

The Counts and Dukes of Hessen

During the 11th century, some major consolidations of lands occurred in Western Europe culminating among other in the establishment of [Hessen](#) as a large county, with [Henrich I. von Hessen \(1244-1308\)](#) [Wikipedia in German, 2018] becoming its first ruler in 1268. The lands he was able to combine came from various inheritances. Those actions affected the Wiederhold family.

Henrich I.'s father, Hendrik the Brave van Brabant (1207-1248) married in about 1240, after the death of his first wife, Sophie von Thüringen (1224-1275). She was the daughter of the wealthy and honored count Ludwig IV. of Thüringen and Sachsen, well-established states to the east of what became Hessen. Her father, Ludwig IV. died in 1227 on the way to Jerusalem during a crusade. Ludwig had also married twice. His second wife, Elisabeth of Hungary, was even sainted in 1235 by Pope Gregor IX. Ludwig's children from his first marriage, through inheritance and marriages, ruled Brabant, Burgundy, Artois, Flanders, and parts of Bavaria. Sophie, the daughter from Ludwig IV.'s marriage to Elisabeth of Hungary, received rights to lands that became part of northern Hessen.

Hendrik's and Sophie's son Heinrich I. was initially known as Hendrik das Kind von Brabant (the child of Brabant). His elder half-brother Hendrik III. van Brabant was to inherit the rich county of Brabant, comprising what is now much of Belgium.

In compensation the younger half-brother Henrich I. was able to consolidate possessions from various inheritances and became the founder of the Hessian dynasty. Note on the map that many possessions are not contiguous, a result of trading and family pacts. Marriages were often motivated by land holdings. Inheritances could be split over multiple sons, creating smaller counties, as in 1567 Hessen-Kassel and Hessen-Darmstadt (not shown on this map) to the south. They could revert, when there were no male descendants into their past holding or merged through a marriage of a daughter. Reallocations were controlled by the kings and dukes, and loyalty to them was an important factor in keeping a reigning family in land and power. Land could also be given to bishops and abbots.




The Landgrafschaft Hessen (light-brown) and surrounding duchies and counties around 1400. Many lands are owned by various bishoprics (Bistum, B.m., Ebm., or Abtei) and shown in blue-grey.

Substantial lands belonged to the catholic church and its bishops [Bistum, Bm] or cloisters [Abtei]. Some bishops had rights that could be inherited [Ebm, Ebft]. Some rulers made donations to the church to gain favors or imposed as a penalty. They accumulated much wealth. The Archbishop of Mainz (an inheritable position), at the confluence of the Main and Rhine rivers to the south-west of Ober-Hessen, was also able to collect tolls from traffic on the Rhine river, wound up with lands to the north-east of Nieder-Hessen, the Eichsfeld region. It stayed catholic throughout the later thirty-years war, as did the many the Wiederholds living there, while Hessen turned protestant.

Creating Hessen

Henrich I. of Hessen was recognized as Landgraf around 1263. His mother, Sophie von Thüringen was instrumental in assembling lands from her parents' various possessions for her favorite son. Heinrich I. helped, by marrying twice, first to Adelheid von Braunschweig, a daughter of the Dukes of the area to the north-east of Hessen, and then to Mechtild van Cleve, daughter of the duke of an area between the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Rhine river, further increasing his holdings. He also traded rights to counties and smaller holdings with his half-brother in Brabant. Heinrich I. subsequently added Giessen and other lands to his possessions. He reigned first out of Marburg, after 1277 from Kassel. His sister, Elisabeth, married Herzog Albrecht I. der Große von Braunschweig, the ruler of lands north of Hessen. A big gap remained, occupied by the Graf of Ziegenhain.

One small area Heinrich I. acquired from his half-brother was Felsberg , which became the base for the Felsberg (Gio's) Wiederhold branch. It had become a possession of the dukes of Brabant after Count Poppo von Reichenbach married the Fürstin Bertha von Felsberg around 1125, who had no children.

Effects on Wiederhold ancestors.

Since the earliest Wiederholds, then Wedderholds, lived in or just north of the region that in time became Hessen, understanding the changes that occurred helps greatly in understanding family relationships and movements. Not only did they live in the area, but they often worked for the counts and rulers of the smaller possessions. Roles as being bailiffs, judges, and tax collectors enabled them to grow their own possessions as rulers traded lands. Some are shown as representatives (Ministralen) of the ruling bishops in Corvey, Paderborn, and even Cologne. They earned enough to send their sons to be educated. Many daughters were able to make favorable marriages.

After Johann VII. von Nassau-Siegen (1561-1623) established a military academy in Hessen, it was a destination for many younger Wiederhold sons. Several were officers in the troops provided by Count Friedrich II. of Hessen-Kassel (1720-1785) for King George III. of the United-Kingdom (1728-1780) to fight against the independence movement that went to the United States.

Merging and splitting lands

Count Heinrich I. reigned first out of Marburg, after 1277 from Kassel, ceding rights to Brabant to his older half-brother. His sister, Elisabeth, married Albrecht I. der Große von Braunschweig, the ruler of lands north of Hessen.

Heinrich I.'s sons fought over their inheritance, splitting Hessen into Nieder-Hessen to the north, with Kassel as the major town and Ober-Hessen to the south, with Marburg as its capital. The two parts were separated by the counties of Waldeck and Ziegenhain. The bishop of Mainz, owned churches and cloisters with substantial lands throughout the area, including a large area, Eichsfeld, to the north-east of Nieder-

Hessen. Many conflicts arose. Henrich I.'s grandson, Heinrich II. von Hessen, referred as *`der Eisern'e*, (the iron one), fought and negotiated with the bishop, increasing his control of Nieder-Hessen. In 1330 he established Kassel as his formal residency. Soon after, a Wiederhold ancestor, Wedderold IV Wedderhold (~1374) appeared to have moved to the area of Kassel, and his three known sons: Hen (~1413), Werner (~1415) and Nicolaus (~1419), were born there, and are shown to have land-holdings there.

After a battle on 23 July 1427 Count Johann II. von Ziegenhain und Nidda lost the rights to his lands to Landgraf Ludwig I. of Hessen. When Johann II. von Ziegenhain died in 1450 Hessen was unified and enlarged. Soon after, the Landgraf of Hessen, then Heinrich III, was referred to as *`der Reiche'* (the rich one).

An early temporary linkage to the Netherlands

A significant neighbor of Hessen was the County of Nassau. The history of its [rulers](#) is complex. They had relationships with many other nobles. For instance, [William the Silent of Nassau-Dillenburg \(1533-1584\)](#) inherited in 1544 from a cousin lands in the Netherlands and the principality Orange in Southern France. As William of Orange he became the first ruler of the independent Netherlands. Through his 4 marriages he gained more possessions all over Europe.

In 1638 a Wiederhold mercenary officer, [Georg Reinhardt Wiederhold](#) (1599-1648) was recalled to the Netherlands to help in fighting the Spanish troops in Flanders. At an earlier stay Georg Reinhardt had married well, obtaining rights to productive lands (the Betuwe). His known children appear all over Europe, but none have known descendants in the Netherlands. He and his wife were buried in Delft.

In 1813 the principality of Corvey, in Southern Westfalen, was turned over to the the house of Orange-Nassau. The official in charge was Georg Dietrich Reinhard von Porbeck (1766-1837), apparently a brother-in-law of Karoline Christine Wiederhold (~1762). In 1866, after the Napoleonic wars, the Nassau family lost their German lands to Prussia. Now most of that area is part of Hessen.

Nobles linked directly to Wiederhold genealogy entries

Some entries from the Warburger Stammtafeln, the source for the early Wedderold and Wiederhold records, and their families and descendants are also related to nobles listed in Wikipedias -- primarily the German one.

- [Adelheid von Büren](#) (1181-1220) in Eichsfeld
- [Albert III., Graf von Everstein](#) (1170-1217), representative of the Bishop of Cologne
- [Otto II, Graf von Waldeck](#) (1307-1369), ruler of a bordering county
- [Heinrich III. der Reiche von Hessen](#) (1440-1483)

From such entries relationships can be established to most noble and royal families in Europe.

Titles

There was a range of titles for rulers those days. Their meaning evolved over time. I provide here an informal classification, which will help in identifying roles in the genealogy. There are some [references] to abbreviations used in the map. I start at the top, with the German titles.

1. Kaiser: emperor, ruling, often indirectly, major segments of continents. The Holy Roman emperor (HRR), an elected position. The Holy Roman empire covered roughly the lands assembled by Charlesmagne (742-814) from the North Sea to the Adriatic. The emperor had the authority to appoint successors in regions where inherited positions were were challenged. To the east of the Holy Roman empire was the empire of Byzantium, centered in what is now Turkey, but by the year 1000 covering lands as far north as Croatia and west as Calabria in what is now Italy. The lands that the crusaders were trying to wrest from the Muslims were symbolically governed by the Emperor of Constantinople. Later there was also an emperor (Czar) of Russia.
2. König: King, a ruler over a major area, as Bavaria. There would be several kingdoms within and bordering the Holy Roman Empire, as Hungary and Sicily.
3. Herzog: Duke, a ruler over a duchy [Hzgtm, Hzm], a substantial area, possibly within a kingdom, or distinct as Württemberg. an area between Bavaria and France.
Some kings and dukes also had the role of Kurfürst (elector), being able to vote for a successor emperor.
4. Landgraf: an officially recognized count, who would rule over a major area [Lgft] as Hessen, but with less authority than a Duke.
5. Graf: Count, the ruler of a county [Gft]. A county would be a manageable area, where every spot could be reached by a Ritter (knight or armed rider) within a day on horseback. A count would typically have right to tax the population, but would also be obliged to support rulers above him. To protect his rights a count would maintain a castle and a militia. One could be Graf of multiple counties at the same time, and so collect yet more tithing, and perhaps divided loyalties.
6. Prinz: either a son of a king or a ruler of a principality, an independent region.
7. Fürst: ruler of a local area, perhaps a town.
8. Herr: lord, ruler of a small area [Hft], perhaps employing laborers to till the land.
9. Ministeriale: Representative, often for a diocese (Bistum), exercising local authority over its worldly possessions. Judicial is often not included. Important for many early Wiederholds was [Bishopric of Paderborn](#), which included then the rich [Abbey of Corvey](#).
10. Vogt: Overseer, similar scope as Herr, but of church possessions, which might be substantial. The term derives from the latin word *advocatus*, an assistant in law.
11. Ritter: knights existed at various levels. If they worked for a high authority they might be members of the Deutscher Orden, under control of the current Holy Roman Emperor; others were recognized by the church because they went on the crusades. Locally appointed knights are authorized ride a horse, carry weapons and would go out on patrols. They might help with collecting the tithings due from the populace.
12. Knappe: page. A young assistant in a noble house. Local rulers would appoint young men from important families in their courts or as officers in their castles (Burgmann). Subsequently they might be elevated to become knights (Ritter). There are many designations as Knappe and Ritter in the Warburg genealogy.

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