

ROTHACKER

The name Rothacker is not a name found among the Amish Mennonites in Canada, except through Magdalena Rothacker, the wife of Jacob Kropf. The name is also not common among the Anabaptists in France, but there were a few. The name (spelled Rohdacher) does appear in Basel Switzerland, but not until 1783.

The first reference to the name Rothacker among the Anabaptists was Peter Rothacker, one of the signers of the 1759 Amish-Mennonite discipline drawn up at Essingen in the Palatinate, Germany. He represented the Durlach congregation, and was a leaseholder of the Hohenwettersbach estate at Karlsruhe, Germany -- across the Rhine River from Strasbourg, now in France. It would take a good deal of manoeuvring to have Peter at the right places at the right times to father one or more of the three Rothacker heads of families which are discussed below.

Two Rothacker heads of households lived on farms in the vicinity of Strasbourg just before and after the turn of the century -- 1790s-1800s. David was born about 1736 at Nuematt, near Rahling in Lorraine. He was first married to Barbara Wittner, and then to Magdalena Boshart -- a name quite familiar to Canadian Amish Mennonites. David and Barbara's first two children were born at Beblenheim in Alsace, the second one, Maria Anna at Sigolsheim. She would eventually marry Joseph Kropf, brother to Jacob, the immigrant to Canada. Sometime after Maria Anna's birth, her mother died, and by about 1785, David married Magdalena Boshart and moved the family to Friesenheim where Magdalena was born in 1786 as well as a son Joseph about 1790.

The French Revolution which erupted in Paris in 1789 may not have affected the Rothackers and their friends at the time, but the overthrow of the monarchy -- the king and queen were executed in 1793 -- and the disrepute suffered by the nobility and the Catholic clergy would have wide repercussions even for the Anabaptists. It may have opened the door for David Rothacker to become the lease-manager of an estate called Murhof on the southwest side of the city of Strasbourg. He occupied this hof from 1791 until his death in 1808. Two daughters were born at Murhof, but their destinies are not known.

THREE ROTHACKER FAMILIES KNOWN TO HAVE LIVED AT STRASBOURG

David Rothacker, b. ca.1736, Neumatt, near Rahling, Moselle
d. 24 Oct 1808, Murhof, Strasbourg, Bas-Rhin
1m. to Barbara Wittner, b.
d. between 1780 and 1785
2m. to Magdalena Boshart, b. ca.1761, Hohwald, Bas-Rhin
d.

Children to first marriage:

- 1) Johannes Rothacker, b. 9 May 1772, Beblenheim, Haut-Rhin
d. 23 Dec 1837, Strasbourg
m. 3 Oct 1796, Strasbourg
Katharina Augspurger (1772-1810)
Five children, all born at Strasbourg
- 2) Christian Rothacker b. 1776, Beblenheim

d. 28 Nov 1795, Murhof, Strasbourg

- 3) Maria Anna Rothacker, b. 13 Jan 1780, Sigolsheim, Haut-Rhin
(or Anna Maria) d.
m. 20 Nov 1798, Barr, Bas-Rhin
Joseph Kropf, son of Christian Kropf and Elisabeth Goldschmidt
b. 18 Mar 1767, Epfig, Bas-Rhin
d.
Seven children, all born at Epfig (See the KROPF file for more details)

Children to second marriage:

- 4) Magdalena Rothacker, b. 7 Aug 1786, Friesenheim, Bas-Rhin
d. 24 May 1878, Wilmot Township, Canada
m. 15 Apr 1811, Epfig
Jacob Kropf, son of Christian Kropf and Elisabeth Goldschmidt
b. 3 Dec 1784, Epfig
d. 29 Jan 1875, Wilmot

- Children: 1) Jacob Kropf (1812-1948) m. Jacobina Bender
2) Christian Kropf (1815-1891/8) m. Mary König/King
3) Henry Kropf (1817-1855) m. Anna Nafziger
4) Catherine Kropf (1819-1840)
5) Elizabeth Kropf (1822-1853) m. John L. Lichti
6) David Kropf (1824-1909) m. Magdalena Oesch

Jacob born in Epfig, Christian in Friesenheim, Henry in Baldenheim, Catherine and Elizabeth in Pennsylvania, David in Canada.

(For more details, see the KROPF file)

- 5) Joseph Rothacker, b. ca.1790, Friesenheim (Strasbourg census -- 1806)
This may be the Joseph Rothacker listed along with the Jacob Kropf family in a list of persons making application for permission to leave France, 22 Feb 1819. His subsequent destiny is not known.
- 6) Katharina Rothacker, b. ca.1791, Friesenheim (Strasbourg census)
- 7) Barbara Rothacker, b. 20 May 1796, Murhof, at Strasbourg

Another Rothacker family possibly related to David above:

Christian Rothacker
Anna Rupp
Lived in Friesenheim, had died by 1817.

Known children:

- 1) Johannes Rothacker (1758-1827) b. at Friesenheim; d. at Strasbourg
m. 14 Feb 1797 to Barbara Litwiller, 2m. Andreas Raber
David Rothacker was among the official witnesses at the marriage, but his relationship, if any, was not given.
no known children

1) Anna Rothacker (1759-1817) b. at Friesenheim; d. at Lingolsheim
m. Daniel Frey (b. 1761/63)
One known child
Granddaughter, Katharina Bachmann, m. Johannes Zehr
emigrated to America in 1841

A third Rothacker family arrived in Strasbourg from Germany about 1812:

Johannes "Michael" Rothacker (1783- ?)
1m. Elisabeth Steiner (1786/7-1920)
2m. Katharina Schneider
Seven children -- six born at Strasbourg, the last one died there as late as
1914.

Notes:

Initial notes made by Lorraine Roth of the Rothackers married to Kropfs --
especially the family of Jacob and Magdalena who came to Canada.

All other information from Neil Ann Stuckey Levine
-- letters dated 17 Dec. 1993 and 10 May 1994
and "Rothacker Families at Strasbourg" by Neil Ann Stuckey Levine in *Mennonite
Family History*, Vol. XX, No. 2, April 2001. This article is chuck-full of
interesting historical, geographical and genealogical information.
A photocopy of the article is found in the ROTHACKER file.
This article contains photos

"Strasbourg to Baden (Magdalena Rothacker Kropf)" is a story first written to be
included in *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women* by Lorraine
Roth. Waterloo, Ontario: Mennonite Historical Society fo Ontario and Women's
Missionary and Service Commission of Eastern Canada, 1992. In the end, however,
the stories of pioneer women were not included.
Two drafts of this story are found at the end of the Rothacker file.

Lorraine Roth
Tavistock, Ontario
April 2010

STRASBOURG TO BADEN
(MAGDALENA ROTHACKER KROPF)

Include a family chart

Magdalena Rothacker was born in Strasbourg, France about 1786 to David Rothacker and Magdalena Boshart. As Magdalena played on the streets of that ancient city, her wildest dreams could not have imagined the gathering of over 6000 Mennonites which took place there almost 200 years later -- Mennonite World Conference in 1984. Perhaps she heard her parents and their fellow Anabaptists discuss the historic events which took place in this relatively tolerant city.

We know the Anabaptists, especially the leaders had a great deal of communication between their various congregations spread throughout Switzerland, eastern France and southern Germany. Since there probably was no organized Mennonite Youth Fellowship, the young people probably did not have quite the same opportunities.

Somehow Magdalena must have met a young man from another Anabaptist family by the name of Kropf, because in 1811 she was married to Jacob in the village of Epfig about 25 kilometers southwest of Strasbourg.

The Rothacker clan was not a very large and prominent one as far as Anabaptist families go, but when Magdalena married Jacob, there were brothers and sisters and aunts, uncles and cousins by the score. Jacob's parents were Christian Kropf and Elizabeth Goldschmidt. The Kropf family had lived in the hilly country surrounding Ste. Marie-aux-Mines (known to the German-speaking Anabaptists as Markkirch), to the southwest of Epfig, for over 50 years.

Magdalena and Jacob were growing up during the time of the French Revolution and were well aware of the problems this upheaval caused. It may have been annoying to have to have your marriage legitimized by a civil agent, but what was worse was the military conscription. The leaders of the church were trying their best to work things out to get exemption for the young men. Some even went to Paris to try to negotiate exemption, but once Napoleon became Emperor of France, there were no more exemptions.

Some young men left the country. Some even crossed the ocean and went to America, but all this was very difficult. One had to have a passport to travel, and it was impossible to get a passport if one was of military age. How Jacob satisfied the laws of the Revolutionary government, we do not know, but in February of 1819 Jacob applied for a passport. The authorities warned the family of the difficulties such an undertaking would incur, but it seems that Magdalena and Jacob were willing to take the risk and set out with their three children for America -- a fourth one was on the way.

In Pennsylvania they found friends of similar faith and found work on their farms. They must have heard about Christian Nafziger's trip to Canada and his plans to start an Amish settlement there or perhaps Christian Erb, one of their

party on the trip to America, and who had gone up to Canada already in 1821, caused the Kropfs to think of penetrating the continent still further. They must have been lured by the promise of "free land," because in Pennsylvania it had become expensive.

In the fall of 1823 Magdalena, pregnant with her sixth child, packed their few belongings, and they set out for Upper Canada. Did they spend the winter at the Twenty (Vineland) or with the Mennonites in Waterloo? In March Magdalena's youngest son was born and she named him David.

It was also during the first year that Bishop John Stoltzfus came from Pennsylvania to organize the small group. They chose two ministers and a deacon. The ministers were Joseph Goldschmidt and John Brenneman. The deacon was Jacob Kropf.

Life in the wilderness must have been difficult. From 1827 to 29 the Kropf family appeared in the Woolwich Township census lists, but Jacob also laid claim to lot #13 North Snyder's Road in Wilmot Township. By 1830, no improvements had been made on it -- not even a log cabin. However, when Joseph Goldschmidt, who had improved lot #14 and built a mill on it, left for Ohio in 1831, Jacob claimed lot #14 also.

Magdalena had finally come "home." The older boys and Jacob worked hard to improve lot #13 and operate the mill. In 1838, Jacob Jr. and Christian married and in 1840 Elizabeth and Henry also married. These happy occasions, however, were marred by the death of Catherine, the oldest daughter only 13 days before her sister, Elizabeth's wedding. But life went on and in 1847 the youngest son married Magdalena Oesch, daughter of Bishop John Oesch, their next-door neighbour.

Magdalena and Jacob were now in their 60s and in those days that was old. In fact, the 1851 census stated that Jacob was "retired." We must remember, however, that Jacob was the deacon of what was by now a thriving Amish Mennonite congregation, and he would not retire from that position as long as he lived. The congregation in Wilmot comprised about 75 families, not counting those in adjoining townships who were also served by the ministry in Wilmot.

One windy, fall day in 1848 Jacob went with his buggy to pick up his fellow minister, John Brenneman, to visit a sick woman. As John opened the gate, the wind whipped it around scaring the horse who sprang forward and trampled the minister under his feet. A few days later John died. No doubt, Jacob relied on Magdalena to comfort him during this sad event.

But there were more trials to come and they were much closer home. On the last day of the same year (1848) Magdalena and Jacob's oldest son Jacob died. It was Jacob Jr. and his wife Jacobina Bender who were living on lot #13, the original land claim. In 1853 daughter Elizabeth died leaving seven children and two years later son Henry died leaving his widow, Anna (born Nafziger) and eight children -- the youngest not yet born. One can only imagine the grief that Magdalena faced as she helped to prepare her sons and daughters for burial, or did others do it for her?

It was also in 1853 that the Kropf mill was destroyed by fire. Jacob had no insurance on his property, because the Amish Mennonites discouraged the purchase of fire insurance. Almost 20 years later the Amish would organize a fire and storm aid union among themselves, but that would be too late to help Jacob. No

doubt, the congregation in Wilmot helped Jacob cover some of his loss, but many of them were also still struggling to make ends meet. A congregation in Pennsylvania sent Jacob some money from their Deacon Fund at this time. No doubt, it was to help Jacob at this time of loss.

How Magdalena must have cherished her sons Christian and David and their families. David built a new house in 1858 by the new mill between Snyders Road and the new railway which cut across the front of their property. Son-in-law John Lichti married again; so those grandchildren had a new mother. Daughter-in-law Anna, however, remained a widow and had to depend on her sons to help her with the farming.

Another sad year was that of 1865 when three of Elizabeth's children died -- cause unknown. Elizabeth was 22, Catherine 20, and Jacob 15. Magdalena had long ago learned to say, "The Lord has given; the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

It was also during the 1860s that Christian and David left their homes in Baden. Was it due to the economic depression which seemed to be a chronic problem in Ontario? Had they over-extended themselves, especially David with his new house and mill? According to family tradition, David took his family to Ohio but because of the Civil War returned to Canada. They stayed in Huron County where the Oesch family had settled by this time. In 1867 David again took his family to the United States and eventually settled in Missouri. Christian's family migrated about the same time and also ended up in Missouri. How difficult it must have been for Magdalena to say goodbye to these families, the only children she had left!

Until 1845 (21 years) it seems that Jacob Kropf was the only deacon in the Wilmot Amish Mennonite congregation. In 1845 his son-in-law John Lichti was ordained to the same office and in 1847 John Gingerich. In 1854 John Gascho was ordained, perhaps to replace John Gingerich. No doubt, the younger men took more and more of the responsibility. After all, in 1854, Jacob was already 70, a very old man in those days.

As a deacons's wife, what were Magdalena's tasks in that early settlement in Wilmot Township? I am sure there was no written job description, but the expectations were probably fairly clear. No doubt, she accompanied Jacob on his visits whenever she was able and when it was appropriate. If she spent many hours alone because Jacob was called to be away, she was expected to take it graciously. She would have listened to Jacob unburden himself about the disagreements in the church. She would have known when he had to visit and try to correct an erring brother or sister, but she was expected to keep all this confidential. Jacob was also responsible for collecting the alms and dispensing them to the widows, orphans and other needy persons in the congregation. There were always sick people to visit and the bereaved to comfort.

No doubt, the Kropf home was one of those expected to be open to hosting the "Versammlung" (church service) which met every other week. Everyone who attended would be given a simple meal when the service was over. That part of the "service" was prepared and organized by the woman of the house, with much help from family, neighbours and friends.

Communion and foot washing were observed twice a year. It was the deacon's responsibility to see that the bread and wine were on hand and the basins and towels were in readiness. We can assume that much of the preparation before the special day was part of Magdalena's task.

By the time of the 1871 census, Jacob and Magdalena were living with Joseph Ramseyer family on Blead's Road. Joseph Ramseyer's wife, Mary (Sommer) Eicher was Jacob's niece, and seems to have taken the place of immediate family in the care of the elderly couple. Shortly after his 90th birthday in December, 1874, Jacob suffered a stroke which left him paralyzed and speechless. Magdalena was then 88. Their children had either died or were a thousand miles away. Jacob's obituary stated he served the Amish church as deacon for about 50 years and during that time his seat [at services] was seldom vacant.

On May 28, 1878 Magdalena, then age 91, also died. She had stood by her husband for 64 years, 50 of those in the service of the founding Amish Mennonite congregation in Canada. She had said goodbye to all of her children. Several of them were buried on the corner of the family farm. In 1866 Jacob had deeded this corner to the School Section for a schoolhouse and burying ground. Although no Kropf family markers remain, the early Kropf burials including that of Jacob and Magdalena must have taken place here.

Much had taken place between Strasbourg and Baden during Magdalena's long lifetime. She witnessed and survived the difficulties of early pioneer life, first in Pennsylvania, then Woolwich Township, and finally Wilmot. She was in the middle of the struggle of this group of Amish Mennonites who had come from several different locations in Europe trying to achieve unity out of their different customs, dialects and languages. She witnessed the clearing of the forests, the building of roads and railroads. She witnessed the growth of a village which came to be called Baden. Ebytown, which was only a cluster of a few buildings when they first arrived was now part of the thriving town of Berlin, the county seat. How many changes can one woman absorb in one lifetime? Magdalena probably set a record!

Notes and Sources:

An excellent article (in French) describing Strasbourg and the experience of the Anabaptists during the early centuries of the movement is found in the 1984 Bulletin of the French Mennonite Historical Society, *souvenance anabaptiste / mennonitisches gedachtnis*, pages 8 to 18.

A genealogy of the extended Rothacher family is found in the article, "Rothacker Families at Strasbourg" by Neil Ann Stuckey Levine in *Mennonite Family History*, April 2001, pages 94-101.

Introductions and family lists are found in the ROTHACKER and KROPF files.

Photocopies and translations of obituaries, story of fire in Kropf sawmill, and other events are found in the KROPF Document file.

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1985, revised 2005