

# The German Migrations to Volhynia

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## Introduction

It is often very difficult to find where your family originated in Germany prior to traveling to Volhynia. There are several reasons why this problem occurs:

- The records currently available for Volhynia are limited.
- The death records often lack details like birthplace and date of birth.
- The marriage records of the bride and groom often lack details like birthplace, parent's names, and date of birth.
- There are no formal immigration records available in Volhynia.
- Such information is also lacking for records from other areas of Russian Occupied Poland.
- Our ancestors often migrated over a period of generations and a number of regions.

However, the pattern of migrations from the German states into areas of Prussian controlled Poland are fairly well known and there are some records available. Also why these moves were made are often well known and will be detailed as we go.

What I will try to do with this paper is to briefly detail the major small migrations into eastern Europe. In the case of each migration I can provide some links that provided the family names involved in the migration and where they had settled at crucial dates like 1772 and 1794.

Additionally I will provide a brief history of each destination area and maps to give you a general idea where these areas of migration were. In multistep migration to Volhynia the maps will also aid you in where they stopped along the way. The story starts about 1600.

### The state of Germany prior to 1700

Germany was not a unified state in 1600. It was a collection of hundreds of small states that were perpetually at war with each other. The introduction of Protestantism aggravated these already complex wars. The worst of these wars was the Thirty Years War (1618 to 1648) that devastated entire regions of Germany, resulting in high mortality from war, hunger and disease. Campaigning armies funded themselves by looting or by exacting contributions from the inhabitants of occupied territories thus imposing severe hardships on the populace. Finally, the exhausted combatants negotiated the [Peace of Westphalia](#) (1648). The overall reduction of population in the German states was typically 25% to 40%.

Following the war, there was much to do to restore physical and social infrastructure. The post war environment also provided the opportunity to consolidate the states into bigger states. Two of the most successful at rebuilding and expanding were Prussia and Saxony. This expansion

particularly into Slavic lands required moving German settlers to the new lands. Ultimately that led our ancestors to Volhynia.

Note: This story is told with the use of maps. The main section is about the migrations of the German people into Eastern Europe from 1700 onward and why they moved and where. In telling that story, I make reference to where they came from and where they went. I show these region names in **bold** in the text. On the included map, you will see those regions names in **bold and surrounded by a red box**. The appendix is a general discussion of what was going on in each of those regions at the crucial time so that you can read more about each of the regions.

In most of the regions there are online aids to tell you some of the family names used and in what village these families lived. I try to provide these links so you can click and take a look for your family name. Each link provides only a few details. So it tells you where to look but not what is there.

## The Migrations

### Saxony's Involvement in Migrations

Augustus the Strong was born in Dresden on 12 May 1670, the younger son of the Elector /King of Saxony Johann Georg III. As the second son, Augustus had no expectation of inheriting the throne of Saxony. Augustus's older brother, Johann Georg IV, assumed the post after the death of their father on 12 September 1691. On 27 April 1694, Johann Georg died without legitimate issue and Augustus became Elector/King of Saxony, and crowned as Friedrich Augustus I. Augustus married Kristiane Eberhardine of Brandenburg-Bayreuth on 20 January 1693. They had only one son; he would later be crowned as Friedrich Augustus II (1696–1763).

Augustus the Strong was additionally crowned as Augustus II, King of Poland in 1697 with the backing of Imperial Russia and Austria. Augustus formed an alliance with Denmark's Friedrich IV and Russia's Peter I to strip Sweden's young King Charles XII (Augustus' cousin) of his possessions; this is known as the Great Northern War. Northern Poland was the battleground; a third of the population died and much of the infrastructure was destroyed.

Augustus died at Warsaw in 1733. Augustus's son, Friedrich Augustus II of Saxony, succeeded Augustus to the Polish throne as Augustus III of Poland and serve there until 1763.

**A common time for migration was after the Great Northern War (1721).** Saxony was home to both German speakers and the Slavic Wendish (now known as Sorbish) speakers so people often spoke both languages. As noted above, one third of the people in northern Poland died in the Great Northern War so there were opportunities for people from Saxony (and their Wendish was easily understood by speakers of Polish and Kascubian). **Many people from Saxony migrated in the 1720's.** These immigrants from **Saxony** start to appear in the church books of **Pomerania** and what became **West Prussia** in the 1720's. Depending on where they migrated to, the migrants had either Friedrich the Great or Augustus III King of Poland and Saxony as their King and protector.

The calls went out in 1754 for people to come to Poland and “homestead” or work on estates. Friedrich the Great of Prussia had initiated this campaign and underwrote some of the costs of moving. **Many people from Saxony also migrated around 1754.**

## Prussia’s Involvement in Migrations

As noted earlier, the Great Northern War (1700–1721) ravaged **Pomerania** and other parts of modern northern Poland. Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm I began rebuilding Western Pomerania as early as 1718. The 1717/19 Hufenklassifikation (census) for Pomerania is available at (<http://pommerscher-greif.de/hufen/>) so you can see if there were already families with your surname in Pomerania. The latter website provides the names and villages of people like farmers in Pomerania that could be taxed by the Prussians. It does not include nobility and the landless peasants working on their estates.

Programs were devised for financial aid to rebuild houses. Vacant residential areas were granted rent free to those willing to erect buildings and farm the land. The Prussian administration also began to develop the swamp land and tame the Oder River delta in Pomerania gained from Sweden in the Great Northern War. The swamps were settled with colonists from the Low Countries beginning in 1718. The Oder River is the border between today’s Germany and today’s Poland.

Friedrich Wilhelm I’s son, Friedrich the Great, continued the work of colonizing areas in **Western Pomerania** seized from Sweden. Also, the noble owners of the **Eastern Pomerania** estates asked the king to allow settlement of their real estate. The final destinations had needs for skilled workers like millers and brewers as well as people to revive and manage the now abandoned estates. Also the Polish nobility and town burgers had lots of available land to be farmed as one third of the population was dead from the Great Northern War. Calls went out in 1754 for people to come to Poland. Friedrich the Great of Prussia initiated this campaign and underwrote some of the costs of moving. Nobles and burgers at the destinations also promised support. Agents were hired to sign up peasants for the move.

**So there was migration to many parts of Eastern and Western Pomerania.** The new settlers came primarily from territories neighboring Pomerania. Also many Germans who migrated from Saxony and then other immigrants from Wuerttemberg, Baden, Hessen-Darmstadt, Hessen-Nassau, the Palatinate and the other regions on the Rhine. That is, from many of the states on the west side of modern Germany.

The preparation of the land and its colonization did not happen smoothly. The contractors had to deforest the allotted land, clear the wood in the contracted area, enrich the soil by means of a water drainage system, and make the land fit for habitation. Almost without exception the accomplishments of the contractors lagged behind the stipulations of the contracts. When Friedrich's settlements in **Western Pomerania** began to flounder, the colonists often moved on to other locations in **Eastern Pomerania** and did not await the resolution of the problems. In 1754 Friedrich sent Prussian General Moritz von Dessau visit the villages, report on their problems, and record who was living there (often including their origin). So you can find out if families with your

surname moved to Pomerania in the 1750's (plus where they came from). See <http://blackseagr.org/pdfs/konrad/Pomeranian%20Colonies%20and%20Colonists%20-%201754.pdf> for an article summarizing the report. Another source of this report is *Der Pommerschen Leute* Volume 40 Issue 1 from the Spring of 2017. Both papers are in English. The original paper in German is also available on the internet.

Details and locations of these villages in Pomerania can be found at <http://www.kartenmeister.com/preview/databaseuwe.asp>. You will find some Lutheran Church Books for this area available at <https://www.archion.de/>. The latter is a repository of scans of German Church Books and requires a membership fee.

But if your people were in areas that were in Poland (for example West Prussia) prior to 1772, your ancestors will be in Roman Catholic Church Books. The Lutheran church was banned in Poland starting around 1714. An index of names in Births, Deaths, and Marriages in the Catholic Church books in pre-1772 northern Poland can be found by searching <http://www.ptg.gda.pl/index.php/certificate/action/searchB/>.

### Migrations resulting from the Partitions of Poland

Meanwhile Poland was becoming increasingly unstable while its neighbors, Prussia, Russia and Austria were becoming stronger. This ultimately led to three partitions of Poland. The first partition occurred in 1772 and gave Prussia the band of land which linked together Pomerania and East Prussia making one contiguous German state across northern Poland. This new area became known as **West Prussia**. Also Prussia gained the area along the Netze River just south of West Prussia.

In late 1772, Friedrich the Great conducted a land census to find out who was already living in West Prussia and in the Netze River valley so that they could be taxed (<http://www.odessa3.org/collections/land/wprussia/>). These lists contain family surnames as well as the villages in which they lived. Be sure to check alternative spellings of the surnames. Noting the predominance of Poles, Friedrich began recruiting Germans to move into West Prussia. Initially this was just a trickle of Germans coming in from adjacent areas like **Pomerania** and **Neumark**.

When Friedrich the Great took over **West Prussia**, he also gained the villages and land in West Prussia previously held by the Kings of Poland. So soon after the 1772 land census Friedrich began to open the former royal villages and land to Germans who were already living in the area. This migration could be referred to as an internal migration and many Germans ended up in different villages than the villages shown in the land census. This internal migration gave Friedrich a more settled German population and more income from Germans paying lease rent for the land as well as paying taxes to Friedrich's government.

The post 1772 instability and uprisings in portion of Poland that was still independent led to the second and third partitions of Poland. Ultimately Prussia got another large chunk of Poland known as South Prussia including Warsaw and a big region surrounding **East Prussia** known as **New East Prussia**. A land census is available for **South Prussia** in 1794 (<http://genealogy.drefs.net/>).

This major land grab focused the Prussians more fully on recruiting Germans for the new areas. There was a successful campaign in 1794 with recruiting from all over the German states (including **Pomerania**) and offering all sorts of promises and enticements to come to the partitioned areas. Many Germans moved to the partitions, particularly to **West Prussia** but as in the 1754 the immigrants found their promises not met. So they began to move around the area in search of good land to farm.

Details and locations of these villages in **West Prussia** and the Netze River Valley can be found at <http://www.kartenmeister.com/preview/databaseuwe.asp>. You will find some Lutheran Church Books for this area available at <https://www.archion.de/>. As noted earlier the latter is a repository of German Church Books and requires a membership fee. Some of the church books in Lutheran repository (EZAB) were scanned by the Mormons and some may be viewed at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog?oldlink=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.familysearch.org%2Fcatalog-search> .

But if your people were Roman Catholic, an index of names in Births, Deaths, and Marriages in the Catholic Church books in all northern Poland can be found by searching <http://www.ptg.gda.pl/index.php/certificate/action/searchB/> .Catholic church books still exist and are found in the Catholic Repositories and State Repositories in Poland. Some of the church books in Catholic repositories were scanned by the Mormons and some may be viewed at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog?oldlink=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.familysearch.org%2Fcatalog-search> .

By 1795 Napoleon had begun his conquest of Europe. When Napoleon was finally defeated in 1815, the meeting of the victors (also known as The Congress of Vienna) redrew many of the borders earlier set in the partitioning of Poland giving large areas of **South Prussia** and parts of **New East Prussia** to Russia. The 1794 land census for **South Prussia** (<http://genealogy.drefs.net/>) is a good source listing the German families still in South Prussia after it was annexed by Prussia in 1794; many of those families were still there when the area was annexed by Russia in 1815. So the Germans did not migrate to Russian Occupied Poland (**Eastern South Prussia** in particular); they were just gobbled up. I might note that technically **Eastern South Prussia** became a part what was called “Congress Poland” which was nominally run by Poles but controlled by Russia.

**South Prussia** with or without Russian rule was a hard place to live. Generally in the western part of South Prussia the soil was sandy and not very productive. The only really viable trade was to produce flax to make linen including preparing the linen products at home. This trade was good and Poland produced the material for the uniforms in Napoleon’s army amongst other products. The defeat of Napoleon meant no more uniform grade linen was ordered.

There were attempts to organize this cottage industry by planning towns like Ozorkow designed for producing cottage industry flax. At this time the industrialization of cloth making was started in Lodz using cloth making equipment designed in England. However this automated equipment was better suited for the product of cotton cloth not linen. So cotton was imported and flax was not

used. As a consequence, Germans became factory workers.

### Events which led to Migration to Volhynia

In 1830 the Poles revolted and a guerilla style war ensued. The Russians quickly and brutally put down the revolt. The Germans suffered at the hands of both groups. The Russians then took firm control of Russian Occupied Poland (also known as Congress Poland) and punished the residents with many penalties including putting high tariffs on the cloth that they produced.

Meanwhile **Volhynia** which was not a part of Poland was not penalized as there were no uprisings there. In 1833 the nobles in Volhynia invited the German cloth makers from Russian Occupied Poland to migrate to Volhynia. Leasehold land was available on reasonable terms. The cloth production was not tarified so the Germans cloth makers succeeded economically. About 1850 land in Volhynia and nearby regions of the Ukraine became available for purchase; many Germans relocated to villages where they could purchase land.

The best source of records on Germans in Russian Occupied Poland and Volhynia is SGGEE. Also maps and gazetteers and other research tools are available including indexed church books and member's contributions of their family trees. See <https://sggee.org/>

### Events which led to Migration to Volhynia and America

In the 1850's plague, famine, terrible weather, and mechanization of farming stimulated migration from all areas of today's Poland. There was a large out migration from Pomerania to America and other overseas destinations.

Migrating to America was the best option and was better than starving in place or moving into areas occupied by the Russians. These Germans peopled the Midwest US and Canada. Some had property to sell to pay for the family's passage. Some signed contracts of indentured servitude to get their way paid to America. Some later brought over a wife and perhaps children from the old village. And sometimes just a single family member was send to America to earn money to bring more of his family over. The latter is known as chain migration.

Migrants could leave directly by boat from places in Pomerania like Stettin, Kolberg, and Danzig. Small ships then would take them to Hamburg, Bremen, or several ports in England to change bigger ships for the Americas.

For Germans of modest means living in the Russian Occupied Poland (for example, living in **Eastern South Prussia**), migrating to **Volhynia** was the easiest and least costly alternative. Also there was migration from **Pomerania** and **West Prussia** directly to Volhynia.

SGGEE's past President Jerry Frank noted that the last part of Russian Occupied Poland to receive German settlers was in the around **Lublin** where some 230 colonies were established between 1850 and 1890. Many of these Germans were from other areas of Russian Occupied Poland like what was formerly South Prussia. And many later continued onward to Volhynia.



Another large scale Polish uprising occurred in Russian Occupied Poland in 1863 further stimulating migration to **Volhynia**. Again the Russians brutally put down the uprising. This time they grabbed full control of Russian Occupied Poland. After the uprising, the serfs in Poland and Volhynia were freed in order to reduce the power of the Polish nobles. So initially farm land was left unfarmed but it was ultimately sold to Germans thus becoming an important secondary reason for migrating to Volhynia.

### Events which led to Migration from Volhynia to America

In the 1880's, the Russians decided all people in their lands including residents of Russian Occupied Poland and Volhynia should speak Russian, attend the Russian Orthodox church, and if male, serve in the Russian Army. Needless to say, this Russification program drove many Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews to leave Volhynia and Russian Occupied Poland. The peak of the migration was in the mid 1890's.

## Putting It All Together

What I have tried to do was to show you the many routes that families took often over generations to get to **Volhynia**. These were migrations that like my family could take over 100 years to get there. Also this story shows the impact on economic, political, and war on our ancestors' migrations. Often circumstances led to having to move and they did what they thought was in the family's best interest. The fact that you are here reading this article is evidence that it all came out alright in the end.

To solve the problem of where in Germany did your family originate, work backwards. Generally these people moved as groups so try to find all those in the area where your family settled and find out all you can about those immigrants. Then try to find records on each family that migrated using the resources of SGGEE.

Then work backward successively. But do not assume a direct route to Volhynia from some village in Germany. My people did not go directly from Germany. Some left Germany (Saxony) for Neumark before 1699, arrived in West Prussia as early as 1720, arrived in Volhynia in 1867, and arrived in Canada in 1892. So almost 300 years of travel. I might note that other family members also went to Pomerania, Danzig, East Prussia, and Lublin.

If your people were in Volhynia, they probably were in Russian Occupied Poland for a while. For example, some of my people went via West Prussia to Russian Occupied Poland to Volhynia, others via West Prussia to Lublin (in Russian Occupied Poland) to Volhynia, and some via Western Pomerania to Eastern Pomerania to Volhynia.

If your people were in Volhynia, they might just passed through Russian Occupied Poland on their way to Volhynia. Some of my people went from Saxony and Neumark via West Prussia to Volhynia to MI and Canada, and some went directly via Kreis Rummelsburg in Pomerania to Volhynia to MI – in both cases just moving through Russian Occupied Poland.

Some of my ancestors were cloth makers. They left the noted cloth making counties like Kreis Kolmar on the border of Pomerania moved to South Prussia (which became Russian Occupied Poland) to Volhynia within a generation. And many went directly from Pomerania to the US, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia by boat.

My people and probably yours were in search of the better life and they did whatever they needed to do to find that life.

The search for why, how, and where our migrant ancestors went can be a very interesting journey.

## **Appendix: Details of Departure Points and Landing Points**

### **Prussia (East Prussia, Brandenburg, Neumark, and Pomerania)**

#### **East Prussia**

In the year 1000 this area was inhabited by the Prussi people, a Slavic tribe. Beginning in 1225 this area was conquered and Christianized by the Teutonic Knights. In 1525 during the Protestant Reformation, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, Albert, secularized the order's East Prussian territory. He became Albert, Duke of Prussia. The new duke established Lutheranism as the state church. The duchy was inherited by members of the Hohenzollern family of Brandenburg in 1618; this union is referred to as Brandenburg-Prussia. It was an open place of refuge for Protestants. There was plenty of land available for cultivation but life was very hard.

#### **Brandenburg**

In the year 1000 this area was inhabited by the Slavic Wendish people. In the beginning of the 12th century, the German kings sought to establish control over these lands. In 1134, in the wake of the Wendish Crusade of 1147, the German leader Albert the Bear was granted this area by the head of the Holy Roman Empire. The Slavs were subsequently assimilated by German settlers. Albert the Bear fortified the towns to protect the townspeople from attack.

The House of Hohenzollern came to the throne of Brandenburg in 1415. Under Hohenzollern leadership, Brandenburg grew rapidly in power during the 17th century. Brandenburg's king Frederick William inherited East Prussia. The resulting Brandenburg-Prussia was the predecessor of the Kingdom of Prussia, which became a leading German state during the 18th century. Prussia's power base remained in Brandenburg and its capital Berlin.

#### **Brandenburg + Neumark**

Beginning in the 1230s, Germans began settling in Neumark. Through land purchases, marriage pacts, and services to Poland's ruling dynasty, the Brandenburg rulers extended their dominion to Neumark. Most of the colonists who settled in Brandenburg's new eastern territory came from Magdeburg or the Altmark. The Slavic inhabitants of the region gradually became Germanized. Because the new land formed an extension of Brandenburg, it became known as the Neumark after the middle of the 15th century.



In 1618, Neumark became part of Brandenburg-Prussia. During the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) both Swedish and Imperial troops plundered, ravaged, and burnt the land, while plague epidemics in 1626 and 1631 killed much of the population. The Kingdom of Prussia (which included Neumark) was created in 1701. King Frederick I of Prussia initiated new waves of colonization around 1720 particularly to Neumark.

### **Pomerania including Vorpomern (Western) and Hinterpomern (Eastern) Pomerania**

Beginning in the late 12th-early 13th century, the Duchy of Pomerania was ruled by Wendish Dukes. Throughout the Middle Ages, there was an influx of German settlers. German law, German customs, and the Low German language were also introduced to Eastern Pomerania. Many of the Wends who lived there were assimilated by the German Pomeranians.

While the German population in the Duchy of Pomerania adopted the Protestant reformation in 1534, the Slavic people remained with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1627, the Thirty Years' War reached the Duchy and severely ravaged and depopulated Pomerania; few years later the same happened to West Prussia. The last Pomeranian Duke died in 1637. Subsequently, the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia divided the Duchy of Pomerania between the Swedish Empire that got Western Pomerania and Brandenburg-Prussia that got Eastern Pomerania.

Prussia gained the southern parts of Swedish Western Pomerania in 1720 and gained the remainder in 1815. The former Brandenburg-Prussian Eastern Pomerania and the former Swedish parts of Western Pomerania were reorganized into the Prussian Province of Pomerania. With Prussia, both provinces joined the newly constituted German Empire in 1871.

### **The Partitions of Poland**

The greediness of Prussia, Russia and Austria as well as the problems in the governance of Poland led to three partitions of Poland. When the partition was completed, Prussia had grabbed:

#### **West Prussia** (annexed by Prussia in 1772)

This region joined Eastern Pomerania and East Prussia to create a contiguous Prussia. It included the port city of Danzig which controlled the commerce in the area. There were many German settlers in this area prior to partition.

#### **South Prussia** was annexed by Prussia in 1794 including its Western part and Eastern part

This region spanned from Warsaw in the east to Prussia in the west. It was largely undeveloped and open for farming and work on estates. Most of the land was only marginal farming land.

#### **New East Prussia** (annexed by Prussia in 1794).

This region surrounded East Prussia thereby expanding Prussia.

Russia occupied all of the eastern most areas of Poland (annexed by Russia in 1772 and 1794) and borderland areas including Volhynia (originally part of Poland, annexed by Russia in 1772

and incorporated into Russia). The Treaty of Vienna in 1815 additionally gave Russia the Eastern part of South Prussia and parts of New East Prussia formerly a part of Prussia.

Austria gained the region of modern southern Poland known as Galicia.

## **Saxony**

The Slavic and Germanic presence in the territory of today's Saxony is thought to have begun in the first century BC. As early as 1000 AD, Germans were migrating into the sparsely populated areas of Saxony. Unfortunately, because of the continuing fighting with other Germans as well as the Slavs, the German settlers had to live in walled estates and towns. In the estates, they were effectively serfs. Throughout the next 500 years, Saxony was characterized by divisions, wars, and discord.

The Slavic inhabitants gradually became Germanized. The two groups lived together and there is still a strong Slavic presence in Saxony. These Slavs were formerly known as Wends and more recently as Sorbs. Many parts of Saxony are bilingual. The Wendish language is very useful in Saxony as well as Poland as it is similar to the Polish and Kascubian languages.

In the 1300's commercial mining of gold and silver began and generated wealth for the nobility. In 1400's, Saxony became increasingly powerful and became increasingly involved in the big European wars. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Saxony was known for its cultural achievements in architecture, music, and (Meissen) china. After 1815, it was no longer a European power.