A Bibliography Plan for:
Investigating Swiss Mennonite Ancestry

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INTRODUCTION

Topic, Scope and Audience

This paper documents my search process in compiling a bibliography on the subject of Swiss Mennonite ancestry. The bibliography is aimed in particular at the study of the Swiss Mennonites who emigrated from Switzerland to Pennsylvania between 1710 and 1754, and from whom most of the current Mennonites of southeastern Pennsylvania descend. The intended bibliography would be comprised of sources in two topical areas. First, those sources relevant to the historical examination of Mennonites and their motivation for emigration from Switzerland, and second, those sources relevant to genealogical research on Swiss Mennonite ancestry. The scope of the bibliography would encompass three main areas: history and origin of the Mennonite faith, persecution of Mennonites and motivations for emigration, and finally, genealogical sources. In the planned bibliography, the first two topics would be grouped together as “historical” sources and the third topic would be its own section of genealogical sources. With regards to genealogical sources, the scope is limited only to genealogical sources with a specific Swiss Mennonite application or focus. It is assumed that the reader would investigate broader genealogical sources, such as censuses and land records, elsewhere.

The audience for the planned bibliography is family historians or genealogists investigating Swiss Mennonite ancestry. A supplemental audience could include those interested in the history of the broader Anabaptist movement, of which the Mennonites were one group.

Motivation

My interest in this topic stems from my own family origins, as my paternal line descends from a Swiss Mennonite who arrived in Pennsylvania by way of Germany in 1732. My ancestor followed a path common to many Swiss Mennonites of this period, first escaping Switzerland to
the Palatinate region of southwestern Germany, and from there departing for Pennsylvania. My ancestor’s story is not uncommon in our nation’s history, representing just one story of millions who left the life they knew behind in anticipation of religious freedom and a better life. Although not particularly religious myself, I have always been intrigued by this particular element of my heritage. Having the good fortune to never have faced such a monumental decision - a life of persecution or life in an unknown land - I was curious to know more about the conditions that led to my ancestor’s journey.

**BACKGROUND**

**History**

The Mennonites descend from the broader Anabaptist movement that emerged in the middle ages and the early Reformation period. Throughout the middle ages, Anabaptist was a catchall term used by the Roman church to refer to a number of separatist groups that were marked by their rejection of Roman church ritual and their belief in the Bible as the only authority (Horsch, 1942). The various Anabaptist groups were distinguished by plain dress, a moral lifestyle, opposition to infant baptism and a refusal to partake in government and oaths (Eshleman, 1991). It is interesting to note that the term Anabaptist, literally “re-baptizer”, was not merely a descriptive term, but a derogatory name for members of the movement (Schelbert, 1978). In fact, in areas where the Anabaptist population took a more radical stance, such as in northern Germany, the term was used to describe any “dangerously misguided revolutionaries” (Anabaptists, 2010) for many centuries afterwards.

In the 16th century, the Anabaptists initially allied themselves with Protestant Reformation leaders such as Martin Luther in Germany and Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, but soon split with them over theological differences, chiefly the issue of separation of church and
state (Smith, 1929). Separation of church and state, while initially a component of the Protestant reform movement, was abandoned as reform leaders made concessions to ruling parties in order to ensure survival of the Reform churches (Horsch, 1942). This led to the establishment of state Reform churches in Germany and Switzerland, along with decrees requiring infant baptism. The Anabaptists rejected the state churches, holding that the true church consisted only of adult members who were voluntarily baptized into the faith (Haller, 1993; Schelbert, 1978). The Anabaptist rejection of infant baptism was problematic in an era when “tax roles and military conscription were based on infant baptismal records” (Anabaptists, 2010), and helps to explain one of the reasons why Anabaptists were so heavily persecuted.

In Switzerland, the Anabaptists called themselves the Brethren, and solidified their split from Zwingli’s Swiss reform movement in January 1525 with the baptism of approximately 15 founding Brethren members (Horsch, 1942; Switzerland, 1955). From 1525 to 1530, the Swiss Brethren grew rapidly, both within Switzerland and to the north, where the movement spread into Germany and up the Rhine River into Holland (Smith, 1929). In fact, it was the Dutch group, later unified under the leadership of Menno Simons and called the Mennonites, who would provide the enduring name for the Anabaptists (Anabaptists, 2010). Back in Switzerland, former allies such as Zwingli decried the Anabaptist refusal to bear arms as “insurrectionary” and “anarchistic” (Horsch, 1942), and Swiss persecution of Anabaptists began in earnest after 1530. In Switzerland, Anabaptists were not merely outcasts but were excluded from every aspect of life. First, the cities of Zürich and Bern banned Anabaptists and forced them into the mountains. Next, laws were passed which made it difficult for Anabaptists to marry and own or inherit land (Smith, 1929). Eventually, thousands of Anabaptists were driven into exile, with punishment for return attempts including public flogging, branding and even execution (Smith,
1929; Whitmer 2001). Anabaptist sympathizers were also severely punished, with harsh measures taken against anyone who gave goods or shelter to Anabaptists, purchased goods from them or provided them with meeting places (Horsch, 1942).

In response to the persecution, and in anticipation of worsening conditions, some Anabaptists began voluntarily leaving Switzerland in the 1530s with groups departing for the Alsace region of France, Russia, Moravia (Czech) and the Palatinate region of southwestern Germany. However, the Thirty Years War and subsequent famines and epidemics decimated many of these early groups, and by the mid-17th century, the many scattered Anabaptists consisted of just three remaining groups: the Mennonites in Holland, the Hutterites in Moravia and a few remaining Swiss Brethren in Switzerland (Smith, 1929). The Swiss Brethren had survived mainly by living in remote regions where they were able to escape notice (Hopple, 1988), however, as Swiss persecution rebounded¹ they again looked to the German Palatinate region for refuge.

The Palatinate princes, as in the previous century, initially welcomed the Swiss Brethren, who they hoped would help repopulate the region after the devastation of the Thirty Years War (Smith, 1929). The Brethren settled in the Palatinate beginning in the 1650s and were allowed to live in relative peace so long as they did not attempt to convert new members and contributed to the economy by farming (Anabaptists, 2010). Yet, the Anabaptists were “only a tolerated

¹ Smith (1929) discusses the reasons for Switzerland’s particularly harsh persecution of the Anabaptists, which was far more severe than in other European countries. Switzerland’s stance was that Anabaptist refusal to bear arms constituted treason because Switzerland, unlike other European countries of the time, did not hire foreign mercenary soldiers, thus relying on its citizens to build its national army. Smith also offers an alternate, more sinister explanation. While Switzerland may not have maintained a mercenary army of its own, it apparently had no qualms with selling its citizens to mercenary armies in other countries, and ran a brisk trade doing so. Thus, the Anabaptist refusal to bear arms and serve as goods for sale posed an economic threat to the Swiss rulers.
people” (Smith, 1929), and beginning in the 1680s, persecution began anew as Catholic princes replaced the more tolerant Protestant princes. At around this time, in 1681, William Penn, himself a Quaker, invited the Palatinate Anabaptists, called the Menists by Penn, and later to be known as the Mennonites, to settle in his colony in the new world, where they could enjoy complete civil and religious freedom (Pennsylvania, 1955). The first group arrived in 1683, and established the first Mennonite settlement in the new world at Germantown (Publication Board, 1998). As conditions deteriorated in the Palatinate, the ethnic Swiss Mennonites left in increasing numbers, especially after 1710 when persecutions heightened both in the Palatinate and in Switzerland (Smith, 1929). Immigration continued in a steady stream until 1754, when the beginning of the Seven Years War ended all immigration for a number of years. This period in the 18th century constituted the highpoint of Mennonite immigration, and it is from this group of Palatinate ethnically Swiss Mennonites that most of today’s Pennsylvania Mennonites descend (Horsch, 1942).

Challenges

There are some inherent challenges in investigating Swiss Mennonite genealogy. First, civil registers have only been mandatory in Switzerland since 1876, and church records are the only documentation prior to this. Since Mennonites were not members of the prevailing church, their lives were usually not documented in church records, save perhaps for the member who first left the main church (Nielson, 1979). This is further complicated by a lack of Mennonite-
maintained church records, owing to the Mennonite view of record keeping, in which even the simple act of maintaining membership lists was viewed as evidence of pride (Archives, 1955).

If records do in fact exist, another challenge lies in identifying the ancestor’s Swiss place of origin (Yoder, 2000). Determining the place of origin in Swiss ancestry is so important because of the unique citizenship model in Switzerland where a person’s citizenship stems first and foremost from the town or community in which the person resided (Strassburger, 1980). This means that any records pertaining to that person - birth, death or marriage - were kept in the person’s “home” community, regardless of where the event actually occurred. By contrast, most records in the U.S. are kept in the jurisdiction where the event occurred, most often at the county or state level. One of the most valuable sources for identifying the Swiss town or community of origin is the Familiennamenbuch (“Family Name Book”), which is discussed in the Appendix. In spite of these challenges, one advantage the Swiss Mennonite genealogist has is the particularly bureaucratic nature of both Switzerland and Germany, with the result that both countries have much more complete records than, for example, British records of the same period (Weaver, 1982).

SEARCH PROCESS

Narrowing the Topic

I began with a vague idea of finding out more about the motivations for the Mennonite exodus from Switzerland in the 18th century, taking primarily a historical focus. However, since I realized there was likely a limited audience for an historic or academic study of this topic, I thought the topic would benefit from the addition of a more practical element. Thus, I developed a two-fold plan for the bibliography, taking into account that the likely audience for this topic would be persons of Swiss Mennonite ancestry investigating their family history. First, I would
include sources that provided a historical exploration of the Swiss Mennonites and their reasons for emigration; second, I would include specific genealogical sources useful to the investigation of Swiss Mennonite ancestry. I had originally hoped to provide genealogical sources that would be specific to each of the three regions: that is, Switzerland, Palatinate Germany and Pennsylvania but I found this was too large of a scope and thus limited the genealogical sources that spoke generally to some aspect of Swiss Mennonite genealogy.

In addition to narrowing the topic, I also needed to consider the types of repositories I would include in my search. With a genealogical subject, it makes sense to include archival repositories, and while there are a number of Mennonite archives, they are mainly located in regions with large Mennonite populations, such as Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and Goshen, Indiana. Further complicating matters, not all of the archives have online catalogs. I felt the nature of the topic necessitated the inclusion of these archives, but I had no way of searching their holdings to ascertain their value. I decided my approach to this would be to include some Mennonite repositories that were searchable online in my search plan, for example the Mennonite Historical Library and the Masthof Bookstore. While I would not be able to examine the holdings of the non-online archives, I believe the planned bibliography would certainly need to mention them as suggested repositories for more advanced exploration.

**Search Strategies**

I used three main search strategies: keyword/key phrase searching, controlled vocabulary and browsing, each of which is described below.

**Search Strategy 1: Keyword/keyword phrase searching.** This strategy encompassed both simple keyword searching and more complex key phrase searching employing Boolean operators. I varied the approach depending on the database. With a highly structured database
such as “Historical Abstracts”, I used key phrase searching. However, with a more basic
database such as the “Masthof Bookstore” catalog, or any database where I was not initially sure
of the classification schema, I used keyword searching. An enumeration of the relevant keywords
and key phrases follows below.

Keywords. One of my first steps was to brainstorm a list of subject terms. These terms
would also serve as my keyword search terms, and are listed below:

Mennonites
Swiss Mennonites
Swiss Mennonite Emigration
Mennonite Immigration to Pennsylvania
Mennonite Genealogy
Pennsylvania Mennonites
Anabaptist

Key phrases. While I planned to use key phrases with some of the more structured
databases, e.g., academic databases, I was initially doubtful as to the coverage on this topic.
Thus, I kept my key phrases fairly simple in order to avoid inadvertently excluding potential
sources:

Mennonite* AND (history* OR genealog*)
Mennonite* AND Pennsylvania
Mennonite AND (Swiss OR Switzerland)
Mennonite* AND (immigra* OR emigra*)

Search Strategy 2: Controlled vocabulary - Library of Congress Subject Headings

(LCSH). Based on my list of subject terms, I next went to LC Authorities online to determine
the appropriate LCSH subject heading. The chart on the next page lists my subject terms on the
left side with the corresponding Library of Congress subject heading on the right side.

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3 An early search revealed “Anabaptist” as an additional subject term/keyword that I had not
noted in my initial brainstorming session. Though I was aware of Anabaptism as the broader
movement out of which the Mennonite faith developed, the term simply had not occurred to me
at the time. Overall, the term was too broad for my topic but it did prove useful in some of my
general reference searches so I have noted it here.
As I reviewed the LC Authorities, I noted a couple of additional potentially useful headings. These additional subject headings are noted where appropriate in the database assessments below.

I used controlled vocabulary primarily in library catalog searches but also within other databases. However, because I used the controlled vocabulary in non-catalog databases more in a navigational fashion than a search fashion, I have classed those searches within the browsing search strategy, below.

**Search Strategy 3: Browsing.** This strategy encompasses both shelf browsing and what I call database browsing - that is, browsing within database subject headings or descriptors that have been identified via their attachment to previously identified sources.

*Shelf browsing.* Below were the most relevant call numbers for shelf browsing⁴:

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⁴ A great majority of the sources I reviewed were housed either at Bethel Seminary library or Concordia University library. Bethel Seminary, not surprisingly, has a large collection of books on various religions, and Concordia houses the collection belonging to the German Genealogical Society, a branch of the Minnesota Genealogical Society. Both of these libraries typify the type of library in which sources relevant to this topic are likely to be found: smaller, regional and/or topical libraries. Since these types of libraries often use Dewey rather than LC, I do not think the LC numbers are especially valuable to a search strategy on this topic but I have included them anyway.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEWEY DECIMAL</th>
<th>LIBRARY OF CONGRESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>289 Religion &gt;&gt; Christian denominations and sects &gt;&gt; Other denominations &amp; sects</td>
<td>BX Christian Denominations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>289.3, 289.7 - most relevant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>929 History &gt;&gt; Biography, genealogy, insignia &gt;&gt; Genealogy, names, insignia</td>
<td>CD Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>929.1, 929.3 - most relevant</td>
<td>CS Genealogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>974 History &gt;&gt; General history of North America &gt;&gt; General history of North America: Northeastern United States</td>
<td>F146 - F160 Pennsylvania history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>974.8 - most relevant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Database browsing.* By database browsing I refer to the practice of browsing within subject headings identified by attachment as descriptors/subject headings on previously-identified sources. While I could have take a more structured approach to this, that is, taken the time to ascertain the controlled vocabulary for each database and perform searches using the controlled vocabulary (as with LCSH above), I found it more efficient to locate starting materials using keywords or key phrases, and then to either limit from there or browse within subject headings.

With regards to browsing generally, with this project and others, browsing located some of the most valuable sources. For this reason, while it may not be a very structured method, it is, perhaps illogically, the search method I have the most confidence in. Even when employing a structured search method, I am always fearful that I have inadvertently omitted some aspect in my search parameters. Thus, I use browsing as sort of a “CYA” method. For me, browsing is a safety net - even if I have located some excellent targeted results using a more structured method, I always browse in some fashion from there to make sure I have not overlooked anything.
Databases

Reference Databases

I did not expect to find a lot of information in reference sources because Mennonites represent such a small minority worldwide. This mostly played out as expected in the sources I examined, with most materials pertaining to the broader Anabaptist movement.

*ALA Guide to Reference*

Search strategy used: Keyword/key phrase

I chose keyword/key phrase searching with *Guide to Reference* because prior experience with this database had shown me that the classification was inconsistent, and I did not want to take the chance of missing anything. The results are summarized below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites AND Genealogy</td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites AND History</td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite AND (Immigra* OR Emigra*)</td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabaptist</td>
<td>Useful; some overlap with Mennonite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration AND Genealogy</td>
<td>Useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration AND History</td>
<td>Useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I struggled with how to rate *Guide to Reference*. It did direct me to one excellent source, *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, discussed in the Appendix, but most sources were related to the broader Anabaptist movement. Also, since my catalog searches also identified *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, I would rate *Guide to Reference* as only moderately useful.
Credo Reference Online: Religion
Encyclopedia of Religion in America

Search Strategy: Keyword

I have grouped these two reference databases together because neither was especially useful. Normally, I would not even search these types of databases, as my, perhaps unfounded, assumption is that they do not provide the depth of information needed for my purposes. However, of the religious focus of these databases and my topic, I felt I should at least give them a try. Based on the small number of results in Guide to Reference, and my expectations being about the same for these two, I only searched on two keywords with each of these, as summarized below.

Credo Reference Online: Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite</td>
<td>Mostly not relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabaptist</td>
<td>Mostly not relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Encyclopedia of Religion in America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite</td>
<td>Mostly not relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabaptist</td>
<td>Useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Encyclopedia of Religion did provide an informative article on Anabaptism that was helpful to my understanding of the development of the Mennonite faith within the context of the Anabaptist movement.

Print Reference Browsing

I located two useful print reference sources while shelf browsing in the reference section.

First, The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions included an entry on the Mennonites, which, while brief, provided a good summary of the major Mennonite migration patterns. Second, Facts
*About American Immigration* contained an article entitled “Immigrants from Switzerland” that included a discussion of the Mennonites as well as some useful statistics on Swiss immigration figures by decade. Of all the reference sources, this was most useful in terms of the information it contained, and also because it directed me to the Haller book, discussed in the Appendix.

**Library Catalog Databases**

**CLICNet**

Search strategy: Controlled vocabulary

My initial searches using LCSH headings yielded a balanced amount of results - a variety, yet still manageable in numbers - and I was able to review them all without having to limit further. While browsing my initial results, I noted five additional LCSH headings with potential and some of these were useful in identifying additional sources. The chart below lists both the LC subject headings I determined earlier, as well as the additional headings located via browsing in LC authorities online and in browsing *CLICNet*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites</td>
<td>Mostly not relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--Switzerland</td>
<td>Mostly not relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland--Emigration and Immigration</td>
<td>Somewhat relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--Switzerland--Genealogy</td>
<td>Mostly not relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--United States--Genealogy</td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania--Emigration and Immigration</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--United States--History--19th Century</td>
<td>Mostly not relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--History</td>
<td>Mostly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania Dutch--Genealogy</td>
<td>Somewhat relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German American--Pennsylvania--Genealogy</td>
<td>Somewhat relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If the above list exhausts the reader, it exhausted me too! I quickly realized I had entirely too many headings, especially as I began to notice overlap among them. In addition, some of the headings contained items either too specific (e.g., Amish Mennonites) or too broad (e.g., German immigration). Thus, I decided to narrow my list to just the most relevant headings for future catalog searches. The most relevant headings, based on CLICNet results, were:

- Mennonites--Pennsylvania
- Mennonites--History
- Pennsylvania--Emigration and Immigration
- Switzerland--Emigration and Immigration

Overall, CLICNet was useful in identifying a starting point, and shelf browsing from there brought me to some really excellent sources. CLICNet’s function as a unified catalog was also very useful to me, since many of the sources were housed at either Bethel Seminary or Concordia. It was helpful to be able to identify all of the sources using the convenience of one catalog.

**MNCat (University of Minnesota - Wilson Library)**

Search strategy employed: Controlled vocabulary

I had not initially planned to search Wilson Library, as I did not think the academic/research focus of its holdings would include a lot of sources relevant to my topic. However, one of the items located at Concordia was a reader-created index to a promising-sounding source: *The Pennsylvania Mennonite Immigration to Pennsylvania in the Eighteenth*
Century, by C.H. Smith. While Concordia had the index\(^5\), it did not have the Smith book itself. Since I would have to go to Wilson Library to review the Smith book (more on that later!), I decided to search *MNCat*, the University’s catalog, for other potential sources. I recalled from my undergrad days that the University used LC classification so I knew I could use the same LC subject headings I had already identified to search *MNCat*. However, as noted above, owing to duplication within my headings, I just searched within the four most useful headings, as summarized below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Somewhat relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--History</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania--Emigration and Immigration</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland--Emigration and Immigration</td>
<td>Mostly not relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I expected, *MNCat* held few sources pertinent to my topic. The two search terms noted as highly relevant above were both attached to the Smith book, which I had initially located using *CLICNet*.

*Mennonite Historical Library (Goshen College)*

Search strategy employed: Keyword and key phrase searching

The *Mennonite Historical Library* is located on the campus of Goshen College, a Mennonite college in Goshen, Indiana. Established in 1906 with just three shelves of materials, it has now grown to one of the most comprehensive collections on Mennonite and Anabaptist history. Despite this impressive description, I was not sure what to expect and the Mennonite affiliation wrongly had me envisioning a “horse and buggy” version of a catalog. I was

\(^5\) The index, by Arta F. Johnson, is identified in the Appendix within the annotated entry for C.H. Smith’s *The Pennsylvania Mennonite Immigration to Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century.*
pleasantly surprised to find that the catalog was nearly of the same caliber as *CLICNet* and *MNCat*. The library uses LC classification so my initial plan was to use my previously-identified LC headings. However, I was not able to determine how to do this as typing the headings into the search box as a subject search did not work. I was able to navigate to the subject headings by using a keyword search but could not determine how to search using the headings themselves. Thus, I instead employed keyword and key phrase searching, as illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND History</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND Pennsylvania AND Switzerland*</td>
<td>Somewhat Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND Pennsylvania AND Immigr*</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND Switzerland AND Emigr*</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND Switzerland AND Genealogy</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the *Mennonite Historical Library* catalog had some limitations, such as not supporting complex phrase searching and limiting to only three search fields at a time, overall it yielded a number of useful sources. Also, since the library participates in interlibrary loan, their holdings are easily accessible to researchers around the country.

*WorldCat*

I had hoped to use *WorldCat* as a fail-safe to check my search strategies in the other catalogs, but I found that the subject terms most useful in the other, smaller catalogs were basically useless here, as they pulled in well over a thousand results each, as summarized below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE RANKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites--History</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania--Emigration and Immigration</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland--Emigration and Immigration</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While I could have taken the time to try to refine more complex key phrases for use in WorldCat, I felt I had already identified a good number of sources using the other two catalogs and felt this would not be an effective use of my time. However, WorldCat did prove useful to me in another way. The nature of genealogy publishing is very much geared towards small regional publishers and even self-publishers. Many of these publications are held only in regional libraries or history centers where the subject pertains to the local population’s ancestry. WorldCat was very useful in locating some of these more obscure sources, which allowed me to either order them through interlibrary loan.

**Full-Text/Abstract Aggregator Databases:**

*Historical Abstracts (EBSCOHost):*

Search strategies employed: Key phrase searching and database browsing

At the outset of this project, I was doubtful I would find anything in these “academic” types of databases. In fact, I considered changing my subject before even beginning the search because I assumed the topic was too specific to have received much academic study. Thus, I was surprised when my initial, somewhat perfunctory search of Historical Abstracts returned a surprising number of results - too many, in fact! A quick glance over the results revealed potentially relevant titles so I knew I had to narrow my results to a more manageable number. From my initial review, I noticed that the results covered the whole diaspora of Mennonite migration (for example, emigration to Russian and Mexican colonies). Since these were outside of my area of interest, I combined the initial simple search phrases into a more complex phrase that limited the results to those pertaining to Pennsylvania and/or Switzerland. This helped somewhat but the results were still pulling in results for Amish Mennonites, also not part of my
topic. Thus, I added an additional limiter of “NOT Amish”, which resulted in 22 results, most of them relevant to my topic. The search results are summarized below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND (hist* OR genealogy*)</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND (Swiss OR Switzerland)</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND (Immigra* OR Emigra*)</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND (Swiss OR Switzerland OR Pennsylvania) AND (Emigra* OR Immigra*)</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mennonite* AND Pennsylvania) AND (hist* OR genealogy*) AND (Swiss OR Switz*) AND NOT Amish.</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also employed database browsing in *Historical Abstracts*, and was able to locate a couple of additional articles using this method. Interestingly, I found that browsing within broader headings, such as:

- MENNONITES -- History
- ANABAPTISTS -- History

yielded more relevant results than browsing within more specific headings, such as:

- SWITZERLAND -- Church history -- 16th century
- MENNONITES -- North America -- History

My most specific, if simple, satisfaction in using *Historical Abstracts* was that it marked my first ever successful use of “NOT” (i.e., “NOT Amish”) as a search operator! On a broader level, I was both surprised and pleased by the number of articles I located using *Historical Abstracts*, and rate it as one of the most useful databases in my search. The only complication was that many of the articles were in Mennonite topical journals not commonly held in this area, such as *Mennonite Quarterly Review* and *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*. Fortunately, Bethel
Seminary held some of the more recent issues and others were easily obtained through interlibrary loan.\(^6\)

**ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials (EBSCOHost):**

Search strategies employed: Key phrase searching

I overlooked this database early on and did not review it until relatively late in my search process. Since it was an EBSCO database, like the previously reviewed *Historical Abstracts*, I did not have high expectations, thinking it would have considerable overlap with what I had already located in *Historical Abstracts*. Thus, I only searched on the two complex key phrases that I had refined while using *Historical Abstracts*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND (Swiss OR Switzerland OR Pennsylvania) AND (Emigra* OR Immigra*)</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mennonite* AND Pennsylvania) AND (hist* OR genealogy*) AND (Swiss OR Switz*) NOT Amish.</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table reveals, I had better than expected with those key phrases, and I was able to locate two additional very relevant articles. *ATLA* is a full-text database, a fact which left me wishing I had reviewed it earlier on as it not only contained the full text of some of the articles I had already ordered through interlibrary loan, it also included a full e-book version of the Smith book, *The Pennsylvania Mennonite Immigration to Pennsylvania in the Eighteenth Century*. Of course, by this time, I had already made a special visit to the U of M to review the book!

**Global Mennonite Anabaptist Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)**

Search strategy employed: keyword and key phrase searching

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\(^6\) With electronic delivery, these articles arrived more quickly than I would have been able to obtain them via a physical visit to a library, even if they had been available locally. Thank you interlibrary loan!
GAMEO is a database of articles on Mennonite and Anabaptist topics, including history, theology and biography, among others. It is a collaboration of several North American Mennonite councils. While originally intended to focus on the Mennonite groups in Canada, it now has a global Mennonite focus. While some articles are user-submitted and all articles are editorially reviewed, GAMEO specifically states that it is not Wiki-style collaboration. The articles are fully indexed by title and there is also a search feature. GAMEO also contains the full text of The Mennonite Encyclopedia, discussed previously and in the appendix. Though not immediately apparent, the database does have search features such as Boolean searching using AND/OR, truncation support, as well as the ability to limit by format, dates, author and editorial review status. However, from what I could tell, the Boolean searches could only be performed as long strings, i.e., they could not be separated into parenthetical sub-phrases, or at least when I did so, the results did not appear limited as I would have expected. Because of this I was afraid to combine AND and OR in the same search string.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite*</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND histor*</td>
<td>Too many results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND history* AND immigra* AND Switzerland</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND history* AND immigra* AND Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite* AND history* AND immigra* AND Switzerland AND Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 The Mennonite Encyclopedia discussed in the appendix is the 1955 print version available at Bethel Seminary library, owing to the fact that I did not discover the more current full-text version was available via GAMEO until after I had already been to Bethel.
Heritage Quest Online: PERSI

Search strategy employed: keyword searching

Heritage Quest is not an academic database like Historical Abstracts and ATLA, however it does provide a number of sources useful to genealogists. It includes sources such as U.S. Federal census records, 1790-1930, some with indexes, records relating to the Revolutionary War and Freedman’s records. I was primarily interested in Heritage Quest’s PERiodical Source Index (“PERSI”) database, which is an index of 2.3 million genealogy and local-history articles. This database does not have a true advanced search feature like the more complex academic databases but did allow keyword and key phrase searching by name, place and periodical title.

There did not appear to be any subject classification - thus, a keyword search on “Mennonite” brought up any item that had that word either in the place, name or publication field, but there was no classification, or at least it was not apparent. My keyword search on “Mennonite” returned a large number of results, so I tried some Boolean searches as a test (the site did not indicate whether Boolean searching was supported). Searching on Mennonite* AND Switzerland reduced the sources and I surmised Boolean was supported. When I tried a slightly more complex search phrase which included a wildcard operator on two search terms, I received an error message that only one wildcard operator was allowed per search - something I had not encountered in any other database. This simply added an extra step to searching: if I wanted to search Mennonite(s) combined with Emigration or Emigrant, I had to run as two separate searches, as illustrated in the last two rows of the summary chart below:
### SEARCH TERMS | RELEVANCE RANKING
--- | ---
Mennonite* | Too many results
Mennonite* AND (Swiss OR Switzerland OR Pennsylvania) AND (Emigration OR Immigration) | Highly Relevant
Mennonite* AND (Swiss OR Switzerland OR Pennsylvania) AND (Emigrant OR Immigrant) | Highly relevant

**Heritage Quest Online: family history books**

Search strategy employed: keyword searching

Genealogical research often builds upon the work of other genealogists and can involve a lot of collaboration. For example, a dead end on your family tree might be advanced by a chance mention of that person in a printed genealogy of another branch of your family, or even in a completely different family related by marriage. Thus, printed family histories and related books can be very useful to genealogical research. Heritage Quest Online has a full-text database of 28,000 books relating to family history. Some of these are also indexed with PERSI but of course the advantage here is that the full text is available. The database can be searched by family name or geographical location, or can be browsed by title. When a name or place is searched on, the database returns the number of “hits” within a given book, which can then be directly scrolled through for closer examination. This makes the process of examining a book for pertinence much easier than physically paging through a 75-year-old family history with a poor or altogether missing index. Since usefulness of this source is specifically contingent upon whether material on your ancestor is included in the database, this database would not be useful to every genealogist investigating his or her Swiss Mennonite genealogy. However, I would still include it as a worthwhile source in a bibliography on the subject.
Other databases

Masthof Bookstore

Search strategy employed: keyword searching

*Masthof Press*, located in Morgantown, Pennsylvania, is perhaps the premier press associated with Mennonite genealogy. One of their primary services is as a self-publishing venue for individual genealogists. *Masthof* also sells over 3,000 publications related to Mennonite and Anabaptist genealogy, history, reference and related subjects.

The bookstore catalog can be searched online and although simple, it is a fairly functional catalog. The search mechanism operates by keyword searching on the title, author or description (plus a couple of other options), or by browsing within broad subject categories. The subject categories seem to indicate some type of classification, but it appears to be Masthof’s own classification schema. There are about 15 general subject categories and due to this “light” classification, I restricted my searching to very basic keyword searches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH TERMS</th>
<th>RELEVANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites (and separately, Mennonite)</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>Highly Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emigration</td>
<td>Somewhat relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>Somewhat relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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8 I am familiar with *Masthof* because my father used them to publish a four-part family history on our family, and if I may brag a little on my father’s behalf, a link to part I of the series can be viewed [here](https://example.com). You will notice the summary mentions other family names mentioned in the book. This illustrates the point made in the previous section that information on one’s family can often be found in a family history whose primary focus is another family. Thus, it is important to cast a wide net in searching family histories.
One caution with this catalog is that it did not support truncation or any other convenience searching method. Thus, in performing keyword searches, I searched on both “Mennonite” and “Mennonites”, as noted above. Also, while I had some luck performing keyword searches, I found it more effective to navigate to the broad subject categories and browse within those.

While it may be unusual to include a bookstore catalog as a database, I think the nature of the topic requires some leniency in this regard. First, the Mennonite community, particularly the branch stemming from the Swiss group, is strongly entrenched in southeastern Pennsylvania. As somewhat of a closed community, Mennonites have not dispersed much outside of this area. Thus, it can be difficult to find mention of these books outside of area repositories that hold the books. Second, with specific regard to family histories, many of them tend to be small-press or self-publications with limited distribution, and it can be difficult to obtain copies unless one happens to live in the area where a local library or historical society has copies. For these reasons, I think Masthof Bookstore’s catalog serves as an important database for anyone looking for historical information on the Mennonites.

**Swiss American Historical Society (SAHS)**

Search strategy employed: browsing

During my CLICNet search, I identified a book authored by the Swiss American Historical Society. Although the book was not ultimately useful to my topic, I thought it would be worth checking the SAHS’ website (http://swissamericanhistoricalsoc.org/) for additional publications. The SAHS, which was founded in 1927, focuses primarily on the publication of its three-times yearly *Swiss American Historical Society Review*, a review of scholarly studies on subjects pertaining to Swiss-American history. In addition, as funding permits, the SAHS publishes books, which are free to its members in the year they are published. With only one
publication printed per year, and some years none, the list of *SAHS* publications is obviously small. As such, there is not catalog but the *SAHS*’ website does provide three-page listing of their publications. I did note one book of interest in this list but unfortunately was not able to find a copy anywhere nearby to view. While the *SAHS*’ website offered no formal searching capacity and was not specifically useful to me, I think it has value as a potential networking forum for genealogists investigating their Swiss Mennonite ancestry.

**CONCLUSION**

The biggest surprise in undertaking this project was the large number of available sources. As previously mentioned, I almost gave up the topic without even investigating it because I assumed there would not be much out there. Besides the number of sources, the level of scholarship in nearly all of the sources also surprised me. Going in, I just had the assumption that this topic would not have received a lot of academic study. Another surprising aspect of this project lay in the documentation of the search process, which I had not really taken the time to notice before. In fact, documenting all of those actions proved to be a real challenge - at times I felt I could hardly type fast enough to keep up! Focusing on the search process so much also resulted in some disappointment as I felt I did not have the time to delve into the actual source material as much as I wanted.

Another challenge I faced with this project was not succumbing to my usual strategy of free form searching. At times it was frustrating to stick to the structured search approach, mainly because I was not used to it and it felt artificial at first. However, I must admit that it was nice to return to the project after a several-days hiatus and not have to wrack my brain trying to remember whether I had already employed a particular search string or searched a particular
database - everything was documented! I know for a fact that this structured approach resulted in much less than duplicative searching than in the past.

Prior to this class, I was not familiar with Kulthau’s Model of the Information Search Process, but I can say that it very closely mirrored my research experience over the course of this project. I began with uncertainty, unsure that I had even selected a tenable topic. Gradually, as I gathered more information, I felt more optimistic, but still encountered some panic (also completely normal, according to Kulthau!). Ultimately, I grew more confident as I identified an emerging sense of direction. Examining this process gave me more confidence as a researcher because I finally understood that the uncertainty I frequently encounter in research is not a personal failure on my part, but an inherent part of the process. Besides this “spiritual awakening”, on a more practical level, I feel I have a far better understanding of how to search and navigate within academic databases, which I previously have felt somewhat mystified by. In addition, I feel I have the knowledge to investigate less structured databases to determine what search strategies are going to be most effective. Finally, while I was familiar with LC headings, working with them as a search mechanism really solidified my understanding of how they work.

On a personal note, it was a pleasure to investigate a subject so personally interesting to me (rather than an assigned subject), and I really value the insight this project provided into a portion of my ancestral heritage. I can hardly believe I have such bravery in my bloodline, and I secretly got a thrill out of the fact that my somewhat staid, ordinary family was at one time associated with a “radical” movement! While I hope to continue exploration of the subject on my own, this project gave me at least a basic understanding of the treatment the Swiss Mennonites endured, and I cannot help but be proud of my brave ancestor for leaving that behind for life in a new world.
APPENDIX: Annotated Bibliography

Historical Sources


As the title implies, this work is the authority on all aspects of the Mennonite faith. The edition I reviewed was published in 1955 but the encyclopedia has been updated since, most recently in 1991, and full-text versions of this are available online either in GAMEO or in ATLA. The encyclopedia covers just about any conceivable topic, person or place associated with the Mennonite faith, including:

- Histories of family names
- Lives of Anabaptist/Mennonite martyrs
- Studies of existing and extinct congregations
- Histories of Mennonites in various countries
- Bibliography of Mennonite genealogies (current as of 1955)


This article, written by one of the premier Mennonite scholars, examines the motives of Mennonite migration from 1650-1750, first to the Palatinate and later to Pennsylvania, culminating with the large migration in 1754. The article provides a detailed discussion of the religious and economic conditions that existed both in Switzerland and Germany that prompted emigration.


Originally printed in 1917, this is perhaps the most comprehensive history of the Mennonites. As the title indicates, it traces the Mennonites’ origins from early Christian separatists and provides a detailed chronology of the growth and spread of the Mennonite faith. It describes a near-yearly account of the various persecutions suffered by the Mennonites, expulsion from Switzerland and other countries and eventual emigration to Pennsylvania. It also includes references to many Mennonite family names as they appear in various historical documents, ship records, letters and other documents.

Though written in 1929, this remains one of the better accounts of the development and migration of the Mennonites, focusing on settlement in Pennsylvania. Mennonite scholars are few and Smith is considered the first, having written the first history of the Mennonites in 1909. It begins with a discussion of Mennonite/Anabaptist development, with a particularly in-depth study on the intermediary Palatinate settlement, the peak immigration period of 1727 to 1754 as well as some of the major early Pennsylvania settlement. It also includes discussion on related subjects such as Mennonite life, practices and religious doctrine.

While impressive and informative, this book is not indexed. The index below was created to fill that gap to allow the user to look for information on particular family names.


This article is an excellent discussion of the Mennonite’s intermediate emigration to the Palatinate region of Germany. It also discusses some of the challenges inherent in tracing Mennonite genealogy and suggests resources for understanding the Swiss emigration to Germany as well as referencing some published genealogies. It further discusses examples of types of information to be gleaned from Swiss archival and church records. For example, in regards to the author’s own research, he has documented that his family line traveled and settled with several other families. Tracing those families has provided some information on his own family.

**Genealogical Sources**


These lists are an example of the advantage gained by the bureaucratic nature of Swiss society. These lists are records of the Swiss emigrants who left the country, which were kept because generally the Swiss discouraged emigration and thus kept careful record of any who left. These lists were compiled from the records in the state archives for the respective cantons. Volume 1 covers emigrants from Zurich canton between 1734-1744 while volume 2 covers emigrants from Bern canton between 1706-1795 and Basel canton from 1734-1794. The cantons are then broken down year-by-year within the communities of each canton. The lists include names of emigrants, as well as age or date of birth (usually) and sometimes even dates of marriage. This source is particularly valuable because the lack of Mennonite church records means that otherwise these dates can be very hard to identify.

The *Familiennamenbuch* ("Family Name Book") is perhaps one of the most valuable resources to any type of Swiss genealogical research, Mennonite or otherwise. Switzerland is unique in that one’s citizenship rights stem first from the town or community in which they reside. No matter where a birth, death or marriage took place, the records were kept in a person’s “home” community. Thus, the first step to Swiss genealogical research is identifying the town in the surname in question is commonly found. The book is divided into three volumes with alphabetical arrangements of surnames. Each surname then lists the towns or communities in which the name is most commonly found. This gives the researcher a starting point for locating records.


This is a concise introductory guide to conducting Swiss genealogical research. It provides tips on identifying place of origin, so necessary to finding Swiss records due to the unique citizenship arrangement. It also provides other useful suggestions, such as noting and tracing families who traveled with your family member since people often traveled and settled in communities or larger family groups.


While the *Familiennamenbuch* is the authoritative subject on locating the town associated with a Swiss family name, and must be included in any bibliography on the subject, this article is more user-friendly and limited to 150 of the major Swiss Mennonite (and Amish) families. This article is especially useful because it provides Anglicized name-spelling variations as they occurred in the US, whereas the Familiennamenbuch only lists the common Germanic spellings. For example, the Anglicized spelling of my family’s name is Gehman but it has been variously recorded as Gahman, Gauman, Gäuman(n), Gayman, Geeman and Geyman. All of these spellings are identified in the annotation in this article and it ties all of the spellings to the original name and also lists the associated Swiss town of origin.


A number of these compilations have appeared over the years but this is the most current, and considered the best to date. The lists were compiled in response to a 1727 law that required all new world immigrants from Europe to swear an oath of allegiance to King George upon disembarkation. All of the compilations have deficiencies owing to the poor legibility, transcription and spelling errors in the originals (my ancestor, for example,
whose original surname was Gäumann which then became Gehman is listed in the ship-lists as “Geeman”) Thus one must use a certain amount of imagination in checking alternate spellings. This edition aims to correct some of those errors, though the author acknowledges some may disagree with his spellings and interpretations. The lists consist of two volume and are indexed.


Written in German, French and English, this bibliography provides a comprehensive list of over 9,000 genealogies of Swiss names. The bibliography was compiled between 1985 and 1992 and the author says genealogies published up through 1990 are included.
REFERENCES


