

## Interview with Ingo Isert (II)

Conducted by Ron Vossler (RV)

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**RV:** It is May 29 1997, and we are at the (Lunchmenscauff...A001) it is part of Bessarabia.

**II:** I would like to correct we are in the (Heighmet Museum...A002) (German spoken...A002)

**RV:** And we are speaking with Ingo Isert who is the curator of the museum.

**II:** (German spoken...A004).

**RV:** Just say your title like that in German so we have it on tape and that is fine, that is what we will use.

**II:** Ok my name is Ingo (Grunekit...A005) Isert (German spoken...A006)

**RV:** Could you briefly describe some background information about yourself?

**II:** I was born in (Waterland...A009) in Germany but my parents are coming from Bessarabia. My father was born in (Tutopponon...A011) and my mother in (Chapeaux...A011). I went to school here in Gutenberg and after the decree I went to Munich and studied there physics. After this I was two years assistant in the University of Stuttgart and then I changed to an industry, at first in the development department, and later into the production. In this time I was very interested in the (???...A018) area, I was very interested in familiar research. It was very different for me foreign names of Bessarabian towns I got contact with the museum and at this time I grew in the organization. For many years we can say I was the right hand of Mister (Christian Freishe...A022) who was the (German spoken...A023) and with the year 1992 I got this position.

**RV:** Would you like to tell us some of your work relating to the museum in general what you do?

**II:** The first we can say 40 years was mainly to collect the documents and some (German spoken...A032) of the Bessarabian. And now we have reached a situation where we have to organize the (???...A033) and the documents. This means to build up our archives also so visitors can use them. This means we want to implement a computer to help to find the right documents. And one of the main points is now to get the internal organization and how we want to collect the documents and archives and what systems we want to use. And the next step is then to identify each document and describe each document and to put into folders and also into the computer. We started with the library, (German spoken...??A047) the speed because the work is not very high because we had to work with volunteers and they are only for a very short time here and normally only one special person is here for one day here per week. And the next day it is a different person and so we had to change because we had to work with volunteers and we were at a most disadvantage for our continuous work.

**RV:** In a broader way, perhaps you could explain to an American audience what you hope to do by studying the Bessarabien heritage? What is the value of what you are doing and how might it affect people?

- II:** If visitors come to us we want to show them a recap of 125 years they didn't live in Germany. It is in the future very difficult to answer such questions if we had not collected all of this information and conserved it. It is possible in Germany to find documents that go back up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. But for the time between 1840 and 1940 there was no document center in Germany that could have collected this information and to fill up this gap, we collect our information, all old papers so research for this time can be made.
- RV:** Could you tell us what is the most interesting part of your work? What you like to do the most?
- II:** There is two parts, one part that I am very familiar also for others, is familiar research but this can be done very quickly now with our documents. And the other point is the history, to collect for each village the information for the locations and the groups and clubs. We are finally in the Bessarbian clubs and papers for the members of them. But kind of theatre to be played and all this information we want to collect. We collect also this information about the situations of the families the middle of last century. Four years ago I was with two people of (German spoken...A084) of Odessa. And we were sponsored for our government and we found very very old documents of the last century of the Bessarabien Germans. And we made about 5,000 copies and we brought them to here and now we have them to (Auchwitten...A089) for content. And for instance for to explain what we have found were two villages except description of each yard. The names of men and wives of the yard, and their children's age, how many land they rented or they gave back, how many cows, horses, porks, and sheep they had. How many trees for the forest, many trees of fruits how many grape vines and so on. So a very detailed description of each yard over the whole village and can say after 40 years, they are now welfare or not, what they have reached from the original uncultivated country is now a cultivated country.
- RV:** Do you ever find journals or letters from the people?
- II:** Also mainly if they have problems with the official offices, and also some many letters which were sent from one colony to Odessa because Odessa was a central and that there were many (A111) and the different colonies had there (A112).
- RV:** When a family left Germany, would they leave people behind in Germany?
- II:** You could ask the relatives.
- RV:** So 120 years later you still had relatives there?
- II:** For instance, I visited relatives of my wife in Belaria and they didn't and their forefathers immigrated to Bessarabia and were found together the roots. In some cases, the roots came together in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and with these relatives we have planned a major family reunion there with members of the tree which stayed in Belaria and the members of the trees that are still in Bessarabia and also we found now a tree that went to (Caucasian...A135).
- RV:** You mentioned earlier that your parents came from Bessarabia, if you could just give us a brief history of when your relatives and your family, great grandmothers and grandfathers went to, from Germany to Bessarabia, where they settles and why they came back?

- II:** For my forefathers this is not the common history of Bessarabia because my forefather came later to Bessarabia and not on the normal way because he produced (Clousses...A147) and he lived before in Russia and he came to Bessarabia because he found out that they have different manufacturing and he found a place in Bessarabia and he founded there. This is for the Isert; naturally the other forefathers I have come from north Germany and as far from the southern part of Germany. There are different paths to Bessarabia so I have two roots on my side, the north Germans and the South Germans. But most of the Bessarabian Germans are coming from the South I would say 70 to 80 percent.
- RV:** Why were they invited into Bessarabia?
- II:** Well there was the so called (Ukarsh...A158) of the 1813 Alexander the first Czar of Russia gave this (Ukarsh...A160) to the Germans in Poland and Poland there lived many Germans of the southern part and settled there many years ago about 10 to 15 years ago. And after this area was no more under the control of Russia, they moved and went to Bessarabia because the southern part of Bessarabia there was plenty of people and the German population was promised a 60 hectare land in Bessarabia and many years free of taxation. And also free of war services but this regulation changed in the 17's of the last century. Many Bessarabian immigrated also to America because they wanted to didn't want to go into the (...??A177). Many of the Bessarabian went to the area of the both Dakotas and the connection between the Bessarabian and the families of the Dakota are distant. It wasn't interrupted and all those letters were sent and many of these letters, which were sent to America they are, printed in the North Dakota German newspapers. So we can read now for us information about different events in Bessarabia and in the Dakota German newspapers. And therefore we all can have microfilms that are here in our museum.
- RV:** Now we talked about why they left Germany and we talked about some of them in the 1970's or so came over to America what happened to the ones who stayed in Bessarabia, after World War One?
- II:** It was in the history a brief interruption with the Russian October revolution Bessarabia was in the past always a part of the (Blexsie...A196) colonization and now Bessarabia was cut off from the rest of Russia and it was reunified with Romania and in Romania it is also a strong German minority but a complete different dialect so German and Bessarabian there is related and from this time is then beginning with about 1920 they started with their own organization. This was in the region (frucksteu...A206) ethnography and also in the (Kiser...A207) and therefore we have now also our own Bessarabian and German organization. No more combined with the organization of the Germans from Russia.
- RV:** Now because they are so different, the two groups?
- II:** Germans of Russia are different groups but they are the groups of Black sea Germans are almost the same group as we are.
- RV:** What happened (???...A217)
- II:** It was a really hard time and the years between 1920 and 1940 because Romania tried to get out the lies and minorities. Therefore the Germans heard that Bessarabia or Romania has to give back Bessarabia to Russia and it was a major conflict. They were very angry and frustrated of what would be the future and thank the world we had an additional contract made between Russia and Germany that the German population can immigrate to Germany so it was a group of Russian and German officials which asked the populations who wanted to leave the country and to go to Germany and where could you get the ride to

leave. Because only who was German or who was married with a German got the ride to leave Bessarabia so nearly 100 percent of the Germans left in the year 1914 within some few weeks Bessarabia was a very good organization and over the Danube they came to Germany. They lived there in Germany one to two years and then they got the opportunity to settle in the eastern part of Germany. They got new years and new homes but this was only for a short time. With the end of the second world war they had to leave again so they left their new home and they left and now most of the Bessarabian live in the southern part in (Batengutenburgh...A255) where it was original from there most of them their forefather came.

**RV:** So in that way they have very different histories?

**II:** We can say we had the fortune that we get the possibility to immigrate and came out under the commission of the regime the Germans did not have this opportunity it was about that time with the collectivity and the deportation of them to central Siberia.

**RV:** Were any of them taken back when the Russians came?

**II:** Some Bessarabians of some communities couldn't flight quick enough from the Russian front and they were overrode and some communities (Tibbits...A273) for instance. Many of the people were transported to Siberia and I believe for six to nine years. Before they could move out of Siberia and came back to Germany. This was for a small part but also for a part of the Bessarabian (German spoken...A278)

**RV:** Now I saw a wonderful new church that had been restored. It was to my understanding that a portion of that money came from donations from the people of Bessarabia and the Germans. When we were there I did not see very many Germans. Why don't the people that are living now in Germany that went to Bessarabia feel this link to go back and to tell people about their trip?

**II:** Also in the 18's of our century many Bessarabian tried to visit their old villages but they had many difficulties. In many instances they got no allowance to visit their villages. They couldn't drive to their village because in every village they had to get this type of allowance and their passport. And with 1990 with the change in the political situation it was more open and with many Bessarabians came to their villages and they saw the situation they saw also that nearly all churches didn't exist more and they were more interested in their original condition many churches there are made to collapse or were attacked or were completely destroyed. One church the oldest church of the Bessarabian was a church of (Sarata...A306) this is the oldest one and it was decided in our community to try and build up this oldest church. Only this church not all the churches as a sign of the German existence in Bessarabia and to also give a sign to the population that the different reaches groups in the area had a new possibility to make it happen. So this renewed church used many Bessarabians, which are not Germans but can use this church.

**RV:** Now the majority of Bessarabian people are?

**II:** Of the Germans only three villages are open.

**RV:** Now I saw the church there when I was there last week. Are there many Ukrainians now coming to this church?

**II:** Yeah the people who live there I think the most of them are Bulgarians.

- RV:** The church is being used?
- II:** Each week, sometimes twice per week.
- RV:** Many Bessarabian Germans living in Germany now try to visit their origins in Ukraine, why do you think that is so, why is it so important?
- II:** The Germans have lost their home they left and they want to see and refresh their memory about their youth and perhaps a neighbor to speak with them and to see where they were born. I have learned from many people that I saw the room where my mother gave birth to me. This is part of their history and which they can relive again. And the second part is that they are trying to help they try to help now the population there many books are brought from Germany to Bessarabia also medicine and instruments all will help to build on something.
- RV:** This is really a commitments to people who are feeling towards their heritage and their ancestors it is not just we want to go back and live there, it's we just want to help.
- II:** In the case between the Bessarabians there is no doubt. We are now in Germany and with a good situation and I don't know, only one person who would want to live there forever, only for some weeks but not forever. Because now our home is here but we have a good connection to the population and we want to hold on this connection.
- RV:** Do you get much contact with people from Bessarabia who did emigrate to America who are talking to your group about what's happening in Bessarabia and wanting to help like the German people are helping?
- II:** No connection to the North American communities. Some few today there are a group that visited us one or two years ago. Sometimes a Bessarabian professor who is German who lives now in America and this professor also will visit the museum.
- RV:** Do Americans ever ask you for genealogical information?
- II:** They ask us in some cases, not really from our people, which live in Germany but in some cases from Canada or United States.
- RV:** What kinds of traditions have you kept in your own family that is the Bessarabian traditions and maybe why have you kept these traditions.
- II:** Also a common discussed tradition is the food, which we brought from Russia. I can remember in my youth if I told my friends what we have eaten they would get big eyes, asking what is it. Also tomatoes were unknown here in Germany and paprika and all these things also. But it is only one side I think another very important side which is not very often reported perhaps it is inside is hospitality. It is now in fact that the Russians were extremely hospitable if you spoke of something you are invited. And I think a little bit of this behavior the Bessarabian Germans brought to Germany and if I make the relations between Bessarabians and Germans then I have the impression that the hospitality is stronger expressed.
- RV:** How many times have you visited your family's village and your feelings?

- II:** I told in the beginning that I am also interested in the family research and to this belongs also that I write down the history of my family. All of the dates that they are born and died, what they did in the meantime, and also I made a map of the area where my fore-fathers lived and I can very well remember the first time I came to the village,(Tutopponon...A434) it is a bigger village. And to this day I remember I had no paper with me and I told the driver now you are to drive over the bridge and after you get over the bridge stop on the left side and I will get out and then I will go the small river until I came along until I came to the place where my parents lived. I recognize the surprised driver he is coming one of middle-Europe, has no paper, is not born here and exactly where I have to hold and here I think must be the area of my father and grandfather and I saw his eyes and he was unsure. He couldn't believe this and then a very old wife came along and she saw that we were foreigners and asked what we are doing here and then it was translated and I asked her can you remember that here lived Germans. Ahh yes she knew this, and then I asked her why she knows this and she said I was a maid in a German family and I asked her which family and she said the name. She said that the family had eight children and I said no the family had 12 children and continued and I saw the eyes open and from this time up the driver believed everything from this point. Then we had also contact with the mayor and it is so good relation. It was the second time I was there and I came the city hall and I looked for the mayor and saw him in a room with his back to me. He turned saw me, went to me and embraced me and then he said to his deputy for this day he has no more time and you shall take my place and come with me and he took the holiday and he showed me all I wanted to see in (Tutopponon...A484).
- RV:** Is your wife also...?
- II:** In the same situation as me I was not born in Bessarabia but both parents are coming from Bessarabia.
- RV:** Is that pretty common to be in a very close community where people have come back here continue to marry people who have had the same experience?
- II:** No, we had here some meetings of Bessarabian youth especially the (??B007) and so on and this was one or two weeks very often. In this time we had the chance to see other youth and so I met my wife here and I know three other couples that were there because most of the Bessarabian are spread over the land.
- RV:** Is it pretty much like America where people spread out and marry into different ethnic backgrounds. Perhaps one last question is what you see is the future of Bessarabian societies as many of the people who have been here grow older and die. The younger generations don't all have the same ties, what do you think is the future?
- II:** We see for the future also a biological problem. Older generations, which were born in Bessarabia, died and will die in the next time. And we are sure our community will be reduced from its original size if I look to our (German spoken...B023) in the first time at about 10,000 and now we are about in the range of 3,000. And this will be reduced even more at next year's dramatically but I am sure there will always exist enough people of succeeding generations who will be interested in the history and for these people we can offer our collections and our rooms here so that the idea will not die and I can make (??B035) to another small group which came to the Southern part of Germany here in Gutenberg in 1699 this was refugees of France. These completely integrated here, but nevertheless they have their own museum and a different distance and in I don't know the distance, maybe two or three years they have a reunion where they had the deserters come together and remember the events 300 years ago.

**RV:** You used to have some French?

**II:** No but the Hugonoughts were a similar group but smaller. And I think in a similar way this will be the Bessarabian Germans. They will then remember if they make their family research their fore-fathers was coming from Bessarabia and with this information automatically, I hope so they will get us information that we need here in Stuttgart with the help of Bessarabia and so we can continue.

**RV:** Now you would be interested in American with this heritage getting in contact with your organization.

**II:** Surely. Mainly on the basis of Bessarabians who are coming originally from Bessarabia. Our task is not only for Germany but we are also into other countries.

**RV:** There were Bessarabian-Germans in South America perhaps too, they were spread out?

**II:** Also. Not so much went to Canada or the US. But also a part went to South Brazil, Argentina, and Chile.

**RV:** Would you say that most of the Bessarabians are in North or South Dakota?

**II:** In both of the Dakotas. And Canada is Alberta.

**TAPE CUTS OUT**