

Chapter 6

Old Prussia — Birth of Ruth to Precarious Survival

In the heyday of Old Prussia, on February 4, 1867, Ruth Ehrengard Gräfin von Zedlitz-Trützschler, was born and christened on the grand Lower Silesian estate of Grossenborau,¹ with none other than the illustrious Otto von Bismarck present at the christening.¹

Post-World War II, Germany's history is virtually bereft of any mention of Prussia — the nation state that had dominated the proud and unified Germany or Second Reich, founded in January 1871,² in the wake of its glorious victory over the French in the Franco-Prussian War.³ Wilhelm I, then King of Prussia, a title which he retained, was adorned with the additional title of Emperor or “Kaiser” of the newly unified Germany. However, the true architect of German unification was the politically astute and adept Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), who now became the Chancellor of the newly united Germany.⁴ As if to accentuate French humiliation, the ceremony witnessed by the father and future father-in-law of the young child Ruth, was held in the most grand of all French palaces — Versailles.⁵ Decades later, in 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm I's grandson, Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859-1941), led the Second Reich into the Great War, but by early November 1918, was forced into abdication and subsequent exile in Holland,⁶ until his death in 1941.⁷ Seven months later, in June 1919, in the same palace of Versailles, Germany, rather than celebrating the dawn of a grand new era, was compelled to sign the humiliating treaty of Versailles.

In spite of Prussia's dominant position in 1871, not all of the Prussian landed gentry embraced this notion of Otto von Bismarck's unified Reich. One such dissenter was Ruth's future father-in-law and Bismarck's oldest friend and bachelor roommate, Hans Hugo von Kleist-Retzow.⁸ However, Prussia remained the most dominant state in Germany until 1945, before it was formally dissolved by the Allied powers on February 25, 1947.⁹

In April 1882, Ruth's father Robert first pointed out the young Jürgen von Kleist-Retzow to the impressionable fifteen-year-old Ruth from his governor's box.¹⁰ This was during a concert outside Oppeln in the military compound; Ruth was instantly enchanted by his dashing presence. However, until Jürgen's formal written proposal to Ruth in October 1885,¹¹ their meetings were fleeting. Before writing his letter, as was the custom, Jürgen had asked Ruth's father for permission. Ruth had yearned for Jürgen, and was resigned that she would never see him again, much less marry him. Upon reading Jürgen's letter, Ruth's reply was: “tausendmal ja!” — “a thousand times yes!”¹² Now, as a young wife, she had an inordinate fear that she would lose him again, during his overnight absences in performing his duties as the district Landrat. Only death, years later in 1897,¹³ would permanently separate them. After which, Ruth never married again.

In 1885, Charlotte, the wife of Jürgen's father Hans Hugo von Kleist, passed away. Her death left her husband so distraught, that he could not bear the thought of burying his wife,¹⁴ and so had her laid in a casket in the church crypt. Seven years later, when Hans Hugo passed away, he was also laid in a casket in the church crypt next to his wife. When Ruth's husband Jürgen first showed her the crypt of his deceased mother in February 1886,¹⁵ just days after their marriage at Grossenborau, Ruth, a native Silesian, incorrectly perceived this as a bizarre Pomeranian tradition, since only in the extreme depths of winter would the Silesians not immediately bury their own.¹⁵

Five or so years later in November 1897, when Hans Hugo's son and Ruth's dear husband Jürgen died at age 43,¹⁶ Ruth decided to have him laid to rest beside his parents in the crypt; Jürgen's unmarried brother and sister had been reluctant to bury their parents in the Kieckow cemetery.¹⁷ For months, Ruth dressed and was veiled in black. Ruth's father, Robert senior, visited seven or so months later in June 1898, and insisted that his daughter must put the past and her grief to bed, under the responsibility that she now bore as the widowed mistress of the grand estate of Kieckow.¹⁸ Ruth conceded to her father the need to move on and accept the responsibility thrust upon her by her husband's death. At the burial, the priest accordingly declared the time for mourning at Kieckow over, while the weekly ritual of Ruth taking her children below into the ancestral crypt likewise ceased forthwith.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the caskets of Hans Hugo and his wife Charlotte remained in the crypt until the cataclysm of 1945.ⁱⁱⁱ

i Upper Silesia is upstream on the Oder (Polish: Odra) River from Lower Silesia. Breslau/Wrocław is in Lower Silesia. See footnote ^{Error: Reference source not found} for Polish WWII Supplement II “The Gleiwitz (Gliwice) Incident” for further clarification.

ii Jürgen was Ruth's husband. Hans Jürgen was Jürgen and Ruth's first child. See the family tree on page 394 of *Matriarch of Conspiracy : Ruth von Kleist 1867-1945* by Jane Pejsa, originally published by Kenwood Publishing, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1991 and in 1992 by The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland Ohio 44115, ISBN 0829809317.

iii The cataclysm of 1945 be discussed in Chapter 25 “Old Prussia Gone With The Wind.”

Having now, in the second-half of 1898, put the grief of her husband's death behind her, the widowed Ruth realised that the modern and increasingly industrial times at the cusp of the twentieth century meant that local schooling was inadequate for her children's future, so she decided, late that year, to leave the Kieckow estate in the capable hands of her cousin Fritz von Wödtkke, and moved to a large town house in Stettin (now modern-day Polish Szczecin)²⁰ to mind the children during their gymnasium education.²¹

That year as well, Ruth's elder brother, Robert junior, started serving in the Imperial Court in Berlin. Until 1903, he would serve as the personal adjutant to Prince Joachim of Prussia, born in 1890²² as the sixth and youngest son of Kaiser Wilhelm II.²³ As impressive as this may sound, the down-to-earth nobleman, Robert, regarded his role as nothing more than playing nursemaid to a petulant boy, insistent on embarrassing the royal family.²⁴ However, in 1903, he would be promoted to the office of *Hofmarschall* (Court Marshall — chief administrator) for the Kaiser's court, and serve there until his resignation in 1910.²⁵ In spite of the promotion to the Kaiser's inner circle, his opinion of the Kaiser's court did not change. Throughout his twelve years in the Kaiser's court, he was frustrated in his efforts to bring about any sort of reform in what he believed to be a Byzantine circle of hangers-on, who distracted, misled and even infected the Kaiser with their gossip and petty intrigues.²⁶

During the reception in Stettin in October 1908 for the wedding of Ruth's first daughter Spes to the local industrial magnate Walter Stahlberg, Ruth's father, Robert senior, expressed his agreement with his son's view of a vainglorious Kaiser who only listened to the worst advice.²⁷ As they were conversing in what they thought was a secluded corner of the resplendent Hotel Preussenhof, Robert senior peered over his son's shoulder to notice his daughter Ruth had been listening to every word. Brother Robert junior implored his sister not to allow the Kaiser to come between himself and her.²⁸ While Ruth seemed to heed his plea then, it was not so sixteen years later, when Robert junior's book was published, documenting the litany of petty intrigues in the Kaiser's court.²⁹

In February 1912, Robert senior saw the Kaiser as indecisive to the point of being dangerous, pontificating in domestic politics while threatening in matters of foreign policy, yet incapable of acting consistently in either.³⁰ In 1890, just two years into the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the architect of German unification, resigned after a major fall-out.³¹ Eight years later in 1898, the year Robert junior entered the Kaiser's court, Bismarck passed away in his estate near Hamburg.³²

Throughout Prussia, there was the sense that the Kaiser and his chancellor did not possess political acumen, such as Bismarck had shown, to ensure the survival of Old Prussia, and a united Imperial Germany in general.³³ Intellectual naysayers in Berlin, and even Gertrud von Bismarck, a fellow Pomeranian Junker and great niece of Otto von Bismarck, were predicting the downfall of the Kaiser and the monarchy within Ruth's lifetime.³⁴ Such talk was depressing for the proud Ruth, in spite of her admission, deep down, of the shortcomings of her Kaiser, as previously elaborated by her brother. As Jane Pejsa commented: “

Still, one man's reign is nothing in comparison to the five centuries that have gone into the building of an orderly system in which every man and woman has a designated place and set of responsibilities and privileges to go with it. Besides, it is all part of God's plan, a secular order in parallel with, yet subservient to, the spiritual order in which Jesus Christ reigns supreme. Whatever the future holds, if the monarchy is threatened and duty calls, Ruth will be there, and she has absolute confidence that all her children, from Hans Jürgen to Ruthchen, will be there too.”³⁵

On July 28, 1914, the fears of a now ailing Robert senior and his son, and the call to arms of Ruth's family, were realised when the empire of Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.³⁶ On the face of it, this should have just been a minor localised spat,³⁷ but the intricate web of European alliances, supposedly fostered to avert war, precipitated what would become the most cataclysmic war so far. A domino effect of mobilisation orders and declarations of war by Europe's major powers, starting with Russia's declaration of war on Austria in solidarity with their fellow Serbian Slavic brethren,^{iv 38} then Germany entering the fight in solidarity with their Germanic Austrian kinsmen, triggered a war that far exceeded what they had planned or desired.³⁹

iv Slavs include Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats and Poles, all categorised as *Untermensch* (sub-human) in the National Socialist dogma. See the endnote ³⁸ from this chapter for more information.

1 Pages 7 to 10 of Jane Pejsa.

2 Error: Reference source not found In regard to the notion of the “Second Reich,” see the book *The Second Reich: Kaiser Wilhelm II and his Germany* Macdonald library of the 20th century, by Harold Kurtz, published by Macdonald in the British Commonwealth, and by American Heritage Press in the USA, both in 1970, ASIN: B008T1517M, ISBN-10: 007035653X ISBN-13: 9780070356535.

3 Position 732.1 onwards of Microcosm at the start of Chapter 6 “Breslau in the German Empire, 1871—1918” describes when and how the unified Germany was formed in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War in the palace of Versailles in January 1871.

4 The online article on Otto von Bismarck on the BBC History website at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/bismarck_otto_von.shtml. Accessed on Saturday July 25, 2020.

5 Pages 148 to 149 of Jane Pejsa. See also endnote Error: Reference source not found of the Preface “Birth and Memory upon the Lesser Known Fault Line of History” in regard to Oma Ruth’s father and future father-in-law witnessing this ceremony. NOTE however, that the notion of the succession of Reichs was only born about a decade or so before Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. As such, Oma Ruth’s father and then future father-in-law, would not have recognised such a term. See article at <https://www.britannica.com/story/why-was-nazi-germany-called-the-third-reich>. Accessed on Saturday July 25, 2020.

6 Pages 118-120 of the book *The Second Reich: Kaiser Wilhelm II and his Germany*, Macdonald library of the 20th century, by Harold Kurtz, published by Macdonald in the British Commonwealth, and by American Heritage Press in the USA, both in 1970, ASIN: B008T1517M, ISBN-10: 007035653X ISBN-13: 9780070356535.

7 Error: Reference source not found On page 262 of Jane Pejsa, the author makes a brief note of the Kaiser’s death in June 1941, with the news hardly registering a beat among the Junkers, in spite of the military funeral that took place in Berlin. See also endnote Error: Reference source not found for Chapter 9 “The von Kleists and the Prophecy.”

8mPage 30 of Jane Pejsa.

9 See article on Prussia at <https://library.eb.com.au/levels/adults/article/Prussia/61665>. Accessed on Saturday July 25, 2020. The circumstances leading to the official end of Prussia’s existence, in particular, the only way of life Oma Ruth knew, will be discussed in Chapter 25 “Old Prussia Gone With The Wind.”

10 Error: Reference source not found Pages 16 to 17 of Jane Pejsa.

11 Page 22 of Jane Pejsa.

12 Page 23 of Jane Pejsa.

13 Error: Reference source not found See the family tree on page 394 of Jane Pejsa.

14 Error: Reference source not found Page 40 of Jane Pejsa.

15 Page 40 of Jane Pejsa.

16 Page 65 of Jane Pejsa. See also the family tree on page 394.

17 Page 69 of Jane Pejsa.

18 Page 69 of Jane Pejsa.

19 Page 69 of Jane Pejsa.

20 Article on Szczecin/Stettin at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Szczecin>. Accessed on Saturday July 25, 2020.

21 Error: Reference source not found Pages 80 to 81, pages 84 to 85 and pages 124 to 126 of Jane Pejsa.

22 Error: Reference source not found See the Family Search web page on Prince Joachim of Prussia at <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/KFBM-3S8/joachim-franz-humbert-hohenzollern-prince-of-prussia-1890-1920>. Accessed on Saturday July 25, 2020. Prince Joachim was the seventh child, but two years later in 1892, Viktoria, the second daughter and youngest was born.

23 Page 21 of *Zwölf Jahre am deutschen Kaiserhof (Twelve years at the German imperial court)* by Robert Graf Zedlitz-Trützschler (Ruth’s brother), published by BoD — Books on Demand, 2012 and Salzwasser Verlag, Paderborn Germany, ISBN 3846008788, 9783846008782. The original was published in April 1924. See page 156 and note #14 on page 397 of Jane Pejsa.

24 Pages 72 to 73 of Jane Pejsa.

25 Page 80 of *Daisy, Princess of Pless, 1873-1943: A Discovery* by W. John Koch, published by BOOKS by W. JOHN KOCH PUBLISHING, 2003, ISBN 0973157909, 9780973157901 and page 93 of Jane Pejsa.

26 Pages 93 to 94 of Jane Pejsa.

27 Page 107 of Jane Pejsa.

28 Page 107 of Jane Pejsa.

29 See page 156 and note #14 on page 397 of Jane Pejsa.

30 Page 115 of Jane Pejsa.

31 The online article on Otto von Bismarck on the BBC History website at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/bismarck_otto_von.shtml. Accessed on Saturday July 25, 2020.

32 Ibid.

33 Page 117 of Jane Pejsa.

34 Pages 117 to 118 of Jane Pejsa.

35 Page 118 of Jane Pejsa. Ruthchen is the German diminutive of Ruth that Jane Pejsa uses to address Ruth’s youngest child.

36 See endnote Error: Reference source not found for the Preface “Birth and Memory upon the Lesser Known Fault Line of History.”

37 See endnote Error: Reference source not found for the Preface “Birth and Memory upon the Lesser Known Fault Line of History.”

38 ^{iv} Error: Reference source not found Admittedly, Lithuanians are not Slavs. However, Slavs do include Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats and Poles. See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Slav>. Accessed on Saturday July 25, 2020. Remember, that in Hitler's mind, Slavs were barely one rung above the Jews in his racial hierarchy. Hence the use of the Einsatzgruppen in Poland and later in the Soviet Union. See also, endnotes Error: Reference source not found ^{to} Error: Reference source not found of Chapter 17 "Pastor and Spy" and pages 426 to 428 of *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler* by Robert Gellately, published by Vintage 2008, ISBN 9780712603577 in regard to Hitler's infamous and racially charged Commissar Order just preceding Barbarossa. (The invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941).

39 Error: Reference source not found See endnote Error: Reference source not found for the Preface "Birth and Memory upon the Lesser Known Fault Line of History."