Ancestral Routes: France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland





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Cast of characters*

GRANDPARENT	
Clara Magdalen ("Madge") Klein McDonough Curry	
GREAT GRANDPARENTS	**GREAT GRAND UNCLES**
John (Johann) Klein & Magdalena (Lena) Welsch	Joseph & Paul Klein
Adam Welsch & Clara Alletzhauser	
2ND GREAT GRANDPARENTS	**2ND GREAT GRAND AUNTS/UNCLE**
Heinrich (Henri) Klein & Katharina (Catherine) Lukas (or Lucas)	Elisabeth & Susanna Lucas/ Theodor Lucas
3RD GREAT GRANDPARENTS	**3RD GREAT GRAND AUNTS/UNCLE**
Andrès Klein & Catherine Hoffmann	Barbe Lucas
Mathias Lucas & Susanna (Trausch) Laubach	Susanna & Johann Laubach
André Welsch & Barbe Mischler (Mistler)	
Henry Alletzhauser & Rosina Spachmann	
4TH GREAT GRANDPARENTS	
Bernard Mistler & Anne Marie Hinsberger	
Philipp Lucas & Margarethe Redinger	
Catharina (Maria Katharina) Trausch & Johann Theodor Laubach	
5TH GREAT GRANDPARENTS	**5TH GREAT GRAND AUNT**
Jacobée Backscheider & Bernard Mistler	Elisabeth Mistler
Jean Nicolas Hinsberger & Barbe Kinder	
6TH GREAT GRANDPARENTS	
Etienne Hinsberger & Odile Kohl	
Anne Ursule Backscheider	
Jean-Bernard Mistler & Marie Eve Rosine Dithmar	
Dominique Kinder & Anne Marie Lang	
7TH GREAT GRANDPARENTS	**7TH GREAT GRAND UNCLE**
Joseph Backscheider & Catherine Adler	Marcel Backscheider
Jean Pierre Mischler & Marie Barbe Lips	
Gaspard Koch & Dorothée Kohl	
Jean Pierre Hinsberger & Catherine Conrad	
Johann Bernhard Kinder & Christine Buchheit	
8TH GREAT GRANDPARENTS	**8TH GREAT GRAND UNCLE**
Johann Ulrich Mistler	Johann Jakob Mistler
Jean Marc Kohl & Anne Deringer	
Christian Heck & Catharina Schneiders	
Adam Buchheit & Eva Fund	
9TH GREAT GRANDPARENTS	
Ursus Mistler & Maria Magdalena Buchwald	
Walter Lienert Deringer & Marie	
10TH GREAT GRANDPARENTS	
Michael Kinder & Rosina Chumler	
SUPPORTING CAST: Maria Erasmy Ambros, Johan Peter Ambros, Nikolaus Ambros, Anna Maria Conrad, Robert Ambros	

* Relationship to Matthew Evangelista

1. Lots of ancestors and ancestral places

John (Johann) Klein (1881-1929) and **Magdalena (Lena) Welsch** (1883-1911) were my mother's grandparents, my great grandparents. John's parents, Heinrich (Henri) Klein and Katharina (Catherine) Lukas (or Lucas) are my 2nd great grandparents. Heinrich's parents, Andrès Klein and Catherine Hoffmann, and Katharina's parents, Mathias Lucas and Susanna Laubach, are my 3rd great grandparents. On Magdalena Welsch's side, her parents were Adam Welsch and Clara Alletzhauser (many other spelling variations). Adam's parents were André Welsch and Barbe Mischler (also spelled Mistler) and Clara's were Henry Alletzhauser and Rosina Spachmann. The next generation back on both John and Lena's sides, my 4th great grandparents, number sixteen people. Before them is a generation that numbers thirty-two people, my 5th great grandparents. They lived in the last quarter of the 18th century into the first half of the 19th century. If we go back as far as the 16th century—and we do have some names and places going that far back—we are looking at my 9th great grandparents. There were 256 of them on John's side and 256 on Lena's.



John Klein in Boston

In searching for ancestral places to visit we faced a lot of choices. The people named so far in the generation of my 3rd great grandparents come from present-day France, Germany, and Luxembourg. Although these areas saw much conflict over the centuries, ordinary people seemed to act as if the borders didn't exist—and today the borders are barely visible. We arranged our trip to travel to the places where our ancestors lived, and the villages and towns they traveled between themselves, many of them now within minutes to a couple of hours of each other by car.



Here is the border today, with stones, dated 1967, marked F for France on one side and D for Deutschland on the other.





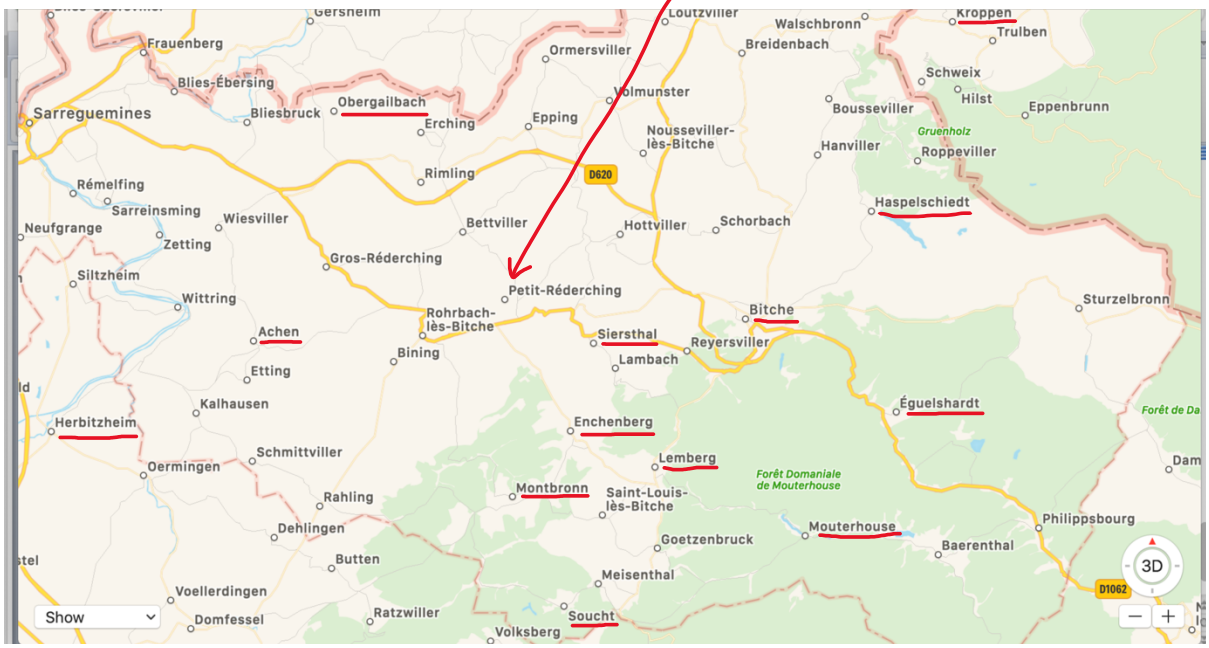
Our best-documented family line for the ancestors from this region is the one associated with John Klein's mother, **Katharina Lucas**. Dylan Kyle Simon, a distant cousin, has located original birth, death, and marriage certificates (in Latin, French, or German) for everyone he includes in his family tree. The furthest back he can go is to Katharina's fifth great grandparents, Christian Heck (1662-1755) and Catharina Schneiders (1672-1755). Simon's work has pointed us to certain ancestral areas: the *Eifelkreis Bitburg-Prüm* district of the Rhineland-Palatinate (*Rheinland-Pfalz*) region of Germany that includes towns such as Bitburg, Neuerburg, and Waxweiler, and the nearby Trier—the oldest city in Germany, founded by the Romans in the late 1st century BCE and later ruled by Constantine (272-337), the first emperor to convert to Christianity; the grand-duchy (yes, it still is one!) of Luxembourg; and the French *départements* of Moselle in Lorraine (a former grand duchy) and Bas-Rhin in Alsace. Alsace and Lorraine were battlegrounds for several wars as control of the region shifted back and forth between France and Germany. Many relatives come from the area, now in France, called Pays de Bitche, after the fortress city of that name.



This is a photo of Katharina Lucas's sister, Elisabeth. She was John Klein's aunt, born in Neuerburg in 1874. She emigrated to the United States in 1890 and married Joseph Hohmann from Germany in 1897 in Boston. The photo was taken in Metz, a mainly French-speaking city in Lorraine that came under the control of the German Empire in 1871 after the Franco-Prussian War, and then reverted back to French control after World War I.

On Magdalena Welsch's side, the documentation is not as solid, but there are many family trees posted by distant relatives in France, Germany, and elsewhere that have much information in common. Lena Welsch's mother **Clara Alletzhauser** (1858-1920) was born in Boston, but **Adam Welsch** (1854-1909) was from Éguelshardt, a town in the Pays de Bitche, where the family of Adam's mother, **Barbe Mischler** (or, sometimes, Mistler) goes back many generations. The Mistlers seem to have come originally from Switzerland, where they lived until the 1600s. The family of Barbe's mother, the Hinsbergers, lived in several towns of the Pays de Bitch from the 1600s on.

This is a map of the Pays de Bitche today, with the places that appear in the family tree underlined. We stayed in a guest house in Petit Réderching and used it as a base to visit many of them.



For our trip, we rented a car in Milan, Italy and drove into Switzerland to see the ancestral villages of the Mistlers, then on to Alsace and Lorraine, where we spent several days in the Pays de Bitche. From there we drove to the *Eifelkreis* to visit Bitburg, Neuerburg, Waxweiler, and Trier. Then we traced the path of our ancestors who over generations traveled back and forth between that area and Luxembourg. Some people would have been born in Luxembourg and died in Bitburg or Neuerburg, and the next generation would be the other way around. That particular route makes it likely that our ancestors were members of the group of itinerant traders known as *Lakerten* or Yenish—ragpickers, mainly, but also scrap dealers, scissors grinders, tinkers, street performers and buskers.





This map from 1814 shows pretty much everywhere we traveled. Soleure (Solothurn, in German), at the bottom center of the map, is the area of Switzerland where Beinwil, Erschwil, and Büsserach are located. Its nearest major city, just north, is Basel (Bâle, in French). The French towns we visited are distributed from the Bas-Rhin west of Strasbourg, northwest into Meurthe and Moselle, whose main city is Metz. North of Metz is Luxembourg, to its northeast is Trier (Trèves, in French) and to its northwest are Bitburg and Neuerburg.

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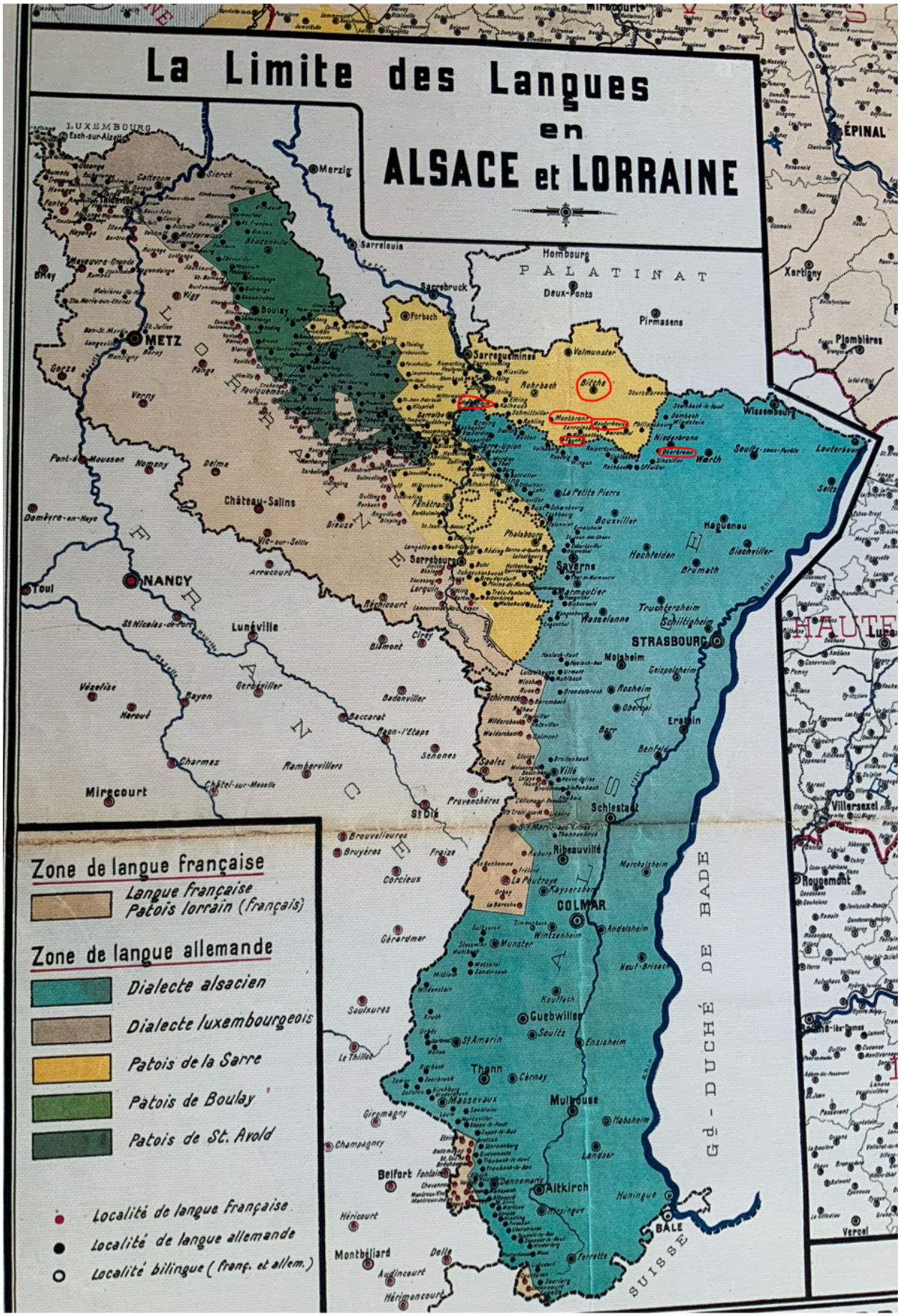
The map on the next page shows the languages spoken in the region, with the villages where our ancestors lived circled. They probably spoke the Germanic *Patois de la Sarre*, except for the Lakerten who traveled between Luxembourg and Bitburg and Neuerburg, and who probably spoke the Yenish (or *Lakerschmus*) language among themselves.


La Limite des Langues
en
ALSACE et LORRAINE
Zone de langue française
Langue française
Patois lorrain (français)
Zone de langue allemande
Dialecte alsacien
Dialecte luxembourgeois
Patois de la Sarre
Patois de Boulay
Patois de St. Avold
Localité de langue française
Localité de langue allemande
Localité bilingue (franç. et allem.)
LUXEMBOURG
PALATINAT
LORRAINE
FRANCE
ALSACE
Gd-DUCHÉ DE BADE
SUISSE
METZ
NANCY
STRASBOURG
COLMAR
BALE
Mulhouse
Thann
Guebwiller
Altkirch
Belfort
Mirecourt
Toul
Lunéville
Sarrebourg
Saverne
Sarreguemines
Bitche
Wissembourg
Haguenau
Schlestadt
Ribeauvillé
Rouge-Mont
Villersexel
Épinal
Plombières
Xertigny
Merzig
Sarrelouis
Sarrebruck
Hombourg
Deux-Ponts
Pirmasens
Forbach
Boulay
Sierck
Thionville
Château-Salins
Vic-sur-Seille
Dieuze
Fénétrange
Phalsbourg
Lorquin
Réchicourt
Cirey
Blâmont
Badonviller
Baccarat
Raon-l'Étape
Senones
Saales
Provenchères
St Dié
Brouvelieures
Bruyères
Fraize
Corcieux
Gérardmer
Saulxures
Le Thillot
Giromagny
Champagney
Héricourt
Montbéliard
Audincourt
Hérimoncourt
Delle
Ferrette
Huningue
Landser
Habsheim
Ensisheim
Soultz
Rouffach
Munster
Wintzenheim
Andelsheim
Neuf-Brisach
Marckolsheim
Kaysersberg
La Poutroye
Ribeauvillé
Villé
Barr
Benfeld
Erstein
Rosheim
Molsheim
Geispolsheim
Schiltigheim
Truchtersheim
Wasselonne
Marmoutier
Bouxviller
Hochfelden
Brumath
Bischviller
Lauterbourg
Seltz
Soultz-sous-Forêts
Niederbronn
Oberbronn
Wörth
Volmunster
Rohrbach
Sarre-Union
Sarre-Union
Dannemarie
Massevaux
Cernay
Mirecourt
Châtel-sur-Moselle
Charmes
Rambervillers
Vézelise
Haroué
Bayon
Gerbéviller
Vigy
Verny
Pont-à-Mousson
Nomeny
Delme
Domèvre-en-Haye
Gorze
Briey
Moyeuvre-Grande
Mercy
Fontoy
Hayange
Cattenom
Sierck
Bouzonville
Metzerwisse
Boulay
Faulquemont
Sarre-Union
Rhin
Rhin

2. Beinwil, Erschwil, and Büsserach, Switzerland



The ancestors from Switzerland are found in many family trees, including in published books, but not in any original documents I've been able to locate yet. **Ursus Mistler**, my 9th great grandfather (there were 128 of them from whom John Klein was descended), was born around 1585 in Beinwil. He married my 9th great grandmother, **Maria Magdalena Buchwald** (1587 or 1589 to 1650) in 1610 in Büsserach. Her home town was either Beinwil or Erschwil, and Büsserach was the biggest small town just north of them. *Bein* means "leg" or "bone" in German, and *wil* is a hamlet. They are all located in the canton of Solothurn (Soleure).



We were told there are more cows than people living in Beinwil now, but we didn't see any. Erschwil has fewer than a thousand people; Büsserach has about twice that many.

These are Büsserach cows.





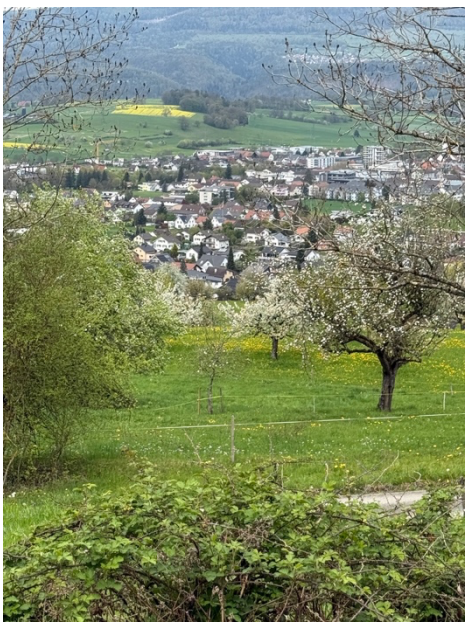




Beinwil's most scenic building is the mill on the River Lüssel.



In Erschwil we stayed at the *Gasthof zum weissen Rössli*, or the White Horses Inn. In the past Erschwil was on the post road and travelers stopped there to change horses before heading over the Alps.



From Erschwil we drove north to Büsserach.



Büsserach is the site of the Neu-Thierstein Castle and the St. Petri church, rebuilt many times, but whose tower dates to 1464.





According to many genealogies, but no documents that I could find, our Swiss origins owe to the family whose name has been recorded variously as Mistler, Mischler, or Mustelin. The earliest named person is Ursus Mustelin/Mistler from Erschwil who married Maria Magdalena Buchwald from either Beinwil or Erschwil. Their marriage took place in Büsserach, presumably in the St. Petri church.





So how did our ancestors get from Switzerland to the Pays de Bitche region of Lorraine in France? It seems that the sons of Ursus and Maria Magdalena made the trip. Some genealogical sources suggest that the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) played a role because of the depopulation caused by the war and the plague: up to 90 percent of the population died in the Pays de Bitche. The Duke of Lorraine therefore welcomed immigrants and made appeals to Switzerland, Germany, and Italy to send people. **Johann Ulrich Mistler** (1610-1701), my 8th great grandfather, moved from Beinwil to Kröppen, a town about 225 km. north, on the German border with Alsace, and not too far from the Pays de Bitche. Some sources say his brother Johann Jakob Mistler also headed to the Rhineland, to the town of Hilst. The Mistlers eventually continued on to France where they then lived for several generations in the Pays de Bitche region.



We didn't go to Kröppen, but on the way to the Bitche area we stopped in the Alsatian town of Sierentz for lunch. Alas we were too late for a full meal at the Auberge du Saint Laurent.

They managed to find some cheese and wine for us, however.



3. Enchenberg, Lemberg, Soucht

In addition to Switzerland some ancestors arrived in the Pays de Bitche from countries such as Belgium and Austria. **Walter Lienert Deringer** (1625-1679), one of my 128 9th great grandfathers, was born in Liège, Belgium and moved to Soucht. He and his wife Marie had a daughter Anne who married Jean Marc Kohl from Lemberg. Their daughter Dorothée married Gaspard Koch. **Catherine Conrad** (1663-1756), a 7th great grandmother, was born in Montbronn and died in Soucht. Her husband, **Jean Pierre Hinsberger** (1654-1734) was born in Soucht and died in Montbronn. Their son Etienne married Odile, the daughter of Gaspard and Dorothée Koch and they lived together in Enchenberg. These places are close together.







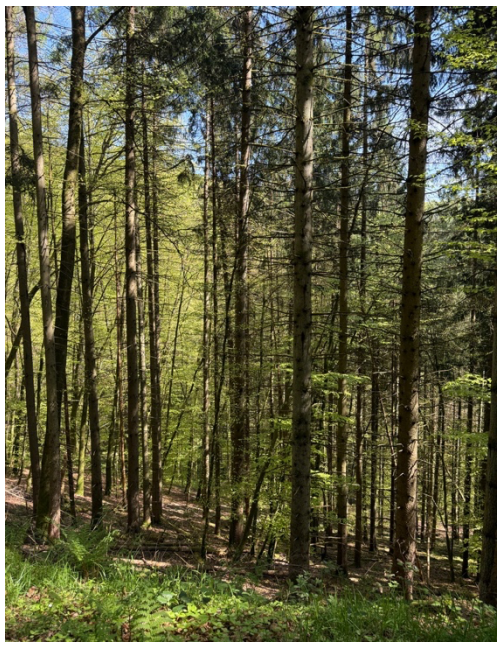


Much of the region is now part of a national forest system. It resembles the Adirondacks of New York State in a way because there are villages and towns but also areas that are mainly forests and fields used for recreation, with hiking and biking trails and fishing spots. The forests seem not more than a century old, understandably, given that they were preceded by battlefields as recently as the Second World War.

These are quite small towns. Enchenberg's population is about 1,200, Lemberg's about 1,400, Soucht's around 1,000. There does not seem to be much industry, although the region is known for its artisanal production of glass, crystal, and ceramics. Each town might have a restaurant or bakery, a primary school, and a town hall.

We spent our time enjoying the natural surroundings and—if we could find a restaurant open—some local food and wine.













Many ancestors lived in Lemberg and surrounding towns for generations, with family names such as Welsch, Conrad, and Hinsberger. My 6th great grandmother **Anne Ursule Backscheider** was born in Bitche in 1737, lived in Éguelshardt with her family, and died in Lemberg in 1782, but her family originally came from elsewhere. The Backschneiders had moved from the area of the Austro-Hungarian Empire known as the Südtirol (South Tyrol, now part of Italy and called Alto Adige). Many family trees show Backschneiders in the late 1600s living in Graun in Vinschgau (Curon Venosta in Italian), Reschen, and Naudersberg in the Südtirol. Today Curon Venosta is located about 70 km north of Bolzano (Bozen), the capital of Alto Adige, on the border with Switzerland and Austria; Nauders and the Schloss Naudersberg are on the Austrian side; and the Reschen Pass joins the two. As in the Greater Rhineland and Alsace-Lorraine, the borders don't seem to matter much anymore.



It was Anne's father **Joseph Backscheider**, a 7th great grandfather, who moved the family from the Südtirol to Éguelshardt. There he married **Catherine Adler** from nearby Hapelscheidt. Joseph's brother Marcel also left the Südtirol around the same time to move to the Moselle/Lorraine area, where he died at Waldhouse. Many relatives lived in and around Lemberg. Backscheider is a rare name these days, although there is a skier called Adrien from Metz.



As of World War I there were still Hinsbergers in the region. Here is a monument at the church in Lemberg that includes the name of one of them, Aloyse, who died in the war.

4. Bitche, Éguelshardt, Waldeck, Mouterhouse



Bitche is a medieval fortress town that dates to the 12th century. Its citadel overlooks the town and surrounding countryside. Eight kilometers to the southeast is Éguelshardt and the castle of Waldeck. It marked the border of the county of Hanau-Lichtenberg and the duchy of Lorraine and the area was frequently ravaged by war. The Thirty Years' War destroyed Éguelshardt and the castle of Waldeck was dismantled by French troops in 1635, according to a history posted on the town's website. By 1708, there were only three families left in Éguelshardt and three in Waldeck, numbering about 35 people altogether. By 1732 there were about a dozen families in the area. They included our ancestors the Mistlers/Mischlers and the Backscheiders, who had arrived there during the war. My 7th great-grandparents **Jean Pierre Mischler** (1660-1747) and **Marie Barbe Lips** (1682-1752) were married in Bitche but lived and died in Éguelshardt. Their son **Jean-Bernard Mistler** (1701-1766) lived in Waldeck with his wife, **Marie Eve Rosine Dithmar** (1720-1765) from Mouterhouse. **Jacobée Backscheider** (1767-1829) and **Bernard Mistler** (1759-1795), my 5th great grandparents, lived in Éguelshardt and Waldeck, and their son, also named **Bernard Mistler** (1792-1834), married **Anne Marie Hinsberger** (1787-1847) from Bitche. They spent their lives in and around Éguelshardt and Waldeck.

The Citadel of Bitche is now a museum. It commands a view of the town, with its population of under 5,000. This is what it looks like from above.



During the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), the fortress withheld an eight-month siege by Prussian and Bavarian troops. Artillery assaults damaged or destroyed a few hundred buildings in town and displaced 135 families, but the 4,300 people in the citadel, about a third civilians, refused to give up until long after Paris had surrendered and been occupied and Germany had won the war. The area remained under German control until November 1918, following Germany's defeat in World War I.









About 8 km southeast of Bitche is the village of Éguelshardt, population around 400. Its church, the Église Sainte Croix was built in 1858 and dominates the modest town hall.



Like most of the Pays de Bitche, which suffered so much from war, Éguelshardt and nearby Waldeck are now mainly devoted to outdoor activity and recreation.



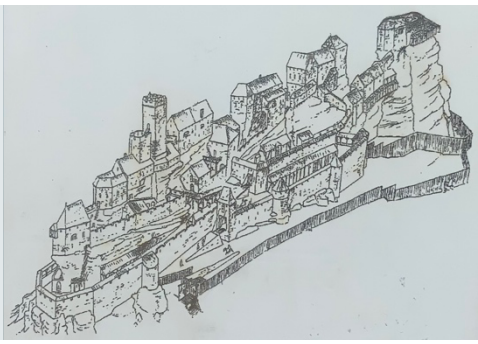
The former battle sites are now forests and fields. We walked through the woods to catch a glimpse of the Waldeck castle and then climbed around the ruins.








Here is a reconstruction of how the castle used to look.





Now its ruins offer a challenge to local rock climbers.



From the castle ruin there are views of the tiny settlement of Waldeck below.









On the way down from the ruins we passed the Étang de Waldeck, the Waldeck Pond.





Next stop was Mouterhouse, a village of about 270 people, located 8.5 km southeast of Éguelshardt at the confluence of the Moderbach and Breibach rivers, where they form the Grand Étang (big pond). It was the birthplace of a 6th great grandmother **Marie Eve Rosine Dithmar** (1720-1765) who married **Jean-Bernard Mistler** (1701-1766) and lived with him in Waldeck.









Here's an old postcard from the period of German occupation, when the town was called *Mutterhausen* from the name of the river Moder (although Mutter also means "mother") and the word for houses.



Iron-rich soil and abundant forests led to the rise of a local steel industry. The first forge was built in Mouterhouse in 1623, but destroyed in 1633 by Swedish forces during the Thirty Years' War. It was rebuilt and functioned for another 300 years, but was destroyed again by the Germans in December 1944 and never rebuilt.

5. Siersthal, Lengelsheim, Altheim, Obergailbach

This part of the exploration revealed again the contrast between the warlike past of our ancestral region, when armies fought over territory and built fortifications to prevent invasion, and the peaceful present, where borders are barely visible.

This small area along the border of present-day France and Germany encompasses villages where our ancestors dating back to the 1500s lived, not far from where our 20th century ancestors died after their children emigrated to the United States.

Siersthal is a village of fewer than 650 inhabitants, on the border between France and Germany. It is the site of remnants of the fortified Maginot Line and a museum devoted to its history. This section is called the Ouvrage Simserhof, after the name of a local farm. The Maginot Line failed to prevent French defeat by Nazi Germany in June 1940, but not because the fortress system itself failed. The Germans chose not to attack it, but instead to invade through Luxembourg and the Ardennes Forest in southern Belgium. The French had considered the Ardennes, an extension of the low mountain range called the Eifel (another of our ancestral regions), impenetrable and therefore not necessary to defend with fortresses or major troop formations.





The Germans took over the Ouvrage Simserhof upon France's defeat. The US 100th Infantry Division liberated it in March 1945. Today the remains of the complex are set in a peaceful forest of relatively young trees.





Our family history in Siersthal goes back much further, thanks to the Hinsberger clan. **Jean Nicolas Hinsberger** (1728-1792), a 5th great grandfather, was born there, the son of Étienne Hinsberger and Odile Koch. We have already met his daughter Anne Marie who married into the Mistler family.

The wife of Jean Nicolas was **Barbe Kinder**, born in 1747. We have no record of her death. Barbe links us to three of the other towns we visited: Obergailbach, Altheim, and Lengelsheim. She was born in Obergailbach, as were her parents, **Dominique Kinder** (1714-1796) and **Anne Marie Lang** (1714-1775), my 6th great grandparents, and her paternal grandparents, **Johann Bernhard Kinder** (1690-1734) and **Christine Buchheit** (1690-1729).

Obergailbach (or Owwergäälbàch for you Lorraine Franconian speakers), population 268 (in 2023), is located on the French side of the border, 2 km from its sister German village of Niedergailbach, with about twice the population, to the north. *Ober* = upper, *nieder* = lower. Gailbach is a version of Hailbach, which in old German meant "border brook." Upper-lower does not mean North-South on the compass. Rivers in Germany typically flow north to the North Sea, so upper means closer to the source.





Today's border between the two countries is barely visible from old markers.









Adam Buchheit (1640-1714), Christine's father, moved to Obergailbach from his birthplace in Altheim, less than 15 km to the northeast, in what is now the German area known as the Saarland. Altheim lives up to its name (*alt* = old), with the first settlements dating to the Neolithic period, 2500-2000 BCE. The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), which has been playing a significant role in our family history, wiped out almost the entire population…but, fortunately for us, not Adam Buchheit! About 500 people live there now, but we saw mainly fields and isolated houses.



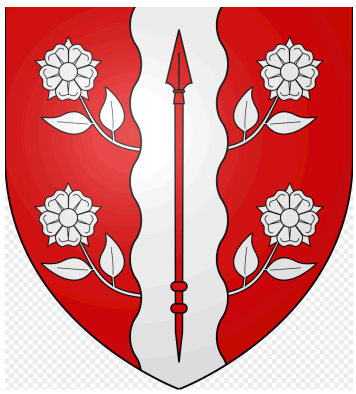
Adam Buchheit was married three times. Following the death of his first wife, Margarethe Lang, in 1692, he married the person who would become my 8th great grandmother **Eva Fund** (1680-1703) from Achen, a nearby town to the south. She is reported as having died in Niedergailbach, now on the other side of the border in Germany. The year after she died, Adam married Anna Zenner. Ten years later Adam died in Obergailbach in 1714.

The Catholic church of Obergailbach, where Adam's funeral likely took place and where his daughter Christine was probably baptized, is called Saint Maurice. The original church dates to the 12th century and has been rebuilt a couple of times over the centuries, most recently after World War II. There are still some pretty old-looking buildings nearby.









Here are a statue of St. Maurice himself and the town's coat of arms.

Not only did the Thirty Years' War somehow spare Adam Buchheit, and consequently his descendants. That same war evidently made possible the marriage of Adam's daughter Christine with Johann Bernhard Kinder. Johann's great, great grandfather, my 10th great grandfather **Michael Kinder** (1582-1644), was born in Baden-Württemberg in Germany. The genealogical sources disagree whether his birthplace was Freiburg im Breisgau or Freiburg am Neckar, but researchers claim that he, his wife **Rosina Chumler** (1585-1687), and their family fled the area in the wake of an invasion by the Swedish army (those bellicose Swedes again!). Freiburg im Breisgau is just across the Rhine from Alsace-Lorraine and not far from our ancestral area of Switzerland, whereas the other Freiburg is about 200 km to the northeast, deeper in Germany.

The was a major battle in Freiburg im Breisgau in early August 1644, when French forces tried to retake the area from Bavarian troops. If the Kinders fled Swedish forces that would have been earlier. The armies of Gustavus Adolphus joined the fighting in the early 1630s, but they were pretty far away from either Freiburg. In any case, the latest that Michael Kinder could have fled from Germany would have been 1644, since that is the same year the genealogical charts record his death in Lengelsheim, but with no more specific date

indicated. The Kinder family was still in Germany at least into the first decade of the 1600s, according to the birth and baptism records. The grandchildren of Michael and Rosina, however, were born in and around Lengelsheim and married into our other ancestral families of the region: Buchheit, Lang, Hinsberger, Steinmetz, and beyond them Mistler and Welsch.

Lengelsheim today is one of the least-populated place we visited, with just 186 people as of 2023. It is surrounded by fields and woods, and in some directions on the way out of the village the paved road turns to dirt or the dirt road turns to grass.



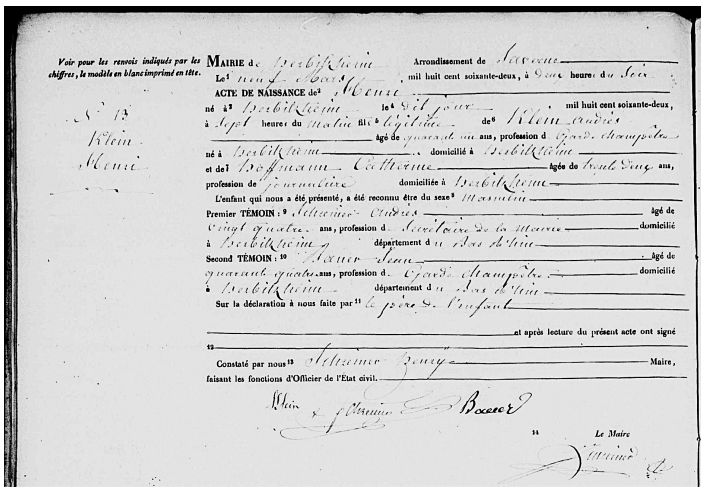





6. Herbitzheim, Le Ban-Saint-Martin, Plappeville, Thiaucourt-Regniéville

Herbitzheim was the birthplace of Henri (or Heinrich) Klein, the father of my great grandfather John Klein. The choice of first names reflects the village's location in the northwest of Alsace, the area that shifted back and forth between France and Germany depending on which side won the most recent war.

Dylan Simon found Henri's birth certificate from Herbitzheim. It is issued by the *mairie*, the town hall, of Herbitzheim in the *arrondissement* of Saverne.



Voir pour les renvois indiqués par les chiffres, le modèle en blanc imprimé en tête.

MAIRIE de Herbitzheim Arrondissement de Saverne

L'an mil huit cent soixante-deux, à Sept heures du Soir

ACTE DE NAISSANCE de Henri

né à Herbitzheim le Neuf Mars mil huit cent soixante-deux,

à Sept heures du matin fils de Andrès Klein de

âgé de quarante un ans, profession de garde champêtre

né à Herbitzheim, domicilié à Herbitzheim

et de Hoffmann Catherine âgée de trente deux ans,

profession de journalière domiciliée à Herbitzheim

L'enfant qui nous a été présenté, a été reconnu être du sexe Masculin

Premier TÉMOIN : Klein André âgé de

Cinq quatre ans, profession de Secrétaire de la mairie domicilié

à Herbitzheim département du Bas Rhin

Second TÉMOIN : Meyer Jean âgé de

quarante quatre ans, profession de Garde champêtre domicilié

à Herbitzheim département du Bas Rhin

Sur la déclaration à nous faite par le père de l'enfant

et après lecture du présent acte ont signé

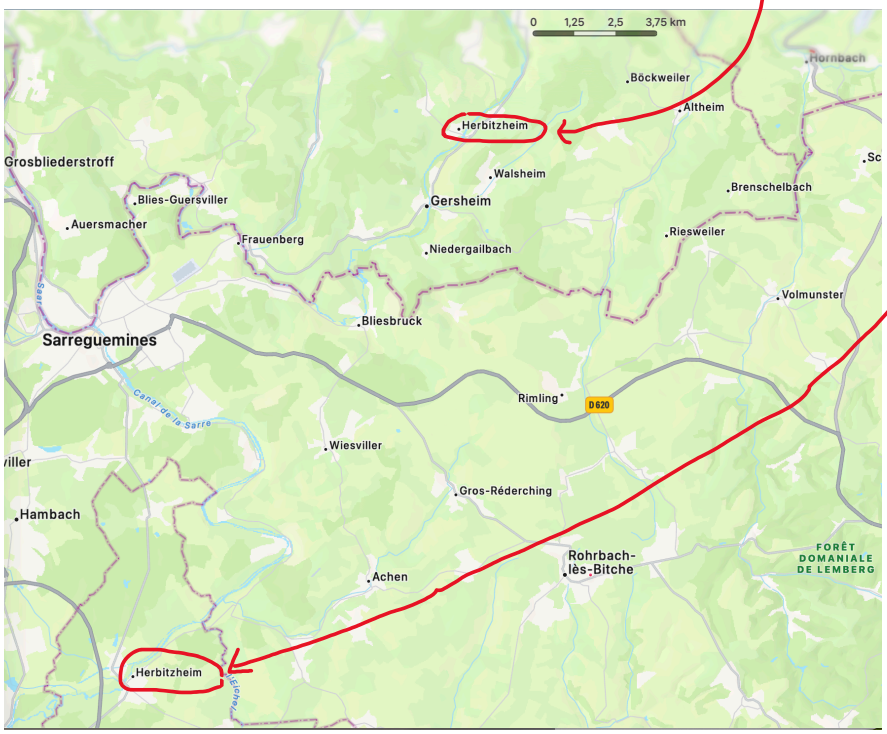
Constaté par nous Schimmer Maire,

faisant les fonctions d'Officier de l'Etat civil.

Le Maire

The birth date is 9 March 1862. Henri's father is Andrès Klein, 41 years old, whose profession is listed as *garde champêtre*, something like a rural guard or officer responsible for policing use of the forest. His mother is Catherine Hoffmann, age 32, a day laborer (*journalière*).

Looking to visit Herbitzheim we found to our surprise that there were two of them, one in the Bas-Rhin region of France (population 1,829 in 2023), and the other in the German Saarland (population 600), less than 25 km away.



We planned to drive to Herbitzheim after visiting Adam Buchheit's birthplace of Altheim, thinking that the one nearby was the correct one. The map app had other ideas. It took us through Gersheim, the bigger municipality (around 6,000 people) with which the villages of Herbitzheim and others (including Niedergailbach) are now affiliated, but then pointed us south to the French village. That turned out to be the right one.



We arrived around lunchtime and decided against the 24/7 automatic pizza vendor in favor of a nice restaurant. I asked the owner our usual sophisticated genealogical question — "Is X a common surname around here?" — with Klein filling in for X this time.







We got a better answer than we might have expected, in the form of a "family book" he brought out from a back room. It had a listing for our Kleins, with some minor discrepancies from what we already had (Henri's father listed as André rather than Andrès) and some more significant ones (André's profession is listed as *tailleur d'habits*, tailor, rather than forest guard), but this seemed to be the right family. Henri's wife, Catherine Lucas, is the person we also know as Katharina Lukas, born in Neuerburg to Mathias Lukas and Suzanne Laubach. We learned some new things, that their wedding took place in Le Ban-Saint-Martin, and that several family members, including André and his wife Catherine, died in a town called Plappeville that had not been on our radar screen. We added those two towns to our itinerary.

1623 **KLEIN** André <1611.2>, tailleur d'habits,* 25.09.1820 Herbitzheim + 08.03.1886 Plappeville
x RP 10.02.1849 Herbitzheim
HOFFMANN Catherine <1361.6> * 07.10.1830 Herbitzheim + 25.09.1882 Plappeville

1. André * 11.08.1849 Herbitzheim
2. Marie, *religieuse*, * 13.05.1851 Herbitzheim + 22.10.1930 Bomy
3. Léon * 28.06.1853 Herbitzheim
4. Rufine * 10.06.1855 Herbitzheim + 22.01.1857 Herbitzheim
5. Balbine * 25.01.1858 Herbitzheim
   x RP 13.11.1880 Plappeville **DEHLINGER** Jacques, fs de D. Jean Pierre et **KREBS** Marguerite
   * 29.12.1859 Etting + 06.03.1871 Herbitzheim
6. Marcel * 28.03.1860 Herbitzheim
7. Henri * 09.03.1862 Herbitzheim
   x RP 22.04.1886 Ban-Saint-Martin **LUCAS** Catherine, fe de L. Mathias et **LAUBACH** Suzanne
   * 24.10.1858 Neuerburg/D + 07.09.1871 Herbitzheim + 05.03.1868 Herbitzheim
8. Catherine * 14.05.1865 Herbitzheim
9. Hypolithe * 06.08.1867 Herbitzheim
10. Paul * 01.02.1869 Herbitzheim
11. Catherine * 13.10.1871 Herbitzheim + 14.02.1875 Plappeville
12. Elisabeth * 03.01.1874 Herbitzheim + 16.08.1878 Plappeville
13. Octavie * 08.04.1878 Plappeville

In the meantime, we took a look around Herbitzheim and found the Catholic church where family members would likely have been baptized, as well as the town hall where their births, marriages, and deaths would have been recorded (it was closed when we were there but we weren't looking to do any archival research anyhow).





Otherwise we looked around for old buildings that could plausibly have been family homes, and found a place that our ancestors would not have known what to make of.













Although our actual itinerary sent us north at this point so that we could get to Luxembourg in time for my lectures at the university, for the sake of continuity of the Klein story we'll cover the towns we visited on the way back from Luxembourg: Le Ban-Saint-Martin and Plappeville.



Le Ban-Saint-Martin is today part of the greater metropolitan area of Metz and one of the few towns we visited whose population is growing (to about 4,700 these days). Metz as a settlement goes back about 3,000 years to when Celtic tribes lived in the area. It is considered the economic center and capital of Lorraine.

Le Ban-Saint-Martin is where Heinrich Klein and Katharina Lukas were married in 1886. We'll give them their German names now because France lost this region after its defeat in 1871 and didn't get it back until after World War I. We'll switch back to "Lucas" later.



Here is a map of *Bezirk Lothringen*, German for Lorraine District. Except for her son Johann (John), who was born in Neuerburg in 1881, the rest of Katharina's children were born in German-controlled Lorraine. A son in 1886, a daughter in 1887, and another son in 1889 were all born in Le Ban-Saint-Martin, called *Sankt Martinsbann* in German. By 1892 the family had moved to Plappeville (*Papolsheim*).

Katharina gave birth to four more children in Plappeville, a daughter in 1892, a son in 1893, another son in 1896, and a daughter in 1901 who lived less than two months. She herself is said to be buried in Moulins-lès-Metz in the communal cemetery, but we did not go there.



Generally we did not make a point of visiting cemeteries, but in Le Ban-Saint-Martin, we came across the grave of Joseph Klein, Katharina's youngest son.

Otherwise, we tried to get a sense of the town and visited a local café, where some residents were enjoying their Saturday morning beer. Any family resemblances?











In Plappeville we stopped by the old church, Sainte Brigide.





We took a look in its cemetery, but didn't see any evident family burial spots, although there could be remains in unmarked graves or the communal ossuary.





Plappeville of the living seemed pleasant enough.



We followed a narrow road through a pretty forest and recreational area.

The town is set on a hill of narrow streets, mostly deserted when drove through.







No one knows what became of Heinrich Klein. Some sources give a precise date of death, 7 June 1918, but Dylan Simon has not been able to verify it and neither the Herbitzheim *Livre des Familles* nor the Neuerburg *Familienbuch* contains information on his death. The sources that give a 1918 date claim that Heinrich is buried in the German military cemetery in Thiaucourt-Regniéville, Département de Meurthe-et-Moselle, Lorraine. We took a look.







There are 11,685 German soldiers buried there for the period of the First World War, 1914-1918.



There is a vast expanse of crosses, interspersed with an occasional stone with a Star of David. Some crosses share two names. They are mainly organized by year.







We did not find Heinrich's gravestone, let alone one marked with a specific date. There were common graves of unknown soldiers, but if he were in one of those, his identity would not be known, even if his precise date of death were. Although Heinrich was born a French citizen he would have been eligible for conscription into the German army, even if his age—52 when the war broke out—would have limited his roles probably to the rear areas. If he did indeed die in 1918, the likely cause would not have been a battle injury but the epidemic of influenza that killed perhaps 400,000 people that year in Germany alone.

7. Luxembourg (and Buffalo)



If the death of Heinrich Klein is lost in the mists of time, equally mysterious is how he came to meet and marry Katharina Lucas in 1886. She was from Neuerburg, about 150 km northwest of his hometown of Herbitzheim, in the Pays de Bitche region, then part of German Alsace, where they came to live and raise many children. The Lucas family were itinerants who traveled between Luxembourg and the towns of the *Eifelkreis*, such as Bitburg, Neuerburg, and Waxweiler.

Here is how Jacobo Surhonio Montano depicted the area in a map commissioned by Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1551. It was so good that the emperor declared it secret and it was only published in 1579. The towns of Trier, Bitburg, and Neuerburg are on it, along with Luxembourg and Metz. Dylan Simon has traced Katharina's relatives nearly that far back.



Viewed in the Bitburg historical museum, but this version comes from https://www.vintage-maps.com/en/antique-maps/europe/luxembourg/ortelius-

These ancestors were known as the *Lakerten* (the broad category) or more specifically, the Yenish, which was also the language they spoke, also called *Lakerschmus*. Linguists call Yenish a jargon. It is based on the Germanic language Luxembourgish, with a lot of words derived from Yiddish, Romani, and the languages of other itinerant, marginalized people with whom the Yenish dealt. *Lakerten* comes from the word *Laken* for "rag" or "towel." Some of the Lakerten were traveling entertainers, buskers, and so forth, but most, including our relatives, were traders. On the marriage certificate for Katharina

Lucas's brother Theodor, for example, his profession is listed as *Händler*, trader or merchant. The occupation of their father Mathias is *Lumpensammler*, rag seller or rag-and-bone man.

The area of Luxembourg City where Katharina Lucas's grandparents **Philipp Lucas** (1802-1876) and **Margarethe Redinger** (1801-1863) were married in October 1826 is Weimerskirch (little church or parish). Philipp was born in Bitburg (part of the Duchy of Luxembourg at the time), and was living in Trier. Margarethe came from the nearby Siechenhof-Pfaffenthal area of Luxembourg. Siechenhof is a variant of "sick house." Pfaffenthal comes from the German words for monk and valley. The area was located just beyond the walls of the city and was where people with long-term illnesses such as leprosy were confined and was at one time administered by Benedictine monks. There are very few places in the world where Yenish is spoken anymore, but two of them are the places where this branch of our family lived—the Weimerskirch and Siechenhof-Pfaffenthal neighborhoods of Luxembourg and the Neuerburg/Eifel region of Germany. There were about 40 Yenish families living in Weimerskirch in 1900.

Here is what the church looks like today in Weimerskirch.



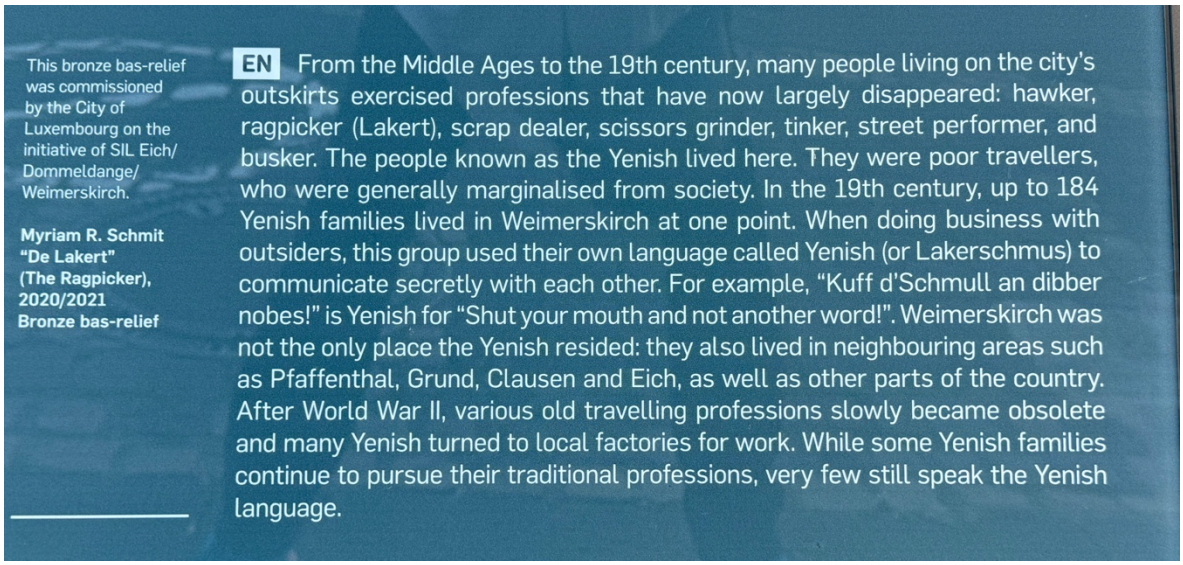


On the side of building near the church is a memorial to the Lakerten parishioners, a bronze relief.





Here's more on the Yenish from the information provided at the plaque.





We couldn't resist the opportunity to look for another family resemblance.

Here are some views of Luxembourg as we arrived from the Weimerskirch area.



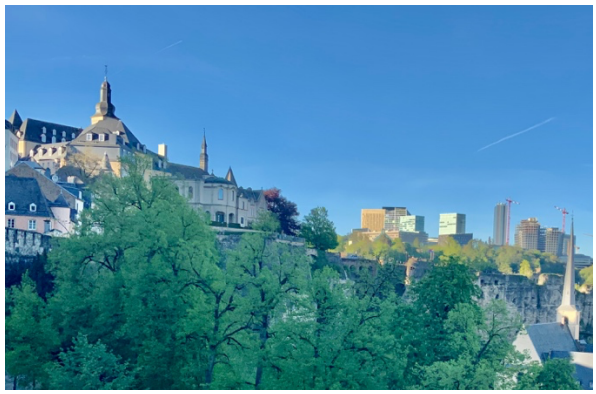








It is unlikely that our ancestors would have met and fallen in love in the Ville Haute section of Luxembourg City, with its palatial buildings, luxurious housing, and grand squares.


Down in the valley, even the once-poorer area known as the Grund has become fashionable and expensive, like the rest of the city.






The Belval neighborhood of nearby Esch-sur-Alzette, where the university is located, is now one big construction site, as new housing is developed for the growing population.







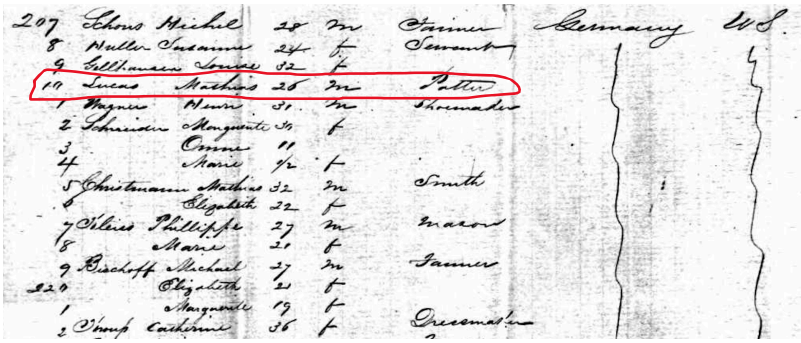




Today's Luxembourg would be unrecognizable to our Lakerten ancestors even though their experience as regional and worldwide travelers suggests they would have found a way to adapt to it.

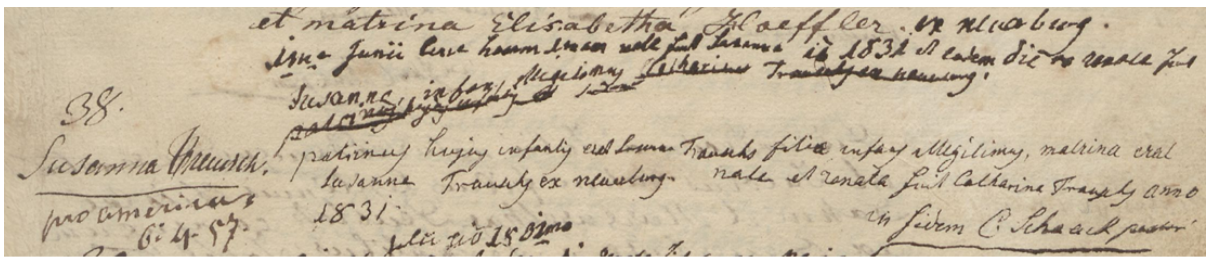
Among the more interesting information cousin Dylan Simon turned up is evidence that these ancestors who traveled back and forth from Luxembourg into Germany also traveled back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean. Katharina's father **Mathias Lucas** (1827-1884) was born in Luxembourg and died in Waxweiler. In between he emigrated to the United States.

Here is the record of his arrival in 1853 at age 26, with his profession listed as potter.



Mathias's wife, Katharina's mother, was born Susanna Trausch on 1 June 1831. Her mother was Catharina Trausch, also known as Maria Katharina, and there was no father listed on Susanna's birth record. Susanna's mother later married Johann Theodor Laubach on 8 January 1839 in Neuerburg. She and her seven-year-old daughter Susanna took his surname.

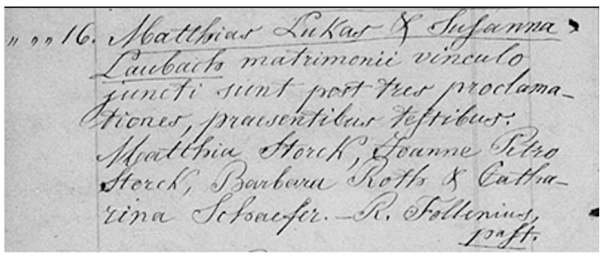
In the margin of Susanna Trausch's birth record, written in Latin, we find an addition of the words "pro americas 6-4-57," evidence that Susanna Trausch Laubach emigrated to the United States at age 25 on 6 April 1857, four years after Mathias Lucas emigrated.



07 38.	01 1ma Junii circa horam 1mam nata fuit Susanna … 1831 et eadem die renata fuit
08 Susanna Trausch	02 Susanna, infans illegitimus Catharinae Trauschs ex Neuerburg.
09 pro americas	03 ~~patrinus hujus infantis est Susanna~~
10 6-4-57	04 patrinus hujus infantis erat Susanna Trauschs filia infans illegitimus, matrina erat
	05 Susanna Trauschs ex Neuerburg. nata et renata fuit Catharina Trauschs anno
	06 1831 in fidem C. Schaack pastor

Mathias Lucas and Susanna Laubach got married in Buffalo, New York at St. Boniface Church on 16 February 1858. We don't know whether they met in the United States or already knew each other from the region of Luxembourg and Germany where their families lived. The church in Buffalo was built by German immigrants and the marriage certificate is written in Latin and signed by the parish priest.





1858 Feb 16 Mathias Lukas & Susanna
Laubach matrimonie vinculo
juncti sunt past tues proclama-
tioner, praesentibus tehtibus.
Matthia Storch. Joanne Petra
Storch, Barbara Roth & Catha-
rina Schaefer. – R. Follenius, past

Susanna and Mathias returned to Neuerburg less than a year after their wedding. Their daughter Katharina was born on 24 October 1858. If they had stayed in Buffalo another nine months she would have been born an American citizen. Instead, she spent her life in Europe. Susanna and Mathias had eight more children there, one of whom died as an infant, less than two weeks' old. Mathias died in Waxweiler in 1884 and Susanna in Neuerburg in 1914.

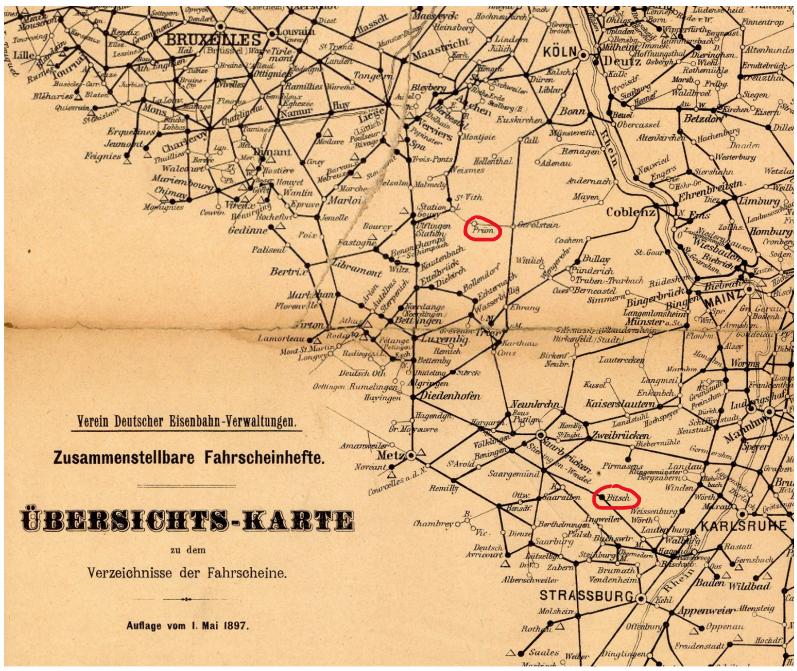
Although Johann Klein's grandparents, Susanna and Mathias, returned to Germany, he had other relatives living in Boston when he immigrated and changed his name to John. They were his aunts, Katharina Lucas's sisters, Elisabeth and Susanna. Elisabeth Lucas, born in Neuerburg, lived in Boston until her death in 1937, eight years after John's death in 1929. It was Elisabeth's photo, taken in Metz, that my grandmother Clara Magdalena ("Madge") Klein McDonough saved. Susanna Lucas (not Susanna Lucas née Trausch) married Matthias Beyer in 1894 in Boston. They moved to Marion, Oregon, where she lived until 1955.

Let us turn now to the area of Germany where the Lucas family lived, as they traveled back and forth from Luxembourg, and where Heinrich Klein's wife Katharina Lucas was born.

8. Bitburg, Trier, Waxweiler, Neuerburg

We have already wondered how Heinrich Klein met Katharina Lucas. Did he travel from his birthplace in Herbitzheim to Neuerburg or was she already in the Pays de Bitche when they married in Le Ban-Saint-Martin in 1886? If either or both traveled between their respective home towns they could have walked—it would have taken a few days to cover the 150 km distance—or traveled by horse-drawn coach. By the late 1800s, however, they also had the option of taking a train, thanks to the growing rail network at the time.

This 1897 map from the University of Chicago's collection shows the nearest station to Herbitzheim as Bitsch (Bitche). From Neuerburg the best connection would probably be Prüm, but there are smaller stations in Luxembourg as well. Diedenhofen looks like a good place to change, or maybe Metz. We remember that Katharina's sister Elisabeth, who lived in Neuerburg at the time, had her picture taken in a photo studio in Metz.



It turns out that members of the Lucas and Klein branches of our ancestors are not the only ones to have traveled between the Pays de Bitche and Germany. Consider the case of Elisabeth Mistler (1742-1815). She was the daughter of my 6th great grandparents, Jean-Bernard Mistler and Marie Eve Rosine Dithmar, who lived in the Waldeck area of Éguelshardt, and the sister of my 5th great grandfather, Bernard Mistler. Elisabeth married Guillaume Schoppard and they lived in Trier, where she died in 1814 or 1815. So one or both of them must have made the journey between the two places, also about 150 km, and before the railways were built.

We've already met Philipp Lucas (1802-1876). He was a 4th great grandfather, born in Bitburg, who married Margarethe Redinger (1801-1863) from Luxembourg. The town of Bitburg, now in Germany, was part of the Duchy of Luxembourg when Philipp was born there. It arose some 2,000 years ago as a stopover point between present-day Lyon in France and Köln (Cologne), Germany. Other way stations included Metz and Trier. We stopped in Bitburg for two nights as we explored the region on our way to Luxembourg.

We stayed in the guesthouse of the Simon brewery, whose slogan promoting its Bitburg beer since Theobald Simon founded the brand in 1817 has been, “Bitte, ein Bit” – “A Bit(burger), please.”





We explored the town and followed a blue moose to the historical museum.









There was a fascinating exhibit commemorating the 1923 mass nonviolent resistance movement against the harsh French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr coal-mining area. Troops had entered in the wake of Germany’s failure to provide adequate amounts

of coal, timber, and gold to its victorious neighbors to fulfill the terms of the punitive Versailles Treaty that ended World War I. The resistance is considered a text-book case of successful use of nonviolent techniques, from mass demonstrations to strikes by coalminers and railway workers.

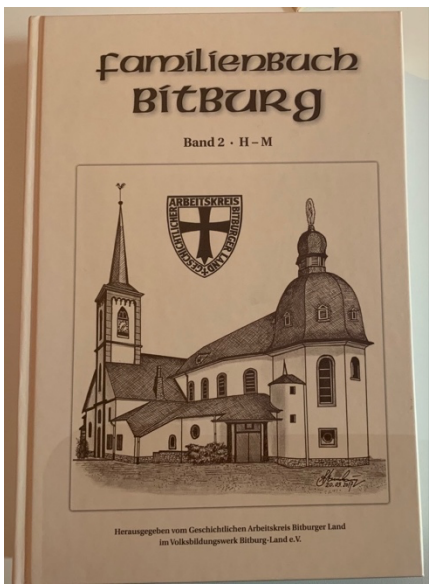


The effort was judged a success, because it led to negotiation of a more tolerable alternative to the original agreement under the auspices of the US-sponsored Dawes Plan. In the meantime, however, the Germany economy suffered the extraordinary inflation that helped pave the way for Hitler's rise, as the government printed money to pay striking workers.

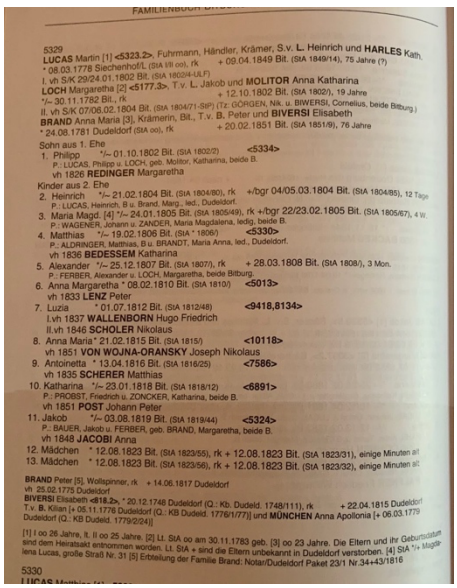




For the purposes of our ancestral research, the museum yielded a useful document, a Bitburg *Familienbuch*, with information about our Lucas relatives.

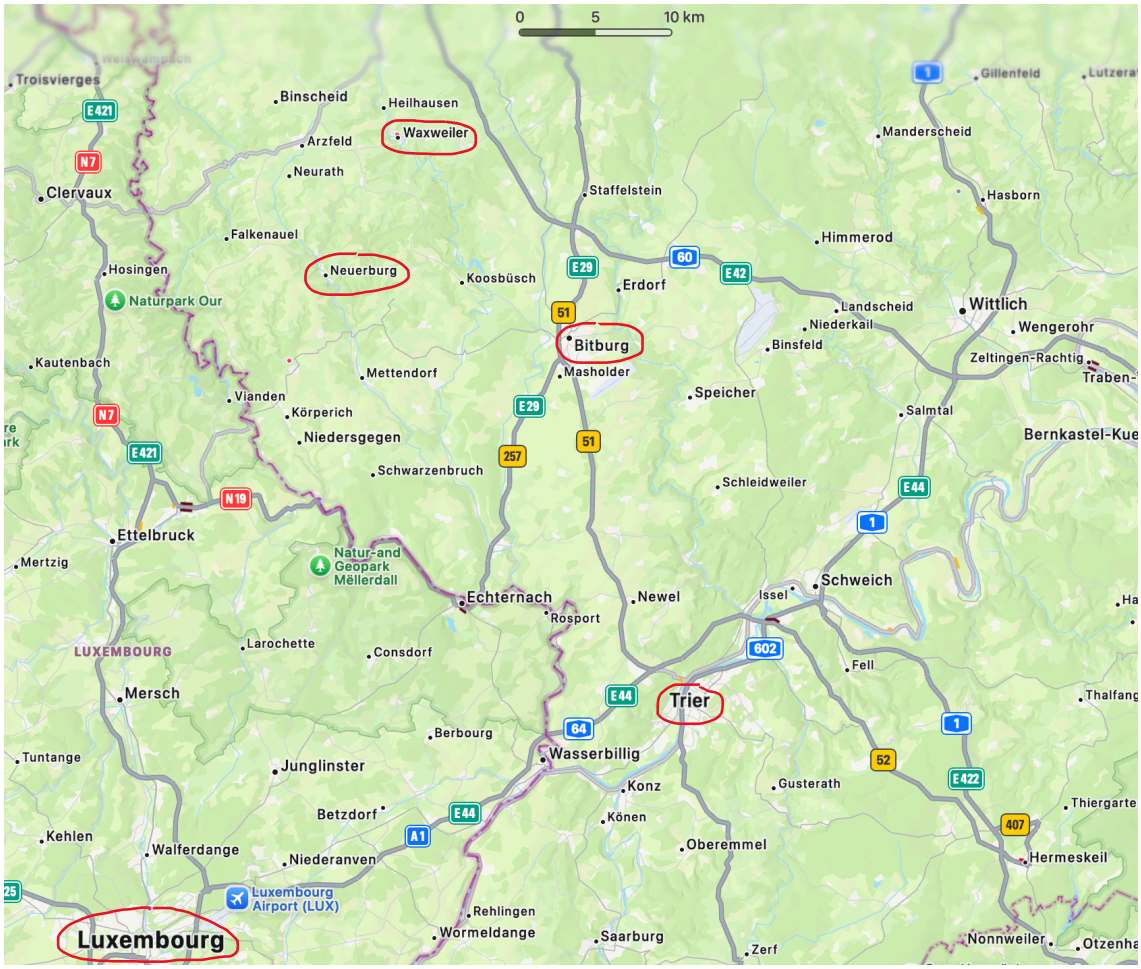


It lists Philipp as having pursued the family trade of *Lumpensammler*.

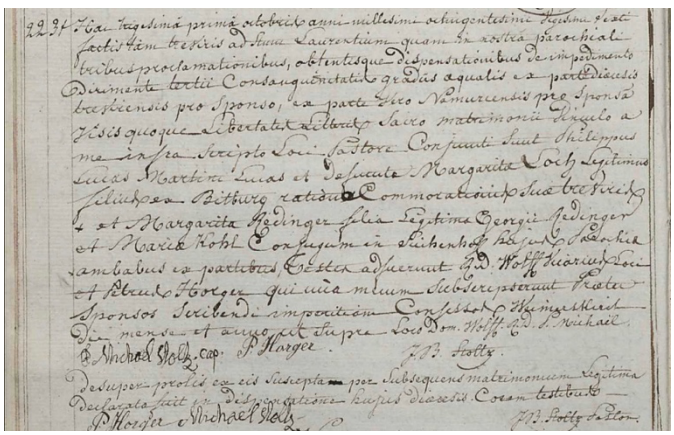


5334
LUCAS Philipp **<5329.1>**, Lumpensammler, S.v. **L.** Martin und **LOCH** Margaretha
*/~ 01.10.1802 Bit. (StA 1802/2), rk
vh S/K 30.10.1826/1826 Luxemburg (StA 1826/97)
REDINGER Margaretha, T.v. **R.** Georg und **KOHL** Maria
* 05.07.1801 Siechenhof/L, rk + 27.08.1863 Siechenhof/L

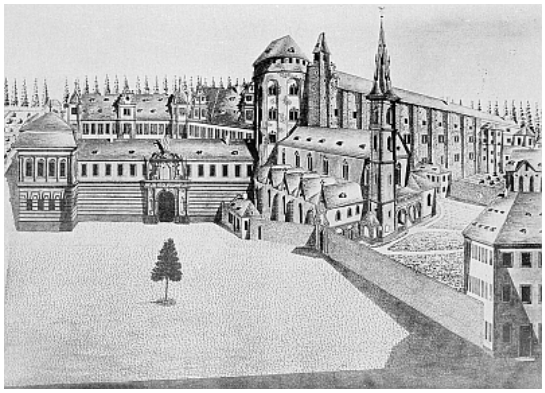
The members of our family from this region were all Roman Catholics and the main regional center of the Church at the time was Trier. This map gives a sense of where it is located relative to Bitburg, Neuerburg, Waxweiler, and Luxembourg.



By the time Philipp Lucas and Margarethe Redinger were married in 1826, Bitburg, which had belonged to the Duchy of Luxembourg, had been transferred to Prussia during the Congress of Vienna in 1815 after Napoleon's defeat. Dylan Simon has located both Church and civil documents registering the marriage, the former in Latin and the latter in French. The Church document attests to three proclamations issued from the Diocese



of Trier for the groom, the Diocese of Namur for the bride, and from the parish of Weimerskirch where the marriage took place. These were special dispensations required to overcome "the impediment of consanguinity," the fact that Philipp and Margarethe were first cousins. Their grandmothers were sisters.



The Diocese of Trier was based in the parish of Saint Laurentius. Here is a drawing of it by Johann Lamberty from around 1808, shortly after the proclamation was issued there for Philipp and Margarethe's marriage.

We didn't visit that church, but we did see the more famous cathedral at Trier and other cool buildings, including a nice *Weinstube* across the street.

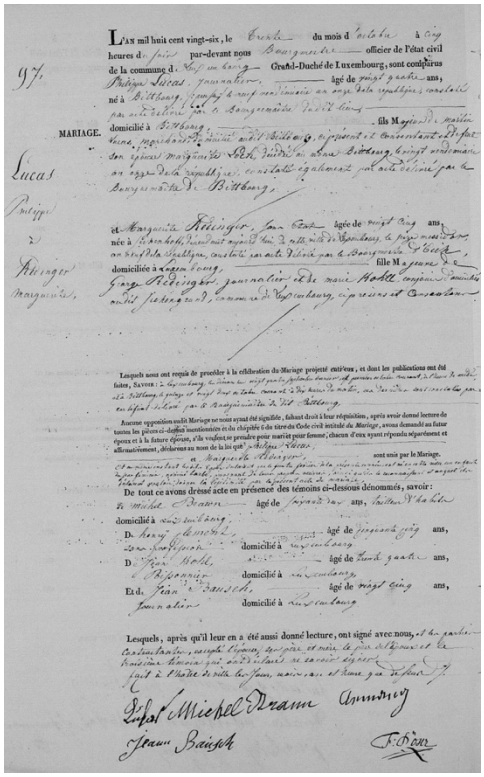












MARIAGE.

L'an mil huit cent vingt-six, le [illegible] du mois d [illegible] à cinq heures d[u soir] par-devant nous [illegible] officier de l'état civil de la commune d[e Bitburg] Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, sont comparus [illegible] âgé de vingt quatre ans, né à Bitburg, [illegible] domicilié à Bitburg, fils Majeur [illegible]

et Margarita Rödinger, sans état, âgée de vingt cinq ans, née à [illegible], domiciliée à [illegible], fille Majeure [illegible]

Lesquels nous ont requis de procéder à la célébration du Mariage projetté entr'eux, et dont les publications ont été faites, SAVOIR : à [illegible] à vingt [illegible] et à Bitburg, [illegible] par [illegible]

Aucune opposition audit Mariage ne nous ayant été signifiée, faisant droit à leur réquisition, après avoir donné lecture de toutes les pièces ci-dessus mentionnées et du chapitre 6 du titre du Code civil intitulé du Mariage, nous demandé au futur époux et à la future épouse, s'ils veulent se prendre pour mariés pour femme, chacun d'eux ayant répondu séparément et affirmativement, déclarons au nom de la loi qu'[illegible] sont unis par le Mariage.

De tout ce avons dressé acte en présence des témoins ci-dessous dénommés, savoir :

[illegible] âgé de [illegible] ans, [illegible] domicilié à [illegible]

D. [illegible] âgé de [illegible] ans,

[illegible] domicilié à [illegible]

D. [illegible] âgé de [illegible] ans,

[illegible] domicilié à [illegible]

Et d. [illegible] âgé de vingt cinq ans,

[illegible] domicilié à [illegible]

Lesquels, après qu'il leur en a été aussi donné lecture, ont signé avec nous, et les parties [illegible]

fait à Bitburg, les jour, mois et an [illegible]

Michel Dram

Jean Baisch

The civil marriage document of Philipp and Margarethe, dated 30 October 1826, contains useful information that complements the Church one. It does not mention that they were first cousins, so perhaps that wasn't an issue for the state authorities. It indicates that wedding banns (announcements) were posted twice in Bitburg and twice in Luxembourg during the preceding weeks and that no one objected to the marriage. The document reports that neither bride nor groom nor groom's father was able to write. Finally it reveals that the couple had a baby daughter named Barbe, born on 4 February 1826, and that they wanted to make her legitimate ("donner la légitimité") by the act of marriage. Less than a year after their wedding, Philippe and Margarethe had a second child, a son, Mathias, born on 2 October 1827, when they were each 24 years old. At the time, according to a document Simon located, they were living in Luxembourg, in "house No. 31," presumably in the Siechenhof or Weimerskirch neighborhoods.

Mathias was my 3rd great grandfather who emigrated to the United States three years before Susanna Laubach did. They married in Buffalo, then returned to Europe. Their daughter Katharina was born in Neuerburg in 1858, after which Mathias and Susanna had eight more children, all of them born in Neuerburg. Mathias died in Waxweiler in 1884.

Today it looks like this, with a population around 1,000. The windmills are recent.







Waxweiler's history, according to legend anyhow, goes back some time. A plaque on the wall of the Church of St. John the Baptist says that the area was the site of preaching by St. Willibrord, a Benedictine monk from Northumbria who brought Christianity to the area in 728. The first mention of a church at Waxweiler came in 943. The cross below looks old and the stones on the right are from an early version of the church. The current one is a product of the 20th century, but in the in Rhenish Baroque style. It underwent further renovations after a fire in 2004.







Here are some entertaining translated excerpts from the plaque below:



Legend has it that in the year 728, St. Willibrord came to Waxweiler on a missionary journey. But instead of listening to the sermon in the church, most of the residents performed pagan dances in front of the church. Willibrord admonished them in vain and cried out in holy wrath: "Then dance without ceasing, if you cannot give up serving the devil." The dancers

could no longer stop. Only when they vowed to reform did St. Willibrord forgive them and assign them, as penance, to dance with holy devotion in Echternach.

The Echternach Dancing Procession is first mentioned in historical records by Abbot Thiofried of Echternach around the year 1100. A set of Echternach statutes lists only the pilgrims from Waxweiler as the dancers, though over the years other groups of pilgrims joined them in their dancing. The citizens had, in their greatest distress, pledged to appear every year at the tomb of St. Willibrord, singing and leaping. The reason may have been a strange illness (staggering disease in livestock; St. Vitus's dance in humans; epilepsy). Presumably, this was done in accordance with the old folk-medicine principle. During the procession in Echternach, the symptoms of the illness were mimicked in a ritual dance in order to escape epilepsy.

The leaping procession was banned in 1777 under Elector Clemens Wenzelaus of Trier and again in 1798 under French rule. Only small groups continued to hold the procession. It was not until 1860 that the great leaping procession was revived, initially starting from Waxweiler. In 1861, Johann Jakob Perrad finally led the participants from Prüm to join the Waxweiler procession. From that time on, the procession has begun in Prüm and proceeded via Waxweiler to Echternach.

To this day, a large procession makes the pilgrimage every year at Pentecost, starting in Prüm, passing through Waxweiler, and ending in Echternach at the tomb of St. Willibrord—a total of about 70 km.

For those disinclined to feign epilepsy while dancing for 70 km, Waxweiler offers more conventional hiking opportunities, with White Mountain-style huts for overnight stays.





Now on to Neuerburg. We end with the town that initially piqued our interest in this region as a source of ancestral information. My sister Elisa and her husband T.J. did some research while they were living in Germany and visited Neuerburg. They discovered Johann Klein's birth information in the *Familienbuch der katholischen Pfarrei Sankt Nikolaus mit Ihren Filialen Neuerburg/Eifel 1700 bis 1899*. Some of the details we

now know were incorrect because we have since obtained the original documents, but this is where we learned the basics of Johann's birth and the various family surnames of Lukas, Laubach, and Trausch. Under the name of Katharina Lukas it reports a marriage with Heinrich Klein on 4 May 1886 in Metz. Under Heinrich's name it lists one child,


Veröffentlichungen der
Westdeutschen Gesellschaft für Familienkunde e. V., Sitz Köln
Band 231

Familienbuch
der katholischen Pfarrei Sankt Nikolaus
mit ihren Filialen
NEUERBURG/EIFEL
1700 bis 1899

Bearbeitet von M. E. Hubsch · Heribert Ambros · K. G. Oehms

Deutsche Ortssippenbücher
der Zentralstelle für Personen- und Familiengeschichte
Serie A Nr. 443

Westdeutsche Gesellschaft für Familienkunde e. V., Köln 2007

Johann, with the designation *S. v. unbekanten Vater*, "son from an unknown father," Johann's birthdate as 10 November 1881, and his godparents (P for *Paten*) as Johann Laubach and Susanna Laubach. They were the brother and sister of Katharina's mother, so her aunt and uncle. The *Familienbuch* estimated Heinrich's birth year as 1858, the same as Katharina's, but we know from his birth certificate that it was 1862. The book listed his father's name as Anton, but we've seen it elsewhere as Andrès or André, and their home as Mont St. Martin in France, but we now know it was Herbitzheim. They put Metz as the site of the wedding of Heinrich and Katharina, but it was actually nearby Le Ban-Saint-Martin.

1589
LUKAS Katharina <1586.1,1342>
* 24.10.1858 Neuerburg in der Enz
∞ K 04.05.1886 Metz
KLEIN Heinrich [1] <1342>
S.v. unbekanntem Vater
1. Johann
* 10.11.1881 Neuerburg
P.: Johann Laubach aus der Enz und Susanna Laubach
[1] S.v. Anton Klein und Katharina Hoffmann, Einwohner aus Mont St. Martin (F)

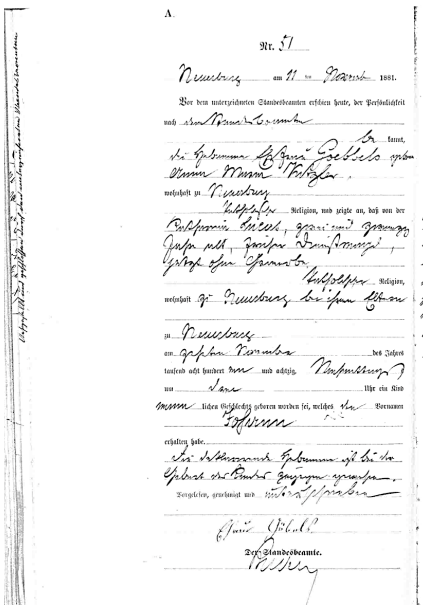
1590

Katharina Lukas
Born - 24 October 1858 at Neuerburg in der Enz
Married 04 May 1886 at Metz to Heinrich Klein

Son of unknown father - Johann -
born 10 November 1881

- Kopie -
Auszug aus dem Familienbuch
der katholischen Pfarrei Sankt
Nikolaus Neuerburg
und ihren Filialen
von 1700 bis 1899

The original handwritten document of Johann's birth provides a bit more information. It is signed by a midwife and a local official.


A.

Nr. 51

Neuerburg am 11ten November 1881.

Vor dem unterzeichneten Standesbeamten erschien heute, der Persönlichkeit

Religion,

Religion,

Uhr ein Kind

Der Standesbeamte.

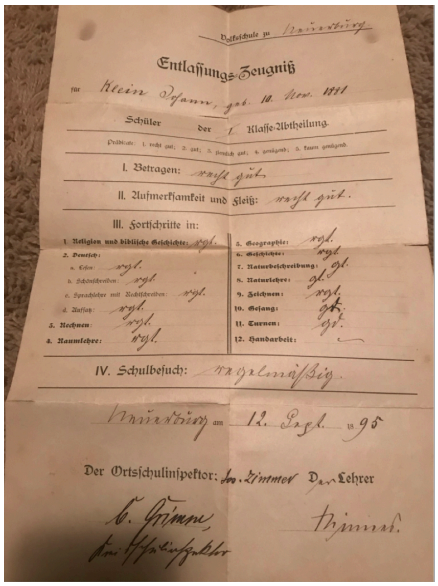
Nr. 51
Neuerburg am 11ten November 1881.
Vor dem unterzeichneten Standesbeamten erschien heute, der Persönlichkeit nach, dem Standesbeamten, die Hebamme Ehefrau Goebbels geb. Anna Maria Ketzler, wohnhaft zu Neuerburg, Katholischer Religion, und zeigte an, daß von der Katharine Leuert [Lucas], zwei und zwanzig Jahre alt, früher Dienstmagd, jetzt ohne Gewerbe
Katholischer Religion, wohnhaft zu Neuerburg bei ihren Eltern, zu Neuerburg
am zehnten November des Jahres 1881, Nachittags um 3 Uhr ein Kind männlichen Geschlechts geboren worden sei, welches den Vornamen Johann erhalten habe. Die deklarierende Hebamme ist bei der GEburt des Kindes zugegen gewesen.
Vorgesetzten, genehmigt und unterschrieben,
Ehefrau Göbbels
Der Standesbeamte
Ruden [?]

Neuerburg, 11 Nov. 1881:
Today the midwife Mrs. Goebbels, born Anna Maria Ketzler [?], resident of Neuerburg, Catholic religion, reported that Katharine Leuert [Lucas], 22 years of age, formerly a house servant, currently unemployed, Roman Catholic, who lives in Neuerburg with her parents, gave birth on 10 Nov. 1881 at 3PM to a male child, who received the name Johann. The midwife attended the birth, and signs this affidavit.
[signed] Ruden[?], Standesbeamte (official in charge of the town hall)

The birth record indicates that Katharina had worked as a house servant or maid (*Dienstmagd*), but was now unemployed and living with her parents. *Dienstmagd* was also the occupation of Katharina's sister-in-law, Susanna, the wife of her brother Theodor, whose professsion was listed as merchant or businessman in the same *Familienbuch*. Katharina evidently lost her job when her pregnancy became known—or at the latest when she was about to give birth—but her parents took her in and her extended family supported her. They supported young Johann as well.

Heinrich Klein and Katharina Lucas married on 4 May 1886 in Le Ban-Saint-Martin. Their son Paul was born on 14 October 1886 in the same town. That means he was either born or conceived four months prematurely. It seems evident that Katharina moved to the Pays de Bitche and had three more children in Le Ban-Saint-Martin and four in Plappeville.

What about Johann? He appears to have stayed in Neuerburg.



Entlassungs-Zeugniß

I. Betragen: sehr gut.

II. Aufmerksamkeit und Fleiß: sehr gut.

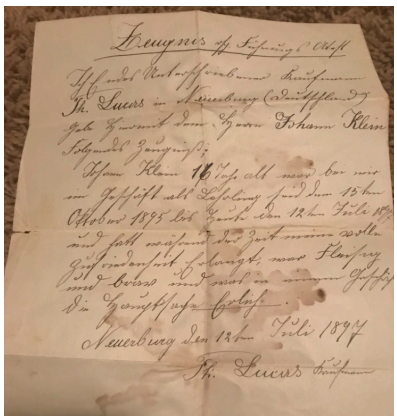
III. Fortschritte in:

1. Religion und biblische Geschichte:	sgl.	5. Geographie:	sgl.
2. Deutsch:		6. Geschichte:	sgl.
a. Lesen:	sgl.	7. Naturbeschreibung:	gt.
b. Schönschreiben:	sgl.	8. Naturlehre:	gt.
c. Sprachlehre mit Rechtschreiben:	sgl.	9. Zeichnen:	sgl.
3. Aufsatz:	sgl.	10. Gesang:	gt.
4. Rechnen:	sgl.	11. Turnen:	gt.
a. Raumlehre:	sgl.	12. Handarbeit:	

IV. Schulbesuch: regelmäßig.

Neuerburg am 12. Sept. 1895

Der Ortsschulinspektor: Lehrer



Zeugnis ggf. Führungs-Attest

Ich des Unterschriebenen Kaufmann Th. Lucas in Neuerburg (Deutschland) gebe hiermit dem Herrn Johann Klein Folgendes Zeugniß:

Johann Klein, 16 Jahre alt war bei mir im Geschäft als Lehrling seid dem 15ten Oktober 1895 bis Heute den 12ten Juli 1897, und hatt während der Zeit meine volle Zufriedenheit erlangt, war Fleissig und brav und was in einem Geschäft die Hauptsache [ist] Erlich.

Neuerburg den 12ten Juli 1897

Th. Lucas Kaufmann

The document to the left is his final transcript from September 1895 issued by the Neuerburg *Volksschule* when he finished at age 13. He got good grades!

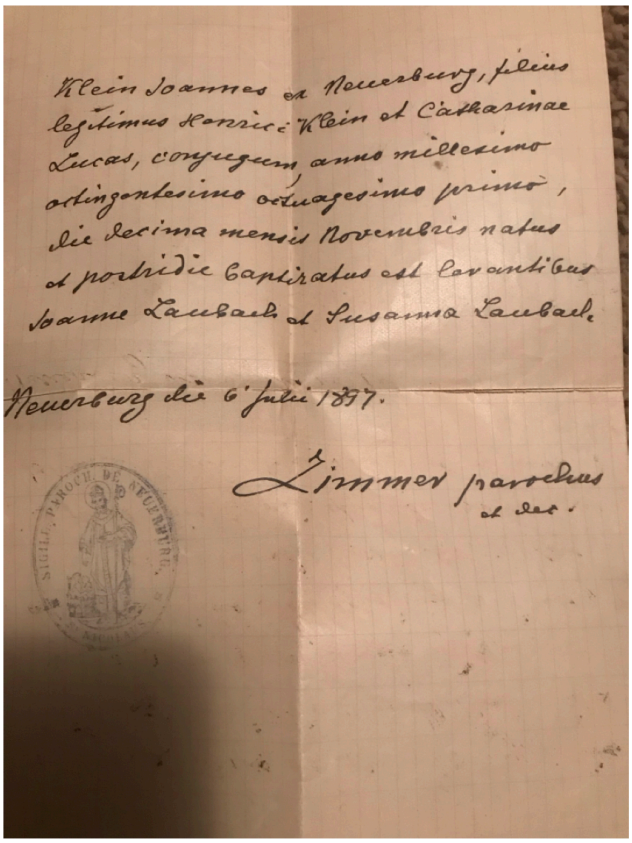
This is a testimonial from Johann's uncle Theodor Lucas who hired him when he finished school to work as an apprentice in his business until July 1897 when Johann left for America.

Here are the German transcription and English translation.

Zeugnis ggf. Führungs-Attest
Ich des Unterschriebenen Kaufmann Th. Lucas in Neuerburg (Deutschland) gebe hiermit dem Herrn Johann Klein Folgendes Zeugniß:
Johann Klein, 16 Jahre alt war bei mir im Geschäft als Lehrling seid dem 15ten Oktober 1895 bis Heute den 12ten Juli 1897, und hatt während der Zeit meine volle Zufriedenheit erlangt, war Fleissig und brav und was in einem Geschäft die Hauptsache [ist] Erlich.
Neuerburg den 12ten Juli 1897
gez. Th. Lucas Kaufmann

Certificate, or Recommendation concerning behavior
I, the undersigned salesman/merchant Th[eodor] Lucas in Neuerburg (Germany) hereby give Mr. Johann Klein the following certificate/recommendation:
Johann Klein, 16 years old, was an apprentice by me in my business from the 15th Oct. 1895 until today, the 12th of July 1897, and during this time he earned my complete satisfaction, was energetic and well-behaved and, which is the main thing in business, honest.
Neuerburg, the 12th of July 1897
signed Th. Lucas

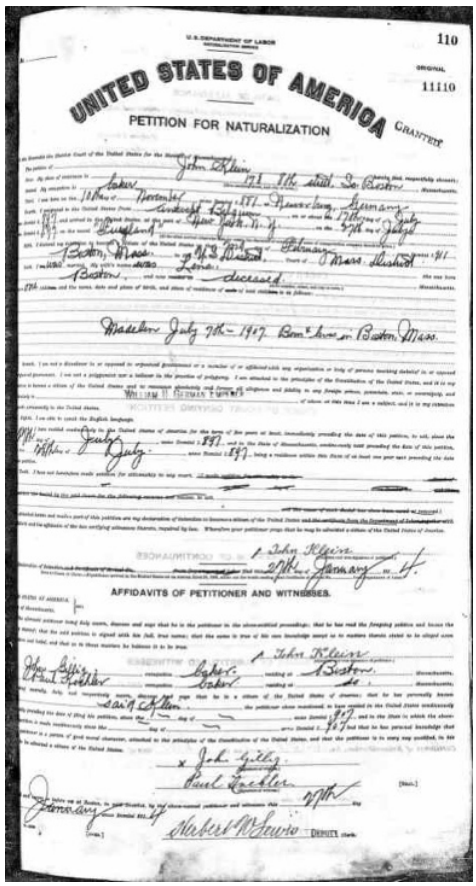
Also in July 1897 Johann received an important document from the parish priest. It attested to his baptism and the fact that he was the legitimate son of Heinrich Klein and Katharina Lucas, born on 10 November 1881. Johann took these three documents with him when he emigrated. As he reports in his January 1914 petition for naturalization as an American citizen, he left Antwerp, Belgium on the ship, Friesland, on 17 July 1897 and arrived in New York ten days later. The petition also reports his profession as baker, information included on his naturalization certificate, issued in May 1914.



Klein Joannes ex Neuerburg, filius
legitimus Henrici Klein et Catharinae
Lucas, conjugum, anno millesimo
octingentesimo octuagesimo primo,
die decima mensis Novembris natus
et postridie Baptizatus est a Reverendo
Joanne Laubach et Susanna Laubach.

Neuerburg die 6 Julii 1897.

Zimmer parochus
et Dec.



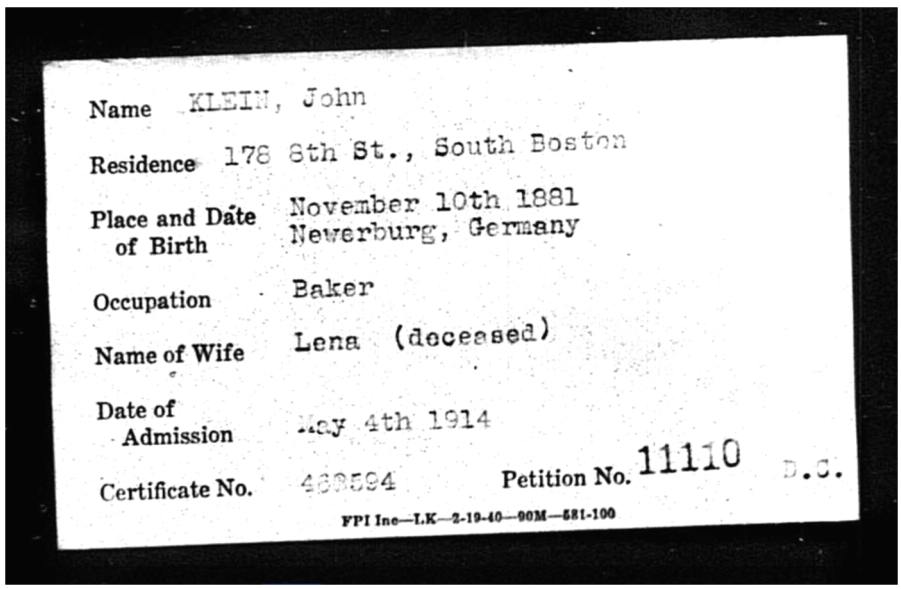
110

ORIGINAL
11110

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PETITION FOR NATIONALIZATION

AFFIDAVITS OF PETITIONER AND WITNESSES.



Name KLEIN, John

Residence 178 8th St., South Boston

Place and Date of Birth November 10th 1881
Neuerburg, Germany

Occupation Baker

Name of Wife Lena (deceased)

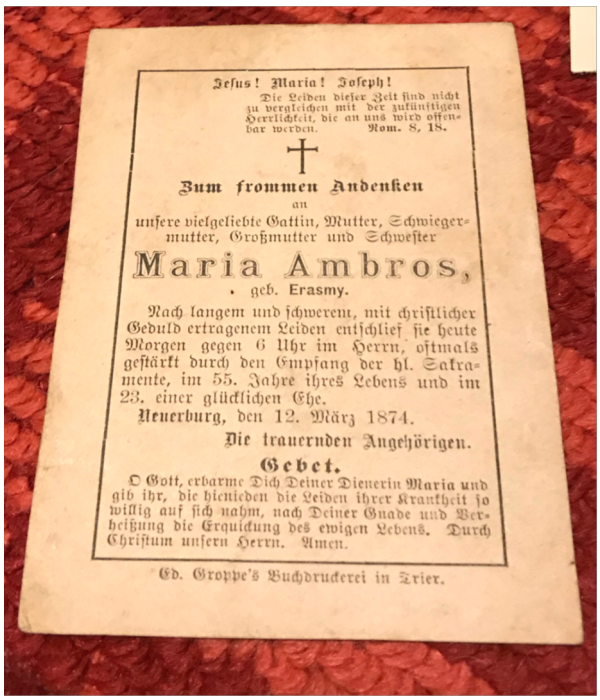
Date of Admission May 4th 1914

Certificate No. 489594 Petition No. 11110 D.C.

FPI Inc—LK—2-19-40—90M—681-100

Johann brought another document with him to America that his daughter and granddaughter saved. If they asked him what it was or why he brought it, we'll never know. It is a funeral card, printed in Trier, to honor the memory of Maria Ambros, née Erasmy, who died at age 55 in Neuerburg on 12 March 1874, more than seven years before Johann Klein's birth. His mother Katharina would have been 15 years old when Maria died.

The Ambros family was prominent in Neuerburg. One of its members edited the *Familienbuch* we have used for research into our ancestors. Why would Johann bring such a document commemorating someone he never knew? One possibility is that it was the Ambros family for whom Johann's mother Katharina worked as a maid. According to the *Familienbuch*, there were three other household members besides Maria. The *paterfamilias* was Johann Peter Ambros, who married Maria Erasmy in 1851 (he had previously been married to Margaretha Schomer from Waxweiler). They had three sons: Nikolaus, b. 1856, Robert, b. 1852, and Johann Georg, who died as an infant. When Johann Klein was born in 1881, Katharina was 23 and Nikolaus Ambros was 25. In 1883 Nikolaus's father died. In 1885 he married Anna Maria Conrath. The next year, Katharina married Heinrich Klein and moved to Le Ban-Saint-Martin, leaving Johann in Neuerburg.



Jesus! Maria! Joseph!
Die Leiden dieser Zeit sind nicht zu vergleichen mit der zukünftigen Herrlichkeit, die an uns wird offenbar werden. Rom. 8, 18.

Zum frommen Andenken
an
unsere vielgeliebte Gattin, Mutter, Schwiegermutter, Großmutter und Schwester
Maria Ambros,
Geb. Erasmy.
Nach langem und schwerem, mit schriftlicher Geduld ertragenem Leiden entschließ sie heute Morgen gegen 6 Uhr im Herrn, oftmals gestärt durch den Empfang del hl. Sakramente, im. 55. Jahre ihres Lebens und im 23. Einer glücklichen Ehe.
Neuerberg, den 12. März 1874.
Die trauernden Angehörigen.

Gebet.
O Gott, erbarme Dich Deiner Dienerin Maria und gib ihr, die hienieden die Leiden ihrer Krankheit so willig auf sich nahm, nach Deiner Gnade und Verheißung di Erquickung des ewigen Lebens. Durch Christum unsern Herrn. Amen

Ed. Groppe's Buchdruckerei in Trier

Jesus! Maria! Joseph!
The sufferings of this time cannot be compared with the future glory that will be revealed to us. Rome. 8, 18.

In pious memory
of
our beloved wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother and sister
Maria Ambros,
née Erasmy.
After suffering for a long time with hard patience, she decided this morning at 6 o'clock in the Lord, often strengthened by the reception of the holy Sacraments, in the 55th year of her life and the 23rd of a happy marriage.
Neuerberg, 12 March 1874.
The grieving relatives.

Prayer.
O God, have mercy on Thy servant Maria, and give to her, who here on Earth willingly took upon herself the sufferings of her sickness, according to Your mercy and promise, the refreshment of eternal life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Grosse's Book Publishers in Trier



Neuerburg today is a small town of about 1,500 people, whose website, https://www.neuerburg-eifel.de has some excellent photos by Martin Brunker of the town, the castle, and the St. Nikolaus church, as well as older photos from the 19th and early 20th centuries.





Südseite der Pfarrkirche St. Nikolaus.

The church dates to the 1870s (and was renovated in the 1950s), so it is probably the one that our ancestors used.

The city website includes old photos, many taken by Ferdinand Homann that may be saved for personal use but not published. They include this one from 1880, the year before Johann Klein was born.



Ansicht von Norden vor 1880, da die Eligiuskapelle noch ihr Türmchen hat. Im Vordergrund sieht man noch den städtischen Friedhof (heute Ehrenfriedhof). Fotograf: Ferdinand Homann.

This one from 1903 gives a sense of the way people dressed and the kind of work our ancestors did. The man on the right is the blacksmith, Matthias Dichter.

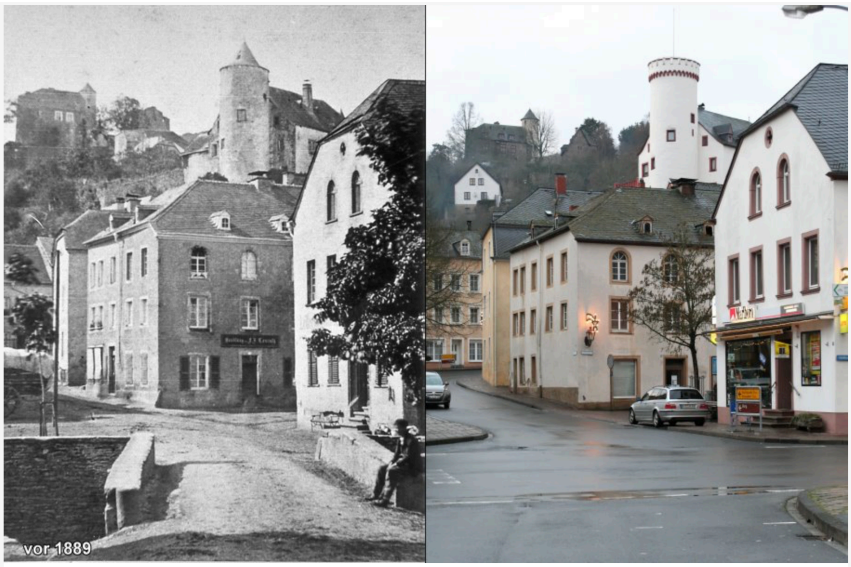


Ansicht von Süden 1903. Der Mann mit der Hacke ist der Schmied Matthias Dichter. Sammlung Studio Höffler, Fotograf vermutl. Ferdinand Homann.





Tordurchfahrt und Tor zum Innenhof um 1900. Das Wasser holte man zu dieser Zeit offensichtlich noch mühsam aus der Schlossbach. Sammlung Studio Höffler, Fotograf Ferdinand Homann.





The website also contains a wonderful collection of old and recent photos of the same sites juxtaposed.

When we visited Neuerburg the town was quiet and nearly empty. Like many of the ancestral places we visited, the local economy seemed based on outdoor activities, including rock climbing.













A hill just beyond town is dotted with windmills and solar panels.



The old castle overlooks a modern house with terraced garden.



Links between past and present in our journey along ancestral routes.