

## Emigration from the Wife's Point of View, Part I

### Gertraut Gerhart, wife of Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach, left her Grossenbach home on 21 March, 1725

*Dreisbach wives have received short shrift in the DERR thus far. It could not have been otherwise, given the society they lived in. It was the husband – father – head of the household who was responsible for decision-making, for signing contracts, for fulfilling the ruling Count's requirements. Women seldom appear in the archival records apart from marriages, baptisms and deaths. When an adult, unmarried daughter was required to do work on one of the Count's properties, she was considered first as part of her father's household, and only second as an individual.*

*After the death of a householder it was his eldest child – son or daughter – who had the right of succession. If the eldest was a grown daughter, she had to be married, as it was the husband who had to sign the document of leasing and servitude, becoming thereby the next householder. There are instances where the eldest daughter was married off at an early age, in some cases when only fourteen, to enable the property to remain in the family.*

*With regard to emigration, we can only imagine what internal family discussions occurred while forging the decision to leave, though the husband's word would generally have carried the most weight. We have information on three separate years when Dreisbach women and their families left their homes in the hope of a better future – 1725, 1743 and 1751. Some of this information has already appeared in previous DERRs. Now, in DERRs 17 and following, we will concentrate on what is known of the individual circumstances of four emigrating Dreisbach wives.*

### **What drew Wittgenstein villagers to a Baltic region about which they knew almost nothing? The push-pull roles of powerful rulers.**

The story of the exodus from Wittgenstein and other German-speaking areas to depopulated Prussian Lithuania was told at length in DERR no. 8.<sup>1</sup> What Wittgensteiners called Prussian Lithuania was part of East Prussia and was under the rule of Friedrich Wilhelm I who reigned from 1713 to 1740.

In 1709 a devastating plague carried off many inhabitants of East Prussia. It was followed in 1710 by an extremely harsh winter and ensuing low agricultural productivity. Many farms lay abandoned for

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<sup>1</sup> The DERR (Dreisbach Emigration Research Report) consists at present of 17 numbers, available for consultation and downloading at the Dreisbach Family Association website, <http://www.dreisbachfamily.org/thederr.html>

years. When Friedrich Wilhelm ascended the Prussian throne in 1713 he was fully aware of the bleak situation in his eastern provinces. He began to solicit immigrants to this region, particularly farmers and craftsmen. His various immigration programs continued in effect for years, and the printed invitations he spread were remarkably successful, including those he circulated in Wittgenstein in 1724.



*Fig. 1. Friedrich Wilhelm I, who bore the title "King in Prussia", as portrayed in 1713, the year when he came to power. Only twenty-five at the time (his hair is powdered), he was already fully aware of the need to repopulate the most severely abandoned parts of East Prussia. He is shown here in full armor, as he was greatly interested in things military. His stance is intended to communicate the role he immediately assumed as absolute ruler of the Prussian territories. As such, he could solicit immigrants and stipulate the terms which, on paper at least, were generous. Friedrich Wilhelm ruled until 1740.*

*(Portrait painted by Samuel Theodor Gericke. Source: German edition of Wicki Commons.)*

Emigration from Wittgenstein was no simple matter, especially after Count August came upon the scene. August had once held a high administrative position in the Prussian government in Berlin, but had been imprisoned for having embezzled huge amounts of money from the departments he had been set to administer. Some years later, in 1719, he returned to Wittgenstein and managed to get himself appointed co-regent with his brother, the ruling Count, Henrich Albrecht. August soon became the dominant figure of the two, and ruled Wittgenstein with a hard and greedy hand.

At the end of 1723 Count Henrich Albrecht, the rightful ruler of Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein, died. He had been a relatively moderate though not very competent regent. Count August now acquired full governing power and imposed various emigration fees to compensate himself generously for the work he could no longer exact from his emigrating subjects.

The villagers' economy was based chiefly on produce, barter and a certain amount of home industry. Whatever funds the hopeful emigrants had would have to be reserved for the demands of a long overland journey followed by the establishment of a new home. The exit permit and additional fees were costly, and would-be emigrants could little afford to contribute to the Count's coffers in this way. On the one hand they were strongly attracted by the Prussian king's fliers, with their inducements to settle in his eastern territory, and on the other hand there was no affordable way to escape from Count August's iron-bound rule but to leave Wittgenstein surreptitiously.

There were dangers along the way. In addition to encountering robbers and dishonest merchants there was the possibility of being caught in an early stage of the journey. All roads leading to Berlin, an important stop along the way, traversed the territory of Hesse (Hessen-Kassel), which was Wittgenstein's large and powerful neighbor. Hessian police had orders to investigate suspect traveling groups. These could easily be spotted, carrying with them necessities for the long journey as well as practical items for use in their future lives. Those who could not present their ruler's written authorization risked being escorted back to the Wittgenstein border where they were handed over to the authorities.

**Two documented emigrating groups with Dreisbach wives (and a third, needing more research).**

The family under consideration in the present DERR is the only fully successful group of emigrants that is known to have included a Dreisbach wife. The leader of this group of eight was Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach of Grossenbach. A Prussian list of 1725 shows that they did arrive at their destination

The next DERR will discuss Simon Dreisbach's aunt, Anna Catharina Stenger. She and her family left their home in Weidenhausen and crossed the border, traveled a moderate distance into Hesse, but were apprehended along with others and sent back to Wittgenstein. The consequences for their future lives were harsh indeed.

The name of Paul Dreisbach appears in a local sheriff's report of those from Hesselbach who had left without permission but then returned. Was this family discovered at the moment of departure? Was their journey soon terminated for unknown reasons? Lacking archival evidence that their lives in Hesselbach were disrupted, or that they actually left Wittgenstein, we have chosen not to include them here among the emigrants who went at least some distance beyond the Wittgenstein border.<sup>2</sup>

In order to show the immensity of the distance such emigrants had to cover, we include here as *Fig. 2* a basic map of northern Europe which was prepared for DERR no. 8. One can also see here the minimal size of the home region when compared to the length of the journey. Even with horse and cart to convey both heavy baggage and young children, the emigrants would generally have to walk most of the way.



*Fig. 2. The journey from Wittgenstein to "Prussian Lithuania" as seen on a modern map. The point of departure lay inside the red circle on the left. An essential stop on the way was Berlin, where the Prussian government could help arrange further travel, either completely overland or partly by boat. The goal of the journey was the area shown within the red circle on the right, where the G. stands for Gumbinnen as part of that area was later called. The "R" indicates that today this entire enclave-like territory (now called Kaliningrad Oblast) is an integral part of the Russian Federation.*

<sup>2</sup> Paul Dreisbach (Hesselbach, 1695-1775), his wife since 1721, Catharina (the widow Müller), and two children appear in Wittgenstein emigrant lists of unauthorized emigrants, though any such absence would have been brief, for other records show them as living in their house in Hesselbach both before and after 1725, and they seem to have escaped punishment. (Information supplied by Jochen Karl Mehlau of Karlsruhe, Germany.)

**The emigrant group that managed to reach its goal. Gertraut Gerhart, wife of Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach (he was a second cousin of Simon Dreisbach), lived for some years in Prussian Lithuania.**

Gertraut Gerhart (1690-1765) is the first known Dreisbach wife to have left her home and reached her family's goal in a distant land. In about 1715 Gertraut married Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach (1681-1748) who was from the more northerly village of Amtshausen. As second-born, she had no expectations of becoming heir to her father's house, *Oberste*, in Grossenbach. Her elder sister's husband would normally have become next householder, but this couple moved elsewhere. After the death of Gertraut's father, Johannes Gerhart, in 1721, a new agreement could be expected to be made between the Count and Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach as husband of the next sibling in line. By then Count August had become the powerful co-regent, but neither then nor in the following years did any transfer of title to the *Oberste* property occur.

As previously mentioned, in late November 1723 Count August's elder brother Count Henrich Albrecht died. August then became the sole, and in many ways absolute ruler of Wittgenstein-Wittgenstein. The prospect of living under his harsh and selfish rule may well have strengthened thoughts of emigration among his subjects.

Gertraut had an uncle and numerous cousins who also lived in Grossenbach. In 1724, the year before she and her family left Wittgenstein, her cousin Hans Henrich Gerhart was already planning to emigrate. The authorities got wind of this and accused him of preparing to leave secretly for Prussian Lithuania. As a result, in April 1724 his father Jakob Gerhart not only had to formally declare that Hans Henrich no longer desired to emigrate, but he had to post considerable security as a form of guarantee that his son would not abscond. Cousin Hans Henrich stayed home.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it was his four Gerhart cousins who left the following spring, under the leadership of Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach.

The winter of 1724-25 was certainly a time of intense discussion and planning in many Wittgenstein households, judging by the number of persons who set out for Prussian Lithuania in the following spring. In the *Oberste* household in Grossenbach there were now three young Dreisbach children, Johan Henrich, Anna Elisabeth and Maria Elisabeth, all under ten years of age. Gertraut must have had many doubts about taking to the road with them in chilly March. There were also the three adult Gerhart siblings still at home in *Oberste*, Hans Jost, Johan Georg and Agnes. They were probably in their twenties or early thirties, and threw in their lot with their elder sister and brother-in-law.

As the (still unofficial) householder, Hans William Dreisbach's opinion would have carried much weight, and was probably decisive. He was forty-four years old, ten years older than Gertraut, and the senior member of the household. Ten years previously he had made the move from Amtshausen to Grossenbach as a new member of the Gerhart household. Now, in 1725, conditions were such that a much more decisive and life-changing move seemed preferable to remaining where they were. There were other Dreisbachs and Gerharts, relatives and acquaintances in various villages, also pondering these things, openly or secretly discussing the pros and cons of emigration. Emigration was a way out of their semi-bondage, inspiring a sense of hope that the conditions of life for themselves and their families could be improved. Gertraut's two brothers and sister must have shared such hope, and acted upon it. As for Gertraut, any optimism would have been tempered by apprehension concerning the immediate future, given the hardships her children would have to endure during the many weeks of travel that lay ahead, not to mention their being transplanted and growing up in totally unknown circumstances.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: see note 5.

### **On the way: some get caught, some turn back**

The date chosen for departure from Grossenbach was 21 March 1725. No other emigrants from the village at that time have been recorded. However, Gertraut had a younger sister, Susanna, living some miles away on one of the Count's manor farms, Schönbach<sup>4</sup>. She, her husband Johann Jost Göbel and their 2½ year-old son also left their home secretly, on the same day, 21 March 1725. We do not know if the two Gerhart sisters had arranged to travel together. If that was so, later events show that they got separated, or had not managed to connect, and the little Göbel family never got farther than Marburg.

Data is scarce concerning travel routes and travel conditions on the journey between Wittgenstein and eastern Prussia. For safety on the road and for mutual support, emigrating families seem to have agreed to travel together. Two lists that were probably prepared by police or court officials have been preserved in the Princely Archive in Bad Laasphe.<sup>5</sup> They contain the names of illegal emigrants from Wittgenstein who were captured in neighboring Hesse. In these lists we see two types of emigration patterns. One is a traveling group of families and unmarried persons from one single village or town. The other is a collection of family groups who come from different parts of Wittgenstein and who travel together for reasons not fully known to us.

The first type of group is seen in the list of thirty-six names of those captured in or near Marburg in Hesse in April 1725. It contains four large family groups and two single men, all from the town of Feudingén. Most of them had left Feudingén on 24 March 1725. To avoid attracting attention they may have started out separately and agreed to meet up in Hesse, perhaps on the way to Marburg. One family had left as late as 4 April.



*Fig. 3, Old houses in Marburg-on-the-Lahn, a university and former pilgrimage town in Hesse. These houses are in the lower town – the part of Marburg most visited by pilgrims in the Middle Ages. This street is very near the impressive thirteenth century gothic church of St. Elizabeth which holds the remains of this saint. Elizabeth was a Hungarian princess who was married to the Landgrave Ludwig IV of Thuringia, was widowed at twenty and moved to Marburg where she served the poor and the ill until her death there at age twenty-four. Canonized almost immediately, her tomb attracted pilgrims from all over Europe. After the introduction of Protestantism the importance of such pilgrimages declined, but the well-traveled roads to and from Marburg remained.*

*Photo: Marcia Dreisbach Falconer*

<sup>4</sup> Schönbach was later known as Augustendal after Count August.

<sup>5</sup> DERR no. 8 has further information on these two lists, which were photographed by Heinrich Imhof and graciously forwarded by him.

A fifth and last family group also appears in this list of captives: a father, mother and young son. They were not from Feudingen like the others, but came from Schönbach and had left as early as 21 March. They were Johann Jost Göbel, Susanna (nee Gerhart) and their toddler son Johann Jost. It is not certain that they were traveling with the Feudingers; they may simply have been caught in some kind of Marburg police dragnet. The Göbels' story is given in DERR no. 8, where we read that they do not seem to have been punished when they returned to Wittgenstein. After being absent from the records for two years, they appear in Grossenbach in 1727, where Johann Jost Göbel became a householder, and here they remained for ten years.

*Fig. 4. The St. Elizabeth church in lower Marburg which surely astounded travelers from Wittgenstein where there were no churches of comparable size or magnificence.*

*Photo: Marcia Dreisbach Falconer.*



The captured Feudingen group was not the only party of Wittgensteiners to have passed through or near Marburg. A young family from Amtshausen had even gone successfully some thirty miles beyond Marburg, reaching the village of Eifa east of Alsfeld. There they stopped and decided to turn back, for one of their three children had become seriously ill. This family bore the name Strack and had a Dreisbach connection in Amtshausen linking them to Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach, of Grossenbach.

It was on 22 March 1725 that Hans Henrich Strack, his wife Anna Maria, and their three small children, two boys and a girl, secretly left Amtshausen. Hans Henrich's aunt, Anna Maria Strack, had married an Amtshausen householder, Hans Henrich Dreisbach, in 1689. It is not yet proven, but highly likely, that her Strack nephew, born in 1697, was the godson of her husband and was given his name, Hans Henrich. In any event there was definitely an Amtshausen-Grossenbach connection, for the two Dreisbachs, Hans Henrich of Amtshausen and Hans Wilhelm of Grossenbach, were brothers.

In 1725 Hans Henrich Strack was twenty-eight years old, and had to plan responsibly for the welfare of his wife and three children on the long journey that lay ahead. It is hardly likely that they would try to face the challenges and unforeseen dangers of such a journey all alone. It would make good sense to link up with the Dreisbachs and Gerharts of Grossenbach. We know from various records that both these family groups did manage to get past Marburg without being captured, the one eventually arriving in Prussian Lithuania, the other having come as far as Eifa before turning back with their sick child. If indeed they were all traveling together, this would have been a difficult parting of the ways.

There may even have been an extra measure of sadness if these two families were aware that they themselves had escaped capture at Marburg, whereas thirty-three Feudingers and the little Göbel-Gerhart family had not.

On the way to Berlin, the young Dreisbach children surely benefitted from the presence and companionship of their Gerhart aunt and uncles. March and April in central and northern Germany can be quite cold, and this little group was surely on the road for weeks. The strains and hardships involved in keeping warm, keeping dry, eating and sleeping along the road are challenges we can hardly comprehend.

### **From Berlin to Prussian Lithuania**

After some weeks on the road, prospective settlers would arrive at their first goal, Berlin, capital of Prussia. There the new arrivals would presumably go to an immigration office to register with the Prussian authorities and be informed about the final stage of their journey. It is known from correspondence that there could be some days of rest until it was time to leave with a scheduled group departure.<sup>6</sup> This was surely a welcome reprieve for Gertraut Dreisbach and her children. The Gerhart siblings may have used this opportunity to see Berlin, probably the first capital city they had ever been in.

Some departures for East Prussia were routed overland. Others might go by sea, in which case the future settlers would be sent or conveyed north to Stettin. This travel information can be found in a letter, or pack of letters, written by four men in Berlin to relatives in Wittgenstein and dated 18 and 20 June 1725. We can also calculate how long their journey to Berlin had taken. On 29 May 1725 two of the men had received departure papers from Count August after paying all the required fees. Within less than three weeks they and their families were in Berlin. Traveling with one's papers in order can have made the journey smoother and perhaps shorter. Those trying to avoid capture can have needed more time along the way.

The sources consulted for this DERR have nothing to say about the type of overland transportation that was arranged for the journey from Berlin to East Prussia. With respect to traveling by ship, some aspects can be deduced. There was of course a good road from Berlin to Stettin, the nearest Baltic port. If barges were available, however, the new settlers and their goods may have been floated down the Oder River to Stettin. Having boarded the ship and set sail for East Prussia, they would experience sights and situations unknown to most landlocked Wittgensteiners. After sailing across what would seem to be a very large lake (the Bay of Stettin or the Stettin Lagoon) and then passing through a narrow strait, they would come out into the seemingly endless Baltic Sea. Sailing eastward, following along the coast of Polish Pomerania, they would eventually arrive at the Bay of Danzig/Gdansk, pass through another narrow passageway, cross more lake-like water and finally reach the university and port city of Königsberg (now Kaliningrad).

From Königsberg it was about fifty miles inland to the town of Insterburg (now Cernjahovsk) in the midst of a large agricultural region that was in dire need of repopulation. With time the Prussian government created administrative districts in East Prussia such as Kreis Insterburg, Kreis Gumbinnen, etc. Descendants of the settlers from Wittgenstein and other parts of western Europe continued to live here

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<sup>6</sup> This and much more information is in Rolf Farnsteiner's ground-breaking "Auswanderung nach Ostpreussen" which appeared in *Altpreussische Geschlechterkunde, Neue Folge*, Vols. 5 and 8 (1957, 1960), and was accessed in an online version frequently, latest on 1 November 2016, at: <http://www.genealogy.net/vereine/Wittgenstein/emigration/auswanderung-nach-ostpreuen/auswanderer-nach-ostpreuen.html>

for more than two centuries. Sadly, at the end of World War II many who had survived the war had to flee, were forcibly expelled or were deported to the Soviet Union.

### **Life in East Prussia**

We do not know in which precise area the Dreisbachs and Gerharts were settled. The Dreisbach presence in East Prussia is documented (though misspelled) in a list of new settlers, presumably made by a Prussian official. This is the *Kolonistenliste von 1725* in which Farnsteiner identified many who are also found as emigrants in the Wittgenstein records. In the Prussian list, the name Dreisbach is written as Kreyspach, and is numbered as 428, indicating that the Dreisbachs were only one of many immigrating European families that year. (Source: see note 6.)

The Dreisbachs and Gerharts were probably assigned to an abandoned farm which may have stood empty for ten or even fifteen years. They would have arrived in early summer and could perhaps manage to sow a few crops and obtain some livestock, but most urgent of all was probably repairing the house and outbuildings. It is not certain that the promised generous aid they were to receive in their new home actually materialized to the amount and degree expected.

One would wish to know how they reacted to their new surroundings. The landscape here at the edge of the North European Plain was rather flat, in contrast to the forested hills of Wittgenstein. New types of soil and a more northerly latitude would require adaptations in farming techniques and choice of crops. The place-names sounded odd; there were still those who spoke Lithuanian, and even the spoken German was very different from the Wittgenstein dialects. This new existence indeed had its difficulties and challenges, but according to Rolf Farnsteiner (see note 6) a competent and hard-working farmer or artisan could soon make a good living in Prussian Lithuania.

At some time within the next five or six years, the family group split up. It may have been a gradual process. Agnes Gerhart may have married. Her brother Johann Georg Gerhart may also have married and had possibly established himself on a farm of his own. Their brother Hans Jost Gerhart may have been dissatisfied with his prospects in Prussian Lithuania. Hans Wilhelm and Gertraut Dreisbach may have been weighing the future possibilities for their children, now approaching or entering their teen years. By about 1731 the Gerharts and Dreisbachs had reached their several decisions about where they intended to spend the rest of their lives. Agnes and Johann Georg Gerhart are believed to have remained in East Prussia as they never again appear in any known Wittgenstein records. Their brother Hans Jost is clearly documented as having returned to Wittgenstein. The Dreisbach family also made the decision to make the return journey – and this time there would be no help from the Prussian government.<sup>7</sup>

### **The return to Grossenbach**

Every few years Wittgenstein officials made a village-by-village and family-by-family tally (*Untertanenverzeichnis*) of the Count's subjects. In the 1732 list of persons living in Grossenbach, the former emigrant family of Hans Wilhelm and Gertraut Dreisbach unexpectedly appears. It is not known exactly how long they had stayed in Prussian Lithuania, nor when they returned to Gertraut's native village, but a stay in Prussian Lithuania of about five or six years is likely.

They had no house to return to, for it had been assigned to a new householder. Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach was now in his early fifties and knew that he had no prospects of once more becoming one of the Count's householders. He could perhaps find work on one of the Count's manor-farms such as

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<sup>7</sup> Information on the presumed later lives of the Gerhart siblings was received from Jochen Karl Mehldau who in 2011 also provided much information on the later lives of Hans Wilhelm and Gertraut Dreisbach.



Schönstein/Augustenhof. With luck the Dreisbach family might move in with a relative or rent a house on someone's property and become a *Beisitzer* (approximately, a co-dweller). Gertraut's brother, Hans Jost, did manage to become a householder in the village of Heiligenborn after his return to Wittgenstein, but first he had to marry the daughter of the house and then wait twenty years until his father-in-law died.<sup>8</sup>

There are no personal records to tell us what lay behind the Dreisbachs' decision to leave Prussian Lithuania. Gertraut, one can presume, was happy to return to her native village and to reintroduce her children to Wittgenstein life. Simply being back in the forested, hilly landscape of western Wittgenstien may have been a balm to her soul after years spent on flat East Prussian farmland.

There is one factor which has not been noted concerning the Dreisbach family's return to Grossenbach. Not only did Gertraut's uncle and cousins still live there in the house called *Jacobs*, but her sister and brother-in-law, Susanna and Johann Jost Göbel, who had been captured at Marburg, had now established themselves in Grossenbach. Hans Jost had become householder of *Gehanns* in 1727.<sup>9</sup> Their



*Fig. 5. Grossenbach in 1739. Detail of the 1739 Forstatlas which depicted all the Count's forest lands. We see here the village surrounded by trees, signifying forestation. The gently rounded hill on which Oberste ('Uppermost') stands, is easily identified as it rises above the roads around it. Oberste itself is in almost the exact center of the picture. Gehanns, home of Susanna and Hans Jost Göbel as of 1727, is one of the houses along the left side of the road. Photo: Marcia Dreisbach Falconer.*

<sup>8</sup> Werner Wied, *Die Feudinger Höfe*, Ortsheimatverein "Auf den Höfen", Bad Laasphe-Rückershausen 1991, p. 554.

<sup>9</sup> Wied, pp. 370, 372.

house was in fact situated along the road that still runs below the hill-top property, *Oberste*, where Gertraut and Susanna had grown up. Johann Jost and Susanna Göbel are recorded as occupying *Gehanns* from 1727 to 1739. It need not surprise us, therefore, that the returning Dreisbachs went to Grossenbach. Exactly where they lived is not known, but the presence of closely related families in the village must have been invaluable as Gertraut and Hans Wilhelm sought to reintegrate themselves into the local pattern of life.

### The move to Rückershausen

Neither Gertraut nor her sister Susanna lived stable lives in just one place. Decisions to move would have been made by their husbands as opportunity presented itself. Johan Jost and Susanna Göbel left Grossenbach first. He had a Göbel first cousin, a householder in Rückershausen, who died in 1736 at forty-four, leaving a wife and numerous offspring. Johann Jost terminated his contract as houseman in Grossenbach and took over the contract of his late cousin's house in Rückershausen. Being at the top of the road, it too was called *Oberste*. This *Oberste*, however, was already full. We know from the 1741

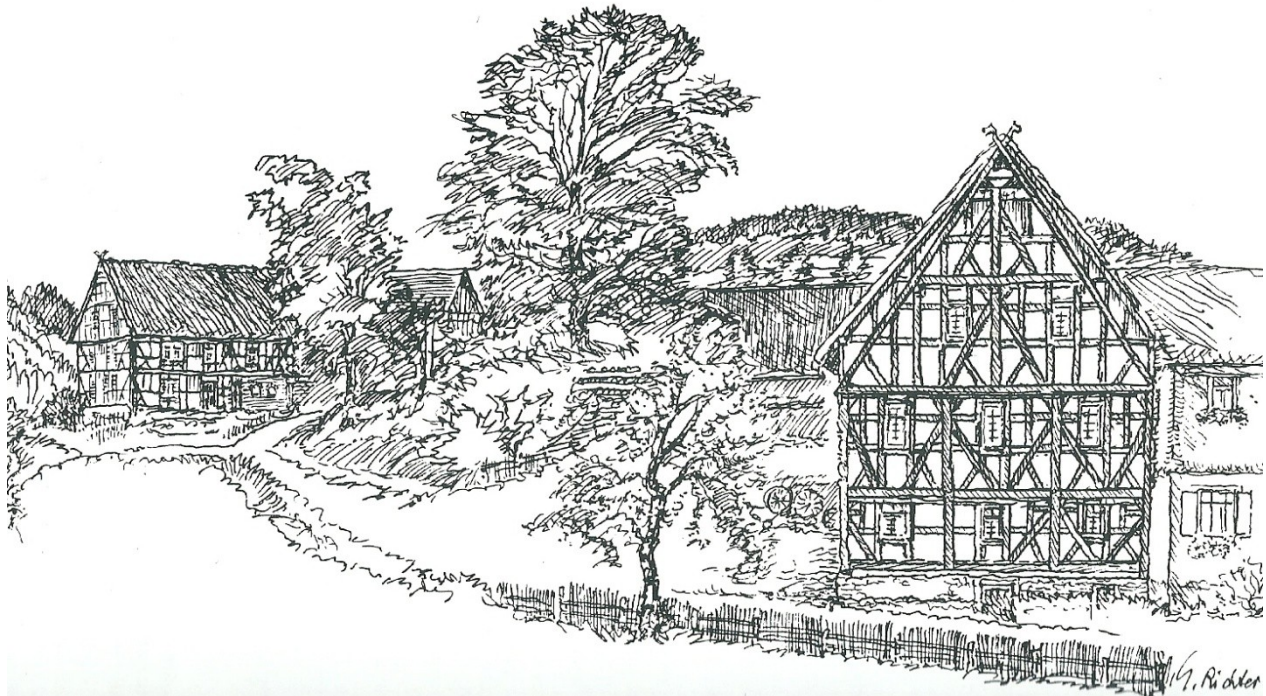


Fig. 6 . The center of Rückershausen as it may have looked in earlier centuries. In "Oberste", up the road on the left, Johann Jost Göbel and his wife Susanna, nee Gerhart, lived for a period of years, starting in ca. 1737. Pen drawing by Helmut Richter. Reproduced with the permission of the Wittgenstein Heimatverein e.V.

tally of the Count's Rückershausen subjects that the late cousin's widow and her six children continued to live in the house. Add to this Johann Jost and Susanna Göbel and their five children, and we find that this dwelling sheltered fourteen persons!<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> These figures are based on a photo of the 1741 *Untertanenverzeichnis* received from Heinrich Imhof.

The Göbels are subsidiary figures in this DERR, but their family relationship and their places of residence can have been of importance for at least two stages in the lives of Hans Wilhelm and Gertraut Dreisbach. In 1743 at the latest, when Hans Wilhelm was about sixty-two and Gertraut fifty-two, the Dreisbachs followed the Göbels to the tiny village of Rückershausen,<sup>11</sup> whose three principal houses were, in translation, *Uppermost*, *Middlemost* and *Lowermost*. There were only a few other houses in addition to the principal three, so perhaps room was found for them in the Göbel house, if the older children of the three families – Göbel, the widow Göbel and Dreisbach, had begun to leave home.

### **Next: Augustenhof**

Soon the Dreisbachs moved on again (but not very far) to the farming estate Augustenhof which lies between Rückershausen and Grossenbach. Hans Wilhelm may have found work there, though he was by then in his sixties. We do not know what circumstances led to making this move. The time he spent at Augustenhof was short, for in the spring of 1748 Hans Wilhelm Dreisbach died at the age of sixty-seven. It is hoped that research will produce further details of his rather unusual life, thereby expanding our knowledge of what it can have been like to live as a *kolonist* in East Prussia, and increasing our understanding of the problems he encountered as a returned illegal emigrant.

### **Journey's end**

After the death of her husband, Gertraut lived for seventeen more years. Her daughters were probably married. Her son Johan Henrich was living in Girkhausen in northern Wittgenstein, and it was here, in his house, that she spent the last years of her life. Gertraut Dreisbach, nee Gerhart, died in Girkhausen on 31 May 1765. She had been born in 1690 (exact day unknown) and had thus lived a relatively long life, dying at about seventy-five.

Thanks to researchers' labors it has been possible to put together fragmented details of persons, places and dates, thereby gaining access to a few external circumstances of Gertraut Dreisbach's adult life. It was certainly not an easy life. In Prussian Lithuania, hard work was required of all – men and women, to make an abandoned homestead functional again. After the return to Wittgenstein, Gertraut and her family lived what was apparently an uncertain life in different places: Grossenbach, Rückershausen, Augustenhof. As a widow she made yet another move, to unfamiliar Girkhausen in the far north of the territory of Wittgenstein-Berleburg. This was to be her last uprooting.

Was hers a hard life? So it would seem, but we cannot know. Gertraut may have had warm and supportive family relationships. Twice the Dreisbach family moved to villages where Gertraut's sister, Susanna Göbel, also a returned emigrant, was living. It is also possible, on the other hand, that Gertraut's whole life was dominated by difficulties. Our lack of insight can lead to excessive theorizing, which this DERR has tried to avoid. However we have drawn on certain historical, geographical and social conditions which might provide relevant contexts for the events of Gertraut's life. One might, for example, see Gertraut as finding comfort in being home again, surrounded by speakers of the old familiar dialect, whereas in Prussian Lithuania she may have had to deal with speakers of unintelligible Lithuanian, Prussian officials whose German was that heard in Berlin or Königsberg, and her *kolonist* neighbors, whose various dialects reflected their Swiss, Austrian or other origins.

Here ends the story of one emigrant wife, as far as it could be pieced together. Future numbers of the DERR will attempt similar portrayals of the other emigrant Dreisbach wives. For the earliest one, leaving led to a catastrophe, alas. For the other two it led to drama and difficulties but proved a success.

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<sup>11</sup> Information received from Jochen Karl Mehldau in a message of 12 March 2011.