

A glimpse into the life of Michael Briese (1738-1819): our earliest known Briese ancestor

by David Briese

Michael Briese was the grandfather of Johann Ludwig Briese, who emigrated to Australia in 1855. There are few records of his life; he is directly mentioned only once in the Czerniejewo Evangelical Parish Book¹, when he died on 4 December 1819, at the age of 81. However, the following year he is referred to as the late father of Christoph Briese in the Parish record of marriage of Christoph to Katarina Steinke (the parents of Ludwig), thus providing the link to the descendants of Ludwig. There is no record of his wife, but they had at least two children, Anna Johanna, and our ancestor Christoph.

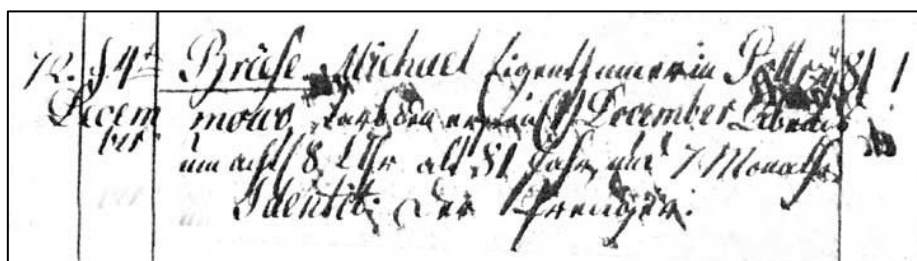
He was described in the Parish Book as an *Eigenthümer* (a property owner) from Potrzymowo, a small village to the east of Czerniejewo. From the death record we can assume that he was born in 1738, but the place of his birth remains a mystery. It may be that the Briese family had lived in Potrzymowo for several generations or they may have moved there recently. It is known that German families in nearby villages (e.g. the grandparents of Michael's daughter-in-law) settled in the nearby village of Gembarczewo in the mid-1700s at the request of the local Polish nobility². This resettlement followed depopulation of the region due to cholera and war.

Michael lived through a period of intense political turmoil³. The region where he lived is now in Poland, and at the time he was born was known as Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), part



Location of Potrzymowo (red circle), home of Michael Briese, transposed onto a map of modern Europe

of the kingdom of Poland-Lithuania. However, the great powers of the time, Prussia, Austria and Russia had designs on Poland. In 1772, they each annexed part of the Polish territory in the first partition. In 1793, the second partition saw the Russians taking more territory in the east and the Prussians more in the west, including the region where Michael Briese and his family lived. This region became known as South Prussia. The Poles revolted briefly under the leadership of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, but were finally beaten and in 1795, the three great powers completed the annexation of Polish territory by dividing up the remainder. However, this was short-lived, as Napoleon stepped into the picture and, with the Poles as allies, defeated the Prussians and Austrians in 1805. Napoleon, however, was more interested



Parish record of the death of Michael Briese on 4 December 1819

Notes

¹ Czerniejewo (also known as Schwarzenau at the time) was the major centre for a number of small farming villages around it, and the Evangelical Parish included people from the town and surrounding villages, such as Potrymowo and Gembarczewo). Parish records were obtained on microfilm from LDS, Salt Lake City.

² K. Lück (1981) Die Bauern von Grünfeld (=Gembarczewo). pp 246-247 of "Deutsche im Gnesener Land" edited by W. Gerke.

³ A good summary of the history of this area can be found at <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/History-of-Poland>.

⁴ A summary of the 1793-94 Land Registration Records of South Prussia was compiled by Reuben Drefs and information on how to obtain further details can be found at <http://genealogy.drefs.net/>



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