

Coming to America, Eh?

Diane L. Richard looks at an emigrant family that came to the US from Canada.



IT IS EASY to think that, since an emigrant ancestor settled in the US, they came directly to the country from one of the major ports. This was not always the case. There are, however, many who first migrated via Canada before settling in the United States. Their journey to America was often a bit more complicated than expected. Let's look at a family who emigrated from Russia to Canada, then Sheboygan, Wisconsin and eventually settled in Portland, Oregon.

GRASMICK FAMILY

Fortunately, the Grasmick family was easy to find in the 1930 and the 1920 census. The first thing that we learn from these records is that the family did not come directly from Russia to the United States. They lived in Canada long enough to have two children. We eventually learned when and at what port they arrived, documented them in Canada and crossing into the US. We also learned where the patriarch, Jacob, was naturalized.

First, the 1930 census tells us that Jacob, his wife Katherine and the children settled in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. It states that they emigrated to the US in 1916 and that Jacob filed naturalization paperwork. It also tells us that two children, Emma and Henry, were born in Canada, in 1912 and 1914 respectively, and another daughter Frieda was born in Wisconsin in 1919. All this is consistent with the 1920 census placing the family in Sheboygan.

Fortunately, there is a 1911 Canadian census available. Given the birth of Emma in 1912, it made sense to see if we could find the family in this census; the enumeration started 1 June 1911.

Searching for Grasmick did not yield a Jacob Grasmick, though it did give a John Grasmick, from Russia, born 1877 (a contemporary of Jacob), living in Winnipeg, Manitoba with wife and children. All demographics, except his birthday were consistent with Jacob. That said, it was clearly not him!

I pulled up the census image to look at the original information

looked at the transcription of the page and there was an entry for a Jacob Grasmick born February 1883 and a Kathaline (different spelling) born October 1881. I know from other sources that Katherine (Huber) Grasmick was born 17 October 1881 in Russia and her husband, Jacob Grasmick, was born in 1883. They are said to have arrived in 1911. This is consistent with the information I've gathered.

It seemed logical to look for Jacob and Katherine in the passenger records for Canada. A search in an Ancestry.com database covering 1865-1935 yielded nothing. This wasn't totally surprising. It's rare to find emigrants quickly in the passenger records. There are too many name variants and indexing issues that typically conspire to make it hard. With access to "Canadian Border Crossings, 1895-1956" at www.ancestry.com, I decided to see if I could determine their arrival in the US, while hoping for clues to their original arrival port. We had a bit more success here. A 1916 border crossing from Winnipeg, Manitoba for a Jacob Grasmick *et al* is found — this matches the emigration year listed in

The image shows a page from a historical document titled "LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS APPLYING FOR ADMISSION". The document is filled with handwritten entries in cursive script, organized in columns. The entries appear to be names and details of passengers. The document is dated 1916 and mentions "Winnipeg, Manitoba" and "Sheboygan, Wisconsin".

A 1916 Canada-US Border crossing entry for Jacob and Katherine Grasmick, leaving Winnipeg, Manitoba and heading to Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

(we are all familiar with transcription errors). As I was scrolling down the page, I saw that right above John Grasmick was what looked to be another Grasmick entry. Realizing that the digitized census image was very hard to read, I wondered if I was imagining it. I used a feature of Ancestry.com where you can "view others on page". Searching in Manitoba for Grasmick, I again found John in the index. I then

the subsequent US censuses.

This clearly lists Jacob and Katherine as heading to Sheboygan, with a daughter Maria. It also states their origin as from Balzar, Russia (consistent with other documents). Subsequent records don't include a child Maria born in 1916. The next surviving child born is 1919 in Wisconsin; maybe a child that died young? Where are Emma and Henry? With a bit more research,

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we find that the parents were listed on Sheet No. 8 and Emma and Henry were listed on Sheet No. 16. The entire family did cross the border from Canada to the US in April 1916. Next, I had to determine when the Grasmick's arrived in Canada. Another search of online Canadian passenger lists still failed to turn up matches. I then decided to broaden the search to include eastern US ports.

Typically, emigrants from western Russia left through a western European port (Hamburg, Bremen, etc.), then went via Liverpool or Southampton and arrived in the US. I discovered a Jacob and Katherine Grasmick who arrived in Boston, 11 April 1911, from Balzar, Russia with a final destination of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Jacob and Katherine did not emigrate directly to Canada. They actually arrived at a US port and then traveled to Winnipeg, Manitoba, only to return a few years later to ultimately settle in Portland, Oregon, after living in Sheboygan, Wisconsin!

A FOOTNOTE

As I was writing this article and re-tracing my research steps, I discovered that there is another passenger record, for an arrival in January 1910 to Portland, Maine. This is the year before the Boston arrival and is for a Jacob and Ekaterina Grasmick heading to Winnipeg. For both of them it stated that they had been in Canada before, though the 1911 Boston passenger record states that they have not been in the US before — this could be technically true in that they were in transit to Canada. Does this mean that Jacob and Katherine traveled back and forth a couple of times? Was there more than one couple with this name who ended up in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1911? There was a family rumor about a first wife that Jacob may have had — was she Ekaterina?

Obviously, some more research — earlier passenger records, naturalization records, possibly the UK Outgoing Passenger List series at FindmyPast.com, Hamburg depar-

tures, US to Canada border crossing records, etc — is warranted to see if we can definitively figure out what happened.

Did I mention that according to Foreign Born Voter Registration

had no reason to believe that I would not find them arriving via a Canadian port — given the birthplace of their oldest children. Yet, we found they arrived at an eastern US port as they started their

Jacob Grasmick and Family in the 1930 Sheboygan, Wisconsin census.

Cards, dated 16 April 1946, Jacob was naturalized on 12 November 1932 in Lincoln, Nebraska, District Court? Apparently, the family left Sheboygan after the 1930 census, lived in Lincoln, Nebraska for awhile, from the naturalization date of November 1932 through the marriage of a daughter in Lincoln in March 1934, before finally settling in Portland, Oregon. Jacob's naturalization paperwork has yet to be found in Lincoln. So, their journey did not end upon arriving in the US — they continued to be mobile.

CONCLUSION

In this particular case, we were fortunate that the census clued us into the fact that this family came through Canada first before eventually settling in the US. We also learned is that they first emigrated through a US port to get to Canada. This tells us that it's important, when we don't find someone where we expect them to be in the records, to look elsewhere. At the start of this project, I

"journey", which ultimately ended in Portland, Oregon! And, for a Finnish family researched, I discovered they did come via a Canadian port before then crossing the border into the US and settling in Washington.

There was not just one way to achieve the emigrants' goal — if at first you don't find them where you expected, start looking into how else they may have traveled!

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