

Overholser Family Association

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FAMILY COAT OF ARMS OBERHOLZER OF WALD, Z.H.

The coat of arms on this letterhead is the coat of arms which was adopted at the annual reunion of the Overholser Family Association on August 14, 1958 at Long's Park, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

This coat of arms was recommended by Dr. Hans Klaui, Genealogical Investigation Office, 287 Ryckenberg Street, Oberwinterthur, Z.H. in a letter dated February 29, 1956 to J. Spencer Overholser after several conversations with Dr. Winfred Overholser, then Supt. of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. and after several exchanges of letters with Spencer Overholser.

For a background to this coat of arms the pertinent portions of the above mentioned letter of Feb. 29, 1956 are quoted as follows:

"In the examination of a country's coats of arms one starts with the fact that in Switzerland there was never a regulated system of coats of arms. However, nobles and city dwellers have carried through the generations in more or less fixed form their family coats of arms. Among the farming families it was often otherwise. No one restrained them from taking a coat of arms, and no one gave them any kind of advice over their form. In this connection there prevailed absolute democratic freedom already in the period before 1798. So it happened that often in the same family father and son, grandfather and grandchild, brothers and cousins never carried a similar coat of arms. Whereas we find in the seals of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries often quite good styled, simple representations of coats of arms; on the other hand we come across heraldic slabs and oven-tiles which are frequently misshaped and heraldically defective products. Such farmer's coats of arms must often be recognized as spontaneous new creations which occurred without much attention or knowledge. And so the coat of arms of the line Oberholzer from the territory of the Canton of Zurich and St. Gall must be placed in the latter category.

"In the historical-biographical dictionary of Switzerland the coat of arms Oberholzer is described as follows: 'Obliquely divided, above of red with a half moon and two stars, below of silver with two green oaks.' This emblazoning is not to be described as very happy, since it leaves in respect of the arrangement of the half moon and the stars, as well as of both oaks, considerable freedom to the designer. One cannot ascertain, for example the color of the trunks of the oaks, or whether they stand on flat ground or on a small hill.

"The somewhat complicated construction of the coat of arms has consequently led to different variations. . . .

"A . . . variation was found some years ago . . . on the oil-painted family tree of the family Spoerry-Oberholzer in the building of the firm of Spoerry and Schaufelberger in Wald. . . .

"In regard to these different variants the undersigned in conjunction with the specialist in heraldry Herbert Hablutzel in Winterthur in the year 1949 made a clarification of the coat of arms. This was based on the device of said painted family tree, kept accordingly for the upper field the blue color, but reduced the figures down to a crescent moon and one star. The arrangement of the firs was retained, but their trunks instead of inheraldic brown were changed into red. The emblazoning of the clarified family coat of arms, that from now on is recommended to interested persons, runs as follows:

"Diagonally divided in blue and silver. In blue an oblique rightward crescent moon, in the left upper corner accompanied by a golden star. In silver two green, re-trunked firs on swaying green ground.

"(Heraldically left-right from the observer and the opposite.)

"The historical-biographical dictionary of Switzerland mentions no crest. . . . the coat of arms shows on the said family tree Spoerry-Oberholzer a bush of five ostrich feathers. If one could make out a full coat of arms with a crest, ostrich feathers are to be considered as a crest. Four of them in the colors blue, silver, blue and gold should be enough.

". . . At the best for the future the correct variation, a sketch of which is given herewith, should be carried on."

The "sketch" is in the files of the Overholser Family Association.

J. Spencer Overholser
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August 1977