

The Gottscheer Arbeitsgemeinschaft

by Viktor Michitsch, translated by Edward Skender

This article was written in 1980 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Gottscheer Arbeitsgemeinschaft (AG), the Cooperative Association of Gottscheer Organizations.

Immediately after the Second World War, during which the Gottscheer homeland was lost, and during the time when Austria was beginning its normalization and consolidation, the Gottscheer clubs in Vienna, Graz, and Klagenfurt, which existed well before the war, were reactivated. They immediately established relief associations for the Gottscheers and other German refugees from Carniola [Krain], first in Graz, then in Klagenfurt, and somewhat later, in Vienna. Stout-hearted men, such as Dr. Franz Perz, Dr. Oskar Plautz, Dr. Walter Linhardt, Prothonotary Dr. H. Karnitschnig (Graz); Professor Peter Jonke, Sepp König, and state counselors Walter Samide, Hubert Truger, Albert Koscher (Klagenfurt); and Professor Franz Kraus (Vienna), to name a few, knew that it was necessary to help their homeless countrymen—to give them assurance and hope that they could find help in their desperation—even given the limited possibilities that existed at that time. The feeling that the neighborliness from back home was still alive gave them the courage to overcome the dismal, almost hopeless situation.

To be sure, the relief associations had to attend to fundamental human needs. Material needs were the most immediate. Clothing, housing, and employment were all lacking. Our people had no incomes—and what they bore especially hard—was that they were foreigners in Austria, with all that this status conveyed. The old servants of the Austrian monarchy were now foreigners in the mother country. What that meant can only be appreciated by those who experienced it. It was especially hard on the older people who no longer had any relatives. They rightly asked: Are we now guilty just because of this wretched war? Why do we now have to bear the consequences? With this also came the sorrowful searching for missing and lost relatives.

Here, the newly-established relief associations offered themselves as a substitute homeland. Their organized meetings were well attended; the

Gottscheers genuinely looked forward to the companionship of their fellow countrymen. Their shared stories of events and experiences provided comfort, strength, and courage. Each knew that he was not alone and that he did not have to face his fate by himself. Today, we must truly thank the people who saw the situation and handled it with extraordinary sensitivity. They did their work selflessly to help their neighbors and friends for the sake of the community, while at the same time having to struggle themselves for their own daily bread!

In Austria, it was such that the individual associations had to work independently, not the least because of the existing military zones of occupation; later they were able to develop a central advisory board which coordinated assistance efforts by working with the reestablished government agencies. The situation for each individual *Landsmann*, however, was different. Already toward the end of the 1950s, a need developed for closer cooperation. The role of the individual clubs was expanding beyond that of providing basic assistance. It was now necessary to establish a record of the property lost in the resettlement and also to begin to preserve and keep the cultural inheritance of our ancestors and homeland. The need for a common effort to move forward proved to be a pressing one. The emigration of our countrymen overseas, especially to the United States of America and Canada, offered an alternate course of action. Thank God all those responsible recognized the plea of those times. In the USA—in the greater New York area—there were helpful organizations already working under a common coordinator, the Gottscheer Relief Association. Thanks to its good works, the relief operations were effective. To give all the names of the leading persons there would exceed the space of this article; they are recognized elsewhere, and even then not totally. In Europe, there was no corresponding umbrella relief association. This was a drawback that had to be remedied. To do so, however, involved legal difficulties.

The reestablishment of the *Gottscheer Zeitung* in 1955 was a unifying bond that offered a suitable basis for cooperation. At the very least, the exchange of mutually needed information was now possible.

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Still, this had to be made to work better, especially since the publication of the paper remained on a quarterly basis, and later on a regular monthly basis. After overcoming various difficulties and the delays of legal formalities, the various Gottscheer clubs in Europe eventually came together on a coordinated set of bylaws. The names of the organizations were generally changed to *Gottscheer Landsmannschaft*, and with that the unity among them became apparent. Also the purpose of the new bylaws reflected the new, changed situation. The clubs' goals were expanded to fit the broadening of their organization's aims. Social services questions shrank in urgency as the issue of compensation for losses from the resettlement came to the fore. Likewise, the cultural work had to be put on a broader basis.

In Germany, the regional Gottscheer groups in Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, and northwest Germany operated under the bylaws of the main club, the Gottscheer Landsmannschaft in Germany, and adjusted their activities accordingly. Because the Gottscheers were so spread out in the Federal Republic, the regional groups were a necessary creation in order not to lose contact and to set up workable arrangements for the work of the organizations. Many reciprocal visits took place.

August 14, 1960, has a special meaning for the overall development of cooperative work among Gottscheer clubs. On this date, after much preparation, and during the celebration of the 630th anniversary of the founding of Gottschee, which took place in Ulm [Germany], and was sponsored by our regional clubs in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, the charter meeting of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Gottscheer Landsmannschaften* (the AG), or Cooperative Association of Gottscheer Organizations, took place. The especially active individual associations approved this necessary step after they had approved the AG's charter. Dr. Viktor Michitsch was elected as chairman. The chairmen of the individual associations served as vice chairmen; the recording secretary was the then editor of the *Gottscheer Zeitung*, Fritz Högler, who especially welcomed the decision.

Paragraph 1 of the final charter stipulates: "The Cooperative Association of Gottscheer Organizations is the affiliation, or council, of Gottscheer organizations for the purpose of coordinating their work as

outlined in this charter and for the realization of their common goals. Accordingly, the AG agrees to act as counsel to its members." Likewise, "the members of the AG agree to inform the AG of such matters on their agendas as would be consequential to the Gottscheers as a whole, or that would necessitate a common approach." At meetings that will need to be held, "any questions and solutions that concern Gottscheers as a group will need to be discussed and debated, to assure a common approach or action in the interest of all the Landsleute [fellow Gottscheers]."

The AG consists of, and belongs to: the Gottscheer Relief Association, New York; the Gottscheer Relief Association, Toronto, Canada; the Gottscheer Landsmannschaft in Germany; the Gottscheer Landsmannschaft in Klagenfurt; the Gottscheer Landsmannschaft in Graz; and the Gottscheer Landsmannschaft in Vienna. [The First Austrian Mutual Aid Association of Cleveland, the Peter Kosler Gottscheer Verein in Ljubljana, Slovenia; the Gottscheer Altsiedler Verein in Pöllandl, Slovenia; and the Gottscheer Heritage and Genealogy Association of the United States, joined the AG after this article was written in 1980.] In accordance with the charter, an annual meeting is held, usually during the Gottscheer *Kulturwoche*. In urgent cases, an extraordinary meeting can be called.

The terms of office of the chairpersons and the recording secretary are two years. The incumbents may be reelected. The current [1980] chairman, Dr. Viktor Michitsch, has until now been unanimously reelected, and he has served for almost 20 years. The first recording secretary, Fritz Högler, was succeeded by Dr. Josef Krauland. After his death in 1973, his deputy, Dr. Herbert Krauland, was elected to succeed him, and is now [1980] the incumbent secretary.

The AG is not incorporated as a legal entity, but operates under a loose agreement by the individual Gottscheer organizations for the purpose of dealing with common issues and for communication. In this way, the individual member organizations retain their complete independence. They are not bound to follow the direction of the AG, and can rely instead on their independence. Notwithstanding, the AG works with its member associations on all questions referred to it. This allows important matters to

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receive the benefit of broader counsel and discussion. A centralized approach for dealing with referred issues is important in our Association. Such issues are: the wartime compensation settlement; cultural opportunities; participation in the historical conferences that our Association attends; Gottscheer publications and their development; the coordination of common arrangements; and the promulgation of statements about the Gottscheer people. The annual meeting of the AG is also the board that confers its highest citation, the Gottscheer Ring of Honor.

The Sepp König Foundation is an actual product of the AG. The foundation sponsors and supports scholarly work that qualifies as research about Gottschee, including dissertations, essays, and discussions concerning subjects dealing with Gottschee. The works must have scholarly value and the prospect of publication, at least in the *Gottscheer Zeitung*.

Above all, the AG has proven itself to be most effective in resolving the wartime compensation issue. In this case, working in cooperation with the authoritative, official experts of the Gottscheer Relief Association in New York was productive. Without exaggeration, it may be firmly stated that the AG contributed greatly to the current success of this issue. It is clear that efforts in this eminently important (to us) issue will be continued, so as before, at each annual meeting, this problem will be discussed and counsel taken, and the resulting decisions made.

Briefly, the goal of the work of the AG is simply this: The common advancement in all of our associations' various interests—such as compensation for loss of property, cultural cooperation, coordination of declarations—with which our combined Gottscheer associations are concerned, and to include common positions against historical falsification. We hope that the organizations in the AG can continue to work still more for the common good of our people. All member organizations and their representatives should be heartily thanked for their past cooperation and the good atmosphere that has been created. They all know that our strength comes from togetherness and unity and that we are better able to accomplish more in this way. We will also have the strength to postpone for as long as possible the writing of the final chapter of our history, and all are dealing with this realization in a positive way. ■

Visit to Rann

by Robert Rees

Rann [now Brežice] in [the former] Untersteiermark, is not far from the eastern border with Croatia. We drove through the city of Novo Mesto [Rudolfswert], passed over the Gurk river and had a fleeting view of the Castle Otočec. The castle sits on an island in the Gurk river. While it was originally constructed for defense in the wars with the Turks, it is now a first-class hotel. As we came into Rann, we passed over a bridge that is at the confluence of the Gurk and Sava rivers. Here the Bishops of Salzburg built Brežice castle [Schloss Rann] in 1548 as a base for the salt trade. [Schloss Rann was where the Gottscheers were processed by the occupying Germans after being resettled from their homeland.]

GHGA member and director Helmut Tramosch was born here. The Rann train station is where almost all the Gottschers arrived in the resettlement area. From here they were sent to farms, villages, and homes [formerly occupied by Slovenians who were forced from their homes].

The Tramosch family was resettled in the village of Niederdorf (Dolenja Vas). Helmut's sisters Erna Putre and Sophie Sandor were able to find the site of their home. They remembered the route they took walking to Gurkfeld (Krško) to school in rain, snow, or sleet. Sophie recalled that during the nights in 1944 and 1945 the German army dropped flares. They would also drop little packages of pencils, pens, etc., for the children. When the children opened the packages, they would explode in their hands. While she knows children would do this only once, she still cannot understand why the Germans did this to the Gottscheers, especially when the Germans knew they were there. Rather than excitement in finding the home site, there was nostalgic recognition of more difficult times that followed for the Tramosch family.

There is a memorial in a small park just down the street from the former Tramosch house site. It was erected in 1995, the 50th anniversary of the end of WW II. This stele commemorates the 1941-42 removal of the Slovenians to make room for the Gottscheers. It goes on to commemorate the return of the Slovenians and the ouster of the Gottscheers. An inscription reads, "The heart forgives, but the memory stays." ■

Gottscheer House Names

by Fred Muschler

With the exception of the Gottscheer dialect, house (vulgo) names were probably the most prominent aspect of our former homeland. It isn't unusual, even today, for people when introduced to a fellow Gottscheer, to ask: "*Bemensch shait i'r?*" (To whom do you belong? That is, from which house do you come?)

While naming houses is not unique to the former homeland, I think it is safe to say that nowhere did the names play such an important role as in Gottschee. It is my understanding that there was honor or prestige attached to the names. Many people were better known by their house names than by their surnames. Even important people were not offended when addressed by their house name.

I have not seen this subject addressed in the past, so it is my intent to talk about the origin of the names. While the origin of some is obvious, for the others I can only guess.

Since I need house names to use as an example, I have chosen my mother's village of Schalkendorf [Šalka vas] with its 105 houses and an abundance of house names. As one approaches Schalkendorf from the direction of the city of Gottschee [Kočevje], the first building is a bowling alley. It carries the number 1. This was not, however, the original building. The original building was the house where my great-great-grandmother, Maria Herbst, was born. It was demolished during the middle of the 19th century. The house name disappeared with the house.

House number 2 was owned by Anton Kresse and was called *Rechatoenaisch*. This is a compound name and not unusual. Other examples were *Luenkavrants'sch* and *Mauchaleansch*. The owner, to distinguish his/her house from that of the parents' home, would add their first name to the front or end of the name of the parents' home—*Recha Toene*, *Peat'r Honsch'sch*. The endings *sch*, *asch*, and *aisch*, indicate the possessive case.

The origin of the name of house number 3, owned by Stimetz (*Matits'sch*), cannot be determined. In order to make this a less cumbersome process, I will refer to such names as "origin unknown."

House

No. Owner's Surname (house name)

- 4 Tomitz (*Blush'sch*), origin unknown
- 5 Pleschinger (*Schaffonsch*) probably from *Stefan*
- 6 Kropf (*Juersch*) from *Juere* (George)
- 7 Kropf (*Hartash*) from *Harta*, a man who tends livestock in the pasture.
- 8 Erker (*Honsch'sch*) from *Hansch* (John)
- 10 Jonke, Flack (*Peat'rlaisch*) from *Peatr* (Peter)
- 11 Roethel (*Shnaidasch*) from *Schnaida*, a tailor
- 12 Hutter (*Vliend'rlaisch*), origin unknown
- 13 Pleschinger (*Vliechaisch*) probably from *Vliech*, fly
- 14 Kropf (*Mauschs*) from *mauch'n*, to milk
- 15 Jonke (*Mertsch*), origin unknown
- 16 Koscher (*Luenkasch*), origin unknown
- 17 Mausser (*Vlueklisch*), origin unknown
- 18 Marinsel (*Tsekkoesch*) probably from *Tsekhar*, tote bag
- 19 Stiene (*Schtienuaisch*) formerly *Ruendaisch*

A change of ownership through marriage or purchase was a common occurrence. In number 19 above, the daughter of the owner, Schleimer, married a man by the surname of Stiene. In most cases of this type, the groom moved in and the house name stayed the same. In this case, however, the son of the owner built a house in the village, and insisted on using his father's house name. The neighbor took the new owner's surname and added a possessive ending, so that *Ruendaisch* became *Schteinaisch*.

- 20 Dulzer (*Dueltsasch*) from *Dulzer*
- 22 Eppich (*Hartamits'n*) *Harta* plus *Mits'n*, Maria's
- 25 Pirzel (*Lokhnasch*) from *Lokh*, a pond (A number of houses were named after a near-by geographic landmark)
- 27 Fink (*Gants'lsch*) probably from *Gants'lain*, a popular cornmeal dish
- 29 Novak (*Shotlasch*) from *Shotla*, a saddle maker
- 30 Koenig (*Kinig'sch*) possessive version of a surname
- 31 Jonke (*Lois'lsch*) possessive version of the first name, Louis
- 32 Perz (*Lippaisch*), probably from *Lipp'*, lip
- 34 Hutter (*Parthaisch*), probably from a previous owner, *Parthe*

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- 35 Kropf (*Prompaisch*) from *Promptain*, brandy
- 36 Rogel (*Rog'lsch*) from surname of owner
- 37 Jeschelnik (*And'rlaisch*) from diminutive name, *Andreas*
- 38 Jonke (*Schueschtasch*) from *Schueschta*, cobbler
- 39 Erker (*Tsuemitsasch*), origin unknown
- 40 Kropf (*Tant'sch*) from *Tante*, aunt
- 42 Schleimer (*Juk'lpau'rsch*) from the first name *Juk'l*, *Jacob*, and *Pau'r*, farmer
- 43 Jeschelnik (*Krainasch*), probably from the Gottscheer word *Kroina*, meaning Slovenian
- 45 Kropf (*Mragasch*), origin unknown
- 46 Erker (*Piet'thonsh'sch*) first name, *Peat'r*, Peter; and family house name, *Honsh'sch*
- 47 Tomitsch (*Wallaisch*) probably from *Walle*, cider sediment
- 48 Kusold (*Kusoldt'sch*) possessive of a surname
- 51 Schleimer (*Pochasch*) from *Poch'*, brook
- 56 Kropf (*Pakschnasch*), origin unknown
- 58 Perz (*Luenkhavrants'sch*) explained above
- 60 Herbst (*Asch'gearaisch*) from *Asch'*, ash, and *Geare*, *Gertrud*
- 61 Kropf (*Muesh'lsch*), probably from *Mueasch*, porridge
- 62 Stimetz (*Jueraisch*) from *Juere*, George
- 69 Perz (*Uent'rmertsch*) from *Uent'r*, lower; and *Mertsch*. (This was a common practice and usually occurred when a son established himself in the same village as where he was born.)
- 71 Kropf (*Mauchaleansch*) explained above
- 72 Schleimer (*Ruendaisch*), probably from *ruent*, round
- 73 Brinskelle (*Bautlaisch*) - see explanation below
- 82 Knoepsler (*Moarlaisch*) from *Moar*, manager of a farm
- 87 Anshlowar (*Riglasch*) from *Rieg'l*, a knoll

The house name *Bautlaisch* (house number 73), may shed some light on the house names whose origins cannot be explained. Mr. Brinskelle was a late comer to Schalkendorf and hailed from a section of the former homeland called Moschnitz. As our readers probably know, every section had its own language peculiarities. In the Moschnitz they called a hatchet *Bautle*, while in our area we called it *Hackle*. Because Mr. Brinskelle could not break the habit of saying *Bautle*, he soon became known as Mr. *Bautle* and shortly after, the house was called *Bautlaisch*. ■

The Footpath

by Fred Muschler

Footpaths—almost every village had two or three, some of the larger villages probably had a half dozen or more. Footpaths were not just in use within the village, but also connected different villages, and sometimes joined sections to each other. For example, the path crossing the Friedrichstein mountain range, connecting the Hinterland to the city of Gottschee (Kočevje), cut the distance between those two places in half. It was used mainly by people who had business to tend to, or wanted to go to a fair.

Some of the more frequently used footpaths had their own names, like the *Milschtaikh* (mill path) and the *Brau'schtaikh* (bride path). The *Milschtaikh*, which connected the village of Zwischlern [Cvišlerji] with that of Seele [Željne], was used mostly by people who brought grain to be ground at the gristmills in Seele. The *Prau'schtaikh*, as the name suggests, was used by eligible bachelors in search of a bride. This footpath had its beginning at the village of Nesselstal [Koprivnik] and ended in Altlag [Stari Log]. Just one look at a map of our former homeland, and one can readily see how much time our ancestors saved by using those footpaths. While most of the footpaths were still in use at the time of the resettlement, the *Prau'schtaikh* was not in use anymore, and was almost completely obliterated. Only some old-timers could pinpoint its course.

While I am sure there were a number of other footpaths in our former homeland, I will leave the documentation of them to someone else. There is another footpath, although not located within the borders of our homeland, but one which is a part of folklore. The path is located about 15 miles northwest of the city of Gottschee. Its name is *Dai Schtuainain'hochtsait* (the wedding part of stone) and crosses a similar mountain range like that of Friedrichstein, ending at the Slovenian village of Velike Lašče.

This is the story. There was a bride with her entourage coming down the mountain on the way to her wedding. Since it was an arranged marriage, she was very unhappy. She prayed that a curse come upon her and her entourage, that they might all turn to stone. Just before they reached the foot of the mountain, her wish was granted. They are still there today. The path where the wedding party walked is marked by a rock outcropping, which runs diagonally down the face of the mountain. ■

Discover Gottschee 2002

by Robert Rees

The following excerpts are from a journal written during the Discover Gottschee Tour, in June 2002. Robert and his wife, Mary Krische Rees, were co-hosts of the tour. Those on the tour visited more than 50 village sites.

City of Gottschee (Kočevje)

Saturday, June 15, was another bright sunlit day as we departed Ljubljana for our journey to the former county of Gottschee. Four members of the group had left earlier by van to travel directly to the city of Kočevje (Gottschee). The Gottscheer Heritage and Genealogy Association (GHGA) directors Mary Krische Rees and Paul Jenner, as well as GHGA member Sophie Sandor, nee Tramposch, and Michael Rausch, representing the Gottscheer organization in Cleveland, Ohio, attended the Roundtable meeting at the Hotel Valentin, hosted by the Mayor of the city of Kočevje and the Gottscheer Peter Kosler Verein. [Presidents or their delegates of Gottscheer organizations from Austria, Canada, Germany, Slovenia, and the United States participated in this event.]

For the noon meal in Kočevje, the Roundtable group sat in a separate section and Prince Karl Auersperg joined them for lunch. Prior to the tour, Ed Skender [vice-president of GHGA] and Mary Krische Rees [director of GHGA] arranged for the reproduction and enhancement of a print of the destroyed Auersperg Castle that had been located in the city of Gottschee. Mary presented a copy of this print to the Prince. In her presentation, Mary told the Prince that she was born in Wretzen (Brezje) and how pleased she was to be back where she was born. The Prince responded by musing, "Isn't it nice that we are all together again?"

On Sunday, June 16, we walked to Saints Fabian and Sebastian's church in Kočevje for a high mass in Slovene, German, and Latin. Prince Auersperg and his grandson, as well as other tour groups from Austria and Germany, attended the mass. A Slovenian priest gave a welcoming speech that was translated into German by a German priest. The theme was peace and brotherhood for all peoples. The highlight of the sermon was a request for forgiveness for the wrongs done during and after World War II. A wonderful choir sang hymns in Slovene, Latin, and Gottscheerisch. The choir included the group that had sung at the luncheon the day before. We were

thus twice blessed with beautiful singing.

After mass, the priest blessed an original sampler [made by Maria Eppich while attending grade school in her home village of Lienfeld (Livold)] and two duplicates. The duplicates, which were hand-stitched by Teresa Reynolds of England, were presented later in the day to the Gottschee Museum and high school in the city of Kočevje. Prince Auersperg and his grandson joined us for this Catholic rite. We were pleased to meet Frieda Steinacker, a Gottscheer who now resides in Germany. Frieda is a watercolor artist, who donated a number of her original watercolor paintings to GHGA.

Later, we went to Gostilna Tuzek for a very large gathering of tour groups and local people. The Peter Kosler Gottscher Verein sponsored the event. A number of Slovenian and Gottscheer vocal and dance groups performed traditional music and dance. It was just what one would hope for when visiting the diverse world community.

Rieg (Kočevska Reka)

We first entered the area of the former Gottschee at the town of Hirisgruben (Iskrba) and passed through Masern (Grčarice) on the way to Rieg to visit the St. John the Baptist Church. During the 1999 tour, we attended the consecration of the church after its reconstruction. Inside this modern church is a Madonna and Christ Child which was salvaged from the destroyed church. Next we visited the cemetery at Rieg. Of particular interest was the plaque dedicated to Gottscheers by the Peter Kosler Gottscheer Verein organization. The plaque memorializes Gottscheers reburied there from the old cemetery.

Unterlag (Spodnji Log)

Another hot and humid day as we traveled to Unterlag for a special mass. The existing church of St. Peter is more than 300 years old; however, it originally dates from the 1400s. The current altar is about 200 years old; but behind it is an older altar and religious artwork that is much older. They hope to obtain more precise information as its restoration continues. The mass was said in Slovene, with Brane Vidmar [tour guide] translating the priest's sermon and comments in English. Kate Prunte presented GHGA funds to the priest for restoration work already completed. Board member Paul Jenner's great-grandpar-

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ents were married in this church. After mass, the tour members took up a collection and made a generous contribution to the church.

Local townspeople invited us to a home for snacks after mass. The highlights were donuts and slivovitz. The plentiful donuts, called Kropfen, were very good. One of the hostesses told us her father-in-law was a Gottscheer named Tschinkel. She had made the donuts and her husband made the slivovitz.

Graflinden (Knežja Lipa) and Reintal (Rajndol)

Graflinden was our next stop. No houses remain there, but foundation stones are still in place for some buildings. There was one three-step stone stairway leading to nowhere. All that remains of its Church of the Trinity is the ruined belltower and part of one wall. The church is dated from 1674. It has a Gottscheer cemetery. Then we arrived at the village of Reintal. It once had about 45 houses, only one of which remains. The village was destroyed in the Italian offensive. One interesting feature about this village is its cistern. The Gottscheers made pine tree bark pipes, or sluices, to transport water from the mountains surrounding the village. While they had to be repaired often, it was a very efficient method of bringing water to the cistern in the absence of other pipe materials. Gottscheers from neighboring towns would come to the cistern for their water. Emil Krese stated that he and members of the Peter Kosler Verein have restored part of the cemetery and they continue in their efforts.

Unterwarmberg (Dolenje Topla Reber) and Oberwarmberg (Gorenja Topla Reber)

These villages are in an area that is a hunting preserve. It is surrounded by a fence, and we had to have a guide with a key to enter. The latter village was accessible only by the guide's four-wheel drive jeep. One can only describe this area as rugged. There are only dirt roads where there used to be improved roads. Deer and wild swine are abundant. A group of five wild boars lingered while we watched. Apparently the wild swine strip all of the vegetation so that the forest floor looks barren.

Mary Rees wanted to visit Unterwarmberg to take photographs for her sister-in-law Elfie, who was raised in the village. Mary had done an oil painting of

it from an old photograph. All of the village's original building were destroyed. Mary discovered the site of the painting because a wide concrete step remained from one of the houses in her painting. This enabled her to photograph the area of the painting. The church steeple still stands, but the rest of the church is in ruins. Only one tombstone remains standing in the cemetery. There are three huge linden trees at the church site, and one has been partially destroyed by lightning.

Wretzen (Brezje)

Wretzen is the village where Mary Krische Rees was born, house number 13, and it is also the ancestral village of Merle Mentzer. All of the houses were destroyed with the exception of house number 4, which happened to be the home of Merle's ancestor, Johann Matzelle. While it is in a state of disrepair, it was obviously a two-story, four family house. There are four separate apartments, each with its own cooking stove and corner heating stove. All are of tile. The church of St. Florian is in ruins; however, its bell tower and steeple still stand. Like other churches we have seen, this one has the bullet holes resulting from the German and Partisan skirmishes during the war.

We were unable to locate any of the other houses, but we did find the old foundations. Gypsies now live in the village. Gail and Steve, the Mentzer's daughter and son-in-law, were with us when we visited Wretzen during the 1999 GHGA tour. They were thrashing about the dense brush, looking for house locations. What they discovered was one of the little chapels (there are two in the village) that was hidden by overgrowth and foliage. Now, with the funds donated by GHGA members and others, the chapel has been restored. ■

Taubenbrunn 2002

by Merle Mentzer

The following excerpts are from Gottschee 2002, June 12 to June 26, a journal written by Merle Mentzer during the Discover Gottschee Tour.

Six of us broke off from the group to take the van to find Taubenbrunn [Golobinjek] and Altlagbüchel [Starološki Grič], small villages that were just over a half-mile apart. We turned off the main road onto a gravel road that kept branching, so that I wasn't sure if we would ever find our way out again. The road continued higher and higher up the mountain with dense woods on both sides. It got narrower until the trees touched both sides of the van. It became a muddy lumber road with huge fallen trees on the side. At one spot, where the muddy road both curved sharply and climbed a steep hill, we could not go up. Brane [our tour guide] did not give up, however. It took three or four tries, but he finally got the van up the hill, while we all cheered. Further on, the road finally turned into two narrow gravel strips with grass between them, then broke out into a broad beautiful meadow and disappeared. According to Brane's map, this end of the meadow should be Altlagbüchel and the other end should be Taubenbrunn. All we could see was the meadow, surrounded by the dense forest. No village was in sight; not a house; not a foundation; not a hint that anyone ever lived there. Needless to say, we were disappointed.

We drove to the center of the meadow and got out of the van to look around and take some pictures. We thought we could see some level places in the meadow where there might have been houses, but not even a stone from a foundation remained. It was difficult to believe that a village of perhaps 20 houses could be so completely eliminated. I took a few more pictures. Judy collected some wildflowers to dry as a memento, and we started calling the others, who had wandered off, to come back. Michael Prunte was the first to show himself. He had been following a broad path into the woods. "You might want to bring the van up here;" he shouted, "there are a lot of ruins in the woods."

He had discovered what we could not, just as we were about to give up! We ran up to the woods while Brane drove the van. We were too excited to wait for the van. The broad path Michael had discovered turned out to be the ancient main street of

the old village of Taubenbrunn. On both sides, back in the woods, so densely overgrown they were hardly discernible, were the ruins of houses. All we could see were foundations; but in a couple of places there were actual walls. One in particular was beautifully constructed with two arched windows.

We counted seven foundations on one side of the old road and eight on the other. Whether they were all houses, or if some were barns, was hard to tell. There were also a few locations that were raised as if there might have been houses at one time, but we didn't actually see any foundations. In the woods we could also see some rows of fruit trees and we also found a well. We couldn't have been more happy and excited. Here we were, standing on the same ground as my ancestors had more than 100 years ago. It was an emotional experience I can still recall vividly as I type this journal.

We headed back down the mountain and saw several deer. I believe that places like Taubenbrunn are accessible today because of the deer, wild swine, and bears. The roads leading to them are obviously used by hunters to get to their hunting stands in the occasional lone tree in the meadows. I know that if the meadows and prairies are left alone, they revert to woodlands in less than 30 years, so someone has been cutting these fields in order to maintain them as meadows. The people to do that would be the hunters, who need the meadow to hunt.

Our next stop was at a hunting lodge located on the site of the destroyed village of Untersteinwand. On the wall of the lodge was a sign saying that this once was a village of 14 houses with 67 inhabitants. Now, no evidence of the village can be seen. We did find the barely visible ruins of a single foundation and a preserved well that still contained water.

Next on our route we found what was left of the town of Reichenau (Rajhenav). Once there were about 70 houses and 300 people living here, according to a local farmer. Today, there are two houses and three people. What is left of the church is the wall surrounding the small rise on which it was built, and a single column, about eight feet tall, that once was part of the altar. From the church ruins, one can see a set of three stone steps in the middle of a pasture. Today, they go nowhere. ■

Visit to Tanzbüchel and Thurn

by John Bertalan

My father and I joined the *Discover Gottschee Tour* 2002 on June 15-18. On June 8, we arrived in Munich, Germany and then drove to Hungary to meet our cousins who we located through the Internet white pages. These four generations of Hebling cousins still lived in Zirc, the same town whence my father's parents and brother emigrated in 1907.

After three full days with the Discover Gottschee Tour, we were very impressed with the planned cultural events, the [Gottschee] museum in Kočevje, the picnic with the multi-national program, and the overabundance of wonderful food at the gostilnas [inns] in the two neighboring towns and hotel. We were especially impressed by the knowledge, hospitality, skills with languages, and accommodating nature of our tour guide, Brane Vidmar and his son.

However, after three days, I still had not seen the villages of my great-grandfather, Mathias Kobetitsch, born 1876 in Thurn [Turn], and his father, Mathias Kobetitsch, born 1847 in Tanzbüchel [Tanči Vrh]. Luckily, I was informed that Mr. Emil Krese was a native of the area and very active in all of the restoration efforts. He was on the tour bus on June 17th, and agreed to take me to the two villages. The next day, we met at the hotel Valentine at 8:00 a.m.

The land in and surrounding the village of Thurn was now leased by a Croatian who used the land as a pasture for sheep and goats. He had started to build a vacation home on the top of the ruins of an old stone house. The property was fenced off and his dog Bruno patrolled and guarded the property. Emil called the night before and was told that the shepherd would meet us on the property and put Bruno away. We drove for about 16 minutes south of Kočevje on a paved road, followed by a short distance on a gravel road. We arrived at about 8:25 a.m. The gate to the pasture was closed and Bruno was still loose. We waited a little while, and then Emil made the decision to go to Tanzbüchel. We would return to Thurn later. He mentioned that the shepherd had worked until 10:30 p.m. the night before, cutting down the tall grass to allow it to dry, and then turn it into hay.

The road to Tanzbüchel was an unpaved, single-lane, dirt and gravel road used by logging compa-

nies. The road was extremely muddy, probably from the weekend rain. Emil stated that he would rather have mud than dust. We saw a deer and a couple of rabbits. I remarked how the people, now and historically, could live off the land. Then Emil explained to me that the people were not allowed to own guns or hunt or take game from the land. The land previously belonged to the kings or rulers and now belonged to the government. Hunting was done by professionals with registered guns and special permits, not the average inhabitants.

We drove off the paved road for about 20 minutes and arrived in Tanzbüchel around 9:00 a.m. Out of the very dense forest, in what seemed to be the middle of nowhere, there appeared a clearing. There was a fairly new five or six foot wooden cross in front of the ruins of the destroyed church.



Church ruins in Tanzbüchel, June 2002. Photo by John Bertalan.

Currently, there was only one existing farm in what had been my great-great grandfather's village. I believe these inhabitants were Bosnians. Emil spoke with the woman and explained what we were doing. I walked around the ruins of the three to five stone house remains. I saw a stone cistern and took a few pictures of the abandoned village and church, and the dishevelled stone foundations. On one of the stone remains, I saw an iron door hinge. I asked Emil to ask the lady if I could take it as a remembrance of my great-great-grandfather's village. In the distance, I saw her make a positive gesture. I picked up the hinge and then we headed back to Thurn by car.

To our surprise, as we drove down the muddy road, a logging truck was picking up cut trees from the

Visit to Tzanbüchel and Thurn (*continued*)

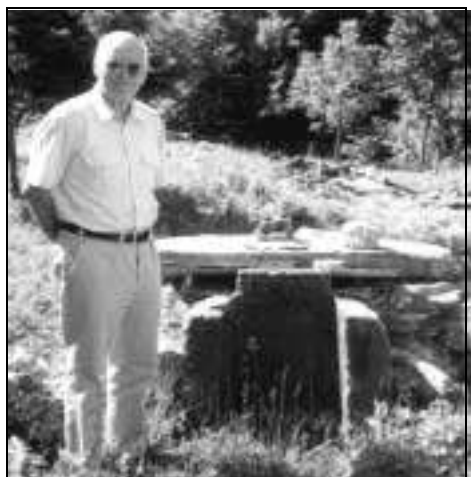
side of the road. The truck was taking up the whole road. The driver was out of the cab, operating an automatic machine in the back of the truck that was grasping the huge logs and lifting them onto the platform of the truck. Emil was about ready to attempt to back up and turn around when the operator spotted us. He graciously stopped what he was doing, turned off the machinery, got in the cab of the semi, started it, and drove it up so we could pass around him.

When we approached Thurn for the second time, the pasture gate was unlocked and we approached the ruins without a canine escort. We could see that the grass had been freshly cut. As I walked around the ruins, Emil explained to the tenant that this was my great-grandfather's village. The man told Emil, "in that case, I could build a vacation home there as well, if I wanted." I'm thinking about it.

The deserted village was a bleak sight, however, with just the stone walls left of three or so houses. I walked around, took pictures, and found a stone wheel for apple crushing, one-fourth of it buried in the ground. I also found a cistern.



John Bertalan with hand on stone wheel in Thurn, June 2002. Photo by Emil Krese.



Emil Krese standing near water cistern in Thurn, June 2002. Photo by John Bertalan.

I looked on the surface, and only saw debris. However, I wondered what other artifacts were buried beneath the soil after 600 years of Gottschee history. I felt as though I were treading on an archaeological treasure. I also thought about the life my Gottscheer progenitors led—working for everything. If you want hay, clear the land, plant the grass, cut the grass, dry the grass, and store the grass. I am sure everything else was like that.

I am grateful for the two hours I spent with Emil Krese. After all, I had already traveled 5,000 miles by car, plane, and bus. I needed to go the extra 26 kilometers. After I arrived back at the hotel, I picked up my father and drove to Trieste, Italy. It was from Trieste in 1907, that his mother and her three-month old son boarded a steamship for America—to meet her husband who had voluntarily left the old world for the new. It may have been the place Mathias Kobetitsch left as well for the new world. ■

Note: The following ancestors of John Bertalan were published in *The Gottschee Tree*: in December 1993, *Anna Kobetitsch McCrady of New Jersey* by John Bertalan, in December 1995, *Descendancy Chart of George Kobetitsch (b. 1744) and Agnes Rom (b. 1743)* by John Bertalan, with assistance of John Krauland and Joe Stanford.

Ancestors of John Bertalan

1. Georg Kobetitsch (b. 1744) m. Agnes Rom in 1765. They had eight children.
2. Johann Kobetitsch (b. 1780 Warmberg, house 2) m. Kathrina Kraker, born in Warmberg, house 10. They lived in house 10.
3. Josef Kobetitsch (b. 1808 in Warmberg, house 10, m. Agnes Jonke of Tanzbuchel house 4. They had 6 children and lived in Tanzbüchel house 4.
4. Mathias Kobetitsch (b. 1847 in Tanzbüchel) m. Katherina Sedlar of Warmberg. They lived in Thurn and had six children.
5. Mathias Kobetitsch (b. 1876 in Thurn) m. 1st Agnes Verderber of Handlern at All Saints Church in Brooklyn, NY, had seven children. m. 2nd Maria Wolf, had three children.
6. Anna Kobetitsch (b. 1900 in Brooklyn), daughter of Mathias Kobetitsch and Agnes Verderber, m. George McCrady. They had four children.
7. Eleanor McCrady m. William Bertalan. They had two children.

Visit to Hohenegg and Nesselstal

by Hedy Stoy

On June 3, 2002, my sister Helen Elaine Easton, my husband Ray, and I, embarked on a Costa Classica cruise from Venice, Italy. After port stops in Italy, Greece, and Croatia, we returned to Venice. Two days later, we boarded a train to Ljubljana, Slovenia.

We were met at the station by Anna Lackner Sefman, my father's (John Schneller) half sister, her daughter-in-law Ajta Sefman, my cousin Danica and her husband, Jose Tepina. The following three days were a whirlwind tour of the area, including Lake Bled, Postojna Caverns, Predjama Castle, and Planica ski-jump. Most important was our trip to Gottschee [Kočevje], Hohenegg [Onek], and Nesselstal [Koprivnik].

The photographs below include a view of the church and cemetery of St. Anna from the hill above Nesselstal, and a close up view of the restored church.



View of the church of St. Anna and cemetery in Nesselstal, June 2002. The chapel of St. Anna was destroyed in 1956. It was restored in 1973 in the center of the cemetery. The parish church of St. Jacob in Nesselstal was destroyed. [See Cemeteries and Tombstones of the Gottscheer Germans by Mitja Ferenc and others, page 109.]



Former Schneller/Lackner house in Nesselstal, June 2002.

The lower half of the former Schneller/Lackner house in Nesselstal is still standing. Tante Anna explained that the missing second story contained four bedrooms and a balcony, and that young boys would serenade her beneath her bedroom window!

The photo of my mother's (Anna Stimpfl) home, Hohenegg, number 24, shows an addition has been made, as evidenced by the difference in the roof. There are two families in residence: one in the old part of the house, and the other in the new half. There still is no indoor plumbing because of the expense. Water must be carried up the hill from the well, and there are two outhouses.

My only other trip to the area was in 1932 when I was 4½ years of age, but I have no recollections of it. This trip is unforgettable! I was so fortunate to have Tante Anna to provide first-hand information. ■



Close-up view of the church in Nesselstal, June 2002.



Former home of Anna Stimpfl in Hohenegg, number 24, June 2002.

Book Review

Cemeteries and Tombstones of the Gottscheer Germans by Mitja Ferenc, Gojko Zupan, Mateja Bavdaz. Zavod za varstvo kulturne dediščine Slovenija, Ljubljana 2002. ISBN 961-6420-01-1. Price of the book: approximately \$26.50 (6,000.00 sit). A copy of the book is available at the Gottscheer Archive, located in St. John's University library, (www.stjohns.edu), 8000 Utopia Parkway, Jamaica, New York 11439. Review by John Bertalan.

This was an easy reference book to review. If you are mildly serious about Gottscheer heritage and genealogy, you must either own this book or gain access to it through a friend or a library! Thanks to the authors for their research and scholarship. They have put pictures and vital statistics of all the available Gottscheer tombstones at the reader's fingertips. Thanks also goes to the Ministry of Culture, Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, and the Cultural Heritage Office of the Republic of Slovenia who envisioned the need for this project and enabled the book's funding and printing.

What is contained in the book? Recent and historic photographs of every remaining Gottscheer cemetery, along with each individual tombstone they were able to locate. Further, there is a transcription of the vital statistics of every single tombstone and an index given by surname, cemetery by cemetery. If that isn't enough, the authors called in a topographer to map the locations of the cemeteries and diagram the location of each existing tombstone, assign a number to them, and then cross-indexed them. Additionally, the narration in the book is trilingual. It is written in Slovene, German, and English.

Why was the book compiled? I quote, "Although most of the 39 cemeteries were leveled and the tombstones of the Gottscheer Germans were removed, the cemeteries present the most important material remnants that testify to the existence of the Gottscheer Germans in the middle of the Slovene territory." The authors imply that after inhabiting the area for 600 hundred years, the remaining Germanic tombstones may be the only concrete evidence of Gottscheer habitation. Except for the minds and hearts of Gottscheers and their descendants, massive emigration, two World Wars, communist rule, and nature are wiping away the material evidence of the Gottscheer existence.

The scholarship of the authors is impeccable. There are plenty of footnotes and references to all statements made in the book. There is a brief history of the Gottscheer region and a history of each of the cemeteries, as well as an account of the status and accessibility of each. There are village location maps on the inside and back covers. There is even a brief history of the types of tombstones and grave markers used throughout the area. I am grateful that I had a chance to have access to this book so close to its publication date. ■

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Marriages of Gottschee, Twelve Parishes: Altenmarkt, Altlag, Ebental, Morobitz, Nesseltal, Oberskrill, Pöllandl, Stockendorf, Tschermöschnitz, Unterdeutschau, Unterlag, and Unterwarmberg. Compiled by James Heimann (2 parishes) and Kate Prunte (10 parishes). Gottscheer Heritage and Genealogy Association, 2002. ISBN 1-931509-35-2. Price of the CD-ROM is \$50.00.

This CD-ROM contains nearly 12,000 marriage records of 12 parishes of Gottschee. Kate Prunte placed all of the past published marriage records on one CD-ROM in Excel format.

Tenth Anniversary, History of the Gottscheer Heritage and Genealogy Association, 1992-2002 by Edward Skender. Gottscheer Heritage and Genealogy Association, June 2002.

This 20 page booklet describes the founding and history of GHGA from June 1992 through May 2002. The booklet was distributed at the 2002 GHGA annual meeting. A few copies are available. Cost is \$5.00 to cover postage and mailing costs.

Abend der Gottscheer Lieder, December 2001, a CD-ROM recording of a choral group singing Gottscheer songs in Slovenia, can be purchased directly from Erik Krisch. The price is \$14.00. Please contact him directly (see your membership book) for the cost of postage. His e-mail address is: erik.krisch@k2.net

Photographs



William Schauer, Esq., speaker at the GHGA annual meeting at Lukan's Farm Resort in Hawley, Pennsylvania, spoke about the role his father, Adolf Schauer, in working with the authorities in the United States and Europe to facilitate the immigration of Gottscheer refugees in Austria to the United States. Mr. Schauer is currently writing a book about the life of his father.



Fred Muschler receiving the President's Award. Photo by Ron Lay-Sleeper.



Left to right: Erwin Bischoff and Joseph F Rom of New York.



2002-2003 GHGA Board of Directors, June 2002. Left to right: Kate Loschke Prunte, Treasurer; Paul Jenner, Director; Mary Krische Rees, Director; Elizabeth Nick, President; Helmut Tramposch, Director; Ed Skender, Vice-President; and Ellie Stiene Stonitsch, Secretary. Absent were Directors Sophia StalzerWyant and Tom Kump. Photo by Ron Lay-Sleeper.



From left to right: Robert Kraker, Mary Krische Rees, Sophie Tramposch Sandor, Erna Perz, Erna Tramposch Putre, and Marie Perz Tirado, lead the attendees in Gottscheerisch songs at the GHGA annual meeting. Photo by Ann Bishop.



Attendees at the GHGA annual meeting. Left to right: Max Mische, Jim Heimann, Gladys Houston, and Robert Sbaschnig.



Attendees at the GHGA annual meeting, June 2002.

Letter to the Editor

I received photos from friends, John and Marie Gerbitz, who were born in Rieg. They showed us the photos and told us a story with them. Unfortunately, you had printed the one with the boys in Rieg on their homemade bikes.

John told us his family owned the sawmill and that his father died when he was very young. His mother raised the children alone. John found the metal fork of an old bike and decided to make a bike out of old pieces of wood and tools that were around the mill. It had no pedals or brakes and could only be ridden downhill. The other boys in town followed his example and each one made a bike.

The picture shows the pride and joy of owning a bike and one that you made yourself. I guess this was the first Gottscheer Bike Club! The names of the boys are written on the back. I am enclosing some other pictures that you may be able to use at some later date. You are all doing a great job!

Your Gottscheer friend,
Anna Bischoff

Note: The page size photograph of the bike club appeared on the back cover of the December 2000 issue of the *The Gottschee Tree*, volume 14, number 4. Below is a smaller version of the photograph. The names of the individuals in the photograph are, from left to right, Ferdinand Wittine, Johann (face is almost hidden), Richard Haas, Albert Gerbitz, Micklitsch, Ernst Gerbitz, Peter Jerschnig, Heinrich Jerschnig, Alois Gerbitz, John Gerbitz, and Josef Michitsch.



Announcements

The Gottscheer Heritage and Genealogy Association has changed its URL address on the GHGA website. Currently, there is a long string of characters following the domain name of gottschee.org. The GHGA board voted to delete the string of letters following the domain name. As of August 15, the GHGA internet address is <http://www.gottschee.org>

About the Authors

John J. Bertalan is a professor of Political Science and Education at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, Florida. He has four children and lives in Tarpon Springs, Florida, with his wife, Beverly. He is the grandson of the late Anna Kobetitsch.

Fred Muschler was born in New York. At the age of two, his family moved to Gottschee and lived in the village of Schalkendorf. Mr. Muschler returned to the United States in 1936, at the age of 16, and lived in Ridgewood, New York. He is retired from the meat industry and lives with his wife in Dover Plains, New York.

Merle Mentzer, born in 1938 in Joliet, Illinois, now lives on Koontz Lake in Walkerton, Indiana. His maternal grandmother, Rosalia Hiris, born in 1876 in Taubensbrunn, immigrated to Joliet in 1896. She married Johann Matzelle of Sporeben in 1898. Merle and his wife Judy made their first trip to Gottschee in 2002.

Robert Rees, born in San Francisco, California, is the husband of GHGA director Mary Krische Rees. Bob recently retired as an insurance company claim vice-president after nearly 50 years in the insurance industry. They reside in Chatsworth, California and enjoy weekends at their mountain home near Big Bear Lake, CA.

Edward Skender, an elected director of GHGA since 1995, became vice-president of the organization in 2001. He is a graduate of Georgetown University, with a Master's degree in Public and International Affairs from the University of Pittsburgh. After nearly 30 years as an Army officer, retiring in 1990 with the rank of Colonel, he currently is the military editor at Stackpole Books, an international book publisher. Ed and his wife Susan live in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.

Hedy Stoy, born in 1927 in Brooklyn, is the daughter of John Leopold Schneller (born in 1894 in Nesselstal) and Anna Magdalena Stimpfl (born in 1904 in Hohenegg). Hedy's varied careers included millinery buyer, bookkeeper, income tax preparer, computer programmer, and office supervisor. After retirement, Hedy moved from Westport, Connecticut to the west coast of Florida. She and her husband Ray, are avid 6 wicket Croquet players.



Dance Hall, Michitsch's Bar in New York, 1940. First row, seated, left to right: Pauline Roethel, Marie Michels (nee Lobe), male unknown, female unknown, Wally Lobe, Dorothy Hönigmann, male unknown, Gladys Laser. Second row, standing, left to right: Tony Poje, Edna Lindner (nee Michitsch), Lillian Sbaschnig, Walter Lobe, Sofie Hutter; Rita Schemitz (nee Hönigmann), Valentine Michels. Third row, standing, left to right: unknown male, accordion player Stanley Vessel, accordion player Fred Kump, Louis Vessel, Alma Failer (nee Michitsch). Photograph courtesy of Edna Linder (nee Michitsch).