

# The Mystery of the Weyerbacher Monument in Lebanon, PA

By Terry J. Lee

February 2010

In the Ebenezer Cemetery in Lebanon, PA, there is a monument<sup>1</sup> to the Weyerbacher family erected many years ago by Albert W. Weierbach (1863-1939), great-great grandson of Hans Nickel (Nichlus) and Cathrina Magdalena (Hermann) Weyerbacher. What is curious about this monument is the top of the inscription which shows Isaac Weyerbacher emigrating from Switzerland in 1691.

The 1751 immigration of Hans Nickel and his family aboard the Edinburgh from Rotterdam, Holland to Philadelphia has been well documented<sup>2</sup>.

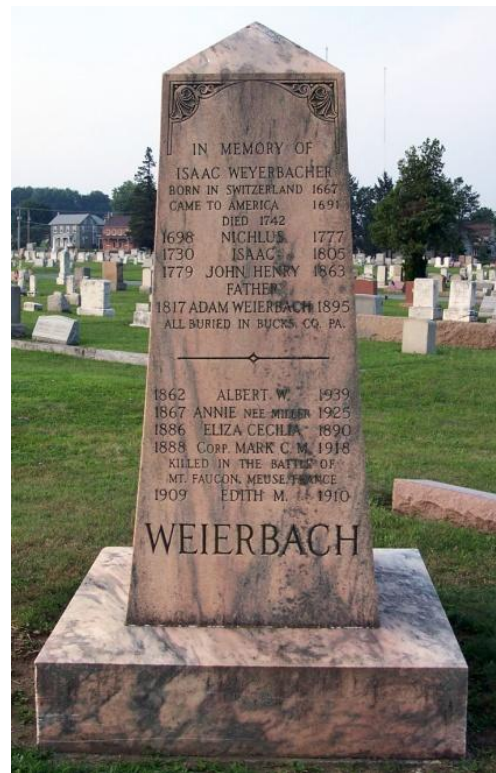
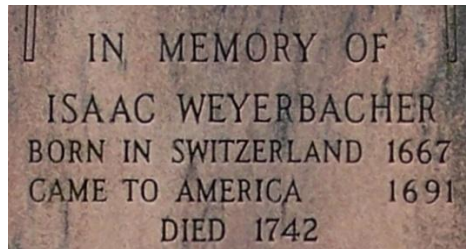
Equally well documented is the two generation ancestry of Hans Nickel Weyerbacher<sup>3</sup>. His father was Hans Nickel Weyerbacher (abt 1665-1711); his grandfather was Hans Otto Weyerbacher (abt 1640-1714).

So what is the source of the information regarding the 1691 immigration of Isaac Weyerbacher from Switzerland?

Two letters from Elvin Weierbach (1890-1968), son of Albert, shed some light on this matter. The first of these letters is dated May 30, 1966 and is written to Dr. Lillie A. Weierbach. Lillie Amelia Weierbach (1886-1970), along with Warren W. Wirebach, founded the modern day Weyerbacher reunion in 1966. Her interest in the family genealogy goes back to her mother, Sarah Amelia (Frey) Weierbach (1850-1935), who married Josiah Weierbach in 1871. Sarah Amelia initiated the research that Lillie and Warren continued. In this letter, Elvin reiterates the information inscribed on the monument and indicates he will see Lillie at the first family reunion on July 10, 1966. It is interesting to note that Elvin describes his father Albert as born 1862 whereas the actual tombstone of Albert, located near the monument, is inscribed with a birth date of May 4, 1863.

Lillie may have expressed some doubts and/or questions about the monument, because a second letter from Elvin to Lillie, dated June 14, 1966, goes into more detail about the information on the monument. Elvin writes,

*"Before my father had the inscription cut on the tombstone he was in Bucks County for at least a week getting information from the old tombstones and from his brothers Zeno W. and William H.<sup>4</sup> who were both older than he was. The old tombstones which are no more on the cemetery of the Reformed Church where nearly all the Weierbach folks were or I should [say] are buried are removed and a monument placed there which destroyed many of the records that was [sic] available. When I was a very young boy say sixteen or seventeen I already knew that our ancestors were Germans from Switzerland. [...] They came from Switzerland from the Weyerbacher Valley a small valley which derived its name from our ancestors<sup>5</sup>. [...] My father had a very keen memory and knew many of these*



<sup>1</sup> The Ebenezer Cemetery is located along Rte 72 N in Lebanon, PA. GPS coordinates for the monument are: N 040° 21' 22.56" W 076° 27' 35.88" (N 40° 21.376' W 76° 27.598')

<sup>2</sup> Rupp, I. Daniel, *Family Legacy, A Collection of Upwards of 30,000 Names of German, Swiss, Dutch, French & Other Immigrants in PA from 1727-1776* (Philadelphia: Leary, Stuart Co., No. 9 South Ninth Street, 1927), p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> Church Archives of Koblentz (Attached to 16 August 1975 letter from W. Wolfgang Munzert to Warren W. Wirebach.)

<sup>4</sup> Zeno died in 1927 and William in 1943. This would put the date of the inscription on the monument no later than about 1927.

<sup>5</sup> This would be the opposite of our understanding that the surname "Weyerbacher" was taken from the (German) village of origin – place named after the people, or people named after the place?

*things when he was a boy as he got a lot of information from his father and from the inscriptions on the tombstones in the cemetery as years ago no records were kept and a good many things were cut on the tombstones and you can rest assured that the information he left behind is absolutely authentic."*

Elvin's letter goes on to state that his great grandmother Maria Johnson was an Indian and was related to President Andrew Johnson. The letter concludes with,

*"If there is anything else that I am able to help you [with] be free to write to me and I will do my best to help [you] along but as I said before rest assured that the genealogy as my father gave to us is absolutely correct as he went to a great deal of trouble and research until he had it all together."*

So where did the information regarding Isaac Weyerbacher emigrating from Switzerland in 1691 come from? I have found only a single historical reference to a Weyerbacher origin in Switzerland. That is in the 1899 Biographical Sketches of Leading Citizens of Bucks County, Penna.<sup>6</sup>, page 263, which states,

*"This old and honored family of Bucks County was founded by the great-great-grandfather of our subject, Nicholas Weierbach, who was born and reared in **Switzerland**, and who came to America and settled in Springfield township, this county, during the colonial days."*

This same source goes on to state regarding Isaac (1730-1805), son of Hans Nickel,

*"He had a sister that was stolen by the Indians."*

This is almost certainly incorrect; Isaac's brother Johannes (1734-1790) had a daughter, Catherine Elizabeth, who was stolen by the Indians in [then] Northumberland County in 1781<sup>7</sup>. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that the entire family account contained in this source came from oral tradition that was simply incorrect. This theory, however, does not explain the dates attributed to Isaac Weyerbacher inscribed on the monument.

I have found no record of an Isaac Weyerbacher, born 1667, died 1742. The church records obtained from Germany following Warren Wirebach's 1973 trip to Germany include documentation of 193 individuals connected to Weyerbachers, many of whom remained in Germany. The only Isaac in this group is the son of Hans Nickel who was part of the 1751 immigration. This Isaac lived 1730-1805.

When Warren Wirebach went to Germany in 1973 to search for the origins of our family, he was aware of three Weierbach villages:

- Weierbach-Fischbach, near Idar-Oberstein in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. This village is about 8 mile NNE of Baumholder. There is another village across the river known as Georg-Weierbach.
- Zell-Weierbach, near Offenburg in the state of Baden-Württemberg
- Weierbach, near Schlierbach in the canton of Lucerne, Switzerland

It was Warren's intention to visit all of these villages if necessary, however, he was able to confirm the Weierbach village near Baumholder as the origin of our immigrant ancestors based on the 1753 (re)immigration of Johannes from Oberstein and the church records for Baumholder.

In addition to the villages described above, I have also found Weyerbach, Weißkirchen an der Traun in Austria and Weiersbach, Hoppstädten-Weiersbach in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany, about 7 miles WSW from Baumholder. It appears that "Weierbach" as a village name is not uncommon, although the meaning of the term is not known. One hint is found in Wikipedia<sup>8</sup>, which states,

---

<sup>6</sup> Biographical Publishing Company, Buffalo and Chicago, *Book of Biographies, This Volume Contains Biographical Sketches of Leading Citizens of Bucks County, Penna.*, <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924028852304> (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo : Biographical Publishing Company, 1899), 263.

<sup>7</sup> Details can be found at [http://weyerbacher.net/pdf\\_files/Searching%20for%20Elizabeth%20Weyerbacher.pdf](http://weyerbacher.net/pdf_files/Searching%20for%20Elizabeth%20Weyerbacher.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weyer>

*"Weyer is a German surname and placename. Etymologically, it appears to be a habitational name meaning "someone living in a place called Weier, Weiher or Weyer". In Southern Germany it can be a topographical name for "someone living by a fish pond."*

Bach is the German word for brook or stream.

#### Conclusion

Although it appears certain that the reference on the Lebanon monument to Isaac Weyerbacher (1667-1742) as the father of Hans Nickel Weyerbacher (chr 1700-1777) is in error, the source for this name and the related dates is unknown. It is possible that the original source used for the 1899 "Book of Biographies"<sup>6</sup> contained this information; however that source has not been identified. It is also possible that a tombstone or monument at the cemetery of the Trinity Lutheran church contained source information. Many of these tombstones were in disrepair and were replaced with newer stones in the 1960s or 1970s. It is also possible that family oral tradition or another source entirely was used as the basis for the monument inscription, however the source of the specific dates associated with this Isaac Weyerbacher remain a mystery.

---

*The author is Vice President of the Weyerbacher Family Reunion and the webmaster for [www.Weyerbacher.net](http://www.Weyerbacher.net).*