

# A History of the Blessig Family

## Philip Jacob I Blessig

### **Alsace**

The ancient province of Alsace, lying between the west bank of the Rhine and the crest of the Vosges Mountains, has throughout history been a borderland, disputed and invaded by neighbouring states. From the XIth. Century until about 1650 it was included in the Austrian Empire under the Hohenstauffen and Hapsburg dynasties, and in 1205 its chief city Strasbourg, which was a trade centre and had a boat bridge crossing the Rhine, became an Imperial Free City.

During the Thirty Years War (1618-48) Alsace suffered invasion by armies from all sides, and for a whole generation all cultural and economic progress was at a standstill. By the Treaty of Westphalia which ended that War, France acquired most of the rights over Alsace which the Austrian Emperors had formerly held. In the War between France and the Grand Alliance (1672-79) Alsace was again invaded and devastated, and by the Treaty of Nijmegen which ended that War, Louis XIV formally annexed nearly all Alsace as a part of France. Finally, in 1681, Strasbourg was surrendered to him on conditions which nominally safeguarded some of the ancient privileges which it had enjoyed as a Free City.

During the years 1792-94 of the French Revolution, Alsace was a frontier province of strategic importance for the defence of France against invading Austrian armies, and its inhabitants were in consequence somewhat severely handled by Revolutionary extremists sent from Paris, although in fact the Alsatians were wholly loyal to France and provided many of her best generals.

After the 1870 War, in which Alsace and one third of Lorraine were annexed by Germany, Strasbourg became the seat of German administration for Alsace-Lorraine. Recovered by France at the end of the 1914-18 War, and temporarily lost to Germany during 1940-44, Alsace is once more restored to France, and is comprised in the two Departments of Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin.

With this varying fortune over many centuries the people of Alsace have a mixed heritage. Basically they are of Germanic stock but during long periods of French rule they have assimilated French culture and characteristics to a considerable extent. They speak Alsatian, which is a Germanic dialect mixed with French words, somewhat similar to the dialects of Switzerland. In Strasbourg and the larger towns, both French and German are also spoken, with the former language predominant, but some of the daily broadcasts from radio Strasbourg are given in Alsatian dialect for the benefit of the rural population. The strain of adjustment to the alternating fortune of the two great neighbouring countries has been especially severe in the

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lifetime of the older generation of Alsatians. It may be true to say that in general Alsatians desire to be neither wholly French nor wholly German, and that their innermost wish is to preserve their indigenous traditions and culture.

The BLESSIG family were Alsatians, Their name occurs in the oldest existing records as Blaess or Blessi (Blasius). In Alsace there are villages named Blaesheim and St. Blaise which were originally fiefs of the abbey of St. Blasien in the Black Forest during the ancient period of Austrian overlordship of Alsace. It seems probable that when family names came into general use in the 14th-15th Centuries one or more families which had been settled in those villages took the name, but the destruction of nearly all documentary records during the wars of the mid-seventeenth Century makes proof of that likely origin impossible.

Towards the end of the 17th Century the Blessig family were inhabitants of the small town named Wasselonne (Wasselnheim), on the river Mossig, about 15m W. of Strasbourg. Wasselonne, which, had a large castle, had been a fief of the Austrian Emperors until 1496 when the Hapsburgs sold it to the city of Strasbourg. It was one of the first towns in Alsace to adopt the Lutheran Reformation, and it can be assumed that the Blessig family were Protestants from an early date. In 1681 the town became French together with other small towns and villages belonging to the commune of Strasbourg.

In Wasselonne, **HANNUS BLESSIG** died before 1653. Although some branches of the Blessig family continued to reside at Wasselonne during the 18th and 19th Centuries, the immediate ancestors with whom this history is concerned, beginning with a son of Hannus Blessig, became citizens of Strasbourg, as will next be described.

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## **Strasbourg**

The first of the Blessig family to move from Wasselonne to Strasbourg was a son of Hannus, named **MATTHIAS (Mathieu) BLESSIG**. He was born in 1623, and he became a Strasbourg citizen in 1653 when he married there. He was a Master Mason, and was elected as a member of the Little Senate in 1681. At that period Strasbourg and its dependent territory was governed by a Grand Senate of 31 members and a Little Senate of 22 members. The whole Corporation was under an Ammeistre (Burgomaster) and 4 Stattmeistres (Deputy Burgomasters). The year 1681 was a turning point in the history of Strasbourg, for in that year the city was forced to render allegiance to Louis XIV of France. Mathieu Blessig no doubt attended with the other senators at the formal reception of the King in the city in October 1681.

Mathieu Blessig died in 1688, and his son **MATTHIEU II BLESSIG**, born 1657, was also a Master Mason. His son, **JEAN LOUIS BLESSIG** born



1688 died 1746, became proprietor of the **Auberge a la Hache**, an Inn which thereafter remained in the Blessig family for several generations, (An earlier house "zur. Axt" was owned in 1536 by Johannes de Turkheim, ancestor of the family of that name in Strasbourg & Baden). It was situated in the rue de la Douane, near the great Customs House on the river Ill, and from its position it probably had a thriving business. The Inn still stands today, owned by a large brewery Co, but its earlier picturesque appearance with overhanging timbered storey has been replaced by a plain facade, probably after the 1870 War when houses in that part of Strasbourg were

much damaged by artillery fire. Incendiary bombs destroyed the ancient Customs House nearby, which had arcades and huge warehouses, and a great high-pitched roof, in 1944.

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From their long ownership of the Inn, the Blessig family of this branch acquired the soubriquet of 'Blessig de la Hache', and their descendant P.J Blessig of St. Petersburg used on his seal a device showing an arm in armour grasping an axe, and his son P.J Blessig of Liverpool chose for his seal a griffin bearing an axe.

The Blessigs of Strasbourg were parishioners of the Church of St. Nicholas which still stands just across the river Ill facing the Inn, and births, marriages, and deaths of the family are recorded in the registers of that Church. Baptismal names of the family were given in both German and French form until the Revolution, and thereafter in French form. The branch of the Blessigs established later in St. Petersburg used German and English baptismal names only.

A distinguished cousin of the family in Strasbourg was Dr Jean Laurent (Johann Lorenz) Blessig, a celebrated pastor and preacher of the Lutheran Church called the Temple Neuf, who was born in 1747 and died in 1816. Memorials to him exist in Strasbourg and a street in the new University Quarter is named after him. His life history is given in Part III.

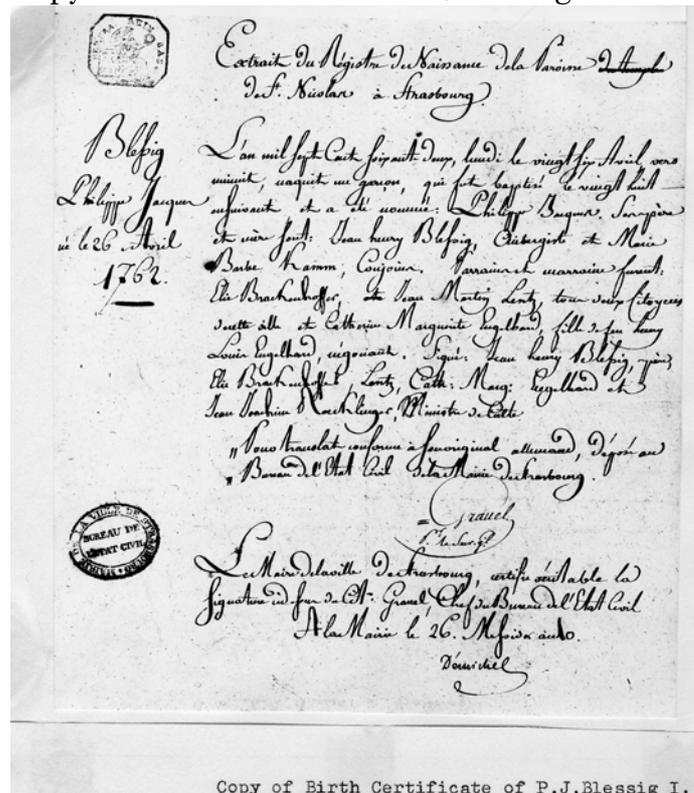
**JEAN LOUIS BLESSIG**, mentioned above, married in 1717 a daughter of the owner of another Inn in Strasbourg called the Auberge a la Hache d'Or, and his son **JEAN HENRI BLESSIG** apparently inherited that Inn in addition to the Auberge a la Hache. He was a member of the Senate, and had 4 sons and 2 daughters. The eldest son inherited the Auberge a la Hache, and the second son inherited the Hache d'Or. One of the daughters, Marguerite Barbe Blessig married Jean George Stromeyer, a Strasbourg merchant, and the other, Caroline Louise, married Joseph Ignace Melling, a Professor of Art from Lorraine.

The youngest son was **PHILIPPE JACQUES (Philip. Jacob) BLESSIG**, born on 26th April 1762. He began his career as a commission merchant in Strasbourg. In the year 1787, when aged 25, he made the enterprising decision to seek his fortune in **ST. PETERSBURG**, in the cold and misty North, some 1200 miles distant from his pleasant native city. The inheritance, which he received as the youngest son in a family of six children, cannot have been large, and courage and determination must have been his strong characteristics. How the long journey to St. Petersburg was accomplished in the late 18th Century is not recorded, but there can have been few Strasbourg citizens of that period who ventured to cast their lot so far abroad.

Some description of the great city of St. Petersburg, in which the descendants of this Philip Jacob Blessig lived for more than 100 Years, will next be given.

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Copy of Birth Certificate of P. J Blessig I.



Rep. Française

Rhin Bas.

Extrait du Registre de Naissance de la Paroisse de St. Nicolas a  
Strasbourg.

BLESSIG

PHILIPPE JACQUES

Ne le 26 avril 1762.

L'an mil sept cent soixante douze, lundi le vingt six avril vers minuit, naquit un garçon, qui fut baptisé le vingt huit ensuivant et a été nomme:

**Philippe Jacques.**

Son père et mère sont: **Jean Henri Blessig**, Aubergiste, et **Marie Barbe Kamm**, Conjoins. Parrains et marraine furent: **Elie Brackenhoffer**, **Jean Martin Lentz**, tous deux Citoyens de cette ville, et **Catherine Marguerite Engelhard**, fille du feu **Henri Louis Engelhard**, négociant.

Signe: **Jean Henri Blessig**, père: **Blie Brackenhoffer**, **Lentz**, **Cath. Marg. Engelhard**, et **Jean Joachim Racklinger**, Ministre de Culte,

"Pour translat conforme à son original allemand, déposé au Bureau de l'Etat Civil de la Mairie de Strasbourg".

(sig.) Granel: pour la Surete Générale.

Le Maire de la ville de Strasbourg certifie véritable la signature au-dessus du Citoyen Granel, Chef du Bureau de

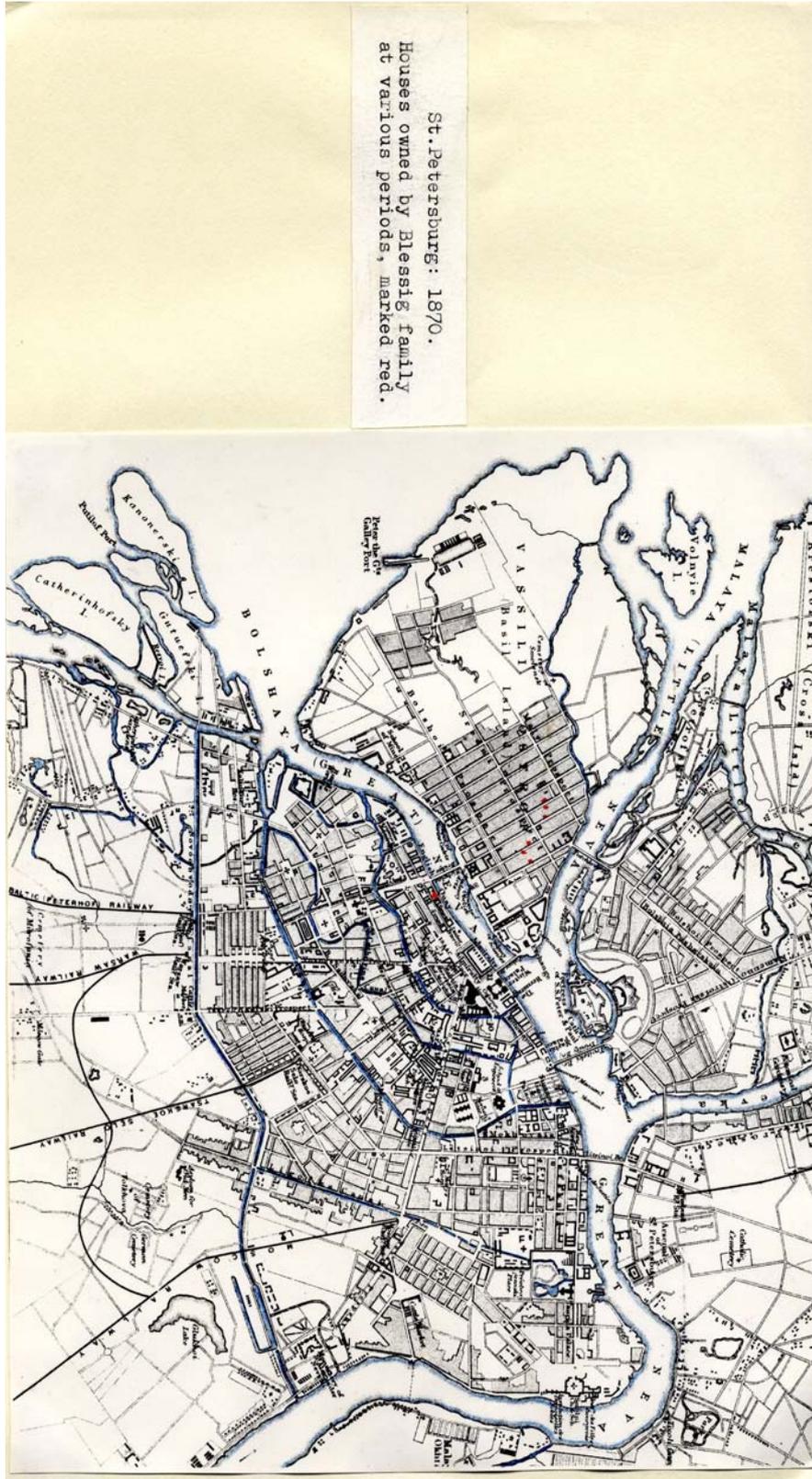
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## ***St. Petersburg***

St. Petersburg was founded in 1703 by Peter the Great, whose object was to gain control of the Baltic from Sweden, and to have 'a window looking on to Europe'. As a capital for the Russian Empire it was on the road to nowhere, being 400 miles from Moscow, 300 miles from Helsingfors, and 600 miles from Archangel. From the landward sides the city was approached through hundreds of miles of desolate plain and forest. The city was built on the swampy delta of the river Neva, where only a few poor Finnish hamlets and farms had previously existed. The surface was dead flat and drainage of the swampy subsoil always remained a difficult problem. There was no pure water supply for the new city, and for more than 150 years the inhabitants relied wholly on water pumped from the contaminated river, and typhoid and cholera epidemics were frequent. Further hardship was caused to the inhabitants by periodic floods, when strong SW winds checked the Neva waters from flowing into the Gulf of Finland. The Neva usually became frozen over by the end of November, and remained frozen until about mid-April when the ice gradually broke up and drifted into the Gulf, and shipping channels to the city could then be re-opened. Temperatures ranged between extremes of 60 degrees of frost in winter and 100 degrees of heat (Fahrenheit) in summer. In mid-winter there were only 4 hours of daylight, with the sun barely above the horizon, and there were very frequent periods of mist and fog, and in mid-summer there were only about 2 hours of semi-darkness. Such extreme climatic conditions had a gradually weakening effect on the physical constitutions of foreigners whose families had lived in the city for two or three generations.

St. Petersburg was laid out on a grand scale by Peter I, with huge open squares and long and broad thoroughfares called 'Prospects' which were intersected at right angles by minor streets called 'Lines'. Building was continued spasmodically by Peter's successors, and the plan was not fully completed until the reign of Catharine the Great. During Peter's reign there was difficulty in populating the city, and he had to force his nobles to live and build palaces there. At the same time he encouraged foreigners, Dutch, English, and German, to settle and use their craftsmanship and business talent in his new city.

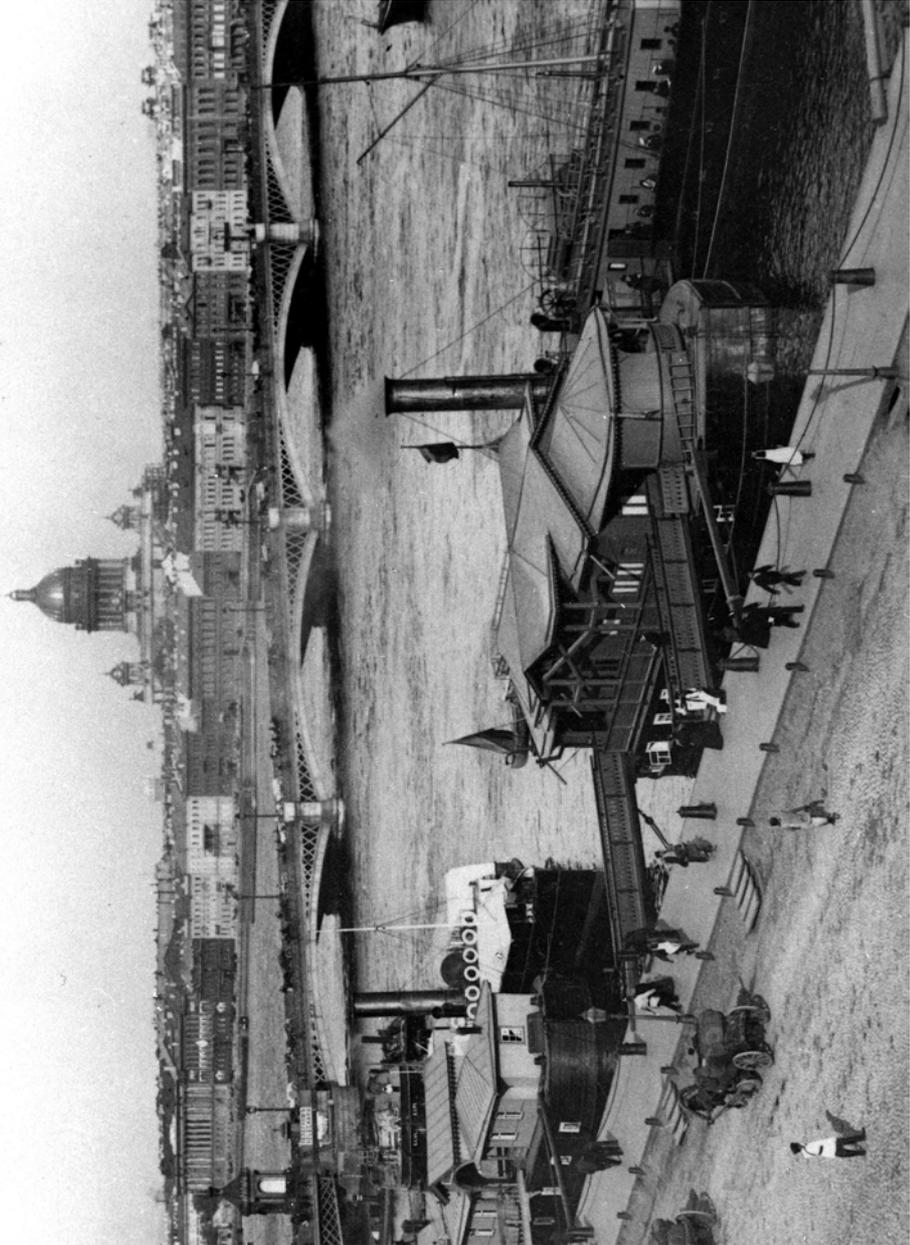
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The ornate palaces of the Grand Dukes and Princes and the smaller houses of the upper class citizens were usually not more than 3 storeys in height, as the swampy subsoil could not support heavy buildings, There was no building stone in the vicinity of Petersburg and so the houses were built mostly of brick, stuccoed over and colour-washed in raspberry red, blue, yellow, and green, to counteract the dazzling white of the winter snow; the houses had double walls and windows and doors, for protection against the great cold of winter, and in winter all cracks in the window-frames were hermetically sealed with putty and strips of linen, and only tiny movable panes were used for necessary ventilation; floors were of birch wood parquetry, without carpets; heating of the houses was done with huge stoves, built through the interior walls so as to warm two rooms or passages simultaneously, and birch wood was the usual fuel for the stoves; because of the heat of the rooms in winter linen underwear was necessary indoors, and consequently heavy furs had to be worn out of doors, from October to end of April. Houses of the working classes and small shopkeepers were built of wood and were similar to peasant houses in the country. The severe climate in winter and subsidence due to the swampy subsoil had a continuously destructive effect on the larger buildings, making cracks in the walls and flaking away the stucco, and during each summer hordes of workmen spent their lives in remaking what the winter had undone.

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Vassili Ostrov (Basil Island), one of the 5 or 6 large islands of the Neva delta which were included in the city, was originally laid out by Peter I on the model of a Dutch town, with canals etc, but later it became the favourite residential quarter for merchants and professional men of German origin, and it acquired some of the features of a German town. On a point of that island was situated the Merchant's Exchange and the Customs House, originally brick structures and rebuilt with Finland granite during the years 1804 to 1816. For nearly 150 years the only bridge crossing the Neva to Vassili Ostrov was a wooden pontoon structure, which had to be removed before the river froze and replaced when the thaw came, causing much inconvenience. It was not until 1864 that the difficulty of laying a firm bridge foundation in the swampy subsoil was overcome by driving thousands of wooden piles into the riverbed, in 3 superimposed tiers, and on that foundation the massive granite piers of the great Nicholas Bridge eventually rested.

In 1787, when P.J. Blessig I arrived in St. Petersburg from Strasbourg, Catharine the Great was in the last years of her long reign. At that period the people of Russia still consisted of two main classes, nobles and serfs; there was no 'third estate' or independent middle class of Russian merchants and professional men, and such Russians as operated in a small way as merchants were of serf status and had to pay over most of their profits to their noble owners. Under these conditions sea-borne trade with other countries could not thrive, and foreign merchants with business experience and connections abroad, were encouraged to come in increasing numbers to Petersburg, and for them Russia offered very attractive opportunities. In the year 1800 there were about 150 English and German Firms engaged in the import and export trade, and a few Dutch and Swedish. The subsequent growth of sea-borne commerce due to their activities is shown by the number of ships entering the Neva at Petersburg. In 1800 the number was about 900, and by 1845 it had risen to 2000, and after the temporary halt imposed by the Crimean War expansion became even more rapid.

Foreigners in St. Petersburg gradually formed their own residential colonies. Although they mixed freely and on intimate terms with the Russians, and very many became Honorary Russian Citizens, they did not actually lose their national identity, and very few married with Russians. In the course of the 100 years during which the Blessigs lived in St. Petersburg they married either with families of Germanic origin, van Zanten, Forsch, Amburger etc, or with families of English origin, Anderson, Cattley, Higginbotham, and Whishaw, etc.

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Under a Decree made in 1798 during the brief reign of Tsar Paul I, foreign merchants of the First Guild, i.e. those whose scale of operation could be regarded as valuable to Russia, were permitted to apply to the Minister of the Interior to be made honorary Russian Citizens (Pochetnyy Grajdamin), and this being granted by Ukase of the Senate, they became members of the 12th Tchin (grade) of the Noble Class, and were addressed as Blagorodie (honourable) and had certain privileges pertaining to the Noble Class. Their sons, born in Russia, became Hereditary Honorary Citizens (Potemstvenniy Pochetnyy Grajdamin). Several members of the Blessig family in St. Petersburg thus became Honorary and Hereditary Honorary Russian Citizens.

Soon after his arrival in St. Petersburg in 1787, PHILIPPE JACQUES BLESSIG, in Russian nomenclature Philip Ivanovitch, entered the office of a Baltic German named Frederic Kümmel, and after 5 years was taken into partnership by him, and the Firm became "Kümmel & Blessig". The Articles of Association stated that the partnership would continue for 7 years from 1st August 1793, each partner having the option of withdrawal at 12 months notice; and that Kümmel would provide 75,000 roubles (approx. £11,000) capital, on which he would receive interest at 8% before division of trading profit; and that the business office would be in Kümmel's house on Vassili Ostrov, near the Merchant Exchange, rent for the office being charged against the annual profit. This partnership continued until the end of 1803, when Kümmel retired. From 1st Jan.1804 the Firm was re-designated as "Blessig & Co." and as such it continued for nearly 100 subsequent years, as will be described later.

At the end of 1794, possibly in view of his intended marriage in Petersburg, P.J Blessig arranged with his brother-in-law at Strasbourg to obtain from the Magistracy there a Notarial Declaration affirming that he had left Strasbourg in 1787 before the French Revolution. Such declarations were necessary at that time in order to protect the inheritance of French citizens who had gone abroad. A later copy of the document, certified by the Mayor of Strasbourg in 1803, still exists, and that copy may have been required by P.J Blessig in support of his application to become an Honorary Russian Citizen.

Photographs of the document, and also of his Birth Certificate, certified by the Mayor of Strasbourg in 1802, are shown in this history.

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Extrait des Registres de la  
Justice de paix du troisième  
Arrondissement de la Ville de Strasbourg

Strasbourg ce Douze Brumaire  
Du trois de la République une  
& indivisible.

Pardevant le Juge de paix du  
troisième Arrondissement de la  
Commune de Strasbourg est comparu  
Jean George Fromeyer, Négociant  
en cette Commune & Nous a exposé,  
que son beaufrère Philippe Jaquer  
Blessig, Domicilié à Viterbourg,  
ayant besoin de constater par acte  
de Notoriété, qu'il s'est établi en pays  
étranger avant le temps de la révolution

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françoise, lui comparant a fait  
comparaitre devant Nous les trois Amis  
suivants:

1. Jacques Martin Lutz, Vitrier.
2. Samuel Füssinger, fils, cordier.
3. Jean George Geck, Négociant.

Tous de cette commune, aux fins de  
Declarer Verité; Lesquels amis, apres  
avoir prêté serment entre nos Mains  
de fidelement proceder a cette  
Declaration, ont dit, qu'il est  
vraie, que ledit Citoyen Philippe  
Jacques Blessig, Négociant, s'est  
etabli a Petersbourg dans l'année 1787,  
conséquemment avant le temps de  
notre Révolution.

Sur quoi Nous avons dressé le  
présent Procès Verbal, que les comparans  
ont signé avec Nous, pour servir &

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valoir ce que De Droit.

fait à Strasbourg le jour, Mois & an  
que dessus. Signé Fromeyer; J. G. Guck;  
Lutz; Samuel Füssinger, fils; Muroth,  
l'aîné, l'aid'homme, Lamey, greffier.

Enregistré à Strasbourg, le 13 Brumaire 3,  
Reçu vingt sols, signé Gallinard.

Collationné  
Stumpf  
greffier



Le Maire de la Ville de Strasbourg certifie  
que le Citoyen Stumpf, qui a collationné  
& signé la présente expédition, est Greffier  
du Juge de Paix du troisième Arrondissement  
de la Ville de Strasbourg. A Strasbourg le  
huit Brumaire an V de la Rep. fr.



Bernard

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Notarial Declaration registered at Strasbourg in November 1794 affirming that Citizen Philippe Jacques Blessig left that city for St. Petersburg in 1787, before the French Revolution. Copy certified by the Mayor of Strasbourg on 30th October 1803.

EXTRAIT des Registres de la Justice de Paix du troisième Arrondissement de la Ville de Strasbourg. Strasbourg ce douze Brumaire An trois de la République Une et Indivisible. (3rd Novembre 1794)

Par-devant le Juge de Paix du troisième Arrondissement de Commune de Strasbourg est comparu Jean George Stromeyer, négociant en cette Commune, et nous a expose que son beau-frère Philippe Jacques Blessig domicilié à Petersbourg, ont besoin de constater par Acte de Notoriété qu'il s'est établi en pays étranger avant le temps de la Révolution Française, lui comparant à fait comparaître devant nous les trois amis ensuivant: (1) Jacques Martin Lutz, vitrier,

Samuel Fussinger fils, cordier, (3) Jean George Geck, négociant, tous de cette Commune, aux fins de déclarer vérité; lesquels amis après avoir prêté serment entre nos mains de fidèlement procéder à cette déclaration, ont dit qu'il est notoire que cedis citoyen Philippe Jacques Blessig, négociant, s'est établi à Petersbourg dans l'année q787, conséquemment avant le temps de notre Révolution.

Sur quoi nous avons dresse le présent Procès Verbal, que les comparants ont signe avec nous, pour servir et valoir ce que de Droit.

Fait à Strasbourg le Jour, Mois, et An que dessus. Signée: Stromeyer: J.G.Geck: Lutz: Samuel Fussinger fils: Menoth l'aine: Prudhomme: Lamey, greffier.

Enregistre à Strasbourg le 13 Brumaire III (14th Nov. 1794); Reçu vingt sols, signe Gallimard.

Collectionne: Stumpft, greffier.

Le Maire de la Ville de Strasbourg certifie que le Citoyen Stumpft qui a collectionne et signe la présente Expédition, est Greffier du Juge de Paix du troisième Arrondissement de La Ville de Strasbourg. A Strasbourg le huit Brumaire an Onze de la République française. (30th Octobre 1803).

(Sig.) Bermann.

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In 1795, at the age of 33, P.J. Blessig married in St. Petersburg, Catharina van Zanten, aged 25. She was one of the five daughters of Francois van Zanten, merchant and Honorary Russian Citizen, who was born in 1733 at Amsterdam and died in 1784 in Petersburg, and of his wife Augusta Catharina Bützow who was born in 1745 at Viborg and died in 1784 in Petersburg; her father was Nicolaus Bützow, Pastor of the St. Petri Church in Petersburg, Catharina van Zanten's sisters married into the Forsch, Carstens, and Amburger families in Petersburg. The van Zanten family was well known in Amsterdam and at The Hague.

It was probably about the time of his marriage that P.J. Blessig purchased a house on Vassili Ostrov, in the 5th Line (street), and a few years later, in 1801, he purchased from his partner F. Kümmel, a datcha (country villa) situated 6 miles SW of Petersburg, near the village of Ligovo on the road to Peterhof, the Tsar's summer palace. A description of that villa and its subsequent Blessig owners during 100 years is given later.

## ***Catharina van Zanten***

By his first marriage with Catharina van Zanten P.J. Blessig's children were:

- (1) Catharina Blessig born 1796 died 1821.
- (2) Wilhelm I Blessig born 1797 died 1862.
- (3) Philip Blessig born and died 1801.
- (4) Georg Blessig born 1806 died 1834

P.J. Blessig's wife Catharina van Zanten died in Dec. 1812 at the age of 40. In the following year he married her niece Emilie Charlotte Forsch, who was aged 24. She was a daughter of Johann Forsch and Elisabeth van Zanten, and she had 3 brothers and 2 or more sisters. Her eldest brother, Friedrich Forsch born 1787, had been in the firm of Blessig & Co. for several years, and was made a partner in 1814. In the following year Friedrich Forsch married P.J. Blessig's daughter Catharina (above), and he thus became son-in-law, brother-in-law, and nephew to P.J. Blessig by his own and the latter's two marriages, a truly remarkable state of affinity.

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## *The house on English Quay*

About 1813, or soon after his second marriage, when his business and family were both becoming larger, P.J Blessig purchased a large house on the well-known English Quay (Angliyskaya Nabereshnaya) in the Admiralty Quarter of Petersburg, whilst still retaining the other small house which he owned on Vassili Ostrov, and the country villa on the Peterhof road. The English Quay was a fine wide boulevard which ran along the massive granite embankment of the river Neva, west of the Admiralty. It was a favourite afternoon promenade for St. Petersburg society, including the Tsar and his Court, in the spring and summer months, and during the 50 years the Blessig family owned this house on the Quay they must have seen all the leading personages in Russian history pass and re-pass below their windows. The houses on the Quay, originally built by English merchants, were almost palatial in size.



The Blessig house was No.3 and stood next to the Senate. It was a two-storeyed building of stuccoed brick and covered a large area, having two interior courtyards, and a back entrance at No.6 Galerenaya, a smaller street which ran parallel with the English Quay. The front of the building contained the main apartments, including a vast dining room, the middle block contained the business office and the servants' quarters, and the back part on the Galerenaya had additional family accommodation. A carriage for town driving and for going to and from the country villa, was housed with two horses somewhere in the building, and in winter its wheels would be changed for sleigh runners.

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The house on the English Quay was none too large for the many members of the Blessig family domiciled in it.

On an average there would seem to have been 6 adults and 12 or more children and grandchildren there, with the usual Russian establishment of servants on what might be described as an oriental scale. In accordance with Russian custom, every visitor to the house was offered unstinted hospitality, and housekeeping must have been a formidable business. P.J. Blessig's second wife Emilie Forsch had somewhat delicate health, and there was a governess housekeeper named Mlle. Europaus to relieve her of the burden. Possibly she came from the St. Petersburg establishment which trained and named orphaned and foundling children as housekeepers and governesses with remarkable success.



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## ***Blessig & Co, St Petersburg***

From an early period the firm of Blessig & Co. began to operate on a large scale in the import and export trade, which as previously mentioned, was almost wholly in the hands of foreign merchants. In dealing with Russians much patience and shrewdness was required, and their business methods in that early period were apparently more Oriental than European, but with hard work and good judgment the Western merchants could lay the foundation of a considerable fortune within a very few years. On the Petersburg Exchange P.J Blessig had many useful friends, including Ludwig Stieglitz, b.1778 in Waldeck d.1843 in Petersburg, who came to be regarded as the Rothschild of Russia, engaging annually some 30-35 million roubles in sea-borne commerce and financing the building of cotton-mills etc. Stieglitz was Court Banker to Tsar Alexander I, and was made a Baron in 1826, and his son later financed the building of railways in Russia.

During the months of November to April the port of St. Petersburg was frozen and inaccessible to shipping, and the winter was not an active period for business, although some trade could be done through the ice-free port of Riga. In the winter months young men of the business community did much shooting in the country around Petersburg where game was abundant, woodcock, blackgame, and wildfowl etc, and there were also expeditions after bears and wolves. The famous ice hill toboggan runs erected every winter in and near the city also provided a winter pastime. The summer and autumn months were always the busy periods of the year, and before the building of railways the two days in each week when the mail ships arrived and left the port, called 'post-days' were high-pressure days. But even during these months, professional and businessmen generally managed to get out of the city for weekends to visit their families in the country villas within a few miles of St. Petersburg.

It has been mentioned that P.J Blessig took his son-in-law Friedrich Forsch into partnership in 1814, and about 1818 he took a junior into his firm, named Paul G. Schinckel, who became a partner after P.J. Blessig's death and married in 1844 another of his daughters. Schinckel was aged about 21 when he came to Petersburg from Hamburg. Business prospects in the latter city had suffered a setback some five years previously, when a French army under Marshal Davoust began their occupation of Hamburg by confiscating most of the Bank funds.

P.J Blessig sent Paul Schinckel to Moscow to take charge of a branch of the Firm which had recently been established there under Franz Forsch, younger brother of Friedrich. It appears that Franz Forsch had somewhat unpractical notions of business, and had started a factory in Moscow for dyeing peasants' shirts with the red extract from beetroots, on the theory that

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as the peasants seldom or never washed their shirts the dye should be sufficiently lasting. Schinckel had to close that factory and employ the Firm's resources in more profitable business. At the end of each year Paul Schinckel had to travel the 400 miles from Moscow to Petersburg by sleigh, to present the accounts of the branch to P.J. Blessig. After the death of the latter in 1832, the Moscow branch was closed, and Schinckel returned to business in Hamburg, but about 1837 at the request of Friedrich Forsch he rejoined Blessig & Co. as a partner in Petersburg.

P.J Blessig continued actively in business to the end of his life and was ably supported by his partner Friedrich Forsch and the junior P.G. Schinckel, and in due course the eldest son Wilhelm I Blessig became a partner in the Firm. For a long period of years P.J Blessig was Consul-General in Petersburg for the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg; many foreign merchants in Petersburg who had become Honorary Russian Citizens held such Consular appointments. From 1807 he was also enrolled as a merchant of Reval, owing to his business connection with that port. P.J Blessig died on 30th May 1832, aged 70, and was buried in the new Volkovo cemetery in the southern outskirts of Petersburg. The inscription on his tombstone recorded the great affection in which all the members of his large family held him. In his life he had achieved great success, and was held in high respect by the merchant community of St. Petersburg. He had founded a Firm which was to last for more than 100 years, and he had opened prospects for further success for his sons and grandsons, many of whom worthily responded to those opportunities.

A portrait in oils of Philip Jacob Blessig I, painted near the end of his life, shows him in the high-collared blue coat of the St. Petersburg merchant of his period. The portrait went to his eldest surviving daughter, Emilie Schinckel of Hamburg. A pencil sketch of it was made about 1845, by her artist nephew Alexander Blessig, which remains with Blessig descendants in England.

# A History of the Blessig Family

## ***Emilia Charlotte Forsch***

P.J. Blessig's widow Emilia Charlotte, nee Forsch, died in St. Petersburg on 9th May 1843, aged 52. By his marriage with her there were 9 children, of whom one died in infancy. Numbered serially after the 4 children of his first marriage, with Catharina van Zanten, they were:

- 5) **Carl Blessig**, born 1814, died 1881.
- 6) **Emilie Charlotte Blessig**, born 1816, died 1897.
- 7) **Frederic Johann Blessig**, born 1818, died 1887.
- 8) **Robert Blessig**, born 1819, died 1821.
- 9) **PHILIP JACOB II BLESSIG**, born 1821, died 1904.
- 10) **Sophia Caroline Blessig**, born 1823, died 1856.
- 11) **Elisabeth Blessig**, born 1826, died 1860.
- 12) **Constantin Ernst Blessig**, born 1828, died 1911.
- 13) **Robert Blessig**, born 1830, died 1878.

All the children of Philip Jacob I Blessig received an excellent education in St. Petersburg, Carl, Frederic, and Philip Jacob II, at the Muralt private Academy, and Constantin and Robert at the St. Petri Church School. Carl and Frederic graduated at St. Petersburg University, and Constantin and Robert at Dorpat University in Estonia. The daughters were educated at private boarding schools in St. Petersburg. The children were fluent in several languages. They learned German from their parents, Russian from nurses and friends, and English or French at school. Many of them had musical talent, and a few had some artistic ability.

The history of the 9th child, **PHILIP JACOB II BLESSIG**, founder of the Liverpool family, will first be given. That of his brothers and sisters will be found in Part II.