

# CLAUS OBLINGER

A SWISS PIONEER

1683 – 1730

with ties to Steiner, Farni, and Murer Swiss families

REVISED EDITION, 2019

by

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an 8<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of Claus

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## REVISIONS to the ORIGINAL EDITION

### A DIFFERENT NICLAUS OPPLIGER

Since writing the original edition of this book in 2015 with my brother and a friend, new information has come to light which has encouraged me to revise the original edition in order to correct mistakes, offer a few different interpretations of the known facts, and present new research which now more positively identifies a different Niclaus Oppliger, born not in 1678, but in 1683 as being Claus Oblinger before his emigration to America.

To explain, the Niclaus Oppliger b. 1678 whom we believed to be Claus Oblinger prior to his emigration, was found by genealogist Richard Warren Davis to have died in 1745 in Switzerland. The author is greatly indebted to him for finding the church record verifying that and providing aid in a renewed search for the elusive Swiss-born Claus. Previously Mr. Davis had done extensive research and writings on Mennonite families from Germany and Switzerland who emigrated here in the late 1600s and early 1700s. With his help a different Niclaus Oppliger was found with strong family ties to our Claus Oblinger that here reveal him undoubtedly to be the true Claus Oblinger. The process of discovering these family connections are explained in Part Three of this revised version.

### THE NAME OF CLAUS' WIFE

The Niclaus Oppliger cited in our original edition created an unresolved problem. Rinkenbach, Heckler and even Claus' memorial gravestone erected by the Oplinger Family Association in 1963 all claim his wife's name was Elizabeth, yet the name of his widow in the final settlement of his estate is given as Katherine (See Fig. 6D, p. 15). With our new Niclaus, this discrepancy is resolved. The Niclaus we now believe to be Claus was indeed married to a Cathrin in 1706.

### 2. THE DATE OF THE SETTLEMENT OF CLAUS' ESTATE

We now realize that the final settlement of Claus' estate was not completed in 1739 when his farm was sold, but in 1750, a full twenty years after his death. This long delay is still unexplained. Note the signing date of the final settlement (Fig. 6D, p. 15).

### 3. CLALUS' RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

We now judge there to be stronger evidence that especially after his immigration, Claus was a Mennonite and not a Dunkard. We also believe it is possible that he never was a member of the Brethren sect in spite of the possibility that he spent time at Schwarzenau and that he was buried in what later became a Dunkard cemetery.

--- Willard L. Oplinger

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Evidence is presented here that a Niclaus Oppliger b. 1683 in Süderen, Bern Canton, Switzerland, was the Claus “Oblinger” who emigrated with his family to Pennsylvania in the late 1720s, thus solving a nearly three-century enigma as to the place of his European origin.

## BACKGROUND

John D. Watkins was the first family historian to collect information and write specifically about Claus Oblinger and his family. His work was done mostly in the 1930s and 40s.<sup>1</sup> The most complete and accurate history of the Oblinger-Oplinger-Uplinger family was written in 1964 by Wm. H. Rinkenbach.<sup>2</sup> Many people having those surnames are descended from one person, a Claus Oblinger, who came to America in the 1720s. Rinkenbach collected his information through genealogical research as well as by attending many family reunions during the 1940s and 50s. His focus, however, was not on Claus himself, but rather on documenting and recording the family trees of Claus’ descendants up until the mid-twentieth century.

Rinkenbach was able to ascertain very little of Claus’ history prior to his arrival here. He and others do offer suggestions as to where Claus might have come from, but they were only guesses based on place names that seem very loosely similar to the spelling of the Oblinger surname. The single previous clue to Claus’ past life was the inscription on the tombstone of his youngest child, Anna, who died in 1804, seventy-four years after Claus’ death (see Appendix II). Anna’s gravestone claims that she was born in Schwarzena[u], Germany. And Rinkenbach therefore assumed that Claus was also born somewhere in Germany. We now know he was from Switzerland, and his surname was derived from the village of Oppligen, very close to Oberdiessbach in the Bern Canton. In church records as early as the 1600s from parishes such as Röthenbach, but also others in that general vicinity, one finds many instances of the surname “Oppliger,” which identified such a person as being from a family originally from Oppligen. The name is also occasionally written as Opliger, Obliger, Opplinger, and Oplinger. For Claus, his surname after emigrating to Pennsylvania became Oblieger in his will, and then later it had the variant spellings of Oblinger, Uplinger, and Oplinger for his descendants in their new country, America.

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Watkins, *Historical and Genealogical Sketch of the Oplinger Family*.

<sup>2</sup> Wm H. Rinkenbach, *History of the Oblinger-Oplinger-Uplinger Family*.

## PART ONE: THE PENNSYLVANIA “CLAUS OBLINGER”

Claus came to America in the late 1720s, arriving in Philadelphia with his wife, Catherine, two sons, Nicholas and Christian, and three daughters, Catharine, Maria, and Anna.<sup>3</sup> Until now, the date and place of his birth were not known. Rinkenbach suggested his date of birth as 1685, but that was only an estimate.

Family historians have speculated that Claus might have come from various places in Germany with names such as Öhringen, Überlingen, an area near the arm of the Lake of Constance called the Überleger See, or from Oberlechen in Austria. These were all unsubstantiated guesses, and not very believable since they were all Catholic areas and Claus, from all indications, was from Anabaptist ancestors. It is clear however, that he came from a Germanic-speaking area and that probably he did live somewhere in Germany for a time before he emigrated to Pennsylvania.

Interestingly, although Claus is now most often referred to as Claus “Oblinger,” it is evident his surname was never spelled as “Oblinger” during his lifetime. Claus was not able to write his name and marked his will with an “O.”<sup>4</sup> Whoever wrote his name had to spell it as best he could according to the pronunciation as Claus and members of his family spoke it. His surname was phonetically spelled as “Oblieger” in his will (3 August 1730) (Figs. 3 & 4) and the Final Account of his estate (January, 1750) (Fig. 6D), and as “Ubliger” on the inventory of his estate (8 October 1730) (see Fig.5). These early spellings in America are indicative of Claus’ own voice coming down to us almost three hundred years later, as evidence of how his name was actually pronounced. Notice how closely these match the pronunciation of the Swiss surname, “Oppliger,” an important clue to his Swiss origin.<sup>5</sup>

Beginning in the late 1730s and early 1740s, substantial numbers of educated pastors and schoolteachers began arriving from Germany to serve the German and Swiss immigrants in Pennsylvania. They brought with them the literary language called “Standard German,” preaching it as the source of all “correct” grammar, pronunciation, and spelling of German words -- including family names. Concurrently, it was becoming increasingly imperative that names of German and Swiss people become readable and pronounceable by the English-speakers in Pennsylvania. By the time of the second generation of Claus’ descendants in America in the 1740s, multiple options were available for the spelling and pronunciation of the family’s surname. Eventually Oblinger, Oplinger, and Uplinger became the common spellings.

The area where Claus and his family settled, called Indian Creek, was some twenty miles northwest of Philadelphia in what are now Franconia and Lower Salford Townships, in the part

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<sup>3</sup> Rinkenbach; page 7.

<sup>4</sup> Claus Oblieger’s will (see Figs. 3 & 4).

<sup>5</sup> These early phonetic spellings of his surname provide a clue to Claus’s Swiss origin, because the ending “-iger” in Oppliger is uniquely Swiss-German; in Standard German the endings of similar surnames are typically spelled with an “n” preceding the “ger.” Examples: “Kissinger,” “Geisinger,” and “Behringer”

of Philadelphia County that in 1784 split off as Montgomery County. The following extract from local histories is descriptive of this area when first settled<sup>6</sup>:

The first residents had immigrated from Germany, Alsace, Switzerland, and Holland, with the overwhelming majority being German. Many were Mennonites, attracted by the religious freedom they found here. As most of these settlers came from an agricultural background, farming was their means of livelihood. Due to their ancestry, German (or one of its several dialects) was the language of choice for the larger number of them. Local residents and church congregations built their own one-room schoolhouses and hired German or "Pennsylvania-Dutch" speaking teachers. Total transition to an English-speaking culture was slow and many of the area continued to speak Pennsylvania Dutch as their primary language into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Claus bought a farm of 155 acres there in November 1729.<sup>7</sup> It was located in Franconia Township, on the boundary line with Lower Salford Township (and facing on what is now Schoolhouse Road in Franconia Township).<sup>8</sup> This became his family's home plantation. Claus did not live very long to enjoy the property he purchased. He made his will nine months later on August 3, 1730.<sup>9</sup> He died two months after that in early October, 1730<sup>10</sup> and was buried on his farm.

In his will Claus designated three neighbors as executors of his estate and as legal representatives of his wife and children. They were Henry Funck, Christian Allebach, and Conrad Reiff. He stipulated that his plantation not be sold, however, until his youngest child then age 6, attained the age of 15.<sup>11</sup>

After Claus' death, the family's interests were at first administered by the appointed executors.<sup>12</sup> However five years later, when Nicholas Jr. had reached his majority, he evidently took over as head of the household. In 1734 this Nicholas "Uplinger" (Jr.) obtained a warrant for some vacant land adjoining their plantation, had it surveyed for 34 acres, and in 1735 obtained a patent for it. And in 1736, acting as proprietor of the original plantation, Nicolas began paying annual rent to the trustees for his use of the property, and in turn was paid a fee for planting it.

After the farm was sold in 1739 Claus' widow, Catherine, and those children not yet married, including at least Anna and Christian, perhaps lived with Nicholas Jr. on his patented land. By the final settlement of Claus' estate in 1750 both Nicholas Jr. and the three daughters were married.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.franconiatownship.org/home/history.aspx](http://www.franconiatownship.org/home/history.aspx) and [www.lowersalfordtownship.org/history/](http://www.lowersalfordtownship.org/history/)

<sup>7</sup> J. C. Munro, p. 36. Claus and a neighbor bought their adjoining properties on the same day, but due to a mix-up, Claus received the deed for his neighbor's 184 acres, while the neighbor received title to Claus's 155 acres; however, the next year they officially swapped deeds, and Claus ended up with the 155-acre deed for the property where he and his family actually lived. There was no need to re-survey properties, only to switch deeds. Both parties knew the boundaries of their properties.

<sup>8</sup> J. W. Munro, *18<sup>th</sup> Century Subdivisions*, a map in the book cited in footnote 11 above.

<sup>9</sup> Claus Oblieger's will (see Figs. 3 and 4).

<sup>10</sup> Inventory of the estate of Claus "Ubliger," 8 October, 1730 (see Fig. 5)

<sup>11</sup> This youngest child would have been daughter Anna, who according to her gravestone was born in 1724.

<sup>12</sup> Final Account of Claus Oblieger's estate, 1750 (see Figs. 6A-6B).

Christian had bought land in Lancaster County in 1748 and probably had moved there in that year. What happened to the widow Catherine is not known.



Fig. 1, The grave of Claus “Oblinger”<sup>13</sup>

The small fieldstone on left is the original gravestone with C.O. inscribed. By the nineteenth century, the small stone had sunk into the ground. After it was unearthed, the modern gravestone was placed in 1962 by the Oblinger-Oplinger-Uplinger Family Association. Note Peter Becker’s gravestone in left background.

The inscription on the 1962 memorial gravestone for Claus shown here reads: “THE FOREFATHER CLAUS OBLINGER ca. 1685 – 1730 A GERMAN BAPTIST REFUGEE HE EMIGRATED IN 1724 WITH WIFE ELIZABETH AND FIVE CHILDREN FROM SCHWARZERNAU, KREIS WITTGENSTEIN, HESSE”

I propose changes to the above inscription including that Claus was born 1683, that he was a Mennonite, and that his wife was named Cathrin, as is claimed in the final settlement papers of his estate in 1750.

This field on his farm later became a Dunkard cemetery but not until sometime after 1758 when Peter Becker was buried there. Peter had been the first Brethren preacher in America.

<sup>13</sup> [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com), under Harley Cemetery, Harleysville, PA.

No personal information such as letters, family Bibles, or any descriptions of Claus' daily life have been found. The only documents concerning Claus presently known to have survived are included on the following pages :

- a. The will of Claus "Oblieger," witnessed on August 3, 1730
- b. Inventory and Appraisal of the Estate of Claus "Ubliger," 8 October, 1730
- c. Final Account of the Estate of Claus "Oblieger," 12 January 1750

In addition, the following documents mentioning Claus have been variously reported in the past, however they cannot be found today:

- a. Rinkenbach reported that the name Nicholas Oblinger was included on a petition in 1727 for the opening of the Morris Road in Indian Creek.<sup>14</sup>
- b. Munro reported that Claus purchased from James Steele on November 13, 1729, 155 acres of land in (now) Franconia Township.<sup>15</sup>
- c. Both Heckler and Monro mention the deed of sale of Claus' plantation by the executors of his estate in 1739.<sup>16</sup>

Claus and his family appear to have been comfortably well off. He had enough money to buy his land in 1729, and the value of his estate when distributed in 1750 was, after expenses, some 324 Pounds.<sup>17</sup> This was a relatively substantial amount for immigrants of that time, suggesting that his primary motive in undertaking the great risks of emigration to America was to escape religious persecution rather than to escape poverty.



Another view of the field where Claus was buried which later became a Dunkard cemetery. The Klein Meeting House in the background was built in 1843.

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<sup>14</sup>No such petition can be found either in the Pennsylvania state archives or the Philadelphia City archives. The "Souderton Independent" of July 7, 1933, that Rinkenbach cited in *History of Franconia Township* as the referenced source for this petition, turns out to be an incorrect citation.

<sup>15</sup>No such deed is registered in the land records of either the Philadelphia Archives or the Register of Deeds of either Philadelphia County or Montgomery County.

<sup>16</sup>In preparing Heckler's *History of Harleysville and Lower Salford*, and also Munro's *18<sup>th</sup>-Century Sub-divisions*, one suspects that the respective authors must have had access to all the land records, including the actual deeds of purchase and sale of Claus's property. Heckler claimed that "all the sons, daughters, heirs and legatees signed the release and grant." But, inexplicably, these deeds cannot be found today either at the Philadelphia City archives or the Pennsylvania state archives in Harrisburg, nor at the Register of Deeds of Montgomery County.

<sup>17</sup>Final account of Claus Oblieger's estate, 1750 (see Fig. 6D).



I<sup>st</sup>  
 I<sup>st</sup> out of class  
 obligate  
 it. in. in. in.

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I the hereunder written acknowledge before Witneses  
 on the hereunder ~~written~~ day of the date hereof ~  
 That this is my Last Will or Testament, That after  
 my Departure or Decease all & singular my goods ~  
 what may be found with the Land & Cattles: to wit  
 all what is there shall ~~be~~ be ordered & parted ~  
 Firstly all Debts shall be paid, And then of the  
 Residue my wife shall have the third part or one  
 third of all what is left, & the remainder thereof  
 shall be parted among my five Children that are yet  
 in being on this manner & form that one shall have  
 so much as the other, or Divide the same Equally But  
 not before my youngest Child is fifteen years old; which  
 is now Six years old. Further it is my will Counsel  
 & desire that Henry Funck Christian Aldebacher and  
 Conrad Heif shall be Gardians or Executors over my  
 wife, Children, & all the goods which I have left behind  
 And it is my prayer & desire that they shall take so much  
 care for the same as possible they can, And if they find it  
 good & beneficial; to sell my plantation, if my wife &  
 Children cannot manage the same, Till the time that  
 they should Divide, Dated the 3<sup>d</sup> day of August 1730.

Witneses: Jacob Funck }  
 Martin Hauser }  
 Samuel Meier }  
 Christian Stauffer }

Claus Oblieger  
 his  
 mark

This is a true translation of the so Claus Oblieger  
 his last will & testament written in High Dutch  
 and translated in to English  
 By Henry Pastorius

Fig. 4, The English translation of Claus "Oblieger's" will, 1730

(This Inventory made the Eighth Day of October 1730 on all the Real & personal Estate of Claus Ubliger late of Sulford in the County of Philadelphia & Province of Pennsylvania Deceased as taken Appraised & Comprized by us whose names are hereunto subscribed)

	Livings	£	s	d
Inventory of the 3 Decy wearing Cloaths	3	16	0	
(Ibid) Books	1	6	0	
Beds & Beddings	12	10	0	
Flax & Tow pieces	2	8	0	
Bags	1	4	0	
All the pen's	1	2	0	
Iron pans & Iron ladles	1	1	0	
6 Brass Kells - small & great	5	0	0	
3 Iron pots	1	0	0	
Carpenter's Tools	1	0	0	
Chests	2	0	0	
Spinning wheels	0	10	0	
Yarn	1	0	0	
Iron Chains	2	6	0	
plow & plow Irons	0	15	0	
Forks & Dung hooks & Haws	0	15	0	
without Iron	1	10	0	
waggon & the appurtenances thereof	14	0	0	
Two Horses - mare & Colt	6	0	0	
3 milking Cows	5	0	0	
4 Heifers 2 years old	3	0	0	
3 year lings	1	0	0	
2 Spring Calves	1	10	0	
Hogs	8	0	0	
60 Bushels of wheat	1	0	0	
2 Saddles	1	0	0	
2 Guns	1	0	0	
Carriage	79	13	0	

Fig. 5, Inventory of Claus "Ubliger's" estate, 8 Oct 1730.



**The Account of Henry Funck one of the Surviving Executors of the Last Will and Testament of the said Claus Oblieger deceased Christian Minister another of the last being deceased, & I was the said another of them being now Absent I as well of all and singular still good Chattels, Rights and Credits which were of the said Deceased which came to the Hand of the said Accountant, as of all and Every the Payments and Disbursements made out of the same are as follows.**

**Impri'd Dr L.D. Item**

**The said Accountant charges himself with all and singular the said Good Rights, Chattels & Credits, as of the said Deceased & which came to the Hand of others. Accountant as mentioned in an Inventory Exhibited into and remaining in the Register Court Office at Philadelphia amounting to**

**At the as at a Public Sale**

**The Movable was sold for £ 98 = 1 = 11**

**And the said Sale for ... 196 = 0 = 0**

**In all £ 294 = 1 = 11**

**Which sum Exceeds the sum in the Inventory mentioned by one hundred**

**The said Accountant pay Allowance for the several Payments & Disbursements out of the same which are as follows**

**From the year 1730 to 1735**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 0 = 8 = 6**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 4 = 15 = 0**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 0 = 14 = 3**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 0 = 2 = 0**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 1 = 18 = 0**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 6 = 8 = 3**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 1 = 1 = 10**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 60 = 0 = 0**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 2 = 14 = 0**

**By Cash paid for the Office of the Deceased ... 11 = 0 = 0**

Fig. 6A, Final account of Claus "Oblieger's" estate, 12 Jan 1750 (first page)

<p> <i>Abundant charges him self also with the said sum of</i> </p>		<p> <i>35 A. of Land in West</i> </p>	<p> <i>6 5 0</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Monies received on acc<sup>t</sup> and as the Advance of the s<sup>d</sup> Estate during the Minority of the Children for the space of five years, until the Place was rented out</i> </p>		<p> <i>114 3 5</i> </p>	<p> <i>114 3 5</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Less all Particulars sold to the heirs of the s<sup>d</sup> Estate</i> </p>		<p> <i>82 1 10</i> </p>	<p> <i>82 1 10</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Two Horses &amp; Waggon &amp; Gears sold to N. S. for the son of</i> </p>		<p> <i>32 10 0</i> </p>	<p> <i>32 10 0</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Several Monies paid to Katherine the wife of the Deceased for</i> </p>		<p> <i>14 19 4</i> </p>	<p> <i>14 19 4</i> </p>
<p> <i>Carried over</i> </p>		<p> <i>47 3 13 1</i> </p>	<p> <i>47 3 13 1</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Cash paid to Sam. Knappe for Rent of Venue</i> </p>		<p> <i>0 18 0</i> </p>	<p> <i>0 18 0</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Cash paid to Isaac Klein for Rent for ditto</i> </p>		<p> <i>0 13 1</i> </p>	<p> <i>0 13 1</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Cash paid to John Johnson for Rent for ditto</i> </p>		<p> <i>0 5 0</i> </p>	<p> <i>0 5 0</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Cash paid to John Johnson for Rent for ditto</i> </p>		<p> <i>0 3 0</i> </p>	<p> <i>0 3 0</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Cash paid to John Johnson for Rent for ditto</i> </p>		<p> <i>14 9 6</i> </p>	<p> <i>14 9 6</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Cash paid to John Johnson for Rent for ditto</i> </p>		<p> <i>0 1 6</i> </p>	<p> <i>0 1 6</i> </p>
<p> <i>To Cash paid to John Johnson for Rent for ditto</i> </p>		<p> <i>0 2 0</i> </p>	<p> <i>0 2 0</i> </p>
<p> <i>Carried over</i> </p>		<p> <i>107 10 10</i> </p>	<p> <i>107 10 10</i> </p>

Fig. 6B, Final account of Claus "Oblieger's" estate, 12 Jan 1750 (second page)





## PART TWO: THE NICOLAUS “OBERLEGER” AT SCHWARZENAU

The original clue as to the possible whereabouts of Claus Oppliger’s family prior to emigrating to Pennsylvania is contained in the inscription on his daughter Anna’s gravestone: “born in 1724 at Schwartzena[u]” (See Appendix II). This reference apparently led historians to believe that Claus must have been born in Germany. But it offers further implications since Schwarzenau in the early 1700s was known as a refuge for religious dissidents.

By the late 1600s and early 1700s Mennonites who were descendants of early Anabaptists and who had survived severe persecution throughout Europe were concentrated in the Bern Canton,<sup>18</sup> particularly in the Emmenthal valley region. Sheriffs from the city of Bern were sent periodically through the canton looking for Mennonites.<sup>19</sup> Whereas a century earlier Bern Canton’s penalties for convicted Mennonites had included imprisonment, burning at the stake, drowning, and sentencing to row Venetian galleys, by the early 1700s these penalties had been ameliorated, largely in response to world opinion. But the penalties were still severe: loss of citizenship and permanent exile from Switzerland and if they attempted to return from exile, confiscation of their estates and adoption of their children by the Bern orphanage. Thousands of Mennonite families fled to the Jura mountains along the France-Switzerland border or to safer places in Germany and then later to Pennsylvania. Claus was undoubtedly of this group.

The town of Schwarzenau, which in 1700 was at most a hamlet, is a mile or so from the town of Berleburg, located 75 miles east of Cologne, Germany. In the 1700s Berleburg was the capital of a county called Sayn-Wittgenstein-Berleburg. At that time the county was an independent state of the German (Holy Roman) Empire. The Schwarzenau hamlet could have remained forever obscure and its name of no significance but for the fact that during the early 1700s the counts of Sayn-Wittgenstein invited religious dissidents to find refuge there and live with freedom of worship. It became well-known throughout Europe for that. And it was here also that a new religious sect which became known as the Schwarzenau Brethren was born in 1708, later known in America as the German Baptist Brethren, or Dunkards. Schwarzenau surely would have been a place for someone as either an Anabaptist or a Mennonite to have gone in order to escape persecution.

Schwarzernau records, reviewed by our request by a local German historian, verified that a “Nicolaus Oberleger” was listed as being there. In 1719 he was fined for selling an immature calf (see Fig. 7). The spelling as so listed may or may not be yet another phonetic spelling of the Swiss surname “Oppliger”. In the previous year, 1718, a “Nicolaus” with no surname given was listed on the same page with Alexander Mack, a leader of the Schwarzenau Brethren (Fig. 8), but with no definite significance. In summary, it is not certain that these listings refer to Anna’s father and could just as well have been applied to a different “Nicolaus” entirely. If one does not regard

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<sup>18</sup> Henry F. Eschelmann, *Annals of the Pioneer Swiss and Palatine Mennonites...and Other Early Germans of Eastern Pennsylvania*, Lancaster, PA, 1917, pages 124-150

<sup>19</sup> Eschelmann, page 51.



the “Nicolaus Oberleger” listing as being our Swiss Niclaus Oppliger, one is still faced with the mention on Anna’s tombstone that she was born in Schwarzenau in 1724.

Anna and her family, if indeed they were there, obviously were not natives of Schwarzenau, as suggested by Watkins, since until about 1700 nothing had been there except a chateau and a mill. Rather, those who settled there were merely transitory residents---religious dissidents seeking temporary refuge. However, historians seem to agree that by 1720, four years before Anna supposedly was born, all religious dissidents had been forcefully driven out of Schwarzenau and most of Germany. The Brethren emigrated for refuge to America in three groups: in 1719 from Krefeld, Germany, led by Peter Becker; in 1720 from Schwarzenau to Holland and from there in 1729 to Pennsylvania, led by Alexander Mack; and in 1733 a remnant, possibly from Switzerland, with Johannes Naase. Evidence shows that Niclaus and his family were not among any of these groups.<sup>20</sup>

Anna, who was at most, only two years old when she came to America, may not have known exactly when or where she was born. When she died in 1804, no close family members were nearby to aid her memory of family history. Perhaps it might be that her parents did live in Schwarzenau for a few years prior to her birth, but that she was actually born elsewhere or even at an earlier date.

In summary, the facts of the Schwarzenau connection and the date of Anna’s birth still seem to be unresolved. It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about them.

Rinkenbach, however, firmly believed that the “Nicolaus Oberleger” was indeed Claus and moreover concluded that Claus had joined the Schwarzenau Brethren and was a Dunkard during his time at Indian Creek. Traditionally, the Oplinger Family Association has long accepted that Claus and his family were German Baptist Brethren (called Dunkards in America) who had fled persecution in Europe. One can see how easily this assumption could have been made in view of the fact that Peter Becker was buried close to Claus’ grave in a field that had once been part of Claus’ farm and later became a Dunkard cemetery. Peter was the first German Baptist Brethren minister in America. He organized the first such congregation in Germantown, PA outside Philadelphia and preached there until he retired in 1745. He then moved from Germantown to Indian Creek to live with his daughter, Maria, and her husband, Rudolph Harley, who had purchased Claus’ former farm. Peter died in 1758, twenty-eight years after Claus died. There is no evidence that Peter and Claus ever knew one another. And it was even later that the field in which they both were buried became a Dunkard Cemetery.

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<sup>20</sup> In 1718, when Peter Becker’s group emigrated, Claus was still at Schwarzenau according to the records. In 1729, when Alexander Mack’s group emigrated, all male shipboard passengers’ names were being recorded on arrival at Philadelphia, and Claus’ name was not among them. By 1733, when Johannes Naas emigrated, Claus had already died.

### Was Claus a Dunkard or a Mennonite?

Actually, there was a strong similarity of beliefs between Dunkards and Mennonites and for our purposes, this question is not very pertinent. It may be in this early time that some did switch from one sect to the other, particularly in sparsely settled areas such as Indian Creek.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps Claus became a member of the new Brethren sect while in Schwarzenau, but there is no way of knowing that. Keep in mind that not all dissidents living at Schwarzenau joined the new Brethren sect. If we have the correct Niclaus, he was already from a family whose members for generations had held strong Anabaptist/"Täufer" or Mennonite beliefs. If he indeed ever was a Schwarzenau resident, he undoubtedly gravitated there because of those beliefs and the offer of protection there from religious persecution. On the other hand, there is evidence to believe that while living at Indian Creek, Claus thought of himself as a Mennonite rather than a Dunkard. The witnesses to his will (including his own third cousin) and the executors of his estate were all recent Mennonite immigrants. Most were of Swiss origin but had been forced out of the country and often lived in Germany for a generation or two before emigrating here. Mr. Davis supplies a bit of background for each:<sup>22</sup>

### Witnesses to Claus' Will

**Jacob Funck or Funk** (c. 1704-1756). He was a Mennonite who came to America probably from Richen, Baden, Germany. He died in Franconia Township. The family was exiled from Canton Zurich. He was the younger brother of Henry Funk, one of Claus' executors (see below).

**Samuel Meier** (c. 1711-1766). He was a Mennonite who died at Lower Salford Township. He was probably born at Langenzell, Baden, Germany. He was the son of Christian Meyer and brother of Elizabeth Meyer who married Nicholas Oblinger, Jr. His family was exiled from Canton Zurich.

**Christian Stauffer** (c. 1678-1735). He was a Mennonite and was Claus' third cousin. They may have immigrated together. He was born at Dirnstein, Bayern, Germany where his Anabaptist great-grandfather had gone after being exiled from Switzerland in 1671 with his wife, children and some grandchildren, a few months before he turned 90 years old.

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<sup>21</sup> An actual example is probably that of Jacob Kropf (Cropp or Krupp) who married Claus' daughter, Maria. He was with the group of Schwarzenau Brethren led by Alexander Mack who sailed for America in 1729 from Holland. He died in 1785 and was buried in the Salford Mennonite Cemetery in Harleysville.

<sup>22</sup> Davis, Richard Warren, [www.mennosearch.com](http://www.mennosearch.com), a paid subscription site.

### **Executors of Claus' Will:**

**Henry Funck or Funk** (c. 1694-1760) He was a Mennonite Bishop. He lived in Salford Township in 1734 and later died at Franconia Township. He married Anna Meyer, daughter of Christian Meyer. He is the brother of Jacob Funk, above. His family was exiled from Zurich, Switzerland and is said to have arrived in 1717.

**Christian Allebach** (1685-1746). He was a Mennonite. He came from Duhren, Baden to America.

**Conrad Reiff** (1706-1777) was not a Mennonite

### **The Children of Claus married Mennonites**

(with estimated dates of birth when indicated)

**Nicholas, Jr.** est.1712-1785 married Elizabeth Meyer, daughter of Christian Meyer, a Mennonite. In 1743 Nicholas Jr. traveled to Philadelphia with a group of Mennonites, the majority of which were from Franconia and Salford townships. This list includes Christian Meyer, his eventual father-in-law, and his son, Christian Meyer Jr., as well as Christian Allebach, Henry Hefflefinger, Jacob Krupp, Daniel Stauffer, Hans Reiff, etc. Almost all were Mennonites.

**Catherine** est.1714-1798 married Henry Hefflefinger, a Mennonite farmer. They settled in Vincent Township in Chester County, PA.

**Maria** 17 May 1719-1802 married Jacob Krupp in 1739. He arrived in August, 1729 on the ship "Allen," with a group, led by Alexander Mack, of Brethren who had been exiled earlier from Schwarenz to Holland. It is unclear if Jacob was a Brethren when he arrived, but he was buried in 1785 in the Salford Mennonite Cemetery.

**Christian** est.1721-1798 married Barbara Forney, daughter of a Mennonite family formerly from Steffisburg. More information on this family will follow.

**Anna** 1724-1804 was married by 1750 to a man named Jost, who has never been further identified. Later in life she became the second wife to a Bernhard Kuntz in Northampton County.

### **Mennonites/Amish/Brethren**

Early immigrants to Pennsylvania from Germany and Switzerland often had been known as Anabaptists in their home countries before joining more specific groups known as Mennonites, Amish or Brethren. In Pennsylvania they associated freely with one another and had similar views about baptism and bible doctrine. As an example, notice the footnote on the previous page about Jacob Kropf who came to America with Alexander Mack's group of Schwarzenau Brethren but when he died 56 years later, he was buried in a Mennonite graveyard.

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## PART THREE: THE SWISS NICLAUS “OPPLIGER”

### Religious Persecution in Switzerland

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century some people began objecting to the church requiring infant baptism. The movement gained strength with adherents being labeled as Anabaptists or “one who baptizes again.” In 17<sup>th</sup> century Switzerland, especially in the Bern canton, civil authorities began joining with the Reformed church to institute severe penalties upon the Anabaptists, even cases where they were beheaded! This is briefly described by Gottfried Fahrni,<sup>23</sup> a living Farni descendant and genealogist:

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a great number of families had left the Reformed church to join the Taufer/Anabaptist movement as they objected, among other things, to baptize children which was in their opinion contrary to the holy book. The Steffisburg area was one of the main centers for the Baptist faith, but the local church books indicate that many Taufer did not abandon the practice of infant baptism until they had fled the country. They were aware that to not baptize one's children was very severely punished. To belong to the Anabaptist/Baptist faith in those days was dangerous as the Reformed Church officials, with the complicity of the Bernese authorities, brutally persecuted the so-called “heretics.” Often their properties were confiscated before expulsion from the land.

And later:

With the growing influence of the Anabaptists, the Masters of Bern launched more virulent persecution campaigns as from 1670. It was officially declared that the Taufer “plague” should be removed from the land with nothing less than extermination. In an effort to locate as many Anabaptists as possible, Berne offered rewards to Taufer hunters. Many Baptist preachers were hunted down, then hanged or drowned in the river. Some adherents were sent to galley slavery in Italy. This resulted in a stream of refugees, forced to flee their land, and sailing down the Rhine river to the Palatinate and to Alsace, which were more tolerant towards religion.

Several leaders such as Menno Simons and Jakob Ammann formed their own versions of Anabaptism, known respectively as Mennonites and Amish. Another group that gathered from various places in Germany became known as the Schwarzenau Brethren, which in America was known as the German Baptist Brethren in Germantown, PA.

### Our Niclaus Oppliger as Claus Oblinger

It is now verified beyond any doubt that the Swiss surname “Oppliger” was derived from the name of the small village of “Oppligen” located in the Bern Canton, only 1 ½ miles from Oberdiessbach. The majority of Oppliger families in the early 1700s lived in places such as Röthenbach, Oberdiessbach, and Signau, all in close proximity to Oppligen. Even Patrick Hanks, an internationally renowned lexicographer and editor of the “Dictionary of American Family Names,” published by Oxford University Press, has agreed with us that the various surnames such as Oblinger, Oplinger, and Uplinger as well as the original Swiss surname Oppliger were all derived from the name of the small Swiss village, Oppligen.

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<sup>23</sup> Gottfried Fahrni, *Descendants of Christanus Von Farne and Barbara Mathysenn from Farni and Eriz*.

When Richard Davis undertook the task to help us find the true Claus Oblinger, he wondered if the surname might have originated in Germany rather than Switzerland. But he found that even families with the surname Oppliger or Opplinger living in Germany had originally lived in the Emmenthal region. He then began searching church records from towns and villages in that area for men named Niclaus Oppliger born in an appropriate time period to have been Claus Oblinger. The most promising find after having ruled out other possibilities, was a Niclaus Oppliger, b. 1683, whose father and grandfather were also named Niclaus Oppliger and who was a sixth-generation descendant of Benedict Oppliger, b.c. 1510 in Röthenbach and a known Anabaptist.

### Same family names

This Niclaus b. 1683 to whom I'll now refer to as "our" Niclaus, was the son of Niclaus Oppliger b.1651 and his wife, "Trini" (Catharina) Murer. An early indication that this was the correct Niclaus was the fact that his siblings, the other children of Niclaus Oppliger and Trini, were named Christen, Catharina, Madlena, and Anna, almost an exact duplication of the known children of Claus Oblinger here in America. In other words, Claus would have named his children after his own siblings, a frequent practice of the time.

### Church records

Church records for our Niclaus Oppliger show he was baptized at Oberdiessbach on 17 May 1683 and married a Cathrin (Catherina) Steiner from Steffisburg on 19 Mar 1706, also at Oberdiessbach, less than 2 miles from Oppligen.

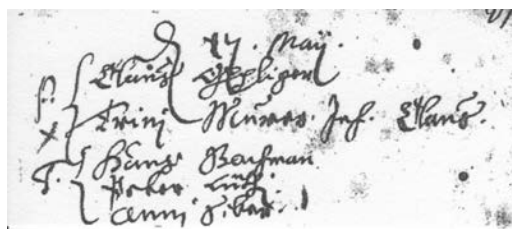
Here is the record of his baptism:

17 May 1683 Oberdiessbach

Parents: Claus Oppliger  
Trini Murer

Infant: Claus

Sponsors: Hans Bachman  
Peter Lüthi  
Anni Siber

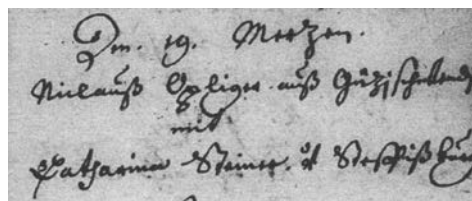


And here is the record of their marriage:

19 March 1706 Oberdiessbach

Niclaus Oppliger from Gutzischwendi  
and  
Catharina Steiner from Steffisburg

(Gutzischwendi is a small area in Südern in the Oberdiessbach parish)

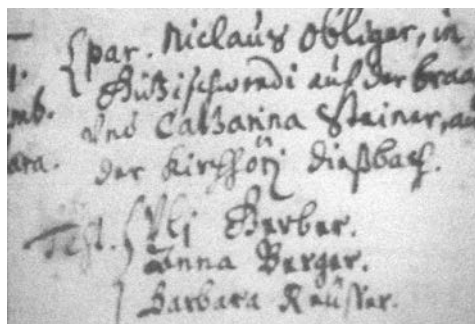


Niclaus and Catharina had a daughter, Barbara, baptized on 11 Dec 1707 at Schwarzenegg<sup>24</sup>.

11 Dec 1707

Infant: Barbara  
Parents: Niclaus Obliger from Gutzschwendi  
Catharina Steiner from Diessbach parish  
Sponsors: Uli Gerber  
Anna Berger  
Barbara Reusser

Diessbach is a shortened form for Oberdiessbach.)



You will note that only a fragment of the name Barbara appears along the left edge of her baptism record---“ara.” However, one can still discern the name must be Barbara since it was the common practice of the time that two of the three witnesses should be of the same gender as the infant to be baptized and in many cases, the child is named for one of the witnesses /godparents. Here that would be Barbara Reüsser.

### A Sudden Disappearance from Their Home Area

Unfortunately, a continued search of the Schwarzenegg church records up to 1720 revealed no other baptisms for children of our Niclaus and Cathrin. Nor did any appear in records from nearby towns. The family apparently left the area sometime after the birth of Barbara in 1707. The lack of further records was not surprising since this Niclaus was descended from a long line of Anabaptists traceable back to Benedict Oppliger c.1510. And in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century continuing into the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Anabaptists from Bern canton in particular, were severely persecuted and forced to leave their country. Some avoided the authorities by moving from place to place, but many eventually moved north into Germany.

One must wonder what happened to this first child, since Claus had only five children who who emigrated with him: Nicholas, Catherine, Maria (a possible Americanization of Magdalena), Christian and Anna. Barbara might have died in infancy which was not uncommon in those times. As a matter of fact, Cathrin Steiner had a younger sister, Barbara, who died young. She might even have been the namesake of this first child of Cathrin and ironically suffered the same fate! It also could be that this Barbara was married by around 1726 when the family emigrated, and she decided to stay in Switzerland.

Niclaus, or Claus, along with his wife Cathrin would have had five more children before emigrating, but their baptisms probably were never recorded. Since Anabaptists did not believe in infant baptizing we are unable to trace their presence after leaving Oberdiessbach. The family is completely undocumented until their arrival in Pennsylvania about 1726, unless one considers

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<sup>24</sup> Schwarzenegg is 9 miles from Oberdiessbach. Oberdiessbach, Schwarzenegg and Steffisburg form points of an almost equilateral triangle.



the reference to Schwarzenau on Anna's gravestone to be of consequence. Her birth date of 1722 already has been discounted as being possible in Schwarzenau. All dissenters had been exiled from there prior to that date. And the name Oberleger in records there is a weak match for Oppliger. Perhaps Anna was born earlier or perhaps not in Schwarzernau??

## REASONS TO BELIEVE THIS NICLAUS OPPLIGER b. 1683 BECAME CLAUS OBLINGER

### 1. A wife named Catherine

Notice that with our chosen Niclaus Oppliger, we now have a wife named Cathrin (Catherine), agreeing with the name of Claus' widow, spelled "Katherine" on the final settlement papers of his estate in 1750. (See Fig. 6D, p. 15) Rinkenbach and others, even including the Oblinger, Oplinger, Uplinger Family Association (see Fig 1), have mistakenly believed that Claus' wife was named Elizabeth. That may have stemmed from a misreading of a statement in Heckler's "History of Harleysville and Lower Salford County," published in 1886, which reads:

"He [Claus] ordered his will that the farm should not be sold until nine years after the date of the will, when the youngest child, which was then six years old, would be fifteen. **The name of the oldest son was Nicholas , and the name of his wife was Elizabeth.**" (not in bold type originally)

Because in previous sentences Heckler had been writing about Claus, it could be that Rinkenbach and others have misread the above by thinking "**his wife was named Elizabeth**" referred back to Claus, not to "the oldest son." But obviously this would have been a misreading since Heckler continues the sequence of speaking first of Anna, the youngest child, and then Nicholas, the oldest son, and continuing by naming the rest of Claus' children and their married or single status.

### 2. A Blood Relative

A most convincing proof that we have found the correct Niclaus Oppliger lies in the fact that a neighbor of Claus who signed his will was actually a blood relative and a Swiss Mennonite. The following chart shows they were third cousins. Both were greatgrandchildren of Peter and Adelheid.

Benedict Oppliger 1510

Peter Oppliger c. 1562 m. Adelheid Blonier

Daniel Oppliger b. 1591 m. Anna Schöni

[Adelheid Oppliger b. 1588 m. Christian Stauffer](#) <sup>25</sup>

Niclaus Oppliger b. 1619 m. Catharina Schenk

[Christian Stauffer b.1615 m. Margaret Anthoni](#)

Niclaus Oppliger b. 1651 m. Catherina Murer

[Ulrich Stauffer b. 1652](#)

[Niclaus Oppliger b.1683 m. Cathrin Steiner](#) third cousins [Christian Stauffer 1678 – 1735](#)

The left column above shows the ancestral line of our Niclaus. Daniel Oppliger and Adelheid Oppliger were siblings, both children of Peter Oppliger and Adelheid Blonier.<sup>26</sup> The next line shows Niclaus b. 1619 and Christian Stauffer b. 1615 who were first cousins. On the third line, Niclaus 1651 and Ulrich 1652 were second cousins, and then our Niclaus 1683 and Christian Stauffer 1678 would have been third cousins and neighbors living at Indian Creek, PA. It is fairly certain that all the above families were Anabaptists. This family tie of being third cousins living as neighbors would not happen with a different Niclaus Oppliger and is part of the proof that we found the correct Niclaus to be Claus.

Other family ties between our Niclaus from Switzerland and Claus from Pennsylvania became evident through investigating the relocation of Claus' younger son, Christian, from Indian Creek to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, his purchase of a farm and his marriage there.

Christian bought a 174-acre farm in Warwick township of Lancaster County in 1748. The date of his marriage is uncertain, so it cannot be established if it preceded or followed the purchase of the farm, but both probably occurred within a two-year period. Through records at ancestry.com it was learned that he married Barbara Forney, daughter of Peter Forney and Ann Schmid, who lived in the township of Earl, part of which bordered on Warwick twp. These records showed that Barbara was born in 1726.<sup>27</sup> The farm Christian bought was sold to him by a Christian Stoner. The Forney surname is a variant of the Swiss surname Farni. And likewise, the Stoner name is a variant of the Swiss Steiner surname. Research revealed the ancestors of Christian Oblinger with our Niclaus as his father, Christian Stoner and Barbara Forney as follows.

The Oppliger/Oblinger line		The Steiner/Stoner line	The Farni/Forney line
Niclaus Oppliger b. 1651 Catherina (Trini) Murer	Ulrich Steiner b.1647 & Barbara Farni	Christian Steiner Sr b.1651 & Catherina Farni	Abraham Farni b. 1668 & Anna Carli
Niclaus Oppliger b. 1683 & Claus Oblinger ?	Cathrin Steiner b 1683 Catherine Oblinger ?	Christian Stoner, Jr. b. 1684 (Witnesses: Christian Murer Niclaus Steiner)	Peter Forney b. 1698 & Ann Schmid
Christian Oblinger      married			Barbara Forney

<sup>26</sup> Adelheid Oppliger's husband, Christian Stauffer, was an Anabaptist preacher and a leader of that movement in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In December of 1671 he, and his second wife, children and some grandchildren were exiled from Eggiwil, Switzerland to Dirmstein, Germany where he died a few months later at the age of 90. The Christian Stauffer who was Claus' third cousin was a great-grandson living in Dirmstein before emigrating.

<sup>27</sup> Ancestry.com collection "Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Mennonite Vital Records, 1750-2014" lists Peter Forney 1695-1747 and wife Anna Smith 1697-Jan 1753. It also lists Barbara Forney b. 1726 as one of their daughters, but mistakenly shows her as married first (?) to a George Miley and then to Christian Oblinger. This obviously resulted from confusing this Barbara Forney with her aunt, a sister of her father also named Barbara Forney who married a George Miley from York County. Barbara's marriage to Christian Oblinger was her first and only marriage.

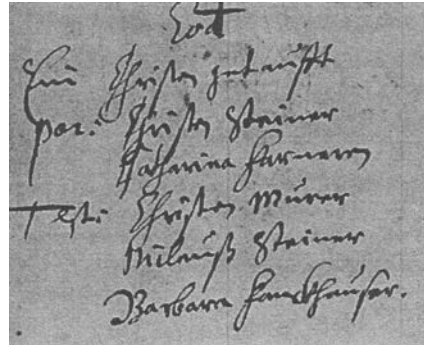
## The Steiner Family

The Christian Stoner who sold his farm to Christian Oblinger was actually a Christian Steiner before he immigrated. He was baptized in Oberdiessbach in 1684, the same parish where our Niclaus had been baptized, and only one year later. It seems very likely they must have known each other as childhood friends!

Here is the baptismal record for Christian Steiner who became Christian Stoner:

13 April 1684	Oberdiessbach
Infant:	Christen
Parents:	Christen Steiner <sup>28</sup> Catharina *Farner
Sponsors:	Christen Murer Niclaus Steiner Barbara Fankhauser

\* Farner is a variant of Farni



Note three other clues from the chart on the previous page that suggest they or their families knew each other in Switzerland. One is that a witness to Christian Steiner's baptism as shown here was a Christen Murer, with the same surname as Christian Oblinger's maternal grandmother, Catherina Murer! A second clue is that Christian Steiner's father was married to a Catherina Farni, perhaps related to Barbara Forney's Farni line. And a third clue is that Christian Oblinger's mother, Cathrin, and her father were both Steiners, (possibly related to Christian Steiner/Stoner?)

It should be pointed out also that Cathrin Steiner had a brother also named Christen Steiner.<sup>29</sup> Both Cathrin and her brother Christen married Oppligers, Niclaus and Barbara respectively. Although these Oppligers were not siblings as first suspected, they were related. Barbara's grandfather was the son of our Niclaus' great-grandfather!

## The Forney Family

Barbara forney's, father, Peter, was the son of Abraham Fahrni and Anna Carli. Abraham Farni, was baptized in Thierachern, 31 May 1668. Anna was baptized 13 March 1670 in Steffisburg. They were married in the Reformed Steffisburg church in December, 1694. Abraham was censured by the church which discovered after the fact that Anna had been pregnant at the time of the marriage, yet wore a crown of flowers during the marriage ceremony, a practice which

<sup>28</sup> The father listed here as Christen Steiner (Sr.) was a Mennonite deacon of Grafenbühl in Oberdiessbach and was exiled in 1711 with his wife and perhaps this is when his son, Christen Jr. decided to emigrate to Lancaster and became Christian Stoner .

<sup>29</sup> See Ulrich Steiner and Barbara Farni's family tree of p. 32.

was against church rules. Two of Abraham's elder brothers, Ulli and Peter Farni, as well as Anna's father, Peter Carli, were all leaders and became martyrs of the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement. As such, Abraham was closely watched by Bernese authorities.<sup>30</sup>

From the baptism records of the children, one can tell that after their marriage, Abraham and Anna lived in Steffisburg only a little more than a year, from late 1694 to 1696, then moved to Wattenwil on the other side of Lake Thun, most likely to become less of a target of the authorities. A connection between this Fahrni family and an Opliger family appears in the form of a witness, Salome Opliger, to the baptisms of two of Abraham and Anna's children, in 1701 and 1703 in Wattenwil.

In an attempt to relate this Salome to our Niclaus, it was found that Abraham's brother, Christian Farni, married a Cathrina Im Hoof in 1670 in Steffisburg. Also found was a Salome Opliger b. 1675 married to a Christen Im Hoof, which may be the Salome listed as a witness in the above Wattenwil baptisms. However no found records connects a Salome Oppliger to Niclaus. Nevertheless, those baptism records reveal a close friendship in Switzerland between the Abraham Farni family and Salome's Swiss Opliger family. These relationships were probably still known in family lore when Abraham's family emigrated to Lancaster County in 1727, and when Peter Farni's daughter (the granddaughter of Abraham) married Claus Oblinger's son, Christian c. 1748 to 1750.

Abraham and Anna eventually left Wattenwil and later, Switzerland, migrating first to the area of Siegerland, Prussia where they lived until their arrival in the New World in 1727. They had ten children, two of which died while still infants, but the other eight also emigrated to Lancaster county. Abraham thus became the progenitor of the numerous Mennonite Lancaster County Forneys. Abraham and Anna, with two of their daughters, first arrived in Philadelphia on the SS William & Sarah in September, 1727. They settled in Earl township on property bordering Warwick township where Christian Oblinger bought his farm.

#### **4 . The Farni Family Connections**

The discovery that the surname "Forney" was the American version of the Swiss surname "**Farni**" was an important find. It meant that if we had the correct Niclaus to be Claus, Barbara Forney's ancestors had the same surname as Christian Oblinger's grandmother, Barbara Farni. And thus Christian had a grandmother named Barbara (Farni) and a wife named Barbara (Forney)---another instance that with any other Niclaus, this undoubtedly would not be true. This also connects the Farni, Steiner, and Oppliger families.

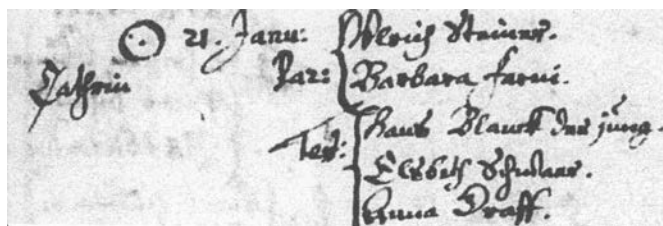
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<sup>30</sup> Gottfried Fahrni's book includes a well-documented history of Abraham's family, ancestors and descendants. The book is available to read online at [www.genealogycenter.org](http://www.genealogycenter.org) under Databases, Free Databases, Family Resources, and F for Fahrne.

Here is the baptism record of Cathrin Steiner, our Niclaus' wife showing her mother was Barbara Farni.

21 Jan 1683 Steffisburg

Parents: Ulrich Steiner  
Barbara Farni  
Infant: Cathrin  
Sponsors: Hans Blanck, the younger  
Elsbeth Schwaar  
Anna Graff

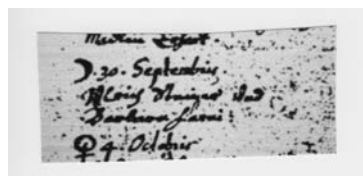


It is documented this Barbara Farni (now Christian Oblinger's maternal grandmother) married Ulrich Steiner in the Reformed Church of Steffisburg in 1672:

30 September 1672 Steffisburg

Groom: Ulrich Steiner

Bride: Barbar Farni



They lived there at least until 1692, documented by the birth of their children until then, and probably even longer. That Steffisburg church is the same church where Abraham Farni and Anna Carli were married in 1694. They lived there before moving to Wattenwil, only less than four miles away, where they lived at least until 1708 when their last child was born. Understanding this makes it very possible to presume that Abraham Farni, (Barbara Forney's grandfather) and Barbara Farni (Christian's grandmother) had known each other while living in or near Steffisburg before both emigrated to Pennsylvania years later. Both couples, (the Steiner/Farni and the Farni/Carli couples) were Anabaptists and it is probable that for a period of time they both were listed as members of that Steffisburg church.

The Farni/Carli couple knew a Salome Opliger, a witness for two of their children's baptisms, while they lived in Wattenwil in 1701 and 1703. And the Steiner/Farni couple knew branches of Oppliger families when their son, Christen Steiner married a Barbara Opliger on 18 Jan 1704 as well as when their daughter, Cathrin, married "our" Niclaus Oppliger on 19 Mar 1706.

### A Summary

Even without further records to prove it, my assumption is that these families in the New World must have been at least acquaintances, if not friends, back in Switzerland. And I believe that years before Christian bought the farm and married, his family already knew of Christian Stoner and/or Barbara Forney's family living in Lancaster County.

It seems odd that Christian would have suddenly decided to leave his mother and siblings and his home for at least eighteen years to suddenly move to Lancaster County. Was there some

compelling reason other than restlessness which motivated him to do so? How did he know there was a farm for sale there? How did he get to know his future wife from Lancaster? Family ties we have suggested seem to be the most convincing answers to these questions and provide a reason for Christian's move.

By 1748, Christian was about 27 years old and still single. His siblings, except possibly Anna, were all married. His father had died when he was about nine and Nicholas Jr. took over as head of the family. Barbara's father died in July, 1747, leaving his wife, Anna Schmid/Smith as the sole support of at least four unmarried daughters.<sup>31</sup> If Christian's mother, Cathrin Steiner, did know the Forney family from Lancaster, one can easily imagine her and Barbara's mother arranging a meeting between Christian and Barbara and encouraging a potential marriage.

Perhaps Christian Stoner knew that Christian's father, a friend from his childhood in Oberdiessbach, had settled his family in Indian Creek and they had been in touch with one another. And then living in a neighboring township to the Forney family, perhaps it was he who introduced Christian to Barbara, and after they became serious about marrying, he offered to sell them his farm.

No matter how all this occurred, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence of family ties between our Niclaus b. 1683 in Oberdiessbach and the Claus Oblinger family living in Indian Creek to prove our case! I believe this evidence proves incontestably our Niclaus to be the immigrant commonly known as Claus Oblinger.

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara, 21, Anna, 17, Mary, 6, and Susan, 2. When Anna Smith died in 1753, she appointed Christian Oblinger to be guardian of her then twelve-year-old daughter, Mary.

## APPENDIX I

### FAMILY TREES

#### OPPLIGER

1. Peter Oppliger b.c. 1562 m. Adelheid Blonier b. 1566
  11. Adelheid Oppliger b. 1589 m. Christian Stauffer b. c. 1590  
(Great grandparents of Christian Stauffer, Claus' neighbor)
  12. Daniel Oppliger bap. 1591m. Anna Schöni
    121. Peter Oppliger bap. 26 Dec 1613
    122. Hans Oppliger b. 1 Apr 1615, bap. 16 Apr 1615
    123. Anna Oppliger bap. 13 Apr 1617
    124. Niclaus Oppliger bap. 7 Feb 1619 m. 1<sup>st</sup> Barbara Lötscher.
      1241. Anna Oppliger, bap. 25 Jun 1641, Röthenbach
      1242. Ulrich Oppliger, bap. 26 May 1644, Röthenbach
      1243. Elsbeth Oppliger, bap. 17 Aug 1645, Röthenbach
      1244. Barbli Oppliger, bap. 15 Jul 1649, Oberdiessbach
  - 124 Niclaus (same Niclaus as above) m. 2<sup>nd</sup> Catharina Schenk
    1245. Niclaus Oppliger, bap. 16 Nov 1651, Röthenbach (His father lived at Süderen Wirt, Oberdiessbach at the time of his baptism.) He married Trini (Catherina) Murer.
      12451. Trini Oppliger, bap. 28 Apr 1678. Röthenbach.  
Father lived at Wachseidorn.
      12452. Anna Oppliger, bap. 30 Nov 1679. Röthenbach,  
Father lived at Wachseidorn.

**Our Niclaus (Claus?)** 12453. **Niclaus Oppliger/Claus Oblinger**, bap. 17 May, 1683.  
(His father lived at Gutzischwendi, Süderen)  
m. Cathrin Steiner in 1706.

his children 124531. Barbara Oppliger, bap. 11 Dec 1707 at  
Schwarzenegg.

#### Proposed additions:

- “ 124532. Nicholas Oblinger Jr. 1710/1714;  
“ 124533. Catherine 1713/1716  
“ 124534. Maria Oblinger 1716/1721 124535.  
124535. Christian Oblinger 1720/1722 m. Barbara Forney  
“ 124536. Anna Oblinger 1724.)  
12454. Christen Oppliger, bap. 10 May 1685. Died by Mar 1687.  
12455. Christen Oppliger, bap. 6 Mar 1687. He died by  
1692

12456. Madlena Oppliger, bap. 13 Oct 1689. Röthenbach.  
Her father lived at Wachseidorn.
12457. Christen Oppliger, bap. 9 Dec 1692. Röthenbach.  
His father lived at Wachseidorn
1246. Christina Oppliger, bap. 7 Aug 1653, Röthenbach, (Her  
father lived at Süderen Wirt, Oberdiessbach at her baptism. (Sister of 1245)
125. Elsbeth Oppliger bap. 04 Nov 1621 (siblings of 124)
126. Ulrich Oppliger bap. 07 Nov 1624 “
127. Hans Oppliger bap. 13 Apr 1628 “
128. Dannel Oppliger bap. 07 Mar 1630 “
129. Michel Oppliger bap. 09 Sep 1632 “

## STEINER

### Ulrich Steiner & Barbara Farni

b. 1647 b. 1651

Married 30 Sep 1672 – Steffisburg 2005964

Children:

Film #			
2005787	Barbara Steiner	19 Oct 1673	Steffisburg, Bern
2005787	Christen Steiner	29 Nov 1674	Steffisburg, Bern
2005964	Married: Barbara Oppliger	18 Jan 1704	b. Diessbach
2005787	Ulrich Steiner	30 Sep 1677	Steffisburg, Bern
2005787	Zacharias Steiner	22 Feb 1680	Steffisburg, Bern
2005787	Cathrin Steiner	21 Jan 1683	Steffisburg, Bern
	Married: Niclaus Oppliger	b. 1683 on 19 Mar 1706	
2005787	Barbara Steiner	14 Mar 1686	Steffisburg, Bern
2005787	Niclaus Steiner	22 May 1692	Steffisburg, Bern



## FARNI/FAHRNI/FORNEY

1. Steffan Fahrni b. c. 1540 Steffisburg He married Anna Schilt.
2. Stefan Fahrni b, c, 1569 Steffisburg He married Barbli Duernermuth in 1594.
  24. Ulrich Fahrni b. 7 Oct 1604 Steffisburg. In 1622 he married Anna Glüki. They had eight children.
    241. Steffan Fahrni b. 1 Jan 1623 in Steffisburg. He married Barbara Ruesser in 1647. They had 11 children. Their youngest, Peter, was an Anabaptist.<sup>32</sup>

Abraham Farni b. 1662 was the son of Steffan and Barbara (above). He married Anna Carli b. c. 1670. They had seven children, two of whom died in infancy. Their children were Peter b. 1695, Barbara b. 1696, Anna b. 1703, Cathrin b. 1704, Christen b. 1708, and Susanna b. 1713.

Abraham and some of the family Immigrated in 1727, arriving In Philadelphia 18 Sep 1727 on the ship, William and Sarah.” Peter and Anna might have come earlier. Cathrin, Christen, and Anna arrived on the ship “Hope” 23 Sep 1734.<sup>33</sup>

Peter Forney/Fahrni was the son of Abraham and Anna b. c.1695- 1700. He married Anna Schmid/Smith (1697-Jan 1753), daughter of John Schmid. They were Mennonites.

Peter warranted land at Earl twp., Lancaster County on 19 Jan 1733. He died there in 1747.

### Peter Forney & Anna Schmid

Children:

- Abraham b. 1720 d. 1784 m. Elizabeth Spurgeon
- Peter b. 1723 d. 1798 m. Barbara Eby
- Barbara b. 1726 d. 1804** m. Christian Oppliger/Oblinger
- Anna b. 1730 m. Jacob Kern of Reading, PA.
- Maria b. 1741 d, 1790 m. Jacob Carpenter (Zimmerman)
- Susan b. 1745 d. 5 Oct 1822.

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<sup>32</sup> [www.mennonsearch.com](http://www.mennonsearch.com)

<sup>33</sup> See document by Peter Wälti in Forney Archives at Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, Lancaster, PA

## APPENDIX II

### ANNA'S GRAVESTONE



#### Anna's Gravestone

The inscription reads:

Hier liegt in der Hoffnung einer seeligen  
Auffertchung die verstorbene Anna Kuntzin.  
Sie wahr eine geborhrene Oblinerin die  
Bernhard Kuntz seine zweite Ehefrau. Sie  
war gebohren zu Schwarzena in  
Deutschland. Sie wahr gebohren in Jahr  
unsers Herrn 1724 und ist gestorben den  
28ten November 1804 und ihr gantzes Alter  
war 80 Jahr.

An English translaton:

Here lies in the hope of a blessed salvation,  
the deceased Anna Kuntz. She was born an  
Obliner, and became the second wife of  
Bernhard Kuntz. She was born in  
Schwarzena in Germany. She was born in  
the year of our Lord 1724 and died on the  
28<sup>th</sup> of November 1804 at the age of 80 years.

Anna's gravestone proclaims she was born at Schwarzenau, however, that is very unlikely, because all Schwarzenau Brethren and other religious dissidents had already been evicted from there in 1720. Anna, who was at most about two years old when she came to America, may not have known exactly where she was born. When she died in 1804, no close members of her family were nearby to help the recollection. It may be that her parents were in Schwarzenau for a few years but that she was either born before 1720 or that she was born elsewhere.

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