

Neu-Nikolajewka (1889-1989)

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Translated by: Allen E. Konrad

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P.O. Box 157, Rowley, IA 52329

onamission1939@gmail.com

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

[Translation Begins]

Neu-Nikolajewka 100 Years 1889-1989

by Alfred and Emil Wildermuth

“I love the beautiful little place where I was born.”

That was the topic of an essay we had to write many, many years ago in High School Class 3 in Tarutino about our birthplace. Everyone tried with great enthusiasm to describe their hometown in the most beautiful colors.

Now that so many years have passed, and we have forever left our homeland, this task has been presented to us once again. With the same feelings as back then, we want to try to provide a description of our hometown, as it has remained in our memory.

Who would not feel a warm glow in their heart at having been born in this beautiful former German village? Neu-Nikolajewka was located in a beautiful, expansive valley, bound on one side by the Byk River and on the other by gently rolling hills, partly covered with trees and low shrubs. Not far from the village, to the southeast, there was low ground that was covered with forest. Due to the shortage of fuel after World War I, this small forest, called *Hyrtop*, was completely cut down. The tree stumps were cleared and burned in the Wildermuth steam mill. The entire area was later used as farmland and pasture.

As a result of the large number of children in German families in the mother colonies, living space became too tight, and the growing sons sought new living space with the help of their fathers. They were aided by the fact that the Russian nobility and large landowners could no longer manage their estates so freely following the abolition of serfdom in 1881. However,

profitable management with paid labor was not feasible, and many a nobleman therefore found it easier to part with one of his numerous estates.

One of these was also the estate owner Nikolajew. In the year 1889, several German farmers from the mother colonies of the Akkermann district came to this estate to inspect it. The negotiations led to them purchasing the entire estate, covering an area of 1,715 *Deßjatin* [4,630.5 acres / 1,869.4 hectares]. So this year is considered the founding year of Neu-Nikolajew. Presumably it is in honor of the estate owner that the village received its name.

It was incorrectly called “*Zenzereni*” in the communities from which the settlers of the new village came, apparently after the unsightly Moldovan village located 8 km [4.9 miles] away. Whether this was only mockery or a lack of geographical knowledge remains to be seen. In any case, it did not harm the reputation of our beautiful village.



After the occupation of Bessarabia by the Romanians in 1918, it was still called *Nikolajewka nemteasch*, meaning “German” Nikolajewka, as opposed to the neighboring Russian village. In the course of the Romanization of German place names, our village was given the name Aneni-noi (*noi* = new), while the neighboring Russian village was given the name Aneni-vechi (*vechi* = old).

The Russians, that is, the current rulers, have also kept the name Aneni-noi, since the northern part of Bessarabia belongs to the Moldovan Republic, where the Romanian language is also allowed as a spoken language.

The families that were among the founders of the Neu-Nikolajewka community included: Aipperspach, Bohnet, Frömmrich, Gentner, Gässler, Hildebrand, Hobbacher, Hoffmann, Künzler, Krüger, Layher, Rauser, Schmied, Seefried, Siewert, Schulz, Weiss, Wildermuth, and Wiedmer.

The majority of the residents were well-off Swabians from Wittenberg, Sarata, Hoffnungstal, Lichtental, Friedenstal, Alt-Elft and Neu-Elft, and other mother colonies. They purchased the estate partly with their own money, partly with funds they had borrowed from a bank in Odessa.

Since the Swabian element dominated, the Swabian everyday language also prevailed. However, over time, the Wittenberg or also the Lichtental pronunciation was increasingly pushed back, and a soft Swabian emerged, containing many idioms and expressions of its own character.

Location:

Neu-Nikolajewka was located on the road between Kischinew [Chişinău], 35 km [21.7 miles] away, and Bendery [Bender], 25 km [15.5 miles] away. It was bordered by the neighboring settlements: to the east by the Russian village of Aneni, to the west by the Singer estate, to the south by the German settlement of Hirtenheim, and to the north by the Moldovan village.

The main occupation of the inhabitants was agriculture, which was practiced excellently and with much love and dedication. In later years, sheep farming and commercial growing of grapes were added. In sheep farming, in addition to producing sheep cheese, they also specialized in breeding Karakul sheep, as this generated higher income. Especially valuable were the pelts of newborn lambs, which were bought by Jewish traders.

Another source of income was keeping dairy cows. Mainly, a red dairy cow was kept. The dairy products were processed by a cooperative-based dairy. The nearness of the cities of Kischinew and Bendery, as well as the Bulboaca railway station, provided good sales opportunities for dairy products and agricultural produce such as wheat, oats, corn, and oilseeds.

For the needs of the community residents, there were: 2 carpentry workshops, 2 blacksmith workshops, 2 tailor shops, 2 cobblers, 2 saddler shops, a barber shop, and a cooperative store.

The modernly equipped grain mill of Karl Wildermuth, which also had an attached oil mill, was known far beyond the boundaries of the community.

The community had everything that belonged to a thriving economic life and made a well-rounded and harmonious impression.

Nevertheless, some sought better opportunities for development across the ocean, perhaps driven by a few crop failures and frequent diseases such as typhus, malaria, and epidemics among the livestock.

The last emigration took place in 1925-1926 to Brazil. Among the emigrants were the families: David Layher (Davidvetter and Luisbas [cousins]) {sic} Bayer and Johannes Mayer, as well as other residents whose names are no longer known. A large number of the villagers (including one of the co-authors of this report) accompanied them to Bulbok railroad station and sang them a farewell song with altered lyrics: "Oh Brazil, you icy cold zone." After a few years, Davidvetter and Luisbas were so overtaken by homesickness that they returned to Neu-Nikolajewka, leaving their family members behind.

In the report of the St. Petersburg Support Fund, Neu-Nikolajewka is listed as belonging to Kischinew. It provides the following figures and refers to the year 1906-1907: 299 souls, a church school with 68 students.

According to the report of the Resettlement Commission in 1940, the community numbered 619 souls at 133 homesteads, including the Singer estate. It still belonged to the Kischinew parish. The last pastor, Erich Gutkewitsch, will live on in memory for a long time.

As already mentioned above, the community grew considerably due to the large number of children. The old schoolhouse, which consisted of a smaller and a larger room, was probably one of the oldest buildings since the village was founded. In the larger classroom, worship services were also held on Sundays. On major holidays (Christmas, Easter), this room could hardly accommodate the people attending the worship service.

The desire to build a new house of worship in a central location had long been present. However, the economic conditions in the years 1925-1930 were far from rosy, and the church treasury was empty.

Due to previous crop failures, many farmers were in debt and had to pay high interest rates. The German People's Council in Tarutino launched a large relief effort at that time and obtained funds from the German Reich at an extremely favorable interest rate. These funds were distributed through a trust office in Tarutino. This was seen as a great opportunity to realize the plan to build a new church. It was decided not to apply for the money reserved for the Neu-Nikolajewka community in the amount of 750,000 lei for individual beneficiaries, but to take it on for the entire community and use it to build a church.

Under the energetic leadership of the then curator Jakob Wildermuth, the construction of the church was undertaken in 1928 and completed in 1929. In a central location, the attractive new church now stood. The dedication of the church took place in the autumn of the same year with the participation of Senior Pastor Haase, Pastor Rivinius, and Pastor Gutkewitsch. For all the surrounding German villages, this was a model representative building.

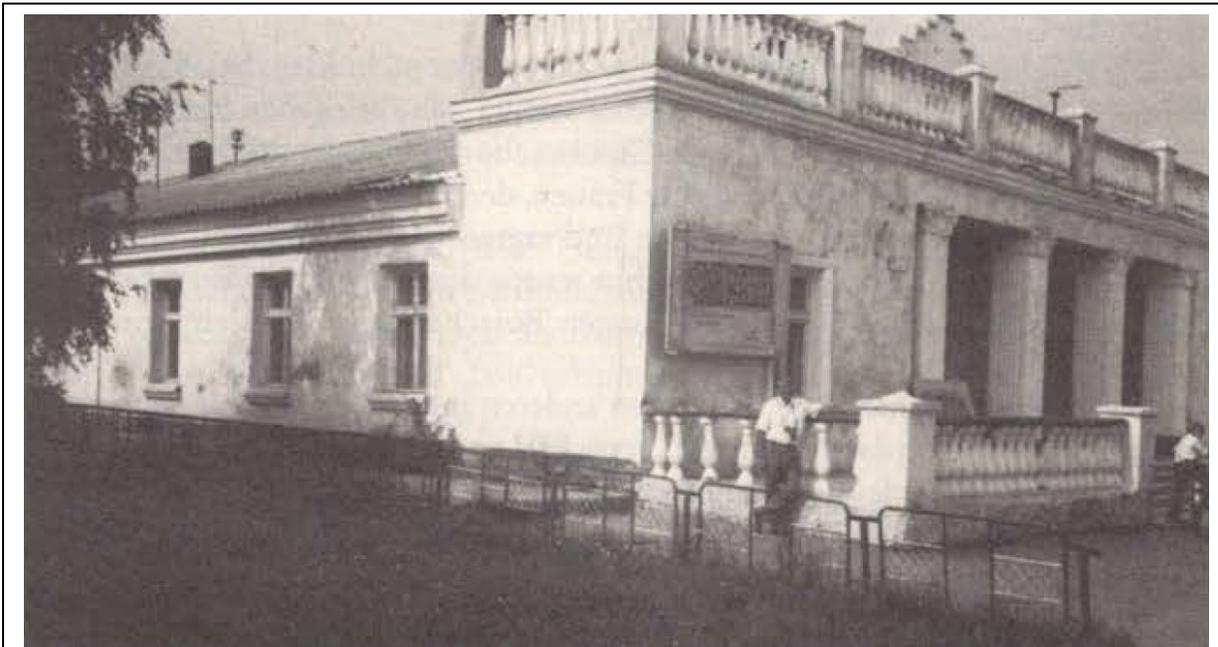
Unfortunately, the community was only able to enjoy this house of worship for 11 years. After the occupation of Bessarabia by the Russians in June of 1940, this consecrated building was disgraced and turned into a clubhouse. In later years, a cinema and a library were established in it.

In order to prevent the church from being immediately recognized as such from the outside, an entrance with a large front staircase in typical Russian style was placed in front of the [church] entrance. The round arches of the windows were straightened, the valuable zinc sheet roof was removed and replaced with gray asbestos cement, and the entire roof was also flattened.

Very likely, on national holidays, the big speeches about the achievements of socialism are kept here and rallies are held.

The following men have contributed to both the church and the political community: Gotthilf Aipperspach, Adam Bohner I, Christian Gäßler, Eduard Mayer, Immanuel Siewert, Emil Wiedmer, as well as Jakob and Karl Wildermuth (curator until 1940).

The following people served as sexton teachers: it should be noted in advance that there are no binding records for any of the office holders. All information was provided from memory by knowledgeable sources. Teacher Schlenker, Andreas Sulz, Heinrich Drews, Edmund Damer, Friedrich Gäßler, David Baumann, Wilhelm Krug, Emil Tschritter, and Oskar Sauter.



Neu-Nikolajewka—today Aneni-Noi, the former church

As for higher education, the following have emerged from the community: Alexander Strohmaier—veterinarian; Benjamin Wildermuth—pastor; Emil Wildermuth—financial councilor; Heinrich Rauser—government councilor; Emmanuel Gäßler—teacher; Gustav Singer—graduate engineer.

Events:

It has already been mentioned that the larger room of the old school building also served as a house of worship. Next to this building stood a bell frame made of two posts connected at the

top by a crossbeam. A small bell was attached to it. It was rung using a rope that reached almost to the ground. For the worship service, the bell was rung three times: at 9 o'clock, at 9:45, and at 10 o'clock. To help the parishioners distinguish which ringing it was, the first ringing was short and continuous, the second a little longer with a short pause, and the third, the so-called combined ringing, was even longer with two pauses.

The stories report that the parishioners did not like this primitive setup. If they did not have their own Prayer House, there should at least be two bells. The proposal from the people fell on deaf ears with the church council, as the treasury was empty.

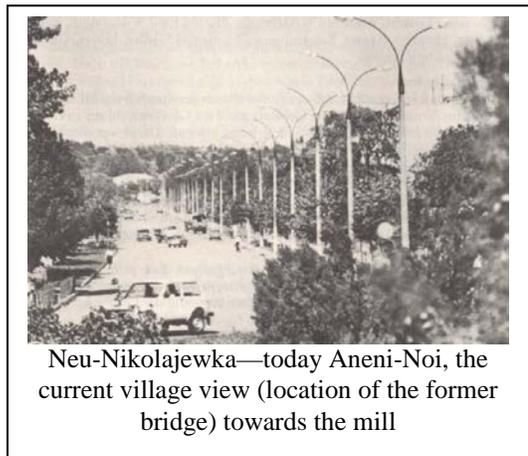
So, among enterprising and courageous young fellows, probably encouraged by older women and men, the plan matured to simply make the little bell, which weighed about 50-60 kg [110-132 pounds], disappear, or, crudely put, to steal it. So, one morning, when the teacher wanted to call the children to school, the little bell was gone.

However, the church and community leaders did not back down. On the contrary, they threatened to bring a tracking dog from the nearby capital at the expense of the wrongdoers, a dog that would surely track down the bell. This made a strong impression, and worried women whose consciences were not flawless [*astrein*=clear of branches] came to the responsible official and said: "Jakob, the ringleader of this prank was your Karl." As a result, the operation with the tracking dog was called off, although the young fellows had to return the little bell to its proper place.

Years later, this trick was repeated by other young fellows, and lo and behold, this time the act was successful. A quickly convened town meeting unanimously decided to acquire two new, larger bells. According to tradition, these bells were purchased for 40,000 lei and temporarily hung on a beam between two trees. Afterwards, the missing little bell also reappeared. The incident is said to have caused great amusement at the time, but was soon forgotten, and the old, good rapport among the villagers was restored. The little bell, which had once caused such a commotion, later found a worthy use at the newly built elementary school.

Great love and care have been shown by the villagers in the design of the streets. □ Along the yard walls ran a sidewalk, which was lined with acacia trees on the street side. The street itself was not laid out very wide, so the residents opposite each other were considered neighbors. This created an interconnected and unified village appearance.

What is immediately striking is that very few houses from the founding period existed in the community. Most farmhouses were solid, built using stones as the building material, and the majority were constructed in the years 1900-1910, if one discounts the construction activity of more recent times.



Considering that nearly 11 years had passed from the founding (1889) until the construction of the first solid houses, one can conclude that the settlers were by no means penniless tenants; rather, they were quite well-off farmers who had purchased the estate from the landlord Nikolajew and had not established the village and their livelihood as tenants (see report by Hugo Häfner, page 75 in the 1985 *Kalender*).

Out of complete ignorance of the actual circumstances, people in the mother colonies of southern Bessarabia repeatedly used the disparaging name “Zinzereny” for our charming village instead of Neu-Nikolajewka.

The Russians have also recognized the centrally advantageous location. They have made Neu-Nikolajewka, which already bore the name Aneni-noi under Romanian rule, into an administrative and industrial center for all the surrounding villages, and elevated it to the status of a small town. However, this has been done by concealing and erasing its German past. Nothing, absolutely nothing, indicates that German farmers once acted there as founders or settlers. Even the Bulborka market, which still played a certain role under Romanian rule, has completely lost its importance. Everything is concentrated around the new Aneni-Noi district (*Rajon*). In a brochure entitled “Aneni-Noi,” which was given to us during a visit in 1987, the following is stated in Romanian, but written in Cyrillic letters:

The Aneni-Noi Rajon (district) was established on 26 May, 1941. It comprises 47 villages. Information about the past of Aneni-Noi is very sparse. At some point, long ago, the village of Koschkan stood in this location, which the Ottoman (Turkish) conquerors destroyed. For a long time afterward, no one attempted to settle here. Subsequently, Tatars from Crimea built a few winter shelters on this site, which they called “Anina”. After the liberation of Bessarabia from Turkish rule, the Tatars left, around the year 1889.

As can be seen from the documents, farmers from the neighboring villages settled in the devastated Anina. This year is referred to as the founding of the village Aneni-Noi. That is the extent of the translation from the Aneni-Noi brochure.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Russians are making great efforts to enhance the importance of the small town. Aneni-Noi is growing and thriving every day. Just a quarter of a century ago, it was a village like any other, but now residential blocks and administrative buildings rise in the town, with paved streets and electric lighting. A sports stadium with a park and swimming pool beautifies the locality. In place of the old dairy, a modern, large department store has been built, and opposite it, a large inn.

New companies were founded for the processing of the agricultural products produced, such as a canning factory and a facility for processing the fruit from the orchards in the Byktal. Also new are rose cultivation and the production of cosmetic products.

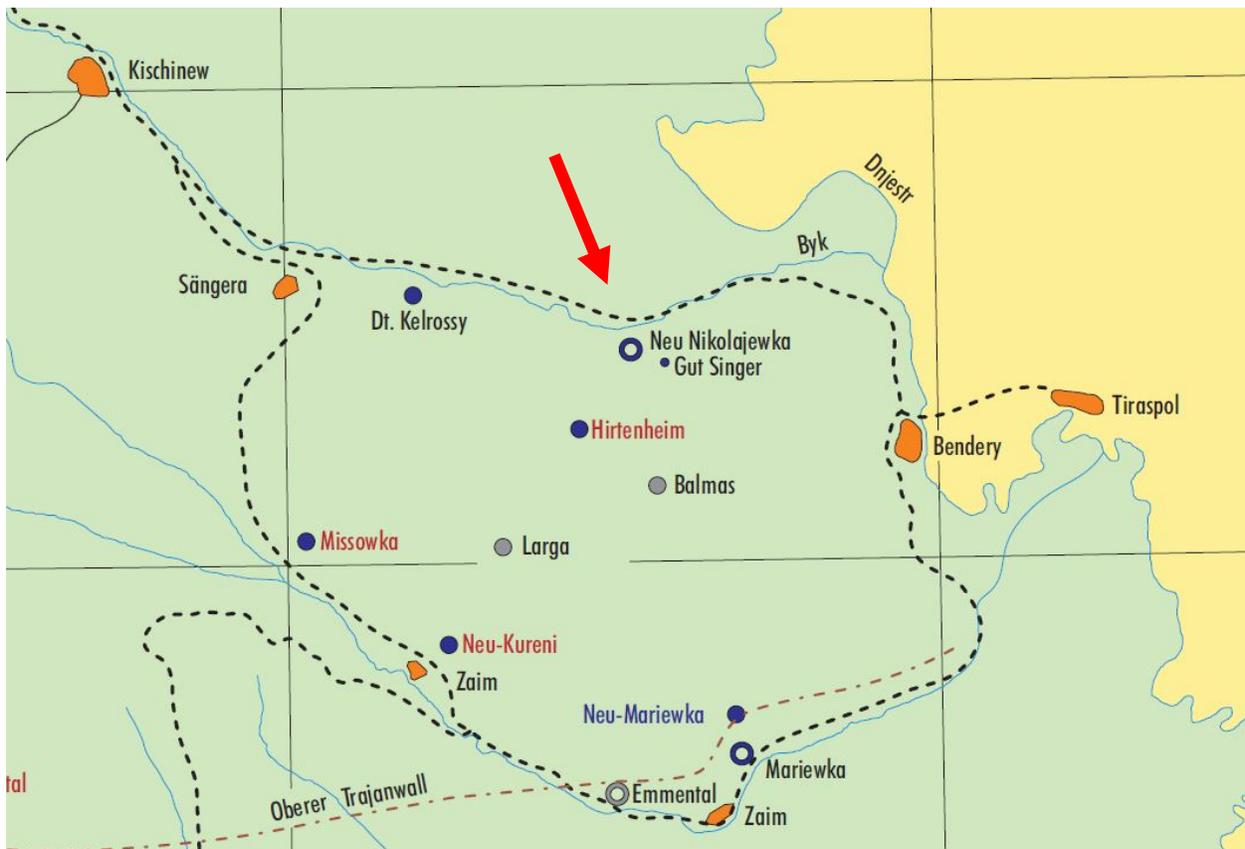
As beautiful as all this is, we must not look back with a heavy heart. We have to let go of it and keep our lovely village only in our memory.

We wish the current residents of Aneni-Noi all the best, but we must thank God that He led us out of this “paradise” and brought us back to the homeland of our fathers.

Source Citation:

Homeland Book of the Bessarabian Germans by Pastor Albert Kern and personal memories of our former teacher Edmund Damer, to whom we would like to express our heartfelt thanks here for his helpfulness.

[Translation Ends]



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