

# A Brief History of The George Swartzendruber Family

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Wellman, Iowa  
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## FOREWORD

This brief Swartzendruber history is written at the request of the family. I am indebted chiefly to Elmer G. Swartzendruber for the data and information contained herein.

There may be a few errors in regard to dates and names. If, so, it is due to discrepancies which appear in different records. These records are practically our only sources of information, as the oldest settlers who would remember facts have nearly all departed this life. Some day we hope to have a more complete Swartzendruber family history.

Kathryn Miller Snyder,  
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# Swartzendruber History

In the year 1765 in Mengerhausen, Waldeck, Germany, was born one, Christian Swartzendruber. Of his parents, brothers, and sisters, we have no accurate record. All we know is the information furnished from data gathered by Frederick Swartzendruber, dated Sept. 9, 1894, a translation follows:

“Grandfather Christian Swartzendruber had three brothers. One's name was probably Casper, another probably Michael, and the third one was Jacob, who came to America when he was 21 years old.” (Possibly around 1792) “Jacob was married to Catherine, daughter of Peter and Barbara Schmucker, and to them were born one daughter Catherine, and one son John, born in 1816. Jacob moved to Canada in 1833 where he died at the age of 66 years.

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The daughter Catherine was married in Canada to Joseph Jacob. John, who resided near Reading, Pa., in Lancaster Co., had nine children. At the time of this writing, Nov. 1, 1893, five of John's children live in Canada, and four in Davis Co., Ind.

Information given to Frederick Swartzendruber by the above mentioned John, he being a first cousin of the father of Frederick.

Christian Swartzendruber was married to Catherine Roth, daughter of Simon Roth. They resided in the mill Hafersack, and later in the Gallows Mill, in Mengerling-hausen, in the principality of Waldeck, in Western Germany. They had three children, Christian Jr., born in 1797, Jacob, born in May, 1800, and Magdalena. Christian Swartzendruber and his sons were millwrights by trade. His sons later became farmers and carpenters also.

It is with the life of Jacob Swartzendruber that we are especially concerned, for he became the father of

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our grandfather, George Swartzen-druber. Jacob was married in 1829 to Barbara Oesch Guengerich, widow of Peter Guengerich of Hueninghausen, and grandmother of the late S. D. Guengerich.

She was born in 1787 and married Peter Guengerich in 1811. To this union were born thre children, Jacob, Daniel, and Susanna. Susanna died at the age of one year, and in 1815 Peter died. After the marriage of Jacob and Barbara they resided in the Gallows Mill until 1833.

The following children were born to Jacob and Barbara Swartzendruber: Joseph, born 1821 (grandfather of Elmer G. Swartzendruber); Susanna, twin sister of Joseph, who died in early childhood in Mengeringshausen, Anna, born 1823 (mother of Brick Chris Yoder); Frederick, born 1825 (father of Jacob F. and Shem Swartzendruber); Christian Z., born 1827 (known as Oregon Chris); and George and twin sister Amelia, born June 2, 1830. Amelia died in 1831

and is also buried in Mengerlinghausen, Germany.

In this same year, 1831, Jacob was ordained to the ministry in Germany.

On May 9, 1833, Jacob Swartzen-druber, with his family and two stepsons, Jacob P. and Daniel P. Guengerich, left their home in the so-called Gallows Mill in Mengerlinghausen, and started on the first lap of their journey to America.

In the diary of Daniel P. Guengerich we find many interesting events concerning their journey to Bremen Harbor, from which point they sailed in the ship Weser, an old time sailing vessel, under the command of Captain Herman Grau, and a very interesting account of their voyage. After 72 days they landed at Baltimore, on August 12, 1833.

Grandfather Jacob brought with him a copy of the family record, dated May 9, 1833, which was taken from the church book at Mengerlinghausen. Translated the letter reads



as follows:

“To the Mennonite Jacob Swartzendruber, to date a miller in the Galganmiihle (Gallows Mill) near Mengerling-hausen, and his wife Barbara, born Oesch, have the following children been born:

1. ~~Jacob~~ Jacob born the 13th July one thousand eight hundred twenty-one.

2. Anna born the 13th April one thousand eight hundred twenty-three.

3. Frederick born the 3rd March one thousand eight hundred twenty-five.

4. Christian born the 21st October one thousand eight hundred twenty-seven.

5. George born the 2nd June one thousand eight hundred thirty.

Extracted out of the church record book of the church in Mengerling-hausen the 9th May, 1833.

K. Steinmetz, Evangelical Minister of Mengerling-hausen in the principality of Waldeck, Germany.”

In the same company with the

Swartzendruber family was another ancestor, Daniel Schoettler, then 22 years old. In later years he often remarked how little did he think that the mischievous little three-years-old George would one day become his son-in-law!

From Baltimore the company traveled by horse drawn trolley to Fredericktown, Md., as steam was not yet used for power in transportation. At Fredericktown they hired a team to take them to the "Glades" region, near Somerset, Pa., at a cost of \$90.

This sum was no small amount to them at that time, as the sale of their belongings in Germany amounted only to \$1800.00 Prussian money, and \$500.00 had to be left with the German government in case they might return penniless, and become public charges. This money was retained by the government, even though they never returned.

The Glades region in Pennsylvania was called home for a short time, but a little later a home was

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made in what is locally called New Germany, about five or six miles southeast of Grantsville, Md. Here a grist mill was erected, and a dam built in the Poplar Lick river by the father Jacob. The dam is still there, seemingly as intact as the day it was finished, although the mill has since been rebuilt. This mill, the only one for miles around, was patronized by so many, that it often became necessary to operate at night. In later years Grandfather George would relate how several times the prowling panthers, with their weird cries, came so close that the mill was hurriedly closed, and the millers hastened across the dam and up the other side about 60 rods to their home.

In 1840 the family moved to Allegheny Co., (now Garret Co.) Maryland. In the fall of 1846 Jacob Swartzendruber came to Iowa on a visit, and while here preached the funeral sermon of a baby daughter of D. P. Guengerich's, who died Aug. 11, 1846. This was probably the first

sermon preached by an Amish Mennonite minister in Johnson County.

In 1851 Jacob Swartzendruber moved to Iowa with his family. They lived on a farm south of Sharon Center, now occupied by Mahlon Slabaugh, although the buildings were in a slightly different location. Two years later, in 1853, Jacob was ordained as bishop in the Amish Mennonite Church.

On Jan. 24, 1856, Jacob's wife Barbara died. She was buried in the Peter Miller cemetery, east of Will C. Brennemans. The stone that marks her grave is an old hand-hewn brown slab with the following hand-carved information:

B. S.  
DIED JN 24  
1856

A few years later Jacob again was married to a woman from Indiana. It is very probable that her name was Miller, altho' we have no

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definite information, and evidently, at her death, was taken back to Indiana for burial.

Jacob Swartzendruber died on June 5, 1868, and is buried beside his wife in the Peter Miller Cemetery. Jacob had one brother, Christian Jr., whose posterity are living mostly around Berlin, Pa., and Magdalena, who married Joseph Bender, and became the grandmother of Amelius Bender.

And now we return to trace the activities of another ancestor, mentioned before, because Schoettler history and Swartzendruber history are closely interwoven.

Daniel Schoettler was born Oct. 8, 1810, in Germany. He lost his mother when a small boy, and in order to escape military service he willingly made the sacrifice of leaving home and relatives for a land of freedom. He sailed in the company with Jacob Swartzendruber, as was before stated, landing at Baltimore, Md., in August, 1833, and made his abode

with the Amish-Mennonite church located at Castleman river.

On Dec. 30 of this same year he married Helena Swartzendruber, who was also born in Germany, Mar. 15, 1815, and came to America with her parents in 1820. Her brothers were Joseph, known as Iowa Joe; Christian, called Big Chris; Peter, father of Preacher P. P. of Wellman; and John, who died single. Daniel Schoettler and his wife lived in Allegheny Co., Md., until 1840, when with his three children, Christian, Mary (our grandmother), and Joseph, they crossed the mountains to Butler Co., Ohio. They lived here two years then moved to Fairfield Co., Ohio. Here they lived until the spring of 1850 when they moved to Iowa.

Daniel had the following brothers and sisters: Christian, who died in childhood; Mary, who married an Otto and became the grandmother of Jonas Otto east of Frytown; Helena, married to a Yutzy. He also had

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several half brothers and sisters: Frederick, Jacob, Christian, Hanna, and Elizabeth.

In the fall of 1849, Daniel, his wife, and two of the children, Catherine and Samuel, hitched an old grey horse, called Lion, to a single buggy, and drove all the way back to Somerset Co., Pa., to say goodbye to their relatives and friends there, thinking they would never see them here on earth. Then, in the spring of 1850, they prepared to move to Iowa.

The only means of travel across western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio at this time was by wagon till they came to Zanesville, Ohio, where they boarded a steamboat going down the Muskingum river to Marietta. Here they changed boats, sailing down the Ohio river to Cincinnati. While waiting here a few days for another boat, little five year old Lydia (Joe L. Hershberger's mother) became lost for a short time while watching the street traffic. A kind-hearted maid, who had seen

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the child at the hotel with her parents, knew where she belonged and returned her safely.

In this company were Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Schoettler and seven children: Christian (grandfather of C. C. and Abner Miller); Mary, (our grandmother); Catherine (wife of Jacob B. Miller); Samuel; Lydia; Daniel Jr.; and John; and Christian Gingerich, father of the late C. C. Gingerich, and Wm. Emde, father of the late John Emde of Horse Shoe Bend.

Grandmother used to tell us over and over, at our request, of one exciting night on the Ohio river. A race was on between their boat and another, and their captain said, "I'll win this race if I have to run the boat into the air." Grandmother Mary and one of her brothers crawled under the covers of their bunks, thinking surely this night would be their last. For some time the boats were racing side by side, so near each other that the passengers could



have shaken hands with each other, but finally our boat won the race and thus put an end to their anxiety.

At St. Louis they once more changed boats and sailed up the Mississippi river to Muscatine (then called Bloomington). Here they hired teams and wagons to take them to their final destination in Johnson county, only 47 miles distant. About half way there, the teams gave out in the deep mud, and again the company waited until Wm. Emde walked the rest of the way for help. Wm. Wertz and Paul Miller, who were among the first Amish settlers in Iowa, returned with ox-teams and brought the travelers, with more or less difficulty, through the March mud and mire to their home in Johnson county.

While the men were building their log cabins, getting ready to till the soil, and making the necessary household furniture, the Schoettler family moved in with a bachelor, John Lambert, whose log cabin

stood about 20 rods east and a trifle north of the Lower Deer Creek cemetery.

On Dec. 1, 1850, the new cabin was ready for occupancy. It stood on the site of the Grandpa house in the house yard of Joe L. Hershberger. It was one and one-half stories high, and consisted of a living room, bedroom, kitchen, pantry, and porch, and in this cabin our grandparents, George Swartzendruber and Mary Schoettler, were married.

In the building of this cabin, the shingles were all made by hand by Grandfather Schoettler, who split them and worked them down until they were fit to use. While the older ones were building the cabin, the younger ones helped by carrying their meals to them through the timber, nearly a mile away, with nothing but a path through the hazel brush to guide them. On one of these trips 11 year old Joseph had an encounter with a rattle snake which frightened him so, that he refused to

make the trip alone after that. The Schoetler children must have thought that truly a boy's best friend is his dog, for old Major, the remarkable dog they brought with them from Ohio, seems to have been Public Enemy No. 1, so far as the rattle snakes were concerned. He would often attack the largest rattlers, taking them into his mouth and shaking them until they were torn in pieces, often leaving pieces hanging along the sides of the buildings. The dog was often bitten severely, but always recovered. When he started on the trail of a wolf he hardly ever failed to get him; and he lived to a ripe old age. Once, when milking, the boys heard a rattler. Upon investigation he was found on the other side of the cow. After killing him they found he filled a half bushel measure, not at all an uncommon size, for the timber rattlers were much larger than the prairie rattlers.

On Oct. 25, 1855. Mary Schoetler and George Swartzendruber

were married, at which time all the young folks of the church in the community were invited. This was the second wedding among our people, Seth Kauffmans having been the first to be married, in Dec., 1854.

After their marriage, Grandpa Swartzendruber lived with George's father one year, then moved on to the farm now owned by Arthur C. Gingerich, known as Maplecrest Farm.

The first permanent settlement of Mennonites in Johnson Co., was by Daniel P. Guengerich and family, William Wertz and family, and Joseph J. Swartzendruber, eldest brother of George, in the year 1846, the same year that Iowa was admitted into the Union. These first three settlers had to walk a distance of about 130 miles to Dubuque, Iowa, where the government land office was located, in order to enter their claims, paying \$1.25 per acre for their land. The only guide they had was a furrow drawn from Iowa City

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to Dubuque.

The first church services were held in 1849 by Bishop Christian Swartzendruber and Minister Joseph Goldsmith, both of Lee Co., with six members present, namely, Daniel P. Guengerich and wife, Wm. Wertz and wife, and Peter Miller and wife. In the fall of 1850 at least two more families moved here from Fairfield Co., Ohio, — Benedict Millers and John Kempfs, but 1851 was the boom year of immigration when 11 families came in from Maryland and Ohio. In this year the church was permanently organized with twenty-seven members.

The first Communion services were held in the home of Daniel J. Guengerich, in the spring of 1852, with Bishop Joseph Goldsmith of Lee Co., officiating. At this time occurred also the first ordination services, when Frederick Swartzendruber was ordained as deacon. A year later. 1853. grandfather Jacob Swartzendruber was ordained as the

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first Bishop of the Church in Johnson Co., by Bishops Christian Swartzendruber and Joseph Goldsmith of Lee Co.

The first minister ordained was Joseph Keim in 1855.

As the settlements were some miles apart we can see how difficult it must have been for the members to meet each Sunday for church services. The only means of transportation for some time was by ox-team and wagon, and many times when church services were held at quite a distance, members made the trip on Saturday evening. Others often walked a distance of nine to eleven miles on Sunday morning.

Breaking the tough sod on the prairies was done with five or six yoke of oxen. At harvest time the men cradled, the women tied the bundles, and the children carried them together. Deer and wolves were plentiful, and often when about ready to butcher the winter's meat supply, Grandfather would send the

boys after deer in order to mix some venison with the sausage. Sometimes Grandfather, who was no mean marksman, would bring home a great antlered deer. Prairie chickens, quail, and fish were also a source of food supply. Hogs were often butchered before selling them,—as many as thirty being killed in one day—and taken to Iowa City where they brought from \$15.00 to \$20.00 per cwt. Grandfather George died July 12, 1904, at the age of 74 years.

A m o n g grandmother Mary Schoettler Swartzendruber's personal belongings was found an old tablet with some of her meditations, favorite scriptures, poems, her hopes and prayers for her children. On the first page are these words: "George Swartzendruber, borne in Germany June 2, 1830. Mary Schoettler borne in Allegheny county state of Maryland. June 5, 1837

Written by Mary Swartzendruber March 10, 1903 from your moth-

er.”

Here are a few excerpts from the pages following:

“I must write a little more to my children. Here I sit in my rocking chair and think about my children, and their children, what will become of them I do not know. When I was a little girl I was very sick. Why could I not die that time? Now I must see all kinds of trouble. I think it was not the Lords will to take me that time. Now I will try and do right as much as I can in great weakness. It seems to me I won't live very long anymore, but the good Lord knows best for me. I think and say every day, “O God forgive a poor sinner” and so you must think every day. Now my dear children, don't forget the Lord's Prayer, and then do what you pray to Him. O my dear children, when we are all dead once, O how good wouldn't it be when we could be all together. I think so much about it. My dear children, don't forget me, what I do and did



say to you.

So much from your mother, Mary Swartzendruber, to my dear, beloved children. Goodbye, my dear children, goodbye, Amen."

Then follow a number of verses:

"He that doeth good is of God, but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

The years roll round and steal away  
The breath that first it gave.

Whate'er we do where e'er we be  
We'er traveling to the grave.

Love God with all your soul and  
strength

With all your heart and mind.

And love your neighbor as yourself  
Be faithful just and kind.

Let us try to care for others

Nor suppose ourselves the best.

We should all be friends and brothers,

'Twas the Savior's last request.

We were made for better things,  
High as heaven our nature springs,

Like the lark that upward flies  
We were made to seek the skies.

If you will turn away from sin  
In childhood's early day.  
The Lord will make you pure within,  
And take your guilt away.

Take time to be Holy. The world  
rushes on.

Spend much time in secret with  
Jesus alone;

By looking to Jesus, like Him thou  
shall be.

Thy friends in they conduct His like-  
ness shall see.

Surely ours has been a goodly heritage. With such an upright, honest, God-fearing ancestry as ours has been, we have much to be thankful for, and certainly nothing of which to be ashamed. Our forefathers kept the faith through hardships, struggles, misfortunes, and sorrows. God forbid that we should be less faithful in preserving the faith of our Fathers!