Chapter 11

The Emigration to Tsarist Russia

Hördt and neighboring villages under the French occupation

What effect did these turbulent events of the Revolutionary and Napeoleonic years have on Jacob Landeis and his family in Hördt? The bare facts recorded in the church books and civil registries reveal little of the impact that all this chaos had on the daily lives of the people. The villagers were at great risk during the battles in the early years of the Revolutionary era and they suffered enormous privations as armies swept through their area. One account was recorded of a major, bloody battle between the French and the allied German forces at nearby Leimersheim on April 3, 1793, during which the French lost 300 soldiers. As the French army retreated, they hastily buried their dead and tore down the cross atop the church in Leimersheim. According to local lore, so much blood covered the ground that when a passing farmer saw it, he shouted in horror, "with my soul," and that area today is still known as the *Seelhof* (place of the dead souls).

Jacob and Anna Marie were married in 1789, the same year when the French Revolution erupted. One positive indicator that he was able to provide for his young family is the ongoing record, from his marriage in Leimersheim through the birth of all eight of his children in Hördt from 1790 to 1804. This suggests that the family was not dislocated in the first years of turmoil, nor during the Great Flight of 1793, which affected Alsace and the neighboring Pfalz. The fact that Jacob continued having children at roughly two year intervals indicates that he was able to maintain some domestic security. The baptismal records for his children from 1790 to 1794 refer to him as the crop measurer for the Administration in Hördt. After that date, the baptismal records refer to him simply as a "citizen" of the town. This may hint that he lost his position at the warehouse, perhaps as part of a purge of local officials by the French Revolutionaries, and it may also hint at the adoption of the jargon of the Revolutionary era, with its emphasis on "citizens." A more likely conclusion is that it reflects differences in the formulaic phrases of the parish priests. Fr. Kröhl was the pastor until 1793, after which he probably fled across the Rhine to escape the anti-clerical pogrom by the French military, which targeted local priests and monasteries. Several of the church books in the Pfalz report that their pastors left at that time. After Fr. Kröhl's departure, there was a rapid turn-over of three different priests at Hördt, each of whom used slightly different phrasing in the church records. It should also be noted that after the French take-over, births were recorded in a civil registry and baptisms were recorded in the church book.

Most of the local villagers were conscripted to build fortifications for the French military. In order to anchor their new conquests in the Pfalz, the French created a massively fortified line of defense, extending from the strategic crossing on the Rhine at Germersheim, to their fortress at Landau, Saarlouis, then all the way to Luxembourg. To support all this construction, they imposed heavy demands on the local villagers for conscripted laborers.

Documents from this period also show that the residents in Hördt, Leimersheim, and nearby Germersheim suffered greatly from the tax levies, the requisitioning of supplies, and billeting French troops. The citizens of Germersheim complained that 84,999 *Guilders* worth of

supplies were taken from them in 1792-93. In addition 1,300 laborers from Germersheim were conscripted for the construction of fortifications.[1]

The chronicles of Leimersheim report that at least eight young men lost their lives serving in the French armies during the Napoleonic wars. Jacob Landeis was apparently able to avoid being conscripted into the military because married men were exempt from the draft; indeed, there was an explosion of marriages in France and in the occupied territories during those years as young men sought to avoid conscription. His two sons, Adam and Anton, were of course too young to be affected by these measures.

It is also known that Leimersheim and other villages along the Rhine became centers for smuggling across the river. A customs station was established at the ferry site there in 1801. The local citizens were well acquainted with the back-waters of the Rhine, so they became engaged in a lively illegal trade back and forth across the river. The major commodities that were smuggled included wine, tobacco, oil, cast-iron goods, and madder-roots, which were used for red dye. The trade was dangerous, but lucrative. The mayor of Leimersheim at that time, named Horn, and the local clergyman, Pastor Bolz, requested that this illegal trade be halted, but to no avail. A customs patrol was stationed there to police the banks of the Rhine, but they were unable to stem the tide of goods. In 1810 a contingent of French troops was added to the patrol. That year a group of 12 smugglers was caught with a large quantity of linseed oil. A fire-fight erupted, one of the border-guards was shot, and the smugglers escaped. In gratitude for their narrow escape, they planned to erect a cross in secrecy in the cemetery at Leimersheim. However, one of the smugglers told his girlfriend about the incident and she later betrayed him to the French. All 12 men were arrested and imprisoned in Strasbourg. One of them, Johann Schardt, was tortured and died afterward in prison on January 18, 1812. Johann Ziemer wanted to take responsibility for the venture in order to spare his comrades. Ziemer was guillotined in Strasbourg on October 20, 1812. The others were imprisoned in chains for several years. They lived to tell their story, which was preserved for posterity after German troops marched into the city and freed all prisoners in 1814. The cross was later erected in the cemetery, as they had planned, and it bears the names of the 12 men with the date 1811. It is locally known as the “smugglers' cross.”[2]

Emigration fever sweeps the Rhinelands: the lure of Russia

During these troubled times another wave of emigration fever soon developed, fueled by religious speculations that the chaos of these times might indeed be portents of the impending Biblical Apocalypse. German farmers and townspeople were intensely religious and the millenarian theme was part of their folk Christian beliefs. The prophetic books of the Bible and other apocryphal Sibylline works had circulated for centuries, and this undercurrent of apocalyptic speculation often surfaced during periods of warfare and upheaval. Some identified Napoleon with the Anti-Christ.[3] In Württemberg the prophet Jung Stilling foretold

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[1] Blanning 1983, p. 114, 123.

[2] Schmitz 1993.

[3] In an earlier article (Wagner 1999) I discussed the Sibylline prophecies that were popular in German regions, which were taken with them to Tsarist Russia where they circulated widely in

that the last days were at hand and that believers should emigrate to South Russia, which would be their refuge when the Second Coming of Christ happened.

Russian monarchs fueled this emigration fever because they sought to attract foreigners to establish colonies along their frontiers, especially along the Volga and the Black Sea coast. In 1763 Catherine II of Russia (reigned 1762-1796), herself of German origin, issued her famous invitation to German immigrants to settle along the Volga river, near Saratov. Catherine had several motives for her decree. It was hoped that the German colonists would provide strategic food materials for her eastern army, as well as stimulate the general agricultural development of her country. The Volga colonies were also intended to be a buffer zone, following the same strategy of Austria-Hungary a century earlier when it had established the so-called *Donau Schwaben* settlements in the Banat region. Catherine wanted to anchor the eastern fringe of her empire against the raids by the Cossacks and other nomadic tribesmen from the steppes of central Asia, which had plagued the empire for centuries. By turning steppeland into productive farms, the Germans would remove much of the open grazing land that was essential for the nomadic lifestyle.

Within four years of Catherine's invitation, 27,000 Germans had settled in the Volga region, founding 104 villages on both sides of the river. Many Mennonites also emigrated to Russia at this time from the Danzig region, accompanied by Lutherans who established villages in adjacent areas in the Jekaterinoslav (modern Dniepropetrovsk) and Taurida districts near the Sea of Azov. The early years were difficult for the German settlers. Besides freezing Russian winters, they had to endure the frequent raids of the Cossacks.

The peace treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardschi with the Ottoman Turks in 1774 allowed Russia to acquire the territory between the Bug and Dnieper rivers and the right for commercial navigation on the Black Sea. The Crimea was incorporated into the Russian empire in 1783. In 1789 the area along the north shore of the Black Sea was absorbed, including Odessa. Wide stretches of the steppelands along the north shore were virtually uninhabited and it was imperative that it be settled as quickly as possible in order to solidify Russia's claim to the area. The use of Russian peasants was not feasible because most of them were serfs at that period of history, bound to the estates of the nobility. In 1789 Catherine extended an invitation once again for German colonists, attracting large numbers of Mennonites, who settled in the Chortitza, near Jekaterinoslav.

In 1804 Catherine's grandson, Tsar Alexander I, continued her policies and planned the creation of a broad fan of German colonies along the north shore of the Black Sea. As before, the intention was that this would serve as a stable buffer zone on the lower fringe of his empire and an anchor for his claim to the Black Sea trade. Alexander issued a Manifesto inviting settlers to the Ukraine, offering them several privileges:

1. Freedom of religion in all ways.
2. Ten years freedom from taxes and other such encumbrances.

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the German colonies. Tsar Alexander I, who was noted for his deep piety, was greatly impressed by these apocalyptic notions, especially those which assigned a central role to Russia. When Tsar Alexander defeated Napoleon in 1812, local preachers proclaimed that he was the "white eagle," prophesied in the Book of Revelations, who would defeat the "black angel," the Antichrist, identified as Napoleon.

3. After the ten free years, colonists will be equally subjected, as the other Russians of the Empire, with the exception that they are not subject to provide quarters for soldiers, except when they are marching through.

4. Freedom from recruitment as well as civil service; however, they are at liberty to enter services for the Highest Crown, but it will not free them from having to repay the debt to the Crown.

5. Each settler will receive an advance and they are to repay it within 10 years after the ten free years expire.

6. Each family can bring their goods (furniture) free of toll, and in addition can bring with them goods for resale, total value not to exceed 300 Rubels.

7. Tradesmen can enter legal contracts and guilds. They can practice their trades throughout the Russian Empire.

8. All the suffering has ended in the Russian Empire due to the generosity of His Majesty, the Russian Emperor.

9. Each family will receive usable acreage of 30 to 80 *Dessjatines* free for its use from the Highest Crown. Each family can use the land without payment to the Highest Crown. The tax which each family must pay after the ten free years is, next to police affairs, the basic tax, a yearly amount of 15 to 20 *Kopeks* per *Dessjatine*.

10. Those who want to leave the Russian Empire to return to their homeland have to pay the debts to the Crown and a three year tax for the use of the land.

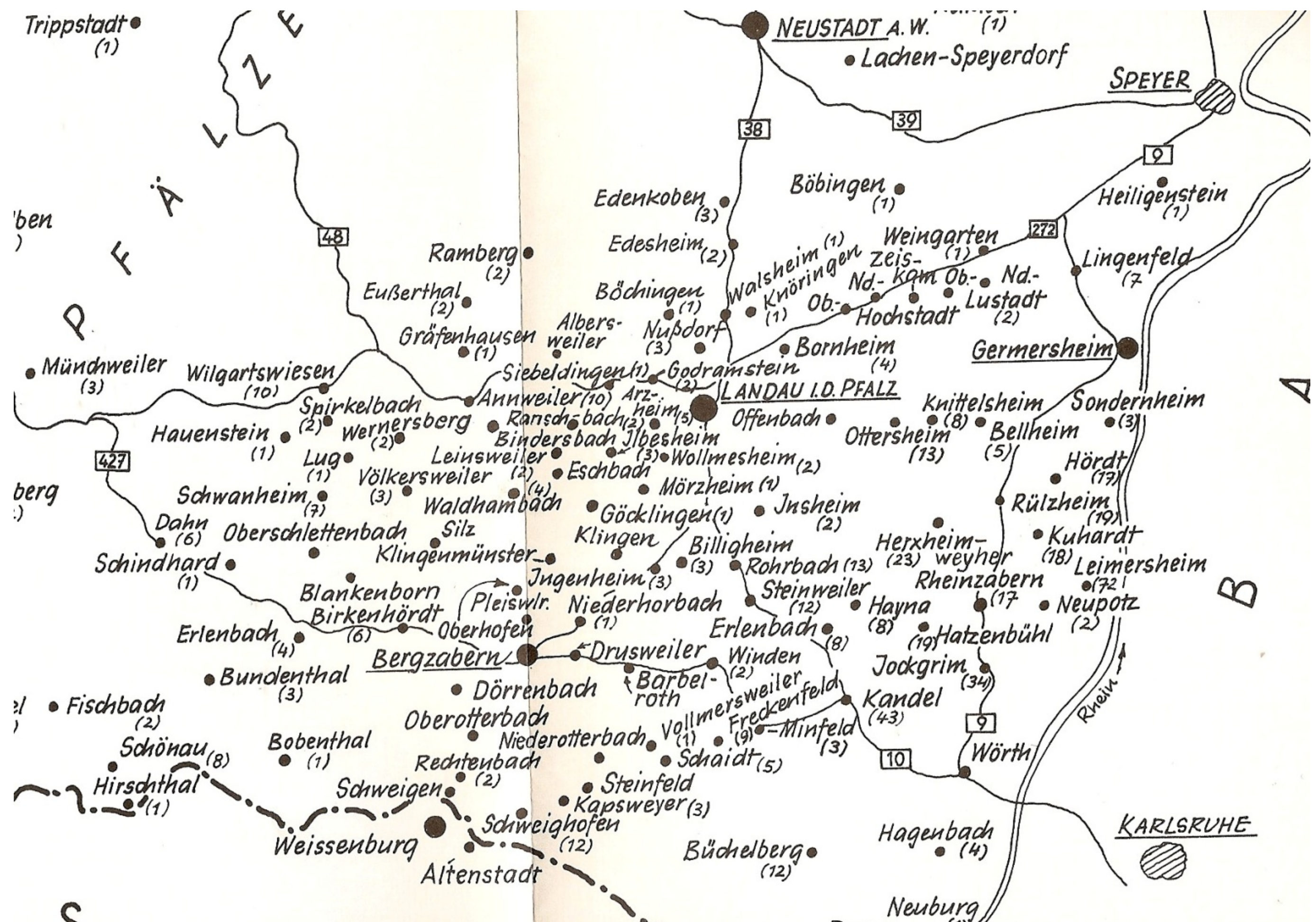
The Manifesto was published by the Russian Empire Colony Transportation Department in Lauingen, on April 20, 1804. Tsar Alexander was on friendly terms with Napoleon at that point, so the French allowed his agents to recruit emigrants in Germany. The invitation was first announced from three Russian embassies -- in Ulm, Frankfurt, and Regensburg. Initially the Tsar had planned to pay the expenses for only 200 families per year. However, word of the immigration offer spread quickly and another mass emigration fever soon gripped the populace throughout the Palatinate, Baden, Württemberg and Alsace. Many families from Alsace and the neighboring Pfalz were refugees who had fled during the "Great Flight" of the French Revolution, and who had been displaced from their farms. During that first year, at least 800 families responded to the offer.

The first wave of emigrants in 1804 converged at Ulm, and they were transported down the Danube on river barges, known as *Ulmer Schachtel*, to Vienna. There they were organized into wagon trains for the journey to the Russian border town of Brody/Radzivilov. After a stay for quarantine, they continued south to Odessa. The first colonies were founded in 1804 near Odessa, in an area which came to be known as the Liebenthal enclave.

French officials became alarmed by the size of the exodus from Alsace and tried to stem the outflow. Emigration was temporarily halted when the alliance between Tsar Alexander I and Napoleon collapsed. In 1805 the French waged a series of military campaigns against the Russians and Austrians. After Alexander's defeat, he once again signed a treaty with Napoleon, then resumed his plans for luring immigrants. In 1808 he issued another official invitation for colonists, and expanded his recruiting efforts by commissioning his agents to issue passports from his embassies in Karlsruhe and Vienna. The emigration wave of 1809 drew people primarily from the same areas as before -- the Palatinate, Alsace, Baden, Württemberg, and

Hesse -- the areas that were hardest hit by the turmoil and the military occupation of the French armies.

By 1810 Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I were enemies once again, and emigration to the Black Sea area was effectively halted. However, Germans continued settling in other parts of eastern Europe. In 1814 the colonization of Bessarabia began, which came into Russia's possession in 1812. Between 1817 and 1820 a wave of colonists were drawn to the Trans-Caucasus area, near Tiflis, inspired by a belief in the impending millennium. The goal of these religious "Chiliasts" was to be as close to Palestine as possible, but many ended up settling north of Odessa. Another wave came in the 1860s when German settlements were established in Volhynia (currently in eastern Poland). A final influx of colonists came as late as the 1870s from Alsace and Lorraine, when the French began conscripting men for the war with Prussia.



The Pfalz, showing numbers of emigrants in 1809[4]

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[4] This map was compiled by Karl Stumpp (1973) at some point after World War Two, using the information that was available at the time. The number of emigrants shown for each village is a conservative estimate.

In total, it is estimated that at least 100,000 Germans emigrated to Russia from 1763 through the 1860s. They founded 300 "mother" colonies, and over time they branched out into at least 3,000 "daughter" colonies. By the 1870s there were approximately 450,000 ethnic Germans in various portions of the Russian empire. By the end of the 19th century their numbers had climbed to about 1,800,000 and they were one of the largest ethnic groups in Tsarist Russia.

The journey to South Russia in 1809

The lure of free farmland in the Black Sea region, fueled by rumors of the extravagent harvests yielded from its virgin soil, sparked major waves of emigration throughout southwestern Germany. In some villages the chronicles report that half of the residents packed up for departure, and in a few cases villages were left virtually empty. In the latter part of May, 1809, it was recorded that 110 residents of Leimersheim left for Bessarabia and the Ukraine, including virtually all members of the families with the surnames of Gehrlein, Heid, Heintz, Kuhn, Lösch, Müller, Pfadt, Schaaf, Schardt, Schwab, Weschler, and Wolf.[5] Karl Stumpp's map (above) shows 17 emigrants from Hördt and 72 from Leimersheim. Jacob Landeis' family, including his mother-in-law, Margaret Messmann, were in the emigrant party of 1809.

The Russian consul at Frankfurt am Main, named von Bethmann, issued passports (*Reisepassen*) to the immigrants in 1809. More than 250 passports have survived -- fortunately including that of Jacob Landeis. Jacob's passport states that he brought his wife (Anna Maria), his mother-in-law, and six of his children. His mother-in-law Margaret was a widow at that time, her husband Josef Messmann(g) had died on Feb. 12, 1769. All three of their sons – Adam, Anton, and Daniel – accompanied them to Russia and they appear on later Tsarist census records. One of their daughters, Maria Catherine, had died in infancy. Maria Petronilla doesn't appear in later Russian censuses, so she may have been married by 1809 and chose to remain behind with her husband – or perhaps she too emigrated but had a new married surname. Franzisca is also not mentioned in the Russia census, and there is no apparent explanation for this since she would have been too young for marriage at the time of their departure.

The second page of Jacob's passport shows the complete itinerary of his journey to the Ukraine, recorded by the seals and the dates for the various towns through which he passed. Some of the dates on the passport are given in two forms -- the "old style" Julian calendar, which was in use by the Russian government until 1918, and the "new style" date which is based on the Gregorian calendar. In the 19th century the Julian calendar was 12 days behind the Gregorian.

Von Bethmann issued hundreds of passports in the early summer of 1809. Each week a new wagon train of emigrants embarked on the journey to the east. About 1,100 families departed between May and late November. When Jacob's group departed, the Danube river route was unsafe for transit because Napoleon was conducting a military campaign in the

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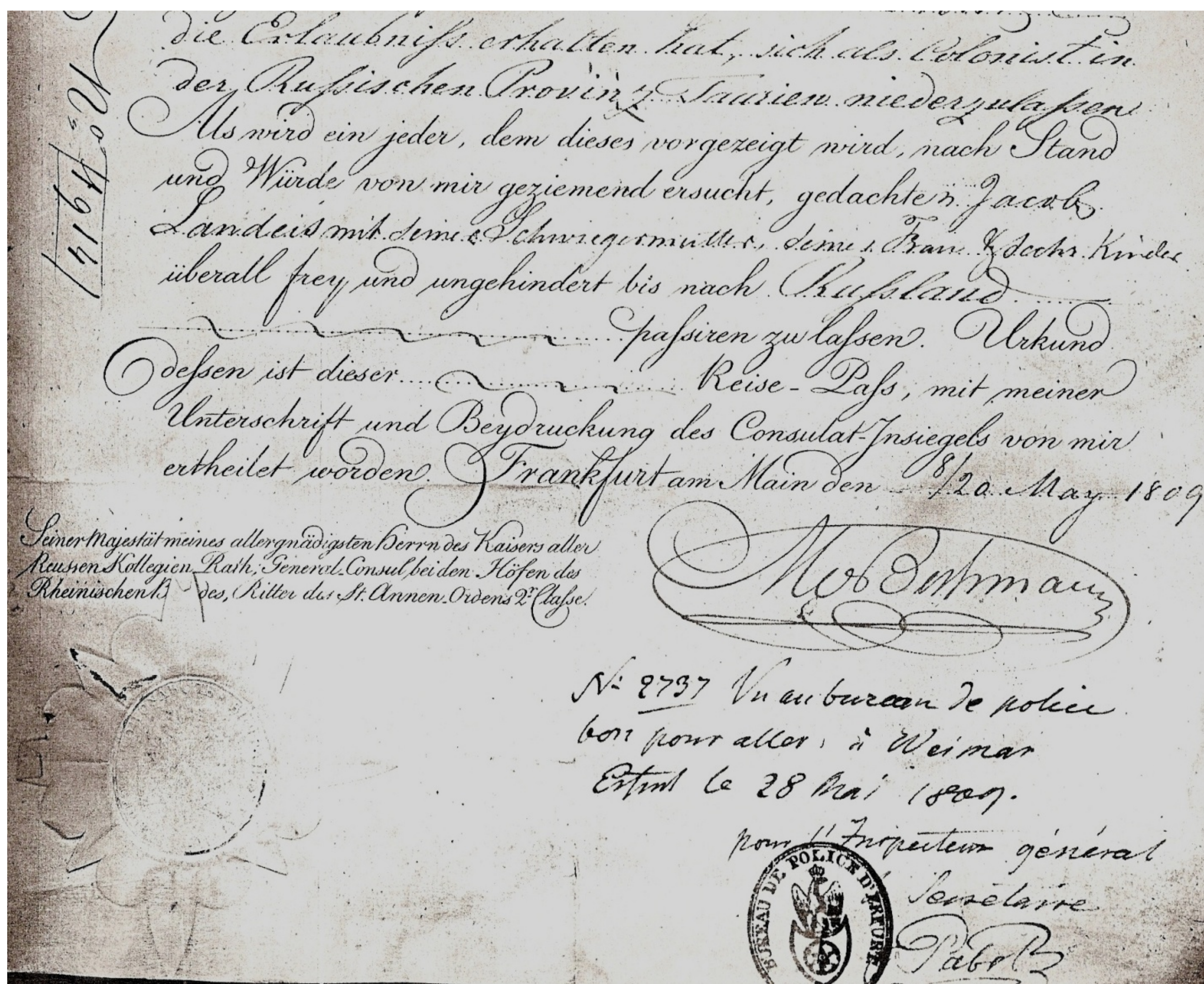
[5] Cited in Hodapp, no date.

Auf Befehl
Sr. Majestaet des Kaisers
Alexander Pawlowitsch,
Selbstherrschers aller Reussen
u.s.w. u.s.w. u.s.w.
Thue hiemit allen, denen daran gelegen, kund und zu wissen, dass
Vorzeiger dieses Jacob Landeiß von Hördt

Jacob Landeis Passport 1809 (top half)

"By Command
of His Majesty the Emperor
Alexander Pavlovich
Autocrat of all the Russias, etc. etc. etc.
I herewith make known to all concerned, that the bearer of this, <u>Jacob Landeiss from Hördt</u> ….
(continued on bottom)



die Erlaubniß erhalten hat, sich als Colonist in
der Rußischen Provinz Taurien niederzulaßen.
Als wird ein jeder, dem dieses vorgezeigt wird, nach Stand
und Würde von mir geziemend ersucht, gedachten Jacob
Landeis mit seiner Schwiegermutter, seiner Frau & sechs Kinder
überall frey und ungehindert bis nach Rußland
paßiren zu laßen. Urkund
deßen ist dieser Reise-Paß, mit meiner
Unterschrift und Beydruckung des Consulat-Insiegels von mir
ertheilet worden. Frankfurt am Main den 8/20 May 1809

Seiner Majestät meines allergnädigsten Herrn des Kaisers aller
Reussen Kollegien Rath, General Consul bei den Höfen des
Rheinischen B[un]des, Ritter des St. Annen Ordens 2r Classe.

M. v. Bethmann

No 2737 Vu au bureau de police
bon pour aller à Weimar
Erfurt le 28 Mai 1809.
pour l'Inspecteur général
le Secrétaire
Pabst

BUREAU DE POLICE D'ERFURT

Jacob Landeis Passport 1809 (bottom half)

… has received permission to settle as colonist in the Russian Province Taurida. Everyone to whom this is shown, according to rank and office, is requested by me as is proper to allow the aforesaid <u>Jacob Landeiss with his mother-in-law, his wife and six children</u>, to pass everywhere free and unhindered to Russia. In witness thereof this passport is issued by me with my signature and imprint of the Consular Seal, Frankfurt am Main, 8/20, May 1809. (The small script on the lower left states:) Collegiate Consul of His Majesty, my most noble Lord the Emperor of all the Russias, Consul General at the courts of the Rhine Federation, Knight of St. Anne, second class. (Signature) M. Bettmann. (The handwritten note at bottom states:) No. 2737, Inspected at the Bureau of Police. Good for traveling to Weimar. Effective May 28, 1809, the Inspector General Secretary, Pabetz (seal of the Bureau of Police of Erfurt)."

upper Danube valley against Austria in 1809, and a series of engagements took place in the spring and summer of the year (the battles of Abensberg, Landshut, and Wagram); therefore, a longer, more circuitous overland route was adopted, which took the emigrants through the German states of Saxony and Silesia, the Polish province of Galicia which was under Austrian sovereignty, then down to Odessa. The overland route to the Russian frontier was 1,600 miles and it took about 45 days travel time (not including the time spent in quarantine at Radzivilov, plus additional time going from the Russian border to Odessa). Each family usually had its own wagon, drawn by two horses. The wagons were similar in style to the Conestoga wagons used in America, which were also developed by wainwrights from the Palatinate.[6]

Jacob Landeis' group included 71 families total. They departed from Frankfurt am Mein on May 20, 1809 ("new style" date). Their route initially took them to Erfurt in Saxony, from which they departed on May 28 to Weimar; on June 1 they departed from Leipzig toward Breslau and Brody in Silesia; on June 22 from Babice (Poland); on June 25 from Myslenice through Bochnia (Galicia); on June 26 from Bochnia to Tarnow; on July 3 from Przemysl to Lemberg (known today as Lvov); on July 5 from Lemberg through Brody to Radzivilov, which was just across the Galician border in Russia. At Radziwilov they spent about 24 days in quarantine, rested, and waited for further instructions. Height[7] estimates that it took another three or four weeks to travel southward from the Russian border through the Dniester steppes (yielding a total of between 93 and 99 days for the entire journey).

When the families finally arrived in the vicinity of Odessa it was too late in the year to proceed to the location where their colony was to be founded. The new immigrants were led to the enclave of colonies in the Liebenthal and Kutschurgan districts, which had been founded a few years previously. There they spent the first winter in Russia in the homes of their fellow countrymen. To their great surprise, they found that the earlier colonists were still living huddled together in primitive dwellings with reed roofs, extracting a living from the soil with great toil. This was the first indication that their dream of a lush paradise in the Ukraine was a fantasy.

Many of the immigrants had brought some cash with them, as well as clothing and other personal effects, and a few owned their own wagons. Most of the cash was spent during the long, difficult journey. Johann Friedrich Grosshans, a contemporary chronicler from the colony of Worms in the Black Sea region, reported that the immigrants spent most of their cash reserves rather quickly because they "...didn't understand the Russian money and the rate of exchange," and they became "victims of the Jewish moneychangers and traders. As a consequence, many of them were forced to sell their clothes. Since they were not yet established and went into winter quarters in 1809, their expenditures increased all the more until some spent all the money which they had brought with them."[8]

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[6] Height 1979, p. 36.
[7] Height 1979, p. 37.
[8] Cited in Griess 1968, p. 157.