

Our Villages

*Translated by Ellen-Hardy Birt, with assistance from Dr. Elvire Necker-Eberthardt
Translated from the book, Wie's Daheim War—Der Schicksalsweg der Bessarabiendeutschen,
by J. Becker, published 1950.*

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My Native Village

(By Sophie Winger)

Peacefully you are lying here in the valley,
dear, precious home place,
lightly shone upon by sun rays,
a safe haven for all tired ones.

After the toils of a day's work,
young and old are coming from the fields,
all are drawing home
to enjoy rest.

Through the valley the colourful herds,
are moving towards the nearby village,
cows, sheep, lively horses
all are looking for the evening rest.

Here crowned with vine leaves,
we once more look at the village,
in the last rays the white church tower
is glistening towards the sky.

There in the valley the train
hurriedly whistles from the East.
It stays hardly an hour here,
Till it goes on.

Now the evening bells are ringing,
they proclaim the evening rest.
Let's still sing a little song,
then we'll move on home.

The roads are dead straight, and the side roads too. One farm borders on to the next. These are divided into front and rear farms. The first is separated from the next either by a building or by a fence. Along the roadside there are beautiful, whitewashed walls leading from one end of the village to the

other. Before Whitsunday, houses and walls are freshly whitewashed. These are built from stones or clay bricks (so-called *Patzen*).

The latter are manufactured by the farmers themselves. A special place is set up for this purpose outside the village. The earth necessary for this is excavated and distributed evenly over a more or less flat area and then water is poured over it. This loose earth is then dug over again and again. Into the resulting hollow water is poured again and again until everything forms a thick mash. Afterwards the horses are brought in. In the same way the horses are used at the threshing place, they are driven, until the earth is totally softened. Again and again straw and dry dung are added as bonding agents. When the earth is well prepared, the horses are removed. Then makeshift tables are placed onto the ground. Everyone working at these tables had a double form (i.e. two bricks could be made with them). So that the bricks better separate from the forms, water was sprinkled over them using a tuft of grass dipped into water. The earth is put on the "Patzen table" with a fork. When the "Patzen form" is well crammed, then the "Patzen" can be laid out on a level and clean place. There they must lie for a long time, until they are more or less dry. So that they can dry even better, they are put edgewise (i.e. they are placed on their side). After some time they are stacked, a procedure already described for the dung. A few weeks later they are so dry that they "ring." Now they are taken to the building site. The foundation is built from stones—sandstone. The outer and inner walls are built with bricks (*Patzen*). "Sägsteine," stones sawn out of shelly limestone, are very often used as connecting stones at the corners of the external walls. The mud bricks—*Patzen*—are a very good and resistant building material. We can see by looking at the "crown houses" ("Kronshäuschen") that they survived over one hundred years. After the roof is in place, the building is left for one year, so that everything can settle.

Already in the next year, the interior finishing can take place. In autumn the newly built house can be moved into. Some years later it is roughcast and whitewashed. Only rarely is a cellar built under the house. Because there is sufficient space on the farm and due to the wealth of wine, larger cellars are needed. These were built at a place especially set aside for them.

All other co-workers, except the master bricklayer, come from the ranks of farmers, who work free of charge in the joint venture work. Every one of them is familiar with bricklaying. The most beautiful thing when creating a building is that no formalities are necessary. The owner prepares the plans himself. Although no legally prescribed structural drawing is required, the buildings are perfectly uniform. The overall view of the appearance of the village must in no way suffer from it. Everyone builds gabled houses; to which they attach the barns and the stables. Outwards they almost look alike. The interior arrangement, however, is different and is adapted to the taste of the owner. Of greater importance is the installation of the stove. It is built into the walls, heats two to three rooms and in most cases is situated at the entrance. Thus one has an even temperature in the rooms and the rooms are not dirty. Everybody is very keen on cleanliness. Not one week goes by without a general cleaning. Some dwellings still have no floorboards, rather loamy soil. Nevertheless it is always cleanly swept. It looks like the floor of a chapel. If one comes into the good room, "the front room," then one sees the most beautiful and finest furniture. There stands also the dowry for the oldest daughter. The beds are piled high. Cushion is piled upon cushion. A harmonium is often present in the house. An immeasurable wealth is in such a "front room."

When entering the parents' bedroom, then one looks automatically onto the table. The books lying on them catch one's eye. They are the Bible, the Martin Luther's catechism and the hymnbook. Each evening a chapter from the holy writing or a song from the hymnbook is read. One knows the catechism by heart.

In the centre of the village stands the church with its majestic tower, the well-kept school and the city hall. School and city hall are significantly larger than all farmhouses. They are all very well kept.

The roads are paved only in the rarest cases. Stone ways often lead across these, so one can visit each other. Friendship and common gatherings are very much favoured. The footpaths are only rarely paved. It is unwritten law that the roads and in particular the footpaths are swept in summer. In most villages, another row of trees are added along the pavement.

Yes, the neat and beautiful villages! One could have easily placed them in the heart of Germany. Nobody could have seen that they are the villages of foreign settlers (Auslandsschwaben). As for cleanliness and order, we could have competed at any time with the villages of Germany.

What was missing, however, was electric lighting and the water pipes. Petroleum lamps still found their use everywhere. The water had to be brought in from outside. In the yard lies the well-known bucket well. In addition, many yards had an artesian well. That's where the women and girls had to get their water. This was very hard work. But it also had some pleasant sides, since by doing this chore they met up with other people. Thus they came emotionally closer and saw their fellow men more as one "of their own." That contributed very much to the fact that the whole village community felt as one family.

Our Village—The Administration

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As far as the administration of our colonies is concerned, it can be said that until 1871 they stood under the guardianship of the colonial authority, with the Welfare Committee (*Fürsorgekomitee*) at the top. Each village had a mayor, so-called "Schulz." He had two officers. He had much power and was honoured and respected by all village members. He even was allowed to impose punishments. Usually, the cleverest and most courageous among the farmers was elected by the community. Very often, drunkards and lazy-bones received harsh treatment. Only the mayor could permit music and dancing. In addition, the permission of the inspector of the German colonies had to be applied for. The wording of an old document follows, which was taken once from community archives.

"According to the report of the mayor's office of the colony Beresina of 8.11.1860 no. 308, the colonists and landlords from the same place, Gottfried Dobler and Gottfried Nitschke, on the basis of the regulation from 20 January 1853, and the rules contained therein concerning music and dance permits, receive the permit to allow music and dance at their forthcoming weddings in his house, whereby the mayor's office particularly refers to paragraph 5 point C of this regulation which must be punctually observed.

Colony Tarutino, 9 November, 1860.

Inspector of the Bessarabian German colonies.

signed Lagorie."

Strong action was taken against thieves and slanderers. Cantankerous people, who repeatedly caused fights and trouble in the community, were banished from the community. The colonists had to be respectful towards the office holders, like mayor, officers, minister, teacher, etc..

Above the village mayor stood the Chief Mayor. The latter was responsible for several municipalities and was at the same time the judge. All mayors were subordinates, as already mentioned, to the colonial inspector. The highest instance was the Welfare Committee (*Fürsorgekomitee*) with its seat in Odessa. They published all guidelines for the immigrants-colonists. Until 1871, German was the administrative language. From then until 1918 however the Russian language was also introduced in the German villages as the administrative language. Starting in 1918, Bessarabia belonged to Romania. The Romanian language immediately became the administrative language. From then on the mayors were subordinate to the region prefects (district magistrate). Their rights were reduced. The authority sank. The instructions were given no more by the Welfare Committee, but by the Romanian Prefects.

The mayor was now a plaything in the hands of the superiors. It even happened that the German mayor was replaced by a Romanian, because he did not know and understand the Romanian language. Although the administration was made equal to the Romanian, it must be said nevertheless that our communities still looked completely different to the others. The word of the mayor still had weight. There was not one citizen who would have come into the town hall and kept his cap on the head, as was possible in

other towns. Until recently "the Häusle (a village or community lock-up) existed in our town halls. The drunkards, who perhaps created unrest, would be locked up there, until their intoxication and the aggressiveness had passed. Also high-spirited boys, who were noisy and had started fights, were slung in the "hole," so that the surplus energy could be spent there. It happened again and again that some spent one or even two nights in the "Häusle." The local council (the Konsilium) stood by the side of the mayor, its size of which depended on the number of inhabitants of the community.

In order to ensure an easier administration, the village was divided into groups of one hundred. Each group of one hundred had a group leader known as "Sotzki." He was selected and obliged to see that his region was in order. During the time of the Romanian administration, these were maintained, although it was not required by the Romanian laws and authorities. The male youth feared them. If they made noise on the road, it was the "Sotzki" who drove them apart with the whip. Only then there was peace on the road.

Apart from the mayor there was also a pastoral mayor (*Hirtenschulzen*) for each end of the village and/or district. Each village had an upper and lower end—upper and lower village. The shepherds master (*Schäferschulzen*) was subordinated to the pastoral mayor. They had to collect the monies and to pay the salaries to the herdsman/shepherds and other expenditures. They had to keep accounts. At the end of the year everything was examined and the result of the examination made public. The pastoral mayor had to determine where and when the animals could be tended. He was the superior. That was a perfect self-government. No national law obliged us to accomplish this. Since the administration—the self-government—had already been introduced by our fathers, and because it had also proven to operate so well, it was maintained up to the day of our repatriation to Germany. Even the representatives of the state frequently admired the exemplary order in our colonies. Of that we could be proud. And today we are even prouder. We remained steady as a lonely Swabian island in a mixture of peoples and were popular in our neighbourhood. We lived with very neighbourly relations among one another. Couldn't it also be so in the life of the nations? How beautiful it would be!