

History of Dennewitz

Source: *Deutscher Volkskalender für Bessarabien – 1936*
Tarutino

Press and Printed by *Deutschen Zeitung Bessarabiens*
Pages 55-57

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April, 2020

Source Location: <https://bit.ly/21v8IWY>
Under 1936 click — <urn:nbn:de:bvb:355-ubr13930-4>
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The German Municipality of Dennewitz in Bessarabia.

Written by Chr. Rall on the occasion of the centennial
of the colony on 3 and 4 November, 1934.

It was in 1834 that 15 families who had emigrated from the upper villages got an amount of 64 farmsteads from land that belonged to Teplitz at that time. The leaseholder who acquired and managed this land was called Hambur, and the village was named after him: Hamburg. More and more colonists from other villages joined and after a short time a stately village had emerged. By order of higher authorities, the colony was also given another name which was: Dennewitz.

We have often scolded and asked why our ancestors settled in the largest valley. But they were not to be blamed; for the Hambur valley was then abundant with water, and our ancestors preferred to settle in places like this as we notice in other village establishments. Dams were made at that time and the water was stocked with fish. In 1873, the municipality had 6 reservoirs that were leased for fishing.

The first settlers had a hard time. They did not receive any support from the Russian government like their mother colonies Alt-Posttal, Wittenberg, Kulm, etc. had received. The steppe was neglected, grass grew meter-high and was filled with snakes and vermin. But the one who is a proper colonist says: Work and do not despair. Since in those times it was only lightly covered with soil, little could be seeded. As late as 1895, there was little land under the plow. In all, Dennewitz had 3,632 *dessjatinen* [1 *dessjatin* = 2.7 acres / 1.09 ha], of which 1,330 were sown,

1,143 hay-parcels and 1,159 *dessjatinen* pasture. At the moment, we still have 274½ hectares [1 ha=2.471 acres] of pasture land.

Very little winter wheat was sown, the main grain was summer wheat. Corn (*Mais*) required a lot of work, as it was scattered and plowed under. And since such a section of corn had to be completely chopped down, there was little interest for this crop. ½ to 1 *dessjatinen* was enough for our ancestors. There was no rotation; where corn was, corn was always planted again. A lot of emphasis was placed on potato growing, as it was a major source of the family's diet. Many a colonist moved from his German hometown as a blacksmith, tailor, etc. and became here in Bessarabia a farming person, in the truest sense of the word. One even practiced as a winegrower, but for the time being had not chosen a good location for vine planting. Because, as we know, a slope to the west is not as suitable as a flat location.

In 1851, the municipality decided to let the old vineyards behind the gardens of the lower village come to an end, and in their place, to plant vines in the section intended for forest.

In 1860, 64 *dessjatinen* were planted with 19,595 vines. In the winter of 1869-1870, almost 6,000 vines froze. We all know how it goes with the old varieties, and that the direct bearers (*Direkträger*) came. But also improved vines (*veredelte Reben*) were planted here in quantity. Joh. Schill planted a particularly large amount of improved vines, who, however, after a year moved to Basyrjamka. However, in order to give his old homeland a lasting service of love, he gave a barrel of fine wine (*Edelwein*) from his remaining gardens on the occasion of the centennial celebration on 4 November. Good luck (*Heil*)!

Our ancestors had enough fruit. In 1860, there were 64 gardens with 2,007 fruit trees. Just as today, our authorities are insisting that we plant forests and plant more trees, so it was in the old days, only with the difference that trees were actually planted at that time. In 1860, Dennewitz had a forest plantation of 17,214 trees. However, this planting also had to be worked well.

Our ancestors had enough pasture and hay. In this way, they were able to devote themselves successfully to cattle breeding. In 1853, there were 327 horses, 256 oxen, 340 cows and 1,002 sheep. Dennewitz currently has 42 horses, 405 cows and 1,750 sheep.

In 1866, it was determined that 30 cattle could be kept on the farm. Sheep were numbered 5 in one section (*Stück*). Each resident was allowed to graze (*laufen lassen*) 8 head of cattle. Whoever had more to graze had to pay 3 rubles per head for cattle and 60 kopeck per sheep. At present, the farmland can graze 16½ sections of livestock. Sheep amount to 4 in one section.

In addition, our ancestors acquired some good from the quarries. In the days gone by, almost every farmer went to the quarry; for a person needed stones for his buildings, and also to sell. The threshing stones are said to have been invented here in Dennewitz. It is said that the settler Karl Gutsche was the designer. Since the Dennewitz threshing stones are characterized by hardness and durability, they are sought after throughout Bessarabia. In the past, stones were broken on the east side of the village. When the layers there were exhausted, they started on the west side. There are even better stones here than on the east side, and they are sufficient for

many years. Nowadays, only a few go to work in the quarry, but at least some landless people can work for their bread here and thereby support their family.

There has been no lack of accidents in the quarries; sometimes people were even trapped by the boulders and badly knocked about. Even at the gravel pits, some of our colonists have already died. For with the ability of strength, there is no eternal covenant to intertwine, and misfortune proceeds quickly.

In earlier times, the reserve storehouse played an important role. This self-help has done much to help our ancestors persevere. Dennewitz built a wooden storehouse in 1840. Later in 1848, a stone construction of 8 *Faden* [1 *faden* = ca. 7 feet] long and 4 *Faden* wide was erected. These storehouses were extremely necessary because there were many poor harvest years. Dennewitz had bad harvest years: 1844, 1846 and 1847, 1867, 1869, 1873, 1877, 1899 and 1904. Livestock epidemics also sometimes raged terribly. So, in 1845, 3-8 head of cattle died for each farm. In 1855, 248 horned cattle fell ill; of which 136 died. There were also epidemics that took away a great deal of cattle in 1857, 1870 and 1877.

One of the biggest plagues were the locusts. Sometimes such swarms came in that the sun darkened. Dennewitz was hardest hit in 1855-1858. In 1857, the locusts invaded an area of 100 *dessjatinen*. In order to destroy these pests, everything had to be put on the field, person and horse, with fishing nets, brooms and thorn loops and threshing stones. Locusts appeared in 1836, 1847 and 1848, 1855-1868, 1860-1864, 1886 and most recently in 1929, which were then completely destroyed in the month of May, 1930.

Women, too, have always been more vigilant in the economy. Flax and hemp were sown, and the spinning wheel, which was everywhere, was spinning all winter long. In 1865, Dennewitz had 50 flax spinners and 15 weavers. The families were richly blessed with children, so there was no need for many servants. In 1865, there were only 15 servants in Dennewitz, and today we have 65 servants serving with the farmers.

Honor the memory of our fathers and mothers! They have worked most vigilantly and have done their duty. We owe it to them that we can hold our own today. They were faithful, German and honest. One man, one word. And the mother, she was the most successful protector (*Hort*) of the house. Would that we always heed the words of the poet Alb. Träger:

Whether good fortune is attributed to you,
Whether your fate is painful,
You dare not to forget the mother,
So that you do not also forget God.

Faithful shall you keep her in your heart,
As things go for you in life;
She taught you to fold your hands
And spoke them as your first prayer.

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