Family research in Schleswig-Holstein - in Germany or in Denmark?

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On contact with American friends of genealogy searching in North-Germany, sometimes the question appears, whether their ancestors from Schleswig-Holstein, e.g. in 1840 or earlier, had been Germans or Danes and whether they should not better address their inquiries to Danish public bodies?

The exact history of Schleswig-Holstein as well as of Germany is very complex and can't be ventilated closer here. On the other hand I will try not to simplify too much with the following...

Still under Charlemagne (748-814 A.D.) the border between Denmark and the 'Francia/Roman Empire' was determined to a line going from Husum at the North Sea to Kiel at the Baltic Sea, marked by the small rivers of Eider and Treene.

The dukedom of Schleswig, north of that line, was a fief of the Danish Crown; the county of Holstein (south of it, dukedom since 1460 A.D.) a fief of the Kaiser of the 'German/Roman Reich' given in 1110 to the count of Schaumburg. He had his origin from the region of river Weser; towns like Bückeburg and Stadthagen.

Over a short time both principalities had been united under the 'Schauenburger', when in 1386 the duchy Schleswig was given to them by the Danish King for fief as well.
At this time the border at river Eider had played a secondary role, especially because of a general immigration from Westphalia, Netherlands and other German regions up to the North, in the context of Hanseatic development, first to the town of Lübeck in Holstein but to Flensburg (Danish, not Hanseatic!) in Schleswig as well.

The 'Schauenburger' ceased and in 1460 King Christian I. from Denmark, a nephew of the last Count Adolph VIII. of Schaumburg, was elected for duke of both the countries - by the knights and barons of Schleswig and Holstein!
In a personal union he was King of Denmark and now as well Duke of Holstein, which formally and juridically still was part of the 'Holy Roman Empire of German Nations'.
As Duke of Holstein he ranked among the German princes of the empire.
There was a similar personal union when in according to succession in 1714 the Prince-elector (Kurfürst) of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, Georg-Ludwig, was crowned in London as King George I. of Great Britain (he had difficulties to learn English, he preferred to speak German and French...).

The people in Schleswig and Holstein had been Saxons and spoke German, in northern regions mixed with Danish words, particularly they spoke Low German. This was the lingua franca of trade and old Hansa in North Europe. In this language old documents were written in German speaking regions, by way of example in Flensburg or in the towns of Schleswig or Lübeck; earliest church-books since around 1600 written in High German.
In the duchy of Schleswig Jutish-Danish legislation was obtained, in Holstein it was Roman-Salic. In the Danish-German area of border of today there is as well as in earlier times an overlapping language border; now adjusted with treaties for minorities on both sides.

For the people in Schleswig-Holstein it was without importance who ruled over them, they knew they were subjects - of a count or a duke - spoke German and didn't hunger for a national sentiment but more for their daily bread.
After all nobody felt like a subject of a German King or Kaiser - repeatedly experienced by traveling merchants with their goods when they had to pay customs several times - not for the Kaiser! - going through that many little territories of the German Empire.

For most of the common people lived in the countryside, couldn't read and write up to 17th century and so it was easy for the parsons to represent the system in place as given by God and possibly referring to the landlord in the matter of daily law.

The Kaiser was more an aloof person, similar to the Pope.

Only when in the beginning of the 19th century, with the arousing of national consciousness in Germany, the question for Danish or German identity occurred and finally plans for the incorporation of the duchy Schleswig into the Danish Kingdom and even introduction of Danish language in office and school became acquainted, it came to a revolt in Kiel in 1848 and later to the German-Danish War, which ended with segregation of whole Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark into the German Reich in 1866.

In the geographic area of Holstein there was located the **Principality Lübeck** (Fürstentum Lübeck, proceeded out of an old estate of the bishop of the town Lübeck) with the residence in Eutin since 1803, reigned in personal union by the dukes of Oldenburg, near to Bremen.

Duchy Lauenburg (Herzogtum Lauenburg) as well located in Holstein area (residences in Ratzeburg and Lauenburg) was reigned since 1689 in personal union by the Prince-elector of Braunschweig-Lüneburg and since 1814 by the King of Denmark, up to 1864.

The **town of Lübeck**, also located geographically in Holstein, had been always a free town (freie Reichsstadt) and virtually was a subject of the Kaiser, to whom they paid directly in exchange for their independence and peace of mind. The Hanseatic City of Lübeck in former centuries campaigned some times against the princes of Holstein and the Kingdom of Denmark.

For the family researcher in the area of Schleswig-Holstein I roughly can give some hints.

The source for church books to be find in some regional church archives spread over Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Hamburg, go to:
http://www.archivnordkirche.de/index.php/Kirchenkreisarchive.html
(with email-address, to ask for a single parish or any research and mention of collections (Bestände) of church-books; chargeable search)

Concerning census, documents, official registers etc. in Schleswig-Holstein you may make a find in
Landesarchiv Schleswig [LAS, archive of the Federal State of Schleswig-Holstein]
https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/Landesregierung/LASH/lash_node.html

Stadtarchiv Lübeck or *Archiv der Hansestadt Lübeck* [AHL, archive of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck]
http://archiv.luebeck.de/ (they have a contract with ancestry.com for registry office, census a.s.o.)

An important archive for this special region of border
Landesarchiv für Nordschleswig or Landsarkivet or *Rigsarkivet in Aabenraa*, Denmark [Danish archive for North Schleswig and South Jutland, email-contact in English surely possible]
Church books of Danish parishes and census to be find here:
   https://www.sa.dk/da/brug-arkivet/besoeg-en-laesesal/rigsarkivets-laesesal-aabenraa/

They all do research only reserved, for a fee and sometimes after months (few staff).

For census of SH:
www.akvz.de and https://www.aggsh.de/german/projects/vz/
in Denmark: http://www.ddd.dda.dk/kiplink_en.htm

A helpful sites as well http://www.rootdigger.de/   www.kartenmeister.com