The Trades as Practiced in the Homeland

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Von der Stirne heiss	From the forehead hot
Rinnen muss der Schweiss	The sweat must run;
Soll das Werk den Meister loben	So shall your work the Master praise -
Doch der Segen Kommt von oben.	From heaven the blessing will descend.

Schiller

The first settlers in Teplitz were mainly farmers, with a few tradesmen. It was not unusual that people held dual positions: farming and a trade or vice versa. Thirty years after the founding of Teplitz, statistics from 1847 show that Teplitz had about 70 farmers and 30 tradesmen. The trade-occupations included weavers, shoemakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, millers, coopers, wagoners, tailors and butchers. The skills of these tradesmen were essential for the building of decent homes and producing the tools and equipment needed to move forward. These tradesmen passed on their knowledge and skills generation to generation. From the beginning of Teplitz until 1940 all trades were practiced withonly manual labor – there was no power equipment available. Only minor changes occurred in available materials and techniques as time went on. In this piece I will discuss various items that pertained to how the trades functioned in Teplitz: the shops, tools used, products made, and practices in general.

Farming remained the main activity to support life. But over time, the land was divided by the inheritance mode which led to less land and less income for most families. Some families owned no land at all. The trades became a popular way for people to support their life and existence. From the beginning of Teplitz, villagers placed a high priority on improving their lives. They wanted and needed progress! The pioneers worked hard to tame the wild land. Housing improved and living conditions progressed at a steady pace. As soon as people had achieved the fundamentals needed for a decent life, they began thinking about obtaining objects that would contribute to a better, more comfortable standard of living. The tradesmen who supplied such items got a lift.

The Blacksmith Shop

My grandpa Simon Zacher owned a blacksmith shop. While some shops looked like a black hole, his was bright and had windows. But to the end we did not have electricity or power motors of any kind. Stepping into grandpa's shop, on the right was a drill press with a big wheel that was turned by hand. Further to the right were the anvil and the hearth with a raised water bath. A bellows forced air into the hearth to provide a hot fire to heat the irons for forging. Along the back wall of the shop was a long workbench with vices and tools that had a variety of uses. Suspended from the ceiling was the chain that held the iron stock pieces as they were forged into axles for wagons. The bellows was activated by a handle that the smithy could push up and down to force air into the hearth. Outside the shop was a rig to press rims onto the wagon wheels. Every nut and bolt needed in the trades was made from scratch in the blacksmith shops. The sleeves needed to fit an axle were made in these shops as well. At times, Grandpa purchased wooden parts for wagons and then sold them. At other times he had jobs where he built and completed entire wagons. Because the trade work was so competitive, only the

ones who worked hardest had any chance to stay in the trade and succeed. But especially for wheelwrights who made the frames for wagon wheels, success came at a price. Many overworked in unhealthy conditions and became ill. Many died from tuberculolsis.

Wagoners and Wheelwrights

My dad owned a wagon-making shop that made all the wood pieces needed for a wagon. The trade had been passed down from his forefathers and this earned the name "Wagoner Opp" for the family. This was also a very competitive trade and hard work was required to make it financially. My dad's shop was well-lit and bright, and positioned next to the winter kitchen of our house. Going into the shop, to the right was the lathe.We had no power source to activate the equipment – everything had to be run by human power. Along that wall to the right was a big wheel with a handle and a strap on it to push and pull to activate the wheel. The big wheel transmitted turning power to a pulley on the lathe via a ropebelt. This lathe was mainly used to make hubs for the wagon wheels. All along the other walls of the shop were work benches with woodworking tools. As in all the shops, there was no light from any community utility source. These shops operated from dawn to dusk.

In the very beginning, our ancestors only had available the two-wheeled wooden-axle cart of the Moldavians. Our ancestors had seen better wagon sin Germany and set about to make improvements. Over the years, Teplitz developed a light-weight iron-axle wagon suitable to handle the varietyof jobs needed to be done by the colonists. From the very beginning, our trade people worked their way up the ladder of success, making wheelbarrows, pitchforks, wooden harrows and rakes, to mention some of their products.

Until my dad was forced to retire in 1936 because of illness, he sliced his logs into boards with a long-saw. The log was placed with one end on the workbench and the other on a stand. One man on top of the log and one lying down underneath worked the saw to cut the log into lumber. All wood pieces then had to be shaped from the rough wood, first with a shave ax and then the finer details were finished with a pull-knife. Spokes got their shape with a pull-knife and a plane. All drilling was done with a hand-drill. Dad sharpened all of his own tools using a sandstone grinder that was submerged halfway into water. To save time, many men had their wives turn the grinder while they sharpened the tools. Mother said that Dad called on her often to hold a work piece that he was shaping. Hubs and spokes, made out of wood, had to be completely dry before assembly to avoid splitting. For that reason we had our bake oven in the barn. When Mother baked bread, she gave the fire extra attention so that it could be used for drying wood after the bread was out of the oven. We did not have carpenters that only built buildings – all carpentry work was done by the wheel wrights. Dad sold wood scraps and shavings generated by the shop work, and gave the money to Mom.

Tailors and Shoemakers

The tailors and shoemakers were tradesmen whose work shifted with the styles but whose methods changed little. The acquisition of sewing machines did make life easier for them – the majority of changes were on account of fashion. To get a new pair of shoes, the customer had to be measured and then endure fitting after fitting until the shoes were finally finished. Everyday footwear could be purchased by the pair at the marketplace from a Russian or Bulgarian merchant, but these were not a precise fit. In our town we had good shoemakers who produced quality products – they specialized in Shaft boots, Sunday shoes and specialties such as wedding shoes. Poor folks and foreign workers often wore Papuscha – a shoe made of one piece of leather. The shoe was a wrap-around style that had a pointed toe and was held together with a drawstring. It looked as though the leather had been pressed over a shoe mold to retain the shape. These came cheap in a few sizes that served to fit most feet – almost "one size fits all." Our people didn't use them that much. Mother said she did

wear them sometimes during the summer – they came in handy to save her better shoes and were easy to wear. Dad had a pair of Shaft boots but rarely wore them. Grandpa wore his Shaft boots more. Grandpa never wore socks in his boots, but rather wore Fusslappen (foot wraps) – soft cloths that he wrapped around his feet. In the army this was all that they used. The Fusslappen kept their feet warm and were easy to keep clean. There was a bit of an art as to how to wrap them so that they stayed wrapped. In the army there was not much choice as to shoe sizes – if your boots were too large you filled in the gap with something. A sock would wear out in no time, and who would mend it? When I was working for the Polish farmer in 1945, I had no socks, either. I used an old shirt and made Fusslappen.

I remember so well when Grandpa would take his Shaft boots off. He would sit down on a chair and ask Grandma to help him. Grandma would take one boot between her legs with her back to Grandpa, who then used his other foot to press against Grandma's back. With Grandpa pressing and Grandma pulling, the boot came off.

To save shoes from wearing out too fast, people had the shoemaker install half-round plates on the heel and a plate on the toe. The soles were spiked with cap nails to make them last longer. Ladies wore no high heels. My aunt had a pair that she used rarely, and only at a dance.

We had tailors of mixed nationality in town who did tailoring for men: Golle – a Bulgar; a Russian and some locals. Dressmakers for ladies were plentiful. They varied both in price and in fashion orientation. Ready-made suits were very rare and hard to find in our area. As ours was a country village, our clothes had to be suited to our environment and usage. Our people felt they were better off getting their clothing made locally. Everyday clothes they either made themselves or found someone who sewed clothing cheaply. Shirts and underwear were all homemade. Sunday clothes were a different matter. Here people wanted to be more fashionable and so went to a tailor of their choice.

Because winters in Teplitz were very cold, the use of sheepskin pelts for warmth was very important. Sewing with pelts became a specialty of the foreigners, and they were very good at it. The pelts, used to line coats, had to be pieced together very neatly. The stitching had to be done neatly and strongly so that the seams did not show and the pelt lining held together. Pelts were also used for collars and cuffs on men's and women's dress-coats, and for sheep-skin caps. For these items a type of pelt called Karakul was used. A Karakul was a pelt from a lamb that was forced into premature birth from its mother. These Karakul pelts had shiny, curly hair and were a pricey product. High quality pelts were used on the ladies' garments, with lesser quality used for men's collars and caps. These sheepskin caps were an age-old tradition in south-east Europe and the Caucasus, and our ancestors adapted to them quickly and wore them proudly.

Weavers

From the beginning, weavers were well-represented - imported yard-good fabric was non-existent. It was the weavers who provided cloth and blankets for the pioneer settlers. Fibers such as wool and flax were used by these early weavers. The weaving trade served the colonists until commercial yard goods became available. Teplitz had a commercial weaving plant called "Jesse & Co." that started operations in 1895. It produced fine woolen cloth for private and commercial use. After that, our town had very few weavers, but one did live next door to my parents. These weavers made floor runners, Plachta (blankets), spreads and horse blankets, among other things. Our neighbor kept busy, Mom said, and did well. These same types of items made by the

Bulgarians were available at the market, but the colors were not to our taste. We have a Plachta in our possession, given to us by my aunt as a souvenir from back home.

Millers

To grind grain into flour is a very ancient practice. Our ancestors made do with a hand-operated mill device that later was upgraded to using horse power. But this was still slow and produced poor quality flour. Then someone thought of using wind power. My ancestor Erhard Müller has been named as one of the first to build and use a windmill. But using wind power to run a mill didn't work out either due to an unsteady supply of wind. In the mid- to late-1800's, things changed when steam-power became available. That was a big improvement that worked well for us until we left in 1940. Our grandmothers were always looking for high quality flour. My ancestor J. Zacher helped to set up the steam-powered mill in Teplitz. The steam generators were fired with straw. Wood and coal were expensive, but straw we had in abundance.

Masons

The masonry trade was in demand in Teplitz from day one. These masons did their work with limited resources and their work was not fancy in design. The first houses built in Teplitz were little more than one-room huts that had a hearth in the middle of the room with no flue – only a hole in the roof. The masons were kept busy building the hearths and bake ovens. In addition to these jobs, the masons also lined the wells. In later years, the Russians and Bulgarians took up the trade, and they were masters at their craft. Our local masons were kept busy building hearth ovens, retaining walls and cellars. The jobs of building stone houses and other large projects went to the outsiders.

Butchers

To kill an animal is not a new idea, and we had butchers among us from the first settler in Teplitz. The books about Teplitz give names of butchers who at one time worked their trade under a license set up by the community. This means that these butchers either worked or sold meat from an outlet under supervision. This could indicate that these butchers needed guidance to be honest and fair to the settlers. A butcher named K. H. learned his craft in Germany and set the standard for meat cutting.

Smoking and salting of meat was not new either. What changed in meat preparation was the method of preparing sausage meat for casing. Today we have meat grinders – back then meat was chopped by hand. That had to be done just right, and not everybody had the talent. People who lacked this skill hired those who were good at it. Word of mouth has it that these "expert" choppers did their chopping to a rhythm.

In my time, we had many butchers who were available for hire. Unemployment forced men to seek more than one trade to feed their families. The good ones stood out from the rest. My parents chose Friedrich Keller, a big man, to do this chore. His wife, Justine, was the midwife who introduced me to this world. My Zacher grandparents used a man named A. Dreher, who had the reputation of being the best in the business. That came with a price. Friedrich Keller was so precise and fast that he was capable of butchering two pigs in one day.

When the day set for butchering work arrived, everything had to be ready down to the smallest details. Mom got help from Dad's mother and sister who showed up at daybreak to do the preparation work. Plenty of hot water was needed along with a clean place to work, clean towels, and containers on hand. The pigs we raised were heavy, and fattened up to produce meat and lard. When the pig was killed, it was not an easy thing to watch. Then work started, with everybody running according to their assigned orders. The intestines had to be cleaned, the meat was ground up, and then everything was ready for sausage making. Meat cuts for salting and

smoking were set aside for preparation on a later day. For us kids, butchering day was a feast – for our parents it was a hard day's work. We children got the first taste of "pot meat" – usually the pig's tail, or a slice from the liver.

We learned to get by on what we had, and to make the best of it. With no time to spare in our struggle to survive, all creative ideas for improvements that came along got a try. One person helping another created a community bond. To survive, we all needed each other. From the time we were removed to Germany in 1940, and then on to Poland for settlement, the lives of the Bessarabians has been a school of new things to get used to. After 1948 our men and women adjusted to jobs in the modern industrial world. It was amazing how well our people were able to adapt to a modern system. This can be explained solely by the fact that our people had developed a great deal of common sense over the years. I'm proud of them and can speak on a personal note. Our people left nothing undone, and they did not quit a task without finishing it. They had many challenges to overcome and faced one obstacle after another. People have energy and strength, but it takes a will to put that to work. I'm battling a serious illness for which there is no cure. What I do have going for me is my will to live. According to the doctor I have already passed the dateline.

If you stand up for what you believe, you are already half-way to succeeding.