

# Two Subbotnik Families Travel to America with Molokans in 1905

## Two Subbotnik Families (Plushnikoff and Moiseve) traveled with a larger group of Russian Molokan immigrants from the Trans-Caucasus Region of the Russian Empire to Los Angeles via the Panama Canal and San Francisco in 1905

Compiled by Bill Aldacushion

The passenger list for the *S.S. San Juan* mentioned below that arrived in San Francisco on August 3, 1905 included these members of the **Moiseve** and **Plushnikoff (Pluss)** families:

- **Stefan Moiseef**, age 50 {**Steven John MOISEVE**} – husband
- Arina Moiseef, age 48 {Irene (LIDYOFF) – wife
- Joseph Moiseef, age 12 - son
- David Moiseef, age 10 – son
- Uavara Moiseef, age 8; {Vera} – daughter
- Simen Moiseef, age 5. {Sam} – son
- **Daniel Plushnikoff (PLUSS)**, age 22 – husband
- Maria Plushnikoff, age 20 – wife
- Ion {John} Plushnikoff, age 11 – son
- Moses Plushnikoff, age 18 – brother

Members of the above families are buried in the Home of Peace Memorial Park In Los Angeles, California: See <http://Subbotniki.net/America/cemetery/index.html>

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Mikhail Petrovich and his Molokan family left their home in Darochichak {in present day Armenia} on February 23, 1905 to begin their long journey to America. His family included his wife Anna and their six young children. They first went by horse and buggy to Kankalic. From there, they took the train to Tiflis {now called Tbilisi in the Republic of Georgia} and eventually to the Georgian Black Sea port of Batumi.

In Batumi, they were joined by many other Russian Molokan and Subbotnik families from the Kars {Turkey} and Yerevan {Armenia} regions. Many elders, friends and relatives accompanied the emigrants, singing most of the way.



Port of Batumi in 1861

Some parents were not quite ready to leave, and others did not yet have enough money to pay for their entire family to travel. These people entrusted Mikhail Petrovich with their sons.

While passing through Tiflis, a couple of the men were robbed. Others in the group contributed to buying tickets for these unfortunate individuals.

A total of 144 Molokans and Subbotniks boarded the ship for the first leg of the journey. The elders who remained on shore sang to them from the Second Chapter of Zechariah, Verse Six:

“The Lord said to His people, ‘Go forth and flee from the land of the north. I have scattered you in all directions just as I have the four winds of heaven.’”

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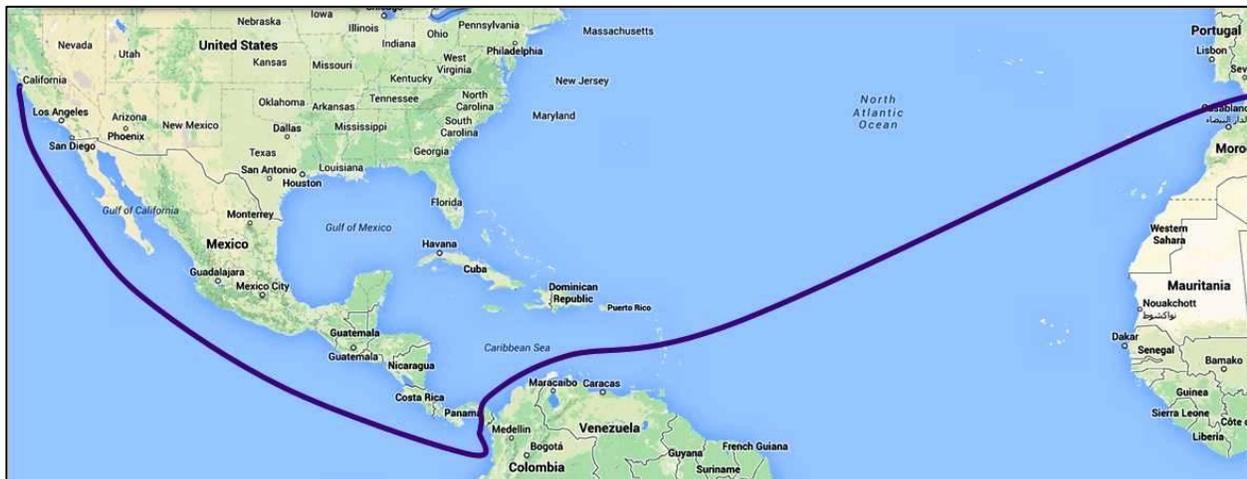
Several years later, Mikhail Petrovich in Los Angeles and told his about the arduous journey:

“As our ship was leaving Batumi, tears came to my eyes. It was very sad to leave my Motherland and even more so, to leave my dear friends and relatives. We sang back to those on the dock until we could no longer see or hear them.



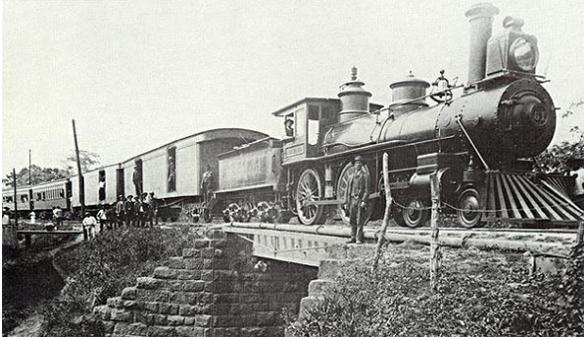
As we traveled across the Black Sea, we adjusted to life aboard ship. We had such a large group that we occupied sixteen tables in the dining room.

Our first stop was Constantinople {now called Istanbul}, Turkey, but we were not permitted to go ashore. Next, we passed through the Bosphorus Strait, the Sea of Marmara, the Dardanelles and the Aegean Sea before entering the Mediterranean. A few days later, we dropped anchor in Marseilles, France. There, we were directed to go to Panama.



We observed Passover occurred during our Atlantic Ocean crossing. We butchered and prepared a couple of the lambs we had brought along for just such an occasion. Before eating the meat, we made our peace with our brothers, said a prayer and then broke bread together.

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Train across Panama

After several days at sea, we arrived in Panama. Since the canal was still under construction, we had to cross the isthmus by train. Along the way, we saw many strange looking people who were brought from all parts of the world to build the canal. Even the birds looked strange to us.

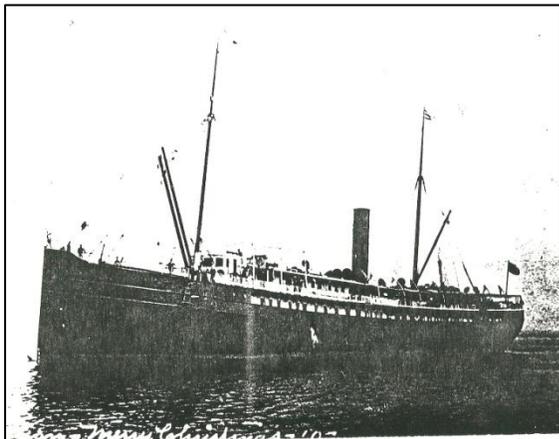
When we reached Balboa on the Pacific side, we said a prayer and gave thanks to God for our safe journey. The next things we did were to build a brick stove and buy some flour for baking bread.

We had no place to stay, so we slept on the ground.

The officials told us we needed to pay more money to book passage to California. Not everyone had enough money left. We could not leave any of those young men whose parents had entrusted us with them. So, we found construction jobs on the Panama Canal project.

It was hard work in the tropical climate. The weather was hot and humid. It reminded us of stepping into a banya {Russian steam bath}. There were many disease carrying insects. Many of the workers before us had caught malaria from the mosquitoes. A yellow fever epidemic had just been reported.<sup>1</sup>

At first, the foreman refused to pay us for our labor. Instead, he asked us to stay and work longer. We protested and told him we must join our brothers and sisters in Los Angeles.



SS Juan - Pacific Mail Steamship Line

For the last leg of the journey, we separated into three groups. Each group sailed on ships of the Pacific Mail Steamship Line at different times. It was a sixteen day voyage from Ancon, Panama to San Francisco, California. The ships made a few port calls along the way. We had run out of lambs by now, so we only ate bread and vegetables.

The first group arrived in San Francisco aboard the *S.S. San Juan* in June of 1905. The rest of us decided to stay together and work another couple of months. Eventually, we earned enough money to pay for all of us to leave Panama. Of course, this was not without paying a price in human life and

suffering. We lost some of our children and had to bury them in Panama.

I was in the second group that also sailed on the *San Juan*. We arrived on August 3, 1905. The last group traveled aboard the *S.S. Newport* that docked in San Francisco on August 25.

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<sup>1</sup>According to David McCullough's book The Path Between the Seas, sixty-two cases of yellow fever were reported in the month of June 1905, nineteen of which were fatal. This yellow fever outbreak frightened away potential workers and contributed to a labor shortage on the project. This shortage could be one reason the shipping company in Marseilles directed the group to Panama instead of New York or Galveston.

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Upon our arrival in San Francisco, we were put in quarantine at Ayala Cove on Angel Island. There, we were only able to take cold water baths. Twenty-eight people from my group were initially rejected by immigration officials and not permitted to enter the United States. Included in this group were my wife and two of our six children.

I went to the Russian consulate in San Francisco. The officials there helped me send a telegram to Theodore Roosevelt. We explained to the President that we were all healthy when we started our journey, but a few of us became sick while working for an American company in Panama. Eventually, the sick ones were granted exemptions and everyone was permitted to enter the United States of America. However, Masha W passed away in quarantine. We buried her in San Francisco and then took a train to Los Angeles.

I arrived in Los Angeles on August 9, 1905, almost six months after leaving Mother Russia. We were met by our Molokan brothers who took us into their homes.



Russian immigrants at Angel Island

After we were settled a bit, we arranged for the use of stoves at a nearby Jewish bakery. We bought flour, milked some cows with our own hands and baked bread for a thanksgiving offering to our Lord. Then we looked for jobs. Our first concern was to earn enough money to pay off our debts. We also wanted to send some money back to our relatives in Russia so they could join us in our new home.”

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