

Welcome to the Dreisbach Emigration Research Report (DERR)

1. What took place before the Dreisbach Emigration Research Report came to be?

We, the DERR editors, compilers and authors, are Dreisbach sisters, born in Allentown, PA and now residing in Ottawa, Canada (Marcia) and Stockholm, Sweden (Ardis). Although the idea to publish the DERR appeared almost literally overnight, there is a long history behind it. In one sense, the DERR can be said to go back to the first Dreisbach Family Association (DFA) founded in 1910, and to a teasing communication concerning Simon Dreisbach it had received from Wittgenstein in 1928. (More on that later.) In another sense, our deciding to produce the DERR was related to our association with the present DFA, which was revived in 1995, and to the comprehensive family history volume which resulted in 1997, *The Dreisbach Book*.

In 2009 Ardis and Marcia carried out a week long research trip in Pennsylvania to look into our mother's genealogy. On this trip we allotted a single day to visiting the Dreisbach area of Northampton County because, after all, the Dreisbach genealogy was so very well known. The fact that we could not connect our most distant Dreisbach ancestor (Henry Dreisbach born 1800) with any of the known Dreisbach lines was, however, a large thorn in our sides. We had speculated about Henry's father. Y-DNA testing had shown that Henry's descendants were closely related to the descendants of Simon Dreisbach Sr, but we had no "real" connection and certainly no paper trail.

It was at this time that a fortuitous genealogical event "freed" us from the burden of hunting for Henry's daddy and enabled us to pursue a much wider area of Dreisbach research. On November 17, 2009, in the tiny reading-room of the Northampton County Archives in Easton, PA, we unexpectedly reconnected with genealogy researcher Richard (Dick) Musselman. Dick, aware of our genealogical predicament at that time, asked us if we had found our missing Dreisbach ancestor. Upon hearing our "No", he pointed to some old books on the shelves just above our heads and asked if we had looked in the "F and B" files. This, he said, was the general term for a book containing an index of names of those indicted in civil court cases. Some of these cases involved illegitimate children, thus: the "Fornication and Bastardy", or "F & B" title. This is not the place to reveal what we found, though it is an interesting story that has been told elsewhere. The upshot was that we now knew, with full certainty, that we were descended from Simon Dreisbach Sr. and could follow our ancestral trail back through Pennsylvania history to the arrival of Simon Dreisbach in Philadelphia in 1743, and farther back, to Wittgenstein.



Fig. 1. "F&B" ledger is the top book on the shelf in the archive room of the Northampton County Courthouse in Easton, Pennsylvania.

2. The birth of the Simon Dreisbach project and how it had to change.

By the end of 2009 we were tracking down the earliest warrants taken out in eastern Pennsylvania by Simon Dreisbach, his five sons and his son-in-law. In the course of studying the surveyors' maps of these Dreisbach tracts we discovered an underlying master plan. This wealth of new information, including the presence of previously unknown Dreisbachs (which will be covered in a later DERR issue) and the necessity for making it known to as many people as were interested, pointed us in the direction of writing a book. It would be about the Dreisbach family of Northampton County from immigration in 1743 until about 1810 when the last of the immigrant Dreisbachs died.

We also recognized the need for a preliminary section to present the many small pieces of information that had emerged during the previous twenty years on our Dreisbach heritage in Wittgenstein. We could build on the genealogical and background history that had been supplied by Wittgenstein historian Gustav Schneider in the 1990's for *The Dreisbach Book*. We had been maintaining sporadic contact with our distant Wittgenstein 'cousins', both active family history researchers, Andreas Sassmannshausen and Martin Dreisbach. Ardis had also begun to benefit from the information generously supplied by Jochen Karl Mehldau from his database he compiled of the early records of all the Wittgenstein churches.

By the time of the 2010 DFA reunion we were nearing a turning point in our planning, though it was not yet evident to us. At the reunion Marcia, in period costume, held a monolog that revealed to one and all the true lineage of '1800' Henry Dreisbach. At last the cat was out of the bag. There too Martin Dreisbach, having come over from Germany, gave a Power Point presentation of his photos of Dreisbach-related places in Wittgenstein. It was only one of many diverse presentations, but was in its way prophetic. Information continued to build up and in the months that followed the 2010 reunion we firmly resolved to produce a book spanning both sides of the Atlantic, summarizing what we knew at that time about the Simon Dreisbach family, in Wittgenstein and in Pennsylvania.

3. Then the project expanded.

In early 2011 Andreas Sassmannshausen, acting on our behalf, contacted Heinrich Imhof, *the* expert on the Princely Wittgenstein Archive in Bad Laasphe. Our hope was that the source of the teasing information of 1928 saying that Simon Dreisbach had left Wittgenstein illegally might be located. Within a few days Andreas sent a triumphant email. Heinrich had found a huge set of archival documents designated WA D 53, "*Dreisbach, Simon / dessen Guth betr.*" (Concerning Simon Dreisbach's house and farm). Here was the very rich source of the concise 1928 communication, with unexpected insights into semi-feudal life in Wittgenstein and – one is tempted to say, "Hold your hats!" – here was *an eye-witness account* of events at Simon Dreisbach's house the night he and his family secretly left for Pennsylvania!

In the meantime Marcia was seeking and finding much information on journeys from Wittgenstein to Philadelphia in the 18th century. It was time to rethink our plan. It was clear we now had enough information to do a whole volume on Simon Dreisbach's life prior to his emigration. We hatched a plan in which there would be a Wittgenstein volume to be joined later by one or perhaps two more volumes concentrating on the journey to North America and the life of Simon and his family there.

3. Surprising Simon Dreisbach! It becomes necessary to refocus - again.

In late May and early June of 2012 Marcia and Ardis went to Wittgenstein for a few days of research. We were pleased to finally meet longtime correspondents Heinrich Imhoff and Andreas Sassmanshausen in the flesh, and to see cousin Martin Dreisbach again. We spent two mornings in the Princely Archive, photographed many new (to us) documents, visited villages with Dreisbach connections, enjoyed a marvelous meal of white asparagus at Martin's house and returned to Sweden and Canada to digest and write up as much as we could of this new information.



Fig. 2. In the Princely Archive of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein in May 2011, researching original documents. L. to R. Heinrich Imhoff, Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean, Holger Weber (reporter for the newspaper, Siegener Zeitung), and Marcia Dreisbach Falconer.

In January and February of 2013 Heinrich (whom we had now discovered was also a distant cousin) found, piece by piece in the Princely Archive, a series of documents – numerous pages of testimonies in the Count's judicial chamber relative to the years 1735-1740. He also found three letters written by Simon Dreisbach himself, two of which (hold your hats again) were written from inside the Count's prison in Castle Wittgenstein! We have not yet fully digested this new material. Old assumptions must be corrected in the light of these new aspects of Simon's complex character.

Nor is the Simon Dreisbach line alone in benefitting from the enthusiasm and cooperation of our Wittgenstein 'cousins'. Recently both Martin Dreisbach and Andreas Sassmannshausen have forwarded information on the family of 1751 emigrant Martin Dreisbach: on the ancestors of his wife Anna Eva Hoffmann and on the true birth years of their children. Some of this has already made its way into the DFA Newsletter, and more can be expected to turn up here in the DERR.

At this stage Ardis, especially, was having first-hand experience of information overload.

4. The result? You are now reading the DERR!

Here, then, is the first number of the DERR. It is our means of portioning out Dreisbach information in digestible chunks to persons who have asked to receive it. The DERR format will allow us to insert new items as they appear, and to make revisions to old ones as needed.

Ardis and Marcia are once more refocusing – this time on the emigration aspects of the known Dreisbachs who arrived in North America in the mid-eighteenth century. We would like to know why they left, what contacts they may already have had in the colony of Pennsylvania before leaving, how they got to the New World, and more. We promise no answers, but are more than pleased to share our findings and our attempts at interpretation.

The life and times of Simon Dreisbach will continue to occupy us, as he has left by far the greatest amount of recorded information. Whenever possible, attention will also be given to Simon's third cousin, Martin, and to Simon's presumed nephew, 1754 emigrant Henrich.

We also hope that the DERR will transmit information of at least some general historical interest, as well as more specific information relevant to Wittgenstein and adjacent territories. In the eighteenth century, arrivals in North America from German-speaking areas were given the amorphous label of 'Palatines'. Wittgensteiners, in our view, deserve to be recognized for what they were, a people from a well-defined area, having a long and at times difficult history, shared customs, a shared religion, a myriad of related dialects and the ability to survive in unfavorable physical and political circumstances.

Coming next: an introduction to the three emigrants, Simon, Martin, and Henrich.