

# Arzis Farmers' School

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Note: Information within [brackets] are comments by the translator.

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[Translation Begins]

## Arzis Farmers' School

by Dr. Arthur Reimann

Our Bessarabian-German colonialism proved to be particularly creative and fruitful in the last decade before the Resettlement. In the centrally located community of Arzis, a new school was established in those years—the Arzis Farmers' School (*Bauernschule*). It was one day to be worthy of the traditional schools of our homeland: the Sarata Werner School, the Tarutino Boys' Grammar School and the Girls' Lyceum, as the fourth secondary school. Although its development was abruptly interrupted after half a decade by the Resettlement, more than 1,000 young people had already gone through its courses and had taken long valuable theoretical and practical knowledge from the Farmers' School for life. The task of these lines is to describe the origin and the unfortunately only short development of the Farmers' School.

Since I was a teacher at the Farmers' School from 1935 onwards and was entrusted with its management in recent years, it will be possible for me at the end of the observations to give an outlook on its future development, as it was planned at that time. It should be said here that the Arzis Farmers' School was not the creation of individual persons, but a pronounced joint work of our people. Here, for years, our graduate farmers, veterinarians, doctors and pastors led our rural youth alongside proven specialists. The young men and women that we had in front of us in the courses showed a great sense of responsibility, a great diligence and a complete dedication to the cause, so that it was a real pleasure to teach them. Never in the five years of my work at the Farmers' School had I met with a single case of greater indiscipline at school or boarding school. We have always been able to treat the course participants as adults and they showed themselves fully worthy of our trust.

The foundation of the school goes back to our unforgettable Dr. Gottlieb Hahn, who is now deceased. In the autumn of 1934, he arranged the first women and girls' course in the building of the Arzis district office. With the participation of the Hermannstadt specialist teacher Mrs. Zoppelt-Femmig, a separate Bessarabian German women's and girls' costume was to be brought into being. The efforts in that first course have subsequently led to a complete success. Critical voices against traditional dresses were also raised in Bessarabia, but who did not enjoy our traditional costume at folk festivals and events from the bottom of their hearts? Picture [not shown in this article] shows us the beautiful becoming girls' costume as it was worn here by participants in the 1938 vocational competition in the boarding school of the Farmers' School and since then has graphically enlivened the picture of youth events and national celebrations.

In addition to the costume question, the purely technical direction came more and more to the fore in the following girls' courses. We finally received the weaving courses, which were so important for our homeland at that time, under the direction of Miss Cornelia Odenbach, Bajramtscha, the later Mrs. Mayer, Arzis, and the tailoring courses under the direction of Miss Marie Fiechtner, Gnadental. Miss Fiechtner also took over the management of the place of boarding.

In addition to these two types of courses, our Bessarabian German physicians created a third—the National (*Volkstüml*) Health courses for women and girls. In a program that was always very rich and varied, our doctors taught young women in these courses: in public hygiene (nutrition, clothing, in the home), in the fight against epidemics, especially in the prevention of tuberculosis, and in the care of infants. I can still remember today how the doctors of Arzis, Dr. Frank and Dr. Gerstenberger, explained to me: how many gross omissions in public hygiene, how many harmful habits and everyday offences against human health have been combated by these very courses. In this way, the Arzis Farmers' School radiated an everlasting blessing to the communities of our settlement area. The lectures on the care of small children were then further specialized by setting up courses for the training of our Bessarabian German midwives.

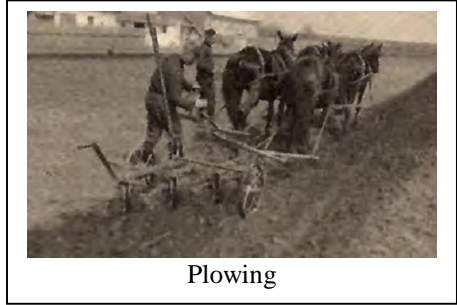


Students of the 1<sup>st</sup> Farmer Course of the Farmers' School in Arzis—  
1934

Coming now to the men's courses, it must be said at the outset that, as was to be expected in a purely rural district, these were almost exclusively in the field of theoretical and practical agriculture. The participation in the material presented, the participation in the discussions, were particularly lively and satisfying during these courses. The first farmer's course

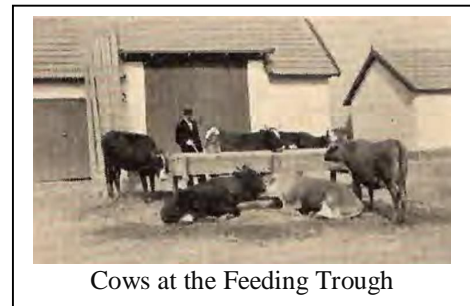
brought together 84 participants in February of 1935, in Arzis. (See picture). This first farmer's course was led by Mr. Robert Bantel, agricultural diploma, in Arzis. Mr. Bantel designed the course so meaningfully and attractively that it served as a model for all subsequent farmer courses. The lectures took place in the morning hours from 8-11 AM, in the afternoon from 2-4

PM. The lectures lasted 45 minutes each. Each presentation was followed by a discussion. In the evenings, our graduate farmers and veterinarians were usually taken to the surrounding communities for lectures. So off to Teplitz, Brienne, Gnadental and Friedenstal. The whole course sometimes rode in groups. The Arzis farmers also gathered for evening lectures in Arzis. It is safe to say that little sleeping took place in Arzis and in the surrounding communities during those training periods. The abundance of new problems occupied all the farmers. The sympathy



of the farmers was also understandable. For a century, our farmers had been addressed by their pastors, teachers, officials, village mayors, and the brotherhood (*Stunden*) speakers. For the first time, they now heard lectures from the agriculture sector. The blessing of such training could not be overestimated, and it soon became visibly apparent. I can still remember today how, on the occasion of the first course in 1935, I spoke about alfalfa cultivation in an evening meeting in Gnadental. After years of effort, I had

succeeded in achieving a beautiful plot of alfalfa on my own farm, which provided me with fresh green fodder for cows, horses, young cattle and foals throughout the summer. I recommended to the people of Gnadental to try to plow a part of their poor communal pasture (thin quack grass with a lot of spurge [genus *Euphorbia*]) as a matter of experimentation, to lime it abundantly and to sow it in the spring with oats and barley as a cover crop, as well as alfalfa as a base crop. Two years had passed afterwards, and I had long forgotten that lecture. In the midsummer of 1937, I took the train in the evening hours and passed the community of Gnadental. An extraordinarily beautiful sight presented itself to me, from the compartment window, in the light of the setting sun. A magnificent lush alfalfa growth of an estimated 50 hectares [124 acres] was not far from the railway line and many wagons were busy loading freshly mown alfalfa and bringing it to the village. Never in my life has the power of the spoken word become so meaningfully clear to me as in those evening hours by Gnadental. The blessing of the Arzis Farmers' School was mainly due to the fact that it did not offer book knowledge, but practitioners talked about our everyday worries in Bessarabian agriculture.



How true-to-life, how rich in experience were, for example, the lectures of our oldest agronomist, Mr. Otto Schulz from Schulzenheim. Mr. Schulz had completed his agricultural studies in Moscow and from there had gone into practice on his own farm. He had picked up on the deepest secrets of the steppe climate and our Bessarabian black earth. The fields of Mr. Otto Schulz could be shown to every foreign visitor to Bessarabia as model fields of our homeland. In the veins of Mr. Otto Schulz flowed the blood of the great farmer organizers of our homeland: his father, Mr. August Schulz, and his grandfather, Mr. Gottfried Schulz. Every new project, no matter how bold, found an advocate in it, if it was likely to strengthen the economic power of our homeland and improve the standard of living of our colonists. Mr. Robert Bantel, a graduate farmer, had graduated from the Agricultural College in Halle. He was not only a precise specialist of our local agriculture, but also of its people. With every new undertaking that affected our agriculture, Mr. Bantel could judge exactly whether our farmer would go along with

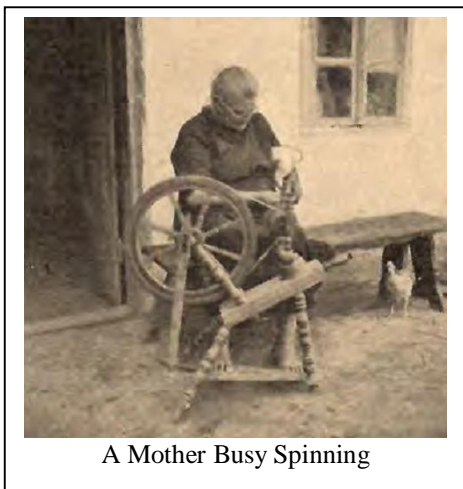
the new idea, or whether he would hold back. Mr. Bantel was one of the most zealous pioneers of our Farmers' School. Mr. Friedrich Müller, also a graduate of the Agricultural College in Halle, farmed on the poor land of a small farm. He was the given counselor of our community wherever one had to assert oneself on limited quantities of land. His lectures were mainly on soil science questions and plant cultivation. Mr. Müller headed the only experimental field in Bessarabia that was worked on by a German agronomist. South Bessarabia was the experimental field for soybean cultivation. As a guest at our first farmer's course, the teacher from the Marienburg Agricultural School, Mr. Erich Szegedi, a graduate farmer from Transylvania, was there. He was a brilliant speaker, his captivating lectures were always rewarded by our course participants with rousing applause. When he sat together with us in the house of Jakob Klett on the last evening before his departure for Transylvania, we were invited outside into the open air. There the entire course had started and through the frosty February night the beautiful song sounded uplifting:

*Wenn alle untreu werden,  
Wir bleiben dir doch treu,  
Daß immer noch auf Erden,  
Für dich ein Fähnlein sei.*

When everyone becomes unfaithful,  
We remain faithful to you,  
That always on earth,  
Be a little flag for you.

While our guest thanked the participants of the course of instruction undertaking, we Bessarabian German agronomists shook hands with each other. We knew it at the time: the birth of the first Bessarabian German Agricultural School had already arrived!

We also received valuable cooperation from leading men from the agricultural sector and from the Arzis teachers. Mr. Alfred Kämmler, from Teplitz, spoke in each course about castor-oil cultivation and about his experiences in lamp-black tilling (*Rußanbau*) [soot produced by burning oil or other combustible organic materials]. Mr. Kämmler was the first Bessarabian



A Mother Busy Spinning

German farmer to create a walnut tree plot of 8 hectares [19.8 acres]. The most valuable suggestions in fruit growing were brought to us by Mr. Imanuel Reinke, Alt-Elft, whose picture was shown on page 100 of the previous year *Heimatkalender*. Mr. Reinke had spent his whole life researching the suitability of numerous varieties of fruit for the arid climate of Bessarabia. He owned a unique, beautiful and large orchard in his home community. Out of pure idealism, Mr. Reinke revealed to his listeners experiences in the growing of fruit trees, which had cost him a lot of effort and economic losses. Teacher Alfred Ziebart, Arzis, spoke about beekeeping in every course, teacher Georg Riethmüller about viticulture. Teacher Albert Witt brought a verbal chronicle of the

municipality of Arlis in each course. The veterinarians, Dr. Schlenker and Dr. Alfried Schulz, gave lectures on animal husbandry and animal breeding of our profitable farm animals.

In the summer of 1938, the organizer of our Farmers' Association, Mr. Ferdinand Wagner, visited our large communities on a tour. Mr. Wagner already reported at that time to the

Agricultural Association about the rich seeds that sprouted in our communities as a result of our training. He also considered the expansion of the Arzis Farmers' School to be the most urgent task of our farmer organization at that time.



In the second year of its existence, the school was headed by Pastor August Hermann, Arzis. He arranged for the transfer of the school through the parish of Arzis to the Tarutino Regional Consistory. In an article entitled *Schools that Need Us* in the 1938 *Farmers' Calendar*, he drew the attention of the public to the popular education courses in Arzis. The article was read by Pastor Hermann at the Synod in Posttal on 31 May, 1937 and we are indebted to him for sending two experts to Stuttgart for training. They were our later subject teacher Miss Fiechtner, Gnadental, and the later head of the cutting out [pattern] courses for men, Mr.

Woldeman Neumann, Sarata.

The girls courses were carried out in such a way that the out of town students were lodged in the house of Mr. Jakob Klett during the courses. The busy day was usually opened with a lecture from 8-9 AM. The whole day was spent on practical lessons in cutting out patterns and sewing, or weaving. In the evening hours, there was usually a lecture, often also a social get-together at the place of lodging. The courses always ended with an exhibition of the things made.



Our picture shows the last course of the Farmers' School, which ended in May of 1940. So the picture was taken a few weeks before the start of the Resettlement. Little did we know at the time that our work in Bessarabia was coming to an end.

The founding of the first Bessarabian German Agricultural School did not take place. In 1937, the Executive Committee of the People's Cultural Course (*Volksbildungstugänge*) had bought an empty place, which was sold in Arzis, for 80,000 lei. I thought this place was unsuitable for a new building, but it was a first valuable investment, and the place could have been exchanged for a more suitable one later. The most beautiful place for a school building in Arzis would undoubtedly be the two building sites by the cemetery above the clubhouse and bordered by the railway line. Every Arzis resident will be able to remember well this elevated place in the village landscape. A wide avenue of poplars led to it past the clubhouse. From here, the school building would have been clearly visible far out into the valley. From here, from the upper floor of the school, one could have overlooked the church steeples of the five venerable mother communities: Arzis, Gnadengal, Teplitz, Brienne and Friedenstal. The building sites belonged to the long-time member of our school board, Mr. Jakob Klett, Arzis. I believe that Mr. Klett would have sold us these places for such an important purpose at that time. Arzis had the advantage over all other communities that the farmers of the lowlands and the uplands met at its weekly markets. It was here that the German business life of Bessarabia pulsed most eagerly. This was also the headquarters of our Trade Association. A childless couple from Arzis had already promised a donation of land to the Farmers' School in the valley for its expansion. They were the Daniel Tobler couple. Mr. Tobler was the secretary of our Farmers' School for many years and was intimately connected with its development.

The Farmers' School was once to become the place of our rural progress in the center of our settlement area. Here, our economic planning was to be put into practice on trial fields.

The work so beautifully conceived was no longer to mature into reality. Fate has led us down different paths than we hoped to take at the time. To our 1,000 students, to our proven teachers we cheer them with a final farewell!

[Translation Ends]