

The following document was provided by Wolfgang G. Sonneborn in August 1995  
Notes preceded by GGD are from George Gustave DORNSEIF of Chicago, Illinois, USA

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DORNSEIF, DORNSEIFF, DORNSIFEN, DORNSIFER  
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**Toward a Genealogy of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries,  
From Documents, [Paybooks?], Contacts etc. up to  
the Beginning of Church Records**

This lineage gets its name from the hamlet of Dornseifen, previously in the community of Fellinghausen and parish of Ferndorf, and now part of the town of Kreuztal, which is about five miles north of Siegen. Dornseifen lies in a small valley adjoining the valley of the river Hees, northeast of the manor Junkernhees. A vassal of the lord of Junkernhees named Johann built the first house at Dornseifen during the 1<sup>st</sup> third of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He is first mentioned as Johann or Johan of Dornsiffen in a document of September 21, 1452. (1)

**GGD Note:** In a conversation with Wolfgang Sonneborn in August 1995, Wolfgang explained that the **DORNSEIF** name derives from the area where the 1<sup>st</sup> Johan lived (the hamlet of **DORNSEIFEN**).. The area was a wet valley (**SEIFEN**) with hedges of thorny plants (**DORN** means thorn).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the 1<sup>st</sup> Johan attended the church in Ferndorf and the church records show him to be Johan von (from) DORNSEIFEN (Johan from the wet valley of thorny plants).

**Kreuz** (cross) + **tal** (valley) = crossing of valleys.

At least three sons of the next generation are known.

1. GERHART of “Dornsijffen, also a vassal of the lord of Junkernhees, paid a tax of 5 florins in 1461. This made him the second-highest taxpayer in the lower valley of the Hees. He witnessed a contract on September 8, 1480, and is mentioned in the tax records for the last time in 1488. The priest of Ferndorf held devotional services for Gerhart von Dornsiffen and received an annual fee of 12 Albus. Gerhart’s descendants were still paying this fee a hundred years later. (2)

Gerhart’s son, Johann, and grandson, Jacob Dornseiffen, were city councillors, jurymen and mayors of Siegen [then the home of the rulers of Nausau]. His great-grandson was a physician named Adam Dornseiffen who practiced in the town of Halver. He was born in 1540 in Siegen and traveled extensively, especially in France. Jacob married a woman named Maria von Edelkirchen in 1584 and often served as a deputy in the diet of the Duchy of Cleves and County of Mark. (3)

Members of later generations were notaries, judges and physicians in and around Halver. Others

were pastors in Sprockhovel and Bochum-Stiepel. The family spread as far as Celle in Germany and into the Netherlands. Two members of the Dutch branch, the brothers Abraham and Isaak Dornseiffen, began extensive research into the family history in 1850. Now Dick Dornseiffen of Bussum (Netherlands) has a virtually complete genealogy of the lineage of Abraham. This branch has died out in Halver. The coats of arms of the Dornseiffens of Halver are known to us through the work of Isaak Dornseiffen.

1. In 1714, a tree growing out of a four-sided bowl.
2. The seal of Hermanus Gothofridus Dornseiffen (died May 28, 1746) included a tree growing out of a triangular bowl.
3. The coat of arms with "A tree on a hill" also appears on the house built by Gottfried Hermann Dornseiffen in 1736.[Nieder B (sp.?) Near Kreispe (sp.?) Not far away from Halver.]

I know of no genealogies of the descendants of Gerhart Dornseiffen who remained in the Siegerland. There are mentions of two students in Cologne, Matthaus Dornseiffen from Siegen in 1485, and Bartholomaus Dornseiffen of Siegen in 1544. Others with the name are mentioned as late as 1580.

2.GOTTSCHALK Dornseiffen is referred to as the Honorable (Ehrn) Gottschalk, known as a priest in Schullar Wittgenstein. Other writers such as Winckel, Herbers and Hinsberg erroneously identify this Gottschalk with the well-known Catholic priest (and later Lutheran pastor) in Bromskirchen with the same name. This error is the result of the false belief that the parish of Schullar became Protestant immediately following the outbreak of the Reformation. Hinsberg is responsible for this mistake, even though the Hessian archives state that Gottschalk Dornseif of Bromskirchen originally moved from a position in Girkhausen, not Schullar, to Bromskirchen. Dr. W. Schmithals of Berlin concludes in his article about Schullar in Wittgenstein magazine in 1984 that the Honorable Gottschalk left Schullar around 1500 and moved to Bromskirchen where his son was the mayor. Gottschalk Dornseif II, probably the son of the Honorable Gottschalk, was the priest in Girkhausen at this time. After 1503, he was sent to Bromskirchen by Henkel Winter. (4)

Both Gottschalks had children by their mistresses ("ex sacrilego concubitu") according to the Hessian archives. Laurentius Dornseif, the father of Johanchen (little John) Dornseif, could have been the mayor of Bromskirchen with whom the Honorable Gottschalk spent his last days. Johanchen Dornseif, son of Laurentius or Lentzes, was among those who founded new homes after the Reformation on the former church lands at Bromskirchen. (5)

It is known that Gottschalk Dornseif II had seven children. He was born in 1463 in Siegen, according to the church records of Bromskirchen. He was a married Catholic priest who then became the first Lutheran pastor in Bromskirchen. We are fairly certain that Gottschalk III (who died by 1577 according to the archives) was a son of Gottschalk II. However we are certain only of Jacob who was born around 1498, presumably in Girkhausen. He married Henkel Winter's daughter, Margarethe. All genealogies that I know of make this link with Gottschalk II. (6)

Johannes, born around 1540 in the next generation, is mentioned by name in the church records of Bromskirchen from 1625. He is known as the father of Johannes Dornseiff II, who was born in

1575 in Bromskirchen and died in Dodenau on December 29, 1636, and of Jacob Dornseiff who died of the plague in Bromskirchen on November 24, 1625.

The great-grandson of Gottschalk II, Johannes II, was a student at Marburg in 1595, a teacher in Bromskirchen between 1601 and 1625, and later a pastor in Dodenau. According to a family tree compiled around 1920 (attributed to Karl Dornseiff), Johannes had a coat of arms: a bird sitting upon a mound. His son, Johannes Wilhelm, was born in 1620 in Bromskirchen and is known for a funeral speech for Georg I, Landgrave of Hesse, on July 23, 1661. Wilhelm was the first of many pastors from a line in Obereisenhausen in the Breidenbach valley. His son and successor, Johann Christoph Dornseiff, was active in genealogical research and wrote a letter to a namesake in Halver on November 30, 1693. The contents of this letter – though faulty in some respects – were written into a family Bible in Halver, and a copy is in the possession of relatives in the Netherlands.

A later descendant of the Obereisenhauser branch, Heinrich Andreas Christian Dornseif (1778-1826), was a pastor in Heringhausen and also used the old bird seal of his ancestor, Johannes from Dodenau. The bird holds a shield emblazoned with a “D” in its beak. This coat of arms was published in 1987 in Waldeckische Wappen II (Waldeckian Coats of Arms), and was adopted by the American Dornseif Fraternal Association in the suggested colors. In the United States, the Dornseifs continue to pursue the ministry and teaching. More than 20 members of these professions are known. The Americans have taken the bird to be a dove.

GGD Note: As far as I know, the “American Dornseif Fraternal Association” does not exist. The late Tom Fitzgerald established the “Dornseif Familien Verein” and coordinated family reunions in the St. Louis, Missouri, USA area on a number of occasions; this reference may be to that association and those reunions.

Jacob Dornseif (died November 24, 1640, in Bromskirchen of the plague) was the brother of the pastor of Dodenau, Johannes Dornseif III. Jacob’s grandson, also named Jacob, moved to Frankenberg. Various genealogies say that he had been a pastor there, but this is not mentioned in the “700 Years of the Liebfrauenkirche of Frankenberg 1286-1986” collection. He must have had some other occupation to support his family.

His son, Johann Daniel Dornseiff (born March 8, 1674 in Frankenberg) worked as a craftsman at the ironworks in Rosenthal. When Johann’s father, Jacob, and his first wife, Anna Catharina (born Wiesemann) died in 1706, he had two epitaphs produced. They are presently outside on the south wall of the Liebfrauenkirche in Frankenberg. The tablets are basically the same. However, they bear different texts and coats of arms. The coat of arms on Jacob’s tablet features a scaffolding in the form of a large “A”; the crossbar is significantly fainter than the supporting arms. Hanging from the top of the “A” almost to the crossbar is a pendulum-shaped weight, bobbin, or plumb line.

The tablet belonging to Anna Catherina features a pair of coats of arms. The one on the left repeats the “A” with a pendulum, but it is more slender and has a higher crossbar. In addition, going from the top left corner to the middle is a stout rod covered by a mallet-like tool.

Presumably, it represents tools used in ironwork. Her tablet is more worn away than Jacob's, and the right side is especially difficult to read. It could include a swimming swan, representing the family of Johan Daniel's second wife, Christina Schwan (swan). Another interpretation one gets from photographs is that of a bathing woman or cherub. Between the two sections is a tree with two trunks. The left trunk reaches the border of the shield, the right one only to the water line. Whether this trunk is a part of the coats of arms or merely a decorative division of the single coat of arms is hard to say.

3. HERMANN Dornseif of Siegen is believed to be the youngest of the three brothers. He was studying philosophy and theology in Cologne in 1461. A year later a Lord Hermann was sent to Hallenberg by the Electoral Prince and Archbishop of Cologne as the junior of three priests. In 1467 and again a few years later he is known to have rights to the town's pastureland. However, he left Hallenberg and his priestly vocation behind and moved to Bromskirchen where he was probably a teacher. He produced a son, also named Hermann, who later became mayor of Bromskirchen. The younger Hermann married a daughter of the Winter family, but it is not known whether her father was Henkel or Werner Winter.(7)

A daughter of this marriage with the name Apolonia married into the village of Somplar where the Winters had their lands. The marriage took place around 1545. It is possible that one of her brothers also found his way to Somplar. On June 3, 1577, the "natural" children of Count Jost von Grafschaft formally renounced any claim to his title; among the witnesses were Noah(Noa) Dornseiff of the "manor of Somplar, the grown children of the mayor and Hermann von Alendorff." A Hermann Dornseiff is mentioned in the same letter. Noah Dornseiff served as a witness in 1608 and is mentioned in other contracts and land purchases involving the miller Simon Dornseiff of Somplar and Daniel Dornseiff, a builder from Somplar. These latter were probably Hermann's sons.

Although Dornseifs are numerous in various documents and contracts in the time before 1625, it simply isn't possible to compile an accurate genealogy. There are just too many people named Dornseif, Dornseiff, or Dornseffen in the Bromskirchen area in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Only occasionally are relationships between family members documented. Further complications are caused by the frequency which the first names Daniel, Hermann, Johannes and Michael were used for men. The church records of Wolkersdorf of 1571 refer to "Hermann Dornseuff and his son Daniel." Bromskirchen church records of 1577 mention "Hermann Dornseffen the elder" and his sons "Hermann the younger", and Daniel. A civic agreement between Bromskirchen and Hallenberg on November 20, 1575, involved the forester Hermann Dornseiff.

In 1582 Hermann Dornseif of Bromskirchen had his son, Jacob, baptized by Pastor Daniel Cranauge (the elder) in Rengershausen. At this time the Basilica of St. Martin in Bromskirchen was being converted to the preaching church it is today, and could not be used for other services. Still it is highly unusual that the baptism took place in Rengershausen rather than Hallenberg, the birthplace of Pastor Daniel Cranauge. Perhaps the child was born in Rengershausen, because this was the mother's home or that of the godfather.

The child's godfather was Jacob Frey "the forester." This must have had something to do with Hermann Dornseiff "the forester" of Bromskirchen. Was this "Hermann the younger?"

The case of Daniel is also confusing. The younger Hermann's brother Daniel is described in the Bromskirchen [pay] books as a blacksmith. Is he the same as "Daniel the Black?" At the same time there was a tailor named Daniel Dornseif. Who was his father? From which Dornseif line does Johencen come? We don't know the father even of the Honorable Simon Dornseif, who finished his studies in Marburg in 1614, was pastor in Eimelrod from 1622-1624, was [???] when the new [???] was introduced in the course of the Reformation, and who then lived in Bromskirchen as a landed farmer.

We also know little about the ancestors of Manuell and Michell Dornseiff, who were born between 1570 and 1580. They are believed to be progenitors of a very large lineage in Bromskirchen. It is our good fortune to have a written contract of sale from July 27, 1606, involving Hermann and Anna Dornseiffe of Bromskirchen. One of the witnesses was Johannes Dornseiff II, then a teacher in Bromskirchen, and later pastor at Dodenau. He wrote (this is very difficult):

Although the count is not available to witness this contract, I, Johannes Dornseiffe, as a teacher of Bromskirchen put my hand to it on behalf of my siblings and cousins. (8)

So Hermann Dornseiffen, mentioned as a sibling of Daniel and Johann Dornseiffen and the teacher, Johannes, thus had a common grandfather! It is also known that the teacher had a seal and thus a coat of arms (bird on a mound). Recall that the grandson of the teacher, Johann Christoph Dornseif of Obereisenhausen, sent a letter to a namesake in Halver in which he explicitly claimed Gottschalk II as his ancestor. Thus we can be certain that the brothers Hermann, Daniel and Johann can be traced back to Gottschalk II, naturally with the proviso that the records only prove that there was one son of Gottschalk II, even though there were more.

Finally, we turn to Rengershausen where the Dornseifs use only one "f". The first known member of the family was Jost "Thornseuff", son of Johannes Thornseuff, who married in Rengershausen on August 20, 1676, and later operated the lower mill. Even the very old church records in Rengershausen give us no further insight into the family relations in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## NOTES

- (1) W. Herling, “Das untere Heestal, Kreuztal, 1981.” Letter from W. Herling to Dick Dornseiffen of Bussum, Netherlands, July 15, 1985. Documents of Dyderich von der Hees from September 21, 1452, state archives in Wiesbaden.
- (2) W. Herling, “Das untere Heestal.”
- (3) Genealogical description of the Dornseif family, hand-written Bible entry from ca. 1700 in Halver. The territories of Cleve and Mark were small states along the Rhine which came under control of Brandenburg Prussia in the 1700s and served as Prussia’s foothold in the Rhineland during the wars of unification between 1864 and 1871.
- (4) Translator’s note: The Winter family was one of a few privileged families raised almost to the status of minor nobility by the Counts of Waldeck and later by the Counts of Wittgenstein. They were vassals of the Counts.
- (5) Report from Pastor Daniel Cranauge II, in volume II of the Bromskirchen [paybook] 1593, concerning settlements in previously abandoned lands around the town.
- (6) For instance, Otfried Praetorius makes this claim. GB 64, AL Praetorius [DGB 64 is Deutches Ges????? buch]
- (7) Declaration of Davit Ante of Liesen (born in Somplar) before the city councillors of Hallenberg , April 21, 1653.
- (8) Hallenberger sources and archives, Alfred Bruns of Munster, 1991. Volume 474, pages 185-186. Official records of Hallenberg 1005, page 49.