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Hamburg: Stolen History (1992)

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V. HAMBURG

After the Banbury visit, I flew to Hamburg and visited the office of Mobil Erdgas-Erdol GmbH located on Steinstrasse 5, where my colleagues have names like Klaus, Gerd, Dieter, Wolfgang, Wolf-Peter, Harald and Jurgen. We talked about business and political matters, including the \$100 billion a year chores associated with the Germans of the old West taking into the fold Germans of the old East. We stayed busy all day, during which Harald Manheim, my associate, kept me to a tight schedule, which he had prepared and from which he preferred not to vary. By end of the day I was near collapse.

That evening Harald, Dieter and I attended a concert at the Hamburg Musikhalle (Music Hall) where the Philharmonie Hamburg performed St. Matthew's Passion by Bach. The three-hour concert was excellent and I enjoyed it, despite my general state of exhaustion and a very uncomfortable seat that had the added disadvantage of being in the front row. The Musikhalle, built in 1910, is a civic and cultural treasure for the music-loving Hamburgers. The performance, by a full orchestra, was supported by a singing conductor and four other singers who included a Finn, a Dutchman, a German and a soprano from New Jersey. In observing these Germans listening to their music I was persuaded that human salvation and redemption is possible, despite the crimes of history.

The next day, Harald and I drove to the Northern Germany Gas Desulfurization Plant (NEAG) in Voigtei, near the town of Sulingen (15,000) in Lower Saxony, which is Germany's oil and gas region. Mobil has 1,501 billion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in Germany, and produces 406 million cubic feet a day, which supplies about 20 percent of the market. The market is expanding into the east, where sulfur laden lignite coal is being replaced by clean burning gas for heat and power. This is, in addition to being good business, one of the largest environmental clean up processes in Europe. The ineptitude of history's most recent losers had turned the land, water and air of Eastern Europe into an environmental nightmare.

Some of Lower Saxony's gas, however, contains sulfur. Mobil and Shell have a joint venture plant called NEAG to clean it up. Sulfur in its various forms in hydrocarbons is dangerous stuff. Robert Lennem, the NEAG plant superintendent, was our host. Robert, about 40, has a British accent and is a very friendly fellow. He had lived in New Orleans and in Mobile, Alabama, where Mobil has gas operations, and he is a lover of Cajun food, baseball and other Americana. He is also a bona fide techie. Robert is one of the co-patent

holders on the MODOP process, which takes the “tail gas” stream (the final 2 percent of the treated H₂S sour gas) and squeezes the final bit of sulphur out of the gas, sweetening it and thus making it safer to transport, use and burn. MODOP, a Mobil-owned desulfurization process, is efficient but deadly. Great attention is taken that no leaks occur and that any accident would be controlled pronto. This is part of my job, too. As I listened to Robert, in his British accent, describing the safety and community relations operations of his plant, I was in awe at his correctness and precision. We discussed wind currents, and nearby villages and schoolrooms, and emergency procedures. Our world is a perilous place. As we stood in the middle of this gleaming industrial marvel, the breeze that day was so gentle and comforting, I felt a haunting chill. Of all things in all places, I realized. I was evaluating a deadly gas plant in Germany.

The sulfur is piped seven miles away where it is loaded on rail cars and sent north to a terminal and treatment center in a town called Brake, on the Weser River. There the heated slurry is dripped on metal sheets in droplets, cooled, conveyed to a storage pile and then conveyed to barges on the river for sale to fertilizer and other chemical plants in Europe.

We later drove to the Brake terminal and were given a tour by Wolfgang Lang, the terminal supervisor. Lang, who spoke only German, had been on the job just a year. Before the Brake assignment he worked for Mobil’s Marketing and Refining Division at a gasoline storage terminal in Bremen. That facility was shut down after Mobil learned that there were unexploded Allied bombs buried on the site.

Explained Harald: “We just learned of this a year or so ago! The British government knew since the war that there were explosives in Bremen, but it was classified and they did not tell us. Some need for security! Only now, 40 years later, do they tell us of these dangers.”



On the drive back to Hamburg, I was telling Harald about my trip to Banbury and had a sudden thought: Saxony. Hey, that’s right. The DeWolf family had a Saxony connection. And what about John Wasserburg, whose daughter was named Sarah Waterbury? There’s a German connection to my English ancestors.

Of course, all of England has a German connection. Queen Victoria married a German, and the royal family is mostly German; with connections to royal families throughout Europe, the blood is just a might too thin, and giving nationalities to any of the royals is a decidedly dicey, shall we say, political game. The Anglo-Saxon race, so-called, is based on the Germanic tribes of Angles, Saxons and Jutes (whose name disappeared) when they invaded the Briton island in the first millennium. The indigenous Britons, and other

invaders (Celts, Scots, Picts, Vikings and Normans) have all had identities submerged into the English Anglo-Saxon archetype.

Harald and I chatted about the possibilities. I told him the yarn about the DeWolf-Saxony connection. The story, which originated through the research of a DeWolf family genealogist in the early part of this century, described how an ancestor long ago named Louis de Saint-Etienne was in a hunting party with King Charles V of France. An unseen wolf charged the French royal and only the quick wits and action of the Louis de Saint-Etienne in jamming a lance into the wolf's side saved King Charles from the attack. At this act of bravery, the French king knighted Louis de Saint-Etienne and named him "de loup," after the wolf.

Louis de Loup's grandson, Emile, left France when he accompanied the Princess Mathilda to Germany at the time of her marriage to the eldest son of Frederick, Elector and Duke of Saxony, in 1427. In Saxony, Emile de Loup became a favorite of the Saxon court and was given the title of baron in 1427 and changed his name from the French de Loup to the German de Wolf. The ancestral seat of the de Wolfs in Saxony is the Castle of Crimmitzshaw. In time, DeWolf descendants moved to Belgium, Holland, Saxony and Prussia, and to the coast of Northern Europe, settling in the Baltic area called Livonia.

At the time a robust North Sea and Baltic Sea trade was taking place among several cities in Northern Europe that would band together in the Hanse League, a kind of cooperative trading market. Hanse cities were in Scandinavia, England, Germany, the Netherlands, France and the Baltic baronies. Hamburg, for example, was a Hanse city, a point of civic honor. Hamburg is officially called "The Free & Hanse City of Hamburg."

One of the most successful North Sea merchant traders in the early 17th century was an Englishman named Theophilus Eaton, who was a king's agent in the Netherlands as well as a longtime friend of one of England's Puritan Divines named Rev. John Davenport. The Eaton/Davenport partnership of commerce and theology eventually led to the establishment and founding of the New Haven Colony, which would eventually fail and merge with Connecticut. How DeWolf came to the New World in the early 17th century is a mystery. But the DeWolf family in Livonia reputedly has a young son who ran away to sea at this time. Balthazar DeWolf, the American DeWolf ancestor who first appears in Hartford in 1643, presumably was the Livonia DeWolf who had run away to America. At least, this was the premise of a DeWolf family researcher earlier this century.

As for John Wasserburg, who appeared in Connecticut at that time, he came to see his daughter Sarah, born in 1667 in Connecticut, call herself Waterbury and marry a man named Benjamin Mead about 1690 in Greenwich. Who better to become part of the emerging commercial expan-

sion in the New World than some Hanse league traders named DeWolf and Wasserburg?

Harald, during the conversation on these points, cautioned that tracing any German people who would emigrate was a difficult process. After all, emigrants tended to be the least rooted in a community. Still there was the possible Hanse/Saxon connection all the same.

“What do you think?” I asked Harald. “Sound plausible?”

Harald remained silent. Finally he agreed this all made sense, yes. “I envy you,” he said, “you have been able to learn so much. I know nothing of these things in my family. I only know that I was born in eastern Germany at the end of the war, and came to Hamburg with my parents. They tell me of their parents, but that is all. No one in my family wants to talk about the past. No one will talk about the family history, where the families are from or anything of that kind. There is a fear to find out too much. It was the Third Reich, you see; it destroyed so much and stole this knowledge from us.”