

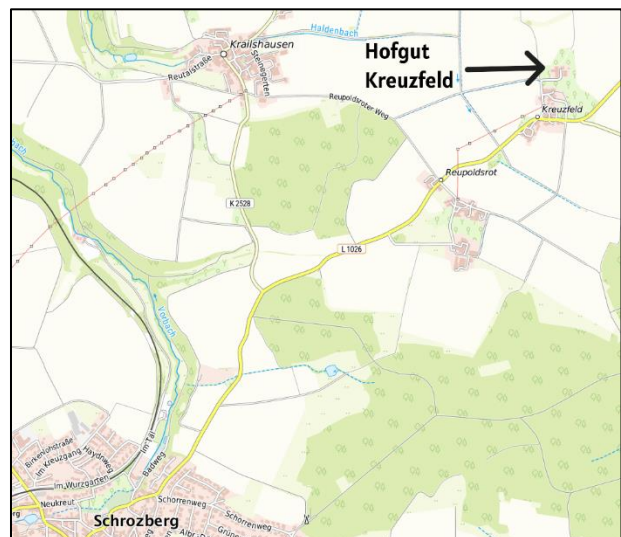
Chapter 3

Story of Jakob Friedrich Zeisset and his wife Margaretha Müller

Each move for the Zeisset family over the past two chapters has represented a new beginning. This is the first time in our Zeisset history that a move and a marriage coincide, which makes the story more poignant. Until now, our Zeisset families have lived communally, with two or three generations at the same farm. In this chapter we will see families dividing into individual units, with just parents and their children. The children will be raised in the *evangelisch* (Lutheran) church. The next move for our nuclear Zeisset family will involve an ocean.

Jakob Friedrich Zeisset (1837–1884) – direct line

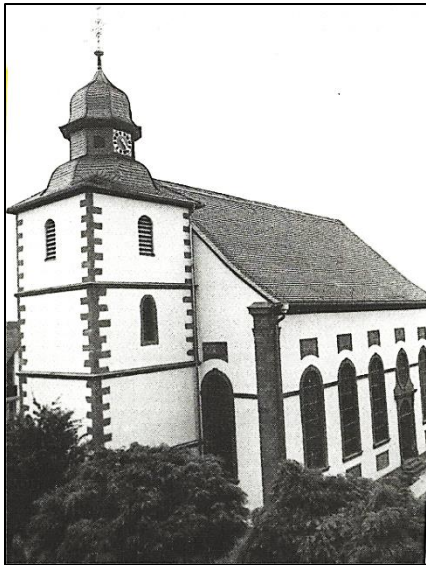
Jakob Friedrich Zeisset moved to Hofgut Kreuzfeld in February 1864, taking over the farm lease from Andreas Ströbel. Jakob Friedrich returned to Adelsheim, the district seat for Sindolsheim and Rosenberg, in March that year. There he married Margaretha Müller of Semd on March 14, 1864. Notices of the intended wedding had been published in Sindolsheim on February 17th, Menzingen on February 19th, and Umstadt in Hessen on March 9th. Jakob Friedrich was still a citizen of Menzingen. Margaretha was from the state of Hessen. She was born in Semd on November 8, 1842. She was five years younger than Jakob Friedrich.



Map showing location of Kreufeld farm, Kralshausen, and Schrozberg

A note about Jakob Friedrich's name: recall that his mother was Lutheran and he was born illegitimately. Mennonites, in those days, did not give their children a middle name, only the first name. Since his mother was not Mennonite, she followed the Lutheran custom of giving her child a middle name. His middle name is used throughout this chapter to distinguish him from other Jakobs.

Margaretha Müller's Parents



Evangelical church at Semd

Margaretha's parents were Johann Georg Müller, III, and Anna Maria Schneider. Anna Maria died two years before Margaretha and Jakob Friedrich were married. Margaretha had two older sisters, both of whom would emigrate (in 1868 and 1870) to America to live near St. Louis. Margaretha had one brother who remained near Semd.

Margaretha's father was a shepherd who died at Semd in 1872. It would seem logical that Johann Georg Müller, III was the son of Johann Georg Müller, II. This is not how things were done in Semd. More than twenty Johann Georg Müllers were found over several years in Semd – the number of each was assigned according to the number of Johann Georg Müllers preceding him in the community and had nothing to do with the name of

the father. Our Johann Georg's father was Johannes Müller who had married Elisabetha Jäger. To further complicate research, Johann Georg Müllers often married Anna Marias and only the wife's maiden name would clarify which Johann Georg Müller was being discussed.

Why Margaretha was in Sindolsheim

Until the summer of 2026, we did not know why Margaretha was in Sindolsheim – or Adelsheim. Semd is 55 miles from Adelsheim, a long day's journey away in those days. The clue to the mystery was in one of the witnesses for Margaretha's marriage to Jakob Friedrich.

Georg Dietz was the first of two witnesses listed for the marriage. He was Margaretha's brother-in-law, married to her sister, Elisabetha. Georg Dietz was also from Hessen and married Elisabetha Müller in 1855. They had four children in Semd, then their fifth child was born at Sindolsheim July 23, 1864. The birth notice in the church record stated that Georg Dietz, a citizen of Semd, then a tenant farmer at Sindolsheim, and his wife, Elisabetha Müller of Semd were the parents of a daughter.

To further verify the relationship, Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha were listed as godparents who, by then, were living at Kreuzfeld. The Dietz family did not stay

long in Sindolsheim but returned to Semd before leaving for America on March 11, 1868.

Margaretha Müller had gone with her sister Elisabetha's family when they moved to Sindolsheim to rent a farm there. Sindolsheim was a small town, so it would have been easy for Margaretha to meet Jakob Friedrich.

About the Kreuzfeld Farm

Kreuzfeld is in a district of Germany called Hohenlohe, named for the Hohenlohe family which ruled the area until 1806 when it became part of Württemberg. The dialect of German spoken in this district, Hohenlohisch, is spoken by only a few of the residents today, but was the dialect the Zeisset children spoke.

Records related to the Kreuzfeld estate are in an archive in Neuenstein, not far from Schwäbisch Hall and significantly expanded our knowledge of life for the Zeissets at Kreuzfeld. During the time the Zeissets lived there, Hofgut Kreuzfeld was owned by the Hohenlohe family, specifically Prince Hugo von Hohenlohe - Öhringen.



**Zeisset descendants exploring the Hofgut Kreuzfeld
Zeisset Family History Tour 2006**

It is important to note that the Kreuzfeld farm was originally two farms, and there were two separate houses for the residents – the Andreas Kolb family and the Leonard Meder family. After the death of Andreas Kolb in June 1857, the two farms were purchased by the Prince Hugo of Hohenlohe – Öhringen, who merged them into one farm. The merged farm was then rented to Andreas Ströbel, who lived in a nearby hamlet in July 1858.

Andreas Ströbel of nearby Könbronn leased the Kreuzfeld farm from 1858 – 1870. He decided to concentrate farming efforts on his Könbronn farm and was going to have his son look after Hofgut Kreuzfeld, but then decided to terminate his lease, so the property was available for a new tenant.

Records from the city hall (*Rathaus*) in Schrozberg show that Johanna Zeisset, Jakob Zeisset (tenant of the prince's farm), and Isaak Zeisset all came to live in the Schrozberg region in February 1864. On the 5th of March 1864, ten days prior to Jakob Friedrich Zeisset's marriage to Margaretha, Jakob Friedrich's mother, "the widow of Jakob Zeisset," and her oldest son, Jakob Zeisset from Menzingen (using the town of his citizenship rather than the current residence at Sindolsheim), assumed the rental of the Hofgut Kreuzfeld for the remaining six years of the original lease.

The Zeissets were listed as *Wiedertäufer* (Mennonites) and relatives of *Gutspächter* (tenant) Bär of Nesselbach and *Gutsbesitzer* (landowners) Bühler and Schmutz of Obersteinach. Peter Bär (1806–1880) lived at Nesselbach with his wife, Katharina Bär (1823–1901) with whom there was a remote Zeisset kinship. Jakob Schmutz (1817–1885) lived at Obersteinach with his wife Barbara Zeisset (1828–1884). The Bühler family may have been related to Jakob Bühler, Magdalena Zeisset Bär's second husband at Niedersteinach. Magdalena Zeisset Bär Bühler and Barbara Zeisset Schmutz were sisters and were aunts of Jakob Friedrich Zeisset. Though it may be difficult to keep these relationships straight, the primary reason for discussing them is to show that there was usually some family connection when moving from place to place for our Zeisset ancestors.

Johanna Zeisset's children all moved to Kreuzfeld: Jakob Friedrich and his new wife, Margaretha; Isaak and his wife, Bertha, with their daughter, Emma; Johannes, Daniel, and 10-year-old Magdalena.

Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha Zeisset lived at Kreuzfeld their entire married life. Family stories described Jakob Friedrich as the manager of a large estate consisting of 520 acres, and that Jakob Friedrich employed up to 72 men during harvesting and planting. It was thought he was prosperous. From information obtained in 2007 about the Hofgut Kreuzfeld, it appears this was not the case, as will be explained.

When the Zeissets moved to Kreuzfeld, they lived in the old Kolb house. It appears to have been a large home, but still, there were six adults, a 16-year-old boy – Daniel; a 10-year-old girl, Magdalena; and Isaak and Bertha's baby. There would soon be several more babies. Some of the family may have lived in the former

Meder home. The buildings were described in later documents as being in very poor condition, requiring frequent repairs.

Then Isaak and his family, and Johannes, left to work on other farms. The brothers had presumably been farming together, so Jakob Friedrich would have to hire men to work for him after that.

Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha's Children

Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha Zeisset's first child, Georg, was born in November 1864. He lived only five hours. He was likely named after Margaretha's father, Johann Georg Müller, or perhaps her brother, Georg. Eight months later, in July 1865, another son was born prematurely. He was stillborn and was emergently baptized by the midwife.

Johanna Luise was born July 20, 1866, and was baptized on the 31st at the Zeisset home by the Lutheran pastor. Baptisms occurred at home in those days. This is **Louise** who later married John Swart. She was named after her paternal grandmother. Her baptismal sponsors were her uncles, Isaak Zeisset, still living at Kreuzfeld, and Daniel Zeisset.



Margaretha and Jakob Friedrich Zeisset
about 1877

Emma was born in June 1867. She lived for about 3 weeks. Her baptismal sponsor was her uncle, Johannes Zeisset, noted to be from Menzingen. **Bertha** was born a year later, in June 1868. She would marry Juergen Nanninga. Bertha may have been named after Isaak Zeisset's wife, who was her baptismal sponsor along with Isaak. Isaak and Bertha were living at Rosshof at this time.

Another son was stillborn in May 1869. **Elisabeth** Zeisset was born in March 1870. Her baptismal sponsors were her uncles, Johannes Zeisset living at Wiegelshof and Daniel Zeisset listed as living at Menzingen. She would marry George Weller.

The babies to this date were all born a year or less apart. Infant mortality was naturally higher in that time, with little or no prenatal care. The cause of death often listed for babies who survived past birth is “gichter,” meaning convulsions, which could have been a variety of serious illnesses for an infant. Margaretha was not likely fully recovered from one pregnancy before she found herself pregnant again. Pregnancy and childbirth were very dangerous times in a woman’s life.

The next baby, another stillborn son, was born in September 1871. Then it was over two years before **Georg Jakob** was born on the last day in December 1873. His baptismal sponsors were Georg Seiffert of Kreuzfeld and Daniel Zeisset of Menzingen. He was called Jake and later married Christine Bohnenblust.

Barbara was born in April 1875. Her baptismal sponsors were Georg Seiffert and her uncle Isaak Zeisset, living at Rosshof. She also used the name Babette, but was usually called Bettie, and later married Ludwig Hoerman.

Heinrich - **Henry** - Zeisset was born almost three years later in February 1878. His baptismal sponsors were Georg Seiffert, of Kreuzfeld and Georg Müller, his mother’s brother, living in Semd. He had a third sponsor, Isaak Zeisset, who was then living at Eichenau. Henry may have been the only baby to be born in the new house, since it appears the house may not have been completed until January 1878.

The surviving children of Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha were Louise, Bertha, Lizze, Jake, Bettie, and Henry, our six Zeisset siblings who would all later immigrate to Kansas.

Jakob Friedrich Zeisset (1837) and Margaretha Müller (1841)

Louise (1866) married John Swart
Bertha (1867) married Juergen Nanninga
Lizzie (1870) married George Weller
Jake (1873) married Christina Bohnenblust
Bettie (1875) married Ludwig Hoerman
Henry (1878) married Perseda Schreiber

Jakob Friedrich’s Siblings

Isaak and his family lived at Kreuzfeld from 1864 until February 1867. Two more children were born to them at Kreuzfeld. Then Isaak and his family returned to the Rosshof estate near his wife’s family, where he took a lease from 1867–1876.

Johannes Zeisset, the third son, was married to Elisabetha Bär at the “Mennonite gathering place” in Berwangen in February 1869. Elisabetha was born at Niedersteinach to Magdalena Zeisset and Matthäus Bär. Her stepfather, Jakob Bühler, was the Mennonite pastor who married them. The marriage was documented in the Menzingen church records since Johannes was a citizen of Menzingen. He was farming near Feuchtwangen in Bavaria at the time of his marriage – where he was a *Pächter* at Wiegelshof.

Magdalena, Jakob Friedrich’s sister, moved to Schrozberg at some point. She was married there to Johann Ludwig Belzner in 1873. He was a stonecutter. In 1874, the Belznern had a daughter, Luise, ancestor of Maria Trepp. Mr. Belzner died in 1876. Johanna Zeisset may have moved in with her daughter, Magdalena, between 1873 and 1876. Magdalena was married to her second husband, Georg Peter Sonder, in Schrozberg in 1881.

Jakob Friedrich Commits to an 18-year Lease

In 1870, the terms of the former lease under Andreas Ströbel at Hofgut Kreuzfeld ended and Jakob Friedrich committed to leasing the property from 1870 to 1888, so all was well at Hofgut Kreuzfeld. Jakob Friedrich was 33 years old at that time, Margaretha was 27 years old, and they had three daughters – Louise, Bertha, and Lizzie. Lizzie was born at the time of the lease renewal.

Shortly after Jakob Friedrich signed the new lease agreement in 1870, the Hohenlohe estate owner announced that a new stable and a new residential home were to be built. A notice of the work to be done was published in a local newspaper so bids could be given for the work, including demolition of old buildings.

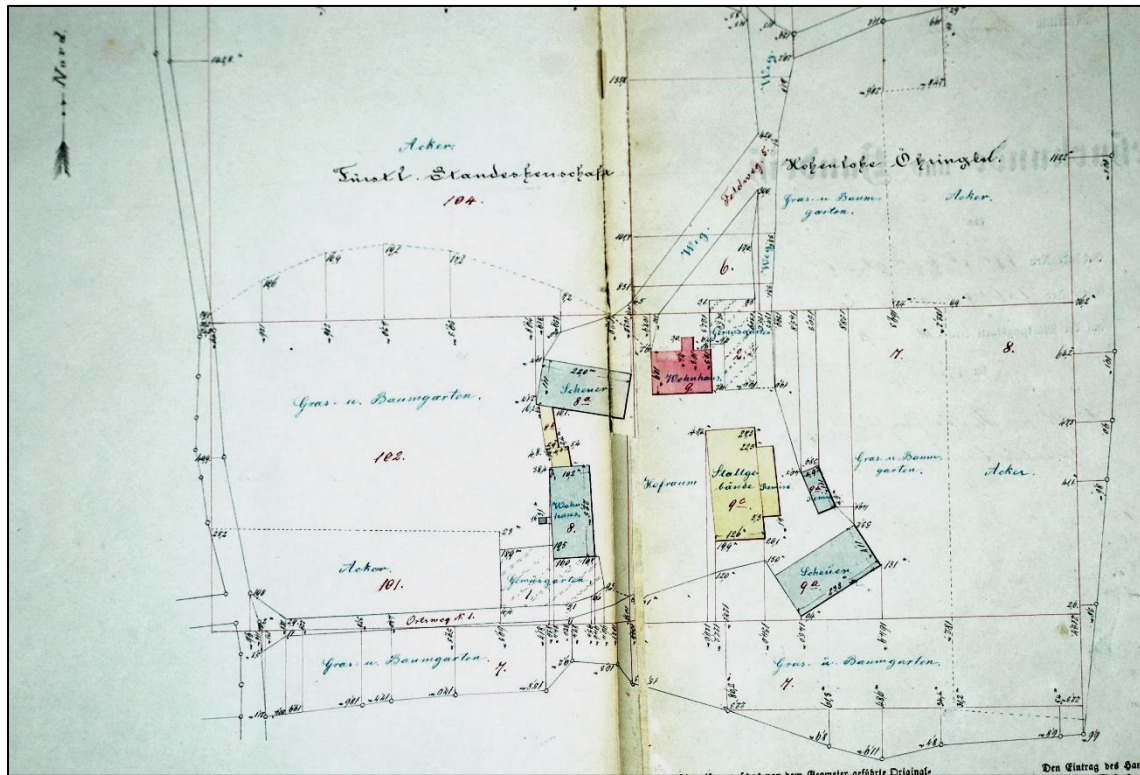
In reviewing other documents, it appears the stable and house were built between October 27, 1875, and January 16, 1878, with Jakob Friedrich doing some of the work himself, or paying for construction work. Jakob Friedrich was eventually compensated for his work by the Hohenlohe estate.

The Neuenstein Archive has diagrams of the Hofgut from several years – 1869, 1874, and 1880. It is helpful to look at a diagram to understand the layout of the farm.

The road to the village of Kreuzfeld is seen in the lower left corner of the diagram. The new house, built in the 1870’s, is shown in red. The Kolb house is the blue rectangle on the lower left and part of it was a stall. After the family moved into

the new house, the old house was converted into more barn space. The narrow yellow building between the blue rectangles was where the colts were kept, later it was a swine shed. The blue rectangle at the north end was a barn built in 1841.

Going clockwise, was the new house and its vegetable garden. Two wells can be seen in other diagrams just south of the garden. The yellow rectangle on the right side was the new barn, built in the 1870s, replacing the Meder home. The small



Hofgut Kreuzfeld, 1874

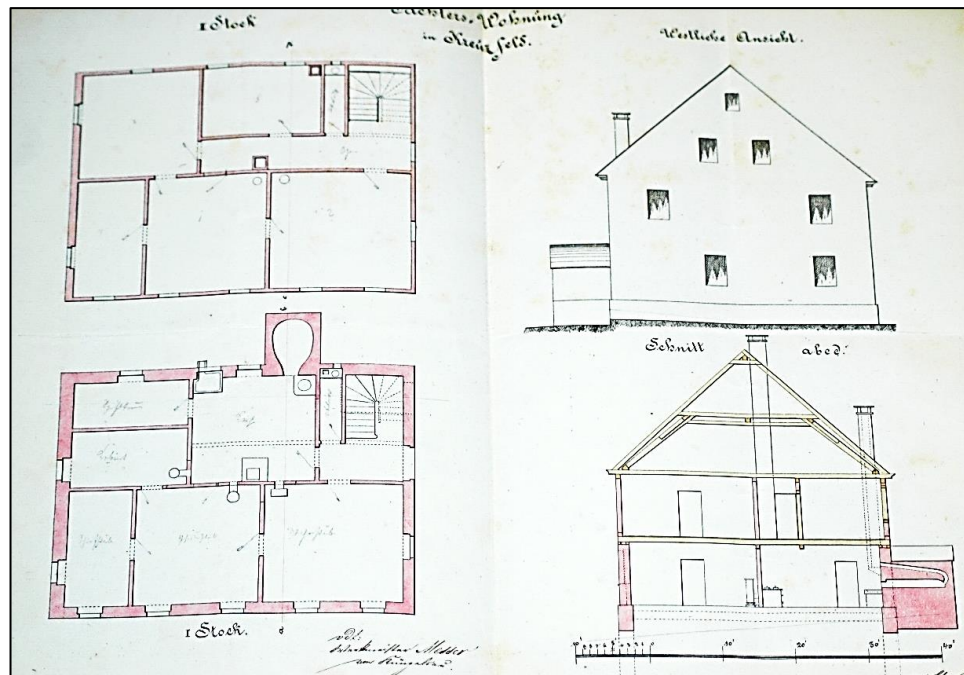
Source: *Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Neuenstein*

blue building behind was a woodshed and the blue rectangle at the end was the Meder barn built in 1855. The 1870 farm diagram shows the manure pile in front of the Meder house. The area in the center of the buildings is the *Hofraum*, or courtyard.

Many farm homes in Germany were “house barns,” with livestock on the ground floor in the winter and family living quarters on the second floor. The two older homes on the property were house barns. Heat from the animals would help warm the human occupants above in the winter. In the summer, well, we can imagine that flies were plentiful, but the livestock would have been outside. The new Zeisset home was not a house barn, but a building separate from the barn – one where only people lived.

New House at Kreuzfeld – 1870–1878

A copy of the floor plan for the 1870s house and a diagram of the house were found at the Neuenstein Archive on a visit there in 2008. The floor plan and description of the house provide us with an accurate description of the home established by Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha Zeisset. How many people can claim to know such a thing about their ancestors?



1870 floor plan for Hofgut Kreuzfeld

The floor plan shown was the original drawing by the builder. Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha altered the floor plan by moving some of the walls and making the rooms different sizes from what is depicted here. Only the original floor plan was photographed and so there is a reason to return to the Archive at Neuenstein, to get the floor plan as built by the Zeissets.

Very detailed descriptions are given of each building on the farm in the 1878 appraisal. The entrance to the house is on the east side, the right side of the floor plan above. The entry contained a stairway to the upper floor immediately to the right of the entry door.



**East side of Kreuzfeld home
2024**

On the left side of the entry was a door to the “*Wohnstube*” or living room. The room was heated by an *Eremitageofen* - an iron stove connected by a pipe to the kitchen on the other side of the wall. The family ate, rested, and worked at indoor chores in this room, particularly in the winter. In the Zeisset home, there was surely a cradle in this room. We can imagine that Margaretha often read stories to her children in this room. The children studied their school lessons here. The living room had a door to Jakob and Margaretha’s bedroom, with an adjacent nursery.



House at Hofgut Kreuzfeld, south side

The kitchen doorway was directly across from the entry to the house. There was a baking oven on the north wall of the kitchen. It was outside the house walls to decrease the possibility of fire in the house and to decrease the temperature in the house during the summer months. The drawing of the house from 1870 has a diagram of the oven with its connection to the chimney. The cook stove was opposite the oven and was connected to the central chimney. A door on the west wall of the kitchen led to the pantry - *Speisekammer*.

One other important feature of the ground floor was in the entry and is a small hall and is labeled *abbord*, a misspelling of *Abort*, a word used for toilet. This was the indoor toilet, and there was another on the second floor. It is interesting that our Zeisset immigrants grew up with two indoor toilets in Germany, but in America they had to put on their heavy coats in the winter to make a quick run to the outhouse several yards away from the nice warm home.

There were bedrooms upstairs, one for the boys and maybe two for the girls. Farm workers may have had rooms on the second and third floors.

Life and Work on the Farm

Jakob Friedrich was busy with management of the estate and his workers. From stories of our Bletscher cousins, we know that it was not unusual to rise at 2 o’clock in the morning to mow hay in the meadow, so farming was certainly not easy work. The Zeisset home previously had a bell at the top which would be rung, to tell field workers to come in for a meal.

The Zeisset home was surrounded by orchards. There were also vegetable gardens, farming ground, meadows and pastures. Jakob Friedrich grew wheat, rye, barley, spelt, oats, hay, “straw,” fruit, potatoes, and root crops. Sheep were his primary livestock, but he also had a few cows, pigs, chickens, and ducks.

The standard unit of measure for land during this time was the *Morgen*, morning in English. The size of a *Morgen* was initially determined by the amount of land that could be plowed with a team of oxen in one morning. This varied depending on what part of the country the land was in. A *Morgen* was equivalent to two-thirds of an acre in Northern Germany. In the south, where Kreuzfeld is located, a *Morgen* was just less than 1.5 acres.

Records show that Jakob Friedrich oversaw 207 *Morgens*. So, Jakob Friedrich farmed around 290 acres, not the 520 acres the family legend described. Farm rent from 1877 to 1878 was 2,640.25 Marks, about \$16,000 today, using various conversion and inflation calculators.

As for Margaretha, she had left her home in Semd to live with her sister at Sindolsheim, where she met her future husband. After their marriage, she moved with him to start a new life at Kreuzfeld. Her days at Kreuzfeld were busy, filled with maintaining the household, and soon birthing children. She spent her time caring for the children, cooking, and cleaning. Because she was pregnant or recovering from childbirth much of the time, she almost certainly had young women who lived with the family and helped with cooking, cleaning, laundry, and sewing. As they aged, the children would have been given chores in addition to their studies.

The family attended church at Krailshausen. The Krailshausen pastor came from Schrozberg, his main church. The children attended school adjacent to the church at Krailshausen, less than a mile west of the Zeisset home, since there is no history of a school at Kreuzfeld.



**Zeisset descendants filling Krailshausen church
2006**

Jakob Friedrich’s brothers lived nearby, so the families likely visited each other with some frequency. Both of Jakob Friedrich’s brothers named a son Jakob Friedrich reflecting the level of

respect they had for their oldest brother. Cousins wrote to our six Zeisset siblings when they lived in Kansas, so good friendships developed while they were in Germany.

1878: A Bad Year

An 8-page letter dated May 18, 1878, plus two pages of accounting for the farm, was written by the Hohenlohe estate's accountant, Mr. Schmidt. Some of the reports are included here to help us understand what happened on the Kreuzfeld farm that led to Jakob Friedrich's demise. Reading the handwriting and translation are very challenging, but the best effort follows:

At the princely domain chancellery, "I was appointed by high decree May 13th and with an inquiry into the circumstances of the tenant Zeisset at Kreuzfeld, who was very much in arrears with the payment of the rent." He went on to say that he met Jakob Friedrich at 5 o'clock in the evening. He asked Jakob about his farming practices, preparations for the next harvest, and expected yields. Then they took a walk through the fields and meadows. While they were walking, Mr. Schmidt asked Jakob how he expected to pay for the rent debt in the near future. Jakob explained that he expected to receive 2,500 Marks from Mr. Roth, a merchant in Eckartshausen, on May 17 or 18, who was buying some of his produce, and would immediately apply this to his rent payment.

Mr. Schmidt inquired about liabilities to third parties. Jakob told him he owed 4,000 Marks to the community bank in Gerabronn. The amount was due at the beginning of June, but the bank extended the payment deadline. His brother, Isaak, at Eichenau, had provided a guarantee for him at the bank. This was his only other debt.

Mr. Schmidt described what he found on his tour of the farm. The summer crops were behind, and Jakob was just now able to sow the fields because the spring had been so wet. He had sown a total of 130 Morgens – 47 in legumes, the rest in fodder. It was noted that the previous tenant had his own farm nearby and could bring hay and straw for the Kreuzfeld farm which brought it to a much more productive state. Mr. Schmidt felt Jakob had done too little to improve the soil's alkalinity. The soil was described as compacted, sandy, silty, wet and cold partly because of the surrounding forest.

On further discussion with Jakob, Mr. Schmidt felt that he had restricted his grain production too much. Jakob pointed out that he started his lease in 1870 with the loss of five horses, that somehow escaped the farm. Then there was a particularly dismal year in 1876, with poor fodder crops, so he had to sell some of his livestock, not having enough to feed them. Moreover, he paid too much for the livestock in the first place. Then he had significant losses in his sheep operation, and illness in his family.

Mr. Schmidt explained to Jakob and Margaretha that the Princely administration wanted to avoid losses and were insisting that he make payment of 2,500 Marks within 2 – 4 weeks. He would have his brother, Isaak, vouch for him.

In summary, Jakob Friedrich was in quite a predicament. He simply could not pay his landlord, partly due to unavoidable circumstances, like the weather, and partly due to some of his unfortunate decisions. It is understandable that the landlord wanted to be paid, and it appears he had been lenient with Jakob Friedrich until 1878.

The Krailshausen *Heimat Buch* has a photograph of the house at Hofgut Kreuzfeld from about 1930. Georg Mann took the photograph and provided a brief history, stating that there used to be two farms at the Hofgut, but through carelessness, the property fell into the hands of the Öhringen Prince.



Hofgut Kreuzfeld House about 1930

Source: *Krailshausen*, Dorothee Bauer, 2009

Mr. Mann also noted that the farm ground was very heavy – a problem we know Jakob Friedrich encountered. Historically, there was a global agricultural crisis in the mid-1870s when prices for grain in Europe collapsed due to importing cheap wheat from the Americas. The weather was unfavorable with cold, wet summers and harsh winters in the 1870s, leading to poor crops and livestock disease. From Mr. Mann's brief note, and from records in the archives, we know that the rent for Hofgut Kreuzfeld was unreasonable.

As to the family illness Jakob Friedrich mentioned, his brother, Daniel died in November 1876 from tuberculosis. He died at Eichenau though where Isaak and Johannes lived with their families. As for Jakob Friedrich's own family, Bettie was born in April 1875 and there were no more babies until Henry's birth in February 1878.

Attempt to Avoid Bankruptcy

Since his brothers were in a better financial situation, it was decided they would assume the lease of the Hofgut Kreuzfeld as subtenants at the end of July 1878. Jakob would continue to live on the farm and manage farming operations, but the brothers would see to financial responsibilities. This arrangement would appease

the Hohenlohen administration and allow Jakob Friedrich and his family to continue to live at Kreuzfeld, and hopefully he would recover financially.

Isaak had leased another property of the Hohenlohe – Öhringen prince at Eichenau in 1876, for twelve years. Eichenau is 15 miles south of Kreuzfeld. Johannes and his family lived at Eichenau from 1876 to 1878, when he worked with or for Isaak. Then he moved to a farm at Erlach, almost 30 miles south of Kreuzfeld – just northwest of Schwäbisch Hall, close enough to keep an eye on things.

Perhaps things settled down a bit after Isaak and Johannes took over the lease – as it turned out, a calm before the storm. A newspaper reported that a barn was consumed by fire on November 11, 1880, along with significant quantities of produce being stored there, belonging to Jakob Friedrich. This was the barn at the southeast corner of the property.

The cause of the fire was not known, but it certainly did not improve Jakob Friedrich's financial situation. Losing produce meant he had less to sell and less to feed to his livestock, so he would have to sell some of the livestock. This would be a small loss compared to the next one, the death of Margaretha.

Death of Margaretha



**Krailshausen church and
cemetery**

The 12th baby was born to Margaretha and Jakob Friedrich on February 19, 1881. The infant did not survive, nor did Margaretha – she died the next morning. The cause of death was listed as a difficult birth. She was 38 years old and left behind six children, and, of course, her husband.

Margaretha was apparently not ill prior to going into labor, judging by a letter she wrote to her oldest daughter, Louise, dated February 17, 1881, three days before her death. She was mostly counseling Louise on how to sew a sleeve in a shirt for Jakob Friedrich. There was no indication of illness. No wonder Louise kept this letter, the last from her mother. From the letter, we know Louise was staying with one of her uncles and likely worked for their family. She was 14 years

old when her mother died. Bertha was 12, Lizzie was almost 11, Jake was 7, Bettie was 5, and Henry had just turned 3.

A funeral took place at the Zeisset home two days after her death. Her body was moved to the cemetery at Krailshausen where there was another service. The small road from the home to the church was called the *Traurigweg* – path of sorrow - mourners followed the coffin on its journey to the cemetery. We know the location of her grave in the Krailshausen cemetery, where her babies had been buried before her because the church sexton told us he remembered it. Graves are rented in Germany for a specified amount of time, usually 20 – 30 years. The lease can be renewed, otherwise the remains are removed, making room for a new grave. The Zeisset grave marker had been removed in 1969, just before Merton Zeisset and his family visited Kreuzfeld.

We do not know much about the days following Margaretha's death. Louise may have returned to Kreuzfeld to help with the household. From church records, we know that Louise was confirmed at Krailshausen in April 1880, and Bertha was confirmed in April 1882, so Bertha was still living at Kreuzfeld in 1881, when her mother died.

Margaretha's death was tragic, not only for the children, who lost their mother, but also for Jakob Friedrich, who lost his wife. He was already struggling to make a success of the farm; and now, he had to determine how to care for and provide for his children.

Continued farming problems

Jakob Friedrich wrote a letter on January 28, 1883, to the law firm representing the Hohenlohe prince. Isaak had written a letter to Jakob telling him that unless he paid the lease money within eight days, legal action would be taken against him. Jakob Friedrich said he had not yet sold his harvest, and recounted various other farming misfortunes. He said he would make the payment as soon as he could sell his produce. He wrote, "I ask only that you do not sue, for if you do, everyone else to whom we three brothers owe money will follow suit, and your lawsuit would plunge three families into ruin at once – a matter that would surely weigh heavily on your conscience. It is a very different thing when someone can pay but refuses to do so; therefore, I earnestly ask you once again not to take legal action."

Jakob was given a brief reprieve. Meanwhile, Louise, Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha's oldest child, left Germany in the summer of 1883 and arrived in New York City at Castle Garden on July 13, 1883, a week before her 17th birthday. We do not know what precipitated her immigration at this time. Because her father was unlikely to be able to give her much money, she needed to make some money on her own. German girls were valued household servants in America, so she went to

Pennsylvania where she secured work before she proceeded to Kansas. Some of her cousins (Peter Baer, John Schmutz, Katherina Bletscher) immigrated to Kansas in March 1883, only four months before Louise left for America.

Perhaps the plan was for Jakob Friedrich and his six children to immigrate to Kansas where they could have a new start, where land was still plentiful. He would not have a chance to find out.

Bankruptcy, Barn Fire, Auction, and Arrest

Bankruptcy proceedings were opened against Jakob Friedrich Zeisset on November 9, 1883, at the district court of Langenburg. Claims against him were to be filed by the first of December. Notice was published in several newspapers. By December 4, 1883, bankruptcy proceedings were discontinued because he lacked sufficient assets to cover the cost. The newspaper notice listed him as the former farmer tenant of Kreuzfeld.

He was still living at Kreuzfeld because on January 21, 1884, a notice was published in the newspaper: "This morning, two large barns burned down at tenant farmer Zeisset's Kreuzfelderhof. The house and other farm buildings were saved.

The damage is quite extensive." The barn just west of the house, built in 1841, was probably one of the barns that burned. The other was likely the house-barn south of the 1841 barn. The damage was assessed at 10,400 Marks on January 25, 1884.

The official end of Jakob Friedrich's lease of Hofgut Kreuzfeld was the 2nd of February 1884. A new tenant, August Landeck, would assume the lease on February 14, 1884. But first, an auction was to take place at Hofgut Kreuzfeld to sell the remaining assets there – officially belonging to Isaak and Johannes. A sale bill was published in the Gerabronn newspaper *Vaterlands Freund*.

The auction would take place over two days, February 11th and 12th, starting at

Kreuzfeld.
Fahrniß-Verkauf.
Der Unterzeichnete verkauft auf dem Fürstlichen Hofgut zu Kreuzfeld gegen baare Zahlung
Montag den 11. d. Mts.
von Vormittags 9 Uhr an,
4 Pferde, 10—12 Jahre alt,
9 Kühe, darunter 1 mit Kalb,
1 fetten Stier,
1 Paar Ochsen,
9 Stück Jungvieh, $\frac{3}{4}$ bis $\frac{1}{2}$ Jahr alt,
1 zum 2tenmal trächtiges Mutterchwein,
1 Zuchteber,
3 Käuferchweine,
8 Enten,
26 Hühner,
1 Hundshütte,
4 Stück eiserne Wägen, 10 verschiedene Pflüge,
4 eiserne Eggen, 1 Ringelwalze und 2 Wasserfässer,
1 Pferchhütte und 16 Stück Gurten, Futtergeschirr und Zubehör, 1 Burzelmühle,
6 Stück Pferdegeschirre und 3 Paar Ochsen-
Am Dienstag den 12. d. Mts.
von Vormittags 9 Uhr an,
700 Ctr. Kartoffel, 400 Ctr. Wurzeln, 10 Eimer Obstmoß sammt Fässer von 200 bis 1800 Liter und 1 Mostpresse mit Obstmühle, sonstiges Handgeschirr, Leitern, Handwerkszeug, F. lb. und Handgeschirr, 7 Tische, 6 Stühle, 18 Stühle, und sonstiges Schreinwerk, 6 Betten mit Bettzeug, Küchengeschirr und allerlei Hausrath.
Hiezu werden Kaufsliebhaber eingeladen.
Isaak Zeisset.

Sale bill from Gerabronn newspaper

9 o'clock both days. Payment was to be made by cash. The following things were to be sold the first day: 4 horses (10 – 12 years old), 9 heifers, including one with a calf, one fat bull, one pair of oxen, 9 heifers (4 – 5 years old), one sow pregnant for the second time, one breeding boar, 3 piglets, 8 ducks, 26 chickens, one doghouse, 4 iron wagons, 10 different plows, 4 iron harrows, a ring roller, 2 water barrels, a pen hut, 16 stalls, fodder and equipment, a root mill, 6 horse harnesses, and 3 pairs of ox harnesses.

The following items were listed for the second day of the auction: potatoes, roots - similar to turnips, 10 buckets of cider with barrels from 200 – 1800 liters, a cider press and fruit mill, strapping equipment, ladders, tools, field and hand tools, 7 tables, 6 armchairs, 18 chairs, other carpentry, 6 beds with bedding, kitchen utensils, and all sorts of household goods.

A brief newspaper notice appeared after the auction: "From the Gerabronn District Office, February 14. Estate tenant Zeisert of Kreuzfeld, whose assets have been subject to bankruptcy proceedings for several months and in whose leased farm two large barns burned down about 14 days ago, was arrested the day before yesterday, when an auction of movable property was taking place in his residence, and taken to the investigating court; what suspicions lie against the man is not yet known."

A final humiliation. It is unlikely that Jakob's children were there when he was arrested, but it is not possible to know. It is thought that he was quickly released from custody and went to live with his brother, Johannes, who was then living at Niedersteinach. Bettie and Henry also lived at Niedersteinach. Lizzie and Jake lived with Isaak at Eichenau. Lizzie was confirmed at the Lendsiedel church in April 1884, so we know she had been living there for several months. Jake was confirmed at Lendsiedel in April 1887.

It is not known where Bertha lived after the disruption of the home. Louise was living and working in Pennsylvania by this time. Jakob Friedrich's 67-year-old mother, Johanna, lived with her daughter, Magdalena, in Schrozberg. We know Johanna was in Schrozberg in June 1883 from Louise's autograph album.

Shortly after the auction, a somewhat cryptic notice was published in *Vaterlands Freund* by Isaak and Johannes Zeisset politely asking that all gentlemen who purchased items at the Kreuzfeld auction pay for their items within 14 days to Mr. G. Kammleiter, the local treasurer at Schrozberg. "At this same time, it should be noted that no one else has the right to collect money for us." Perhaps creditors were trying to collect payment?

Trial of Jakob Friedrich Zeisset

The newspaper in Schwäbisch Hall reported the outcome of the criminal case against Jakob Friedrich at a trial held on August 14, 1884, at Schwäbisch Hall. It noted that he was living in Niedersteinach. It described his transfer of the lease of Hofgut Kreuzfeld and the estate's inventory to his brothers in July 1878, yet he remained on the estate as manager and authorized agent. He did this without informing anyone of the change that had taken place – and that seemed to be the crux of the matter.

He was charged with having caused financial loss to others with the intent of securing an unlawful financial gain for himself. Because he concealed the changes in his circumstances, he was able to obtain loans which would not have otherwise been given. Evidence showed that Jakob Friedrich had appointed Leonhard Wirth from nearby Reupoldsroth to provide a guarantee for Jakob Friedrich for a loan from the Gerabronn Trade Bank. For this act, he was convicted of one count of fraud and was sentenced to prison in Schwäbisch Hall for one month and 15 days. He was acquitted on four other counts. Specifically, there was no mention of arson.

Imprisonment



Schwäbisch Hall Prison 2026

Jakob Friedrich entered the state prison at Schwäbisch Hall along with seven other men on August 26, 1884. Tragically, he paid for what was considered a minor crime with his life.

The prison would have been a terrible place. In August, it may have been hot, dank and filthy. In addition to sharing his accommodations with other prisoners, he may have shared his space with rats. Rats carried lice

and lice carried typhus, a common disease of that time. Symptoms of typhus include severe headache, body aches, fever, and rash. Over a period of about two weeks, kidney failure and pneumonia would develop.

Jakob Friedrich Zeisset died of typhus at 5:30 in the evening on October 6, 1884, a few days before he was due to be released. A review of the prison records shows

there was only one other prisoner who died that year – the day before Jakob Friedrich.

Jakob Friedrich was buried in the Nikolaifriedhof, the city cemetery, in Schwäbisch Hall on October 9th. The grave may have been unmarked and in the pauper section of the cemetery. The pastor in charge of the burial was Eugen Ströbel, of St. Michael's church in Schwäbisch Hall. Since the burial was two days after his death, perhaps his family was able to attend – we don't know.

Barn Burning

Family lore held that Jakob Friedrich had been accused of burning his barn. One story was that he was in the tavern when he was told his barn was burning and said something like, "Let it burn, it's insured."

Author's note: I was determined to find the truth behind the story that Jakob Friedrich burned his barn, a journey of 30 years. Not only was it the story the descendants in America eventually told, but it also existed in Germany. When I first visited Hofgut Kreuzfeld in 1985, Alfred Küpler, the farmer then working the former Zeisset farm was aware of the same story. The surviving records pointed in a different direction. Newspaper notices, bankruptcy records, prison records, and the report of the criminal trial show that Jakob Friedrich was convicted of fraud.

Another story was that the local brick maker was accused of setting the fire because he needed work and thought he would be hired to make brick for a new barn. Louise reportedly saw him adding fuel to the fire to get it started – we know that was not accurate because she was in Pennsylvania by that time.

A brief newspaper notice tells us that Isaak and Johannes filed a suit against Georg Herrschner, a brick maker from Kreuzfeld, for slander. The case was heard on September 10, 1884, in Schwäbisch Hall. The outcome is not known at this time, but Mr. Herrschner turned around and filed charges against Isaak at the end of October 1884 concerning a claim arising from a loan. There appeared to be bad blood between the Zeissets and the brick maker.

There was another story that when a man in Riley County had been accused of something years later, people who knew of Jakob Friedrich's story said something about Jakob having been falsely accused.

Because of the tone of the newspaper notice when the two barns burned at Hofgut Kreuzfeld at the end of January 1884, and because Jakob Friedrich was arrested three weeks later, it is certainly possible that he was accused of arson. The charge

never made it to the courtroom. Perhaps in investigating the allegation of arson, the crime of fraud was discovered.

Aftermath

The prevailing family lore was that Jakob Friedrich was accused of burning his barn, which landed him in prison. This is not so hard to comprehend, having reviewed the circumstances, but the surviving records show something else. He was convicted of one count of fraud because he concealed his financial circumstances when obtaining a loan, not arson.

Hofgut Kreuzfeld



Zeisset places of interest

What became of Hofgut Kreuzfeld? Mr. Mann, in the book *Krailshausen*, told of the tenant there for three generations – the Landeck family, who assumed the lease after Jakob Friedrich. The lease was terminated, according to Mr. Mann, because of excessively high rent. Two subsequent tenants did not fare well either. The Prince of Hohenlohe - Öhringen sold the property to a factory owner named Weber from Göppingen in early 1933 for 55,000 Reichsmark (German currency from 1924 to 1945).

The farm was eventually rented to a family who lived there for many years. The house has been unoccupied since the deaths of members of that family. It still draws descendants to the place where our six Zeisset siblings began their lives.

At the time of Jakob Friedrich's death, the moment our six Zeisset siblings became orphans, Louise was in Pennsylvania. Bertha, 16 years of age, must have been living with one of the family members.

Lizzie and Jake were living with their uncle Isaak and his family at Eichenau. Bettie and Henry were living at Niedersteinach with their uncle Johannes and his family.



**Painting of Niedersteinach by Karl Wörner, Johannes Zeisset's son-in-law.
Home of Johannes Zeisset and family 1882 – 1893.
Home of Bettie Zeisset 1883–1885. Home of Henry Zeisset 1883–1893.**

Less than a year after Jakob Friedrich's death, Bertha and Bettie left Germany to join their Baer and Bletscher cousins in Kansas.

Isaak Zeisset and his family moved from Eichenau in February 1888 to Darstadt, near Würzburg, where he rented a farm.

Chronologically in our Zeisset story, the next event was the January 1889 death of Johanna Zeisset, mother of Jakob Friedrich, Isaak, Johannes, and Magdalena. Johanna was living with Magdalena and Magdalena's daughter, Luise.

Magdalena married her second husband, Georg Peter Sönder in 1881. In 1887, Magdalena moved with her family, including, Johanna, to Fasanenmühle, a property just below the hilltop town of Waldenburg, west of Schwäbisch Hall. Johanna died at this home in January 1889 and was buried at Waldenburg.

Georg Sönder left Magdalena in February 1889 and immigrated to Pennsylvania, where he started a new family. George and Magdalena were officially divorced in November 1889.

Jake would be the next of our six Zeisset siblings to immigrate. He may not have gone with Uncle Isaak to Darstadt. He immigrated to Kansas in February 1890.

Lizzie did go to Darstadt with Uncle Isaak, and there may have been more than one reason. Isaak employed a young man named George Weller, who worked for him at both Eichenau and Darstadt. George and Lizzie would emigrate to Kansas where

they were soon married. Lizzie left Germany in May 1891, and George left in July of the same year.

This left Henry as the only one of the Zeisset children still in Germany. He was still living at Niedersteinach with Uncle Johannes Zeisset. Henry was confirmed at the church in nearby Orlach, and then he joined his sisters and brother in Kansas in April 1893. Johannes Zeisset and his family left Niedersteinach in 1893 and moved to Würzburg.

That is the end of the story of our six Zeisset siblings in Germany. None of them ever returned to the country of their birth. As children, they did not understand the full extent of their father's financial and legal struggles. They could not be shielded from the devastating loss of their mother, displacement from their homes, and then the loss of their father, first to imprisonment and then to the grave. They began their new lives in Kansas and, although it was never easy, they prevailed.