

Bits of Paper from Old Palatine

We sometimes heard it said that only a few family documents survived from the 18th Century. Often the statement is made that only this or that family managed to save their paper records from the destructive raids and natural disasters which befell our ancestors. On up into the 20th Century, these assumptions have been found to be grossly inaccurate. We can only guess why and how these Bits of Paper actually survived. The ancestors of the families whom we will discuss are Palatines from along the Rhine River in Germany. The disasters which befell them in their homeland were only a prelude to those which they would see in the new world. Next in importance to their families was the acquisition and retention of the land that was to sustain them and their families for all of the generations that would follow. The story of our Palatine ancestors' quest for land and their often forced movement from that which they had regarded as their own is well known.

The written indentures which guaranteed the retention of this land probably were regarded as their most valued personal possessions. Often these paper records were kept in special boxes. Some were small wooden chests; others were made of leather or possibly somewhat later tin. These receptacles were small enough to pick up and transport easily from building to building and place to place. Is it any wonder that was what happened during the destructive raids of the French and Indian Wars and the American Revolution? If a family was fortunate enough to have warning of coming disaster, they might secrete their deed boxes or they might carry them to wherever they want to seek refuge. So with any luck these valuable scraps of paper came through the ages to the present time to help document the transaction.

I wish now to review the handed down stories of some of these documents survival and some of the writer's own experiences. As an always interested resident of Stone Arabia for 64 years, I have been able to know some of the players in the Document Preservations story. I want to say first and foremost that I do not intend to belittle the people who failed to recognize the historic value of these scraps of paper. Some of these accumulations were still held by descendants of the families that had kept them for so many years. Some cherished them and some did not. Often these documents had been found in old houses and some still remained with distant relatives of their original owners. Some had found their way to antique dealers who luckily had preserved them. Some had found their way onto the internet. Now let's look at some Palatine families. I hope to describe only 18th century documents rather than ones of later days, many of which survived and are recorded.

Nellis Family - I will start with the William Nellis family whose descendants survived only by chance. As the family story goes: some 2 or 3 generations ago, a Nellis observed his wife feeding a bonfire. He found that a group of early papers wound around a stick were next to be incinerated. He saved these ancient documents and they are a cherished possession of one of his descendants who still owns and cultivates a farm which came into his family in 1723. Since my wife was a Nellis, I will add here the story of another Nellis document. In the mid- 1950's, I met an elderly lady whose mother was a member of the Eaker family. She told me that she had something she would sell. I purchased such as I could afford including a very few Eaker documents. The lady reserved a shoe box of old papers. Years later she sold them to me. Imagine my surprise to find William Nellis, the pioneer's original will. One Nellis

genealogist said no one had found William's will. He and many others received copies of that will to add to their genealogical research. You might ask how I got into the Eaker family. The will was hand written on October 21, 1777, only a few months after the battle of Oriskany which witnessed the loss of many area residents. The state and federal governments were not yet firmly established. To answer the Eaker connection Johannes Eaker was one of the 3 subscribers to William's will. William was infirm and 83 years old. Can you imagine his handing his will to Johannes Eaker with the request his wishes to be carried out?

Dillenback Family - This family were Patentees of Stone Arabia granted October 19, 1723. I saw the 18th century land deeds soon after I came to Stone Arabia in 1948. They were cherished possessions of the family .Going from one member to another. They still survive.

Brower Family- I first saw these ancient family documents in the hands of the last member of the Brower family who owned the old farm. The Brower family was Holland Dutch. They came to Stone Arabia from Schenectady in the 1730's. Documents from that period survived in these old records. The originals still survive. The Mont. Co. Dept. of History and Archives at Fonda, NY have typewritten copies.

Kilts Family-This writer has owned the 1750 period Kilts farmstead for some 40 years .The 18th century deeds and receipts still exist within the kilts family. The 1750 release from the Livingston family for this land now remains with this old property. It is ironic that several pieces of New York State and Continental currency from the Revolutionary days remained within a branch of the Kilts family. They were worthless even in the era which they were printed. A reminder of a great loss of life, property and wealth that the people of Stone Arabia sustained in their effort to create a new nation.

Dygert Family- The Dygerts were among the earliest families of Old Palatine. An extensive collection of early documents has come down through the family.

Fox Family- The Fox family were patentees settling near Foxes Mills now Palatine Church. I saw extensive papers many years ago .Some 50 years ago, a member of that family gave me two Peter Gramps documents that were among them. One was an important letter written by John Eisenlord in 1777 to Peter, his father-in-law. For details, see my book "Shoes for John-the story of a farm boy during the Revolution". The other document was a deed signed by Sir William Johnson. A few years ago, I saw Peter Gramps' grave in Fox Cemetery. He married a member of the Fox family.

Getman Family- A few 18th century Getman documents have been noted. Some were in the hands of a descendant at Lassellsville, NY - now deceased.

Snell Family-Years ago I saw a few Snell family documents. I do not know of their whereabouts now. The Dockstater family intermarried with the Snells. One of the mentioned documents was a deed to land south of the river across from Amsterdam. It bore the Dockstater name and was signed by John and Mary Johnson. How I wish I knew where that deed is today.

Christman and Duessler Families-Not long ago these documents were in the Ephratah area. I hope they have been preserved.

Gramps Family-There are various spellings of the family name. Among them was Grems and Krems. The family were patentees. I have waited until last to tell about these family documents as I believe their discovery was one of the most interesting and important things I have added to Stone Arabia History. The other participants in this story are now all deceased. I'll tell this curious story in greater detail. The papers only survived by a strong quirk of fate. A very large and prominent farm here in Stone Arabia was in different branches of the Gramps families from the first settlement.

The Gramps name had run out many years ago. The farm came down to the hired man and his wife, now long deceased. Their three children, two boys and a girl, were much older than I. They were excellent farmers, but not particularly interested in history. I had obtained some interesting Stone Arabia artifacts from them. I was told some old papers survived. Upon further questioning, I found they lay on the garage floor. They got there because the chest they were in was wanted to put horse tack in to go to the County fair. The papers would have been burned in the stove if the stove pipe had not fallen down. I made a bee line for that garage. Oh! What I found. There were about a bushel of papers covering the period from the 1730's to the 1850's. All were from the Gramps family. There were 2 receipts signed by Sir William Johnson, another piece of Revolutionary War currency, deeds signed in the 1730's and 1750's signed by all of the Stone Arabia patentees and a host of other things. Also there were unrecorded 18th Century wills and information about Gramps genealogy. Possibly the most important paper was an agreement to build a new Stone Arabia Church in 1734; a church that would have been burned by the Crown forces in 1780.

Klock Family- I must add to this list of existent documents the Klock Family Papers which were published in the 1930's. Copies can be obtained.

Wagner- I saw a considerable amount of Wagner family documents, yet in the hands of a descendant who is now deceased. I have no idea where they are now.

Stone Arabia Lutheran and Reformed Churches-Both of the pre-Revolutionary Stone Arabia churches were burned October 19, 1780. In some way, their records, or some of them survived. Many people cherish the genealogy they received from them.

I have only gotten into this long dissertation to show the reader that things have survived that are primary source material. I'm sure that some yet lurks in strange places. I have shared these findings with the Montgomery County Department of History and Archives in Fonda and with others who have interest. The Department does an outstanding job piecing together all of our yesterdays as a foundation for our tomorrows.

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