

Lutheran Church in Kishinev History

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[Note: Comments in square brackets are those of the translator.]

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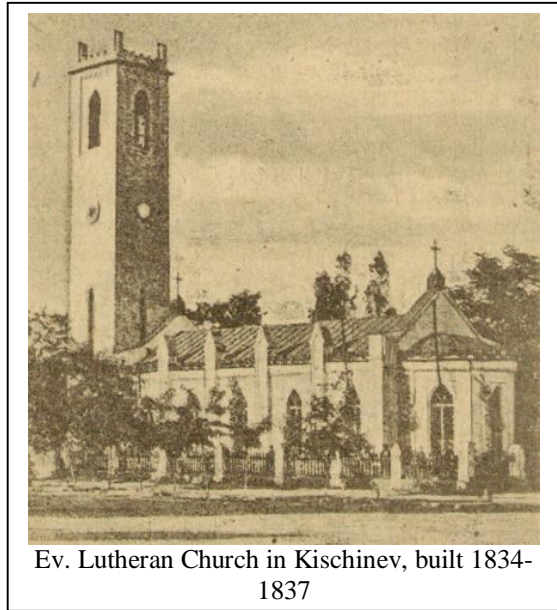
From the History of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Kishinev

On 24 August, 1924, Pastor Erich Gutkewitsch celebrated his 25th anniversary in office within his congregation at Kishinev [today spelled Chişinău]. On the evening when this occasion took place at the congregation, the one celebrating gave a lecture on the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Kishinev. The following is taken from this lecture with the kind permission of the author.

As Bessarabia became a Russian province in the year 1812 and Kishinev was elevated to the seat of the provincial government, German officials and craftsmen also moved to our city of Kishinev. The Catholic Germans joined themselves with the Polish, coming together as a Roman Catholic community and acquired a priest. The Lutherans continued to live for more than a decade without any religious association. From time to time, evangelical [Lutheran] pastors came from the German colonies, held church services and administered holy communion. The Catholic priest also performed the weddings, baptisms and funerals for the Lutherans (*Evangelischen*). 100 years ago, there was a master tailor by the name of Wilhelm Töpel, who probably was at home in the “Kingdom of God”, and, therefore, concerned about the religious plight of his fellow-believers: joined the Lutherans together in his home for Sunday worship services and, despite the indifference he found, did not wear out in thinking about establishing a Lutheran prayer house in Kishinev and collected money, with the permission of the provincial government, for this purpose. In 1827, congregation awareness strengthened so much so that steps were taken to choose church leaders. An election process was introduced which has been preserved over the decades in the congregation and many years later still exists so today: from the fixed number of 4 church leaders, 2 are elected from the “higher circles of society” and 2 from the gentry citizens “*Bürger*” (like that in the “*Chronicle*”). Now there follow only names of the ones bearing the office but no longer alive in our midst; those that should still be mentioned, to give blood and color to the picture of the congregation. The first 4 magistrate were: 1. The Provincial Land-surveyor Gottfried von Eitner, 2. Lieutenant-Colonel Andreas von

Gleining, 3. The already mentioned Master Tailor Wilhelm Töpel, 4. Master Saddle-maker Nikolaus Anderson.

In the wake of the outbreak of the war with Turkey in 1827, the weak congregation was brought to a standstill. It is only in 1832 that we hear again of new rain and endeavor (*Regen und Streben*) among the Lutheran Germans. It seems to have been by the meritorious work of two German men, the local Vice-Governor Johannes Kliemsch and the retired official Andreas von Böhm, to obtain permission from Emperor Nicholas I for the provision of real estate for the building of a church, whose plan was sent from Petersburg. The money lacking also showed up: upon the presentation of 20,000 ruble banco to the Crown by the General Governor of South Russia, Count Woronzow, for the construction of a church, half the amount to be paid back by the congregation when possible. The possibility of repayment never materialized, and the Emperor later waived it. On 26 September, 1834, the foundation stone for the Church was laid through Pastor Pensel of Glückstal, who, through the designation by Provost Granbaum in Alt-Freudenthal, served our congregation as its vicar. Soon, the good news also arrived that the monarch had appointed a Lutheran Division preacher for Kishinev with financial support from the Crown. The construction of the church was completed in the summer of 1837. The master builder is not mentioned in the Chronicle, it seems, according to the shape of the tower to close, to have been an Italian. Now the congregation asked the St. Petersburg Consistory to appoint a preacher, even one who at this place enjoyed general recognition, Pastor Pensel of Glückstal. The Consistory, in turn, also presented the pastor of Tarutino, Johann Samuel Hellwich, who must have made the request, as their choice. From this proposal of the Consistory, we see that the congregation received the right of choice in the employment of this first minister (*Seelsorger*), a right that was allowed to take place 70 years later with the appointment of its current preacher. The congregation voted unanimously for Pastor Pensel since they were not that familiar with Pastor Hellwich of Tarutino. But it was not Pastor Pensel, who refused the call, but Pastor Hellwich, whose employment the congregation then requested, who moved to Kishinev in the spring of 1838, with a financial support from the Crown of 1,200 ruble banco, and was solemnly installed in his office by the Parish Council.



Ev. Lutheran Church in Kischinev, built 1834-1837

It was only in August of 1838 that permission arrived from Petersburg for the dedication of the church—up until that time the pastor held worship services in a private home—which was then carried out by Pastor Hellwich, under the assistance of Pastor Pensel from Glückstal, on 28 August. The church leaders had worked tirelessly and lain down their own employment duties. Four new names appear at the top of the congregation: 1. the State Council Doctor of Medicine Johannes Wolfinger, 2. Pharmacist Gotthardt Fielbrandt, 3. Master Saddle-maker A. Jakobi, 4. Brewer Friedrich Engler. On 1 November, the first sexton (*Kirchendiener*), Christian Löffler, also entered into his service. Cantor in the church was the Württemberger Johann Hermann, who

had already previously been in the service of the congregation as a teacher. In the spring of 1840, Sexton Löffler, with permission of the congregation, began to erect for himself a small house made of clay on the church grounds. As a result of a state collection for the building of a parsonage, which was probably too little, it was instead used to build a wooden fence around the church grounds and the rest of the amount used for the decoration of the church. Four years after the construction of the church, the ceiling began to crack, penetrated by the rain. The investigation concluded that it could not be fixed with small repairs; it was decided to raise the roof of the Church, and what was so far a flat ceiling would now be arched. But the estimated cost of 800 rubles silver was 50 rubles more than what was in the church treasury. The cracks in the Church got bigger, the ceiling threatened to collapse. Dr. Wolfinger and Pharmacist Fielbrandt, putting their confidence in God's assistance, began construction. The Bessarabian War Governor, Paul Fedorow, allowed for a collection for this purpose to be gathered in the whole of Bessarabia and gave a contribution himself. The already mentioned, aforementioned retired official Andreas von Böhm, 79 years old, went through the city with a collecting book and gathered the sum of over 200 silver rubles. It more money was realized than was necessary: from the surplus, the church was painted and a second bell was made. In the new church council elections, Dr. Wolsinger and Pharmacist Fielbrandt were re-elected; elected from among the gentry citizens (*Bürger*) were Master Saddle-maker Nurdning and Master Locksmith Heisel.

There was a prolonged military division located in Kishinev. The commanders of the troops were German over and over again, we meet up with the Baltic names: Wrangel, Adelberg, Samson von Hemmelstierna and others. At the time of the church construction, 600 Latvians from Courland were stationed here. Then again, only 70 Lutheran Soldiers, then again 600 and so forth. In 1843, the otherwise diligent schoolteacher and cantor Johann Hermann, due to domestic sorrow, took his life. A person from Hamburg, by the name of Schuch, took on this position temporarily. Then the worship service stayed for years without choristers, but Pastor Hellwich can still report that worship attendance did not diminish, but increased and recognized the power of the Word of God so that it never ended up with no people. Throughout all this time the congregation, except for some families on the countryside and the Lutherans in the military, had only 100 members. In 1845, a schoolroom was attached to the residence of Sexton Löffler, and Textile-maker Pilmeyer, from Poland, began to provide the education process in July, but, already in October, had to be dismissed due to incompetence.

We find the following entry in the Chronicle of this year: "As all Lutheran congregations in southern Russia had been informed since February of this year (1845), the Reverend General Superintendent and Vice President of the St. Petersburg Lutheran Consistory Ritter and Dr. von Flittner travelled to these communities in the months of May, June, July and August, and also this specific small congregation had the honor and joy to encounter these dignitaries in their midst and hear from them a delightful and uplifting address on the 1st Sunday of Pentecost on the 3rd of June." Pastor Hellwich then traveled with the "Illustrious Men" to the colony of Borodino, where the visitation and worship service took place on the Second Sunday of Pentecost.

On 1 January, 1846, school teacher and cantor Ludwig Baisch from the Kingdom of Württemberg was installed and the pastor praise him as efficient. In the same year, Sattler master Nuding and Master Butcher Ellwanger was elected to the church council. In 1846, the church chronicle mentions for the first time the pastoral service concerning country

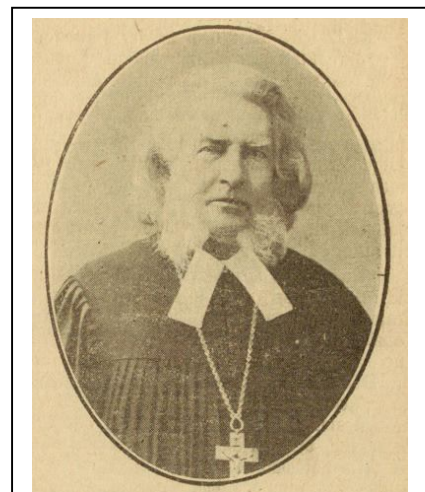
congregations—a work that was taken on by Provost Faltin—that necessitated the appointment of an assistant. In 1846, the colonies were these: Sarata near Faleschty, 110 versts from Kishinev, with 10 families, and Naslawtscha, in northern Bessarabia, with 16 families, settlers from Bukovina.

At the end of this same year 1846, the ailing Pastor Hellwich resigned from his office and the Minister of the Interior appointed the Pastor Woldemar Kroon of Arzis to his office as the Division Chaplain of Kishinev, having been introduced by Provost Fletnitzer from Odessa with assistance from Pastor Hellwich. With this man, of whose personal record the archive of the church has preserved nothing, a personality entered the work of the Kingdom of God work in this congregation for a short time, who struggled with holy zeal for the Lord of the Church and, as always in the world, met up with resistance. At the same time, Pastor Kroon was also no compliant and easy character. Often he lamented over the indifference of the parishioners with the introduction of instructions for children (*Kinderlehre*), Bible studies and other spiritual ideas. The congregation has him to thank for its first church organ. In our city crowded by Hebrew people, he baptized the first proselyte (among others, a Dr. David Wurzel). That was the prelude to a mission to the Jews, later organized here by Pastor Faltin himself. Pastor Kroon also acted in contrast to school teacher Baisch, who, as the pastor in the chronicle put it, “led a debauched lifestyle” which led to his dismissal. The congregation divided itself for and against their caretaker of souls. This became evident in the church on the day of the dedication of the organ: the followers of the schoolmaster Baisch, to which Church Council President Dr. Wolginger belonged, prevented the organist, invited by the pastor, from playing. The pastor is forced to conduct the worship service without organ accompaniment. Soon after the successful employment of William Eberhardt, the active schoolmaster for the past 18 years in the colony of Rohrbach, the upheavals in the congregation gradually stopped. But the pastor laments that the parents who place their children in our church school, place them in a kind of Russian institution. In the summer of 1847, Pastor Kroon traveled to the previously mentioned congregations at Sarata and Naslawtscha, which today have ceased to exist, and also held worship services in the small towns of Bessarabia: Chotin, Belzy, Telenschty (which mostly burned to the ground recently), Ismail, Kahul and Kilia, and had the pleasure to distribute the holy communion to the believers who had not received it for 8 or more years. He also traveled through Bessarabia to serve the Lutherans in the military. The distance covered amounted to 1,600-1,800 verst [1 verst = 0.66 miles/1.06km]. His frequent absence from the city congregation resulted in complaints by Provost Fletnitzer, who traveled here for a church visitation, but the complaints between the Church Council President Dr. Wolfinger and the pastor, who relied on the calling of his office, could not be mediated. Then the pastor received a call to Tiflis [Georgia] and now it became evident that his earnestness and his pursuit of consecrated efforts in the congregation found recognition: he stayed and the congregation offered him a free place to reside until a parsonage was built. He stayed, but not for long. Death took him on 11 July, 1848, resolving all conflicts. Returning home from an official trip, he died 2 days later of cholera which was rampant in the city. His opponent, Dr. Johannes Wolfinger, preceded him in death eight days earlier of the same disease. Pastor Hellwich, living 60 verst from Kishinev, laid both of them to their final rest. The orphaned and frightened congregation asked him not to leave her, and, in October of 1848, Pastor Hellwich moved to Kishinev with his family and, after having been validated by the Minister, received a new introduction on 30 August, 1849, by Provost Fletnitzer from Odessa.

Now names occur in the Church Council which survive in the congregation up to today: Master Tailor Johann Schlichenmeyer and Cutler Friedrich Rapp. Schoolmaster and organist Eberhardt resigned from his office on 1 May, 1852, after five years of work and now Ludwig Baisch showed up again—Pastor Hellwich seems to have thought about him differently—but his new activity came to an end suddenly: he died on 27 April, 1853. His successor, Konrad Stradinger from Glückstal, is a pupil of the Werner School (identified in the Chronicle: training college for school teachers and writers) in the colony of Sarata. In the same year, Provost Fletnitzer conducted a church visitation, under the assistance of Pastor Pingoud from Tarutino, which ended up to the satisfaction of everyone, where the pastor from Tarutino, which the Chronicle will have more to say, discussed with the adult church members about the need for and the benefits of worship at home.

In the spring of 1854, war mobilization against Turkey began again; a lot of military moved through the city and the Lutheran officers and soldiers rejoiced to find a Lutheran Church and pastor; moving celebrations of the Lord's Supper were conducted. From September, 1854 to April, 1855, their headquarters was located in Kishinev with Senior Commander, Prince Gortschakow, at the head. Among the staff of the Prince were many Lutheran Germans and also a Lutheran chaplain, Pastor W. Stahl from Peterhof, who led the worship services alternately with the local preacher. For some weeks, Grand Dukes Nicholai and Mihail, two sons of the Emperor, spent some time in the city. The large church attendance also brought the congregation a rich measure of income which helped cover the felt needs of the congregation: a special hearse was purchased.

Pastor Hellwich died on 1 March, 1856 and left behind, in extreme poverty, a widow and four children. It appears that travelling the territory brought about little success for him, which probably led to his poor health, as Sarata and Naslawtscha are always the only two villages mentioned. On his grave stone one can read that he was born on 1 October, 1808 in Wenden (Livonia). After being vacant for over three years, during which time Pastor Karl von Doll from Glückstal and Pastor Mickwitz from Cassel served the vacancy, Pastor Faltin arrived from Riga with his wife and 2 children on 2 August, 1859—a “Christmas gift” to his congregation, as he referred to himself, since he was installed on 24 December, 1858 by the Minister as Division Pastors of Kishinev. Even before the arrival of the new pastor, the congregation had finally started to give their caretaker of souls a more secure life base by carrying out the decades long plan to build a parsonage in the fenced off area. The spirit behind this undertaking was the Church Council President, Pharmacist Rosenbaum. The newly-arrived Pastor Faltin laid the foundation stone for the building yet in August 1859, which, at his request, was to house the school under the same roof. The construction moved forward briskly under the supervision of the city architect and Church Council member Bernardazzi, a man who had finished outstanding buildings here in the south. The school was dedicated a year later. The



Propst Rudolf Faltin, pastor of the Kischinev congregation from 1859 to 1903. Died 1918 in Riga

parsonage was completed in October, 1861, and the benevolent fund had granted 2,000 rubles toward its construction. Around this time, Pastor Faltin's wife died and soon two small sons followed her in death. Years later, the pastor married the sister of architect Bernardazzi and had a faithful companion for many years, but the congregation had a caring mother.

Three Reich Germans moved into the city around this time: Misters Runge, Volkmann and Spitta (a son of a music composer) and built a steam mill. They were loyal helpers of the pastor for all his major thoughts on the consolidation of the parish, while the Church Council President, pharmacist Rosenbaum (as it is noted in the Chronicle) "sought to neutralize the work of the pastor by means of malicious talk." Merchant Runge is the one who summoned Pastor Faltin to "work concerning Israel." One of the first to be baptized was Rabbi Gurland, who later became the pastor's assistant and, subsequently, worked a great blessing in Mitau [Jelgava, Latvia]. (cf. *Kurland "Aus zwei Welten"*).

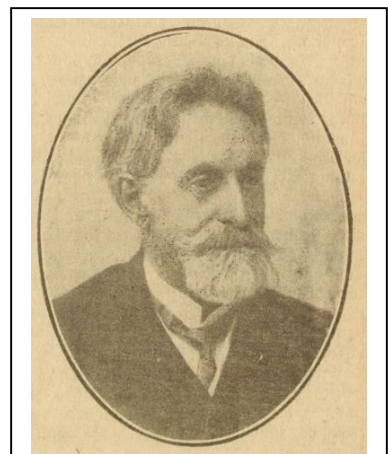
Concerning Rudolf Faltin's 44 years of activities, whose life's work still bears testimony today and whose memories are dear to the congregation, here are some dates to refresh the memory. A sanctuary (*Asyl*) was built for Israel [the Jewish people] in 1866. A residence for the school teacher in 1869, and, in 1871, a wing added to the parsonage for the widows of pastors. In 1870, August Wacknitz became school teacher and organist, a faithful helper to Pastor Faltin. In 1872, Merchant Runge became Church Council President. He is the one who obtained for the pastor the first congregation salary amounting to 200 rubles. That same year, cholera showed up again, but spared the congregation; only a few visiting (*zugereiste*) Germans were ravaged by it. In 1873, Johannes Allendorf, from the Baltic, was called as a member to the School Council, a man who became a great supporter of Pastor Faltin and his successor E. Gutkewitsch. In 1874, the cornerstone was laid for the school building on Bajukanskaja Street. A Women's Society was founded in 1875, and Christian Löffler, who was installed as sexton when the church was dedicated in 1838, retired. In the same year, City Architect Bernardazzi celebrated his 25th year in the profession with many from the city and congregation participating.

In 1877, Kishinev again became the headquarters in the war against the Turks with military important and the lowly of the Lutheran confession, Lutheran doctors and pharmacists, Lutheran brothers and sisters filled the city. Emperor Alexander II set up his residence here, celebrated his birthday here and, on that occasion, gave 600 rubles to the Lutheran school. On behalf of the headquarters, Pastor Faltin travel through the German colonies and gathered compassionate brothers; of the 200 Germans presented by him, 144 were accepted (including 12 from the Kishinev City Congregation) and trained here for Samaritan service. Many wounded and sick people arrive from the war theater and Pastor Faltin, above all, was functioning as a representative of the Red Cross.

After the war, Pastor Faltin traveled through Switzerland and the Kingdom of Württemberg and lectured about his work concerning Israel. In 1881, Major Koenig gave us our church clock and Merchant Gottlieb Heer built the chapel on our cemetery. In 1883, on the 400th year of Luther, a collection was taken for a new organ, which organ builder Hoeck from Odessa then built the next year. In 1886, the chandeliers in the church were given by Johann Rapp. In 1887, Johannes Allendorf, modern secondary school teacher (*Realschullehrer*), became the President of the Church Council. In that same year, City Head Karl Schmidt, member of the congregation,

encouraged the beautification of the cemetery and secured the salary of the cemetery caretaker through the city. A Cemetery Committee was selected which, to this very day, still cares for the resting place of those of ours who have gone home. On 28 August, 1888, the congregation celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the church. They renovated the church inside and out in preparation for the festival. The expenses were covered through the proceeds from a festival booklet titled *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Kishinev*, which was written by Church Council President Allendorf. There was construction again in 1889; the school on Bajukanskaja Street was expanded and a new school building was erected on Meschtschanskaia Street. In 1890, Pastor Faltin was chosen by his brethren in the ministry to be the Provost of the South Russia Provost District and it was confirmed by the administration. A famine broke out in Bessarabia in 1893, and Provost Faltin collected the starving colonists in the city and gave them work. The impassable road to our cemetery was gravel surfaced (*chaussiert*) and a small guard house was built which is still today as it was back then. In 1893, water pipes were laid on the church grounds, and, due to an earthquake, chimneys collapsed and walls received large cracks. In 1896, the Division Parish, at the very most, was suspended and now the congregation had to take care of its pastor (*Seelsorger*) all by itself. The spreading out of the Kishinev Parish took on such a great dimension during the time that Provost Faltin was in office, that, after the retirement of Provost Faltin, the St. Petersburg General Superintendent Pingoud redistributed to other parishes of Bessarabia that which was south of Kishinev. In June of 1902, after a severe illness during the previous winter, Provost Faltin held his farewell sermon at his congregation and moved to his hometown of Riga, where he was granted the enjoyment of 15 more years of well-deserved rest. In 1918, he experienced the joy to see the entry of German troops into the Baltic country before the collapse of Germany. His wish to be here in the midst of his community and to rest in our cemetery along with the first two pastors to await the day of resurrection were not to be realized due to the changed circumstances.

In August of 1904, Pastor Gutkewitsch started his work in Kishinev. Church Council President Johannes Allendorf, who was eliminated from the Church Council in 1893 due to rivalry with his pastor, was again at the head of the Church Council; in March of 1913, Pastor Gutkewitsch officiated at his burial; through his legacy of 20,000 rubles for the benefit of the church, it was possible for the congregation to convert the two large school buildings on the church property into modern furnished rental homes, whose original purpose (up to then rented out to the city as public schools) could no longer find renters and, consequently, provided the support of the church property through the income received. In the year of Allendorf's death, the congregation celebrated—already without him—the 75th anniversary of the dedication of their church; the Church was again restored beautifully through gifts of love from the members of the congregation and the new organ—the third since the construction of the Church—beautified the uplifting festival. Of the then festival preachers, the Lord God has already called Pastors Peters, Kufeldt and Willigerode into eternity.



Grammar School Senior Teacher Johannes Allendorf. For many years a member of the Church Council of the Lutheran Congregation in Kishinev. Died 1913

Finally, it should be noted that the submitted sketch is naturally can only portray a purely exterior picture of the history of the small Kishinev Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, which today has only about 500 souls, the work concerning the souls that has been performed here in a 100 years defies human description and our judgment. May the Lord be a merciful judge on the caretakers of souls in this place! Also the truth of the Lord's word in his parable of the householder, who sowed good seed in his field, illuminates us during this endeavor. Like the house servants said to the House father: Lord, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where then did it get the weeds? He said to him: the enemy has done this. This life portrait of the Kishinev congregation also sustains dark features (*Züge*), it is also here often as they say euphemistically: human, goes the way of a human [*menschlich, allzumenschlich zugegangen*]. Our portrayal is finished. We close with a reminder from the author from his time in school, which always again went through his mind in the days of his anniversary in the professional office. They are the final words from the poem by Chamisso: "The Old Washerwoman."

“Und ich an meinem Abend wollte,
Ich haette diesem Weibe gleich
Erfuellt, was ich erfuellen sollte
In meinen Grenzen und Bereich.”

“And I on my evening wanted,
I had this women just
met, what I fulfill should
in my boundaries and area.”

[Note: The poem version I was able to locate on the internet did not have any of these words in it. So I am keeping the German, giving a word for word translation, and leave it up to the poets to come up with a fitting English translation.]

[End of Translation]