



YODER NEWSLETTER



Vol. I No. 1

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A BIT OF HISTORY

All American Yoders whose ancestry is known or suspected trace their lineage to the Joder clan in the canton of Bern in Switzerland. They are a very old family, apparently of Germanic-Swiss stock, yet the name comes from St. Theodore (Theodorus, Theodulus) a missionary monk who in the fourth century crossed the Alps from Italy to bring the Gospel to the Valais country in southern Switzerland. This patron saint was held in ever greater reverence as time went on, and we hope in forthcoming Newsletters to give more on the story of his life and influence and of St. Joder items and places still existing today.

Joderhuebel (Yoder Hill) is a natural fortress on the Emme River in the southern part of the canton of Bern. Since it was so named as far back as anyone can remember and Joders were said to have lived there in the middle ages, researcher Karl Joder of Ludwigshafen-am-Rhein (West Germany) believes the family must have lived there before recorded history. The oldest record he has found is of a Peter Joder born in Joderhuebel in 1260. In 1389 a grandson Ulli Joder and his son Heini were among the leaviest taxpayers at Nuttwil, a town about thirty miles north. Karl Joder is confident that the Joders found later in nearby towns can be traced back to Ulli...including those of the town of Steffisburg.

Steffisburg, located near Thun south of Bern, is truly the homeplace of many American Yoders and in discussing our European origins we shall refer to Steffisburg again and again. Here Joders lived for generations as farmers, brewers, millers and other varying occupations. They were active in the affairs of both church and state and a number of heraldic banners (coats-of-arms) are set in stained glass at the old Steffisburg church, which was the center of a large parish. The town was not only a center for the State Church (Swiss Reformed), but for the Anabaptist sympathizers as well, who believed in the separation of church and state.

As in many instances where people must choose between differing ideas, the Joder family had members on both sides of the religious fence. Many were quite prominent participants in Reformed Church activities, and others were attracted to the Anabaptists.

From Steffisburg, Joders of both groups migrated north at the end of the 17th century and early decades of the 18th. They settled in Neustadt, Annweilerhof, Oggersheim, Fussbach, and Lppstein in the Palatinate of west central Germany. The Anabaptists (known as Swiss Brethren and later Mennonites...and the followers of Jacob Amman from nearby Erlenchbach who came to be called "Amish") fled at the turn of the century for refuge in not only the Palatinate, but Alsace-Lorraine as well. Many of the Anabaptist group in particular eventually moved on to America.

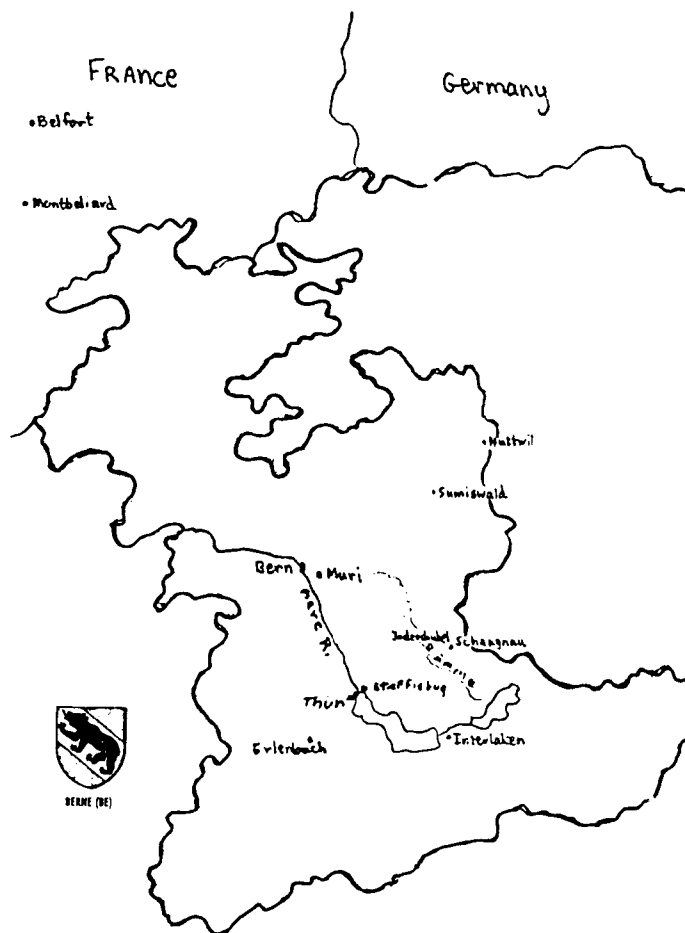
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Elsewhere in this newsletter some of these immigrants to the New World are discussed. Although they and their descendants will quite naturally receive the lion's share of attention in subsequent issues of this newsletter, the Joder family has certainly not vanished from the "Old World" countries of today. A 1940 list of Mennonite family names of South Germany showed 34 Joders among six separate congregations. Seven people named Yoder, Joder, or Jother were members of French Mennonite churches as of 1951. Descendants of one Steffisburg Joder family are reported to have moved to Rumania and Eastern Europe where they are said to be living still.

In spite of considerable migration, many Joders remain in the ancestral homeland. In a visit to Switzerland in 1980 it was found that five Joders appeared in the Steffisburg phone directory, and six Joders were identified in the phonebook of the capital city of Bern.

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Pictured below is a map of Canton Bern, Switzerland. The Aare River separates Thun and Steffisburg and from there east lies the Emmetal. The Yoders came from this region. The distance from Steffisburg to Bern is about 20 miles.



A WORD FROM THE EDITORS

BEN YODER

To set you at ease regarding the two of us, both Yoders, we want to introduce ourselves to our readers. We hope and pray this venture will be the first of many more to come, but this does depend on you too.

I am Ben F. Yoder, resident of Goshen, IN., born in Middlebury, IN. in 1913. I am a retired teacher. My church affiliation for over 45 years has been with the Goshen Christian Reformed Church. Since age 10 I've worked in grocery stores, factories, ice and ice cream plant, coal office, and as a real estate salesman. During WWII, I served the United States Coast Guard, both ashore and asea, as a Radioman. After the war, I reentered Goshen College received a degree and entered Western Michigan University getting a Masters while teaching. I've also attended Ball State, Indiana State, and Indiana Universities. Several years ago I retired from teaching of which ~~fer~~ years were spent as an elementary school principal. Since then I've spent five years as part-time courier and custodian at the Salem Bank & Trust Co., from which I retired in late 1982.

I've the privilege of enjoying over 45 years of happiness with my good and faithful wife, Nell (Hoogenboom). Together we spent happy years through the Depression and raised four children.

I'm the eighth of nine children of Harvey M. and Laura V. (Miller) Yoder, both natives of this county.

Both Chris and I were strangers until Rachel Kreider got us together. Rachel (well-known to some of you) has long been steeped in Yoder family lore and is well-done and ready to serve. We will look forward to Rachel's literary contributions informing all of our rich heritage and roots. Her knowledge of the very early Yoders in Switzerland should be enriching.

But we look to each Yoder (and related readers) to make contributions of anecdotes, family jokes, legends, etc., which will put life in the pages of future issues. There's a lot of wisdom and wit out there. Let's preserve it for the future. It's up to all of us. Let's do it!

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CHRIS YODER

My name is Chris Yoder, and I'm a descendant of Christian Yoder, one of the early Amish Yoder immigrants mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. I was born in Knoxville, TN and grew up in: Davenport, IA; Mt. Lebanon, PA; and Tokyo, Japan. I'm the son of Otho B. Yoder and Phyllis (Pamperien) Yoder. I have a BS from the University of Arizona in Tucson in Political Science and History. As an employee of the Department of Defense, I've been stationed at: Texarkana, TX; Ft. Campbell, KY; New Cumberland, PA; Ft. Knox, KY; Kitzingen, West Germany; and currently Battle Creek, MI.

My wife Carroll and I have a son Christian, age 6, and a daughter Jerusha, age 4. Christian was named after the immigrant ancestor of my Yoder line.

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I first began studying Yoder family history in 1973 while living near the Pennsylvania State Library at Harrisburg. My interest was rekindled in 1980 after returning from an assignment in Germany to Michigan. Here I have easy access to the genealogical collection at the Allen County Public Library, Ft. Wayne, and to the many records available at Goshen College.

Currently, I am compiling a directory of all the descendants of my grandfather's grandfather, Reuben Yoder (1831-1912) an Amish-Mennonite of LaGrange County, IN. It has been very rewarding to find hundreds of cousins who I never knew existed, and to receive the help of so many in tracking down various family lines.

My primary interest in this newsletter is in the opportunity it presents for sharing our family history and for expanding the frontiers of our knowledge in this respect. Ben mentioned the help we are getting from Rachel Kreider, one of the most respected Yoder historians in the country. We have also received a "count me in" from Dr. Don Yoder, current editor of the Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine, and an authority on Pennsylvania German immigrants. Knowledge about our family is not confined to scholars such as these, and I would hope that all our readers will see fit to share from their own traditions and lore.

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LIVING TREASURES

How many of us have told ourselves "I wish I'd written down some of the stories my grandparents used to tell" or "I wish I'd thought to ask grandfather about..."? With the passing of each generation we can so easily lose a precious portion of our heritage. Our senior Yoder generation is indeed a living treasure.

There are many ways in which you can preserve your heritage for those who will follow. Ask your older family members about their parents and grandparents; extend your family by locating and keeping in touch with second and third cousins; hold periodic reunions and get together; gather old family photos and put together a genealogy for your children, cousins, etc. (all you need is a typewriter and a Xerox machine).

If you are a member of our senior generation take some time to write or tape record things about your family which would be of interest to those to follow. I don't mean just names and dates and places, but also stories of human interest which will make the past generations come alive. A heritage of love and humor and pleasant memories is something we can all hope to leave after us. Don't forget to include stories about your own experiences. Who can better preserve those things about your own life which might be of interest and value to generations yet unborn. Be assured that even if your efforts are not immediately appreciated, they will be some time in the future.

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The heritage of the past is the seed that brings forth the harvest of the future.

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Send your ideas in. Perhaps you have some suggestions that will make this NEWSLETTER worthwhile.

There are many thousands of Yoders living in America today, but this large population is descended from a rather small number of immigrant lines. All of these branches trace back to the Swiss Joders. The best known of these immigrations are briefly introduced below.

I. THE OLEY YODERS

The first Yoders known to have come to America were the brothers Hans and Yost, who settled in the Reading area of Berks County, Pennsylvania. They arrived with other Protestants from the Palatinate and had settled in the fertile Oley Valley by 1714. According to contemporary references they were well-known frontiersmen and at least initially belonged to the Reformed Church. Descendants spread into Schuylkill, Union, Adams, Northumberland, and Jefferson Counties. By the third generation, this line was being researched by an early genealogist. In more recent times they have been researched by Dr. Don Yoder of Temple University, a descendant. Dr. Yoder has found the direct link between these brothers and the Joders of Steffisburg.

II BUCKS-LEHIGH COUNTY YODERS

As early as 1734 one John and Anna Yoder came to "Penn's Woods" and took land in what later became Milford Township in Bucks County and Upper Saucon in Lehigh. Montgomery County also soon came to be home for some of the descendants of this line. These Yoders were the only ones in America to use the name Casper, found so frequently among the Steffisburg Joder records. A John Yoder is known to have married Anna Bachman, but it is not clear whether this was the senior immigrant or John Jr. Although there is still some confusion as to the generations, this branch may be the next to establish a demonstrable connection to the Joders of Steffisburg.

III EARLY AMISH YODERS

There has been a long tradition that one Barbara Yoder who lost her husband at sea came on to America with her nine children. For generations there has been confusion about her and her relationships to the other Amish of her time. Thanks to the persistent efforts and theory-testing of Dr. Hugh F. Gingerich of Washington, D.C., most of the Amish-Mennonite Yoders can now be traced to two families who arrived on the Francis and Elizabeth on Sep. 21, 1742 (and to one other younger family who was undoubtedly related, but for whom the connection is yet to be found). One of these two families seems indeed to be that of Widow Barbara, and the other of Christian Yoder (probably her brother-in-law) whose children for many years were thought erroneously to belong to Strong Jacob Yoder. These prolific families migrated from Berks and Lancaster Counties on to Mifflin and Somerset in Pennsylvania, to Holmes County in Ohio, northern Indiana, and on West.

See the map of the southeastern counties of Pennsylvania on page 4. X's mark the locations along with designated numerals.

When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of human civilizations.

--Daniel Webster

Among the the Yoders in the Strassburger-Hinke immigrant lists (and we are able to identify a number of them) was one Conrad Yotter, who arrived October 25, 1746 on the ship Hep-tune. This seems to be the Conrad who is said to have visited a relative in Pennsylvania and then joined a friend, Henry Wediner, who was making a return trip to North Carolina. He acquired considerable land in Lincoln and Catawba counties, where his descendants can be found today. Several of his sons later moved to Indiana and one to Tennessee. Conrad may have had a Mennonite background, but he was not a member of a church and a number of his descendants are Lutheran. Prof. Fred R. Yoder of Pullman, Washington published a book on this clan in 1968.

V. MICHEL YODER, PALATINE

In 1825 Michel Yoder (1788-1873), his wife and two children and his sister-in-law and her two children left Hesse-Darmstadt for America. He was the son of Samuel, an Amish Bishop in the German Palatinate. Samuel was in turn the son of Jacob, son of John. Karl Joder has identified this line as to their origins among the Yoders of Steffisburg. Michel was probably related to the Yoders of Somerset County, Pennsylvania, for that is where he went after borrowing money to get his family released at the port of Baltimore. In 1845 he moved his family to Holmes County, Ohio, where his children intermarried with other Amish. A genealogy outlining this family was compiled by S. & F.E. Mast in 1950, and was updated and reissued by Roy A. Yoder within the last few years.

VI. LATER ALSATIAN YODERS

The Yoders who arrived from Montbeliard and Belfort in Alsace seem definitely connected to the other Anabaptist lines that hail from Steffisburg. They did, however, in most cases stay in France 100 years longer. They came as individuals or small groups in the early nineteenth century, settling especially in Stark and Wayne Counties in Ohio and Allen and Davies Counties in Indiana. Their common origin and their use of names suggests that they were related among themselves, but it has been difficult to connect them. Perhaps because they were influenced longer by the cross-currents of European culture (one had been a cavalry officer in Napoleon's march on Moscow) they seemed less close-knit than their American counterparts, and in many cases their Amish ties were soon loosened. We have been told that there is a researcher working on the genealogy of these later immigrants but thus far have been unable to locate him. We hope that exchanges through the Newsletter can help in this regard.

VII. OTHER YODERS

There are certainly other Yoders in America who do not stem from these migrations; nevertheless those outlined above make up the large majority of Yoder immigrants and are the best documented. In future issues we hope to go into more specifics on each of these as well as to touch on other lines of our family.

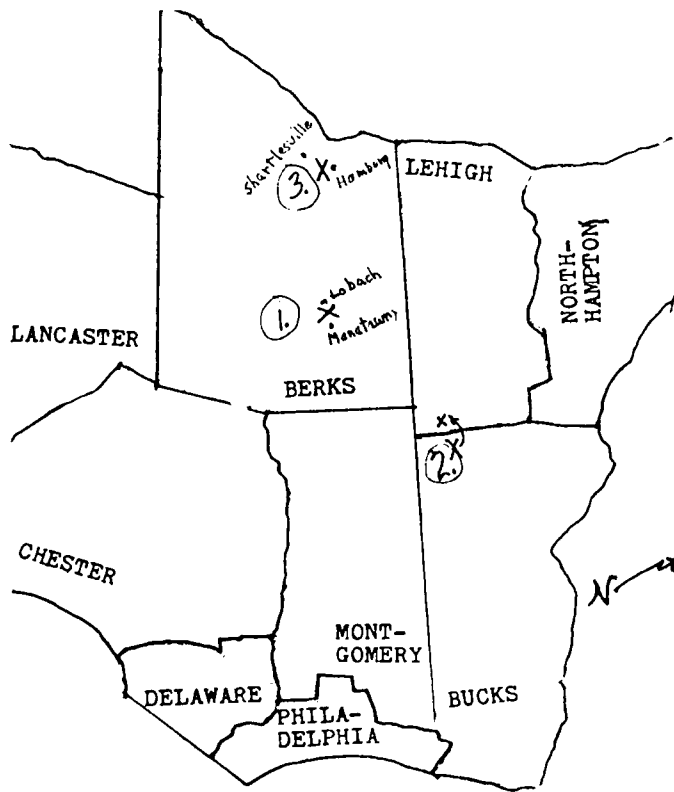
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Discontent arise from our desires oftener than from our wants. Restlessness arises from our wants more often than from our needs.

You will note elsewhere in this issue the reference to the book being prepared by the Reuben Yoder Family of Northern Indiana. This descendant's directory includes an ancestral sketch of Yoders through the two Christian Yoders of Somerset County, PA, both Amish bishops back to the original immigrant of 1742.

Another book, the most complete compilation to date of early Amish Yoders in America has been made in recent years by Hugh F. Gingerich, PhD, of Washington, DC. and Rachel W. Kreider, MA, of Goshen, IN. The Yoder section will be the largest in a 1000-page volume on basic Amish genealogy, which seeks to trace over 125 Amish surname families and their inter-relatedness from immigration to an arbitrary cut-off date of about 1850. Now in its last stages of preparation, the book is scheduled to go on sale by the end of 1983. This outline of Amish Yoder families, with dates, and census locations wherever possible, will be of special interest to Yoders stemming from this European branch as will also the copious Yoder notes in the appendix.

Do you know of any other Yoder studies now in progress? We would be glad to hear about them.



No. 1 marks where the first Yoders to America settled between Lobach and Manatowny in Berks County east of Reading in Oley Township. They were Reformed and Lutheran.

No. 2 in upper Bucks County marks the area where the second group settled. This was in Milford Township. Some of these soon crossed over in Lower Milford Township into Lehigh County. This group was Mennonite.

No. 3 in upper Berks County marks the area settled by the first Amish-Mennonite Yoders. The Amish seceded from the Mennonites during 1693 in Switzerland. This area is in Upper Bern Township, southwest of Hamburg at the foot of the Blue Mountains.

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READER EXCHANGE

This NEWSLETTER will publish Yoder-related ancestral inquiries or exchange from readers. Please limit to thirty words or less and include a complete mailing address for response

Who was Sarah Yoder, born 8-Apr-1811 in PA, M. Tobias Fike 12 Aug 1832 at St. Michael's Evangelical Luth. Church in Wayne Co. OH, d. 6 Sept 1854-Allen Co, IN? Respond to this NEWSLETTER address and marked "inquiries".

WANTED: Information on location of the Yoder research files of Charles T. Yoder, of Washington, DC, (circa 1890) and Lynn Yoder of Fairmont WV (circa 1930's). Respond to: 203 Lakeshire Road Battle Creek MI 49015