

Teator - Teter Tree

Summer 2003

Newsletter #18

Happy early summer to all,

No need to panic! This is not a re-union notice. That's not until next summer.

I trust this newsletter finds you in good health, a wet and cool spring notwithstanding (and some blazing heat recently).

Enclosed is a copy of an article I read in the Altamont Enterprise. In it, Harold Miller details some why the Palatines (our general ancestry) came to America and why they ended up where they did. And, since our ancestors came to live the next town away, some of the details are appropriate.

My research shows that in about 1805, Henry Teter comes with his wife and most (if not all) of his children to the Cheese Hill area between Preston Hollow and Rensselaerville. I've wondered what route they would have taken from the southeastern Columbia County area (West Copake) to get to the hilltops of the triangle of southwestern Albany County, northwestern Greene County, and eastern Schoharie County. At first, I thought, and maybe still likely, is that they headed west to the Hudson River, followed the pathways along the Catskill Creek and found land available on

a hilltop that many of us today deem to be tough farmland. Furthermore, they found themselves enmeshed in the Van Rensselaer tenant system, described in the Miller article.

The other possible route would have been the one described in the article. At some time, probably wintertime when the frozen rivers are easily traveled, our ancestors may have taken the Hudson River, to the Mohawk, entered the Schoharie Valley, and found their spot just east of Middleburgh and south of Berne. Which way is the real way they took? If you find a good clue, let me know.

A very rough pathway of our ancestor, by generation, goes something like this:

--- Lorentz, immigrated from the Palatinate (today, southwestern Germany), probably lived in East Camp (Germantown) for a short time before heading with his brother Jurge (George) to the Rhinebeck area.

--- Second generation Henrich probably lived his entire life in Rhinebeck.

--- Third generation Zacharias is born in the Rhinebeck area but probably moved to the West Copake area.

--- Fourth generation Henrich (Henry, of

our Cheese Hill) lives his early adult life in the West Copake area before moving across the river.

--- Fifth generation David (he would have been about 15 years old when his parents move to Cheese Hill) is born in the West Copake area, and lives his adult years in the Cheese Hill area and is buried on Cheese Hill.

--- Sixth generation John Teter is probably born on Cheese Hill (baptized in an Oak Hill church that no longer exists) before moving to the valley just a mile or two east of Livingstonville.

--- The seventh generation, and on, of course, is the subject material of our Teator/Teter reunions.

As I've written before, when I started the family research, I would discover that a fifty mile circle around my house in Freehold would encompass much of the American ancestry on the Teator side. Only in the past two or three generations has such large distances been put between parents and children. Still, when I put out this mailing list, the same fifty mile circle takes care of the majority of your households.

On a different note, I thank those of you who responded to my request for educational background, as well as corrections. I received about twenty letters, a good response, I thought.

At some point in my life, when I have a little more free time (I hear from you retirees that no such thing exists!), I'd like to flesh out some of our stories. One area that I wish I had more of is the accomplishments or high points of our lives.

Leafing through a Times-Union supplement one day, I came across a familiar face of a person who sits (sat, now that the school year is over) in my English class. Amanda Every, daughter of Gene and Claudia, was recognized as the female scholar-athlete for Cairo-Durham High

School, accompanied by a short write-up. I have obviously clipped it for my family files but I know there have been other articles or clippings I have missed. Keep me in mind, and mail me a copy when you chance upon something.

And, as I'm reading Amanda's clipping, I am reminded that we take for granted so many of the small things of life. I have had the distinct pleasure of having my second cousins, no-times or one-time removed, in my English classes at Cairo-Durham since 1985 – Bill Teator, Jay Teator, Hayden Reynolds, Alicia Brink, the aforementioned Amanda, and a few others I would see and know. Some times, it is these shared experiences that add meaning to the many layers of life.

Other reminders:

- Change of address? Let me know and I'll keep the newsletters coming.
- As new households are established, pass along the new address.
- Is the mailing label still right? If you want a change, let me know.
- Any new births and marriages? Send me the info.
- I haven't written up a family profile or biographical sketch in a while. I invite you to do so for your family or parents, or just make notes for me to use.

I will try to put out one more newsletter before the reunion newsletter. Keep the third Sunday in **July, 2004** open if you want to attend.

That's it for now, and take care.



German Refugees: Settlers in the Helderbergs

By Harold H. Miller

Albany County extends about 25 miles west from the Hudson River, and is bisected from north to south by the Helderberg escarpment, an abrupt rise of land that in many places is a sheer cliff, making access to the hill country difficult. The earliest European settlements were in the fertile valley lands along the easily accessible Hudson River; the land above the escarpment remained wilderness for another century.

In 1621 the Netherlands government granted the Dutch West India Company a 24-year trading monopoly in its American colonies. The company conceived of the Patroon system as a way to attract settlers without increasing its expenses. A patroon, or Dutch lord, was granted a large tract of land; in return he agreed to sponsor settlers and colonize the land at his own expense.

In 1629 Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, a prominent Amsterdam merchant and principal shareholder in the Dutch West India Company, was granted the colony of Rensselaerwyck, incorporating what is now the city of Albany, plus most of what is now Albany, Rensselaer, and Green counties. Fort Orange, now Albany, became the center of the Dutch fur trade.

The Dutch farmers brought over by the Van Rensselaers to clear and work the rich Hudson Valley farmland were not permitted to own it. Rather they were granted long-term leases, assuring the patroon a healthy yearly income. The leases could be sold, along with the buildings, but the underlying land and mineral rights belonged to the patroon. When the English wrested control of the Dutch American colonies in 1664, they did not disturb the patroon system.

For the next 65 years or so, the land in the Helderbergs — for the most part hilly and rocky — remained wilderness. One familiar with the topography of Albany County would think that

when the first settlers finally took to the western hills in the early 18th century they would have gone up over the Helderberg escarpment, but that is not the case. They entered surreptitiously through the "back door" via Schoharie. Thus they avoided detection and having to pay rent for almost 50 years! These early squatters in the Helderbergs were refugees from the Palatinate region of what is now Germany.

Palatine emigration

In the 17th century, northern Europe was a disparate collection of fiefs and kingdoms. The Palatinate was a German-speaking region along the Rhine River, roughly where the modern German state of Rhineland-Pfalz is located. It consisted of rich river-bottom land with vineyards on the steep sides of the valley.

The period following the Protestant Reformation was a time of strong religious fervor, with Protestants fighting Catholics. Thus it was for both social and economic reasons that many wars were fought for control of the Palatinate region. About half of the population was killed. Vacant lands were re-settled by a variety of Protestants: Moravians, Calvinists, Brethren, Mennonites, French Huguenots, and Lutherans from Holland and Switzerland.

The struggle for control continued; farmers caught in the middle had their families killed, crops destroyed, and buildings burned. As a further burden, their taxes were increased to unprecedented levels to pay for the wars that were ruining them!

Then, in 1690, a Catholic became ruler of the Palatinate; his devotion bordered on the fanatical. He persecuted all Protestants who refused to convert.

At the time, large landholders in the British American colonies were seeking settlers for their sparsely populated holdings. They distributed pamphlets up and down the Rhine extolling the climate and availability of land in Carolina and Pennsylvania. The devastation brought on by the war, confiscatory taxation, and fear of religious persecution, prompted the start of the Palatinate emigration to the new lands in America.

Then in the winter of 1708, yet another catastrophe befell those

who had not fled. An almost unprecedented cold spell across northern Europe killed the few remaining cattle and ruined the vineyards and fruit trees that had survived the devastation of the wars. Farmers by the thousands sold what little they had and crowded their families into riverboats for the long journey down the Rhine to the Netherlands port of Rotterdam. There they camped on the outskirts of the city in crude, reed-covered shelters.

England decided it was time to take positive measures to encourage the population of its colonies in the new world. Ships bringing troops from England to the Low Countries to fight the French were instructed to transport the Palatine refugees to England on their return trip.

In England, the Palatines were placed in a series of squalid refugee camps in and about London. At first the refugees were pitied and helped, but as the summer passed and more kept arriving, Londoners turned on them.

On one occasion, feeling threatened by the influx of low-cost competition, London laborers armed with scythes, axes, and hammers attacked the Palatine immigrants in the overcrowded camps. Responding to this social unrest, as well as fearing the spread of disease and pestilence, some refugees, including all of the Catholics, were sent back to Holland to be returned to Germany. Later that year a few were settled elsewhere in England; others were sent to Ireland and Carolina.

Tar industry

In 1709 most of the pine resin used to make tar for waterproofing ships came from Sweden. Since it was important to the British Navy to have its own supply, it was proposed to ship

the Palatines to New York to establish a British tar industry on land along the Mohawk or Hudson Rivers. As an added benefit, any settlement in the Mohawk area would provide a buffer between existing settlements in eastern New York and the French in Canada, as well as the hostile natives in western New York.

The refugees were promised 40 acres and farm tools. In return they had to work the land and pay back the costs of their transportation and subsistence. Their contracts were in English, and a German translation was read to them. What the British commitments actually were would later be the subject of much dispute.

Toward the end of December, 1709, about 3,300 Palatines were packed into the holds of 11 small ships in crowded and unsanitary conditions. Incredibly, it was not until April of 1710 when they finally set sail. During the ensuing two-month voyage, hundreds died of typhus.

The ships arrived in the harbor of New York in June, six months after the initial shipboard confinement of the helpless passengers. For fear that they would spread contagious diseases, the sick and half-starved refugees were kept in isolation in temporary tent camps set up on what is now Governor's Island in the Hudson River just off New York City. There, many more became ill and died of typhus. Records of refugee marriages performed in 1710 show that about half were between widows and widowers. Orphans were made indentured servants to the Dutch colonists.

New York Governor Hunter, who the British put in charge of the refugees and the tar project, kept careful lists of the families provided subsistence, so the government could be repaid. To save money, families considered to have too many young children for the government to support, had the "excess" taken from them forcibly and given to Dutch families as indentured servants.

(Palatine Families of New York, by Henry Z. Jones Jr., is a genealogical compendium of the ancestors and descendants of the Palatines on Governor Hunter's subsistence lists; among them were the following early Helderberg families: Ball, Becker, Bellinger, Bouck, Cassleman, Coons, Chrysler, Ecker, Enders, Kniskern, Loucks, Mann, Miller, Schaffer, Schanz, Sternberger, Warner, and Young.)

Governor Hunter sent a survey team to the Schoharie Valley area to see if it was suitable for his tar project. A Mohawk chief, when made aware of Hunter's proposed use of the land, gave it to the Queen for "Christian

settlements." Nevertheless, although he accepted the land, Hunter later rejected its use for his tar project since it had no suitable pines.

The governor then purchased about 6,000 acres from Robert Livingston, a Dutch Patroon with extensive land holdings on the east bank of the Hudson River. The British Crown already had possession of the land opposite it on the west side of the river. About 1,200 of the Palatines were settled in several camps on both sides of the Hudson near the juncture of present day Columbia, Green, Dutchess, and Ulster counties. They were given small tracts of worthless land upon which to build a shelter, and set to work stripping the bark from pine trees for the tar project.

By the spring of 1711 the Palatines were extremely dissatisfied with their bleak prospects, and were on the verge of rebellion. They demanded the lands

out and rations were reduced to a third of a loaf of bread and a quart of low-alcohol beer daily for each adult.

In vain hope of additional funding, Hunter advanced his own money to buy food, thus keeping the pitch tar project from collapsing. Finally, in the middle of September, 1712, his credit ran out and the Palatines were unexpectedly told they would have to fend for themselves. So that they could be contacted if funds became available to restart the project, they were told they must obtain permission to leave. Many remained in the area; others received permission to go to New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Settling in Schoharie

About a quarter of the Palatines chose to go to Schoharie without asking permission. They sent their leaders on ahead to negotiate with the natives for a place to settle. The Indians readily agreed, since they had

fees. Believing the Schoharie land had been given to the queen for their use, the Palatines simply squatted rather than applying for a grant. When Governor Hunter heard about the Schoharie settlement, he was furious and ordered them out. With no likelihood of subsisting elsewhere, and believing they were on their promised land, they indignantly refused to go.

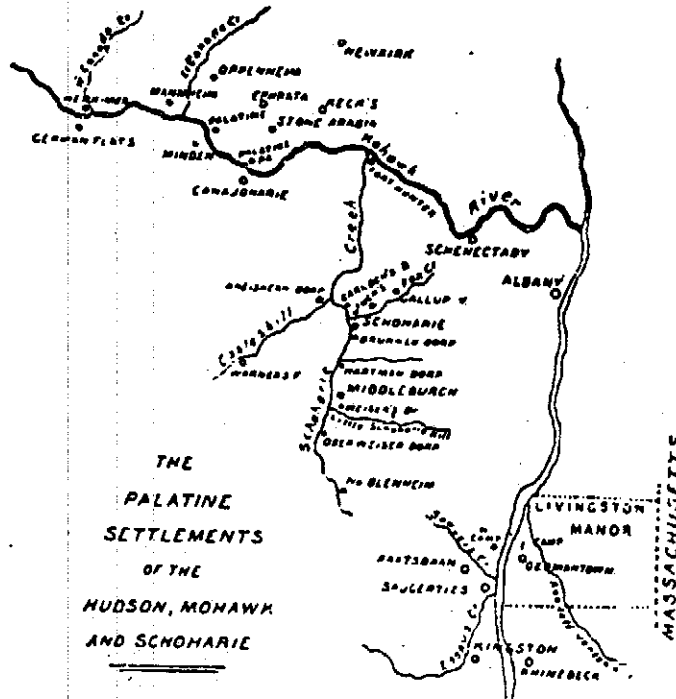
In March 1713, the families who had wintered near Schenectady loaded what little they had on crude sledges and dragged them to Schoharie to join their comrades. Following the custom back home on the Rhine, the Palatine farmers initially lived in small villages and had their fields on the outskirts. Each village along the Schoharie River consisted of small huts built of logs and earth. Certainly the first year or so, they worked communally to clear the land and prepare it for crops.

In 1714, in an effort to force the squatters from Schoharie, Governor Hunter granted the flat bottomland along the Schoharie River on which they had settled to Martin Schuyler and other Dutch aristocrats. That same year, an adjoining tract was granted to Adam Vrooman, a well-do-do Dutch trader from Schenectady, who had purchased it from the Indians in 1711. Schuyler tried for many years to either sell his land to the German squatters, sign them up on long-term leases, or evict them. In 1718, after a number of brouhahas and arrests, three of the Palatines went to England to petition for their right to remain on the Schoharie land.

By that time, deep in debt himself, Hunter had returned home to London to try to recoup his fortune. There he falsely reported that the Palatines had settled on land already granted to others. Actually the land on which they had settled in 1712 was not sold to Schuyler and his partners until 1714. While Vrooman bought the adjoining land from the Indians in 1711, the British did not grant it to him until 1714. Even so, the Palatines lost their appeal; at Hunter's suggestion, the Palatines were to be offered land elsewhere on the frontier.

As a result, in 1721, Governor Burnet gave the Palatines permission to purchase land from the Mohawks in the Mohawk Valley. Over the next few years the majority of the Palatine families in Schoharie moved to Montgomery and Herkimer counties; others went to Pennsylvania and Canada.

Those that remained in Schoharie had to lease their farms from Schuyler and his partners. Finally, in 1729, seven (Continued on next page)



Maps show Palatine settlements in the area.

in Schoharie Valley that they believed had been given to the Queen for their settlement. Hunter replied that they could have 40 acres only after repaying with their labor the government outlay for their transportation and subsistence; and he would decide where the land would be located. The enraged refugees' rifles were confiscated, and they were forced to remain at the work camps under increased military surveillance.

The Palatines' food was initially paid for by a grant from the British. When a new British administration withdrew support for the project, funds ran

given the land to Queen Anne for that purpose. About 150 families immediately relocated to a temporary camp near Schenectady while they cleared a 15-mile path to Schoharie.

With winter imminent, a third of the families then moved into the Schoharie Valley. At times that winter, they were reduced to eating roots and herbs found with the help of their Indian neighbors.

The Palatines were fully aware that to obtain legal right to land, they first had to buy it from the native owners, and then apply to the governor for a grant and pay the necessary

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Palatine families bought the land they were farming, including that upon which the village of Schoharie is now located. At the time of the sale it was ostensibly to be divided into seven homesteads.

However, there is evidence to suggest that, following the custom of their homeland, the families continued to live close to one another rather than on separate farms. If so, they probably worked their own assigned plots on the surrounding communally-held land. It was not until 1753 that they divided this large tract into individual homesteads for each family.

Moving to the Helderbergs

Because of the land troubles, it is possible that some of the early Schoharie settlers who wanted to remain in the area near friends and family, but either could not or would not pay rent, decided to move just a few miles east to what are now the towns of Berne and Knox, in Albany County.

At that time, the wilderness land there could be had for the taking. As long as they entered by the back door, so to speak, i.e. from the west, Van Rensselaer would not know they were there. Certainly, some of the new Palatine German, Swiss, and Dutch immigrants who arrived about that time with plans to settle in the Schoharie Valley, instead squatted on the "free" lands in nearby Rensselaerwyck, since they had no money to rent or buy land.

(*More Palatine Families*, by Henry Z. Jones Jr., contains the genealogy of the following German and Swiss families who immigrated after 1717 and settled in the Helderbergs: Coons, Dietz, Fisher, Herzog, Hillegas, Mann, Martin, Proper, Reinhart, Schafer, Schell, Snyder, Shultes, Simon, Steiner, Tice, Wagner, Weidman, Young, Zeh, and Zimmer.)

Without a doubt, the Ball and Dietz families were among the earliest settlers in the Helderbergs. There is convincing evidence that by 1740 they were living next to each other in the Switzkill Valley, a few miles southwest of what is now Berne.

Schoharie history says that Peter Ball first settled in Schoharie. If so, he undoubtedly moved his family to the Switzkill Valley during the land troubles.

It was after 1730, when the Dietz family emigrated from the Palatinate. Although Schoharie history says they initially settled in the Schoharie Valley, a careful study of the evidence indicates that this was not the case.

Due to the lack of primary evidence, it is difficult to determine who were the earliest settlers in the Helderbergs. As has been demonstrated, the Palatines who initially settled in the greater Schoharie area were quite obstinate; they clearly did not put much store into getting leases or deeds. Also, for several decades, there was no church in the Helderbergs; marriages and baptisms were frequently performed by a circuit preacher and recorded in Schoharie.

During this early period of settlement, it appears that the Berne area was probably still considered part of Schoharie; so naturally records indicate they lived there. For all of these reasons, it is impossible to say with certainty who were the first settlers in the Helderbergs, where they lived, or when they arrived.

History books say that Knox was settled about 1745 by German and Dutch settlers who were on their way to settle in Schoharie when they got into an argument and some settled where they were. An early history reports that a Lutheran church was built about 1750 on Route 156, the Berne-Altamont Road, near the intersection with Route 157, Thompson's Lake Road. Reverend Peter Nichols Sommers from Schoharie is said to have preached there on occasion and administered the sacraments. Perhaps so, but a summary of his ministry does not support this. Unfortunately the church records were lost or destroyed in a fire, so the names of the early communicants are unknown.

Sometime before 1765, the area east of what is now the Albany--and-Schoharie county line finally had a name of its own. It started to be called "the Beaver Dam," named after a large beaver dam on the Foxenkill on the flats below what is now the village of Berne.

About 1765, the first church in the Helderbergs was constructed on the road to Schoharie, a mile west of what is now the village of Berne. Since there was no village at the time, it can be assumed that the Beaverdam Reformed Church was constructed near the center of the

then-settled area. It was several more years before a fulltime minister was hired; in the meantime, many baptisms and marriages continued to be recorded in Schoharie.

A 1767 map of the Rensselaer Manor shows no leases above the Helderberg escarpment. This strongly suggests that the patroon either had no interest or no knowledge of the perhaps half a hundred families who had been squatting on his mountain lands, some possibly for more than 40 years.

Leased land

Finally, in 1774, Van Rensselaer granted one of the earliest leases in the Helderbergs to Jacob Weidman. It was for land on Fox Creek in the Beaver Dam upon which Weidman had constructed the first sawmill and grist mill almost 20 years earlier.

A decade or so later, a few years after Stephen Van Rensselaer II inherited the manor, he commissioned a survey of the land above the Helderberg escarpment, dividing it into a grid of quarter-square-mile lots. Leases were keyed to the numbers on the map grid.

The resulting 1767 map shows the number of each lot and the name of the leaseholder, as well as roads, churches, mills, and streams. In the area that now includes the towns of Berne and Knox, the map shows about 90 irregularly-shaped lots. This is evidence they had been settled prior to the survey; the shape of the leased lots matched the land actually cleared and settled.

The 1787 Van Rensselaer map shows a concentration of leases in the Switzkill and Foxenkill valleys along what is now Route 443, the Helderberg Trail; just east of East Berne the trail turned south towards Westerlo. There were also numerous leases along the top of the Helderberg escarpment.

Farther north there were leases in a broad swath that generally followed the route through Knox between Altamont and Schoharie. This appears to have been the main east-west road through the hill country at the time. Scattered among the farms were vacant lots for which no leases had yet been issued. There were no villages.

The 1787 map also shows unbroken wilderness in the rugged hills above the Switzkill and Foxenkill valleys, and in the northern half of what is now the

town of Knox. These lands were vacant but evenly surveyed into lots of 160 square acres each. Stephen Van Rensselaer made plans to develop and populate the unsettled lands of the manor.

Handbills were distributed throughout New England announcing that he would give veterans of the Revolution homestead without cost. Only after the farms became productive would he ask for any compensation. The conditions of the grants stated that a farmer must clear the land, build a dwelling, and live there for seven years before beginning to pay rent.

By 1790, there were enough new settlers that a Lutheran church was constructed about two miles east of what is now the village of Berne. This indicates that the center of population was shifting east towards the Helderberg escarpment. It also shows that there was still no village center.

Confirmation is that the earliest recorded store in the Helderbergs, built in the late 1700's, was on the flats north of what is now the village of Berne. Apparently it wasn't until about 1800 that the village of Berne, the first in the Helderbergs, began to take shape.

Due to the success of Stephen Van Rensselaer's land promotion efforts, there was soon an influx of Dutch, German, British, Irish, Scottish, Swiss, and French settlers from the overcrowded lands of New England and the Hudson Valley. Early farmers had large families; in order for their children to have their own farms, some had to move west — for many in New England, this was to the highlands of western Albany County. A few decades later, this pattern would be repeating itself in the Helderbergs; the sons and daughters of the previous generation of settlers would be packing up and heading west.

Many families that lived near each other in the Palatinate remained together in the Hudson River camps and later in Schoharie. They then settled in Berne, where their descendants still live near each other today. Amazingly, some of these same families now winter near each other in Florida!