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The Yoders: The Name And Early Settlements in Switzerland

By Kenneth L. Yoder

Joder, Jodder, Jodter, Ioder, Jother, Jotter, Yoder. Where does this name come from? How does one account for all the different spellings? What does it mean? Does the name come from yodler as some have speculated? Are the Yetters also part of the Yoder family? I will give some thoughts on these questions.

The family name Joder comes from Saint Theodore (Joder). He was a missionary monk who in the fourth century crossed the Alps from Italy to bring the gospel to the Valois country in what is now Southern Switzerland.

Saint Theodore became the first bishop of what is now Switzerland. He was very successful. Miracles are attributed to him. He was later granted sainthood. Switzerland still lists August 16 and Austria August 14 as Saint Joder's day. According to Dr. Ephrem Omlin of the Engelberg Monastery, the name went through the following series of abbreviations: Saint Theodore, Saint Toder, Saint Toeder, Saint Tioder, and Saint Joder.¹

The Greek meaning of the name Theodore is gift from God.

Karl Joder, our distant cousin and Joder researcher in Germany, states that the Joder family name is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, family name in German speaking regions! He also lists the name as deriving from Saint Joder. As his sources he lists: Professor Dr. K. Brechenmacher, Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Familiennamen; Gottschald, Max, Familiennamen, Entstehung and Bedeutung; Below, Hans, Familiennamen and Vornamen Nach Ursprung and Sinn; Dr. Nied, Deutsche Familiennamen: Historisch - Biographisches Lexikon der Schweiz, Book IV page 405. With this kind of documentation one can surely assume its certainty.²

There is no evidence that the name Joder comes from yodler. The similarity of the words is a mere coincidence!

How then did our family come to bear the name Yoder? Are we direct descendants of Saint Joder, possibly through marriage? Was this before marriage of monks and priests was forbidden? Could a son have been born out of wedlock that carried his name? Or has some one, upon becoming a Christian, taken on a new name which may have been Joder? Or may it be a name given the religious followers of St. Joder or possibly even a nickname as the followers of Menno Simons were called Mennonites?

The latter seems unlikely because very many people would then have had the name Joder. I don't know the answer to these questions and could only speculate. However, it is commonly reported that the Joders are part of a German clan that moved into the German part of what is now Switzerland, living in the Emmental as early as the 4th or 5th century.³

In Switzerland the name was generally spelled Joder. I think this is still true. As the Joders moved north through Alsass and the Palatinate in Southern Germany, various spellings began to be used. In German it is customary to spell a word as it sounds. As the Joders moved through communities with different dialects, different spellings began to be used. The Y replaced the J when the Joders came to America. The English Y sounds like the German J.

I haven't heard or read anything that the Yeters, such as the former secretary of agriculture, Clayton Yetter, are part of the Joder family. Because of the similarity of the name, it seems that they should be. Perhaps someone would know if and where they fit in.

Through the centuries, St. Joder became even more loved and popular through paintings and stories about him. Some were not very accurate, but their popularity grew later through Joder's Chapel, built in 1492 at Altzellen. Joder's Chapel contains paintings of things St. Joder is said to have accomplished.⁴

Locations also began to be called Joder, either because of Saint Joder or the prominence of the Joder family. I list some examples here:

1. Joder - a small village
2. Joderton - a farm at Entlebach
3. Joder Hubel (Hill) - in Emmental
4. Joder horn - a 3039 meter high mountain at the Italian border
5. Joder Gletcher - in the Swiss Alps
6. Joder Quelle - in the Swiss Alps
7. Joder Pass - in the Swiss Alps
8. I also heard of another Joder Chapel but have forgotten its location.

The Joders settled in different areas in Switzerland long before some of the famous cities were in existence. They had settled in the areas of Huttwil, Summiswald, Dogmarsellen, Altburon and Alteshaven before the city of Bern was in existence. And in the areas of Steffesburg, Segriswill the farms Seblin - Joder and the Senhof Joderton stood long before one house stood in Luzern.

Joder's Hubel (Joder's Hill), according to Karl Joder, had its name "seit urzeiten" (since the middle ages) because the Joders had settled there. The Joder Hill is surrounded on 4/5 of its sides by the Emme River or its tributaries. The hill, at many places rising almost vertically from the river to over 60 ft. high, was a natural fortress of the Joder family for many, many years. At one point along the river, the hill is accessible by a natural bridge. The size of the hill is approximately 2 square kilometers, its highest point is 967 meters. For centuries, until 1847, the hill was in the Joder name when an inlaw changed the ownership to Schluechter. 5

These are some of the very early beginnings of the Joder family. Additions or corrections to this article are invited.

1. Rachel Kreider, "A Yoder Patron Saint," Menonite Life, July 1968.
2. Karl Joder, Chronik der Familie Joder-Jotter, 1977, p. 12.
3. Karl Joder, Chronik u Dokumentation der FAmilie Joder, 1977, p. 15.
4. Yoder Newsletter, (P.O. Box 594, Goshen, IN 46526) Issue 7, April 1986.

A VISITORS' TRAVEL LOG

By David I. Miller

INTRODUCTION

A log of a trip taken by Abner Yoder and P. Kinsinger from the Kalona, Iowa area to Somerset County, Pennsylvania, is preserved in the Mennonite Archives in Kalona. They travelled by train, leaving Iowa City on August 23 and arriving in Meyersdale, PA, at 2:00 a.m. on August 26. The year was 1882, according to an accompanying document of similar content also preserved in Kalona. This dating is supported also by two points of content: 1) They went to a Sunday morning service at "Joel Beachy's meeting house" (Maple Glen), which was built in 1881 and 2) Abner Yoder died on Dec. 12, 1883.

With the help of Lester Miller, president of the Iowa Mennonite Historical Society, we identify the travellers as follows:

Abner Yoder (1814-1883) was an Amish Mennonite bishop of the Glades congregation in the Berlin-Brotherton area of Somerset County. He moved to Johnson County, Iowa in 1866 where he served as bishop. His wife was Veronica Schrock (1814-1886).

Peter Kinsinger (1839-1923) was born near Springs, Pennsylvania. His first wife, Delila Yoder, died at age 24 in 1865. (See Descendants of Jacob Hochstetler, fam. 3870.) In 1870, he married Elisabeth (1846-1934), daughter of Abner Yoder. The wedding was in Somerset County on February 20, according to Memorial History of Peter Bitsche, Fam. 268. This means that Elisabeth returned to her native community for the wedding or had not moved to Iowa with her parents four years earlier. Peter was a minister and later a bishop in the Amish Mennonite church in Iowa.

The purpose of this visit to Somerset County is not stated in the document. For both it was going "back home" and they visited many relatives and friends. Peter was ordained to the ministry in Iowa in 1878 (bishop in 1886), but Abner had served as bishop in the Glades congregation before moving to Iowa sixteen years before this visit. Both men were married, but apparently their wives did not travel with them. Was it a social visit? Was it church business? Do any of our readers have further information or evidence of the purpose of this visit?

They visited homes extensively. Peter's parents, Jacob and Catherine (Beachy) Kinsinger lived at Springs and may be the the Jac. Kinsinger mentioned as one of the first visits and again as one of the last. They went as far south as the Joel Miller home at Grantsville and slept in the house now occupied by the Kenneth L. Yoder family. They ventured as far north as Somerset and apparently visited homes in the Berlin-Brotherton area from Sept. 4 to 12 where the Amish Mennonite church was by then declining and later became extinct.

From this factual list of data, one can travel with these preachers and begin to feel the intensity of their mission. Hopefully, other resources can be found to support or revise the interpretations given here, to answer remaining questions, and to flesh out the historical meanings related to the log.

The log is presented here as typed from an extant copy in Kalona without concern for capitalization or punctuation. One feature is added: the slash (/) is used to separate the elements of the text which belong to a given day in the schedule of visits.

THE LOG

Abner Yoder and P. Kinsinger left Iowa City for Pa. Aug. the 23rd at eight o'clock P.M. / arrived at Chicago the next morning at 7:30 A.M. left there at 9 A.M. arrived at Elkhart at 1 P.M. and at Toledo a little before sundown / arrived at Youngstown a little past 2 left there a little past 5 A.M. arrived Pittsburg at 9 A.M. left there at 1:46 P.M. arrived at Connelsville at 4:30 P.M. left there at 11:10 P.M. / arrived at Meyersdale at 2 A.M. took lodging and breakfast at the Jones house. went to Christ Livengoods then to Salsbury (sic) by railroad then to Dan Otto and Jac. Kinsingers / 27th meeting at Joel Beachys meeting house. lodging at Joel Beachys / 28th to Rudy Yoder, Jake and Joel Miller Jr. lodging / 29th to Eli & widow P. Miller & Levi Kinsinger & Moses Kempf then to L. Kinsinger lodging / Aug. 30 then to Henry Miller and Sam Beachys lodging / Aug. 31st Aaron Beachy then to Sol Yoder and Wilhelm Bender lodging / Sept. 1, to Joel & Manasses Beachy & Moses Schrock, lodging 2 / to David Jacob & Christ Yoder lodging / 3, to meeting, then to Eli Yoder lodging / 4th to Tobias Lehman & Benedict Yoder lodging / 5th to Michael Schrocks then to Abm Miller lodging / at Michael Schrocks 6th to Shanks and Juliana Yoder Pierce Fisher & Jacob Reiman Charles Beam, & George Schrock lodging / 8 to Dan. Walker Jake Schrock, Moses Yoder & John Snider lodging / 9 John Reiman, David Snider Josiah Weigel Ben Yoder lodging / 10 Sus. Pew, Harrison Zervas, B Yoder lodging / 11, Somerset & John Schrocks lodging / 12, to Somerset and Rockwood & Eli Yoder and M. Beachy lodging / 13, to Sam & Eli Miller, Joel Miller & Dan Hershberger lodging / 14 to Jacob Yoder & Jacob Kanagey lodging / 15, to John Keim, Tom Lee, Christ Beachy, Eli Hershberger lodging / 16, to Dan Otto, J. Stephannas, Dan Miller, Dan Lee, Emanuel Hershberger, Joel Beachy lodging / 17 to meeting, then to Manasses Beachy lodging / 18, then to Jac. Kinsinger and Moses Schrock lodging / 19th to

Christ Hostetler & Eli Yoder then to Meyersdale and took the cars for for home, Cumberland, Piedmont, Oakland, Grafton, change cars Utica, Frederick, Independence, Lexington, Mansfield Ohio, Shelby, Plymouth, Chicago Junction, Tiffin, Bascom, Fostoria, Bairdstown, North Baltimore, Hamler, Holgate, Defiance. 183 miles east of Chicago lumbering business, Delaware, Bend of Maumee River, Sherwood, Hickville, St. Joe, ___ Junction, Cromwell, Syracuse, Nappanee, Bremen,, Walkerton Junc. Chicago, lodging at the United States Hotel No. 44 Sherman Street James Norri, proprietor, Frank Parmelee Ominbus line, Blue Island, Joliet, Seneca, Ottawa, Lasalle Tisch Atkinson, Moline, Davenport, Fulton, Wilton, Moscow, West Liberty, Iowa City.

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.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE HISTORIANS

Membership in the Casselman River Amish and Mennonite Historians is now being offered for the year of 1992. Subscribing to membership now assures continuation of benefits of membership, including receipt of The Historian and Mennonite Family History throughout the year. The membership subscription form enclosed with this issue can be used for enclosing the selected fee. In the case of those already holding membership for 1992, the form can be given to an interested friend.

The membership list for 1992, as of January 5, is as follows:

INDIVIDUAL

Esther Beachy
Milton Beachy
Henry Brenneman
Mark Brenneman
Ervin N. Hershberger
Harriet Hershberger
Lemar Mast
Rhoda Maust
Catherine J. Miller
Della Miller
Rachel Miller
Bernard Orendorf

Alta E. Schrock
Bonnie Schrock
Elnora A. Schrock
Simon J. Tice
Ida Yoder
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Ivan & Hilda Maust
David & Erma Miller
Laban & Helen Peachey
Kenneth & Ruth Yoder

Paul & Marie Yoder
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