

## History of Swissdale

History of Swissdale, Pa

### Religious Activities

From 1832 to 1842 the religious services of the community were usually conducted in the homes without a minister, held by Mrs. Sutter, who had been trained as a Deaconess in the Lutheran Church of Berne. Mrs. Sutter (Suiter) had intentions of becoming a missionary before her marriage but gave this up when she became Sutter's wife.

When the congregation increased the meetings were held in the barn on the Sutter farm, with Mrs. Sutter as the substitute minister. She was chosen the first classleader when the church was organized and served in this capacity for many years. There were also local Preachers who served in the Religious Community form time to time. These were: Daniel Shoemaker, John Probst, David Suiter and Frederick Glise. These served in the NEW CHURCH built in 1869.

The first preachers in this section were circuit riders who came in once a month or less, following the narrow trail on horseback. The riders were sent out by the Evangelical Association Church which was organized by German speaking people, so these early preachers spoke German. On Monday morning they left and the intervening services were in charge of the laymen.

### Early Ministers

The Evangelical Church was first organized by W. S. Seibert in the school house on the farm of B.F. Probst about 1843 or 1844, now the Simcox Farm. In 1858, when a schoolhouse was built at the Cross Roads, the old log house was "done over" for a church by being weather-boarded on the outside and having new seats and a pulpit added. This served as a Church until 1869, when the white church at the Cross Roads (now razed) was built. This was located across the road from the present church and was sold and torn down in 1927. Services were held in this church from 1869 until 1923. The present church was built in 1895. In 1952 the Swissdale congregation purchased the one room school house, which is located across the road from the present church. It has been renovated and is used as a church hall and a social gathering place. The preachers of the old church were:

REV. S.W. SEIBERT, the circuit rider, who later became a bishop.

REV. ORWIG, later a bishop.

REV. YOUNG, who later served in Lock Haven.

REV. KRAMER

REV ZULAUF

REV. RESSER.

REV. BOWERSOX, who later became a missionary to the Pacific Coast.

Swissdale was part of a circuit, which was formed in 1872, and had the following appointees: Swissdale, Frontonia, McElhattan, Pine, Nippenose, Friedens, Salladaysburg and Jersey Shore. It was called the Jersey Shore Circuit. In 1885, the Lock Haven Circuit was formed with Farrandsville, McElhattan, Pine, Caldwell and Swissdale as appointments. Swissdale, Pine and McElhattan were detached from the Jersey Shore Circuit and Farrandsville and Caldwell were added to make five appointments. In 1928, the appointments on the Lock Haven Mission were: Swissdale, Rote, Clintondale, Nittany and Castenea which were later changed to Swissdale, Dunnstown and Liberty.

With the exception of the local people who have been mentioned no record remains of the preachers who served in Swissdale from 1832 to 1872. From 1872 to 1884 inclusive the following ministers served the Jersey Shore Circuit:

1872	Z. Hornberger - J.A. Hetner
1873	A. Rearick - W.L. Rightmire
1874	A. Rearick - N.B. Sherk
1875	A. Rearick - B.F. Keller
1876	H.A. Dietrick - D.P. Kline
1877	D.P. Kline - G.H. Schleh
1878	Jacob Boaz - G.H. Schleh
1878-80	H.W. Buck - F.S. Vought
1881-82	H.W. Buck - H.T. Searl
1883	D.W. Miller - J.H. Welsh
1884	J.G.M. Swengle - J.R. Sechrist

During this period two preachers served the circuit at the same time. This was for the reason that there were eight appointments, the distance between them was rather great, and the only available conveyance was horse and buggy or horseback. The pastors were usually an older and a younger man. Many of the older members of the time could not understand English very well, so German was the language used every other Sunday by the old minister. Some of the younger ministers could not understand German very well; therefore English was the language used by the younger preacher every other Sunday.

The Ministers who served the Lock Haven Circuit from 1885 to 1894 inclusive were:

1885	J.G.M. Swengle
1886-88	P.C. Weidemeyer
1889-91	J.S. Shambach
1892-94	H.S. Bason

During the years between 1891 and 1895 a controversy arose among the leaders of the Evanelical Association General Church and as would be expected this worked its way down to many of the local churches. In 1895 the general church was divided. This division extended as far west as the Mississippi River. The group which broke away from the original church was called the Untied Evangelical Church. At this time the Swissdale congregation was divided. From 1895 until 1923 there were two churches in Swissdale.

The following pastors served at this time. It has been impossible to get the list of the Evangelical Association ministers in chronological orders. This is a list of those who served:

Evangelical Association

- J. Fenstamaker
- Tonkins
- Freed
- O. Martin
- Yergy
- J. Willauer
- W.A.C. Eby
- J. Fenstamaker
- J.W. Romberger
- W.I. Miller
- I.F. Heisler
- P.Z. Taylor
- J.H. Rosenberger

United Evangelical

1895-96	J.D. Stover
1897-98	J.B. Fox

1890-1902	J.R. Sechrist
1903-06	W.N. Wallis
1907-10	H. Minsker
1911-14	C.J. Dick
1915-19	R.S. Daubert
1920-23	J.H. Ricker

In 1923 the members of the two local congregations were united and became once again members of the same church called the Evangelical Church as did the members of the divided churches throughout the nation.

During the period from 1923 to 1946 the following ministers served the Swissdale Congregation:

1924-27	W.E. Yingling
1928-30	T.R. Hustler
1931-1937	M.A. Herman
1938-1943	J.A. Corle
1944-46	L.W. Bartges

In 1976 the Evangelical Church and the United Brethern in Christ united to form a larger and stronger church called the Evangelical United Brethern Church. The ministers who served the local congregation from 1946 to the present (1976) are:

1947-52	L.W. Bartges
1953-57	R.L. Frease
1958-61	J.E. Snook
1962-63	H.E. Glasgow
1963-71	A.F. Romberger

1972-76	A. Cox
1976-	P. Zelinka

At a congregational meeting held Wednesday evening, March 11, 1964 a majority of the members were present, who were qualified to vote, decided to direct the Trustees to make alterations so as to enlarge the original church and to add a Sunday School unit of eight rooms, with a basement which could be used as a dining area complete with kitchen space. It was the desire of the congregation to make the alterations and additions without marring the desirable appearance of the original building. The work started April 8, 1964 and was completed October 24, 1964. The building was dedicated to the service of God November 8, 1964.

The information listed here was taken from History of Clinton County by Cora Suiter, the History of the Probst Family, Swisssdale History by Florence Laubscher. All this can be found in the Ross Library.

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#### History of Swisssdale, Pa.

##### [Frontier Life](#)

Let us look at the wild life of this community. These families lived here with nothing but a hunter's path for many years. To the north was a vast forest 100 miles deep and on every side you could hear the howl of the wolves, the scream of the panthers and the cry of the wildcat. Bears were plentiful until 1870 or 1880. Panthers screamed in the woods until the end of the 1880's.

Many a night women with small children were alone in their homes when panthers and wolves climbed on the roof and tried to push aside the scantling and shingles, then they tried to force open the door and window, so one door and one window were quite sufficient for these early settlers homes.

Each family in Swisssdale had its encounters with wild beasts. All kinds of animals were very numerous. Whole herds of deer were seen feeding at one time. Wolves came up to the door where any feed might be thrown out and picked it up while they glared at the family. Panthers and bears boldly carried off domestic animals in broad daylight. Many families, after working all day with their faithful dogs would watch most of the night to save their flocks.

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[Background/Early Years](#)

The French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars from 1798 until 1815 repeatedly changed the map of Europe. The defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo was followed by long negotiations of the Congress of Vienna, and the resulting peace treaties created many dissatisfied situations in Central Europe.

### **Frequent Revolutions**

The years from 1820 to 1848 saw frequent revolutions in practically every nation; some of these wars were so severe that they practically threatened again and again to disrupt the general peace. To strengthen the neutral position which she had taken, Switzerland had drafted more men into the National Army, and from 1815 until the present day, Switzerland has compelled all men from 18 to 21 to take two years of military training. It was this ruling together with reports about opportunities in the United States that caused many of her inhabitants to seek milder form of government elsewhere.

Canton Berne, in which Nicholas Sutter lived sent him as an agent of the government to explore the land and see whether the reports about Pennsylvania were true. Fond of adventure, he seized this opportunity of coming to America. He started out alone and crossed the ocean in 38 days. Landing in Philadelphia, he came by boat and stage to the present site of Lock Haven when it was a great wheat field. He looked over the territory here, then went out sightseeing, going through the Irish Settlement, Caldwell, and Haneyville, up to the Block House in Potter County.

### **Delighted By Forests**

As the forests of Switzerland had been entirely depleted and no one was allowed to cut down a tree or even a branch without permission, he was greatly impressed by the virgin forests here. When he saw the wide stretched of open country, he became so enthusiastic that he decided to remain here and sent word back to his Canton.

Upon his return to this section, Mr. Sutter, John Feller, and John Witchey, who came here at the same time, bought a tract of land in the northern part of Woodward and Dunnstable

Townships. Swisssdale, formerly known as the German Settlement, is a narrow strip of land between the Fred Goodman land (about one mile west of Rest Haven entrance) to about one mile northeast of the entrance of the main highway from Upper Lockport to Queens Run. This is known as Croak Hollow. On the north is the Whipporwill School, and on the south is Dunnstable Road. This was settled almost entirely by emigrants from Berne, Switzerland. Here in 1825, John Feller with 17 men cut, hauled the logs and put up a cabin in one day. A short time after this, Nicholas Sutter and John Witchey built a second house near where the home of Chirst Blesh now stands. From 1826 to 1831 there were just these two houses in this wilderness. Nicholas Sutter and Elizabeth Witchey (who came with her family to America) became well acquainted during the five week journey and they were married soon after they arrived here in 1826.

### **Long Journey**

In 1831 and 1832 six families came over from Canton Berne: Jacob Shoemaker, John Blesh, Johannes Laubscher, John Probst, Frederick Glise and John Swope. These families, hearing the good report sent back by Mr. Sutter, loaded their goods on wagons and travelling 23 days across the country to Havre, France, sold their horses and wagons, boarded a sailing vessel and in 34 days landed in New York. From there they went to Philadelphia by railroad, to Pottsville by canal boat and from Pottsville they travelled to Lock Haven in hired horses and wagons.

When they reached the home of Nicholas Sutter in Swisssdale, they expected to see him rolling in wealth and were greatly surprised at his unpretentious manner of living. The first day they arrived, Johannes Laubscher put up a 10 by 12 hut and they lived in it until they built their home. Three families stayed with Nicholas Sutter. These pioneers said that when dormitory space on the second floor became crowded they divided into shifts--one half sleeping while the others flailed grain on the kitchen floor.

Later Nicholas Sutter bought several hundred acres of land and moved from one farm to another selecting his home in the east end of the new settlement. Here he built an eight room log house which was considered a mansion by Swiss people in those days. Later he built a large brick house. [Brick was made from clay therein.]

### **Heirs Hold Farms**

Four families, Shoemakers, Probsts, Bleshes and Wenkers, who came in 1839, bought 200 acres of land at \$2.00 an acre west of the church and divided it into four farms, which their families (heirs) occupy today. The Wenkers coming last were allotted the hilliest part of it, and often they said they wished the boat that carried Nicholas Sutter over had sunk and saved them all this steep-hilled farming.

Other families following were: Jacob Weises, 1833; Halbeys, 1834; Keiffers, 1842; Rotes, Hecks, Maders, Grosses, and Messerlys, a little later; George Wises and Baumans, 1841; Weavers, 1852; Goodmans, 1863. The number of Probsts coming over exceeded all the others, there

being at one time 15 different families of the Probsts. More coming to this small community were the Sorgens, Monroes, Raders, etc.

These new settlers coming into this woods brought their carefully selected seeds, hoes and shovels. There was little use for a plow. Trees were felled, roots dug out and these spots were sown with wheat. Every stalk of wheat was cut, carried into the house, flailed, and then gathered into a measure. When they had a bushel, a man carried it four miles to the old grist mill at Chathams Run, and carried the flour home. More than one crop of wheat was threshed on the floor of Christ Blesh's home, and on the sitting room floor of Sam Probsts home before the barns were built.

### **Lived a Busy Life**

During the first few years, these men cleared their land, planted it, and then worked as many days as possible for William Dunn of the Island; for Nathaniel Hanna, called "Danny" at Lockport, and some worked on the dam when the canal was being completed here. When the land was cleared and cultivated, they raised large crops of wheat. Rye was raised for family use, white bread being a luxury.

In a word these men came, saw, and conquered, but when a bad year came and they had poor crops, they blamed Nick Sutter for bringing them to such a country. Some of these settlers received very hilly or stony sections of land as their portion, but one farmer jokingly explained that Mephiste was carrying stones in his apron and the string broke when he was striding over his farm.

Aside from farming, many of the men had a trade and followed it, going from house to house as in the days of Chaucer. For instance, John Blesh, a tailor, with his cloth, patterns, and scissors went to the different houses and fitted the family with new clothes. Johannes Laubscher and his wife, Mary Warrenbred, were basket and broom makers. John Probst was a barrel and cask maker. Jacob Schumacher (Shoemaker) and Abraham Wenker were skilled cobblers.

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THE SWISSDALE STORY  
*by*  
Miss Florence M. Laubscher  
*for*  
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
March 20, 1962

## **The Swissdale Story**

Goethe tells us that the best thing we derive from history is the enthusiasm it raises in us. History has meaning. We understand the new in the light of the old.

Swissdale, formerly known as the German Settlement, occupies a strip of land between the Fred Goodman land (about one mile west of the Rest Haven entrance) to about one mile northeast of the entrance to the main highway from Upper Lockport to Queen's Run. This is often known as Croak Hollow. On the north is the Whipporwill School; on the south the Dunnstown Road. Part of Swissdale is in Woodward Township and part in Dunnstable.

In order to orient our thinking let us learn when the neighboring villages were settled. The oldest is Dunnstown laid out in 1794 by William Dunn. Lock Haven was a farm of 200 acres belonging to Dr. John Henderson of Huntington. Jerry Church bargained for it in October 1833, with full possession April 1, 1834. Lock Port, part of the Nathaniel Hanna farm was laid out about the same time. Queen's Run, formerly Quinn's Run, attracted manufacturers of firebrick as early as 1835. Woodward District was formed in 1841 out of a part of Dunnstable and named in honor of G. W. Woodward then the presiding judge of this judicial district. Woodward District or Township then included Dunnstown, Lock Port and Queen's Run.

But the land beyond was a vast wilderness a hundred miles deep. It was to this wilderness that Nicholas Sutter came from Berne, Switzerland, in 1825. Why? In order to get the facts let us go to Switzerland.

The Swiss have always been a freedom loving people. As early as August 1, 1291 three communities made a perpetual alliance to protect themselves against bullying neighbors. That was the beginning of the Swiss Confederation. In the 1700's Switzerland felt the growing power of France. French armies swept down on the little republic in 1798 and quickly over ran the country. In 1803 Napoleon gave Switzerland a new constitution setting up a federal republic of nineteen cantons. After Napoleon lost his power the old system was restored with only a few changes. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 guaranteed the neutrality of Switzerland and that neutrality never since has been broken. But there was a struggle for national unity. The constitution of 1815 was not satisfactory.

During the years from 1820-1848 there were frequent revolutions in almost every European country. Food was scarce, opportunities were limited. The Cantons were overcrowded. Land was very scarce. The government divided the farms into small plots, placed signs with numbers on them and gave each man his number. Sometimes the plots of ground would be several miles from the house where he lived and kept his animals. Each day he had to walk to farm his plot, and he had to give every tenth bushel to the government. The people decided their only hope was emigration. There had been rumors about the opportunities in Penn's Woods, so many people decided to seek a more peaceful life.

In 1825 Canton Berne in which Nicholas Sutter lived, sent him as an agent of the government to explore the land and to see whether reports about Pennsylvania were true. Sutter was born in Zurich, but moved to Berne in childhood. He started out alone and crossed the ocean in 38 days. He was the only passenger on the ship who was not seasick and always proud of that fact. He helped to do the work and to wait on the sick passengers. In this way he became acquainted with Elizabeth Witchey who was coming to America with her brother John and his family. During the five weeks' trip they became well acquainted and they were married soon after they arrived in 1826.

While all of the families who came over afterward were from the country districts around Berne, Elizabeth Witchey was from the city of Bern. She had had all of the free education that was offered. This was equivalent to about five years beyond the grammar grade. She also had had religious education and expected to do missionary work or enter the ministry in America. This she laid aside to marry Nicholas Sutter.

They arrived in Philadelphia early in the spring of 1826 and came up by boat and stage past Milton and Williamsport to Lock Haven which was partly wheat fields and partly swamp. It is said the swampy part was covered or "paved" with huge logs to make walking possible. They had no definite goal, but were looking for a section resembling Switzerland.

The forests of Switzerland had been depleted and no one was allowed to cut down a tree or even a branch without permission. Therefore when Sutter saw the miles of virgin forest he was quite impressed. He sent word back to his Canton: "Kommen alle; est ist wunderbar. Die walde sind unendlich und da sind gross Gelegenheiten fur Werzen Rocken and Gartenge-minze za wuchsen."

Linn in his History of Centre and Clinton Counties (1883) says "with him were John Feller and John Witchey. (I have not been able to find anyone who knows anything about John Feller). There were no houses or signs of habitation, just a couple of trails and wild animals - panthers, wolves and bears. John Feller built the first log hut on land later owned by Jacob Weise. Mr. Feller and seventeen men cut and dragged logs, put up houses, split boards, put on the roof all in one day. Right here the mention of seventeen

men is puzzling but remember the contemporary history I stated in the beginning - Lock Port, Dunnstown, Quinn's Run were already established.

Next day Mr. Feller and family moved in. John Withey and his brother-in-law Nicholas Sutter put up houses soon after and began to clear garden patches. All of this work was done without the aide of a team.

In 1830 Nicholas Sutter's cabin burned. This was on land later belonging to Christ Blesh. Soon he built a larger log house with one room upstairs and one room down with one door and one window. The forest was unbroken and this truly could be called a "howling wilderness". But these settlers went to work with axe and grubbing hoe-- there was little use for a plow. The trees were felled, roots dug out and these spots sown with wheat. Every stalk of wheat was cut and carried into the house and flailed, then gathered into a measure. When they had a bushel they carried it on their backs miles away to the grist mill and next day carried it home. Sutter often cradeled wheat in Lock Haven and on the Nathaniel Hanna farm for "Danny" Hanna.

He sent letters back to the 'old country' telling the advantages of the new land. One advantage was that the worker received every tenth bushel he harvested.

In 1832 and 1833 six families came from Canton Berne: Jacob Schumacher (later changed to Shoemaker), John Blesh, Johannes Laubscher, John Probst, Frederick Glise and John Swope.

I examined the passport of my great-grandfather -- Jacob Rudolph Schumacher and his wife Ann Kirkoffer Schumacher and their three children Rosanna, age 7, John R., age 4, and Jacob, age 3.

The official language on the passport was French. The writing was done in French by a Swiss and he evidently suffered in his lack of knowledge in writing French. In the upper left corner was a description of age, height, hair, forehead, eyebrows, nose, mouth and chin and face. It was issued by the Swiss Confederation Canton De Berne, Breteige Prefecture de Cerlier. They left Bern May 14, 1833. It was signed by an interpreter. Next the French Ambassador in Switzerland placed his stamp thereon. On June 25, 1833 at Basle there was a stamp for the Consul General. This inscription read, "Seen at the Consulate General of the United States of America in Switzerland for going to the United States." On July 20, 1833 at Le Havre, France, it was stamped by the police after the would-be passengers swore that all the statements thereon were true. As they embarked, a heavy stamp bearing an anchor and an inscription were placed on it.

The passport consisted of a double sheet, each page 13 1/2 x 9" on heavy vellum or parchment paper.

Miss Ethel Probst who retired in January 1962 as a Guidance Counselor and Supervisor in some of the New York City Schools examined the passport of her great grandfather, John Probst, and gave me some interesting facts. It too was written in French: Age 24 years, height - 5'2", forehead low, eyebrows black, eyes black, nose ordinary, mouth medium, chin round, face oval. Then an introductory paragraph follows: "All those who are charged with the maintenance of order and surety are invited to let pass freely John Probst, Cooper, (barrel or cask maker) and his wife nee Laubscher and infant son John Probst aged one year. Originating from Finsterhennen, Prefecture of Cerliere." The said Probst exhibited to the proper official the prescribed sum required for the voyage - seven hundred fifty francs. It was requested that aid and assistance be given on the basis of reciprocal offer.

The passport was valid for one year including traveling time or until destination was reached.

It was given at Cerlier 11th day of May, 1833. On the reverse side were several items of interest.

First item - "The Official at the Republic of Bern, certifies that the signature of Mr. Probst is valid", 14th of May, 1833 at Bern.

Second Item- "Seen at the United States Consulate in Basle", 17th of May, 1833.

Third Item- "Seen at the Embassy of France in Switzerland for the purpose of entering France", 19th of May 1833.

Fourth Item- Seems to be something about the voyage to New York having been authorized. 20th of July, 1833.

Following are interesting facts about the rest of the group. John Blesh was a tailor and wife Elizabeth Marouf Blesh, small children John Rudolph, Mary and Ann came from Biele.

Johannes Laubscher, a basket and broom maker and wife, Mary Warrenbred, came from Bern.

Frederick Glise bought his land in 1840 then sold it in 1843. In 1855 he wanted it back but had to pay double the price for it.

The John Swope family tells an interesting story about the son's wife. He was quite young when he came over with his parents, Mr. & Mrs. John Swope. Several years later he met Mary Berger from the Irish Settlement. She and her sister Barbara had a difficult experience when they came from Germany to join their brothers who had been here for a few years. They were taken to New Orleans instead of New York. They worked their

way north by doing odd jobs for short periods of time. This was more difficult because they could not speak English then. Finally they reached the Pittsburgh area. This gave them new courage and they managed to get to Lock Haven and then to the Irish Settlement.

This group of five families loaded a few most precious possessions on their wagons and traveled to the seaport Le Harve, France, where they sold their horses and wagons and then boarded a sailing vessel. They were on the ocean 37 days. One of the Probsts descendents tells me the Simons family of Lock Haven were on the same boat coming from Germany, but they did not leave New York for awhile. Later they came to Lock Haven. From New York City the Swiss "immigrants" "took the cars" to Philadelphia. The ground was broken for the first railroad on the Baltimore and Ohio line in 1829, consequently they must have ridden on the first railroad connecting Philadelphia and New York. From Philadelphia they came to Pottsville by canal boat.

It is said that the Wenker family and some others who came in the second contingent - in 1839 - came by canal to Sunbury or Milton, then walked over the Whitedeer Mountain to join the rest in the German Settlement. They were saving what money they had - all gold coins and carried in a heavy bag.

When the first group finally reached Nicholas Sutter they expected to see him "rolling in wealth". They were greatly disappointed for his place was surrounded by a wilderness. Four families stayed with him in his small house while they hewed the timber and built their own homes. These pioneers said that when dormitory space on the second floor was filled, they divided into shifts - one half sleeping while the other half flailed grain on the kitchen floor. It was the month of August, so many may have slept outside in spite of the howling wolves and panthers. Johannes Laubscher did not stay there. Immediately he put up a 10 x 12 log hut in another section.

Then began for all the struggle for existence. Land was apportioned up the side of the mountain, over the next valley, etc. as it had been in Switzerland. During the first years they cleared the land, planted it and then worked as many days as they would for Nathaniel Hanna at Lock Port or for William Dunn on the Island. Some worked on the dam (1834) when the canal was being completed here. Others worked at Quinns Run for Hollenbeck, McDonnell and Co., manufacturers of firebrick (1835-1840).

There were several ways of obtaining ownership of the land. Several big landowners, one of them by the name of Welch, and others claimed territory by purchase, by grant or even by "Tommy Hawk" rights. the new immigrants would hire on to clear so many acres. Then they were allowed to cultivate these for three years as their pay. In that time the thrifty Swiss had saved enough to purchase the tract. It was said that there were several unfair deals because no deed had been given and later someone else made them pay again to get the deed. Others of these early settlers just took squatters' rights to less desirable parts. Still others bought the cleared acres outright.

When the land was cleared and cultivated they raised large crops of wheat. Rye was raised for family use; white bread was a luxury, so the wheat was sold. It is said that they made a winter's supply of bread in the fall as they had no place to store grain. They left it freeze in pits or outside ovens, then brought it in as needed and put it on the hearth again. This must have been much like our storing baked goods in the freezer today. When a bad year came they blamed Sutter for bringing them into this section.

Aside from farming these men had a trade and followed it. For instance, John Blesh a tailor with his cloth patterns and scissors went to the different houses and fitted the family with new clothes. (Years ago I saw some old school pictures. Boys about seven or eight had very short hair, but seemed to wear dresses. My aunt who taught some of them told me that in many of the large families boys until nine wore dresses, but always kept their hair cut closely, while hair always had long hair.) Jacob Schumacher (Shoemaker) and Abraham Wenker were skilled cobblers. With leather and lasts they spent a week or more in each home in the autumn seeing that the family were properly shod for the winter. Some of the adults kept their own lasts from year to year.

Later Nicholas Sutter bought several hundred acres of land and moved from one farm to another selecting his home one in the East end of the new settlement. Here he built an eight room log home which was considered a mansion in those days by these Swiss people. Later he built a large brick house. (Brick was made close by from clay therein.)

These families lived here with nothing but hunters' paths for years. Wolves and panthers were plentiful until the '70's; bear until the '80's. Mrs. Sutter told how on some nights when she was alone at home with small children (Nicholas, her husband was working away) a panther and wolves climbed on the roof and tried to push aside the scantling and shingles; then they would try the door and window. One can readily understand why a cabin with one door and window was usually built.

Why did these people settle in this territory? No one knows except that they had followed Sutter and that the hills reminded them of their homeland in Switzerland. But one thing is true - Swiss can make a living where no one else can. This was due to the back history of the Swiss. These men came from ancestors who had had a perpetual struggle. All of them were very strong and determined. Every scrap of land in Switzerland was well cultivated. To the man who owned just a 'patch' on the mountain side of Switzerland, and who had burned every branch of a tree for wood, one or two hundred acres in this new land looked like a great wealth. The hills were farmed like a garden and all the early settlers were prosperous. Nicholas Sutter made enough to retire very young. He never believed in a bank, so he kept his money in a secret drawer, and lent it to anyone of his own nationality who was in need. A few forgot to pay back.

Other families followed: Wenkers - 1839, Probsts, Jacob Weise, Peter Boloman, Helbys, Kieffers, Rotes, Hecks, Maders, Grosses, Messerlys, Christian Blesh, Baumans, Goodmans, George Weises and Weavers. The number of Probsts coming over exceeded

all others; there were at one time fifteen different families of Probsts, but many of them were not related. Many had the same first name so they were distinguished by middle initial, such as John A., John B., John F., etc. The same applied to the women; for example Mary E., Mary W., Mary A., Mary Adam (wife of Adam). The following is told as a true happening. In Sunday School the teacher asked the boys and girls who was the first man. One replied "Adam". "Who was the first woman?" Reply: "Mary Adam."

Some of the later ones to come over to this interesting community were Bernhardt Mader, Grosses, Sorgens, Bauman, Monroes, Weises, Raders, etc. I think that some of them came from Germany. It is said that Bernhart Mader could speak Italian, French and German quite fluently.

From 1832 to 1842 the religious services were first conducted in the houses without a minister. Mrs. Sutter who, before her marriage, had planned on becoming a missionary, now found her field of labor. She had been trained as a Deaconess in the Luthern Church of Berne. When the congregation increased and was too large for the homes, the meeting was held in the barn. She was chosen the first Class Leader. The first preachers were Circuit Riders who came in once a month more or less, following the narrow trail on horseback. On Monday morning they left and the intervening services were in the charge of the laymen.

Mrs. Sutter used to conduct revival services and also funeral services as late as 1870 when no preacher was available for the service.

The first preachers were Evangelicals, as this Church sent out German preachers. Jacob Albright, the founder of the Evangelical Church had held a revival in Brush Valley, Centre County in 1805. The Evangelical Church was first organized in 1843 in the log school house on the farm of B. F. Probst. This school house had been built in 1841. In 1858 when a new school was built at the Cross Roads, the old log house was done over by being weather-boarded and having new seats and a pulpit added. This served as a church until 1869 when the white church at the Cross Roads was built. It was across the road from the present church. This building, "The Evangelical Association Church" was torn down and sold in 1927. The present church "The United Evangelical" was erected in 1895.

German Settlement as it was called was formerly constituted as a part of the Jersey Shore Circuit. In 1872 there were eight appointments" Frononia, Wayne, Pine, Nipponose, Friedens, Salladasburg and Jersey Shore. They were all detached from Jersey Shore in 1900. During 1872 to approximately 1890-92 the charge was served by two preachers at the same time, usually an older and a younger man. The older man preached in German and the younger man in English the following Sunday.

Differences arose in the church in 1891. A controversy arose in the Evangelical Association which was the name of the original denomination. This took place not only

in the German Settlement, but also throughout the church of this faith as far west as the Mississippi. In 1895 the Central Pennsylvania Conference which had and still has jurisdiction over the Lock Haven Circuit, broke away from the Evangelical Association and became "The United Evangelical Church". The present church at Swisssdale was built at that time. Therefore, services were conducted each Sunday in each of the Churches. In a small community this made an intense rivalry. The Swisssdale Church was a unit of the Evangelical Church from 1895 until 1922 when most of the Evangelical Association churches joined with the United Evangelical churches to become "The Evangelical Church". The Association group were known as the Esherites, named for the leader Bishop Esher. Some of the older residents like to tell this tale. When the group in the church on one side of the road would sing "Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown" the group on the other side of the road reply by singing "No, Not One; No, Not One."

Two of the early Circuit Riders became Bishops: Rev. John Seybert in 1839 and Rev. W.W. Orwig in 1843.

In the new church Daniel Shoemaker, John Probst, David Sutter (Suiter) and Frederick Glise served as local ministers.

Educational opportunities were somewhat meager. Linn says that one first school in Dunnstable Township was erected at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Previous to 1804). The common school system was established in 1837 and was divided into three districts: Liberty, Deckard, and Deise. Deckard and Deise were in part of the German Settlement.

Woodward District was founded in 1841 out of part of Dunnstable and named in honor of G. W. Woodward, then presiding judge. In 1841 a school was opened in the German Settlement on the B. F. Probst farm one mile from the Cross Roads. This school room had the typical pine benches without backs. Benches not fastened to the floor sometimes rolled over and as a result many a howl was heard. Some of the older residents carried injuries such as broken noses, sprained ankles and crippled fingers as relics of those days.

Some years later the house occupied by this school was abandoned and a new one erected about one mile east of the old one at Churchville, one of the several names given to the settlement. In 1854 a school house was built on the public road leading to Lock Haven to Churchville. In 1868 another one was built near the northeastern boundary of the district.

Here the first pupils were taught the three R's without books. Many learned to read and spell from newspapers. (The first newspaper Eagle, Lock Haven, was August 1838, by William Kinsloe). They learned the multiplication tables from the blackboards. Some of the older people declared they never had a book of any kind during their entire school career. Yet many of them graduated from the Central State Normal established in 1873.

Others went to college elsewhere and several went on to graduate work and professional schools. Few places the size of Swissdale have given so many teachers to the world. Whole families minus one or two graduated from college and Normal School and went into professions. Some of these were the Daniel Shoemakers, the John R. Shoemakers, the Suiters, and the Wenkers. Some of the Probsts, Bleshes, Glises did likewise. I am referring to those who did so from 1850 to 1900.

The first teacher in the German Settlement School was William Hiley, husband of Rosanna Schumacher one of the first immigrants at age 7. After his death she married Samuel Sutter (Suiter) also a teacher. Others in this school were Mr. Olman, Mr. Newell, Mr. McCormick, Mr. Schrack, Bob Aire, Isaac McCloskey, Wm. McCloskey, Samuel Suiter (son), John Bechdal and W. J. Shoemaker.

Most of these teachers believed in the old adage "Spare the rod and spoil the child." These children were certainly not spoiled. In the early days teachers "boarded round". Most families gladly took their turn for money was scarce. Later teachers were paid \$15 - \$20 a month from which they paid their own expenses. This was not too bad for in some old letters I noticed butter was 15 cents a pound; eggs 15 cents a dozen and housework \$1.50 - \$2.00 a week. Chaucer's words were quite true even then as they are true in many places today. "Quite learned was the pedagogue, All threadbare was his coat." These Swiss truly appreciated education. A book was a treasure handed down from generation to generation.

In the early days seven went out to become doctors and surgeons and a dentist. They were Dr. William A. Shoemaker and Dr. Fred Shoemaker who practiced in St. Louis; Dr. W. J. Shoemaker in Lock Haven; Dr. William Blesh, dentist; Dr. Lincoln Blesh who did graduate work in Vienna and located in Oklahoma; Dr. Ada Blesh Chandler, his sister, located in Wisconsin; Dr. David Suiter, grandson of Nicholas Sutter, practiced in New Jersey\* (\*authors note: practiced in Philadelphia, Penna. for 45 years, died in New Jersey- *Louise Suiter Sweet*) and died recently. Dr. Ernest H. Grugan, Dr. Austin Grugan and Dr. Frank H. Brown are the present generation of these earlier doctors.

These early settlers took active part in the Civil War. Many of them saw service in the hardest battles, did time in the prisons and received battle scars. I could not find the exact number from Swissdale. Its boundaries are so indefinite. About 75 went from Woodward Township. Frederick Probst and John Cohan lost their lives.

My grandfather, John R. Shoemaker told me when he was to Civil War my grandmother sold many of her cherished handwoven linens and laces. Also other heirlooms brought from "the old country". The men were fighting; the wheatfields could not be cultivated but there were hungry mouths to feed. Most had large families. True there were small savings but they were used for sickness, death and education. Her oldest son entered Northwestern University in 1874, the next daughter graduated from Central State School in 1884 and another one in 1889, so the savings were needed.

Some of these heirlooms were sold to wealthy lumbermen who happened to be in the area. (The Woodward House in Lockport which is the old red brick and small frame standing at the end of the Lock Port bridge was established in 1847. It entertained 25,000 men in one season. The Hanna Hotel, now torn down but known as the old hotel, was the second structure about the Lock Port bridge on the River Road. It was established 1834. It entertained 20,000 one rafting season and fed 1400 in one day.) Some of these men were executives and lumber bosses from down state. Sometimes they brought their wives for a visit to the mountains. Farrandsville was the thriving business center. A kind of public market was held there where everything was sold. Then as now people were eager for beautiful handmade laces, linens and heirlooms. Grandmother even cut a very large banquet cloth into squares 12" x15" which she sold separately, thus making more than if it was sold whole. Some mothers and wives worked in the Woodward and Hanna Hotels so they could eat and then carry leftovers to their children. Other strong women with half-grown boys plowed and sowed as their men had done. This probably was the usual pattern during the Civil War.

Swissdale was chiefly a farming community. However, it had one industry - a small brick yard. It was located along the main road called the German Road in the neighborhood where Sutter and Feller located. Today the home of Ray Probst is near that location. All of the brick homes in older Swissdale were made from them: the John F. Probst home, now owned by William Laubscher, the Swope home where Mrs. Annie Reeder lives, the Suiter home and the Daniel Shoemaker home (now occupied by his grandson Lawrence) are still in good condition.

Some of the people became interested in making pottery. It was said that the Indians had used a cave near Queen's Run to make beautiful pottery. The Swiss being artistic and skillful craftsmen searched for some of this clay near the cave and it is said that there are many beautiful pieces of pottery made by the residents of Swissdale. I have not been able to find anyone who owns any pieces.

Many people today know Swissdale because of its beautiful cemetery. It was first called "Jacob's Garden". It was on land owned by Jacob Schumacher. Many of the lots purchased in recent years have been sold by his heirs. I believe the Probsts owned the other end and the Getz's some of it. A paragraph in Jacob Schumacher's will is interesting - quote "I wish my body be decently interred in the burying ground on my premises called Jacobs Garden according to the rites and ceremonies of the Evangelical Church and that my funeral be conducted in a manner corresponding with my estate and situation in life." Usually one's funeral has been conducted before one's will is read. I hope that Jacob had no disappointments.

In the early days many buried on their land or in small neighborhood plots. I know of three such plots. One is on the farm now owned by Harvey Simcox about 2 miles east of the Cross Roads. This is the place where the first school house was built. It is referred to as the old cemetery over the Red Hill Road. A few of the Wenkers are buried here also

some relatives of the Salmons. Another is said to be along the Little Plum Run Road, a mile to the left of the entrance to Crestmont, where the Shaffers are buried. It was the Rader place and it is the end of the Old German Road.

Then there is said to be another on the hill in front of the Donald Weise home on Big Plum Run Rd. I believe some Weises and Halls are buried there.

Swissdale has several suburbs: Hardscrabble (made famous by Faraway Moses), Pleasant Valley, (some citizens battled long and hard to keep this one), Plum Run and Whippoor-Will Hill, Deise Hollow, VonGunder or Beck Hollow, Croak Hollow, Skunk Hollow and Halltown.

Halltown has an interesting story. It is 3 miles from Lock Haven on the public road from Lock Haven to Swissdale. Today one much pass it in going from Dunnstown to the Cross Roads. Linn says it was taken up by warrant in the name of Peter Grove ( the Indian Scout) said to be a soldier's claim. It was sold for \$2.00 - \$4.00 an acre. Some of the first settlers were Felix McCloskey, Isaac McCloskey, John Smith, Coleman Huling and Andrew Litz. The first school house, known as the Smith School, was built in 1854 by Felix McCloskey. William Hawkman was the first teacher. Today this area is getting to be like the Eastern Seaboard a kind of "rural megalopolis".

As we said, Swissdale was known as Churchville, Pleasant Valley but mostly called the German Settlement. After years of different designations, a kind of town meeting was held in the church. This was about 1890. After discussing pro's and con's David Wenker rose and said it seemed ridiculous to call it German Settlement when most of the settlers came from Switzerland, and he moved to call it Swissdale and the motion carried.

The census of Woodward Township taken in 1850 is interesting. There were 249 white males, 215 white females and 12 colored. There were 152 colored in the county in that census: Lock Haven 55; Keating 52; Bald Eagle 17 and the other 20 scattered.

These settlers deserve great credit for the energy and persecerance they displayed in pioneering into the wilderness where surrounded by wild animals they cleared farms and established homes. The Indians had already left. This research helped to glimpse and relive the vicissitudes, the sacrifices, the suffering, the joys and hopes of our ancestors. Their's were not spectacular lives. They had no wealth, but they had the true fundamentals: love of learning, love of home, love of country and love of God. They were willing to make sacrifices to remain true to these ideals. On such was America founded and on such it must go forward.

(Florence Laubscher - for Clinton County Historical Society - March 20, 1962)

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Also - Personal examination of tombstones, passports, family Bible, etc. and talks with relatives of ones mentioned.

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**\*Donated by Dean Laubscher**

### History of Swissdale Education

Educational opportunities were somewhat meager. Two schools were erected in Dunnstable Township before 1834, no one knows exactly where. The first school available for Swissdale is the previously mentioned log one, built on the farm of B.F. Probst in 1841, one mile east of the Cross Roads, several years after the bill of Free Education became a law. This school room had the typical "pine benches, without back," not fastened to the floor. As a result, many a cry was raised by pupils and benches rolling on the floor. Some of the old residents still carry injuries, such as broken noses, sprained ankles, and crippled fingers as a relic of those days.

Here the first pupils were taught the three "R's" without books. Many learned to read and spell from newspapers, and learned to multiply from the blackboard. Some of them declared they never had a book of any kind during their entire school career.

The teachers of this school were: W.J. Riley, Mr. McNerney, Mr. Olman, Mr. Newell, Mr. McCormick and Mr. Shrack. Among the early teachers in the school at the Cross Roads were: Bob Airs, Isaac McCloskey, David Suiter, John Bechdol and W.T. Shoemaker.

Most of these teachers, who were Germans, practiced the old adage "Spare the rod and spoil the child" and these children were certainly not spoiled. The teachers here were well remunerated, receiving from \$15.00 to \$20.00 a month from which they paid their board. Then as now, the words of Chaucer still ring true, "Quite learned was the pedagogue, All threadbare was his coat."

The Eckard School was built in 1845 and the Deise in 1855 in another part of Dunnstable Township.

The information listed here was taken from History of Clinton County by Cora Suiter, the History of the Probst Family, Swissdale History by Florence Laubscher. All this can be found in the Ross Library.

\*Donated by Dean Laubscher

History of Swissdale  
[Stalked by Panthers](#)

A panther following Nicholas Sutter for two miles one night, was kept off by his walking backward striking a flint before the animals eyes. A pet fawn, pigs, and sheep were killed the same night. Hearing a call from the forest which sounded like "Hello", then seeing two glaring eyes in the distance he concealed himself in the thick bushes while a panther galloped by.

On another occassion there seemed to be trouble among the pigs. As the owner went out he saw what he thought was a man carrying off a pig. He took a fence rail and pushed the supposed man until he dropped the pig -- and then an old bruin got down on all fours and strode sulkily past him.

Suburbs of Swissdale are Whipporwill Hill, Plum Run, Deise Hollow, Pleasant Valley (some citizens battled long and hard to keep this one), Hardscrabble (made famous by Faraway Moses), VonGunder or Beck Hollow, Croak Hollow, Skunk Hollow and Halltown.

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