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Yost Joder - The Anabaptist

By Kenneth L. Yoder

The brothers Yost and Niklaus Joder, sons of Casper Joder (governor), and Margret Hennig, married wives with the same name, Anna Trachsel, in a double wedding on October 14, 1642. The wives were first cousins. Both of these families became Anabaptist and many of them left the country.

We want to concentrate in this article on Yost, the direct ancestor of the Yoders of Amish Mennonite descent. He was born November 30, 1607, and lived to a ripe old age. He fled from his home in his late 80's or early 90's. The children of Yost were:

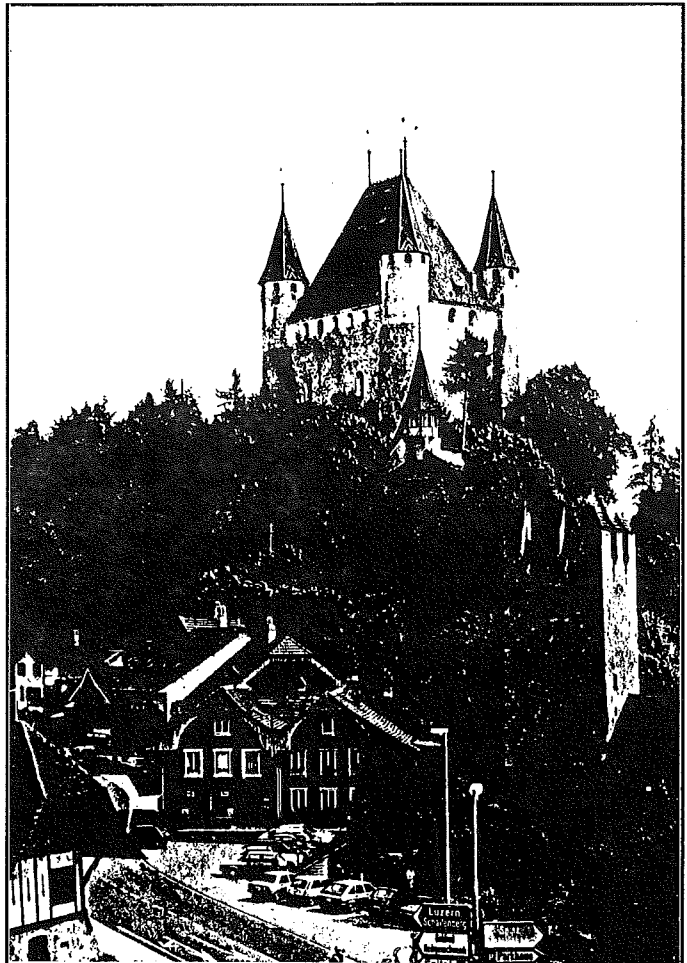
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|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1) Hans b. April 21, 1644 | m. Catharin Risser |
| 2) Anna b. April 19, 1646 | died as child |
| 3) Verena b. Sept. 12, 1647 | m. N. Rupp |
| 4) Peter b. 1649 | m. ____ Stahli? |
| 5) Jacob b. April 4, 1652 | m. Verena Kaufman |
| 6) Anna b. July 17, 1653 | m. Christian Blank |
| 7) Barbara b. Oct. 28, 1655 | m. N. Berger |
| 8) Christian b. May 10, 1657 | m. Barbara Gerber |
| 9) Caspar b. ca. 1664 | m. Verena Stauffer |
| 10) Catharin b. July 8, 1666 | m. Hans Rupp ¹ |

The Religious Context in which Yost Lived:

What was it like for Yost to leave his home community in which he had invested so much of his life and to which his ancestors of many centuries had contributed so much to develop? To help understand this context, I will write something about the religious and political times in which Yost lived.

Yost was born approximately 100 years after Zwingli began the Reformation in Switzerland. Parts of Switzerland were ruled by the Reformed (followers of Zwingli) and other parts were under the control of Catholic bishops. Steffisburg, home of the Yoders, was now Reformed, though Basel was under the bishop's control. Church and state were one. Religious pluralism was not understood and was considered a threat. At some places and times the Anabaptists were tolerated. The bishop at Basel allowed the Anabaptists to live in the undeveloped Jura mountains above 1000 meters where it was almost impossible to eke out a living. (Mennonites still live there).

In Steffisburg the Anabaptists enjoyed the sympathy and protection of the population as a whole. The pastor and the "Chorgericht" (church court) did not hinder or promote the private home meetings of the Anabaptists. During this



The castle of Thun, where Yost Joder may have been imprisoned because of his Anabaptist persuasion.

¹Karl Joder, Chronik der Familie Joder-Jotter, 1977, p. 42.

time the Anabaptists flourished.² However, this did not continue.

The big problem was the "Tauferkammer" (Department of the Anabaptists), whose purpose was to eradicate the Anabaptists. Gradually Steffisburg had come under the control of Bern. The council at Bern established its own "tauferkammer" which then appointed "Taufenjäger" (Anabaptist hunters). If Anabaptists were caught and did not recant, their possessions were confiscated and they were either executed or exiled. If they were exiled and came back, they were to be given the "third baptism" (drowning) at the spot where they were found. This problem was so severe that by the beginning of the 18th century, 346 families had left the canton of Berne and had gone to the Palatinate, the Jura mountains, or Holland, and from there to America and South Africa.³ This was the regional situation in which Yost lived. Now lets take a closer look at Yost's church in Steffisburg.

The Pastors at Steffisburg: From 1605-1637 Christian Seeman was pastor. In 1622 he received "gutes Lob" (good praise) for his life and teaching. He was concerned about the school, which he loved.

Hans Jakob Guder was the next pastor who also had a good testimony, except that sometimes he didn't hold church on Monday. His answer was that no one came except the sexton, not even the "sworn ones", even though they held court that day.

The next pastor was Gabriel Schmid. He arranged children's instruction on the church. In 1657 he confessed to the magistrate at Thun a mistake he had made in his youth. He was taken to court, sentenced to death and beheaded on April 17, 1657 at 4 o'clock in the morning. Could it be that he was a "Treuherziger" (Anabaptist sympathizer) and the real reason for his execution is not listed?

The next pastor was Johann Uriel Freudenburger. His critical self righteous conduct kept people from church. He said they just want to run to other meetings (Anabaptist). In 1670 he was dismissed because he kept false records and withdrew too much from the treasury.

The next pastor, Johann Jacob Freudenreich, was a very industrious, enthusiastic and learned pastor. His teaching and life were in harmony with the meaning of his name, "rich in joy". The common testimony was that he was concerned for their souls. He held many children's classes in outlying areas. During the time of this patient and good man, many Anabaptists were found in the area. The pastor and the chorgericht were not very hard on them. If some missed communion without a good reason he was probably an Anabaptist and he visited them in their homes.⁴ Under these pastors, Yost grew up and served with some of them in the church court.

Yost and the "Chorgericht" (church court): The church court was begun in 1529 by the Reformed. It oversaw the life and conduct of its members in spiritual as well as civil matters. Church and state were one. Sometimes the "Staathalter" (governor) was chairman and the pastor was secretary with any number on the court. I do not know when Yost began on the court, but he with two others, Peter Roth, and Hans von Farney made up the court under Pastor Freudenreich. Each was responsible for one third of Steffisburg and Yost was the chairman.⁵ In the years 1686-1692, Karl Manuel, a declared opponent of the Anabaptists, was an official at Thun.

The "Tauferkammer" (Department of the Anabaptists) at Bern, on March 21, 1692, asked Pastor Freudenreich and the church court, Yost Joder, Peter Roth, and Hans von Farney, for the names of the Anabaptists in their area. After their refusal to give any names, the Department of the Anabaptists ordered Karl Manuel to arrest the church court, bring them to Bern, and hold them hostage at their own expense in the most expensive hotel until they gave the names. They held them there six months, but they refused to give any names. Yost would have been 86 years old then. How could Yost be the chairman of the church court and at the same time be loyal to the Anabaptists? Was he one of the "Treuherzigen" (Anabaptist sympathizers) or was he a real Anabaptist, but held this office in the court as long as he could to protect the other Anabaptists?

In the manuals of the chorgericht, number 5 of 1697, Yost was described as an honorable, wise, careful, and modest man. However, these words were later crossed out. Yost was relieved from the Chorgericht at his own request.

Yost and the Anabaptists: When did Yost become an Anabaptist? Yost and Anna had ten children from 1644 to 1666. The first seven were born from 1644-1655. These were baptized as infants. The last three, born from 1657-

²Hans Zeller, Steffisburg, (Thun, Switzerland: Ort Verlag, 1967), pp. 52,53.

³Zeller, p. 50.

⁴Zeller, p. 51-53.

⁵Karl Joder, Chronik und Dokumentation der Familie Joder, 1977, p. 46

1666, were not baptized as infants.⁶ From this one can conclude that some time between 1655 and 1657, Yost developed convictions against infant baptism. This was one of the beliefs of the Anabaptists.

A factor which may have influenced Yost was the extremely unreasonable execution of the seemingly good pastor, Gabriel Schmidt. He was executed on April 17, 1657. Yost's son, Christian, was born May 10, 1657, less than one month after the execution of Yost's pastor and possibly co-worker. Could this have been so repulsive to him that it gave fruit to a growing conviction? If this were the date that he became an Anabaptist, the time from this event to the time when he was arrested and taken to Bern would have been 35 years! He would have been a member of the Reformed church and possibly on the court during this time. Did he keep his position to protect the Anabaptists? Remember the Anabaptists flourished during this time and it would have been his responsibility to correct them.

On July 16, 1690, the Department ordered the official of Trachselwald to inquire whether the Anabaptists Yost Joder and Christian Blank were staying in Shangnau and whether they had moved their things there. They were to report back as soon as possible.⁷

In 1690 five children of Yost were identified in the Steffisburg records as suspected Anabaptists. Peter, Jakob, Anna (wife of Christian Blank), Christian, and Casper.

The State archives at Bern show a record dated 4-18-1695: "The Anabaptist Christian Joder has left the country." This could have been Yost's son, Christian.

As early as 1685, descendants of Yost were already found in the Palatinate.⁸ Among members of the Joder family, it is believed that Yost that was locked up in the dungeon of the castle at Thun in Switzerland.

Yost Joder and Jakob Ammann: Erbenbach, in the Emmental, the home of the Amish founder, Jakob Ammann, is only about ten miles from Steffisburg. Ammann was a contemporary of Yost. He fled this area to Alsace in 1673. Twenty years later, in 1693, he returned to Switzerland. In this famous visit, which resulted in a confrontation with Hans Reist, he was accompanied by Christian Blank. Could this have been Yost's son-in-law who married Yost's daughter Anna? In a letter of 1700 to Hans Reist, Ammann asks forgiveness. This letter was also signed by a Christian Blank. Joders were also present with Ammann in the Alsace.

One can assume some connection between Yost and Ammann because of the geographic proximity of their homes and the early involvement of Joders in the Amish movement.

An Observation of First Names: Many of Yost's ancestors and family members were called Caspar, probably because of some early prominent Caspars. Of Yost's descendants, there are not many Caspars, but many Christians, sometimes 3 or 4 generations in a row. This was true in Germany as well as the United States, perhaps reflecting a change of interest from politics to serious disciples of Christ.

This then is the information I have on Yost. I believe much more could be learned from the Swiss archives. It would be so exciting to know much, much more about this man. If anyone has more information, please let me know.

⁶Karl Joder, Chronik Der Joder-Jotter Familie, un-numbered pages in the Joder pedigree.

⁷Karl Joder, "Chronik u. Dokumentation Der Familie Joder" (unpublished), p. 39.

⁸William Woys Weaver, "The Swiss Anabaptist Emigration to Germany," The Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage, Vol. V, No. 1 - Jan '82, p.5.



CORRECTION

In the April 1992 issue of The Historian, the dwelling house on the Ortuebhlgut was referred to as the "Hoch Haus". This is incorrect. The "Hoch haus" was built about the same time as the Ortuebhlgut, but was not part of it and was not built by the Joders. The information about the dwelling house is otherwise correct, but it was not called the Hoch Haus.

A N N O U N C I N G

The Annual Meeting of the Casselman River Amish
and Mennonite Historians

Featuring the History of the Joder/Yoder Family

Friday evening and Saturday, September 4 & 5, 1992

At the Maple Glen Church
(1 mile north of Grantsville on Dorsey Hotel Road)

—SCHEDULE—

Friday evening: 7:00 p.m.

Business meeting (including action on revised constitution)

Slide lecture: The Yoders in Switzerland (from Saint Joder to Yost Yoder) - by Virgil Yoder

Saturday morning: 10:00 a.m.

Slide lecture: The Yoders in Alsace and Germany - by Virgil Yoder

The Yoder Newsletter and Yoder genealogy on computer

Places named Yoder

Lunch break (Lunch available at Maple Glen)

Saturday afternoon: 1:00 p.m.

The Yoders in America

-The Reformed, the Amish, the Mennonites, the Yothers, the North Carolinians, and others. The main focus will be on the Amish Yoder families on this 250th anniversary of their arrival in America.

Displays: The public is invited to these sessions and is invited to bring for display items of interest to Yoder history, such as genealogies, heirlooms, land deeds, etc.

Motels in the area: The Casselman (in Grantsville) 301-895-5055; Comfort Inn (Frostburg) 301-689-2050; Holiday Inn (at I68 [formerly SR 48] and US 219, 3 miles east of Grantsville) 301-895-5993

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