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Review: Tritt Family History. Volume I: Ancestry, Life and Times of Brothers Hans, Peter, and Christian Tritt, Immigrants to Pennsylvania in 1739, and Their Children

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Review

Tritt Family History. Volume I: Ancestry, Life and Times of Brothers Hans, Peter, and Christian Tritt, Immigrants to Pennsylvania in 1739, and Their Children, by Tritt Family Research, Inc., 1999. Available from Richard L. Miller, Treasurer, 510 Schoolhouse Lane, Shippensburg, PA 17257-1020. 201 pages. 208 photographs and drawings. Hardbound. \$ 45.00 plus \$4.00 shipping.

Although its contents are not directly relevant to family historians of Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, this top-quality history demonstrates how to organize, research, and present the story of a Pennsylvania German family with Swiss roots.

Interested Tritt volunteers formed Tritt Family Research, Inc. in 1977, later obtaining official recognition as a non-profit corporation. They held business meetings and assigned volunteers to tasks such as building a database of Tritt descendants, publishing a newsletter, organizing reunions in the U.S. and Europe, researching early Tritt pioneers in North America, raising funds to commission professional research on Tritt ancestors, planning publication of this book, and creating an archive at the Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Ten volunteer researchers investigated the early Tritts and systematically documented the Tritt genealogy, building on a century of sporadic work by various Tritts. Nine editors and authors put together this book, drawing on the input of 34 persons acknowledged for important contributions. Other individuals or couples (54) donated funds toward the publication.

Researchers have identified the Obersimmental Valley in southern Canton Bern, Switzerland, as the place of origin of the Tritt family. The name is spelled variously as Tritt, Tritten, Tritter, and Treat among the Swiss records, and standardized to Tritt (sometimes Dritt) in colonial Pennsylvania. A map on the front inside cover detailing a five-mile stretch of the Simme River draws attention to five early ancestral villages where Tritt family records have been found. Among the earliest is a 1590 record from the village of Lenk, along the upper reaches of the Simme River, which shows a family member fined 10 *Pfennig* for permitting dancing at his home on Christmas Eve. However, an even earlier record, dated

March 8, 1485, declares Petrus Tritten of the Simmental as a witness on a legal document in Sion, in the house of the ruling governor of the Canton of Valais (p. xviii). This proves that Tritt families have lived in the Obersimmental at least since the fifteenth century, and that they had maintained contact across the Alps by way of Rawyl Pass to Canton Valais to the south. The Tritt/Tritten family name is likely derived from the German noun "Tritt" which meant "the one living at the path that has steps."

In the 1690s the Tritts became part of the general exodus out of Switzerland into lands to the north. Friedrich Tritten left the Obersimmental and settled in Diedendorf, Alsace, forty miles northwest of Strasbourg. His grandsons, Hans Peter Tritt, Jr., and Christian, left from there for Rotterdam, Holland, where they embarked on the long trans-Atlantic voyage to Pennsylvania, arriving in 1739.

Researcher Harold M. Hegyessy ponders the reasons for emigration. Were the Tritts Anabaptists driven out of Switzerland by religious persecution? This is plausible since Hans Peter Tritt was christened as an adult in the Diedendorf Reformed Church in 1710, indicating that he may never have been christened as a youth. One quibble of these reviewers came with calling Anabaptists a "dissident group of the Zwingli Early Swiss Reformed Church" (p. xx) when in fact the Swiss Anabaptists separated from Zwingli's followers. In addition, economics certainly played a role in migrations. The cycle of poverty ground tightly around the rural population as small tracts of land could no longer be subdivided to satisfy all heirs and the few other occupations were rigidly controlled by powerful trade guilds. Wealthy merchants and bureaucrats were actively buying up rural lands and displacing the inhabitants from their livelihoods.

Upon arrival in Pennsylvania Hans Peter Tritt settled near Rearnstown, Lancaster County, and associated with the Muddy Creek Reformed Church. Around 1750, he left Lancaster County and moved to Windsor Township, York County, where he acquired over 200 acres and died in 1768. Some of his descendants later settled in Cumberland County, near Newville.

Several researchers detail the stories of Hans Peter Tritt's children, providing photographs of homesteads and illustrated reproductions of various historical documents, including survey maps, deeds, and wills. The eldest son, Johann Jacob Dritt (1746-1817), was a prosperous citizen of York County. He acquired large tracts of land in Lancaster County as

well, and attempted to establish a town on the east bank of the Susquehanna River near what is now the west end of Blue Rock Road in Manor Township. On Saturday, March 14, 1807, 300 lots were advertised for the newly formed town of Woodstock, which would be sold by lottery drawing. One lot was reserved for a market and four others for churches of the Mennonite, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Moravian confessions (p. 40). In addition, Dritt also agreed to pay \$800 to the person drawing lot #16, which also planned to include a bridge across the Susquehanna. The lottery produced so few respondents that the idea was dropped until 1811 when Dritt laid out 122 lots for the town of Washington (now Washington Boro) near the same site as Woodstock. This time all the lots were drawn and the new town Washington was birthed. John Jacob Dritt drowned on the evening of December 19, 1817, while attempting to cross the swollen Susquehanna from Washington.

The book also includes a section of Tritt family legends, an etymology, a description of early life in the Obersimmental, and a history of Diedendorf. The back cover details a section of the Susquehanna Valley in Pennsylvania from Shippensburg to Gap showing fifteen colonial locations pertinent to Tritt family history. Currently the family is found in France, Germany, Uruguay, and New Zealand, in addition to the major groups in the United States, and the descendants remaining in the original communities of the Obersimmental in Switzerland.

These reviewers have the impression of systematic, thorough, and well-documented research. The enthusiasts in Tritt Family Research, Inc. are already planning four future volumes to further share their family history. With their inspiring example combined with ample research tools, now including e-mail and the Internet, Mennonite researchers should rise to the challenge of understanding our own history as a people and sharing our heritage with our children and others.

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