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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  
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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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of his or her contribution

**Published by  
The Association of Swabians from the Banat**

## **Ofsentiz**

The community lies south of Gilad and Tschakowa and west of Detta and north of Banlok in the southern Banat. Before the settlement of the German village there had already been a Serbian village here in the past. The site of the village had originally been located on what was later the railway line linking Jebel-Banlok-Gier (a spur line to Ofensitz and Dolatz). Building stones and ruins have often been found at this location. The fact that the Serbian church stood right behind the Catholic church can now be verified and it is assumed that the Serbian village was built around it. The Hungarian name for the village was Karátsonyi-Falva (Karátsony-Village) and was named after Count Karátsony who had his estates and castle in Banlok. The Romanian designation is Ofsenita and the German name was Ofsenitz and Offsenitz. In the local dialect of the community it was referred to as Hopsenitz (spring village). The village name "Ofsenitz" is of Serbian origin and means sheep or sheep stall.

## **The German Settlement**

The German village of Ofsenitz was founded in 1807 and was settled during three time frames. It was settled because Count Karátsony required tradesmen and a work force. The people came from various Banat villages as part of a new inner migration. There are also entries in the Detta parish records that pertain to Ofsentiz.

There are 1,850 Joch of land within the boundaries of Ofsenitz of which 600 Joch belonged to the estates and castle at Banlok. Some inhabitants of Detta had land within the boundaries of Ofsentiz and some of the landholdings within the Banlok and Gilad boundaries were owned by inhabitants in Ofensitz.

In 1910 there were 728 inhabitants; in 1930 there were 704 and in 1940 the population reached 809. According to the census of 1942 Ofsenitz had 872 German residents. The names of the streets are a reflection of the German character of the community: *Froschne* (Frog) Street is the way from the church in the direction of Dolatz. *Spatze Eck* (Littler Bird Corner) also leads from the church but towards the cemetery. The *Klein* (Little or Small) Street leads from the brickyard to the pond (Perta). *Kreuz* (Cross) Street was between the *Gross* (Major or Main) Street and the *Klein* Street was linked to the *Hutwar* (pastures) Street in the direction of Banlok and was the last street to the right. The last numbering of the houses occurred between 1899/1901. A number was given to every lot and house. There were 256 house numbers. This also included 26 undeveloped house lots. An additional 15 house numbers were assigned to the church, town hall, the two schools, shops, workshops and public buildings. The distance to neighbouring villages was not very far. The District capital Detta was 7 kilometres away and the neighbouring village of Gilad 6 kilometres, Dolatz 6 kilometres, Banlok 7 kilometres and the Banlok railway station was 2 kilometres away. Temesvár was 42 kilometres away and Morawitz was 22 kilometres.

The 30th of May in 1962 was remarkable day in the history of our village. On that day the community was placed on the electrical power grid which brought electric lights to

the houses and provided electric street lamps. The inhabitants had to provide a financial contribution towards the street lamps to pay for the digging and setting up of the lamp posts in front of the individual houses. One after another, the house owners had themselves connected to the power lines.

Picture  
A Glimpse of *Gross Gass*  
(Main Street)

### **Churches and Cemeteries**

Construction of the Catholic church that bears house number 207 began in 1880 and was completed in 1882. The community was financially responsible for the building costs up to the level of the windows and Count Karátsonyi of Banlok contributed the rest. Count Karátsonyi was a Hungarian nobleman at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy and had his castle and estates in Banlok. The castle was later to become the summer residence of the mother of King Michael of Romania. The Queen Mother often attended worship at the church in Ofensitz. There were also 660 Joch of pasturage that belonged to the castle estate that bordered the boundaries of Ofensitz.

There is one person buried in the crypt beneath the altar. It is assumed that Count Karátsonyi of Banlok has found his final resting place there. In 1916 two of the bells were taken down and were sent to a smelter in aid of the war effort. After the First World War the two missing bells were replaced and were dedicated on *Kirchweih* Sunday, October 20, 1929. There was a strict seating order in the church. The men sat in the pews on the right hand side and the women on the left. The front row pew on the women's side was reserved for the Banlok Domain owner.

Picture  
The Catholic Church  
in Hopsenitz

The following words can be read on the ceiling above the altar: "God does not want our thanks in words but in deeds." Renovations and restorations have followed. The original wooden shingles on the roof were replaced by a tin roof in 1968.

The church was damaged as a result of an earthquake on July 12, 1991 whose epicentre was in the immediate vicinity of Banlok. The roof of the church above the choir loft and organ collapsed so that the church was exposed to wind, rain and weather. Large cracks ran through the masonry of the church and tower. The tower was in danger of collapse and could not be rebuilt at the time. The interior of the church could only be entered through the sacristy. The altars were removed along with several of the sacral vessels and were taken to safety through the efforts of the priest in Detta. In 1992 the church tower was restored from funds contributed to the church so that the bells could be rung once again.

## The Parish of Ofensitz

The community of Ofensitz always had its own priest until the departure of Father Mausz in 1969 and the community became part of the parish of Dolatz. The Ofensitz rectory was house number 206. The most significant priest in the 20th century was Nikolaus Bojdisz who served from 1915 until April 1943. He bought an old house (house number 200) from Frisch the knife-smith where he had a new rectory built. In 1943 he was buried next to the cemetery chapel in Ofensitz. While he was still alive he chose the men to carry his coffin to the cemetery. They were: Sebastian Kessler, Josef Aller, Josef Loscher and Franz Bittenbinder. He was succeeded by Father Nagy (1943-1947) and then Martin Sauer (1947-1957) who was responsible for Ofensitz, Banlok and Partosch. It was during the bad times when the Communists came to power when the Catholic Church and its priests were attacked and persecuted. In the years 1957-1969 Father Mausz served the believers in Ofensitz, followed by Franz Dippert (1969-1979).

The Serbian church stood behind the Catholic church and was torn down from 1963/1964 because of structural damages. It had 208 as its house number. A metal and stone cross stands on the site today. It was once mentioned in the newspapers as a 500 year old cultural heritage site. The rectory had the house number 127 and stood across the street from the church. The chapel in the German Catholic cemetery was built in 1887. The chapel is outfitted with a small altar, several pictures and a bell. On the exterior wall of the chapel there are two inscribed stone tablets with the dates of the birth and death of members of the Papp family who were the servants and stewards in the castle of Count Karátsony in Banlok. Next to the cemetery there are several houses on the road towards Detta that were called the Gypsy houses. The cemetery covers four Joch. It was enclosed by Father Mausz with a wall and iron gate.

Picture  
The Crucifix and Stone Marker  
Site of the Serbian Church  
in Ofensitz

Left of the entrance to the cemetery there was the site where a mortuary was in the process of being built prior to the enclosure of the cemetery. The remains of it were torn down during the erection of the walls. Because only a small portion of the cemetery was used for grave sites in 1950 the parish leased the remainder of the land that was most fertile to be cultivated. In more recent times in the area behind the German graves local Romanians lie buried while the Serbian inhabitants have their own cemetery on the way to Detta. The church in Ofensitz is dedicated to St. Wendelin. His Saints Day is on October 20th. *Kirchweih* is celebrated on the weekend after St. Wendelin's Day.

Ofensitz never had a festive colourful *Kirchweih* costume as was the custom in other villages in the Banat. Before the Second World War the Hopsenitz unmarried young women wore their Swabian costume to church which was in various colours but their entire ensemble was of one colour. In addition to that they wore a black or white apron with fine lace trimming. On the Monday of *Kirchweih* they wore white or black aprons.

The young unmarried men wore hats that were decorated with ribbons that their partners had prepared for them. After the war the young women wore contemporary clothes and the young men wore suits.

On the Saturday of *Kirchweih* the *Kirchweihbaum* (Kirchweih Tree) was brought to the church accompanied with music and was set up at the rectory. An unadorned rosemary wreath was auctioned off by the young men in charge of the celebration at the dance held in the community hall. The rosemary wreath was decorated by the young women who were the partners of the lead dancers later in the evening. The lead couple carried it in procession to the church on Sunday.

Early in the morning the young men picked up their decorated hats at the homes of their partners to the accompaniment of music. Prior to the beginning of mass the two young men in charge of the *Kirchweih* treasury were picked up by their partners. The lead dance couple with the decorated *Kirchweih* wreath accompanied by all of the other *Kirchweih* couples paraded through the streets accompanied by music on their way to church. During the festival service the wreath and the bottle of wine of the *Kirchweih* couple were dedicated. In the afternoon the wreath was bound to a barrel and hoisted up on the *Kirchweihbaum* (Kirchweih tree) while the lead couple danced around it. The hat and kerchief of the lead couple were raffled off. The young man who hoisted the wreath up the tree invited all the couples to a short dance before going for dinner.

On the Monday of the *Kirchweih* festival, dancing took place in the afternoon and evening in the tavern. The Tuesday of the *Kirchweih* marked its conclusion. On this day the *Kirchweih* tree was taken down and the *Kirchweih* was symbolically buried in the form of a bottle of wine and with that the festival was over.

Picture  
The *Kirchweih* Wreath  
Being Auctioned

### **Memorials and Wayside Crosses**

There is a wall with an iron gate in front of the church around a flower bed and two memorials. To the front of the church in the direction of its entrance way there is a war memorial to the right. There is an Imperial Eagle on the second memorial beside it. It was knocked down and damaged in 1944/1945. The war memorial was knocked off its base during the earthquake but it was not otherwise damaged. The war memorial was dedicated on October 20, 1929 on the occasion of *Kirchweih* Sunday. In 1992 the war memorial was set up back on its base at the initiative of the Romanian inhabitants of the village. The names of those killed in action and missing in the First World War (28 fell victim) and the Second World War (21) are inscribed on the monument. It is not known when the names of those who died in the Second World War and those who perished in the deportation to Russia were added. Of the 95 persons from Ofsenitz who were deported to Russia twenty of them died there and three children were born there.

On June 17, 1951 there were 62 inhabitants of Ofsenitz who were forcibly deported to the Baragan Steppes including eight who were Romanians. Two children were born in the desolate Baragan and one of our countrymen died there.

Picture  
Dedication of the Flag  
In Ofsentiz in 1934

### **Village Life and Associations**

The major occupation of the inhabitants of Ofsenitz was crop growing on their own cultivated land and livestock rearing. In addition there were numerous tradesmen and craftsmen in the village. There were stores that sold provisions and groceries: house number 79 operated by the Loch family and the Dinjer family ran another one at house number 109. A dance hall and bowling alley were operated in the Wirtmüller house number 133 as was also true at house number 181 operated by the Franzen family. Dominik Bartl and Dominik Bauer operated tailor shops in house numbers 47 and 142 respectively; while our countryman Kessler ran a butcher shop in house number 121. The village had three blacksmiths, Jakob Gerger, Hans Müller and Nikolaus Kühn. To a great degree the craftsmen met the every day needs of the populace or did repair work and as a result there were the following working in our community: a wagon builder (Latko), carpenter (Hans Waröry) shoemaker (Josef Lichtfuss), barbers (Nikolaus Burgermeister, Andreas Burgermeister and Andreas Klug) tinsmiths (Hans Bauer and Philipp Aller) and weavers (Mathias Peter and Hans Klug).

The church council had the responsibility of looking after the affairs of the parish and its property. It consisted of eight persons. With the resignation of a member a new member was appointed or elected.

The year that the second most significant association, the Reading Society, came into existence is unknown. Over the years there were various reading rooms in the village such as house number 152 (Peter Stoll), house number 44 (the Vogel family) and house number 142 (Nikolaus Burgermeister). A Choral Society was formed in 1909 under the direction of Jakob Klug and Johann Pfeffermann was the honorary chairman for many years. Through the personal contributions of the members of the Society a new flag was dedicated in 1934 on the occasion of the Society's 25th anniversary. The name of every contributor was inscribed and engraved on copper platelets attached to the flag pole. On the green side of the flag the following words were embroidered: "Men's Choral Society 1909-1934 Offsenitza." While on the white side the following verse appears:

"Pure in song, true in word,  
Steady in harmony forever."

The flag and the original copper plaques that were kept in the partially destroyed church were brought to Germany in 1992 for safekeeping. The original flag pole could not be brought along with the tassels and ribbons. The flag was not cleaned nor restored and the

new flag pole was adorned with the old list of donors whose number was 333 that are inscribed on the four copper plates.

Picture  
The Roman Catholic Church of Ofsenitz  
Following the Earthquake  
on July 12, 1992

Another significant association was the Machine Owners Society but the founding date is unknown. The grist grinder they owned operated out of house number 198. The first owners of threshing machines were the families of Peter Lukas, Jakob Lukas and Katharina Maushammer. The Bittenbinder family that later moved to Ofsenitz also had a threshing machine.

In 1932 the Catholic Women's Rosary Society was founded under the direction of Johanna Urban one of the local teachers. Among the youth groups in the village there was the Youth Association founded in 1932 and led by Johann Klug. Over time there were three musical groups that were led by Hans Klug, Friedrich and Paul Michael that performed at various festive occasions in the life of the village.

The primary school of the village was the so-called "small school" (Grades 1-4) that offered instruction in house number 205, while the "big school" (Grades 5-7) found its own place in house number 204. In each of the schools there were residential accommodations for the teachers who also had the school garden for their own use to meet household needs (house number 200).

*Uncle Matz* from Hopsenitz, Hans Kehrer, teacher, pedagogue, actor in the Banat State theatre, author and poet was hidden and looked after in the vineyard of the Röhich family on the outskirts of the village after his flight from arrest by the authorities in 1944 in the aftermath of the war. Later when he was no longer an actor with the Temesvár German State Theatre, he took on the stage name of "Uncle Matt from Hopsenitz" that all of the inhabitants of the Banat knew him by on his TV shows and appearances.

### **The HOG of Ofensitz**

Before the founding of the HOG of Ofensitz, Sebastian Kessler, represented Ofensitz at gatherings of the Countrymen's Association to participate in various attempts at integrating their work and efforts and outcomes. Later Nikolaus Wiener took over this responsibility. The HOG was founded at the first Hopsenitz *Treffen* (reunion) held in Regensburg in 1982 that did not have a very long existence. The gatherings of our countrymen held in the years 1984 and 1986 were organized privately. Following a survey in 1988 a *Treffen* of our countrymen took place in Wiesbaden where the HOG was reconstituted. Today the major activities of the HOG along with maintaining contact with all of our countrymen is the collection and sorting through of data, dates, sources of information and time frames for the publication of a future *Heimatbuch* for the former German community of Ofensitz in the Banat that we once called our home.