

## **Authentic Autobiography of Conrad Weiser**

### **Taken from C.Z. Weiser's 1876 Biography**

In the year 1696, on the 2d of November, I, Conrad Weiser, was born in Europe, in the land of Wuerttemberg, in the county (Amt) of Herrenburg, the village is called Astael, and was christened at Kupingen, near by, as my father has informed me. I say, I was born on the second of November, sixteen hundred and ninety-six. My father's name was John Conrad Weiser, my mother's name was Anna Magdalena, her family name was Uebele. My grandfather was Jacob Weiser, my great grandfather also Jacob Weiser. He was magistrate (Schultheiss) in the village of Great Aspach, in the county (Amt) of Backnang, also in the land of Wuerttemberg. In this latter village my ancestors from time immemorial were born, and are buried there as well on my father's as my mother's side. In the year 1709, my mother passed into eternity on the last day of May, in the 43d year of her age, while pregnant with her sixteenth child, leaving children, Catrina, Margareta, Magdalena, Sabina, Conrad, George Frederick, Christopher, Barbara, John Frederick, and was buried there by the side of my ancestors. She was a woman fearing God, and much beloved by her neighbors. Her motto was, "Jesus Christ, I live for you, I die for you, thine (sic) am I in life and death."

In the year mentioned above, namely in 1709, my father moved away from Great Aspach on the 24th of June, and took eight children with him. My eldest sister, Catrina, remained there with her husband, Conrad Boss, with whom she had two children. My father sold them his house, fields, meadows, vineyard, and garden, but they could only pay him 75 gulden, the remainder, 600 gulden, was to be paid to my father at a subsequent period, which was never done, so it was made a present to them. In about two months we reached London in England, along with several thousand Germans whom Queen Ann, of glorious remembrance, had taken in charge, and was furnishing with food. About Christmas day we embarked, and then ship loads with about 4,000 souls were sent to America.

On the 13th of June, 1710, we came to anchor at New York in North America, and in the same autumn were taken to Livingston's Manor, or as it was called by the Germans Lowenstein's Manor, we were to burn tar, and cultivate hemp, to repay the expenses incurred by the Queen in bringing us from Holland to England, and from England to New York. We were directed by several commissioners, viz., John Cast, Henry Meyer, Richard Seykott, who were put in authority over us by Robert Hunter, Governor of New York. But neither object succeeded, and in the year 1713 the people were discharged from their engagements and declared free. Then the people scattered themselves over the whole Province of New York. Many remained where they were. About 150 families determined to remove to Schochary (a place about forty English miles to the west of Albany.) They therefore sent deputies to the land of the Maquas to consult with the Indians about it, who allowed them to occupy Schochary. For the Indian deputies who were in England at the time the German people were lying in tents on the Blackmoor, had made a present to Queen Ann of this Schochary, that she might settle these people upon it. Indian guides were sent to show the Germans where Schochary was. My father was the first of the German deputies.

In November, 1713, when the above mentioned deputies had returned from the Maqua country to Livingston's Manor, the people moved the same autumn to Albany and Schenectady, so as to be able to move in the spring to Schochary. Bread was very dear, but the people worked very hard for a living, and the old settlers were very kind and did much good to the Germans, although some of a different disposition were not wanting. My father reached Schenectady the same fall, where he remained with his family over winter with a man named John Meyndert.

A chief of the Maqua nation named Quaynant visited my father, and they agreed that I should go with Quaynant into his country to learn the Maqua language. I accompanied him and reached the Maqua country in the latter end of November and lived with the Indians: here I suffered much from the excessive cold, for I was but badly clothed, and towards spring also from hunger, for the Indians had nothing to eat. A bushel of Indian cord was worth five to six shillings. And at this period the Indians, when drunk, were so barbarous, that I was frequently obliged to hind from drunken Indians.

1714. In the spring my father removed from Schenectady to Schochary, with about 150 families in great poverty. One borrowed a horse here, another there, also a cow and plow harnesses. With these things they united and broke up jointly so much land that they raised nearly enough corn for their own consumption the following year. But this year they suffered much from hunger, and made many meals on the wild potatoes and ground beans which grew in great abundance at that place. The Indians called the potatoes Ochna-nada, the grounds beans Otach-ragara. When we wished for meal, we had to travel 35 to 40 miles to get it, and had then to borrow it on credit. They would get a bushel of wheat here, a couple at another place, and were often absent from home three or four days before they could reach their suffering wives and children crying for bread.

The people had settled in villages, of which there were seven. The first and nearest, Schenectady, was called Kneskern-dorf 2. Gerlacho-dorf; 3. Fuchsen-dorf; 4. Hans George Schmidts-dorf; 5. Weisers-dorf, or Brunnen-dorf; 6. Hartman's-dorf; 7. Ober Weisers-dorf. So named after the deputies who were sent from Livingston's manor to the Maqua country.

Towards the end of July I returned from among the Indians to my father, and had made considerable progress, or had learned the greater part of the Maqua language. An English mile from my father's house there lived several Maqua families, and there was always something for me to do in interpreting, but without pay. There was no one else to be found among our people who understood the language, so that I gradually became completely master of the language, so far as my years and other circumstances permitted.

Here now this people lived peaceably for several years without preachers or magistrates. Each one did as he thought proper. About this time I became very sick and expected to die, and was willing to die, for my stepmother was indeed a stepmother to me. By her influence my father treated me very harshly; I had no other friend, and had to bear hunger and cold. I often thought of running away, but the sickness mentioned put a bit in my mouth; I was bound as if by a rope to remain with my father to obey him.

I have already mentioned that my father was a widower when he left Germany, and landed in 1710 with eight children, in New York, where my two brothers, George Frederick and Christopher, were bound by the Governor, with my then sick father's consent, over to Long Island. The following winter my youngest brother, John Frederick, died in the sixth year of his age, and was buried in Livingston's bush, as the expression then was, and was the first one buried where the Reformed Church in Weisers-dorf stands.

In the year 1711 my father married my stepmother, whom I have mentioned above. It was an unhappy match, and was the cause of my brothers and sisters all becoming scattered. At last I was the only one left at home, except the three children he had raised by my stepmother, viz., John Frederick, Jacob, and Rebecca. Everything went crab-fashion; one misfortune after another happened to our family, of which I always was partaker. I frequently did not know where to turn, and learned to pray to God, and his word became my most agreeable reading.

But to return to Schochary. The people had taken possession without informing the Governor of New York, who, after letting them know his dissatisfaction, sold the land to seven rich merchants, four of whom lived in Albany, the other three in New York. The names of those in Albany were Myndert Shyller, John Shyller, Robert Livingston, Peter Van Brugken; of those in New York were George Clerk, at that time Secretary, Doctor Stadts, Rip Van Dam. Upon this a great uproar arose in Schochary and Albany, because many persons in Albany wished the poor people to retain their lands. The people of Schochary divided into two parties; the strongest did not wish to obey, but to keep the land, and therefore sent deputies to England to obtain a grant from George the first, not only for Schochary, but for more land in addition. But the plans did not succeed according to their wishes, for in the first place the deputies had to leave secretly and embarked at Philadelphia in 1718. As soon as they got to sea they fell into the hands of pirates, who robbed them as well as the crew of their money, but then let them free.

My father, who was one of deputies, was three times tied up and flogged, but would not confess to having money; finally William Scheff, the other deputy, said to the pirates, this man and I have a purse in common, and I have already given it to you, he had nothing to give you; upon which they let him go free. The ship had to put into Boston to purchase necessaries for the crew and passengers, in place of those taken by the pirates. When they reached England, they found times had changed, and that there was no longer a Queen Anne on the throne. They still found some of the old friends and advocates of the Germans, among whom were the Chaplains at the King's German Chapel, Messrs. Boehn and Roberts, who did all in their power. The affairs of the deputies finally reached the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, and the Governor of New York, Robert Hunter, was called home. In the meanwhile, the deputies got into debt; Walrath, the third deputy, became homesick, and embarked on a vessel bound to New York, but died at sea. The other two were thrown into prison; they wrote in time for money, but owing to the ignorance and over-confidence of the persons who had the money to transmit which the people had collected, it reached England very slowly. In the meanwhile, Robert Hunter had arrived in England, had arranged the sale of the Schochary lands in his own way, before the Board of Trade and Plantations. The opposite party was in prison, without friends or money. Finally, when a bill of exchange for seventy pounds sterling arrived, they were released from prison, petitioned anew, and in the end got an order to the newly arrived Governor of New York, William Burnet, to grant vacant land to the Germans who had been sent to New York by the deceased Queen Anne.

Towards the end of the year 1720, this William Burnet arrived in New York. In the commencement of the year 1721, I was sent to New York with a petition to Governor Burnet. He appeared friendly, and stated what kind of an order from the Lords of Trade and Plantations he brought with him, which he was resolved to comply with, but deputies were yet in England, not content with the decision, but could get nothing more done. In the last named year, viz., 1721, William Scheff returned home, having quarreled with my father; they both had hard heads. At last, in the month of November, 1723, my father also returned. Scheff died six weeks after his return.

Governor Burnet gave patents for land to the few who were willing to settle in the Maqua country, namely in Stony Arabia, and above the falls, but none on the river as the people hoped. They therefore scattered, the larger part removed to the Maqua country or remained in Schochary, and bought the land from the before-named rich men.

The people got new of the land on Suataro and Tulpehocken, in Pennsylvania; many of them united and cut a road from Schochary to the Susquehanna rive, carried their goods there, and made canoes, and floated down the river to the mouth of the Suataro creek, and drove their cattle over land. This happened in the year 1723. From there they came to Tulpehocken, and this was the origin of Tulpehocken settlement. Others followed this party and settled there, at first, also, without the permission of the Proprietary of Pennsylvania or his Commissioners; also against the consent of the Indians, from whom the land had not yet been purchased. There was no one among the people to govern them, each one did as he pleased, and their obstinacy has stood in their way ever since. Here I will leave them for a time, and describe my own circumstances.

In 1720, while my father was in England, I married my Ann Eve, and was given her in marriage, by the Rev. John Frederick Heger, Reformed clergyman, on the 22d of November, in my father's house in Schochary.

In 1722, the 7th of September, my son Philip was born, and was baptized by John Bernhard von Duehren, Lutheran clergyman; his sponsors were Philip Brown and wife.

The 13th of January, 1725, my daughters Anna Madlina was born; was baptized by John Jacob Cehl, Reformed clergyman; her sponsors were Christian Bouch, Junior, and my sister Barbara.

In 1727, my daughter Maria was born on the 24th of June, and was baptized by William Christopher Birkenmeyer, Lutheran clergyman. Her sponsors were Nisklas (sic) Feg and wife.

In 1728, December 24th my son Frederick was born; was baptized by John Bernhart von Duehren, Lutheran clergyman; his sponsors were Nicklas Feg and wife.

These four were born to me at Schochary. Afterwards, namely, in 1729, I removed to Pennsylvania, and settled in Tulpehocken, where the following children were born to me, namely:

1730, the 27th of February, my son Peter was born, and in 1731, the 15th of February, I had two sons born, who were called Christopher and Jacob; the first lived 15 weeks, the latter 13 weeks, when they were released from the evils of this world and taken to a happy eternity.

1732, June 19th, my daughter Elizabeth was born.

1734, the 28th of January, my daughter Margaret was born.

The 23d of April, 1735, my son Samuel was born.

The 18th of July, 1736, I had again a son born to me. I called him Benjamin; when he was three months old, the care of the Almighty God took him away; the same year my daughter Elizabeth followed him. A merciful God will give them all to me again, to the honor of his glory.

The 11th of August, 1740, another son was born; I called his name Jabez. The mercy of God removed him from the evil of these days when he was 17 days old.

The 27th of February, 1742, another daughter was born; I called her name Hanna; the following 11th August she went into a happy eternity.

The 16th of March of this year my dear daughter Madlina went from time to eternity, through an easy death, after a long and tedious illness. Her faith, consolation, and refuge was in the crucified savior Jesus Christ, whom she had vowed herself to in days of health, with soul and body.

The 12th of Aug., 1744, my son Benjamin was born.