

LYBARGER/LEUENBERGER BEGINNINGS

by Hans Leuenberger, and Lee H. Lybarger
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Long before recorded history human kind wondered when and where they first originated. This was especially true once genealogy became the popular hobby that it is today. To search for one's ancestors, especially an original ancestor, from a different country, and a different language, is to search for when and where family names were first known to have appeared in a documentable form.

There were no governmental or church records of baptisms, marriages, and deaths among common people, until the end of the Middle Ages, about 1550,

Given the enormous complexity and timespan involved, the research findings must be spread over two issues of the LMA newsletter. The search in this issue focuses is on the period before the advent of genealogical records., i.e. going back to as early as the 1200's. First a possible individual in the 1200's will be identified. An alternative option will posit that the original ancestor emerged from a communal group of peasants all of whom who had a common name, but lacked distinct individual names. **1**

Leuenberger/Lybarger connection

The authors and others, in searching for the origins of their surname, indicate that the search requires a search for surnames similar yet different to the way the surnames are spelled today. The jumping off point is the possible most verifiable common ancestor, Jakob Leuenberger, born about 1594 in Switzerland.**2**

The results of Y-DNA testing show clearly that the Swiss Leuenberger branch represented by Hans and Hans Rudolf Leuenberger, of Switzerland, genetically match the Y-DNA results of John L. and Lee H. Lybarger, of the U.S.A. The lineage of Jakob Leuenberger will be elaborated in a follow-up article in the spring, 2018 Lybarger Linkages issue. **3**

Organization of the research findings

Given the enormity and complexity of the task, it will be necessary to be guided by three search criteria as follows:

1. The spelling and/or pronunciation of the original ancestor(s) should approximate the current spelling of Jakob Leuenberger, the earliest genealogically proven ancestor from whom all living Leuenberger and Lybarger descend.
2. There should be a geographical, religious, social, and/or occupational context.
3. There should be valid documentation in verifying the original person or group.

This research on the origins of the Leuenberger family name is the first known attempt to both identify and relate all living Lybarger and Leuenberger descendants to a possible original documentable ancestor (or ancestors). Because of the complexity of the topic, how the results were obtained are as important as the findings themselves. To make the findings understandable, only a simplified report will be possible. **4**

A cautionary note: all family history knowledge is built on earlier knowledge as it comes available. Thus, the findings are never final. They are subject to human error, incomplete facts, and new knowledge yet to be discovered.

The article will be organized under the following headings:

The Swiss historical setting

Etymology of Lowenberger/Leuenberger

Original documentable ancestor as a named person

Original documentable ancestor from a common named community

Conclusion

Footnotes

The authors

The second phase of the article, to be published in a 2018 issue of the LMA newsletter. It will trace the known common ancestor, Jakob Leuenberger to the Nicolas Leyenberger who emigrated to America in 1739. It will draw on the genealogical work of John Lavern Lybarger and Hans Leuenberger.

The Swiss setting 5

Geographical context: Switzerland, is a mountainous country, located in the heart of western Europe, surrounded by five countries: Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Liechtenstein. The boundaries of Switzerland are: The Jura mountains form the border with France, the river Rhine with Germany and Liechtenstein. The boundary with Austria and Italy consists of high mountains of the Alps.

Languages: German is spoken by 64% of the native Swiss population followed by French, Italian and Romansh. Switzerland as a confederation of 26 cantons (states) with a population of 8.4 million, which differs in culture, religion and 4 official languages. Although the mountainous Alps comprise the distinctive feature of Switzerland, the people are concentrated in the rolling hills and plains of the plateau region bordering mostly on France and Germany.

Swiss history: To understand the known origin of the Leuenberger name requires an understanding of the Swiss context in which the name emerged. Switzerland dates her beginning as a federation of three independent cantons (states) Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden that formed a federal charter in 1291.

In the Middle ages or Medieval period, 5th -15th centuries, citizenship was limited to towns as there was no nation state at that time. To be a "citizen" of a town or fortified city did not require residence in the town, but a citizen received the protection of the fortified town in case of war.

He could be expected to be recruited for military service. He was also expected to provide food for the needs of the townspeople. Disputes with neighboring estates were settled in the town, where one would be recorded as a citizen.

A citizen of Bern, or of an allied town, such as Burgdorf, enjoyed protective privileges of citizen. In return, the protected peasants provided agricultural products for the castle. Male members could also be recruited as warriors in the event of conflict with a rival power. Illiterate citizens' names would be recorded by the noble family, but not their birth or parentage. It was one of the few ways a name could be documented.

This was important during the Middle Ages for free persons living in the country side in the neighborhood of knights serving under the foreign power of the Austrian Habsburg kings.

After the final defeat of the Austrian Habsburg empire in 1386, Switzerland became an autonomous confederacy of 8-member states. This confederation was militarily and politically successful for over a century, culminating in the Burgundy Wars of the 1470s that established Switzerland as an autonomous political entity.

When the Protestant Reformation came to Switzerland in 1524 it divided the Swiss confederation geographically into Reformed in the north and Catholic in the south. This distinction is important as it about the 1550's that churches began recording baptisms, marriages and deaths. Such data is vital for genealogical tracing ancestral origins. Leuenberger church records are only found in areas where Lutherans and Reformed churches prevailed.

Etymology of Lowenberger/Leuenberger

The origin of a person, tribe or clan presupposes they can be identified by a name. For prehistoric people to differentiate themselves from other tribal communities, they distinguished themselves using names based on distinctive features of their natural environment e.g. a river, a mountain, animals, vegetation, etc. Or they may have differentiated themselves based on their skill as hunters, farmers or herders etc. Perhaps it was their distinctive physical characteristics by which they came to be known. Such names would be passed on via the oral tradition especially among classes or communities that lacked a written history.

It is believed that the name of Leuenberger, Lowenberger, or Leyenberger (eventually Lybarger) is derived from the German word for lion, i.e. lowe or Leuen. The lion was a powerful; and fearsome animal. It was not surprising that the lion provided a mythical context for use in family coats of arms or in the name of a castle. The first families who used it in the early Middle Ages were knights who lived in a castle. Adopting the name Lowe (Lion) means power and should have a deterrent effect on their enemies. They might add a physical characteristic of their surroundings to indicate their location. For people living near the

mountainous region of the Swiss Alps they would use the word berg for mountain or hill.

It was from the area of the Rhine River and the Alpine mountains that a people would be known as a Lowenberger or Leuenberger. There was no familial or marital connection when peasants **5** became known by the name of their protectors

To identify the most original source of the Leuenberger name would require a comparative analysis of the genetical DNA of the remains of members of the Germanic tribes who invaded and threw over the Roman military in about the second century A.D. for control of what, over a thousand years later, became Switzerland. **6**

The original documentable ancestor as a named person

A search for the earliest documentable origin of the Leuenberger name is found in the FRB (Fontes Rerum Bernensium). It is a chronological bibliography of the earliest sources of Bernese history located in the archives of the Canton of Bern, Switzerland. **7**

In it was found the name, Jordanus de Löwenberch (berch is the Swiss German dialect for berger). He was the first person mentioned as a witness in 1257 in a region, which is relevant to the search of the documentable origin of the Leuenberger surname in the city of Burgdorf close to Bern. The prefix "de" of his family name was used for families who were and were not knights. The unusual first name "Jordanus", triggers the question: was the first name related to the crusade of Emperor Friedrich II in 1228/29 to the Holy Land?

Löwenberch was born about 1200 near the fortified city of Burgdorf, Switzerland. From the archival records, it is presumed that he, as a page, accompanied the Teutonic Knights of the noble family "von Brandis", in their crusade to Jerusalem in 1228/29. He married about 1220. Their one known child, Jordanus de Löwenberch, was born about 1229/30. He was christened after the father returned safely from the crusade of the emperor Friedrich II. It is also possible that de Löwenberch family, having no son, had adopted "Jordanus" during the times of the crusades. It is not known if Jordanus, the son, married and had any children. However, it is possible that the noble family "de

Löwenberch", knights from Eastern Switzerland, accompanied the Teutonic Knights and the Earl Werner von Kyburg on the crusade of Friedrich II to Jerusalem. As an adopted son, Jordanus, lost the social status of a knight. Further studies are needed to get a better insight in that time.

It cannot be excluded that Jordanus de Lowenberch was a member of the "von Löwenberg" family residing originally in Fultigen. Some members of this branch seemed to have adopted later the citizenship of Burgdorf. The "von Löwenberg", citizen of Burgdorf and the noble branch von "Löwenberg" of the Canton of Jura and those, whom originate from Fultigen have died out. Only the much more numerous "Leuenberger" families, who have accompanied the noble ones did not die out with one exception: the peasant family "Leuenberger", who lived in the 16th century in Stäfa (Canton of Zurich). In one marriage register of the Canton of Zurich, (16th century) a Hans Löwenberg, a nobleman, i.e. a lord, whose family line died out.

The original documentable ancestor from a community of peasants

Searching for the origin of a documentable family name where individual names were not known, requires an understanding of how names were used in the Middle Ages before there were records of the peasantry. Persons, with no names were identified by the name of castles, the geographic estates, and/or the noble family to whom peasants owed their allegiance and livelihood. Thus, they would be known as Lowenbergers or Leuenbergers approximating the way people today may be identified as Clevelanders or New Yorkers.

In the European Medieval period (5th - 15th centuries) it was thought that human society consisted of three orders: those who pray, those who fight, and those who labor. **8** The first order was the clergy and the second order were those who fought, e.g. the knights. The largest order were laborers who were diversified into peasants, skilled artisans, merchants, with peasants being the largest group. Leuenbergers came from the peasant class. Among families, in the European Middle Ages, only the clergy and members of the nobility had names, usually a first name complemented with the name of the site adjoining a wooden castle.

Alfred Havercamp in his study of medieval Germany noted that

...nobles were more and more mentioned in the sources by the name of a castle, as well as by their first name. ... the castle began to be established as the center and a characteristic of the noble family. ...the nobility began to be named after their castles. **9**

Peasants who settled in Western Switzerland from 1000-1200 were identified by the name of the noble family under whom they served, and from whom they received their protection, in this case von Löwenberg. This interpretation is supported by Prof. Stefan Sonderegger.**10** University of Zurich and by Prof. Werner Meyer, in his book, *Die Löwenburg*. He wrote that the noble family "von Löwenberg" existed along with the peasants with the surname "Leuenberger". They supported the knights with food, and acquired the name Lowenberger from the knights when surnames started to be used (1000-1200 A.D.).**11**

The "von Löwenberg" knights were accompanied by peasants, when they were going to the forested undeveloped western area of Switzerland probably at the end of the 12th century, Sonderegger is convinced that the name Löwenberger, respectively Leuenberger, was used by the peasant families, who were protected by the von Löwenberg knights. **12**

The name of Leuenberg is associated with the noble Swiss family owning a castle with that name. The name is located at 4 different sites: two castles in Eastern Switzerland (Zuzwil, Canton St. Gallen; Schluens Canton Grisons) and two castles in Western Switzerland close to the city of Murten in the Jura Mountain region of the Swiss Alps. **13**

A distinctive feature in the way names were used, is a coat of arms fashioned after the name of the ruling noble family of the estate. In this case the Lowenberger, or Leuenberger, the family name is depicted by a red lion on a green mountain. The mountain lion symbolized strength and power as it was a fearsome animal that could prey on the livestock of farm families.

The mountain symbolized the Alpine region near where the feudal estate was located.



The coat of arms of the city of Murten shows a red lion on a green mountain meaning "Löwenberg". If the emblem is interpreted as a coat of arms, peasant families living under the protection of the castle "Löwenberg", went by that name. Further studies are needed, whether the noble family, which constructed the first wooden castle "Löwenberg" close to Murten, had the surname "von Löwenberg". At least the time frame and the geographical region can be identified.

Conclusion

It is apparent that the search for an originally documentable ancestor is inextricably related to how names were used to designate a castle, a coat of arms, a brotherhood of knights, and the peasants who belonged to the castle all which bore the same name. It was not until about 1550 that the Church began to keep records of persons in their parishes.

The search for the documentable origins of a family in Switzerland is possible if sources can be found that predate the recording of births, marriages and deaths by the Church. It is necessary to study the cultural history of people living in the Medieval period (or Middle Ages) from the 5th to the 15th centuries. Records of names may be found in financial or transactional documents or, if illiterate, may be associated with the name of a castle or a community of knights.

It is important to know how the use and importance of names emerged so that persons and their families fit into their cultural and political contexts.

Further research into the archives of the universities and institutions in Switzerland where ancient records are maintained is needed. Understanding of historic texts and language of early German would be required.

Footnotes

1 – Peasant defined: was a member of a traditional class of farmers, either laborers or owners of small farms in the feudalism of the Middle Ages (5th -15th centuries). They were divided into three classes based on their personal status: slave, serf, and free tenant. (source: Wikipedia)

2 - Jakob Leuenberger is the father of Bendicht Leuenberger, who was baptized in the church of Affoltern, Affoltern i.e. in 1624. The name of the mother of Bendicht is known and validated. The marriage of Jakob L. with Barbly Jordi, which took place on 4 Feb. 1614 is known. Affoltern im Emmental is a [municipality](#) in the [district](#) of [Trachselwald](#) in the [canton](#) of [Bern](#) in [Switzerland](#). Details on Jakob can be found on-line at <http://www.query.sta.be.ch/suchinfo.aspx> - Urbar. Wangen 18, 109 (verso) 1631 in the Archive of the Canton of Bern, Switzerland.

3 – For further details on the DNA matches between Leuenbergers and Lybargers, email Hans Leuenberger at hans.leuenberger@ifiip.ch or John L. Lybarger at johnlybarger64@gmail.com.

4 - For the complex details, contact Hans Leuenberger at hans.leuenberger@ifiip.ch.

5- *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*. www.his-dhs-dss.ch/d/english
www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland.

6 – See Wikipedia, Germanic Tribes

7 – Fontes Rerum Bernensium (FRB) – official source of historical documents related to the archives of the Canton of Bern, Switzerland. Accessible online from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Library. A document in Latin certifies the 1257 existence of Jordanus de Lowenberch. It was originally in the Staatsarchiv At Bern. Leuenberger, Hans. *Ancestor List*.2015. Accessible via hans.leuenberger@ifip.ch. Jordanus de Lowenberch's name is found on pg. 457 a 1257 Burgdorf Switzerland FRB document (in Latin)where his name appears as a witness.

8 -www.medievalists.net/2016/01/those-who-pray-those-who-work-those-who-fight/.

9 – Havercamp, Alfred. *Medieval Germany 1056-1273*. Oxford University Press 1984. Pg. 200.

10 - Sonderegger, Stefan. Private communication (Hans Leuenberger, 1980) University of Zurich.

11 -- Meyer, Werner, *Die Löwenburg im Berner Jura, Geschichte der Burg und ihrer Bewohner*, Basel/Stuttgart 1968

12– Leuenberger, Hans. op.cit.

13 - For history and geography of Murten: Wikipedia.org

The authors

The authors' diverse backgrounds helped make this research possible. First, is Hans Leuenberger, formerly residing at Pfeffingen (Basel country), Switzerland. As professor emeritus in pharmaceutical technology, he retired in Florida in 2016 to be with his son and family. He has published three papers for the Yearbook of the Swiss Society for Genealogical Studies.

He was, for many years, the president of the Genealogical Heraldic Society of Basel. From 1977-1984, he was Vice President of the Swiss Society for Genealogical Studies. The material for this article was mostly written by him. The trustees of the Lybarger Memorial Association (LMA) voted to make the recipient of the Lybarger Memorial Association in 2018. He provided most of the content of this article.

Lee Hartshorne Lybarger provided some of the background information and the alternative perspective of the origins of Jacob Leuenberger. Lee brings an historical and a social science perspective to the results of the research findings. He was a founder of the Lybarger Memorial Association in 1984; the editor of the LMA newsletter for 30 years. He co-authored with John Lybarger the 1997 and 2000 editions of *The Lybarger Descendants*. He received the Distinguished Service Award in 2015.

