

~~~ The Journey ~~~



The Case for Trans-Atlantic Correspondence:

Carl and Henrietta Geier immigrated to North Dakota in the summer of 1913. To tell the truth, it was supposed to be just a visit which turned out otherwise. About one year after their arrival in North Dakota, war broke out which eventually involved many nations and came to be called the First World War. Carl received a telegram from the Russian embassy requesting his immediate return, but that story is told elsewhere.

As I stated before, Carl Geier and family made this journey of visitation and fully intended to return to Russia. It is perhaps a little known fact, but relatives of Carl Geier had immigrated to North Dakota at least 15 years earlier. Who were these people? A brother, John Geier, Carl's grandmother, Marie 'Katie' Geier, and her daughter, Dora. Below is a portion of the census taken in June, 1900, for Kidder County, North Dakota:

|               |               |   |   |      |      |     |   |   |   |   |              |
|---------------|---------------|---|---|------|------|-----|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Geier Henry   | Son           | w | m | July | 1895 | 4   | S |   |   |   | North Dakota |
| John          | Son           | w | m | May  | 1897 | 3   | S |   |   |   | North Dakota |
| Edward        | Son           | w | m | Apr  | 1899 | 1   | S |   |   |   | North Dakota |
| Shlander Fred | Head of Hk    | w | m | Nov  | 1876 | 23  | m | 3 |   |   | Russia       |
| Dora          | wife          | w | f | Dec  | 1870 | 27  | m | 3 | 2 | 2 | Russia       |
| Henry         | Son           | w | m | Nov  | 1897 | 2   | S |   |   |   | Russia       |
| Katie         | Daughter      | w | f | June | 1899 | 1/2 | S |   |   |   | Russia       |
| Geier Matiss  | Mother-in-law | w | f | Jan  | 1836 | 64  | w |   | 8 | 4 | Russia       |

The first column holds the persons name (last name first). This is followed by the persons relationship to the head of household, race, sex, birth month, birth year, current age, marital status, and years married. The next two columns are for mothers showing the number of children born to them and the number still living. The last column holds the persons birth place.

On the fourth row is the name Fred Schander, who is listed as Head of Household. Dora Schander is his wife of three years, and they have two children, Henry and Katie (age two and eleven months respectively).

On the last row is the name Katie Geier. The census taker misspelled her last name. She is listed as Fred Schander's Mother-in-law. In 1900 she is 64 years of age, widowed, and the mother of eight children, four of whom are still living. Katie homesteaded land that abutted the Schander homestead and which would eventually become the Carl Geier farm. The history between the Geier's and Schander's goes all the way back to Russia.

With these facts now firmly established, one has to ask the question: Did relatives in North Dakota communicate with those living in Russia? Specifically, did they provide information useful to the undertaking of such a long trip into unknown territory? I strongly suspect, but have no proof, that this is the case. It is tantalizing to imagine that we could have access to these letters, but alas, none of them survive to the present day.

### By Train, Ship, and Automobile

#### 1) Russia to Germany:

We don't have any details for this leg of the trip, but we can venture a guess. Europe had an extensive rail system dating back to the early 19th century. The nearest train station from Karlsruhe was the major city of Stavropol, approximately 112 miles (180 Km) to the west. Hard to say what mode of transportation they used to get there, perhaps some kind of horse-drawn vehicle. From Stavropol the most likely rail route might have been via the following cities:

- Rostov-on-Don, Russia
- Kiev, Ukraine
- Warsaw, Poland
- Berlin, Germany
- Bremen, Germany

This had to be an enjoyable trip for Carl, having only lived in relatively backward Imperial Russia and then be able to experience traveling through these modern metropolitan cities in Europe.

#### 2) Trans-Atlantic Voyage:

Carl, Henrietta, and the two boys, David and Charles, departed from Bremen, Germany onboard the Rotterdam, a steamship operated by the Holland-America Line. In the late 1800's and early 1900's it transported cargo and passengers to ports in the United States and Canada. In those days the trip took nearly a week. Grandpa Carl regaled me with many stories but not one about this experience. Maybe because it was not very pleasant. Most landlubbers suffer horrible motion sickness onboard ship. Then there was the food:

*"For most immigrants the sea voyage was far from a cruise ship with lavish buffets. Passengers in steerage survived on lukewarm soups, black bread, boiled potatoes, herring or stringy beef."* Smithsonian Archives

However they fared, the ship finally made port at Montreal, Canada. Wait a minute! Did not most immigrants arrive at Ellis Island in New York? True enough, but not in this case. Below is a portion of Carl Geier's declaration of intention to become a citizen of the United States:

|                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I emigrated to the United States of America from <u>Bremen Germany</u>                                                                                                   |
| on the vessel: <u>Rotterdam</u> (If the alien arrived otherwise than by vessel, the character of conveyance or name of transportation company should be given.): my last |
| foreign residence was <u>Warsaw Prussia</u>                                                                                                                              |
| It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign                                                                              |
| prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to <u>The States of Prussia</u>                                                                               |
| ....., of whom I am now a subject;                                                                                                                                       |
| I arrived at the port of <u>Portland Canada thence to Portal</u> in the                                                                                                  |
| State of <u>North Dakota</u>                                                                                                                                             |

Portland is a small town in eastern Ontario, Canada, but it is not a port city. Portal, North Dakota sits along the Canada-United States border and is a major port of entry for road and rail traffic. The language difference (English versus German) may have contributed to this confusion. So, if the ship did not dock at Portland, where did it?

Detail of Charles Geier's citizenship application:

|                                                                     |                                 |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| my last foreign residence was                                       | Dawsunk, Russia                 | (Country) |
| I emigrated to the United States of America from                    | Dawsunk, Russia                 | (Country) |
| my lawful entry for permanent residence in the United States was at | Portal, North Dakota            | (City)    |
| under the name of                                                   | Charles also Karl or John Geier | (Name)    |
| on the vessel                                                       | Canadian Pacific Railway        | (Vessel)  |
|                                                                     | on July 17, 1913                | (Date)    |

Here it clearly states the family entered the United States at Portal, North Dakota, not New York or any other American city. Turns out during the period 1909-1914, some ships of the Holland-America Line had the following ports of call: Hamburg - Bremen - Rotterdam - Quebec - Montreal.

Source: <http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/hollandam.shtml>

### 3) Canada to North Dakota:

From Montreal they boarded a west bound train on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Their first stop might have been Ottawa, the capital city of Canada. Other cities along the route were Sudbury and Thunder Bay in Ontario, and Winnipeg, Manitoba. Most of this journey would have taken them through the vast coniferous forest of southern Canada. Not until they approached Winnipeg did the landscape change from forest to grassland. A spur of the CPR tracks from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, entering North Dakota at Portal, servicing several cities including Minot, Harvey, Fessenden, and Carrington.

### 4) Journey's End:

When Carl, Henrietta, David and Charles disembarked from the train, most likely at Fessenden, I like to think family they knew were there to receive them. I bet they had a lot to talk about.