

ROMBS – A TEACHING LINEAGE

By: Craig Rhombs

In researching my **Rombs** family, I was first led to Alsace and from there, I was astounded to discover a paternal line of teachers whose teaching tradition reached from the early 19th century back to the early 18th century. ⁱ

My father's line in the United States is associated with the ethnic group commonly called German Russians. Tracing this line led me to the village called Selz (*sic*) in South Russia. Selz was one of a small number of largely Catholic Colonies, known as the Kutschurgan Colonies. Evidence exists that my fourth great grandfather, Franz Ludwig Rombs, b.1763ⁱⁱ, was a teacher and migrated from Kesseldorf, Alsace, in the summer of 1808 with a number of people from Alsace and other nearby areas to found this village. The name of this village mirrors that of the village Seltz in Alsace, not far from Kesseldorf.ⁱⁱⁱ

Some 19th century records of the families that founded Selz and the other Kutschurgan colonies are available from the Germans from Russia Heritage Society (GRHS) in Bismarck, North Dakota, US.^{iv} After reviewing this information, I was intent on finding information about my paternal ancestors in Alsace. The search also led me to records as far back in time as the 17th century in villages slightly to the northeast in Rheinland-Pfalz. What follows describes my findings about Rombs families from about 1700 until migration to Russia in 1808.

Places of significance to this narrative are marked with yellow stars in the associated contemporary map. They are Neibsheim, Zeutern, Oberöwisheim, Bruchsal, Jockgrim, Herxheim, Oberlauterbach, and Kesseldorf.^v

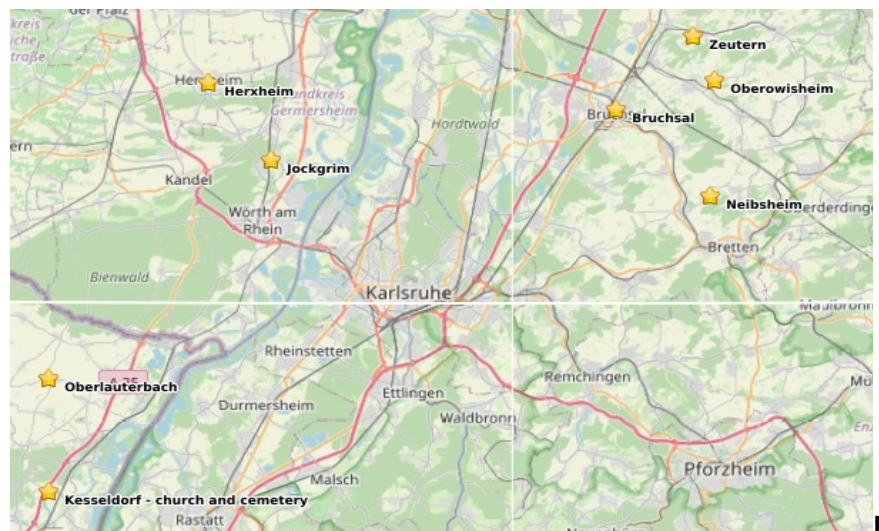


Figure 1.

Contemporary map of parts of Alsace and Rheinland-Pfalz.

The earliest record found for a paternal ancestor is for Nikolaus Rombs, who was a resident of Jockgrim at the end of the 17th century.^{vi} His origins may lie in Franconia. He is possibly the father or brother of Johann Michael Rombs/Rhombs (1676–1756)^{vii}. Nikolaus was a citizen and a *Gehilfe* (assistant) of some sort in Jockgrim.



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It is with Johann Michael that the occupation of teacher is confirmed. Johann Michael's life in Neibsheim in current-day Baden is well documented. In 1697 he married Katharina Kritzer, who lived to be 100 years old, dying in 1770 in Neibsheim. They had a family of three daughters and three sons. The lives of the three daughters, Gertrud, Maria Anna, and Jakobina, are not well documented. Each of the three sons, Johannes, Johann Anton, and Ferdinand Reinhard, became a teacher. Johannes was my fifth great grandfather and the one who moved from Neibsheim to Oberlauterbach in Alsace.^{viii}

The circumstances under which Johann Michael Rombs became a teacher in Neibsheim are recorded in the *Das Heimatbuch von Neibsheim (1200 Jahre Neibsheim 770–1970)*^{ix}, which was brought to my attention by the Stadtarchiv in Bretten.^x

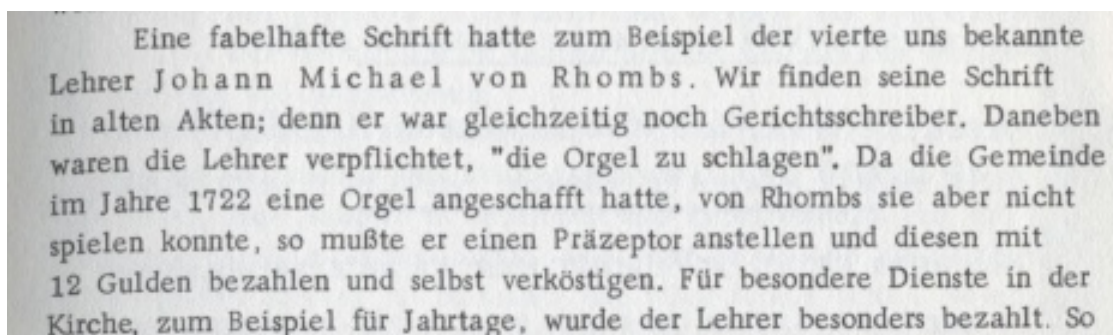


Figure 2. Excerpt from *Das Heimatbuch von Neibsheim*.

Here is a rough translation of the above passage.

"A wonderful letter has made us familiar with the fourth teacher, Johann Michael von Rhombs. We find his letter in old legal documents, because he was the court clerk at the same time. He was also obliged to "play the organ." The congregation had purchased an organ in the year 1722; Von Rhombs, however, could not play it, so he had to engage a tutor (preceptor) and pay him 12 gulden and feed him at his own expense. For special services in the church, for example, for anniversaries, the teacher would be specially paid. Thus he would receive 30 kreuzer when a composition was sung in the choir on St. Wenelin's Day. He also received yearly a small coin from the congregation for the erection of the May statue in the church.

Johann Michael von Rhombs was "ludimagister et aeditus ecclesiae" for 47 years, that is, schoolmaster and church assistant. He died February 19, 1756 at about the age of 80. His widow Katharine (born Kritzer) was 100 years old when she died in 1770. A Johann von Rhombs was also engaged as *ludimoderator (schoolmaster)* in Büchig, married in 1732 to Margaretha Bachmann in Neibsheim. He was evidently the son of the Neibsheim schoolmaster, one of the ancestors of a flourishing generation of teachers. His tutor in the year 1732 was a certain Koch (unmarried) from Franconia."

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Research into the lives of the three brothers, Johannes, Ferdinand, and Anton, led me to the following information. This information, needs to be viewed in the difficult social, economic, and political contexts of the times for the locations in which their families lived. However, in the interest of brevity, the following information focuses only on facts about the families. Like their father, the sons found work in small Catholic schools. Each had other civil/ecclesiastical duties as well which I assume provided some additional income. I believe that incomes were not only monetary but often included local produce.

Ferdinand was the youngest son of Michael and Katharina. He was born in 1717 but died fairly early in life in 1771 at age 54, in Jockgrim. He met and married Eva Margaretha Merz (1722–1794) in 1741 in Bruchsal, which was not far from Neibsheim where he was employed as a teacher. One source describes her as a “demure virgin.” Together they had 15 children born in various locations which seem to reflect the locations where Ferdinand served as a teacher. These places include not only Bruchsal, but Herxheim and Jockgrim. Most of their time together was spent in Jockgrim, where Eva Margaretha was a mid-wife. The fact that I have found evidence that only three of the children, all girls, survived to adulthood which may reflect some difficult and unhappy times. However, the couple continued to have children until 1764. The three surviving daughters married into lines with surnames of Gebhard, Jäger, and Worden. I have not found any distant contemporary cousins from any of these lines. Eva Margaretha seems to have lived in Jockgrim until her death in 1794.^{xi xii}

Ferdinand migrated to the west across the Rhein River, while the middle son Anton (1714–1752) accepted a teaching job in Oberöwisheim, where he met and married Maria Regina Lenge/Lengele (1711–1772) in 1735. The couple eventually moved to Zeutern, where Anton again assumed a teaching position. Of their ten children, the first six were born in Oberöwisheim while the later ones were born in Zeutern. The last child was born in the year of Anton’s early death at age 38. Again, many of the children appear not to have survived to adulthood. However, I have been able to follow one line into the 19th century and another continuously to the present day. The line of the son Philipp Anton Rombs (1744–1825) led to the discovery of an individual who emigrated in 1872 as well as to an existing contemporary cousin still living in Zeutern. The immigration of the former person, Andreas von Rombs, to the US explains the existence of what had been a mysterious Rombs line in the US.^{xiii xiv xv}

The eldest son, Johannes Rombs (1712–1786), is the progenitor of the line that leads to Alsace, then to Russia, and finally to Dakota Territory in the US. Like his father, his handwriting was clear and easily recognizable. Before coming to Alsace he married Margaretha Bachmann in 1832 in Neibsheim. His profession at the time was teacher, the same as his father, except that he apparently taught in Bauerbach and Büchig, both near his home town.^{xvi xvii}

Unfortunately, the first child of Margaretha and Johannes died shortly after birth in 1738.^{xviii} Margaretha also died in 1740, but the cause is unknown.^{xix} These were two tragedies in a short span of time, and perhaps explains why he relocated to Oberlauterbach some time between 1740 and 1744. In August of 1744, Johannes married Maria Barbara Schickel in Oberlauterbach.^{xx} Schickel families in the area of Oberlauterbach are well documented.^{xxi} The record of the marriage provides a clear link to Neibsheim.



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Besides the marriage record mentioned above, the first clear example of Johannes' signature on parish register documents is associated with the baptism of their first son, Johann Stephan, in 1745.^{xxii} Johannes is described as the local *ludimoderator* or school master. Thanks to the clear writing of the priest, C. L. Kellermann, the record in Latin is easy to read. Johannes' signature is easy to recognize in the parish registers where it appears frequently.

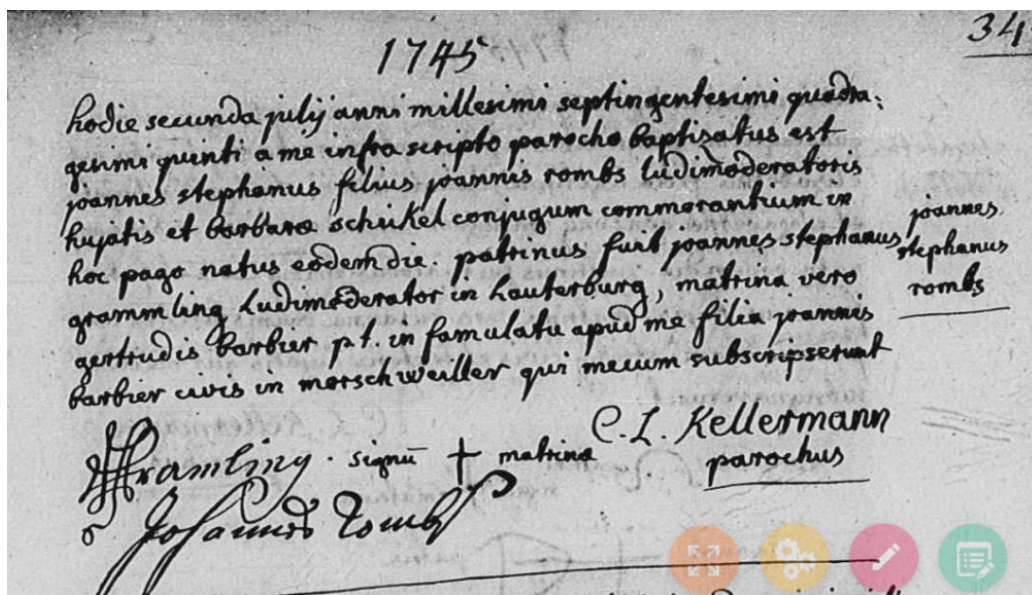


Figure 3. Baptismal record of Johann Stefan Rombs.

Johannes and Barbara lived in Oberlauterbach through 1763. While there, they had nine children and, after moving to Kesseldorf, they had one more child. I believe that they migrated to Kesseldorf in 1764–1765 based on the presence of Johannes' signatures in parish registers in Oberlauterbach and Kesseldorf. Here is a list of their children.

1. Johann Stephan (1745–?)
2. Carl Ludwig (1746–1749)^{xxiii xxiv}
3. Anna Maria (1748–?) m.1775 to Francois Xavier Nanse^{xxv}
4. Elisabeth (1750–?) m.1784 to Jean Arnet^{xxvi}
5. Catherine (1753–1782) m.1780 to Paul Braun^{xxvii}
6. Maria Anna (1755–1755)^{xxviii xxix}
7. Margaretha (1756–1812) m.1786 to Francois Joseph Staub^{xxx xxxi}
8. Johannes (1759–?)^{xxxii}
9. Franz Ludwig (1763–1836) m.1784 to Margaretha Werner^{xxxiii}; traveled to Russia in 1808^{xxxiv}
10. Marianna (1771–after1813) m.1794 to Christian Zentner^{xxxv}; traveled to Russia in 1808^{xxxvi}

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I have followed the life of Franz Ludwig Rombs and his wife Margaretha and their descendants. Just like his father and grandfather, Franz Ludwig served as a teacher, but I have found few details of his activities in Kesseldorf and Seltz.

Franz Ludwig, Margaretha, and children departed for Russia in 1808 along with the family of Ludwig's sister Marianna and a number of others from the vicinity of Seltz.

Franz Ludwig and Margaretha had five children as follows. All survived the trip to Russia where they started families of their own – mostly marrying other Alsatian emigrants.

1. Maria Josepha (1783–1840) m.~1809 to Georg Baumgartner (from Pfalz) ^{xxxvii}
2. Franz (1789–1852) m.~1809 to Katharina Sennhauser (from Alsace) ^{xxxviii}
3. Katharina (1791–1836) m.~1811 to Franz Karl Mitzel and m.1830 to Anton Halter (from Alsace) ^{xxxix}
4. Maria Elisabetha (1795–1831) m.1814 to Johann Schall (from Alsace) ^{xl}
5. Marianna (1801–?) m.~1821 Jakob Usselmann (from Alsace) ^{xli}

The descendant lines of Franz Ludwig and Margaretha led to marriages with other (mostly) Alsatian immigrant families. Example surnames include Baumgartner, Fetsch, Hirsch, Kessler, Sennhauser, Mitzel, Schall, Halter, and Usselmann. ^{xlii}

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the favored status of the immigrants to Russia was taken away. Many families then emigrated. Some, however, remained in Russia where they suffered a number of fates including execution, “rehabilitation,” transport to places like Kazakhstan, etc. Some eventually tried to flee west near the end of WW II.

My great grandparents relocated to Dakota Territory in the United State in 1884. ^{xliii} And, unknowingly, both my father and I had brief teaching careers to carry on an ancestral teaching tradition started in about 1700 and led through the Rheinland, Alsace, Russia, and the US.

Many people have been helpful in my research. Of special note are Antoine Merkel (member of AGAWE, Atelier de Généalogie de l'Arrondissement de Wissembourg et Environs ^{xliv}), Bernard Duthu (Werner line research), Niko Heinz (a distant cousin), Peter Fuchs (a distant cousin), Mark Moseley (translations), and the staff of the Bretten Archive.



- i For full details, a larger description can be found at my website <https://281connections.us/> using this URL - https://281connections.us/281connections_Wiki/South_Dakota_Families/Rombs-Kessler/Early_Rombs_Family_History/Teachers-RombsFamilies-in-Alsace.pdf .
- ii See Oberlauterbach - Paroisse catholique (Avant 1793) - Registre de baptêmes 1709-1779 - 3 E 346/1 - page 146; <http://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432-2321241>
- iii *Paradise on the Steppe*, Joseph S. Height, North Dakota Historical Society of Germans from Russia, second edition, c.1973, pp 61-70.
- iv Germans from Russia Heritage Society, 1125 West Turnpike Avenue, Bismarck, North Dakota 58501; <https://www.grhs.org/pages/home> .
- v Google map reference: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/KYna7zNNrgbh3z4U7>
- vi Refer to the *Ortsfamilienbuch Jockgrim 1684-1909*, Peter Distl, Reihe: Deutsche Ortssippen-/Ortsfamilienbücher, Band 12.127, 2019, family 2570.
- vii Distl, op. cit., family 2569.
- viii *Das Ortsbuch von Neibsheim : Stadtteil von Bretten*, Willi Hartman and Heinz Erich Walter (editor), Walter, Leingarten, Germany, 1986 . Also online at <https://ofb.genealogy.net/famreport.php?ofb=neibsheim&ID=I20498&nachname=Von%20Rhombs&lang=de> .
- ix *Das Heimatbuch von Neibsheim. (1200 Jahre Neibsheim, 770-1970.)*, Willi Hartman and Heinz Erich Walter, Walter, Ludwigsburg, 1970, page 177.
- x Municipal Archives of Bretten, u. Kirchgasse 9, 75015 Bretten, Germany. Also online at <https://www.bretten.de/tourismus-kultur-freizeit/stadtarchiv> .
- xi Distl, op. cit., family 2571.
- xii *Ortsfamilienbuch Bruchsal*, Maria M. Schlitz, c.2015, Cardamina Verlag Susanne Breuel, ISBN 978-3-86424-268-7, family 27828.
- xiii *1200 Jahre Oberöwisheim*, Heinz Erich Walter, 1973, WALTER-VERLAG GmbH – LUDWIGSBURG, family, pp 211-212.
- xiv I Karl Diefenbacher and Klaus Rössler, 1995, Interessengemeinschaft Badischer Ortssippenbücher, Lahr-Dinglingen, family 2270.
- xv Ortssippenbuch (Familienbuch) Zeutern 1682 – 1900, Franz Kessler, Verl. Regionalkultur, Ubstadt-Weiher, 2001, family 3904.
- xvi Deutschland, Baden, Erzbistum Freiburg, katholische Kirchenbücher, 1678-1930, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:WX5V-W92M> : Mon Apr 29 19:36:15 UTC 2024), Entry for Joannes Rhombs and Michaelis Thombs, 1732.
- xvii See the online entry for Johann von Rhombs at <https://ofb.genealogy.net/famreport.php?ofb=neibsheim&ID=I20789&nachname=VON+RHOMBS&lang=en> .
- xviii Deutschland, Baden, Erzbistum Freiburg, katholische Kirchenbücher, 1678-1930, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QP3F-W1P2> : Sun Mar 10 01:12:55 UTC 2024), Entry for Joannis Rhombs.
- xix "Deutschland, Baden, Erzbistum Freiburg, katholische Kirchenbücher, 1678-1930", FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QP3F-7XYC> : Wed Jul 10 21:56:04 UTC 2024), Entry for Margaretha Rombs and Joannis Rombs.
- xx Oberlauterbach - Registre de mariages 1729-1813 - 3 E 346/4 - page 21, url is <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207435#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207435-2321340> .
- xxi See for example the baptismal record for Barbara Schickel. - <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432-2321095> .
- xxii See <http://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432-2321166> .
- xxiii For baptism, see Archives d'Alsace: Oberlauterbach - Paroisse catholique (Avant 1793) - Registre de baptêmes 1709-1779 - 3 E 346/1 - page 78; <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432-2321172>
- xxiv For burial, see Archives d'Alsace: Oberlauterbach - Paroisse catholique (Avant 1793) - Registre de sépultures 1729-1805 - 3 E 346/5 - page 34 ; <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207436#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207436-2321472> .
- xxv For marriage, see "France, Bas-Rhin, Parish and Civil Registration, 1525-1912", FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6XFT-LBCG> : Tue Mar 05 01:08:06 UTC 2024), Entry for Franciscus Xaverius Nausc and Francisci Josephi Nausc, 20 Nov 1775.
- xxvi For marriage, see "France, Bas-Rhin, Parish and Civil Registration, 1525-1912", FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6XFY-HRYC> : Tue Mar 05 01:33:18 UTC 2024), Entry for Joannes

- Stonet and Joannis Rombs, 1 Jun 1784.
- xxviiFor marriage, see "France, Bas-Rhin, Parish and Civil Registration, 1525-1912", database, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSRY-ZB13?cc=4116416> : 18 July 2023), image 1 of 1.
- xxviiiFor baptism, see Oberlauterbach - Paroisse catholique (Avant 1793) - Registre de baptêmes 1709-1779 - 3 E 346/1 - page 111 ; <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432-2321206> .
- xxixFor burial, see Oberlauterbach - Paroisse catholique (Avant 1793) - Registre de sépultures 1729-1805 - 3 E 346/5 - page 45 ; <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207436#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207436-2321483> .
- xxx For marriage, see France, Bas-Rhin, Parish and Civil Registration, 1525-1912, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6XFT-5D5G> : Tue Mar 05 00:57:53 UTC 2024), Entry for Franciscus Josephus Staub and Francisci Staub, 20 Nov 1786.
- xxxiFor burial, see Kesseldorf - Etat civil - Registre de décès 1812 - 4 E 234/8 - page 5 ; <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C234-P1-R154328#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C234-P1-R154328-1575565> .
- xxxiiFor baptism, see Oberlauterbach - Paroisse catholique (Avant 1793) - Registre de baptêmes 1709-1779 - 3 E 346/1 - page 128 ; <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C343-P3-R207432-2321223> .
- xxxiiiFor marriage, see France, Bas-Rhin, Parish and Civil Registration, 1525-1912, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6XFT-13GF> : Tue Mar 05 01:29:06 UTC 2024), Entry for Ludovicus Rombs and Joannis Rombs, 3 May 1784.
- xxxivHeight, op. cit.
- xxxvFor marriage, see Kesseldorf - Etat civil - Registre de mariages 1793-An IV - 4 E 234/3 - page 4 ; <https://archives.bas-rhin.fr/detail-document/ETAT-CIVIL-C234-P1-R154198#visio/page:ETAT-CIVIL-C234-P1-R154198-1575257> .
- xxxviHeight, op. cit.
- xxxviiMarriage date (1809) is estimated from church records from the Kutschurgan Colonies in Russia that indicate a first child (Franz Baumgartner) was born there (Strassburg Colony) in 1810. These records are privately held by the Germans from Russia Heritage Society in Bismarck, North Dakota, USA. See also <https://blackseagr.org> .
- xxxviiiMarriage date (1809) is estimated from church records from the Kutschurgan Colonies in Russia that indicate a first child (Franz Joseph Rombs) was born there (Selz Colony) in about 1811. These records are privately held by the Germans from Russia Heritage Society in Bismarck (GRHS), North Dakota, USA. See also <https://blackseagr.org> .
- xxxixThe first marriage date to Franz Karl Mitzel is estimated as indicated above. The date of the marriage to Anton Halter is 02-Feb-1830 in the Baden Colony according to Kutschurgan Church records held by the GRHS organization noted above.
- xl The marriage year (1814) is estimated from a census taken in Selz (Russia) in 1816. See the Kutschurgan Church records privately held by the GRHS organization noted above.
- xli The marriage to Jakob Usselman is an estimated to be 1821 based on church records from the Kutschurgan Colonies in Russia that indicate a first child (Adam Usselman) was born there (Selz Colony) in about 1823. These records are privately held by the Germans from Russia Heritage Society in Bismarck (GRHS), North Dakota, USA.
- xl ii These lines of descendance are described in a paper entitled *19th Century Russian Relations*, which can be found here - https://281connections.us/281connections_Wiki/South_Dakota_Families/Rombs-Kessler/19th-century-russian-relations.pdf .
- xl iii Passenger list of the S.S. *Oder* at New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1891, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVSV-3FB5> : Fri Mar 15 17:00:17 UTC 2024), Entry for Johannes Rums, 1884.
- xl iv AGAWE website: <https://agawe-genealogie.jimdofree.com/> ■