

Tracking Western Lehigh County Ancestry

By Dr. Don Yoder, the foremost living scholar of the Pennsylvania Dutch

Editor's note: Dr. Don Yoder passed away in August 2015.



New Goshenhoppen Lutheran Church in Montgomery County, the so-called "Six Cornered Church." pictured to the left.

Delong Ancestry

In tracking and charting the ancestry of my father, Jacob H. Yoder (1883-1959), a native of Schuylkill County, I was delighted to discover that most of his 18th-century emigrant ancestors on arriving in the American "Promised Land," had settled in what is now Lehigh County. The main exceptions were the Yoders, Swiss-Palatine emigrants of 1709-1710, who settled on their William Penn grant in the Oley Valley of Berks County in 1714, and the Delongs (his grandmother's family) originally

Hudson Valley Netherlanders (Holland Dutch) who migrated in 1738 to Maxatawny Township, Berks County. There Pyeter deLangh (as he spelled his name in Netherlandic fashion) founded the Delong Reformed Church at Bowers near Kutztown, and headed a vast progeny that included many Reformed pastors, college and seminary professors, and other scholars. And of course through my Delong network I am a kinsman of Carl D. Snyder, whose mother, Anna, was a Delong.

All the rest of my father's ancestors settled in the Western townships of Lehigh County – from Lynn and Heidelberg in the North to the Milfords and Macungies and Saucons in the South. I count as ancestral places of worship the historic country churches of Ebenezer, New Tripoli, Heidelberg, Jordan (Lutheran and Reformed), Weisenberg, Lowhill,

Zionsville (Lutheran and Reformed), the Blue Church of Upper Saucon, and especially the Lehigh Zion Church in the fields outside of Alburtis.

My forbears in the "far North" include the Krausses of Heidelberg, and the Beissels of Lynn. The Krausses, with their kinfolk the Handwerks, appear first in the records of New Goshenhoppen Lutheran Church in Montgomery County, the so-called "Six Cornered Church."

Klotz Ancestry

A Krauss daughter named Veronica married Johannes Klotz (1743-1796) of the Jordan Lutheran Church, and they have been assumed to be the parents of my great-great-grandmother, Magdalena Klotz Maurer (1784-1876), wife of Johannes Maurer (1783-1854), proprietor of the woolen mill in Mahantongo Valley. I am not completely convinced of this connection, since there were other Klotz families in the nearby townships. Magdalena's Taufschein (if it turns up) or the Johannes Klotz Bible (who has it?) would settle the question. I'd be happy if it is so, or that would make Magdalena Maurer the aunt of the most distinguished (and most interesting) of the Lehigh Valley Klotzes – Col. Robert Klotz (1819-1895) of Mauch Chunk, who was an officer in both the Mexican War and Civil War, and pioneered in Kansas during the slavery agitation (1854-1857), where he was one of the founders of the city of Topeka. Returning to Carbon County, he served several terms as a Member of Congress, 1879-1883. Will Klotz genealogists please get in touch with me to settle these questions?

Beissel Ancestry

My Beissel ancestry also has some question marks. Peter Beissel was a Reformed elder and member of the building committee of the original Ebenezer Church at New Tripoli in 1761, and later appears in the Lowhill records. Was he the father of my revolutionary ancestor Jacob Beisel (1759-1827) who first appears as godfather at a baptism at the Longswamp Church in 1779, also later in the Lehigh Zion Church books. But in 1785 he moved to Oxford Township, Chester County (why this totally English area?) and farmed there until 1805 when he moved north and settled in the Mahantongo area, where he joined his wife's relatives, the Wagners, Maurers, and Reinerts.

To complicate the picture, it appears that there were several emigrant Peter Beissels in the 18th century. One of these is documented in the Dryland (Hecktown) area of Northampton County, who had a son Jacob (not my ancestor), whose revolutionary war service my Mahantongo Beissel cousins have all erroneously appropriated in their DAR applications! (I haven't told them this yet!) So, friends, if any of my Lehigh County kinsmen are working on the Beissels and can help me, please correspond!

I did make a major breakthrough on the Lehigh County Klotz Family, however.

The old reliable History of the Counties of Lehigh and Carbon, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1884), states, under Lowhill Township (p. 289), that "Jacob Klotz, the ancestor of the Klotzes of Lowhill, emigrated from Germany with his wife, who was born in Uteloch". After searching in every German gazetteer I could locate for the mysterious place name "Uteloch," I finally realized it might have been a misreading of "Huttenloch" in Württemberg, a recognized place name that produced the surnames "Huttenloch" and Huttenlocher." The whole thing came to a happy conclusion when I found the answer in the monograph, Emigrants from Eppingen to America in the 18th and 19th Centuries, compiled by Annette K. Burgert from the local Ortssippenbuch. In this source I found – to my complete astonishment! – the marriage record of Jacob Klotz, a 22 year old tailor from Kleinsachsenheim, to Maria Elisabetha Huttenloch of Ötisheim, on April 25, 1738. They had decided to get married before proceeding down the Rhine to Rotterdam, which they did and arrived at Philadelphia on the English ship Nancy, September 20, 1738. It appears from this, that the wife's name, Huttenloch, was erroneously thought to be the place name of her origin.

Alas, even some of my 19th-century Lehigh County kinsmen, when interviewed for the 1884 county history, evidently could not read German script very well anymore! The villages, Kleinsachsenheim and Ötisheim, are situated in the Kraichgau in Baden-Württemberg, near the historic court and market town of Sinsheim. I will be tracking both the Klotz and Huttenloch families on my next visit to Baden-Württemberg, later this year. Be patient, Klotz kinsmen!



Colonel Robert Klotz (1819-1895) pictured to the left.

Heppler Ancestry

My ancestry in the southwestern parts of Lehigh County include my father's mother's Freindchaft – the Swabian Hepplers (Hepler in Germany), whom I finally, after forty years search, identified in the town of Vaihingen on the Enz River near Stuttgart. The emigrant, Caspar Heppler (1713-1769) came over in 1748 and settled in the Hosensack Valley of (then) Upper Milford Township. The next signer on the ship list after Caspar was Bartholomew Scheible, 19 years old, who turned out to be of teenage brother of Caspar Heppler's wife, Susanna Scheible of Lomersheim.

In preparation for emigration, Caspar Heppler sold his town property and his vineyards. The deeds of sale are still extant in the Vaihingen Town archives, and they state that the buyer had to furnish a bottle of good Swabian wine for the signing ceremony! Caspar was a tailor by trade – his father was the master of the Tailors' Guild of Vaihingen, with 25 tailors under his charge. From these emigration records it appears that there was something out of order physically with the emigrant. The documents state, for instance, that he was relieved of paying certain emigration fees, "because of his condition," which however was not specified. I found the explanation in the Dairies of David Shultze (1724-1796), who under date of July 20, 1769, recorded the death of "the hunchback tailor Heppler."

For this obvious reason Caspar plied his trade at home, but had his brother-in-law, Michael Scheible, do his farming. But he had six children, was evidently a good father, and in his will left 20 shillings (then a considerable sum) to the Zionsville Lutheran congregation, so I honor my sole hunchback ancestor!

Family scandals also turn up to explore, and sometimes they provide the key to paths one's ancestors took in life. The Heppler emigrant's distinguished father, Caspar Heppler Sr. (1680-1750), who managed to have the town's leading citizens as godparents at his children's baptisms, fell into disgrace in 1743 by committing adultery (Chebruch), which was then a highly punishable crime. As the Lutheran minister recorded in his record book, this man maliciously deserted both his wife and fatherland. By "fatherland" here is meant not Germany, which did not exist as a political entity at the time, but Württemberg.

Actually the disgraced father fled to Saxony, taking his oldest son, Christopher Heppler (1709-1750) along. (Was Christopher the favored son, and the hunchback rejected? Who knows, but the scandal must have played a part in inducing the emigration.)

We may well ask, why Saxony? Because undoubtedly Caspar Heppler had contacts in Saxony through the military services of his father – yes, another Caspar Heppler (1650-1720) – who was Sergeant Major with the Saxon troops during the wars of the late 17th century. The German states of Saxony and Württemberg were allies, since they were both strongly Protestant (Lutheran) and defenders of the Protestant religion. It all makes sense. In the Saxon town of Borna (near Leipzig) in Electoral Saxony, Christopher Heppler married Christine Gerlach and they had four little Heppler boys. In 1750 Christopher Heppler, his Saxon wife and four little Heppler sons, plus Christina's widowed mother, Susanna Gerlach, and – *mirabile dictu!* Christopher's father and his second wife set out for the Promised Land of Pennsylvania. Alas, Christopher died at sea, the father also died on the way, but widow Christina, her four children and her mother, landed at Philadelphia and settled in what is now Montgomery County, where Christina became the third wife of the leading member of the old Goshenhoppen Lutheran Church, Michael Reiher (Royer), 1698-1772. He was a big Elder of the Congregation, but he must have also been a champion stud of the region, since he fathered 24 children to his succession of three wives. At any rate, all four of the Heppler sons grew to manhood, married and had families, and are mentioned favorably in the Diaries of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787).

But if you are looking for Hepplers in Lehigh County today, you won't find any because they all left over two hundred years ago. After the Revolution, America was on the move, and the Hepplers joined the procession. Of the hunchback's German-born sons, Jacob moved first to Northeastern Pennsylvania, then to Western Pennsylvania where a large clan resulted. Christopher, the other German-born son, moved to North Carolina, where also there are multitudinous Heppler cousins. Of the American-born sons, George moved to Virginia and Caspar (1751-1816), my ancestor, followed the trail to Mahantongo – and multiplied. As my cousin Avice Heppler Morgan, author of the Heppler Family History (Baltimore, 1986) once said to me, "Don, you can't throw a stone in Mahantongo without hitting a Heppler."

Reinert Ancestry

One more tidbit. I was able to locate the ancestry of my Upper Milford Township ancestor Jacob Reinert in the fascinating Swabian town of Schaigern, near Heilbronn in Württemberg. Jacob was born in what is now Lehigh County in 1761, but his father Christian Reiner (1722-1784) and Christian's brother George Reiner (1721-1791) both emigrated in 1749 on the Ship Fane. Jacob Reinert joined the Mahantongo Migration (see next section), and died in 1857, the last surviving Revolutionary veteran in both Berks and Schuylkill Counties. The surname was usually spelled "Reiner" in the European records but in America it frequently became Reinert. Dr. Guy F. Reinert, the Pennsylvania Dutch historian and folk art specialist, was a descendant of the emigrant George Reiner.



Dr. Don Yoder, speaking
at the 2011
Lynn-Heidelberg
Historical Society dinner
banquet is pictured to the
left.

The fantastic network of
relationships I discovered
in Germany for these
Reinerts connects them
to the Lehigh and
Lebanon County Bogers,
the Virginia
Abendschons, and the
North Carolina
Barringers. Paulus

Barringer (1721-1807), a first cousin of Christian Reiner, was the progenitor of the distinguished North Carolina clan of Barringer, which produced judges, congressmen, a U.S. Senator, a Confederate general, even a U.S. Minister to Spain. (See the excellent multi-volume encyclopedia of North Carolina Biography, for these Barringers and their careers.) I should prepare a follow up article on this massive Pennsylvania migration to North Carolina, where whole counties were settled by Pennsylvania Dutchmen, and where even today their descendants are often very proud of being Pennsylvania Dutch in heritage.

About the Author

Dr. Don Yoder is Professor Emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught for forty years and directed fifty-three doctoral dissertations, in Folklife Studies, Religious History, American History, and American Civilization. For lack of time and space, the sketches of his Lehigh County ancestry here, do not, include the equally important Lehigh County families of Huber of Macungie and Allentown; Reiss of Upper Milford; and

Maurer and Schankweiler of Macungie, to say nothing of his Yoders, Weidners, and Eysters, Berks Countians with branches in Lehigh.