

Dobrudscha Presentation

[Slide #01—Title Page] For several years, I served as the president of the Bessarabia Regional Interest Group Chapter. Although the chapter is identified as pertaining to Bessarabia, it has the word “Dobrudscha” attached to it. I did not pay too much attention to the Dobrudscha section because I myself do not have any ancestors who once lived in Dobrudscha and there was no “chatter” among our electronic listserv chapter members about Dobrudscha. Although I have not been able to attend each annual GRHS Convention, for the ones I did attend, I never saw a presentation on the agenda about Dobrudscha.

A few months ago, I was asked if I would consider giving a presentation at this convention. I decided that this was my opportunity to see what I could come up with to inform me and our GRHS members about Dobrudscha. This should be enough of an introduction to let you know that I am not an expert on Dobrudscha. I am just turning over to you what I have been able to find on the subject. There may be some of you in this session who had relatives who once lived in Dobrudscha, and you may even have visited the country. If so, I hope to have some time left over at the end of this presentation so that you can share some of your own experiences.

[Slide #02—Map of Romania in Europe] The Dobrudscha that we are considering is not a country, but a province or state within Romania. Romania is located in eastern Europe, bordered by the Black Sea, Ukraine, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

[Slide #03—Five Provinces of Romania] Of the 5 provinces in a country that looks like a fish, Dobrudscha is the tail on the eastern end of that fish.

[Slide #04—Map of Dobruja] As you can see from this map of Dobrudscha, it has a lot of Danube River wet-land delta, some mountainous country, and some hilly and prairie land on its southern end. Actually, I found out that Dobrudscha can also be thought of as a section of countryside which crosses the border from Romania into Bulgaria. Similar to how we think of the prairie of central North America as existing in both Canada and the United States. As I started my search for things pertaining to Dobrudscha, I was wondering what the countryside looked like. The internet is a wonderful resource to take the place of actually traveling to Dobrudscha. So here is a quick silent trip through Romania’s Dobrudscha Province.

Photos:

- [Slide #05] Northwest Dobrudscha (count to 5)
- [Slide #06] Macin Mountain Range (count to 5)
- [Slide #07] North Central Dobrudscha (count to 5)
- [Slide #08] Northeast Dobrudscha-Tulcea (count to 5)
- [Slide #09] Danube Delta (count to 5)
- [Slide #10] Danube Marshland (count to 5)
- [Slide #11] North Central Dobrudscha Plateau (count to 5)
- [Slide #12] Plateau Hills & Fields (count to 5)
- [Slide #13] Central Dobrudscha Plateau (count to 5)
- [Slide #14] Sheep Grazing (count to 5)
- [Slide #15] Wind Mill (count to 5)
- [Slide #16] Southern Dobrudscha (count to 5)
- [Slide #17] Rugged Southern Coastline (count to 5)
- [Slide #18] Prairie Four-Lane Highway (count to 5)
- [Slide #19] Dobrudscha on Bulgarian Side (count to 5)

[Slide #20—AHSGR Work Paper] In my quest for finding articles which spoke about Dobrudscha, I came across a book titled: *Die Deutschen in der Dobrudscha* by Paul Trager. As I started translating it into English, I discovered that a lot of the information in this book had been dealt with in a paper published in the American Historical Society of Germans in Russia, Work Paper No. 8, May, 1972.

[Slide #21—Dr. Adam Giesinger] The author of this information was Dr. Adam Giesinger. And here is my confession to you: What he presented in that work paper was so to-the-point that I wondered why I should invent the wheel again. So I decided that I would just read his paper to you and provide slides of interest which focus on what Dr. Giesinger was writing about.

[Slide #22—Spelling & Pronunciation] Before I begin reading about the Germans in Dobrudscha, a word about foreign words as pronounced by English-speaking persons. If you speak German, Dobrudscha looks like the first spelling. Other languages see it spelled somewhat differently. I am bringing this up because I will no doubt pronounce some of the place names differently from how you or others might say it. No problem. Look at the difficulty we have with place names right here in the United States. [Here I will pronounce the names of Charlotte, IA, Cairo, IL, Pierre, SD, and Louisville, KY]

German Settlements in Dobrudscha

So, now to Adam Giesinger's paper about Dobrudscha and the Germans who went there to establish settlements.

[Slide #23 Yellow Map of Danube River] The lower Danube, on its eastward course toward the Black Sea, forms the southern boundary of Rumania for more than 300 miles. After it passes the Bulgarian city of Silistra, about 70 miles from the sea, it swings northward and runs more or less parallel to the coast for 100 miles before turning eastward again to empty its waters into the Black Sea. The coastal strip of Rumania south of the Danube delta, thus cut off from the rest of the country by the wayward course of the river, is the **Dobruja**, whose chief city is the Black Sea port of **Constantza**.

[Slide #24—Russian-Turkish War] Until 1878, the Dobruja was ruled by the Turks, but it became part of Rumania as a result of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78. It had a mixed population: Turks, Tatars, Rumanians, Bulgars, Greeks, as well as Germans in significant numbers. When the Nazis undertook the repatriation of Germans from southeastern Europe in 1940, they found 15,000 Germans in the Dobruja. Almost without exception, they were Germans from Russia, who had been migrating into this obscure little corner of Europe since the 1840's.

[Slide #25—Map 1835-1917] By 1840 the German colonies in Bessarabia and the Odessa region, which were to supply the Dobruja settlers, had existed for a generation or more and had developed a considerable landless population. The Russian colonization law, as it applied to the Black Sea settlers, did not permit a father, who had received a crown land allotment when he came to Russia, to divide his land among his sons. Instead he had to pass it on in its entirety to the youngest son. Reserve lands, given to the colonies at the founding to provide for older sons, had long since been allotted.

[Slide #26—Map Odessa Province] A few new land grants made possible the founding of daughter settlements here and there, such as Neu-Freudental (1828) and Helenental (1838) in the Odessa region, both founded by sons of the Liebental colonies, and Neu-Danzig (1839) on the Ingul river, founded by sons of Alt-Danzig and the Beresan colonies. But most of the mother colonies had not yet developed the resources to undertake the founding of daughter colonies and few fathers had acquired sufficient wealth to buy land for their sons independently.

[Slide #27—Map of Europe] The landless sons, if they were not content to work as day laborers or as tradesmen in their home villages, had to find suitable land to rent, which often took them far from home. By the 1840's it was common to see

them migrating in groups from one area to another, within Russia and beyond its borders in the Turkish-ruled Balkans, living now here, now there, eventually perhaps making their permanent home in a new land. Such were the Germans who first found their way into the Dobruja.

[Slide #28—First Migration] (count to 5 and go to next slide)

[Slide #29—Sketch Map Jacobsonsthal, Macin & Acpunar] It was in the summer or fall of 1841 when a group of Bessarabian Germans from Beresina and Leipzig crossed the Danube to land in the Dobruja town of **Machin**. After spending the winter there, they moved on to the Turkish village of **Acpunar**, about 20 miles to the southeast, where they decided to stay, thus founding the first German settlement in the Dobruja. In 1846 they were joined by another group of their compatriots, who had been wandering about the Balkans for some years and had been settled briefly in **Jacobsonsthal**, north of Braila, on the other side of the Danube. In 1848, however, the young German colony at Acpunar was dissolved and its German settlers to a man moved a few miles farther on, away from the Turks, to found a new independent settlement.

[Slide #30—Satellite Map Tulcea & Malcoci] The earliest founded Dobruja German colony which survived down to our own day was **Malsochi**, just (~~Trager says northeast~~) southeast of the city of **Tulchea**,

[Slide #31—Map Beresan District] founded in 1843 by Catholics from the Odessa region, from the colonies Josephstal, Mannheim, Elsass, Landau, Katharinental, Speyer and others.

[Slide #32—Map Moldavia & Wallachia] Most of these had left their homes in 1841 and had wandered about Bessarabia, Moldavia and Wallachia for two years before crossing the Danube into the Dobruja. They came to Tulchea, where a few families decided to stay, but the majority accepted the Turkish government's offer of free land some miles from the city.

[Slide #33—Sketch Malcoci Church] The land was heavily wooded and very laborious to clear, unaccustomed work for people from the steppes, but there were special incentives to spur them on. Each colonist was offered ownership of as much land as he could clear and, in the meantime, sale of the lumber he cut provided his family with a living. In 1847, when a Catholic parish was set up, Malsochi had 28 families, with 134 persons.

[Slide #34—Sketch Map Atmagea] The second oldest German colony in the Dobruja was Atmajaya, about 15 miles west of Babadag, founded in 1848 by the Bessarabian Germans who had been settled briefly at Acpunar. They were Platt-speaking North Germans, from west Prussia, Brandenburg, Pomerania and Mecklenburg, all of them Lutheran Protestants, whose fathers had settled in several different Bessarabian colonies in the years 1814-16.

[Slide #35—Satellite Map Forest] Like the Malsochi colonists, they were given heavily wooded land, of which an individual colonist could acquire whatever area he could clear. There were 35 families at the founding. By 1857 the number had grown to 58 families.

[Slide #36—Map Crimea War 1853-1856] A new restlessness developed in the South Russian German colonies as a result of the Crimean war of 1853-56. Again groups of young families left their home villages to seek better living conditions elsewhere. Some of these, along with older wanderers who had left their Russian homes in the 1840's, became the founders of two new Dobruja settlements.

[Slide #37—Satellite Map Cataloi] Kataloi, about 8 miles south of Tulchea, was founded in 1857 by 40 German families of various backgrounds. The majority were North Germans from the Bessarabian colonies, but there was a strong Swabian group, some of them probably originating from the Beresan colonies. All were Protestants, predominantly Lutherans of a pietistic tendency.

[Slide #38—Satellite Map Ciucurova] The other new colony founded at this time was Chiucurova, a few miles to the southeast of Atmajaya, in which 30 families, mainly Platt-speaking North Germans from Bessarabia, settled in the years 1857-58. Among the founders occurred many of the same family names as in Atmajaya, indicating that they came from the same villages in Bessarabia and ultimately from the same parts of Germany. There was, however, a minority of South German origin. All the Chiucurova settlers were Protestants.

[Slide #39—Lutheran Pastor] In 1858, as the result of an appeal to the church authorities in Berlin, a pastor was sent from Germany to Atmajaya to serve the German Protestants of the Dobruja. The pastor was stationed at Atmajaya but served also the people of Chiucurova and of Kataloi. Soon after this establishment of regular Protestant church services, however, the even tenor of religious life in the Dobruja was disrupted by the arrival from Russia of zealous missionaries of the Baptist faith.

[Slide #40—Baptists in Russia] This faith was brought to Russia in the early 1860's from Germany. There were Baptists among the new settlers in Volhynia at that period and Baptist missionaries began to appear here and there in all parts of the Black Sea and Volga regions. Johann Gerhard Oncken, the leader of the Baptist movement in Germany, himself visited Russia and one of his chief lieutenants, August Liebig of Hamburg, spent some years there. Baptist views strongly influenced the Mennonite Brethren movement, then in its beginnings among the Black Sea Mennonites. The earliest Baptist success among the Lutheran Protestants was in Alt-Danzig and Neu-Danzig, where there appears to have been a mass conversion in 1864 and where, a few years later, in 1869, the first Baptist parish in Russia was formally set up.

[Slide #41—Oppressive Measures] The success of these foreign missionaries of a new faith alarmed the leaders of the established German Protestant Church in Russia, as well as the Russian government. Repressive measures were introduced to discourage the movement, including the banishing from Russia in the mid-1860's of seven of the most zealous members of the Danzig Baptist congregation. It was 1879 before Baptists were officially tolerated in Russia.

[Slide #42—Exiled Baptist Leaders] The Baptist leaders exiled from Russia, Stulberg, Heringer, Edinger, Leitner and three others, went to the Dobruja, where they settled in Kataloi. Here they appear to have found kindred spirits (and perhaps also earlier acquaintances from the Beresan colonies) and rapidly made many converts to their faith.

[Slide #43—German Church in Kataloi] By 1872 Kataloi was almost completely Baptist and there were converts in both Atmajaya and Chiucurova, where the loyalty to the traditional Lutheran church proved stronger.

[Slide #44—Map of Moldavia] The Dobruja Germans experienced a period of special trial during the 1860's. The settlers in Kataloi and Chiucurova had not yet adjusted to the hard life of hewing farms out of the forest and even in Atmajaya, which was ten years older, there was a restlessness which threatened to bring the Dobruja adventure to an end. In 1861, having heard rumors that there were free lands and more attractive living conditions in Moldavia, nearly all the colonists of Atmajaya, Kataloi and Chiucurova suddenly took off across the Danube and wandered about for several months in their former style. Not finding the paradise they were seeking, most of them returned in the next year or two. They had barely got their farms operating again, when a new and menacing problem appeared.

[Slide #45—Muslim Circassian Homeland] The Turkish government had generously offered a new home in the Dobruja to Moslem Cherkess tribesmen from the Caucasus and in 1864 had settled some of them near Atmajaya. These new neighbors were a lawless, thieving lot, who “carried off everything except millstones and red hot iron”. For years these brigands harassed and robbed the colonists and kept them at the poverty level. The unhappy state of their temporal condition at this time undoubtedly contributed greatly to their ready response to the other-worldly fervor of the Baptist missionaries.

[Slide #46—Second Migration] The 1870’s, well known as the era in which large scale emigration of Russian Germans to America began, saw also a new surge of immigration into the Dobruja. The movement in both cases was the result of the Russian government’s abrogation of the special privileges which German colonists had enjoyed since the days of Catherine II.

[Slide #47—1871] Two changes especially annoyed the colonists, their incorporation into the general network of Russian local government in 1871, to replace their traditional local government system, and the abolition of their exemption from compulsory military service in 1874.

[Slide #48—Satellite Map Cogevalac & Tariverde] As early as the summer of 1872 delegates from some of the Bessarabian colonies visited the Dobruja to find land and to negotiate with the Turkish authorities. They seem to have been successful, since in the following year Germans began to arrive from Russia to settle on the grassy steppes of the central Dobruja. Three new colonies were founded in the years 1873-74, mainly by Protestants from Bessarabia, but including some families from the Odessa region: **Cojehalac**, half way between Babadag and Constantsa; **Tariverde**, just northeast of Cojehalac;

[Slide #49—Satellite Map Fachria] and **Fachria**, almost due west of Constantsa, near the town of Chernavoda. All three of these became relatively prosperous later.

[Slide #50—Sketch Map of Dobrudscha] In the spring of 1876 a new group arrived from Bessarabia, 25-30 families from the Catholic colony of Krassna. After many vicissitudes, some of them resulting from the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, the main group, shortly after the war, settled in **Caramurat**, northwest of Constantsa, and the rest, a little later, combined with compatriots from Mannheim in the Odessa region to found **Culelia**, farther north. Also founded by new immigrants from Bessarabia in the immediate postwar years were **Anadolchioi**,

Horoslar and **Cojehala**, all near Constantza, and **Ortachioi**, a few miles north of Atmajaya.

[Slide #51—Sketch Church in Culelia] During the Russo-Turkish war the Dobruja became a battleground, bringing much suffering to the inhabitants of the province. The Germans of three colonies particularly, Atmajaya, Cojehalac and Fachria, lost almost all their possessions and had to start afresh after the war.

[Slide #52—Dobrudscha Becomes Part] As a result of the war the Dobruja in 1878 became part of Rumania. The easy-going Turks, who had permitted the Germans to run their affairs as they pleased, so long as they paid taxes, were replaced by the much more exacting Rumanians.

[Slide #53—German Village] The new masters put a Rumanian “Primar” in each village to head the local government in place of the elected German “Schulz”. This official rarely understood the language of the colonists and imposed his will on them with little understanding of their needs.

[Slide #54—Land Reform] Laws of 1882 and 1884 brought a new subdivision of the land, making 10 hectares [24.7 acres] the norm for the individual farmer, rather than the unlimited possibilities permitted under Turkish rule. The arbitrariness of the new officials in applying the laws led to bitter resentment. Colonists who could not show titles in documentary form from Turkish days were dispossessed. Land acquired by the government in this way, and by seizure for non-payment of taxes, was given to Rumanian war veterans, who were introduced into the German villages against the wishes of the inhabitants.

[Slide #55—1884] Very annoying too, after their complete freedom in this respect under Turkish rule, was the rumanizing of their schools. In 1884, even earlier in some cases, a Rumanian teacher was imposed on each village and the German teacher was restricted to teaching only German and religion for an hour a day.

[Slide #56—Four Maps] The dissatisfaction engendered by the arbitrariness of the new regime gave the impetus to an emigration movement from the German Dobruja colonies to America, which began in the early 1880's. The growing land shortage and religious animosity between Baptists and Lutherans living in the same village also played an important role. The first seven families to go to America are said to have left Kataloi in the year 1882 and to have settled in North Dakota. By 1884 the movement was general, every German village contributing its quota. Baptists especially left in large numbers. Most frequently the destination was

North or South Dakota, but some groups went to Canada and some of the Catholics to Argentina.

[Slide #57—Third Migration] The founding of new German settlements in the Dobruja had come to a stop soon after the Rumanian regime took over. There was, however, a brief resumption of immigration from Russia in 1890-91, as a result of the harsh russification measures of Tsar Alexander III.

[Slide #58—Satellite Cobadin to Mangalia] Two of the German villages founded in the Dobruja by immigrants at this time survived: Cobadin and Sarighiol, both in the southern part of the province. A few daughter colonies, also in the south, founded from the old colonies in the 1890's and later, were also relatively successful, particularly Mamuzlu and Manjehapunar.

[Slide #59—German Population] When the Dobruja became Rumanian, the province is said to have had about 3,000 Germans. In spite of relatively large families, there was no rapid population increase, because the natural increase was partially offset by a steady emigration to America. By the turn of the century the number of Germans in the Dobruja had increased to about 5,000. In 1921 a count showed 8,534. When the Dobruja colonies were dissolved by the Nazis in 1940, 15,000 Germans were repatriated to the Reich.

[Slide #60—Daughter Colonies-Romania] At this point, Adam Giesinger's document comes to an end. Of course, there is a lot more that can be said about the Germans in Dobrudscha. As I mentioned earlier, I am in the process of translating Paul Trager's 1921 book about the Germans in Dobrudscha. He makes mention of the emergence of daughter colonies in 1893-1917. Germans took up residence in the following places (**which I am not going to read out loud**): Alacap, Bratianu, Chernavoda, Chiragi, Ciobanu, Docuzaci, Doumai, Garliciu, Ghinventia, Harsova, Klein-Mangeapunar, Mamaia, Mamuzlu, Mangeapunar, Ostrov, Palaz Mare, Rasova, Sofular, Techirghiol, and other isolated places.

[Slide #61—Daughter Colonies-Bulgaria] Although the focus has been on the Dobrudscha in Romania, it is important to note that the German farmers did not stop at Romania's southern border. They also sought land in the Dobrudscha of Bulgaria. Although Paul Trager does not have great details about those settlements because the events of World War II prevented him from finishing his research there, he does list the following places where Germans did settle (**which I am also not going to read out loud**): Ali Kalfa, Arboceko, Baladja, Balcik, Biela Slatina, Brdarski-Geran, Celindje, Cepangchioi, Ciobankujus, Dobritsch, Durbali, Emirler,

Endze, Hasirlik, Jamboli, Kalfakioi, Karali, Kasimkioi, Koroceko, Musubej, Plevna, Serdimen.

Trager estimated that at least 4 completely German colonies arose in the Bulgarian Dobrudscha and in at least 13 areas there were, at his time of research in 1917, isolated German farmer families or smaller groups in settled places numbering something like not less than 150 families with approximately 800 souls.

[Slide #62—Resettlement] There were only 22 years after World War I that the Dobrudscha Germans were able to live out their lives in a semblance of peace and prosperity. In that period of time, Germany, hurting from its defeat in 1917, was building up its military strength and the Nazi Party came into power. In 1939, Germany started to vigorously expand its political borders. Great successes eventually turned into retreats. In 1940, Russia made its advance into Bessarabia and the German Reich began organizing the evacuation of the ethnic German people living in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dobrudscha.

[Slide #63—VOMI-DAI] From the DAI microfilms at our GRHS Library of documents captured during World War II, I have been able to glean some of the following information about the evacuation of the German settlers from Dobrudscha from VOMI correspondence.

[Slide #64—Embarkation Harbor] Although records show that Chernavoda was the place where ethnic Germans boarded ships for evacuation, the harbor was not suitable for all the activity of ship docking and also the maintenance and repair required by the ship, so Jiurjiu became the VOMI center of administration.

[Slide #65—Iron Gate] When the German settlers made their way to Russia in the early 1800s, there was a dangerous path along the Danube River known as the Iron Gate. Rocks from both sides of the Carpathian Mountains tumbled into the river bed and made it tough for ships to pass over the rocks and through the falls they created. By 1940, dredging had eliminated some of the danger and it was through this pass that the evacuated ethnic Germans passed on their way to Yugoslavia.

[Slide #66—Shipping List] Another VOMI document gives a summary report on what ships were used to evacuate the Germans from Dobrudscha; how many times they travelled the 270 miles from Chernavoda to the harbors at Belgrade, Yugoslavia; and the total number of ethnic Germans that were taken on as passengers. Only one ship sailed 80 miles further north of Chernavoda to pick up passengers at Braila. The VOMI report noted that Dobrudscha passengers from the

ships **Istvan** and **Uranus**, departed Belgrade at 3:09 PM, Thursday, 21 November, on Train 8a and headed for Baden, near Vienna.

[Slide #67—Wedding] And so came to an end about 100 years of ethnic German life in Dobrudscha. They stopped ringing their church bells. The excitement of weddings and all that happened at them ceased. Cemeteries holding their loved ones were abandoned.

[Slide #68—Dobrudscha Resources] Check out these web-sites for more information about Dobrudscha things. With what time we have left, this will be our opportunity to hear from any of you present who have ancestors who lived in Dobrudscha and, if you have had the chance to visit that land, maybe you would be willing to share something about that with us. If there are any questions about Dobrudscha, now is the time to ask and we will see if folks in the room can come up with some answers.

[Leave Projector & Computer on until dismissal]