

The German Colony Blumenfeld (Odessa District)
on the 50th Anniversary of its Existence
by P. Konrad Keller

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Deutscher Volkskalender [German Folk Calendar]
Printing and publishing house of the Klemensverein Odessa
N5 (or 15, illegible) 1912

In 1861, a new cultural era began for the German colonists in southern Russia, because serfdom in Russia was abolished. Up to that time there was seldom land to sell, because the estates of the Russian nobles were worked for free by the serfs, always bringing in so much that the nobleman could live in luxury in Paris or elsewhere abroad. But when this institution, which dishonored humanity, was abolished by the proclamation of 19 February 1861, the Russian nobles were in a state of crisis, because now the work on the estates had to be paid for, and when a bad harvest came, bankruptcy was just outside the door [around the corner]. If the debt burden became too great, the estate was put up for sale. In this way, the German colonists got the opportunity to acquire their own land. Thus, many German colonies arose in southern Russia on purchased land, of which Blumenfeld is one of the oldest and most beautiful.

The Founding of the Blumenfeld Colony in 1862

After most of the German colonies in the South of Russia existed for more than 50 years and the number of souls [the population] increased steadily, but the [amount of] land remained the same, and therefore fathers who had many sons divided [the land] more and more, so that in some families there were 1/8 farms; it was thought that married sons could either settle on leased land or buy land. In 1862, the Odessa merchant Theodor Powlow Rodokanaki reported to the Welfare Committee¹ that he wished to sell an estate not far from Odessa to German colonists. The then Colony Inspector Schwamberg, who knew the conditions in the colonies well, offered to make the matter known in the colonies under his authority. At the announcement of Mr. Schwamberg, enthusiasts from the Liebental and Kutschurgan areas soon reported to purchase the estate of the merchant Rodokanaki. On July 18, 1862, the following German colonists concluded the act of purchase with the aforementioned merchant Rodokanaki. From Fransfeld: Jakob Leibham, Jakob Schaub, Michael Köhler, Nikolaus Häußler, Joseph Häußler, Georg Matery, Valenten Matery, Joseph Büchel, Joseph Matery, Anton Rüffel (or Rüssel), Georg Fix, Jakob Zerr, Jakob Häußler, Michael Mardian, Adam Kaiser, Johann Wagner 1, Valenten Nold, Nikolaus Nold, Johann Wagner II, Franz Kaiser, Johannes Mastio, Philipp Mastio, Joseph Rißling, Konrad Köhler, Leonhard Braun (?), Konrad Mok, Michael Zerr II, Michael Zerr I, Daniel Wagner, Jakob Kaiser, Johann Kiefel, Johann Lutz, Michael Mastery. From Elsass: Martin Trautmann, Anton Pflieger, Johann Keller and Johann-Georg (?) Ziegler. From Kandel: Johann Vetter, Franz Wolf, Martin Jochim and Ludwig Halter. From Selz: Johann Rombs and Johann Jakob. From Strassburg: Josef Mildenberger, Adam Braut (?), Benedikt Brauer, Kasper Burgardt, Georg Reiß, Michael Schwan, Anton Burgardt, Johan Holzer and Jakob Kraft. The main content of the act of sale was: the merchant Theodore Pavlov Rodokanaki sells to the said colonists his landed estate consisting of 3,731 dessiatins at 52 rubles 50 kop, the dessiatins, the colonists undertake to pay off every year for the dessiatins 3 rub. 50 kop, so that the land will be paid off in 15 years.

¹ This was the Russian government body with authority over the German colonists.

The estate was purchased in 1862, but the actual settlement did not happen until 1863. Only a few families of the above-mentioned Kutschurganers were liable for a part of the land in lease (at 30 kop. per dessiatin) and these formed the original inhabitants of Blumenfeld. In the spring of 1863 on Whitsunday [Pentecost], the first settlers from outside came to the site of the new settlement. They were: Philipp Mastio, Johannes Wagner, Ludwig Halter, Georg Halter, Daniel Wagner, Anton Pflüger and Joseph Mildenerger. As soon as they arrived, they built reed huts and started to make themselves at home and to cultivate their fields. However, at that time there was still frost and it was not possible to heat the reed huts, so the colonists moved to the Russian families, who lived in 5 mud huts in the present upper village, where the pond runs through the street.

Place and Location of Blumenfeld

The colony Blumenfeld is located in a side valley of the steppe river Tiligul (this is a Turkish word and means raging river), called Bes...imjonny (illegible) Brut, 120 versts from the governorate city of Kherson, 65 versts from the district town of Odessa, 5 versts from the Volost Anatolyevka and 15 versts from the post station Sositzkaja. The place was formerly called Gribowski Chutor. The Tiligul, one of the largest steppe rivers in southern Russia, begins in Podolia, on the wooded foothills of the Carpathians, and flows after a course of about 200 versts into the liman of the same name, which is separated from the Black Sea by a sandbar of 3 versts, but is connected with the sea during high tide. The direction of the course of the river is from its origin, with various turns, to the southeast to the town of Berezovka, namely to the mouth of the mentioned liman. The Tiligul River basin is heavily populated because the most important factors of life are abundant: fertile land, good drinking water in abundance and usable stones for building. Likewise, the river is very rich in fish in the lower reaches. Even in ancient times, the Tiligul, then called Axiakes, was already known. Herodotus reports that the Scythian people of the Kallipids (?) had their residences there, and another historian writes that on the left side of the liman at the sea was the Greek trading town Ordessos. The tributary valley, in which the colony of Blumenfeld is located, is formed from several ponds about 40 versts north of the colony, runs in a southwesterly direction and flows into the Tiligul Liman a few versts below the Russian village of Anatolyevka. The village Blumenfeld is situated in two rows of houses on the right side of the valley in the north-south direction and stretches 1 1/2 versts in length. The street is planted with pretty trees on both sides, which gives the village a pretty appearance. Also, the cleanliness of the streets and yards is noticeable everywhere. To the east of the village, behind the threshing places, are pretty vegetable gardens abutting a water dam, and to the west, on the hillside, are vineyards.

The Misery of the Early Days and the Gradual Development Towards Prosperity

As all beginnings are difficult, so it was with Blumenfeld. Most of the settlers came to the new homeland poor, and they were very badly off at first. Others had rich fathers or relatives in the old homeland who supported them, and these made some progress, albeit very slowly.

The best off were the Franzfelders, most of whom were related to each other and were also wealthier and perhaps more industrious than the others.

In 1863, a table shows us the following prosperity of the young colony: houses and mud huts 35, inhabited by 55 families and composed of 147 male souls. The sowing was: winter wheat 222 dessiatins, summer wheat 960 dessiatins, oats 92 dessiatins, millet 26 dessiatins, barley 156 dessiatins, rye 54 dessiatins, potatoes 44 dessiatins, Welschkorn [grain? buckwheat?] 48 dessiatins, flax 10 dessiatins. The livestock counted horses 229, oxen 2, cows 208, pigs 116, community stallions 1, community farms 2. Farm implements were: Plows 53, harrows 95, wagons 68. We see from this table that the sowing was quite good, but the following year of 1864 was a complete failure and the new settlers hardly harvested bread and seeds. But another misfortune added to this bad year. A terrible cattle epidemic arose, which destroyed all the livestock of some colonists. This cattle plague and also the bad harvest were repeated in 1865 and brought the poor people into the greatest misery. In this hard time it was still a good fortune that the merchant Rodokanaki was a good merciful man and waited for the buy-out amount until better times. Most of the colonists had to borrow money in those years and

many got into debts that they had to pay for 7 years. The year 1866 was quite fruitful, and for some the prosperity improved, but the following 4 years were again barren and the misery began anew. It got to the point where some abandoned their land and secretly went away. It was a hard, difficult and unforgettable testing time for the young colony. But the Heavenly Father finally heard the pleas of His dear children and gave them several abundant harvests. The misery was over, the debts were paid and the prosperity of the colony increased rapidly. The most fruitful years since the settlement were 1870, 1878, 1881, 1883, 1888, 1893, 1895, 1897 and 1898.

Founding of the Blumenfelder Parish

The Blumenfelders are generally religious people and good Catholics, which is sufficiently proved by their zeal for religion and their dying [?] in the progress of church life. In the beginning, Blumenfeld belonged to the Landau Parish. Church services were held in the early days at [the homes of] Michael Matery and at Michael Zerr. In 1865 the people of Blumenfeld built a prayer house, which presently served as a schoolhouse. When a parish was founded in Sulz, Blumenfeld became a branch of this new parish. But this was of little help to the people of Blumenfeld, because the parish of Sulz was 35 versts away from Blumenfeld and the clergyman came only for Easter confession, the church patron saint festival, the first communion of the children and for the blessings of the sick and for deaths. A regular pastoral care was not possible under the given circumstances. Feeling this lack of spiritual care, the colonies of Blumenfeld, Sebastianfeld, Krasna and the surrounding chutors decided on 13 January 1890 to submit a request to His Excellency the Most Reverend Bishop Antonius Zerr to confirm Blumenfeld as a branch of the Selz Parish. The parishes of Blumenfeld, Sebastianfeld and Krasna granted the clergyman (branch priest) 600 Rbl. salary together with housing, heating and necessary transportation to Odessa and Nikolaev. Those from the Chutor were to pay 1 rbl. from each family for the year. The clergyman should be obliged to hold services on Sundays in Blumenfeld, Sebastianfeld and Krasna. The clergyman traveled to the chutors goes only on weekdays, when he has to do the Easter confession. or other matters. This request was approved by the authorities, and Blumenfeld was confirmed as a branch by November 1890, and Fr. Franz Löwenbrück was sent there as the first branch priest. In 1904 Blumenfeld was elevated to become an independent parish. Up to the present the following clergymen have been active in the pastoral care in Blumenfeld: Fr. Franz Löwenbrück, branch priest from 6 November 1890 to 3 May 1892. Fr. Jakob Dobrowolski, parish priest of Landau from 3 May 1892 – 28 December 1892, Fr. Philipp Becker, branch priest from 28 December 1892 - 20 October 1893. Fr. Johann Hofmann, branch priest from 20 October 1893 - 17 March 1897, Fr. Florian Schulz, branch priest from 17 March 1897 - 14 July 1899. Fr. Raphael Schäfer, branch priest from 14 . July 1899 – 10 November 1899. Fr. Joseph Beilmann, branch priest from 10 November 1899 - February 6, 1902. Fr. Gabriel Gwaramadse, branch priest from 6 February 1902 – 27 June 1904. Fr. Johannes Schneider Junior, administrator from 27 June 1904 – 25 September 1911. Fr. Peter Eisenkrein, administrator from 25 September 1911 until now.

The pastorate is located to the left of the church, was built in 1891 and costs the community 4,000 Rbl. The pastorate is 10 faden [70 feet] long, 5 faden [35 feet] wide and 2 faden [14 feet] high. It has 6 rooms and an attached kitchen. On the west side there is a spacious glass corridor. There is also a well and the necessary stables.

The Parish Church in Blumenfeld

The prayer house built in 1865 served as such until 1900.

As the congregation continued to grow and the space became too small, they decided in 1899 to build a church from their own resources. As soon as the permission for this enterprise was obtained from the authorities, the construction was started and completed in 1900.

The church is built of good quarry stones and cost 30.000 Rbl. The architectural style of the church is pure Romanesque and in technical terms it is very nicely executed. The church stands in the middle of the village with the main altar facing west, is 17 faden [119 feet] long, 7 faden [49 feet] wide and 5 faden and 2 arschin [39.7 feet] high. The tower is attached to the church and is three stories and has the height of 18 faden [126 feet]. On the third floor there are three bells that ring a pretty harmonic chime. The church has two doors, the first under the bell tower, the second at the back of the sacristy. On each side of the nave are three windows three faden [21 feet] high, one faden [7 feet] wide, likewise there is a window in each of the two sacristy

chambers. Behind the high altar there are three small chambers for storing church supplies with four small windows. Upon entering the church, one sees pretty pews on both sides. The walls are painted entirely with yellow paint, which is pleasant to the eye in the abundance of light. Simple but handsomely painted station pictures hang on the walls to the right and left. Between the second and third windows stands the simple confessional and next to it the tumba [probably used to hold the coffin during during a funeral mass]. A few more steps forward and you are in front of the side altar, dedicated to St. Joseph. The altar stands on two steps, is very simply built of wood and has a small tabernacle. Above the altar is the beautiful image of St. Joseph depicted as the patron saint of artisans. From there one enters the semicircular presbytery and finds oneself in front of the high altar. This stands on three steps, is four arschin [9.3 feet] long, two arschin [4.7 feet] wide and four faden [28 feet] high. The woodwork of the altar is simple and adorned with many gilded carvings. Above the tabernacle is the handsome image of St. George, the patron saint of the church. To the right of this image, in a niche, is the statue of St. Aloysius and to the left the statue of St. Agnes. The presbytery is lit from both sides by a window with colored glass. When one leaves the presbytery again, right next to the communion bench you can see a beautiful statue of the Suffering Savior and right next to it the second side altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. The altar stands on two steps, is of simple woodwork and is also provided with a small tabernacle, on which a pretty statue of Our Lady is placed. Next to the altar is a beautifully painted picture of the Mother of God with the child Jesus. Next to this altar is the simple baptismal fountain and right then the pulpit. In the center of the church hang two pretty but small chandeliers. The gallery stands on four pedestals, but is somewhat narrow. On the gallery is the beautiful new organ from Mauracher's workshop, which cost the parish 2,600 rbl. As we can see, the interior of the Blumenfeld church is still poorly furnished. Therefore, it would be appropriate now, at the 50th anniversary, for the rich Blumenfelders to decorate the house of the Lord with beautiful altars and pictures out of gratitude to God and in memory of this jubilee year.

Education

The school was always maintained with special care by the Blumenfelder. A schoolmaster was hired immediately after the settlement. This was the Franzfeld colonist Johann Kinfel, an able and quite educated man. His salary was 120 rbl. and 10 tschetwert [probably about 60 bushels] of wheat. The number of schoolchildren in 1863, 15 boys and 14 girls. The school was held in a private house until 1865. In 1865, as already mentioned, a new prayer house was built in Blumenfeld. In this prayer house, a large room for the school was also built on the north side. When the new church was finished, the prayer house was divided into two nice classrooms and the former school room was used as a chancery. The building is 12 faden [84 feet] long, 6 faden [42 feet] wide and 4 arschin [9.3 feet] high. At present in Blumenfeld there are a Russian teacher making 300 Rbl. salary without lodgings, a German teacher making 225 Rbl. salary and lodgings, a sexton teacher making 475 Rbl. salary and free lodging. Schoolchildren are 90.

Current prosperity of the colony

Blumenfeld counts at present 87 houses and 46 (or 16, hard to read) Semelanken [small houses, often dugouts in the earth]. Of the houses, 16 are covered with reeds, 20 with iron sheet and 51 with roof tiles. The number of souls is 367 males and (illegible) females, all of Catholic denomination. The land portion of the community is 3,731 dessiatins. Individual landlords own 2,392 dessiatins of purchased land in various places. For every 60 dessiatins, there are 10 dessiatins for cattle pasture. New vineyards are 31 desjatines, old vineyards are 900 square fadens on 60 dessiatins. The sowing for 1912 is as follows: on own land, winter wheat 1,374 dessiatins, rye 255 dessiatins, spring wheat 1,397 dessiatins, oats 179 dessiatins, barley 1,397 dessiatins, Welschkorn [grain? buckwheat?] 134 dessiatins, potatoes (?), flax 149 dessiatins, hay 16 3/4 dessiatins. On leased land: winter wheat 133 dessiatins, rye 14 dessiatins, spring wheat 54 dessiatins, oats 5 dessiatins, barley 159 dessiatins, flax 14 dessiatins.

The livestock counts: horses 764, cows 452, young cattle 194, pigs 361, community stallions are two, one of which costs 551 rbl. Bulls are 6. Household and farm equipment are: wagons 236, [blank space] 175, steam threshing machines 3, horse-drawn threshing machines 3, sowing machine 80, jigsaw mill [to clean grain] 80, Britschken [maybe chaff cutters] 24, phaetons (?), steam mills. Craftsmen are: tailor 1, shoemakers 2, blacksmiths 3, wheelwright 1, carpenters 3. Blumenfeld also has a small credit society, 5 general stores and a wine cellar.

The Blumenfelders read, besides various books, 14 "Deutsche Rundschau," 6 American, German newspapers and 6 Russian newspapers.

The author wishes the Blumenfelders all the best for their jubilee, but above all, may they live in love and peace, grow in good resolutions and godly undertakings, and blossom in all the virtues of the Christian life.

Handwritten portion: The original is written in gothic script. The text is very difficult to read, so not all of it is legible. However, I have done my best to "translate" the essay into Latin script.

Your Olga Halter
to my [can't read] Elisabeth Halter

Versts - 1.067 km

The Scythians - members of an ancient Iranian nomadic people, who migrated to the Don and Danube in the 8th century BC.

Dessiatin - about 1 hectare = 100 ares = 10,000 m²

Farre - (obsolete) bull used in breeding

Expositur- delimited, independent pastoral district or branch of a parish

Faden = 1.8 m [Editors' note – other sources say a faden is 7 feet, which would be 2.1 m.]

Tumba – mock up of a coffin standing on a shroud, which is used for the funeral mass in the church

Tabernacle - elaborately designed shrine in the church, where the consecrated hosts are kept

Presbytery - sanctuary

Gallery - inner, gallery-like, open-upper floor

Sexton - church servant (Latin: guardian of the church treasury)