

A Pilgrimage to Berks County

By Daniel E. Hochstetler, Son of Elam DJH 6150

Since 1979 I have made nearly a dozen visits to Berks County, Pennsylvania. Each trip is a kind of pilgrimage, as I look for and find the farmsteads which were the first American homes of a number of families on my family tree, the Hochstetlers, Hertzlers, Stutzmans, Blanks, Gnaegis, Millers, Yoders, Detweilers, Masts, and others.

On June 7, 2007 I spent a day by myself retracing some of my earlier steps. This visit was especially significant since this is the 250th year since the tragic Indian attack on our ancestors. I especially enjoyed talking with some of the people who now live on those same acres in Upper Bern and surrounding townships. At the west edge of Hamburg I crossed the Schuylkill River (and the 1-78 underpass) and continued westward 1.7 miles on the Hex Highway/Olde 22 to the Bishop Jacob Hertzler homestead on the right, just past Pine Road. An engraved plaque on a post beside the highway identifies the farm, called "**Contentment**." Bishop Hertzler arrived in 1749 and was an early leader in the Northkill Amish settlement, and his daughter Catherine married my ancestor John Hochstetler. What a heritage I have for this pioneer church leader to be my ancestor!

Several years ago the former owner sold this farm on auction to an investor who kept about 50 acres for development to eventually build houses and sold the buildings and 15 acres to a young local couple, John and Kristi Koiniski, in April 2005. John was at work, but Kristi was at home with preschoolers Emily and Travis. She was very friendly and helpful, and produced the visitors' roster which had been begun by former owners. As I signed it I recognized various familiar names. Kristi thinks a church holds the deed to the historic cemetery, and the easement for its access is on their 15 acres. It is about a five-minute walk via the lane behind the barn and through the pasture field with the cattle to the 14X23 yard cemetery. The cemetery is fenced in by a stone wall on the north side and an ornamental wire fence on the other three sides which keep out the cattle. Tall grass, weeds and poison ivy dominate, and there is a single tall evergreen tree in the center. The Hertzler memorial stone, erected in 1901 by descendants, stands in the extreme southwest corner, with an inscription explaining that the "Preacher of the Gospel" (1703-1786), his second wife Catherine, and second son Jacob are buried here.

I continued westward on Hex Highway toward Shartlesville. From the center of town I headed southward on the Wolf Creek Road about 1.6 miles to the Christian and Barbara (Hochstetler) Stutzman farmstead on the right in a lane across the Wolf Creek. There is a big farm house, a large old barn, and quite a number of sheds and outbuildings. It is obviously a working farm, but is not very well kept up. There was a welcome sign at the house and I called and knocked, but no one was at home. A sign at the road declared "POSTED, hunting, trapping, fishing, or trespassing for any reason prohibited...." Just beyond the buildings a short distance southward is Feick Drive on the right, which also crosses Wolf Creek. While the buildings are old, they are probably not

dating from the late 1700s when my ancestors Christian and Barbara lived here, possibly already in 1757 at the time of the Indian attack on Barbara's family just across the fields.

I drove southward from Feick Drive on Wolf Creek Road about 0.4 miles to Pleasant Road on the left, then drove eastward about 0.4 miles to a lane on the left which goes past a small private lake to the homestead of the widow Magdalena Stutzman, who was likely the mother of Christian. Two cats welcomed me to the old house, and I called and knocked at the house but no one was at home. There were some mowed areas around the house, but generally the place is quite natural with many trees and tall grass and weeds. The area of the old barn on the north side of the lane west of the house where I had seen stone foundations and walls some years ago was all grown up with trees and tall weeds so that I could not see any of this - except one 6-foot stone wall around the back was visible. This place also was heavily posted at the road with No Trespassing signs on the trees. I had stopped at both Stutzman homesteads in past years and have never met any of the owners and only once did I talk with the renters on the other farm.

After lunch in Shartlesville I drove west about half a mile on Olde 22 to Roadside America, which is located on land that had once been a part of the Jacob Hochstetler Penn land grant acquired in 1739. This tourist attraction continues in the family of the originator, Laurence Gieringer, who died Jan 13, 1963, and his wife Dora (Seisler) who died in 1973. The employee at the desk directed me to the displays on the wall, which included a recent obituary of "A. H. Bernecker," who had been the owner-operator since 1973. This was the daughter Alberta, who died at the age of 83 on April 18, 2007. Her husband was Walter A. Bernacker who had also died Dec.17, 2006. The business is now operated by their daughter Dolores, married to Craig Heinsohn from Shartlesville and



This prominent statue stands in the parking lot of the tourist attraction Roadside America, which is located on part of the original Jacob Hochstetler farm west of Shartlesville, Pa. Just behind the statue several hundred feet is the entrance to the Kevin and Sandra Schlappich home, the site of the 1757 Indiana attack on the Hochstetler family. With a little imagination one can picture Mr. & Mrs. Jacob Hochstetler on their horse-drawn wagon on the way to church at a member's house!

their girls. Their daughters are Bettina L., who has just finished her first year at an area college, and Felicia M., who graduated from high school in June 2007. I know of no other heirs or members of the founder's family.

While I was there, Bettina came to work at the desk, checking in tourists, and when I asked some questions she couldn't answer she directed me to her mother Dolores who was working in the gift shop just to the east of the parking lot. Dolores was very congenial in telling me about her grandfather's dream and work, and the way the business is continuing in their family. The huge display of miniature structures remains unchanged except for periodic cleaning and maintenance. She said there continue to be many inquiries by visitors about the Hochstetler family, and she mentioned the broadside that her grandfather had prepared for inquirers and then printed on an old press himself. I gave her my card, and explained some of the things we are doing in the wider family. She would like to have some newsletters related to the area.

Mrs. Heinsohn knew that the Hugh Mooneys, owners of the nearby Jacob Hochstetler homestead, had been in contact with Hochstetler descendants at the time they wanted to sell the place (in the 1980s), but didn't understand why we never bought the farm. She spoke very highly of the present neighbors, the Schlappichs, who bought the remaining Hochstetler homestead from the Mooneys. Dolores said that after the place was sold, Mr. and Mrs. Mooney retired to a place not far away, westward in Berks County, and both of them died rather soon from cancer, Evelyn in January 1987 and Hugh Jr. a bit later in 1987 or early 1988. I also asked about the large statues of the Amish couple in the parking lot between Roadside America and the gift shop. She didn't know the exact history, but believes someone was commissioned to make the statues, possibly from the Lancaster area. She thought this was after her grandfather's death in 1963 and probably in the late 1960s. They have been refurbished from time to time. Their imposing presence reminded me of my ancestors-Jacob and his unnamed wife-who owned the land below them over 250 years ago.

I then called the Schlappich number and Kayla, who was graduating from high school the next day, answered and I also talked with Sandra who welcomed me warmly. I had been there maybe three or four times since they moved here in 1985. Kevin works in Reading and was not at home. Jesse is 21 and also has a job. The youngest child is Luke, who finished 4th grade. When I mentioned that I want to take a picture of the memorial marker beside the driveway, Sandra, who is not working out at present, was quite concerned about some of the weeds around it and quickly cleaned it up! The marker has turned quite dark, and some of it is covered with moss. While parts of the yard are mowed, much of the wide areas are left natural and no doubt look very much like they did when our ancestors lived and worked here. As I reread the plaque on the memorial, and looked around the area my mind went back 250 years to the time of the Indian attack. Today, this event and the faith displayed by our foreparents is remembered not only by their descendants but by numerous others who share their desire for peace and nonviolence. This included many of the Native Americans who lost their claim to their homeland during this time

following the War, and the Delawares, also known as "Peacemakers on the Frontier," began their long sad trek Westward via Indiana and eventually to Oklahoma.

I walked over to the spring west of the house beyond the driveway where the log spring house still stood in the early 1940s. Part of the stone wall around the spring is still in place, and the water continues to flow silently toward the west. There is rather dense undergrowth in the area. I also walked over to the area of the outdoor bake oven southeast from the house, and several stones imbedded in the grass I



This is how the house looked 60-some years ago where the Schlappich family now lives on the site of the 1757 Indian attack near Shartlesville, Pa. While the main part of the house on the left was likely built in the 1820s (DJH pp. 61 & 62), the stone part on the north side is definitely older, and may have been built soon after the original Jacob Hochstetler family home was burned. Virgil believes he many have gotten this picture from his parents, Ura and Mae Miller, DJH 5073 & 5684.

believe mark the location of the original oven. I took pictures of all these places of significance, but due to the growth of trees and bushes it is hard to do certain angles and scopes. The exterior of the house, with the older section on the north end, seem to be largely unchanged, except for a nice front porch built by Kevin, from the time I first visited here in 1979. The long single story shed/garage, begun by the Mooneys since my earliest visit here, and the little barn built by Kevin Schlappich since 1985 represent the major changes in the buildings on this place. Sandra said Hochstetler relatives continue to visit here on occasion, but it doesn't seem to be more often than they are comfortable with. Common courtesy demands that a phone call should precede one's visit. As I left I also took a current photo of the Northkill Amish historic marker near the entrance, along Olde 22, behind the parking lot of Roadside America.

I then drove westward on Olde 22 a few hundred feet to the entrance of the long lane of what had been John and Catherine Hochstetler's farm at the time of the Indian attack in 1757. There are three houses on this farm, and I didn't get a response to my knocking at the two older houses west of the barn. Then the owner came from his house east of the barn. Paul and Paulette Heisey bought the 110-acre farm at public estate auction in 1981. The former owners were Grace and Raymond Leshner. I had met Grace, a retired school teacher, when I first visited here in 1979. She died in 1980, and then the farm was sold. Paul said his ancestors had come to the area about the same time the other settlers came to Pennsylvania. When he first moved here to this farm he raised some grain, but now mostly grows hay and raises cattle. He rents out the two older houses to people who have other jobs, and he and his wife live in the newer house that was there when he bought the place. It may have been built by the Leshners.



This Fort Northkill sign is located at Power Drive about two miles west of the Hochstetler farms on Olde 22, and reads, "1 mile north to site of Fort Northkill." There is apparently nothing left of the fort, built in 1756 during the French and Indian War. See DJH page 28.

Paul said both of the older houses are log houses which have been sided and modernized. He believes the larger one may actually have been the original home of the John Hochstetler family, who moved to southwestern (then Bedford, now Somerset Co.) Pennsylvania in 1784. It still has exposed hand-hewn beams, one a 14X14 beam, with some unfinished ceilings that are not plastered. The tenant who lives there now was born there 52 years ago when his family lived here as renters, and his mother died here. The smaller house, also originally a log house, was the spring house. It is a three room cabin built over the spring from which the earlier families got their water. During the modernization a kitchen was added as an attachment on the north side. Paul showed me the little structure on the east side which covers the spring and then the water still runs through the full length of the basement and out the west end into the large pond beside the houses. This water was also used to cool things and was still in use when he bought the farm in 1981. Since then he had a well dug which now serves

both houses. When he showed me the walk-in basement I noticed that the ceiling beams were flattened logs, and the axe marks could still be seen. The exterior foundation walls of the spring house have obviously been redone and repointed.

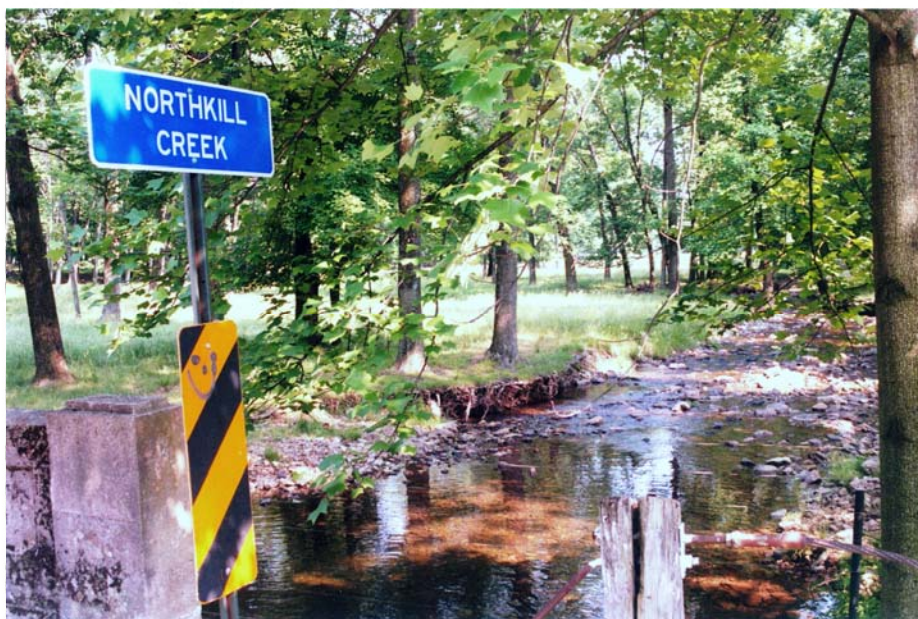
There is a reconstructed outdoor bake oven in front of the newest house where the owner lives which was there already when they bought the farm in 1981. On the east side of the spring house there is a large flower bed. Paul said there are some foundation stones in that flower bed, and he believes this was the location of the original bake oven. There also appears to have been a walkway from the large (log) house to the bake oven. Paul believes this bake oven was moved to the new location at the time that house was built, perhaps by the Leshers. The bake oven door has a local foundry name, including the word "Hamburg."

Paul told me about the old Fort Northkill near Strauss- town to the west, but he doesn't think that there is anything left of it. Following his directions, I drove two miles west of his farm on Olde 22 to Power Drive, then turned north across 1-78 to the "T" road (Bloody Spring Road). I went west on BSR, past a sharp right turn, then at a sharp left turn I went straight ahead on a gravel township road for a mile or more. There are some beautiful houses in this wooded, Blue Mountain area, and everything is heavily posted "No trespassing" and "Private Drives." The old fort was somewhere in this area in the mountains. On Olde 22 at the Power Drive intersection

there is a historic sign indicating that the fort, constructed during the French and Indian War in 1756, was one mile north of that spot. See DJH page 28.

Paul said various individuals as well as bus loads of Hochstetler descendants have come to his farm. He invited me to drive through the open hay fields to the top of the hill behind the farm for a view of the valley below, including the Jacob Hochstetler farm. However, due to the heavy growth of trees surrounding the buildings I could see only Kevin Schlappich's little barn. One could get a better view in winter when there are no leaves on the trees. I thought about how my ancestor John had witnessed the Indian attack on his parent's family 250 years ago.

I also stopped at the Northkill Creek which crosses Olde 22 about 0.3 miles west of the between the Northkill Creek and Wolf Creek. This original Amish Mennonite settlement in



The Northkill Creek where it crosses Olde 22 highway 0.3 miles west of the entrance to the Jacob Hochstetler farm west of Shartlesville, Pa. The original Amish Mennonite settlement in America took its name from this creek in Upper Bern Township of Berks County.

2007 Photo by DEH

colonial Pennsylvania was named the Northkill settlement. In the decades following the French and Indian War many of the people started resettling in other areas. Old Jacob eventually moved to the next county westward, Lebanon Co., and of the immediate family only Christian and Barbara Stutzman (and possibly

Joseph's wife Anna) died in Berks County. All the other Hochstetler children and grandchildren moved to other newly-available land to the West.

All in all, this had been a very profitable day even though I didn't cover very many new areas, and I didn't drive south the ten miles to where Joseph and Anna (Blank) Hochstetler, also my direct ancestors, had lived in North Heidelberg Township next to the "Hochstetler Hill." A "pilgrimage" like this brings the past and present very close together.

The most helpful single resource in finding the locations of 77 early Amish farms in Berks County is the map book [*Early Amish Land Grants in Berks County, Pennsylvania*](#). Published 1990 by Pequea Bruderschaft Library, Gordonville, Pa. It is available from Masthof Bookstore, 219 Mill Road, Morgantown, PA 19543. \$20.00 plus \$3.75 shipping.