

VON TRAPP FAMILY

Georg Ludwig Ritter von Trapp (1880 to 1947)

Italian citizenship

On leaving Austria the Trapps traveled to Italy, not Switzerland as depicted in *The Sound of Music*. Georg had been born in Zadar (now in Croatia), which at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1920, Zadar became part of Italy under the Treaty of Rapallo, as European national borders were realigned after the First World War and the collapse of the Empire, and Georg was thus an Italian citizen, along with his wife and children. The family had a contract with an American booking agent when they left Austria. They contacted the agent from Italy and requested fare to America.^[11]

Departure from Austria and later life

In 1935, Trapp's money, inherited from his English first wife, was invested in a bank in England. Austria was under economic pressure from a hostile Germany, and Austrian banks were in a precarious position. Trapp sought to help a friend in the banking business, Auguste Caroline Lammer (1885–1937), so he withdrew most of his money from London and deposited it in an Austrian bank. The bank failed, wiping out most of the family's substantial fortune.^[8]

At about that time, a Catholic priest, Franz Wasner, around Maria's age, came to live with the family and became the group's musical director.^[3] Around 1936, Lotte Lehmann heard the family sing, and she suggested they perform paid concerts. When the Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg heard them on the radio, he invited them to perform in Vienna.^[18]

According to Maria von Trapp's memoirs, Georg von Trapp found himself in a vexing situation after the German takeover of Austria in 1938. He was offered a commission in the German Navy, a tempting proposition, but decided to decline the offer, being opposed to Nazi ideology. He also refused a request for the family to perform at an event for Hitler's birthday.^[11] The family decided to leave Austria. They took a train to Italy, then traveled to London, before sailing to the United States for their first concert tour.^[11] In 1939 the family went back to Europe to tour Scandinavia, hoping to continue their concerts in cities beyond the reach of the Third Reich.^[19] During this time, they went back to Salzburg for a few months before returning to Sweden to finish the tour. From there, they traveled to Norway to begin the trip back to the United States in September 1939, just after World War II broke out.^[8]