

The Schools

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by J. Becker, published 1950.*

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Already in the first years, our ancestors thought of the establishment of a provisional praying house, in which, during a few winter months, laymen—usually farmers—instructed the school-age youth in religion, reading, writing and arithmetic.

However, after living there for 40 or 50 years, each village dreamed of having a school. It is unclear whether its emergence was due to an internal desire of the village, by the order of the administrative authorities or to the influence of the clergy. It is to be accepted, however, that the clergy contributed much, as they were the only intellectuals.

The places of education were church schools. The school was under the supervision of the responsible pastor. The teachers were employed and paid by the community. On the management of questions about internal and external furnishing of the school, employment and dismissal of teachers, the opinions of the clergymen were authoritative. Because relevant instructions concerning the school were still not at this time given by the Committee for Foreign Colonists, each teacher was more or less left with a free hand. He had extensive liberty in the organization and practice of the lessons. The results in the school depended thus on the teacher's comprehension of the task of the educational understanding. It is also clear that during this time no suggestions came from the community on how to improve the public education system, because they still had to focus on their economic livelihood. This could only be undertaken by the clerics.

At that time, the course of education and the educational standards for teachers were entirely different. They were either efficient farmers, who were able to read and write, or they were people from the old homeland chosen particularly for this purpose. Often it was a farmer, who had acquired a comprehensive knowledge through his tenacity and self-instruction, who was appointed as 'school teacher.' This is reminiscent of Peter Kaefer in 'Suffering and Joys of a Teacher' ("Leiden und Freuden eines Schulmeisters"). Generally the school had one class. Only in the larger villages was the headmaster given an assistant or 'Provisor,' who was allowed to mostly teach the small children and was dependent on the former.

At that time the schools were quite scanty buildings. Most still had loamy soils as floor. Only a few villages had wooden floors, but they were unpainted. The equipment in the classrooms was very poor. The school benches had eight to ten seats, and for all ages being of the same measurements, as they also served as prayer houses. Coat stands were unknown. Reading was learned with the aid of spelling and reading tables. In addition, one learned writing, counting, singing and religion. The spelling method was used when giving reading instructions. The Bell-Lankaster system was frequently used. From the primer, the pupils went straight into the Testament. The stick was used as a universal means to better success. Working groups of the teachers only took place under the presidency of a pastor. Like the desert has oases, there also existed progressively minded teachers, who increased their knowledge and skills through intensive self-instruction and who, because of their conscientiousness, were held in fond memory by their villages.

The conditions soon improved. The 'central school' in Sarata supplied the villages with teachers, who

already had a better education. New schools were built. Illustrative material was purchased. The number of teachers increased from year to year. In 1872 our schools were placed under the command of the Ministry of National Enlightenment. The main and basic drawbacks in our schools were school times, which were too short, and over-crowded classes. These grievances were not removed by this dependence. In 1881 the introduction of the Russian language was also required in our schools. Knowledge of the national language required not only the public interest, but also the interest of the German man, who needed it ever more in his daily life. For this reason, on the occasion of the "Kuesterpruefung," knowledge of the Russian language was also examined. In 1890, the Ministry even introduced the Russian language as the language of instruction. Ten hours per week were assigned to instruction in the native language and religion. The government took the view that the knowledge of the Russian language was best taught to German children by Russian nationals. For this reason vacant positions at multi-class schools were only assigned to Russians. Germans could occupy these places only if they had passed the Russian school teacher exam. The teacher was released from military service. For this reason many seized this occupation, even if they did not feel an inner calling. The higher school administrative boards were disappointed with results in Russian. Therefore they started once again to occupy the vacant places with Germans who were tested. It was only natural that the pupils' knowledge in German and religion rapidly decreased. Here it must be said that during this time, with co-operation of the district president, the villages built many new, roomier and more appropriate school buildings. School curricula and instruction plans facilitated the lessons for the teacher.

In 1906, a petition from the Synod in Odessa, in association with the representatives of the villages, succeeded. The government permitted the use of the German language as the language of instruction in the two first years; reading in Russian began once the children had a knowledge of German behind them. This educationally correct measure bore fruit. Most schools at that time had about a hundred children per teacher. Unexpectedly a government decree arrived for a maximum of 50 pupils per teacher. For the conditions at that time this was a devastating measure, as we had way too few teachers to be able to do this regulation justice. By 1914, with the outbreak of the war, a much more pleasant picture developed. In the larger villages, we find imposing school buildings honouring our villages. Now the teachers had illustrative materials and other educational and learning aids at their disposal. While in former times, our school children possessed only a bible, catechism and hymnbook, now each child had his own textbook furnished for each lesson. The teachers had their working groups (conferences). At summer courses, the teachers grew closer and extended their knowledge in pedagogy, psychology and methodology. Each school now had a library with classical works, technical literature and writings. The number of the teachers grows constantly with those, who already enjoyed a more solid technical training and were much better prepared.

The "Odessa Newspaper" contributed very much to the fact that public education had a huge upswing in the later decades. It published conference reports, essays regarding academic topics and references to existing deficiencies in the external and internal public education system. At this time, a school newspaper, "The New School Newspaper" ("Das neue Schulblatt"), was also published. Unfortunately, after the appearance of the sixth monthly magazine, the Russian government already forbade it.

The First World War

Our school experienced probably the hardest and worst time during the time of the First World War. All our schools were closed. The able-bodied men were called up, among them the teachers. Even private lessons were forbidden. I remember well how concerned our mothers were for us. In order to learn reading and writing at all, private teachers were nevertheless employed, who themselves had finished a few upper school classes. They had to teach in secret. When a tsarist policeman came into the village, we then had to leave the place in a hurry, climb over walls and fences in order to get home quickly and without being seen. At the end of the First World War, Bessarabia was proclaimed an

independent country, and shortly after, the affiliation to Romania took place. For us Swabians, a new era now began as a minority. A totally new life began for our people. Cut off from our brothers, who remained in Russia, we had to reorient ourselves on the basis of completely new criteria. Soon the consolidation of the Romanian Germans took place. Through assiduity, tenacious perseverance, loyalty, religious loyalty, etc., here we also soon acquired respect again. It was also possible only because of this that we could bring to bear our rights with the new national government.

Our elementary schools were put under state control in the new country; the teachers were Romanian officials and the school building state property. This was one of the deepest cuts into our lives and into our national ethos. With the stroke of a pen, they took our national ethos from us. Many teachers did not want to become state teachers; they did not want to undergo the most diverse examinations, and so they remained outside the system. They became farmers, shopkeepers, etc., or remained as verger in the service of the church, the villages. The whole public education system still had a rather loose character. In the early years few things changed in our schools. The German language was used in lessons. The salaries of the teachers no longer had to be paid by the villages, because the state took over their payment. To that extent, the nationalisation of the school was a huge relief for our villages. The state also immediately opened more places, and thus the school performances were increased from day to day. Thereby student numbers were rapidly reduced per class.

In the year 1924, the school law written by the liberal government (Cultural Minister Angheliescu), and the analytical programme (school curriculum and materials distribution plan) became effective. Thus the school received a firm framework for its activity. The German teachers in Bessarabia were ordered to attend Romanian language training courses. After passing a language examination, they were transferred to the government service as civil servants and remained in their positions. By their diligence and persistence our educators managed to match the requirements. Thus they protected their rights and saved the use of the German language in schools. However, it didn't last very long, and the German language was only allowed to be used as a special subject. All remaining lessons had to be taught in the Romanian language.

Great importance was attached to the Romanian language, Romanian history and geography. This dual-language instruction system had the desired success demanded from both sides. Again the German teachers formed the bulwark against the large number of Romanian instructors in our schools. Due to the political situation of the country, as well as foreign policy influences, the German language was often completely prohibited. With petitions and visits to the Ministry for National Education, our national representatives succeeded again and again to cancel these orders. Daniel Haase, our chief minister and representative at that time, a son of our peoples, who was esteemed and well respected by the Romanians far beyond the borders of Bessarabia, and even of Romania, rendered huge services in this respect.

Since one soon realized here also that one could reach the expected goals, then these waves also abated. One even aimed at a relationship as colleagues in the schools. The relationship between German and Romanian colleagues and authorities frequently became very friendly. The school supervisors and principals often closed both eyes, in order to avoid seeing that German was also taught.

In 1936 and 1938, the school program was again re-developed and the working school was based on sociological principles, which converted the character of a learning school into an educational school. Ever more it became school for life. It thus obtained practical value and met the demands of modern education. The centre for our teachers was our German teacher seminar in Sarata, the Werner School, once a donation of Christian Friedrich Werner from Giengen at the Brenz. Each year it discharged about 20 teachers to our Bessarabian people. It protected their rights through all the troubles of the time. That was solely due to the wise and energetic guidance of our old master, Director Albert Mauch

(today in Nuertingen). We also owe it to him that we had German teachers in Bessarabia. Solely due to him we had a German reading book in our schools. How he maintained and preserved the German folk song! He also presented us with our homeland song. We, his pupils, will always know to thank him. Also we can justly say that he is the father of the Bessarabian teachers.

Our teachers had to pass the first exam, during the tsarist time, at Russian schools. During the time when we lived under Romania, we had to pass a similar exam after completion of the sixth, later the seventh and, in the last years, the eighth class at the Werner School. This was conducted before a commission, consisting of representatives of the state and corresponding tutors of our seminar.

The second exam was passed with Romanian colleagues at a Romanian educational establishment for teachers. All subjects were examined—everything in the Romanian language. It was thus substantially more difficult than the first exam. Only when the second exam was successfully passed, could you have employment for life.

A third and optional higher exam (High school teacher exam) was introduced. Also here we were examined only in the Romanian language. However, we succeeded to overcome these difficulties and our idealism gave the strongest impulse to serve our nationality and to retain the German elementary school.

Our elementary school covered seven school years, that was from 7 up to 14 years of age. These seven classes were divided into the basic level (class 1-4) and the upper level (class 5-7). The big elementary school, which existed in the larger villages, could provide our graduates with an education of three high school grades. After completion of the 4th class, the pupils could sit for their entrance exams into the teacher seminars or high school. Our high schools for boys and girls also maintained their German character and retained their public rights. The teachers were in cultural spheres (working groups), which held monthly conferences. These were held on a Sunday; they were all-day conferences. Forty to 50 teachers from approximately 5-6 neighbouring villages belonged to a culture sphere.

The conference progressed like this:

- Practical lesson
- Joint church-going
- Criticism of the practical lesson
- Lecture from literature or Pedagogy
- Criticism of the lecture
- Joint lunch
- School celebration

The whole village was invited to attend a school festivity. The program consisted of songs, poems, theatre plays and a lecture on practical educational work. Seventy to 80 per cent of these meetings were naturally conducted in the German language and thus formed the link between school and the parents' house.

In evening training courses, the young people, aged 16 to 18 years, were instructed in the Romanian language and sociology, so that they could make themselves understood during their the military service and in dealings with the authorities.

After our teachers showed themselves worthy and esteemed and respected by the authorities in Romania, they came to Germany in 1940. After a longer probation, our teachers were taken over as life-long civil servants.

After the collapse of Hitler's Germany, some came to their former homeland, Wuerttemberg. We are pleased for this luck! Due to the benevolence of the Ministry for Education, most are again employed in the school service on a private basis. When will the day come that the resettled Swabian teachers are again taken over as civil servants? They have earned it. We hope that the day will come soon when, with our whole heart, we can say: We are in the homeland of our fathers, at home, in dear Swabian country. The circle is complete. Here we are no longer a minority. We share joy and sorrow with our brothers. We resettled Swabian teachers form an inseparable family with our native colleagues. Their concerns are ours, and ours theirs.

On both sides this resoluteness is present. Because of this, with an intrinsic conviction, we set about the implementation of this common wish.