

Biographical Study of “the Oldest” 1709 Palatine Emigrant:

JOHANN MARTIN MATTHEUS

In addition to being the oldest recorded emigrant to America among the 1709 Palatine Germans, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that he also may have enjoyed the most interesting and even exotic life amongst his peers.

What follows is an exploration of the life story of Johann Martin Mattheus who was born in the year 1720, probably born in the town of Limbach, Kusel District, Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany but lived much of his life before emigration in Dunzweiler, a village a few miles to the northeast. The approach will be chronological.

Background: The church books for the reason generally begin about the middle of the 1600s – which is amazing considering the number of small villages, and the fact that the area has been trammled by numerous armies over the years – WWII, WWI, the conflict over the unification of Germany in the 1870s, and in particular the Thirty Years War. Religion (religious differences) played a large role in the conflict – especially after the schism wrought by Martin Luther which saw Catholic supporters (principalities) at the throats of Protestant (Calvanist, Lutheran) supporters (principalities).

A particular nasty time, involving widespread destruction, often combined with hardships due to crop failures and harsh winters, resulting in famine and extreme hardship was the **Thirty Years War (1618-1648)**. Although it may seem unlikely, history tells us that one of the most important players was Sweden who was allied with the French (despite religious differences) and many German princes against the Austrian Hapsburgs and Spain. By a series of treaties in 1648, the War was officially over. However there was utter devastation left in the wake.

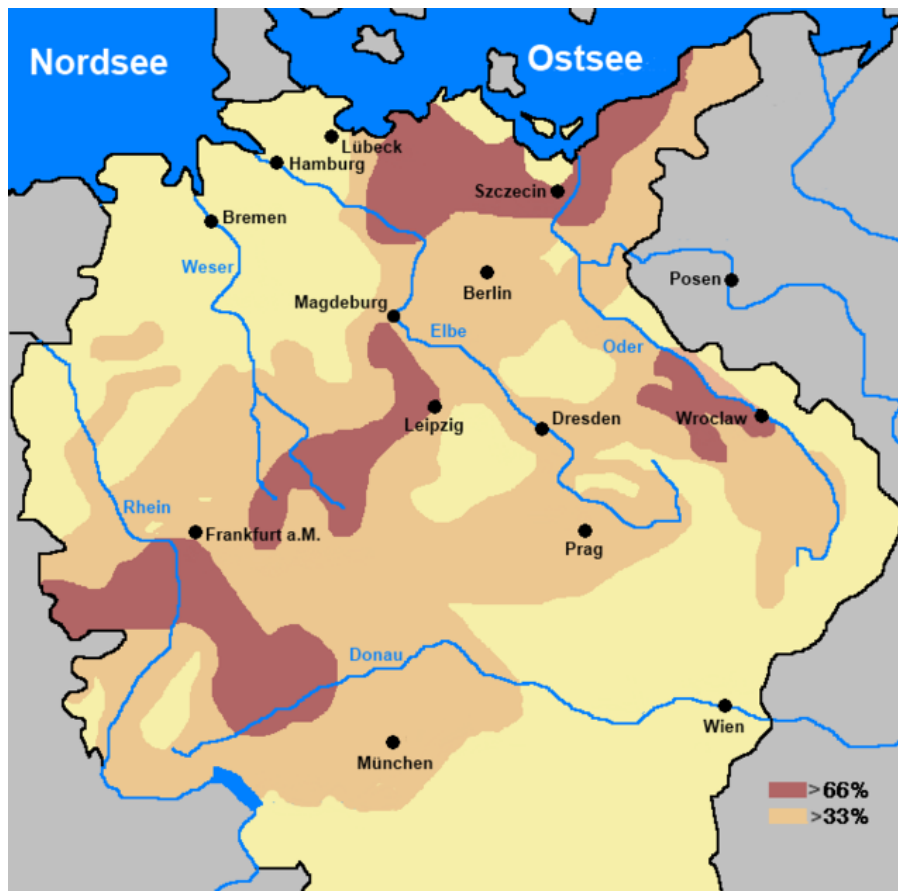


The toll on the peasant population was immense and there was little mercy or sensitivity to their plight as the above sketch suggests.

Rampant witch hunts became the order of the day. Disease, including plagues of one sort or the other, were rampant. Even “friendly” forces such as the Swedes, were responsible for a lot of the destruction. Mercenary armies were particularly destructive. It is estimated that the Swedish “armies alone may have destroyed up to 2,000 castles, 18,000 villages and 1,500 towns in Germany, one-third of all German towns”.

A huge vacuum was created as the population took many years to recover. Hence there was, due to wartime depredations and disease, a great deal of movement during the War, and after as some had nothing to return to. The reverberations of this War would play a significant role in the decision of many of the children and grandchildren of those born during the Thirty Years War to take the drastic step of leaving the Fatherland forever and migrating to England then America beginning in 1709.

Many regions of Germany lost 50% or more of its population with the civilian population being little more than stepping stones and punching bags to soldiers scouring the countryside for food and other amenities. As can be seen in the map below, the Palatinate was within the area where depopulation above 66% was typical.



Most of the information that follows comes from the work of Hank (Henry Z.) Jones. Hank's efforts are beyond unique, and he has provided Palatine descendants with the place of origin in Germany of many of their ancestors. His published work is listed at the end of the present study. Anything in italics below is from Hank's "Even More Palatine Families" (Volume 3, p.1716).

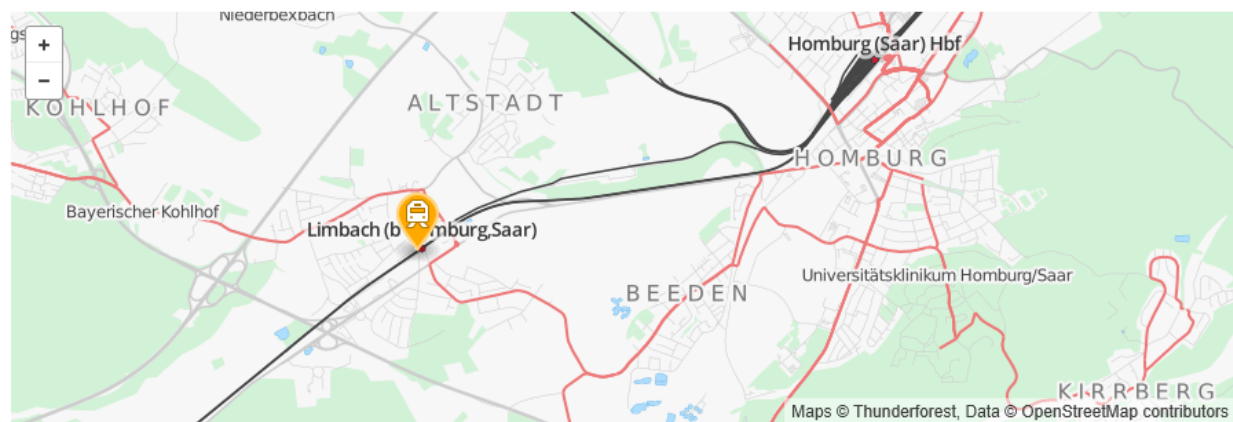


Birth: Johann Martin Matheus provided a very specific date of birth in a petition he submitted on 27 October 1702. Herein he noted that, *he is very old, on upcoming Martin's Day his 81st year will end.* He is telling us that he was born on "Martin's Day" which is 11 November, the birth date of St. Martin after whom he was doubtless named. This means that he was born on 11 November 1620. Hence he first saw life at the beginning of the Thirty Years War, and was

fortunate enough to survive throughout its full extent – a particularly noteworthy feat since his birth and residence appears to have been within the area most hard hit by the Thirty Years War. It is probably no coincidence that “Martin” does not appear to have had children until quite late in life, after the years of rebuilding which characterized the years from 1648 to 1660 or so.

It is not known where he was born, but considering that he spent a considerable part of his life in the service of obtaining funds to repair the Church at **Limbach** (much more on this aspect later), it is likely that he was born in this village just west of Homburg. The location where he resided in the years prior to his emigration to America is **Dunzweiler**, a small village north of Homburg. These locations can be seen in the map above, underlined or highlighted in red. All are in the Rheinland-Pfalz region, which was, between the years 1681 and 1719, part of the State of Pfalz-Zweibrücken ruled by the Kings of Sweden. Limbach is also shown in the map below, and needs to be differentiated from three other villages of the same name, one being directly west of St. Wendel and directly north of Saarbrücken.

Limbach (b Homburg, Saar) location



It seems that in the closing years of the 17th Century, Martin was moved by a cause dear to his heart (or perhaps born of a desperate need for money), which took him on a trip across much of Germany and to Sweden. It is to this story that I will now turn.

Early Appearances in the Records for Dunzweiler: On a “French tax list of 1697” we find, “Hans Martin” tricoteur. His occupation noted in the Waldmohr Churchbooks (which begin in 1689), Martin is listed as a “hosenstricker” in 1697. Both words mean “stocking weaver”, which is also the occupation given in the London List records of 1709.

Martin’s Effort to Obtain Funds for the Repair of the Church at Limbach: A series of petitions and correspondence dated between 1700 and 1708, amounting to 50 pages, now housed at the Church Archives in Zweibrücken (File #AHWst II/294) entitled, “*The money collected in Sweden by Johann Martin Matthaus of Dunzweiler for the repair of the church in Limbach (w. of Homburg/Saar) 1700-1703, 1705, 1707-1708*”, reveals the details of the perambulations of Martin.

This documentation reveals that in the spring of 1699, Martin, a stockingweaver, of his own suggestion and volition, embarked upon a mission, *to collect money for repairing the church at Limbach*. He spent the time between then and the spring of 1700 travelling the countryside to reach his goal. His primary destination appears to have been Sweden, where he stayed for one year, returning to Germany in the spring of 1700. On 23 February 1700 Martin wrote a letter from Stockholm to Pastor Euler in Waldmohr, indicating that, *he has up to now already collected money, and that he spoke recently in person with 'our King of Sweden' on the same behalf*'. As noted before, the Kings of Sweden were then the princes and rulers of the State of Pfalz-Zweibrucken. In other correspondence we learn that he, *had his arm broken on the sea travel*. On the way back home, Martin stopped at a series of German towns to obtain his goal. The list is quite impressive. He stopped at Hamburg in Pommerania, and at Bremen. Upon receiving a, *letter from the Pastor in Limbach, he decided to return. He came via Coburg, Sonnenburg two hours from Coburg, Bamberg, Nurnberg, Franfurt, Mannheim, other places in the Palatinate, finally to the dominion of Gutenberg and, from there, to Bergzabern*. In the latter location, two days previous, he was, *taken into custody by the Pfalz-Zweibrucken county official, for he wanted to return once again to Frankfurt. He was sent to Zweibrucken in the company of a guard for further investigation*. Presumably this inquiry led Martin to declare, *that he had left the collected alms with trustees (merchants), with some money he had lent to a man named Simon Grimm of Alzey two years ago in Stockholm*. The researcher reported that, *Hans Martin Matthaus signed [his affidavit] with his own handed signature*. So we can conclude that Martin was literate, and prone to perambulation. As to the assessment of the Church and County officials, *Seemingly, it turned out that every detail as to his claims about the money could be substantiated, and the trustees turned in the money one by one*.

The fact that Martin did not go on this adventure without the expectation of receiving some compensation should not diminish the actions in any way. Apparently he was allowed one third of the moneys for his expenses and own uses. In his later petitions Martin reviewed his three year voyage and stated that, *he was promised the third part of the collected monies for himself, as he now needs it, for he is very old*, specifying that he would be 82 on St. Martin's Day of 1702. Furthermore, in 1705 Martin reported that he has, *bought a lot and intends to build a house on it*. In his final petition relating to this voyage, Martin noted that, *he was in Sweden. He spent nearly three years on the voyage, has been to Griefswald. He intends to build a house in Dunzweiler for his daughter, is a very old man and had his arm broken on the sea travel*.

The Family of Johann Martin Mattheus: A good part of his family constellation can be ascertained from his letter of 23 February 1700 where he sends greetings to:

- *his son Georg Wentzel*
- *the wife of his son, Georg Wentzel*
- *his son's mother, that is his own wife*

- *his daughter*

- *his brother-in-law Hans Jost Scherer (changed in text from Johann Groscher)*

So apparently in 1700 he was married, possibly to a woman with the surname Scherer, and had two children, a son Georg Wentzel Mattheus, and an unnamed daughter (for whom whom he apparently intended to build a home in Dunzweiler).

A list of inhabitants of Dunzweiler dated 6 November 1701 confirms the number of children. Here we find, “Hans Martin Mattheus, Luth., and 2 kinder”. As we shall see, both children came with him to America less than a year after his last petition to the County of Zweiburcken and/or the Church officials there dated 6 September 1708.

It is unfortunate that the Waldmohr Churchbooks do not begin until 1689 since it is likely that the baptism and marriage of Martin would have been recorded there or in the satellite church of Limbach. The Waldmohr Registers do, however, provide a clear indication of the identity of his son and daughter noted in the records above:

1) **Georg Wentzel Mattheus** married 4 October 1696 as the son of Hans Martin Mattheus of Dunzweiler to Maria Catharina, daughter of the late Andreas Jung of Dunzweiler. [Here we learn that Georg Wentzel married the sister of the present author’s ancestor Johann Theobald Jung, son of Hans Andreas Jung of Dunzweiler]. Apparently “Dorfbuch Dunzweiler 1247-1997, by Dieter Zenglein (Waldmohr, 1997) contains a short chapter on pg. 17 about Jorg Wencelaus Mattheis, Schuldiener zu Duntzweiler and his pre-1709 activities”.

2) **Anna Christina, daughter of Hans Martin Mattheus** was a sponsor to Hans Jacob Kuffer in 1702 and to Georg Wentzel Mattheus in 1704. *It was she who md. Henrich Conrad Wallrath* [another ancestor of the present author].

Emigration to America: The motives for Martin’s leaving the Fatherland at the age of 88 years can only be inferred from the above information. He has to be among the oldest Palatines to leave the homeland to seek out opportunities in America. At any rate, the “Oberamt Zweibrucken Tax Account Book” for 1709 shows that, *Hans Martin Mattheis of Dunzweiler should have paid 4 fl for manumission fee, according to the government order, but he has gone away with many others moving to America.*

We next find Martin Mattheus, his wife, and 4 children on Capt. Robert Bulman’s ship in the 4th party of those departing for England in 1709 as seen in the “Rotterdam Lists”. We are blessed in having him also appear in the “London Lists” as Marcus Matthes aged 88, and a daughter aged 24, Reformed (Church), stockingweaver, “in the 4th arrivals in England later that year. It is unclear as to what happened to his wife and the other 3 children in his party.

Johann Martin Matheus makes his first appearance on the “Hunter Lists” for subsistence rations on 30 June 1710 with 1 person over 10 years of age in his household. It would appear that just

before this date that his 24 year old daughter Anna Christina had married Henrich Conrad Wallrath and was the second person over 10 years of age in the latter's household.

In most of the Hunter's Lists of New York and the Livingston Manor (West Camp) we see Martin listed beside his son Georg Wentzel Mattheus or his son in law Henrich Conrad Wallrath.

He moved to Schoharie with his said son and son-in-law about 1712, and is found on the Simmindinger List of 1716/17 in the Schoharie town of Neu-Quunsberg next to Georg Mattheus, and Henrich Wallerrath, and the latter's father Gerhard Wallerrath – clearly illustrating the point made by Hank Jones that Palatine families tended to stick together in the New World, residing close to each other. Here the entry reads,

Georg Mattheus, wife Catharine, and 1 child.
Martin Mattheus' widow (age 110 yrs).

Since there is no evidence that Martin had a living wife at this time, and considering that much had been made of the age of Martin, this is likely a mistranscription that should read Martin Mattheus, widower, age 110 years. There is doubtless an exaggeration here since Martin's correct age would be about 96. One wonders, considering his perambulations and stories of the past, whether Martin might have had a slight tendency to exaggerate a bit (although not on the London Lists which give his correct age).

At this point the records go cold for most families in the Schoharie, Mohawk Valley area. All we can say at this point is that Martin was alive in 1716, and that he likely died soon after this date.

At any rate, thanks to surviving records, we are privy to a great deal of information about this Palatine immigrant about whom, if the records were complete, we could likely say that he was the most senior person to risk all and come to America. He must have judged it worth the effort and uncertainties.

My deepest thanks to my good friend Hank Jones for his dedicated research efforts. Since the late 1970s he has tackled the seemingly impossible task of determining the villages of origin for each of the 800 plus 1709 Palatine immigrants, continuing to add to what was found each year to the present, and expanding his research horizons to encompass all 18th Century German immigrants to America (including those from later migrations from the same regions of Germany to New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and the Carolinas).

The author obtained the information for the present study from the following books by Hank (Henry Z) Jones Jr:

- 1) "The Palatine Families of New York – 1710", 2 Volumes, (1985 and 2001).
- 2) "More Palatine Families: Some Immigrants to the Middle Colonies 1717 to 1776", (1991).

3) “Even More Palatine Families: 18th Century Immigrants to the American Colonies and Their German, Swiss and Austrian Origins”, 3 Volumes, (2002).

These books can be obtained from the author via Hank’s website [here](#).

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