

Jost Dreisbach's Three Elizabeths

Who gave birth to Jost's twelve children?

For more than one hundred years descendants of 1743 immigrant Jost Dreisbach have been seeking the identity of the mother, or mothers, of his twelve children. In the rare baptismal records the mother appears simply as *Elizabeth*. The time-span between the births of Apollonia on 11 January 1750 and Michael on 1 April 1779 is unusually long: about 29 years and two months.

Such an extended period of fertility is rare but not impossible. Yet, we may wonder, could just one life-long spouse have borne so many children, living first as a pioneering wilderness wife, then enduring the trials of a refugee existence during the so-called Indian troubles, returning home to the demanding role as mistress of the household of a busy miller who was also a church founder and militia officer, seeing her children grow, marry and disperse? Three of the twelve children died in childhood, all of the remaining nine were still living in 1811, the year of Elizabeth's death. Following Jost's death in 1794 she had experienced eighteen years of widowhood. If there was but one Elizabeth, surely she must qualify as 'a woman of parts'.

On the other hand it was not at all unusual that wives died young, particularly in childbirth, and that widowed husbands with young children sought to remarry as quickly as possible. In recent decades a few family historians have put forth the theory that Jost Dreisbach most probably had two wives, basing this on occasional lengthy periods between births such as that between Adam (15 October 1762) and Susanna (14 April 1767). Here, the reasoning went, was a period where Jost might have acquired a younger second wife. A set of three wives was not even considered. Nevertheless there is a third candidate.

We have, in fact, three very different Elizabeths to consider. One was discovered in a Wittgenstein archive in early 2011. Another was mentioned in a 1914 history of Lehigh County and was not definitively disqualified until almost a century had passed. In the following we shall attempt to unravel the stories of the three women who have been or could have been paired with Jost Dreisbach.

Elizabeth no. 1. Elisabeth Wolf, born in Wittgenstein in 1718. Jost "took her along" when the Simon Dreisbach family left for Pennsylvania.

On the morning of May 16, 1743 Herman Jung, Count Friedrich's chief law officer in the Feudinggen administrative district, received unexpected news. During the previous night (as he wrote in his report

later that day) the Simon Dreisbach family of Oberndorf had secretly left their house and lands with the intention of starting anew in North America.

Jung set out from his home in Feudinggen, heading for Oberndorf a few miles to the northwest. There he visited the abandoned Dreisbach farmhouse, shut and locked the door and went into the village to ask questions and gather information for the investigation that was sure to follow.

He then returned to Feudinggen and wrote his report to the Director and the Councilors of Count Friedrich's Chamber (which was both judicial and administrative) in the castle at Laasphe. Jung's report begins with several lines of customary florid salutations and then comes to the point. The actual communication begins:

I must hereby humbly report that this morning I learned that Simon Dreisbach of Oberndorf this past night fled from his house with his family and all his movable things, taking along a cow and a calf and a horse and two carts, in sum all that he had, and his eldest son also took along a female servant from Oberndorf who is the daughter of Johannes Wolf of Glashütte; ...¹

This "female servant from Oberndorf" was Elisabeth Wolf, a young woman of twenty-four who came from the village of Volkholz. Her mother, Gertrud Wolf, had been born into the Wied family in the village of Oberndorf where, in that May of 1743, Elisabeth was working for a family. Dreisbach-Wied relationships were strong. After the death of Simon Dreisbach's father, Georg Wilhelm Dreisbach, Simon and his younger brothers for a time had a step-father, Jost Wied of Oberndorf, until his death in the early 1720's. He was in fact one of Elisabeth Wolf's many Wied uncles, but she was too young to have known him.

Nowhere else in the documents of the Chamber's hearings and testimonies which followed the Dreisbachs' exodus is there mention of a "daughter of Johannes Wolf" who left with the Dreisbachs. The Chamber was primarily interested in legalities and economics (i.e. the Count's income from his subjects). It must have been Sheriff Jung himself, therefore, who garnered this news while questioning the villagers of Oberndorf where there were several houses with Wied connections. It is unclear what the sheriff may have meant when writing that eldest son (Jost Dreisbach) "took along" the daughter of Johannes Wolf. One possibility, of course, is that the connection was a romantic one.

At the time of the Dreisbach family's nighttime departure Jost was 21. Elisabeth, whose story has been put together from various records by Jochen Karl Mehldau (see below) was 24½. As mentioned above, Dreisbach-Wied relationships were close in the village of Oberndorf, and although Elisabeth grew up in Volkholz and Glashütte, as children Elisabeth and Jost would have seen one another from time to time. We may assume that sheriff Jung had been correctly informed by the Oberndorf villagers which he questioned on 15th May. Elisabeth's departure was of no economic consequence for the Count's finances, and such things could therefore be revealed to the sheriff without

¹ (Author's translation.) The lengthy document in which this letter appears was discovered in early 2011 by Wittgenstein emigration historian Heinrich Imhof. It is in holding 53 of the Princely Archive of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein in Bad Laasphe, and is part of a long official investigation into the economic and legal consequences resulting from Simon Dreisbach's illegal defection to North America.

fear of possible consequences from on high. Oberndorf relatives would surely know if Elizabeth Wolf had indeed left with the Dreisbachs.

It is possible that Elisabeth and Jost had developed some form of attachment. It is also possible that Elisabeth was chiefly intending to use her small sum earned by working for various Oberndorf families, in the hope it might be sufficient to get her to Pennsylvania and a new life. Mother Katharina Dreisbach would probably have been pleased to have her help with the younger children along the way and onboard.

Elisabeth Wolf and her first cousin Conrad Wied.

Was this Elisabeth Wolf always Elisabeth Wolf? Did she complete the journey to Pennsylvania? At the request of the present author some years ago, Jochen Karl Mehldau, the expert on Wittgenstein church and official records, searched the available documents on the family of *Johannes Wolf of Glashütte*. He came to the conclusion that it was *Juliane Wolf*, born in 1718, the youngest daughter of hammer-smith Johannes Wolf and wife Gertrude nee Wied who, for reasons unknown to us, decided she would be known as *Anna Elisabeth Wolf*. In two of Count Friedrich's head counts of his subjects there is no Juliane recorded in the household of Johannes Wolf. There is, however, an 'Anna Elisabeth' (18 years old in 1736, 24 in 1742) which correlates well with Juliane's 13 Nov. 1718 date of baptism, depending on the time of year when the count was made. Moreover there is no parish record of death or burial anywhere in Wittgenstein for either Juliane or her *alter ego* Anna Elisabeth Wolf, indicating that she left the territory as an adult.²

We cannot know if 'Elisabeth' Wolf accompanied the Dreisbachs down the Rhine to Rotterdam, nor if she completed the voyage to Philadelphia with them. The *Lydia's* passenger list does not contain the names of women and children. We have no idea if Elisabeth was able to leave the ship together with the Dreisbachs. She may have 'disappeared' upon arrival in Philadelphia like her cousin Conrad Wied, who was traveling on the same ship with the Simon Dreisbach family and who, after arrival in Philadelphia, entered into what was intended to be a lengthy period of indentured service.

Financing the voyage.

Before passengers could leave the ship, the Captain made sure that all their expenses on board had been paid. Simon Dreisbach, always financially strained, would have had accounts of his own to settle and it is doubtful that, after all the expenses during the long journey to Rotterdam, he still had the funds to cover his own family, let alone Elisabeth Wolf. There had developed what one authority called "a

² Communication from Jochen Karl Mehldau, 6 July 2011.

trade in strangers”.³ Those unable to pay their travel debts could find financial relief *at a price*. Merchants would appear onboard and negotiate with the captain to assume the sum owed by one or more passengers. Indenture would result, allowing the merchant to sell the labors of the passenger to pay his or her travel debts. The penniless arrival would be subject to an agreement of bound labor whereby he or she promised to work for a specified number of years as payment for the debt which the “redeemer” had assumed. An indentured servant would receive bed and board during the years of service, and perhaps a set of new clothes when leaving. (It is possible that Simon Dreisbach indentured some of his sons. Many immigrant families paid at least part of their passage by indenturing their teenage children.)⁴

We now know that such an agreement was chosen by another member of Simon Dreisbach’s small group of emigrants. This was Conrad Wied, a first cousin of Elisabeth Wolf, who was traveling with his wife Magdalena and possibly with their year-old daughter, Maria Elisabeth (the child is not mentioned in any of the relevant records). In Wittgenstein they had had no house of their own and had been living with their relatives in the new village of Weide. It is certain that they could not have been able to pay the debts owed to the Captain, and there is proof that Conrad bound himself to a Quaker named George Kastner. However, Wied ran away about ten months after his being ‘bound’ in Philadelphia. Kastner then placed an advertisement in the widely read newspaper, *Pensylvanische Geschichts-Schreiber*, of 16 July 1744:

“George Kastner, Whitpain Township, advertises that his German servant, Conrad Wied, ran away. He is 30 years old.”

The typical Wittgenstein name Wied and the age of the runaway strongly suggest that this was indeed the Conrad Wied who arrived on the *Lydia* with the Dreisbach family. What Conrad Wied’s circumstances were, then or later, is alas not known.⁵

Similarly, the circumstances of Elisabeth Wolf’s life in America have not come to light – if indeed she did complete the long journey to Philadelphia. It is possible that like her cousin Conrad she began her sojourn in America as an indentured servant. If, in contrast, she and Jost did marry, she cannot possibly have borne all his children. When the last child, Michael, was born (1779) this Elisabeth would have been sixty-five and a half. There remains the possibility that Elisabeth Wolf died after giving birth to a number of Jost’s offspring and that a second wife, also called Elizabeth, was the mother of the later children. Such reasoning leads to the ‘two wives’ theory.

Elizabeth No. 2. Elizabeth Rachenberger (variously Rauschenberger/Rauschenbager/Rauschenberg): Jost’s second wife?

³ Source cited in n. 4.

⁴ See Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1999, pp. 98-112 for the larger context of the assumption of newcomers’ debts by merchants and others.

⁵ There is an American “Wheat” family whose ancestor, a “Conrad Wheat”, lived in western Maryland 1763-1767 and died in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1781. (Communications from Wheat descendant Scott Coonce in early 2017.)

In 1914 the name of Jost Dreisbach's wife appeared in print (possibly for the first time). This was in the two-volume publication, the *History of Lehigh County, Pennsylvania*.⁶ On page 283 of volume two, under the heading "*Dreisbach Family*", we find the information that Jost Dreisbach "*married Elizabeth Rachenberger and had children...*". Then follows a paragraph with the names of the twelve children (with spouses) and births and deaths where known. No sources are given.

Ten years later, in 1924, the 'Historian of the Dreisbach Family', Laura M. Helman, having assembled numerous names of additional descendants of the Simon and Martin Dreisbach lines, published *History and Genealogy of the Dreisbach Family* (Institute of American Genealogy, 1924). Here we see that her knowledge in relation to Jost's wife had not increased. Her text repeats the information which had appeared in the 1914 *History of Lehigh County*. Her one addition may have been related to a sense of propriety. Given that Apollonia was listed as born in 1750, Hellman inserted a suitable date for the parents' marriage (twice in fact) on pages 3 and 6: "*about 1749*".

Elizabeth Rachenberger continued to be named as Jost Dreisbach's presumed wife into the 1990s. During the preparation of *The Dreisbach Book* in 1996-7⁷ no alternate proposal for this woman's identity was received. A date for her marriage to Jost was available (without an attached source) and made its way into the book's text on page 23 as '16 July 1748'.

The major part of the *Dreisbach Book* was not occupied by text but by descendant listings. They were based on a myriad of sources, including the many handwritten ancestor lists that had been received. In the book's *Descendants of Simon Dreisbach* section which starts on page 70, we find eldest son Jost and his wife Elizabeth Rachenberger. Her birth date is given as 17 Mar 1723. This was most fitting and meant she was about two years younger than Jost who was born in September 1721. On the other hand this birthdate meant she would have been 56 when her youngest son Michael was born in 1779, a circumstance not noted before the book was printed.

In the above descendant listing the marriage date for Jost and Elizabeth is 17 October 1749. (Source not known to the present writer.) Not only is this approximately a year later than the date given on p. 23, it implies that Apollonia was born three months after her parents' marriage. It is not surprising, therefore, that by the end of the century Dreisbach researchers were agreeing that much remained to be verified in the case of Jost Dreisbach and his wife or wives.

Though researchers tended to favor Elizabeth Rachenberger as Jost's second wife, her religious connections were at first not discussed. Most of the early Dreisbach wives were from Reformed families. The name Rachenberger in its various forms was not one readily found in church or civic records in what is now northern Northampton County, but no leads had been found to other areas. There was a newly formed (1740) Moravian community, Nazareth, some miles to the east, but it was self-sufficient, was oriented to the larger Moravian center, Bethlehem, and had little contact with non-

⁶ Authors Ch. R. Roberts, John B. Stoudt, Th. H. Krick and Wm. J. Dietrich, Vols. I-II, Allentown, PA, 1914.

⁷ Ardis Grosjean Dreisbach, Bruce Jack Dreisbach, Rev. Charles V. Dreisbach, *The Dreisbach Book. The Dreisbachs, Dresbachs, Driesbachs, etc. of North America, and their European Origins*, printed for the Dreisbach Family Association by Smith-Bates Printing and Design, Klamath Falls, Oregon, 1998. Out of print.

Moravian settlements. To all intents and purposes the name Rachenberger was absent from the world inhabited by Dreisbach settlers. The origins of Elizabeth Rachenberger had yet to be found.

Enter the Moravian connection.

Raymond E. Hollenbach was a non-Moravian local researcher who shed a little light on the Moravian convert Frederick (Friederich) Rauschenberger and his family who lived in what is now lower Lehigh County. Hollenbach was not the first to have done this. Frederick Rauschenberger's role in the Emmaus (Salisbury) Moravian community had already been presented in detail in the first volume of the 1914 *History of Lehigh County*, pp. 638 and 876. As this information concerned Salisbury Township and the Moravian Church in Emmaus in southern Lehigh County, it seems to have escaped the notice of researchers interested in early settlers of northern Northampton County.

Hollenbach (1893-1991) himself was born in northern Lehigh County but had been employed in a corporate concern in Philadelphia until his retirement in 1963. His true vocation was local history. After his retirement he emerged as a major researcher, dedicating himself to the study, translation and publishing of the records of many Reformed, Lutheran and Moravian congregations in Eastern Pennsylvania.

In his *Church Records, Emmaus Moravian Congregation in Salisbury Township (1754-1869)*, a 1973 typescript deposited at the Lehigh County Historical Society,⁸ Hollenbach mentions Friederich Rauschenberger and his wife as founding members of the Emmaus Moravian congregation. He does not mention their children, however (one of whom was an Elizabeth!). In a later context, Hollenbach did cite Jost Dreisbach's wife as Elizabeth Rachenberger, but he was almost certainly drawing upon the aforementioned Dreisbach information in the 1914 *History of Lehigh County*. It took the research of a Dreisbach descendant of the Jost line, and the decisive discovery of a Rauschenberger descendant, to propel the search for Elizabeth Dreisbach forward.

Progress at last in identifying Elizabeth Rauschenberger (and her husband).

In 1998 the late Irene Konrad (1920-2014), a descendant of Jost Dreisbach's youngest son Michael, put the results of her family research online. Her many sources included Hollenbach's work. Born in Bethlehem, PA, she and her husband had long been living in Florida. In 1998 Irene was as yet unaware of the newly formed Dreisbach Family Association (DFA, now DDFA) or the recently published *The Dreisbach Book*. Immediately after her own family research became available on-line, she was inundated with responses. Soon Irene was corresponding with a number of DFA researchers who agreed with her that Elizabeth Rauschenberger must have been Jost Dreisbach's second wife.

⁸ The present author has not seen this manuscript which belongs to the Lehigh Valley Historical Society, but assumes it has long been available for consultation at the Library of the Lehigh Valley Heritage Museum in Allentown, PA.

1998-2001 was a period of intense Dreisbach research. Results can be seen in the greatly augmented contents of the *Dreisbach Book 2001 Supplement*, a much expanded on-line revision of the descendant listings of the 1998 *Dreisbach Book*.⁹ Necessary corrections were made and new knowledge was inserted. In Simon Dreisbach's descendant listing Elizabeth Rachenberger retained her place as wife of Jost until she was deleted in 2019.

Irene Konrad continued her own research on Jost's Elizabeth which she summarized in a six-page message to the present author on 21 February 2001. Konrad wrote that according to Raymond Hollenbach, Elizabeth Rauschenberger was a Moravian.¹⁰ In recent years the search had been on to find this Elizabeth's dates of birth and death. Was Jost's Elizabeth indeed a Moravian? Was there a connection between Dreisbachs and the Emmaus Moravian community? Konrad, herself a life-long Moravian, wrote that she had sought this Elizabeth in various Moravian records, but without success.

An observation on certain aspects of Moravian-Reformed marriages may be in order here. Dreisbach researchers were dealing mainly with members of Reformed congregations, and occasionally with Lutherans. The two denominations frequently cooperated in maintaining so-called 'union' churches. In such an arrangement Reformed and Lutheran congregations shared the building and its maintenance, but conducted their services on alternate Sundays. Gaining an insight into the closed and tightly organized Moravian towns was another matter. The early Moravian communities were fervently Christian, cultivated, musical and self-sufficient. They had created architecturally handsome communities where charity and self-discipline were practiced; they also viewed the area's native tribes with respect and compassion. Strict discipline was accepted by the Moravian members. Had Elizabeth Rauschenberger left her Moravian world to marry the Reformed Jost Dreisbach she would definitively have been expelled from the greater Moravian community, permanently estranged from her family and from the only social context she knew.

The real Elizabeth Rauschenberger (1747-1824).

It is not quite certain who first found the birth and death dates of Elizabeth Rauschenberger. A birth date of 1747 may have been discussed before 2000, or soon thereafter. The first report to Irene Konrad of Elizabeth's true Moravian identity came, with dates, in an e-mail received on 26 March 2003. The sender, one William Roushey, Jr., a descendant of Friedrich Rauschenberger, wrote:

"I am convinced that Elizabeth Rauschenberger (daughter of Friedrich), was not married to Jost Dreisbach. I base this on the Journals of Nazareth Moravian Church."

Roushey had consulted the Moravian records of Bethlehem, the main Moravian settlement, and of Nazareth, where Elizabeth Rauschenberger from Emmaus had lived with her husband, Michael Moehring. From these records, and especially from Elizabeth's *Lebenslauf*, the brief biography of each Moravian who died within the community, it was immediately clear that this Elizabeth could not have

⁹ See **Research Notes** at the end of this paper for the site address.

¹⁰ From her 6-page email message to the author, delineating her Elizabeth Rauschenberger research.

married Jost Dreisbach. Born in Macungie on 20 November 1747 and baptized two days later in the Moravian congregation at Emmaus, Elizabeth Rauschenberger, when a girl, had for a time worked at the Moravian guest house in Nazareth, the Rose Inn. In 1775 she married Michael Moehring, lived thereafter in Nazareth and had no children. Her husband died in Nazareth on 16 June 1796. Elizabeth died twenty-eight years later, on 22 November 1824.

Thus there never was a young second wife from Emmaus for the presumed widower Jost Dreisbach, Lehigh Township miller and pillar of the Reformed congregation which he and his father had founded. Elizabeth Rauschenberger did not leave the Moravian world of her birth, and was never banned for marrying outside the community.

Elizabeth No. 3. A wrong choice in 1773 is at last corrected and leads to the girl next door.

The background: getting established on the frontier. Dreisbachs arrived in an area where Dieters had already warranted two tracts of land and were probably ‘sitting’ on several more.

In 1745, possibly earlier, two members of the Dieter family, Johannes or John (Junior) and his younger brother Wilhelm/William, had staked out tracts for themselves several miles apart in the area now known as Lehigh and Moore Townships in Northampton County, PA (at that time part of a large area called “The Adjacents of Allen”). Their tracts were located in what had recently been frontier territory.

On 22 June 1745 the two Dieters were in Philadelphia at the Land Office where each acquired a warrant for a tract of 100 acres. There was already a scattering of warranted tracts in the area. Still others were being defensively marked off as land which was to be claimed at the Land Office, or perhaps squatted upon for the time being, or lying fallow until a purchaser appeared.

Little is known about the Dieter family in their early years in Pennsylvania. More than fifty years ago Dieter descendant Esther Gundry located two very early Dieter tracts next to each other in the Land Warrant Applications at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg. One was a 150 acre tract warranted to “*John Dater (alias Teeter)*” in February 1735. This was a rectangle straddling the county line between what are now lower Lehigh and Berks Counties. The other tract had been occupied by “*John Teeter Jun’r*” but was no longer in his name. Gundry follows the family northward to Whitehall Township in (now) Lehigh County, where two Dieter marriages took place in the 1740’s.

In 1745 when the Dieter brothers John and William acquired warrants on their first tracts in what is presently Northampton County, the larger Dreisbach family had probably not yet established itself there. It is likely, however, that in 1745-46 Jost Dreisbach, then 24 to 25 years old, was already scouting the area in search of vacant land, particularly the land he may have heard of from surveyors in Germantown.¹¹ Jost, intending to build a gristmill, would of course have been looking for a stream to

¹¹ Marcia Dreisbach Falconer has discovered a network of Germantown connections the Simon Dreisbach family had developed soon after their 1743 arrival, including the important Lukens family of surveyors. (Publication in preparation.)

supply water for a mill race. He may already have decided to occupy land along what would soon be known as Indian Creek.

June 1747: Jost Dreisbach warrants his first tract and acquires a ‘squatting’ neighbor.

We cannot ever know, but it may well have been near Indian Creek that Jost Dreisbach first encountered William Dieter, son of John Dieter the Elder, and younger brother of John Dieter Jr. William Dieter’s own warranted tract was at some distance from Indian Creek. However, close to Jost, on the western rise above the Creek, members of the larger Dieter family may already have been occupied with building living quarters for the head of the family, widower John Dieter the Elder. He would bring a second wife here in 1749. Thus, the area where Jost Dreisbach settled was not total wilderness.¹²

It is in any event somewhat unexpected that in 1747 Jost Dreisbach was able to occupy and warrant a tract lying between the Dieters’ unwarranted higher land to the west, and the other side of Indian Creek to the east. Land along a stream was generally warranted more quickly than other types of land. Jost’s warrant was for only twenty-five acres, but it is likely he was occupying a much larger area. His later warrant applications demonstrate that his plans for expansion were extensive.

No map of Jost’s first tract has survived, but we can assume that its lower limit adjoined the northern edge of a ‘forbidden territory’, that is: the large area within which, by decree of the Penn family, no one was permitted to settle or warrant land. It was known locally as the Indian Tract (which the native tribes had already left), and the Dreisbachs were about to initiate a process of successfully enclosing the Tract’s north-eastern borders.

Thanks in part to the research of the above-mentioned Esther Gundry we are able to discern early signs of Dieter-Dreisbach relationships. It is in any event clear that these contacts were quickly and firmly established.¹³ An example of this close relationship can be seen in the Postscript to this text. One could wish that Esther Gundry had had more to say on the relations between Dieters and their Dreisbach neighbors, but this was – and still is – a relatively unexplored topic. Gundry was descended from the elder brother, John Dieter, about whose line she assembled copious information. Her reasons for ceasing work on the William line are cited in the Research Notes below.

While Jost was in Philadelphia in 1745 at the Land Office it is possible or even likely that his parents, Simon and Katharina Dreisbach, and their youngest children were occupying his tract. They

¹² After John the Elder’s death in 1758 the land on which his house stood was still unwarranted. Henry Ulrich, husband of Jost’s sister Catherine, purchased the buildings standing on this technically ‘vacant’ land from the Dieters and then proceeded to get title to the land itself.

¹³ We are indebted to Esther E. (Dieter) Gundry, drawing repeatedly upon her ground-breaking book, *John Dieter of Northampton County Pennsylvania and his Descendants 1735-1972*, privately published in 1973. The book includes several records involving the neighboring Dreisbachs. Though now hard to find, it is a significant compilation of Lehigh-Moore Twp. settlement information.

would have been needed there to keep an eye on Jost's claim in his absence. It is likely that Jost was occupying both sides of the north-to-south flowing Indian Creek. Here he may already have begun building a small sawmill which would facilitate the construction of the grist mill he was planning to erect. Part of the land to the north seems to have been held by an absent warrantee. To the west and northwest certain tracts were either already warranted and occupied by William Dieter or unofficially occupied by his family.

William Dieter's father John (the Elder) is shown by an extant document to have lived on William's unwarranted tract to the west of Jost's land until his death in late 1758. The two fathers, John Dieter the Elder and Simon Dreisbach Senior, had cooperated in founding a small Reformed congregation in which they were both elders. A log meeting-house was built, and according to a local tradition the church straddled the line between land that Jost was occupying and the likewise unwarranted but occupied 'Dieter' land next to it.

1749: Other Dreisbachs have arrived. Frontier marriages take place.

The Dreisbach family continued to warrant land abutting the Indian Tract. Not far to the east of Jost's settlement two additional Dreisbach tracts were warranted at the Land Office on 25 May 1749. They were situated along the north-eastern border of the Indian Tract and were obtained by Simon Dreisbach Senior and an otherwise unknown relative, Johannes Dreisbach¹⁴, who is recorded as remaining in the area into the 1770's.

As early as 1746 a Dieter marriage had already taken place on the western side of the Lehigh River. On 11 November 1746 in Jordan Lutheran Church Juliana Dieter (presumed daughter of John the Elder) and Adam Mersch were married. They would eventually settle east of the Lehigh in Moore Township on land adjoining that of other Dieters.¹⁵

The summer of the year 1749 saw two unrelated weddings. In 1749, on 3rd July, the widower John Dieter the Elder acquired a new wife. This was Elizabeth Yundt who lived in Whitehall Township across the Lehigh River. Their marriage also took place in Jordan Lutheran Church. Elizabeth would bear John Senior three daughters before he died in 1758.¹⁶

That same July 1749 Jost's brother Adam was in the town of Lancaster where he had become engaged to Susanna Coerber/Körber. There they married on 16 July in Trinity Lutheran Church. The Dreisbachs, like nearly all Wittgensteiners, were Reformed. At this time Lancaster's Reformed pastor was in Philadelphia and unwell, which explains why that summer a number of Reformed couples, including Adam and Susanna Dreisbach, were married in Lancaster's Lutheran church.

¹⁴ This is an as yet undetermined Johannes Dreisbach. He was not the youngest son of Simon Dreisbach whose name was also "Johannes". He appears in the records of the Reformed Congregation of Zion Stone Church and seems to have been younger than Simon Dreisbach Sr but older than Simon's son, Jost.

¹⁵ Gundry, *op.cit.*, pp. 14, 49-52

¹⁶ The marriage of John Dieter the Elder in (1749) is found on Gundry's p. 8.

Adam brought his new wife to the area near Jost's settlement, and before the end of 1749 he too had been to the Land Office and obtained a twenty-five acre warrant for the piece of land he had selected at the northeastern corner of the Indian Tract. Adam was then twenty-four, both a tanner and a farmer, and in the coming years he would warrant several other tracts, thereby helping the Dreisbach family reinforce their holdings around this corner of the Indian Tract. By the summer of 1749 Jost Dreisbach ought also to have been married. But was he?

Jost Dreisbach: Marriage, children, a second wife?

It is possible but not documented that Jost Dreisbach and an Elizabeth (but not a 'Rachenberger') were married in 1748 or 1749. Jost was then twenty-seven or twenty-eight and was attending to the many facets of his gristmill-and-sawmill project. His land was traversed by a primitive track soon to become an important road starting from Moravian Nazareth, and later from the new county seat, Easton, and going to the Lehigh Gap and beyond. The road continued through the neighboring two-piece tract where John Dieter the Elder lived, perhaps with other family members and certainly, as of July, with his new wife. This road forded Indian Creek just below the site of Jost's gristmill. Various clergymen were serving the 'Dreisbach' church sporadically, one of whom might have performed the marriage of Jost and his Elizabeth. No such record has as yet emerged. Surely the enterprising Jost Dreisbach needed a wife, especially now that Simon Dreisbach Senior and family, and a relative, Johannes Dreisbach, as well as Adam and Susanna Dreisbach all had their own lands. If Jost did marry in 1749, was his bride then a girl in her mid-teens?

There has been no sure and undisputed evidence available with regard to Jost Dreisbach's marriage. No source is known to the present author supporting either of the two previously mentioned marriage dates appearing in the 1998 *Dreisbach Book*.¹⁷ Jost's twelve children could quite possibly have been born to one woman, though the 'two wife hypothesis' has appealed to many. If we posit just one wife Elizabeth, then we should attempt an estimation of her age.

The twelve children of Jost and Elizabeth Dreisbach were born between 11 January 1750 (Apollonia) and 1 April 1779 (Michael). Predicating Elizabeth's age on the date when Michael, her last child, was born, then we shall take 1 April 1779 as the starting point of our calculations. The results can also aid in estimating Elizabeth's age in early 1750 when Apollonia was born.

Positing that Elizabeth was, let us say, forty-five when she gave birth to Michael in the early spring of 1779, then by subtracting her presumed age from the time of his birth we find that Elizabeth's own year of birth may have been 1734, give or take a year. This could mean that when Apollonia was born at the very beginning of 1750 her mother Elizabeth was sixteen or younger. Apollonia's conception can be calculated to have taken place in about the second week of March 1749.

We might assume, then, that Jost's marriage took place at some time in 1749, but that is not certain. Catherine, the next child born after Apollonia, arrived more than four years after her sister.

¹⁷ See p. 4 above.

The maiden name of Jost's wife is not the only matter needing to be explained. Clear documentation of Jost's marriage (or marriages) is needed. Might the last two or three of Jost's children have had another mother than this Elizabeth? Who, then, was Michael Dreisbach's mother?

The mother of the youngest child Michael Dreisbach and of the eldest child Apollonia, emerges in an 1811 document. The late Elizabeth's motherhood is confirmed.

Elizabeth Dreisbach, widow of Jost, died at a time prior to 20 December 1811. On that date proceedings began whereby certain of Elizabeth's heirs (her son Michael Dreisbach and her four daughters accompanied by their husbands) gave their permission for a 'Release', granting to their brother Adam Dreisbach Letters of Administration for the late Elizabeth's estate.¹⁸ Here Elizabeth Dreisbach is described in a form of 18th century 'legalese' as: "*being in her lifetime and at the time of her decease being lawfully seized and possesseth of and in a considerable Estate of personal Property died Intestate*". Elizabeth did not die poor.

Signatures of the Dreisbach siblings were required to validate Adam as administrator of the estate. The order in which the signatures appear is: Michael first, then the four sisters in the order of their birth, from Apollonia (spelled Appolonia here) to Magdalena, along with their husbands. The men signed with their names, the women affixed their marks. Obtaining the signatures of the other three brothers may have been arranged in another fashion as they lived at some distance – two in New York State and one in Columbia County, PA.¹⁹ The completed proceedings were recorded on 17 August 1812.

This "release" document is not mentioned here for its legal value, but to point out the significant conjunction here of 'Appolonia' and Michael, the first and last of Elizabeth's children. They are named next to each other as 'son' and 'daughter' of Elizabeth. Moreover, at the beginning of the document when the names of the participants are cited, the empty space next to Michael's name has the added words, "*son of late Elizabeth*", and next to the four wives there is an addition in the margin, "*daughters of late Elizabeth*".

Later in the document, where Michael's signature and his sisters' marks are found, there is again a clarification next to them: "*being a son, and girls (i.e. daughters) of the said Elizabeth*". This Elizabeth was no one's step-mother. It was she who had borne all Jost's children.

A mistaken reading of one word in a 1774 will is corrected, and this leads us to Elizabeth's family name.

¹⁸ Northampton County Archives, Deed Book H-3, p.137, *Michael Dreisbach to Adam Dreisbach, 20 December 1811*.

¹⁹ Of the 12 children, 9 were living. 8 signatures were needed to confirm Adam's role as administrator: the 4 sisters, Michael (living in the area), and 3 brothers living at a considerable distance.

Should there exist somewhere a document that clearly reveals the maiden name of Jost's Elizabeth, it has not come to the attention of Dreisbach researchers. Esther Gundry came close when she found an abstract of the will which William Dieter made in early 1774, some months before his death.²⁰ As is usual the testator names two to be the executors of his estate. William Dieter named his wife Magdalena and his brother-in-law Jost Dreisbach. Gundry had no doubts about the brother-in-law relationship; in her view William and Jost had become brothers-in-law when Jost's sister Magdalena became William Dieter's wife.

What Gundry did not know was that Jost had no sister Magdalena, and there was no record in Pennsylvania or in Europe of such a daughter having been born to Simon and Katharina Dreisbach. Using the only information available to her, Gundry had created a set of relationships that never existed. Thus, in her book Gundry inserted 'Magdalena Dreisbach' as William Dieter's wife. This was not known to (or challenged by) the authors of the 1998 *Dreisbach Book*. A consequence was that on p. 125 a phantom sister, Magdalena Dreisbach, was inserted as the youngest of Jost Dreisbach's siblings and the wife of William Dieter.

The reader will of course have been aware that another interpretation of "brother-in-law" is available. Having found that William Dieter's wife Magdalena was not a sister of Jost Dreisbach, we can choose the other available angle of inquiry and arrive at the correct solution: Jost Dreisbach's wife Elizabeth was a sister of William Dieter.

We have already found in the document of 1811 ample confirmation that it was an Elizabeth who bore all Jost's children. We can now identify her as a sister of William Dieter and a daughter of John Dieter the Elder. As such she would most probably have lived with her father in his house on the tract which adjoined land occupied by Jost Dreisbach. It would appear that Jost Dreisbach had indeed married *the girl next door*.

Conclusions

Of the three Elizabeths considered in these pages, the first appeared in 1743 in a brief Wittgenstein report, never to reappear. The second remained in her Moravian world and may never even have heard of a Jost Dreisbach. The true identity of Jost Dreisbach's wife having remained hidden far too long, the present paper proposes that Jost Dreisbach had only one wife, Elizabeth Dieter, daughter of John Dieter

²⁰ Found by Gundry in *Abstracts of German Script Wills, Northampton County Pa., 1752-1840, Vol. II, C-E, p. 62*, Easton Public Library.

the Elder and younger sister of William Dieter, and that she was the mother of Jost's twelve children and was his life-long companion.

The main supports for this statement are the following: 1) A document from 1811 in the Northampton County Archives provides ample proof that Jost Dreisbach's widow Elizabeth was the mother of all of Jost's children, from Apollonia, born 1750, to Michael born, 1774. 2) Esther Gundry's mistaken interpretation of the term brother-in-law in William Dieter's 1774 will is here challenged and corrected. Jost Dreisbach and William Dieter became brothers-in-law when Jost married William's sister Elizabeth; the *Magdalena Dreisbach* added to the Simon Dreisbach descendant list in *The Dreisbach Book* never existed.

We are nevertheless indebted to Esther Gundry for the research results she published in *John Dieter of Northampton County Pennsylvania and His Descendants*,²¹ where we find a general context for Elizabeth Dieter's early life and for the early Dreisbach settlements in Northampton County's Lehigh Township.

The many descendants of Jost Dreisbach now have a new and documented foremother to insert in their ancestor lists: Jost's one and only wife, Elizabeth, nee Dieter. Her biography has yet to be researched and written. We may expect it to provide information supporting the proposal that this Elizabeth was indeed 'a woman of parts'.

Postscript: christenings in a troubled time

February 8, 1758. Three christenings that day in a small clapboard covered log church will be entered into the records of the Tohickon Reformed congregation in Bedminster Township, Bucks County, PA. Two of the three are first cousins. One is Jost Dreisbach, almost three and a half months old, born in Lehigh Township, Northampton County. He is the first male child born to Jost Dreisbach and his wife Elizabeth nee Dieter. The other is little Jost's slightly younger cousin Elizabeth, only two months and ten days old. Her parents are the adult Jost Dreisbach's only sister, Catharine, and her husband Henry Ulrich (see note 13).

These infants will not be sleeping in their respective cradles in Lehigh Township in the near future. They, their parents, other family members and friends, are now far from home, having arrived in the Tohickon area in recent weeks.

In late December 1757 many in Lehigh and nearby townships had fled from attacks by members of Indian tribes, actions which were fomented by French forces in Quebec and the Ohio

²¹ Gundry's hard-to-find book is listed by several online book-sellers which rarely have copies for sale.

Valley. Neighbors had been killed, injured, taken captive. A stream of refugees traveled southward, some finding refuge among the Moravians of Bethlehem. Dreisbachs and Dieters were perhaps briefly among them, but if so they soon moved on, taking the hilly road down to their goal: Bedminster Township in upper Bucks County. Their former pastor Egidius Hecker was already established in this region as the minister of several Reformed congregations, including Tohickon.

The full story has yet to be written of this southward flight of families from isolated farms in the northern Lehigh Valley, and of how they were received and initially housed by families in upper Bucks County. Soon familiar names from Northampton County began to appear in the Tohickon church records. Of the three such baptisms on February 8th two, as we have seen, had Dreisbach connections. One of them had Dieter godparents; the Dieter-Dreisbach connection was still flourishing.

As early as 1920 the baptismal and other records of the Tohickon Reformed congregation of Bedminster Township appeared in print.²² There we find the record of infant Jost's christening, which we insert here in bold italics. The parents are: ***Jost Dreisbach and Elizabeth***; the child is: ***John Jost, b. Oct. 26, 1757; bap. Feb. 8, 1758***; the baptismal sponsors are: ***William Dieter and wife***.

Jost and Elizabeth came to Tohickon with their three little girls and the infant Jost. The Dieters had older offspring, some of whom may have accompanied their parents. How the many refugees were housed and 'maintained' in this area during their first weeks or in some cases months is a topic worthy of investigation.

One can imagine the newcomers' constant uncertainties about the homes and farms they had left, and about the safety of the men who had begun to travel back and forth to inspect and if necessary defend their homesteads. The Dreisbachs and Dieters while taking part in the familiar christening ritual may simultaneously have been grappling with their present conditions, their many new concerns and the related practicalities.

The Tohickon records indicate that members of some families stayed on for several years, and that new relationships developed. The two baptismal sponsors for the infant Elizabeth Ulrich were her uncle John, the youngest of the immigrant Dreisbach brothers, and a 'local' young woman called Elizabeth Waldman. On 14 November 1758 these two were married (presumably by Rev. Hecker); they later moved north and established themselves about a mile south of Jost Dreisbach's gristmill.

Having glimpsed Elizabeth, Jost and the Dieters in Tohickon in their new and uncertain circumstances, we have also seen at the baptismal font evidence of the two families' continuing close relationship. This is not the place for further biographical details. In Elizabeth's future lay thirty-six eventful years as Jost's wife, the mother of his twelve children. Widowed in 1794, Elizabeth did not remarry but remained *Jost's Elizabeth* until her own death in 1811.

²² "Tohickon Reformed Records", *The Pennsylvania-German Society*, Vol. XXXI, Ephrata, October 8, 1920. The baptismal records for 1758 begin on p. 89.

Research Notes

1. Elizabeth Wolf. Elizabeth ‘Rachenberger’.

Too little is known of the Wittgenstein Elizabeth’s fate. She does however form a link to the young Jost Dreisbach and the life and prospects he left in Wittgenstein. Why Jost “took her along”, and whether she did arrive in the colony of Pennsylvania will perhaps never be known.

Elizabeth Rauschenberger’s life story is well documented in the Moravian records. Why she was assumed to have been Jost Dreisbach’s wife, and was published as such in 1914, is still a mystery. The answer lies somewhere prior to 1914, but may never be found.

2. Warning: Missing sources!

After more than twenty years, i.e. since the 1998 appearance of *The Dreisbach Book*, Dreisbach research is still to some extent dependent on the information that appeared there and in its 2001 supplement. As noted above, much of the contributed information lacked sources. Conversely, if these sources were known and had been contributed, examined and included, the book may never have seen completion.

3. Proof no. 1: The crucial 1811 document in the Northampton County Archives.

The present paper’s history goes back to a number of visits to the Northampton County Archives which two Dreisbach sisters, Marcia Falconer and Ardis Grosjean, made in the years after 2010. Dreisbach-related documents were photographed from the Archives’ various holdings, including the Deed Books. These are large volumes containing hand-written copies of original documents concerning property ownership and related matters. It was not until 2018 that the November 1811 document was understood to be a negation of the ‘two Elizabeths’ theory.

4. Proof no. 2: Gundry’s ‘brother-in-law assumption’ when corrected reveals Jost Dreisbach’s wife to have been a Dieter.

To the present author’s knowledge, no one has to date challenged Esther Gundry’s mistaken interpretation of the term ‘brother-in-law’ in William Dieter’s will of 1774 (but of course neither the will nor the Gundry book are well known). A simple change of mental viewpoint was all that was needed to arrive at the maiden name of Jost’s Elizabeth. As for the ‘phantom’ Magdalena, she will eventually be removed in a projected on-line revision of *The Dreisbach Book*.

5. On p. 38 of her book Esther Gundry expresses her annoyance with a defector from the Dieter research ranks who was to work on the William Dieter lineage. Gundry, being of the “John Dieter” line, does not try to remedy the situation.

“Much to our regret, because of lack of time to search later records concerning the children of William and Magdalena Dieter and not receiving co-operation from a prospective contact, we had to discontinue the history of this branch of the Dieter family. We hope some descendent will become interested and make a thorough search of William Dieter and Magdalena Dreisbach’s descendants.”

6. Elisabeth Rachenberger/Rauschenberger is disappearing from Dreisbach genealogy.

Go to dreisbach-dresbach.org or to <http://www.dreisbachfamily.org> and click on the *Dreisbach Book 2001 Supplement*. You will have to download it to see the following. There, on its p. 32 in the list of Simon Dreisbach descendants, the name of Jost’s wife “Elizabech Rachenberger” is gone and has recently been replaced by a simple “?” (a well-informed person has set things temporarily straight). Yet on p. 19 there remains an earlier thumbnail biography of Elizabeth Rachenberger which gives her a Wittgenstein birth(!), includes the full names of her Moravian parents, and says she was Jost’s second wife – possibly an attempt by the 2001 editors to deal with the variations in “Rachenberger” information. A comparison of this confused information on pages 19 and 32, indicates welcome progress from 2001 to 2019 in Dreisbach historiography. The family’s history continues to evolve, as it should.

Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean, Stockholm, Sweden, May 2020