let the Swedes settle down as farmers in Sweden - and to live the life that they were used to living. The purpose was thus to buy farms in different areas of Sweden. There were two parts of Sweden that were particularly interesting to the committee: the island of Gotland and the districts of Västergötland and Småland. It was in other words absolutely clear to everyone involved that it was out of the question to keep the people of Gammalsvenskby together in one village as they were used to. During the autumn of 1929 the Gammalsvenskby foundation was formed to take care of the practical arrangements concerning the purchase of the farms. During the first year in Sweden the committee thought that it would be best for the farmers from Gammalsvenskby to work as apprentices on Swedish estates in order to get used to Swedish farming. The elderly farmers among the Svenskbyborna deeply resented this act of guardianship from the committee.

Already on August 17, 1929 the first bomb exploded. The newspaper Göteborgsposten wrote that the people from Gammalsvenskby had been offered 150.000 Canadian dollars if they moved to Canada. It was the Swedish Lutheran Aid Association that had made the offer and then the Canadian Pacific Railway Co had declared willing to take care of both the transports and the settling itself. The company had land enough in the central part of Canada to offer to Svenskbyborna if they just wanted to come. There was an immediate bitter reaction from the Swedish press - the people of Gammalsvenskby were thought to be ungrateful and cunning at the same time. They had deluded the Swedish authorities into getting them out of the Soviet Union only to respond in such a deceitful way. The fundraising in Sweden did not succeed especially well after these articles in the newspapers. On September 2 as many as 62 families had announced their interest in going to Canada.

The next bomb exploded on September 13 as the communist paper Folkets Dagblad reported that 20 people wanted to go back to the Soviet Union. That only three families were concerned was never mentioned. It was the brothers Johan and Woldemar Utas and their brother-in-law Petter Knutas who now wanted to return to what the newspaper described as “The home of the workers and farmers”, as they called the Soviet Union. The Swedish Communist party had organized a committee of their own called “The Workers’ Gammalsvenskby committee”. Especially one man by the name of Kasper Gustafsson was very active in contacting the people from Gammalsvenskby and trying to persuade them to go back. On November 24 the three families, who had never left the barracks in Jönköping, traveled to Stockholm and waited for their visas to the Soviet Union to be ready. At the end of December they left Sweden and went by boat to Finland and from there by train via Leningrad to Moscow. On New Year’s Eve Woldemar Utas

made a radio speech in Moscow where he expressed his disappointment at the treatment the people from Gammalsvenskby had received in Sweden.

In the meantime the official Gammalsvenskby committee had bought the first 20 farms to be handed over to the Svenskbyborna. Among the people from Gammalsvenskby themselves they knew very well who the good farmers were. There was a general disappointment as the committee announced the names of those who were selected to get a farm. Immediately the number of people who wanted to go to Canada - and of those who were speaking of going back to the Soviet Union - increased. If only the committee had announced officially how long it would take until all of the families among the Svenskbyborna could get a farm of their own, people would have stayed calm. In 1930 the Gammalsvenskby Foundation purchased totally 35 farms. 21 of these were situated on Gotland and 14 on the border between the districts of Västergötland and Småland. At the end of the year 51 families were living on these farms, which was just under a third of the total number of families remaining in Sweden. At the beginning these farms should be leased to the Svenskbyborna, but the idea was that they could purchase the farms from the Foundation after some years in Sweden.

There were hard times in the 30s for those who settled down on Gotland or in Västergötland and Småland. In many cases the Gammalsvenskby Foundation had paid too much for farms that were in bad condition. The people of Gammalsvenskby were hard-working people, though, and have succeeded in reaching a standard of living that is about the average (or better) in Sweden. They are still keeping together as a group especially on the island of Gotland where they are living quite close to one another. In 1954 the Society of Svenskbyborna was established. Its purpose is to document and preserve the culture of the people from Gammalsvenskby. The society has published four jubilee books (1954, 1969, 1979 and 1989) and the fifth one is on its way this year (1999). Every year on August 1 these people meet in Roma on the center of the island. The following Sunday there is a similar meeting in Huskvarna (in the region of Småland) and in December there is a meeting in Stockholm for the people who are living there. The choir of the Society is very active and has recently recorded a CD with some of their most beloved songs.

The settlements in Canada

On January 2, 1930 there was a conference held at the station of the Svenskbyborna in Jönköping. Participating were representatives of the Swedish authorities, a Swedish Member of Parliament, the representative of the Canadian Pacific Railways, Reverend Hoas and most of the heads of the families who were still living there. The director general of the National Board of Health and Welfare, Gunnar Huss, stated that those who left Sweden would not get any money at all from the National fund for Svenskbyborna. This would mean, he said, that every family who went to Canada would have to start their new life there with a debt of 17.000 Canadian dollars in order to cover the expenses for traveling and settling. A new Gammalsvenskby, he continued, could only be established in some remote area with bad communications. The council of Svenskbyborna did not know what to do. Perhaps the idea of going to Canada was not so good after all, but something had to be done or else many more people would go back to the Ukraine. Director Hågglund from the Canadian Railway Company came up with the suggestion that a delegation consisting of five members of the council would go to Canada to investigate the circumstances there. It was decided that Kristoffer Hoas, Johan Irjasson Buskas, Andreas Andreasson Malmas, Andreas Pettersson Buskas and Wilhelm Hansson Knutas would go. Since Andreas Buskas suffered from trachoma he never went, but the other four set off on February 22.

A month later three of them returned. Kristoffer Hoas, Johan Buskas and Wilhelm Knutas all agreed that there was no chance of re-establishing Gammalsvenskby in Canada. Therefore it was better for the Svenskbyborna to stay in Sweden after all. Andreas Malmas was of another opinion and he had decided to stay in Canada and to tell others to join him. Malmas had signed a contract with the Canadian Pacific signifying that he would, together with others from Gammalsvenskby, take over the property called Camp 1 situated at Meadows in Manitoba. The property consisted of 1.270 hectares and would be named Lilla Svenskby (Little Swedish village).

On May 10, 1930 the first group traveled to Canada. There were 8 families with 42 people, Andreas Malmas excluded who was already there. On May 24 the next group left - 8 families with 35 people. In 1932 two additional families and a single woman (Alvina Norberg about to marry Petter Malmas) - all together 16 people - left Sweden. All together 94 people had emigrated to Canada by then. The group that went to Meadows arrived on June 30, 1930 at Wetaskiwin in Alberta where they worked as farm hands until everything was settled in Meadows. The farm they had bought was known as Camp 1 and was situated some 25 English miles west of Winnipeg. On April 17 the first nine Swedish families arrived and immediately started to work at the farm. Another three families came to Meadows in 1931, but they did not

stay there. Two families (the families of Jakob Hoas and Kristian Knutas) that came from Sweden in 1932 settled here as well, but they decided to go back to Sweden after a few years. Gustav Pettersson Utas, the teacher from Gammalsvenskby, got the property Van Horn outside Winnipeg in a similar way to Andreas Malmas. Five families from Gammalsvenskby and three other families from Sweden took part in this project, together with Gustav Utas. This property consisted of 1.200 hectares of land. Gustav Utas got tired of farming quite soon though, and decided to go back to Sweden with his family. There were hard times for farmers in Canada in 1929-31, but in 1933 it started to change. Kristoffer Hoas then became interested once more in establishing a Swedish village in Canada but at that time most of the Svenskbyborna had decided to stay in Sweden. Many of them had got farms of their own on Gotland or in Småland-Västergötland by then. Instead of this, six families returned in 1935-36 from Canada to Sweden - the two from Meadows, Gustav Utas' family and others.

The Swedish people from the Ukraine have been successful in Canada. There is still somewhat of the "Old Swedish atmosphere" from Gammalsvenskby around Meadows. But as much as the young descendants of the Svenskbyborna who stayed in Sweden have become "real" Swedes, the descendants of those who went to Canada have become Canadians. The young generation has lost the Old Swedish dialect of their ancestors and the way of living in Gammalsvenskby. This means that the descendants of Gammalsvenskby may have problems communicating with each other if they are not able to speak English.

Röda Svenskby - the Swedish village under the Communists

The first ones who returned to the Ukraine and some of those who had stayed there all the time wrote several letters to their relatives in Sweden during the spring of 1930 and asked them to join them. On May 24 the communist newspaper Ny Dag reported that another 44 people wanted to go back. The Communist international (the Comintern) sent several Swedish communist party members who had been working in the Soviet Union to Gammalsvenskby in 1930-31. Edvin Blom and others were instructed to establish a collective farm in the village and to build up a communist party cell among the Swedes. On September 11, 1930 a second group went back to the Soviet Union. It was altogether 39 people from 9 different families and two single women. They said to Ny Dag as they left Sweden: *"We let the Kulaks fool us as we left Russia, but we came to Sweden and here our eyes were opened."* Among these were Julius Teodorsson Annas, Petter Kristiansson Utas and Petter Hindriksson Utas (II). On August 17, 1931 a third group left Sweden. This group consisted of 35 families with 183 people. Altogether 245 people went back to the Soviet Union and in the autumn of 1931 there were at least 260 people of Swedish nationality in Gammalsvenskby. The families of the Swedish communists that had been sent down there are not included here. Most of the Jews had already left the village (they had moved further to the west) and the village was now divided between Swedes and Germans. In the autumn of 1929 the Germans formed their collective farm - Kollektiv Lenina - and the remaining Jews in the area had their own collective called "Vperjod k pobede" (Onward towards victory). In 1930 the Swedes formed a minor collective farm (an Artell) on the initiative of Edvin Blom. The artell was named name "Sjvedkompartija" (The Swedish communist party) and Johan Wilhelmsson Utas became the first chairman. The Swedish communists sent from Sweden were besides Edvin Blom and his family, Kasper Gustafsson with his wife, two sons and a daughter, Ture Gräås and his family, Carl Holmström and his family and the bachelor Erik Pettersson. In 1932 another two Swedish socialists arrived, Karl Andersson and Hugo Herrmann Lauenstein. Edvin Blom who called himself "The red devil" was the one who dominated the life of the village. Edvin Blom, the communist teacher Klara Nevronis and the party activists Gustav Schultz and Lina Portje - all from Mühlhausendorf, were the elite of the communist party. These four were active in the eviction of Kulaks in the four villages of the district. In Gammalsvenskby - or as the communists preferred to call it - Röda Svenskby - only one farmer was evicted. This was the old Petro Krakovskij. The Kulaks had to be liquidated according to Stalin's speech of December 29, 1929. The people who had been classified as Kulaks were thrown out of their homes, their property was allowed to be plundered and the rest was sold by auction. The so-called Kulaks had to leave the village and live as beggars on the streets. In Klosterdorf several families were evicted and the same goes for Schlangendorf and Mühlhausendorf. One night Paulinas sisters Lydia and Sofia visited Greis and Paulina Albers. These women were married to Germans in Tauria (on the opposite side of Dnepr) and had several children. They had been evicted from their home villages and had spent some nights in caves in a rift nearby. Now they had come to get something to eat from their sister. Paulina and Greis Albers did not, however, dare to let them in. It was prohibited to have anything to do with the evicted Kulaks.

At the age of 15 you could be a member of the Komsomol (the Young communists). Some Swedish boys e.g. the brothers Julius and Johannes Johansson Utas became members of the organization. In 1933 the

members of Komsomol were the most active ones as the bell tower of the church in Gammalsvenskby was torn down. Johannes Utas fell down while doing this and broke his leg, something that was noticed by the Christians in the village. The church had been used as a so-called palace of culture - with a cinema there as well - since the Swedes had left in 1929.

In 1930 Edvin Blom was elected chairman of the village Soviet (council) and in 1932 he succeeded Johan Utas as chairman of the kolkhoz as well. In 1932 and in 1933 there were famines in the Soviet Union. In the Ukraine alone 4 million people died of starvation. In Gammalsvenskby only the old Simon Hinas died of hunger but in Mühlhausendorf and Klosterdorf there were many more casualties (5 and 8). During this time the Swedish communists left the village never to return again. In 1932 there had been 16 members of the communist party in Gammalsvenskby. In 1933 so many were thrown out of the party that there were only two members left: Petter Kristiansson Utas and Julius Teodorsson Annas. Petter Utas was then the chairman of the village Soviet in 1933-38. Julius Annas was chairman of the collective farm in 1934-37 and in 1939-41.

As the people in the village were beginning to starve in 1932, the idea of going (back) to Sweden emerged again. On March 8, 1933 20 people in Gammalsvenskby were arrested by the GPU because they had signed a list stating that they wanted to leave the Soviet Union. Five of them were sent to prison. They were Alexander Knutas, Mats Norberg, Simon Sigalet and Petter Utas and the Swede Karl Andersson who had come to the village a year before. Alexander Knutas died in prison. Karl Andersson was released and went to Sweden in the autumn of 1933 along with his wife Maria Utas. The other three were also released (in 1935/36) and were allowed to return back home to Gammalsvenskby.

In 1936 the political purges started. Josef Stalin feared a strong opposition to his ideas and decided to purge the people who could be described as political opponents on all levels. In Gammalsvenskby Alvina Hinas was taken away as the first one on August 13. She had been sending letters to Sweden and had baptized a child. Between October 13 and November 18 ten men were taken away. On February 13, 1938 another two men were arrested by the GPU. On July 18, 1938 the last group of six men was taken away. Altogether 24 people vanished. At first there was a rumor that these people had been sent away to labor camps but soon their relatives found out that they had been killed. There was no doubt that informers among the Swedes themselves were responsible for the purge. Makar Zjurduk, Petter Kristiansson Utas, Julius Annas and Mitjka Krakovskij were the ones who were pointed out as the informers. The atmosphere of the village was very infected. Everybody (except the informers) was scared of being the next victims. The four children of the Hinas' family suffered more than most people, as both their parents had been taken away and the oldest son, at the age of 17, was in charge of two sisters and a brother.

Only five boys - Kristian Annas, Andreas Utas, Emil Utas, Karl Utas and Johannes Frey - were drafted into the army after the war against Finland broke out in 1939. The Soviet authorities only put a gun in the hands of boys of families they trusted. People tried to survive but every kind of joy of living seemed to be gone. This was the situation in Röda Svenskby - Gammalsvenskby under the communists from 1933 to 1941.

Alt-Schwedendorf - Gammalsvenskby during World War 2

In August 25, 1941 the German army marched into the village. East of the Dnepr the Soviet authorities had evacuated the Germans by force and arrangements had been made to do the same west of the Dnepr. This never happened since the German army conquered the Ukraine so quickly. People received the German soldiers as liberators on their arrival. By then Gammalsvenskby had approximately 500 inhabitants, of whom 265 were Swedes, 68 Ukrainians, 5 Jews and the rest were Germans. All the colonists here, no matter if they were of German, Dutch, Swiss, Alsatian or Swedish nationality were now to be classified as "Volksdeutsche" - people of German nationality. This meant that they were to be protected by the German army, but it also meant that they had to contribute to the war economy. People had hoped that the collective farms would be disintegrated and that they would get their land back. Nothing of the kind happened. The German army wanted to keep the collective system because it could serve them better with supplies than private farmers could. The teaching at the school in Gammalsvenskby was conducted only in German. Swedish had been prohibited already in 1938 and until 1941 the Ukrainian language was used in the schools. It was compulsory to study Russian as well. Kristian Wilhelmsson Utas was elected Bürgermeister (mayor) of Alt-Schwedendorf in September 1941. Jakob Hernberg became chairman of the collective farm at the same time. In 1942 the German Friedrich Wittman replaced Kristian Utas for political reasons. Hans Krassmann from Mühlhausendorf succeeded Jakob Hernberg for the same reasons.

In the spring of 1942 time had come to deal with the informers of the 30s. Makar Zjurduk had disappeared from the village but Julius Annas, Petter Utas and Mitjka Krakovskij were still here. These three were now accused of working for the GPU and being responsible for the deaths of at least 25 people. The German Sicherheitsdienst (the German security police) arranged a trial and Petter Utas was the first to appear there. He was sentenced to death and executed by the SS south of Schlangendorf. The body was dumped in a ditch and abandoned. Some Russians from Dremajlovka buried him later. After a month Julius Annas and Mitjka Krakovskij were arrested. They were sentenced to death by hanging but they were not aware of the sentence as they were taken away. On their way to the gallows that had been put up right across the church Julius and Mitjka suddenly understood what was going to happen to them. Both then tried to escape. Mitjka was shot immediately but Julius tried to run up towards Nybyn. He did not manage to get very far before the German police shot him too. Both corpses were then strung up in the gallows where they had to hang for three days. No one was allowed to touch them. After three days had gone by the relatives were allowed to take them down and bury them.

In September 1943 there was a compulsory draft of men between 16 and 60 years old into the German Waffen-SS. No one was sent to the front yet though. The German army was now pushed back by the Red army. After the defeat at Stalingrad the Russians launched an offensive. On October 25 the German authorities gave the order to evacuate all the people of German nationality from the villages in the district to Germany. On the following day everybody had to leave Gammalsvenskby. The Russian army conquered the western bank of the Dnepr already before New Year 1944. All but a few Swedes followed the trek to Germany. Kristian Utas managed to hide on one of the islets in the river and Emma Krakovskij (born Utas) stayed with her husband in Berislav. The trek of people heading for Germany was divided into several minor treks. The Swedes were also divided into two different groups. One went by train and ended up in Offenburg in Baden in the western part of Germany. The other stayed on the trek and traveled by horses and carriage to Krotoschyn in Warthegau - the western part of Poland that had been annexed by Germany during the war. Heinrich Himmler had made a plan to colonize the eastern part of The Third Reich with reliable Germans who were used to dealing with people of Slavic nationality. The Germans from Russia were thought to fit in here. This plan was to turn into the worst nightmare of these Germans as the Russian armies conquered this area during the winter of 1945. These Germans, who had been Soviet citizens, were as the war was ended accused of treason against their country. They had voluntarily left the Soviet Union in order to cooperate with the enemy. Almost 150 Swedes were caught by the Soviet authorities and sent to labor camps in an area southwest of Vorkuta. More than 50 people managed to go to Sweden from Hamburg in the autumn of 1945. Some people managed to go back to Gammalsvenskby in the Ukraine and some stayed in refugee camps in Germany.

Back to the Ukraine via the GULAG

The people who were sent to labor camps in Syktyvkar in the Komi ASSR southwest of Vorkuta in the autumn of 1945 only survived thanks to a miracle. An engineer from Sweden was putting up an industry for making sheets of plywood. He heard some women speaking Swedish and then decided to help them out of there. With his help they were allowed to return to the Ukraine as early as in 1947. As they came back there was a famine in the area but they managed to survive even that. After the war the name of the village was changed. The local authorities did not want to be reminded of the German colonists anymore. All the villages were given new names in Russian or Ukrainian. The center of the district was now Zmejvka - formerly Schlangendorf. Gammalsvenskby had been called Starosjvedskaja in Russian before but was now given the name: Verbivka (The birch village). Klosterdorf got the name Kostirka and Mühlhausendorf was called Michailovka. The village the Swedes came back to had never been completely empty. The Ukrainian Krakovskij families were still there, so were Kristian Utas and his Russian wife and some families that had escaped the war in Poland and moved down there. Makar Zjurduk had also returned and he was the one who was politically in charge of the district. He was responsible for the decision that the Swedes were not allowed to emigrate to Sweden in 1958-59 which they had a chance to do. In 1965-66 several people of Swedish nationality were at last allowed to go Sweden.

There are still more than 140 people in the Zmejvka-district whose passport says that they are of Swedish nationality. If the surrounding areas are included as well there are perhaps twice as many. In 1983 a reporter from the Swedish broadcasting company had the opportunity to visit the village. He made some interviews and received a letter of complaints from an elderly lady. It was the widow of Petter Kristiansson Utas, who had been executed in 1942. The widow Darija now wanted "her husband's murderers" - as she calls them - to be sent back from Sweden to the Soviet Union to be punished. She and her family were perhaps responsible for the decision of the local authorities not to let anybody from

Sweden visit the district until 1988. In 1988 a group of people with their roots in Gammalsvenskby were allowed to visit the village after all. Soon afterwards a reporter from the Swedish national Radio Company, Gunilla Linder (nee Martis), made her first visit out of many in which she documented life among the last Swedes in Zmejvka - or what used to be Gammalsvenskby. In 1989 the Ukrainian Autokephal Orthodox Church rebuilt the church that had been in ruins for more than 40 years. It is standing there as a hybrid of a Lutheran and an Orthodox Church building. In 1992 the Swedish Lutheran congregation was reestablished and it receives several visits every year from Swedish ministers. Reverend Kjell Knutas from Skövde and his Swedish congregation are in charge of these contacts. Both Reverend Staffan Beijer and the minister Henning Herrman from Gotland also take part in this. Kjell Knutas and others have made several trips with aid for the local hospital. They have also tried to meet some of the need for sanitary articles, clothes etc. In 1995 a Swedish company that produces canned food was established in the town of Kachovka on the opposite side of the river. The Sturén family, who owns part of the company, has been very helpful to the people of the village of Zmejvka and Mrs. Kristina Sturén has also been working as a teacher of Swedish in the school of Verbivka (Gammalsvenskby). Most of the people who are still able to speak Swedish are old now. The language will soon vanish and so may the traditions of the Gammalsvenskby people. But there will still be people here who are aware of their roots and are interested in the history of their ancestors. They will also be interested in keeping in touch with people in Sweden and in Canada who share the same roots with them. There are more ways than ever today to stay in touch. Let us all do that. The history of the people from Dagö and Gammalsvenskby must not be forgotten!

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