

# SIMSBURY

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### Der Traum (The Dream)

#### Finding Family Places in Baden and Bavaria, Germany

With my trip to Germany in September 2005, I feel like I have completed the dream of every genealogist. I have walked in the villages, found any of the original homes still standing, entered the churches and toured some of the cemeteries of *all* my immediate ancestors. Well, actually, all but one but I'll get back to that later.

While my husband was still alive, we toured Ireland three times and on each trip spent time in the village of Rush, about fourteen miles north of Dublin on the Irish Sea, where my mother Frances Agnes Creighton was born on October 27, 1893.<sup>1</sup> We also toured Germany twice but this last and third trip with my oldest son, James F. Winzer, was strictly for genealogy purposes to see the places from which both the paternal and maternal branches of my father's family originated.

My father was Ernest A. Sesselmann and he was a first generation American, born November 14, 1892, in New York City to German-born parents.<sup>2</sup> His father was Malachais Jakob (James) Sesselmann, born July 13, 1871, in Schwand, Stadtsteinach County, Bavaria.<sup>3</sup> His mother was Emma Philipp, born December 28, 1870, in Aasen now a part of Donaueschingen, Baden-Wuerttemberg.<sup>4</sup>

I was aided in the planning and executing of this last trip by two third cousins, once removed, that I found through what I call my "Village Letters." I go to the village of my ancestor in the German Telephone Book White Pages on the Internet, put in only the surname I am interested in contacting and print off the list that shows up. I then pick out about ten names based strictly on gut reaction and send

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#### About the Author

Muriel Sesselmann Winzer was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, and graduated with an Associate Degree in Laboratory Sciences, with high honors, from what is now Western Connecticut State College. She has worked as a laboratory assistant, engineering aide, statistical research assistant, bookkeeper, and office manager, and she was the assistant to the general manager and to the controller of a manufacturing company when she retired in 1990. When her two sons were young, she worked as a reporter/photographer for the *Hartford Courant* covering the Farmington Valley area.

She and her late husband, Frederick W. Winzer, traveled extensively, frequently incorporating their love of history into their itinerary. She initially became interested in genealogy when she found a box of old pictures after her mother died and she tried to identify those in the pictures. She was really "hooked" after taking a course, "Introduction to Genealogy," at SGHRL in the Spring of 1997, taught by Dawn Bobryk, in which a class experiment found a long lost uncle. She has been a volunteer at SGHRL for several years.

off a very short letter to each one selected. In the letter I introduce myself, briefly cite my ancestor(s) and ask if we could be related or would they help me find any information available. These letters have been very successful.<sup>5</sup>

One cousin is fifty-two-year-old Ferdinand Philipp of Wiesloch, which is east of Heidelberg. He is an engineer who took over his father's company but now works alone out of his house taking jobs only within fifty kilometers of his home. His very modern home, which he and his wife literally built with their own hands, is on a street called Am Hang. It is so aptly named as it means "the slope" and the house literally hangs off the side of a high hill with all Wiesloch spread out below you.

When Ferdinand first responded to my letter, he just directed me to an office where some of the information I wanted should have been located, but agreed we probably were related. His great-great-grandfather, Albin Philipp, born February 28, 1830, in Horrenberg, was a brother of my great-grandfather Joseph Philipp, born June 4, 1839, in Horrenberg.<sup>6</sup> I never got a response to the letter I sent to the office he recommended.

Several years later he found a book which had all the records I needed.<sup>7</sup> He bought it and mailed it to me just in time for Christmas 2002. It was one of the best Christmas presents I ever got. With this book I was able to go back on this particular line fourteen generations to 1660 when the family was still in Holland and Belgium and before they wandered down the rivers toward Heidelberg and its environs.

The other cousin is forty-four-year-old Reinhard Schnekenburger, who is controller of the Heilbronn branch of an American company. My letter actually went to his brother Hermann in Aasen. Hermann neither reads nor speaks English so he faxed my letter to Reinhard. Their great-great-grandfather, Michael Schnekenburger, born September 29, 1838, in Aasen, was a brother to my great-grandmother Elisabetha Schnekenburger, born October 28, 1839, in Aasen.<sup>8</sup> Aasen is located on the edge of the Black Forest near the Swiss border. Reinhard did the most for us making hotel reservations, arranging and rearranging our schedule then taking days off from work to travel with us and act as our translator. This was invaluable as in most of the places we were visiting few people spoke English and Jim and I started out speaking very little German.

I had participated twice in the Simsbury Adult Education German courses but, frankly, they were a disaster for me. I am just not good at speaking languages though I have become somewhat proficient in reading German and Old German script. It is now mandated in Germany that English is taught in all the schools. It was very interesting, needing a translator to "talk" to adults and having one of their offspring approach you to tell you that they could speak "some" English. They seemed to really like the chance to practice their English on an American and most did very, very well.

We flew into Frankfurt and picked up a rental car. Jim has a 1988 BMW at home and was looking forward to driving a new one. He was speechless when we ended up with a big black BMW 528d[iesel] station wagon. It was equipped with GPS and Collision Avoidance systems, both of which came in very handy. Some villages we were going to were not on most maps, many streets were very narrow and made more hazardous by the German method of parking; that is, leave your car anyplace it will fit. Incidentally, diesel fuel was \$6.00 plus per gallon. It cost me \$100 every time we filled the tank.

We drove to Heilbronn (at least 90 mph on the Autobahn) and checked into a nice but old fashioned hotel. Reinhard was standing outside the hotel waiting for us. We went to Reinhard's lovely

home for lunch and to meet his beautiful wife, Anja, and very bright seven-year-old son, Carlos. That night, after a nap, we enjoyed the first day of Heilbronn's wine festival.

When Jim commented on the fine caliber of the wine, saying he that had never tasted anything like it at home, he was told that they only send the junk to America, keeping the best for themselves. One of Reinhard's friends went into the Ratskeller (Town Hall Restaurant) to claim a comfortable chair so I could sit at our wine barrel in the Town Square and really enjoy myself.

The next morning Jim and I were off to Wiesloch to meet Ferdinand Philipp. Reinhard did not need to come along as Ferdinand speaks some English. Actually he carried a dictionary with him to look up words he did not know. He was anxious to learn the proper pronunciation and exactly how each English word was used. We, in turn, started to pick up our first German words. He met us just as we came off the highway and led us to his home. When we left to visit the various villages, he insisted on driving his car, a Porsche Cayenne, the SUV to end all SUVs.

We first went to the village of Horrenberg which was similar to all the villages we toured. It was neat and clean with flower boxes on almost all the buildings, which were located very close to each other. There were little or no lawns or yards. Houses are also crowded very close to the churches. Although the front door of the Horrenberg church, Maria Königin (Mary Queen), was locked, we were able to get in via an unlocked door on the side of the church near the altar. This was true for all the churches we visited.

This church had been rebuilt in 1951 and updated to eliminate the old altar and accommodate just one altar facing the congregation. To the left of the main altar as you face it, known as the Virgin Mary's side, I saw something I have not seen in our area of the United States in years due to fire fears. It was a rack of small votive candles with a donation box so you can light as many candles as you wish in memory of someone or for a special intention. Jim and I made straight for them. He wanted to light one for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. We ended up lighting every candle that was available. We found such candles in all the other churches we visited and lit as many as we could. It was sort of like overdosing on a long lost and loved activity.

Near the church was part of a very big old town wall which could have been from a small fortress reportedly connected to a nobleman of the area in 1238.<sup>9</sup> An ancient house, supposedly the oldest in town but still in use, as it had a TV dish on the roof, was attached to the wall.

Although my ancestors were born in Horrenberg and attended church there, most of their marriages took place in the larger church in Balzfeld. Ferdinand had called the Horrenberg church and was told any records could be found in Balzfeld. We found the Balzfeld church, Heilig Kreuz (Holy Cross), on a really steep hill with a very long flight of stairs up to the entrance. Its old ornate altar has been retained with a small altar facing the congregation added in front.

The priest's house was at the bottom of the stairs and across the street. When we asked for records, we were referred to the book Ferdinand had sent me. We stood in middle of the road and had a real good laugh about that. Here, I'd spent thousands of dollars and traveled thousands of miles to be referred to a book that was on a shelf at home. But, I guess that speaks to the book's accuracy and reliability.

When I mentioned that a friend had ancestors from nearby Eschelbach, Ferdinand insisted on driving us to that village so I could get pictures for her. Our day concluded with a late but very good

lunch in Sinshein.

How and why my great-grandfather Joseph Philipp, a shepherd, left Horrenberg and traveled so far to a village near the Swiss border may never be known. According to family lore, there was an earlier wife than my great-grandmother Elisabetha Schnekenburger. There are no records in either Horrenberg or Aasen to support this story.

The next day Reinhard, Jim and I headed for Kulmbach to try to find the elusive Sesselmanns in the Schwand/Deckenreuth area near the Czech Republic border. I have never had much luck communicating with them. Carlos could not understand why he had to go to school rather than come with us. On the way we stopped for a soccer game in Nuernberg. Jim is a big time soccer fan. He has played, coached and officiated. His favorite team is Bayern Munich and he really wanted to see a live game while in Germany. Reinhard came through for us again standing in line for an hour and a half to get tickets for a Bayern Munich–Nuernberg game.

So, there I was on a cloudy, partially rainy day in Germany with 49,999 really enthusiastic fans in a soccer stadium. We were in a covered part of the stadium and, I must say, I really enjoyed the spectacle. There was no violence but a lot of exuberance as the fans hurled insults at each other, sometimes printed on large banners saying such things as “The Champs Play the Village Idiots.” When the fans stomped to show their pleasure, or displeasure, the whole stadium shook. I was thankful, especially for Jim, when Bayern Munich won, 2 to 1, even though it was later found the winning goal was offside. The walk between the car garage and the stadium was through a beautiful forest. Reinhard said it was to calm the fans.

We stayed at a lovely hotel on the outskirts of Kulmbach where we enjoyed a beer reported to have the highest level of alcohol in all of Germany. I just thought it was good.

A third cousin I found as a submitter to the Mormon Family Search Ancestral Files, William (Bill) T. Hickman of Roanoke, Virginia, had sent me information he had gotten from the late Dr. Ernest Sesselmann of Muskegon, Michigan, that the Sesselmann name appears to have originated in Kulmbach.<sup>10</sup> It then evidently spread north through what is known as the Frankenwald. Sesselmann means “Chairman” as a maker of chairs or “Leader” such as an official in a city hall. It is first recorded in Kulmbach in the 1300s with the most prominent person being a Friedrich Sesselmann who was chancellor of the Mark-Brandenberg region and later elevated to being the Archbishop of Lebus. I have a picture of a statue of the bishop which was in Berlin but destroyed at the end of World War II.

Bill Hickman’s great-grandmother Margaretha Sesselmann was born March 4, 1837, in Schwand.<sup>11</sup> She was a sister of my great-grandmother Barbara. Dr. Ernest’s family reportedly started out in Schwand but moved to Stadtsteinach. Neither Bill nor I have been able to find a connection between Dr. Ernest’s family and ours. I am sure it is there if we can just go back far enough. Reinhard, Jim and I went to a museum (the Heimatmuseum) in Stadtsteinach connected to a Siegfried Sesselmann. It had any number of interesting objects but none that could help our search for a family connection.

Schwand has no church so its residents go to St. Bartholomaeus in Wartenfels (Waiting Rock). Reinhard had called the priest, Adalbert Lachnit, who has been there since 1977. The phone call was as successful as all other attempts at communication with people in this area; that is, not much. We decided the best thing to do was to go to the only Sunday Mass at the church and approach the pastor after the services. When we got to the church we found two large bronze plaques in the entryway

listing those who had died in World War I giving their date of death and where they died. I found numerous family names on the plaques.

In a history of the church I got off its Web site on the Internet, I found that a church on the site was first destroyed in 1444. For many years the church struggled as a ramshackle and very poor parish. Finally in the mid-1800s a new church was built and dedicated on September 8, 1867. There was a complete transformation of the church in 1970–71 under the direction of Munich sculptor Klaus Backmund. There were a number of sculptures in what appeared to be black marble in the altar area but, frankly, I could not figure out what they were supposed to be.

Imagine our surprise when we discovered the Mass that day (September 11) was celebrating the dedication of the church in 1867, and they pulled out all the stops. Town and church officials equivalent to our mayor, fire chief, police chief, board of selectmen and parish council, carried ten- to twelve-foot standards with numerous flags and pendants. To get the standards into the church they had to carry them parallel to the floor until they cleared the loft about midway down the main aisle and then put them upright. They were moved around a lot during the Mass, making a very impressive and visually pleasing spectacle. Speaking of the loft, I found out why there were no children in the main part of the church. They were all up in the loft and there was not a peep out of any one of them during the entire ceremony.

During the 1970–71 transformation the old altar was removed and a new one installed on a pedestal facing the congregation. Behind the new altar is a large upright marble slab with some of those indecipherable sculptures attached, and behind it, where the old altar had been, is the organ. We saw women congregating on the left side of the slab and men on the right. They were the choir. When the organ began to play and they started to sing it was one of the most beautiful sounds I have ever heard. What wonderful voices, and they blended so well. The acoustics in that church were unbelievable. I told my son they sounded like a mini Mormon Tabernacle Choir. So much of what they did for the next hour reminded me of the old fashioned Masses I participated in as a child and wish we could still have today. Pure and joyous religion.

After the Mass we waited quite awhile for Father Lachnit to come out of the sacristy. I was surprised to find him in a blue suit and jazzy tie rather than a black suit with clerical collar. So much for the old fashioned ways. He smiled a lot but it was not a nice smile and he said very little. He gave me the impression that he thought we were more than a little foolish pursuing old information. Finally, Reinhard got him to admit he had records only for the last ninety-five years, with all prior ones having been sent to the archives at the Bamberg Archdiocese. Later I realized he knew what families we were seeking, knew some were at the church during the Mass, but did nothing to get us together. Though he smiled his smile a lot, he did not get the sizable donation I had ready to give him.

We left Wartenfels and drove to Schwand. The first sign we saw said “Otto Sesselmann–Hof.” Hof means farm and, to supplement the basic farm, Otto hosts family farm vacations for people from the big cities. I had written to him several times and Reinhard had phoned a number of times with no success. After contemplating how many times I could stand rejection, we decided to stop in and see him anyway.

He was obviously a Sesselmann with the high forehead, round face, big frame and curly hair. At first he just frowned and said nothing, but when Reinhard said, “Didn’t I see you singing at the church this morning,” he broke into a big smile and started to talk. He told us the village originally had

four Sesselmann families and all were farmers. He is the only one still operating a farm.

Both my grandfather Malachais Jakob (James) and great-grandmother Barbara were born in Schwand #3.<sup>12</sup> Otto's home was #6. I asked if he knew where #3 was and he pointed right down to the edge of his property and across the road to a yellow house. He said it was the original house but had had a lot of updating. I had found the first home where an ancestor had been born.

He very proudly said his was not the original #6, as he had that torn down and rebuilt entirely new. During the demolishing of the original house old papers, "some even 300 years old" were found in the attic but thrown away. I definitely felt my fingers tingle with the urge to strangle the dear man.

We asked directions to Werner Sesselmann's house, Schwand #34. Werner's great-grandfather Johann Georg Sesselmann, born August 1, 1841, in Schwand, was a brother of my great-grandmother Barbara.<sup>13</sup> When we arrived at Werner's home we were greeted by an older woman who tried to shoo us away. As we started back to our car, a younger woman came to the door saying she was Werner's wife, Elke, and that Werner was not there. Probably from the letter I had sent, she realized who we were and asked if we would come back at six o'clock to see Werner and stay for a cold supper. We agreed.

From there we went to Deckenreuth where my great-great-grandmother Elisabeth Dressel was born on June 28, 1810.<sup>14</sup> She married my great-great-grandfather Andreas Sesselmann on February 4, 1831.<sup>15</sup> He was born November 14, 1803, in Schwand #3.<sup>16</sup> The only people we saw walking around were by a bed and breakfast, Dragonerhof, built in the usual alpine style with exposed wood and overflowing flower boxes. Reinhard told them we were looking for anyone named Dressel and the oldest woman said she was a Dressel. She invited us into their dining room and, although we never found a family connection, we had a nice visit.

Before I left for Germany I had printed my complete vertical ancestors tree from the Family Tree Maker program on my computer. It was the smartest thing I ever did. I found when you start talking to people about your genealogy, especially those who don't know or don't care about it, you get a dazed expression. When I unfolded this tree, about 2 by 3 feet, the dazed expression got more so and, then, suddenly they found a family name or a village name and I had hooked them; they were interested. They looked at me differently and it also got them talking.

This is what happened with the Dressels. They verified that old papers were thrown away by Otto and others, how some Sesselmanns moved to Stadtsteinach and how, in order to differentiate the various Sesselmann families, nicknames were used. Werner's family is "Eis Bier" (ice beer) while Otto's is something that sounds like "Schee-fer." No one knows what it means or how it is spelled.

I noted my great-great-grandmother Elisabeth Dressel was born in Deckenreuth #3 and I asked if they knew the location of that building. They pointed out their dining room window to a very old building that was being remodeled. I had found a second home where ancestors were born.

When we left the hotel that night to go to Werner's home, we were asked if we would not stay out too late. They had had a big wedding the day and night before (Saturday) and it did not break up until 5:00 a.m. that morning (Sunday). (It was the first time I had ever been given a curfew by a hotel. But we did make it back in time to enjoy a few more Kulmbach beers.) When we got to Werner's he did not look that happy that we were there, but it didn't take him long to start talking and telling us interesting stories. He is a *lastwagenfahrer* (lorry driver, as in truck driver). Unemployment is very

high in this area. Elke laid out a wonderful cold supper with more kinds of ham than I thought existed, various other meats and cheeses plus so many wonderful breads.

I had always thought that they lived in East Germany, but actually they live in West Germany about ten miles from where the infamous Wall was located. Werner said they would never forget when the Wall came down. They awoke to hear “those little awful Communist cars pockety-pocking down the road.” He said they were “invaded” by East Germans with their money, but no place to spend it at home. They bought everything in sight and emptied all the stores in all the area towns. This kept up for a month or so. The older woman who had tried to shoo us away was Elke’s mother who slowly worked her way into the kitchen and finally ended up sitting at the table with us. When the talk turned to the Wall and its coming down she started to call out every once in awhile “Reagan *Gut*” (Reagan Good).

Before we left Kulmbach we visited the Plassenburg Castle which hovers over the city. It was built about 1130 when Kulmbach was founded. We went primarily to see its Museum of German Pewter [tin] Figures. When they were young, Jim and his brother, Mark, made many models and dioramas with painted figures. In this museum, there were five floors of dioramas ranging in size from about eight inches to eighteen feet covering worldwide events or stories. The figures ranged from half an inch to several inches high and all were authentically painted. It was an unbelievable exhibit.

While there, I had one of my usual “only me” experiences. Before entering the tin figure museum portion of the castle, I decided to use the ladies room. While in there, the power went out but there was plenty of light from the window. When I tried to leave, I found the huge, thick, arched, wooden (think “castle”) door locked. I knew yelling for help would do no good with walls several feet thick. It took some time and a lot of pounding on that heavy door, but I was finally rescued by two very embarrassed and apologetic maintenance men. Seems everything went into lock down when the power went off.

We next visited a Manfred Sesselmann who was recommended to us by the Dressels as “someone working on the family history.” He owns a shoe store in the main square of Kulmbach as well as a specialty store on an adjacent street for making orthopedic shoes and devices. He looked exactly like my grandfather Malachias Jakob (James) except he had the red hair of Grand Uncle Andreas (Andrew). Upon seeing him Reinhard said, “We found another Sesselmann.” He had some genealogical material but not much. We exchanged information but, frankly, I felt he got the best of the deal. Some of the items I got from him will need further research on my part and we could find no connection between our families.

We also went to Bad Berneck to see Inemarie Amschler–Sesselmann. I had been referred to her by Bill Hickman. According to Bill and based on how she hyphenated her name, I thought she had married into the Sesselmann family. This was not true. She was a Sesselmann and related to Dr. Ernest’s line.

She was a very tiny, sprightly eighty-two-year-old who had homes in Bad Berneck (her late husband’s) and Bayreuth (her family’s). She alternated between the two saying, when she woke up in the morning, she never knew which house she’d be sleeping in that night. She insisted we delay our arrival until she had time to bake a cake. It was delicious and loaded with real whipped cream. There was the usual dish of extra whipped cream just in case the cake did not have enough. How I lost three pounds during this trip, I will never know. When I said I wanted to take a picture of her, she leaped up

running to the chair Jim was in, sat down on the arm and threw her arms around him. Initially, Jim looked like a deer caught in the headlights but soon he looked like he was just having fun with a favorite maiden aunt.

She believed she was descended from Bishop Friedrich and has a picture of her father and uncle standing by his statue. I have a copy. I was told by Bill Hickman that the Nazis destroyed the statue, but Inemarie said it was the Russians. Also, I have a picture of the rubble left after the statue was destroyed. We then headed back to Heilbronn to switch some of our clothes at Reinhard's house before going on to Aasen.

In Aasen, the relatives we were going to see were all Schnekenburgers: Reinhard's parents, Anton (Toni) and Rita, his Uncle Dr. Ferdinand and Aunt Eva, his Uncle Kurt and Aunt Erika, and his Aunt Else and her husband, Gregor Rothweiler. Dr. Ferdinand, the only one who could speak English, is not a medical doctor. His doctorate is in winegrowing agriculture and he worked at the Badischen Weinbauinstitut Freiburg (Wine Institute of Baden in Freiburg). During our trip to Kulmbach and as a result of numerous cell phone calls, we found out that the Aasen relatives were having a "dust up" about who would do what for us and when. Finally in the typical German way to organize and control matters, Reinhard told them what our schedule would be, who would do what, as well as when and how it would be paid for. They split the cost and refused any money from us for anything all the time we were in Aasen. It got to the point I was teasing Reinhard about his negotiating skills.

The hotel where we were staying in Aasen was Der Gasthof Pension Burg (The Inn Guesthouse Castle). When Kurt and Erika renovated the building in 1969, they removed the castle that was attached to the building at the time my great-great-grandfather Ferdinand Schnekenburger, a *Bäckermeister* (Master Baker) got permission in 1840 from the local council to also be a beer landlord. The inn-restaurant has been in the family ever since, and is now operated by Kurt and Erika's son, Frank. I was able to photograph a drawing of the original structure as well as an early photograph, though the castle portion is not that obvious. Although the restaurant portion of the operation is open only on weekends, they opened it for Jim and me. The rooms were typical of what you find in Swiss hotels.

The next morning we went to the farm of Reinhard's parents, Toni and Rita. Due to Toni's age and health problems, it is now primarily operated by Reinhard's brother, Ralf, but Toni enjoyed showing us all the modern equipment. Reinhard commented that Ralf was responsible for all the improvements which his father had fought but "now likes to play with them." During the tour of the farm, I got to pet a newborn calf. In the basement of their beautiful home, Rita was baking bread in a wood burning ceramic brick oven for sale to villagers.

When we entered any family's home all during our stay in Germany, bottles and glasses were immediately put out onto the dining room table. The bottles contained *wasser* (plain water), *sprudel* (sparkling mineral water which was either medium gassed or heavily gassed) and *saft* (fruit juices) such as apple or grape. You were encouraged to mix your own drink, combining the waters and juices to your own taste. As the only way I like sparkling water is with scotch, I opted for plain water or juice most of the time. But once, by mistake, I ended up with the heavily gassed mineral water. I thought my stomach was going to burst. Reinhard told us that his parents, after harvesting the apples on their farm for all the various types of canning, gather up the rest of the apples and take them to a mill. In exchange, they get back enough bottles (60) of *Apfelsaft* (apple juice) to last them for a year.

Around noon we went to the Gasthof to meet all the Schnekenburgers for lunch—and what a lunch—wiener schnitzel, spaetzle, French fries and salad. Dessert was to be later at Else's home. She was famous in the village for her Black Forest Cake.

Before the lunch, everyone wanted to see my Family Tree and the Family Group Sheets that I had brought with me. Dr. Ferdinand whipped out a map of the United States and said he wanted to see exactly where we all lived. It was a wonderful “family” time. Reinhard said we would go to the church and cemetery after lunch and before going to Else's home. I thought he meant just Jim and me but, no, everyone got up and trooped along with us.

Outside the church was a beautiful monument of a praying soldier from World War II. On the sides were lists of all the soldiers from Aasen who had died in the war. Number four on one of the lists was Rita's father, Herman Wiehl, who died October 5, 1941. Rita was five years old at the time. The inside of the church has changed little over the years except for the addition of an altar facing the congregation. Initially this altar was very simple but it has since been replaced by an ornate one to match the original, very elaborate altar. The paintings and statues have been meticulously maintained and are very beautiful. Dr. Ferdinand took the time to explain each and every item to us.

Toward the end of 2001 when I first started communicating by email with Reinhard, he sent me copies of the actual church records he found in Aasen for the birth of my great-grandmother Elisabetha Schnekenburger, the marriage of her parents and the Family Register for the parents. I had hoped to pick up some more of these records for other ancestors on this trip, but it was not to be. The rectory was closed, the priests had been moved around and nobody knew what had happened to the old books.

This was the first cemetery I wanted to see in Germany since I found out the recycling system they use. In twenty-five to thirty years after the last body has been put into a grave, the family must repurchase the plot and install a new monument. Once burials start again, if any bones are found they are put on top of the new casket. This is done due to the shortage of land. They are trying to encourage cremation. From pictures taken by Dr. Ernest, most of the monuments in Wartenfels had just a surname and an address like Schwand 3. With this system there would be no old monuments with pertinent information. I knew this cemetery would probably have a monument with names and dates as Reinhard's grandmother Frieda Buck Schneckenburger just died in 1993.

While there, Rita wandered off alone to pray at her daughter's grave. Gerda died an untimely death in 1993 at age thirty-two. I followed her and put my arm around her shoulder. She looked up at me and said, “*Danke*” (Thank you). I was later told no one ever did that to her. I felt like asking if anyone had ever tried.

While at the cemetery, we saw a three-part monument to the fifty-eight Aasen men and boys killed in World War II. One was a twelve-year-old boy who was standing behind a soldier. The bullet passed through the soldier and killed the boy. Dr. Ferdinand also told what he had witnessed himself as a boy just before the war ended. Aasen was occupied by the French, but they were Moroccans. Just as the war was ending a few of the French Moroccan soldiers went on a rampage throughout the village. They beat up people, wrecked homes and raped a number of women. When the “Amerikaners” came the next day and heard what had happened, Dr. Ferdinand said they rounded up the offenders, took them out into the countryside, made them dig their own graves and put up their own crosses before shooting them. “We liked the Amerikaners,” said Dr. Ferdinand, “they were so big and strong and helped us.”

Then the whole group went to Else's home where we were joined by the next generations of children and grandchildren. Else's Black Forest Cake was different and delicious. It was not that dark, heavy, sticky stuff we get so often here. It was a medium brown and light as a feather. Jim mentioned tasting just the hint of *kirsche wasser* (cherry liqueur) in the cake. Of course, there was real whipped cream galore. After that cake was demolished, Else brought out plum tortes.

She had also found a letter sent just before the war from one of my great aunts asking the head magistrate in town about a possible family inheritance. We all had a good laugh about that. Dr. Ferdinand read it in both German and English. When we finished it was about 4:00 p.m. Else wanted to know if we were coming back at 6:00 p.m. for a cold supper. We declined citing overeating.

That night Reinhard took us to a *Klinik* (clinic) in a nearby town. His father, Toni, for years played the accordion in a small band. With age and health problems he can no longer do that, but he still goes every other week to this Klinik to lead the in house patients in a sing along. When we were introduced as American relatives, we got a rousing round of applause. When we sat at Toni's table, I noticed he had a big glass of wine. On glancing around the room, I saw almost everyone had wine or beer. Then I saw the bar and the barmaid. Now this was my kind of clinic. (Wondered immediately if I could get a concession like this set up at McLean?) Even though we had booklets to help us sing along it was not easy, as the songs were all in German. However, the crowd enjoyed me singing one chorus of "Roll Out The Barrel" in English.

The next morning we had to start saying our goodbyes to Aasen and it took us until 3:00 p.m. to finish. Reinhard drove us up into the hills to overlook the town, check out the land still part of the family farm and stop at a small chapel tucked into the hills. We toured the farm again and enjoyed another huge lunch with Rita and Toni. Rita gave me a candle she had made with wild flowers from the area embedded in it. Dr. Ferdinand and Eva arrived for coffee and dessert and gave me a beautifully illustrated book, *Sudschwarzwald* (Southern Black Forest).

Next we stopped at Kurt and Erika's home where Kurt had a collection of old kitchen equipment from the original Gasthof. As a card table he was using an old round table that had been in the family since 1732, and that date was carved into the table. He also had a lot of pictures which, unfortunately, were not labeled. With Reinhard and Kurt's help we were able to identify some of the people and I took some pictures with my digital camera. All Catholic homes in that area had a huge cross depicting the crucifixion which was carried by a member of the family during certain religious and other holidays. Kurt had the original one from the Schnekenburger home (the Gasthof) on the wall in his front entrance hall where the stairs went down into the lower level. It took up two levels.

The last stop was at Else's home where Reinhard told me not to get out of the car. I suggested he keep the motor running. It was getting harder and harder to say goodbye to these wonderful people who kept thinking of more and more they could do for us.

Finally we headed back to Heilbronn for a final visit to the wine festival. I was again treated to my own comfortable chair by our wine barrel. We all had such a good time that we had to take a taxi home. I am not a big wine drinker but even I was not about to try to drive Reinhard's Mercedes-Benz through those narrow cobblestone streets with cars parked every which way and thousands of people leaving the festival.

The next day was just to take it easy in preparation for the flight home. We did some shopping in Donaueschingen, saw the Furstenberg castle, lakes and brewery and ended with a wonderful supper

in a restaurant high in the hills overlooking Heilbronn with Reinhard, Anja and Carlos.

To get back to the one immediate ancestor whose village I have not visited. He was born Philipp Kohlmayer on June 16, 1841, in Heinzenhausen.<sup>17</sup> I am pretty sure he is my great-grandfather, the father of Malachias Jakob (James) Sesselmann. Heinzenhausen is near Lauterecken between Heidelberg and Luxembourg. I can find no record of my great-grandmother Barbara Sesselmann ever marrying, but she had at least four children.

The only record of a father for her children is the church record for my grandfather. On the record of his birth, his mother is listed as single and his father is given as Friedrich Philipp Kohlmeier of Heinzenhausen with Jakob Kohlmaier as the sponsor.<sup>18</sup> However, the information on the father was added to the record on September 7, 1871, months after my grandfather was born on July 13, 1871. (Note the different spellings of the father's name.)

I found a record of Philipp Kohlmaier's death on March 20, 1871, in Aschaffenburg which is southeast of Frankfurt. That means he died four months before my grandfather was born. His Death Certificate was transferred to Heinzenhausen on April 2, 1874.<sup>19</sup> I also have a record of Barbara leaving Wurzburg, where she was working, to return to Schwand on April 19, 1871.<sup>20</sup> She always claimed she was the widow of Philipp Sesselmann. Probably confirming the connection is that my grandfather, on an application to Social Security in 1937, said his father was Philipp Sesselman and his mother was Barbara Kohlmeyer.<sup>21</sup> If I ever get back to Germany to visit my husband's family places, maybe I can stop in Heinzenhausen, too.

We can never thank Reinhard enough for all he did for us. After spending so many hours of so many days translating and interpreting for us, he frequently looked exhausted, but he claimed he was enjoying himself. He said it was a really different thing to be doing.

This trip was jam-packed wonderful. There was some disappointment that I could not find more old church records, but just being *there* was wonderful. You sure get strange feelings in your stomach and heart when you wander through places your ancestors lived. Jim and I returned home very tired but happy. It wasn't ruined even when I fell in Newark Airline Terminal and broke my nose.

*By Muriel Sesselmann Winzer*

## Notes

1. Certified copy of the "Registration of Births and Deaths in Ireland...1893. Births Registered in the District of Lusk in the Union of Balrothery in the County of Dublin," dated November 20, 1909.

2. Certified copy of "State of New York. Certificate and Record of Birth," No. 47244, dated September 12, 1940.

3. Certified copy of "Birth Register 1871," page 4, of the Wartenfels Catholic Parish from the Archivi Archidiocesis Bambergensis, Germany, dated May 19, 2005. The original in Old German script was translated for the author by Schubert Translations, 513 High Ridge Road, River Falls, WI, 54022. Hereafter cited as Schubert Translations.

4. Copy of the inside rear cover of the Bible of her mother Elisabetha Schnekenburger Philipp. Bible in possession of Ronald J. Seidel, one of Elisabetha's great-grandsons. Note: Both church and municipal records give December 30 as the date of birth but it may be the date of christening. I opted to take the word of the mother.

5. This procedure was submitted to *Ancestry.com* and included in the site's Quick Tip Jamboree on December 10, 2002.

6. Klaus Ronellenfitsch, comp., *Dielheimer Familienbuch, 1648-1900, mit Horrenberg, Balzfeld, Unterhof und Oberhof* (Hemsbach: Druck Partner Rübemann, 2000), #2856 on page 459.

7. Ibid.

8. Copy of Family Register page for Ferdinand and Agatha Gruninger Schnekenburger from the records of St. Blasius Church in Aasen. Copy of St. Blasius church record of Elisabetha's birth and christening. Schubert Translations.

9. Correspondence, February 2, 2004, from Wolfram Schubert, River Falls, WI, who still has family in the area and does translations from Old German for the author.

10. "The Origin of the Name Sesselmann" as translated and condensed by the late Dr. Ernest J. Sesselmann, a dentist from Muskegon, MI, in 1989 from "Historical Facts as Gathered by: Ludwig Sesselmann, from the Town of Lauingen on the River Donau." (Ludwig's research is proven from the church records in Schlund, Breitengussbach.)

11. William T. Hickman, *More Begats: Lineage of the Hickmans, Jacksons, Sesselmanns and Betzags*, 2nd ed. (Roanoke, VA: by the author, 1989). Note: Sesselman is spelled here with only one "n." It was an attempt to "Americanize" the name. Bill's line dropped the second "n" while my line kept it.

12. See note three. Also, copy of "Birth Register, 1843," page 48, for the Wartenfels Catholic Parish from the Archivi Archidiocesis Bambergensis, dated May 19, 2005. Schubert Translations.

13. Copy of certificate of baptism from St. Bartholomaeus Church, Wartenfels, dated March 6, 1939, sent by Werner Sesselmann to William T. Hickman, who forwarded a copy to author.

14. Ibid

15. Certified copy of the "Marriage Registry, 1830-1831," page 33, of the Wartenfels Catholic Parish from the Archivi Archidiocesis Bambergensis, dated May 19, 2005. Schubert Translations.

16. Ibid.

17. Copy of "Birth Certificate of Philipp Kohlmayer" found on Mormon Family History Center Film No. 0415848. Schubert Translations.

18. See note three.

19. Copy of "Transfer of Death Certificate of Philipp Kohlmaier" found on Mormon Family History Film No. 0415849. Schubert Translations.

20. Copy of "Application for Temporary Residency" in Wurzburg from November 18, 1868 to April 19, 1871. The copy was provided to the author by Bavarian researcher Reinhard Mayer of Trostberg, Germany. Schubert Translations.

21. Copy of form SS-5 "U.S. Social Security Act, Application For Account Number," by James Sesselman, September 7, 1937.

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## Resignation

The Board of Trustees of the Simsbury Free Library recently accepted with regret the resignation of Stephen E. Simon. Stephen served as the Director of the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library and as its genealogist for almost thirteen years.

## In Memory

Elizabeth Williams Cathles, an ardent volunteer at SGHRL, died on November 17, 2005, at the age of ninety-one. She and her late husband, Lawrence M. Cathles, had lived in West Simsbury for more than fifty years. They bought the land and oversaw the development of the homes on Highridge Road. Among her many accomplishments, Betsy was one of the first women to serve as a trustee of the Wadsworth Atheneum and she served on the Governor's Hospital Commission in the 1970s. She volunteered at the University of Hartford's Mortenson Library and at the Simsbury Visiting Nurse Association, where she was a board member. She also belonged to the Simsbury Garden Club and was a longtime member of the First Church of Christ, Simsbury.

Betsy kept a travel diary during a trip around the world that she made as a single woman in the company of a cousin just as World War II was beginning. In it she recorded her observations and experiences in places in Asia rarely visited by Westerners at that time and, in Europe, she wrote about many of the first signs of war. Her family recently had her diary privately published and donated a copy to our library, where it is available for all to enjoy.

Alix Paull Schultz, who had volunteered at SGHRL for about six years, died on January 28, 2006. When she wasn't serving as a guide at the Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington she could often be found at our library researching her own family or helping other patrons delve into their family history. Alix was also an active member of the DAR's Abigail Phelps Chapter in Simsbury, a volunteer at the Simsbury Historical Society and a member of St. Alban's Episcopal Church.

## John Case Book

An increase in the cost of printing has made it necessary to increase the price of the 290-page spiral bound paperback book *John Case and His Descendants* compiled by Ruth Cost Duncan. It now costs \$36.00, plus \$2.16 tax.

## Query

Interested in all lines of the John Case (d. 21 Feb. 1703/4, Simsbury) family. David Stielow, P.O. Box 10370, Burbank, CA 91510. E-mail: hollywoodland99@sbcglobal.net

## Editor's Note

Because this Winter newsletter is sixteen pages long (double the normal size), for budgetary reasons no Spring newsletter will be published in May. The Summer newsletter will be published as scheduled in August.

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## Some Recent Acquisitions

### **Books:**

*Canton Remembers: Incidents in Local History* edited by Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence S. Carlton

*Family Records or Genealogies of the First Settlers of Passaic Valley (And Vicinity)* by John Littell (purchased with a donation from Charle Smith)

*Fifty is Nifty: A History of the Simsbury Auxiliary of The Village For Families & Children, Second Chance Thrift Shop, on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Auxiliary in 2005* by Mary Lou Patrina (donated by the author)

*Fortieth Anniversary of Hop Meadow Country Club, Simsbury Connecticut* by Bob Griffin, Bert Knust, Ed Lindeman and Sue Ludorf (donated by Bob Ellis)

*Gee Family Tree: Charles<sup>1</sup> and Hañah From the Colonial Era to the Year 2000, An Expansion and Update of The Kin of Dr. Ned Gee, Lunenburg County, Virginia....* by Marian S. Kessler and Garnette S. Teass (donated by Garnette S. Teass)

*History of St. Joseph County, Michigan, with Illustrations Descriptive of its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Manufactories....* published by L. H. Everts & Co. (donated by Richard Lawrence in memory of Roy Lawrence)

*History of The Simsbury Copper Mines: Rendered in Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements For the Degree of Masters Of Arts, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, June, 1928* by Creel Richardson (donated by Betty Guinan, East Granby Public Library History Room)

*Shrewsbury, Vermont: Our Town As It Was* by Dawn D. Hance (donated by Robert Perry)

*World Travels of Frances Elizabeth Williams, 1938-1939* by Elizabeth Williams Cathles (donated by Peg Donohue and the Cathles family)

### **Microfilm:**

*Hale Collection of Connecticut Vital Records: Surname Index to Headstone Inscriptions and Newspaper Death Notices, Web through Zywika* (12 reels)

You are cordially invited to hear Janet Pestey speak on  
“The Many Computer Sites Available For Researching Your Family Tree”  
At the library on Saturday, May 6, at 11:00 a.m.  
Free and open to all.  
Refreshments will be served.

**SIMSBURY MARRIAGES**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>
Mar. 3, 1880	Alfred Dorman	66		Burlington, Ct.
	Martha A. Pittunger	44		Mass.
May 2, 1880	Frank L. Reed	29		Granby, Ct.
	Lucia M. Bacon	18		Granby, Ct.
Apr. 28, 1880	George H. Barnard	22		Bloomfield, Ct
	Julia E. Goodwin	25		Bloomfield, Ct
May 23, 1880	Walter G. Belding	24		East Douglas, Mass.
	Augusta Hodge	18		East Douglas, Mass.
Jun. 9, 1880	Levi W.D. Wicks	24		Huntington, Mass.
	Nellie G. Howard	17		West Hampton, Mass.
Jun. 3, 1880	William H. Greely	47		Portland, Me.
	Hannah B. McLean	32		Simsbury, Ct.
Aug. 12, 1880	John P. Mark	32		Tolland, Ct.
	Lizzie M. Davis	24		Bellows Falls, Mass.
Aug. 25, 1880	Daniel W. Sizer	31		Springfield, Mass.
	Hattie A. Risederf	20		Simsbury, Ct.
Sep. 14, 1880	Charles B. Holcomb	37		Granby, Ct.
	Sarah L. Munson	23		Hamilton, N.Y.
Oct. 6, 1880	Eugene Wakefield	25		Norfolk, Ct.
	Selah (?) B. Case	20		Kansas
Oct. 3, 1880	George W. Fletcher	21		Canton, Ct.
	Nellie Wilcox	19		Simsbury, Ct.
Feb. 25, 1880	Rufus R. (?) Bond			Not Given
	Harriet A. Eno			Simsbury, Ct.
Jan. 18, 1881	Leman H. Traver	30		Clifton, N. York
	Ella H. Stancliff	26		Barkhamsted, Conn.
Mar. 10, 1881	Charles J. Graves	19		Lebanon, Ct.
	Hester A. Shaw	20		Westchester County, NY
Mar. 2, 1881	John Shaw	55		England
	Anna Greenshaw	62		England
Mar. 5, 1881	James McBride	26		Ireland
	Sarah Hunt	25		Ireland

This continuing series on Simsbury's early marriage records has been copied by Stephen E. Simon from microfilmed records at the Connecticut State Library.

## Spring Talk

### The Many Computer Sites Available For Researching Your Family Tree

Janet Pestey, Speaker

Janet Pestey is a retired educator and a member of the Connecticut Society of Genealogists. She volunteers at the Woodbridge Family History Center and belongs to a number of groups related to genealogy. She has taught family research courses for Wallingford Adult Education, ECONN Outreach, Manchester Community College and Hamden Adult Education and she has been Program Co-chair of all-day genealogy seminars.

She often speaks on Irish, German and Slovak research and on researching in Connecticut.

Saturday, May 6, 2006

11:00 a.m.

At the Library

FREE AND OPEN TO ALL

Refreshments will be served.

FIRST CLASS

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Simsbury, CT 06070

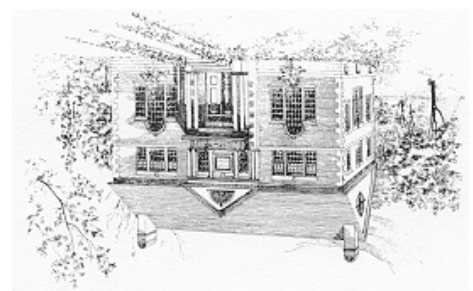
860 658-5382

E-mail: [genhist93@hotmail.com](mailto:genhist93@hotmail.com)

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Please call before coming to verify hours.

Mary Jane Springman, Editor



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**An Address Given By  
Lina F. Wagner, Historian  
September 15, 2003**