

## Letter From Plotzk, Bessarabia

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[Translator's Note: A letter by Mr. and Mrs. Friedrich Schlechter about the 1840 trip from Württemberg to Russia, via Warsaw, and what life was like once they arrived in Bessarabia. It appears that this letter is a joint venture because both wife and husband contribute to the message. It seems that the person who ended up typing out the handwritten letter added information in places to clarify terms. These are indicated by the curved { } brackets with italicized words in between. At times, I include the original German word in curved ( ) brackets to indicate the dialect in the letter. Words within square [ ] brackets indicate the translator's comment.]

[Translation Begins]

### Letter from a Family that came to Bessarabia in 1840

Blotzge [Plotzk] Colony  
10 January, 18(41)

Dear brothers and sisters, friends and acquaintances!

I am now greeting all of you and will be very happy if my letter meets you in good health. I want to write to you about how things went during our journey. When we arrived at Sulzbach, my husband drank a glass of beer at the Crown Inn Has (*Kronenwirt Has*). As for me, I did not go in because I was thinking it was difficult for me to do, when the innkeeper called to me and I did come in. He gave me the best *Scoppen* wine and my children some soup with meat and everything was for free. It brought me to tears. He wished us good luck on the trip and when we arrived at Murret {*Murrhardt*}, the Stag Innkeeper (*Hirschwirt*) gave him as much as he wanted to drink and also wished a happy 24<sup>th</sup> {*the year 1824*}. And I was also sick for 14 days. I had a fever and chills, my head and teeth ached. In Saxony, on the eve of Ascension Day, we came to an Inn where there was a high ranking gentleman who was offering to take our child. He said that he was well off, much better than we were, and that he was truly fortunate. I immediately took him in my carriage (*Schöhse*) {*Kutsche*}, but we said we would not, never in all the world. After driving for 2 days, an axel (*Axs*) broke in the middle of the road. There was no village anywhere nearby, so he constructed an half-axel out of the brake (*Mücke*) {*Bremse*}. Then we drove farther and then one of the wheels broke. We did not know how to help ourselves. We were not too far from Warsaw and eventually arrived there. He bought a wheel in Warsaw. We stayed over in Warsaw for 9 days until we were able to receive travel documents (*Bässe*) {*Pässe*}. Then we left Warsaw, desiring to travel through Austria (*Ehstreich*) {*Oesterreich*}, but were not permitted to enter because our travel documents did not allow for that. We travelled back, parallel to the area, going 80 hours round about and, after going far into Russia, our grey

mare (*Schimmel*) could no longer continue so we bought a nice pregnant grey mare for 40 German gulden. So we continued with 3 horses (*Ross*) but were barely able to make any progress. Eight hours before Odessa, we had to cross over the big water {*Dnjestr*}. The width of it takes 2 hours to cross. We were able to cross it in 45 minutes on a steamship, and this verse came to me: Of what help are our heavy sorrows, of what help our miserable outcries, what help is it if all of our troubles drown tomorrow. We make our cross and unpleasantness only greater through the sadness. The children are now also receiving good learning. They attend school during the winter and not at all during the summer. There is no flour here like at your place. They grind by means of a horse-drawn mill (*Roßmühl*), which I am not pleased with. By going around once, it is only rough ground and you have to sift it back at the house. Everything is expensive. It is frustrating because there are no potatoes and no millet (*Hirschen*) {*Hirse*}, no *Welschkorn*, and only a little bit of wheat, flax is also disappointing, because there has been no rain. Wheat costs 2 rubles per *Simri* {*in those days the common dry measure for grain, one Achtel Scheffel or 20 liters*}, which is equal to one German Gulden {*Reich Mark 1.71*}, and the *Welschkorn* costs 48xr [10<sup>th</sup> ruble or 48 kopeck-?] and potatoes 24xr. We bought 2 Mess {*1 Mess = 5 liters*} to plant, they are similar to the hazelnut, and a Mess [5 liters] of flax costs 2 rubles. The coffee beans, by the pound, costs 48xr, same with white sugar and sugar candy (*Zuckerandel*), beef costs 2xr and a pound of butter 10xr; however, a pound does not weigh the same like back in Germany. Each pound is short a half *Vierling* [1 Vierling = 5.53 liters]. Oh, if I only had my dear brothers and sisters (*Geschwistrig*) with me because I am so homesick (*Andung*) {*Heimweh*} for them. When Sunday came around, I was happy because they all came to me, but now I do not see them anymore. Oh, time goes by so slowly for me. I do not hear the sound of a bell, I do not hear the gong [of a village clock], I see no tree, I see no hill with grape vines on it. They {*the Russians*} have no bell and no clock. Things do not take place here like back where you are. They are actually putting up a school and there is where we also attend church. The school master is also in charge of conducting church. I made the whole round-about journey with my brother Michael as long as I did not take leave of him. I completely forgot about it before the arrival of January. He will more than likely fade [from thoughts]. When we arrived, there was a place, which the blacksmith from Allmers was unable to buy. We bought a place for 380 fl. There is also a 4 Morgan spot close by for a garden and a vineyard. We have a big place for a yard on which there is a tiny house. However, we are able to manage quite well until we build. Our place has 120 Morgen [ca. 1.3 hectares & 1 hectare = 1.247 acres] of ground, 2 horses, hay, straw, a plow, a drag, a table, a small barrel holding 6 Im [1 immi = ca. 1.84 liters] and 3 pregnant cows and 2 *Räuble* {*young cattle*} and burning material (*Brennzeug*) and plan to buy 2 more cows in the spring and also sheep. A nice sheep costs 5 ruble. We also have 4 horses; to have just 2 is as if someone in Germany had just 1 cow, hard to imagine, and 10 chickens, the people are for the most part still 3 *Trippel* (*3 Trippel am Boden*) on the ground, appearing to a person from a distance as if they are manure piles. The brother-in-law also was in such a *Lich* this winter, they call it a stall (*Buden*). There are mostly people from Poland (*Bohlen*) in our colony; time really goes slowly for me; however, they are Germans. Christmas Day and New Years are 12 days later than at your place {*until recently, also in Romania*}, all festival days are celebrated according to the old calendar, which is almost impossible for one to get used to. I have it much better when it comes to eating, one does not have to be so sparing with the milk, eggs and lard, nevertheless, but I am not happy to be in Russia because my dear brothers and sisters are not with me. My children are always speaking about you, my Friderike says, "I would really be happy if I could only be with my *Basen* and my *Döte* and my *Dote*, she

gives me some little goody (*Gutle*).” She was sick, had a swelling in the jaw, oh how my heart ached for her and all I could do was to let destiny take its course; we have no plaster (*Pflaster*), and no pharmacy (*Abetek*) {*Apotheke*} anywhere close by, for this is now Russia and no longer the land of Württemberg. The winter is much colder than at your place, sometimes the cattle cannot be taken to drink water for two or three days because of the wind and storm, and in the summer it is also much hotter and my brother-in-law has 44 sheep, 7 cows and 5 young cattle (*Räuble*). Oh, I want to thank my dear brothers and sisters again for what you have done for me and my children, and my Friedrich says, “Write a word of thanks also from me to my *Döte*, *Doten* and *Basen*.” Please forgive us for not having sent you a letter in such a long time, we did send one a long time ago which it seems you never received, it is so difficult to get hold of paper, it costs 8 ruble, which converts to 4 German florin. So we had to wait a long time again before we were able to get hold of correspondence paper, it takes 6 hours for us to go and buy some, and I was not all that well, I still have my old cough which has been with me since winter time, I had to sit up in the bed during the nights and had to gasp for air. Write to us and tell us what is still growing after the storm damage which you told us about in that sad letter you sent us. We really wept bitterly as we were reading it.

I am so embarrassed in regards to my release. I have enclosed a delayed letter, I do not know how this happened to me, it is a big mistake, for I cannot be registered if I do not have the dismissal, so I am asking Magistrate (*Herrn Amtmann*) Pfuderer, that he would help me. I have to also write some points of information, the cattle price: one year-calf costs 7 fl., a couple of three-year steers cost 60 fl., one can purchase a cow for 18 fl., a horse for 20 and 22, some of the nicest animals, pure mountain snow white in color. With the crops it is, as people say, that often for two years in a row there is barely (*berig*) enough to eat, even 2 or 3 years where whole fields (*Stieger*) {*Stücke, Acker*} cannot be gathered in but everything rots in the fields. In the latter part of this year, I planted fifteen hundred grape vines. The vineyard was definitely not affected by frost, and also not by bad weather, but the Lord sought to bring the Russians (*sucht die Russländer heim*) home by means of a drought. If the Lord wants to hold back his blessings, he can do so in many different ways. A father may be up to his neck in trying to provide the things necessary for survival, he may drag on as he will, after all, it is better in some places than in others. For my part, I am content with my destiny, it has often happened to me on the way, even here {*in Russland*}, that things have gone awry, yet despite all, I have a small house and farmyard, about a stone's throw away to my neighbor, and I can turn my horse and wagon around as I want. I admit that my wife is not all that pleased, but things will change once we get out into the field. If only my children were bigger, then things would not trouble me as much. The crops are mown with the scythe, usually not tied into bundles, the oats and the barley is placed in piles and then loaded up with the pitch fork and then, once it is back on the farmyard, it is trampled [threshed] with the horses. A person needs only two horses, whether his land is build up or not. It is difficult for me to describe the soil to you. It is a black, firm soil which allows itself to be harrowed (with struggling effort) but I believe that two proper German horses could accomplish the task, but the fodder is unable to support them and they soon die. If my brother wants to come, let him because there are still many places available. If he is unable to bring 5 or 6 hundred florin to this place, then he should stay home.

Many thousand greetings to my mother, to my brothers, to my brothers-in-law, to my sisters-in-law, to Mr. Magistrate (*Herrn Amtmann*), to Mr. Ochsen Innkeeper (*Herrn Ochsenwirt*), to Mr.

School Teacher (*Herrn Schullehrer*), to my cousin/uncle [?] (*Veter*) David Knorp and his wife and his mother, to my neighbor, and to all good friends and all who ask about me. This letter, which I have sent to Mr. Magistrate, should be paid for by my cousin/uncle [?] (*Vetter*), the mayor (*Burgemeister*). I am looking to Mr. Magistrate for help to obtain my release. I also ask my best friend, Regina, that she would also ask Mr. Magistrate that he would be a help to me if he would give my brother-in-law Jakob direct access (*Zeulet*) to the supreme office (*Oberamt*), this would help me out. The mailing address it to be made out to Akkermann, Bessarabia {*Ackermann was the district town during Russian times, also a German settlement and now in Romanian times is known as Cetate Alba*} which is still the district center of the Klöstitz (*Glehstitz*) colony of Plotzk (*Blotzge*).

Send my things to Plotzk (*Blotzge*), not to Odessa (*Oedes*). Receive our love, I have learned nothing better.

I remain your true friend,

Friedrich Schlechter

[End Translation]