

# Timeline for Wittenberg, Bessarabia

Compiled by Dwayne Janke, GRHS Village Coordinator for Wittenberg (Feb. 2006)

<b>1796-1806</b>	Prompted by overpopulation, Germans emigrate from the Kingdom of Wuerttemberg (mostly the Black Forest & Danube districts) to what was central Poland (now Prussia territory) with only minimal help from the Royal Prussian regime.
<b>1806-1807</b>	Napoleon attacks Prussia and deprives her of the Polish possessions, setting up the Duchy of Warsaw. Polish nobility persecutes the German settlers as foreigners and makes their lives difficult.
<b>1810 - 1812</b>	Revolutionary unrest in Poland and maneuvering of French troops on their way to Russia brings heavy losses to the Germans, prompting them to seek emigration from Poland.
<b>1812</b>	The Russian army battles Napoleon's departing French army at Malojaroslavets, a typical Russian town of about 10,000, located above a bridge crossing on the Lutz River, about 70 miles southwest of Moscow. The battle is considered by the Russians to be the beginning of the French army's ruin.
<b>1813</b>	Alexander I's Russian government issues an invitation to the Germans to resettle in the newly acquired province of Bessarabia.
<b>1814</b>	Commissioner Crueger comes to Poland to personally distribute the necessary passes to the Germans. They gladly follow Alexander's call, many placing great messianic hopes in him.
<b>1814 – 1815</b>	124 families of Warsaw colonists leave in several groups from Poland to Bessarabia. One travels via Volhynia, under leaders Bernhardt Bohnet and assistant Martin Vossler; another travel with a Russian official by the same route. They make the nearly 1,000 km trek by wagon, handcart or on foot. Because they arrive in Russia in late autumn, the settlement cannot proceed. The settlers are housed in various Moldavian villages in Bessarabia and are given provisions until they can relocate on land of their own.
<b>1815 / 1816</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Germans found their colony—among the first 7 of 19 mother colonies created in the Bessarabia's south central Budshak region—situated in the Kirgish Creek Valley, located 106 km from the provincial capital Kishinev.</li> <li>• More than 20,000 acres (8,183 Dessjatines and 570 Faden) of rolling land is allotted to the colony. Two Bulgarians, Slatkow and Mongowsky, had previously held a lease on this empty steppe land, a former estate. Each of</li> </ul>

	<p>138 families in the colony receives 162 acres of land.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From the Russian crown, the colonists also receive: shrubbery to erect houses; a small allowance to buy building materials; wagons, machinery and a stock team; 32 pounds of flour and grits monthly until the first harvest; and 104 liters of potatoes and 104 liters of wheat for planting. For this subsidy, each family incurs a debt of 1,114 silver rubles, to be paid back in full through interest-free payments, starting in 1833.</li> <li>The settlers wanted to have four streets, so they count two rows to the north as two streets and the same to the south. A row of houses is begun on both sides of the village's broad street. The center is reserved for public buildings.</li> </ul>
<b>1815</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colonists equip a farmhouse to be used for schooling and church services. Wittenberg is part of the governmental district of Akkerman and the Evangelical Lutheran parish of Tarutino (pastored first by Friedrich Schnabel). The Tarutino parish pastor conducts churches services in Wittenberg 14 times per year. On other Sundays, the sexton (schoolteacher) reads the service text and holds Sunday school in the afternoon, a practice that many of the residents are familiar with from their native Wuerttemberg.</li> <li>Bernhard Bohnet is the first mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>Post 1816</b>	After the founding of the colony, 16 families from Prussia join the settlement, for a total of 140 families in the community. Two families resettle elsewhere, due to insufficient land, reducing the total to 138 families.
<b>1816 – 1818</b>	Wittenberg colonists enjoy good crops (the opposite is true in some other colonies) and high sale prices for their cattle (16-20 rubles each). However, not knowing the customs, laws and language of the local inhabitants, the colonists are cheated and lied to.
<b>~ 1817</b>	Though the colony is first named Mariental, Russian authorities (the Welfare Committee for South Russian Colonists) notify the colony that they should use the official name Malojarowslawetz for their community, apparently an historic reference to the battle at Malojaroslavets in 1812. It is later renamed Wittenberg, after Wuerttemberg (from which so many of the settlers originate), since the dialect pronunciation sounds like "Wittenberg."
<b>1817</b>	A district office for Malojarowslawetz is established in the colony.
<b>1817 – 1821</b>	Colonists depend entirely on grain sales for their livelihood, but the price for a Tschetwert (=26 liters) of wheat is low (1 ½ -2 ½ rubles).
<b>1819</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The colony's first school building is built and equipped; previously, schooling was conducted in private homes. Church services are also held here.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A large earthquake occurs.</li> </ul>
<b>1819 – 1825</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colonists depend on cattle sales but prices are low (3-4 rubles/head). This fact and the mishandling of the fields mean that the colonists are very poor and can not build decent or large enough official buildings for Wittenberg.</li> <li>• Because of a heavy workload or disinterest, children are not regularly attending school and the new generation is poorly educated.</li> <li>• The years spent by the settlers in Poland left “undesirable traces” such as spending time in taverns but not church. The authorities intervene with rules and regulations to keep up customs and maintain order, assisted by the example of “decent citizens amongst the settlers.” It becomes mandatory that all children have to be able to read, write and know simple math, and have knowledge of their Evangelical Lutheran beliefs before they are confirmed.</li> </ul>
<b>1819 – 1822</b>	Fair crops are grown.
<b>1821</b>	Jakob Flaig becomes mayor.
<b>1822</b>	A portion of the crop is destroyed by hail. The price of cattle plummets to 3-4 rubles per head (20 % of what cattle prices were just four years earlier).
<b>1823</b>	Unable to make use of its land bordering Tarutino because it is a great distance away, Wittenberg gets permission from the Russian authorities to divide its community. Chosen by casting lots, 69 families found a new colony on half of the land (4,069 Dessjatines or over 10,000 acres). It is called Malojaroslawetz II (Alt Posttal). Advantages are clear for Wittenberg—fields are now more accessible and every third house has been removed (dismantled and rebuilt in the new colony) to enlarge the village construction area.
<b>1823 – 1825</b>	Locusts destroy field crops, resulting in bad harvests.
<b>1825</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wittenberg is home to 82 families, totalling 483 people.</li> <li>• The colony has 227 horses, 1,237 cattle and 173 sheep.</li> <li>• Included among the settlers in Wittenberg are 5 weavers, 3 carpenters, 3 millers, 2 shoemakers, 2 tailors, 1 blacksmith, and 1 wood joiner.</li> </ul>
<b>1826</b>	A cattle epidemic results in great losses for the colonists.
<b>1826 – 1827</b>	Crops are fair.
<b>1827</b>	There are still 82 families in the villages, but the population is now 500.
<b>1828 – 1829</b>	Wittenberg is located at the crossroads of between Kischinev, Ismail, Bender and Reni. In May, during the Russian-Turkish War, Russian troops march through the colony on their way to Turkey. In the winter, the military set up quarters in the colony, using up Wittenberg’s stored food and feed. The colonists suffer many

	hardships, as a result, and the farmers are never financially compensated.
<b>1828 – 1831</b>	Grain crops are good.
<b>1829</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After signing a peace treaty with Turkey, Russian troops again pass through the community on their way home. The colonists are unhappy, since they are not reimbursed for providing food and shelter to the military.</li> <li>• A large earthquake occurs in November.</li> <li>• Another livestock epidemic virtually wipes out the entire herd in the colony.</li> </ul>
<b>1831</b>	A cholera epidemic (said to have entered Russia from Persia through the Caucasus) fortunately takes only a few lives. This is in contrast to other German colonies in Bessarabia, where as many as 80 inhabitants die.
<b>1832 – 1833</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new prayer house is erected. Eventually a church with 800 seats would be built in the community.</li> <li>• The old school house is renovated, but is still small and damp, and is threatened by flooding each annual snowmelt.</li> <li>• There is not much rain, so crops are poor. Prices rise for cattle (to 14-15 rubles per head) and grain (6-9 rubles per Tschetwert, which =26 liters).</li> </ul>
<b>1833</b>	Families are scheduled to repay a debt of 1,114 rubles each, received as an interest-free subsidy from the Russian crown when the colony was founded.
<b>1834</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The area district office is moved to Alt Posttal.</li> <li>• Georg Widmer becomes mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>1835</b>	In August, Wittenberg suffers a severe hailstorm, with melting stones still weighing 1 ½ pounds three days later. The grain was not damaged because it was already harvested, but there are great losses in the vineyards and orchards.
<b>1835 – 1836</b>	Harvests are fairly good.
<b>1836</b>	The ‘free years’ have expired so the colonists now have to pay dues to the crown.
<b>1837 – 1838</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The harvests are good and fair, respectively.</li> <li>• In the latter year, an earthquake “shook the land for 10 minutes.”</li> </ul>
<b>1839</b>	A grain silo is built.
<b>1840</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After initial discouragement, the colonists have learned that they can’t work the vineyards the same as in their land of origin because of land conditions and climate here. They are now beginning to get better results and more vineyards are now being planted.</li> <li>• The iron plough and scythe becomes customary in the colony.</li> </ul>

<b>1840 – 1841</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Due to little rain, the crops are meager.</li> <li>• The winter is harsh. Snow falls for several days in November 1840, and several more blizzards cause the snow to remain until March, often measuring ½ Faden (about 1 meter) on the steppe land. The result is shortness of livestock feed, and prices for a bale of hay being 20-30 rubles.</li> </ul>
<b>1842</b>	The old school house is torn down and replaced by a larger one in a better location.
<b>1842 – 1843</b>	There are decent harvests both years.
<b>1844</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Torrential June downpours lead to four floods, washing away hay bails, damaging orchards and devastating gardens.</li> <li>• The old schoolhouse is flooded and is made unusable; a new one is built at a higher location.</li> </ul>
<b>1845</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A devastating cattle disease arrives in June, killing many cattle.</li> <li>• The crops are bad this year and next.</li> </ul>
<b>1845 – 1847</b>	Cattle prices are very low (7-8 rubles/head). Wheat prices have remained level since 1838.
<b>1846</b>	A new large, two-story school building is finished, with teachers living quarters located in the basement.
<b>1847 – 1848</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A June locust swarm destroys a major portion of the crop, leaving a meager harvest.</li> <li>• A horse disease in the winter spreads and most farmers lose their work teams.</li> <li>• Snowfalls are high, with temperatures dropping to –15 to –20 degrees C for weeks at a time.</li> </ul>
<b>1848</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of a courthouse, begun last year, is finished.</li> <li>• Residents await spring with worry, as nesting of locusts has spread throughout many Bessarabian villages.</li> <li>• The colony’s chronicle to the Russian government says that the circumstances in the village since its founding have eased and thrived, proving that “through perseverance, efforts and practical farm management, it can be successful.” It emphasizes that thanks to the precautions taken by the authorities and the “healthy location” of the village, the colony has been spared the brunt of illnesses, has had less deaths, and families have not been torn apart as severely as in other surrounding colonies.</li> <li>• As of January 1, the colony’s population of 77 families is 768 people (386 males and 382 females).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are 259 horses, 856 cattle (down 30% of that in 1825) and 2,294 sheep (13 times more than 23 years ago!) in the colony.</li> <li>• The colony has 3,013 acres under cultivation and 7,496 acres as pastureland. Vineyards and fruit orchards cover 511 acres.</li> <li>• The soils in the hills are best suited for vineyards and grain crops. Fruit trees and forests haven't thrived because the heavy, hard soil won't allow roots to spread and absorption of necessary moisture. Most fruit and ornamental trees died after 15-20 years.</li> <li>• The community owns 15,160 rubles to the crown. They are taxed 58 rubles to pay for the colony authority; 18 rubles to support the state police; 56 for land and postal fees. Local taxes are 661 rubles and the county tax is 1,069 rubles. 4,056 liters of grain is stored for emergencies.</li> <li>• A Mr. Necker is mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>1850</b>	The star-shaped threshing stone is introduced. It is dragged behind horses to roll over grain piled on the ground in farmyards, as a way to separate kernels of grain from the chaff.
<b>1862</b>	Wittenberg has 1,182 residents, including 145 school students.
<b>1867</b>	Since 1825, at least 115 Wittenberg residents have left and resettled in other Bessarabian German mother colonies, including 12 families (77 people) to Kulm; 8 families to Katzbach; and 55 persons to Dennewitz between 1834-1844.
<b>1870</b>	The mowing machine and cleaning mill begins to be used by Wittenberg farmers.
<b>1871</b>	There are 1,347 Germans residents in Wittenberg; 782 people (58%) are in 194 farming families. There are 106 families in the trades, and 7 families earn a living as professionals.
<b>1880</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population increases have created land shortages for the Wittenberg colonists. As a result, many residents leave to found daughter colonies.</li> <li>• Albota, Bessarabia is founded with the majority of settlers coming from Wittenberg; 19 families (122 people) come from mother colony.</li> <li>• Marasliensfeld, Bessarabia is founded: 5 families (36 people) come from Wittenberg.</li> </ul>
<b>1881</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kurudschika, Bessarabia, is founded; 9 families (50 people) are from Wittenberg.</li> <li>• Johann Schmied becomes mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>1884</b>	Adam Kalmbach becomes mayor.
<b>1885</b>	Erhard Rath becomes mayor.

<b>1889</b>	Neu-Nikolaewka, Bessarabia is founded; 10 families (56 people) come from Wittenberg.
<b>1890</b>	Christian Rath becomes mayor.
<b>1892</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wittenberg's population stands at 1,903, of which 238 are school children.</li> <li>• Sofiewka, Bessarabia is founded; 29 families (188 people) come from Wittenberg.</li> <li>• Mariewka, Bessarabia is founded; 5 families (25 people) come from Wittenberg.</li> <li>• Martin Vossler becomes mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>1894</b>	Friedrich Vossler becomes mayor.
<b>1896</b>	Erhard Rath becomes mayor.
<b>1897</b>	There 2,432 people living in Wittenberg; 304 are students in school.
<b>1898</b>	Adam Sackmann becomes mayor.
<b>1900</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Though some consider Wittenberg to be backwards because it is such a conservative community, it has a hygienist and nurse with office space to work in. Later, Dr. A. Necker graduates from the medical faculty at the University of Tuebingen, Germany, and practises in Wittenberg, hiring the nurse. This is unique; only one other Bessarabian colony has a doctor.</li> <li>• Johann Rath becomes mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>1901</b>	Erhard Rath becomes mayor.
<b>1904</b>	K. Kuenzler becomes mayor.
<b>1905</b>	Christoph Widmer becomes mayor.
<b>1906</b>	Wischniowka, Bessarabia, is founded; 44 families (238 people) come from Wittenberg.
<b>1908</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alexandrowka, Bessarabia, is founded; 12 families (69 people) come from Wittenberg.</li> <li>• Villagers who have remained in Wittenberg are expanding their wagon making facilities, establishing up to 33 blacksmith shops. The wagons sell well, especially in Bulgarian villages, and the Wittenbergers control the entire market at Ceader-Lunga.</li> </ul>
<b>1909</b>	Georg Widmer becomes mayor.
<b>1912</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The population has fallen to 1,637, with 305 being school students.</li> <li>• Johannes Klaiber becomes mayor.</li> </ul>

<b>1913</b>	Johannes Necker becomes mayor.
<b>1914</b>	Adam Stickel becomes mayor.
<b>1916</b>	Johannes Klaiber becomes mayor.
<b>1917</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Johannes Rath becomes mayor.</li> <li>• Despite the Russian revolution, images of the Czar still decorate Wittenberg living rooms.</li> </ul>
<b>1918</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In March, Romanian troops occupy Bessarabia. The province, including Katzbach, becomes part of Romania.</li> <li>• 26 men from Wittenberg have been killed or declared missing in action during World War I.</li> </ul>
<b>1920</b>	Andreas Widmer becomes mayor.
<b>1921</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The population continues to fall. It stands at 1,386, with 258 in school.</li> <li>• Martin Vossler becomes mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>1922</b>	Christoph Mueller becomes mayor.
<b>1923</b>	Johannes Klaiber becomes mayor.
<b>1925</b>	Christoph Widmer becomes mayor.
<b>1927</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wittenberg has 1,435 residents; 264 are school students.</li> <li>• Since 1867, 1,945 Wittenbergers have emigrated out of the colony: 69% have gone to other villages in Bessarabia; 16% to other regions in Russia; 13% have gone to North America; and 2% to other countries. The height of the emigration occurred between 1900-1910.</li> <li>• Christian Sharf becomes mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>1929</b>	Jakob Rauschenberger becomes mayor.
<b>1931-1938</b>	The following are mayor during this period: Johannes Flaig, Michael Schmied, Georg Widmer, Christian Bohnet, Georg Widmer, Johannes Irion, Johannes Kungel.
<b>1933</b>	Just over 1,540 people live in Wittenberg; 256 being school students.
<b>1935</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crop yields for wheat, barley and oats per hectare in Wittenberg (Bessarabia) are 47-70% of what they are in Wuerttemberg, Germany, and prices the farmers get for the grain are 27-45% that of what their counterparts receive in the motherland.</li> <li>• There have been 3,326 births in Wittenberg since 1825.</li> </ul>

<b>1938</b>	Wittenberg is removed from the parish of Tarutino and becomes part of the Alt Posttal parish.
<b>1939</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dark clouds gather over Europe in the summer and fall, as WWII begins. This also creates uncertain times for Bessarabia. Russia has never accepted Romania's claim and occupation of Bessarabia. The August 8 non-aggression pact between Hitler and Stalin determines Bessarabia's fate. It is secretly agreed that Hitler will take the Germans from the region, and Stalin will take the land back into its realm.</li> <li>• Johannes Flaig becomes mayor.</li> </ul>
<b>1940</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The population is 1,451, including 63 non-Germans. There are 160 families in the village, more than double the number in 1848.</li> <li>• Since 1825, about 2,340 people have emigrated from Wittenberg, including 280 since 1927.</li> <li>• The colony has 7,410 acres under cultivation (nearly triple that of 1848) and 2,474 acres in pasture (one-third that of 1848).</li> <li>• A farmer in Bessarabia can make a reasonable living with 37 acres of land or more. However, only 124 of the 160 farm families own that amount of land, so many had to lease property.</li> <li>• There are 550 horses in Wittenberg. Farmers with less than 74 acres usually have about four horses, those with 74-160 acres have 6-8 horses, and those with more than 160 acres have 8-10 horses.</li> <li>• Included among the residents in Wittenberg are 53 blacksmiths, 51 carpenters, 6 wood joiners, 3 saddle makers, 2 shoemakers, 2 tailers, and 1 miller.</li> <li>• There are also 640 cattle and 6,000 sheep on the colony.</li> <li>• Johannes Irion is the last mayor of Wittenberg.</li> <li>• On June 26, 1940, the U.S.S.R. gives Romania an ultimatum to vacate Bessarabia in four days. The Soviet military then occupies the region, arriving in Wittenberg on June 29. All Germans in Bessarabia are later told they can resettle to Germany.</li> <li>• Between Sept. 24 and Oct. 22, 1,366 residents of Wittenberg (including 491 men, 525 women, 52 children under 2 years of age, and 298 children aged 2-14) leave their colony home behind. They join a massive resettlement effort organized and run by the German army that moves 90,000 Germans out of Bessarabia to Germany. (The Wittenberg residents are initially moved to camps in seven towns of Oberbayern in Germany).</li> <li>• After 125 years of existence, the Bessarabian German colony of Wittenberg is no more. It is occupied by surrounding Russian inhabitants.</li> </ul>

**Sources:** *1848 Chronicle of Wittenberg; Heimatbuch Wittenberg, Bessarabia* (Paul Rath, Klara Bollinger), 1987; *Homeland Book of the Bessarabian Germans* (Albert Kern), 1998.