

## **In the Shadow of Time**

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For nearly a century, the German colonists in Bessarabia were under Russian rule, Then in 1918 the territory was handed over to Rumania and we carried on our life as Rumanian citizens for 22 years, until 1940. The world around us moved on in time and in development. The history of the world continued to be written. We knew of events taking place outside our country, but viewed these things as not affecting us. This also seemed to be the viewpoint of Rumania at large, not recognizing that events in Europe and elsewhere in the world could impact us. We were accustomed to a life that we had inherited from our ancestors. We maintained our customs and way of living without consideration of the possibility of imminent change. The life of our people changed gradually. From a lack of education back to the pioneer days, we caught up to a pace where most of our people could read and write. That in itself had an impact on our economy and our ability to participate in the trades, in commerce and marketing. We must ourselves take some responsibility for not pushing ourselves further to reform to modern ways.

My dad had a wagon-making shop and my grandfather Zacher had a smithy shop. The workshop ("Werkstatt ") was part of the "Einheitshaus," the all-in-one German longhouse that was the family home with extensions for storage, work and barn areas. The work in the family shops of Teplitz was done entirely manually, using long outdated tools and equipment. Labor was plentiful and cheap. We had a lumberyard in town and a mechanical sawmill of which the trade made little use. The method my dad used was typical of how others performed their work. To make the wagon wheels, my dad would buy steam-bent oak rims from the local lumber dealer. Spokes he made from oak wood stock shaped by hand with a pull-knife and plane. To save money on precut lumber, Dad and his men split hardwood logs manually with a longsaw. The log was positioned with one end on the work bench and the other end on a stand. The men went to work, one standing on top of the log pulling the longsaw up, the other man laying on his back pulling the saw down. In this manner they split the log into boards. Each log was good for five boards - these were again cut to size with a narrow-blade saw to get wood pieces with the required curvatures. All the pieces were later cut into their final shapes with a pull-knife and plane. To make the wheel hubs, Dad first shaped a chunk of the wood with a shave ax, then put it on a lathe that was activated by a six-foot wheel and rope belt connecting the lathe pulley. This apparatus was run by human power. It took a strong man or two females to power the wheel and pulley mechanism that turned the lathe. Drilling and chiseling were also done manually. To keep the hubs and spokes from splitting, the wood had to be completely dry before the wheel was assembled. For this purpose, the warm bake oven in the kitchen was used whenever Mom's bread was finished baking. An oven full of wood parts went a long way to supply Dad with the inventory he needed.

The wagon and all needed accessories were produced in the shop. This included the undercarriage, the wagon box, the seat, high and low sideboards, the extension beam to make the wagon longer, the shaft and an inside tool-box for each wagon. These items were made from various types of solid wood, not from plywood or laminated materials. The finished wagon went on the market without a paint job unless so ordered.

In Grandpa's smithy shop, things were no different. To shape an axle from a 3" x 3" by 6-foot iron stock required the efforts of three men. One end of the stock was suspended by a wire loop, the other end was on the anvil. After the stock had been heated on one end, two men pounded it with a large hammer to shape it, with "Opa" working on finer details with a smaller hammer. Drilling, filing, and making nuts, bolts and threads were all done totally manually. Cabinet makers worked the same way. So did tailors and shoemakers. There were no power tools or power machinery to work with.

Once we were back in our ancestral homeland in Germany, we noticed that trade-work followed similar steps, but the work was done using power-assisted equipment. This had been the state of things since the turn of the century -- nearly 50 years! Fewer men and less time were needed to get the job done. In Bessarabia it took us a month or more to build one wagon. In Germany, the same work was done in about a week! In Teplitz, due to land shortage, half the population was employed in the trades. One could easily see how the trade had its struggles to stay competitive. Prior to World War I, Teplitz did well by selling their wagons to the Russians in the East. But after WWI the trade took a dive. Shops in Teplitz had to work literally day and night to make any headway. As can be seen, a change was needed in the entire system. Our ancestors hung onto their methods as long as they could, and even at the end were reluctant to let go and make changes. The only life we knew was one of hard work. Nothing was handed to us to make life easy. Only God gave us the strength to survive that type of life.

Even with the differences in equipment used, the basic process in the trades was the same whether in Teplitz or in Germany. Once we arrived in Germany in 1940, our tradesmen were immediately employed in the work force. Our people fit right into the German system with remarkable ease. They found that a trade once learned is an asset - to change tools is not a handicap.

Wherever the Germans lived in Russia, the fruits of their labor shaped the land and society. They left a legacy that enriched the lives of many people, Germans and Russians alike. The history of the lives of the Germans in Russia cannot be ignored by us or by the world. We know the sweat, blood and tears of our people left a permanent mark in Russia that is there forever. God knows, and so do we. Our remembrance of this history provides a bond with our ancestors that remains with us today. We thank God for the feelings of pride and dignity our ancestors passed down to us.