History of the Purfürst Surname
and Its Lands

In the area ultimately to be known as Germany there arose during the third and fourth centuries after Christ a number of the great tribal confederations to take the place of the numerous petty tribes with their popular tribal form of government. One such confederation was the Thuringans. In 1422 the Margravates Thuringia was united with other territories, which gradually received the name of Saxony. (Margravates are territories ruled by princes of the Holy Roman Empire). In 1672 Thuringia split away and began to be divided into separate principalities.

As early as the year 1000, Emperor Otto II permitted lands on the eastern boundary of Thuringia to be administered by imperial *vogts*, or bailiffs, whence this area received the name of **Vogtland**. The area, on the western boundaries of the Kingdom of Saxony, was known as the *Reüssischen Herrschaften (Principality of Reuss)*. In 1244 the *vogt* Henry IV entered a Monastery. His sons divided his possessions with ruling seats established in **Weide**, **Gera** and **Plauen**. The Plauen line was subdivided about 1300 between a senior member designated as *Reuss ältere Linie* and a junior branch designated as *Reuss jünere Linie*. It was in these two Principalities that I found first record of our Purfürst ancestors. The areas corresponds to the southern most areas of the adjoining present day German states of Saxony and Thuringia north of their common boundaries with the German state of Bavaria and the country of the Czech Republic. (see chapter on History of Germany)

Our research has centered on the families whose surnames are an Anglicization of the original surname of Purfürst, which exists in Germany yet today. All conversions were necessary due to the absence of the umlaut diacritical mark in most other languages. Some groups simply dropped the umlaut and retained the "u". Converting the umlauted letter to "ue", as was done by other groups, would be considered a proper scholastic translation conversion. Still others converted the umlauted letter to a double-ee. The eastern European pronunciation of the letter "u", with the umlaut, is similar in sound to the double-ee in the surname "Lee". Therefore, depending upon how that double-ee was pronounced, the resultant spelling of Purfeerst could also have been considered the proper conversion of the family surname. Early immigrants generally initiated spelling changes in such a manner as to ensure correct pronunciation.

Before the Middle Ages (AD 476 - AD 1450) single names were used exclusively. In early times only the first or "given" name was recognized by law; surnames were variable additions to separate those having the same name. Given names were first used as surnames in the 1100's, the first being Germanic in form. Dynastical names such as Heinrich and Friedrich next appeared and as Latin became the common language in the church it also affected the form of surnames. The Statute of Additions in the reign of Henry V (1413-1422) made such additional designations necessary to legal documents and made surnames customary and slowly they became permanent. During the 16th century reformation it became popular to use Old Testament given names such as David and Daniel. When the Counter Reformation occurred the names reverted back to Christian names. During the Napoleon occupation of Europe, French had a strong influence on German names by the use of Luise and Henriette. The use of double names did not begin until the 16th century, a custom started by the nobility. The use of multiple given names rapidly increased until 1685 when the Magdeburg Church Ordinance was passed which limited the number of given names to two. By the 1800's, however, multiple given names again became popular.

At baptism, if two given names were given to the child, the first given name was a spiritual name, originally developed from Roman Catholic tradition and continued by the Protestants in their naming customs. The second given name was the secular or call name by which the person was known both within the family and to the rest of the world. The spiritual name, usually to honor a favorite saint or person (ruler, land owner, etc) was usually repeatedly given to all of the children of that family of the same sex. You will see this custom practiced in the early Purfürst families. But after baptism they would not be known by that first given name but would be known by what we would think of as their middle name. Equally as important is the fact the name always had a spiritual spelling as well. Thus, for example, the proper baptismal name for John would have been Johann. A combination of these customs obviously made research efforts interesting when we American descendants only knew our early ancestors by their non-spiritualized middle names while all early records of the individual reflected something entirely different.

The term "Senior" or "Junior" following a name did not necessarily imply a father and son relationship as it does now. It could have been a uncle and nephew who had the same name and lived close to each other. It could have been two unrelated individuals with the same name who lived near each other. To help friends and business associates keep track of who-was-who in their discussions they added "Sr." and "Jr." which simply meant older and younger, respectively. In this family bibliography I have added such terms to family members when I felt it would help clarify generation relationships.

It was common practice to have strict naming patterns. For example, the first son would be named after the father's father; the second son named after the mother's father; the third son named after the father; the fourth son named after the husband's father's father, etc. This custom occasionally provided clues in determining the possible names of earlier generations. In the 1880's 30-40 percent of children died before the age of 10. If a child died in infancy the name was often reused. A child's name was also reused when a spouse died and the surviving spouse remarried and had more children with the next spouse. This results in two adult children with the same name; an occurrence found in our Purfürst family tree.

The pronunciation in Saxony differs in relation to other German areas. Most significant is that there is no difference between b and p, between g and k, and between d and t. In fact p, k and t seem to be completely ignored. The Saxons say that B is a "soft" B and that P is a "hard" B. During my research it was noted that, at various times, the spelling of the Purfurst name began with a "B". The name was frequently spelled with a "B" in old German gothic lineage publications.

The Purfürst name is a "High German" variation of the original name Burgfürst. The term "High German" applies to dialects spoken in areas of Germany south of an imaginary geographic line extending from the French border near Strasburg through the cities of Stuttgart and Nürnburg to the German city of Hof on the Czechoslovakian border. Names changed when a person moved from one of these regions to another. The surname Burgfürst is known to have existed as early as the year 1321 and translates to "The First Man on The Castle", usually a Knight serving a king or duke. For a commoner it could simply mean a man who lived at the top (the "First") of the hill. (see chapter on Germany Nobility)

The Catholic Church prevailed in the German Empire for over 500 years prior to the Protestant Reformation. During this time many important records began to be kept by church officials concerning land, tax, court and civil affairs. Secular officials owned many of the churches and many of the documents and functions later became the basis for public record keeping. The reformation provided

much of the impetus for the widespread recording of parish registers in Germany. The early Protestant records date from 1523 and most early Catholic records from 1563. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) caused extensive damage to records in many areas thus many church records commence from a date after the war. It was during the maintenance of the parish records associated with the Baptism process that the educated priests began to cause the continued use of family names with a common spelling.

Bohemia is a historical region in central Europe, occupying the western and middle thirds of the current Czech Republic. It was an independent kingdom until centralization reforms in 1743, when it became a part of the Austrian part of Habsburg empire, and German became the only official language. A national Czech movement against (mainly German) foreign immigrants was promoted by the religious movement of Hussites under the leadership of Jan Hus, a precursor of Martin Luther, who was eventually burned at the stake. When the crusade against heresy was declared by the Pope, it created a period of turmoil in Bohemia called the Hussite Wars. Bohemia was granted freedom of religion in 1436 by so-called Basel Compactates (Peace and Freedom between Catholics and Utraquists (today: Bohemian Church)) but this lasted for only a short time, as in 1462, Pope Pius II declared Basel Compactates invalid. In 1609, Bohemian king Rudolph II, who was titularly a Catholic, was coerced by Bohemian nobility to publish Maiestas Rudolphina, which confirmed the older Confessio Bohemica of 1575. It can be said that there was relative freedom of religion in Bohemia between 1436 and 1620 and in this Bohemia was one of the most liberal countries of the Christian world. In 1555 the Conference in Augsburg granted to the estates of the Empire the right to decide what religion they wish to have (quius regio, euis religio-he who rules, his religion) and individual people were granted the right to immigrate if they preferred Protestant. The Protestant nobility were largely expelled after the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. The ruling classes had largely been German-speaking since the late Middle Ages. After World War I, Bohemia became the cornerstone of the newly-formed country of Czechoslovakia which became a rich and liberal democratic republic.

The Purfürst family member for whom I found earliest record was born in 1565. This record was located but 10 Km north of the Bohemia portion of the aforementioned Uberdeutsch "High German" area. All early records of the Purfürst family indicates they were of the Protestant faith thus I think that the Purfürst surname had is origin in Bohemia and the earliest German resident identified may have came north out of Uberdeutsch Catholic Bohemia area after the Protestant Reformation. It is my supposition that the earliest ancestor took advantage of that emigration freedom and moved north across the border into southern Thuringia. Thus my future research may ultimately lead me south to Bohemia (The Czech Republic). Of course it wasn't until the 1600's when priests caused the continued use of family names (surnames) with common spelling. Examination of records that predate that period, which reflect only first names, obviously complicates development of family structures and the conclusion of ancestral relationships.

Throughout the history of the German Empire, wars, epidemics, plagues and pestilence swept through the land, greatly diminishing the population and causing tremendous material destruction and a dramatic increase in poverty. The chaos resulting from these disasters allowed for the displacement of many valuable parish registers and the potential for the undocumented death of family members.

There was not a church in every town and the towns that had a church did not necessarily maintain their own registers. The residents of each town were assigned to a particular Protestant or Catholic Church in the area. Depending upon the size of the population a number churches were then assigned to a Parish. The events of baptism, marriage or burial would have been recorded in the town where that parish office was located. Thus I have family members indicating they resided in a certain city only to find out that

the church in that city does not have records. That policy required me to go in search of the parish office that did.