



***MEMORIES OF OUR
DONAUSCHWABEN
CULTURE – A
COLLECTION OF
ARTICLES***

by

The Cultural Committee of the

Trenton Donauschwaben

127 Route 156, Yardville, NJ 08620

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Introduction

This is a collection of reminiscences is written by Donauschwaben-Americans about their lives both in the old country and here in America. The stories were gathered by Dennis Jacob Bauer and Hans Martini, members of the Trenton Donauschwaben Cultural Committee. This compilation of articles is published to celebrate the club's 50th Anniversary (2006) here in Trenton, NJ.

These articles appeared over the years in the Trenton Donauschwaben's newsletter, *Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten*. Contributors Adam Martini, Andreas Franz and James Lieblang are members of the Trenton Donauschwaben. Other contributors are Lilly Murphy, Rose Zentner Vetter and Pat Drobnek, all of whom are fellow Donauschwaben researchers and had submitted articles to the Trenton Donauschwaben for publication in the newsletter. Several of the articles were originally published in German and later translated by newsletter staff.

These writings are published as a Donauschwaben cultural and historical resource. It is hoped that it may help future generations learn about their proud ethnic heritage, how their ancestors lived, and how they survived the 1944 - 1948 Communist genocide. We hope these writings will help them develop an appreciation of their DONAUSCHWABEN ROOTS. The collection will be expanded as more memories are published in the newsletter.

The articles are arranged in chronological order according to publication in the club newsletters.

THE DANUBE SWABIAN ASSOCIATION, TRENTON, NEW JERSEY
(Vereinigung der Donauschwaben, Trenton New Jersey)

Cordially invites you to a
Dinner and Celebration
In Honor of Our 50th Anniversary
(Ladet Sie herzlichst ein Zu Ihrem 50 Jubilaeum)

Saturday, October 14, 2006
5 - 9 p.m.

Arbeiter Hall
151 E. Franklin St.
Trenton, New Jersey

Live music by Tony Walter Combo

Please RSVP by October 1, 2006
(reply card enclosed)

This book is dedicated to all the Donauschwaben-Americans who had the courage to venture to a new land here in North America and become valued and up standing citizens in their newly adopted country.



History of the Vereinigung der Donauschwaben, Trenton, NJ

We are delighted that 2006 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Trenton Donauschwaben. Begun as a committee to help newly arriving immigrants, our club quickly evolved into the social and cultural institution that it is today. Indeed our very first Trachtenfest was held in January of 1957 and by the end of that same year, the Trenton Donauschwaben became a member of the Dachverband der Donauschwaben. Since then, our club has served as both a gathering place for friends, family and “Landsleute” as well as an organization that seeks to promote and preserve our cherished heritage.

In the early years, we conducted our meetings and events in a variety of places ranging from a church hall in the city of Trenton to individual members’ homes throughout the area. Then, in 1973 our members self-financed the purchase and renovation/expansion of a 100 + year old farmhouse that came with a shaded picnic area and a caretaker’s house. Though modest in size, the facilities have served our needs very well over the years - though we always seem to be remodeling or improving something!

Yet, while our “Vereinsheim” traces to a bygone era, our efforts to communicate with our membership and friends do not. In 1999 our club joined the high tech age and began its popular and full-featured web site, www.trentondonauschwaben.com. Tens of thousands of web-visitors have checked us out to date and the number keeps growing! An even more important communication tool is our newsletter, *Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten*. The popular publication features genealogical and historical articles, automotive news, editorials, the latest “goings on” at the club, and, among other things, fascinating stories written by the older generation about the time “back home”.

Speaking of “back home”, our club is also committed to honoring the memory of those who died during and after WWII. We have two memorials, the largest of which is located at Our Lady of Lourdes cemetery in Trenton where we have held annual prayer services since 1979. The 18 feet long by 5 feet tall monument is one of the largest of its kind and remains a powerful reminder of what our people had to endure.

As important as it is to remember our past, clearly our club’s survival depends on what we have done and are doing for our future. Like our friends at the Philadelphia Donauschwaben and the United German Hungarians, our club can be proud of its strong commitment to the younger generations. We formed our first Kindergruppe in September, 1957, which gave way to a German School for children shortly thereafter. Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s, up to 60 students were enrolled in 5 grades covering everything from *der, die, das* to the works of Nicholas Lenau and Adam Mueller-Gutenbrunn. Currently, our German School meets each Friday evening and all elementary and middle school youngsters are invited to attend.

Besides the school, our dance group has been an important element in keeping our youth involved at the club. Our *Jugend Tanzgruppe* was enormously successful throughout the 1970s and 1980s with up to 12 couples performing in places such as Milwaukee, Washington, D.C. and the Catskill Mountains. In the last few years, our dance group combined with that of the Philadelphia Donauschwaben in a joint venture that has been a big plus for both clubs. In addition, frequent canoeing, camping, hiking and skiing trips have been and remain an exciting part of the club’s schedule of events geared toward the young (and the young at heart!).

Some of our activities have been aimed specifically at our older members too. Since 1980, our club has had an adult German language program. Many active members have come from the ranks of the adult student population and the school remains vital to our club’s mission. The semester runs from April through October and anyone interested in attending can contact the club for more information.

More recently, we started an “AutoKlub” for the car aficionados among us. Since its inception in 2003, the group has grown steadily in size – and really does have some great looking cars! Last year, we joined with our neighbors at the German American Society to host a successful car show that attracted one hundred cars and many hundreds of spectators. We hope to have many more in the future.

Indeed, it has been a busy 50 years for the Trenton Donauschwaben. We are grateful to the many dedicated and hard working members who have made it possible. Thanks to them, our club is doing well and looking to the future with optimism. Because of them, we remain committed to being a meeting place for all to enjoy... and a place where the spirit of our ancestors lives on. Prosit Stiftungfest, 2006!

Hans Martini - 2006

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Remembering the German-Hungarian Neighborhood in Trenton

By Jim Lieblang

August-October 2001 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

I wanted to write you a short note/letter about your recent posting in our Donauschwaben Newsletter concerning German-Hungarian businessmen in Trenton taken from the 1937 issue of the *Deutsch – Ungarischer Familien Kalender*.

My family had a dairy and milk business in Trenton from 1916 to 1976. As such, I was acquainted since boyhood with many of these (now) elderly members of our community who came from “the old country”. I served milk and collected bills from many of them.

Growing up, I certainly remember the names of various families who it seemed all knew each other. The Schoens, Herdts, Baslers, Bohns, Winklers, Drobneks, Rohrbachers, Fredericks, Hahns, Weissers, Yungers, Ofners, Schmeltzes, Klespies, Knotts, Regers, Dingers, Weiners, Kiss’, Karlowitsches, Wildmanns, Mahlers, Wilwols on and on and on.

Now to the particulars of your article. First, the Wildmans. They ran a corner grocery in the Franklin Park section. I remember they had an old wooden freezer I used to take cases of milk into when serving. I think the wife’s name was Rosa. Maybe not. Anyway, I remember the store from my youth. Very nice people. The Weissers also ran a store as did the Klespies.

The Angebrandt’s lived on Division Street down by Hewitt Street. One of the benefits of having a Dad with a milk business and many customers was that I was always getting “fixed” up to date one of the daughters! I dated Mr. Angebrandt’s daughter once or twice in my teens. He was a “paper hanger” like another German customer, Frank Fiest.

Mrs. Stettner ran an upholstery business if I am not mistaken. My Aunt Anna worked there as a young woman.

George Marosovitz is another name I remember. He and his wife lived directly opposite St. Raphaels Church in White Horse. He taught me how to use a SCUBA tank in his pool! George used to deliver soda to our house. His partner was Joe. The store was one or two blocks from where Kuser hits Hamilton, right near St. Anthony’s school. George used to sell his own version of a cross between Ginger Ale and Sprite called “Tune Up”. It was delicious. He had a great “crème” soda and a “root beer” which was the best. Home deliver of soda, like milk, soon went the way of many things.

I don’t know if the Duachek is who I am thinking of but I seem to remember one that was a tailor.

The Yungers (Tasty Bottling) lived (some of the family) right by Franklin Park near the Schmeltzes and Ofners. I remember Mrs. Yunger lived into her 90’s and eventually had a home off of Parkside in West Trenton. She and the Ofners used to play pinochle with my Oma and Opa often. As a matter of fact, the Ofners were best man and bridesmaid to my Oma and Opa when they got married in 1915. I still have their wedding picture. (My grandparents came over in 1905 and 1907 from Banat and Batschka).

I also remember the name Hengert put can not place it any better.



The Potatoes

By Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff, August-October 2001 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

The following personal account came up recently during an evening's conversation with my brother-in-law, Stefan Mayer. He and I were talking about the new book, *Genocide of the Ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia*, and reflecting on our own experiences in the camps. Indeed, all survivors, including him, my wife, Eva, and me, still have many memories of that unforgettable time.

It was in the camp of Krushiwl (Serbian: Krusevlje) that this event took place. We had just come out of the camp at Jarek and ended up here with many other fellow unfortunates. I still recall the house and the room we were forced to share with some 12 – 15 others. On the floor we would sleep, one next to the other, like sardines in a tin. I was eight or nine years old at the time and as thin as a beanstalk.

The women knew of a locked courtyard, not far from us, wherein harvested potatoes would be stored until their eventual shipment to points elsewhere. It was located in the middle of the camp but was inaccessible because it was built up on all sides and the gate was securely locked and, I think, under guard.

Someone checked out the barn that enclosed the garden side of the courtyard. There they found an outhouse that was accessed from inside the yard and backed up to the outside. Some of the boards on the back of the outhouse were rotted enough that they could be pried away. The opening was then just big enough for a skinny kid like me to wriggle through. An old sack was thrown over the horrible smelling sewage and I shimmied through the toilet seat to gain access to the courtyard... and to the potatoes.

I was as scared as a hunted rabbit. I had no idea if I was being watched as I approached the beautiful looking mountains of potatoes. Anyway, I grabbed a few and ran back to the outhouse. There a board had been placed at an angle under the toilet seat across to the opening on the other side. In this way, I was able to roll the potatoes to the waiting women who would in turn keep telling me to get more. I was truly scared to death, especially since it was so quiet in the courtyard and it was just me alone spiriting about at this late hour.

Several times I heard steps on the drive in front of the big gate. When the steps stopped by the gate I would run like lightening to the outhouse, throw the board to the side and jump in through the toilet seat. Naturally, this meant I would come in contact with the foul smelling contents below. Although my grandmother would clean me up it was not something I wanted to do at all. The women, however, could never get enough potatoes and had me repeat this procedure several more times.

Eventually, either the potatoes were shipped off or someone revealed how it was we acquired the potatoes. In any event, I was no longer needed and for a long time thereafter was pleased that this potato swiping had finally ended.

Hunger drove us to some unbelievable lengths. Much was tried and truly anything was eaten. It seems one can now only laugh about these experiences or forever remain silent.



What a wonderful time we had...

by Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff, November-December 2001 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

Although I was just seven years old back in 1944, I still remember quite clearly some of the many traditions, celebrations and elements of everyday life in my Donauschwaben hometown of Bukin, Yugoslavia.

Bukin had by this time electrical service and many families already owned radios. This “new thing”, however, wasn’t yet found in every home. In fact, everyday life in our village was still centered on things other than listening to the radio.

The year, with its seasonal changes, dictated and influenced what we did and how we conducted ourselves. Here there were no exceptions. Our village, like so many other Donauschwaben villages, was primarily a farming community. The needs and concerns of the farmer set the tone and pace of life. Of course, there were also other professions too: tradesmen, businessmen, laborers and the upper stratum of society comprising government officials, teachers, doctors, etc. While all of these different groups intermingled at various times they also had separate social circles extending even to which Gasthaus they would feel most welcome. It gave our village life a wonderfully simple yet dynamic and vibrant quality.

In this day and age of the computer, mass media, mass transportation, mega malls, mega vacations and the accompanying stress, perhaps a look back to a less complicated way of life isn’t such a bad idea!

I remember... The time of Advent... The difficult work of the harvest was at an end and many could relax a little. One could now enjoy going “maja” (pronounced: my-ya), something akin to a coffeeklatsch. Friends and neighbors would take turns hosting each other, going over the latest news and interesting tidbits of life in Bukin.

St. Nicholas, Krampus and Christmas time... Usually a senior member of the family, often an older aunt, would get the job of Christkind (akin to a religious Santa Claus in the form of an older Christchild). The Christkind would bring the wished for presents and the Christmas tree. At the same time, a switch was brought along for those who might misbehave!

Butchering pigs... This usually occurred just before Christmas in the backyard of one’s home. The fattened pig or two would hang from a sturdy branch or a constructed stand for processing. Out of the meat, fat and other usable elements of the pig would come sausages (Wurst), bacon, pork and ham. The process of making especially liverwurst involved a huge cooking pot where the parts of the sausage would cook prior to going into the casings. This also produced gallons of very rich tasting soup. Neighbors and relatives would come with pots or milk cans to take some of this valuable soup home. Today we don’t even think of using such a byproduct!

Kirchweih (Church founding celebration)... In Bukin we had this celebration at the beginning of June. It was a most enjoyable time for every member of the community. Carnival attractions, along concession and arts & crafts stands would be set up in the middle of town to help create a most festive atmosphere. How wonderful those times in Bukin were!

Wine tasting time... When the new wine was ready the traditional wine-tasting would commence. Everyone test-tasted each other’s wine to see which one was the best. Even the smallest children would be allowed a sampling – something unheard of today but which never did any harm back then it seemed.

Weddings, etc.... Weddings could go on for days! People would literally go home, tend to the livestock, and return to continue the wedding celebration. How different is this from what we do today! Every important occasion, whether the birth of a child, a christening, confirmation, wedding; or death would be appropriately recognized. These were considered very important events in the community and one would always take the necessary time to participate. It was part and parcel of the respect one accorded to one's fellow man.

My father and his vineyard... I remember my father, Johann, a master cabinetmaker with a couple of employees, had little time leftover for gardening and his vineyard. Instead, as was customary, a neighboring farmer and laborers would be compensated to do the work for him. One of the jobs he did do, however, was spraying the vines in the vineyard - a job for which he always made time. I recall accompanying him on those occasions.

The vineyard was not far outside of Bukin, located in the midst of some fields. The grapevines were arranged in straight and orderly rows with a small clay building in the center. Next to the little house stood barrels meant to catch rainwater from the run-off. Small fruit trees dotted the areas between the rows of vines making for a most idyllic setting. It was very much like paradise to my mind. I could play in the very inviting earth while my father would attend to his spraying.

At noon, he would find me and we would walk to the cool clay house and out of the very hot summer sun. There we quietly had a very tasty lunch, consisting of bread, bacon, onions perhaps, and some wine. Afterwards, we would lie down for a couple of hours until the midday heat subsided. Those were splendid times for a young boy from Bukin. They are also some of the very best reminiscences I have of my father.

So much could be written about life in my small town. One could fill many volumes on just the traditions and life experiences alone. But that seems now all so far in the past... Today we seem to have such a different reality. To someone like me, the stress and worries of today makes the memory of those wonderful times in that small town called Bukin all the more precious.

We Donauschwaben use our rich heritage as a basis upon which our offspring and their offspring might benefit. Indeed, every generation writes its own history. Despite all of the present uncertainties and stresses, many good and positive things happen every day. Just like my memories of times past, our children and grandchildren will no doubt look back on these times and say: "*what a wonderful time we had...*"



Life in Banat and Batschka as told to me by my Grandparents

By Jim Lieblang

January-March 2002 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

As a child, I remember hearing stories from my Oma and Opa about life in the “old country”. To better understand the following story, first a little background to understand their local rivalries.

My Grandmother (a Rohrbacher) was born and lived in Palanka (Batschka). She came directly to the US from there. My Grandfather Lieblang’s father came from Molidorf (Banat). They had moved to Wekerledorf (8 km n of Palanka) about 1890. My Great Grandfather had previously married a woman from Obrovatz (Batschka), about 30 km n of Palanka.

About 1895, the Lieblang’s moved from Wekerledorf to Orolik/Rollitsch (Syrem), just south of Palanka. They came to the US in 1905.

Thus, my family had lived in three of the five German settled provinces (except for Baranja just west of Batschka and Slavonia, just west of Syrem). In their hearts, the Lieblang’s always considered themselves BANATER’s and the Rohrbacher’s always considered themselves BATSCHKA’S”. The seeds were planted for rivalries that always exist throughout the world.

Just as we nowadays tell jokes or stories about PA versus NJ, or Mercer versus Burlington, or Hamilton versus Ewing Township, so did our grandparents have their own rivalries.

It still continues, but as good natured humor for those involved. I am also a member of the German American Club. The first time I went to the bar there, I was told by one of the Herdt’s (or Bohn’s) that the “Batschka people sit on one side of the bar and the Banaters sit on the other side of the bar” still to this day!!!!

As a child, Oma and Opa would occasionally kid each other about how there province was better than the others.

One day, Oma (who was from the progressive modern metropolis of Palanka) was kidding Opa telling him how all Banater’s were just poor farmers compared to those in Batschka. Well, Grandpop would not take that lying down! He replied, “Maybe others were poor, but we were rich. We were NOT poor.”

Grandmom laughed and said “You were just as poor as all the other farm families there”. Grandpop hesitated, said nothing for a moment and then played his “ace card”....

“We were too rich” he said, “and I can prove it!” Grandmom’s eyebrows raised. Maybe she should back down. But no, she defiantly said to Opa “Prove it!”. Grandpop, who was not much of a talker, showed his ace for all to see..... “We were rich because WE OWNED A HORSE!”

Game over. Set, game and match I thought. Grandmom can not top that one ever!

Wrong! Oma began to smile.... Her grin got bigger and bigger. Finally, she looked at Grandpop and played her secret card.....”YOU MAY HAVE HAD A HORSE, BUT IT WAS BLIND !!!!!”

Grandmom won.....or so I thought.....We all laughed. Poor Opa, just retreated and said nothing. A cute story. Funny punch line. It is over. But it was not!.....

This is not the end of the story. I must have heard that story around 1955 or so. I had to wait until 1992 to find out that Grandpop was actually right! They were rich! How did I find out?

My wife and I are friends with an Austrian historian named Dr Erwin A Schmidl. He has written several books on 17th thru 20th century European history. He is also the Assistant Director of the Austrian Military Museum in Wien. One night at dinner I told him the above story. I got to the last part and told him

how Grandmom had “snuckered” Grandpop and won the argument with her “blind horse” comment.

Erwin shook his head and laughed. “I am sorry to tell you this” he said, “but your Grandfather was right! Hardly anyone could afford to buy a horse in good condition. The cost was out of reach for just about everyone. Once in a while, the Army would get rid of its remounts that were lame or blind. The lucky farmer who had saved up money got to buy one of the ex-army horses. It was a status of wealth because even though blind, the horse could still pull a plow and a cart! Your Granddad’s family had an envious possession. Anyone would have loved to had a blind horse to help in the fields.”

So Opa, you were right all along! Your family was rich in a material sense with the purchase of their blind horse. Sorry Oma, but you were wrong.

In today’s life with Pokemon’s and Sony DVD players, it is probably difficult to have our children relate to a story about life four generations ago. But the story does reflect our roots and who we are and what we are and where we come from. We are the children and grandchildren of these poor farmers who settled the “wild east”.

And we should never forget it or not be proud of our heritage. Read the story to your children. If you have some of your own, send them in to our editor, Dennis for others to share.



MY ESCAPE TO FREEDOM

by Adam Martini

**Translation by newsletter staff, January-March 2002 & April-June 2002 issues, Trentoner
Donauschwaben Nachrichten**

In 1947 my mother, grandmother, sister and I found ourselves in the “detention” camp of Kruschiwel situated near the Yugoslav – Hungarian border desperately trying to figure a way to escape. It was a daunting prospect despite the close proximity of Kruschiwel to Gara, Hungary. In fact, the border was shaped in such a fashion that if one wasn’t careful one could end up right back in Yugoslavia! To make matters worse, my grandmother had a great deal of trouble walking, I had a form of malaria with its accompanying high fever and cold shakes, my little sister Maria was just three and my mother worked every day in nearby fields. We were not the ideal group to attempt an escape! Our prospects were not good and we had little hope.

It’s interesting that a real opportunity to escape came just when it seemed things couldn’t get any worse and the end appeared near. Our salvation came in the form of three young men hired by my aunt, a schoolteacher and nun stationed in the aforementioned Gara. These men made it possible for a number of Donauschwaben to flee and secretly visited us to discuss the plan. Upon seeing us for the first time – my ailing grandmother, my little sister and myself, a skinny bean of a kid almost too sick to move – they determined that we would have to be much healthier if our escape would have any chance of success. They then began to bring us bread during each successive visit to help make us stronger. And so it was that at the very depths of our hopelessness and despair, there now flickered a glimmer of hope that we might yet survive this horrendous ordeal.

After a few weeks our escape was set. It was a day on which my mother would be working in the fields nearby, allowing her to come directly to a meeting point outside of camp. Everything was in place and soon the moment arrived. I was completely energized by the possibility of survival! My grandmother grabbed my sister and me and proceeded to the “no man’s land” strip of cleared field, which surrounded Kruschiwel. This clearing aided the sentries posted all around the perimeter and were meant to prevent anyone from escaping. The idea was that we would work our way to the other side of the clearing by collecting firewood and when we were close enough, run into the nearby cornfield. Slowly we worked our way over, keeping our heads down all the while pretending to be intent on our task.

A loud “stoj!!” (halt!) stunned us as we looked up to see a sentry with his menacing weapon. We then ran as fast as we could back to camp, even my grandmother managed to keep up! My mother returned to camp later after waiting in vain at the designated meeting place for many hours.

Our second escape plan was similar to the first. We had a strict schedule to adhere to once we made it through the clearing and into the cornfield. A whistle would signal us to move to the end of the cornfield and another whistle would signal the move toward the Hungarian border and freedom. Of course, the whistle would also alert the sentries so precise timing and swift movement were required. Those who were not fast enough would be left behind.

Our second escape attempt found the three of us in the same clearing making as if we were collecting firewood just as before. Always looking down, we stopped here and there to pick up a twig or something and slowly eased our way through the clearing.

The shrill command “stoj!!” was again heard but as we were more than halfway, we decided to make a run for it! We ran for our lives with little regard that the field we ran through was a

hemp field and not corn. Hemp is planted in dense, thick rows with pollen that makes you dizzy (I would suffer from an intense headache as a result). Onwards we ran as our lives truly hung in the balance. We ran until the shout of the sentry could no longer be heard and then sat hidden in the hemp for hours until late afternoon. The three of us proceeded to the meeting place with my mother who had stolen away from her work detail. Our joy upon seeing her, however, was tempered by the need to move to the cornfield and avoid the frequent patrols whose path our little group couldn't afford to cross.

We waited many hours in that cornfield and listened like hawks for the sound of the whistle. While my mother and sister dozed, my grandmother and I sat fully awake. Partially because of the excitement of the moment and the idea of being free at last, there was no way I could sleep. Then after a small eternity the whistle finally sounded! We awakened my mother and sister, both of whom rose quickly knowing that time was of the essence. My mother, perhaps disoriented from malnutrition, the long hours of hard fieldwork and lack of sleep, proceeded in the wrong direction! Try as we might, my grandmother and I could not convince her otherwise, and we all headed to the wrong end of the field. The sound of the whistle at the other end of the field meant we would not be escaping to freedom that night. It was with great care (and not a little disappointment) that we had to steal our way back into the camp at Kruschiwel.

The same three young men again aided our third and final escape attempt. A different area of the camp and clearing was chosen and we soon found ourselves trying to find our way in a large cornfield. We bungled about in the maze of corn until we heard voices – German voices. This was truly wonderful for me, as our bad luck in previous attempts had made me a nervous wreck. But as we waited and waited for my mother to arrive from working in a field at the other end of the camp, our luck seemed to again be running out. As the day began to turn night, our guides became nervous. My ears were like antennae and I heard everything being said and every noise around us. I soon picked up from the grumbling of the group that they wanted to leave without my mother. Freedom beckoned and my mother was nowhere to be seen!

My grandmother, being quite religious, began to pray fervently. My sister fidgeted and made nervous noises while I strained to listen for the dear voice of my mother. Soon two of the three guides set off in opposite directions to look for her. It was resolved that they would return in half an hour and the group would then set off with or without her. I knew, of course, that my grandmother would never leave without her and that we would then have to make our way back to camp, again. The first of the two guides eventually returned, sat on the ground and said nothing. The group of people escaping with us grew increasingly scared and wanted to get going. Just then the second guide sounded his approach. He wore a headband and it was he who brought us bread from Gara (sadly, I never did know his name). Behind him followed my dear mother! I was overwhelmed with joy and gratefully thanked God in whom I placed my trust. My grandmother cried tears of joy and my sister was simply ecstatic. It was a moment I shall never forget.

And yet this terrifying adventure was not yet over and we quickly departed, as the border was still a couple of miles away. Actually it wasn't the distance that was the problem, rather it was the need to avoid the patrols that made us most fearful. And so it went on that moonlit late summer night. A group of about 16 Donauschwaben led by some very young guys sneaking through various fields on the way to the border. There we were confronted with much the same scene as outside our camp: a cleared strip of "no man's land". This time hay bales dotted the landscape along with small guard towers at regular intervals. Sentries walked back and forth between them, meeting in the middle, turning and walking back to their respective posts. One of our guides crept up to the middle point to determine the best moment for our group to rush through the gap as the sentries' backs were turned. The sentries must have been scared too as they sang continuously and we knew precisely where they were. Soon our moment arrived. As the sentries turned toward their towers, our guides urged us to quietly follow them as quickly as possible. Onward, we were implored, ever onward. First through the clearing with its hay bales, my mother carrying my sister and I holding my grandmother's hand, which I pulled ever harder toward the freedom that lay ahead. The hay bales did provide us some protection despite the moonlight but we knew the sentries would still be able to see us. My grandmother fell over a few of these bales but would always jump up and run onward. I don't think I've ever been closer to her in my entire life. We went on like this for hours and yet no one complained of being tired. It's funny but in the camps none of us felt we could do much of anything and yet now we could go on for hours – a small wonder.

After a while we did hear we were in Hungary but the guides hurried us along, as the Yugoslavs were known to chase after refugees far across the border. We then heard a dog barking and quickened our pace, as the guides were once again quite nervous. We came upon a small brook with just a small board running across it. My grandmother absolutely refused to cross such a rickety bridge. My mother and sister

were already on the other side as was the rest of the group and they were intent on continuing apace. I had little choice but to pull my grandmother across! Soon the sound of the barking dog receded into the distance and a very good feeling suddenly washed over me. I think you must experience something like this to truly understand it. For me the three years spent in camp were finally at an end and I finally felt free.

Our group came upon a farm the next day that served as a transit point for the Donauschwaben escaping to freedom. From here, our group would make its way to Gara in smaller groups of two or so the following day. While we waited, a large bucket of fresh milk was brought in for us to drink. Fresh milk! I drank and drank; I just couldn't get enough. It was for me another memorable moment: Fresh milk, freedom, and life. It was an indescribable feeling. The next day we arrived in Gara at the home of my grandmother's sister, my aunt.

This experience and many others have convinced me that we Donauschwaben *are* a special group. Through great difficulties we have achieved our goals, have enriched our heritage and have set a fine example for our children and grandchildren. We did not go under, we are Donauschwaben!



A TYPICAL DONAUSCHWABEN WEDDING

By Lilly Murphy

July-September 2002 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

My mother, Eva WASCHEK geb.GIESSWEIN was born in Gajdobra on Dec 10, 1927 and lived there until October 12, 1944. She is the daughter of Theresia Drobnik and Andreas Giesswein). Eva remembered the following about weddings in Gajdobra, Batschka.

Weddings were usually on Tuesday at 10.00 A.M. This gave you 3 days till Friday to eat all the food that was prepared, since on Friday we never ate meat. All of the guests and the band would meet in the yard of the Bride's parents.

It was customary for all attending the wedding to meet at the bride's home and walk to the church in procession. The young girls went first followed by the bridal couple, close family, and then friends. The celebration often lasted 3 days!

The band would play "Schön ist die Jugend, sie kommt nicht mehr" before leaving for church. Everyone walked together to the church as the band played a happy marching tune. (There was a certain order that the people walked to church in but she is not quite sure she remembers it right) After mass, everyone went straight to the Wirtzhaus (pub, tavern, inn) or to the home of one of the parents if it was a smaller wedding. Everyone took turns dancing with the bride.

Afterwards a luncheon was served. The food was prepared by 2 women who always cooked for weddings. Even if the wedding was at a home these woman usually catered the meal. They also had girls that helped serve and clear dishes. Cooking started days before the wedding. Beef or chicken soup was usually followed by goulash or something like that, then roast pork and beef and chicken with all the trimmings and then lots of cake and cookies and other desserts. Beer and wine were usually drunk but not much hard liquor (schnapps). After lunch, the tables were pushed to the side to make room for dancing. The dancing continued until it was time for dinner. Usually at 6:00 pm. Another huge meal was served. After dinner there was more dancing and drinking. At midnight the bride and groom would leave and go to their new home or wherever they were to live. They would return again as "true" husband and wife sometime during the course of the night. The bride would no longer be wearing her wedding gown, but her normal dress. Of course there would be much cheering when they returned to the party.

The festivities would continue until morning. Many times the party was "crashed" by people who were not invited to the wedding. They usually arrived after midnight and wore funny costumes and provided some sort of humorous entertainment to earn their stay. They were usually classmates or vague acquaintance or just someone from town that wanted to join in the festivities! In return for amusing the guests they could eat and drink and dance as long as they liked.

The biggest wedding she remembers the most was the wedding of Peter SCHUMACHER and Elisabetha PIFFATH. At their wedding, some young uninvited men arrived dressed as woman. They attached seltzer water bottles to themselves under their skirts and somehow triggered them as part of their comedy routine. (Making it appear that they were woman laughing so hard they wet their pants!) The festivities would continue until dawn when the guests and the band would walk to the bride and groom's house and sing a song outside their bedroom window.

The party would continue as long as the guests were able. Just like here, there were always a few

guests that didn't know when to go home. Sometimes the celebration lasted for days but was always over by Friday.

This article was posted on the internet *Banat List* by Lilly Murphy, 23 April 2002. Lilly is a fellow Donauschwaben researcher and friend of our Editor, Dennis J. Bauer. Lilly and her mother, Eva, have given the Club permission to publish this historical & cultural article about our ancestor's customs. The Club wishes to thanks Lilly and Eva for this look at the past.



Village Life in a Modern World

by Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff, October-December 2002 issues, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

Autumn has come to pass. Summer is now just a fading memory. The days are getting shorter, the nights cooler. It is a time for reflection. Images of summers' past, of festivals and of the good old days come to mind. Why do we Donauschwaben hang on to "the good old days"? Why do we put on old ancestral costume; sing melodies from the past and dance the dances of long ago? Not only do we old-timers do this, but we want our children and their children to do so too.

This can only be the result of our love and longing for the small town or village life of our past. For Donauschwaben everywhere, it is the life we left behind that we miss most in the modern world of today. When I think back to my family home and the small town in which I lived, the memories come sharply into focus. Our houses were not palaces by today's standards, but they were neat, comfortable and had either thatched roofs or tiles depending upon their age. There was no central heating system much less air conditioning, but thick walls made it bearable in summer and winter. We had a tiled central heating stove which heated everything from the entranceway back. By the way, the entranceway to the house always faced the yard and was often adorned with vines and roses that bloomed at different times of the year. These would serve to beautify the entire yard area for long periods of time.

There was a summer kitchen, a wine cellar, and a well with a bucket that one raised and lowered with the turn of a crank. This system also served as a refrigerator during the hot summer months. For instance, melons were put into the bucket and lowered into the well to chill. Everything lived and revolved around the family house which was always a beehive of activity. The yard was a lively place with chickens, geese, ducks, pigs and often rabbits and doves. There were also vegetable gardens, vineyards, and fields that needed tending. Indeed, the work went on without let up – at least until Sunday, that is.

Sunday was a special day of rest. It was a day for church, visits to the cemetery and, above all, a day to get together with friends and family. In addition to Sundays, occasions such as baptisms, marriages, burials, name days, and the big holidays like Christmas and Easter were very important and always celebrated appropriately. You see, there were no TV's and only a few radios but we never seemed to need them. We had a dynamic, busy and interesting village life!

It was in this environment that we Donauschwaben grew up. A close union with nature gave us our strength and character, it was our source of joy and contentment. This is why so many Donauschwaben gather for events such as the Treffen in Milwaukee. It is why we put on the fashionably old styled clothing; sing the old standards; and, recite meaningful and time-tested prose. To my mind, the incredibly nurturing experience of life in a Donauschwaben village means that I am never really free of its effects. In many ways, our club is a family organization based on these same ideals. Ideals from long ago transported to our modern day existence. We all have this yearning for a simpler, less complicated village life. We all seek a connection with our fellow man. We all seek the same type of life affirming interactions that no TV show can give us. These instincts live in all of us and drive our desire to preserve our heritage: a heritage as relevant today as it ever was. Support this wonderful Donauschwaben club of ours.



By Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff, January-March 2003 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

In the everyday life of the Donauschwaben, the winter months were always full of meaning. The short days and long nights were ideal for the slow rhythms of village life. This was in stark contrast to the summer season, where work consumed practically all of one's waking hours. Winter was a time for reflection, a time where one could breathe freely again. Among other things, the cold season meant it was time for butchering fatted pigs; partaking of culinary favorites like sausage soup; even the newly made wine could now be sampled. Life was good and most everyone was content.

Men would often find their way to the local tavern where cards were played. Some of their favorite games were "Ziehmariasch" and "Ramscheln". The women would visit with friends and relatives. Such socializing was called "maja" in our town and one could be sure that all of the local news would be exchanged – and all while sewing or knitting. There were also many opportunities for children to be part of the action. One of these I best remember was the New Year's celebration.

The New Year's tradition of visiting relatives and friends to extend best wishes was the same in Austria as it was in our area of southeastern Europe, if I am not mistaken. We children had a list of people whom we would call on to wish the best for the New Year. For this, we would get money and sometimes a gift as well. Of course, for us the money was a huge plus! The coins would be thrown into our "money bag" with a noisy jingle, bringing the person good luck. Money was such a rarity for children back then that it was only spent with the greatest care and was always treated with the utmost respect. Of course, we would also enjoy seeing who could collect the most!

New Year's was such a wonderful time for all of us back then. In retrospect, I see so many good reasons to have this type of interaction between young and old. It was not just the money although for us it seemed so at the time. Direct contact between young and old just was not part of normal everyday life. The New Year's handshake with an adult, looking them in the eye and reciting a verse or two was an important and life-affirming experience. And so it was back then...

Today, however, money seems to mean far less than it did for children back then. Surely it is because there is so much more of it and that even children have little trouble getting a hold of it. One does not speak of saving, or of gratitude and contentment as much as one speaks of more and faster, all with the least amount of effort. This lack of appreciation often insinuates itself into a life style that is often less than healthy.

With this in mind, let me take this opportunity to segue from the Donauschwaben of yesteryear to our Donauschwaben club here in Trenton. Our organization has always considered the making of money as a necessity, not as a way to obtain profit. That is why our active members are not paid although they do the work that allows our club to exist. It is a completely unselfish and most generous thing they do. All of our guests should know that the dollars they spend for their dinners are dollars that are for the upkeep of the club only. Maybe that is why our club continues to enjoy that "just like home" feeling, where the food is good and the atmosphere is cordial and relaxed.

Please continue to support your club. Come to the dinners and participate whenever and wherever possible. The doors are open to anyone interested in our German/Donauschwabens culture. We continue to be a refreshing alternative to an otherwise money-centered and overly materialistic world. See you at the Donauschwaben!



On becoming a Woodworker...

by Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff , April-June 2003 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

I was 15 years old and had just completed the mandatory part of my schooling. I was a young teenager and had to decide on a profession or if I wanted to pursue further academic studies. After some thought, I decided on a career as a craftsman. This dovetailed quite nicely with our family's background: my father and grandfather were both craftsmen and once had their own woodworking business back in Bukin, Yugoslavia.

In Austria, the way one went about learning to become a woodworker – or any other profession – was to find an apprentice position at a master craftsman's workshop. Happily, I easily found such a place at the firm of "Eduard Schrott" in the town of Ostermiething.

The course of training would last for three years. In that time span, I would work for 48 hours a week with a seven week technical training course each year in the town of Mattighofen, Upper Austria. For other students in other areas, one would attend the technical school once a week. This was often the case in larger towns.

The first few months are by far the most difficult time for a "Lehrling", a student craftsman candidate. To me it seemed like some kind of military boot camp. In the workshop where I was placed there were nine journeymen (fully trained craftsmen), two apprentices, and the master craftsman/boss. There was also a painter and his assistant on staff. The journeymen behaved like sergeants and the master craftsman like a general! You can imagine what that must have been like for the lowly apprentice.

That first year found me often holding a broom in hand and being the butt of practical jokes, which caused great amusement in the shop. On the other hand, woe to the apprentice who did not find the right tool quickly enough, the journeymen could be most heartless. It behooved one to find all one could about every facet of the work, as quickly as possible! That first year was for most apprentices the most difficult time and, for a few, a psychologically overwhelming time. Consequently, some would drop out and find another line of work.

Following that terrible first year – a student's baptism of fire, so to speak – things did get better. One was thankful that the journeymen then had a new apprentice to pick on!

The life of a student craftsman changed dramatically in the second year. For instance, I received a workbench and my own set of tools. I would work under a senior craftsman (called an "Obhut") and was located right near his work area. I would glue boards together, sand them, and do various other jobs for the senior journeyman. It was far more interesting work though there was constant pressure from the other journeymen who would find every opportunity to make the student "feel the pain". I cannot imagine anything remotely similar occurring in today's day and age.

During the third year, things would again change dramatically. I received my own small projects to complete and was allowed to use all of the machines in the workshop. Although I was often just as productive as a journeyman, there was no doubt I was still low man on the totem pole. I still had to greet them personally and, no matter where we were, I had to play "go-for" whenever they asked. This meant not only for things like getting wood for their projects but also to run and buy them cigarettes!

Slowly the journeymen had to make room for the third year apprentice, however, as the relationship would dramatically change after the year-end examination was successfully completed. The former greenhorn and go-for, would then become a work colleague. This would be especially difficult for the more senior of the journeymen to accept.

As already mentioned, the apprentice had to attend seven weeks' worth of technical training. There many students gathered from a variety of professions: mechanics, masons, carpenters, etc. The technical school was also a boarding school that would be just like a home away from home for all of us. Of course, we were young guys "feeling our oats", as it were, so strict rules were in place to maintain control and order. From the time one got up in the morning until "lights out", everything was strictly regulated. Our dorm rooms slept six, with three bunk beds per unit. Meals were taken *en masse* in a large cafeteria. However, each profession had its own lecture room and workshop where proper techniques would be demonstrated and practiced.

Boarding school life had its fair share of not-so-wonderful aspects. One of them, the twice-weekly shower, comes quickly to mind. Yes, the communal shower was one of those traumatic experiences of boarding school life: rows of fellows in their birthday suits waiting in line for what seemed like an eternity. Five then would gather in a circle under a single showerhead and await the stern instructions from the teacher. Cold water would suddenly burst forth... which slooowly began to turn warm. Of course, just about the time it became bearable, it would stop and the command "apply soap!" rang out. The nice, warm water would eventually be turned back on – but not for long. Quickly warm water became cold, until it was very cold at the end. The instructors knew they were in control and would let the cold water run for a long time. By the end of our shower, we were often as red as lobsters!



A Donauschwaben Refugee's Story

by Adam Martini

Translation of newsletter staff, July-September 2003 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

Our time at school found us studying five different subjects along with instruction time in the workshop. One learned how to conduct proper correspondence and client relations; cost analysis and drafting; pricing and advertising. In the third year, an extra two subjects were added: citizenship and accounting. At the end of the class work, a report card was issued which also had relevance for the journeyman's examination. This course of study was very important for our profession, we learned ways to make the work easier and everyday life easier. We students had to go by the rules of the school and could not deviate from them. To do so meant expulsion and an abrupt end to one's woodworking ambitions.

So, after three years as an apprentice in Ostermiething and three seven-week courses at the school in Mattighofen the big day finally arrived. Actually, the big week finally arrived: the weeklong journeyman examination. In my time, the journeyman's exam was conducted by a committee of master craftsmen from the area of Braunau on the river Inn. For my exam, I had to build a bookcase in an unfamiliar workshop under the watchful eye of the master craftsman. From there, we would go to an assembly area with all the other journeyman candidates. I had a week's time to make the cherry bookcase and was then to place the piece on display along with everyone else's. A five-member panel of master craftsmen then judged the items.

At the same time, my teachers from Mattighofen were on hand to give exams in all of the aforementioned subject matter: drafting, accounting, etc. This written part of the examination process lasted almost the entire day. Around three or four in the afternoon all of the journeyman candidates gathered for the results to be announced. Unfortunately, not everyone passed the rigorous examination and those who did not would have to repeat the whole process within a year's time. In any event, I was now a fully trained woodworker just like my father, grandfather, and great grandfather before me. I was a proud guy on that day and was relieved my education was at an end. I was now well prepared for a career in woodworking.

I am pleased to say that I still enjoy woodworking tremendously and now, at the age of 66, am working with my son, Hans. He also opted for a career in woodworking and has been in business for quite some time.

It may interest our readers to know that as an apprentice from 1952-55 I earned 37 Schilling for a 48 hour workweek during the first year. During the second, I earned 52 Schilling per week and by the third year, it was 110 Schilling per week. In those days, a Schilling was worth just about 4 cents!

One other item of interest: Back when I was growing up, an institution in the Donauschwaben towns of the Batschka (and elsewhere) was the journey taken by the journeyman craftsman. Right after his examination, the journeyman would grab his bag and go from town to town in search of work. There was an unwritten rule, that when a journeyman came knocking at the door of a master craftsman's shop, he could always stay over night free. The next day the journeyman would then go on his way in search of work. Of course, if the master of the shop had enough work, he would then employ the journeyman for a while. In this way, the journeyman would learn a variety of methods and techniques from which he would benefit throughout his professional life

You know, the journeyman tradition was an accepted and integral part of everyday life back then. Today, such an idea is unthinkable. It's a shame that our modern society has no room for something so

valuable and worthwhile. Especially with the advent of the computer age, people are becoming increasingly isolated from each other. We Donauschwaben remember well those wonderful times, when work could only be performed by people and not high-tech machines and computers!

The Danube Swabian Association of Trenton is always striving to tie old traditions together with the new. Be a part of our activities and undertakings, we're sure you'll find it most worthwhile. See you at the Donauschwaben.



ARE WE THE LAST DONAUSCHWABEN?

by Andy Franz

Translation by newsletter staff, July-September 2003 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

On the 1st of June, I was again part of the group making the annual pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. John Neumann in Philadelphia (see photos on page 11). Each year, the Donauschwaben clubs of Philadelphia, New York and Trenton lead a commemorative mass in honor of those who perished in the communist death camps, 1944-48. During the mass, I sat just in front of the altar, facing the congregation. Many of assembled participants were of the older generation, with hair of gray or white – just like mine. Yet, in the first row of pews I saw a dozen youngsters in colorful traditional garb. Young people were also well represented but, as mentioned before, I'm convinced most were older Donauschwaben. How I know they were Donauschwaben, I'm not really sure. Perhaps it was in their faces, possibly it was just a feeling I had. Maybe it's just because I, like them, am a Schwob.

I was born in the Donauschwaben town of Batschka Palanka in 1935. It was home for me until the first grade. It was then that WWII came crashing home to our town. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere, school was closed and my friends were mostly gone. Along came that day in 1944 when a communist partisan, brandishing a pistol, forced us from our house and into the "internment" camp called Jarek. I spent some 18 unhappy months there, finding out first hand what hunger and cruelty were really like. I was then made an "indentured servant", serving as a shepherd for some farmer. Eventually, I ended up in another camp at Sombor: from where I would finally escape to freedom in Austria.

April 1947 found me in the historic city of Graz, Austria, where I caught up with the three school years I missed. Then it was on to high school and training for a career as a woodworker. In 1956, I arrived in Trenton and have lived in this area ever since. Over the many years since leaving Palanka, I've been often asked about my ethnicity and nationality. At first I said: "I was born in Yugoslavia, but I'm an Austrian." Then I said: "I'm from Austria, but I'm an American." "Ahhh," it would be said: "but what are you *really*?" "Well, I'm a Schwob." To which it was replied: "What's that?"

Yes, I'm a Schwob, but why? After all, I was just 8 ½ when I had to leave my home. I certainly have memories of Palanka, but I saw the people, the town and the everyday life there through the eyes of a child. Then came the camps, where the most important thing was survival. In Austria I was resented as a burdensome refugee/foreigner and in America I was called a "greenhorn." Believe it or not, what all of these experiences taught me was a pride in my Donauschwaben identity!

You know, I really don't know the town of my birth as well as many of those present in the church that day. It was, in fact, my parents, grandparents and countrymen (Landsleute) who gave me a Donauschwaben identity over the years.

They taught me the value of hard work, the concept of honorable behavior, diligence, and belief in God. Often it was a hard lesson to learn (especially when I was younger). Now that I'm slowly becoming one of the last Donauschwaben who remembers what our home was like, it can be said that it was one of the best lessons I could have learned. After much reflection and considerable discussion, especially with my friend, Adam Martini, I've concluded that while we are the last of those from the Donauschwaben towns, we aren't the last Donauschwaben. I see much of what was taught to me in the way our children and grandchildren behave and believe. Many of us carry over the mother tongue and traditions to our children, but even those who have "Americanized" seem to pass something Donauschwaben along to their children. If you don't believe, just check out our children!

No, I'm not the last of the real Donauschwaben, there are still many to come long after me.



DONAUSCHWABEN CONSCRIPTS

By Pat Drobnek

July-September 2004 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

Years ago, I was sitting with my cousin, Josef (Josie) Branitsch, in his kitchen near Stuttgart. Ironically, Josie and my Dad (first cousins and both only 19 years old in 1944) had fought on different sides of the world during World War 2 -- my Dad in the Pacific with the US Navy Seabees and Josie in France with the German infantry as a conscript. Now, as we sat there, Josie said to me "I was in Trenton (New Jersey) once!" Startled, I re-translated what he had said back and forth in my head. At that time I didn't think that Josie had ever been in the United States. Grinning, he repeated it. He then told me what none of the rest of the US family knew. He had been captured by US Forces in France during 1944 and spent the rest of the war in one of our POW camps in Texas.

As he was being repatriated after the war, the train stopped in Trenton, NJ. He said that he could have made a phone call to his aunt (my grandmother, Lena Rohrbacher Drobnek from Palanka & for many years the caterer for the Arbeiter). However, two things stopped him: his lack of English (!) and his fear of "causing trouble" for my grandmother. He continued by saying to me that two things really impressed him -- he was never mistreated by the Americans and he always had enough to eat. His treatment was far different from that of his brother-in-law, who had been captured by the Soviets.

Pat Drobnek (Dschwab1902@aol.com in her email to the Banat list, permission granted to print).



The Donauschwaben: a Uniquely German People

by Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff, October-December 2004 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

Our ancestors from the German speaking areas of central Europe were always possessed certain desirable qualities. These included an excellent work ethic, trustworthiness and a fear of God. The popular Latin phrase: “Ora et Labora” (prayer and work) was the guiding principle in those days. It’s no wonder then that this group would be much sought after to colonize and rebuild the devastated areas of southeastern Europe in the 1700’s.

The virtually uninhabitable areas of Hungary, the Batschka and Banat, with their devastated villages and decimated fields became the new home for our Germans ancestors. The destruction of this part of Europe was the direct result of the Turkish Ottoman Empire’s efforts to gain control of Europe. For a while, the Turks were triumphant in this endeavor and approached the gates of Vienna... but could go no further. After a time, campaigns were then waged to retake the land. These were lead by Prince Eugen of Savoy, among others, and were overwhelmingly successful. As the Turks retreated, formerly oppressed regions became free again and with it came the need to rebuild – an almost unimaginable task.

And so it was that our ancestors traveled down the Danube by boat and arrived in these godforsaken places. Much has been written about the first settlers and the extreme circumstances they had to endure. Only after many generations would all of the hard work finally create a relatively good life for our ancestors. Indeed, eventually the area became the breadbasket of Europe. Such was the success of the Donauschwaben that scientists from Germany would come to study crop production techniques.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the villages and towns of the Donauschwaben areas would experience a time of unprecedented prosperity. These “Doerfer” had either all-German populations or were a mixture of Hungarian, Croatians and/or Serbians. Life was good. There were German churches, schools, singing societies, cemeteries and taverns. There was still much hard work to do but now there was time to celebrate as well.

In many ways, life revolved around the church. Built at the center of town, the church was the focal point of the community and its all-important bells could be heard in every direction. It was truly believed that God was with the Donauschwaben; whether in the fields, in the vineyards, at home, or anywhere else. It was as if there was a partnership with the Almighty and that every problem had a solution through Him.

This idyllic life and coexistence with other ethnic groups came to a quick end in 1944. Overnight, Donauschwaben would lose everything and, if they hadn’t escaped ahead of time, were sent to concentration camps or were killed outright. Hundreds of years of hard work suddenly amounted to zero with many sneaking away at night as if they were thieves. The Donauschwaben, of course, knew the real thieves all too well.

With this catastrophe, one could well imagine that the Donauschwaben would finally disappear into that dark night. Not so with this group! They had strong and resilient forefathers who never gave up

and always kept on going.

Today, this heritage of strength and vitality lives on in all of us. We have every reason to believe we can take on life's challenges and succeed. The unfortunate part of today's prosperity is that all too soon we forget the value of getting one's "hands dirty" while doing something worthwhile. Life is (too) good, the cupboard is full and, for many, one's proud heritage is just a quaint and somewhat foggy notion. We don't want for anything and, as a result perhaps, we feel we don't really need anyone either. Even God is far less important today, there just isn't room for Him in our busy lives. We are "free".

We must, of course, be on our guard for this type of empty and meaningless lifestyle. This is especially true as it relates to Hollywood's vacuous propaganda, which constantly challenges us to stay true to ourselves and to God. This attack on our well-being is somewhat different today than it was for our ancestors so many years ago. We are at risk of becoming estranged from our communities, from one another and of distancing ourselves from God. Let us use the example of our pioneering ancestors to give our lives new meaning and a positive direction.

The Trenton Donauschwaben is but a small club in a big world. The doors, however, are open to everyone interested in the German way of doing things. The atmosphere is relaxed, the people are friendly, and the place is ideal for children and families alike. Come, participate with us, we need each other!



The Town Crier

by Ruth Melcher

January-March 2005 issue, *Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten*

When my parents were young, in the 1920s and 30s and early 1940s, their villages still had town criers who walked down the streets calling out news from the village hall. In Beschka, Yugoslavia, my mother's village, the crier read messages in High German for Germans and in Serbo-Croatian for the Serbs. In Gyönk, Hungary, my father's village, he used High German or Hungarian. In Gyönk he wore a police uniform; in Beschka, he came in his everyday clothes.

They called him, the drummer, but his official title was *der Kleinrichter* (little judge) because he assisted *der Grossrichter* (big judge) at the village hall. He also delivered individual messages from the village hall.

The town crier came about once a week, stopping here and there and drumming until everyone came out. Then he announced things like Volkfests, dates taxes were due or auctions for a sheep or for wood cut from the county woods.

My father remembers that often after his announcement, people would say, "In case of rain, we'll do it the day before." This was an old saying that the settlers probably brought with them from Germany 200 or 300 years earlier.

Those days when people could still make jokes were happier, simpler times. My mother's last memories of the town crier are from the summer of 1944, near the end of World War II. He came more often then, two or three times a week, to tell ethnic Germans that they needed to flee to Germany. The village was half German and by fall all of them had left.

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Ruth Melcher has written a book, *Borne on the Danube*, about her father's life as a Danube Swabian growing up in Hungary, his WWII experiences and his immigration to the U.S. More information is available at <http://pws.prserve.net/usinet.jmelch/usinet.jmelch/> however, the ordering address is incorrect. Copies are now available from: Ruth Melcher, 4624 Bruce Ave., Edina, MN 55424; phone: 952-920-3061. Cost: \$12.95 plus \$3.25 shipping/handling.



A HELPING HAND

By Andreas Franz

Translation by newsletter staff, April-June 2005 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

In the year 1945 my mother, both grandmothers and I found ourselves in the concentration camp (for ethnic Germans) at Jarek (Yugoslavia). It was February and the weather was frigid. Our sleeping quarters had little more than straw bedding for roughly 20 people, mostly children and old people. There was no heat, no blankets and what little there was to eat was barely edible.

Death came easily in these circumstances, first the old people and then the children. I was a frail eight year old who contracted one of the first cases of typhus. There were no doctors for us and the only thing my mom could do for my fever was to try and keep me cool. There were no medicines, no extra food and really no hope for me and for many others.

Nearby lay an old man named Franz, a beer maker from Palanka and his much younger wife, Wetti-Neni. Somehow, they had received some supplies from a daughter, consisting of ham, bacon, sausages and lard. Everyone else in the room had nothing. After a short time, however, this food began to run out. The old man became weaker and weaker while I too struggled for my life.

Fortunately, my fever broke after a week and suddenly there was some hope I might survive. But my mother could do nothing to help me along the road to recovery as she had no food to give me. As I got weaker, so did the old man next to me. His young wife cared for him as best she could, giving me what little there was of the food she had left. As for myself, my mother could only cry in despair because I could now just barely move.

As it happened, my mother awoke me early one morning and tried feeding me. It was a bit of ham and hard bread with lard that seemed to appear out of nowhere. After a few tiny bites, I quickly tired and fell asleep. Yet eventually my appetite returned and with it, my strength. It took weeks but eventually I was able to stand on my own two feet.

With spring just around the corner, the bitter cold finally began to subside. On one of the first sunny days some surviving children and I played in the courtyard. It was then that Wetti-Neni succumbed to diphtheria. Her husband followed shortly thereafter. I, on the other hand, had luck and absolutely no idea why or how I survived typhus.

Many years later, I complained to my mom about the well-to-do couple at Jarek who had food they didn't share with the rest of us. "They were both bad", I said, "they kept everything for themselves". With that, my mother began recalling our time at Jarek, my near fatal illness and Wetti-Neni. "You know", she said, "she gave you the last of the food so that you might survive". "She did this during the night, quietly and without a word, so that no one else would know. This well-to-do Wetti-Neni gave you the food that may have helped her survive. She did so for no other reason than because you were very weak and helpless."

Although my mother said nothing more I have never forgotten how it is that I survived. To this day, I try to do things for others to honor the memory of what a fine woman did for me so many years ago.



The Big Dog (DER GROSSE HUND)

by Andreas Franz

Translation by newsletter staff, April-June 2005 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

My first childhood memories of my parents, grandparents and our house are tightly intertwined with our shaggy, bear-like dog named “Nero”. He was both my mild-tempered and patient playmate and my protector. I was a slender boy back then and, among the group of boys in my neighborhood, one of the weakest. However, as long as I was within ear-shot of Nero, no one would bother me. He would come whenever I called and stand by me. His massive and intimidating presence was enough. Naturally, of course, if I was too far away from him, I would “get it”! It goes without saying then that I always tried to take him with me wherever I went. There was this time I took him for a forbidden swim.... but that’s another story!

I came to Trenton in 1956 and ran into many older Palankaers who would ask “and who are you?” “Franz, Andreas” I would answer. “Which Franz?” they would counter. “My father was the butcher”. “The one with the big dog?” they asked. “Yes”, I said, “the one with the dog called Nero”.

It seemed that everyone knew exactly who I was because of this unforgettable dog! How is it that so many fellow Palankaers knew of this dog of mine? The story starts at my parents’ wedding. It was then that Nero was presented as a gift to the newlyweds. He was one of ten puppies and the only one to survive past the first few months. Nero was a cross between a St. Bernard and a Newfoundland and as such, eventually weighed in at somewhere north of 150 lbs. He had a huge head, a thick, almost waterproof brown coat, and was a beloved and loyal member of our family.

As butcher, my dad had to travel anywhere from 12 to 36 miles for cattle, pigs and lamb. This he did with a quirky horse with a light wagon... and Nero. Where normally it took a couple of drivers to ride herd over the livestock, Nero could accomplish the task alone. When we had a dozen or so swine in a stall, it was often quite difficult and dangerous to pull one out for slaughter. Yet, my father could count on our dog to get the job done.

When there was snow on the ground, Nero would pull my brother – Buwi – and I about on a sled. My dad would sometimes send the dog in the direction of my grandmother’s house and off he would go. If all went well he was there in minutes. However if he saw a cat, look out! We would fall off the sled as Nero took off after the cat. After much yelling and wild barking, the journey would eventually resume.

As house protector, Nero would often stand guard near some freshly hung Bratwurst. My father would make these sausages at three in the morning and let them cool in the courtyard. The overwhelming scent of freshly made Bratwurst brought cats to our property from near and far. For some cats the attempt to steal a Bratwurst did not end well. Cat-owners soon came to dread the sound of our dog and we suspect someone may have tried to poison him. After recovering from this attempt, Nero learned to eat only from the hand of our immediate family.

There was another Bratwurst related story:

My father and a good friend were at a local tavern and had a few drinks. By and by, the friend came up with the idea that he could take away one of my dad’s well-liked Bratwursts from our home without Nero bothering him. My father warned him that it wouldn’t be possible with the dog standing guard. “Yeah, but Nero knows me” said the friend and off he went. Some time later, my father went to investigate why he had not heard from his friend. When he got home, Nero was sitting inside the house in front of the door... with my dad’s friend sitting in front of him. Seems the dog allowed him in but not out!

One last memory of my dog, one that taught me a very good lesson. At the age of six, my father gave me the responsibility for feeding Nero. By this time our dog was pretty old and fragile. School would

end at midday and of course I came home hungry and looking for something to eat. “Mom give me something to eat, I’m so hungry” I would say. My mother would bring me something to eat right away. One time, however, my father was around at the same time and took me to task. He said something I’ll always remember: “Before taking care of yourself, do your duty and feed the dog who can’t take care of himself. Always remember to help others before helping yourself.” This admonishment and my dog Nero will always be a part of me.



How I learned to read and write

By Andy Franz

Translation by newsletter staff , July-September 2005 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

I was born on the third of March, a Sunday morning, in the Yugoslav town of Palanka. Sunday children were lucky children my mother would reassure me over and over again. Upon my baptism, I received the name Andreas. Though it seemed to me as occurring far too quickly, the time eventually came for me to attend school. First came Kindergarten or “Owada” which I honestly did not like much. The very first day I stayed but an hour and then ran off. The second day was the same. I really didn’t like “Owada”!

I attended first grade at a convent. Our teacher, a nun, was a feisty woman of considerable girth who did not “spare the rod” when it came to discipline. To add emphasis to her lessons, she would also bang the rod into her hand for effect. So, the first thing we learned was writing, initially in the old gothic style and later in modern Latin form. Fast on the heels of writing came mathematics. It was not long before we knew the times tables backwards, forwards and sideways!

The nun would stroll slowly through the class and we never knew whom she would call on next. We sat three on a bench, with me in the middle. Frankie on my right side never paid much attention, gave incorrect answers and got one on his ear for his efforts. The impact sent him flying toward me, I fell against Joey on my left who then flopped off the bench! Without a doubt, this would serve as an excellent lesson for us all. And so it was that I would slowly learn reading and reading.

For second grade we had a long and skinny teacher whom we nick-named the “stork”. We had to learn Hungarian which gave us all problems. So, first came German, then Hungarian, then back to a bit of German. My reading went so-so, but writing was just miserable. This, then, was second grade and it would be my last grade in Palanka.

The concentration camp at Jarek was my “home” for the next three years and there would be no school. During the first months at Jarek, the partisan camp guards gave a few of us kids the task of collecting books throughout the town. This we did gladly as there were a few pieces of bread given as a reward. The (German) books, however, were burned.

In one of the attics, I found a beautiful family bible complete with hand-painted pictures. This I would stash in a well-hidden spot.

Jarek then experienced an outbreak of typhus and I was one of the first to catch it. My recovery took a couple of months and I was bored just laying there with nothing to do. It was then that I remembered the bible hidden away. The reading went slowly, with many interruptions for questions, but it was the bible after all and the elders gladly helped-out. Again, reading went well but writing: forget about it!

After our escape to Austria I was enrolled in a “beginner’s” school for a few months. There were kids from 7 to 14 years of age present. The big question was, “what did we know?” I was called upon and asked, “can you read, Andreas?” “Yes”, I replied, “pretty well.” “How about writing?” “Well, so-so”, I said. Then came a shock! The questioner gave her “considered” evaluation: “reading, very good; writing minimal; and you, Andreas, don’t speak German!”

I was baffled. “Miss,” I asked, “you understand me yet say I’m not speaking German?” She tried to explain what “high” (standard) German was, but to no avail. After my interrogation – and it was an interrogation! – I was placed in the third grade, which did not sit well with me at all.

During summer recess, I met a retired teacher for whom I would do yard-work, buy groceries and assist in a variety of ways. Somehow, writing came up in conversation and she persisted until I explained my dilemma. “My writing is just so-so,“ I lamented. “Okay, I will help you and in six weeks you will how to write German well,” she stated... no, commanded. I would then sweat my way through the next six weeks and pass the forth grade with an “A”!

The next summer she again helped me with my studies, this time adding English to the mix. This allowed me to jump a couple of classes right into middle school. In fact, since I did so well, some of my fellow classmates became a bit annoyed. I was called the “walk-in foreigner”. Many of my teachers, however, went out of their way to be helpful, a fact I will never forget. Perhaps that is why I myself became a teacher.

The bible in the camp laid the foundation for my reading. The old teacher taught me how to write and so I became a good student. These experiences have been my inspiration over the years and still inspire me today.

So, how is my writing? Well... so-so. As in my early years, German is becoming difficult again!

The Return Home...



By Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff, October-December 2005 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

Our escape from our hometown ahead of the communists had its origins in the waning days of summer, 1944. From our village called “Bukin” (pronounced: “boo-keen”) in a part of Yugoslavia called “Batschka”, we set off in a horse and wagon along with just a few essentials for our journey. We attached ourselves to a long line of wagons heading out of Bukin and eventually ended up in a part of eastern Germany called “Pommern” (now a part of Poland).

Once we reached our objective, we no longer needed our horse and wagon and it was our intention to unload them at the earliest opportunity. Indeed, the feeding and maintenance of a horse is quite a responsibility, one we could scarcely justify in those circumstances. We had little to worry about though as in a short time German military authorities would take them for the war effort.

WWII was still a roaring inferno. Vast Russian armies, unstoppable in their numbers, were heading west – in our direction! The whispers were everywhere, “pack up and head west, the Russians are coming...” and so on and so on. Suddenly, the local authorities issued a command: “All who want to flee to the west had to be over the bridge by 9 the next morning!” The bridge was to be blown up precisely at 9 AM to slow the advancing Russians. The bridge, unfortunately, was some 3 miles away.

The prospects did not look good for us. Our little group consisted of my 8 month old sister, my grandmother, my mom, myself (a not-so-strapping 7 year old), and our possessions... and no horse and wagon! We were not the only ones in such a predicament and soon a rising panic seemed to pervade the area. There were very few bicycles and even fewer motor vehicles so most people started toward the bridge on foot. The few “essentials” we were able to bring from Bukin now had to be left behind. Only that which my grandmother and I could carry was taken as my mom had to carry my sister. And so we were off...

The way to the bridge developed into a foot race. To add to the frenzy was the growing sound of artillery in the distance signaling that the front was coming nearer. My mother, never one to sit still for long, urged us to speed up – speed up! My grandmother, on the other hand, was of a different mind set which inevitably lead to confrontations. In the end, my mother would usually prevail and our little group moved along as fast as it could. In any event, we made it across the bridge in time.

It was not long before we heard explosions that brought the bridge down behind us. Many refugees were still on the other side and their fate would not be known. We headed off in the direction of the train station and arrived there along with hundreds of others. It was a teeming sea of humanity! Somehow, my ever-resourceful mother, clinging child around her neck, managed to squeeze us on board the packed train. Many would be left behind. We, however, were happy everything worked out – if just barely - and that we were heading west.

My next memories of our “refugee trek” is from the mountainous Riesengebirge area during Christmas, 1944. We got off the train in the town of Hirschberg and the local authorities set up the gymnasium for refugees. As it was Christmas Eve, the townspeople tried to bring us some holiday cheer

by bringing Christmas trees and even Santa Claus who gave us youngsters a small gift. This incredibly loving gesture still lingers in my memory. The gracious and friendly behavior of these people underpins my theory that Germans everywhere have much to offer the world. They think clearly and have a good heart.

It was pretty in Hirschberg. Snow made everything white and the big pines looked like so many wonderful Christmas trees. Alas, we had to go and my mother had to decide where. Many of our relatives had gone to Bavaria and Württemberg already but we headed for upper Austria (Oberösterreich) to an area called Wels. We ended up being assigned to a farm in a small village. The people there were not very friendly. However, no one had asked them if they had wanted us either, I guess. There we would wait out the last few months of WWII.

During this time, we heard some wild rumors that Hitler was going to have planes fly around dropping gas everywhere to prevent Germans from being taken alive by the enemy. I was understandably terrified as I really did not want to die! So it was that every time I heard an aircraft, I would hold my breath.

One day, American soldiers came to our village and it was then that I saw my first black person. It was quite a shock really. The soldiers were friendly but went house to house collecting guns to be destroyed in the village center. After a short time, my father came "home" to us after having served as a soldier since 1943 and survived. This, however, made our host family even more unfriendly. In the mean time, we became aware of a train that was said to take people – people like us - back to Yugoslavia. What a fight this caused in our family! On the one side, my grandmother, who wanted nothing to do with such an idea. On the other, my parents. My dad dreamed of a return to the family workshop and mom to her house, vineyards and fields. They longed to see the majestic Danube and the Mostung tributary that flowed near our village. They even had hopes to see our dog "piri" (bee-ree) whom we had left behind. You know, I still remember his howling when we left, so sad and so all knowing.

My grandmother, though, was correct. She asked my parents if they thought the war was just some twisted fantasy. She said they should be happy to have escaped with their lives from Yugoslavia. The call to go home, however, was too strong for my parents and nothing would stand in their way. So, we boarded the very first train back to Yugoslavia. The engine and passenger cars were festively decorated with flowers and placards. People sang, toasted with wine and beer and were happy to be heading home. Everything went according to plan until we entered Yugoslavia and the town of Zagreb (Agram).

The train rolled to a stop at the station in Zagreb. What was thought to be a short stop became longer and longer. Then came the command: "everyone shall stay put until further orders". The next followed "Leave everything in the train and assemble in the station hall". My grandmother then gave my parents a look that said, "this is the beginning of the end".

At this point, everyone who was in the train was now out of the train and in the station. The exits were locked and we were placed under armed guard. Thus began a very long night, one I can truly not forget. The friendly tone from the loud speaker became shrill and hateful. One command followed the next; "earrings, rings, watches, money, etc. shall be turned over!" We had to file back through the entryway to surrender our possessions. The loud speakers seemed to be everywhere at once. Then came an announcement that someone had failed to turn over valuables and would now have to be shot. Shortly thereafter, a shot was heard nearby! This caused much commotion and not a little hysteria in some. It really was like some kind of horrible circus.

Once outside we had to stand in a large group with heavily armed soldiers surrounding us. Again and again, we heard a gun shot with the explanation that someone else had failed to surrender his or her valuables. This tactic caused an enormous panic in everyone. At the same time, the soldiers began looking for anyone associated with the German military. These men were taken away... after which we again heard gunshots. My father hurriedly burned any pictures of his military time in a tiny little fire around which our family huddled for secrecy. They did not catch him then and it was not until later in our first concentration camp that he would be taken away. This was how our first stop went in our beloved homeland.

The next day we headed off to Krndia. For us it was the first of four death camps we would have to endure and somehow survive over the next many months and years. We would then pass through places like Jarek, Mitrowitz and Kruschivle where tens of thousands of Donauschwaben would perish. From the last camp, Kruschivle, we were miraculously rescued by an aunt (a nun) who had hired men to sneak us out. We then escaped with them across the border into Hungary and freedom.

As for my father. He died after being taken away from us in Krndia. We never got anywhere near

the town of Bukin, my birthplace, and my dad never saw his beloved workshop again.

The second train called "Back to the Homeland" was halted by Austrian authorities and never crossed the border into Yugoslavia....

Note: The Martinis would settle in Austria, where Adam would attend woodworking school. He would immigrate to Trenton, New Jersey in 1956.



Gathering the wheat...

By Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff, January-March 2006 issue, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

Gathering the un-harvested wheat was an activity that occurred every year in Bukin. This was actually a good way for many poorer folk to obtain much-needed grain. It would help feed their chickens, and if they had enough, they could barter it for flour.

As a child, I anxiously awaited harvest time as it was closely followed this activity. The largest farmers in the area weren't much interested in what happened in their fields once the harvest was in (though one still had to ask permission). I wasn't allowed to go into the fields alone, but getting someone from the family interested in accompanying me was almost impossible. For my grandmother this activity was only for poor folks and I wouldn't even get a response from my dad. So that left me with my mother! I needed to convince her that it was a shame so many good wheat stalks were just lying about on the fields... and that we had to get them before the plows buried everything under. I knew too that my mom really did like gathering the wheat.

So it came to pass that my mother and I went to the fields for a short time. I dreamily imagined a whole list of things I would encounter that day. I had only to actually be there for my joy to be complete. The anticipation was almost too much to endure – adventure was waiting for us! Finally we were standing on the edge of the field, breathing in that special aroma.

At this point, it was necessary to find a place no one had yet gone. Often the parts traversed by footpaths were quite empty. More remote areas, however, were filled with surprises. Often we startled rabbits that would then run zig-zagging away. Other times birds would fly up and scatter at our approach. It felt to me like one big harvest celebration!

Sometimes the edges of the fields were cut so that one could find large wheat stalks entangled in the weeds. I usually rushed to these spots and gathered as many of these choice stalks as possible. One held the bundle in one hand with the ear above and the straw part below. When there was enough, the bundle was tied up and laid in a small pile. Back home there would be extra wheat for the chickens and straw for the house pets.

This tradition would repeat itself each summer. While it really was a day of harvest for the less fortunate, for us kids it was much more. The stubble fields with the big piles of harvested wheat lying about always looked so impressive. Walking barefoot on those stubble fields was like a game for us and our soles would be like leather by the end of the harvest time. The rich, black earth of the Batschka, with its hot summer days and cool nights, and the extraordinary skill of farmers who knew just how to get the most from the soil gave our area a great reputation throughout Europe.

Even as a child I loved the earth of our beloved "Heimat". My friend and I played in the street trenches, on the field paths, in the vineyards, and anywhere else we could dig a hole in that wonderful earth. And so it was in Bukin, my hometown. It truly felt as if we had one foot in paradise back then. The connection one felt to the earth was so real. The contact was direct and the reward was immediate.

Today, there are many opportunities to get close to nature, whether it is in the vegetable garden or in flowerbeds, whether camping or hiking, whether picking fruit or even... working in wood! This closeness to nature always gave the life of the Donauschwaben meaning and direction. It was something that always served them well.



FROM NEUSATZ TO CANADA
by Rose Zentner Vetter
April-June 2006, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

Thank you for your interest in my journey from the Batschka to Germany and eventually to Canada. In Neusatz (Novi Sad) we lived in peaceful co-existence with Serbs, Croats, Hungarians, Slovaks, etc., sadly, that was soon to change. From friends and neighbours I learned to speak Serbian and Hungarian (which I've unfortunately forgotten) beside my German mother tongue.

We lived only about a block from the Danube, between two bridges, across from the famous Peterwardein fortress. These bridges were main targets of Allied bombers. Almost every night we were awakened by air raid sirens and had to rush to an air raid shelter, only to return one night to find our home destroyed by bombs. In August 1944, as the German army was retreating out of Yugoslavia, we were urged to pack our bags and board the refugee train---they told us we would be back in about three weeks!

My father had been drafted into the army shortly before, so my mother, my older sister and I followed suit. We pleaded with my grandparents in Palanka to come with us, but they were in frail health and would not leave their home, insisting that no one would harm them. Little did they know of the cruelty awaiting them on that fateful 29th of November, when Tito's Partisans drove them out of their homes into the streets, where they had to spend the night in the rain and bitter cold.

On the following day they were forced to walk 60 km to the Pasicevo camp. My grandfather collapsed and was thrown on a wagon like a sack; he died nine days later, my grandmother two years after him. Old people were starved, neglected and lived in squalid, filthy conditions not fit for animals. My aunt who was with them was forced to hard labour. She managed to escape to Austria in 1948 and lived to tell about their ordeal. A number of my relatives died in the concentration camps and two of my cousins were taken to Russia to work in the mines.

As for my family, we survived our flight to war-ravaged Germany, sometimes in open cattle cars, after being shot at with machine guns by dive bombers.

We spent the next two years in about twenty refugee camps, occasionally being placed in private homes. People died of dysentery, typhoid fever and other diseases and were buried daily in mass graves, it's a miracle we survived.

Years later when I had children of my own I came to appreciate how brave and stoic my mother had been during that time---I only saw her break down once. It was Christmas Eve 1944. We lived with a family in Thüringen, who, when being told that they were to accommodate a refugee family from Yugoslavia, feared they were going to get a family of gypsies. When they saw our blond hair and fair complexions and heard us speaking German, they were puzzled until my mother told them we were German. Nonetheless, they were not too happy having to give up one of their rooms for us. The unfriendly treatment, not knowing whether my father was alive or dead, and being far from home finally was too much for my mother and she dissolved into bitter tears---I was eight years old, but that was one Christmas Eve I will never forget.

In June 1945 we were reunited with my father. He showed up in a ragged uniform, the only clothes he had. He had to lie naked in bed all day while my mother washed and dried his clothes---all of us, including my father, thought it was funny at the time.

We were in the Russian Zone in eastern Germany, and I remember drunken Russian soldiers going on rampages at night looking for young women to rape. This was in 1946 and my parents decided to move west into the English Zone, which was a wise move because the Communists had not built the Iron Curtain yet.

From then on our life improved relatively. We were placed on a farm in Niedersachsen near Bremen, where we lived until we emigrated to Canada. We settled in the prairie city of Winnipeg. That's where I met and married my husband and we had our three children. In 1968 we moved to Vancouver, BC and we now make our home in nearby Richmond.

I could go on and on, but I tried to condense my story as much as possible I thank God that he spared us after all the danger, starvation and suffering and gave us a new life of freedom and peace in our adopted country.

Footnote: Rose posted this story on the Donauschwaben Village Helping Hand mail list on 28 February 2006. She was contacted by our Dennis Bauer for permission to re-print it in our newsletter. She graciously agreed. After comparing ancestries it appears they are distant cousins through the Spieldenner line from Palanka! She had many relatives (Zentners, Esserts and Pilgers) settle in the Trenton area. It is a small world for us Donauschwaben.



My Big Adventure: America

By Adam Martini

Translation by newsletter staff, October-December 2006, Trentoner Donauschwaben Nachrichten

The year was 1956, eleven years since WWII had ended and 12 years since I left my hometown of Bukin in Yugoslavia. I was having very mixed emotions about leaving my home, my relatives and friends for a new life in America. As a student and even afterwards, books by the author Karl May and his wonderful depictions of the “Wild West” created a tantalizing image in my mind as to what America was like. My formal schooling as well as woodworker’s training had ended and so did my patience for the locals always telling the Donauschwaben who lived among them they were “outsiders”. So, I decided to leave and talked my good friend Andreas Kovatsch into “seeing the world” with me.

Once we decided to go everything started to happen rather quickly. In August, 1956, Andreas and I boarded a train for Bremerhafen (northern Germany) and eventually entered a collection station in that area. There we encountered throngs of people from every corner of the map. It wasn’t long before we ran into a couple of guys and formed something of a clique. At 19, I was the youngest of the four and was looked upon as a country bumpkin by the one of the guys who happened to come from Linz, Austria. Indeed, he seemed to fancy himself as something of a Casanova. With his quick wit and charm, he endeared himself to more than a few of the ladies. On the other hand, I was shy and reserved, quite content to watch as the others “operated”. As we waited for our departure, we celebrated a “bon voyage” every day with wine and beer. The date of our sailing seemed to arrive quickly. The time of our big adventure was about to begin.

A big ship called the “General Langfitt” would bring us to America. Family and friends waved and cried words of goodbye to those seeing them off, promising a prompt return and a speedy reunion. No one, however, was there to see the four of us off that day.

We left Germany and our “old” lives that day, walking up that gangplank to our new lives. The ship gently rocked back and forth as we came aboard. Suddenly our dashing Casanova from Linz quickened his pace, walked on to the ship and directly to the other side... and threw up. He turned toward us, looking quite pale and so very unsteady. He stumbled toward his bunk, laid himself down and barely got up thereafter.

Our area in the ship was set up with four bunks one on top of each other with a capacity of some 300 people. My two friends took the bottom two beds, I took the third and our luggage went in the top bunk. As it turned out, being above my seasick cohorts was a good thing.

For sure, travel by sea had its romantic moments, but there was also the flip side: seasickness. The ship was really a troop transport – actually one of the well-known “Liberty Ships” – and it was manned by navy personnel who were totally unaffected by the rocking motion of the sea. The sailors were friendly folks, always willing to help, but there was little they could do for my friends and so many of the other passengers who did not have “sea legs”. In fact, we all carried around a bag for those moments when seasickness would get the best of us. The smell was just awful!. Stormy days just amplified the distress. You can well imagine the scene of misery in our big room with 300 moaning people!

Showering and going to the bathroom was a learned art. It was difficult business! Despite hand-grips, one could easily be flung right into someone else’s shower stall since there were no walls to stop you. Though I did feel a bit queasy at times, I really did have a much better time at sea than most. When we

could venture on to the deck, I spent many hours just looking toward the horizon and wondering how this grand adventure would finally turn out.

The journey lasted nine days from Bremerhafen to New York. On the ninth day we neared the “Big Apple” and laid anchor just outside the harbor around four in the morning. My friend Andreas woke me and told me to come with him topside. Looking around, we were suddenly awestruck by the huge number of headlights shining in the darkness. There were automobiles as far as the eye could see and we had never seen anything like it in our lives. Where could they all be going? As I contemplated this thought, a ship’s officer tapped me on the shoulder, pointed, and said “Statue of Liberty”. This, I knew, was the welcome sign for immigrants. We had arrived.

I was very excited and waited impatiently for daylight to make a few photos with my Agfa camera. Soon a tugboat positioned itself next to our ship and began pushing us toward our pier and to America, more specifically Manhattan, New York. It was then that, after nine days, we were able to touch “terra firma” for the first time. My state of mind combined a bit of curiosity with fear and anxiety since I was so far from home, my mom and my relatives. I had to grow up fast and become a man without losing my nerve.

The pier in that great harbor was such a noisy place. In the midst of all of it, immigration officials scurried back and forth, making sure everyone’s papers were in order and organizing us into groups. Many fellow passengers had relatives and friends come and take them away at this time. The rest of us piled into express buses and headed for the train station.

The bus drove through lower Manhattan and into the Bowery. All along, whenever the bus stopped for a red light, it caused the doors to open automatically although no one actually came aboard. During our drive through the Bowery a drunken man with a backpack attempted to jump aboard at one of the red lights. He was already on the first step of the bus when the light turned green. The driver then stepped hard on the gas causing the doors to close as he drove off. The would-be rider was thrown from the bus, tumbling off to the side for a short distance with his backpack not far behind. This made me very anxious and all of my dreams for a better life seemed to evaporate quickly. I wanted to turn right around and go back to Austria. I was deep in thought over what just happened when yet *another* down-his-luck type tried to get aboard and was tossed to the wayside. I concluded then and there that life in America was unforgiving and I would have to rise to meet the challenge if I was to succeed.

So we finally came to the train station and assembled in the big hall. Local students, eager to practice their German skills, helped us with our tickets and made sure we got on the right trains. I then discovered that I had a big problem. My job and my sponsors, the family of Jakob Eppli from my hometown of Bukin, were in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. But, my student-helper gave me a travel document that said “Trenton, New Jersey”. I knew Wisconsin was a thousand or so miles away and yet this fellow said I was to travel just 45. My friend Andreas and the others could not help me either as they had already departed. And, so, I resigned myself to my fate and just waited to see what would happen next.

It was in fact a very hot day, unlike anything I experienced before. The temperatures were in the 90s and I was soaked with sweat. It did not help that I was warmly dressed and even had my new raincoat on. Our student-helpers had hung various papers on our jackets telling us that people would help when they saw the documents. So, despite the heat, I felt I had to keep my rain jacket on in order that all the papers were properly visible! Back “in the day” there was no such thing as air-conditioned railway cars either so you can imagine how hot it got. So I sat, rain jacket on and sweating, while the train took me to this place called “Trenton”.

As you may suspect, no one helped me despite the documents hanging visibly from my jacket. People saw me, saw the papers, and laughed. The conductor just ignored them, punched my ticket and let me sit there. It’s not hard to imagine that soon I became nervous about missing my stop and going right past Trenton. So, I bravely ventured over to the conductor, pushing my chest out as far as I could so that the documents were most visible. After some hesitation, I finally asked the whereabouts of Trenton in my school-taught Oxford English. He looked me up and down and said in a machine gun like fashion, “Tren-in”, “Tren-in”, and walked away. I then decided to just look out the window and hope to see the station sign. It was a great relief when I finally spotted the sign and got off the train.

Many people got off at Trenton Station. Very quickly however they all disappeared from the platform. I stood alone, looking around to see if anyone could help me. I finally spotted what turned out to be a soldier but he just shook his head “no”. So now what? Far from Wisconsin and quite at a loss as to what would become of me, I was not a happy camper!

With suitcase in hand and still sweating most profusely, I slowly went up the stairway to the waiting area. I walked along with my head down trying to figure out a plan of action. What should I do? Suddenly and to my complete surprise, I looked up and spotted a group of four guys by the exit door. One of them had a black hat on and looked very much like a Schwob. He looked at me and said, "that's him, he looks just like his dad". And so it was that Mr. Josef Stiller from my home town of Bukin identified me based on how he remembered my late father. He was accompanied by Franz and Paul Walter, as well as Rudi Wilhelmi. Salvation at last! I felt immediately better about everything.

I then found out that my sponsors, the Eppli's, had moved from Wisconsin to Trenton but couldn't inform me in time. This, then, was the reason why I ended up in Trenton. I then had a great tasting dinner at the Walter household. My hostess, Apolonia Walter, told me we would all be going to the "Liederkrantz" club in Trenton for a dance event. This was not what I had in mind to do after such an exhausting day. All I wanted to do was go to bed! But, I felt I needed to go and meet the "Landsleute" so off I went.

This then was my first day in America. It was the most important day of my life. Since then, fifty years have passed and I have learned to love my adopted home. The possibilities here are limitless and I'm thankful to have ended up in such a great place!
