

[DRAFT] TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	v
Scope and Objectives of this Study	vii
Events Timeline	ix

PART 1: A PRUSSIAN FAMILY'S PASSAGE THROUGH LEIPZIG	1
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I.	A CAST OF CHARACTERS: TOWARDS 1871	1
II.	THE ROAD TO LEIPZIG: 1871-1878	17
III.	'SOPHIE'S WORLD': 1879-1899	33
IV.	THE LONE RANGER FROM THE EAST: TOWARDS 1900	57
V.	LEIPZIG: NEXUS: 1900-1907	75
VI.	BABY BOOM, CLASS DISPUTES: 1907-1914	101
VII.	CHAMPAGNE TO DIE FOR: 1914-1915	137
VIII.	THE HOME FRONT: 1914-1918	171
IX.	Pt.1: THE LOST GENERATION: 1919-1920	221
IX.	Pt.2: WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE CHILDREN? 1920-1923	253
X.	VOYAGE TO THE NEW WORLD: 1923-1927	293
XI.	DIE GOLDENE ZWANZIGER: 1924-1929	339
XII.	SEA CHANGE: 1927-1931	393
XIII.	FAREWELL TO THE HEIMAT? 1930-1939	451
XIV.	SOCIALIST TERROR: 1930-1939	451
XV.	LIVES LESS ORDINARY: THE TALE OF TWO IRENES: 1939-1945	471
XVI.	RISING FROM RUBBLE: 1945-1949	531
XVII.	GERMANY (AND EUROPE) DIVIDED BY A WALL: 1949-1962	551
XVII.	LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM: 1963-1969	571
XVIII.	A COUNTRY GARDEN: 1970-1982	599
XX.	WINDS OF CHANGE: 1983-1990	631

PART 2: WANDERVÖGEL	
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Nomads or Opportunists?	651
The Pull and Push of Leipzig	701

ANNEX: HOW WAS IT DONE?

Afterword

LIST OF TEXT BOXES

1.1: Networked Germany: The Rapid Rise of the Railways	7
2.1: Apprenticeships and Journeymen in Germany Today	19
2.2: Leipzig since the Middle Ages	24
2.3: The Schneider and His-story	25
2.4: The Innung - a new kind of Guild	26
2.5: Leipzig: Not just a MesseStadt - a Banking Centre too!	28
2.6: Stand and Deliver - The Rise and Fall of Stagecoaches	30
3.1: Leipziger Allerlei (or 'Everything Leipzig')	40
3.2: Education in Germany at the end of the Nineteenth Century	43
3.3: Leipzig's most famous photographer: Hermann Walter	51
4.1: Silesian Cuisine	62
4.2: The Furrier's Trade	66
4.3: A Short History of Eastern Jews	70
5.1: Snapshots of Paul Tyralla's Life as a Trainee Soldier	82
5.2: Who was the <i>Junker</i> and what did he have to do with Friedrich Hinsch?	92
6.1: 'The Incubator Doctor'	102
6.2: Cigarette Retailing in Egypt - A Source of Inspiration?	108
6.3: Weltuntergang (or <i>The End of the World</i>)	116
6.4: A Short History of German Cinema	120
6.5: The Leipziger Lerche and Other Culinary Specialities	125
7.1: A Quick Guide to Paul Tyralla's place within the Imperial German Army	144
7.2: The Irony in Conformity: The Story of Fritz Haber	147
7.3: In Flanders Fields	148
7.4: The Champagne Battlefield ...' <i>Ex-post-analysis</i> '	163
7.5: Fritz Hinsch: <i>Mitt Gott für König und Vaterland</i>	167
7.6: The Resurrection of Paul Tyralla?	169
8.1: <i>Nelly de Hond van Mama</i>	179
8.2: Leipzig - Hauptbahnhof Officially Opens	185
8.3: Who's That Girl?	187
8.4: Who Am I? The Mysterious ' <i>Onkel Albert</i> '	193
8.5: Leipzig's Lure in 1915	194
8.6: Daylight Saving Time	198
8.7: Paul Tyralla - Spotted in London?	199
8.8: The Growth of the German Film Industry	200
9.1: Black Market! Snapshots from the Countryside...	229
9.2: Germany's Bleeding Frontiers: Upper Silesia	239
9.3: The 'Toothbrush' Moustache	241
9.4: The <i>Wandervoegel</i> : A Nature-loving Movement with a Clouded Future	255
9.5: Germany's Most Famous: The <i>Thomasschule</i> and <i>Thomaner Chor</i>	257
9.6: Oswald Büttner and the Work of the Impresario	264
9.7: <i>Hanns Fischer</i> : Naturalist who Popularised World Ice Theory? (and 'saved' the young Tyrallas)	266
9.8: Race to the Stage?	270
9.9: Inflation by Design?	281
9.10: Elite Germany's Love Affair with the Horse	285
9.11: Authoritarian (grand)Parenting: A Psychologist's View	292

10.1: All Aboard the SS Mongolia	296
10.2: From <i>vau de Vire</i> to <i>voix de ville</i> to <i>Vaudeville</i>	301
10.3: The Six Rockets – Refueled!	302
10.4: New World Snapshot	304
10.5: The Six Rockets: The Only Girl Act of this Kind in the World	311
10.6: Manhattan, the ‘Roaring’ Twenties and Flappers	317
10.7: On Broadway	320
10.8: “Radio has damn near ruined Vaudeville”	321
10.9: The Mad Hatters	324
10.10: Atlantic City: A Kingdom of Dreams Built on Sand	331
10.11: The Headlines in Summer 1927	336
10.12: Büttner and his Rockets Head Home	338
<hr/>	
11.1: The Road to Insterburg	346
11.2: Spoilt for Choice: Saxony’s Political Landscap, 1923-1926	351
11.3: Paula Petzold, Berlin...and Brazil?	335
11.4: Dietrich’s Star Rises	358
<hr/>	
11.1: XXX	370

Abstract:

Part 1 of the study brings to life modern German history during the period 1850-1990. In places it stretches back as far as the turn of the 19th century. It documents the transnational migrations of successive generations of a Prussian family from one political entity to another including the Kingdom of Saxony, the US, Netherlands, England and Canada. Much of the contents have been prepared on the basis of information gained from archives across Germany and was inspired by a solid collection of family photographs (cca.1880). The individuals’ movements are set against the social and political context of the period. This also reflects on migrations from country to town and the growth of urban environments and developments in means of mobility (e.g. train, automobile, and flight). The result is a study that reflects particularly on Leipzig’s but also old- and new-world history. More detailed reasoning for the reported migrations is documented within Part 2 of the study; for instance the role of gender, the attraction of Leipzig and other venues, as well as means of mobility. Of particular interest is the eight year period one of the characters in the survey spent as a member of a Vaudeville all-girl acrobat troupe between 1923-1931; the family’s first and second world war experiences; frequent interactions with the Jewish diaspora; military occupation; the cold war era and life on both sides of the iron curtain.

DRAFT

FOREWORD

Bohemia, Prussia, Schleswig-Holstein, Upper Silesia, Saxony, North Holland, Bedfordshire in the UK, and Pest (as in Budapest, Hungary) all share one thing in common. They are provinces, counties or kingdoms that constitute the homelands of a number of generations of my family. That makes me a very privileged 'European' who today might choose any one of four nationalities (but who is rather more comfortable just being 'European'). Yet in this age of globalization and mobility, who can say where fate, fame or fortune might take my children, or theirs?

Looking back to 1987 and my grandmother's 80th birthday celebration in Holland I could hardly have imagined the project that event would set in motion. That occasion sowed a seed which eventually became a quest to learn who my Prussian forefathers were. At 16 I learned (via my mother: my grandmother spoke no English) that remote Leipzig was where she had been born, into a family that possessed the very unusual name 'Tyralla.' Her father had originated from 'Poland' while her mother's origins were said to be Schleswig-Holstein at the Danish border.

The subsequent fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 brought to a head a series of changes that had started in 1985 when Gorbachev became leader of the USSR. So when the chance arose to visit that (barely) former and mysterious East German city after completing my undergraduate studies in 1992, I seized it and went to Leipzig.



The Independent: Nov. 11th, 1989

That visit was the advent of many years' international research that intended to discover my family's history; to understand who were the people that stood in a remarkably well-preserved (but widely scattered) collection of photographs, some more than a hundred years old; and to determine what their corresponding lives must have been like. Along the way I managed to grasp a little of the German language and also become acquainted with the German people.

The twinkle that shone so vividly from my grandmother's eyes in 1987, a sort of enigma, faded within three years. From afar I saw her wilt as life slipped away and she became a shadow of her former self. A saying goes that when an older person dies, a whole library goes with them. It would seem obvious then that we ought to save those stories, before they are taken to the grave. Yet sadly little if any of the information collected here came directly from my Nanna. As a result she's unaware of the biographical study she inspired.

Much of this work was accomplished by relying on her three daughters, her cousins' families and the excellent archives maintained by the authorities chiefly in Leipzig but also Berlin, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Leeds, London, Budapest and even San Francisco (a more detailed methodology is described within the Annex). I am indebted to all who passed on stories and turning points that might have otherwise been lost with the passage of time - and the considerable distance between us as we ourselves are now scattered across Europe and beyond.

This absorbing adventure to reconstruct their lives and marry their history to Leipzig's (itself generally under-reported in English) was a significant part-time occupation until 2001 or thereabouts. A hiatus, an inspirational autobiography by Irish emigrant Thomas Mellon and my own mother's sixtieth birthday celebration set me on course for the completion of this 'fly-on-the-wall' study of a family who ventured into and out of the Kingdom of Saxony's Leipzig during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The result is a book that brings to life Leipzig, Germany's and Europe's history by describing the family's lives and times in that context, as well as the legacy of their seniors and children. Coloured with the aforementioned family portraits and anecdotes, besides documents of the period, it maps a family scrapbook to a social reality that allows us a 'walk in their shoes.' In tandem it remains a tribute to my grandmother, by introducing and preserving her life and that of those closest to her. In this way it is also a gift to my family and all our children - one that assures this 'library' stays firmly in our hands.

At the same time this work rekindled relations with those relatives, lost, forgotten and assumed deceased since world war two. Meeting them was a dream I always held when I used to ask, "are there any relatives still living in Germany?" and heard: "Not very likely. They all died at the hands of the Russians." Celebrating the 85th birthday of one of those survivors in Leipzig in September 2013 literally then was the icing on the cake.

Jerome Simpson, Budapest, 2013

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

When this research project got underway in 1992, it set out to paint a picture that would accompany an enormous archive of photographs, besides answer three key questions: First, where in modern-day Poland did the life of my grandmother's father, Paul Tjyralla, who it was said never returned from the first world war begin? Second, where was the *Landhaus* that had served as the playground for my grandmother's summers, together with her cousins? And third, what fate really befell them at the end of world war two, alleged to have perished at the hands of the Russians. Could any of their children or grandchildren still be alive? Along the way, it was my intention to see my grandmother's hometown of Leipzig and to acquaint myself with those places that would have been familiar to her.

The resulting study answers those questions within what is a broader piece of research that evolved to address four main objectives:

- First, to serve as a chronicle or a *family history*, outlining the lives, professions, and migrations of my forefathers and their children. It references them personally as far back as the 18th century and chronologically continues their story to the present day. It begins essentially with my grandmother's grandparents, because of the availability of personal anecdotes as well as hundreds of photographs dating back to 1880 that reveal the faces of the names recollected here. By discovering, presenting and preserving their stories, these pages become a kind of family scrapbook while giving greater meaning to their lives in biographical form. A key aim was to answer all (if not most) of those questions I would ever put to these people, were they still here today, about their lives and environments.
- Second, to serve as a *historical study of the "late modern period"*,¹ particularly relating, through detailed research, the social, economic and political contexts within which my relatives grew up. Although initially concerned with Germany and with Leipzig, a European and global context is maintained. This is interesting for instance when the family found itself polarized by world war two, with members on the Dutch and English sides with the other on the German or Austrian. Thirty years later, some members were continents apart, perpetuating in fact the Cold War that divided the world and Europe, in turn contributing to Leipzig's isolation. Text is occasionally punctuated with grey 'text boxes' or footnotes that provide additional general interest features – contextual information, facts and figures, related data about trades, persons, ethnic groups or even cuisine. This offers additional 'colour,' without disturbing the flow of the story itself. Where other authors' works have been used they are typically referenced.

¹ Roughly the period from 1815 to the modern-day, the post-Napoleonic age, a period during which a combination of epoch events totally changed thinking and thought

- Third, to tentatively act as *travel literature*, giving the reader the chance to literally walk in our forefathers' footsteps. Locations are carefully described as they appeared at the time, while the inclusion of period and current maps enables one to visit these places today and make comparisons. This in itself makes for an interesting study, as one may compare the urban environment of a place like Leipzig or Waldenburg 'yesterday' with its appearance - and accessibility - today.
- Fourth, to perform an *analysis* and draw some specific conclusions on the mobility and migration of multiple generations of a family. For example, to examine whether its '*Wandervögel*' nature is down to ethnicity, a nomadity more typically seen among *Roma* and/or whether these movements were influenced or constrained by gender or the family. It also examines whether political, social and economic conditions were simple overriding causes, or whether nostalgia for one's roots saw two descendents return to their origins. A key element in this analysis is the role of the city of Leipzig, which as a rapidly developing urban centre in the 19th century served as a magnet for family members, but which during the 20th century effectively 'purged' them, scattering them far and wide.

The primary target audience for this work is of course family, including my children, their children, my sisters, parents and their wider families. A secondary audience may include academics, social anthropologists and historians. A tertiary group is Leipzigers themselves, who may take a special interest in knowing something about the lives and times of their forefathers.

Language editing follows those conventions described in the *Associated Press Style Guide*. In the case of the absence of rules, those applied by the publishing arm of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (my employer since 1995) are used. UK English is preferred over American English, while footnote referencing follows acceptable convention.

EVENTS TIMELINE (to come)