

THE FIRST GERMANS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Penn's mother was a German, and since he offered religious freedom to all who were oppressed, our forefathers finally sought refuge in Pennsylvania. The first group of German settlers to reach Berks County arrived in Oley in 1712 and settled along the Manatawny Creek. These came northward on the east side of the Schuylkill from Germantown where they had previously settled. It was not long after, that Germans from the Schoharie entered Pennsylvania coming south on the Susquehanna and westward into the Tulpehocken section, settling in the vicinity of Womelsdorf. Among this group was Conrad Weiser, who had crossed the ocean in the ship Sara Maria with his father. By 1752 the Germans were far more numerous than all the other settlers combined. Though most numerous, as long as the Penn's were in control, they did not exert the greatest influence. Many of these Germans were educated men, who had a knowledge of ancient and modern languages as well as art and music. They made almanacs and school books. They settled the best lands and there built homes, churches and school houses. So many of the Germans came from the Palatinate that the name Palatines was soon given to them all.

You will thus see why these Germans left Europe and sought a new home in America; and although the most numerous in Pennsylvania and the most influential, why they founded no new empire of their own but at once became the subjects of England. Of all the great nations of Western Europe during the centuries immediately following the discovery of America, Germany alone took no official step in the colonization of the New World. Spain in Florida and South America, France in Canada and Louisiana, Holland in New York, England in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and even Sweden in New Jersey, took formal possession of the territory settled by their subjects.

[*"A Concise History of the Balthasers,"* by Francis W. Balthaser, 1924, Source #19]