

A Short History of the Saar Region in Germany

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The French kings had tried for years to extend their realm eastwards and pretty well succeeded up to the Rhine, except the Palatinate, the Saar area and the countries further North. This resulted in very frequent military actions and the consequent devastation of the country by marauding armies. Here actually starts the beginning of the Eisenbeiss clan at the Saar. The first ones to migrate there were two brothers from Thuringia, one a carpenter, the other a miller who appeared some years after the Thirty-Years-War (1618-1648) to rebuild destroyed mills in the region. One of the brothers married a local girl and received permission in 1697 to buy a flour mill near Wellesweiler, the family seat for some hundred years.

The German state Saarland, named after the river Saar (Sarre in French), is one of the smaller German states with just 2,570 sq. km. and among the new ones, having been formed along historical lines out of a Prussian Province in 1945. The region borders in the North and the East on the Land Rheinland-Pfalz and in the South and west on France (Region Lorraine with its Department Moselle) and a few kilometers on Luxembourg. The population is mainly Frankish, from the important Germanic tribe which settled in a zone from what is now Czechia in the East to well into northern France, Belgium and southern Netherlands in the west, and very roughly a line South of the present French Autoroute A 4 (Saarbrücken-Metz-Paris) and the German Autobahn A6 (Saarbrücken-Mannheim-Nürnberg).

The Saar area is rich in relics of Celtic life, mainly found in graves. Around 50 BC Julius Caesar had conquered Gallia and the area of the present Saarland became part of the Roman Province of Belgica where it was an significant administrative center and an important thoroughfare with a large Roman (and Gallic) population. From about 275 AD Germanic tribes started increasingly their pressure on the Roman Empire; the Roman culture eventually was destroyed. Among the various Germanic tribes the Franks were the most successful, eventually forming the first European Empire under Charlemagne (Karl der Grosse) whose area comprised what was the Federal Republic of Germany (the former German Democratic Republic, the DDR, was largely not part of the Carolingian Empire), a good part of Austria, Northern Italy, Spain up to the Ebro river and with the exception of Brittany (Bretagne) all of France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Franks have given their name not only to places like Frankfurt, but France herself (Frankreich, i.e. Kingdom of the Franks) is named after them.

An event of major impact to this very day took place in 843, the Treaty of Verdun, where the three grandsons of Charlemagne divided his empire into three kingdoms, western France of today, a middle kingdom from the Netherlands down to the Mediterranean and an eastern kingdom, virtually Germany and Austria. The middle Kingdom of Lothar (hence Lothringen, Lorraine) did not last very long, and the successors of the Eastern and the Western Kingdoms, lately France and Prussia-Germany, have fought over the spoils ever since.

After the end of the Roman centuries, the Saar area appears again in history around 600 AD as a Frankish fiefdom in documents deeding property by a nobleman to a monastery. A thousand years later the area is owned by the Archbishops of Trier (Treves) and of Mainz (Mayence), the Bishops of Metz and of Worms as well as by the Counts of Nassau-Saarbrücken and the Dukes of Wittelsbach (as Lords of the Duchy of Zweibrücken), the rulers of the Palatinate, just east of our area with Heidelberg its capital. This arrangement remained basically unchanged until the French Revolution.

In 1792 French Revolutionary troops invaded and in 1797 areas of the Palatinate and of Nassau were annexed by France and organized into the Departments Mont-Tonnerre, Sarre and Bas-Rhin. In the treaty of Luneville 1799 all parts of the Palatinate west of the Rhine as well as the possessions of the Counts of Nassau-Saarbrücken and the Bishops of Trier became officially French. In 1803 a monumental event took place which simplified the map: The princely states absorbed all clerical states (including the property of the church!); thus the sovereign bishoprics of Cologne, Mainz, Speyer and Trier disappeared and were absorbed by princely states around them. The next large step followed in 1806 when the old German Empire the "Roman Empire of the German Nation" was formally dissolved. What was left of the smaller or semi-independent states was absorbed by the bigger entities; a few exceptions remained, e.g. with political connections: the Marquis (Markgraf) of Baden had his son marry the stepdaughter of Napoleon, so the stepfather-in-law saw to it that the small Markgrafschaft was duly enlarged by Austrian, Bishopric Speyer and Bavarian parts to form the Grand Duchy of Baden.

With the end of the Napoleonic Empire, after the Viennese Congress in 1815, France had to return the areas formerly owned by German clerical or political princes; however, a good number of them including all clerical states

did not exist anymore, so the powers which had survived grabbed what was available. Thus Saarbrücken became again part of the Duchy of Nassau, which happily had absorbed a good part of Trier as well. Pfalz-Zweibrücken, nominally independent, became officially a part of Kurpfalz, which in turn was ruled by the Bavarian King. And Prussia received parts which had formerly belonged to the Bishops of Trier and of Mainz

Then came the Prussian/Austrian war of 1866 where most southern German states sided with Austria, among them Hesse-Nassau. This war was actually not unlike the Civil War in the US, a war between North and South though for different reasons (who is going to be No. 1 in Germany? Don't forget: until 1806 the nominal head of the German states was the - Austrian - Emperor in Vienna, Austria was a formidable German power). Prussia won and cleared up: with not too many exceptions the North became Prussian. Hesse-Nassau disappeared, the Saar became Prussian. Hesse-Darmstadt did not disappear until many years later in 1918 with the founding of the German Republic when it became part of Hesse. 1866 the British Queen Victoria as well as the Czar of Russia were first cousins of the Grand Duke, for Prussia a situation a bit too delicate to handle.

Any family lives within the frame of its historical and political environment. Its flourishing and often its very survival depends on circumstances beyond its control. Thus a history of a family, even one not found in history books, cannot be written without reflection on the larger history of the regions where it chose or just happened to live.