

Zeisset Family History

History of the ancestors of six Zeisset siblings who
immigrated to Kansas between 1883 and 1893

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Zeisset Family History

Foreword

The first Zeisset family reunion took place in Leonardville, Kansas, in October 1969. One-hundred-five descendants of six orphaned Zeisset siblings who immigrated to Kansas from Germany between 1883 and 1893 gathered for the reunion.

The six immigrants were Louise, Bertha, Lizzie, Jake, Bettie, and Henry, children of Jakob Friedrich Zeisset and Margaretha Müller. Very little was known about the family in Germany, just the parents' names and the place of birth. Only one of the six siblings was still living, Bettie, but she had advanced dementia and died in 1970.

After the 1969 reunion, Henry Zeisset's son, Merton, determined to document the history of the Zeisset family in America. His son, Ray was inspired to learn the history of his Zeisset ancestors in Germany. This led Ray, together with his wife Carolyn, to plan a trip to Germany for themselves and his parents, Merton and Ina, in 1970. This is history as provided by Ray's brother, Paul Zeisset, who helped with funding the trip.

Before going to Germany, Ray consulted a German genealogist, Dr. Hans-Ulrich Freiherr von Ruepprecht (1911–2006) of Stuttgart, who provided a history limited to two generations of Zeissets and Müllers for a fee of \$30. He also provided valuable hand drawn maps.

Bits and pieces of the family's history surfaced, including one of the most interesting stories: Jakob Friedrich Zeisset, father of the six orphans, died in prison in 1884. This revelation piqued my interest, even though I was only 15 years old at the time of the Zeisset second reunion, held at Leonardville in June 1972.

Merton began to compile vital statistics of the Zeisset descendants, with help from Ray and Carolyn, after the first reunion.

A one-page history of the family was written in 1972. By 1980, Merton had written a six-page history of the Zeissets. Then, in 1992, he published a spiral-bound book, "Our First Century in America – The Zeissets Who Came to Kansas from Germany 1884–1893." The narrative had expanded to 10 pages of text, followed by vital statistics for the six Zeisset siblings and their descendants.

I expanded on Merton's 1992 history, having extensively researched the family in Germany, because I was certain there was more to be discovered. My research of the Zeisset family continues to this day.

I began with a review of various German church books. Not all history can be found in church records, so I visited archives in Ludwigsburg, Neuenstein, and Schwäbisch Hall. First, I had to learn to read printed German script and hand-written records.

We could just tell our story of the Zeisset family at Kreuzfeld where the six siblings were born, and leave it at that, but there is so much more to tell. The family had an interesting history before arriving at Kreuzfeld, and that story needs to be told too. The history starts with the first mention of Zeissets in Germany and leads toward Kreuzfeld, where our six Zeisset siblings were born. It ends with their immigration to the United States.

Acknowledgments

In my early research I had assistance from Kurt Jäger of Berlin, and Dr. Elisabeth Kludas of Bochum. I continue to work with Daniel Stihler, an archivist in Schwäbisch Hall. I am grateful to all of them. I am grateful to Paul Zeisset who maintains the Zeisset genealogy webpage and posts my narratives of our family history. I wrote the first narrative in 2000, with amendments in 2006, and 2008. It is now time for a new version of the story, with some of the same text, but with considerable new or corrected material.

I am also grateful to my Zeisset relatives who contribute histories of their families in America. All too often people become interested in their family's history when the ones who can tell it are no longer around. We can be proud that our Zeisset history is documented for generations to come. It is curious that our six Zeisset immigrants either did not know much about their life in Germany or chose not to tell what they knew. They were, after all, children when they immigrated, and most children are not interested in such things. Their story is one of perseverance and success with new lives in a new country.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my research and findings to my grandmother – Barbara (Bettie) Zeisset Hoerman (1875–1970), the fifth surviving child of Jakob Friedrich and Margarethe (Müller) Zeisset.

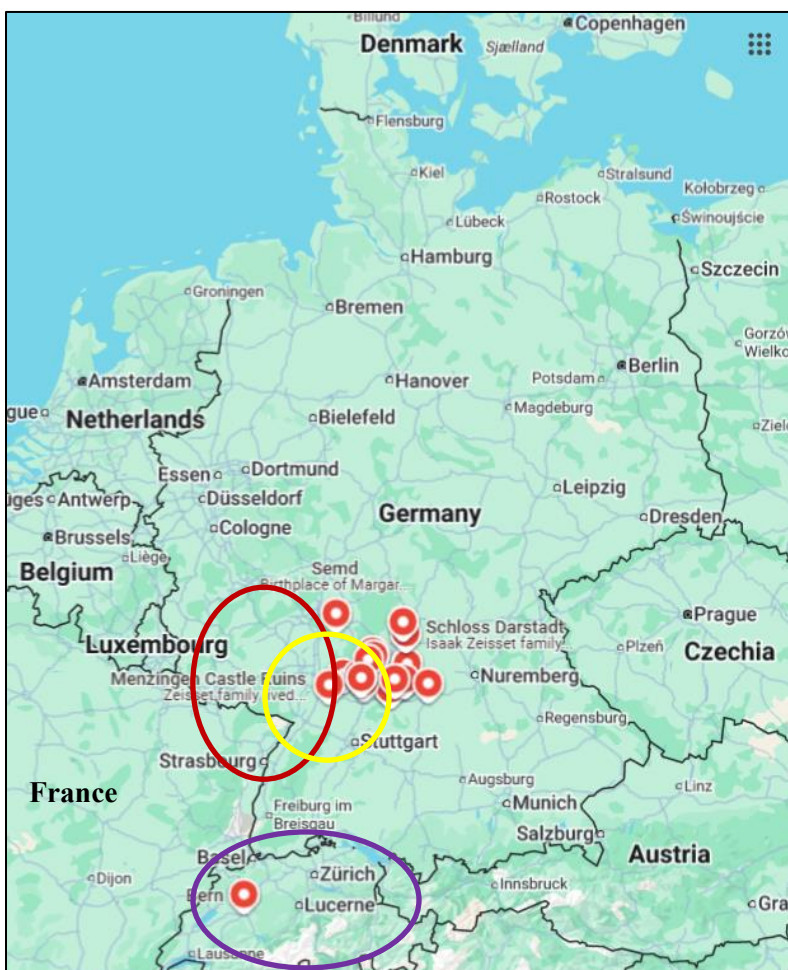
Guide

Maps are included in the following story. There are many generations with repeated names. The Zeissets were particularly fond of Jakob. For clarity Sr. or Jr. may be added, otherwise, I tried to identify people with their year of birth in parentheses.

For those of us who are descendants of the six immigrant Zeisset orphans, these sisters and brothers will be referred to throughout this history as our six Zeisset siblings. The names of direct-line ancestors in the subheadings will include “direct line” to help keep the reader oriented.

There are also three appendices at the end which were generated by Google Gemini which are intended to help the reader keep everything straight.

Here is the first map which will help with the discussion in the first chapter. The purple oval near the bottom shows the country of Switzerland with the city of Bern noted. We believe our Zeisset ancestors came to Germany from Bern. The red oval approximates the area called the Palatinate. The yellow circle approximates the area called the Kraichgau. The cluster of red markers are places of importance in the history of the Zeissets in Germany.



Map of modern Germany and bordering countries, with areas of Zeisset interest as noted.

Source: map from Google maps.

Chapter 1

First Mention of Zeissets in Germany

The Zeisset family came from Switzerland settling first at Rauhof sometime between 1660–1670, according to typewritten records dated 1939 from Alfred Funk (1905–1971). Our ancestors were Mennonites. The original spelling of the name was probably Zyßet (Zysset). Several variations on the name followed, including Zeissert, Zeiset, Zeisert, Seizert, and even Zersert.

The first Zeisset at Rauhof was Jakob Zeisset in about 1680, according to Alfred Funk. The only information about Jakob Zeisset is his name, place and date, but we do have documentation that Abraham Zeisset was at Rauhof. He was probably Jakob Zeisset's son.

A review of the history of the Mennonite church in Europe helps us understand why the Zeisset family came to Germany, why they moved frequently, and why they are difficult to trace in written records.

Mennonite History

The Protestant Reformation included three well-known religious leaders: Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–1564), and Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531). The goal of this movement was to “reform” the Roman Catholic Church in Europe.

Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. The theses challenged the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the authority of the pope, and the practice of indulgences. Ulrich Zwingli of Switzerland had arrived at similar conclusions but differed significantly with Luther regarding the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Zwingli successfully defended his 67 Theses before the Council of Zurich, which then supported him.

The idea of rebaptism has existed since the 2nd century, but the establishment of Anabaptism, an early term that came to include Mennonites, did not occur until sometime between 1525 and 1527. Anabaptists did not recognize infant baptism but believed a person should be baptized when they fully understood the meaning of the baptism. This belief prompted Zwingli to refer to them as *Wiedertäufer* or rebaptizers.

Such was Zwingli's disdain for Anabaptists, that he began a systematic persecution of them in 1525. Täufer-hunts were organized to find Anabaptists, who were

driven from their homes, tortured, and even put to death. Their marriages were considered by the government to be void, thus making them guilty of adultery.

Persecution was based on three principles: 1) Preaching without authorization from the government (2) Baptizing without governmental authorization and (3) Refusing to take oaths (to the government). By the year 1530, two thousand Anabaptists had been put to death. Martin Luther was also bitterly opposed to Anabaptism.

Menno Simons, a converted priest organized Anabaptists in the Netherlands in 1536–1537, founding the Mennonite religion. By this time, Anabaptists realized Switzerland was not a good place to live and emigration began. Some went to the Netherlands, and some to Germany. In 1671, many Swiss Anabaptists went to the Alsace, Baden and the Pfalz in Germany. Anabaptist sympathizers fled with them. Persecution continued until another mass emigration in 1709–1717. The first Mennonites known to emigrate to America were thirteen families who arrived in Pennsylvania in 1683.

Baden, a state in Germany at the time, had some Anabaptists as early as 1525. Margrave Philip of Baden (who died in 1535) was not supportive of Anabaptists and issued commands for his officials not to tolerate them. As late as 1581, twenty Anabaptists were executed for their faith in Baden.

The Palatinate is an area in southwestern Germany extending over multiple German states, so it was fragmented politically and religiously. The Palatinate changed its faith five times in the 16th century, following the dictates of its different leaders - Catholic, then Lutheran, then Reformed, then Lutheran, then Reformed. These fluctuations probably allowed increased penetration by Mennonites. Nonetheless, in 1527, several Anabaptists were imprisoned at Alzey and eventually executed, the men were beheaded and the women were drowned.

Over the next century Palatinate Electors were intent on converting Anabaptists rather than executing them. The Thirty Years War broke out in 1618 and by 1648, the Palatinate was almost completely depopulated. The Elector of that time, Charles Louis, was very concerned about the repopulation of his devastated lands. He allowed Mennonites into his land and even assigned a space for Mennonites to meet in Mannheim. Local religious leaders were not as tolerant as their Elector.

The Kraichgau region is in southwest Germany between the Neckar and Rhine rivers, in the former German state of Baden. Before the Thirty Years War there were few, if any, Mennonites in the Kraichgau. After the war, because of the loss of so many German lives and the need to rebuild, Mennonites were offered refuge and partial religious freedom in the Kraichgau in 1664. Mennonites found

tolerance here, at least *some* tolerance compared to what they had at the hands of the Swiss.

Other families who relocated to the Kraichgau from Switzerland included the following names: Baer, Landes, Horsch, Bachmann, Fellmann, Schmutz, Funck, Hege and Kreiter, Kaufmann, Hodel, Heer, Mosemann, Duersstein, Frey. Most of these families were from the area in and around Bern. Members of these families joined communities along with the Zeissets, so these are names found among the Zeisset spouses.

In 1664, Charles Louis granted Mennonites some additional freedoms. They would be allowed to meet in groups of more than twenty, but non-Mennonites were not allowed to meet with them. For this additional freedom, they were to pay a tax of 6 guilders per person, which was considered a hefty fee. This was during a time of significant persecution in Switzerland, so Swiss Mennonites sought refuge in the Palatinate, including our Zeisset ancestors.

In 1672, there were about 360 Mennonites west of the Rhine and 160 on the east. Charles Louis died in 1680, and subsequent Electors were not as tolerant as he had been, slowing immigration into the Palatinate and speeding up emigration from the Palatinate.

Three hundred Palatinate Mennonites left through the port of Rotterdam, Holland in 1717 to go to Pennsylvania, USA where religious freedom would be theirs. By 1732, three thousand Palatinate Mennonites had arrived in North America.

Margrave Karl Wilhelm (1709–1738), founder of the city of Karlsruhe in Baden, promoted tolerance of Anabaptists. Mennonites of Bern sought refuge in Baden in 1710. Land ownership was forbidden, and they were required to pay a protection fee. Families had to pay a death fee when a Mennonite died to compensate for the loss of income from the deceased.

Based on favorable experiences Baden citizens had with Mennonites over the next century, more rights were granted to Mennonites in 1809. Records of births, weddings, and funerals were required of the churches, as all other citizens were required to do. Mennonite children were excused from religious education in public schools. Mennonites are pacifists, so men were not required to do military service. In return for excuse from military service, they were required to pay a fee. Eventually Mennonite men could pay a substitute to do military service for them.

Mennonites who remained in the Palatinate established a reputation for excellence in farming. They contributed greatly to local agricultural and craft markets and

were viewed as industrious workers who could turn poor farm ground into profitable land. Political leaders recognized that, except for their religious practices, Mennonites were valuable members of society.

By the mid-18th-century, Mennonites were allowed to build meetinghouses, but they were required to look like a farm building on the outside. The Palatinate was under French rule from 1792 to 1813, but it was officially dissolved in 1806. The Palatinate was divided between the German states of Baden, Bavaria, and Hessen after Napoleon's defeat in 1814. Under French occupation, almost all restrictions on Mennonites were removed.

In 1821, a census of Mennonites in Baden enumerated 1,512 members of the faith. Over the next one hundred years, the number of Mennonites in Baden decreased to about 1,200.

This was the background and setting for our Zeisset ancestors. Mennonites can be difficult to trace since they were not allowed to own land, and for a time, they were not included in church records.

Abraham Zeisset (1718–1787) – direct line

Abraham Zeisset is the first documented ancestor of our Zeisset family, reportedly born at Rauhof in 1718. Rauhof is not a town but a large farming estate. Abraham Zeisset later rented the Rauhof estate from two women, Frau Von Moser, and Frau Von Liebenstein.



Visiting the Rauhof on the Zeisset Family Tour 2006

One source says that Abraham was appointed pastor of the Hasselbach Mennonite congregation in 1731. If that is true, he would have only been 13 years old when he was named pastor. It is more likely that his father was also named Abraham and was an elder of the Hasselbach congregation in 1731. Abraham (1718) also served as elder at Immelhausen and Hasselbach beginning in 1749 and lived at Rauhof.

Abraham Zeisset (1718) was documented in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, the first four volumes of which were published between 1955 and 1959. Because it is a detailed published reference to our early Zeisset ancestor, and because it shows his

religious leadership and the controversy surrounding him, the entry is included in full. The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* reads:

Zeisset, Abraham (d. c1786) From 1749 an elder of the Immelhausen (*q.v.*) and Hasselbach (*q.v.*) Mennonite congregations in Baden, Germany. In 1783 (not 1773 as stated *ME* III, 14) he moved to Willenbach (*q.v.*) in Wuerttemberg and served the Willenbach congregation until his death. He played a role in the strife that developed among the South German Mennonites to the left and the right of the Rhine in the 18th century. The occasion for the disputes was the activity of the strongly pietistic Mennonite preacher Peter Weber (*q.v.*) of Hardenberg. Weber's justified interest in awakening new life in the Mennonite congregations which were in many cases congealed in tradition met with opposition to the left of the Rhine under the leadership of Jacob Hirschler of Gerolsheim and a strongly conservative group; on the right of the Rhine from 1766 on, Abraham Zeisset was his most active opponent. Contemporary documents and letters about that quarrel indicate that Zeisset certainly had the honorable intention of preserving the old Anabaptist individuality and of representing it with conviction. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that he was guilty of personal obstinacy and unbrotherly attitudes.

The quarrel began when Zeisset deposed from their office on the strength of his own authority the preachers Georg and Abraham Bechtel, Jost Glueck, and Jakob Krehbiel, who were spiritually alive and were friends of Peter Weber. This created great offense in the congregations of these men. They feared a division similar to the one caused by Jakob Ammann (*q.v.*). On Oct. 14 and 15, 1766, a conference took place at Rauhof in which three Swiss Mennonites participated besides the ministers of Baden and the Palatinate. Zeisset himself had invited them. The peace that resulted from this meeting was unfortunately of short duration. The newly awakened disunity was so severe that in 1767 the spring communion was not observed in North Baden.

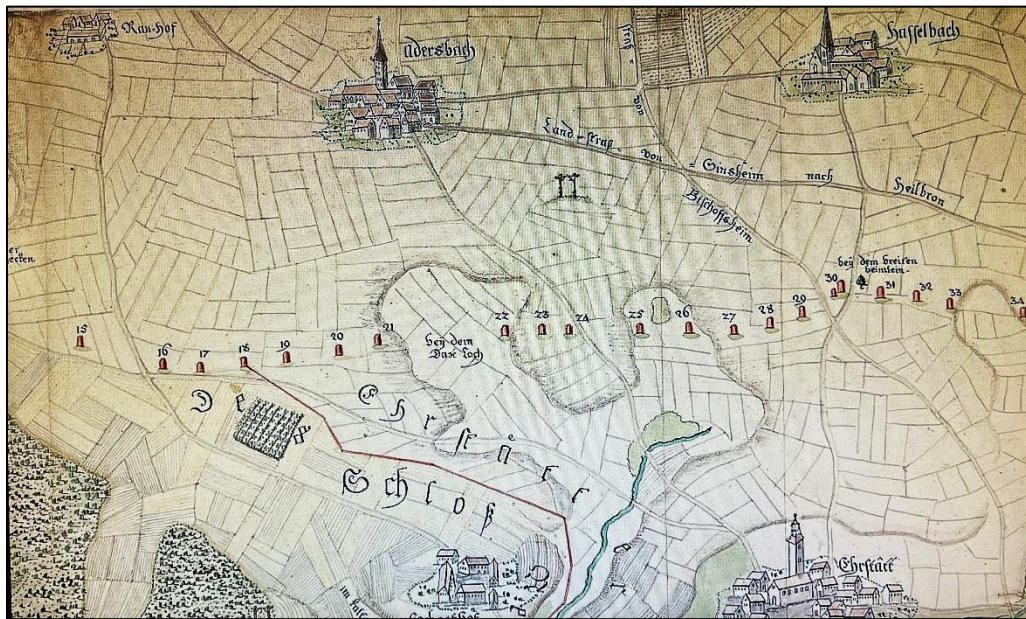
In 1770 a new effort was made to bring about peace at a conference of elders and preachers on the Himmelhaeuserhof (today Immelhaeuserhof). Zeisset and other leaders of the dispute were set back from communion "impartially and without respect of person" for Easter of that year, temporarily removed from the office of preaching, and asked to apologize for their previous hostile attitude. But the strife was not yet completely removed. Zeisset even appealed to the civil authorities for help. Not until 1782 was the affair settled.

Abraham Zeisset was also for a time engaged in correspondence between the West Prussian and the Southern German congregations. But after he had offended other correspondents of the South German congregations and did not succeed in drawing the West Prussians to his side, he dropped out of this circular letter. His relationship with the Swiss Brethren on the whole remained clear, although they were by no means on his side. In spite of the differing judgments concerning Zeisset, it must be reckoned as a service on his part that he contributed to the closer union between the South German Mennonites of the time and their Swiss brethren.

Admittedly, this entry makes our ancestor sound like a difficult and forceful personality. He was clearly firm in his convictions, and while the record portrays

him as stubborn and argumentative, it acknowledges his honorable intentions. He is credited with improving relationships between German and Swiss Mennonites.

To understand the seriousness of the conflict described in the entry, it helps to understand the role of communion in Mennonite Church life. Communion was not done at every church service. Prior to receiving communion, moral integrity, unity, and peace were required of those who would be communing. The Sunday prior to Communion was set aside to cleanse the congregation so all would be ready the next Sunday. If it was not possible to meet the terms for communion, the congregation would not be allowed to observe communion, or those not at peace with God and their fellow man would be asked to stay away. The congregation could vote on whether all should receive communion.



Map showing Rauhof in the upper left corner and Hasselbach in the upper right,
1790 Source: *Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe*; accessed June 21, 2026

We can presume from the information about Abraham Zeisset in the Mennonite Encyclopedia that his move to Willenbach may have been precipitated by disagreements at Immelhausen. However, the Rauhof estate was sold to the Von Gemmingen family in 1785, and the records from the sale state that Abraham Zeisset, the tenant, had cultivated the winter crops (vineyards) 1777–1778, and was compensated for that after his departure from the estate in 1778. Rauhof is still owned by the von Gemmingen family.

Vital records (births/baptisms, marriages, and deaths) were maintained by the clergy of local churches. But Mennonites were not recognized as a church, so they were not included. When recording of Mennonite births, marriages, and deaths was

required in 1809, their statistics were compiled by one of the accepted local churches: the evangelical (Lutheran), Catholic, or the Reformed Church.

Church records were handwritten by clergymen and may be in Latin or German. The first challenge is to determine which parish kept records for Mennonite families. There are additional frustrations in locating the oldest church records. One common reason for missing records was a fire in which all records were lost. Germany, of course, suffered through two world wars.

To date, no records have been located providing information about the Zeissets at Rauhof aside from mention of Abraham Zeisset as a tenant. When they moved to Willenbach and Lautenbach, Zeisset names were found in the Catholic church records of Ödheim.

Willenbach and Lautenbach

The Zeisset family likely arrived in Willenbach in 1778, based on their documented departure from Rauhof in 1778. Information from the Mennonite Encyclopedia provides 1783 as the year of Abraham Zeisset's arrival there. A son, Cornelius, was thought to have been born at Willenbach in 1773, but this is unproven.



Mennonite births were not listed in the church records for Willenbach and Lautenbach

Zeissets gathered at Lautenbach in 2006 at building thought to be former Zeisset residence

until 1804, since Mennonite infants were not baptized. When the priest began adding Mennonite births, the name of the midwife was listed where the priest's name was noted for Catholic births. Some of these women would attempt to baptize infants, much to the disapproval of the parents. Elisabetha Greis and Margaretha Benningin were midwives who attended Mennonite births at Willenbach and Lautenbach. The records of another parish, Hettstadt in Bavaria, noted that baptism would occur when the child was of age 12, 13, or 14 years old.

A record from the 1813 marriage of George Zeisset, Abraham's grandson, noted the family had lived at Willenbach for over 30 years, so before 1783.

Ödheim is a small town just north of Heilbronn. Willenbach is about 2 miles northwest of Ödheim. Lautenbach was another Mennonite settlement about 2 miles south of Ödheim. Willenbach and Lautenbach were not villages, but estates. Each estate had a *Hofgut*, a farmstead where several family units lived. Zeisset families lived at both estates. Other Mennonite families also lived at the two estates.



Rauhof – Zeisset home about 1680–1778

Hasselbach – Abraham (1718) and his father were elders here

Oedheim – Willenbach and Lautenbach are near here. Zeisset home 1778–1823

Zuzenhausen – birthplace of Elisabetha Landes

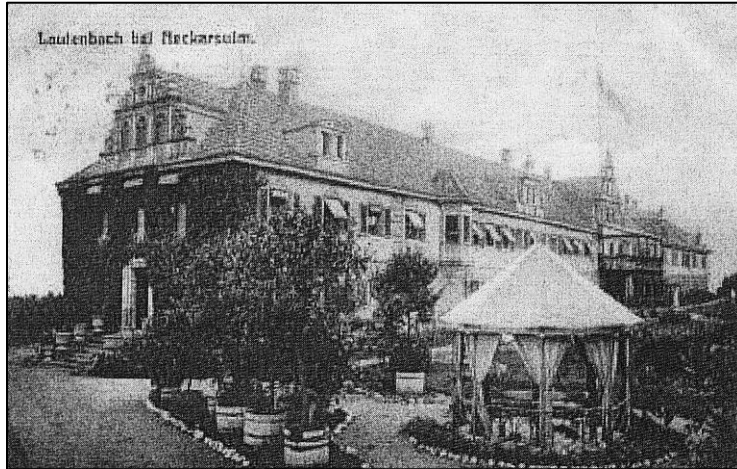
Meckesheim – birthplace of Magdalena Pletscher

Rappenau – two Zeisset daughters lived here with their families

In the late 17th century, Mennonites were allowed to rent a farm for a period of 6 to 9 years. The time restriction was abandoned after Mennonites proved themselves as capable farmers of integrity. A Mennonite farmer could lease a large estate and even pass the lease onto his heirs.

These estates were under the control of the feudal lords, a condition which allowed the tenants more freedom to try farming innovations than if the estates had been under local control by the villages. Among the crops grown by these farmers were potatoes for the manufacture of brandy, and mangelwurzel - or mangels, a type of beet used for cattle feed. Mennonite farmers in Germany became known for plant cultivation as well as animal breeding. This was the occupation of our ancestors.

Duke Frederick granted Mennonite tenants of Lautenbach the right to lease some of his properties in Württemberg in 1801, in exchange for a “protection fee,” according to the Mennonite Encyclopedia.



Undated Lautenbach postcard picture

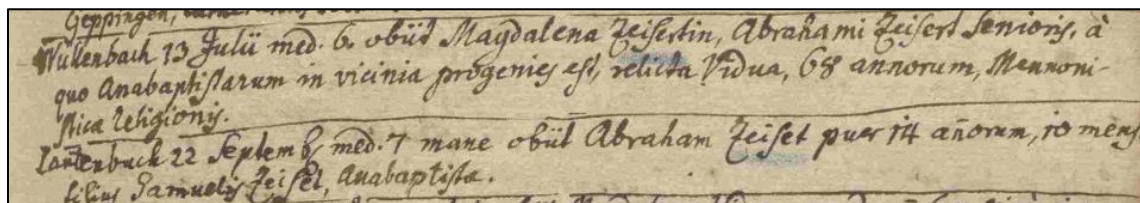
Lautenbach was owned by the city of Heilbronn from January 1772 until 1823. At that time, the property covered about 1000 hectares (one hectare = 2.471 acres). Now, in the 21st century, the property covers only 200 hectares. Some of the buildings at Lautenbach today are original. Lautenbach is currently an event venue, after considerable renovation.

Lautenbach survived WWII, but Willenbach was nearly destroyed. Old buildings in Germany are rebuilt even after heavy destruction. The manor house at Willenbach was built in 1603 by Hans Wolf Capler of Ödheim (the nearby town). Walter Landes rented the Willenbacher Hof in 1925, and the Landes family has continued to rent the Hof since then, according to Günther Landes, a resident in 2006. Willenbach is now operating as a hunting school.

Abraham and Elisabetha Zeisset's Family

Abraham Zeisset (c.1718–1787) and his wife, Elisabetha Landes (c.1720 - 1802) of Zuzenhausen, had at least eight children together. For the purposes of this history, this Abraham will be referred to as Sr. and his son, Jr.

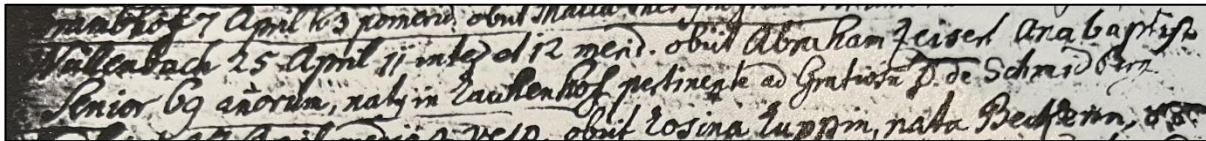
A note about Elisabetha Landes: Her date of death has not been documented. Ödheim records show the death of “Magdalena Zeisert” on July 13, 1802. She is listed as the widow of “Abraham Zeisert Seniors” from whom the Anabaptists in the area are descended. Her age is listed as 68 years, which would make her birth in 1734, too young to be the mother of those attributed to her. However, because she is listed with Abraham Senior as parents of the Mennonites in the area, it is possible this was Elisabetha Landes and the age and name are incorrect.



Entry from Ödheim church record 1802 for death of Magdalena Zeisert (in Latin)

Ray Zeisset has compiled the ancestry of Elisabetha Landes from data on My Heritage.com. Several of her siblings emigrated to Pennsylvania.

A notation in the church record in Latin stated that Abraham Zeiset Senior, Anabaptist, 69 years of age, born at Rauhof, died on the 25th of April 1787. His wife appears to still be living at that time.



Entry from Ödheim church record 1778 for Abraham Zeiset, Senior

Abraham Senior and Elisabetha had three daughters and six sons. The daughters were Anna (1748–1818), Barbara (1754–1806) and Elisabetha (1770–1816). The sons were Heinrich (1746–1808), Abraham (1755–1808), Samuel (1757–1807), Jakob (1764–1813), Isaak (c 1766–1843), and Cornelius (1773–1811).

The oldest daughter of Abraham, Sr., and Elisabetha, Anna, married Heinrich Mosemann. This couple lived at Lautenbach, where Anna died in 1818. The second daughter, Barbara, married Christian Schmutz, Sr., and lived with him in Rappenau. The third daughter, Elisabetha, also lived at Rappenau with her husband Jakob Moser.

The oldest son of Abraham, Sr. and Elisabetha Zeisset was Heinrich. He married Magdalena Heer and they had five children, one of whom was also named Heinrich (1778 –1845). Heinrich and his fifth wife, Veronika Fellmann (1798–1848) are the direct ancestors of our cousin, **Claudia Desmet-Zeisset**, who lives in Switzerland and Argentina.

Abraham Zeisset, Sr., and Elisabetha also had a son named Abraham. Abraham, Jr. married Christina Pletscher and raised their family at Willenbach, where Abraham, Jr. died in 1808. This couple had four children before Christina's death in 1787 at Willenbach. Abraham, Jr. and Christina Zeisset's oldest daughter was Barbara Zeisset who later married Heinrich Baer at Dammhof in 1798, making the **first known Baer-Zeisset marriage**.

The only son of Abraham, Jr. and Christina Zeisset was Johannes Zeisset (1786–1825). Johannes married Magdalena Schmutz in 1812. Their oldest son was named Christian, born at Lautenbach in 1813. He was the **first of our Zeisset line to emigrate to America in the 1840s**. After spending a bit of time in the California gold fields, Christian returned to **Ohio**, where he died in 1882. His **youngest**

brother arrived in America in April 1850 and changed his name to Jacob Zeisert. He married Elizabeth Stock in Ohio and then moved to Lenawee County, **Michigan**.

The Zeisset descendants in Ohio and Michigan had many variations of the spelling of the name. Christian Zeisset's gravestone spelled the last name Zizet, and his children spelled the name Sizer, Zizert, Zeizert, and Zeisert. Records are found in Germany with the spelling Zeisert and the Michigan family believes this is the original spelling. Variations found in the Michigan family include Seizert, Zeisert, Zeiszert and Zeizert.

Abraham Zeisset, Jr. married his second wife, Magdalena Fellmann, in January 1788 probably at Willenbach. This couple had nine children, but only four daughters survived. They married men with the names Bühler, Hodel, Mosemann, and Frey.

The third son of Abraham Zeisset, Sr. and his wife Elisabetha was named Samuel. Samuel married Katharina Fellmann and lived at Lautenbach, where he died in 1807. An example of how well Mennonites came to be regarded is found in the death notice for Samuel, made by the Catholic priest. The Latin entry is translated as "Samuel Zeisset, patriarch of the sect, known everywhere and by all for his sincerity, died at the age of 49 years and 8 months. The funeral was held on the 27th of this month, with the greatest attendance of the parishioners and neighbors."

Interestingly, the funeral sermon for Samuel was compiled in a document entitled "*Predigten eines Mennoniten-Predigers in Württemberg, 1830.*" There is a much longer title which in translation is: "Two funeral orations from 1) the death of the Mennonite-Preacher Samuel Zeisset, of Lautenbach, and 2) the death of the wife of Christian Hunzinger.../from Cornelius Zeisset." This document can be found in the Bethel College Library at Newton, Kansas.

The fourth son, Jakob, **ancestor of the Kansas Zeissets**, is discussed in the next chapter.

The fifth son, Isaak, raised his family (five sons) at Willenbach, where his wife, Barbara Hodel died in 1819. One of their sons, **Georg Zeisset (1793–1861), emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1853, establishing a line of Zeisets in Lancaster County.**

We have tried to determine how the Zeiset family of Oklahoma and Kansas is related to Zeisset family. There is no proof currently, but it is likely the **Oklahoma and Kansas Zeiset families** are descended from this son Isaak (1765) also,

through Georg's brother Jakob (1796 – 1865). Samuel Zeisset, the patriarch of the Oklahoma and Kansas Zeissets, was born at Giebelstadt in 1829. Jakob (1796) and his wife, Elisabetha Horsch, died at Giebelstadt in 1865 and 1858), and the birth of a son in 1829 would fit their family. Samuel Zeisset was also later listed in the Lancaster County Mennonite vital records.

Isaak Zeisset (1765) married his second wife, Magdalena Muselmann, in 1820. They had eight more children. Isaak and Magdalena moved to Hettstädterhof southwest of Würzburg, in Bavaria to join her parents who had moved there in 1804. Isaak died at the Hettstädterhof in 1843, which is near Giebelstadt.

The sixth son of Abraham Zeisset, Sr., Cornelius Zeisset, was born, married to Elisabetha Heer, and died at Willenbach in 1811. This Cornelius Zeisset was the author of Samuel Zeisset's funeral sermon. Only one of his seven children lived to adulthood and was also named Cornelius. Infant mortality among the Zeisset family in Willenbach was high. For instance, only four of the nine children of Abraham Zeisset, Jr. and his second wife's nine children survived infancy, all daughters, so the Zeisset name did not carry on from this line.

Family Chart summary for the first generation:

Abraham Zeisset (1718) and Elisabetha Landes (c. 1720)

1. Heinrich Zeisset (1746) and Magdalena Heer (1745)
Claudia Zeisset-Desmet line
2. Anna Zeisset (1748) and Heinrich Mosemann
Anna died at Lautenbach 1818, five children
3. Barbara Zeisset (1754) and Christian Schmutz (1751)
Fourteen children at Rappenu, five survived infancy
4. Abraham Zeisset (1755) and Christina Pletscher (c. 1758)
Ohio and Michigan Zeisset line with various spellings
5. Samuel Zeisset (1757) and Katharina Fellmann
Five children, none survived
6. Jakob Zeisset (1764) and Magdalena Pletscher (1764)
Kansas Zeisset line, Illinois Zeisset line
Raphael Zeisset line
7. Isaak Zeisset (1765) and Barbara Hodel (1770)
Pennsylvania Zeisset line;
Probably Samuel Zeisset line in Kansas, Oklahoma
8. Elisabetha Zeisset (1770) and Jacob Moser (1759)
Eleven children, seven survived infancy; lived at Rappenu
9. Cornelius Zeisset (1773) and Elisabetha Heer
Six children, two survived infancy;

Jakob Zeisset (1764–1813) – direct line

Jakob Zeisset was the great-great-grandfather of our six Zeisset siblings. Jakob Zeisset (1764–1813), son of Abraham, Sr. and Elisabetha Landes Zeisset, was born at Rauhof in 1764, moved to Lautenbach in about 1778 and married Magdalena Pletscher (1764–1826) of Meckesheim in 1785. Pletscher is sometimes spelled Plätscher. Magdalena was born in Meckesheim,

Jakob Zeisset was a co-tenant farmer, *mitpächter*, at Lautenbach, presumably working with his brother, Samuel. Jakob and Magdalena had eleven children, seven of whom died in infancy or childhood. One of the surviving children was a daughter: Magdalena (1792–1850) who married Abraham Bühler, then Isaak Fellmann, and eventually died in Bruchhausen, a town southwest of Heidelberg.

Jakob Zeisset (1764–1813) and Magdalena Pletscher's surviving sons were Abraham (1787–1817) who died in Lautenbach; Johannes (1794–1855), also born at Lautenbach, will be discussed in the following chapter; and Isaak Zeisset (b. 1803), for whom no other information has been found.

The chart below shows Abraham, his son, Jakob, and his grandson, Johannes, all in the direct line of our six Zeisset siblings.

Abraham Zeisset (1718) and Elisabetha Landes (c 1720)
Jakob Zeisset (1764) and Magdalena Pletscher (1764)
Johannes Zeisset (1794–1855) and Christina Bär (1798–1866)

This chapter told of the Zeisset family coming from Switzerland to Germany, from being persecuted to being accepted as productive members of society. The next generation of our Zeisset ancestors, born in the 19th century, is less difficult to trace because Mennonites were consistently included in church records. The following chapter discusses the next three generations, including the birth of the father of our six Zeisset siblings, Jakob Friedrich Zeisset.

Chapter 2

Zeissets of the 19th Century

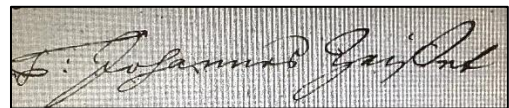
This chapter begins with Johannes, the grandson of Abraham Zeisset, Sr., discussed in the previous chapter. We will learn about all Johannes' children, and then return to the firstborn, Jakob, the ancestor of our six Zeisset siblings. We will follow their moves through Menzingen and Sindolsheim before arriving in Kreuzfeld.

Since we will see more emigration to America, it should be noted that name spellings are Americanized, removing the umlaut marks (two little dots over vowels). Also, Johann and Johannes are two different names in Germany.

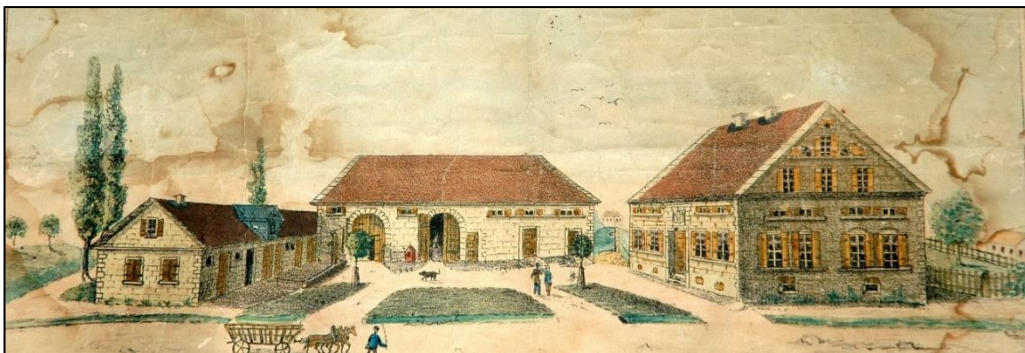
Johannes Zeisset (1794–1855) – direct line

We know Johannes was born at Lautenbach, where some of the extended Zeisset family moved around 1778. Jakob was his father, and Magdalena Plestcher was his mother. His father died in 1813, when Johannes was 19 years old. This is where our story begins.

Johannes paid a tax of 22 florins in lieu of military duty in February 1815. Because he was under 25 years of age, he was prohibited from marrying unless he paid a redemption fee for mandatory military service. Twenty-two florins was a hefty fee, perhaps worth as much as one year's wages, but he was about to be married. He had to petition the district administration at Neckarsulm to admit his bride because she was coming from different district, Dammhof near Eppingen.



Johannes Zeisset's signature 1815



Artist's rendering of the Dammhof, not dated. Source: Elaine Baer, Riley, Kansas 2002

Johannes married Christina Bär in April 1815 at Lautenbach. Christina was born in 1798, at Dammhof, to Matthäus Bär and Barbara Schmutz. Christina was a sister of Barbara Bär who married Georg Zeisset, ancestor of the Pennsylvania Zeissets.



Location of Dammhof in relation to Rauhof and Oedheim

The Bär family has been well documented by other researchers. They came to Ittlingen, Germany, around 1650, from Hausen, Canton Zürich, Switzerland. They were trying to escape persecution since they were also Mennonites. They have been traced back to the mid-16th century. For this chapter, the focus remains on the Zeisset family.

After Johannes and Christina married, Johannes continued to farm at Lautenbach. He probably farmed with his brother, Abraham, until Abraham's death in 1817 at 30 years of age.

Johannes and Christina had five children while living at Lautenbach. Their first child was born in 1816 and was named Jakob. He would become the grandfather of our six Zeisset siblings. Johannes and Christina had a daughter, Magdalena, born in 1819.

Several Zeisset families moved to Menzingen around 1823 to rent a different farm. To make matters more confusing, one of the other Zeissets was named Johann (1786–1825), a first cousin of Johannes (1794–1855). Menzingen is now a district within the municipality of Kraichtal since 1971.

The first Zeisset event reported in Menzingen church records was the death of twins born to Johann (1786–1825) and his wife Magdalena in February 1824.

The Zeisset family suffered several deaths in 1825. Johannes and Christina's fourth child, Catharina, died at Menzingen in January 1825, shortly after her fourth birthday. Cousin Johannes (1786) died in May 1825, and then another cousin,

Isaak (1801), died in July 1825. Johannes and Christina's sixth child, the first of their children born at Menzingen, died in September 1825.



Kraichtal – Menzingen in the lower left corner. Lautenbach, south of Oedheim is shown in the upper right corner.

So many deaths in a short period of time must have been discouraging to the Zeissets in their new home. When Johann (1786) and Isaak (1801) died, not only did the family lose the provider, but the farm lost a worker. Johannes' mother, Magdalena Pletscher Zeisset, died at Menzingen in February 1826.

In addition to the five children born at Lautenbach, Johannes and Christina had seven children while living at Menzingen, but the first three died within a few months of birth. Finally, a daughter, Barbara, born in 1828, became the couple's fourth child to survive infancy. Three more sons were born, Matthäus (1830), Johann (1833), and Abraham (1838).

The Menzingen Estate

We visited the ruins of the *Wasserschloss*, or water castle, at Menzingen on the Zeisset Family Tour to Germany in 2006. We were told the Zeisset family farmed the grounds belonging to a Baron who owned the castle, and that the Zeissets lived in the building immediately in front of the castle.

A brief history of the *Evangelische Kirche* of Menzingen published in 1998 reported a population of 1,500



**Zeisset family members
at the Menzingen Water Castle 2006**

residents in the mid-19th century. Of these, there were only seven Catholics, 100 Jews, and 32 Mennonites. Most of the Mennonites were Zeissets.

Mennonite families known to live at the Menzingen farm during these years were: Johannes and Christina Zeisset; Johann Zeisset's (1786) family – his widow, Magdalena Schmutz, who married Samuel Dürstein a year after Johann's death; Isaak Zeisset's widow Elisabetha Hege, who married Daniel Bähr in 1828 and remained in Menzingen; and Samuel Brand and his wife, Barbara Kaufmann.

Johannes and Christina's oldest son, Jakob, married Johanna Epp at Menzingen in 1838. They were the grandparents of our six Zeisset siblings. Before that story is told, the other children of Johannes and Christina Zeisset will be summarized because of their connections to other branches of our Zeisset tree.

Johannes Zeisset (1794–1855) and Christina Bär (1798–1866)

Jakob (1816–1861) and Johanna Epp (1817–1889)

Grandparents of our six Zeisset siblings

Magdalena (1819–1884) and Matthäus Bär (1809–1859)

Bär family at Niedersteinach; Baer family in Kansas

Barbara (1828–1884) and Jakob Schmutz (1817–1885)

Parents of John Schmutz at Junction City, Kansas

Matthäus (1830 – 1896) and Friederica Ribstein (1831 –1869)

Direct line of Raphael Zeisset

Johann (1833–1878) and Jakobina Behr (1833–1901)

Direct line of Illinois Zeisset family

Magdalena Zeisset Bär

The second surviving child of Johannes and Christina Zeisset was Magdalena (1819–1884). She will be mentioned in our history as the mother of the Bärs at Niedersteinach, some of whom immigrated to Kansas.

Magdalena was born in Lautenbach in 1819 and moved with her parents and brother to Menzingen around 1823. She married Matthäus Bär at Menzingen in 1839. They immediately made their home at Niedersteinach.

Matthäus Bär was born in 1809 at Dammhof, an estate nine miles east of Menzingen. Niedersteinach was quite a bit farther away from Menzingen – 87 miles northeast. Magdalena Zeisset Bär's mother, Christina Bär, was also born at Dammhof, but the two were not related. Magdalena and Matthäus lived at Niedersteinach the rest of their lives. Niedersteinach will become more important to our Zeisset family later.

Barbara Zeisset Schmutz

Barbara (1828–1884) was the third living child of Johannes and Christina Zeisset. She was born at Menzingen and married Jakob Schmutz at Streichenberg in 1850, a castle south of Sinsheim. The 2006 Zeisset Tour participants may remember it as a place we were unable to visit because of pouring rain.

Barbara and Jakob Schmutz settled in Obersteinach, very near Barbara's sister Magdalena at Niedersteinach. Only four of Barbara and Jakob's nine children survived childhood. Their son, John Schmutz, immigrated to Kansas in 1883. He settled in Dickinson County, later moving to Junction City, where he died in 1924. John Schmutz married a widow named Sophia in 1884, shortly after his arrival in Junction City. This couple did not have children.

Barbara and Jakob's oldest daughter, Christina Schmutz, married Heinrich Kaufmann and remained in Germany as did her younger sister, Anna, who married Christian Landes. This couple lived, at least for a short time, at Niedersteinach. Barbara Zeisset and Jakob Schmutz lived the rest of their lives in Obersteinach. Barbara died in 1884 and her husband, Jakob, died in 1885.

Matthäus Zeisset

Johannes and Christina Zeisset's second son was named Matthäus. He was born in Menzingen in December 1830 and married Friederica Ribstein, also of Menzingen, in 1857. This couple is the **ancestral line of Raphael Zeisset**, our German cousin, whom many of us met on the Zeisset tour in 2006.

Matthäus and Friederica had ten children, but only two survived infancy – a daughter named Friederika (1860–1928) who later married Heinrich Bär (1847–1921), and a son, Matthäus Zeisset (1868–1938).

Of special interest regarding the daughter, Friederika (1860–1928), is a 1926 letter she wrote to Anna Baer Bletscher in Leonardville, Kansas. She talks about some of the history pertaining to this Bär line. Friederika and Heinrich Bär never had children together, but Friederika was a beloved stepmother to Heinrich's children by his first wife.

Friederica Ribstein Zeisset died two days after twin sons were born in May 1869. Her husband, Matthäus Zeisset (1830–1896), then married Magdalena Funk in 1870, and this couple had five more children, with three who survived childhood: Heinrich (1873–1903), Jakob (1878–1971), and Barbara (1881–1976), who married Friedrich Dürrstein.

Matthäus Zeisset moved with his family to Laudenberg, Germany, between 1869 and 1871 and then to Hohenlindenhof in 1879. Hohenlindenhof is only a short distance from Überlingen, a town on Lake Constance.

Matthäus and Friederica Zeisset's son, Matthäus, married Christina Horsch at Daisbach, Baden, Germany in 1895. Matthäus Zeisset, Sr., died in Hohenlindenhof in 1896 and his wife, Magdalena, died in 1903.

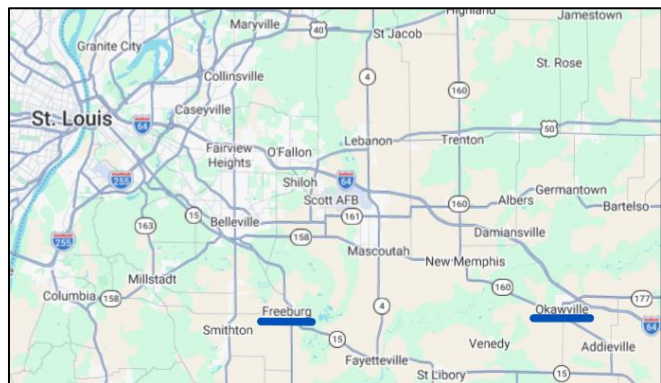
Johann Zeisset – ancestor of the Illinois Zeissets

The third son of Johannes Zeisset and his wife Christina Bär was Johann (John) (1833–1878), born at Menzingen. I previously reported that Johann Zeisset arrived in the United States on the 9th of August 1854 aboard the *SS Carolus Magnus*, but this was incorrect. We know John married Jacobina Carolina Frederika Behr of Beilstein, Germany (about 40 miles east of Menzingen), on July 10, 1853, in Belleville, St. Clair County, Illinois. He will be referred to as John in Illinois.

The mystery of John's arrival has been solved. Frederika was the only member of her family to emigrate, so I looked for her in the ship records. Frederika Behr was listed as a 19-year-old male, traveling with 19-year-old Joh. Zeissel, listed as a female, on the *SS St. Petersburg*, arriving in New Orleans, Louisiana on November 6, 1852.

"Joh. Zeisset" was mentioned in a May 1853 New Orleans newspaper on a list of German letters at the post office. Interestingly, his marriage to Frederika Behr in Illinois was reported in a Würzburg, Germany newspaper in October 1853, along with four other German couples who were married in Belleville, Illinois.

The John Zeisset family is listed in the 1860 Federal census in Freeburg, St. Clair County, Illinois. Freeburg is 23 miles southeast of St. Louis, Missouri. Two sons, William and Frank, were listed on the census. William John Zeisset was born in Freeburg, St. Clair County, Illinois, in February 1857. He married Mary Hoffart in Clinton County, Illinois and this couple had twelve children. Many Zeisset descendants remained



Section of Missouri and Illinois map showing Freeburg and Okawville, Illinois

in Clinton County, Illinois. The son listed as Frank was Phillip Zeisset who married Caroline Koester, moved into St. Louis, and had three children. Phillip and Caroline both died in St. Louis.

The 1870 census listed John Zieser at Freeburg with his wife, Frederika, and their five children: Henry, John, Phillip, George, Helena, and William. George was born in 1863 but died in 1873.

John Zeisset, died in Okawville, Washington County, Illinois in 1878, from meningitis. Frederika remarried Jacob Lehr sometime over the next two years. She survived her second husband and died in St. Louis, Missouri on the 16th of June 1901, where she lived with her daughter, Magdalena. The name Magdalena was often shortened to Lena, as was the case here.

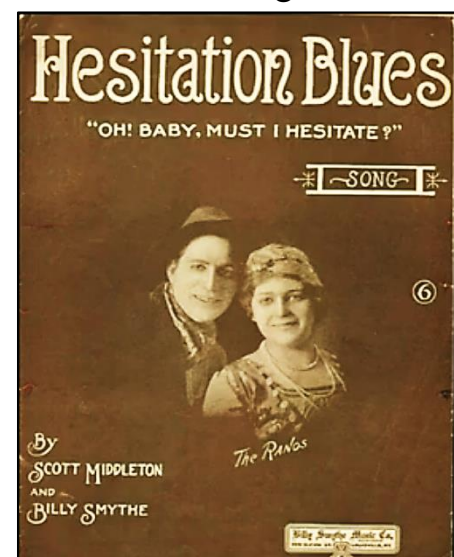
The 1900 census lists the number of children born to each woman and lists the number of living children. Frederika reported seven children, with four living in 1900. The four surviving were John, Phillip, Lena and one other. Lena's son became famous in music circles, so his story is told in the following section.

Billy Smythe, Famous Blues Musician

Magdalena, daughter of John and Frederika Zeisset, was born in 1865 in Freeburg and married Charles Schmitt in St. Louis in 1884. Charles was born in Erie, Pennsylvania and moved to St. Louis where he first worked for the railroad. He eventually became a factory watchman.

The Schmitts lived their married life in St. Louis where they raised six children: Mae, William, Albert, Charles, Edna, and Helen. The father, Charles, died in St. Louis in 1933, while Magdalena lived until 1947. She died in Rockbridge, Illinois where she lived with her older daughter.

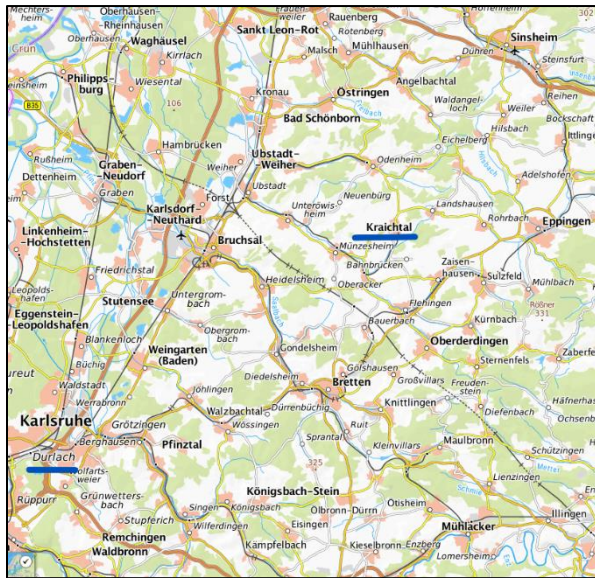
The Schmitts' oldest son, William, gained some fame as a piano player in St. Louis. He changed his name to Billy Smythe and married Edith Middleton in 1910. She was also a musician, as was her brother Scott. They moved to Louisville, Kentucky where Billy became a composer and music publisher. He played and wrote ragtime and blues music, the most famous being "Hesitation Blues," which he wrote with Art Gillham and Scott Middleton. "Hesitation Blues" has its own Wikipedia page! There is a long list of artists who



have performed the piece, including Willie Nelson, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Janis Joplin, and many others.

Billy moved to San Antonio, Texas around 1934 where he managed and later owned a radio station. He and his wife were divorced before 1940. He died in Corpus Christi, Texas in 1972.

Abraham, youngest son of Johannes and Christina



Map showing location of Durlach and Menzingen (Kraichtal), underlined in blue

The fourth son of Johannes Zeisset and Christina Bär was named **Abraham**, born in Menzingen in 1838 and married Magdalena Schenkel in Durlach, Baden, Germany in 1868. Abraham was a citizen of Durlach, a town just outside of the city of Karlsruhe. He lived in Karlsruhe for the duration of his married life and worked there as a *Kutscher*, or coachman. Abraham and his wife, Magdalena, had three daughters and one son, all born in Karlsruhe, but only one of these children survived. The daughter, Maria, was born in 1870, married in 1894, but died when she was only 32 years of age in Durlach. Abraham (1838) also died young, in Karlsruhe in 1881 –

so he was only 42 years old at the time of his death. Abraham and his wife were members of the Protestant church. Abraham even departed from the naming patterns of the past and named his son, Theodor, but he lived only one and a half years so the Zeisset name from this line ended with the death of Abraham in 1881. Other Zeisset descendants would live in this area in coming years.

With Johannes and Christina's other children summarized, the story returns to their firstborn son, Jakob, whose descendants became central to the Kansas branch of the family.

Jakob Zeisset (1816–1861) – direct line

Johannes and Christina's firstborn, Jakob Zeisset, was born a little over a year after they were married. He would become the grandfather of our six Zeisset siblings. Jakob was born at Lautenbach in 1816 and moved with the family to Menzingen when he was 7 years old. Jakob was a farmer, like his father.

Birth of Jakob Friedrich Zeisset – direct line

Menzingen church records documented the birth of Jakob Friedrich Epp to Johanna Epp on May 30, 1837, with his baptism the following day by the Lutheran pastor, who noted that the infant was illegitimate (*unehelich*). Nine of 62 births in Menzingen in 1837 were illegitimate.

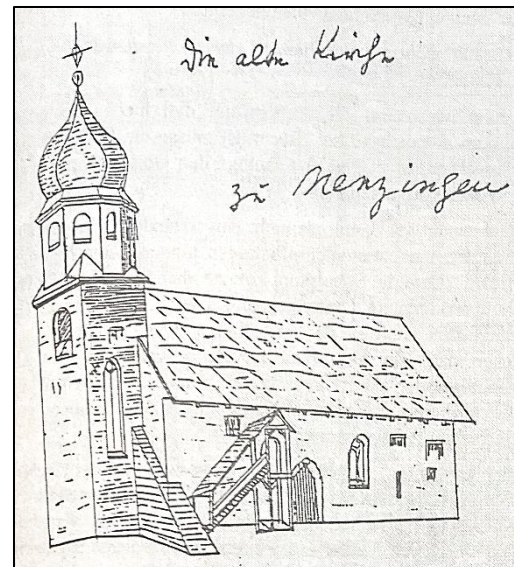
Over a year later there is an entry in the church record, in smaller writing, stating that Jakob Zeisset freely and willingly, with confirmation by Johanna Epp, explained that he was the father of Jakob Friedrich and wants his last name to be changed to Zeisset. The entry was signed by both parents and two sponsors on September 13, 1838. Jakob Friedrich was the only one of Jakob and Johanna's children to be baptized as an infant. Remember that Mennonites did not believe in infant baptism but instead baptized their children around 12–14 years of age.

Occasional illegitimate births were noted among Mennonites but seemed to be less common than among Protestant and Catholic families. In this case, Jakob was noted to be a Mennonite, while Johanna was *evangelisch*, or Lutheran. Jakob and Johanna were married by the Lutheran pastor on November 4, 1838. Their wedding date was previously listed as October 16, but that was the date of the marriage permit. Jakob was 22 when he was married, and Johanna was 21.

Johanna Luise Epp (1817–1889)

Johanna would become the grandmother of our six Zeisset siblings. Her father's family had lived in Menzingen for many years. Her ancestral Epp line can be traced back to the mid-1600s in Menzingen.

Johanna's father, Bernard Friedrich Epp (1790–1840), was a tax collector. Her mother, Catherine Friederika Grudina (1787–1826), was born in Michelfeld, 15 miles north of Menzingen. The last name was also sometimes spelled Krutina. Johanna's father remarried after his first wife died in 1826 and had seven more children with his second wife. Johanna's younger brother, Friedrich Epp, immigrated to New York in 1847. Her sister, Louisa, married and remained in Menzingen.



Old Menzingen Church

Source: 1848-1998 church history

It is interesting to note that the surname Epp is associated with Mennonite families, however, Johanna's lineage was evangelical since the time of the Lutheran reformation. During Johanna's youth, it was physically dangerous for members of the congregation to attend church services because of the poor condition of the 300-year-old church. The side had collapsed and the tower was cracked. A new church was completed in 1848 after more than a decade of disputes between the church and the local nobility. For a time, the church met in the town hall.

Johanna and Jakob's Children

A second son, Isaak, was born to Johanna and Jakob Zeisset in March 1839. They were married by the time of his birth. Because Jakob and both sponsors were Mennonite, Isaak was not baptized at birth. The pastor noted that the mother was "on the other hand" Protestant.

Johannes was the third son born to Johanna and Jakob, on December 29, 1841. The two sponsors were Protestant this time, but Johannes was also not baptized at birth. A daughter, Barbara Friederika, was born in September 1844, but lived only a month. A son, Friedrich, was born in June 1846, and died 11 days later. Then Daniel was born on November 27, 1848. Magdalena would be born at their next home in 1854.

Move to Sindolsheim

Records indicate that Jakob's father, Johannes Zeisset, rented an estate at Menzingen from Candlemas 1833 to Candlemas 1851, eighteen years. Candlemas, also called Lichtmess, is a religious observation on the second of February, forty days after the birth of Jesus, recognizing the ritual purification of His mother,

Mary, and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem. There is an old German proverb "The badger peeps out of his hole on Candlemas Day, and when he finds snow walks abroad; but if he sees the sun shining, he draws back into his hole." In America, this day is recognized as Groundhog Day.



One route between Menzingen and Sindolsheim (upper right)

One record indicated that Jakob Zeisset bought property at Menzingen after the lease ended in 1851. The Zeissets left Menzingen sometime between February 1851 and 1854 for Helmstheim, where we found the family next in 1854. Menzingen and Helmstheim

were about 50 miles apart.

Helmstheim is a farm 2 miles northeast of the village of Sindolsheim. The Helmstheimerhof, owned by the Barons of Löwenstein-Wertheim-Rosenberg, was a sizable estate and among the buildings were the house, barns, stalls, blacksmith shop, distillery and a pub, the Wirtshaus zum Golden Pflug. The Zeiset family lived at Helmstheimerhof where Jakob was a tenant farmer, but only for a brief time. The resident of the Helmstheim farm showed me a photograph of the farm from 1854, shown below, when I visited the farm in 2004.



Map of the Helmstheim farm in 1854

Jakob and Johanna's only surviving daughter, Magdalena, was born at Helmstheim on December 28, 1854. Her birth record stated Jakob was a citizen of Menzingen and a tenant at Helmstheim. Shortly after Magdalena's birth, the family moved to Sindolsheim, 62 miles northeast of Menzingen.

Jakob Zeisset (1816–1861) and Johanna Epp (1817–1889)

1. Jakob Friedrich (1837) and Margaretha Müller (1842)
Parents of our six Zeisset siblings
2. Isaak (1839) and Bertha Hettinger (1843)
3. Johannes (1841) and Elisabetha Bär (1845)
7. Magdalena (1854) and Johann Belzner (1846)
Ancestors of Maria Trepp

Records at the Neuenstein Archive indicate the Zeissets lived at *Schlossgut Sindolsheim* – the farm of the Sindolsheim castle. This castle is a large, long building at the bottom of the street leading to the church. After a devastating fire in

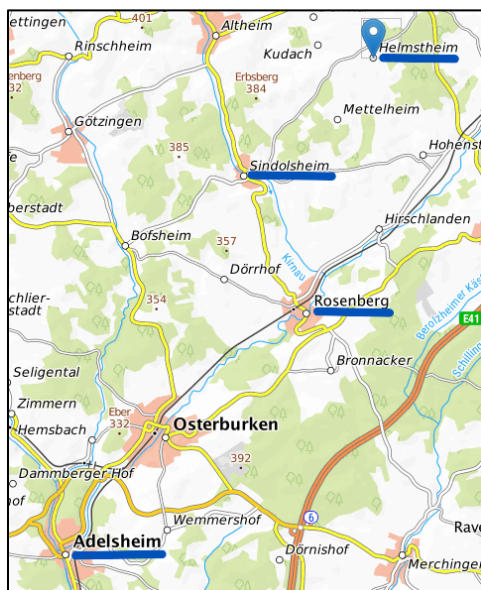
1801, the castle was rebuilt and still stands today with four different living quarters, so four families can occupy the building.

Johannes Zeisset, Jakob's father, died on April 30, 1855, soon after moving to Sindolsheim. He was 60 years old. Johannes was buried at Sindolsheim and interestingly, the pastor did not record him as being a Mennonite.



Sindolsheim Castle 2008
Zeisset family lived in one of the sections

The Sindolsheim *Heimatbuch* – a local history book published by most German towns and villages, listed the population of Sindolsheim for various years. The first Mennonites were noted in the 1845 report, with only seven people, out of a total population of 712. There were 70 Jews living in Sindolsheim at this time. Interestingly, only two Catholics were noted. The Mennonite family living in Sindolsheim in 1845 was Jakob Frey, with his second wife, Elisabetha Bechtel, and their children. Most of the Frey family remained in Sindolsheim.



**Map showing Helmstheim,
Sindolsheim, Rosenberg, and
Adelsheim, top to bottom.**

The Sindolsheim Mennonite population reported in 1855 had risen to sixteen, which now included the Zeisset family – Christina (Johannes was likely dead by the time the population was counted), Jakob and Johanna, and their five children. By 1865, the number of Mennonites was down to eight – the Zeisset family left in 1863.

Jakob was only 45 years old when he died six years after his father, Johannes. His death occurred on September 8, 1861, and he was listed as a Mennonite. Both Jakob and his father, Johannes, were buried at the church cemetery in Sindolsheim. Now there were two Zeisset widows with the family group – Christina, widow of Johannes, and Johanna, widow of Jakob.

The Zeisset tenancy of the Sindolsheim estate ended on *Lichtmess* February 1863. The Zeissets, except for Isaak, moved to Rosenberg, a small town about three miles south of Sindolsheim, where Johanna purchased a home.

Isaak Zeisset, Jakob and Johanna's second son, was the first of Jakob and Johanna's children to marry. He was listed as a *Landwirt* – farmer and Mennonite in the marriage notice on June 30, 1863. His Lutheran bride was Bertha Hettinger from Eberstadt, a town about 30 miles south of Sindolsheim.

Isaak and Bertha's daughter, Emma Louise, was born on November 9, 1863, at Sindolsheim and was baptized on the 18th of November. Infant baptism was a distinct change for the Zeisset family, indicating they were not continuing to practice Mennonite ways. This birth indicated that at least some of the Zeisset family continued to live at Sindolsheim after Jakob's death. Jakob Friedrich was listed as a witness at the baptism, and he was still living at Sindolsheim. It should be noted that some of Bertha Hettinger's family lived at Sindolsheim, and that her parents and a sister later died there.

We are very fortunate to have a photograph of the Zeisset family at Sindolsheim. It was sent to Bettie Zeisset Hoerman by one of the German cousins, a son of Johannes Zeisset (1841). We know it was taken at Sindolsheim because Jakob Zeisset died there in 1861. Magdalena appears to be about 6 years old, which puts the date of the photograph at about 1860.



Zeisset family at Sindolsheim about 1860
Back row: Johannes, Jakob Friedrich, Isaak
Front row: Daniel, Jakob, Magdalena, Johanna

The Zeissets lived in Rosenberg for a very short time, maybe only a year. They were about to move to Kreuzfeld.

Move to Kreuzfeld

Jakob Friedrich Zeisset, with his mother, had arranged to rent the Kreuzfeld farm from the Prince of Hohenlohe-Öhringen. Below is a translation of the transcribed document regarding the rental. It gives us several details about our Zeisset family. The spelling variation between Jakob and Jacob is not significant.

...1864, as the lessee of the Sindolsheim estate; the attached certificate to this effect, dated March 12, 1863, has been provided by the estate's owner. Since Candlemas of this year, the Widow Zeisset has resided with her five children in Rosenberg, near Sindolsheim, where she purchased a house.

An attached document dated 12 March 1863 officially attests that the Widow Zeisset possesses assets valued at 10,000 to 12,000 florins, and the enclosed certificate dated the 4th of this month gives Jacob Zeisset a favorable character reference.

The eldest son, Jacob Zeisset (aged 28–30), intends to move onto the Kreuzfeld leasehold estate with his mother initially; however, he plans to marry soon, and his bride will bring a dowry of several thousand florins. Until Jacob Zeisset is able to provide the lease security deposit of 1,500 florins himself, Schoolmaster Hettinger and Pharmacist Strelin of Sindolsheim have pledged surety for him, as recorded in the attached protocol dated the 4th of this month. Furthermore, the lease security deposit provided by Ströbel—secured by a lien on real estate—should not be released until the sub-lessee has actually paid the stipulated sum of 1,500 florins.

Under the terms of the existing contract, the Widow Zeisset and her eldest son Jacob would take over the Kreuzfeld leasehold estate for the remainder of the lease term (until Candlemas 1870) and fully assume the obligations of the lessee, Ströbel—including liability for the return of the inventory in kind and for the value of the farm equipment. In view of the fact that the documentation provided regarding the takeover of the Kreuzfeld estate by the Widow Zeisset and her eldest son, Jacob, appears to offer sufficient security—and given the favorable impression made by the son, who comes across as a sensible and articulate man—it would seem appropriate to proceed with the proposed sublease arrangement.

The Widow Zeisset holds substantial stocks of fodder and straw in Sindolsheim and intends to sell them there rather than transport them to Kreuzfeld—a distance of approximately nine hours' travel—and instead wishes to purchase the supplies currently

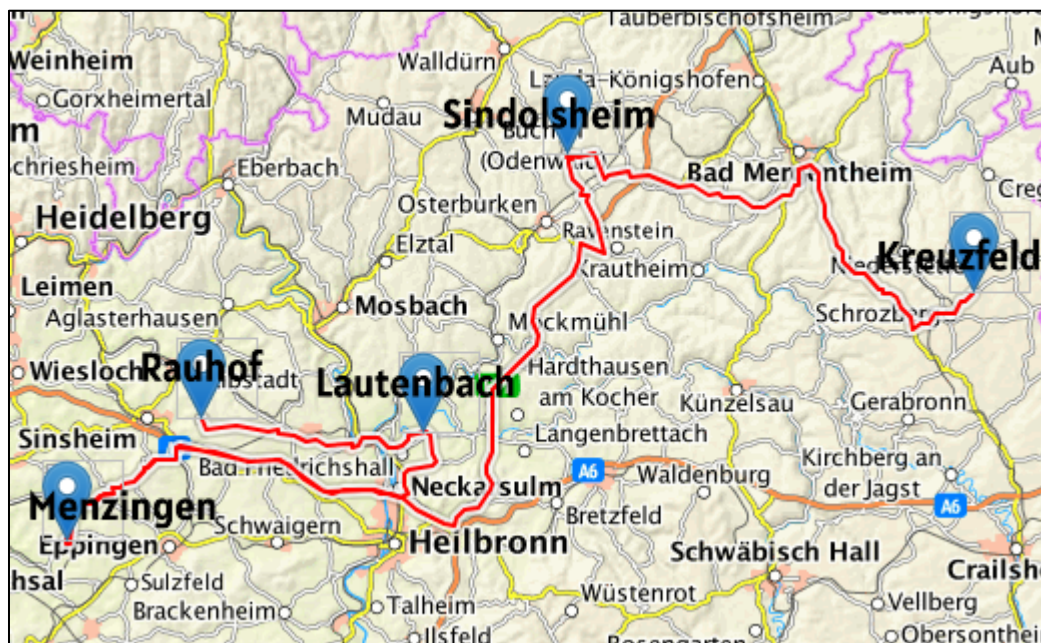
held by the tenant, Ströbel, at the Kreuzfeld estate; both parties therefore earnestly request a decision as soon as possible.

Respectfully, Rent Office B.

Noteworthy details from the above translation are that Jakob had a good character reference, and that his wife would bring a bit of money to the marriage. The travel time from Sindolsheim to Kreuzfeld was said to be nine hours. Johanna's estate of 10–12,000 florins was substantial. It is difficult to clarify what a florin would be worth today. One estimate suggests 1,500 florins in 1864 Württemberg would be worth \$15–35,000 today in the United States.

The Zeissets moved to Kreuzfeld in February 1864. Christina, Jakob Friedrich's grandmother, had been living with the family at Sindolsheim and Rosenberg. She moved to Niedersteinach to live with her daughter, Magdalena, who had married Matthäus Bär. By this time, however, Matthäus had died (in 1859), and Magdalena was married to her second husband, Jakob Bühler.

We have followed the Zeisset family from Rauhof to Willenbach and Lautenbach, then to Menzingen, then Sindolsheim, and finally to Kreuzfeld where we will meet a new generation of Zeissets. Our six Zeisset siblings were born at Kreuzfeld, but they would not only leave Kreuzfeld; they would leave Germany and never return.



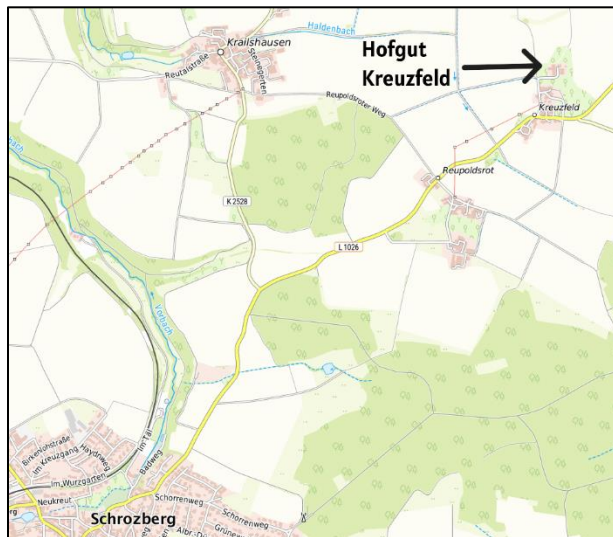
The map above shows the route of the Zeisset family: Starting at Rauhof in 1680, then going to Lautenbach, then Menzingen, then Sindolsheim, and finally Kreuzfeld nearly 200 years later

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



**Map showing location of Kreufeld farm,
Kraitshausen, and Schrozberg**

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

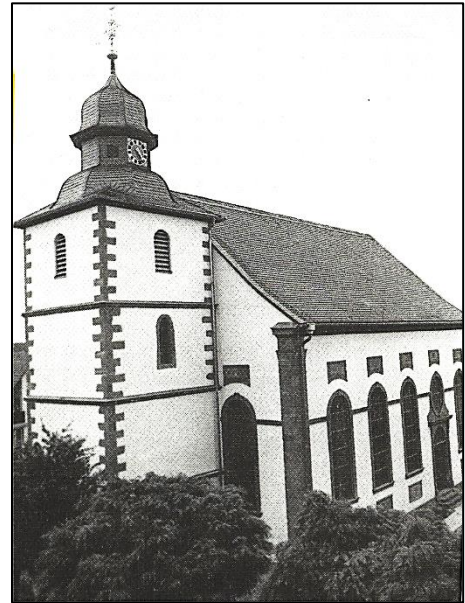
years younger than Jakob Friedrich.

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

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.



Evangelical church at Semd

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



Margaretha and Jakob Friedrich Zeisset
about 1877

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.

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.

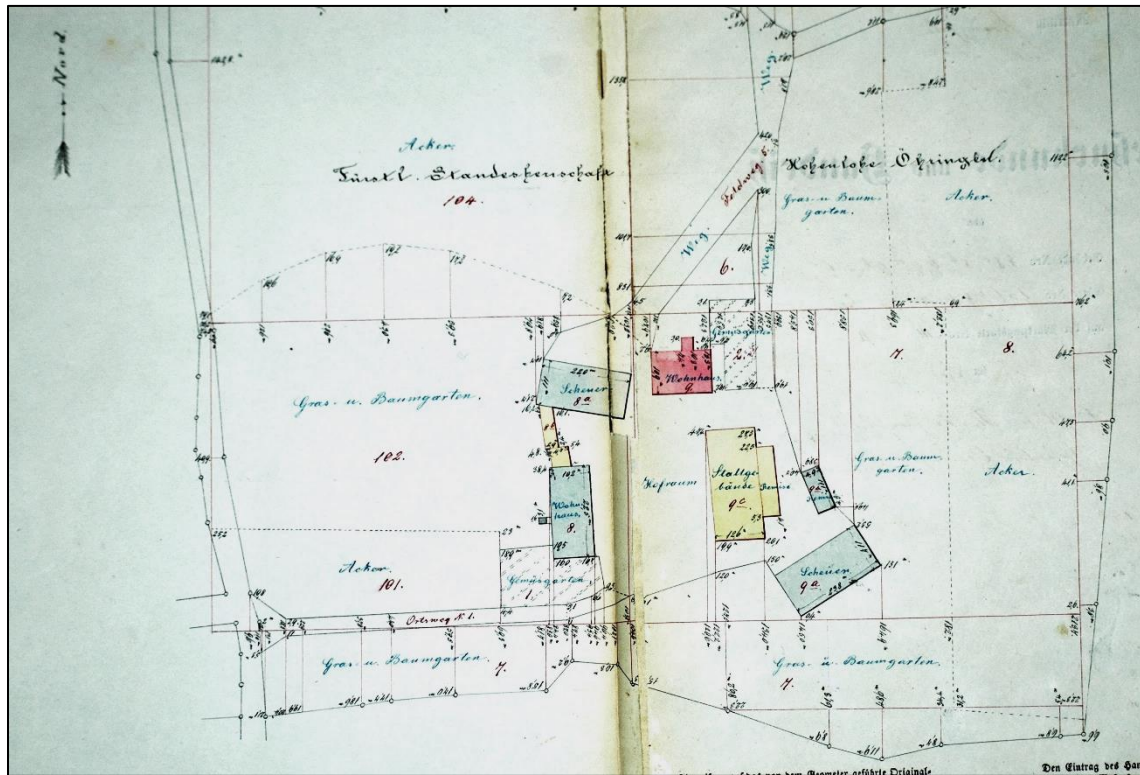
Shortly after Jakob Friedrich signed the new lease agreement in 1870, the Hohenlohe estate owner announced that a new stable and a new residential home were to be built. A notice of the work to be done was published in a local newspaper so bids could be given for the work, including demolition of old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

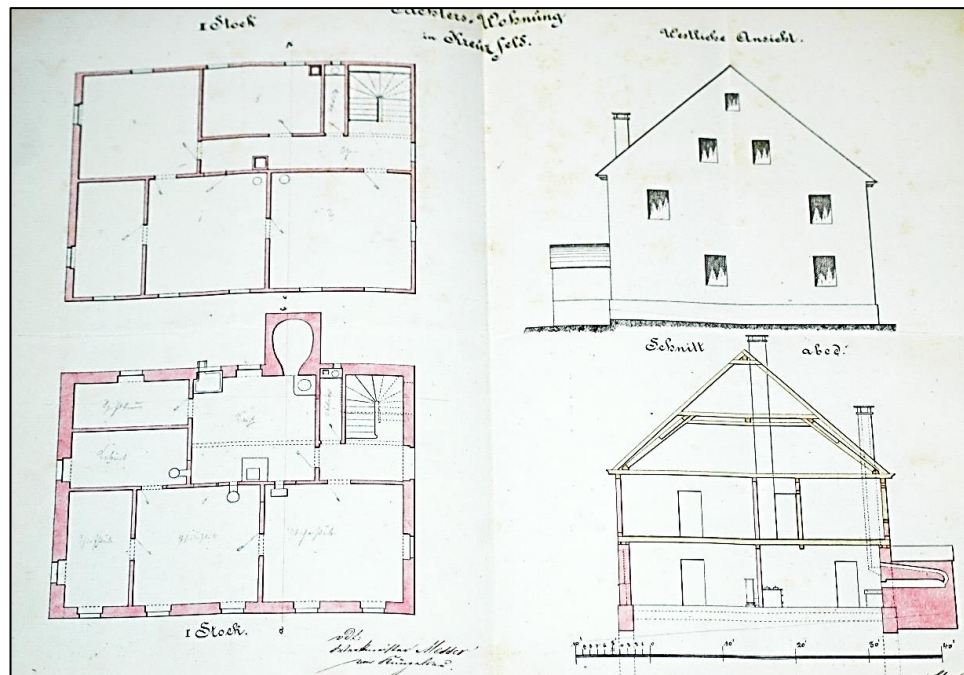


Source: *Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Neuenstein*

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.

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*.



House at Hofgut Kreuzfeld, south side

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.



Hofgut Kreuzfeld House about 1930

Source: *Krailshausen*, Dorothee Bauer, 2009

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.

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

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



Krailshausen church and cemetery

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 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.

Kreuzfeld.
Fahniß-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 $\frac{1}{4}$ Jahr alt,
- 1 zum 2tenmal trächtiges Mutterfchwein,
- 1 Zuchteber,
- 3 Käuferfchweine,
- 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 Hurten, Futtergeschirr und Zubehör, 1 Wurzelmühle,
- 6 Stück Pferdegeschirre und 3 Paar Ochfengschirre.

Am Dienstag den 12. d. Mts.

von Vormittags 9 Uhr an,

700 Str. Kartoffel, 400 Str. Wurzeln, 10 Eimer Obstmohr sammt Fässer von 200 bis 1800 Liter und 1 Mostpresse mit Obstmühle, sonstiges Handgeschirr, Lettern, Handwerkszeug, Feld- und Handgeschirr, 7 Tische, 6 Stühle, 18 Stühle, und sonstiges Schreinwerk, 6 Betten mit Bettzeug, Küchengeräth und allerlei Hausrath.

Hiezu werden Kaufsliebhaber eingeladen.

Isaak Zeisset.



Sale bill from Gerabronn newspaper

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

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.



Schwäbisch Hall Prison 2026

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

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.



Zeisset places of interest

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.

Appendix A

Zeisset Family Timeline

This timeline summarizes key events in the Zeisset family history, from the family's Swiss Mennonite origins and early settlement in Germany through the immigration of the six Zeisset siblings to Kansas.

16th–18th Centuries: Mennonite Roots and Early Zeisset Generations

- **1517** – Martin Luther posts his 95 theses in Wittenberg, helping launch the Protestant Reformation.
- **1525–1527** – Anabaptism emerges as a distinct movement, later including Mennonites.
- **1536–1537** – Menno Simons organizes Anabaptists in the Netherlands, giving rise to the Mennonite faith.
- **1660–1670** – According to Alfred Funk's 1939 records, the Zeisset family comes from Switzerland and settles at Rauhof in Germany.
- **About 1680** – Jakob Zeisset is identified by Alfred Funk as the first Zeisset at Rauhof.
- **1718** – Abraham Zeisset, the first documented ancestor of this Zeisset line, is reportedly born at Rauhof.
- **1731** – Abraham Zeisset, presumably the father of Abraham born in 1718, serves as elder at Hasselbach.
- **1749** – Abraham Zeisset (1718) begins serving as elder of the Immelhausen and Hasselbach Mennonite congregations.
- **1764** – Jakob Zeisset, son of Abraham Zeisset (1718) and Elisabetha Landes, is born at Rauhof.
- **1766–1782** – Abraham Zeisset is involved in a major Mennonite church dispute described in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.
- **1778** – Abraham Zeisset departs from Rauhof; the family moves to Willenbach and Lautenbach.
- **1785** – Jakob Zeisset marries Magdalena Pletscher of Meckesheim.
- **1787** – Abraham Zeisset dies at age 69.

19th Century: Lautenbach, Menzingen, and Sindolsheim

- **1794** – Johannes Zeisset, son of Jakob Zeisset and Magdalena Pletscher, is born at Lautenbach.
- **1813** – Jakob Zeisset dies when his son Johannes is 19 years old.

- **1815** – Johannes Zeisset pays a military-duty redemption fee and marries Christina Bär at Lautenbach.
- **1816** – Jakob Zeisset, son of Johannes Zeisset and Christina Bär, is born at Lautenbach.
- **About 1823** – Several Zeisset families move from Lautenbach to Menzingen.
- **1825–1826** – Several Zeisset family deaths occur at Menzingen, including children and extended family members; Magdalena Pletscher Zeisset dies in February 1826.
- **1837** – Jakob Friedrich Epp, later acknowledged as Jakob Friedrich Zeisset, is born to Johanna Luise Epp at Menzingen.
- **1838** – Jakob Zeisset acknowledges Jakob Friedrich as his son and marries Johanna Luise Epp.
- **1839** – Isaak Zeisset, brother of Jakob Friedrich, is born at Menzingen.
- **1841** – Johannes Zeisset, brother of Jakob Friedrich, is born at Menzingen.
- **1848** – Daniel Zeisset, brother of Jakob Friedrich, is born at Menzingen.
- **1851–1854** – The Zeisset family leaves Menzingen and is next found at Helmstheim, near Sindolsheim.
- **1854** – Magdalena Zeisset, sister of Jakob Friedrich, is born at Helmstheim.
- **1855** – Johannes Zeisset dies soon after the family moves to Sindolsheim.
- **About 1860** – The Zeisset family photograph at Sindolsheim is believed to have been taken.
- **1861** – Jakob Zeisset dies at Sindolsheim at age 45.
- **1863** – The Zeisset tenancy at Sindolsheim ends; the family moves briefly to Rosenberg.
- **February 1864** – Jakob Friedrich Zeisset, his mother Johanna, and other family members move to Hofgut Kreuzfeld.
- **March 14, 1864** – Jakob Friedrich Zeisset marries Margaretha Müller of Semd.

1864–1884: The Kreuzfeld Years

- **November 1864** – Georg, first child of Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha, is born and dies the same day.
- **July 1865** – A stillborn son is born to Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha.
- **July 20, 1866** – Johanna Luise “Louise” Zeisset is born at Kreuzfeld.
- **June 1867** – Emma Zeisset is born and dies in infancy.
- **June 1868** – Bertha Zeisset is born at Kreuzfeld.
- **March 1870** – Elisabeth “Lizzie” Zeisset is born at Kreuzfeld.
- **1870** – Jakob Friedrich commits to an 18-year lease of Hofgut Kreuzfeld.

- **1870–1878** – A new house and stable are planned and built at Hofgut Kreuzfeld.
- **December 31, 1873** – Georg Jakob “Jacob” Zeisset is born at Kreuzfeld.
- **April 1875** – Barbara “Bettie” Zeisset is born at Kreuzfeld.
- **1876** – A poor farming year, livestock losses, and family illness contribute to Jakob Friedrich’s financial troubles.
- **November 1876** – Daniel Zeisset, brother of Jakob Friedrich, dies of tuberculosis.
- **February 1878** – Heinrich “Henry” Zeisset is born at Kreuzfeld.
- **May 1878** – Hohenlohe estate accountant Mr. Schmidt investigates Jakob Friedrich’s rent arrears and farm conditions.
- **July 1878** – Jakob Friedrich’s brothers, Isaak and Johannes, assume the Kreuzfeld lease as subtenants to help avoid bankruptcy.
- **November 11, 1880** – A barn at Hofgut Kreuzfeld burns, destroying stored produce belonging to Jakob Friedrich.
- **February 20, 1881** – Margaretha Müller Zeisset dies after a difficult birth, leaving six surviving children.
- **July 13, 1883** – Louise Zeisset arrives in New York and begins her life in America.
- **November 9, 1883** – Bankruptcy proceedings are opened against Jakob Friedrich Zeisset.
- **December 4, 1883** – Bankruptcy proceedings are discontinued because Jakob Friedrich lacks sufficient assets to cover the cost.
- **January 21, 1884** – Two large barns burn at Hofgut Kreuzfeld.
- **February 2, 1884** – Jakob Friedrich’s lease of Hofgut Kreuzfeld officially ends.
- **February 11–12, 1884** – An auction is held at Hofgut Kreuzfeld to sell remaining livestock, equipment, and household goods.
- **February 1884** – Jakob Friedrich is arrested during the auction and taken before the investigating court.
- **August 14, 1884** – Jakob Friedrich is tried at Schwäbisch Hall, convicted of one count of fraud, and acquitted on four other counts.
- **August 26, 1884** – Jakob Friedrich enters the state prison at Schwäbisch Hall.
- **October 6, 1884** – Jakob Friedrich dies of typhus in prison.
- **October 9, 1884** – Jakob Friedrich is buried in the Nikolaifriedhof in Schwäbisch Hall.

1883–1893: The Six Zeisset Siblings Immigrate to Kansas

- **1883** – Louise Zeisset leaves Germany and arrives in America; she later joins her siblings in Kansas.
- **1884** – After Jakob Friedrich’s death, the six surviving Zeisset children are orphaned; all but Louise live with relatives in Germany.
- **1885** – Bertha and Bettie leave Germany to join Baer and Bletscher cousins in Kansas.
- **February 1888** – Isaak Zeisset and his family move from Eichenau to Darstadt, near Würzburg, taking Lizzie and possibly Jacob with them.
- **January 1889** – Johanna Luise Epp Zeisset, mother of Jakob Friedrich, dies at Fasanenmühle and is buried at Waldenburg.
- **February 1890** – Jacob Zeisset immigrates to Kansas.
- **May 1891** – Lizzie Zeisset immigrates to Kansas.
- **July 1891** – George Weller, who had worked for Isaak Zeisset, leaves Germany; he and Lizzie marry shortly after arriving in Kansas.
- **April 1893** – Henry Zeisset immigrates to Kansas, becoming the last of the six siblings to leave Germany.
- **1893** – Johannes Zeisset and his family leave Niedersteinach and move to Würzburg.

20th–21st Centuries: Remembering and Researching the Family

- **1969** – The first Zeisset family reunion is held in Leonardville, Kansas.
- **1970** – Ray and Carolyn Zeisset, with Merton and Ina Zeisset, travel to Germany to learn more about the family history.
- **1972** – The second Zeisset family reunion is held in Leonardville; a one-page family history has been written by this time.
- **1992** – Merton Zeisset publishes *Our First Century in America – The Zeissets Who Came to Kansas from Germany 1884–1893*.
- **2000** – A new narrative of the Zeisset family history is written by Loretta Hoerman, with later amendments in 2006 and 2008.
- **2006** – Zeisset descendants participate in a family tour to Germany.
- **2026** – The current expanded Zeisset family history is prepared, incorporating new and corrected research findings.

Appendix B

Key Places in the Zeisset Family Story

This appendix provides a quick reference to the towns, estates, regions, and family locations that appear throughout the Zeisset family history. Many of these places were not villages in the modern sense, but farms, estates, leaseholds, or small communities where Mennonite families lived and worked.

Regions and Historical Context

- **Switzerland, especially the Bern region** – The believed homeland of the Zeisset family before their move into Germany. Many Swiss Mennonite families came from the area around Bern.
- **The Palatinate** – A politically and religiously fragmented region of southwest Germany that became a refuge for some Mennonite families after periods of persecution.
- **The Kraichgau** – A region of southwest Germany between the Neckar and Rhine rivers where Mennonites found limited tolerance and where several related families lived.
- **Baden** – The former German state where several Zeisset family locations were found, including Rauhof, Menzingen, Sindolsheim, and Rosenberg.
- **Württemberg** – The former German state associated with Willenbach, Lautenbach, Schrozberg, Krailshausen, Kreuzfeld, Schwäbisch Hall, and other later Zeisset locations.
- **Hohenlohe** – The district where Hofgut Kreuzfeld was located. The region was associated with the Hohenlohe family and its estates.

Early Zeisset Locations

- **Rauhof** – The first known Zeisset location in Germany, where the family reportedly settled after leaving Switzerland. Jakob Zeisset is identified by Alfred Funk as the first Zeisset there. Abraham Zeisset later rented the Rauhof estate.
- **Immelhausen and Hasselbach** – Mennonite congregations associated with Abraham Zeisset, who served as an elder and was involved in a major church dispute described in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.
- **Willenbach** – An estate near Ödheim where Zeisset families lived after leaving Rauhof. Abraham Zeisset's later years and several family records are associated with this place.

- **Lautenbach** – Another Mennonite estate near Ödheim where Zeisset families lived and farmed. Several direct-line ancestors were born, married, or died here.
- **Ödheim** – The nearby town whose Catholic church records include vital records for Mennonite families living at Willenbach and Lautenbach.

19th-Century Family Moves

- **Menzingen** – A major Zeisset family location after the move from Lautenbach. Jakob Friedrich Zeisset was born there as Jakob Friedrich Epp, and the family lived near the Menzingen estate associated with the water castle.
- **Dammhof** – The birthplace of Christina Bär, wife of Johannes Zeisset, and an important Bär family location connected to later Zeisset-Bär relationships.
- **Helmstheim / Helmstheimerhof** – A farm near Sindolsheim where the Zeisset family lived briefly after leaving Menzingen. Magdalena Zeisset, sister of Jakob Friedrich, was born there in 1854.
- **Sindolsheim** – The family lived and farmed at Schlossgut Sindolsheim after Helmstheim. Johannes Zeisset died there in 1855, Jakob Zeisset died there in 1861, and the important Zeisset family photograph was likely taken there around 1860.
- **Rosenberg** – The brief home of Johanna Luise Epp Zeisset and her children after the Sindolsheim tenancy ended and before the move to Kreuzfeld.

Kreuzfeld and Nearby Places

- **Hofgut Kreuzfeld** – The central location of the story of Jakob Friedrich Zeisset and Margaretha Müller. Their six surviving children were born there, and the family's financial crisis, barn fires, auction, and displacement occurred there.
- **Kreuzfeld** – The small settlement associated with Hofgut Kreuzfeld and the birthplace of the six Zeisset siblings who later immigrated to Kansas.
- **Krailshausen** – The church and school location for the Zeisset children at Kreuzfeld. Margaretha Müller Zeisset and several infants were buried in the Krailshausen cemetery.
- **Schrozberg** – The regional administrative and church-related center near Kreuzfeld. Johanna Zeisset and Magdalena Zeisset Sönder lived there during part of the family story.
- **Neuenstein** – The archive location where records about Hofgut Kreuzfeld, the house, farm diagrams, and Jakob Friedrich's circumstances were found.

- **Schwäbisch Hall** – The city where Jakob Friedrich Zeisset was tried, imprisoned, died of typhus, and was buried in the Nikolaifriedhof.

Related Family Locations in Germany

- **Semd** – The hometown of Margaretha Müller, wife of Jakob Friedrich Zeisset. Her Müller family lived there, and her father was a shepherd.
- **Adelsheim** – The district seat where Jakob Friedrich Zeisset and Margaretha Müller were married in 1864.
- **Niedersteinach** – Home of Magdalena Zeisset Bär Bühler and later Johannes Zeisset's family. Bettie and Henry lived there after the breakup of the Kreuzfeld household.
- **Obersteinach** – Home of Barbara Zeisset Schmutz and her family; Jakob Friedrich's aunt, sister of Magdalena Zeisset Bär Bühler
- **Eichenau** – Farm location where Isaak Zeisset lived and where Lizzie and Jake stayed after the Kreuzfeld household was disrupted.
- **Darstadt** – Later home of Isaak Zeisset near Würzburg. Lizzie Zeisset was associated with this location before immigrating to Kansas.
- **Fasanenmühle and Waldenburg** – Johanna Luise Epp Zeisset died at Fasanenmühle in 1889 and was buried at Waldenburg.
- **Würzburg** – A later destination for Johannes Zeisset and his family after leaving Niedersteinach.

American Destinations and Family Memory

- **Pennsylvania** – Early destination for some Zeisset and related families who immigrated to America, including distant relatives in Lancaster County. Louise Zeisset lived here three years before she went to Kansas.
- **Ohio and Michigan** – American locations associated with earlier Zeisset-related immigrant lines, including descendants whose surname spellings varied widely.
- **Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri** – Locations associated with John Zeisset of the Illinois branch and his descendants.
- **Kansas** – The destination of the six Zeisset siblings: Louise, Bertha, Lizzie, Jake, Bettie, and Henry. Their new lives in Kansas mark the conclusion of the German portion of the family story.
- **Leonardville, Kansas** – The site of early Zeisset family reunions and a central location for preserving and renewing the family's shared memory.

Appendix C

Direct-Line Ancestor Chart

This chart follows the direct Zeisset line leading to the six orphaned siblings who immigrated to Kansas between 1883 and 1893. It is intended as a quick reference for readers who want to keep the main family line in view while reading the larger history.

Direct Zeisset Line

Generation	Direct-line ancestor	Spouse	Key places and notes
Possible earlier ancestor	Jakob Zeisset, identified by Alfred Funk as the first Zeisset at Rauhof, about 1680	Unknown	Believed to be part of the Swiss Mennonite family that settled at Rauhof after leaving Switzerland.
1	Abraham Zeisset, about 1718–1787	Elisabetha Landes, about 1720–possibly 1802	Born at Rauhof; elder of the Immelhausen and Hasselbach Mennonite congregations; later associated with Willenbach and Lautenbach.
2	Jakob Zeisset, 1764–1813	Magdalena Pletscher, 1764–1826	Born at Rauhof; moved to Lautenbach; married Magdalena Pletscher of Meckesheim in 1785; co-tenant farmer at Lautenbach.
3	Johannes Zeisset, 1794–1855	Christina Bär, 1798–after 1855	Born at Lautenbach; married Christina Bär in 1815; lived at Lautenbach, Menzingen, and Sindolsheim; died soon after the move to Sindolsheim.
4	Jakob Zeisset, 1816–1861	Johanna Luise Epp, 1817–1889	Born at Lautenbach; moved to Menzingen as a child; married Johanna Luise Epp in 1838; later lived at Helmstheim and Sindolsheim; died at Sindolsheim.
5	Jakob Friedrich Zeisset, 1837–1884	Margaretha Müller, 1842–1881	Born at Menzingen as Jakob Friedrich Epp and later acknowledged by Jakob Zeisset; moved to Kreuzfeld in 1864; married Margaretha Müller of Semd; father of the six Zeisset siblings who immigrated to Kansas.

Children of Jakob Friedrich Zeisset and Margaretha Müller

Jakob Friedrich and Margaretha had twelve children at Hofgut Kreuzfeld. Six died in infancy or at birth, and six survived to immigrate to Kansas.

Child	Birth	Notes
Georg	November 1864	Born at Kreuzfeld and died the same day.
Unnamed son	July 1865	Stillborn.
Johanna Luise "Louise" Zeisset	July 20, 1866	Oldest surviving child; immigrated to America in 1883 and later joined relatives in Kansas.
Emma Zeisset	June 1867	Died in infancy.
Bertha Zeisset	June 1868	One of the six surviving siblings; immigrated to Kansas in 1885.
Elisabeth "Lizzie" Zeisset	March 1870	One of the six surviving siblings; left Germany for Kansas in May 1891.
Unnamed son	May 1869	Stillborn.
Unnamed child	September 1871	Stillborn.
Georg Jakob "Jake" Zeisset	December 31, 1873	One of the six surviving siblings; immigrated to Kansas in February 1890.
Barbara "Bettie" Zeisset	April 1875	One of the six surviving siblings; immigrated to Kansas in 1885.
Heinrich "Henry" Zeisset	February 1878	Youngest surviving child; immigrated to Kansas in April 1893.
Unnamed infant	February 19, 1881	Did not survive the difficult birth in which Margaretha Müller Zeisset died the next morning.

The Six Zeisset Siblings Who Immigrated to Kansas

- **Louise Zeisset** – Born July 20, 1866; immigrated in 1883.
- **Bertha Zeisset** – Born June 1868; immigrated in 1885.
- **Lizzie Zeisset** – Born March 1870; immigrated in 1891.
- **Jake Zeisset** – Born December 31, 1873; immigrated in 1890.
- **Bettie Zeisset** – Born April 1875; immigrated in 1885.
- **Henry Zeisset** – Born February 1878; immigrated in 1893.

Together, these six siblings carried the Zeisset family story from Kreuzfeld, Germany, to Kansas, where their descendants gathered generations later to preserve and continue the family history.