

## Mennonite Family Names in Iowa

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## Mennonite Family Names in Iowa

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MENNONITES FIRST SETTLED permanently in America in 1683, when they helped establish Germantown, in what is now a part of Philadelphia. During the eighteenth century, they founded additional settlements in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. Then in the nineteenth century, they settled between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River. Their first settlement west of the Mississippi was begun in 1839 when John C. Krehbiel and family settled in Lee County, Iowa. During the next century Mennonites continued to follow the westward movement but also settled in the southern states. By 1973 slightly over one-half of the more than 548,000 baptized Mennonites were living in the United States and Canada while the other half were living in forty other countries in five continents.

The Mennonites had their origin in Switzerland in 1525. As the third wing of the Protestant Reformation, they advocated freedom of conscience, insisting that no government had the right to determine the religion of its subjects. They administered baptism only to those who voluntarily asked for it following their declaration of faith. Their members pledged themselves to a radical Christian discipleship, which included a renunciation of violence and warfare. This brought them into conflict with both church and state and led thousands of them to martyrs' deaths.

In spite of persecution, the movement spread into Germany, the Low Countries, Austria, and other places. America, and Pennsylvania in particular, furnished the first large laboratory where the concept of pluralism in religion could be tested. Mennonites took their name from Menno Simons (1496-1561). A leader of the group in northern Europe, his motto was I Corinthians 3:11: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which Jesus Christ."

Because the Anabaptists, as they were first called, fled from country to country in search of religious freedom, they became indeed "strangers and pilgrims" in the Biblical sense. Migrations became a part of their heritage and they perhaps found "pulling stakes" less of a traumatic experience than did some other new world pioneers. The writer's own Gingerich ancestors had been citizens of Canton Bern in Switzerland. In 1705 they left Switzerland and by 1713 were renting land in Wittgenstein, but by 1743, his direct ancestors were renting a dairy farm at Arolsen, in Waldeck, Germany. From there great grandfather John P. Gingerich emigrated to eastern Pennsylvania in 1835. Soon he and his family moved on to Fairfield County, Ohio, and in 1851 to Johnson County, Iowa. Although most of his descendants remained in Iowa, the family is now scattered from coast to coast.

Most Mennonite families in North America can be placed in one or the other of two ethnic groups. One group is Dutch in its origins. Some of these Dutch Mennonites came directly to America; many others migrated to North Germany, and from there over a century later to South Russia. After a century in Russia, around 18,000 of them migrated to the prairie states and the provinces of North America in the 1870s. A majority of the Mennonites in western United States and western Canada are thus of Dutch ethnic background. Some of the common family names among them are Balzer, Bartel, Dirks, Dyck, Duerksen, Edigers, Enns, Epp, Ewert, Friesen, Giesbrecht, Goertz, Harms, Harder, Isaac, Jansen, Klassen, Kliever, Krahn, Lohrenz, Neufeld, Nickel, Pauls, Peters, Ratzloff, Reimer, Regier, Rempel, Thiesen, Toews, Unruh, Warkentin, Wiebe, Wiens, Willms.<sup>1</sup> Only a few of these names are found in Iowa; most of them are in Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, the Pacific Coast states, and in Canada, from Ontario to British Columbia.

The other Mennonite immigrants to North America were the Swiss ethnic settlers. Nearly all Amish and Mennonites living east

<sup>1</sup>For a more complete list of Dutch-Prussian-Russian Mennonite family names write to Dr. Cornelius Krahn, editor of *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, North Newton, Kansas 67117, or to Adelbert Goertz, Wayne Heights, Waynesboro, Pa. 17268. A second great migration of these people from Russia occurred after World War I and after World War II, to Canada and to South America.

of the Mississippi River, and many in the West also, are of Swiss background. Some migrated directly from Switzerland but the majority came from Germany or Alsace where they had settled during the days of the fierce religious persecution in Switzerland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The great majority of the Swiss Mennonite refugees settled in the Palatinate, a district of southwest Germany. A list of "Palatinate Mennonite Family Names" of Swiss Mennonite refugees in the Palatinate after 1664 who later came to Pennsylvania was published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Goshen, Indiana, in 1941. The Mennonite historian John Horsch, in working through these names, produced a list of 253 Swiss Mennonite family names in the Palatinate who later were represented in Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> In his researches in Iowa Mennonite history, this writer has become aware of at least sixty-eight of these Swiss-Palatinate family names having been represented among the Mennonites of Iowa.

Although many Mennonite refugees had settled in the Palatinate and Alsace, others had migrated into the Jura Mountains near Basel, others had moved eastward, and some had gone to Wittgenstein, Hesse-Darmstadt, and Waldeck. Between 1707-1756 probably 5,000 Mennonites, including 300 Amish, who are the most conservative of the Mennonite groups, came from Switzerland and the Palatinate to eastern Pennsylvania. The Napoleonic wars, and the military conscription that followed those wars produced a new wave of migrations, from Alsace, Bavaria, Hesse, the Palatinate and Switzerland, bringing at least 3,800 additional persons of Swiss background to America.

The largest Mennonite community in Iowa is the Johnson County community, which extends into northern Washington County and into eastern Iowa County and northeastern Keokuk County. Their first settlers located in southwestern Johnson County in 1846. By 1973 they had at least twenty-four congregations in this community with a church membership and unbaptized children numbering over 5,000. Many of their descendants have left the church of their fathers but remain in the larger community. Many descendants have also moved into other communities, as a perusal of their published family histories demon-

<sup>2</sup>The list also appeared in John Horsch, *The Mennonites in Europe* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1942), pp. 383-85.

strates. To obtain accurate statistics on the growth of the community is therefore difficult. The writer took a survey of the Swiss Mennonite family names in the above community from the telephone directories of this area. Of the 253 family names in the afore-mentioned Swiss Palatinate Mennonite list, at least fifty-one are presently found in this Iowa community. The ten most common names in the directories are Yoder (140), Miller (126), Gingerich (61), Swartzendruber (50), Brenneman (38), Schlaubaugh (37), Hochstetler (37), Hershberger (25), Stutzman (22), and Troyer (16). Less common names include Eash, Fisher, Hartzler, Kempf, King, Kinsinger, Marner, Martin, Nisley, Rhodes, Ropp, Shetler, and Zook. The list also has twenty-two Benders, but it is doubtful if the Benders were Swiss; although they were Amish for generations they may have been German instead of Swiss. This list of course does not include the Old Order Amish Mennonites whose names do not appear in telephone directories, but a list of their names would be very similar to those above. In this community perhaps most of the Mennonites over fifty years old can still speak the Palatinate German, or as it is more commonly known in America, the Pennsylvania German language.

The second largest settlement of ethnic Swiss Mennonites is in southeastern Washington County and in the northern half of Henry County. Earlier it included also the eastern edge of Jefferson County. Mennonite settlers entered these counties in the late 1840s and during the 1850s, although some immigration from Alsace and Switzerland continued into this area up to World War I. This Mennonite community therefore has more foreign born members than any other of the settlements in Iowa. Its family names, though of Swiss origin, do not duplicate the above Johnson County list, although there has been intermarriage and migration between the two communities for a century. At least thirty Swiss Mennonite family names are found in the telephone directories of the area. The ten most common are Roth (52), Graber (27), Rich (24), Wenger (20), Christner (18), Leichy (18), Conrad (16), Widmer (15), and Boshart (15). Less common names are Alliman, Eicher, Freyenberger, Krabill, Nebel, Schantz, and Stauffer.

The Mennonites settled in Lee County as early as 1839 with

the coming of the John C. Krehbiel family, who were of Swiss and Palatinate background. They were followed by the families Galle, Ellenbeyer, Eyman, Weber, Kaegy, Gram, Bergthold, Herstein, Leisy, Risser, Rupp, Schowalter, Eicher, Wuertz, and other families, all of whom are in the Swiss-Palatinate list referred to earlier. The Mennonites still have a strong church in the county, in Donnellson. The Amish Mennonites who arrived in the county in the decade of the forties settled near the Mennonites, around West Point and Charleston. Eventually the Amish community disintegrated because of faulty land titles in the Half-Breed Tract, where many had settled. They moved on to Henry and Davis counties. The family names in the Lee County Amish settlement included Augsburger, Plank, Schwarzendruber, Nafziger, Schantz, Lehman, Schrock, Schlatter, King, Roth, and Raber. Other family names in the Lee County Amish settlement, not on the early Palatinate list but probably Swiss in origin, were Rogie, Kinsinger, Werey, Hauder, Reese, Fordemwalt, Haundrick, Gunden, Wagler, Klopfenstein, Miller, and Bechler.

The Davis County Amish Mennonite settlement, begun in the 1850s in the area around Pulaski, early contained the following family names: Augspurger, Plank, Miller, Tschantz, Dieffenbach, Fordemwalt, King, Wagler, Kinsinger, Schlatter, Baughman, Blough, Brenneman, Conrad, Kropf, Sharp, and Swartzen-druber. As stated above, some of these families came directly from Lee County; others came from Ontario, Indiana, and Wayne County, Ohio. It should be pointed out that there were variant spellings of these Swiss names.

A smaller settlement of Mennonites came to Mahaska County in 1852. The most common name was Beutler. Their descendants, now Butlers, are still prominent in Oskaloosa and other parts of the county. The family had migrated from Bavaria to Ashland County, Ohio, and then on to Iowa.

Polk County had a Mennonite as well as an Amish settlement. The Nussbaums and the Neuenschwanders came to Iowa from Putnam County, Ohio, around 1849 but no church was organized until 1858. Other families in their community were the Leichtys, Gehmans, Snyders, Gefflers, Beerys, and the Singers. The Amish community, near the Story County line, was started in 1868 and had Hochstetlers, Kempfs, Millers and Mishlers, who moved there from Johnson County.

Another Mennonite settlement that was not permanent was the one in the southeast quarter of Page County, when the Goods, Hornings, and Hoffmans moved in from states east of the Mississippi beginning in 1864. They were followed by the Fergusons, Snivelys, Sheelenbergers, Lapps, Gehmans, Eberlys, and the Berrys. Descendants of some of these families remain in Page County.

In the 1860s several Mennonite families from the East, particularly Virginia, settled in Keokuk County, near South English. Among them were Rhodes, Hildebrands, Wengers, Herrs, and Groves. When a Mennonite church was finally organized near South English in 1898, its charter members included Lapps, Blossers, Lineweavers, Wengers and Cooks.

A community established in Calhoun County, near Manson, in 1892 by Summers, Ulrichs, Eigstis, and Zooks, from Illinois, came to be a large permanent settlement, with 300 church members in 1973. Other persons of Swiss ethnic background joined the community in the early years with family names of Bauman, Gingerich, Stoltzfus, Swartzendruber, Weiss, and Zehr.

An Amish Mennonite community was established in Wright County near Eagle Grove, in 1892, by families from Johnson County. The family names were Swartzendruber, Kreider, Gingerich, and Yoder. Later Miller, Gunden, Bender, and Fisher families joined them but the settlement was shortlived, the majority returning to Johnson County, and nearly all the rest moving on to other localities.

In 1897-98, Good, Zimmerman, Miller, Horsch and Shantz families settled in Pocahontas County, near Rolfe and Gilmore City. They never organized a church but in time some of them joined the Mennonite church in adjacent Calhoun County.

In 1886 the Josiah Martin family located in Osceola County. They were joined the following year by the Jesse Bauman family. Soon after this the Weaver, Stauffer, Gingerich, Brubaker, Aufer, Gehman, and Weaver families settled in this community. They were nearly all from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and were members of the "Stauffer Mennonites," a small, very conservative group that has split off the Mennonite Church. Their settlement soon disintegrated because of internal church troubles.

The largest of the new settlements is the Old Order Amish community in Buchanan County. The first settlers moved to this county in 1914. They now have five congregations. Most of them are from Johnson County and from Reno County, Kansas.

Many residents of Iowa have a Swiss Mennonite ancestry. A study of the Des Moines telephone directory for 1973 revealed that there were at least sixty-three family names that might possibly fit into the above category. For these sixty-three names, 609 persons or families were listed. This naturally does not take into account the persons whose ancestry may have been Swiss Mennonite through the maternal line. Nor did the above sampling take into account the 570 Millers in the Des Moines directory. Although Miller is one of the most common Mennonite family names, it is widely represented in many ethnic groups in America and often represents a trade name rather than a geographic or ethnic name.<sup>3</sup> Or to take another illustration, Gerberich's *The Brenne-man History* (Scottdale, Pa., 1938) shows that Brenne-man descendants live in 114 places or towns in Iowa.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>I am indebted to Miss Jill Hartzler, daughter of pastor Robert Hartzler of the Des Moines Mennonite Church, for the survey of the city's telephone directory.

<sup>4</sup>The four volume *Mennonite Encyclopedia* published at Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, Pa., 1955-1959, contains many family histories and much genealogical material.

If one suspects that he has ancestors of Palatinate-Swiss Mennonite background, there are several clues that may be followed to find answers. Is the name found in the old European lists of Mennonites? The *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, pages 457-465 gives bibliographical data on scores of published genealogies of Mennonite families. Most of these books can be found in the historical libraries of Mennonite colleges, such as Bethel (Kansas), Bluffton (Ohio), Goshen (Indiana), or Eastern Mennonite (Virginia). Especially helpful have been Dr. Delbert Gratz, librarian at Bluffton College, who is an authority on Swiss Mennonites, James O. Lehman, librarian at Eastern Mennonite College, Harrisonburg, Virginia, and Ira D. Landis genealogist at the Mennonite Library and Archives, Lincoln Way East, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

A second lead relates to old Bibles and other books among the family heirlooms. If there is a Froschauer Bible handed down in the family, it most likely had been a prized Bible of a Mennonite family. This Bible, produced in Switzerland, first in the year 1524, was the favorite of the Swiss Mennonites, who brought copies with them to America. Another prized book among Mennonites was the *Martyrs Mirror*, the first edition in German having been published in 1784. This book contains the stories of early Christian martyrs and also of their own martyrs of Reformation times.

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