

History of Alt-Elft

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[Note: Comments in square brackets in the document are those of the translator.]

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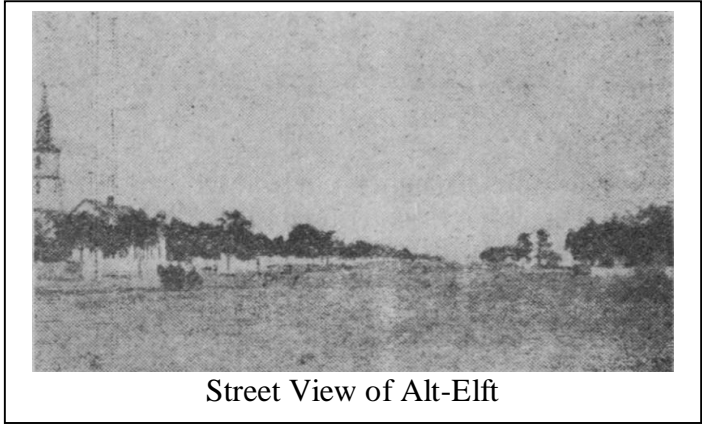
Colony Fere-Champenoise I. [Alt-Elft] and its Municipal Buildings From the Village History, written by Teacher Emil Witt.

As we know, the Romanian state considers all municipal buildings that the individual municipalities have built from their resources to be the property of the *Komuna*, and therefore also of the state. The *Komuna* is regarded as a political entity that has to dispose of the property of the municipalities. The buildings under consideration here include: the school, the village administration, the granaries and shops, the market, and so forth. Initially, only very few municipalities saw the danger established by such a situation to the municipal buildings. But as more time passed, it became clearer that the municipalities were no longer the masters of their buildings. A person started to wake up from sleep. Our nationalist (*völkischen*) organizations have long since seen this danger approaching like a heavy storm cloud. Yes, it had long been clear before their very eyes that the municipalities would simply have to look out for their buildings. The struggle for the return of the municipal buildings was now dealt with, but unfortunately, despite much work and effort, little could be achieved. It was only this summer that our delegation succeeded in bringing all the municipal buildings back into the possession of the German municipalities. For this purpose, it was necessary to separate the ecclesiastical community completely from the political one, and then the ecclesiastical communities gathered documentary evidence that they had erected their buildings only from their own resources. As a result, the government returned the municipal buildings to all those communities that could produce such evidence. Sincerest thanks is due to all those who helped to recover this million-in-assets national fortune! What had the German municipalities lost, and what did they regain? A huge fortune, for many municipalities perhaps even their existence.

This consideration gave me the reason to put the municipal buildings of Alt-Elft Colony in the *Kalender* for the year 1926. It is worth talking and writing about. And it should show us again and again that the saying: “Unity makes us strong” is and remains a true saying. This victory should continue to spur us on in the future so that we can really achieve something special in national territory, if we want to. And if we also adopt the principle: “One for all and all for one,” then we will also be able to maintain our municipal buildings and especially our most sacred goods (*Güter*), church and school, from our own resources in the future. But only in this way will it be possible for us.

Before I let the individual small reports about the municipal buildings of our colony and their illustrations follow, I would like to let the honored reader look into the past of the colony on the basis of the village history, which is kept by me, because a good part of the history of our municipal buildings lies in the past.

It will be unknown to most readers, including most folks from Alt-Elft, that our village had the name “Michaels-Ruhm” as its first name. This is proven by an old document of the Welfare Committee, dated 1816 (year of founding): “To the Mayor’s Office of Colony ‘Michaels-Ruhm’. The mayor and the representatives of the colony have to come to the Comptoir to get money to buy the still missing crown cows for the colony. President Möller.” In another later letter, dated 24 April, 1817, the address reads: “To the Mayor of Colony No. 11.” In the mandate of 9 February, 1818, the colony already bears the name “Fere-Champenoise.”



Street View of Alt-Elft

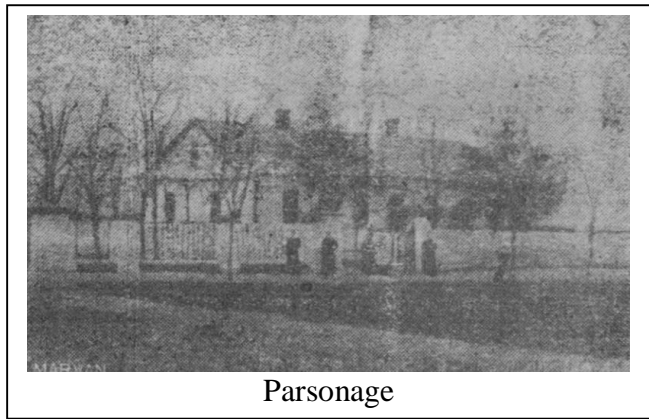
In 1822, the “ag” disappeared from the name and was replaced by an ‘e’, that is, “Fere-Champenoise”. This name is due to a French town, called Fere-Champenoise, where battles took place between the French and Germans at that time. When the colony was divided in 1826 and the daughter colony, 9 *Werst* [6 mi / 9.5 km] over the hill, was founded, it was clear that there had to be “Fere-Champenoise I and “Fere-Champenoise II”. Because our steppe was No. 11 or the “eleventh” steppe, so the village was popularly called “Eleventh or Elft,” and when the division of the colony was made, the mother colony was called “Alt-Elft” and the daughter colony “Neu-Elft”. So these names have survived in the vernacular to this day.

The first thing that our ancestors did was to build. Of course, their first houses could only be miserable earth huts. The Russian government supported the German colonists with building materials, money and food. We can understand that our ancestors had to struggle with many hardships and difficulties when settling. Their first sowing was tears. Due to the not fit to live in climate and the poor food, various diseases arose, such as: fever (malaria), typhus, smallpox (*Blattern*), which swept away the people in large quantities, so that whole families died out. In addition, of course, there were occasional crop failures, which always resulted in great material damage. We can record a whole number of years in which there were crop failures: 1823, 1830,

1834, 1867, 1899. Also, our ancestors were afflicted by various other plagues of which the present generation has no idea. There were, for example, the locusts, which destroyed entire stretches of land. The last locust plague was in 1875. Since then, we only know the locusts by name. All this weighed heavily on our good old people, who, however, in spite of all the misery and the great need, held together, one to the other. Already in the first years of settlement they provided a prayer house and school house. Many other buildings still stand in the municipality, which our ancestors built together, in unity. Yes, not only did they build a prayer house and a school house, but they also took care of them and handed them down to us, their descendants. It would be sad if we had to admit that we are not in a position to maintain these buildings, let alone build new ones. To my delight, at least I cannot say that of my Alt-Elft people, because they have always erected, although somewhat slowly, from time to time new church buildings that adorn the colony. And if they are required to maintain their school again from their own resources in the future, they will not stand in the last place. The municipality has proven this many times.

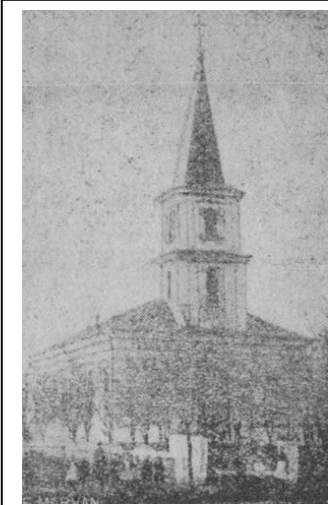
In the following sections, I will now take the liberty of illustrating individual municipal buildings. Unfortunately I cannot bring them all, because I do not have all the pictures available to look at.

The parsonage, which is located in our village, as the parish village, was built in 1839. So it is a rather old building. It was thoroughly remodeled this summer and through this has received a very nice look again.



The first village administration, as well as the prayer house and school house, were housed in a house that still stands solid and secure today and is inhabited by Gottlieb Nesper. In 1840, the old prayer and school house, which was already the second one and stood there where the administration building stands today, was converted into an administration building. In another location, a new prayer and school house was built. In 1862, the administration building, that we see in the picture, was built. It cost 1,340 gold rubles, excluding stones and compulsory labor. In 1910, it was improved and thoroughly renovated. The stables, which are located in the administration courtyard, were built in 1890 and cost 600 gold rubles. The village administration building with its stables is currently in good condition.

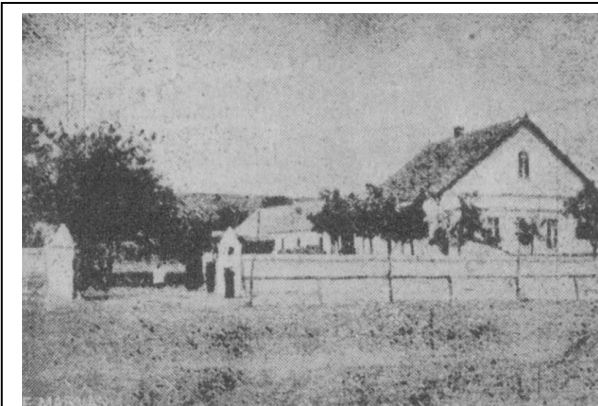




Church

The church was built in 1894-1896 and dedicated on 6 October, 1896. All in all, it cost about 37,000 gold rubles (that is, seven and thirty thousand rubles). The men **Karl Reinke**, **Heinrich Tschritter**, **Gottlieb Reinke** and **Aug. Tschritter** have acquired a lasting memory through their energy and loyalty to duty while building the church in the municipality. Soon after the church was built, at the suggestion of Pastor **Johs. Jundt**, the church is decorated with a large, beautiful image of Jesus, which looks very beautiful in the background of the altar in its expensive oak frame. It cost 500 gold rubles. Since its construction, the church has been whitewashed and painted several times. And we hope that even now the municipality will not hesitate to do it again, because it is necessary.

Next to the school is the sexton and teacher's residence. It was built in 1898. It is particularly emphasized here that the municipality has actually done a lot, in that it was already 2 years after the church was built, to build a sexton and teacher's residence. It testifies to unity and willingness to sacrifice. The residence has a rather nice appearance. The interior furnishings are practical and comfortable. In the meantime, it cost 2,600 gold rubles. The deceased old **Gottlieb Knodel** was elected by the municipality as the authorized agent (*Bevollmächtigter*) for the construction of the sexton



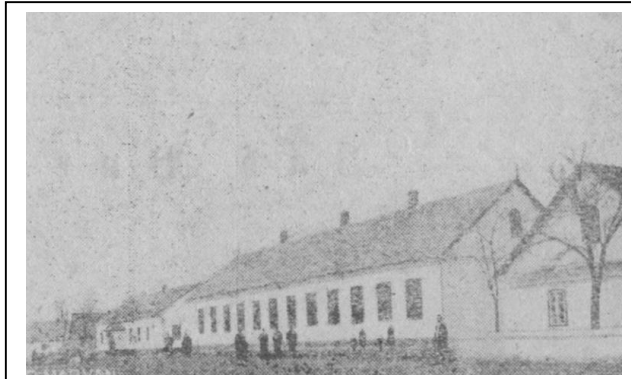
1st Village Administration Building (house of Gottl. Nesper)

and teacher's apartment. He has long been in eternity, but we still remember him in gratitude today. In 1908, the then Mayor Karl Reinke built a stone wall around the entire residence.

It can be assumed that the municipality already had a **school** from the first years of settlement. The first prayer and schoolhouse is said to have been the house of Gottlieb Nesper, who still lives there today. Soon after, the municipality built a new prayer and schoolhouse on the site where the village administration building stands today. In 1840,

this prayer and schoolhouse was converted into a village administration building and a new school building was built next to it, that is, on the place where the new school stands today. However, this building soon became too small. Therefore, it was rebuilt and enlarged in 1852. Prayer house, school hall and sexton's apartment were brought under one roof. When the new sexton and teacher apartment was built in 1898, the old sexton rooms in the prayer house were converted into a classroom and the old prayer house into a second school hall. For each of these three there was now a special building, that is, church, school, sexton and teacher's apartment. The old school has served the community for 84 years. In 1924, however, it had fallen into such a ruinous condition that the municipality decided to demolish it to its foundations and build a new school on the same site. On 25 May, 1924, the corner-stone for the construction of the new school was laid and already on 12 October of the same year, that is, after four and a half months,

it was solemnly dedicated. Work has been done here, beyond compare. The new school is 16 *Faden* [112 feet / 33.6 meters] long and 5 *Faden* [35 feet / 10.5 meters] wide, is divided into four classrooms and fully meets their requirements. The new school cost the municipality a total of 775,000 lei. All respect to the people of Alt-Elft! The work was carried out under the direction of the Building Committee, consisting of these men: **Simon Reinke, Martin Ziehmann, Friedrich Quast, Gustav Reich** and the mayor, **Johannes Bauer**. Everyone joyfully did his own, and many hands soon brought it to a conclusion.



New School—next to it: Teacher's Apartment

Since the autumn of 1921, the church garden has been adorned with a War Memorial. In order to pay their last respects to the heroes who breathed their last breathes on the battlefield during the Great War, the community erected a memorial to them. This is all of 5 *Archin* [11.7 ft / 355.55 cm] high, has a beautiful slender construction and is decorated on the top with a black cloth. The inscription contains the names of 21 heroes, some of whom died in the war and some of whom went missing in action. The War Memorial cost 5,000 lei which amount was gathered together by a collection. Joyfully and gladly, everyone gave his little bit to it. I believe it is always a comfort for the relatives of the fallen when they pass by the monument of their loved ones when they go to church, remembering them in love and know that the whole community shares in their pain. “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

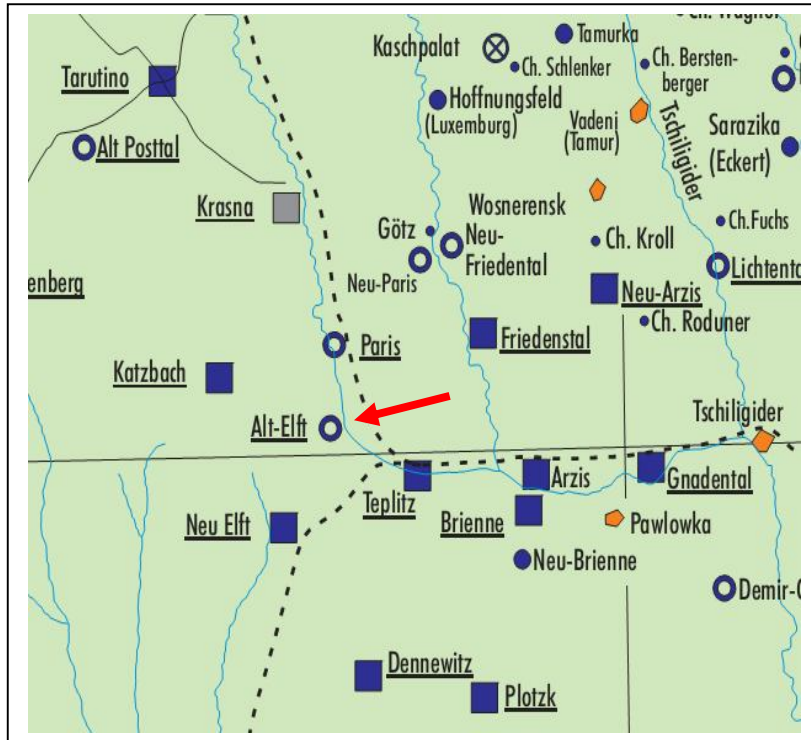


War Memorial

If we now consider that the municipality also owns other buildings, the community shop, a community magazine, a shooting gallery and 3 shepherds' houses, all of which are in good condition, we must say that the municipality has always been anxious to build the necessary municipal buildings and to maintain them in good condition. Likewise, there is no doubt that the municipality will continue to strive in the future to take care of its buildings in order to be able to pass them on to its descendants in good condition. Let us always be mindful of the words: “What you inherit from your fathers, preserve it in order to possess it!”

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Map of Alt-Elft Area



Stumpp Map of Bessarabia reworked by Rolf Jethon—not in original document