

John Rohrer of Lancaster County

Condensed from a paper by Albert L. Rohrer, of Maplewood, New Jersey.

When one attempts to search the records of John Rohrer, he is at once confronted with a perplexing handicap, — there were three John Rohrers who were contemporaries in Lancaster County, Pa., and two of them lived in Lampeter Township.

1. John Rohrer, who owned several tracts of land adjacent to the Big Spring in Lampeter Township, died 1771.

2. John Rohrer, of Connestogoe Creek, Lampeter Township, Pa., died 1772.

3. John Rohrer, of Hempfield Township, died intestate, 1778.

It is said that No. 2 John Rohrer came from Switzerland and Strasburg Alsace. He may be the one listed in "Strassburger's Pioneers," who arrived in Philadelphia, August 24, 1728, by ship Mortonhouse, and a clerk wrote his name on one list as Johannes Roer and on another as Johannes Roar. He married Elizabeth Snavely, and in his will written in "High Dutch," presented to Court June 17, 1772, and some time later translated but not recorded, he mentions his wife, Elizabeth, and sons, John, Isaac and Christian. It is said that other children were David, Henry and Magdalena. The witnesses to the will were Abraham Witmer and John Stouffer; the executors named were Jacob Hartman and John Witmer. The inventory, dated July 3, 1772, totaled 976 pounds, 17s. 6d.

A deed dated October 8, 1763, shows the purchase of 570 acres of land along Connestogoe Creek. Another deed of land to his heirs, dated March 6, 1773, indicates that he was a "kinsman" of Charles Christophel. No further trace was made.

The only record found of No. 3 John Rohrer is an inventory dated April 23, 1778, submitted by Jacob Moyer and Benjamin Barr, which totaled 710 pounds, 1s. 9d. This inventory was presented to the register's office five years later, January 4, 1783, by Simon Wittmer and Barbara Wittmer.

This John Rohrer may be the one on the Strassburger List who arrived in Philadelphia on November 3, 1750, by ship "Brotherhood."

No. 1 JOHN ROHRER. On page 501 of "Harris' Biographical History of Lancaster County" there is a sketch which may be summarized as follows:

1. JOHN ROHRER was born in Alsace, France, in 1696.

2. When he reached the age of 14 years religious persecution drove the family from its home.

3. John was sent back to obtain some family belongings, was captured, and from that time on lost sight of his parents.

4. John escaped from prison and found his way to England, where he studied Veterinary Surgery.

5. Emigrated to America and settled in Lancaster County.

6. In 1732 he married Maria Souder (Sauder).

7. Some years later, being in Philadelphia and hearing of the landing of a ship, he went to the dock and recognized one of the passengers as his

father, who was accompanied by his second wife and their sons.

8. After some years John aided his half brothers by buying lands near Hagerstown, Maryland, for them.

We now have the further information that John Rohrer was the son of Hans Michael Rohrer and Katherina Schwägler-in, whose marriage took place in Markirch, Alsace, on June 6, 1688, and John or Johannes was their fourth child, born on May 13, 1696.

The record of this Rohrer family was discovered in the church book of "der Deutsch-reformierten Kirche von Markirch von 1688."

Children born to Hans Michael Rohrer and Katherina Schwägler-in:

Hans Jakob.....	May 15, 1689
Hans Michael.....	April 15, 1691
Verena.....	May 10, 1693
Johannes.....	May 13, 1696
Anna Maria.....	May 4, 1698
another Johannes.....	Nov. 1, 1701
David.....	Feb. 10, 1704
Died: Anna Maria, Sept. 25, 1701. 3 years 5 months.	

Another marriage record was noted, that of David Rohrer and Elizabeth Chenal on February 20, 1696. This David and Hans Michael may have been brothers.

The old Rohrer family Bible, now in the possession of Robert B. Rohrer, has the entry that John was born in March, 1696. All entries were made in the same hand writing and evidently copied from some list. It is likely that John, in giving his birth, quoted from memory and did not recall the day of the month. Then, too, the difference between March and May is very small, so that the two dates are in fair agreement, and we can assume that the above is correct information about John Rohrer and his parents.

It is not known when John Rohrer arrived in England and when he left, nor the date of his arrival in America. Our theory is that having been in England for some years, and having been educated in the English language, he would naturally sail on an English ship from London. Most of such ships landed at the port of New York, where no landing lists have been preserved. If he landed in New York, he no doubt took the route of that day to Philadelphia, which was by sail boat to Perth Amboy, then a fifty mile trek to Burlington, then by row-boat down the Delaware River to Philadelphia. It is said that Benjamin Franklin walked that fifty miles in three days.

At any rate, he settled in Lancaster County and probably for a short period practiced his profession of veterinary surgery, although no evidence of it has been found. He, like other immigrants, was no doubt land hungry and soon gave his time and energy to the soil. Eventually he became a large land owner in Lampeter Township.

Sometime after March 8, 1733, John Rohrer married Maria or Mary Souder, daughter of Jacob Souder and his wife, Ann, and she was born in Mannheim, Germany, on February 24, 1716. On the date of the marriage he was 37 years and his wife but 17 years.

Jacob Souder arrived in what is now Lancaster County sometime before May 16, 1719, for on that date he purchased a certain tract of land from Hans Graeff. He had two daughters—Mary and Susanna. The latter married Martin Funk. Jacob Souder died in 1737. His will, written in the German language and never translated, dated March 8, 1733, was presented to Court August 3, 1737. In the body of the will the name appears as Sautter. The witnesses were Felix Landis, Peter Jourdea, and John Rorer.

It is said that Hans Graeff fled from Switzerland to Alsace; came to Germantown in 1695 for a short time, and then located first on Grove's Run in Earl Township.

The family of JOHN ROHRER and Maria Souder, as shown in the old Rohrer family Bible and by the other records consulted, is the following:
John ROHRER, born May 13, 1696; married Maria Souder, born Feb. 24, 1716
died Nov. 23, 1771 died May 11, 1769

CHILDREN:

1. Jacob, born June 26, 1734; married Magdalena Weaver.
died Apl. 19, 1803
2. Ann, born Feb. 2, 1738; married Jacob Houser.
3. Christian, born Oct. 23, 1741; married Lizzie Neff.
died June 27, 1804
4. Elizabeth, born Nov. 17, 1744; married Franz Smith.
5. John, born Mch. 18, 1746; married Maria Neff, born Aug. 16, 1752.
died Jan. 10, 1814 died July 1, 1825.
6. Maria, born Jan. 28, 1749; married John Baughman.
7. Martin, born Sep. 4, 1751; married Christiana.
8. Susanna, born Mch. 16, 1756; married Peter Nicholas Müller
died Nov. 23, 1815 born Dec. 28, 1742.
died Dec. 28, 1831.

There is a manuscript which was deposited in the Library of Congress with the "Compliments of George Castor Martin, of Asbury Park, N. J." and which bears the title, Genealogical Data Relating to the Rorer or Rohrer Family. One section of it is devoted to the Rohrer Family of Lancaster County and lists the children of John Rohrer and the names and dates agree with those given above, except that it omits Ann. It mentions two other children, John, born Feb. 2, 1738, died young, which is Ann's date. They may have been twins. The other is David, the youngest, with no date of birth.

John Rohrer died Nov. 23, 1771. His will, in Appendix II, dated December 1, 1768, and witnessed by John Mylen, Christian Forrer, and Jacob Weaver, was presented to Court, December 7, 1771, and on the same day Christian Hare and Jacob Carpenter qualified as executors of the estate.

The will makes interesting reading. It provides for the definite comfort and support of his "Beloved Wife, Mary," and charges son, John, with that duty, but her death preceded that of her husband. Each of the eight children share in the estate; Martin's share is the "Plantation and Tract of Land in Frederick County, Maryland, containing 320 acres."

The inventory submitted by the executors on December 21, 1771, lists household articles, but the most important items are:

Bonds, Notes & Book Debts	1194 pounds	1s.	9d.
Cash	205	"	12" 7"
Cash	80	"	6" 8"
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Total	1480 pounds	1"	0"

On September 6, 1774, John Hare, the surviving executor, reported to the Court that the cash on hand amounted to 902 pounds, 14s. 4½d., which, with a slight deduction for expenses, was divided equally among the eight children. No doubt earlier distributions had been made. Other documents are on file which show that certain adjustments were made in order to equalize the shares of the estate.

As one studies the various documents which refer to his activities, he is impressed that JOHN ROHRER was a man of affairs and a leader in the community. His descendants should feel proud to think of him as the Patriarch of the "Big Spring Rohrers."

Some Rohrers were Mennonites, and it is said that he was of that faith, but we have found no evidence of it. His parents were not of this faith.

Some Rohrers were Quakers. When the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania was in session on September 24 to 27, 1743, two of the men naturalized were John Rhora and Jacob Rhora, of Lancaster, and the record states that they were Quakers.

Again, when this Court sat on September 24, 1761, Jacob Rohrer, of Cocolico Township, Lancaster County, was naturalized, and the record states that he was a Quaker.

It is known that some Rohrers were Lutheran.

The search for the parentage of JOHN ROHRER was prompted by a theory of the probable relationship between him and the writer's ancestors. Harris said that he bought lands near Hagerstown, Maryland, for his half brothers. The writer's ancestor was Samuel Rohrer, and he had a brother Martin. Both lived south of Hagerstown, and Samuel's farm bordered on the north the 320 acre tract known as Piney Hills Enlarged, which JOHN ROHRER bought from John Swearingen on March 16, 1763, and which by his will he left to his son, Martin.

When Samuel Rohrer's first daughter was born she was christened Ann Houser, a singular combination of names to give to a daughter in that day, and it invited a study for an explanation.

We know that John Rohrer's first daughter was Ann and that she married Jacob Houser, thereby becoming Ann Houser. The inference is apparent. The half-brother, Samuel, was glad to express his gratitude by naming his first daughter for the first daughter of his benefactor.

The writer therefore claims that he has good grounds for his assumption that Samuel and Martin were the half-brothers of John Rohrer.

Failing to make contact with descendants in Lancaster even after advertising in the local paper, which brought but one response and that from a

Rapho Township Rohrer, the writer felt the urge to go it alone and extend his research to Alsace to discover the parentage and place of birth of John Rohrer.

In 1931 he spent some time there, principally in the cities of Strasburg and Colmar, without results.

In 1934, in Berlin, while discussing the problem with an American business friend and a resident of that city for eight years, a plan for the search was developed. We obtained the services of a seasoned archivist whose organization had numerous contacts in Alsace. Our request to him was brief: "Search the records and find the birth of a John Rohrer who was born in 1696, probably in May." A large order because of its vagueness.

Much correspondence followed, and in due time the report arrived. Later the report was confirmed by the writer, who is very pleased to place before the members of this Historical Society, his findings.

Mention should be made of the fact established by our search in Alsace, that the name Rohrer appears in the records of several places other than Markkirch, and almost always they carry the statement, "immigrated Swiss from Berne," usually referring to groups rather than names. These instances might be listed, but they would lengthen this paper unduly.

Supplement to

Locomotives — Made In Lancaster

The locomotive manufactured by the Lancaster firm of Pennell, Lenher and Humes was completed about May 11, 1840 (see page 2). Upon its boiler was painted "Hugh Keys," the name of one of the canal commissioners of the state. That it gave satisfactory service is attested to by a passenger on the way to Philadelphia, in December of that year. He stated that they overtook another train, and their engineer, chafing at the delay, hooked on to the rear of that train, and brought both into Philadelphia in quick order.

Railroading had unusual trouble and opponents those days. The story is told that one day when the train was approaching the Gap, a bull attacked the locomotive. After three futile efforts to overturn it, the beast retired.

Daniel H. Herr was born at Millersville, January 14, 1835. He was a direct descendant of Hans Herr, and followed the business of mechanical engineer and patent attorney. Returning from a brilliant service in the Civil War, Colonel Herr, in the spring of 1866, was employed as a draughtsman by the old Norris Locomotive Works, where he did work for the Pennsylvania, the Chicago and Northwestern, the St. Louis, Alton and Terre Haute, and the Lehigh Valley railroads, and assisted in constructing two of the *heaviest locomotives then known to the world*, weighing sixty tons, and having five pairs of driving wheels connected. Colonel Herr remained with the company until they ceased operations in October, 1868. (*See Biographical Annals of Lancaster County, p. 29.*)