

THE OBERHOLSERS

The Oberholsers are undoubtedly of Swiss origin. The family is represented in at least one Canton of Switzerland (Zurich) to this day. Kuhns says that the name had its origin in one or all of several villages by that name in Canton Bern. It is a matter of history that, together with a large body of defenseless Mennonites, Martin Overholtz and Michael Oberholtz fled from relentless persecution in Canton Zurich, Switzerland into Alsace, above Strasburg, about 1672, where they remained till they emigrated in 1709 to London, where they received assistance from Quakers to go to Pennsylvania. In 1710 the party to which these Oberholtzers belonged received a grant of 10,000 acres of land in Pequea, now included in Lancaster County. They were among the first settlers in this region.

This party of refugees, though sheltered only in the crudest huts, surrounded by wild animals and wilder savages, in the depth of a trackless forest, far from their kind, were so much pleased that of their poverty they contributed enough to send one of their number (Martin Kendig) back to Germany and Switzerland to tell their suffering friends of their great good fortune, and to invite them to come and share it. Marcus Oberholtz was one of many who responded. He received a grant of 300 acres of land in what is now Lancaster County in 1712. Every effort has been made to discover more of the history of these three Oberholtzers but to no purpose.

When the grant of 10,000 acres was divided among the party, it is presumed that Martin and Michael Oberholtz got their shares, but there is no proof that they ever owned land. The grant of 300 acres to Marcus Oberholtz is not mentioned again. There is no record, that in any of these cases, the land was transferred, nor do these names appear in any court record in Philadelphia, Chester, or Lancaster Counties at any time. What became of them or their possible progeny can only be conjectured.

The next Oberholtzer to come to Pennsylvania was Samuel, who, in the spring of 1727, with his family, made the tedious journey down the Rhine; for he was held up at the boundary of every principality, and made to pay some tax or other. In ten days or two weeks he had run the gauntlet and, landing at Rotterdam, took passage on the ship Molly, captained by John Hodgeson, for America. The boat stopped at Deal, England, for additional supplies and after the usual voyage of from six to three months, she touched at Philadelphia with the cargo of 300 men, women, and children, all from the Palatinate or Switzerland. All men over fourteen years of age signed papers of allegiance on landing, and then scattered to the four winds.

The men who came to Pennsylvania from Switzerland and the south of Germany in the colonial period were of those who for a thousand years had made of the upper Rhine a garden and granary for Europe. They were the world's best farmers. With unerring knowledge they passed through the forests of Montgomery and Chester Counties and, coming to the limestone valley of the Conestoga, where the black walnut grew they stopped, and of the wilderness they made a garden that to this day is the richest section of the most productive agricultural county to be found in this wide country of ours. The achievement of these people was magnificent. In a few decades with no means but what was furnished by stout hearts and willing hands they made of the wild forests orderly, productive fields with houses and barns, horses and cattle. But when it is remembered that for centuries the upper Rhine was left a desolate waste again and again by the many armies that swept over it, purposely burning crops, and every building, cutting down fruit trees and vines, plowing up and burning and putting to torture or to the sword many women and children; and when we recall that even when there was peace between nations these poor people

were made to suffer the bitterest persecution from both Catholic and Calvinist, principally because they chose to wait until children had reached years of discretion before they were baptized, we can understand how quiet, peace-loving, defenseless, and deeply religious that they were, with a nobility of and strength of character that kept them free from vice and immorality of their time, they thankfully and with joy in their hearts labored early and late to make themselves and their children a home in a land where justice and peace reigned.

Since no evidence can be found to the contrary, it is believed by the writer that the Oberholtzers of Lancaster County and many of those in Lebanon are descended from one Samuel Oberholtz who died in Manor Township near where Millersville now is, in 1748. Whether this Samuel Oberholtzer and the Samuel who landed in Philadelphia in 1727 are the same persons has not been proved, but the evidence points strongly in that direction. There is, of course, a possibility that he was the son of one of the earlier Oberholtzærs, but after diligent search nothing could be found to substantiate the theory. It is the opinion of the writer that the Samuel Oberholtzer who, with his family sailed on the ship "Molly" for America, is of our branch of the family in America, just as is Jacob Oberholtzer, who landed in August, 1752 and settled in Franconia Township, Philadelphia County, the head of the Montgomery County Oberholtzers. The only other Oberholtzers who landed in Philadelphia prior to the revolution were Hans Jacob Oberholtzer, September 5, 1730; Henry Oberholtzer, February 7, 1739; and Hans George Oberholtzer, October 22, 1754. Of these, nothing further is known. The line of Samuel Oberholtzer has been established, however, beyond a doubt.

In 1735 Andrew Hamilton received a grant of 1500 acres of land in Conestoga Manor subject to a quit rent of one shilling per one hundred acres. In 1739 this tract was transferred to Michael Baughman at a profit of six pence per hundred acres annually. May 26, 1746, Samuel Oberholtzer bought 207 acres of this tract for a consideration of one hundred twenty pounds cash and a yearly quit rent of one ear of Indian corn to be paid on the first day of May to the said Michael Baughman or his heirs forever.

May 2, 1748, the will of Samuel Oberholtzer was probated. It is evident that he was comparatively old man when he died. The original was written in German and only part of it exists. It was signed by mark, which shows a nervous hand. The name is spelled Oberholtzer. A quaint English translation of this paper is preserved. The wife, Elizabeth and two sons, Jacob and Martin, are named. Reference is made to two daughters: These were Magdalena, wife of Henry Musselman, and Veronica.

There were various divisions and transfers of this property between the four children till, finally, Jacob determined to strike out for himself. He sold his share to his brother Martin in 1759, and bought from Jacob Good one hundred twenty-six acres in Warwick Township for five hundred pounds in 1761. In the spring of 1762, he bought from Jacob Shearer, for twenty-one pounds a brown cow with a white mark on her forehead and various housekeeping necessities of those days. So it may be inferred that he married about this time, though more than forty years old. He died in Manheim Township in 1806, owning land in Manheim, Warwick, and Hempfield Townships, leaving his property to his wife Catherine, his son Jacob, and three daughters -- Mary, wife of John Schumaker, Ann wife of Jacob Ober, and Catherine, married to Michael Ober. Children of Mary by her marriage to John Schumaker -- Catherine, Elizabeth, Magdalena, and John. *Jacob*

Martin Oberholtzer, the younger son, settled down on the old homestead and by his wife, Elizabeth, to whom he married shortly before his father's death in 1748, he had eight children -- Jacob, Magdalena (died in childhood), Christian, Mary Samuel, Anna, Elizabeth (born in 1763), and Martin, born in 1764. Martin, the elder, died in 1767, in middle life. His youngest child, Martin was only three years old, and all but Jacob were minors. Christian and Mary chose their big brother as guardian while Samuel and Anna chose Jacob Frick, of Manheim Township. The court appointed John Kilheffer of Manor as guardian of the estates of Elizabeth and Martin, they having been under fourteen years.

After his father's death the oldest son, Jacob, petitioned the court to have the farm of one hundred eighty acres appraised in order that he might enjoy it. The twelve men appointed found that the plantation was worth ten hundred seventy-five pounds lawful money, and Jacob agreed to pay to the widow 358-6-8 and to each of the children 102-7-7- $\frac{1}{2}$, he, himself as oldest son got a double share. In due time Mary married Jacob Kilheffer. Anna married Philip Yenoway, and Elizabeth became the wife of John Staiman. Christian married and moved to Hempfield Township. He had four children, Christian, Anne, Molly, Barbara. He died in 1789.

Samuel married Christiana Wissler, daughter of Christian Whissler of Warwick Township. They had nine children: Samuel, Christian, Jacob, Esther, Catherine, Anna, (wife of Joseph Weaver), Magdalena, (Wife of Benjamin Lehman), and Maria (wife of Samuel Landis). He died about 1822 quite well-to-do. His son Samuel got 127 acres of land in Warwick Township, Christian 135 in Earl Township, and Jacob got the plantation in Heidelberg Township, Lebanon County. The old Oberholtzer homestead on the Little Conestoga near Millersville, held by Martin's oldest son, Jacob, was sold when all the children, except Martin, had become of age, to Jacob Kilheffer (married to Mary) for 1300 pounds in 1782, and when Martin became of age in 1785 he released his share of the estate for 185 pounds and fifteen shillings, which with his share in the personal property appraised by John Frantz, David Hare, and Henry Musselman in 1757 at 236 pounds and 14 shillings, constituted his inheritance.

In June 1790, Martin Oberholtzer, in partnership with Jacob Kilheffer bought 115 acres of land in Manor Township for 550 pounds, payable 60 pounds yearly from Jacob and Michael Eby, but he did not stay long in this venture. In 1791 or 1792, he married Elizabeth, coincidence that his mother's and grandmother's names were Elizabeth also. Soon after this marriage in 1792 he bought from his father-in-law a mill property near Brownstown, now known as Wenger's mill, for 2300 pounds. Here the first son was born on the last day of February, 1793. They named him John. The remaining children born to this couple were Ann, wife of Hetzel Stirk, Elizabeth, wife of Samuel Watts, Christian, Martin, Jacob, Samuel, Issac, and Daniel. In 1795 Martin Oberholtzer true to family traditions, returned to farming. He bought land upon which Terre Hill is now built, and built himself a house, bearing on the gable the date "M.O. 1795." This house is still in a good state of preservation. The mill property was sold in 1797 to John Royer for 4600 pounds. He spent the remainder of his life in the home he built, accumulating quite a fortune. He died in 1833 and is buried in Terre Hill Cemetery. His good wife, Elizabeth, for whom he made elaborate provisions in his will, died in 1854.

*Sally
Estes*