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DAS BANAT UND DIE BANATER SCHWABEN

BAND 5

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STADTE UND DORFER

**BEITRÄGE ZUR SIEDLUNGSGESCHICHTE
DER DEUTSCHEN IMBANAT**

Redaktion
Elke Hoffmann
Peter-Dietmar Leber
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Für den Inhalt der Beiträge ist der jeweilige Verfasser verantwortlich.

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THE BANAT AND THE SWABIANS OF THE BANAT

Volume 5

CITIES, TOWNS AND VILLAGES

**Contributions to the Settlement History
of the Germans in the Banat**

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Blumenthal

The community of Blumenthal is located in the north eastern portion of the Banat and is approximately 36 kilometres from Temesvár along the highway between Temesvár and Lippa. The surrounding fields that form the boundaries of Blumenthal in the so-called Banat prairie, separates it from Fibisch, Fiskut, Aloisch, Charlottenburg and Königshof. Here the landscape consists of rolling hills with broad deep valleys to the depth of 30 metres and forested hillsides. A small creek known as the Bersaugraben that flows to the Bega River on its 73 kilometre journey forms the boundary between Blumenthal and the cultivated fields surrounding Königshof. The railway station is located a distance of three kilometres from the village and is actually closer to Königshof.

With regard to the origin of the name Blumenthal there are two major but different interpretations. The first explanation points to the family name "Blumenthal" thought to be that of the wife of the salt merchant and nobleman, Karl Samuel Neumann of Lippa who was originally from Buchholt who was responsible for the development of the new settlement. This supposition is possible but it cannot be proven. The second theory suggests that the ancestors of the villagers of Blumenthal settled in the valley of flowers which is the literal meaning of Blumenthal. The valley is very spacious, open and flat. It was known as the "Great Valley". The hypothesis that the first settlers established the village on this site is quite plausible because the major well that lies three kilometres from the present day village was always referred to as the "Great Valley" well. In addition to these two variant traditions there are the hard facts that lie strewn throughout the surrounding hills consisting of shards of broken pots, dishes and jugs. But the actual layout of the original village contains some answers. It provides us with a clue: shortly following the erection of the makeshift early improvised settlement the ceaseless autumn rains set in. As a result it became obvious that this chosen site for the new settlement was unsuitable. The soil at the site was very muddy and consisted of mud and clay. As a result of the heavy rainfall the soil quickly becomes saturated and it is impossible for wagons to drive through it. In addition very strong and often cold winds are common in the area in the autumn and winter. After the limitations of the site were recognized a higher and better location for the new village was sought. The already well established name of Blumenthal was given to the new site. In the years 1833 and 1834 the German name was replaced with a Hungarian variant and was known as "Virág Völgye" which means "The Valley of Flowers" and was than later designated Maslak. Following the Second World War the name of the village was changed to the Romanian Masloc. But in the common usage among the inhabitants of the village and their neighbours the village simply continued to be called Blumenthal.

The Settlement

The settlement of present day Blumenthal began in the year 1770 during the second phase of the Great Swabian Migration (1763-1773). On February 25, 1763 the Empress Maria Theresia issued a colonization Patent which a Settlement Commission undertook to implement in 1766. Responsible for the colonization of the northern Banat was the nobleman from Buchholt, Karl Samuel Neumann. In a report from Temesvár on

September 29, 1771 he provided statistics on the number of houses erected in the new settlements in the years 1770 and 1771 in which Blumenthal is included with 95. The third phase of the Great Swabian Migration in 1783 resulted in an additional 16 settler families in Blumenthal which ended the direct involvement of the Viennese government in any future settlement and colonization. In the following years additional settlers arrived from the unsuccessful and abandoned settlement of Greifenthal, a community that had been established between Königshof and Fibisch. Greifenthal had to be abandoned because of adverse conditions and repeated attacks and plundering by bandits. The former inhabitants of Greifenthal sought sanctuary and shelter in Blumenthal. Later in 1820 the last major wave of settlers arrived in the Banat consisting of several thousand from Bohemia. Several of these families from Bohemia settled in Blumenthal. The future development of the village and its German population would be reflected in its prosperity and the setbacks they suffered.

The First and Second World Wars

Following the assassination of the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary and his wife in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 and Serbia's refusal to comply with the ultimatum they received to hand over the perpetrators of the crime, the outbreak of war was only a matter of time. On July 26, 1914 the total mobilization of manpower throughout the Empire was announced in all of the villages of the Banat with the usual beating of drums at the main intersections of the villages. In Blumenthal the general consensus among the population was that in light of the superior power of Austria-Hungary the war would not last longer than two or three months. On the day of the announcement of the order for recruitment along with a list of names of the men involved and the units to which they were assigned it was posted at the town hall afterwards. A total of 188 men from Blumenthal were recruited and served on the various fronts where the Monarchy was engaged with its enemies. There were a total of 37 men from Blumenthal who died a hero's death. Following the end of the war in 1918 there were various territorial changes in which the Banat was divided and awarded to three countries: Hungary, Romania and Serbia. This meant that the men from Blumenthal after returning from the war who had engaged in the war as Hungarian citizens returned as Romanian citizens after the war. As a result of the Agricultural Reform in 1920 all of the landowners in the Banat who did not reside in Romania had their land that they did not work and their property that they did not occupy confiscated by the state. The last noble landlord with landed property in Blumenthal was Count Wimpfen who lost all of his land and manor house that was purchased by the Wilz family from Fibisch. There were certain land agreements between Hungary and Romania which established land purchase prices which allowed for the reselling of the land a few years later at the going prices. The purchasers of such land locally were mainly farmers from Blumenthal itself. By 1939 the landholdings of the Blumenthal farmers reached 700 Joch in the effected landholdings in Fibisch, Aloisch and Fiskut despite rising prices per Joch that reached 35,000 Lei in 1939. The inter-war years were a time of prosperity and cultural enrichment for the Swabians in the Banat which would all come to an end with the coming of the Second World War.

There were 154 men from Blumenthal who participated in the military in the Second World War; 34 in Romanian Army and 115 in the German Army as well as five others who deserted from their units. During the war 20 soldiers serving in the Romanian Army were killed in action, missing or died as a result of wounds or the privation of prisoner of war camps in Russia; and 32 other men died serving in German military units. Following the capitulation of Romania on August 23, 1944 Hungarian military units retreated through Blumenthal pursued by advancing Red Army troops. There were no battles in the vicinity of Blumenthal nor was there any attempt made to flee on the part of the local population as was the case in most of the other nearby communities. The year 1944 ushered in another plentiful harvest so that kitchen cupboards and cellars were filled to the brim. The arrival of the Russian troops resulted in fear and terror. Following the loss of the war the Germans were the target of numerous infringements of their rights, outright discrimination and reprisals.

On January 14, 1945 the deportations to slave labour in Russia began that affected the younger age groups among men as young as those born in 1928 and young women born in 1927. The quota set for Blumenthal was not met. There were 182 persons from Blumenthal who were taken to do slave labour in Russia of whom 22 did not survive the hard work, hunger, cold and deprivations they suffered. Soon after the deportation operation colonists arrived, both Romanian and Gypsies, from other parts of Romania and displaced those German families that had been driven out of their homes to house them. These new Banat citizens acted like they were in charge and tried to emulate the lifestyle of the German population without doing much work. The Agricultural Reform also occurred at that time that primarily affected the Germans. Cultivated fields, vineyards, agricultural machinery and equipment were divided up and distributed among the new colonists and the livelihood of the German population was taken away from them. For no explained reason Blumenthal was spared the deportation to the Baragan Steppes in 1951 that effected all of the other German villages in the Banat.

Life After 1945

As a result of the Agricultural Reform of 1945 a state collective farm was established in Blumenthal in 1949 that expropriated over 1,314 Hectares of cultivated land. This increased the economic resources of the German population who were able to earn a living as day labourers. In the prosperous years some 300 to 400 persons were employed in the various forms of employment in the state owned operations. Their major scope of activity included the fruit orchards, vineyards, various field crops, livestock rearing and repair shops. Characteristic of these state owned operations was that those who were employed with the exception of the day labourers had a secure income. In the 1950s "*the Collective*" as it was known among the German population of Blumenthal was involved in agricultural production and had 35 families participating, 15 of whom were German families. Between 1953 and 1955 there were an additional 66 families that were accepted into the collective all of whom had no land of their own. During this period many of the leading positions were held by Germans from Blumenthal and they continued to advance to higher offices in the state hierarchy. The future livelihood of the Germans in Blumenthal was closely tied to the Collective.

Unlike the state operated businesses and shops, after the harvest the members of the Collective received quotas of wheat, corn, oats, barley, hay, sunflower oil, grapes, wine, liquor and honey based on their level of productivity. In the year 1964 the district authorities of the LPG amalgamated the Blumenthal Collective with that of the neighbouring village of Königshof so that by 1970 it consisted of 1,418 hectares of cultivated land and had 318 family members. As a result of the ever higher quotas demanded by the state government and the dwindling in the number of German members as a result of the emigration to the Republic of Germany ~ by the end of 1987 there were only 20 German members left ~ the harvest and the income of the Collective declined more and more. During 1940 there were 1,173 Germans living in 278 houses in Blumenthal. In 1950 they numbered 942 living in 261 houses. By 1989 there were 764 living in 189 houses. Then in the mid 1989 there was a drastic reduction and there were only 208 Germans left living in 108 houses. With the decline of the German population within the total population a planned colonization with Romanians was set in motion resulting in the Romanian-ization of the community. In 1999 out of total population of 827 there were only eight Germans. There is no longer a German Blumenthal and the community is now totally Romanian.

Church and School

The first settlers in Blumenthal were Roman Catholics like all those who followed them up to 1783. From the time of the settlement of Blumenthal in 1770 it was a filial of the of the Guttenbrunn Parish but in March 1771 it became a parish of its own under the leadership of their resident priest, George Förstner, and erected a wooden chapel dedicated to the Apostle St. Bartholomew. The *Kirchweih* was celebrated on August 24th or the following Sunday. In 1786 the 115 colonist families committed themselves to building a new church that was completed in 1788 with a shingle roof that was replaced with tiles in 1942. Today's church tower was built in 1814 following a fire through the generous donation of the Bohemian Count Schwarzenberg then the resident landlord of the Domain of Blumenthal. The tower clock was purchased and built into the tower in 1853 and the organ in the church was installed in the year 1861. A major interior and exterior renovation of the church was carried out in 1956 at which time a tower cross was dedicated. The bells that were melted down during the First World War were eventually replaced. During the period from 1916-1924 there were no bells and during those years a spade was hung in the cemetery and was beaten with an iron rod three times a day as a call to prayer and announcing the noon hour.

Initially the priest lived in the school house that was enlarged in 1783. The free standing rectory was erected in 1880. The Blumenthal cemetery was laid out shortly after the first 93 houses were built and was located in the southern end of the village which is still its present location and included a chapel donated by the Stephen Schmidt family and was consecrated on August 25, 1902.

Blumenthal had a number of noteworthy crosses in the village and at its boundaries. There is the cross in front of the Church of the Holy Trinity, the war memorial in memory

of the men who died in the First World War, the crosses at the boundaries leading to Lippa, Aloisch, Arad and Fibisch. The oldest cross, donated by the Fidel Prinz family is erected on the so-called "Hill of the Cross" which is identified on the field map of the Austrian military published in 1864.

The first school in the community was erected shortly after the settlement took place. It is likely that the settlers brought the first teacher with them. The villagers were responsible for the upkeep of the school and the salary of the teacher while the owner of the Domain paid the salary of the priest. The present day school was built in 1891 a year after the old school fell victim to flames. In the year 1778 there were 56 pupils in the school. In 1809 there were 157 pupils and in 1835 the number of pupils increased to 200. From the outset the language of instruction was German up until the Compromise of 1867. In that year the language of instruction became Hungarian and continued to be so up to the end of the First World War. With the annexation of the community by Romania as a result of the Peace Treaty the language of instruction became German once more. The 1930 census of the Kingdom of Greater Romania reported that there was one Roman Catholic school in Blumenthal with two teachers, 132 pupils, taught in two classrooms, Grades 1-4 and Grades 5-7.

After August 23, 1944 all of the German confessional (denominational) schools were closed and the German children in the village had to attend the local Romanian school. On September 1, 1946 through the insistence of the German population and the Church the German confessional schools were re-instated which was rare occurrence in those times. The German population of the village paid the two teachers because the school received no state support in its operation. This German confessional school with seven grades was shut down two years later following the Educational Reform Act of 1948 which replaced it with a state school with eight grades in which German was the language of instruction. This was the case until there were always fewer and fewer German pupils because of mass emigration of Germans to the German Republic.

Dialect and Community Organizational Life

The first settlers in Blumenthal originated primarily in Alsace-Lorraine, Luxemburg, Swabia, Baden, the Rhine Palatinate, the Saar and Hesse. The dialect spoken in Blumenthal like the dialect spoken in most of the German communities in the Banat was of the Rhineland-Franconian type with diffuse Palatinate characteristics. Linguistic scholars have established that the Rhineland-Franconian dialect with its simply syntax and grammatical construction was able to pervade throughout the German communities in the Banat.

In the first half of the 20th century there was an extensive organizational life in the community. The Roman Catholic Memorial Society was founded on February 2, 1900 that had 500 members in a very short time. In the year 1902 the Blumenthal youth band came into existence which achieved great cultural significance under the leadership of the teacher, Peter Lammersfeld from 1908-1914. 1907 was the founding year of the "Youth Choir of Blumenthal" which in the next decades helped to maintain and preserve the

customs and traditions of the German community. A men's choral society was founded in 1921 with 30 members. A sport's federation for children and youth was established in the 1930s and bore the name: "Schmoll Club Blumenthal". At first football (soccer) was played and later handball was introduced. The original sports field was laid out in the 1930s in the north end of the village.

After August 23, 1944 all organizational activities were banned. In the latter years of the 1950s the cultural activities of the German community were primarily organized and led by teachers and included dance groups, theatrical groups and choirs. The evening dances and performances took place in the House of Culture. All of these activities were interspersed throughout the year but then gradually disappeared as more and more of the German population joined in the emigration to Germany.

Up until 1989 there were 759 German inhabitants of Blumenthal that had resettled in Germany and later they were joined by 216 others. The majority of them remained there, while 26 now reside in Austria and 42 have gone overseas and twelve are in Canada.

The HOG (Homeland Organization) of Blumenthal was founded in Göppingen in 1979 whose president is Adolf Gutekunst and engages in activities of interest to the former inhabitants of Blumenthal now living in Germany.