

When Scherzer landed at Ellis Island on October 21, 1921, a representative of the Immigrant Mission of the Dutch Reformed Church arranged to take him to Penn Station. He knew no English, except for a few phrases he had picked up from the sailors on the voyage from Hamburg.

Scherzer took the first train he could to Pittsburgh and must have seemed confused when he walked out of the train station. A Pittsburgh policeman stopped him and asked if he needed help. But Scherzer didn't understand English, and the officer understood no German. Scherzer managed to communicate that he was looking for a family named Heinlein who lived in or near Pittsburgh.

The policeman took Scherzer to a phone booth where he studied the directory. He found a list of some 20 Heinleins in the telephone book, with one listing for Konrad. The policeman placed the call and handed the phone to John. It was the Heinlein family he has been searching for. A family member arrived at the Pittsburgh station in a Model T Ford and took John to the family farm. It was his second day in America!

First Home in America

The first job that John had in America was husking corn on the farm. The Heinleins had 3 large greenhouses and glass-covered boxes for raising bedding plants for farmers.

John worked for the Heinleins from October 1921 to May 1922, when he got a job with a construction gang at the Vulcan Oil Company in Coraopolis. The company was building an oil refinery along the Ohio River. Scherzer's foreman was a German master carpenter and a member of Zion Lutheran Church, who told his pastor that he had "a new crewman, who was too smart to be a laborer, but he would make a good Lutheran preacher."

In February 1922, while Scherzer was working on the farm clearing land for spring planting, the dinner bell at the farmhouse started ringing. "We looked and saw a cloud of smoke rising where the house was standing. We ran home. Some neighbors arrived to help, but it was already too late; a brisk wind had reduced the house to a pile of smoldering timber."

(There are some things different than what my grandfather, Carl Heinlein, told me.)

These excerpts show historically, socially, and culturally how life was in Germany during the early 1900's and what obstacles and problems people faced every day.