

## Some Family History

In family memoirs, it is assumed that the Baeyers were among the [Protestants](#) in [Salzburg](#) (north-central Austria) who lost their homeland in the upheavals caused by the [Reformation](#) in the early 1500s, and moved into what is now Germany.

From the mid-1500s to the mid-1700s, the Baeyer family were known to be farmers and wine-growers in the [Rheinland Palatinate](#) (southwestern Germany).

It must be noted that the story of the European origins of the family traditionally focusses on those who used the name Baeyer (also spelled Beyer, Baier and Bayer). But maintaining this focus into the modern day would not give due recognition to the wives who keep their maiden name, the children who are given the wife's surname, and those who follow other forms of family naming.

In the Palatinate, the family lived in the village of [Odernheim am Glan](#), not far from [Bad Kreuznach](#). The name of the village – Home of the Otters on the Glan River – inspired the inclusion of three fish-eating otters in the von Baeyer family crest which was granted to Adolf many years later, when he was awarded a Bavarian knighthood (see below).

In 1713, Johann Jacob Beyer (1685-1748) married Gertrud, the daughter of Daniel Dupuis, who was a wig-maker in nearby [Mainz](#). His ancestors were [Huguenots](#) (French Protestants) who had been forced to leave their homes in France because of the revocation of the [Edict of Nantes](#) by [Louis XIV](#) in 1685, which had protected them for almost a century. The exiled Huguenots brought significant economic and cultural development to the places where they settled.

In the mid-1700s, the Baeyer family immigrated to [Brandenburg](#), which encircles [Berlin](#), because of the deplorable, even abusive state of affairs in the Palatinate at the time.

One farmer's son, also called Johann Jacob, was [Johann Jacob Baeyer](#) (1794-1885), who was allowed to pursue higher education. He went on to become a Prussian Lieutenant General and prominent in the science of [geodesy](#) (determining, for example, the size and shape of large regions of the earth). He married Eugenie Hitzig (1807-1843), the daughter of an old Prussian-Jewish family of bankers and scholars, who had been baptised as a Protestant.

Their son Adolf became Professor of Chemistry in [Munich](#) in 1875. In 1885, he received a hereditary knighthood from [King Ludwig II of Bavaria](#), becoming Adolf Ritter von Baeyer. “[Ritter von](#)” translates literally as “Knight of” and was in the past a title for males in the second-lowest rank of the nobility. The “von” has for many years now been a part of the family surname for both males and females, and the “Ritter” survives in the names of males in parts of the family.

[Adolf von Baeyer](#) (1835-1917) went on to win the [Nobel Prize in Chemistry for 1905](#). He married a woman from a family with Jewish roots: Lida Bendemann (1847-1910), the granddaughter of a banker who had himself been baptised as a Protestant, and whose relatives included senior civil and military officials as well as artists.

Such a symbiosis of [Jewish](#) and [Protestant](#) families was not unusual in the Germany of the 1800s and early 1900s. The racial madness of the [Nazis](#), especially the [1933 law requiring official positions to be cleansed of all Jews](#) and those with Jewish ancestors or spouses, put an abrupt end to this symbiosis. For the Baeyers, these Jewish connections led to expulsion from German academic positions and, for many, emigration from Germany.

One of Adolf and Lida’s children was [Hans von Baeyer](#) (1875-1941). He was a pioneer of orthopedics and the founder of a modern clinic in [Heidelberg](#) which transformed the old home for crippled children into a centre for rehabilitation. He was removed by the Nazis. He had married Hildegard Merkel (1882-1958) whose ancestors came from the Protestant Merkel family in [Nuremberg](#), active in business and scholarly pursuits (not the family of the long-serving German Chancellor).

One of Hans and Hildegard’s children, [Hans Jakob von Baeyer](#) (1912-1998) escaped with his family to Switzerland and then moved to Canada. He settled in Ottawa, becoming a leader in Canadian telecommunications. He married [Renata Freudenberg](#) (1911-1977), daughter of a professor of pediatrics who came from a German family known particularly for its entrepreneurial activities.

One of Hans Jakob and Renata’s children is Cornelius, the presenter of this page ([cornelius@vonbaeyer.net](mailto:cornelius@vonbaeyer.net)).