

A Young Person's Guide to Survival in 18th Century Wittgenstein: Part I. Strategies 1 – 4.

In an imperfect world, some societies will be farther from perfection than others. In the two Wittgensteins in the eighteenth century, conditions of life for most of the Counts' subjects were heavily weighted toward the 'imperfect' end of the scale. Apart from the burdens of heavy taxation and obligatory personal service in various forms, there was the double problem of lack of work opportunities and lack of available housing for the children of the Counts' householders.

In this hilly, forested region with few natural resources, the choices of occupation were limited. The housing situation impacted on all, and grew more serious as family size increased, while the number of houses available remained almost static, being regulated by the Counts.

The inhabitants of Wittgenstein had to be hard-working, given the relatively harsh and fickle climate associated with their high-lying inland territory. They had to be inventive and ingenious to circumvent both natural conditions and their rulers' constant need to extract more income from them. Here and in the following DERR we identify and present certain strategies available to young people in Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein (the southern county) and Wittgenstein-Berleburg (the northern county). This is no socio-economic study, but simply an informal survey. Its aim is to provide DERR readers with a background against which they can view the Dreisbach research results.

Simon Dreisbach	36	Lehrmann und Bamberger	
Maximilian Dreisbach	37	da er in d. i. p. att.	25
		Ein Sohn Johann Jakob	15
		Ein Sohn Johann Adam	15
		noch Ein Sohn Simon	11
		Ein Sohn Georg Wilhelm	15
		Ein Sohn Georg alt	2
Jost Hackler	60	Ein Sohn Peter alt	40
Anna Maria Hackler	55	Ein Sohn Jost	35
		Ein Sohn Leonard alt	24
		Ein Sohn Jacob	18
		noch Ein Sohn Jost	9
		Ein Tochter Maria	25
		Ein Sohn Johann	20

Right col.: occupations of those not living at home.

Fig. 1. Detail of Count Friedrich's 1736 list of subjects in the village of Oberndorf, showing the families of Simon Dreisbach and Jost Hackler (Hackler). Right col.: occupations of those not living at home.

Strategy no. 1. Find work elsewhere.

In Fig. 1 we see listings of two of the households in Oberndorf in 1736, that of Simon Dreisbach and that of Jost Hackeller. The first person to be listed in the household of **Simon and Maria Kette Dreisbach** is "the man's brother Mannus, age 25". He is serving in the Count's militia for a period of four years. This is **Simon's youngest brother Hermannus (Mannus)**, whose rightful place in our survey is under Strategy no. 2.

1736-38: the Hackeller (Hackler) offspring of Oberndorf find work away from home.

Jost Hackeller (Hackler) has five grown children working elsewhere. They have no immediate connection to the Dreisbachs, but their work activities will serve well to exemplify Strategy no. 1.

- Son **Pöter**, age 40, is working in Bermershausen (a village a few kilometers from Oberndorf).
- **Jost**, 35, is working for the Count's forester, Wunderlich. This is probably Gilbert Wunderlich in neighboring Rùppershausen, quite near Oberndorf.
- Son **Conrad**, 24, seems to be working for someone called Krömbeher.
- **Jacob**, 18, is a "*landmilizer*" like Mannus Dreisbach, and is serving for two years.
- Daughter **Maria Eliss(abeth)**, 25, is also working for the Count's forester, Wunderlich.

1737 and 1738: where are the Hackeller offspring now?

There is a surprising amount of mobility among the Hackellers, which is not unusual in the Wittgenstein context. In the listings of the Count's subjects for the following two years, we find rather frequent changes in the Hackellers' work situations.

- **Pöter**, the eldest, has left Bermershausen and is at home in 1737, but in 1738 at age 42 he is working in nearby Rùppershausen.
- **Jost** has left forester Wunderlich and in 1737 he is working somewhere across the border in neighboring Siegerland (Nassau-Siegen). In 1738, at 36, he is still there.
- **Conrad** was briefly in the militia in 1737 and in 1738, at 34, he is working in Erndtebrück.
- **Jacob** remains in the militia for his two year stretch, and in 1738 at 20, he is still a militiaman.
- **Maria Eliss(abeth)** has left forester Wunderlich and is back home in 1737. In 1738, at 26, she is still at home.
- Younger sister **Catherina**, 21, has found work in or near the village of Zinse in 1737, but in 1738 she is a maid-servant in the village of Sassmanhausen until her work there ends on 31 August.

All but one of the siblings found more or less temporary work within Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein. Jost found work across the border in Nassau-Siegen, and can have had to obtain permission from the Count's authorities to stay there. He may have had to pay an exit fee as well. Jost is just one small part of the fairly continuous exodus of Wittgensteiners to the more populous and prosperous towns of Nassau-Siegen and the employment opportunities there.

For many, this strategy was necessary but not ideal. The work the Hackeller/Hackler siblings found seems to have been of short duration and was not likely to provide a foundation upon which to build a life.¹

Did the Dreisbachs use this strategy?

Martin Dreisbach (Raumland, 1717 – Buffalo Valley, Union Co., PA, 1799) seems to have done so. He left Raumland for work reasons and went to Krombach in Nassau-Siegen, though we have no

¹ These lists of the Count's subjects in Oberndorf in Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein, are found in the Princely Archive of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein, Bad Laasphe, in the collection *WA W 56*, pages 41b, 48a and 68b.

details. His marriage in Krombach at age 25 to Anna Eva Hoffman (1722-1789) implies that he had left Raumland when much younger, giving him time to get established in Krombach and start a family there.

An examination of records from other parts of Wittgenstein would doubtless provide examples of more Dreisbachs who left home to find work. **Simon Dreisbach's eldest son Jost**, at age 21, worked for a time in 1741 at the Count's property and sawmill at Ludwigseck. **Simon's brother Mannus**, after leaving the militia (see Strategy no. 2), worked at Castle Wittgenstein in Laasphe, possibly laboring on its large farm.²



Fig. 2. The two Wittgensteins and Nassau-Siegen in the 18th century.

Wittgenstein villages, etc., mentioned in DERR no. 4:

1. Balde
2. Feudingen
3. Raumland
4. Amtshausen
5. Steinbach
6. Oberndorf
7. Rüppershausen
8. Berghausen
9. Richstein
10. Grossenbach
11. Ludwigseck
12. Erndtebrück

The village of Dreisbach in Nassau-Siegen is now part of Dreis-Tiefenbach in Siegen-Wittgenstein.

Strategy no. 2. Sign up for military service.

Entering the Count's militia can be considered a survival strategy. The number of years to be served was stipulated at the outset, offering more certainty than many other types of work. We have seen how 18-year old Jacob Hackeller signed up for military service under the Count for a term of two years. **Mannus Dreisbach**, who enrolled for four years of service, possibly in the early 1730's, can have been thinking strategically, especially if he did not have a taste for farm work at home with Simon. However, considering that by 1736 there were five children under fifteen in Simon's and Maria Katharina's family, and that the farm was in serious need of manpower while Simon was sitting in the Count's prison in Castle Wittgenstein from Oct. 1735 to late spring 1737 (more on that later), Mannus's being away in the militia was inopportune, to say the least.

² For both Jost and Mannus Dreisbach see the 1741 list of Oberndorf subjects in the Princely Archive of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein, Bad Laasphe, under WA W 51, p.114a.

At other times the men of the villages had no choice. Early in 1737 there were revolts and unrest in farm villages in the neighboring territory of Hessen. Not only both Wittgensteins, but other territories in the region were expected to contribute troops when their powerful Hessian neighbor called for them. The southern Count's list of his subjects in 1737 shows many men serving in his militia. However, this military information was crossed out, and "befreyt" (freed and sent home) was written in instead. Fortunately for these temporary soldiers, the uprisings in Hessen had been quickly quelled, and the 'foreign' soldiers were no longer needed.³ Sadly, some young men were not so lucky, for In this same period there was a far more serious type of conscription going on in Wittgenstein and elsewhere in Europe, perpetrated by what one might call "the tall soldier kidnapers".

The negative side of Strategy no. 2. A digression: "The tall soldier kidnapers".

Young men in Wittgenstein had to be on their guard. King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia, who reigned from 1713 to 1740, wanted his soldiers to be impressively tall, and he sent his recruiting agents across Europe to bring back 'big men'. The reward paid to the recruiters was considerable, and therefore these agents often resorted to kidnapping. Two instances of this are mentioned as taking place on either side of Oberndorf – one just outside Erndtebrück, and the other in nearby Feudingeng. In the Feudingeng instance, the recruiters were actually busy measuring the height of one victim, while his friend managed to run away.⁴

Strategy no. 3. Marry the house.

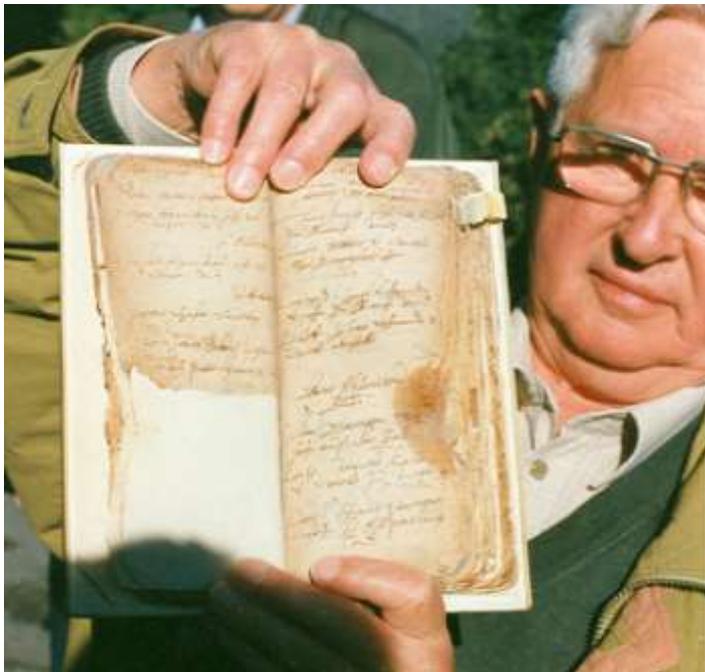


Fig. 3. Feudingeng church, book of marriages (Trauungen 1574-1739). Photo from 1996 showing Wittgenstein historian Gustav Schneider holding the marriage book open at the 1611 entry, on Misericordia Sunday, of the marriage of Johannes Dreisbach from Balde and Leisen, widow of the late Arnolt Keller, Amtshausen. (Photo by Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean outside the Feudingeng church, 1996.)

*Text on bottom half of page (but excluding the last two lines):
Johan . Georgen Treiß[bachs]
sohn auß der Bal(the) [und]
Leise[n], Arnolt Keller
s[elige] Witbe zu Amps[hausen]*

All three of our Dreisbach emigrants were born in houses which their fathers had acquired through marriage. The Wittgenstein inheritance laws were such that the eldest child, male or

³ Information on this Hessian episode was kindly provided by Dr. Ulf Lückel, in a communication of 7 May 2013.

⁴ Accounts of forcible conscription are found in the collection *WA D 14* in the Princely Archive, Bad Laasphe.

female, inherited the right to continue renting the house from the Count. In the case of daughters, it was the husband who became the new "*Hausmann*" or householder for the Count (as always, under conditions laid down by the Count or his administration).

- In **Simon Dreisbach's** line, this practice of marrying the heiress began when **Johannes Treisbach** (1581-1636) left the family's house, "Wahnersch", in Balde in 1611. Leaving the northern territory of Wittgenstein-Berleburg, he moved a few kilometers to the south to the village of Amtshausen in Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein, where in 1611 he married widow **Elisabeth Keller**, nee **Hain**, of the house "Drüben die".

Daniel Dreisbach (1623-1685), son of Johannes and Leisen, moved from Amtshausen to the village of Steinbach, marrying before 1650 the daughter of the house, "Josts", **Catharina Benfer** (1626-1681). Their son **Georg Wilhelm Dreisbach**, (1669 – before 1712), left Steinbach and married **Margreth Sasmannshausen** of the house "Am Aberge" in Oberndorf in 1697, and it was thus that future emigrant Simon began his life there in 1698. Here was a consistently used survival strategy.

- Both **Martin Dreisbach's great-grandfather** and his **grandfather** remained in Balde. There **Daniel**, (documented in the years 1616-1624) was recorded as a carpenter (*Zimmermeister*) in 1616. His son **Johannes** (ca. 1625/30 – 1699), survived the troubled last years of the Thirty Years' War, and was taxed as having a mill in 1647/48.⁵ However, his son, **Hans Georg Dreisbach** (1670-1734), left Balde and found a wife in Raumland, **Anna Elisabeth Leyendecker**, heiress to the house "Leie", said to have been the largest farmhouse in Raumland. There **Martin** was born in 1717. Having many older siblings, Martin knew he would never inherit "Leie". His strategy was to leave the northern territory of Wittgenstein-Berleburg and go to Krombach in neighboring Nassau-Siegen.



Fig. 4. "Leie" in Raumland, the birthplace of Martin Dreisbach, as it may have looked in the 18th century. From Fritz Krämer, ed., *Raumland, Beiträge zur Geschichte unseres Dorfes*, published by Gemeinde Raumland, 1975, p. 30⁶

- **Henrich Dreisbach**, the 1754 emigrant, is presumed to be the Henrich who was born to Simon Dreisbach's brother **Georg Dreisbach** in the village of Richstein in 1735. Father Georg was already in Richstein by 1730, some four or more years before he married **Katharina Feuring** (Richstein, 1714-1744). This implies that he had first gone to Richstein to find employment, and later found and married an 'heiress', whose house name has not been identified.

⁵ Information on the house "Wahnersch" and its inhabitants in Balde is from Werner Wied, ed., *Erndtebrück*, vol. 2, Jagdgenossenschaft Erndtebrück, Erndtebrück, 1977, p. 475.

⁶ Reproduced with the permission of Raumland Bürgermeister emeritus Wilhelm Uellendahl. Note: a 1996 photograph of this house was included in the *Dreisbach Family Association Newsletter*, October 2012, p. 1.

We are fortunate in having both a drawing and several photographs of **the Hans Georg Dreisbach house in Raumland**,⁷ whereas pictures are lacking for **the Georg Dreisbach house in Richstein** as we do not know which house it might be. In the case of **the Simon Dreisbach house in Oberndorf**, its location is known, but at present there is only some lawn, a garden patch and few trees. The house is said to have burned down in the 1840's.⁸



Fig. 5. Site of Simon Dreisbach's house, "Am Aberge", on the north-facing slope of the Aberg hill. Hidden between the Aberg and the hill in the background is a small stream, the Oberndorfer Bach, and a road that appears on 18th century maps. Photo by Marcia Dreisbach Falconer, 2012.

Strategy no. 4. Exercise a trade or have some other source of extra income.

Though none of our three known Dreisbach emigrants to Pennsylvania has a clear-cut history of having a trade or sideline in Wittgenstein, this was a widespread and indeed necessary practice. **Henrich Dreisbach**, who left Wittgenstein in 1754 at age eighteen and had his nineteenth birthday at sea, has left no paper trail. As the eldest child in a small household consisting only of his step-mother, Maria Birkelbach (1725-1792), his younger sister Anna Elisabeth (1738-1792) and his half-sister Maria Elisabeth (1747-1803), he was surely not idle. Henrich was only twelve at the death of his father, **Georg Dreisbach** (buried on 1 February 1748), and his widowed step-mother was only twenty-two. Moreover, she was from the town of Erndtebrück on the other side of Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein, had only been married a little more than a year and had an infant who was only six weeks old when father Georg died. It is not known what kind of support system this little family group may have had. According to the church records, Henrich's step-mother did not remarry.⁹ Technically, Henrich stood to eventually inherit the house and be the Count's *Hausmann*. It seems likely, further, that he had been doing some kind of work since his mid-teens. Why Henrich chose to be one of the Wittgensteiners who emigrated to North America in 1754, we do not know, but he was young, and the tug of unknown opportunities in North America must have prevailed.

As for **Martin Dreisbach**, no record of what he may have been working at while in Krombach in Nassau-Siegen has been found. His grandson, "Rev. John" Dreisbach, wrote that Martin was a

⁷ See Note 6. An old photo of the house "Leie" was on the front cover of *The Dreisbach Book*, published in 1998.

⁸ Oral information from Gustav Schneider, 1996, and also from an elderly Aberg neighbor, a Frau Schlabach.

⁹ Jochen Karl Mehldau, *Nachfahrenliste Dreisbach, Georg 1701b* (Descendants of Georg Dreisbach), received from him on 3 December 2011.

blacksmith by trade.¹⁰ Whether Martin already worked as a blacksmith while living in Krombach, or took to the trade in Pennsylvania, is not known.

With regard to **Simon Dreisbach** we are both better informed, and yet more at sea. Simon was the only one of the three emigrants who was an official householder -- in effect, a tenant-vassal of the Count (until 1735 this was the harsh Count August, and from 1735 onward, the more humane but still strict Count Friedrich). In Simon's case, our confusion arises from there being many pages of recently discovered documents that are in some way connected with his various activities, but whose interpretation is not always obvious. Future DERRs will attempt to trace the main aspects of these documents. DERR no. 6 is planned to be a presentation of an early letter written by Simon, in which he specifically mentions "my profession".

There is one recently identified instance of a family member exercising a trade which will interest the descendants of Simon Dreisbach. Simon's mother, **Margreth Sassmannshausen**, was the daughter of a master carpenter, **Johannes Sassmannshausen**. The house that he built in Nassau-Siegen in 1696, the year before his daughter Margreth married **Georg Wilhelm Dreisbach**, is indeed the work of a master. Sassmannshausen must have had a reputation that extended outside Wittgenstein to be hired to build a house as imposing as this one in the town that is now known as Dreis-Tiefenbach.



Fig. 6. House in the former village of Dreisbach, Siegerland, now part of Dreis-Tiefenbach in today's Siegen-Wittgenstein. An inscription above the door says the house was built in 1696 by Johannes Sassmannshausen of Oberndorf. He was Simon Dreisbach's grandfather. Photograph prior to 1974.¹¹

Johannes Sassmannshausen is not known to have been a full-time house-builder. At present no other house by him has been documented. He has been mistakenly called a "master distiller," but was in fact a master carpenter.¹² Born in 1648, Sassmannshausen lived in the house "Am Aberge" in Oberndorf from his marriage in 1679 until his death in 1722.¹³ He lived to see the baptism in 1721 of his great-grandchild, **Jost**

¹⁰ "Rev. John's" account will be discussed in a later DERR.

¹¹ Herbert Kienzler, *Siegerländer Fachwerkhäuser*, herausgegeben vom Kreis Siegen, Siegen, Verlag Vörländer, 1974, no. 34 in the photo appendix. Reproduction rights for further use pending.

¹² This disparity was discovered by Jochen Karl Mehldau (communication to the author of 20 January 2012).

¹³ See Werner Wied, *Die Feudinger Höfe*, published by "Auf den Höfen", Bad Laasphe-Rückershausen, 1991, p. 406, where Sassmannshausen is erroneously termed a "*Meister Brenner*" (master distiller).

Dreisbach, Simon's firstborn.

Johannes Sassmannshausen, for all his mastery in carpentry and house-building, was always a "*Hausmann*" of the Count, with all the obligations and economic burdens it entailed. His application of the fourth survival strategy was exemplary, to say the least.

* * * * *

There are three more "strategies" to be presented, each of them having some connection with money or the lack of it. They also shed some light on how economic problems impinged on Simon Dreisbach's life. It is our good luck that the Wittgenstein records have preserved three letters and one agreement, each signed by Simon Dreisbach. We even have a scribe's version of the words spoken by Simon Dreisbach in a hearing!

Welcome to DERR no. 5, scheduled for early June 2013, with some of the unexpected ways in which Simon Dreisbach applied Strategies Five to Seven.

Research Notes

1. "*Survival strategies*":

The seven so-called survival strategies as presented in this and the following DERR have no formal existence or validity in the world of learning. They are a fanciful construction by the present author to help DERR readers find their footing in this small, closely knit Wittgenstein society, most of whose members were struggling under conditions laid down by Counts who aspired to be absolute rulers.

2. "Marrying the house":

This phrase seems to have been coined by Marcia Dreisbach Falconer to describe a marriage pattern in Wittgenstein in which a man marries an eldest daughter who can be expected to inherit her family's house.

3. *Gustav Schneider (Fig. 3.)*:

The DERR readers in Wittgenstein and a few in North America will remember Gustav Schneider of Bad Laasphe and his years of dedicated efforts on behalf of Wittgenstein's local and family history. Gustav was our earliest source of Dreisbach descendant lists, starting with Abraham of Balde.

4. "*Dreisbach*" as a place name and a family name in the territory of Siegen:

In 1885 Dreis-Tiefenbach was formed from two neighboring villages, Tiefenbach to the west and nearby Dreisbach to the east. Dreisbach is in fact a not uncommon place name denoting a stream flowing from or past wet or uncultivated land. There are no Dreisbach villages in Wittgenstein itself, but there are several not far from its borders.

In early records of the territory of Siegen one can find the family name Dreisbach, spelled in various ways, including Dreispe. Some of these Dreisbachs were townsmen of Siegen. There is no proven connection between the Dreisbachs of pre-1600 Siegerland and the Dreisbachs of Wittgenstein who began to leave traces in and near Balde around 1600. Moreover, it was not until about 1600 that family names came into general use in Wittgenstein. For some questions there seem to be no findable answers.

A.D.G., May 2013