

Sensebach Heritage

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On the Origins of Sensebachs

Jacob Sensebach of Heidelberg, Pennsylvania

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In 1723 thirty-three German families left Schoharie Valley of New York. These families, many arriving from the Palatinate, had only recently settled in New York. They traveled through fifty miles of forest to the upper reaches of the Susquehanna River. There they built rafts and canoes and floated down the river while driving their livestock along the shores. Upon reaching the Swatara Creek (just south of present-day Harrisburg) they worked their way up that creek. They settled along the banks of the Tulpehocken Creek in Lancaster County, well west of any other German settlements. There were no Sensebachs among them.

These Germans, a few years later including the famous Conrad Weiser, had originally arrived in New York as part of the 1709 group of migrants from Germany. While many Lancaster County Germans arrived through Philadelphia (the misnamed Pennsylvania Dutch) these New York Germans in Tulpehocken were the only settlers in that part of the county. More Germans from New York came in later years.

As lands in Lancaster County were filled, these Germans (and others) began to move south along the Great Wagon Trail into the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, seeking land in areas such as Augusta County, Virginia.

Is this history of interest to the Sensebach families? Possibly. The Sensebach families in America can roughly be divided into two groups.¹ First are those whose origins trace back to the Sensebach immigrants who settled in colonial New York, arriving by 1728.² The second group trace back to Augusta County, Vir-

ginia; specifically to John and Eve Sensabaugh and their 13 children,³ who arrived in Virginia by 1775.⁴ John's origins, oft-speculated upon, are not yet known.

So in the early in the 1700's, Germans migrated from New York (where there were Sensebachs) to the Tulpehocken region of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. And in the mid-1700's, Germans arrived in Augusta County, Virginia (where Sensabaughs appeared) via the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania. Could Virginia's Sensabaughs trace their lineage to the New York Sensebachs? The most tantalizing clue lies in the nexus of all this migration, Tulpehocken, and neighboring Heidelberg (both townships) in Lancaster (after 1752, Berks) County, Pennsylvania.

In 1736 a Jacob Sensebach obtained a warrant for 150 acres of land in Tulpehocken.⁵ By 1771 Jacob had passed away; by 1774 no further mention is made of Sensebachs in extant records of that area. Could he be the

"missing link", the genealogical stepping stone for the Sensebachs along the historical path of German migration from New York to Pennsylvania to Virginia? This theory has been postulated in the past; occasionally it is stated as if a fact. Let us examine, however, what is currently known about these Sensebachs in Tulpehocken/Heidelberg and their possible connections to New York and Virginia.

The Sensebachs of Heidelberg

After his initial appearance on 6 October 1736 obtaining a warrant for 150 acres in Tulpehocken township, Jacob Sensebach does not again appear in the records until 10 October 1746.⁶ On that day his daughter Susanna was baptized at St. John's Church (also known as Hain's Church) in Heidelberg Township (which had been formed from part of Tulpehocken Township). The sponsors were Johannes Orth and his wife Susanna. The name of Jacob's wife is not recorded, she is listed simply as "his wife".

On 13 March 1750/51 "his wife" is first named. Both Jacob and his wife Anna Regina are listed in the will of Nicholas Riehl.⁷ Anna Regina was Nicholas' daughter. On 18 August 1751 the Riehl connection is seen again; Jacob and his (unnamed) wife were sponsors of John Adam, son of David Riehl.⁸ That same year Jacob appears on the Heidelberg tax list.⁹

Starting in 1751 Jacob begins to appear in the records of St. Daniel's Lutheran Church in Heidelberg Township.¹⁰ That year he is listed as contributing 10 shillings to a collection on laying of the cornerstone of the new church in Heidelberg. In 1754 or 1758 (the record is unclear) Jacob Sensebach and his wife are

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