

CHRISTIAN SCHMUCKER (ca. 1718 - 1782)

Grindelwald is a valley about ten miles long in the Bernese Oberlands, above Lake Thun at an altitude of about 3400'. People living in this community in the Canton of Bern, constructed houses and buildings on the steep slopes of the Bernese Alps. These massive mountains are iced with everlasting snow. The main road terminates in the village and is often considered the last frontier.

In 1536 Menno Simons (1496-1561), a Dutch Catholic priest, joined the Anabaptist group in Holland. Because of his leadership, the Swiss Brethren Anabaptists later became known as Mennonites. After almost 2 centuries of Anabaptism in Europe, accompanied by constant suppression, Jakob Ammann, a Minister, sensing a lack of discipline among the followers of Anabaptism, emphasized a more rigid observance of certain tenets of their faith. The followers of Ammann became known as Amish and represent a conservative offshoot of the Anabaptist Swiss Brethren of Mennonite. It is not known when the Anabaptist movement reached Grindelwald. Christian was a member of the Amish faith when he arrived in this country.

Christian Schmucker's name surfaced when he was incarcerated April 4, 1745 for 4 days in the prison in Trachselwald Castle, because he was a Pietist teacher, perhaps a preacher. Perhaps he was called a Pietist because Anabaptism and Pietism had much in common. Trachselwald Castle held a prison dungeon, accessible only by means of a rope and pulley. Feet clamps, sitting holes and hand irons in each cell, still intact today, are a mute witness to the brutal treatment inmates of these cells likely received in the 16th century, Christian likely occupied a cell for 4 days in April, 1745. It was not known why Christian was imprisoned in this castle when there were closer prisons to Grindelwald. Perhaps he might have been living in the Emmenthal or visiting fellow Anabaptists there and appeared too active in sharing his faith with others which the local authorities did not tolerate. Excruciating pain and suffering in prison a few days might help influence a prisoner to promise to leave the country if he were released.

It is not known when Christian actually left Switzerland. It may have been soon after his release from prison. The family likely walked from Grindelwald to Montbéliard (now a part of France), a distance of about 100 miles "as the crow flies," taking only what few meager possessions they could carry. The Amish Congregation at Montbéliard started keeping church records in 1750, but the records do not contain the name of Christian or any members of his family.

The Montbéliard authorities were more tolerant towards Anabaptists than they were in the Canton of Bern. Nevertheless, life in Montbéliard was hard. Christian, like many others, likely had a desire to own some land and enjoy a better economic life, along with religious freedom, as Catholic princes of the principalities now began to persecute the Mennonites. Amish and Mennonites from Switzerland, the Palatinate, Alsace, Lorraine and even Montbéliard were emigrating in large numbers to Pennsylvania with the promise of religious freedom and the challenge of economic betterment with the development of the wilderness.

Christian's name surfaced when he and several fellow believers applied for a passport. On May 8, 1752, the authorities of Montbéliard issued a passport to the group wishing to go abroad. At the head of the list was "Christ Schmucker and his wife Catherine Hesster and four children." Might Christian's name be at the head of this group of people indicate he was the leader or spokesman for them or perhaps a preacher?

River transportation was the easiest method of travel. The Rhine River, one of the main rivers of central Europe, flowed to the North Sea where there were several ports from which ships sailed to America and other countries. Christian and his traveling group likely walked from Montbeliard to Basel, Switzerland, a distance of about 45 miles. At Basel they would obtain passage on a ship sailing down the Rhine to Rotterdam, a distance little less than 200 miles. This would take considerably time mainly because of the many petty kingdoms, each with a custom house, all along the river.

In Rotterdam, Christian and his traveling group secured passage on the Ship St. Andrew; this would take them to North America with James Abercrombie as captain. After stopping at Plymouth, England, the St. Andrew headed out to the open waters of the Atlantic, bound for Philadelphia. If their voyage were similar to that of other ships crossing the Atlantic at that time, the passengers likely experienced difficult and unpleasant situations. Problems and miseries started almost immediately as soon as they boarded the ship. The ships usually were packed and overcrowded. Lice were a great annoyance for passengers and crew throughout the entire voyage. The food was terrible and unpalatable. The drinking water had an almost unbearable stench. Contrary winds and sometimes no winds added to the problems of the crossing. Passengers had to endure many unpleasant smells, fumes, horrors, vomiting, seasickness, fever, dysentery, headaches, heat boils, scurvy, mouth rot, measles..... People living in such cramped quarters soon began to get on each others nerves. Tempers often flare. Many people died enroute and the corpses unceremoniously thrown into the ocean.

About 19 weeks after they received their passport at Montbeliard, Christian and his traveling companions were arriving in a new country with the promise of religious freedom and the challenge of economic betterment. The ship arrived in Philadelphia on September 23, 1752. Before the passengers were free to leave the ship, usually all males over sixteen years of age were marched to the courthouse to take the pledge of allegiance, later called "The Declaration of Fidelity and Abjuration."

Reformed churches were settling along the Pequea and Conestoga Valley in what is now called Lancaster County. The Schmucker family may have started for this county soon after they left the ship in Philadelphia.

Every inhabitant of Pennsylvania was assured religious freedom. Christian would choose wisely the area where they would settle and they would put down their roots as far as soil productivity is concerned plus the fact that he chose an area where Mennonites and Amish were settling. Even though scattered, the group would be in a position to practice mutual aid, characteristic of the Amish for many generations. Christian and Catherine would have 2 more children born after coming to America; they now had 6 children.

Christian received his naturalization papers on September 10, 1761, which cost 2 Shillings each. Tax records for 1756 list Christian Smocker (Schmucker) in Earl Township as "a poor man," no acres, no grain, no hoes, no cows, no sheep. On November 13, 1760, after years of indentured labor, and in spite of the uncertainty the French and Indian War created, Christian purchased a tract of land of 147 acres, on the south side of the Welch Mountain, south of what is now New Holland. The cost of the land he purchased was 22 Pounds, 6 Shillings and 4 Pence. Visions of an abundant harvest were dashed as a drought hit Lancaster County in the summer of 1762. It didn't rain from June until the 22nd of September. Almost all the springs were dry and the forest trees looked scorched. A mild winter was followed by a typical spring. Farmers carried their

guns when they performed their daily toils in the more exposed fields as the French and Indian War drew to a close. Word came that people had been killed by Indians . Of course, Christian and his fellow believers did not arm themselves.

The grains were growing in the fields plus the vegetable and fruit plants looked like a very good harvest was forthcoming. But on the 17th of June, a most destructive hailstorm fell on the entire county. The countryside looked like it had been destroyed by a swarm of locusts.

On the Schmucker farm, the land needed to be cleared of brush and trees so crops could be grown and the wilderness tamed. The average family cleared about an acre of land during the course of a year. As land was cleared, more crops could be grown. Soil types on the farm were among the best in Lancaster County. Harvests became bountiful.

The original dwelling on this farm was a two-story log house, likely constructed by one of the two previous owners. It is thought that they first built a barn to store harvested crops and shelter the animals such as horses, cows, pigs and sheep. Stones for building walls and trees for timber suitable for building purposes were close at hand.

When war began to loom, this peace-loving people stood fast to their original oath of allegiance taken upon entry into this country - not to take up arms against the king of England. A draft was instituted in the colonies where all males between the ages of 18 and 53, capable of bearing arms were to serve for 2 months on active duty. Men above the age of 53 were listed on a separate document known as, "The Old Men's List" and were assessed annually with an extra tax. Christian appears on the first list in 1778. Despite this there is an account of Christian being placed in the Reading jail during the Revolutionary War. Another writing told how his wife, Catherine and their little grandson, Christian, Jr., were victims of stone throwing as they carried meals to the men in jail. According to this story, *Christian was severely tried and imprisoned with a number of other Amish-Mennonites refusing military service on account of their religious convictions and their nonresistant faith. They were sentenced to be shot and a day was set for the execution. A meeting was held in the Reading prison to administer the Lord's Supper to the condemned brethren. The execution was never carried into effect. Through the leading of a kind Providence, friends interfered who appealed to the authorities in behalf of those who fled from Europe to escape military service, and who could not now be expected to do what their conscience forbade them to do in Europe. The appeal was heard and the peace-loving prisoners were set free.*

Pioneering on the frontier was not an easy life. Continuous hard physical work over a period of years is always a strain on the body. Uneasiness associated with the Revolutionary War added stress and tensions to daily living. Inflation was rampant and taxes were becoming increasingly more burdensome. Christian made out his will in the year of 1782, leaving his property to his youngest son, Christian, Jr., which was the custom in the Amish families, as that was the son who would likely still be at home. He provided for Catherine, and Christian, Jr. had to pay his siblings from the profits of the land for the next several years. Only 6 weeks after making out his will, Christian, Sr. died.