



The Desolation of Exile: A Russian Family's Odyssey

Nina Bogdan

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The Russian Revolution and Civil War that followed it from 1918 to 1922 irrevocably altered a nation that had existed for one thousand years. Over the next decades, the annihilation and exile of millions of people continued this process of radical alteration until what existed little resembled what had been. Millions of Russians left their homeland for what they thought was temporary exile, dispersing to Western and Eastern Europe, China, Japan, Australia, and North and South America. Most had to struggle to survive but they refused to abandon their heritage and took their history, language, and culture with them into exile. This is the story of the noble Ukhtomsky family, descendants of Rurik, the first ruler of Rus' in the year 862. The Ukhtomskys, originally from the northern reaches of Rus', were also descended from the Belozersk Princes, cousins of the Muscovy Princes, whose rule of Russia ended with Ivan the Terrible.

In the 19th century, a branch of the Ukhtomsky family lived in the Simbirsk Province on the Volga River. They sought to effect positive social change on a grassroots level through education, building local schools, and strove to counteract the effects of endemic poverty by establishing hospitals and social services for the peasantry in their home province. Prince Nikolay Alexandrovich Ukhtomsky, the author's maternal grandfather, fought in World War I and the Russian Civil War, battling the Bolsheviks in the Volga Region, from Simbirsk to Kazan, and in the Urals with Admiral Alexander Kolchak's Armies. He and his family were eventually forced to flee Russia and, with the assistance of the Czech and Slovak Legion, the Ukhtomsky family made their way to Harbin, China, accompanied by the noble Golitsyn family.

In exile, Prince Ukhtomsky worked as a journalist in Harbin, Berlin and Paris and in his work and travels, he associated with various factions of the Russian Diaspora as they attempted to either battle or come to terms with the Bolshevik regime. Branded as an enemy of Soviet Russia, Prince Ukhtomsky was arrested by SMERSH, its dreaded counterintelligence agency, which sought out and arrested thousands of Russian émigrés after the war.

The author's study of her family history actually began when she, at the request of her father, traveled to Ukraine to meet his family. The Bogdanovs, although of peasant origin, also suffered greatly under the Soviet regime in the period leading up to World War II. The author's father was taken to Germany by the Nazi authorities under the infamous Ostarbeiter program, which forced Ukrainian youths to work in labor camps for the Reich.

In her quest to learn her family's lost history, Nina Bogdan traveled throughout Russia, Ukraine and China, even to Vorkuta, location of one of the Soviet Union's most horrific GULag camps where her grandfather was imprisoned.

In this epic tale, the author tells the thousand-year saga of her Russian family, intertwining it with her own impressions of modern Russia, whose people are struggling in the aftermath of the implosion of the Soviet empire and attempting to come to terms with the consequences of the actions of a murderous regime that, in the course of 70 years, wiped out some of the best and brightest people in that nation's history.

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