

The Wenstrup Family and Heuerleuten

Following the 30 years war during the 16th century a system by which only the oldest son would inherit the family farm began. This was done in large part to avoid the continual breakdown of farmland into smaller and smaller parts that would eventually be unable to sustain themselves profitably. Younger sons were encouraged to enter the religious life, find work in an occupation other than farming, or basically to rent a portion of farmland from a large landed farm to work with a portion of the produce owed to the landed owner. In some cases the land could be purchased from the original landed farm but these were significantly smaller farm tracts than traditional landed owners had. In Germany the term "Heuer Mann" was given to descendents from landed farmers that were not the oldest son, and did not enter the religious life, but rather carved out an existence without land of their own. Descendents of the Wenstrup family such as Joes Bernard and Johannes Bernardus would have been classified into this system; although it appears at some point they were able to purchase a small farming tract. This tract may have come perhaps from one of the original landed Wenstrup owners of this third southern farm, or perhaps by simply putting into cultivation a tract of land previously not being used.

While the historical origin of the inheriting with regards to land names go back into the time of the Saxons around the middle of the first millennium (500AD). The proprietors of that time, formed through full and half heirs, the single class of the country's population. The Saxon hierarchy later banned the division of farms and in essence dictated therewith the population far into the Middle Ages. Sons not inheriting the farm were directed toward the religious life or other non-landed occupation often in service to the hierarchy or church.

Later in the high Middle Ages, the ban on the separation of the farm were relaxed in order to help with increasing the level of agriculture and harvests. In the area of Wenstrup, this may well have been what occurred in the case of the formation of the smaller farm Bultmann (today B. Dorenkamp) as a split from the farm which would later become Jans-Wenstrup.

The Heuerling System as it existed during the time that led to a large emigration of German peoples including several Wenstrup families from the Westphalia and Hannover regions of Germany had its historical beginnings in the 16th and 17th Century. The specific factor which prompted it can be found in the existing rights of inheritance, such as it prevailed the Germanic regions through the ages, making the oldest son the sole heir. The younger sons were due a "Child's portion".

Of course, a younger son conceivably could acquire his own piece of farmland through a suitable "In-Marriage". Additionally, common lands (within an Estate) which until now had lain fallow were now put under cultivation and new, basic, primitive, living quarters erected. Mostly, though the reality seemed different, many of the younger sons faced a dismal future as subservient co-workers on the older brother's estate. Not all

accepted this fate gladly. Sometimes one in this position would take permanent leave of their family and villagers and headed for work in the city; some enlisted in the military to make that a career.

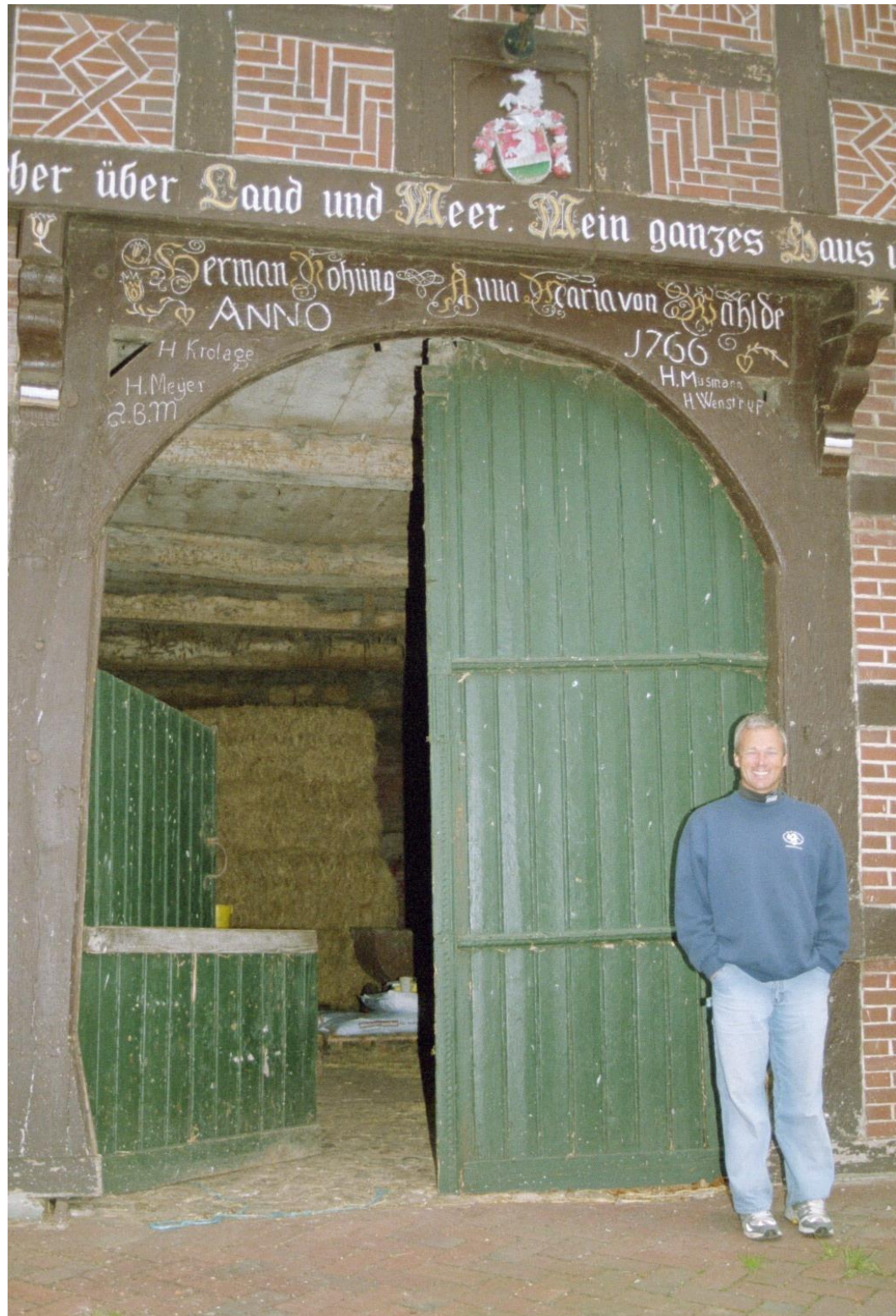
The period of religious upheaval, following the Reformation, and the 'Thirty Year War' (1618 – 1648) served to make substantial changes in the village social structure. Perhaps as a result of these unsettled times the younger farmers' sons would often not accept their fate without some protest. They made an effort to lead an independent life style.

At the same time the farmers themselves were among the hardest hit populace following the 'Thirty Year War'. Their lands had been devastated, their cattle stolen, their homes plundered. The demands for tax revenues on part of the Sovereign to be extracted from the farmers rose constantly, and with that, the indebtedness of the farmers. Faced with adversity, the possibility of a fixed income from farm lease arrangements, and the discontinuance of the burdensome inheritance tax, held a certain appeal. The introduction of the Heuerleute system could alleviate the problems of both sides, the farmers as well as the departing farm sons. The farmer would make a portion of his land available, for which he could expect a suitable fee, with a number of hands available to assist in his operations.

The term "Heuer Mann" well describes the relationship as the Platt Deutsch "Heuer" or "Hür" implies lease or rent.

It is known that some of the Wenstrup family found occupation in both the skilled labor trade (building houses, barns, etc.) and as Heuer Mann operating a small farm. There are farm buildings on other family farms in the Neuenkirchen area that contain the name Wenstrup in their doorways. A common practice among landed farm owners was to put the owning family name on the top of the doorway and the builders of the premises would also sign their names below the owning family. This was especially true on the main building, which typically acted as primary residence and barn. Generally two thirds of the building was used to house the animals and one third to house the family. In many of these structures there was not even a wall dividing the two sections of the building such that heat from the fireplace could benefit both the animals and the family.

In later years after the 17th century when International travel become more feasible, it would be the plight of the Heuerleuten in the Osnabruck area that would lead to a very large emigration from Germany. Well over 90,000 Germans would leave the Osnabruck region in the period between 1830 and 1890 in order to seek a better life in the new world.



18. David Wenstrup in front of a barn on the Wahlde farm built near the Wenstrup farms by an H. (probably Herman) Wenstrup in 1766. Herman would have been a Heuermann (picture taken Oct. 2004).

In most ways the Heuerleuten of 17th century Germany, especially in this area of Hannover and Westphalia where the Wenstrup farms existed, were like the sharecroppers of the 18th and 19th century United States. That is to say they were primarily skilled in farming and trades associated with maintaining farms (i.e. carpenters, etc.). The Heuerleuten typically owned neither house nor land on which they lived, but rather rented an outbuilding and a small piece of land (typically less than 2 hectares) from the landed owner. For this he paid rent and was obliged to work, often without cash remuneration, for the landed owner.

Migratory Work in Holland:

An additional method by which the Heuerleuten would subsidize their existence was through migratory seasonal work. In Holland, it came as a result of the economic upswing after the long war against the Spaniards (1567-1609), that a labor force deficiency existed in the number of men needed to appropriately harvest the agriculture of the area. Thus already prior to the 30 year war, German men were traveling to Holland for migrant farm work during harvest and planting seasons especially; but also less seasonal work including lawn and peat work as well as dock and ship work.

Thus many thousand young willing to work men hiked annually out of the northwestern regions of Germany including Westphalia and the Osnabruck region in the name of finding work, clothing and nourishment into the Dutch zones by the North Sea. At the city of Neuenkirchen Vörden in the year 1806, when this phenomenon had already past its high point, there were still recorded between 224 and 230 people making this trek for work in that year. The work in the lawn and peat regions was a long arduous day lasting from sunrise to sunset.

As a result of the heavy work, the bad lodging in makeshift buildings as well as sheds and peat cottages, and the deficient nourishment obtained, many young German men were subjected to early aging and other physical damages. Long sickness and death were too often the result of these Holland treks.

The deceased teacher Aloys Tepe looked through indices to record the deaths of Catholics and protestants from Neuenkirchen region that died in these Holland treks. Of the 65 deaths during a 300 year period, ranging in date from 1575 to the last in 1866, there were many from the area of Wenstrup that died in Holland.

Brockmann, Gerdt - born on Sept 29, 1686, son of Herman Brockmann and Catharina Bultmann, died in July 1711 in Holland (24 years old).

Grundinck, Herman Henrich - a youngster of 19 years, died shortly after his return from Holland.

Messmann, Henrich - born Dec 29, 1655, son of Gerdt Messmann and Thabeke Hoffmann, married on July 25, 1683 to Elsche Baumschluter. Died on July 18, 1693 of a sickness after returning from the Friesland.

Theoder Wanstroth - 40 years old, born the son of Arendt Wanstroth and Taubke Hoffman, married on Feb 10, 1744 to Anna Catharina Bultmann. Theoder left behind 3

children (with a 4th being born after his death). He died on July 11, 1752 in Schullinggoet in Holland.

Westendorf, Johann henrich - born on November 30, 1786, the son of Herman Henrich Westendorf and Catharina Maria Renneker. Married since August 18, 1809 to Maria Catharina Moller. Johann was a farmer in the region of Nellinghof, he died on the return out of Holland, having to stop in Schwagstorf on the way because of a high fever, he died shortly after that on July 31, 1826.

Cottage Industries:

In addition to the treks to Holland to subsequent their income, farmers also worked looms in their homes. Typically in each farmers house one could find a loom, that the father or grandfather in his leisure time would work producing cloth, while the woman and the children would stay busy spinning the yarn. The produced linen were brought to a "Legge" or cloth market in Neuenkirchen and Damme, for sale. The "Leggemester" had the task of reviewing the finished piece to determine the prescribed quality and then to stamp it as such for sale.

In later years with the coming of the mechanical loom and the industrial manufacture of linen, the importance of the individual farm looms lost their importance because they could no longer bring enough yield for income. Also during this time came about the division of the remaining common land (known as the Markenteilung) around the farms. Where once the Heuerleute could gather wood and peat, now the landed farmers would use the land for cattle meadows. The division of the Markenteilung (1817-1824) broke yet the last support leg of the existence of the Heuerleute after already the work in Holland had slowed and the loss of income from the mechanization of the textile industry had occurred. The single hope now for the Heuerleute existed in the emigration to North America.