

Chapter 10

The Early Years in North Dakota

By 1870 much of the prime agricultural land in the American Midwest – the belt of fertile lands known as the “tall-grass prairie,” stretching from eastern Texas to Minnesota -- had already been settled by earlier immigrants of Scotch, Irish and English descent. When the new wave of immigrants from Russia arrived most of them settled in the remaining land, known as the “high plains” in western Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, the Dakotas, and eastern Montana. This region was also known as the “great American desert.” It was noted for its vast desolation, extreme weather, and danger from Indians who roamed this area hunting the buffalo herds. In order to attract settlers, the boards of immigration in those states launched advertising campaigns throughout Europe, lavishly describing the “free land available for the landless.” The U.S. government also encouraged development by granting the railroads right-of-way, along with vast tracts of land which they in turn resold for very reasonable prices.

The German-Russian immigrants were the right people and they arrived at the right time. They brought with them agricultural skills that were pre-adapted for survival on the Great Plains, from decades of farming in similar conditions in the Volga and the Black Sea regions. The Mennonites began settling in Kansas in 1874. They were lured by the affordable land offered by the railroads and also by the State Legislature, which had passed a bill exempting religious objectors from military service. The Mennonites brought with them a hardy strain of wheat which had thrived in Russia and which also proved to be adapted to the high plains environment. This wheat, known today as “turkey red wheat,” or “hard winter wheat,” became the basis for our modern wheat industry and it made Kansas the “Granary of the Nation.”

The largest concentration of Germans from the Black Sea colonies was in North Dakota, primarily in the southwestern portion of the state (west of the Missouri River), in a region which became known as the “German triangle.” The town of Richardton was founded in 1881, and its population was still quite small when Germans from the Black Sea region began arriving in the spring of 1885. The Northern Pacific Railroad operated an immigration house at Richardton to provide temporary shelter for the new settlers until they could become situated on the land.¹ The first recorded colonists were four bachelors from Speier who left Russia – typically enough -- to avoid the Russian military service. In 1887 colonists from Neu-Karlsruhe (the daughter colony of Karlsruhe, from which my mother’s family derived) began settling on land south of Antelope (in Stark county, just east of Richardton). They sent word back home and soon, by the spring of 1891, colonists from Karlsruhe, Rastadt, München, Speier, Landau

¹ George Rath, *The Black Sea Germans in the Dakotas*, Freeman, S.D.: Pinehill press, 1977, p. 263; also, Sallet 1974, p. 39.

and other German colonies in the Black Sea region began to blanket the area around Richardton and Dickinson, and adjoining counties.² Fr. Wehrle established a mission in Richardton in 1893 to provide religious services for the newcomers. This later became St. Mary's Assumption Abbey, which provided the first school in the area.³

Adam Wagner my Grandfather

Adam Wagner arrived in the Dickinson area in 1891 as an unmarried man, age 24, without much money or any immediate relatives. Later, his younger brother Johann and three cousins came over and settled in Saskatchewan – Rochus Wagner, Katherine Wagner (married to Joseph Schropp) from München, and Salomea Wagner (married to Michael Wormsbecher) from Rastadt. Adam had no known contacts with them, other than perhaps a few letters. My father recalled that Adam's brother Johann made a brief visit sometime in 1921, perhaps when Johann received word that Adam had cancer. In those days people relied on newspapers for contact with persons if they didn't have specific addresses.

When Adam first came to North Dakota he worked at various farm labor and mining jobs for families with whom he had previously worked in Russia, particularly the Heckers and Obrigewitschs. They sold their lands in Russia and brought enough money to become established in this new country. Ignatz Reis, his wife, Christina Sticka, and their children arrived from Rastadt the following year in 1892. Ignatz was 46 years old and he had managed to bring a considerable sum of money with him (an estimated \$9,000, according to family stories), derived from selling his property in Russia. Ignatz was an ambitious entrepreneur and he quickly took out a homestead and a coal-mine. Adam worked for Ignatz and in 1894 he married Ignatz's daughter, Katherine Reis, a beautiful 18 year old girl born on July 19, 1876 in Rastadt. According to my Aunt Barbara, Katherine said she didn't know Adam in Russia, which indicates that Adam hadn't worked for Ignatz in Rastadt during his early years (although she may not have remembered him because she was eight years younger than Adam).

All the documents available on Adam Wagner have minor inconsistencies in his age, and sometimes also in the date of his arrival in the USA, which is not unusual for records during those early years. Adam applied for a marriage license on Jan. 19, 1894. His age was listed as 25 (in reality, he was one month shy of his 27th birthday), and Katherine was 18. The judge who filled out the marriage certificate was James Caulfield, who presumably didn't speak German, and Adam didn't know English at

² Richard Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, translated by La Vern J. Rippley and Armand Bauer, Fargo: N.D. Institute of Regional Studies, 1974, p. 39

³ My mother's Landeis family from Neu-Karlsruhe came to Richardton at this same time and their children attended the Assumption Abbey school, along with the children of most other German-Russian Catholic families.

that time. The marriage took place at the old St. Patrick's church in Dickinson on Jan. 22, 1894, with Franz Hecker serving as the witness.

Adam filed his declaration of intention to become a U.S. citizen on Nov. 5, 1894, and he became a citizen on May 4, 1903. Once again the reported age is off - the application states that he was born in 1869 (rather than 1867) and his date of arrival in the USA was stated as 1892 (rather than 1891). At that time the law stipulated that persons had to reside in the USA for at least two years, and at least one year within the state where the court was located, before they could apply for citizenship - although the minimum residence requirement was not strictly enforced in Dickinson at that time. Adam waited three years after his arrival in the USA before he applied for citizenship; however, his father-in-law, Ignatz Reis, had already applied within two months after his arrival (see details below, in discussion of the Reis family). It's possible that Adam, like some other young immigrants, waited to see whether conditions in the USA would be favorable enough before abandoning his right to return to the home country, if necessary - or perhaps even more likely, to go north to Canada, as many other German-Russians had done, including Adam's brother Johann. Ignatz, on the other hand, was already middle-aged when he came across in 1892, he had sold all his property in Russia and he had made a commitment to a new life in North Dakota. After Adam married Ignatz's daughter, he too followed his example and applied for citizenship.



Katherine Reis and Adam Wagner

APPLICATION FOR MARRIAGE LICENSE.

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA,

County of Stark,

} ss.

IN COUNTY COURT.

In the Matter of the Application of Adam Wagner for a Marriage License

The undersigned, Adam Wagner, of _____ in the County of Stark State of North Dakota hereby applies for a Marriage License for the marriage of himself of _____ in the County of _____ State of _____, and Katherina Reis of _____ State of _____ of the County of Stark and State of North Dakota

The said Adam Wagner and Katherina Reis, being duly sworn, represents that the said Adam Wagner and Katherina Reis are both unmarried, of sound mind, not related within the degrees of consanguinity prescribed by law, that no legal impediments exist against the consummation of said marriage, and may lawfully contract and be joined in marriage; and after being duly sworn, deposes as follows in answer to the following interrogatories.

Question: What is your age?
Answer: my age is twenty-five years of age.
Question: What is Katherina Reis's age?
Answer: her age is eighteen years of age.
Question: Has either of the parties a husband or wife now living from whom he or she has not been divorced?
Answer: No

Question: Are either parties for whom application is made for Marriage License in any way related? If so, to what extent?
Answer: not related

Question: Is the signature to the consent of _____ that you herewith file with this application, in the handwriting of the _____?
Answer: _____

Question: Was the same signed in your presence? Answer: _____

Question: What other person was present when the consent was signed?
Answer: _____

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 19th day of January 1894 Adam Reis Wagner
J. C. Campbell Judge of the County Court.

**Adam Wagner and Katherina Reis
Application for Marriage License
Jan. 19, 1894**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA, }
County of Stark. } ss.

Adam Wagner personally appeared

before the subscriber, the Clerk of the District Court of Stark County, State of North Dakota, being a Court of Record, and made oath that he was born in Russia

on or about the year eighteen hundred and eighty nine; that he emigrated to the United States, and landed at the port of New York

on or about the month of May in the year eighteen hundred and eighty two;

that it is his bona fide intention to become a citizen of the United States, and to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign Prince, Potentate, State or Sovereignty whatever, and particularly to the Emperor of Russia whereof he is a subject, and that he will support the Constitution and Government of the United States.

Adam Wagner

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 5th day of Nov A. D. 1894

By Guy J. Franer Clerk of said District Court.

By Deputy.

Adam Wagner Application for Citizenship
Nov. 5, 1894

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA,
COUNTY OF STARK.

SS:

DISTRICT COURT,
SIXTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT.

TERM, 190³

In the matter of the application of Adam Wagner to become a citizen of the United States,

Chas Kono and

and

Jno W Goodall being severally sworn,

do depose and say, each for himself, that he is well acquainted with the above named Adam Wagner that he has resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for five years last past, and for one year last past within the State of North Dakota; and that during the same period he has behaved himself as a man of good moral character, attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and well disposed to the good order and happiness of the same.

Subscribed and sworn to in open Court this

4"

day of

May

A. D. 190³

Clerk.

By

J. J. Sanders

Deputy.

Chas. Kono

Jno W Goodall

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA,
COUNTY OF STARK.

SS:

DISTRICT COURT,
SIXTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT.

I, Adam Wagner, do swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States

of America, and that I do absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure, forever, all allegiance and fidelity to every Foreign Power, Prince, Potentate, State or Sovereignty whatever, and particularly to Czar of Russia

whose subject I was. And further, that I have never borne any hereditary title, or been of any of the degrees of nobility of the country whereof I have been a subject, and that I have resided within the United States for five years last past, and in this State for one year last past;

Subscribed and sworn to in open Court this

4"

day of

May

A. D. 190³

Clerk.

By

J. J. Sanders

Deputy.

Adam Wagner
Mark

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA,
COUNTY OF STARK.

SS:

DISTRICT COURT,
SIXTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT.

**Adam Wagner Bestowal of Citizenship
May 4, 1903**



1914 Atlas, north of Dickinson, N.D.
 Township 140 N., Range 97 (left) & 96 W. (right)
 Adam Wagner and Reis family holdings (section 19)

Acquiring land

The Homestead Act of 1862 stipulated that a claim to land could be filed by anyone (male or female) who was at least 21 years of age (there was no minimum age if the person was married and the "head of a family"). The applicant had to be a citizen, or have filed for citizenship, and had to testify that he had never taken up arms against the U.S. government. He also had to declare that he did not already own more than 160 acres of land and that the homestead was for his exclusive benefit and for actual settlement and cultivation. Initially the person had to file an affidavit of intent with the Registrar of the Land Office in order to "enter" the homestead land, and pay commission and filing fees of \$22 for 160 acres. He had to establish residence on the land within six months. After 14 months he had the option to purchase the land (as a "preemption claim") for \$1.25 per acre, or he could reside there for five years (without leaving it for more than six months at a time) and then take title to it as a homestead. Certain improvement had to be made to the property -- the soil had to be cultivated, a dwelling had to be built (homesteaders typically built a small "claim shack"), a well had to be dug, and a portion of the land had to be fenced. After five years and not later than seven years, if these conditions were met, a petition for title was filed, known as a "patent," which required the testamentary signatures of two witnesses and the payment of a final fee of \$12 for 160 acres. The person had to have become a U.S. citizen by that point, and the land couldn't be attached by lien for debts. The N.D. newspapers routinely posted notices of "final proof" for homesteads with the names of witnesses who testified that the claimant had resided continuously on the land.

There were limits on the amount of public land that could be claimed. One person could not acquire more than one tract of land by homesteading. However, the amount depended on whether it was designated for farming or grazing or mineral development. One-quarter section (160 acres) could be claimed for farming. The "Desert Land Law" of 1877 had expanded homesteading to include arid regions, which were not suitable for farming but which could be used for grazing. This law allowed a single person to claim 320 acres (640 acres for a married couple) of designated arid land for grazing, a portion of it had to be irrigated within 3 years, a fee of \$1.25 per acre had to be paid, and it did not have a residency requirement. Should a person fail to find a suitable homestead he could purchase a "relinquishment" from someone willing to give up his claim. Typically persons filed for a 160 acre homestead and purchased an additional half section.

The loopholes in the homestead laws soon led to vast abuses, both by private landowners and large land syndicates. The going rate for purchasing land from the railroads at that time was at least \$2.50 per acre. However, the "preemption claims" allowed settlers to purchase lands not only for farming, but also for grazing, tree claims, and coal extraction after six months at \$1.25 per acre. Some homesteaders used this as a legal loophole to purchase more desirable land for below market rates, then they sold

their original claims for a profit. The Desert Land Law didn't have a residency requirement, so many homestead claims were filed by residents on the East Coast who then sold them to land syndicates. Some of these claims were filed by people who were a fraudulent front for the syndicates. All of this undermined the original intention of the Homestead Act, which was to promote small scale owner-occupancy. By 1885 major portions of Wyoming and Montana had been taken over by land syndicates. The "Coal Land Law" provided another legal loophole, created for the benefit of the railroads, allowing them to appropriate great stretches of coal deposits. For \$1.25 an acre the railroads and coal mining monopolies, which were interlocked in ownership, could buy as many millions of acres of coal, iron, and timber land as they wanted. The timber claim law, which had led to clear-cutting of large areas of forest, was repealed in 1890 because of rampant fraud and abuse. During Theodore Roosevelt's administration he tried to have other such laws repealed, but he was unsuccessful.⁴

The German-Russian immigrants were small-scale entrepreneurs who took advantage of the homestead opportunities, as the legislature had intended. Adam homesteaded 160 acres (one-quarter section) about 5 miles northwest of Dickinson. We don't have copies of the original papers for the application for the homestead, or for the final award ("patent") of the property, so the date is uncertain. The best guess is that he applied about 1894, since that was the date when he applied for citizenship – which he had to do before he was eligible to apply for the homestead -- and this was also the year when he became married. The family was living on that land at the time of the 1900 census. In 1905 he purchased the additional quarter adjacent to his homestead on the north, giving him 320 acres total.⁵ On the 1914 Atlas (above) these two quarters of land are shown as the entire eastern half of section 19, Township 140 N., Range 96 W. He also rented additional land from the school district for raising hay (northwest quarter of section 20).

Further details about the legal process followed for homesteads is provided in *The Dickinson Press*, April 11, and April 18, 1903, which reported:

"Notice of Homestead, Final Proof. Land Office, Bismarck, N.D., March 27, 1903. Notice is hereby given that the following named settler has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim, and that said proof will be made before Geo. Auld, United State Commssioner, Dist. of N.D., at his office in the City of Dickinson, on May 20, 1903, viz. Frank Hecker, for the sw ¼ sec. 2, twp. 140 n., r. 97, w 5th, p.m. He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon, and cultivation of said land, viz: Adam Wagner, Ludwig Metz, Joseph Polenski, Ignatz Ries [sic.], all of Dickinson, N.D."

⁴ Lynn Severson, *Plum Valley Women, Minot's First One-Hundred Years*, Minot, N.D.: Minot Commission on the Status of Women, 1985, p. 19.

⁵ The additional 160 acres was purchased from Philip Heck for \$440 on Nov. 27, 1905. On the Atlas, each numbered square section is 1 mile on each side (one-quarter section = 160 acres).

Several such notices of Final Proof of homesteads were reported in The Dickinson Press in 1903 for other settlers, with various named witnesses, including Adam Wagner, Frank Hecker, and others.

The area to the northwest of Dickinson was rich in coal deposits, which were an important source of fuel and income for the settlers. There were several coal mines in operation. In North Dakota coal was relatively inexpensive, costing about \$2 per load, 8 to 10 loads lasted one year. This region borders the Theodore Roosevelt Badlands National Park, and it is still in mining production today. On April 20, 1897 Adam applied for a second homestead in this area for coal-mining (160 acres, southeast corner of section 2), located about 5 miles from his farmhouse. The coal land was patented to Adam 5 years later on Aug. 19, 1903. There are papers showing that he acquired another 160 acres of adjacent coal deposit, in the same part of section 2, which was patented to him on March 11, 1910. Adam and his in-laws used the coal for fuel and they also hauled gravel, which they sold in Dickinson, along with the coal. This land had a considerable amount of oil, which was close to the surface. When Adam dug a well on his property, he found that the water was contaminated with oil and he had to skim the film of oil off the top before it was usable. At that time, oily water was regarded as an annoyance and a curse. Adam had to haul in barrels of drinking water for the family and livestock. Unfortunately, when the family farm was later sold they did not retain mineral rights. There has been a producing oil well on the former Wagner farmlands for at least 30 years.

Sometime during this period Alexander Landeis, my mother's father, worked for Adam at his coalmine. Alex and his parents had immigrated from Neu-Karlsruhe (north of Nikolaiev) in 1889 and homesteaded near Richardton, N.D. After my parents were married, Alex met my dad (his new son-in-law) and recalled that he had worked for Adam, and that at that time Adam and Katherine had two small children - Frank, the oldest child, and Tillie (Ottilia).

Once when Adam was blasting with dynamite to loosen the coal deposit, a large rock was blown into the air and it hit his oldest son Frank on the head. Frank was knocked unconscious, his scalp was laid wide open. According to Aunt Barbara, "his brains were visible, and they had to pick pieces of coal out of his brains."

I found a newspaper account of this accident in the Ward County Independent, Dec. 13, 1917:

"Frank Wagner, of Dickinson, a son of Adam Wagner, was seriously injured Friday afternoon at the Ridl mine on Green River while setting off a charge of dynamite, opening a coal vein. The blast threw debris more than 100 feet into the air and a large piece of coal in descending struck young Wagner on the head fracturing the skull and rendering him unconscious. Some time elapsed before the boy was found. He was taken to Dickinson and at the hospital an operation was performed on the skull. The boy is resting easy since the operation but his condition is not of a hopeful character."

Frank was born in 1895 so he would have been 22 years old at the time of this accident. Frank survived, but it deeply disturbed Adam and it brought an end to his commercial coal-mining business. He said that it wasn't worth it if he had to risk the lives of his children. He sold his coalmine to the North Dakota Clay & Coal Co. The 1914 Atlas shows that by that date this company owned all of the southeast quarter of section 2 and other adjacent quarters.

The Dickinson Herald reported that Frank Wagner took out his first homestead papers on Dec. 30, 1910. This seems unusually soon because Frank was born in 1895, he would have been only 15 years old at that time.

NAME of each person whose place of abode on June 1, 1900, was in this family. <small>*Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Include every person living on June 1, 1900. Omit children born since June 1, 1900.</small>	RELATION. Relationship of each person to the head of the family.	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.								NATIVITY.			CITIZENSHIP.			OCCUPATION, TRADE, OR PROFESSION of each person TEN YEARS of age and over.		EDUCATION.						
		Color or race.	Sex.	DATE OF BIRTH.		Age at last birthday. Whether single, married, widowed, or divorced.	Number of years married.	Mother of how many children.	Whether of those children living.	Place of birth of each person and parents of each person enumerated. If born in the United States, give the State or Territory; if of foreign birth, give the Country only.			Year of immigration to the United States.	Number of years in the United States.	Naturalization.	OCCUPATION.	Months in or out of school (in months).	Attended school (in months).	Can read.	Can write.	Can speak English.	Can read or write.		
				Month.	Year.					Place of birth of this Person.	Place of birth of Father of this person.	Place of birth of Mother of this person.												
Wagner Adam	Head	W	M	Apr	1867	33	6			Russia	Russia	Russia	1891	9	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Catherine	Wife	W	F	July	1876	23	6	3	3	Russia	Russia	Russia	1891	9	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	
Frank	Son	W	M	Jan	1895	5	8			North Dakota	Russia	Russia	1892	8	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	
Otilia	Daughter	W	F	Dec	1895	4	8			North Dakota	Russia	Russia			yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	
Barbara	Daughter	W	F	Oct	1897	2	8			North Dakota	Russia	Russia												
Sticker Elizabeth	Boarder	W	F	May	1889	11	8			Russia	Russia	Russia	1890	10										

1900 Census, Adam Wagner family

The 1900 census, dated June 22, lists the following information: Adam Wagner, age 33; born April 1867 in Russia; his parents were born in Russia; he immigrated in 1891; he had lived in the USA for 9 years; he was a farmer; he had never been unemployed; he could read and write, but spoke no English; and he owned his farm with no mortgage. All this information is correct except the birth month, which should be March rather than April -- my speculation is that he rounded up his birthdate by one month to accommodate the Gregorian calendar system in the USA. His wife, Katherine, was shown as age 23, born July 1876 (should be 1875) in Russia, she also could read and write, but spoke no English. Three children are shown, Frank, Otilia, and Barbara, who were of preschool age. Elizabeth "Sticker" (Sticka), age 11, was also shown as a "boarder" living with them. She was Katherine Wagner's cousin (Katherine's mother was Christina Sticka-Reis). They resided on the farm that Adam had homesteaded, but which had not yet been patented to Adam since he had not yet attained U.S. citizenship.

The census of 1910 repeats this information, with ages updated and the names of five additional children born within the previous ten years: Anna, Margaret, Joseph, Michael, and Mary. By then, both Adam and Katherine indicated that they could speak English, and both stated that they had attended school. Adam's age is stated to be 42 (at that time he was actually 43 by 3 months), and his date of arrival in the USA is correctly shown as 1891.

Adam built a two-room sod house on his land, as did most of the other German-Russian settlers during their initial years. Later, as he acquired the money, he added a three-room wooden frame house, painted pink with green trim (the colonies in Russia were also noted for bright colors on their doors and window trim). The old sod rooms were kept for storage. My father remembered playing in the sod rooms as a child. He used to cut out pictures of horses, harnesses and wagons from the Sears-Roebuck catalog, glue them onto cardboard, and set up little farm scenes. The Atlas also shows a small butte in section 17. My father called that knoll the "*Kledebügel*," which in their dialect meant the "clay hill." He recalled that he and his friends used to run 2 miles all the way to the summit, then back to the farmhouse.

Adam and Katherine farmed and ranched on their land for 28 years. They had 10 children (see tables in final chapter for further details):

1. Franz (Frank), born Jan. 1, 1895 (his obit. says Jan. 7).
2. Ottilia (Tillie), born Nov. 1896.
3. Barbara, born Oct. 2, 1898.
4. Anna, born Aug. 28, 1900.
5. Margaret, born Sept. 13, 1902.
6. Joseph, born Sept. 12, 1904.
7. Michael, born Oct. 22, 1906.
8. Marian (Marie), born Mar. 3, 1909.
9. John, born Dec. 16, 1911; my father.
10. James (Jimmy), born Feb. 3, 1917.

Newspaper reports about Adam Wagner and Katherine Reis

The Dickinson Press, Oct. 7, 1893 had a list of unclaimed letters, ending for the week of Sept. 30, 1893, which were being held at the Dickinson post-office for 35 families, including for Adam Wagner.

There were two notices in The Dickinson Press, July 9 and July 23, 1904, which stated "Taken Up, at my place 5 miles north of Dickinson, 1 black 3-yr. old heifer, white face, branded on right hip, Owner prove property and pay charges. Adam Wagner."

The Dickinson Press, April 19, 1913, reported that there was an application to cancel the \$300 valuation on personal property tax by Adam Wagner, as allowed by the Green River Township board.

On March 22, 1913, The Dickinson Press reported that Green River Township was divided into two districts and Adam Wagner was elected as overseer for the western half. A tax of \$4 was levied on all residents in each quarter for road improvements. A resident was exempt if he worked 8 hours on the road using his own team.

The Dickinson Press, July 20, 1914, reported that a tax was levied on local residents for the extension of a rural telephone line by the Western Telephone Company, the line was about 15 miles long and extended into farming lands northwest of Dickinson. The farmers had all the holes dug on their property and they were awaiting the arrival of the poles, which apparently they had to install. The plan was to extend 6 rural lines connected to the local exchange. The farmers included Ridl, Hecker, Froehlich, and Adam Wagner.

The Dickinson Press, July 14, 1917 reported that 1,399 young men had registered for the military draft with the local board in Stark County. One of them was Frank Wagner, Adam's oldest child. There are no reports or stories told about harassment of the local Germans during World War One, although this was rampant in most parts of the country at that time. Perhaps the very large number of ethnic Germans in North Dakota shielded them to some extent.

There were also reports of different Wagner families who lived in the area. The English language newspaper, the Emmons County Record had reports of a Wagner family from 1917 to 1920 who resided in Williamsport, which is today an unincorporated area, outside the county seat of Linton, in Dakota Territory. Emmons County is on the southern border with South Dakota. It was heavily settled by Germans from Russia and from Germany. My presumption is that this family was not my grandfather. I will give a brief summary.

The Emmons County Record reported a real estate transfer on Nov. 27, 1919: "Theodore B. Meinhover and Sadie Meinhover to Adam Wagner, lots 7 and 8, block 24, Hunter's First Addition to Linton. \$1 and other valuable consideration." On July 11, 1917, July 26, 1917 and Oct. 17, 1919, the Emmons County Record reported that Adam Wagner was paid \$1 for road work in District no. 25. On March 25, 1920 there was a property transfer by "Adam Wagner and wife to Christian Herr, lots 2, 3, 4 of 2-132-79, for \$1 etc." On Oct. 2, 1919 the property of Adam Wagner was auctioned, described as "16 miles west of Linton." This almost certainly indicates that they were a different family because they were far removed from the Dickinson area. There was also an unrelated Wagner family which lived in Hettinger, east of Richardton, and an Adam Wagner who lived "south of town" in Dickinson; our Adam Wagner lived northwest of town.

In 1921, the editors of the *Nord Dakota Herold* decided to reprint Fr. Keller's book on the Catholic colonies in the Black Sea region as a series, since there were so many settlers in the Dickinson area who came from these colonies. The editors requested that readers inform the Herold of their colony of origin, as well as for their family and

friends, which would then be compiled as a list and published, along with Fr. Keller's data. The book appeared in January, 1922. It contained the names of people in the Dickinson area, with their colonies of origin, and several graphic accounts of the suffering of those who remained behind at the hands of the Bolsheviks. Adam Wagner, the Reis, Sticka, and Obrigewitsch families were all shown as originating in Rastadt. Adam's son, Joseph, was a subscriber to the *Herold* at that time so he probably submitted the information for the family.

Personal anecdotes about the Wagner family

Everyone recalls that Adam Wagner was rather short, with dark hair and blue eyes. He had a long torso, but his legs were relatively short for his size (a trait passed on to my father, and to myself). Katherine was supposedly about 2" taller than Adam (although in the only surviving photo their heads are at about the same height). She had brownish eyes and light colored hair. Neither of them were ever heavy-set at any time in their lives. Adam wore one earring in his right ear-lobe, as recalled by everyone with whom I spoke. Aunt Barbara thought it was a folk remedy, perhaps related to the practice of wearing copper bracelets as an aid for arthritis. She said he suffered occasionally from terrible headaches, which she thought may have been due to high blood-pressure. He consulted a *Brauche* folk healer, who told him to wear the earring.

Adam had his own whiskey still, which he used to make "*Schnapps*," a popular form of distilled drink mixed with herbs. He took a drink in the morning and evening, but that was all, he didn't drink to excess. This practice was also common in Russia, where vodka was regarded as a stimulant, the "water of life." He always kept a bottle available to offer visitors, especially in the winter when people stopped by to "warm up." They would customarily have a cordial drink, which they referred to as a "*Schnäpple*" (a "little Schnapps"). Harry Boehm said that his father, Joachim, also had his own still; the men would sit around and play cards, sampling the distilled liquor as it dripped. Like other German-Russian men, "he believed in drinking but he wasn't a [heavy] drinker. That stuff they'd drink was so strong you could smell the raisins in it yet." North Dakota was not suitable for growing grapes, but beer was made as a food beverage. Adam didn't make his own beer; he brought it in from town in bottles - a barrel full at a time - which he stored in the root-cellar where it would stay cold.

Every fall Adam would haul in ten 100 lb. bags of flour and a 200 lb. bag of sugar from Dickinson, which would last the family over the winter. It cost about \$1.50 for a 100 lb. bag of flour in those days. Eight of the bags were of white flour, and two were rye. Adam disliked rye flour because he said that's all they had to eat in Russia when he was a child. He felt that children in America were very spoiled. He used to remark that they were very poor in Russia. They were lucky if they had milk soup and rye bread to eat. Rye bread was generally regarded as a mark of poverty by German-Russians, who always preferred white flour. It is notable that in Adam's brief family

history in the St. Joseph's Church Jubilee book he thanked God because he now had "good bread to eat." My assumption is that Adam never reached his full height potential because of his limited diet during his formative years.

In the 1900 census, Adam and Katherine indicated that they couldn't speak English, but by 1910 they indicated that they could, although my father said that neither of them spoke English very well. The Dickinson area was heavily populated by Germans from colonies in South Russia (the Ukraine) and from the Banat river valley in Hungary, all of whom spoke German dialect in the home and with each other in town. Adam and Katherine could also speak Russian fluently. They spoke to each other in Russian if they didn't want the children to eavesdrop on their conversation. They probably learned Russian in school, since by their childhood years in the 1880s Russian was the mandatory language of instruction in the German colonies. Adam probably also had close contact with other non-German farm workers in Russia and learned the language from them. Adam could also speak some "Bohemian." There were several Bohemian farmers (as my dad described them) near Dickinson, who came over about the same time as the Germans from Russia. Bohemians settled mostly north and northwest, with New Hradec (in Dunn County) the center. Southwest of Dickinson was a mixture of Bohemians, German Russians and German Hungarians. Bohemian is a Slavic language (a dialect of Czech), so Adam may have learned some phrases in that language based on his earlier knowledge of Russian. In those days people often stopped at each other's houses to warm up on their way to Dickinson during the winter. The roads intersected near the Wagner house, which was the last stop on the way into town, so everyone stopped there to rest and to exchange gossip. My dad remembered that Adam was able to converse with everyone, regardless of their nationality.

Adam's application for and award of citizenship and his marriage certificate are all signed with an "X" and the clerk wrote "his mark" on the forms. Ignatz Reis, his son Peter Reis, and others signed their forms in their own hand, so this leads me to suspect that Adam was illiterate in English. In the 1900 census Adam indicated that both he and Katherine could read and write, but they couldn't speak any English at that time. Most likely Adam knew how to sign his name, but he preferred to not sign documents in English because he couldn't read them. Another person with whom I spoke also indicated that her father could read and write in German, yet he too always signed his English language documents with an X. It's possible too that the clerk at the courthouse couldn't speak German and couldn't give instructions, such as "*bitte, unterschreiben Sie hier,*" so he simply had them put an X on the appropriate line.

Trying to describe the personality of Adam Wagner is an interesting puzzle and every person with whom I spoke had a slightly different impression. In 1974 I spoke with John Boehm's siblings, Harry Boehm and his sister Edith, both of whom were in their 80s at that point. The Boehm family were close neighbors and in-laws to the Wagners, so they had many memories. They gave very candid descriptions - but these should be taken with a large grain of salt because they were mischievous teenagers at

the time who obviously annoyed their neighbors, both the Wagner and the Reis families. They described Adam as being very "neat" and "fussy," for him "everything had to be just so." In the Boehm family the children had the daily chore of cleaning the barn, which they did quickly, using pitchforks for the job. Adam wanted his barn cleaned properly, so he always did the job himself. He used a pitchfork to scoop up the manure, after which he thoroughly swept the barn with a broom. He spent so much time cleaning the barn before any other chores that he went out to do fieldwork later than the Boehms. When I told this story to my dad, he admitted that Adam tended to be fussy and very clean, but he also commented that the Boehm teenagers didn't take proper care of their barn yards, they waited until the manure piled up a foot deep before they would clean it out.

Adam didn't like it when the Boehm teenagers visited his children while he was away because he couldn't keep an eye on them. He was "very strict," and he could be "very rude" to them when he returned home and found them there. My guess is that Adam wanted to keep an especially sharp eye out for his daughters, as was typical for German parents. Barbara and Anna once wanted to attend a wedding party of the Metz family, but Adam had forbidden them to go because he had a disagreement of some sort with the Metz, and he wouldn't allow the girls to go without a chaperone. They sneaked off anyway, walking about two miles to the party, and by the time they returned it was already evening. Adam had waited up for them. He was very upset, and he wouldn't allow them in the house, he made them sleep in the barn on a straw pile. My father remembered this incident, he said that Adam told the girls that if they "acted like pigs then they should sleep outside like the pigs." We should keep in mind that it was a common attitude back then that teenaged girls should be chaperoned at all times, and fathers strictly monitored their daughters.

As if to justify Adam's worst fears, Barbara became pregnant before she was married. There ended up being a double wedding between the Wagner and Boehm families -- John Boehm married Barbara, and Frank Wagner married Elizabeth Boehm. However, these marriages didn't happen without some major emotional fireworks which threatened relationships between the two families. While John and Frank were courting each other's sister, they would pass each other on the road to visit each other's house, which was about one mile apart. Adam had hesitated at first to allow Barbara to marry John, but when he found out that she was pregnant he paid a formal visit to Joachim Boehm to discuss when the wedding would take place. Joachim hesitated because his daughter Edith was older than his son John, and he thought that Edith might want to marry her boyfriend, named Schaff. If that was the case, then he wanted to plan a large triple wedding, which would help cut down on the expense -- John with Barbara, Frank with Elizabeth, and Edith with the Schaff boy. The three sets of parents all got together to discuss the matter. Joachim said that he wouldn't agree to the arrangement until he had a chance to talk it over privately with Edith, to see what she wanted to do. Things completely fell apart at that point. Edith adamantly and

emotionally refused to marry the Schaff boy, she said he was so “stupid” that he didn’t even have the courage to propose to her! The Schaff parents were naturally embarrassed and upset. Adam became quite angry because he thought Joachim was holding back because his daughter Barbara and son Frank “weren’t good enough for them”! The two fathers eventually resolved matters and a double wedding finally took place. Both couples were married at the same time at St. Joseph’s church in Dickinson. However, the priest added a last-minute snag -- rather than having the couples stand side-by-side at the altar, as was the custom in a double wedding, Barbara and John had to stand behind Frank and Elizabeth because Barbara was already three months pregnant, “and everyone knew it!”

After all these fireworks, Adam wouldn’t let bygones be bygones, he continued to hold a grudge against the Boehms for quite awhile. As Edith described it, he was “*kribbelig*” (crabby, irritable, impatient), he would “pick and pick” at things for months at a time. Edith pointed out that Adam had allowed Frank to go out unchaperoned with Elizabeth Boehm without making a fuss, but he didn’t like it when Barbara went out with John Boehm. However, back then girls were more strictly supervised by their parents than boys. Having a daughter become pregnant before marriage was a much greater public shame in those days, especially among Germans from Russia, who were very religious. Harry Boehm, who told this story from the perspective of the Boehm teenagers, finally agreed that Adam wasn’t so unusual in this regard, as he noted “all them Germans, they were all strict with the younger generation.”

Aunt Barbara said she felt closer to her mother, but she was non-committal about Adam. Most of what she knew about the old days was from stories told by Katherine, since Adam didn’t talk much about it. Aunt Marie, one of Adam’s younger daughters, gave quite a different perspective about her parents. She liked Adam more than her mother because she could “get away with more” with him, and he rarely disciplined her. When they went into town Marie would sometimes ask him to bring back some cloth for her to sew. Katherine never would do this, but Adam always brought her something. When the kids clowned around in the barn, throwing hay down from the loft onto each other, Adam would whip the boys, including my dad, but he would somehow always “miss” Marie. My father once chased his younger brother Jimmy and threw a brick at him, which missed and went through the screen door. Adam gave him a whipping for doing this. In the incident involving Anna and Barbara, when he made them sleep outside, he didn’t whip them. Harry Boehm remarked, “I guess he didn’t want to spank them because he was so mad he would have half killed them,” but it seems to me that Adam used physical punishment mainly with the boys, while the girls received mainly lectures and criticism.

The deaths of Adam and Katherine Wagner

There were hundreds of German language newspapers in the USA and most of them were forcibly closed down during the war years. The *Staats-Anzeiger* in Bismarck continued publication from 1906 until 1969, although at some point it shifted to an English-only edition. *Der Nord Dakota Herold* in Dickinson remained in publication until 1960 and it too transitioned to English. It was published in German until at least 1930, when the obituary for Katharine Wagner was printed. Unfortunately the 1921-1924 issues are not available so we don't have an obituary for Adam Wagner. There was a concurrent English language newspaper, The Dickinson Press, published in Dickinson.

There is a brief report in The Dickinson Press, Jan. 17, 1914, that states: "Adam Wagner from south of town has been at St. Joseph's hospital since Saturday where he had an operation performed." No further details were provided. I'm not certain that this was the same person as my grandfather because as far as I know Adam and his family always resided northwest of town on his farm, whereas this Adam Wagner was "from south of town." It's possible that there was another person in Dickinson with this name, or perhaps Adam was doing hired work at that time. If this is my grandfather, it may indicate that he was developing early symptoms of cancer, which eventually took his life.

In about 1920, Adam became ill with tongue and throat cancer. The story told is that one day he was eating fried chicken and he jabbed his tongue with a bone. The sore never healed and it gradually spread down his throat. The cancer was undoubtedly caused by his pipe-smoking, of which Adam was quite fond. Adam consulted Dr. Schnuzlich in Dickinson, then he went to St. Mary's hospital in Rochester, Minnesota, which was the main source for medical treatment in North Dakota at that time (it is referred to in several articles in the *Nord Dakota Herold*). They tried experimental therapy on him - they clamped his tongue and ran electrical current through it "to burn out the cancer," but to no avail. They then surgically removed part of his tongue. Adam lingered for about two more years and he endured much suffering before his death. His tongue became so swollen that it protruded from his mouth. Katherine fed him soup, but Adam reached the point where he couldn't swallow. Doctors put a tube down his throat to feed him, but he just withered away. He died at home on April 3, 1922. My father recalls coming home from school, and seeing a group of people at the house. His mother met him at the door and told him that Adam had died. As was the custom at that time, they had a wake, known as a *Todewacht*, a "death-watch." They kept his body in an open casket in the parlor for about two or three days, surrounded by blocks of ice, and family and friends stopped by to pay their respects. The women sat in a circle around the body and prayed the rosary. It was still cold outside, so they kept the parlor door closed with the heat turned off. On the day of the funeral, everyone walked from the church to the cemetery, which was about 1 1/2 miles from the church in Dickinson. Everyone threw a handful of dirt onto the coffin. He

was buried in the St. Joseph's Catholic cemetery, in Dickinson, N.D. (where Ignatz and Christina Reis, and other early members of the family are also buried). My father recalls that in April the ground was still frozen, so they had difficulty digging his grave. Adam had bought a plot for the entire family. When I visited the cemetery there was no head-stone to mark his grave site.

Katherine Wagner was a healer (known as a "*Brauche*" in the German dialect), and she often helped other families in need. *Braucherei* is an ancient form of folk-healing in the German speaking regions in Europe, combining prayers, blessings, religious medals, and herbal remedies taken either as an infusion or applied as poultices on various parts of the body. My father recalled that people brought their sick children to her for healing, and she baptized many sick babies that were at risk of death. My Aunt Barbara had a prayer book that belonged to Katherine, which she showed me. It was in German, printed in 1873 in Russia. The title page was: "The Great Golden Key of Heaven, or, a very Powerful, Useful, and Comforting Prayer Book for the Release of Beloved Souls in Purgatory, Containing all Available Powerful Morning, Evening, Mass, Vespers, Confession, and Communion Prayers." While she was helping another sick person in the community, Katherine contracted spinal meningitis. Because this is a contagious disease, they didn't allow family members to visit her in the hospital. At first they let my father help hold her down while they gave painful shots in her spine, but after a while they didn't allow this for fear that he too would contract the disease. She died on Feb. 27, 1930, at the age of 53. She was buried next to Adam in St. Joseph's Cemetery, southwest of Dickinson about 2 miles.⁶

We do have the obituary in 1930 for Katherine, which I have translated below:⁷

"Mrs. Katharina Wagner Dies.

Last Thursday, the 27th February, at 15 minutes before 8:00 in the evening in St. Joseph's hospital, after receiving the Last Rites of the Church, Mrs. Katharina Wagner died from the contagious disease spinal meningitis (*Hirn-und Rückenentzündung*) at the age of 53 years, 7 months, and 8 days. Her death recalled so stirringly the Words of Holy Scripture: It is but a step between life and death. At the beginning of the month she was still healthy and in good spirits, and within the short span of 17 days she was already a corpse.

The deceased was the daughter of the deceased Ignatz and Christina Reis. She was born in Rastadt, South Russia, on July 19, 1876. On June 3, 1892 she came with her

⁶ We visited the cemetery in 1991. Adam purchased 8 plots for the family. Adam and Katherine are buried in space 4; their graves are unmarked (no headstone), due to the cost at that time. Frank and Elizabeth's first-born were twins, who died in infancy. They were named Adam and Eve, and buried at the foot of Adam's grave. Caroline Wagner (one of Frank's daughters who died of diphtheria in childhood) is in space 2. Joseph is in space 8 (with headstone), and Frank is in space 7 (with headstone).

⁷ Obituary for Katherina Wagner, *Nord Dakota Herold*, March 7, 1930, p. 8.

parents to America, where they settled on a farm 7 miles northwest of Dickinson. Two years later, on January 30, she married Adam Wagner. From this union they had 10 children. They lived with their family on the farm for 33 years, 5 miles northwest from the city, where her husband preceded her in death on April 2, 1922. In the Fall she left the farm and moved into the city.

She was a capable and good mother and is now mourned by her old, sick and blind mother, Mrs. Christina Reis, and her 10 children: Franz Wagner, [Barbara] Mrs. John Boehm in Dickinson, [Ottilia] Mrs. Frank Schlosser in Mott, N.D., [Anna] Mrs. Alexander Roll in Burt, N.D., [Margaret] Mrs. Philip Bosch in Laurel, MT, Joseph Wagner in Belfield, N.D., Mike Wagner, [Marie] Mrs. Anton Kilwein, John and James Wagner in Dickinson, as well as by her siblings, friends and acquaintances.

The funeral was on Saturday morning at 8:00 in St. Joseph's church, where a Requiem Mass was held with the relatives and society-sisters. In the previous evening a large number of her society-sisters in the St. Anna Altar Society assembled in St. Joseph's Church and prayed the rosary for the deceased. Her body could unfortunately not be taken into the church, because of the contagious disease. At 2:00 in the afternoon she was taken to the cemetery and laid to rest next to her spouse. The pall-bearers were Mike Schoch, John Fischer, Joseph Koffler, Peter Matz, Dinius Olheiser and Victor Weisgerber. May she rest in the Peace of the Lord."

After Adam's death, Katherine and the children continued farming for 6 years, until Fall of 1929, when she sold the farm and retired to Dickinson. The farm land was sold to a local Bohemian family known as Kostelecky. My dad and Aunt Barbara both said that the farm house, which was built by Adam, was purchased by Joachim Boehm (the father to John Boehm, Adam's son-in-law), and moved one mile to the west (southeast quarter of section 24), where it remains standing today. In 1939 my parents visited the old farm and dad took a photo with his Brownie box camera (below).



Adam Wagner farm, 1939

In 1991 I located the house and took photos, which match the old black-and-white photo that my father took 52 years earlier. I also took photos on a return trip in 2009. Although additions have been made over the years, the basic structure is still recognizable.⁸

⁸ In 2009 the northern city limits of Dickinson had grown to about 3 miles from the old farm site. The original site of the Wagner farmhouse has been plowed over and all that is visible today are fields of wheat owned by Arthur Ridl and sons. The location today is on the northwest corner of 34 St. SW and 113 Ave. SW. After Katherine sold the house, it was moved one section to the west, where it still stands. The current address is 11523 34th St. SW.

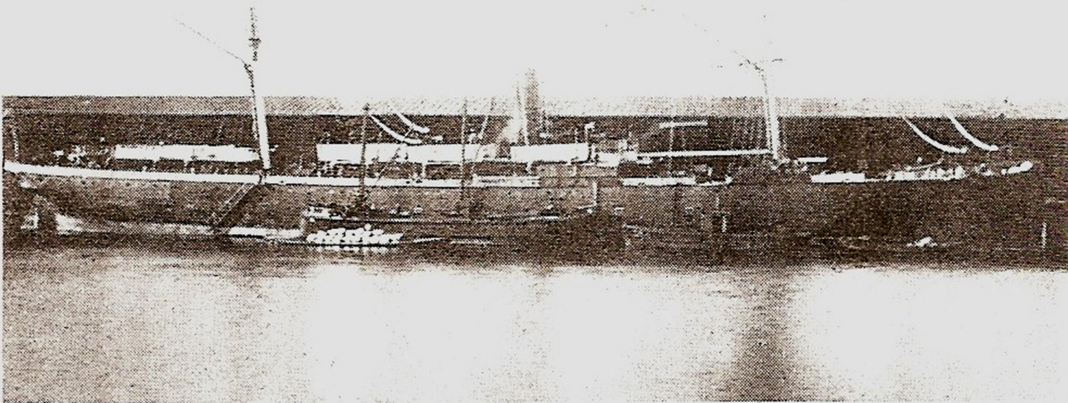


Adam Wagner farm house, 2009

The Reis family

Katherine Reis, Adam's wife, was the daughter of Ignatz Reis and Christina Sticka. Ignatz and Christina, and all their children, were born in Rastadt - he in 1846 and she in 1848. His parents were Karl Reis and Katherina Kroll. The Reis family was not among the original founders of Rastadt in 1810, so it is not certain where they originated. The earliest records available point to Georg Reis from Wollmesheim, district of Landau in the Pfalz, who arrived sometime after 1810, with his wife Katharina, and children Konrad, Michael, and Elizabeth. They resided in the colony of Landau in 1816, then in 1839 his married son Konrad appeared in Speier. Several records for members of the Reis family appear after that date in Landau and Speier, so there is a good likelihood that Karl Reis moved from one of those two colonies to Rastadt, where he married Katherina Kroll. Karl Reiss was one of the signators of the registry of eligible voter in Rastadt in 1862. The Kroll family stemmed from Michael Kroll, who was one of the founders of Rastadt in 1810. He was from Böchingen, in the Pfalz. Like so many other colonists, Michael Kroll died during the first year in Russia. The 1811 agricultural report for Rastadt shows Agnes Kroll, a widow, with 3 sons and 1 daughter.

Ignatz and Christina were already middle-aged when they immigrated to the Dickinson area (he was 46, and she 44 years old). All of their children came with them, including their married son Peter Reis and his wife Sophia, and their son-in-law Ludwig Metz who was married to their daughter Elisabeth. Georg Reis (Ignatz's brother or cousin) and his wife Marie and four children also traveled with them. They boarded the steamship Gellert in Hamburg on May 22, 1892, which docked in New York 12 days later.



S.S. GELLERT, 1874 Hamburg American Line
Courtesy The Peabody Museum of Salem

They had 10 children (further details are provided in the summary tables at the end of this book):

1. Peter, born Apr. 11, 1867.
2. Johann, born Aug. 20, 1872.
3. Elizabeth, born July 12, 1875.
4. Katherina, born July 18, 1876, my grandmother.
5. Jacob (Jack), born Mar. 24, 1878.
6. Joseph, born Apr. 1881.
7. Ottilia (Tilly), born Apr. 1882.
8. Anna, born Jan. 1884.
9. Anna Maria (Mary), born Nov. 1885.
10. Thomas, born Dec. 1887.

According to family stories, Ignatz sold his land in Russia and had about 18,000 *rubles* in cash when they came to North Dakota, worth about \$9,000 – a considerable sum of money at that time! A person was supposed to reside in the USA for 2 years before applying for citizenship, but Ignatz apparently did not want to wait. He filed for citizenship on July 11, 1892 – about 2 months after their arrival. The stated date of arrival on the application was correct, so it is unclear why the clerk allowed him to file

so early. His son, Peter, also applied early, on August 1, 1892, while his other son John applied Nov. 2, 1894. Ignatz received citizenship on Nov. 14, 1898. One reason why he filed early was because he was in a rush to file for a homestead, which he did two weeks later on Aug. 13, 1892.⁹ His land was located one mile from Adam Wagner and Joachim Boehm, about eight miles northwest of Dickinson. He also purchased the adjoining quarter to the west (the 1914 Atlas shows that he owned both those quarters). He built a substantial stone house and barn, which are still standing today. Ignatz also took out a homestead in the coal fields northwest of Dickinson (the same area as Adam Wagner). Harry Boehm remarked that Ignatz's house didn't leave any air space inside the walls, so in the winter water would condense on the inside. He recalled that in the kitchen the exposed stone walls would sweat and water would run down the walls, which froze into a layer of ice overnight.

As my father and his siblings grew up, most of their family contacts were with their grandparents and uncles and aunts on the Reis side, who were the only family they knew. Ignatz was a stout old family patriarch. He lived on his homestead northwest of town, surrounded by his married sons, sons-in-law, and numerous grandchildren. According to Harry Boehm, he was rather short, about 5'6", and husky - not really fat, just "built that way" (heavy of frame). He always smoked a large curved pipe. Unlike Adam Wagner and Joachim Boehm, Ignatz didn't have a whiskey still, and he didn't enjoy having a daily "*Schnäpple*."

Christina Reis once became ill and she thought she was on the verge of death. She had his daughters Anna, Tilly and Mary make her a "death robe" (a burial robe) out of white cloth. When she got better she didn't want to throw the robe away and she didn't know what to do with it, so one of the girls used it for a nightgown. This was in 1910 or 1911, before Ignatz and Christina moved into town. The Boehms always recalled this as a funny incident about the Reis family.

When their last daughter, Mary, became married and moved away from home, Ignatz and Christina were elderly by this point, and they decided that it was time to make other living arrangements. Tom Reis's son, Timmy, was described as being rather rambunctious, which caused tensions between the elders and Tom's wife. Ignatz sold the stone farm house to Joe Metz and they moved in with Adam Wagner and Katherine. About this same time a brief notice appeared in the *Nord Dakota Herald* on Oct. 14, 1921 that Tom Reis was having an auction at his place, six miles from Dickinson. This may mark the time when Ignatz sold his farmhouse.

⁹ Township 140, Range 96, Section 18, southwest quarter. This homestead was patented to Ignatz on July 29, 1899.



**Ignatz Reis and Christina Sticka
Parents of Katherine Reis-Wagner**

Ignatz and Christina lived with Adam Wagner and Katherine for about 5 years. My father recalled that Ignatz gave Adam enough money to add another room onto the house for them. Christina then went blind, and developed cancer, which required that much of her colon be removed. After that she was basically an invalid. My dad recalled a ritual that the grandchildren in the family did every morning with Christina, after her eyesight failed her - they all had to stand in a row and she would go down the line and feel their faces, then announce their names (*"oh, du bist Jimmy, du bist Johnny,"* and so on). Dad would duck his head because he didn't like her touching his face, so Katherine would stand behind him to make him put up with it out of respect for the old woman. Another anecdote was that Christina used to snort *"schmoose"* tobacco. One

time she ran out and Adam sent my dad into Dickinson to buy some for her. He found an old can along the road with some left in it, so he brought it back for her. He figured that since she was blind she wouldn't notice the difference. She scraped some out of the can, snorted it, then had a major spasm of sneezing from the pungent old tobacco.

After Adam became ill with cancer, Katherine couldn't take care of her parents, so Ignatz and Christina bought a small house in Dickinson where they spent the remainder of their years. Both lived to a ripe old age. Ignatz died on Nov. 18, 1925 at the age of 79 from complications of a hernia. A brief note in the *Nord Dakota Herold*¹⁰ reported his death: "He was troubled with a long standing illness, but old age is given as the main cause of death. He entered the hospital for an operation the first of the week, but his condition was far beyond aid, and he lingered on for but a day." Apparently his hernia had created an intestinal obstruction, which caused an embolism. One week later, his obituary¹¹ appeared:

"As we briefly reported last week, on the 18th of November Ignatz Reis died completely unexpectedly at the age of 79 years. Other than a hernia injury, which caused his death, he was reportedly always healthy and vigorous, in contrast to his tragic wife who is blind and who by herself couldn't be much help to her beloved husband who is now deceased. For almost 60 years Frau Christina Reis, born Sticka, was married to him, and this marriage was blessed with 10 children, eight of whom are still living and reside in this area: [names of children follow]. The elderly couple came from Russia to this country in 1892 and soon after homesteaded close by Dickinson. The funeral occurred on Friday at St. Joseph's church, with many people in attendance. May the departed rest in peace."

Ignatz was also noted to be a devout church member and he belonged to several of the men's clubs in the parish. A notice in the next column after the obituary informs the members of the St. Anthony's Society that in accordance with their statutes, all should pay "the death-dollar within 30 days to Jacob Mack, secretary." One of the functions of the church sodalities back then was to provide death insurance, with all members contributing \$1 for funeral expenses. Ignatz is buried in the St. Joseph's church cemetery in Dickinson. His family erected an impressively large tombstone, one of the largest in the entire cemetery.

After his death, Christina was cared for by her granddaughter, Mrs. Jacob Reisenauer. Christina died Nov. 7, 1934 at the age of 86. The next day her death was reported on the front page of the newspaper: "Aged woman died after living 40 years as invalid." The obituary¹² notes that she died at the home of her granddaughter, Mrs.

¹⁰ The Dickinson Press, Nov. 20, 1925.

¹¹ Nord Dakota Herold, Nov. 27, 1925.

¹² The Dickinson Press and Dickinson Recorder Post, Nov. 8, 1934.

Jacob Reisenauer, on the South Side of Dickinson. Death resulted from “complications attendant upon old age.” Christina is buried next to Ignatz, along with several other members of the Reis family.

Germans from Russia in Saskatchewan

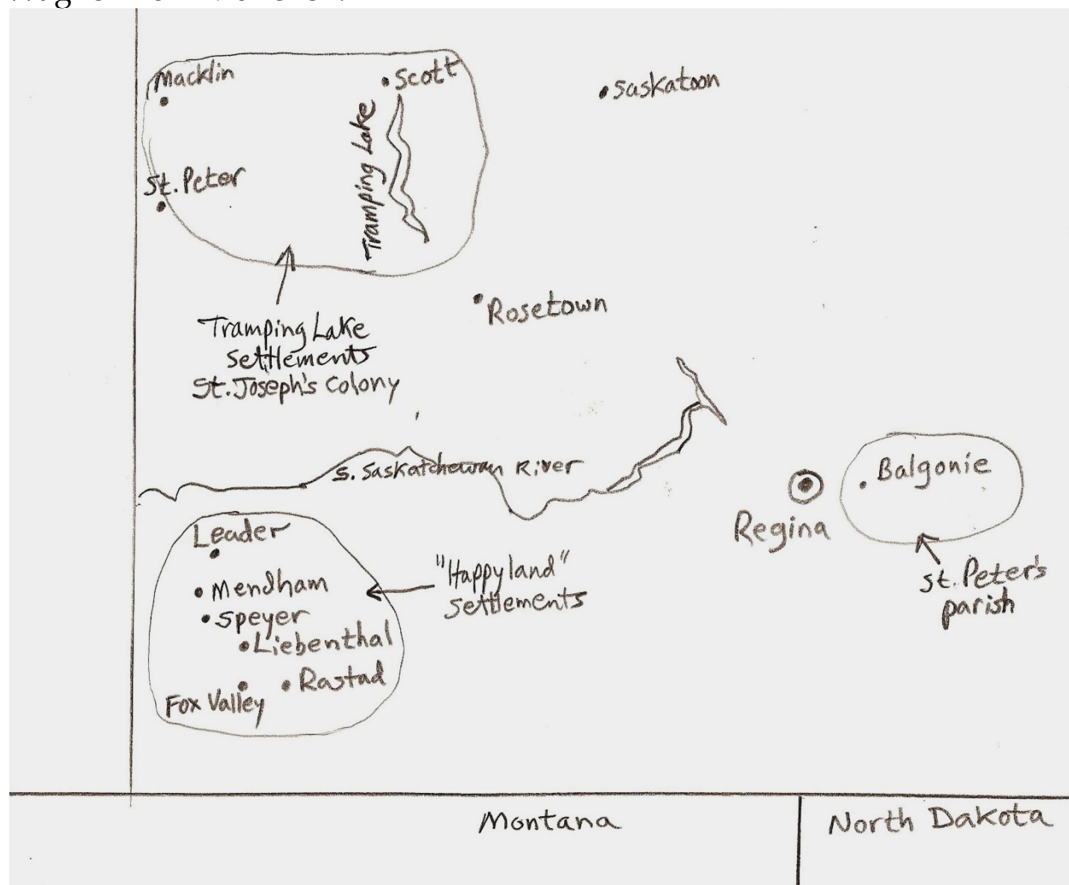
The Dominion lands in Saskatchewan and Alberta became available for homesteading (referred to as “script-land” in Canada) by 1882, and the opportunities were well-advertised throughout eastern Canada, the USA, and overseas. Many Germans from Russia were lured there, some of whom had initially taken out homesteads in the Dakotas, then moved further north in hopes of finding better land. The provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were formed in 1905. The peak of the land settlement was in 1909–1912, and by 1918 most parts of these provinces were well settled. After this, the provincial government created the rural municipalities (R.M.) as the unit of local government. There were three major areas of settlement by Germans from Russia in Saskatchewan.

The earliest area of settlement was about 16 miles east of Regina, near Balgonie. There, in 1886, eight German-Russian families took out homesteads, and by 1890, some 24 Catholic families lived there. They came from Josephstal, about 17 miles from Odessa, and in 1894 they named St. Joseph’s Colony in honor of their home. In 1890 immigrants from the Beresan colonies in the Ukraine began to settle in nearby Kronau, 15 miles south of Balgonie and about 20 miles southeast of Regina. By 1899 there were 65 families living in three small communities named after those in the old country – Rastadt (also known as No. 7 Colony), Speyer, and Katharinenthal. In 1916 these three colonies united to form St. Peter’s parish.¹³

Another cluster of German-Russian settlements was established in 1905 near Tramping Lake (west of Saskatoon, northwest of Rosetown). In 1904 a German immigrant, F. J. Lange, was appointed as an immigration agent by the Canadian government, and placed in charge of the Catholic Resettlement Society. Lange’s goal was to establish a Catholic settlement in the Tramping Lake area. He placed ads in various German Catholic newspapers in the Dakotas, which soon attracted great interest. Missionary priests of the Oblate Order also encouraged the German-speaking people in the Dakotas and neighboring states to come to Canada. Many of these settlers had initially homesteaded in Pierce and Towner counties, N.D., near the Canadian border, where the land was very sandy and unsuitable for grain farming. Families sold their lands and left in groups, heading north. Between 1905-1908 some 77 townships

¹³ The history of the settlements in St. Peter’s parish is presented in an article by Fr. H. Metzger, which was originally written in 1930 and reprinted in the April, 1975 issue of the *AHSGR Journal*.

were established near Tramping Lake, in an area that also became known as St. Joseph's Colony. The population skyrocketed after the railroad came through in 1909. The first settlers were Catholics from the Kutschurgan colonies of the Ukraine. None of them derived from the Beresan colonies, and none appear to be related to Adam and Johann Wagner from München.¹⁴



The third cluster of settlements was the "Happyland" region, centered near Fox Valley, Prelate and Leader, below the South Saskatchewan River. German-Russian families began moving into that area between 1908-1909. The R.M. of Happyland was organized on January 1, 1913. The town of Prussia was founded that year, and in 1917 it was renamed Leader. Large numbers of the early settlers were German Catholics from the Beresan region. As had happened earlier near Balgonie, their settlements were named after the old country -- "Rastad," Speyer, and Liebenthal. Fox Valley was named after a valley in Russia from which they had come, called *Fuchs Tal*. Rastad and Speyer opened to homesteading about 1911-12. According to local old-timers, Rastad and Speyer were never really "towns" -- rather, they consisted of a church and a cemetery, with several farmhouses scattered nearby. The old Rastad church burned

¹⁴ Joseph Height, *Memories of the Black Sea Germans*, privately published 1979, provides a detailed history of the settlements in the Tramping Lake region, beginning on p. 275.

down many years ago, but the cemetery remains today, isolated on the prairies, about 10 miles northeast of Fox Valley. The Speyer cemetery also stands isolated about two miles south of Mendham. The Speyer church still stands in Mendham, where it was moved years ago. Liebenthal also was the center of a small cluster of farmsteads, with a Catholic church.

Adam Wagner's Cousins

Five of the families that came across on the same ship with Adam Wagner from München in 1891 settled in St. Peter's parish, near Balgonie. These included Joseph Schropp and his wife, Katherine Wagner, and the families of Franz Dietz, Franz Bast, Wilhelm Thomas, and Heinrich Bengert. In the fall of 1891 Johann Obrigewitsch and his family arrived from Rastadt. In 1892 two more families arrived from Rastadt -- Peter Herauf and his wife, Katharine Sticka, and Simon Schmidt and wife, Anastasia Sticka. In 1893 Matthias Obrigewitsch and his family arrived from Rastadt, and settled just west of Kronau in Saskatchewan. Finally, in 1899 Michael Wormsbecher and his wife, Salomea Wagner arrived from Rastadt, along with 11 other families. They settled in the community of Rastad (also known as "Seven Colony"), which had been founded by earlier settlers in Saskatchewan. Salomea and Michael Wormsbecher settled in Sedley, where they remained until their deaths.¹⁵ Rochus Wagner settled in Prelate, Saskatchewan.

We may assume that the two Sticka women were related to Christina (Sticka) Reis, who later became Adam Wagner's mother-in-law in Dickinson. Rochus Wagner, Katherine Wagner (married to Joseph Schropp) from München and Salomea Wagner (married to Michael Wormsbecher) from Rastadt were Adam's cousins.

Katherine (Katy) Wagner

The baptismal records in Russia show that Katherine (Katy) Wagner was born Aug. 1, 1862 in München, the dau. of Adam Wagner and Margaret Rössler. Katy married Joseph Schropp. Joseph was born May 29, 1862 in München and d. Feb. 2, 1928 (age 65, = b. 1863). Joseph and Katherine were on the same ship as Adam Wagner when they immigrated in 1891. They initially settled near Regina, Saskatchewan then moved to Montana in 1899. Katy d. Mar. 14, 1870 in San Bruno, CA.

Katy and Joseph had three children -

1) Margaret Schropp b. Sept. 15, 1882 in Russia, her husband was Arthur J. Loomis. The 1920 and 1930 U.S. Censuses show her as Maggie Loomis, they had three

¹⁵ Information on these early settlers near Balgonie is drawn from the article by Fr. Metzger referred to above (Metzger, 1974).

children – John (born in N.D.), Harold (born in Colorado), and Floyd (born in MT). Maggie was born in Russia, her mother tongue was German, she died in 1970.

2) Martin Schropp b. Aug. 30, 1884 in Russia, marr. in 1906 in Billings, MT, he d. Oct. 30, 1973 in Chicago.

3) Annalie (Amelia) b. ca. 1890, apparently died in childhood.

Katy and Joseph Schropp resided in Billings, MT at the time of her death on July 12, 1920 (age 58, = b. 1862) while she was visiting relatives in Regina, Saskatchewan, probably Salomea Wagner-Wormsbecher or Rochus Wagner.

Salomea Wagner

The baptismal records in Russia show that Salomea Wagner was born Nov. 18, 1871 in München, the daughter of Adam Wagner and Margaret Rössler. She married Michael Wormsbecher, he was born Sept. 20, 1869 in Rastadt and died in 1946. They emigrated to Saskatchewan in 1899, with three children – Margaret, Katherine, and Dorothea. They had 8 children total. Salomea died March 27, 1954 in Sedley, Saskatchewan. Her father, Adam Wagner, was the son of Ferdinand in München, so she was a cousin to our Adam Wagner and sibling to Katy Wagner-Schropp and Rochus Wagner. Salomea and Christian Wagner (her brother?) sent a letter published on April 30, 1920 in the *Staats-Anzeiger*, a German language newspaper in Bismarck, N.D. She inquired about “her mother, Barbara Rigel, married to Adam Wagner, and later to Schweigert.” She also asked about her “cousins” Adam Wagner and Jakob Maier. She offered to give a one year subscription to the *Staats-Anzeiger* to anyone who could provide information.

Her letter is unclear, it states that her mother was Barbara Rigel, instead of Margaret Rössler as is stated in the records in Russia, and that her mother later remarried to someone named Schweigert. There is an editor’s question mark after the surname Rigel, which indicates that Salomea’s handwriting was unclear. The baptismal record for her sister, Katy Wagner, shows her mother as Margaret “Riele,” which is likely a variation on the surname “Rigel,” which could be Rössler.

Salomea also inquired about her cousin, Jakob Meier. This was most likely Jakob Meier who was born in either Rastadt or München, he and his family immigrated to N.D. in 1904 and they settled near Mott, N.D. Jakob Meier was a brother to Louisa Meier and Heinrich Landeis (my great-grandparents) who immigrated in 1889 and initially settled in N.D., then eventually to Ryegate, MT.

Rochus Wagner

Another member of the Wagner family who settled in Saskatchewan was Rochus Wagner, born Aug. 16, 1864 in München. His parents were Adam Wagner and Margaret Ressler/Rössler so he was a brother to Salomea and Katy. The name

“Rochus” is unusual. It occurs in German and Dutch speaking regions. I suspect that it may be an informal form for “Drocharius,” which supposedly means “Gottlieb.” There is a baptismal record in München on Feb. 25, 1822 for “Drocharius” Schwamm, born Jan. 29, the son of Simon Schwamm and Magdalena “Meyor” (Meier). St. Rochus was also the namesake for one of the nearby Catholic churches in the Beresan colonies.

Rochus and his wife, Katherine Kowitz/Kovis, had six children (see summary tables in the final chapter). Rochus had subscribed to the *Staats-Anzeiger* newspaper from Bismarck, N.D., which provided him with information about those who had immigrated to North America. This was a common practice at that time, since those in the German colonies wanted to gather as much information as they could about conditions in the New World. He and his family boarded a steamship on April 17, 1913, with a group of families from München, and they arrived in Canada on May 28, 1913, destined for Sedley, Saskatchewan, near Regina.

Shortly before their departure, Rochus’s son, Kaspar Wagner, wrote a letter to the *Staats-Anzeiger* on March 15, 1913, from Sedley, Saskatchewan, which provides some information about this branch of the family:

“I have been looking for the address for **Siegfried** and **Joseph Wagner**, sons of **Anton** [Kaspar’s brother]. If these gentlemen are not readers of this paper, perhaps someone can forward their address to me. (We cannot determine if they are subscribers as we need more information about them. Editor.) I have been living in Canada for the past two years and have not heard a word from either of them. My parents who live in München, South Russia will be moving to Canada soon and therefore I ask that instead of sending the remaining subscription of *Der Staats-Anzeiger* to my father **Rochus Wagner** that it be sent to **Wilhelm Kowis** of München. (The subscription will expire this week. Editor.) I want to ask that my Uncle **Wilhelm Kowis** write a report about my home village of München and in return, I will pay for a one year subscription for him. I send greetings to my nephews **Bernhard** and **Georg Kowis**, sons of Franz in Plantersville, Texas as well as to the Editor and all readers of this dear paper. Kaspar Wagner, son of Rochus.”

Johannes Scherger, who accompanied Rochus on the ship, was residing in Elardee, Saskatchewan in 1914. He wrote a letter to the *Staats-Anzeiger* newspaper dated March 26, 1914 inquiring about Rochus, and in this letter he stated that he was the nephew of Rochus. This is the passage:

“I see that **Rochus Wagner**, living in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, is no longer a reader of the paper, and yet I am convinced that he was a reader of the paper last winter in Munich, South Russia, since I myself often have read the paper at his home. Has he now, in the new world, become so proud or so lazy? Already during this winter he has married off his oldest son and his oldest daughter. I think that what he is

most proud of is that he hopes to become a grandfather next fall. Would the readers of the paper in Regina please tell him this: I send him cordial greetings as his nephew.”

Another letter, written in 1914 by Balthasar Wagner in Strassburg, N.D., also inquired about Rochus. We may assume that Balthasar too was a relative. Rochus eventually settled in the Prelate area, about 24 miles north of Fox Valley. He died 6 years later, and Katherine remarried. Not much is known of Rochus, other than that they were poor, and shared the hardships of all the immigrant families during the early homesteading years. He was born only three years before Adam Wagner in München, so Rochus was undoubtedly a first-cousin. This information was provided by June McDonald, his great-granddaughter, who currently lives in Australia. Her grandmother, Margaret Wagner (b. Aug. 22, 1887, München) was the daughter of Rochus Wagner (b. Aug. 16, 1864) and Katharina Kovis (b. Aug. 20, 1868). June also sent me a photo of Rochus. In my opinion, Rochus bears a clear resemblance to our Wagner family, especially to my father John and his brothers.

Rochus died in Prelate, Saskatchewan Oct. 29, 1919, at the untimely age of 55. His record shows that his property was probated on Nov. 3, 1919 by his wife Katherina age 51, and children Margaret 31, Kaspar 28, Max 24, Anton 20, and Anna 14. He was listed as a farmer in Saskatchewan.¹⁶

It should be noted that there is an unrelated family with the surname Wagner living in the Fox Valley area today. There were two Wagner brothers in town, named Lucas and Adolf. Adolf was still alive when I visited that area in 1995, residing in a nursing home in Leader. His son operated the store in Liebenthal. The little town of Liebenthal barely merits being shown on modern maps, and this is primarily due to the Wagner general store and a gas-station, which became a convenient place for a postal-drop station. There is no apparent link between this Wagner family and great-uncle John Wagner from München, Ukraine.

The search for Great-Uncle John Wagner

Adam's younger brother, John, was born in 1870 in München. According to family stories, he left Russia about two or three years after Adam. He may have stayed initially with Adam in North Dakota, but no details of these early years are known. By that point (about 1893-94) much of the desirable land in the Dakotas had already been taken, so later arrivals took homesteads in less desirable areas to the north, such as in Pierce and Towner counties, which were basically scrublands with sandy soil that was unfavorable for wheat farming. At some point John went to Saskatchewan, probably following other families from München and Rastadt who had settled near Prelate, north

¹⁶ Rochus' farm land was SW 15-20-26, Saskatchewan.

of Fox Valley, or Balgonie. He also found employment in the seasonal harvesting crews.

John and Adam periodically sent letters to each other. Shortly before Adam's death in 1922, he wrote his brother to inform him that he was dying of cancer. John took the train down to Dickinson and spent a couple of weeks with the family. This was the only time that they met their uncle John, or any other relative on Adam's side of the family. Various fragmentary memories have been passed down. At that time John told them that he was living near Rosetown, Saskatchewan. He was unmarried and he owned some land and cattle. Since he had no heirs, John promised that all his property would someday be willed to Katherine and the children. Nothing ever came of that promise. Everyone described him as somewhat eccentric. He wore two pairs of long-handled underwear to keep warm in the winter, which all the kids thought was funny. Everyone remembered that John loved music. Adam's oldest son, Frank, had an accordion which immediately drew John's interest. He offered to make a trade -- if Frank would give him the accordion, John promised that he would send Frank a rifle after he returned to Canada.

The family never heard from John again after he left. The rifle never arrived, nor did anyone ever receive word of his death. Katherine wrote him a couple of letters, probably addressed general delivery, Rosetown, but they were returned with "addressee unknown" stamped on them. In the early 1930s my father decided to drive to Rosetown to discover the whereabouts of his uncle John. Unfortunately, this was during the Depression years and the Canadian border guards wouldn't let him into the country because he didn't have enough cash.

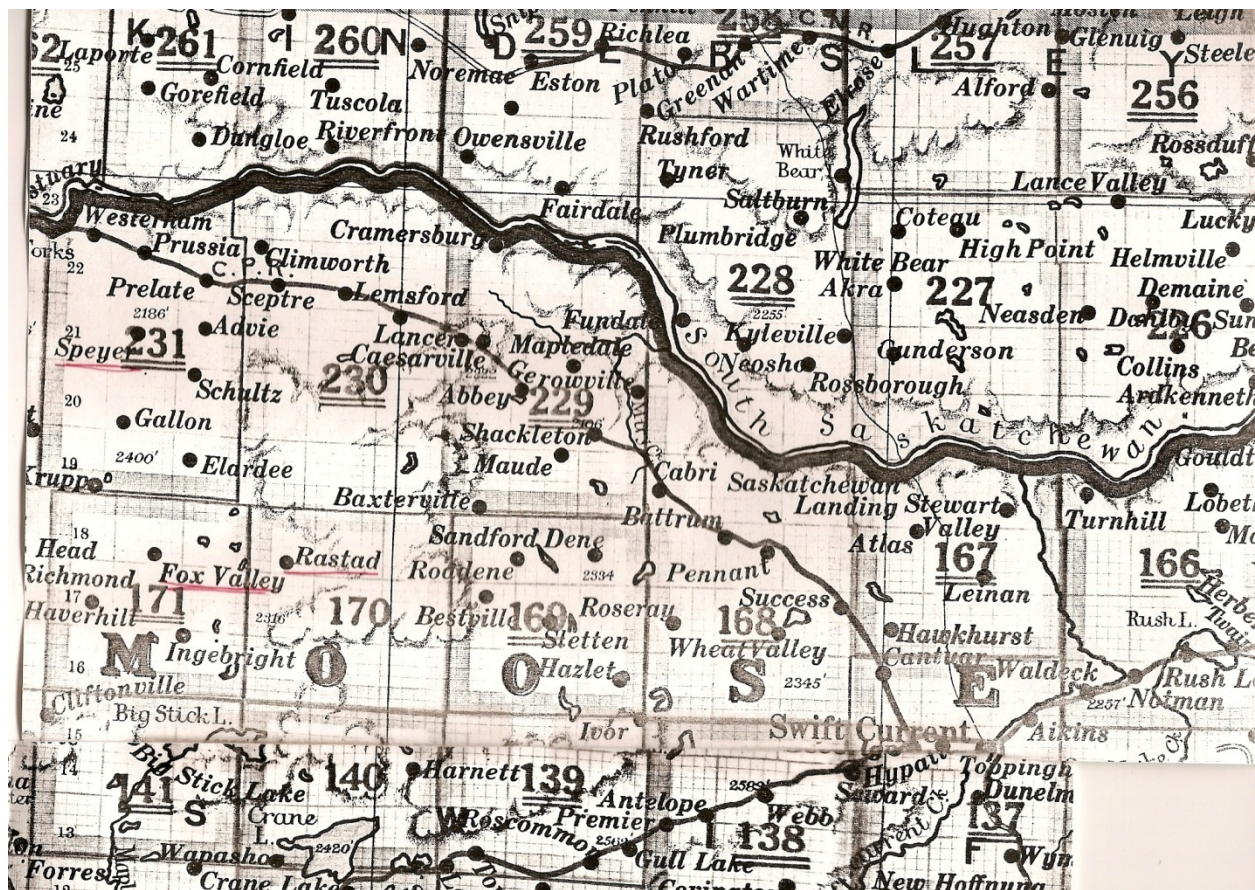
For decades after, whenever my parents got together with relatives and talked about the old days, the topic invariably turned to uncle John and everyone wondered what happened to him. Part of the fascination was with whatever had happened to his estate, which had been promised to Katherine Wagner and her children. One speculation was that John had become close to another family in Saskatchewan and after his death his estate went to them because he had no known heirs and they wanted to keep it for themselves. John knew the Obrugewitsch family and several others from Russia who resided in Fox Valley during his final years.

Inspired by the family's stories, George Wagner (my cousin, the son of Frank Wagner) drove to Rosetown, Saskatchewan in 1990 to continue the search, but couldn't find any trace of uncle John.

In the summer of 1995 I too drove to Rosetown, but didn't have any luck. I looked in the local telephone book to see if there were any residents with the surname Wagner. I called one at random, who informed me that their family didn't derive from Russia. Another old-timer gave me an overview of the local history of Rosetown. The land there opened for homesteading in 1904, when the railroad came through connecting Saskatoon to Calgary. The majority of the early homesteaders in the area were of British extraction, they had moved westward from Ontario, and this area had

very few Germans from Russia. Why, then, did John Wagner report that he was residing near Rosetown back in the early 1920s? Although this area was not a magnet for German-Russian settlers, one possibility is that John was there with a harvesting crew, since it is known that he traveled around quite a bit doing hired farm labor.

After leaving Rosetown, I stopped at a local historical museum where I noticed an old wall-map of Saskatchewan, dated about 1910. The map showed towns with the names of "Rastad" and "Speyer" near Fox Valley, in the southwestern corner of the province. I recognized those names from the German colonies in the Ukraine and decided that this would be a likely place to continue the search for great-uncle John.



**Fox Valley, Prelate, Rastad, and Speyer
Southwest Saskatchewan Atlas, c. 1910**

We found that Rastad no longer exists, but the Rural Municipality (town-hall) in Fox Valley (about 10 miles to the west) had a list of names of persons buried in their local cemetery, as well as those in the old Rastad cemetery. Our search for great-uncle John finally ended when we found his name on the list. He died in Fox Valley in 1943 and was buried in the local Catholic cemetery. The church death record confirmed that

his father's name was Franz, and that John was three years younger than Adam. While we were in the R.M., an elderly man named Jack Obritsch entered. When we were introduced, I asked him if his family name was originally Obritschgewitsch, or Obrigewitsch, and he confirmed that it was, they had shortened their surname over the years. Jack's father was Nicholas Obritschgewitsch, from Rastadt (Ukraine), and his mother was Filomena Seelinger, born in Canada but her parents also came from Rastadt. They had initially settled near Dickinson before moving to Fox Valley in 1911-1912. He remembered John Wagner from his youth, and he shared some stories. The manager of the R.M., Daniel Buye, owns John Wagner's homestead land today, and he too became interested in the story.

When John Wagner came to the USA in about 1893, the lands in the Dickinson area were already homesteaded, so he looked elsewhere in Canada, as did many other later immigrants. He does not appear on the census records for Stark County, North Dakota in 1900 or 1910, so we may assume that he didn't remain there long after arriving in this country. Fox Valley, Rosetown, and Tramping Lake were not yet open for homesteading in the 1890s, so John probably initially went to the Balgonie area, then later to Fox Valley and Prelate when they opened for homesteading around 1909.

The parishes of Fox Valley and Liebenthal were founded by German-Russian settlers in 1910.¹⁷ The *Nord Dakota Herald* in Dickinson regularly contained letters from those who had moved into Saskatchewan, informing family and friends of their whereabouts and their well-being. In 1914 the newspaper printed a notice stating that it had gained two new subscribers from "Rastad, Saskatchewan." On Feb. 20, 1914 another letter from "Rastadt, Canada" reported that the P. Obrigewitsch, who lived nearby, had stopped by to visit. On March 20, 1914 it was reported that "Michael Obrigewitsch sold his land to Nikolaus Sticka for \$20 per acre. He wants to resettle in Canada, with all his farm equipment, in order to continue farming there." This same issue also reported that "last week Georg Haff from Rastad, Canada, visited his brother-in-law, Martin Hatzenbühler, and other friends in Dickinson."

John took out a homestead just north of Fox Valley, a quarter section¹⁸ of land on the north edge of the land owned by the Urlacher family. Jack Obritsch remarked that John Wagner was a hard worker, but he didn't till his land much because the soil wasn't good. According to Daniel Buye, the present owner, the land is very rocky. The presence of rocks is an indicator that the land was never intensively tilled, otherwise the rocks would have been removed and piled up over the years. John spent much of his time during the spring and summer doing wage labor and herding for other farmers.

John was described as having dark hair and as being short (about 5'6" from Jack's description). This was due to his having short legs, but a rather long torso (a

¹⁷ Diocese of Gravelbourg, Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, *Historical Sketches of the Parishes of the Diocese of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan 1930 - 1955*, privately published, 1955, 112 pages.

¹⁸ Southwest quarter of section 19, township 17, range 24.

description, we recall, that was also given for Adam Wagner). John remained a bachelor all his life. Yet, according to Jack Obritsch, “he didn’t drink, he didn’t chase women, and he didn’t go to church either.” A standing joke on Sundays was that they would ask John if he was going to church, and he would casually answer with the old German proverb -- *kei Frosch, sie hopft nit fort* (“it’s not a frog, it won’t hop away”).¹⁹

John lived by himself in his small house, and passed his time with hobbies. He weaved pocket-watch chains out of horse-tail hairs. Jack recalled that John once gave him a railroad conductor’s watch as a present, with a horse-hair chain attached. He also whittled wooden toys. Jack confirmed that he was very fond of music, although he wasn’t really an accomplished musician. John told him stories of when he was a lad in Russia, he used to trap gophers, skin them, and make little *Dudelsack* (bagpipes) out of them -- little balloons with tiny feet sticking out, and he whittled tiny wooden reeds for them -- which John gave as toys to local kids. Jack recalled, chuckling, about how he was given one of those weird *Dudelsacks*. John also bought himself a real bagpipe in Canada, but the reed was out of tune. He was constantly carving on it, trying to get it to work properly. He bought an accordion once from Adam Lerner for about \$27. Afterward, Adam decided he needed it back to play at a dance, but John refused to return it. He finally decided to sell it back after Adam became angry about it. These stories about his musical interests match the tale of how he wanted his nephew Frank’s accordion when he visited in Dickinson.

Most of his time during the warm seasons was spent as a hired farm-worker throughout the area. Once when John was working for Jack’s father, Nicholas, stacking bales of hay, Nick asked him to change sides at the baling machine since the wind was blowing in his face. John refused, and in anger Nick slapped him in the face. John filed a complaint with the sheriff, and Nick had to pay a fine (Jack chuckled over this event, as if it showed how odd John was!). John also raised sheep, likely because his land was not good for agriculture. Since he spent so much time alone with his sheep herd, he always had a dog, of which he was very fond.

John eventually sold his land, retired in Fox Valley and purchased a house where he spent his remaining days. He died on Feb. 6, 1943 at the age of 73, and he was buried the next day in the Fox Valley cemetery. A rumor circulated for years afterward that he had buried a tobacco can full of silver coins, somewhere on his property. Daniel Buye wrote me that he has never found that can, but he was still keeping his eyes open for it!

¹⁹ In her study of the Central Dakota Germans, Shirley Fischer Arend points out that their language was rich in proverbs and quaint expressions. One of those she cites is “*Die kirchig isch kei grot, sie hopst nit fort*” (p. 179). She interprets it as: “said by someone who is too lazy to go to church and he wants to postpone it to another Sunday.” Shirley Fischer Arend, *The Central Dakota Germans*, Georgetown Univ. Press, 1989.

My aunt Barbara said that John couldn't read or write English and that a neighbor handled his correspondence and his bills for him. This may well have been true, since his father, Franz Wagner, died when John was about nine years old and he likely didn't have much schooling afterward. Jack Obritsch also confirmed that a local family handled many of John's affairs (possibly the Urlachers, or perhaps the Obrigewitschs themselves). Since Katherine Wagner's letters to John after Adam's death were returned unopened, Barbara was suspicious that this family may have deliberately kept John out of communication with his relatives in North Dakota, and they may have taken his money after his death. Probably the letters were returned because John had moved to Fox Valley and didn't leave a forwarding address. Jack Obritsch vaguely recalled that relatives from the "Regina area" may have claimed what remained of his estate. This may indicate that John had some contacts with Katherine Schrapp who had settled near Balgonie. Another possibility is that John had contact with Rochus Wagner from München, who was his first-cousin. Rochus and his family settled near Prelate, a small community about 40 km. to the north of Fox Valley.

Fox Valley was too small to have a newspaper of its own at that time, so no obituary is available for John Wagner. The Maple Creek News, in the neighboring town about 40 km. away, carried information from Fox Valley. The museum contains back issues of the newspaper, but my search did not turn up any notice of John's death.



Great-Uncle John Wagner's grave, Fox Valley, Saskatchewan

I asked Jack Obritsch why, in his opinion, John Wagner had never married -- and he answered rather straight forwardly, "maybe he wasn't much interested." My assessment is that John Wagner was poor, he couldn't support a family, and he was one of those typically shy old bachelors that were so common throughout the Midwest in those days. Many of them had limited education, limited means, and they lived a wandering lifestyle. They were accustomed to spending a lot of time alone, they had their horse and their beloved dog for a companion, and as they grew older they became more taciturn. Most German-Russian families had a few old-timers that fit this description. On my mother's Landeis side of the family, they came from Neu-Karlsruhe (Nikolaiev district) two years before Adam Wagner. My grandfather, Alex Landeis, spent his childhood as a sheep-herder and he was alone much of the time on the prairie with his dog, a horse, and a rifle. He was extremely taciturn, and his knowledge of English was limited. Two of Alex's brothers, Ambrose and Jack Landeis, shared his childhood lifestyle and they became drifters who never married. They passed through life as farm-hands, cowboys, and rodeo riders. When they became too old for such physical hardships, they spent their final years in rooming houses in small rural towns.

Most of our German-Russian family trees are populated with staunch, church-going farmers and their wives, who had 10 or more kids - like Ignatz and Christina Reis, or Adam and Katherina Wagner. However, on the twigs of the tree there were several leathery old bachelors, whom we should not forget. They all seemed to have that uncanny ability to roll Bull Durham tobacco with one hand, and they passed their days swapping yarns, snorting "*schnoose*," quietly slipping through life into their twilight years without leaving much of a trace. All of them (in our family) were raised strict Catholics, but they didn't gravitate much to church because they didn't have many family functions to attend. They were some of the most interesting characters in our family, and they were the ones we all loved to talk about. Garrison Keillor, in his radio talk-show about Lake Wobegon, had a standing joke about the eccentricities of Norwegian bachelors in Minnesota - he said that you can always tell when spring was in the offing because all the Norwegian bachelors would then hang their long-handled underwear out the window "for a good airing out!" Uncle John, we recall, wore two pair at once!

I've always been strangely fascinated by old uncle John because his whereabouts were such a mystery to our family. My quest for him gave me great satisfaction -- I was resolving some of my father's unfinished business, and although my father had passed away by that point, I was able to share it with my mother at least. All the unlikely coincidences fell into place, leading me straight to his grave site. It was almost like he was there, saying "finally, someone in the family found me." As I ponder the old bachelor uncles in my family, John Wagner, Ambrose and Jack Landeis, Harry Boehm, I

wonder if I would have been as content under their circumstances, could I have reached their level of acceptance of life with virtually nothing? When I did anthropology fieldwork with the Navajo Indians in Arizona I met many old-timers like them, living by themselves, miles out in the desert in isolated sheep camps. Most of them had a placid acceptance of their place in life. These old guys were a unique breed. I don't think they make them like that anymore.

The Wagner Family in Texas

Some of the German-Russian immigrants who came across with Adam Wagner on the ship, *Augusta Victoria*, gave their destination as Plantersville, Texas. Although the great majority of German-Russian immigrants settled in the Dakotas and Saskatchewan, a secondary magnet was the area near Plantersville, located in Grimes County, north of Houston. Those who chose Texas disembarked at the port of Corpus Christi. These families came from various colonies in the Black Sea region, some from Rastadt and München in the Beresan, and others from Franzfeld in the Grossliebental region near Odessa. Plantersville today is just a small cluster of old buildings along a rural highway, about 40 miles northwest of Houston. However, the crown jewel of that isolated community is St. Mary's Catholic church, about 1.5 miles north of the intersection. As was typical of the German-Russians, the original settler families pooled their resources to build a church, which was the center of their community. This church remains in use today, in gorgeous restored condition, and it is regarded as the hallmark of an early German painted church in Texas. Although the descendants of the original families have dispersed to various places, some in Houston, there are still about 250 families who regularly commute from many miles around to attend church services at St. Mary's. It is certainly well worth the trip to see this masterpiece of German Catholic religious art.

In 2011 we visited Plantersville to see what information was available on these early settlers. Today there are many families in the Plantersville area with the surname Wagner, descendants of the early German-Russian immigrants, some of whom came across on the *August Victoria* with my grandfather, Adam Wagner. Members of their family have done genealogical research on their roots, which is available on internet. Most seem to be descendants of Johann Wagner (born 1867), and Johann Joachim Wagner (born 1877), from the colony of Franzfeld in the Grossliebental region. They and several other Germans from Russia immigrants are buried in the St. Mary's cemetery in Plantersville. Since Wagner is a relatively common German surname in various colonies, we cannot conclude that these families from Franzfeld who settled near Plantersville are related to our Wagner family from München. However, the headstones in the cemetery at St. Mary's show several surnames that were common in the Beresan colonies and who also settled in North Dakota, such as Merdian, Boehm, and Kowis. As was typical of the German-Russians, the same groups of families

emigrated together, to the Dakotas, to Plantersville, and to other areas. Also, as we have seen in the letter written on March 15, 1913 by Kaspar Wagner, the son of Rochus, he sent "...greetings to my nephews **Bernhard and Georg Kowis**, sons of Franz in Plantersville, Texas." Clearly there was a relationship with the Kowis family from München, but no clear link with our Wagner family.

Those who remained behind in Russia

Before I close this family history, I want to call the reader's attention to the sad fate of the many ethnic Germans who remained behind in Russia, including some members of the Wagner family. We should consider ourselves fortunate that Adam Wagner and other cousins emigrated when they had the opportunity, before the doors closed in 1914 when World War One broke out. This conflagration brought about the collapse of the Tsarist regime, followed by the Civil War between the Red and White armies, and the onset of an even grimmer period under the Bolshevik regime. The resentment against the German farmers, which had been building since the last decades of the 19th century, was unleashed and thousands of them were executed during these years.²⁰ The colonies in the Beresan region were looted, many houses were burned, and in some the men were lined up and shot. In Rastadt in 1919, "the hordes descended upon the people like wolves - in their houses, on the streets, in the fields, in the cemetery - no matter where they hid. Many were shot in the church. Wives and maidens were abused; 78 houses went up in flames."²¹

During the period of forced collectivization during the 1930s, at least half of the German farmers were branded as *kulaks* (so-called "wealthy farmers") and their entire property and estates were confiscated by the Soviet government. Many of them were also arrested, executed, or sentenced to several years of forced labor. During World War Two, as the *Wehrmacht* advanced into the Ukraine, the Soviets began quickly rounding up all remaining ethnic Germans in the former colonies. What little property they had was confiscated and the entire ethnic group, some 1,200,000 people, was deported at gun-point to the work-camps of Siberia and Central Asia. The first victims were those who lived in the colonies further east, in the Volga River region. The rapid advance of the German army saved many of those farther west in the Black Sea region. They were evacuated to a region in Poland (the so-called *Warthegau*), where they were naturalized as German citizens and settled on farms. Later, when the Soviet army

²⁰ There is a slowly emerging literature on the genocide of the German-Russians. See, for example, Samuel J. Sinner, *The Open Wound, the Genocide of German Ethnic Minorities in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1915 - 1949 - and Beyond*, Fargo, N.D.: Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University, 2000.

²¹ John (Johannes) Philipps, *Die Deutschen am Schwarzen Meer zwischen Bug und Dnjester*, Fargo, N.D.: Germans from Russia Heritage Society, 1999, p. 119.

pushed westward, they forcibly rounded up these unfortunate people once again and shipped them off to Siberia, where they shared the fate that had earlier befallen their compatriots. Between 1941 and 1946 at least 300,000 lost their lives from starvation, over-work, disease, exposure to the elements in Siberia, or outright executions. To justify this mass violation of human rights, the Soviets collectively indicted the entire ethnic German population as spies and traitors.

Since the war, various societies have been formed in Germany to gather information about the ethnic Germans in the former Soviet Union, who at this point in history have been allowed to return to the modern Federal Republic of Germany and reclaim rights as citizens. Records are emerging from the former Soviet KGB archives about the huge number of ethnic Germans who were murdered during the Bolshevik era and World War Two. A memorial society has been formed in Odessa, which is extracting the names of victims.²² As the information comes forth, it is being reported in the German newspaper, *Neues Leben*, published by the *Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland* in Stuttgart, and also by the two historical societies of Germans from Russia in the USA.

The Soviet records typically list the victims as “repressed” and later “rehabilitated” (i.e. posthumously pardoned, after their execution). At least one record is known for a person who was obviously a relative, since he lived in the colony of München:

“Wagner Max Franzovich [son of Franz] was born in 1897 in the village of München, Mostovsky district, German, a peasant, educated, lived in the village of München. A worker on a collective farm. Was arrested on 2 September 1938. Sentenced to be shot by the Special Committee (Troika) of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs in the Odessa region on 25 September 1938. Was executed on 1 October 1938. Was posthumously pardoned (“rehabilitated”) in 1967 (page 22).”²³

Karl Stumpp’s *Wehrmacht* command recorded a map of München in 1941. The household plot for Max Wagner is shown, who was most likely the one executed in 1938 and his surviving family may have remained in the village. Stumpp also recorded a map of Rastadt in 1944 and of a daughter colony *Klein-Rastadt* (“little Rastadt,” known to the Soviets as “Lenintal,” founded in 1927). None of the families shown on these two plot maps have the surname Wagner, which indicates that members of the family had not resettled there

²² The Ukrainian memorial group has published the names in a book entitled *Odessa Martyrology, Book 1*, written in Russian, printed in 1997, 750 pages (ISBN 966-571-065-9).

²³ Germans from Russia Heritage Society, *Heritage Review* 32:4, 2002, p. 4.

In addition to Max Wagner, the following people with the surname Wagner who were arrested and/or executed in the Odessa area have been listed:

<u>Victim</u>	<u>Father</u>	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Date of Execution</u>
Wagner, Adam	Gottfried	1881 ²⁴	22 Feb 1938
Wagner, Anton	Kasper	1894 ²⁵	19 Nov 1937
Wagner, Anton	Kasper	1894	20 Nov 1937 ²⁶
Wagner, Christina	August	1895	released
Wagner, Daniel	Edward	1910	10 years forced labor
Wagner, Edmund	Franz	1892	27 Dec 1937 2316
Wagner, Emil	Jakob	1908	8 Mar 1938
Wagner, Friedrich	Wilhelm	1897	10 years forced labor
Wagner, Georg	Georg	1902	26 Dec 1937
Wagner, Gustav	Erik	1883	10 years forced labor
Wagner, Gustav	Wilhelm	1905	10 years forced labor
Wagner, Ignatz	Georg	1896	14 Oct 1938
Wagner, Ivan	Georg	1904	17 Oct 1938
Wagner, Jakob	Adam	1918	7 years forced labor
Wagner, Johann	Adam	1875	10 years forced labor
Wagner, Johann	Georg	1904	executed
Wagner, Johann	Jakob	1878	26 Aug 1937
Wagner, Johann	Jakob	1878	27 Aug 1937
Wagner, Johann	Jakob	1906	executed
Wagner, Johann	Johann	1903	10 years forced labor
Wagner, Joseph	Johann	1884	25 Aug 1937
Wagner, Joseph	Johann	1884	26 Aug 1937
Wagner, Joseph	Philipp	1902	executed
Wagner, Karl	Karl	1896	28 Sep 1938
Wagner, Katerina	Michael	1897	6 years forced labor
Wagner, Kurt	Karl	1902	1 Oct 1938
Wagner, Otto	Eugen	1895	14 Oct 1938
Wagner, Rachil	Kalman	1905	3 years exile to Siberia
Wagner, Rudolf	Georg	1889	3 years exile to Siberia
Wagner, Rudolf	Leonhard	1893	27 Dec 1937
Wagner, Rudolf	Johann	1893	2 years forced labor
Wagner, Stephan	Georg	1898	5 years forced labor
Wagner, Theophil	Theophil	1913	8 years forced labor

²⁴ Philipps, 1999, p. 173 lists Adam Wagner as born in 1886; the date of execution matches.

²⁵ Philipps, 1999, p. 182 lists Anton Wagner as born in 1897; the date of execution matches.

²⁶ Philipps, 1999, p. 189, lists Anton Wagner's execution as in 1938.

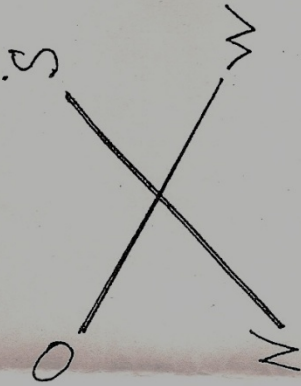
Wagner, Theophil	Frantz	1876	8 years forced labor
Wagner, Vladimir	Johann	1908	executed
Wagner, Wilhelm	Johann	1906	25 Oct 1938
Wagner, Wilhelm	Wilhelm	1881	10 years forced labor

ORTSPLAN DER GEMEINDE

MÜNCHEN

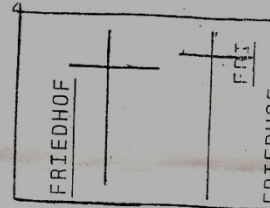
Geb. Odessa

Stand. 1941.



137 THOMAS JOH.
138 ACKERMANN

139 KOPP JOH
140 HERMANN M.



FRIEDHOF - STRASSE

136 GIESER JOH.
135 HELFRICH
134 HELFRICH

133 MAZ RPSA
132 DIEZ PET
131 DIEZ ANT
130 SCHWAMM
129 HECK M
128 BRAUNH

NEU Gäßchen

BÄHRNERSTELL
SCHWAMM K 39
37 SCHWAMM
36 SCHWAMM
35 BENGERT JOH.
34 ACKERMANN B.
33 THOMAS JOH.
32 DEIBELE Gg.

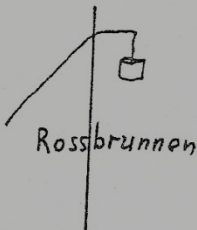
31 SCHEERGER MAX
30 BENGERT GEORG
29 SCHERGER FRANZ
28 THOME JOHANN
29 THOME RAFAEL
26 HECKER JOHANN
25 HECKER KONRAD

24 ZIMMERMANN
23 VOGT GEORG
22 ACKERMANN
21 KNIEL Gg.
20 STROH JOH.
19 MAYER JOS.

18 NUSS MICHAEL
17 STROH MATT

nach Rahstadt

SCHWAMM B. 40
SCHMIDT TH. 41



ACKERMANN 42
JÄGER WOLH 43
SCHMIDT P. 44
BENDER JAK. 45
SCHMIDT ALB 46
HELFRICH J. 47

HALLT + Stro

KNIEL ST. 48
HECK WILH. 49
THOME JON. 50
STROH MIKOD. 51
MAYER ALOIS 52

Tschischig 219 - Flur

Schafstall

FRIEDHOF

141 KOPP JOH
142 ACKERMANN

143 HECKER ST
144 THOME LEC
146WIRTMÜLLER
146MAYER J.
147 HECK JOH.
148 HELBLING
149 GIESER J.
150 NUSS MATH.

153 UHRLACHER
152 SCHMIDT
151 METZ R

127 HECK FRANZ
126 METZ ST
125 KOWIS HY
124 SCHERGER
123 HEHRLE
122 SCHERGER
121 OBENLOCH
120 ACKERMANN
119 KESSEL B.
STROH J. 118
117MAYER N.
116KESSEL R.
115 NUSS PH.

NEU GÄSSCHEN

18 NUSS MICHAEL
17 STROH MATT.
16 THOME JAK.
15 BELITZER L.
14 SCHMIDT E.
13 KONSUM
12 SCHULE
11 SCHÄFER M.
10 THOME K.
9 MAYER LUCIA
8PFARRHOF
7KIRCHE
6 KLUG FRANZ
5WAGNER MAX
4 THOME KARL

3 HECK JO
2WIRTMÜLLER
1THOME FR. 114

STROH MIKOD. 51
MAYER ALUIS 52
HECK FRANZ 53
MAYER ED. 54
SCHERGER J. 55
KOWIS GG. 56
METZ AMTON 57
VOGT GEORG 58
ACKERMANN F. 59
THOMAS GR. 60
MAYER AL. 61
KANZLEI 62
KESSEL J. 63
SCHERGER 64
SCHMIDT J. 65
HECKER LUD. 66
KNIEL M. 67
MAYER GR. 68
NUSSEBY 69
NUSS FR. 70

Hecker 105	104 VOGT RAF
Dame	103 KLUG JOSEF K
Thome	106 VOGT JOH.
Thome	101 CIESER P.
Mayer	100SCHMIDT M.
Kowis	99 THOME GEORG
Berger	98 BENGERT GEOR.
	97 HACK PETER
	96 FEININGER JOH.
	95 THOME MAX
	94 HÜBNER JOH.
	93 SCHERGER MAR.
	92SCHMIDT
	91 KOWIS
	90 KNIEL

Bachstraße	SCHMIDT 83
	MARIA-EVA
	KOWIS JON. 84
	Wollbau
	Wirtmül 81
	ler 85
	Rhomas 86
	Markus
	79 Math
	Hecker
	Wollbau 87

HERMANN M 72
FEININGER 73
WOLLBAUM 74
HONECKER 75
THIME A 76
FEININGER 77
FEININGER 78

V I E H T R I E F T - S T R A ß E

Schmidt

Rastadt and München Today

As was noted previously, Rastadt is known today as “Poretschye-Bolshoye,” which roughly translates as “at a river – big.” München is located about 1 kilometer west from Rastadt, in the direction of Mostovoje. München is known as “Poretschye-Malaya,” which roughly translates as “at a river – little.” According to modern reports by those who have visited the colonies, München today is little more than a semi-deserted suburb of Rastadt, which may explain the “big” versus “little” designation. Both colonies are located on the same Tschitschekleja river (which is spelled in various ways when transliterated in German or English; photos show that it is little more than a stream flowing seasonally through a broad, grassy valley). The two former colonies are roughly 85 miles (140 kilometers) northeast of Odessa, and about 50 miles (80 kilometers) northwest of Nikolaev.

Descendants of the German-Russian immigrants have been visiting the home villages of their grandparents in large numbers since the collapse of the USSR and the opening up of these formerly sealed off areas to foreigners. One of them, David Hecker, the grandson of Franz Hecker who was on the same ship with Adam Wagner when they came across in 1891, wrote a detailed description of his visit to München and Rastadt in 2010. I will cite it in some detail, since it provides a good portrait of what these former German colonies are like today.²⁷

“Finally I was returning to this village [München] that my great-grandparents Martin and Christine Hecker and children, including Frank, my future grandfather, had left in 1891 for America...

The van driver turned onto the main street of Rastadt. All eyes were on Magdalena [Hecker-Reiswick, an elderly woman who accompanied them on the visit, she was born in München and was evacuated to Germany in 1944]. This village was close to München, and she had walked to it during her youth to visit an aunt and her family. ... She then asked [the local village] secretary about a stream that she remembered was close to where we stood [probably the Tschitschekleja]. The secretary then led us over to the other side of the road and pointed to where the stream had been. The bed of the stream was still there, but it was dry and filled with sandy soil and weeds. We all looked around and saw that many old houses and outbuildings on both sides of the street had been partially restored since the destruction the Russian Army left in 1944. Other buildings were empty and crumbling, and many lots had nothing but battered foundations.

The Rastadt secretary agreed to go with us to München. On the way there we stopped at the former Rastadt Catholic Cemetery. We walked down a hillside with

²⁷ David A. Hecker. “Full Circle: A Journey in Search of Roots.” *Heritage Review*, December, 2011, pp. 5-8.

some open grassland and large sections of shoulder-high shrubs. We pushed into the brush and found some headstones bearing names of German colonists. Magdalena became excited as she pushed into clumps of shrubs to see if she could recognize any names. Then she saw a large granite headstone that announced *Hier ruhet in Gott* (Here rests in God) Raphael Seelinger (born in 1887 and died in 1910). Magdalena started weeping...she knew the Seelinger family and the familiar caption on the headstone, she finally was convinced that she was in her former homeland...

We continued on to München and arrived there in just a few minutes. If I had thought that Rastadt was in shambles, München was much worse. There was no school, no store and fewer houses and outbuildings. Workers had abandoned many houses when the collectives had dissolved in 1992. Since they had no ownership of the places, they had let them fall apart and then left them when their work source vanished. Our van stopped in front of the Catholic Church that Magdalena was baptized in and had attended until she left at age 16...She cried as she looked at the ruins that stood in front of her. The church had no steeple. The Soviet Army had pulled it off, and the steeple lay now on its side in weeds down the street. The secretary explained that the church had been used for storage and animal shelter. When the roof caved in later, the church was abandoned. We entered the church and saw that the back wall where the altar had been was gone. A side room where robes, bibles, and chalices had been stored now held debris and a dead dog.

An old man wearing a ragged, mud-stained military uniform walked towards us from behind the church. He was Ukrainian and spoke to our guide. Serge asked him where the old German cemetery was located. He pointed to a hillside covered with scrubs in the distance. He led us to it where he pointed at some shattered concrete blocks with metal plates still attached, but the iron crosses and lead nameplates were gone. Serge noted that they had been taken and melted down to make implements of one kind of another. He said also that any headstones that had been erected by Germans in earlier times had been removed and were used to build foundations for buildings or bridges. With a gleam in his eyes, Serge added that in one case a bridge that had been built out of headstones collapsed the first time a horse and wagon crossed it...[David then describes an old former colonist house that is still standing, with thick adobe walls plastered interior and exterior, with a deep root cellar, similar in style to old settler homes in North Dakota].

Back out onto the street we looked around a village that once had four streets according to an old plat map from 1941. I saw nothing but other shabby structures, and nobody was about except one villager who came in his bedraggled garments and offered to sell us his place and several acres of land for a couple of hundred dollars...

...In spite of the ruins I witnessed, I was pleased to be at München and to see the church and cemetery that had been used by generations of my family. I was also glad I had visited a home that was built by neighbors of my distant relatives. I walked on the same ground that they had trod. I looked at the same horizon they had viewed. I saw

the fields they had worked. But I also now gave my great-grandfather thanks and my gratitude for leaving here when he did.”



Photo of Munchen Catholic Church.

I will end this account of the history of our Wagner family by affirming David Hecker’s conclusions. However, speaking honestly, I have never felt the same desire to visit Rastadt and München, or to walk the same streets as Adam Wagner did in his youth. From the few descriptions that were passed down to us by Adam, his memories were not idyllic. The family was poor, especially after the death of his parents, when he and his siblings had to hire out to other families such as the Heckers, who were more fortunate. Adam never forgot the deprivations of his childhood. He said they were lucky if they had milk soup and rye bread to eat, which is why he favored white bread all his life. He always felt fortunate to have left Russia when he had the opportunity. Descriptions of the former colonies by those who visit there today uniformly agree that only a few shabby structures remain. The Soviets removed the steeples from the beautiful old churches and turned them into warehouses or meeting halls. Visitors who hope to find old tombstones bearing their ancestral family names are disappointed to find nothing left, even these remnants of the German colonists were destroyed in an

effort to extinguish the presence of our ethnic group. Russia afforded the German colonists a temporary refuge from the chaos of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic years, but at this point our Wagner family has been in the USA and Canada considerably longer than the 80 years of their previous stay in Tsarist Russia, which was not long enough for me to personally identify with Russia as my "homeland." To those of you who are curious to tread the streets where our ancestors once walked, I recommend visiting Insheim in the Pfalz, or especially Kronach in Bavaria. There you will find wonderful, quaint, well preserved monuments from our past which were the real ancient cradle for our family, rather than these few crumbling, dying, and depressing ruins in the Ukraine.