

Brief History of Strassburg II

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

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[Translation Begins]

Brief History of the Strassburg II Municipality

Founded in 1878. Number of founders: 8. They seem to have been stronger farmers throughout, as each worked 100 hectares [247 acres]. The estate on which the community was founded belonged to the Russian prince Alexander Wolkonsky. The land of 800 hectares [1,977 acres], on which the German farmers from several colonies settled, was leased by contract for a number of years. (Lease price can no longer be determined) Each was assigned a yard of 18 times 80 *Faden* [126 x 560 feet / 16.8 x 168 meters] on which the renters built their houses, very similar in shape and size. Most of them seem to have achieved great prosperity, as they moved away from here over time and new farms were founded in other places by means of purchase. In their place, new fellow-countrymen appeared here; they, however, became poorer when they arrived here. Since the lease price became higher and higher with each new contract and the land was never maintained, whereby the crop yields became weaker and weaker, the farmers became more and more impoverished so that at the outbreak of the World War only poor farmers lived their miserable existence here. Their number, however, rose to 13, while the amount of land decreased threefold.

After the end of the World War, the community found itself, in 1918, as a refuge for people who no longer had stability (*Halt*). At that time, their number rose to 30 farmers. In 1921, as a result of the implementation of the Agrarian Reform, the number of families increased to 30, while at the same time the amount of land decreased to 300 hectares [741 acres]. The people were consistently very poor and could hardly build their own homes.

In 1921, the community was hit by a hard blow; a flood destroyed half of the village. All those affected were brought to the point of the beggar's staff (*Bettelstab*), to which contributed the fact that we had a total crop failure in the same year. The destroyed homes are rebuilt in a higher place; the haunt of hunger was imminent. Therefore, it is not surprising that most people here reached for the beggar's staff. There was no help from anywhere. A farming progress was unthinkable here.

Hardly had the wound somewhat scarred over time and the community was hit by a new, even greater flood. However, this could be overcome more easily, as those affected were supported in mass by our German people of Bessarabia.

Since the time of the World War, we had a total crop failure in 1921, and also crop failures in 1924, 1928, 1932 and 1938. There were good harvests in 1926, 1929, 1930 and 1933; otherwise they were below average, average and above average.

As far as the cultural state of the community is concerned, it is at a very low level. All sorts of vices are spreading in the community. So far, to their discredit, hardly anything has been done on the part of the people to contain them. By the way, here, as everywhere among our people, egotism prevails.

Strassburg II
22 September, 1940.

Rudolf Thillmann

[Frame 2446766 missing – so no information from title page]

-----Wilhelm Knecht, Daniel Brückmann, Ferdinand Knecht, Gottfried Steinke, Gottlieb Ziemann, Friedrich Anklam, Wilhelm Knecht and Samuel Sikorski.

I received the above information almost 20 years ago from Samuel Sikorski, who was a founder himself, but left his new home after only one year.

The founders came from the following colonies: The three Knechts and Fr. Anklam from Paris; D. Brückmann and G. Steinke from Alt-Elft; and Samuel Sikorski from Brienne.

The fact that the people here were doing well is proven by the fact that most of the founders, as well as many who came here from various places and spent several years here, bought their own land in another community and settled there. In general, Strasbourg II seems to have been a place in which any ambitious fellow-countryman could bring it to prosperity as soon as he seized hold of it properly.

Over time, however, the situation here constantly changed. The founders disappeared one after the other from the community, while their positions were filled by fellow-countrymen from abroad. Already in the founding year we meet August Ruff here, who seems to have taken over the farm of Samuel Sikorski. Furthermore, the following are to be referred to as newly added names:

1884—Samuel Gutsche, Wilhelm Pöd and Johann Gust

1886—Gottfried Sukut, Daniel Haase, Gottlieb Konrad, Jakob Kreil and Wilhelm Steinke

1887—Christian Siewert

1890—Daniel Rink

1893—Andreas Konrad

1894—Christof Friesske

1896—Wilhelm Friesske, Samuel Ring, Samuel Solo and David Siewert

1897—Friedrich Ruff

1901—Ludwig Maile

1902—Ferdinand Bader
1903—Jakob Stotz, Johann Bader and Gottlieb Sauter
1904—Heinrich Maier, Gottfried Haag
1905—Georg Maile, Johann Hettig
1906—Adam Buchfink
1908—Ferdinand Bader, Johann Bader
1909—Immanuel Anklam
1910—Johannes Faas, Wilhelm Kroisandt, Friedrich Roth
1914—Christian Schneider, Gottlieb Landsiedel, Friedrich Faas and Martin Schimke
1916—Rudolf Bohnet, Michael Bohnet, Wilhelm Steinke
1918—Johann Schimke and Albert Ziebart

As already mentioned, the municipality of Strasbourg II originally consisted of only 8 farmsteads. Over time, however, two farmyards were measured out and built upon at the southern end. The second to last of the newly built houses was later acquired by the community and thus served as a school and prayer house for several decades. Somewhat separated from the village, towards the south, a mud shack and a house were built afterwards, which was used by the administration of the estate for special purposes. Thus, the village consisted of eleven farmsteads when the World War began in 1914.

While the conditions were still reasonably orderly until then, a real tragedy began for the community with the advent of the World War. The farming economy was shaken to the core and experienced a completely impoverished community at the end of the war.

When Bessarabia was annexed to Romania in 1918 and our situation began to improve, the remaining members of the municipality decided, in agreement with the administration of the estate, to enlarge the village in order to create and maintain better community conditions. 13 new farmyards were added, one of which filled the open space between the village and the two most recently built houses, while the remaining twelve were separated from the old row of houses by an alley to the west. The construction of these farmyards began in 1919. The new residents who built on these farmyards were: Daniel Gross, Johann Niebel, Immanuel Scherbinski, Andreas Schill, Johann Bast, Christian Maier, Katarina Thillmann, Gottlieb Schöpp, Immanuel Funk, Albert Ziebart, Johann Schimke, Rudolf Thillmann, and Christian Fried. Gross, Schill, Bast, and Schimke came from Basyrjamka, Niebel from Sarjari, Scherbinski from Sangerowka, K. Thillmann, R. Tillmann and Ch. Fried from Mannsburg I, Funk from Alt-Elft. The community now had 25 built-up farmsteads. A difficult time began for the newly immigrated members of the community. For the most part, these were people who had previously lived in dependency, namely semi-farmers, farm-hands, shepherds, etc. Most of them as poor as a church mouse. No wonder, if everyone had a special blueprint for themselves and the whole thing ended up more like a ‘Babylonian tower’ (*babylonischen Turn*) than a German settlement. However, when winter surprised us for the first time in our new houses, it looked miserable in some living rooms. As soon as the frost arrived, the insides of the clay roofs as well as the walls were covered with frost. It turned out that everything was made too flimsy. No wonder that everyone fell for special tricks to protect themselves and their family from the cold. I, for example, made my children shoes with wooden slats, and as soon as carpenter Frost covered the stream with a load-bearing blanket, I chased them onto the ice. They were extremely satisfied with it and came home every time sweaty and reddened like the boiled crabs. Of

course, they always had a good appetite. The latter was already a harder job, because in this respect it also came to a standstill. While the 8 founders of our community had once begun to cultivate 100 hectares [247 acres] each, it was not possible for all of us new members to together cultivate only 100 hectares in the first few years. The “old farmers” also contributed to this by occupying the best field and usually leaving us hay parcels. Although a year ago they themselves were anxious to enlarge the village, they were now, in 1919, consistently against any enlargement of the community. This change in the behavior of the “old occupiers” can be explained by the fact that they had in their head that they are now the very next heirs of the 800 *dessjatinen* [872 ha / 2,160 acres] upon which the community was originally founded. It should be noted, however, that at that time none of the founders were any longer here, except Johannes Steinke, who was only the son of a founder and took over his father's business several years before the outbreak of the World War. He was born here in Strassburg in 1879.

This man was the “cornerstone” of the old owners, who all came here either during the World War or a few years before its outbreak. While the community had already lost more than half of its original land holdings by 1918, land was still taken from it despite growing in size and the land amount for the individual melted down to 8 *dessjatinen* [8.7 ha / 21.6 acres] in 1920. So much land had to be preserved by the Agrarian Reform for each family.

It should be mentioned that towards the end of the World War such confusion arose in the countryside of Prince Wolkonski that the municipality of Strassburg was no longer able to maintain a piece of land on its own. As everywhere in the great Russian Empire, the Germans were made to feel their denial of rights by the Russians from the neighboring Marianovka II who invaded the field of the people of Strassburg and seizing land wherever they could. The only fortunate thing for the people of Strassburg was that the Russians had too little pulling power [animal or machine] to be able to wrest even more land from them.

Even before the Revolution, the out-spokenness of the Russians towards the Germans could hardly be tolerated, but after the outbreak of the same in 1917, it rose even more as the lower classes assumed that they were now entitled to satisfy all their desires at will. But there was always something that hindered them in their impulsiveness and so they always nurtured the hope of achieving their wishes at some point in the future. However, when in April of 1918, Romania, Russia's former ally, laid its hand on Bessarabia, our neighbors—the Russians from Marianovka II—had to give up a good deal of their hope and settle for what lay beyond the Alkalia River. Consequently, Strassburg remained on the field again for themselves alone. However, when the 13 new members appeared here in 1919, they found the field to come to them, for the most part, already sown by the old owners or in the hay parcels, as already mentioned above. A race now arose between the old owners and the newly arrived members (they were abruptly called Bolsheviks) in that they drove into the field long before dawn and where there was an unoccupied piece of land, stopped and seeded the same without further argument. However, the new ones had to be overcome, because, first of all, they were unknown in the field and, secondly, they were also not as strong as the old ones.

Strassburg, October 1940

Rudolf Thillmann

[Translation Ends]