

Bessarabian Business

Translated by Darla Anhorn Lee, with special assistance given by Dr. Elvire Necker-Eberhardt for some specific words and phrases in this article. Translation project coordinated by Dwayne Janke.

Translated from the book, Wie's Daheim War—Der Schicksalsweg der Bessarabiendeutschen, by J. Becker, published 1950.

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At first businesses were only in private hands. Later joint stock businesses came into existence. In each colony there was eventually a community store. One could buy everything there. A big and rapid development took place in the grain trade. Each farm made speedy progress. Initially it lay completely in foreign hands, but with the passage of time and as land in the community became harder to acquire, many Germans devoted themselves to the grain business. This business brought in big profits. Mr. Otto Broneske is to be thanked for the founding of the people's organization of business unions. Everything went through him. The same can be said of the egg and butter trade. The German villages in Bessarabia produced 400,000 kg. of butter annually. The overall butter production equaled about 25 million Lei, a profit of over 5 million Lei for the German businesses. Most of the farmers looked for a farm association to deliver their grain, butter and eggs. In the course of time, prosperous businesses were started up in each village. Besides this we had three small market towns: Tarutino, Arzis and Sarata. In these villages the best-furnished and most modern shops were found: colonial and textile goods firms, shops, beer gardens, bookstores, places to convert milk into money (these were in all the big colonies), etc. One could purchase the best and the most expensive. It was lively at the horse, wagon, vegetables and poultry markets. A person could buy anything at a reasonable price. One could hear many languages. The social life of the members of the different peoples was sometimes touching. For example, one could see two Russians or Bulgarians at the horse market, and when they bought a horse they would demand a "German word" from the seller. If he would do so, then one could assume that what he said about the horse was true. We had gained great trust and respect by the others. One could see piles of vegetables, fruit, water and sugarmelons, paprika, as well as the small, delicate red paprika ("Turkish pepper"), etc.

It was all very lively, moving and active. Some of our farmers made a sport of horse trading at the weekly market in the winter and earned a nice sum of money. When a deal was closed, a strong handshake was given. Finally one went into a business or wine shop to pay what he owed.

The Land Expropriation

Through industry and tenacious endurance many of our ancestors managed to accumulate considerable funds. They lived quite frugally in order to get ahead economically. Because they were so industrious they bought more land almost every year to add to their property. Their ideal was to enlarge their real estate. When all the available land within the colony was bought up, they began to buy land outside the colony. Indeed many sold their property within the community in order to acquire more land outside of it. Thus it came about that our farmers owned 200, 500, 1000 and more hectares of land. What an endeavor; what a work! It was a pleasure that everyone should see and experience. Our ancestors speak with such love when they talk about these beautiful, good times. Day by day the rapid economic upswing of our colonies was established. "Man runs and hunts for the best, golden object."

This situation however did not last long. With the entry of Rumanians into Bessarabia there eventually came a new agricultural law which demanded land reform. It ordered that no farmer in Bessarabia could possess more than 100 hectares of land. The outcome of this standard was to expropriate land from those who had over 100 hectares and give land to those who had none. The law naturally applied mostly to the Germans. There was great consternation among the farmers. What could be done? Each wanted to keep his property. Thus many went to see the various Rumanian lawyers to save their land. These understood quite well how to extract money from our Germans. Indeed it all

came to nothing. Many of the affected farmers sold part of their land in order to carry on lawsuits with the proceeds.

The money brought great profit to the lawyers, but not to the farmer who had to pay. Eventually he would be dispossessed of the remaining [land over 100 hectares].

Some of those who did not have land were taken care of at the time when the land was divided. In this way 8,200 hectares of the land which formerly had been expropriated came back into German hands. The daughter colonies, which were founded on this kind of land, were called "Hectar Communities" because every head of a household received 6 hectares of land. Most of these daughter colonies, i.e. these "hectar communities," had a hard battle to fight; they had an extraordinarily hard existence. For those who had lost land, it was worthwhile to maintain steady nerves, not to lose one's head and to seize fresh courage. The work of generations was destroyed by the stroke of a pen, but in this moment the Bessarabian-Germans were shown to be true Schwabians. They conducted themselves peacefully, and said we will do it again. And so it happened. Before very long they found ways to buy back their former lands from those to whom it had been given by the Rumanian government. They would not budge. They could always start over after a severe setback. They did not so easily lose their vital energy, being mindful of these words: The world belongs to the courageous.