

# Early ancestry in Hessen

Northern Hessen is a region inhabited early on by a tribe “Chatten” [Wikipedia in German] who already fought the Roman occupation around the birth of Christ. They were surrounded on the northeast by the Saxons and to the southwest by the Franks. References to these tribes remain today. Frankfurt – where the Franks could ford the river Main is today the largest town in Hessen, and its area to the south of the river is Sachsenhausen, where the Saxons lived.

I have received a citation that in 837 a Widerhold gave land to the Abbot of Fulda for a monastery (Klooster). Also that a Widerhold was from 990-1000 the abbot at the cathedral in Strassbourg. A third note was that Widerhold line, starting in 1235 died out in Waldeck. It appears that in 1500 there was a Widerhold beer brewery. But I have not found any documents that provide linkages, so they don't appear in the genealogy.

The earliest Widerhold reference Alfred Wiederhold found is a Wedderhold who became in 1243 a citizen of Korbach in the Waldeck region of northern Hessen, implying that he owned land there. In 2018 I was able to obtain a [book containing records of Wedderolds in that area](#). Through that resource I can trace all Wedderholds, and hence most Wiederholds to single ancestor, written down as Volland, a judge and mayor from 1229-1248 in Marsberg, small town in Westfalen about 25km upriver from Warburg castle. The river Diemel defines the boundary of Hessen and Westfalen there. Volland called one of his three sons Wedderhold. Ancestors of Volland's wife and son-in law can be traced back to 1140 and 1160. The story in the [Wiederhold section of the book has been translated into English](#).



Map of Northern Hessen, with relevant places marked in red.

The surprising aspect of the entries for his sons and grandsons is that they all became, apparently, even when fairly young, council members (Ratsherren) at various towns in the area, up to about 50 km distant from Korbach. Some of those appointments occurred even prior to their becoming citizens. Those facts indicate that they must have had connections to some reigning entity, perhaps as land record auditors and tax collectors.

Volland is Gio's 22<sup>nd</sup> grandfather. While I have a credible paternal line to Volland, I don't have all maternal ancestors, nor their paternities. The full tree would contain up to 2<sup>23</sup> or 8,388,608 individuals. Since there are quite a number of [marriages among cousins](#) some branches collapse, lessening the number. But since there would be also additional ancestors of my cousins, many should be added. This Wiederhold genealogy is obviously incomplete, since, as of April 2010 it has not quite 40,000 entries.

### The establishment of Hessen

At that time some major consolidations of lands occurred in culminating in the establishment of Hessen as a large county, with Henrich I. von Hessen (1244-1308)[in German] becoming its first ruler in 1268. I describe more details as the [Story of the Counts of Hessen](#). Henrich came von Brabant, now part of Belgium, but his father had inherited, through marriages, lands in what is now Germany. At his death Henrich split the possessions with his half-brother, and moved east to what became Hessen.

Hessen did not exist as a unit until about 1250 when [Heinrich of Brabant](#) managed to assemble dozens of smaller counties, principalities, and other domains into two major blobs in central Germany. One such domain was Felsberg ● (the base for my Wiederhold branch), which had become a possession of the Brabant line when Poppo von Reichenbach married Bertha von Felsberg around 1125. It was traded to the count of Hessen when Henrich I. and his half-brother Hendrik III. van Brabant split their father Hendrik II. van Brabant's lands after Hendrik II's death in 1246.

### Moving on

Early Wedderhold descendants settled in Volkmarsen (25km southeast of Marsberg) and in Warburg new town (20km northeast) or old town (25 km east). From 1370 to 1687 many ownership and loan documents refer to a Hausgenossenhufe in Wittmar 2.5 km north of Volkmarsen. In 1555 Count Philipp IV. der ältere von Waldeck (1493-1574) is a partner. The village existed from 963 to the 16th century, now only a small chapel (Wittmarkapelle) remains.

The Felsberg and Homberg (Efze) branches of Wedderolds, then starting to be named Wiederhold, moved around 1400 south, likely following the Count of Ober-Hessen, when Hessen was split among two sons. For that branch I have comprehensive records. Other branches remained in the area, and their relationships are not that complete.

After the thirty-years' war some family branches are found further east, in an area called Eichsfeld, which remained catholic, being owned by the Bishop of Mainz

How the early Wiederholds apparently became to be minor bureaucrats for these rulers is unclear. I found no records of direct Wiederhold familial relationships; but there are some more distant in matrilineal lines. Records showing that many of them as councilmen made it clear that they could read and write, a facility mainly limited to priests in those times. When very few common folk could write, and even many princes could not, just being a scribe conveyed considerable commercial power.

The local domains were still overseen by some nobility: counts, lords, or overseers for church-owned property. I entered much about these ruling families and their complex relationships in my genealogy as

well. Some names appear in the Wiederhold records as their employers, allowing verification of times and places.

In earlier days there was little movement of people. Partners' homes were rarely from places more than a few hours walking distance away. When the men were soldiers or moved due to employment, as [Johannes Kaspar/Jean Caspar Wiederhold](#), the distance could be much greater.

## Intermarriages

With limited travel and living in small towns the choice of partners was constrained. Concerns about land ownership and levels of education determined selection as well. Marriages among relatives were common. For instance, at least 5 descendants of Heinrich Augustin Kirchberg \*1657 in Dingelstädt (Eichsfeld) married Wiederholds. Heinrich is listed as an Amtsschreiber – official scribe, a profession similar to that of many Wiederholds.

Pastors were required to check if marriages involved cousins. It seems they could issue a dispensation if the relationship was remote, but closer relationships required getting a dispensation, and maybe a payment, from the bishop. If close, a cardinal or even the Pope could get involved, as history tells us about [Henry the VIII](#). Where preserved, those church records provided good information for validating genealogies. A note for the marriage of Johannes Heinrich Christoph Wiederhold from Dingelstädt, a widower, with Anna Maria Henckel, his 4<sup>th</sup> (in Quarto) cousin specifies that it was approved 2½ years later by the reverend and gracious vicar in the bishopric of Mainz, resident in Frankfurt:

*Die 23 Julii Anni 1797 per Copulationem matrimonialem inthronizati fuerunt Joannes H. Wid. honestus Viduus Faber lignarius, et pudica virgo A. M. Hen. G. p:M: et M. Cath. G. legitima, sed dedecto impedimnto dirimente in quarto Affinitatis Gradu Lineae aequalis a Reverendissimo ac Gratioso Vicariatu Generali Monguntino ob Pellum Gallium Francofurthi residente Dispensato Gratis data fuit, et Die 15 Januarii 1800 Eorum Matrimonium in Facie Eccl. ad S. Gert. ... est renovatum [Kirchenbuch Dingelstädt #5767]*

At the same time, absence of a dispensation of a marriage of two Wiederholds provides a hint that they were not closely related <example>.

## Subsequent travel

As travel became more convenient, families spread out. Now that any place in the world can be reached in one day, Wiederholds are found all over the world.

Later generations were well documented by [Alfred Wiederhold](#).



Back to the [Wiederhold](#) [↑ Ancestor Stories](#) page.



Back [to the Wiederhold](#) [T Family Main](#) page.

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