

Jacob Showalter (Abt. 1710-1773) of Northampton Co. PA Patriarch of the Showalters of Rockingham County, VA

Including a transcription of his Last Will and Testament

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Farmland in Rockingham County, Virginia (Photo by SAM 2010)

On November 3, 1750, the ship *Brotherhood* arrived at the port in Philadelphia. The ship, under the command of Captain John Thomson, sailed with three hundred passengers from the ports of Rotterdam (Netherlands) and Cowes (England). When they arrived in port, foreign men over the age of sixteen were required to appear before the judge at the courthouse in Philadelphia and take the Oath of Abjuration. On the list of passengers from this ship who took this oath are the names of Jacob Schowalter, Johannes Showalter, Christian Showalter, Jacob Showalter, and Peter Schowalter. (Source: *German Pioneers to Pennsylvania: Passenger Ship Lists*) Records indicate that these were Jacob Schowalter and his sons who settled in Northampton County. While the actual birthplace of Jacob and his children isn't known, it is believed that the Showalter family originated in Switzerland.

As with other Mennonites in Switzerland, the Showalters were severely persecuted. For this reason, they fled to the German principalities of Bavaria, Württemberg, Hesse, Moravia, and the

Palatinate. Many of this sect came to America at the invitation of William Penn. As of 1750, there were over 2,000 Mennonite families living in the Americas. (Jones)

Jacob Showalter and his family settled on a 450-acre tract of land in Whitehall Township, Northampton County, Pennsylvania in 1751. The name of Jacob's first wife, who is the mother of his children, is unknown. Some family members believe he later married a Maria Saunders, a sister to Margaret Saunders, the wife of his son Daniel. According to various court documents and family records, it is believed that Jacob Showalter had 11 children (8 sons and 3 daughters): Peter, Jacob, Christian (m. Barbara Sherrick/Shirk), Johannes (m. 1. Anna ? and 2. Esther Funk), Joseph (m. 1. Magdalena ?, 2. Maria ?), Daniel (m. Margaret Saunders), Valentine (m. Anna Funk), Ulrich (m. Susannah Watterson/Woolerson), Barbara (m. Henry Funk), Margaret (m. Peter Bassler) and Martha Ann (m. 1. John Tressler 2. Joseph Trissel). (Jones)

Jacob Showalter was one of the founders of the Mennonite congregation that gathered to worship in the village of Siegfried (one of three villages in the Lehigh Valley to merge into Northampton, Pennsylvania in 1902). A log meeting house was constructed there about 1760. The cemetery, located opposite the meeting house, "was conveyed on March 10, 1770, by Daniel Chambers to Joseph Showalter, Henry Funk, Peter Fried and Jacob Baer, in trust and for the congregation of Whitehall and Allen Townships." Over the course of time, the Mennonite families moved elsewhere, the meetinghouse was abandoned, and the cemetery was covered over. (Heller)

Jacob Showalter wrote a will, dated March 7, 1767, which was witnessed by George Graff and Jacob Ber in Philadelphia, PA. A transcription of this will appears at the end of this article. The source of this transcription is unknown. According to his will, Jacob was a resident of Whitehall Township in the County of Northampton in the Province of Pennsylvania. Jacob noted in his will that he had given his plantation, a tract of 100 acres of land, to his son Valentine in exchange for 400 pounds. Jacob then detailed how this money was to be paid out to his other sons and daughters. Jacob's wife was not mentioned by name. Only 5 children were named in Jacob's will: Valentine, Peter (listed as the eldest child), Ann Trisler (listed as a widow), Joseph, and John. In addition, there was reference to son-in-law Henry Funk. Henry Funk, along with Joseph, was named executor and son John was listed as overseer. (Source: Jacob Showalter's Will is filed in the Philadelphia Courthouse, Will Book P. Vol. 279. Pg 400. Proved and probated on April 28, 1773, after Jacob's death.)

The exact date of Jacob's death and the location of his grave are unknown. Martha Jones stated in her article that it was believed that Jacob died in the home of his daughter Margaret Showalter because his will was recorded and probated in the courthouse in Philadelphia on April 28, 1773. She noted that other family members are buried in the cemetery in the middle of the little town of Siegfried. (Jones)

Following the American Revolution, at least five of Jacob Showalter's eleven children moved south to Virginia. Between 1786 and 1790, Daniel, Barbara, Ulrich, Martha Ann and Valentine (Felty) Showalter, along with their spouses and children, relocated to Rockingham Co., VA. Daniel and Margaret had eleven children and most remained in Rockingham County. (Daniel and his wife Margaret are buried in the Trissels Mennonite Cemetery near Broadway, Rockingham Co. VA.) Barbara and Henry Funk had 13 children; all but the oldest moved to Virginia. Ulrich

and Susanna had nine children. Valentine and Anna had six known children. These Showalters left a significant number of descendants in Rockingham Co. VA. (Jones)

Other Showalter Immigrants and the European Origins of the Showalters

There are various spellings of the name, including Schaanwalder, Schawalder, Schoenwalder, Schoenwalther, Schowalder, Schowalter, and Showalter.

The first Schowalter on record in America was a John Showalter, a Moravian missionary who arrived in 1744. Nothing more is known of him. On September 15, 1749, a Christian Schowalder came on the ship *Phoenix*. In 1750, Jacob Schowalter arrived with his family. Rev. Paul Schowalter of the Mennonite Historical Society at Weierhof, Germany made significant effort in tracing the Schowalter family of the Pfalz (Germany). He felt that the Showalters who immigrated to America were all from the same family. (Jones)

As stated at the beginning of this article, the exact place of origin for the eighteenth-century Showalter immigrants to America is unknown. A search at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org in November of 2014 turned up few records of Showalters (Schowalters) in Switzerland (none with these spellings). There were records of a Johannes Shonwalder and Jakob Schoenwalder, sons of Georg Schonwalder (Schoenwalder) and Wybrandt Mang, baptized in Basil, Switzerland in 1597 and 1599, respectively. An Elise Schewalder came to America from St. Gallen, Switzerland in 1903. It should be pointed out that relatively few Swiss records have been indexed. There were, however, eighteenth-century records of Showalters in Germany, particularly in the Pfalz region of the country.

Nonetheless, earlier family researchers believed that the Showalters originated in Switzerland. In 1933, at a Showalter Family Reunion near Mt. Clinton (just outside of Harrisonburg, Rockingham Co, VA), Dr. W. J. Showalter, Chief of the Division of Research of the National Geographic Society, spoke about the Showalter family history. Excerpts from his address at the family reunion were printed in the Harrisonburg VA Daily News Record on August 7, 1933. It was noted that he had spent much time in researching the history of his family. According to him, Showalters originated in the foothills of the Alps Mountains in Switzerland, in what is now the Canton of St. Gallen. In 1712, they joined an exodus of Mennonites to the Rhineland country in the region of Pfalz. Dr. Showalter reported that he had visited Showalter families in both St. Gall and in the Rhine country and had letters outlining the history of the family in Europe. Dr. Showalter examined genealogical records in Washington DC and in Harrisburg, PA, as well as the court records of eastern Pennsylvania counties. From these records, he also concluded that the first Showalters to come to America were John Showalter in 1745, Christian Showalter in 1749, and Jacob Showalter, who along with his family, arrived on the *Brotherhood* in 1750. Dr. Showalter noted that he had "photostat copies of the signatures to the oath of allegiance that was required of the male arrivals above the age of sixteen. Jacob Showalter, Senior, signed his name in the old Swiss fashion, Jacob Schowalder. His sons who signed the oath were Peter, Jacob Junior, John, and Christian. All of the boys spelled their names as we spell it today, showing that Americanization had begun as soon as they landed at Philadelphia." Dr. Showalter noted that the family of Jacob Showalter settled on a 450-acre tract of land in what was then Whitehall Township, Northampton County, PA. "This land was eventually subdivided and sold in parcels

to the sons and sons-in-law of Jacob Showalter." This homestead was on the banks of the Lehigh River, near what has since become the village of Cementon, a few miles from Allentown, PA. (Showalter, Dr. W. J.)

Dr. Showalter stated that he had pieced together wills, deeds, tax lists and other records and concluded that Jacob had eight sons and three daughters who grew to adulthood. He mentioned that Valentine, Daniel, and Ulrich settled in Rockingham Co., along with Barbara, who married Henry Funk. He also noted that he had not found a Showalter family in Rockingham who was not a descendant of one of Jacob's children. According to him, most of the Showalters of Rockingham County are descendants of Daniel. Jacob's daughter Barbara married Henry Funk and they are the ancestors of most of the Funks of Rockingham County. Dr. Showalter also stated his belief that his ancestor Jacob Showalter is buried in a little cemetery "of long ago" in the heart of Cementon, which is now preserved by the Daughters of the American Revolution. (Showalter, Dr. W. J.) (Cementon was once known as Siegfried's Ferry and located across the Lehigh River from the village of Siegfried.)

In her article on the Showalter family ancestry, Jones repeated a family legend stating that on the eastern borders of Switzerland, in the principality of Lichtenstein, is a small town called Schaan, surrounded by forest known as the Schaanwald. In the early 1400s, a man from this region relocated to St. Gallen on the shores of Lake Constance. As was the custom of the day, he was known by his neighbors as the Schaanwalder or the man from Schaanwald. According to Jones, there was a record of a Sylvester Schauwalder and his wife Barbi who had five children baptized between 1575 and 1583 at a parish church in Zofingen, five miles from Strengelback, Switzerland. (Jones)

Sources:

German Pioneers to Pennsylvania: Passenger Ship Lists, *Brotherhood*, November 3, 1750, Web. 5 Nov 2014.

Heller, William J. Ed. *History of Northampton County (Pennsylvania) and the Grand Valley of the Lehigh*. American Historical Society of the Lehigh River Valley, 1920. *Google*. Web 5 Nov 2014.

Jones, Martha F. "The Search for the Showalters." *Mennonite Family History, A Quarterly Publication*. Elverson, PA: Mennonite Family History, Elverson, PA. Vol. III, No 4. October, 1984. P. 155-159.

Showalter, Dr. W. J. "Showalter Family Originally Came from Switzerland." Harrisonburg, VA: *Daily News Record*, August 7, 1933.

A transcription of Jacob Showalter's will, dated March 7, 1767, follows:

VITAL RECORDS FROM PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia Courthouse, Willbook P, Vo. 279, page 400.

Jacob Showalter

I Jacob Showalter of Whitehall Township in the County of Northampton in the Province of Pennsylvania having by the blessing of the Almighty God considerably advanced to old age and feeling the infirmities thereof tho at the same time being of sound understanding and memory I do in the first place recommend my soul to the hands of my true Redeemer Jesus Christ and my Body to the Earth until Resurrection agreeable to the Lord's will, and for preventing all Contests and disputes which might arise after my decease I have made and published this my last Will and Testament in manner following, First, I have delivered unto my son Valentine Showalter my Plantation or Tract of one hundred acres of Land Situate in the Township & County aforesaid, that is to say, for the Consideration of four hundred pounds Lawful money of Pennsylvania, and this said money shall be paid to my Children in manner following, Valentine Showalter shall of the aforesaid four hundred pounds have Sixteen pounds beforehand and then my Children shall have each an equal part thereof. But in consideration that I have given to my son Valentine sixteen pounds beforehand he shall pay twenty pounds every year commencing to pay the Eldest who is now living and so continuing to the youngest until each shall have received his part of the afore four hundred pounds, and he shall give his Brothers and Sisters Notes and Bonds for their inheritance. Further I do ordain that my Eldest Son Peter Showalter or his Heirs shall have one Shilling Sterling for his taxable share of Inheritance and over & above this one Shilling Sterling he shall not under any pretence whatever have more than an equal part with my other Children, and moreover I Will that the heirs of my Eldest on shall in the last place receive their Inheritance. But whatever I have yet in my hand Shall remain till after the mother's death and then it shall be divided like moveable goods among my heirs. And I do further will and ordain, that if my daughter Ann Trisler should marry again then so much of her hereditary portion as she has yet to receive shall be divided among her children in equal parts tho my daughter may have it in use until the children come to age. Further I do Constitute and ordain my son Joseph Showalter and my son in law Henry Funk Executors and my son John Showalter overseer. Now I hope that this my last Will shall be inviolately kept so that if possible none my be wronged. In Witness whereof I have in the presence of Subscribing Witnesses set my hand and seal hereunto the 7th day of March 1767,

Jacob Showalter (seal)

his
George Graff, Jacob X Ber, Phila.
mark

April 28th 1775. Personally appeared George Graff and Jacob Ber the witnesses to the foregoing Will and on their solemn affirmation according to Law did declare that they saw and heard Jacob Showalter the Testator therein named Sign Seal publish and declare the said Will as and for his last will and Testament and that at the execution thereof he was of sound and disposing mind memory and understanding to the best of their knowledge and belief
Coram Benjamin Chew, Regr. Genl.

Be it remembered that on the 28th day of April 1773, the last Will and Testament of Jacob Showalter deceased in due form of law was proved and probate and Letters Testamentary thereof were granted to Joseph Showalter and Henry Funk Executors in the said Will named and being solemnly affirmed well and truly to administer the said deceased estate and bring an inventory thereof to the Register Generals Office at Philadelphia on or before the 28th day of May next and render their account of the said administration on or before the 29th day of April, 1774 or when thereunto Lawfully required. Given under the seal of the said office.
Benjamin Chew, Reg. Genl.

Note: I have not reviewed the original of this will.

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