This number of the Woolf Call is devoted largely to the Number One American in Woolf Family History. Perhaps there is no prominent member of our family whom we have studied so much, and about whom we know so little. Even some of the little we have supposed we knew is now under question. What was his name? What brought him to America? When did he come? What were the circumstances that brought him?

4 generations have sought the answer to these questions. We may also ask what has conspired to keep the answers to these simple basic questions from coming to light. Is our lack of knowledge a natural result of the times in which he lived—a time when old government was dying & a new resurgent one was boiling up under foot, not yet well enough established to have found itself, or was the concealment deliberate.

It is not difficult to understand & that if our ancestors were a Hessian soldier & deserted from enforced service, in order to espouse the cause of freedom, there would be some precautionary wisdom in the concealment of his identity, lest by any chance his cause should not prosper & he be called to face a military tribunal to account for his absence.

One fact we know about our ancestor is that he became a land owner, was naturalized 27 Jan 1797, in New York as Anthony Woolf & certified at that time, that he had resided at least 2 years in the United States & one year in the State of New York. At the time of his naturalization, he was 36 years of age. There are some who think he might have been in Germany as late as 1783 to receive an honorable discharge from the German Army. Tradition, however, says he was either 16 or 18 when pressed into service, in which case he would have come to America in 1777 or 1779.

When naturalized, he gave his residence as Morrisiania, Westchester, New York. Morrisiania is said to be the 3000 acre estate of Lewis Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Tradition has it that when this young man deserted, he swam the Harlam River in full uniform under fire & landed on the estate of Lewis Morris, who befriended him & later helped him to buy a farm.

He married Phebe Weeks, who was born in New York 127 May 1765. To them were born Elizabeth, Ann, Abigail, Sarah, James, Hannah, Andrew & John Anthony. The latter, the youngest was born 31 July 1805. The father at that time would have been 44 years of age. John Anthony joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New York in 1841, at which time his father, if living would have been 80 years old. John Anthony’s oldest child Absalom, born in 1832, would have been 9 years old, & his youngest child John Anthony II, born in 1843, was not yet born. Since the John Anthony Woolf family migrated to Utah in 1847, after having spent some time previously in Nauvoo, it is apparent, if we allow the usual amount of estrangement between members of a family joining the Church & the rest of the family, that the children of John Anthony were not too well acquainted, the children were too young to note or remember anything but the most apparent things about their grandparents.

Thus, it is that the western branch of the family, most of them Mormons, & many of them devout genealogists, know all too little about the first American ancestor, in spite of four generations of research. This issue of the Woolf Call focuses attention on Anthony Woolf, our first American Ancestor in the Woolf line, & calls attention to some extensive & exhaustive research on Anthony Woolf, to whom we are all greatly indebted & to whom we offer our
gratitude & affection. May the search continue & may it prosper in order that we may better know & thereby more greatly honor our first American Ancestor.

ANTHONY WOOLF  THE HESSIAN SOLDIER

The following paragraphs appear in a book entitled “Westchester County & its people” by Ernest (L, T, or F) Griffin Vol. I. To those who have studied the life of the above, the following is a startling revelation.

If Griffin is correct, Von Frank’s conclusion was incorrect, & we should spare no effort to search the British Army Records of Hessian enlistments. No effort should be spared to disprove or confirm the statements made by Mr. Griffin.

Nephi 24 Feb. 1856
Dear Son & Daughter,

I now take my pen to inform you of the death of our little boy, (to Homer Brown), William Henry. He died on 21 at 7 a.m. We mourn his loss. When we count up to see if all are here at mealtime, we feel so sorrowful when we see his place at the table vacant, but we feel to say the will of the Lord be done.

The little girls are better; the rest of us are all as well as usual. I received the letter that you sent by Brother Meeks, written by your brother as to grain in this place.

The people are alarmed. They hear of the hard times all around. Abraham Boswell is here & says that there is much want of bread in Manti. Brother Swiggins? Is here buying corn at $2.00 a bushel-cash for same.

Brethren in Springville & I actually believe that there is not more than enough to bread the inhabitants of this place, but still I believe that a few bushels might be bought for cash. There is a tinner here who is getting a number of bushels for tin.

While I was writing I received a letter from you stating that you had got home safe.

Your Father & Friend,

J. A. Woolf

(Identifying the Ancestors of John Anthony Woolf & His Wife, Sarah Ann Devoe—Anyone having additional information-send it to the family to help identify them)

ANTHONY WOOLF’S GRAVE

While visiting New York to do genealogical research, cousins Lois Rasmussen & Mary Mays called on a cousin, John Anthony Woolf (probably a grandson of James Anderson Woolf). From John Anthony they learned that Anthony Woolf, the Hessian soldier & first member of the Woolf family to come to America, was buried in the graveyard of St. John’s Church, Saw Mill River Road, Yonkers, New York.

Keeping this mind, after their return they prevailed on Cousin Rodney Fenton Waite, who lives in Cal. But makes frequent business trips to New York, to look further into the matter of Anthony’s grave. He visited Yonkers, called at St. John’s Church, and found Anthony’s grave and photographed it. The grave is run down and neglected, hence the inscription on the headstone is weathered and difficult to read. As nearly as Rodney could make out, it reads:

In MEMORY OF ANTHONY WOOLF
Who departed this life  Oct. 1, 1829  Age 67 Y 10 Mo 12 days
Lois and Mary have also learned that Phebe Weeks, Anthony’s wife, was buried in the cemetery of the Fordham Manor Reformed Dutch Church, 2703 Reservoir Ave., Bronx 68, New York, and that subsequent to her burial a new church building as constructed on the burial site before which the graves occupying the site were moved to Kensico, near Valhala, New York.

It has been suggested that the family org. also arrange to have the remains transferred to the St. John’s burial ground adjacent to the grave of Anthony. It so happens that the lot in which Anthony is buried has places for 12 graves, only 6 of which are occupied, thus leaving room for 6 more.

Orilla Woolf, Granddaughter of John Anthony Woolf I, used to tell of often having held a candle for her grandfather when after a long day’s work in the fields, he would cut wooden pegs by candle light for nailing soles to shoes.

ANTHONY WOOLF  The Woolf family has tried to trace the ancestry of Anthony Woolf, the Hessian soldier who, after the Revolution, remained in America, married an American girl, Phebe Weeks, became a substantial landholder, a respected citizen, & the father of a large family in Pelham, New York.

It was the youngest member of this family, John Anthony Woolf, who, after marrying Sarah Ann DeVoe, the daughter of a French Hugenot Family, listened to the teachings of the Mormon Elders, & in 1841 joined the Mormon Church.

John Anthony & his wife & their then 6 children migrated westward. Established their home in Nauvoo, Ill. Driven from Nauvoo by mobocrats, the family continues westward in 1846, spending the winter of 46-47 on the Missouri River at Winter Quarters, Neb. They continued westward in 1847 arriving in Oct. At the settlement that has become Salt Lake City. They became the parents of 12 children. 107 grandchildren. The total number of descendants approximates 8,000 persons, as estimated 7,000 still living.

Typed into computer 14 Oct 2002 Kathleen Jardine Woolf Idaho Falls, Id. A lot of duplication, but the info. Needs to be saved. Hopefully we can learn more.
ANTHONY WOOLF  By Mary Mays

Presented at Hyde Park, Utah 15 Aug. 1959

In order to present a clear picture of our Genealogical problems, we must first make sure we know exactly which ancestor we are talking about. So suppose you get your pedigree chart out. Is the earliest known Woolf ancestor on your chart given as John Anthony Wool I, born 11 Nov. 1761, in Mainz, Germany? If so, you have it written the way most of the Woolf descendants do, except maybe those who have been in Woolf Howls. They may have changed it because of evidence indicating he was known all through his lifetime in the United States only as Anthony Woolf, not John Anthony (except in Utah). Here is a list of vital records in New York which gave his name only as Anthony.
1. His application for citizenship into the United States. Surely such an occasion he would have given his full name. This paper was reproduced in full in the No. 2 issue of Woolf Call.
2. His tombstone-reads “Anthony Woolf, died (as nearly as the date can be made out) 1 Oct 1829, age 67 years, 10 mo. 12 days”
3. His wife’s tombstone reads “Phebe widow of Anthony”.
4. The Census Records, both for 1790 & 1800 lists him as Anthony Woolf.
5. 5 different deeds & mortgages, all give him as Anthony.
6. Maps of New York City showing his lot, lists him as A. Woolf
7. The baptism record of his children gave their father as “Anthony”.
8. His will-where he designates himself as “Anthony Woolf”.
9. Inventory of the estate of Abel Weeks shows a note made to Anthony Woolf.

In all the records that have been found in the East, from descendants of 2 different sons, not once is he given as “John Anthony”. You naturally wonder why the Utah Woolfs appended the name John. It is natural to assume that most some know the full name of their fathers. In the Patriarchal blessing of John Anthony (the only son who joined the Church & came west) he gave his father’s name as John Anthony Woolf. This is the only record we have been able to find where this son gave his father’s name. It is also written John Anthony in the Woolf Temple Record book compiled by John Anthony II, known as “Uncle John”, a grandson of Anthony. But neither of these evidences constitutes a “primary source”, which is a “record of an event or circumstance made by an eye witness or someone closely connected with the event, recorded at or near the time of the event,” by himself or someone closely connected. Whether you are convinced enough to change your records is up to you, but from here on in this report will be referred to only Anthony.

Next a word about the way we spell Woolf. Those who have been to Germany know that the Germans spell it “Wolff”, it is the Dutch who spell it “Woolf”. Why did a German adopt the Dutch spelling? Because New York was predominantly Dutch–originally named New Amsterdam. Our ancestor may have adopted the Dutch spelling because the recorders were Dutch & wrote it that way, or because that was the popular way to spell it, or because he wanted to Americanize it, or even disguise it a little by changing from Anton Wolff to Anthony Woolf.

We have taken considerable time & space in dealing with the name because there are quite a few who still feel it should be written John Anthony Woolf, & that any records pertaining to an Anton Wolff probably do not pertain to our ancestor, & we feel it is important that you have all the facts available so you may make your own records as nearly right as it is possible to make them.
Next we present a report of research that has been done in the military & church records in Germany, including the record of an Anton Wolff, a soldier from Heese, born in 1761 in Mainz, a son of John Jakob Wolff—a wine merchant & horse racer. This Anton was christened Peter Anton, but he followed the prevalent German custom of dropping the first name & using only the second or middle name, & was named in the military records & in his father’s will only as Anton. We will also consider whether this Anton could be our ancestor.

The Woolf family tradition tells how Anthony Woolf was taken while a young man from his home in Mainz, Germany & pressed into the Hessian Service in a regiment loaned to the British to fight against the Americans in the Revolution. He deserted, so the story goes, swam the Harlem River in full uniform under fire & landed on the Devoe farm with a bullet hole in his knapsack, & joined the American forces.

All those who have done any research on this line have started with this story, assuming it to be true, since there has been no known reason to doubt it. Up to the present time there is no absolute proof either that the tradition is true or false.

The earliest known research was done by Phyllis Scholes. All research in New York failed to reveal the names of Anthony’s parents. His tombstone gives his date of death 1 Oct. 1829 & his age at death as 67 years, 10 months & 12 days, which would have him born on 19 Nov. 1761 instead of 11 Nov. As we have always believed.

Since Anthony Woolf was supposed to have been in the Hessian Service, Sister Scholes then engaged a researcher to search the records of the Hessian Army. She received the following report from the State Archives in Marburg:

“Hessian soldiers did not enlist personally for the American War: the Count of Hessen-Kassel loaned several of his regiments to Great Britain. The Hessen-Kassel regiment took entries each spring of all soldiers, giving name, age, years of service, height & place of birth. Some have not been preserved, those preserved are in the archives & were searched. Your ancestor was not found among them.”

Also monthly lists were kept of each division, giving transfers, desertions, etc., but some were missing. The regiments assigned for the American-English war in 1776 consisted mostly of Hessian citizens, most of whom returned to their homeland. No record of our ancestor could be found on these lists.

Later Lois Rasmussen took up the search, & hired a researcher in Austria by the name of Karl Von Frank, to search the Hessian Military records. He began by searching among other places, the State Archives in Wurzburg, Germany. In the personal files of the Electorate (highest authority) of Mainz, dealing with illegal enlistments, etc., was found a note, which read in part: “Upon the request of the Lord Stewart of Mainz, Anton Wolff was discharged from the Imperial & Royal Armed Services.” The office of the Commanding General in Hungary, where Anton was serving at the time was ordered to discharge him under date of August 9, 1783.

This indicated a search of the Kreigsarchiv Wien (War Archives, Vienna). Here they located the Muster Rolls of the Cuirassier Regiment de Vahera, dated 16 Aug. 1783, which showed that a private Anton Wolff, (the only person by that name in the whole regiment) age 22 (which would make him born in 1761) a Roman Catholic, unmarried, a bookbinder by profession, born in Mainz, enrolled on the 12 April 1778. In the muster rolls of the same squadron, dated 24 Aug. 1788, it is stated that according to the order of the Office of the Commanding General, dated 19 Aug 1783, this Anton Wolff was honorably discharged by the end of Sep. 1783. This discharge was ordered upon a petition of his parents, & was
recommended by the Elector of Mainz. The regiment didn’t object, because of his weakness of constitution, & since he had no liking for the military profession. He was granted a special favor in not having to provide or pay a substitute to serve in his place, indicating the family was not without some influence. It also stated that the father’s name was Jacob Wolff, a citizen & wine merchant of Mainz.

Now that the father’s name had been found, a search was made of all the church registers of all the parishes of Mainz, & all Wolff entries for the time in question were extracted. This search turned up the surprising fact that there were 2 Jacob Wolffs with families in Mainz & that both were wine merchants, & both had married twice.

The first Jacob Wolff had 14 children, but none of them had either a first or middle name of Anton. The second Jacob Wolff was a horse racer besides being a wine merchant. (Horsemanship seems to run in the Woolf family). He had 10 children among them was Peter Anton, born 17 Sep. 1761 in Mainz. Apparently he had dropped his first name by the time he enlisted, or perhaps it was never used. It is a very common practice in German records will know

According to Mr. Von Frank, this is only person by the name of Anton Wolff, born in Mainz during this period.

According to Mr. Von Frank, this is the only person by the name of Anton Wolff, born in Mainz during this period.

Further research in the town records of Mainz revealed the will of Jacob Wolff & his wife, dated 15 March 1791, in which they named their 5 living children, Barbara, by marriage Wieland, Anna Rosina, by marriage Beringer, Anton, Michael & Heinrich. The father died on the 28 Nov. 1795 & when the estate was settled, a procurator was appointed for the son Anton who was absent. (Probably in a foreign country or he would have been summoned.) Our ancestor Anthony is listed in the American Census of 1790 as living in New York, so he would have been gone from Germany at least 5 years by the time of his father’s death.

Further research showed that Anthony’s father Jacob Wolff was a native of Zornheim Therefore the parish records at Zornheim were searched & it was found that the father had been christened Johann Jacob, & was born 10 Dec. 1721, son of Wilhelm Wolff & Barbara Brodtman. So Anthony’s father had also dropped his first name. Also note that his first name was John. It could be possible that John Anthony Woolf was told by his father that he (John) was named for his grandfather & perhaps JAW knew that his father had dropped his first name in Germany & assumed it was John.

At any rate the data on this Peter Anton coincides with our family tradition in 2 says: 1 He was born in 1761 in Mainz, Germany, and 2. He was a Hessian & in the German Army.

It appears to disagree with it in the colorful parts about his being forced into the service of the British, deserting & joining the American forces, etc. The difference in birth dates is not significant since we ourselves have 2 dates & are not quite sure which one is right.

The only way we know to absolutely prove whether Peter Anton is our ancestor is to find a passport, or shipping list or some proof of the exact time he came to America. If he was here before the war ended in 1783 he could not be the Anton in the German Army in Sepo. 1783. If he did not come until after 1783, he could not have fought in the revolution as our tradition says our Anthony did. We know there was a Private Anthony Wolfe (English spelling) in New York in Col. Morris Graham’s Regiment in 1780. But so far we have been unable to obtain any information concerning where & when he was born, who his parents were, etc. This needs to be
investigated by a professional in Military Records. Also our deceased cousin, John Anthony Woolf in New York City, left a wealth of material which very likely has many leads which would be valuable if they could be examined. And it might be if the right person were to approach his widow or her son in the right way they could be obtained, or at least studied. This seems to be a promising possibility, but it would require someone with genealogical know-how to interpret what is there, & the personality to win the confidence of our New York cousins. This permission was denied the Genealogical Society when they requested it, but possibly a new approach could be made that would be more appealing to our cousins in their eastern environment.