

Bessarabia: Before, During, and After the German Settlements

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INTRODUCTION

[Frame 001] *Wenn du zu d' Schul gehsch, laufsch immer bei d' alter Mann sei Haus. Schwetz a'molle mit Ihn. Er kehrt zu uns.* Those were my mother's words to me during my last couple of years in high school. She was reminding me that the man down the street was one of our relatives and I would do well to take the time to *Schwetz* with him on my way to school. *Jah! Schwetz* about what? What does a Junior in high school have to talk about with an eighty year old man? That day never happened when I had a meaningful conversation with my old relative. Little did I know then that he could have told me a lot about the Old Country. He was from Bessarabia. Even my grandfather came from Bessarabia, but I do not recall anyone ever telling me that our people came from Bessarabia and so we never *schwetzt*, or talked about it. Maybe they did, but I either was not allowed, as a youngster, to sit with the adults in the living room as they reminisced, or I was not ready yet to absorb that bit of information. So some 30 years of my life passed by before I woke up to a desire for learning about my Bessarabian heritage. By then, the old people were asleep in their graves. I had to be satisfied to come to know about Bessarabia through the writings of others.

Today, I find myself in front of you folks, offering to tell you, in less than 60 minutes, something about Bessarabia. I realize that some of you may have visited the region and that some of you may even have lived there at one time. If you are one of those people, I ask that you bear with me and, hopefully, I might come up with a fact or two that is new to you, or you can make sure I stay on the right track. I decided to make up this presentation as though this was the first time we ever came across the idea of a place known as Bessarabia. I would want to know where this place is and what kind of history it had before my ancestors set foot on it. I would also want to know how it is that my relatives ended up in that corner of the world and what it was like while they lived there. And, finally, it is obvious, by our now being citizens of nations in North America, that our people left Bessarabia. So I want to also touch on the cause for our people leaving that place and get an idea of what happened to Bessarabia since then.

I. BESSARABIA BEFORE THE GERMAN SETTLEMENTS

LOCATION OF BESSARABIA

[Frame 002] So where is this place called Bessarabia? On the basis of a world map, my homeland is found in North America. To find Bessarabia, I have to look eastward. [Frame 003] Crossing the Atlantic Ocean, you come to western Europe. Since I identify with ancestors from the Wuerttemberg area, the marker on the map indicates roughly where that place is located in the southwest part of Germany. [Frame 004] But you have to look even farther east to get to Bessarabia. As marker "3" shows, Bessarabia touches a blue body of water known as the Black Sea. A direct flight from North Dakota to Bessarabia would be about 6,800 miles (10,941 km).

[Frame 005] Bessarabia is a land mass mostly surrounded by water. On the west side, the Pruth River flows all the way south and empties into Bessarabia's southern boundary, the Danube River. The north and eastern front of Bessarabia is demarcated by the Dniester River, which flows into a large estuary, or lake known as the Dniester Liman, which itself empties into the Black Sea.

[Frame 006] The topography of Bessarabia can be thought of in three sections. The northern highland area consists of tall mountains, deep gorges, forests and lakes alternating. Think of this region as the foothills to the Carpathian Mountains on Bessarabia's west side. The land is some 1,600 feet (487m) above sea level. Central Bessarabia gives way to oak forests and rolling hills. As the land approaches the Black Sea, it turns into flat prairie land, known as the Steppe, at an average of 600 feet (182m) above sea level. Finally, it drops down to meet up with the Black Sea in lowlands of estuaries and wet-lands. [Frame 007] A look at a physical features map, with Bessarabia circled in a red line, lets you see the different elevations with the brown colored highlands to the north and the greener lowlands to the south.

[Frame 008] The size of Bessarabia is about 17,600 square miles (35,600 km²). It would take four Bessarabias to fill North Dakota. At its narrowest part, it is about 20 miles (32 km) wide. The widest part covers a distance of about 140 miles (224 km). The distance from south to north is about 235 miles (378 km).

PAST HISTORY OF BESSARABIA

[Frame 009] Bessarabia is loaded with its own history. A history which pre-dates the coming of our German ancestors. Since Noah and his family got off the ark in the mountainous area near the southeast side of the Black Sea, I suppose it did not take too long for people to start showing up in the area we call Bessarabia. But we have no written records in reference to the area until the Greek historian, Herodotus (485-425 BC), mentions places which some people identified today with the Dniester River and the town of Akkerman and maybe even Tiraspol. Some 200 years before Christ, Scythians invaded the region and are considered the oldest inhabitants of this part of the world.¹

[Frame 010] Following the Greeks on the political stage, were the Romans. By around 100 AD, they ruled the Mediterranean world and had some influence around the Black Sea as indicated by the pink shading on the map of the extent of the Roman Empire.² [Frame 011] There is evidence of earthen works north of the Danube River, from Kahul to the Kunduk Liman near Tatarbunar, probably constructed to protect commerce on the river from invasion from the north. There are remnants of a second earthen works extending westward from Bender. Both these earthen works got labeled as the Trajan Walls. This area, so remote from Rome, became a place where unwanted Romans, such as the poet Ovid, were sent into exile. Even today, there is a town known as Ovidiopol on the Dniester Liman, southwest of Odessa.

[Frame 012] By 375 AD, there was a lot of people movement across the Eastern Roman Empire (in pink) region which we now know as Bessarabia. Goths and Visigoths (black lines) were pushed westward by the Huns (blue lines) from the East and Bessarabia was occupied for a period of time by the Huns.³ Burial mounds, known as "cannon hills", bear testimony to their presence. Huns made way to Avars, Bulgarians, and Slavs. Pushing and shoving of people groups continued and so merchants from the west built fortifications on the Black Sea coast and up the Dniester River as far as Bender and Akkerman to carry on business with the Mongolian Tartars.⁴

[Frame 013] The Bessarabian region became a part of the Moldavian principality from 1367 AD on. Akkerman (also known as Cetatea-Alba) was fortified even more strongly to stop the invasion of the Islamic Turks from the south, but to no avail. The Turks occupied the area and then invited their Tartar tribal relatives from the East to settle it.⁵ So, by the mid-1600s, the political map shows that the Ottoman Empire ruled most of the territory around the Black Sea, Bessarabia included. The tan shaded area shows the extent of the Ottoman Empire.⁶

POLITICAL HISTORY LEADING UP TO BESSARABIAN SETTLEMENT

[Frame 014] I wonder why a couple would decide to up-root, leave behind familiar surroundings, family and friends and head on out to a strange land like Bessarabia. It is easy for us today to think in terms of what we are experiencing. Generally speaking, times are good to us and we live quite secure in our communities. Of course, there are the exceptions, but still, compared to other corners of the world, life is good to us here in North America. We think of Europe in terms of its present day national boundaries. Until recently, Germany was separated by a wall that created an East and a West Germany. Now we see it as one nation. However, that is not the Europe of several hundred years ago.

¹ Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book of the Bessarabian Germans*, p.1-2

² *Hammond Historical World Atlas*, map H-8

³ *Ibid.*, map H-11

⁴ *op. cit.*, Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 2

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁶ *op. cit.*, *Hammond*, map H-25

[Frame 015] There was a time when Germany was not one united country. Look again at the map of Europe of the 1600s. Notice the patchwork of little states that existed between the Kingdom of France (shaded green) and the Kingdom of Poland (shaded light purple). As different maps will be used to show the political boundaries of nations, keep in mind the size of the Kingdom of Poland. During the 1700s and 1800s, this piece of real estate became the envy of Poland's neighbors.⁷

[Frame 016] Little territories, in what we now think of as Germany, were governed by leaders, who coveted their neighbor's territory in order to gain more power and resources for themselves. The Duchy of Prussia and Brandenburg (shaded blue), north and west of Poland is where lots of territorial expansion took place. It started with the establishment of a tiny kingdom known as Prussia in 1701. Several military conflicts and, by the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the Prussians had gobbled up Saxony and took Silesia away from Austria.⁸

[Frame 017] Each time Prussia added new territory to its kingdom, the king would extend an invitation to citizens of various German provinces to come and settle. Not that the land was minus native people, but the idea was that wooded areas needed clearing and marshes needed draining, and, by settling the land with German heritage people, the local slavic people could be dominated. Slowly, Poland decreased in size. In 1667, Poland (borders in red) lost land to Sweden (yellow shading) and to Russia (green shading).⁹ [Frame 018] In 1772, Poland decreased in size again with Prussia taking the purple shaded area to the northwest, Austria, in yellow shading, took some southern territory and the Russians, green shading, took more eastern land.¹⁰ [Frame 019] Then, in 1793, another partition gave more land to the Prussians on the west side and the Russians on the east.¹¹ [Frame 020] In 1795, Poland disappeared from the list of nations when Prussia, Austria and Russia divided among themselves what was left of it.¹²

[Frame 020] Then along comes Napoleon Bonaparte from out of France. After crowning himself Emperor in 1804, he gathered his troops and began to march eastward across Europe. In a battle in 1806, he defeated the Prussians. The Russians were defeated in 1807. His army marched into Moscow (red lines), but eventually had to retreat. Along the way, his army ate off the land, replenished its combat loses with recruits impressed into service from territories conquered. One of Napoleon's acts was to establish the Grand Duchy of Warsaw to be administered by the Polish people. This was going to be of some significance for many of our German ancestors.¹³

[Frame 022] As Russia was gobbling up parts of Poland, it was also carrying military campaigns in the Black Sea region. In the War of 1768-1774, Russia succeeded in taking over land on the Black Sea belonging to the Ottoman Turks. The War of 1787-1791 was an expansion attempt against the Turks who were then in conflict with their Tartar relatives. The peace treaty gave Russia the land westward up to the Dniester River, the east side of Bessarabia. Bessarabia still remained under Turkish rule. The War of 1806-1812, again involving Russia and the Turks, ended up with Turkish defeat and the Treaty of Bucharest ceded all of Bessarabia to Russia.¹⁴

MOTIVATION TO RELOCATE

[Frame 023] Now was the time for Russia to do something about the land of Bessarabia. As nations are prone to do, it is wise to put a buffer of people between your own citizens and that of hostile neighbors. For Russia, it was also useful for their economy to develop the newly acquired land. Several times before, Russia had invited Germans to help settle their new real estate. Once in Volhynia, then along the Volga River and, just recently, territory bordering the east side of Bessarabia known as the Kherson/Odessa District.

⁷ op. cit., *Hammond*, map H-25

⁸ .op. cit., *Hammond*, map H-27

⁹ op. cit., *Hammond*, map H-28

¹⁰ op. cit., *Hammond*, map H-28

¹¹ op. cit., *Hammond*, map H-28

¹² op. cit., *Hammond*, map H-28

¹³ op. cit., *Hammond*, map H-31

¹⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, *Russo-Turkish Wars*, 1970

[Frame 024] But how do you get people to leave their homeland, their friends, familiar surroundings, churches and cemeteries and move to some strange far off place? The first motivator is within the homeland of the soon-to-be settlers. Consider what had been going on in western Europe up until the opening of Bessarabia for settlement. Let me summarize some points made by Karl Stumpp.

Political reasons: Wars had ravaged western Europe for almost a century. Areas were captured, lost, and recaptured. Land was devastated and property destroyed. Men were impressed into military service both by their lords and by the enemy. While the princes fought each other, the citizens were forced to come up with the tax money to cover the costs.

Economic reasons: Taxed so heavily, the land farmed was unable to produce enough to meet the needs of the families plus the demands of the rulers. Nobility lived in luxury while the poverty stricken peasantry was expected to do labor service of several days a week for the prince. As families grew in size, the amount of land available to support that family was not big enough. There were poor harvests, total crop failures, the toll of disease among animals, and adverse weather conditions.

Personal reasons: Families that had emigrated to Russia during earlier invitations, to places like the Volga River area [1763] or to the Kherson area [1804] north of the Black Sea, encouraged their relatives back in Germany to consider the move.

Spiritual reasons: More so a consideration in the Wuerttemberg area than in other parts of Germany was the movement of pietism that focused on a serious devotion to religious duty. It swept the region and people organized gatherings outside of the accepted church events. This created conflicts between the state church and locals. A Separatist movement arose which rejected church authority and became focused on the possibility that Jesus Christ was about to return to this world. These people wanted to be as close to Jerusalem as possible for that day.¹⁵

[Frame 025] The other motivation was an offer by the Russian government to persuade people to come to Russia. In 1763, Empress Catherine II issued a **Manifest** which offered incentives for settling in Russia's newly gained territory. The Manifest was slightly revised and held out these things to lure people to come to Bessarabia:

- Colonists asked to improve gardening, viniculture, and silk harvest techniques
- Religious freedom with control of their own churches and schools
- Exemption from military service
- Local self-government
- Funds for food from day of arrival until the first harvest
- Free land grant of 60 dessiatine (164 acres or 66 hectares) which can be inherited by descendants
- Interest-free loan of 270 rubles (ca. \$55) for 10 years to help poor families get started
- Tax exemption for a period of 10 years
- During the second 10 year period, repay Crown financial support it gave settlers.¹⁶

PATHWAY FROM EUROPE TO BESSARABIA

[Frame 026] For many people, the time was right to pack up and start a new life. The first movement of Germans into Bessarabia came out of what was once known as Poland. When Napoleon created the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and put Polish nationals into administrative power, the squeeze was on for many of the Germans living there. Many were people of Lutheran heritage who had accepted Prussian invitations to take over Polish farms and further develop the region. This, undoubtedly, led to hostile feelings on the part of Polish Catholics. Napoleon's reversal of political roles put Lutheran Germans under pressure. So, when Czar Alexander I invited the Germans living in his newly acquired Grand Duchy of Warsaw to come south and settle in Bessarabia, there was ready reception to the offer.

¹⁵ Stumpp, Karl, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763 to 1862*, p.25-29

¹⁶ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p.3

Travel Overland

[Frame 027] Even as times have changed in our life-time, the times were even much more different for our Bessarabian ancestors. Airplanes and vehicles have brought us to this gathering. Four-lane highways cross bridge-covered valleys, rivers and streams. Tunnels make way through formidable mountains. Rest-stops, refueling centers, eating places and motels dot our country. To decide to travel in the early 1800s meant a difficult road ahead. [Frame 028] The light blue route marked out on the map from Warsaw to Odessa on the Black Sea was some 700 miles (1,100 km) of difficult terrain to travel over minus the amenities we take for granted.

When the invitation was extended to the citizens of other Provinces in Germany, these folks had a couple of options. As you can see on the map, the Carpathian Mountains are a huge barrier for direct access to Bessarabia from a place like Wuerttemberg. People might choose to move overland via the Warsaw route. This would put them on the trail for some 600 miles (965 km) to Warsaw and a total of some 1300 miles (2091 km) to Odessa. This compares to a trip from North Dakota to near the Pacific Ocean. One such partially documented trip from Murr, Wuerttemberg, via Poland, to Plotzk, Bessarabia, took 10 weeks and 3 days.¹⁷

Travel by River

There was another option, the Danube River. From its source in the Black Forest region to where it empties into the Black Sea, the river runs some 1776 miles (2857 km). [Frame 029] A diary exists of one such journey on the Danube, using the Ulmer Schachtel boats.¹⁸ One would assume that this would have been the easier way of traveling, but dangers on the water, difficulty in finding food and shelter along the way, plus sickness and death due to climate change, all contributed to a perilous trip for hundreds of people venturing out to make a new life for themselves.¹⁹

II. BESSARABIA DURING THE GERMAN SETTLEMENTS

PREPARATION BY RUSSIA FOR SETTLEMENT OF BESSARABIA

[Frame 030] Prior to Bessarabia being turned over to Russia, the area had been sparsely populated by Tartars in some 90 villages and more than 380 hamlets, who left the area as a result of the war. This region was known locally as the Budjak. The word means "angle" and was used to depict the triangular shape of the territory. With a vast area of land now unoccupied, Czar Alexander I ordered, in 1813, that it be surveyed in preparation for settlement. Some land in the Budjak was designated for German settlements, the rest went to Bulgarians toward the west, to Russians of various nationalities to the east, and some to nobles, generals and other civil servants.²⁰

[Frame 031] In order to administer the Black Sea colonies, an immigration bureau was set up in 1818, known as the Committee for the Betterment of the Foreign Settlers in Southern Russia, or Welfare Committee (*Fürsorgekomitee*). Its office was located in different cities until 1833 when it was located in Odessa.²¹ It was responsible for the details in establishing settlements in this part of Bessarabia. Some 4.6 million acres (1.8 million hectares) were eventually set aside for German settlement. The original survey divided the area into 15 parts, each receiving a number, which covered about 30 miles by 30 miles (48 km x 48 km). A wedge of territory on the east side of the 15 sections was to also be considered a part of the land for German settlement. In 1817, an official suggested each area be named after members of the Czar's family. However, eventually, names were assigned in memory of famous Russian military victory sites during Napoleon's campaign against Russia.²²

¹⁷ Schlechter, Emanuel, *A Letter*, pp. 16-20

¹⁸ Wenzlaff, Theodore C. (trans), *Fateful Danube Journey – A True Account of an Emigration to Russia 1816-1817*

¹⁹ Bodamer, George, *Emigration*, pp. 2-15

²⁰ Karamanov, Sergey, *On Naming Bessarabian Colonies*, pp. 33-35

²¹ Wenzlaff, Theodore C., *The Russian Czars*, p.7

²² op. cit., Karamanov, Sergey, pp. 33-35

[Frame 032] Usually organized to travel in groups, people began to arrive at the doorstep of the settlement authorities. Some with their belongings in horse or ox drawn wagons, some pulling their loads in hand carts, many getting the chance to do hundreds of miles of walking. Others took the trip down the Danube River. Weak from travel, tried by the perils on the long trip through strange territory, and often afflicted by diseases which led to the death of individual family members, or even whole families along the way, they waited for their assignment to one of the newly organized settlements. The government tried to check people for diseases before allowing them to enter Bessarabia. When a disease was identified, it meant the people would be quarantined for a period of time before they could be settled in. As healthy people waited for their loved ones to get better, the sicknesses might spread and death would take even more people.

[Frame 033] One would like to think that the Welfare Committee had all things in place to receive their invited guests. There were occasions when groups of settlers arrived on the scene only to find that the supplies for setting up the farmyards were not yet available. Without a place to establish themselves, these new-comers ended up being housed in the homes of Russian citizens. Imagine being told by your government that you were going to host a number of people in your home for an unspecified time. Strangers living in your tiny house or primitive shelter to share your space, eat at your table, and all the other things that happen in daily life. A mix of different languages, customs, cultures, religious aspiration in close quarters. Some of the newly arrived Germans made use of existing abandoned structures of one-time nomadic people who wandered the prairie to graze their animals, or they just built their own. As one writer put it: "A large, square, deep hole was dug in the ground, covered with poles, reeds, grass and dirt, the interior walls plastered with mud; therein one was able to withstand the first winter. The next year four stout corner posts were planted in the ground, beams with rafters laid thereon, the beams covered with thin poles and the rafter structure covered with reeds and grass, the space up to the beams filled with interwoven shrubbery, the entire structure inside and out plastered with mud."²³

Settlements Established

[Frame 034] To get a feel of how the settlements were established, a progression of maps are shown with new settlements indicated in red. In 1814, Borodino and Tarutino were founded. [Frame 035] Five new colonies were established in 1815: Kloestitz, Krasna, Kulm, Leipzig and Wittenberg. [Frame 036] In 1816, five more were added to the list: Alt-Elft, Arzis, Beresina, Brienne, and Paris. [Frame 037] Teplitz was the only one established in 1817. [Frame 038] Then a four year lull until Katzbach was founded in 1821. [Frame 039] Then, in the wedge which was not numbered among the first 15 regions surveyed, the colony of Sarata was established in 1822. [Frame 040] The next year, 1823, two more colonies were founded: Alt-Posttal and Neu-Elft. [Frame 041] Two years later, 1825, Neu-Arzis was established. [Frame 042] Gnadental came about five years later, in 1830. [Frame 043] Three years later, in 1833, Friedenstal was established. [Frame 044] Two colonies, Dennewitz and Lichtental, were started in 1834. [Frame 045] It was another five years before Plotzk was established in 1839. [Frame 046] The last colony of this territory to be founded was Hoffnungstal, in 1842. [Frame 047] These 15 villages, each known in German as a *Dorf*, make up what would be known as the Mother Colonies. [Frame 048] All the villages, except Hoffnungstal, are still shown on the maps of today. Of course, now they have Ukrainian names. On this map, you see how far apart these mother colonies were from each other. If you go on the internet and search for a satellite map of the Ukraine, you can zoom in so close that you see the fields, roads, trees, streams, and even the buildings in these mother colonies as they are today.

LIFE OF A SETTLER IN BESSARABIA

Local Administration

[Frame 049] Each colony was granted self-government which was structured in such a way that everyone was concerned about everyone else. Each community (*Gemeinde*) was a settlement village (*Dorf*) with a mayor (*Schulz*) elected by majority vote of the voting community members. The mayor was in charge of the civil government and police power in his *Dorf*, except that criminal cases such as murder or theft in which the stolen goods exceeded 25 rubles silver, about \$18, came under the jurisdiction of the district court in which the village was located. The mayor's tasks were to announce and enforce such things as official decrees, to handle matters concerning

²³ Dalton, Hermann, *Reformed Colonies in South Russia*, p. 31

inheritances, orphan matters, or marriage contracts. Two councilmen (*Unterschulzen*) served under the mayor. It was their duty to handle economic issues, such as community livestock, livestock herds and shepherds, and fire safety.²⁴ To ensure law and order, the mayor was given two or more auxiliary policemen (*Zehentmänner*) called "tenth men" because each policeman represented 10 men in a village. These men were selected from the community. Each night one of them had guard duty and would have to take the night watch and see to it that there was order. If there was any disorder in the streets, they had the right to place the guilty one into the stronghold. They were usually the supervisors at every community service job. They even had the assignment in church, during worship service, to see to it that there was order among the youth in the balcony. This assignment died out with the advent of church administration in Romanian times. They also had to perform a most unpleasant duty which was to go with the tax collector, from house to house, and help the agent collect the taxes.²⁵ The fourth official was a clerk (*Schreiber*) who had to be capable of writing and keeping records.

[Frame 050] A number of colonies were gathered together under a district jurisdiction, under a superior magistrate [*Oberschulz*], two district associates and a district clerk.²⁶ These officials had authority over the colonies and received their instructions from the Welfare Committee located in Odessa, who, in turn, functioned under the Ministry of the Domain in St. Petersburg.²⁷

[Frame 051] This map shows how Bessarabia was at one time divided up into what we might compare to our municipalities or counties. At one point in the history of Bessarabia, there were 8 jurisdictions, taking their names from a major town in the district. The districts, from the north end to the south, were Khotin, Soroka, Bel'tsy, Orgeyev, Kishinev, Bendery, Akkerman, and Ismail (also known as Kahul). The German mother colonies were in the Akkerman District.

Farmyard Configuration

[Frame 052] In general, German villages farmyards in Bessarabia were separated from the street by a street front wall, usually of stone. They were cleaned and whitewashed and gave the yard a nice appearance. The entrance to the yard was often provided with two yard gates of wood or iron that were mounted on two pillars. Often you would find a kind of roof connecting the two pillars. The iron gates were made in various designs. The first homes in the village of Kulm stood diagonal in the yard. Later, the houses were situated with the gable toward the street.

[Frame 053] The house plan, upon entering, was the kitchen in the middle and a room on either side, one a bedroom and the other a living room [*Staatsstube*]. Only special guests were allowed in the living room. A shed [*Schuppen*] was built onto the house in which stood an oven and a hearth. During the summer, cooking and eating took place in the shed because the heat in the kitchen was too much. Connected to the living quarters were a horse, cow and calf stall; a chicken and sheep shed; a grain shed; and even a room for the firewood. Many farmers also built other sheds crosswise on the property. In the back yard, near the threshing floor, there were chaff stalls and the straw and hay stacks. The pigs were in small side sheds or in wood pigsties.²⁸

Farming the Land

[Frame 054] When one hears that each family coming to Bessarabia would receive about 160 acres of land for free, that may not mean much to someone not connected with agriculture. Let me use a chart to give us some understanding. Although not all of our nation is measured out in the same way, those of us living in the middle of the nation are used to the concept of crossroads every mile or so. Within that square mile, there exists 640 acres of land known as a Section. [Frame 055] The section is then divided into quarters. Each quarter measuring 160 acres. So a Bessarabian farmer was promised land equaling that of about a half mile wide and a half mile long. [Frame 056] But, as you can see from this picture, the fields were not handed out in quarter section shapes. The farmer received his yard space in the village. Then he was given a part of the fields in the outlying area. Often a narrow

²⁴ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 6

²⁵ Konrad, Allen, *Kulm Community Homeland Book*, p. 12

²⁶ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 7

²⁷ op. cit., Dalton, Herman, *Reformed Colonies*, p. 31

²⁸ op. cit., Konrad, Allen, *Kulm Community*, p.84

strip next to another farmer's narrow strip, often sowing and harvesting similar crops. In another outlying area, another piece of land may be assigned to the farmers, all eventually adding up to about 160 acres.

[Frame 057] Our first settlers had a difficult beginning. Prairie sod had to be broken and plowed with a wooden plow that had one iron plowshare attached to it and was weak in drawing power. The seed was sown by hand from a sack which hung on the shoulder. The first grain was cut with a sickle, threshed with a threshing flail and winnowed by the wind with a winnowing shovel. Old people laid around the pile of grain at night. At the first sign of a breeze, all would be woken and start winnowing. After this, the grain was cleaned with a small screen.

[Frame 058] In those first years, only the land [*Baustückland*] nearest the village and farmyard was worked. The remaining land was hay and pasture on which the bigger animals grazed. The sickle gave way to the scythe...the scythe to the reel and machine rake. The wooden plow gave way to a one-, then a two-, then a three -bottom plow. Hand-sowing was replaced by seed spreaders, and drills came next. [Frame 059] In place of threshing flails came the threshing stones. In a few instances, toward the end, threshing machines, grain cleaning mills, and winnowing machines took over the work.

[Frame 060] Despite the improvements and easing the workload of field labor, the farmers still had to slave and exert themselves. Neither man nor beast was spared. When threshing time came around, work started early in the morning (around 3 AM) and ended around 11 PM, or later. There was only a short break for eating. During harvest time, the grain was brought together in a round pile with the ears turned inward for protection against the rain. Right after the harvest, the threshing started. The men would bring the grain in on big, long rack wagons [*Harbiwagen*]. The loading gave these men some free time. Even young women were familiar with this work, especially the straw stacks. The straw, as well as the hay stacks were put up in the open because there were no barns big enough. The stack was the pride of the young women. One would get fodder from these hay and straw stacks for the horses and cows. A hay-plucker [*Heurupfer*] was used that had an iron prong with a barbed hook. Because it did the job faster, one often made use of the hay-shear [*Heuschere*] which would separate the needed fodder from the layered pile. During the winter, when the snow was deep, some hay and straw would be hauled into the barn, if there was room. There was a chance for rest during the winter, and the farmer only had to see to it that the animals were taken care of. In the evenings, he would visit with neighbors and relatives and enjoy the wine and food from his own cellar and storeroom.

[Frame 061] As with the grain, the field corn [*Welschkorn*] was also sown by hand at first. Caring for the cornfield was a lot of trouble, because you had to hoe the whole field. Later on, the corn was planted in rows. Someone would go ahead of the plow and scatter the corn into the furrows. It was only later that a corn planter came which was fastened to a wheel of the plow. This in turn was replaced by the box [*Kasten*] which was fastened to the plow. Both replaced seeding by hand. The corn planter [*Welschkorntippler*] finally also displaced the box and did a clean job in as far as it planted two rows at a time. Naturally, in the Fall the land had to be plowed deep and in the Spring it was worked over once again with a harrow [*Eggen*]. [Frame 062] The rows between the corn were cultivated with a special corn plow and then hoed 2 or 3 more times. When the cobs were rip, they were gathered. A person would hang a sack over the shoulder, go between two rows and break off the ears, stick them into the sack and empty the sack on a pile down the way. Later, they were loaded into wagons, taken home and stored in large sheds. A lot of people were always invited over in the evening for the corn shelling. The evening was spent in singing and having fun, and ended with a meal and a generous amount of drinks.

[Frame 063] In Kulm, as in other villages, the three-field system was adopted in which winter grains, summer grains and root crops were rotated. Winter grains consisted of winter wheat, winter barley, winter rape seed (canola) and, in some cases, winter rye, which was cultivated only for fodder. Summer grains were summer wheat, summer barley, oats, millet, rape seed (canola), mustard, flax and hemp. Root crops planted were field corn (known as maize by the Romanians and as *Popsche* by Kulmites), sunflowers, castor oil plant, soy beans, potatoes, turnips, etc.²⁹

[Frame 064] People in Bessarabia took pride in their garden plots known as *bashtans*, located near their farm houses or in a nearby field. The word is of Tartar origin and a concept borrowed by people from the Ukraine all the way beyond the Caspian Sea to the east. The *bashtan* was not planted in plots and rows. In the middle, usually, were the watermelons (white, yellow, pink, or red insides) and muskmelons.. Everywhere between them, standing

²⁹ op. cit., Konrad, Allen, *Kulm Community*, pp. 68-70

tallest in the garden, were the sunflowers with yellow flower heads sometimes maturing to a circumference of 5 feet, signaling from far off the presence of a *bashtan*. The outer side was planted with onions, radishes, beets, turnips Turkish lentils, tomatoes (the size of a man's fist), cucumbers, egg-plants. Also planted were a wide variety of pumpkins (some the size of flour sacks), and gourds of many different colors, shapes and sizes (some almost 2 feet in length). Seeds from the sunflowers, melons and pumpkins contributed to the pass-time of cracking, extracting the seed with the tongue and lots of spent shell spitting. The maize, known as *Welschkorn* (meaning "foreign corn"), not only planted in the fields but also in the *bashtan*, was used to prepare *mamaliga*, a corn mush dish prepared with butter and eggs. The *bashtan* perimeter was guarded by numerous traps to deal with the steppe gophers that relished the watermelon seeds.³⁰

Farm Life for the Housewife

[Frame 065] One has to admire the farmers who packed up their families and wandered off to an unknown country to deal with land and climate they were unfamiliar with. But one has to also admire their wives and all they had to go through. They were often faced with two or three generations living together on one farmyard. They sewed everything from underwear to Sunday clothes; bed and table linen; and work clothing. They did knitting, spinning and weaving. Had to have a practical knowledge of proven home remedies. Took care of the older generation until their death. Worked in the yard, pruned vineyards, hoed vegetable and fruit gardens and corn fields. Cows had to be milked in time to hand them over to the village cattle herder and have the milk ready for pickup. They turned the grain and straw as it was being threshed. [Frame 066] At harvest time, they prepared meals for the threshers. They spent a couple of weeks breaking off corn cobs, tossing them into wagons, and then stripping the husks. Women cut down corn stocks and brought them to the farmyard. They pick grapes. Made yeast cakes from foam of fermenting grapes and cornmeal to last the whole year for baking. They salted or roasted butchered meat, placed it in crocks and seal them with hot lard—hanging other meat in the smoke-house. Housewives processed plucked goose feathers for bedding. [Frame 067] They processed manure into burning material by mixing it with straw, spreading it out, cutting it to size, and stacking it after it was dry. Of course, they did not have to do all this alone. If they trained the oldest child right, all the rest learned from that one. The older children were expected to care for the younger ones. [Frame 068] After the threshing season, housewives could take some time to go to town markets, or visit relatives near-by on Sundays. During the winter months, there was time for handicraft and needle work. Probably most important of all, they helped mold the spiritual character in their children.³¹

Communal Pasture Land

[Frame 069] As you heard, one of the duties of the housewife was to get the animals ready for the village herder. Each morning, the village herder walked the length of the village street on his way to the pasture land held in common by the community. His duty was to collect the cows and herd them to the pasture. At the end of the day, he would herd the animals back into the village, dropping off the appropriate animal at the gate of each farmyard. [Frame 070] In some places, there were other herders: people who tended the sheep and those who took care of the horses of the villagers.

Merchants and Craftsmen

[Frame 071] Of course, not everyone was a farmer. There were those who operated businesses. There were dairies to process the milk of their many herds of cows, like the one in Gnadental. [Frame 072] The farmer had to have a place to process his grain to make flour, so some mills were started such as this one in Beresina. [Frame 073] Unable, as an outsider, to be accepted into the Tarutino community, a man went to the market village of Tatarbuniar and set up a water mill and started the first cloth manufacturing plant in Bessarabia.³² There were also brick factories, general stores operators, wagon makers, blacksmiths, cobblers, carpenters, locksmiths, saddle makers, and many other craftsmen to serve the needs of a community.

Labor Service

³⁰ Kohl (Koch), J.G., *The Bashtan: Pride of the Steppe*, p. 25-27

³¹ Knell, Victor, *The Life and Work of the Bessarabien German Women in the Old Homeland*, pp. 18-21

³² op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 188

[Frame 074] Although exempt from certain obligations which were required of Russian citizens, the German settlers did have an obligation to give some of their time in service both to the local and the district level. Whether farmer, laborer, craftsman or operating a business, citizens were called upon to dig drainage ditches, develop tree plantations, construct and maintain those sections of roads, bridges, and dams that were within their particular community. They were required to provide lodging for a night to soldiers who were passing through. The community was required to furnish vehicles for the transportation of public officials and for the delivery of official letters and packages from village to village. The Czar had the right to command any kind of natural service, such as transporting soldiers and provisions in cases of emergency (war, epidemics, natural disasters), which was for the general safety and welfare of the community.³³

Church Life

[Frame 075] Generally speaking, villages were settled by people of a particular religious group. Krasna was the only settlement among the mother colonies which was predominantly Roman Catholic. It was established in 1814 by 105 Catholic families and 19 Lutheran families from Poland and served by a Polish priest who arrived with the Germans. [Frame 076] In 1825, the Lutheran families asked to be resettled to the Lutheran village of Katzbach, a few miles southwest of Krasna, so that they could observe their different church holidays in unison with a Lutheran community. Settlement officials favored such segregation of denomination as well as nationality and granted the relocation.³⁴

[Frame 077] Krasna, a parish since its founding, belonged to the Diocese of Kamenetz. In 1848, it was annexed to the Diocese of Tiraspol, across the river from Bender. The families of Krasna founded the Emmental parish in 1886, about 18 miles (29 km) from Bender, by the Dniester River. That same year, another parish was established in Balmas. In 1891, the Larga parish was founded. As a result of events in World War I, in 1918, Krasna was transferred to the Diocese of Jassy, Romania.³⁵ There were three other Catholic communities of mixed nationalities in Akkerman, Bender and Kischinev.³⁶

[Frame 078] The rest of the mother colonies were established as Lutheran villages. In 1832, Czar Alexander II and the Lutheran authorities in Russia came to an agreement whereby a General Consistorium was established, headed by a bishop and a non-clergy president. It was put in charge of eight existing Consistoriums, six for the provinces on the Baltic Sea and two for Russia's interior and Siberia, headquartered in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Bessarabian parishes fell under the authority of the St. Petersburg Consistorium.³⁷ Dorpat, a town in Eastern Estonia/Russia is where the congregations looked for seminary trained pastors. After World War I, changes took place also among Lutherans. A provisional Consistorium was founded in Tarutino in 1919. The Bessarabian Lutheran were annexed to the Lutheran Church of Siebenbürgen, Romania in 1920. Pastors were then trained in Tuebingen, Leipzig, Marburg (Germany) and Vienna (Austria).³⁸

[Frame 079] The life of the church developed in stages, much as our people experienced it when they settled down in North America. Worship services were first held in private homes. Then a prayer house might be put up to care for both the needs of educating the children and holding church services. Not every village had their own pastor, but often depended on sporadic visits from a pastor farther down the road. In the absence of that pastor, a sexton was appointed who saw to it that children received religious training, conducted worship services, read the sermons from books, and even baptized children. [Frame 080] Eventually, the community might be able to raise the funds to put up a proper church building, always in the center of the village. Men sat on the right and women on the left. If a church had a balcony, the girls sat above the section where women sat, the boys on the right. Once married, they could no longer sit in the balcony. [Frame 081] The church bell served many purposes. It called the children to school and the public to worship. During times of blizzards, it was rung continuously to given travelers a sense of direction to find their way to safety. [Frame 082] It was rung to announce a fire in the village and to let people

³³ Heigt, Joseph S., *Labor Service in the Life of the German colonists in Russia*, p. 28

³⁴ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 196

³⁵ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 196

³⁶ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 201

³⁷ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 24

³⁸ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 27

know that someone had died.³⁹ Church attendance was not an option. I recall reading somewhere once that a fine was imposed on families who, without good reason, failed to attend services.

[Frame 083] A Reformed Colony was started in 1822 in Schabo along the Dniester Liman between the town of Akkerman and the Black Sea. Swiss people settled in a town once inhabited by Turks who, after Turkey's defeat in 1812, left the place with only the Greek Orthodox community of Moldavians remaining behind. The Swiss were unable to meet the government's requirements for time limits on settling the place and so, in 1840, it was opened up to settlers from the German colonies in Bessarabia. For a while, the Reformed Church was served by the Lutheran pastor from Arzis. Later, the community came under the jurisdiction of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Grossliebental near Odessa. By 1845, they were served by pastors who came from Switzerland, or Reformed pastors from Odessa.⁴⁰

Brotherhoods

[Frame 084] Various communities developed brotherhoods, known as *Brüderstunden*, to provide for some of the spiritual needs some folks felt the local church was not providing. They met in private homes during the week. Led by laymen, the focus was on getting into the Bible, singing spiritual songs, time for prayer, all with the goal of the revival of a person's life by repentance of wayward living and returning to the ways of the Bible. These groups often came into conflict with the established churches and might meet opposition from the pastors.⁴¹

COLONY EXPANSION

Inheritance Laws

[Frame 085] Each settlement began to expand as families grew in number. In earlier German settlements in other parts of Russia, the practice was to grant farmland to a family and ownership passed down to the sons. So, 160 acres (68 hectares) of land supported the original settler and his family. But if the couple had several sons, it had to be subdivided among the next generation. Eventually, the plots became so small that these families were barely able to support themselves. This practice of inheritance was changed for the Bessarabia settlements. Only the youngest son could inherit the farm while the other sons had to learn a trade. This gave the father a chance to use some of his farm resources to put his elder sons into some kind of business. It might even be that he bought some land from a deceased farmer's estate, or someone who was planning to leave the country. But just how many carpenters, blacksmiths or shoemakers could one village support? It became obvious that some folks had to venture out and find a new place to live.⁴²

Land Expansion

[Frame 086] When the Russians took over the territory of Bessarabia from the Turks, land was granted to noblemen, military officers, and others, probably as political favors or a reward for work well done. Often, these men lived nowhere close to their estates and probably never ever saw their land. They might hire someone in the area to administer the land and collect the revenue. Such parcels of land became of interest to the Germans as they were becoming confined on their own land. People began to look beyond their immediate settlement for vacant areas open to possible development. A man might make an agreement to lease a small piece of land and move his family onto it. Such a small family farm was known as a *Chutor*. Another approach was to rent or lease land from the nobility and establish a settlement of farmers. *Pachtland* is what this was called and it might be leased with the option to buy, or simply revert to the nobleman at the end of the lease along with all its development.

Another option is what a man like Dennewitz settler Gottfried Schulz did. He achieved the wealth to purchase land outright from noblemen who needed money to support their life-style in some remote city. This man would buy large pieces of land in the southern Budjak, or even entire estate villages with all their structures. He then

³⁹ op. cit., Konrad, Allen, *Kulm Community*, p.26

⁴⁰ op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland*, p. 193

⁴¹ Hommel, Emil, *Works of Blessed Influences of Pietism*, pp. 39-41

⁴² op. cit., Kern, Albert, *Homeland Book*, p. 4

contracted with German families interested in settling the land. All buyers would be listed on a single contract, each responsible to the other farmer. Ownership of the entire tract was held in common. Land was surveyed and distributed to the owners in several parcels and in various locations according to the usefulness of the soil. Distribution was by the drawing of lots. If an already established estate village with farm plots was under consideration, these too were distributed by the drawing of lots.⁴³

Daughter Colonies Established

[Frame 087] I am going to use an alphabetical listing of the Evangelical Lutheran parishes around 1939 to determine what other colonies were established out of the mother colonies. Since parishes consisted of a cluster of communities in the immediate vicinity of the main congregation, I want to use parish centers to give an idea about where the new colonies were located. The map will indicate daughter colonies in yellow. White locations indicate Germans living there, but not originally a German settlement. Where there is a conflict in the date when a daughter colony was established, I will indicate both the Kern and the *Heimatkalender* dates.⁴⁴ With parts of Bessarabia changing political hands several times, there may be conflict in the listing of a daughter colony's administrative jurisdiction. I am using map demarcations as they were in 1883.

Kahul (Ismail) Jurisdiction

[Frame 088] Because all these daughter colony names are being thrown at you in such a short period of time, a list has been provided in the hand-out material. A reading of Albert Kern's *Homeland Book of the Bessarabian Germans* will help you gather more detailed information on each daughter settlement. For now, though, we will buzz through the list. We look first of all at the Kahul (Ismail) Jurisdiction in the southwestern part of Bessarabia.

[Frame 089] Three different Lutheran parishes served this region. Within the **Albota Parish** there were 12 daughter colonies [Albota-1880; Alexanderfeld (1908); Alexandrowka (1908); Baimaklia (1912); Balaban (1920); Eichendorf (1908); Netusche Weiler (1926); Neu Dennewitz (1913); Nusstal (1925); Paruschowka (1921); Sofiewka (1892); Unter Albota (1919)]. [Frame 090] Further to the eastern end, within the **Arzis Parish**, were 4 colonies [Friedrichsdorf (1911); Maltscha (1911); Parapara (1916); Pomasan (1911)]. [Frame 091] The **Neu Sarata Parish** served 14 German daughter colonies [Bajusch (1910); Bergdorf (1921); Ebenfeld (1914); Fundu-Sarazika (1892); Fürstenfeld I (1895); Fürstenfeld II (1911); Jargara (1882); Manukbejewka (1893); Marienfeld (1911); Mariental (1925); Mischeny (1912); Neu Sarata (1889); Rohrbach/Romanowo (1887); Wischniowka (1906)]. Leowa was not originally a German settlement although it had a Lutheran community within it.

Akkerman Jurisdiction

[Frame 092] In red is Jurisdiction Akkerman, or its more ancient name of Cetatea Alba. Because this is the location of the mother colonies, many daughter colonies were established in the surrounding area. Seven parishes served these Lutheran daughter colonies. [Frame 093] Only one daughter colony was in the **Alt Elft Parish** [Neu Paris (1910)]. [Frame 094] **Andrejewka Parish** had ten daughter colonies [Andrejewka (1892); Eigenheim (1861); Halle/Alisowka (1894); Kisil (1909); Neu Alexandrowka (1911); Neu Seimeny/Dox (1921); Oloneschti (1883); Raskajetz (1886); Romanowka (1895); Tschemtschelly (1862)]. [Frame 095] Within the **Arzis Parish** there were 8 communities being served. One non-German village [Demir Chadschi (1860)], four colonies [Hoffnungsfeld (1864); Kaschpalat (1911); Neu Brienne (1934); Neu Friedenstal (1922)], and three estates [Chutor Kroll, Roduner, and Schlenker]. [Frame 096] There were ten daughter colonies in the **Eigenfeld Parish** [Annowka (1908); Eigenfeld (1880); Freudenfeld (1879/1880); Friedensfeld (1879/1881); Gnadenfeld (1879/1881); Korntal I/Kantemir (1829/1886); Korntal II (1889/1929); Neu Odessa (1879/1899); Pharaonowka (1892); Sarazika/Eckert hamlet (1908)]. [Frame 097] Daughter colonies in the **Klöstitz Parish** numbered six [Friedrichsfeld/Bodamer Estate; Gnadenheim/Semsotka (1909); Hoffmannsfeld/Luxemburg (1922); Philippowka (1914); Tamurka (1895); Tschiligider (1884)]; and two estates [Chutor Gerstenberger; Chutor Hoffman]. [Frame 098] **Posttal Parish** had the biggest number of daughter colonies served. There were twenty-seven communities, but two were not originally German colonies. This listing on one of two pages shows nine of those daughter colonies [Basyrjamka (1891); Benkendorf (1863); Kamtschatka (1893); Katlebug (1895); Luxemburg (1929); Mannsburg (1862); Neufall (1867); Neu Posttal (1864); Pawlowka (1888)]. [Frame 099] Sixteen more are listed on this two of two pages [Popasdrü

⁴³ Schlechter, C., *Gottfried Schulz—A Bessarabian Developer*, pp. 30-31

⁴⁴ *Bessarabischer Heimatkalender 1951*, p. 130

(1922); Sangerowka (1898); Schabo-Possad (1894); Schabolat (1840); Schulzenheim (1907); Sofiental (1863); Strassburg I (1920); Strassburg II (1878)], and eight Chutor estates [Ensslen (1920); Faas (1907); Fuchs (1912); Gassert; Gerling (1907); Irion; Kurz; and Reimann (1925)]. [Frame 100] The **Sarata Parish** served seven congregations, but only five were daughter colonies in the true sense [Balaktschelly (1899); Maraslienfeld (1880); Rosenfeld (1890); Sarjari (1860); Stanhopka (1899)].

Bender Jurisdiction

[Frame 101] Jurisdiction Bender, in the green shading on the map, was also known at different times as Bendery or Tighina. [Frame 102] The **Eigenfeld Parish** served two daughter colonies [Jakobstal (1873/1886); Neu Annowka (1879)]. [Frame 103] The **Kischinev Parish** served four colonies [Hirtenheim (1887); Missowka (1907); Neu Borodino (1920); Neu Nikolajewka (1889)]. [Frame 104] **Leipzig Parish** had eight daughter colonies under its supervision [Blumental (1881); Jekaterinowka (1908); Kolatschowka (1908); Kurudschika (1881); Mintschuna (1868); Peterstal (1873); Romanowka (1882); Tschimischilia]. [Frame 105] The **Mathildendorf Parish** had eleven colonies under its jurisdiction [Hannowka (1896); Helenowka (1895); Josefsdorf (1865); Lunga (1907); Mansyr; Mariewka (1892); Neu Josefsdorf (1923); Neu Mariewka (1925); Neu Mathildendorf (1907); Neu Tarutino (1906); Reulingen (1890)].

Kischinev Jurisdiction

[Frame 106] Jurisdiction Kischinev is identified on the map in the light blue color. This is also the location of Bessarabia's capital city, Kischinev. [Frame 107] The **Kischinev Parish** served seven daughter communities [Alt Oneshti (1885); Bratuleni (1896); Calmatzuie; Hantscheshti (1898); Ketrossy (1912); Neu Kureni (1914); Strymbeni (1881)] and two Chutor estates [Roemmich and Singer (1902)]. [Frame 108] **Neu Sarata Parish** served one daughter colony [Rosental (1923)].

Soroka Jurisdiction

[Frame 109] The Soroka Jurisdiction is to the northeast section of Bessarabia and indicated in the lighter green shading. [Frame 110] There was just one daughter community in this area [Glückstal (1929)] and it was served by the **Kischinev Parish**.

Bel'tsy Jurisdiction

[Frame 111] Bel'tsy Jurisdiction, also known as Belz, was on the northwestern end of Bessarabia, shown in the orange shading. [Frame 112] Four German congregations were served in the region by the **Kischinev Parish**, but only three were daughter colonies [Neu Strymba (1860); Ryschkanowka (1865); Scholtoi (1865)].

The establishment of Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed daughter colonies came to almost 140 communities throughout Bessarabia by 1940.

POLITICAL EVENTS IN RUSSIA AFFECT THE GERMAN SETTLERS

Changes after 1856

[Frame 113] In 1854, Britain and France opposed Russia's expansion into the Ottoman Empire in the Black Sea area along the Crimean Peninsula. What ensued came to be known as the Crimean War. Russia was defeated and, in the Treaty of Paris 1856, Russia had to give up its virtual protectorate over Moldavia and Wallachia, the yellow territory west of the Pruth River and had to return a part of Bessarabia's southern Budjak to Moldavia. A union of Moldavia and Wallachia then became known as Romania.⁴⁵ The red circle in Bessarabia shows where the Mother Colonies of the German settlements were located in relationship to the part of Bessarabia that had to be surrendered by the

⁴⁵ *Dictionary of World History*, p.238, 698

Russians. In 1878, after more warring with Turkey, Russia received this southern part of Bessarabia back into its domain.⁴⁶

Change in Russian Society

[Frame 114] One person's good fortune can become another person's misfortune. The average citizen of Russia was pretty much living under a serfdom existence when the German settlers came to Bessarabia to establish their new colonies. Most Russians could only dream of having privileges like those granted to the Germans by Czar Alexander I. Winds of change blew over the Bessarabian Steppe when Russian nationalism started to raise its head and the Russification policies of the czarist regimes led to the abrogation of all colonist rights, except religious freedom. In 1861, 25 million serfs in Russia were emancipated from their masters, making them free peasants. In 1871, the independent administration of the Black Sea Germans' Welfare Committee [*Fürsorgekomitee*] was dissolved. The German settlement districts were integrated into the Russian administrative system, providing a system of district and provincial self-government for all Russia.⁴⁷ Exemption from military service came to an end in 1874. All medically fit Russian males were subject to military service for a period of six years on reaching the age of 20.⁴⁸ The German schools, which each community developed and supported with their own resources, were placed under the jurisdiction of the Russian Minister for Peoples Enlightenment. Now it was Russian school inspectors who had control over the German schools and wrote the school curriculum. Use of the German language had to make way for instruction in Russian.⁴⁹ Some Germans began to make plans to leave Russia for a better life somewhere else.

World War and Revolution

[Frame 115] With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, life became even more difficult for the Germans in Bessarabia. Germany was the enemy and so it was logical that Russians would look with suspicion on the Germans living in their country, no matter how long they had lived there and even if they had been born there. We might well identify with such suspicions in our own land when one considers how our citizens of German ancestry were treated during World War I, and how the citizens of Japanese ancestry were treated during World War II. Unrestrained hatred toward things German was heaped upon the Germans living in various parts of Russia. An expressly appointed "Commission to Combat the German Assault" was to liquidate the Germans as "Enemies of the Russian Empire" and decree the "Liquidation of the German Landed Property", to expropriate their land without reimbursement and drive them from house and yard.⁵⁰ Many Germans were gathered up and exiled to Siberia, but that decree never got to be implemented in Bessarabia.

Propaganda against Bessarabian Germans mounted when a notorious Turkish sabotage command was sent ashore to South Bessarabia from the German cruiser "Breslau" in 1914, a troop of 20 mounted Turkish soldiers landed at the German sea resort of Basyryamka and disappeared on the steppe. The troops were to blow up the Dniester Bridge at Bendery [Tighina] to disrupt reinforcements to the Carpathian front. The troops got lost on the steppe and, once supplies were exhausted, voluntarily surrendered to imprisonment. Russia's largest newspaper headlined the event as German Spies and Turkish Dissenters in Bessarabia. The match was lit. The general public believed that Bessarabian Germans had assisted in this act and concluded that Germans had been sent to Russia in the earlier days to colonize the land in preparation of a future take-over of Russia for Germany.⁵¹

[Frame 116] Germany's military successes brought them to the door of Bessarabia when Romania was overrun. Tempted by territorial grants by the Germans if Romania entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, in 1916, the Romanians, instead, entered the war on the side of the Allies and assisted Russia in its campaigns. In 1917, Russian losses on the battlefield brought down the moral of the people. Revolution broke out in Russia in March, the czar abdicated and moderate provisional government took over only to be succeeded by another more socialist group. By early August, the Russians were driven out of Galicia and Bukovina, territories on the northwest side of

⁴⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, *Eastern Question*, 1970, Vol. 7, p. 874

⁴⁷ Wenzlaff, Theodore C., *The Russian Czars and the Loss of Political Status by the German Colonists*, p.8

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48

⁴⁹ Richey, J.M., *Our Fellow Countrymen Under Soviet Rule and in Soviet Exile*, p. 18}}

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18

⁵¹ *op. cit.*, Schlechter, C., *Gottfried Schulz*, p. 32

Bessarabia. In September, the Bolsheviks under Lenin came to power and signed an armistice with Germany in December.⁵² The stage was set for Russians to live under the rule of communism.

[Frame 117] But Bessarabian Germans escaped for a while the horrors of that Russian Revolution. After the 1905 Russian Revolution, a Romanian nationalist movement started to develop in Bessarabia. In the chaos brought by the Russian revolution of October 1917, a National Council (*Sfatul Țării*) was established in Bessarabia. After two Russian divisions experienced a disorderly retreat from the Romanian front in 1918, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of Romanian Front, Black Sea Fleet and Odessa Military District (Rumcherod Committee) proclaimed itself the supreme power in Bessarabia. Ten days later, on January 24, 1918, the National Council declared Bessarabia's independence as the Moldavian Democratic Republic.⁵³ With the defeat of the Central Powers and the creation of greater Romania, the National Council now voted with complete confidence a union of Bessarabia with Romania. This was recognized by the Treaty of Paris signed at the end of World War I.⁵⁴

Romania the New Boss

[Frame 118] Our Bessarabian Germans now had to shift gears in the way they did things. The Russian Ruble gave way to the Romanian Lei. The office of mayor became known as *Primar* and the clerk became a *Notăr*. The Romanian government immediately put through a drastic land reform whereby the maximum holding of land allowed was 247 acres (100 hectares).⁵⁵ The Agricultural Decree of 1920 provided landless German families with about 15 acres (6 hectares) of land per family.⁵⁶ But development was hindered due to Russia's lingering eye on a territory lost to them. Also, the railway system was geared to that of Russia and not Romanian. The closing of access to the Dniester River and the loss of the natural outlet, Odessa, had a disastrous effect on the economy. Bessarabia was put under a centralized regime, at times military in character. In 1938, King Carlos of Romania attempted to break up the historic unity by dividing it among newly created regions.⁵⁷

The first recruitment for Romanian military service took place in Tarutino in 1919. Upon reaching his 22nd birthday, the fit and able young man would be called to his unit in the military. Length of service in the infantry, cavalry and artillery was one year and eight months; in the air force and the border guards it was two years; and three years in the navy and military police. Those who had the means could bring their own horse and join up with the cavalry or artillery for three months, but the soldier had to provide for his horse's feed and maintenance. The equipment was supplied by the government.⁵⁸

RESETTLEMENT OF 1940

Bessarabia Re-occupied

[Frame 119] After the German-Soviet Pact of August 1939, the Soviet Union revived its claims to Bessarabia. With Germany at war once again, events in mid-1940 led to Romania receiving an ultimatum from the Soviets. Bessarabia and northern Bukovina were to be returned to the Soviet Union. Romania submitted and Soviet troops entered Bessarabia in June. The central part of Bessarabia was joined to part of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic just east, across the Dniester River with Kischinev serving capital. The Khotin district in the north and the southern districts of Akkerman and Izmail [Kahul] were incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.⁵⁹

Negotiations

⁵² Encyclopedia Britannica, *World War I*, 1970, Vol. 23, p. 709

⁵³ *Bessarabia*, Wikipedia, <<http://en.wikipedia.org>>

⁵⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, *Bessarabia*, 1970, Vol. 3, p.547

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 547

⁵⁶ *Lists Concerning Landed Property Situation of Germans in Bessarabia-1939*, DAI Microfilm T-81, Roll 321, Group 1035, VOMI 947, Frames 2452670-75 }

⁵⁷ *op. cit.*, Encyclopedia Britannica, *Bessarabia*, p. 547

⁵⁸ *op. cit.*, Konrad, Allen, *Kulm Community*, p. 68

⁵⁹ *op. cit.*, Encyclopedia Britannica, *Bessarabia*, p. 547

[Frame 120] And the world started to close in on the Germans of Bessarabia. Unknown to them, and to the rest of the world, in August of 1939, the Soviets and the Nazi governments, through their representatives Molotov and Ribbentrop, signed a Non-Aggression Pact which had several secret provisions to it. One of them, Article III, noted: With regard to Southeastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterest in these areas.⁶⁰ And with Germany's attack on Poland the very next month, the Soviet Union began its push to get back a piece of territory they had lost to Romania. A year later, negotiations between Germany and the Soviet Union concerning the resettlement of ethnic Germans in Bessarabia started in Moscow in July, 1940.⁶¹ Since Soviet forces had already been advancing across Bessarabia, it was important to work out the details on how to get ethnic Germans out of Bessarabia as quickly and safely as possible. In September of 1940, the German Kommando was allowed to set up headquarters in Tarutino and sessions were held with the Soviet authorities as the resettlement efforts sprang into action. These meetings lasted from 15 September to 13 November and minutes were recorded.

[Frame 121] These are some issues they dealt with: Who gets to leave Bessarabia. How much property each family can take along. Who will pay for what is left behind and what the rate for compensation will be.⁶² Ownership of horses and how many can be taken along by the resettlers.⁶³ Ask the Soviets for permission to take along 2000 sheep, 150 Karakul and the rest ordinary sheep of 5 per sheep farm.⁶⁴ Ethnic Germans being requisitioned by the Soviets to do field work when they really need time to prepare for resettlement.⁶⁵ In the advance of the Russian troops, the fleeing Romanian military requisitioned the horses of the German settlers, which left the farmers without enough draft animals to bring in the ripening oil seed harvest and so the crops were left standing.⁶⁶ The Soviets complained that some straw stacks and grain fields, still about 60% unharvested, which now belonged to the Soviet government, were being set on fire.⁶⁷ The negotiators struggled with questions like how to arrange for medical evacuation of the ill from Arzis, Sarata and Beresina.⁶⁸ A complaint was brought by the German Kommando that Soviet authorities in Dennewitz had been putting pressure on people to give up the idea of resettling and even blocking them from registering.⁶⁹ My grandfather's cousin, Heinrich Konrad confirmed that such things were going on. However, he said that even though leaving for resettlement was not compulsory, a *muß*, why would anyone refuse to leave seeing how communism was working out in other parts of Russia. The only hope left was to pack up and leave Bessarabia.⁷⁰ The logistics of moving more than 88,000 souls out of Bessarabia to Romania took some quick planning and constant readjusting of those plans.⁷¹ Originally, the trek out of Bessarabia was to be by trucks and horse-drawn wagons. But poor road conditions altered that plan so more use was made of the railroad system.⁷² The Minutes show that it was agreed to put together railroad trains consisting of Pullman, freight, and baggage cars, destined to cross over at Reni and capable of carrying 1000 persons per train.⁷³ The question of how people should be dealt with once the convoys arrived at the designated border crossings into Romania was also considered.⁷⁴

By 05 October, 1940, approximately 33,000 ethnic Germans from southern Bessarabia had already crossed the border to harbor town destination points.⁷⁵ By 20 October, some 100,000 had been transported to Romania.⁷⁶

⁶⁰ *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, 1939*, Modern History Source Book, Internet Web-site:
<<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook.html>>

⁶¹ Stumpp, Karl, *Letter*, DAI Microfilm T-81, Roll 321, Group 1035, VOMI 947, Frame 2452655 }

⁶² Konrad, Allen & Straeuli, Helmut, *Bessarabian Resettlement Minutes of 1940*, October 2004, p.18

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 54

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁶⁶ *Letter by Lichtental settler Christian Esslinger*, DAI Microfilm T-81, Roll 321, Group 1035, VOMI 947, Frames 2452657-58

⁶⁷ *op. cit.*, Konrad, Allen & Straeuli, Helmut, *Bessarabian Resettlement Minutes*, p.11, 34

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24

⁷⁰ *Interview of Heinrich Konrad by Allen E. Konrad*, Klein Klattbach/Vaihingen am Enz, Germany, 1981

⁷¹ Konrad, Allen, *Evacuation from Bessarabia and Bukovina in 1940*, September, 2001, p.9

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁷³ *op. cit.*, Konrad, Allen & Straeuli, Helmut, *Bessarabian Resettlement Minutes*, p.31

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11, 38

Arranged that trains arrive in Reni in the morning and truck convoys arrive in the afternoon so that all arrivals can be processed smoothly, delays in arrivals led to some chaos.⁷⁷ The last trek transport from southern Bessarabia was to cross the border into Romania by 24 October and then the resettlement process would be over for that section of Bessarabia.⁷⁸

Evacuation

[Frame 122] The German authorities divided Bessarabia into four evacuation districts: Albota [Al], Beresina [Be], Mannsburg [Ma], and Kischinev [Ki]. A sequence of numbers was assigned to each district. Each zone was then assigned sub-districts which included a certain number of villages. The numbers for a district were then assigned to each sub-district and every man, woman and child to be removed from Bessarabia was assigned one of those numbers. Without a number, you would be prevented from leave Bessarabia.

[Frame 123] Trek routes across southern Bessarabia would take some ethnic Germans to the Pruth River bridge at Girugiulesti, a harbor town where the river empties into the Danube, where they could then continue over land to Galatz, Romania, a few miles west of the bridge.⁷⁹ Some would travel southward toward Galatz via Czischme and Reni,⁸⁰ while others trekked to Kilia.⁸¹ Some went to Galatz via Oancea, west of Kahul.⁸²

[Frame 124] My grandfather's cousin said that every farmstead was allowed one wagon and two horses. Each adult was allowed to take 110 lbs (50kg) of baggage and each child 77 lbs. (35kg). Many wagons had covers over them for protection from the elements. [Frame 125] When they arrived at a camp in Galatz, the horses were surrendered and thousands of wagons were standing in neat rows in a very large area. Then, during the night, there was an earthquake while it was raining. A couple of days later, they boarded a steamship for Yugoslavia.⁸³

[Frame 126] With good thorough German record keeping, we learn the following about the evacuation to Romania from a Report on Bessarabia dated 02 Dec 1940. The four evacuation centers moved out about 21,000 households amounting to 91,049 souls. 11,408 wagons and 22,505 horses were dropped off in Romania. 20,045 persons were processed at Kilia, 39,150 at Reni, and 29,350 at the Pruth Bridge near Galatz.⁸⁴

[Frame 127] The German authorities chartered three groups of ships from the Danube Steamship Company numbering 26 vessels. The 6 largest steamships, with a capacity of 1,000 persons each, would sail only as far as Prahova, Yugoslavia and transfer the passengers to trains due to the Iron Gate section of the Danube which made it impossible for large ships to navigate the rough waters.⁸⁵ [Frame 128] Counting both those evacuated from Bessarabia, and those from Bukovina, the ships transported a total of 105,841 passengers up the Danube River.⁸⁶ Once the people disembarked, they were processed and eventually resettled in the Warthe Region of Prussia, or Old Poland. For some families, this was full circle within a period of about 4 generations. They were right back to where their ancestors once lived.

Although promised compensation for property left behind in Bessarabia, not a cent was ever realized. Promised compensation for horses and wagons left behind at the Romanian port city of Galatz, nothing ever came of it. The door slammed shut behind these people and even more suffering was waiting for them once the Soviet military advanced across Poland later on in the war and came face to face once again with past citizens of Bessarabia. But that is beyond the scope of this presentation.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 57

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 41

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 61

⁷⁹ op. cit., Konrad, Allen, *Evacuation from Bessarabia*, p.23

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 45

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 48

⁸² Ibid., p. 51

⁸³ op. cit., *Interview of Heinrich Konrad by Allen E. Konrad*

⁸⁴ op. cit., Konrad, Allen, *Evacuation from Bessarabia*, p.9

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 5

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 6

III. BESSARABIA AFTER THE GERMAN SETTLEMENTS

Moldavia SSR

[Frame 129] Romania entered World War II in 1941 on the side of Germany and reoccupied Bessarabia. Moldavian peasants from Transnistria (a newly organized Romanian province between the Dniester and Bug Rivers) were settled on the farms of departed Germans. On August 20, 1944, a 3,400,000-strong Red Army began a major summer offensive code named Jassy-Kishinev Operation. The Soviet armies overran Bessarabia in a two-pronged offensive within five days. In pocket battles at Kischinev and Sarata, the German 6th Army of about 650,000 men, newly reformed after the Battle of Stalingrad, was obliterated. Simultaneously, with the success of the Russian attack, Romania broke the military alliance with the Axis and changed sides. At the end of the war, Bessarabia became part of the USSR, known as Moldavia SSR.⁸⁷

Republic of Moldova

[Frame 130] Bessarabia was under Soviet Communism until the Republic of Moldova became independent on 25 December, 1991; a day before the final dissolution of the Soviet Union. Its boundaries remained unchanged from those established in August of 1940.⁸⁸ According to some traveler's guides I browsed through, looking for information on Moldova, I came to find out that life in the capital city of old Kischinev is on the modern side, but the rest of the country is far from experiencing the modern life. Citizens used to travel freely between Moldova and Romania to obtain goods and services, but with Romania seeking membership into the European Union, this would put an end to such easy access and Moldovians would need travel documents to enter an EU country.

CLOSING REMARKS

[Frame 131] This short hour cannot say everything about our German ancestors in Bessarabia. However, if you knew very little about the place, I hope you know a little more now. I have provided you with a handout which lists the sources for the information I have shared with you. You can get more details by consulting past issues of our own Germans from Russia Heritage Society Heritage Review Journals.

[Frame 132] Another source that I found very helpful is Albert Kern's book *Homeland Book of the Bessarabian Germans*. I believe it is available at the GRHS Bookstore. It provides bits of information on each of the Bessarabian German mother and daughter colonies.

[Frame 133] The End

⁸⁷ *Bessarabia*, Wikipedia, <<http://en.wikipedia.org>>

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

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[End of Presentation]