

# BENEDICT BRECHBUHL, HANS BURKHOLDER AND THE SWISS MENNONITE MIGRATION TO LANCASTER COUNTY, PENNA. THE SWISS EMIGRATION

What were the causes of the large Swiss Emigration to America? Many from Switzerland were refugees there. That republic was the common refuge for the persecuted Protestants, in the Reformation period. The fires of Bloody Mary in England, the relentless fury of the Spanish in the Netherlands, the diabolical revocation of the Edict of Nantes by France, drove numbers of the English, French and Dutch to this mountain retreat, where the Italians joined them in holy exile and noble sufferings for Christ. John Knox and John Calvin are notable examples. By an agreement between the Protestant Cantons, Berne was to receive and aid one-half of the needy fugitives. At one time nearly every well-to-do family in the Canton Zurich had one or more quartered upon it by order of the government. ANTISTES HESS says (Tercenary Volume, Zurich, 1819) "From 1682 to 1685 many hundred French exiles settled in Zurich. In 1686 one thousand Piedmontese refugees arrived. In 1688, there were more than 3000. In 1687, the Swiss confederation sent delegates to the Palatinate, Brandenburg, Hesse and Holland, requesting the governments of those countries to aid Switzerland in providing for the exiles of the Reformed Church." In 1687, in five weeks, 8000 Protestant refugees entered Geneva; 28,000 had passed through seeking some asylum, and ordinarily there were 3000 in the city. The French Protestant Refugee Fund, established in 1545 and having 8000 crowns capital, was exhausted. In 1696, there were in the Canton Berne, including its dependency, the Pays du Vaux, 6500 male refugees, of whom 2000 were paupers dependent upon public support. Some German-Swiss objected to the billeting of refugees among them, and guards with halberds in hand, had to enforce the hospitality. Legacies, donations, collections in churches, appeals to the Waldensees and public subsidies, were given to maintain the suffering of Christ's persecuted.

Still earnest efforts were made to facilitate their departure. Thousands were helped to leave, but many were driven back by the army of Louis XIV. In 1703 many came from the Principality of Orange. Many of these refugees were blessings to Switzerland; but there numbers were too large. Such was the story year after year, until the burden became ruinous and the hospitable cantons were compelled to find homes for their homeless and unbidden guests. Moreover, many refugees were skilled mechanics, and took work away from the native artisans, so that great distress ensued. Emigration was the relief. (Weiss's Prot. Refugees, Vol. II, pp 163, etc.)

The religious war in Switzerland in 1703 and onward caused sore disturbances and ruin. Switzerland depended for its political existence on the fidelity to the treaty of Westphalia, made in 1648. Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed were the only religious bodies recognized by that settlement. The Anabaptists or Mennonites were not to be tolerated; therefore, a violent persecution arose against the Mennonites in Zurich and Berne, which culminated in 1710. Many of this sect went to the Palatinate and thence to Pennsylvania. (Seidenstecker's Gedachtnissblatter, p. 66.)

With this foreword a more detailed account of two of the exiles of 1710 and who later came to Lancaster County will follow. One organized the Mennonite Congregation at Strasburg and the other the Congregation south of New Danville. Both are flourishing today.

## HANS BURKHOLDER

HANS BURKHOLDER located in what is now Pequea Township, Lancaster County, Penna., in 1717.

In order to get an understanding of the conditions through which the subject of this sketch lived, more specifically that which was set forth in the foreword, it will be necessary to read "Geschichten den Bernischer Tauffer" or History of the Swiss Mennonites by Ernest Mueller. The experience of this man was shared by many who lived in the Canton, Berne and suffered for the steadfastness of their convictions. People who were not members of the government-controlled denominations, were subjected to all kinds of pressure and annoyances to bring them under control. They were arrested and jailed. Some were sold to the Italian Galleys, some were exiled, many became refugees in Germany and Bohemia. In 1693 a decree was issued, declaring all sales transactions and obligations of the Mennonites to be void. That all males fourteen years old and older must register with the military forces, and all who refused were to be considered Anabaptists and Tauffers. The payment for the apprehension of an Anabaptist teacher was twenty dollars and for a foreign teacher was fifty dollars. A decree a few weeks later, in May, was passed declaring that all Anabaptists or Mennonites should be closely hunted about Berne and all suspicious persons should be arrested.

These people claimed the right to worship God according to the light of their own consciences, for they said "When you come before your God in the last Great Day, and you are asked why you did not live according to the Light that was given you, it will avail you nothing to say that your government or church did not allow you so to do. It will not be there to defend you."

The persistence in maintaining their rights and suffering arrest, punishment, imprisonment and exile and all the while praying for Divine guidance with unfailing hope, eventually brought them to their new home in the wilderness of America; and into the best part thereof. Their principles are a corner stone in our government.

Hans Burkholder was a deacon, teacher and preacher in Langnau, which is in the Enmenthal, the eastern part of Canton Berne, Switzerland. He was arrested a number of times. He tells about the circumstances in a letter to the Holland Commission which is inserted in full.

"For the remembrance of my descendents and my fellow believers, I Hans Burkholder, of Langnau, want to relate what happened to me. I had gone to the mountain called Blumenreid (Community of Langnau) with my wife and two sons. There a poor man came to us, to whom we gave something to eat.

This man subsequently went to Harwig to the authorities and told them that he had seen us. Thereupon, the bailiff of Trachselwald and the traitor with a few others came to take me prisoner. They came early to the hut in which I was unaware of any danger, and when I noticed the man before the door, I him supplied with something to eat. When I was made prisoner and they took me away from my wife and children and led me to the Castle of Trachselwald and placed me in a dungeon for four days, during which time I was taken sick. Then the bailiff with two provosts brought me in a cart to Berne. There they placed me, sick as I was, in a prison called the Ahur and there I lay about five weeks, and altogether about seventeen weeks in solitary confinement. Thereupon they led me to another prison called the Island. There I lay during the long cold winter with an unhealthy body and suffered very much from the intense cold. I was watched so closely that none of my family or any of my friends could come to see me, so that my friends did not know whether I was living or dead.

"Thereupon in the beginning of May, 1709, I was brought with all the other prisoners to the hospital, and there I was kept under such close surveillance that few persons could speak to me. We were compelled to work on wool from early in the morning to late at night, viz.: from four o'clock in the morning till eight o'clock at night, and we got nothing to eat but bread

and water. This lasted thirty-five weeks. Thereafter we were treated better. Then the authorities had us conveyed to the ship, viz.: March 18, 1710, with the design to take us to America. The authorities told us that if at any time, or by any means we were to return to that country, they would inflict the death penalty on us. The Merciful Father, by his strong hand and through the Brethren in Holland, delivered us from our oppressors, as we came to Nime-wagen, and came to the town where they had to release us. For this we thank the Almighty GOD and FATHER of all mercy, who will not forsake those who place their confidence in HIM, but will make them prosper.

The whole time of my imprisonment was about twenty months. For in July, 1708, I was taken captive and on March 18, 1710, I was led away from Berne. I will come to a close."

Benedict Brechbuhl, a preacher at Trachselwald was arrested in 1709 and Melchoir Zaller was arrested in March, 1709. They with 57 others were loaded on a vessel on March 18, 1710. They were taken direct from the jails, not allowed to consult with families or friends and were to go direct to America. Many of these prisoners were old and feeble and had suffered long in prison.

Hans Burkholder, with others, was busy with the Holland authorities, along with the committee of the exiles in securing their release and in finding a place to locate. This is more fully detailed in the sketch of Benedict Brechbuhl, who was in the same company. The threat of the death penalty did not keep him out of Switzerland. It seems that he was a leader in the opposition of the Bern government. On July 11, 1711, his children in company with Uli Gerber, his hired man, as well as the ten children of Daniel Grim and Christian Neuenschwander armed themselves with pitch forks, sticks and clubs and made stubborn resistance to Burkholder being thrown out of Switzerland or to being arrested. On being threatened with being placed in irons, he resisted further, and was put on another vessel with exiles. This list contains 346 persons and there were three vessels. In this list we find the familiar names of Hoffman, Binkley, Frei, Shallenberger, Wenger, Eschbach, Zimmerman, Huber, Risser, Meier, Kratzer, Schmeid, Roth, Althouse, Sommer, Stettler, Habecker, Oberli, Rohrer, Shirk, Haldiman, Wisler, Strohm. Burkholder was placed in charge of one of these vessels, but he with twelve others left the vessel at Briesach. These exiles left Basle July 17, 1711.

During the time of their exile in Germany, they were busy consulting about prospective places for the location of their persecuted Mennonite brethren. The leaders kept in touch with one another. In February, 1717, a committee consisting of Benedict Brechbuhl, Hans Burkholder, Melchoir Zaller, Hans Rub and Peter Donens had a conference with the Mennonites at Mannheim and it was decided that they go to America (Vol. II, Penna. Magazine of History.)

Hans Burkholder came to America in 1717. His sons, John, Jr., and Jacob, and Abraham Burkholder came with him. The last named located first at the mouth of the Pequea along the Susquehanna River and later in Chanceford Township, York County, Pa., where he died in 1776, leaving five sons and three daughters. Hans Burkholder bought 200 acres from Martin Kendig and his wife, Elizabeth, in 1729. This was a part of the Hans Herr and Martin Kendig grant from Wm. Penn. In 1734 he bought 250 acres from the Penn heirs for 25 pounds. In 1734 he sold one of these tracts to his son, John, Jr., for five shillings and the other to his son, Jacob, for one English Silver Shilling. These tracts are located in Pequea Township on both sides of the Great Conestoga Road or the Long Lane, as it is known today. They have never been sold except to his lineal descendants and are owned today (1927) by heirs of Kate Burkholder Rush and Barbara Burkholder Meyers. The male line died with Jacob Burkholder in 1852.

Hans Burkholder organized the Mennonite Congregation south of New Danville which is flourishing today. The grounds were taken, the east half from his farm and the west half, from the farm of Melchoir Brenneman. This explains why the road turns to the west around these grounds. He signed the Dortrecht Confession of Faith along with fifteen other Mennonite ministers in 1727. (See Cassel's Ger. Ed. of the Mennonite, p. 20.)

The fruits of the steadfastness of Hans Burkholder and his associates in trials and tribulations have been sources of permanent satisfaction to their descendants in Lancaster County, who have been constant beneficiaries of the sacrifices and sufferings of their pioneer ancestors.

### BENEDICT BRECHBUHL

BENEDICT BRECHBUHL of Trachselwald in the Canton of Bern, Switzerland, was born in 1665. He joined the church at the age of twenty and was ordained a minister in 1699. He was twice driven from Switzerland on account of his religious activities. He returned to remove his wife and children to Mannheim in the Palatinate. While on this mission he was arrested. He describes the incident in a letter to the Holland Commission, as follows:

It was in the year of 1709, on the 12th day of January, that the authorities of Berne sent seven provosts with a constable, early in the morning to my house, whereby we were greatly frightened so that my wife and myself tried to hide ourselves. I concealed myself under a haystack. They searched my house in every nook and corner. Finally they came to the haystack and thrust their swords in it, so they struck me and were made aware that someone was hiding therein. Thereupon I crept out and they seized me and asked my name and whether I was a preacher, which I told them and acknowledged it. Then they led me to my room; there the constable gave me a box on my ear and tied my hands on my back and led me out of my home. Thereupon my children began to lament and cried so piteously that, as the saying is, a heart of stone would have been touched thereby. But the provosts were in great glee that they had succeeded in catching me. They led me hence to the City of Bern in company with two other brethren, and put us in imprisonment and that too, in the very long and cold winter. There we lay as prisoners. If we wanted anything warm, we had to pay dearly for wood. After six or seven days they brought me to another jail. There they put iron shackles on me. In the mean time the authorities had given those who captured me 100 thalers, which my family had to reimburse out of my estate. After two days they again brought me in the tower and set me in a separate hole and fastened me to an iron chain. There I lay about eighteen weeks. After that they led me with all the other prisoners to the hospital. There we were compelled to work from four o'clock in the morning to eight o'clock in the evening in wool and they fed us with bread and water but supplied these in sufficient quantity. This lasted about thirty-five weeks. The remaining ten weeks the work was easier. So the whole time of my imprisonment at Bern was one year, seven months and seven days.

This happened in the 44th and 45th years of my age.

BENEDICT BRECHBUHL,

A native of the Emmenthal.

The jails at this time were filled with religious prisoners and due to the famine in Alsace, many former exiles were returning to Switzerland. The disposition of these Mennonites taxed the wits of the Bern authorities. So they decided to send them to America. On March 18, 1710, 57 of them were taken from the prison and were loaded on a vessel for deportation direct to America. They had suffered imprisonment, some for two years, many were old and infirm and none were allowed time for preparation for the trip, or to say farewell to their families and friends. Fortunately for them, the jurisdiction of

the Bern government ceased at the border of their country. Twenty-eight of the most infirm left the vessel at Mannheim on March 29th. The rest left the vessel at Nimewagen in Holland, where they found a Mennonite Congregation under the teacher Hendrick Laurens. This congregation ministered unto them. They provided food and shelter and reported the situation to the Holland authorities and the Mennonites at Amsterdam. The men started to return to the Palatinate to seek for their wives and children who were scattered in the Palatinate, Alsace and in Switzerland. Among these were Brechbuhl, a preacher and Burkholder and Zaller, deacons. The list also contains such familiar names as Baumgartner, Frankhauser, Berger, Musser, Hofer, Kraybill, Wenger, Gasser, Rupp, Maurer, Hager, Fahrni, Engel, Rohrer, Stettler, Eshelman, Ebersol and Shenk.

The Holland authorities and the church at Amsterdam at once began an investigation and Brechbuhl, Burkholder and Zaller were detained for the purpose. Twenty-four questions were submitted to them, four were to be answered in writing. The letters quoted were in answer to these four questions. The brethren in Holland furnished these three with 30 gulden travel money and the Holland Commission furnished 1200 gulden for the relief of the exiles. In a letter dated May 7, 1710, Brechbuhl states that his three children came from Switzerland.

During the next five years, Brechbuhl was looking for a place to locate these Swiss exiles and refugees who were coming from Switzerland in increasing numbers. This was also the time of the great German exodus from the Rhine Valley to England when 15,000 left this section and flocked to England in response to the invitation contained to Queen Anne's Gold Book. There were only a few Mennonite families in that outpouring. (See N. Y., Grn. Register.)

He visited a number of places and had an invitation from the King of Prussia. In company with Hans Ramsayer and Uli Bauer, he had a conference with King Frederick I about settling in his domains or in Lithuania. There was a project to send the Mennonites to the bogs of northern Germany to a place where war and pestilence had destroyed all the inhabitants and the powerful influences behind the project ought to make us appreciate how narrowly the ancestors of many of us here in Lancaster County escaped being sent to another section of the world, from which they never would have reached Pennsylvania. By a similar narrow margin, they escaped being sent to East India by the East India Company. Brechbuhl was a strong factor in preventing both of these fates to our people. The Swiss Historian Mueller, says that a recital of all of the journeys from Amsterdam and Rotterdam and the Hague, make a large catalogue in the Mennonite Library at Amsterdam.

During this time the efforts of William Penn attracted their attention to the Colony in Pennsylvania. The pioneers led by Hans Herr had located in the Pequea in 1710. John Funk was here in 1711. Peter Yordea and a few others in 1714. Martin Kendig had returned to the Palatinate and made a favorable report of the conditions here. So we find him in Holland on February 6, 1714, considering the migration to America. In February, 1717, in company with the committee of Burkholder, Zaller, Rub and Donens they attended the Mennonite Conference at Mannheim and asked assistance for the exiled brethren to migrate to America. He received 4000 gulden from the Holland Commission.

On September 25, 1717, he brought 150 acres from John Funk. This was a part of 530 acres which John Funk, late of Switzerland, bought of Wm. Penn on June 30, 1711, for 37 pounds and 2 shillings. It was located in Strasburg Township (See Vol. A, No. 4, page 232, record book in the Land Office at Harrisburg). This tract adjoined lands of Jacob Miller on the east. On April 15, 1737, the heirs of Benedict Brechbuhl sold this 150 acres to Henry Shank for 30 Shillings. The receipts are signed by Woolrich Brakebill for 20

shillings, Barbara, wife of Jacob Graf for 5 shillings and Maudlin, wife of Emanuel Heer for 5 shillings. (Jacob Graf was the oldest son of Hans Graf.)

This may indicate the approximate time of his death. His name does not appear in the list of signatures to the Confession of Faith of 1727 (See Cassel's History of the Mennonites, Ger. Ed. p. 30). His son Woolrich had a plantation of 530 acres adjoining his father's land on the east. (See Record Book U, page 108, in the court house.) The church property was likely taken from one of these tracts.

He was likely the main factor in the organization of the congregation at Strasburg but there is no record of further activities after the settlement in 1717. His activities, however, during the interval of his exile and his arrival in America are full of import to those whose ancestors were influenced by his decisions. We are sure that those years were filled with tribulations and prayer for guidance and that the final decision was made in answer to earnest prayer and that our people were guided not only to America but also to the finest part thereof.

His descendants are now living in the section which he selected for his home. The church he organized is a flourishing congregation today and his descendants for every generation have been active members and officers.

The sources of information were: History of the Presbyteriana Church at New Bern, N. C., The Mennonitischer Lexicon, Mueller's Geschichten den Bernischer Tauffer, Eschelman's Back Ground of Penna. Names. The record in the Lancaster Court House and in the Secretary of Internal Affairs at Harrisburg, Pa.

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