

# History of Sofular, Dobrudscha

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

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## **A History of Sofular Community, Constantsa District (Dobrudscha)**

Written by Sexton-Teacher Gustav Joh. Aug. Ziebart

The first real estate purchase by Germans in Sofular took place in 1890, and this by brothers Emanuel and Michael Leyer who originated from Plotzk, Bessarabia. The brothers lived in Kobadin and, over a period of three years, bought all the land that belonged to the village, about 1,200 hectares [1 hectare = 2.471 acres], from the Turks who returned to Turkey.

The first German families arrived in the autumn of 1892, five families from Volhynia and two from Bessarabia, who worked the land of the Leyer brothers as tenants (*Pächter*) or half-farmers (*Hälftbauern*). Families Postschick, Dutz, Horst, Heppert, and Jakob Maisch, all from Volhynia, left again after one year. The author is unable to determine where they migrated to. In 1893, five families joined the two Bessarabian families, Gottlieb Diete from Dennewitz and Gottlieb Radomske from Katzbach, so that, at the end of the year, there were again seven German families residing in the colony. The names of those last to arrive families are: Jakob Schan I, Georg Schan, Georg Heichert from Galicia, Daniel Göhres from Friedenstal, and August Fink from Alt-Arzis, Bessarabia, of whom Daniel Göhres emigrated to Argentina in 1904. In 1894, 28 more Families settled in the village, those from Bessarabia: (a) From Friedenstal: 1. Wilhelm Kalis, 2. Johann Neibel, 3. Friedrich Schweigert, 4. Christian Waldbauer, and 5. Johann Eisele. (b) From Paris: 1. Wilhelm Böttcher, 2. Krauß, 3. Gill, 4. D. Almer, and 5. Gottlieb Klatt. (c) From Brienne: 1. Christian Haupt, 2. Christmann, 3. Friedrich Welz. (d) From Klöstitz: 1. Johann Peter, 2. Jakob Littke. (e) From Alt-Posttal: Gottfried Bode. Those from Dobrudscha: (a) From Ciucorova: 1. Peter Frank, 2. Karl Kolschewsky. (b) From Cataloi: 1. Johann Neumann, 2. Gottlieb Neumann, and 3. Karl Dörrmann. Those coming from Cherson: 1. Peter Serr, 2. Rudolf Rosenberg, 3. Peter Führer, 4. Friedrich Schwenk, and 5. Heimrich Huscht. Those from Galicia: 1. Valentin Schmitt and 2. Jakob Speitel.

The majority of settlers lived in the clay huts which had been sold, along with the real estate, to the Leyer brothers by the Turks who were leaving. Only a few built themselves houses, some of which, when they left the village, were sold to their successors, and some to the landowners. All of these families worked the land of the Leyer brothers as tenants or half-farmers.

In the years 1896-1901, most of the last to arrive families emigrated, the majority to North and South America and some back in their old homeland of Bessarabia. Only a few families remained here, namely: Jakob Schan I, Johann Wagner, Jakob Radomske, Karl Kolschewsky, and Friedrich Welz. These were joined, in 1906, by Georg Schan from Ebechioi, who had already lived here once before.



Farmyard and Residence of Michael Em. Leyer in Sofular

In 1907, Michael Em. Leyer, the second son of Emanuel Leyer from Kobadin, got married and settled permanently in Sofular, where he worked on the estate inherited from his father, some of it independently and some with half-farmers. We will speak a little latter about the big influence he had on community life.

In the years 1908-1916, some more families left our village; those leaving were: 1. Gottfried Bode to Alakap in 1908, 2. Peter Frank to Mamuslia in 1912, 3. Karl Kolschewsky to Kobadin in 1914, 4. Jakob Littke to Kobadin in 1916, and 5. Friedrich Welz to the Crimea in Russia..

In 1912, Michael Mich. Leyer, the oldest son of Michael Leyer, also took up residence in Sofular, so that now two big estate farms had their landowners living here.

In the years 1920-1930, some more families came from Bessarabia, Dobrudscha, and Banat; also some married young couples (children of the old settlers), so that the community now has 29 German families with 129 souls, namely, 61 males and 68 females. There are also 12 Romanian families with 61 souls who have settled here little by little since 1908. (They were all former hired hands of the Leyer brothers.)



Michael Em. Leyer, Chairman (1904-1927) and President of the People's Council of Dobrudscha (1924-1927)

The current families originated from the following Romanian provinces: Dobrudscha, Bessarabia, and Banat. Families Michael Em. Leyer, Andreas Mich. Leyer, Emanuel Mich. Leyer and Gottlieb Bossert, came from Dobrudscha, specifically from the village (*Ortschaft*) of Kobadin. Jakob J. Schan I, Jakob G. Schan II, Johann G. Schan I, Johann G. Schan II, widow Elisabeta Schan, Wilhelm Wagner, widow Wagner, Philipp Schan, widow Berta Schan, Jakob Radomske, Gottfried Radomske, Daniel Radomske, and Alfred Radomske from the village of Sofular. The Friedrich Schwenk family from Ebechioi, the Robert Seefried family from Viile-Noi, and the Wilhelm Steinke family from Constantza. From the village of Alt-Arzis in Bessarabia: David Weiß and Reinhold Schock. From Plotzk, Christian Frank and August Frank. From Brienne, Eduard Jans. From Schabo, Alexander Bauer and Salomon Mutschler. From Schabolat, Adam Mahler, and from the Banat, Joseph Fuchs.

Because the Leyer brothers did not allocate individual pieces of land to the local settlers before the war, they lived accordingly. They got the necessary land to work from the landowners, until in 1912, when the State expropriated about 180 hectares [445 acres] of land from the Leyer brothers, although it was bought with superior permission. The people were able to become independent with this expropriated land, but since it was not enough for all settlers, Germans and Romanians, a large number still continued as half-farmers. With the outbreak of the war, all inhabitants had to leave the village, abandoning all belongings and the entire harvest of 1916, and were barely able to escape with their own lives. The estates especially had to suffer much, because they were better equipped. Several months after leaving their gates, the people of Sofular returned, found the houses partly damaged, all furniture carried away, doors and windows in the trenches, etc. Miserable, the people settled again and had much trouble and hardship, until after a few years, thanks to some good harvests, were again able to have furniture in the house and cattle in the farmyard. But the poor harvest in 1922-1923 again set the people back, although six of the Germans, because they took part in the war, received (*Impropriatorie*) five hectares [12.4 acres] of land and the others could lease as much land from the State as they wanted, because the State had once again expropriated over 300 hectares [741 acres] from the landowners. A few of the settlers had their own houses, therefore, the *Kommuna* distributed yards to the newlyweds in 1923, who, unfortunately, built in the valley that same and following year.

On 29 August, 1924, there was a big flooding caused by a cloudburst that totally destroyed four German farm houses, 3 new and one old, and severely damaged four other ones. The house of a Romanian also collapsed and two were damaged. The people barely escaped with their lives because the flood came at the break of day and took them by surprise while they were sleeping. Fortunately, in spite of the major physical damage, there was no human life to be lamented. The cattle could also be saved with the exception of a calf belonging to the settler Wilhelm Wagner. The mayor (*Primarie*) assigned new and higher ground farmyards to the victims, some of which were received yet that same autumn, others the next spring, thanks to the support of the

government department (*Ministerium*), which made it possible for them to build homes again. Only one German stayed on his old farmyard and built his house and stables at the higher end. The water disappeared only after eight long weeks. The events of this disaster will stay for a long time in the memory of all those who had to go through this difficult time. A few only had daily bread until the next harvest. The vast majority, both Germans and Romanians, earned their living by breaking up rocks in the quarries nearby the village. The Sofular rocks are valued as good building material and sought after by all the surrounding villages.



Old School House in Sofular

The community did not have a special building for the school and prayer house up to 1928. However, during this time, a room was offered by a farmer in which to hold the worship services, alternating among the landowners and provided freely, in which room, as long as there was a teacher in the village, the children were taught their lessons. Finally, after years of negotiations, they moved forward in 1928 for the construction of a school and prayer house on a place in the center of the village. The funds to construct were mostly by voluntary donations from the inhabitants, partly through collections in the German villages, but the larger portion through the assistance from the Bucharest Deanery, because the community had no church assets of its own. In 1927, Sofular, like all other German communities of Dobrukscha, thanks to the efforts of the Chairman of the People's Council in Dobrukscha, Mr. Michael Em. Leyer, five hectares [12.4 acres] of land was set aside by the Romanian State, for which, until obtaining the final title of ownership, the community paid a low rent. The yield of this land, worked by compulsory labor, was then assigned to the School Building Fund. In 1928, the rough brickwork was completed and provided with a cover, and the inner walls, roof, windows and doors were first installed the next year. The community provided the stones necessary for the construction of the wall, as well as the clay for the bricks, etc. Finally, in the autumn of 1929, the teacher's residence was completed and was occupied by the author of this history; nevertheless, the floor boards were still missing in the teacher's residence as well as in the school hall, plus an absence of the entire interior decoration, such as benches, lectern and blackboard, and also the altar, pump organ (*Harmonium*), and bell for the worship service. The total cost of the building





Sexton-Teacher  
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amounted to 140,000 lei, minus the materials provided by the community. Of this sum, the community, through voluntary contributions, came up with about 30,000 lei and about 35,000 lei through collections. The Bucharest Deanery and Constantasa People's Council donated 6,000 lei for which warmest thanks is expressed. Community members handed over the balance interest-free. Our community has demonstrated on this occasion a sense of sacrifice, second to none (*der seinesgleichen sucht*), just a poor and small community whose landowners, during the aftermath of the war, were unable to contribute in accordance with their former assets.

It is first in 1904 that we find Sofular as a firm affiliated parish, in which year Michael Em. Leyer took leadership in hand and continued so to the complete satisfaction of the inhabitants. He was a serious, rigorous, and Christian-minded administrator, who was seeking by all means to introduce Christian values and order in the community. In the years 1907-1911, he paid

the teacher mostly from his own funds so that the children of the village would not grow up quite so ignorant. Even after the World War, in which he participated as a Romanian non-commissioned officer, he worked tirelessly, in the cooperation with the late Georg Schan, for the good of the community. It was during his administration that the undersigned also came here as a Sexton-Teacher. For the sake of health, Michael Em. Leyer went to Germany in November of 1927, and came back again in March of 1929. The better minded members of the community seriously regret that his state of health does not allow for him to continue to hold this honorary post in our community, where he enjoys great popularity.

In the spring of 1928, a new presbytery was elected under the new church statue with Emmanuel Mich. Leyer as curator at the head. Among the presbyters, the late George Schan deserves to be mentioned particularly. He showed himself as exemplary, as the organizer of the compulsory labor for the cemetery wall and school construction, and, it is to be noted, that it was because of his influence and his energy that the projects were completed so quickly. Death torn him away in the midst of the work: barely two hours after leaving the construction site, he succumbed to a stroke on 26 June, 1929. He rests in peace. The current curator, Emanuel Mich. Leyer carried out his office in difficult times; however, despite everything, displayed an enthusiastic activity in that by going ahead to lead by example, he brought the members so far that the long-planned construction of the school was finally started and is now happily completed. Right after his installation, Michael Em. Leyer made a gift of property and a new German cemetery (the old one also has Romanians buried in it) was fenced in with a rough wall (*Rohmauer*). We hope that through the tireless efforts of the curator, the necessary school benches, a blackboard, and a lectern will be purchased by the time school starts, so that the children can then be taught in their own place. How nice it would be to be able to work things out for a pump organ and a bell.

Since the arrival of the first German settlers in Sofular and up to 1907, no German teacher was hired here. The first worship services for the settlers, as already stated, were held in a private home.

In the autumn of 1907, at the instigation of Michael Em. Leyer, teacher Fritz Hannemann, who just finished teacher training college at Alt-Tschau near Neusatz (Silesia, Germany), was hired as the first German teacher in Sofular, where he served in the sexton position at the same time. Now the fairly numerous children of Germans could be taught in the mother tongue. Teacher Hannemann gave three years of his service to the full satisfaction of the community, then he accepted a call from a larger German community. His successor in the office was Emil Meister, who, unfortunately, held his position for only one year because he had to return to Switzerland, his native homeland, due to a throat ailment. The village children, who attended the school in those years, can all read and write with ease but not so with the younger ones, because, since from Meister's departure until 1926, no German teacher was hired. For two years, 1922-1924, a Romanian school operated here with a government salaried teacher, so the children of German settlers, during this period, learned how to read and write a little Romanian. In the winter after the flood, no Romanian school took place in the area because no accommodation could be found for the Romanian teacher due to the housing shortage. Since 1927 up to today, the Romanian school is in operation again in the area, for two years in a separate building which was bought by the German-Romanian village community with money gathered from its own resources. Time for German studies were also allotted in this building. Since 1926, Gustav Joh. Aug. Ziebart has been serving as sexton-teacher, during which time the German children have again learned to read and write pretty good. During this time, careful attention was given to German folk song, so much so that at weddings and other festivities beautiful German folk and spiritual songs can be heard from the mouths of the youth, something which was hardly possible in the previous four years.

Since its founding, Sofular has belonged to the Constantsa Parish until 1912 and, during this time, was served every two months by the pastor from Constantsa, namely by the following caretakers of souls (*Seelsorgern*): Pastor Paul Janke (1893-1901), Pastor Theodor Graff (1901-1906), Pastor Kurt Peisker (1906-1909), Pastor Ernst Meier (1909-1914), and after the war, by Pastor Ludwig Fritsch (1919-1921), and Pastor Joseph Scheiner (1921-1923). After the establishment of the Kobadin Parish in 1912, Sofular became part of it and was served by community care-giver (*Gemeindepfleger*) Johann Zwick (1912-1914), Pastor Kurt Meier (1923-1925), and, since 1926, by Pastor Herbert Hahn.

Now we have a pastor officiating at a worship service every two months. The religion of all the Germans is the Evangelical Lutheran confession. For years, there were some Baptists in the village, but they gradually emigrated. Other sects have not been able to gain a foothold in Sofular up to now.

Not much is read by the people. Being read are 2 copies of *Siebenbürger Tageblatt*, 2 copies of *Deutsche Zeitung Bessarabiens*, 2 copies of *Wegweiser*, 1 copy of *Bukarester Gemeindeblatt*, and 3 copies of *Lichter der Heimat*. Besides the Bible and hymnal, many families have no book in the house, not even a *Kalender*. However, in 1928, a lending library was established.

Male youth maintain their socializing and entertainment through fellowships (*Kameradschaften*). Such societies are not existing, so one encounters the youth on the street almost every night. There is the playing of the accordion (*Ziehharmonika*), dancing, and singing. The songs are not

always nice to mention, but where should beautiful songs come from if nobody is concerned about the youth. They are on their own.

People in Sofular are simple farmers, they are always busy at work. As for the dress costume, there are no actual folk costumes. Compared to the other villages, the people of Sofular are way behind when it comes to fashion, and yet the fashion devil (*Modeteufel*) has even arrived here.

We also have a mill in the village which was put up by Michael Em. Leyer and Eduard Seefried in 1923. Thank God, we do not have a wine and liquor shop (*Schnapschenke*) in our village. And no one is wishing for such in the village.

A major drawback for the village is that there is neither a store or butchery, so one has to drive to another village for every little thing.

The following persons have experienced misfortune: Michael Radomske, who was found frozen to death in the field in December of 1925, and the one and a half year old child of Reinhold Schock fell into a well and the dead body was pulled out.

Johann Georg Schan gets his sparse pension as a war invalid. As a hero, Jakob Kling, originating from Neu-Arzis, was killed on the battle field in the World War, leaving behind wife and children in Sofular.

Up to the war of 1916, the individual members of the community lived peacefully for themselves and each other. The plight of the post-war period, however, nearly caused the peace to vanish and, in its place, allowed for discord and envy to come up. But this time will hopefully soon be overcome so that all can again live in quiet and peace. God grant that all members of the community learn to consider themselves as instruments of God and learn not to stand in the way of a better time for the coming generation.

Our community has its own particular task and can meet this only by national and religious unity.

May this realization increasingly take root in the minds and hearts of the members of the Sofular community, whereby Sofular will become what it should be.

[End of Translation]