

History of the Hershey Family

from the year 1600 -

By Scott Funk Hershey, Ph. D., L. S. D.

The Petite Book Co. - New Castle, Pa.

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Benjamin Hershey. The Hersheys were all mennonites, and, upon coming to this country, settled in Lancaster Co., from thence they migrated to other counties, and rapidly to other States. Before the Revolutionary war, they were in Maryland and Virginia and Canada.

Founders of the Mennonite Church.

These Mennonite forefathers of ours carry the protest against the sinfulness of war, and that of the sinfulness of state and ^{church,} union, far beyond where we have been placing it. It takes us back before George Fox and William Penn were decrying war, and Roger Williams was thundering for separation of church and state. The Swiss Mennonites of Immesholden were opposed to war, to oath taking, and to holding of civic positions. Their view in regard to oaths, and to holding of civic positions. Their view in regard to oaths and war is one of the links in the chain, showing that the Hersheys of Immesholden Alps had descended from early Jewish converts to Christianity, who had come through the fire of Roman pagan persecutions in the early centuries.

3. The upper elevations of the Half Canton of
Innersholden, Switzerland, reach a height of
8,215 feet, passing into a field of perpetual
snow. The highest peak is Mount Sents, from
a glacier of which starts the River Sittler, in
whose beautiful valley is situated Appenzell.
In the long ago it was the seat of the Abbots
of St. Gall, founded in 720.

In this secluded, magnificent cathedral of
nature, shut off from the corruptions of Rome,
and the confusions of Europe, we meet, prior
to the year 1650, a class of people called Pietists,
mystics, Idealists. We find them French Huguenots,
German religionists, descendants from old Roman
Christians, and exiles from Bohemia and
Moravia. They loved Nature and Nature's God.
Their time was largely given to meditation on
Scripture, communion with nature, and ideal
fellowship with each other. Among these we meet
with the Hersche family, our ancestors. Just
when they appeared in Innersholden, we do
not know. We do know at least one family
that lived there about 1580 or 1590. Likely but
two families were there at that time, as no
marriages were celebrated in the family in
penalty, and some were sold to the Turks. Their
Innersholden residence came to be a bitter

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that province prior to 1600. During the entire first half of the century following, there were but three marriages among the Hersches in the whole province of Innesholden, while in the second half of that century there were fourteen; and in the first quarter of the next century there were as many marriages among the Hersches as in the entire century preceding, though many had already left for Germany, Holland, England, Ireland and America. This is official proof that the Hersches entered Innesholden in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, and at most there were but two families. Only for two or three generations were they left to the freedom of their consciences. The feudal system came to be a burden in these mountain valleys. The Hersches had to pay war tithes and taxes, and were liable to war service under their feudal lord. The religious persecutions came from Catholics and Protestants. The Hersches were distasteful to the State Church founded by Zwingli because they refused to bear arms. They were exiled, imprisoned, tortured, while some of them

tortured while some of them suffered the death

5 The faith of these Swiss Pietists was akin to that of the English Quakers, In fact before the English Quakers arose, these people were given to spiritual meditation for their religious instruction and were opposed to oath taking and going to war.

William Penn took at least two trips into Germany, and on the second penetrated into Switzerland. His object was to visit the German and Swiss Pietists, for the purpose, as he states, to serve them "In the service of the Gospel". It was natural afterward, when Charles II gave Penn a grant of the largest province in America, that he should look to Germany and Switzerland for colonists. In 1683 he invited them to settle in his American colony. The promise of liberty of conscience, which he circulated through Europe, attracted all the religious idealists. Penn had an agent at Rotterdam,

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Their view in regard to oaths and war is one of the links in the chain, showing that the Hersches of the Innesholderen Alps had descended from early Jewish converts to Christianity, who had come through the fire of Roman pagan persecutions in the early centuries. They did not get their opinions from Menno, their first appointed leader. Menno Simons had become troubled about Roman Church Doctrines, and, after a careful study of the Scripture, he renounced the Papacy, and began to associate with those men of like faith. They urged him to become their religious leader. This was the first Mennonite congregation. The movement spread rapidly over Zurich and Innesholderen. The ideal Apostle with these Swiss Mennonites was John.

They believed that taking oaths, holding office, serving in war, and going to law, were contrary to the Gospel. So that they were persecuted alike by Catholics and Protestants. They were put in prison, their homes were burned

their property confiscated, they were shackled by the feet and sold for service in the Swiss mercenary army, while some were put to death. One more they had to move on. Among them were the Hersche family - Some went only for a short sojourn, it seems to the region of the Rhine in Germany, others went to Holland, where they were protected by the noble Prince of Orange; others went to England, under the invitation of Queen Ann, and still others to Ireland; while some came to America. To all these countries the Hersche family immigrated -

It clearly appears that we owe our lot in this country, to the refusal of the Swiss Hersches to bear arms, and take oaths, which exposed them to civil persecution; and to their evangelical faith, which exposed them to religious persecution. out of their great misery, has come our greater good.

Queen Ann came to the throne of England

in 1702 and shortly after when these persecutions came to be bitter ^{these Pietists} were invited to England and many were assisted to America, Ireland and elsewhere.

Some thirty thousand left in answer to the Queen's invitation - 1 thousand died from exposure and hardships while seven thousand because utterly discouraged and returned.

Some six hundred settled in Ireland - Their descendants still reside there and are the most wealthy farmers in the country. County Limerick

One of the early efforts of these people was to print the Mennonite Martyr Book - a great work, dealing with the sufferings of their fathers in the old country. The Hershers have always been opposed to warfare - The family dates back to the early Christian centuries, when all the disciples of Christ believed that war was wrong. The Piedmont Christians, "not only disapproved of oaths but held it to be unchristian to shed blood."

Declaration

To our honorable assembly, and all others in high or low station of administration and to all friends and

9 in habitants of this country, to whose sight this may come, be they English or Germane - - 3 pages of small print - then the above declaration written by Benjamin Hershey, minister of the Mennonite Church, and signed by a number of Elders and Teachers of the Society of Mennonists, and some of the German Baptists, presented to the Honorable House of Assembly on the 7th day of November 1775 was most graciously received -

Many of our fathers were leaders of the Mennonite church in Switzerland and in this country - The first family that came from Switzerland the father was a Bishop, or lead minister, and his son after him, while another son was a minister. In the 1709 family two out of three brothers were ministers - In almost every family from one to three sons became ministers -

The Rev. John B. Hershey was one of the founders of the United Brethren Church, while a sister became the mother of the celebrated Bishop John Erb of that church. The family is now represented in the ministry of perhaps every church in the country, except the Catholic and Episcopal.

Bishop Christian Hershey, an elderly Swiss gentleman, was the first Hershey to appear in this

country. He located in Lancaster Co., Pa., with his three children. His son Benjamin was a Bishop in the Mennonite church. Bishop in the Mennonite church was not similar to that office in the Catholic Episcopal or even in the Methodist church. A Bishop in the Mennonite church was the lead pastor, or a sort of President of the Board of Ministers - It indicated the distinction of service and honor held by our fathers in that church. This and other titles will be used merely to distinguish the different branches, and for this it is very useful.

Christian Hershey was the first Mennonite Bishop in this country. He held the office until his death. He was succeeded by his son, Benjamin who was in turn Bishop until his death. This record is not complete, but is made as full as possible from the data furnished. It shows the descent of the Hon. Washington L. Hershey, who has done so much to collect records of the family -

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Rev. John Hensley was one of the original founders of the United Brethren of Christ Church. Before it was formally organized in 1800 he was associated with Otterbein, Newcomer and Kemp in laying the foundations of the church. He made his home on Beaver Creek seven miles east of Hagerstown, Maryland. He belonged originally to the Mennonites. He and his wife sleep side by side in Fahney's Graveyard a mile or two from his home.