Chapter 9

Emigration to America

Adam Wagner's concise summary of his early years in Russia

Old family memories begin to play an increasingly important role in reconstructing the history at this point. After Adam Wagner emigrated to the USA, he homesteaded near Dickinson, N.D., where he became one of the founders of St. Joseph's Catholic church in 1902. The "Silver Anniversary" Jubilee book for the parish compiled by Fr. Aberle in 1927 lists the names of the founders, along with a brief personal statement provided by them.[1] Unfortunately the statements are anonymous, but story #4 is the only one that matches the known details of Adam Wagner's life. This is my translation of his statement:

"My life journey, from the age of 15, was also not a bed of roses. My father died and so I had to seek my bread elsewhere. When I was 23 years old I gripped the wanderer's staff and in the year 1891 came to the promised land and the blessed city of Dickinson. I had absolutely nothing, but God be thanked, today I have good bread to eat and I live contentedly with my family."

In his very succinct and poetic language Adam provided us with a few important clues about his early life. These details match those recalled by my Aunt Barbara (Wagner) Boehm, one of Adam's daughters. She recalled that Adam had mentioned how his parents died when he was young – his mother died when he was about 6 or 7 years old, and his father died when he was about 15. Adam and his brothers were destitute orphans and they had to fend for themselves by doing hired work for other families, which was common practice at that time. This theme is mentioned in several other family stories. One example states: "at [age] 12, Johann was an orphan and from that time on he had to seek his bread by working for farmers."[2] Another example is provided in the story of "Alla Lizzie," whose family was left destitute after her father died when she was 9 years old in 1888. Her mother couldn't provide for the children, so they were raised by various relatives or placed in other homes where they served as household maids and farm workers. The girls typically did household chores, while the boys lived in the barns and cared for the livestock. They had little, if any, opportunity to go to school. Their treatment by their host families varied widely, in some cases they were treated kindly, almost as one of their own children, but in other cases they

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[1] Msgr. George P. Aberle, *Souvenir des Silbernen Juilaeums der St. Josephs Gemeinde, 1927*, published in Dickinson, N.D.: North Dakota Herold press.

[2] August Wilhelm Kludt, "Zulpich to August," *Heritage Review*, North Dakota Historical Society of Germans from Russia, Bismarck, N.D., April, 1977, p. 31.

reported cruel discipline.[3] Even if a youngster was not left an orphan, parents often hired out some of their sons if they were not needed on the farm. This usually happened at a young age, around 14. Some boys were away from their parents from that age on.[4]

In the case of Adam -- and likely also for his brothers Johann and Joseph – he apparently was taken in as a farm worker by the Obrigewitsch family in Rastadt and the Hecker family in München, and he may have lived with them from the age of 15. They later helped him emigrate to the USA. Adam had turned 24 by only 3 months when he boarded the steamship to America with them in 1891.

<u>The "Mysterious Circumstances" of Adam Wagner's Departure from Russia</u>

According to family lore, there was some type of subterfuge involved when Adam Wagner came across to America. Different stories have been told, one version is that he may have "sneaked" out of Russia to avoid the military draft, or possibly (according to Aunt Barbara) he "stowed away on the ship" and later "jumped ship" after it docked in New York. Identical tales are widespread in the German-Russian community about immigrant ancestors who "sneaked" out of Russia, and in some cases these details became embellished over the years. It is true that many young men, most notably Jews, fled Russia with forged papers when they came to the USA. They feared that if this became known, they and their families could be expelled back to Russia. Consequently, it was very common for young immigrants to conceal details, or more commonly they just did not talk about their old life in Russia. Adam was notably reticent about his early years in Russia and he rarely talked about it, even with his own family. The stories about how Adam "sneaked" out of Russia have not been confirmed and each version of the story presents some major problems. At this point in time, the "truth" is probably impossible to determine, but there are some clues which will be discussed below.

<u>Avoiding the military draft?</u>

One of the most common themes in German-Russian family histories is that their ancestors left Russia to avoid having to serve in the Russian military. This is cited in the family histories of several contemporaries of Adam Wagner in Fr. Aberle's books -- for example, by Mike Schaff,[5] and also by Joachim Boehm (my uncle John Boehm's father), from Karlsruhe, who had served three years in the Russian army, 1885-87, but when he

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[3] Helen Eichstaedt, *Alla Lizzie*, Anna Arbor, Michigan: Kennedy Associates, 1995.
[4] Mgsr. George P. Aberle, *Pioneers and Their Sons*. Dickinson, N.D.: N.D. Herold Press, vol. 1, 1966, p. 460. There are also serveral sources on this topic on internet – for example, http://www.roots-saknes.lv/Army/military_service_.htm.
[5] Aberle, 1966, vol. 2, p. 266.

was recalled into service he decided to leave for the USA.[6] Most such stories are undoubtedly true when told directly by the immigrant ancestor, but the problem is that these stories became embellished when they were passed down by the following generations. Speculations were borrowed from other family stories and these details became presumed facts, even when the evidence indicated otherwise. For example, one family had always believed that their grandfather had "sneaked out of Russia to avoid the draft," or that he possibly was an "army deserter." Yet they later found records showing that he was drafted into the Russian military in 1892 and served five years. After his release, he spent two years in the reserves in his home village before emigrating -- certainly more than enough time for the authorities to locate him if he were being pursued – and he even brought his Russian army uniform with him to America, along with photos showing him proudly wearing it! The person relating this anecdote was baffled about how the rumor that their grandfather was a "draft dodger" had ever originated![7] The answer seems to be that someone had heard stories about others who sneaked out of Russia to avoid the military, and this story became adopted as plausible for their own immigrant ancestor as well.

Young men were not allowed to emigrate unless they had the proper certificates pertaining to military service. There were five types of certificates: 1) "Certificate of Registration for the Draft," which all young men received when they registered between the ages of 16 to 20; 2) "Certificate of Appearance for Military Conscription," which indicated that he had participated in the lottery but had drawn a high enough number to avoid being conscripted; 3) "Certificate of Appearance for Military Conscription: Temporary," which stated that he had received a deferment for some reason (attending school, having a criminal record, etc.); 4) "Certificate of Discharge" for those who had served their term of active duty and were discharged to the reserves; and 5) "Military Service Sheet" for veterans which listed their full record of service.[8] Near the end of the 19th century the Tsarist government became more restrictive about issuing passports, even to those who were veterans in the reserves, because tensions were building with Japan and the Russo-Japanese War was imminent. This did not prevent young men from leaving the country, using any means they could.

In the case of Adam Wagner, none of my aunts or uncles thought that he had served in the Russian military. He never mentioned this to his family, nor did he refer to it in his brief paragraph in his life story. Adam probably had participated in the draft lottery, as did other young men, and even if he was not selected the first time around he undoubtedly knew that he was a prime candidate. This likely was one major reason for him to leave the country. He emigrated shortly after his 24th birthday. He may have had to use subterfuge of some type to get out – although, as we shall see, it is unlikely that he actually used dramatic disguises or "sneaked" out in the dead of night.

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[6] Aberle, 1966, vol. 2, p. 286.

[7] Reported in GR-Heritage, an internet discussion group on German-Russian issues in 1998

[8] Koprince, 1981, p. 9.

Leaving Russia without a passport?

The great majority of German-Russians, especially those with wives and children, emigrated from Russia with legal documentation. Many families today still retain the passports of their immigrant grandparents. The passports were issued at the closest administrative city (those in the Volga region went to Saratov, and those in the Black Sea region usually went to Odessa or Nikolaiev). They had to present legal papers signed in their home village by the mayor or chief administrator (*Obervorsteher*), and sometimes also by the district judge (*Bezirksrichter*), certifying that they had cleared all unpaid taxes and other liabilities. Men also had to have the proper certificate of military service, otherwise they might not be issued a passport, depending on how strictly the law was enforced. Not all members of the family had to have a passport – it was issued to the family head, and it served as legal documentation for himself and his immediate family. The passport indicated the number of people emigrating in the family group, and it stated the country of their destination. The typical cost for putting the papers in order was 10 rubles per person.

Most of the emigrants used the services of a Jewish travel agent named F. Mistler (or Mischler), who was based in Bremen, with an office in Odessa. His agents helped them obtain the necessary emigration papers, arranged their train trip to Germany, and booked their passage on steamships to America. Most of them traveled by train across eastern and northern Europe to German, Belgian, and Dutch ports of embarkation.

Another hurdle was that they had to pass a physical examination before they would be allowed to leave the country. In one anecdote, a family traveled to Saratov in 1913 and obtained all the necessary legal paperwork, then went to Novosinsky to board the train. There everyone was subject to a medical examination. The doctors discovered that the man's wife had an eye infection, so the family had to remain there for three months before they could depart.

For those who were unable to acquire passports, a variety of means of subterfuge have been reported, usually involving bribery. Mistler had a well-organized underground for obtaining forged passports and identity papers, and smuggling people out of Russia. Some men used another person's legal passport and traveled out of the country using an alias. At least three such cases have been reported in which, for various reasons, the original party had changed his mind about emigrating and gave his passport to someone else. [9] In another case in 1908 a person used his younger brother's name, baptismal certificate and school papers as supporting documentation in order to leave Russia to avoid the draft. If a person appeared young enough, there were cases in which he traveled out of the country posing as the son of someone else. Anecdotes tell

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[9] Discussions on GR-Heritage, internet 1998.

how older men sometimes left, taking their nephews or younger brothers posing as their own children. There are many cases told (especially in Jewish families) of people changing their names in order to receive a passport.

Another strategy is revealed in a case from 1913, when a man got permission to leave the country for six months to "visit" family members on a "vacation" passport. Such means of exiting the country would surely have been unusual since few people could afford the expense of a "vacation," although undoubtedly some men did leave Russia temporarily. Supposedly, if a person failed to return on time as promised, he was subject to a fine for each month of delinquency. If others had served as guarantors of his return, they would be liable for the penalty.

Labor recruiters from the USA also made arrangements for groups of German-Russian workers to leave the country, and they may have rolled the price of bribes to the officials into their ticket price. They purchased special group travel tickets with the shipping lines and handled all the legal details. One such instance was reported for the Round Oak Factory in Dowagiac, Michigan.

Bribery was rampant at that time. In 1901 two brothers arranged with a farmer to spend the night on his farmstead near the border, bribed a local guard, and slipped across. Another such instance was reported of an 18 year old paying a bribe to cross the border in 1903. Bribery was a common means for the guards to supplement their meager pay. Even if an emigrant had a legal passport, the guards often would hold the document and not allow him to leave unless he paid them a fee. During the years of governmental collapse during the Revolution, the guards were virtually starving in many cases, and they had to resort to extortion to survive.

Fred Gross provides us with this example:

"There was the matter of a passport, but for that, the time was too short…I would have to go minus a passport.

…[U]ntold numbers would simply go in hopes of crossing the border into Poland with the help of agents by paying them a certain sum of money, for which they would guide us, by night, across the border…To evade the customs officers, one had to get off the train station before the border where the agents would be readily available."[10]

Some cases have been reported where people "sneaked" out of Russia without documentation (illegal or otherwise) and without paying bribes, although these were likely a minority of cases. The penalty for getting caught was harsh. In one instance, a person was caught in 1892 while trying to sneak out of Russia and he was sentenced to a six-month jail term. After his release, he tried it again and succeeded. In another example a young man was still serving his active duty in the military, but he decided to leave Russia with his parents while he was home on leave. They had a legal passport,

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[10] Fred Gross, *The Pastor*, Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1973, p. 27.

but he couldn't get one for himself. He traveled with them to the Polish border, then mounted a horse and galloped across, while the Russian guards chased him firing their pistols. The Polish guards stopped him on the other side and almost returned him, but due to some altercation with the Russian guards they decided to allow him to proceed on his way. Another such anecdote reported that a young woman crossed the border hidden inside a hay-wagon, and when it crossed the border the guards speared it in several places with a pitchfork. The woman reportedly carried a scar on her leg from that ordeal for the rest of her life. Still another account gives these hair-raising details:

> Leaving Russia with the draft in place wasn't as easy as a lot of people would like to think. My mother's grandfather, Karl Dorr and his brothers Jacob and Rudolf, fled Kassel, Odessa, by being smuggled out of the country. He told my mother stories...of families in Kassel with sons of draft age being taken in the night. One particular family...had hidden their sons in the rafters and told the soldiers they had no sons. The officer in charge ordered the soldiers to shoot into the ceiling. After they had riddled the ceiling, the officer said, "Now, you have no sons!"[11]

Reports about fleeing the country were especially common during the years of the Bolshevik Revolution, when Russia was in a state of chaos and there were great numbers of refugees – traveling through the forests at night, disguising themselves as peasants, hiding in hay-carts, etc., using any possible means of escape. During those years probably most lacked legal papers, or in some cases they reportedly had forged papers. People were leaving Russia in any way they could. Not all took the western route. There are several cases where persons went east to Siberia where the border controls were laxer, then crossed over into Alaska and Canada, and went down into the USA. One such story was told about a sergeant in the Russian army who deserted along with another man, following this eastern route.[12]

Such stories of flights across the border while concealed in hay wagons, or being pursued by guards with guns blazing, were undoubtedly true, but common sense suggests that this was only in a minority of cases. Emigrants, especially those with wives and children, likely used much less dramatic ways of getting out of the country so that they could take some assets and belongings with them.

Traveling across Europe without identity papers?

This raises another question: Would young men like Adam have problems traveling across Europe if they left Russia without a proper passport ("*Reisepass*")? The answer is no, once a person succeeded in leaving Russia he was unlikely to encounter

[11] *Heritage Review*, Germans from Russia Heritage Society, May 1991, p. 10.
[12] Cited in a Ger-Rus internet discussion, 1998.

legal hassles while traveling across Europe, especially if he traveled with a group of emigrants. Contrary to all our modern stereotypes about strict German bureaucracies, passport inspections at the borders were laxly enforced at that time. This may not have been the case in the early decades of the 19th century, when Germany was still divided into numerous political states, and citizens were supposed to obtain a travel-pass listing their exact destinations. For example, if a person wanted to travel to Paderborn, he was supposed to obtain a "Paderborn destination travel route" (*Paderborner Zwangs-Reiseroute*), which showed the exact route that he would follow. This would be presented at the police station at each stop-over point enroute, where the traveler would obtain a stamp which allowed him to spend several days in that locale. Foreigners staying in a city also were supposed to report to the local police station and display their passport, where it would be officially stamped. By mid-century, German states were laxly enforcing passport screening at the borders, if at all. By 1855, Berlin was one of the few cities in Prussia that bothered to examine papers. People entering the country were expected to have some sort of legal identification, but passport inspections at the frontier were abolished outright in 1866 and replaced by a discretionary inspection of papers by the police, if deemed necessary.[13] The bureaucratic requirements probably were very lax for groups of emigrants who were passing through on the train, on their way to the port of Hamburg.

Most emigrants from the Black Sea colonies traveled to the closest railroad terminal, where they boarded a train to Odessa, and from there went on to Hamburg. According to Karl Baedecker's 1914 guide book on Russia, the express train journey from Odessa to Berlin took 37 hours, with the fares being 105 *Mark*, 70 *Mark* economy class, and 1 ½ *Ruble* extra for a seat-ticket. The route went via Podwoloczyaka, Lemberg, Krakow, and Oderberg, a distance of 1,744 kilometers (1,084 miles). The train journey via Brest-Litovsk, Warsaw, and Alexandrovo (or Kalisz) took 42 hours -- fares 102 *Marks* 45, 68 *Marks* 15 *Pfennig*; seat-ticket 1 ½ *ruble* 70 *kopek* extra. Most emigrants purchased the cheaper, lower class tickets. From Berlin it was only a few hours by rail to Hamburg.

Direct sea passage from Odessa or Crimea through the Mediterranean was possible, but it was slower, more expensive, and there were still lingering political problems between Russia and Turkey. The great majority of German-Russian emigrants embarked from Hamburg, which was the largest and most important seaport of the European continent at that time. Hamburg was referred to as the "Venice of the north." The city was honeycombed with canals and ports and large warehouses had been built to accommodate the emigrants. Major steamship lines were operating a lucrative business taking massive numbers of emigrants to the New World. Their fast ships crossed the North Atlantic at a fraction of the cost or the time required by a sea voyage from Odessa. Between 1881 and 1890, there were around 90,000 emigrants per

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[13] Andreas Fahrmeier, *Citizens and Aliens, Foreigners and the Law in Britain and the German States, 1789 – 1870,* Monographs in German History, vol. 5, New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.

year from Hamburg, two-thirds of whom embarked to the USA.[14] So many people were crowded into Hamburg at the time that the city was vulnerable to epidemics – one such epidemic of cholera in Hamburg in 1892 reportedly killed over 8,000 people.

In 1891-92 steamship companies even offered prepaid tickets to Germans in Russia who wanted to go the USA.[15] Emigrants could also purchase their tickets as a total package from agents for the American railroad companies. The ticket included the train fare to Hamburg, the ship passage, plus the train fare to their destination in North America. The Jewish travel agent named Mistler (or Mischler) in Odessa also provided emigrants with information, travel papers, and tickets. Copies of his advertisements circulated widely in the German colonies.[16] He had a string of agents along the travel route via train from Odessa through Warsaw to Berlin and from there to the seaport at Hamburg, who could take care of his clients' needs.

The cost of a steamship ticket to the USA in 1888 was about $120 for an adult, and $30 for an infant.[17] As the exodus grew, competition grew between the steamship companies for the booming travel business of those leaving Russia. There was competition for passengers between the North German Lloyd Company operating out of Bremen and the Hamburg America Company operating out of Hamburg, All this competition for their business resulted in rate wars and falling prices, which became an additional inducement for emigration.

"Stowing away" on a ship?

One of the guesses made about Adam Wagner's arrival in the USA is that he maybe "stowed away on the ship and jumped out at New York harbor." This dramatic story about how an immigrant ancestor was a stow-away is popular folklore in many German-Russian families, and it has become more widespread as it is retold. In virtually all cases it likely was not true. The lack of legal papers would not have been a major problem when boarding a steamship to America because the shipping lines were only concerned with whether the passengers had enough money to pay their fare. Legal documentation would be handled by the customs officials at the point of destination, if they desired. It would have been very difficult to "sneak" aboard the steamship since the names of everyone (including children) were carefully recorded in the register when they boarded, and each family was assigned a bunk. If a passenger hadn't already paid the money, he could pay the captain after they were at sea (which

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[14] Brumley, 1986, p. 87.

[15] Eichstedt, 1995, p. 15.

[16] Fr. Metzger, 1976.

[17] Alvin Graf, "My Grandfather Jacob Graf," Germans from Russia Heritage Society, Bismarck, N.D.: *Heritage Review*, March 1992, p. 30. Another source cites a similar figure of 109 *rubles* for adult fare from Hamburg to Winnipeg, Fr. H. Metzger, "Historical Sketch of St. Peters Parish and the Founding of the Colonies of Rastadt, Katharinental and Speyer," Germans from Russia Heritage Society, *Heritage Review*, Sept. 1976.

the captain may then have kept for himself). In a few cases it was reported that the immigrant ancestor was allowed to pay his fare by working aboard ship doing the things that the regular staff preferred not to do.

Typically the Germans from Russia emigrated in groups of families from the same village -- they stayed together on the ship and after they reached port they usually traveled together to their destination. The Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration in Hamburg commented in his annual report for 1901: "In the past year, 1,000 German-speaking colonists of German descent traveled from the Russian Gouvernements of Cherson, Bessarabia, and Tauria to the state of South Dakota with the intent to settle there permanently as farmers. These German colonists always traveled in groups of 20 - 30 families and usually took the fast steamers..."[18] Virtually all Germans from Russia traveled "steerage" class, which was a cheaper way to travel since they did not have separate cabins. Typically, each family was assigned a compartment with bunks, separated by blankets suspended from the ceiling. Living conditions were very crowded and there was little privacy. Upon arrival the ship's captain had to account for all passengers, otherwise he forfeited the bond which was posted on them by the shipping company. It would have been extremely difficult under those circumstances for someone to literally "stow away," manage to get enough food and water to survive the journey, sneak off the ship without being seen, and then navigate his way to North Dakota in a completely unknown country, without knowing a word of English!

It should be noted that a growing number of families in Germany also joined the emigrant trek to America. An article in a German newspaper in 1888 noted:

"A large number of emigrants, adults and children, most from Baden and Würtemberg, arrived yesterday through our city, on their way to their new homeland in America. Lately several south German families who sought their fortune there have returned after expending all their savings, completely penniless: they were lucky to have been back on German soil."[19]

<u>Illegally entering the USA?</u>

The USA did not require passports for foreigners entering the country until 1918, which came about as a result of World War One. Before that date it was possible for someone to enter the country without any identification papers, although travelers may have been asked to present a passport if they owned one. U.S. citizens also could leave the country before that date without passports, although many did secure one for the legal protection it provided. First-class passengers were released at the docks in New York City; other immigrants were processed at Castle Garden Immigration Station, which had opened in 1855 in New York harbor. The screening of immigrants became more strictly enforced when Ellis Island was opened on January 1, 1892. The Bureau of

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[18] Private communication from Detelf D. Hollatz, via Internet, Jan. 13, 1996

[19] *Siegburger Kreisblatt*, Sept. 19, 1888.

Immigration and Naturalization was created by the Naturalization Law of June 29, 1906. Screening was based on health and mental status, deportment, and economic well-being. Immigrants who did not possess a specified minimum amount of money could be rejected because they were deemed likely to become a charge on public welfare. Mental illness, criminality, bigamy, and prostitution were some of the behaviors that could lead to a foreigner being refused admission. Those who entered the U.S. without a passport would not have had any disadvantage if they applied later for U.S. citizenship. Naturalization requirements were generally restricted to a minimum number of years of residency in the country, a testimony as to the applicant's good character, and a pledge to uphold the Constitution of the U.S.[20]

The Journey to America

The Hamburg ship records show that there was little if any subterfuge used by Adam Wagner. He boarded the steamship Augusta Victoria on May 15, 1891, using his own legal name, along with several other families from "München, Russia." These include the following:

Franz Hecker (wife Elisabeth, and children, Max, Michael, Michael, Franziska, Ottilia, and Anna); Franz "Obrischkavitz" ("Obrigewitsch," his wife Anna, and children Michael, Andreas, Elisabeth, and Nicolaus); Martin Hecker (wife Christine, and children Mathias, Franz, Georg, Hannes, Adanine?, Elisabeth, Georg, Rosa, and Magdalene); Franz Bosch (wife Barbara, and children Elisabeth, Marianne, Johan, Max, and Juliane); Philipp Klug (wife Elisabeth, and children Jacob, Barbara, Marianne, Johan, Peter, and Philippp); Josef Schropp (wife Catherine, and children Margaret, Martin, and Annalie (Amelia); Leonard Metz (wife Julianne, and children Christian, Franziska, and Anna); Wilhelm Thomas (wife Magdalena, children Marianne, Philipp, Franz, and Max); Franz Kessel (wife Marianne, and children Jacob, Max, Josef, and Hieronymus); Adam Banger (wife Marie, and chidren Catherine, Anna).

In addition, the following families are listed as coming from "Rastatt, Russia":
Martin Heck (wife Catharine, and children Carl, Susanne, Fredricka, Michael, Gretchen, Georg, Klemenz); Franz Koch (wife Anna); Franz Dietz (wife Marie); Mendel Margolina; Paulus Koch (wife Anna, and children Eda, Catha, Franz, Salomea, Julia); Joachim Eberle (wife Julie, and children Meinrad, Franz); Nicolaus Reichert. Leonard Schwind (wife Franziska, and children Paul, Franz) are listed as coming from "Rastatt, Baden," but this may have been an error since there was a Schwindt family in the colony of Rastadt, members of which emigrated to North Dakota.

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[20] Information on citizenship requirements in the U.S.A. was reported Allyn Brosz on the Ger-Rus email list, Dec. 30, 1997, based on his conversations with Marian L. Smith, historian with the U.S. Immigration and Nationalization Service

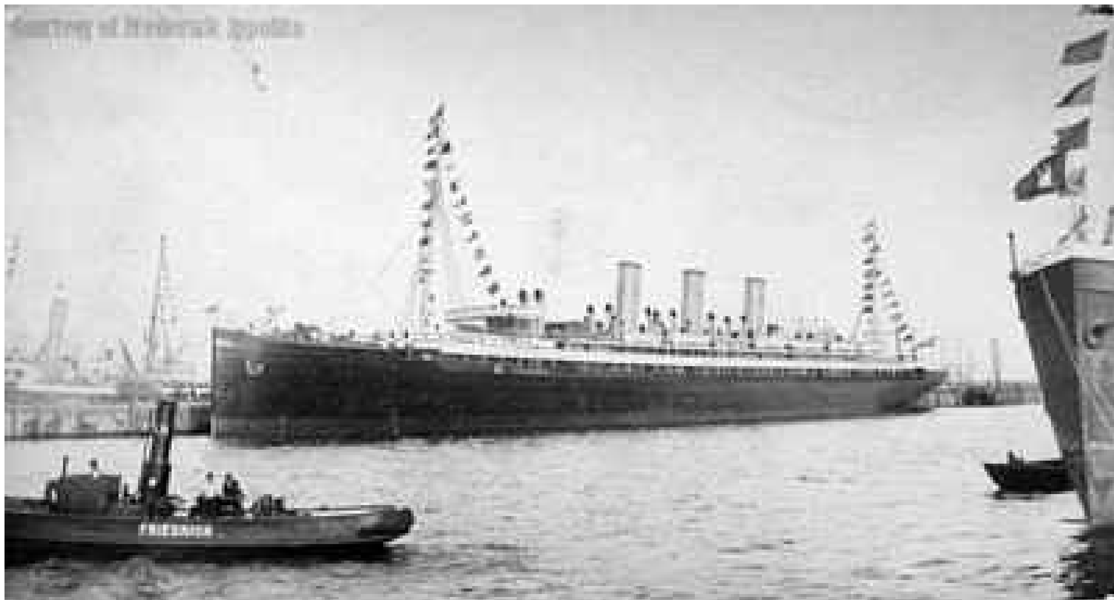
Adam Wagner had no immediate relatives aboard the August Victoria, other than perhaps Joseph Schropp and his wife Catherine Wagner from München (who later settled in Saskatchewan, discussed in more detail later). It should also be noted that

Hamburg, May 15, 1891
Passenger Registry for the Augusta Victoria[21]

[21] Hamburg passenger list, microfilm 0475681

these records show that Fr. Aberle made some errors when he stated in his book that Adam came to the USA as a single man in the company of the Franz Hecker and John Obrigewitsch families on May 15, 1890.[22] There are two errors: he came across in 1891, and he was accompanied by the families of Franz Hecker and Franz Obrigewitsch, who were brothers-in-law to each other. Martin Hecker and his family also were part of this group. John Obrigewitsch came across later, in 1898.

These were all of the passengers aboard the ship who originated in the German colonies in Russia. The fact that they all stated their point of origin as München or Rastadt indicates that they left as a group, and they had undoubtedly been discussing and preparing for emigration for quite some time. There were a total of 1,100 passengers aboard the Augusta Victoria, 927 of whom traveled "steerage" class. All of the Germans from Russia traveled steerage class, and they occupied adjoining compartments on the ship. In addition, there were 131 passengers with private cabins who embarked from Hamburg (most were German citizens), and 42 additional passengers with private cabins who were picked up when the ship stopped at Portsmouth, England.



Augusta Victoria

The Augusta Victoria arrived in New York eight days later, on May 23rd. The immigrant processing facility at Ellis Island wasn't established until January, 1892, so they probably were processed on the mainland at Castle Garden in New York City. The New York ship records generally match those in Hamburg, although the "country of origin" for all the German-Russian passengers is inexplicably shown as "Poland," but

[22] Aberle, 1966, *Pioneers and Their Sons*, vol. 2, p. 286.

the "hailing place, or place of starting" is correctly shown as "München" or "Rastatt." This likely was because the train from Russia passed through Poland on its way to Hamburg. The destinations for the German-Russians are listed either as Scotland, Plantersville, or Winnipeg. Scotland is a city in South Dakota (about 26 miles northwest of Yankton), and at that time it was a popular embarkation point for immigrants on their way to North Dakota. Many immigrants from the Black Sea colonies also went to Plantersville, in Grimes County, Texas, most of whom disembarked at the port of Corpus Christi. No destination is shown for Adam Wagner, although we know that he settled near Dickinson, North Dakota, along with several other families aboard the August Victoria. The only passenger aboard the ship that showed the destination of Dickinson was Leonard Schwind.

New York, May 23, 1891
Passenger Registry[23]

Piecing all this together, we know that Adam Wagner was unmarried, he had recently turned 24 years of age at the time of his emigration, and he would have been a prime candidate for the military draft. No one in the family recalls Adam ever speaking about serving in the Russian military. According to Adam's own account of his early years, he hired out to do farm-labor in his youth after his father died when he was 15 years old, and it is likely that he worked for the Hecker family in München and the Obrigewitch family in Rastadt, who were in-laws with each other. My mother recalled

[23] New York customs passenger list, microfilm 1027614

vague stories about how these two families wanted to sponsor Adam to help him across to the USA, but some complication prevented this. They somehow "helped" him leave Russia and come to America. We know that Adam traveled with them on the same ship and he was listed on the passenger register – using his own legal name -- both in Hamburg and in New York, which shows that he didn't "sneak" aboard the ship, stow away, or jump ship in New York harbor. The most likely scenario behind the story of subterfuge is that he left Russia to avoid the draft, as did so many other young men at that time. The Hecker and Obrigewitsch families probably advanced his travel expenses, or he earned the cost of the ticket through farm labor for them.

It is possible that he posed as a close relative of Franz Obrigewitsch, perhaps in order to qualify on Franz's passport as a member of the family. This would make sense if Adam had worked for them since he was 15 years old, he may even have been treated like one of their own sons. This may also explain the curious fact that Adam's oldest son (my uncle Frank) had written down on a slip of paper, which he had preserved -- "Adam Obrigewitsch Wagner" from "München, Russia." When I told my Aunt Barbara about this, she said "that's ridiculous, the Obrigewitsch family are no relatives to us."

We do have several histories available for members of those families, as well as detailed genealogies, which show that Aunt Barbara was correct.[24] The ship registry of the Augusta Victoria shows that Adam came across with a group of families, including the Heckers and the Obrigewitschs, but he was not shown as their relative, he was listed as a sole passenger under his own name. The Hecker family resided in München and the Obrigewitsch family in Rastadt, where Franz Obrigewitsch was born in 1858 (making him nine years older than Adam Wagner). His sister, Elizabeth, moved to München after she married Franz Hecker, and Franz Obrigewitsch also moved there after he became married. None of the family histories show any relationships or marriages with the Wagner family – although there undoubtedly were some indirect "shirt-tail relative" ties of some sort, as was true for most of the families in München (for example, Franz Hecker's daughter, Monica, married Ludwig Reis, who later became the brother-in-law to Adam Wagner in North Dakota). Mike Hecker came to the USA in the spring, 1890, and the next year other members of these two families emigrated to the USA as a group, along with Adam. He almost certainly had worked for them and resided with them in München, and he may well have exited Russia using their family passports and identity papers, perhaps posing as their nephew, which was a common practice at that time.

In sum, all the records available for our Wagner family indicate that the scrap of paper showing "Adam Obrigewitsch Wagner" was just another example of the

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[24] I have a detailed genealogy for the Obrigewitsch family, which traces the family back to Jacob Obrigewitsch, born in Rastadt in about 1825. Jacob and his wife, surname Herauf, had seven children, all born in Rastadt. Several of them emigrated to North Dakota and Saskatchewan in the 1890s. Family histories are also available in *Stark County Heritage and Destiny*, published in Dickinson, N.D. 1977. None of these show any marriages or relationships with members of the Wagner family.

confused speculations that were so common in German-Russian families during that time period, which were passed down as family legends. Inaccurate generalizations about how the immigrant ancestor was born in "Odessa" or "Nikolaiev," about how he sneaked aboard the ship, and about confused family relationships, are all too common in the narratives of the later descendants of emigrants from Tsarist Russia.