

SUMMARY

*Baltic German Restart 1945–1952*

In 1982, when Jürgen von Hehn published his seminal “Die Umsiedlung der baltischen Deutschen – das letzte Kapitel baltisch-deutscher Geschichte,” (Resettlement of the Baltic Germans – the Final Chapter of Baltic-German History), not many Baltic Germans disagreed with the title. In their eyes, the history of the Baltic Germans as a group had ended by leaving the “Heimat” of Estonia and Latvia during the years 1939–1941. The following years of “resettlement” in western Poland until January 1945 were considered as a kind of epilogue.

Despite this proclaimed “Final Chapter,” the Baltic German community did not cease to exist but started to re-create itself with the foundation of Baltic German organisations in Western Germany after World War II. But, what were the intentions and goals of these new organisations? Following Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs,” one can suspect that these organisations, initially engaged in charity, were dissolved when the economic and social crisis came to an end in the 1950s, or reinvented with an entirely new set of goals.

Most of the new Baltic German organisations like the “Baltic Relief Committee”, the “Hilfskomitee der evang. luth. Deutschbalten” or the “Deutschbaltischer Jugend- und Studentenring” focussed on gathering fellow Baltic Germans in the “diaspora” and were based on the organisation of material relief. But from the start, these organisations were engaged, as well, in immaterial relief. In local groups, summer camps and seminars they offered to the community venues to meet and formed a so-called “mittelbare Heimat” (indirect homeland) under the auspices of the “Deutsch-Baltische Landsmannschaft im Bundesgebiet”. The preservation of the Baltic German cultural heritage was the leading goal of all organisations from 1945 onwards, not only of the “Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft,” as the most decidedly Baltic German cultural organisation. Led predominantly by individuals, who had already worked actively in Baltic German organisations in pre-war Estonia and Latvia, the post-war organisations were largely affected by a self-image of the ethnic group as elite – with representatives from aristocrats, academics and the bourgeois. Therefore, however, they neither reached nor represented all Baltic Germans in the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany.