

Earliest Documented Generations

First Generation

Johann Ernst

The first Ernst ancestor we know anything about is Johann Ernst (1) born about 1699 in Regenwalde, Pomerania. Regenwalde was a rural town about 40 miles northeast of the much larger fortified city of Stettin on the Oder River.



Figure 7. Stettin in 1642. In 1720 it became the capital city of the Brandenburg-Prussian Pomeranian province. In 1816 the city had 26,000 inhabitants.

Johann was known as a *Shustermeister*. It was quite an accomplishment to become a *meister* (master) of anything and it required a lot of schooling or training. The person had to carry his books and credentials with him to show that he really was a *meister*.



Craftsmen were part of a guild in many German towns during the period 1300-1900. The trade guild consisted of local experienced master craftsmen. Guild members often displayed a wrought-iron sign outside their establishments. Charters or letters authorized by the city or the ruler established medieval guild authority and thus the craftsmen were able to hold a monopoly on trade within the city. The training period was extensive and required three steps. First, a boy was apprenticed by his father to a master craftsman. Second, the apprentice worked with the master craftsman for a minimum of three years. Third, the apprentice took an examination and, when passed, he became a journeyman and was awarded a certificate (*Gesellenbrief*). To progress further, a journeyman usually undertook a journey (*Wanderscraft*), traveling to other towns to work for other master craftsmen and guilds. At the end of the journey, he was eligible to be a master craftsman himself and open his own shop and train other apprentices. In some crafts, the applicant had to pass a second examination before being considered as a master craftsman. Each stage in this process required written documentation. To apply for admission into the guild he had to present a birth certificate or other documentation that established that he was not illegitimate. A journeyman carried a passport (*Wanderzettel*) that confirmed

his competence and identity. The names of master craftsmen were recorded in the book of masters (*Meisterbuch*).

Johann designed and made shoes. He most likely had several apprentices working under him who were learning the trade from him. Shoes of the early 18th century had extremely pointed toes, were stiff and had medium-sized heels made of wood. Rich people wore shoes embedded with precious stones, while peasants' shoes were unadorned.

Maria Elizabeth Hoppe

Johann married Maria Elizabeth Hoppe (2), who also was from Regenwalde. She was born about the same year as Johann. We have not uncovered either the parents of Maria, nor Johann. Nor do we know the year they were married or when they died.

Second Generation

Johann David Ernst

Johann David Ernst (1728-1811) ◀ Johann & Maria Ernst

Maria bore a son on 14 September 1728 and they named him Johann David Ernst (3). Johann had several titles. He was called a *bürger*, a senator, and a *shuster*. As a shuster, most likely he was one of the apprentices working under his father. A *bürger* was one who owns a house and is registered in his village or town, in this case, Regenwalde. Not everyone in town was registered.

Bürgers were full citizens and enjoyed the right to vote and to hold public offices. To become a *bürger*, applicants had to be a legitimate son of a *bürger*, meet various conditions, including good moral character, and pay the fee (*bürgergeld*). The town council decided who could become a *bürger*. In addition to other rights, a *bürger* received a yearly gift of firewood, perhaps wood for building, and the right to graze cattle on the village meadow. Those that were not eligible *bürgers* were called *hintersassen* or *beissassen* and they received none of the above benefits.