

Story: Journey to Odessa and Set-Backs of Some Emigrants

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[Translator's Note: This document lists no author, nor indicates when written. Found in a folder of documents about customs and practices of Bessarabia, probably written shortly after the Resettlement of 1940. Speaks about the hardship, illness and death that people experienced as they migrated down the Danube River from Ulm, Germany to Odessa, Russia.]

[Begin Translation]

Journey to Odessa and Set-backs of Some Emigrants

Ulm was the gathering point for thousands of immigrants. The date for the coming together of particular groups (*Harmonien*) in Ulm was made known and each had to take care of their own matters there. The columns (*Kolonnen*) obtained their Russian passports in Stuttgart. After notification of the Russian Envoy, no passports were issued to individual persons, but a so-called Group Passport was issued to a group in the name of the leader which listed the specified number of individuals belonging to that group. So, for example, the first 900 emigrants had 4 passports for all of them. "The caravans of the emigrants were always amply provided with money. They enjoyed the special protection of the Russian government and, in passing through Austria, they encountered no delays due to that government providing invitations to them.

Final organizational preparations were made in Ulm, administrators elected, offices distributed, and the columns were finally assembled. At this point, advance detachments were sent to Vienna and Odessa so as to make the necessary arrangements for the arrival of the multitude of emigrants.

It was not only the Swabian emigrants that gathered here, but also the people from Baden, German Separatist emigrants, that met in Ulm and departed "from here with their society for Russia, their destination being Georgia [in the Caucasus]." Ahead for the emigrants was their transport by the seamen's guild on "barges" (*Zillen*). Therefore, the contract with the seamen was not by the head, but by the vessel. For that reason, so many people were squeezed into the small Danube barges (*Donauschiffe*), so much so that one could hardly find any place in them, without regard for keeping a single column together or even holding a moderate number of passengers.

According to a release from Passau dated 16 June, 1817, after only just 3 weeks, not only the announced 900, but actually 1,800 people from Württemberg were to have passed over into Austria. The journey took place without any problem up to that point. Then, in mid-June, there was a traffic block. The groups had to stay longer in Vienna, some as much as 8 days. Some

were transferred to other barges, or occupants on two barges were joined into one, so that, at times, 430 persons were packed into one barge.

An eyewitness reported in 1804: “No pen can describe the condition of these people in the uncomfortable narrow Danube barges. The whole space is full of men, women and children; the healthy and the sick; those having recently given birth, newborn and those dying; even those already dead lying among the others; a foul smell was all around; even in the vicinity of the vessels; and cursing and prayer, crying and laughing tore the ear to pieces.”

Add to this the unhealthy Danube areas, the slow progress down the river in the heat of the summer, the irregular diet, the unhealthy consumption of lots of fruit and the hotly spiced Turkish wine, the utter exhaustion—all this worked extremely adversely on the health, produced fever and other illnesses which already required a lot of human sacrifice in Hungary, whose intensity only led to a tragedy for the emigrants once in Ismail.

Already on the trip from Galatz, where a few days of rest layover were spent, the fever raged furiously and took away many lives. In Ismail, the first city belonging to Russia, the emigrants had to stop, were quarantined by orders of the government, and for that reason were confined to a specific island. According to the report of the Minister of the Interior to the Ministerial Committee, “here their own tents and huts were their only protection against the rain,” so that they had to endure their quarantine period under the open sky in time of storm and rain. The poor emigrants had their sad situation compounded day by day due to a severe lack of food and clothing and the perpetual harassment of the authorities. The quarantine was supposed to have lasted from 40 to 50 days. Although those who arrived, by order of the Emperor, received daily bread, flour, meat, butter, rice, barley, coffee and sugar, also wine, brandy, wine vinegar, olive oil and soap, it, however, was not enough by far for the great multitude of starving and sick. They had to sell the last remnants of the assets they had brought along. This sad situation was taken advantage of by many who used their remaining funds to charge interest and to seize unusual goods (*fremdes Gut*) for themselves. There were also those who served as go-betweens for the helpless families, who, with all their relatives often sick and flat on their back. They would sell to the residents of Ismail and then keep half, or more often, as much as two-thirds of the proceeds for themselves.

Immediately after arriving in Ismail, a terrible epidemic of the fever broke out. Nerve fever and other fevers, yellow and red dysentery (*Ruhr*), large ulcers on the head and throat raged violently. Although there was no lack of doctor or drug, compared to the damaging extent of the epidemic, it was only a drop of water on a hot stone. The rapid spread of the misery really fostered an unhealthy situation in the quarters. Over 20,000 fallen soldiers had been buried in this place after the Russians had captured Ismail. When pitching the tents and ramming the tent pegs into the ground, one came across many skeletons and bones which had been rapidly buried.

A large number of the folks succumbed to the misery. These who survived were transported further on. Only a little more than half of those who had embarked in Ulm with the high hopes of reaching their primary goal of Odessa made it there and that is where they were supposed to stay for the winter.

[End of Translation]