

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
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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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Moritzfeld

Moritzfeld, a beautiful village in the mountains of the Banat, lies 60 kilometres from Temesvár and 40 kilometres from Reschitza in the hill country surrounding the Romanian villages of Sosdia, Ghertinis and Gataja in the District of Karros-Severin. The community is situated 143 metres above sea level and the region covers an area of 8,549 Joch. The Hungarian designation for the village is Moriczföld and the Romanian counterpart is Maureni. To the east is the *Knowelberg* (Knowel Mountain) while to the west the *Schamik* mountains can be seen in the distance. When the weather is good you can get a clear view of the Werschetz Mountains. The *Hauptgasse* (Main Street), *Nationalstrasse* (National Street) and *Europastrasse* (European Street) divide the village into almost two equal parts. The community covers an area of 1,520 kilometres.

The Name of the Community and Its Settlement

The community has St. Mauritius (Moritz) to thank for its name. He was chosen by the faithful as their Patron Saint and extended it to the name of their community.

A second version of the origin of the name suggests that a certain Ignatz Riegler who had emigrated to Hungary from Germany much earlier along with "Moritz" whose family name has gone missing without a trace was the first colonist in the community and his given name was compounded to form the name of the community: Moritzfeld.

In 1786 following the appearance of the Recruitment Patent decreed by Joseph II the first families settled in Moritzfeld and had to deal with the climatic conditions of very hot summers and severe winters and the lack of workability of the soil of their new home. The Moritzfeld soil is heavy, contains clay with a watertight subsoil and has little humus. Because the soil does not take in water it is either too wet or too hard and therefore it is very hard to work. From the time of the settlement until today, the land of Moritzfeld demands hard work if it is to produce even a mediocre crop.

History of the Community

The community was settled by 970 persons in 1786. There were 380 individuals who came from the Rhine Palatinate, 126 from the Empire and 138 from Lorraine and Luxembourg. The other settlers came from Baden-Württemberg, Alsace, Bavaria, Austria and Bohemia. From the year of its founding until 1846 Moritzfeld was a state owned Domain and had to pay taxes and tithes to the Temesvár State Finance Administration. In 1805 the village received the right to hold markets, both weekly and an annual fair and market were held here where livestock trading flourished. From 1847 to 1921 the community was part of a privately owned Domain. The first resident owner had a lavish castle built for himself.

Moritzfeld can thank the fact that because the Domain was state owned they were able to have their first church. The building material was provided by the government and with the help of the inhabitants of the village it was completed in the late summer of 1819. On

November 11th, St. Martin's Day, the church was consecrated by the Dean of Werschetz, Albert Martini at a festive service. Moritzfeld was a self-sustaining parish. The first settlers were Roman Catholics. The parish included affiliates in Gataja, Kleinschemlak, Berzovia, Tirol, Ferendia and Fizesch.

Picture
A View of Moritzfeld from the Church Tower
In the Direction of Bahnallee

Picture
The Centre of Moritzfeld
Church and School

The Revolution of 1848-1849 did not effect or disturb the people of Moritzfeld. They were an industrious, peaceful people that were determined to make their livelihood from the niggardly soil and did not concern themselves with political matters.

In their history the population of Moritzfeld had to cope with hard times and reverses. In 1863 the whole region fell victim to drought and more than half of the harvest was ruined. Many farmers removed the straw on their roofs to feed their livestock. Twelve years later on July 12, 1875 a fierce storm raged through the region and at noon a fire broke out that had its source in an outdoor bake oven. The terrifying fire destroyed 96 houses and nearby buildings and the church tower. The damages caused by the fire meant years of hard work to pay for the costly reconstruction. Six days later, on July 18, 1875 a heavy hailstorm struck the village and destroyed all of the crops and the oat harvest. The wheat that had been stoked in the fields was also badly damaged.

The church tower that had been burned down during the blaze on July 12, 1875 was temporarily replaced by a provisional and lower one. It was only in the year 1927 that a total renovation was completed on the still standing 34 metre high church tower. In the sanctuary of the church here is a marble tablet inscribed as follows:

"The tower was raised and the church was renovated in the year 1927. On May 6, 1928 the church was consecrated by Bishop Dr. Augustin Pacha who was born in this parish."

School and Kindergarten

In 1786 a Roman Catholic denominational school was founded in Moritzfeld with two teachers. Until 1868 the school was German speaking. In a few years the number of pupils rose to over 300. In the years following it became a community school in which German and Hungarian were the languages of instruction. In 1873 the Community Council committed the village to the building of a new school because the old one was no longer structurally sound and could not be renovated. At the end of 1874 the imposing two storey building was completed and on January 23, 1875 there was a celebration on

the first day of school in the new building. On February 16, 1885 the school became a state school and all instruction was given in the Hungarian language. This Magyarization (Hungarianizing) process intensified at the beginning of the 20th Century as a result of the Apponyi School Regulation of 1907. The consequences of this law made the withering of the German schools in the Banat apparent to all. The worst result by far was that the German children could no longer read and write in German and were unable to speak Hungarian properly. At the end of 1918 the Hungarian Minister of Education Adalbert Jankovich (1865-1939) issued a decree to the School Inspectorate that the mother tongue of the pupils should resume to have its appropriate place in the state schools. As a result of the First World War the greater portion of the Banat was incorporated within Romania and the German teachers taught in German once more until 1922 when a Romanianization process first became apparent which was to become much worse in 1935 and went far beyond what the Magyarization attempts from 1890 to 1918 had ever been.

In 1932 the first Romanian school in Moritzfeld was opened. In the fall of 1944 all of the German children in Moritzfeld were assigned to the Romanian school. In 1948 the mother tongue of the pupils was re-instated as the language of instruction and Michael Kaiser, who had taught in Moritzfeld since 1947 took over the leadership of the German school. Initially teaching ran into some serious difficulties. The children had not received any instruction in German for many years while on the other hand they had suffered great gaps in their education because they could not understand Romanian well enough. Many of the children were being brought up by their grandparents so that there were language problems in both home and school.

In the school term of 1949/1950 there were 168 pupils attending the German school who were taught by ten German teachers. At that time the Grade 1-4 class in the Romanian school was taught by a single teacher. A boarding school was established in Moritzfeld to provide classes beyond Grade Five for the German children living in the surrounding smaller villages such as Tirol, Waldau, Kleinschemlak, Birda and Klopodia. The activities carried out by the school were varied. Agricultural methods were imparted through the use of the school garden. The Literary Society and the well stocked school library awakened and encouraged an interest and love for German literature. The setting up of a science laboratory in 1955 greatly improved the teaching of the subject.

The cultural activities and creative work that followed were noticeable features that added to the progress of the pupils. There was a school choir, an often prize winning orchestra, dance groups that won regional prizes at school music festivals. The performances and recitals of the groups brought forth and recognized the talents of the individual members and became an incentive for the village inhabitants to have an opportunity to escape from the drudgery of every day life for an hour or two of good entertainment. After 1960 the two sections of the school were amalgamated under a single director and a great deal changed in the school. There were always fewer and fewer German children while the number of Romanian pupils rose. By 1979 there were only four grades in the German department that were taught by one teacher.

A Kindergarten was also part of the school that was established in 1893. From 1919 to 1924 it was closed down. After that Kindergarten was a well established institution in the life of Moritzfeld up to the present day. In 1958 a Romanian counterpart was founded. The developments in Kindergarten reflected what was happening in the rest of the school with a decline in the number of German pupils and an increase in the number of Romanians. The reason for this development is sufficiently well known and is a result of the uprooting and the migration and emigration of the Swabians in the Banat as it was also reflected in the life of Moritzfeld. There are no longer any German children in the Moritzfeld Kindergarten.

Village Library

Among the cultural assets of Moritzfeld was the village library that came into existence at the end of the Second World War. In 1955 it contained 1,200 volumes. This made it possible for the pupils and students in Moritzfeld to further their education with these books that were available to them in their community. By the year 1995 the library housed over 18,000 books. Much reading was done in the village, especially during the winter months. Along with teachers from the school there were delightful evenings at the library for the youth of the village.

Picture
The Swabian Bishop
Dr. Augustin Pacha
Carrying Out Confirmation

World Wars, Deportations and Resettlement

In 1918 the soldiers who fought in the First World War came home and sought to find a new beginning in the new situation in which they found themselves as citizens of Romania that would be closely linked to a lot of hard work and hardships. As a result of the First World War, Moritzfeld lost 104 men killed on the front and 32 came home badly wounded and disabled. With the departure of the German troops in mid November 1918 the Serbian Army occupied the greater portion of the Banat. After an eight month occupation the Serbian military finally withdrew taking 57 horses, 34 cows and 5 sheep with them.

In August of 1919 units of the Royal Romanian Army marched in and were warmly welcomed. This is the way the Banat was incorporated into Romania. At this time house lots were divided, land was bought and sold, fields were enclosed and the boundaries of the community were secured.

In the years from 1925 to 1936, a total of 23 Romanian families were settled in Moritzfeld. They were given a house and garden plot. Distant cultivated fields were leased out. With the money from the sale and leasing of agricultural land the damaged church tower and entire church could be renovated in 1927.

The most famous son of Moritzfeld, Bishop Dr. Agustin Pacha, was proud to be a child of our village. He was named a bishop in 1927. On the occasion of the consecration of the church in 1928 he began his speech with the phrase, "I've come home." He said that he experienced this moment with the deepest joy that by God's grace he could re-consecrate the old church of his home community and be able to offer this greatest gift a bishop could to his countrymen. On one occasion when he was asked where his scholarship and learning came from, he replied, "From the University of Moritzfeld." The "Swabian Bishop" as he was called was condemned to 18 years in prison in 1950 on the pretext that he was a spy for the Vatican, dealt in foreign currency, was involved in weapons smuggling and other crimes against the state. He was released in September of 1954 suffering from very bad health and was allowed to return to Temesvár where he died on November 4th of that same year.

Who could have ever known that with the outbreak of the Second World War the last chapter of the history of German Moritzfeld had begun? Following the agreement between the German Reich and the Romanian government signed in Bucharest on May 12, 1943 the men of Moritzfeld were recruited into the German Army. And the list of the names of those killed in action or are missing in this senseless war is far too long. There were 65 men from Moritzfeld who fell serving in the German Army and 11 others who had served in the Romanian military. Even the end of the Second World War did not end all of the suffering of the German population of Moritzfeld. In January of 1945 from among the 2,000 German inhabitants of Moritzfeld 205 of them were dragged off to Russia to do forced labour there. Most of them were taken to Kadyevka and many of them would never return. Of their number, 68 of them died in Russia and 8 others died after their release as a result of the privations they had suffered. They were primarily young married women and juveniles both male and female. After five years the survivors were allowed to come home. But many of them were put on trains heading for Germany because Romania refused to accept them. There they built a new lives for themselves.

On June 17, 1951 seven families from Moritzfeld were deported to the Baragan Steppes. The people were unloaded from their cattle cars out on an open field in the midst of the stubble left behind and were left under the open sky and let to shift for themselves. It was only later that they were able to build small clay walled huts for themselves. With a roof over their heads others dug earth pits and rammed stakes into the ground and covered them with blankets and rugs to provide themselves with a roof. After five years they were eventually released. One of the families from Moritzfeld had to wait for thirteen years before they were freed.

As a result of circumstances like these, war, years as prisoners of war, and the two deportations, countless families were torn apart. This led to the migration back to Germany to reunite them with their family members who were living there. At the beginning of the 1960s the first families left to rejoin their relatives in Germany. This caused a chain reaction so that slowly but surely Moritzfeld lost its German population. Many had to wait for years for their exit permits. Several young people risked their lives and fled across the border into Yugoslavia. One youth from Moritzfeld paid for it with his life for trying escape in this way.

We have to be thankful that our community belonged to the Krasso-Severin District where purchasing one's freedom by paying bribes in hard German cash (Deutsch Marks) was not practiced as was the case in other government districts of the Banat. Here it was a matter of only small bribes that were paid to the various officials for a "small favour" done for you. 200 *Lei* (Romanian currency) opened the way to an interview, a pound of coffee shortened the waiting period and 1,000 *Lei* would provide a way to the Exit Permit Commission.

The changed demographics that developed reflect the effects of both world wars and the discrimination and persecution of the German minority in Romania. This was not only caused because of those killed in the war but also the deportations to Russia and the Baragan Steppes that also had a negative effect on the development of the local German population.

The large scale emigration began after the overthrow of Communism in 1989. After that the number of Germans was reduced to 104 by 1999. In 1916 Moritzfeld had a population of 2,453 and in 1943 it still had 1,923 inhabitants and in 1948 there were 1,849 inhabitants. During all of these years the German population of Moritzfeld made up around 94% of the total population.

Significant Edifices in the Community

Because Moritzfeld had a niggardly and unproductive type of soil there was little wealth and few splendid buildings and monuments except for the war memorial in the cemetery on which the names of those who fell in the First World War were inscribed.

Three wayside crosses on the perimeter of Moritzfeld indicated that Christians lived in this community. They were located at *Waldspitz* (Tip of the Forest), *Knowelperch* (The slopes of the Knowel Mountain) and *Bahnweg* (The Way to the Station). The school was one of the few village schools in the Banat that had a second storey. It had sixteen classrooms, a staff room for the teachers, a laboratory and gymnasium.

Picture The Moritzfeld Railway Station

The rectory was quite large and roomy with four large living and bedrooms, a large kitchen and a large library with a varied selection of books.

The mill in Moritzfeld was well known beyond the borders of the community. In the good years many farmers came to the mill with their wagons from neighbouring villages with their grain to be ground under the best of conditions.

The House of Culture, a general purpose hall, served as a movie theatre and dance hall. It was a venue for all kinds of events and festive activities.

The former Catholic Youth Centre was expropriated and was offered for the use of the Orthodox Church. The fire hall built next to it was erected in 1960.

The Economic Structure, Organizations, Trade and Commerce

Up until the Second World War Moritzfeld was a farming community in which almost all of the inhabitants were engaged in agriculture. Up until the first half of the 19th Century the crops and produce were grown to meet their own needs and only a small portion was marketed in the community and in nearby towns and cities.

The new freedoms that were linked to the Revolution of 1848 brought about a major upturn in economic development. Through industrialization and population growth in the western portions of the Monarchy the demand for foodstuffs rose dramatically. The expansion of the railway network made it possible for the Banat to be connected to all of the European market. But there were still local egg sellers, lumber dealers, grocers and leather merchants. Before the Second World War, Moritzfeld had numerous and varied tradesmen like bakers, barbers, harvesters, butchers, hotel keepers, hatters, comb makers, masons, shoemakers, mineral water producers, tinsmiths, wagon builders, sausage makers, brick makers, harness makers, saddlers, locksmiths, blacksmiths, cabinet makers and carpenters. There were so many barbers in Moritzfeld that the following expression made the rounds, "The men of Moritzfeld come into the world with a razor in one hand." Some time around the turn of the century the three field agricultural system that left one field in three fallow was no longer practiced and different seeds were sown in each field in a three year rotation.

At the beginning of the 20th Century the first steam driven threshing machine appeared in the village. The hand sowing of seeds was replaced by the ridge drill. In 1914 the harvester and binder were introduced that cut down on the number of labourers needed for harvesting crops and reduced much of the former hard work demanded of them. This loss of jobs led to the first wave of emigration to America.

After the First World War an erratic development in the mechanization of agriculture took place in Moritzfeld. New German and American agricultural machinery were purchased. As was the case in most villages in the Banat various grain crops were grown such as winter wheat, maize, winter barley, oats, rye and clover. Wine growing was mainly for household use. Fruit growing was limited because of the poor heavily clay soil. There were only individual fruit trees in the vineyards. Livestock rearing played a major role in the life of the village next to the cultivation of the land and was an important source of income for the farmers. Since the days of settlement horse breeding was given a great deal of attention and was expensive and required a great deal of work. In addition, cattle, swine and sheep were bred. A welcome side income was the raising of silkworms. The heaviest blow the farmers of the Banat had to suffer since the time of the settlement was the confiscation of the agricultural land and property of the Germans in the time of the discrimination against the Germans after August 23, 1944 and the Land Reform of March 1945. Many farmers became factory workers. In 1952 the Agricultural

Production Co-operative was founded in Moritzfeld in which the farmers were assured of an income after a few years of operation.

The farmer's most important source of income was the proceeds from selling his farm produce. In order to sell his produce the farmer had to drive to the nearby cities like Temesvár, Bokschan and Reschitza. In the 19th Century Moritzfeld was the only market town in our area where weekly markets were held. In the annual market and fair it was subdivided in terms of cattle, grain and shopkeepers and grocers. In the 1940s these annual markets slowly came to an end because almost everything could be bought in the city, town and village stores and shops. At the beginning of the 20th Century there were two steam driven mills and up to the Second World War there was one carpenter shop with motor driven equipment used in the manufacture of various items of furniture. In addition a mineral water factory also did very well.

In 1893 the "Moritzfeld Farmers Association" was established. The activities of the Association comprised of issues related to cultivation of the land, livestock rearing, forestry matters, garden and wine growing, silk worm production, fish farming, beekeeping and other agricultural pursuits. During the days of the Monarchy in the Banat, tradesmen sought to form guilds and in October 1851 the "Moritzfeld Tradesmen Society" was formed and in 1875 the "Moritzfeld Trade and Commerce Union" was founded. At the end of the 19th Century the "Moritzfeld Savings and Loan Union" was established and was renamed "First Moritzfeld Bank AG" the following year. Both institutions took in deposits, made loans and their sphere of activity took in the surrounding communities. In 1920 a local affiliate of the "Swabian Trades and Commerce Bank AG" of Temesvár was established in Moritzfeld.

In the 18th Century no road network had been developed in the Banat. Journeys were seldom possible across country. There were walking paths and roads to Grossschemlak, Ferendia, Klopodia, Grossscham, Gertenisch, Skulia, Schipet and Finesch-Königsgnad. In 1859 Moritzfeld was linked to Detta by a postal connection that in 1863 was extended to Bokschan and Reschitza. Since 1866 there were daily stage coach connections from Detta to Reschitza.

From the time of settlement until 1870 the residents of the community made use of the "lard lamp" and the "oil lamp". From 1870 onwards the petroleum lamp gradually took over. In 1929 electric lights were installed at all street intersections, all public buildings and some private houses. The community has been connected to the national power grid since 1960.

Cultural Life and Institutions

Towards the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th several societies were called into being. In 1909 the local chapter of the "Catholic People's Union of Hungary" was formed in Moritzfeld. The main purpose of this institution was to further the religious education of the people. With the fall of the Monarchy at the end of the First

World War, the "Catholic People's Union" was formed in the Romanian and Yugoslavian portions of the diocese.

In 1919 a local branch of the "Swabian German Cultural Association" was formed in Moritzfeld. Later this group was known as "The German Cultural Association". A month later the local group established a continuing education school for you male adults.

Picture
The Singer Sewing Machine Embroidery Class of 1925
In the Moritzfeld School

The lightest baggage the immigrants from Germany brought with them as they settled in the Banat was their treasury of German songs. As far as we can tell there was a choral society as early as 1860. In 1896 the "Moritzfeld Men's Choral Society" was founded with the goal of introducing youth to German songs, to increase their understanding of music, to discover talent and enhance it and raise the musical level of church and festive celebrations.

In 1870 the first brass band with twelve members came into existence in Moritzfeld. In 1928 a twenty-eight member boy's and men's band was founded.

In 1934 the "German Catholic Women's Association" was founded with 75 members. In order to preserve the old folk customs and traditions the Association held an annual *Trachtenball* (Traditional Costume Ball) that was loved by old and young alike. The activities of the Women's Association and the Girls' Circle involved theatricals, furthered the learning and performing of old folk dances and the singing and performing of folk songs. All of which were of a festive nature for the edification of all.

The starting point for youth work after the First World War was the "Youth Association" that had been founded earlier prior to 1914. In the autumn of 1906 the "Roman Catholic Youth Association" was founded in Moritzfeld. At his own expense, Bishop Dr. Augustin Pacha had a Youth Centre built for them in 1932. German culture and tradition were cultivated, one sang German songs, one cherished one's mother tongue and we were encouraged to love one's German origins and heritage. In 1949 the Youth Centre was given to the Orthodox congregation to serve as their church. Since the erection of the new House of Culture in 1972 it is the meeting place for the youth and where all cultural activities take place.

Worthy of note is the "Moritzfeld Girls' Circle" which came into being in October of 1929 under the name, "German Catholic Girls' Circle". The major goal of its activities was to facilitate religious values among its members and to cherish their mother tongue and preserve their folk songs and folk dances.

In 1930 the first "Football (soccer) Association" that included a handball team was formed and out of which emerged several national champions.

In Moritzfeld a south western Rhine Franconian dialect was spoken. But there was also a noticeable Austrian and Bavarian influence that was, however, unable to overcome the overwhelmingly Palatinate character of the dialect.

Resettlement and Emigration

Until 1989 before the overthrow of Communism in Romania according to the data supplied by the HOG there were about 1,000 Germans living in Moritzfeld and about 2,200 were living in the Federal Republic of Germany. The great majority live in southern Germany, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. About twenty live in Austria and some thirty or so live in the USA.

Integration in Germany

In order to further contacts and maintain them, it was decided in 1979 to organize a *Treffen* (Reunion) of former residents of Moritzfeld every two years. The first Moritzfeld *Treffen* took place on October 6th and 7th in 1979 in Donaueschingen in which 200 people from Moritzfeld attended. This first *Treffen* was to a great deal organized by the Bucholz and Rohm families. Since then, these assemblies have taken place regularly. We meet friends, neighbours, relatives and acquaintances and share memories of the past but also talk about our lives in our new homeland.

Gerlinde Boger