

**German Outpost Born of Racism in 1887 Blends Into Paraguay**  
**By Simon Romero, Nueva Germania Journal; in: The New York Times**  
**5 May 2013**

***A Lost Colony in Paraguay:** Nueva Germania was founded by German immigrants looking to start an Aryan colony in the late 1800s. It failed, but remnants of German culture remain.*

NUEVA GERMANIA, Paraguay — The year was 1887 when two of the best-known German anti-Semites of the time put down stakes here in Paraguay's remote jungle with 14 German families screened for their racial purity.

The team of Bernhard Förster and his wife, Elisabeth, the sister of the philosopher [Friedrich Nietzsche](#), had an ambitious plan: nothing less than the establishment of a colony from which an advance contingent of Aryans could forge a claim to the entire South American continent.

But the continent had other plans for this new Fatherland.

"Some were able to survive," said Lidia Fischer, 38, a blonde-haired descendant of a family that was among Nueva Germania's first settlers. Those pioneers struggled with disease, failed crops, infighting and the megalomania of the Försters, who lorded over the colony from an elegant mansion called the Försterhof.

"Some returned to Germany," said Ms. Fischer in an interview on her farm, where she lives with her husband and their five children. "Some committed suicide."

Within two years the dream had been shattered, and today the Försterhof, where a sign that read "Over all obstacles, stand your ground" once hung on the wall, lies in ruins. The forest grows over its charred remains. Not long after founding the outpost and envisioning its mission as the "purification and rebirth of the human race," Mr. Förster grew despondent over Nueva Germania's progress. He swallowed a mixture of morphine and strychnine, killing himself in 1889.

Mr. Förster's wife left Paraguay in 1893 for Germany, where she spent her later years staining her brother's reputation. While Nietzsche derided anti-Semitism and expressed disdain in correspondence with his sister for the anti-Semitic character of Nueva Germania, she went on to reinvent his legacy after his death in 1900, transforming the philosopher into a kind of prophet for the Nazi propaganda machine.

Somehow, the remote settlement the Försters left behind survived, drawing meager income from the cultivation of the yerba mate tree, the leaves of which are used to make tereré, the infused drink consumed across Paraguay. In what would be a shock to its founders, today's Nueva Germania has skewed sharply from its mission of elevating the white race with Aryan pioneers.

While there are still a few blond-haired children running around, after generations of intermarriage, many of the town's 4,300 residents have German surnames but are indiscernible from other Paraguayans. Nueva Germania's dominant language is Guaraní, the [indigenous language](#) widely spoken in Paraguay; even those families who still hew to old ways, speaking German at home, mix it with high-pitched, nasal Guaraní and some Spanish.

Describing a towering tree in the yard of her farm with few branches around its trunk, making it daunting to climb, Ms. Fischer, the descendant of Nueva Germania's pioneers, called it simply "ka'i kyhyjeha," an indigenous term roughly translating as "monkey's fear." "Guaraní and German are so different from each other," she said, "but they mix well for us."

The poverty that persists in Nueva Germania also makes it stand in contrast to some other agricultural colonies in Paraguay founded by European immigrants, like the prosperous Mennonite towns where new pickup trucks barrel down country roads. Some descendants of the first German

colonists here scrape by as subsistence farmers, moving crops like cassava, an important staple, on horse-drawn carts.

In hindsight, it might seem absurd for ideologues from across the seas to have hinged their dreams on impoverished Paraguay. But this landlocked nation, with territory about the size of California, has a long history of luring utopian settlements.

In 1893, a teetotaling faction of Australia's labor movement created [Nueva Australia](#), which survives to this day. [Finnish vegetarians](#) started Colonia Villa Alborada in the 1920s. More recently, [Sun Myung Moon](#), the founder of the Unification Church who died in 2012, bought 1.5 million acres of Paraguayan land and sent an advance group of followers to set up a "[Victorious Holy Place](#)."

Few projects had the ambitions, however, of Nueva Germania. From the start, the Försters envisioned it as an idyllic "Naumburg on the Aguarya-umi" river, where crops would grow in abundance and Lutherans could worship in isolation away from Jewish influence, as the writer Ben Macintyre recounts in "[Forgotten Fatherland](#)," a 1992 book on the colony and its founders.

While some people from other parts of Paraguay have settled here over the years, aspects of the town seem aimed at a tenuous connection to Europe, like the two unfinished, fortresslike towers, built in mock-medieval style, greeting travelers on the road into town. Light posts are decorated with the colors of both the German and Paraguayan flags.

A one-room museum, while lacking electricity, provides visitors with a simplistic account of Nueva Germania's origins, focusing on the hardship that the colonists had to overcome. The museum remains locked on most days, the key to its door held by Waltraud Kück, 48, who also operates a boardinghouse for children from the countryside who attend school in the town.

"We don't get many visitors," Ms. Kück said one recent afternoon. "A man came from Ciudad del Este not long ago, wanting to speak only in German."

Away from the town, in adobe houses built near winding dirt roads, some of Nueva Germania's residents are taken aback when asked about the racist ideology that propelled their ancestors to come here in the first place.

"We don't like to talk about that," said Brigitte Haudenschild, 60, on the porch of the farmhouse where she cares for her parents. "Life isn't easy here, you know?" she added, describing how she had to bake cakes and sell them door to door in Nueva Germania in order to buy food for her children.

But others are more forthcoming about their views.

"According to the experts, they say that Germans have the best judgment in the world, and then come the Koreans, or rather, the Japanese," said Guillermo Fischer, 40, a farmer. "And Paraguayans come in last place," he added, within earshot of his Paraguayan wife, Delia, 28, who is not of German ancestry but has learned to speak German fluently.

Nueva Germania's first wave of colonists was reinforced in subsequent decades by some other German-speaking families, reflecting Paraguay's openness to accepting German immigrants, especially after [World War II](#) during the 35-year dictatorship of [Gen. Alfredo Stroessner](#), who was the son of a brewer who had immigrated from Germany.

Josef Mengele, the Nazi doctor who did experiments on concentration camp inmates, fled to Paraguay after the war and lived under his own name in [Hohenau](#), a German farming colony near the borders with Argentina and Brazil. He was said to have passed through Nueva Germania, but proof of that contact remains elusive.

Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche did not survive to see Paraguay shelter Nazi war criminals, but she counseled and supported the Nazis until her death at age 89 in 1935, when Hitler gave her a state memorial service.

The colony is less isolated than it once was. The road to the capital, Asunción, has been paved, reducing by about half the seven hours it once took to get here by bus. After the Försterhof was destroyed in a fire, one of the only testaments left to the philosopher's sister is a sign on a peaceful street.

The name on the sign is spelled "Elizabeth Nigtz Chen."

*Nadia Sussman contributed reporting.*

© The New York Times