

# First Colonist Newspaper and its Editors

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Note: Information within [brackets] are comments by the translator.

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[Translation Begins]

## First Colonist Newspaper and its Editors

by Albert Landsiedel

It seemed that my search for a source about the first colonist newspaper was doomed to failure, when a fortunate coincidence placed a report in my hands that provides abundant information both about the *Entertainment Paper for German Settlers in Southern Russia* (*Unterhaltungsblatt für deutsche Ansiedler im südlichen Rußland*), as the newspaper was called, and about its editors, among whom Johann Heinrich Sonderegger, who came from the colonist community, was the most outstanding. The report was published shortly before the outbreak of the First World War in a *Kalendar* of which only the pages on which the report was printed still exist. The author of the article, J. Stach, who was an active contributor to the *Odessaer Zeitung*, provides a complete portrait of Sonderegger in his “Biographical Sketch”. A reproduction of the portrait of Sonderegger, which J. Stach included with the report, was made by the undersigned and handed over to the Bessarabian Homeland Museum.

In view of the importance of the report as a document that conveys a piece of history from that distant time, I will let the report follow in its full wording.

### The First Newspaper Editor among the German Settlers in Southern Russia

Biographical Sketch by J. Stach

His name is Johann Heinrich Sonderegger and his paper was called: “*Entertainment Paper for German Settlers in Southern Russia*.”

The first volume of the paper was published from April 1846 to March 1847. It was edited by Ph. Jäusch, about whom nothing is known to us. However, he himself does not seem to have been a colonist. In the first issue of the second volume, Sonderegger is already introduced as editor in a note to the readers, which we reproduce here verbatim in unchanged spelling.

**“A Word to the Readers!**

With the current month (April S.B.), the entertainment paper begins the second year of its existence. The goal set when this publication was started remains unchanged to this day. Its purpose is: to make the colonists aware of their current situation and familiar with the means they already possess or can acquire, to show them how they can improve their agriculture and trades and increase their prosperity taking local conditions into account; to awaken curiosity and commendable ambition in them; and to provide them with enjoyable and instructive entertainment.

The experiment conducted with the first volume has convinced us that many colonists have recognized the well-meaning attitude of their superiors and have not only found pleasure in reading this paper, but have also shared their observations and written articles in it. This serves as the best reward for our effort and the expenses incurred, and encourages us to continue what we have begun.

We considered it necessary to entrust the publication of the paper to the Großliebental settler Johann Heinrich Sonderegger and assume that this change will not cause the paper to lose favor in the eyes of the settlers, but rather will make it even more accessible to them, because a periodical dedicated exclusively to the German settlers, and consequently covering only what is closely related to the nature, means, and concepts of the settlers, could have no more suitable editor and knowledgeable contributor than the settlers themselves.

We therefore invite all those who are inclined to work for the common good to share with us, for inclusion in the publication, everything that, in their opinion, can capture the attention of the planters and help achieve the aforementioned goal. As before, each mayor's office will receive this publication free of charge in three copies and is also requested to give one of them to the local village school.

Because several settlers have expressed the desire to purchase the *Entertainment Paper* for their domestic use, we have increased the number to be printed of each issue and have set a payment of 45 kopecks in silver for the current second volume, which will end at the same time as the year and therefore will only have nine issues. In the future, however, this paper will begin with the month of January.

Anyone who wishes to receive the *Entertainment Paper* for themselves can report it to their mayor's office with an enclosure of 45 kopecks in silver and will receive the paper regularly according to its publication schedule.

E. v. Hahn”

As far as the foreword for the second year of the *Entertainment Paper* is concerned. State Councilor E. v. Hahn was at that time Chairman of the Committee for the Welfare of Foreign Settlers in Southern Russia. And so the paper was published on behalf of the government and is evidence of the commitment of the Russian authorities to improving culture in their young German colonies as quickly and successfully as possible for the benefit of the entire country.

Until the year 1855, that is, for nine years, Sonderegger edited the *Entertainment Paper* with good success. His successor was W. Schwammberg, yet the name of Sonderegger still appears for a long time under many useful articles of the publication. Schwammberg led the editorial office until the beginning of 1864, approximately the same length of time as Sonderegger. In the final period of its existence, the paper was edited by committee member N. Nelgoffsky and agronomist J. Unterlauf. The Welfare Committee was, as is known, dissolved in 1870, but the paper seems to have ceased publication even earlier.

The *Entertainment Paper* establishes one of the most important sources for the first century of the history of the German colonies in southern Russia, in which the name of Sonderegger must also not remain unmentioned. The material for the following brief biographical sketch of his life the author owes to the communications of the eldest son of Johann Heinrich Sonderegger, Mr. Adolf Sonderegger, who, even in old age, holds the memory of his father in high regard.

Johann Heinrich Sonderegger is the son of Johannes Sonderegger and his wife Anna Dorothea, née Pleß. He was born on 20 June (2 July), 1810, in Gais, Canton of Appenzell Outer Rhodes, and came to Russia with his parents in 1817. In the French colony of Chabag (Schabo) in Bessarabia, his parents acquired a farm. However, since his father was a piano maker by trade, he did not fit in well in Chabag, where mainly viticulture was practiced. He soon moved to the German colony of Freudental, located on the other [east] side of the Dniester River in the Kherson Governorate, to work as a village schoolteacher. It was here that the true apprenticeship years of young Johann Heinrich began. In addition to teaching at the German school of his father, he diligently learned French from his mother. He also practiced Russian through his own efforts and gradually achieved a thorough knowledge of the language. The mother, an educated woman from a parsonage in Switzerland, exerted the greatest influence on him. It was not long before the father was allowed to work as a teacher in Freudental. He and his son, our Johann Heinrich, were bitten by a mad dog and both had to be taken to the hospital in nearby Odessa. The father died, while the son survived. The widowed mother then moved with her child to her older son in Odessa. The brave young man, who was only ten years older than his brother, had brought a solid education from Switzerland, held the rank of a government secretary, and earned his living as a piano teacher. At the age of about seventeen, Johann Heinrich was sent to Großliebental for confirmation instruction. Although he surpassed all his fellow confirmands here in knowledge and education, as an outsider he had to take the last place. After the confirmation, he had to start earning his own bread. Despite his youth, he took up the position of village schoolmaster in the colony of Worms. He does not appear to have held this position for long. He became the municipal clerk in Freudental, where he had spent his finest years of youth. Here, at the age of twenty-eight, on 2 January, 1838, he married Katharina Barbara, née Engel, a nineteen-year-old daughter of the colonists, who remained his faithful life companion. In Freudental, he quietly carried out his duties, but he was always careful to further his education

and to perfect himself as much as possible in knowledge and experience. Around the year 1842, he received the honorable appointment as district clerk in Großliebental. The circumstances that led to this appointment are interesting. A colonial inspector had embezzled sums of money; the receipts for the funds received from the community, signed by the inspector, were at the Großliebental district office, but in the imperial treasury, where these funds were supposed to be delivered, they had not been received, which is why they were requested for a second time. Now all ten clerks of the district were called upon to solve the problem of why the pension office was requesting the funds a second time. Sonderegger clarified the matter by demonstrating that the pension office had not disbursed all the sums for which the relevant inspector had issued receipts. Then everyone realized that the funds had disappeared into the pocket of the inspector. Apart from the inspector, the one who fared worst in the entire affair was the then district clerk of Großliebental, Schmidt. It was now commonly said: Schmidt must go, and Sonderegger should be appointed as the district clerk in his place. He held the position in Großliebental until 1849.

Here in Groß-Liebental [*sic*], the colonial authorities also seemed to have taken notice of Sonderegger. In 1847, he was granted by them the honorable and important position of editor of the *Entertainment Paper*. But other people had also recognized the work of Sonderegger. Near the Mannheim colony, about 20 versts [13.4 miles / 21.2 kilometers] behind Freudental, there was the Diderim Estate, which at that time belonged to Professor von Gavel from the Baltic provinces. Sonderegger became the manager of this estate. In 1853, Gavel sold his estate and gave Sonderegger, in settlement of the arrears of his wages, about 1,000 rubles in silver, and 130 *Deßjatinen* [351 acres / 141.7 hectares] of unused land, which the latter called “Boschi Dar” (God’s Gift). Sonderegger then built his own home on his own land and, as he had already done as a manager, engaged in agriculture. Yet his heart belonged to the young German settlements. The editorial office of the *Entertainment Paper*, which appeared monthly, remained his main occupation for another two years. Our dear Sonderegger was treated so well by the colonies that in the 1860s he left his own estate to once again become a district clerk and orphan father (*Waisenvater*) in Großliebental. In his capacity as an orphan father, that is, accountant of the orphan fund, he established a much more practical accounting system, which received approval from the Ministry of Finance and still exists in its basic form today. For his service, he received three silver medals with the inscription “For Zeal”. The first on the Order of St. Anne from Emperor Nicholas I, the second on the Order of Stanislaus, and the third again on the Order of St. Anne, both from Emperor Alexander II. In 1857, Sonderegger acquired a 40 *Deßjatinen* [108 acres / 43.6 hectares] estate in Bessarabia on the Dniester River in the Lotosso Valley near the village of Raskiizy (Raskaietz). It was from the Archbishopric Estate in Kishinev for the cultivation of vines and fruit trees, as a perpetual lease for his male descendants until the extinction of the family line, in exchange for paying a tenth of each year’s harvest. His two sons, Heinrich and Gustav, who still live there today, have achieved considerable prosperity. The estate “Boschi Dar” is currently owned by the heirs of the second son, Johannes. Part of this estate belongs to Adolf, the eldest son, from whose verbal account the author owes these records. When the agricultural offices were established, Sonderegger was a representative in the Odessa district landscape for several years. Despite his many years of larynx ailment, he remained mentally sharp, was never bedridden, and even an hour before his death, he walked around freely in the yard. He spent his last days in Großliebental, where he was treated by Doctor Laß.

Here he also succumbed to his suffering on 3 December, 1870, at the age of sixty. Sonderegger had an understanding of the significance and role of the German colonists in southern Russia, which is why he was able to edit the *Entertainment Paper*, essentially an agricultural monthly, in such a way that it was not only of great importance for the present but also became an inexhaustible primary historical source for the colonies.

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