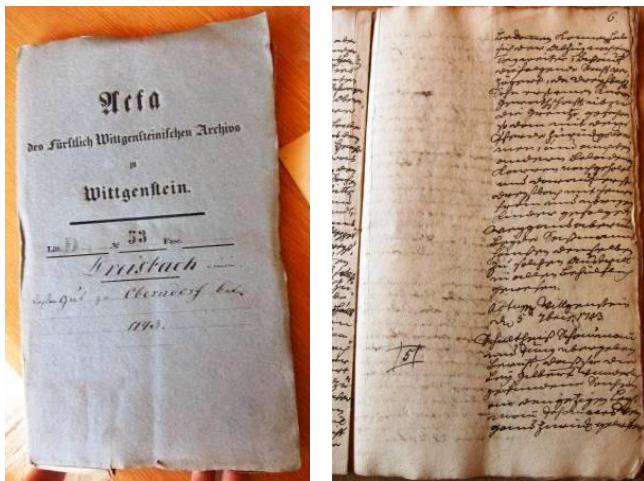


# Dreisbach Family Association

July 2012 Newsletter©

## A Recent Visit to Wittgenstein, Germany

*In May 2012, Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean, genealogist for the Simon Dreisbach line, and Marcia Dreisbach Falconer, DFA newsletter editor, visited the area of Wittgenstein, Germany, considered to be the Dreisbach family 'homeland'. Ardis and Marcia are currently writing a book about Simon Dreisbach and his family and the trip was to gather information and photos. This issue describes some of their findings and experiences.*



*The Dreisbach File in the records of the Administrative Chamber of the Count of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein that describes the secret 1743 departure of Simon Dreisbach and his family and what happened afterwards.*

**Simon Dreisbach Sr - the focus of the trip:** Much information exists about the Dreisbachs in Germany, but is largely in the form of scattered documents. The upcoming book will gather these fragments and hopefully make a coherent story about Simon and his ancestors. An important point to clarify on this trip was Simon's departure from Wittgenstein.

**Simon's Illegal Exit - Quest for Documentation:** In 1928 in response to a query from H. F. Hippenstiel, a member of the DFA, an Archivist from the Princely Wittgenstein Archive in Laasphe sent a letter reporting that archived documents show Simon Dreisbach illegally departed from Wittgenstein in 1743. Wanting more information, Ardis asked Andreas Sassmannshausen, a cousin many times removed who lives near Wittgenstein, if he could help to document this statement. Andreas contacted noted Wittgenstein historian, Mr. Heinrich Imhof who

succeeded in finding material about Simon's secret departure that far exceeded our hopes!

**The Dreisbach File:** In the spring of 2011, Mr Imhof located a file (WA D 53 Dreisbach, Simon/dessen Gut zu Oberndorf betr. 1743) in the records of the Administrative Chamber of the Count of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein. Documents in this file describe much of what happened when Simon Dreisbach and his family illegally departed from Wittgenstein on the night of 15 May 1743. Photographs of these documents were taken by Mr Imhof and forwarded to Ardis. The documents were in old German script, couched in the legal terminology of the 1700's, and extremely difficult to read.

Ardis spent months transcribing the handwriting, then translating the text, with timely help from Andreas Sassmannshausen. The story that emerged from these old documents is nothing short of amazing. That story will be featured in a subsequent issue of the DFA newsletter as well as in the upcoming book.

On this trip, we had the opportunity to meet Mr. Imhof and to visit the Princely Archive of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein, located in the Rentkammer Wittgenstein. There we saw and photographed even more documents relating to Simon Dreisbach!



*Left to Right: Heinrich Imhof, Ardis, Holger Weber (a reporter for Siegener-Zeitung newspaper) and Marcia, pore over documents in the Rentkammer Wittgenstein.*

**St Martin's Church, Feudingen – a focal point:** The Reformed church was an important part of Simon's life in Wittgenstein. Church attendance was expected and most Sundays Simon and his family walked the two miles between their home and St. Martin's. Sundays were a time when people visited with each other and were relieved of the heavy duties of everyday life. These traditions continued when the family moved to Northampton County, Pennsylvania.



*St. Martin's Church, Feudingen, was built in the 1200's and has wall paintings documented to 1250. In this very church Simon's family celebrated baptism, marriage and funeral rites.*

Baptismal, marriage and death records, going back to the 1500's are kept in the parish hall. There we photographed the baptismal records for Simon and his wife and for all of their children.



*Baptismal record for Simon Dreisbach Sr, son of Gurg Wilhelm Dreisbach and Margreth Sassmannshausen, baptized the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, 1698 (7 August 1698). Top left entry.*

**Simon's house in Oberndorf:** One aim of our trip was to photograph the houses in which the Dreisbach family had lived. Simon lived in House No. 2, "Am Aberge" in the village of Oberndorf. The "No. 2" indicates it was the second house built in the village of Oberndorf. We knew the house had burned about 1840 but wondered if we could find any evidence of its existence. Fortunately local knowledge of where it stood remains and the foundation is still visible as a rectangular outline of darker grass. The line drawn on the photo below makes the foundation more visible.



*Line shows where foundation of Simon's house is located.*

**Where did the Dreisbachs live in Wittgenstein?**

Simon's ancestors lived in at least four different houses in Wittgenstein between 1550 and 1743. To understand this complicated ownership of property one has to know about "marrying the house".

**"Marrying the house"** In the Wittgenstein of Simon's time and before, almost all the houses and associated lands were owned by the ruling Count and leased to people as hereditary lands. The right to live in these houses as a householder (*Hausmann*), was inherited by the oldest child, either a daughter or a son. This meant that the younger children, who did not inherit their father's house, had no chance of becoming householders themselves.

For a younger son, there was a good way to solve this problem – marry a woman who would inherit the house from her father. In other words "marrying the house". Many Dreisbach men did exactly this. Given that competition to marry these women must have been fierce, the Dreisbach men seem to have been very good looking or smooth talkers, or both!

**Simon's father 'married the house':** Simon's father, Gurg Wilhelm Dreisbach (1669-1712) got his house and associated farm lands, and thus became a *Hausmann*, by marrying Margreth Sassmannshausen (1679-1726), who would inherit "Am Aberge" in

Oberndorf – the house where Simon was eventually born and in which he raised his own family.

**Simon's grandfather also 'married the house':** Daniel Treisbach (1623-1685) married Catharina Benfer (1626-1681). She was the oldest child of Georg Benfer who owned House No. 2, "Jost's", located in the very small village of Steinbach (photo below). When her father died, Catharina inherited the farm and by marrying her, Daniel Dreisbach became a *Hausmann*.



*The house in Steinbach called "Jost's" belonged to Simon's Grandfather, Daniel Treisbach about 1650. Since then it has been greatly enlarged and the half-timbers covered with slate.*

**A visit to House No. 2, "Josts", in Steinbach:** Ardis, Marcia, Dave, Martin Dreisbach (a distant cousin who lives in Germany) and Martin's wife Dagmar, visited Daniel's house called "Jost's". As we stood in the courtyard, the affable owner, Helga von Essen, came out to greet us. Soon we were sitting on her patio, eating waffles and strawberries as we discussed the history of the house and the similarities between the dialects of Pennsylvania Dutch and Wittgenstein'sche German!



*On the patio of the house, "Jost's #2" in Steinbach. Left to right: a friend of Helga, Martin (blue shirt), Dave, Gabbi (friend of Helga), Dagmar (seated behind Helga) and Helga von Essen.*

**Even Simon's great grandfather 'married the house'!** Simon's great grandfather, Johan Treisbach (about 1580-1636) married Leisen Hain Keller (about 1580-1636) who was born in the farmhouse called "Drüben die". As the oldest child she stood to inherit both house and hereditary lands thereby making her Dreisbach husband into a *Hausmann*. A visit to see and photograph this house was clearly in order so Ardis, Marcia and Dave set out to find it.

The village of Amtshausen, where "Drüben die" is located, is a very tiny place. As we were about to drive out of the village, we stopped to ask a woman if she could tell us where "Drüben die" was located. She looked at us in amazement – as though everyone should know the answer - and said "Hier ist "Drüben die"!" pointing to her own house. We had stopped in front of the house we were seeking!

**The "Drüben die" House:** The young woman didn't know much about the history of the house, so she went inside and got 'the grandmother'. Frau Müsse, an elderly lady with a lovely smile, came to the door.



*Frau Müsse, and her son, Herr Müsse, the current Hausmann of "Drüben die" House in Amtshausen, Wittgenstein.*

As Frau Müsse talked with us, a car pulled up to the house and out hopped an angry looking man. Clearly the owner of the place, he stormed over to us and, in gruff German, said "Waddaya want here?" We had a large, expensive, rental car with license plates from the north German city of Hamburg. Wealthy people from Hamburg are buying up old houses in the countryside as summer places, which angers the local farmers. It's clear he thought we were on a house hunt and probably wanted to buy his farm.

When we explained we were from Canada and Sweden and were looking for the houses our ancestors had lived in – he relaxed. After a longer chat in which he ascertained that we like ice hockey he told us a bit about his farm and then brusquely

declared “You will stay for coffee.” With that he went into the barn to take care of his cows.

“**Drüben die**” is a genuine, old, Wittgenstein farmhouse, the kind in which people lived in one end of the building and their valuable animals were kept in the opposite end. There are still many farmhouses like this in Wittgenstein but today almost all of the barn ends have been converted into a garage or extended living area. Not here. The Müsse family continues to share their roof with 27 milking cows, a few chickens and some goats!



*The barn end of “Drüben die”. If you look carefully you can see the hind end a cow through the open barn door!*

Beside the house was evidence of a wealthy and well-kept farm – a big manure pile! In old Wittgenstein these steaming piles were the source of a farmer’s pride and Herr Müsse was, indeed, a very fine farmer. It was an impressive sight to see – including chickens happily pecking away on the heap.



*Away from farm life, manure piles are regarded as humorous or embarrassing or both. They are neither. They are vital and valuable parts of a healthy farm.*

We were invited inside. In the front hall were three doors. The door straight ahead led to the kitchen – the main room of the farmhouse. The door to the left went into the barn. The door to the right led to the formal living room used for guests and on great occasions. Here Frau Müsse had set a lovely table with her best china and a homemade coffee cake. She

was so pleasant, but also a bit nervous – perhaps we were the first foreign guests she had ever entertained.



*Living end of “Drüben die”. A Bible verse and other designs are painted on the half-timbered wood.*

As we sat, sipping coffee, we mentioned we had been to Balde, the village where the first known Dreisbach had lived. Frau Müsse happily told us she had been born across the street from the site of this old Dreisbach house! Ardis then brought out a few pictures of Balde from the 1996 DFA trip to Wittgenstein. One of these showed the now deceased brother of Frau Müsse. When she saw this there was an instant connection and we became, no longer foreigners and guests, but family.

**Balde – home of the first known Dreisbach:** A few days previously we had visited Balde. Abraham Dreisbach of Balde (b. after 1535 - d. after 1575) is the first person to carry the surname Dreisbach that we know of. Surnames were just coming into use at this time, so perhaps Abraham actually was the first person to be called Dreisbach.



*Front side of Abraham of Balde’s barn called “Wahnersch”. The barn has been extensively enlarged and renovated.*

**“Wahnersch” in Balde:** A new house occupies the site where Abraham lived but the barn that Abraham used, although extensively renovated and enlarged, is still there. House and barn were called “Wahnersch” – or ‘wagon maker’- which was probably Abraham’s occupation.

**1751 Immigrant Martin Dreisbach’s house:** We also saw the house where the founder of the Martin Dreisbach line was born. It is similar in size and age to “Drüben die” but with a dormer added and the barn portion turned into living space.



*The house where 1751 immigrant Martin Dreisbach was born.*

**Raumland Church:** We visited 800 year old St. Martin’s Raumland Church – a focal point of life for Dreisbachs who lived in the more northerly part of Wittgenstein. Baptism, marriage and burial records for the Martin line of the Dreisbach family are kept in the church offices here.



*St. Martin’s Church, Raumland*

Our German cousins, Martin and Andreas, also took us to a fine museum in Erndtebrück that was filled with objects illustrating life in “Old Wittgenstein”. Of great interest were examples of red pottery ware which is very similar to that produced by the Pennsylvania Dutch – yet more evidence of how people from Wittgenstein were part of, and influenced, the culture of the Pennsylvania Dutch.



*Red pottery in Erndtebrück museum is very similar to that made in Pennsylvania Dutch localities..*

**Food! So many good experiences:** It was *Spargel* (asparagus) season and we had the very best *Spargel* for lunch at Martin and Dagmar’s house! Another day Martin took us to a local inn where we had a lunch plate containing five different kinds of sausages!



*Dagmar’s white asparagus. Farmer’s lunch with 5 kinds of local sausages. The only vegetable on the plate is a pickle!*

**Helpful Cousins:** Our trip was made possible through the help of two *distant* cousins. How distant? Well, for Martin, our most recent common ancestor was Daniel Dreisbach born in the “Drüben die” farmhouse in 1623! For Andreas Sassmannshausen the most recent common ancestor lived back in the 1500’s. Distant cousins, indeed – but only in a genealogical sense! A big THANK YOU to them both!



*The (genealogically distant) Cousins! Left to right: Andreas Sassmannshausen, Ardis, Martin Dreisbach, Marcia.*

We saw so much, did so much and learned so much that our experiences cannot be contained in a single edition of the DFA newsletter. Best to go to Wittgenstein yourself and enjoy it!

Marcia Dreisbach Falconer  
*Dreisbach Family Association Newsletter Editor*  
 Email contact: [dreisbachfalconer@gmail.com](mailto:dreisbachfalconer@gmail.com)