



June 22, 2024

On July 22nd, 1763, a young woman got out a quill and signed a decree. "We, Catherine the second, Empress and Autocrat of all the Russians... We permit all foreigners to come into Our Empire, in order to settle in all the governments, just as each one may desire."

In her manifesto, Catherine the Great promised immigrants from the West numerous incentives: exemption from military service, self-governance, tax breaks, initial financial aid, 30 hectares (75 acres) of land per settler family. In addition, freedom of language was guaranteed, in particular to German immigrants. And above all, the manifesto granted immigrants "the free and unrestricted practice of their religion according to the precepts and usage of their Church."

This affected millions of people in western and the middle of Europe but focused on Germans. Russia was a vast domain settled only in parts, and that sparsely. That land was worked by serfs in a primitive fashion. Russia needed a larger population. The colonist's population in southern Russia grew to about 600,000 in 1914.

After Catherine died in 1796 her grandson Alexander began his reign and issued his own proclamation annulling the decrees of Catherine the Great. Millions of German colonists in Russia started to emigrate to America during this time, including our family.

Elizabeth Forch Beck Zwicker, our Grandmother, was born in Old Freidental, a small community near Odesa

Russia on August 24th, 1878. She was one of 8 children. Elizabeths oldest brother, Jacob, moved with his wife and son to America in 1899, at that time Elizabeth wanted to go also but her parents wouldn't permit it.

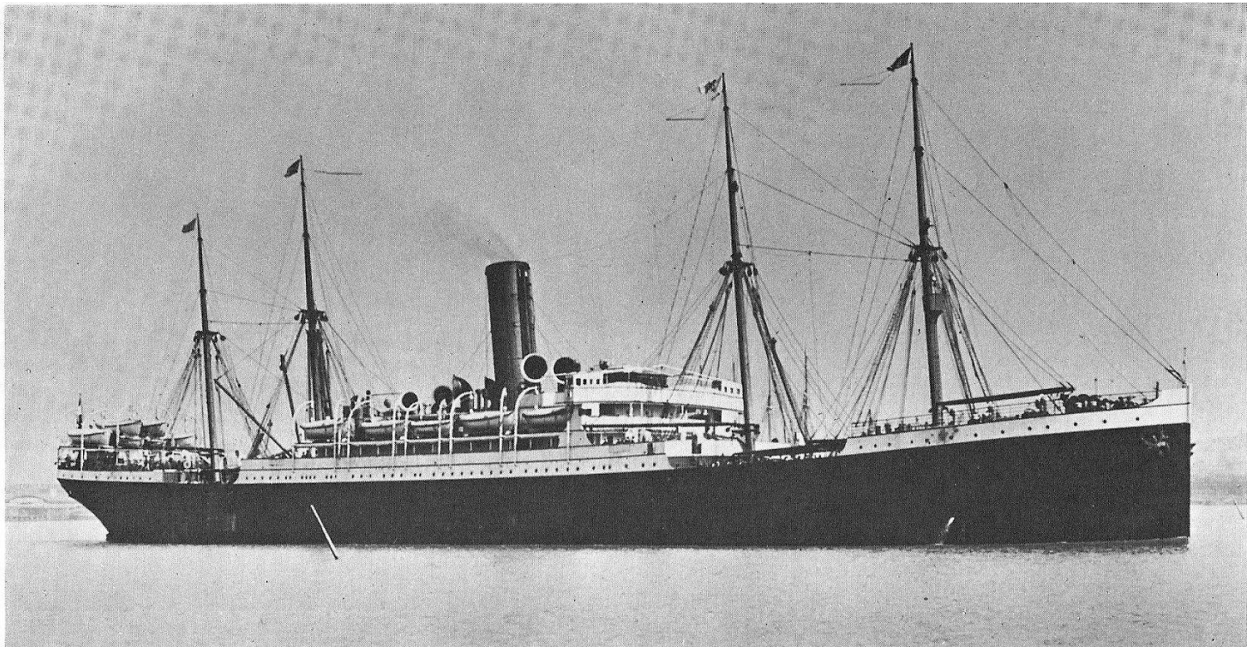
Jacob Beck, grandfather of Beck family, was born on March 30, 1870, and married Eliazbeth on November 5th, 1898, in Bessarabia. They had 6 children, 3 died in infancy. Jacob died on March 26th, 1907. Another child was born in October but was killed in an accident. Grandma was 20 when she got married, had her 1st child at 21, widowed at 29 and had 6 children by that time, 3 of which lived.

Christian Zwicker, grandfather of Zwicker family, was born in Old Grossliebental on May 19, 1882. Christian was one of eleven children two of his siblings died in infancy. Christian became a blacksmith. Elizabeth met and married Christian in 1909. They had five children, 2 died in infancy. Elizabeth had a total of 11 children, 5 of them died in infancy.

Elizabeth never forgot her dream of emigrating to America. The couple decided to go. Good timing, the beginning of World War one and the revolution in Russia. While making the decision to leave they knew they would never see their parents or siblings again. They sold all their possessions and, in mid-May 1914, the family of five set off on an arduous journey. Under Russian law the three Beck children were wards of a guardian who decided they wouldn't allow the Beck siblings to leave. These people knew how much money the family had and extorted Christian to allow the Beck children to leave.

They went by wagon, part of the way hidden under hay and straw. Finally boarding a ship for America at Brennen, Germany, they were handed another blow. The men on the ship gave them a choice of giving them all the remaining money they had, or they would take the Beck siblings back to Odesa. They finally departed Brennen, Germany on May 28th, on a ship named the Rhein landing in Baltimore in June 1914. From Baltimore they traveled by train to Herrick, South Dakota where Elizabeth's brother and family lived.

The family of five arrived with \$18 in their pocket. The trip took about a month.



The family lived in South Dakota, farming until the mid-30's. Several of the children were married and starting their families. All but Martha moved to Washington. She and her family moved to California. Ben and Florence had eight children, Frederick and Bertha had 12 children, Martha and Gene had 3, 2 girls died in infancy. Edward and Emma had 4 children, Lizzy and Henry, and 2 boys. Maggie and Clarence had 3 children, Harold and Elsie had 5, Elsie and Louis had 1 son and Erna and Chet had 2 girls. A total of 40 children with 2 dying in infancy. I couldn't start to count grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great great-grandchildren. Most individuals with the name Beck or Zwicker living in Whatcom County are direct descendants Grandma and Grandpa Zwicker and Grandpa Beck.

Had Grandma Zwicker not had a dream of coming to America when she was a young girl our family would look much different. She left everything she knew and everyone she knew behind, knowing she would never see her family again.



Top Row: Christen Zwicker, Benjamin Beck, Elsie Hayes, Marth Younker, Fred Beck, Elizabeth Zwicker

Middle Row: Edward Zwicker, Harold Zwicker

Front Row: Elizabeth Derr, Magdalena Harper, Erna Hughes