

# Through the German Colonies of the Beresan District and Colonist Tales

*Herman Bachmann*

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**Herman Bachmann : Through the German Colonies of the Beresan District and Colonist Tales** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Through the German Colonies of the Beresan District and Colonist Tales:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Through the German Colonies of the Beresan District and Colonist Tales By Mr. Michael M. Miller Book review by by Edna Boardman, Bismarck, North Dakota This book is unusual in its setting--the German Russian villages of the Beresan District (Rastatt, Waterloo, Speyer, Laudau, Katherinental, Karlsruhe, Sulz, Johannistal, Rohrbach, and Worms) in the Ukraine. It is a collection of short stories, more anecdotes, that reveal the personalities and lives of the people of these villages in the late 1920s, when communism had taken over but had loosed its grip a bit for the period when the New Economic Policy held sway. In the first part, Through the German Colonies of the Beresan District, Bachmann, a teacher and cultural researcher, tells of making a tour via assorted horse carts through these villages to collect the texts and melodies of folk songs. Bachmann is accompanied by Victor Schirmunki, a professor interested in recording differences in German dialect. The men choose a most inopportune season, harvest time, but learn what they can. They stay with the teachers in each village, then contact whoever has information about songs and language. The most intriguing thing about the songs is the popularity, even competitiveness, of singing among teenage males. In the second part, Colonist Tales, Bachmann's good humor and insights into the lives of the people (he came from among them) bring into focus a time most American and Canadian German Russians know little about. The terrible wars and destruction of the Bolshevik revolution and the famine of

the early 1920s are over, and kulaks live in huts on their former estates. Education has been secularized, and communists demand constant attendance at meetings. But the harvest is coming in, a measure of normalcy has returned and life goes on. Introductory material by Joseph Schnurr and an epilogue by Roland Wagner put Bachmann's life and the stories themselves into context. The stories, which were originally written in German, appear to have had at least some intent to show communist leaders that the communist ideology was taking root satisfactorily and people were starting to cooperate with the new system. The introduction and epilogue also tell about the years that followed, when Stalin, determined to enforce collectivization, again terribly disrupted the lives of these people. Extensive footnotes document sources and explain words and matters within the stories that may be confusing to readers. The stories are entertaining, but the scholarly material is not easy reading. Scholars and publishers within the German Russian community need to be congratulated and supported as they discover and make available this material. Readers will be well informed about an important but little-understood period whether they read all of the book or just the stories.