

I. FROM EUROPE TO AMERICA

The origins of the Kerstetter family date back at least four centuries to the region of Germany southeast of Heidelberg known as the Northern Kraichgau.¹ Kerstetters were living in the area before the end of the 16th century and may have been there in previous centuries. No one knows where they came from originally.

Siebmacher's *Wappelbuch*, the exhaustive and definitive work on Germanic heraldry, reports that a family named Kirchstetter was part of the nobility in Vienna from the Middle Ages. An early entry from the year 1178 refers to an Udalrich de Chirchstetter as witness to a donation to the church. Later entries for von Kirchstetter and Kirchstetter continue through 1859 and suggest the family moved in court circles and was associated with law, the University of Vienna and perhaps the military. A small community named Kirchstetten is located in Austria southwest of Linz.²

Kerstetters in the Northern Kraichgau, by contrast, were farmers and lived ordinary lives. Some members of the family lived in Obergimpern, a village not far from the Neckar River in an area that is largely Lutheran.

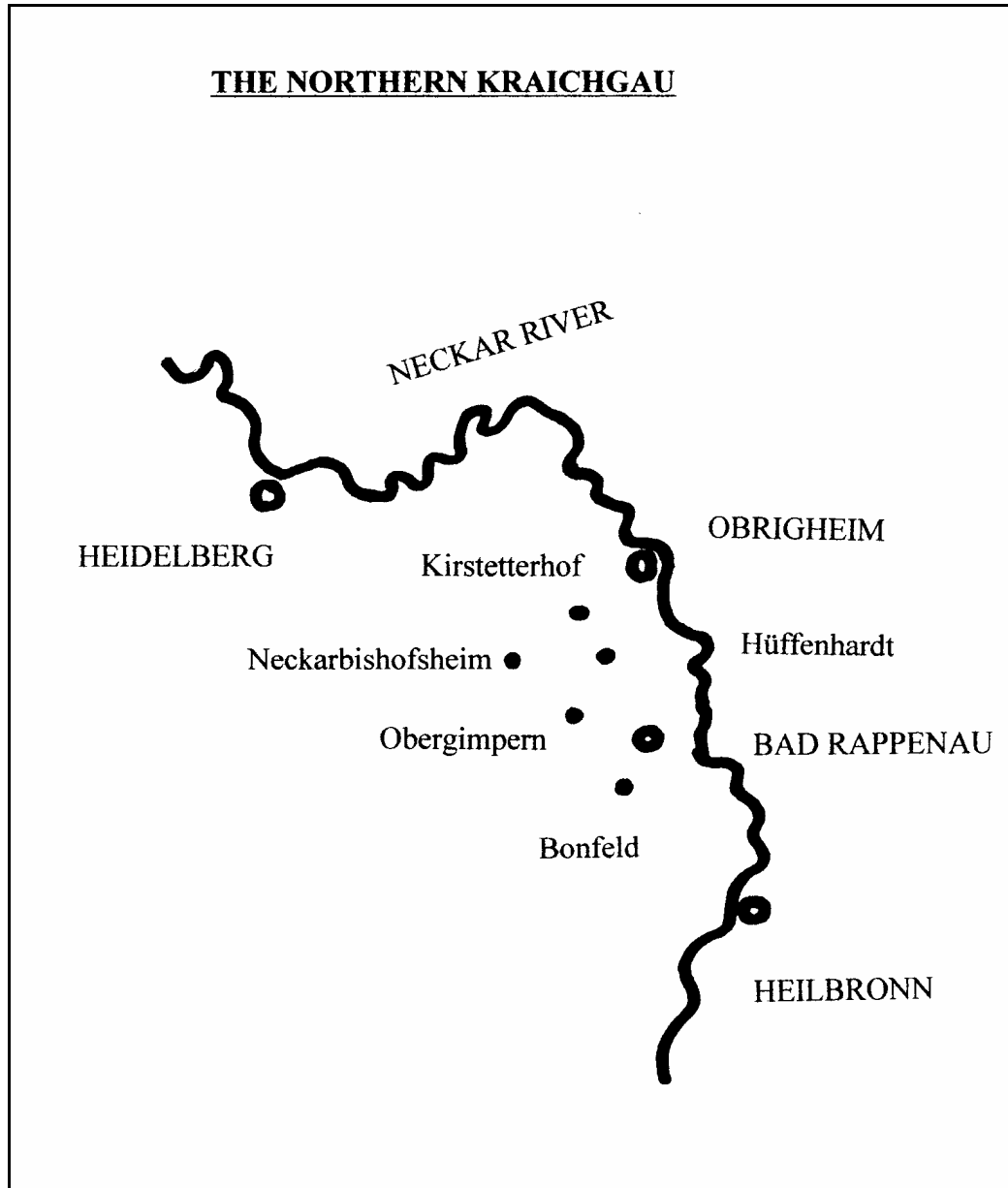
Other Kerstetters lived in the community of Bad Rappenau southeast of Obergimpern or in the community of Hüffenhardt northeast of Obergimpern. North of Hüffenhardt on Highway K3942 is the tiny farmstead of Kirstetterhof or Kirstätterhof. Visitors to Kirstetterhof in the 1990s found only an unoccupied farm house and farm storage sheds.³

Still further north and east along Highway K3942 is the town of Obrigheim on the banks of the Neckar. The highway is renamed Kirstetter Strasse when it gets to Obrigheim and becomes a local thoroughfare.

Fragmentary records from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries show five generations of one Kerstetter line in the Northern Kraichgau through Joh. Martin Kirstätter, who left the region with his bride in 1727 for Pennsylvania.⁴

- Wolff Kurstetter and his wife Anna were born about 1575.
- Wolflein Kurstetter was born about 1600. His wife's name was Anna.
- Wolf Kirstetter was born in Obergimpern in 1618 or 1625. His wife's name was Magdalena.
- Hans Leonhardt Kirstetter was born in Obergimpern on Nov. 28, 1668 and married in 1696. His wife's name was Anna Ursula.
- Joh. Martin Kirstätter was born in Obergimpern and baptized on Sept. 5 or 15, 1697. He married Maria Dorothea Frey of nearby Bonfeld on April 29, 1727, in the Lutheran church in Neckarbischofsheim. Maria Dorothea was the

daughter of Joh. Martin Frey and Anna Apollonia Junger. The church marriage record stated specifically that the couple was going to Pennsylvania. It also described Martin as a farmhand.⁵



Martin and Dorothea were among the 300 “Palatinates” who arrived in Philadelphia in September 1727 aboard the ship Molly (possibly Malley or Molley) from Rotterdam and Deal, an English port just north of Dover.⁶

Pennsylvania was established by William Penn as a haven from religious persecution. Penn recruited immigrants in Germany, and roughly one-third of the early settlers of Pennsylvania were German.

Germany had been devastated during the Thirty Years' War that ended in 1648. The Palatinate was rebuilt, only to be devastated again by the French under Louis XIV. The state also became a center of religious conflict and oppression of Protestants under its Catholic elector John William in the early years of the 18th century.⁷

Some Palatines fled to England in 1709 and 1710 and eventually resettled in the New World. The great migration directly from the Palatinate to Pennsylvania began about 1717 and lasted several decades.

Getting to North America in those early years was dangerous as well as thoroughly disagreeable. Immigrants typically started out on boats down the Neckar River from Heilbronn and then down the Rhine to Rotterdam. The trip down the Rhine lasted four to six weeks and involved delay after delay at 26 different customs houses on route. Immigrants boarded ships at Rotterdam and normally went to an English port before setting out across the Atlantic. The ocean crossing took seven to 12 weeks depending on the winds.

Gottlieb Mittelberger described the hardships suffered during a crossing in 1750. Passengers were packed into steerage like herrings without proper food and water and were ravaged by disease. Mittelberger said 32 children died on his ship, and even that wasn't the worst of the horror.⁸

One day, just as we had a heavy gale, a woman in our ship, who was to give birth and could not under the circumstances of the storm, was pushed through the porthole and dropped into the sea, because she was in the rear of the ship and could not be brought forward.

Christopher Sauer, publisher of a German-language newspaper in Germantown, Pennsylvania, complained to the governor of the colony in 1755 of the long-standing mistreatment of German passengers by captains and crews.

Captains sometimes left behind the chests of passengers or shipped them on different vessels, he told the governor.⁹

The poor people depended upon their chests, in which they had some provisions, such as they were used to, viz: dried apples, pears, plums, mustard, medicines, vinegar, brandy, gammons, butter, clothing, such as shirts and other necessary linens, and some of them had money and what they brought with them, and when their chests were left behind, or shipped in other vessels, they suffered for want of food - and when there was not a sufficiency of provision laid in for passengers, they famished and died - when they arrived alive, they had no money to buy bread, or any thing to sell of their spare clothes - neither had they clothes so as to change linens, &c.; they were not able to keep themselves clean, and free of vermin.

Sauers also said there were daily complains for years on end of crew members breaking open chests and stealing the valuables inside.

ENDNOTES

1. The Northern Kraichgau now is part of the state of Baden-Württemberg.
2. Information about the *Wappelbuch* was first provided by Dr. Gregory K. Castetter of Grove City, Ohio. All but five of the more than 100 volumes now are available in the original German on Ancestry.com.

Ancestry.com says the name Kerstetter is an alternate form for Kirchstetter and refers to someone from Kirchstetten in Austria or Kirchstätt. The link to Kirchstätt seems unlikely. The small Austrian community of Kirchstätt is just outside Obertrum am See. The German community of Kirchstätt is east of Munich and north of the Lake Chiemsee and has only a few houses or farms.

3. Information from Ruth Wood of Buckeye, Arizona. Despite its tiny size and lack of residents, Kirstetterhof appears in Google Maps and is the only named site along that part of the highway.
4. Early records of the family in Europe were provided by Carleton L. Weidemeyer of Clearwater, Florida. The individual records can also be found in the International Genealogical Index (IGI) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.
5. Annette Kunselman Burgert, *Eighteenth Century Emigrants from German-Speaking Lands to North America. Vol. I: The Northern Kraichgau.*

Dorothea's parents were listed on the Fisher: Myers: Haney: Horigan & Related Family Genealogy web site at www.kwaker.com.

Neckerbischofsheim, Obergimern, Bonfeld and Bad Rappenau all are on or near Highway L549. Presumably, the highway was built over roads that dated back to the 17th century or earlier. A early sketch of Neckerbischofsheim on page 32 of Burgert's text shows a walled city of very modest size - several dozen homes at best.

6. *Pennsylvania German Pioneers* lists a Martine Kearstuter as a member of the group. The name is spelled Martin Kearstucker in the minutes of the Provincial Council. Both references are contained in the *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, edited by P. William Filby.
7. Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1648-1840.*

8. *Gottlieb Mittelberger's Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 and Return to Germany in the Year 1754* is quoted in *Pennsylvania German Pioneers* by Ralph Beaver Strassburger and William John Hinke.
9. I. D. Rupp, compiler, *History and Topography of Northumberland, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Centre, Union, Columbia, Juniata and Clinton counties, Pa.*, pp. 55-58.