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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
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**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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Bethausen

Bethausen is located within the outer rim of the German settlement area of the Banat approximately 26 kilometres southeast of Lugosch. The Bega River flows by the southern edge of the community. The rectangular shape of the original village plan at the time of the settlement has been basically maintained even though understandably much of it has changed. The history of the establishment of the community differs from most of the other settlements in the Banat due to the fact that it was settled over one hundred years later. The founders came from Zichydorf in Torontal County and were Germans who were unable to purchase land or make a living there. They organized themselves into an official group with the plan to migrate elsewhere in June of 1881. Franz Gulding was the head of the group that chiefly attracted younger able-bodied men. For example there were the following among them: Michael Butto, Jakob Bär, Peter Schönherr, Michael Niessner, Thobias Kapitän, Jakob Engel, Franz Singer as well as others who later joined the group. Count Bethlen, who was the steward of the Domain at that time, assigned the would-be settlers some fields adjacent to the Romanian village of Cladova. The new community was established there which was given the name: Bethlenhaza ("Bethlen" named after the Count and "haza" which is Hungarian for home or house.) As a result of the political and territorial changes that took place after the First World War, the name of Bethlenhaza would also effected because the new powers that were now in control wanted the community to have a Romanian name. However, that did not happen, because the representatives of the community were opposed to it and over time they succeeded in renaming it: Bethausen. Despite all kinds of efforts on the part of the government to change it, the name of community has remained the same to this day.

The settlers were all of German origin and their forebears had primarily come from Swabia, Alsace, Lorraine and Bohemia. The first group of migrants arrived on March 5, 1883 and the second group arrived on March 10th. Their new home presented them with a rather dreary and desolate picture. There was a massive forest that was named the Hosiak stretching from the railway station to the Bega River. The road was covered in mud and precisely where the village was to be located the area was under two metres of water caused by the unrelenting rain. The whole area made such a wretched impression on the settlers that several left weeping on their way as they returned back home to Zichydorf. In the following years the trees in the forest were felled and the logs were floated down the Bega River to Temesvár. This work took fifteen years to complete. Because they arrived when the weather was still winter-like and cold the settlers had to seek food and shelter in the nearby village of Cladova. The first task of the forebears of the future inhabitants of Bethausen was the building of emergency huts for shelter. Franz Gulding, their recognized leader, was elected as the community *Richter* to represent the community in all its official affairs. The land that was assigned to the community was divided into 177 plots and each house had an allotment of 8 Joch (4.6 acres). Each house lot consisted of 2,900 square metres. The first large buildings that were erected were the school (1884/1885), the church (at the end of 1885), the post office (1896) and the water powered mill (Raz family) and larger mill (Griesbach family), the bridge over the Bega River (1900) at a cost of 1,000,000 Forint. The First World War severely effected the inhabitants of Bethausen as was true of all of the communities in the Banat. Many men

had to give up their lives and the community experienced and suffered an economic downturn.

In the mid-1920s Bethausen consisted of three broad parallel streets with a beautiful square in the centre of the village where the church was located. The town hall was across the street from the church. The number of houses totalled 179 that were occupied by 200 families. The local population engaged in agricultural pursuits cultivating the soil and livestock rearing. In addition there were a large number of skilled tradesmen. In 1924, the community Notary, Adolf Dobrov, was successful in procuring the right to hold a market fair in the village three times a year which eventually became very successful. In 1925 Bethausen was accepted into the membership of the "German Swabian Cultural Union" and the "German Folk Group Association."

The period between the two great wars can be described as the heyday and golden age of the life of the Germans in Bethausen. Everything that had been achieved and established led to this high point in its economic development as well as defining the cultural and spiritual aspirations of its people. There were now times when alongside of industriousness and fortitude there was also a sense of satisfaction and a fine sense of community that was felt among the people; in other words people were simply well off. The beginning of the Second World War was also in another sense the beginning of the end of Bethausen. From this point onward the German population of Bethausen began to leave, never to return. Some, like for instance, the Herold family, J. Krawanya and J. Scheidnas emigrated to America. At the beginning of the war a portion of the young able-bodied men were called up to serve in the Romanian Army and were sent to the Eastern Front. A remainder of the men, 53 in all, joined up with the Waffen-SS. The war and its aftermath left deep scars in its wake in the life of Bethausen: material losses, persecution and banishment.

In January 1945 a new period of suffering began for 83 inhabitants who were forcibly deported to slave labour in Russia. It was a discriminatory act of "recruitment" in Bethausen. This operation took place during two successive nights. Those affected were allowed to take some necessities with them and were kept under guard at the school. They were taken to Lugosch by horse and wagon and after a 21 day journey they arrived at their destination in Donbas (Donets Basin) in weak physical condition. Those who were from Bethausen were brought to the camp at Belakalitwa and Tschistakowa. Several years of torment and degradation followed.

Following this event life in the community became more difficult. As a result of the agricultural reforms of 1945 along with confiscation of land and property it inevitably led to a decline in the fortunes of the landowning families. At the beginning of the 1950s the step by step dispossession of all of the Swabian families followed. Their landholdings were taken away from them, along with their farm machinery and horses. In 1952 the local collective farm was established. Prior to that in 1951 the Farm Machinery and Tractor Station of Bethausen was founded as a state owned operation that played a prominent role in the life of the community. This undertaking employed 300 workers when times were good. Another similar industry was the "Ferma" in which farmers

worked their own land for the state but it did not prove to be very successful. Through these various endeavours jobs were created that provided a regular monthly salary. A vocational training school was opened for the training of mechanics to provide the young men with a profession. In 1954 electricity was introduced into the community. It was much earlier than in most of the neighbouring villages. We can proudly say that at that time compared to other communities Bethausen experienced an economic upswing and also made notable cultural gains.

Significant decisions were made that had consequences nationwide that led to the deterioration of the economy. The agricultural pursuits being carried out in Bethausen were being adversely affected more and more. The nationwide, stern, austerity measures led to a shortage in all kinds of products and wares including basic foodstuffs. The dissatisfaction among the population became greater and greater and individuals began to look for a way out of their predicament: emigration. In this period of time a whole generation was challenged that was not unfamiliar with grief and need and were also not in agreement with Communist policies or their economic theories and sought a better future for themselves and their families. It was the generation that had resisted national assimilation and cherished the hope to return to the homeland of their forebears. It was a long and bitter struggle. They had to contend with all kinds of underhanded methods on the part of officialdom, faced repercussions at the work place with threats of dismissal. Despite all of the obstacles many were able to emigrate to Germany. After the events of December 1989 the new government demonstrated its commitment to democratic values by opening Romania's borders. The German emigration became a mass exodus.

The inhabitants of Bethausen were part of this last stream of emigrés and left their homeland forever. It all ended much as it had begun so many years earlier. The former inhabitants of Bethausen were scattered all across Germany. But there were some that settled in proximity to one another. Today many of them live in Spaichingen, München, Aachen, Neuburg, Heilbronn, Ludwigshafen and Singen.

In 1999 there were still twelve Germans living in Bethausen who for personal reasons had decided to remain behind. But in our hearts the memory of Bethausen will live on. Our time in Bethausen is a part of our lives, a memory worth remembering.

With regard to the population statistics of Bethausen, we know that in 1927 there were 1,035 German inhabitants; in 1937 there were 813; in 1960 there were 796.

School and Education

Among the first priorities to be dealt with at the time of the settlement of the community was the erection of a school. Until the completion of the construction of the school which took place between 1885/1886 teaching took place in private houses. The first classes were conducted by Michael Hari. Because the number of children was always increasing a second school was built in 1902 and a third school known as the "Big School" was erected in 1912. Until 1926 instruction was provided for six grades. From then until 1964 there were seven and after 1965 there were eight. This again necessitated the expansion

of the "Big School" which occurred in 1965/1966. In addition to the first teacher that was mentioned, in the years that followed the following taught in Bethausen: K. Fulda, E. Dobrov, M. Popa, M. Schiller and J. Schiller. Following the Second World War the following teachers carried out German language instruction: H. Vogel, K. Kontorubis, E. Konstantiniu and R. Buschinger.

Picture

Caption: The Volunteer Fire Brigade of Bethausen in 1939

Faith and Church

The settlers brought their religion with them as an inheritance from their homeland and right after the founding of the village church life began. Up until 1900 all of the inhabitants were of the Roman Catholic faith. The first church in Bethausen stood across the street from the town hall. Once the villagers had achieved in developing a better material existence for themselves it became possible for them to build a larger and more beautiful church in 1937. The basic size and form of the church is similar to many Roman Catholic churches in the villages of the Banat and has a tower with a height of 32 metres. The style of the interior architecture maintained that of the older church. The high altar is crowned with a beautiful painting of St. Wendelin the patron saint of the church. On the left of the altar there is a side altar with a statue of St. Anthony and to the right is the pulpit. The copula above the high altar is beautifully painted in rich colours and is adorned by the Angel of the Lord. There are three bells in the church tower. The first priest who came to serve in Bethausen was Father Georg Budinky. In the years that followed he was succeeded by: Deacon Imre Lauko, P. Nikolaus Wagner, Dr. Elmar Kroner, P. Wilhelm Prinziger and P. Herbert Laschober.

Organizations

Because Bethausen was a small community we can only provide a short discourse on this theme. The Fire Brigade was founded in 1905. In the same year the Hunt Club was formed. It had about fifty members. The executive included Nikolaus Stroh (captain), the other executive members were Franz Kotre (second lieutenant) and Michael Sibla (lieutenant). The Hunt Club had a flag of its own that could still be seen years later in the church. In 1907 a children's band was formed with fourteen participants. The conductor was Karl Divo. Their uniforms consisted of a black shirt or blouse, white trousers, and a red neckband. The life of the band was limited to four years. In the same year a choir for girls was also formed with twenty participants. The director was K. Mezsaros. In the years between the two world wars an amateur theatre group was founded under the leadership of F. Ludwig and there were regular performances. They were primarily comedies like "His Own Grandfather" and "The Stingy Farmer" and also dramas like "Homesick" and "Justice Is Dead".

In 1925 the village band was formed. This band had great results and the number of skilled musicians increased. Because not everyone could play in a single band a youth band was brought into existence in 1935. The beginning of the Second World War sealed the fate of both bands. After the war in the 1950s and 1960s musical programmes and theatricals in German were presented by the school children.

Picture

Caption: Interior of the Church in Bethausen

Folk Costume and Dialect

At the time of the founding of Bethausen the local folk costume worn was not uniform because the settlers came from various and different regions, each with their own distinct characteristics and styles. In the same way the local dialect was a blended dialect that developed over the years that included Swabian, Lorraine, Bavarian and Bohemian elements.