

Wie wurde gebaut? (How buildings were constructed?)

At the time of settlement wood was the most important construction material. There was enough of it present on the slopes of the mountains. It was necessary anyway to clear portions of the forest to create fields and meadows. Tree trunks were hewn into square-edged beams and put together, the crevices in between were stuffed with moss and smudged with clay. On top of the walls beams were laid across and then the room was roofed with boards. The 'Estrich' (flat surface of wooden planks, screed) was then covered with a layer of clay and chaff. Above the room the roof was constructed from wood, reeds, or 'Lieschgrass' (timothy grass? special type of grass), which could be found plentiful on the marshy valley floor. After the wheat harvest roofs were also covered with straw that had not been broken by threshing with the flail. The construction of a house was the same as it had been in the old homeland. Also, the same familiar names were used to identify each component of the process. The ridge of the roof was covered with a thick layer of timothy grass or straw which were fastened by 'Dachreiter' (roof riders).

The small windows were covered with "Schlemmen" 'Schleimen'. These were stretched animal bladders through which a sparse light entered the room.

After the forest had been cleared over large areas, and the wood for construction had to be expended more frugally, another method of construction came up which used less wood. It was a covered-up half-timbered design. On top of a foundation of stone which extended from the basement to the ground floor of the house thick wooden planks were laid down upon which then a framework of beams was erected. Between the vertical and horizontal woodwork a weave of branches of white beeches was fitted which then was covered with loam. In order to prevent cracking yet remain porous to enable a natural exchange of air, chaff was added to the clay. As the last step the walls were smoothed and white washed. Such walls were protected from rising dampness of the ground by the wooden planks and from snow and rain by the overlapping roof. The twenty to thirty centimeter thick, thatched roof served as good a protection from the cold in winter as from heat in the summer.

Such a house was called a "buian stuf" (Bohlenhaus, house of thick boards). This name actually recalls the mode of construction mentioned first. The last witnesses of this half-timbered type of house construction are still present in Number 9 and Number 50. In other houses brickwork was added to the weave of branches between the beams of the walls or the solid walls of loam which were not broken up by spaces for windows or doors, but this was only done in houses for the poor or at times of extreme necessity.

In Siebenbürgen some houses were constructed using stonework already in villages in the 16th century. This also had been the case in Grosskopisch which was clearly attested to by a contract on July 1, 1599 settling four points, written in German language, between the master of masonry of the village and the guild of masonry. Because there were so few houses built with stones in the town, according to J.M.Salzer (report?), a resolution was formulated in Hermannstadt in the year 1546: "No pastor should be allowed to buy houses made of stones and permitted only to buy wooden houses so that he then could rebuild them with solid material". In the 18th century one began building houses with bricks. Then people also started to cover the roofs with tiles. The scale-like appearance of the roof tiles led to naming them "Schuppenziegel s. septsäja". In some places bonuses of considerable amounts of money were awarded because with tile roofs the danger of fire was diminished. But this new method of construction prevailed only after young men from every village were sent to Hermannstadt, as ordered in a decree from the National University, to learn the craft of stone masonry and tile making.

The floor consisted of tramped down loam which was smoothed by hand weekly with a liquid mixture of clay and water and then covered with sand. The most impoverished people of the village still do this at the present time. One speaks then of a "gestrixanan iaran".

The gable of the house remained open through centuries. Later it was closed by boards. With the beginning of stonework construction pointed gables made of bricks emerged whose stucco edges were decorated with a garland of vines and a meaningful saying.

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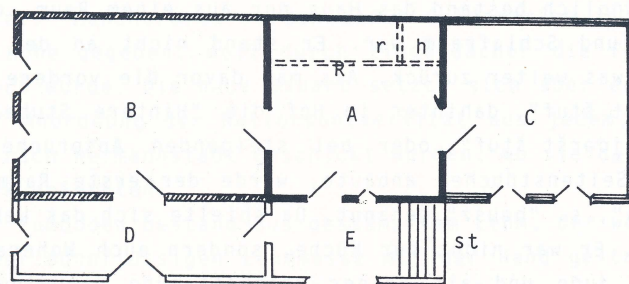
In one corner of the house the open hearth was located. Its smoke escaped through the flue. This consisted of a wide open "Rauchfang" (smoke catcher, vent) whose lower diameter was as large as the stove. The stove sat on a long "Rast" (slatted surface, grid?) that supported the shortened beam above the stove and a shorter one which rested on this one and the wall, and which was called "Rauchfangrast" s. kuiparast", as well as on a corner of the wall. At first the vent was a wicker basket painted with loam which became narrower upwards. Its descendants, built with bricks, had the same form. Some houses, among them the rectory, still own one like it. The bottom end is now closed off with boards and clay. The smoke is directed through a stovepipe or a brick-walled tube into the wide vent. Into this place one hung meat and lard in the winter to smoke them. This still happens today when, from the roof, one knocks a door into the vent and places some hooks into the walls of the chimney or vent to hang up the meat supplies. The vernacular of the region has kept this mode of construction alive in the words "kip, kep, kujip". In the Rhineland a basket woven from willow branches that farmers use to carry their products to the market, has such a name.

Originally, a house had only one room which serves as kitchen, living room, and sleeping room. The house was not located directly at the alley but placed a bit further away from it. Then another room was attached in front of it "vordere Stube" s. fedarst stuf (frontal room), and another in the back on the court yard "hintere Stube" s. hanjdarst, or, with rising expectations, a side room was added. The first room was still called "Haus" s. "hausz. In it the activities of daily farmer's life took place. This room was not only the kitchen but also living space for everybody, young or old, where in the winter everybody pursued his own activities. Here children did their homework, the farmer read the "Agricultural Sheets" or a book, here, on long winter evenings the spindle of the mother of the family whirred, and, where, at the pleasantly crackling wood fire, the most beautiful fairy tales and legends were remembered and retold.

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But when the female neighbors came with their distaffs "in the alley", that is "for a visit" the last news of the village were exchanged in animated conversation. If you want to meet casually with friends and neighbors and talk, as this still happens today, it is called "in the house".

On the side of the courtyard a "Laube" (arbor?) was attached to the house, as well as a covered platform in front of the entrance door which could be reached over steps directly from the street. For the most part steps at the back led towards the outbuildings. If, next to the front room a small side room was added, then the arbor s. "da l0if" only had a staircase in the back. The roof of the arbor rested on two pillars. An arch with a wide span between the pillars let the necessary light fall into the house. The arbor was to not only protect the entrance to the house, but more importantly, the entrance to the basement, the "Kellerschanz" s. kalar sauelts, from bad weather. At first it was only a "Schanz" (entrenchment), which, without a roof, would have turned into a chute. Where the terrain was so steep that no access to the basement could be dug up in the courtyard, the access to the basement was moved to the front facing the alley, as, in the Little Alley, where one could get directly into the basement via two to three steps down from the street which made the construction of an arbor superfluous. The following plan shows the plan of construction for a house.



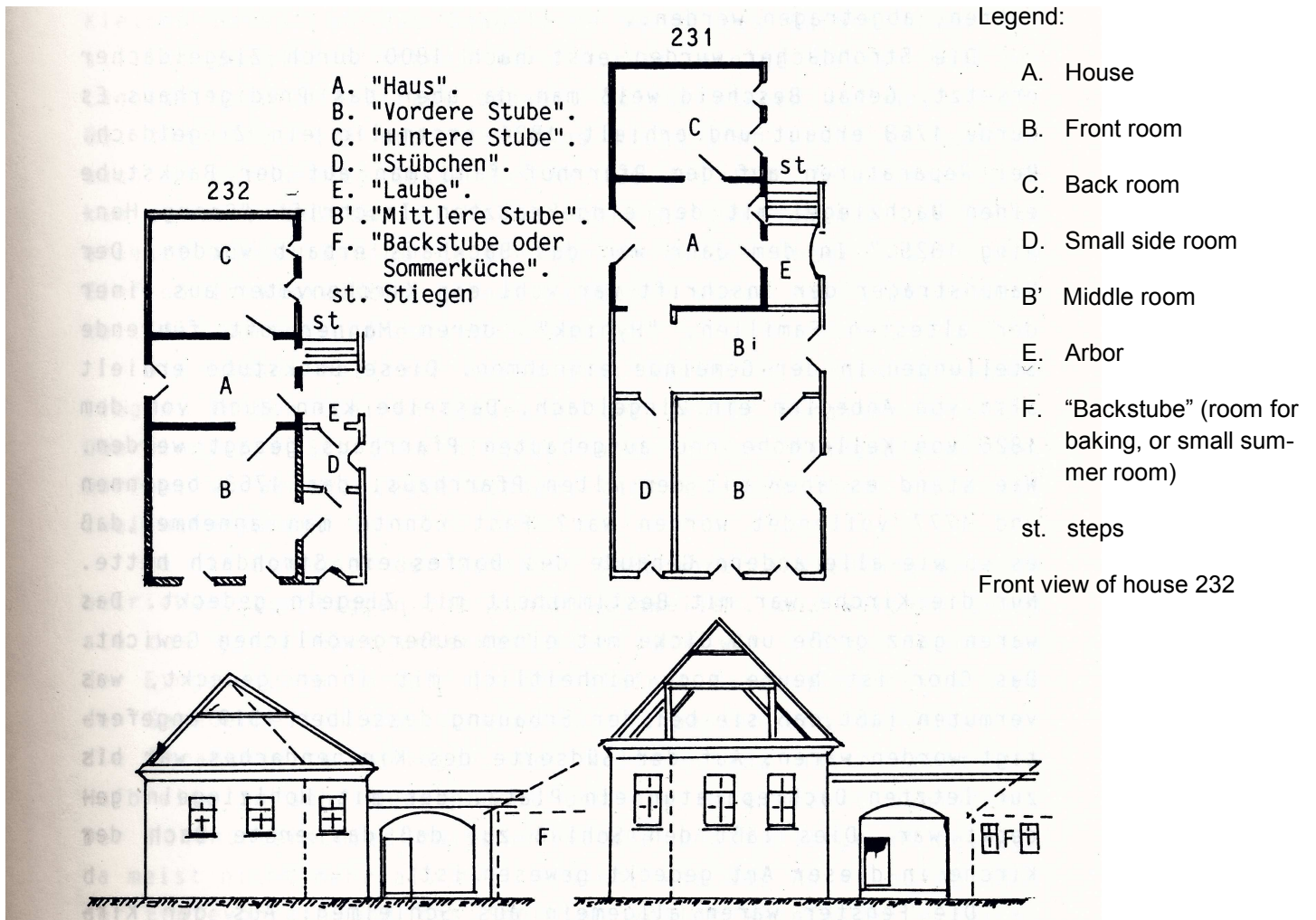
Sketch of a plan of a house with a legend:

- A. Ältester Teil des Hauses. "Haus", s. "häusz" genannt.
- B. Vordere Stube, s. "fedarst stuf".
- C. Hintere Stube, s. "hanjdarst stuf".
- D. Seitenstübchen, s. "stifkən".
- E. Laube, s. "l0if".
- R. Balkenrast, s. "stuvərāsz". h. Herd, s. "hjärd".
- r- Rauchfangrast, s. "kūipərāsz". st. Stiegen, s. "trāpən".

- A. Oldest part of the house "Haus", s. 'hausz
- B. Frontal room, s. fedarst stuf
- C. Room in the back, hanjdarst
- D. Little side room, s. stifkan
- E. Arbor, s. luif
- R. "Balkenrast", s. stuvaraszt, h. stove, s. hiard (beam grill?)
- r. "Rauchfangrast", s. kuiparast (vent grill), st. steps, s. trapan

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Most of the expansions, annexes, and modifications were carried out in the first half of the 19th century as the population was doubled. In some houses, based on the recurrent cracks in the walls, one can recognize what was added; in others it is the form of the roof that provides information about its history. Examples about it are the two houses Number 231 and 232, the ground plan and front view of both are sketched below:



At the house Number 232 not only is the crack in the wall between the front room and the added side small room is clearly visible but also the form of the roof indicates the extension. From the crest of the old roof longer rafters were placed to extend the roof above the annex, while at the house Number 231 one can see that a new, larger roof was built to cover the annex.

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On many occasions these extensions were also not sufficient. When the roofs were slated with tiles and therefore the danger of fire was diminished, a small room for the elders, summer kitchen, and baking house were added on to neighboring houses. After that the communal baking houses could be given up, which had been operated under the supervision of the neighboring fathers and which had been located on a public place in the village, away from the straw-covered roofs.

The straw-covered roofs were not replaced by tile roofs until 1860. Exact information about this is known for the house of the vicar. It had been built in 1768 and received a tile roof in 1824 for the first time. During repairs on the vicarage a roof tile was found with an inscription scratched in "Georg Henning 1825" in the baking room. In that year the room for baking (Backstube) had been built. The person of that name most likely had been a forefather of the church (Kirchenvater) from one of the oldest families, "Hynigk", whose male members often carried leading positions within the community. This baking house received a tile roof from the beginning. The same thing can be said about the new construction of the vicarage from the basement up in 1826. But how about the old vicarage, whose construction had begun in 1763 and completed in 1777? One could almost assume that it had a straw roof just like all the other houses in the village. With certainty only the church had a tile roof. The tiles were very large and thick and had an extraordinary weight. The choir is still covered with these type tiles to the present day, which allows the guess that they had been fabricated at the time the choir was built in 1519. On the south side of the church roof until the last repair there was a place covered with hollow tiles, which leads to the conclusion that the first roof of the church had been tiled in this way.

The windows in general were made of 'Schleimen' (stretched-out animal parts). From the church invoice it appears that the vicarage received 1771 windows made of glass. A bill from the same source stated that in 1763 still 'Schlemmen' were bought for the school, the purpose for this purchase was explicitly documented there for the first time.

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Our forefathers brought the architectural style from their homeland with them. It gave the alleys a unified appearance, for which it was later adopted by the other inhabitants of Siebenbürgen. Thus large portions of the country acquired a German character. So also in Grosskopisch where there was no difference in the methods used to build Saxon and Romanian houses. The residence always stood with the narrow side facing the street. The gable was pointed; later it was 'abgekragt' (modified top point) with the last modification after 1956. In the Little Alley, where the terrain for buildings was narrow because of the creek and the steep slope of the mountain behind, some buildings were oriented with the broad side to the street. Such are on Numbers 27, 42, 98, 108, 113, 114, and 248. Without a visible clue this also happened in the Great Alley on Numbers 136 and 137. In newer times it occurred that the gable was positioned to the street by a slant of the roof. Some newer houses were built in an angular shape, influenced by city styles. Because of this change the unified appearance of the image of the village was broken up.

The houses had mostly three rooms which were placed one behind the other. In the Small Alley, where the steep slope of the mountain formed an unsurmountable barrier, and in the border areas of the village where poorer people lived, there were many houses with only two rooms.

Since the residents of the community were wine growers they needed a wine cellar. For that reason they built a cellar under the whole house. As we already learned, the entrance to the basement was in the court yard. In the Little Alley they had to adapt to the special conditions of the ground and therefore put the entrance to the basement facing the street. Otherwise the ramp to the cellar would have narrowed the width of the court yard so much that the entry to the court yard would have been hindered. The difference in height between the street and the cellar in most cases is no more than two steps which made it easier to load and unload the products from the harvest and the transport of the full wine casks. These were rolled on a special ladder from the basement onto a cart. The ladder consisted of two strong oak poles measuring more than three meters which were held together by two crossbeams. One had at the end an iron hook to attach it to the wagon so that it did not fall off.

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The basement was divided into several parts to create a separate wine cellar, where on square wooden logs two long, heavy, thick beams, called the 'Ganters' s. gaunar rested. Upon them the wine casks were placed. In this room only apples were stored which in the winter led their enticing fragrance escape through the small windows, which did not harm the taste of the wine. Potatoes, turnips, and root vegetables were stored in a different room in the cellar. There was also the 'Bütte' s. kampsztbid with the indispensable 'sauerkraut'. In extreme cold the windows were plugged up with straw. The door to the cellar was closed and one could enter the basement only through a 'Kellerschlucht' s. kalarslluaxt (special cellar access within the house). For this purpose a trapdoor was installed in one corner of the living room, by which one could reach the basement with a broad-step, steep ladder.

Attached to the house was a 'Schopfen' ('Schuppen', shed) in which the tools for farming, the cart, fire wood, and the 'Kelter', wooden wine press were housed. Where the court yard was sufficiently level an additional shed for cattle was built, reaching up to the barn, which was positioned transversely, and which closed off the courtyard in its whole width from the garden.

The barn was divided into three parts. In the middle was the 'Tenne' (threshing floor) s. "dar den". When bringing in the stalks of grain, bundled up in sheaves, one placed them first on a layer of hay in the so-called 'Viertel' (quarter) s. "fuiral". The 'Estrich' (floor) of the threshing floor had been smoothed before with a thin clay and water mixture, so that no small seed got lost. While in our present days threshing is done with a threshing machine, it had to be done then with a threshing flail. There the men lined up, put a layer of sheaves on the floor with the seed-carrying ends towards the middle and beat the grains out. Most of the time teams of three men swung the flails in a three-beat rhythm from dawn to dusk. These days this tool is banned to a museum. It consisted of two perfectly round sticks of different lengths which were loosely tied together with a strong leather band. Picked up at the longer end, swung around the head the shorter stick flatly whizzed

down on the grain. It was heavy work causing hunger. Therefore one still says about a good eater “He eats like a thresher”. Why, almost no-one can still remember.

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Like in biblical times wheat and chaff were sorted with a winnower. First the straw was picked out and removed. The remaining mixture of chaff and wheat was swept on one side of the threshing floor, the ‘Tennenwand’ s. “denwuund”. Then the door of the barn was opened so that drafts occurred. Hereupon the winnower shovel, that is a hollowed-out shovel, approximately eighteen centimeters wide, ten centimeters deep and sixty centimeters long with a eighty centimeter long handle, was filled up with the chaff and wheat mixture and emptied in a wide arc against the wind. The wind blew back the lighter chaff to the thrower while the heavier seeds fell slightly farther back on the smooth threshing floor. That was a kind of work that only a few people still know and nobody still practices, but this is the very reason it reserves to be recorded. Not the least because our Savior also used it this as an example for God’s method of meting out judgment. The straw was stacked up in a ‘Driste’ s. “draszt” in the garden. The chaff ‘Kaff’ s, “kuav” was deposited in the ‘kuavas’z’, that is a narrow addition to the garden at the ‘Viertel’ (quarter) of the barn.

Less than one-third of the barn usually was reserved as place for the stable for cattle with several window-like openings to the threshing floor. They were called ‘Raufenlöcher’ (rack holes), because through these holes the feed that had been prepared on the floor was placed into the hay rack for the horses, and into the manger for the cattle. In front of the stable was the pit for the manure. If the gates to the barn and the door to the street were closed each farm represented a little fortress on its own.

Today, in many cases, only the houses remain of the former farms. Stables, ‘Schopfen’, and barns were largely demolished because they were no longer used that would have caused major expenses to maintain them.

Towards the street the court yard was closed off with an archway of bricks which spanned the entrance. In the center of the village these archways are still present...

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...Once one entered the farm under these archways, he not only enjoyed the hospitality, but also the protection of the owner. If you broke the peace over the ‘Frieden’, the ‘Umfriedung’ that is the surrounding fence towards the neighbors, you would be severely punished. Equally punishable was if you entered the farm yard through any other way than the arched gate. Holy was the threshold of the house over which the bride was carried, as also the stove upon which the baby was once placed after its baptism.

The so-called ‘Bodenzaun’ (ground fence) or the ‘Dorf Frieden’ encircled the gardens of the whole village. It had to be carefully maintained in good condition by all landlords and this was watched over by the neighborhood. The fence had been prepared with utmost care. First the stakes, spliced from the core of oak trees, were rammed deep into the ground at appropriate intervals. The stakes were sharpened at both ends. Between them nimble willow branches were weaved. When the weave had reached a certain height, sharpened sticks, approximately eighty centimeters long s. “fatsstaken”, were inserted at the upper end and horizontally put through about halfway. To this stick a flat piece of weaved willow switches was attached upon which a roof thatched with straw was put up. The top of the roof was below the points of the fence stakes. This way they not only provided a support for the straw, but also held down the blackthorn branches which had been put on top of the stakes. This fence was protected from snow, rain, and wind. Climbing over was made most difficult.

At the entrance to the village was the trap door, s. “faualduiar”, supposed to increase the safety of the residents of the village from threats of the outside. But even more important were the eye and the bright ear of the night guard who still at the time of the First World War walked through the alleys at night, called out the hours, and reminded the residents to guard the fire.

In the beginning the inventory of the houses was conceivably simple. There was a table and benches, a chest, a bed, and the bench at the stove. The more living space was created the more sophisticated the furnishings became. The craft of carpentry developed in the cities more and more, and offered the farmers the brightly painted pieces of furniture at the ‘Jahrmärkte’ (funfairs).

Birrhälm, however, was very close and with a known master there one could be sure that you were offered good work. Therefore it was quite understandable that the people of Grosskopisch took the way across the 'Hill' and made their desired purchases right there in the neighborhood. Unfortunately the beautifully painted beds, tables, chests, dressers, and frames have long been disappeared. Today there is no longer a difference between a household in Grosskopisch and one in the city. All rooms can be heated with natural gas which was introduced in 1958, and lighted with electrical current since 1962. In some houses bathrooms were installed. The houses became cozier. But one thing remained the same. When meeting together to talk, be it as a larger family circle or with a group of neighbors, then, even today, one sits preferably 'im Haus', which still is kitchen and living room. The room in front is reserved for "guests". To the farmer, maybe better referred to as the owner, this room is stayed in only at baptisms, weddings, and – city people added with secret mockery – at a wake, if one dies.