

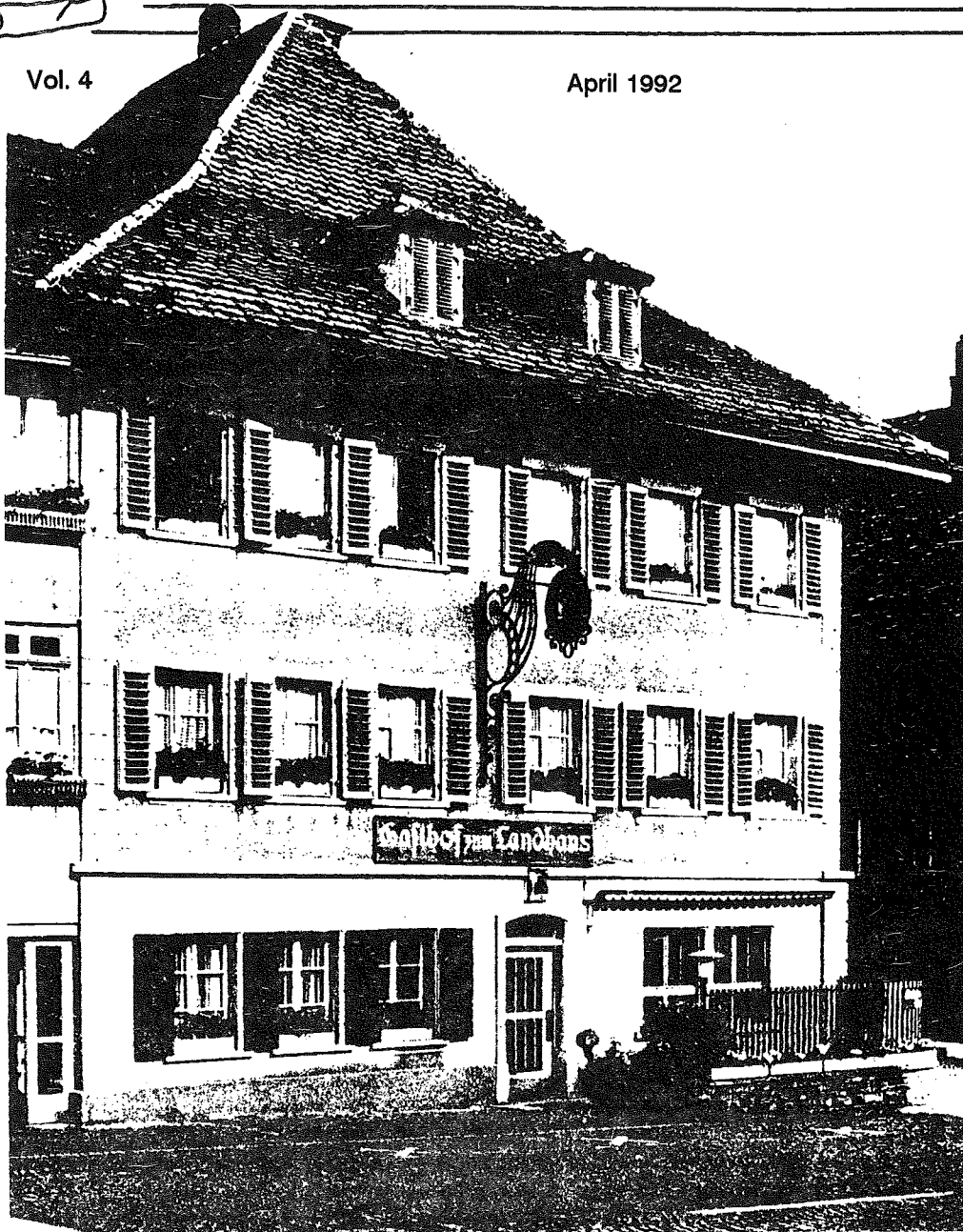


The Historian

Vol. 4

April 1992

No. 2



The Landhaus of Casper Joder was built in 1543 on the property known as Ortbuhgut. The third floor with the six windows was the council room of the courthouse. It is preserved yet today in its condition of 400 years ago when it was used for legal and political meetings when Joder was chairman of the court.

Prominent Pre-Anabaptist Joders in Switzerland

by Kenneth L. Yoder

Is there something about the Yoder genetic "makeup" that causes them to rise to positions of leadership where they go? If this is true, it is certainly not a recent development. It has been happening for centuries.

The Joders were not only farmers and herdsman. Very early they were involved in businesses like saw mills, feed mills, flour mills, brick factories, tanneries, breweries, blacksmithing, as well as breeders of cattle and

THE HISTORIAN is a quarterly newsletter published by the Casselman River Amish and Mennonite Historians. Executive Committee: David I. Miller, chairman; Richard I. Yoder, vice chairman; Kenneth L. Yoder, secretary-treasurer; Laban Peachey; Bennie C. Yoder. Address: P.O. Box 591, Grantsville, MD 21536. Subscription is by membership in the Casselman River Amish and Mennonite Historians. Editor: David I. Miller.

horses. They were also involved in local and regional governments in positions such as governor, mayor, magistrate, treasurer, judge and knight.

To qualify for these offices, one had to be able to read, write, and do arithmetic. Karl Joder states that in all the Joder documents that he has seen, he never saw one signed by an X.

I will list some prominent Joders that are believed to be in our direct ancestral line¹ along with their family crests² and the Ortbuehlgut³ which the Joders developed.

The crest of Casper Yoder, 1291, is one of a larger mounting which appears to include crests of other individuals. This crest was sent to Karl Joder by the chairman of the town council at Steffisburg. The date is 1291, the year in which the three first cantons (Unterwalden, Uri, and Schwyz) joined in a loose confederation to become Switzerland. However, "Das Frei Gericht Steffisburg", now the canton of Berne, did not join until the second group joined in 1332 - 1353. More research is needed to determine what this crest represents. Two important features are the date of 1291 and that the crest of Caspar Joder is part of it, whatever it represents.

Ulli Joder was born before 1340. He married Elsie Zaug (Zook).⁴ He was a magistrate in Altbueren. His crest is a red shield with a silver Pelican accompanied by a silver head of grain. The silver decorated helmet is covered with a red silver material. In the red umbrella shield is a black walking bear in the gold angled bar.

In 1389 Ulli was the third highest taxed individual on the tax list. His wife, Elsie, the blacksmith's daughter, also owned large sections of land which she donated to the "Deutschen Orden" (German order of Knights) as her contribution to the crusades. At this same time, the "Deutsche Orden" from Summiswald was undertaking a crusade to take back Jerusalem. Ulli himself achieved knighthood, and it was believed that he participated in the crusade.⁵ The presence of the pelican in the crest indicates such participation.

According to a secular history of Steffisburg, the wealthy (noblemen) were obligated to supply knights for the crusaders. Knighthood could only be attained through achievement - one was not born a knight. He had to be courageous, faithful, have pure motives and show respect to women.⁶ It was thought at the time that the most noble thing a person could do was to participate in the crusades.

Jost Yoder was born around 1387. He was a grandson of Ulli and Elsie. The name of his wife is unknown. Jost was a farmer and real estate holder. From 1415-1428 he was chairman of the council and chairman of the judges with legislative powers. He was a "bevollmaechtigersstatthalter". A loose translation of this title could be "a keeper of the state with full authority." This was probably something like the office of a governor. His crest was used as a seal and as identification of the house and the estate. His place of authority was "an den Lauenen Vor Thum."

Casper Yoder was born February 24, 1571 to Caspar Joder and Anna Joss (?). He married July 4, 1596, to Margaret Hennig. He was a farmer and real estate holder at Steffisburg. His crest has a black foot of an eagle on a gold background. It was used as a seal and as an estate identification. From 1611 to 1613 he was "bevollmaechtigersstatthalter" of the Free District Steffisburg.⁷

Several other Joders were in politics, though not of our direct line. Ulli Joder, son of Ulli and Elsie Zook, was a magistrate in Altbueren in 1462. This Ulli had two descendants, each named Hans Joder. The one was a magistrate in Altshafen.

The Ortbuehlgut at Steffisburg is significant in Joder history, as well as in the history of Steffisburg from the 14th to the 18th century. The "Gut" was in the family during these years. Our Jost Joder, the judge who became an Anabaptist, came from this family. The name Ortbuehlgut consists of three words: Ort - place or village; Buehl - hill or hump; Gut - a large farm or estate. So it could be translated "Village Hill Estate."

The house of the gut called the "Hoch House"⁸ was built about 1480. It had large rooms for political meetings of the "Steffisburg Frei Gericht" (Steffisburg Free District). The Free District was like a state which

¹Referring to Yoder families of Swiss Amish and Mennonite ancestry.

²The family crests are reproduced on page 3 in black and white and, unfortunately, are not shown with the advantage of color. The written description in the text on coloration should be noted.

³A farm estate, as explained later in the article.

⁴Goerg Thuerer, Free and Swiss (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press), pp 22-33.

⁵Karl Joder, Chronik u. Dokumentation der Familie Yoder, pp. 22 unpublished.

⁶Hans Zeller, Steffisburg (Thun, Switzerland: Ort Verlag, 1967), p. 20.

⁷Karl Joder pp. 29

⁸Zeller, pp. 36.



Crest of Casper Joder, 1291



Crest of Ull Joder, 14th century

Crest of Jost Joder, 1428



Crest of Casper Joder, 1572



ANNUAL MEETING OF THE HISTORIANS 1992

The annual meeting of the Casselman River Amish and Mennonite Historians is scheduled to be held at the Maple Glen Mennonite Church, 1 mile north of Grantsville on Dorsey Hotel Road on Friday and Saturday, September 4 and 5, 1992. The main focus of the meeting will be on the history of the Amish and Mennonite Yoder family as represented by the Yoders in the Casselman River area, with special attention given to the European roots. An ad hoc planning committee has been appointed to arrange the program for the September meeting, consisting of Kenneth L. Yoder, Bennie C. Yoder, and Virgil Yoder. Anyone with items of interest related to the focus on the Yoder family in 1992, is invited to contact any member of the committee.

ADDITIONAL MEMBERS OF THE HISTORIANS

Elam and Mildred Bender
John A Bender
Eli and Ruth Bontrager
Samuel C. Engle

Laura Folk
Ora A. Graber
Dan A. Hochstetler
Daniel E. and Sarah Miller

Calvin M. Will
Mark and Mayla Yoder
Nathan Yoder
Virgil and Ruth Yoder

included the town called Steffisburg. The house was remodeled and enlarged a number of times. Sometimes three or four Joder families lived there at one time. The gut had large barns, horse stables, granaries, and a smeltery.

The "Landhaus"⁹ was erected after August 17, 1543, in the garden of Caspar Joder's Ortbuehlgut, joining the main house. The third floor with the six windows is where the political meetings were held. The Ortbuehlgut, the Hochhaus, and the Landhaus were built by three different Caspar Joders. 1) the Caspar Joder who married Annie Mayer, 2) the Caspar Joder who married Margaret Moser, and 3) the Caspar Joder who married Margaret Henning.¹⁰

Until about the 14th century, Steffisburg has been under the control of the Kloster at Interlaken. It was now possible to do confessions and to prescribe punishment at Steffisburg.¹¹ So Steffisburg began to emerge as a capitol with considerable authority. They insisted that they were "free" and were not obligated to anyone. After this the history of Steffisburg was tied in with the history of Berne. At first it was largely an economic union, but it gradually came under Berne's control.

So it appears that the Joders were aggressive people for many centuries and have been involved in the leadership of their communities.

Surely any Yoder interested in his history would want to visit Steffisburg surrounded by the beautiful snow-capped mountains. The Landhaus and the Hochhaus still are there. You can have a cup of coffee in the Gasthaus (first floor of the Landhaus). When Ruth and I were there, they gave us a tour of the building from the wine cellar to the attic. It is an awesome feeling to be where one's ancestors called home 500 years ago and still see the results of their work.

In the next issue, I want to write about Jost Joder, the judge, who out of this context became an Anabaptist and who is believed to be the ancestor of all Yoders of Amish and Mennonite ancestry.¹²

⁹See the photocopied photograph on the cover.

¹⁰Zeller p. 109.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Personal letter from Swiss historian Karl Joder, Jan. 10, 1983.