

Dying Out of German Customs and Practices in Bessarabia

Source: *Deutscher Volkskalender für Bessarabien – 1929*

Tarutino

Press and Printed by *Deutschen Zeitung Bessarabiens*

Pages 82-84

Translated by: Allen E. Konrad

October, 2014

Internet Location: [urn:nbn:de:bvb:355-ubr13936-5](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:355-ubr13936-5)

Note: A lament by an Alt-Posttal school teacher, in 1929, about some customs and practices that have been disappearing from among the Bessarabian Germans due to the intervention of pastors, government officials and Pietistic elements. Words in [square brackets] are those of the translator.

=====
[Translation Begins]

Dying Out of German Customs and Practices in Bessarabia

by Martin Weiß, teacher in Alt-Posttal

Over 100 years ago, our ancestors left their German fatherland and looked for a new home here in the bleak lonely Steppe on the northern shores of the Black Sea. The reasons that led to this were the troubles and miseries of war in the old fatherland. Through tireless hard work, tough endurance and a love for order, they turned the barren wilderness into a flourishing pleasant open country in the course of century. Where, since time immemorial, the storm winds whistled and howled over the endless desolate wilderness of grass, and the hungry wolf, sly fox and biting badger, almost the only residents here on the endless Steppe of the Budschak, they woke it up out of its sleep so that today there are waving golden grain fields, the rustling of extensive plantings of corn, hills of green vineyards encircling the large flourishing towns, a true oasis in the colorful maze of the various groups of people in this corner of the earth. All this came about through German industriousness. The German colonist transplanted German ways onto this ancient Steppe soil. He let the light of German culture with its bright friendly rays shine into the long, long night of this play-ground of different sojourning groups of nomadic people. With the arrival of the German colonists in this country, a beautiful new and better era dawned on it. Forgotten and abandoned by his old fatherland, friends and family members, he was left to himself and his destiny in this utterly strange world. But still he remained German in the innermost marrow of his bones and did not deviate a finger's breadth from the German way. He has faithfully kept his German mother tongue and the faith of his fathers to this very hour. Yet it must not be concealed that some old customs and traditions have been lost in the course of the century. Therein, the Bessarabian colonist stands with neighboring people who firmly abide by external customs and ancient traditions even as he does. Attempting, at this time, to investigate

the reason that caused the cessation of many old customs and practices , we bump into three causes: the church declared many of the old customs as bad habits and sins. So we encounter “commands” in the directives of some pastors to the church governing bodies and mayoral offices of the German colonies in the early years of the settlement with examples like strictly forbidding the wearing of bouquets and colorful ribbons at a wedding. Even decorating the horses, which carried the bride and groom to the village where the pastor resided, “was toward the last strictly prohibited.” Also music and dancing at weddings was vigorously attacked during this same time and eventually they managed to bring it to a standstill. Before the departure of the bride and groom to the wedding in the parish village, one of the “bridal party young men” (*Brautjungen*) would give notice of the so-called journey. It was a funny poem. By it, the bridal party young men, adorned with lots of colorful ribbons, invited the wedding guests to the wedding house for a meal. For whatever reason this custom stopped, I am unable to say. Now, let us go on the street. What a happy life took place there! The accordion sounded and the singing of national songs echoed up and down the village street. Today, everything has become completely quiet. Where are their street singers? The overly strict village police were always on their heels. Therefore, silent stillness has arrived. On the first of May, for Pentecost, the village street was decorated with fresh maypoles. They have also disappeared in most of the colonies. The colorful flags of the maypole no longer flutter in the wind, no longer embellish the festival of the goddess of spring. At the festival of Easter, the youth gathered eggs on the green meadow, at which time many a village beauty admired the bravery of her “young boys” (*Buben*) with proud eyes. But this innocent pleasure of egg gathering was also soon eliminated by overly pious pietists. A village elected official imposed a stiff fine on the youth of his area for being involved in an egg gathering. When he was made aware of the injustice of such a severe sentence, he threatened to resign from his office. At weddings, the custom was that the shoe of the bride was stolen. This always provided a lot of fun and cheerfulness. If I am not mistaken, it has been abolished by the church. When the harvest was finished, folks gathered for the “hanging up of the sickle” (*Sichelhängade*). As Goethe put it: “Sour weeks, joyful celebrations.” Scythe and sickle have disappeared; and with them also the “*Sichelhängade*.” “*Kirbe*” [*Kirchweihfest*=a church consecration festival usually celebrated in the Fall] was a time of merriment. For it was said: “Today is *Kirbe*, tomorrow is *Kirbe*, until Wednesday evening.” It also has shrunk beyond recognition. The cake (*Kuchen*) stayed, the shepherds still get “pretzel” and *kuchen* in the morning when the animals are driven out to pasture. On Christmas Eve, the “Christchild” (*Christkindle*) came and brought nuts and sweets to the good children; the “*Pelzamärte*” [literally=fur-coat tormentor] brought birch switches for naughty children. They do not come anymore. Only the Easter Bunny does not allow itself to be chased away and still lays its colored eggs in the nest as in earlier times. As the earlier church and village elected mayors zealously worked against old customs, so it continues today, to a large extent, in the community of the pietists, who explain everything what does not fancy them as being sin,

The dying out of old customs and traditions is, however, to be deeply regretted, for with them is lost a good part of the German character. “What you have inherited from your fathers, acquire it so as to possess it.” Even you, German colonists, on the shore of the Black Sea!

[Translation Ends]