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New Farmsteads in the SOZ/GDR: Political Implications and Adaptation Processes

Abstract: *The 1945–1948 land reform led to the emergence of 210,000 new farmsteads on former “Junker land” in the Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany (the later German Democratic Republic). Farmland, fields, wooded areas, farmhouses, barns, and farming equipment from the inventory of manor state families were confiscated and given to applicants. These “new farmers”, which included families of agricultural workers, landless farmers, as well as German refugees and expellees of the Second World War, were expected to form their own social group. Their property from the land reform was “bonded”: i. e., they were not allowed to sell, lease, or mortgage it. This paper analyses these new farm houses as standing at the intersection of state action for socio-political reform and the legitimation of the ruling party on the one side and individual adaptive processes on the other. What role did the land reform play in the lives of the families living in the new farmer houses? What political implications were tied to the new structures? And what processes of adaptation and interpretation of state intentions could, and can, be read into the new farmer houses? In order to answer these questions, archival sources, contemporary publications, as well as statements from witnesses have been taken into account.*

In northern Thuringia on 26 May 1946, the keystone was ceremoniously laid for a new settlement that was to become a prototype: Großfurra-Neuheide became the first new farmer settlement (*Neubauernsiedlung*) in the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SOZ, *Sowjetische Besatzungszone*). Project planning, led by Hermann Henselmann and Toni Miller, began in 1945 at the Weimar university of *Baukunst und Bildende Künste*.¹ Miller planned the district as a “village green type, expanded

¹ Sabine Ortmann: Zwischen Aufbruch und Verwerfung – die Neubauernsiedlung Großfurra/Neuheide, in: Thüringisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege (ed.): *Aus der Arbeit des Thüringischen Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege. Bauaufgaben des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Erfurt 2005, 109–112, esp. 109. The district of Sonderhausen was particularly effected by the land reform. 51 manor houses and 14,000 hectares of land came under its aegis. Andreas Dix: “*Freies Land*”. *Siedlungsplanung im ländlichen Raum der SBZ und der frühen DDR 1945–1955*. Köln 2002, 198–9.; Along with Großfurra, Seega and Bruchstedt constituted the model villages of the “first hour”: Ulrich Wieler: *Bauen aus der Not. Architektur und Städtebau in Thüringen 1945–1949*. Köln 2011, 131 ff.; for further information on Henselmann see: Frank Hager: Biographie und Beruf im staatlichen Spannungsfeld. Der Architekt Hermann Henselmann in der Zeit des “Bauens in nationaler Tradition”, in: *BIOS* 27, no. 1/2 (2014), 169–186.

Note: Translation: Edward C. Hamelrath

road”.² The village (Figure 1) comprised 18 farms, each with nine hectares of fertile land, and three hectares of wooded area.³ The farmhouses were built according to Henselmann’s design by the name of “Thuringia”. As so-called *Streckhöfe*, they combined the areas of living, livestock, and storage under one roof.

Of a total area of up to 220 square metres, approximately 60 square metres were given over to living quarters.⁴ The farmhouses were built in the half-timbered style (*Fachwerkbauten*), making use of local building materials, with the gabled areas wood-encased and the saddle roofs fitted with dormer windows.⁵



Figure 1: New farmer settlement Großfurra-Neuheide, © Uta Bretschneider, 2013.

² Dix, “*Freies Land*”, 203.

³ Ortman, *Zwischen Aufbruch und Verwerfung*, 109.

⁴ The above refers to New Farmstead design “Thuringia” built in Kloster Veßra. Kreisarchiv Hildburghausen, Gemeinde Kloster Veßra, 929/263a, Bauakten 1945–1951, unpag., Entwurf zum Neubauernegehöft des Erich Moor, 15 May 1948.

⁵ Ortman, *Zwischen Aufbruch und Verwerfung*, 109–110; see also: Christian Schädlich: Die Neubauerneidlung Neuheide in Großfurra, in: *Architektur der DDR 2* (1989), 54.

Monument preservationist Hermann Wirth claims that the designs reflected a “clichéd idea of a Thuringian Street-Common-Village (*Straßen-Anger-Dorf*)”.⁶ However, this form of *Streckhof* is rarely found in Thuringia today.

The founding of the prototype settlement of Großfurra-Neuheide was intended as a fundamental revolution in the rural landowner- and power-structures. In the autumn of 1945, land reform was introduced into the SOZ (Figure 2). By 1948, this came to include 3.3 million hectares of land, corresponding to 35 per cent of the useful agricultural land of the whole of the SOZ at the time, equivalent to the entire surface area of the state of Brandenburg today.⁷

The property of alleged or known National Socialists, as well as that of landowners who possessed more than 100 hectares, was confiscated without any form of compensation. This included taking arable land, pastures, and forests as well as building structures and farming equipment. The confiscated property fell to a state land fund, which was subsequently redistributed. The result was that, between 1945 and 1948 in the SOZ, approximately 210,000 new farms emerged on the so-called “Junker” estates.

The land reform made “new farmers” (*Neubauern*) of agricultural labourers, landless farmers, small-scale tenant farmers, as well as refugees and expellees of the Second World War. Ideologically, the term was heavily loaded, for these people were supposed to form a separate social group. However, the term “new farmers” was in no way a creation of the immediate post-WWII era. The term was already in use after the First World War, when manor estates (*Gutsanlagen*) were “relocated” (*aufgesiedelt*). And in the era of National Socialism, new farmers were supposed to be the “pioneers” who helped to implement the expansion policy in the East.

In the following paper, the “new farmer houses” (*Neubauernhäuser*) of the post-war era are analysed as standing at the intersection of state action for socio-political reform and the legitimization of the ruling party on the one side and individual adaptive processes on the other. What role did the land reform play in the lives of the families living in the new farmer houses? What political implications were tied to the new structures? And what processes of adaptation and interpretation of state intentions could, and can, be read into the new farmer houses? In order to answer these questions, archival sources, contemporary publications, as well as statements from witnesses have been taken into account.⁸

⁶ Hermann Wirth: Neubauernsiedlung Großfurra-Neuheide. Über Unwegsamkeiten und Missverständnisse im Denkmalschutz, in: Heimatbund Thüringen (ed.): *Heimat Thüringen. Kulturlandschaft – Umwelt – Lebensraum* no. 2/3 (2002), 53–4, esp. 53.

⁷ http://www.statistik-portal.de/Statistik-Portal/de_jb01_jahrtab1.asp (24 March 2016).

⁸ The source material was collected as part of the dissertation project: “Vom Ich zum Wir”? *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene als Neubauern in der LPG* (“From I to We”): German Refugees and Expellees of WWII as New Farmers in the Agricultural Cooperatives). Uta Bretschneider: “Vom Ich zum Wir”? *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene als Neubauern in der LPG*. Leipzig 2016.

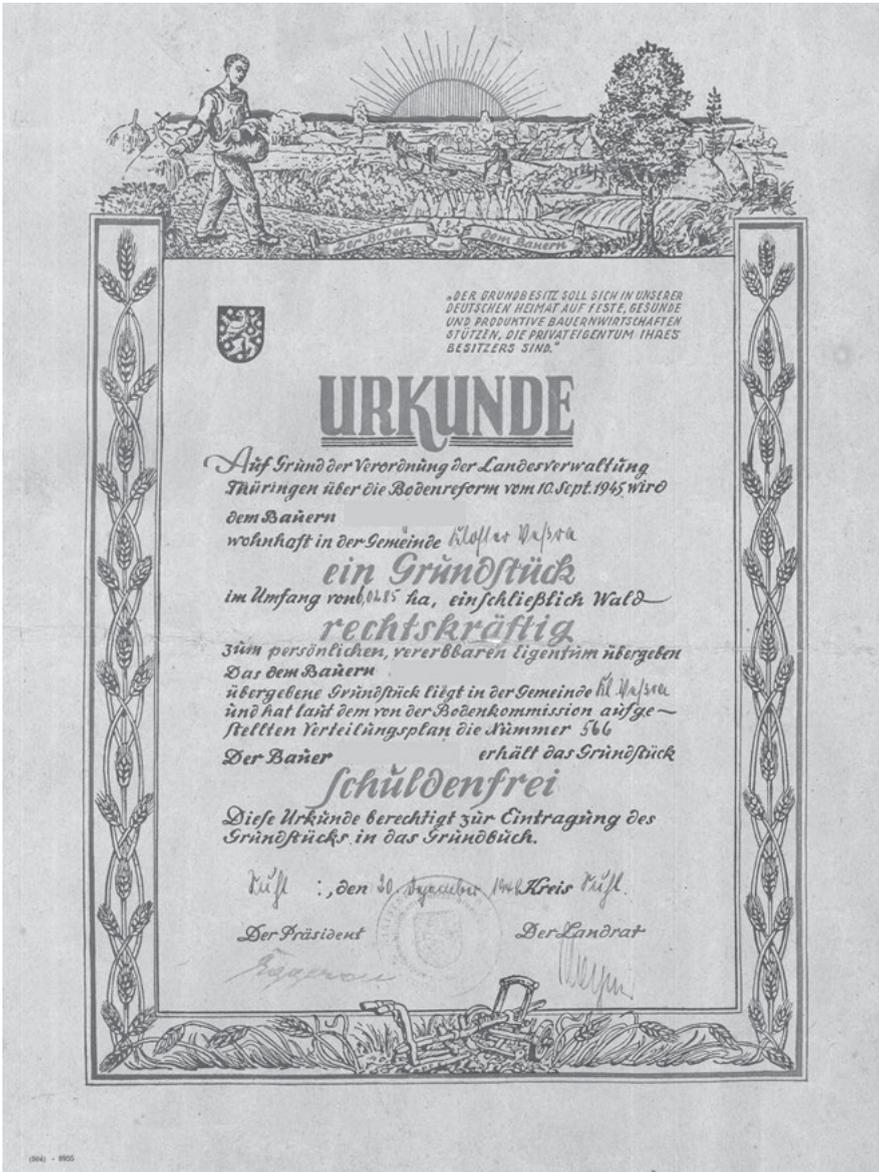


Figure 2: Land reform certificate, 1948 – Archive of the Hennebergisches Museum Kloster Veßra, A III Nr. 7.

Designing | Constructing

In essence, the design for the new farmer houses was based on the ideas of the Planning Commission (*Planungsverband*) that existed from 1945 to 1951 at the University of Weimar (*Hochschule Weimar*).⁹ Toni Miller, mentioned above, led the Project Group “Rural Building and Settlement” (*Ländliches Bau- und Siedlungswesen*), which, among other things, was occupied with the construction of new farmsteads.¹⁰ Due to the destruction wrought by the war and the temporary “re-agriculturalization”¹¹ of society, as well as the land reform, entirely new challenges and new areas of work for rural architecture emerged. Therefore, due to the difficulty of obtaining supplies, “long-established makeshift construction methods” were to be propagated and developed, in particular those using clay.¹²

As early as 1946, the design portfolio *Grundlagen des ländlichen Bauwesens. Typen für landwirtschaftliche Kleingehöfte* (“Foundations of Rural Architecture: Designs for Small Farmsteads”) from the Planning Commission was published, which contained a total of 34 designs, among them the “Thuringia” type described above.¹³ In accordance with the principle “form follows function”, the new farmer houses were built with the internal work flow of the farmstead in mind.

9 Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar (ThHStAW), 6-32-0130, Land Thüringen, Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit Nr. 2576, Maßnahmen zur Durchführung der Bodenreform im Land Thüringen, 1945–1948, Aufbau und Aufgaben der Planungsgemeinschaft Wiederaufbau (gez. von Prof. Henselmann), 20 Oct. 1945, 17–19; Wieler, *Bauen aus der Not*, 128 ff. In Brandenburg, the Office for Reconstruction (*Amt für Wiederaufbau*) also submitted designs. Katja Schlenker: *Das unbequeme Erbe. Mecklenburgische Gutsanlagen und Herrenhäuser seit 1945*. Rostock 2003, 102.

10 Andreas Butter: Das Funktionalistische Fachwerkhaus? Ländliche Nachkriegs-Architektur im Osten Deutschlands und die Moderne, in: Ulrich Kluge et al. (eds.): *Zwischen Bodenreform und Zwangskollektivierung. Vor- und Frühgeschichte der “sozialistischen Landwirtschaft” in der SBZ/DDR vom Kriegsende bis in die Fünfziger Jahre*. Stuttgart 2001, 251–276, esp. 255; Toni Miller: Die landwirtschaftlichen Versuchshöfe des Landes Thüringen, in: *Neue Bauwelt* 22 (1946), 3–7, esp. 3.

11 Arnd Bauerkämper: Traditionalität in der Moderne. Agrarwirtschaft und ländliche Gesellschaft in Mecklenburg nach 1945, in: *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 51 (2003), 9–33, esp. 31.

12 ThHStAW, 6-32-0130, Land Thüringen, Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit Nr. 2576, Maßnahmen zur Durchführung der Bodenreform im Land Thüringen, 1945–1948, Aufbau und Aufgaben der Planungsgemeinschaft Wiederaufbau (gez. von Prof. Henselmann), 20 Oct. 1945, 17–19, here 18. On the use of clay building methods in this context see Uta Bretschneider: Improvisieren und Aneignen. Neubauernhäuser in der Nachkriegszeit, in: *Volkskundliche Kommission für Thüringen e. V. und Thüringer Freilichtmuseum Hohenfelden* (eds.): *Haus und Hof. Leib und Leben*. Hohenfelden 2015, 95–106, esp. 98–9.

13 Dix, “*Freies Land*”, 60 ff.

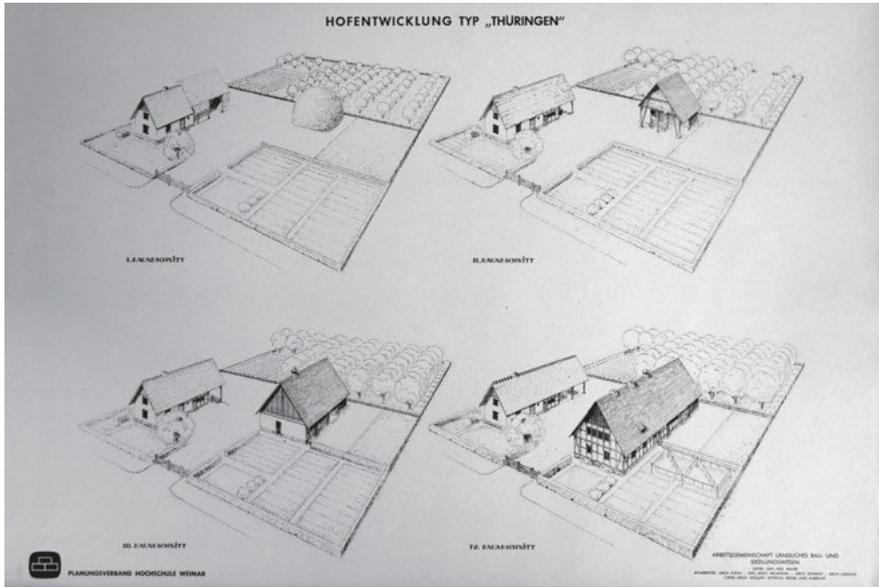


Figure 3: Sketch of a new farmstead type “Thuringia”, in: Planungsverband Hochschule Weimar (ed.): *Grundlagen des ländlichen Bauwesens. Typen für landwirtschaftliche Kleingehöfte*. Weimar 1946.

As a result of the lack of building materials, the limited possibilities for individual initiative, and the granting of credit only being done in steps, the designs often allowed for multiple stages of construction. Toni Miller advocated a construction design in sections in accordance with the so-called “cell system” (*Zellensystem*). Here the buildings – depending on the availability at any given time of financial and material resources – were to be expanded and, with the development of the economy, allowed to grow (Figure 3).¹⁴

From 1946, the theoretical considerations of the working group were amended by practical attempts. This is how, among other things, the “landwirtschaftliche Versuchsbauten des Landes Thüringen” were created. On this topic, Miller wrote: “the goal is to identify the best, most economically productive small farms”.¹⁵ The three prototype farms that were created in Weimar – closed, half-open, and open construction style – still exist today, albeit in a rather dilapidated state.¹⁶

¹⁴ Miller, Die landwirtschaftlichen Versuchshöfe, 3–4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Ibid. The building situated in the Rainer-Maria-Rilke-Street 46 in Weimar (type *Halboffen*) is under a preservation order until today.

To deal with the materials shortage, the university in Weimar tried out clay construction methods – a so-called “Clay Construction School” was established and in 1947 a “Clay Construction Primer” published.¹⁷ Richly illustrated, the book offered practical instruction on extracting and preparing loam, as well as the various processing forms.¹⁸ Rammed-earth clay, cobbled clay, clay brick techniques (*Stampflehm-, Lehmweller-, Lehmziegeltechniken*) were to be used in the construction of a new farm house.

However, since the nineteenth century, this type of building had been largely replaced by bricks and had thus fallen into obscurity.¹⁹ Therefore it came as no surprise that contemporary builders viewed the “rediscovered” material with great scepticism. They considered it to be outmoded and “dirty”. So, due to the lack of expertise, numerous mistakes were made in the construction, which did nothing to improve the reputation of clay construction – which today, under the physical construction aspect, is highly regarded.²⁰ As a result, the following order was issued in Thuringia in 1947: “To the extent that it is locally and economically justifiable, the Building Approval Commission is to stipulate, emphatically, the use of natural building materials. Other building materials and procedures recently approved and recommended here are to be strongly promoted.”²¹

In general, the designs of the Planning Commission reflected architectural tradition. The classical *Streckhöfe* of the new farmers after land reform looked like – of course in a more reduced version – a new farmer farmstead of the national socialistic settlement projects. Documents found at the *Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar* include, along with plans for the post-war period, designs from the 1930s. The sources of inspiration were obvious. And it was not only in the term “new farmer” that certain strands of tradition could be found to have endured. Subsequent land reform architectures – those that emerged in the early 1950s in the transition to cooperative agriculture – resembled the agricultural labourer’s houses of the

17 The “Clay Construction School of the State of Thuringia” (*Lehmbauschule des Landes Thüringen, Landeslehrstelle für Naturbauweise*) was subordinate to the University of Weimar and existed between 1948 and 1951 in the building of the later “German Bee Museum” in Oberweimar. Art. “Lehmbauschule”, in: Gitta Gunther et al. (eds.): *Weimar. Lexikon zur Stadtgeschichte*. Weimar 1998, 274.

18 Forschungsgemeinschaft ländliches Bau- und Siedlungswesen Hochschule Weimar (ed.): *Lehmbaufibel*. Weimar 1947 (new editions: 1993 and 1999).

19 Dix, “*Freies Land*”, 277.

20 *Ibid.*, 281.

21 Originally the order was published in 1946, but, thanks to the transition to Central Economic Planning, required modification. Kreisarchiv Hildburghausen, Gemeinde Heckengereuth, 2027/6, Bausachen, Zuteilungen, Hochwasser, Gewerbe, 1945–1956, unpag., 6. Anordnung über die Baulenkung durch die Baupolizeibehörden. Neuordnung für 1947, 14 May 1947.

1930s.²² Of course, this continuity comes as no surprise when one considers that both Henselmann and Miller had already been working on agricultural structures before 1945.²³

Subsidies | Interventions

In the post-war era, the villages experienced a veritable building boom and “changed their faces” as it was repeatedly called in contemporary publications. As far as the new farmer houses were concerned, a specific type of serial architecture was introduced to rural structures. In reference to the building ordinance, four essential forms were established for the land reform buildings. First, new farmsteads were set-up within already existing village areas. Sometimes these buildings, with their typecast architecture, formed a visual counterbalance to the traditional orientation of villages towards the manor house. Secondly, entire streets were created with only new farmsteads within or just on the edge of the village boundaries. Thirdly, individually secluded farmsteads were usually built directly on the fields. Fourth, and last, complete settlements – such as Großfurra-Neuheide – arose in close proximity to the villages.

In the course of the land reform measures, the new farms each received, on average, five to ten hectares depending on the quality of the soil. This land was not given out for free. Per hectare, the market value of one harvest of rye was to be

²² For example, the design portfolio of the THÜHAG and the Planning Commission contained numerous designs from the period before 1945 that show strong similarities with the later land reform structures. ThHStAW, 6-32-0130, Land Thüringen, Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit Nr. 3050, Entwürfe und Bauzeichnungen für Neubürgersiedlungen, Neubauerngehöfte, Kleinsiedlungen und Volkswohnungen der Thüringischen Gemeinnützigen Heimstätte Aktiengesellschaft Weimar und des Planungsverbandes Bauhochschule Weimar, 1945–1949. On the National Socialist’s tradition of New Farmsteads see also: Reichsnährstand, Reichshauptabteilung 1 (ed.): *Der Weg zum Neubauernhof. Für die deutsche Landjugend*. Berlin [second half of the 1930s]. On the designs for the later land reform buildings see: *Das Bodenreform-Bauprogramm 1952*, herausgegeben vom Ministerium für Aufbau der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Kreisarchiv Hildburghausen, Rat des Kreises, EA 1730/2, *Bodenrecht 1950–1951*, unpag.

²³ Ulrich Wieler: Was vom “Planungskollektiv Bauhaus” übrig blieb. Der “Planungsverband Hochschule Weimar” 1945–49 als institutionelle Versuchsbaustelle, in: Klaus-Jürgen Winkler (ed.): *Neubeginn. Die Weimarer Bauhochschule nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg und Hermann Henselmann*. Weimar 2005, 67–79, esp. 69. Toni Miller was born Anton Müller in 1914 near Budapest. He held the chair for Rural Structures and Settlement at the State University for Architecture and Visual Arts from 1946 to 1949. He then fled to the Western Zone. Written information on the subject Toni Miller from the University Archive, *Bauhaus-Universität Weimar*, 27 May 2014.

used as the measure of payment. The payments varied from district to district and in accordance with soil quality – fees ranged from 179 Reichsmark per hectare in Mecklenburg to 277 Reichsmark in Thuringia.²⁴ This amount of land was far too small to ensure financial viability. Therefore, along with the heavily state-influenced architecture of land reform, numerous aid packages were necessary in order to stabilize the new farms commercially.

The biggest problem for the new farmers was the lack of useable buildings. This led the Soviet Military Administration to issue Order No. 209 in September 1947 – the so-called “New Farmer Construction Program”. The intention was to construct 37,000 buildings for living and working by the end of 1948.²⁵ The real need, however, was significantly higher. In any case, by October 1948 only 15,000 buildings were up and ready to be used.²⁶

So why did construction proceed at such a slow pace? Building owners lacked the financial means, and their chances to take part in the work at the construction sites themselves were limited because there was so much else to do. There was a constant lack of materials, vehicles, and workers.²⁷ Nevertheless, in the long run, as a result of Order No. 209, about 95,000 farmhouses were built, as well as over 100,000 animal stalls, and 38,000 barns.²⁸

Along with the construction program that was phased out with the beginning of the collectivization of the agricultural sector in 1952, subsidized credit was a form of state support. The Soviet Military Administration had already issued Order No. 62 at the beginning of 1946. It guaranteed new farmer families a loan of up to 1,500 Reichsmark as a “business loan” and 4,500 Reichsmark as a “building loan”.²⁹ In 1948, the *Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission* (German Economic Commission)

24 Wolfgang Meinicke: Die Bodenreform und die Vertriebenen in der SBZ und in den Anfangsjahren der DDR, in: Manfred Wille et al. (ed.): *Sie hatten alles verloren. Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands*. Wiesbaden 1993, 55–85, esp. 63. The journal *Die Ähre* listed the following prices: 262,90 Deutsche Mark der Deutschen Notenbank in Thuringia and 174. 60 Deutsche Mark der Deutschen Notenbank in Mecklenburg. O. A., Der Schulungs-Brief, in: *Die Ähre. Monatsschrift der Zentralvereinigung der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe*, vol. 3 (March 1950), 7–9, esp. 8.

25 Arnd Bauerkämper: Problemdruck und Ressourcenverbrauch. Wirtschaftliche Auswirkungen der Bodenreform in der SOZ/DDR 1945–1952, in: Christoph Buchheim (ed.): *Wirtschaftliche Folgelasten des Krieges in der SOZ/DDR*. Baden-Baden 1995, 295–322, esp. 309.

26 Meinicke, Die Bodenreform und die Vertriebenen, 145.

27 Bauerkämper, Problemdruck, 313.

28 Meinicke, Die Bodenreform und die Vertriebenen, 80.

29 Archiv des Hennebergischen Museums Kloster Veßra, BI 7f Nr. 9, Schreiben der Landeskommission zur Durchführung der Bodenreform an die Kreiskommissionen in Thüringen, Betr.: Neubauernkredit, 30 Oct. 1946.

set the maximum credit for the establishment – or conversion – of a new farmstead at 15,000 Deutsche Mark der Deutschen Notenbank.³⁰

And with the debt-relief and financial aid law for peasant and mid-level farmers passed by the provisional *Volkskammer* of the GDR in the summer of 1950, all outstanding loan repayments over 15,000 Deutsche Mark der Deutschen Notenbank were cut in half.³¹

Despite this relief and the reduced rates, the debt continued to be a considerable strain on many new farmer families. It was particularly hard on the refugees and expellees amongst them, most of whom had arrived in the SOZ with no means of their own. One interviewee who grew up in a new farmstead, and whose family had been driven out of East Brandenburg, remembers: “I had to hear it over and over as a child: ‘We have to get that done and we are in debt.’”³² Her sister added: “There was always some kind of financial difficulties and there was always some borrowing here and some borrowing there.”³³

As a result of the difficult economic situation and aided by minimal interest rates, many new farmer families paid back their debts very slowly. It was not unusual for debts to be paid off only *after* the peaceful revolution of 1989/90. “The amount was so minimal. What was it, 90 Marks per year? So then I checked with the bank after the *Wende* and there were still 2,000 Marks to pay, which I paid off immediately.”³⁴

With the end of the GDR, the land reform record could be deleted in the land registry after the remaining debt was paid off. In March of 1990, the limitation on disposal for land reform ownership was annulled. With this action, a unique form of property ownership came to an end.³⁵

30 Bauerkämpfer, *Problemdruck*, 317.

31 Meinicke, *Die Bodenreform und die Vertriebenen*, 78.

32 Ingeborg Lösch, born 1939. Was driven out of district Landsberg, Brandenburg (today Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland) along with her family (the father was a prisoner of war). After many stops along the way, they landed in Kloster Veßra in 1948 (Interview 12 May 2011), line 13.

33 Bärbel Lohner, born 1940, sister of Ingeborg Lösch. Was driven out of district Landsberg, Brandenburg (today Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland) along with her family (the father was a prisoner of war). After many stops along the way, they landed in Kloster Veßra in 1948 (Interview 4 Nov. 2011), line 955.

34 Peter Lang’s, born 1956, parents (the father was a “resettler” from East Prussia, the mother came from Kloster Veßra) took over a New Farmstead and were one of the founding member of the agricultural cooperatives *Vorwärts* (“onwards!”) – occasionally the father was even chairman of the LPG (Interview 11 June 2011), line 729.

35 URL: <https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2000/bvg00-144.html> (9 May 2016).

This special form appeared in its origin, in Article 6 of the Thuringia Land Reform Law of 1945: “1. The businesses created from this order may not be wholly or partially divided, leased out, or mortgaged. In exceptional cases, the distribution or leasing of these businesses may be allowed by a decision of the state administration. 2. The business owners shall receive the land free of debt. The tax levies for the year 1945 will come from those who take a yield from the land in question.”³⁶

The new farmsteads were “bound property” or “limited ownership” as the scope for state intervention was vast, while the rights of the “owners” were rather modest. This included heritability, where in this case “change of ownership” regulations (*Besitzerwechselforschriften*) trumped hereditary rights. From the state’s point of view, this was intended to secure the continuity of the agricultural business operation. This set-up also made it difficult to give up a land reform parcel.

A witness to these events is still angry when talking about the conditions of those times: “My parents built the connecting piece (*Zwischenstück*, i. e. connecting extension – UB). And – I believe, it was up to 3,000 Marks – this credit was paid off. It was really a small amount. And the person that took it over, Mr. B, had always promised that he would pay my parents off. They even left the lamps and the curtains there. They left Veßra with *nothing* – and they never saw a penny of what they were owed. I mean, they had paid for everything out of their own pocket, the entire structure and they never got a penny for it.”³⁷ This example illustrates: when remitting the land, all property rights ceased to exist.

On the one hand, the operational tasks demanded that one keep to a preconceived procedure: a waiver was to be submitted and had to be approved by the local land reform commission and the corresponding district. In this, the procedure called for clearly defined reasons, e. g. illness or death. On the other hand, if a new farmer became criminally delinquent, or if their land was not being adequately run (i. e. financially stable), the land reform area could be withdrawn.³⁸

36 Archiv des Hennebergischen Museums Kloster Veßra, BI 7c Nr. 37, Gesetz und Ausführungsverordnung zum Gesetz über die Bodenreform im Lande Thüringen, 15 Sept. 1945, 9–10.

37 Jutta Schenk, born 1941 in Kloster Veßra (her mother was housewife and part-time farmer, as well as a seasonal worker on the estate). The parents took over a new farmstead in 1945, were founding members of the agricultural cooperative *Vorwärts* (“onwards!”) in Kloster Veßra in 1953; members of the cooperative until resignation in 1965 and moving out of Kloster Veßra (Interview 10 May 2011), line 302.

38 Sebastian Pries: *Das Neubauerneigentum in der ehemaligen DDR* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 2, Rechtswissenschaft 1581). Frankfurt a. M. 1994 68 ff.; Elke Scherstjanoi: *SED-Agrarpolitik unter sowjetischer Kontrolle 1949–1953* (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte 70). München 2007, 172 ff.; compare also: Ira Spieker: Neubauern (3 June 2015), in: *Online-Lexikon zur Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa*, 2012, URL: <http://ome-lexikon.uni-oldenburg.de/55207.html> (24 March 2016).

The difficult situation of many new farmer enterprises, which often amounted to an existential crises, led to many farms being given up. Most of all, it was former agricultural worker families who, although they understood the running of a farm, became so totally overwhelmed with running an independent business that they turned their backs on the land reform economy. In the immediate post-war era many women waiting for their husbands and sons to return from war and captivity took land during the land reform. There are no exact statistics for women participating in the land reform (yet). But Jonathan Osmond estimates for the area of Saxony that approximately 8,000 of the 21,000 new farmsteads have been conducted by women.³⁹ In autumn 1946, in general (regarding all farm businesses), almost 121,000 female farmers run farms without their husbands. Until 1949 the number decreased to 88,000. Although the female new farmers were supposed to have the same rights as ‘complete’ new farmer families in the process of land distribution, they had to deal with many problems and often gave up their businesses after receiving the news of the death of their husbands.⁴⁰ In addition, the gradual growth of the industrial sector led to a rising number of people leaving the rural economy. At the end of the 1940s, the returns to the state land fund increased so intensely that the new distribution of every single new farmer position became impossible. As a consequence, the so-called “local agricultural businesses” (*Örtliche Landwirtschaftsbetriebe*) had to take over the running of those lands designated as “devastated grounds” (*devastierte Flächen*).⁴¹ This was a complex construct that brought very unsatisfying levels of profit. At the end of 1953, 24,000 local agricultural operations in the entire GDR were working a total of 700,000 hectares of land. Gradually they were integrated into the newly emerging agricultural cooperatives (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften, LPG*).⁴²

39 Jonathan Osmond: Geschlechtsspezifische Folgen der Bodenreform in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone: Gutsbesitzerinnen, Bäuerinnen, Landarbeiterinnen nach 1945, in: Arnd Bauerkämper (ed.): *„Junkerland in Bauernhand“? Durchführung, Auswirkungen und Stellenwert der Bodenreform in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone*. Stuttgart 1996, 153–168, esp. 155.

40 Siegfried Kuntsche: Das Bauerndorf in der Nachkriegszeit. Lebenslagen und Alltag, in: Evmarie Badstübner (ed.): *Befremdlich anders. Leben in der DDR*. Berlin 2000, 64–116, esp. 90; see also Bretschneider, *„Vom Ich zum Wir“?*, 323–326; Uta Bretschneider: Umsiedlerin – Neubäuerin – Genossenschaftsbäuerin. Lebensumstände und Handlungsspielräume 1945–1960, in: *Ariadne. Forum für Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte* 63 (2013), 64–71.

41 Christel Nehrigh: Zur sozialen Entwicklung der Bauern in der DDR 1945–1960, in: *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 41 (1993), 66–76, esp. 72; also see: Dix, *„Freies Land“*, 319.

42 *Ibid.*, 319.

All together, up to 1952, about one third of all new farmer families gave up their farms.⁴³ Even those that did not have constantly to struggle to survive. Arnd Bauerkämper estimates a mere 15 per cent of all land reform farms to have been relatively stable.⁴⁴ Therefore it can come as no surprise that the new farmers were among the first to join the agricultural cooperatives founded in 1952.

Thus, the early participants in land reform involuntarily became the pioneers of collectivization. This represents a structural connection between land reform and collectivization.⁴⁵ Although it may appear illogical to break up mostly functioning large farm businesses in favour of highly fragile small farm business, only later – in the form of the *Genossenschaft* (collective) – to re-incorporate them, land reform was deemed a necessary ideological step. Considering the situation of the war's end and its societal, political, and supply challenges, a more direct transition from the large manor farms to collective farming immediately after the war would have been barely possible, if not unthinkable.

Implications | Legitimations

With this outline of the emergence of the new farmsteads and the conditions that enabled them, it has become clear that they were subject to a variety of state interventions. Nevertheless: what concrete political implications were bound up with both the new farmers as a social class and with their buildings? In order to answer this question, it is worth taking a look back at the aims of the radical agrarian reform in the period from 1945 to 1948.

The kickoff for the land reform began with a speech by the later president of the GDR, Wilhelm Pieck, on 2 September 1945 in the town of Kyritz in

43 Arnd Bauerkämper: Umbruch und Kontinuität. Agrarpolitik in der SBZ und der frühen DDR, in: Ernst Langthaler and Josef Redl (eds.): *Reguliertes Land. Agrarpolitik in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz 1930–1960*. Innsbruck 2005, 83–97, esp. 85.

44 Arnd Bauerkämper: Die vorgetäuschte Integration. Die Auswirkungen der Bodenreform und Flüchtlingssiedlung auf die berufliche Eingliederung von Vertriebenen in die Landwirtschaft in Deutschland 1945–1960, in: Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz (eds.): *Geglückte Integration? Spezifika und Vergleichbarkeiten der Vertriebenen-Eingliederung in der SBZ/DDR*. München 1999, 193–214, esp. 203.

45 Jens Schöne: *Frühling auf dem Lande? Die Kollektivierung der DDR-Landwirtschaft*. Berlin 2005, 10–1; Falco Werkentin: Klassenkampf auf dem Land. Zu den Methoden der Kollektivierung von 1952 bis 1960, in: Michael Beleites et al. (eds.): *Klassenkampf gegen die Bauern. Die Zwangskollektivierung der ostdeutschen Landwirtschaft und ihre Folgen bis heute*. Berlin 2010, 47–66, esp. 47.

Brandenburg.⁴⁶ Under the motto *Junkerland in Bauernhand* (“Junker property into peasant hands”) Pieck portrayed the “reform” as an initiative from below: “What has not been accomplished, despite centuries of war and revolution in Germany, will now be achieved on the way to a democratic land reform. The Junker hold on power will be broken, and their land handed over to farmers and agricultural laborers.”⁴⁷ With this, Pieck expressed one of the central aims of the land reform: the elimination of National Socialism, which – in the interpretation given it at the time – was closely linked to the dominating Junker class. Traditional hierarchies in the rural areas were to be broken up and the structures and actors of the National Socialist regime were to be suppressed. In this sense, the land reform was classified as an “anti-fascist, democratic revolution” (*anti-faschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung*). Secondly, the reform was to serve as a cornerstone for the “building of Socialism” (*Aufbau des Sozialismus*). The new farmers were to represent farmers of the “new type”. Loyalty to the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, KPD) and the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) was to be promoted and an alliance between “farmers and the (industrial) working class” to be created. Thirdly, supply aspects were made a part of the desired aims. Therefore, radical redistribution was to offer “help to self-help” and to try to secure the supply of foodstuffs in the immediate post-war period. It was also intended to contribute to the integration of refugees and expellees who had flooded into the area.⁴⁸

The land reform completely overturned rural property relationships. Manor farmer families – as the “village elite” – were stripped of their power and had their property confiscated. With agricultural worker families and the refugees and expellees from former German and East European territories – designated as “resettlers” (*Umsiedler*) – two groups of people who had mostly up to that point been landless were to obtain property: the agricultural labourers, who had been

46 Jens Schöne: *Das sozialistische Dorf. Bodenreform und Kollektivierung in der Sowjetzone und DDR* (Schriftenreihe des Sächsischen Landesbeauftragten für die Stasi-Unterlagen 8). Leipzig 2008, 60–1; Jürgen Ast and Kerstin Mauersberger: *Zweite Heimat Brandenburg. Flucht, Vertreibung, Neuanfang*. Berlin 2000, 86–8. In 1985 a land reform memorial was dedicated in Kyritz. In 2015 there was supposed to be another memorial to celebrate the anniversary, but this has yet to be completed. Uta Bretschneider: Um-Deutungen – Zeitenössische und aktuelle Darstellungsmodi von Bodenreform und Kollektivierung, in: Markus Gloe et al. (eds.): *Standortbestimmung Deutschlandforschung* (Schriftenreihe der Gesellschaft für Deutschlandforschung 108). Berlin 2016, 35–54, esp. 51.

47 Wilhelm Pieck: *Junkerland in Bauernhand. Rede zur demokratischen Bodenreform Kyritz, 2. September 1945*. Berlin 1955, 20–1.

48 For further information see: Bretschneider, “Vom Ich zum Wir”?, 203–4.

dependent on the manor farm owners, and the “resettlers”, who had lost their livelihoods as a result of their forced migration. Such gifts of land were intended to make particularly loyal citizens of the recipients. Yet the idea bore little fruit. In general, however, the new farmers represented an excellent screen onto which ideological concepts could be projected. They were perhaps the first social group supposed to represent the “new socialist man”. And naturally, the “new socialist man” had to have an adequate “socialist architecture” with specified construction styles.

Frank Hager has assessed the situation as follows: “The new architecture had to befit the ‘new man’ and therefore to reflect both the socialist aim of total planning and the regional building traditions.”⁴⁹ This especially applied to the new farmsteads. The new farmers were a part of the founding mythology of the self-proclaimed “worker’s and peasant’s state” (*Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*) and therefore an important element in the GDR’s claim to legitimacy.⁵⁰

In the contemporary interpretation, the farmers that emerged from the land reform contributed to the establishment of the “alliance between farmers and the working class” (*Bündnis zwischen werktätigen Bauern und der Arbeiterklasse*): “The working farmers, freed in the antifascist-democratic revolution from oppression and economic exploitation, forged the alliance of the industrial workers and the agricultural workers and, at the same time, created a stable basis.”⁵¹ In accordance with the government’s plans, the new farmers were to make up ONE social group in the rural areas. However, in their composition they were extremely heterogeneous, particularly in their origins and agricultural know-how.

The buildings of the new farmers represent the culmination of political measures directed at controlling settlement and intervening in social development. Within village society, the new farmsteads were to represent a turn away from, indeed an opposition to, the architecture of the manor farm. As part of land reform, and as a consequence of the new farmstead program, about 2,000 manor farmhouses were torn down in the SOZ. Others were partially restored, but the key architectural features eliminated. It is estimated that by doing this, about 71 million bricks and approximately five million tiles were extracted for use in new construction.⁵²

⁴⁹ Hager, *Biographie und Beruf*, 171.

⁵⁰ See Spieker, *Neubauern*.

⁵¹ Kurt Groschoff et al.: *Genossenschaftsbauern – gestern, heute, morgen. Die Klasse der Genossenschaftsbauern im Prozess der Gestaltung der industriemäßig produzierenden Landwirtschaft in der DDR*. Berlin 1977, 19.

⁵² Jens Schöne: *Die Landwirtschaft der DDR 1945–1990*. Erfurt 2005, 16.

The price for pushing both ideology and material acquisition was the irretrievable loss of historic landmarks. Yet contemporary policy insisted that “[t]here can be no doubt that the manor house lost its right to existence with the disappearance of the class that it served. If such a building cannot be reconfigured to serve the new needs, its demolition is only a matter of time.”⁵³ With the elimination of the previous hierarchies, the corresponding architecture was also to be expunged from collective memory. In a sense, the buildings were punished in lieu of their owners. This highly symbolic act invested houses with a certain agency as embodiments of rule in the village landscape standing in the way of changing power relations.

In this sense, many of the answers offered by Anke Rees, a scholar in cultural studies, are applicable to the question of what the buildings have to do with the people, and in particular the manor houses. “They tempt, steer, keep secret, and block. They protect and preserve, close and hide, open and expand. They awake emotions and memories.”⁵⁴ Rees adds: “You can’t just do anything you want with them. They ‘go underground’, or they stumble along, reassert themselves and occasionally collapse.”⁵⁵ Some of these manor houses “went underground” and became useful for public service. Kindergartens, senior citizens’ residences, and hospitals all found homes in such places. This was symbol-laden reutilization, which turned places for the few into places for the many, the common people of the villages.

Along with the intended visibility of the new economic order, the new farmsteads made visible – unintentionally – the social status of the new farmers as “emergency farmers” (*Notbauern*). In other words, the intended look of “opposition” came at the cost of an unintended stigmatization. Many new farmsteads remained provisional for a long time. As soon as physically possible, families moved into the core farmhouses, which were sparsely furnished and often without running water. As late as 1949, nearly half of the new farmsteads were without electricity.⁵⁶ Sometimes, the buildings remained in their provisional state for a long time. One interviewee explained: “The other rooms were never finished because somewhere, something was always missing. I mean, every Mark that came our way was immediately spent on something that was more important at the time. So the other things never got taken care of. And my father was not exactly a great carpenter.”⁵⁷

53 Walter Ohle: Ehemalige Guts- und Herrenhäuser in Mecklenburg, in: *Denkmalpflege in Mecklenburg* (1951/52), 90–113, esp. 92.

54 Anke Rees: *Das Gebäude als Akteur. Architekturen und ihre Atmosphären*. Zürich 2016, 16.

55 Ibid.

56 Bauerkämper, *Problemdruck*, 318.

57 Bärbel Lohner, line 865.

Reutilization | Reinterpretation

Besides the political intervention and influence – state control – that came with the new farmsteads, the subjective processes of adaptation require consideration. In various ways, the given construction types were made into unique buildings that the residents created for themselves. On the one hand, they created as much of a cosy or liveable atmosphere as circumstances allowed. On the other, they created a working space to match their needs, because plans that appeared as logical and rational on paper did not necessarily prove so in practice.

One way of adapting was permanent work on the buildings. This was necessary to compensate for the difficult supply and personnel situation, but it also meant that the owners could make their future home through their own physical labor. Individual work and adaptive measures are closely linked in such instances. A building that was made possible only through borrowed capital on unknown land was made into one's own by working on it with one's own "sweat and blood". In addition, a garden could represent a form of adaptation – here the new farmer family could make use of the land around their home, thereby also making it their own.

Another form of adaptation came in the form of deviation from the prescribed designs. One interviewee described the possibilities: "My father tried to turn a curse into a blessing. He spoke with the construction people. He said: 'What could we at least touch up a bit? Because that size will not do at all for a proper new farmstead. It may be OK for the collective farms, but that's it.'⁵⁸ The father had the stairs into the upper floor arranged differently. Instead of a crawl-space basement, the building got a full proper cellar. In order to enlarge the attic space, he had a jamb wall installed.

The gardens located next to the new farmer house offered opportunities to adapt the new surrounding by working the soil and growing plants as well. It is needless to say that the kitchen gardens in addition played an important role for the food supply of families.

Ultimately, the new farmer families changed and added to the prescribed building designs in the course of time. Most of all, with the transformation wrought by collectivization in the years 1952 to 1960, the small farms lost their role as a microcosm of living and working. Therefore, they could be reutilized and converted – at least as far as lack of material and government restrictions permitted.

⁵⁸ Rudolf Peters, born 1940. Fled with his family in January 1945 from Waldheide, Silesia (today Świętoszyn, Poland). After many stops along the way, they settled in Altenhain (Interview 8 March 2013), line 5.

Especially after the German reunification 1989/90 the former land reform buildings were transformed into modern one or two family houses. As it was no longer necessary to use parts of the new farmer houses for agriculture, the areas of livestock and storage turned into living areas as well. Contemporary building materials were used and the seriality of the post war period was turned into a seriality of the mushrooming DIY markets. Nevertheless the land reform farmhouses are identifiable as such until today in many Eastern German villages.

Conclusion

This period of the land reform economy was determined by a series of problems. There was a lack of financial resources, personnel, specialized knowledge, agricultural equipment, livestock, and buildings. Unlike established farming businesses, the new farmer families had to struggle with an array of shortages. To hand over agricultural products was a particular burden, because farmers had to simultaneously build up a working business while paying the state its due. Most – especially in the case of the so-called “resettlers” – could not fall back on a social network that could have offered them support. Not least, they lacked any kind of continuity or tradition, as well as equipment and knowledge, which are so central to the successful running an agricultural business of an old farm family.

In addition, many of the new farmer families used part of the existing manor houses for community purposes. Thus they were actually “farmers without homesteads” for a long time. On top of that, the newly built new farmsteads – most of which were set up as *Streckhöfe* – put a face on the strangeness of the new farmers in their new roles and in the expanded structures of the village. The new farmsteads made it very clear to everyone what the problems of ownership were in the land reform economy – limited property rights and thus the power of state control over the whole process.

As mentioned above, the difficulties of the special status of the new farmers drove them to become the main protagonists in the collectivization of agricultural lands that culminated in the so-called “Socialist Spring” (*Sozialistischer Frühling*) of 1960. In the course of this radical transformation process, the rural areas of the GDR once again underwent shifts in their social structure. New forms of management as well as different forms of village architecture were established. To mention just one example, the prescribed material for large animal stalls and blocks of flats was now concrete in a style that had only, up to that point, been seen in the cities.



Figure 4: New farmer house in the open-air museum AGRONEUM, © Uta Bretschneider, 2014.

The new farmsteads can be analyzed as an intersection of state measures social-political and regime legitimating and individual adaption processes. Particularly interesting in this respect is that the buildings, although the new farmer economy in the SOZ/GDR existed only from 1945 to (at the latest) 1960, its architectural legacy is still present and visible today in the rural landscape of eastern Germany. Nevertheless, a deeper study and mapping of these regions has yet to be done.

Since the 1970s, at least four new farmsteads have found a new use in museums. These are the Hennebergisches Museum Kloster Veßra, the Thünen-Museum Tellow, the Deutsches Landwirtschaftsmuseum Schloss Blankenhain, and the AGRONEUM Alt Schwerin (Figure 4). And, although they were converted to museums at different times (1970s, 1980s and in the middle of the 1990s), they still reflect the standard GDR interpretation of the land reform as a success. None of the problems addressed above, the various and overlapping crises and the high number of farmsteads that had to be given up, are discussed in these museums.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See Bretschneider, *Um-Deutungen*.



Figure 5: Land reform monument in Großfurra, © Uta Bretschneider, 2013.

On the question of the legal confirmation of the land reform, there have been heated juridical and political debates since 1990, some of which have yet to die down. On the one hand, there are the families from whom everything was confiscated in 1945 without any compensation, who are fighting to obtain some sort of restitution. On the other hand, there are the families who, since the collapse of

the GDR, have been fearing for the property that is theirs since the land reform.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the laws and decisions in these matters are a vast theme that is beyond the scope of this paper.

In summing up, let us return to the beginning, and with this, let us go back to Großfurra-Neuheide. Here, a memorial plaque dedicated in 1965 may be found (Figure 5). It bears the inscription: “*Junkerland in Bauernhand: 20 years of democratic land reform, 1945–1965. The first New Farmer Settlement in Germany.*” (Figure 5) Of special interest is the line: “first New Farmer settlement in Germany”. Today, this plaque is the only hint of this particular aspect of history in the area.

The Central Monument List of the GDR (*Zentrale Denkmalliste*) listed the new farmsteads and the memorial plaque in Großfurra in 1979 under the rubric “Memorial to the Culture and Life of the working classes of the people” (*Denkmale zur Kultur und Lebensweise der werktätigen Klassen und Schichten des Volkes*).⁶¹ The Thuringia Memorial Law of 1992 confirmed the status of the location. However, in 2004 it was struck from the list of monuments.⁶² The residents repeatedly had defied the stipulations, and the once standardized new farmsteads were completely altered through roof-surface windows, canopies, glass roof tiles, etc. – another form of adaption, and indeed in a very stubborn form.

60 Under certain circumstances, the following applied: Whoever was not working in agriculture on 15 March 1990, or who had not worked at least 10 years in agriculture, had their land reform property returned to the state. Hans Modrow and Hans Watzek (eds.): *Junkerland in Bauernhand. Die deutsche Bodenreform und ihre Folgen*. Berlin 2005.

61 Gesetzesblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin, 5 Oct. 1979, special print no. 1017, Bekanntmachung der zentralen Denkmalliste, 25 Sept. 1979, 7.

62 Ortmann, *Zwischen Aufbruch und Verwerfung*, 110 ff.