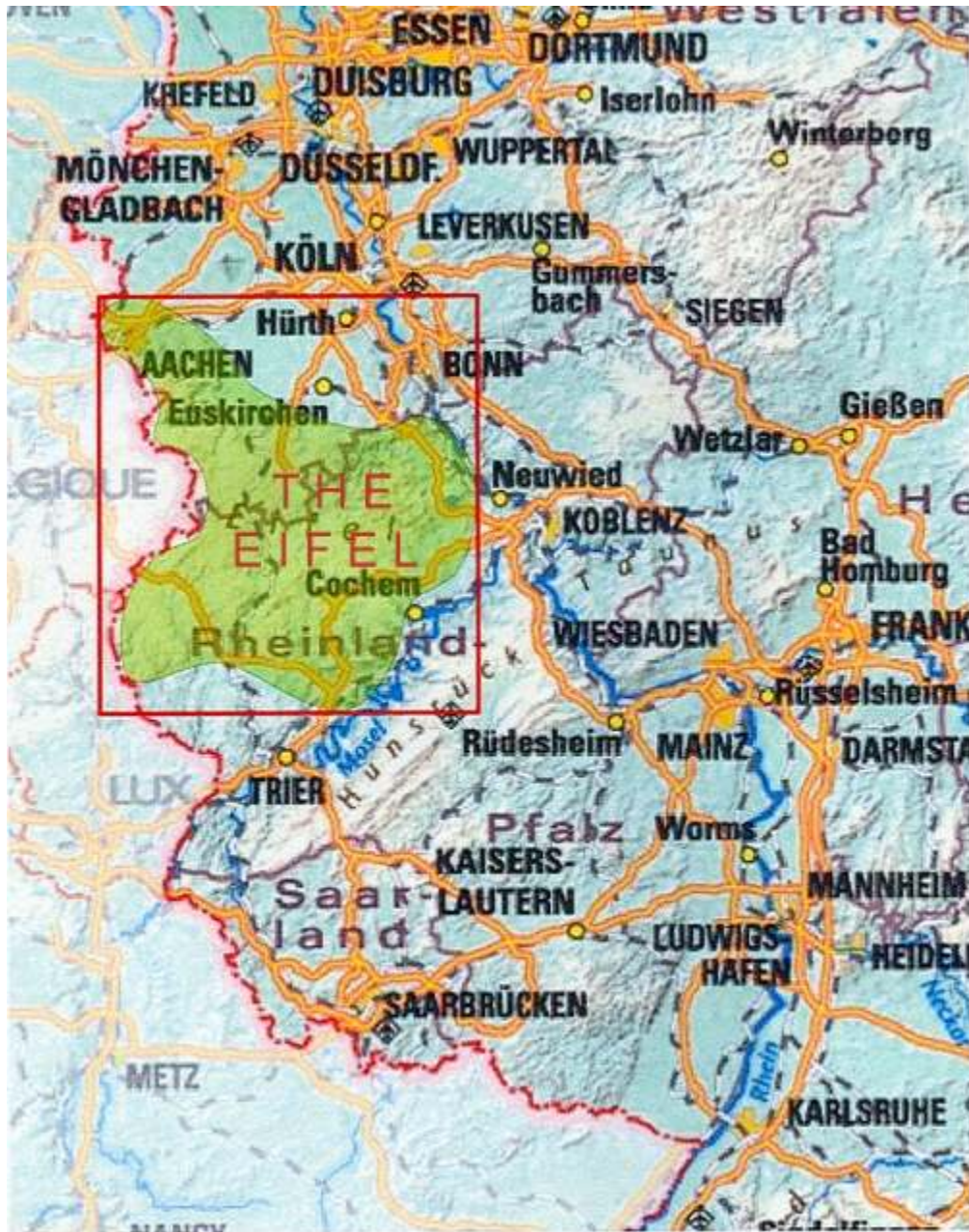


IN GERMANY

The Eifel Region



The area outlined in red indicates the Eifel region of Germany where our Hommerding ancestors lived

The "Eifel" region of Germany is a volcanic plateau in western Germany and eastern Belgium, approximately midway between Cologne on the north and Trier on the south. It is bounded by the Rhine River in the east, the Moselle River in the South and the Ardennes (a mountainous region that was the site of World War II's "Battle of the Bulge") in the west. Once a volcanic "hotspot," the Eifel contains hills that are ancient volcanoes. A dense network of maars (crater

lakes) formed in these volcanoes. The volcanism left mineral wealth in the form of iron and lead deposits.

I found the following history of the Eifel District on the [Diederich family website](#). I have excerpted pertinent parts of this history which give an understanding of why some of Johann Peter's offspring were willing to leave their homes in the Eifel and brave the uncertainties of life in "Amerika."

History of the Eifel Region

When Julius Caesar moved into the South Eifel in 54 B.C. with four legions, he met the distinct culture of the Celtic "Treverer" who inhabited the Ferschweiler plateau. [*Nusbaum, Hommerdingen and other Hom(m)erding birthplaces are just north of the town of Ferschweiler.*] Caesar conquered the local people and the "Romanization" of this area between Trier and Cologne began.

During the long peacetime from 70 to 260 A.D., the Eifel experienced an economical and cultural heyday which has not repeated itself to this day. The best builders of antiquity interlaced the land with several big highways whose branches formed a dense road system. The mineral resources of the earth were regularly mined. Numerous Roman settlements, trade centers, and temples came into being. Roman engineers built the famous aqueduct which carried water from several springs in the mountains to Cologne. The culmination of the Roman culture in the Eifel were large estates with cold-, warm-, and hot-water baths, floor heat, big loggias like the ones known in southern Europe, mosaics, and walls decorated with frescoes. Even today, magnificent mosaic floors in the ruins of the [Roman] villa Otrang near Bitburg show that never again have people lived as comfortably in the Eifel as almost 2,000 years ago.

When the Franks occupied the Eifel in the middle of the Fifth Century, the majority of the Romanized Celts fled the land. With them the Roman culture disappeared. The Franks avoided the large stone buildings of the Romans and built their typical farming communities in wood and clay in water-rich valleys which were favorable to agriculture and cattle breeding. Thus, the Eifel became a pure farm country.

At the time of Christianization, large cloisters were founded.....which played an essential role in the colonization of the unsettled or deserted woodlands. Through intensive wood clearings, the land was made accessible. Farmers and craftsmen settled. The first marketplaces since the fall of the Roman trade centers developed. It is said that the Eifel was the favorite hunting ground of the Emperor Charlemagne, who had his throne at Aachen.

But, by the late 1700's the Eifel region had become the poorhouse of the nation. What happened? All through the Middle Ages, the Eifel territory was fought over by powerful nobles and their armies.....But all this fighting pales compared to the terrors of the Thirty Years War, starting in 1618. [*The Thirty Years War was a series of political and religious wars, mainly caused by political rivalry between Catholic and Protestant princes in Germany, and at times, the interest of foreign powers in German affairs.*] During that time 205 towns, 327 castles and forts, and 2,033 villages were destroyed in the Rhinelands. The real horror hides behind terms like, "Quartier", "Kontribution" "Fourage", "Tractament". These are synonyms for uninterrupted pillage, going

on for decades among the Eifel population, who themselves marked by starvation, were expected to provide bread, meat, wheat, and beer for the marching armies. In some places agriculture completely ceased to exist;...livestock had been totally wiped out; the majority of the people were starved, had fled, or died. Whole villages disappeared forever. Allied and enemy troops were equally bad; in some areas, German soldiers were feared more than the Swedish or French.

Even after the end of the Thirty Years War, [*in 1648*] the Eifel continued to be caught between the warring armies of France and Germany. The war aim of the French was to put a large area of scorched earth between France and the German Empire, therefore, forts, villages, and towns were systematically destroyed. Today all castles and fortifications in the Eifel are in ruins or have completely disappeared.

This war [*between Germany and France*] ended in 1697. It left behind a totally ruined land where existence was almost impossible. War and destruction had hit every corner of Europe, but nowhere else but the Eifel did the fighting go on for centuries.

In the second half of the Eighteenth Century, changes took place. Instead of going back to agricultural diversity, people in the Eifel almost exclusively started growing potatoes. This one-sidedness backfired in the Nineteenth Century as it did in Ireland, in great famines. Flocks of sheep crossed the wide plains of this desolate country and changed the Eifel into heathy grounds where only tough juniper escaped the hungry sheep.

A modest economic upswing took place after 1794, when French revolutionary troops occupied the Eifel. They did away with the old class system, all clerical and worldly feudal powers were dismissed, and the Eifel population received civil rights. Compulsory labor and taxes to cloisters and nobility came to an end. During the occupation by France, which lasted until 1814, new markets of the old Eifel industries opened up: quarries, iron and lead mines again took up production on a large scale. For a long time, the Eifel population fondly remembered their French "occupiers". The highly praised alliance with Prussia then brought to the land an economic downfall. The Eifel became a border area cut off from its traditional markets by the newly formed boundaries in the west.

In a hopeless struggle for existence, the last part of the huge beech forests that once covered the whole Eifel was cut down, until even charcoal for the ironworks became scarce and expensive. Thereby the competition with the cheaper coke was lost, the iron industry of the Eifel folded, thousands lost their jobs. Then, when the great famines caused by rained-out and frozen harvests started, a big part of the population left the land. The Eifel became known as "Prussian Siberia." Joseph Goerres, editor of a political newspaper from 1814-1816 wrote: " The majority of the Eifel population are starved to death, unable to work. They were not able to buy seed. More than 50,000 people are suffering under these circumstances." At the same time the iron and fabric industries of the area had come to a standstill due to the lack of a system of transportation. Because of the economic misery, emigration to America took on unexpected dimensions. Entire villages left their land together for "Amerika."

The sons and grandsons of Johann Peter Hommerding were part of that emigration in the Nineteenth Century.

The Eifel Region Today



From a [German tourism site](#):

The Eifel has a host of rare treats in store for the visitor. These central highlands between Aachen, Cologne, Koblenz and Trier have retained the fresh beauty of their landscape, and that is exactly why they are so attractive. The region was shaped by volcanic activity in the Cenozoic period. When the mysterious and violent forces within the Earth pushed their way to the surface all those years ago, they emerged just where the Volcanic Eifel lies, leaving a dense network of maars (crater lakes), the Eifel's "blue eyes". Culturally speaking, this undulating upland has much to offer. Our Celtic and Roman predecessors have left their mark. The exquisite mosaics in the Roman villa near Otrang are one such reminder of Roman times. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the monasteries at Echternach and Prüm were founded and began disseminating religious, scientific and economic influence.

Although the region was once considered poor, with little more to offer than crater lakes, the modern era has gradually transformed the region. Yet what has remained unchanged is the austere beauty of its natural scenery and its core, the Volcanic Eifel – volcanoes that have been extinct for 10,000 years. Since most people find it hard to picture the history of the Earth, the Eifel volcano museum in Daun and the maar museum provide help visualising those dramatic events. High-tech computer simulations make volcanoes smoke again, open up the maars and send lava flows hissing and spitting towards the visitor. This truly is a spectacular experience.

It gets hot in Brockscheid, too. This is where the rare feat of bell founding has been taking place for five generations. In churches and cathedrals around the world, these bells now ring out to call the faithful to prayer. The mineral water extracted from the Eifel also travels around the world, as a refreshing, healthy drink.

This region is an enriching one in which to walk. Neatly kept villages, castles, palaces, abbeys, cliffs, lakes, waterfalls and over 500 sparkling mineral springs invite the visitor to experience sparkling fun. Many maars (water-filled volcanic craters) like Lake Laach are now very popular with watersports enthusiasts. The attractions of the region include the Eifel Lakes, with Europe's largest system of dams. The landscape of rolling hills and deep valleys is dominated by woodland and heaths. Here and there, untouched wetlands remain and provide habitats for amphibians. Isolated areas are home to rare plants and near-extinct animals.



One of the "crater lakes" (maars) in the Eifel



An interesting archeological feature of the region is the Roman Eifel Aqueduct

The **Eifel Aqueduct** was one of the longest aqueducts of the Roman Empire. It shows the great skill of the Roman engineers whose level of technical achievement was lost in the Middle Ages and regained only in recent times.

The aqueduct, constructed in AD 80, carried water some 95 km (60 miles) from the hilly Eifel region of what is now Germany to the ancient city of Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium (present-day Cologne). If the auxiliary spurs to additional springs are included, the length was 130 km (80 miles). The construction was almost entirely below ground, and the flow of the water was produced entirely by gravity. A few bridges, including one up to 1,400 m (0.87 miles) in length, were needed to pass over valleys. Unlike some of the other famous Roman aqueducts, the Eifel aqueduct was specifically designed to minimize the above-ground portion to protect it from damage and freezing.

Next--[The Villages where the Hommerdings lived](#)

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