

The Wittgenstein Corner (Die Wittgensteiner Ecke) No. 4

MARTIN DREISBACH'S TWO LIFE-CHANGING DEPARTURES (first in his youth, then as a family man)

1.) Martin Dreisbach (1717-1799) had two “home towns”, and he left both of them. He was born in the village of Raumland in northern Wittgenstein on 24 May 1717, the youngest of nine children. His mother died while he was a toddler, and there is no known paper trail to help us follow young Martin from his childhood in Raumland to his marriage on 9 November 1742 to Anna Eva Hoffman in Krombach in northern Siegerland (Nassau-Siegen).

Among Martin's numerous Dreisbach/Dresbach descendants in Pennsylvania, Ohio and elsewhere, there have been family historians who were aware of Martin's marriage in Krombach and the children born there. There was also a family tradition that Martin and Simon Dreisbach were first cousins. (They were, in fact, third cousins.) In any event, how Martin, a Dreisbach from Wittgenstein, came to marry the well-connected Anna Eva Hoffman in Krombach is perhaps on the way to being explained. What does seem certain is that it was Martin's choice to work in Nassau-Siegen (and, it may be, to emigrate to Pennsylvania).

2.) In the summer of 2019 Marcia Dreisbach Falconer released the results of her far-ranging research: *The Life and Times of Martin Dreisbach (1717-1799)*.¹ Here the many aspects of Martin's long and active life are treated in detail. Marcia has investigated and described in depth what Martin's early blacksmith (*Hammerschmidt*) career may have been like, starting with his apprenticeship, most probably in Wittgenstein. Later, during his journeyman years, he will have furthered his abilities, leading to some form of involvement in the Siegerland iron industry. Marcia has also suggested certain local connections which can have led to Martin's being considered a suitable partner for Anna Eva Hoffman of Krombach.

It has not been possible to pinpoint the time at which young Martin went to Nassau-Siegen, but the record of his marriage in Krombach indicates that at twenty-five he was prepared to shoulder family responsibilities there. Church records of the baptisms of five children and burials of two of them imply that Martin was now well rooted among the burghers of Krombach.

¹ Well researched and richly illustrated, this not-for-profit publication was released by Marcia Dreisbach Falconer at the 2019 DDFA Reunion. It is available by order on line from Lulu.com

After the long apprentice and journeyman years he now had a more settled existence, having become a resident of his wife's home town.

3.) Nevertheless, in 1751 when Martin was thirty-four he uprooted himself, his wife and their three young children and left Krombach to travel down the Rhine to Rotterdam and take passage to Philadelphia. Marcia has connected this with the negative effects of the new and less favorable circumstances at the principal forge that was used by many local *Hammerschmidts* in that part of Siegerland.

In addition Marcia has learned that at least one ship owner in the trans-Atlantic trade also had economic interests in Pennsylvania forges. He would have the authority to offer somewhat favorable travel conditions in exchange for five or so years of blacksmith work in a Pennsylvania forge. Direct proof may never be found, but such an arrangement could help explain why Martin was ready to expose his wife and three children, the youngest of which was only five months old, to the Atlantic crossing and the unknown conditions ahead.

4.) Martin had departed for good from Anna Eva's home town and family, but not from his early career in metalworking. Marcia Falconer has found no record of Martin's existence in his first five years in Pennsylvania, but he may well have been working to repay the expenses of the family's journey. Then, in 1756, he appears in a tax record for West Cocalico Township in Lancaster County, which may indeed mean that Martin was now running his own life. From then on Martin's career in Pennsylvania has many aspects, of which blacksmithing is only one.

At this point Martin Dreisbach's life can be followed in the extant records. He is shown to be a master of many skills, selling his property after a time and purchasing new land elsewhere. It is a remarkable story as he moves first eastward to Alsace Township in Berks County, then northward to Buffalo Valley in what is now Union County where life in the 1770's and 1780's could be dramatic and dangerous and involve flight back to Alsace Township.

5.) Martin Dreisbach's life in Pennsylvania no longer included the defining notion of a home town. Here and there a tavern, a few houses and perhaps a church could be found at a crossroads, but the majority of settlers were farmers living separately on their land.

However, there was in fact an original Dreisbach home town. Its name was, and is, **Balde**, and **the 500th anniversary celebration** of its having appeared in the Wittgenstein records for the first time on *September 4, 1521* was scheduled to take place on *September 4, 2021*. But the Covid epidemic has put an end to it (at least temporarily).

The Wittgenstein Corner may have more to say about all that. . .

Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean, September 3, 2021