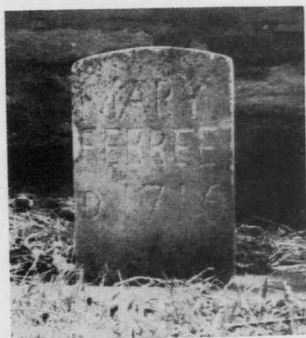


THE FRENCH ELEMENT AMONG THE PENNSYLVANIA GERMANS

BY GEORGE G. STRUBLE*

NOBODY really knows how many settlers of French origin came to Pennsylvania. We are aware that there were Frenchmen in Pennsylvania before the time of William Penn. The white population of Pennsylvania prior to 1681 has been variously estimated at between five hundred and five thousand. Even before the coming of the Swedes in 1638, several trading posts had been



"MARY FERREE D. 1716"

*In a corner of the Marie
Ferree Cemetery near Stras-
burg, Pennsylvania.*

established at various points along the Delaware by the Dutch, and among these Dutchmen were a surprisingly large number of men who bore French names. Most of these Frenchmen were Huguenots who had fled from the religious persecutions in France, and, after a sojourn in Holland, had sought a field of greater opportunity in the New World. How many of them there were, we have no means

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of knowing. But these early Frenchmen were forerunners of the thousands of Protestants of French ancestry who came later—descendants of French Huguenots who had fled France, had lived briefly or perhaps for years in the Protestant regions to the north of France, and then had come to Pennsylvania to be amalgamated with the dominant groups among whom they lived.

It is this submerged group that is the subject of the present paper. The story of those *other* Frenchmen who came to Pennsylvania—the French soldiers of Western Pennsylvania who administered the oft-told defeat on Braddock's army, the gallant Frenchmen who came at the time of the American Revolution to fight for the American cause, the aristocratic émigrés who lived briefly in Philadelphia during the 1790's or even more briefly in their fantastic village at Azilum, the refugees from Haiti—that story has been so often told that it is not necessary to repeat it here. The important point at the moment is that these other Frenchmen did not remain in Pennsylvania and contributed very little to the permanent population of the Commonwealth. By contrast, the submerged group with which we are now concerned came here as homeseekers, and their descendants live among us today. It is one of the ironies of history that the Frenchmen who contributed most to our permanent population have been the least publicized.

We cannot within the limits of our present paper chronicle in detail the mass migration of French Huguenots into the Rhine regions to the north. It will suffice, I think, to quote in translation two passages from Gilbert Chinard's *Les Réfugiés Huguenots en Amérique*:

During the first part of the seventeenth century the Huguenots had maintained a thin but constant thread of emigration toward those countries where they believed they would be able to find both the religious toleration they sought and the chance to remake their fortunes. In the years which immediately preceded and followed the revocation [1685] of the Edict of Nantes, this thin thread was transformed into a veritable tidal wave. (page 58)

But it was a rare thing for these Huguenots to go directly from France to America. More commonly they sought refuge in a country as close as possible to their native France. The Walloons went first into the Low

Countries, the Huguenots of Normandy had only a short trip to make to find security in the channel islands belonging to Great Britain, and those in the east of France made their way into Switzerland or into the Palatinate (pages 33-34).

It was these last who contributed in greatest numbers to the population of Pennsylvania. Evidence of their presence in substantial numbers among the German-speaking settlers of Pennsylvania is abundant. This evidence is of three main types: historical, genealogical, and linguistic. Under historical records we include 1) records of French settlements, 2) comments made by various early travelers, and 3) various types of church records, particularly of the German Reformed Church.

Settlements made up exclusively of French-speaking elements were rare in Pennsylvania, or non-existent. We had no colonies comparable to New Paltz, Esopus, or New Rochelle in New York state, or to Gallipolis in Ohio. The possible exception might be the town of Azilum in northern Pennsylvania, but this was settled, not by refugees from religious persecution, but by refugees from the French Revolution, aristocratic émigrés who returned to France at the first opportunity, and hence their settlement was short-lived and their permanent influence negligible. Yet there were in Pennsylvania two communities which contained a large enough body of French settlers to be worthy of special attention.

The Pequea Valley settlement, now Strasburg, about ten miles southeast of Lancaster, was founded in 1710 or shortly thereafter by Madame Ferree, her son John, and her son-in-law, Isaac LeFevre. That there were other French families who settled in the neighborhood then or later is attested by the records of the New Providence Reformed Church and the First Reformed Church of Lancaster. A large proportion of these names are French, and as late as 1771 we hear of sermons in the French language. It was in Lancaster that Philip William Otterbein, founder of the United Brethren Church, found his bride, Susan LeRoy; and John William Hendel, pastor of the Reformed Church at Lancaster and the New Providence Church at Pequea (the two churches formed one charge), married Susan's sister, Elizabeth LeRoy.

Another settlement which attracted a considerable number of

French Huguenots was that of the Oley Valley in Berks County east of Reading. It included, in whole or part, the territory of the present townships of Amity, Exeter, Earl, Oley, Pike, District, and Rockland. Into this region from the Huguenot colony at Esopus, New York, came Isaak DeTurck. Though the name may not appear to be French, there can be no doubt about his origin, for we have his own statement, reprinted (page 62) in the *Annals of the Oley Valley* (Reading, 1926), by P. C. Croll. Isaac DeTurck wrote: "My ancestors, by the name of Isaac DeTurck, lived in France and belonged to the so-called Huguenots, whence they fled, on account of their religion, to the Palatinate, residing in the city of Frankenthal. From thence, they journeyed to America and settled in the State of New York in the region of Esopus during the reign of Queen Ann. From there they moved to Oley between 1704 and 1712." Later settlers, Huguenots or Swiss Calvinists, bore such names as LeVan, Yoder, De la Plaine, Sharadin, Chapelle, Lebo, Bertolet, Herbine, Reiff, Keim, Guldin, Leshner, DeBenneville, Griesemer, Barto, Burgoign, and Huet. Evidence that most of these families were French (or in a few cases Walloon or Swiss), in spite of the German appearance of some of the names, is supplied by Croll in the work cited above. Mr. Croll quotes, for example, a birth certificate showing that Abraham LeVan was the son of Daniel Levent and Marie Beau; and the name Griesemer in the earlier records is variously spelled Griesheimer, Greasmere, Croixmere, and Croismare. To this matter of the metamorphosis of French names we shall revert presently.

In the travel literature of early America one finds many references to French settlers scattered through various parts of Pennsylvania. Especially valuable are the reports of French travelers, who would naturally be interested in the activities of their compatriots. I list some of the most notable of these, together with the approximate dates of their American sojourn: Rochambeau (1780-1783), Chastellux (1780-1782), Barbé-Marbois (1779-1785), Brissot de Warville (1788), La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt (1794-1797), Moreau de St-Méry (1793-1798), André Michaux (1793-1796), de Tocqueville (1831-1832), and Michael Chevalier (1833-1834). There were others, of course, such as LaFayette and Volney, but the ones I have named are the most valuable for our present purpose. Howard Mumford Jones draws freely upon this

travel literature in his admirable book *America and French Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1927). From this (page 141) I quote:

A good many Frenchmen settled in Pennsylvania. At Springmill near Philadelphia, La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt visited the farm of Legaux (an assumed name), who had been an avocat in Metz and a person of importance in Guadeloupe, and whose reputation in Philadelphia was none too good. At Potsgrove he met a Frenchman named Gerbier, the nephew of a celebrated Parisian avocat, who had been in Santo Domingo. At Whitehorst [sic], four miles from Potsgrove, the inn was kept by a Lorraine German who had married an American girl, the daughter of a man from Avignon and a woman of Franche Comté. At Middletown, twenty-seven miles from Lancaster, he met three Frenchmen, one a jeweler and clock-maker, and one a doctor; the third remains anonymous to the muse of history. At Harrisburg there was a French doctor from Martinique who toasted La Fayette in good Madeira. In August, 1793, Michaux interviewed some Frenchmen in Pittsburg, one of whom—Louisière—had been concerned in a plot to deliver Havre to the English-Spanish fleet. The younger Michaux, travelling the same way in 1802, remained at Pittsburg ten days, "during which," he writes, "I frequently saw the Chevalier Dubac, formerly a French officer, who, being compelled by the occurrences of the Revolution to quit France, had at first fixed his abode at Scioto, but soon afterward changed his residence and settled at Pittsburg, where he is engaged in commerce. His knowledge of the western country is very correct." And forty years later de Tocqueville met in a remote district of Pennsylvania a Frenchman who had begun as an ardent demagogue and who now defended property rights and quoted the evangelists in support of his views.

Finally, under the heading of historical records, we have a good deal of church history that testifies to the presence of a French element among the Pennsylvania Germans. Particularly valuable, because it was Calvinistic in origins and drew into its fold a large proportion of the Huguenot element of the population, are the records of the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania, which had its beginnings in 1725 under the leadership of John Philip Boehm. William J. Hinke in his *Ministers of the German Re-*

formed Congregations in Pennsylvania and other Colonies in the Eighteenth Century (Lancaster, 1951) lists, among others, such names as Dechant, Guldin, Antes, Dorsius, Dubois, Pauli, and Pernisius (or Pernis) to whom the formula for ordination was "very distinctly read . . . in the French language" (page 213). Regarding another pastor of the Reformed Church, Frederick Delliker, Hinke says (page 147), "The notion is widely current that the original name of the family was De la Coeur, and that he was of Huguenot descent. This is absolutely impossible, for the genealogical records in Zurich show that the family settled in Zurich as early at 1401." However, it turns out that the name Hinke had traced back to 1401 was Tälliker "tallow (candle) maker," and he does not establish any relation between Delliker and this old Zurich family. The father of Frederick Delliker, according to Hinke, was born in Berlin, studied painting in Paris, and it was in Paris, concedes Hinke, that Frederick Delliker was "possibly" born. He came to Philadelphia in 1767 or 1768. Both Croll in his *Annals of the Oley Valley* and Howard Mumford Jones (*op. cit.*, page 94) accept the French derivation.

Additional evidence of the French element in the Reformed Church can be found in the file of autograph letters in the library of the Historical Society of the Reformed Church, housed in the library building of Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster. Among these letters one finds such names as Descombes, Beaufort, Dechant, Bonnell, Du Bois, Lavater, Godet, and a manuscript biography of John Jacob Larose. None of these items are in the French language. However, Joseph Henry Dubbs, in his *The Reformed Church in Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, 1902), quotes (page 40) a letter in French from Abraham Blumer, an early pastor of the Reformed Church who had been born in St-Gall, Switzerland, educated at Basle, and had come to America in 1771. The letter is an answer to a "call" to Blumer to come to New York City to be pastor of the French Reformed Church there. He says, "C'est vrai que je parlais la langue française quelque peu il y a quelques années, mais j'avoue ingenuement que je ne possédois jamais cette langue dans un tel degré pour satisfaire à tous les devoirs d'un ministre établi dans une église française." His correspondents of the New York Church had understood that he had recently preached in French at Germantown. To this he replies, "Mais

permettes que vous dise, mes très chers frères, que c'étoit pas moi, mais mon compagnon de voiage dans ce pais-ci, M. Boehme, ministre de Lancastre, qui precha un sermon français à Philadelphia au mois de may passé."

The M. Boehme mentioned in the letter was not John Philip Boehm, founder of the Reformed Church in Pennsylvania, but Charles Louis Boehme, pastor of the Reformed Church at Lancaster and at Pequea. Regarding him, Dubbs (*op. cit.*, page 40) reports: "In Lancaster, where a company of French traders had long been settled, the Reverend Charles Louis Boehme, who was pastor of the First Reformed Church from 1771 to 1775, preached regularly in the French language. This is distinctly stated in the records of the congregation. He also occasionally preached in Philadelphia." Dubbs also quotes (page 41) from the Lancaster paper of January 27, 1788: "Peter Andirac, from France, has the honour to announce to the Gentlemen and Ladies that he intends to keep a school in the French language. His wife makes known to the ladies that she makes habits, caps, chapeaux, etc., after all sorts of fashions. He lives at the Widow Newman's." The Hinke transcripts at Franklin and Marshall College include church records of the Reformed Congregation on the Pequea dating back to 1758, and list such names as LeFevre, Ferree, Beyer, Fait, Paret, Plaen, and Rollard; while the records of the First Church at Lancaster reveal names like LeRoy, Fortunet, Michel, Lerue, Farnon, Sudor, Loretz, Mardy, Gerière, Hillegas, Mathieux, Rudi, Le Rou, and Marquant.

Besides the various types of historical material already cited, there are a number of genealogical studies that bear evidence of French blood among our Pennsylvania Germans. Mr. Croll draws from several of these in his *Annals of the Oley Valley*. These annals also indicate that there was a good deal of intermarriage, generation after generation, among a relatively few families. The Bertolets married with the Yoders, the Yoders with the DeTurcks, the DeTurcks with the LeVans and the Deyshers, the Guldins, the Bartos, the Rahns, the Trivitz, etc. (See especially pages 64 and 78.) A very detailed genealogy of the Pennsylvania LeFevres, founded in 1712 by Isaac LeFevre of the Pequea Valley, was published in Strasburg, Pennsylvania, in 1952. The father of Isaac LeFevre, together with his wife and six of his children, was

massacred near Chateau Chinon in the valley of the river Yonne shortly after the revocation (1685) of the Edict of Nantes. Isaac escaped to come to America and brought with him his father's French Bible, which now reposes in the library of the Lancaster County Historical Association. A genealogy of the Flory (Fleury, Fleure, Flora) family, which also claims French ancestry, was compiled by Mr. Walter Q. Bunderman of Harrisburg and published in 1948. Descendants are to be found today in Lebanon, Lancaster, and Dauphin counties.

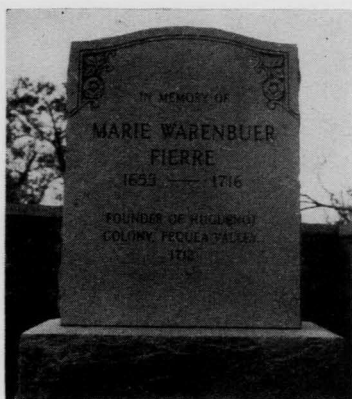
On the linguistic evidence of family names we come to one of the most controversial questions of our subject. The claim has been repeatedly made that many of the family names of this region, though German in appearance, are really of French origin. Howard Mumford Jones (*op. cit.*, page 84) quotes examples from Rosen-garten, *French Colonists and Exiles*: Lebo from Le Beau, Bashore from Bésore, Sausser from De Saussier, Berrot from Perot, Groshong from Grosjean, Woodring from Voturin, Fortney from Fortineau, Buckey from Bouquet. Other writers have derived Zerbe from Serbier, Leaman from Le Mont, Bennech from Ben-nage, Beaver from Beauvoir, and Zellers from Cellier. Professor Dunaway, of Pennsylvania State University, writing in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (October, 1929) derives Trego from Tricot, Shuey from Shuette, Quay from le Quay, Lora from Loreau, Leshner from Le Shar, Rettew from Retteau, Barto from Perdeau, Plank from de la Planch, Beaver from Bieber, Sheriadan from Giradin, Depew from De Pui, Dorney from Tournet, Douty from Du Tay, Delliker from De la Cour, Bushong from Beauchamp, Wesger from Vasqueau, and Lessig from Lesecq. With all deference to the distinguished Professor Dunaway, is it just possible that he and others have been in some cases misled by the fantasies of arm-chair philologists on a field-day? Such derivations can be accepted as authentic only when they are supported by other evidence, historical or genealogical. It is of course common knowledge that European names were commonly anglicized when their bearers came to America. By devious processes of change Bon Coeur became Bunker, Schneider appears in Lebanon County as Daylor, Herr Schwartz may later turn up as Mr. Black, and a colonist from France whose name

was Pierre à Fusil may have a grandson who bears the name Peter Gunn. It is also likely that the degalicizing of Huguenot names had already made considerable progress in the German Palatinate before their descendants, now intermarried with the German inhabitants, started their voyage to America. Once in Pennsylvania there would be little motive for preserving any trace of their French origin. They were living in a German community, attending a church whose services were ordinarily conducted in the German language. Furthermore, at the time when most of them arrived, the feelings of the people of the English colonies—whether those people were English, German, Dutch, or Swedish—were not too friendly toward the French. To them the French were those crafty people to the north and west, allies of the anti-Christ at Rome, potential enemies who incited the Indians to scalp white people and who were even then engaged in building forts in the Ohio valley in preparation for war. Nor would the Huguenots themselves feel any great sense of loyalty toward the country that had persecuted their ancestors, confiscated their goods, and driven them from their homeland. That is the reason, I believe, why they felt fully justified in concealing the identity of their origin, and that is the reason, too, why so few letters in French, so few French family Bibles, so few evidences of the survival of the French language, have been found among these people who bear French names.

With regard to the names, another question may be raised. What do we mean by a French name? Whether the family name was originally a place name, a totemistic name, an occupational name, or something else, it would usually go back to a common word of the language. In terms of ultimate origins, French words are of three chief sources: 1) Celtic or Gallic, 2) Germanic, including Frankish, and 3) Latin. The French language has hundreds of words of Germanic origin. Therefore to establish that a family name (e.g., Bieber or Beaver) goes back to a Germanic word doesn't necessarily preclude the possibility that it may have been sometime later a French name. It is also true that some German family names (e.g., Meyers, Victorius) are not Germanic in origin. In other words, linguistic evidence is not a very reliable guide in tracing ancestors.

Out of all this, however, emerge several incontestable conclusions:

1. Thousands of French Huguenots fled France into the upper Rhine valley, intermarried there with the Germans, and many of their descendants later came to Pennsylvania.
2. Many other Huguenots came to Pennsylvania, either directly from France or after intermediate residence elsewhere. These Huguenots have since become pretty well amalgamated with the Pennsylvania Germans of this region.
3. As a result of these two streams, there is a considerable admixture of French blood among the Pennsylvania Germans.
4. Some of our Pennsylvania German families have names that have been variously changed and modified, and in their earlier forms some of these names appear to be French.



GRAVE OF MARIE FERREE

The old gravestone, "Marie Ferree D. 1716," is behind this modern monument in the Marie Ferree Cemetery.