

The following was translated by Henry A. Fischer on behalf of the Zichydorf Village Association from:

DAS BANAT UND DIE BANATER SCHWABEN

BAND 5

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STADTE UND DORFER

**BEITRÄGE ZUR SIEDLUNGSGESCHICHTE
DER DEUTSCHEN IMBANAT**

Redaktion
Elke Hoffmann
Peter-Dietmar Leber
Walter Wolf

Für den Inhalt der Beiträge ist der jeweilige Verfasser verantwortlich.

**HERAUSGEGEBEN VON DER
LANDSMANNSCHAFT DER BANATER SCHWABEN**

THE BANAT AND THE SWABIANS OF THE BANAT

Volume 5

CITIES, TOWNS AND VILLAGES

**Contributions to the Settlement History
of the Germans in the Banat**

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Ostern

The beautiful community of Ostern (that was once our home) is surrounded by fertile cultivated fields in a chain of flourishing Swabian villages and is located in the north western portion of the Banat. This chain of villages includes: Hatzfeld, Grabatz, Gottlob, Grosskomlosch and Lunga along the Yugoslavian border. The community owes its name to the fact that it was founded on Easter Day of 1772, at least according to oral tradition. This supposition is far from certain and is often questioned as to whether the name can be directly associated with this Church festival. In Hungarian the community was referred to as Kiskomlós (literally meaning: small hops); the German designation Kleinkomlosch (small Komlosch) is a literal translation of it and which was also the basis for the similar name that was given to Grosskomlosch. The Romanian designation "Comlosul mic" follows the same pattern and is a literal translation as well.

From 1717-1775 the community of Ostern belonged to the Imperial Province of the Banat, the Csanad Regional Authority; later the Csanad District and the Hatzfeld Revenue Office. From 1779-1849 and 1861-1918 it belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary, Torontal County. From 1924-1948 it was part of the Kingdom of Romania, Temes-Torontal County.

The community was settled in two major phases. The settlers came from the Rhine Palatinate, Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria and other German regions as well as Austria. One group of settlers were under the leadership of the five Fraunhoffer brothers from Straubing, Bavaria who brought a crucifix with them. It was called "The Settler's Cross". This cross is now once again in Bavaria in the care of the Fraunhoffer family in Töging am Inn. Through these five brothers the family name was widespread in the community and in order to differentiate the various families they were given nicknames.

Ostern was a government settlement. The community was laid out on the basis of a government plan. Between 1772 and 1782 the community was served by the priest in Hatzfeld and from 1782 and 1785 the priest serving in St. Hubert. In the following year the community became an independent parish of its own with a resident priest. In 1785 an adobe prayer house was built on the site of the present day church. Worship took place in the school. In 1807 the church that is still standing was built and consecrated to St. Thekla. From the years 1785 to 1989 there were 23 resident priests. From 1987 onwards the parish was no longer self-sustaining.

At the beginning, the school consisted of one classroom and the pupils were provided with a Catholic education. Later the teachers of the community school were engaged by the community and paid by them. The school that had been erected at the time of the arrival of the first settlers was dismantled and a new and larger school was built in 1832 on the same site and still stands to this day and is still in good condition. In 1845 compulsory education was introduced in the Banat.

Demographic Development

Since the founding of the community of Ostern its population has been almost entirely German. In 1859 there were 1,900 Germans (97.5%) alongside of 32 Romanians, 16 Jews and some others who were living in Ostern.

Picture
Threshing in a Farm Yard
in Ostern

The following picture emerges in 1890: 2,099 Germans make up 97.3% of the total population; the number of Romanians stood at 38 and the Hungarians numbered 19. This tendency was consistent well into the 1930s (1,578 Germans = 94.1% and up until the 1940s there were 1,611 Germans = 97.8%). During the First World War Ostern suffered the loss of 63 countrymen and 48 in the Second World War.

In 1945 there were 196 persons who were forced to go to Russia as slave labourers. In 1951 there were 437 persons who were forcibly resettled in the Baragan Steppes of whom the greater part were released after five years and returned home.

The major occupation pursued by the villagers was agriculture, including livestock rearing and wine growing. Ostern was well known for raising swine. The total area of its cultivated land covered 4,646 Joch.

In 1944 there were 447 houses, 163 sowing machines, 141 mowing machines, six threshing machines, nine tractors and many other implements and equipment. In addition the villagers possessed 408 horses, 266 cows and 3,960 swine. Tradesmen operated several workshops: four blacksmiths, three locksmiths, five carpenters, five construction workers, two bakers and then there were two guesthouse operators.

The 20th Century

The major historical events of the 19th century bypassed the settlers to a great degree as they occupied themselves with the development of their landholdings and the other tasks necessary for their survival. There were upheavals as Hungary strengthened its position within the Monarchy. The area of settlement was rather compact and the isolated community of Ostern did not experience much change. The fall of the Monarchy as a result of the First World War brought about a change in the citizenship of Ostern's inhabitants. Ostern was one of seven communities that were annexed by Yugoslavia in 1919 as part of the terms of the Treaty of Trianon. It was only in 1924 when Ostern became part of Romania. Being part of Romania and as citizens of the country brought with it constitutional rights including self-determination in all spheres of life. The world economic crisis impacted upon both the highest and the lowest. The turning point came through the favourable economic ties between Romania and Germany. An unprecedented economic upswing was set in motion. Basic foodstuffs, raw materials and meat products were exported and various forms of technology were imported. Above all that included agricultural machinery and equipment but also electrical power stations that began operating in 1937. The electrification of the community was undertaken. The first

electrical apparatus that was introduced was the radio. Two years later the hemp factory was modernized electrically in its operations.

But these times were to come to an end and much too quickly. The aftermath of the war and the human and material losses suffered touched every family. The incorporation of Romania into the Soviet orbit of influence was disastrous. Deportation to Russia followed, then the forced resettlement in the Baragan Steppes and the expropriation of land and property. There in the Baragan a slow growing and stable community structure began to emerge out of nothing. Many of their achievements were destroyed or disappeared forever. They were in close proximity to the border of Yugoslavia and their communities also bordered the settlements that had received new settlers like them from across the Banat or refugees from Bessarabia. The great terror eventually ran its course. Those who managed to survive could only do so at a subsistence level. It was only in the mid 1950s that most of them succeeded in coming home again. Another difficult new beginning was about to start again. The fertility of the soil and industriousness of the inhabitants of Ostern resulted in a new upward economic trend in the life of the community. The openness to the West in the 1960s led to a better standard of living and a renewal of cultural life.

Picture
The Fraunhoffer Family in Schei in the Baragan
In front of their house in the 1950s

The social position Ostern held in the Banat was unique especially in light of its new dispensary, movie theatre and the harvest thanksgiving festival. The theatrical events and the Kirchweih celebration as well as the school graduations that involved all of the students were the high points in the cultural life of the community and were essential components of the infrastructure of the community. Cultural life in Ostern, as was true in all of the villages, was centred on the brass band, the choirs, the dance and theatre groups. The theatre group from Ostern was well known in the entire region for which we have to thank our countryman, Michael Holzinger. He left his imprint on the cultural life of the community over many succeeding decades. His poems and Kirchweih speeches that were in our spoken dialect were very much beloved by all. He was known as a dialectician and a "farmer poet" throughout the Banat. His numerous plays written in our dialect, that were often performed by our local theatre group, made a great impact and had a large following.

Picture
The Dancing Group from Ostern
By Preisträger in Hatzfeld
1952

All of the streets were connected to a water main to provide drinking water to the houses in 1970. The strengthening of a sense of community was the challenge of its own history. The so-called "coming-together-of-families" began and was now set in motion. Everyone tried to find a way to leave Romania to find a better life in the Republic of Germany and

begin a new life in freedom. At the end of the 1970s the final phase of the mass migration occurred. As the economic turndown worsened it affected every facet of life.

At the beginning of the 1980s ration cards were issued for foodstuffs. The great majority of the German minority in Romania just wanted to get away as soon as possible. The first of the abandoned houses were on the brink of falling to pieces. For those who remained they had to take up the struggle for survival. Surprisingly in 1989 the downfall of the Communist regime took place and overnight the possibility of emigration was made more possible. In a short time all of those who sought a new life and had the courage to do so left for Germany.

The sense of euphoria was great at the beginning but resettling brought surprises with it. For most, adapting to the new situation was difficult and for a time the homesickness was almost unbearable, but everyone realized there was no possibility of returning home. Visits to the old homeland raised the question: Was this my world or was that world in which I had experienced so much of what had happened simply gone? And now the disappearance of the prairie town of Ostern is part of the current five year plan of the government. Soon no one will even remember that it ever existed.

Scattered all across Germany there are those, especially the older ones among us, who take great joy in participating in the *Treffen* (reunion) held every two years. But always in the forefront there is the realization that even though we are better off: "It will never be like it once was." After more than 200 years of history, of settling, living there and resettling here no matter in which way we want to look at it we have come to the end of the history of the former German community of Ostern in the Banat.

The HOG was founded in 1982 under the leadership of Herbert Fassel in Waldkraiburg, Bavaria.

Herbert Fassel