

Häusling<sup>1</sup> Johann Heinrich Grabenhorst, Kriegsheimkehrer aus Amerika  
Excerpt from Watzumer Chronik by Walter Lehman 1998  
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### Johann Heinrich Grabenhorst, War Veteran Returned From America

Very detailed records are available pertaining to the Watzum yarn- and back-basket-dealer Johann Heinrich Grabenhorst. He and one of his brothers were members of that army of 4,330 men that the State of Brunswick<sup>2</sup> summoned to fulfill a subsidies agreement with England in the North American War of Independence (1776–1783). Only through the revenues from these inglorious transactions under Duke Carl Wilhelm Ferdinand was the State of Brunswick, suffering at that time under unsound management of the state finances, saved from bankruptcy.

Presumably the Grabenhorst brothers originated from farm ... no.<sup>3</sup> 44. Their father, Jacob Grabenhorst, had died in 1774, and the farm was *“in court administration because of debt.”*<sup>3</sup> None of the children felt in a position to take over the farm at first. In 1784 *“two discharged musketeers, the Grabenhorst brothers of Watzum, were granted”* a permit to open a yarn business there *“under certain conditions.”*<sup>4</sup> Four years later, Johann Heinrich Grabenhorst appealed to *“His Serene Highness the Duke, his most gracious Prince and Lord,”* with the request that he *“most mercifully waive the contribution from the most graciously bestowed yarn dealership, and also permit a small back-basket<sup>4</sup> dealership.”*<sup>5</sup>

In his statement of grounds, he writes: *“The yarn business in this small village of Watzum is very meager, all the more so because the yarn buyer Strümpel from Schöppenstedt, who used to live here and therefore knows many people, often goes around here and buys up the yarn.”*

Furthermore, he bewailed additional demands for contributions from the local court in Watzum as well as the loss of his *“best physical powers in the military campaign in America,”* which made him “unfit for hard tasks.”

*“...I most humbly ask Your Serene Ducal Highness to graciously grant me permission to run a small back-basket dealership, so that I can better make ends meet. I will honor this most gracious concession with humblest thanks and remain in deepest devotion until death*

*Your Serene Ducal Highness’s*

*most humble servant*

*June 12, 1788*

*Johann Heinrich Grabenhorst*

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<sup>1</sup> *Häusling* (= *Häusler*) was a social class, a villager who owns a small house and garden but not a full-size farm, and therefore must earn his living from a small business or trade or by performing day labor.

<sup>2</sup> Braunschweig in German

<sup>3</sup> probably the number on a tax roll, but I can’t verify the first part of the abbreviation *Assnr.*

<sup>4</sup> *Hucke* (= *Hocke*), a basket designed for carrying things on one’s back.

## *Häusling in Watzum*

In August 1879 his petition was underpinned with another:

*“I own nothing of my own from which I can earn a living other than my personal diligence and industriousness; and much as I wanted to earn my bread as a day laborer, a wound that I sustained while in the service of Your Highness in America made me almost completely unfit to work for day wages.*

*When I received my discharge after returning from America, I, like the other discharged servicemen at the time, was assured that instead of a pension I would be permitted to ply a trade of my choice in this country, without anyone’s hindering me from doing so.*

*In reliance on this assurance, I started a small rural business with the few most essential victuals but I was not able to continue with it, or, threatened by the shopkeepers of Scheppenstedt, I at least believed I would not be able to continue, without having received a valid permit to do so.”*

In the course of the review of the case, in which Johann Heinrich Grabenhorst argued that he had “received gracious permission orally from Your Serene Ducal Highness in the previous year, shortly before the feast day of St. John, in the Lecheln forest,” manor lord Hecht, after assuming his new official post in Watzum, turned to the ducal authorities in October 1789 to bring the still unresolved legal situation to a satisfactory conclusion.

Whether Johann Heinrich Grabenhorst’s petition was finally granted is unknown. The decidedly servile approach can only be explained by his special plight, but it casts a light on the inadequacy of social welfare assistance in those days, as well as on the aloofness of the governing powers from the everyday life and way of thinking of ordinary people.

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<sup>3</sup> Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel, Kontributionsbeschreibung [description of contributions] 1778; 74 Abt. [section] 1, p. 434 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel; 10 Alt 8

<sup>5</sup> Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel; 10 Alt 8