

Story: First Year in the New Homeland

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[Translator's Note: This document lists no author, nor indicates when written. Found in a folder of documents about customs and practices of Bessarabia, probably written shortly after the Resettlement of 1940. What it was like when the first German settlers arrived in Sarata, Bessarabia in the early 1800s.]

[Begin Translation]

First Year in the New Homeland

Already once before, in the 15th century, a proud German people –the Goths- lived in steppe tents on this spot of the earth. The Gothic empire stretched from the Don River to the foothills of the Caucasus, and the Black Sea was also dominated by them. For several centuries, Gothic songs resounded from here and the Gothic language was spoken. Then came the decline and, after another century, Germanic life would once again spring up in a foreign country.

Truly, the first years of the settlement were not easy. The environment was unfamiliar, the climate something they were not used to, the homes promised were not there. Weary of traveling and homesick, most of them poor and penniless, they camped in steppe grass and weeds tall as a man, pitched their tents and constructed sod huts. On top of all this, severe diseases often broke out. Fever, typhoid, and cholera were almost always angels of death in those simple living quarters (*Wohnhütten*). One account puts it this way: “Due to hardship, bad living quarters, and unfamiliar climate, dysentery broke out and spread in a most frightening way among the settlers, so much so that in the spring of 1806, out of 65 families, only 29 remained, and even they were not left unaffected.” Going on: “As a result of the lack of proper housing and appropriate care, many got sick and so, in 1805-1806, a whole colony, except for a few persons, died. In 1804, in Alexanderhilf, 366 souls died between the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels [29 September] and Christmas.

H. Roemmich made this report on the arrival at and settlement of Sarata, Bessarabia:

Arrival in Bessarabia

It was on 19 March that a long train of wagons approached from the east the small steppe river area of Sarata. A wide steppe valley, bordered on both sides by gently ascending slopes, came into the view of the travelers. As far as the eye could see, there was an endless plain of grass and over the top of it the dark blue skies of the south. The eye scanned the blue expanse without seeing anything to catch one's attention. However, just beyond the little river one caught sight of a well, the destination of the journey. Wagon after wagon creaked through the river sand and

stopped at the well. In a wide encirclement of the well, they created what looked like a wagon fort. The sounds of Swabian (*Schwäbische Laute*) are heard; a bustling of activity begins. Tents are pitched and out comes the stuff that was brought along: tools, household goods, clothing, a spinning wheel, a Bible and hymnal, and perhaps even a letter or a photo of loved ones from back home. It is not much, but here in the wilderness, irreplaceable. The women light a fire in order to prepare the meal and also because a cold March night on the steppe would be upon them. The men take care of the draught animals.

Then father Lindl walked into the middle of the encircled wagons, everyone stopping what they were doing and gathering in the circle for prayer. On their knees, they thanked God for gracious guidance, for the new homeland. Then the pastor begins to speak. He is aware of what is in the hearts of his congregation: a longing for the homeland, which is so different from where they are now gathering as a body of believers (*Sinöde*), faint-heartedness and anxious concern about their having left the old country. His confidence stabilizes them, his reminder to unity and trust in God finds open hearts. It was like that, that he also stood before them in the old homeland when he took leave and, for the sake of his convictions, went into a foreign land. He also thought only about them in their separation and prepared for them a refuge in this place. He was someone you could have confidence in. And now he was speaking so intimately again that everything was melted away with tears. Finally, everyone made a promise to him, with a handshake, to maintain the unity of the group and to live as sincere Christians. That is how Lindl started off in the new homeland with his congregation.

[End of Translation]