



1885

Wilson J., 2009c

Russians, Ukrainians and Baltic peoples

## Russians

Russia was formerly one country of many incorporated in Tsarist Russia and then the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, 1922–1991). The USSR, or Soviet Union, broke up in 1991. At this time many countries which had been republics within the Soviet Union, including Russia, the Ukraine, and the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, became independent. Almost all immigrants to New Zealand from countries that were formerly within the Soviet Union have come from these five countries. Some have also come from two other countries of Eastern Europe, Belarus and Moldova, but very few from the countries of the Caucasus or of what was Soviet Central Asia.

### Early Russian immigrants

There were almost certainly Russians among the gold miners who flocked to New Zealand in the 1860s, but the first group to arrive in numbers were Jews escaping persecution. Some of the Jews who reached Australia, like the gold miners before them, travelled on to New Zealand. The Manoy brothers, Motueka businessmen, were New Zealand-born of a Jewish Russian father and an Australian mother. Their parents came to New Zealand in the 1870s.

The Melbourne-based artist Nicholas Chevalier, born in Russia of a Russian mother and Swiss father, spent long enough in New Zealand in the 1860s to leave a significant pictorial record of the country.

Through the last two decades of the 19th century and the early 20th century, people born in Russia (including people from the Baltic states, Ukrainians and Volga Germans – ethnic Germans from the Volga valley) arrived in steady numbers, bringing the total to 1,242 in 1916.

### Fears of invasion

During the 19th century, Russians were seen by many New Zealanders as potential aggressors. From the 1850s, when England and Russia fought against each other in the Crimean War, unannounced visits of Russian warships to Australasian ports caused anxiety in New Zealand.

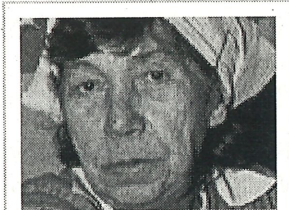
In 1873 an Auckland newspaper editor alarmed townsfolk with a false report that the crew of a Russian warship had seized gold and taken the mayor as hostage. The scare became known as the 'Kaskowiski' (cask of whisky) hoax, after the name of the fictional ship.

The later Russian scare of 1885 grew out of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Afghanistan and led to the building of major fortifications along New Zealand's coast.

between the wars



A New Zealand scene by Nicholas Chevalier



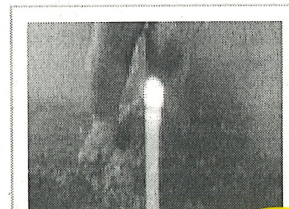
Russian factory workers, 1973



Alex Malahoff



Russian couple and child



A Russian Orthodox baptism

3rd

Yellow circle



From 1918 to 1939 few Russians came to New Zealand. One who did emigrate in that period, Victor Zotov, arrived in 1924 as a teenager. He went on to become a leading New Zealand botanist. Harry Seresin, though born in Germany, was of Jewish Russian background. He came to New Zealand in 1938 and played an energetic role in New Zealand's cultural life from the 1950s to the 1980s.

## The Second World War

Refugees of the Second World War era included White Russians, supporters of the Tsarist government who had been living in exile since the Russian Revolution in 1917. Those living in Prague fled when the Soviet Army approached in the war's closing months. Some came to New Zealand.

After the war some Russians arrived in New Zealand as displaced persons – people unable or unwilling to return to their home countries at the war's end. Their arrival raised the total number of Russians in New Zealand: at the end of the war in 1945 there were 348; in 1956 there were 740. (These figures probably included a number of Ukrainians.) In 1965, about 80 Old Believers – members of a Russian Christian sect who had been living in China – settled in Southland and Christchurch. In the 1970s and 1980s, close to 300 of the Jewish people permitted to leave the Soviet Union came to New Zealand.

### 'Nobody will chase you out'

Fifty years after they arrived in New Zealand in 1948, members of a White Russian family gathered for a reunion. They had been living in exile in Prague since the Russian Revolution and fled to New Zealand after the Communists took over in Czechoslovakia. One daughter remembered: 'My father, before he died, he said, "At least I have achieved what I promised – you will have your own roof over your heads and nobody will ever chase you out."' <sup>1</sup>

## A recent increase

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 the flow of people from Russia to New Zealand increased. The 2006 census counted 4,581 people born in Russia, of whom only about 200 had arrived before 1990. Some women entered New Zealand as the wives or fiancées of New Zealand men.

## The community today

In the early 21st century the Russian community, including first-generation children of Russian parents, was probably at least 6,500 strong. About one-fifth of them were associated with the Russian Orthodox Church in Auckland.

Many of the Russians who came in the 1990s were professionals seeking economic opportunities and freedom from political restraints. Some had difficulty getting their qualifications recognised, and returned to Russia. But some 1990s Russian immigrants who stayed on weighed the setbacks against the pleasure of being free to leave their passports at home rather than carrying them for identification.

Some Russian seamen from freighters or fishing boats stayed in New Zealand after marrying New Zealand women. In the 1990s the Russian community in Wellington became concerned that ship-jumpers were giving all Russians a bad name, but the problem was short lived.

Like earlier immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, some late-20th-century immigrants from Russia found New Zealand still a disconcertingly 'new' country and missed the museums,

galleries, theatres and sense of history they had left behind.

#### Footnotes

1. From the *New Zealand Herald*, 1998. › Back

## Biographies



Nicholas Chevalier, 1828–1902



Harry Manoy, 1879–1954 and Lionel Manoy, 1881–1960



Victor Zotov, 1908–1977

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