

GROßKOPISCH IN TRANSYLVANIA, 700 YEARS OF HISTORY. Our maternal great grandfather & grandmother SCHULLER came to the United States from the village of Grosskopisch (written “Großkopisch”) in Transylvania, now Romania. Their ancestors were German settlers who managed to keep their language, customs and history through unbelievable circumstances up until modern times. This is a small part of the history of Transylvania and Großkopisch.

GROßKOPISCH, THE VILLAGE was officially settled in 1235 under King Bela IV, son of Andreas II. The German word for Transylvania is Siebenbürgen, or “seven villages”. The town itself lies in a valley but the top of the mountain of Großkopisch is 1600 feet and was strategically important in that all paths leading into the village could be seen. The first written mention of this village was in a document dated 1283. The village had enough importance that King Ladislaus V granted the right for the community to hold the much coveted annual fair on the 24rd and 25th days of August beginning the 12th of March 1455. The first day was reserved for a cattle market, the second for trading general goods. These much anticipated fairs were the focal point of community affairs. When the community prospered so did the kingdom. The cattle fair took place until 1962 when Communists collectivized agriculture and caused Romanian farmers to lose their cattle.

ANCIENT BEGINNINGS. Many tribes of ancient people lived and died in Transylvania from early times. Well known early inhabitants were the Dacians and Getae, both thought to be part of the Thracian people. The first mention of them is found in Roman & Greek writings. The country was known as Dacia. The Dacians were a well organized and prosperous people as well as warlike. They became a threat to the advancing Romans. The Romans knew that Dacian territory, the western Carpathian mountains, was rich with gold, silver and other natural resources such as salt. With systematic wars, under emperor Trajan, Dacia was conquered. It took 2 wars, one in 101 A.D. and the second in 105 A.D. to subdue them. The victory in the first war was so important that Trajan commissioned a monument known as “Trajan’s column.” Built as a triumphant war monument it is 125 feet tall, made of 20 large Carrara marble drums of 32 tons each. It has an internal staircase and externally has a continuous spiral relief in pictures describing the Roman war with the Dacians. The bas reliefs are thought to have been colored but no coloring remains.

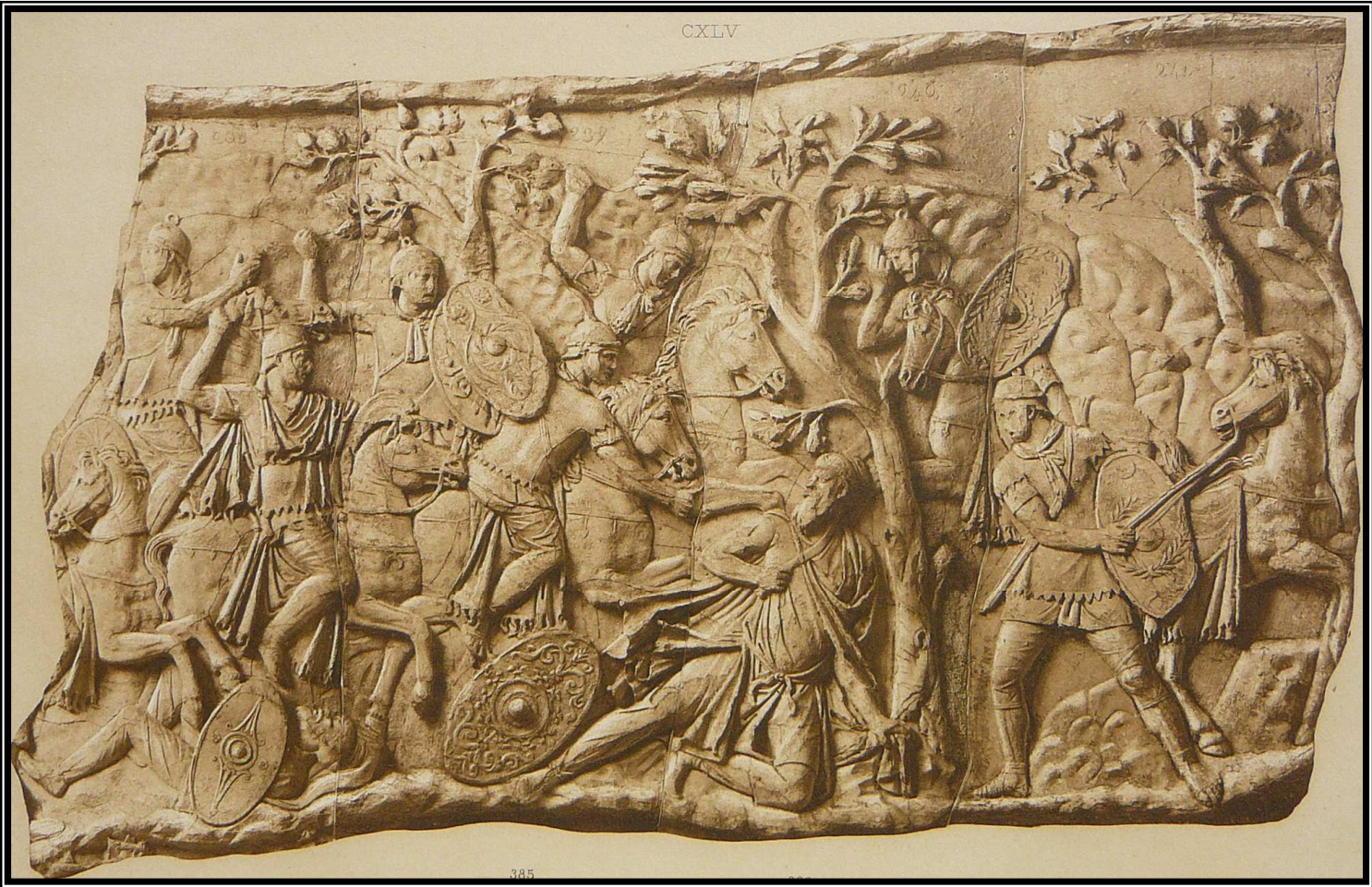
In order to maintain their conquered outpost, the Romans built roads and waterways, stationed troops and carried on trade. Latin became the official language. This lasted for about 200 years. Other invading tribes were either defeated by the Romans or negotiated with, such as the Goths. In the year 375 A.D. invading Asian nomads arrived, the barbarian Huns. Everyone, including the Goths, tried to move out of the way of the advancing Huns. There were also German Gepidae, Vandals and Sarmatians. The Romans were unable to maintain the defense of Dacia as an outpost due to its distance from the empire, emperor Aurelius withdrew. The vacuum left by the Roman withdrawal was the beginning of centuries of invasions. The Huns were eventually defeated and the German Gepidae took over. They were defeated by the Avars and Langobards. Eventually Charlemagne defeated these tribes. A quiet invasion since the second half of the 7th century also had been taking place in the form of pastoral tribes which traveled slowly and settled the land intermingling with the population, these were the Slavs. However, “Withdrawing from Dacia, the Roman empire did not remove the entire population. The remaining Romans were slowly slavized during the 7th century. These slavized Romans mixed with the already Romanized Thracians...”


MEDIEVAL HUNGARY. Beginning in 895 the Hungarians or Magyars, a fierce people, took control of the Pannonian plains west of Dacia. Their goal was twofold: First to raid southwest to gain access to the Adriatic sea, and second, to move east and obtain Transylvania for its natural resources and the mountainous barrier of the Carpathians, hoping to stop invaders. These mountains were a natural barrier against the raiding tribes from the east. In the west they raided and terrorized western Europe for half a century until they were defeated by the German King Otto I in 955. The Magyars began moving east during the 10th and 12th centuries.

As a result of the Magyars defeat, the Magyar prince Geysa became a Christian and had his son Stefan baptized. Christianity began taking over the paganism of the Hungarians and King Geysa began friendly relations with the west. “He gave the country a well-ordered administration for which he relied on the German Nobles who had been called into the country.” Thus arrived the first German settlers. Invading tribes continued, so much so that in



A SMALL PART OF THE FRIEZE OF TRAJAN'S COLUMN





the south of the country large areas were laid waste by the Magyars to inhibit enemies progress. Trees were cut down and rivers blocked to produce swamps. In other areas where possible raids could be made, earthen mounds 10 to 40 meters wide with abatis were built. Armed farmers and peasants, in particular a people called the Szeklers were hired to settle these areas and keep out invaders. When these border areas were secure, they were advanced again with new earthen mounds and abatis. This continued until the border reached the mountains. By the 13th century all of Transylvania was part of medieval Hungary.

SETTLEMENT OF THE SAXONS. Many reasons led to the calling of outside settlers to the land. Every advancement of the border created unsettled territory. The Magyars did not have enough people to settle into these new lands. New settlers would improve the country; they cleared land, began farming and were providing commerce. Repeated wars had devastated populations, new settlers developed mineral resources and satisfied requirements for salt and precious metals. Skilled trades were necessary for mining and day to day commerce. The land in the south of Transylvania that had been used as a bulwark against invaders needed to be improved. The unsettled border land was claimed by the King as “Crown” land and available for him to allocate as he saw fit. Beginning with Prince Geysa’s son Stephen, who had become king of Hungary in the year 1001, “hospites” or guests were invited to settle the newly created borderland. To entice the “guests” they were promised privileges, a chance to advance in social standing, personal freedom, freedom of movement, independent judicature, tax freedom, absence of homage and choice of priests. These guest were recruited from Germany and Flanders where populations had increased rapidly. Rural people in these areas were impoverished by being suppressed by feudal landowners. There was little chance to advance in social standing. The prospect of owning land and personal freedom were very attractive. After King Stephen, King Geysa II continued to try to attract settlers, trades people and lower nobility. King Geysa had an official deed defining the rights of the settlers. This was called the “Goldener Freibrief” or Guarantee of Freedom, granted in 1224. The original has been lost but it was recertified 21 times by kings and dukes to assure right and duties of the settlers. Keep in mind that “acquired rights are valid only as long as they can be defended.” It was a daily struggle to maintain ownership of land and to keep what little freedoms were granted.

MORE BARBARIAN INVASIONS. At the beginning of the 13th century Mongolia had become a powerful empire under Ghengis Chan. The Mongols & Tatars raided Transylvania for about 400 years. Invaders would sack the towns, burn them down and take prisoners for ransom. “An adult cost ten thaler, a child four horseshoes.” Despite these invasions, Transylvanians prospered in the 14th century. Craft and trades had flourished which made them inviting targets for invaders. At the end of the century, intense power struggles between Hungarian nobility, ethnic Hungarians plus other outside influences all tried for domination over the Transylvanian territory. Not only the Mongols but the Turks invaded and ransacked Transylvania. Constant Turkish invasions began in 1391 when they invaded Hungary and then moved to Transylvania. The inhabitants found themselves rebuilding their villages again and again. Townspeople began to build fortified places especially fortified churches where the populace could try to take refuge from the invaders. “...in 1602 the people (of the town) of Hermannstadt had imprinted coins with the inscription: “Ahead and behind us doom. God be merciful in the end!”” Invasions, withering taxes imposed on the populace by nobility to pay for wars, arbitrary and cruel rulers, bouts of plague, many injustices contributed to the poverty and suppression of the populace.

POLITICAL & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. Despite a history of invasions, oppression and hardship, the Saxons had managed to develop politically and economically throughout the middle ages. They became the “...free Germans of Transylvania, ...with political, administrative and judicial representation.” At every breach of the edicts given in the Goldener Freibrief, and there were many, they fought to keep their limited independence. In 1486 after many years, with reference to the document of privileges of King Andrew II, the Transylvania Saxons grew into a cohesive group called the “Sachsische Nationsuniversitat” or an intact unity of the Saxon people. It was self governing and used the German language. They had special legal status within the medieval Hungarian state. This group, along with the free Szekler defense farmers and the Hungarian aristocracy were the three cohesive representative groups in the Transylvanian assembly. This personal freedom, proprietary right and equality before the law remained in effect until 1853.

DOCUMENT OF PRIVILEGES OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN SAXONS THE "GOLDENER FRIEBRIEF"


In the name of the holy Trinity and indivisible Unity. Andrew by the grace of god King of Hungary, Dalmatia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Galicia and Lodomeria for always. As it behooves the royal dignity, to suppress disobedience, it is proper for the royal kindness, to alleviate the humble affliction mercifully. To protect the service of the loyal and show and provide to all what is deserved with grace.

Here are our loyal guest settlers, the Germans beyond the forests (Transylvania), having approached in unity our majesty, presented to us humbly their complaints and pleas that they risk to lose entirely their freedom provided by our grandfather, the all merciful King Geysa, unless our royal majesty continues as in the past to keep a merciful eye on them. Therefore, out of poverty and despair they could not provide service to the royal majesty.

In listening mercifully as usual to their just complaints we wish to announce for the present and the future to follow the trail of our predecessors, and emotionally touches, grant the freedoms they previously had. And as to:

1. King Andreas II confirms that he has rededicated the free land to the German settlers into which they had been called by his pious grandfather King Geysa II.
2. So that all of its people remain one nation under a supreme judge. Nobody shall be a judge who is not a resident among them. The people shall elect the best among them. Nobody may buy this authority with money or influence.
3. The people are obliged to give 500 Marks in Silver annually for the use of the King's Chamber.
4. If the King undertakes a campaign within the empire the Saxons shall provide 500 soldiers for the King's army. For campaign outside the empire the people shall send 100 warriors if the King goes out by himself without allied troops.
5. The people should select their pastors in free elections. The selected should be introduced, the Tenth (a portion of taxes) should be given to them (the pastors).
6. Nobody shall be their supreme judge except ourselves or the duke of Hermannstadt...The judges shall only judge to the rules of common use. They shall not invite anyone into our presence except when the judicial conflict cannot be resolved by their judges.
7. We bestow the forest of Blachen and Bissenen with adjoining waterways for common use...
8. We have granted them to keep a single seal which we and the other powers will acknowledge without a doubt.
9. If someone should sue one of the people in matters of money he can bring no witnesses from the outside before the judge...
10. The right to fetch salt three times a year for eight days each time from the royal mines.
11. The right not to be harassed by custom agents on their travels in and out of the area.
12. None of our Nobles dare make demands for a village or a piece of land from his Royal Majesty. If anyone demand such, the citizens of the community should rightfully protest.
13. If our faithful allies should march across the land, the people should entertain the King's ambassadors and be responsible hosts on 3 occasions.
14. Trades people may travel freely everywhere in our kingdom and enforce their right by referring to the royal highness.
15. We order their markets to be free of taxes.
16. We apply to this sheet our two seals for enforcement Provided in the 1224th year after the incarnation, in the 21st year of our Kingdom.





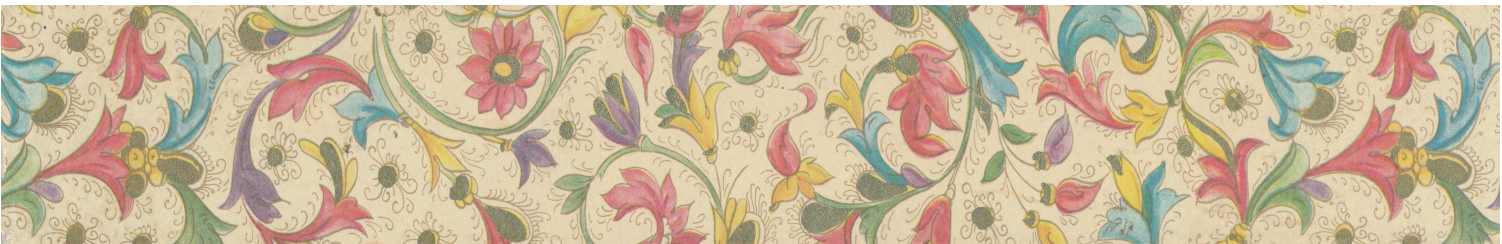
TURKISH INVASIONS. In 1526 medieval Hungary was invaded yet again and defeated by the Islamic ruler Sultan Suleiman I the Magnificent in a battle of Mohacs. The Hungarian King Ludwig II died in the battle. Central Hungary was then occupied by the Turks and was converted into a Turkish province. They collected tributes, war costs, punitive monies and took agricultural products, cattle and young people for slaves or foot soldiers. A new king was installed which the Saxons rejected. The new king Johann Zapolya ravaged the Saxon villages and forced them to surrender. Hunger, plague and war had taken their toll. In 1538 King Ferdinand of Austria made peace with Zapolya and negotiated a truce with the Turks. By then Zapolya's son was heir but the county was ruled by his mother, Queen Isabella. Ferdinand sent an army with 3000 Spaniards and three regiments of Germans who occupied Transylvania. When their pay did not arrive from Austria they robbed and looted the Saxon towns. With the help of foreign troops they were defeated and Queen Isabella returned. In eleven months, thirteen oppressive taxes were raised. Even internally they suffered, "On the 17 of May, 1605, the disloyal Szekler destroyed the market (of Großkopisch with fire and robbed the church."


AUSTRIA. When King Ludwig II died, the Hapsburgs of Austria claimed the crown of Hungary in the west and northeast. In 1683 the Turks' strength was broken by the siege of Vienna. The country was partitioned between the Ottoman Turks, the Habsburg Monarchy and the principality of Transylvania. In the struggle between these three entities, the Saxons sided with the Austrians due to their German heritage. The Saxons looked upon this as a long awaited formal connection with the German people. However, Austrian troops came to Transylvania and had to be housed and fed by the inhabitants. "Well it was a burden, but...the burden is perceived half as oppressive," because the Saxons traded it for the arbitrary cruelty of the Turks. A small corps of cavalry was housed in Großkopisch.

"Eventually the treaty of Karlowitz secured Transylvania for the Habsburgs in 1699. Under the crown of Austria, the Transylvania Saxons slowly began to lose the independent rights they had fought so long for as an entity within Transylvania. Austria intended to eliminate the pluralism of the ethnic groups in Transylvania. Emperor Joseph II (1789-1790) wanted to unify all citizens into the Austrian nation. "He abolished the "Nationsuniversitat" in 1876 which opened the door for Hungarians and Romanians to settle on Saxon lands with "equality in all rights"". The Romanian population had increased during the 17th century and they were settling in towns emptied of Germans due to wars and epidemics. Romanians and Hungarians wanted the same rights the Saxons had enjoyed. Along with pressure from these people, the council of the government and military of Austria practiced tyranny. Taxes were levied, their religion was suppressed and dissatisfaction grew. "The German government intervened and attempted to obtain the right to emigrate for the Protestants...They (the Saxons) were shackled and even sold to Venice as slaves for the galleys." In 1731 many emigrated to Germany and elsewhere. In 1758 the Goldener Freibrief was declared invalid. In 1784 the constitution of the country was canceled and the Saxon Nation declared extinct.

There was a revolution in Hungary in 1848/1849 which developed into a war for independence from Austria. "Hungary and the Szeklers stood on the side of the revolutionaries, while the Saxons and the Romanians fought for a united homeland." Austria allied with the Russians and defeated Hungary. "Austria and Hungary became a dual monarchy and Transylvania was integrated into Hungary." Because they were losing their rights and being persecuted "The Saxons wanted to prove that their rights had been earned by faithful service to their homeland and to the German Imperial government. To this end, historical sources were gathered and researched and the first newspaper came out in 1784 in Hermannstadt." People in Germany were made aware about their Saxon brothers and sisters in Transylvania. Their claim was that "It (they) had been of importance to the country not by the numbers but by its economic performance and its acknowledged rights." Thus they tried to gain favor with Austria. The Saxons resisted integration or "Magyarization." Sermons were still held in German and Lutheran schools taught in the home language. However, in 1897 all names of villages, towns and cities were Magyarized as well as state schools. No German names were allowed. Magyaric became the language of the state.

As a result of World War I, the Austria-Hungarian Dual Monarchy disintegrated into several independent nations. Transylvania was annexed by the Old Romania. With the returning veterans and in the populace, deep doubts arose about the sense of all the events during the war. Again, German names of towns were prohibited, this time only Romanian names were allowed. Agriculture was reformed and new laws confiscated the Saxons church and





town land. New authorities had no sympathy for the Germans since they had been the belligerents during the war. Connections to the industrialized regions of Austria were cut and Saxon youths were drafted for the Romanian army. Poverty was endemic. Oppression and general dissatisfaction allowed radical nationalistic oriented groups to be established themselves among the Saxons. They became attracted to Hitler's rhetoric.

WWII & COMMUNIST ROMANIA. The alliance they sought with Germany invited the German government to intervene in the affairs of the Saxons. The German government made an agreement with Romania to have the Saxons serve in the German military forces. Many served the Waffen-SS, some the Romanian army, some the Hungarian army. In short, the German Saxons found themselves Romanian citizens but giving allegiance to Germany, a confusing situation. Returning home after the war the soldiers were mistreated and discriminated against. They hid in foxholes below barns to try and remain undetected while Soviet troops occupied Romania. A communist government took over in March of 1945. "On the 14th of Jan 1945 all men present in the village between the 17th and 45th year and all females between 18 and 30 years of age were arrested. This happened on the same day all over the country to all Germans." They were deported to Russia to work in forced labor camps. The economy was placed under state control. Private and religious schools were dissolved, agriculture was socialized. The state owned all possessions including books and furniture. School curriculums were instituted by the Soviets. Many survivors slaved until 1952 in the coal mines of Russia.

The agricultural collectives did not fare well. Yield was low. Young men tried to migrate to the cities and there was a lack of field workers. To try and make matters better, "Decree #81 in 1956 directed the Soviet administrative organizations to give a house and property back to German families. Everybody could only receive one, even if more than one had been expropriated. The Saxon family received a document of ownership and had to register it—naturally for a fee—into the Land Registry. The donation was considered an act of mercy, it could not be passed down through inheritance and was not considered reparation for any wrong."

Slowly, families began to try and re-unite after the war. Soviets released their prisoners. In 1951 the Red Cross helped 1000 Romanian Germans reach Germany. It was not until 1958 that the communist regime allowed emigration. A procedure developed for uniting relatives. In 1978 approximately 11,000 persons were allowed to leave Romania for Germany. Prior to Dec 1989 a total of 242,326 Germans came from Romania to Germany. Eventually the communist dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu was deposed. Only a small number of Germans remain in democratic Romania today.

Andreas Türk writes: "The greatness of a nation exists especially in the diversity and acknowledged differences of all of its peoples, with freedom and equal rights for all! Only a free independent man is happy and ready to put all his/her creative capacity into the service for the community. "

"We have become a people on a quest for a homeland. In view of this situation one has to ask the burning question: What is to happen to our home community of Großkopisch? Nobody can give an answer to this question. Only God knows!"

REFERENCES:

1. Translation: 700 years Homeland Großkopisch in Transylvania. By Andreas Türk. Edited self-published, Andreas Türk, Pfr.iR, 7000 Stuttgart 75, Bernsteinstr.107 requested by the Transylvanian Sächsischen Cultural Council, with funds from the Transylvanian Sächsischen Stiftung. Preparation: Druckhaus West GmbH, Stuttgart 1983 Note: Andreas Türk is a retired Lutheran Pastor.
2. Transylvania Dreaming. The History of Transylvania and the Transylvanian Saxons by Dr. Konrad Gündisch, Oldenburg, Germany.



NOTES:

The story of our great grandparents only started to make sense to me after I started researching the history of Transylvania. I had first read of the town of Grosskopisch when I sent away for Josephine Schuller's death certificate. Place of birth was Grosskopisch, Austria. This town could not be found on Google initially.

The US Federal census' listed her husband, Peter Schuller and herself with their birthplace as follows: In the 1910 Magisterial Coal district census from the town of Adamston, County Harrison, W. Va., it was Austria. In 1920 they were living in Warren, Jefferson, Ohio and birthplace is listed as Austria. In 1930 again living in Warren, Jefferson, Ohio, the birthplace is listed as Romania. I was confused.

The current name of the town is Copsa Mare.

The Schullers immigrated in 1901 according to the question on the Federal Census sheets. It makes sense that our great grandfather was a coal miner given that it was a very important trade in Transylvania.

After Peter Schuller died, Josephine remarried George Gaertner. They are both buried in Union Cemetery, Steubenville, Ohio. In the cemetery records, George's nationality is listed as Romanian, which I thought was odd. Now I know why. Incidentally, I cannot find the town he was born in, listed as Tilldorth, Austria-Hungary on his WWI draft registration card.

Josephine Schuller's maiden name is Schuller. Originally the name was written as Schullehrer which means schoolteacher.

I ordered the book, 700 Jahre Heimat by Andreas Türk, from Germany with help from a friend. It is currently being translated by Barbara Gothe. Mr. Türk is deceased, my contact was Friedrich Binder who I think is a son.