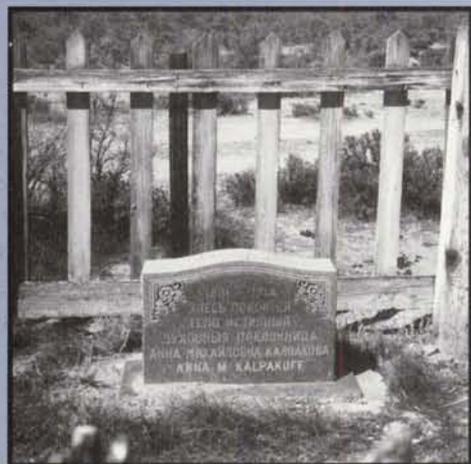
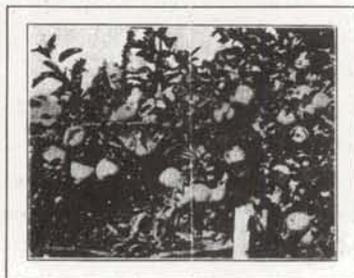


FROM DUST TO DUST:

By Sarah Yates



Invest Dimes and Reap Dollars
in Park Valley, Utah



PACIFIC LAND & WATER CO.

(Incorporated under the Laws of Utah.)

Suite 816 Newhouse Building, :: Salt Lake City, Utah

THE WIND ALWAYS SEEMS TO BLOW around a tiny picket-fenced cemetery south of Park Valley in Box Elder County. There, two gravestones stand as a monument to the hopes of Russian immigrants who, somewhat like the Mormon pioneers before them, tried to create a remote utopian colony. Arriving in Utah in April 1914, with dreams kindled by the extravagant claims of a land company's brochure, members of the Molokan faith attempted to form a self-sustaining farming community where they could freely worship.

The story of the Molokan colony began four centuries ago, when the Russian Orthodox church revised its rituals. At that time, a group of peasants who felt led by the Holy Spirit to a simpler form of worship broke away from the church. Because Russian law forbade all religions but Orthodox, these dissidents (who were called "Molokanie"—or milk-drinkers—since they did not conform to Orthodox fasts) were persecuted through the years.

From 1904 to 1912 some 3,500 Molokans migrated to America, the majority settling in the Los Angeles area. But California was not the utopia they had imagined. The modern world began to close in, imposing civil law over church customs. As the Molokans began looking for a place farther from cities and government, some found a 1911 Pacific Land & Water Company brochure that featured photographs of sheep and cattle, waist-high grain, and fruitful orchards near Park Valley, Utah. "Hundreds of acres of land [are] lying ready to respond most generously to the touch of the husbandman," the brochure promised. Pacific Land and Water was one of many land scheme companies that had purchased large portions of land previously granted to railroads, then marketed parcels to buyers from out of state.¹

Convinced by the company's lavish claims, some 20 families decided to make the move. The group's arrival was announced in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in April 1914:

More than 100 Russians, who for some time past have been members of the Russian colony near Los Angeles, Calif., left the southern California metropolis yesterday for Box Elder County, Utah. Another large contingent, it is said, will follow in a few weeks...

Traveling in a special train of four cars, two baggage and two passenger, the group had equipped the cars

A grave marker that replaced an earlier, wooden marker stands on land where Russian Molokans tried to start a farming colony. A promotional land brochure had called the valley the "Land of Certain Success," influencing the Russians to move to Utah. Historical photos courtesy of Edwin Kalpakoff.

A RUSSIAN SOJOURN

with stoves so they could cook on the way. Since Molokans followed kosher-style food laws, this was important to them. In addition, the group wanted to retain some of their Old World ways. Noted the *Tribune* article:

In fact, it is to get away from American customs that the Russians are coming to this state. It is only the older ones, however, who object to the check put upon them in California. They object strenuously to their young people adopting American customs, especially as to dress, and it is their intention to go to a partly isolated locality, where they will be free to follow customs such as prevail in the land of their birth.

The train stopped in the small Box Elder County town of Kelton, and the group traveled by wagon to the dry sagebrush flats of lower Dove Creek. There they set about building plank houses, digging wells, and clearing the land for farming. They also brought in furniture and farm equipment and bought livestock. "My father had Percheron horses," recalled Lawrence Carter, who was a Park Valley teenager at the time. "They came to buy them and took out a wad of bills that would choke a cow. They paid cash for all their purchases."

Among the settlers were Fierce John and Agafia Kalpakoff and their sons and families: Mike F. and Mary Mathew Kalpakoff and their children, Andrew and Anna Kalpakoff and children, and sons Alex and Willie Kalpakoff. According to area residents, the colony leader was a Kalpakoff. It is to this family's photographs and journal entries and the continuing interest of the Mike Kalpakoff family that history owes much of what is known about this short, but unique and poignant, chapter of Utah's past.

Tragedy struck the Kalpakoffs almost immediately. Andrew's wife Anna had become nervous while he was cleaning his gun. He raised the gun to show her it was not loaded, pointed it toward her, and pulled the trigger. But a cartridge had remained in the barrel; the bullet entered Anna's heart, and in ten minutes she was dead. The *Box Elder News* reported on May 7, 1914:

The grief-stricken husband lost his mind, and it was with considerable difficulty that three men who witnessed the accident prevented him from terminating his life. When he regained self-con-

trol his grief was almost more than he could endure.... His wife was an extremely good woman, loved dearly by all who knew her. She was generous and always willing to assist those in need. She could be found with the poor and at the bedside of the sick—a true, devoted wife and loving mother, in the prime of life, being but 36 years of age, and in perfect health and spirits.

Anna Kalpakoff was buried in the nearby Park Valley Cemetery amid great mourning. An early resident of Park Valley recalled, "They came from burying her and were chanting and crying and huddled in the wagon."

But life went on in the Russian colony. What had seemed a pleasant, green climate in early spring turned into a long, hot summer with little water available. The Russians' diligent attempts to raise crops that first summer proved largely unsuccessful, but they attracted the attention and admiration of the neighboring Mormons. In August 1914 a writer from the *Box Elder News* compared the group's "working together and having everything in common" to the United Order, a onetime communal system within the LDS church. Today, descendants do not know whether the colony's finances actually were communal or whether the group just assisted each other in a spirit of cooperation.

Tragedy struck again with the death of another young mother: "1915 year 12th of February 10 o'clock in the evening died Mary Mathew Kalpakoff," reads the translated-from-Russian entry in Mike Kalpakoff's family record. Although the family belief is that this was a childbirth-related death, there is no entry for a birth, nor is there a grave marker for a child. Neither is there an obituary or mention of this death found in any of the area newspapers. Photographs from the funeral of Mary M. Kalpakoff show her dressed and laid out in white; the men wear white stoles denoting their status as lay priests in the Molokan faith.

Religious services were an important part of the colony's life. Christian fellowship, combined with a common cultural heritage, tied the community together. Molokan worship, having cast off the icons and gilded decor of the Russian Orthodox tradition, is simple. During worship, men and women



Mary Kalpakoff's family mourns her death. Her two-year-old son Paul, held by his father at the right of the coffin, is barely visible. *Opposite page: house and family at colony.*

It sounded like jibber-jabber to me.... They were very honest, and you could trust their word. The women wore big full skirts, so different; I was entranced. They were all big women. They would laugh and talk and put it down after they looked at things. They always paid for what they got.

According to Mrs. Hirschi, "The leader seemed to have had the money, but I don't know whether it was his or the colony's."

Early on, at least, there were several children in the colony. Al-

though they stayed less than two years at Dove Creek, the family of John and Vera Chernabaeff had ten living children, according to daughter and tenth child Pauline Dobrenen, who wrote that her parents had a "hard time" living in the city. "When I was three years old they moved to Utah to farm. It did not work out for them, so they came back to L.A. more poor than before they left."

The Chernabaeffs relocated to several small farming communities in succeeding years, and their mother lived to the age of 84 as "a beautiful kind woman in her Christian ways," according to her daughter.

It was not until recently, when he began collecting family genealogy, that George N. Morzov became aware that his mother, Hazel, had briefly lived in Utah. He did not recall his mother ever speaking of the experience. "Molokans are very private people, even today," he says. During his research, he learned that Paul and Anna Kobzeff lived in the colony with their four daughters, Dorothy, Anna, Hazel, and Mary, who ranged in age from three to thirteen.

There were enough children in the colony that by April 1915 the Pacific Land & Water Company, projecting a school population of 20 boys and 20 girls, issued a deed for a school site at the Russian colony. A schoolhouse was erected and opened that fall, but by November the superintendent reported that the school had hardly enough students to justify its con-

are seated separately; women wear the traditional clothing and men wear a simple, uncollared shirt and a sash on one side. Worshippers sing and pray, and individuals read from and speak about scripture. A communal meal follows the service.

At the time of Mary Kalpakoff's death the family decided to move Anna Kalpakoff's body from the Mormon cemetery in Park Valley and bury her alongside her sister-in-law on Fierce John Kalpakoff's property at the center of the colony. Fierce John and Mike Kalpakoff erected a wooden fence around the two graves and erected triangular wooden markers facing to the east.

Another spring and summer came, and the plowing and planting went on. "The Russian men pulled peg-tooth harrows and were very hard workers," said Lawrence Carter. He continued:

The women wore long black dresses and veils or scarves over their heads. I don't remember there were many children. They mostly stayed out at that place. The men usually came into town to shop. It was a shame to see all their beautiful belongings from L.A. out there in the worst dry place in all of Utah.

Elizabeth Goodliffe Hirschi also recalled the people.

They used to come and buy goods at my father's store, everything from groceries to wagon wheels to clothes. I would like to listen to them.

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tinuance and that the children would be bussed to Rosette.

For three to five seasons, the small colony plowed and planted, but drought conditions resulted in poor and failed crops. Gradually, the families surnamed Kobseff, Potapoff, Shegloff, Karyakin, and all the rest returned to the Los Angeles area. The Kalpakoffs were the last to go, leaving behind a town of abandoned board buildings. According to Elizabeth Hirschi, the Molokans left angry at Harold LaFount, a promoter for Pacific Land and Water. "My father was [angry at him], too," Hirschi said, "and he was a friend."

Local residents removed the houses and outbuildings; many of these are still incorporated into the homes and ranches of the area. Today, the graves are central to a landscape pocked with holes representing cellars, wells, and outhouses gradually filling in from wind and time.

The same wind was blowing in April 1990 as the grandson of Mary Kalpakoff stepped back after clearing weeds from around the graves, bowed his head, and offered his respects to his grandmother and a great-aunt buried there. This was not Edwin Kalpakoff's first visit to the graves, and memories of an earlier pilgrimage flooded his mind.

Edwin's father, Paul, had been a two-year-old child when his mother died in childbirth. As he grew, he asked questions of everyone who knew his mother. And he asked about her burial site in the barren valley. Relatives told him that he would not be able to find the graves, that the wind would have blown everything away.

But in 1948 Paul brought his young family to Utah to find the graves. Stopping at the local service station, he asked the proprietor, Lawrence Carter, if he remembered the Russian people who had settled in the area 35 years before. Carter did. "I am Paul Kalpakoff," Paul told Carter. "I have come to find my mother's grave."

The Kalpakoff family drove to the grave site over a road so rutted that at times they had to stop to fill in the ruts with sagebrush and dirt, Edwin recalled. When they got to the grave site, there were weeds and sagebrush growing all around. There was a fence and a wooden marker, which still had some legible Russian writing cut into the wood. Before they left, the Kalpakoffs visited the Hirschi family, who showed them furniture in their home that had

been removed from the colony site. The Hirschis told Paul Kalpakoff that they paid respect to the graves twice a year.

In 1966 the family placed new headstones, with wording on each that states in Russian, "Here lies the body of the true [or authentic] spiritual worshipper." After his father's death in 1989, Edwin Kalpakoff and his wife returned once more. Together they walked among the pits, rotting timbers, broken china, and rusted tea tins, and they felt closer to those who had once dreamed of establishing a peaceful, religion-based farming community.

Today, Kalpakoff retains strong connections to this place and to the graves. "Spiritually, [finding the graves] made a big difference, because I was with my dad when he found the grave for the first time," he says. "It was a very satisfying, rewarding feeling as a child—but even more now." Kalpakoff's wife, Janice, agrees: "It definitely has made a difference in our lives. It was very important, something that he had to do. It is part of our ancestry, where we came from and who we are."

1. The Pacific Land and Water Company, with offices in the Newhouse Building in Salt Lake City, was headed by James H. Paterson, president; C. N. Strevell, vice president; F. A. Druehl, secretary and treasurer; Harold A. LaFount, general manager; W. Mont Ferry, Ed. D. Woodruff, and Robert LaFount, directors. (This last name is spelled LaFount in the pamphlet but in other documents is spelled LaFaunt. Paterson is also spelled Patterson.)

Sarah Seibel Yates, recently retired as managing editor of the *Box Elder News Journal* in Brigham City, spent eight years searching out information on the Russian Colony. The story might never have been completed if a 1987 letter she sent to Russian Orthodox churches in Los Angeles had not made its way into a 1989 Molokan newsletter. Letters began to arrive from descendants of the colonists and even from two who had lived there briefly as children. In particular, Edwin Kalpakoff's personal interest and family mementos meshed with the author's research and interviews to add a human touch to the facts.

