

PRUSSIA

Frederick I (1701-1713)

Frederick William I (1713-1740)

Frederick II ("the Great") (1740-1786)

Frederick William II (1786-1797)

Frederick William III (1797-1840)

During the late Middle Ages a new state began to take shape in northeastern Europe. This country, later called Prussia, owed its rise to a long series of capable rulers within the Hohenzollern family.

In 1415 the Holy Roman Emperor gave the province of Brandenburg to the Hohenzollerns as a reward for military services. In the 17th century the family obtained lands along the Rhine and the valuable region of East Prussia. In 1701 the elector of Brandenburg was crowned **King Frederick I** of Prussia (once again for military service to the Holy Roman Emperor).

Frederick William I - the second king of Prussia (1713-1740) transformed the country into a militaristic state, tripling the size of the army and making it the most efficient fighting force in Europe. Frederick William I also improved the efficiency of the Prussian government by developing a class of well-trained obedient public servants who had a strong sense of duty to their sovereign. The king was an absolute ruler...

Frederick II (1740-1786) was also an absolute monarch, but he also worked hard to improve the government and the living conditions of his people (he promoted elementary education, had canals extended and marshes drained, fostered industries - especially the manufacture of woolen and linen textiles). As an "enlightened" monarch Frederick II abolished torture in criminal cases, reformed the civil courts, and granted religious toleration to all people in Prussia. In *1740 he began a war with Austria* (ignoring the pledge his father given about respecting the Austrian boundaries and the acknowledgment of Maria Theresa as the sole heir of his dominions). Frederick II claimed the rich province of Silesia. He defeated the Austrians in 1745. At the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle the transfer of Silesia to Prussia was confirmed (1748). The *war of the Austrian Succession* had engaged many countries in Europe (France, Spain, Saxony and Bavaria joined Prussia in the "scramble" for Austrian territory). Only England had sided with Austria, not so much to help Maria Theresa as to oppose France! In the years immediately following the war the European powers switched sides so completely that the realignment has been called the "Diplomatic Revolution". By 1756, France was allied with Russia, Sweden and Austria. England was now siding with Prussia when the conflict known as the *"Seven Years' War"* erupted. The war had already started in 1754 in the North American colonies when the French defeated a force of Virginia militia (under the command of George Washington!). When France and England formally

declared war on each other. 1756 Frederick II attacked Austria. The war went bad for England until 1757. This year William Pitt became Secretary of State and took over direction of strategy. He provided Prussia with large sums of money to be used against France. This plan kept the French occupied in Europe and left England free to attack them on the seas and in the colonies. Pitt's strategy paid off for England while Prussia was left alone to fight the combined forces of Austria, Russia and France in Europe. Frederick II managed to stave off defeat, although not without severe losses. This heroic struggle and his abilities as a ruler has given him the nickname "**Frederick the Great**". At the Treaty of Hubertusburg 1763 Frederick II did not gain additional territory, but he had greatly increased Prussian prestige by his success in war against heavy odds.

The weakness of Poland in the 18th Century greatly interested its neighbors; Russia, Prussia and Austria. In 1772, Frederick the Great convinced Catherine of Russia and Maria Theresa of Austria that Polish territory could be easily seized. The three nations bribed members of the Polish parliament, which approved the *first Polish partition*. The countries took a big part of Poland. It totaled more than one fourth of the country. Even though Prussia saw constant warfare under the reign of Frederick the Great his careful management of the country's finances left the treasury well filled at his death.

Frederick William II (1786-1797) enlarged Prussia further. The partition of Poland continued in 1793 when Russia and Prussia invaded Poland. They forced Poland to repudiate a newly adopted constitution and seized more land in this *second Polish partition*. This caused a national uprising. After an unequal struggle against the forces of Russia and Prussia the insurrection collapsed. In 1795 Russia, Prussia and Austria divided what remained of Poland in the *third Polish partition*. Poland ceased to exist as an independent nation!

Meanwhile Europe had been shaken by the French Revolution (1789) and its most radical phase (1793-1794). In the beginning of the new century a new threat against European peace appeared - Napoleon!

Prussia had participated against France in the *First Coalition 1793* (together with England, Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Sardinia). After no gain Prussia concluded a Peace Treaty in Basel 1795. Prussia remained neutral when new conflicts broke out until **1806** when **Frederick William III** (1797-1840) *joined forces against Napoleon*. The result was a catastrophe! The Prussian army was defeated at the Battle of Jena and the Battle of Auerstedt. At the Peace of Tilsit Prussia lost half of its territory and the rest became a French puppet state. Napoleon never understood the importance of Nationalism.

At first it developed as a movement of resistance against French control. All countries experienced an upsurge of patriotic feelings against the hated French, but it was particularly significant in Germany after 1800. Prussia became the center of this movement. At the University of Berlin the principle Fichte became wellknown for his speeches to "**the German nation**".

After Napoleons ill-fated attack on Russia 1812 Prussia and Russia announced a *War of Liberation*. Austria joined and they defeated Napoleons forces at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1913. In April the year after Napoleon was defeated. Prussia together with England, Austria and Russia signed the first Treaty of Paris. It was a lenient peace aiming for peace instead of a French desire for revenge. This created a "Balance of Power" in Europe.

The *Congress of Vienna* met in *September 1814* and lasted for eight months. In Germany Napoleon had created the "*Confederation of the Rhine*" with 38 states. The Congress of Vienna essentially accepted his work by establishing a German confederation of 39 states. As a safeguard against France Prussia received the Rhineland. The hardest problem was what to do with Poland. Russia wanted to put Poland under Russian domination. Prussia had no objection as long as it received Saxony. Austria and Britain did not agree to this arrangement. Both nations feared it would make Russia too strong and Austria was afraid that the addition of Saxony to Prussia would endanger the Austrian position in the German Confederation, where Austria and Prussia where rivals for influence and prestige. A compromise awarded almost half of Saxony to Prussia and nearly all of Poland to Russia. Even if Poland officially was united with Russia it was granted a liberal constitution and its own separate institutions including an army! Some of the main results of the Vienna Congress for Prussia were;

- Prussia moved westward
- Prussia received a higher number of Catholics
- Prussia became a proto-industrialized country instead of agrarian (this created a unique alliance between agrarian Junkers and the strong men within the growing industries...)

PRUSSIA 1800-1815 (Wikipedia)

During the reign of King Frederick William II (1786–1797), Prussia annexed additional Polish territory through further Partitions of Poland. His successor, Frederick William III (1797–1840), announced the union of the Prussian Lutheran and Reformed churches into one church.

Prussia took a leading part in the French Revolutionary Wars, but remained quiet for more than a decade due to the Peace of Basel of 1795, only to go once more to **war with France in 1806** as negotiations with that country over the allocation of the spheres of influence in Germany failed. **Prussia suffered a devastating defeat against Napoleon Bonaparte's troops in the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt**, leading Frederick William III and his family to flee temporarily to Memel. Under the **Treaties of Tilsit in 1807**, the **state lost about half of its area**, including the areas gained from the second and third Partitions of Poland, which now fell to the Duchy of Warsaw. Beyond that, the king was obliged to make an alliance with France and join the Continental System.

In response to this defeat, reformers such as Stein and Hardenberg set about modernizing the Prussian state. Among their reforms were the liberation of peasants from serfdom, the emancipation of Jews and making full citizens of them, and the institution of self-administration in municipalities. The school system was rearranged, and in 1818 free trade was introduced. The process of army reform ended in 1813 with the introduction of compulsory military service.

After the defeat of Napoleon in Russia, Prussia quit its alliance with France and took part in the Sixth Coalition during the "**Wars of Liberation**" (*Befreiungskriege*) against the French occupation. Prussian troops under Marshal Gebhard Leberecht **von Blücher** contributed crucially in the **Battle of Waterloo of 1815** to the final victory over Napoleon.

Prussia's reward in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna was the **recovery of her lost territories, as well as the whole of the Rhineland, Westphalia, and some other territories**. These western lands were to be of vital importance because they included the Ruhr Area, the centre of Germany's fledgling industrialization, especially in the arms industry. These territorial gains also meant the doubling of Prussia's population. In exchange, **Prussia withdrew from areas of central Poland to allow the creation of Congress Poland under Russian sovereignty**.

Prussia emerged from the Napoleonic Wars as the dominant power in Germany, overshadowing her long-time rival Austria, which had given up the imperial crown in 1806. In 1815 Prussia became part of the German Confederation.