

## The Decision to Come to America

Peter Gdaniez was born about 1825 in the province of Gdansk Poland (Danzig during German Occupation). Gdansk is located at the northern part of what is now Poland on the Baltic Sea. He married Catherine Radowska about 1851 and had a daughter by the name of Frances Agnes Gdaniez in April 18, 1852.

Sometime between 1853 and 1865, Catherine Radowska passed away leaving Peter with at least one daughter. Peter married Mary, maiden name unknown, about 1869. Peter and Mary Gdaniez had their first son Josef on November 13, 1870. They had at least one daughter who was born on December 13, 1872 and was named Pauline. Most probably there was another daughter named Helen who married a Brown and lived in McKeesport, but we have no dates.

According to reports, Mary was not very nice to Frances and in fact probably was the "stepmother from hell". Probably in the mid to late 1870's Frances married Joseph Gola from Gillnetz Prussia which at the time was in the same province as Danzig. Joseph Gola was born on December 25, 1858 which would have made him about 20 and Frances about 26 when they were married.

September 24, 1880 brought a daughter named Roselia to Joseph and Mary Gola/Golla. We assume that at this time, The German Norddeutscher Lloyd [North German Lloyd] Line was busy bringing emigrants from the oppressed Prussia to America. Between 1875 and 1888, over 1.5 million immigrants would cross into the United States, many on the shipping lines of Norddeutscher Lloyd.

Probably in early 1881, Joseph Gola/Golla decided that it was time to go to America. Some stories have him wanting to get out of the country to avoid military service. One document I have seen from Pennsylvania seems to say he is unfit for military service. Whatever the case, he sold his belongings and took his wife and daughter and left them with her father Peter. He then went to Essen Germany to await the next ship to leave Bremerhaven. According to the story, he departed Germany on the Utopia.

The ship was a disaster from the time it was built. It took on water several times, caught fire, and eventually was listed as being involved with one the worst sea going disasters of it's time. The "Utopia" was a 2,731 gross ton ship, built in 1874 by Robert Duncan & Co, Port Glasgow (engines by D&W.Henderson Ltd, Glasgow). Her details were - length 350.3ft x beam 35.2ft, straight stem, one funnel, three masts (rigged for sail), iron construction, single screw and a speed of 13 knots. There was accommodation for 120-1st, 60-2nd and 600-3rd class passengers. Launched on 14/2/1874 for the Anchor Line of Glasgow, she sailed from Glasgow on her maiden voyage to Menville and New York on 23/5/1874. She started her 12th and last voyage on this service on 28/8/1875, and in 1875-76 completed two Glasgow - Liverpool - Bombay voyages. On 30/4/1876 she inaugurated a new London - New York service, and made 40 round voyages on this route, the last commencing 8/12/1881. In February 1882 she commenced Glasgow - Messina - Naples - New York - Glasgow sailings and between 1882 and 1891 made 17 Glasgow - Mediterranean - New York - Glasgow voyages. She was fitted with triple expansion engines in 1890 and refitted to carry 45-1st and 900-3rd class passengers. On 25/2/1891 she sailed from Trieste for Naples, Gibraltar and New York with 3 saloon passengers, 815 Italian emigrants, a crew of 59 and 3 stowaways. On March 17th, she entered Gibraltar harbour in pitch darkness and a full gale, where the British Mediterranean Fleet was at anchor, crossed too close to the ram bow of the battleship HMS Anson and tore a large hole in the liner's stern quarter. The "Utopia" started to sink rapidly, the lights failed and a panic ensued, the emigrants ran foreward and jumped overboard. The British Fleet sent rescue boats, but the "Utopia" sank within ten minutes with the loss of 520 emigrants, one saloon passenger and 12 crew as well as two of the naval rescuers. Because of the danger to navigation, the ship was refloated by using cofferdams and pumped clear of water and came to the surface 17 weeks after

the disaster. Towed to the River Clyde, she lay idle until 1900, when she was sold and scrapped.

Joseph Gola now sailed to America. Whether he was on the Utopia or not we really don't know, yet. We are still looking over the records in Baltimore. But he may not even be listed as Joseph Gola if he was getting out of Prussia quick, especially if he was using his friends papers. We may never find his name. As the story goes, the ship caught fire off the coast which, according to the details of the ship we can believe. He was brought to the harbor of Baltimore and found work on a truck farm in Woodstock. We believe that he was working on the farm at the entrance to the College on Old Court Road.

Meanwhile, Frances stayed in Prussia with her daughter, living with her father Peter and her step mother Mary, as well as the two kids. Again Mary must not have been nice to her, telling her that her husband had found a new life and she would not hear from him again. Frances went to the local parish priest to ask advice and was told to go to America and find her husband.

Now Joseph's brother and his wife had gotten tickets on a ship of the Norddeutscher Lloyd Line with connections to Baltimore and then by train out of Penn Station to Alpena, Michigan. They accompanied Frances and Rosa to the new world probably late 1881 or early 1882.

Upon their arrival in Baltimore Joseph's brother (Jacob or John) and his wife had to leave Frances and the child Rosa at the train station. Now it was a custom that people from the farms or industries in and around Baltimore would come to the stations when the ships arrived to recruit help. Seeing her dismay, a German woman<sup>2</sup> came to the aid of Frances and Rosa. She immediately got Rosa milk and Frances something to eat.

This woman then took them to live with her on a farm in Granite, Maryland. At this time, Woodstock College was self sufficient with several farms on its 600 plus acres to supply the Jesuits. In tracing out the farms of the time, there were several in the area including the College. But it also could have been the Stomer or Blunt farms. Whatever, they were all in the same close vicinity of each other.

Sometime after this, Joseph Gola/Golla had his employer write a letter to his wife in Prussia. After it was written, they took it to the post office. At the post office, the postmaster told them that he had sent a letter to that same town by a lady with the same last name. This could not be for his wife was still in Prussia. However, the postmaster had other ideas. He directed Joseph Gola/Golla and his employer to the other truck farm in Granite. There, sitting on the porch, was the German lady and his wife Frances.

Joseph, Frances and Rosa left the farm to return to Joseph's employers residence. Although Frances did not want to leave her kind German friend, she wanted to be with her husband.

Joseph did not want to be a farmer the rest of his life and in late 1885, they moved to Dent's Run, Pennsylvania to work on the railroad.

We think that it was about this time that Frances wrote home telling the family what was going on and that there was work to be had in Granite near Woodstock College. Maybe, she wrote them telling them of the German lady who needed labor and encouraged them to come help. Whatever the case, Peter Gdanietz, his wife Mary, his son Josef and at least one daughter

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<sup>1</sup> [North Atlantic Seaway by N.R.P. Bonsor, vol.1, p.460] [Merchant Fleets by Duncan Haws, <sup>1</sup>vol.9, Anchor Line] - [Posted to The ShipsList by Ted Finch - 23 February 1998]

<sup>2</sup> Could this have been Mary Stamm who already living in America and most likely with her husband, managing one of the College farms.

Pauline possibly another one named Helen, left Bremen sometime in March of 1887 bound for America on the SS America, another ship of the Norddeutscher Lloyd Line.

In 1890, the Golla family moved to Penfield, Pennsylvania. It was in Penfield that Mary Dennis went to live after the death of her husband Peter in about 1891. Later, Pauline and her husband John Seduski, moved to Tyler, Pennsylvania in Clearfield County and had her mother Mary move in with them. The family only spoke Polish and John worked in the Coal mines as did his sons.

John Seduski passed away in 1917 during the flu epidemic. We believe that Mary Gdanietz/Dennis passed away right after him though we have no date but probably 1917 or 1918. She would have been 83 or 84 years old.

I have made copies of the stories sent to me by our relatives in Pennsylvania. Please read them as they tell the story much better and with more passion than I ever could.