
Castellum



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President's Message

by Gary Little

Greetings once again and welcome to the seventh issue of *Castellum*. Although our group is still quite small (around 50 members), it is very loyal. Of the twenty-one people who joined the LCC when we published the first issue of *Castellum* over a year ago, *all but one renewed for another year*. We interpret this as a strong vote of confidence and we will strive to continue delivering useful and interesting information about Luxembourg and its collectibles. As usual, I implore each of you to consider writing a brief article. Please share your interests and knowledge with everyone!



The town of Bech, a 16th century drawing by Abbot Jean Bertels.

Luxembourg issued its final six stamps of the year on December 7. They include a stamp commemorating the 40th anniversary of NAMSA, the Luxembourg-based NATO Maintenance and Services Agency, and, for the fourth consecutive year, a semi-postal Christmas stamp.

Of particular interest (to me at least) is a colorful set of four semi-postal stamps depicting 400-year-old drawings of small Luxembourg towns by Abbot Jean Bertels of Echternach (1544-1607).

Bertels was also a talented author and is recognized as the "first historian" of Luxembourg for his 1595 book, *Historia Luxemburgensis*.

The *Office des Timbres* of the Luxembourg P&T has a new web site where you can learn more about these stamps and others — the address is www.philately.lu. The P&T has just released the 1999 stamp program, but I'll wait until the next issue of *Castellum* to review it with you.

Has your membership expired? Your mailing envelope indicates the last issue of *Castellum* you will receive. Renew by sending \$USA 12 (in cash or by check drawn on a U.S. bank) to the Luxembourg Collectors Club, 3304 Plateau Drive, Belmont, CA 94002.

Grand Duke Adolphe and the Founding of the Nassau-Weilburg Dynasty

by Gary Little

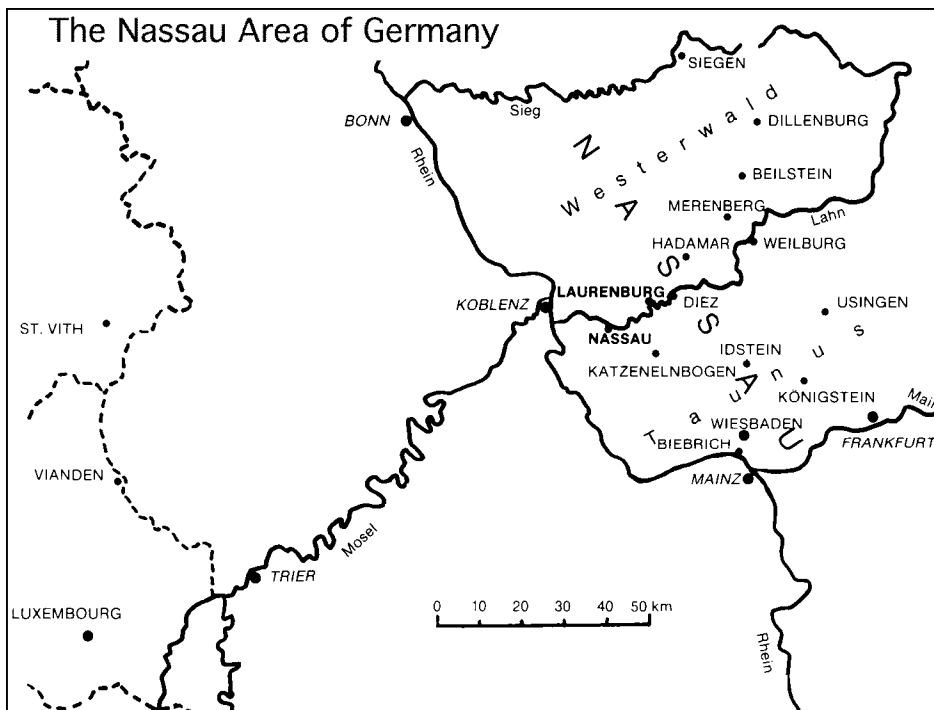
The royal dynasty that presently rules the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is the *House of Nassau-Weilburg*. This dynasty has guided the country for just over 100 years, having assumed power when its founder, Adolphe, Duke of Nassau, succeeded William III, of the related House of Orange-Nassau, when William III died in 1890.

Luxembourg issued a souvenir sheet in 1990 to commemorate the centenary of the Nassau-Weilburg dynasty and to honor the three Grand Dukes and two Grand Duchesses that it has contributed to date.

To understand why a change of dynasties became necessary in 1890, and how members of the Nassau family came to rule Luxembourg in the first place, requires a brief history lesson.



Centenary of the Nassau-Weilburg dynasty (1990 souvenir sheet).



The German town of Nassau is located to the east of Koblenz on the Lahn River, a northern tributary of the Rhine. Nassau was the center of a small medieval county of the same name that started to gain importance in the early 12th century as it began to annex lands in the area north of the Rhine between present day Frankfurt and Bonn. Ruprecht I and Arnold I, counts of Laurenburg, built a small castle at Nassau around 1120 and within 125 years Nassau had become important enough that ruling counts preferred the title of Count of Nassau to

all others. Henry II the Rich (died 1247/51) was the first to adopt the title Count of Nassau exclusively.

In about 1255 the Nassau lands were divided between Henry II's sons Otto and Walram. Walram, the elder, received the portion to the south of the Lahn, which included Weilburg, Wiesbaden, and Idstein. Otto received the portion to the north, which included Dillenburg, Beilstein, Siegen, and Hadamar. The family castle at Nassau was shared.

The Ottonian Branch of Nassau — Otto and his descendants — gradually expanded its land holdings over the centuries (primarily through convenient marriages) to include estates in what is today The Netherlands and, in 1544, the Principality of Orange (near Marseille in southern France). The most famous Ottonian ancestor was William the Silent (1533-1584), who led the northern provinces of the low countries in revolt against Spanish domination from 1566 until his assassination in 1584. In 1648, the United Provinces (the Dutch Republic) were formally recognized.

Over the centuries, the Ottonian lands were often divided up and distributed to different sub-branches of the family. In 1702, however, when William III (the great grandson of William the Silent who became King of Great Britain) died without heirs, these lands once again came under the control of a single person — John William Friso — who became known as the Prince of Orange-Nassau.

When the Kingdom of The Netherlands was created by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, William Frederick, great grandson of John William Friso, who was then the Prince of Orange-Nassau, was the obvious choice to be monarch because of his close connection to the lands making up the kingdom. He took the throne under the name King William I.

The Congress of Vienna, a peace conference at the end of the Napoleonic wars, also created the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and gave it territorial boundaries similar to those of the 14th century glory days of the old Duchy of Luxembourg.

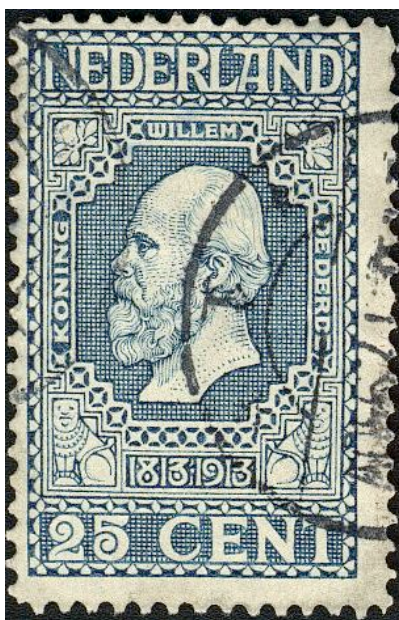


William I (1939 stamp).

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was created to serve as a neutral buffer separating the warring German states and France.

In a surprising move, Luxembourg was granted to William I as a *personal possession*, so he became not only King of The Netherlands but also Grand Duke of Luxembourg.

The reason for this grant was to compensate William I for the transfer of his hereditary estates in Nassau to the Prussians, namely the principalities of Dillenburg, Diez, Siegen, and Hadamar, as well as the lordship of Beilstein. The influential Prussians had insisted on receiving these territories during negotiations at the Congress of Vienna.



William III (1913 stamp).

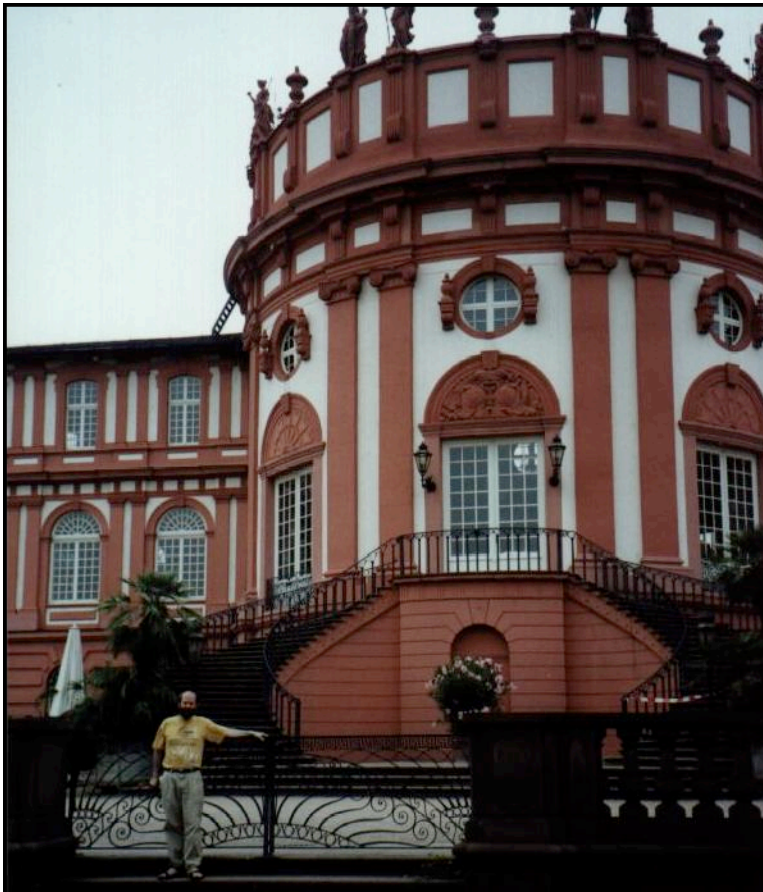
So this is how Luxembourg came to be ruled by the House of Orange-Nassau, the Ottonian Branch of the House of Nassau. William I ruled for 25 years before abdicating in 1840 in favor of his son William II. William II died in 1849 and his son, William III, became King of The Netherlands and Grand Duke of Luxembourg. William III had two male heirs when he came to power, William (born 1840) and Maurice (born 1843). Although the future of the dynasty seemed secure, an hereditary crisis would soon arise that would affect the leadership of Luxembourg.

Before examining the nature of the crisis, we must quickly review the history of the Walramian Branch of the House of Nassau. Over the centuries, the Nassovian possessions of the Walramian Branch to the south of the Lahn River were divided up several times and granted to various sub-branches of the family. By the end of the 18th century, however, there were only two sub-branches remaining — Nassau-Weilburg and Nassau-Usingen.

In 1806, as part of a restructuring of Germany forced by Napoleon, the Duchy of Nassau was created. It was led by Frederick August of Nassau-Usingen and Frederick William of Nassau-Weilburg. The elder Frederick August was appointed as the Duke of Nassau but because he had no sons, Frederick William was the heir apparent.

Frederick August died ten years later in 1816, resulting in the consolidation of all the Walramian lands under William of Nassau-Weilburg. (William was the son of Frederick William who died earlier in 1816.) William also assumed control of the Ottonian possessions in Nassau north of the Lahn River, which Orange-Nassau transferred to the Prussians by the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The Prussians had granted these lands (with the exception of the town of Siegen) to the Duchy of Nassau as compensation for the loss of territories in distant Saarbrücken. Thus, for the first time since the initial division of 1255, the ancient Nassovian territories were united under a common ruler.

William, this second Duke of Nassau, was the father of Adolphe, his eldest son. William ruled the Duchy of Nassau until his death in 1839 and Adolphe succeeded him as the third Duke of Nassau.

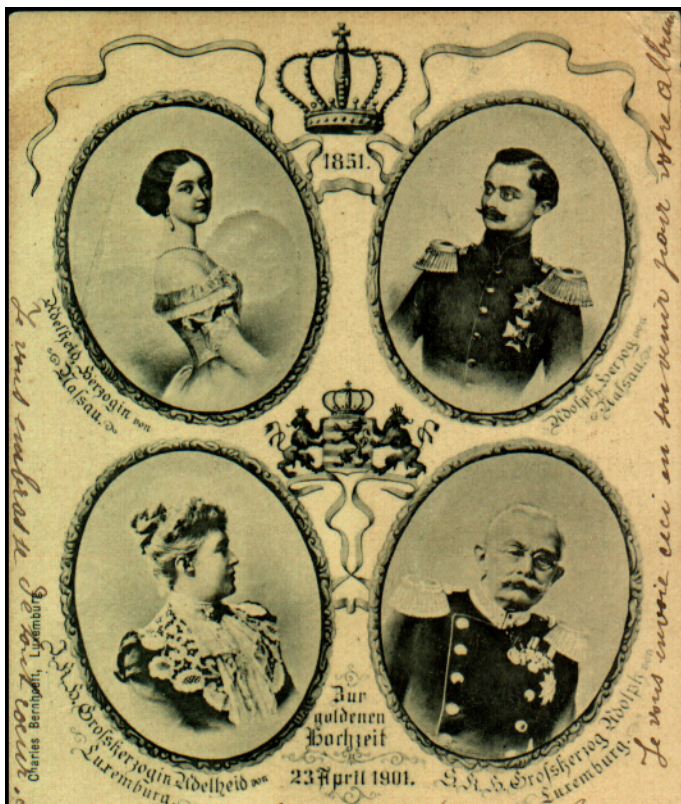


Biebrich Castle in Wiesbaden (central rotunda).

Adolphe was born on July 24, 1817 at Biebrich Castle, the family château in Wiesbaden. At the time, Wiesbaden was the capital of the Duchy of Nassau; today it is the capital of the German state of Hesse.

Biebrich Castle is a prominent building that was constructed from 1700 to 1750 on the right bank of the Rhine. It is a highly symmetric building with two long wings extending directly opposite each other and joined by a central rotunda. The trim of the building is painted in an eye-catching vibrant brown-orange color.

Biebrich Castle was sold to the German state in 1934 and now houses various cultural administrations for the state of Hesse. It is often used for official government receptions.



Adolphe's 50th wedding anniversary was in 1901.

Adolphe was only 22 years old when his father died on August 21, 1839 and he became Duke of Nassau.

He married Elisabeth of Russia in early 1844, but she died less than a year later after giving birth to a baby girl who also did not survive. Adolphe had an ornate Russian Orthodox church built in Elisabeth's memory. It was completed in 1855 and is located in the Neroberg district in the northern part of Wiesbaden.

Adolphe's second marriage in 1851 was a much longer one. His bride was Adelheid-Marie of Anhalt-Dessau and the marriage would last 54 years until Adolphe's death in 1905.

Adolphe and Adelheid-Marie had five children, notably William, later Grand Duke William IV, who was born in 1852.



Grand Duke Adolphe
(1939 stamp).

Adolphe's fortunes took a very bad turn in 1866 when he chose to side with Austria in the brief Austro-Prussian War. The decisive battle was at Königgrätz (Sadowa), east of Prague, where 44,000 Austrian soldiers were either killed, wounded, or captured in a humiliating defeat. Part of the price exacted for standing up to Prussia and losing was the annexation by Prussia of the Duchy of Nassau.

Adolphe, stripped of his realm at the age of 49, was now forced to live off the family fortune in exile in Vienna and contemplate how to occupy himself for the rest of his life.



Grand Duke Adolphe
(1895 stamp).

It is now time to discuss the details of an important Nassau Family Pact of June 30, 1783 that would soon play an important role in determining succession rights to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. This pact, called the *Nassauischer Erbverein*, governed rights of succession of the Nassau family's German possessions. It was designed to guard against the break-up of the ancestral Nassau domains in the event of succession problems.

The pact was signed by the leaders of the four branches then existing of the House of Nassau — William V of Orange-Nassau (Ottonian Branch), and the leaders of the three sub-branches of the Walramian Branch: Charles Christian of Nassau-Weilburg, Charles-William of Nassau-Usingen, and Louis of Nassau-Saarbrücken. A key provision specified that in the event of the extinction of the male line in either the Ottonian Branch or the Walramian Branch, the German possessions would pass to the other branch of the family. This agreement was later extended to apply to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg by virtue of Article 71 of the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna of 1815.



Grand Duke William III
(1939 stamp).

William III of Orange-Nassau had three sons by his first wife, Sophia of Württemberg, and one daughter, Wilhelmina, by his second wife, Emma of Waldeck-Pyrmont.

When he became King of The Netherlands and Grand Duke of Luxembourg in 1849, two of his sons had already been born and were still alive — William (born 1840) and Maurice (born 1843). Although Maurice died as a young child the following year, William III's third son Alexander was born in 1851, so there were two male heirs once again.

But in an era of inconsistent medical care and unpredictable life expectancy, this was not to be enough to ensure continued Orange-Nassau control of Luxembourg. The eldest son William died in 1879 before the age of 40. Then, on June 21, 1884, Alexander, the last male heir of the House of Orange-Nassau, passed away.



*Portrait of Adolphe
(from the 1891-93 set).*

Suddenly, Adolphe, the 67-year-old leader of the Walramian Branch of the House of Nassau, was, by virtue of the Nassau Family Pact, next in line to the throne of Luxembourg.

When William III died six years later on November 23, 1890, Adolphe became Grand Duke of Luxembourg. The House of Nassau-Weilburg had come to power. Meanwhile, in The Netherlands, Queen Emma acted as regent until 10-year-old Wilhelmina, the only child of William III to survive him, reached the age of majority and became Queen.

Adolphe made his solemn entry into the City of Luxembourg on July 22, 1891. To honor the occasion, Luxembourg issued 10c and 25c stamps bearing his portrait on the following day. The stamps were printed in sheetlets of 25 stamps and are considered to be precursors to modern souvenir sheets. Eight supplemental values adopting the same design were issued in 1893.

Adolphe ruled Luxembourg until his death at age 88 on November 17, 1905. He is interred in the family crypt under the church attached to Weilburg Castle in Weilburg, Germany. Weilburg is a picturesque town located on the Lahn River upstream from the town of Nassau. Weilburg Castle sits at the summit of the hill on which the town is built in a loop of the river. I tried to visit the Nassau-Weilburg crypt on my visit to Europe last June. Unfortunately, it is only open to the public on one day each year — November 17, the day on which Adolphe died — so I was out of luck. I also had poor luck at the Weilburg city museum — it had no information at all about Adolphe despite his historical importance to the area.



The Nassau-Weilburg family crypt in the church of Weilburg Castle. From left to right, the caskets of Grand Duke William IV, Grand Duke Adolphe, Grand Duchess Adelheid-Marie, and the casket shared by Adolphe's three children who died in their youth (Frederick, Marie, and Francis Joseph).



The Adolphe monument in Wiesbaden.



*Grand Duke William IV
(1906 stamp).*

There is a dignified stone monument dedicated to Adolphe in Wiesbaden. It is located about two miles north of Biebrich Castle along the main north-south thoroughfare.

This monument, inaugurated in 1909, features a larger-than-life statue of Adolphe, recumbent lions, and several admiring subjects.

The front of the monument bears the legend (translated from the German): “Adolphe / Duke of Nassau / 1817-1905 / Grand Duke of Luxembourg / 1890-1905.”

On the back is the dedication from the people (again, translated from the German): “For the princely House of Nassau with love and admiration. The grateful subjects. 1909.”

Adolphe’s successor as Grand Duke was his eldest son, William IV. He was 53 years old when his father passed away.

Ironically, William IV and his wife Marie-Anne of Portugal had six daughters, but no sons, so another dynastic disruption in Luxembourg was on the horizon.

However, the problem was solved in 1907 by an amendment to the Nassau Family Pact of 1783 which specifically allowed female succession in Luxembourg. (Presumably, this amendment had been easier to negotiate because Queen Wilhelmina of The Netherlands did not have a male heir either. In fact, there would be no male heir of The Netherlands until the birth of the present Crown Prince William Alexander in 1967.)

The amendment paved the way for two of William IV’s daughters to succeed him — first Marie-Adélaïde (1912-1919), then Charlotte (1919-1964).

References:

1. LaFontaine, Paul, *Notre Dynastie* (1990, Editions Saint-Paul, Luxembourg).
2. Weilburg web page at <http://www.weilburg.de/>
3. Wiesbaden web page at <http://www.wiesbaden.de/>
4. Rhine/Lahn District web page at <http://rhein-lahn-info.de/>