

## AN IMMIGRATION STORY HOW WE GOT TO WHERE WE ARE

A zoom address (the first of a series of four)  
Given in celebration of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the  
German Reformed Churches in Pennsylvania  
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Richard H. Taylor

This year we are celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first German Reformed Churches in Pennsylvania! We rejoice that God has led us these many years.

But have you ever wondered why so many Germans came here way back then? Pennsylvania was a British colony. They weren't British citizens. Most people here spoke English. They didn't speak the language. They were not from the nations establishing American colonies - Catholic or Protestant. Why did they come here? Hopefully this evening we can find some answers.

**[Next Slide]** 1648 Map

Strangely we begin by saying that in 1725 there was no such place as Germany. *Deutsch*, German, was a language, a culture, with many dialects and local customs. At the time of the Reformation most of German-speaking Europe, including modern Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Alsace was part of the Holy Roman Empire. It also included places with other languages and cultures, such as Bohemia and Moravia. The Empire included over 300 States and, except for the imperial cities, they were princely states ruled by a variety of archbishops, bishops, abbots, kings, princes, dukes, and counts. This map is from 1648, after Switzerland had gained its independence. The red line is the boundary of the Empire. While each small nation state had considerable independence, they were all part of the Empire which was theoretically supposed to keep the peace in central Europe.

The Emperor was not hereditary but was elected by seven specific “electors,” leaders of the seven most important states: three Roman Catholic archbishops who led secular lands, and the rulers of Saxony, Brandenburg, Bohemia, and the Palatinate. Later Bavaria and Hanover were added to the seven. But after the Reformation, there was always a Catholic majority. And during the times we are discussing they always chose someone from the Habsburg dynasty.

This Empire was the home of most Germans, and the place where the Reformations began.

**[Next Slide]** Pictures of Luther and Zwingli

I suspect we all know that the Reformation began with Martin Luther's posted theses in 1517. Other Reformations quickly followed, such as one in Zurich, Switzerland led by Ulrich Zwingli. Many Reformers soon met at Marburg to seek a way to work together. They agreed on fourteen principles, but disagreed on their understanding of communion. Still, most agreed to “display Christian love,” and “ask God for guidance.”

Two major Protestant movements emerged. Many north German princes accepted Luther's view of consubstantiation in communion, and established the Lutheran Church in their states.

In Switzerland many Cantons were moving towards republican governments and working to leave the Empire. They moved towards Zwingli's more humanistic, symbolic understandings. Several Cantons adopted or tolerated the Reformed faith.

After Zwingli's early death Reformed leadership moved towards French-speaking Geneva, and John Calvin. Much of the early growth of the Reformed movement took place outside of German-speaking Europe, among French Huguenots, people in the Netherlands over throwing Spanish rule, Presbyterians in Scotland and Puritans in England.

About a generation later, more than a decade after Luther's death, some Germans began to question Lutheran rigidity. This began in the Palatinate, which you will remember was ruled by one of the powerful electors. Much of our story begins here. The title “Elector Palatine of the Rhine” actually

means the “Elector of the palaces along the Rhine River.” For those who have sailed the Rhine, the concentration of many large castles are in the former Palatinate. It had become a wealthy trading center between Switzerland and Holland. It was also a place of great education, the home of the oldest German university, Heidelberg. Just south of Mainz, the home of Gutenberg, it was close to the rise of printed books.

When Frederick III became Count in 1559 he “found his country seething with 'the madness of theologians.’” To end the confusions and controversies he invited highly regarded thinkers to the Palatinate and the University, including Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus to bring reconciliation. They became the writers of the 1563 Heidelberg Catechism, Reformed in faith, but excluding Calvin's predestination. A new liturgy was also adopted, and the Palatinate moved into the Reformed faith.

**[Next Slide]** 1780's map

The Emperor was opposed to Frederick's innovations. But that did not block a wave in the next fifty years of other German states moving towards the Reformed faith: including Nassau, Bremen, Zweibruecken, Anhalt, Lippe, Hesse-Kassel, Cleves, Julich, and Berg. In 1613 the rulers of Brandenburg converted to Reformed, while tolerating the established Lutheran Church.

The map here is from the time of the American Revolution, after the French had moved to the west bank of the Rhine. I am showing it here so that you can clearly see the Rhine River, the line running up from the French border in the south up to the Low Countries.

**[Next Slide]** Reformed on map

This black and white version of the same map shows in pink most of the areas where the Reformed church was established. As you can see most are near the Rhine.

1618 marked the beginning of the Thirty Years' War. It started when Bohemian Protestants wanted the Elector Palatine to become their new king. The War “one of the most destructive conflicts in European history.” It is estimated that up to eight million people lost their lives “from battles, famine and disease.” Some parts of Germany lost half of their population!

The 1648 Peace of Westphalia granted Switzerland full independence. It also provided that there would be three approved *landeskirchen*, “churches of the land,” established state sponsored religions: Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed. The rule was that “the religion of the prince would be the religion of the people.” But the wars did not cease. One followed another.

Now let me say a bit about this side of the Atlantic. Colonialism as we know, was a project of imperial states. The Catholic powers came first, Spain, Portugal, France. But Protestants were not far behind. There were Anglican settlements in Virginia, English Puritans in New England, Netherlands Reformed in New York, Swedish Lutherans along Delaware Bay. Europe's wars stretched across the Ocean, the Dutch conquered the Swedes, the English conquered the Dutch. All of western Europe's major faiths were complicit in the colonial project. And we must be honest, settlements were in many ways violent and sad stories. Remember Native American peoples, and Africans cruelly imported.

Many came for power. Others came for wealth. But some also came for refuge, or simply to find a way to begin their lives again.

Scattered German-speaking people did come to the colonies in the 1600s. After Switzerland gained its independence from the Empire, some Swiss entrepreneurs came here. For example, adventurer Peter Fabian was hired by the proprietors of Carolina to explore their colony.

German-speakers close to the boundary with the Netherlands were often bi-lingual and some attended Dutch universities. Some decided to join those coming to Dutch New York. They included leaders and pastors. Some people in the Dutch colony made their way through New Jersey, and crossed the Delaware into Pennsylvania.

Before receiving the proprietorship of Pennsylvania, Quaker William Penn, visited Anabaptists and Mennonites in Holland and northern Germany. After Pennsylvania was established he invited some

to settle here. A few dozen members of these minor sects arrived on October 6, 1683, settling Germantown.

The pietist Swiss Reformed pastor Samuel Guldin, had been controversial there, so he came and settled in Germantown in 1710. Before 1720 most of the handfuls German-speakers in Pennsylvania were Swiss.

Back in Europe, wars continued to rage.

French invasions towards the Rhine began in the 1670's and France was able to seize Strasbourg and most of Alsace. In 1684 Louis XIV ended the toleration of Protestantism. Protestant refugees fled across the Rhine into the Empire, often seeking refuge in Reformed areas.

**[Next Slide]** Burning of Speyer

The very next year, 1685, the Elector Palatine died leaving no heir. The Habsburg Emperor named a new Catholic Elector. At the same time King Louis of France tried to name his sister-in-law as Elector. The two great European powers began the War of the Palatine succession. Louis with a wrathful temper ordered his armies to "Ravage the Palatinate." In 1688 and 1689 two thousand villages were burned by the French, including the seat of the Empire's Court, the city of Speyer, shown in the picture. Four years later another one thousand two hundred villages were burned. The Palatine capital of Heidelberg and its honored University were virtually destroyed.

The Emperor's choice did gain the seat of Elector, and as a Catholic he began to seize some Protestant churches for Catholic worship.

In 1701 Charles II, the Habsburg ruler of Spain and its rich colonies in Latin America, also died leaving no heir. The War of the Spanish succession followed! Louis now sought to impose his grandson Philip on the throne, while the Empire's Habsburg dynasty sought to retain the crown. Again the Rhine was where the armies met. In 1707 French Marshall Villars crossed the Rhine, invaded the Palatinate and repeated the earlier atrocities. Again thousands of villages were burned, foodstuffs destroyed. France became the dominant power in Europe, the Palatinate was left in ruins. Religious persecution continued.

That next winter, 1708-1709, was the worst on record. Vineyards developed over decades were wiped out. Hunger ensued. People were desperate.

**[Next Slide]** Kocherthal's Carolina Report

Some Swiss entrepreneurs thought this might be the moment to recruit some from the Rhine for their plans in the Carolinas. One talked to the English government about a Swiss colony there. Another visited America and published a "Guide to America" in Berne, Switzerland. About the same time a Lutheran pastor, Joshua Kocherthal, who had fled Baden after the French invasion, ended up in England. There, learning about Carolina he published the pamphlet seen here, promoting the colony. It was also said that at the same time a "Golden Book" or "Rhinegold Circular" made its way through the Rhine Provinces. It was said that Queen Anne's picture was on it printed in gold, and it promoted settlement in Carolina. This *Rhinegold* had nothing to do with Wagner's operas or beer. It was widely believed in the Palatinate that if you came to England, Queen Anne would send to Carolina.

**[Next Slide]** Queen Anne

And indeed, things were happening in Anne's England. After the short reign of James II in 1688, England had a "Glorious Revolution," resulting in the passage of the Toleration Act, giving all Protestant sects freedom to worship. Also, Queen Anne advocated for the unification of England and Scotland. A Treaty of Union signed, and the United Kingdom's first Parliament met in 1707. The breadth of religious toleration now even allowed for the establishment of different churches in the same nation, Presbyterian in Scotland, Episcopal in England! If France was the dominant Catholic power in Europe, the new United Kingdom was to be the dominant Protestant power.

Excited about this new prominence the new Whig Parliament celebrated in 1708 with the passage of the Foreign Protestant Naturalization Act. It provided that any foreign Protestant could

become a British citizen by swearing allegiance to the Queen. The bill passed in March of 1709, the same time as the end of the great winter famine on the Rhine.

Palatines hearing of this, saw Britain as a safe place. Thousands began pouring down the Rhine seeking passage to London. William Penn facilitated some boats to get people across the North Sea. In two months thousands of Rhine valley refugees had started to overrun the City. By mid-June 6,500 had arrived. In July they numbered 11,000. The British government asked the Dutch to stop the migration. The Dutch sent them on. Most came from the Palatinate, Hesse, Zweibruecken, Nassau, and Alsace, mostly Reformed provinces. One group of over 2,000 people was led by the John Frederick Haeger, a university educated Reformed minister from Nassau. In the summer they tried to take a census of the migrants, and got 15,000 names. It reported that 56% were from the Palatinate. 44% from other places. But since there was no German nation at the time, and people remembered the Palatine wars, the British referred to all of the refugees as Palatines. Most sources agree that by the end of the year 30,000 people had arrived in London. Even though London was then the largest city in Europe, its population then was less than the current population of Bucks County. Imagine 30,000 people arriving in your area all at once!

**[Next Slide]** Daniel DeFoe

Daniel Defoe (seen here), the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, published a book, *A Brief History of the Poor Palatine Refugees* to support aid for the arrivals. He argued that they would create new markets for British goods. As excellent farmers they could introduce new farming techniques in Britain and could develop the forests and wastelands.

Meanwhile conditions in London were deplorable. During this year a delegation of chiefs from the Kanien' Keha-ka native Americans, often called Mohawks, had been brought from New York, so that the British could show off their culture and power. Instead they were stunned and repulsed by the masses of hungry people, some sleeping on the streets.

**[Next Slide]** Palatine Tents

Many British had no patience with the refugees. Pamphlets and poems appeared attacking the Germans, such as this one entitled *The Palatine Catechism* showing the tent cities. One 24 page diatribe ended saying, "We're poor enough among ourselves, Need no encroaching foreign elves." Riots broke out in the streets.

A German Reformed historian writes that, "The [Tory Party]... were opposed to the coming of these Palatines. The[y]... were aided by the lower classes of England, who looked at the arrival of these strangers as interfering with labor, lowering the prices paid for labor. They were also angry when they saw these foreigners getting charities which they thought by right belonged to the English. Besides, the maintenance of the Palatines made the poor taxes higher."

**[Next Slide]** Jonathan Swift

Opposition to refugees often came from the Church of England whose leaders thought the Lutherans and Reformed would overwhelm their Church. They enlisted for their spokesperson this fellow, Jonathan Swift. He would later write *Gulliver's Travels*. He argued that "people are not the riches of a nation." The maximum advantage of increasing population only came when you invited only people with specific pre-articulated skills, or had great wealth - they were willing to bring their money to the country. Swift was rewarded with a prominent church position in Dublin.

If you think that this immigration argument sounds familiar, it is.

Soon the Tories gained control of Parliament and set out to rid the city of the foreigners. They discovered that about 2,800 were Catholic. They sent them back to the Continent. Another 3,000 were sent to Ireland to help Protestantize it. With all the interest in Carolina, more than 800 were sent there, to begin a place called New Bern. Some scattered into the countryside, while others found ways to get on ships going wherever. The Parliament repealed the Naturalization Act in 1711.

**[Next Slide]** NY Governor Robert Hunter

The largest single group of the refugees were impacted by a plan of the new Governor of the

New York colony, Robert Hunter. He got permission to take over 3,000 refugees to be sent to the northern part of his colony to be a buffer between the Native Americans and the existing settlements. The idea was to put the Germans between the British settlements and the Native Americans and the French. If either of them attacked - the Germans would be killed first. In New York the Germans would serve as indentured servants and be required to prepare naval stores: turpentine, rosin, tar, pitch, and hemp for the British Navy under the supervision of Governor Hunter. They were told that once they paid off their debt, set at ten thousand pound sterling, they would be given land by the Queen.

Haeger and Kocherthal volunteered to go with them as pastors, but they were required to be approved by the Anglican mission society, and be re-ordained by an Anglican bishop. The deal was approved, and they set sail in April, arriving in New York in June, 1710. This was the largest single migration to colonial America by any group at one time! There were 3,100 people on ten ships. 407 died on the way. They arrived with about 50 new widows and 100 new orphans. The Anglican Church in New York had hoped to convert them. But after Kocherthal gathered the Lutherans around him, the Reformed turned to Haeger.

Philip Otterness in his 2004 book *Becoming German* reminds us that the refugees were from many principalities, spoke different dialects, and were of different religions. But the mixed passage and lack of a safety net led to mixed marriages. Lutherans and Reformed married. Swabians and Palatinates married. Varied dialects merged into a new mash of what we call "Pennsylvania Dutch." No longer just Palatines, they were "becoming German."

In October 1710 they were sent "up the River" where there were few shelters and little food. Several acres had been set aside on either side of the Hudson. Arriving at the break of winter survival took precedence over naval stores. When spring came Hunter promptly drafted most of the men to go north on a military excursion against the French.

And, the economic goals of the Governor were impossible. The only tar bearing tree in America, the Georgia pine, did not grow north of Virginia. They simply could not produce what the Governor required. Hunger set in. People were boiling grass, and children were eating leaves off the trees. Hinke summarized it as "poor preparation, poor supervision, too little aid, and inconsiderate treatment by the Governor."

In the meantime, the Tory government in England told Hunter there would be no more aid for the Germans. At the start of the winter of 1712, the Governor told the Palatines that they would have to fend for themselves.

Well, it just so happened that some of the Kanien' Keha-ka natives who had been in London lived just over a mountain from the settlements on the west of the Hudson. They saw the cruel treatment. They invited the Germans to come over to their land and settle along Schoharie Creek that flowed down towards the Mohawk River. By 1715 half of the Reformed had taken up the offer. Today it is populated with towns named Palatine Bridge, German Flatts, and Manheim.

Governor Hunter still interfered. He said he had deeded the Native land to some people in Europe, so they couldn't live there. He declared them rebels - and sent the sheriff to order them to return to the Hudson. One fiery settler, Magdalena Zeh made such a fuss that the sheriff gave up and went home. The promise of land from the Queen meant nothing. Appeals to London against the Governor got nowhere.

**[Next Slide]** PA Lt. Governor William Keith

In 1722 some colonial representatives met in Albany. Among them was William Keith the Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania. I'd bet that some of you were wondering when I would get to Pennsylvania. Keith was actually the man on the ground in Pennsylvania, as the Penn Governors were in England. Keith was the last on the ground leader in the Colony who was appointed by William Penn. Penn had died in 1718. While in Albany Keith learned of the distress of the Palatines, and told them of "the freedom and justice accorded to their countrymen in Pennsylvania."

Excited by Keith's words, John Zeller went down the East Susquehanna to explore

Pennsylvania. He made his way up Tulpehocken Creek, then returned to New York in praise of Pennsylvania's farm lands. This was the third time in his life that Zeller was fleeing scarcity and persecution. Zeller was the son of French Huguenots that had fled to the Palatinate in the 1680s, then to London in 1709 and New York in 1710, and now on to Pennsylvania. Zeller was an ancestor of poet Wallace Stevens who remembered him in a poem "Old John Zeller."

**[Next Slide]** Conrad Weiser Jr.

Immediately several bands made their way south. Conrad Weiser Jr. was a young man whose mother died in the cold winter of 1709. At loose ends as a teenager in New York, he was welcomed by the Kanien' Keha-ka people to live with them in their tribal community. There he learned their language and life skills, and met leaders from other Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) leaders. Making his way back to the German community, he led several of the bands coming to Pennsylvania. Among them were those who began the settlements of all those Heidelberg Townships in Western Berks County, and also in nearby Lebanon County. Because of his knowledge of native people, Weiser became the most prominent German in colonial Pennsylvania. Other groups of New York Palatines came down the Delaware River and made scattered beginnings for many communities. Letters were soon sent home praising Pennsylvania. It not only had great farm land, but unlike New York or the Carolinas, it had freedom of religion!

Despite the poor treatment of Germans in England, others kept coming down the Rhine to seek new lives. After William Penn's death the control of Pennsylvania fell to his sons. They had left the Quakers, becoming Anglicans. Moving away from their father's moral concerns, they began to see the colony as a commercial investment from which they could gain riches. Getting new settlers became a goal. When other Germans got to England the Penn brothers allowed ships to be fitted to go to Pennsylvania. One such ship to Philadelphia in 1720 was said to be carrying 240 Palatines. Among them was a school teacher, with his wife Anna Maria, and their four children: John Philip Boehm. They were not Palatines. Boehm was the son of a Hessian Reformed minister. He had been teaching in the imperial City or Worms on the Rhine, and nearby Lambsheim.

Boehm, of course, becomes the central character in our 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. We know the story of how Reformed lay people got him to preach, and then asked him to serve communion. He originally held back, but he later agreed on the basis of their accepting his church order similar to that of the European churches. This led to the first three communion services in 1725.

In 1727 Boehm also organized the Tulpehocken Church of some of those come south from New York, and other churches over a wide area. He was later ordained by the Dutch Reformed, and kept track of all the Reformed congregations in Pennsylvania, sending reports to Holland seeking more clergy. Finally enough had arrived to organize the Coetus in 1747, of which Boehm became the first elected President.

It would be easy to say from then on "they lived happily ever after."

Sadly, there were people in Pennsylvania who were just as opposed to the coming of Germans as those in London. Even Governor Keith when he took office expressed concerns about potential problems with foreigners who did not speak English.

By 1725 the Proprietors had ruled that all Germans coming to Philadelphia must be registered and take a loyalty oath to the King. Still migration increased, peaking between 1749 and 1754, falling off during the French and Indian War, and almost ceasing during the Revolution.

There were still people who didn't welcome the newcomers. One of the most outspoken was one of the wealthiest people in Pennsylvania who also had strong influence in the media. Benjamin Franklin asked, "Why should these Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us...?" The Germans "who came here hither are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation."

So this is the reality of our immigrant story.

**[Final slide]**

Scripture tells us:

“...thou shalt not oppress a stranger -  
for ye know the heart of the stranger -  
seeing you were stranger in the land of Egypt.”  
Or shall we say America?