

Bethausen

Bethausen, also known under the designations Béthlenhaza (Hungarian) and Betlenhaas (Banat Swabian) is located in the northern section of what is now the District of Temes in the Romanian Banat. It is a friendly Swabian village that geographically belongs to the Banat Lowlands. *Geographical Location:* the village finds itself on the right bank of the Bega River 45.8563 degrees north (northern latitude) and 21.9608 degrees east (eastern longitude) and is part of the Banat lowlands and is located 30 kilometers north of Lugosch (Romanian: Lugo) and 20 kilometers west of Fatschet (Romanian: Faget).

A Short History

Historically, Bethausen is one of the youngest villages in the Banat. It was founded late as a result of the inner migration of settlers from their original home community of Zichydorf, now known as Mariolana in present day Serbia.

Zichydorf, located in Torontal County, was established by settlers from Swabia in 1787/1788 along with others from Alsace, Lorraine and Bohemia. Following the usual difficulties involved in establishing a new settlement, Zichydorf developed into a market town and by the middle of the 19th Century as a result of the progress it had made in its agricultural development led to the scarcity of more arable land to meet the needs of a growing younger population. From among the various streams of migrating settlers that resulted from the lack of available and affordable land in the Banat were the settlers who founded the village of Bethausen in 1881. A group of hardworking young men who were unable to buy any agricultural land in Zichydorf or were impoverished and had to work as day labourers banded together under the leadership of Franz Gulding to move elsewhere to improve their lot.

The land agent for Count Béthlen held out the prospect of available land for them that lay adjacent to the Romanian village of Cladova which led to their decision to take up land there and began to prepare to leave.

The first group of settlers arrived on the future site of the village on March 5, 1883 and the second group followed on March 10th. Because it was still winter they had to seek shelter in the neighbouring village of Cladova. Their first task was to clear the dense forest, known as the Hosiak. The timber was loaded on flat wagons and driven to the Bega River where the logs were formed into rafts and floated down river. The settlers who came to this new home of theirs had fifteen years of hard labour ahead of them to transform the terrain into a habitable condition. The land survey which the settlers signed provided 177 house lots with eight Joch of land allotted to each. In addition there was also land set aside for the priest, teacher and notary.

The newly established community was given the name of Béthlenhaza in honour of Count Béthlen. The Hungarian word “haza” means “house” and the German settlers in daily discourse changed that to “haus” which is the German equivalent of “house.” Later in 1920

the designation Bethausen became official as a result of the political changes after the First World War. The designation would remain unchanged even after the departure of the German population.

After the recently established community slowly developed agriculturally the need for building various community facilities became necessary. As a result, the school was built in 1884/1885. At the end of 1885 the first church was erected. The Post Office was built in 1896 and in 1900 a bridge was built across the Bega River. During this same period other important construction to meet community needs took place, the water mill (the Raz family) and the larger mill (the Griesbach family).

In the mid 1920s Bethausen consisted of three parallel broad streets with a large village square in the middle where the church stood across from the community centre facilities. The houses now numbered 179 separate residences that housed 200 families comprising a total population of 1,035 inhabitants in the village.

The population increased especially in terms of the number of children. As a result a second school was built in 1902 and in 1912 the “big” school was constructed and a Kindergarten had been added in 1906.

The economic and material situation of the population improved greatly and in 1937 a new, larger and beautiful church was erected to replace the old one from the settlement period.

The population of Bethausen was primarily engaged in agricultural pursuits and livestock rearing although there were also numerous tradesmen. There were four blacksmiths, four wagon builders, four carpenters, two tailors, five shoemakers, one butcher, one grocer, two furriers, one cooper, two tinsmiths, two wood and brick salesmen, two dairymen and three barbers. In addition there were five stores and a credit union was in operation. At that time the community was quite prosperous and was the economic hub of the neighbourhood. There was a weekly market held on Saturdays and fairs were held three times a year.

The original settlers in Bethausen were German and belonged to the Roman Catholic faith. Later with the assistance of the Hungarian government that provided low interest rates there was an influx of Hungarian settlers in the community who were also Roman Catholic. Beginning in 1900 Romanians from Arad County came and settled in the community.

The best years in Bethausen in terms of social and economic life, was the period between the two world wars. The population was well off economically, and their cultural and social lives were the foundations of the sense of community experienced by the village inhabitants. In 1925 Bethausen was received into the membership of “The German Cultural Union” as well as “The Association of the German People.” There were various associations including a Hunt Club that was established in 1905 and a volunteer fire brigade in the same year.

In 1907 a children' s band was formed and a choir for girls. The village band was formed in 1925 and was followed by a youth orchestra in 1935. The cultural aspirations of the village gave rise to the formation of an amateur theatrical group that presented plays on a regular basis, both rustic and more serious productions. A local poet, Adam Schönherr, is worthy of mention, who penned the words of the “Ansiedlerlied” (Song of the Settlers).

The dialect spoken in Bethausen belonged to the South Rhine Franconian group of dialects. What this indicates about the dialect is also true of the garb and attire that was worn in the village that was unique to the community resulting from the fact that from the founding of the village not only settlers from Zichydorf arrived here but also others from other regions and villages and in their life together crystallized into a blended dialect and attire. This phenomenon was common in all of in all of the secondary settlements resulting from the inner migration which was also true of Josefsdorf and Giseladorf that were established in the same time span as daughter settlements.

The Population

The settlers that came to Bethausen were German whose origins were primarily from various areas of present day south western Germany: Swabia, Alsace, Lorraine and a few from Bohemia. There is documentation to the effect that in 1890 there were 546 inhabitants of whom 13 were Romanian, 104 Hungarians and 399 were German. A census was taken in 2002 that indicates that there were 909 inhabitants of whom 784 were Romanians, 35 Hungarians and only 14 were German.

The beginning of the end of the future development of the village and its people was the outbreak of the Second World War. The German inhabitants began to leave earlier never to return having emigrated to America but the war resulted in their dispersal from the village.

The Agricultural Reform of 1945 had immediate consequences that were difficult for the German population to live with so that many of the villagers who saw no future for themselves if they remained left for a new life in the cities. The last step was their mass exodus to Germany. Concrete official documentation with regard to the further development of the village and its population is not available but the census of 2011 indicates that the population of Bethausen was 3,057 inhabitants of whom 97% were Romanian. As to the minorities living in Bethausen only mention is made of some Ukrainians and Hungarians and Germans are no longer mentioned as living there.

The German inhabitants had left en masse for Germany after 1989 and live scattered throughout the Bundes Republic of Germany in Spaichingen, München, Aachen, Neuburg, Heilbronn, Ludwigshafen, Singen, etc.

Most of them would concur in their hearts with what Franz Ludwig writes in his introduction to his book, “Towns and Villages in the Banat:”

“But still the memory will always remain in the hearts of all of us. The time we spent in Bethausen is a lasting loving memory and a wonderful at that.”