

## The Original Search

Research on the Eisenbeiß name began in 1980 by writing letters to various Eisenbeis / Eisenbeisz families throughout North Dakota and South Dakota. At that time it appeared that these families should be related, since all of them had ancestors who: 1) originally lived in southwestern Germany near the French border, 2) moved from Germany to Russia, and 3) moved from Russia to the Dakotas. But exactly how they were related was a mystery.

Initially, the information received was very confusing. A letter was received that stated, "My grandfather was John, and his brothers and sisters were Christian, Frederick, Jakob, Christina, Fredericka, Rosina, Katherina, and Joseph." And then another letter was received that stated, "My grandfather was Christian, and his brothers and sisters were John, Frederick, Jakob, Christina, Fredericka, Rosina, Katherina, and Matthew." And then another letter was received that stated, "My grandfather was Jakob, and his brothers and sisters were Christian, Frederick, John, Christina, Fredericka, Rosina, and Maria."

The first thought was that people were making minor mistakes in remembering the names of their grandfather's siblings. But only after the birth dates and death dates of these people were received did it become clear that these were all different families with the same names.

This led me to create a numbering system to reduce confusion.

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----
# a: Father
> a:1 First Child
> a:2 Second Child =>
> a:3 Third Child =>
> a:4 Fourth Child
----
# a:2 Second Child
> a:2.1 First Child of a:2
> a:2.2 Second Child of a:2 =>
> a:2.3 Third Child of a:2
----
# a:2.2 Second Child of a:2
> a:2.2.1 First Child of a:2.2
----
# a:3 Third Child
> a:3.1 First Child of a:3
> a:3.2 Second Child of a:3
----
```

The leading digits indicate the parent's number, and the last digit indicates the placement in the family (i.e. a:3.2 is the second child of the a:3 parents). The first character indicates a different family tree. The character 'b' is another family tree, the character 'c' is another, etc.

Note that a '-' is used instead of a '.' after every fifth number to help distinguish the differences between long strings of numbers ... for example, a:3.1.5.3.7-4.8.2.1.3-7.1 CLYDE THOMAS EISENBEIS. This number indicates that I am the oldest child, my father was the seventh child, my grandfather was the third child, my greatgrandfather was the oldest child, etc.

Searching through the genealogy records of the past couple of centuries, the Eisenbeiß families consistently named their children after the parents, the grandparents, and the aunts and uncles (in one case there were five cousins and one uncle with the name Jakob). While this may have made sense to the families

of the time as it honored the past generations, it makes life very interesting for the genealogist in trying to sort the families using old documents that are not always clear or complete.

Families and friends had their own way of identifying the different people with the same names. They used nicknames that described some characteristic of the person. For example: "Jakob der Dicke" (Jacob the fat one), vs. "Jakob der Alte" (Jacob the old one) vs. "Jakob der Blutkopfig" (Jacob the baldheaded one) vs. "Jakob der Schimmelkopfig" (Jacob the white haired one).

For the genealogy, it has been helpful to know the maiden name of the wife. This makes it easier to find the correct family.

The letters from North Dakota and South Dakota indicated that many Eisenbeiß families left the Dakotas and moved to other parts of the country, especially in the 1920's and 1930's when many moved to the Lodi, California area, Yakima, Washington area, and to Canada. Consequently, the letter writing expanded to Eisenbeiß families located across the country.

As the new letters came, Eisenbeiß families were identified who did not come to the U.S. through Russia. They came directly from Germany and settled in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Kansas, Washington, Illinois, Indiana, and California. The spellings of the names changed slightly ... Eisenbeiß, Eisenbeisz, Eisenbeiss, Eisenbeis, Eisenbise, Eisenbies. Over time, more variations of the spelling appeared.

Occasionally a letter was received that stated, "I'm sorry, but my husband died last month, and I don't know the answers to your questions. But if he were alive, I know he would know." And so the pressure was applied to write even more letters as quickly as possible to retrieve the information that was recorded in the minds of the venerable custodians of Eisenbeiß family history before they left us.

The letter writing expanded to Germany in 1982 shortly before the 1st International Eisenbeiß Family Reunion at Beulah, North Dakota. From this connection, historical information was obtained regarding the very early Eisenbeiß families living in Germany. A trip by four Eisenbeiß'es from Germany to attend the 2nd International Eisenbeiß Family Reunion in 1984 at Aberdeen, South Dakota, and a return visit to Germany in the summer of 1987 led to even more extensive historical information. As people have become aware of this book and of the reunions, new information continued to be sent to be included in this book.

The response to the genealogy search letters has been nothing short of amazing. Many genealogists claim to get a very poor response to written inquiries to families they don't know. In this case, the response has been at the high 90% level! Out of hundreds of letters written, fewer than six did not respond.

While genealogy research can be very challenging, this effort was particularly so, especially with the branch of Eisenbeiß families who traveled through Russia before immigrating to the U.S. Records are nearly impossible to obtain from Russia (if they even exist).

One good source for information is church records. Unfortunately, many of the church records from North Dakota and South Dakota are difficult to find. Many small churches have closed since the late 1800's and early 1900's. Quite often, church records are kept in the custody of former members. Over time, people forget who has the records. Eventually, the records are destroyed or lost.

Other good sources for information come from obituaries and applications for naturalization. Obituaries from the 1800's and early 1900's are, quite often, very detailed and contain lots of useful information. Likewise, the applications for naturalization (not the naturalization documents but the application for naturalization) usually contain useful information.

Much of the information comes from 'word of mouth' and people's memories. Most of it has been substantiated by two or more people. Nonetheless, errors do quite likely exist, as some information conflicts with other information.

The information listed, however, is a best estimate based on the vast amount of information received from people's memories, grave stones, county burial records, birth and death certificates, applications for naturalization, Bibles, and obituaries.

While considerable progress has been made with tying together the many different Eisenbeiß families, more remains to be done. The genealogy record in this book lists two main genealogy trees labeled 'a' and 'b'. Other branches, that have not been tied to these main trees, are labeled c: ... z:. The challenge that remains for us is to tie these branches into these main trees.

## The Newest Search

All of the original genealogy info was entered into a computer in 1980. This worked very well as it was easy to make additions and corrections.

The reunions led to a lot of new genealogy information. 344 people came to the second reunion in 1984, including four from Germany. We invited everyone with the last name Eisenbeiß (with a variety of spellings) from quite a few states.

We hung every page from the genealogy book on the wall (11x17 size) in the hotel event room, a room the size of a large gym. The book was comprised of history and genealogy. The families had a unique numbering system (see the genealogy section for a description).

We put a person's genealogy number on their name tag. When people looked at another person's name tag, they could determine how they were related. People looked at the docs on the wall to see other relatives. They reported errors they found.

Before the reunions, I would get letters that they were in Texas and saw the name Eisenbeiß in the phone book, but did not have time to call. After the reunions, people would write that they were in Illinois and called people with the name Eisenbeiß ... and here is what was said. The genealogy info increased dramatically ... and I had new people to contact.

Albert Eisenbeiß, who attended the second reunion, brought a wealth of new info. He was born in Bessarabia (now known as Moldavia) and moved to Germany in the early 1940's. He provided extensive info on relatives who lived in Russia.

Because of the increase in attendance from other countries, we renamed the reunion to International Eisenbeiß Family Reunion. We have had family members from Canada, Germany, France, Switzerland, and Luxembourg at the reunions.

In the mid-1980's, I received a phone call from an Eisenbeiß who wanted to join the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution). This led to info about an Eisenbeiß family who came to the US in 1751, had sons who served in the American Revolution, and ended up in the Reading, Pennsylvania area. This is the first known Eisenbeiß to move to the US. Melissa Sutton provided considerable information about this family tree.

All initial research was done by letter ... hundreds of letters over more than a decade. This switched to the internet in the mid-1990's.

I ran across a Christine Eisenbeis who lives in France. She responded to an email ... her Uncle Henri does genealogy. I sent him a letter as he does not have a computer. He responded in broken English ... it was better than my French.

Henri originates from Neunkirchen, Germany, which is near the French border. He was a pilot for Air France and had done considerable genealogy. He heard I had some Eisenbeis History & Genealogy books left from the last reunion and sent \$20 cash in the mail.

After he received the book he wrote that he wants eight more books ... but does not want to mail that much cash. His friend in Texas will call and mail a check.

While visiting with his friend, Jean-Loup Chrétien, I find that he is currently in Houston ... at NASA ... going up on the next space shot! He was a Cosmonaut! One of the first non-Russian's to fly to the MIR space station. I received a check from a Cosmonaut!

He and Henri were best friends since they were in the French Air Force. Henri left the military to fly commercial jets. Jean-Loup stayed with the military. He traveled to Russia and was the first non-Russian to

become a Cosmonaut ... flew to the MIR space station twice. When Jean-Loup flew into space with NASA, Henri flew to the US to be part of the event.

Our sons tracked the space launch. Henri sent our sons some Jean-Loup Chrétien badges. Our sons found a website with a photo of Jean-Loup Chrétien receiving a medal of honor from Leonid Brezhnev, leader of the country of Russia.

I visited Cape Canaveral about seven years later. After spending a few hours there, I was getting ready to leave when I saw a sign with Jean-Loup Chrétien's name. I asked the staff and was steered to a building for authorized people only. When someone came out of the building, I asked about Jean-Loup Chrétien. They asked who I was and reluctantly went back into the building. Jean-Loup came out immediately ... he recognized my name.

This was his first trip to Cape Canaveral since the space launch. Cape Canaveral hosts astronauts for a week to give a short presentation to the visitors a few times per day. We just happened to be there at the same time. I am one handshake away from Brezhnev.

Henri added extensive, new information about Eisenbeiß families. He had info dating back to 1595 (b: family tree). It did not tie into the info I had dating back to 1540 (a: family tree). But his info starts in Neunkirchen and mine starts in Freudenstadt. The two towns are only 70 miles apart. As German's were meticulous record keepers, the families are quite likely related ... although we have no definitive proof.

In the 1500's, Protestant churches started recording marriages and baptisms. With this info, it is possible to reconstruct families. I have Eisenbeiß names dating back to 1449, but those names are on tax records ... thanks to Lutz Eisenbeiß of Germany. It is not possible to extract families from tax records.

I had gathered genealogy on Eisenbeiß families throughout the US. Many of them were dangling branches ... I had not tied them to the main tree. With Henri's help, we were able to tie many of those dangling branches to the b: tree.

The genealogy info has been on a website (text format with family genealogy numbers) for well over a decade. Henri converted much of that info and posted it on genealogy websites.

Periodically, I receive emails from folks who ran across one of the websites. They are surprised that most of the time, their grandparents are on the website ... and often their name is there too. They email updates for their family genealogy.

In 2011, I received an email from Maria Tsvetkovskaya, a relative closely related to me, who descends from Eisenbeiß'es who did not move from Russia. She was surprised to find the extensive info on the website (her great-grandfather was shot by Stalin). She provided info about Eisenbeiß families who lived in Russia, and acquired additional info about Eisenbeiß families who live in the Odessa, Russia area.

The emails continue and the genealogy info continues to grow. History becomes more interesting when our relatives were there. I don't know why we complain about anything. We don't know hardship.