

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE ELLER FAMILY IN GERMANY

J. Gerald Eller

James W. Hook failed to fully document what he wrote on the history of the Eller family in Germany. Letters were written in 1986 to several researchers in West Germany who were known to be interested in the history of the Eller family and to several archives and church officials. Confirmation, corrections, and additions to that which Hook published on this subject were requested. Several letters and some published information have been received and will be shared when translations are available.

For the benefit of readers not acquainted with Hook, his writings on the history of the Eller family in Germany are presented below and followed by letters from three contemporary German Eller family researchers.

FROM: James W. Hook, "JAMES W. HOOK AND VIRGINIA ELLER", New Haven, 1925, pp. 102-103.

The Eller family is a very old and honorable one in Germany. According to Siebmacher the name in the middle ages was spelled Elner. The family was one of the most distinguished in the Rhineland. Its ancestral seat was near Dusseldorf from whence the family spread to Westphalia and south to the Rhineland Provinces. One branch, at a very early date, settled in Eastern Prussia near Danzig, where Joachim Eller confirmed the family emblem of nobility in 1600.

The name and emblem of the Dusseldorf family was adopted by a branch of the Baron von Eberstein family which was heir to some of the Eller estates and in 1819 the emblems of the two families were combined for Carl Heinrich Christian Wilhelm von Eberstein, Royal Prussian Major, universal heir of his uncle Drost Christian Ludwig van Eller, who was the last of his name to carry the baronetcy title.

Many members of the Eller family from the time of the first crusade were in possession of high orders of dignity, one of whom was General Major Wolf Ernst von Elner, Chief of a Regiment and Governor of Minden. He died in the year 1680. The name is found in many other distinguished places; among writers, physicians, teachers, and explorers. Frederick Eller was private physician to Frederick the Great.

Some members of the family seem to have been among the first to accept the teachings of the Reformation. Some were followers of Kaspar Schwenkfeldt and remained loyal to the Schwenkfeldian faith to the end. The Dusseldorf family for the most part were Lutheran, but when the Dunkard faith was organized in 1708 many joined and underwent the persecution that destroyed the sect in Germany and forced a nucleus of the more ardent members to emigrate to America and reestablish their church on the free soil of Pennsylvania.

It is said that the Eller emigrants to America between 1740 and 1750 were Dunkards, or descendants of that faith. They were, indeed, non-Lutheran Protestants who accepted the Baptist Church after their settlement in America. They may have been Dunkards, but it is more probable that they were Ronsdorfers, a sect founded by Elias Eller of Elberfeld in 1727. The disciples of this sect underwent the usual persecution meted out to nonconformists and in 1737 sought isolation on the estate of one of their comrades about thirty miles east of Dusseldorf. Here they founded the now prosperous town of Ronsdorf and initiated some of the industries for which the city to-day is well known.

(Note-JGE: Ronsdorf today is a part of the large city of Wuppertal. JERRY RUETZ is now translating a paper on Elias Eller, founder and first mayor of Ronsdorf)

The Ronsdorf sect believed in the millennium, but due to the intolerance of strong contemporary religious belief it met with vigorous persecution and scarcely survived its

founder, who died in 1750. Many of the members came to America between 1737 and 1750, and settled in Pennsylvania, and among them, no doubt, were the Eller immigrants, the ancestors of the early Ellers of North Carolina.

(Note-JGE: Hook offers no convincing evidence in support of his view that early Ellers in NC were Dunkards or Ronsdorfers. In fact these Ellers were in all probability members of the Luthran faith.)

From: James W. Hook, "GEORGE MICHAEL ELLER AND DESCENDANTS OF HIS IN AMERICA", New Haven, 1957, pp.1, 433-435.

(Note-JGE: In this, his last book, Hook does not reaffirm or correct earlier statements about the Eller families in Germany. On P. 1 he states, "The Eller families in America came, apparently, from the Palatinate of Germany in the first half of the 18th century.") He presents, pp. 433-435, new material on this subject which he apparently received shortly before the book went to press--this is extracted below.)

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THE ELLER FAMILY OF THE DISTRICT OF ALGAU OF SOUTHWEST BAVARIA:

This district belongs to the Province of Suabia and Neuberg. It formerly was a much larger territory that extended to the Danube on the north and to the Swiss border on the south.

The writer is indebted to Mr. Aurel Eller of Goffstrasse 3, Munich, Germany for the following record of the Algau family of Eller which in some respects suggest a connection with certain early emigrants to America.

The Algau family of Eller apparently is one of great antiquity. Quoting from Mr. Eller's letter to this writer, dated 21 April 1957, he says, "In the dark ages, 6th-7th centuries, our era, there lived in Lindenberg in Algau-formerly Lintiberc -then only a dense jungle- powerful giants 3-4 meters tall. They were called teutones and came from Jutland. They moved on gradually during the 8th century, and in the 9th century came the Alamans, who settled down on Bodensee. (Lake Constance) They were of Swedish (schweban?) origin and they in their turn descended from the Germanic race. Single families of the Alamans wandered into Westallgau. These again spread out as early settlers in the old forest regions of that time. One of these settlers with the forename ELLO, and his family, cleared land in an opening of the forest, at the foot of Hirschberg. This clearing became the ancestral seat of the Eller family. (Hirschberg is in the Algau Alps near Bergenz on Lake Constance.)

It is true I cannot positively ascertain the genealogy of our forefathers before the beginning of the 1500's because my studies were made very difficult during the war years. In the city archive of St. Gallen (Switzerland), the state archives of Bregenz (Vorarlbert in Austria), and in the state archives in Neuberg on the Danube, are valuable material about the heads of the Duchy of Altenberg and family, their bondsmen and serfs. Mr. Eller thinks these records would reveal much information if one would take the time and dig it out.

Mr. Eller's letter then continues, the real authentic proven founder of our family of Algau is Michael Eller of Unterstein, near Scheidegg (Algau) born in 1630. According to his father he must have been born in Unterstein or in Ellersreute, because the two towns lie only about two kilometers apart. In the middle of the 1500's to the beginning of the 1600's, according to Mr. Eller's letter, one Mathias Eller was living in Ellersreute and Hans Eller was living in Unterstein, while seven others of the name were landlords in the same region.

Michael Eller and his family appear by the church (catholic) record to have been as following:

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Family I

MICHAEL ELLER, born in 1630 either in Unterstein or Ellersreute in Algau, Bavaria. No record found of his death., He married, January 1659, Agatha Wucher, born 1630; d. 7 Jan.

1699. Their children, all born in Unterstein, were:

- (1) Hans Eller, b. 1660.
- (2) Martin Eller, b. 1663. An inheritance record in the Archives of Neuberg on the Danube, dated 11 Feb. 1700, says the second son of Michael Eller is said to have left the country and up to now no trace has been found of him. Should he or his heirs return then the six brothers must pay him (or heirs) his share- (one 7th share). (Vorderosterreich Lit. 845, page 249)
- (3) George Christa Eller, b. 1665
- (4) Bartl Eller, b. 1667; d. I Dec. 1724; m. 15 Oct. 1690, Barbara Swartz, b. 1665; d. 1 April 1728. She is said to have married twice. (See Family II below.)
- (5) Jacob Eller, b. 1668.
- (6) Mathias Eller, b. 16 Feb. 1670. He is the ancestor of Mr. Aurel Eller, now living in Munich, Germany, who supplied this record of the Algau Eller family.
- (7) Mang Eller, b. 5 Sept. 1773.

Family II.

BARTL ELLER, born in Unterstein, Algau, Germany in 1667; d. 1 Dec. 1724 in Grethemuhle. He married, 15 Aug. 1690, in Gnetthemuhle, Barbara, widow of Michel Milz, whose maiden name was Swartz; She was b. 1655; d. 4 Jan. 1728. Her first husband died, 1 Dec. 1688, in Gnetthemuhle. As will be noted two of his son according to the records were given identical names. It was not unusual for early German families to give multiple names to their children one of which would be the same for more than one child but most unusual to make all given names the same for two or more of their children yet the record (Catholic Church) of Bartl Eller naming two of his children George Michael, this writer has been assured, is correct.

Children of Bartl Eller and his wife, Barbara Swartz, were:(Catholic Record)

- (1) Joseph Eller, b. 9 Feb. 1692.
- (2) Georg Eller, b. 24 April 1694.
- (3) George Michael Eller, b. 5 Sept. 1695. The church record says he "emigrated", but to what place and in what year is not given nor was any other reference to him found. His date of birth would reasonably well fit that of George Michael Eller, the emigrant ancestor of this genealogy whose first son was named Peter must have been born not later than 1746 (see pages 17-31 herein) and, according to this writer's guess, was born in Germany and may have been a half brother of the emigrant's other children . There are other facts, however, that militate against the George Michael Eller, born 5 Sept 1695, of the Algau family in Germany being the same as the George Michael Eller of this genealogy. In the first place the Algau George Michael Eller was a Catholic whereas the George Michael Eller of this genealogy and his children were Protestant. This fact, of course does not preclude the possibility of the latter George Michael having been born a Catholic and later becoming a German Baptist Brethern, or Dunkard, the church he attended after reaching America. In the second place whereas the Algau George Michael had no brother named Henry, the American George Michael apparently did have. In the third place the children of the George Michael Eller of this genealogy bore given names that did not conform very well with those of the Eller family of Algau.

- 4) George Michael Eller, b. 31 Oct. 1696; d. 18 June 1772; m. 1st. Magdalene Speiler, b. 1705 in Scheidegg; d. 25 Jan. 1774 in Neuhaus; m. 2nd. in 1745, Anna Brunner, b. 1715; d. 24 June 1769 in Neuhaus.

There were seventeen children by both marriages, eleven by the first marriage and six by the second (Catholic Church Records). (Note-JGE: names of the 17 children omitted here)

- (5) Andreas Eller, b. 3 Dec. 1698.
- (6) Georg Eller, again, b. 25 Jan. 1700.
- (7) Martha Eller, b. 8 Jan. 1705.

Note (Hook): Mr. Aurel Eller in his letter of 21 April 1957, reported finding the birth record (22 July 1724) of one Christian Eller, second son of one Michael Eller; also of finding a birth record of one Anna Eller, born 1695, daughter of one Melchoir Eller. These names were the same as those of early Eller settlers in Rowan Co., N.C.

In another letter to Mr. Wayne M. Eller of Petersburg, VA, Mr. Aurel Eller again stated his belief that the Eller family had its beginning with one CHR. ELLO who, in the 9th century A.D., was living in Hirschberg near Bregans on Lake Constance where he established, out of virgin forest, the ELLER'S CLEARING" that has existed to the present day. In the same letter he stated that the name Henry (Henrich) does not appear in Algau while the name George is often found.

In his letter of 1 June 1957 Mr. Aurel Eller refers to a great Eller family of the Rhineland, also mentions the Eller-Ritter Family whose family seat has been in Dusseldorf for centuries, owning estates and castles as far up the Rhine River as Cologne. An heir of this family was Heinrich Adam von Eller, Lord of Burgau who was given his princely credentials in 1572-77 and married Cecilie von Bongard. It is from one of these Rhineland families that this writer has believed, and confesses he still believes, the Ellers of this genealogy descended but can supply no proof.

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(Note-JGE: The above Eller-Ritter reference may come from a mistranslation. The German word for "knight" is "Ritter" and the Dusseldorf Eller family originated from a family of Teutonic knights named Elnor.)

Another famous Eller family, Mr. Aurel Eller says, was the branch located in Solda, Italy on the border of the Tyrol where the Hotel Eller now stands at the foot of Ortlergebirges Glacier. This family originated in Algau before 1570..

(Note-JGE: Summary- Hook speaks of the following Eller family locations in Europe)

1. Dusseldorf from which the family spread to Westphalia and the Rhineland Provinces. There does not seem to be any evidence to support the view that the Ellers of Westphalia, apart from those of the Einer- Eller line, or the Ellers of other Rhineland Provinces, such as the Palatinate, spread from these Dusseldorf Ellers.
2. Eastern Prussia near Danzig (Joachim Eller 1600).
3. Ronsdorf (Elias Eller sect 1727).
4. District of Algau (Allgau) (Hirschberg, Unterstein, Scheidegg, Ellersreute, Grethemuhle.)
5. Solda, Italy.

Hook dismissed the Algau Eller as ancestors of the early Eller immigrants to America on the grounds that the latter were Protestant and not Catholic and the name, Henry, did not occur in the Algau Eller family. Hook says that he thinks the immigrant Ellers came from the Palatinate in the Rhineland but can offer no proof. Many questions remain unanswered today about the relationships among these various Ellers of Europe. Were they branches of a single family as Hook seems to imply?

I have attempted to contact Mr. Aurel Eller of Munich, West Germany without success. I would like to correspond with members of the Association who have new information to share about the Allgau Eller or other Eller families in Europe. In the meantime, read the following three letters for reactions from Eller family researchers in Germany to Mr. Hook's views.

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From: GEORG ELLER, Bannzaunerweg 7, 6530 Bingen 1, Rheinland-Pfalz, West Germany, dated 2.11.87.
Translators LOUISE ELLER, 2932 Homeway Dr., Beavercreek, Ohio 54385.

You are right to assume that the name ELLER is often represented in Germany and that not all bearers of the name ELLER are descended from one person.

How did the family name come about? ELLER is an old German term for the German Erle (alder) tree. When family names were introduced in Germany during the 12th century, not everywhere nor at the same time, which was impossible because of the many large and small possession rights and regulations. There were many possibilities, for example, a family that had an Erlen tree on their property was given the name Eller or took (adopted) it themselves.

Variations are possible like "Eler", "Erler", for example. Also later on, because spelling wasn't determined or legally regulated, and also because pronunciation adjusted to different parts of the country, and because very few people during those times could read or write, the results were that the name was passed on orally to the official government in most cases this was the teacher- superintendent of the village.

The statements of James W. Hook as they were published in the USA are in many cases simply wrong and not applicable. What Siebmacher (cited by Hook) ascertained in his books is surely right, however, one should not simply connect one to another. Joachim Eller of Danzig who bore a crest (part of Coat of Arms) with a squirrel, as substantiated by other documents, was, because of his beliefs, a refugee from Salzburgischer (Austria).

Karl Eller in Koln (Cologne) bore a crest in 1625 with a stork on a blue panel, and comes very close to the old Rhein area family line of the Eller's of Dusseldorf, but since, according to Siebmacher, the Dusseldorf line of Ellers died out totally and, as Hook correctly states, the line was carried on by the heir and uncle "von Eberstein", no direct genetic connection is present anymore.

I also don't believe that General Major von Elner, mentioned by Hook, can be connected with Frederick Eller, personal physician to Frederick the Great. This happens to be very interesting, but simply because of the name cannot be used as a source of descent.

One thing is sure: The religious beliefs play a very meaningful role in ancestor research. Especially the Lutherans were the ones that were very attached to their church and usually married accordingly (equivalent) and also picked their place of residence where ever there was a Lutheran congregation. You will find this also in my family tree, when in my crest description I will mention Anton Eller, who in 1548 was mayor and inn proprietor in Frankfort on the Main, and who took in as quest during his travels the well known theologian and friend of Martin Luther, Phillipe Melanchton, who also had close ties with

the former free empire city of Oppenheim, where, as is well known, Luther stayed overnight during his famous trip to the lower house in Worms, and Oppenheim being about 8-10 KM distant from which happens to be the first definitely substantiated place of residence of my Eller ancestors, and in the final analysis good relations existed between the Ellers of Frankfort and Oppenheim, so if I were to regard that Anton Eller of Frankfort as an ancestor, either in direct or indirect family line, it would not be provable but it would certainly be bordering on acceptable probability.

It cannot be excluded that a connection exists with the descendants of the Dusseldorf Ellers, but this is at least questionable, therefore I don't want to be quoted on that especially since as already indicated the name ELLER can be found more often than one thinks.

Some time ago when ancestor research, though in good reputation, -et everyone that held himself in high esteem wanted to carry a crest with a corresponding proof of descentance, one of my distant relatives, a teacher by profession, had a crest "provided" by profit-hungry professional genealogists: A blue crest with a stork and crest description as follows: Old Rheinlandisch family Karl Eller of Koln on the Rhein in 1625 carried marginae crest. Anton Eller, teacher. . . and his son and vinyard owner Friedrich Wilh. carries this crest at present, a silver stork on blue ornament, blue wing, in it a silver double hook, cover blue silvery. Further particulars are not available. This is typical for the line of thought in those days. Whoever thought of himself as SOMEBODY just had to have a Crest. That's how simple it is sometimes, when in fact it is so uncanny difficult to make connection among existing facts and eventually connect these with still available archive records before the beginning of Church Book registrations (around 1550-1600).

So I do not assert my own representations of the crest portrayed to be unobjectionable perfect but they are quite entirely within range of real possibilities with certainty bordering probabilities. Despite this I am still in search of further real possibilities..

[a graphic rendition of the ELLER Coat of Arms \(152kb\)](#)

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(Note-JGE: a full description of his family Coat of Arms is contained in a separate document in my possession which has yet to be translated.)

Because of my profession as civil servant of vital statistics I had and still do have more extensive realistic possibilities. I learned a lot from researchers who were looking through my old files (that are at my place of employment) and I myself searched through many archives, for example: Frankfur, Mainz, Oppenheim, also the archives of the Lutheran court of Leiningen, which today is located at Amorbach/Hessen, the Church Books of all possible localities. At Heimatstelle Pfalz in Kaiserslautern which I'm sure by now you are familiar with, I searched through ancestor records and ancestor ranks of other genealogists, drew my own conclusions and put them on the paper. Yet one never gets done with it and just when one thinks to have reached the end of all possibilities quite often there are suddenly new leads and discoveries. That is how it must be with you, too, and so one must separate the chaff from the wheat as we say in this country, which means one must try and find the real and exclusive accuracy. I hope that you, too, will get a breakthrough in your research work so you will be able to further pursue your ancestors in Germany.

I obtained all the Eller documents from the already mentioned Heimatstelle Pfalz in

Kaiserslautern but I cannot recognize a connection with your ancestors especially since I have only emigration data after 1800. Maybe now there are ongoing new documents that I am not familiar with so, for example, the two families ELLER/FITTING which emigrated to Groveland, Illinois USA after 1800. This Eller line does not belong to my family tree.

In a recently published new book by Werner Hacker "Emigrations from Rheinland Pfalz and Saarland during the 18th Century" two Ellers are mentioned, those that emigrated from Eimsheim to USA and one that emigrated to Galizien, those definitely belong to my clan. I assume that you have gotten hold of this book by now, because besides names it also contains very important research results concerning emigration technicalities, etc.

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While studying this book a notion came to me that since Zweibrücken, from where the wife of one of your relatives originates, is partly connected to the principality and county of Leiningen a connection may exist, either through possession or personal relation and since all the Leiningers were strict Lutherans maybe there could be a connection with your first mentioned ancestor, Casper Eller. In very rare instances did one go to a far away region in those days to fetch a wife! Even though Hacker writes in his previously mentioned book that the courts of Leiningen were reformed-- that is not correct and here he errs. Naturally after 1700 reformed citizens were living in Leiningen sovereign territory, yes also catholic citizens, but those were the exceptions and originated from neighboring villages.

I worked a long time with documents and learned details and ascertained circumstances of that time. So I found, and this concerns me very personally, an individual original document dated 1642, wherein the widow of my ancestor (substantiated ancestor) requests permission of the court of Leiningen to move with her two minor children 3 KM to a place governed by the courts of the community of Eimsheim for the purpose of remarriage, the move was graciously granted after a suitable fee was paid.

Enough for today. I hope in the meantime you have received mail from Old Germany with good results for you and with it came closer to your goals. Maybe our lines will meet somewhere, it cannot be disregarded. I am very anxious to hear from you occasionally concerning your research results and it would make me happy if I could be of progressive help to you. I apologize again for the long delay of my answer but it was caused by reasons of health.

I would be very pleased to hear from you again especially how far you have succeeded in your research and maybe on the basis of newer knowledge I could help you progress or be available for counsel and deed.

With friendly greetings from our house to your house and with all good wishes. GEORG ELLER.

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From: Professor Dr. K. NAPP-ZINN, Botanical Institute of the University of Cologne, Gyrhofstr. 15, D-5000 Koln 41, dated 16.9.1986. Translated by JERRY REUTZ, Jonesborough, TN.

Your friendly letter of July 11th interested me very much. It made me very happy and I thank you for it. As far as the family name ELLER is concerned it is a synonym for "Erle", a kind of species of bushes and trees, with the scientific genus name of "Alnus" (alder). Proof of this fact seems to me found in the enclosure of your letter where the nameform "Elner" appears', which seems to have an etymological relationship with "Alnus".

Through the development of civilian family names- the name "ELLER" surely sprang up in different parts of Germany independently of another. I think it therefore impossible that the different Eller stems (family lines) from the Lower Rhein (Dusseldorf), from the Algaeu and from the Pfalz are related to each other. As far as I know such a relationship has never been documented, least of all not before 1800, the time in question. The Ellers from the Allgaeu are so far-unknown to me.

Concerning the Lower Rhein Ellers, their center was not Dusseldorf, but a town approximately 20 KM. from "Dusseldorf" named Ronsdorf- which is now a part of Wuppertal..

(Note-JGE: The line of Ellers derived from the name Elner, mentioned by Hook, had their ancestral home in the town of Eller which is now a part of Dusseldorf; this was a noble line of ELNER-ELLERS. The Ronsdorf Ellers were a middle-class family whose relationship to other Eller lines is not clear but the origin of their name, ELLER, was probably not from ELNER. So far I have found no Eller immigrants from Ronsdorf to America.)

In Wonsheim we were able to research our Eller ancestors back to approx. 1680 A.D. Since our research dealt only with direct descendants and not siblings, cousins, etc., I cannot say at this point, whether your Caspar Eller comes from Wonsheim or Alzey and is related to my Eller ancestors. Considering all that has been said thus far, as well as the townships named in your enclosusre, I do not believe that your Eller ancestor lived near Dusseldorf.

These Ellers from Ronsdorf played indeed an important role in origination of a sect that split in the 1700's from the Lutheran or Reformation Church (I cannot remember which) both of which existed- and still do.

I am sure if the Eller sect belonged to the "Dunkers" or Anabaptists- in German "born again"-, but it is certainly possible. If these things are of importance to you (even though there is no family connection), I shall send you in time copied pages of a book depicting the History of the Evangelical Church in the Rheinland.

Your Ellers obviously, as do mine. came from the Pfalz (Palatinate). The hometown of some of the wives of your Ellers was in the Pfalz. My mother also is by birth an Eller, her paternal ancestors coming from Wonsheim in Rheinhessen, near Alzey, which belonged earlier to the Pfalz region.

With friendly greetings,

K. Napp-Zinn

p.s. He who wrote something about 3-4 meter large giants who were supposed to live in Allgaeu- should- in genealogical view- not be taken seriously..

From: JDR. KURT NIEDERAU, WERDERSTRASSE 17, D- 5600 WUPPERTAL 11, dated 5 Nov. 1986.
Translator: Ann Sherwin, 1918 Medfield Rd., Raleigh, NC 27607

I am pleased to confirm that I received your inquiry and would be glad to help you. I have a great deal of information about the noble gentlemen von Eller, who descended from the House of Eller near Dusseldorf. I have also published much of it in several places. . . This noble family died out on 6 May 1819, whereupon Karl von Eberstein took over the von Eller name and coat-of-arms. But it is certain that there were no emigrants to the USA from this noble family.

The information from Mr. Aurel Eller of Munich to J.W. Hook contains several erroneous statements. For example, it is not true that a Heinrich Adam von Eller of Burgau was made a prince. The name of the family at Burgau (near Duren in the Rhineland) was von Elmpt, not von Eller, and no one in the family was ever made a prince.

I am absolutely certain your ancestors do not trace back to either the von Ellers or the von Elmpts. Rather they originated, as you yourself know, in the Palatinate.