

The Germans in Dobrudscha (Part 10)

The book listed below, containing 248 pages of information, is being translated chapter by chapter and posted as each chapter is completed. Part 1 gives you a summary of each of the 15 chapters in the “Contents” section. The words in the [square brackets] are those of the translator and are not found in the original text.

Translator: Allen E. Konrad
22 June, 2017

The Germans in Dobrudscha

**along with a contribution
to the history of the German
migration in Eastern Europe**

**by
Paul Traeger**

**With 73 illustrations in the text and tables
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10.

Village Layout, House, Yard, Farm, Weaving and Dress

Any official regulations for a systematic design of the colonies had not been produced to the German immigrants during Turkish times or under the Romanian rule. From the Turks, they were simply given a place to settle. In the older colonies it was, as we saw, still uninhabited and primeval forest. But they were not given an allotment of a fixed size. According to the rules of colonization, everyone received as much land as he needed to cultivate, i.e. whatever he was able to conquer by his own efforts.¹ The new localities could be equally well made up of scattered detached yards or irregular villages as the Turkish, Tatar and Bulgarian settlements of Dobrudscha are. The colonists of the last period of immigration were limited from the outset with regard to the land available to them, but in the design of their villages they were not bound to established plans and guidelines. The Romanian regulations for the rural communities, however, contain some regulations about the dwellings, yards and fences, but they are of a general nature, and besides, they appear only on paper, because in reality they are paid attention to almost nowhere.

The German farmers also had a free hand in setting up their own village as they wished. It could therefore be expected that here the different tribal origins were expressed, that the Kashubian immigrants, according to their native habit, built their village differently than the Swabian. But that is not the case. The Dobrudscha colonies all show the same design. The decisive influence was not old homeland tradition, but also here the way in which it was used on the Russian steppe. In fact, the descriptions of the village complex of the South Russian colonies also apply to the Dobrudscha villages.² The settlement of New Russia has been conducted from the outset by the Russian Government in every respect with more consideration and method than it happened on the part of the Turkish and also the Romanian administration. Generally valid systematic regulations were adopted for the design and development of the new colonies. The boundaries of the land belonging to a colony were established at the outset, the size of the individual allotment and farmyard precisely determined, and the land strips measured out to the settlers joined each other in a given sequence. The unconfined, flat steppe offered no natural obstacles. So, in the same way, there were long, straight village streets of the greatest uniformity.

This kind of village complex had become the accustomed pattern for the generation later migrating from Russia, which they also took to Dobrudscha and in which they have strictly adhered to even where they settled in already existing localities with mixed population alongside Tatars, Turks, Russians or Romanians. So they still have until recent time lain out their circumscribed street, which is strictly copied from another place, even if they are a small number within a whole Turkish or Tatar village, as in Palaz Mare or Alacap.

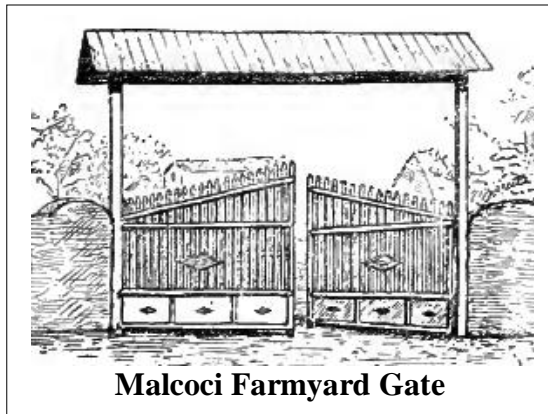
¹ Article 4 of the Regulations states: "In the provinces of the Empire, which are considered as most suitable for their settlement, one will choose from among the government land available to them which is the most fertile and healthiest, and as much land allotted to each colonist as he requires to cultivate or for any other activity." According to Article 8, the colonists had the right to sell the landed property granted free of charge to them by the government after a minimum of 20 years, but it seems that little attention was paid to this provision in Dobrudscha.

² Vgl. Busch, Vienemann, Mathaei, Schmidt.

These well-maintained, wide, carefully-oriented white walls delineated by two high rows of trees, on whose sides all yards are the same width, all houses spaced the same, has become typical and characteristic of a German settlement in Dobrudscha.

Most of the colonies consist only of one sometimes very long street, such as Cogeala, Cobadin and Tariverde. In some, like Malcoci and Sarighiol, parallel roads were created, in Caramurat even 3 on each side. A village square is not provided, and the church is also included in the series of yards. The colony of Cogealac differs somewhat from this rule as the streets have quite the typical form, but include a large market place and are thus partly perpendicular to each other. A significantly different picture shows only in the layout of the colony Atmagea which is built on considerably hilly land. (Compare plan on page 46 [p.63 in original].) Here there are five streets going out from the church square which are very different in their directions and intervals given the possibilities in the terrain. Also, the yards and the arrangement and form of the buildings are not as uniform in this early settlement as in the later. This is also true of the other two old colonies of Malcoci and Kataloi. In place of the street walls there are still many slat-fences, wicker-fences and braided fences. Only the later immigrants seem to have the usual style of the village complex and farmyard of the so firm and fixed imprint in the Russian homelands that it appears almost template-like in appearance.

The width of the street in the larger villages is 23 to 25 meters [75 to 82 feet]. A sidewalk is



Malcoci Farmyard Gate

found on each side. There are two entrances into the yards, a wider one for the wagons and a narrower one for persons, both often framed by very beautiful thick columns, spanned with high arches or provided with a moderate roof. On the side of the street there is often a fixed, wide bench made of the same material as the walls, on which the farmers carry on their chatting during their leisure evening and Sundays. The width of the yards, which are also separated by walls, is different in different villages, but usually not within a village. They vary between 30, 35 and 40 meters

[98, 114 and 131 feet], the depth is usually 80 meters [262 feet]. Behind and next to the wall, where the gable side of the house faces the street, there is a small front garden. This is like that in all the yards on the same side and at the same distance from the wall, so that they stand rank and file, aligned on the street.

The shape of the house and its arrangement is the same in all the colonies. A very long, narrow building with a fairly pointed roof, where from the best room (*guten Stube*) on the street follow, one after the other, the rooms necessary for living and for farming. Larger differences only show up in the proportion of the length to the width. Especially in the younger colonies in the south, the houses are almost everywhere of extraordinary length, with a width of only 6-8 meters [20-26 feet], often 60-70 meters [196-229 feet] long. They have a fairly pointed roof. Even where this is still covered with reeds, it is always in very good condition.



German Home (right) with Attached Farm Buildings

In the wealthier colonies, however, there is predominantly solid roofing. This house form is also typical of German homes in Dobrudscha, but it is not to be thought of as a German tradition back in the old country. It has developed like all the village designs in Russia, and it is significant that only the houses of the Lipovans [Old Believers, dissenters of the Russian Orthodox Church] are



Romanian Farm House. Sketch by R. Canisius.

similarly built, while in the rest of Dobrudscha we still see the ancient primitive earth huts (*bordee*) which are stuck half into the earth, so that often only the low roof stands above the ground. The Tartar resides in a pretty wretched, not put up with care or maintained, low clay hut with bull-rush roofing. Romanians and Bulgarians have their own, adopting the type of an old era.

The gable tops of the German houses often end, especially in the Kashubian colonies, with two wood-carved horse heads, placed one over the other, crosswise, as we find them in various areas of Germany, in Mecklenburg, Schleswig, Braunschweig, Nassau, but also in Tyrol. We are dealing with an old German popular belief.³ For they owe their existence not only with the intention of decorating the house, but to protect it against demons and sorcery, very much like the Bulgarian in Dobrudscha who sets up in his yard, on a long pole, a horse skull to ward off evil spirits.

³ Andree, Rich., Braunschweiger Volkskunde, 2. Aufl. S. 170 ff.



Tatar Yard with Corncrib, without Yard Enclosure

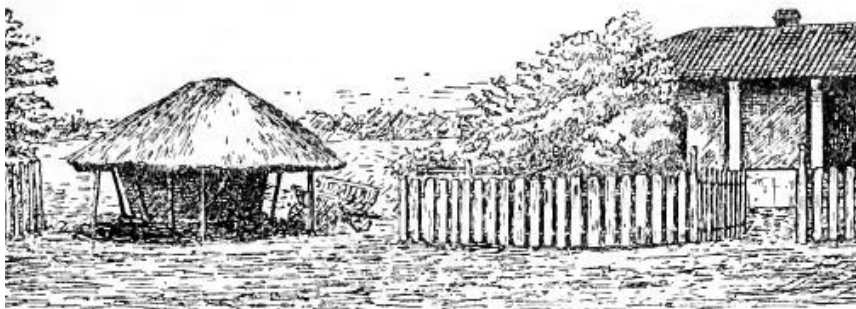
The gable triangle is mostly interconnected and painted on the street side with vivid colors, the most popular being red, blue, green, violet and light brown. Here, usually on a small plaque or painted right onto the gable is the name of the owner, often, in addition, a verse or a Bible text. So I read the beautiful words at a home in Tariverde:

*The house belongs to me, and yet it does not.
After me, someone else will enter it.
It also is not his.*

Christian Mayer.

This contemplative consideration concerning our fleeting existence seems to have been more set at the end of the house. It is the same thought that Bush found in a South Russian colony on a triangular gable crown in the following form: *We build here so permanent (feste)*

*And are nothing more than guests.
And where we shall be eternally,
There we build so little.*⁴



**Bulgarian
Yard with
Corn-Crib**

⁴ Both texts belong to the oldest and most widespread in Germany. The first one traced back to 1715 in Alsace, Baden, Württemberg (Laufen on the Eyach and in the Upper Area of Leutkirch and Laupheim), Upper Bavaria, Tirol, Salzburg, Hesse, Altenburg, West Bohemia etc. (Joh. Bolte, *Drei deutsche Haussprüche und ihr Ursprung*, Z. B. f. B. 28. S. 113). In Oberbergen near Breisach, the last verse says: "Who will be the last?" In Ewattingen near Bonndorf, it concludes, "who was before me, also believed, it was his. He pulled out, I came in. After my death, it will also be like this" (Alemannia, 3. F., I. Bd. S. 55). The second is verified, among others, in Alsace, Swabia, Switzerland and Transylvania. Dr. Aug. Andree (*Hausinschriften aus deutschen Städten und Dörfern*, Globus, 89, S. 885) was read to him on a house in Göttingen with the year 1618, as well as originating in the 17th century in Hannover, Erfurt and Goslar and in Oberamt Laupheim. It already showed up in a Low German proverb compilation in 1400. It already had a long journey through the German districts behind it before it came to Russia.

The aforementioned parts of the house, as well as the street walls, are first “smeared” with a mixture of clay, straw, cow and horse manure and, after drying, “white-washed.” White-washing is redone often so that the Germans farm houses are the cleanest white at all times.

The entrance to the residence is located on the long side of the house, always immediately after the first room next to the street. One first enters into a small hallway, which is adjacent to a small room used as a kitchen back room. To the left of the entrance hall is the street room (*Straßenzimmer*), the good parlor (*gute Stube*). It contains the best furniture and rugs, besides a table and chairs, a cupboard with glasses and plates, and every now and then there is also a large, old, colorfully painted chest with a flat lid. The floor is decorated with colorful “woven rag rugs (*Lumpenplachten*), bright clean curtains decorate the windows, and the walls are hung with a lot of pictures and photographs, framed sayings and the confirmation certificates with pictorial decoration. Under the photographs are those of the deceased in a coffin around which are gathered the mourning community. The two major pieces of the room are the huge, white or

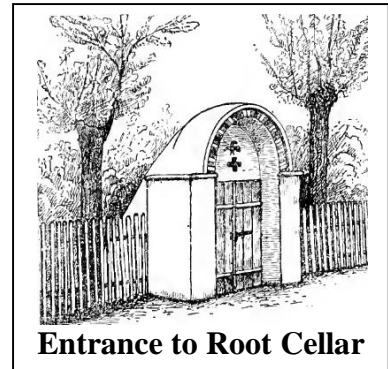


German Farmyard; Corncrib, Well, Cattle Trough, Summer Kitchen

colorfully painted oven, made of fired bricks, which is heated from the kitchen, and a large display bed (*Paradebett*), on which five snow-white, embroidered feather pillows are placed, always in the same way as our picture [attached at the end of the book] shows. To the right of the entryway are one or more simple furnished living rooms and bedrooms, and these are attached to the provisions room and stables (*Ställe*). Almost without exception, there is meticulous order and cleanliness in all houses and rooms.

Opposite the house, usually separated from the street by a slightly larger garden, lies a small, solidly built little house, which serves as a summer kitchen. Furthermore, in the front part of the courtyard you can see the often very handsome superstructure of the cellar, also neatly plastered and white-washed or painted. Further back come the well with a thick drawbar (*Ziehstange*). Next to its frame there is usually a long trough to water the livestock. With the adverse water conditions of Dobrudscha, not all farmers everywhere have their own wells, so, for example, in

Mamuzlu, there is only one in the whole village. Never, however, within the farmyard is there an absence of the “*Hambar*,” the “corn-crib” (*Maisstall*), a free-standing small building through which air can pass, in which the maize (*Kukuruz*) is dried and preserved. The Germans almost always make their *Hambur* from lath (*Lattin*), while those of the Tatars, Bulgarians and Romanians are always made of woven twigs and have the shape of large baskets. Afterwards, the yard contains smaller stables for pigs and hens and, a little further to the back, the “*Harman*,” an open enclosure with a tall roof used as a summer barn for the large livestock. It is also used for the processing of the manure, which is used in Dobrudscha by the German farmer as well as with us. It remains lying in the barn until spring, flattened on the ground and the manure layer is cut into brick-like or cube-like pieces.

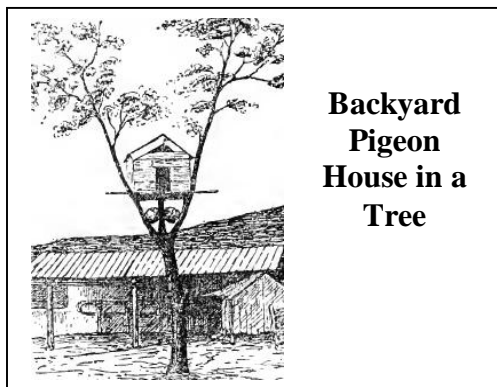


Entrance to Root Cellar



Manure Blocks Stacked to Dry

These are then stacked outdoors so that the wind can pass through them to dry, and serve in the winter as a fuel material. The largest space in the rear of the farmyard is taken up for the threshing of the grain. The German farmer also took on the primitive method used in the South Russian steppe, but also in Bulgaria. The grain is spread out on the “threshing place,” then four and more horses are hitched in front of a heavy, intimidating roller, the “threshing stone” (*Dreschstein*), and driven around in circles.



Backyard Pigeon House in a Tree

The straw is piled up in huge piles behind this threshing floor. A beautiful ornament of the farmyard presents itself in some villages with beautifully constructed and colorfully painted pigeon houses which are mounted on high poles or often very picturesque between the branches of the trees. There is often a thick wire stretched across the whole farmyard between the house and the summer kitchen. It is used to hold a movable ring on which a long line of the yard dog is attached so that it can run back and forth and in this way have command over the whole width of the yard.

But what particularly distinguishes, at first sight, every German property and every German street, as a whole, from the drab, barren residential sites and localities of most other Dobrudscha dwellers, and makes them recognizable already from afar as German is the splendid, affectionately cared-for nice tree, which encloses every yard with fresh greenery and, in a long, tall avenue, shading every street. One can usually readily see in it the expression of a particularly strong, German love of nature. And certainly, without such a planting and keeping of trees in a country in which being without trees is characteristic, it would not happen without this care and persistence. But as for the whole layout of village and yard, what was experienced at the beginning of the South Russia steppe colonization also contributed out of necessity to the official direction taken here. In paragraph 51 of the "Instruction on the Internal Establishment and Administration of the New Russian Foreign Colonies" it was ordered: "To protect against storm and fire, the houses, barns and farmyards must be occupied with all kinds of fast-growing trees." And it belonged to the duties of the mayor to strictly see to it that it happened everywhere. But the practical purpose here was at the same time the natural tendency, and so, in the treeless Dobrudscha, every German village became a green island delight to heart and eye.

I have already given information about the size of the land ownership of the individual colonists when speaking about the villages. As long as they were under Turkish authority, it varied differently in conformity to the natural surrounding, depending only on the laborers and the industriousness of the families. The already mentioned installation of a mayor from Atmagea in 1878 shows, in an example, the development until the time before the Romanian appropriation.

After this, new regulations were made for the property in the newly acquired land by decree on 3 April, 1882, supplemented by decree of 10 March, 1884. The Turkish charge for the ground, a tenth, the *Dijma*, was replaced by cash payments, which for the first 5 years was 2 *frank* annually per hectare, for the next 15 years it was fixed at 3 *frank*. However, anyone who ceded a third of his recognized property to the state was exempted from the redemption of the *Dijma* for the remaining two-thirds. More important was the provision which gave the Romanian farmers and those immigrants with government permission the right to purchase land from the state under reasonable conditions if they had not previously owned or had less than 10 hectares [24.7 acres]. The landless were given lots in size up to 10 hectares, and the one whose recognized possession was smaller, could supplement himself to that extent. In addition, under other conditions, lots of 10-100 hectares [24.7-247 acres] were also given by the government, and some German colonists also used this opportunity to enlarge their land ownership. However, apart from that, the new regulation has, to a certain extent, created a equalization on the basis of 10 hectares. Whoever got land from the Romanian Government usually had to pay a annual levy of 3-5 lei for the hectare for 25 or 30 years before he was granted full ownership.

Over the years, however, the proportions have again completely changed. On the one hand, the normal ownership was mostly reduced by divisions; on the other hand, settlements were unable to expand any further, and in all of them the number of those who only possess their yard or have no own land at all increased. As we have seen, especially among the younger colonies, there are quite a few that rely solely on lease land (*Pachtland*). In the early times, many were rented for half the yield (*Halbscheid*) or turning over every third pile (*dritten haufen*). Today, probably almost everywhere it is the same, which, before the war, was 20-30 lei per hectare, in some areas

even over and above. But even on leased land the farm fed the family, and, apart from some colonies with bad soil, the farmers were well off.

The cultivation of farmable land is generally carried out extensively by the German farmers in the old Russian way. In place of walking behind the wooden plow it is now an iron one, some obtained from Germany, but there is still little deep plowing and no spreading on of manure. Likewise, a methodical rotation of crops is still unknown. The yield therefore remains far behind that of Germany. Wheat, corn, oats, barley, and, to a lesser extent, rye, rape-seed and flax are sown, and here and there a little patch for domestic use. In those lying in the hills of the colonies of the north, as in Ciucurova, I also saw beautiful potato fields. The growing of grapes has suffered almost everywhere through the grape louse and because of that has declined very much.

Cattle breeding of the colonies was at a high level before the war. The German farmer put his pride in having beautiful and, where possible, many horses, and in the community pasture in all the colonies, the noise of a magnificent herd of cattle. It is one of the most beautiful and emotional among the impressions that one receives in these distant German settlements when, in the evening, the whole herd from the village returns from the pasture and proceeds in a long line through the street until every animal has found its home. Sheep breeding did not have the same significance as in the early days, but there were still herds of 1,000 and 2,000 head in individual colonies. Of course, there was no lack of pigs and poultry in the German farmyards. In the selling of milk, Dobrudscha has remained quite outstanding for a long time. According to a Romanian author, Zacharia Zeciu,⁵ there was not a single cream separator (*Milchzentrifuge*) in the country in 1905, and only 17 agitating butter barrels (*Schlagbutterfässer*). If, on the other hand, there was no house without a separator before the outbreak of war in various German villages, it certainly points to impressively commanding progress. While Zeciu claims about the German farmer that he does not work the soil any better than the local peasant, he fully recognizes that “it is the women of the German settlers who are at the top of the high utilization of cow's milk and get their income from it.”

Only reluctantly does a colonist son decide to learn a craft. Most of them confine themselves to that which is related to German farming: blacksmith and barn maker, then also saddle-maker, cabinet-maker, and shoe-maker. On the other hand, the work of a tailor is usually left to the Romanians.

Spinning and weaving, in earlier times the main winter activity of women and girls, is pretty much out of style. The finer and cheaper European factory fabrics have also displaced the coarse, self-made linen cloth from the Dobrudscha farmhouse. Especially in the southern colonies, to which the Constantza business places are easily reachable, one rarely sees a spinning wheel, and one has to search to find a house in which a loom is set up and in operation. In Sarighiol, for example, there are only 4, in Cobadin only one. The older colonies of the north have remained more loyal to the old custom, as in some other respects. In general, it is almost only older women who still understand and practice the art of weaving. In earlier time, the in the house industrious female not only had to care for all the linen cloth for shirts and towels, but also for the thick fabrics of the women's dresses and men's pants. All the work of warping, spinning, dyeing and weaving was done in the house, and in some it still happens today. The woolen

⁵ Die Landwirtschaft der Dobrudscha im Laufe des 19. Und am Anfange des 20. Jahrhunderts. Leipzig 1909. S. 49.

garments are dyed with a much liked dark blue, where the indigo is being applied in a not too appetizing manner in human urine. A product of the house weaving still plays a big role in all houses today: the “*Plachten*.” They are the big, very colorful, same on both sides carpets, which are woven either from pure, personally dyed wool or from stripes of old shirts, blouses, aprons and stockings. These “Rag Coverings” (*Lumpenplachten*) can be found everywhere in large numbers as blankets and flooring. The woollens serve mainly as wearable material (*Tragtücher*) for the young children and are therefore usually called children blankets (*Kinderplachten*). The mothers, who on the street have wrapped their children in a colorful, flowing blanket over the left shoulder and under the right arm, are a typical sight in the German villages. Each farm woman shows with pride her ownership of *Plachten*, only that in these days she usually no longer weaves herself, but lets it be woven with the wool she supplies. About 6-10 pieces make up a never missing part of the dowry of the daughter. One will find strikingly beautiful, in color and pattern, very tasteful works of superior workmanship. For the differences in the type of patterns and weaving there are various technical terms. It is woven with “side strips” (*Beistreifen*), with “heart” (*Herz*), “pulled through the board” (*durchs Brett gezogen*), many chests are covered with “corner blankets” (*Eckenplachten*) and “strip blankets” (*Bandplachten*), where only wide strips without narrow intermediate strips come next to each other. As the German farm women themselves all say, the art of this weaving has been learned in Russia. The blankets and carpets of the Bulgarian and Romanian women, which are infinitely more busy in weaving, are quite different from the German *Plachten*. The Romanian loom also shows deviations in construction in that it has up to 6 “treadles,” while the German colonists have only 2. Also of the rich embroideries which the Bulgarians and Romanians have on shirts, aprons, towels and make a show of, the Germans have not adopted anything.

The women's and young girls' clothing of the colonists has nothing to do with colored charm or decoration. It is plain and simply practical: a long, dark skirt and an equally dark blouse. Characteristically similar for all is that they tied in the same way a narrow fitting headscarf with a long tip covering the neck. The tightly combed hair is parted in the middle and joined at the back of the head in a knot. In the Catholic villages, all women and girls usually wear on their chest a velvet ribbon with a golden cross hanging from it. With the men and boys, one can speak more of a costume, but it is not of the old German fathers, but a Russian one that was adopted in the steppe. In the younger colonies, this is also beginning to disappear; in the older northern, on the other hand, it is still generally held onto. Here no hat with a big brim has yet displaced the tall black wool cap and, among the youth, the dark, wide cap. The trousers are tucked into high boots, on top the light, multiple-red shirt with a wide, multi-wrapped sash. The older men often wear an embroidered or woven colorful neck scarf, for which also the Russian term “*Scharf*” is maintained.

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