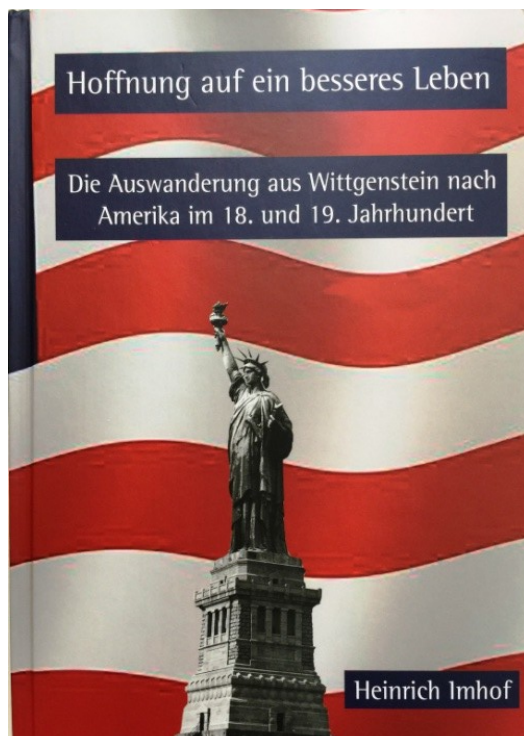


Dreisbach/Dresbach Family Association Newsletter

February 2019

Heinrich Imhof's important book about Wittgensteiners who went to the United States

Heinrich Imhof, a distant cousin of many American Dreisbachs, has produced a much-needed and well received book: *Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben*. The full title in English (present author's translation) is: "Hoping for a Better Life; Emigration from Wittgenstein to America in the 18th and 19th Centuries". Written and published by Heinrich Imhof, Bad Berleburg, 2018.
(Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean)



Front cover of Heinrich Imhof's new book

"All Wittgensteiners are inter-related."

This is a statement one can hear at times on village streets in Wittgenstein, as well as from genealogical researchers. There is indeed a chain of recorded evidence that links 1743 immigrant Simon Dreisbach Sr to his ancestors Sophie Im Hof and her father Hansen Im Hof, both of whom were living in the village of Weidenhausen before 1600. Similar documentation between Martin Dreisbach and the author has not (yet) been established but we can confidently say that all Dreisbachs who originate in Wittgenstein can consider themselves cousins, Wittgenstein style, of author Heinrich Imhof of Weidenhausen.

Heinrich Imhof is Wittgenstein's leading authority on two centuries of emigration from Wittgenstein to North America. In 2018 he published his pioneering, comprehensive and well-received book which is based on fifteen years of intense research.

Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben is a rich book. It is far from a dry historical analysis of economic and social aspects of the emigration - immigration process. Each chapter and topic is illustrated and enriched by individual stories, letters and photographs. These well-documented accounts can be courageous, enterprising, successful and, on occasion, tragic.

The D/DFA website <http://www.dreisbachfamily.org> concentrates on regions in eastern PA and southern Ohio where descendants of Simon and Martin Dreisbach chose to settle. Heinrich Imhof's immigrant net is cast much wider. His research has brought to the fore several thousand Wittgenstein immigrants who established themselves in widely



Heinrich Imhof holding a copy of his book, Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben, at a ceremony celebrating the book publication on 23 June 2018 in Bad Berleburg, Wittgenstein.

Photo by Holger Weber.
Published in *Siegener Zeitung*
on 23 June 2018.
Source: <http://e-pages.siegener-zeitung.de/wittgenstein/4516/>

scattered areas of the United States between 1712 and the early 20th century.

One settlement region may surprise the reader. It is hard to imagine a stronger contrast than that between the rolling forested hills and narrow valleys of temperate and even chilly Wittgenstein and the 'wide open spaces' of hot and dry Texas. Now, however, Imhof has provided us with a documented list of the large number of Wittgensteiners who went to Texas. (None were Dreisbachs.) In the list we see the names and other information on those who sailed to Galveston in the 1840's and the many who followed into the 1860's. It is clear, however, that they make up only a fraction of the Wittgenstein emigrants Imhof has found, documented and inserted in his emigrant list.

Heinrich Imhof's major achievement must clearly be this huge list of two centuries of Wittgenstein emigrants to North America, 1712 to 1908. It is the book's final section, found on pages 437-534 and titled *Auswanderer aus Wittgenstein nach Amerika im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Emigrants from Wittgenstein to America in the 18th and 19th centuries). New relevant information continues to come to the author's attention, but at the time when the book went to press his emigrant list comprised no less than 5,464 names, many of which were married persons, traveling with their wives and children, often unnamed.

To call it a list is an understatement. In addition to the year of departure and the name of the emigrant, we learn the date of birth and place of residence in Wittgenstein, whether they left with or without official permission, were traveling alone or with dependents, the ports of departure and arrival when known, along with name of the ship and a column of references giving the sources of information on that particular person or family.

Imhof's monumental list can be seen as the culmination of the myriads of information he has presented in the foregoing chapters. Before arriving at this crowning work the reader is first confronted with the absolute poverty and hard conditions of servitude endured by many in Wittgenstein. There are, for example, first person accounts in the Wittgenstein records of meetings with known individuals – women and their children, who are clearly on the brink of starvation. Until the Treaty of Vienna in 1809 the Counts (for a short while Princes) were *absolute rulers* and their subjects lived in a state of semi-serfdom.

Imhof cites official rulings, still preserved in archives, showing how 'legal' would-be emigrants made application and paid dearly for the right to leave the territory. Only occasionally are the Counts' decisions humane. They could also be blatantly heartless, requiring emigration tariffs and fees the supplicant could never pay. The number of those who fled secretly by night is huge. (Here we note that both Simon Dreisbach as well as his young nephew Henrich [1754 immigrant] fled in this way. On the other hand Martin Dreisbach applied for, paid for and received official permission to emigrate from Siegerland where he was then living.)

Just before the emigrant list, the author provides us with instances of emigrants who returned to Wittgenstein for a visit, as well as a list of persons who returned permanently after many years in America. The breadth of Imhof's findings is truly astonishing.

It is most unlikely that this useful volume will ever be translated into English. Moreover, the majority of those who receive this newsletter or visit the D/DFA website are not proficient in German. What, then, is the point of introducing the book here? For one thing, the very existence of this extraordinary collection of otherwise unavailable research results is reason enough to make it more widely known. Our readers may know of researchers and individual family research groups who could benefit from it, not to forget periodicals, libraries and certain university faculties.

Finally, and specifically for D/DFA readers, we might self-consciously mention the book's Foreword in which the author thanks a number of persons who have provided him with information and assistance, including his "amerikanische 'Cousinen' ". These include, as he writes, Ardis Grosjean Dreisbach of Solna/Stockholm in Sweden and Marcia Dreisbach Falconer of Nepean/Ontario in Canada, both born in Pennsylvania, who provided him with leads and details concerning emigrants from Wittgenstein, especially the Dreisbach emigrants.¹



Back Cover of Heinrich Imhof's book

BOOK ORDERS:

Book orders for *Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben*, can be placed with the author, by emailing him in English, via his e-mail address: H.Imhof@gmx.de

Price of the book: 38.00 Euros. Mailing to North America: 17.00 Euros. Total 55.00 Euros.

If ordering from the US or Canada, please discuss with your bank the best way to send money to Mr. Imhof. US checks are difficult to cash in Germany. A money order from your bank is one way to pay for the book and shipping.

¹ This article was written by Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean with minor additions and changes by Marcia Dreisbach Falconer.