

Dreisbach Family Association

April 2011 Newsletter

The Dreisbachs' Josts and The Revolutionary War 1776 – 1783



There are more than 35 references to “Jost Dreisbach” in sections of the Pennsylvania Archive documents that relate to the Revolutionary War. Until now, it was assumed that all refer to a single person, Jost Dreisbach (1721 – 1794), son of Simon Dreisbach Sr. However careful reading of these references produced a surprising result: **most of the citations refer to two different Jost Dreisbachs, both of them active in the Revolutionary War but in very different ways.**

Jost #1 was born in 1721 in Wittgenstein, Germany. In 1775, he is 54, married and the father of seven. He owns a gristmill and a sawmill, is a prominent member of his church as well as a respected person in the community and he serves on the Committee of Observation and Safety from 1774 through 1775¹.

When the Northampton County Militia was formed in May 1775, **Jost #1** was elected Captain by the men of his company². Five months later he was appointed to be Colonel of the 3rd Battalion of the Northampton County Militia, a post that would only be given to a man who was already known and respected in his community³.



Men wearing 'woodland garb' which is similar to that worn by men doing their militia service.

Who then, is **Jost #2**? The best candidate is the oldest of the next generation of “Josts” – a nephew of **Jost #1**. Yost (also spelled 'Jost') Dreisbach (1754 – 1808) is 22 years old in 1776 and the son of Adam Dreisbach. At 22 he is more likely to be made a 2nd lieutenant than his cousins who are also named “Jost” but who are only 19, 18 and 12 years old in 1776. They are probably too young for a commission. Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about this Yost/Jost - *The Dreisbach Book*⁴ does not show if he married or has any descendants.

The first indication that there are two different Josts is when the Assembly in Philadelphia, in March 1776, appoints “Yost Dreisbach” (**Jost #2**) as a 2nd Lieutenant in Capt. Henry Shade's Company of the Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment⁵. At the same time Col. Jost is back home organizing the 3rd Battalion. Clearly the well known and respected Col. Jost Dreisbach (**Jost #1**) is not about to give up his position as head of about 500 men in his 3rd Battalion of the militia to accept the much lower rank of *second* lieutenant serving under a captain. These are two distinct Jost Dreisbachs beginning their military service in the Revolutionary War.



Uniform of a man in the Penna. Rifle Regiment

As we trace their careers we see, time and again, that the two Josts, **Jost #1** and **Jost #2**, are in different places doing different things at approximately the same time. The inescapable conclusion is that they are two different men.

On 27 August 1776, Lt Jost Dreisbach (**Jost #2**), serving in Capt. Shade's Company of the Penna. Rifle Regiment, commanded by Samuel Miles, fights in the Battle of Long Island and is taken prisoner⁶. According to the PA Archives and Heitman⁷, he is released on 10 Dec. 1776.

During this same period of time, from August to December 1776, Col. Jost Dreisbach (**Jost #1**) is in Northampton County supervising the 3rd Battalion of Militia. He is not at the Battle of Long Island. Indeed, he writes a letter about Battalion business that is read on 10 Sept 1776⁸ while **Jost #2** is in prison in New York. Once again it is clear that two individuals are involved.

As an extra bit of evidence, the PA Archives name them by rank, making reference to **Lieutenant** Jost Dreisbach receiving money owed to him in Dec 1776⁹ and at the same time, Dec 1776, citing **Colonel** Jost Dreisbach in a list of officers in service with the militia¹⁰.

In Jan. 1777 Col Dreisbach (**Jost #1**) launches a complaint against a member of the Militia, Frederick Beck, and Col Dreisbach appears on 30 Jan 1777 to testify in this case¹¹. It is worth going on-line to read about this complaint in the Pennsylvania Archives (see instructions how to do this on last page of newsletter).

When **Jost #2** was released from prison in Dec 1776, he found his former regiment was in tatters. At this time Baron Ottendorff was raising a German speaking, independent corps. With no Rifle Regiment company to call his own, **Jost #2** joins Ottendorff and is made Captain of Company Number One in March 1777¹².



Uniform of Ottendorff's Independent Corps

At this point a muster roll in the PA Archives introduces a 3rd Jost Dreisbach (**Jost #3**) - a private in the 4th Battalion of the Northampton Co militia¹³. This "Jost" is NOT Colonel Jost, nor is it Captain Jost. It will be a younger Jost who is a cousin of **Jost #2**, and who has

become of age to do his militia service, all men between 18 and 53 being required to serve in the militia.

In June 1777, **Jost #2** is serving under Armand in Ottendorff's Corps and takes part in the Battle of Short Hills¹⁴. Col Jost Dreisbach (**Jost #1**) is still serving in Northampton County. He does not take part in this battle.

Armand eventually inherited Ottendorff's Corps and had troubles commanding the existing officers, clashing with them numerous times. One such clash landed Captain Jost Dreisbach (**Jost #2**) in serious trouble.

On 19 July 1777, Capt Jost (**Jost #2**) was court martialed with the following charges laid against him by Armand:

- 1) *Absent without leave*
- 2) *Said he'd had enough time and declined to join his company*
- 3) *When arrested used bad language*
- 4) *Questioned why the Col ordered a return to Amboy.*

*He was acquitted of the first charge and found guilty of the remaining charges and sentenced to be reprimanded in General orders and to ask pardon of Col Armand in the presence of the officers of his corps. On 7 Aug he was reprimanded by George Washington who said that "the conduct of Capt. Friesback must be deemed highly criminal, and of a very dangerous tendency."*¹⁵

On 1 Aug 1777, Capt Jost (**Jost #2**) resigns his commission and leaves Armand's Corps¹⁶ - for a while.



Uniform of an officer in Armand's Legion in 1780 in the South. Unlike the militia, this Corps was run much like a Hessian Jaeger Corps, with pride in military precision and in their uniform.

In July 1780, Capt Dreisbach (**Jost #2**) is listed as commanding 40 men in the Corps of German Volunteers under Armand¹⁷. He takes part in the Battle of Camden, South Carolina on 14 Aug 1780. Uncomplimentary things have been written about Armand's Legion in this battle and it appears that Capt Jost (**Jost #2**) may have resigned again and this time he went home - back to Lehigh Township, Northampton Co where in 1782 and 1783, he is shown as part of the Militia's Light Horse¹⁸ and makes up the "Cavalry" for the 7th Co of the 3rd Battalion¹⁹!

There is no proof that 2nd Lieutenant Jost Dreisbach who is in Henry Shade's Company in 1776 is the same person as Captain Jost Dreisbach, who joins Ottendorff's Corps which later becomes Armand's Legion. However it is much more likely that a Lieutenant, newly freed from a British prison camp would be promoted to Captain than that a young Jost Dreisbach, straight from the backwoods militia, would be appointed a Captain in Ottendorff's Corps.

Conclusion: This is the first time that the exploits of the Revolutionary War Veteran, Col. Jost Dreisbach, previously seen as the experiences of one man, have been shown to be the exploits of two separate individuals!

Colonel Jost Dreisbach served his country well – in Northampton County, PA. He was on the Committee of Safety. He helped to form the Northampton County Militia and initially was chosen by his men to be Captain of his company. Subsequently, the Committee of Safety appointed him as Colonel of the 3rd Battalion of the Northampton County Militia where he had command of about 500 militia men. He had great responsibility, and his efforts contributed to the military success of the American Revolution, however he never fought in a battle, nor was he ever taken prisoner.

The young Jost Dreisbach was a military man. He was appointed 2nd Lieutenant in the Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment in Philadelphia and he served in the Continental Line. He fought in the Battle of Long Island, was captured and imprisoned and subsequently freed. He joined Ottendorff's Corps as a Captain and took part in the Battle of Short Hills. He was court martialed and resigned but later apparently rejoined Armand's Legion as Captain of the Corps of German Volunteers. Although not recorded in the PA Archives, a number of reliable sources say he took part in the Battle of Camden, South Carolina. After this it appears he returned home to Lehigh Township, and finished out the Revolutionary War, serving with his local militia company.

Scattered here and there, throughout the muster rolls of the Revolutionary War in the documents of the PA Archives, there are other listings for "Jost Dreisbach". This is (**Jost #3**), and could be Johan Jost Dreisbach (1757-1813), the son of Col. Jost, and/or Jost Dreisbach (1764 – 1854), son of John. Both are first cousins of **Jost #2**. Currently it is not possible to differentiate between them but both served in the Northampton Co. militia.

Researched and written by:
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REFERENCES:

- ¹ Pa Arch, Ser 5, Vol VIII, Muster Rolls Relating to Associators & Militia of Northampton Co. p 4.
- ² Pa Arch, Ser 5, Vol VIII, Muster Rolls Relating to Associators & Militia of Northampton Co. p 9.
- ³ Pa Arch, Ser 5, Vol VIII, Muster Rolls Relating to Associators & Militia of Northampton Co. p 16.
- ⁴ Ardis G Dreisbach, Bruce J Dreisbach, Rev Charles V Dreisbach, *The Dreisbach Book*, Klamath Falls, OR. 1998. p77
- ⁵ Pa Arch, Series 5, Vol II, Penna. Rifle Regiment, Col. Samuel Miles, March 6, 1776 p 258
- ⁶ PA Arch, Ser 2, Vol X, Pa Rifle Reg. Col. Samuel Miles, p220.
- ⁷ Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution April 1775 to December 1783*. Washington D.C., 1914. p 204.
- ⁸ Pa Arch, Ser 5, Vol VIII, Battalion Not Stated Northampton Co. Militia, p 535
- ⁹ PA Arch Colonial Records, Vol XL, Minutes of the Council of Safety, pp 44-45
- ¹⁰ Pa Arch, Ser 5, Vol VIII, Muster Rolls Relating to Associators & Militia of Northampton Co. p 14
- ¹¹ Pa Arch, Ser 2, Vol XIV, Muster Rolls & Papers Relating to the Associators & Militia of Northampton Co. pp 622-624
- ¹² PA Arch Ser 2, Vol XI, Continental Line, The German Regiment, July 12-1776 – Jan 1, 1781, p 90
- ¹³ PA Arch Ser 5, Vol VIII, pp 309-310
- ¹⁴ www.captainselinscompany.org/chronology.html
- ¹⁵ University of Virginia Library, Electronic Text Center, found at: www.etext.virginia.edu which has online: Washington, George, 1732-1799. The writings of George Washington from the original manuscript sources: Volume 9, August 6, 1777, August 7, 1777
- ¹⁶ Photo located at The American Memory Library of Congress at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem>
- ¹⁷ Patrick O'Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter, The Revolutionary War in the Carolinas*, Vol. Two. See also a website devoted to the Battle of Camden. <http://battleofcamden.org/oob-camden.txt.htm>
- ¹⁸ PA Arch Ser 5, Vol VIII, pp 275-276
- ¹⁹ PA Arch Ser 5, Vol VIII, pp 292-293



The men in Col. Jost's 3rd Battalion of the Northampton County Militia would have looked much like these re-enactors. All photos courtesy of Jim Filipski. www.captainselinscompany.org

Some Notes on Researching 'Josts' in the Revolutionary War

It is worth the time and effort to look at some of the documents about the two Jost Dreisbachs that are available on-line. It is both interesting and humbling to read about the ideals and struggles of these men who are related to us – however distantly.

We are lucky to have numerous mentions of three Dreisbachs: Jost Sr (**Jost #1**), Jost the son of Adam (**Jost #2**), and Simon Jr - who will be the focus of an article later on. Most of the records from the Revolutionary war have been lost or destroyed. We are fortunate that a Civil War surgeon, Harrisburg native, William H. Egle (1830-1901), was interested in history and made copies of documents he found while serving as state librarian from 1887-1899. It is these rescued documents that make up much of the published Pennsylvania Archives. And it is in these same documents that we find the records of the Dreisbachs who served in the Revolutionary War.

Many of the records from the published Pennsylvania Archives (PA Arch) are available on line. To access them go to: www.footnote.com

- 1) In the grey bar near the top of the screen, click on the arrow to the right of "Browse". In the "publication" column select "Pennsylvania Archives **FREE**"
- 2) Then click on "Colonies and Revolution to: 1815"
- 3) From the list that appears on the right, select: Pennsylvania Archives and click on it

You will see a choice of "Colonial Records" and Series 1 through 9. If you look at the references given for the article about the two Josts, you will see something like this:

Pa Arch, Ser 5, Vol VIII, Muster Rolls Relating to Associators & Militia of Northampton Co. p 4.

To see this reference, follow the instructions above. Ser 5, means click on "Series 5". Then select Volume VIII and click on that. If more information is given, look for this title and click on it, then scroll to the appropriate page.

Access to the online Pennsylvania Archives is free and you do not have to join Footnote.com to view them.

There are many other sources of information about the Revolutionary War on the Internet. Some are good, some are poor and contain major errors. It is always best to check the primary source if you can.



A company from the 1st Pennsylvania Battalion on the march

*Special THANKS to
Jim Filipski of Selin's Independent Company,
Ottendorff's Corps*

Anthony Selin, like Jost Dreisbach (**Jost #2**), was captain of a company in Ottendorff's Corps. Much more is known about Selin's Company and today a dedicated group of re-enactors are committed to faithfully reproducing the lives of the soldiers in Selin's Company.

We can reasonably assume that life for Capt. Jost (**#2**) was essentially identical to the lives of the men in Capt. Selin's Company and through the re-enactors we can get a glimpse of what life must have been like for the soldiers and militiamen in the Revolutionary War.

Jim Filipski is the adjutant for Selin's Independent Company and a Revolutionary War historian. He has provided much help and guidance in tracing the Josts along the convoluted path of the Revolutionary War.

The photos in this newsletter are all courtesy of Jim. If you are interested in an accurate account of 18th Century life in Colonial Pennsylvania, go to:

<http://www.liv18thc.com/>

And for much more information on Ottendorff and Selin as well as good photos and more, visit:

<http://www.captainselinscompany.org/>

Thank you, Jim!



Jim Filipski at work in his 18th Century gun workshop.