

Hoffnungstal Colony – An Historical Overview

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Translated by Allen E. Konrad – March, 2012
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[Translator's Note: A brief history of Hoffnungstal Colony, established in 1819, located northwest of Odessa, in the Glückstal Province of the Kherson Jurisdiction. When this report was written is not clear. The report speaks of events within a period of 30 years since the colony's founding, but also mentions a census figure from the Revision of 1860. Entries in square brackets indicate information supplied by translator.]

[Begin Transcription]

Brief Historical Overview of the Founding and Existence of Hoffnungstal Colony

The main motivations for many from Württemberg to consider leaving their otherwise so blessed fatherland were partly due to difficulty in making a living, the burden of high taxes, our colonists almost exclusively more and more expanding their fields of apprenticeship, and related changes in church and school raising concerns about what could lead to a withdrawal of the pure teachings of the Gospel for themselves and their children over a period of time. Specific opinions among them had made for an enthusiastic desire to be as close to the Promised Land as possible. Their gaze fell mainly to the southern part of the Russian Empire, especially since they could hope that there they could lead a quiet life in complete religious freedom without any fear of conscience. In the quest to be accepted in South Russia, some of the fathers turned to Lord Baron von Stackelberg, the Russian Ambassador then living in Stuttgart, for mediation with His Most Gracious Majesty King Alexander I concerning the Russian decree (“*Ukas*”) offering freedom to practice their way of worshipping God. As a result, a significant number of residents from many areas came together: Backnang, Waiblingen, Kirchheim, Marbach, Esslingen, and some others to form two columns. The undertaking, which was led by Billingmayer and J. Lutz, departed for Ulm in May and June, 1817, via the Danube River, then to Vienna, Ofen, Orsowa, Galatz and, after many difficulties, finally arrived in Odessa. Hundreds of them, notably during the quarantine confinement in Ismail, were snatched away by deadly diseases, and according to many documents, by a severe epidemic upon their arrival in Odessa. It was so severe that many families were left with only widows and orphans without parents; in some cases not a single member of a family survived. Most of them continued their journey to Georgia (*Grusien*) despite the well-meaning performance of the Russian colonial administration and even the monarch, and only a few decided to stay and settle in the local area. The Cherson [Kherson] Gouvernement allotted our colonists 4,306 dessj. [1 dessjatine = 2.7 acres] of land to develop. Here they found a small village by the name of Zibrik which had 17 dilapidated cottages consisting of missing roofs and no furnishings, and another 15 of stone and some of wood. These unfinished buildings, on behalf of the Crown, were to have been put up for Bulgarian settlers. Most of the new arrivals laid over in the neighboring old German colonies, however, most, under great misery, endured the most pitiful cottages over the winter and got ready in 1818 to build, but were first able, in 1819, under extreme efforts, to actually move forward and

establish the colony. 64 heads of households, among them several craftsmen, formed the first settlement, each receiving an advance of 500 rubles from the Crown to go toward the purchase of construction lumber, cattle and farming implements. Later, 30 families made improvements through (acquired-?) an advance of 3,000 rubles from the Crown. Because of this, our settlers received a total advance of 10,000 rubles. And so it was that in 1819, our colony actually came into existence. Over the course of 5 years, all colonists managed to put up their homes. In a general meeting, it was decided to give the new colony the name of "Hoffnungstal" [Valley of Hope]. This name was chosen to show that by the relocation there was this hope for a happy future. The ratification by the Minister took place on 2 December, 1891. For all that, we now turn our attention to a detailed local description of our colony. It is situated in a healthy location, on one side a range of hills, on the other side undulating land, and supplied with good well-water. It is completely isolated from all the other German villages and surrounded on all sides by Russian villages (*Ortschaften*). To the north, Perepljetowka; to the east, Gori; to the south, Zipulowka; to the west, Korssilowa (Grossulowo). The soil is generally fertile, except for 406 dessj. of unproductive land that is unfit even for pasture. The top-soil is mostly black, some containing salt-peter and some partly mixed with sand. The many medicinal herbs growing here contributed to calling our area "Herbal Prairie" (*Kräutersteppe*) in earlier times. Half of our prairie land (*Steppenlandes*) is used for pasture. During favorable weather conditions, all sorts of cereal grains, just as we knew them over the years in our previous fatherland, also sprout out of our fertile fallow fields. Summer crops often fail because of the intense heat or due to a lack of rain. Potatoes do not produce every year. At times, they produce in large quantities and of very high quality. Our Hoffnungstal is not yet abounding in orchards, especially since one can grow trees around here with great difficulty and one has to also struggle to maintain gardens with particular difficulty. It is a pity that the duration of grown trees is so short. Despite all this, we are able to grow several varieties of fruits. Growing grapes is fairly economical and some varieties are especially good. Only a few farmers are given to bee-keeping. Vegetable gardens are important for us every year, limited up to now for domestic use but what is still missing is selling on the market. The establishment of the wooded area is still in its early stages because, for some time, special care has to be put into it to get it to reach productive growth.

Through ingenuity, dams have been constructed, where even the shepherd has his living quarters. However, the colony does not have the resources for this. We have some very porous stones in the hills, often consisting of broken up mussel shells, as our source for stones. They are not very useful to us. Sand and saw-stone (*Sägsteine*) do not exist. Under God's blessing and the protection of the authorities, the colony has enjoyed continued advancement since its inception 30 years ago. Unquestionably, to the delight of every visitor, the colony now can show off two regular, wide streets that intersect in the middle of the village, a church which they put up at their own expense between 1840 and 1842, containing an organ since 1847, a building with a green metal roof, trees planted on the property and enclosed with a masonry wall, all looking very smart. Most houses are painted white, 120 in all, with a quantity of lovely bushy greenery around them. The farmyards are enclosed by walls. In 1837, the community also purchased a house on their own for their spiritual leader, the much respected Pastor Friedrich Wilhelm Pöschel, who came from Saxony. It should also be noted that the community is in the process of constructing a spacious schoolhouse, to be completed in a few months, for 250 school-age children and where the teachers will find their comfortable living quarters. The cemetery (*Gottesacker*) has had a wall around it for the past year and is now well maintained.

Up until now, the number of inhabitants has continued to increase. The gaps in the numbers, caused by the emigration of established farmers, were filled by later arrivals from the Backnang Colony, the Marbach ship, and also by new immigrants. Fever dominated the first years of the settlement, but specifically cholera in 1831, typhus in 1844, and some common childhood illnesses, also smallpox, which claimed quite a few victims in the past few years. The number of souls, according to the latest Revision of 1860, taking into account the large number of workers not from this area and those persons just passing through, probably amounts to something like 1,000.

We now come to the important events that have affected our colony, some of which passed through with adverse effect, although we praise God, that we had no significant fires to speak about. Five buildings burned down over a period of thirty years. We probably should not forget the significant damage done over the years in our settlement, notably the flooding of 1822, 1830 and 1838 which targeted the houses, cellars and grain. The last flood caused close to 3,000 rubles of damage. Also, due to big storms, especially in 1822, quite a few houses were damaged and some houses totally torn to pieces. The earthquakes of 1820, 1829 and 1838 took place without any lasting effect. In some instances, bred cattle were decimated a few times by animal diseases in the years 1828, 1833, 1844 and 1845, yet cattle-breeding is flourishing fairly good; also, the odd passing winter has been unable to affect them, in that our colonists were able to feed them sufficiently, in part, with the surplus of feed of the surrounding neighborhood offered as a helping hand to those in need. Most of the harvests were good, some mediocre, and, for the most part, the grain prices were good. The prosperity of our colony was advanced a lot. Agriculture has allowed our colony to spread out because there is a lot of land, in the whole of the neighboring area, available to our colonists. The grasshopper invasions of 1826, 1827, 1846, and 1847 brought us hardly any misfortune worth mentioning. However, significant devastation occurred in 1830, 1835, and 1836. We have been spared from the destruction of hail up to now. Much damage was brought by caterpillars and beetles, most notably, to the fruit. We allow ourselves to mention another evil which has often affected our area. There are very few who have not already been touched by sad experiences in regards to their property in the house, barn, cellar, garden, vineyard, or out on the field. At least 250 animals, among them the most beautiful horses, were lost along the way. Our colony has gained the privilege of being a bazaar since 1835, which is held every 14 days in the open area behind the village. This always offers more opportunities for a lively trade and benefits the buyers and the sellers since they no longer have to drive to the not-to-distant city of Odessa to take care of the things they need. So our area remains secure against many harmful influences. Moreover, satisfaction prevails among our settlers. They acknowledge their true well-being with thanks. (With help) purpose, charitable regulations, the farmers and craftsmen strive, with few exceptions, to better themselves. We are especially thankful that there is a discipline for church and religion, furthermore, maintained and practiced to the praise of God's blessed wisdom.

In particular, we thank God for the unspeakable benefits of His precious Word, which we enjoy in church and school and ask Him, that He would furthermore, as to the true culture of our area, prosper our hearts and homes, so that our Hoffnungstal might attain to spiritual, lovely blessings, to the glory of God, to the delight of our great and small supervisors and to our salvation for time and eternity.

A.K. Current Pastor: Fr. Wilh. Pöschel
Teacher: Röder
Assistant (*Provisor*): A. Fritz

Church Elders: I. Leibbrandt, I. Lutz, Klotz, and Lachenmaier

Mayor (Schulz): Fr. Metzger

Bürgermeister: Zweigart and Schlichenmaier

Secretary: G. Wagner

Bittel: Mauch

(Report transcribed by Sister Elisabeth Maier, Sarata Sister [hospital nurse] – Submitted by Miss Anna Schrenk, from Korntal in December, 1938)

Sister Elizabeth's address: Sarata

Transcribed 23 August, 1939

[End Translation]