

The Germans in Dobrudscha (Part 11)

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.

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20 July, 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
Stuttgart 1922
Foreign and Home Publishing Company
(*Ausland und Heimat Verlags=Aktiengesellschaft*)**

11.

Village Administration

According to the “Instruction for the Internal Establishment and Administration of the New Russian Colonies,” which was issued in the year 1801 for the foreign settlements in the south, there was to be an election in each village from among the independent farmyards for a mayor (*Schulze*), 2-assistants (*Beisitzer*), and a policeman (*Zehntmann*) for each 10 farmyards.¹ The duties of the mayor were conceivably the most diverse. He not only had to supervise and guide all the affairs of the village, he was also to constantly influence the individual colonists and care for their material and moral well-being. He was to make known to them the legal ordinances, see to it that everyone was living a moral and peaceful life, was industrious, busy doing what was right, and attend church, and in particular oppose haughtiness, wastefulness, and drunkenness. He was to see to it that every land-owner kept his barn, stables and fences in the best of condition and clean, that the streets were always kept clean and that trees were planted within the farmyard. Furthermore, he was to encourage the learning of crafts, examine the properties of the soil, visit the fields and pay attention to their appropriate classification and development. He was to supervise the colonists so that everyone goes to his work at daybreak and that even in the winter time no one gets caught up in idleness.² He was urged to admonish offenders; if nothing came of that, to punish with community labor or to impose monetary fines. So, the mayor was not only the director and administrator of the general affairs of his community, but also possessed a high degree of power and authority over every single one of his village comrades, even in their personal affairs. The penalties were also not limited in the aforementioned; there were also arrests, switch beatings (*Rutenhiebe*), and putting someone into the stock (*Block*). And a strict control was followed. We learn that one person had to cut down 5 square *faden* [about 10 square meters/107 square feet] of trees because he had a bad roof, no trees in and no wall around the farmyard. The reputation of the mayor was especially protected. In the Colony of Franzfeld, 2 colonists each receive 45 beatings by the switch “because they had offended the mayor.” Another one, because he scolded him, was put in the block for an hour. The public administration of stick beating seems to have been used quite often, both on men and women. “Jakob L., along with his wife, has stolen 71 bundles of community reed, for this he gets 40 blows in front of the assembled community, and even his wife received 50 blows.”³ In Kleinliebenthal, in 1842 — 45 strokes of the rod were administered for men and women, boys and girls because of spiteful accusations, indecent conduct, loitering, fighting, wastefulness, drunkenness, stealing, for laying violent hands on the mayor, and mocking parents. In this way, the German villages were provided with strict disciplinary measures for the preservation of order and good manners.

The election of the mayor, the assistants and the secretary was carried out by the village assembly, to which the colonist of every farmyard had to show up. Its course of action also included the assessment of the taxes and benefits to the village, the exclusion of harmful community members and the passing of resolutions concerning the general needs of the village.⁴

¹ An extract of the Instructions given by Keller, Bd. I, S. 61 ff.

² §§ 49 bis 78 der Instruktion.

³ Begebenheiten aus der Vorzeit der Kolonie Franzfeld, Keller, Bd. I, S. 284 ff.

⁴ Stach, S. 26.

The farmers transferred these arrangements of the Russian settlements also into their new Dobrudscha. The Turkish government also gave them their freedom in this respect. The "Colonization Regulations," which each colonist, as it seems, had to submit to by written signature, only mentions in Article 10: "The colonists recognize the authorities of the District (*Casa*) or of the Department (*Sandschaks*) in which their villages and spots are located, and are administered and protected by them just like the other subjects of the Empire." No Turkish official was to be put in place in the colonies themselves. As long as the taxes were regularly received and no crimes took place, the Turkish authorities seemed to have paid little attention to the quiet and industrious German farmers.⁵ The regulations of their municipal affairs was left up to them themselves, and furthermore, they choose their own mayor, the assistants, and the secretary just as they were accustomed to in their Russian villages.

The transition of Dobrudscha into a Romanian possession also changed these conditions. The administration of the localities was uniformly organized for everyone by the Romanian authorities, and so the German colonies were subjected to the general "Regulations for the Internal Administration of Rural Communities." It was introduced in the Cogealac colony in August of 1884, and probably in the same year also in all the others. Each village received a *Primar* (*Bürgermeister*) as a Romanian official who had at his side an assistant and 5 committee members (*Consuläre*). Much of what had up to now been organized by the German mayor and the municipal assembly, according to old tradition, or at their own discretion, was taken over by paragraphs in the Regulations and established with general acceptance. It dealt with provisions of public safety with the obligation of residents for day watchmen and night watchmen; about the beautification of the municipalities, according to what the *Primar* thought proper about the place and the construction of the houses and layout of the farmyards; about the public roads and their use; about the provision of wagons for the Romanian officials; and even more. The Regulations also included no less than 21 articles dealing with ordinances concerning domestic service. Understandably, the new ordinances aroused much bad blood among the German farmers, especially when a Romanian *Primar* installed in the village was someone they could hardly understand. They felt that their rights had been encroached upon and they lacked confidence in the new Romanian officials.

However, with the establishment of the Romanian mayor (*Primar*) as the head of the village, the existence of the German mayors (*Schulzen*) was not completely abolished. The German farmers continue to choose their leader, the two assistants and a secretary, and they still do it today. But the scope and powers of the German mayor pertains only to matters where the German colonists are doing things on their own. He is essentially only the administrator of their municipal property. He manages the cattle lists for the common pasture, hires the shepherd and the village guard, procures the community stallions and bulls and supervises the necessary work at the church and school. He collects the dues from the colonists for their common economic and cultural institutions and conducts their meetings. He also represents the German community and its interests before the *Primar*. But he lacks the official character and he no longer possesses the earlier far-reaching rights over his community members and so is no longer the old strong authority.

⁵ According to Article 5 of the Regulations, concerning the government land turned over for settlement, the colonists were exempted from any territorial tax and personnel tax for the duration of 6 years.

It is immensely significant for the whole mindset of these farmers and their deep rooted need to preserve the old traditional institutions even if the real foundations are no longer present. What the state authority took away from the position of their German mayor in importance and prestige, that they are seeking to reproduce voluntarily, even a certain criminal law. This is illustrated in a very vivid way by the minutes of the election and the establishment of a *Schulz*, which dates already in recent times to 1910, and comes from Caramurat Colony. This document shows most impressively, as any description could do, the distinct sense of these German farmers for order and authority, and it maintains such a vivid glimpse into their lives that it probably deserves to be reproduced in detail. It bears the heading “Authorization” and then begins:

We, the undersigned residents of the German-Catholic community to Cara-Murat, give our unanimous voice to fellow-resident, Josef A. Söhn, by electing Josef A. Söhn to the office of mayor of our community and give him the following rights and privileges:

1. When the community is assembled, the *Schulz* alone, or his assistant, has the right to speak because of his position, until the *Schulz* calls upon the men for their opinion and asks them to speak. If the men are given the right to speak, then everyone has the freedom to express his opinion; however, it is necessary to see to it that everything is done in a calm way and in unity, for those who are subject to shouting or disagreement with the community are to be punished by the *Schulz*, who has the right to levy a punishment from 50 *Bani* to 2 *Frank*.
2. If someone conducts himself poorly at the community assembly and the *Schulz* orders him to leave the assembly, he must leave the assembly without any arguments: if he does not, the *Schulz* has the right to select a man who will lead out the disobedient one; if the selected man does not want to do it, he gets the same punishment as the guilty person.
3. When the community is assembled and the men cannot agree on something, the *Schulz* has the right to select 20 to 40 men to settle the matter. But if there are men who consider this result to be wrong, they should go to *Schulz* and complain about the matter, but not go about the village, yelling about and speaking words of insult against the *Schulz*, for if they do such a thing, then the *Schulz* has the right to punish them.
4. We all commit ourselves to honor and submit to Josef Söhn, whom we unanimously have chosen to be our *Schulz*. We are also committed to obeying the representatives of the said *Schulz*, when the same is instructed to act in his place.
5. If a member of the community considers the sentence given by the *Schulz* to be unfair, the *Schulz* shall give the dissatisfied person a period of 14 days from the day on which the sentence was handed out. During these 14 days, the one being punished can seek his right in all judicial and penal instances; however, if the 14 days are over and the punished man has refrained from the conditional investigations, the *Schulz* has the complete right to punish him immediately.

6. If the *Schulz* requires someone to come to the government office, the one summoned must absolutely appear; if he has to be summoned a second time, his punished will be 50 *Bani*. In the government office, everyone has to behave properly; as soon as someone wants to justify himself with rudeness, the guards will show him the door.
7. When the *Schulz* appears in the community assembly with his assistants, everyone has to uncover his head, be quiet and stop smoking as long as a case is being considered. In case someone disturbs the order, he will be punished.
8. All that has just been said, we residents of the German-Catholic community of Caramarut confirm, signing the current document (*Prokur*) in our own hand, voluntarily and without reservation, granting our *Schulz*, Josef A. Söhn, the aforementioned rights.

It may not always be easy, without official means of power, to keep these voluntary farming communities together, and also to raise the necessary funds through informal outside dues. It testifies to the highly developed common sense when, beside the official community authorities, it was possible to continue everywhere for so long without splinters and divisions. The office of the *Schulz* also imposed work and duties which apparently were not always readily accepted by the ones chosen. This is indicated by the decision of a municipality that a financial penalty was going to be imposed on the one being chosen as *Schulz* if he refuses to accept the office, even though he is unable to read and write or something else, for it is not a valid reason recognized by the community. For those chosen to be assistants, the lack of knowledge of reading and writing is also not an excuse; by refusing to take up the office, they are punished without any further action.

The self-government of the German colonies extends, as I said, today only to the economic property and cultural institutions that they have in particular for themselves. In regards to the community pasture, the communal stallions and bulls, in one or the other village there is still a separate community house, a brickyard, a lime-kiln, a community tavern, a farmers area financial office (*Ortskasse*). Above all, it is the German church and school whose administration and maintenance is of the most primary concern of the colonies. The municipal assemblies therefore have to regulate the grazing business, establish the fees for the use of the common facilities, decide on construction work for the church and schoolhouse, the payment of pastor, teachers and church servants and, on the part of the members of the community, to undertake rates of work (*Arbeitsleistungen*) and payment in kind (*Naturalleistungen*). However, if one pages through the minutes of the meetings of the municipal assemblies, it is shown that they did not restrict themselves exclusively to these given tasks and powers. They occasionally laid down certain laws, such as when a municipality decided that from Saturday night after sunset, no one was allowed to drive and carry on business anymore. Those who went against this were to be fined. It can be seen that the German settlers also feel beyond their common real interests also a special community strong enough to be able to make demands of their associated subordination. Those who do not fulfill their duties in the community were to be excluded from it, and would no longer be allowed to lease farmland or pasture.

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