

The village of Molidorf was founded in 1833. Molidorf is located in the Banat region, to be more precise, in the upper NE corner of present day Serbia, close to Kikinda, just south of Szeged, Hungary and to the west of Timisoara, Romania.

Most of the original Swabian (ethnic German) residents came from the surrounding villages in the area: St.Hubert, Charleville, Soltur, Heufeld, Massdorf, Hatzfeld, Bikatsch, and Novosel - these villages were already full and the new generations were anxious to find homes and farms of their own elsewhere.

The village of Molidorf was founded by Count Francis Zichy-Ferraris with his wife Countess Maria Wilhelmina Ferraris who owned a large estate in the district.

Subsequently the estate changed ownership a number of times, from the Count to his nephew, then to Duke Henrik Chambord (Baron Johannes Cyrill Billot was the estate administrator), then to the Duke of Parma then to the Parcell Bank in Timisoara.



In the early years, the residents of Molidorf worked the surrounding fields on the estates of the counts and barons. The arrangements varied, from renting and leasing to conventional serfdom and share-cropping. A contract was signed with the landlord that

exchange for working to plant and reap the harvest from a particular parcel of land.

Around 1910 the villagers finally had the opportunity to purchase land for themselves from the nobles and/or from the newest landlord, the bank in Timisoara. For those few that could afford it, this was a very unique opportunity, to realize their dream: finally to own their own land.

Their way of life was simple - full of hard work, love of the land and of their horses, as well as a strong bond that drew them to each other as a community. A hard life yes, but a good life.

The surrounding farm land was rich and fertile but prone to periodic flooding as the region is very flat and surrounded by rivers. The Bega canal was built in the period 1728 - 1733 in order to alleviate the recurring flooding. It was 70 km long and ran the distance from Timisoara to Klek. This construction project was one of the biggest engineering feats of that era.

Through the years berms and ditches were constructed to prevent the flood waters from inundating the village. In spite of this effort the area around Molidorf was flooded again in 1872 and once more in March of 1942 and for the last time in the fall of 1955.

Molidorf was known by a variety of names depending on the year and on who was in power politically in that area: German: Molidorf, Hungarian: Molifalva, Serbian: Molin Variants in use were: Mollidorf, Mollyfalva, and Mollydorf.

In 1843 there were 661 inhabitants, mostly ethnic Germans (Swabians) and mostly Roman Catholics. In 1848 there were 897 residents and by 1902 the

counted 1107 people and 310 homes.

In the first years, there was no church in Molidorf but there was a chapel at the manor house (sometimes referred to as the Molidorf "castle").

From 1833 until 1846 the church book records of births, deaths and marriages were recorded and kept in Torda, for that was the mother parish or filial parish.

Subsequently, in the late 1840's the first church was built which was more likely a prayer house or chapel. The first church was built in 1878 and dedicated in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. From 1846-1864 the Molidorf church book records were kept in Molidorf however from 1864 on they were kept in Toba, which was by then the mother parish.



In 1925 the small church was demolished and replaced by a larger structure to properly accommodate the growing population. The altar was donated by the royal family Parma of Bourbon and the church was once again dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Molidorf did not have its own rectory but was joined with the Toba parish. The priest came to Molidorf only once a month and on feast days to celebrate mass. On other Sundays mass was conducted by a cantor.

Today it is here in Toba that we find the Molidorf church book records for the years 1846-1944.

We find the first genealogical events in the church records for Molidorf to be a birth on October 6, 1833, a marriage on October 18, 1833 and a death on November 22, 1833. The first church book records for Molidorf are from 1846.

In the years following WWII (the camp years) genealogical events are not documented in the church books.

In 1868 thirty families left Molidorf to move to new settlements. Twenty families settled in Giselaheim (Giselahain) near Kobin, and ten families settled in Elisenheim. Since the settlement in Giselaheim (Giselahain) was flooded, ten of the original twenty families returned to Molidorf. The other ten families moved to the villages of Komlosch, Marienfeld, Ostern and Billed.

Around 1910 the nobility began to sell off their large estate properties and fields to their staff, workers and lease-holders (renters). This could be interpreted as a land reform measure since the nobility was politically quite far-sighted and realized that ownership and management of such vast estates would not be feasible in the future. The former lease-holders and renters now became farm owners, but in the beginning it was only with great difficulty that enough money could be earned to make the payments as most farmland had been purchased on credit.

The manor house of the nobles was located on the road from Zerne to Toba near Molidorf. Part of this property was subsequently purchased by the Schon Family. There is still a memorial cross standing on the site today displaying Anton Schön's name.

On July 28, 1914 in Sarajevo, bullets from an assassin's gun felled the heir to the throne and brought about the outbreak of WW 1.

Even the Molidorf church bells were requisitioned for the war effort. Since the men were drafted into the army, the

their farms.

In the fall of 1918 the war finally ended but several of our Molidorf men had perished in battles on various fronts while many others perished as prisoners of war. In every Swabian town one could find their names engraved on war monuments that served as reminders of unforgettable sorrows.

The Versailles peace treaty brought about many drastic changes, redrawing borders and establishing new countries in the process. Large areas of Hungary were severed and given to the newly created countries. The public wearing of medals won in the WW1 battles was strictly prohibited in these newly created countries.

In 1930 a new school was built along with a new town hall (council house) by the Molidorf community without any kind of financial aid from the state authorities. Two years after its construction the school was taken over by the state and the rooms of the council house were converted to living quarters for the teachers.

In 1941 a treaty agreement was signed in Vienna between Yugoslavia and Germany. Throughout the country demonstrations against this treaty were held led by radical Serbs. Their slogan: War NOT Treaty. The political situation was very tense and the Yugoslav army units were ordered overnight to Belgrade since the government feared a popular uprising. Many men in Molidorf also received their call-up papers from the Yugoslav military at this time. Everyone began experiencing the hatred against all things German.

In every ethnic German (Swabian) town the police authorities began arresting men and women to be held as hostages in case of war. The hostages were

The list of hostages had already been prepared previously by the authorities and did not depend on any political leanings or activity.

In Molidorf the following were taken hostage: Johann Binder, Mathias Geml, Dominik Haberkorn, Georg Haberkorn, Nikolaus Lesch, Franz Pfenndt, Mathias Petri, Josef Remsing, Jakob Schauss, and Mathias Tensch.

On April 6, 1941 the first bombs fell on Belgrade. Without a proper declaration of war, Germany had initiated the attack on Yugoslavia. German troops crossed the borders from Austria, Romania and Bulgaria into Yugoslavia. This phase of the war was brief and ended with the German victory and Yugoslav surrender.

Serbia was occupied by German troops. Now under German occupation, ethnic Germans including our Molidorf men were subject to service in the German army. The women and children and elderly were left once more to their own devices in managing their farms as best as they were able during the time of war. The



greatest danger came about from the activities of the partisans which made work in the fields hazardous.

In October 1944 Molidorf was occupied by the Russian military. Along with them came the Serb

empowered town administration and police force were selected from their ranks. Already within the first few days of assuming power, two citizens of Molidorf disappeared.

The newly established communist government of Yugoslavia gave orders in April 1945 that converted the town of Molidorf into an internment camp. Shortly thereafter followed the proclamation of the law which confiscated all property of the Swabians (ethnic Germans) including all the residents of Molidorf. The time of great suffering began for the inhabitants.

A few residents had managed to escape before this but the majority remained at home because they could not imagine the horrors that were soon to follow. They remained because they simply didn't know where to go even if they had wanted to leave. They felt that they had done nothing wrong but could not conceive the vengeance awaiting them in the post-war years due to their ethnicity.

From 1945 - 1948 Molidorf served as a concentration camp. All the town people were rounded up and ordered to go to the town hall (Gemeindehaus). They remained here under guard for several days in sheer terror. Then they were ordered to go to their respective places of internment to the various houses in the village that had been emptied of their contents and furnishings. Soon many more people were brought here from the surrounding villages in the area. Many women and some men were transported to Russian labor camps as war reparations.

The inhabitants in the camp were mostly women, children and the elderly. Most remaining adult males had been the first to be shot. The elderly were the next

worked in the fields during the day and then returned at night to their imprisonment.

The women were segregated from their children tearing their families apart. They lived in unfurnished and overcrowded communal houses, sleeping on straw-covered floors. Food rations were minimal at times non-existent and many simply starved to death. Others lost their lives by shootings or torture. Disease was rampant due to the unsanitary conditions and lack of medical care.

A comment from a survivor gives an idea of how terrible this time was: "I went to sleep each night, hoping that I would die during the night and then when I awoke the next morning, realizing I was still alive, I was in tears in such deep sorrow".

According to the Heimatbook, Molidorf was the second largest concentration camp with approximately 10,000 detainees of which 4800 perished. The camp existed from April 1945 to July 1947.

There were other similar concentration camps in the Yugoslavian Banat and Batschka regions where the ethnic Germans were interned (i.e. Rudolfsgnad, Gakowa, etc.).

It is estimated that in the Banat and Batschka 1,500 civilians were murdered in ambushes committed by the partisans between July 1941 and October 1944.

After the beginning of the occupation in October 1944 until the end of the war, local communist groups, state police (OZNA) and special command units of partisans ("Intelligenzija-Action") began shootings or other ways of cruel liquidation of leading and wealthy citizens from

1945 approximately 9500 persons fell victim to such actions.

During the camp years, 51,000 of the 170,000 Swabians who were interned in these concentration & extermination camps lost their lives due to abuse, shootings, starvation and disease. Of these 51,000 people, 6,000 were children less than 14 years old.

Of the 12,000 people deported to Russia, it is estimated that about 2,000 perished there. At the end of the war, 5,000 Swabian prisoners of war were killed by shooting. Consequently, one out of three persons lost their life during the period 1944-1948.

In 1948 the Molidorf camp was closed down. Already in May 1947 the transfer of the elderly and ill internees to other camps had begun. Many were sent to meet their fate in Gakowa and Rudolfsgnad.

By now security was more lax and some had managed to make their escape across the borders into Romania or Hungary seeking safety in Austria where many then settled. Others eventually moved on to Germany and some to France. Many of the survivors eventually found their refuge in the US or Canada and Argentina, and Australia.

From July 1947 Molidorf homes stood empty for a short time. Then some Serbian families from nearby towns were resettled here and began living in the recently refurbished Molidorf homes.

In the fall of 1955 a flood inundated the town, damaging many homes. The flood water froze solid during the winter months thus cutting off all contact as Molidorf was completely surrounded by ice. Severe damage had

colonists were moved once more in the summer of 1956. Once the homes were vacant, work crews arrived to salvage any usable building materials which were disbursed in all directions. The remaining homes were then demolished, the ground leveled, and trees were planted.

Yet even today it is still possible to determine where the homes once stood since the surface of individual house properties is approximately 50 cm higher than the roads. Also evident are mounds which today are covered by brush, scrub trees and vegetation. Each mound of rubble represents the spot where a tidy home once stood.

Tall poplars still line the Northeast boundary of the village. Although many of the gravesites were destroyed and the headstones toppled or removed, there are still some headstones remaining at the site of the cemetery, which is mostly covered with overgrown vegetation.

The 'grundloch'* on the east side of Molidorf is still there. In the summer it has just a little water in it, but in the spring it is a full lake. The 'grundloch' on the north side is gone now. It has been filled in and is now part of a farm field.

The ditches on the north and south side of the village are still there and are filled with standing water in the spring. The moat around the cemetery is still there; well at least in the northern part it is visible, filled with water, but the southern part is no longer there.



Today looking from a distance, the site looks like a rectangular forest, a thick band of trees lines all four sides of the village boundaries. Within the band of trees, there are various openings, interspersed with scrub and brush and hundreds of mounds. In a few places there are a few bricks and a few shards of roof tiles poking out of the soil. Of course, everywhere are those mounds, those silent mounds which are witness to places the homes formerly occupied.

To walk through Molidorf today is such an intensely emotional experience. One can "feel" the intensity of the love and sorrow that pervades this place. There is a silence there that is so very "loud", so very touching, so moving. It is simply impossible to walk through this place today without crying, with love and with sadness.

The eerie silence is only broken by the sound of birds and bespeaks the presence of the thousands of souls who lost their lives there.

This is our Molidorf, and we will remember it always, and it will and does live on ~~~ everywhere, within us and around us.



We will never forget this special place or our loved ones who lived, and loved, and died there. ~~~



***Grundloch:** A pond made by a deep pit in a quarry that was the source of clay used in making the adobe-like bricks to build the homes in the community. Usually such quarry areas were located on the outskirts of the Banat and Batschka towns and were considered community property. Eventually this deep depression filled with ground water, rain run-off and/or melting snow and thus became a community pond.