

## *The Wittgenstein Corner (Die Witgensteiner Ecke) No. 2*

### **MAY 16, 1743: A Day to Note in Dreisbach History**

**Why May 16th?** This day is a ‘watershed day’ for the descendants of Simon Dreisbach. In 1743 on the night of 15-16 May Simon, his wife Kette, their six children aged six to twenty-two, a young woman and various farm animals had successfully made their secret and definitive exit from Simon’s house on the outskirts of the village of Oberndorf. Early on the sixteenth they would begin the first stage of their trek: from the small territory of Wittgenstein to the Rhine River and its barges which could take them to the principal port of departure, Rotterdam. The long journey to Philadelphia had indeed begun. We would know nothing about the details of this secret event were it not for a written report sent to Count Friedrich in Castle Wittgenstein. After almost 280 years this report can still be found in the holdings of the Princely Archive in Bad Laasphe.<sup>1</sup>

**Who wrote the report? (Having received a jolt on May 16<sup>th</sup>.)** In the town of Feudingingen, a short distance from little Oberndorf, there lived a man of some local importance named Herman Junck (pronounced Yoongk). Being the area’s *Schultheiss* he was, in a sense, the long arm of Count Friedrich. It was his task to maintain order and to see that fees, contributions in kind and physical duties required by the Count were paid, presented or performed. On the morning of May 16<sup>th</sup> Junck received information which jolted him into action: Simon Dreisbach had illegally abandoned the property which the Wittgenstein Counts had leased to his forebears and to him. Junck’s task was to investigate.

We can assume that by late afternoon Schultheiss Junck was back at his house after a day filled with investigative duties in two villages, as well as the necessary inspection of the abandoned farmhouse. Count Friedrich who was Simon Dreisbach’s landlord and in effect his liege lord, had to be informed. The letter which Schultheiss Junck wrote later that day would presumably be delivered to Count Friedrich in Castle Wittgenstein the following morning.<sup>2</sup>

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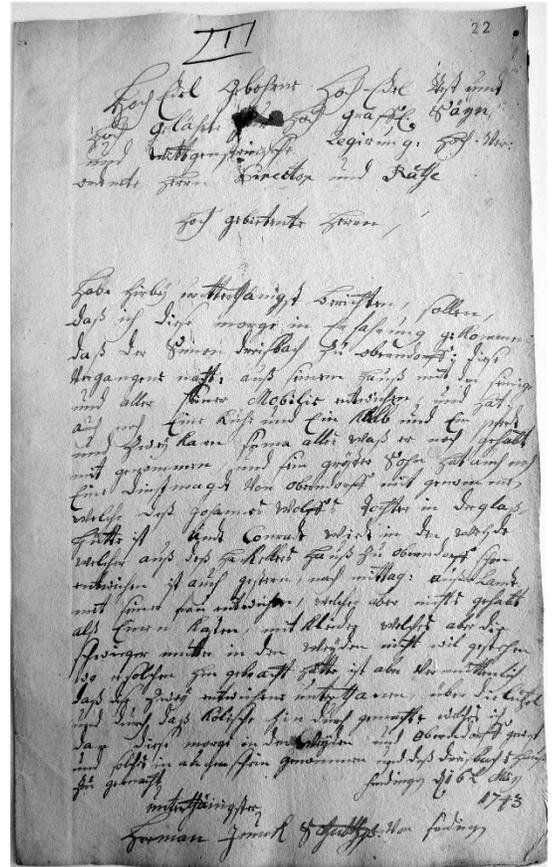
<sup>1</sup> The Archive is no longer in the castle itself, which is now an international school, but is in a separate building somewhat farther down on the road leading up to the Castle.

<sup>2</sup> The discovery of this report (and also of many more Dreisbach-related documents) was the result of a chain of email inquiries and responses in 2010 and 2011 between the present author and two distant Wittgenstein ‘cousins’. They are the knowledgeable Andreas Sassmannshausen and his historian colleague, Heinrich Imhof, the designated ‘Thursday expert’ at the very archive where information on the emigrant Simon Dreisbach was hoping to be found.

## The text of Schultheiss Junck's report:

*I must hereby humbly report that this morning I learned that Simon Dreisbach of Oberndorf this past night fled from his house with his family and all his movable things, taking along a cow and a calf and a horse and two carts, in sum all that he had, and his eldest son also took along a female servant from Oberndorf who is the daughter of Johannes Wolf of Glasshütte; further, Conrad Wied of Weide who already absconded yesterday in the afternoon from the Hackler house in Oberndorf, leaving the territory with his wife; however he left behind nothing but a chest with clothing, concerning which his mother-in-law refuses to say where he can have left such a chest; and it is probable that the two runaway subjects (of the Count, i.e. Dreisbach and Wied) took the way via Lützel and then through the territory that is governed by Cologne. This morning I was in Weide and Oberndorf. I have personally inspected such things and closed up the Dreisbach house.*

*Most humbly  
Feudingens, the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1743  
Herman Junck Schultheiss of Feudingens  
(Translation by Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean)*



Report from Schultheiss Junck written in 1743. Photo: Heinrich Imhof

**May 16, 1743: The journey begins.** Simon Dreisbach and young Conrad Wied, who had left with his wife earlier on the fifteenth, had surely agreed upon a meeting-place the next day so they could all travel together. Conrad Wied does indeed appear on the ship's list of the *Lydia* together with the Dreisbachs, and was among those disembarking in Philadelphia. The young woman taken along by Jost Dreisbach has not been found in Pennsylvania. (Jost Dreisbach later married his neighbor's daughter, Elizabeth Dieter.)

**Where can Junck's report of May 16<sup>th</sup> be found?** It is beyond all expectation that this brief report should still exist as part of a voluminous archival holding in the Princely Archive of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein in Bad Laasphe. Yet there it is, in Herman Junck's script, one of many documents, proceedings and interrogations in a holding with the following *signum* and title: *WA D 53 – Dreisbach Simon / dessen Guth betr.e 1743 –* (which means: *Dreisbach Simon / concerning his house-and-tracts 1743 to 17--*).

Here we can follow deliberations in the Count's administrative chamber concerning Simon's abandoned property and the need for a contract with a new *Hausman*, given that a significant part of the Count's income was dependent on the fees paid into his coffers and the value of various contributions and tasks imposed upon the lease-holders. Here are also problems with Simon's two brothers involving inherited pieces of land which had not been regularized with the Count's administrators. Such matters were eventually settled, and of course had no significance for Simon in Pennsylvania.

**May 16, 2021: Looking forward.**

'Cousins' Imhof and Sassmannshausen continue to share their knowledge. They have supported our efforts to learn about, examine and publish information on the early Dreisbachs, whether in Wittgenstein or in North America. An on-going example is the **DERR (Dreisbach Emigration Research Report)** where the individual articles about Simon Dreisbach and his family in Wittgenstein are firmly undergirded by the archival information which especially Heinrich Imhof has uncovered and graciously supplied to researchers .

On May 16<sup>th</sup> this year it may be rather early to look forward to the completion of ongoing projects, but it is a good moment for taking stock and for doing what one can. We might also appropriate a little of Simon Dreisbach's positive approach to change and his confidence in the coming May 16, and add: whether it be 1743 or 2021.

*Ardis Grosjean Dreisbach, Stockholm, May 14,2021*

For more information and greater detail go to:

[http://www.dreisbachfamily.org/images/DERR\\_16\\_The\\_NIght\\_the\\_Dreisbachs\\_Left\\_Wittgenstein.pdf](http://www.dreisbachfamily.org/images/DERR_16_The_NIght_the_Dreisbachs_Left_Wittgenstein.pdf)