

Welcome to *The Wittgenstein Corner / Die Wittgensteiner Ecke* What is it, and why will it be unpredictable?

Many readers of this new site will be Dreisbach/Dresbach descendants who have known or heard that their Dreisbach ancestors came from a territory called Wittgenstein somewhere in Germany. There is a fair amount of material on this tiny territory and its inhabitants, available mainly in German archives and in German publications. Such information, whether surprising or dramatic or quaint, is for the most part inaccessible to our DDFA readers in North America. Therefore *The Wittgenstein Corner* (or *Die Wittgensteiner Ecke*, or simply *Die Ecke*) has come into being as an informal meeting place somewhat like a corner at a village crossroads where our readers are welcome to listen and learn about events and conditions of life in Wittgenstein: work, servitude, courtship, feasts, famine and more.

Our brief texts are based on printed sources and on research results communicated by our Wittgenstein friends. These *Ecke* pieces aim to be informative but not academic in style. Nor is it necessary that historic events be discussed in chronological order. Footnotes will probably be scarce. Each *Corner/Ecke* will be numbered and may appear on our website one by one, or as one of a small group of texts. Keep a watchful eye on the DDFA for new topics at *The Wittgenstein Corner*. Welcome! *Willkommen!* (by Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean)

The Wittgenstein Corner (Die Wittgensteiner Ecke) No. 1.

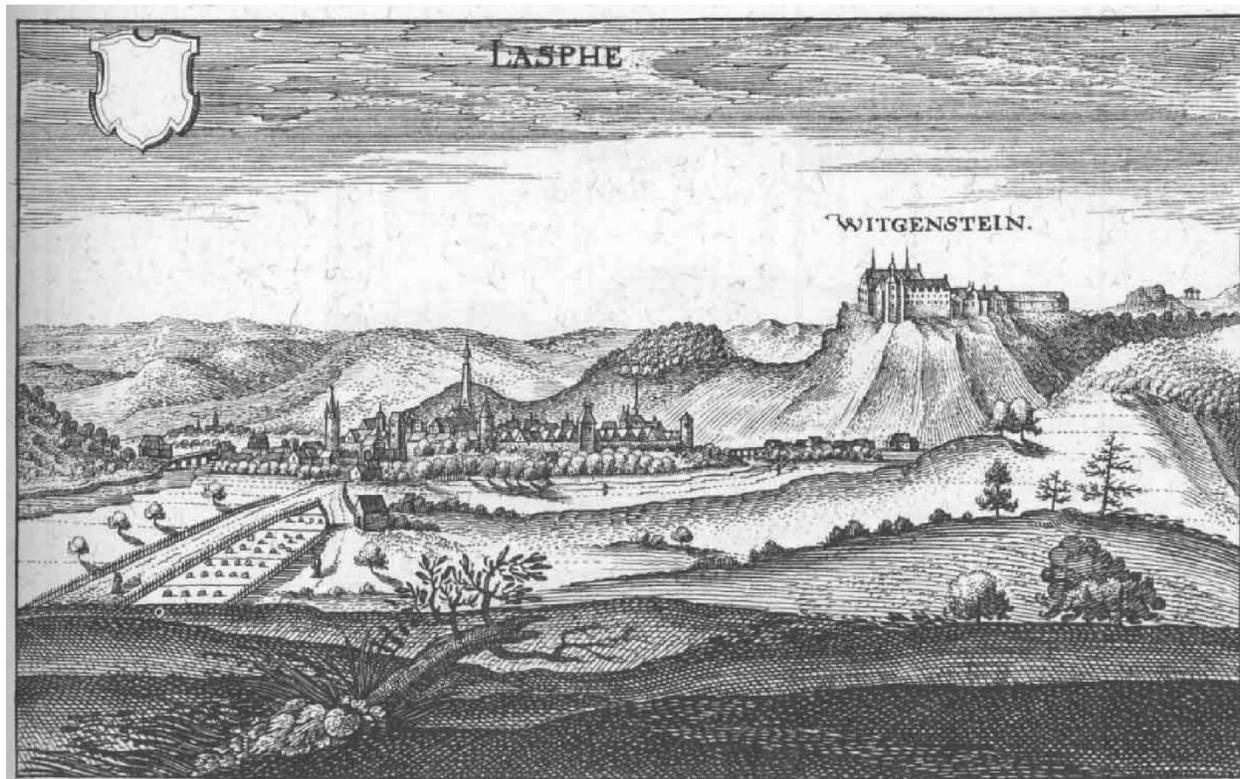
From *Widekind* to *Wittgenstein*. How did the territory of Wittgenstein get its name?

The name Wittgenstein goes back to the Middle Ages, possibly to the mid- or late 1100's. It is a combination of two words: the masculine name *Widekind* (pronounced VEE-duh-kint) and the word *Stein*, a stronghold or fortress. *Widekind*, was not an unusual name, and was in use at least as early as the eighth century. We do not know who the early *Widekind* was whose name was attached to the fortification, but we do know that in 1190 there was a Count Werner of Battenberg who was in control of part of today's territory of Wittgenstein, including the hilltop fortress which had already acquired the name Wittgenstein. Werner was the first to call himself Count Werner of Wittgenstein (*comes Wernerus de Widechinstein*).

There seems to be no sure date for the construction of the original fortress. Its placement was strategic, providing an excellent view of the Lahn River wending its way eastward toward Marburg, accompanied by an early east-west roadway of possible military importance. It is not certain when the village of Laasphe came into being. Situated between the Lahn and the foot of the fortified hill, Laasphe became a walled town of some importance, as seen in the engraving by Matthäus Merian made about 1650.

The Merian engraving also shows that high above Laasphe the former military stronghold had developed into a stately, complex and turreted residence. What the engraving does not mention is that shortly after 1600 the palace's principal occupant was the ruler of only half of Wittgenstein. In the years

1603-1605 the territory had been divided so that three brothers would each have a territory to rule. One brother received a territory outside Wittgenstein. One received the northern part of Wittgenstein with the town of Berleburg as his seat. This 'county' became Wittgenstein-Berleburg. Further south, the eldest of the brothers remained in the traditional family seat, Castle Wittgenstein, from which he governed southern Wittgenstein (officially Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein).



Engraving of the town of Laasphe ca. 1650, by Matthäus Merian from his book "Topographia Hassiae" which was published in 1655. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laasphe_De_Merian_Hassiae_144.jpg

View of the walled town of Laasphe on the Lahn River in the (then) County of Southern Wittgenstein, with Castle Wittgenstein on the somewhat stylized hilltop. Engraving by Matthäus Merian Sr. (1593-1650) or his son Matthäus Jr., who published it in 1655 in *Topographia Hassiae*, a collection of Hessian engravings.

The Wittgenstein Corner will have something gripping to say concerning Castle Wittgenstein and the Simon Dreisbach family in the 1730's. It will also reveal (in part) how it was that a German photo of *Schloss Wittgenstein* appeared on every cover-page of the short-lived *Dreisbach Family Journal* (Vol. 1, October 1913–July 1914, and Vol. II, Oct. 1914–Jan. 1915).