

# Our Family Stories: “Never Give Up” — New Discoveries About Niculae Vrancean

By Dave Pedersen

*The story about Linda Pedersen’s “miracle” in search for her grandmother’s roots in Romania was featured in the August 2014 newsletter of the Romanian Genealogy Society. Dave says this follow-up story could be called “The Miracle: Part Two.”*



RGS member Linda Pedersen learned to never give up hope in finding her family history after discovering her grandmother’s Calugar relatives in Romania in 2011. She called it a “miracle” because of a unique set of circumstances. (*That story was featured in the August 2014 issue of “Romanian Roots.”*) However, there still was a big void in Linda’s heart not knowing what happened to her grandfather, Niculae **Vrancean**, after he went back to Romania in 1921 and was not allowed to return as the Iron Curtain dropped in Europe between the World Wars.

Sometimes it only takes one little word to open the doors to discovery. It also takes the help of groups like the Romania Genealogy Society and Heritage Organization of Romanian Americans in Minnesota (HORA), both great advocates for Romanian family history research. The Romanian organizations have been very active as of late, producing a documentary of Romanian immigrants to Minnesota, helping set up a historical display at the museum where the documentary was shown, and conducting quarterly meetings where support is offered.

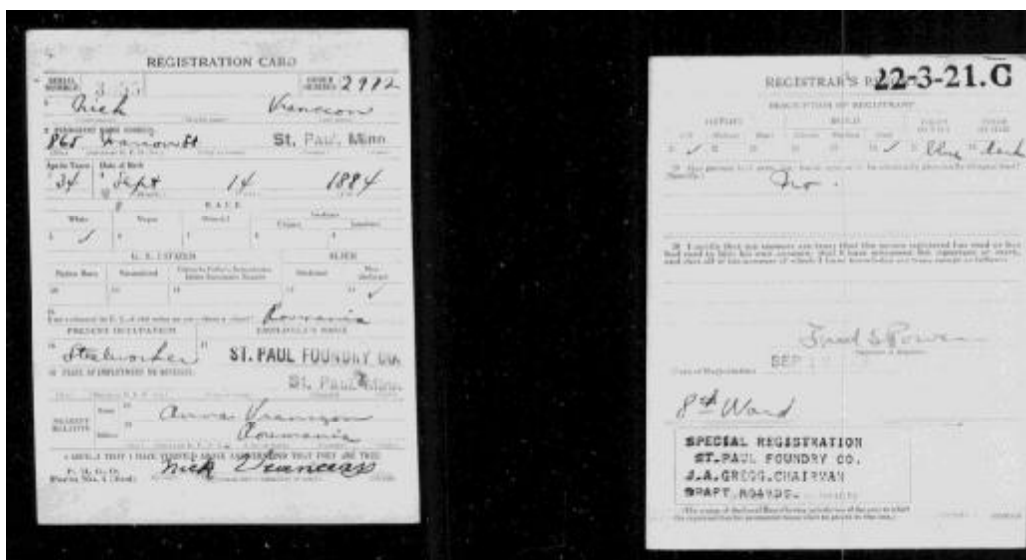
Both a word and the Romanian organizations played important parts in Linda finally discovering in December what ever happened to Grandpa Nick **Vrancean**. There was some suspense and a dose of patience revolving around the search for Nick, who left Minnesota some 94 years ago and was never heard from again --until now. Linda was relieved to learn that Nick had a long life in Romania, living until 1959 into his mid-70’s. A second marriage resulted in another wife named Ana, one child named Victoria, four grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

The little word that helped find Nick was *Dragusi*. One of the photos in the Romanian exhibition at the Dakota County Historical Society in South St. Paul, Minnesota included members of a Romanian fraternal society. Linda’s grandfather Nick **Vrancean** was pictured in the photograph as the Vice President, seated in the center of the front row. Each of the many people in the photo are identified by a number, and for each number at the bottom of the photo is the name of the town of each person’s origin in Romania, plus the county and region. For person number 15, Niculae Vrancean, it said, “Co; *Dragusi*; j;d; *Fagarasi*.” It was confusing for us to know what

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was what. Once it was determined that Dragusi is the smaller town near the bigger city of Fagaras which is located in the county of Brasov, it became known where to look for records of Nick.

The genealogy society even helped locate Nick's records regarding naturalization, the WWI draft registration, plus birth and even death certificates of two of his children. However, there were no records, notes, letters or any sign of Nick **Vrancean** after he went back to Romania in 1921 to help his mother after a house fire. His citizenship papers were not finalized when he left and he got trapped there.



*WWI Draft Registration Card of Nick Vrancean*

Looking back, Nick married Linda's grandmother, Ana **Calugar**, and they lived in the North End of St. Paul by St. Mary's Romanian Orthodox church, just off Rice Street. They had three children, but two died young. Linda's mother Mary was joined by her brother Peter, born just after Nick left to visit Romania. Once it was realized Nick would not be allowed to return to Minnesota, he and Ana decided to start new lives where they were in different parts of the world.

Soon after Ana **Calugar Vrancean** re-married and had one more daughter in 1925, her new husband developed cancer and passed away in 1928. Ana raised her three children and passed away in 1978 at the age of 95.

In 2011 Linda discovered her grandmother's family in Romania. Some are in the city of Sibiu, located not far from Dragusi. They had a friend in Dragusi who worked as an investigator. He said he found records of Nick **Vrancean** and his granddaughter Silvia, who still lives there. However, frustration arose when there was no response to calls or emails. This caused us to doubt this person was related to Nick. Months went by as everything seemed to stand still after appearing to be so close to this great discovery.

Finally, a local priest was asked to help and we learned that Silvia has an illness resulting from a stroke and has no phone or computer right now. A neighbor used her phone to connect Silvia to Ana's family in Sibiu. Yet, there still was not a big desire by Silvia to talk; a sign of mistrust was surmised.

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Still not learning much about Nick, the family in Sibiu had an idea. They had received a photo calendar from Linda, including older family photos from Minnesota, one being a portrait taken of Grandpa Nick sitting in a high back wood chair. Linda received an email from her family in Romania saying, "Today we received a call from someone in Dragusi. The woman we had contacted received the package with the calendar. A daughter-in-law said that when they opened the calendar and saw Nick's photo in the chair where he sits cross-legged, they recognized him because they also have the same photo. She said it was her grandfather. The woman seemed very nice and grateful for our efforts. She said they are willing to meet everyone and keep in touch."

The only bad news is that we don't speak Romanian and none of this family speaks English, nor do they have a computer or internet service. They also don't have a lot of older family photos. There was not a lot to learn about Grandpa Nick, but it was enough to fill the hole in Linda's heart. With great joy she discovered a "granddaughter counter part" of their grandfather.

Linda learned that her grandfather returned to Dragusi and like his first wife Ana **Calugar**, he also re-married. Nick and his new wife had one daughter named Victoria, who also had one daughter, Silvia, who had four children, three of whom who are still living. Silvia had three children and one grandchild. Nick lived nearly 38 more years after leaving Minnesota in 1921, when he was about 38 years old.

Linda says how the Romanian organizations were crucial in finding her grandfather and urges others not to lose hope. Not only did the group know good things about doing family research in a country dominated by so many different countries over the years, it provided important moral support and encouragement. Linda's advice? "Never give up."

*Dave and Linda Pedersen currently live near Hutchinson, Minnesota.*



*Shown above is the panoramic photo identifying each person by number; Nick Vrancean is number 15. At left is an enlarged section of the lower portion of the photo which identifies the name and town of origin of each person numbered in the picture.*