

## **SKETCH OF GERMAN HISTORY BEFORE THE BIRTH OF HERMAN GROTHAUS IN 1670**

Germany has not always been a nation. In fact, it was not unified as a modern nation until 1871, under the leadership of King Wilhelm I [William] of Prussia and his chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. Wilhelm then became Kaiser [Emperor] of the second German Empire. Even that unity did not last past World War II: Germany was divided into sectors by the victorious Allies, and these sectors were solidified into the democratic West Germany and communist East Germany. The two Germanys were reunited into one on October 3, 1990.

During the Middle Ages, there was a great deal of factionalism resulting from the regional differences of the many tribes which had settled in Europe. Charlemagne, King of the Franks, extended his rule over much of western Europe and was crowned emperor on Christmas Day, A.D. 800. The Carolingian Empire revived the ideal of unity from the Roman Empire and gave a common heritage to modern France, Germany, and Italy. "Charlemagne" is French for Charles the Great; Germans called him "Karl der Grosse." Charlemagne's only surviving son, Louis the Pious (who ruled from 814 to 840), was a weak ruler who wasted his resources on civil wars. His three remaining sons divided the empire by the Treaty of Verdun in 843 and set the pattern for subsequent political divisions: Charles the Bald took Neustria and Aquitaine (the core of modern France); Louis the German took the lands east of the Rhine (modern Germany), including part of the modern Austria; and Lothair received the imperial title plus a narrow strip between the other two and about two-thirds of Italy. Lotharingia included the area that would become the political football of Europe for centuries—the modern Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Saar, Lorraine, Alsace, Franche Comte, Switzerland, Savoy, Dauphine, Provence, and most of Italy.

When the last direct descendant of the Carolingian Louis the German died in 911, the powerful dukes who controlled the various regions of Germany elected Conrad of Franconia as king. This separation from the Carolingians marked the clear beginning of Germany as a separate political entity. It was a loose federation of powerful dukes under a weak king until 962, when Otto I "the Great" established the first German empire, later called the Holy Roman Empire. It was strong in the early centuries but then gradually declined until it was described much later as "neither holy nor Roman nor an empire." Napoleon I ended it officially when he reorganized the area in 1806 as the Confederation of the Rhine.

The Protestant Reformation in Germany began in 1517 with Martin Luther's publication of his ninety-five theses. A combination of factors—including religious dissatisfaction with some practices and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the political ambitions of most of the German princes, economic frustrations, the spread of literacy after the invention of the printing press about 1450, and even the distraction of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V by the Turkish armies pushing toward Vienna—contributed to the success of the Reformation. In 1555 the Religious Peace of Augsburg brought a temporary end to the military struggles between Protestants and Catholics for control of various German territories and provided that the ruler of each German state should choose the religion for his subjects. The choice had to be made between only Catholicism and Lutheranism, however; Calvinism was not recognized as an option.

The Catholic Counter Reformation responded with the Council of Trent to review Catholic doctrines and practices and the Society of Jesus (the Jesuit priesthood) to try to win back the people in Europe and promote missionary work in the Americas and Asia. There was a great deal of tension in Germany.

In 1609 the Catholic Duke of Cleves died without leaving a male heir. His lands, in northwestern Germany, included Cleves, Jülich, Berg, Mark, and Ravensberg (in which Bielefeld was a prominent town). Most of the people in these territories were Protestant, and seven Protestant and Catholic German princes claimed the inheritance through descent from or marriage to one of the female relatives of the duke. The three most serious candidates (all Protestants) were John Sigismund, Elector of Brandenburg from 1608 to 1619; Wolfgang William of Neuburg, a count in the Palatine; and John Frederick, Duke of Saxony. Decisions in cases of disputed inheritances were to be made by Emperor Rudolf II, who was Catholic and wanted the territories to remain under a Catholic ruler. Before the emperor had made his decision, the Brandenburg elector and Palatine count invaded and occupied the territories with troops. During the next five years, other German Protestant and Catholic forces came to help one faction or another. The Palatine count converted to Catholicism to get Spain to send help, and the Brandenburg elector changed from Lutheranism to Calvinism to enlist aid from Holland. The dispute was settled in 1614 with a treaty by which the Palatine count received Jülich and Berg, and the Brandenburg elector got Cleves, Mark, and Ravensberg. Thus in 1614 the town of Bielefeld became part of the holdings of the Electorate of Brandenburg (in northeastern Germany).

From 1618 to 1648 the Thirty Years' War ravaged the people of Germany. Armies lived off the land and burned, raped, and looted. What began as a religious struggle with political overtones ended as a political war with religious aspects. In the last phase, the Catholic Cardinal Richelieu of France supported Protestant German forces in order to prevent the Catholic Hapsburg emperor (who controlled Austria and much of Germany) and his relatives who held Spain and the Spanish Netherlands from encircling France with Hapsburg lands. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 gave legal status to Calvinism along with Catholicism and Lutheranism, restored ownership of property to the owners in 1618 (except Catholic church holdings confiscated by Protestants before 1624), and essentially gave sovereignty to more than 300 German political entities. The real authority of the emperor was limited to the lands which he held directly. City-states, bishoprics, abbacies, and counties **enjoyed as much freedom as large duchies and electorates. This was the political situation in which Herman Grothaus's father was born about 1650 and Herman himself in 1670.**

There had been a significant loss of life and property during the Thirty Years' War. In some areas up to a quarter of the population may have died from military action or starvation. For an entire generation (though not always in the same districts) crops and livestock had been confiscated or destroyed, and homes and churches had been looted and burned. Both business and agriculture continued to suffer in the decades after the war. Money was scarce, people clipped edges off the coins, and less pure metal was used in minting coins. The port cities at the mouths of the Rhine, Weser, Oder, and Elbe rivers were controlled by foreign countries. The territorial lords became absolute rulers, and the middle and lower classes were hard pressed. It is no wonder that many German people began to consider the economic, religious, and political advantages of migrating to the British colonies in America.

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Sources: Rodes, John E. *Germany: a History*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.  
*The World Almanac and Book of Facts*: 2006. New York: World Almanac Books, 2006.

## CHANGES IN BIELEFELD'S POLITICAL STATUS

**Before 1614**—**Bielefeld** was a town in the **County of Ravensberg**, a possession of the Duke of Cleves.

John William, Duke of Cleves, died in 1609. (Ravensberg was noted for making linen.)

**Treaty of 1614**—County of Ravensberg plus Duchy of Cleves and County of Mark were given to John Sigismund (a Hohenzollern), Elector of Brandenburg (1608-1619). (The Hohenzollern family had acquired the **Electorate of Brandenburg** plus Lusatia in 1411.)

John's wife, Anne, was a niece of Duke John William. As the oldest daughter of Albert Frederick, Duke of East Prussia, Anne also inherited East Prussia in 1618 since she had no brothers. George William, the son of John Sigismund and Anne, thus inherited Brandenburg, East Prussia, Cleves, Mark, and Ravensberg in 1619 and ruled until 1640.

(Albert Frederick's father, Albert of Hohenzollern, had been the grand master of the Teutonic Knights, which held East Prussia as a fief from the king of Poland. Albert had converted to Lutheranism, dissolved the order of the Teutonic Knights, and taken over East Prussia as a personal fief from the Polish king.)

**1618**—The Hohenzollern holdings became "**Brandenburg-Prussia**" after the death of Albert Frederick and the acquisition of East Prussia.

Frederick William "the Great Elector" ruled from 1640 to 1688.

In 1648, with the Peace of Westphalia, he acquired eastern Pomerania (with former bishopric of Kammin), Halberstadt near the Elbe, Minden, and Nordhausen.

The Great Elector's oldest surviving son was Elector Frederick III, who ruled from 1688 to 1713.

**January 18, 1701**—Elector Frederick III crowned himself King Frederick I of East Prussia with the emperor's approval (after Frederick had promised military support for Hapsburgs in Spain).

The royal title applied only to Prussia, which was outside the Holy Roman Empire; as Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick still owed fealty to the emperor. Frederick, however, began to use the title King of **Prussia** as his primary title throughout his territories.

King Frederick William I (1713-1740)

King Frederick II "the Great" (1740-1786) increased Prussian lands by over half and connected Brandenburg with Prussia by annexing parts of Poland.

King Frederick William II (nephew of Frederick II) was king from 1786 to 1797, during the French Revolution. The second and third partitions of Poland (1791 and 1795) erased Poland from the map of Europe and added a large Slavic population to Prussian control. This time marked the greatest eastward expansion of Prussia.

King Frederick William III (1797-1840) was a young man during the Napoleonic Wars and mostly kept Prussia neutral.

**1803**—Napoleon's first reorganization of Europe eliminated over half of the more than 300 sovereign political entities in Germany that had been existence since 1648. Prussia lost its territories west of the Rhine River to the French Republic, but Ravensberg stayed within the Kingdom of Prussia.

- 1945**—The German surrender took effect on May 9, 1945, following Hitler's suicide on April 30. The victorious Allies—England, the United States, Russia, and France—divided Germany into occupation zones under the **Allied Military Government**. The English zone included Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, the city-state of Hamburg, and a new state named **North Rhine-Westphalia** (which included Westphalia, the Ruhr, and the Lower Rhineland). Since then, Bielefeld has been part of North Rhine-Westphalia.
- 1947**—**Bizonia** was created on January 1, 1947, to combine the English, American, and French zones into one administrative unit, separate from the Russian zone in the east.
- 1948**—The **German Federal Republic** was organized in West Germany, including the states of Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hesse, Rhineland Palatinate, Württemberg, Baden, and Bavaria.  
The German Democratic Republic in East Germany was controlled by the Russian communist Soviet Union. East Germany included Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony, and Thuringia.
- 1990**—The two Germanys were reunited into one nation, the **Federal Republic of Germany**, on October 3, 1990.

## SUMMARY STATEMENT

Herman Grothaus was born in 1670, according to a transcription of his tombstone. At that time Bielefeld was part of the County of Ravensberg in the Electorate of Brandenburg-Prussia during the rule of Frederick William "the Great Elector." This area was part of the Holy Roman Empire.

When Herman migrated to America in 1709, Bielefeld was part of the Kingdom of Prussia (and still part of the Electorate of Brandenburg and the Holy Roman Empire). Frederick I was King of Prussia.

Bielefeld became part of Westphalia in the Confederation of the Rhine in 1807 and part of North Rhine-Westphalia in 1945.