

THE HARBAUGH FAMILY

Part I

European Origins

by William Harbaugh

I had planned to present this amplification of the first part of my remarks at Reunion 2000 in finished form, but research and other matters intervened. So I have assembled instead a commentary on my notes, readings, and correspondence about our origins, which is what our patient editor suggested I do in the first place. Two more parts, also expansions of the talk at Pen Mar, will come later. Part II will review the forces that drove or pulled thousands of German-speaking people out of the Lower Palatinate (Pfalz) from the late seventeenth century to the late eighteenth. Part III will dwell on their social, economic, and cultural life after they came to America. The Harbaughs will be woven into both parts.

I knew that we were Swiss-German because my father told me so, just as his father told him and the Rev. Dr. Henry Harbaugh's father doubtless told him. Serene in that certain knowledge, I passed through the Palatinate city of Kaiserslautern in the spring of 1945. Had I known at the time that Jost Herbach, founder of the Harbaugh line in America, came from a farm just outside that city, I would have been torn. There was so much that was German to admire, from the Bach I had sung in the church choir to the lieder that crossed the Rhine by radio night after night. There also was so much to reject, from the "Prussian" mannerisms we had derided in our youth to the evil of Nazism so apparent even before we stared disbelievingly at the emaciated corpses in a Dachau satellite camp in late April.

For nineteen years after the war I continued to pride myself on my Swiss-German origins; no guilt by historical association would burden my conscience. Then, in May 1974, I received a letter from Dr. Fritz Braun, retired director of a historical institute at Kaiserslautern and, as I sensed and soon learned, a gentle and generous man. He was collecting data, he explained, for a book about one hundred emigrants from the region in the eighteenth century, and he was interested in information I might have on my branch of the Harbaugh family and the characteristics and special activities of Harbaughs in general. He added that Jost Herbach had left Otterberg, four miles north of Kaiserslautern, in the late 1730s. Would I, he asked, write an article for the institute's publication, Pfalzer Heimagrub? He would help with the German part of the research. I agreed to do so.

Here are some of the facts, non-facts, and conjectures about our family's German origins, putative Swiss or Dutch descent, and apparent change in religion while still in the Palatinate:

(1) The earliest printed statement about our origins appears to be the assertion of Henry Harbaugh in his Annals of 1856 that his great-grand father, "YOST HARBAUGH, was a Swiss, and came to this country . . . about the year 1736, or 1738." The informative Life of Henry Harbaugh (1900) by Henry's son Linn echoes him, as does Elizabeth Clarke Kieffer's intellectual biography, Henry Harbaugh: Pennsylvania Dutchman (1945).

(2) The Moravian Archives in the library of the York County Heritage Trust, formerly the York County Historical Society, state that George Herbach of Kreutz Creek (eldest son of Yost, a Moravian since 1750, and the first of the three brothers to establish himself in Harbaugh Valley) "came to America in 1738." That, it would seem to me, settles the dating of the family's arrival.

(3) Although the Cooperiders' Harbaugh History, first published in 1947 and recently reprinted, is mainly a

genealogical directory, readers more enamored of biography than genealogy should find interesting reading in some of the commentaries that mark many of its 2761 entries. (I read all of them in order to make couple of generalizations on family occupations and military service in my piece for the Kaiserslautern institute.) Speculative readers should also be engaged by the three-page “DENMARK ORIGIN” section in the Coopriders’ preface. No one should miss the reluctantly persuasive case against the Swiss origins theory in the “SWITZERLAND STORY” and, by inference, “GERMAN BACKGROUND” sections.

The anti-Swiss brief rests partly on the report of the Registrar’s Office of the canton of Uri that the name Herbach “is not represented anywhere in Switzerland as citizens” and partly on a conjecture by Henry Young, a descendant of the first Yost and director of the York County Historical Society from 1933 to 1949. Copies of the relevant correspondence are in the Harbaugh File of the society at York and are printed in the Coopriders’ book. The following quotation is from a letter by Dr. Young to J. L. Coopriders in December 1944:

“I have long believed that the family is of German, not Swiss, origin in spite of the tradition cited by Henry Harbaugh . . . and that the Harbaughs were one of a group of mountaineer families that are called the Schweitsers or Swiss Party in Frederick County [Sabillasville was founded by a Swiss named Zullinger] because they were closely associated and intermarried, partly Swiss and all of them mountaineers. I have the impression that they were an important democratic element, and through ignorance of some details they evidently came to accept the idea that they were racially Swiss as well as socially and politically. Otherwise, I cannot satisfactorily explain the facts that the Moravian records both at York and Graceham show that Yost’s eldest son, George, was born near Kaiserslautern in the Palatinate. These records were compiled . . . before the Annals were published and were not known to Henry Harbaugh, but we have no evidence of Swiss origin earlier than the tradition published in the Annals and accepted without question ever since.”

(4) The most detailed records about Yost and his children are those compiled by the historical institute in Kaiserslautern and by The Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormon). Both draw their birth data from the German Reformed Church records in Otterberg. The Mormons list Yost’s seven children by his first wife, including a daughter who died four years before the family emigrated and two born in America. But they give Otterberg rather than the Gersweilerhof, where the birthing surely occurred, as the first five children’s place of birth. This, of course, is a common practice; indeed, some of the records apparently used by the Coopriders list Adams County, Pennsylvania or Waynesboro of the same state as the birthplace of children actually born in Harbaugh Valley, Maryland.

The Mormon listing of Bavaria in the space for State or Country of birth can also be confusing. For long periods the Pfalz (Lower Palatinate) was bound closely to Bavaria. At times, however, it was more or less autonomous. The years 1648 - 1777, when it was being ravaged by French forces, were one such period. Nonetheless, the Otterberg church continued to link the Lower Palatinate with Bavaria in its records (Yost’s first five children were born between 1728 and 1735) and the Mormons transcribed the birth notices as written. A separate Mormon document gives the data on Yost’s four children by his second wife (all American), beginning with Leonard the builder-architect, though it fails to state his or anyone else’s occupation. Meanwhile, Dr. Braun prepared files for the historical institute in Kaiserslautern which list only the Gersweilerhof.

Braun’s document makes three singular contributions. First, it gives a specific year - 1703 - for Yost’s birth, as compared to the ten-year span - 1695 to 1705 - found in other sources. Second, it identifies Maria Margarethe Klein, whom he married in 1725, as the daughter of the grocer and master tailor at Ulmet, some fifteen miles northwest of Kaiserslautern. Third, it lists Yost’s father, Peter, as the “Hoffman auf dem Gersweilerhof” (farm owner on the Gersweiler Court). No birthplace is given for Yost and, significantly, a question mark appears in the space before “Schweiz” in the entry on Peter. A second document specifically reports the Gersweilerhof as the birthplace of Yost’s five pre-America children.

The Coopriders list the names of all Yost’s children except the girl who died before the family emigrated. Drawing on the Moravian Church records in York, they note that George was born on the Gersweilerhof. They mis-date Jacob’s birth by three years and give neither him nor Ludwig a place of birth. Their

informative note on John, the fourth of the four sons who sailed with Yost and their mother to America ca. 1738 and became a successful miller near York, erroneously reports that he was born in 1735. Yet, in a larger sense, such errors are as fly specks on a wall. The Coopriders had no access to German sources before they published their valuable work in 1947, and, as Dr. Braun's research shows, the story would not have changed much if they had been able to establish communication at that time.

(5) On May 9 1975, following months of pleasantly routine correspondence, Dr. Fritz Braun sent me "A complete new message": The Herbachs had come to the Palatinate from the Netherlands in the late seventeenth century; moreover, they had come as Mennonites. The controlling facts of that and two or three more letters are these: The church book of the Reformed congregation at Waldfishbach, some miles south of Kaiserslautern, states that Bruno Herbach, a Mennonite from the "Niederlandt," had his daughter baptized in the Reformed faith in 1693; the book of the Reformed Church at Otterberg reports that a Mennonite named Wilhelm Herbach [origin not given] became a member in 1710; the name Herbach was unknown in the Palatinate until the latter part of the seventeenth century; finally, the protocols of Kaiserslautern's city council for 1744 mention that Jost Herbach, "des Gersweilerhofmanns Sohn," left for the new land seven years earlier.

Braun further wrote that "the few early families in the Kaiserslautern area at that time are all of one stock," that Yost's father Peter had "probably" been born in the Netherlands about 1674 and emigrated as a child, and that the Bruno Herbach who had his daughter baptized in 1693 "must be a close relative" to Peter, perhaps even a brother. Dr. Braun also explained his initial reluctance to credit the Waldfishbach church book's identification of Bruno Herbach with the Netherlands:

"A special point. We have so many mennonites from Switzerland and only some of the Netherlands. Sometimes emigrants coming from the mountain area (highland) in Switzerland into the Rhine Valley (lowland) - they are speaking of 'Niederland' and use this word also . . . when they arrive on another place. But I couldn't find a name Herbach in Switzerland - it sounds not Swiss. Many difficulties of that kind."

For all my respect and affection for Fritz Braun, I think the single reference to the Netherlands in 1693 is a thin reed on which to lean. Dr. Braun died of cancer before we could discuss the Netherlands theory at length, and I could not find the name Herbach or anything reasonably close to it in a search of Dutch directories a decade ago.

Where, then, do we stand? Our only certain knowledge is that the four sons of Yost who accompanied him to America in 1738 were born in the Lower Palatinate. Probably their mother was native to the Palatinate. Yost may have been born there. His father Peter could have emigrated first from Switzerland and then from the Netherlands. He could also have come from elsewhere in Germany. Herbach may have been a new spelling of the family name. One hopes that Mennonite records in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Germany will someday be examined and that the Coopriders' many leads will be pursued.

Meanwhile I note that even though we do not yet know where the Harbaughs lived before Kaiserslautern, we do know a great deal about the general movement of peoples during the years of our concern. As indicated at the beginning, Part II will try to place the Harbaughs, as appropriate, within those larger movements both in Europe and America.

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