

## The Dreisbach who turned nineteen at sea in autumn 1754

### The early years of Henrich Dreisbach (Bucks County Henry), and recent (2018) information on his identity

#### Why this paper had to be written.

Of the three Dreisbach immigrants who disembarked in Philadelphia in the years 1743, 1751 and 1754 (Simon, Martin, Henrich), it is the last and youngest who has been the greatest mystery. Whereas detailed information on the two earlier immigrants and their accompanying family members has increased in recent years, very little has come to light in the past decade on the early life of Henrich Dreisbach.

More than one expert on Wittgenstein family history has presented information indicative of close family ties between young Henrich Dreisbach of Richstein in eastern Wittgenstein and the Simon Dreisbach family of Oberndorf in the western part of the territory. Information on the child Henrich was derived from reliable church records and has carried significant weight among family researchers. The infant who was born in Richstein to Georg and Katharina Dreisbach and was christened Henrich on 30 October 1735 in the Arfeld church<sup>1</sup> has been proposed as being both the nephew of Simon Dreisbach and the nineteen year-old *Henrich Dresbach* who disembarked from the *John & Elizabeth* in Philadelphia on 7 November 1754.<sup>2</sup> A supporting link, however, was lacking.

In the spring of 2018 such a link appeared (in German) in Heinrich Imhof's definitive work on two centuries of emigration from Wittgenstein to North America, *Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben* (Hoping for a Better Life). This fact-filled tome was years in the making. Its subtitle is *Die Auswanderung aus Wittgenstein nach Amerika im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Emigration from Wittgenstein to America in the 18th and 19th Centuries).<sup>3</sup>

In his book this highly respected authority has covered two centuries of emigration to North America, marshalling numerous and varied examples, some heroic and others tragic, shedding light on the why, the who, the when and the whither of emigration. The last 100 pages of the book contain what is surely Heinrich Imhof's crowning achievement, his *Auswandererlisten* or emigrant lists. Here

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<sup>1</sup> Arfeld church baptismal record p. 182, 3<sup>rd</sup> entry, courtesy of Jochen Karl Mehldau of Karlsruhe, Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph B. Strassburger & William John Hinke, *Pennsylvania German Pioneers, A Publication of the Original Lists of Arrivals in the Port of Philadelphia From 1727 to 1808*, Pennsylvania German Society, Norristown, PA, 1934, vol. III, p. 752.

<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Imhof, *Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben*, published by Heinrich Imhof, Bad Berleburg, 2018.

he has assembled no fewer than 5,464 emigrants from Wittgenstein to North America in the period 1712 – 1908. And it is here, on page 446, that we find Imhof's linking of the young emigrant Henrich Dreisbach with the village of Richstein. Among the Wittgenstein passengers Imhof lists aboard the ship *John & Elizabeth* is:

*Dreisbach, Joh. Heinr. (born) 1735, Richstein*

In his emigrant lists Imhof has standardized the varied spellings of the Wittgenstein names, thereby bringing them into line with today's usage. On the two lists the newly arrived Henrich signed at the Philadelphia Courthouse on 7 November 1754, he wrote his name as

*Henrich Dresbach*<sup>4</sup>

Later in this paper we shall consider what may have contributed to young Henrich's modification of his family name, including some possible strain in the relationship between his father Georg and his uncle Simon.

Information on Henrich as a teenager is hard to find. A few interesting aspects are known, however, regarding his departure for the British colony of Pennsylvania. As we shall see, there is some hitherto unnoticed information with regard to young Henrich's traveling companions and their shared conditions aboard the ship *John & Elizabeth*.

### **One voyage, three lists.**

In *Pennsylvania German Pioneers*<sup>5</sup> one can study the passenger lists of many ships that arrived in Philadelphia from Europe in the eighteenth century. The first and basic list, required by the magistrates in the Philadelphia Courthouse for the official registration of the newcomers, was presumably put together on board the ship. It contained the names of male passengers above the age of sixteen who were to be walked from the ship to the Courthouse. The ship's officers, being English-speaking, had written the unfamiliar names of their German passengers as they heard them, and the resulting passenger names on many ships' lists can be a source of linguistic wonderment. Henrich Dreisbach, for example, appears on the *John & Elizabeth* passenger list as *Henrick Troestback*!<sup>6</sup>

At the Courthouse each immigrant had to sign two new lists which followed the same order as that of the ship's list. By signing the first list, the oath of allegiance, they swore loyalty to their new ruler, the British sovereign. Signing the second list, the oath of abjuration, meant that they renounced all fidelity to their former rulers. A majority of the *John & Elizabeth's* 130 male signers could write their own names. Twenty-nine of them, however, placed an X next to the name inserted for them by a courthouse scribe.<sup>7</sup> On both lists Henrich wrote: *Henrich Dresbach*, using a form of the Dreisbach surname that was not unknown in Wittgenstein, but was not common. Whether this might have been the young man's intentional rejection of his Dreisbach heritage is a question to be considered.

Ships' lists do not cite passengers' individual origins, but three regional areas of origin do appear at the top of the *John & Elizabeth* passenger list. They are Hanau, the Palatinate, and Wirtemberg (Württemberg). There is no mention of tiny Wittgenstein. A number of the ship's passengers bore family names known to exist in Wittgenstein, but Imhof includes in his emigrant list only those for whom he can document Wittgenstein origins or residency. Of the 130 adult male passengers on the *John & Elisabeth*, Heinrich Imhof was able to identify fourteen men, including our Henrich, who share eleven Wittgenstein family names. Imhof even calculated the probable number of their dependents on board as thirty-eight, based on extant Wittgenstein records and on the huge

<sup>4</sup> Strassburger & Hinke (see note 2) vol. III, pp. 668, 670,

<sup>5</sup> See note 2.

<sup>6</sup> Strassburger & Hinke, vol. I, p. 666.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, Vol. I, pp. 668, 670. With grateful thanks to Marcia Dreisbach Falconer for supplying exhaustive information on the *John & Elizabeth* lists as found in the published Strassburger & Hinke lists.

database compiled by fellow historian Jochen Karl Mehldau.<sup>8</sup> The three lists also provide us with an additional significant indication of Henrich Dreisbach's Richstein origins, but we shall keep that till last.

### **From Henrich to Henry.**

The contrast is great between the paucity of facts about the young Henrich of Richstein and the many later church, tax and military records generated by the mature Henry Dreisbach in the north-western corner of Bucks County, PA. His adult life there is well documented, and in the church records his name is once again spelled Dreisbach. In 1808 Henrich/Henry died where he had lived his adult life, and was interred in the Almont burial ground near his house and farm. Family researchers have given him various epithets including "Bucks County Henry".

With regard to young Henrich Dreisbach's life in Wittgenstein, our knowledge is expanding. We know now that in 1743 and the following years Henrich's father, Georg Dreisbach, was affected legally and economically by certain consequences of Simon Dreisbach's unauthorized departure for North America in 1743.<sup>9</sup> We also know that in January 1748 twelve-year old Henrich of Richstein, having already lost his mother, now lost his father. Though our knowledge of his teenage years is almost non-existent, we do have Heinrich Imhof's unhesitating connection of the Richstein boy with the *Henrich Dresbach* who at eighteen made his way to the Amsterdam wharves and took passage on a ship destined for Philadelphia. In the following we shall examine certain information and related contexts which, we propose, can have set Henrich Dresbach on the path that led to the colony of Pennsylvania, there to make a new life for himself as Henry Dreisbach of Almont in Bucks County.

### **The story starts in Oberndorf.**

The roots of Henrich's story lie partly in Oberndorf, in the *Am Aberge* house and its lands. Did the child Henrich Dreisbach ever accompany his father Georg on the long way to Oberndorf and the Dreisbach house on the hill, called *Am Aberge*? It was there that Henrich's father Georg Dreisbach had been born in 1701. There George's elder brother Simon, born in 1698, had been the official head of the *Am Aberge* household since at least 1727. A younger brother, Hermanus, called Mannus (1706-1765), was seldom at home, as he served in the count's militia, and later worked on his grounds as a hired man.<sup>10</sup>

Until Henrich turned eight, it would have been possible for him to visit his six Dreisbach cousins at *Am Aberge*, five of whom were boys. The youngest, Johann, was closest in age to Henrich, as both were born in 1735.<sup>11</sup> After early 1743 such visits were no longer possible. *Am Aberge* was vacant and despoiled. Leaseholder Simon Dreisbach had secretly left for Pennsylvania on the night of 15 May with his household and farm animals. Thereafter Henrich's only close Dreisbach relative was his uncle Mannus whose life was not without problems, as we shall see. Whether 'Uncle Mannus' could be considered a model uncle is a matter for discussion. In the meantime we shall seek for Georg Dreisbach's possible reasons for leaving the *Am Aberge* homestead.

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<sup>8</sup> Jochen Karl Mehldau is the first to be thanked of those Imhof cites in his Foreword. Mehldau has built up a huge database, *The Wittgenstein Family Database (Wittgensteiner Familiendatei)*, and has long shared his information with Heinrich Imhof and with American Dreisbach researchers.

<sup>9</sup> The consequences of Simon Dreisbach's departure are treated for the first time in English below.

<sup>10</sup> Werner Wied, *Die Feudinger Höfe*, Ortsheimverein "Auf den Höfen", Bad Laasphe-Rückershausen 1991, p. 405.

<sup>11</sup> A possible encounter in Pennsylvania between the Dreisbach cousins Johann son of Simon and Henrich son of Georg perhaps took place in upper Bucks County, PA in the late 1750's. See Research Notes.

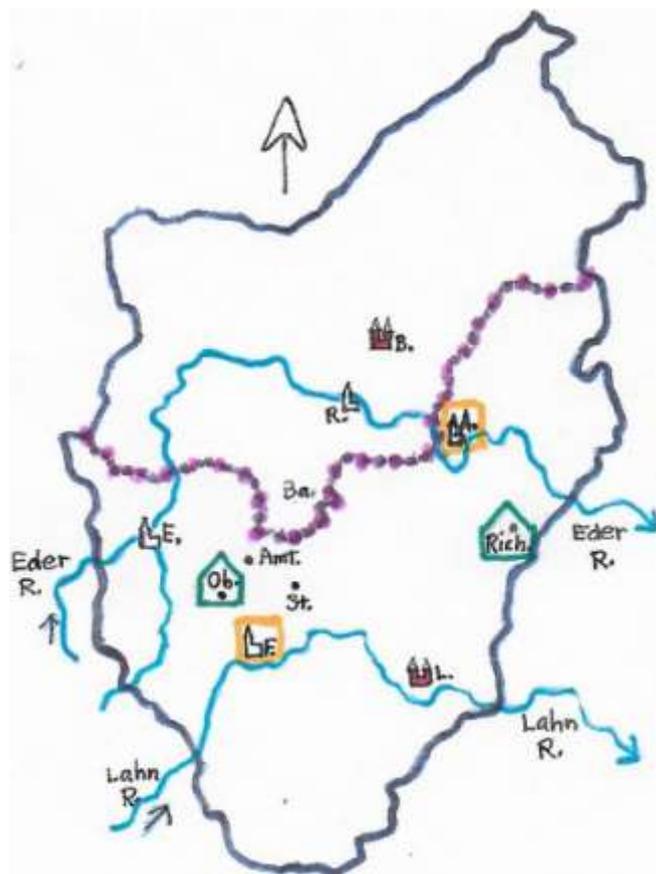


Fig. 1. The two Wittgensteins in the 18th century. The dotted line divides Wittgenstein-Berleburg in the north from Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein in the south. The counts of the north and south had their seats in Berleburg and in Laasphe respectively (the turreted castles B. and L.).

The blue houses represent the villages of Oberndorf and Richstein.

The yellow squares indicate two parish churches: A is Arfeld, which served many eastern villages including Richstein. F is for Feudingingen, which served Oberndorf and some twenty other villages.

R., Ba, Amt., St. are the villages Raumland, Balde, Amtshausen, Steinbach, where various Dreisbachs lived.

E. is Erndtebrück, an important town for westward connections and birthplace of Georg Dreisbach's second wife.

### Georg Dreisbach leaves Oberndorf and *Am Aberge*.

It would have been clear to all that Georg Dreisbach, being a younger brother, would have to fend for himself. There was an ancient rule in Wittgenstein that when one of the count's fief holders or vassals died it was the first-born who would follow him. If the eldest child was female this right would pass to her husband. Likewise, if the widow chose to remarry, it was the new husband who would become the next fief-holder or *Hausmann*. In 1712, a year or so after the death of *Hausmann* Georg Wilhelm Dreisbach (1669-pre-1712), the *Am Aberge* widow Margreth Sassmannshausen married Jost Wied, a local man. He was then thirty-two and could expect to have charge of the property for years to come; his son-in-law Simon Dreisbach might well have a long period of waiting before succeeding him.

How long Jost Wied actually functioned as *Hausmann* at *Am Aberge* is not known. The last indirect traces of him are quite early: the baptism of a daughter on 4 April 1716, and her burial the following year.<sup>12</sup> We know only that his death preceded that of his wife Margreth, for in the Feudingingen church record of her death on 27 April 1726 she is called the widow Wied.<sup>13</sup> Nor do we know exactly when Simon Dreisbach acceded to his birthright. The earliest known record of his being the *Am Aberge* fiefholder is from the year 1727.<sup>14</sup>

The three Dreisbach brothers found separate economic solutions. To supplement the income of his not very large farm, Simon worked occasionally as a carter in the 1720's, making deliveries as

<sup>12</sup> Feudingingen church baptismal record of 4 April 1716 p. 233, record no. 11; burial record for 7 Sept. 1717, 22nd entry on p. 184 verso.

<sup>13</sup> Feudingingen church burial record 1726, entry 13, p. 201 recto.

<sup>14</sup> Note 10.

far away as Cologne.<sup>15</sup> There is scant information on the youngest brother, Mannus, who in 1732 at age 26 signed a four-year contract to serve the count as a militiaman and, as mentioned, later worked as a laborer on the Count's properties.<sup>16</sup>

As for Georg, in late 1727 at twenty-six he was still living at home. A document dated 9 December 1727 lists the Count's adult male subjects with their civil status, village by village.<sup>17</sup> In Oberndorf, the first family listed is that of *Simon Dreyßbach*. His two brothers, cited as *Johann George* and *Manus*, are both noted as single and living at home. Soon thereafter Georg seems to have left Oberndorf and moved to Richstein, perhaps for reasons of employment. We would not have suspected this, were it not for a nephew's baptism in Feudingingen in early 1730.

In early January 1730 Simon Dreisbach and his wife Katharina were expecting the birth of their sixth child, and plans were being made for the many visitors who would come to *Am Aberge* to congratulate the parents.<sup>18</sup> The christening in the Feudingingen church would be scheduled quite soon after the birth, and the baptismal sponsors would need to be informed quickly of the day and time of the ceremony in Feudingingen. Simon's brother Georg had been asked to be one of the sponsors.

The child was probably born after mid-January and would receive the name Simon at the baptism on 24 January 1730. In the church record the baptismal sponsors appear with their place of residence. Unfortunately, the page with little Simon Dreisbach's christening has been seriously damaged. Researcher Jochen Karl Mehldau examined the document, finding "*Georg ...bach des Vaters Bruder*", (Georg [Dreis]bach the father's brother), but his place of residence was damaged or illegible. However, Mehldau did not hesitate to insert Richstein (from his extensive family data base) as Georg's place of residence. Herr Mehldau can no longer be approached for further information, but his placing Georg Dreisbach in Richstein as early as January 1730 is not easily dismissed.<sup>19</sup>

### **The 'pull' of Richstein.**

The village of Richstein had a longer and more impressive history than Oberndorf could ever claim. In 1984 Richstein celebrated 600 years of recorded history as a civic entity. As early as 1384 it was a regional seat of government with its own court of law. Its medieval castle dominated a long north-south rise in the landscape and the village was a string of houses along the road leading to the castle.

By the time Georg Dreisbach moved to Richstein the village had totally changed. The castle was a ruin and the houses on the hill were gone. Disaster had struck one day in 1590 when a fire spread rapidly through the village destroying thirty houses and leaving only two sheds standing. Richstein was rebuilt at a lower elevation on the opposite side of the stream known as the Richsteinbach. By the year 1730 Richstein had become a sizeable village, having no less than 230 inhabitants. (In 1736, Oberndorf had a mere 90.) Moreover, Oberndorf lay at the far end of a small road and a few tracks, whereas Richstein was situated at a crossroads. Though we do not know if Georg Dreisbach had a trade or other specialization, Richstein by its very size may well have had better opportunities to offer a man in his late twenties.

**Georg Dreisbach starts a family.** It remains a mystery how Georg Dreisbach supported himself in Richstein in the years before his marriage. Information on his adult life has come mainly from records of church rites – baptisms, marriages, funerals.

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<sup>15</sup> See DERR no. 6, "Simon the carter", on the DFA website.

<sup>16</sup> Note 6.

<sup>17</sup> Princely Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein Archive, Holding W 51, *Untertanenverzeichnis*, Oberndorf, p. 21b.

<sup>18</sup> A girl, Katharina, had died in 1725. Two more, Alexander and Elisabeth, would die in the course of 1731.

<sup>19</sup> The detailed information on the 1730 christening of Simon Dreisbach Jr., which Jochen Karl Mehldau has supplied in a print-out of his *Descendant list for Simon Dreisbach born 1698*, is only one example of his careful and extensive work in collecting and digitizing the extant early Wittgenstein records.



Fig. 2. Richstein ca. 1738. Formerly situated along the road on the left leading up to the Richstein castle, it was totally destroyed by fire in 1590 (the ruined castle and a chapel possibly used for baptisms are seen on the left). Richstein was rebuilt on the opposite side of the stream. In 1738 young Henrich Dreisbach was living in one of its many houses. Photograph: Marcia Dreisbach Falconer, from Count Friedrich's unique 1739 Forstatlas (Forest Atlas) in the Princely Archive Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein in Bad Laasphe.

It was not until 1734, when he was 32, that Georg married Katharina (Catharina Elisabeth) Feuring, a young woman of Richstein, thirteen years his junior and heiress to the house called *Hebelhaus*. Thus Georg became a *Hausmann* under Count Friedrich. His future was now secure if he worked hard, paid various fees and made other contributions to the Count's administration. Between 1735 and 1743 four children were born to the couple, but only the first two lived to adulthood. The firstborn, the future emigrant Henrich, was baptized on 20 October 1735 as Johann Henrich, and must have had at least one baptismal sponsor though the record does not contain any.<sup>20</sup> Next came Anna Elisabeth, baptized on 6 March 1736. (The first names given at baptism were so-called *church names*, in this case Johann and Anna, which would not normally be used in the child's everyday life. Johann was the most popular church name for boys; for girls there were two, Anna and Maria.)

At the baptism of Anna Elisabeth only one godparent is mentioned. He was *Hermann Dreysbach*, the father's brother, from Oberndorf. Thus Mannus, the youngest of the three Dreisbach brothers, came for the christening of his niece, perhaps in the Arfeld mother church or in its chapel in Richstein. In any event Mannus and the other guests and family would have accompanied father Georg to *Hebelhaus* to join in the celebratory festivities.

<sup>20</sup> Baptismal records of the Arfeld parish church, p. 182, 3<sup>rd</sup> entry.

### Young Henrich Dreisbach and a chain of deaths.

As can be seen in the view of Richstein in Fig. 2, Henrich Dreisbach came into the world in a village whose many houses clustered in a narrow space hemmed in by hills. In such a village Henrich and his sister Elisabeth could find many playmates. Their childhood, however, was less than carefree.

The family grew; two girls were born in close succession. Maria arrived in July of 1741 when Henrich was six. She died one year later. Luise was born in December of 1743, but died in April 1744 only four months old. Then, in that same year, came the hardest blow of all. The children's mother, Katharina, died in August, only a few months after baby Luise's death. The surviving older children, Henrich and Elizabeth were then eight and six, and had experienced three deaths within just two years.

Georg Dreisbach, now a single parent, was left to rear Henrich and Elizabeth. For lack of access to published information on the early inhabitants of Richstein it is not certain whether there were Feuring in-laws in Richstein who could provide help and support for this little family. George was in any event no stranger to death, having seen much of it in his birthplace.<sup>21</sup> He was now the stable element in Henrich's and Elisabeth's lives. This situation lasted until the end of 1746 when a brighter era seemed to dawn for this family of three.

On 16 December 1746, more than two years after the death of his first wife Katharina, Georg Dreisbach remarried. He had found a young woman, Maria Birkelbach, from the town of Erndtebrück on the western edge of Wittgenstein. Born in November of 1725, Maria was only twenty-one on her wedding day in the Arfeld church; her husband was forty-five. In fact, Henrich acquired a stepmother who was only ten years his senior. One year and two days later a daughter was born, Maria Elisabeth, who would grow to adulthood and live till 1803. Life had returned to the family in the house called *Hebelhaus*. Or so it seemed.



*Fig. 3. The church in Arfeld which served various villages in eastern Wittgenstein, including Richstein. Here both of Georg Dreisbach's marriages were performed, the baptisms of his children were recorded, his first wife and two of their infant children were buried. Georg Dreisbach was also interred here. See also notes 24 and 25 for later family burials.*

*Drawing by Helmut Richter. Reproduction rights graciously granted by the Wittgensteiner Heimatverein e.V.*

<sup>21</sup> Georg lost his father before he was ten. His mother remarried, her child died in infancy and the father himself died after 1716. The maternal grandparents continued to live in *Am Aberge* until their deaths in 1721 and 1722. Brother Simon lost a little daughter there in 1725. The mother of the three Dreisbach brothers died there in 1726.

**Georg Dreisbach in his med-forties. Civic respect, yet at the mercy of the Count.**

**1) Georg Dreisbach as a responsible citizen:** The one known piece of information relative to Georg Dreisbach's status in Richstein is his civic title, cited in one of Count Friedrich's administrative documents. Dated 4 February 1744, it identifies "Georg Drespach" as "Gemeinsman von Ruchstein". This meant that as Richstein's *Gemeinsman* or *Gemeindeman*, he had been elected to a position of local responsibility by his fellow householders in the village. This position involved various official and administrative tasks, including meeting the Count's demands for teams from the village to perform long hours of work on his farming estates.

The title *Gemeinsman* represents a position of trust, and can be seen as a confirmation of Georg's successful integration into a community where he had been living for no more than fifteen years. He appears to have attained a level of social respect never achieved in Wittgenstein by either of his brothers (see Research Notes). Ironically, the document which identifies him as Richstein's *Gemeinsman* was in fact related to quite another part of Georg Dreisbach's life – to an undeclared inheritance that had not been reported to the Count's administration.

**2) Georg Dreisbach, a "hay thief"?** His legal troubles begin in the summer of 1743. It was Simon Dreisbach's secret departure for Pennsylvania that set off a chain of official actions leading to legal troubles for Georg Dreisbach and certain of his relatives. On the night of 15-16 May 1743 Simon had secretly left *Am Aberge* with family and farm animals.<sup>22</sup> Count Friedrich, ever mindful of his own income, ordered that a new *Hausmann* candidate be found for the abandoned property. First, however, the Count ordered a full investigation of the pilfering that had taken place in connection with the Dreisbachs' departure, for Frederick viewed everything on the property as belonging to himself.

In July or early August a propertyless Oberndorf man emerged as an eager candidate to replace Simon Dreisbach. Crops in the abandoned *Am Aberge* fields were ripening, particularly the grasses destined to become hay, and the candidate was given permission to start harvesting in the neglected fields and grasslands. In no time at all a long-hidden problem was revealed. The future leaseholder complained to the Count that men were harvesting hay on his land and taking it away.

The Count again ordered an investigation. Witnesses were heard, and Georg Dreisbach of Richstein and his uncle Jost Sassmannshausen of Oberndorf were accused of mowing grass for hay and hiding it in a shed in Oberndorf. Now the existence was revealed of certain undeclared and untaxed private plots embedded among the Count's *Am Aberge* meadows and fields. Such plots were legal, but only if the inheritance was recorded and the associated fees and taxes were paid into the Count's treasury. None of this had been done.

These private plots had been the personal property of the Dreisbach brothers' maternal grandfather, master carpenter/builder Johannes Sassmannshausen, a previous *Hausmann* in *Am Aberge*. Until Simon left secretly in May 1743, there had been five heirs to these plots. After Simon Dreisbach's illegal departure for Pennsylvania, the heirs were four in number. Not knowing what the future of their secret inheritance might be, the four heirs had already made a simplified redistribution of their plots into three parts, one for each of the two Sassmannshausen sons and the third for their two Dreisbach nephews, the sons of their late sister.

Now, with the new contract for *Am Aberge* about to be formalized, action was called for. Georg Dreisbach and his uncle Jost Sassmannshausen went to 'their' fields and cut the fully grown grasses. It was an unwise decision. The future householder immediately complained vociferously.

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<sup>22</sup> The exit of the Simon Dreisbach family from *Am Aberge* on the night of 15 to 16 May 1743 is treated at length in DERR no. 16.

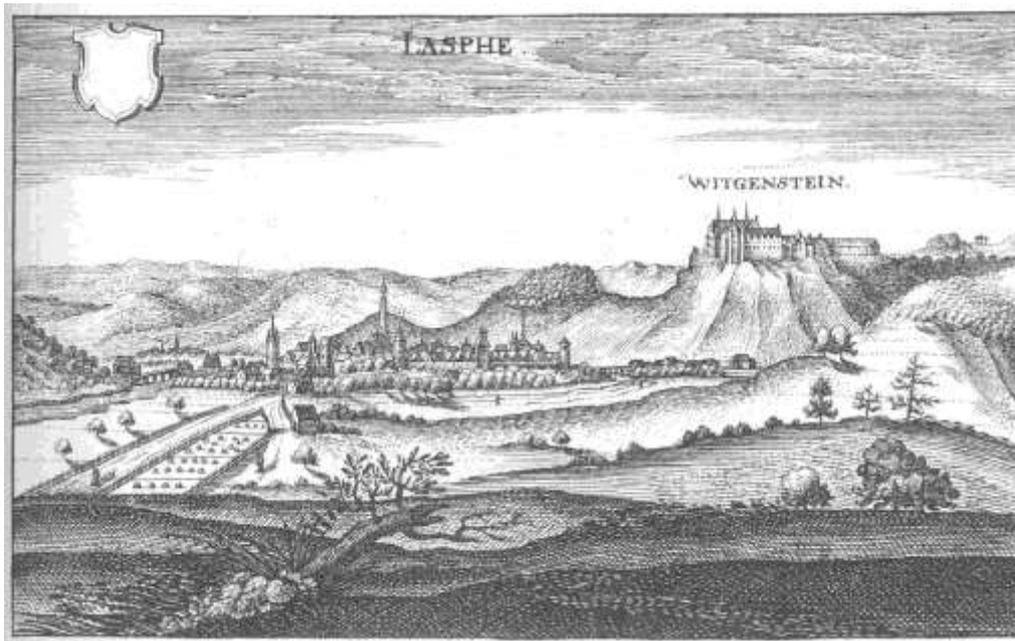
The hay was soon found, measured and weighed, and the "hay thieves" were summoned to appear on 10 September for questioning by the Count's Chamber in Castle Wittgenstein.

### 3) Georg Dreisbach's honor restored.

Both Sassmannshausen uncles, Jost and Arendt, were interrogated on 10th September 1743, as well as Georg Dreisbach. (His brother Mannus was not personally implicated as he had not participated in the hay harvesting.) The Council was now confronted with so many unresolved issues and technicalities that further action was postponed until the next session, one week later. The two sets of brothers, Sassmannshausens and Dreisbachs, got to work and formulated their separate appeals to be presented to the Chamber.

Returning to Castle Wittgenstein on 17th September, and having already submitted their appeals, the Sassmannshausens and their nephews awaited the Chamber's decision. The Sassmannshausens were informed that their appeal had received a positive response. There were fees and taxes to pay, but ownership of their plots was confirmed. For Georg and Mannus, however, there was sterner news. Due to a technical hindrance in their case (possibly related to Simon's absconding and his unpaid debts to the Count's treasury) a final decision could only come from the highest level, from Count Friedrich himself. The case was then closed and the Dreisbach brothers were left in a situation of uncertainty that would continue for more than two years.

Finally, on 14 September 1745, the Chamber announced that on 24th August a decision had been duly reached at the highest level, and on this basis the Dreisbachs' right to their hereditary lands was now legally recognized.<sup>23</sup>



*Fig. 4. Castle Wittgenstein above the town of Laasphe, engraving by Matthäus Merian published posthumously in 1655 in the series Topographia Germaniae. The landscape is exaggerated, as is the relative size of the castle, but this is a seemingly faithful representation of Laasphe below. It was still a walled town in 1743 when the Sassmannshausens and Dreisbachs were making their way up the steep road to the castle. Source: Wikimedia Commons.*

<sup>23</sup> See the remarkable documentation of these events as presented in the Research Notes below.

### **The end of a short life.**

Georg Dreisbach died in late January 1748, aged 46 years and approximately 2 months. He had had a mere thirteen months of family life with Maria Birkelbach. Georg was interred in the Arfeld church's burial ground on the first of February 1748. His life had been short and not particularly carefree. He had experienced many family deaths in *Am Aberge* and then in his own *Hebelhaus*. He had lost two infant daughters in July 1742 and April 1744, and soon thereafter his first wife, in August of that same year. From the summer of 1743 to September 1745 his life had been overshadowed by uncertainty as to the ownership of his inheritance at *Am Aberge* which Count Friedrich seemed in no hurry to grant.

Georg's life then took a new and positive turn with his marriage in December 1746 to Maria Birkelbach. She was young and would live a long life, as did their daughter Elisabeth, born 18th December 1747.<sup>24</sup> As the year 1748 commenced, it did indeed appear that life had returned to the *Hebelhaus* family.

There is no specific information on the death of Georg Dreisbach, neither the cause of his death nor even the exact date of death. We do not know what happened in Georg's life in the first weeks of the year 1748. There is only the Arfeld Church's record of his interment at the beginning of February. Georg and Maria had been married for one year and six weeks. Their child Elisabeth was just six weeks old.

Henrich and his sister Elisabeth were old enough to recognize the gravity of the situation. Their father had been the secure foundation and support of their lives. Henrich was twelve years and three months old when Georg died. Elisabeth was a few weeks short of her tenth birthday. Maria, their widowed step-mother, had turned twenty-two a few months previously.

At present there is no available information on life in *Hebelhaus* in this period. It is quite possible that the cause of Georg's death was a sudden illness or an accident. It is doubtful that the family was in any way prepared for his demise. There were no near Dreisbach relatives to turn to except Mannus, who led what appears to have been an unstable existence. It is probable that there were friends of the family in Richstein, and perhaps some helpful Feuring relatives of George's first wife. We can only surmise.

### **Henrich Dreisbach from twelve to eighteen (1648 to 1754).**

We have reached the end of what is known or what we can deduce concerning Henrich Dreisbach's early years. Our final image is that of a young widow with her infant daughter and two step-children, living in the house called *Hebelhaus* in Richstein. They would have found some sort of support, one assumes, in a village of Richstein's size where most of the inhabitants were communicants at the Arfeld church, and where Georg Dreisbach, having been elected *Gemeindemann* by his peers, would be remembered as a person of some local consequence.

The widow Maria did not remarry, and was interred in 1792 in the Arfeld burial ground. Her infant daughter Elisabeth grew up, married and died in Richstein. She and her husband were buried in Arfeld in 1803 and 1790 respectively.

Henrich's younger sister Elisabeth also remained in Richstein. In 1763, nine years after her brother left for Pennsylvania, she married a church elder and died in Richstein in 1792 shortly before her step-mother's death. Elisabeth and her husband were interred at the Arfeld church in 1792 and 1798 respectively.<sup>25</sup> Young Henrich was the only family member who left Richstein.

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<sup>24</sup> Maria Dreisbach lived on in Richstein until her death in 1792. Her daughter Elisabeth married in 1780 and died of a fever in Richstein in 1803. (From Jochen Karl Mehldau's descendant list for Georg Dreisbach, dated 03.12.2011).

<sup>25</sup> The Arfeld burial records: Maria Dreisbach 1792, no. 32; her daughter Elisabeth 1803, no. 3; Elisabeth's husband 1790, no. 5; Elisabeth (Henrich's younger sister) 1792, no. 5; her husband 1798, no. 7.

Nowhere, to our knowledge, have any sources been found that mention the orphan Henrich Dreisbach in these years. It is most likely that as the *Gemeindemann's* son he would have been attending the village school in Richstein. Twelve at the time of the funeral, he may have continued his schooling at least until the summer and perhaps longer.

The established religion of both Wittgenstein territories was that of the Reformed faith. At about age fourteen Henrich would have been confirmed, probably at the Arfeld church. (It is well documented that in Pennsylvania Henrich and his children were members of Reformed congregations.)

What did teenage Henrich do? There was no formal guild system in either of the two Wittgenstein territories. There were a few towns, but no cities. There were no natural resources apart from the Wittgenstein forests which were mainly the personal property of the Counts. The principal occupations included farming, forestry, the milling of grain, the production of charcoal and its carting to the hammers and forges of neighboring Siegerland. There was no structured apprentice system to speak of, but there were of course beginners and learners in the mills and elsewhere, and one could learn various trades and skills that were practiced by the Counts' subjects, especially during the less active winter months.

Henrich can have learned a trade or craft locally, but these are things we may never know. What we do know is that throughout his American life Henry Dreisbach was primarily a farmer.

### **Making sense of uncles Simon and Mannus: both pride and shame at being a Dreisbach?**

What was teenage Henrich's view of his Dreisbach heritage? The little we know about the adult life of *Gemeinsman* Georg Dreisbach is positive. Even his mowing of the grass for hay can be seen as a consequence of Simon's poor management and his tendency to put things off. From Georg's testimony before the Count's court we learn that Simon had secretly used the Dreisbach brothers' pieces of hereditary land as collateral to obtain a much needed private loan for himself.<sup>26</sup>

Henrich was only seven at the time his father testified before the Count's court, and he doubtless understood little of all that had happened after Uncle Simon and his family had gone far away earlier that year. By the time he was twelve, however, Henrich may have heard the family talking about the difficult years when Uncle Simon was a prisoner in Castle Wittgenstein. (In Henrich's infancy his uncle had spent one and a half years in the castle prison, much of it at hard labor in the construction of an addition to the castle.) Henrich may never have heard of Simon's involvement in the group of local amateurs who experimented with making false coins, nor of his subsequent imprisonment, nor do we know whether his father made visits to the prisoner's family at *Am Aberge* where the fields were untended, aunt Kette was alone with her children and food was scarce.<sup>27</sup>

Henrich may not have known of or understood his uncle Simon's difficulties. He cannot have fully comprehended any comments by his father on Uncle Simon who was hopelessly strapped by debt following his release from prison in 1737. Simon would have to pay significant sums to the Count's coffers for the rest of his semi-serfdom life. This was the price for being freed two months

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<sup>26</sup> From the testimony of Georg Dreisbach before the officials of Count Friedrich's court at Castle Wittgenstein on September 10, 1743, as recorded in the protocol of the investigation following Simon Dreisbach's unauthorized departure from Wittgenstein: *Dreisbach, Simon / dessen Gut zu Oberndorf betr. 1743*. (Concerning Simon Dreisbach's Property in Oberndorf, 1743). Preserved in Holding WA D 53, in the Princely Archive, Bad Laasphe under the title: *Dreisbach, Simon / dessen Gut zu Oberndorf betr. 1743*.

<sup>27</sup> DERRs no. 12, 13 and 14 give detailed accounts of events leading to Simon's incarceration, his testimony in court and his life as a prisoner, including his two letters to the Count pleading to be allowed to go home and plow his fields.

early so he could go home and plow his fields. From Simon's point of view it must have seemed only logical to steal away to America since he had no prospects of escaping from this financial bondage.

And what of Uncle Mannus? Was he any help in Simon's fields? Serving at least twice in Count Friedrich's militia and also working on the Count's properties, he was not always free to come and go. It is not known where else Mannus may have worked. He married at last at age forty-one, five years after Simon had left for Pennsylvania. This marriage was preceded by a certain amount of public disgrace. As was required, the bans were read out in church a few weeks before the marriage was to take place. In the course of the reading from the pulpit it became public knowledge that Mannus (but not his future wife) had engaged in 'immoral' behavior, and that he had had to confess and renounce this before the marriage would be performed. This event took place in the summer of 1747 when brother Georg was still alive and Henrich was eleven.<sup>28</sup>

Young Henrich Dreisbach was evidently not blessed with uncles who were models of financial and moral correctness. Fortunately, he had had a father who was both a self-made man and a respected member of his community. After Georg's death in early 1748, Henrich and his sister may have received some support from their late mother's Feuring relatives. It is doubtful that uncle Mannus or the Sassmannshausen cousins provided any significant support.

According to the research of Jochen Karl Mehldau, Mannus Dreisbach had no descendants. Whether or not the teen-age Henrich knew that his uncle Mannus was still childless, there was a strong possibility that he himself might one day be the last male Dreisbach of the *Am Aberge* line in Wittgenstein. A desire to disassociate himself from his uncles by making a symbolic shift in the spelling of his family name was a possible response. Extant records contain many forms of the Dreisbach name; so many, in fact, that only the 'r' and the 'ch' were more or less immune to spelling vagaries. Henrich was free to manage the spelling of his family name as he pleased. In any event, when beginning his new life in the Philadelphia Courthouse he signed his name as *Henrich Dresbach*.

### **Planning to emigrate. A Richstein traveling companion!**

It is probable that Henrich began planning his departure from Wittgenstein in the year 1753. Having no knowledge of the circumstances of his life at this time, we do not know if he and his siblings had a guardian, if he was a 'learner' of a craft or had some form of income. How did he intend to finance the river boats to the Netherlands and the ocean voyage? Even in Richstein, which produced very few of the emigrants, there was surely talk of the many who had left from other Wittgenstein villages in recent years.

This was in fact the peak period of emigration to the colony of Pennsylvania. In the years 1749 to 1754 Philadelphia received more than 39,000 German-speaking immigrants. In 1754 alone they numbered 6,139. Little did Henrich know that in the very next year this number would drop to 324, in 1756 to 138 and that in 1757 no German-speaking immigrants at all would be registered.<sup>29</sup> Another large immigrant group to North America, the Irish, followed a similar pattern. The other ports in North America also saw a huge reduction in immigrants. Not until 1763 did the trans-Atlantic vessels once again carry a significant number of emigrating passengers. The cause was not a sudden drop in the number of those wishing to emigrate but was an effect of a major international conflict – the Seven Years' War, in which the part played out in North America was called the French and Indian War. Had Henrich put off leaving until the following year he might not have found a ship to sail on.

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<sup>28</sup> With grateful acknowledgement to Jochen Karl Mehldau for hard-to-find information on Hermannus Dreisbach included in the descendant list for Georg Dreisbach 1550~ (*Nachfahrenliste Dreisbach, Georg 1550~*).

<sup>29</sup> Immigration figures from Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers. The Beginning of Mass Migration to North America*, The Pennsylvania University Press, University Park, PA, 1999, p.45.

Knowing almost nothing about Henrich's life from twelve to eighteen, one wonders how he could have planned and carried out his emigration plans. It is unlikely that he had any contact with his uncle Simon who by 1754 had been in Pennsylvania for eleven years. Henrich may not even have known in what part of the colony Simon had settled.

Having one or more traveling companions would be essential. Thanks to Henrich Imhof's emigrant list, we find that young Henrich did have company from Riehstein to Philadelphia. The name of this travel companion was Philip Achenbach<sup>30</sup> and he too was from Riehstein. Born there in 1732, he was about two and a half years older than Henrich. They are the only two passengers on the *John & Elizabeth* whom Imhof cites as coming from Riehstein. On the three *John & Elizabeth* passenger lists (ship's list and two court house lists) their names are always next to each other. It is reasonable to assume that that they made and carried out their emigration plans together

### **An interesting arrangement aboard ship.**

There is seemingly endless information about the trials, mishaps and deceptions inherent in the process of leaving Europe and getting established in the New World.<sup>31</sup> Such things lie outside the scope of this paper which concentrates on one single person and his family in Europe. There is, however, certain interesting information about life on board the *John & Elizabeth*.

There were apparently sleeping units, if not simple cabins on the ship that are reflected in the groupings on the passenger lists. Henrich Dresbach and Philip Achenbach are two of a group of four single men sharing some kind of space onboard. Editors Strassburger and Hinke are not quite sure what arrangement underlies the numbers from 1 to 88 they have found in the ship's list, where each number comprises one to four male passengers.<sup>32</sup>

Our conclusion is that Henrich Dresbach was thus not sleeping in a dark and crowded lower deck but was sharing some sort of separate space with his friend Philip Achenbach and another Wittgensteiner, Johannes Schumacher from Elsoff, who was some ten years older than Achenbach. The fourth man in the group had a name common in Wittgenstein: Lückel. At the Philadelphia Courthouse he signed his name as *Daniel Leukel*. Heinrich Imhof and Jochen Karl Mehldau have searched for him in vain in the Wittgenstein records and have concluded that he may have come from a nearby territory. When Henrich turned nineteen in late October or early November as the ship neared the entry to the Delaware Bay he was assured of having at least three fellow passengers to celebrate the occasion.

### **Absolute proof?**

Here ends our endeavor to examine what is known or can be deduced from various records in order to give the young Henrich Dreisbach a history of his own. Certain facets of his life may now have been identified and confirmed, though one might argue that no documentation exists which plainly says it was Georg Dreisbach's son Henrich who sailed to Philadelphia on the *John & Elizabeth* in 1754. There is no lack of circumstantial and documentary evidence indicating that it was indeed Georg Dreisbach's son Henrich who left his native Riehstein in 1754 and most probably made the journey to Amsterdam together with the slightly older Philip Achenbach, also from Riehstein, that on the ship they were known to be from the same place and were therefore assigned to the same 'sleeping space'.

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<sup>30</sup> On one list he wrote his name as *Philib Achebach* and on the other *Philipp Achenbach*. Strassburger & Hinke vol. I, pp. 668, 670.

<sup>31</sup> Marianne Wokeck's publications are some of the most informative, starting with her doctoral dissertation, "Tide of Alien Tongues: The Flow and Ebb of German Immigration to Pennsylvania 1683-1775", Temple University, 1983. See also note 29.

<sup>32</sup> Editors Strassburger & Hinke write in a note at the bottom of page 665, "These numbers seem to refer to the cabins on the ship".

**And then . . .**

What happened later in Pennsylvania is another topic altogether. There too it is the church records that provide glimpses one would otherwise not have. Henrich/Henry married in eastern Pennsylvania at some time before 1760 and had a daughter Elizabeth christened in the newly formed Indian Creek Reformed congregation not many miles from his farm in what is now Almont in Rockhill Twp., Bucks Co. Elizabeth was followed by two brothers, Jacob and John, and sisters Anna Catharina (mar. Reigel), Maria and Magdalena (mar. Diemer). Henrich/Henry Dreisbach had an eventful military career during the Revolutionary War. He remained in Almont until his death, which was entered in the register of deaths at the Tohickon Reformed Church in upper Bucks County, PA under 8 January 1808, as: "*old Mr. Dreisbach*".

**RESEARCH NOTES****1. Our highly valued German correspondents and sources of information.**

Members of the Dreisbach Family Association have been fortunate in receiving from **Jochen Karl Mehdau** over the course of some two decades, his Dreisbach descendant listings and much other information from church records and other sources. He has also supplied many other family researchers with historical and cultural information on their Wittgenstein forebears. (See also footnote 8.)

Another generous researcher who has worked in close collaboration with Mr. Mehdau through the years is **Heinrich Imhof**, the designated archival researcher, correspondent and host to the visitors of the Princely Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein Archive in Bad Laasphe. He is also familiar with other archives in North Rhine Westphalia and is the author, as noted above, of the recently published *Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben*, a monumental work on emigration from Wittgenstein to America in the 18th and 19th centuries.

A younger and equally generous correspondent with deep Wittgenstein roots and a wide knowledge of local research and researchers is **Andreas Sassmannshausen** who, since the year 2000, has supplied the present author and Marcia Dreisbach Falconer with hints, sources, texts, solutions and valuable contacts.

**2. The hitherto unknown series of archival documents which is a key to understanding the clandestine departure of the Simon Dreisbach family. In 2011 it was located and photographed by Heinrich Imhof in the Princely Archive in Bad Laasphe and transmitted via Andreas Sassmannshausen to the author.**

In the Princely Archive of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein, located in the Rentkammer of *Schloss Wittgenstein*, Bad Laasphe, there is an important document, once presumed unfindable, which was located by Heinrich Imhof in 2011. It is the protocol of an investigation by Count Friedrich's officials of the events and consequences of the Simon Dreisbach family's clandestine departure for Pennsylvania, titled *Dreisbach, Simon / dessen Gut zu Oberndorf betr. 1743*. (Concerning Simon Dreisbach's Farm Property in Oberndorf, 1743).

Imhof found this lengthy document in the Princely Archive's  *Holding WA D 53*, recognized its importance for Dreisbach researchers, promptly photographed its many handwritten pages and had it forwarded to the present author. Both Imhof and Sassmannshausen were most helpful while major parts of the document's 18th century German script were being transcribed and translated into English by the present author.

The document records a lengthy investigation by the Count's legal and administrative officers into the Dreisbach family's secret departure, as well as the hearings during the following weeks and months. It is a most valuable source of otherwise unobtainable information on the context in which Simon Dreisbach had been struggling to survive. DERR no. 16, "The Night When the Dreisbachs Left Wittgenstein" is based mainly on information from archival source WA D 53. This document is also the source for our knowledge of Georg Dreisbach's involvement in defending his right to certain inherited plots of land that had been the property of his maternal grandfather.

### **3. Young Henrich's probable initial ignorance of where in Pennsylvania Simon Dreisbach was living (Footnote 11).**

As already noted, it is not certain that Henrich Dreisbach had any notion of where in Pennsylvania his Uncle Simon had settled. Henrich's arrival in Philadelphia took place eleven years after the Simon Dreisbach family had disembarked there in 1743. By about 1760 Henrich was living well north of Philadelphia in an area that was no longer the frontier. He seems to have attended two Reformed churches, one of which (Tohikon Reformed) had been attended by 'displaced' Dreisbachs between 1756 and 1758/60 following Indian attacks in the more northerly area where they had their farms. It is not likely that before returning to their homesteads the Dreisbach refugees would have heard about a newly arrived young man with the same family name who sometimes attended the Tohickon church. On the other hand Henrich Dreisbach, new to the area and the Tohickon church, may well have heard of the refugees from the north who bore the same family name. It is possible but uncertain that he made an attempt to meet these relatives. Local scholarship might have more to say on the topic.

### **4. Philip Achenbach in PA.**

Certain activities of Henrich Dreisbach's sailing companion are known, but only in the last decades of his life. Philip appears in the 1780's in Plainfield Township, upper Northampton County, some miles to the east of the lands of various Simon Dreisbach descendants. Like them he was also fairly close to Blue Mountain. He married a widow five years his junior and late in the century became an elder of the Plainfield German Reformed Church. A few years before his death in 1800 Philip would have encountered a much younger Dreisbach member of the same church, George Peter Dreisbach (1767-1833), a grandson of Simon Dreisbach. In the late 1700's it is unlikely that George Peter would have had any knowledge of his great-uncle Georg Dreisbach in Europe, much less of Georg's son, Henrich. These were old and easily forgotten relationships from the nation's colonial past.

*September 2019, Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean*