

Dreisbach Family Association

Supplement to March 2013 Newsletter©

Martin Dreisbach, Supplement:

When Part One of Martin Dreisbach's life was published as the DFA Newsletter for September 2012, I did not have information about their trip across the Atlantic Ocean. Since then I learned of the existence of two letters written by a fellow passenger which describe part of the trip and some of the circumstances they met upon arrival in the new world. Because such information is so rare, and so important in understanding what happened to Martin, Eva and their children, I think it is worthwhile to send out this short supplement.

Brief Recap of Martin's life:

Martin was born 23 May 1717 in Raumland, Wittgenstein in what is now Germany. On 9 November 1742, Martin married Anna Eva Hoffman (1722-1789), the daughter of Johannes Hoffman and Elisabetha Hadem, in the Evangelical Reformed Church in the town of Krombach. The couple lived in Krombach for the next nine years during which five children were born and two of them died.



Left: Krombach Evangelical Reformed Church built about 1250 and restored in 1706. In this church Martin and Eva were married, their first five children were baptised and two of their babies were buried.

1751 – Final Decision to go to Pennsylvania: At some point, Martin and Eva decided to leave Krombach and travel to Pennsylvania. We do not know the reasons behind this momentous decision. It could not have been easy to leave friends, relatives and all that they knew, and set out on a dangerous journey taking with them 6 year old Martin Jr, 3 year old Margaretha and the 7 month old baby Johann Jacob.

In addition to the many discomforts and dangers, this was an expensive proposition. Martin and Eva had to procure papers from the count, allowing them to leave Wittgenstein. This cost money. If they left without permission, then they would have needed to buy forged papers in order to continue their journey.

From their home in Krombach the Dreisbachs had to get to the city of Cologne on the Rhine River. They probably took a cart loaded with food and the possessions they would need for the trip. The cart would have been pulled by a horse or by an ox and the animal(s) as well as the cart likely were sold when the family got to Cologne – another way to raise money for the journey.



Typical wood cart used from the middle ages until the mid 20th century. Martin and Eva probably used a similar cart to transport their belongings and food for the journey. Wikipedia.

Once they reached the port of Cologne, they had to find a “merchant” – a man who specialized in transporting people down the Rhine to Rotterdam and then across the Atlantic to Pennsylvania. The agent was also responsible for assigning them to a particular ship for this trans-Atlantic journey. Martin booked with an agent who represented the well-known shipping firm of Stedman, owner of the three-masted ship, “Queen of Denmark” as well as a host of other similar ships which plied the trans-Atlantic routes.

After sailing down the Rhine, the family spent some weeks in Rotterdam, waiting for their ship to sail. Then, on a warm summer day, the 8th of July 1751, Martin, Eva and their children boarded the “Queen of Denmark”¹ along with nearly 340 other people.² Almost three months later, on the 4th of October 1751, the ship landed in Philadelphia, PA.

What did the Dreisbach family experience on this trip? It appeared we could only make guesses – until two letters were discovered. They were written by a man named Peter Recher who sailed with Martin and Eva on the same voyage, in the same ship! He wrote letters to his relatives back in Switzerland, telling them about the journey. Fortunately for us, these letters have been preserved, translated and published. ³

Peter Recher was born in 1724 in Basel, Switzerland and immigrated as a single young man. After reaching Pennsylvania, he settled first near Muddy Creek in Brecknock Township, Adams County, PA. but later moved to Frederick County, Maryland, where he died in 1771.

In two letters to his father, brothers, sisters and brother-in-law, who were still living in Switzerland, Peter described a bit about the journey and about Pennsylvania. Through his words we have some idea of what Martin, Eva and their children encountered on their journey. Peter probably did not share the same boat trip down the Rhine with Martin and Eva, but I include it for information.

In a letter dated 4 December 1751, written just two months after arriving in Pennsylvania, Peter writes:

“Now I will tell you a little of the journey. Down the Rhine everything went fairly well, up to the town of Arnheim in Holland. Here the helmsman drank so much beer and brandy that he could hardly see straight. He steered the ship straight into the “Schiffsbruck” (possibly a pier, or part of a bridge). People standing nearby were sure that the ship would break apart, but through God’s guidance nothing happened to our ship. Only the little “Weitling” (a small boat) which we had tied to the ship, was broken. No other damage was done.



Photo of an unknown ship similar to The “Queen of Denmark”.

On the 23rd of June we arrived in Rotterdam, where we stayed for 6 weeks. From Rotterdam, across the “tollen Hund” (the English Channel) we went to a town in England called Cowes. We stayed there for 10 days. Then we started our voyage over the big ocean.

For the first 8 days on the ocean we had unfavorable winds, so that we reached an island called Santa Maria. There we waited for 6 days, and once the wind became favorable we continued our voyage and had good winds for the most part.

On the 20th of September we were caught in a storm. The wind broke our middle big mast. Waves battered against our ship so that it sounded like the thundering of several cannons. The ship rolled on to its sides so such a degree that one thought one might drown at any moment. This wind lasted from 4 o’clock in the afternoon until 4 o’clock in the morning. The waves washed high over the ship.



Unidentified sailing ship in heavy seas. Wikipedia.

Several times we had excellent wind, so that we traveled 10 to 12 miles in an hour. Our journey across the ocean, from Cowes to Philadelphia, took 9 weeks. The 4th of October we reached land. 350 passengers were on our ship, of which 29 died; 18 of them were children below the age of 4.

I was well and healthy the whole time. But during the time on the ocean I must have regretted being there as many times as there a minutes in a year. My dear friends, I advise no one to come, for the journey is dangerous and troublesome.”

After this Peter goes on to describe a bit about the land. I have not copied the whole of Peter’s two letters here, but below are excerpts which may apply to the

situation Martin Dreisbach found himself in as another newcomer to Pennsylvania.

"When I came to this country I owed 100 Pounds in debts, but I have been able to pay it all back in one year. Hans Hemmig was my surety. I am now living with Hans Hemmig and have taken service with a shoemaker for one month.

"...I have seen enough of the country to know that there is much rough country with "Schein" (land not suited for cultivation) and mountains as in Switzerland.

There is also much good land, but it has already been claimed in Pennsylvania, and it is as expensive as in Switzerland. There is as much wood here as one could wish for. The wood in the forests is so thick as to make them almost impassable. If only you would be able to use some of all this wood, as I have often wished you could! You certainly would not have any lack of wood – regardless of how much you needed!

I wish that all 'mouse-poor' people could be in this country and would not have to have any debts. They could earn their daily bread properly if only they had the desire to work.

But I advise all who can 'make it through' over there not to move to this country. Much money is used up in getting here, and once here it is all used up. Then the misery starts and one hardly knows how to help oneself. For all those who have bread, it is as good to eat over there as it is here in the new country.

There is still much uncultivated good land, but the wild people (Indians) live on it and become very angry.

The wild and uncultivated land is covered by woods. There are as many varieties of trees here as in Switzerland, perhaps even more. Here in Pennsylvania there are mainly oak trees, but also many nut trees, some chestnut trees, poplars, walnut trees, mulberry trees and sassafras trees.

The farmers grow all kinds of grains, but for the most part, wheat and rye. We have buckwheat or heathergrain. Many potatoes, beets, turnips, beans and all sorts of garden vegetables are grown, just as in Switzerland.

The drinks which are most common here are cider, beer and whiskey, which is distilled from wheat.

They have valuable horses here, which can be ridden 4 to 5 miles in an hour. Cattle is the same as in

Switzerland, as are the sheep and pigs. But there are no goats.

Many wild animals can be found: deer, bear, wolf, fox, rabbit and turtles weighing up to 15 or 20 pounds.



Baby fox cubs in the wild.

There are also many snakes: green, grey and black ones and rattlesnakes.

The birds are as in Switzerland, except that we do not have storks or vultures. Eagles are plentiful. In the summer there are so many fireflies, which fly at night, that one thinks fire flames were flying in the air.

Here the days are 2 hours shorter in the summer and 2 hours longer in the winter. The summer is warmer, but the winter just as cold as in Switzerland. Snow is the same. The English leave their cattle outside, in the woods, all winter long, as they have no stables. Many of their animals freeze to death. The Germans have stables and the English are starting to follow their example.

Before Easter 1752 I moved from Hans Hemmig closer to the city of York. I work here in the trade under a master craftsman, and have each week 3£ and 2 or 3 "Batzen" (shillings?) as wages. Everything is 3 or 4 times as expensive as in Switzerland. A pair of men's shoes cost 3£, a pair of women's shoes 1 "Taler".

In addition to these descriptive paragraphs, Peter Recher talks about people he has visited and about people he has unsuccessfully tried to find. He says that he hopes to return to Switzerland for a visit after he has saved enough money. Whether or not he ever made a return trip is unknown, and no more letters have been found.

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¹ Strassburger, R.B., Pennsylvania German Pioneers, A Publication of the Original Lists of Arrivals In the Port of Philadelphia From 1727 to 1808. Ed. by Hinke, W.J., Vol. I, 1727-1775, Pennsylvania German Society, Norristown, Pennsylvania, 1934.

² Wokeck, Marianne S. "Trade in Strangers, the Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America". Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA. 1999. p 244.

³ Hein, Klaus, Mennonite Family History Vol. XI, Number 4, October 1992,
pp 162-164.