Friedrich Lütze—First German Doctor in Bessarabia

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

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[Translation Begins]

Friedrich Lütze, First German Medical Doctor in Bessarabia

by Ella Winkler-Lütze

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when German farmers settled the Bessarabian steppe, devastating conditions prevailed across Russia in the field of healthcare. The few doctors who lived in the cities were foreigners. They served the upper social class. There was no independent free peasant class. The rural population were people in bondage. They were the slaves of the landowners and could be bought and sold by their masters. They were hardly regarded as humans. In cases of illness, they were completely dependent on the quacks from their own ranks.

Bessarabia was a Turkish province until the year 1812. As the Tsarist soldiers occupied the land, the Turks living here destroyed their settlements and withdrew with the retreating Muslim armies across the border to the south.

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Transcript
National Archives—Ludwigsburg
Emigration Registers 1816—1859
F 164 Bundle No. 73 Page 51

The surgeon and wound doctor Georg Friedrich Lütze, son of the surgeon Ferdinand Friedrich Lütze, requests on 5 November, 1831, through the mayor's office of Blochingen*, for permission to emigrate to the Russian colony of Sarata. The petitioner has already gone there in 1827 and is

in good health there. He has sent a certificate stating that he has also renounced his current state and municipal citizenship rights in Blochingen.

According to the mayoral official report, there is no obstacle to emigration of Lütze.

*Note: Blochingen is the old spelling for the name of the town Plochingen, still in use around 1831.

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According to the will of the tsar, the fertile Bessarabian steppe land was to be cultivated by a free peasantry. Since agriculture in his own realm was at a very low level, he endeavored to bring farmers from Germany. The new foreign climatic conditions, but above all the low standard of living during the early years of settlement, living in damp earthen huts and the poor, one-sided nutrition, combined with the complete absence of any sanitary preventive measures, were responsible for the fact that the settlers were afflicted by various infectious diseases, many of which killed them.

To remedy this evil, the Russian government decided to call for doctors from the old homeland of the German farmers. It instructed its representative in Stuttgart to find suitable men for this purpose through a recruiting process.

Young doctor Georg *Friedrich* Lütze from Plochingen/Neckar was ready to practice his profession abroad for several years. In 1827, he made a contract with the Russian government through their embassy in Stuttgart, in which he committed himself to work as a doctor in Bessarabia for ten years.

Lütze was born on 21 January, 1803, in Plochingen. He came from an old Württemberg family of doctors, had studied at the Faculty of Medicine in Jena like his father, and had chosen surgery as his specialized field.

His journey took the young doctor down the Danube [River] to Galatz [Romania], from there according to instructions to Kischinew, where he was to introduce himself to his direct superior, General Insow. Here he learned more about his area of responsibility. This extended not only over the German villages of the Akkerman District but also included all foreign communities. In particular, the task of supporting employees and workers of state-owned enterprises in the countryside was emphasized. This included, in addition to the large properties that had not yet been transferred into private hands, the salt-works in Tusla, which at that time belonged to the Russian state. He was also burdened with the duties of a veterinarian: along with the livestock in the villages, the large herds on the estates of the landowners. Because the Russian state had generously rewarded its deserving generals of the Turkish war with land.

General Insow had designated the colony of Sarata as the seat and work center, and warmly recommended to the young doctor the gentlemen Gottlieb Veygel and Aloisius Scherzinger, two men who, already well acquainted with the circumstances of the new homeland, would certainly assist him with advice and action.

With mixed feelings, Lütze set off for Sarata. At the Russian embassy in Stuttgart, he had signed the contract as a surgeon. Here, however, he was required to fulfill the duties of a practical physician. Listening to his objection, General Insow smiled and expressed his firm belief that, in spite of it, everything would go very well. Apparently, he held the view that anything was possible for a German. Lütze pondered over whether it might be better to return home under such circumstances. However, the contract had already come into effect.

It was thanks to the warm welcome in the home of Gottlieb Veygel, the persuasive skills of Aloisius Scherzinger, and the efforts of Mr. Veygel that the concerns of the young doctor were completely dispelled and his self-confidence strengthened. He began to understand that the circumstances in Russia were different from what he was used to at home.

To determine which diseases were most prevalent in this country and which medications were needed to combat them, especially to get to know the population, Lütze boldly undertook his first trip to his work area. On this occasion, he introduced himself in Akkermann to the responsible district doctor, who, as a Jew, spoke German fluently. Lütze was looking forward to this and took it for granted that he would receive advice from the older colleague for his work. He was mistaken. The greeting was very unfriendly. Although the district doctor never traveled to the villages entrusted to him, he had received subsidies from the state for their care, which now fell to the German. This was an unforgivable reason to ignore the younger colleague. Throughout his life, his behavior remained cool and distant.

A second journey led to the port city of Odessa, which was already known for its extensive trade and substantial industry at the time. Here was the essential purchasing ground for a doctor for medications. In the first half of the nineteenth century, pharmacy was still taught as a subject in the medical faculties at universities, and preparing medicines was among the duties of a doctor. In this large city, it was also possible to meet with foreign doctors, especially German ones. Beneficial exchanges of ideas provided new inspirations, and many good pieces of advice could be realized in practice.

The travel opportunity at that time in vast Russia was the horse-drawn mail coach, whose approach was announced by a bell attached to the front of the shaft. In Bessarabia, this arrangement still functioned in its early stages and was very inadequate. It was essentially only for government employees on inspection trips, with whom a merchant from other regions of Russia could sometimes travel. One often had to wait a long time during the horse changes at the stations. These lengthy journeys through the steppe in the company of Russian-speaking companions were the young doctor's first conversational school for learning the local language. However, they also introduced him to the secrets and tricks of the vast steppe, briefly bringing him into contact with people of dubious, adventurous nature. During one of his first trips, it turned out while changing to another mail coach that his luggage, along with the medical supplies, had disappeared. On another occasion, highwaymen ambushed the wagon. The travelers, all well-dressed people, were taken in different directions so that no one would ever learn of the fate of the others. They held the doctor captive for ten days in an earthen hut. Apparently, in the meantime, they subtly made inquiries based on his statement to confirm that he was indeed the doctor from Sarata. Without demanding a ransom, they led the prisoner,

blindfolded, to the country road and pointed him towards the nearest settlement, which he could then reach on foot. It was never clarified which band of robbers was at work here.

This incident occurred at a time when the young doctor already had an overview of his field of work. According to a fixed plan, he was subsequently transported from place to place by a wagon from the involved municipality. This service by the wagon drivers was regarded as compulsory labor (*Fronarbeit*) by the municipal administrations. However, as soon as he was financially able, he bought horses and a wagon, and also hired a suitable caretaker for the horses. For years, he had a young German named Michael Scheck from Friedenstal in his service. Conscientiously, he took care of the horses and was a loyal, reliable travel companion. Both, the doctor and the wagon driver, equipped with rifle and pistol, now jointly faced the dangers of the steppe, which, besides bandits in the winter, was mainly threatened by hungry wolves. It was Scheck who accompanied the doctor on the night journey from Kulwetscha across the Kronsteppe, when the people of the robber chief Toppeltock escorted them as far as Sarata. (Further description in *Heimatkalender* 1955, pages 95/96 and in *Heimat in der Steppe* by Friedrich Fiechtner, page 238: "A Mysterious Hospital Visit").

Lütze had divided his large working area into districts, where he spent a few days each month in the larger, centrally located municipalities. Here he received patients from the surrounding areas during office hours, from here he made home visits in the villages, and from here he also oversaw the implementation of sanitary regulations set by the government, which had to be strictly adhered to in all villages, especially during epidemic threats. Such centers were Alt-Posttal or Wittenberg, Arzis, Klöstitz, Leipzig, Sarata, Tarutino, and the foreign base villages of Bairamtscha, Kulewtscha, Tatarbunary, and Tusla.

For his own place of residence, Sarata, only three days were scheduled each month in the first fifteen years. This constant absence had a very detrimental effect on his family after Lütze's marriage. It was particularly difficult during late autumn and winter time when the roads were almost impassable. Often, he would remain missing for weeks from his family, as postal conditions were also very irregular. Some of his own children fell victim to suddenly emerging childhood epidemics during his absence.

The most dangerous infectious diseases of that time were typhus, cholera, and plague, as well as smallpox, tuberculosis, catarrh (*Rotzkrankheit*), rabies (*Tollwut*), tetanus (*Starrkrampf*), anthrax (*Milzbrand*) (commonly referred to as "black blisters", called *Sibirka* or *Sibirskaja Jaswa* in Russian), the eye disease trachoma, which originated in Egypt and was widespread in Bessarabia, and childhood diseases, among which the most dangerous were diphtheria, scarlet fever (*Scharlach*), and rickets (*Gichter*) (child cramps). It is not the purpose of this document to discuss the treatment of individual diseases. However, it should be mentioned that it was a difficult time for both doctors and patients. The great researchers in the field of bacteriology had not yet been born. Vaccinations, which are taken for granted today, were not yet known. When an epidemic broke out, death always reaped a rich harvest, especially with the appearance of childhood diseases.

In contrast, surgery, mainly in the treatment of wounds, fractures, and others, was the area where the doctor could work successfully. As already mentioned, Lütze was a surgeon, but he also had to perform the duties of a practical physician in his wide field of work.

Additionally, he had to prepare all the medicines himself and so was his own pharmacist. The remedies of that time came from the plant kingdom (herbs, roots, fruits), the animal kingdom (glandular parts, whole insects–{Spanish fly-*Kanthariden*} plasters), and the mineral kingdom (salts, sulfur, and so on). They had to be properly assembled and prepared. The chemical preparations of today did not exist back then.

Since the preparation of medicines for the sick in such a large area would have taken too much time, Lütze sought a suitable worker willing to learn the preparation of medicines. He found that person in Christina Reinöhl, a niece of Gottlieb Veygel, whom he had met here in the House. Through her inborn intelligence and interest in this work, she soon became an absolutely necessary help.

Around the year 1830, a plot of land (a plot of land = 60 *Deßjatin* = 65.55 hectares / 162 acres) with a house and yard was sold in Sarata. The owner, a craftsman named Rüb, had died. Since the widow moved away with her children, she sold the property. It was the last yard on the cross street of the young colony that later became known as Werner Street, running from south to north.

Lütze, who had since acquired Russian citizenship, was now considered a settler and bought the estate for 500 bank rubles [about $100 in 1850]. Shortly after, he married his pharmacy assistant and moved into his own home.

Mrs. Christina tirelessly stood by her husband. She helped as a receptionist, performed the duties of a nurse (*Krankenschwester*) and caregiver on site, especially when her husband was working away from home. Under his guidance, she trained to become a perfect pharmacist. The work now ran smoothly along the assembly line. Through messengers from the villages where the doctor was currently working, his prescriptions were sent to the pharmacy in Sarata, and the medicines safely reached their destination.

In addition to her work at the pharmacy, Mrs. Christina was an exemplary housewife. She also had the courage to live in the last house of the village with her children, which she had gifted her husband over the course of seven years. Since the times were very uncertain back then, with robberies being common and hungry wolves often daring to venture into the village in search of prey during the winter, this was a highly commendable achievement for a woman. In this house, she also experienced the aforementioned encounter of her husband with the robber chief Toppeltock.

In the area of practice of the doctor, especially the surgeon, there are often cases where decisive action must be taken and male strength is needed as assistance. One only needs to refer to the setting of dislocated limbs and the application of traction bandages in leg fractures. For both, Lütze had found assistants in the various villages. Among them, one distinguished himself with remarkable talent in this field. His name was Matthäus Oberlander from Sarata. Since he lived in the neighborhood, he was always quickly at hand in case of emergency. It was due to Oberlander's inborn skill and his interest in this work that he received thorough training in this

field under the guidance of Lütze. Over time, he was able to independently represent the absent doctor. After the death of Lütze (1883), however, Oberlander continued this work. He taught his children, who in turn passed it on to their descendants. Until the Resettlement in 1940, the members of the Oberlander family were known among Germans and foreigners as lay specialists in setting bone fractures and were frequently sought after.

The ten years required in the contract with the Russian government passed quickly. The doctor tirelessly built up and organized the work in his field. His strict sense of duty did not allow him, as a surgeon, to rest, especially when epidemics occurred. Plague and cholera were the worst among them. Of course, when he arrived in the country in 1827, the strongest waves of these diseases had already receded. However, they flared up temporarily again in various villages.

At such times, many barrels of sulphur (*Schwefel*), carbolic acid (*Karbolsäure*) and lime (*Kalk*) were stored on the doctor's yard in Sarata. They were delivered by the government (*Kasná*) and were used for disinfection. According to the ordinance, houses, stables, especially toilets, had to be whitewashed under medical control, and the floors, including the yards, had to be sprinkled with carbolic acid and liquid lime. The clothes and beds of the deceased were covered with sulphur and burned, and the house of death was fumigated with sulphur. Before entering a place affected by this disease, the doctor had to put on one of the rubber coats supplied in larger quantities by the state. If he left the place, the coat was to be hidden outside the village in a safe area inaccessible to the population—a preventive measure from past times to prevent the spread of the plague to other places.

Here is a small experience of the author from her childhood (1907/08) that provides insight into the mentioned circumstances and the attitude of people at the time. In the home of Benjamin Lütze, Bessarabian homeland legends were told in a close family circle. They mostly originated from the Turkish period. The grandmother, born in 1844 in Klöstitz and raised there, said: "During my youth, there was also a mysterious place in Klöstitz. A niche was hewn into the stone quarries. A giant stone blocked the opening. It was rumored that a Turkish treasure was hidden here in a chest of gold. Lions with flaming jaws guard it. Two of our 'older people' are said to have had a terrible experience here. Consequently, a warning was issued at a community meeting about this place. Even as a young girl, I was involved in collecting stones a few times. I shuddered when I saw the niche from far off, and I hurried to get away from here quickly."

"Hold on," shouted Grandfather, "I believe I know an explanation for this. My father often spoke of the cholera times. I know that the rubber coat he wore in Klöstitz during the epidemic was stored in a niche of the quarry. The community leaders were given strict instructions to ensure that no one came near it. The cunning folks must have invented this story to keep the curious away from this place."

The often occurring typhus also harvested a relentless toll on the population. Especially during seasons with nearly impassable roads, controlling it was almost impossible, although the doctor traveled continuously from place to place to visit the sick under the most difficult conditions.

In his reports to his superior, General Insow, Lütze repeatedly pointed out that the treatment of various diseases did not fall within the concern of a surgeon. On the advice and mediation of the General, he succeeded in studying for several years at the University of Kiev in order to acquire

the remaining knowledge of a practical physician. After passing the state examination and successfully obtaining his doctoral degree in medicine, he returned to Bessarabia. His superior, General Insow, received him very graciously in Kischinew, announced his appointment as a Russian civil servant, and personally presented him with his portrait.

It was a joyful return home to the family in Sarata. The secured position for life, especially the feeling of rightly being in his appointed position, provided new motivation for work. Over a quarter of a century had passed since the settlement of the first German villages, and visible successes had been achieved in economic terms. A number of new German villages had been established. They brought the doctor more work. Changes had also occurred in Sarata that clearly marked progress. His house was no longer the last in the village. Next to it now stood the building of the Werner School. Two teacher families and a number of students lived there. Changes were also approaching for the doctor and his family.

In January of 1847, the leader of the community, Gottlieb Veygel, died. While he was still alive, he had arranged for the succession of his residence located in the center of Sarata. Since the entire estate was planted with fruit trees, and his brother, who lived nearby, owned a well-equipped farm as a wealthy farmer but showed no interest in this one, he identified Mrs. Lütze, the daughter of his eldest sister, as having the first right of purchase. Dr. Lütze purchased the property and moved there with his family. Widow Veygel, who retained the right to live in the house until her death, was very satisfied with this arrangement, as there had always been a close relationship between her and Mrs. Lütze.

After moving into the Veygel house, the doctor was able to appropriately set up his practice. In three large rooms facing the street, he arranged a waiting room, consultation room, and pharmacy. However, soon a new building with basement was constructed in the middle of the courtyard, between the garden plots, for the pharmacy. A wide stone-paved path led from the courtyard gate to this building. In the large corner room that was now freed up, an infirmary (*Krankenstube*) could be established. This fulfilled a long-held wish of the doctor. There were cases in his practice where patients were lying at home in impossible conditions. He brought them into his infirmary, where they were cared for and looked after even during his absence. He had trained his now grown daughter to be a nurse. When he was on the road, his wife also performed this work. In the winter, it often happened that patients of both sexes found shelter in the House. Then the consultation room was also transformed into an infirmary, and the broad hallway was used as a waiting room. This attempt was associated with the idea of leading a settled life in old age and working in his own hospital. His patron, General Insow, was no longer alive. However, the state, or rather the district administration, to whom he had requested the establishment of a hospital, gave an indefinite answer and remained reserved.

From the Private Life of the Doctor

In the thirty-six years of his life in Bessarabia, Dr. Lütze traveled to Württemberg five times. Above all, his visits were for his aging mother. However, he also met with colleagues there, became acquainted with the advancements in medicine at that time, and always returned to his steppe homeland with richer knowledge and many new impressions. Besides medical instruments, the furniture and various household items remained a lasting memory of those travels for his later descendants. They had to some extent survived until the Resettlement.

The estate that Rüb had once purchased also included the vineyard adjacent to the large farmyard, as well as some farmable land. Over time, Dr. Lütze acquired an additional sixty *Deßjatinen* [162 acres / 65.4 hectares] of land and several vineyards. While the arable land was leased to half-farmers (*Halbbauern*), the vineyards were tended by hired labor under the supervision of Mrs. Lütze. However, as a true Württemberger, he personally enjoyed this activity. Unfortunately, he had very few free hours in which he could find balance for body and mind through physical work, aside from his professional activities.

The loyal wagon driver (*Kutscher*) and horse caretaker Scheck took over the family farm after the death of his father. Moldovan Danilo from Frumuschika took his place. He was also loyal to his employer and remained in this position until the death of the doctor. Later, he worked the land for the doctor's widow until the youngest son Benjamin grew up and could manage his property as an independent farmer.

Dr. Lütze was a man of medium height, strongly built, stout. He loved his profession and was very conscientious in it. His life, as well as his work, was based upon deep religious conviction. Naturally good-natured, friendly, and inclined to joke, the patients felt great trust in him. He led a happy family life, which was unfortunately disturbed by his frequent absences. The few free hours he could spend with his family during his workdays in Sarata were dear to him. It was a joyful gathering, often accompanied by music and singing. He felt a deep sense of happiness and deep gratitude towards his wife, who always stood by him bravely and supported him in his career. Unfortunately, the couple could only raise three children. The oldest of them, their daughter Maria, was trained by her father to become a nurse after her confirmation. She often accompanied him on his long journeys.

At the end of the 1850s, Tatarbundary received a young Russian doctor. He also served the surrounding foreign villages. This brought Dr. Lütze a little relief. Around the same time, the district administration in Mansyr opened an eye clinic. From then on, eye patients were referred there. Medical stations were also planned for Tarutino and Bairamtscha. It seemed easier times were coming for the aging doctor. However, he did not live to see them. During a typhus epidemic, he succumbed to the disease on 25 December, 1863. Details about the course of this illness and his death are described in the records of his daughter. Despite the turbulent times of the Resettlement and Flight from Wartheland, these documents have been preserved.

The news of the death of Dr. Lütze spread quickly. People from many villages flocked to the funeral. In addition to representatives of German communities, a large number of foreigners also appeared to give the doctor his final farewell.

The survivors of Dr. Lütze were:

His widow Christina Catharina, née Reinöhl, the only daughter Maria, born 12 March, 1833, married since 1851 to teacher Karl Baisch, and the two sons Georg *Friedrich*, born 4 April, 1835, student of theology at the University of Dorpat (later returned to Germany) and Benjamin, born 7 February, 1846, Central School student. He stayed in Bessarabia, was a farmer; his descendants settled back in Germany in 1940.

The death of the first and at that time the only doctor in the German colonies of Bessarabia resulted in the healthcare being entirely in the hands of laypeople for several years. Although a Field Surgeon School had been established by the Russian state in Odessa in the 1850s, its graduates were assigned to reside in larger villages or market towns and were required to provide healthcare to all the villages in their responsible district office. However, it took at least ten to fifteen years after the death of Dr. Lütze for this regulation to be implemented in Bessarabia. After his death, Sarata itself was served in urgent cases by the Russian doctor from Tatarbunary. In 1869, the Baltic German Dr. Schummer settled in the area. A few years later, the hospital was built.

The report laid out here about the life and work of my great-grandfather, Dr. Friedrich Lütze, is not based on any written evidence. It has been recounted from memory as my grandfather Benjamin Lütze, born on 7 February, 1846, often told it to me during my childhood and early youth. It was the wish of my father, who rests in Bessarabian soil, that I write down this biography of his ancestor to preserve it for future generations. The circumstances of my life meant that I postponed researching the old records of the Sarata community as well as the archives of the district in Akkerman and in Kischinew or Odessa to a later time. Due to the unexpected Resettlement of our ethnic group to the old homeland in 1940, this intent became impracticable.

Among the old documents displayed at the Centenary celebration of the community of Sarata (September 1922) in the newly established local museum, there was an identification card of my great-grandfather, in which he was titled as “the doctor for humans and animals”. Furthermore, he was a pharmacist, as I learned from my grandfather. To clarify the subjects of his studies in the 1820s, I contacted various relevant authorities for information.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the administration of Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, which informed me in a letter dated 10 July, 1954, that pharmacology at that time was a field of study associated with the medical faculty.

Furthermore, I owe my heartfelt thanks to Professor, Doctor of Medicine, E. Stübler in Reutlingen, who communicated to me in a letter dated 10 March, 1955, on behalf of the University of Tübingen: “There was no training facility for human and veterinary medicine. However, it is likely that a qualified physician was often consulted in cases of animal diseases.”

I am also grateful to Pharmacist Kurt Friedrich, formerly of Waiblingen, now of Bittenfeld, who shared and explained to me the remedies and their preparation in the nineteenth century.

Special thanks also go to the Württemberg State Archives in Ludwigsburg. During my research on my ancestors, who were surgeons for several generations, I was also presented with Meyer’s Great Conservation Encyclopedia (sixth edition, volume 4). Here, among other things, I read about surgery: Previously (in Germany until 1848), universities educated internal physicians (*medici puri*) and educated surgeons (wound doctors). Today, however, it is equally required of every doctor to pass the comprehensive examination covering all branches of medicine, known as “practical doctor”.

[Translation Ends]