

# OUR VON PRESSENTIN ANCESTORS IN GERMANY

## Where the heck is Hölkwiese ??



*Entering the village of Hölkwiese*

And, why should anyone care about this tiny village in present-day Poland? Well, if you are descended from one of the five von Presentin brothers who immigrated to the United States in the late 1860's and early 1870's, Hölkwiese looms large in your family history. It was in Hölkwiese that those five brothers and their siblings were born and spent much of their childhood.

It was not until my daughter, Karen Halliday, translated the von Presentin family histories that I learned Bernhard Friedrich gave up his earlier profession as a forester and *"went to Pomerania, where in the fall of 1846 he bought the estate of Bothenhagen near Schievelbein, which, however, he traded a year later for the manor Höltkewiese near Baldenburg."*

Here is the description of Bernhard von Pressentin's estate in Hölkwiese, from Book II of the von Pressentin family history, published in 1935:

### *Hölkwiese*

*bei Groß-Carzenberg, Kreis Rummelsburg [Kreis = USA County], (Pom.). 1847-1868. Village with several estates, formerly belonging to the district of Bublitz. Of these estates, belonging to a Herr Friedrich Gell, on September 29, 1847, Bernhard [v. Pressentin] (St. J. 16) exchanged his property in Botenhagen, Schivelbein District, for Hofs a, b, c, d, the [Erbpachtkrug: ? "hereditary-lease-inn"] no. 8 as well as the establishments no. 9a and b and half of the Lang Hof with all of its inventory. The exchange worth taken amounted to 50,000 thalers. In 1868 Bernhard fell into bankruptcy and the estates of Hölkwiese a, b, c, d along with the inn grounds were auctioned on October 16; the highest bid was only 32,911 thalers. The remainder of the property presumably fell to the till-then hereditary leaseholder through dispute with the farmers. In 1890/91 the Hofs were divided up.*

I'm still trying to determine the equivalent value of 50,000 "thalers" to the USA dollar of the 1860's or 2007. So far, no luck.

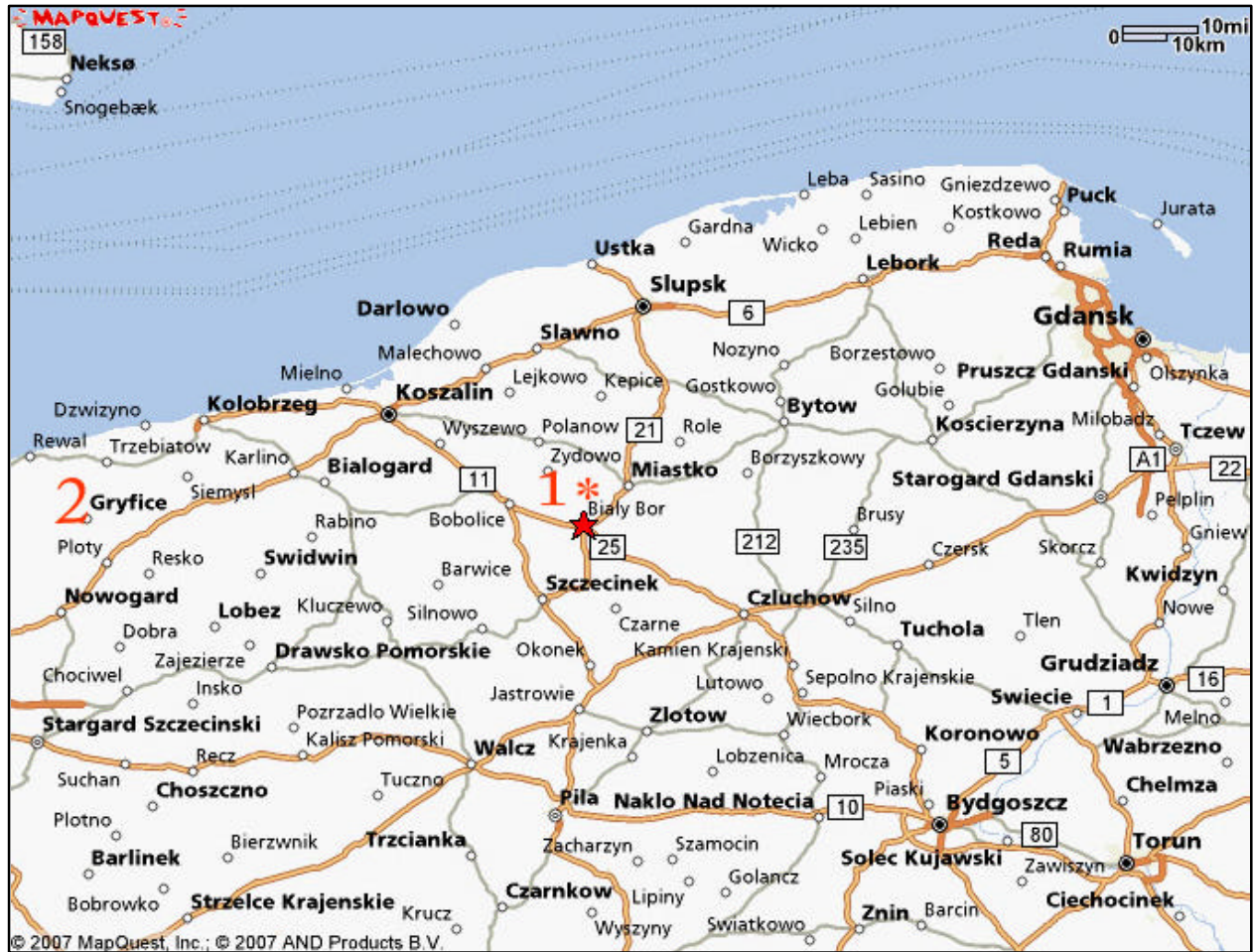
Trying to find Hölkwiese on a map was a challenge! Armed with the knowledge that Hölkwiese was in "Pomerania" I entered the words "Hölkwiese" and "Pomerania" into a Google search. To my surprise, I found an entire website devoted to this small village! This is the link to the website: "<http://hoelkwiese.de/>"

While the website is in German, there are many photos of the village and also maps that place Hölkwiese well east of the present day Germany-Poland border. I highly recommend this website to you. The website's owner, Dr. Bodo Koglin, of Berlin, has done a very comprehensive review of the history of the village, where his grandparents once lived.

Dr. Koglin was born in Berlin, but as a young child, he spent the World War II years in Hölkwiese. He has included photographs of Hölkwiese taken in the 1930's and on his return visit in 1996. One of the most interesting articles on Dr. Koglin's website is about his return to Hölkwiese in 1996. The last time he had been there was in 1945, after the Russian army had swept through the village. With Dr. Koglin's permission, I have used some of these photos.

It is possible to get a *very* rough translation of German to English on the Internet and I was able to understand enough from the website articles to know that little Hölkwiese has undergone many transformations since Bernhard and Emilie von Pressentin lived there with their family from 1847 to 1868.

For starters, the name of the village has been changing. While Book I of the *von Pressentin history* (published in 1899) calls the village "Höltkewiese" the second and third histories (written in 1935 and 1962) drop the "t" and call it "Hölkwiese." Apparently there is now a trend to substitute "oe" for the German umlaut "ö" and Dr. Koglin spells it "Hoelkwiese" in his e-mail address. These are minor changes compared to what happened to the village's name when it became part of Poland after World War II. Now, you must look for "Koltki" on present-day maps!



### Hölkewiese/ Koltki

Indicated by **No. 1 & red asterisk** on map, lies approximately in the center of a triangle formed by three towns in western Poland. Bublitz/Bobolice is about 12 miles to the west, Baldenburg/Bialy Bor (red star on map) 4 miles to the south, and Rummelsburg/Miastko 7 miles to the east.

Hölkewiese is about 186 miles northeast of Berlin.

Bernhard Friedrich's wife, Emilie, was from the town of Greifenberg/Gryfice (**No. 2 on map**).

Little Hölkwiese, with a population of 382 in 1935, had the misfortune to be right in the path of the Russian Army when it invaded Germany in 1945. The following excerpts are from a "History of Hölkwiese" I found on Bodo Koglin's website. The fractured English is the result of having a computer "translate" from German to English.

***"In the morning 26 February 1945 the first Russian tanks drove from Baldenburg coming by the village. Most village inhabitants tried afterwards to flee to the north; the route to the west was blocked. But only a small part reached in time the coast and arrived over the Baltic Sea into the west. The remainder returned after two weeks."***

Dr. Koglin's family was among those who came back. What they found on their return was a devastated Hölkwiese. Several homes had been shelled and destroyed. It appeared that a very small German force had tried to defend Hölkwiese and repel the Russians. There were probably about 100 Russians in the attack group and the village had been severely shelled. The foxholes of the Russian soldiers were found in yards and a burned-out Russian tank stood in a field. The villagers found a few Russians' graves, marked with red stars. The bodies of seventeen German SS soldiers (from Bavaria) were found where they had fallen throughout the village. The Russians had buried their few dead, but ignored the dead Germans as they headed on west. The stunned villagers buried the soldiers in a mass grave. Dr. Koglin writes that the only bright spot for him, in this terrible day, was to find his pet dog still alive, and running up to greet him.

Apparently all records of these SS soldiers were lost. In October, 2002, Dr. Koglin persuaded the German authorities to send a team to Hölkwiese and they found the mass grave where the villagers had buried the soldiers.

Two years after the Russians swept through Hölkwiese, Dr. Koglin writes, the remaining German villagers were driven out of their homeland as a result of the "Treaty of Potsdam." The German population in what had been Pomerania was transferred westward to Germany while Poles from lands adjoining Russia were resettled in villages such as Hölkwiese. After 1947 Hölkwiese must have experienced the same changes that occurred in East Germany—it was now a Communist village, and located in a different country--Poland. Those who were resettled from eastern Poland brought with them a different language and a different religion. Probably most traces of the village's history were lost when its inhabitants were forced out in 1947.

If any of Bernard and Emilie von Pressentin's offspring were to travel to Koltki/ Hölkwiese today, would they find structures that had endured since 1868? Would there be any traces of the "manor Hölkwiese near Baldenburg"? [Baldenburg is now called "Bialy Bor"] That's a question I cannot answer, but certainly, this small spot on the globe has managed to take part in many of the great social changes that have swept over Europe in the past century.