

Alle gut Wünsch fer en Frehlicher Grischdaag und en Gälllicher Neí Jahr.

(All good Wishes for a Joyous Christmas Day and a Happy New Year)

From the Dreisbach/Dresbach Family Association



Christmas 1762 for the Dreisbach/Dresbach families

The previous decade had been one of worry for many of the Dreisbach families. The Seven Years War (1756-1763) between England and France manifested as the French and Indian War in the North America. Attacks, house burning, killings and scalpings in 1755 and 1756 drove the Simon Dreisbach families south to areas of greater safety. In the early 1760's warfare between native Americans and settlers was greatly reduced and the Simon Dreisbach families felt they could return to their lands in Northampton County, Pennsylvania.

By Christmas 1762, Simon Dreisbach Sr and his wife Katherina were now in their mid-60's. Their children were grown, each with children of their own. We do not know where Simon Sr and Katherina spent Christmas of 1762. In 1759, Simon Sr bought land on the northern edge of the Lehigh Valley, right next to Blue Mountain and well away from the area where all of his children lived. It is hard to imagine how the elderly couple could manage to live and farm all by themselves. Perhaps the purchase was an investment and he and Katherina continued to live with one of their children in Lehigh Township, Northampton County. If Simon Sr and Katherina did live on this lonely plot of land, Christmas of 1762 may have gone largely unnoticed.

Simon Dreisbach Sr's sons - Jost the miller, Adam the saddle maker, Simon Jr the tanner, George the millwright and John the farmer and their sister Anna Catherina may well have had a much more jolly Christmas than did their parents. In 1762 there was a log church on the property of the oldest son, Jost, and all of the Dreisbach brothers and sister lived within a short horseback ride of this church. While the church had no regular pastor, it's quite possible that some of the Dreisbach families and their neighbors gathered here on Christmas and held their own worship service.

Christmas Day of 1762 would have been celebrated in Lehigh Township, Northampton County, PA by six Dreisbach couples and their children - and there were quite a few children. Jost's family had three girls ages 12, 10, and 7, and three boys 5, 2, and a three month old baby. Adam and Susanna had five daughters, ages 14, 11, 6, 5, and 3, and one boy aged 8. Simon Jr and Maria Dorothea had six sons, 10, 8, 6, 5, 3 and 2, and a 4 month old baby daughter. The children of George and Sophia are not certain, but in 1762 it appears they had at least two young sons and perhaps a young daughter, all less than 5 or 6 years old. The youngest of Simon Sr's sons, John, and his wife Elizabeth, had only a two month old baby boy. Simon Sr's only surviving

daughter, Anna Catharina and her husband Henry Ulrich had three girls ages 5, 4, 1 and a baby on the way who would be born on the 14th of January. That makes a total of 12 adults and at least 27 children between the ages of 14 and 2 months living close to each other in Lehigh Township, Northampton County, PA!

Over in Lancaster County, PA we meet another Dreisbach family. In April 1762, Martin and Anna Eva Dresbach finally got title to the land in Cocalico Township where they had been living for at least six years. Here Martin had a flourishing blacksmith shop as well as a grist mill and saw mill. They attended a church just down the road and the couple had made friends. Their oldest son had just turned 17. Their family also included a 12 year old son, an 11 year old daughter, a 7 year old son, a 3 year old daughter and a three month old baby boy. Life was as good as it was going to get.

And we look in on our last immigrant family, that of Henry Dreisbach and his wife Anna Maria. Henry had arrived in Pennsylvania in 1754 as a young, single man. He started off in Philadelphia, made his way to Montgomery County and then to Rockhill Township in Bucks County. Somewhere along the line he met and married Anna Maria (whose last name may be Scholl). In 1760 they had their first daughter and by Christmas of 1762 they also had a 6 month old baby boy.



So there we are - Christmas Time 1762 with three very different Dreisbach/Dresbach families. Up in Lehigh Township in Northampton County, we have a whole tribe of Dreisbachs. Having arrived in 1743 with two adult sons as well as three younger sons and a daughter, they had been settled on the land for over 15 years. With the exception of Simon Dreisbach Sr, the Dreisbach farms adjoined each other forming their own community, one that even had its own church.

Martin and his family had arrived in 1751 and by 1762 they too were a settled family, owning a good piece of land, with income from blacksmithing, milling grain and sawing wood. Their oldest son was reaching adulthood, and the family had a three month old baby and four children in between. Although they had no relatives nearby, the Dresbachs were the picture of success.

Henry Dreisbach and his wife were just settling in and starting their married life. Henry doesn't appear to have purchased land yet, although he will soon. With two little ones, their family will grow as well. Henry and Anna Maria may have had family nearby. We know there were other Dreisbachs living near Henry and his wife, but we do not know if or how they were related to the Dreisbach descendants of Abraham of Balde.

All three families, Simon, Martin and Henry, were related through ancestors back in Wittgenstein, Germany. Simon Dreisbach Sr and Martin Dresbach were third cousins. They shared a great, great grandfather - Georg Dreisbach (born about 1560, died about 1615) who was the son of Abraham of Balde (b. about 1535, d. after 1575). Henry was the son of Simon Dreisbach Sr's brother, Georg - making Henry a nephew of Simon Sr. Did the three know each other back in Wittgenstein? Probably not, but they may have known *of* each other. However it is not likely that Martin and Henry knew each other at all. They were different generations and they grew up



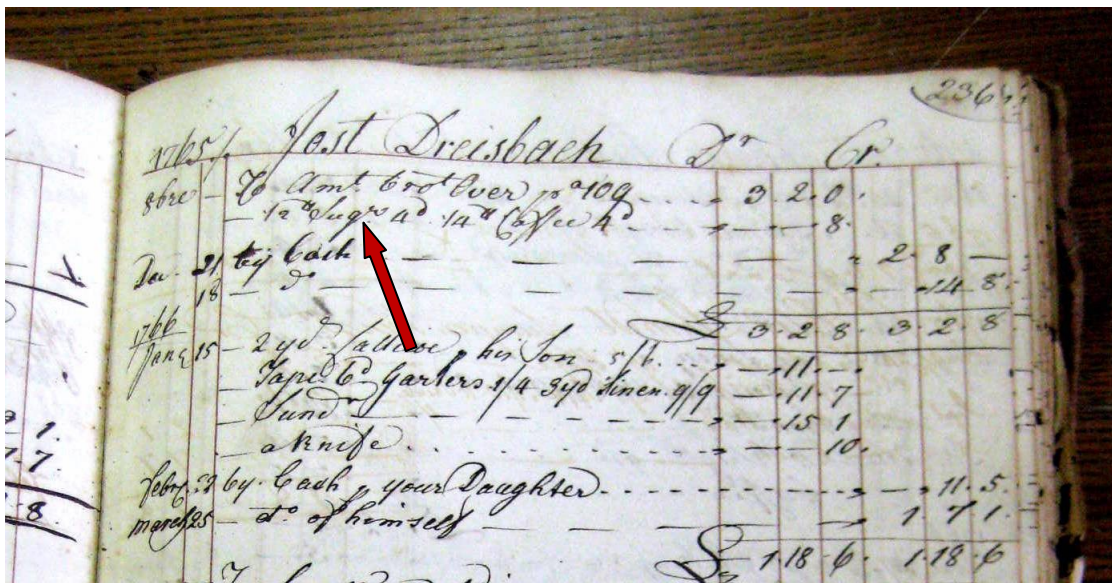
different parts of Wittgenstein. Nevertheless family ties were important and so we should not dismiss the possibility that they knew *about* each other.

With these pictures in mind ... let's try to imagine what Christmas of 1762 was like for Dreisbachs and Dresbachs. They were all living in small log houses that they had built with the help of neighbors and family. The larger families probably had two storey houses and it is likely that all had clapboards on the exterior rather than exposed, chinked, logs. The houses had a large fireplace for cooking and heating but free standing, cast iron stoves would have been in the homes of those who could afford it. Jost the miller and Martin the blacksmith are good candidates to have had cast iron stoves to heat their living areas.

Were the houses decorated for Christmas? We know there was an ancient German tradition of bringing evergreens into the house as part of the celebration of the return of the sun at the winter solstice. When Christianity was introduced to much of Germany by St Boniface in the 700's, it was easy (and pragmatic) to transform celebrations for the return of the sun into celebrations for the 'coming of the Son' - both bringing light and hope to the world. The Dreisbach families would have kept the customs they practiced as children back in Wittgenstein so we can picture their small houses decorated with boughs of evergreens.

Did they have a Christmas tree? We can't be sure, but decorations of evergreen branches clearly could include small trees. If little trees were in the house, we can be certain that they were hung with homemade decorations. There is a good possibility that at least some of the Dreisbach homes had small Christmas trees.

Baking of sweet treats was an important part of Christmas but before the baking could begin, somebody had to get the ingredients - and there were no nearby stores! The Dreisbachs of Northampton County were lucky in that the large Moravian Community of Bethlehem was nearby and that the Moravians allowed at least some people to purchase goods from their communal store. Here the Dreisbachs could get sugar, molasses, dried fruits from far away as well as pots, blankets, combs, knives and material to make clothing. Martin would have had to make a trip to Lancaster or Philadelphia to procure the baking ingredients Anna Eva needed. Henry probably also made a trip to Philadelphia to buy sugar and molasses and other necessities.



Ledger from the Bethlehem Moravian Store showing purchase of sugar and coffee (red arrow) by Jost Dreisbach in December 1765.



Lebkuchen Cookies

2 3/4 cups flour
1/2 tsp baking soda
1 teaspoons ground nutmeg
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
1 egg
3/4 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup honey
1/2 cup molasses
Mix dry ingredients together.
Mix wet ingredients together.
Pour wet ingredients into dry and stir until completely mixed. Use your hands to mix ingredients when the dough becomes stiff.
Roll out between wax paper to 1/4" thick
Cut desired shapes.
Bake at 350° for 20 to 25 min or until done.

While the women got ready to do the baking, the girls churned butter needed for baking and the boys were sent to find nuts and then to crack them open and extract the nutmeats. All the children had the task of opening the nearly indestructible shells of the delicious black walnuts. The men rode to the nearest store - which might be a full day's ride away - and brought home white and brown sugar, molasses, and sometimes small presents to give their children at Christmas. Then the baking began.

There were lebkuchen of various shapes and sizes. These are a kind of gingerbread cookie that could be crisp or soft, and each baker had her own blend of spices. Lebkuchen could be baked as a bar, or a small round, or rolled and cut with cookie cutters that were kept especially for this purpose. Powdered white sugar was turned into icing to decorate the cookies and cakes. Unlike modern cookies, lebkuchen should not be eaten as soon as they're baked. Ideally they should be stored in an air-tight container and kept in a cool place for several weeks while the flavors blended and melded. However for the Dreisbachs and Dresbachs with few hiding places and lots of hungry youngsters in the house, it is doubtful that any lebkuchen had a chance to "blend and meld".

There was also special Christmas candy. This might be made by the woman of the house, or might be bought from a neighbor who specialized in making candies. One candy was something similar to peanut brittle and was called "Moughy or Moshey". Another candy was made from boiled sugar which was colored and poured into molds.



There were gifts for the children - usually one present for each child. While they might be purchased on a shopping trip, many or even most presents were handmade at home. However - it was not Santa, nor Saint Nicholas who brought gifts for the children. It was the Belsnickel!



Der Belsnickel on his rounds to see if little children have been 'naughty or nice'. He was a forerunner of Santa Claus.

"Belsnickel" means "pelts of fur worn by St. Nicholas" Like many traditions, it harkens back to a much earlier time before Christianity reached Germany. And like many holiday traditions - it was given a new meaning. A week or so before Christmas there would be a loud knock on the door and then the door would forcefully swing open allowing a man dressed in furs, face blackened by soot and disguised with a yarn wig, to enter the house. He carried a bundle of twigs and sometimes even a whip and chased children around the house asking if they had been good or bad. When the children stopped screaming in fear and delight (for they knew the Belsnickel was coming) - they had to recite a Bible verse or two. If it was perfectly done, the Belsnickel reached into a sack he carried and brought out small presents for each child. Then - with their promise to be better children - he would stomp out of the house, banging the door closed behind him. This figure was seen in German houses up and down the Rhine and he moved with the Palatine immigrants to Pennsylvania becoming a firm part of Christmas

celebrations in the Pennsylvania Dutch areas of southeastern PA. It is very possible that der Belsnickel visited the Dreisbach /Dresbach children.

Christmas in 1762 was celebrated on two days! The first celebration took place on December 25th and was largely religious in nature. It was a quiet day with Bible reading and perhaps a special meal. However the real *celebration* took place the following day - on Second Christmas. This was the day of visiting, eating, drinking and playing games. We can be sure that the Dreisbachs/Dresbachs had a great deal of fun on December 26th. Jost, the miller, may well have hosted rousing games, along with lots of drink, at his mill.

Christmas continued until January 6th - with visiting, eating and whiling away the dark days of winter.

May you all enjoy the Spirit of Christmas - in the quiet moments of Christmas Eve as we await the birth of the Son and in the joy of opening presents and sharing a meal with family and friends.

**Merry Christmas to All
and to all a good night!**

from

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