

The School at Alexanderhilf

*Erinnerungen an die deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa
(1803 - 1944) by Eduard Mack*

Translated and submitted by Michael Bader

School

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After being abandoned for 40 to 45 years, the old buildings, which had once served as the school center, were also used as a place of worship. With the growing population, the number of schoolchildren increased, and with the prosperity of the colonists, interests shifted—fortunately, both for the church and the school. The communities found opportunities and means to build new churches and schools.

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After the construction of the new church (1857–1858) in Alexanderhilf, the community began in 1861 to build a spacious school and teacher accommodations. It was decided to construct a new school building parallel to the church, between the church and the cemetery. The school building was planned to include three large classrooms, a teacher's room, and a spacious hallway—corridor. The eastern part of the school building was designated for teacher housing. To the north, the school street ran past the community building, the school, and the cemetery, crossing a bridge leading to the fields. Directly opposite the school, on the other side of the school street, right next to the cemetery, another large building was constructed to house teachers and the church custodian. The attic of this building was converted into a storage room for the community. This new school building was typical for a three-class village school and served this purpose for over seventy years. Four generations of the Alexanderhilf community studied in this school. Many of these former students are still living today, serving as living witnesses. Some are now over 80–90 years old, such as Adele König, née Mayer (95), Luise Bader, née Baumgärtner (94), Albert Uhl (91), Katharina Bader (85), and many others.

Unfortunately, I could not determine who the first schoolteacher in Alexanderhilf was. The last teacher of the German language who worked before the 1917 Revolution and who also served as the last church custodian until 1929 was David Mayer. He was called "the German schoolteacher" by the community. At that time, he lived in the teachers' residence. He was a skilled pianist and organist, and many Alexanderhilf residents learned to play the piano from him.

Between 1926 and 1930, the teaching staff included the following teachers: Karl Bader (Director), Wilhelm Scheu, Christian Bader, and Otto Bernhard. They were well-liked by both students and the entire community.

In 1932, a fifth-grade class was introduced in Alexanderhlf for the first time. Part of the schoolhouse that had served as teacher accommodations was converted into a classroom. Two years later, the teacher residences near the cemetery were converted into four additional classrooms.

The first fifth-grade teacher was Mr. Rossau. In 1933, he was transferred to the school in Peterstal, and a new teaching couple, Klara and Reinhold Siffermann, took his place. Reinhold was very musically gifted. In his first year, he founded an orchestra of stringed instruments with students and later also with young people. This marked a cultural and social shift in the village.

Shortly thereafter, the Siffermann couple started a dance group where both classical and modern dances were taught, which had not yet been seen in the village at that time.

Until 1930, all communities except Großliebental only had four-class elementary schools. Those who wanted to complete seven grades had to go to Großliebental, where a seven-class school had existed for many years. It was housed in the former central school building and staffed with experienced teachers. The principal was Johann Schützle.

The school had a well-equipped workshop with modern instruments such as a compass saw and electric lathes for wood and metal, which were not yet found in any other community. The head of the workshop was teacher R. Zwicker.

In 1930, by order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, all students were required to complete seven years of school. However, since Alexanderhlf only had a four-class school, all students had to transfer to Großliebental for the fifth grade. From Monday to Saturday, we stayed in the dormitory, which we called the "Konvikt" and which was located in the former orphanage. There we lived and were also financially provided for.

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In the years 1929-1930, students from all villages in our district attended the upper grades.

After the introduction of the mandatory 7-class school requirement, there were major problems at school. Many of our classmates who had completed the 4th grade did not want to attend the 5th grade in Großliebental. However, since school attendance was strictly enforced, several parents were legally punished. Because the children still did not attend school, they repeated the second year and were later expelled from school. In our 5th grade, Eduard Wörner, Albert Torno, Nina Mayer, and I remained. In the 5th "A" class remained: Arnold Benjamin, Bader

Alexander, Kreis Richard, and Lehr Eduard. The next 5th grade had to attend Großliebental in the school year 1931-1932. These were students born in 1919. We were naturally happy when more classmates joined us. But this year, too, many resisted going to Großliebental. Then, in the fall of 1932, the 5th grade was opened in our village, allowing graduates of the 4th grade (born in 1920) to attend the 5th grade in our hometown of Alexanderhilf. Several students, who already had to attend the 6th grade, voluntarily repeated the 5th grade to avoid going to Großliebental. Although Großliebental was only 7 kilometers away, being at home with their parents was much better for 13-year-olds.

Since September 1, 1938, lessons were no longer taught in German. Only a few German teachers who spoke Russian were allowed to continue working, but they had to present their subjects in Russian or Ukrainian. Since in Odessa, Russian was predominantly spoken, teaching by all German-speaking teachers had to be conducted in Russian. The rapid transition from one language to another was very difficult for students, as they hardly mastered this language. They finished school in June, and in the new school year starting September 1, 1938, only Russian teachers taught in Russian. Naturally, students' knowledge declined sharply in the first six months, as at the beginning, neither the students understood the teachers nor the teachers understood the students.

The school reform from one language to another was kept secret by the government. None of the teachers knew about it. On the first of August, one month before school began, it was officially decreed, and the necessary changes were implemented.

From Homesteaders on the Steppe, page 339

A new community school built in 1901 provided 3 spacious, well-lighted classrooms. The old school building that had been built in 1861 was remodeled in 1871 to serve as the town hall. In 1914 there were 144 schoolchildren in attendance and instructed by the sexton-schoolmaster and two Russian teachers. Up to the First World War, 86 students in the community had attended secondary schools. Of these, 30 became elementary grade teachers, 13 became secretaries or bookkeepers, and 4 advanced to a university education.

Among the notable schoolteachers in Alexanderhilf were Karl Christian Bader (until 1910), Alexander Weissman until 1924, David Daniel Mayer until 1930, Wilhelm Scheu until 1933, Otto Bernhard and Karl Jakob Bader until 1933 and Reinhold and Klara Sifferman.