

Evaluating Claims Made for the Ancestry of David Doerksen (1740)

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David Doerksen (1740)

David Doerksen (1740) was one of the original homesteaders in Chortitza when the settlement was first established. He came from Tiegenhagen in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth [See Benjamin Unruh, *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen*, 1955, p. 292]. Census records for Chortitza indicate he was born around 1740. He appears in the Census of 1795 in Neuendorf, and it is likely he was still living there in 1797. He does not appear in the next census, taken in 1801. The record of his wife's death in 1801 says she was a widow. Therefore, he lived to the age of about 60 years.

An earlier census entry for David Doerksen appears in the 1776 Census of Mennonites in West Prussia. He was living in Ellerwald Trift 3. This record counts David and his wife along with four sons and five daughters, consistent with other records for his family. As of this date I have found no genealogical records that provide information about his parents. Therefore, David's ancestry remains uncertain.

However, a search of public genealogy websites provides hundreds of family trees that claim to identify David's parents and grandparents. This speculative information is very attractive for genealogists intent on identifying earlier generations of family lines, but can this information be relied upon? I examine these claims below.

Claim # 1: David Doerksen's Parents

Hundreds of public family trees tell us that David's parents were Gerhard Doerksen (1719) and Sara Klassen (1720). In most cases these search results also indicate that Gerhard and Sara had two additional sons, Julius (1746) and Franz. These results cite records of Gerhard Doerksen's baptism as an infant in 1719 at St. Elisabeth's Reformed Church in Danzig. As will be discussed in Claim # 2 below, this baptism information is key to the identification of Gerhard's parents.

David Doerksen was a Mennonite. This is a fact confirmed by numerous reliable genealogical records. On the other hand, Gerhard Doerksen and his parents were not Anabaptists. While it is possible that Gerhard converted to the Mennonite Church and married Sara Klassen, there are no records to support this.

A search of the Family Books of the Danzig Mennonite Church provides references to a couple named Gerhard Doerksen and Sara Klassen who were Mennonites. [See https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Danzig_Family_Book_2.pdf]. They lived in Nassenhuben and belonged to the Mennonite congregation of Heubuden. This registry says

they had a son named Gerhard in 1742, followed by a second son named Julius in 1746. The baptism register of the Danzig Church Book also mentions Franz Doerksen, another son of Gerhard and Sara [See https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Danzig_Baptisms_1667-1800.pdf, Frame 44]. There is no mention in any of these documents of a child named David.

These records do not support the claim that David Doerksen was a son of Gerhard Doerksen and Sara Klassen. They also raise doubts about whether the Gerhard Doerksen who was baptised as an infant in the Reformed Church in 1719 is the same Gerhard Doerksen who is the husband of Sara Klassen and appears in the Danzig Mennonite Church records.

Claim # 2: David Doerksen's Paternal Grandparents

The same search results that make Claim # 1 also claim to identify David's paternal grandparents – that is, the parents of Gerhard Doerksen. According to this information, Gerhard (1719) was born to Gerhard Doerksen (1678) and Constantia Gilles (1679). The child's baptism record, mentioned above, identifies these parents. There is an earlier record showing the marriage of Gerhard Doerksen (1678) and Constantia Gilles (1679) in the same church in 1716. Therefore, it seems certain that there was a Gerhard Doerksen born and baptized in 1719 in Danzig who had these two parents. The question is whether he has any relationship to David Doerksen.

In 1905 Georg Conrad published an exhaustive genealogy of Gerhard Doerksen (1678) and Constantia Gilles (1679) entitled "Geschichte der Familie Dirksen und der Adelsfamilie von Dirksen". A copy can be found at:

<https://kpbk.umk.pl/dlibra/publication/20961/edition/34020/content>. Conrad's work confirms the birth of Gerhard Doerksen in 1719 to parents Gerhard Doerksen and Constantia Gilles. He was baptised in the Reformed Church of St. Elisabeth in Danzig.

Gerhard (1719) married Louisa Thamm in 1744. It appears that this wedding occurred in Konigsberg. Between 1744 and 1762 this couple had nine children. Eight of these children were male and among them there were no boys named David, Julius, or Franz. The children were baptised in the Reformed Church in Konigsberg. They were not Anabaptists.

These records do not support the claim that David Doerksen was a son of Gerhard Doerksen (1719). They also demonstrate that the Gerhard Doerksen who was baptised as an infant in 1719 is not the same person as the Gerhard Doerksen who appears in the Danzig Church records as the husband of Sara Klassen.

Y-DNA

The Mennonite DNA Project has a database with Y-DNA samples contributed by descendants of David Doerksen (1740) and Julius Doerksen (1746). Across 32 DNA markers the Julius sample and the David sample have a difference of 1 marker, suggesting they are related, but probably

not brothers. The caveat is that Y-DNA conclusions are statistical in nature and not certain. Therefore, the DNA evidence does not preclude the possibility they are brothers, but it makes this relationship unlikely.

Of interest for future research, there is also a Y-DNA sample from a descendant of a person named David Dirks (1699). Across 32 markers the Julius Doerksen (1746) sample and the David Dirks (1699) sample are identical. This indicates a very close relationship. Genealogical records show that David Dirks (1699) had a son named Gerhard, born in 1721. Perhaps this Gerhard is the father of Julius.

Conclusion

The information found on public genealogy sites claiming to identify the ancestors of David Doerksen (1740) is not supported by genealogical records. The extant genealogical records tend to disprove these claims. Further, the sibling relationship between David Doerksen (1740) and Julius (1746), son of Gerhard Doerksen and Sara Klassen, cannot be proven by Y-DNA evidence.