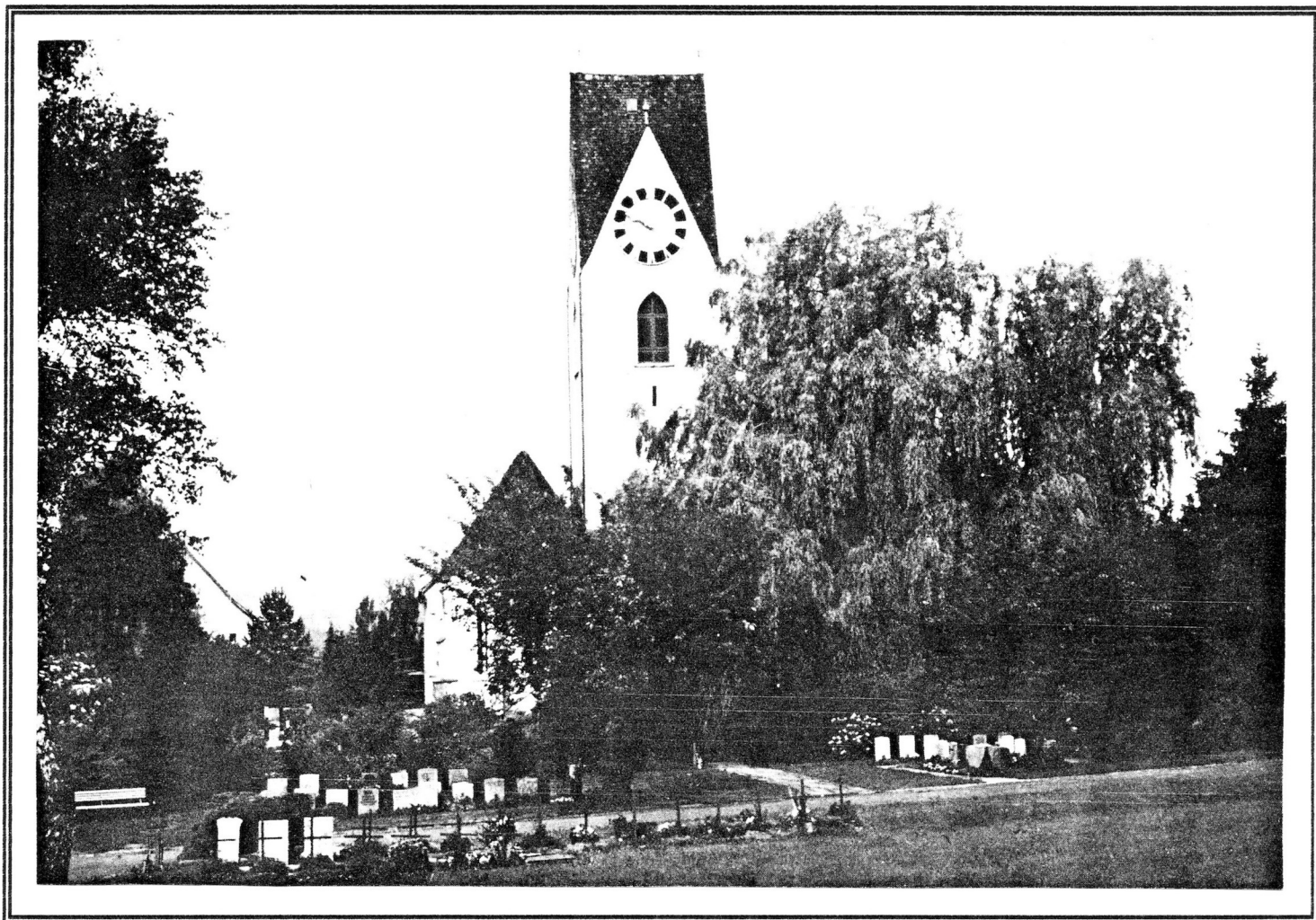


## WEIDLER

The following are articles, documents, maps, pictures, etc., most of which are not included in *Michael Weidler: His Antecedents and Descendants* by Elizabeth Meredith Houston, TX: Author, 1987. A few are of a general nature, but primarily they pertain to our particular Weidler line. For a definitive Weidler family history consult the book referred to above.



Evangelical-Reformed Church in Ottenbach, Zurich, Switzerland, where records were begun in 1540. Credit: Albert Best  
*Mennonite Family History*, October 1989



## WEIDLER

European origins of the family of Michael Weidler of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; for the later history of this family refer to *Michael Weidler: His Antecedents and Descendants*.

The earliest record found which appears to relate to the Weidler family of Michael Weidler was located in the State Archives of the Canton of Zurich, Switzerland, and dates back to the year 1475. According to the *Geschlechterbuch von Dürsteler*, one Anna Widler of Albisrieden was the second wife of Peter Füssli of Zurich. In the fifteenth century Albisrieden was a small village near Zurich, but it has now been encompassed by the city. No Widlers appeared on the tax lists for the year 1470 in the tax book of Albisrieden.

Records in the State Archives of Zurich indicate that in 1504 Felix Widler and Conrad Widler and his wife Adelheit along with their children, Heini, Gretli and Elsi came to Albisrieden seeking safe haven. Their previous place of residence is not known. For many years the Widlers/Wydlers were the millers<sup>1</sup> of Albisrieden, and descendants of the family are still residing there.

About 1569 one Hans Widler acquired from Jörg Meyer the mill at Rickenbach *bei* Ottenbach in the canton of Zurich eight miles southwest of Albisrieden. He is presumed to have come from Albisrieden.<sup>2</sup> Rickenbach was then, as it is now, nothing more than a hamlet of half a dozen houses and buildings on the stream Lindenbach. These structures consisted of the mill and the homes and outbuildings of the millers' families. The church censuses for the first half of the seventeenth century indicate that the Widlers were Rickenbach's only inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> What Rickenbach lacks in size is compensated for by its scenic location in the valley of the Reuss River with its backdrop of snow covered mountains.

Fridli Widler, Michael Weidler's earliest proven antecedent, was first taxed as the miller of Rickenbach in 1610 upon the death of the previous miller, Hans Widler.<sup>4</sup> Fridli, whose birth occurred about 1568, was born somewhere other than Rickenbach, probably Albisrieden. According to Johannes Frick, a Swiss genealogist who made a study of the Widler family, the Hans Widler who preceded Fridli as miller was his father. Other Widler millers living in Rickenbach before 1600 were Ulrich and Wolfgang; and a Michael Widler, an Oswald Widler and a Jacob Widler are mentioned in early church records of the area. Mr. Frick indicated the progression of the ownership of the mill based on tax records was Hans (1569-1583); Ulrich (1583-1589); Hans (1589-1609) and Fridli (1610+).<sup>5</sup>

The residents of Rickenbach at the time the Widlers lived there (approximately 1560-1660) fell under the jurisdiction of the Reformed Parish of Ottenbach, a small town about a mile distant. It is from the parish register of the Reformed Church of Ottenbach that the earliest proof of Michael Weidler's ancestry comes. (A photograph of the church can be found earlier in this compilation.)

Jacob Widler, Michael's grandfather, was the youngest child of the aforementioned Fridli Widler and his second wife Anna Schnewli. Jacob was baptized on 24 January 1622 and married to Barbara Hoffstetter on 12 November 1644 (see page 9-27).<sup>6</sup> Barbara was the daughter of Lieutenant Hans Hoffstetter of Lunnern and his wife Anna Gutt<sup>7</sup> (see page 9-147).<sup>7</sup>

By 1662 the mill at Rickenbach was in the hands of Jagli Frey and the various Widler families who had lived there were scattered. Jacob's brothers, Hans and Gregorius, had moved to

Lunnern; his brother Felix had gone to Thunsen (now Toussen); and his married sisters lived in Thunsen, Lunnern and Ottenbach.<sup>8</sup> Between September, 1659, and March, 1664, Jacob Weidler, his wife, Barbara Hoffstetter, and their children immigrated to the town of Kirchartd in the present state of Baden in southern Germany. Several other families from nearby communities made the same migration, though perhaps not together with the Weidlers.<sup>9</sup>

Their relocation was no doubt a part of the large migration into the Palatinate which had been devastated and depopulated by the Thirty Years War. Switzerland had suffered only marginally from the actual fighting, and apparently the Weidlers had lived during this period in relative safety. The same may not necessarily hold true for some of the ancestors of Michael Weidler's wife, Elizabeth Klein. They appear in the earliest Kirchartd Reformed Church records (1650) with no reference to a previous residence.<sup>10</sup>

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) began as a conflict between the Catholic Austrian Hapsburgs and Protestants interests. Germany became the battlefield. Most of the nations of Europe eventually entered the war for their own self-interests. The misery endured by the Germans throughout the hideous progression of campaigns and sieges with their accompanying slaughter, plague and famine cannot be overemphasized. The war gave license for all manner of crime; it was rich with atrocities. The early, largely autobiographical German classic, *The Adventures of Simplicius Simplicissimus* by Johann Christoph Grimmelshausen presents an eye-witness account of the war from the vantage point of both peasant and soldier. It was first published in 1669, and was so popular that it experienced three editions within the first year.

The war's end did not measurably decrease the misery. Bands of demobilized mercenaries roamed the countryside scavenging. They retained their weapons, had little or no money, and took what they wanted.

Following is a quotation translated from *Schweizer Einwanderer im früheren kurpfälzischen Streubesitz der Kraichgaues (1650-1750)* by Heinz Schuchmann.

After the Thirty Years War there was a great deal of immigration of Swiss people into the Kraichgau. The Kraichgau was in the east-west theater of the war and experienced the same devastation and depopulation as the left Rhine-side Pfalz. Especially hard hit was the area between Wimfen and Wiesloch. [Kirchartd lies on the eastern edge of the Upper Palatinate or Kurpfalz in the heart of this region.] Toward the end of the war, some communities in this area had less than twenty burgers: Steinsfurt 19, Reihen 14, Richen 9, Schluchtern 15.<sup>11</sup> The elector, Karl Ludwig, offered tax concessions on devastated land to those Swiss who were adherents to the Reformed Religion.

The first Swiss already appeared in the Kraichgau records by 1650. In 1653 an uprising of downtrodden Swiss occurred which set in motion a conspicuously strong migration. With the political fugitives arrived the impoverished peasants who were oppressed by their canton governments. When they received good reports, other family members and friends followed. An entire ponderous group of Swiss Mennonites immigrated, these because of the tolerance of the elector as well as of the Lutherans. Aristocrats, subject to the elector alone, willingly undertook the migration to the Kraichgau as leaseholders and bondsmen. Sixteen hundred seventy-one was the high point of the immigration, so much so that it created a vacuum in Emmental. The fact was that in many a Kraichgau pulpit a Swiss pastor stood . . .<sup>12</sup>

Elizabeth Klein's maternal grandparents, Hans Saxer/Sachser and his wife, resided at the time of her parent's marriage in the aforementioned town off Richen.<sup>13</sup> They were also part of the Swiss migration.

With the help of the energetic Swiss, the Rhine-Pfalz began its recovery. Cultivated fields and vineyards were restored and towns, villages and farms rebuilt. But adversity had not yet done with this unfortunate area. Many of the immigrants were struck down by a plague which ravaged the Palatinate in the winter of 1665-1666. The plague's severity was reflected by the large number of deaths recorded in the parish register of the Reformed Congregation of Kirchartd. In 1674 French armies overran the Palatinate destroying everything in their wake, and again in 1688 Louis XIV invaded, and when the action went badly, ordered the Palatinate's devastation with systematic brutality.

Few births were set down in the Kirchartd Reformed Kirchenbuch from 1688 to 1696, and no marriages nor deaths recorded from 1685 to 1700.<sup>14</sup> Very likely the book had been hidden or buried and the pastor recorded the births privately entering them later in the church book. Some records were destroyed by the plundering French armies. The resurgence of Catholicism and the suppression of the Reformed and Lutheran Religions in this time frame may have helped account for the paucity of records.

It is unknown whether the Weidlers went directly from Richenbach to Kirchartd. As the Kirchartd records make no note of Jacob Weidler's occupation, it is not known if he continued to pursue his profession as miller. According to the *Kirchartd Renovationsbuch of 1760*, their mill had been destroyed during the Thirty Years War.<sup>15</sup> The year of its return to operation is not stated. While we do not know specifically the Weidlers' reasons for immigrating, we do know that religious persecution in Switzerland which was accelerated against the Mennonites following the Thirty Years War was not responsible since the Weidlers were members of the Reformed Church. Almost surely they went to better themselves economically, which apparently they succeeded in doing. Michael Weidler's father Hans became the mayor of Kirchartd, and also *Kurpfalz Anwaldt*, a position which he held for many years.<sup>16</sup> The anwaldt was the agent or representative in the local community assigned to look after the interests of the overlord, ruling authority, or in some instances the interests of a group of landlords.<sup>17</sup> Hans Weidler's obituary (see page 9-28 ) speaks of his many years of public service.<sup>18</sup>

Michael Weidler was baptized in the Reformed Church of Kirchartd, Baden, Germany, 13 February 1705 (see page 9-28).<sup>19</sup> Although not in agreement with, this date should take precedent over, the birth date, 14 September 1705, purported to have been on Michael's original tombstone, now replaced in the churchyard of Salem United Church of Christ (Hellers) in Lancaster County.<sup>20</sup>

Michael's parents, Hans Weidler and Anna Barbara Wohlgemuth were almost middle-aged when Michael was born, and nothing is known of his early years. Michael mother's death occurred on 1 November 1716 when he was eleven.<sup>21</sup>

The following year Hans Weidler remarried. His second wife, Dorothea Kappler, was the widowed mother-in-law of his own daughter, Susanna. Michael was confirmed in the Reformed Church of Kirchartd in 1718 at which time his age was listed as fourteen. In April, 1726, and again in January, 1726, Michael acted as sponsor at the baptisms of two of the children of Heinrich Weidler and his wife, Maria Ursula Bender. Heinrich was Michael's cousin, the son of Rudolph Weidler and Maria Ursula Reinhardt.<sup>22</sup>

Hans Weidler's prominence in the community is reflected by his lengthy and glowing obituary in the Kirchartd parish register on the occasion of his death on 20 February 1726. Three months later Michael Weidler and Anna Elizabeth Klein were married (see page 9-28).<sup>23</sup>