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"Too Little to Live and Too Much to Die" The Burgenländers' Immigration to the United States During the Interwar Period

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“Too Little to Live and Too Much to Die”
The Burgenländers’ Immigration to the United States During the Interwar Period

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
History

By

Philipp L. Strobl
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Abstract

This paper explores the history of a group of immigrants that came to the United States from the small rural Austrian region of the Burgenland between World War One and World War Two.

By examining several biographical life stories of contemporaries it wants explain why the emigrants decided to leave their country, how they managed their passage, how they assimilated to their adopted-home, and how they integrated themselves into the new society.

Keywords: Atlantic Passage, Austria, Burgenländers, immigration, immigration laws, Interwar Period

I. Introduction

Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten [Land of unlimited possibilities] is one of the numerous expressions in the German language that describes America. It depicts a land where everything is reachable, a land with unlimited possibilities. For several million Europeans, America became such a place. The United States offered those persons prospects and opportunities they did not know before. Numerous groups of immigrants from various European ethnicities came to America, especially during the late 19th and the early 20th century to try their luck in the “New World”.

This paper is about one of these groups. It describes the estimated 80,000 Austro-Americans with roots in the state of the Burgenland – the so-called Burgenländers.¹ It will describe the life of the “typical” emigrant from the Burgenland through individual emigration stories. Because of the diversity of that group and the long duration of the Burgenländers’ immigration to America spreading over more than three generations, a limitation of the observation period is necessary. The Burgenländers’ migration to the United States was characterized by three important phases. The first one, the so-called pre-war migration, occurred at the end of the 19th century and lasted until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The second phase took place in the interwar-period (1919 – 1939). The last phase started after World War II and ended when the economic situation in their old home country improved during the mid 1950’s.²

This paper is focused on the second phase because it not only brought the largest share of migrants to the United States during a relatively short period, but also because

¹ “Burgenländische Gemeinschaft and Burgenländers in the U.S.,” *Austrian Information* 62, January/February, 2009, p. 4.

² Walter Dujmovits, *Die Amerikawanderung der Burgenländer* (Stegersbach: author’s edition, 1975), p. 64.

it played the “most critical role” in shaping the Burgenländers’ identity in America.³ Most of the Austro-Americans who had their roots in the Burgenland are descended from immigrants of that period.

The paper describes the emigrants’ lives through passages of some selected biographies. Most of them are written in German. To allow a better understanding, they have been translated into English by the author.

The use of original quotations is a good way to show the living conditions of those days as realistically as possible. These conditions could sometimes seem alienating to present day people, especially when life in the “old homeland” is described.

The main intention of this paper is to question why the emigrants decided to leave their country, how they managed their passage and their arrival in their new chosen home, and how they integrated themselves in to the new society. The paper will also focus on whether the emigrants abandoned their old home’s roots and came into their newly adopted-home as so-called “quiet invaders”, as E. Wilder Spaulding named the whole group of Austro-Americans who came to the United States “so quietly and with so little to say about the glories of the old monarchy or the charm of the young republic that Americans are surprised to learn that they were ever anything but American,”⁴ or whether they formed an own ethnic group. In that context that paper also takes a look at the origins of the so-called “white ethnic” term and the question whether the emerging of a white racial identity during the interwar period and the postwar years helped the Burgenländers in becoming “accepted average white Americans.”

³ Encyclopedia of Chicago, „Austrians“, in Encyclopedia of Chicago, <<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/95.html>> (accessed 16 Sep. 2009).

⁴ E. Wilder Spaulding, *The Quiet Invaders: The Story of the Austrian Impact upon America* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1968), p. 1.

To allow a better understanding of the diverse stages of life of the emigrants, this paper covers the main stages of their lives. The first section serves the purpose of describing the development that made the small rural area in the East of Austria the “leading emigration region of Central Europe.”⁵ It also describes the first phase of the Burgenländers’ immigration to the United States, which paved the way for the exodus that occurred during the interwar period. The second section is about the life of the migrants before their emigration and the reasons for their migration to America. It will describe important aspects of the Burgenländers’ life, such as housing, nutrition, and clothing. It also will mention the “push factors” that led to their decision to leave their homeland. The third section is about a further hurdle in the life of the Burgenländers - the passage to the United States. It will describe aspects of the passage and discuss how the emigrants financed their expensive trip. Section four deals with the immigrants’ arrival in the United States and will describe the formal immigration procedures in the main point of entry, New York, as well as the impact of the strict new immigration legislation of 1924 on the Burgenländers. It will also describe what happened with the Burgenländers after their arrival in America. Section five explains how the immigrants integrated themselves in their new society. It will analyze the phenomenon of remigration. The last section finally provides a short conclusion of this thesis.

The literature concerning the Burgenländers emigration during the interwar years is skimpy. Most sources are written in German. The standard work is *Die Amerikawanderung der Burgenländer* written by Walter Dujmovits in 1975. It is based on his university of Vienna dissertation and provides the reader with great details about the Burgenländers’ emigration. Another informative book is an exhibition catalogue published for a state exhibition in the Burgenland in 1992 - *Nach Amerika*.

⁵ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 19.

*Burgenländische Forschungen Sonderband IX*⁶. It covers various aspects of the Burgenländers' emigration. The Burgenländische Gemeinschaft, generously provided numerous biographies of emigrated Burgenländers. These biographies constitute the bulk of evidence for the analysis.

II. The Burgenland – A Center of Emigration

II.a) Background: The Burgenländers' Tradition of Emigration

Interestingly, Austria's smallest state was also her most important emigration region. In the years of 1922 and 1923 more than 60% of all Austrian emigrants to the United States came from this small rural area.⁷ This section analyzes the developments that made the Burgenland the leading emigration center of post World War I Central Europe.⁸

Map 1
*Today's Austria and the State of the Burgenland*⁹



⁶ *Nach Amerika: Burgenländische Forschungen Sonderband IX* (Eisenstadt: Rötzer, 1992).

⁷ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 204.

⁸ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 19.

⁹ Wikipedia, "Burgenland," in: wikipedia – Die freie Enzyklopedie
<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Karte_A_Bgld.svg>(accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

The end of the First World War left Europe completely ruined. The former great power Austria-Hungary broke up into several independent nation-states. Among them were the countries of Austria and Hungary. The states of the victorious Entente regarded both as enemies at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. As defeated succession states, Austria and Hungary were loaded with high reparations demands and territorial losses by the victorious allies. Various economic problems arose for both economies, resulting from the collapse of the former huge trading markets of 55 million people living in the Habsburg Monarchy.¹⁰ At the same time, the peacetime economy could not absorb the enormous numbers of civil servants left jobless by the collapse of the monarchy.¹¹ It was a time when people got increasingly interested in emigration. A region especially affected was the Burgenland. Until the end of the war it was a part of the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy. Even the name Burgenland did not exist during that time. The region later known as the Burgenland simply was a part of the Hungarian region of Western Hungary until the End of the First World War. Because of its high share of German speaking inhabitants, the victorious states at the Versailles Peace Conference decided to adjudicate it to the Austrian Republic.

The Burgenland was an agricultural area. Industrialization did not really arrive until the second half of the 20th century. During the 18th century, it had become more and more traditional for the inhabitants of the Burgenland to work abroad for a limited period of time in what was called *Saisonarbeit* (seasonal work).¹² Hungarian agricultural

¹⁰ Kurt Wessely, "Die Pariser Vororte-Friedensverträge in ihrer wirtschaftlichen Auswirkung", in: K. Bosl, ed., *Versailles – St.Germain – Trianon. Umbruch in Europa vor 50 Jahren* (München, 1971), p. 143-166 (citation p. 165).

¹¹ Ursula Prutsch, "Austrian Emigration to Latin America between World War I and World War II", in: Klaus Eisterer and Günter Bischof, eds., *Transatlantic Relations. Austria and Latin America in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006), p. 121 – 136 (citation p. 121).

¹² Günther Stefanits, "Endonymische Minderheitennamen im Bundesland Burgenland", Österreich, in: Nomenklaturkommission des Landes Burgenland, ed., *United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names: Burgenland Paper 2006* (Vienna, 2006), p. 11.

estates employed the first seasonal workers. After the industrialization of the greater area of Vienna in the second half of the 19th century, that region became more and more important as preferred destination for seasonal workers from the Burgenland.¹³

Map 2
*The Burgenland and its Neighboring Regions*¹⁴



¹³ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Maps of World, "Burgenland State Map," in: mapsofworld.com
<<http://www.mapsofworld.com/austria/states/burgenland/state-map.jpg>> (accessed 18 Nov 2010).

To understand the phenomenon of mass-emigration that took place in the Burgenland one needs to analyze the most important factors making the small state of Austria Central Europe's leading emigration region. As mentioned before, the lack of industrialization is an important factor that forced many people into emigration. Other industrialized regions could offset the growing population during the late 19th Century by developing new jobs in newly created industries. This was not the case in the Burgenland with her traditional agriculture-based economy.

A second cause is the limited size of the country. This did not allow higher production through expansion of the agrarian land. Instead, the growing number of children led to a steadily division of the farms. The end result was an agrarian structure composed of a large number of small farms.¹⁵ This structure led to a third cause for the emigration - the small capital resources of the Burgenland farmers.¹⁶ Investment in new technologies and machinery could have increased the productivity and could have bettered the situation in this agricultural country. Due to the small harvests, most of the peasants produced just enough to secure a minimum standard of living and mere survival.

II.b) "Ins Amerika fahren" – The Origins of the Burgenländers' Emigration to the United States

In the last 25 years of the 19th century, the direction of the Burgenländers' emigration changed. Opportunities to find a job in the city of Vienna and its industrialized hinterland sagged more and more because of the arrival of tens of

¹⁵ Walter Dujmovits, "Die Amerikawanderung der Burgenländer", in: *Nach Amerika*, p. 104-119 (citation p. 106).

¹⁶ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 16.

thousands of workers from other regions of the Habsburg empire, especially the regions of Bohemia and Moravia. At the same time, the American east coast and Midwestern region experienced an enormous push towards industrialization and urbanization. The United States needed a workforce to sustain that development. Immigrant laborers erected the modern urban infrastructure and provided unskilled labor in the emerging mass production industries.¹⁷ At that time, the so-called “new immigration” began, which brought millions of poor people from the rural regions of Eastern and Southern Europe to the *Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten*, the country of the limitless opportunities.¹⁸ First messages from that “miraculous country” reached the Burgenland through Hungarian emigrants whose emigration track started in the middle of the 19th century.¹⁹ Around the year 1875, the Burgenländer began to adapt their seasonal work traditions for the United States.²⁰ Ten years later, the emigration to the American east coast captured large sections of the population.²¹ The intensity of the Burgenländer’s mass emigration was also supported by new inventions in the transportation sector.²² The building of railway lines simplified the travel to the harbors in Northern and Southern Europe. Sailing ships were replaced by steamers and later by high-speed steam ships. This transportation revolution represented a shortening of the passage time from two or three month (sailing ship), to two or three weeks (steamer), to less than 15 days (speed steam ships).²³

¹⁷ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 18.

¹⁸ Mae M. Ngai, Race, “Nation, and Citizenship in Late Nineteenth-Century America: 1878-1900”, in: N. Bayor, ed., *Race and Ethnicity in America. A Concise History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 96-130 (citation p. 119).

¹⁹ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 23.

²⁰ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 31.

²¹ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 31.

²² Dujmovits, *Burgenländer*, p. 107.

²³ Stefan Knobloch, “Auswanderung auf alten Graphiken”, in: *Nach Amerika*, pp. 138-153 (citation p. 146).

The main region targeted by the emigrants during the late 19th century was the so-called “German belt”, the urbanized region between Chicago and New York.²⁴ Rural America was predominantly Protestant and to a certain degree hostile to foreign Catholic “intruders”.²⁵

At the beginning, most of the Burgenländers who immigrated to America regarded their emigration as temporary. After earning a certain amount of money, they planned to go back to their home country and buy a farm or run an inn. But in most cases they grew closer and closer to their new country and finally decided to stay there. Out of the estimated 26,000 Burgenländers who immigrated to the United States until the year 1913, less than fifteen percent moved back to the Burgenland.²⁶ That was a lower rate of remigration than the average immigrants who came to the United States at that time. American immigration statistics indicates that only sixty-seven percent of all immigrants to the United States stayed there.²⁷

At the beginning of their immigration to the United States, the Burgenländers adopted their traditional seasonal working system (*Partiensystem*). This meant that a leader, the *Partieführer*, recruited a group of peasant laborers to work with them abroad within the framework of a close working group.²⁸ But in most cases these work gangs began to dissolve after a while and workers started to go their own way. But that does not mean that the Burgenländers forgot about their roots. Most of these early immigrants were very active members of at least one of the numerous associations that practiced and celebrated the culture and traditions of their “old” home country. The

²⁴ “Burgenländische Gemeinschaft and Burgenländers in the U.S.,” *Austrian Information* 62, January/February, 2009: 4.

²² Rokicki, Jaroslaw, “Polish Ethnic Groups in the United States”, in: Walter Hölbling and Reinhold Wagleitner, eds., *The European Emigrant Experience in the U.S.A* (Tübingen: Gunther Narr Verlag, 1992), pp. 111-126 (citation pp. 115f).

²⁶ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 203.

²⁷ Barbara Benton, *Ellis Island: A Pictorial History* (New York: author’s edition, 1985), p.18.

²⁸ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 44.

exact number of the Burgenländers' associations founded in that early time is not known. However, the *Eintracht*, a German-speaking journal, estimated in the year 1937 that there were more than 33 such associations.²⁹

The estimated 26,000 persons who immigrated to the "New World" before World War One built the network and communication system for the next wave of Burgenländers' emigration during the inter war years. America no longer was a strange country for them. Thanks to that first wave of emigration, almost every Burgenländer arriving in the interwar period had at least one relative in the United States.³⁰ These relatives as well as the abundant Burgenländers' community life they built up made the decision to immigrate into the States easier for people willing to migrate.

III. The Old "Country" - Life in Burgenland and Motives for the Interwar Emigration:

Nearly every person who emigrated from the Burgenland during the interwar period could tell a story about the unspeakable poverty of his or her home country. The whole period was characterized by poverty. Few changes occurred that eased the hard daily life of the people. Only when the economic situation improved after the withdrawal of the Red Army in mid 1950's, could the Burgenländers begin to defeat the centuries' old, deeply entrenched poverty of their region.

III.a) Housing

²⁹ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 190.

³⁰ "Burgenländische Gemeinschaft and Burgenländers in the U.S.," *Austrian Information* 62, January/February, 2009: 4.

Most changes took place in the field of housing. After World War One, the so-called 2. *Bauernhausphase* (second phase of farmhouse) began introducing important changes in appearance and equipment of their houses.³¹ In many cases, renovations or new buildings were financed with dollars earned by the relatives in America.³² During that time, more and more Burgenländers became proud owners of a brick house, a tiled roof, and a new stove with smoke outlet. Public water supply was unknown in that region until the 1950's.³³ Instead, every house had a freshwater well in front of the house.

Picture 1
*Typical Houses in Early 20th Century Burgenland*³⁴



³¹ Walter Dujmovits, "So war es damals. 4. Folge Bauernhaus – Dach", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 331 (9/10 1994).

³² Walter Dujmovits, "So war es damals. 7. Folge Bauernhaus 2", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 334 (3/4 1995).

³³ Walter Dujmovits, "So war es damals. 5. Folge Bauernhaus – Rauchküche – Brunnen", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 332 (11/12 1994).

³⁴ Museumonline.at, "Alte Welt," in Museumonline.at, <http://www.museumonline.at/1998/schools/burgenla/BL_GUSSI/fr_vorl.htm> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

Like the establishment of a public water supply, most of the streets were asphalted only in the 1950's. Before that time, most of the roads were graveled.³⁵ Because nearly every Burgenländer worked in the agricultural sector, every house had its own fields. But the fields often were too small in size to support a family. The average area of a Burgenländer farm is depicted in a biography of the Marosits family:

"2 ½ ha (5 Joch)³⁶ of fields belonged to the old house in which they lived. In the year 1907 son Josef (Joe) was born in St. Michael. Because the harvest was not plentiful enough to feed the whole family, they decided to immigrate to America."³⁷

The biography of the emigrant Stefan Schedl, written by his grandchild Tony, gives us a good impression of the appearance of Uljanik, a typical village of the Burgenland.

"Uljanik had just one main street. On both sides of the street, there were houses strung-out with a fountain in front, a small herb garden on the side, and a barn in the back. Next to the houses there were fields and meadows and close to the village there also was a small forest."³⁸

Tony Schedl also mentions the omnipresent fountains in front of the farmhouses and the limited space, the farmers had to till the soil. The small flats of the farmers are also described in a biography about the Gerbavsits family:

"It was a large family, my great-grandfather's family, and they were living in Sulz/Szalay 68, in the house which was to become my parents' house. In those

³⁵ Walter Dujmovits "So war es damals. 3.Folge Kleidung", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 330 (7/8 1994).

³⁶ About 6 acres; for more detailed conversion tables see

<<http://www.asknumbers.com/AcresToHectaresConversion.aspx>>.

³⁷ Elisabeth Jandrisits, "Auswandererschicksal. St Michael bei Güssing", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (05/06 1992): 12f (citation p.12).

³⁸ Tony Schedl, "Auswandererschicksal. Oberloisdorf", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 380 (11/12 2002): 11f (citation p.11).

days, it was the home of my great-grandparents, Anna and Gabriel Gerbavsits, their mother (Baba) and seven children (four other children had died young). Their farm was much too small for all them to make a living. So it was in 1921 that Gabriel, who was then 20 and the eldest of the Gerbavsits brothers and sisters, felt compelled to leave his native country, and like many others at that time, went to America by ship.”³⁹

Apart from the overwhelming lack of space, living in these families’ modest houses forced many Burgenländer to leave their land, we also see in these biographies the large number of children most Burgenländer families had at that time. The demographic pressure to emigrate was overwhelming.

III.b) Nutrition and Clothing

Due to the deep poverty and the enormous family size, food was in short supply. Many families could not really eat their fill for many weeks.⁴⁰ The situation usually worsened during the long and cold winters, when people could not collect additional food such as strawberries or edible mushrooms. The typical meal plan was determined by the bounty of the seasons. In the spring, the Burgenländer harvested potatoes and salad. The summer brought them salads to eat and edible mushrooms. Sometimes they butchered old chickens, which did not lay eggs anymore. The best time for the Burgenländer, however, was the plentiful harvest season, the autumn, when the main harvest was gathered and the cattle were butchered after the fieldwork. In the wintertime, the farmers lived off their hoards of preserved food.

The persistent food shortage and the scarce nutrition figured prominently in the memoirs of these people. Depictions of the scarce diet surface again and again in the

³⁹ Renate Schweda, “Auswandererschicksal. Sulz”, *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (03/04 1991):11f (citation p.11).

⁴⁰ Walter Dujmovits, “So war es damals. 2.Folge Nahrung”, *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 329 (5/6 1994).

biographies of the emigrants. The life story of Theresia Unger, who left Austria at the age of sixteen, gives us a detailed picture of the composition of the monotonous diet of those days:

"The nutrition of those days was not very diversified. More complex meals were only served on the "Kirtag". On that day, grilled meat was served along with the chicken that was cooked usually on Sundays. During the week, the only meals that were served were "Grumbansterz", "Kukuruzsterz", "Milchnockerl" or similar dishes. Meat was rare on workdays. The butter produced on the farms was mostly sold. And the money was needed to buy salt and yeast. Breakfast contained from "Einbrennsuppe", "Krautsuppe" on Sundays, and bread and "Strudel", that obviously was baked at home. Usually, only one pig was butchered every year, mainly to have enough bacon and fat."⁴¹

Such reports show impressively how monotonous the Burgenländers' diet was composed mainly of semolina and basic vegetables such as cabbage and beets. Most of the dishes such as the different kinds of the mentioned *sterz* are cheap dishes made from maize, wheat, buckwheat flour, and water. Rich in calories, they are comparable to American "grits". The different kinds of soup mentioned above also are cheap dishes made of cabbage and potatoes that grew in the small gardens of the Burgenländers' farms. Animal products were very scarce and had to be rationed. Farmers had to sell the butter they produced in order to buy essential products such as yeast and salt, which could not be produced on the farm. Other biographies also show this devastating scarcity of food, which frequently provoked the emigration. Families that decided to stay home never had enough to eat and finally became dependent on the public, as the following passage in the text shows:

⁴¹ Erwin Weinhöfer, "Auswandererschicksal. Glasing", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (01/02 1991): 4f (citation p.04).

*"Hedwig spoke of poor meals and gifts of firewood and rabbits from her gamekeeper uncle and once a year oranges, some nuts and a gift from the castle of Draskovich at Christmas time. She also spoke of large apricots, plums and other fruit in the harvesting season and the joyous spring following a winter of hardship and cold."*⁴²

In this text we also see the mentioning of the arduous period of the wintertime and the pleasure of the people when the cold time passed and the first sunbeams of the spring sun melted away the snow.

*Picture 2
A Burgenlanders' Family Wearing Traditional Costumes*⁴³



The great scarcity affects the population's supply of clothes too. Their overwhelming lack of financial resources forced people to skimp on clothing. Adult men usually possessed two types of clothes.⁴⁴ One was used for Sundays and festive days the

⁴² Gerald Berghold, "Auswandererschicksal. Kleinmürbisch", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 409 (04/06 2006): 11-12 (citation p.11).

⁴³ Museumonline.at, "Alte Welt," in Museumonline.at, <http://www.museumonline.at/1998/schools/burgenla/BL_GUSSI/fr_vorl.htm> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

⁴⁴ Dujmovits, "So war es damals. 3.Folge – Kleidung", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 330 (7/8 1994).

second type were basic work clothes. Most of the Burgenländers did not discriminate between summer and winter clothes.⁴⁵ They wore the same clothes the whole year. In most cases, the first-born son got some new outfit such as pants or jackets. Younger children had to put up with the old clothes of their elder siblings. In many cases, there was just one good jacket or one pair of new shoes for all children, as the biography of Theresia Unger tells us:

*"The families mostly had just one pair of new shoes, or one jacket that could certainly be worn just by one person. If some of the siblings went to church, the others had to stay at home, because the parents did not let their children enter the house of god with old shoes."*⁴⁶

It often was the eldest son who had the honor to go to church in the only clothes for festive days. The other children had to stay at home.

Local cobblers still made shoes for the Burgenländers. But because of their high price, a pair of shoes had to last for many years. During the warmer season, women and children went barefoot in order to save the soles. The memoirs of Hedwig Mühl demonstrate their plight very impressively:

*"She remembered cold, bone chilling walks in winter and dusty barefooted walks in summer to the Maria Heimsuchung Church in Güssing for Sunday services."*⁴⁷

In this simple passage, we see the insufficient state of the Burgenländers' clothing. In the wintertime, the clothes were not really warm enough and in the summer the people had to go barefoot.

⁴⁵ Walter Dujmovits, "So war es damals. 3.Folge – Kleidung", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 330 (7/8 1994).

⁴⁶ Weinhöfer, "Glasing," p.04.

⁴⁷ Berghold, "Kleinmürbisch," p.11.

III.c) Working Condition

Finding a job was not easy in a region where most of the people were rural self-supporters. Because of the lack of industrial establishments in the region, the Burgenländers who had no farm of their own, often had no other choice but to leave and to work in other regions. Sometimes they were lucky and found a rare job provided in a local craftsman shop or an even rarer job in a bigger company, as for example the Vita-Quelle in Sulz, which produced mineral water. In the time before and after World War I, the Burgenländers' rural economy was largely composed of small farms. For centuries, peasants split up their farmland among their children. This led to an inefficient subdivision of the fields.⁴⁸ The peasants of the interwar period could not think about selling their crops on the market; they not even had enough of a harvest to feed all members of their own family. Sometimes the farm was so small that even its owner had to find additional jobs to pull through at subsistence level. Such a situation is described in a biography about the life of the Derkits family:

"The Derkits family from Schoader was one of the numerous families typical at Stegersbach. A family with lots of children that ran a small farm. The profit from the farm was too little to live and too much to die. Father had to find additional work. He worked in a telegraph company, which was very typical for Stegersbach. He had to work all across the territory of the old Habsburg Monarchy and therefore was not at home very often. He visited his family only several times a year. The mother had to stay at home with the children and had to run the small farm [...]. The family had five children: Maria (Mary) 1899, Michael 1901, Paul 1903, Hermine 1905 und Johanna 1914. One son took over the farm and paid out the remaining four siblings with his scarce means, because they had to go abroad. "⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Gertrude Weiss, "Auswandererschicksal. Stegersbach", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (09/10 1993): 11f (citation p.11).

Women had to run the farm in addition to all of their other daily tasks of raising a big family. The story also shows the difficult condition in the case of their heritage. As it was described, the farm was too small to feed all members of the family. But in case of the father's death, it was planned that the son who took over and ran the farm had to pay out his siblings – a situation given to ruining his own existence. There are many stories similar to the situation of the Derkits family. Most of the Burgenländers did not own even a small farm. They belonged to the very mobile group of the seasonal workers, the *Saisonarbeiter*. Their particular mobility and entrepreneurial spirit are described in the biography of Franz Omischl:

*"His father originated from St.Gotthard, his mother from Hodis. The father went to Budapest to work as a waiter. The mother also was employed in a restaurant in Budapest. It was there that they got to know each other for the first time. They married in Hodis in 1912. The father practiced his profession and went to Rothirsch-Sauerbrunn, a part of Styria that is in the territory of Slovenia today. In that spa town, he bought a restaurant from a widow. He paid for it with money he borrowed from his parents and his parents-in-law."*⁵⁰

This passage shows the impressive mobility of the seasonal workers. First, the parents of Franz Omischl worked in the faraway city of Budapest in the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy and then moved to Styria. After the economic situation got worse, his father finally left Europe and moved to Chicago.⁵¹ The story of the family of Franz Omischl is characteristic of a type of emigrant found frequently among the emigrants from the Burgenland. The lack of opportunities at home created a special type of person who had to develop a willingness and courage to take risks. A good depiction of the

⁵⁰ Walter Dujmovits, "Auswandererschicksal. Markt Neuhodis", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (11/12 1996): 11f (citation p.11).

⁵¹ Ibid, p.11.

hopeless economic situation of these days is given by a biography of the Gerbavsits family:

"A few people were lucky to earn their living in the "Vita-Quelle" [a company that produced mineral water] in Sulz. But most people worked in the fields and meadows; this work was hard and was carried out by hand, without the modern machines everyone uses today. Nevertheless people were glad to do the work as long as they had a job, since jobs were scarce in those days and families were large."⁵²

In this passage we recognize the two main problems of the Burgenland during the interwar years – the frustrating lack of opportunities to find work and the huge number of children produced by a society that was in the middle of the so-called demographic transition.⁵³ The birth rates were still very high at that time. The mortality rate, on the other hand, had already begun to sink. This created a huge population surplus. Along with the Burgenländers' emigration tradition, described above, these produced the mass exodus of the interwar period.

Picture 3
A Farmer Passing a Church with his Wagon⁵⁴



⁵² Schweda, "Sulz," p.11.

⁵³ Dujmovits, *Burgenländer*, p. 106.

⁵⁴ Museumonline.at, "Alte Welt," in Museumonline.at, <http://www.museumonline.at/1998/schools/burgenla/BL_GUSSI/fr_vorl.htm> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

Although more than 24.553 Burgenländers decided to emigrate to the “New World” after World War I,⁵⁵ we have to keep in mind that the vast majority did not like to leave their homeland, even though the living condition were more primitive than in other, more developed Austrian urban regions such as Vienna and Graz. In nearly every case, the emigration was forced by the bad economic circumstances the Burgenländers were enduring.

“The old home was the Burgenland; the place where one came from and where one would prefer to be. The new home was America, a place where one was forced to move.”⁵⁶

Most of the emigrants did not want to leave their homes, but they were forced to do that in order to survive. Because of the family networks among the Burgenländers of the preceding phase of emigration, America became the number one emigration target after World War I. The people in the old home country received numerous letters from their relatives in the new world. All these letters drew the picture of a country where everything was possible. Very often, they came together with a dollar bill that reinforced the picture. The emigrant Franz Mandl wrote one of these letters in 1929. Because of the authenticity of his writing style containing typical Burgenländer’s expressions, the text is presented in the original German language. An English translation is attached afterwards:

“.....Du schreibst das du Pilgersdorf verlassen möchtest wenn du fileicht Lust nach Canada hast dann kannst schon kommen aber ein wenig must noch warden bis

⁵⁵ Dujmovits, *Burgenländer*, p. 205.

⁵⁶ Walter Dujmovits, „Auswandererschicksal. Gerersdorf“, *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (05/06 2000): 11-12 (citation p.11).

ich ein eigenes Heim habe fileicht drift sich was bis nächstes Jahr das ich eine Farm pachten kann dann will ich dir schon helfen das du mit deiner Familie kommen kannst hir kommt man leichter zu einer Existens wie in Österreich man muß halt gedult haben auf einmal geht nicht alles zuhause wär ich immer ein armer schliker geblibn hir hoffe ich mir eine bessere Zukunft....”⁵⁷

“....You told me that you planned to leave Pilgersdorf. If you would like to come to Canada, you are invited to do so. But you have to wait a little while until I will have my own home. Maybe I can lease my own farm next year. I will help you then to come to me with your family. It is much easier to build up an existence, but you have to be patient. At home I would be a poor guy for the rest of my life. Here, I can hope for a better future....”

We have to keep in mind that most of these emigrants did not tend to mention bad news in their lives, as historian Doris Knasar pointed out. According to Knasar, most of the Burgenländers in America were in a defensive position. They thought that they had to justify their emigration against accusations of their relatives in Austria. The best way to justify the emigration was to inform the people back home about “social and economic advancement” in the new homeland and the rightness of their decision to emigrate.⁵⁸

IV. Leaving the Homeland – The Passage to the United States

The best sources of information about the country of great opportunities were the letters of previous emigrants. Emigration was also an important topic for newspapers and magazines. Especially family journals of that time described the emigration process in detail.⁵⁹ There also were numerous travel magazines that

⁵⁷ Doris Knasar, “LIEBE ELTERN IN FREIDEN ERGREIFE ICH DIE FEDER AN EICH EINIGE BAR ZEILEN ZU SCHREIBEN...”, in: *Nach Amerika*, pp. 194-205 (citation p. 203).

⁵⁸ Knasar, “LIEBE ELTERN,” p. 202.

⁵⁹ Knobloch, “Graphiken,” p. 139.

described the new world very impressively with detailed pictures and maps.⁶⁰ Because of the large increase of people willing to leave Austria, the newly founded Republic of Austria created the so-called *Wanderungsamt* (office of emigration) in 1920.⁶¹ Its main task was to inform the emigrants about the most important aspects concerning their emigration. But its main office was located in the city of Vienna and was out of the reach for many Burgenländer.

After the decision to leave was made, the Burgenländer had to travel a long and difficult journey before they arrived in their new homeland. Most of the emigrants faced the problem that they often did not have sufficient funds to pay for their passage. They had to borrow money, which normally had to be paid back later with their expected earnings in America. Once enough money was raised, they had to buy a ticket at one of the numerous shipping companies whose branches sprang up like mushrooms all over the Burgenland. With a ticket in hand, they took the train to one of the great harbors of Northern Germany (Hamburg, Bremerhaven) where they boarded a steamer to embark on their great adventure in a new land.

Picture 4
A Local Branch of a Shipping Company⁶²



⁶⁰ Knobloch, "Graphiken," p. 140.

⁶¹ Prutsch, "Austrian Emigration", p. 121.

⁶² Eva Brunner Szabo, Gerd Schlögl, "Museum der Erinnerungen," in [memoryprojects.at](http://www.memoryprojects.at/burgenland/bilder.htm), <<http://www.memoryprojects.at/burgenland/bilder.htm>> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

IV.a) Scraping Together the Money for the Passage

The costs for the passage were a big hurdle for the Burgenländers' way to America. Depending on the company, expenses for the voyage could amount up to several hundred dollars. In the case of the 16-year-old emigrant Theresia Unger, her father had to pay 250 dollars for her passage in 1923.⁶³ That was an enormous amount of money for a poor farmer. In the late 1920's, 250 dollars accounted for more than 1,700 Schillings, the Austrian currency of that time.⁶⁴ The average weekly wages in the year 1930 amounted to 56 Schilling.⁶⁵ But we have to keep in mind that most of the Burgenländers were farmers who lived from their harvest. Therefore, most of them had less cash to spend per week than the amount of the average Austrian weekly wage. The emigrants also had to bring cash beyond the costs of the passage. In those days, the US-government asked immigrants to possess at least 25 dollars at the moment of entering the United States.⁶⁶ There also was an immediate head immigration tax of 8 dollars.⁶⁷ In many cases the emigrants got the money from relatives in America as Hedwig Mühl's life-story shows:

"Brother Joseph (born 1875) became a journeyman tailor. He then emigrated to Allentown, Pennsylvania in 1903, where he worked as a tailor. He rented a

⁶³ Weinhöfer, "Glasing," p.04.

⁶⁴ Dujmovits, "So war es damals. 1.Folge – Gründung des Burgenlandes, Weltwirtschaftskrise" *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 328 (3/4 1994).

⁶⁵ Münze Österreich, „Was kann ich dafür kaufen. 5.Folge – Kaufkraft im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert,“ in *Münze Österreich* <http://www.austrian-mint.com/&union_kaufkraft_5?l=de> (accessed 09 Jan. 2010).

⁶⁶ John Halper, "Erlebte Geschichte: Ein Auswanderer erzählt aus seinem Leben", in: *Nach Amerika*, pp. 190-193 (citation p. 191).

⁶⁷ Roger Daniels, *Two Cheers for Immigration*, in: Daniels, Graham (eds.), *Debating American Immigration: 1882 – Present* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), pp. 73-188 (citation p. 13).

house at 166 Chew St. and sent his mother and sisters steamship and railroad tickets as well as money to join him in Allentown.”⁶⁸

In her case, Hedwig Mühl received money from her son, who had emigrated two years earlier to earn enough money to bring his family over to the United States later. Poorer families managed to raise sufficient funds to send only one person to the United States. The family member who made it first to the United States had to save his earnings to pay for the passage of the rest of his family. The biography of Alexander Ulreich shows such a colon situation.

“To flee the plight of those days and to find better opportunities for him and his family, the father went to New York in 1923 with a steamer called “Seydlitz”. From there he moved to Chicago [...]. The father had a good job in Chicago and eventually got his whole family to join him by November 1929.”⁶⁹

Usually it took the relatives in America years to save enough money to pay the passage of several of their relatives who wanted to come too. In the case of Alexander Ulreich, he had to wait six years for the tickets.

Another way to raise the money was to borrow it, as the story of Mary Kelemen indicates:

“It all began in Unterwart in 1922 when someone from America who had been born in Austria, was visiting Mary’s parents. He was telling about America and Mary was very much interested in going too. She asked him if she could come to America. After he went back to America, she wrote to him about how to find a sponsor. She didn’t tell her parents about this. 10 days later, he sent her a visa and the money for the trip. [.....] After arriving in America she worked and repaid her sponsor a fee of \$ 225.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Berghold, “Kleinmürbisch,” p.11.

⁶⁹ Walter Dujmovits, “Auswandererschicksal. Oberwart“, *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (09/10 2003): 11f (citation p. 11).

⁷⁰ Marcella Kelemen, “Auswandererschicksal. Unterwart“, *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (09/10 1992): 11f (citation p. 11).

After their arrival in the United States, the new immigrants, who had borrowed money, were disadvantaged by these start-up debts. Mary Kelmen, for example, got a weekly salary of about 25 dollars⁷¹ and had to work at least two years to pay back the debts she had incurred to make it to the United States.

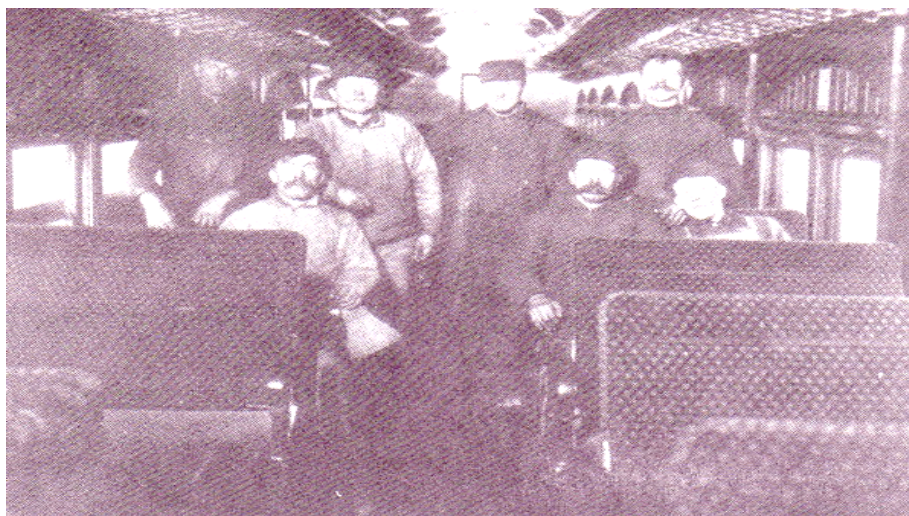
IV.b) A Long Way to the New Homeland – The Passage

The final years of the 19th century represented an important milestone in improving the field of transportation and advancing the process of modernization. Traveling from and to the port cities for example, was simplified by the erection of a railway network. The invention of steamships shortened the length of the Atlantic passage dramatically and made the time spent on the ship much more comfortable. Despite numerous improvements, the passage continued to be a huge burden, especially for the numerous pregnant women who emigrated to the United States. The passage was also a time of separation and loneliness, since many Burgenländers left their homes for the first time in their lives.

The railway network had been extended to the Burgenland in the late 19th century. Most of the emigrants now did not have to walk long distances to reach a railway station. In some cases, they took the bus to the main railway station in the capital city Vienna, from where international trains departed.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 11.

Picture 5
*Burgenländers in a Bus Heading for a New Future*⁷²



The emigrants chose the ports of embarkation and with it the shipping company because of the good accessibility.⁷³ Most of the biographies studied for this paper, named the two important German port cities of Bremen (“Norddeutscher Lloyd”) and Hamburg (HAPAG) as their port of embarkation. These two North German ports were also the ports from where the majority of the Austrian immigrants usually left Europe.⁷⁴ The train trip from Vienna to Hamburg took 1½ days.⁷⁵ The journey to Bremen took the same time. The following biographical excerpts describe two typical passages of Burgenländers:

⁷² Agendorf.hu, “Aus der Geschichte von Agendorf,” in Agendorf.hu, <http://www.agendorf.hu/nemet_intro/fomenu/mozaik/tortenelme/index.htm> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

⁷³ Knobloch, “Auswanderung,” p. 142.

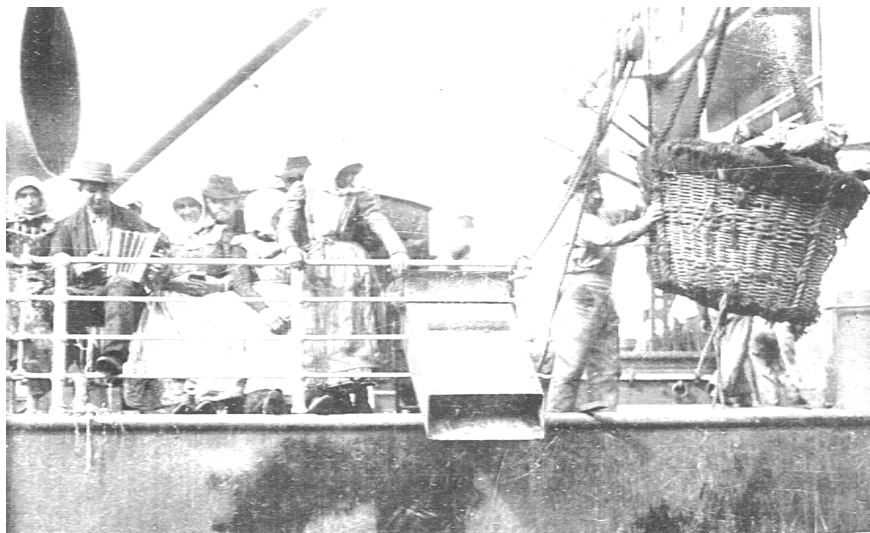
⁷⁴ Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 71; Annemarie Steidl, “Transatlantic Migration from the Late Austrian Empire and its Relation to Rural-Urban Stage Migration”, in: Annemarie Steidl, Joseph Ehmer, Stan Nadl, Hermann Zeitlhofer, eds., *European Mobility: Internal, International, and Transatlantic Moves in the 19th and Early 20th Century* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009), p. 207-226 (citation p. 210).

⁷⁵ Weinhofer, “Glasing,” p. 4.

He walked with his uncle and his brother Hans to Güssing. From there he went to Vienna by bus and then to Bremen by train. He crossed the Atlantic with a ship called Bremen.”⁷⁶

“My mother accompanied me to the train station in Oberschützen where I boarded the bus to Vienna. I then went to Bremen, Germany, to board the ship to America. I know two men that traveled with me. Both had attended the same school as I had. [...] The name of the boat was George Washington. I had two suitcases, one filled with feathers for my aunt in New York. The other carried my belongings and we still have that suitcase. It took eleven days to reach America. It was March 11, 1929, Sunday afternoon when we arrived at Ellis Island.”⁷⁷

Picture 6
Burgenländers on a Steamer⁷⁸



Because of the numerous emigrants from the Burgenland, several Burgenländers traveled together by train or steamship. In the previous passage, John Calper met two men he went to school with. The biography of Anton Traupman draws a similar picture:

⁷⁶ Walter Dujmovits, “Auswandererschicksal. Neustift bei Güssing”, *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (07/08 1991): 11f (citation p. 11).

⁷⁷ Halper, “Auswanderer,” p. 191.

⁷⁸ Academic dictionaries and encyclopedias, “3.Einwanderungswelle,” in Academic dictionaries and encyclopedias, < <http://de.academic.ru/dic.nsf/dewiki/516343> > (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

*"It is also interesting that more than 50 persons from the nearby villages of Traupmann's hometown were on the ship that left Bremen. All of them wanted to try their luck in America."*⁷⁹

The presence of familiar faces made the passage easier for the young Burgenländers who often left their home for the first time in their lives and were frightened by the prospects of living overseas. Emigrated Burgenländers spoke frequently about the excellent and exotic diet on board of the steamers. Most of them came into contact with exotic fruits such as bananas and pineapples for the first time in their lives, as the biography of the Mühl family from Kleinmürbisch shows:

*"Hedwig told me she felt like a princess and her mother began acting like a great lady. Hedwig was introduced to food that she never tasted before like pineapples and bananas. She didn't know whether or not one was supposed to eat the skin of the banana."*⁸⁰

The Atlantic passage brought a lot of new experiences to the emigrants. New food was one aspect, boarding an ocean liner for the first time of their life was another thrill. It is not surprising that most of them became seasick, as is mentioned in numerous biographies:

*"Compared with the time before, the steamer provided much more luxury. There was enough food available and Theresia and her friends saw bananas and oranges for the first time in their lives. They ate the fruits together with the skin. The seamen had to explain the travelers how to eat these fruits. As numerous others on board, the 16 year old Theresia ate too much and became seasick at the second day of her trip."*⁸¹

⁷⁹ Weinhofer, "Sumetendorf," p. 11.

⁸⁰ Berghold, "Kleinmürbisch," p. 11.

⁸¹ Weinhofer, "Glasing," p. 4.

Comparing the Atlantic passage with that of their predecessors a generation earlier, the ship voyage in most cases was a positive experience for the emigrants of the interwar period. That was due to both the numerous technical improvements, and the arrangements, the newly created Austrian government had negotiated with the shipping companies in the years 1920 and 1921. The so-called *Regulativ* obligated the shipping companies to take care of the Austrian passengers and to grant them a “correct passage”.⁸² For health reasons, the shipping companies established health examinations before the departure of their ships. One of these is described in Theresia Unger’s biography:

“Theresia and all others who wanted to enter the ship were examined by doctors. They were bathed, and freed from potential lice. Even the clothing had to be cleaned with vapor. Their food consisted of tea and bread with jam on it.”⁸³

In spite of the rich fare on the ship and the good treatment, it did happen sometimes that passengers did not survive the passage. No such case was found in the biographies researched here. But a passage in the life story of the family Kassanits showed what might happen:

“She became very ill on the passage and we feared that the child would not survive the travel. My grandmother mentioned later how terrible it was to see how the dead bodies were wrapped in shroud and thrown into the sea.”⁸⁴

⁸² Felix Tobler, “Zweigstellen von Schifffahrtsgesellschaften im Burgenland (1921-1938)“, *Nach Amerika*, p. 120-137 (citation p. 121).

⁸³ Weinhofer, “Glasing,” p. 4.

⁸⁴ Siegfried Gollatz, “Auswandererschicksal: Mischendorf“, *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (07/08 2009): 11f (citation p.11).

The dimensions of the rooms in the steerage class were constructed to accommodate a maximum number of passengers. Although the situation changed for the better in the early 20th century and the passage became much more comfortable, a lot of people were still crowded together into narrow spaces. Such close quarters led in many cases to the outbreak of fatal bacterial diseases such as dysentery or diphtheria and people perished from it.

Picture 7
*The Steerage*⁸⁵



V. The New Homeland – Arrival in the United States

Like all emigrants to the United States, the Statue of Liberty welcomed the Burgenländers in New York harbor. Upon arrival, they were ferried from their ocean-going vessels to Ellis Island, the biggest immigration station of the United States. Once

⁸⁵ FCK.at, "Thema Auswanderung," in FCK.at, <<http://www.fkc.at/auswanderung.htm>> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

they passed immigration, the way into their new homeland was free and they could start their lives in a strange land.

V.a) Arrival in Ellis Island

Because of the steadily increasing influx of new immigrants, the United States government began passing new immigration laws during the last quarter of the 19th century. The first attempt by Congress to curb immigration was in response to a steadily increasing population of Chinese workers in California in the 1870's.⁸⁶ As a result of the new immigrant population, several laws were passed aiming at the exclusion of certain groups of people. In 1882, Congress enacted the first generally exclusive immigration law banning all immigrants that were "convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming any public charge" and all "foreign convicts except those convicted of political offenses".⁸⁷ Congress created for the first time in United States' history a new immigration bureaucracy supervised by the Secretary of Treasury.⁸⁸ New immigration laws were defined in 1891 and 1892 that stayed in effect for more than 22 years. These laws also affected the Burgenländers who immigrated in the United States before World War II and after. The sequence of immigration procedures now became strictly regulated. Each alien applying for an admission was required to submit a medical examination by an immigration doctor and to attend a legal interrogation by an inspector. The inspector received information from the shipping companies and the medical report from the examination. On the basis of the information of these documents, he had to decide, whether the immigrant is "clearly

⁸⁶ Benton, *Ellis Island*, p. 34.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 34.

⁸⁸ Daniels, "Two Cheers", p. 13.

and beyond doubt entitled to land,”⁸⁹ To meet the requirements posed by the growing number of immigrants, Congress decided to establish America’s biggest immigration station on Ellis Island in New York harbor. As a consequence, New York City received the biggest share of new immigrants. Although Ellis Island opened in 1892, the completion of the station took place in December 1900 when migration officers finally occupied the last buildings.⁹⁰

Ellis Island was the first place of debarkation for most of the Burgenländers. Interestingly, I could not find many references to that place in the biographies I researched. Most of the Atlantic passengers mention the station only casually. This seems to speak against all the horror stories circulating about long waiting times and thefts on Ellis Island. If the immigrants had been repeatedly robbed on Ellis Island, people would have mentioned it in their biographies. John Halper, for example, mentioned a waiting time of about one day. He did not speak about unbearable circumstances on Ellis Island:

“It took eleven days to reach America. It was March 11, Sunday afternoon, when we arrived at Ellis Island. We stayed overnight on the boat and then went our separate ways.”⁹¹

Most of the Burgenländers who immigrated to the United States after the late 1920’s did not even see the immigration station. The Austrian emigration authorities had reached an agreement with the American government. Now, an American doctor examined all Austrians before boarding their ships in Europe.⁹² They only had to go through Ellis Island in case of an outbreak of disease on their ship. Starting in 1898, all

⁸⁹ Benton, *Ellis Island*, p. 61.

⁹⁰ Thomas Dunne, *Ellis Island* (New York: Wilton Tifft, 1971), p. 23.

⁹¹ Halper, “Auswanderer,” p. 191.

⁹² Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 58.

Austrians arriving at Ellis Island received free advice and help from the “Austrian Society” of New York, which was supported by the Austrian government with an annual 5.000-dollar grant.⁹³ These few Burgenländers who could afford a second or a first class ticket, had also the pleasure to be exempted from passing through Ellis Island, as the biography of Hedwig Mühl shows:

“Mother and daughters landed in New York on 28 February and took the ferry to Newark where they found the train to Allentown. As second-class passengers, it was not necessary for them to clear through Ellis Island. Immigration processing took place aboard ship.”⁹⁴

Immigration Officers inspected the first and second-class passengers in the ship’s saloon. Usually these examinations were rather rigorous. First-class passengers were given the most cursory examination, while the second-class was scrutinized more carefully. This obvious inequality in the treatment of the passengers came as a result of the authorities assuming that anyone who could afford a first-class ticket was “unlikely to become a public charge”.⁹⁵ Because of the vast amount of new immigrants streaming in to the United States before World War I, the waiting time on Ellis Island might be prolonged and became very hectic. The station took care of more than 5.000 people per day.⁹⁶ That means that 5.000 people were first examined and then interrogated by inspectors on a daily basis. Yet there were days, when more than 15.000 people arrived in the harbor of New York. In these cases, people had to wait. This might have led to a chaotic situation. Some of the immigrants took advantage of these conditions when entering the country by falsifying their data, as the biography of Leopold Ziller shows:

⁹³ Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 74.

⁹⁴ Halper, “Auswanderer,” p. 191.

⁹⁵ Benton, *Ellis Island*, p. 62.

⁹⁶ Benton, *Ellis Island*, p. 62.

"As we can see in the existing documents, young Leopold Ziller was made older, during his immigration to the United States in the year 1922. That was mainly to obtain the work permit for him."⁹⁷

It appears that the last step before entering the United States would not be so memorable for the immigrants. It was just a physical examination, which was surely not very pleasant. But because it normally did not last very long, the passage through Ellis Island did not present a huge hurdle in the voyage of the Burgenländers to their new abodes.

*Picture 08
Arrival⁹⁸*



⁹⁷ Ingrid Lung, "Auswandererschicksal: Rax", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (05/06 1994): 11f (citation p. 11).

⁹⁸ Museumonline.at, "Bremerhaven," in Museumonline.at, <http://www.museumonline.at/1998/schools/burgenla/BL_GUSSI/fr2_vorl.htm> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

V.b) New Immigration Laws and Changes for the Immigration of the Burgenländers

A much bigger hurdle was created with the so-called Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, when a new set of very restrictive immigration laws was introduced in the United States. Following the First World War and the Red Scare of 1919-20, American restrictionists achieved a long-lasting victory. More and more citizens began to fear that the increasing number of immigrants threatened to “lower the standard of living” and to “dilute the basic strain of the American population.”⁹⁹ In that time southern- and eastern European “new immigrants” had commonly been viewed as racially inferior to Americans with northwest European background.¹⁰⁰

In 1921, the Quota Act, passed by Congress, placed ceilings on the number of immigrants admitted from each country outside of the Western Hemisphere. Austria was regarded as a “non-white” country belonging to the region of Eastern Europe.¹⁰¹ Hence the Austrian quota was reduced to 7,442 immigrants to the United States per year.¹⁰² And people could enter the United States only when they had relatives in the country guaranteeing a so-called “affidavit of support” that they were able to take care of the newcomers.¹⁰³

In May 1924, the Johnson-Reed Act limited the total European immigration to 150,000 per year, and reduced each nationality's allowance to two percent of the population that had entered the United States in 1890.¹⁰⁴ In the census of 1890, significantly fewer Southern and Eastern Europeans were recorded than in the 1920's

⁹⁹ Ngai, “Impossible Subjects”, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ Russel A. Kazal, “The Interwar Origins of the White Ethnic: Race, Residence, and German Philadelphia, 1917-1939”, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23/4 (2004): 78-131 (citation p.80)

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.80.

¹⁰² US Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1960* (Eighty-first edition.), Washington D.C., 1960, p. 91.

¹⁰³ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁴ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, p. 22.

when the law was passed. This effectively reduced immigration from “non-white” regions while making more room for immigration from “white” western Europe. As a result of the 1924 quota restrictions, immigration from Austria was limited to 785 persons per year.¹⁰⁵ The restrictive legislation generally stopped the wave of immigration that had been flooding to the United States since the end of the 19th century.¹⁰⁶

As a result of those restrictions, the Burgenländers’ immigration to America sharply declined. The years 1922 and 1923, for example, brought 10,255 people from the Burgenland to the United States.¹⁰⁷ During the whole decade from 1924 to 1934 however, a mere 3,408 persons came to the United States from the Burgenland.¹⁰⁸ The laws of 1924 led to a redirection of the flow of immigrants. As a consequence, 4,276 Burgenländers moved to other American countries further south, such as Argentina, Brazil, or to Canada in the same decade.¹⁰⁹ The consequences of the Johnson-Reed Act had an impact on many life stories of Burgenländers. Thousands of them were forced to choose another destination in the Americas for their emigration; most of them would have preferred to come to the United States:

“Their parents borrowed money to make the young couple’s emigration possible. In the late 1920’s the United States introduced strictly limited immigration quotas. Because of that, many emigrants from the Burgenland immigrated to South America in those years. Most of them went to Argentina.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ US Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1970 (91st edition.), Washington D.C., 1970, p. 91.

¹⁰⁶ Easterlin, “Economic Characteristics”, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 204.

¹⁰⁸ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 204.

¹⁰⁹ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 204.

¹¹⁰ Dujmovits, “Litselsdorf,” p. 11.

As a result of the changing flow of immigration from the Burgenland, Canada and Argentina became the second and third largest foreign communities of Burgenländers on the American continent with up to 12,000 (Canada) and up to 3,000 (Argentina) descendants.¹¹¹

V.c) Starting New Lives – The Burgenländers in America

“The industrial worker of the Burgenland was created in America” – says historian Walter Dujmovits in describing the transformation of the Burgenländers in America. Although nearly all of them came from a rural background, the bulk of them moved into urban areas and did not return to agriculture. In fact, more than five-sixths of all Austrians, who moved to America during that time, were urban dwellers, and two thirds of the countrymen of the final sixth were not farmers but small-town folk.¹¹²

After their arrival in the port of New York, the Burgenländers began to disperse across the area between Chicago, Pennsylvania and New York. Most of them went to Chicago making it the “biggest Burgenländer city” in the world. Estimates show that nowadays, more than 30,000 people from the Burgenland and their descendants live in Chicago.¹¹³ That is more than twice of the population of Eisenstadt, the biggest city of the Burgenland. The high share of Burgenländers in Chicago led to the building of Burgenländer areas such as the so-called “Little Burgenland.”¹¹⁴ Even today, there are still recognizable areas in which Burgenländers settled in significant numbers, especially

¹¹¹ Burgenländische Gemeinschaft and Burgenlanders in the U.S, in: *Austrian Information* 62 (Jan/Feb 2009): 4-6 (citation p. 4).

¹¹² Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 83.

¹¹³ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 93.

¹¹⁴ Encyclopedia of Chicago, „Austrians“, in Encyclopedia of Chicago, <<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/95.html>> (accessed 16 Sep. 2009).

on the North side of the city and in the Southwestern suburbs.¹¹⁵ Most of the immigrants of the interwar years found work in the stockyards, the railroads, or in related industries such as foundries or construction.¹¹⁶ Others worked in one of the numerous workshops of the city, like the young immigrant Franz Omischl:

*"Shortly after his immigration to Chicago, the twelve year old boy began to sell newspapers. He had to do that very early before he had to go to school. That was a hard work. After the end of his school days, he began to work in a butcher's shop, where he delivered meat."*¹¹⁷

The initial situation of most of the poor immigrants was very challenging. Even children had to earn money in order to pull through. Most immigrants from Burgenland were males who worked in industry and the workshops; there was also a sizeable group of female workers. Many of them found a job as domestic servants or governesses. The wages mentioned in the biographies indicate that the salary of women domestic workers was often better than the wages of other unskilled workers. The life-story of Mary Kelemen, who worked as a governess for a St. Louis' family, indicates that she earned a weakly salary of 25\$ in the mid 1920's.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, Anton Traupmann, who emigrated in the mid-1930's, earned just five \$ in his job in a New York bakery.¹¹⁹ Gustav Perl, who also worked as an unskilled worker in a New York deli during the 1920's, also earned five \$ per day. Theresia Unger, who was employed as

¹¹⁵ Encyclopedia of Chicago, „Austrians“, in Encyclopedia of Chicago, <<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/95.html>> (accessed 16 Sep. 2009).

¹¹⁶ Encyclopedia of Chicago, „Austrians“, in Encyclopedia of Chicago, <<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/95.html>> (accessed 16 Sep. 2009).

¹¹⁷ Dujmovits, „Markt Neuhodis,“ p. 11.

¹¹⁸ Kelemen, „Unterwart“, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Weinhofer, „Sumetendorf,“ p. 11.

unskilled worker in a cigar factory in Allentown, PA, during the mid 1920's was paid a lower salary of seven Dollars per week.¹²⁰

Another important immigration region in the United States was Allentown, PA. Numerous Burgenländers found jobs in the local cement plants and cigar factories. In the city of New York were many immigrants employed in one of the many German breweries in town, such as Schäffer, Rheingold, or Knickerbocker.¹²¹ Although, all of the Burgenländers usually found a job in America, working and living conditions were not very good during the interwar period, especially during the years of the so-called Great Depression. The quality of life of the Burgenländers in the large American cities did not differ much from that of their European relatives.¹²² The main difference was a steady cash income in America high enough to allow people to plan for their future. Burgenländers in Europe earned just enough to barely make it through the winter. They very rarely managed it to build financial reserves in contrast to their relatives in America who usually were salaried employees or workers.

The life-story of Theresia Unger offers some insight into her first hard years in America:

*"Because Theresia just reached age 16, while compulsory education in America lasted until age 18, she had to go to school again. Her uncle could have released her but he did not have enough money. Therefore Theresia had to attend night school. During the day, she worked in a Jewish cigar factory in Allentown. She earned one dollar a day. In the beginning she spent more for her daily consumption of sausages and white bread, what she did not been able to have before."*¹²³

¹²⁰ Weinhofer, "Glasing," p. 4.

¹²¹ Encyclopedia of Chicago, „Austrians“, in Encyclopedia of Chicago, <<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/95.html>> (accessed 16 Sep. 2009).

¹²² Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 47.

¹²³ Weinhofer, "Glasing," p. 04.

This indicates that she was in a bad financial situation in the initial years after her arrival in the “country of limitless possibilities.” Yet it demonstrates that she had many more opportunities to find work and go to school in Allentown than in her native Burgenland. She attended night school to improve her education. And from the very beginning, important aspects of her life like nutrition improved dramatically in America because of the greater variety and richer diet there.

Picture 09
*Economic Life: Construction Workers from the Burgenland in America*¹²⁴



¹²⁴ Museumonline.at, “Berufe in der Neuen Welt,” in Museumonline.at, <http://www.museumonline.at/1998/schools/burgenla/BL_GUSSI/fr3_vorl.htm> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

One problem of the Burgenländer who came to the United States before 1930 was their Hungarian school education. Compared to the Austrian school system, the time in school required in the Hungarian Half of the Dual Monarchy was much shorter. Students in Hungary were only required to attend six years of primary school while in Austria it was eight years.¹²⁵ The main problem for the Burgenländer students, however, was the teaching language Hungarian, not their native German. As a consequence, the educational background of many immigrants was “very low.”¹²⁶ As a result of their low levels of education, many of them found jobs only as unskilled workers. Occupational advancement was not easy for them in many cases. If they wanted to earn more money, they had to work more or faster.

The Depression of the 1930's further deteriorated the situation. For the first time, it was hard to find jobs for the Burgenländer in the United States. Some of them who lost their jobs either returned to Austria or they tried to find work in bigger cities such as New York or Chicago, as the life story of Mary Nikles shows:

“She went to Allentown in Pennsylvania, where she married Joseph Schubitsch with whom she had four daughters. But times were hard. After the world depression of 1929, many people in Pennsylvania lost their jobs. Because of that, the family went back to New York, where one still could find a job.”¹²⁷

VI. Remigration and Immigration – The Burgenländer's American Invasion

How did the Burgenländer assimilate into American society? According to E. Wilder Spaulding, Austrians tended to come to the United States “so quietly and with so

¹²⁵ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 50.

¹²⁶ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p.51.

¹²⁷ Mary Nikles, “Auswandererschicksal. Heugraben”, *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (01/03 2005): 11f (citation p. 11).

little to say about the glories of the old monarchy or the charm of the young republic that Americans are surprised to learn that they were ever anything but American".¹²⁸ Were the Burgenländers such "quiet invaders" too?

VI.a) "Unquiet invaders" – The Burgenländers' Integration into American Society

In many cases, the Burgenländers differed from the rest of the Austrian immigrants to the United States. While most of the "Austrians" from the western half of the monarchy blended into multiethnic society, or at least into German neighborhoods, the Burgenländers built up their own community life. Like other American ethnicities, they created a "symbolic culture" to "unite individuals, local communities, and different organization" in a supra local, compound social unit called ethnic group.¹²⁹

E. Wilder Spaulding noticed that most of the Austrians integrated so quietly that their American contemporaries did not even know about their Austrian roots.¹³⁰ The Burgenländers, as mentioned above, had created an ethnic group. Even to this day, they are well organized in different associations (as the *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft*). They publish journals in America such as the *Eintracht* serving to exchange ideas and opinions within their ethnic group.

Four causes may help explain the unique situation of the Burgenländers in America. First, the overwhelming part of the immigrants came from a poor and rural background that was traditionally dominated by "familial cohesion" and the so-called

¹²⁸ Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Jaroslaw Rokicki, "Polish Ethnic Groups in the United States", in: Walter Hölbling and Reinhold Wagleitner, eds., *The European Emigrant Experience in the U.S.A* (Tübingen: Gunther Narr Verlag, 1992), p. 111-126 (citation p. 112).

¹³⁰ Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 1.

Sippenbewußtsein (one's extended family network).¹³¹ It therefore was not very easy for immigrants to cut off ties with their old home. Quite the contrary, numerous letters, cash remittances, an abundant community life, and last but not least thousands of the remigrants proved that most of the wandering Burgenländer did not want to cut off the ties with their relatives and their culture in their home country. The most important indicator for a firm connection with old home traditions is in the choice of the life-partner. As the majority of the biographies show, it was common practice for the Burgenländer to marry compatriots in their new chosen home. In some instances, people, who had known each other only casually from their time in Austria, found one another in America, as the biography of Mary Kelemen shows:

*"During the first year of her life in America, Mary made friends, went to dances and began dating Joseph Kelemen. Mary grew up in Unterwart with Joseph. The six people who came over on the boat together from Austria on August 12, 1922 were all acquainted with one another. [...] There were not any romantic aspects of Mary's and Joseph's relationship at the time they came over on the boat. Mary's sponsor was Frank Gyorg. At first, Frank wanted Mary to marry his brother, Louis. But Mary was not interested in him. One year after she arrived in America, she married Joseph Kelemen."*¹³²

Marriage among the Burgenländer was a crucial institution to strengthen their ethnic ties. The second cause that supported the Burgenländer in preserving their culture was the fact that many of them immigrated during a relatively short window of time. 10,255 immigrated to the United States in the two years 1922 and 1923.¹³³ The high density of newly arrived compatriots in their new home allowed them to build an abundant community life, complete with traditional *Tanzlokale* (dancing bars), taverns, and churches. But that also made it possible to settle together in communities, such as "little

¹³¹ Knasar, "LIEBE ELTERN," p. 196.

¹³² Kelemen, "Unterwart," p. 12.

¹³³ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 204.

Burgenland” in Chicago or the Burgenländer communities in Allentown and Colplay, PA. Many of them even continued to speak exclusively German during the first years of their stay. Their principal social interactions were solely with their compatriots. They worked together in workshops and companies with other Burgenländers, read one of the numerous Burgenländer-journals, went to Burgenländer-owned taverns after work and attended the holy mass in German on Sundays. Like other ethnicities as Poles or Italians, the Burgenländers had created their own social networks. 73,960 Italians, for example, lived in more than 20 settlements in 1930 Chicago.¹³⁴ Like their 30,000 Burgenländers compatriots who lived in the city at the same time¹³⁵, they also had their own newspapers, inns, bars, and social associations such as the Italian-American civic League that helped them preserving their own ethnic identity.¹³⁶

Theresia Unger’s biography allows us an insight into the situation in Colplay, PA.

“During her work, Theresia met a lot of people from her home-communities, Urbersdorf and Sumetendorf. She worked also with people from Glasing and Postrum. Germans, Hungarians, Croats and Americans [!] were also mixed together in groups. She did not have problems understanding the new language, because she could speak German in every public office. The holy mass in Colplay and also in the neighboring city of Northhampton was held in German.”¹³⁷

We do not have statistics about the rate of Burgenländers who did not speak English during the interwar years. But a survey shows that five percent of all Austrians who lived in New York in 1930 were unable to speak English.¹³⁸ The census data for 1930 revealed a percentage of 6.6 of all foreign-born persons in the United States unable

¹³⁴ Encyclopedia of Chicago, „Italians“, in Encyclopedia of Chicago, <<http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/658.html>> (accessed 10 Feb. 2010).

¹³⁵ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 89.

¹³⁶ Anna Maria Martellone, *“Italian Immigrants from the 1880’s to the 1930’s”*, in: Hölbling and Wagleitner, *The European Emigrant Experience*, p. 171–188, p. 178.

¹³⁷ Weinhofer, *“Glasing”*, p. 04.

¹³⁸ Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 83.

to speak English.¹³⁹ Because of the lower educational background of the Burgenländers, caused through the Hungarian school system, and the much more intensive community life among them, we may assume that the rate among Burgenländers who could not speak English well would be higher than the average Austrian immigrants. A comparison with the average acquisition rate of other immigrant ethnicities with an abundant community life, might be instructive. For example, 18 percent of Italian immigrants and 9.2 percent of Polish immigrants, who lived in New York in 1930, were not able to speak English.¹⁴⁰

These rates might be more pertinent in drawing a realistic picture of the situation among the Burgenländer immigrants. The abundant Burgenländers' community life was, and is still today, a good reflection of the variety of their associations. According to estimations of the Burgenländers publication *Eintracht*, the Burgenländers already claimed 33 cultural associations of their own in 1937.¹⁴¹ Two Burgenländer associations in New York, for example, still elect their "Misses" every year as representatives of the young Burgenländers' generation in America.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Easterlin, "Economic Characteristics", p. 11.

¹⁴⁰ Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 83.

¹⁴¹ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 190.

¹⁴² Burgenländische Gemeinschaft, "New York, New York....", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 381 (01/02 2003).

Picture 10
*Social Life: A Burgenländers Dancing Group*¹⁴³



A third cause for the slow assimilation of the Burgenländers was that they, similar to southern and eastern European immigrants, during the early 1920's and before had been viewed as "racially inferior" by many Americans with a northwest European background.¹⁴⁴ That position, as Russel A. Kazal showed, changed during the inter- and postwar years. Until the 1920's, eastern or southern Europeans commonly were regarded as "non-white". After that decade and particularly during the 1960's and 1970's "white" Americans increasingly developed a "white identity" for all Americans with a European background, regardless of their country of origin. That certainly supported the Burgenländers' integration in their new society because they now were regarded as part of a "white" American population, not as member of a "non-white" minority. According to Kazal, three interwar (and wartime) events can be held responsible for those changes. Firstly, the moving by of tens of thousands of black Southerners into the cities of the North during the 1910's and 1920's – the years of the

¹⁴³ Museumonline.at, "Alte Welt," in Museumonline.at, <http://www.museumonline.at/1998/schools/burgenla/BL_GUSSI/fr_vorl.htm> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Muller, *Immigrants and the American City* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 29.

so-called Great Migration.¹⁴⁵ Those changes supported the creation of “non-black” or “white” identities among the “white” residents of these cities. Secondly, the rise of a racialized nativism that culminated in restriction during the 1920’s.¹⁴⁶ A third cause, responsible for that development was the wartime advent of a conformist, “100% American” nationalism during World War Two.¹⁴⁷ Arnold Hirsch has shown, that the inhabitants of the “Burgenländers city” of Chicago participated intensively in the creation of a new white overall identity during the 1920’s and 1930’s.¹⁴⁸ However it lasted until the 1960’s that the term “white ethnics” itself appears to have entered common usage.¹⁴⁹

A fourth factor responsible for the intense national identification among the Burgenländers in America is the fact that a huge number of them planned to stay in the United States just for a limited period of time. They wanted to practice the same working system they did during their seasonal work schedules in Austria or Hungary.¹⁵⁰ Since most of them wanted to return to Austria after saving a certain amount of money in the United States, they never intended to fully assimilate themselves in the local communities they settled in. The so-called *Partiesystem* was designed to bring groups of immigrants to America to work closely together for a limited time period did not help to integrate the newly arrived Burgenländers in to their respective societies rapidly. In many cases, their assimilation was sped up when the decision was made to stay in the new home country. Most of the Burgenländers made that decision after a few years. Out of the 24,300 Burgenländers who came to the New World between the years 1919 and

¹⁴⁵ Kazal, “White Ethnic,” p.82.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.82.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.82.

¹⁴⁸ Arnold R. Hirsch, "E Pluribus Duo?: Thoughts on 'Whiteness' and Chicago's 'New' Immigration as a Transient Third Tier," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 23 (Summer 2004): 7–44 (citation p.11f).

¹⁴⁹ Kazal, “White Ethnic,” p. 80).

¹⁵⁰ See chapter three.

1939, only 3,500 returned to Austria.¹⁵¹ In total, less than 15 percent immigrants from the Burgenland left the United States after a while. These data correlate with the average total remigration rate in the United States.¹⁵²

But many of the Burgenländers, returned to the Burgenland regularly to visit their relatives. They did so in spite of the costly journey, as described above. A good example for the Burgenländers' sense of *Heimatverbundenheit* (connectedness with their old home) gives the life-story of the Jandrisevits family who emigrated from the village of Tudersdorf:

*"In spite of the enormous size of the immigrants' family, comprising siblings with their spouses, their children and grand-children, the relationship with their old home was never discontinued. Nearly every year, there are visits and return visits. That is mainly due to shape the younger generation's nostalgia for the home of their ancestors."*¹⁵³

One of the reasons why so many Burgenländers remained in the States can be found in the modes of transportation. Steady improvements (price, duration of the passage) allowed the immigrants and their descendants to visit their old home regularly or, as historian Hiroshi Motomura would say, to "stay in close touch with their countries of origin."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 206.

¹⁵² Richard A. Easterlin, "Economic and Social Characteristics of the Immigrants", in: Richard A. Easterlin and Bernard Ward, (eds.), *Immigration. Dimensions of Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 1-34 (citation p. 1).

¹⁵³ Jandristits, "Tudersdorf," p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Hiroshi Motomura, *Americans in Waiting: The Lost Story of Immigration and Citizenship in the United States* (Oxford: University Press, 2006), p.169.

Picture 11
*Burgenländers Visiting Their Families in the “Old Home” by Plane*¹⁵⁵



VI.b) Remigration to Austria

Although nearly every immigrant of the Burgenland came to the United States with the intention to stay just for a limited period of time, only 15% of the Burgenländer immigrants of the interwar period returned to Europe.¹⁵⁶ The economic attractiveness of the United States, as well as the Burgenländers' rich community life and the circumstance that many immigrants got their families to join them in the United States, were the main causes for the decision to stay in the new home. Many of those who decided to remigrate to their old home invested their money in a new farm. The dollars coming back with the immigrants unleashed a farm-building boom in the Burgenland during the interwar period. Especially the financial crisis of 1929, as well as the

¹⁵⁵ Museumonline.at, “Besuche in der Heimat,” Museumonline.at, <http://www.museumonline.at/1998/schools/burgenla/BL_GUSSI/fr4_vorl.htm> (accessed 01 Oct. 2010).

¹⁵⁶ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 206.

Depression of the 1930's forced thousands of the Burgenländers to return to Austria with their savings. The years 1931 to 1933 even brought the Burgenland a so-called "positive migration movement".¹⁵⁷ During these years, the number of Burgenländers leaving America was larger than the number of those arriving in the United States. The Marosits family was among those who left during that time:

*"The world economic crisis embraced not only Europe but also America. In the year 1931, the family finally returned to their old home, only son Robert stayed in the country and moved to New Jersey. The family sold their old house and bought a new one in St. Michael [Austria]. The property was further enlarged through inheritance and purchases to seven hectares."*¹⁵⁸

But it could happen that the remigrants did not accumulate sufficient savings when they returned to their old homes. In that case, they were forced to return to America to save more money, as the following example shows:

*"After the birth of my sister in 1920, my family returned to Poppendorf [Austria]. [...] I was born on July 27th 1922 in Poppendorf. It was a hard time. The land was given to Austria just some months before. My parents became short of money and the house that we inhabited was unsound. My mother decided to return to America in order to earn money for the renovation of the house. She worked in a cigar factory in Philadelphia and returned one year later. But the money did not suffice again. So she went to America for a second time."*¹⁵⁹

In this case the lady had to go to America three times in order to save enough money for the renovation of the house. That kind of remigration was not very unlikely among the returnees of those days. Living in the old home was often more expensive than they expected. In many cases, the people were short of money after a while. Estimates for the

¹⁵⁷ Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁸ Jandrisits, "St. Michael," p. 12.

¹⁵⁹ Walter Medl, "Auswandererschicksal. Poppendorf", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* (11/12 1994): 11f (citation p. 11).

entire population of Austria shows that about 17% to 27% of the people who returned, emigrated at least a second time.¹⁶⁰ The persons, who stayed in America until their retirement and then returned to Austria to spend their retirement in their native land, represent a further, yet smaller group of the remigrants. The life story of the Wechsler family gives us some insight view in their remigration:

*"The parents were hard working people. They retired in 1970. Immediately after that, they went back to Neustift [Austria] to spend their evening of life there. John Wechsler died in 1983 in Neustift and was buried there."*¹⁶¹

VII. Conclusion

Interestingly, the smallest state of post-World War I Austria was her most important emigration region. All in all, more than 62,600 persons from that area left their homes to look for a better life in America.¹⁶² That is very remarkable when one puts this number of people in relation to the total population of the Burgenland. In 1870 254,300 persons lived there, in 1951 276,100 people lived in the Burgenland.¹⁶³ In other words, almost a quarter of the population emigrated due to the hard socio-economic circumstances.

At the beginning of this paper, we posed the question, why so many Burgenländers left their country. The answer to that question lies in its agrarian subsistence agriculture. There was a lack of cities and industrial establishments. The limited size of the land limited the production through expansion of agricultural areas.

¹⁶⁰ Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 76.

¹⁶¹ Walter Dujmovits, "Auswandererschicksal. Neustift bei Güssing", *Burgenländische Gemeinschaft* 386 (11/12 2003).

¹⁶² Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 206.

¹⁶³ Spaulding, *Invaders*, p. 84.

The small financial resources of the farmers did not allow for conditions to grow the population. Yet the Burgenland, at the very time, was in the middle of the demographic transition that produced a huge population surplus. Given the lack of opportunities in the country, the population was forced to develop an emigration tradition. At first, this surplus population searched for working opportunities in the neighboring regions. But with the start of the industrialization of the American East coast, Burgenländers became more and more part of the massive influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe to the United States, known as the second wave of immigration. These immigrants were needed to erect the modern urban infrastructure and provide unskilled labor force in the emerging mass production industries. At that time the classical demographic push factors that forced Burgenländers to work abroad were combined with the important pull factors of the American industrial expansion.

We also analyzed here how the Burgenländers' Atlantic passage unfolded. This passage itself did not really represent a hard time for the immigrants. Quite the contrary, most of them encountered new items such as tropical fruits. For the first time in their lives, they were provided with a balanced and ample diet as well as medical care during the Atlantic passage. Most of them also were not alone on the ship. Numerous immigrant biographies demonstrate that it was very likely that Burgenländers from neighboring villages met each other on the ships. A much bigger problem for willing emigrants was to come up with the relatively high price of the ship ticket. Many of the Burgenländers burdened themselves with debt, which they had to pay back with their first paychecks in the new home country.

Upon arrival, they encountered a new multicultural society. The third aspect of this essay was to investigate the assimilation behavior of the immigrants. Here, we could

not agree with E. Wilder Spaulding's well-known description of all Austrians as so-called "quiet invaders" in the United States. Rather than assimilating quickly, the Burgenländers did not immediately abandon their culture to integrate without a trace in the new culture. Various associations and magazines, many of them still in existence today, speak against Spaulding's thesis. It would be better to compare the Burgenländers' group of immigrants with their Italian and Polish contemporaries. Unlike the rest of the Austrian immigrants, the Burgenländers built up an abundant community life with magazines, associations, taverns, dancing bars and their own churches. In larger communities like Chicago they even settled together and populated entire districts, such as the so-called "Little Burgenland". There are mainly three causes for the strong ethnic identity among the Burgenländers in America.

First, the overwhelming majority of them came from rural and poor background traditionally dominated by "familial cohesion" and a strong tribal consciousness (*Sippenbewußtsein*). Due to this strong cohesion it was very difficult for the immigrants to cut off the ties with their family in the old home. Secondly, a very large group of the Burgenländers, some 10,255, came to the United States in a relatively short time period (1922-1923). This encouraged them to join together in associations, where the old ethnic traditions and rites could be more easily pursued. Thirdly, during the 1920's and partially also the 1930's, the Burgenländers were commonly viewed as Eastern European "non-white" immigrants inferior to the older established American population. That brought about their ethnic separation, at least in their first years in America. Fourthly, they retained their Burgenländers culture in their new homes since many of them planned to return to Austria after they had earned enough savings. They just wanted to stay long enough to save sufficient money to return to Austria and life a

better life. They had practiced seasonal work for centuries to return home. Therefore, they did not deem it necessary to integrate themselves quickly in the new communities, at least not in the very beginning.

VIII. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Burgenländers' Emigration to the United States 1922-1934¹⁶⁴

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of emigrants</u>
1922	5,088
1923	5,167
1924	299
1925	247
1926	239
1927	479
1928	410
1929	649
1930	741
1931	68
1932	35
1933	48
1934	193
Total 1922-1934	13,663

¹⁶⁴ Source: Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p.204.

Appendix 2 - Total Burgenländer Emigration to the Americas 1919-1939¹⁶⁵

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of emigrants from the Burgenlands</u>
1919	604
1920	906
1921	1,873
1922	5,346
1923	6,683
1924	523
1925	601
1926	636
1927	1,555
1928	1,471
1929	1,477
1930	1,202
1931	163
1932	97
1933	113
1934	246
1935	480
1936	220
1937	132
1938	182
1939	44
Total 1919-1939	24,554

¹⁶⁵ Source: Dujmovits, *Amerikawanderung*, p. 204.

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