

# Frederick Valentine Melsheimer, Entomologist

*By* M. LUTHER HEISEY.

Some years before the close of the 18th century, two characters, with minds of scientific trend, tramped the fields of this county, one in search of the flora of the land, the other bent on gathering every manner of creeping bug and flying beetle. Both were men of highest scholastic attainments, both were devout and devoted pastors of Lutheran parishes. The Rev. Henry Ernst Muhlenberg, of Lancaster, was a botanist; the Rev. Frederick Valentine Melsheimer, an entomologist. There were times in those early days when Muhlenberg walked to his country charges, and we can visualize him traveling the road to his mission at Conestoga Center, eight miles away, and then, after the service, climbing the river hills in quest of rare and desirable specimens for his herbal. None the less interesting, but perhaps at times more ludicrous, if he pursued the way of the naturalist with the customary net, was Melsheimer in the quest of the elusive beetles and butterflies. His ramblings took him across the upper part of the county from Maytown to New Holland and Strasburg, for in that section he served five Lutheran congregations.

These two faithful preachers turned for an avocation to the fields of nature, and we are positive that through the works of nature they found closer communion with their God—the Creator and Preserver of nature; and that they found in the tiniest insect or minutest plant an evidence of God's handiwork, and that this communion made them more convincing messengers of the Gospel to those whom God created "a little lower than the angels."

The sentiments expressed in the lines written by Henry W. Longfellow to Agassiz on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday, apply to these naturalists.

"And Nature, the dear old nurse,  
Took the child upon her knee,  
Saying, 'Here is a story book  
Thy Father has written for thee.'

"'Come, wander with me,' she said,  
'Into regions yet untrod,  
And read what is still unread  
In the manuscripts of God.'

"And he wandered away, and away,  
With Nature, the dear old nurse,  
Who sang to him, night and day,  
The rhymes of the universe."

The story of Rev. H. E. Muhlenberg has been well told in our Proceedings, Vol. 32, No. 7. Now, we shall give in full detail the story of his

contemporary, Rev. F. V. Melsheimer. First, let us read from his own pen a short sketch of his active and useful life.

"I was born in the year of our Lord 1749, the 25th of September, in Regenborn, a small village in the Duchy of Brunswick. My parents were: Joachim Sebastian Melsheimer, a ducal forester, and Clara Margaretha Melsheimer, whose maiden name was Reitemeyer, a merchant's daughter from Holzminden. My parents took good care that, shortly after my birth, I was dedicated to the Lord, and therefore I was christened, and the Christian name of Frederick Valentine was given me.

"If my memory serves me right, my Grandfather and Grandmother on my father's side stood sponsors at my baptism. In my earliest youth my parents took notice, that I possessed a love for study, to cultivate this they placed me, while quite young, into the ducal cloister school at Holzminden, at which school I remained till 1769. At this school I laid the foundation to my future studies. In 1769 I entered the University at Helmstadt, where I pursued my studies until 1772. From 1772 until the beginning of 1776, I was employed as Tutor in two families at Halberstadt, and while at a little place called Suderode, I was agreeably surprised to receive a call from the Consistory at Brunswick. This call consisted of an offer to become chaplain of a regiment of Dragoons. February 6th, 1776, I was examined by the Consistory at Wolfenbüttel and the day following I was ordained.

"February 10, 1776, I preached my first sermon to the Dragoons. As this regiment of Dragoons had been selected to go to America, we embarked and left the Vaterland on the 22nd of February, 1776, and on the 1st of June the same year we cast anchor at Quebec. We remained at Quebec until May 1777, when our regiments were ordered to the northern provinces. On the 16th of August 1777 our regiment, myself included, was taken prisoners at the battle of Bennington, by the American troops. We were taken to Brimfield in the province of Massachusetts. After an imprisonment of 14 months at the latter place, I was on the 29th of September 1778, paroled and sent to New York. In the following year all paroled prisoners of war were recalled, and so it happened, that on the 3rd of March 1779, I, with the officers of the regiment were again prisoners and we were sent to Bethlehem in the province of Pennsylvania.

"On account of some difficulties I had with my brother officers, I resigned my commission as chaplain, and assumed charge of several congregations in Lancaster County, where on the 13th day of May I preached the first sermon. On June 3rd, 1779 I was married to Maria Agnes Man. The birthplace of my wife was Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Her father's name was Samuel Man and her mother's name Anna Catharina.

"November 12th, 1784, I removed to Manheim, where I took charge of four congregations.

"October 25th (\*), I removed to New Holland, where I served four congregations.

"July 25th, 1787, I removed to Lancaster and on the 19th of August, 1789, to McAllister†, where I served five congregations."

What a modest recital for a man of such great accomplishments! There is no mention of his scholastic ability and appointments, or of his labors in scientific fields.

#### AS A PASTOR

After his resignation in 1779 as chaplain of the Dragoons, Rev. Melsheimer visited Lancaster County. Several writers tell us he preached in Dauphin County until 1784, but that county was not formed until 1785, and we have no record showing that he preached in territory now a portion of that county. However, he did preach in territory now a part of Lebanon County. The record of Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Jonestown, states, "The first baptismal entries of Rev. Melsheimer were made in 1779."‡ He also served the pastorate of the "Hill Church," near Annville, in the years 1779-1784.§ Rev. Melsheimer states definitely in his autobiography that he assumed charge of several congregations in Lancaster County, "where on the 13th of May (1779) I preached the first sermon."

We know that in the years 1784-89 he preached at Maytown, Manheim, Muddy Creek, New Holland, Bergstrasse, and Strasburg. Of his work as pastor and preacher little is recorded, but from the tone and quality of his writings on religious themes, we gain the impression that here was a man of deepest reverence and abiding faith. He served the charge at Hanover from August 19, 1789, until his death, June 30, 1814. This congregation, known as St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, was founded in 1740, and was the second oldest Lutheran congregation west of the Susquehanna River. Four smaller churches were associated with this charge. Rev. Melsheimer was one of the ablest of the early Lutheran clergymen in America, and an intimate friend of the Muhlenbergs, who exerted a large and beneficial influence among the German settlers of Pennsylvania.

#### AS AN EDUCATOR

Following the completion of his work at the University of Helmstadt, Rev. Melsheimer's first undertaking was the position of tutor in two families at Halberstadt, Germany. His interest in educational fields is shown throughout his life. While pastor at New Holland, he promoted a movement to establish a common school for German and English students, and his enthusiasm

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\*The year is not given in the original paper. Probably, it should be 1785.

†In 1763 Richard McAllister founded McAllister's Town, later known as Hanover, York County, Pa.

‡Egle's History of Dauphin and Lebanon Counties, 1883, p. 187.

§Ibid, p. 225.

for the enterprise spread through the community, with the result that practically the whole population supported a subscription list for funds for the erection of a two-story building. This was completed and dedicated December 26, 1787, one hundred and fifty years ago.

His ability was recognized and his interest secured by Franklin College. The corner stone of this institution was laid June 16, 1787, and Rev. Melsheimer became Professor of Languages, teaching German, Latin and Greek.\* Rev. H. E. Muhlenberg was president in the first year, Rev. Melsheimer in the second year. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a trustee of the college, commended him "as a man of critical knowledge and taste in polite literature."

Rev. John Andrew Shulze, later governor of Pennsylvania, as a lad attended school in Lancaster, under the care of his uncle, Rev. H. E. Muhlenberg,† and completed his preparation for college under the instruction of Rev. Melsheimer at Hanover. Could it be that the character and influence of these two men so shaped the life of young Shulze, as to make him the most popular candidate for the gubernatorial office, and secure for him a greater proportion of votes from the electorate than ever accorded any other aspirant?

Besides his achievements in science and in classical languages, Erdman's Geography, published in German in 1790, recognized Rev. Melsheimer as having "gained distinction as an authority in the geography of Pennsylvania."

### AS A SCIENTIST

We turn to the biography of Rev. Melsheimer, as written by George R. Prowell, of York, Pa., for many facts regarding his scientific studies.

"John Sebastian Melsheimer, father of Frederick, was well versed in natural history, and during the thirty years that he served as superintendent of forestry for the Duke of Brunswick, was a student of botany, and the medicinal virtues of the herbs, plants and trees of his native country.

"It was through the inspiration derived from his surroundings in early boyhood that Frederick became interested in the study of natural science. His father placed him in a school at Holzminden in 1756, at the age of seven years. Here he remained several years, acquiring the rudiments of his education. When he returned to his home, among the native groves and

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\*There are in the library of Franklin and Marshall College several letters written by Melsheimer, relating principally to delinquency in the payment of his salary. These were translated and read by Miss Elizabeth C. Kiefer, assistant college librarian, following the reading of of Mr. Heisey's paper, at the meeting of the Historical Society.

†Eva Elizabeth, a sister of Rev. Muhlenberg, married Rev. Christopher Emanuel Schulze. They were the parents of Governor John Andrew Melchoir Schulze (Shulze).

forests of the dukedom, he met another young man of studious habits, who afterward won distinction in the field of science. This was A. W. Knoch, with whom Melsheimer kept up friendly relations the remainder of his life. Together they studied the elements of botany and the birds and insects, so abundant around the picturesque home of Melsheimer's parents."

While serving the congregations in Lancaster County, "he began the study of American entomology. His devotion to this line of original work amused, rather than interested, some of his parishioners, when they observed him coming to their places of worship with some new species of bug, beetle or butterfly, that he had found on his way to his country church. But it was a pleasant pastime to 'Prediger' Melsheimer, as well as a profitable occupation for his leisure hours. Some of these newly found specimens, unknown in his Fatherland, he sent across the ocean to his friend, Dr. A. W. Knoch, the eminent entomologist of Germany.

"In a book dedicated to Melsheimer and published in 1801, Dr. Knoch acknowledged the receipt of 700 specimens of American insects from Melsheimer. A copy of this book is now in the museum at Harvard University.

"It was in 1806 that Melsheimer wrote a book on entomology\*. This little book of sixty pages was the pioneer work on the science of entomology in the country, and gave occasion for the renowned scientist, Thomas Say, one of the founders of the Academy of Natural Sciences at Philadelphia and the author of a work on 'American Entomology,' published in 1824, to designate Melsheimer the 'Father of American Entomology.'"

From a review of Melsheimer's book, written in 1894 by Dr. E. A. Swartz, of the Bureau of Entomology, at Washington, D. C., we learn that this book was intended to contain a catalogue of the insects of North America, which were then known to the science of entomology. It has been frequently referred to in both European and American scientific literature. It contains a classification of 1,363 species of American insects, and many points of interest that deserve to be rescued from oblivion.

Dr. Hagen says that of the 1,363 species only 205 are now surely known, but from the copy of the catalogue before me I find that more than twice that number can be identified. This copy, kindly presented to me by Mr. B. P. Mann, is that used by F. V. Melsheimer, and contains numerous manuscript corrections and additions, partly made by the author and partly made by his eldest son, the Rev. J. F. Melsheimer, the correspondent of Thomas Say. The latest of these additions dates from the year 1825. A few notes and an index, written previously to 1834, are from the handwriting of Dr. F. E. Melsheimer. He sent many of his American specimens to correspondents in Europe, especially to Prof. A. W. Knoch, of Brunswick, Germany. These

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\*In 1894 Dr. E. A. Schwarz said that this book "is now very rare, and not more than three or four copies are known to exist in the United States."

specimens were accompanied by notes of explanation. A few of these notes but certainly not the most interesting ones, were published by Knoch in his 'Neue Beytraege zur Insectenkunde' referred to by Illiger.

"Not the least interesting feature of the catalogue are Melsheimer's references to economic entomology. As a matter of course the list of injurious coleoptera was not as formidable then as it is now. Some of the most destructive species had not yet been brought over from Europe at that time, and many of our native species were not so injurious. They are simply enumerated in the catalogue, and some of them are not mentioned at all; or, at least, they cannot be recognized among the manuscript names. The scientific names of those species which Melsheimer considered as especially injurious are accompanied by the popular names, while footnotes refer to the nature of the damage, or even, in two instances, recommend remedial measures."

On January 16, 1795, he was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, Pa., the foremost scientific body of that time in the country.

Thomas Say, in his "American Entomology," published in 1824, Vol. 1, writes of the species, *Scarabaeus tityus*, "This insect is so extremely rare in Pennsylvania that the late Rev. F. V. Melsheimer, the parent of Entomology in this country, and a very industrious collector, found but two individuals in eighteen years." This insect, though rare, is mentioned in the Coleoptera listed in Rupp's History of Lancaster County, published in 1845.

#### AS A WRITER.

The first work from the pen of Rev. Melsheimer is the diary or account of the passage across the Atlantic with the Brunswick Dragoons in 1776. This was published in the latter part of that year, by Justus Heinrich Koeber at Minden, Germany.

In 1797 he published an account of a theological controversy\*, which he had with Rev. Father Brosius, pastor of the Church of the Sacred Heart, situated on the Conewago Creek, near Hanover.

His book on Entomology in 1806\* was the first American work of its kind.

He wrote an article on "Christian Worship and the Beauty of Holiness," and published the same at Hanover, in 1809. This was followed by "The Truth of the Christian Religion," published at Frederick, Maryland, in 1811. His last work, "The Occupation of the Heart with God," is written "with rhythmic beauty of language, and with a fervency of tone and spirit that evinces a character of loftiest devotion and the deepest reverence."

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\*A copy is in the library of the Historical Society of York County, York, Pa.

Rev. John F. Melsheimer had prepared for the ministry under the instruction of his father, and succeeded him as pastor of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Hanover, Pa.

Quoting further from the paper of George R. Prowell, we learn that "he was an eloquent preacher in the English and German languages, and in 1821 was the first president of the Sunday School Society at Hanover. He took up the study of entomology with his father, and continued it during the remainder of his life, keeping up a continuous correspondence with Thomas Say, of Philadelphia, whom he had frequently met. Many of the letters written by Say to Rev. John F. Melsheimer and his father were afterwards presented by Dr. Frederick Ernst Melsheimer to the Academy of Natural Sciences at Philadelphia. They have recently been published by William J. Fox, the entomologist of that institution, and relate to species of insects, newly discovered by these entomologists.

"After the death of Rev. John F. Melsheimer (in 1873), the collection of insects, made by himself and his father, came into the possession of his brother, Frederick Ernst Melsheimer, who had studied medicine, and was graduated from the University of Maryland. He engaged in the practice of medicine at Davidsburg, in York County.

"When Dr. Carl Zimmerman heard of this, he drove to Dover Township to visit Dr. Melsheimer. He found that he lived in a plain home in the center of a grove of native trees, and, in his diary Zimmerman says: 'I found his wife at the spinning wheel. The reception was indeed a cordial one, and when he heard that his father's book was well known, and was mentioned in German, English and French works, which he never dreamed of, he became animated and talked with great interest on entomological matters and books.'

"Zimmerman wondered at this, and soon found that Dr. Melsheimer himself was a devotee of the science, as well as his deceased father and brother. They looked over the collection of specimens which were kept in good order, and all the labels of his father's handwriting were correctly attached.

"It was in 1860 that Dr. Melsheimer came into correspondence with Prof. Louis Agassiz, the great naturalist and founder of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. This correspondence led to a description of the Melsheimer collection of insects, which induced Agassiz to visit Davidsburg, and in 1864 he sent a representative to Melsheimer and purchased the entire collection, and immediately sent it to his museum at Harvard."

Prof. Agassiz, in his annual report to the trustees of the museum for the year 1864, said: "The museum has obtained, with the Gray Fund, the extensive type collections of insects from Dr. F. E. Melsheimer and Rev. Daniel Ziegler, of York County, Pa. The former of these was the first con-

siderable collection ever brought together in the United States, and was commenced more than eighty years ago by Frederick V. Melsheimer. Most of the oldest of these specimens, notwithstanding their age, are in a fine state of preservation."

In a recent communication from Nathan Banks of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College, he states, "The Melsheimer collection is here, safe. It is kept in a separate cabinet, and is consulted several times every year by specialists, who visit here. There are about three to four hundred type specimens in it, but some cannot be easily marked, as the Melsheimers did not mark their types in any way, so it is not always certain which specimen was the basis for the description. Each specimen bears a printed label, 'Melsh'."

Prof. H. A. Hagen, the successor of Agassiz, describes the collection as follows: "The Melsheimer collections, when purchased (for \$150), filled 41 wooden boxes 10½ x 14 inches and 2 inches high, each one lined inside with *Helianthus* pith. It contained, netto, 5,302 species with 14,774 specimens. Of this number, 2,200 species belonged to the United States, 1,894 species from Europe, 422 from Brazil, 8 from Mexico, 9 from West Indies, 4 from Siberia; China, 74; Java, 8; Africa, 39; Australia, 14. The other insects were *Hymenoptera*, 148 species; *Hemiptera*, 28; *European Diptera*, 90; *Lepidoptera* none." The collection shows that the Melsheimers in their investigations, corresponded with scientists in foreign countries, and exchanged specimens.

"Dr. F. E. Melsheimer was president of the American Entomological Society in 1853. The object of this society was to publish the known coleoptera of the United States. Rev. Daniel Ziegler and Dr. Melsheimer were co-laborers in this important work, and the book was soon after published, and is now very valuable in scientific circles. This work was revised by the late Prof. S. S. Haldeman and J. L. Le Conte in 1853, and published by the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, D. C."

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SOME DESCENDANTS OF FREDERICK VALENTINE MELSHEIMER

Frederick Valentine Melsheimer married Maria Agnes Man (Mau is the name recorded in the Hill Church baptismal lists, Annville, Pa.)	{	Karl Theodor, 1780-	{	Lucian F. b. cir. 1823, d. Sept. 27, 1903, Burgess of Hanover	{	John Adam b. Jan 13, 1858 d. April 21, 1935 Physician	{	Amelia m. C. Fisher Ehrehart of Hanover, Pa. Frederick Ernst
		Frederick Ernst, 1782-1873						
		Johann Frederick, 1784-1829						
		Ferdinand August, 1788-						
		Heinrich Ernst, 1790-1792						
		Heinrich Ernst, 1792						
		Wilhelm August, 1795-1804						
		Johann Wilhelm, 1797						
		Maria Susanne, 1798						
		Henrietta, 1799						
Carolina Amelia, 1805								

From the Record Book of the Annville, Pa., Lutheran "Hill Church." Title page, "Church Record of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at the Quitaphila in Lebanon Township; Commenced in the Year of Our Lord (anno Christi) 1743." Showing the baptisms during the pastorates of Revs. Stoever, Melsheimer and Hoerner. Frederic Theodore (?) Melsheimer and Mary Agnes Mau (Man), b. November 16, 1759, married January (?) 3, 1779. Children: Charles Theodore, b. April 16, 1780; bap. May 14, 1780. Sp. Valentine Keller and wf. Justina. Frederic Ernst, b. April 20, 1782; bap. May 17, 1782. Sp. Adam Bardt and his wf. John Frederic, b. July 12, 1784; bap. August 1, 1784. Sp. Anthony Kermini and wf. Christina.—From Egle's Notes and Queries, 1898, pp. 231, 246.