

# Searching for Elizabeth Weyerbacher

By Terry J. Lee, from the files of Warren W. Wirebach

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[Warren W. Wirebach was born June 1, 1916 and is a 4<sup>th</sup> Great-Grandson of Johann Nicholas Weyerbacher and Catharina Magdalena Hermanni, who emigrated from Baumholder, present day Germany, to America in 1751. He began researching the Weyerbacher family history in the 1960s. Warren is the founder of the Weyerbacher Family Reunion, held each July in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. See [www.weyerbacher.net](http://www.weyerbacher.net) for more details. The various spellings of the Weyerbacher family name and others in this article are as they appear in the source material from which the information is derived.]

## Family Origins

Catharine Elizabeth Weyerbacher was born on September 3, 1765 in Lower Saucon Township, Northampton County, Pennsylvania, the daughter, and first child, of Johannes Weyerbacher (1734-1790) and Catharina Best (1745-1804). She was the granddaughter of Johann Nicholas Weyerbacher and Catharina Magdalena Hermanni. Also born in Lower Saucon Township were four of her younger siblings: Anna Weyerbacher (16 July 1767), Maria Magdalena (28 July 1769), Anna Maria (4 September 1771), and Nicholas (1 July 1773).

The family moved to Northumberland County, Pennsylvania and on 30 May 1775, a 336 acre tract in Buffalo Township (which later became part of West Buffalo Township, present day Hartley Township, Union County) was conveyed from Michael Traister to John Weyerbaugher for the sum of 307 (pounds?), recorded 20 June 1776. It was here that the family operated a farm<sup>1</sup>. A list of inhabitants in 1775 (*Annals of Buffalo Valley, Pennsylvania, 1755-1855*) lists John Wierbaugh with 8 acres under cultivation with two horses and three cows. This property had been surveyed for Traister 27 September 1770. At that time this part of Pennsylvania was the frontier.

On 13 March 1780, a son, Johannes, born to Johannes and Catharina, was christened in the First Reformed Church, Easton, PA. One of the godparents was Margaretha Best (single).

This seemingly inconsistent event, occurring far from the Buffalo Valley, is explained by "*The Great Runaway of 1778.*" As further discussed below, during the American Revolution tribes of the Iroquois Nation sided with the British. *From Annals of Buffalo Valley, Pennsylvania, 1755-1855,*

*"July 3d occurred the massacre at Wyoming, the news of which received on the 5<sup>th</sup>, caused the general stampede of the settlers of our Valley, called the 'Great Runaway.'"*

A captured American Indian prisoner reported that it was the intention of the Indian war parties to murder all white inhabitants on both branches of the Susquehanna River. That revelation produced a great panic among the white settlers of the area, and they fled to various places that were perceived to be strong points.

This event explains the retreat of Johannes and family to Easton, where perhaps Catharina had family as evidenced by Margaretha Best as godmother. Sometime after the 1780 christening of Johannes, either in late

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<sup>1</sup> The farm was located along present day Shirk Road, about ¾ of a mile west of Millmont.

For the location of the farm, see: <http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&ll=40.885194,-77.154665&spn=0.02375,0.055618&t=h&z=15&msid=100854885372120880833.00046be00bd6680f7432c>

1780 or early 1781, the family moved back to the Buffalo Valley farm. In 1782 and 1785, daughters Ann Margaret and Catharine were born.

### Indian Raids

One day in 1781, while most of the family were working in the fields, Elizabeth and one of her sisters were captured by Indians. From ***Indian History of Wagenseller Farm, Snyder County Annals, 1919 (p. 137)***,

*It was in the afternoon when the savages made their descent upon the Weierback cabin. All of the family, both males and females, were out in the fields reaping, except the two girls. The savages set fire to the cabins, and departed. The ascending smoke from the burning dwelling was the first intimation that the reapers had of any thing being wrong. In a few days one of the girls returned, having escaped from her captors. After the war was over, Weierback having heard of the whereabouts of his daughter, went after her and found her the wife of an Indian, on the waters of the Allegheny; but she had become so attached to the wild life of the savage that all the inducements that he could offer her to return were of no avail. She was never heard of afterwards.*

This last statement proved to be in error as discussed in detail below.

The story is briefly retold in the Annals of Buffalo Valley, Pennsylvania, 1755-1855 (p. 206), published 1877, where the family name is spelled "Wierbach."

A photograph of the site of the Weierback cabin was taken about 1912 and published in the ***Snyder County Annals*** (p. 148) where it was identified as "Brookside Farm, near Millmont, Union County, Pa., owned by Geo. W. Wagenseller, Middleburg, PA., site where John Weierback's cabin was burnt by the Indians and his two daughters captured and spirited away in 1781, as told in the story page 137."



GEORGE WEGENSELLER FARM at Glen Iron in Union County is the subject of this photo published in the (Williamsport) Sun-Gazette on July 28 (1997), according to John McCallus of Avis. He recognized the photo as one used in a history book of that area. His family once owned the farm. He does not know the identities of the people proudly displaying their horses and automobiles. The site was the scene of terror and bloodshed some 140 years before when Indians burned the first cabin built there and abducted two girls, McCallus noted.

In a recent photograph of the property, the barn and house of the 1912 photograph can clearly be seen.



2002 photograph of the site of the Johannes Weyerbacher farm

In the late 1960s, Warren W. Wirebach, Weyerbacher family historian and 1<sup>st</sup> cousin 4 times removed to Catharine Elizabeth, began a quest to find information about her following her 1781 capture. This effort was to continue for more than 20 years with some success and some disappointment. This is the story of Warren's search for Catharine Elizabeth.

There are many accounts of similar raids and abductions by Indians in and around this part of Pennsylvania and New York during the American Revolution. At the time of the capture of Catharine Elizabeth and her sister, John Shively, who owned a farm about a mile away, was also "captured and carried away by the Indians and was never heard from afterwards." As a historical note, John Shively's farm was later owned by Richard V. B. Lincoln, who was a 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin of President Abraham Lincoln, as evidenced by the President's letter to him.

Springfield, Ill.  
Apr. 6 1860

Richard V. B. Lincoln Esq.

*My Dear Sir,--Owing to absence from home, yours of March 19th was not received till yesterday. You are a little mistaken. My grandfather did not go from Berks County, Pa, as I learn, his ancestors did, some time before his birth. He was born in Rockingham County, Va; went from there to Kentucky, and was killed by Indians about 1784. That the family originally came from Berks county I learned a dozen years ago, by letter, from one of them, then residing at Sparta, Rockingham County, Va. His name was David Lincoln. I remember, long ago, seeing Austin Lincoln and Davis Lincoln, said to be sons of Ananiah or Hananiah Lincoln, who was said to have been a cousin of my grandfather. I have no doubt you and I are distantly related. I should think, from what you say, that your and my fathers were second cousins. I shall be very glad to hear from you at any time. Yours very truly,*

"A. Lincoln"



## Indian Alliances

At the outset of the American Revolution, both sides officially urged the various tribes of the Iroquois confederation to remain neutral while privately urging their assistance. At last, the British made an open appeal to the Iroquois to declare war against the Americans, using bribes of rum and goods so generous that the occasion was remembered for years. The last to hold out for neutrality were the Chenussio Senecas of the Genesee and upper Allegheny rivers, who acquiesced in a decision made at Oswego, NY in July, 1777, after which they joined in the attack of the American Fort Stanwix at Rome, NY.

One of the leaders of this group of Senecas was Cornplanter, who fought as a "captain" of Indians throughout the war, mostly in the New York theater. Many historical accounts indicate that Cornplanter was frequently the leader in bloody raids on the Pennsylvania frontier. The evidence strongly suggests that the Indians that abducted Catharine Elizabeth and her sister were under the leadership of Cornplanter.

Cornplanter was born to his Seneca mother and Dutch father, John Abeel, originally of Albany, about 1750 near Avon, NY. White people knew him as John Abeel (or Obail). He emerged from the Revolution as a chief of the Senecas. After the peace treaty between Great Britain and the United States, he realized that the British, despite their promises, had neglected their Indian allies and had effectively abandoned them to the former colonists. From that time on he cast his lot with the United States, believing that to be the wisest course for his people.



Cornplanter, a Seneca Chief, 1796

Cornplanter was instrumental in negotiating treaties to settle land problems and Indian relations. During 1790 and 1791, he earned the gratitude of Pennsylvania by his heroic effort to check the development of a threatening alliance between eastern and Ohio Indians. In recognition of this effort, a grant of land, known as the Cornplanter Tract, was made to him and his heirs by the Pennsylvania general Assembly in 1791. After 1812, Cornplanter became disillusioned with the Americans because of their shabby treatment of his people. He died at his home on the Cornplanter Tract on February 18, 1836. His descendants and other Indians continued to live on the tract, in Warren County, northwest Pennsylvania, until 1964 when the newly constructed Kinzua Dam was completed, flooding the Allegheny Reservoir and submerging the community's physical remains.



Cornplanters and Senecas gathered at the Cornplanter tract on August 24, 1940, to adopt Governor Arthur H. James of Pennsylvania as a "blood brother" of the Senecas. More than 3,000 visitors attended the traditional ceremonies.

### **Johannes's Estate**

Johannes Weyerbacher, Catharine Elizabeth's father, died intestate in 1790.

On October 26, 1790, a document was executed binding Catharine Weirback and Adam Heaney as administrators of his estate, in payment of 350 pounds to John Simpson, Register for the Probate of Wills for Northumberland County. This document charged them with making an accounting of Johannes's estate within one year. Catherine was apparently illiterate as she made a mark on the document. Adam's signature spells his last name as "Henney." Adam was the husband of Anna, sister of Catharine Elizabeth.

In a document believed to be dated October 25, 1791, the estate of John Wirebacher was valued at 106 pounds, 15 shillings, 4 pence. In a later undated document, payments made by the estate are listed, indicating an overpayment of 61 pounds, 7 pence, in favor of the estate. Throughout the various documents Johannes is "John" although the spelling of his last name varies.

On July 1, 1802, son Nicholas petitioned the Orphans Court to "award an inquest" to value the 336 acre tract of land and award distribution to John's heirs. The petition lists widow Catherine; children: Nicholas (as petitioner), John, Elizabeth intermarried with (blank space), Magdalena intermarried with Henry Hederick, Mary intermarried with Phillip Deal, Margaret intermarried with Frederick Wies, Catherine who is within age; and three grandchildren, Catherine, Peter, and Adam, of his daughter Anna, deceased, who intermarried with Adam Hennig.

On April 25, 1803, the Orphans Court at Sunbury, awarded the estate of John Weirbach as follows: one-third to widow Catherine for her life; the remaining two-thirds to be divided into eight equal parts, one to each child, with the part for daughter Anna, deceased, to be divided into three equal parts for each of her children. The spouse of each daughter is noted, with the intermarriage of Elizabeth again being blank.

On May 20, 1803, the result of an inquisition taken at the house of John Weirbach, deceased, agreed that the lands could not be parted and valued them at 1513 pounds and 11 pence.

In a subsequent undated petition, Nicholas, his brother John, Phillip Deal, and Frederick Weis, refer to an April 25, 1803 Jury of Inquest, and the determination that the estate could not be parted "without spoiling the whole." That jury valued the property at 1513 pounds and 11 pence. The petitioners ask to provide security to divide the value of the estate.

In 1804, Catharina (Best), wife of John, died of cancer in West Buffalo, Northumberland County.

A release and power of attorney from daughter (Catharine) Elizabeth dated November 12, 1808 at Upper Canada was recorded at Sunbury, the county seat for Northumberland County. In it, she is noted as Elizabeth Leef of Barton Township, Province of Upper Canada. Today, what was Barton Township is part of Hamilton, Ontario.

A reference to this Power of Attorney is found in an undated release in which the estate is valued at \$4811. All of the siblings of Elizabeth and their spouses are listed with the exception of Anna who died in 1794. Anna's

widower, Adam Henig is listed. Each of the eight siblings (in Anna's case, her children) received a 1/8 share, or \$601. This release conveyed the farm to Nicholas. That deed was recorded 30 January 1811. In a release recorded 21 May 1811, the siblings relinquished their share of the estate to Nicolas.

These documents list the three children of the deceased daughter Anna Henig: Catherine and her husband Daniel Williams, Adam Henig and Peter Henig.

John and son Nicholas Weierback owned this land during the Revolution and until May 17, 1811 when Nicholas sold the farm to Christian Braucher, who in 1810 came from Northampton County (now Lehigh). The farm remained in the hands of the Braucher relationship for a full century until 1911 when it was sold at public sale to George W. Wagenseller. The above farm photo was taken about a year after this sale.

Sometime after the sale of the farm, Nicholas moved to Ohio, where he died in Carroll County in 1846. The lineage of his son John, who spelled his name "Wirebaugh," is traced in a book by Rachel Saul Tefft published in 1997, available from [www.higginsonbooks.com](http://www.higginsonbooks.com).

Warren Wirebach's search for Elizabeth uncovered the above information covering the period from John's death in 1790 to Elizabeth's final release in 1811. Subsequently, Warren continued to search for evidence of Elizabeth after 1811. Over a period of more than 20 years, he wrote many letters and made many visits to Canada to find some evidence of a "Leef" line that might include Elizabeth. He considered numerous variations of the name "Leef," including "Leaf," "Lees," and "Leas," reasoning that the letter "f" might actually be a script "s."

Warren did find some "Leefs" during his search, but none of them indicated any possible connection to Elizabeth. Several questions remain:

- Did Elizabeth marry an Indian named Leef? If so was he of mixed parentage, thus the English (or German) name.
- Did Elizabeth marry a white man named Leef?

In 2002, with the help of local residents, Warren was able to identify the site of the original farm.

### **Other Stories**

Although Warren was unable to find any evidence of Elizabeth or any of her descendants after 1811, his extraordinary efforts did not go totally unrewarded. Through communication with various authorities and Weyerbacher cousins he did uncover numerous stories and other family relationships.

One such story explains the death of John's daughter Anna, who died in 1794 at about age 27, while married to Adam Henig. In a 1990 letter from Sonia S. Coulton, a descendant of Adam Henig and his second wife Barbara Vonada, Ms. Coulton relates the following two stories from several Henig sources:

- Anna and infant daughter Anna drowned in a creek when a horse slipped. Adam was carrying the twin brother Adam, Jr. and was unable to save his wife and daughter.

- Adam's youngest sister, Margaret, was kidnapped by Indians shortly after the family moved to Northumberland County. She chose to remain with the Indians out of fear for her family's lives. She married an Indian and lived into her 80's.

This second story is documented in an apparently republished article from Hiawatha, Kansas, of an April 1899 account by Jesse Henney of Horton Kansas. In it she relates a history of the (John) Adam Hennig family and the abduction of his sister by Indians, an incident eerily similar to the abduction of Elizabeth.

### ***A Sad Incident of the Revolutionary Days***

*Prior to the revolutionary war, Christopher Hennig removed from Dauphin Co., Pa. to Buffalo Valley in Union County of that State.*

*During the war for independence he served in Captain Clarks Company. After the close of the war his son, John Adam Hennig and family established themselves a little farther West in Peen's valley, Centre County, Pa., and thither the Father followed.*

*During the war a part of the Delaware Nation of Indians sided with Great Britain. Subsequent eruptions between them and lawless land hunters continued to rend them hostile to settlers. During this period it was usual for a number of settlers or members of the family to work together for mutual protection, one of the number carrying firearms and standing guard while the others labored. One day during the harvest time all hands in the family had repaired thus to the field leaving only a twelve year old daughter at home to prepare food. The primitive method of harvesting then in vogue by which only a handful at a time of grain was cut with a sickle made the process laborious and the woman contributed a material portion of the labor required. Returning homeward after the days work, they found their cabin a heap of smoking embers and the daughter not to be found. They could only conclude that she had been carried into captivity.*

*A year passed without tidings. Then came a rumor of two captive white women living at an Indian stronghold two hundred miles away (in New York State).*

*The Father with several other men at once undertook a journey thither in the hope of finding and rescuing his daughter. She proved to be one of the two captives and knew her Father. He desired of her that she return with him and to this she agreed. But when they made known the plan the young men of the tribe warned her in the Indian tongue that if she were taken away, they would kill the rescuers on the road. Thereupon the unselfish daughter declared that to save her Father's life she would remain with the Indians, that she knew their language and customs, that they were kind to her, etc.*

*Her Father and companions returned without her and with heavy hearts, and he died of grief shortly afterwards in 1790. She became the wife of a chief, the mother of a large family and lived to beyond the age of 80 years. Names of her husband and children are not known.*

*Jesse Henney, April 1899*

Perhaps with the availability of new research tools via the internet, some trace of Elizabeth may yet be found.