

ABRAHAM OVERHOLSER WHO DIED IN 1791 IN MORRISONS COVE, BEDFORD CO PA

Abraham Overholser, his wife, and his family were part of a group of members of the Church of the Brethren who lived in the Morrisons Cove area of northern Bedford County, Pennsylvania. It appears that Abraham served as minister to the congregation there. Page 126 of James M Sell's A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN IN THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA states, "In a manuscript written by Samuel Teeter who lived at New Enterprise and died in 1901, the following statement is made concerning the beginning of the Yellow Creek congregation.

MORRISON'S COVE OR YELLOW CREEK CHURCH

BEGINNING OR ORGANIZATION

Inasmuch as there has no record been kept from the beginning, by request, will try to give a short sketch of the church in part by hearsay and part by memory.

In the first the Yellow Creek consisted of Snake Spring and part of the Cove. The first minister was a man or brother by the name of Overholser who died in the Cove ..."

It is almost certain that this minister was Abraham Overholser. Abraham Overholser was the only Overholser of his generation living in the area, and there are two references to a Brethren minister of this period named Abraham Overholser. Pages 138 and 139 of George R. Prowell's 1907 HISTORY OF YORK COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA state: "The annual conference was held first in York County in 1789 on the Great Conewago. The following named elders or bishops were present: Daniel Leatherman, Martin Urner, Jacob Danner, Heinrich Danner, John Funk, Jacob Stall, Heinrich Neff, Conrad Brumbach, Daniel Utz, Andreas Eby, Samuel Gerber, Herman Blasser, Jacob Basehor, Abraham Oberholtzer. Some of these may have been visitors from Lancaster County or Maryland." Pages 501 and 502 of Martin Grove Brumbaugh's 1899 book, A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN BAPTIST BRETHREN IN EUROPE AND AMERICA, contain a similar list with some differences in spelling and a few differences in names. The last name on the list in that book is "Abraham Overholtzer."

Records of payments from Abraham Overholser's estate show that his wife's name was Catharine. It has been suggested that she was a Teeter, a daughter of Hans/John Diederich aka Teterich aka Teeter Sr. whose land straddled the Mason-Dixon line of present day Washington Co MD and Franklin Co PA. This John was a Dunker minister. I have seen no documentation to prove this.

On page 56 of the 1986 book, BIBLE, AXE, AND PLOW by Ben F. Van Horn, in a section contributed by Frank Bayer, it states:

The oldest village in the Bedford County part of Morrisons Cove is Waterside. In the earliest histories published, it is stated that a group of "Dunkards" came into the Cove about the year 1755. This religious group, probably about five families, was led by a man by the name of Overholtzer, and took possession of the land as squatters. They settled along the southern edge of Potter Creek and along Yellow Creek, now Waterside, and vicinity.

The only verifiable facts concerning the Overholtzer family are found in the will of Abraham Overholtzer, the indenture on the settling of his estate, and the deeds of land claimed by him. One tract contained 220 acres as titles on the Rolls Office (Register and Recorder) of Bedford County, 1785, and another tract named "Fiddle Bow" for 190 acres in 1786, as "improvement claims." In those days a person had to move onto the land, build a house, and clear a certain amount of land before he could claim it. Abraham Overholtzer wrote his last will on July 23, 1790, and died in the year 1791. This would have been about thirtysix years after the arrival of the group in the Cove.

In the Border Cemetery, located on the hill directly west of Waterside along an old abandoned road, two limestone grave markers can still be read. One contains the inscription A.O. 1791, and the other M.O. 1795. These two stones are believed to be the oldest engraved cemetery stones in the southern end of Morrisons Cove, and supposedly mark the graves of Abraham Overholtzer and his wife.

A newspaper article titled, "Cove's Oldest Dated Grave May Be Overholser's" in the Oct. 14, 1976, MORRISONS COVE HERALD, states:

A southern Cove man who has been digging into old family and real estate records for some time has come up with an identification for the person buried in the Cove's oldest dated grave.

In the Border Cemetery on a hill west of Waterside are two limestone markers. On one, the inscription "A.O. 1791" can still be read. And on the other are the initials M.O. and the year 1795.

Rev. C.W. Karns on page 228 of his 1933 "Historical Sketches of Morrisons Cove" discussed those two stones, which are believed to be the oldest engraved cemetery stones in the southern end of Morrisons Cove. But Rev. Karns offered no clue as to whom A.O. and M.O. were.

D. Frank Bayer of New Enterprise, in pursuing his interest in the genealogy of his own and other families of the Southern Cove, has developed a theory that would identify A.O.

According to Bedford County Orphans Court records, a petition for the division of the estate of John Snider was filed in 1829. John Snider had built in 1812 the big stone house north of Loysburg along Route 36 that is now the Robert Sell home. The part of land on which the Border Cemetery is located was John Snider's 1,420-acre estate. It was described in the petition as part 3, a tract of land containing 219 acres and 96 perches that had been acquired by Snider from Abraham Overholser.

Mr. Bayer checked the name against some other records. A 1790 census lists an Abraham Overhaster in Bedford County.

Still a third variation of the name, this one spelled Overholtzer, appears in early church histories. An example: "A colony of Duncards (sic.) settled in Morrisons Cove about 1755 but were driven out and later returned after the Penns had purchased the land from the Indians. It is thought that a man by the name of Overholtzer was the leader of this organization and he remained in charge until Samuel Ullerich, son-in-law of Jacob Brumbaugh and brother-in-law of John Brumbaugh, became minister for the German Baptist Brethren, who absorbed the Dunkards in the 1780 period."

Br. Bayer states, "It is my theory that the Abraham Overholser is the man buried in the Border Cemetery."

John Snider was purchasing land about 1790. The tract of land where the big stone house stands was in the name of William Lloyd but was deeded to John Snider Nov. 3, 1790. About a dozen tracts, including those of Overholser, were combined to form the Snider holding.

Border Cemetery is situated atop a hill across Potter Creek from the rear of William Reed's home—the first house on the left as one enters the Potter Creek Road from route 36. An old township road, now abandoned, crossed the creek near the Reed home and ran along the cemetery. An old house foundation has been located along the road, where antique hunters, digging through the foundation, found many broken bottles and china dishes of the type made before 1850.

“Could this have been the Overholser home?” asks Mr. Bayer. He’s reluctant to give an affirmative answer but thinks it’s very possible. “If anyone can add any information to these few facts to help clear up the mystery,” he said, “it certainly would be interesting.”

I have not yet found the source for the quote from “early church histories” that appeared in this newspaper article.

Abraham Overholser does not appear in the 1779 Bedford County tax list or the 1784 Bedford County census, so, if he was part of a group of settlers of Morrisons Cove in 1755, the statement from the newspaper article that they “were driven out and later returned” appears to be correct. I don’t believe that Abraham Overholser could have led this group to Morrisons Cove in 1755. Assuming that Abraham was in his twenties and thirties when his children were born, he was probably born around 1740. That would mean that he was about 15 years old when the settlers are said to have arrived in Morrisons Cove, not nearly old enough to have been their leader or their minister. He could, however, have been the leader of the group on its return to Morrisons Cove in 1785.

I do feel that the headstone marked A.O. 1791 is almost certainly Abraham’s. With a will dated 1790 and an estate inventory dated 1791, 1791 is a likely year for Abraham's death, the initials fit, and the community minister would certainly merit a headstone. When I visited the Waterside Cemetery in 2001, the cemetery was well kept, although I had to hike through a cornfield to get there. I found two headstones next to each other. The one that was standing was the A. O. 1791 stone. It is in the first photo below. The one laying on the ground has the inscription O. 1795. Both headstones are in the second photo. Because I had the information with me that the second headstone should say M. O. 1795, I looked very carefully at where the M would be. There was nothing but rough stone. In addition, the spacing of the inscription would not be symmetric if there were an M there. My conclusion is that there was never an M on the stone. Because Jacob Overholser, Abraham’s son, died in 1795, I believe it is very likely that this is Jacob’s headstone. Jacob’s estate records prove that Abraham’s widow, Catharine, was still living in 1806 and would not have had a 1795 headstone.



A O 1791 HEADSTONE



A O 1791 AND O 1795 HEADSTONES

The original reference to the headstones is in the 1933 book, C. W. Karnes, HISTORICAL SKETCHES OF MORRISONS COVE. In a 1996 letter, Jim Boor wrote, "The Waterside Cemetery (Border) I published in BURIAL GROUNDS OF BEDFORD COUNTY #6. There are 78 stones - Stone 58 has "A.O. 1791." I put a picture in the book. The M.O. 1795 I couldn't locate for certain. I found one that had the shape of it near the A.O. stone."

According to Frank Bayer, on page 57 of BIBLE, AXE, AND PLOW, "When Abraham Overholtzer died, he owned all the land on which Waterside is now located. After his death in 1791, about all of the land became the possession of John Snider, the man who built the large stone house between Waterside and Loysville."

Abraham Overholser's will is located in Bedford County Estate Files #793-17A. The original will is in German and is dated July 23, 1790. There is an English translation of the will in the file.

TRASNSCRIPTION OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF ABRAHAM OVERHOLSER'S WILL

In the Name of God Amen. I Abraham Oberholser living in Woodberry Township in the County of Bedford in the Province of Pennsylvania being weak of Body but of sound memory and understanding do make and constitute this my Testament and Last Will as it shall be kept after my decease. I recommend my Soul in the Hands of God and my Body to be decently interred. Further I direct that out of my estate in the first place the Debts yet due shall be paid. Secondly I devise to my wife the third part of my Property and based so my son Jacob shall support a ... on the Place for her. Thirdly I devise to my Daughter Susanna the wife of John Schneider Four Pounds. Fourthly my son John shall have the Land on which he lives and also Five Pounds in advance. Fifthly my son Jacob shall have the old Place on which I now live containing about 200 acres. Sixthly my daughter Maria shall have the Land on which Peter Schono... lives containing about 100 acres - The Land whereon John lives Contains about 80 Acres. The whole of the Land shall be appraised by men to be chosen between them and then be divided equally except my Son John as before mentioned shall have Five Pounds more than either. Also my Son John and my Daughter Maria shall have the liberty of sawing free of any cost at our Saw Mill so much as they may want for their own use. Likewise my Son John shall be allowed for the work he has done on his own place. In case either of them shall lose their Land by reason of any Person having a better right thereto such loss shall be equally sustained between them. Also my son Jacob shall have Twenty Pounds which he earned after his becoming of Age. Further I nominate David Ulrich of Woodberry Township Bedford County and Jacob Peterbach also of Woodberry Township Bedford County Guardians for the purpose of regulating all things. Wrote the Twenty third Day of July in the Year of Christ One thousand seven hundred and ninety in the presence of the undernamed witnesses and subscribed by me.

Witnesses John Martin Conrad Brombach Jacob Stutzman	Abraham his o Oberholser mark
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The foregoing is Translation of the Copy of the Will in the German Language hereto annexed

Fred Bea ... es
 Feby 22 1799

The will lists five heirs, "my wife", "my son Jacob", "my daughter Susanna the wife of John Schneider", "my son John", and "my daughter Maria". This means he had four living children in 1790, Jacob, Susanna, John, and Maria. The estate auction results are in the estate file written in German, dated (Jan.?) 29, 1791. The total receipts were 109 pounds 11 shillings 9 pence.

The final distribution of the funds from the sale of Abraham's estate was reported to the Bedford County Registers Office on November 19, 1798. A payment is listed to Jacob Overholtzer. Jacob died in August or September, 1795, so at least some payments must have been made several years before the final settlement was reported. Payments were made to "Catharine Overholtzer widow of the deceased", "John Overholtzer", "Jacob Overholtzer", "David Stutzman", and "Susanna Snider". David Stutzman had married Abraham's daughter, Maria, so he received her share. John Snider died in 1793, and his wife, Susannah, was a widow when the payment was made, so she, not her husband, received her share. That means this payment was made after John Snider's 1793 death.

There are no birth records or marriage records for any of Abraham and Catharine Overholser's children. Estimates for the birth years for his two sons come from a report on taxes assessed in 1789 by Martin Loy in which "he noted in a margin of that report, in front of some of the names, a figure which appears to be his estimate of the taxpayer's age." Transcriptions of that list by James Boor and John Hale Stutesman show Overholtzer, Jacob 21, and Overholtzer, John 25.

The children of Abraham and Catharine Overholser are:

1. SUSANNA OVERHOLSER - born Bedford Co PA
married Bedford Co PA, 5 known children
JOHN SNIDER - died in 1793 between June 17 (date of will) and August 7 (date estate was appraised) Bedford Co PA (Bedford Co WB 21/285 – on microfiche as #793-13), son of Jacob and Margaret Snider of Berkeley Co VA (now WVA)
2. JOHN OVERHOLSER - born about 1764, Bedford Co PA, died 1842, Montgomery Co OH
married Bedford Co PA (first child born about 1787), 10 known children
SUSANNAH SNIDER - died Dec., 1849, Montgomery Co OH, daughter of Jacob and Margaret Snider of Berkeley Co VA (now WVA)
3. JACOB OVERHOLSER - born about 1768, Bedford Co PA, died in 1795 between Aug. 22 (date of will) and Sept., 28 (date will filed for probate), Bedford Co PA (Bedford Co WB 1/47 – on microfiche as #795-8)
married Bedford Co PA (first child born 1791), 3 known children
SUSAN ULRICH - born 1770, died 1861, Clinton Co IND, daughter of David and Barbara Ulrich, married (2) Daniel Shively
4. MARIA OVERHOLSER - born Bedford Co PA, died 1845, Elkhart Co IND
married about 1790, Bedford Co PA (first child born July, 1791), 8 known children
DAVID STUTZMAN - born about 1765, Frederick Co MD, died July 3, 1852, Elkhart Co IND, son of Jacob Stutzman and Christina Ulrich

In late 1794 or early 1795, Abraham's older son, John, sold his Woodberry Township land, and moved with his wife and children a few miles west to Quemahoning Township in the part of Bedford County that became Somerset County on April 17, 1795. His younger son, Jacob, died in 1795. Less than five years after Abraham's death, there were no adult male Overholser's in Woodberry Township.

Abraham's will and estate records show only the distribution of funds from the estate auction. Title to land simply changed hands. Jacob Puderbaugh, executor of the Abraham Overholser estate, received a total of about \$100 from the estate of Abraham's son, Jacob, who died in 1795. There is no record of the distribution of that money or of any other money that was part of Abraham Overholser's estate.

Abraham Overholser's younger son, Jacob, was the major beneficiary of Abraham's will. Jacob died in 1795. When Jacob's land was sold on June 6, 1806, the deed stated, "Whereas the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania did grant to Abraham Overholtz a warrant by value of which the following tract of land was surveyed in pursuance of said warrant dated the 14th of March One Thousand Seven hundred and eighty five" and that the land contained 185 acres and 120 perches, was willed by Abraham to Jacob, and was being sold by Jacob's executors to John Snider for 729 pounds 2 shillings and 9 pence. The major beneficiaries of Jacob's estate were his widow and children, but significant payments were made to Abraham Overholser's estate, to Jacob's mother, Catharine Overholser, to Jacob's brother, John Overholser, and to Jacob's brother-in-law, David Stutzman. Catharine Overholser received payments totaling about \$50 between 1795 and 1805 and \$210 on April 1, 1806. That confirms that she was still living in 1806. It is not known when she died. There were no payments from Jacob's estate to his sister, Susanna Snider, or to anyone who might have been her second husband. Perhaps the payments to Abraham Overholser's estate went to her or to her children.

THE APPEARANCE OF ABRAHAM OVERHOLSER'S NAME
ON TWO VERSIONS OF A LIST OF CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MINISTERS
WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE 1789 ANNUAL MEETING
AT GREAT CONEWAGA, PENNSYLVANIA

The minutes of the 1789 annual meeting do not include a list of participants. Two secondary sources, however, contain similar lists of participants. Those lists are shown below. Names are listed under the title of each book in the order in which they appear in that book. Abraham Overholtzer/Oberholtzer is the last name on both lists.

MARTIN BRUMBAUGH (1899)

GEORGE PROWELL (1907)

A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN BAPTIST
BRETHREN IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

HISTORY OF YORK COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Pages 501 and 502

Daniel Letterman
Martin Urner
Jacob Danner
Heinrich Danner
Johannis Funk
Jacob Stoll
Heinrich Naff
Conrad Brumbach
Nathaniel Schrieber
Daniel Utz
Andreas Eby
Samuel Gerber
Herman Blasser
Jacob Laschet
Abraham Overholtzer

Pages 138 and 139

Daniel Leatherman
Martin Urner
Jacob Danner
Heinrich Danner
John Funk
Jacob Stall
Heinrich Neff
Conrad Brumbach

Daniel Utz
Andreas Eby
Samuel Gerber
Herman Blasser
Jacob Bashor
Abraham Oberholtzer

"List of Standing Committees"

" 'The annual conference was held first in York County in 1789 on the Great Conewago.' The following named elders or bishops were present:"

"Some of these may have been visitors from Lancaster County or Maryland."

Sources for this information include BIBLE AXE, AND PLOW, by Ben F. Van Horn, THE OBERHOLTZER BOOK by Barbara Ford, A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN IN THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA, by James M. Sell, A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN BAPTIST BRETHREN IN EUROPE AND AMERICA by Martin Grove Brumbaugh, HISTORY OF YORK COUNTY PENNSYLVANIA by George R. Prowell, HISTORICAL SKETCHES OF MORRISONS COVE by C. W. Karnes, "A 1789 Tax Record For Morrison's Cove, Bedford County, Pennsylvania, Listing the Taxpayer's Age," by John Hale Stutesman, MENNONITE FAMILY HISTORY, April, 1995, the will of Abraham Overholser and other documents that I found on an August, 1995, trip to Bedford and Somerset Counties, Pennsylvania, estate records for Jacob AND John Overholser, the headstones at the Waterside Cemetery that I saw on an August, 2001, trip to Bedford County, Pennsylvania, and correspondence with James Boor and John Hale Stutesman.

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