

What's a Palatine, Anyway?

James M. Beidler examines the Palatinate, Germany's emigrant hotbed for centuries.

THE PALATINATE, which is now part of the German state Rhineland-Palatinate, began supplying a steady stream of immigrants to America in the late 1600s and contributed to the formation of the Pennsylvania German culture and dialect among German ethnics in the New World.

So many of the Germans who left for America in the 18th century were from the Palatinate that the word "Palatine" became synonymous with "German". This is especially borne out in the case of the ship captains who transported these immigrants (primarily from Rotterdam to Philadelphia) and were required to file lists with the Pennsylvania authorities beginning in 1727. The captains' lists — as well as the lists showing Oaths of Allegiance — typically mention the number of "Palatines imported".

While this is indicative of the fact many immigrants came from this area of Germany, it also has left a legacy of confusion since 18th-century immigrants also came from other states in southwest Germany such as Baden, Wuerttemberg and Saarland.

The Palatinate is a region named neither for a characteristic of its area nor a geographic feature. In fact, the region of Germany known in the English language as the Palatinate (*Pfalz* in German), was named for the title of a courtier or official in the court of Charlemagne, who ruled from 768 to 814AD and became the first Holy Roman Emperor in 800.

'Comis Palatinus' to 'Pfalzgraf'
The original title of these courtiers in Latin was *comis palatinus* (literally, "companion of the palace"). In English, this title was count palatine while in German the

today as the Palatinate. Less than 300 years later, a member of the Wittlesbach family became Pfalzgraf as well as Herzog (duke) of Bavaria. From this date in the 1200s until the early 1800s, there was a relationship between the rulers of Bavaria and of the Palatinate — culminating with the ruler of the Palatinate inheriting Bavaria in 1777.

In the 1300s, the Pfalzgraf became one of the members of the Electoral College that was responsible for choosing the Holy Roman Emperor. As a result, the area became known as the Electoral Palatinate, or *Kurpfalz* in German.

The Reformed religion of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli swept through the Palatinate in the 1500s, but later

rulers installed Lutheranism and a Roman Catholic dynasty inherited the area in 1685. The Thirty Years' War (1618-48) reduced the Palatinate to ruin, and little more than a generation later, in 1688, the armies of the French King Louis XIV destroyed cities and villages.

After the Palatinate was again occupied by France during the Napoleonic era in the early 1800s, most of the Palatinate was divided between Hesse, Baden and Bavaria. Since WWII, it has been part of the state Rhineland-Palatinate (or Rheinland-Pfalz to Germans).

In addition to Pfalz and Kurpfalz, this area is also sometimes called Rheinpfalz (Rhenish Palatinate in English) or Niederpfalz (Lower Palatinate). Just for confusion's sake, it should be acknowledged that there is also



The Palatinate as depicted in William Blaeu's 1645 atlas *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*.

word was *Pfalzgraf*. Charlemagne used these counts palatine to administer crown lands, and these lands became known as *palatinata* (Latin), palatinate (English) and *Pfalz* (German).

After Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Empire and its emperor were acknowledged as overlords of Germany more in the breach than in the observance. As a result, there were fewer of the "crown lands" to which Charlemagne had originally sent counts palatine to supervise. This is how the terms "Palatinate" and "Pfalz" became attached as names to just a few regions of Germany.

Otto the Great, the next powerful Holy Roman Emperor after Charlemagne, ruled in the mid-900s. It was he who appointed a noble as Pfalzgraf for the area of the Rhine Valley that is known

a region of Bavaria known as the Oberpfalz (Upper Palatinate) or Bavarian Palatinate. This is the area around and north of Regensburg and borders the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, these terms are sometimes used incorrectly to refer to the Pfalz on the Rhine because of the mere fact that the rulers of the Pfalz on the Rhine were also sometimes Bavarian.

Palatine Emigrants by the Thousands

The wars of the 1600s left the Palatinate devastated and depopulated. Many German-speaking Swiss moved down from the mountains into the Palatinate after the Thirty Years' War and French Huguenots (expelled from France beginning in 1685 when the edict guaranteeing them toleration was revoked) also became part of the Palatinate population. The invasion by Louis XIV coincided with visits from agents of William Penn who were seeking colonists for Pennsylvania — Penn's "Holy Experiment" of religious toleration.

The first families from the Palatinate area landed in Pennsylvania in 1683 and established Germantown, now part of Philadelphia but originally out in the country. A trickling of immigration to Pennsylvania continued through the rest of the 1600s and early years of the 1700s before mass migration to America began. In the winter of 1708-9, Europe experienced one of its worst winters on record. (Among other things, the Baltic Sea froze so solidly that the King of Sweden was able to transport his army across it to begin the Great Northern War with Russia.)

In the Palatinate, this winter spurred thousands of people to find their way up the Rhine River. They spent time in England before being sent off to upstate New York in 1710 as colonists. After further adventures, some families stayed in New York while others migrated in the 1720s to the Tulpehocken Creek area of Pennsylvania (modern-day western Berks County and eastern Lebanon County).

SAUCONY CREEK bei			
Wohnort	Geogr. Kutztown	Provinz	Pa.
		Land	USA
		QF	
		QAF	Q
Name	Christmann	Vorname	John Michael
	S.d. Jonas Ch.u.d. Magdalena Pfeifer von Weltersbach (K' Lautern)		
Geburtsort	29. 9. 1724	Geburtsort	"Steinwerdt/Pfalz"
		Kreis	= Steinwenden (K' Lautern)
Berufliche Ausbildung	heutige Befähigung		
Verheiratet am	in	Bekanntes	
Verheiratet mit	geborene	Abstammungsort	
Geburtsort	Geburtsort	Kreis	
er baute 1773 ein 2stöckiges Steinhaus am Saucony-Bach, ganz in der Nähe von Kutztown			
heutige Anschrift	Kreis - Provinz	Staat	Stück
Wenn nicht feilt ausgeändert - nur nur der Auswanderer!			
"Steinwerdt/Pfalz"			
Abstammungsort der Familie	Steinwenden (Kaiserslautern)	Abwanderungsort	1773: Saucony Creek bei
Wann ausgeändert	Phil. 15. 9. 1748	urpr. Ansiedlungsort	Ged. Kutztown, Pa., USA
Schiff "Two Brothers"			
Wanderweg			
Erlaubte Verbindungen mit Verwandten in der alten Heimat! Mit dem Michael Pfeifer von Neutzweiler u. Appolonia Thewald, Ehefrau des "Heffner" Effenbach.			
Taufpaten: Michael Korb von Weisenbach, Appolonia Thewald, Ehefrau des "Heffner" Effenbach.			
Quellenschilder QAF-Christmann;			

A copy of a card from the Palatine emigrant card file.

Researchers are fortunate that Henry Z "Hank" Jones Jr. began studying these 847 "Palatine" families nearly 40 years ago. During that time he has — in conjunction with German researchers — tracked down the immigrant origins of hundreds of these families. Beginning with a two-volume work titled *The Palatine Families of New York — 1710*, which was published two decades ago, Jones has put these origins into print. He continued with *The Palatine Families of Ireland, More Palatine Families*, and, most recently, three volumes of *Even More Palatine Families: 18th Century Immigrants to the American Colonies and Their German, Swiss, and Austrian Origins* (co-authored with Lewis Bunker Rohrbach).

Jones' research has gone through many twists and turns. In the *Even More Palatine* set, the immigrant origins of the important (in terms of number of descendants) Batdorf family in Pennsylvania were established after years of false starts. This was one of the families that moved from upstate New York to the Tulpehocken region, and the key to cracking the case turned out to be that the family name was really Bardorf, even through a slim minority of early American records about the family included the "r".

Where the work of Jones stops, the canon of Annette Burgert begins. Burgert became widely known in the 1980s with the publication of her two-volume set for the Pennsylvania German Society, *Eighteenth Century Emigrants*, one volume of which dealt with the Western Palatinate. Since then, Burgert has put out books on 18th-century emigration from a number of towns and areas of Germany including another major volume dealing specifically with the Palatinate — *Palatine Origins of Some Pennsylvania Pioneers*. This latter work focuses on towns in the eastern Palatine on the west side of the Rhine River.

While Jones' research is "time specific" — he is the expert on the 1710 Palatines — Burgert's is "geographic specific" — she delves deeply into the German church and other records of selected villages and often finds the ties between Old World and New. As with many other immigrant groups, the Palatines often traveled in packs. It is common to find more than one family from the same Palatine village on the same ship bound for America.

And the Palatines did come to America — by the thousands. Even when they did not travel with others from same village, they were often responding to the

Websites

- German Genealogy: Rheinland-Pfalz (www.genealogienetz.de/reg/RHE-PFA/rhein-p.html)
- Genealogy in Pfalz (www.krebs-onl.de/pfalz/)
- Frequently Asked Questions: German-Rheinpfalz (<http://thorin.adnc.com/~lymnd/gfaql.html>)

Organizations

- German-Pennsylvania Association (known by German initials, DPAK) Website: www.pennsylvaniaen.de
- Institut für Pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde, Benzinning 6, D-67657, Kaiserslautern, Germany; e-mail: info@institut.bv-pfalz.de
- Mid-Atlantic Germanic Society, P.O. Box 2642 Kensington, MD 20891-2642
- Palatines to America, 611 East Weber Road, Columbus, OH 43211-1097; phone: (614) 267-4700; fax: (614) 267-4888; e-mail: Pal-Am@juno.com
- Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, PO Box 306, Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA 19530; phone: (610) 683-1330; e-mail: henry@kutztown.edu
- The Pennsylvania German Society, P.O. Box 244, Kutztown, PA 19530-0244; phone: (610) 894-9551; fax: (610) 894-9808; e-mail: pagerman@pgs.org

call of a friend or family member who had already settled in America (Pennsylvania, most of the time) — someone writing back home to tell everyone stories about the abundant land and other opportunities awaiting them across the Atlantic. Records of most of these immigrants are published in the three-volume work *Pennsylvania German Pioneers*, which are the ships lists counting “Palatines imported” that were referred to earlier in this article. Most of the lists contain the names of every male passenger aboard the ship who was age 16 and over, and some of the lists show the

immigrants’ actual signatures. How helpful these lists are for researchers is difficult to play down. In addition to the fact that few colonial-era passenger lists have survived from other ports, even the Philadelphia ships with immigrants from the British Isles were not required to keep lists since those people were already subjects of the British crown and therefore not required to pledge an oath of allegiance as was mandated for the German Palatines.

Emigration Continued into Later Centuries

While not all 18th-century emigrants from Germany were from the Palatinate, the majority did come from this area, and as a result they left a firm stamp on the cultural group known as the Pennsylvania Germans.

In addition to crafts and folk art, the so-called Pfaelzisch dialect of German spoken in the Palatinate influenced the dialect still spoken by some in parts of Pennsylvania and other states — known today variously as “Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch”, “Pennsylvania Dutch” or “Pennsylvania German”.

There are many contrasts between the 18th-century emigrants and those of the 19th and 20th centuries. Members of the “second wave” of immigrants after the 1700s are frequently called German-Americans. More of them came from the German states in the north, east and southeast. However, there were still many emigrants from the Palatinate who joined in the later voyages to America.

A great source for documenting the Palatine immigrants of all centuries is the emigrant card file kept in the city of Kaiserslautern by Institut für Pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde (Institute for Palatine History and Folk Culture, previously known as the Heimatstelle Pfalz). These cards attempt to link information on immigrants both before and after they left Germany. In cooperation with the institute, this card file is also now accessible at the Pennsylvania German

Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania.

Primary Source Records of the Palatinate

The most helpful group of records for researchers with Palatine ancestors is the church register books, which usually contain baptisms, marriages and burials. Some of these church registers begin in the era of the Thirty Years’ War, but in a fair number of cases the registers were destroyed during the French invasion of the 1680s and the extant records only begin around 1700.

Fortunately for researchers, nearly all of the surviving church records from the Palatinate have been microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah and are in the Family History Library system. It is important to note that the Family History Library Catalog lists towns under the state they belonged to at the time of the German Empire (1871), so towns of the Palatinate can be found under Hessen (the German spelling of Hesse), Bayern (German version of Bavaria) and Baden.

Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths became uniform throughout the German Empire in 1876, but there are registrations from some areas before this date. Between 1792 and 1798, when France occupied the area west of the Rhine River, the government began civil registration in parts of the Palatinate. These records are usually written in French and exist through the overthrow of Napoleon in 1814, when civil registration was suspended. Many of these records have been microfilmed.

The late German historian Werner Hacker compiled listings of thousands of emigrants from Germany in the 1700s. One of his works focuses exclusively on the Palatinate and Saarland. This book, while written in German, has a format that is accessible to English language researchers, including an introduction in English.

There are also tax lists (*Schatzungregister* in German) from

some Palatine towns that are in the Family History Library system. They date mostly from the 1760s, too late for the bulk of the 18th-century immigration but can be helpful for later immigrants.

Organizations that Help

There are organizations on both sides of the Atlantic that can help researchers find Palatine ancestry. The previously mentioned Institute for Palatine History is the top German resource; in addition to its card file, the institute investigates all aspects of Palatine history and publishes its findings. The institute's beginnings date to 1953.

The number one American group devoted to study of the area's immigrants is Palatines to America. This organization was begun in 1975, and while its mission embraces research about any German-speaking immigrants, the name "Palatines to America" does show its emphasis on the 18th-century immigrants from the Palatinate. PalAm has chapters in a number of states. Among the projects that the group coordinates is the "Immigrant Ancestor Register" in which researchers share what they know about immigrant ancestors including many from the Palatinate. In some cases, the register helps people share their own knowledge, while in other cases new researchers are able to add to the submitter's information.

Further Reading

- Burgert, Annette K. *Master Index to the Emigrants Documented in the Published Works of Annette Kunselman Burgert*. 2nd edition (Myerstown, PA: AKB Publications, 2000).
- Burgert, Annette K. *Palatine Origins of Some Pennsylvania Pioneers* (Myerstown, PA: AKB Publications, 2000).
- Hacker, Werner. *Eighteenth Century Register of Emigrants from Southwest Germany to America and Other Countries* (Apollo, PA: Closson Press, 1994).
- Jones, Henry Z Jr. *The Palatine Families of New York: A Study of the German Immigrants Who Arrived in Colonial New York in 1710*. 2 vols. (Universal City, CA: H.Z. Jones, 1985).
- Owen, Ralph Dornfeld. "Palatine and Palatinate" in *Pennsylvania German Roots Across the Ocean* (Philadelphia, PA: Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, 2001).
- Strassburger, Ralph B. and William J. Hinke. *Pennsylvania German Pioneers*, 3 vol. (Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1992).
- Yoder, Don. "Problems and Resources in Pennsylvania German Genealogical Research" in *Pennsylvania German Roots Across the Ocean* (Philadelphia, PA: Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, 2001).

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