In Search of
Schaefer Origins
in Prussia

by Mary Ann Schaefer
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Where is Udenhausen??

In the last year, we have located not one but two Schaefer immigrants to America. Philip and Peter Schaefer both married their brides in Brooklyn on June 6, 1870. Both listed their father as John Schaefer, their mother as Margaretha Gibb, and their birth place as Udenhausen, Prussia.

But where is Udenhausen today? We know that Prussia as a country does not exist today. It was dissolved in two stages. First after WWI when Germany was held solely responsible for the war, Wilhelm II abdicated in 1918 and the Kingdom of Prussia was replaced with the Free State of Prussia. Then after WWII, in February, 1947, representatives of the Allied occupation signed a law abolishing the state of Prussia, believing it had been the source of all German malaise that afflicted Europe. As a result, it is estimated that between 12 and 14 million ethnic Prussians/Germans and their descendants were displaced from their homes. But that is a story that comes long after our Schaefer’s left for America.

So because Prussia does not exist any more, it is necessary to find maps of Prussia from the past. Prussia was just one (and the largest) of hundreds of German states in Europe, and trying to figure out all the changing political boundaries is daunting to say the least. So in studying recommendations of other genealogists who are researching their German heritage, I ran across the Meyers Geographical and Commercial Gazetteer of the German Empire, a book that was reprinted in 1912 and which includes all areas that were part of the German Empire prior to WWI. That’s us! The Meyers book (as I shall simply call it) is, however, daunting. It is printed in Gothic type and its entries are all abbreviated German. I've had to order other books just to teach me how to read the Meyers book!

So now I can report that according to the Meyers Gazetteer, there were three Udenhausen’s:

A) One Udenhausen is located in the former district (in German: Kreis) of Hofgeismar in what was until 1866 Electoral Hesse (in German: Kurhessen), the capital of which was the city of Kassel. From its capital city, Electoral Hesse (Kurhessen) was often referred to as Hesse-Kassel (or to use the older spelling, Hesse-Cassel). In 1866, the Kingdom of Prussia (in German: Preussen; capital: Berlin) annexed Nassau, Hesse-Kassel, and the city of Frankfurt and combined the three territories into what was to then remain until 1945 the Prussian province of Hesse-Nassau, with the city of Kassel as its capital. This Udenhausen is today part of the town of Grebenstein.

B) One Udenhausen is located the former district (Kreis) of Alsfeld in what was until 1918 the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt, the capital of which was the city of Darmstadt. Following World War I and the abolition of the German monarchies, Hesse-Darmstadt became simply the state of Hesse, but with borders completely different from those of today's postwar state of Hesse. This Udenhausen is today part of the town of Grebenau.

C) One Udenhausen is located in the Hunsruck mountains in the former Prussian province of Rhineland, in the district of Sankt Goar (St Goar). This area (the west banks of the Rhine River) became part of Prussia after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. In 1976, this Udenhausen was incorporated into the city of Boppard.

What does all that mean?

Well, first let's get our bearings. Here is a map showing the Udenhausen locations in the order and labeled as I just described them:
In the sections that follow, I will share what I have learned about each location. I will refer to each location as they are labeled on this map. Thus:

Point A = Udenhausen-Grebenstein
Point B = Udenhausen-Grebenau
Point C = Udenhausen-Boppard
**Point A Udenhausen**

First let's look at Point A.

Gutsbezirk Reinhardswald borders Point A on the east. Looking that up in wikipedia and translating from German:

The **Gutsbezirk Reinhard Forest** is a unincorporated community in the district of Kassel in the Land of Hesse in Germany. The area of a municipality area is 183 km². As the largest of the three Hessian Gutsbezirk it covers practically the entire surface of the Reinhard Forest.
The Reinhardswald – home to countless myths and legends, like the Grimm's Fairy Tales – is renowned country-wide, especially for the Sleeping Beauty castle of Sababurg.

I also want to make note that this woodland is bordered by the River Weser, which flows to Bremerhaven, which was a major port for emigration. From the map I have, there was also a railroad as early as 1866 which ran the same general course as the river. Although the only emigration record found for Phillip (so far) had a departure from Hamburg, and Peter's departure was thought to be Antwerp, Belgium, it's still interesting to consider how they might have traveled to the coasts: walking, cart/coach, boat, or rail?

Here is a map showing the Weser River. Point A is just north of the town Kassel, possibly closer to the Weser tributaries Diemel and Fulda.

Now, let's look at the Catholic population of Point A.\(^1\) According to German Maps and Facts for Genealogy, in 1871 (soon after our Schaefers were thought to leave Prussia), the religious population of Hesse-Nassau was:

Evangelical: 988,041; Catholic: 371,376; Other: 3,892; Jewish: 36,390

The following information is from [http://www.progenealogists.com/germany/hesse/hessnasG.htm](http://www.progenealogists.com/germany/hesse/hessnasG.htm)

Region: Hessen-Nassau

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality (Farm, Village, Town, City)</th>
<th>(Kreis)</th>
<th>Catholic Parish</th>
<th>Evangelical Parish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grebenstein</td>
<td>Hofgeismar</td>
<td>Hofgeismar</td>
<td>Grebenstein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udenhausen</td>
<td>Hofgeismar</td>
<td>Hofgeismar</td>
<td>Mariendorf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see, there is a Catholic parish in this area. When I search in Hofgeismar for a Catholic Church, there is one there today called St. Peter's. I don't know how long it has been there:

![Katholische Kirche St. Petri](image)

\(^1\) I need to point out that we really have nothing that proves Peter or Phillip Schaefer were baptized Catholics. We assume they were because they were married in a Roman Catholic church in Brooklyn, so it seems likely they would not be allowed to marry there unless they were Catholic. Still, there is some room for wondering.
Point B Udenhausen

Now let's look at Point B.

The following comes from http://www.vogelsberg-touristik.de/Towns-G-J.481.0.html?&L=1.

Framed by gentle hills lies the town of Grebenau and its seven dependent districts in the area known as the 'Gründchen' in the eastern part of the Vogelsberg. This key town, located as it was at the intersection of two old trading routes, already enjoyed official town status and the right to hold markets in 1605. The half-timbered town hall in Grebenau, originally built as a monastery in the middle ages, bears witness to this bygone age. Other sights worth seeing are the 'Johanniterhalle' (Hall of the Knights Hospitaller), the listed 'Amtmannshaus' (Bailiff’s House) and the old Jewish cemetery. The foothills of the Vogelsberg and the Knüllgebirge, where luxuriant deciduous and coniferous forests stretch far out into the valley, offer excellent opportunities for hiking, cycling, horse riding and carriage rides.

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Now let's see the religious parishes for Point B. The following is from http://www.progenealogists.com/germany/hesse/hessendFG.htm

Region: Hessen-Darmstadt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place Name</th>
<th>Evangelical Parish</th>
<th>Catholic Parish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grebenau (Kr. Alsfeld)</td>
<td>Grebenau (1645 gaps)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udenhausen (Kr. Alsfeld)</td>
<td>Udenhausen (1701)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that there are not any Catholic parishes in this region. Again, that is not to say our Schaefers did not originate from here. But if we have to lean one direction before another, Point A would seem to have more weight at this point.

Here are the numbers from German Maps and Facts for Genealogy, in 1871 regarding the religious population of Hesse-Darmstadt was:

Evangelical: 584,391; Catholic: 239,088; Other: 3,873; Jewish: 25,373
**Point C Udenhausen**
According to the German wikipedia (translated), Point C is:

- area of Boppard in the Rhine-Hunsrück-Kreis in Rheinland-Pfalz

From the translated page of the German wikipedia:

**Udenhausen (Boppard)**

Udenhausen is a town in the Rhein-Hunsrück-Kreis in Rhineland-Pfalz.

**Geography**

395 meters above sea level is Udenhausen in front Hunsrück, at the height between the Rhine and Moselle, south of Koblenz. Udenhausen has 526 inhabitants and an area of 384 hectares.

The dead-end village is free from through traffic, however, has by its proximity to Hunsrückhöhenstrasse, the B327 and the motorway A61 convenient transport links.

**History**

Document was first mentioned Udenhausen in 1021. The name is derived from Udenhausen the first settlers, a gentleman from Udo.

Administratively Udenhausen belonged to the estate of the lords of Pyrmont and later came under the suzerainty of the Elector of Trier from 1817 to 1970 on the mayor's administrative reform Halsenbach and the district of St. Goar, then to the municipality Boppard in the newly formed Rhein-Hunsrück-Kreis. 1976, closed 10 local municipalities, among other Udenhausen, the city Boppard together.

The church service was Herschwiesen to 1957 at the Catholic parish, now in the parish Nörtershausen.

The site shape, especially in the center to the branch Church St. Nikolaus, a few half-timbered houses, including the "Back", the old bakery, where special occasions today is baked into bread.

Since 1963, three years will change the so-called "tripartite meetings" between the three villages of the...
same name held in: Grebenstein -Udenhausen (Unna Place "), Grebenau -Udenhausen (Nerrehuse ") and Boppard -Udenhausen (Orrehause ").

In May 2007, the Heritage Museum in Udenhausen "Schuster Klose-house" was opened, which has since, in addition to the exhibition to take place, regular events.

At the state competition "Our village is beautiful" could achieve some success in the past Udenhausen.

The following graphic shows the location of the Hunsruck mountain range in Germany (from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunsr%C3%BCck)
This map is from 1905 (http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b4/Rheinland_1905.png):

and here is a blow-up. Just south of Coblenz is the town of Boppard, where the village of Udenhausen had apparently been incorporated.
OK. Now let's consider the religious makeup of this region.

Here are the numbers from German Maps and Facts for Genealogy, in 1871 regarding the religious population of Rhineland was:

Evangelical: 906,867; Catholic: 2,628,173; Other: 5,834; Jewish: 38,423

This region is significantly more Catholic!

After doing just a preliminary search of Catholic churches around Boppard, the Church of St. Severus built in 12th and 13th centuries has one of the oldest set of medieval bells in Germany.

This area borders the Rhine River. In my reading of the history of the area, the left bank is very heavily Catholic to this day, and the right bank is heavily Protestant.
General Notes on German History of This Period and Some Thoughts

The period when our Schaefer's came to America was a very volatile time in Germany. There was a lot of fighting going on! First in 1864 was the Schleswig-Holstein Wars, which Prussia won. Then in 1866 was the Austro-Prussia War, which Prussia won. Mr. Otto von Bismarck, who was orchestrating all this struggle, was not only Protestant but bordered on being anti-Catholic. When the Austrians were defeated, the new North German Confederation excluded Austria as well as four southern German states, which included Hesse-Darmstadt, where Point B is located.

All of this was building up to the Franco-Prussian War where Napoleon would be defeated and a unified German Empire would emerge in 1871. Our Schaefer's were in America by then. When they each married in Brooklyn in June, 1870, each brother listed Udenhausen, Prussia as his place of birth. Since neither Point A nor Point B Udenhausen was part of Prussia when the brothers were born (1838 and 1844), and since Point B was not part of Prussia in 1870, I start to think we can eliminate (or move to the bottom of the list) Point B Udenhausen.

That leaves Point A and Point C. Of these two, I find myself leaning toward Point C. Why? First because it is so predominantly Catholic. Even though we haven't yet proven that the Schaefers were Catholic, and certainly many Catholics did live elsewhere in Prussia, Point C was historically Catholic the longest. The second reason I lean toward Point C is the possible immigration record of Phillip Schaefer. While I can't be 100% certain that the record I found belongs to our Philip, his age, date of arrival, and occupation are all consistent with what we know of Philip. On that ship manifest, his origin is noted as what appears to be “Cöln” which would be the German spelling for the city of Cologne, which was just up the river from Point C. It seems reasonable to think that Philip was working in Cologne before deciding to emigrate.

Were They Legal Emigrants?

It should also be noted that with all this fighting going on, that if the Schaefer men did not serve in the Prussian military, they had to be trying to escape it. This following excerpt from http://francoprussianwar.com/armies.htm:

The Prussian Army was composed not of regulars but conscripts and reservists. Service was compulsory for all men of military age, thus Prussia and its North and South German allies could mobilize and field some 1.2 million soldiers in time of war, which it did within 18 days of mobilization. The sheer number of soldiers available made possible the mass-encirclement and destruction of entire enemy formations. Every able bodied man had to serve in the army for three years, then he was released to the reserves for four years and after that he was on call to the national guard for five more years.

This following is an excellent site with a very good summary of the many factors that impacted German emigration:

http://www.genealoger.com/german/ger_emigration_records.htm
This particular point is interesting:

Compulsory military conscription was unpopular. Many young men emigrated without permission in order to avoid military service. It has been estimated that more than fifty percent of young men of military age emigrated illegally.

In following this line of thought (were the Schaefer men trying to emigrate 'illegally'?), this website is very informative:

http://www.progenealogists.com/germany/articles/bureauc.htm

This site reveals that in order to emigrate legally the Schaefer men would have to a) prove their military service, b) show they could afford passage to America, c) show they were not otherwise in debt. If the Schaefer men followed this avenue, there would have been newspaper announcements so that anyone who felt a debt was owed could come forward. So that is one possible avenue of research. But before making that particular effort, we would have to really consider whether our Schaefer's were legal emigrants or not.

So, there is still a good deal of digging to be done on all this, but I hope this document at least can serve as a start for thinking about how to zoom in on Schaefer origins 'across the pond'.

MAS
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