

# The History and Memory of the Marburg Uprising of 1809 and the Napoleonic Wars in Hessen

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## Abstract

In 1809 a small band of men tried unsuccessfully to overthrow the French occupation forces in Marburg, a provincial university city in what is now the state of Hessen, in Germany. They were imprisoned, tried, and executed. Approximately 100 years later, a monument was erected in the city in their honor. Our project asked why this monument appeared when it did, which social groups were involved in its creation, and what role the monument played in the landscape of historical commemoration in the city. Building on what is now a vast literature in German history on the “history of memory,” we asked what role did this story and its commemoration play in the construction of local and national identity in the region. We did our research in Marburg in the state archives and university library using primary source documents, such as newspaper articles, city records, and the papers of the regional and local historical Hessen society. We found that the memory of other historical developments played a more prominent role in historical consciousness and local identity of the elite of the city (such as the history of St. Elizabeth, the prominence of the *Landgraf* or the duke in the medieval and early modern period, and the accomplishments of the romantic literary figures the Brothers Grimm). Still, the memory of the uprising did play a role in the historical landscape that framed local and national identity in Marburg. The monument, which appeared at the turn of the city, became one of many ways that the local elite tried to anchor the history and identity of Marburg and Hessen within that of the Prussian-dominated new German Empire. We also used a comparative approach in our study, contrasting the history of the memory of this event in Marburg with that of Kassel, the capital city Kur-Hessen, the kingdom and then state to which Marburg belonged. We used the changing political contexts to explain why the event had different public significance at different periods of times in these two cities.

## Research Questions

1. How was this story remembered?
2. Which groups were involved in the commemoration?
3. Was the story of the Napoleonic wars in general a part of the local landscape of commemoration? If so, when and why did people focus on the Marburg Aufstand (uprising) as part of that memory?
4. Why was there a different history of commemoration in Kassel, Marburg, and then much later Ockershausen?

## Primary Sources and Historical Documents

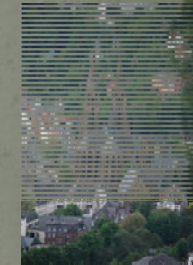
- Articles from the *Oberhessische Zeitung*
  - Records from the Hessen History Association (Kassel and Marburg branches)
  - Journal Articles from the Hessen History Association
  - Marburg city records
- (All sources were in German, some were in 19<sup>th</sup> century *Fraktur* print, Handwritten sources were in old German script)

## Research Process

The research was coupled with my study abroad semester in Marburg, Germany. It was done in Marburg at the state archive and Phillip’s University library. At the Archive we studied primary source documents, such as documents from the history association and public records from the city. At the University library we found microfilm copies of the *Oberhessische Zeitung* which was the primary newspaper in Marburg during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In addition to primary source document research at the archive and library, I studied the monuments to the uprising that were created to commemorate the event. This research project utilized my advanced German language skills.

## Conclusions

- The Story was remembered as a regional “Hessisch” event and was commemorated with a plaque to Andreas Emmerich and a stone dedicated to those who lost their lives.
- The Hessen History Association led the commemoration and was supported by Hessen members of the German Military such as General Pentz and local Marburg dignitaries like the Mayor of Marburg at the time.
- The event was used to connect the local/regional identity of Hessen to the broader German National Identity
- The event was first commemorated in Kassel because the leaders of the uprising were executed in Kassel
- Kassel was also the seat of the Kurfurst or “Prince Elector of Hessen” in addition to the capital of Jerome’s Kingdom of Westphalia.
- Furthermore the uprising was used to discredit the French rule and re-legitimize the rule of the Kurfurst in Kassel.
- The Uprising was relegated to a much smaller role in Marburg identity until 1904-1910.
- Generally only referred to by History professors and the History association except on major anniversaries.
- The uprising is a small part of the landscape of public memory in Marburg which is dominated by St. Elizabeth, the Landgraf, and the Grimm Brothers.
- The Uprising is important to Ockershausen as it is one of the few major events that happened in and around Ockershausen in its almost 800 years as a village.



## Historical context

- The Napoleonic Occupation of Germany stretched from 1806 until Napoleon’s final defeat in 1815.
- In 1807 Napoleon created the Kingdom of Westphalia which included the electorate of Hesse, the electorate of Hanover and several other German territories.
- Napoleon’s brother Jerome was king of the Kingdom of Westphalia.
- In 1809 a small band of Hessen officers and their followers rose up against the French forces occupying Marburg. They were defeated and the leaders were imprisoned and executed in Kassel, the capital of Westphalia.
- The 1809 Marburg Uprising was preceded by another failed uprising against the French in 1806.
- The uprising was part of a series of revolts against Napoleon including more famous examples such as Schill’s Revolution and the Domburg Uprising which also aimed at toppling Jerome Bonaparte’s rule in Westphalia.
- Following the battle of Leipzig in 1813, in which the French forces are driven out of the German states, the Kurfurst of Hessen was restored to power.

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- Kassel
- Marburg
- Ockershausen