



Floor Plan of Weavers Church I.

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MORE ON THE BURKHOLDERS

Sheldon "Pete" Burkholder of 7620 Gladwell Ln., Harrisonburg, VA (Phone: 867-9287) has long been interested about his ancestry on the Burkholder side. He compiled his research in a piece entitled "PETER BURKHOLDER – Three Family Questions."

Taking the question approach he collected information to answer questions that intrigued him over a period of years from the sources he uncovered. With very slight editing we have tried in this issue to present his findings.

As editor of *SMH* I have not pursued that family line, so we present what Pete has to offer. If someone has more publishable information, or corrections or additions to what Pete presents in this issue, let us know what you have. I can be contacted at lehmanj@myvmrc.net or called at 437-4326.

By now most readers should be aware of the book that Elwood E. Yoder published on the Martin Burkholder letters, entitled *The Bishop's Letters: The Writings, Life, and Times of Virginia Mennonite Bishop Martin Burkholder, 1817-1860*. Harrisonburg: Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, 2011. 147 pages, illustrated.

That letter collection resides in the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives, who leases space from EMU. Harold Huber is the archivist for the VA collection. Harold generally has hours on Mondays and Fridays if you should wish to contact Harold and/or see the letters. It is a group of letters **TO** Martin Burkholder, and only has several letters written by Martin. The letters throw a good bit of light on the Martin Burkholder era of the 1840s-50s.

PETER BURKHOLDER - Three Family Questions

By Sheldon "Pete" Burkholder

From an early age I was treated with several (Peter) Burkholder traditions, actually assumptions that made it into the family histories and thence to cousin Nancy Hess' volume, *BY THE GRACE OF GOD*.

Three of these assumptions were: [1] that the widow Burkhalter, sometimes called Elizabeth, or Christine, sailed from Rotterdam with her six children after the untimely death of her husband, either enroute or shortly before they were to leave Switzerland; [2] that Peter I (the Immigrant) passed while visiting his aged mother in Lancaster Co., PA, and was buried there in 1799; [3] that Peter II (the Bishop) purchased the "Michael Miller" plantation (now the Fitzgerald "Inn By the Side of the Road") just west of Harrisonburg and lived there, ministering to the Burkholder Church that met in his home for Sunday services.

Over the several years that I have been doing my own family research and reading of others' discoveries, especially in Switzerland and Pennsylvania, it has become most obvious that these three assumptions are at best partly mistaken, and in the case of the last, false.

These are the three Burkholder questions for which I have sought answers:

- I. Who were the immigrants Burkholder?
- II. When did Peter I pass, and is he buried at Groffdale Cemetery, PA

III. Did Peter II ever own the Fitzgerald (“Burkholder Church”) property?

The first two pieces of documented evidence regarding the immigrant family surfaced at about the same time, at least for me. Delbert Gratz had been involved in Swiss Burkhalter family research for a time when he came upon a tax census document in the French-speaking part of Switzerland called the Jura Mountains, in the town of Courtelary. Dated 1745, and written in French, it describes a family of immigrants who had lived there for a time, Anabaptist tenants in La Hutte for 17 years. The family included father Ulrich of Ruderswil, Canton Berne, 45 years, wife Barbli 40 years, and five children, Ulrich 8, Pierre 2, Barbes 12, Anna 8, and Elizabeth 5.¹

The second corroborating piece appeared somewhat serendipitously to Mennonite historian Amos Hoover. He was able to purchase a *Martyrs Mirror* that had belonged to immigrant Christian Burkholder, who stayed in Lancaster and was later chosen a minister and bishop. On a leaf of Christian’s *Mirror*, he had written the record of his siblings in birth order. They were 1734 barbara burkolteri, 1735 Ana burkhaltry, 1737 Uli burkolter, 1740 Olsbet burkolter, 1743 beter burkolter, and 1746 Chrystli burkhalter.²

The similarity of these two distinct lists make it certain that this was the immigrant family, Ulrich and Barbli of Ruderswil, and children, Barbara, Anna, Ulrich, Elizabeth, Peter and Christian.

¹ Delbert Gratz, 1475 Tax Record (written in French), Courtelary, SW.

² Amos Hoover, family newsletter, “Who were the Immigrants,” 2001.

Gratz and others followed the lead back to Ruderswil and found birth and property records detailing a Burkhalter family who lived in the *Burkhalten* community near Reugsbach, then branched to a property called Steinberg, at Ruderswil. Ulrich's (born 1700) direct ancestors were Benedict (born 1661), and Anna, and Joseph (born 1628) and Elizabeth.³

Peter Burkholder I (the Immigrant) first purchased property in Virginia in 1788, some 500 acres near Broadway, VA, from Wolfrey Kester. Though we're not certain when he moved his family, he received a Patent on 500 acres in 1800. He was subsequently taxed by the county of Rockingham each year on his 555 (sometimes 543) acres, until in 1807, we find land deeds to sons Henry and Peter, recorded in Rockingham County Minute Book (RCMB) 1807.⁴

Finally by 1810 the transactions are complete, with Henry and Peter, "jun," taxed on large tracts, and Peter, "Sr," having 60 acres in his name.⁵ In *Minute Book* 1813 an "appraisement" of the estate of Peter Burkholder is noted,⁶ and in 1812 a "nuncupative will" from Lancaster is offered by sons Peter and David and recorded in Rockingham County, VA.⁷ Finally a Peter Burkholder settlement is recorded in *Minute Book* 1813,⁸ and a burned scrap can be viewed in the Richmond Historical Library.⁹

³Gratz, et al., copies of Burkhalter birth records (Pete Burkholder Collection).

⁴ RCMB 01: p. 172, Tues., 16 June, 1807.

⁵ Rock. Co. Tax Book 1, 1810, pp. 289, 290.

⁶ RCMB 01: pg. 352, Tues., 16 Mar., 1813 and Reel 668, p. 126, 1811, Richmond Hist. Library.

⁷ RCMB 01: pg. 315, 316, Tues., 17 Nov., 1812, and Will copy (EMU Library) d. 15 May, 1813.

⁸ RCMB 01: pg. 435, 19 Tues., Oct., 1813.

⁹ Wills and Admin. 1810-1814, Richmond Hist. Library, Reel 668, screen 133.

What happened during these dozen years? Peter I apparently died in Lancaster County, PA, as seen by the (oral) will accepted there, but when? If he died on a 1799 trip (his wife had died and was buried at Trissels Mennonite Church in 1798 in VA) all these legal and binding transactions and tax payments were made in the name of a dead man, and recognized by Rockingham County. But if he lived on in PA, or in VA, after 1799, why is his death recorded at Groffdale (PA) Church in that year (“buried beside his mother”)?¹⁰ Or if he is not buried there, who is? Taken all together, we can propose that he likely died between the 1807 sale of properties to his sons, and the court-accepted appraisal in 1811. But that doesn’t satisfy all the questions.

Peter (II) Burkholder was made a bishop of the Virginia church following the death of Henry Shank. Tradition has him starting and preaching in the Burkholder Church just west of Harrisonburg, first in his home and later in the newly built Weavers Church (named after the first sexton Peter Weaver) near his home. But the mansion and property where he is said to have lived and held services was never deeded in his name. It was the Michael Miller property, 210_ acres at “head of Cooks Creek,” purchased at auction in 1818 by Samuel Shank, and transferred to nephew Jacob Shank, a Miller son-in-law (Frances Miller) and legal trustee, in 1819. It is recorded as sold to Jacob’s son-in-law John B. Wenger about 1840. Thence, et cetera, et cetera, and finally to the present Fitzgeralds.¹¹

But never to Peter Burkholder.

¹⁰ Nancy Hess, *By the Grace of God*, pg. 19.

¹¹ BDB 3: p. 509 Michael Miller, dce’d to Sam’l Shank, 1817; then BDB 4: p. 209, Saml to Jacob Shank, 1818.

Jacob and Fanny Shank donated land for the Weavers Church in 1828 in the name of trustees Peter Burkholder, Frederick Rhodes and Abraham Niswander.¹² Jacob and Maggie (2nd wife) donated more land later, and Jacob's son-in-law John Wenger as well, possibly for burial grounds and/or property across the Rawley Pike for a new church building.¹³

Peter (II) Burkholder paid taxes, and presumably lived on 245 and 108 acres along Cedar Run, part of the immigrant Peter's holding, in 1817.¹⁴ The next year, 1818, he paid tax on 203 acres at "hd of Cooks Creek," with the tax book recording that the property was by "Philip Firebaugh." (Firebaugh was taxed on the same 203 A in 1817.)¹⁵

The Firebaugh property is possibly the same as a 200 acre patent surveyed in 1796 for John Pence and transferred by deed to Philip Firebaugh.^{15a}

The Peter Burkholder acreage was left by will,¹⁶ undivided, to sons David and Martin. David then sold his half to Martin, who held 254 acres and his "plantation" in 1857.¹⁷ He later sold portions, including one to Daniel Garber which ran south to the meeting house later called Garber's Church.

¹² BDB 8: p. 387, Jacob and Franny Shank to Weavers Ch. Trustees, 1828.

¹³ BDB 10: p. 131, and BDB 23: p. 113.

¹⁴ RC Tax Book 2. 1817: p. 33.

¹⁵ RC Tax Bk 3: p. 31, 1818, & p. 267, 1817

^{15a} RCMB 09, March 1818: p. 200 "Firebaugh to P Burkholder," Survey Bk A173, 1796 & BDB 1: p. 481, 1791.

¹⁶ Rock. Co. Wills, etc. 1839 will

¹⁷ BDB 23: p. 328, David and Anna Burkholder to Martin, 1851.

Martin's "half" went to son Caleb (called "Martin Burkholder, dec'd, estate . . . adjoins David Wenger"), where he farmed with wife Sophia. That did not include an 8 acre "dower" where Rebecca Burkholder lived and then sold in 1882 to neighbor John Wenger.¹⁸ Peter's tax bill in 1839 (one year after Martin wed Rebecca Shank, Nov., 1838) included \$150 for a "new house," likely the daddy house he (Peter) mentioned building in his will for he and Rebecca for life.¹⁹

Bishop Peter Burkholder never owned the "Burkholder church" house, now called "Inn By The Side of the Road." A handwritten scrap surfaced among my father Warren's papers, from Grandfather Samuel M. Burkholder, detailing the sequence of owners of the Shank / Miller property.²⁰ Bishop Peter did buy Cooks Creek property in 1818 and lived there until his death. Since the Martin Burkholder estate was said to adjoin David Wenger (who inherited his father John B. Wenger's farm), we can assume that Peter's property also adjoined that of Jacob Shank, the "Burkholder Church" meeting place.

On another note, Martin Burkholder is said to have married his neighbor Rebecca Shank, from Broadway. But given their birthdays (Martin, 1817, and Rebecca, 1821) relative to an 1818 move, and that her father Samuel had properties near Cooks Creek, it seems more likely that her family lived for a short time near the Burkholders (possibly the "dower" tract) before moving to a farm just south of Broadway.

¹⁸ Burned Deed Book (BDB) 22: pp. 65,66, and BDB 29: p. 167, 1886.

¹⁹ Rock. Co. Wills and Admin., 1839 Peter Burkholder will., & Tax Bk, 1839: p. 5.

²⁰ Pete Burkholder Collection & PP "3 Questions," 2011.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING:

Mark Nov. 10, 2012 in your date book. On that Saturday morning at 9:30 a.m. the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians have their annual meeting at VMRC Village Hall. Come and hear our speaker.

Editor's note:

We are indebted to Sheldon "Pete" Burkholder for working through all the details of Rockingham County land and deed records, minute books, wills, and everything else he could put his hands on that throws light on this complex subject, then putting together what seems logical with regard to the ownership and involvement of Burkholder family members.

Obviously, it was a labor of love by someone who knows family genealogy and searching specialized records and how they contribute to putting some clarity and connections to the subject.

We welcome comments from anyone else who has worked through the details involving land, deed, survey books and other records, even including a search through Burnt Deed records. If someone has questions regarding any of the above details, contact Sheldon "Pete" Burkholder directly,

He can be reached by phone at 867-9287 or by email at pburky@msn.com

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