

Wenstrup – Wisendorphe 'Saxon Rule and Charlemagne' 500 – 1000 AD

Thus it was that the Wenstrup farms were to come into existence at the beginning of the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages being a time labeled by historians from the 5th century (The fall of the Roman Empire) to the 15th century (The rise of national monarchies), during which historians propose less human advancement was ongoing.

From the 4th to the 8th century, the Wenstrup farms would have been part of the Saxon empire. Saxon religion at this time was one of pagan worship of gods and goddesses. Places and names were often named with prefixes and / or suffixes referring to these gods. Saxon villages beginning with Wednes, Wodnes, and Woodnes are known to come from the war god Woden.

Unlike other Germanic tribes, the Saxons were divided into a number of independent bodies under different chiefs, in times of war the bodies would come together to elect a Duke. The name of the tribe Saxons derives from one of their ancient weapons, a stone knife called a Sax.



4. Early 5th century Saxon farm reconstructed on site of known Saxon settlement.

The Saxons during this time were divided into 4 subregions: Westphalia, between the Rhine and Weser rivers within which the Wenstrup farms existed, the Engern which was the land in the Weser river valley on both sides of the river, the Eastphalians between the Weser and the Elbe rivers, and the Transalbingians in the present day Holstein area. The Holstein area being the land north of the Elbe river on the Jutland peninsula where today is Denmark. The Saxon peoples occupied the lands encompassing the entire coast of Germany and as previously stated in the 5th or 6th century crossed the Baltic and settled in Britain. They were known as a rugged people for their ability to make a living

in a harsh environment, that of northern Europe along the Baltic coast. Many including Charlemagne considered the Saxons an especially war-like and ferocious group of people.

As the Saxons continued their western expansion at the end of the 5th beginning of the 6th century, they came into a vicious conflict with the Frankish empire when they reached the Rhine river. The Frankish empire during this time was able to bring all of the Germanic tribes into the ways of Christianity except the Saxons. From the 6th century for more than a hundred years there was intermittent warfare between the Franks and the Saxons. During this time many of the Saxon descendents who had moved to England and adopted Christianity, came back to the Saxon empire as Anglo-Saxon missionaries and tried to convert the Saxon tribes to Christianity. The names of some of these missionaries who gave their lives in this cause were St. Suitbert, St. Egnert, St. Lebuin, and St. Bonifacius.



5. Map of Europe at the end of the 7th century showing the various empires and regions of the time.

At the end of the 8th century Charlemagne (b742 – d814) and the Frankish empire subdued the Saxons in most of Northern Germany. From 772 AD to 804 AD Charlemagne battled the Saxons in the name of Christianity in what is known as the Saxon wars. By the year 800 the area around the Wenstrup farms had been subdued enough that Charlemagne established a bishopric in the town of Osnabruck. The established diocese of Osnabruck included the Damme mountain region and the Wenstrup farms. The records of the bishop of Osnabruck would provide many of the documented facts about the Wenstrup farms over the next 1000 years.

After the defeat of the Saxon tribes by Charlemagne, the Westphalia region of northern Germany came under the rule of the Frankish empire. This period of rule in the Frankish empire was known as the Carolingian period after Charles Martel. Charlemagne is associated with the peak of the Carolingian period. The Carolingian dynasty ruled from the middle of the 8th century to the beginning of the 10th century.

Upon his death in the year 814, Charlemagne was buried in the Aachen Cathedral of his name, and succeeded by his only surviving legitimate son Louis the Pious. The Aachen Cathedral often known as the Imperial Cathedral is the oldest cathedral in northern Europe. Construction was begun on the Palatine chapel in 786 at the behest of Charlemagne.

During his lifetime, Charlemagne collected a number of religious relics and put them on display in his Cathedral. The Aachen Cathedral and the religious relics acquired and brought to the cathedral treasury make Aachen the third most important city in Christendom after Jerusalem and Rome. The four major relics on display at the Aachen Cathedral are:

- 1) the cloak of the blessed virgin
- 2) the swaddling cloth of the infant Jesus
- 3) the loin cloth worn by Jesus on the cross
- 4) the cloth on which lay the head of John the Baptist after his beheading



6. *The Aachen Cathedral in Aachen Germany, the seat and burial place of Charlemagne.*

As stated Aachen became one of the most important cities in all the Christian world and as such was a seat of power of the Catholic faith. Swarms of pilgrims from throughout Germany would travel to Aachen to view the sacred relics. By the middle of the 14th century there were so many across Germany and the rest of Europe making the trek to Aachen that it became necessary to limit the exposure of the relics to the faithful. From then until today the relics have been displayed every 7th year for 14 days from the 7th day of the 7th month. The next showings will be July 7th – 21st 2007, and 2014. It can be surmised that the proximity of the Wenstrup farms to this important Catholic site helped develop the family's Catholic faith and in fact would in future years be a big reason that this part of Germany maintained its Catholic heritage during the Protestant revolution.



7. Map showing the relative locations within Germany of the Wenstrup farms, the Cloister Corvey, and Aachen.

It would also be during this time that a cloister and abbey were built in Westphalia Germany near the current day town of Corvey. This Cloister Corvey would play an important role in the history of the Wenstrup family.



8. *Shown above is the abbey at the Cloister Corvey on the Weser River. The original structure was begun in the year 834AD and modifications were made through the 12th century.*

The Cloister Corvey is located about 2km Northwest of Höxter and is composed of the Castle complex and Abbey of Corvey. It is situated along the Weser river, the river from which Carl Friedrich Wenstrup would emigrate Germany in 1892; sailing out of Bremerhaven up the Weser river and out to the Atlantic. The Abbey of Corvey is the most distinguished Benedictine abbey in Northern Germany. It was founded in 822 by Ludwig the Pious and secularised in 1803 - it now belongs to the Duke of Ratibor. Of the old abbey church, the carolingian west work [873-885] survives in its original state from the abbey which would have recorded the Wisendorphe estate in the early 11th century. The Abbey at the Cloister Corvey is the oldest building of the early medieval period in Westphalia, Northern Germany.



9. *Shown above is the entrance to the Cloister Corvey on the Weser River.*