

## 1.5 Maria – the streamlined version<sup>135</sup>

Maria Auguste Kutschera was born in Vienna on 26 January 1905 to Karl Kutschera and Augusta, née Reiner. Although she often used Auguste as her first name until 1938/39, she will be called Maria here. I will come back to the circumstances of her birth after a brief look at her ancestors.

Maria's paternal grandfather was Josef Kutschera (Joseph Kuczera), born in 1809 in the village of Wien in Moravia, today Viden in the Czech Republic. His father was a peasant there, and Josef had at least five siblings.

As a “poor young man” Josef came to Vienna and began to work as a beer seller. Soon he became acquainted with Katharina Finkenstein (1801-1840), one of the owners of one of the oldest beer taverns in Vienna. In 1830 Katharina Finkenstein had an illegitimate son called Joseph, in 1835 an illegitimate daughter called Amalia; both children were legitimized only in 1840, when Josef Kutschera married Katharina on her death bed.

With her death Josef's position changed from that of a brewery manager to that of “co-owner of a house”. He was still an innkeeper when in 1848 revolutions broke out in various places in Europe, among them quite prominently in Vienna. A national parliament, the *Reichstag* (imperial diet), was elected that year – and Josef Kutschera became a parliamentarian for the “democratic left” for his home county of Groß-Meseritsch in Moravia.

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<sup>135</sup> Sources, many more details, further arguments, and nuances in interpretation can be found in the preceding chapters.

However, the *Reichstag*, also called “Kremsierer parliament” after it had to move to Kremsier (Kromeriz) in Moravia, was dissolved in 1849 when it became too “progressive”. Although Josef’s activity in parliament had not been too noticeable, he did have some difficulties with the authorities when he returned to Vienna and took up his profession as an innkeeper again.

In 1852, Josef was listed in a directory as an innkeeper in Alsergrund nr. 260, today’s Boltzmannngasse in Vienna’s 9<sup>th</sup> district; he had a son; and he married the child’s mother. The son, born on 10 January 1852, was baptized “Carolus” (Karl) on 16 January, and legitimized by Josef marrying Karl’s mother, Anna Elisabeth Rittner, born 1821 in Freihung in the Upper Palatinate in Bavaria, on 16 February 1852.

Josef and Anna had a further three sons, one of whom died about eight weeks after his birth, and a daughter called Maria, who was born in 1853. In the early 1860s Josef again participated in politics and became elected to the district council for Alsergrund in 1863 and 1865. He died of a stroke on 14 January 1867, much lamented, but also soon forgotten, by his liberal friends.

Anna married another innkeeper, Michael Beutl (also written Beitl; born 1836), in 1870. Her daughter Maria Kutschera married a hotel manager, Georg Deininger, from Graz/Styria in 1874. Michael Beutl unexpectedly died in 1879, so Elise Beitl, as Anna called herself now, was once more a widow. In the 1880s, Maria Deininger came back to Vienna, after her divorce from Georg Deininger, and managed several coffee houses in succession.

We do not know what Karl Kutschera did during the first 35 years of his life, except that he served for some time in Austria’s territorial army. He suddenly appears on 20 June 1887 in Graz, marrying Clara Reiner. Clara had been born on 31 May 1868 in Leopers-

dorf, now a part of Kindberg in Styria, to Katharina Hatzmann (1846-?), one of at least six children of a baker in Krieglach/Styria. Soon after Clara's birth a man asked for his name to be entered into the church record as her father: Karl Reiner. He had been born in 1838 in Freudenberg/Carinthia as one of at least six children of a hammersmith and his wife from South Styria (today in Slovenia). Two of his brothers died very soon after their birth, but one, Constantin (1844-1914), would become quite successful as a businessman and local politician in Trofaiach/Styria.

In 1870 Katharina gave birth to another illegitimate girl, Johanna; only in 1888 was she legitimized by Karl Rainer. (The family used both spellings haphazardly.) On 27 April 1873, Karl Reiner and Katharina Hatzmann finally married in Wiener Neustadt (Lower Austria), on 14 November 1873 Katharina gave birth there to Maria Reiner. And on 14 September 1876, another girl was born to them in St. Ruprecht near Klagenfurt/Carinthia: Augusta Reiner.

Let us return to the marriage of Karl and Clara in Graz in 1887, where Constantin Reiner was one of the witnesses. Karl had a country inn in Mürssteg, a village in Styria well-known for an imperial hunting lodge, but seems to have lived also in Graz. It was in Graz that, on 16 July 1888, Carolus Joannes (Karl Johann) was born to Clara and Karl. And it was in Graz, on 28 October 1888, that disaster struck the young family. Returning in the evening from an excursion to the environs of Graz, the somewhat notorious driver of the fiacre mistook a canal for the street and drove the buggy in. Karl escaped, but it soon turned out that Clara had been trapped under the carriage which was swept away, and had drowned. Karl jr. apparently had not accompanied them.

After the trial of the driver in December 1888, Karl vanishes from the record for 15 years. It is likely that Karl did not raise Karl jr.,

but whether he really was given into the care of the foster family that would later care for “our” Maria, as she claims, we do not know. Maria would also later claim that her father had traveled the world. This is unlikely – and it does seem to have escaped notice that the places where Karl allegedly had been in the 1890s and/or very early 1900s were all places where Georg von Trapp had been on his two voyages to the Pacific and to China between 1898 and 1901.

In 1892, Maria’s paternal grandmother, Anna “Elise” Beitzl, formerly Kutschera, née Rittner, died in Vienna. In 1895 Karl Reiner, Maria’s maternal grandfather, died in the Styrian mental asylum Feldhof near Graz. His widow, Katharina, née Hatzmann, may have married again before 1900, and was alive in 1904, but there is no further information about her.

After the death of her divorced husband, Maria Deininger, née Kutschera, married again in 1896: Eduard Tobisch, a high official at the Austrian Postal Savings Bank. Yet he died suddenly of a stroke in 1902.

Clara Reiner’s sisters seem to have moved to Maria Enzersdorf in Lower Austria in the late 1890s. Maria Reiner had two illegitimate children there in 1899, one of them still-born; in the same year Johanna Reiner married Heinrich Thomas Brickmayer and then moved to Vienna.

Augusta Reiner (Rainer), too, was in Maria Enzersdorf when she married Karl Kutschera on 26 October 1903. Because Clara and Augusta had been sisters, Karl needed special permission from the church and the state to marry. At the time Karl was described as a hotel commissionaire living in Vienna’s 8<sup>th</sup> district; according to an entry in the Viennese directory he was a traveling courier, a

man who prepared journeys for clients, also going in advance to the location to ensure everything runs smoothly.

How Karl and Augusta had met (again?) will likely remain unknown. Maria's version that Karl had noticed Augusta when visiting Clara's grave – in Graz, not in some Tyrolean village – is possible, but not really likely. In any case, Augusta now moved to Vienna.

In 1904 Maria Reiner married Franz Seraph Mayer, an insurance official from Vienna and the father of her daughter. At least until 1906 both lived at Mariazellergasse no. 10 in Maria Enzersdorf.

So, to repeat, on 26 January 1905 Maria Auguste Kutschera was born. We can be quite certain that she was born in the *Gebäranstalt*, the birth clinic, of the Alservorstadtkrankenhaus (Alservorstadt hospital) in Vienna's 8<sup>th</sup> district – and that she was baptized there on 29 January 1905 with Maria Mayer, her aunt, as godmother – because we have the entry in the birth register of that institution, complete with the name of the mid-wife there. It is very unlikely that Maria was born on a train to Vienna, as she claimed, and practically impossible that the train came from Tyrol, because neither the Kutschera nor the Reiner family was connected in any way to Tyrol.

And then disaster struck again: Augusta Kutschera died of pulmonary tuberculosis on 21 November 1905, at the Kutscheras' flat at Fuhrmannngasse no. 6 in the 8<sup>th</sup> district. And again Karl gave his child away: until 11 May 1906 Maria was registered at Mariazellergasse no. 10 in Maria Enzersdorf, where her aunt and godmother Maria lived. On that date her residence registration changed to Kirchengasse no. 105 (the name changed to Schrottensteingasse in 1909) in Kagran (nowadays Vienna's 22<sup>nd</sup> district), as she be-

came a *Kostkind*, a child for whose upkeep the foster parents get paid, of Josef Kramer.

One mystery that will likely never be solved is why Maria Mayer did not take care of Maria for a longer time, and why none of her other rather close relatives in Vienna stepped in: Maria Tobisch, her paternal aunt, or Johanna Bricklmayer, her maternal aunt. That Karl would have raised his daughter himself was probably seen as a rather unpractical proposition in those days.

Instead, Maria came to Josef Kramer, whose wife Katharina was in fact related to Maria: Katharina's paternal grandmother was Karl Kutschera's maternal grandmother, i.e., the mother of Anna Rittner, Josef Kutschera's second wife.

Josef Kramer, a cook, had been born in 1842 in St. Peter in the Comitat Wieselburg in Hungary and in 1869 had married in Vienna Anna *Katharina* Dimler, born in Freihung in Bavaria in 1842. They had eight children, of whom four died before Maria came into the family, so she only knew: Anna "Anni" (1877–1928) – Maria's paternal grandmother was her godmother –, Joseph "Pepi" (1879–1947), Catharina "Kathy" (1881–1934) – her godmother had been Maria Deininger, née Kutschera –, and Alfred (1885–1947?).

Maria's impressions of her childhood, as given in her 1972 autobiography "Maria", are contradictory: "I had never known a real warmth of homelife", she wrote, but about 30 pages earlier we find: "My foster mother was very kind, as was my foster father", they "took me in most willingly and lovingly". Maria also complains that the Kramers did not have small children and that she was feeling so lonesome that she imagined a large family around a farmer she called Paultraxl. Yet, an Ignaz Paultraxl (1889-1954),

poultry farmer, actually lived only a few hundred yards from Maria's place in Kagran.

Maria's claim that her foster father died when she was "very young" is belied immediately afterwards by her remark that "[t]he only family I knew as a child were my foster parents". In fact, Josef Kramer died in 1914, when Maria was nine years old.

In 1972 Maria also reminisced about her father, that he had a large apartment filled with books and music instruments, with one room turned into an aviary, and so on. Yet, we know in detail what Karl Kutschera's apartment contained when he died, down to how many pairs of socks he owned, and this information is completely incompatible with Maria's descriptions.

Also, her father was not an engineer, as she claims, but still a hotel commissionaire, at least until 1914, when he was described as "private", likely because he had retired. (Maria also gives the impression that her father might have been something of an "intellectual"; there is no evidence for this.) That he sometimes appeared out of the blue to take Maria on travels might be explained by his occupation, when he had to prepare a customer's journey and decided to have Maria accompany him.

In any case, Karl did not die when Maria was nine years, as she writes, but a year later, on 27 August 1915 in his flat at Jenuhgasse no. 7 in Vienna's 14<sup>th</sup> district. Strangely enough, several relatives were noticed by the police, but only one was named in the report: Franz Mayer. He also had keys to cabinets in Karl's flat – and, as it turned out later, he owed Karl money.

Karl jr., an engineer who was serving in the Great War, arrived on 31 August, one day after Karl's burial, and found Karl's testament. Karl had left all his money to Maria, because Karl jr. already had received about the same sum from his uncle Constantin Reiner

after his death in 1914. (Constantin, without children of his own, had left quite large amounts to several relatives, including Maria Mayer, but not to Maria, the only child of his niece Augusta.)

It is not surprising that the unmarried Karl jr., who was in any case going back to the war, did not, after all, petition for guardianship of his half-sister Maria. Yet, again, apparently none of Maria's aunts on either side wanted to take her in: not Maria Mayer (died in 1959 in Czechoslovakia), nor Johanna Bricklmayer (died in 1922 in Vienna), nor Maria Tobisch (died in 1926 in Vienna). Karl jr. nominated Franz Kugler (1883–1953), a judge and, since 1914, the husband of “Anni” Kramer; the proposal was immediately accepted by the authorities. Maria's childhood came to an end.

Franz Kugler, “Uncle Franz”, has been painted by Maria as a socialist, an atheist, and as someone who hit her often and without reason. The latter charge is possibly true – and unprovable, although Maria's “explanation”, that he died in a mental asylum, is not true –, yet the first two are not very plausible. As a young judge, even in the late monarchy, it would have been rather unusual to be an outspoken atheist and socialist. Moreover, one would have expected Franz to leave the church when it no longer was deemed necessary to pretend, i.e., in 1919 or so, but he did not.

Surprisingly, there is another person who would fit the first two “charges”, but who is never mentioned by Maria: Maria (Marie) Kramer (1884–1973), née Herzmansky, later Deutsch, “Pepi's” wife during the 1910s. (Her brother Friedrich Herzmansky (1881–1948) was Maria's “puppy love”: “Uncle Fritz”.) Marie, a teacher like her husband, left the Catholic Church already in 1917 and was very active in socialist/social-democratic politics after the fall of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918. Personally I also consider it likely that she was Maria's role model and the reason why she wanted



to become a teacher herself, although this cannot be proved, of course.

There is no reason to assume that Maria's school career was different from that of many Viennese girls. After five years of elementary school, from 1911 to 1916, she proceeded to a *Bürgerschule* (an extended elementary school rather than a junior high). In 1919 she graduated and had to decide what to do. Allegedly in conflict with "Uncle Franz", she wished to become a teacher. (With a graduation certificate from a *Bürgerschule* she already had one qualification necessary for beginning training as an elementary school teacher; the other one was a test.)

At the time, Viennese newspapers reported a glut of female teachers and, correctly, predicted that the situation would become even worse. Vienna had three teachers colleges for women, but Maria either attended the "Staats-Lehrerinnenbildungsanstalt" (state-run women teachers training institute) at Hegelgasse nr. 14 in the 1<sup>st</sup> district, or the "Österreichische Staatserziehungsanstalt für Mädchen in Wien III" (Austrian state-run educational institution for girls in Vienna III) at Boerhaavegasse nr. 15 (3<sup>rd</sup> district), which was attached to a women teachers training institute. The main argument for the latter is that it was the only institution providing board and lodging – and Maria claimed she had a scholarship providing for this. The main argument for the former is that it would better correspond to the name Maria claimed for her college: the "State Teachers' College of Progressive Education".

All teachers colleges in Austria shared a flaw since their inception: compulsory schooling ended at the age of 14, but teachers training could start only a year later. Most prospective teachers thus took a preparatory course at one of colleges, but we do not know whether Maria's scholarship provided for that year, too. It is, how-

ever, likely, that Maria took such a course in 1919/20, then started the “official” training in 1920 and graduated after four years in 1924, although no records seem to have survived.

If we believe her 1972 autobiography, she said “good-bye” to her foster family when she started teachers college. I do not believe this because her foster mother, Katharina Kramer, only died in 1929, still living at the same address in Kagran. As to Karl jr., her half-brother, Maria claims that she met him for the first time after her graduation – likely from *Bürgerschule* in 1919 –, visited him a couple of times, but “[t]hen we lost track of each other again until after the [second world] war.” Maria then heard that Karl jr. had been bombed out and sent him care packages. Even though some of the details of Maria’s story about Karl jr.’s death cannot be proved, part of it is true: Karl jr. died in a Viennese hospital from a heart attack on Christmas Eve 1947 – not on Christmas Eve 1948 from pneumonia, as claimed by Maria –, while Maria was so ill at the same time that she missed the Christmas concerts of the Trapp Family Singers in New York, possibly even receiving the Last Sacraments on Christmas Eve 1947 in a hospital in Peoria, Illinois.

Maria’s story about what happened after her graduation from teachers college runs as follows: during most of the time at teachers college Maria had been without religious faith, and anti-Catholic. Only on Easter of her graduation year was she converted back by a Jesuit priest in Vienna. Her post-graduation trip brought her to the high Alps, where she had an epiphany and immediately boarded a train to Salzburg; having no idea about the customs and manners of the Church she sought out the strictest convent, was directed to Nonnberg Abbey, and was interviewed by the abbess on the day of her arrival. She told her that she wanted to become a nun, and that no-one had sent her because in that case she would

not be there; the abbess decided to take her in and Maria began teaching at the abbey's school. About two years later, in October, shortly after the school year had begun, Georg von Trapp sought a live-in tutor for his sickly daughter Maria (II). Against her wishes Maria was sent to him immediately for a projected ten months, fell in love with Georg's children – and, again rather against her wishes, was proposed by Georg, but married him mostly on the advice of the abbess.

To be blunt, I do not believe any part of this story. Having already discussed the details in chapters 1.4.4 to 1.4.6, I will lay out here my reconstruction of what happened. While this has to be regarded as speculative, it is, in my opinion, not only more plausible, but also better grounded in the few things we know from “external” sources about Maria during that time.

If Maria really had lost her faith at some stage in the late 1910s, she soon recovered it. And perhaps it was not so much a loss of religious faith itself, but rather of faith in the Church. Maria herself later claimed that she had been a member of “Bund Neuland”, a Catholic youth organization – not endorsed by the Catholic Church, though, and viewed by parts of its hierarchy with suspicion – that was, among other things, interested in liturgical reform and in opening up towards workers. (Georg Trapp's daughters Agathe and Maria also mention her membership in “Bund Neuland”.) Such a membership – not necessarily in “Bund Neuland” itself – would have begun early during her time at teachers college, not in the rather few months busy with preparing for her final examinations. (It also meant that Maria had been much more knowledgeable about the Church than she claims to have been.)

It is probably not a coincidence that “Jungösterreich”, of which “Bund Neuland” had split off, held its federal meeting in Salzburg

from 8 to 13 July 1924. This included female members of “Jung-österreich” and of “Bund Neuland” singing at Nonnberg church under the personal direction of the abbess of Nonnberg. This, and other meetings in Salzburg for Viennese teachers in the summer of 1924, would have provided opportunities for Maria to find a job in a city to which she had no previous connection whatsoever. Due to the serious over-supply of teachers at the time, especially female ones – not just in Vienna, but all over Austria – it was extremely difficult to find a job. It was necessary, however, because Maria did not yet have the qualification to become a tenured teacher: Like all other teachers college graduates she first had to show two years of teaching experience and then pass another examination to be eligible for a permanent job at all.

We know from a record book held at Nonnberg Abbey that Maria started there on 18 September 1924. That seems to have been the day regular lessons of the school year 1924/25 started in Salzburg, so Maria started on that day at Nonnberg Abbey (girls’) school, but not as a teacher, but likely as an *Erzieherin*. Her job was to teach a bit, but mainly to share in the life of her charges, especially outside classes, to form their character and educate them universally.

There is nothing to indicate that she had any other connection to Nonnberg Abbey at this time. Only in her second year, 1925/26, is she reported to have worn a “postulant’s collar” to show that she had entered the convent at its lowest rung. Whether this was because Maria really wanted to become a nun, or rather as an “insurance policy”, I do not know. (While there is no doubt that she was very religious later, as, for example, her youngest son Johannes has confirmed several times, we do not know how much this was true already in the mid-1920s.)

With the end of the 1925/26 school year, the Nonnberg school let Maria go. During the summer holidays of 1926 she was a short-term live-in *Erzieherin* for the siblings of one of her charges at Nonnberg school, but a career as a teacher would have been nearly impossible by that time, and prospects to live as an *Erzieherin*, or as a nun, were poor, too.

According to the record book of Nonnberg Abbey, Maria left (her job as an *Erzieherin*?) on 23 August 1926. She may have been back at the convent – not at the abbey school – after her holiday job. On 16 September 1926 lessons began again in Salzburg; around that time Georg (von) Trapp, a widower with seven children, looked for a live-in tutor for his daughter Maria. This was a chance for “our” Maria, perhaps even *the* chance. On 18 December 1926, about three months after coming to the Villa Trapp, Maria finally changed her residence registration from Schrottensteingasse no. 105 in Vienna to Salzburg. And whatever really went on between Georg – 47 years old, of good social standing, and rich – and Maria – 22 years old, a commoner without money, and with scarcely any career prospects –, they married on 26 November 1927 at Nonnberg Abbey church. Maria’s career as a wife and mother began.



## 2.8 Summary: The Trapps until early 1938

Georg Ritter von Trapp was born on 4 April 1880 in Zara/Dalmatia (now Zadar/Croatia) to August Ritter von Trapp (1836–1884) and his wife Hedwig, née Wepler (1855–1911). Both parents had been born on the territory of today's state of Hesse/Germany; August's ancestors had come from Lorraine in the first half of the seventeenth century. The family had no connection with Tyrol, especially not with the noble family Trapp there.

August apparently had come to Austria-Hungary to join its navy. In 1874, as a captain, he managed to save nearly the entire crew of the brig "Säida"; as a reward, he was ennobled and made a hereditary knight in 1877, becoming August Ritter von Trapp.

A year earlier, August had married Hedwig; besides Georg they had another son, Werner (1881–1915), who would die on a Galician battlefield during the Great War, and a daughter, "Hede" (1877–1947), who became a known painter and poet. The family was Lutheran in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, although Werner converted to Roman Catholicism in 1907, and Georg in about 1925.

After August's death, the Trapps finally settled in Fiume (Rijeka/Croatia) where Georg attended a navy high-school from 1894 to 1898. After graduation, he was enlisted in the Austro-Hungarian Navy and went on a year-long journey to the Pacific. Having come back in 1899, Georg was called up to leave on 23 June 1900 on the torpedo cruiser "Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia" for China as part of the rather small Austro-Hungarian squadron sent to help international forces to quell the Boxer Uprising. Most of the time Georg lived there "like in peacetime", but on 20 September 1900 he saw some of the horrors of war when he participated

in taking the Peitang (Beidang) Forts in today's Tianjin. In May 1901 he transferred in Nagasaki/Japan from the "Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia" to the "Donau" and returned to Austria-Hungary. (On neither journey did he "circumnavigate" the globe.)

After his return he slowly rose up the ranks. In 1908 he was promoted to ship-of-the-line lieutenant 2<sup>nd</sup> class and despatched to Fiume to supervise the construction of submarines there. Apparently at the launch of the submarine "U 5" in 1909, Georg met Agathe Whitehead.

Agathe's father, John Whitehead (1854–1902), the head of the Whitehead torpedo factory in Fiume, was the son of the inventor of the torpedo, Robert Whitehead (1823–1905), and, although British, had been born in Fiume. In 1887 he married Agatha countess Breunner-Enkevoerth (1859–1945), a member of the higher Austrian nobility, and had six children with her, all raised as Catholics, like their mother, not Anglicans, like their father.

Agathe, who was born on 14 June 1891 in Fiume, was their third child; especially her brothers Frank "Uncle Franky" (1889–1950) and Robert "Uncle Bobby" (1893–1961) would later play a role also in Georg's life.

On 14 January 1911 Georg and Agathe married in Fiume, but then lived in Pola/Istria (now Pula/Croatia). On 1 November 1911, their first child, Rupert, was born there; on 12 March 1913, their daughter Agathe (II).

Some time after the outbreak of the First World War the family – without Georg, of course, who commanded a torpedo boat – moved inland to Thumersbach/Erlberg near Zell am See in the Austrian state of Salzburg. Here the Whiteheads, who were very rich, had a villa, the Erlhof, where the Trapps now lived with Aga-



the's mother, two of Agathe's sisters, and the widow of Werner von Trapp.

Several Trapps were born at the Erlhof: on 28 September 1914 Maria (II), on 21 December 1915 Werner (named after his deceased uncle), and on 28 July 1917 Hedwig. In the meantime, Georg became a war hero: five days after taking command of the "U 5", which he had helped to launch in 1909, he succeeded in sinking the French battle cruiser "Léon Gambetta" during the night of 27 April 1915. (684 French sailors died.) This helped "convince" the Allied forces to stay out of most of the Adriatic, giving the Austro-Hungarian Navy more room. On 20 August 1915 Georg also managed to sink an Italian submarine, the "Ne-reide". On 10 October he took command of the captured French submarine "U 14" (formerly the "Curie") which, after unrestricted submarine warfare had been declared in 1917, he used to sink eleven, mostly British or Italian, cargo ships.

Especially for sinking the "Léon Gambetta" Georg had been decorated with various orders, but only in May 1918 was he promoted to corvette captain, one rank below the one his father August had attained at the end of his career. Already in June 1917, Georg had also applied for the highest military order of the Habsburg monarchy, the Militär-Maria Theresien-Orden, but only in April 1924, after a rejection in 1921, did he receive it. (Here the son outshone the father.) Had Georg received this order before the end of the monarchy, he could have applied to become a *Freiherr*, one rank higher than *Ritter*. Then he would have been correctly addressed as *Baron*. (The rank of baron did not exist in the Austrian part of the Habsburg monarchy, only the style, i.e., the form of address.) But this was not to be, so neither Georg nor any of his family members ever were "barons" or "baronesses".

In August 1918 Georg became commander of a submarine base in the Gulf of Cattaro; here he had to face in early November the end of the Great War, of the Habsburg monarchy, and of his military career.

With the end of the war, Georg and his family became Italian citizens because Trieste, where Georg had his legal domicile (“inherited” from his father), was annexed by Italy. At first “Deutsch-österreich” (German-Austria), as it called itself briefly, did not allow former Austro-Hungarians from Galicia, Dalmatia and Istria to become Austrians. This was most likely done to prevent Galician Jews from becoming Austrian citizens, with the inclusion of Dalmatia and Istria in the law serving as a figleaf. Georg could have opted for Austrian citizenship in 1920/21, and could have applied for it later, but apparently was not interested. The family stayed Italian, although Rupert would change to Austrian citizenship in 1933, while studying medicine at the University of Innsbruck. Werner would try to do the same in 1936, but Salzburg-Aigen raised the price for the right of domicile there to a level that Georg was unable to pay.

An Austrian law of 3 April 1919, which is still in force, abolished all noble titles: Georg Ritter von Trapp became Georg Trapp, although especially in the 1930s the “von” (or “v.”) was used again.

One more change in 1919 was the family’s move from the Erlhof to the adjacent former hotel Kitzsteinhorn, owned by Frank Whitehead. Yet, Johanna Trapp was still born at the Erlhof on 7 September 1919. When the lower floor of the Kitzsteinhorn was flooded in 1920, the family moved to the Martinschlüssel in Klosterneuburg/Lower Austria, a small castle owned by Robert Whitehead, at the end of 1920, beginning of 1921. On 17 February 1921 Martina Trapp was born there. And in the Martinschlüssel Agathe

contracted scarlet fever in January 1922, which may have led to her death on 3 September 1922.

The following year Georg bought a large house in Aigen near Salzburg, had it rebuilt, and, in April 1925, moved with his family into the “Villa Trapp”. In September 1926 Maria Kutschera went there as an *Erzieherin* or governess for Maria II, who had been ill; in November 1927 Georg and Maria married, on 8 February 1929 Rosmarie was born, and on 14 May 1931 Eleonore, both at the Villa Trapp.

Since about 1920 Georg also had taken up a new career as a businessman. Using the wealth of his wife Agathe, and usually working with his in-laws Frank and Robert Whitehead as well as other members of the extended Whitehead family, he became a director of several shipping companies, especially between 1921 and 1923, but also of other types of company, such as sawmills, or a ceramics producer. From 1928 to 1934 he was a director at a rather large Lower Austrian metalworks with subsidiaries in Berlin and Budapest.

It is not known how successful Georg was as a businessman. He did, however, make one fatal mistake by investing all of his family’s money in the Bankhaus Lammer, the only bank in Austria founded by a woman, Auguste Lammer (1885–1937). Lammer, who had been acquainted with Georg’s wife Agathe, had established the bank in Zell am See with the help of Frank Whitehead, but financial problems developed already in the mid-1920s. A mixture of wrong decisions, fraudulent behavior, and external shocks led the bank to become technically insolvent in 1931, although this only began to be noticed by the public in the second half of 1933.

At least since 1934 Georg was involved in the creditors’ council; at the trial of Auguste Lammer he freely admitted that he had in-

vested because she had promised him a return of eight to ten percent. In 1935 Lammer was sentenced for bankruptcy, fraud and embezzlement, but died before the end of her prison term. Georg likely lost more than 450,000 Schilling – though some money was returned in 1944, possibly only to be lost again with the end of the war. With this amount he could, in theory, have bought in 1934 about eight one-family villas (seven rooms, bath) in Aigen, each with about an acre of garden and forest. Yet, he still had the Villa Trapp, as well as undeveloped real estate in Pullach near Munich.

With the loss of their money the Trapps had to economize and to find different sources of income: They drastically reduced their household staff; rented out rooms in the villa; Georg wrote his wartime memoirs, “Bis zum letzten Flaggenschuß” (“To the Last Salute”); and gave lectures about these, but also other parts of his military career.

And music would provide further income. The Trapp family had been musically interested and talented since the beginning: both Georg and Agathe played instruments well: he, for example, the violin, she, the piano. The children, too, already began playing instruments and singing in the 1920s. While Georg was especially fond of *Schrammelmusik*, a kind of Viennese folk music, Maria brought different kinds of music, especially part singing and madrigals, into the family. From February 1931 to June 1932, Agathe II, Johanna, Maria II, Martina and Werner attended preparatory music classes, theory as well as playing instruments, at the “Mozarteum”, a Salzburg music school that catered to beginners up to near-professionals.

Until autumn 1934 it was mostly visitors to the Villa Trapp who were able to listen to the family playing and singing. Whether encouraged by them, or on their own initiative, the Trapps entered

a regional folk song competition in Salzburg on 1 and 2 September 1934 and won the prize in the group category. (This was very likely the only music competition they ever entered.) On 5 January 1935 the Trapp family sang for the first time on Austrian radio; a broadcast of 6 December 1935 included vocal music and vocal music with instruments, with Georg playing the first violin, and Maria's name missing from the announcements.

Since about Easter 1935 the Catholic priest, organist, composer and conductor Dr. Franz Wasner (28 December 1905 – 21 June 1992) trained the Trapp family choir and soon brought it to a level that would earn it recognition in all of Austria. (In 1937 and 1938 Wasner was also an editor of a regionally important Salzburg church newspaper.)

On 29 January 1936 the “Kulturgemeinschaft der Ostmärkischen Sturmsharen” (cultural community of the Eastern March storm-troopers) – a Catholic-fascist militia turned cultural organization, led by the Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg – organized an “Österreichischer Abend” (Austrian evening), at which Schuschnigg gave the main speech, and the Trapps (with Maria and Wasner, but now without Georg) performed among others.

During 1936 the Trapps gave various concerts under various names, until, towards the end of the year, they decided on “Salzburger Kammerchor Trapp” (Salzburg chamber choir Trapp). In March 1937 they possibly gave their first concert outside Austria, in Berlin, in May Radio Munich featured them in a variety program.

On 21 August 1937 the “Salzburger Kammerchor Trapp” gave an important concert at the “Mozarteum” in Salzburg. Although the “Salzburger Festspiele” (Salzburg festival) was held at this time, the concert was not part of the festival. In fact, the famous opera singer Lotte Lehmann (1888–1976), who seems to have been fas-

cinated by the Trapps, tried to get their concert to be associated with the Salzburg Festival, but was rebuffed by the organizer.

Yet, around the time of that concert several invitations arrived for concerts outside Austria, so the “Salzburger Kammerchor Trapp” would sing in London, Brussels, Paris and a few other places in December 1937; an Italian tour followed in January and early February 1938, culminating in a private concert for Benito Mussolini, the Italian *duce*, in Rome, and in the Trapps singing at a public audience of Pope Pius XI.

Concerts with the Austrofascist leader Schuschnigg attending, for the archetypal fascist Mussolini, and for Zita, the former empress of Austria and queen of Hungary, and her son Otto Habsburg, prove that for Georg and Maria, at best, any possible distaste for anti-democratic politics was trumped by business. Certainly neither can be called “anti-fascist”, nor is there any sign that they had an interest in democracy. There is hardly any reliable information on the concrete political views of Georg or Maria, let alone of the by now adult or nearly-adult children. German assessments in 1937 and 1938 saw them as “Catholic-legitimist”, meaning they considered the Habsburg monarchy as the only legitimate form of government for Austria. (The Trapps relation to Germany will be covered in the next chapter.)

To all appearances, the Trapps, especially Georg and Maria, were not uncomfortable with Austrofascism, with its strong Catholic component and regard for monarchy. They certainly did not swim against the tide, although, based on the available evidence, they were not necessarily “propagandists”, either. And the Austrian *Ständestaat* (corporate state), and its press, was comfortable with the (technically Italian) Trapps, although this did not necessarily

extend to such favors as letting them claim to be part of the Salzburg Festival.

Concerning the Trapps' patriotism I argue that Georg was not an "Austrian patriot": his homeland had been the Habsburg monarchy, and here the Adriatic part. I do not see any strong identification with Austria in the geographical limits since the end of 1918; nor, however, with Italy, even though he kept its citizenship after it had been forced upon him. This refusal to take Austrian citizenship, together with his wish to emigrate to the Pacific with his family, already expressed rather soon after the death of Agathe, shows that his heart was not in Austria.

Whether Maria strongly identified herself as Austrian, or at least with a particular region, we do not really know. By the late 1930s her identification with the Catholic Church may even have eclipsed any "patriotism". The Trapp children's views are, again, unknown.





### 3.6 Synthesis

After the *Anschluss*, Germany's annexation of Austria on 13 March 1938, Georg and the Trapps were inundated with "invitations" and "offers" by the Nazis: Rupert, who had just graduated, was to become a high-ranking doctor at a Vienna hospital; Georg was asked to command a German submarine; the choir was selected to sing on Hitler's birthday. But the Trapps chose their moral principles over fame and fortune beckoning, and said "No" to Hitler and the Nazis. Fearing reprisals by the spurned suitor, they signed a contract for a tour in the United States with Charles Wagner, an American music manager, and "fled", or "escaped from", Austria just in time in summer 1938, coming via Italy and London to the United States, in effect as political refugees.

That, in a nutshell, has been the accepted story since Maria's 1949 memoirs "The Story of the Trapp Family Singers".

It is also a deeply implausible story, for which no documentary evidence has ever been offered. Moreover, whether consciously or not, it uses, and bolsters, the myth of Austria as the "first victim" of national socialism.

Therefore I ask you, the reader, to re-file everything you have seen, heard or read before about the Trapps in 1938 under "fiction". In the following I will present a more plausible, and less dramatic, storyline which I am certain comes much closer to the truth. (Details, arguments, and references can be found in the preceding sub-chapters.)

In August 1937, at the time of the Salzburg Festival, the Trapp family's career took a new turn. Whereas the choir had until then performed mostly in Austria – with one or two concerts in Ger-

many – now offers for concerts in Paris, Brussels, and London came in. Most importantly, Charles Wagner offered a concert tour in the United States, beginning in October 1938 and lasting for several months.

Whether to sign or not was a momentous decision, which led Georg to consult all the older family members. The participation of everyone was deemed necessary for the choir's success – vice versa the choir's success was important for most, perhaps even all of the family members' livelihood. Everyone agreed and the contract was signed.

In September 1937 Maria – because of problems with a pregnancy – went to Munich for a week or two, at first accompanied by Georg. At that time they went to the “Haus der Deutschen Kunst” (the newly opened exhibition space for “German art” in Munich) and may have seen Hitler in the restaurant.

Even before that, likely at the beginning of July 1937, Georg had written to the “NS-Kulturgemeinde” in Berlin, a national-socialist cultural organization, to arrange lectures by him in Germany on his experiences in the Great War. However, this was rejected because the choir – and, by extension, Georg – was considered as “black” (Catholic); to let Georg lecture in Germany was seen as a possible affront to the Austrian Nazis.

Much the same happened when, first a “manager” of the choir, then Georg personally wrote in late 1937 to the “Reichsmusikkammer” (Reich music chamber) to arrange a German tour of the Trapp family choir. The choir was seen as “Catholic-legitimist”, meaning the Trapps believed in the Habsburg monarchy as the only correct form of government for Austria, a stance that was acceptable in Austria (except to the Nazis there), but not in Germany. Besides, so many requests for performances in Germany

were received that the Reichsmusikkammer chose those performers known to be sympathetic to national socialism. Georg was told by the Reichsmusikkammer that it saw no chance for a successful tour of the Salzburger Kammerchor in Germany.

Around the time of the *Anschluss* someone, possibly Georg himself, contacted some high-ranking person or institution in Germany to inquire again about any (political) concerns about the Trapps. (In February 1938 the Trapps had returned from their Italian tour, so Georg possibly tried once more to secure a source of income for the roughly half a year until they would leave for the States.) This time, the personal adjutant of Hitler became involved and asked the Gestapo, Germany's secret police, on 18 March 1938 to report on the Kammerchor and on the claim that Georg's book and lectures might have been banned in Germany.

On 30 March the Gestapo replied. It repeated the story about Georg's inquiry at the Reichsmusikkammer and the reasons for the rejection, and noted that it had no information about a ban of Georg's book and lectures. (There may, in fact, have been a second attempt by Georg in late 1937 to get his lecturing in Germany approved.) The Gestapo's report ended: "There are no concerns about the chamber choir von Trapp performing in Germany."

Whether Georg was informed by Wiedemann, or a putative third party, is not known. If so, this likely would have been in April, and we may assume that the Nazis replied with "no concerns and no interest" to his attempts to solicit business in Germany. They correctly saw Georg and the choir as Catholic and as legitimist, but not as a danger, nor as a potential asset.

For the Trapps this possibly presented an economic problem: they could no longer count on patronage as they had under the Austrofascist state. And that past association may have haunted them

now in relations with local Nazis. Concerts and lectures in “Austria” might have become more difficult to arrange, especially as there would have been few, if any, non-state sponsors.

Yet, there is no reliable evidence that the Trapps did, in fact, lose business due to the new regime. We do not know whether they tried to arrange concerts in “Austria”, and if so, for what reason they may have failed. The “Austrian” press did no longer report on them, but was this because of their association with the overturned *Ständestaat* (corporate state), or because there was nothing to report? Even the official south German Nazi paper announced in its radio program that the Trapp choir would be broadcast on 12 May 1938 on Radio Munich.

In short, we do not know much about the Trapps’ fortunes from March to June/July 1938, except that there is no evidence for either “extreme” – “invitations” by the Nazis and the German state on the one hand, “persecution” on the other.

And there is, in any case, a fundamental flaw with Maria’s and other family members’ tales of such “invitations” – to Rupert as a high-ranking doctor at a Vienna hospital, to Georg (the Italian) as commander of a German submarine, to the (Italian) choir to sing on Hitler’s birthday as representatives of “Austria”. They presuppose, either that the Trapps were favored because they were Nazis themselves, or that they were so famous, capable and important – “desirable”, as Maria called it – that the Nazis chose to overlook their political and ideological differences with them. (Though for what purpose should the Nazis have “desired” them?) Neither supposition is plausible: there is no reason to believe that the Trapps were Nazis; Rupert had only just graduated; Georg had been a hero in an age long gone; the choir was scarcely known in Germany, and, despite its quality, I see no “mass appeal” even in

“Austria”. So the “invitations”, for which no evidence has ever been offered, did not happen; considering Maria’s grasp of reality in her memoirs, they even may have been “rejections”.

In this context we might briefly look at any other impact the *Anschluss* might have had on Georg and Maria. I have already explained that I do not see Georg as an Austrian patriot, so I do not think that he mourned the end of Austria deeply. And while I personally do believe that Georg, as a monarchist, and Maria, as a rather extreme Catholic, disliked the national-socialist regime, Georg’s persistent attempts to engage with Nazi Germany in 1937 should raise questions about his alleged rejection of the post-*Anschluss* situation.

But any problems the Trapps might have had after March 1938 would have been temporary anyway, because they had their contract with Wagner. So they, and their Catholic conductor Franz Wasner, prepared for the American tour – which had been announced in the press already in August 1937 – getting the necessary visa, etc. They rented the Villa Trapp to priests and in mid-August 1938 unhurriedly traveled to South Tyrol for their customary summer holiday. (Wasner briefly returned to “Austria” in September to get a German passport.) There they spent about six weeks before traveling to London and, on board the “American Farmer”, to the States, where they arrived on 17 October 1938.

In March 1939 the Trapps came back to Europe. The American tour had not been a commercial success, because the choir had not yet adapted to the different audience, and because an anti-German climate in the States, and perhaps Maria’s now visible pregnancy, had led to the cancellation of about half the concerts. But the Trapps already had a contract for a second American tour beginning in October 1939.

In the meantime, they performed mostly in Scandinavia and stayed some weeks in the Netherlands. However, at least in June 1939 Georg was back in “Austria”, and in July 1939 most of the rest of the family, too. They combined holidays – the older Trapp children visited relatives of their mother Agathe – with getting their visas for the States and with family business: Maria even hired a nanny for her youngest children, who then accompanied the Trapps to the States. Rupert, however, did not go back, but went to Naples where he received a quota immigration visa to the United States, for which he must already have applied in summer 1938 at the latest, likely in Italy, too. Franz Wasner also stayed away from Germany. Under those circumstances the choir could and would not operate in “Austria”/Germany.

Afterwards, the whole family went again to Scandinavia for concerts and brief relaxation.

After the outbreak of World War II in Europe on 1 September, but without major problems, the Trapps traveled to the United States where they arrived on 7 October 1939 – not as political refugees, but as visitors for business, except for Rupert, whose early decision to immigrate has never been discussed in the literature. At least Georg likely had not yet made a firm decision about emigration. But as Maria candidly told “The New York Times” on the day of their arrival, life in Europe was economically far worse than in the States, so she wanted to stay. (Besides, her youngest child, Johannes, had been born on 17 January 1939 in Philadelphia/PA and therefore was an American citizen.) Thus the Trapps became economic migrants, then permanent residents, and finally, in 1948, American citizens; Georg, however, had already passed away on 30 May 1947.

Martina Dupire, née Trapp, died on 25 February 1951; Hedwig on 14 September 1972; Maria on 28 March 1987; Rupert on 22 February 1992; Johanna Winter, née Trapp, on 25 November 1994; Werner on 11 October 2007; Agathe II on 28 December 2010; Maria II on 18 February 2014; Eleonore Campbell, née Trapp, on 17 October 2021; Rosmarie on 13 May 2022.