

Sommer Families in Early PHL

By Mary Ann Schaefer

3 January 2015

Please ask permission to copy any part of this article.

Besides differentiating the Georg Sommers of my line from other people of that name and time (see my article, "*Differentiating Sommer Surnames*," 30 Nov 2012), I'm seeing a lot of mixing-up of the person named Jacob Sommer of my Sommer family and a Jacob Sommer who was a carriage maker in Germantown. To my knowledge, my Freistett family were not carriage makers, so let's compare notes.

My Sommer Family

Here's what I believe to be true about my Sommer family. They came from Friestett, Baden, Germany aboard the ship Brothers in 1752. We know about three brothers from Freistett on that ship, Georg, Johannes (John), and Martin, and there was potentially at least one sister who also made the journey to America. I have made these associations based on

- church records from PHL and NJ
- church records from Freistett
- passenger records

We know that Georg Sommer (1722-1785) lived in Lower Dublin and Smithfield (later called Somerton) before moving to Sussex, New Jersey, from where my line descends. His brother Johannes (John) Sommer (1724-1792), is believed to have lived in Moreland and Byberry, married to Anna Eva, and had only one child who survived, Jacob Sommer (1758-1827), and who was, besides being a farmer, also a lay judge. I believe the other brother, Martin Sommer, (1729-1799), married Margaretha, lived in Lower Dublin and Moreland, and had several children from 1764-1784, of whom we know little about.

Sommer Family - Carriage Makers

Jacob Sommer who was a carriage maker in Germantown lived from 1749-1817. He married Anna Marie (Mary) Dauber in 1772, and participated in the Revolution. He died in 1817, and his wife Mary died in 1827, leaving their property to their son, Jacob Jr. I have seen some remarks that claim the carriage-making occupation came with the original Sommer immigrant, and another that says the carriage-making business did not start until Jacob Jr. married somebody named Sarah whose family was in the carriage-making business. Jacob Jr. later moved the carriage business to Baltimore.

Jacob Sommer Sr. of this line had a brother named Leonard Sommer 1759-1836, who married Elisabeth Phelps (Phillips or Phillipi), and served in the Revolution. He can be found in the 1790 census in Germantown but after that he was in Harrisburg, so I don't believe he was as involved, if he was at all, in the carriage-making business.

The sources for this information are admittedly secondary:

"Genealogical Notes" on ancestry.com

"History of Old Germantown with a Description of Its Settlement...", p. 199-200, partially available on google books.

Different Jacob Sommer's

The idea that there were two Jacob Sommer's of about the same age in the same area can be confirmed by looking at the 1800 census.

1. Jacob, the Carriage-Maker, 1749-1817, found in the 1790-1810 censuses of Germantown, parents supposedly named Johannes and Anna Margaretha, which can only be corroborated by the baptism record of Jacob's presumed brother, Leonard in 1763.
2. Jacob, the Judge, 1758-1827, who I believe to be the son of Johannes Sommer of Freistett, and his wife Anna Eva, was born and baptized in PHL, and can be found in the 1800-1820 censuses of Moreland where his presumed father John Sommer had been enumerated in 1790. This Jacob's will leaves his many properties to his son, Dr. John Sommer. The evidence I have that Jacob the Judge is related to my Freistett family is circumstantial based on two county histories in Michigan (the place where my branch eventually migrated) referring back to a Jacob Summers who had been a judge of records in Philadelphia.

The source "*Genealogical Notes*," as well as other undocumented sources out there say that the father of Jacob Sommer the Carriage-Maker was named Johannes Sommer. Given that Carriage-Maker Jacob was born in 1749, I can see where it is tempting to say that Johannes Sommer from my line, 1724-1792, was Jacob the Carriage-Maker's father. Except that:

1. there are records of Johannes Sommer from both Freistett and Philadelphia showing his wife's name of Anna Eva. This is contrary to notes that say the wife of Johannes the Carriage-Maker was named Margaretha.
2. in 1768 there was a baptism record for Johannes Leonhard Sommer, son of Johannes and Anna Margaetha at the St. Michael's Evangelical Church in Germantown, which is evidence supporting the Carriage Maker story that Johannes Sommer was married to Anna Margaretha and not Anna Eva.
3. in the source, Names of Foreigners Who Took the Oath of Allegiance to the Province and State of Pennsylvania, 1727-1775, there were 3 Sommers on the Ship Brothers who arrived 22 Sep 1752. Johannes, Georg, and Martin - all known to be brothers from Freistett. At least one other name associated with my family, Jacob Braun, is found on the same passenger list. All of which is to say I don't believe that Johannes the Carriage-Maker arrived on the ship Brothers in Sep. 1752. More research would be required to establish his arrival.
4. I have the will for Jacob the Judge, who died in 1827 in Moreland. It mentions one son named Dr. John Sommer, and no mention of a wife nor any other children, and notably not one named Jacob. Additional sources say Jacob the Judge was 69 when he died, which lines up perfectly with the baptism record in 1758 for the son Jacob born to Johannes and Anna Eva Sommer. This is significant because there is supposedly a 10-year difference between the ages of Jacob the Judge and Jacob the Carriage-Maker, the latter being older.

But let's also think about what evidence might support the idea that Jacob the Carriage-Maker descends from the Sommer's of Freistett.

- Secondary sources report that the father of Jacob the Carriage-Maker was named Johannes, and there was a Johannes Sommer who died in 1792 in PHL was a) of the age to have been a father of Jacob the Carriage-Maker, and b) was recorded as being from Freistett.
- Is there anything else in support of this thesis?

This might be a case where it boils down to the quality of our sources. To be continued....