

A letter written to me in 1966 by J.C. Meyer, my mother's uncle. He taught at Gordon College.

THE GERIG FAMILY BEFORE 1850

The Gerig Family Before 1850

I have the doubly underlined documents and several others

My grandmother, Elizabeth (Gerig) Meyer, with her two sons arrived in New York just in time for the Fourth of July celebration in 1872. Until better informed she feared that they had come to an America at war. Only when she met someone who could speak her language did she become disillusioned.

My special interest is in the documents that they brought with them as they throw light on the family history. Uncle Mathias Albert brought a copy of his birth record which is dated April 26, 1871. My impression is he needed it for some types of work at the age of sixteen. On the document is given as Mathias Albert. Later he was usually called Albert or Albert Matthew. On his naturalization paper his name is given as Albert Meyer. He was naturalized October 14, 1879, after over seven years in America. According to family tradition he has not called Mathias as a child because his father's employer had that name and in order to avoid confusion he was called Albert. So far as I am informed the name Albert was new in the families involved.

I have my father's too

My father, Jacques (Jacob) Meyer, brought a birth certificate dated May 10, 1872. Apparently he obtained it in view of the plan to migrate to America. Just before sailing from the port of Havre, France, he made out an option which states that he left as a citizen of France. This was possible under the Treaty of Frankfurt, May 10, 1871, by which Alsace became a part of Germany. A provision in that treaty and a or special stipulation convention dated December 11, 1871, provided that those who migrated within a certain time could choose to leave as citizens of France. That option was important for me in 1918 when I tried to get into the relief work in France. Even with it I could not convince the French consul in Philadelphia that I was not pro-german. When I finally went into the relief work after the armistice I found it necessary to get

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my visa for the passport from the consul in New York. The "Quakers" had discovered that he was not as strict with those of Aleatian background. These French officials probably did not know as I did not know then that four of my second cousins were called into the German army for the war. Two of them never returned and the third served four years but came back in good health though he had been wounded. The fourth was a trained mechanic and was married so he served in the production of military supplies. (See note at end.)

The most important document for my purpose was a copy of the wedding record of my grandparents. There is one obvious error in the copy made in 1872. The date of the wedding is correctly given as October 6, 1845, but the copyist erred in stating that the groom was thirty-five years old. The date of his birth is correctly given as May 1, 1815 so the error is quite obvious. The bride's age is given as twenty-eight which is correct. She was born August 20, 1817. There is also an error in her original birth record but it is one that is easily corrected. My special interest in the marriage record is due to the information on the parents of the bride and ^{of} the groom, my great-grandparents. The father of the groom, Nathian Meyer had died June 26, 1838. He was fifty years, nine months and 18 days old. The mother of the groom, Anna Marie Ritzenthaler, was present and gave her consent. Her age is given as sixty years which may be roughly correct, but since she could not write and since I cannot find out details about her place of birth my impression is she was not born in Jehnshelm but in a neighboring village. Like the Meyers she probably came from a landless family.

The parents of the groom were present and signed the document together with the bride and the groom. The signatures interested me to the extent that I got a photostatic copy of the document in French. Both the bride and her mother signed with their maiden names. Though the

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Names of the Bride and the groom were in French in the document they signed in German. Thus the groom's name in the document is Jean Jacques Meyer his signature is Jakob Meyer. Likewise though the bride's name is Elisabeth Koerig her signature is Elisabeth Gerig. There is one witness mentioned whom I cannot identify. It is a Jacques Meyer who is said to have been an uncle of the groom. His age is given as forty-eight years.

My next problem was to find out more about the great-great-grandparents.

Read it but have no copy.

In the death record of my great-grandmother, Elisabeth Zimmermann Gerig, who died February 28, 1848, her parents' names are given as Jean (John) Zimmermann and Barbara Stöcki (Stucky or Stuckey). Elisabeth was born in Robertsau (Ruprechtsau in German), a suburb of Strasbourg (Strassburg in German) and was fifty-one years old. My great-grandfather, Jacob Gerig, died September 1, 1851 at the age of sixty-three years according to the record. There may be some doubt as to the exact age or the time of his birth for his age was given as thirty in 1817 when my grandmother was born, fifty in 1842 when Benjamin Gerig was born, and again fifty in 1845 when my grandmother was married. Apparently he and his wife started out on a farm and were fairly well off but during the years he lost his property and became very careless in other respects. There are different accounts of his losing out economically. One is that he gave his name as security for others and then had to pay their debts. Another is that he was cheated out of his money. Somehow Mennonite writers fail to mention that there were three French Revolutions during his lifetime and such political changes not infrequently mean that even conservative folks lose their property. I have known of a number of Mennonite families that lost out during one of the several depressions in my seventy-eight years. At all events my grandmother could never forget the story her mother told her of the hard times during the Napoleonic period. She lived a few years while he was still a prisoner at St. Helena, but her story as she told it to us was based on the impressions she got from her mother.

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According to the record of his death reported by his son Christian, a weaver, aged thirty-two years, and Christian Tschantz, a cooper, a nephew aged thirty years, the deceased was born in Saint Marie-aux-Mines (Markkirch or Mariakirch in German). His parents were Elisabeth Goldechmidt and Christian Gerig. This document opened the way to find out more about my great-great-grandparents. But when I went to Markkirch I was disappointed for I could not find the names, Gerig and Goldechmidt in the records though I found the following Swiss Anabaptist names which were not strange to me: Eymen, Geiger (Geyger), Garber, Gillen, Gottschalk, Jacques (Jacob), Karach, Kipfer, Kraemen, Kropf, Kurtz, and Sonthemer. One of the attendants in the office where the records were kept informed us that he knew of Anabaptists living in the region in 1929, the date when I made my search. He also warned me that *early (before 1742)* the records of the Anabaptists were kept by the church and were therefore not easily found.

(see note at end)

Fortunately I discovered a book by a Lutheran minister on the Anabaptists in Alsace, Montbeliard, and neighboring regions, which proved to have some important information on the Gerigs and several other families whose names appear in my maternal and paternal ancestral lines. The first Gerig ^{*Gerig*} (Gersik) I discovered who lived in the region of Markkirch was a Heinrich Gerig who signed a document dated November 22, 1693. Ten years later the name of Hans Gerig appeared on a document of an official nature in the same region. Unlike the name Meyer (in whatever spelling), or the name Zimmermann, the name Gerig (in whatever spelling) is rather unusual. Both Heinrich and Hans Gerig were part of a group of Swiss Anabaptists who left Switzerland due to severe persecution during and after the Thirty Years' War which ended in 1648. Many Swiss Anabaptists had the choice of serving in Italy in the galleys which was a combination of alternate service ^{*Many were imprisoned and lost their property*} and slavery. In one case a Lieutenant Gerig conducted a group to Italy for that purpose. Apparently he was not an Anabaptist.

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Jacob Amman and Hans Reist.

It was in the 1690s that the Amman-Reist division developed among the Swiss Brethren or Anabaptists. Amman's followers developed into the Amish, and Amish-Mennonites whereas the followers of Hans Reist became the Old Mennonites of Europe and America. This division lasted until our own time and still tends to cause confusion for the uninitiated in the history of the many types or kinds of Anabaptists and Mennonites. There were several issues that caused the division or ^{that} developed during the discussions at the time. Writers do not agree on several major matters involved. No doubt personalities played a part as is usual in such cases. The objective historian may also conclude that later writers on the subject had axes to grind and sometimes used "loaded" words in their treatment. My impression is that practically all of the writers on the subject failed to take into the consideration one important factor. That was brought out for me by the late Bishop Pierre Sommer of Montbaliard, France, in 1919 when I first met him. He pointed out that among the French Amish Mennonites (practically all of the French were followers of Jacob Amman), those who observed a strict nonresistance stand on ^{or on the oath} ~~tiltation~~ migrated to America during the 19th century thus leaving the compromising members in France. Professor Frederick Jackson Turner who was the prominent historian of the American frontier taught me (I took his course and in another year acted as his assistant), that the men who go to the frontier are the more determined or the less compromising when the conditions seem burdensome or oppressive. In America the Amish Mennonites usually went to the frontier before the Old Mennonites who preferred the old Pennsylvania settlements. When Gordon College was opened it was staffed to a great extent by Amish Mennonite teachers. When it was reopened in 1924 the new ^{and the dean,} president and the majority of the faculty were again of the Amish Mennonite branch. Several of the outstanding critics of the institution were Old Mennonites with special emphasis on certain regions, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Kansas. After this general

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statement I now want to get at the more significant details on the Gerigs and other Swiss Anabaptists in the region of Markkirch. It so happened that about 1690 Louis XIV the king of France developed a new policy which meant the nonresistant Swiss Anabaptists might lose their special privileges in the region. That crisis did not affect the Swiss Anabaptists in the home land ^(Switzerland) nor those refugees who lived across the border in the Palatinate. By a coincidence the important leader of the Anabaptists in the region of Markkirch at the time was Jacob Amann. At all events he seems to have been important in the struggle for their established rights as a nonresistant group. ^{they had been allowed to pay a special tax and thus be free from army service.} Thus the followers of Hans Reist and the Palatinate Swiss refugees tried to compromise and thus avoid the division. The Palatinates wrote a letter to the Markkirch group, dated October 16, 1693, calling for a meeting to bring about a compromise. The Markkirch group wrote a reply dated November 22, 1693, in which the name of Heinrich Gerig (Gerig) appears as one of the signers. There was other correspondence between the two groups but I am more interested in list of Anabaptist families which was submitted to the official government authorities in 1703. In that list the following names appear among others: Gerber, (Hans) Gerig, Hochstetler, Kropf, Linder, Müller (Miller), Murer (Maurer), Roth, Yoder, and Zimmermann. There were three Zimmermanns who signed or were listed and then the document was signed by a Hans Zimmermann and Jacob Amann who probably forwarded it.

Five years later, in 1708, another list was sent in with even more names than are found on the list of 1703. Three names on the list were Frena Hertig, Barbara Valtins, and Catharina Recheo. There was also the name of Ulrich Greber which seems to have been added sometime later. The French writer thinks that Valtins and Recheo ^{are} in the Latin form. I am especially interested in the name Recheo. My great-grandfather, Christian Gerig (II), married a Barbara Reck (Pay in French). I am inclined to think the name Recheo appears in Anish Mennonite and Mennonite families as Rogi, Roggi, Rogy, Roggy, Rocke, and Rogne, in addition to the name Reck which is common among my Oregon cousins. Many of the names on these lists appear in my paternal and maternal

ancestral lines.

The problem raised is whether Heinrich Gerai and Hans Gerig are in the direct ancestral line of my great-great-grandfather Christian Gerig who, according to the record, lived in the region of Markkirch about 1788 when my great-grandfather Jacob Gerig was born. It would seem quite likely because the name Gerig, unlike the name Meyer, or Zimmermann, is not common. But one is dependent on church records and they are not available so far as I am informed. My great-great-grandmother in that line was Elisabeth Goldechmidt. I was interested in getting the negative information to the effect that among the family names of the Swiss Anabaptists in the region of Markkirch I could find no Goldschmidts. My father informed me that he found in an old Bible the name of a Barbara Goldschmidt. That may have been the name of the mother of Elisabeth. If that is true she was my great-great-great-grandmother.

Note on page II. My second cousins who were involved in the German army during the first world war were:

Armand Sturm who was killed on the Russian front Nov. 30, 1914

Arthur Sturm who was reported as missing Feb. 6, 1915.

Edward Sturm who was rather severely wounded but recovered and got home after four years of service.

Emil Sturm, the oldest, was married and was a trained mechanic so he worked in a factory that made military supplies.

These facts are from a letter from Hortense Sturm, their sister, dated March 25, 1919. I contacted the family while I was in Relief and Reconstruction work.

As for the other documents mentioned ^{and underlined} I have copies of them. The reports of the marriage of my grandparents I have in photostatic form and in an ordinary copy.

The book by the French preacher-scholar is very important. He is or was a Lutheran minister.

Ch. Mathiot, Recherches Historiques sur les Anabaptistes (in Montbeliard, Alsace and neighboring regions). Belfort 1922.

You will find material in the Mennonite Encyclopedia, 4 Volumes, Scottsdale, 1955 and after.

See the articles on Alsace, The Gerigs, Sebastian Gerig, Pulversheim, Markkirch, (In that article Bishop P. Sommer points out that Jacob Armand worked vigorously to get the exemption from military service etc extended.) Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXXV, 297-308. An article on Sebastian Gerig by Melvin Gingerich. In that and in the article on Sebastian Gerig in the Encyclopedia there are several errors.

