

The first Dreisbach attempts to leave Wittgenstein in 1725: success, capture, and, for some, hardship.

Dreisbachs going east.

The emigrants we encountered in DERR no. 7 went westward to Pennsylvania, and were primarily religiously motivated. There were no Dreisbachs among them. Now we shall look at what was almost a mass movement eastward in the years 1724-1725. Whole families of up to three generations left everything behind in the hope of making a better life for themselves in a part of East Prussia sometimes called Prussian Lithuania, in villages inland from the Baltic Sea. There were Dreisbachs among them, and things did not always go well for them. Here are their fates, briefly outlined.

One Dreisbach family apparently tried to leave secretly, but turned back. They seem to have escaped punishment. Another made the long trek to the Baltic region, arrived, settled, farmed for an unknown number of years, and then returned to Wittgenstein. Yet another family, including Simon Dreisbach's aunt, was captured soon after crossing the Wittgenstein border. The result was imprisonment for the men and hardship for the families. However, things went relatively well for a cousin of Simon Dreisbach's wife. After being captured and sent back, and after initially moving from house to house, he eventually led a settled life. Each of these stories is valuable in itself. Taken together they provide a panorama of the desperation and the hopes of Wittgenstein villagers in the mid-1720's.

Why did they go east?

There are several answers to this question, involving both 'push' and 'pull' factors, none of them complicated. 1) They went because they were invited. 2) They were invited because they were needed. 3) They left Wittgenstein because their ruler kept increasing the demands he made upon them. 4) They were enticed to emigrate by the generous conditions promised by the Prussian authorities.

Exactly where did they go?

The name "Prussian Lithuania" will be new to most DERR readers. It will not be found on current maps, as it was a name once used for part of the territory of East Prussia, also absent from today's maps. At the end of the Second World War the city of Königsberg and the area inland from it was claimed by the Soviet Union as an integral part of the Russian state. Thus the agricultural area where Wittgensteiners were settled in the eighteenth century is now part of territorial Russia. The map in Fig. 1 shows national borders as they are today. To find the goal of those Wittgensteiners who headed east in 1724 and 1725, we must look inside the small territory between today's Poland and Lithuania. It is marked "R", which stands for Russia. The dot above the "K" stands for the historic city of Königsberg as well as its present incarnation as Kaliningrad with its large Russian naval base.

The farms assigned to the Wittgenstein immigrants lay in a small and under-populated inland region that we have chosen to mark with "G." "G" stands for the district "Gumbinnen", a name that was in German administrative use from 1815 to 1945. There was also a small town, Gumbinnen, which is today "Gusev", while the largest town in the district, formerly called Insterburg, is now "Chernyakhovsk".



Fig. 1. From Wittgenstein to East Prussia. On this basic map with today's borders, the territory of the two Wittgensteins is in the red circle on the left. The red circle on the right encloses a small -area labeled "G." for Gumbinnen. This was the former Prussian territory that approximated the still earlier "Prussian Lithuania" which was the goal of many hopeful 18th century settlers. It is now part of a Russian enclave that is marked "R." on this map. "K." is today a large Russian naval base, Kaliningrad, but was known for over 700 years as Königsberg.

Fig. 1 shows just how great the distance was between Wittgenstein and part of the former Prussian Lithuania, Gumbinnen. Emigrants intending to take passage for America at Rotterdam had a much shorter overland journey than those who were hoping to start a new life inland from the Baltic. Moreover, what the Wittgensteiners found there must at first have seemed very foreign to them.

Having lived in hilly, forested Wittgenstein, they were now to farm on soil that was totally unfamiliar to them. The land was flat, farming conditions were very different, and there were lingering elements of the culture of the Poles, the Lithuanians and the Balts. The north-German dialect spoken there was not only different from the dialects of Wittgenstein, but its predecessor, Old Prussian, was not yet totally dead. Even the place names where Wittgensteiners settled were foreign-sounding: Pelkawen, Uschballen, Egglenschken, Telitzkehmen in Maygunischken, Scheppetschen in Waldaukel.¹

Who invited them to Prussian Lithuania, and why?

The rulers of Prussia, who titled themselves "King in Prussia", needed to repopulate areas in East Prussia that had suffered from the very hard winter of 1708/09. Widespread crop failures had followed. Then came epidemics, of which the worst was the plague that struck in 1710. Whole families perished and many farms were left empty. To remedy this, Friedrich I tried to attract immigrant settlers. From 1713 onward it was his son, Friedrich Wilhelm I, who issued invitations that were distributed widely in Europe. Fig. 2 shows the title page of one such invitation or recruiting document, dated 11 February 1724. Here we read, freely translated, *"A reiterated patent, urging more artisans of all manner of professions, and*

¹ From a Prussian list of 1736 of the new settlers. The Wittgenstein homesteaders found on Prussian lists can be seen in the online version of the important research published by Rolf Farnsteiner in 1957 and 1960. See note 6 below for bibliographical and online information.

also 400 families of industrious persons expert in agriculture and animal husbandry, to go to Prussia, and the advantages (Douceurs) they will enjoy there. Printed in Königsberg at the printing house of the Royal Court.



Fig. 2. Title page of an official Prussian recruiting document or Patent, dated 11 February 1724, distributed widely in German-speaking regions to attract immigrants for the purpose of repopulating certain parts of eastern Prussia. The first word, "Wiederholtes" indicates that other invitations had preceded it. Still more artisans ("Handwercker", in bold letters) of all types were needed, as well as 400 farming families. They are promised certain benefits or "Douceurs". Photo, Heinrich Imhof.

Why did Wittgensteiners respond to these invitations?

When conditions of life give rise to dissatisfaction and even hopelessness, and when there are prospects of an attractive future elsewhere, emigration beckons. The Prussian invitation came at the right time, with promises of assistance in resettling, i.e. the "Douceurs" mentioned in Fig. 2. These advantages, consisting of both land and

pecuniary promises were listed in the pages accompanying the "Patent".

In Wittgenstein, in this period, Count August of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein was continually placing harsher demands on his farmer subjects. They protested, both passively and actively, but this only resulted in fines and further increased demands on their time and labor.² Indeed, at about the time when the Prussian invitation in Fig. 2 was being distributed, Count August issued an edict, on 25 March 1724, which not only forbade unauthorized emigration to Prussian Lithuania, but threatened severe economic punishment and even imprisonment for those who might try to steal away. His was a traditional feudal reasoning. Those who had acquired the right to farm his properties (for a fee) were considered to be his bond-tenants, not too different from serfs. In order to emigrate they would have to pay stiff compensatory fees to be freed from this bondage. Thereafter a document could be issued allowing them to legally exit the Count's territory. There were, however, few who had the means to meet the Count's conditions and pay the exit fees.

The hope of a better life was stronger than the threat of capture and punishment, and in the spring and summer of 1724 a number of Wittgenstein families left their homes, many doing so clandestinely, and began the long journey to Prussian Lithuania. Then, on 31 October 1724, the decisive and final blow to the Count's village farmers was delivered by the Imperial High Court, convened in Wetzlar. On that date, in accordance with the new demands Count August made on his bond subjects, the High Court ruled that

² Werner Trossbach, "Widerstand als Normalfall: Bauernunruher in der Grafschaft Sayn-Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein 1696-1806", *Westfälische Zeitschrift*, vol. 135 (1985); see especially pp. 50-91.

August's subjects were, indeed, totally his *Leibeigene* or serfs, and that there was no limit to the amount of work he could require of them.³

The Wittgenstein farmers' hopes of a better life at home were dashed. Rather than remain under such conditions, emigration to Prussian Lithuania continued in the following year, and now there were Dreisbachs among them.

The Dreisbachs who left, or tried to leave for East Prussia in 1725.

1. The family of Paul Dreisbach of Hesselbach soon turned back.

How Paul Dreisbach fits into the known Dreisbachs of this period is not certain. He was born in 1695 in the village of Hesselbach near the southern border of Wittgenstein. His father and grandfather, however, were born farther north, in Schameder, only a few kilometers west of Balde. Thus far, although a connection is possible, no link has been found between this family and that of Georg Dreisbach of Balde (ca. 1550 – 16??) who was the ancestor of the three documented Dreisbach emigrants to Pennsylvania.

In 1721 Paul Dreisbach married the widow Katharina Müller, nee Stenger.⁴ The original emigration lists produced by the constabulary of the Fischelbach district on 24 and 30 May 1725, show them as having two sons, Johannes and Hermann.⁵ More important, the family only appeared in these lists because they had left their home in Hesselbach, presumably to go to Lithuania, but returned to it before the end of May 1725 when the lists were drawn up. Rolf Farnsteiner's ground breaking research on the 1724-25 emigration from Wittgenstein to East Prussia builds on these local Wittgenstein lists and also on the East Prussian "Kolonist" lists of 1724, 1725 and 1736.⁶ Farnsteiner places the Paul Dreisbach family in his second category: those who had left for East Prussia, but who returned. Assuming that the family left Hesselbach in the spring of 1725, they cannot have traveled very far if they were recorded as being back again by 30 May at the latest. Paul Dreisbach appears to have escaped fines and punishment, and the family is recorded as living in the same house both before and after 1725. Theirs is a more fortunate outcome than that of certain other emigrants we shall consider.

2. The extended family of Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach of Grossenbach did arrive in Prussian Lithuania. Some stayed, some came back to Wittgenstein.

Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach (b. Amtshausen 1681 – d. Augustenhof near Volkholz 1748) was a third cousin of Simon Dreisbach, and was born in the same house in Amtshausen where Simon's grandfather was born. Hans Wilhelm and Simon attended the same Sunday services in Feudinggen, and they had intertwining

³ Jochen Karl Mehldau, "Auswanderer nach Pennsylvanien?", *Wittgenstein, Blätter des Wittgensteiner Heimatvereins e.V.*, Vol. 73 (2009), no. 4, p. 138. See also Trossbach, *op.cit.*, pp 85-91.

⁴ Biographical information on Paul Dreisbach was generously provided by Jochen Karl Mehldau; communication of 12 March 2011. His wife, though born a Stenger, had no known connection to the Stenger family of Weidenhausen in section 4. below; information received from J. K. Mehldau, 25 Jan. 2014.

⁵ There are lists drawn up in late May 1725, at Count August's demand, by the sheriff's offices in each of the four administrative districts. Village by village, they give the names of persons who had left or were suspected of getting ready to leave for East Prussia. The sheriffs' lists are preserved in the Princely Archive in Bad Laasphe in holdings W 60 – W 65. The two mentions of Paul Dreisbach are in W 65 I and W 63 III.

⁶ Rolf Farnsteiner's "Auswanderer nach Ostpreußen" originally appeared in the German genealogical journal, *Altpreußischer Geschlechterkunde, N.F.*, Vols. 5, 8, (1957, 1960). Its principal contents can be consulted in an online version (in German) at <http://www.genealogy.net/vereine/Wittgenstein/emigration/>. To continue, click on *auswanderung-nach-ostpreußen* for Farnsteiner's text, and then *auswanderer-nach-ostpreußen* for the alphabetical list of emigrants. (This site was last consulted on 12 January 2014.)

relationships in several villages. When Hans Wilhelm married Anna Gertraut Gerhart (b. Grossenbach 1690 – d. Girkhausen 1765), he moved southward from Amtshausen to Grossenbach. Here, too, he was within the Feudingen church district, and here in Grossenbach Simon Dreisbach also had relatives. One sometimes hears that all Wittgensteiners are inter-related. A move as serious as the exodus of an entire family could hardly be kept secret in Wittgenstein villages..

According to the records of the investigating sheriff, it was on 21 March 1725 that Hans Wilhelm, wife Anna Gertraut and their three children secretly left Grossenbach. Three of Anna Gertraut's younger siblings, Jost, Georg and Agnes, also joined them. The long journey usually went via Berlin, the Prussian capital, from whence transport was provided for the new colonizers, either overland or partly by water. By whatever means, the Dreisbach-Gerhart group did indeed reach Prussian Lithuania. In the Prussian list of new colonists of 1725 they are recorded as no. 428, under the name Kreyspach.⁷

It is not surprising that several family groups chose to travel together for mutual support and to minimize the dangers of highway robbers and other perils. Thus, we find in Farnsteiner's list that a family from Hans Wilhelm's native Amtshausen, that of Hans Henrich Strack, left Amtshausen secretly on 22 March 1725, almost simultaneously with the Dreisbach-Gerhart group of Grossenbach. It could be that Hans Henrich Strack, b. 1687, wished to travel with the older Dreisbach. This younger family did not reach Lithuania, however, for a child fell seriously ill in the town of Eifa, a short distance on the far side of Marburg. They returned to Amtshausen, and were recorded as still living there in 1744 and 1750.⁸

The Dreisbachs did not stay away for long, however. The house they had abandoned in Grossenbach having been assigned by the Count to another family, the returning Dreisbachs became renters of a house that was not theirs. After being recorded as inhabitants of Grossenbach in 1732, they were next recorded as living in Rückershausen in 1743, and after that they lived and presumably worked on the Count's large farming property, Augustenhof (formerly Schönstein), where Hans Wilhelm died in 1748. His widow moved to a son in Girkhausen and died there in 1765. Two of the three Gerhart siblings remained in Lithuania, but one returned to Wittgenstein and had the good fortune of marrying a woman who was heiress to a house in Girkhausen.⁹

3. The capture of 33 persons from Feudingen, and three from Schönstein – the little family of Johann Jost Göbel (cousin of Simon Dreisbach's wife Kette).

It takes no feat of imagination to picture the dismay of the villagers from the extensive Feudingen church district who would have gathered outside the church on a Sunday in mid-April. By then they would have received news—that thirty-six persons, thirty-three of whom were from Feudingen, had been captured by the Hessian authorities, acting at the behest of Wittgenstein's Count August. Most of these families, some with up to six children and even with grandparents, had left Feudingen in 24 March 1725 (one family left two weeks later, on 7 April¹⁰). They had all left clandestinely, without paying the Count's exit fees, and thus without permission. Instead of starting a new life as homesteaders in Prussian Lithuania, they had been arrested in or near the first big town across the eastern border, Marburg in Hesse, and were sent back to Wittgenstein.

⁷ Source for the information in this paragraph: Farnsteiner, Rolf (see note 6), from the online version of his text, and also from the online alphabetical list of emigrants under *Threyßach (Dreßbach)*.

⁸ Werner Wied, *Die Feudinger Höfe*, Ortsheimatverein "Auf den Höfen", Bad-Laasphe-Rückershausen, 1991, p. 331.

⁹ The information in this paragraph was kindly made available on 12 March 2011 by Jochen Karl Mehldau from material that he has not yet unpublished.

¹⁰ The first family on the Marburg list, that of Johan Dornhöffer, age 50.

Specification der Familien, welche von Johann Philipp von
Wittgenstein für alle in zu Marburg angetroffen
wird.

pat.	Johann Seifriedus	50.	Jahr
mat.	Anna Maria	30.	
Kind.	Johann Jacob	8	
	Johann David	5 1/2	
pat.	Johann Joseph	1 1/2	
	Johann David	44	
mat.	Anna Catharina	35	
Kind.	Anna Elisabeth	16	
	Carl Elisabeth	13	
	Anna Catharina	11	
	Anna Margareta	9	
	Johann	6	
	Anna Margareta	2	
pat.	Georg Maubryne	34	
mat.	Anna Margareta	28	
Kind.	Johann	7	
	Anna Margareta	6	
	Joh. David	5	
	Joh. David	2	
arvul.	Joh. Joh. Maubryne	65	
aria	Dorothea von Fran!	60	
	Anna Catharina von		
	Erzgen. des P.	20	
pat.	Ebert Dreher	44	
mat.	Anna Maria	43	
Kind.	Anna Maria	14	
	Johann	12	
	Anna Sophia	9	
	Joh. David	2	
gener.	Johann Maubryne	27	
mat.	Elisabeth	22	
Kind.	Anton	1	
pat.	Johann Joseph Göbel	30	
mat.	Pusanna	25	
Sil.	Johann Jacob	25	
	Johann Georg Wabro	30	
	Johann Wabro Ludwig	25	
	<u>Summa</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>prodit</u>

3. Kattaler

Diana Stengen von Lang
Event St. Kilian ibid
Johann Joseph von
Erzgen.
Event Stengen von
Mühlhausen

+

Ob für nicht danach im
Museum April, 22 regere
Johann Stengen von Lang
Christlich eine
abgeschafft, das für nicht
früher die von erden
gute die Ludwig Stengen
in der Stadt Wittenberg
in erigen?

Fig. 3. Page with an undated list of the 36 unauthorized emigrants from Wittgenstein, captured in or near Marburg in April 1725. (The smaller list pertains to Battenberg captives.) Photo: Heinrich Imhof.

There would have been good reason for the dismay such news would cause in Feudingingen. Some of the captives may have had little or nothing to return to, especially in the case of the extended families.¹¹ After the forcible return, the heads of families could expect imprisonment in Castle Wittgenstein and, with time, a stiff fine. It is known that two of these men, Johan Dornhöffer and Peter Schneider, received considerable fines of more than thirty-three Reichsthaler on 28 July 1725.¹² They would not have been released until family and friends had paid the fines in full.

The main list on the page shown in *Fig. 3* was presumably put together by Count August's authorities to itemize the captives' family relationships, names and ages. It has been photographed together with another document, to be discussed below, and is in the Princely Archive in Bad Laasphe in holding W 63 II. The last two names are young men from the Weber family in Feudingingen, ages 30 and 25. Just above them is the little family of "*pat[er] Johann[e]s Jost Göbel, 30*", which requires special attention.

Johann Jost Göbel from the count's estate, Schönstein – a survivor of sorts.

The only non-Feudingingen family on the list is that of Johann Jost Göbel, age 30, his wife Susanna, 25, and their 2½ year-old son. This young father was the first cousin of Simon Dreisbach's wife, Maria Katharina (Kette) Keller, whose mother was a Göbel. Kette and cousin Johann Jost were contemporaries, born only eight months apart. Records show that Göbel and his family did not leave Wittgenstein with the Feudingingen group. They had already left the Count's farming estate, Schönstein, as early as 21 March



*Fig. 4. The center of Rückerhausen as it may have looked in earlier centuries. In "Oberste", on the left, Johann Jost Göbel and his wife Susanna, nee Gerhart, lived until Johann Jost's death in 1750.*¹³

¹¹ The extended families of Georg Marburger, age 34, and his parents, ages 65 and 60, and of Ebert Dreher, age 44, and his daughter age 22 and son-in-law, age 27 (who was nee Marburger).

¹² From the Farnsteiner list (see n. 6 above).

¹³ Drawing by Helmut Richter. Reproduced, with permission of the Wittgensteiner Heimatverein e. V., as found on p. 440 of Wied, *Die Feudinger Höfe* (see n. 8 above). On the other side of the hill was Simon Dreisbach's house.

1725.¹⁴ Thus they can have been some of the first on the list to be captured, and may have been traveling on their own, or on the way to connect with other emigrants.

There is, however, another element to be considered: Susanna Göbel was actually a Gerhart, from Grossenbach! Here we find an as yet unnoticed connection. We have seen above that four of Susanna's Gerhart siblings, one of them Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach's wife, had left Grossenbach to start anew in Lithuania. The Göbels of Schönstein and the Dreisbachs and Gerharts of Grossenbach had all left their homes on the same day, 21 March 1725. The Dreisbach-Gerhart group managed to arrive in Lithuania, but Susanna and her Göbel husband were caught in or near Marburg and sent back to Wittgenstein. For the five Gerhart siblings, this was a separation without recourse.

We do not know what happened in the first years after the Göbels' forcible repatriation. We have seen above that at least two of the other men captured in Marburg were stiffly fined. Whatever the judicial and economic consequences may have been for Johan Jost Göbel, he eventually landed on his feet. After an apparent absence of several years from the extant Wittgenstein records, he is recorded in 1727 in his wife's native Grossenbach, where he acquired a householder's contract from the Count for house no. 4, "Johanns", remaining there until 1737. Then he moved to Rückerhausen near Oberndorf and took over house no. 1, "Oberste" after a Göbel relative. Here he lived out his days, dying in 1750.¹⁵

In Rückerhausen, the Göbels would have been living on the south side of the Aberg hill, while Simon and Kette Dreisbach lived on its northern flank in their house, "Am Aberge". It cannot have taken long, in May 1743, for the Göbels to learn of the Dreisbachs' abandonment of their house and their exit from Wittgenstein. With time, news would have come that Simon, Kette and their children had arrived in Pennsylvania, successfully completing an emigration journey such as the Göbels had attempted eighteen years earlier, albeit in the opposite direction.

4. Another tale of capture, and of "prison widows", one being the aunt of Simon Dreisbach, Anna Catharina Stenger.

The last of our emigrant stories is that of yet another capture. It too involves several families traveling together. They chose a more northerly route than those in group 3, and were soon arrested about fifteen kilometers east of the Wittgenstein border in the town of Battenberg in Hesse. They were handed over to the Wittgenstein authorities at the border town of Beddelhausen, and at least two of the men were imprisoned in the Count's castle above the town of Laasphe.¹⁶

A brief list of four captured men is preserved in the Princely Archive in Bad Laasphe, (*Fig. 5*), and has already appeared as part of *Fig. 3*. It is however, a separate item consisting of two parts.¹⁷ At the top is written Battenberg, followed by the four names: Simon Stenger of Banff, Evert Hesselbach of the same place, Johan Jost Clauß of Erndtebrück and Evert Stenger of Weidenhausen. Underneath, below the number 4, there is what seems to be part of an interrogation of one of the Battenberg captives in which he is asked if he had not promised, the year before, that he would not try to emigrate. The number of persons involved in the Battenberg arrest was fourteen, as can be calculated from the online Farnsteiner list, which names the accompanying family members.¹⁸

¹⁴ Göbel's date of departure is cited in the Farnsteiner alphabetical list (see n. 6).

¹⁵ Göbel's residences as householder are listed in Wied (see n. 8), on pp. 370 and 439.

¹⁶ Information on the Battenberg captives was received from Heinrich Imhof on 4 March 2013.

¹⁷ *Fig. 5*, was taken from Heinrich Imhof's larger photo shown in *Fig. 3*. Both lists, which are separate items, are found in holding W 63 II in the Princely Archive, Bad Laasphe.

¹⁸ See n. 6.

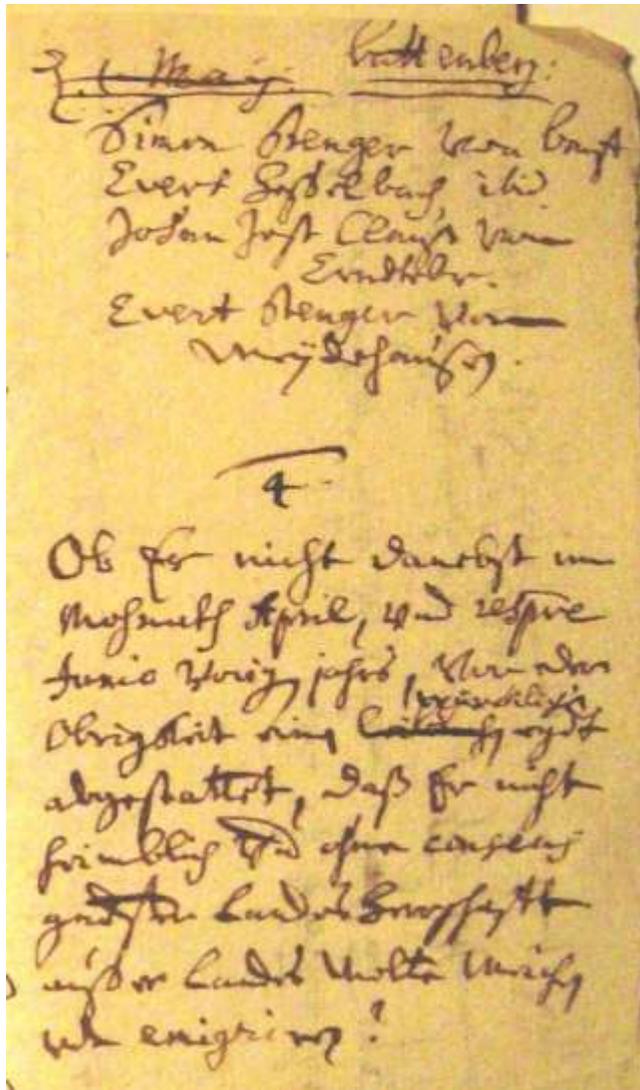


Fig. 5. Small piece of paper, somewhat enlarged here, with the names of four men captured in Battenberg in Hesse, above a text that may have been question no. 4 in an interrogation of one of the captives. Excerpted from Fig. 3. Photo: Heinrich Imhof.

Although four men are named, the captured families were only three in number, but comprised several generations. Evert (Ebert) Hesselbach can be counted as part of the family of his son-in-law, Simon Stenger of Banff, along with Simon's wife Maria Elisabeth and their three daughters, making a total of six persons.¹⁹ Listed together with Johann Clauß (Claus or Klauss), of Erndtebrück is his wife, Anna Elisabeth, and also his mother-in-law and brother-in-law = four persons. In the Evert (Ebert) Stenger family there was Ebert, his wife Anna Catharina (nee Dreisbach), and their two sons, Johannes and Jost = four persons. These families came from different parts of Wittgenstein and, despite the similarity of family names, at this moment no specific links between them is known to the present writer. Of special interest to us is the wife of Ebert Stenger, for she was Simon Dreisbach's aunt on his father's side.

"Prison widow" Anna Catharina (Dreisbach) Stenger (b. Steinbach 1672 – d. Hemschlar 1735).

In December 1672 Anna Catharina was born in the house "Josts" in Steinbach, a few kilometers east of Oberndorf. Her parents were the householder Daniel Dreisbach (1623-1685) and Catharina Benfer (1626-1681), and she was the youngest of their children who survived into adulthood. Next youngest was Georg Wilhelm (born 1669 – died between 1709 and 1712), the future father of Simon Dreisbach. When Anna Catharina married Ebert Stenger in November 1703 at the mature age of nearly thirty-one, she moved to his house, "Schusters", in the village of Weidenhausen. They had two sons who were thus younger cousins of Simon Dreisbach.

Ebert Stenger was about fifty-two when he and his family started out for East Prussia on 20 March 1725. Anna Catharina was fifty-three, and their sons must have been approaching manhood.²⁰ As we have seen, they got no farther than Battenberg, and on 11 April 1725, some twenty-two days after setting out, they and the other captives were back at the Wittgenstein border and were handed over to the

²⁰ Information on Anna Catharina Dreisbach and her husband is from Jochen Karl Mehlau's *Nachfahrenliste Dreisbach, Georg 1550-*, descendant no. 33.

ter to August, their "*High born Reichsgraf, gracious Countand Lord!*" (Fig. 6).²³ In the very first sentence (line three) they stressed their "euserste noturfft" (in today's German, *äusserste Notdurft*, or extreme need), adding in line six that their husbands had been imprisoned a long time (*eine lange Zeit inhafftirt gewesen*). They explain that their husbands had allowed themselves to be lured by Lithuanian "promises"²⁴ (lines 7 – 9), and that through stupid ignorance the men had acted contrary to their duty (line 10).

Though it may seem to us that these women possessed initiative and enterprise, neither of them could write. At the bottom of the letter's second page, in lieu of signatures, the scribe has written: "Most obediently", on the next line "the most humble", followed by the identity of the persons sending the letter, "the wives of Eberhart Stänger of Weidenhausen and Johan Jost Claussen of Ermgartenbrück" (Fig. 7).

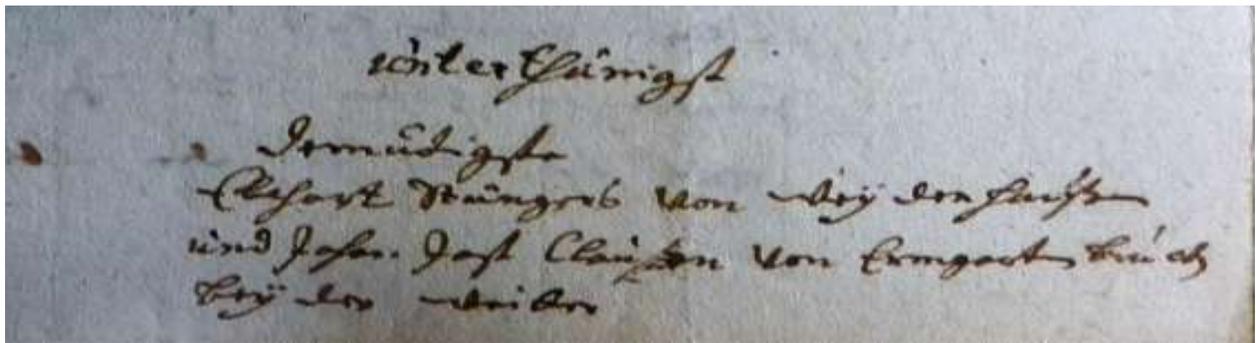


Fig. 7. Bottom right corner, page two, of the letter from Anna Catharina Stenger and Elisabeth Clauss to Count August. There are no signatures. The scribe or notary has simply identified the two women by the names of their husbands and the men's places of residence.

The letter had no effect on the Count. The date that we can see top left in Fig. 6 shows that the letter had been received on 5th June 1725. Not until 28 July 1725, however, did Stenger and Clauss come before the court and receive their fines, which were identical – a punishment of 33 Reichsthaler and 15 Albus, and additional fees to be paid yearly. They had both lost that year's seasons of planting and harvest, and Stenger would have returned to a village where reconstruction of the burnt-out houses had begun without him. His house was not reconstructed until later, by someone else.²⁵ Within seven years Ebert Stenger was dead. His widow outlived him for only a few years, dying in 1735, presumably at the home of one of her sons.

To have left Wittgenstein for East Prussia, the so-called Prussian Lithuania, and to have come back, either freely or as a captive, was in various ways a negative experience. Paul Dreisbach of Hesselbach seems to have come off best, but his absence; must have been brief, and produced no serious consequences. What we can posit is that these early attempts at emigration were widely known, and can have helped prepare the way for later emigrants, particularly those who went to Pennsylvania. In any event, we have assembled here, probably for the first time ever, those Dreisbachs who are found in the records as having participated in the first large emigration movement from Wittgenstein.

²³ This letter, along with various other documents cited here, is in the Princely Archive in Bad Laasphe, in holding W 63 II. It was not only photographed, but also transcribed by Heinrich Imhof.

²⁴ The original word here is "*pralem*," based on the Latin for "foretaste", and must have been inserted by the scribe, rather than the non-literate women.

²⁵ Information communicated by Heinrich Imhof on 11 Oct., 2013.