

THE GERMAN SETTLEMENTS IN THE BELOVEZH PARISH IN CHERNIGOV PROVINCE*

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In times of need and distress, it is good to remember what our people have already experienced once before, and if there are again many who see no way of dealing with our problems except emigration, then it is important to learn from the fate and the attitude of our forefathers. "Be faithful unto death!" they call *to us*.

In 1943 the city of Gelnhausen was reminded that a number of its children had migrated to the east from 1763 to 1766. to Russia. An active emigration recruitment campaign was •aged on her behalf by special agents in western urope, especially in the western German territories which were divided into numerous sovereign entities. Western Germany was severely impoverished as a result of the Seven Years' War, which had just ended; hence, the campaign had particularly great success here. In a relatively short period of time (1764-1767), some 30,000 people, mostly from Hesse and the electorate of the Palatinate, were persuaded to go. Many villages were partly, others completely, depopulated.

There was a recruiting center in the county encompassing Gelnhausen as well as one in neighboring Buedingen now a county seat. The latter became the assembly camp for emigrants in 1766. In those communities in which such assembly camps were located, one can still find Clues as to the original homes of each emigrant because marriages took place there. Three hundred fifty-seven couples were wed in Buedingen in the period from February 24, 1766, to July 8, 1766. (Their surnames were published in 1927 by a periodical in Darmstadt.) It also happened that someone sought to escape from his creditors by emigrating.

Of the thirty-three names of those stemming from Gelnhausen, only the following, so far as is known, were represented in the Belovezh Colony, whose fate is to be depicted here:

Kronhardt (previously Gronhardt), Laukart, Schafer, Weber, Schneider.

The others presumably went to the Volga River area or other regions of Russia. In spite of that, tradition has indicated only Gelnhausen and Frankenhausen near Frankfurt on the Main as original hometowns. In any event, surnames like Schwab and Oldenburger lead to the conclusion that many also came from elsewhere.

Schneider was the name of the pastor who

accompanied them and served for thirty more years in Belovezh. If he came from Gelnhausen, that would explain the recollection of this original hometown, because the pastors's influence was always decisive.

The emigrants reached Lubeck by road or down the Elbe River. From there, transportation was by sea to Oranienbaum [now Lomonosov] near St. Petersburg [now Leningrad]. This trip took years and cost many people their lives. But many found a new home in the expanse of Russia where, with toil and sweat, they transformed swamp and barren land into productive fields. Some of the emigrants settled in the Neva River region [near Leningrad], a smaller number went to Livonia [now northern Latvia], but most went to the Volga River area. Seventy families got to the county of Borzna in the southern part of the province of Chernigov, adjacent to the border of the province of Poltava. Here they found what their old home, despite its beauty, had not been able to offer them: rich, black soil.

From the notes of the pastor's wife, Marie Neander, who lived and worked among the descendants of these seventy families at the side of her husband from 1880 to 1908, we learn the following about the development of this colony:

When in the '80s, of the last century, this isolated colony, too, was robbed by Russification of the right of autonomous government, which Empress Catherine II had promised them for "time eternal," all the documents in the hands of the mayor's office were simply thrown "onto the manure pile" and the mayor's office was changed into a Russian "volost" (municipal administration), with Russian as the official language. A colonist, Georg Becker, succeeded in saving some papers, and from them, he compiled a history of the colony, which my husband preserved in the church archives.

Empress Catherine II arranged for four villages to be laid out immediately alongside a swampy area, where a river, the Osteer, originates. The distance from the beginning of the first village to the end of the single, long row of houses was already almost 10 kilometers [6.2 miles] in our day.

The villages were named:

Gorodok, the little city, because mostly artisans lived there;

Belovezh, the white meadow or boundary field, the village in which the church was located: then came

Kalchinovka, with the municipal office; and finally Rundewiese [meaning “round meadow”].

The empress had solid houses built of oak. When we were there, only one of these old houses was still standing; it had survived for more than 100 years. The houses built later did not last that long. The residents of Gorodok, called “towns people,” were the poorest ones, because they remained farmers like the others and did not become artisans, but originally they received only 8 dessiatines [1 dessiatine = 2.7 acres] of land. The others received more. But the residents of Gorodok resisted taking “too much,” because they were afraid to drive too far from the village “because of the wolves and the Russians.” Later they dearly regretted not having taken more, because it became ever more difficult to buy land in that region, which became so densely populated.

Thus it happened that about every forty a portion of the landless youth moved to another area, where land was still available. As a result, daughter colonies of Belovezh arose, first at Grunau in Ekaterinoslav [now Dnepropetrovsk] Province, then Neusatz in the Crimea, then Alexanderdorf in the northern Caucasus Region and finally, in our time, about forty families moved to Turgay in a completely desolate area east of Orenburg [name changed to Chkalov, then changed back again] populated only by the nomadic Kirghiz. In Turgay, the colonist received 15 dessiatines of land for each male person, even the newborn, free transportation, and all kinds of assistance for procuring cattle, seeds, and equipment. Of course, people had to live in excavated huts for years before they could really build their own houses, and they had to equally long on the mother colony for money with which to buy bread, because the soil, which had never been cultivated before, produced only crop failures at first. Not until six years later did they have their own bread.

The Layout of the Settlement

In Belovezh (the whole parish also bore the name of the church village), the farmyards were rectangular, surrounded by the residence, which usually had its gable end toward the street, and auxiliary structures. A high board fence with a high gate crowned with a roof separated the yard from the street. Behind the yard there was a piece of garden land, which was fertilized and planted with tobacco, the chief source of income; then, to the south, came the community meadow; and then the swamp. By our time, the latter had been drained by many ditches, runoff channels for the flax fields, and goose ponds, but elk antlers and boat remnants could still be found, which showed that woods and water must have once

been there. Now long rows of windmills stood there and geese, which provided feather beds and wedding roasts, cropped the grass. The cows and sheep also pastured there; indeed, even herds of swine were driven there.

On the opposite side, toward the north, the cemetery (Kerchhof) was to be found beyond the fields. It lay near the Swedish fortifications from the campaign of Carl XII, who lost this territory at the Battle of Poltava in 1709. This embankment was the only elevation in an otherwise completely flat land. The graves had wooden crosses, but otherwise were not tended, because garden flowers thrived poorly in the black soil. Thus only the most beautiful wild flowers bloomed on the grave mounds, and when they were mown the village youth went to the banks to play [*spillen*] on Sundays, because the woods were 4 kilometers [2.5 miles] away.

Right of Succession and Means of Livelihood

Our small colony, of which no one knew, to which no one paid any attention, and which lay like an Oasis in Russian surroundings, had to divide each inheritance among all the sons, according to Russian law. A daughter inherited Property only if there was no son. If a father unlucky” enough to have eight sons, they all became poor. In the colonies in the Black Sea area, which were not settled until after the wars of liberation [from Napoleonic control], the provision that only the youngest son could inherit the property and that no farm could be reduced by even 1 dessiatine was honored from the first. The farm had to have the full 60 dessiatines in order to be able to support the necessary livestock and the necessary labor force. Only in exceptional cases, when both had learned a trade, could a father split his farm between two sons. Because of the crazy Russian regulations by which we were bound, wealth or poverty really were not a matter of merit or blame but altogether due to chance or to the decree and will of God, although envy did not fall to impute all manner of wrongdoing to the rich.

We had an extremely rich man in the village of Belovezh; he was known as “the rich” Laukart, to distinguish him from the other Laukarts. He had purchased four farms over the course of time and had established an attractive stud farm. He had a daughter, along with an obedient son-in-law, residing on each property. When his wife bore him an eighteenth child, and it was finally a son again, he was very happy.

Beginning when he was still small, Johnny [*Hannesche*] accompanied his father in a small spring wagon on the latter’s daily trips on his estates, and he grew up aware that “All this will be yours one day!”

“Oh, Johnny,” I heard his mother once say to him, “how rich and lucky you are!”

She had not gained happiness from this wealth.

Rather, as the only daughter-in-law, she had always had to go to work in the fields, along with the maidservants, and had had to leave her small children with her mother-in-law. Thus it happened more than once that when she came home at night, she had found her little one dead in the cradle. A child had simply suffocated in its pillow without having had any illness. The mother-in-law had had so much to do with the "poultry" that she had not had any time to attend to the child. Johnny and his wife were to have it better one day than she and her daughters, who, of course, were also only maidservants.

The well-to-do, as well as the poor, farmer allowed his children to marry at an early age, eighteen or even sixteen, and they all worked together with the parents until there was a couple living in each of the four rooms of the house. If there was another son, or even several more, the father had to build his oldest son who often already, had grown children himself a house at the end of the village. Hence, the villages, which had been so small originally, had already grown to more than 160 farmyards by the time we arrived. Only Gorodok was smaller, having only about seventy.

This unfortunate village had burned down almost completely in 1878; only the buildings of a couple of farmyards, which were at the very beginning of the village and upwind, remained standing. The farmyards were, of course, too close to one another, with the thatched roofs of the auxiliary buildings abutting each other. Therefore, a fire was unstoppable if there was a strong wind. A fire department and fire extinguishing equipment did not exist until long after this calamity.

Baron Koskull, who was tax inspector in Borzna, was the first to introduce a voluntary fire department in the county seat, around 1900, and drilled the volunteers himself. The Baltic baron did that; a Russian would not have been so likely to think of something like that in those days. But since he was a baron and an imperial official, he was, of course, one of the first destined to be shot in 1917.

The unfortunate residents of Gorodok were taken in by the people of the other villages on that occasion and provided with all the necessities, but they nevertheless fell deeply into debt. In case of a fire emergency, all the colonists were united as one person. It was the custom to help one another in times of need, except that this was not done very willingly with cash. When it was done, high interest rates were charged.

In general, the children were obedient to their parents including the grown sons in the choice of a wife. If there was any instance where a son insisted on his choice and brought a wife who was not acceptable to his parents' home, the poor "*Schnerch*"

[a derogatory colloquialism for the unwanted daughter-in-law] had such a hard time of it later at the hands of her "*Schwieger*" [mother-in-law] that she left even a beloved husband in the lurch and returned to her parents. Then the minister had a hard time reuniting the two parties again. The husband was the master of the house, and if a wife remonstrated, she had to expect a whipping.

Family life was, on the whole, sound. Between 1880 and 1908 only four illegitimate children were born in the four villages. The fact that the young men had to serve in the military from the age of twenty-one to the age of twenty-three did create some difficulties for family life.

So much for the good customs of our colony, much of this certainly preserved by the work of

the predecessors of my husband, above all by already mentioned first pastor of the congregation, Pastor Schneider. The congregation built small, wooden shrines [*Holzkapellen*], which later were replaced by wooden crosses, over his grave and that of his successor, Pastor Horn of Moscow, who also labored eighteen years in the colony.

My husband's immediate predecessor was Pastor Strauss of Courland [southwestern Latvia], a peculiar man and very strict. For example, he could not tolerate the youth cracking their whips, instead of deferentially taking off their caps as the Russians did when they drove their cattle past the church. They must have done so deliberately in order to irritate the pastor. Furthermore, he cut down the fruit trees in the pastor's garden with his own hands, "because they only enticed the youth to steal."

Pastor Strauss could no longer undertake the strenuous trips to the members of the congregation throughout the province. The work in the diaspora [parish] increased, since many German skilled laborers and white-collar employees in prominent positions came into the province with the growth of industry. Pastor Strauss traveled by horse-drawn mail coach, with a lot of baggage, a camp bed, and a servant. Despite that, the travel was too exhausting for him in the long run, so he moved to Poltava. But before his departure, he initiated the construction of a brickyard on land belonging to the parsonage. This was where the bricks to meet the needs of the farmers, but above all for the planned construction of a new church, were baked.

Villages Without Taverns

I must say one more good thing about our parish: when we arrived, there were no longer any taverns in our four villages. When the government introduced a liquor monopoly, each village was allowed to close by a public resolution all pubs where the liquor purchased at the government liquor store

could be consumed in public company. Our four villages had done so, while the Catholic villages of Gross and Klein-Werder [meaning large and small island], which had been settled at the same time, had not. There, one was told, even women lay drunk in the streets on workdays. Of course, there were also drunkards in our villages, but people were ashamed of them and their relatives avoided tempting them. Laughing at a drunk person was considered unseemly, which was certainly a sign of good upbringing but the poor wives of habitual drinkers had a hard time. Once I met a woman, whose husband had gotten into the habit of drinking during the [1904-05] war with Japan, crying over her songbook. The song which she had just read began, "Poor widow, do not cry!" She was worse off than a widow and commented that, for once, she had downright cried her heart out over the beautiful song. Good that she could read!

Customs and Manners

Now I must also relate something about the wedding customs. I have already mentioned that the parents decided which girl was to be sought for their son to marry. If he was asked and if he was discreet he was of the same opinion as his parents. If there were any pains of separation, they were brief and slight in comparison with a long life without peace in the home or in the heart. If a feeler had been extended to the parents of the prospective bride and there had been an encouraging reaction, then and only then did one proceed to the formal solicitation and to the *Weinkauf* [glass of wine to seal the bargain], which had the validity of an engagement. If an engagement was ever broken off later, which happened very rarely, then the responsible party had to pay all the costs.

The very next Saturday, the pastor received from the district office an *Uffrufzedel* [A *ufrufzettel*, which means the proclamation of the banns], which read:

"Das derjun(g) Gesel(l) H. O. Georgs Sohn, mit der jung Frau Scharlotte R. Wilhelms Tochter ehelich zu verbinden kein Hinternis in wege stet, wird hie mit beschient. OberSchulz N.N."

("That there is no hindrance to the marriage of the bachelor, H. O., Georg's son, to the maiden, Scharlotte R., Wilhelm's daughter, is hereby certified. Mayor, N. N.")

Then, after three Sundays, the wedding followed in the church on Tuesday or Thursday. Because the festivities before and after the marriage lasted for days, my husband undertook no weddings on other workdays in order to observe the Sabbath. All weddings occurred in the fall, when the geese were fat; only widowers married in other seasons

also.

Some days before the wedding, the *Hochzeitläder* [wedding inviters], usually the godfathers of the groom and the bride, came riding on horses decorated with flowers and ribbons and with similarly decorated caps in their hands, inviting 'as many households [*Hauser*] as there were roast geese available.

"Mer sind geschickt von Braut und Brautigam und beiderseitige Eltern, Georg O. und Wilhelm R., auf den kun/tigen Diens tag aufderHochzeit zu erscheinen. Also bitten wir das ganze Haus, Grosse und Kleine, alles was den Loffel lecken kann."

("We have been sent by the bride and groom and the parents on both sides, Georg O. and Wilhelm R., [to invite you] to be present at the wedding next Tuesday. Therefore, we invite the entire household, large and small, all who can lick a spoon")

They always brought a loaf of nice black bread and a fully dressed goose along for the pastor, who could not possibly "be present" at all the weddings but yet was supposed to have something to partake of. That was a very friendly custom, and since there were twenty-five to thirty weddings each fall, this was not insignificant for the domestic economy of the *Pastorschen* [pastor's wife].

The wedding always took place in the home of the bride and began the previous evening with a dance for the unmarried young people. The very monotonous dance music was provided by two pitiable fiddles. The costs of this hospitality were shared equally by both households. That people often went into debt to defray these expenses was not a good thing, but we did not succeed in effecting any change. When a young widower provided only one meal after marrying a second wife, this was strongly held against him.

On the wedding day the groom was brought to the home of the bride very early in the morning by the two bridesmaids. The wedding inviters accompanied the decorated wagon with shooting and hurrahs. With great solemnity, the bridal couple danced a round dance [*Reigen*] with the bridesmaids while the entire assembly of guests breakfasted on butter and honey, pickled meat and sausage, and a shot of whiskey. Then people drove quietly to the church, but on the way back there were again gleeful shouting and shooting. The parents awaited the young couple at the gate to the yard.

All four rooms (all houses were built according to the same plan: each had two rooms to the left and two rooms to the right of the hallway leading down the middle) were completely cleared out, with benches and tables borrowed from half the village set along all the walls. The old people already sat in their seats in the first room when the young people arrived from the

church. The two parental couples did not seat themselves at the tables but instead, with the assistance of the neighbor ladies, served the guests and urged them to eat and drink.

Things were liveliest in the room where the young couple sat; there the godmother of the bride boastfully held sway. She had taken off one of the shoes of the bride upon her entrance, and the wedding inviters were now forced to bid good money for it. The more silly witticisms she managed, the more expensive the shoe became.

Meanwhile, people dined on rich beef soup with rice and a lot of spice one tureen for each four guests. Only the pastor and his wife received individual dishes and tin spoons; the others ate out of the tureen with beautiful, varnished Russian wooden spoons. If a tureen was empty, it was refilled. Then came the much renowned "black broth," a soup made from the blood of geese, sweet and sour, with raisins and baked dumplings in it; one could easily eat himself sick on this. A good hostess also sent a small jug of this to the pastor's children, who came along to the wedding only very rarely.

After people had feasted long enough and the shoe had been successfully sold, people crowded together even more closely, and in the small rectangle, which was cleared in the middle, the young couple and the two bridesmaids danced a round dance with dead serious men. Stamping energetically and sweating and turning around each other, they completed the strenuous task. I never understood whether they got any joy out of this. The old couples danced with each other quite differently. They called their dance the "Rhineland," slow and with all kinds of roguish gestures, but that was not danced until the evening

After the aforementioned four had stamped around enough, the godmother of the bride appeared in the door. High above her head, she held a large, beribboned pillow, on which lay the bride's headdress, embroidered in the back and in the front with wide silk ribbons. It was the duty of the godmother to donate the pillow and the headdress to the bride.

The screeching fiddles, which had accompanied the dance with sad, monotone beats, became silent, and the women began to sing the old "wedding songs": the dear old folk songs they had brought along from their old homeland but which they had unfortunately had to sing over the course of many years completely without guidance or supervision. However, they were rendered enthusiastically, with ear-splitting "screams":

*Es war em Mddchen von 18 Jahr,
Das hatt' 2 Buben lieb.
Der eine war em Schdfer,
Der andere des Kaufmanns Sohn.*

*Da ging das Madchen zum Bruder:
Wen sie wohi nehmen sollt'?*

*"Lass du den Schafer fahren,
Nimm du des Kaufmanns Sohn!"*

*Wie das der Schafer vernom men,
Hat er zum Mddchen gesagt:*

*"So soll dich der Teufel holen
An deinen Hochzeits tag!"*

(There was a girl of eighteen years
Who loved two boys.

One was a shepherd,

The other a merchant's son.

Then the girl went to her brother:

Which one should she take?

"Let the shepherd go;

Take the merchant's son!"

When the shepherd heard that,

He said to the girl:

"May the devil take you

On your wedding day!")

This was depicted in the most horrible way, with the devil finally pulling her by the hair through the window.

The heartrending farewell song went:

Wollt ihr mich noch einmal sehen,

Schaut hinab ins tiefe Tal.

Nun leb wohl Du lie ber Vater, Mutter, B ruder,

Schwester,

Nun lebt wohl, auf Wiedersehn!

(If you want to see me again,

Look down into the deep valley.

Farewell, dear father, mother, brother, sister,

Farewell, until we meet again!

Besides that, they sang: "Oh, Strassburg!
Oh, Strassburg! You Wonderful City!" or the
'Lazy Greta (Gritche)':

Ach wer em faules Gritche hat,

Der kann wohl lustig sein.

Sie schldft ja alle Morgen,

Bis dass die Sonne scheint,

Und der Hirt zum Walde treibt.

Der Vater von dem Acker hommt,

Das Gritche liegt und schla ft.

Ach Gritche, lie bes Gritche,

Der Hirt treibt schon in'n Waid,

Unsre Kuh steht noch im Stall.

Das Gritche aus dem Bette springt,

Das ilcicklein flunk zur Hand

Und geht das Kuhchen melken

Mit ungewaschner Hand;

Ist das nicht 'ne grosse Schand.

Und wie sie's Kiihchen g'molken hat,

Giesst sie frisch Wasser zu.

Ach Vater, lie ber Vater,

Viel Milch gibt unsre Kuh.

Denn das macht die lange Ruh!

(Oh whoever has a lazy Greta
 Can certainly be jolly.
 The sleeps every morning
 Until the sun shines
 And the cowherd drives [the cattle] to the
 woods.
 Father comes from the field,
 [But] Greta [still] lies and sleeps.
 Oh, Greta, dear Greta,
 The cowherd is already driving (the cattle to
 the woods.
 Our cow is still in the barn.
 Greta jumps out of bed,
 Quickly grabs her skirt
 And goes to milk the cow
 With unwashed hands;
 Isn't that a big shame?
 And after she has milked the cow,
 She adds fresh water.
 Oh, father! dear father!
 Our cow gives much milk
 For that is the result of the long rest.)

The bridegroom, who always looked very earnest and solemn this whole day, and the bride, who was always swimming in tears, were now placed in the middle of the room. The singing women encircled them, and while the love songs, .th their often very sad endings, resounded, the bride, who was often crying loudly, had the paper flowers which were sewn on her hair, and from which ten to twenty wide silk ribbons (her supply of bonnet ribbons to last a lifetime) hung down her back, cut off.

In fact, a bride had to be properly supplied with all the clothing she would ever need: homespun and home-woven linen tablecloths, bed sheets and underwear; at least twelve color fully striped woolen skirts, which could stay erect when they were set up because they had been woven so tightly and pressed in folds; dresses which consisted of a sleeveless bodice, a jacket with folds in front (the Mutzen) and a pleated skirt with ribbons sewn on; countless towels and brightly colored aprons, which were worn. Only on dresses of purchased cloth for church on Sundays (no aprons were worn over home-woven skirts, "because they did not absorb dirt"); and countless bonnets embroidered in black and red, adorned in back with a large bow (the Schlupp), for a married woman had no time anymore to sew bonnets. Widows wore white, quilted bonnets. The [bride's] hope chest was large enough, but unfortunately not always full enough.

The godmother now dressed the bride's hair in a different way. As a maiden, she had until now worn a single braid (*Horschwanz*), , which was braided tightly to the very end and to which a broad ribbon was tied. The hair was parted in the middle

and greased with butter, so that it would look as dark as possible and glisten. Now it was combed back, coils were rolled on both sides, and the godmother placed the bonnet, without which she was never to show herself again, on the bride's head. Then she laid the pillow on the bride's lap, handed the bridegroom the fur cap, and called upon the guests to give presents to the bridal couple.

The guests came forward singly and laid their presents for the two, who were always encouraged to cry so that they would get more, on the lap or in the cap, respectively. Meanwhile, the long rack wagon, on which the bed, the chest, and the spinning wheel stood, had been driven up. The farewell song rang out, the bride bid her family a touching, tearful farewell, and together with her husband, she stepped aboard the wagon, which was crammed chock-full of young people.

Standing up, they extended their hands to each other over the load and drove through the village, singing, to the house of the bridegroom, whose parents, standing at the gate to the yard, awaited them with "salt and bread," according to Russian custom.

The mother-in-law took the bride by the hand and guided her first to every corner of the house and then also to the barn, the stables, and the storerooms. After a fortifying drink, they returned to the wedding house.

Meanwhile, the older people had danced , pastor and his family were gone, and now it really got to be merry. The evening meal was ready; the fat dripping roast goose and the millet gruel with honey interrupted the pleasure of dancing, which lasted until morning. People went home only to take care of the livestock and the children; then they returned for breakfast in order to continue the fun. The wedding lasted for as long as there was anything left to eat and drink, often into the third day. That was just the way it had to be. How long it took the fathers of the bridal couple to pay off their debts was a question no one asked. They alone had to deal with that and many of them were never able to do so.

Of course, people lived very modestly the rest of the time, eating black bread since more rye than wheat was grown and especially potatoes with lard or oil, buckwheat porridge, and Russian mixed vegetable soup ('borscht'). In summer there were plenty of cucumbers, watermelons, and pumpkins (which were baked).

In cases of severe illness, people were wont to call someone to "charm away" the illness, despite the pastor's explicit prohibition. If someone had died, the *Totenfrau* [layer-out] would wash him. Indeed, it was said of the residents of Belovezh, who did not have bathrooms like the Russians, that they were washed properly only twice in their life after birth and after death.

As long as the deceased lay in the house, relatives and neighbors held a wake, with lights left burning. The casket was always carried, never driven, and kept closed, not open as the Russians did. A special church covering was placed over it. But before it was lowered, it was opened once more at the graveside, and then the wailing of the women, with words and loud lamentations remindful of the hired mourners of earlier times, began. After the burial, "consolation wine," schnapps, and a hearty meal were served at home.

In the winter, the youth gathered in the spinning room, where secular, "profane" songs, as they were called in contrast to sacred ones, were sung.

The School Situation

Now I have related to you at length how the residents of Belovezh behaved, but, of course, we had been sent there to see to it that they changed, and that was a heavy task. Where did one begin.

First, the construction of the new church. The old one was very small, modest, and cold. My husband suffered particularly from the fumes of the many wax candles which burned on the altar; the rich donated these to the church on both suitable and unsuitable occasions, as was done among the Russians. A carved wooden angel, which hung above the altar as the only ornament, had been turned as black as a Moor by the smoke.

The women chattered, and the small children, whom they were accustomed to bringing along, howled during the worship services. The singing, accompanied by the sexton, Phillip Tipelius, on a small, often faltering organ, was slow, but we were assured that it had been much slower previously. Moreover, inserting "musical" flourishes between the lines had made the singing "more beautiful"! These flourishes may have been necessary in order to make it possible for at least some of the people to figure out the letters of the next words, because their reading ability was pitiful.

There were no schoolhouses or schoolteachers. Around November, when the first snow fell and it really became impossible to drive the cattle to the meadow, people started inquiring which villager had a room free, so that the so-called "school" could be held there. Whoever had a spare room got the school and the duty to admonish the children to learn.

"Children, learn [*lärnt*] I heard such a host call out again and again when the children were noisy, at the same time rapping his stick on the table.

How the children learned was their business, he concerned himself with that only when one of them approached him to ask what a word was.

Each child had its own book, which it brought from home and which had been taken along from Germany. One child had a catechism, the other

one a songbook. In these the child spelled out the individual words laboriously, without understanding anything about the content. Only very few, especially talented ones made enough progress by this "method" to memorize anything.

My heart bled when children who were barely fourteen came and requested early confirmation because they were needed at home for work. Church rules specified: no child was to be confirmed until it could read and had memorized the catechism.

The reports of the general superintendents from St. Petersburg [now Leningrad] who had visited the congregation every twelve to fifteen years and had "imposed an obligation" on the residents to build a schoolhouse, had been signed by congregation and church supervisors and lay in the church archives but how was that to be accomplished? Who was to pay for this? No one had an answer, and so things remained as they were.

Custom is known to be stronger than any thing else in the world: "Our forefathers did it this way" (also in Germany before 1760!), "why should we change it?"

And the women opined, "*Mir sein aach uf dern A verkomfermiert wore, und wann die Kin ner zu viel larnen, dann folgen die net meh, un iberhaupt die Mddche, zu was braucke die das?*" ["We were also confirmed this way (barely literate, having progressed only to A) and if the children learn too much, they will not obey us, and especially the girls why do they need that (education)?"]

"Formerly," of course, the bride had to give the groom as a wedding gift a shirt which she herself had spun, woven, and sewn as well as mittens and stockings which she herself had knitted. "Now," all those things were purchased, more conveniently and less expensively, at the annual fair. But to exchange a convenient and inexpensive custom for an inconvenient and expensive one who likes to do that?

Building of the Church

Construction of a church had already been decided upon and had begun by the time my husband assumed his duties in Belovezh on January 1, 1880. Pastor Strauss had established a brickyard on a piece of land belonging to the church. It had already produced the bricks needed for the construction project. The required amount of money had been raised from the revenue of the bricks, which has been sold self-taxation, and collections. Pastor Wasem from Kiev, who had substituted in Belovezh after Pastor Strauss's departure and had pushed the project strongly, had already had a German architect in Kiev draw up a plan. The governor of Chernigov had given his approval.

The man in charge of the construction sent [shilled] workers from Kiev. The old church was torn

down, and the cornerstone of the new one was laid on June 29, 1884. By the fall, the masons were done and the church had a roof.

During the winter the windows and doors were finished in Kiev, and the altar and pulpit, which the Kiev congregation was donating to the residents of Belovezh, were built. A picture of the resurrection of Christ for the altar, two beautiful stained glass windows (Christ in Gethsemane, and Christ with Thomas), chandeliers, and altar draping were ordered.

The new church was dedicated on June 29, the old church festival day [*Kirchweihtag*] of the congregation in 1885. It was known as the "Church of St. Peter and St. Paul" and June 29, the saints' day for these two, continued to be the highlight of the year, the nicest festival at the nicest time of the year, which the church members from elsewhere in the province also attended

It had cost 21,000 rubles to build the church, and except for the altar from Kiev, no outside assistance had been needed. The four villages had done it themselves, and they had provided all the necessary [unskilled] labor themselves as well! a wonderful time! The general superintendent, Laaland, came from St. Petersburg, Pastor Wasem from Kiev, and my parents came.

My father was pastor in Prishib, a German colony farther south.) We had practiced singing as a choir in four voices. The celebration was uplifting.

The next Sunday Pastor Wasem preached a very strong sermon about the need for a regular school.

The only thing for which the money had not sufficed was a new organ. It came several years later, ordered from Ludwigsburg. The rich Laukart also donated a new church bell. Now there was fresh enthusiasm for the even more difficult task of getting a school.

In view of the great distance from one end of the four villages to the other and the every muddy conditions which made travel so difficult in the spring and in the fall, it was clear that just one German school, besides which Russian schools would also have been necessary, would not have taken care of our problem.

Two Russian schools, each serving two villages, with one Russian teacher for every twenty children, had already been built by the district. (They were torn down when the four new ones were built.) But the schoolhouses were much too small to accommodate all the children, so they were attended only by those boys who knew that they would have to serve in the military. The German language and religion were not actually taught there. Nominally, the pastor was the religion teacher, but he was not in

a position to work in the 5chOOls because of his travels throughout the province, so he was "represented" by the sexton, Tipelius. It was a difficult situation.

Something had to happen, and it did. A petition was sent to the Benevolent Fund (our Gustav-Adolf Society) asking for money needed to acquire two school benches, a blackboard, and some school books which we received.

From large families we asked for eight boys who had already been confirmed and who were interested in more education, even though they had already attended the Russian district school. We wanted to train them as teachers for these small private schools [*Winkelschulen*]. It was a rash idea, but we tried it. I tried to help them understand the methods of how to teach reading and writing and gave them reading and writing lessons, always with the children who were to be taught by them in mind, as well as lessons in the recitation of Bible stories and singing; my husband instructed them in catechism.

This happened for three short winters, and then Philipp Kampf and Wilhelm Schtitz were ready to be appointed to the two district schools as "deputies" of my husband. Konrad Tipelius, the son of the sexton, and Jakob Oldenburger, who later became teachers, were already studying under Philipp Kampf.

But that was far from adequate. There was room for forty children, at most, in each of the district schools, whereas we had well over one hundred in each village. The other young people [we trained] had to be hired for the small private schools and were paid 50 rubles per winter. "And that for such young guys that they did not even have beards yet, of whom the children would have no fear." It was very difficult.

My husband came out of the church assemblies dripping with sweat and very disheartened. I had already experienced such things with my parents. In 1870, when the pastors in Bessarabia had sought to introduce into the schools a reader which contained the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood, the settlers had said, "Our children tell too many lies already. If they are now taught in school that wolves and foxes can talk, that's the limit!" And they smashed the pastors' windows with the readers.

On that occasion, the police helped. But we did not want to proceed that way. We armed ourselves with sticks, because of the ill tempered dogs, and with lanterns, because of the mud and the darkness. Each accompanied by a young teacher, we went house to house during the long autumn evenings, explaining to every head of household why slates and primers were necessary and that only our young teachers knew how to deal with these things.

The result was that the people said, "Well if the pastor and his wife themselves come to see us, then

we have to acquiesce.” The primers and the slates were ordered, the young teachers hired, and when the children soon learned to read, the parents believed that sorcery was involved. But what was puzzling is that no child wanted to stay at home.

We still needed the schoolhouses. At that time, the government loaned every village which wanted to build a school, including our villages, 1000 rubles for a Russian school.

The community’s resolution to build a school had to be signed by two-thirds of the people. We knew that the school would cost 4000 rubles if it was to be big enough.

The villagers had assembled, evening was approaching, and the cattle were beginning to bellow when the mayor, Johannes Reimgen, removed the key from his chamber door and said, “No one gets out of here until the resolution has been subscribed to by all!” No escape was now possible; people signed and went home, shaking their heads.

In 1897 the first schoolhouse was dedicated in Gorodok; the next year the second in Belovezh; the other villages built schools, too, so that we now had a school for children from the eighth to the fourteenth year in every village. From the eighth to the tenth year, they attended the German preparatory school where they received only one hour of language instruction from the Russian teacher, since they knew only their mother tongue from at home. They were required to go to the Russian school from the eleventh to the thirteenth year. Those students who had completed their [regular course of] studies by thirteen received further instruction from the German teacher. At fourteen they were confirmed.

Every year a number of children took the final examination in the presence of Russian district officials an event to which the parents also came. The children read fluently in both languages understood what they were reading, and could tell you what they had read. They did arithmetic only in Russian, but they knew the catechism and Bible stories well.

A library was established and was used diligently. Now it became practical to require every bridal couple to buy a Bible, and every teacher received a Bible intended for popular use annotated with explanations by Ruprecht.

The Last Years

Pastor Jurgens served in Belovezh as recently 1909-1915. Then he moved to the North Caucasus Region. From 1915 to 1924 the congregation had no pastor. How faithfully it preserved its heritage, nevertheless, is indicated by the short report, “Firm in Faith,” by the divisional pastor, Lessing, who visited the congregation in March 1918. In 1924 Konrad Tipelius was able to participate in the council session

of the Evangelical general synod in Moscow as the delegate of the Belovezh congregation. After that, Pastor Mollmann came to Belovezh, but he was later deported. Since 1933 this congregation has not been heard from.

The population of the individual villages in 1940 was as follows:

	Men	Women	Children	Total	Abducted
1. Gorodok	69	111	206	386	26
2. Belovezh	142	211	289	642	31
3. Kalchinovka	204	234	408	846	30
4. Rundwiese	163	231	415	809	38
5. Gross- and Klein-Werder	261	341	441	1043	4
6. Khreshchaten	4	80	120	204	64
	843	1208	1879	3930	193

The first four villages were Evangelical and remained strictly German as a result of the German-oriented work of the Evangelical church and school, even though the Bolsheviki had banned these institutions. All of the residents, including the older village youth, could speak, read, and write German.

On the other hand, the people in the Catholic villages of Gross- and Klein-Werder began to lose their knowledge of the German language already in the last decades of the previous century as a result of the Polish- and Ukrainian-oriented work of the Catholic clergy. At the end, no one except the mayor and a few old people in these villages knew German. Nevertheless, they thought of themselves and identified themselves as Germans and were also perceived thus by the Ukrainians living in the area. In spite of the fact that they now spoke Ukrainian, only two German men in these villages married Ukrainian Women (out of 210 families).

The mayor of Werder came from Khreshchaten. This village 80 kilometers [50 miles] farther east half Evangelical and half Catholic and, despite its complete isolation from other German manages and in totally Ukrainian surroundings, remained purely German.

These villages, secure in their existence until the First World War, have been totally destroyed. In 1933 many, especially children, died from starvation. The parsonage and the church were torn down, with the stones used for building a movie theater. The uncompleted structure, without windows, has towered skyward for ten years already, surrounded by dilapidated clay houses, on which no maintenance work has been done for twenty-five years. Since instruction in the German language was prohibited in 1937, there are no German teachers there any more either.

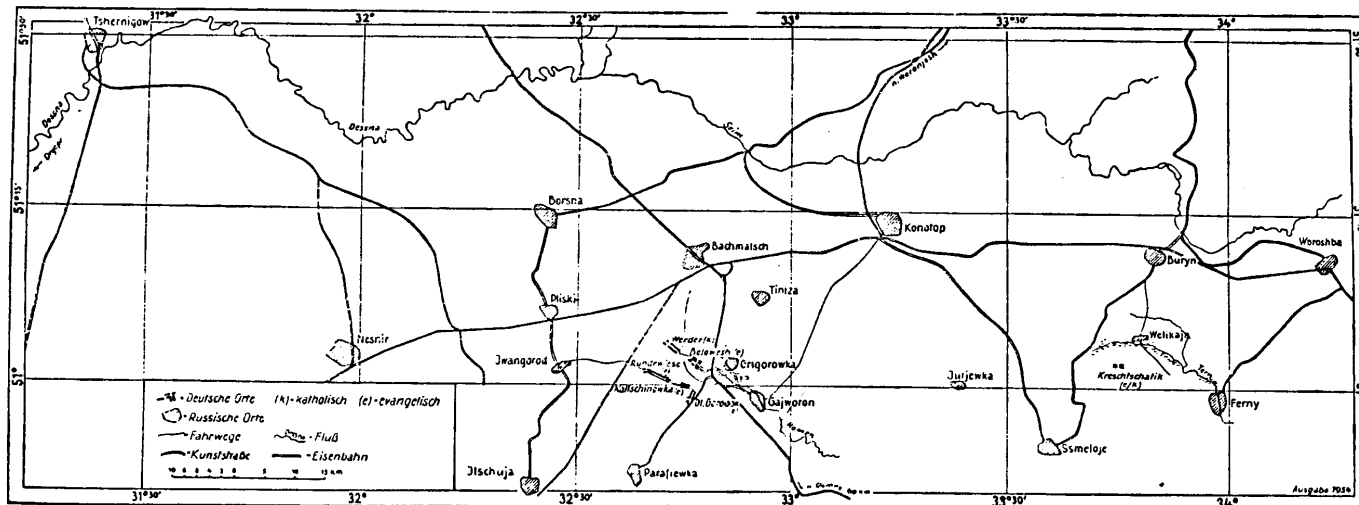
Comments by Editor of the *Heimatbuch*

Many readers may consider this article a bit too long. Just the same, we felt we had to reproduce it in

full. It deals with an area which lay far away from the other compact German settlements. The fact that these villages gave up their German linguistic heritage in part but only in part should not becloud our judgment of them. Indeed, we must regard it as a great blessing that these people, despite their isolation, did not lose their German identity or their deep faith, but held on to them steadfastly in the bottom of their hearts, they remained German and

held on to the faith of their forefathers. It required only a stimulus, such as a visit by a German military chaplain, for the inner being of these people to surface.
*

**The observations of the German military chaplain who visited the Belovezh Colony during World War II will be printed in a future issue of the Journal.*



Map of the German colonies of the Belovezh District in the province of Chernigov. Drawn by Dr. Karl Stumpp.