

The Development of Prussia from c.1000 to 1806 CE and Beyond

by John Noack.

Physical, geographical and political Maps generally depict the locations of coastlines, rivers, mountains, political boundaries and plenty of cities, towns and villages. In contrast, historical Maps include names and dates and they use colour or pattern codes to depict changing political boundaries over a period of time.

The Map titled “Entwicklung Preussens I”, which means the “Development of Prussia”, is in the Library of the Wendish Heritage Society Australia. It has recently been photographed and posted on the website www.wendishheritage.org.au as the last photo under News and Events/Past Events/Wendish Heritage Society’s 2013 Christmas Luncheon. This map includes the names of 14 Hohenzollern/Prussian Electors and Kings, the sequence of territorial acquisitions/Erwerbungen by a colour code and the relevant dates. The information in this article is intended to present this Prussian time-line and to clarify some of the historical material relating to persons, areas and dates, which are included in this valuable Map. The references to authors and pages in square brackets refer to the books by surname which are listed in the Bibliography.

As a preliminary comment, the first German Empire dated from about 800 CE when Charlemagne unified Central Europe. This became the Holy Roman Empire in 962 CE under the Saxon King Otto I.

In about the year 1,000 CE, Burchard I was the Count of Zollern, who owned a castle called “Hohenzollern”. This was located south of Tübingen in Württemberg and this name was subsequently continued as the Family name.

By the 1400s under Austria, the “Holy Roman Empire” had added to its name the phrase “of the German Nation”. By 1415, the Hohenzollern Family was invited to assume the role of Elector in Kurmark located in the area of Berlin. It consisted of Altmark, Prignitz, Mittelmark, Uckermark and Lebus and this area was also called Brandenburg. This Family’s first 14 Electors and Kings listed on the Map ruled from 1415 to 1806 and what follows are their names, dates, acquisitions and some features. This will be of particular interest to the Wends with ancestors from Lower Lusatia, many of whom were subjects of these Rulers.

[1] Elector/Kurfürsten Frederick/Friedrich 1 (1415-1440) had been the Burgrave/Burggraf of Nuremberg, but on 16 April 1417, he was the first Hohenzollern to be invested by the Habsburg Emperor Sigismund with the sovereignty of Kurmark or the Mark of Brandenburg. This area, which is coloured red on the Map, was mostly between the two rivers Elbe and Oder and the central town was Berlin or Kölln. In 1431, Friedrich was defeated at Taus during the Hussite War. [Kinder, p.197; Ergang p.491]

[2] Elector Friedrich II (1440-1470) crossed the River Oder east of Berlin and in 1455 acquired Neumark, which is coloured orange and numbered 2. In 1462, he followed the River Spree down to Kottbus and claimed some of the Spreewald area from Saxony, an area which extended in a radius of about 40 km from Kottbus, including Peitz and Werben. The rest of Lower Lusatia/Nieder Lausitz was in the Electorate/ Kurfürsttum of Saxony/Sachsen. Further

north, Berstein in Neumark was added in 1470.

[3] Elector Albrecht Achilles (1470-1486) has ruling-dates which include the acquisition in 1482 of the area east of the River Oder including Krossen, Kay, Klemzig and Züllichau. These dates also include the birth in 1483 of Martin Luther, the later Protestant Reformer.

[4] Elector Johann Cicero (1486-1499) continued to govern within the established Hohenzollern boundaries.

[5] Elector Joachim I (1499-1535) ruled at the time of such note-worthy Reformation events as the nailing of the 95 Theses onto the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517 and the adoption of the Augsburg Confession in 1530. The Hohenzollern Family were supporters of the Lutheran Reformation and the Family became Lutherans.

[?] Elector Joachim II (1535-1571) is not included on this Map.

[6] Elector Johann Georg (1571-1598) is listed next with his ruling date beginning in 1571. He continued his responsibilities in relation to governing his lands and he continued his membership in the Lutheran Church.

[7] Elector Friedrich (1598-1608) also appears to have continued this Hohenzollern governing and religious pattern.

[8] Elector Johann Sigismund (1608-1619) on the other hand sought further acquisitions. The date of 1614 and the Treaty of Xanten are connected with the acquisition through inheritance of the Duchy/Herzogtum of Cleves/Kleve and with the nearby Duchy of Jülich, as well as with the principality of Ravensberg. [Kinder p. 263].

The earlier conversion of Johann Sigismund to the Reformed Church in 1613 made such acquisitions on the western edge of Germanic settlement easier to accomplish. In 1614, he also published his "Confession of Faith".

The date 1614 is further connected with the acquisition of the Principality/Kurfürsten of Mark in Westphalia/Westfalen to the west of Berlin.

To the east of Berlin, the date of 1618 appears in the area labelled Duchy/Herzogtum of Prussia/Preussen, also called East Prussia, with purple as its colour code and numbered as the 3rd main acquisition. He received East Prussia as a Polish fief by inheritance in 1618. [Kinder p. 263]

[?] Elector Georg Wilhelm (1619-1640) is not listed on the Map.

Between 1618-1648 was the religious and political Thirty Years War, which caused much devastation to the Prussian lands and population.

[9] The Great Elector/Der Grossen Kurfürsten Friedrich Wilhelm (1640-1688) made important acquisitions in 1648 at the Peace of Westphalia. Prussia received Further/Hinter Pomerania/Pommern, which included the coast of the Baltic Sea from the River Oder to near Danzig. Brandenburg also received the bishoprics of Halberstadt, Camin/Kammin and Minden

and the candidacy to the Archbishopric of Magdeburg. [Kinder, p. 255; Ergang p. 491]

In 1680, he acquired Holzkreis nearby and in 1687, Region/Kreis Jerichow east of the River Elbe. It is colour-coded yellow and is numbered as the 4th main set of acquisitions.

He also continued to practise the Reformed Protestant religion and he introduced a program for a union of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches. [Brauer, p.3]

Between 1662 and 1668, he constructed the Friedrich Wilhelm Canal/Kanal between the River Oder South of Frankfurt and the River Spree. This Canal was later used by the “old Lutherans” on their way from the area of Klemzig in Brandenburg to Hamburg to their new home in Australia in the late 1830s.

This Elector also promoted agriculture by the reclaiming of waste lands, encouraged persecuted Huguenots from France to immigrate here, centralized the administration and established roads and a system of mails. [Ergang, p. 493]

[10a] Elector or Margrave Friedrich III (1688-1701) began his rule as an Elector but during his reign, the Kingdom of Prussia was founded and his title was changed to King/König. When the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I was in need of military support for the War of the Spanish Succession, the Elector obliged but his support was at the price of the kingship.

[10b] King/König, Friedrich I (1701-1713) therefore became the King in 1701, when he crowned himself at the Königsberg Castle as “Friedrich I, King in Prussia”. When West Prussia was later acquired, this title became “King of Prussia”. [Weiss p. 401; Ergang p. 494]

In 1702, he was involved in acquisitions in the areas of Osnabruck, given the abbreviated title “Bm”, and of Lingen, west of Hannover, given the abbreviated title “Gft” .

[11] King Friedrich Wilhelm I (1713-1740) is best known as the very stern father of his son, who later became King Frederick the Great. Friedrich Wilhelm I claimed to rule “by divine right” and was very stern and despotic in his behaviour. In one incident, when his son Friedrich rebelled and tried to escape from his strict upbringing in Prussia with a friend called Lieutenant von Katte, both were apprehended. As a lesson, Frederick’s father had this friend executed in full view of Frederick. [Ergang p. 496]

The King continued to centralize the Prussian State and to establish new industries. In 1720, he acquired Vorpommern/Closer Pomerania, which included Stettin. He was called the “Soldier King”, who constantly wore his military uniform and who increased his army to 83,000 men. He had a mania for tall soldiers and he included them in his “Potsdam Regiment of Giants”. [Kinder 281; Ergang p. 495]

[12] King Friedrich II, the Great/der Grossen (1740-1786) displayed an early interest in high culture and in the exploration of literature, philosophy and the humanities. However, he was also influenced by the stern demands of his Father in relation to the administration of government and involvement with the army. He saw himself as fulfilling the role of an “Enlightened Despot”, by promoting colonization, draining the marshes, encouraging agriculture, allowing freedom of both religion and thought and by reforming the legal system. [Kinder p. 287]

Friedrich was keen to increase his acquisitions, which on the Map are numbered 6th and are colour-coded blue. He further strengthened his army, increased the stock of war munitions, added more than 10,000 men to the army and dismissed the useless Regiment of Giants. When Habsburg Emperor Charles VI died in 1740 and his daughter Maria Theresa succeeded him, Friedrich invaded Silesia/Schlesien in 1742, thus adding to his Kingdom fourteen thousand square miles and nearly a million and a half subjects. Austria ceded Silesia to Prussia at the Treaty of Dresden in 1745 and in 1748, after the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and at the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, this acquisition of Upper and Lower Silesia was confirmed. (Kinder p. 281; Ergang, p. 498]

In 1744, Friedrich was on the Atlantic Coast acquiring the principality of Ost-friesland, with the abbreviated title “Fsm” meaning “Fürstentum”.

In 1756, Friedrich over-ran and occupied Saxony and then invaded Bohemia. Soon after in 1757, he defeated the French and Austrian armies at Rossbach near Leipzig. However, he faced a crushing defeat at the hands of the Austrian and Russian armies at Kunersdorf and the Peace Treaty signed in February 1763 at Hubertusburg forced Friedrich to relinquish Saxony but allowed him to retain Silesia.

In 1772, he combined with Catherine II of Russia and Maria Theresa of Austria to dismember Poland. In this way, he acquired West Prussia, including Ermland, Kulmerland, Pomerellen and the Netze-District, which were located between East Prussia and Hinter-pommern. His title was then changed to “King of Prussia”. [Ergang, p.500]

[13] King Friedrich Wilhelm II (1786-1797) continued the expansion of Prussia in the East, where in 1793, South Prussia/Süd-Preussen was acquired and in 1795 New East Prussia/Neu-Ost-Preussen was gained. This was a large area of land between the Duchy of East Prussia/Herzogtum Preussen and Silesia, which is colour-coded light green on the Map.

[14] King Friedrich Wilhelm III (1798-1840) had to deal with the antics of Emperor Napoleon as he sought to extend his French Empire. After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Friedrich Wilhelm was granted the whole of Lower Lusatia, which Saxony, a supporter of Napoleon, was required to surrender. However, Upper Lusatia remained under Saxony’s control.

A brief look at the period beyond 1806 reveals the various attempts of Friedrich Wilhelm III to create and establish a Union Church of Reformed and Lutheran Protestants in the Prussian kingdom.

In 1808, King Friedrich Wilhelm III placed the churches in the Prussian kingdom under the Ministry of Public Worship.

In 1817, he issued a Union Decree, which required the blending together of the Lutheran and the Reformed churches.

In 1821, the official “Agende” or Order of Worship was imposed.

In 1823, the subscription to the Lutheran Confessions was nullified.

On 30 April 1830, coinciding with the 300th Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, he issued a decree to impose the “Union” of the two churches.

On 28 February, 1834, the concept of “Union” was modified to “Confederation”.

On 4 April, 1834, some Lutheran clergy submitted a Petition for “absolute freedom of religion” but this was rejected. Further laws promoting Union were formulated.

Finally in 1840, Friedrich Wilhelm II died.

Beyond the Map’s end date of 1806 CE, the Hohenzollern Family continued with four more Kings and Emperors.

[15] King/König Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1840-1861) withdrew his support for the Hohenzollern quest to unite the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches.

[16a] King Wilhelm I (1861-1888) spent his first ten years as King working with Bismarck to unite Germany under Prussian leadership. A war in 1864 against the Danes ended in the Peace of Prague and Prussia’s gaining of Schleswig, Holstein, Hanover, Hesse-Cassel and Nassau. A war against France and the Peace of Frankfurt resulted in Prussia gaining Alsace and Eastern Lorraine.

[16b] King/König and Emperor/Kaiser Wilhelm I (1871-1888) received the additional title of Kaiser or Emperor bestowed on him on 18 January 1871 at the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. He also witnessed the name of the North German Confederation being changed to the “German Empire”. [Rickard, p. 205]

[17] King and Emperor Friedrich III (March to June 1888) held these two roles for only four months.

[18] King and Emperor Wilhelm II (1888-1918) dismissed Bismarck and planned for a larger army and navy, as well as for more overseas colonies. Other European countries pursued similar aims and these came to the fore when on 28 June 1914, the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian Crown, was murdered by a pro-Serb sympathiser in Bosnia. At the end of this war in 1918, the German Empire of Second Reich collapsed, Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated and fled to Holland, Germany was disarmed at the Armistice on 11 November 1918 and in the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, Germany lost Alsace-Lorraine, Posen, Danzig and all of her overseas colonies. Prussian Rule thus came to an end and from 1919 to 1933, the Weimar Republic and then in 1933, the Nazi Party governed Germany.

After the defeat of Adolf Hitler in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, still existing Prussia was dismantled and by 1947, it had ceased to exist. The new eastern border of Germany was the boundary-line along the Rivers Oder and Neisse and the eastern section was under Communist Rule. The divided sections of Germany were reunited in 1989.

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(All of these books are available at the Wendish/Sorbian Research Centre.)

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Das Kurfürstentum Sachsen/The Principality of Saxony in 1806 CE.

Another useful historical Map in the Library at the Wendish/Sorbian Research Centre is titled “Das Kurfürstentum Sachsen am Ende des Alten Reiches”, which means “The Principality or Electorate of Saxony at the end of the Old Empire”.

The First Empire/Reich was the Old Roman Empire founded by Saxon King Otto I in 962 CE and later called “The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation”. This came to an end under Napoleon in 1806, when it became the Confederation of the Rhine, with some areas being ruled by Napoleon’s family members. [Rickard, p. 188]

The Second Empire/Reich was created by Bismarck in 1871 and this lasted until the “German Revolution” of November in 1918 and the abdication of the Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The Third Reich was first described in 1923 and became the title of Hitler’s planned World Empire. [Walshe, p.188]

This Map presents each Region/Kreis, their districts and their administrative centres and facilities in Saxony in 1806. They are colour-coded, with Upper Lusatia in dark yellow and Lower Lusatia in light yellow. Each region is called a “Markgraftum” and administrative features provided include Amt, Herrschaft, Hospitaler, Kreis, Landvogtei, Ordensamt, Rat, Ritterschaft, Salzamt and Stift.

In 1806, most of Lower Lusatia was part of Saxony, apart from an area with a radius of about 40 km around Cottbus. However, because Saxony had supported Napoleon and provided him with supplies and troops, after Napoleon’s eventual defeat in 1814 and as a result of the Congress of Vienna held from November 1814 to June 1815, Prussia was allotted Posen, a

large “Rhine Province” and nearly half of Saxony. [Rickard, p.198; McEvedy, p.80]

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