

## [Roger Miller](#)

### **THE TRAGIC & UNTIMELY DEATH OF JOSEPH GERIG IN 1779: Another body found in a river!**

This account of Joseph Gerig's death was entered into the Montbeliard Mennonite Church Register by Joseph's brother-in-law, Hans Rich, who was a longtime serving elder of this Amish-Mennonite congregation. Joseph Gerig married Anne Rich on January 4, 1763. The Montbeliard Amish-Mennonite Church did not own a church building but rather met in each other's homes in and around the municipality of Montbeliard. The Montbeliard Church Register was recently translated by Joel Springer, who is the Curator of Goshen College's Mennonite Historical Library. Joel translated the Church's records and published it in 2015. He adds his own commentary throughout the publication. I hope to visit the library in Goshen this coming June and perhaps meet with the staff. I am curious what Joel Springer might know about the Gerig family in Alsace. It was Joel who suggested that Joseph Gerig was Anne Gerig's brother. The church records record that a nephew of Joseph's, named Hans Augsburgur, was baptized there in 1777. His mother is not named in the record. But we know that Anne Gerig was married to a Jacob Augsburgur, so it is tempting to identify her as Joseph's sister. Via civil records we can document that Anne was the sister of Katharina Gerig, who in turn was living in the small valley of Hang with our Christian Gerig and his brother Jean (Hans). The last three were all born in Saint Marie-aux-Mines.

Joseph Gerig's death may have occurred only one year after Moise Gerig's criminal inditement (hopefully in May we will discover the actual date). **It is ironic in that this also involves a body found in a river!**

Here is the translation from the Register with Joel's commentary:

On the date of June 16, 1779 at Audincourt at the castle, a misfortune occurred with Joseph Gerig who had an acute illness. He got out of his bed in the night between 11 and 12 o'clock without anyone knowing it, got into the water in the Doubs [river], drowned and was not found again until June 18, 1779 in the morning between 7 and 8 o'clock, a good hour below Audincourt, beyond Bavans, by fishermen [who were shown the location] by another man who had seen him the day before, and he was laid to rest in the earth right away on June 18, 1779 around 7 o'clock in the evening at Mont-Chevis, but with much effort, because [the burial?] had to be arranged [?] by the daughter [i.e. Maria?] of Joseph and had to receive permission from the civil authorities to bury him. Thus it caused me a lot of trouble and vexation and even cost a lot. Thus may almighty God have taken and accepted him through the merit of Jesus Christ and the gifts from the Holy Spirit into his eternal grace. Amen. I, Hans Rich, attest to the above.

Hans Rich

Thus, on August 13, 1779 his resources were assessed and written up at Sevenans and on August 14 at Audincourt.

Hans Rich

Note: Montbeliard Mennonite Church Register (1794 extract) specifies he was a "tenant farmer." - The German term indicates that the illness was one that involved a high fever or an inflammation. Joseph Gerig was married to Hans Rich's sister Anna Rich. The couple had at least two daughters: Maria (baptized in 1777) and Barbara (not baptized until 1788). Presumably Maria, who earlier that year had married Christian Roth, is the daughter referred to above. Gerig's widow survived until 1792 but was at the time perhaps afflicted by the same illness or otherwise incapacitated. In Oct. 1777 Gerig had taken over a new 18-year lease for Sevenans from Christian Ummel, apparently continuing prior obligations at Audincourt.

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The implication is that he had a high fever and was delirious. Perhaps he went to the river to cool himself off and passed out and drowned by accident. They didn't have Tylenol to break a high fever nor antibiotics to treat an infection. Life was difficult before modern medicine.