

Memories of Molotschna Colonies

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[Translator's Note: Memories of the Molotschna colonies by the wife of Pastor Kludt. For some insight into the history of the Battle of Kalka, you might want to go to this web-site:

<<http://www.xenophon-mil.org/rushistory/battles/kalka.htm>>]

[Begin Translation]

Memories of the Colonies The Molotschna

By the wife of Pastor Kludt

Between the Carpathian Mountains in the West and the Volga River in the East, there extends the immensely large Dalmatian Plain. It is well-watered from the North to the South by a number of rivers: the Dnjestr, the Bug, the Dnjepr, and the Don. These rivers all originate in the Ural-Baltic Ridge, which does not have much of an elevation and, therefore, they flow slowly and repeatedly deposit their silt during the summer, which, naturally, affects shipping adversely. There are smaller rivers between these large rivers that wind their way through the lower elevations and ultimately empty into the Black Sea and the Azov Sea. One such river is the Kalmius, which became famous because of a battle there (Battle on the Kalka – 1222 ?) where Ivan III, son of Johann [Ivan] the Terrible decimated the Tatars and caused them to finally leave Russia altogether. At the mouth of this little river lies the town of Mariupol, located on the Azov Sea. A little farther west, flowing into the Azov Sea, is another little river going by the name of *Milchfluss* [Milk River], or *Molotschnaja* in Russian. The source of *Milchfluss* is from two streams, upper and lower *Kokmatschka*, which join and then, with a lot of winding in a southerly direction, flows into the *Milchfluss* which itself then empties into the Azov Sea somewhat to the east of the Crimean Peninsula. Between 1818 and 1820, Germans, who decided to accept the invitation of Emperor Alexander I, came to Russia and settled at the spot where the two streams come together. The folks from Central Germany, Hesse and Franconia chose to live on the east [corrected to read west] bank while the Low German-speaking Mennonites picked the west [corrected to read east] side of the Molotschna. The colonies that developed on the west [corrected to read east] side of the Molotschna were: Prischib, Hoffental, Nassau, Durlach and Wienua. On the left bank were the colonies of Halbstadt, Muntau, Tiegerweide, Fischau, Lichtenau...up to the town of Melitopol, also on the Molotschna, being about 50 km from Halbstadt. Both German dialect-speakers, The Hessians and the Prussians, lived together peacefully as neighbors to each other, but, politically, belonged to two different districts (*Kreisen*), and, because of that, had few occasions for their precincts to come into opposition with each other. Whenever the young folks wanted to become mischievous with each other, the Mennonites would call the Lutheran “Colonist”, and, in turn, the other side twisted the word “Mennonite” and called them “*Monist*”. But that was just some harmless fun. Otherwise, the

two groups got along good and rivaled each other to see who has the nicest fields, the most beautiful gardens and the best horses and cows. When it came to horticulture, in our opinion, it was the Mennonites who had the flower gardens in front of the house and beautifully trimmed acacia bushes. By the 1900s, they had a fine tree-nursery with several sorts of different fruits. As for the Hessians, they bred a excellent breed of cows, which came to be known as Molotschna-Cows and were especially valued in all of Russia. They were reddish-brown in color, smartly built, could be milked all year long without a calf around. The colonies were all set up in similar fashion, that is, in two straight rows of houses, each house with the gable facing the street, protected by facing the prevailing winds. In front of the gable side of the house was a small flower garden. By the street, inside the masonry and white white-washed fences, separating the street from the property of the farmer, acacia trees were planted, protecting the house from the dust of the street and giving protection from the burning rays of the sun. The barn was connected directly to the other end of the house so that the farmer would be able to hear what was going on in the barn. Sheds were arranged in a row beyond the barn to handle the feed for the cattle and to prevent the wind from blowing it all over the yard. Beyond the sheds was the threshing area with the straw stack and beyond that came the vegetable and fruit garden, which went all the way up to the Molotschna River. As the colonists were establishing themselves in the previous century, Emperor Alexander I provided them with a Welfare Committee (*Fürsorgekomite*), made up of Baltic landed proprietors who knew the land, the people and the soil very well. Since the Dalmatian Steppe belonged to Turkey until the end of the 1800s, and did not have forests, this Welfare Committee directed that every settler had to plant some trees at the end of his piece of land. Some of the wood should take the place of dried manure used to heat their hearth and oven. The trees should also serve as a wind-break from the strong northeast winds which blew freely in the wide open flat country. At the Molotschna River, there was a tree-nursery which every farmer had the right to obtain from it his garden seedlings of bushes and trees. As a penalty for going against the orders of the Welfare Committee, useful community labor in the plantation would be arranged, such as recording the amount of sacks of caterpillars picked off from the trees, or planting so and so many trees along the street, or some such thing. As for the Mennonites, who had a particularly efficient caregiver named Cornies, villages close to each other were connected with avenues of beautiful linden, popular or acacia trees. This Welfare Committee did a great service for the German settlers by coming up with three wise suggestions. It arranged: 1. That no settler receive less than 60 hectares of land per family and that this parcel of land, in the future, be divided into two parts to be inherited by the two youngest sons. 2. That each of 10 communities join themselves into a single parish and, as a stipend for the pastor, request from the government 120 hectares of land. 3. That each of 28 villages join themselves together as a political district and, in turn, obtain from the government a tract of pasture-land to be leased for sheep raising, the money realized at the end of every 10 years to be used to purchase a new piece of land for the settlement of the younger generation. Herein was the answer to the big mystery of how the Germans were able to purchase one piece of land after another and settle it. Whenever 10 new villages were formed, they appointed a pastor immediately and soon after that he saw to it that his school was built and a teacher hired, and the government did not have to provide for those things. The pastor's office and school were usually in the middle of the village and so no one had to go too far to get to school. In Prischib, however, the little church, which has above the entrance the date 1823, was built on a slight elevation, a few years after their settling there on a hill where two sources of water unite into the Molotschna River and then continue across the plateau. The church is small

in comparison to the newer ones, but it was built with love in the style of the era. In addition, the cemetery is according to the custom in Germany and, if a person were to see the church and cemetery from the hills further off, one would instinctively recall the *Uhlands* song: Up there stands the chapel, looking down on the valley, and the closing verse: "From up there one brings them to the grave, here to look forward to something in the valley..." ("*Droben bringt man sie zu Grabe, doe sich freuten in dem Tal...*")

The parsonage was situated on the lower part of the hill and surrounded with acacia trees. The sexton's house was about half way up the same hill. The rest of the villages of the parish were located on the right bank of the Molotschna, partly on the high plateau, where the churches spread out. They also had beautiful, spacious schools, and teachers who were trained at the central school (*Zentalschule*) in Prischib. As of the middle of the 19th century, the colonies of the Molotschna had a training site for their teachers at the Prischib central school. Of the pastors at Prischib, Pastor Dobbert was the first. (He was in charge into his senior years, even if it had to be with a small switch in his hand, providing discipline and order in the village. Pastor Keuchel (around 1868-78) was next in line, then came the Swabian Lang (78-81) and, after him, Pastor Baumann (1881-1940), who with much love gave the religious instruction in the central school and also founded the Prischib school for the deaf. The most noted district secretary (*Gebietsschreibern*) was Friedrich (?) Hine, who headed the office with great care for many years. He was often called the Bismarck of the German colonies because he possessed many diplomatic talents and outwardly was reminiscent of Bismarck's stature. His successor was Benjamin Kludt. The colonies increased and every 10 years a new piece of property was purchased by the district office (*Gebietsamt*) and the younger generation settled on it. The first daughter parish was Eugenfeld near Melitopol, called "Tatschinak" by the colonists. Then came Kronau in Cherson, already far surpassing its mother colony by the beauty of its buildings. If someone wanted to marry a son who was not among the lucky ones to get an allotment in the new official settlement, these would team up with something like 30 fathers, who were in the same situation. They, by private means, bought a piece of land on the somewhat flat country in the northern part of the Crimea. So, during the second half of the 19th century, this is how the area was settled by Germans, up to as far as the Jaila mountain range where the Greeks, Tartars, and Armenians were the primary populations, who planted the mountains with grape-vines and orchards and where the beautiful goods of the members of the *Kaiderlaichen* families were located. Not to be overlooked among the men who deserve mention in the colonies in southern Russia is the book seller, Gottlieb Schaad. This man provided all the colonies not only with the necessary school textbooks, but also ensured that the adults had access to read the necessary and only good books and publications of Christian perspective. He edited the Molotschna Calendar every year which was probably not absent in any colonist house, and, thereafter, also a small weekly illustrated periodical under the title of "Homeland Bells" (*Heimatglocken*). More recently, he provided a good reader book for the schools, which, unfortunately, is no longer allowed to be sold. When the time came that no more property was available to purchase, the folks from Molotschna moved on to the Don District, then into Samara and Orenburg, and eventually many moved on as far as Siberia (around 1900), in order to offer their younger folks fresh land. Wherever they came to, they created, in the monotonous or wasteland prairie (*steppe*), green fields, blossoming orchard, which became a contrast, like an oasis in the desert, and increased the heartbeat of the traveler.

It was like this until the second decade of this century. Then the devastating Bolshevism came over the land, which tore everything down but came up with little that was new, and now everything is dismally grey because what once was created in Russia by the hard work of the Germans, and awaited the dawn (*Morgenrot*); all this, what had been at one time, will reappear if the Almighty allows, after some difficult years of testing, his face to shine friendly once again over large and fertile Russia.

25 August, 1939

[End Translation]