

The following was translated by Henry A. Fischer on behalf of the Zichydorf Village Association from:

# **DAS BANAT UND DIE BANATER SCHWABEN**

**BAND 5**

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## **STADTE UND DORFER**

**BEITRÄGE ZUR SIEDLUNGSGESCHICHTE  
DER DEUTSCHEN IMBANAT**

Redaktion  
Elke Hoffmann  
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*Für den Inhalt der Beiträge ist der jeweilige Verfasser verantwortlich.*

**HERAUSGEGEBEN VON DER  
LANDSMANNSCHAFT DER BANATER SCHWABEN**

**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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## Grabatz

By hearing this name the uninitiated would never come to the conclusion that a German community lies hidden and concealed behind it. The name is of south Slavic origin and consists of the word "Grab" which means "the beech tree" or "the white beech tree" plus the suffix "ac" or "vac" (atz, watz) which is the same as the German suffix "ingen" or "hausen." Without a doubt the open prairie on which Grabatz was established bore this name. One can also conjecture that perhaps a family name was assigned to the community. Other etymological interpretations of the name of the community can be found in the Grabatz *Heimatbücher*. (Homeland books)

In the dialect spoken in Grabatz which has the characteristics of the Rhine Palatinate, it was pronounced "*Grawatz*." The Hungarians called it Grabác and Garabos, while the Romanian designation was Grabati, Grabat as well as Grabaci. In the period before the Second World War there was an unsuccessful attempt made to Germanize the non-German designations for communities in the Banat with a majority German population. In view of that, the name *Buchenau* was suggested for Grabatz. Considering that type of tree did not grow in the community - in Grabatz there were simply no beech trees to be seen nor were there any in the area - the name Heidenau was considered instead. This Germanization effort was soon consigned to oblivion.

In September of 1768 the first German settlers were able to move into their homes. The head of the Administrative Council, Johann Wilhelm Hildebrandt, had the village built without the assistance of these settlers who arrived later. From its very beginnings Grabatz had the reputation of being a model village which is indicated in a petition from 1769 that was presented to the Imperial Royal Ministry in Vienna by the 40 settler families who hoped to settle there and who make it quite clear in their deposition. It is stated in these words, "We have already been here in Temesvár for six weeks and we have learned that the colonists in the new village of Grabatz have the best of everything above all of the other villages and on the strength of that our honest farmers request that we might be settled in the fine houses and be given land to farm there..."

In this way Grabatz was founded as a hub and focus of settlement in the area and like all of the Banat Swabian villages it was provided with a church, rectory, school, community centre and a tavern. From this point onward the destiny, intellectual, and spiritual life of the new settlers were linked together even though they had come from various regions of the Empire. The first years were plagued with great difficulties, but they were able to cultivate the soil and bring in a harvest through hard work and ceaseless toil and were able to nourish their families and provide them with the necessities of life. But later there were always setbacks, such as, the great cholera epidemic of 1836 which resulted in the deaths of 175 victims in Grabatz alone and in a very short time. After the epidemic died down the Stations of the Cross were erected in the cemetery and a cemetery chapel was built on the unearthed diggings. On July 2nd of every year on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary a service of thanksgiving was held there. Not only illnesses and epidemics but also fire, floods, inclement weather and droughts left their mark and scars on the two hundred households of this Banat lowlands village.

From the time of its settlement Grabatz was a State owned Domain (1768-1848). Even though it was offered for sale in 1781 along with Csatád and Bogarosch it did not find a buyer. The settlers in Grabatz came from the following areas: Rhine Palatinate 27%, Alsace-Lorraine 24%, Baden-Württemberg 10%, Bavaria 10%, Luxembourg 10%, Sudetenland 9%, Hungary 2%, Westphalia, Hessen and Silesia about 1% each.

Picture  
The Church Built in 1780  
Stands in the Centre of the Village

Picture  
The Grabatz Stations of the Cross  
At the Beginning of the 20th Century

The steady growth of the Grabatz population from the 700 inhabitants in 1768 to 2,800 inhabitants in 1900 (of whom 90% were German Roman Catholics) was attributable to the very high birthrate that held sway until 1900. After that the population decreased as a result of the One-Child and Two-Child System and levelled off between 2,300 and 2,400 persons. Through the massive government sponsored inner migration after the Second World War the population increased to 3,357 and then after 1951 as a result of the measures taken against the German minority by the Romanian Communist government the population sank below 2,500.

The church in Grabatz that replaced the wooden prayer house built at the time of the settlement was dedicated on October 8, 1780 to "Mary of Perpetual Help" and the *Kirchweih* is celebrated on September 8th (the Nativity of Mary). The self-sustaining parish and its history are recounted in the *Heimatbücher*.

There is also much worthwhile material one can read about in terms of the school and Kindergarten in the *Heimatbücher*. It is astonishing that in the 19th Century school classes consisted of up to 180 pupils. Valentin Albetz was the teacher serving in Grabatz from 1824 to 1886. That is a total of 62 years and indicates he began teaching here in his youth. The original school was a denominational school. Later it was a Hungarian state operated school to foster and promote the Hungarianization of the pupils and after the First World War it was a Romanian state operated school and also served as a vehicle to assist in the Romanianization of the pupils. The school in Grabatz was placed under the jurisdiction of the German Folk Group in Romania and then following the Second World War it became a preparatory school for Communist indoctrination and life in a collective state.

Alongside the leaders of the church and school there was also a community council where all of the representatives were elected during the 19th Century. Their role was clearly defined to adjudicate the life of the community that would closely bind the fate of the inhabitants to one another. The fact that the representatives of the church, school and

community were not always of one mind or had the same goals or aims is a pity but it was all part of daily life of Grabatz.

Despite these different opinions the people of Grabatz always displayed an especially strong striving towards economic, intellectual, cultural and social advancement and progress. The economic progress that had been made and the other prerequisites for intellectual, cultural and social development were already evident in the middle of the 19th Century. The farmers of Grabatz read the "Viennese Morning News" and "The Telegraph". The diaries of Johann Bartole (1847-1862) and Josef Neurohr (1876-1899) contain abundant information about these times. The first artesian well (1889) had great importance for the inhabitants of the community. Clean water significantly bettered and strengthened the health of the villagers. In 1891 a local Farmers Association was founded and the first modern agricultural machinery could be seen in the fields of Grabatz and somewhat later the *Drill* (used for seed sowing) and threshing machines. In 1908 the parish priest, Father Brevis, in writing "Historia Domus" wrote: "I like it here. It suits me fine. I'm going to stay..."

In terms of economic and social life Grabatz had the reputation of being a model community and in fact it was. The community was known far and wide because of its exemplary cattle and swine breeding and accurate pedigree charts. The famous "Bull Market" was not only attended by farmers from the surrounding communities who sought to strengthen their stock by purchasing younger bulls and boars but it was also a meeting place for politicians, members of parliament, senators and veterinarians who were all interested in the development and maintenance of sound healthy and profitable breeds. Following a visit in 1926, Hans Rauch, an engineer from Munich wrote the following words: "Fortunate land! These words cannot remain unspoken on one's lips if one has had the opportunity to roam across the fields of the Banat. And there is Grabatz which is famous for its cattle breeding pedigree charts!"

The village was known throughout the Banat for its model wheat growing and sugar beet cultivation. The "Great Mill" was built in light of the high yield in harvested wheat. It was the second largest mill in the Banat. With regard to the development of agriculture after the Second World War I would refer the reader to the chapters entitled, "Socialist Agriculture" and "Communist Mammoth Business Enterprises in Agriculture" in the Grabatz *Heimatbuch*.

In the years before and after the First World War organizational life flourished in Grabatz. The two men's choral societies, the mixed Cecilia Choir and the church choir were all very active and sang at various events in the community and made tours of neighbouring villages in the Banat Bergland. In 1932 the Grabatz men's choir joined the Association of Banat German Singers and were able to celebrate their 25th anniversary in 1935.

The Grabatz Hunt Club, that was first established in 1944, played a significant role in the life of the community. It set traps for rodents and held rabbit hunts, concerned itself with

the care of the fields and provided feed to the wild creatures in the wintertime and monitored the observance of off season hunting.

Above all the Grabatz Sports Association gloried in its football team (soccer) which was numbered among the best in the northern Banat in the 1930s and provided players for the Temesvár Rapids. The Rifle Club was founded in 1852 and performed demonstrations as was common in many Banat communities especially at the time of church festivals. The associations in which married women and young unmarried women were involved included the Rosary Society and the Marian Girl's Circle as well as the Village Women's Association founded in 1926. The Grabatz Trades and Commerce Association was founded in 1920 and was made up of merchants and tradesmen of all sorts that met to exchange ideas and engage in cultural pursuits. The Association library was well stocked with books and periodicals.

The *Tillschneider* band was well known beyond the community itself and played at countless events. Also greatly loved by the public in Grabatz were the enjoyable theatricals and operetta performances under the direction of Michael Bauer. All of these associations and organizations were dissolved after 1944.

Following the end of the Second World War a large number of people from Grabatz remained in Germany. They were spared the fate that would befall those who had remained at home. Without legal rights of any kind, deportation to Russia, the Land Reform Laws, confiscation of land and property, the forced resettlement in the Baragan Steppes and other arbitrary acts of the Communist authorities shook the confidence and trust of the inhabitants of Grabatz and the continuance of their community solidarity was put into question. What followed was the saddest chapter in the history of the people of Grabatz between those "who no longer want to be here" and those "who can't leave yet." The attention, thoughts and strivings of many inhabitants of Grabatz in the 1970s was fixed on emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany. Yet at that time the people of Grabatz endeavoured to put up with the living conditions that resulted from the totalitarian Communist system as much as it was humanly possible. The cohesiveness and unity of the people in Grabatz became focussed on their determination to maintain their traditions, language and customs.

Picture  
Typical Cattle Rearing in Grabatz

During this period the second band, the Fendler Band, was formed and according to the old custom *Kirchweih* was once again celebrated and every opportunity was used to further their aims by gathering to sing German songs as well as perform theatricals or musical comedies in German. Numerous inhabitants of Grabatz emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany prior to the fall of Communism in 1989, either by paying bribes which were called "buying your freedom" or attempting the life-threatening illegal crossing of the border. With the end of the Communist dictatorship in Romania the last of our countrymen emigrated. Only a few remained behind, mostly elderly people who did not want to leave Grabatz.

On the 225th anniversary of the founding of the community, on All Saints' Day in 1993 a stone memorial was dedicated next to the church and following the names of all of those who had died in the Second World War one can read the following words: "After this offering was made the remaining Germans returned to their Motherland. In parting they blessed this earth that was the home of their people for two hundred years."

The former residents of Grabatz have found and made a new home in over one hundred different communities in Germany. The HOG of Grabatz was founded in 1975 and had Michael Gruber as its first president followed by Johann Gruber in 1986. Today Alfred Ivanov is our president and like his predecessors he is engaged in maintaining and strengthening the bonds that bind us together. Up until 1998 the HOG of Grabatz has made 29 *Treffen* possible providing an annual opportunity to see one's countrymen again, well knowing this could only happen in the new circumstances in which we find ourselves in our new homeland.

Picture  
The Grabatz Second World War Memorial

Johann Dietrich