

# Annals of Womelsdorf, Pa. and Community

1723—1923

HISTORY'S YARD-STICK  
*for* TWO-HUNDRED YEARS

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"Lest we forget! Lest we forget!"

—*Kipling*

"Posterity will not forget his services."

—*Pres. Geo. Washington at Conrad Weiser's grave*

"I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives."

—*Abraham Lincoln*

## Chapter XVIII.

## OUR MOST ILLUSTRIOUS FAMILY

There is no doubt but that the family and descendants of Conrad Weiser constitute Womelsdorf's most illustrious domestic group. A brief history of it, together with its genealogical branches and the achievements of this lineage during half a dozen generations within the past two centuries, will form too important and interesting a chapter to be omitted from these "annals."

The life of Conrad Weiser is comparatively well known to the historical reader. It has been often told in addresses and summarized in brief sketches. There have been at least three different biographies published of him to the writer's own knowledge. Yet there is a woeful ignorance of the real greatness of this man, even in the county where he spent the best, the ripest and most active half of his life. The achievements and public services of this important character during the provincial period of our state and nation must be told again and again, "lest we forget! lest we forget!"

His own brief autobiography, up to the time of taking up his home in Berks county, which the writer once had the good fortune of having in his hand for the purpose of making a transcript of its beautiful and simple German, must form the preliminary or initial story to his career, which is to follow, and which was enacted here at Womelsdorf during the last and most strenuous 30 years of his life. We give here a translation of this autobiography written in his native tongue in a small blank book, about three by six inches. It had descended into the possession of Michael Kalbach, a lineal descendant, of Womelsdorf, from whence it passed into the hands of the late Jacob S. Livingood, of Reading, who later deposited it as a choice historic treasure among the archives of the Pennsylvania Historical Society library, of Philadelphia.

**WEISER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.**

This autobiography as translated by the late Dr. H. H. Muhlenberg, of Reading, follows:

On Nov. 2, 1696, I, Conrad Weiser, was born in Europe, in the land of Wurttemberg, in the county (amt) of Herrenberg; the village is called Astaet, and was christened at Kupingen, nearby, as my father has informed me. I say, I was born on Nov. 2, 1696. My father's name was John Conrad Weiser; my mother's name was Anna Magdalena; her family name was Uebele. My grandfather was Jacob Weiser; my great-grandfather also Jacob Weiser. He was magistrate (Schultheiss) in the village of Great Aspach, in the county (amt) of Backnang, also in the land of Wurttemberg. In this latter village my ancestors from time immemorial were born and are buried there as well on my father's as my mother's side. In 1709 my mother passed into eternity on the last day of May, in the 43d year of her age, leaving children, Catrina, Margaretta Magdalena, Sabin, Conrad, George Frederick, Christopher, Barbara, John Frederick, and was buried there by the side of my ancestors. She was a God-fearing woman and much beloved by her neighbors. Her motto was, 'Jesus Christ, I live for thee, I die for thee, thine am I in life and death.'

"In the year above mentioned, namely in 1709, my father moved away from Great Aspach on June 24, and took eight children with him. My eldest sister, Catrina, remained there with her husband, Conrad Boss, with whom she had two children. My father sold them his house, fields, meadows, vineyard and garden, but they could only pay him 75 gulden, the remainder, 600 gulden, was to be paid to my father at a subsequent period, which was never done, so it was made a present to them. In about two months we reached London, England, along with several thousand Germans, whom Queen Anne, of glorious memory, had taken in charge, and was fur-

ishing with food. About Christmas Day we embarked, and 10 shiploads, with about 4,000 souls, were sent to America.

#### AT LIVINGSTONE'S MANOR.

"On June 13, 1710, we came to anchor at New York in North America, and in the same autumn were taken to Livingstone's Manor at the expense of the queen. Here in Livingstone's, or as it was called by the Germans, Loewenstein's Manor, we were to burn tar, and cultivate hemp, to repay the expenses incurred by the queen in bringing us from Holland to England, and from England to New York. We were directed by several commissioners, viz. John Cast, Henry Meyer, Richard Seykott, who were put in authority over us by Robert Hunter, governor of New York. But neither object succeeded and in 1713 the people were discharged from their engagements and declared free. Then the people scattered themselves over the whole province of New York. Many remained where they were. About 150 families determined to remove to Schochary (a place about 40 English miles to the west of Albany). They therefore sent deputies to the land of the Maquas to consult with the Indians about it, who allowed them to occupy Schochary. For the Indian deputies who were in England at the time the German people were lying in tents on the Blackmoor, had made a present to Queen Anne of this Schochary, that she might settle these people upon it. Indian guides were sent to show the Germans where Schochary was. My father was the first of the German deputies.

"In November, 1713, when the above mentioned deputies had returned from the Maqua country to Livingstone's manor, the people moved the same autumn to Albany and Schenectady, so as to be able to move in the spring to Schochary. Bread was dear, but the people worked very hard for a living, and the old settlers were very kind and did much good to the Germans, although some of a different disposition were not wanting. My father reached Schenectady the same fall, where he remained with his family over winter, with a man named John Meyndert.

#### AMONG THE INDIANS.

"A chief of the Maqua nation named Quaynant visited my father, and they agreed that I should go with Quaynant into his country to

learn the Maqua language. I accompanied him and reached the Maqua country in the latter end of November, and lived with the Indians. Here I suffered much from the excessive cold, for I was but badly clothed; and towards spring also from hunger, for the Indians had nothing to eat. A bushel of Indian corn was worth five to six shillings. And at this period the Indians, when drunk, were so barbarous, that I was frequently obliged to hide from drunken Indians.

"In the spring of 1714 my father removed from Schenectady to Schochary, with about 150 families in great poverty. One borrowed a horse here, another there, also a cow and plow-harness. With these things they united and broke up jointly so much land that they raised nearly enough corn for their own consumption the following year. But this year they suffered much from hunger, and made many meals on the wild potatoes and ground beans, which grew in great abundance in that place. The Indians called the potatoes ochna-nada, the ground beans otach-ragara. When we wished for meal we had to travel 35 to 40 miles to get it, and had then to borrow it on credit. They would get a bushel of wheat here, a couple at another place, and were often absent from home three or four days before they could reach their suffering wives and children, crying for bread.

"The people had settled in villages, of which there were seven. The first and nearest, Schenectady, was called Kneskern-dorf; second, Gerlach-dorf; third, Fuchsen-dorf; fourth, Hans George Schmidts-dorf; fifth, Weisers-dorf, or Brunnen-dorf; sixth, Hartmans-dorf; seventh, Ober Weisers-dorf. So named after the deputies who were sent from Livingstone's Manor to the Maqua country.

#### MASTERED MAQUA TONGUE.

"Towards the end of July I returned from among the Indians to my father, and had made considerable progress or had learned the greater part of the Maqua language. An English mile from my father's house there lived several Maqua families, and there were always Maquas among us hunting, so that there was always something for me to do in interpreting, but without pay. There was no one else to be found among our people who understood the language, so that I gradually became completely master of

the language, so far as my years and other circumstances permitted.

"Here now this people lived peaceably for several years without preachers or magistrates. Each one did as he thought proper. About this time I became very sick and expected to die, and was willing to die, for my stepmother was indeed a stepmother to me. By her influence my father treated me very harshly. I had no other friend and had to bear hunger and cold. I often thought of running away, but the sickness mentioned put a bit in my mouth; I was bound as if by a rope to remain with my father and obey him.

"I have already mentioned that my father was a widower when he left Germany and landed in 1710 with eight children in New York, where my two brothers, George Frederick and Christopher, were bound by the governor, with my then sick father's consent, over to Long Island. The following winter my youngest brother, John Frederick, died in the sixth year of his age, and was buried in Livingstone's bush, as the expression then was, and was the first one buried where now the Reformed Church in Weisersdorf stands.

"In the year 1711 my father married my stepmother, whom I have mentioned above. It was an unhappy match and was the cause of my brothers and sisters all becoming scattered. At last I was the only one left at home, except the three children he had by my stepmother, viz: John Frederick, Jacob and Rebecca. Everything went crab fashion, one misfortune after another happened to our family, of which I always was partaker. I frequently did not know where to turn and learned to pray to God and His word became my most agreeable reading.

### SOLD TO MERCHANTS.

"But to return to Schochary. The people had taken possession without informing the governor of New York, who, after letting them know his dissatisfaction, sold the land to seven rich merchants, four of whom lived in Albany; the other three in New York. The names of those in Albany were Myndert Shyller, John Shyller, Robert Livingstone and Peter Van Brygess; of those of New York, were George Clerk, at that time secretary; Dr. Stadts and Rip Van Dam. Upon this a great uproar arose in Schochary and Albany, be-

cause many people in Albany wished the poor people to retain their lands. The people of Schochary divided into two parties; the strongest did not wish to obey, but to keep the land, and therefore sent deputies to England to obtain a grant from George the First, not only for Schochary, but for more land in addition. But the plans did not succeed according to their wishes, for in the first place the deputies had to leave secretly and embarked at Philadelphia in 1817. As soon as they got to sea they fell into the hands of pirates, who robbed them as well as the crew of their money, but then let them free.

"My father, who was one of the deputies, was three times tied up and flogged, but would not confess to having money; finally, William Scheff, the other deputy, said to the pirates, 'This man and I have a purse in common and I have already given it to you, he has nothing to give you.' Upon which they let him go free. The ship had to put into Boston to purchase necessaries for the crew and passengers in place of those taken by the pirates. When they reached England they found times had changed and that there was no longer a Queen Anne on the throne. They still found some of the old friends and advocates of the Germans among whom were the chaplains at the King's German Chapel, Messrs. Boehn and Roberts, who did all in their power. The affairs of the deputies finally reached the lords commissioners of trade and plantations and the governor of New York, Robert Hunter, was called home. In the meanwhile the deputies got into debt; Walrath, the third deputy, became homesick, and embarked on a vessel bound to New York, but died at sea. The other two were thrown into prison; they wrote in time for money, but owing to the ignorance and overconfidence of the persons who had the money to transmit which the people had collected, it reached England very slowly. In the meanwhile Robert Hunter had arrived in England, had arranged the sale of the Schochary lands in his own way, before the board of trade and plantations. The opposite party was in prison, without friends or money. Finally when a bill of exchange for 70 pounds sterling arrived, they were released from prison, petitioned anew, and in the end got an order to the newly arrived governor of New York, William Burnett, to grant vacant land to the Germans who had been sent to New York by the deceased Queen Anne.

**SENT TO THE GOVERNOR.**

"Towards the end of 1720 this William Burnet arrived in New York. In the commencement of 1721 I was sent to New York with a petition to Gov. Burnet. He appeared friendly and stated what kind of an order from the lords of trade and plantations he brought with him, which he was resolved to comply with, but deputies were yet in England, not content with the decision, but could get nothing more done. In the last-named year, viz., 1721, William Scheff returned home, having quarreled with my father; they both had hard heads. At last, in November, 1723, my father also returned. Scheff died six weeks after his return.

"Gov. Burnet gave patents for land to the few who were willing to settle in the Maqua country, namely, in Stony Arabia, and above the falls, but none on the river, as the people hoped. They, therefore, scattered. The larger part removed to the Maqua country or remained in Schochary and bought the land from the before-named rich men.

"The people got news of the land on Suataro and Tulpehocken, in Pennsylvania; many of them united and cut a road from Schochary to the Susquehanna River, carried their goods there, and made canoes, and floated down the river to the mouth of the Suataro Creek (Swatara), and drove their cattle over land. This happened in 1723. From there they came to Tulpehocken, and this was the origin of the Tulpehocken settlement. Others followed this party and settled there, at first, also, without the permission of the proprietary of Pennsylvania or his commissioners; also against the consent of the Indians from whom the land had not yet been purchased. There was no one among the people to govern them, each one did as he pleased, and their obstinacy has stood in their way ever since. Here I will leave them for a time and describe my own circumstances.

**MARRIED IN 1720.**

"In 1720, while my father was in England I married my Ann Eve, and was given her in marriage by Rev. John Frederick Heger, Reformed clergyman, on Nov. 22, in my father's house in Schochary.

"On Sept. 7, 1722, my son, Philip, was born, and was baptized by John Bernhard von Duehren, Lutheran clergyman; his sponsors were Philip Brown and wife.

On Jan. 13, 1725, my daughter, Anna Malinda, was born; was baptized by John Jacob Oehl, Reformed clergyman; her sponsors were Christian Bouch, jr., and my sister, Barbara.

"On June 24, 1727, my daughter, Maria, was born, and was baptized by William Christopher Birkenmeyer, Lutheran clergyman. Her sponsors were Nickolas Feg and wife.

"On Dec. 24, 1728, my son, Frederick, was born; was baptized by John Bernhard von Duehren, Lutheran clergyman; his sponsors were Nickolas Feg and wife.

"These four were born to me at Schochary. Afterwards, namely, in 1729, I removed to Pennsylvania, and settled in Tulpehocken, where the following children were born to me, namely:

"On Feb. 27, 1730, my son, Peter, was born and on Feb. 15, 1731, I had two sons born, who were called Christopher and Jacob; the first lived 15 weeks, the latter 13 weeks, when they were released from the evils of this world and taken to a happy eternity.

"On June 19, 1732, my daughter, Elizabeth, was born.

"On Jan. 23, 1734, my daughter, Margaret, was born.

"On April 23, 1735, my son, Samuel, was born.

"On July 18, 1736, I had again a son born to me. I called him Benjamin; when he was three months old, the care of the Almighty God took him away; the same year my daughter, Elizabeth, followed him. A merciful God will give them all to me again, to the honor of His glory.

"On Aug. 11, 1740, another son was born. I called his name, Jabez. The mercy of God removed him from the evil of these days when he was 17 days old.

"On Feb. 27, 1742, another daughter was born. I called her name Hanna; the following Aug. 11 she went into a happy eternity.

**DEATH OF DAUGHTER.**

"March 16, of this year, my dear daughter, Madlina, went from time to eternity, through an easy death, after a long and tedious illness. Her faith, consolation and refuge was in the crucified saviour, Jesus Christ, whom she had vowed herself to in

days of health, with soul and body.

"On Aug. 12, 1744, my son, Benjamin, was born."

Thus far the story of Conrad Weiser's ancestry, birth, immigration to America, trials, Indian experiences, home, studies and hardships of unfriendly domestic relations, the bitter years in New York province, poverty, defraudings by land sharks, disappointments and trials of many kinds which befell their family in common with others, then his marriage, the birth and baptism of his children: his removal to Penn-

sylvania and settlement in the Tulpehocken region; more births and deaths, until the year 1744.

Surely this was a rough and a checkered schooling. It was laying the foundation in hardships and eventful trials—just such as often happen to men of God, who are to become instruments in His hand for great service to humanity. We shall see in our next how the divine Providence used him in his day and his offspring after him to serve this new country of America in its formative period.