

Chapter 11

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.¹ 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."²

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 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

¹ 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.

² John (Johannes) Philipps, *Die Deutschen am Schwarzen Meer zwischen Bug und Dnjester*, Fargo, N.D.: Germans from Russia Heritage Society, 1999, p. 119.

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.³ As the information comes forth, it is being reported in the German newspaper, *Neues Leben*, published by the *Landmannschaft 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).”⁴

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

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 ⁵	22 Feb 1938
Wagner, Anton	Kasper	1894 ⁶	19 Nov 1937
Wagner, Anton	Kasper	1894	20 Nov 1937 ⁷
Wagner, Christina	August	1895	released
Wagner, Daniel Edward		1910	10 years forced labor

³ 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).

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

⁵ Philipps, 1999, p. 173 lists Adam Wagner as born in 1886; the date of execution matches.

⁶ Philipps, 1999, p. 182 lists Anton Wagner as born in 1897; the date of execution matches.

⁷ Philipps, 1999, p. 189, lists Anton Wagner’s execution as in 1938.

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	

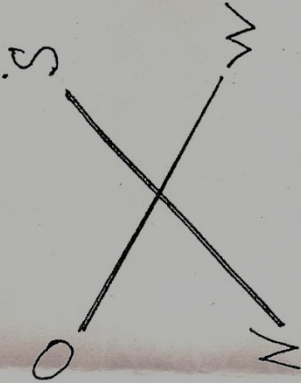
Wagner, Rudolf	Johann	1893	2 years forced labor
Wagner, Stephan	Georg	1898	5 years forced labor
Wagner, Theophil	Theophil	1913	8 years forced labor
Wagner, Theophil	Frantz	1876	8 years forced labor
Wagner, Vladimir	Johann	1908	executed
Wagner, Wilhelm	Johann	1906	25 Oct 1938
Wagner, Wilhelm	Wilhelm	1881	10 years forced labor

ORTSPLAN DER GEMEINDE

M Ü N C H E N

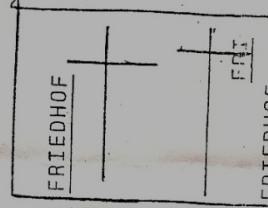
Geb. Odessa

Stand. 1941.



137 THOMAS JOH.
138 ACKERMANN

139 KOPP JOH
140 HERMANN M.



FRIEDHOF - strasse

136 GIESER JOH.
135 HELFRICH
134 HELFRICH

BBHNERSTALL
SCHWAMM K 39
37 SCHWAMM
36 SCHWAMM
35 BENGERTJOH.
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
133 MAZ RPSA
132 DIEZ PET
131 DIEZ ANT
130 SCHWAMM
129 HECK M
128 BRAUNII

NEU Gäßchen

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

HALLE + Stro

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

TSCHESSCHIG 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

Thohme 114
3 HECK JO
2WIRTMÜLLER
1THOME FR.

STROH MIKOD. 51
MAYER ALDIS 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
106
104 VOGT RAF
1053KLUG JOSEF K
106 VOGT JOH.
101 CIESER P.
100SCHMIDT M.
99 THOME GEORG
98 BENGERT GEOR.
97 HACK PETER
96 FEININGER JOH.
95 THOME MAX
94 HÜBNER JOH.
93 SCHERGER MAR.
92SCHMIDT
91 KOWIS
90 KNIEL

Schmidt
83
82
81
80
84
85
86
87

HERMANN M 72
FEININGER 73
WOLLBAUM 74
HONECKER 75
THIME A 76
FEININGER77
FEININGER 78

Bachstraße
V I E H T R I F T - S T R A ß E
nach Worma

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.⁸

“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 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

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

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 villagers 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."

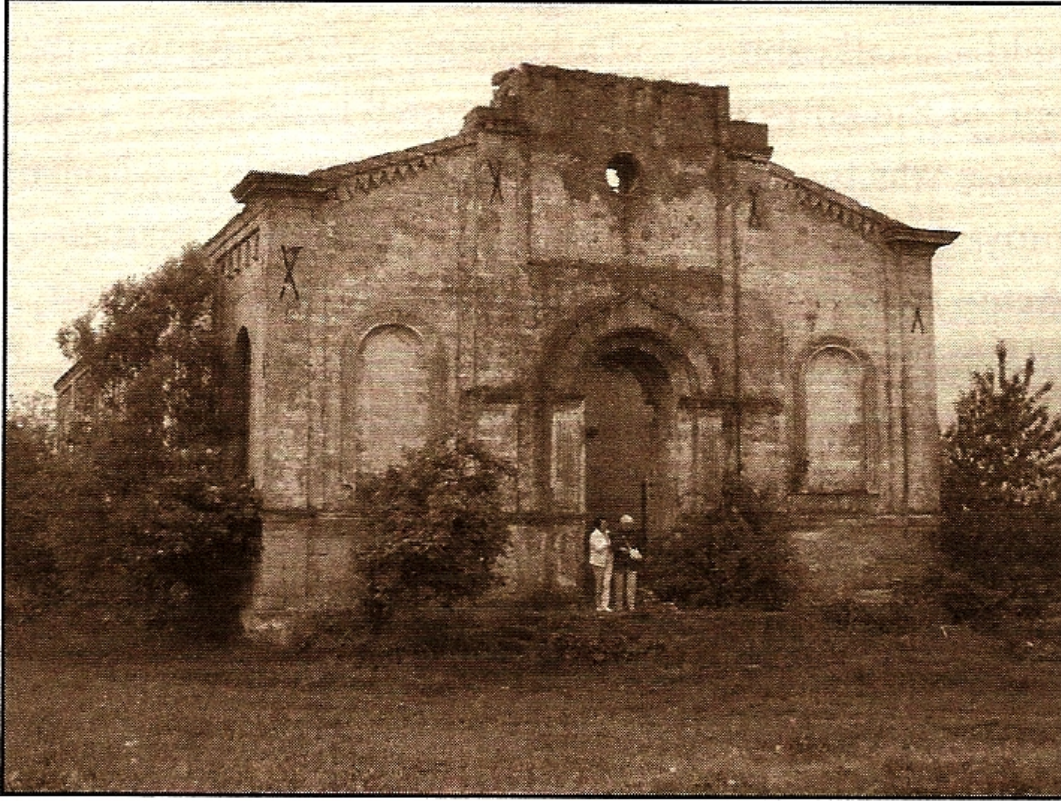


Photo of Munchen Catholic Church.

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