

Otto Hilger

Born 8.1.1857

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A partial memoir of Otto Hilger (1857-1945), and his wife Lilly Rabeneck (1860-1924) who was the daughter of Arthur and Betty Rabeneck. The photo above is from 1889, when Otto was 32 and Lilly 29. Otto and Lilly were the parents of Gustav Hilger (1886-1965). This memoir, covering the years 1885-1923, is taken from a website made by Christian Stoltz in Rio de Janeiro, found by Sabine Hartung, (great granddaughter of Eugenie Rabeneck 1862-1948, another daughter of Arthur and Betty). Sabine was told by Stoltz that pages before the start of this text have either been lost, or never existed. Translated from the German by Andrew Rabeneck in 2020.

Our civil marriage ceremony took place on Monday October 19, 1885, in Dresden. On the Tuesday Lilly and I were married once more in the Hofkirche cathedral by Pastor Rühling, and we had our wedding breakfast at the Belvedere on the famous Brühlische Terrasse overlooking the Elbe. The speeches were lovely and the meal very lively, so my wife and I drove off at seven to catch the Berlin train in a very jolly mood. My brother-in-law Moritz Böker had made all the arrangements at the station.



Hofkirche cathedral in the distance and the Brühlische Terrasse, Dresden 1840s

In Berlin I'd booked a room in the Tiergartenhotel that was highly recommended, but it wasn't anything special. Nevertheless we had a wonderful time in Berlin, including an evening with my sister Elisabeth and her husband Moritz. We travelled from Berlin to Biebrich to see my brother Friedrich and Helene Bettelhauser, then went on to Remscheid. Of course there were quite a few dinners, some grander than others, and we received lovely wedding gifts from relatives and friends including a grand piano from my parents, which we would find only on our return to Moscow, plus a box of 18 silver table settings from uncle Louis and aunt Auguste Rabeneck.



Fürstenhof Hotel on Potsdamer Platz, Tiergarten, Berlin, 1907

During our ten day stay in Ehringhausen near Remscheid we made day trips, one to see my aunt and uncle Rabeneck in Düsseldorf, and one to Schalke to see my sister and brother-in-law Vorster. Then we went on to Dresden for a short stay where we enjoyed lots more dinners, and plenty of walking between offices to get the paperwork for duty-free import to Russia. Sadly these efforts were in vain, because when the presents and the dowry finally arrived in Russia, I had to pay heavy duty to clear customs. Clearly poor relations between Russia and Germany over the years had played their part.

On November 1st, 1885, the same day as exactly a year earlier, we left Dresden. My brother-in-law Ludwig Rabeneck had joined us and we decided to travel via Petersburg for convenience, but also because Ludwig wanted to spend a day in Dünaburg visiting his brother-in-law Tchaikovsky and his wife, who were garrisoned there. We stayed another day in Petersburg before finally arriving home in Moscow on the 22 November, a Sunday Morning. Sasha Rabeneck¹ greeted us with bread and salt as is the Russian custom. We were pleased to be home, but there was lots to do, with visits to relatives and friends, plus plenty of invitations to meet the 'young couple'. Once again we received tons of wedding presents, mostly accompanied by salt and bread, even though the bread was often replaced by cake.

On the first Saturday after we got back we drove with aunt Lilly to Sobolevo using a troika on the newly opened road. There was an incident along the way which often amused us whenever we recollected it. Ludwig, Edmund and Edouard Rabeneck were driving towards us, also in a troika. We saw them near Osery, a village about ten versts outside Sobolevo. Instead of politely greeting us they jumped onto our sleigh letting out wild whoops. We were so tightly wrapped up against the cold that we must have been hard to recognise. Thinking it might be a robbery on the deserted road I grabbed the guy who was at my throat with all my strength, but he shook me off. Then I hit him on the head quite hard with my fists which annoyed him until we realised what a mistake we were making, and all dissolved in laughter. But even though I'd had a good fight with uncle Ludwig, it was Uncle Edmund who had been behind the joke, as he so often was. He was the brother of my late father-in-law Louis Rabeneck, who lived at Pushkino near Moscow. He'd been estranged from his family ever since marrying a factory worker, after which the family ladies refused to visit him. However, we men liked to see him, and he was pretty sociable; his wife was very personable and a good influence on him.

During the summer of 1885 I got my business plan into focus. I'd convinced myself that in the long term it would be impossible to work with Lützeler, particularly since he was claiming the lion's share of the profits while I was doing all the work. Following a thorough discussion in the presence of Uncle Louis, who was the main investor in the business and who had provided most of the capital, we agreed to split as of January 1, 1886. A few weeks later I opened a new business under my own

¹ Sasha is a Russian pet-name for Alexander or Alexandra. 'Sasha' refers to Alexandrine Rabeneck, née Weber, Ludwig's wife.

name. I'd found a beautiful large office in the newly built Gusskov building on Ipat'yewski Pereluok² in which I could partition off a small space for myself and still have enough room for a few employees, for my large sample display and for a small amount of stock.

I had inherited the staff employed in Lützeler's metal department, a salesman and a trainee. And I hired Mr Frankel as accountant and authorised signatory, who had been warmly recommended to me. At first things were tough; if Lutzeler had found it hard to make himself known, it was even harder for my new company that was completely unknown, even though my salesman and I had good reputations among local customers. I tried unsuccessfully to win the representation of the Riga wire industry, visiting Riga in the summer of 1886. But I failed because their management preferred to give the business to a young man, brought in after the death of his predecessor, who knew the language, the country and the business.

It was difficult building the business and there was plenty of competition. Shifting exchange rates and capricious customs conditions had a colossal effect. There were instances of sudden massive increases in duty at only a few days' notice. Or there were sudden policy shifts such as duty payable only in cash or in Russian government bond coupons, although German bank notes were usually accepted as gold equivalents.

These ups and downs, which became particularly extreme in 1887 and 1888, forced me to buy foreign exchange futures months in advance. I was able to buy them quite cheaply, particularly in 1888, even though 1886 and 1887 had been pretty bad for me. Things got better only later in 1888, when customs conditions improved, as did the political situation.

² Ипатьевский переулк

But I ought to recap on 1886. We'd furnished our apartment quite comfortably after our stuff arrived from Germany. We had at our disposal a large living room, a separate bathroom, a spacious dining room and a modest bedroom with dressing room. The cabinet was on the corner and was absolutely freezing so it could not be used when it was really cold. It only became fully usable when a chimney was built into the outer wall in the summer of 1886.

At first we didn't follow the Moscow custom of renting a dacha in the country for the summer, instead we happily accepted the invitation of our friends the Berens to spend a few weeks with them in the country at Bolshevo. We also drove out to see other friends, mostly to Sobolevo. Meanwhile my mother-in-law decided she wanted to live full time in Moscow and we found her a very nice apartment on the little Bolshoi Haritonevsky Pereulok.³

On September 10th, 1886, one day after her birthday, my wife Lilly gave birth to our first son Gustav, a cause for much celebration.

³ Харитоновский переулок

In February 1887 we had the pleasure of a visit from my brother Walter, and he continued to visit us regularly until his death in 1905. In the summer of 1887 we stayed in the city but we spent a lot of time with my mother-in-law Betty Rabeneck (née Quack). She had a large shady garden behind her house. During the summer we also moved house, settling into a small, detached house on Chekhovski Pereulok.⁴ The rooms were smaller than in our apartment but there were more of them. An advantage of the move was that we now had a small garden, and the new house was only three minutes away from my mother-in-law's. There was plenty of to-and-fro between our houses.

Our second son Arthur was born on June 13th, 1888, but unfortunately I had to go to Germany four weeks later for an eight week stint of work. Much as I enjoyed the work it was tough to leave my wife and children in Moscow, even though I knew they would be well looked after by Betty.

⁴ Чудовский переулок

In the spring of 1888 Mr Prollius joined the business as an accountant. I knew him from the days of my apprenticeship in Bremen when he worked at Finke and Weinlig; he was actually my supervisor.

In early July I left for Germany because I had to report for military duty on July 15th. As in previous years I was to report to the cavalry. A march from Osnabrück to Wesel was planned and I had to report to my battery in a village near Munster. I went there on Saturday, the 14th, and spent a very cosy evening with the Wiesmanns and my cousin Hardt from Lennep. Since the Wiesmanns knew most of my fellow officers personally from their time in Osnabrück, they were able to bring me up to date. The next morning I drove to the village. I was greeted along the way by my cousin Richard Hasenclever and various other comrades. I found quarters in a nice cosy farmhouse; I'd already sent my riding gear to Osnabrück, and there the next morning I was shown a horse 'Blitz', small and very nervous. The next morning I reached a lonely farm in the area where something happened which may be worth recalling. The lady of the house probably felt obliged to entertain me. After an excellent meal she asked me where I was from. When I told her I was from Russia, she said rather naively "That's strange. I always thought I couldn't speak Russian, but I can understand you perfectly well!"

On Thursday morning we moved to the Friedrichsfeld artillery range near Wesel, where in addition to the cavalry the whole 22nd Field Artillery Regiment was also billeted. On the first afternoon I had to ride out to the ammunition stores at the edge of the range to watch cartridges being made, which wasn't much fun after a four day march.

Early on I had to swear allegiance to Kaiser Wilhelm II, who had just come to power. I was appointed platoon leader and had to lead a large regimental drill in the first few days. I must have managed to please Colonel Nernst, who said "If the regiment's deployment to the firing position went smoothly we owe it primarily to the leadership of Lieutenant Hilger, who understood how to lead his troop in such a way that they arrived on time." As one can imagine this remark made me very proud. The rest of the exercise was greatly affected by an outbreak of influenza among the horses. Most of the time we had to move about in groups of four, but still getting close to the guns.

At the end of our exercise we went through an interesting exercise with the Düsseldorf Hussars, part of the 39th Infantry Regiment. A battle-proven contingent from our own regiment opened fire on designated targets using live ammunition. It gave us a first-hand idea of the terrible effects of machine gun fire.

Otherwise, we had plenty of time to relax. At the outset I had a room to myself in one of the barracks, until another young officer returned from artillery school in Berlin, a

pretty personable chap. My brother Walter had laid in a good supply of port so some of my colleagues used to come round for a drink in the morning after work. Unfortunately my cousin Richard got sick, but the upside was that I was able to take over his horse, much better than my fidgety 'Blitz'. On Sundays I went over to Remscheid or Schalke, where my sister Clara Vorster lived. Our exercise was over by the middle of August.

Right at the end, though, I had a nasty surprise. I had just mounted my horse for a fine morning ride when I was given a telegram from Remscheid telling me that Lützeler's Moscow operation had colossal debts which implicated my Remscheid business because we were shareholders and had some liability. I'd had no business relations with Lützeler for a long time, and not much in a personal way either. I wasn't up to speed on the business relationships between Remscheid and Lützeler. Shortly before the catastrophe I had been given an inkling about the nature of the business relationship and, although I didn't like it, I found it hard to believe that Lützeler would exploit it in such a fraudulent manner, nor that he'd been doing so for some time. Apart from ourselves it was mostly Uncle Louis Rabeneck who stood to lose the most.

I rushed back to Moscow to save what I could but it turned out pretty badly. Lützeler had a large team of lawyers and I didn't trust our lawyer with his plan to get uncle Louis in even deeper. So I assumed the loss myself. In other respects 1888 was a pretty good year and we ended up in profit. 1889 brought another addition to the family with our third son, Rudolf, born on July 29th. We spent June at Sobolevo where mother lived in a few rooms at my brother-in-law Edouard Rabeneck's house. Edouard had married Nellie Lasch in 1887 and they moved into the large house he'd built previously, right next to his brother Ludwig's house.⁵

In the fall of 1889, I learned that a new steam boiler was to be installed at the Rabeneck factory and I asked if I could take responsibility for the delivery, partly because Steinmüller at Gummersbach, who were the preferred bidder, were located close to Remscheid. I was given the job and I had the idea of setting up a business to deliver heavy equipment into Russia. In the autumn I went to Remscheid to visit the renowned boiler manufacturers in the Rhine area; Steinmüller, Walter and Dürr, and others, with the aim of securing an agency. But this plan didn't work out because I didn't want to commit myself to a single manufacturer, and they in turn preferred to keep a free hand. But I have stayed in touch with Steinmüller ever since even though not acting as their permanent representative.

While I was in Germany I got to know the family of my eldest brother Walter Ernst, who had settled in Bonn. But while I was away from Moscow our eldest son Gustav suffered a badly scalded arm, caused by the carelessness of an inexperienced nanny. He had to have surgery under chloroform, but luckily the wound healed quickly.

⁵ An 1889 group photograph showing Otto and Lilly Hilger at Edouard Rabeneck's house with their children Gustav and Arthur is included as an appendix. Arthur Rabeneck hangs above the gathering in a portrait photograph.

In the spring of 1890, we had the pleasure to welcome my brother Walter and my brother-in-law Moritz Böker, who hadn't been to Russia before. We spent an agreeable week together and of course we visited the relatives at Sobolevo. Besides that we limited business to visiting some of Moscow's largest machine factories.

In May my wife and I, with our three children and our trusty Marie, went to Remscheid, where we were supposed to meet up with our friends who were to spend the summer there. After a day in Warsaw we arrived at Remscheid on the eve of Ascension Day, and I was able to stay with them for a fortnight.

Because our apartment had become too small for our three children with a fourth on the way, I had to look for somewhere else, and I found just the thing in Kisel'nyy Pereulok,⁶ directly opposite where we had lived for our first few years in Moscow. I had to organise the move on my own but I had a lot of help from Jenny Rabeneck. In July the family came back from Germany, together with Edouard Rabeneck, and I was very happy to see them again. Besides the fact that Lilly was rather out of sorts and homesick for Moscow, she hurried back because of her sister Jenny's⁷ wedding to Friedrich Loos, planned for August 2. That went off very well at the Hotel Continental. In November our fourth boy was born, but unfortunately he died at birth and Lilly was very slow to recover.

Over the course of the summer I was pleased to be promoted to first lieutenant, but of course with the simultaneous request that I undertake another exercise. I had to turn that down, however, because my business and private circumstances wouldn't allow me to be away from Moscow for several months.

In August 1890 I had the joy and honour of being presented to the German Emperor at Narva. I'd been a board member of the Association of German Reich Members since spring 1889, and in that capacity I went with my colleague Camesasca.⁸ Keller, who was staying near to Narva with his family, joined us. On August 9th the ceremony took place in the magnificent Polovtsev Park, the grounds of the palace where the Emperor was staying. As well as us three from Moscow there were about twenty other gentlemen from Petersburg, Reval and Riga, and the Emperor made a point of talking to each of us. I was the youngest, out on the far end of the line. After eyeing me up the Emperor said "I'm seeing you for the first time today. When I was in Moscow in 1884, you weren't present in the receiving line." I had to agree,

⁶ Кисельный переулок

⁷ Eugenie Rabeneck

⁸ The "colleague Camesasca", mentioned a couple of times, is the father of my uncle Nikolei Camesasca. Nicolei was a friend of Helmuth Loos (son of Eugenie Rabeneck and my grandfather), they knew each other from Moscow. Helmuth married Hildegard Dunkel and Nikolei Christa Dunkel, both daughters of the Bremen architect Albert Dunkel. (Sabine Hartung)

because at that time I didn't have my uniform in Moscow and therefore couldn't join the honour guard. The Emperor's memory was remarkable since he hadn't been briefed by the Chancellor, who was also in Narva, nor had we any contact with his entourage. Naturally we celebrated the meeting with a lunch at our hotel, then in the evening we drove over to the seaside resort of Syllamäghi, not far from Narva, where Keller's family were staying. We went to a dinner dance at the health spa and drove on to Petersburg at dawn where we spent the day before going on to Moscow.



Polovtsev Park palace, St Petersburg

On the Kaiser's birthday in 1891 I had to give a toast to the Emperor, which I managed by quoting the beautiful words of Torquato Tasso's Antonio "There is no more beautiful sight in the World than a prince who rules wisely; an empire where everyone is proud to obey, where each believes he is looking after his own interests because all are ordered to do the right thing." Judging from the applause and congratulations I received I must have struck the right note in the hearts of the audience.

My family spent the summer of 1891 in the company of my mother-in-law Betty Rabeneck (née Quack) and my aunt at Katharinental near Reval, from where I picked them up on August 19th. But in the end, I stayed for about ten more days with various visits to my business friend Hofrichter.

In the winter of 1891/92 our friend Edward Berens (who was married to Emma Rabeneck) informed me that he intended to build a house on Petrovski Boulevard during the summer and he asked if we'd like to rent a floor. Once I'd had a look at the plans I was happy to accept his offer, particularly since the rent was only marginally higher than our previous apartment. During the summer of 1892 we moved "to Datsche" for the first time, to Sokolniki where we'd found a large two story dacha where we took the ground floor and the Loos' the upper story. On the first day of Pentecost, June 5th, our first daughter, Ella, was born, and this seemed to inspire my sister-in-law Jenny who gave birth to her first son Fritz a few weeks later.

The summer was generally very pleasant and on September 1st we returned to town after four months away. It had been great for Lilly and the children, but our flat was not yet ready so I had to move Lilly and the children in with Betty in the interim, while I took a room at the Hotel Dussaux. Our furniture had been in storage at Rogoshin after our lease ended. Our new flat was ready by October 1st and we were very happy to have such lovely spacious and airy rooms. The upstairs flat was rented by the Könemanns, four very old, quiet people we'd known for years (Edward Könemann had been a friend of Ludwig Rabeneck and owner of a cloth works at Sobolevo, who had encouraged the Rabenecks to invest there). Apart from some good music we were not disturbed by our quiet neighbours.

At the end of November 1892 I had to go to Germany again and I traveled to Upper Silesia where I had business in Katowice and Malapane. I had wanted to go to Lübeck and Hamburg with my brother Walter, but in Berlin I had a telegram from him saying he had a bad cold and could not travel with me and that I should first go to Remscheid and he would join me later. On December 9 I went to a very nice ball with Moritz Hasenclever and a few days later Walter and I drove to Lübeck and Pinneberg to get some enamelling work done. We met Privy Councillor Heye of Hamburg and our cousin Alfred Hasenclever, at the Schloss Tremsbüttel hotel near Hamburg. We visited relatives in Bremen and finally our Vorster siblings at Leer where they had moved some time ago, and from where my brother-in-law ran a factory at Papenburg. On the way to Remscheid I spent an agreeable evening in the officer's mess of the Kaiser's First Berlin Regiment, where I was introduced by a gentleman called Henck, an acquaintance of my brother Caspar from Moscow.

After very happy holidays in Remscheid I arrived in Moscow on December 31st, just in time to do all the preparations for Christmas. In the summer of 1893 we were back in Sokolniki, but we took another dacha because we didn't have the Loos' with us. It was a very nice dacha and as neighbours we had Nick and Billo whom I had known for years and whose children were almost the same age as ours, and who had a lot in common with each other. When we got back to Moscow we had to prepare for a trip to Remscheid to celebrate my parents golden wedding on October 12th, taking Gustav with us at their request.

After a good trip we arrived at Remscheid on October 5th and put up in my parents house. The eight days before the party flew by with all sorts of preparations. Siblings and relatives arrived throughout the week and all were found room in the house. All the guest rooms were full. My siblings from far away also brought as many of their children as they could. My brother Caspar came from New York with his eldest son Arnold, but unfortunately his wife couldn't join him. She was the only one among the sibling families to miss the beautiful party.

The religious ceremony took place in the house, whereas the banquet was held at the same Remscheid restaurant where we had celebrated the silver wedding twenty-five years earlier. My parents house was beautifully decorated, inside with gold-painted myrtle branches on the candelabras and outside with oak wreaths bearing gold painted acorns!

The actual day of the party, on the 12th, was fine but not as cloudless as usual for that time of year. Everyone gathered at the house in Ehringhausen early in the morning. When everyone had arrived the dear old parents came down from their bedroom and the grandchildren broke into a beautifully rehearsed song "Lord your kindness goes as far as heaven can, and your grace as far as the clouds." The primary school children from Ehringhausen set up in the garden beneath my parent's window and sang some festive songs. After the singing we lined up to congratulate the parents, including my niece Maria Vorster with her husband to be Dr Fritz Riedlin. As she approached a sprig of myrtle from the chandelier fell into her hair, and everyone took it as a good omen for their marriage.

Countless friends and relatives came by during the morning and Pastor Liebert held a short service with a nice speech and the Kaiser's gold wedding medal was presented. The lord mayor of Bohlen presented them with the Order of the Crown, third grade. The title of 'Secret Commercial Council', which had been requested, couldn't be awarded since it is only for merchants who are still in active business. There were all sorts of gifts and splendid bouquets from all quarters.

A golden wreath was put on my mother's head by the great-granddaughter of her childhood friend, our aunt Henny Focke, who had already together with her daughter and granddaughter given her a green and silver wreath. Three generations! The Bremen relatives turned up in great numbers.

We children refrained from giving individual gifts but we clubbed together to get a large gold cup which was presented by Elizabeth, my youngest sister with a few heartfelt words. The goblet was intended to circulate with fine wine at all family celebrations, and it has fulfilled that purpose many times since then, most recently at a family get together in May 1914, just before the outbreak of the Great War. Once the well wishers had left my father gave each of his ten children a gift of money; most of us used it to buy something special for the house as a souvenir of the celebration. Others treated it as a useful contribution to the considerable expense of attending the party.

After breakfast and a rest we all headed for Remscheid where the banquet was to take place. My parents of course went in their own car accompanied by their two eldest daughters. It was a special occasion for our chauffeur Fritz. The 'Zum Weinberg' restaurant, so well known to us all had been very nicely decorated and our big party sat down at four long tables. My brother Ernst opened a round of numerous toasts with one for the jubilant couple. This toast, together with the text of my sister Elizabeth's speech on the presentation of the gold cup, can be found in a book given to us by Elizabeth, in which she recorded everything said during the day. My job was to toast two of my mother's friends who were present, my aunt Henny Focke and her cousin George Hasenclever, who were also residents of Ehringhausen.

At the express request of my parents the table service was performed by their housemaids rather than by the restaurant staff. They were dressed in black with white aprons and did a super job, contributing significantly to the family character of the celebration.

All the performances during the entertainment had a strong family feeling, of course, with many references to my parents' younger years and their home life. A councillor from Hamburg, the older sister of my two sisters-in-law Bertha and Ida, as well as a friend of my older sister Johanna Friederichs, made special contributions, and Ida had composed charming songs set to well-known melodies.

The quantity of telegrams received from all over was innumerable; to my great delight Moscow was very well represented. Only two people were out of sorts, my brother-in-law Hugo Friederichs who was recovering from a serious illness, and Elisabeth Bettelhauser who had a sore throat that kept her out of the singing. We ended up with lively dancing, with music provided by the prize-winning Deutz Pionierkapelle, and very good they were. They'd been awarded the top music prize within the 8th Army Corps a year or two earlier. The day was considered a great

success by everyone, particularly my parents, and even Hugo and Elisabeth managed to have a good time. The next evening there was a party for the employees of Kontor and Packstube held in the restaurant.

The next day Moritz and Elisabeth invited all the young people to a ball at which Heinrich Böker and his wife, plus Lilly and I were the only married couples to be invited. In welcoming us Moritz said they hadn't been able to choose between a ball 'with nieces' or with '*with* nieces'⁹, but ultimately we went with the former. This crafty wordplay delighted all the nieces who turned up.

After the party we stayed in Remscheid for a short while and then drove over to Hanover to see my wife's aunt, a Dietze, with her children Carl and Olga Hecht. After a few very cosy days there we drove on to Berlin where we stayed for a couple of days spending an evening with Moritz before returning to Moscow very pleased with our trip.



'Zum Weinberg' restaurant at Remscheid, near Wuppertal

⁹ wordplay with niece translated as "not at all"

We spent the summer of 1894 in Sokolniki again, and in the autumn I went back to Remscheid because I'd promised my parents to spend their anniversary with them whenever possible. This year the stay was sad because shortly before we went my much-loved brother-in-law, Hugo Friederich, succumbed to a long and painful illness; a release for him but a particularly hard blow for my poor sister with her nine small children. Around the same time my cousin Richard Hasenclever died quite suddenly of a stroke when he was about to go out with his troops. The Ehringhausen families were all deeply saddened.

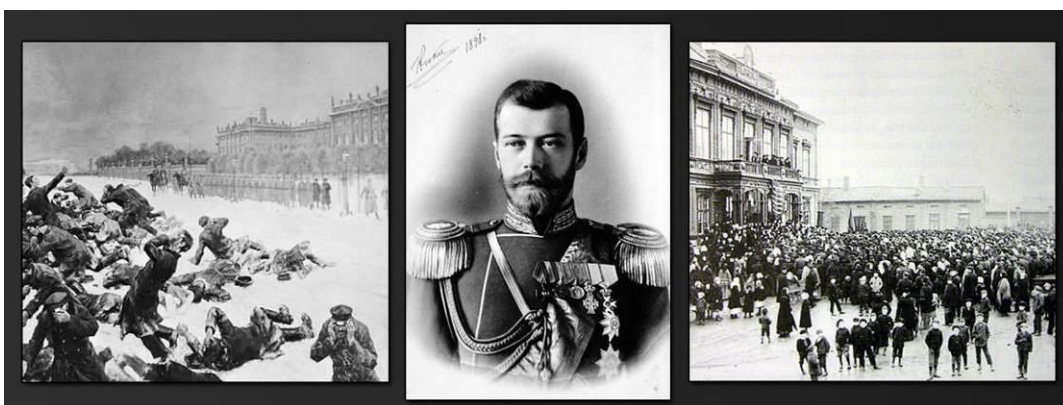
On January 10, 1895 our little daughter Lilly was born so we could now proudly say “we have sons and daughters”. We spent the summer again in Sokolniki, our second year in the Dacha Sorokina, where my mother-in-law Betty had previously stayed.

In the autumn I went to Germany as usual. On these autumn trips, of course, I never confined myself to a Remscheid visit but always saw business friends, which took me to Offenbach most years, where I could visit my siblings in Biebrich.

Meanwhile our two eldest sons were going to the Michaeli Realschule which had an excellent reputation, and where I later sent Rudolf. For 1896 we decided to move into a dacha in Perlowka on the Yarosavl railway line,¹⁰ which had been offered to us by our friend Prollius. We enjoyed the place so much we kept coming back until the outbreak of war in 1914, with the exception of a few years at Tarassowka. We didn't always stay with Prollius who had behaved extremely unpleasantly, but later with Ivanov who did everything to make us comfortable in his freshly decorated, comfortable dachas.

¹⁰ Ярославская железная дорога

In 1896 we moved to the country a little later because of the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II that took place in May. The influx of guests from all over Europe began in early May. On the 6th I was with Prince Heinrich, to whom I introduced the other board members of the Association of German Reich Members; a few days earlier we'd introduced ourselves to the German ambassador, Prince Radolin. I also introduced myself to the Grand Duke of Hesse, whom Camesasca and I had to invite on behalf of the German Reich Members to the garden party. The coronation itself took place on May 26th. with colossal splendor. The illuminations, over three days, were beautiful beyond description. On June 1st, our association invited all the German princes with their entourages who had come for the coronation, as well as numerous military deputations, to a garden party which went off very well except that there was violent reaction in the German press to a remark in Camesasca's speech in which he said a that Prince Heinrich had come to the coronation with a large 'retinue' of German princes. The word 'retinue' was sharply objected to by the prince, now King Ludwig of Bavaria, because the princes weren't a 'retinue' but loyal allies of the emperor. Of course the speaker had not meant anything bad by using the word 'retinue'. It was only the Bavarians who got upset; in Berlin the remark was better understood. In any event Camesasca got a medal from the Prussians.



Coronation of Nicholas II, followed by tragedy of Khodynka Field where 1,398 died in a stampede

The celebrations of the coronation were in stark contrast to the terrible calamity of the Khodynka field where between five and six thousand people were crushed and trampled to death during a popular entertainment. The last official festivity was a concert organised by the German ambassador, for which the entire Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Professor Schuch had come to Moscow. The feast and everything that went with it had been brought from Berlin. The Russian press agreed that this party eclipsed anything done by the other ambassadors.

Over the summer we spent a lot of time with Alexander Lasch and his wife, who lived in Taininskoye, a dacha village right next to Perlowka. But the summer also brought great sadness with the death of my sister-in-law Nelly Lasch, Edouard Rabeneck's wife, who died after giving birth to a magnificent boy. This was a great blow for Edouard and his four children, and also for the whole family because Nellie had been so very much loved. In August that year my wife and I went to the trade fair at Nizhny Novgorod, which we enjoyed a lot despite the incredible heat.

In autumn I went back to Germany. In February 1897 we had a visit from my brother Walter and Moritz Böker but unfortunately around that time Gustav had come down with a virulent form of scarlet fever. He was looked after by Lilly in the apartment, while the other four children went to stay with Nelly Rabeneck in Edouard's house at Sobolevo.

By April Gustav was completely recovered and we moved in with the others while our flat was disinfected. There in Chidovsky Tupik¹¹ where mum lived in a small detached house, our fourth son Otto was born on May 19. Lilly recovered quickly and we were able to move to the dacha after only three weeks.



Edouard Rabeneck's house at Sobolevo

It was on a farm shared with the Loos' and the Laschs and we spent an enjoyable summer in their company. The two ladies also had babies, and that gave rise to lots of good jokes.

¹¹ Tupik = Dead end

On June 24th, 1897, my dear father died at the age of eighty-three. I could not go to the funeral and I was the only one of his ten children who couldn't pay their last respects. Elisabeth later sent me a copy of the funeral oration, which can be found among my papers.

In August of this 1897 the German Emperor came to Petersburg, and I was once again pleased to be sent by the Association of German Imperial Members to greet them, this time accompanied by messrs Keller, Speidel and my friend Walch. We had a steamer at our disposal and we went up to Hohenzollern to see the cruisers and torpedo boats accompanying the imperial yacht to Kronstadt. It was a wonderful sight when the squadron steamed by, with noisy salutes from the German and Russian warships opposite the Kronstadt fortress. In the afternoon we were on the German training ship 'Charlotte'. We were well received by the officers and cadets and spent the evening with them at the famous Leiner restaurant.

The next day all the deputations were summoned to the German embassy. The emperor and empress spoke graciously with each and every one of us. The Emperor was particularly sorry not to have been able to attend the inauguration of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Bridge near Remscheid, and promised to make up for this very soon. In the event he was as good to his word, but a few years later. The empress was curious about school conditions in Moscow and I was able to offer some explanations.

After the reception, which was most satisfying for all of us, the deputies for Moscow, Kiev, Liepaja, Odessa, Kharkov, Riga and Reval, etc. gathered for a communal dinner. Among the many speeches was one that brought up the subject of establishing German schools, as an issue for the German Support associations. I was strongly against this idea, maintaining that we are merely support associations, established as such and acknowledged by the Russian government. We should therefore be mindful that if we exceed the scope of our statutes the goodwill of the government could well be lost. In my view the founding of German schools would be seen as exceeding the rights granted to us. Later I was reproached for not expressing my opinion within the group, because it was correct, if not in tune with the mood of the group. A member of parliament for Riga had actually succeeded in establishing a German school, even though it was only the local conditions that made it practical.

In principal, however, I haven't changed my position on this question. I have always emphasised that we German citizens in Russia enjoy many rights but we also have an absolute duty not to interfere in internal Russian affairs. Today more than ever, I think I can say that the events of the ensuing years have proved me right. When the war broke out the Russian police showed no evidence that they'd understood our position, rather the contrary. But more of this later. The war is still seventeen years off.

Although some of the deputies stayed in Petersburg for another day. I drove back to Moscow in the evening with my friend Walch. In the fall of the year I found myself back in my parent's home in Germany. Of course it was quite different following my father's departure in June but I was pleased to find mother in good sorts. Before going on to Remscheid I had visited Biebrich where I attended the Bettelhäuser's silver wedding. It went off well although they were still mourning the death of my father. Lots of children turned up and my job was to make a toast to the happy couple. Only close local friends were invited. The next day, when everyone was driving home I made a detour to Niederwald where I had never been. I was sad that there was no one around with whom to exchange my feelings and impressions.

We spent the summer of 1898 very comfortably in Perlowka with lots of time spent in Sobolevo where Edouard's new wife Else had moved in. Since my wife needed a break we drove down to Opatija in Croatia in September where we spent an extraordinarily pleasant fortnight. After spending a few days in Vienna, we went over the Semmering Pass when the weather was nice, enjoying the scenery, and arrived at our destination in the evening in pouring rain, but at last it was warm. We found a very nice room in the Hotel Quarnero and we were pleased that the weather cleared up the next day and we could start swimming in the sea which we kept on doing until



the last day. The Risch family, whom we knew from Moscow, were staying in the same hotel. The weather was so nice that we had our coffee outside most mornings. At about eleven we went for a dip and in the afternoon we did some side trips, on foot into the mountains or by steamboat to Fiume or to one of the villages on the beach. We were very happy with the hotel, the food and the way of life in Opatija. After a two week stay we took a train to Venice, where we stayed for two days. Our visit coincided with a visit from the German Emperor on his second visit to the orient. We saw the magnificent gondolas from the time of the Doges with everyone in costume, a beautiful sight. I was curious that the welcome of the Emperor was by clapping rather than shouting. Of course we did a lot of sightseeing and spent an afternoon at the Lido in the company of an experienced guide recommended by the hotel. We found it strange that though it was late in the season people still slept under mosquito nets. Incidentally, I forgot to mention that we'd previously taken a short break in Trieste where, of course, we visited Miramare, the palace of Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. The weather was bad, but the siting of the castle is indescribably beautiful.

From Venice we drove to Verona, where we spent the day visiting the arena and Juliet's tomb, famous from 'Romeo and Juliet'. From Verona we took the magnificent express train north via the Brenner Pass to Biebrich, which is on the route to Frankfurt, where we arrived early in the morning. The evening before we'd met in our sleeping car Mr Amburger from Petersburg, whom we know. After a day's stopover in Biebrich we drove on to Remscheid where we stayed with my dear old mother for a week. From there, after a short stay in Berlin, we returned to Moscow, very happy with the outcome of the trip.

The year 1899 brought another addition to our family with the birth of Robert on October 18th. I arrived home from abroad on the same day in the afternoon, so I could say as the father “As I count the heads of my loved ones I see there are seven rather than six.” Our domestic life continued at its calm, steady pace. The three eldest boys attended the pretty good Michaeli Realschule, and the girls were taught at home by a Russian governess. We deliberately chose a Russian woman so that our children would learn perfect Russian from the outset, and I believe we have fully achieved that.

On December 4th, 1900, my eldest brother Ernst died of pneumonia in Bonn at the age of 56, the first hole torn in our large sibling group. And in the winter of 1900/1901 my dear wife suddenly fell seriously ill leaving us most worried for several days. The problem started a few days before Christmas, and we could only decorate our tree on January 5th, while our patient was still very poorly. Our family doctor, who was usually very efficient, was never clear about the causes of the disease; he thought it might be an inflammation of the inner walls of the heart. We were made aware of the seriousness of the situation when, after a particularly difficult night, our doctor suggested he needed a second opinion. Whether she had passed the crisis that night, or because of the treatment he had given, it's difficult to say, but the doctor who came the next day said he could not find anything to worry about. But I will never forget the worry and fear of this time.

Lilly's recovery was very slow, and she felt weak. It was only after several weeks that we risked her first outing, offered by my brother-in-law Ludwig. Our dacha at Perlowka was right on the railway and rather noisy so we decided to move to Tarassowka further down the line but still on the Yaroslavl line. There we found the Billo family who had been our neighbours at Sokolniki. There was a lot of coming and going between our houses especially among the young who were about the same ages. I had stayed at Mr Billo's house on my first long visit to Moscow when I went to see my mother in 1882. We'd both been married about the same time. My mother-in-law, Loos' and Laschs both lived at Bolshevo about an hour from Tarassowka and we were there at least once a week.

In the summer of 1902 Lilly and my mother-in-law Betty went to Sestroretsk near Petersburg for a few weeks to enjoy the sea air and the resorts; the stay did both of them a power of good, despite the rather primitive conditions they found there. Aunt Louise Quack took care of the housekeeping while they were away. During the autumn I was, as usual, in Germany.

In March 1903 I had disturbing news about my dear old mother's health, so I decided to take a short trip to Remscheid, fearing that she might not last until my normal visiting time. On 15th March I arrived in Remscheid to wonderful spring weather and was pleasantly surprised to find mother very lively and sprightly. March 17th was the wedding of Clara Friederichs with Heinrich Kiessler, and I drove my mum to the wedding in an open car in the most beautiful weather. It was a very jolly affair with lots of relatives and friends. A couple of weeks later the young couple went off to Mexico where Keissler worked for Robert Böker. When I left for home a few days later I felt sure I would not see my mother again. In May she died very quietly and gently joining her husband in eternal rest, the man who harvested only love because he had been the most loving throughout his life.

We now no longer had a parental home, and although this was painful for all of us it was particularly bad for my unmarried sister Marie who had lived with her parents her whole life. According to my father's will the house was to be passed on to my brother Gustav. Over the summer the contents were divided among the siblings by agreement. To my great joy my share included the portraits of the parents, which were good likenesses and very well done. I felt most privileged.

The house then underwent a thorough repair and partial renovation, which was a tribute to our mother who had always wanted to see the house done up, but didn't want to go to the trouble in her last years. The renovation changed both the inside and the exterior of the house and we all approved of the result, only sorry that mum hadn't had a chance to see it, especially the lovely verandah facing the garden that she always wanted.

On this trip to Remscheid I took our eldest son; he was supposed to spend a gap year working in factories before going to university at Darmstadt. Gustav worked first at Frau Hürxthal's small machine works, then at Bergische Stahl Industrie Gesellschaft, and at Klein Brothers in Dahlbruch, before going to Darmstadt in 1904. I'd previously asked at the Ministry of Culture about eligibility for one year voluntary service. I was well received perhaps because I had a recommendation from Councillor Friederichs in my pocket. In any case the Michaeli school leaving certificates were sufficient for Arthur and Rudolf, and I received confirmations for both of them from the chairman of the relevant commission in Remscheid.

The year 1904 brought me to Remscheid again in the autumn. I was there to celebrate the silver wedding of my brother Gustav and his wife Ida on October 2nd. 1904 was a very difficult year for Russia. The war with Japan broke out in January which was a disaster for Russia, as we know now. The mood towards us Germans was, however, very positive. It was apparent as soon as the war started, with large demonstrations in front of the German consulate. But within the administration, particularly the army, things were not so good and lots of mistakes were made. The general mood of the country was generally depressed and often very angry. At the beginning of the war the two German choral societies organised a big concert to support the wounded. It was a huge success and raised a lot of money, including from German Imperial members.

Our domestic life was very quiet. I attended regular meetings of the Association of German Reich Members; on Wednesday evenings we saw my mother-in-law Betty and on Fridays I went bowling. I enjoyed these regular outings. Foreign visitors, especially my brothers, were always welcome and they enjoyed seeing Betty and going bowling, too. The association should have celebrated its 25th anniversary, but because of the war we put off celebrations until better times.

My work for the Association of German Reich Members was specifically to serve the Support Commission, of which I'd been a member since joining in 1889. When the long serving treasurer, my friend Walch, died in December 1904 I was asked to take over. I was happy to do so because he was my friend, but I was also with him on the day of his death, because I needed to get a check signed for funds for the Support Commission, for duties I had to carry out the next day. Cashing the check wasn't easy. Walch had written the check on December 4th, but dated it for December 5th, because it could not be presented for cashing until the next day. If I'd simply presented the check on the morning of the 5th it would have been accepted with no trouble. However I thought I ought to point out that Herr Walch had died the day before, even though the check was dated 5th December. This led to a meeting of the bank's directors, but in the end the check was paid. I remained as treasurer of the Association until spring 1914, when I was elected to be the second chairman of the

Association, just after celebrating my 25th anniversary as a board member. I'll tell the story about the very nice party later.

Now came the memorable year of 1905. In the spring we celebrated the anniversary of the Association of German Reich Members, with enormous participation of the German colony and German-Russian charities and associations, all of whom participated with delegations and speeches. Also lots of Russian groups turned up and there was a huge number of congratulatory telegrams. We had a personal telegram from his majesty the German Emperor, not just from the cabinet office. We also had telegrams from the Moscow's Governor General, the Grand Duke Sergius, and



current and former German ambassadors to Petersburg. The festival began with a big ceremony in the Ruskaya Palata of the 'Slaviansky Bazar' hotel on Nikolskaya Street followed by a big banquet in the lower hall attended by many Russians. In March I was honoured to be awarded the Order of the Crown by his majesty for my many years of service to the club. My brother Walter sent me the miniature insignia of this order that my father had always worn.

But already by spring the uneasy mood of the country became more noticeable. It found expression in the murder of Grand Duke Sergey at the Kremlin, Moscow, following large-scale demonstrations in Petersburg in January that had left many dead and injured. Throughout the summer there were riots in various parts of the empire, especially among workers. Although a peace treaty had been signed with Japan in America, the returning troops did nothing to calm the country. The birth of a royal heir in July did, however, give rise to heartfelt support of the royal family.

Despite the uneasy mood I went back to Germany in the autumn because there were too many questions that needed sorting out. The business had suffered badly, especially due to the decline of the Ural industry where we usually had strong sales.

Costs kept rising while sales were falling, and there was no evident reason. The day I arrived in Warsaw there was news of the murder of the great Łódź manufacturer Scheibler, and the whole uneasy atmosphere in Poland is illustrated by the fact that our train from Prague to Warsaw had soldiers on board.¹² But we did get through Poland unscathed, and when I got to Remscheid I stayed with my brother Walter, as I had in 1903 after mother's death. Although I had stayed with Gustav in 1904 because Walter's house was full of guests, this year's visit to Remscheid had an unhappy ending.

After I'd been a week at Remscheid my brother Walter suddenly fell ill after we'd been to a general assembly of the Bergische Stahlindustrie the evening before, followed by a dinner. At first we didn't pay much attention to the low level infection he was suffering because he'd always enjoyed good health apart from a chronic cough since childhood. The disease dragged on for a week, and exactly eight days after our dinner meeting my dear brother closed his eyes for ever. This was an extremely hard blow for all of us, because Walter had become the leader of our large circle, something everyone acknowledged and endorsed, due to his fine, friendly and accommodating nature. His wide popularity was demonstrated by the huge turnout for his funeral, and by effusive obituaries on the part of the mayor and the associations to which he belonged.

I took my son Arthur to Remscheid this year, as he was supposed to go through an apprenticeship at Hilger and Sons, where Walter wanted to prepare him for business in Russia. Walter's own son was currently in North America, after he'd finished studying at Charlottenburg. He'd gone there on a study trip with Heinrich Böker, my sister Elisabeth's youngest son. Her other son was still studying in Bremen. Walter's sudden death was particularly hard on Arthur, his godson, whom he loved dearly.

My brother Gustav now had to take the business into his own hands, since his eldest son Alfred had gone to work in the Wiebusch and Hilger store in New York.¹³ This made it all the harder for Gustav, who was increasingly focussed on North America and India at the expense of the Russian businesses. But the death of his brother was not the only thing worrying him.

Even while Walter was ill we were getting news of the unrest and strikes that had broken out in Russia that eventually led to the general strikes of the railways, the post office, the telegraph, etc. Even hospital staff and pharmacists went on strike. All

¹² Scheibler was a second generation cotton industrialist, originally from the Rhineland, like the Rabenecks. He was killed during the Łódź insurrection of Polish workers and anarchists against the Russian Empire. The Russo-Japanese wars had led to mass unemployment in Poland. Martial law was declared in early June 1905 and the uprising was put down by June 25th, leaving several hundred dead and wounded.

¹³ Hilger & Sons was an importer of cutlery and hardware in NYC, founded 1848. Eventually, probably in the 1890s, it merged with Wiebusch, to become Wiebusch & Hilger, one of the top 19th and early 20th century US importers of German, Bohemian, and English cutlery (there were dozens of wholesale importers, most located in the cutlery district of lower Manhattan, on or near Duane Street; (other top firms included H. Böker & Co., Adolph Kastor & Bros, and Alfred Field & Co). After the 1891 US tariff increases, many of these importers acquired or built US knife factories of their own. Wiebusch & Hilger owned Challenge; Böker owned Valley Forge, which became Böker USA.

Russian transportation ground to a halt making it impossible for me to return to Moscow. Mercifully the telegraph strike in October was not total and I was able to receive the occasional telegram, reassuring me that my loved ones were alive and well, even though the business was completely stalled and all shut up. Finally at the end of October we heard that there was a clear route in via Petersburg, and I didn't hesitate, setting out immediately.

At the beginning of November, I think it was on the evening of the 9th, I drove from Remscheid to Moscow without stopping in Berlin, only picking up my old friend Aussem whom I met by chance in Berlin. It was still pretty quiet in Petersburg and we arrived safely in Moscow on the morning of November 12th. We had taken the through train to Sebastopol that doesn't stop in Moscow proper, but only for a short time at a nearby station. Of course the family had no way of knowing that and my dear wife was waiting for me at the Nikolai Station where I rushed over to meet her; we were so happy to be together after all these restless weeks. And the next day we found out how lucky I had been to rush back; on Monday the 13th all traffic was halted.

The whole of November was very uncomfortable with ongoing major strikes, especially the post office and the telegraph that disrupted business immensely. There were raids and head-on attacks in every nook and corner of the city. I had already moved my main office out of the centre, where it had been for twenty years, to a street off Myasnitskaya Ulitsa, where I opened a new shop on the main street, concentrating on machine sales. On December 22nd there was a clash between striking typographers and gendarmes and, overnight on Saturday, an armed uprising broke out in Moscow. The trigger for this was the 'siege' of the Revolutionary Committee at Fiedler's School, near our apartment.¹⁴ At twelve o' clock sharp we were woken by gunfire. The house where the rioters had assembled was shot at from a wooden courtyard opposite using grenades, until the whole gang surrendered. The next day, Saturday 23rd December, street fighting erupted, and my street wasn't spared either, because the area in front of the Kazan and Nikolai stations was under fire from the 'Red Gate'. From December 23rd to 29th there was endless shooting from noon until the evening; artillery, machine gun and handgun fire was continuous and raged more or less violently all across the city.

Of course all the shops and other businesses were closed, and an attempt I made one morning, together with my brother-in-law Ludwig Rabeneck and our friend Lasch¹⁵, to get to the office for a few hours, failed completely. Halfway there we met an

¹⁴ The Fiedler school building (at Chistiye Prudy) was regularly used for party meetings. During the evening of December 9 (22), 1905, when a meeting was being held there, it was surrounded by troops. The participants in the meeting, mostly members of volunteer squads, refused to surrender and barricaded themselves in the building. The troops opened fire using artillery and machine-guns. During the destruction of the building more than 30 persons were killed or wounded; 120 were arrested. V.I. Lenin *Proletary* No. 2, August 29, 1906.

¹⁵ Alexander Lasch had become a director of the Ludwig Rabeneck company, having been responsible for sales and distribution in Turkestan since joining the company in 1894.

armed patrol which we had to dodge; had we delayed we'd certainly have been attacked. Since the infantry in the Moscow garrison had proved to be unreliable, the Semenov Ward Regiment had been sent down to Moscow from Petersburg. On 30th December they succeeded by bombarding the entire area around the Prokhorov factory driving the remaining insurgents back into the beautiful Schmidt furniture factory in the Presnensky district where the revolutionaries had their headquarters, reducing it to rubble - by 1914 nothing had been rebuilt there.

A state of siege had been declared in Moscow, with a curfew that stopped all traffic at six in the evening. At Christmas, eight days later, things eased up and we were allowed to stay out until nine in the evening. We were able to celebrate Christmas quite happily, since we'd been able to buy a tree. But there wasn't any celebration of the 'German Christmas' because of the fierce fighting that took place in Moscow on the day. Normally each year there had been a 'German Christmas Festival' celebrated by the Association of German Reich Members strongly supported by the German community, and we kept that up until the outbreak of the World War brought it and the Association itself to an end.

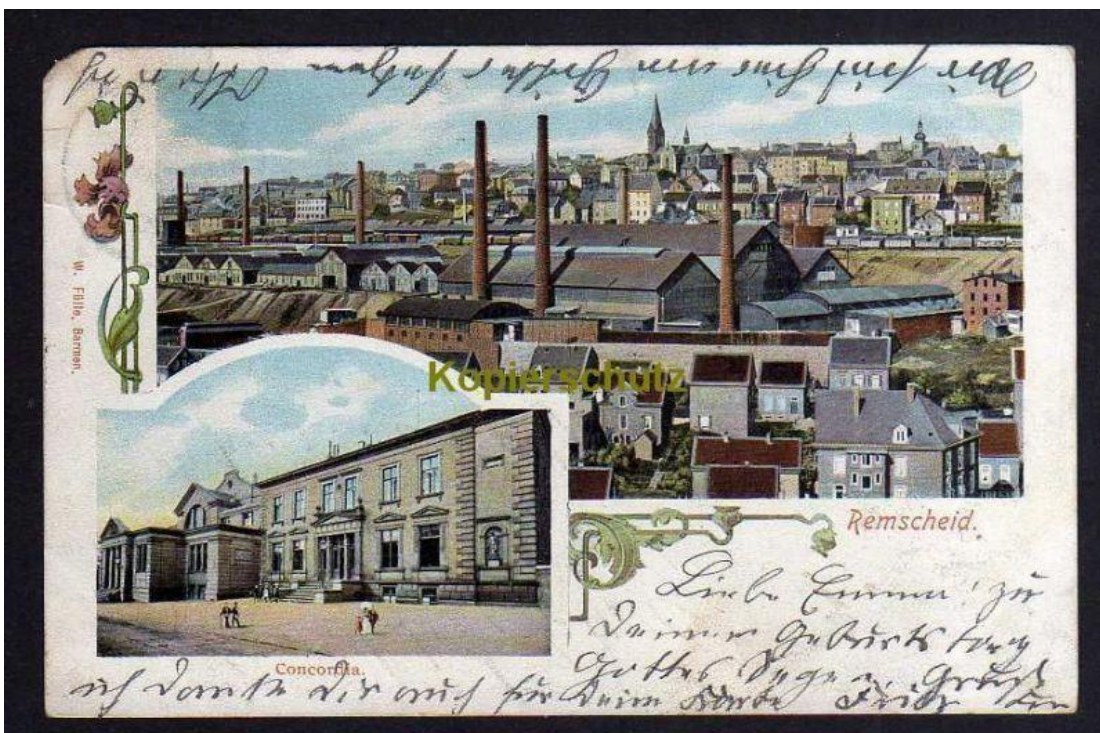
As to other events in 1905, I should mention that we celebrated the centenary of Schiller's death with a very nice reception at the 'Slaviansky Bazar', which was attended not only by the Association of German Reich Members, but also by Germans from Switzerland and Austria, as well as from Russia.



Nicolai Station, terminus of the Petersburg railway line, re-named Leningradsky Station in 1937

The year 1906 continued to be very troubled, politically; there were bank robberies, robberies of individuals and robberies of mail trucks in the city despite strong military escorts. During the summer a friend of mine who was a German electric tram engineer was shot dead in the company workshop. The transfer of his body to the Nikolai station was a solemn occasion attended by the mayor and various officials.

In the autumn I was back in Germany, but my stay was interrupted quite suddenly by the death of my long standing colleague and confidant, Karl Prollius; I had to rush back to Moscow. I took my son Rudolf with me who had been working at Johann Hasenclever & Sons in Ehringhausen where he was doing his commercial apprenticeship. We travelled with Herr Molloth and his eldest son who was in college at Darmstadt. His sons were great pals of Arthur and Rudolf and we'd known Frau Molloth for many years, becoming firm friends. Both ways I went via Petersburg because it was still unsafe to go via Warsaw. I left Rudolf in Berlin because I wanted to go on to Bremen to my nephew Alfred Hilger's wedding where I was happy to find many old friends and acquaintances. In the spring of 1906 we had the pleasure of a visit from my brother Gustav who had only been to Russia once, some thirty years ago.



The “Concordia” restaurant, popular in industrial Remscheid

The year 1907 brought us nothing special. In the autumn I went as usual to Germany. During my stay we wanted to organise a Hilger family day for all the siblings and as many children as possible. We planned to hold a family feast at the “Concordia” restaurant in Remscheid, but unfortunately the planning was upset by the sudden death from TB of Fraulein Martina Meuchner, the youngest daughter of my Vorster relatives, a few days before the planned event. Sadly no Vorsters attended, but the rest of the family did, and we had quite a jolly time. Instead of the “Concordia” we held it at the Böker’s house. Afterwards I went with Arthur and Rudolf to Wiesbaden for six days of relaxation and I visited Gustav several times who was in college at Darmstadt. I really enjoyed our stay in Wiesbaden because there’s so much to do there, a health resort in beautiful surroundings. I should mention that we also enjoyed seeing my sister Bettelhäuser in Biebrich. It all made a big impression on Rudolf who knew only Moscow and Remscheid; he loved Cologne Cathedral which we saw on the way out, as well as the Rhine and the Niederwald monument we visited from Wiesbaden.

During 1908 I travelled only at Christmas because I hadn't been able to get away in the Autumn. Once more I stayed with the Bökers, whereas in the past I'd stayed at my mother's house in Ehringhausen until she died, and later at my brother Walter's house until he too died. I spent Christmas Eve with my sons, Arthur up from Colmar on vacation, and Rudolf and my sister Johanna Friederichs, where the boys were lodging. It was an extremely nice cosy evening, and when I got back to the Bökers I found a lavish Christmas spread. On Christmas day I took the boys over to my brother Gustav's house in Ehringhausen.



Bismarckhütte foundry and sheet metal works in Zabrze, Upper Silesia, Poland

My son Gustav was employed in a large factory in Zabrze in Upper Silesia and I visited him there in connection with a visit to the Bismarckhütte works with whom I did a lot of business

Before that I'd spent a day in Berlin with Werner Delbrück and my sister Bettelhäuser from Biebrich. Although it was already quite cold in Remscheid we had 20 degrees of frost in Berlin and Zebrze, pretty cold by German standards. We spent an enjoyable New Year's Eve with Gustav's boss at the Zebrze casino.



The Casino in Zebrze, known as the Donnersmarkhütte

On January 1st I went with Gustav to Katowice where we visited a very pretty theatre in the evening. From there I returned to Moscow in a nearly empty train via Warsaw, at night. Exceptionally, I was the only passenger with luggage at the border post at Sosnowice, so I was let through with no inconvenience.

In March of the following year, 1909, the German ambassador to Petersburg, Count Pourtales, visited Moscow with his wife, treating the German colony to a massive feast at the Hermitage, which was very well attended. The next day our consul, Dr Kohlhaas invited some members of the board to a more intimate dinner with the ambassador at his apartment, and I was among the guests. After the meal we accompanied the guests of honour to the station, and it was just my luck to catch a very severe cold. I was laid up in bed with a kidney infection for three weeks, which was exhausting. The illness was particularly frustrating because I was unable to meet a business visitor from Alsace in Moscow for the first time. I had wanted to introduce him personally to some companies that interested him. While I was ill my old friend Carnatz¹⁶ with whom I'd been close friends since my first stay in Moscow in 1884, died. To my lasting regret I was unable to attend his funeral.

That year I didn't travel to Germany in the fall. Instead Arthur came back to Moscow after a year in the business at Remscheid where he worked for the parent company. It was a great relief for me because it enabled me to spend much more time on marketing, which I needed to do.

¹⁶ Wilhelm Georg Carnatz 1936-1909, married to Anna Rabeneck 1850-1883. They had four children.

In the meantime, 1910 brought dramatic changes. In March my nephew Alfred Ellinger came to Moscow to familiarize himself with the Russian business, to the extent he could do that in a mere ten days. During his stay he floated the idea of a complete separation of Remscheid from Moscow. And soon after he returned to Remscheid I received an official letter from the company giving me notice and enclosing all the paperwork for a separation, but saying he wanted to separate on friendly terms. Thinking about it, I soon got used to the idea because I had long been convinced that the business arrangement made little sense and costs were increasingly disproportionate to the benefits.

Nevertheless, I found all the correspondence and the break itself personally offensive. It's hard to put it out of my mind even though seven years have passed. I can only repeat today with a clear conscience that in the 27 years I worked for Hilger and Sons in Moscow, for 25 of them as my own boss, I gave it my best. I admit I made one or two mistakes along the way, but then so did Remscheid; there was no reason to treat me the way they did.

But I should emphasise one thing. My brother Gustav, who took over as head of the business in Remscheid after Walter died, had no part in the malicious accusations. They came solely from the two nephews, Alfred and Ernst. Each time I have visited Remscheid since then I have offered an olive branch to the nephews if they would only take a step towards me. But nothing happened and all I got over the years were more nasty letters. There has still been no reconciliation to my lasting regret.

As a result of the negotiations in 1910, I kept all the marketing assignments that were in my own name rather than that of the Remscheid company. I undertook to liquidate the joint business for a fixed fee, i.e., selling off the stock as quickly as possible and collecting all receivables. Moreover the settlement left both parties free to pursue work in Russia at their own discretion. Because many of my former customers only wanted to deal with me, Hilger & Sons offered to fill orders for me on commission, should I want to promote Remscheid goods at all. Even though representatives no longer visited me some old customers remained loyal, and although I told them to contact Hilger & Sons, they preferred working with me personally. These were mostly customers who had always behaved correctly and paid their bills.

Business between Hilger & Sons and myself proceeded pretty smoothly from then on. I had a freer hand in marketing, and I soon saw the fruits of this increased activity. I also took on some good new representatives who got me into the textile industry. I had plenty of work, and I was pleased that I no longer had to share the profits. The shop had shrunk to half its size and when the last machine was sold in 1910, I gave up the whole location and rented a smaller, cheaper office. The staff dwindled,

particularly the Hilger & Sons salesmen, and I kept only those whom I could count on to work actively and loyally throughout the general unrest.

My son Arthur went over to F. Hackenthal & Sons at Remscheid, because he thought he'd have a better future than with me, and also because I was now working with factories and technologies of which he'd had no experience at Remscheid. As an employee of Hackenthal's Arthur came to Moscow quite often, and we were always pleased to have him stay with us.

Sad though 1910 had been in many respects, it brought us great joy in the autumn when we had the opportunity to celebrate our silver wedding anniversary, something we really wanted to do in Germany. My brothers and sisters knew very well that because of my precarious business situation we couldn't possibly afford to go on an expensive vacation, but they all chipped in to pay for our trip, and we could not have had a more welcome gift. We did not use the dacha in 1910, but we were able to use our friend Berens' large garden right next door to our apartment at any time, and we also went to the country on Sundays and public holidays to visit relatives and friends.

In Early September we set out for Germany in typically Russian style with no plan as to where we would go, only the idea that we'd let the weather decide. When it's fine we would like to go to the sea, but if not we'd go to Wilhelmshöhe park, Kassel. When we got to Berlin the weather forecast advised against the sea so we took a train to Wilhelmshöhe after a couple of days in Berlin.



The cascade at Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel

We found a reasonably good room in the only hotel and even though it was raining when we arrived we were greeted by a beautiful sunny autumn day the next morning. We spent a very pleasant fortnight there, walking in the mornings and exploring the magnificent grounds of Wilhelmshöhe in the afternoons, as well as the surrounding forests. I visited as many sites as possible that I hadn't seen for over 30 years, including my regimental barracks. Naturally we also went to the charming court

theatre, the picture gallery, the castle, etc. Kassel and its surroundings had changed so much since my last visit that parts of it were unrecognisable to me. We celebrated my dear wife Lilly's fiftieth birthday by taking a wonderful trip to Wilhelmsthal castle. After an extraordinarily enjoyable stay we made our way back to Remscheid, where Lilly hadn't been for twelve years. We were made comfortable by the Bökers, and we had a very warm reception not only from them but also from the other relatives. Son Rudolf came to meet us at Rittershausen, and we were pleased to note that he enjoyed the crisp mountain air.

We planned to spend about a fortnight in Remscheid, and we were very pleased that the Bökers had invited all our brothers and sisters to help celebrate our silver anniversary on the 20th of September, a month ahead of the actual date because they couldn't all travel to Moscow. To our great joy they were all able to attend. Among the younger generation only Heinrich Böker, Moritz's son, and his wife, and Rudolf were invited. In the morning my three brothers-in-law, Bettelhäuser, Vorster and Böker, plus Rudolf went for a spin in the car through the Oberbergische, also visiting Bökersche Gut Billinghausen. In the evening we met up for a cosy silver wedding dinner with no shortage of toasts and congratulatory telegrams. After dinner there was a surprise treat; Heinrich Böker, who was part of a 'Steel Industry Male Choir of the Mountains', was asked to sing us some songs in the garden. It made a great impression on all of us, but particularly on me, proof of how well my dear sister Elisabeth knows me, clearly shown in her choice of songs. If I get to go through the old papers on my desk in Moscow I'll probably be able to find the program.

Leaving Remscheid, we went to Biebrich to visit my sisters in their own homes as I had done for several years. From there we went to Dresden because my wife wanted to re-visit places she hadn't seen for a long time. We stayed in the Kaiser Wilhelm Hotel, where Betty Rabeneck used to stay on her annual visits to Dresden, and we even stayed in her regular room. The days passed very quickly with visits to the few old acquaintances still living in Dresden, and taking in the main sights of Saxon Switzerland.



Mountains of Sächsische Schweiz, or Saxon Switzerland

In Berlin, where we went next, we were pleased to be met by Rudolf who was on holiday earlier than planned and who could now come back to Moscow with us. We arrived on October 10th, glad to be back with the children. We had decided to celebrate our silver wedding anniversary with a meal at the 'Hermitage' because there wasn't enough room in the apartment even for relatives and close friends. Although we limited the numbers we were still about fifty at table. As we came out of our bedroom in the morning we were greeted by the children who gave us silver jewelry in the form of a wreath and bouquet. Lots of well-wishers dropped by during the morning including a deputation from the Association of German Reich Members, who delivered a beautifully made and exceptionally warm address. The framed address had been drawn and painted by my fellow board member Sillem, while the text was composed by our chairman Dr. Kruger; it took a pride of place in our living room. The number of gifts and bunches of flowers was huge and we were happy to see how many friends we have. The evening was lively and there was no shortage of both funny and serious speeches at table. There were many telegrams also. When everyone had left my wife and I looked back in gratitude on a beautiful day.

In November 1910, the Reich German Colony of Moscow celebrated the seventieth birthday of its very popular first chairman Dr. Kruger, with a big banquet at the Hermitage, in which many German Russians participated with no shortage of honours for his well-deserved jubilee.



The Hermitage Restaurant in Moscow, birthplace of Russian Salad, closed after the 1917 Revolution

On December 31st, 1910, the close relationship that had existed for twenty-five years between my own company and the Remscheid headquarters came to an end. On January 1st, 1911, I had to start all over again to build a new business. I was helped in this primarily by two of my friends, by my sister-in-law Nelly and by Ludwig and Edouard Rabeneck. But I also got a lot of support from Russian and foreign business acquaintances. The encouragement I received convinced me that the new business could succeed, even though the liquidation of the old business had been a real headache.

We spent the summer again at the dacha at Perlovka, which allowed us to spend a lot of time with friends, especially my wife's brothers and sisters at Sobolevo and the Losino-Petrovsky District, as well as our friends the Laschs who live there. Since there was no longer an urgent need to visit Germany, I skipped my usual business trip in 1911.

In October we had the sad news that my dear mother-in-law Betty Rabeneck had died. She was almost eighty years old and had suffered from an internal cancer for over a year. Even though her death relieved her of great pain, not to say agony, it left a deep impression on the family and particularly on my sister-in-law Eugenie Loos (née Rabeneck). For years Betty had been our guest on a weekly basis, often on a Friday. Every Wednesday evening all the children as well as aunt and uncle Quack would have gathered at Betty's. I have personally always attached great importance to these family get togethers; they definitely strengthen family bonds and they have a way of de-fusing arguments that otherwise lead to resentment.

Christmas this year brought us great joy; first our son Rudolf visited us to say goodbye before he left for North America; and secondly our son Gustav got engaged to Marie Hackenthal, the youngest daughter of his boss, in whose factory Gustav had been an engineer for some years. We heartily welcomed the dear, cheerful girl as a daughter, and I was pleased to establish a new relationship with Ernst Hackenthal, whom I'd known for many years.¹⁷

¹⁷ This period of Hilger history is discussed in detail in Jörn Happel's Der Ost-Experte: Gustav Hilger - Diplomat in Zeitalter der Extreme, Ferdinand Schöning, Paderborn, 2018

The year 1912 brought various changes that are worth a mention. The Remscheid headquarters of Hilger & Sons decided to drop business in Russia altogether, once it realised it couldn't get better results without me. There was a certain satisfaction in this because I'd always been the blame dog for all the failures.

My brother Gustav visited us together with Arthur, and their stay showed once more that the relationship between us brothers remained strong and cordial. I was thrilled for Arthur that Ludwig Rabeneck had offered him a job, since Hilger & Sons had decided he could no longer stay at the Remscheid works. It also meant that we'd see more of him since he'd be based in Moscow.

In January 1912 our landlord Edward Berens told us he'd have to put the rent up from April 1st. Because it would be too much for us we immediately started looking for another apartment; also, although we'd been there for almost twenty years we longed for a place with more light and modern conveniences such as electric light. Luckily we soon found such an apartment on Pokrovsky Blvd¹⁸. Although it was only a little cheaper it was much more comfortable, benefitted from morning sun, and was in a nicer location. It also had central heating and electric light - we were overwhelmed by the sheer convenience. We moved in on April 3rd and the move took only a few days; the hard work of my wife and daughters managed to create an extremely cosy home.

Friends and relatives gave us all sorts of housewarming gifts, mostly electric light fittings of which we had none at all before. The best was an extraordinarily lovely chandelier for the dining room from Ludwig and Edouard Rabeneck. We also had some of our old paraffin lamps converted for electricity, which was done with taste and skill. Our bedroom and dining room faced east so we had sun early in the morning, which was wonderful for us who had lived for twenty years in a dark and dingy flat. Even though the old place was very spacious, and we've been happy there we were pleased to have moved.

Gustav's wedding took place on May 12th. Since his bride was a Catholic, and the clergy had insisted that she be married in that rite, the wedding took place at the French Roman Catholic church, followed by a consecration at the German Reformed Church. As if that were not enough one of the first people to greet us at the bride's house was a Greek Catholic clergyman, although he was there as a guest rather than as a priest. But I smile even today remembering the suggestion of another guest when he saw that clergyman, that we do it all over for a third time! The wedding was extremely cheerful and the young couple were accompanied to the station by a large group of young guests at around nine o' clock. It's a Moscow custom to see young couples off like this. I can't say that I approve but, different countries, different

¹⁸ Покровский бульвар

customs. In Rome it's best to do as the Romans do. Soon after the wedding we moved back into the dacha at Perlowka, where our good friends Schienmann and Stolarow had re-opened their summer residence, and with whom we naturally spent a lot of time.

In the middle of May the 'Association for Further Education in Political Science' in Germany consisting of two hundred highly educated men from all professions, came to visit Moscow. They had been on a study trip throughout Russia, ending up in Moscow after visiting large agrarian reform projects in the south. Here in the city they hoped to learn something new and interesting, and I think they did to some extent. The day they arrived, Privy Councilor Professor Sehring who led the delegation invited a number of gentlemen from the Moscow city administration and the German colony to a meal at the hotel 'Monopol', and I was delighted to be among the guests.

On my right was the well-known educator Kerschensteiner from Munich. The meal went ahead after a lively lecture about Russia from our Consul General Dr. Kohlhaas. There were plenty of toasts. After dinner we split into smaller groups with lawyers and administrators accompanied by Moscow magistrates, to go and see for ourselves what the city was doing for the homeless and the poor by visiting night shelters and other such places. It's no mistake to think the visitors were pleasantly surprised by what they saw. The same was true of a prison visit, every aspect of which received high praise. This was confirmed to me many years later when I met a high court official in Düsseldorf who had been on the tour. While most delegates were occupied in serious study, many others were keen to sample the more cheerful aspects of Moscow life. A large group met in the famous Courtyard restaurant in Petrovsky park at midnight.



Petrovsky Palace and its courtyard, 1780, Moscow

The performances on the variety stage were not specifically Russian, so the group gladly took up the offer of the commercial councillor Waldemar Heuss, to visit some

smaller venues as his guests. There they were able to see gypsy choirs, Russian choirs and Russian dances. It was all extremely Russian and the hospitality was terrific. Herr Heuss will be fondly remembered by all.

The next evening the board of the Association of German Reich Members invited the whole study group to a cosy evening at the 'Slaviansky Bazar', and we were pleased that most of them came along. Because of the lack of space and the expense we'd only been able to offer a cold snack and beer. In addition to the German guests lots of local officials and Russians wanted to join us. The cold snack consisted of the richest 'Zakuska'¹⁹ possible involving lots of caviar. For most of the guests this was something completely new and more than fulfilled our desire to offer something original. There were also a number of gentlemen from the city administration and General Dahunkowsky, the Moscow Governor, the most senior local official, was greeted most enthusiastically by all. He was a most respected and very personable civil servant. The evening went very well, with serious and light-hearted speeches and songs alternating from the groups that had formed at each table. Many friendships were forged.

In the afternoon on the same day the city officials invited the group to a demonstration by the Moscow fire brigade on Red Square. I, of course, was present and able to see what a favourable impression was created by the speed and efficiency of the firemen. The demonstration ended with a parade.

In the autumn of 1912 I had to go back to Germany, because the new relationships I had established with German businesses required my getting to know and talk with the owners on a personal level. This related mainly to the Ernst Gessner, a company at Aue in the Ore mountains, and to Fichtel & Sachs in Schweinfurt. I had long been advised by reliable friends that I needed stronger ties with the textile industry, and I was very pleased to tie up with Gessner, one of the best manufacturers of certain kinds of textile machinery; they were very helpful to me. I'd had an earlier relationship with Fichtel & Sachs, but the business in the wool and cotton industries in my area had developed to such an extent that I urgently needed to talk to them. I was well received at the various factories I visited and favourably impressed by their management and products.

My brother Caspar, whom I had visited every year in Düsseldorf, invited me to spend a few days with him in Baden-Baden, where he was staying with his wife, Lulu Scheibler, and their sons during September. I was very pleased to join them, particularly since I'd never visited Baden-Baden. They'd found a small self-contained apartment at the 'Hotel Regina' with a spare room that I was able to move into. We

¹⁹ Zakuska (Russian *закуска*, small bites or snacks) are common starters in Russia. They consist of pickled or fresh vegetables, salads and sandwiches with sausage, caviar, salted, marinated and smoked fish. The zakuska is traditionally served on a special table and eaten standing.

had beautiful weather for the whole week I was there. In the mornings Caspar, Lulu and I went for walks in the afternoons unless we went out in the car. On the 12th, which was Caspar's birthday we had a nice long ride around the Baden countryside and I was really impressed with the countryside and the towns. In the south I'd previously only visited business friends and Max Speidel of the German association in Stuttgart, as well as Sister Helen in Biebrich. I resolved to visit more often, particularly Helen, who lost her husband this year in February after forty years of a very happy marriage. I'd also be able to see the Vorsters in Biebrich.



I had left Moscow towards the end of August this year, when the centenary of liberation from the French was being celebrated, mostly on the actual battlefield of Borodino. Because this is close to Moscow, and on the Moscow-Smolensk railway, and it would be attended by the Tsar, all the stations were beautifully decorated. I had to wonder what this celebration was likely to do for the present entente cordiale between Russia and France, especially French officers unveiling a memorial at Borodino. It was the same as the fuss over the exhibition of paintings by Vasily Vereshchagin of French rule in the Moscow of 1812, a time when relations between the two countries were at their worst.

In May 1913 we were very happy that our first grandson was born to Gustav. He was baptised as Andreas, in the country during the summer. It was a strange coincidence that my brother-in-law Moritz Böker came across an Andreas Hilger while researching the Böker and Hilger families. In any event there had been no Andreas in recent generations. The baptism was of course performed by a Catholic clergyman, whose words would have been impossible to understand even if he'd said them in German instead of Latin. The clergyman and his assistant left immediately after the ceremony, while the numerous guests, mostly invited by the Hackenthals, settled down to a fine baptismal dinner, and very delicious it was. The day was most satisfactory.

In May Rudolf came back from North America where he'd been working for a year. He was visiting us in Moscow to say goodbye for at least three to four years; he was heading to Rio de Janeiro where he'd be working for the Hasenclevers. Because I needed to talk to my German business partners once more this year, I decided to accompany Rudolf to Germany on his steamer to Hamburg. I also took Ella with me so she could finally see Germany for herself. She didn't have to return home with me after a few weeks; she could stay with relatives for a few months and then easily get an agreeable lift home because there was so much traffic between Moscow and Germany. Friends of ours, the Borcharts, took her with them.

In Hamburg I really got to know the life and goings-on of the city and trading port, fortunately unaware that within a year this large port and its proud fleet would be quiet and deserted. Naturally I used my visit to meet new business associates and to



Entrance to Hagenbeck Zoo, opened in 1907

visit the famous Hagenbeck zoo in Stellingen which has unfortunately also fallen victim to the war conditions. Shortly after my return from Germany the German chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg paid a visit to Moscow having just attended the meeting between the Tsar and the German Emperor at Reval. Although his visit to the old tsarist city was supposed to be private the board of the German Association, against the advice of the German vice-consul Dr Hauschild, went to meet him in the royal waiting rooms opened for him at the station. He seemed pleased to see us and we talked for a long time. The next day five of us received an invitation to lunch at the Hotel National, and we had the chance to get to know Bethmann, a very congenial gentleman.

In the anti-German papers in Moscow quite malicious attacks had been made on Bethmann who, unlike his French counterpart who had also been to Moscow and made his presence felt, came privately and not as Chancellor or Minister of Foreign Affairs. He avoided stirring up the press. On his departure a few days later the board of the Association presented him at the train station with a large beautifully carved box of confectionary from "One", the well-known Moscow chocolate and jam shop, with the request that it be presented to his wife. A short while later we received a warm thank-you note from Frau Bethmann.

On Sundays or on public holidays in the summer of 1913 we mostly went to Sobolevo or to Gustav or to the Hackenthals, on the Kazan railway²⁰ line.

²⁰ Казанская железная дорога

So the year 1914 arrived, welcomed by most in the hope of a more peaceful future, despite many who nonetheless recognised the gathering storm-clouds. Lots of people kept quiet, not wanting to be taken for prophets of doom, while others hoped the storm-clouds would clear or at least play out as minor showers. The small number whose avowed intention was to bring Germany down from its pre-eminent position, had every reason to keep their intentions to themselves. If a more open-minded later generation were to study the newspapers of early 1914, they would spot a number of things that should have given cause for concern, but that is with the benefit of hindsight. The only thing we can say today - I am writing this in 1921 - is that a small number of irresponsible people ignored their sacred duty to protect the people. The old saying that people always get the government they deserve, was sadly confirmed in 1914. In Germany particularly, the government took too much for granted, without involving people in policy matters, particularly foreign policy. I should also mention that reports from the embassies were relied on too much at the expense of bulletins from local consulates that were nearer to the ground.

Trade and commerce had experienced an unprecedented boom and countless talented people had done their best to boost this trend, more and more promoting growth and consolidation. But this required intensive work in the factories and workshops, in the laboratories, in the universities, the forests and the fields. People were so taken up with work that they had little time to work outside their sphere of activity, for the common good. This also explains why the parliaments had relatively few members drawn from practical life. Instead they were stuffed with those for whom politics had become a profession through repetitive re-election, who went on electing academically educated people and farmers, particularly from among the socially conservative, always considered to be the ruling class.

I am firmly convinced that our dear German fatherland would have avoided many bitter disappointments had more practical people sat in the Reichstag than was actually the case. However the best minds would have had to interrupt their careers, so the sheer inconvenience of parliamentary life kept them out of it as far as possible. There was another reason that kept many talented people out of parliament, and that was the need often to vote or act against ones own convictions. Of course that was not true for everyone, but putting party interests ahead of common sense undoubtedly played a major part in the reluctance of many good people to seek election to the Reichstag.

And how are things today? I would say that matters have only got worse rather than better; the party still comes first, well ahead of the actual needs of the country. The fact that most civil servants are also members of the ruling party can be regarded as evidence of this, and they are often not the best qualified people in their field. Hence the just criticism that the Social Democrats who used to make up the party in power

have become complacent. They consider themselves to be the natural party of government despite having large numbers of officials who don't know what they're doing. Furthermore proper management and recruitment for many government positions requires plenty of practical experience. These are pillars of government that today's high-ranking officials often lack.

Now it's December 1925. In the intervening years I haven't been able to keep up my story, but I'd like to try and capture what I've missed, even at the risk of omitting some details.

The Hilger family had decided to try and hold another big reunion in 1914 in memory of my father's 100th anniversary. This actually fell on March 16th but it wasn't the most seasonable time to hold a party so we decided on the first day of Pentecost, May 31st. We had to decide whether to invite all the descendants of Gustav and Marie Hilger to Ehringhausen once more, to the old parental home or to the grandparents. Of course my wife and I immediately agreed to go to the party, and to follow it with a visit to Bad Ems. Our Moscow doctor had insisted my wife do something for her throat. She suffered quite a lot from hoarseness and bronchial catarrhs, which were extremely unpleasant.

Having moved to our dacha at Perlovka in May as usual, we left Moscow on May 24th. We received the usual warm welcome from Moritz and Elisabeth Böker at Remscheid. The family party was extremely beautiful and harmonious. We eight living siblings all turned up with our wives and husbands, and there were also lots of grandchildren and great grand-children. For lunch we all went to my brother Gustav and his wife Ida in the parent's old house where we enjoyed good weather in the house and garden. That day I took group photos that we took back to Moscow with us; sadly they later got lost along with everything else. In the evening we went to the "Concordia" for a meal, where my brother Caspar, the eldest, gave a very nice welcoming speech. There was plenty of vigorous dancing, good music and youthful memories. In the week after Pentecost we went to an ophthalmologist, Dr. Stodt in Barmen to have Lilly's eyes tested. He recommended an eye operation, with an excellent prognosis. On Sunday evening I took my wife to the clinic where the operation was successfully carried out on Monday morning, June 8th. It didn't give her complete relief from the itchy inflammation she was suffering, but it was an unmistakable improvement. To make things worse Lilly was also suffering from lumbago during these days, and what with the rather severe pain from the eye operation, she was generally rather low.

After visiting her in the clinic on Monday evening, I set off on my business trip which took me to Aue in the Ore Mountains, near Neustadt, to Orla and to Schweinfurt. Then I accept the invitation of my brother Caspar to go to Bad Kissingen, where my brother Gustav was taking the spa.

I had a very pleasant stay and was pleased to visit a place my father had come to for twenty-five years, usually accompanied by my mother and one of my sisters. After a business trip to Aachen I was able to pick up Lilly at the clinic on June 17th. and travel to Ems on Friday June 19th. We spent almost three weeks there which was altogether delightful. Anyway, the cure had done Lilly a power of good, and that was the main thing. We enjoyed really good weather, we met acquaintances from Moscow, we had a welcome visit from Mr and Mrs Kraus from Gummerbach near Cologne, and we went on nice walks and excursions.

Of course the assassination of the Austrian Crown Prince in Sarajevo, which had just occurred, was an unpleasant piece of news, although we could not know that it would be the first signal, heard around the world, of the mass murder that would ensue. We were back in Moscow around July 21st. after visiting the Vorsters in Magdeburg. We got back all in one piece, but the political news soon got worse and worse until war was declared on August 10th. We read it in the newspaper at the dacha on Sunday morning, and we were shocked to learn that the declaration of war had been made by Germany. But we soon realised that Germany had had no choice if it wanted to avoid an even more difficult situation. Russia had already mobilised, as we witnessed on a daily basis. I hardly need to describe what followed, because you, my dear children shared it with us from May 1915 to 1918. I therefore think I can interrupt my notes here; you know only too well what joy and sorrow we had to endure over the next few years. If anything could compensate for the hardest blow of my life, at least outwardly, it is the love and care with which you, my dear children, have surrounded me. May God reward you.

Writing from Oberkassel in 1928

Two years have passed since I last wrote. Now I'd like to use my spare time since retirement to record our experience of internment, since I've been able to hang onto the diaries we kept during that time. Even if you, my dear children, find this of little interest, your own children, my grandchildren might like to read about what we did during the war. You should feel free to correct any inaccuracies at your discretion. I started this record on August 31, 1914.

After the order to mobilise was given to the Russian army on July 30th, Germany issued an ultimatum to Russia to rescind the mobilisation by July 31st. When this was ignored Germany declared war on Russia on August 1st. We heard the news while we were at the dacha on a Sunday morning, and we were extremely dismayed because we'd thought that the impending thunderstorm had abated. We were aware that people were digging in, horse traffic was at a standstill and there was a curfew. Life on the streets continued, but people looked serious and withdrawn. Tram traffic was severely restricted because many of the employees had been called up.

Of course, we avoided speaking German outside the house, although I am not personally aware of any harassment of Germans by Russians. The German General Consulate was closed immediately, and the Americans assumed responsibility for

protection of the German imperial family. Protection certificates were produced on Monday August 3rd.

We experienced our first serious personal blow on Saturday August 8th, when our son Gustav was arrested. We never found out the reason for it. Gustav and Arthur had both reported to the German General Consulate but had been declared unfit for garrison duty or field service. Gustav was physically weak, and Arthur had been suffering a lot from nerves in recent years; the result of the examination didn't surprise me at all.

On Wednesday, August 12th, all Germans between the ages of seventeen and forty-five had to report to the Krutzky Barracks in Moscow, where they were detained as prisoners of war. Arthur and Otto didn't have to show up until Friday because the order reached them late at the dacha. Otto was released after a couple of days because he was still a student. In the meantime we heard that all Germans would have to leave Moscow, and that naturally caused a lot of alarm.

On Thursday the 13th I had just got to the office in the morning when a police officer appeared and asked me to come immediately to the district chief of police. I thought it must be about my passport, because I hadn't registered my change of address. Imagine my surprise when I found many German citizens at the police station, whom I knew well, who had just been told that they and their families had to leave Moscow by the following evening. This order was revoked the next day at the behest of the Tsarina, I was told, and of Governor General Vladimir Dzhunkovskiy, a fine and fair gentleman. Immediately after I entered the police chief's office, he told me I had to consider myself arrested, I would be deported in the next few days and I had to choose among three possible governorates as destinations, Vologda, Wätka or Orenburg. After a moment's thought I chose Vologda because it was the closest. But imagine my dismay on hearing this news. I asked why we were being arrested and sent into exile, but I was told that though I could ask I should not expect an answer.

I was allowed to ask one of the gentlemen present to notify my brother-in-law Ludwig Rabeneck so that he could gently inform my wife, what had happened and that I would not be coming back. And I was allowed to call the office to ask an employee to come over immediately so I could give him my keys and other necessary information. In the meantime I was made to answer a lot of questions, and I had to give them a detailed personal description of myself. After my money and wallet were taken from me I was put in police custody.

Before I was taken away my employee Allart came to see me and I was able to give him the necessary instructions for the office, as well as the message that we were first to be taken to the Moscow transfer prison. At around three-thirty in the afternoon I was picked up from police custody, where I'd been previously allowed to grab some bread and sausage. My money, wallet and pocket-knife were returned to me and I was dispatched to Butyrka accompanied by a patrol officer, who happened to be the

one usually stationed outside our apartment so he knew me well. He also behaved decently, and suggested we take a cab since it wouldn't be pleasant for me to cross Moscow with a police escort. The feeling that crept up on me as the prison gate closed behind me is indescribable. I had often passed these high walls during my time in Moscow, but if someone had told me I'd be inside one day I'd have laughed at them or written them off as crazy. The behaviour of the policemen towards me was quite decent and polite.



Butyrka central transit prison, 1879, Tverskoy district, Moscow

The prison room I was taken to has been better described by Tolstoy in “The Resurrection” than I could have done. I had to wait there for an officer of the prison administration, who turned out to be a very kind and decent man. After a series of questions I had to hand over the contents of my pockets, including my toothpick and pince-nez. I was given a receipt and told that I'd get everything back at my destination. I was then told that I could eat at my own expense, ordering from a long list via the guard. The amount would be deducted from the money I had deposited, and it was done quite scrupulously. My request to keep my pince-nez had to be dealt with by the prison doctor to determine whether eyeglasses were necessary; if there was a legitimate problem I could have glasses but not a pince-nez.

After another thorough search I was led into a room, No. 71, which was about seven and a half meters long by seven and a half meters wide and four meters high. Wooden beds ran down both walls and there were a couple more in the middle. When I arrived there were already five or six Czechs there I knew from the Austrian Support Association. Each occupant got a straw mattress and a pillow. Of course, I was very happy that evening when the guard brought me my little pillow from the apartment, plus a blanket and some laundry. A little later I was able to get my office clerk to bring in some more items of laundry, but a further bag of personal laundry was confiscated by the prison administration. My dear wife had sent all this stuff in after

she found out what had happened to me. She had found a way, with the help of some of my employees, to do this.

Gradually our cell began to fill up, mostly with native Germans but also some Austrians, towards whom the Czechs did not behave very courteously, but who were well treated by the Russians. Among those who were still arriving by the evening were many Germans who had been sent from Riga to Moscow and who had been put up at the 'Billo', an exclusively German hotel. They were taken from the hotel and brought to prison in large buses. Among them were many reserve officers, but also an active Bavarian officer who happened to be a close friend of a "related by marriage" nephew of mine. There was also a seriously ill former Austrian lieutenant colonel. There was a General Stangen, who had also been at the hotel, and who they did not dare arrest because he formerly commanded the second Gardedagon regiment whose patron was the Empress. His son-in-law, Meyer, on the other hand, was among the new arrivals, as was Herr Pönsgen from Riga who had been carrying my brother Caspar's business card around in his wallet for three years!

By late evening there were sixty-one people in the cell, but this grew to seventy-five over the next few days. Since they had run out of beds many had to sleep on the bare asphalt floor. The infestation of bugs was terrible and simply indescribable. A bitter struggle against this vermin started on the very first night. The next day we bought just about every sort of insect powder and sprinkled it liberally around in enormous quantities; it achieved incredible success. Our guard assured us that our cell had only recently been thoroughly cleaned, and that all other rooms in the prison suffered from this plague, but even more so. In a neighbouring cell there were many German women who had been questioned much more closely than us men, contrary to regulations. Even their wedding rings had been removed.

The Ungers, a German couple who lived in China and who were on their way to holiday in Germany, were arrested at the Kursk Station in Moscow, and taken separately to prison. They later found themselves in Vologda.

Discipline in the prison was very strict. When a whistle sounded in the corridor at nine o' clock in the evening, we had to line up to be counted. Then, after about half an hour an officer came to check the tally. The same procedure was repeated again at six o' clock in the morning. The officer was a friendly, decent sort who enquired if we had any special needs, and could we please submit them in writing. Many of the inmates asked to be allowed to travel to their sites of exile at their own expense, but none of their requests was answered.

On the very first evening we were handed a large sheet of paper which listed exactly what we could order from the prison canteen in the way of food, milk, cigarettes, etc. You wrote down your wishes and the next morning the stuff arrived, very good quality and really cheap prices. The amounts were deducted from the money that had been taken from the prisoners. As well as food and cigarettes everyone also bought a

teapot and a glass. There was an electric kettle at our disposal. Sterilised milk and mineral water was also consumed in large quantities, and both were supplied by well-known Moscow suppliers. The few people who had arrived without money or who didn't want to spend it had to make do with the prison food which was delivered twice a day. I tried it once, but not again. There was soup at lunchtime and groats in the evening. On the first evening we were issued with wooden spoons and I would have liked to have taken mine with me as a souvenir, but they had to be returned when we left to be transported to our place of exile.

There were many engineers among the detainees, a large number of intelligent people with whom one could have a good conversation. In particular I should mention that I have rarely laughed as much as I did on my first day in prison because among the inmates were comedians who did great impersonations and humorous duets.

We were let out on the landing three times a day under strict supervision to satisfy natural necessities and to wash in the morning. For nighttime needs two metal buckets were placed in the cell which then had to be emptied twice a day. This was generally done by convicts, who also had to provide hot and cold water, and who cleaned out the cell. But then a new supervisor ordered us to do the work. We all refused point blank, except the Bavarian, probably so he could complain later. But that never happened; I later learned that he was killed very soon after his return to Germany. I'm not sure why he was sent back, unless he was part of a prisoner exchange.

In the morning and afternoon twenty-five to thirty of us were we were allowed into the exercise yard where we could walk in pairs. Talking was generally forbidden, but quiet conversation was overlooked, so these short walks were a real boon. Otherwise you just sat around on your bunk chatting to one and all. The highlight of these gloomy days was a quarter-hour in the afternoon when we were allowed visits. Those inmates with visitors were taken under close guard to another building where there was room for about a dozen visits to take place. These took place in cubicles separated from the visitors by about two meters. A guard walked up and down, to make sure there was no passing of objects, and of course to eavesdrop on the conversations. All packages brought by visitors or mailed in were carefully checked before being handed over to the internees. The inspection extended to the sandwiches I was sent daily from home; they were often removed from their wrapping and poked through, before being bundled up and given to me. This didn't do much for my appetite, but I don't think things were stolen. One day I was allowed to accept a package directly, and that's how I got my warm overcoat and galoshes. They would both be very useful to me. A group of men from Riga had great fun playing Skat all the time, although it's a mystery to me how they got hold of playing cards.

On Monday August 17th, we were told by one of the prison administrators that we'd be transported to Vologda the next day, under guard in third-class carriages. I don't

know whether he was just making it up to keep us happy, but things turned out very differently.

During one of the daily visits from Herr Block, my authorised representative; I organized for him to get me a bag for my belongings, because we weren't allowed anything with metal parts. The bag, that had laundry, toilet articles and other things was kept in the guardhouse and handed over to me the day before we left. On August 18th at three in the morning we were woken up and hurried through the roll-call. The reserve officers had been taken away the evening before and I don't know what happened to them. Without coffee and unable to have a wash we were herded into a large hall, each with his sack on his back. After names and ages had been taken there was yet again an embarrassing body search, and naturally a search of our travel bags. We were allowed only a little laundry and some bread and cheese, and we had to give up the insect powder that we hadn't used. I should mention that the escort teams, officially referred to as convoy soldiers, varied in the manner of searching us. I was personally well treated in respect to the search of my clothing, although others were more roughly examined.



After this procedure we had to line up four abreast in rows. Ahead of us were forced labourers in chains and bringing up the rear were convicted criminals. After the officer had read out the strict marching orders we were led into the courtyard where trucks were waiting to take the women and the luggage. I took advantage of this because I didn't fancy trudging across Moscow with a heavy sack on my back. Around five o' clock we were marched off to the Savyolovsky railway station²¹, where I'd never been before.

Once there we were led to a train that was waiting, and to our horror we noticed that the windows were barred on several of the carriages we were put into. At a signal

²¹ Савёловский вокзал

from the officer accompanying us the women and children had to take their places in the first carriage together with their menfolk plus the Austrians. When the carriage was filled and looked, we were put into the next carriage together with the criminals and the forced labourers. In this way there were about forty people in each carriage. Fortunately there was a floor to ceiling grille in the middle of the carriage separating us from the convicted criminals. After a while the train got under way and after long delays at various stations we finally reached Losino-Petrovsky, a stop just ten kilometres from Moscow after about an hour. My sister-in-law Eugenie Loos (née Rabeneck) lived nearby in a dacha village with her seven children, as did our close friends the Lasch family. I don't remember how long we were in the station, but I do remember the wistful looks we gave the several Datcha trains that went through while we waited. The order to stay silent wasn't too strictly enforced while we were in the station, but when the conversation got too noisy the guard did call us to order.

After some to-and-fro, the train finally set off back to Moscow, where I guess we arrived between nine and ten o' clock. After a lot of shunting we finally stopped in front of the main building on the track from which our dacha trains usually went. Eventually, at half past eleven, the train set off again. Our carriages had been hooked up to the normal passenger train on the Yaroslavl line. Fortunately this train does not stop at every little dacha station. Although we have lots of friends and acquaintances who live along this line I did not see a single familiar face along the way, nor in the stations.

During the trip the escort team brought hot water for tea into the carriage, and we had ten kopecks to buy bread, etc. Most of us offered money to the soldiers, although they were pretty decent about it, urging us to keep it because we'd need it again for bread later. They knew from experience that we wouldn't see our money any time soon, and indeed it was four weeks before we were able to get some of it back.

Along the way we saw many military trains and in Yaroslavl, which we reached in the evening, the station was packed with people who had been seeing off reservists and militiamen. It was there that a small incident took place: a newspaper had been pushed through an open window of the carriage, and although the man sitting by the window had handed it over immediately to the guard all the windows had to be closed. The air became stifling and unbreathable, but we were only allowed to open them again after the train got moving. The night was awful.

For about an hour I was able to sit on the hard bench with my blanket spread out. Then I moved to another bench with a couple of men for the rest of the night. We couldn't decide whether to each take a bunk on the triple high beds, or to use the top one for luggage. That the treatment differed from carriage to carriage was apparent from the fact that smoking was prohibited in our carriage while in other ones gentlemen were sharing cigarettes with the guards.

On August 19th. around ten in the morning we finally arrived in Vologda. When all the passengers had disembarked and left the station we were allowed off the train. Then we were led off to prison under guard in tight formation, with the women and children and their luggage loaded onto wagons. When we got to the prison yard, the convicts were put into cells. But apparently no one had been informed of our arrival. The governor of the prison and his assistant were madly calling the police to find out what was going to happen and where to put us. They were quite decent about it, and happy for us to make ourselves comfortable in the prison yard while the negotiations were going on. We spread our blankets on the grass in the glorious weather, and soon fell asleep, catching up on our rotten night.

At about four in the afternoon we were told that we had to spend the night in the only spare space in the building, while the women and children would be taken to another building nearby. In the space provided there was only a bench, a table, and a few chairs. After the furniture was removed there was just about enough space to lie down on the bare asphalt floor. There was one small kerosene lamp for lighting and two small air vents that the guard wanted to close. Because we were really squeezed in you can imagine what the air smelled like after a while. To make sure the evening roll-call went smoothly I was nominated as the room monitor, who had to report anything unusual to the inspecting officer and relay special requests. As soon as the familiar whistle sounded in the corridor I lined the people up in rows and announced to the officer who came in that there were sixty-one men present. This procedure apparently made a good impression on the officer, who saluted us with a friendly “good evening” and inquired about any special wishes, which I passed on to him. He undertook to take them into account if possible. Then we were left to our fate, and everyone tried to get comfortable on the floor, hard though it was. We all eventually managed to sleep, as nature requires.

The next morning we were woken up at six o’ clock, with just enough the time for a wash, as far as it was possible. We went back to the yard, from where we were taken about ten o’clock to the police administration office. There we were led to a courtyard where a police officer read out individual names and we each had to state our age and military rank. When this had been done we were dismissed to find temporary quarters, but told to return to the police station the next morning to find out where we were to be sent. The relative sense of freedom this gave us was overwhelming and we immediately set out to find somewhere to stay. We tried to get into hotels but were told they were prohibited from accepting guests from ‘hostile states’. So we started trying to find rooms in private houses. But it was difficult because we had no money on us and when we asked the police if we could get our money left in the Moscow prison, we were told we’d only get it back at our final destination. Luckily we met Baron von Wedel, who understood our plight and asked if he could help. He trustingly gave each of us five to ten rubles so that we could at least eat something and pay for the onward journey, because the Russian state wasn’t picking up the bill.

After some searching we found a house where the owner was prepared to rent us some rooms. They were in the middle of wallpapering it and there was no sign of any furniture, but the owner agreed to put in bedsteads and straw mattresses for which we'd have to pay a ruble a night. Nine of us choose a reasonably spacious room, while there was larger room to be used as a dormitory for even more men. There was also a room for the ladies. When that was settled we went off to a hotel to eat. The pleasure of sitting at a set table again, and not living on sandwiches, was very great.

When we got to the house later that evening it turned out there were only four or five mattresses, which we naturally gave to the women. Our landlord had the cheek to claim that mattresses hadn't been mentioned as part of the deal so we had no claim to them. This infuriated us to such an extent that we berated him until he promised to deliver the rest of the mattresses within a few hours, and indeed they arrived in the middle of the night. A Slovak lying next to me was helpful in making sure I got a mattress, because it was a free-for-all with no proper distribution. Power and dexterity were crucial.

The next morning we reported back to the police station, but were told to come back at midday, because there were still too many people waiting to be processed. At noon we were ordered to come back the following day. In the afternoon, though, an acquaintance on the street told me he'd heard my name being called by the police, so I rushed over to find out what it was about. I was told that I was being sent to Totjma, a town in Vologda, and I had to be ready to leave within twenty-four hours. On the same afternoon I tried once more to get my money, including two hundred rubles that had been sent from my office to the Vologda police for safekeeping. But it could not be traced despite our accountant making inquiries at all the offices where it might have been.

Our landlord had already warned us that he would evict us if we didn't pay him what we owed. But we were running out of money, so after long negotiations we agreed to pay him two rubles for two nights, promising to pay as soon as we were able. He can't have had a very clear conscience, because there were signs stuck up on every street corner warning Vologda residents of severe punishment should they exploit the plight of strangers for their own benefit. Still, a reduction of only one ruble for such accommodation bordered on trickery.

In the afternoon I managed to borrow twenty-five rubles from a Herr Ludt, so I now felt like Croesus. After paying the landlord his two rubles I decided to make some necessary purchases. First I bought a decent travel bag in which to put my few belongings, then a notebook, a pencil, and just in case a pound of chocolate from "One". In the hotel, (where we didn't take our meals), one of the waiters was glad to see I was a guest because he remembered me from the well-known "Alpenrose" restaurant in Moscow. He was Russian of course, but that didn't seem to be a reason for him not to look after us.

Totjma, our destination, was on the Sukhona River and we had to get there by steamer. We managed to make bookings on a steamer going up on Saturday evening. In the afternoon I saw our fellow prisoners being marched into the barracks. After saying goodbye to the ladies in our group I went to the steamer at five o' clock, only to find all the cabins had been taken. Eight of us had to make do with a communal cabin where we slept in armchairs and on a divan. The price for the trip to Totjma depending on class was one, two or three rubles, so not too expensive. At six in



Church of the Entry Into Jerusalem (1774-94), Totjma, Vologda Oblast

the evening our little paddle steamer started up the river. The next morning at eleven we arrived at Totjma. Our first concern was, of course, to find accommodation. Six of us went with a police officer to look for an apartment which we finally managed to do after hours of searching. On the edge of town we found a detached house belonging to a forester who was able to let us two very good rooms in which we could reasonably house six people. The family of our landlord, Sosima Feodorovich Paklin, consisted of him, his wife and their three children Lubov, Anatol and Nikolai, of whom the first attended a girl's high school, while the sons were in junior high. Because of his job, the husband was often away in the forest for one or two weeks. But when he came home he did nothing between meals, leaving his wife working from morning till night to do whatever was possible for us.

Naturally there wasn't much in the way of beds, and no mattresses; we had to sleep on the floor again the first night. The next day our top priority was to buy mattresses, other essentials, and bread, butter, meat etc. We managed all this in some rather good shops. An incredibly hard mattress filled with wood-shavings cost 4.20 rubles. A carpenter knocked me up a bedframe for my mattress and I endured it until the end of our stay in the boonies. We also had to purchase bedding, hand towels, knives and forks, dishes and a good hanging oil lamp, because the landlord couldn't provide anything. But in the end it became quite comfortable for our modest needs.

For our rooms we had to pay 30 rubles a month, or five a head, which wasn't too expensive. A samovar was set up for us in the morning and again at noon and in the evening, and our landlady cooked us lunch from food we'd given her or had ordered from her the evening before. It usually consisted of soup and rice or buckwheat groats; the soup was always cabbage, pea or noodle - not very varied, but it always had four pounds of meat in it. For breakfast we always had coffee, bread, butter, eggs and cheese. In the afternoon we had coffee again and in the evening tea, bread, butter, eggs and cheese. So life in Totjma was tolerable and we couldn't complain. Thousands of our compatriots were far worse off. Fresh vegetables were hard to come by in our town, but even harder to get in the village we were later sent to.

We started getting up at seven o' clock, taking it in turns to wash in the kitchen in front of the family, which was pretty rural in a way. As soon as our landlady came back from the distant town with our bread, we had coffee. After breakfast, around half past nine, I usually wrote letters until eleven or half past, followed by a trip to the post office. The mails were very erratic with letters from Moscow often taking five, six, or even seven days to reach us. The river steamer from Vologda no longer brought the mail. The mail now went overland by horse on the so called "Route", which was 204 versts long. If the weather was bad, no more than four to six versts per hour we covered. Letters postmarked on different days often arrived all together. But the joy of receiving them can only really be understood by someone who has been in our predicament.

I regularly received the Petersburg and Petrograd newspapers from the office in Moscow, which was still open at the beginning. Even though the reports from the front didn't interest us because we heard them in Totjma, the newspapers had lots of reports and extracts from the Russian press that were devoured by all of us. In the war reports we soon learned to distinguish between what was on the lines and what was in between them.

In the mornings we went shopping or for a walk, but we weren't allowed to leave the town. We seldom got home before one o' clock. Until lunch at two I would write, read something, or just take a nap. After lunch most of us lay on our beds to read or sleep until around four o' clock. Then we'd have a cup of coffee. After that there was usually someone who wanted a game of skat, played for a quarter of a kopeck a point, and later a tenth. Dinner was at half past eight. After that we usually played a game of 'Commerce', a French card game I'd taught them, or I played patience.

On September 15th, Herr Brunnert, who'd already been told in Vologda that he'd be free to leave, got his papers, and was of course pleased to leave on the same day. On the other hand, the same day, I got the depressing news that my application for release, lodged on August 24th., had been turned down. I now had to wait and see whether the higher authorities could establish that I had done nothing wrong and should be allowed to return to Moscow. In the newspapers we read that the exchange

of subjects between Russia and Germany was supposed to have begun, but to date none of our petitions had borne fruit.

On the evening of September 12th. I received a telegram from my son Arthur in Moscow saying that he and six friends would be coming to Vologda the next day after confinement in the Butyrka central transit prison. He hadn't yet been told where in Vologda he'd be sent, but when I heard that a group of young people were being allowed to go to Totjma I was delighted because it included besides Arthur, Wilhelm Rabeneck²² and two of my Loos²³ nephews. Although we were strictly forbidden to go to the steamer landing pier, I managed to get special permission, but it wouldn't be happened anyway. The company office had said the steamer was due between five and six in the afternoon because of heavy fog. In the end they arrived earlier and turned up at the house at half past three and couldn't stop talking and catching up. On the first day they managed to find a good room close by, and they are quite well set up now. Of course we see each other every day, sometimes here or sometimes by them, and we play Skat or go for walks in groups of three to avoid giving the police a reason to intervene. I should have mentioned here that it was strictly forbidden for more than three people to walk around or stand together on the streets and squares of the town, or to talk German in public. Violations of this order have been punished with more or less severe prison terms. I must add that there were quite a number of Germans who could not understand a word of Russian, let alone speak it. For example, two gentlemen who happened to be present in Riga, were surprised by the war and were dispatched to Totjma without further ado, and had to travel here at their own expense.

Now a few words about Totjma itself. The town lies on the left bank of the broad Sukhona River, on which beautiful big steamers travel between Vologda and Archangel. Most of the houses are built of wood with wood shingle cladding. Roads in the town are quite wide and give a good first impression, but they are terrible in bad weather; unpaved roads become simply impassable. There are wooden boardwalks along one side of the streets, but they are in such a bad state it's better not to use them. The weather was pretty poor in the autumn of 1914.

The population consists partly of earlier exiles, often well-educated people. The town must have been rich in the past, judging by the numerous large churches built by Russian merchants, to salve their guilty consciences over their business practices.

Very close to our house is a large and apparently rich monastery in the valley of a tributary of the Sukhona. The view of the town from there is quite wonderful. It's a shame we're not allowed to leave the town. Much as we'd like to explore the forests we have to stick to local paths on our daily walks. We walk even in bad weather because sitting in a small room all day is pretty unbearable. Writing is quite difficult

²² Wilhelm Friedrichovich Rabeneck (1894-1968), son of Friedrich and Emilie Rabeneck

²³ Fritz and Helmuth Loos, sons of Eugenie Rabeneck

when you're constantly distracted by people chatting and playing cards; not conducive to concentration. But, after all, people get used to almost anything. I have to applaud the fact that our house was relatively free of vermin, although, of course there were bugs.

From my diary, which I kept from the outset, I can list some of the prices we had to pay in rubles for groceries when we arrived. Rubles per pound: Best quality coffee 1.30; tea 2.0; meat 0.12; butter 0.45; cheese 0.35; cabbage 0.03; rice 0.12; sugar 0.17; groats 0.03; peas 0.05;. Kopteken per pound: Chicken 0.20; hazel hen 0.30. Eggs 0.18-0.23 for 10; milk 0.02 a glass; cream 0.18-0.20; kerosene 0.06.



My son Gustav came to us in Totjma on September 25th after he'd first been wrongly sent to Wätka due to a misunderstanding. The poor chap had to go through a lot during his seven weeks of imprisonment. But he recovered relatively quickly, and fortunately he was allowed to stay in the house where his brothers and cousins were. But I still had no news of the money that had been taken from or sent to me.

As well as our group, a large number of people were sent to Totjma in a state of destitution and who were therefore dependent on the support of their fellow countrymen. We applied to the police to be allowed to organise a proper relief operation for these people. Our suggestion was well received and the police were most supportive. A committee was formed and I was asked to sit on it but I preferred to help only in an advisory capacity, leaving the hard work to the young people. We also had to set up a kitty so that we would always have at least some cash on hand. Twenty percent of card winnings was paid into the kitty. We later received some regular subsidy from the German government.

On October 11th my accounts clerk turned up at Totjma with a number of suitcases packed with warm winter clothing for us, as well as lots of highly welcome 'gifts of love' of all sorts such as books, canned goods, cigars, etc. Because the transport companies refused to deliver to us, the only way to get them was to ask my clerk to bring them to Totjma in person, and he did a fine job. In the meantime some parcels arrived that had been handed into the post office some weeks earlier. There were a hundred cigars so smashed up that only thirty of them could be used for pipe tobacco. These parcels had been sent from Moscow on September 26th, then had to pass through a prison camp in Petersburg before reaching me on October 21st. Around

then I also heard from the police that the money they had taken from us in prison could now be paid to us, but only after a couple of weeks, and then only in instalments.

During October winter really set in. The river froze over and the post came only overland twice a week. Around midday telegrams would arrive from the front, and it was very interesting to see how they were received; older Germans judged them quite differently from the young born in Russia, who were in turn different from the locals at Totjma. Personally I stuck to the old adage “*audiatur et altera pars*” - all sides must be heard. I don't have to account for my thoughts and feelings to anyone.

During that time there was a huge horse fair at Totjma, for which farmers came from as far as 200 kilometres. Shortly after that military recruitment started that had already involved huge numbers of people, including the twenty-one year old son of our landlord. During recruitment Germans were not allowed to leave their homes, to prevent unpleasant incidents. And I'm glad to say nothing did happen even though recruitment made the town very overcrowded. Our campaign to get financial support went badly. Of 360 Germans in Totjma, at least 180 were completely penniless and in need of support.

We relied on the support of the American embassy which looked after the interests of Germans generally, but nevertheless we worried that the means made available to us wouldn't be enough. We'd applied for a thousand rubles a month, but we received only 240. But according to my diary for January 1915, support was building for our cause, and we were getting enough money to support two hundred people on 20 kopecks a day. The authorities showed us great courtesy in this matter. However their job was made much easier thanks to the German Committee. Some internees had already died, and the Russian clergy kept their promise to help with funerals, confirming their reputation for compassion.

A harsh new police regulation keeps us from using the field behind our house, and we may no longer use the beautiful path to the monastery. The pogroms of October 23rd and 24th, involving the expulsion of all Germans from Petersburg, caused great agitation, especially among Muscovites who prayed to God that the same shouldn't happen in Moscow.

Correspondence with my relatives in Moscow was pretty reliable, although letters occasionally got lost. In mid-November I was thrilled to get letters from my brother Gustav, and my sisters Marie and Elisabeth mercifully they were able to tell me that the family was still intact.

The winter was relatively mild because even though it was around 30 degrees réaumur at Christmas, it was much warmer later. The Germans in Totjma were guarded by three dedicated police officers; they were fair and decent people who understood our situation. We also tried to make their work easier by observing their

rules. Teachers forbade their pupils from harassing Germans by throwing snowballs and the like at them, and the clergy behaved very decently towards us.

We spent a very nice Christmas with the youngsters, and we had a beautifully decorated tree for the table. Parcels from Moscow, containing very welcome gifts, arrived on time, and some gifts came from the Totjma handicraft school. My boys gave me a sideboard and a rattan armchair, which served me well for the whole of the internment. For my birthday my housemates decorated both the chair and my wife's portrait with fir branches, which pleased me. Of course we couldn't see in the New Year because we had to be in by nine o' clock, but we visited each other as well as friends on January 1st. At the beginning of December my authorised representative, Böck, came again from Moscow to discuss business.

We were particularly worried about company registration issues; it was announced that German companies could not reregister. Russian law only allowed for registration of pre-existing companies on an annual basis. It was a sort of tax that cost me about 1000 rubles a year. But, eventually our company was granted permission for permanent registration, which was a relief.

A terrible blow to everyone was a decision made at the beginning of 1915, that all German businesses in Russia had to be wound up by April 1st and all German employees had to be let go by then. Of course this affected not only me personally, but also my sons and nephews. We would now be completely without any means of support.



Over the winter all the former members of the Fleet Association²⁴ had been arrested, including several of those interned at Totjma. I can't remember why I wasn't included in the roundup, but it was lucky for me; otherwise I'd have ended up in

²⁴ Deutscher Flottenverein

Totjma prison. Most Germans in Moscow were members of the Association, but it was odd that only Germans were arrested while Russian members went unmolested. Then on February 14th 1915, the German members of the Association were suddenly released from custody in the middle of the night, on the direct orders of the Tsar, who was reportedly himself a member of the Association.

We also had some rather difficult days when about 1,500 recruits came though Totjma on their way to the front. Although there had never been trouble on earlier occasions, this time there was a nasty clash between the recruits and some Czech internees, that left three Czechs dead and a couple seriously injured. Also a German internee suffered bad internal injuries. At this time we were under strict house arrest, of course, and I was glad just to get out in the yard with snow shovels and enjoy a bit of exercise.

To my great regret all German newspapers from Petersburg and Moscow have now been closed, one could image why. I really missed the excellently written and edited Petersburger Zeitung. I'd also recently received a whole bunch of books from my sister-in-law Else, and I was very glad to have fresh reading matter. Furthermore, our menu, that had been so monotonous at the beginning, had become much broader thanks to a large quantity of bouillon cubes and then through more frequently available veal, mutton and rabbit. Unfortunately, though feathered game was no longer sold. Finally, after six months, I received the last of the money taken from me in prison, the first instalment of which came in October.

At the beginning of March 1915 it was announced that interned German and Russian nationals could be exchanged, provided they were women or men under 17 or over 45, and they could pay for passports, travel, etc. Since the financial situation of most of the internees was such that an expensive trip, such as one from Vologda at this time of year, was unthinkable, very few volunteered to leave the country. But when it was explained that the German government would pay the costs via the American consulate, over one hundred and forty applications were submitted.

On March 16th, I was ordered to the police station where I was informed that nothing stood in the way of my own departure, and that I could have had a passport issued at Beloostrov if I had the necessary affidavits about not having any gold coins or money deposited in Russian banks.²⁵ When I explained to the officer that I'd never made in application to leave they were astonished. They made me sign a paper to the effect that I had never made an application to leave. It was only on my return to Germany in 1918 that I learned that it was my German relatives, particularly my brother in law Vorster in Magdeburg, who used their influence to obtain my freedom. However I didn't want to leave my wife and children behind in Russia, I'd have preferred for us to stay together in Moscow.

²⁵ Beloostrov is a terminus for the Finnish Railway Service, near St Petersburg, a common exit point for leaving Russia

In April I was asked for six rubles to pay for the passport, but once more explained that I didn't want one. By then only two of the hundred and forty people who had announced their departure had actually left, and those only because they had sickness certificates. Most of the others were faced with fresh difficulties, such as proving they had not served in the German military. How were they to do that?

After a colossal snowfall in March warm weather and sunshine set in after April 3rd, so the snow melted very quickly and one realised how deep it had been. By the end of April the ice had melted on the river and navigation could be resumed. We missed the spectacle of the breakup of the ice, though, because we were kept indoors for a week due to a call-up of reservists in town. During that time our landlord's children carried our letters to the post office and took messages to our youngsters. The police promptly delivered incoming mail. I was now subscribing to 'Retsch' (speech), which came out in Moscow, and which was generally well written and had a decent tone.

In April Gustav and I were able to rent a nice big apartment, consisting of a large dining and general living room and four large bedrooms. We were expecting our womenfolk, plus my son Otto and Grandson Andreas, to arrive at the beginning of May, and we could hardly wait to be reunited after a separation of nearly eight months. However we still had a lot to do because, apart from a few card-tables and some rather primitive chairs, the house had no furniture. Gustav and I wanted to move in immediately and sort out the furniture later, to avoid having to pay double rent. Then, very happily, on May 18th our wives arrived with their sons. We were able to get all their luggage off the steamer an hour after it arrived, even though the luggage tags for it had been sent to Moscow rather than Totjma.

Our landlady was the widow of a Totjma businessman who traded in all sorts of things but made a specialty of Russian-made products. I was and remain convinced that her husband was also a 'political man' who had been sent to Totjma; his attitude to the government strongly suggested this. Such people were generally respected by the internees; there was no ill feeling.

Things were pretty quiet over Easter, the weather was good, and we were given permission to attend church on Easter night, although we did not take it up. A magnificent Easter basket had arrived on time from our loved ones in Moscow. It was organised by Uncle Edouard and Aunt Else, and contained sweets, cigars and books. There were a lot of books by Reuter, Jatho,²⁶ Foerster, Chamberlin, etc. that was very welcome.

The liquidation of the business involved me in a lot of work and I was pleased to be busy. But, despite the hard work of my long term employees, especially Herr Böck and Fraulein Lappings, some things remained unsold. Böck's son Otto worked every hour God sent at the office and he performed very well. I had really been looking

²⁶ Karl Jatho (1873 – 1933) was a German aviation pioneer and inventor, performer and public servant of the city of Hanover.

forward to working with him this year for a long time. Oh, this rotten war, if only it would end!

To help around the house we hired a very good woman, who came with her husband who was also excellent. His name was Prittwitz and he was a member of a well-known family of military officers from Prittwitz. But his father had renounced his nobility and cut himself off from the family, or so he claimed. I'm not so sure it wasn't the other way around. In conversations with him I learned that his father had given up the military service, which can't have been very popular within such a family.

Otto of course immediately moved in with the youngsters where he and Arthur shared Gustav's old room. Conditions got worse and worse, not only in the city of Moscow but also in the countryside, as well as at my brother-in-law Edouard Rabeneck's factory where our children were staying, to stay outside Moscow. We telegraphed for them all to come to Totjma, and we were very happy when they arrived on June 6th, my two daughters and my youngest son, so the whole Hilger family except for my son in Rio, was reunited.

We divided a large room that was previously vacant with a curtain, so the newly arrived children had plenty of room. Andrei was a complete delight around the house and a hit with the youngsters who frequently came to visit. We saw Arthur and Otto regularly on Sundays and Wednesdays, and the others came in twos to eat with us from time to time. After much thought we decided to file a petition to travel abroad for my wife, Ella, Lilly, Robert and I. We sent it off on June 26th and then we just had to wait for an answer. Of course, were we to get approval, the idea of leaving Arthur, Otto and Gustav behind was difficult for us. But we weren't the only Germans in Russia who had applied to leave.

On June 18th the first transport left Totjma for Germany with about a hundred people on board, and one can imagine how pleased they were to leave. During the summer I was ordered to go to Ispravnik to see the district governor. He wanted to know who all the people were visiting us. When I told him, quite truthfully, that they were our sons and nephews, he immediately said there is nothing against that, but that I should not hold meetings. Apparently denunciations were reported to him, but he didn't seem to take them seriously. Around August there were rumours that we were going to be shipped further inland from Totjma and taken to a village where, allegedly because of us, the food prices had risen sharply and the people had complained that housing was not available because of us. The reason given was apparently overcrowding, but I could have objected to the authorities pointing out that it was now impossible to find suitable houses because all the good ones were already occupied by Germans. In September an order came that two thirds of the detainees, that is 244 people, would be leaving for other villages about fifty kilometres from Totjma. Our hope that we might stay behind was in vain. On the other hand because

his wife was a Russian citizen Gustav was given leave to remain, as were a number of other men and women who had a good chance of returning to Germany.

On October 2nd two of the youngsters, including Arthur, went ahead to the village of Gorbenzowo, to which we had been assigned, to look for accommodations. They managed to find two houses opposite each other on the main street and they sent us a telegram to let us know. On October 4th my wife, my two daughters, my youngest son and I took a steamer to the mooring nearest to the village, arriving in late evening. First we had to disembark onto a small boat to cross the river, then we went by primitive farm wagons over bad forest paths and in very bad weather to the village. This was no place for a healthy person, let alone my poor wife suffering from sciatica.

Our accommodations in the village were really primitive: two small rooms 4.75m x 3.50m plus a kitchen and hallway of 2.70m x 4.75m most of which was taken up by the stove. Even though the youngsters had done their best to tidy up the rooms, they still looked pretty bad. Above all, it was swarming with vermin. Of course there was no bathroom or even a toilet; we had to make do with buckets that were emptied through a hole in the floor where it fell down into a cess pit; simply unbelievable conditions. After a few days of hard work things had improved a bit, but it still felt like a long way from Totjma. Furthermore there was no furniture and since our possessions wouldn't arrive from Totjma for several days, we had to take special measures e.g. sleeping fully clothed on top of the mattresses for a few nights. We planned for my wife and daughters to sleep in the back room with me and my son in the front room that doubled as a living and dining room.



Gorbenzowo 1916 Back Row: second from left Helmuth Loos (21); third from right Arthur Hilger ? (28); second from right Fritz Loos (24). Front Row: second from left Gustav Hilger (31); third from left Marie Hilger née Hackenthal (23).

Our landlord was a small-holder like most in the village, without much land. He was the cartwright for the village, and also shod the few horses owned by the villagers to make a little extra income. When I visited his extremely primitive workshop the morning after our arrival, just to check things out, I had to laugh. The very first tool I picked up was a saw bearing our name and trademark, which probably came from our shop in Moscow. The second tool I looked at was from the Hermann Böker company in Remscheid. When I told the farmer who I was, he rather naively suggested that I could send him some new tools when I got back to Moscow, which I would have done gladly if the opportunity arose. His wife was a calm and simple woman and they had a teenaged daughter and two younger children in the house.

Our youngsters lived opposite us in a house belonging to a brother of our landlord. Most of the farmers in the village had taken in Germans, and they were happy to have the income that was a real benefit to them. The locals who had no Germans billeted to them were prejudiced against them, but it was not really their decision whether or not to take in people.

The Germans sent from Totjma were distributed around five villages that were several kilometres apart. We were not free to travel between the villages, so if we wanted to see someone in another village we needed a police escort. We also could not walk in groups of more than three, and it was strictly controlled, violators were sent to prison. For some of the time we weren't even allowed to walk around the yard of our own house in groups of more than three, even though it wasn't on the main village street. Our village policeman was a raw, mean guy, who tried to bully us whenever he could. A supervisor from Totjma didn't dare take action against him because he supposedly had a good friend in the government at Vologda.

The procurement of food was difficult, even though we got good bread from other Germans who baked it themselves. At the outset there were no eggs and no meat at all, but soon farmers from neighbouring villages came to sell eggs, poultry and game. Sugar was scarce and was supplied only in small one or two-pound packs. There was also careful rationing to ensure no one was getting too much, while others were getting none. Once I bought two pounds of sugar, but the next day when my daughters wanted to buy a pound or two, it was not allowed because they knew we were from the same family.

The mail was particularly bad because there was only one post office for the five villages and it was in, of all places, a village that had no German internees. All outgoing mail had to be submitted to the village policeman for censoring, even though he could hardly speak or write Russian properly, let alone German, therefore all German correspondence had to be sent to Vologda or Totjma for censoring. Because of this the village policeman demanded that the Germans write all letters in Russian, even though very few of them could. In mid-October I had the great pleasure to receive a letter from my sister Elisabeth in Germany, which she had written back in August, and which was forwarded by my friend Alexander Lasch

with a few covering lines. He told me that apparently my siblings hadn't received any of my letters; heavens knows where they got stuck!

We had telegraphed the district administrator in Totjma about the bullying behaviour of our village policeman, but somehow the telegram never got sent. But we found another way to get our complaint through, whereupon he came to the village himself, listened to our complaints and took remedial action as far as he was able. Once he was gone, though, things returned to normal.

Then he sent the policeman who had been in charge of us in Totjma to our village, a very orderly and decent person whose orders were willingly followed because they were free of harassment. He also gave permission for us to visit other villages when we asked, which happened on most days because the only place you could buy better quality goods was in a neighbouring village. He could not be bribed. He was decent to us, but he could be mean to the Germans living in other villages and they suffered a lot from his harassment.

One aspect of our house I should mention is that it faced south, giving a lot of sun and warmth and we couldn't complain about the warmth of the place. The rent, including wood and water was 17.50 Rubles a month. But the water was very bad; yellow coloured like a Rhenish wine, it's a pity it wasn't. The ventilation was also bad; although each room had a small air vent, they got very hot from the stove, the samovar and kerosene lamps especially in the evening when the air was hardly breathable. Then, if we opened the door we had first-hand experience of the smell from the cowshed, which was directly below us. It was impossible to concentrate on any work, as we'd been able to in Totjma, because we were short of space and most of the time we had the youngsters with us. Robert regularly got German lessons with Külov, Russian with Willy Rabeneck, physics with Otto, and maths with Fritz Loos.

There were no doctors or pharmacies in all five villages, only a first aide nurse who stocked the most common remedies. Winter came early and the steamer stopped in mid-October. Food, especially butter and sugar, became scarce and expensive. On November 3rd we received a large shipment from Moscow consisting of six large parcels containing canned goods, confectionary, etc. etc., that was greeted with the greatest enthusiasm. They were sent, of course, by the Rabenecks; my sister-in-law was particularly concerned to make our lives easier if possible. All the parcels were opened by the police chief, and I was only able to take them home once the contents had been recorded and signed for.

On November 4th I received a letter from the American embassy in Petersburg, asking me to clarify why I had not made use of my permission to travel to Germany. I immediately wrote with the necessary information, but I have no idea whether my letter ever reached them, because our village tyrant had to give his permission for the letter to be sent to the district administrator in Totjma, who would then forward it to Petersburg for censoring, before it could be delivered to the embassy.

We were very concerned about the shortage of money for the poorer amongst us. The money came to us from the embassy in small amounts. On December 18th I learned that funds transferred by wire on October 23rd had still not arrived. Plus the weather was very changeable. One day we would have 15-20° and completely windless and the next zero degrees and strong winds. On one very cold morning my nose got totally frozen so I had to stay indoors for four days. Fortunately, from mid-December things got better and we had enough eggs, butter and meat in the form of a cow which was cut up by skilled butchers, in our case two Alsatian cooks. Each day we took as much as necessary and because of the sharp frost, there was no danger of the rest spoiling.

Also in December about twenty Germans were ordered to Totjma to be evaluated for military duty. They returned a few days later, not knowing the results of their tests. Then on December 18th I was also asked to report to Totjma on December 23rd at nine in the morning to be assessed for my fitness to serve in the army. I had to be there the day before, because if I missed the examination I would have to sign away my application to leave the country. I'll remember that jaunt to Tojtma for a long time. I set off with the temperature at minus 43°C. Our landlord got me there in ten hours in an open sled pulled by two horses. Although I was wrapped in furs, a woollen sports hat with a fur hat over it, two pairs of gloves, long felt boots, covered with a thick woollen blanket and a throw, and with a big pillow in my back, the trip was bitterly cold and it didn't take long for my nose to freeze up again. Wrapping our feet in newspaper proved very effective against the cold. We left at eight in the morning, passing through ten kilometres of pine forest, which was so beautiful as the sun rose, something I had never seen before. Along the way we took a break of about two and a half hours, when we set up the samovar and had our sandwiches, although they had to be de-frosted first. In the evening around six we arrived in Totjma where we were not expected by Gustav and his wife; I found that they only got my confirmation letter the following day.

The course of the examination carried out the next day deserves to be recorded in detail. I was ordered to attend at nine o' clock in the morning. After signing in with the police the evening before I turned up at nine punctually, only to be told that there would be no examinations before eleven o' clock. I waited from eleven to a quarter to twelve, then to half past twelve, then again until half past one. The whole examination was then done in a few seconds; I didn't even have to undress and no questions were asked. I got no information about the result. The finding however was the same for everyone: suitable for military service. They clearly didn't want to let us go free.

However the district administrator gave me permission to spend the night with my children so I could leave on the morning of the 24th December. We drove back to the village with the temperature a few degrees lower. The cold continued until the New

Year, with temperatures as low as minus 46.25° C, so when it was only minus 15-18.75° C by January 1st, it felt almost like a thaw.

We'd spent the Christmas holidays very pleasantly. Our Moscow relatives had spoiled us once again, but our village tyrant had issued a new regulation according to which no German could have a pocket-knife. He'd also declared, ostensibly on the order of the governor, that Germans were not allowed to have a Christmas tree. This was untrue because no corresponding order had been issued in Totjma, and Gustav and his family were celebrating Christmas with a tree. So it was clear he was just making it up. He had also forbidden Germans to make music, even inside their houses. We only had a few guitars, balalaikas and perhaps some harmonicas. Eventually he let us know that it was alright for the Hilger family to play Christmas music. He was probably afraid we might complain to his superior again.

January was unusually mild with the temperature rarely dropping below 3.75°C, but this didn't lead to better health; my son Otto had to deal with severe angina and two young daughters of our cleaning lady died of scarlet fever. The local nurse was on vacation and the doctor lived forty kilometres from the village. Timely help was not available, nor could we disinfect the house, but fortunately there were no further cases of scarlet fever.

Our local policeman had decreed that no more than three people could be present at a burial, whereas the administrator in Totjma allowed up to twenty-four. No speeches could be made and in the event of a violation, the penalty was a whipping. Getting coffins was also very difficult because the locals didn't want to sell them to us. In the end, though, it got sorted out; an orthodox priest blessed the body and said some prayers on the way to the cemetery, but did not go to the grave, leaving one of the Germans to read a final prayer.

Our tyrant had also banned the use of walking sticks by internees. But since I am dependent on a stick because of my feet, I wrote to my Moscow doctor for confirmation of my condition, which he promptly did. At first the bully didn't want to acknowledge the certificate, but he gave in eventually.

The mail was terrible. All outgoing letters had to be submitted for censoring, however the official was often absent so the mail was held up for long periods. Normally the incoming mail was quicker. However all letters from neutral Switzerland, from my sister-in-law Jenny Loos²⁷ and of course from my siblings in Germany went missing for many weeks. By February 10th no letter had arrived from Moscow or abroad in response to Ella's engagement announcement.

²⁷ Eugenie "Jenny" Loos left Russia on July 24, 1915. With her daughters Betty, Emma, Edith, Jenny and son Kurt, she traveled from Moscow to Kiev, via Ungeny, Kronstadt to Budapest, via Vienna, Prague to Dresden. After a two-week stopover, they went on to Switzerland because it was only possible to communicate with those left behind in Russia in a neutral country.

It was only by re-reading my journal entries in mid-March that I realised to my great surprise that I hadn't mentioned Ella's engagement, which earned me criticism from Ella and peals of laughter from everyone else. The young couple enjoy being together very much and the groom visits with us all day on Wednesdays and Sundays and for meals. We translate interesting articles in the Russian papers in the mornings, and play Skat in the afternoons day after day, relieved only by a walk before lunch and again later between three and four. I read a lot of classic German and Russian literature such as Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, etc., and also the Russian writer Chirikov, who reminds me of my time in the transit prison.²⁸

Our youngsters living opposite had been very upset when their cleaning lady had to quit immediately after the death of her daughters, but a former ship's steward has now taken over the cooking and cleaning. Otto and Ella's fiancé had applied to go to Totjma so that Ella could visit a dentist. By the end of March 1916, however, no permit had arrived. Then, at last, a doctor came and arranged for the disinfection of the apartment in which the sick girls had been living.

Our village tyrant had also told local farmers that it was alright to shoot Germans if they tried to escape the village. But since this had reached the ears of the district administrator, he turned up one fine day to make it clear that it was all nonsense and that no one was under any obligation to follow the tyrant's instructions. April 1916 was the first time my wife and I were bothered by soldiers in the countryside, whom we ran into on our daily walks. April brought us nice warm weather, and it was even hot on some days. In spite of this the roads were still in a terrible condition and as late as May 1st a horse on the so-called post-road sank up to his belly in mud and the cart he was pulling had to be emptied before the horse could be pulled out of the dirt. Naturally we were all together for Easter with my wife and daughters busy preparing Kulitsch and Pas'cha²⁹ and dyeing eggs the day before.



²⁸ Chirikov, Evgenii Nikolaevich 1864-1932. Author of fiction, short stories and personal narratives about distant parts of Russia.

²⁹ Kulitsch (Russian Кулич) is a mostly round Easter bread from Russia, a Pas'cha (Russian пасха, Russian for Easter) is a moulded dessert made from curd cheese, cream, butter, sugar and eggs and various spices, prepared at Easter in Russia and the Baltic States.

During May the weather was very up and down, sometimes rain and snow and sometimes hot. One day my nephew Loos got reprimanded by our tyrant for going out in the street without a coat. He had on just a fine sports shirt and a wide leather belt. But what can you expect from such a half-crazy guy.

In June I had to go to Totjma again to be examined for fitness for military duty; it was actually the fourth time. We drove to the steamer station at half past three in the morning, but had to wait until ten for the steamer. Our tyrannical policeman also happened to be there and he immediately attacked me, wanting to know why I was leaving the village without him knowing about it. He also went up to my farmer, who had brought me to the landing stage with his horses, threatening to punish him for driving me without his permission. The farmer gave him short shrift, which gave me a certain amount of satisfaction.

The result of the investigation in Totjma was of course not communicated to me. There I had to do the interpreting for many people who spoke no Russian at all. I also heard one of the assessors arguing strongly that it was shameful to be declaring frail old people, some over eighty, as fit for service. He seemed unaware that I understood every word he said.

On the steamer I met a gentleman who was well known to me from Moscow and we soon got into conversation, as we had many points of contact and mutual acquaintances. He was very angry about how the Russian government dealt with the Germans living in Russia, who had nothing to do with the cause of the war. He himself continues to support a number of his old German acquaintances.

At noon on Ascension Day Willy Rabeneck's future bride, a Miss Berens from Moscow, arrived after a bad trip. Both the train and the steamer had been very full and she could only get third class tickets. The next day we all got together at noon and in the evening with the youngsters to celebrate Willy Rabeneck's engagement. And on June 3rd we had news of the birth of a daughter to Gustav and Manja.³⁰ I bought three-and-a-quarter *arsin* (one *arsin* = 71.1cm) of trouser material for 10 rubles an *arsin*, not pure wool but mostly cotton. In the winter a similar fabric cost 3.55 Rubles per *arsin* and that was considered expensive. The tailor made up trousers from the fabric within ten days for 3 Rubles.

The summer brought us a very unpleasant plague of flies and wasps but nothing could be done about it. At the beginning of July three Germans tried to run away. One of them managed to escape through Sweden, pretending to be deaf and dumb. He eventually managed to visit my brother in Remscheid. I don't know what happened to the other two. On July 1st Otto drove to Totjma, having been given permission to go there for a month to have his teeth seen to.

³⁰ Gustav and Marie Hackenthal's daughter Isika, born 2 June 1916

In August three more Germans tried to escape but were caught in the afternoon and put in jail for a few months. One afternoon we were sitting with the youngsters on Alfred Meinert's birthday, when Mama got her papers with permission to visit Totjma so she could see the dentist. She'd be able to stay with Gustav, of course. I also had some good news from my brother-in-law Ludwig, from Jenny Loos and from my representative Blöck.

At the beginning of September wolves became very noticeable in the village; bears also were around and some farmers paid the price by losing cattle. I also had a letter from the American embassy to tell me that they were still working on my case and would let me know as soon as they had news. At the end of September, just as in Germany, we had heavy snow and frost and good sledging weather. But the cold snap didn't last long. Apparently in revenge for my complaint about the appalling late delivery of parcels, our newspapers and letters were held up for a while and not delivered. We knew the letters had been sent but they didn't reach us. Later we learnt from a reliable source in the village that our tyrannical policeman was bragging about holding up our incoming mail and not forwarding the mail we posted. The people in the village who were aware of this didn't dare do anything about it.

Although we had to celebrate German Christmas without a tree, we nevertheless decorated the living room with fir branches and red ribbon. Luxuries from Moscow helped create a festive spirit. On January 1st we got official permission to decorate a Christmas tree, which we did on January 6th. In the afternoon of December 31st the youngsters came over to celebrate the anniversary of Ella's engagement.

On January 8th 1917 we celebrated my sixtieth birthday, for which of course we were joined by the youngsters. Half the village had also come to see our Christmas tree. On January 27th we celebrated the birthday of the German Emperor. January was bad for our health; everyone except me had a cold with high temperatures, but they didn't last too long.

As everyone knows the Russian Revolution broke out in February of 1917. For reasons I no longer understand my diary, which I had kept since the start of our internment, cuts off on February 13th. I guess it was because I couldn't get any notebooks or even paper in the village. Later on, in Düsseldorf, during November 1928 I tried to recall what had happened at that time. The revolution in Russia made itself felt, for example, when the police disappeared and the village administration was taken over by the farmers, which immediately gave rise to a sense of relief. All police officers were immediately drafted into the military and either sent to the front or behind the lines. We soon found out that our local tyrant had been given a particularly loving welcome by the army, being made to do the most unpleasant and dirty work in the barracks. On the other hand the policeman from Totjma charged with our personal supervision, who had always behaved very well towards us, was well treated by the troops and even returned home alive and well after only a few months in the field.

While he was away my daughters had to write his wife's letters to him, because she didn't know how to write. They had done this also for the illiterate farmers in the village during the whole period of our internment. When our tyrant wanted to put a stop to the practice, the women protested, and they prevailed. There must have been an incredible number of men from the Vologda region captured and imprisoned by the Germans.

The chairman of the peasant's militia - the word policeman, particularly hated by Russians, had been abolished immediately - settled into his new position, bringing quite a bit of originality to it. One of his first decrees banned peasants from selling cattle or meat to Germans, but it didn't prevent him from offering us as much meat as we wanted from his own stock, from the very first day of the banning order. The Germans were naturally delighted with the offer and with good reason; the chairman proved very receptive to money under the table. So we now enjoyed many freedoms previously denied over the years, such as being allowed to visit other villages at will.

I do not remember any special events during the summer of 1917. My daughter-in-law Marie was given permission to return to Moscow with her children, though Gustav had to stay in Totjma where he was still looked after by our old 'Marja' who had been with us since 1885. She also left, while the steamers still traveled between Totjma and Vologda.

As soon as she arrived in Moscow my daughter-in-law started her efforts to free us from internment, her husband stuck in Totjma, and me and my wife and daughters. She was told that notice of our discharge had been sent to the local 'police', but we didn't get anything from them. A few days later we bumped into the messenger who picked up the mail for the local administration. When I asked him if he had anything for us he calmly pulled a telegram addressed to me from down in his boot, which he had had been carrying it around for several days, obviously having no intention to deliver it. The telegram said that we were allowed to leave the village immediately, so naturally we began to prepare to depart as soon as possible. The farmers were very happy to buy stuff from us and our sons that would be of no use to us; they'd never seen such good quality household goods sold so cheaply.

For our trip to Vologda, the nearest railway station, in early January we decided to cover the 150 kilometres in stages, each about 20-25km, before changing horses. Gustav had already come over to join us from Totjma. We needed three sledges: one for my wife and I; a second for our son and the two daughters; and a third for the luggage. Each sledge was pulled by two horses; our landlord undertook to drive us for the first stage and to negotiate new horses for our next stage. This method worked out fine. We left at nine in the morning on January 5th 1918 and arrived in Vologda around noon the next day.

Our sled had a fabric cover, but the other two were open. When we set off, even though it was early in the morning our landlord's family and all our Russian friends waved us goodbye and wished us a safe trip. The temperature was minus 36°C but it fell to minus 40°C during the night. At every stop the samovar was set up, because we had to warm ourselves thoroughly. We'd brought sandwiches with us that had to be thawed out, because there was no other food along the way. Once we had to stop in the forest for almost two hours because one of the horses became lame and a replacement had to be brought from a village. Another time we covered two stages - 40km - using the same horses because the driver didn't want to stop at the planned staging village. A sledge had been attacked there a few days before. On the last stage into Vologda we could only get open sledges. We traveled through open country and there were extremely violent winds. It was uncomfortable in every possible way.

For clothing we had the family furs of a relatively wealthy farmer's wife, which she lent us although we could offer no security. All she asked was that we should hand the furs over to the Swedish consul in Vologda or leave them at a certain hotel, whence she would pick them up when she had the opportunity. The woman owned the largest shop in the village and we had got to know her well during our years of internment. We were touched by her trust in us, and she did get her furs back in the end. For special protection against the cold we had also wrapped ourselves in newspapers which provides the best insulation.

In Vologda we drove straight to the best hotel in town where we had no problem getting in and had a reasonable lunch followed by a nap. My son Gustav went to the railway station to enquire about trains that might be going to Moscow. And just as he'd organised the first part of our trip so efficiently, he managed the next leg too. In the evening there was a train and we were able to buy tickets with money and sweet talk - the money was particularly useful. We could not reserve seats. In the evening we went early to the station, but instead of waiting for a train to arrive we were accompanied by an officer to a train that was waiting in a siding where we got installed in a first class compartment. We saw what a smart move that had been later when the train was brought into the station. The rush to get on was such that we certainly wouldn't have got seats - there was no longer a reservations system. Of course we were not alone either, and a few officers and a lady joined us in our compartment.

In the evening we left at ten o' clock. The trip to Moscow was without incident and we arrived there safely on January 7th, 1918. At the station we were welcomed by a Rabeneck employee with sledges and horses who immediately took us to my brother-in-law Edouard's apartment where we also met Ludwig Rabeneck and his wife Alexandrine. Of course Gustav went straight from the train station to his in-law's house where his wife Marie and the children had already been for a few months. We found accommodation in the apartment of our nephew Nikolai Rabeneck, who was away in the Caucasus with his young wife, whom we hadn't yet met.³¹ A couple called Decker lived in the same mews as us; he was English and she was the daughter of a prominent Moscow merchant I had known for years. These people were most hospitable towards us and there was no talk of Russian animosity towards the Germans. I only got the cold shoulder from one former German Reich member who had taken Russian citizenship some years before for business reasons. But, as we know, there have always been such people everywhere you go. With my old Russian business friends I was always most welcome.

Of course the Bolsheviks were never happy, but they firmly believed that everything would be sorted out by autumn at the latest. Then I was sent all the documentation concerning a large timber company in the Caucasus which wanted me to obtain offers for processing machinery from Germany. Once I returned from Germany I'd have plenty of work to do.



The beautiful Maroush, eldest daughter of the talented peasant family of Gavrilov Parfyonov, wife of Nikolai Rabeneck

³¹Nikolai Rabeneck, 1894-1983, married in 1915 to Maria Gavrilovna (Maroush) Parfyonov, a musician and singer. See [The Rabenecks Moscow Manufacturers](#) p.79.

Shortly after arriving in Moscow we had to leave our nephew's apartment, because he was returning from the Caucasus. We went to stay with my brother-in-law Ludwig Rabeneck until his house, too, was siezed. We then had to move in with a cousin of mine, a Dutchman named Quack. Conditions got worse by the day in Moscow, and the outlook was poor, especially regarding the supply of food and procurement of wood.

Nevertheless, we did experience an unpleasant incident, albeit with a happy outcome. One beautiful day a car appeared in my brother-in-law's yard full of heavily armed people. They were anarchists, keen opponents of the Bolsheviks, who they thought where not radical enough.

They demanded that the adjacent building be vacated, where a family I'd known for years lived. One of my nephews was able to phone the police who came very quickly with a car full of officers. The shootout that developed between the two sides was so lively that we had to retreat to rooms where we'd be reasonably safe from being shot at or hit by stray bullets. It didn't take long for the intruders to be overwhelmed, loaded onto a truck and taken away. I was assured that we wouldn't see the gang again; they were probably shot the same afternoon.

As most people know the Swedish consulate took over the protection of German citizens, and my eldest son Gustav had also made himself available to assist in the care of German Reich members, which he was well qualified to do thanks to his thorough knowledge of the country and its people as well as his excellent Russian language skills. The consulate worked hard on the repatriation of German Reich members. The Swedes really went out of their way to help and we Germans should be eternally grateful. However it took until April to get results. After a few trains carrying Germans had left, we were told to prepare to depart on April 22nd. We didn't have much preparation to do. Our meagre possessions could mostly be taken as hand luggage, and anyway there was no room for trunks.

Then we made our round of many farewell visits, congratulated by most but envied by those who were leaving later. My last visit was to a good old friend with whom I'd had the best of business relationships for years. He took a bottle from his parent's cellar as a goodbye gift; a very old, wonderful Rhine wine, which we enjoyed on the Sunday morning. None of us could have guessed the difficult years my friend yet had to face before he too was allowed to leave Russia.

My efforts to retrieve our assets at the bank proved largely unsuccessful. All I managed to do was to visit our safe deposit. But when I wanted to go through our papers, it was immediately forbidden to do so and I had to leave the room. Our jewelry, silver and table silverware had been stored with my sister-in-law or in safes and fireproof rooms at a city safe-deposit office, which was as secure as you could get. But we lost nearly everything. Among the lost items were many very valuable and artistically beautiful things, some of which we'd received for our silver wedding

anniversary, as well as a number of outstandingly beautiful sports trophies. I then took whatever silver pieces that remained to the Swedish consulate general, and we later recovered them in Düsseldorf via the Deutsche Reichsbank.

On Monday April 22nd at nine in the morning we were ordered into to a large building, being used to house German military and civilians. It used to be the extraordinarily grand and luxuriously furnished palace of a Russian nobleman. Individual transportation tickets were compiled and processed there. My son Gustav, who was entrusted with this work by the Swedes, had prepared everything perfectly. The few signatures still required were obtained quite promptly. Then we went to the station after a very good and tasty lunch.

Our train was at the Windauer Bahnhof near the Krestovski Pereulok. It had been set up as an ambulance train by the Swedes, made up of third class coaches adapted for sleeping, so that everyone had a bench with a mattress and a blanket. The person in charge was a Swedish colonel, a very fine and personable gentleman. He was helped by some nurses from the Red Cross. The processing of our group by the Russians took several hours. But in the evening we finally got under way. We were all dog tired from the standing and walking around all day, constantly checking our watches, and finally glad to be on our way to Germany.



Moscow Rizhsky Station, (Windauer Bahnhof in German), completed in 1901, serving Riga, Latvia

Imagine our surprise to find out in the morning that during the night we had only got as far as the Brest station in Moscow. At eight in morning we got going again on the well-known route via Smolensk to Warsaw and eventually Berlin. After about two hours we made our first stop at a place where there was a train from Germany bringing the first post-war German ambassador, Count Mirbach, to Moscow. He was

accompanied by a number of gentlemen who had previously been in Moscow, with whom I had been acquainted before.

Even though Russian trains are never very fast, it seemed our train was going as slowly as possible and it was Thursday before we arrived at the German customs posts in Warsaw. It's hard to describe the strong emotions that overcame us.

All day we worried about how it would be at the border in regard to the checking of luggage and passports. However our Swedish colonel managed to smooth over any potential difficulty and no one was inconvenienced. After a brief delay the train got going again and finally stopped at Molodechno in Belarus, between Minsk and Vilnius at noon on Friday. There we had to get off the train and move to a sort of barrack/warehouse near the station, from where we were to be sent to Grodno to go through a twenty-two day quarantine.

We said goodbye to our excellent Swedish travel marshal who gave me back a package of very important papers that I had asked him to keep for me. In return he asked for the latest annual report of our Organization, which supported Germans in exile, which seemed to interest him a great deal. The report was among my papers. But I also carried many other numbers of interest to me written on very thin soft material sewn in between the fabric and linings of my wife and daughter's clothes so that they couldn't be detected just by feeling them.

The barracks consisted of a number of very low sheds with a door on the short side. Inside there were wooden platforms, with wood shaving pillows but no mattresses or blankets. There were sixty to seventy people in each building, with men and women mixed together.

The train that had brought us to Molodechno got filled with returning Russian prisoners. Some of them expressed strong communist views and tried to influence us, but I didn't see one case where they succeeded.

In our barracks there were quite a few people who had come from other internment locations and who were now on their way to their homeland. Our first stop was the canteen, where we were pleased to be able to get a bottle of wine again which, incidentally, was quite good.

The next afternoon we were to move on to Grodno. I asked the train manager who looked like a deputy officer judging by his uniform if he could get us at least four third-class seats, which he immediately agreed to do. Then he didn't think he could guarantee four second class places; after all the train was made up of ancient freight cars with damaged roofs. The man was taking bribes of three marks paid by anyone who still had a bit of cash, but he certainly didn't deserve it. We made ourselves as comfortable as we could on the floor of the wagon because there were no seats. When it started raining during the night we had to close the door but it was still very

uncomfortable because the rain came through the roof and we had to open our umbrellas to keep from getting soaked. There was no question of sleep, particularly since the air became incredibly bad.

The next morning we were able to fortify ourselves in Vilnius with a cup of coffee and some rolls. Then we went on to Grodno in fine weather, finally arriving on Sunday April 28th in the evening. The so-called Old Castle had been assigned as our place of quarantine. When we got there, after a long uphill march, it turned out that nothing had been done to prepare for our arrival.



The Old Castle at Grodno, Belarus

We were exhausted after our long journey without seats followed by the long march through the city to the castle. After lengthy negotiations with an officer I finally managed to get sixteen people into a room set up like a barracks with two-tier bunks and a large table in the middle. Priority was given to the claims of married couples, even though most of the people in our group were East Prussian agricultural workers. But I had to be quite firm with the officer; he couldn't just pile us in higgledy-piggledy. His behaviour towards us became a little friendlier after I spotted on the notice-board under the heading 'Military Relations' that he was not only a lieutenant but the scion of the Club of German Reich citizens living in Moscow, whose patron was well known to be the German Emperor.

For washing, there were bowls in the room, which we left for the ladies' own use. We men washed in the yard at a long trough through which cold water ran. The toilet facilities were the most primitive imaginable, similar to those in the Moscow transit prison, and by comparison those at Vologda could be considered luxurious. Once again we had to come up with ideas to improve things. On the first morning after our arrival we were taken into the city to be de-loused.

We ate breakfast and dinner in our room and for lunch we went down to the town where we got good and plentiful food at a soldier's barracks. It was run by a female manager who personally served up the portions at lunchtime. For a very small fee you could have your plate filled as often as you liked. Sometimes a military band played during lunch, which of course we particularly enjoyed.

Once my dear wife suddenly developed a violent sore throat accompanied by a high fever. Fortunately, she was able to see a Jewish military doctor and she recovered enough to get up after a few days. But it reminded us that the barracks didn't make a good sick room.

On our first day in Grodno we told our relatives in Remscheid how pleased we were to have arrived and that we'd see them after three weeks of quarantine. Imagine our surprise when a few days later our nephew Alfred Hilger suddenly turned up; he's a captain in the army posted to Bialystock not very far from Grodno.

After seeing our set up in the barracks he went to see the commandant to get permission for us to move to a hotel, where we stayed for the duration of the quarantine. The next day we happily said goodbye to our barracks-mates and moved to two large rooms in the Hotel Bristol. How lucky we had been to move can be seen from the fact that a few days after we left there was a typhus outbreak in the barracks, and the quarantine period had to re-start from that day.

Alfred had introduced me to the officer's mess and I spent many happy hours there. On May 21st we received our papers for departure following the quarantine, including four second class tickets to Remscheid via Warsaw and Berlin. The last part of the trip wasn't without incident. Soon after leaving Grodno a German army policeman came to our compartment to examine our papers. He finally asked "Where's your permit to cross the border?" I showed him our papers, particularly our tickets to Remscheid. He insisted, however, that we needed special permission to cross the border. At Bialystock we were met by my nephew Alfred who spoke to the policeman, but it was all in vain. He wouldn't be convinced.

We continued our journey anyway, but we were warned again in Warsaw about the need for the permit. However we were not put off by this until we told again at Alexandrovo, the last Russian station, that we couldn't go on without a permit issued in Vilnius, which would certainly take more than twenty-four hours to obtain. Since I couldn't understand the reasons for this, even with the best will in the world, I disregarded their advice and decided to deal with the consequences, when we got to Vilnius. As I correctly guessed the officials there were content to let us go after passport control and customs clearance, which was handled very well. I still don't know whether we let through on purpose or by accident. In any case we soon had the old German-Russian border behind us, arriving safely in Berlin on May 23rd. 1918.

Along the way we suddenly noticed that my travel bag was missing. Our daughter Lilly quickly went off to look for it on the train, and it didn't take her long to find it. It was on the overhead baggage rack in another carriage. Without saying anything she just took the bag and nobody challenged her. We didn't bother to follow up how the bag got into the hands of strangers. The bag full of items, that meant a lot to me, was found in the compartment occupied by a Jewish group



We had to stay in Berlin until Saturday May 25th, finding accommodation in the small but excellent Coburger Hof hotel. First of all we had to report to the police, of course, if only to obtain ration cards and identity cards so we could make purchases.

Among friends we visited only my niece Mieke Sauveur, in whose lovely home we spent a very cosy afternoon. But unfortunately we were only able to contact my niece Tillie Solden by phone. That evening we had the great pleasure of seeing our Moscow friend Alexander Lasch, who travelled specially from Bremen to Berlin to see us. The next day Mr and Mrs Meinert came from Saxony to meet their future daughter-in-law Lilly, and on Saturday morning we were very happy to set off on the last leg of our trip, arriving in Remscheid in the evening without further incident.

We were joyfully greeted by my siblings who had prepared everything for a nice homecoming in our old homeland.

And that was the end of this chapter of my life.

O-O-O-O-O-O

Since we didn't know the exact time of our arrival we just said it would be in the evening. But the Remscheiders has worked out from the train timetables that we wouldn't get there until about nine o' clock, but we arrived on a train from Hamm that got into Remscheid at seven o' clock, so there was no one at the station to meet us. Moritz and Elisabeth Böker where both surprised and happy to see us on their doorstep. The long-time housekeeper, Johanna, struck the gong emphatically as soon as she saw us summoning the siblings upstairs to come and meet the guests. The welcome we received was touchingly warm; my dear sister had prepared everything in a way of which we could hardly have dreamt.

Lilly and I stayed in the house as guests, while our daughters were put up at Heini Böker and Lisbeth's. We hadn't changed our clothes or done any laundry for ages, but the siblings had already taken care of that, and we found enough clothes and linens in dressers and closets to have all new clothes. The day after the cobbler came to the house to measure us for new shoes. On Sunday the visits of relatives and friends got under way. Everyone wanted to say hello. On Monday morning I registered with the Lord Mayor, who didn't miss the opportunity of making sure I had the necessary cards made out so we could complete our purchases.

Our first concern of course was to find employment and permanent accommodation. My brother-in-law, Moritz Böker also took on the challenge; after a few days he introduced me to his colleague Karl Hauck from the Bergische Stahlindustrie, who suggested a sales job at the Düsseldorf branch, starting July 1st.³² Of course I was happy to accept. Firstly I was happy to be able to go on working with my oldest business friends, and secondly I had always wanted to live in Düsseldorf.

³² Moritz Böker appears in this memoir mainly as Otto Hilger's brother-in-law, married to Elisabeth Hilger in 1879, but he was also a major figure in the steel industry around Remscheid, Managing Director of BSI, as well as responsible for employing Otto on his return from internment in Russia in 1918.

Through my brother Caspar who had lived in Düsseldorf for almost twenty-five years we soon managed to find a suitable boarding house where my wife and daughters could stay temporarily, as could my sons who had arrived in the meantime. With Caspar's help my daughters both found work, after completing courses for shorthand and typing.

We stayed in Remscheid during June. Arthur, Otto and Robert arrived there in the middle of the month; they hadn't waited to get permission to leave the internment village but just ran away one fine day - like other Germans. They'd arrived via Vologda, Petersburg and East Prussia. They were accompanied by Fritz and Helmuth Loos, who soon travelled on to their mother. Otto also found a job at the Bergische Stahlindustrie, while Arthur and Robert went into the army, although neither had to go to the front. Arthur got a job behind the lines and Robert joined my old regiment in Wesel.

In June we moved to the boarding house on Humboldtstrasse in Düsseldorf. It was tidy and clean, but the food was very bad, even allowing for the general scarcity of food. We were therefore rather pleased, when our boarding house closed down, to find rooms at the Vieten Pension where the food was excellent, even if it left a lot to be desired in the way of cleanliness and tidiness.

In September 1918 I went on a short business trip to Thüringen and Sachsen to get to know the automobile factories based in Leipzig, which I was probably to manage in future. But that never happened, and I remained in Düsseldorf where I was put into the communications department. Even though I didn't really like this sort of work, having never done it before, I was at least glad to have the work and not to be hungry and on the street like many thousands of other refugees.

In the autumn we were delighted that Arthur brought us his fiancée, Irmgard Heimburg. At that time she was still working as a nurse. Our son Gustav had remained in Moscow where he had been employed first by the Swedish consulate, then by the German embassy or respectively by the Red Cross to transport German prisoners of war and civilians home. However his wife and children could no longer remain in Moscow, because the conditions were becoming increasingly unbearable. They also came to Düsseldorf where they found temporary accommodation in the Pension Pollack in the Hofgarten before moving to Berlin.

On August 24th, 1920 we celebrated the wedding of our son Arthur and his wife Irmgard in Reinfeld, where we also spent fourteen days at the small seaside resort of Grömitz and another eight days with my cousin Olga Hasenclever at their Tremsbüttel estate. During the year we also had the pleasure of seeing our son Rudolf

with his wife Hannah and their first child Sophie. Rudolf had been in Rio de Janeiro since 1913, and we had not even met his wife before. During their short stay with us



The 'Holy Bath' at Bad Pyrmont in Lower Saxony, Germany

they were able to find accommodation in our boarding house. My wife and I had previously been to Wilhelmshöhe near Kassel and while our Rio brood were doing a long-awaited cure at Pyrmont my wife went to Reinfeld where Arthur and Irmgard were living with her mother, and from where Arthur drove daily to Lübeck, where he had found a job in the Reichsbank. I also went to Pyrmont for eight days before picking up Lilly at Reinfeld

We were especially happy that Christmas. In addition to having our children from Rio over with us, the Bergische Stahlindustrie suggested that I take over the management of a steel warehouse being planned for Oberkassel.³³ Quite apart from the fact that the offer was quite an honour because it showed their trust in me, I liked the idea of a more independent position. A major benefit was a wonderful apartment in Oberkassel that came with the job; I had to be located on site. Originally a former officer of the company had been considered for the job, but he wasn't that keen on it, so it was offered to me at the suggestion of my brother-in-law Moritz Böker. The announcement was made on December 24th; truly we hadn't celebrated such a happy Christmas for a very long time. I had to start work on the morning of the 27th of December, even though the warehouse buildings and the apartment were in a pretty rough state. I was at work all day and every day in Oberkassel from December 27th onwards. The work went well and we were able to move in in January 1921, and the first steel shipment left the warehouse in mid-February. The whole family once again chipped in to help us furnish the apartment, primarily the Bökers of course, but also relatives from further away e.g. my cousin Olga Hasenclever from Ehringhausen who provided us with furnishings that her father-in-law, my uncle Walter Hasenclever, had bought years ago for his study. Our daughter Lilly, who had a job in an office like her sister Ella, gave it up to help my wife furnish the house. Downstairs we had a kitchen and a dining room, and upstairs we had a living room, four bedrooms, a nice bathroom and a separate room for the girls. There were also nice basement rooms.



³³ Oberkassel is a district of Düsseldorf across the Rhine opposite the old centre of the city

The house also had a nice garden which gave excellent, if not much, fruit. An employee, Mr Haase lived upstairs with his wife and three daughters. He was the son of an estate manager and a great gardener. He looked after the garden and shared the fruit harvest with us. We lived with the Haase family in harmony until the business was wound up in 1928, when we left Oberkassel. We never really had any differences. The couple were most discreet and brought up their daughters excellently.

Since the existing building was too small for a fully equipped warehouse, and we were also running out of office space at Uhlandstrasse on the other side of the river, it was decided to build a new warehouse next to the old one and then replace the existing one. Excavation work for the new warehouse began on July 25th, 1921, and it was stocked with steel on April 18th, 1922. The Uhlandstrasse office building was started on September 27th, 1921 and the very beautiful and practical building was occupied by November 1922. An apartment building was also erected on that site, starting on October 6th, 1921, and occupied on July 26th, 1922.

No sooner had we been set up in our apartment in February 1921 than a commission appeared to see whether and which rooms could possibly be seized.³⁴ Oberkassel had been occupied by the Belgians since November 1918, which caused a very severe housing shortage. After a very thorough inspection, the gentlemen came to the conclusion that we had no superfluous rooms, and subsequently they left us in peace. It amused me that the gentlemen refused a cigar briefly and firmly before the inspection, but gladly accepted it afterwards. We always got along well in the later years, as I often had to deal with the commission because of our workers' apartments.

We spent a vacation in the summer of 1921 in Soden an der Werra, where my wife was supposed to inhale to improve her neck. We also wanted to go to Ems, but the beautiful baths were overrun by the French, mainly by Moroccans; and that was reason enough for me not to go there. In Soden we found very good accommodation and pleasant company in the Hotel Gundlach and returned from there satisfied.

³⁴ On 10 January 1920, the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission assumed its duties. From its headquarters in Koblenz, it governed by decree all facets of the occupation, from the most trivial to most crucial details.

In 1922 we were in Teinach in the northern Black Forest for a few weeks, a place that we liked very much because of the beautiful walks in the beautiful air. There we met friends from Düsseldorf and also visited Gustav and Manja, coming from Badenweiler, in Teinach. But already in that year the increasing inflation and the devaluation of the Mark weighed heavily on all minds, and in the next year the inflation increased to such an extent that we could not think of a trip. We therefore gladly accepted my brother Gustav's request to come to Ehringhausen for a few weeks, and we also spent a very pleasant time there. The outward and return journeys were quite difficult since the rail traffic from Düsseldorf to Benrath and Hilden was stopped due to the passive resistance due to the occupation of the Ruhr. So on the way back we drove in the car, together with Robert Böker and Jean Hauck, to Benrath, crossing to the left bank of the Rhine, from where we returned home by car from Oberkassel.

It's hard to imagine the difficulties we faced getting goods into the unoccupied territory without having them confiscated by the occupying powers. But there were still enough people among the hauliers and chauffeurs who knew how to get around the French, and when they managed it we were all pretty pleased. .

At the end of 1923 the Mark stabilized, how and with what victims I can't discuss here. But stabilization did a lot to get life back to normal. How far inflation had gone is shown by the fact that the Mark was not calculated in millions, or even in billions, but eventually in trillions, a very fantastic number. However, I do not want to go into further details about these seemingly incredible conditions. If you didn't live through it you need to read up on it in books, of which there are plenty, both good and bad. It's also worthwhile reading the good ones if you did experience it, though, because it's amazing how quickly some things can disappear from memory.

Additional note by Otto's son, Arthur Hilger (1888-1975), written around 1918/1919, about the treatment of German civilian internees during World War

One

This is a report on the treatment of German civilian prisoners living in Russia. I will stick mainly to my own experiences because, with only a few exceptions, conditions were hard regardless of which district the Germans were sent to.

On July 20th, 1914, (Russian calendar), we heard about the declaration of war in the morning while we were in Moscow. The war came as a complete surprise to everyone, but right away all newspapers without exception started accusing Germans and everything German of being responsible for the war, and that had very bad consequences for Germans living in Russia.

In the first week following the declaration of war individuals began to be arrested indiscriminately and without reason. On July 26th, Russian style, my older brother Gustav, an engineer at a valve factory in Moscow was arrested at the factory and taken to a police station where he was kept until his later deportation. On July 30th my sixty year old father (Otto Hilger) was arrested for no reason at his office and immediately taken to Moscow's Butyrka transit prison.

There he found Germans, many of whom were women, some of whom had been arrested in their private homes, others in hotels. After each of them, including the ladies, had been subjected to thorough searches more suited to violent criminals, forty or fifty people were locked into the cells and treated like criminals. With some difficulty my sisters were able to deliver some necessities to my father. It was just as well because his arrest took place quite unexpectedly at the shop and he was taken to jail wearing only a summer suit and a straw hat.

After a week in the prison the Germans were taken to Vologda in a prison transport. They had to travel in a wagon with Russian criminals, some of whom were chained together. All the newspapers carried an announcement according to which all male German citizens between the ages of seventeen and forty-five had to report to a barracks in Moscow. Most of us thought it would be a simple identity check, so we went along in light summer clothes, not realising that none of us would get out of the barracks yard again. There was a group of about 5000 Germans and Austrians in all who, after they had their papers taken from them as well as any sharp objects such as knives, scissors and pencils, were put into the barracks. We slept on soldier's bunks whereby two beds always had to do for three people. Once people around the city realised that the Germans were being held in the barracks, their relatives were able to come during visiting hours to provide us with basic necessities, since we had to assume we were going to be sent away.

Most of our visitors were women, and they were viciously harassed on their way to the prison. Stones were thrown at them and they suffered gross insults. This was certainly the result of the press campaign against Germans. After a fortnight in the barracks we were transported to Vologda in one batch, but at our own expense. Other large shipments of Germans went to Orenburg and Vyatka, but after we had been given a choice among three districts. In Vologda our arrival took the police authorities completely by surprise. Because their prisons and barracks were already full of Germans from Petersburg, we had to look for accommodation in the town. But the renting was at our expense. The Russians spent nothing on housing or feeding their prisoners.

We stayed in Vologda for about a fortnight. Then an order was issued, according to which the majority of the Germans living in Vologda were to be sent to the small district towns and villages of the governorate. Regardless of relatives or acquaintances, the Germans were distributed to the most distant villages, and it was only thanks to our good knowledge of the Russian language that we were able to get the police to send us to the district town of Totjma, where my father had already been sent.

This trip of about 200 versts by steamboat, accompanied by my cousins and friends from Moscow, and without police escort, was very pleasant. In Totjma we were able to look for an apartment immediately after registering with the police. We rented a large room big enough for seven people, but without furniture. We had to go out and buy beds, dishes and essential cutlery.

In Totjma there was by now a colony of about five hundred German citizens who had arrived there from various regions of Russia. There were also lots of factory workers expelled from Poland who were suddenly arrested by the police, and packed off to the east where they were simply left to their fate.

We were all told when we arrived at the internment place that we were prohibited from going outside the city limits, there was a curfew between 9:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., there was to be no speaking German on the street or gathering in groups of more than three together outside. Violations of these laws resulted in prison terms from three weeks to three months.

The great majority of the Germans had only arrived there with very small means, so that they ran out of money very quickly, even though life in the small town of around four thousand inhabitants was initially very cheap. After two weeks, people were in serious need. Germans were strictly forbidden to work, so it was also impossible to earn money. On the other hand, the Russian government provided no shelter or food for the prisoners. After two weeks you would meet Germans on the streets who were forced to beg.

Because official organizations were strictly forbidden, an unofficial German committee was formed that collected money among the wealthy Germans of the colony, to provide minimal support to needy Germans. That was how the most pressing need in the colony was remedied. Meanwhile, the committee contacted the American legation in Petersburg, because at that time the Americans were responsible for representing the interests of the Germans in Russia. After a few months the committee received money from the German government through the legation, by means of which a little support could be paid to the needy Germans. This organization stayed in place until the end of the war.

I should like to mention, however, that the Americans, as representatives of our interests, right from the beginning did not take the matter very seriously, hardly bothering to respond to various detailed reports from our committee asking for help. I'd find it hard to believe that the American embassy has even made one appearance before the Russian government arguing to improve the situation of the Germans.

The Swedes, on the other hand, were completely different, taking over America's responsibility after America's declaration of war. Although it was extremely difficult to obtain any benefits for Germans from the old Russian government, the Swedes always tried to do so and gradually developed several avenues of support.

The Americans used to take months to pass on government money, thereby leaving the colony in great need and hunger, but now the monthly support money arrived regularly and on time.

I have already mentioned the restrictions which had been imposed on the Germans, with violations punished by jail. This resulted in quite a few Germans ending up in jail, because few of them spoke a word of Russian so they were forced to exchange a few words in German with their friends on the street or in the shop. Any complaint from a Russian, even a child, was enough for the German to be prosecuted and invariably sent to jail.

But the first year in Totjma was relatively more bearable than the last three years we spent in the outlying village. It should also be mentioned that during the first year there was a military recruiting drive for youngsters and older people about every six weeks, for which up to four thousand farmers from around Totjma came to town, needing to report for a medical exam and to be conscripted.

This led to disputes and brawling between the rough peasants and the German deportees. Even defenceless women were attacked and beaten by the peasants, and consequently Germans were prohibited from leaving their homes during conscription. Since conscription sometimes lasted for three weeks, we were cooped up in our small rooms for three weeks in the hot summer; even sitting by open windows was strictly forbidden to prevent clashes with the visitors.

Our Russian hosts had to obtain food on our behalf. But in cases where they refused, in order not to starve, the Germans had to risk going into the city in disguise and despite of this they were often attacked and beaten. The police were powerless against the large gatherings of farmers in the city and only strictly enforced the requirement that no German show up on the street or at the window. We weren't even allowed to use the courtyard of our house at that time.

Furthermore, not only the visiting peasants, but also the urban population became increasingly mean and aggressive towards Germans. The so-called intelligentsia of the city, consisting of teachers, civil servants and priests, mounted a campaign to expel Germans from the city.

Rising prices in Totjma after nine months of the war, were used to blame Germans for inflation. There was also a lack of housing. These were mostly invented reasons, which nevertheless led to a plan in September 1915 to move most of the colony to villages 50 versts away. The outcome was very unpleasant because of the expense, which the Germans had to bear themselves, not long after they had partially furnished their primitive, mean apartments. On the other hand we were pleased to be moving to a new setting because the relationship between the city population and the internees had deteriorated so much; each time you walked the street you were exposed to the grossest comments and insults from Russians, which you had to tolerate in silence if you didn't want to go to jail.

For two hundred and fifty internees five villages were nominated, which were near each other and within a radius of five to six versts. The village where the post office, the telegraph office and the main shop were, and where the Germans were not allowed to live, was four versts away. The plan was to allow movement between the villages inhabited by Germans and to treat the line that encompassed these villages as a boundary that should not be crossed. Unfortunately, the plan only lasted for a few days. Movement between villages soon became strictly prohibited and we were confined to stay in the individual villages. We were confined to a village of thirty to forty houses, stretching over three quarters to one kilometer long. All you could do was to walk on the filthy village main street, which was only generally accessible during the summer.

In winter, autumn and spring, only people with top-boots could move on the street. The mud was so deep, despite the fact that this was the main road between the regional capital of Vologda and Totjma. The mail coach, which had to travel this way, regularly got stuck in the mud in autumn, despite its four horses harnessed together, and the village had to be alerted to pull the horses and wagons out. The order restricting our freedom was issued by a minor local police officer, a very illiterate, coarse peasant, to whom our colony was henceforth subordinated, and who began a campaign of harassment from the outset.

But first I would like to mention something about the living conditions we had to endure over the last three years. I was the first to visit the villages with another gentleman from Totjma to find apartments for my family and some friends. Certain farmers in the various villages were instructed to let rooms for rent.

Our first visit was to a farmhouse that had been described to us as one of the best available. The first thing that struck me when I entered this apartment, recommended as the best, was a loud and inexplicable noise. But then I noticed that the noise was caused by hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of cockroaches or Prussians, as these pests are called here, covering the walls and ceilings and moving about on them. The numbers mentioned are not exaggerated, and the locals are fond of these lovely little animals, that run over people and get into food, because they are supposed to bring happiness into a home.

The sight of the dirty peasant family, slouched around the samovar drinking tea, combined with the danger of vermin, immediately made me want to move on, as I was sure I could find something cleaner and better. But the effort was in vain. I walked through four villages and saw all the apartments and parlours that were available for rent to Germans; but none of them was any better, and most of them were worse than the first. And in almost all of them, Germans would have had to pass through the Russian's room to get to their living space.

For my parents I managed to find a somewhat cleaner and more comfortable apartment, but we youngsters had to take the first apartment I had seen. I immediately telegraphed my parents to bring as much insect powder as possible from the city, and then I straightway waged a very vigorous war against the animals, which was quite upsetting for our landlords. It took about eight days to clear the rooms of the corpses of the animals, piles of them every day. Pursued by us, they crawled out of all the cracks, raining down from the ceiling after swallowing poison.

It was then necessary to re-paper all the walls and ceilings. Only then did the apartment begin to look a bit liveable, and much cleaner. I should mention, though, that most of the internees weren't able to re-decorate and were forced to live for years in the dirty rooms I have described. Although for the most part we gradually got rid of the cockroaches; bed-bugs, which couldn't be driven out of the wooden building, tormented us during the three years of our stay.

Our apartment consisted of two small rooms (shared by seven men) with its own corridor kitchen that had the advantage of its own Russian cooking range. Most Germans depended for cooking on their Russian landlord's kitchen; having to share a cooker with these indescribably dirty people. To enter our apartment from the outside or to move from room to room, one had to bend down low, because the doors were at most one and a half meters high. Although I'm not very tall, I could easily touch the ceiling with my palm. In these narrow rooms, which were very hot in summer and unbearably cold in winter (five to six degrees), we had to spend two and three-quarter

years without work. It is a miracle that we didn't go completely mad, even if we did suffer a lot in terms of morale. We received only Russian books and were able to read them, but we were an exception, because the vast majority of internees could read only German, and German books were strictly forbidden until the time of the revolution.

I mentioned earlier that our freedom of movement was limited to the village where we had our apartment. But the main shop and post office were in a neighbouring village where no Germans were allowed to live. In order to visit the village, permission had to be obtained from the police officer in charge of us, and Germans, regardless of whether they were women, children, old or young men, were only allowed to leave their own village accompanied by him. So, like real criminals or prisoners of war, we civilians were led across the street with a police escort. The distance from our village to the shop was at most half a kilometre. In order to get permission to visit the neighboring village, one had to hang about on the street in the morning, waiting until the police officer remembered to visit our village. No specific time was designated for his visit, and waiting in winter, when the temperature was down to minus 35 Réaumur, was not one of the most pleasant activities. The granting of the permit then depended entirely on the grace of the little official: firstly, only a limited number of Germans were allowed to be taken along every day; and secondly, the guy decided at his discretion whether he wanted to take a German with him or not. Individual people who hadn't sucked up to the man were not taken for weeks and had to use friends to do their shopping.

With these increasingly severe restrictions and harassment by the police, the local population turned against us, so that the relationship between farmers and internees, that was initially friendly, began to deteriorate. The internees were increasingly exposed to insults that went unpunished, as well as being spied on by those who had been ordered to watch out for German spoken on the street, or Germans in groups of more than three on the street. A complaint from a village child was sufficient to lead to prosecution and a subsequent jail sentence, imposed by the governor. I can't think of a single prosecution drawn up by the little police officer and sent to Vologda that didn't result in a penalty. It became a way for petty local officials to exploit and abuse the power given to them. Very often these guys pre-identified their victims, wanting for some reason to see them in jail.

I would like to describe a particularly significant instance here: a policeman who broke into one of the Germans' apartments at twelve o'clock at night to check whether everyone was at home, was not greeted in particularly friendly fashion, especially by the women. I knew that the Germans living in this house did not speak Russian. A few days later, the policeman saw four of these Germans walking in pairs on the street about fifty paces apart. He was watching them from about five hundred meters away, so he couldn't hear anything or see the distance between the couples. But this didn't prevent him from reporting to his authorities that four Germans had been seen walking in a group on the street speaking German. The result was a

prosecution that went to the governor in Vologda putting all four Germans, including a lady, in prison for six weeks. This case merely serves as an example of many similar incidents of police violence, that occurred under the old Russian government.

With much petty harassment, the police managed to make our lives as unpleasant as possible, although our living conditions were miserable enough. The harassment went on all the time. Postal items, letters, cards and newspapers were not only delayed for days or weeks, they were often destroyed for no reason. This refers to outgoing as well as incoming correspondence, both of which were subject to strict local censorship. After the revolution we learned from the police officer's acquaintances that he often boasted of harassing Germans by destroying whole batches of mail. Nevertheless, we were always told that we were treated far better than Russian prisoners in Germany, who were suffering there in an indescribable way.

We have now learned how this abuse, especially of civilian internees, developed. Among the minor harassments, which were repeated everywhere, I should mention: a ban on putting up Christmas trees at Christmas; the German custom could not be tolerated; prohibition on carrying walking sticks, particularly tough on old people who needed sticks to walk; a ban on making music with the threat of confiscating our instruments such as guitars, balalaikas or mandolins.

One fine day the local peasants were told they could shoot any German who left the village unescorted by a guard. You need to understand the situation there to realize how dangerous this ill-considered decision by the police officer was, against which we naturally immediately raised our objections, writing various complaints, none of which reached their destination because the mail was hi-jacked. After a week I finally managed to speak personally to the district police chief who was passing by, notifying him of the crazy order. The decision was then immediately revoked. During subsequent interviews with the police officer who had issued the order, however, I was repeatedly reminded that we civilian prisoners ought to be viewed and treated as criminals.

We were forbidden to accompany the dead to the cemetery in groups of more than three people; and many internees died from lack of medical attention. In the neighboring village we only had a first aid nurse who understood nothing but pulling a tooth or prescribing an ointment. The nearest doctor was fifty kilometers away, and he rarely came, even with an urgent telegraphic request, because we were German. Most of those who died in our colony in captivity died because they hadn't received medical help in good time, and often not at all. Characteristic of the intelligence of our police officer, who could do as he pleased with us, is a case I made a note of so that I would not forget it. It was a scarlet fever epidemic that broke out in our district, similar to other cases within the German colony. The official's children also contracted this disease. The first aid nurse was called to him, and he told her seriously that it was the Germans' fault that his children were sick, because they'd spread

bacilli on his coat in the waiting room as revenge for his behaviour. He'd seen the bacilli himself.

And this was the guy in charge who had everything to say about us, often telling tales and claiming, in response to our protests, that he had the full right to do so, and that it was only thanks to his upbringing that he didn't say more. I'm sorry I can't include a photograph of him here; it would help to make it possible to form an idea about this animal.

A significant change in our situation occurred after the revolution broke out and the police were replaced by a peasant's militia. The tight control eased, and we were given greater freedom of movement, able to move between the villages where Germans lived. We were allowed to work, if only field work or chopping wood for the farmers; and such Germans were allowed to move further afield from the place of internment, provided of course that they kept the same place of residence.

This freedom of movement became necessary, too, because food was growing scarce and you couldn't get everything on the spot. You had to go to distant villages to get flour or potatoes. But if the pressure from the police and the constant harassment stopped, the rule of the peasant's militia began, who also wanted to exercise their new power over the Germans. Repeated resolutions of the peasant assemblies to move us internees out of their district, whereby we would simply be dumped on the street with our belongings, but without instructions from another internment location, thank God were not carried out.

With the help of the Vologda Soviet, we always managed to stall the farmers from month to month, until finally old people, women and children were given permission to leave. We young people left the internment centre without permission, but with the support of the Swedish Delegates in Vologda, aiming to get to Petersburg. After the revolution, our district was actually ruled by an administrator who had enormous influence on the peasants. He was the only man in the entire district who could hold down the job of secretary to the local Soviet. Everyone else could either not write well enough, or they were too decent to do the job. This administrator was a crook who had been imprisoned for several years for a drunken murder and who managed to get free during the revolution. With appropriate bribery, I managed to get this otherwise very anti-German guy on my side and was able to settle some matters concerning the German colony in our favour.

However, some Germans who visited the office of the Soviet on business got beaten up by the administrator when he was drunk and put into cells in the administration building without charge. After the introduction of self-government by farmers, there was no longer a way to complain; In such cases, the only option was to pay the fine of the imprisoned Germans or, with an appropriate bribe to convince the administrator to liberate the Germans. It was lucky that this option was still possible. Thanks to our relationship with the administrator, our committee was afforded the

opportunity to make the necessary trips to the city to get money without hindrance. Difficulties in purchasing the order for the colony were also eliminated through his support.

Resolutions were passed in the farmers' assemblies not to sell food to the interned Germans, and a fine was imposed on those farmers who disregarded this prohibition. And such provisions often left us in a very difficult position, since at first most of the farmers were afraid to sell to Germans. But in the end our money became too attractive, and the regulations were gradually relaxed. The food issue extremely critical up until the end. The district town had already told us in February 1918 that it would no longer be able to deliver a monthly ration of flour because the townspeople themselves no longer had enough flour. Plus, there was no flour available at local farms, so we had to work out where we could get flour for our colony.

To get flour we had to go one hundred and fifty to two hundred kilometers into the country at our own risk, to grain-rich areas, accompanied by farmers we knew and who had to bring it back for us. The winter roads such as they were had to be used for these trips, and we did eventually manage to provide our colony with grain, twenty pounds per person per month, which we then had to get to the mills, until our liberation. Furthermore, it had become impossible to obtain flour in our area. Even local farmers who had run out of flour had to travel to Siberia to find grain.

The risks of buying the grain are borne out by the fact that on the return trip our buyer - also an internee - was attacked by farmers who stole all the grain from him. It is only thanks to his knowledge of the Russian language and his special talent for dealing with the locals that, after appearing at the peasant assembly, he managed to persuade the people to give back half of our grain and to pay for the rest in money. We had to cope with the loss of the flour taken by the peasants, and the Russian authorities who did nothing to support us in the matter.

At the end of April, the long-awaited message from the Swedish legation arrived that the evacuation of the civilian internees could gradually begin. Because the roads were impassable due to the thaw, only people on foot were able to leave the internment villages, that is to say young people who had known how to obtain medical certificates. When the ships could travel again, the entire colony was evacuated and completed within a week.

Young people, who didn't get permission from the Russian authorities, travelled to Vologda without papers, and were then smuggled out by the delegate of the Swedish legation to Petersburg, where, by paying 20 Rubles to a medical examiner they could get a disability certificate and were able to travel on to Germany. It wasn't until the end of May that the order was issued that all internees, regardless of age, were allowed to leave Russia. So much for the situation of German internees in Russia! And what about the Russian internees in Germany during the same period? Only a very small number of those people, the ones who didn't want to comply with police

regulations, were interned. But most people could exercise their professions and earn money just as in peacetime. That was the extent of abuse of Russian internees by Germans, of which we have read so much in all the Russian newspapers during the four years.

Appendix: Edouard Rabeneck's family at Sobolevo in 1889

In the Rabeneck family archive is a photograph of Edouard Rabeneck's large family taken at Sobolevo in 1889, in the garden next to their house.



The Left hand group: Edouard Rabeneck, 31; Nellie Rabeneck, 27; with son Charles, 1, on her knee; Arthur Rabeneck, 5, sitting cross-legged;

Sitting at the table: Alexandrine Rabeneck née Weber, 34; Leo Lvovich Rabeneck, 6; Ludwig Rabeneck, 33; in the oval photograph frame Arthur Rabeneck 1836-64; Arthur's widow Elizabeth Rabeneck née Quack, 58, at her feet Andrew Rabeneck, 3;

The Right hand group: Eugenie Rabeneck, 27; at her feet Gustav Hilger, 3; Otto Hilger, 32; Lilly Hilger née Rabeneck, 29; on her knee Arthur Hilger, 1.