

South Russian Conference (German Colonies)

JÓN HJÖRLEIFUR STEFÁNSSON

Jón Hjörleifur Stefánsson, M.A.,
is a Ph.D. candidate, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam

The South Russian Conference was a church unit for Germans in southeastern Russia that operated from 1901 to 1905.

Territory and Statistics¹

Period: 1901-1905

Territory: German colonies in southeastern Russia (Ukraine and the Caucasus)

Population: 1,500,000

Membership: 938

Churches: 34

Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Work in the Territory

Adventist mission work in the Russian Empire began in Crimea. German Russians who had emigrated from southern Russia to the United States sent Adventist literature back home. "As early as 1882" some Crimeans had begun to keep the Sabbath. "These began to send publications to other parts of Russia, which, with those sent from America, carried the message to the Caucasus and to some Mennonite settlements north of the Crimea [southern Ukraine], and later on, to the West, along the borders of Poland."² In May 1886, one of the American immigrants, Conrad Laubhan, returned home by the Volga River and spread the Adventist message to family and friends and others. L. R. Conradi arrived in July and started working in the Crimea. There he organized the first Adventist Russian church.³ He was, however, arrested and imprisoned, and upon his release he cut his labors there short. Laubhan continued his ministry despite "feeble health" and "organized several churches." Jakob Klein from the United States soon joined him.⁴ During the first years, the membership grew rapidly. By 1890 there were 300 "Sabbath-keepers in Russia."⁵ A decade later the membership had more than doubled and

needed to be organized into a conference.

Organizational History

A general meeting of the believers in south Russia was held at Furstenort, Stavropol, on October 7-13, 1901. Since the south “was the oldest field in Russia” and numbered by now “over seven hundred members, it was thought best to organize it into a Conference.”⁶ The territory of the conference was southwestern European Russia, but limited to work among German settlers.⁷ The conference started with more than 700 members.⁸ The initial officers were H. J. Löbsack (president), Tetz, Schürer, Fischer, and Lehmann.⁹ The new conference belonged to the German Union which had been organized some months before.

Over the next few years members increased by the hundreds and German and Russian believers of the territory eventually agreed to associate in the same conference. These reasons gave rise to the following organizational changes in 1905, taking effect in 1906. Russian believers of the territory who had formerly belonged to the Middle Russian Mission were incorporated into the South Russian Conference; part of the conference was cut off to form the new South Russian Mission; and the conference itself changed its name to the East Russian Conference.¹⁰

The church units continuing the work in the territory of the former South Russian Conference were the East Russian Conference and the South Russian Mission, which now included both Germans and Russians.

List of Presidents

H. J. Löbsack (1901-1905).

SOURCES

Conradi, L. R. “General Meeting in Southern Russia.” *ARH*, November 26, 1901.

Conradi, L. R. “The Meeting at Alexandrodar.” *ARH*, March 8, 1906.

Conradi, L. R. “Reiseerfahrungen.” *Zions-Wächter*, November 4, 1901.

Holser, H. P. “Central Europe.” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1890.

Olsen, O. A. “Opening Address.” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1890.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1883-1886; Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1887-1892. Battle Creek, MI: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1893-1894. Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1904. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1905.

"Vierteljahrsbericht der deutschen Union-Konferenz vom 1. Juli bis 30. September 1901." *Zions-Wächter*, November 4, 1901.

"Vierteljahrsbericht der deutschen Unionkonferenz vom 1. Okt. Bis Dez. 1905." *Zions-Wächter*, February 5, 1906.

White, William Clarence. "Report of Elder W. C. White, Foreign Mission Secretary." *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1891.

NOTES

1. Statistics gleaned from the last reports of the conference: "South Russian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1905); "Vierteljahrsbericht der deutschen Unionkonferenz vom 1. Okt. Bis Dez. 1905," *Zions-Wächter*, February 5, 1906, 35.
2. William Clarence White, "Report of Elder W. C. White, Foreign Mission Secretary," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1891), 77.
3. William Clarence White, "Report of Elder W. C. White, Foreign Mission Secretary," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1891), 78; H. P. Holser, "Central Europe," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1890), 63-64.
4. William Clarence White, "Report of Elder W. C. White, Foreign Mission Secretary," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1891), 78.
5. O. A. Olsen, "Opening Address," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1890), 142.
6. L. R. Conradi, "General Meeting in Southern Russia," *ARH*, November 26, 1901, 770; see also L. R. Conradi, "Reiseerfahrungen," *Zions-Wächter*, November 4, 1901, 129.
7. The oldest preserved *Yearbook* entry of the conference gives the territory as the "German colonies of Southeastern Russia." "South Russian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1904), 62. Russian believers in the territory belonged to the Middle Russian Mission. See L. R. Conradi, "The Meeting at Alexandrodar," *ARH*, March 8, 1906, 14.
8. The church members of this field numbered 728 by the close of September, shortly before it was organized. "Vierteljahrsbericht der deutschen Union-Konferenz vom 1. Juli bis 30. September 1901," *Zions-Wächter*, November 4, 1901, 133.
9. L. R. Conradi, "General Meeting in Southern Russia," *ARH*, November 26, 1901, 770; see also L. R. Conradi, "Reiseerfahrungen," *Zions-Wächter*, November 4, 1901, 129.

10. L. R. Conradi, "The Meeting at Alexandrodar," *ARH*, March 8, 1906, 14-15; "East Russian Conference" and "South Russian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1906), 73, 75.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000