

## **The Wertman Story: George Phillip Wertman and Family By Hal Merz, 2022**

The story of George Phillip Wertman and family in America begins in the early 1700s. Unlike some other German immigrants to our country, we have not yet found a ship's list or other records documenting his arrival in America.

The first appearance of his name in official records is a 1741 warrant for purchasing 100 acres of land near present – day Reading, Pennsylvania. The land – which at the time of purchase was in Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania – is presently in Alsace Township of Berks County, Pennsylvania. This location may give a clue to the European origin of George Phillip or his spouse. The township, created in 1745, was named Alsace because a large proportion of its early settlers were from the region of Alsace.

Alsace, on the West side of the Rhine River, has gone back and forth from French to German rule several times in its history. Today it is in France, yet the names of many of its villages are distinctly German. Many inhabitants are bilingual, speaking both German and French. The Wertman's nearby neighbors in Alsace Township included the Hoch or High family who were of Alsatian ancestry. One of their land plots had a name including the word Haute, which is French for High. Hoch in German also means High.

We do not know much about George's family in those early days in Alsace Township, except that George would have been at least 21 years of age to purchase the land, so his birth would have been at or before 1720. We have a birth date of one son, George Phillip II, as 1741, indicating that he was around the time of the family's land purchase. Another son, Johan Michael, possibly was born earlier but we do not have a birth date. During the time the family lived in Alsace Township, several other children were born. Son Jacob was possibly born 1742-43. We have a birth date of 1747 for son Simon. We suspect there were daughters but do not have proof.

With the help of maps and old land records, we located this first Wertman land along the North side of a road in Alsace Township. The plot was not exactly the best laid out for agricultural land, as it slopes down a hill toward the road. A more level plot would have been better suited for farming.

Like many other German farmers in Pennsylvania, George was on the lookout for a better piece of land which could be obtained at a reasonable price. They would talk to friends, relatives and neighbors for tips about land, including land that might be some distance from their current residence. In 1749, George took out a warrant for 100 acres of land in what was then Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Today, the land is near the town of New Tripoli in Lynn Township of Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. In 1750 George warranted an additional 50 acres in the same vicinity. When the 2 land plots were officially surveyed many years later, they were found to be 197 and 123 acres, or a total of 320 acres.

The Lynn Township land was about 30 miles Northeast of Alsace Township. It had fewer neighbor settlers and was more isolated than the Alsace land. The land was more level and proved to be a good environment for farming, as successive generations of Wertmans successfully farmed there for more than 150 years. Lynn Township still has farms today and had only a little over 4,000 residents in the 2010 Census.

The isolation of Lynn Township proved to be a disadvantage, as Indian attacks on settlers began during the start of the French and Indian War. Some people living not far from the Wertmans were killed and injured beginning in 1756. Residents in the area petitioned the government of Pennsylvania to not abandon nearby Fort Franklin, a frontier fort. George Phillip Wertman's signature appears on this petition document in 1757.

Establishment of churches was a high priority for German settlers in Pennsylvania. When Wertmans moved to Lynn Township, there was a small Moravian group there. Some other worshippers gathered at the home of one of Wertman's neighbors, Phillip Scholl or Sholl. In 1760, George and some of his neighbors organized to buy land and build a "union church" which was comprised of people from both the Lutheran and German Reformed traditions. Union churches shared the same building for use of two different groups of worshippers. This congregation became the Ebenezer Church, a congregation which still exists today as the Ebenezer United Church of Christ of New Tripoli, Pa.

George's name appears on a list of church leaders for this congregation. The list includes both Lutheran and Reformed people. An unusual feature of this small church was that it had a small pipe organ. One of the nicknames for the congregation was the "organ church."

Small rural churches of this type did not have permanent local pastors at this time, but depended on the services of traveling pastors who served multiple congregations. A Reverend Daniel Schumacher visited the "organ church" on a regular basis, preaching and baptizing children. His record book lists several baptisms from 1758 into the 1760's involving Wertman family members including this one where George Phillip Wertman was listed as the baptismal sponsor or "godfather:"

1760 – Jurg Phillip "Werdmann" was baptismal sponsor for Jurg Phillip, son of Jurg Christoph and Margaretha Heringh. Note – Jurg is a German form of George.

Margaretha Heringh may have been a daughter of George Phillip; more research is needed to verify this.

George Phillip was probably a literate person who had obtained some schooling. He witnessed 2 wills by his personal signature – one in 1760 for the will of John Flack whose daughter married George's son John Michael Wertman.

During the 1760s and 1770s more people moved into Lynn Township and some sons of George Phillip bought land not far from their father.

When the Revolutionary War began in 1775-76, George Phillip was probably over the age of 53, meaning that he was not required to participate in the local militia units of Northampton County. The Wertman family, like some of their other German neighbors, did not wholeheartedly embrace the "patriot" cause. Some of the local patriot leaders were very harsh to their Mennonite and Quaker neighbors who were pacifists. This mistreatment was one of the reasons that some Pennsylvania Germans questioned the patriot cause. One of George's sons, Jacob, was accused of being a Loyalist and was briefly held in the Reading, Pennsylvania jail and had to pay a fine.

Another son, George Phillip Wertman Junior, actually left his home, joined a Loyalist regiment and ultimately went to Nova Scotia, Canada after the war. The remaining Wertmans – probably reacting out of social and political pressure – signed an Oath of Allegiance to the patriot cause in 1777. Their names appear on the Oath of Allegiance lists very close to the deadline dates for signature. In 1782 several family members were called up for a 3 month military service. Instead, they hired substitutes to serve for them, which was legally permitted.

George Phillip's first wife – whose maiden name is uncertain – died sometime between 1756 and 1780. He remarried the widow Catherine Delong, whose husband Abraham Delong had died in 1756. The Delongs were early residents of Lynn Township.

A sad chapter in the life of George Phillip is that in Spring 1780, Catherine filed a complaint in Northampton County Common Pleas court against her husband George Phillip Wertman. She accused him of menacing and threatening her life. The court required both parties to appear in court again in the Autumn term and George's son Martin posted a bond that his father would indeed appear. We searched the records and did not find an Autumn 1780 record, so it is uncertain what happened to the case. Since George had no previous brushes with the law and was evidently a respected citizen, we suspect he may have been suffering senile dementia. Regarding Catherine, she moved to near Sunbury, Pennsylvania where in 1787 we find a record of her selling personal property.

George may have died between 1780 and 1782. There are no probate records for him. His name disappears from the Northampton County tax lists after 1778. Presumably he turned over his land to his sons before his death. The last available public record for him is a 1782 property transfer record involving the former Alsace Township property he warranted in 1741 and the Keller family.

George Phillip Wertman showed an adventuring spirit by moving from a more settled region of Pennsylvania to what was the true frontier of the time. He displayed leadership in church affairs and as a member of the community. He has many descendants still living in Pennsylvania, but others living in states all across the country.