

*The Historical Development of the Danube Swabian Village of **Jarek***

(Bački Jarak, Tiszaistvanfalva) in Batschka

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After Eugen, Prince of Savoy, had freed the Pannonian Plain of the Osmands, the Court of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Vienna thought about populating the land between the rivers Danube and Tisza (Theiß). During the reign of the Osmands, which had lasted over 200 years, this region had been completely devastated. The Court in Vienna wanted to populate this vast empty country with industrious colonists, farmers and workmen. In order to find the necessary aspirants, canvassers were sent out to all parts of Southern Germany to look for people willing to colonize this country.

There were three long periods of immigration to the southeast of the Empire. They were named after the emperors who ruled the country at that time. The first two periods were named after the Emperor Charles VI and his daughter Maria Theresia, the last was named after her son Josef II, the Josefinian period (1782-1787). Jarek was founded in the last period.

Josef II was a liberal ruler, who permitted not only Catholic colonists to settle, as his mother and grandfather had done, but also Protestant ones. Jarek is a Lutheran settlement.

In the spring of 1886, about 700 Lutheran and Calvinistic families of settlers from all parts of Southern Germany arrived in Vienna. They had sailed down the river Danube on flatboats, so-called "Ulmer Schachteln", which they had boarded at Ulm, in Wuerttemberg. After their arrival they heard that the settlement period had already come to an end. After many weeks of uncertainty and waiting, the Earl Sigismund Pejachevics offered to make them settle on his land at Ruma, in the south of Fruska Gora, about 35 km south of Peterwardein.

In the autumn of 1786, they finally arrived at Ruma after a long tedious voyage on the Danube and across the hills of Fruska Gora only to hear that they had been deceived again. Earl Pejachsevics offered land to some families only, not the promised large farms, but 5 3/4 jokes, (about 6 acres) to each family. This was not enough to support them. Besides there was not enough land for the other 500 families.

The local settlers of Ruma, who had lived in this place since 1745, were Catholic and they were not happy about the "invasion" of the newly arrived settlers. They had settled under the reign of Maria Theresia and had also received only 5 3/4 jokes land from the Earl. They could rent the same amount in addition to their own land and were now afraid to lose this privilege. They let the new settlers live in their barns and stables. There was no other accommodation for them. So when winter came, the poor people dug caves into the hillside for shelter. They wrote letters to the Imperial Court in Vienna pleading for help and describing their desperate situation, but no answer arrived. So when spring finally came, a large number of them had not lived through the winter and had died of hunger and diseases. Finally the news of their terrible fate reached the emperor himself and he advised the Chamber of the Court to find a solution.

In March 1787, 80 families with 300 persons were taken to a territory about 15 kilometres north of Peterwardein. It was a small triangle of 1800 jokers that belonged to the Chamber of the Court, and there they settled on the conditions of the Emperor's settlement act with all the promised privileges. So Jarek was founded as the last and smallest of the nine Protestant Josefinian villages in Batschka.

After their arrival at Jarek in the spring of 1787, our ancestors were busy building simple "colonist houses" of stamped clay covered with reed. By the end of the year they had finished 80 houses, each costing 200 Guilders. During the following years they were able to get a foothold in the "promised land" and began to prosper and set themselves up in life.

But soon they were struck by a heavy blow. The land they had settled on as free farmers under the protection of the Chamber of Court was bought by the Earl Szechenyi in 1796, and for the following 50 years the Jarekers lost their liberty and became the serfs of this landowner with all the usual duties.

In 1848 the next disaster befell them. During the revolution of 1848 they gained back their liberty, but lost their village and all their belongings. During the revolutionary riots a fire broke out at Jarek on August 31st, 1848. It destroyed all the houses and spared only the outer walls of the church, which had been built in 1823 in "late Baroque" style. The inhabitants fled to the neighbouring villages of Kleinker, Schowe, Werbas and Torschau. They left all their belongings and their full barns and stables to the fire. This period in the history of Jarek was called "Ausreiss" (the escape). The people of the villages mentioned showed great hospitality and accommodated their poor neighbours until their return to the ruins of Jarek 2 years later. In order to rebuild their houses, the Jarek community signed a mortgage contract with the Chamber of Court over 20.000 Guilders. It was a heavy burden, and it took many years to repay this immense sum of money.

In 1790, the village had built a small chapel and from that time on Jarek became the "mother parish" for the Lutheran settlers who lived in the surrounding Serbian communities of Temerin, Gospodin, Zabalj, Tschurug, Djurdejevo, Katsch, Schajkasch Sv. Ivan, Neusatz and Peterwardein.

The village began to prosper and the population grew so fast that many young families had to leave. The first so-called "daughter village" was Katsch. In 1820 the first couples went there, and in the following years a steady stream of young people left Jarek and moved to the villages mentioned above. The pastor of Jarek, who had been installed in his office in 1790, was the only Lutheran minister in the whole area.

During the years after the reconstruction the population of Jarek multiplied, and soon the farmland around the village became too small again for the growing number of inhabitants. So, in 1885, many young couples from Jarek and other Danube Swabian villages decided to move to the newly founded village of Budisava, also called "Waldneudorf." There they had enough land for new farms for everybody. From the beginning of the 20th century to the 1930s many families emigrated from Jarek to the USA, Canada and Argentine.

The fertile soil of the Pannonian Plain, which is one of the best in Europe, and the never ending diligence of the people, soon enabled the people of Jarek to prosper and become relatively wealthy. At the beginning of the new century, many of the old houses, which had been built after the "Ausreiss", were pulled down and new richly decorated brick houses were built instead. Their rooms were 4 metres high. Elaborately decorated outside walls, windows with beautiful ornaments and various forms of stucco

decorations above the large gates showed that their owners lived rather comfortably. The new community centre, the "Gemeindehaus" was also built during this period in 1903.

After the revolution of 1848, when the Batschka became part of Hungary, the Danube Swabians in the Hungarian State had to struggle to keep their German identity. Especially the inhabitants of the towns were often forced to change their German names into Hungarian ones, mostly those who wanted to become civil servants. During World War I many Donauschwaben fought as soldiers in the Hungarian army and lost their lives for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. 85 citizens of Jarek became victims of this war. That was one fifth of the male population that time.

In the peace treaty of "Trianon" in 1920 the former Hungarian "Batschka" became part of the Yugoslav autonomous republic "Voivodina". The new state, "the Kingdom of Yugoslav and Croatia" was formed, and after some years it became the "Kingdom of Yugoslavia".

Soon after World War I the Donauschwaben founded a cultural club, the "Deutsche Kulturbund" and a newspaper, the "Deutsche Volksblatt". They also managed to elect representatives to the new Yugoslav Parliament. Their aim was to preserve the German culture, language and tradition in this new multi-ethnic state.

At the same time German farmers in "Batschka" also founded the "AGRARIA", an agricultural organisation which enabled them to introduce the modern agricultural development of Germany and also the USA. First they only exported their surplus of wheat and "Batschka" became the "breadbasket" of Germany. But soon the farmers started catering for the need of the German industry and produced special crops like hops, sunflower seeds, hemp, rape seeds and rhicinus for the exportation to Germany. In this way the members of the "Agraria" became the most modern farmers in the country. They imported modern farm machinery and seeds even from the USA, as well as new breeds of hogs and other animals. Whole groups of farmers from Germany came to visit the model farms in Batschka. There they were the guests of the local farmers and their wives, who proved their hospitality by cooking and baking Danube Swabian specialities.

In 1937, Jarek celebrated the 150th anniversary of its foundation. At that time the village was in the prime of its economic and cultural development. The farming area, which had only been 1800 jokes at the time of the foundation, had been extended to over 9400 jokes. This land had been bought in the course of time from the farmers of the surrounding villages.

Many guests from the neighbouring villages and even from Germany had arrived to celebrate this event. Every local family offered their hospitality to visitors. During the festivities there was a presentation of a "traditional wedding ceremony", where all the participants were dressed in traditional costumes, the typical clothes that had developed at Jarek through the years. The whole village population took part in this event, and there were various other celebrations lasting several days.

The people of Jarek were able to show that in spite of the many misfortunes that had befallen their forefathers and ancestors, their village had developed into one of the most prosperous communities within the "Donauschwäbische Siedlungsraum", the settlement area of "Danube Swabians", as they are commonly called. But it had always required a great effort to keep their German identity under the changing governments and among the many peoples of the "Pannonian Plain".

What they did not know at that time was that the shadow of their final destiny would soon fall on them. Only 2 years later, in 1939, World War II began and this time the Germans in Yugoslavia were caught in the dilemma between their national German identity and their Yugoslav citizenship. After the beginning of the war many young men were drafted into the German army and fought in all parts of Europe. They did not realize that they were not fighting for Germany, but for Hitler. For some time the German army had occupied Yugoslavia. However as the Russian army approached, the German army retreated. German refugees from Romania and various German settlements in Eastern Europe began to pass through Jarek on their way back to the homeland, the "Reich". They were given shelter and food for a night by the villagers and then they continued their flight.

Many of the residents of Jarek did not think that one day this would also be their destiny, because there was still the faint hope that the Russian army could be stopped at the river Tisza (Theiß). But soon after the "Theiß" had been crossed by Russian troops the mayor of Jarek was given orders to make sure that the people of the village would be ready for evacuation at a given date in the near future. Now preparations began. People covered their farm wagons, loaded them with the necessary provisions for some weeks and got ready for the final command to leave.

By the end of 1944 all the able bodied men were in the army and only elderly men, women and children remained to do the necessary work. They were told that they would have to leave their homes for a short time only and would soon be allowed return. People dug ditches in order to hide their valuable goods, like silverware, porcelain and even good clothes. Everything was looted later on, when the village was empty.

At that time the harvest had been gathered. The barns were full of grain and all the stables were full of cattle and hogs, the yards full of chickens, ducks and geese. A large number of cattle were waiting on the pastures for the autumn sales. The women had been busy filling the cellars and larders with preserves and jams. The farmers had butchered some hogs so that there was enough meat and food to last for quite some time. The wagons were loaded with part of the provisions, and all the rest was left behind.

Then, on October 6th 1944, there was the final order to evacuate the village. During the following 2 days most people left in 3 groups (Trecks) on their horse-drawn covered wagons, others were taken to Novi Sad by army vehicles and were evacuated on riverboats on the river Danube. Some families decided to stay behind, fortunately not many. The Danube Swabians, who had remained in the villages, were taken to detention camps. When the Serbian Army returned, they took bitter revenge on those Germans. In the camps about 50.000 people, mostly women, children and elderly men died of famine and diseases or were beaten to death by the Tito Partisans.

As Jarek had been completely evacuated, the Danube Swabians of the surrounding villages who had not left their homes were taken to Jarek, and the village became one of those "Death Camps". Over 6.500 people lost their lives in the once so beautiful village and were buried in mass graves in and behind the cemetery. From December 1944 to April of 1946 more than 15.000 Donauschwaben were interned in the "Lager Jarek".

But that is another very sad story.

The refugees from Jarek managed to reach Germany after many months of hardship. The large cities had been bombed and lay in ruins, and now millions of refugees from all parts of the former "Reich" were flooding into the destroyed country. Most of them were taken to rural areas and put up at the houses of local families. Many elderly people had lost their lives during the long flight full of hardship back to the old "homeland", whose customs and language they had preserved for more than 150 years. Industrious proud farmers, who had always been their own bosses, now had to work as farm hands for farmers who looked down upon them. They did not believe the stories about the fertile land and the rich crops of Batschka.

All those who had once lived in the beautiful neat village of Jarek will always remember it as they had left it a number of decades ago. It will forever stay in their hearts and memories.
