

My Swiss Wenger Ancestry

by C. Pauline Walters*

What a wonderful adventure it would have been to have "tagged along" with our ancestors in years past. To have learned first hand some of their habits, some of their sayings, and main events in their life, would have been an experience. I wasn't able to do that, but our Wenger historian, Rev. Roger Winger, who has researched our early ancestors, gave a good glimpse of each of our Wengers in his Wenger clan notes.

He says the "Wen" in Wenger meant "wide, extended meadows, as they are located on fertile hillsides", and many villages in Switzerland begin with "Wen" or "Wan".

Our ancestor, Hans Wenger, Sr., was a weaver in Bern, Switzerland, and was among those Mennonites who suffered persecution at the hands of the authorities. He died in Switzerland. (There were also other Hans Wengers in Switzerland).

After his death, they continued to persecute his widow, demanding that she attend the state church at least once a year, to acknowledge faith in its' doctrines, and to show a willingness to recognize its authority.

Some of her relatives did this, but the widowed mother felt she should stand up for her own convictions. So when the soldiers came to arrest her, she was concealed by her friends in a cellar between a double wall.

The soldiers noticed the wall, but must have felt that there was no hiding place there, for they gave up the search and left. However, the family, knowing from experiences that they would come again, disposed of what they could among friends, and leaving the rest, they escaped Switzerland by night to come to America.

IMMIGRANT HANS WENGER JR.

One of Hans Wenger, Sr.'s sons, Hans Wenger, Jr., their oldest son, had already left Switzerland the year before and went to Zwiebrucken. But, for reasons unknown, probably more persecution, he came to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in America on September 16, 1748.

Hans settled in Bethel Township near the present Jonestown, in what is now Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. The next year, his widowed mother, with two sons, Christian

and Michael, arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September 9, 1749, and they settled in Rapho Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Hans Wenger, Jr. was my great grandfather.

IMMIGRANT CHRISTIAN WENGER

Christian Wenger, Hans Jr.'s brother, was issued a warrant for a grant of land in Rapho Township on October 19, 1750. It was surveyed to him on May 14, 1761. He died soon after this, and the land was patented to his son, John Wenger, on December 27, 1764. Christian had two daughters, Catherine Wenger married Jacob Sider, and Anna Housey Wenger married Henry Damude of Canada.

Christian's son John later spelled his name Winger. He was founder of the Brethren in Christ Church in Lancaster County and was its second ordained minister. With his family and others he went to Stevensville, Ontario, Canada, near the mouth of Black Creek, on the Niagara.

John had four children: Christian II, John, Jr., Peter and Barbara. Christian II died in 1842. His wife was Eve ??? They had a son Peter, born March 12, 1821, who married Lydia Fortney on February 18, 1842. She died on December 12, 1844, and is buried in Canada.

Peter then married Susanna Wildfang. They moved to Kitchener, Ontario and in 1857 moved to Elkhart, Indiana. Susanna died in Elkhart on October 31, 1864 and is buried in the Olive Mennonite Church Cemetery.

Their children were Absolem, Joel, Catherine, David, Eva, Jonathan, and Herschelrode. In 1872, they moved to Moundridge, Kansas, where they died and are buried.

Peter's children had changed their name back to Wenger. They were all Mennonites, but in Canada they all belonged to the Brethren in Christ Church.

Peter's son, Absolem, married a Mennonite, Sarah Holde-man on August 8, 1875. Their children were Helena, Emma, Anna, Frances, Frank, Conrad, Elizabeth, Martha, Mary, and John. Frank was a preacher in the Church of God in Christ Mennonite, as was also his son Harry, in Moundridge, Kansas.

IMMIGRANT MICHAEL WENGER

Michael Wenger, Christian and Hans' brother, came to

*C. Pauline Walters, 1812 Hillcrest Drive, Crawfordsville, IN 47933, is descendant of Immigrant Hans Wenger Jr. married to Anna Shirk, through their son, Martin Wenger (1742-1815) married to Anna Gingerich.

America with their mother and Christian on the ship, "St. Andrew". On the ship list, his name was spelled Wagner. On an assessment list in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania in 1750, his name was also spelled Wagner.

After his death, when his children received the farm, which had Wenger in it, they spelled their name Wenger. He had two sons, John and Isaac, and a daughter Anna Wenger.

John Wenger I, son of Christian Wenger I, had a cemetery on his farm in Stevensville, Ontario, Canada, known as the Wenger and Boroland Cemetery. He was the one who started the Brethren in Christ Church in Pennsylvania, but also founded the Tunker Church in Canada.

In 1932, the joint council of the Tunker Church put a new gravestone on his grave, which reads, "Sacred to the memory of Bishop John Wenger, one of the founders of the River Brethren Church in U.S.A. 1787, and founder of Tunker Church in Canada 1793. He fell asleep in Jesus 1828."

Most of our Wengers came from Wenger, located in the canton of Bern, Switzerland. Wenger is a very pretty village, quite popular as a resort in all seasons.

MY WENGER ANCESTRY

I am descended through Immigrant Hans Jr.'s seventh child. Much of the following information was compiled by Rev. Roger Winger.

1. Hans Wenger, Sr., died in Switzerland
Widow came to America in 1748
11. Hans Wenger, Jr., 1705-June 1, 1772
1748 Immigrant
m. Ann Shirk, d. 1771 in Pa.
Eight children, of whom Martin was seventh.
117. Martin Wenger, 1742-Sept. 23, 1815
b. Europe, d. near Chambersburg, Pa.
m. 1) Anna Gingerich, 1743-Aug. 16, 1793
Anna was the daughter of Yost and Anna (Huber) Gingerich and granddaughter of Jacob and Anna Huber (Hoover).
m. 2) Catherine Funk
12. Michael Wenger, d. Jan. 15, 1791
13. Christian Wenger
14. Martin Wenger

Martin (117) was in the Revolutionary War, listed as Private, 3rd class, residing in Green Township, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania (later Franklin County, Pennsylvania). He was in Co. E, 4th Battalion, Cumberland County Militia, commanded by Capt. Joseph Culbertson and Lt. Samuel Culbertson, 1781.

Martin's father, Hans Wenger, Jr., started a cemetery in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, where ten generations of Wengers are buried.

Martin Wenger (117) owned a hempmill. Today, a stone from this mill can be seen from the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The mill was erected in 1791 at Silvan, along the Concockeque

Creek, Green Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Flax and hemp were among the home-grown products that supplied many of the needs of our ancestors.

Martin owned a total of 1,000 acres in different tracts. He also owned land in Canada. Martin and Anna Gingerich Wenger's children were:

1171. John Wenger, 1765-1848
m. Elizabeth Hoover (my ancestor)
dau. of John Hoover
1172. Joseph Wenger, 1767-1840 (my ancestor)
m. Chatrina/Catrina Hoover, d. 1832 in Va.,
dau. of John and Elizabeth Hoover (1171)
Joseph later changed his name to Winger.
He lived in Canada for a short time.
11721. Henry Wingert, Jan. 23, 1800-Aug.
16, 1881.
m. 1822 Magdaline Frantz, April 17,
1798-Sept. 6, 1880, dau. of
Michael and Magdaline (Zug)
Frantz.
1173. Martin Wenger, 1769-died young
1174. Christian Wenger, b. 1771
1175. Elizabeth Wenger, b. 1774
m. John Detwiler
1176. Michael Wenger, b. 1776
m. Magdalena Lehman
dau. of Daniel Lehman, first Mennonite
minister in Franklin Co., Pa.
1177. Abraham Wenger, b. 1777
m. Catherine Sollenberger
14 children
1178. Barbara Wenger, b. 1781
m. George Eby, lived in Canada
1179. Martin Wenger, Jr., b. 1799
1170. Katharine Wenger, b. 1800

Henry Wingert (11721) was the first of this family to add a "t" to the end of his surname. He was born in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and died in Montgomery County, Indiana. Magdaline, his wife, was born in Virginia, and died in Montgomery County, Indiana.

In 1822, they were married in Botetourt County, Virginia, and became members of the Dunkard Church.

I am descended through their son, Jacob (1829-1898) m. to Juliann Matilda Ashwell (d. 1920). Jacob operated a flourishing brick factory near Whitesville, Montgomery County, Indiana. He was a member of the Dunkard Church, until talk of a new church for Whitesville began, when he became a founding member.

One of Jacob's daughters, Sarah Magdaline (1861-1948), m. James Rendel (1883-1900), and became my grandparents. They had a son, Orval Wingert Rendel, who had a daughter, Pauline Rendel Walters.

This is a family we can look back to with pride and appreciate what they contributed to make America what it is today!