

A Century of German Colonist Settlement Progress

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[Translator's Note: This document lists no author, nor indicates when written. Found in a folder of documents about stories of Bessarabia, probably written after the Resettlement of 1940. A comparison of the ease with which the third generation of Germans from Bessarabia fared over against some of the difficulties faced by the first settlers.]

[Begin Translation]

How, over a Century, the German Colonist Fared in His Settlement

We, who are the third generation of the settlers in Bessarabia, live in houses that are covered with tiles. Our rooms are covered with boards, the windows are supplied with double panes, the stoves closed with iron doors. That is the standard for us. How very different was the design and the internal arrangements of the homes of 100 or more years ago. Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers can report to us their own observations, how one built and lived at that time. Then simple round timbers were stuck into the earth, the posts were braided with shrubs, the braid-work was smeared with clay, the room made of cane or reeds, door and window covered with sack-cloth and there you had it, a little house. The clay was damp and the wind blew through all the joints. After all, living in such houses was far better than living out under the open sky. We want to think about the colonist in his capacity as a farmer. He needs a plow. The plows of our time are entirely of iron and plow a straight furrow without being held onto. That first plow, which our ancestors had to use to tear up the original sod, was designed differently. Other than the plowshare, it was made entirely out of wood, whose plow-handle the one plowing had to hang on to firmly and unceasingly guide and control it if he wanted to keep it from falling over.

Threshing took place with a stoneroller, and threshing with the stone is still common today. However, to clean the threshed grain in our time we use what is called a cleaning mill (*Putzmühle*). Whatever is threshed on a given day is cleaned by the mill, even if it goes on into the middle of the night. It was different in the olden days. According to the oriental way, what was threshed had to be tossed with a shovel, but wind was required for this maneuver in order to be able to separate the grain from the chaff, and the wind was not always available whenever the people called for it. However, waiting wastes time.

The grapes had to be pressed. Our grape crushers (*Traubenmühle*) accomplish that in a short time. A pail of grapes is "processed" within 2-3 rotations. In grandfather's time, a young boy had to tread the grapes with his feet inside a barrel full of holes in its bottom. The pressing of the grape skins was a true test of patience for the winemaker. Since there were only 5-6 presses in the village, he had to wait for hours and days until it was his turn to use one.

It was a laborious and time-consuming job for the one cutting the grain with a sickle and scythe. Although human hands are still necessary in the operation of our mowers, they, however, accomplish a hundred times more work than that of the past.

The situation for the one going to school was miserable and pathetic. Today, a child has his own text books for each class, exercise books and metal pen, which instruct him with pictures of animals and plants, with things concerning domestic and economic life and good maps. Back in those days, the teachers had to make do without all that. In the best of situations, the children learned to read from a spelling book (*Fibel*). Throughout the whole time in school, the Bible served as the reader. Studying choral music was greatly loved and diligently practiced. When you came to the end of the Book of Revelation, you started over again with the Gospel of Matthew. As for writing, one made use of the goose feather. The quill feather of the goose was brought to the teacher by the student. The teacher then had to shape it with a penknife which he usually did on a Saturday afternoon. To come up with an exercise book was the job of the teacher, drawing the lines on the pages with the straight-edge of the child.

In the prayer house (*Bethaus*), many places put boards on stones to become benches, annoying was the fact that various hymnals were in use at a worship service and the dull reading of the sermon was carried out by an untrained sexton. Of the 24 mother communities, 5-6 joined themselves into a church parish with their own spiritual leader. Krasna, the only Catholic community, had their own priest. Should a parish become vacant, which happened frequently, the neighboring pastor had to help out. With 12-13 congregations in his charge, he was able to visit each congregation only rarely. Klöstitz, which was without a pastor for 30 years up to 1845, had to be served out of Tarutino, which obtained its first pastor in 1825. And just when Klöstitz received its first pastor, Tarutino became vacant. In such conditions, we see that spiritual care of the community was very poor for many years.

For the maintenance and monitoring of civil order in the communities, an inspector was appointed by the Welfare Committee for the foreign settlers of South Russia, who had his headquarters in Tarutino. Strict discipline (*Zucht*) was practiced and the president of the committee showed up in the colony from time to time. Too bad if he found disarray in the house, barn or granary during his visit! The landlord was never sure how many blows of the switch would be handed out. After a decade, the president of the committee could also speak about a "European reputation", enjoyed by the German colonies, which they earned, that would be included in the formulation of the history of the colony. The plan came to nothing after the president (*Jslawin*) left his position in the following year.

[End of Translation]