

The Germans in Dobrudscha (Part 3)

The book listed below, containing 248 pages of information, is being translated chapter by chapter and posted as each chapter is completed. Part 1 gives you a summary of each of the 15 chapters in the “Contents” section. The words in the [square brackets] are those of the translator and are not found in the original text.

Translator: Allen E. Konrad
11 January, 2017

The Germans in Dobrudscha

**along with a contribution
to the history of the German
migration in Eastern Europe**

**by
Paul Traeger**

**With 73 illustrations in the text and tables
Stuttgart 1922
Foreign and Home Publishing Company
(*Ausland und Heimat Verlags=Aktiengesellschaft*)**

3.

The First German Emigration out of Russia

Unlike the first migration to Russia, the first German immigration to Dobrudscha did not take place by way of a public colonization policy and no official welfare organization directed and watched over it. The German farmers left their South Russian home sites on their own initiative and at their own expense to find new land and their luck elsewhere. So they were not yet thinking about Dobrudscha as they made their move. The first places where they stopped off were in a sense wild start-ups of which a person is likely to search in vain among the Turkish State Archives bound documents. Its inhabitants were left to themselves, only given to difficult work and concern for the basic necessities of life. Many years went by before a teacher and pastor came to them, community lists kept, and civil records made. No one was concerned about them and knew about them. They were just farmers, and they have remained like that until today, without developing a higher schooled class or even develop only modest documentation.

As a result, there was no one to write up a history for nearly half a century. While the German settlements in southern Russia were pursued from the outset with lively interest, not a single literary phenomenon was reported about Dobrudscha for a long time, apart from a few occasional reports by travelers, which received little attention, who came to this particular corner and came across a German village by accident. As far as I was able to determine from my research, it was only around 1883 that something was published concerning the development of things German in Dobrudscha. It was a call for help from the pastor of the German Lutheran parish in Bucharest, the distinguished Willibald Stefan Teutschländer¹ had paid an official visit to a couple of colonies and sought to reveal their sorry situation to the people in Romania and in the Reich via a letter in the *Bucharester Zeitung*. The German press reproduced a short notice and the *Deutschen Kolonialzeitung* repeated the report.² To the editor of *Weltpost*, Richard Lesser tried on his own to get more news about the unknown German settlements in Dobrudscha. As a result, he was able to come up with an overview of the colonies by way of information on the number of inhabitants and several short messages in his magazine in the same year of 1883,³ and, in the following year, another article in the *Deutschen Kolonialzeitung*.⁴ In addition, there was also a report by Dr. Jan Kraus in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.⁵ In 1886, there appeared the first major article dedicated to the lost ethnic countrymen in Dobrudscha. Pastor Bernhard Schwarz had visited some villages in a hasty manner in connection with a Romanian trip and, because of that, felt compelled to come up with a comprehensive, overpowering, wordy 130 page book.⁶ What he in essence reported in it about the colonies and their inhabitants, is as scanty as it is superficial. In the following year, Pastor Rode made a report to the Diaspora Conference at

¹ Wir verdanken ihm die "Geschichte der evangelischen Kirchen=Gemeinde in Bukarest," Bukarest 1869, die er dann zu einer "Geschichte der Evang. Gemeinden in Rumänien mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Deutschtums" erweiterte, erschienen Bukarest 1891.

² Jahrg., Frankfurt a. M. 1884, S. 41: Von den deutschen Bauern in der Dobrudscha.

³ *Weltpost*, 3. Bd., S. 188/90, 221 und 273/4.

⁴ "Ein Stück moderner deutscher Völkerwanderung," 1. Bd., Frankfurt a. M. 1884, S. 433/35.

⁵ Nr. Vom 11. Okt. 1884.

⁶ Vom deutschen Exil im Skythenlande. Erlebnisse, Klagen und Aufklärungen aus der Dobrudscha. Leipzig 1886. 8.

Dessau about some of the colonies.⁷ Afterwards, in 1891, Teutschländer, in his history of the Lutheran (*evangelischen*) congregations in Romania, gave a brief report concerning 9 existing in Dobrudscha; however, he is mostly inaccurate in his statements about their early years.⁸ There is very little else a person can say about the literature concerning the Germans in Dobrudscha.⁹ The only work of value to be taken into consideration about the congregations in Dobrudscha are the submitted reports and also the history of origins sections of the 1901 published work about the diaspora of the German Evangelical Church in Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria by the former Pastor in Braila and Bucharest, H. Meyer.¹⁰ It is confined exclusively to the evangelical congregations, however, it does not deal with them thoroughly. But Meyer did use church documents for his presentation, so this gives valuable information about the earlier time despite some mistakes. Small reports on a number of colonies are presented by their teacher or pastor in three Year Books of the German People's Education Association in Romania.¹¹ An attempt was made in 1911 to come up with statistics. In more recent times, mainly after the marching in of our troops, many articles have appeared in magazines and newspapers, but have little significance for the research.¹²

Literary sources are not available from older times, and there are also no written documents for the years leading up to the development of an organized church community life. So one is almost exclusively directed to the oral tradition and the stories of the old people, whose youth still goes back to the beginnings of the individual settlements. Every now and then, later civil records provide a source of proof in the investigation of a birthplace such as evidence of long-disappeared and forgotten settlements and stays. The richest and most diverse document material, not merely of population lists, birth, baptism, and death registers, but also of the documents of community transactions, I found old letters and the like in the church at Atmagea which was looted by the Russians.. Even the portfolios and documents were ransacked by them and scattered all over the place, but it seemed that at least nothing had been destroyed.

Either in the summer or autumn of 1841, the first German farmers entered Dobrudscha. It seems to have been only a small number of families that came from Beresina, Leipzig, and probably also from other Warsaw colonies and headed fairly directly for Macin. They stayed here over the winter and settled in the following years in the Turk inhabited village of Akpunar, located about 30 km [18.6 miles] southeast on the road to Babadag. This then may have been the first German settlement in Dobrudscha.

But these families were only a small part of the considerable amount that, in that year and perhaps somewhat earlier, left the German colonies of New Russia. A vast majority of emigrants found their way into Dobrudscha only after first going through a long time of wandering about

⁷ Protokoll über die am 5. und 6. Okt. 1887 zu Dessau abgehaltene Jahresversammlung der Diaspora-Konferenz. Leipzig 1888, S. 3 ff.

⁸ Bukarest 1891, S. 235/43.

⁹ Erwähnt sei aus jenen Jahren noch eine Übersicht über die evangelischen Kolonien bei: Kobbelt, Rud. Die deutsche evang. Diaspora, II. Heft, Gotha 1893, s. 82/86. — Ferner ein mancherlei irrtümliche Angaben enthaltender Aufsatz des damaligen Direktors der deutschen Realschule in Bukarest, Franz Schmidt: Ein Stück untergehenden Deutschtums. In: Die deutsche Schule im Ausland. 1. Jahrgang (1902), S. 603/610.

¹⁰ Potsdam 1901.

¹¹ Ersch. im Selbstverlag des Vereins, Bukarest 1910, 1911 und 1913.

¹² Eine Übersicht über die Kolonien, die jedoch weder vollständig noch frei von Irrtümern ist, gab der um die Geschichte des Deutschtums in Rumänien sehr verdiente Bukarester Forscher Emil Fischer in der Temesvarer Zeitschrift "Von der Heide," VII, Heft 1-3.

and searching, stopping over in many distant places far removed from one another. Their stories reveal that they had previously been, for shorter or longer periods time, here and there in Moldavia and Wallachia and even on the Bulgarian bank of the Danube. We learn with surprise that around the year 1840, in these mentioned countries, a whole string of German settlements arose, of which nothing is left today and no knowledge of them was made known to us. In Moldavia: Botosani, Baja, and Basluiu were mentioned to me or indicated in documents as places of birth. In Wallachia: a group sat for a year at Ploesti, and, after that, about two years on the Danube in Bordusani, located about 12 km [7.5 miles] to the north of Fetesci. A larger group of Catholic families from the Kherson *Gouvernement* had settled near Kalarasi in 1841-1842. Others, after unsuccessful searches in Wallachia, crossed the Danube and put up residences between the Bulgarians in the region of Silistra. For this information, we owe our thanks to a chance encounter with a contemporary literary document. When the German traveler Professor Karl Koch was on his way to Constanta in the summer of 1843, he stopped off in Cernavoda and saw some small German wagons and by them Swabian men from Bessarabia dressed in blue linen jackets and blue trousers. They said that something like 300 families had made a request to the Turkish Government for land and had been initially willing to develop the empty Dobrudscha steppe, and that the foolish Turkish Government gave them, blind to the benefit for them, a negative response. "So the poor Germans turned around and sought to earn their pitiful bread by wagon transporting and manual labor. The largest part of them located in Wallachia and only 11 families succeeded in finding accommodations in Silistria."¹³ Others seem to have followed them and their stay in and around Silistra lasted only a few years. As places of birth for residents of Atmageas and Katalois, I found 2 villages near Silistra that were mentioned: Holtenski Kischta (?) with the birth year of 1845 and Ostlok (Ostrów?). Some of the colonists from Bessarabia had extended their migration at that time even as far as to Hungary and then returned again to Wallachia, finally, to find refuge in Dobrudscha.

Only the German settlement in Wallachia, from around that time, has survived until our days. For decades, it has been an important transit point to Dobrudscha and, because of that, became of greater importance for the history of its German villages. The place is the **Jacobsonsthal Colony**, or Satul Nemtesc, as the Romanians call it, located about 6 km [3.7 miles] north of Braila. As a result of its closeness to and membership to the Lutheran (*evangelischen*) parish of Braila, it had been mentioned several times and also not remained entirely unknown in Germany.¹⁴ In 1844, colonists from Bessarabia, who previously stayed for a while at Ploesti and Braila, despite urgent warnings, settled on the Danube, and the village was completely flooded and destroyed several times. Nevertheless, the inhabitants were not deterred and each and every time returned and rebuilt their homes. It is quite surprising, since none of the colonists were the owners of the soil that they cultivated, not even the home place was theirs, it was all only worked as rented land. In the World War, after the capture of Braila, it had to be evacuated because the place became the fire zone between the German and the Russian-Romanian troops. The inhabitants, then down to 38 families, were brought to the village of Chiscani, about 10 km [6.2 miles] up-stream on the Danube. It was here that I visited them in the summer of 1917. They told me that all of them had decided that they did not want to stay in Rumania any longer. However, after the Peace of Bucharest, they again returned to their old place and had gotten busy

¹³ Wanderungen im Orient während der Jahr 1843 und 1844. Weimar 1846. Bd. I, S. 108.

¹⁴ Im Ueberschwemmungsgebiet der unteren Donau. Von Pastor Winkler, früher in Braila. Heft 26 der Sammlung: Gut Deutsch und Evangelisch Allewege, Potsdam o. I. — Meyer, H., Die Diaspora, S. 328 ff.

with reconstruction. When I again visited them in October of 1918, some houses were already standing. However, about half of the families had left to find a new home in Courland, while the others wanted to wait for the first reports and then follow them. So now it actually seems that, due to changing fortunes, the end of this tough German settlement is about to take place. Due to the sudden retreat of our army, the removal of German farmers was no longer possible, and Jacobsonsthal will be able to once again rise up and persist.

Emigration from Russia in 1840 seems to have begun almost at the same time that it did in both the Warsaw colonies in Bessarabia and in the older settlements in the Kherson *Gouvernement*. It did not take place in a trifling number. What is it that prompted these German farmers, around that time, to suddenly leave their villages which, according to all reports, they had developed well and achieved a certain prosperity and then get caught up in once again taking up the journey into the unknown? While for the later periods of withdrawal from Russia, immigration to Dobrudscha almost always recognizes a certain impetus, the question for the reason for the first immigration is not so easy and clear to answer. Even as the already noted documents and articles provide sufficient evidence, so the literature concerning the German colonies in South Russia in older times is not only pretty extensively, but also objectively surprisingly rich and good, in contrast to the usual kind of literature about the German character abroad. It is noteworthy that not the slightest indication about these migrations is to be found. Outside events, such as the interfering political or legislative measures of the Russian government, which, as a result, repeatedly gave rise to emigration, did not occur at that time. That the colonists left the Russian Empire simply “because it no longer suited them there,” as H. Meyer put it,¹⁵ is something that a person can hardly consider as a serious statement.

I was repeatedly told that the basic reason that the people who came from the colonies in Bessarabia, as well as those from the area around Odessa, left in search of land. A person did not have any and there was hardly any left there. At first, this sounds strange and not quite understandable. In these endless territories in which one actually had to call on people from distant places to come and populate it, should it already be lacking in space? We also know that the Russian government, in measuring out land for the foreign immigrants, had not been stingy. In the Warsaw colonies, a family received not less than 57 *Deßjatinen* [154 acres; 62 hectares], but in some instances even 78 [210a; 85ha] (Teplitz); 80 [261a; 87ha] (Krasna); and up to 104 [280a; 173ha] (Brienne). And the best of all, it was profitable soil to the worker. And yet, in some the colonies, a land shortage had, in fact, already begun.

This was associated with certain provisions which Catherine II had already touched upon in her colonization law of 19 March, 1764 and which had remained in force, with some restrictions, for the colonies in New Russia. The colonist families, or their heirs, were not allowed to sell their assigned share of farmland, or transfer it, or divide it. Due to the inheritance law, the farmyard always went to the youngest son. If only the widow and daughters survived, the first male to come into the family by marriage always had the right to possess it. All the older sons of colonists were also barred from possessing any of their father’s land. However, to also give them the possibility of obtaining land, the law had determined that a 6th part of the colony fields and farmyards had to remain undeveloped in anticipation of the future increase of the inhabitants, or the colonies should set up stock land (*Stück Vorratsland*) for this purpose. On the

¹⁵ Diaspora, S. 329.

one hand, these precautionary arrangements were not adhered to everywhere; on the other hand, that sixth or the stock land did not reach far enough to take care of the abundance of children of the German farmers. Therefore, the only recourse for sons locked out from their own possession of property in the mother colony, was to look elsewhere to either buy or rent land. This, after the proliferation of the first generation, resulted partly in the establishment of daughter colonies. Children of the Freudenthal colonists, founded Neu-Freudenthal in 1828, on the property of a landowner; families from Petersthal and other villages founded Helenenthal in 1838. However, the parents, especially in the younger settlements, could not come up with the funds to acquire outside, remote lands, and the increasing demand also led to the increase in the rental and purchase prices. As a result, in fact already after a few decades, there was an ever increasing number of landless families in many colonies. How fast they grew, how big they were in many places, especially already in the 1830s, and also at the time of the first emigration, is revealed in the circumstances in the Molotschna District, where, in 1841, with 1,033 farms, there were already over 1,700 landless families and neighbors. During the 1850s, the government received petitions in large quantities from the South Russian settler communities about new land directives.¹⁶

There is therefore no doubt that there was a shortage of land in the German settlements and their surroundings around 1840. After all, such a development takes place only gradually and makes it hard to understand that in a particular year or at least in a limited period of time, so significant an exodus takes place in different areas, at the same time. One must assume that, in addition to the general trend, there was still a specific impetus that showed up. The people that Karl Koch met in Cernavoda testified that “many years of crop failure” had caused them to leave. The main reason was never given to me. But numerous documents can be found that actually indicate that the fourth decade brought a string of unlucky years to the German farmers. In the colonies near Odessa, there was a total crop failure, poverty and stagnation of trade in 1833; there was a plague outbreak in 1837.¹⁷ According to a report about the Liebenthal District, 1835 and 1843 were years of total crop failures.¹⁸ The colonies in Bessarabia, in the Sarata area, they suffered severe livestock diseases in 1835-1836, and the locusts in 1836.¹⁹ All reports from the year 1838 tell of a violent earthquake that put the farmers in the greatest of fear.

It may well be that these gloomy experiences also contributed internally to shaking the confidence of many colonists for a prosperous move forward and to evoke a mood of discontent that produced restlessness and a desire for change in the villages. They were not tied to the ground, and it would not take much to reawaken the hardly fallen asleep wanderlust. So, at about the same time, Catholic Swabians from the somewhat older colonies near Odessa, as well as the Kaschubians from the war free original settlements in Bessarabia, loaded up their wagons with their household goods and headed southwestward toward the Sereth and Danube Rivers, without any other real goal than to search for land.

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¹⁶ Klaus, S. 267.

¹⁷ Bienemann, S. 153, 163.

¹⁸ Stach, S. 168.

¹⁹ Archiv f. wiss. Kunde von Rußland 1853, S. 437 ff.