

“The Sound of Music”: Fact or Fiction

Real Story of the von Trapp Family

Historical Archives of the von Trapp Family

The events in the *The Sound of Music* are so dramatic, it's easy to forget that the film is based on a true story of love, passion, and family devotion that unfolded against the backdrop of fascism and war. Study the [Timeline](#) to get a perspective on other events that were happening around the world at that time.

THE VON TRAPP STORY

The von Trapp saga begins in 1910, when distinguished naval commander Georg von Trapp met Agathe Whitehead at a ball. Not only was it love at first sight, it was an almost royal match. Captain von Trapp was as distinguished a war commander in Austria as Eisenhower was in America following World War II. And the von Trapp-Whitehead marriage had the same mythical aura as that of the Kennedy-Bouvier union. Both Georg and Agathe came from privileged families, and the von Trapps were able to live comfortably off the interest from Whitehead's inheritance.

According to Hirsch's book, the fairy tale started to take a turn when the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed after World War I. Now without a coast, Austria no longer required a navy, and the Captain lost his post. When Agathe died, von Trapp was inconsolable. According to Johannes von Trapp, his father was as devastated by the end of his naval career as by the loss of his wife: "My father's life was the navy," explained Johannes, "He was uncomfortable doing anything else. He was simply lost."

After the loss of their mother, the children had an endless parade of governesses. One would be hired for the older children, one for the younger, and one to run the household. But the children wanted to have just one governess, and Maria seemed to be a perfect fit.

Even before Maria arrived, introducing madrigals and other complex music, the children were musically inclined. Encouraged by the Captain, they sang all the time, and he often accompanied them on guitar, mandolin, and violin.

Maria, along with Father Wasner, a neighborhood Priest, brought a sophistication to the family's singing, but according to Johannes, the Captain's naval stature helped the family forge their careers. Even before they began singing the Captain was very well known, and his name lent a certain air of importance to their group.