

History of German Settlements in Southern Hungary by Sue Clarkson

This is a history of ethnic German people living in the Danube river basin. Many countries now own portions of this basin, which is over 300,000 square miles. These include Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine. This history, written by Sue Clarkson, focuses largely on the areas that were once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but does include information specific to the ethnically German people who once lived in present-day Yugoslavia.

History of German Settlements in Southern Hungary by Sue Clarkson At the end of the nineteenth century, there were more than two million Germans living in Hungary. During the eighteenth century, the Habsburg monarchy of Austria, which ruled Hungary at that time, had enticed Germans to emigrate to the unsettled lands of Southern Hungary, which had been devastated by over 150 years of Turkish occupation. From 1711 to 1750, approximately 800 villages were founded in Hungary by German settlers. The Banat Province was one of the primary areas of settlement.

The Habsburgs had become the ruling monarchy in Hungary in 1527, following the death of King Louis II of Hungary. King Louis was killed defending Hungarian territory against the Turks (Ottoman Empire) at the Battle of Mohacs in 1526. After Mohacs, the Turks dominated two-thirds of Hungary, including the Banat. The remaining portion was ruled by the Habsburgs. War with the Turks continued throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Austrian Imperial Army commanded by Prince Eugene of Savoy was finally successful in driving them out. A peace settlement at Karlowitz in 1699 brought Hungary, except for the Banat, under control of the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I. Later, Prince Eugene captured the Banat, and the province was ceded to the Habsburg Emperor Charles VI after the Treaty of Passarowitz. The Banat was considered a crown territory of the Holy Roman Empire from 1718 to 1778 and was administered from Vienna during that period. Although there had been German emigration to Hungary prior to this time, the expulsion of the Turks resulted in an organized settlement program sponsored by the Habsburgs.

The Habsburgs had three aims: to fortify the land against invasion, to develop farm land, and to further the Roman Catholic Religion in Eastern Europe. Thus they offered Catholics of the southwest German states inducements such as free agricultural land, homesites, construction materials, livestock and exemption from taxes for several years. The colonization of the Banat was entrusted to Claudius Florimund, Count of Mercy, general under Prince Eugene of Savoy. Mercy sent agents to the Habsburg territories in the region which is now western Germany. Settlers came from the regions known as Baden, Wuerttemberg, Alsace, Lorraine, the Rhinelands, Westphalia, Bavaria and Swabia as well as from other areas. Although they came from various regions and spoke various dialects, the Hungarians called them Swabians, and the name came to be used in reference to all of the Germans who settled in the Danube valley. Most were poor peasants who had farmed the land of feudal lords, and who had been subjected to heavy taxation and military conscription.

The city of Ulm, in the Swabian region of the German states, was a common point of departure. From Ulm, settlers boarded boats called "Ulmer Schachtel" and sailed the Danube to Vienna, where they registered for their land. Covered wagons, which also followed the Danube, were also used for transportation. The route of the Danube took them through Budapest and into the Banat." The colonization came to be known as "der Grosse Schwabenzug" or the "Great Swabian Trek." The majority of the migration took place in three phases which were named after their Habsburg sponsors:

1. The "Karolinische Ansiedlung," or Caroline colonization, which occurred from 1718 to 1737;
2. The "Maria Theresianische Ansiedlung," or Maria Theresian colonization, which occurred from 1744-1772
3. The "Josephinische Ansiedlung," or Josephine colonization, which took place under Joseph II from 1782 to 1787.

After 1789, the government-sponsored colonization was discontinued, but some settlers continued to arrive in Hungary until 1829, after which only those with 500 Guilders cash were allowed to migrate.

During the colonization period, people of other nationalities also settled in the plains of the Banat. Among them were Serbs, Croatians, Bulgarians and Romanians, and to a lesser extent, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Czechs and a few French and Italians.

Many of approximately 15,000 German settlers from the first colonization were killed in Turkish raids, or died from bubonic plague. Thus, the second wave of approximately 75,000 German colonists had to rebuild many of the settlements. They were successful in re-establishing the towns, but their life was filled with hard work. The third wave consisted of approximately 60,000 new German settlers who were able to increase the economic prosperity of the Hungarian farm land. The Banat region later came to be known as the "breadbasket of Europe." The hardships endured by the three groups of colonists is summarized in this verse:

Der Erste hat den Tod, Der Zweite hat die Not, Der Dritte erst hat Brot. which is translated as, "The first encounters death, the second need, only the third has bread."

Despite the hardships, more than 1,000 German villages were established in Southern Hungary. Plans for the villages were laid out in Vienna. The towns were generally built in a square checkerboard pattern, with the Catholic church and its surrounding square in the center of the town. The style of the buildings was a modified Baroque, and came to be called "settler's Baroque." Each village, however, had slightly different designs for the decorative finishes on the buildings, and the differences are still visible today.

The houses were built perpendicularly to the street, and consisted of a series of adjoining rooms, with the parlor on the end which faced the street, and sheds for domestic animals on the opposite end. Long covered porch ways extended the full length of the house. The Swabians were known for keeping their houses and gardens clean and carefully maintained. Each houseplot was surrounded by a fence, and the courtyard within the fence contained grape vines, fruit trees and the household garden.

The streets in the villages were wide, and were used as pathways for community activities, such as baptism, wedding and funeral processions. Cattle were also led down the street to the common pasture in the surrounding area of the village. The streets, too, were always kept clean.

Crops were grown in the fields surrounding the village. The specialty crops grown in this area were sugar beets and hemp. Other crops were wheat, corn and alfalfa. The farmers also kept horses, cattle, pigs, chickens and geese. The home gardens included grapes for eating and for wine production, vegetables, and fruits such as peaches, apricots, melons and tomatoes. In the villages, schools were built in close proximity to the church. As the settlers were allowed to bring clergy and teachers, the first school master usually came with the settlers.

Teaching was done in German. Whether or not the people were pious, the social customs of the village centered around church activities. Sunday dress for the women consisted of the "tracht", or village costume, which included a distinctive dress plus decorative shawls, scarves and aprons. Each village had its own type of dress and hair style. Baptisms and weddings were festive events for family and neighbors, and included a street procession and special dinner. The major feast of the year was called "Kirchweih," the church consecration days, and was held on a Sunday in Autumn. The young men wore special hats which had been created by the young women of the village, and all took part in a procession led by a selected young couple. The day included a special mass, a festival dinner, and dancing in the street.

In the larger cities, where people were craftsmen and shopkeepers, a German middle-class and cultural life developed. Here, schools in German areas of the cities also had instruction in German. There were also German-language newspapers and magazines. Concerts, plays and balls were held, and Temeschburg was known for its fine German theater events and other cultural activities.

The Habsburg rule in Hungary, which began in 1527, lasted for nearly four hundred years, until the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918. The German immigrants, invited by Habsburg agents at the request of the Hungarian Parliament, often lived peacefully side-by-side in the cities and villages with other ethnic groups. There were many Hungarian authorities of Magyar descent, however, who resented

having to accept non-Magyar rule, and the "Germanization" effect of the Habsburgs. The loyalty of the Swabians went to the Habsburgs, who were primarily responsible for freeing the land from the Ottoman Empire, and for organizing the resettlement program.

Under the Habsburgs, German replaced Latin as the official language of Hungary, and German influence became very strong in the cities. In 1740, even Budapest was a predominantly German city. In the country, German peasants were the better farmers; and in the cities, many of the master craftsmen among millers, tailors, shoemakers, masons and other artisans were German. Throughout Hungary, Swabians held many positions in government offices.

The Hungarian nobility wished to counteract the Swabian influence by making Magyar (Hungarian) the official language of the country, and supported scholars in the development of Magyar literature. Religion, too, was a source of conflict, since the Habsburgs wanted to advance the Roman Catholic religion in a country which had been predominantly Protestant (Lutheran, Calvinist and Unitarian.)

The Habsburg Emperor Joseph II, who also ruled as King of Hungary from 1780 to 1790, attempted to reduce friction between Catholics and Protestants by passing the "Patent of Toleration" in 1781. He also introduced other reforms with the intent of improving life for the peasantry by removing them from the jurisdiction of feudal nobility, and by taxing the nobles to increase Hungary's share in supporting the cost of government. After Joseph's death, many of his reforms were reversed and Magyars began to assert greater authority. In 1844, Hungary passed the Language Act, which made Magyar the official language for government, education and religion. This was the beginning of the "Magyarization program," which was directed primarily against the German-speaking people of Hungary. The Magyars wanted greater independence from Austrian rule. In 1867, a compromise was reached with the Emperor Franz Joseph which resulted in the formation of the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. In 1868, the Nationality Bill assured that all citizens of Hungary enjoyed equal rights, but also affirmed Magyar as the official language. The Educational Act of 1879 made Magyar the compulsory language of instruction, which furthered the assimilation of ethnic minorities. The Swabians were the largest minority group in Hungary, and some, particularly in the cities, became assimilated to the point of changing their family names to Magyarized versions. Access to education beyond the village schools and to the privileges of higher social status required such assimilation, and those minorities who accepted the Magyar way of life were not subjected to discrimination. The rural Swabian villages were less affected by the Magyarization program due to their isolation, and the agrarian lifestyle there remained relatively stable for two hundred years after the settlements were established."

Danube Swabians in the Twentieth Century

At the turn of the century, Hungary was a large, ethnically-diverse nation occupying over 109,000 square miles in Central and Eastern Europe. The population of more than eighteen million was 49% Hungarian (Magyar), 17% Romanian, 13% German, 13% Slovak, 4% Serbo-Croatian and 4% from other ethnic groups. Since the formation of the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary in 1867 under the Habsburg ruler, Franz Joseph, the Swabian peasants of the Banat had enjoyed a period of economic prosperity due to the thriving agricultural economy of the region. At this time, most Swabians were not politically aware or nationality-conscious, and they were proud of their children who had moved to urban areas and found success via Magyarization.

Land ownership was necessary for making a good living in agriculture, and the Swabian Germans practiced the inheritance custom known as "Anerberecht," in which land holdings were inherited by the first-born son, keeping farm sizes large and intact. Other sons were forced to earn a livelihood as landless farm workers, or in other professions.

This custom differed from the Magyar practice of dividing farm lands among their sons, which resulted in increasingly small parcels with each subsequent generation. Large tracts of land in Hungary were still held in possession by the upper class and the Roman Catholic Church, leaving very little farm land for sale, and at very high prices. As the population continued to grow, lack of available land eventually led to wide-scale emigration, primarily to the United States and Canada, but also to other countries. Between 1899 and 1911, over 197,000 Germans left Hungary. For many, the goal was to earn enough money to

return to Hungary and buy land, and some did return, but most stayed in their new countries.

Other factors contributed to emigration from Hungary. In America, industry was expanding rapidly, and steamship lines and manufacturers sent agents to the villages to recruit factory workers. Compulsory military service caused some young men to leave. Under Parliamentary law, military service began when a man reached the age of 21. After three years of active service, men were transferred to the "Reserve," where they could be recalled until reaching 43 years of age. Others were tired of the heavy taxation which resulted in poverty and inequality for the peasant class. Emigration continued in the years immediately following World War I.

World War I was a turning point for Austria-Hungary and its ethnic groups. Even before the war was over, nationalities within Austria-Hungary were eager for independence. In October 1918, the Czechoslovak Republic was declared and the Yugoslav National Council proclaimed independence from the Dual Monarchy. The Hungarian Republic was formed in November and in December, the Romanian National Assembly declared unity with the geographical regions known as the Banat and Transylvania. When the war ended, the Habsburgs were no longer in power, and Austria-Hungary had been dissolved. Revised final boundaries for Hungary were formed at the Treaty of Trianon in June, 1920, and this resulted in the loss of two-thirds of her former territory. Land in Transylvania and most of the Banat was awarded to Romania. Yugoslavia gained land in Southern Hungary, including a strip of the western Banat. Czechoslovakia became a new country fashioned out of former Hungarian territory. The Swabian villagers whose families had lived in Hungary for almost 200 years now found themselves in three different countries.

In post-Trianon Hungary, the Germans, by default, became the largest minority group, because the people from the other minority groups were now citizens of other countries. Although the post-war treaties contained clauses which protected the rights of ethnic minorities, Magyarization continued to put pressure on Germans. In part as a counter-reaction, and also stemming from contact with Germany as a result of the war, cultural awareness began to develop among young, educated Swabians in urban areas. German cultural societies such as the "Ungarischer Deutscher Volksbildungsverein" (UDV, Educational Association of the German Peoples in Hungary) were founded. A later group, the "Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn," (VDU, Union of Germans in Hungary), which was more political than cultural, became subsidized by the German Nazis, who were eager to promote their concept of "Herrenvolk," or "Great German Folk." The VDU was favorably received by the majority of youth under 35, but was rejected by most of the elder "Swabians".

Romania inherited large numbers of ethnic German citizens as a result of World War I. Here, freedom was granted to the Germans to conduct school lessons and church services in their own language. A cultural association called the "Verband der Deutschen in Rumaenien" (Union of Germans in Romania) was founded in 1921. In Yugoslavia, Germans set up schools where teaching was done in the German language, and formed the "Schwäbisch-Deutschen Kulturbund" (Swabian-German Cultural Union). The Nazi party was also able to gain influence in these countries, as they had done in Hungary.

In the period between the wars, the lifestyle of Germans in rural villages in all three of the countries remained much the same, and the isolated villagers were much less affected by the political concerns which arose in the cities. However, the rise of Hitler in Germany and the outbreak of World War II forced even rural Swabians to become conscious of their status as ethnic Germans. Hungary and Romania were initially aligned with Germany, although they both changed alignment later, while Yugoslavia sided with the Allies.

In Hungary, with the full sanction of the Hungarian government, Swabians could enlist either in the Hungarian army or the German army. The Nazis recruited Hungarian Germans by bringing them into Germany for youth camps, summer schools and sports programs, where they were indoctrinated with propaganda. Many youths volunteered freely for the German army to avoid the discrimination they were sure to receive in the Hungarian army. The German army encouraged those who had Magyarized their names to change them back. Many were recruited to the Waffen Schutz Staffel (Waffen SS, the military militia). In Romania, Swabians could also enlist in the Germany army and remain Romanian citizens, and

more than ten per-cent of the German population did so. Yugoslavian Germans also enlisted in the Waffen SS, many of them into the all-Swabian Prince Eugene Division, named after the Austrian military hero who had freed Hungary from the Turks. After Germany overran Yugoslavia and occupied the country in 1941, Yugoslavians of German descent were forced into the German army. Feelings among Swabians, however, were not unanimously in favor of the Nazi party, and there were as many who resisted the movement as there were who supported it.

As German defeat became imminent, German military leaders initiated plans to evacuate ethnic Germans from the many Eastern European countries in which they lived. In Hungary, many refused to leave the only homeland they had ever known, but some 50,000, primarily those most closely associated with Nazi Germany, did leave in convoys of horse-drawn peasant wagons. The Soviet communists took control of the country, and in some Swabian villages, most of the adult German men and women who remained were deported to forced labor camps in the Soviet Union. Those who did not die in the harsh conditions in the camps were returned to Hungary in 1946, but found that they were no longer welcome. In 1945, German-owned land had been seized by the government without compensation, and non-Magyarized Germans had been expelled as traitors. Germans were considered non-Magyarized if they had listed German as their nationality or as their mother tongue on the latest census, if they had changed Magyarized names back to German, or if they were members of a cultural association of the Waffen SS. The expulsions took place in 1946, and resulted in 170,000 Germans being transported to the American Zone of West Germany, and 50,000 to the Soviet Zone in East Germany.

The Russians liberated Romania from the Germans in 1945. About 100,000 Swabians had left Romania when the Soviet troops began to arrive. There were no reprisals or expulsions in Romania, but property of German-speaking citizens was confiscated without compensation. Under Soviet authority, 75,000 adult German men and women were deported to labor camps in the Russian Ukraine. The 85% who survived the difficult conditions in the camps were released from 1945-1951. About half of those released did not return to Romania, but went instead to West Germany, East Germany or Austria.

In Yugoslavia, 60% of the Swabians left the country in horse-drawn carts with the retreating German army as Soviet troops invaded. Those who remained were declared traitors, and were subjected to cruel and harsh treatment due to their association with the German soldiers who had occupied their country during the war. Since 1941, the German occupation had created high levels of resentment among the predominantly Serbo-Croatian population. The German Army had executed thousands of Yugoslavian hostages in retribution for the killing and wounding of German soldiers during the occupation. The result was that in 1944, Germans were stripped of citizenship, and their property was confiscated. Approximately 27,000 to 37,000 were deported to the Soviet Union, and others were placed into concentration camps which had been made from Swabian villages, resulting in 35,000 to 45,000 children being separated from their parents. Thousands died in the camps from starvation, malnutrition and disease, but other thousands escaped. Prior to World War II, approximately 1.5 million Danube Swabians lived in Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. The result of war deaths, expulsions, deaths in labor and concentration camps, and emigration was a reduction of two-thirds of that number. In 1983, only 550,000 Swabians were estimated to remain (270,000 in Hungary, 250,000 in Romania, and 30,000 in Yugoslavia). Of the approximately one million refugees who went to Germany and Austria, about 250,000 later emigrated to other countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, France and the South American countries of Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela. Emigration still continues particularly from Romania, even though it is difficult to get permission from the government to leave.

The events which forced the Swabians from their homeland triggered a heightened awareness of their unique ethnic identity. In Austria, there now exists the Danube Swabian museum, the Danube Swabian archives, and the "Haus der Donauschwaben" at Salzburg. In Germany, many cities have active Danube Swabian organizations, and Danube Swabian newspapers and other special publications exist. In Sindelfingen, the Haus der Donauschwaben has cultural exhibits and a research archive. There is also a genealogical association which is totally dedicated to genealogical research on Danube Swabian families.

Ethnic clubs also exist in Australia, South America, the United States and Canada. Many of the clubs sponsor special events commemorating their cultural history. In the U.S., the national Danube Swabian

Association of the USA, Inc., was founded in 1956, and has its base in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The eventual result of the emigration of the Danube Swabians from Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia is the disappearance of their cultural influence in the region. Those Germans who remained in Yugoslavia are already "invisible" even though the past is still evident in the architectural appearance of the villages. The remaining German populations in Hungary and Romania are too small to make a cultural impact. Since so many members of younger generations have left, the number of German children being born continues to diminish. Although the emigrants continue to preserve memories of their cultural heritage, first-hand knowledge of the traditions will disappear. Change is inevitable in all societies, and it is fortunate that so many associations have been founded in so many countries to preserve the history of the Danube Swabians.

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