

**Researching
Martin Sommer
of Oxford Twp, Philadelphia**

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This version replaces the previous document of this title, which was only a collection of research notes and some speculative analysis. This version compiles the evidence to date more succinctly, and attempts a bit more structured analysis. Special thanks to N. Ettensperger for her many contributions.

Introduction

After establishing the identity and origins of my direct ancestor, Georg Sommer 1722-1785, I became interested in learning what became of his brothers, Johannes (John) and Martin, who also arrived with Georg to Philadelphia (PHL) in 1752. Starting with John, I followed a long and winding trail to his son, [Jacob Sommer 1787-1824](#). Jacob Sommer of Moreland wrote his will in 1823, making mention of a Martin Sommer who was not otherwise identified other than to say one Barbara White lived with him. This small detail, who was the Martin Sommer referred to in Jacob's will?, has been the driver for much of my Sommer research since.

That continuing research has produced a probate file of one Martin Sommer of Oxford Twp,¹ one of the surrounding PHL communities. This Martin Sommer died in August 1824, and so he was still alive when Jacob Sommer wrote his will in 1823. Was Martin Sommer of Oxford (Martin-Oxford) related to Jacob Sommer of Moreland (Jacob-Moreland), and if so how?

I then started a comprehensive study of [men of the name Martin Sommer/Summers](#) in early PHL (1750-1800), and for those associated with my Freistett Sommer family, none were alive when Jacob Sommer wrote his will! I was befuddled, and circled back to consider each of the Sommer brothers from my Freistett family group:

- [John Sommer](#), who settled in Moreland, had only one child who survived him, Jacob-Moreland, and Jacob had only one child who survived him, Dr. John Sommer. So Martin-Oxford was not a son or even grandson of John Summers.
- Neither was Martin-Oxford was a son of [George Summers](#) who died in Sussex, New Jersey in 1785, because George left a will, which did not name a son, Martin. Also, neither of the sons of George had a son named Martin.
- The youngest Freistett brother, [Martin Sommer](#), apparently married Margaretha in PHL. His burial record in 1799 indicated his age as 69 years and 4 months, which matches nearly exactly with the Freistett records we have for this Martin Sommer. This Martin and Margaretha did have a son named Martin, a blacksmith who died in 1811. Martin-Blacksmith's burial record clearly indicated that he was born in 1770 to Martin Sommer and his wife, Margaretha. So Martin-Oxford was not a son of Martin Sommer of Freistett.

But did the sons of Martin-Freistett have a son named Martin? Yes, both Martin and George appear to have had sons but we don't exactly know who they were. But we do know that Martin and George married in 1792 and 1798 respectively, which would make any son of theirs under 30 years old when Jacob-Moreland wrote his will. According to the 1820 census of Oxford, the oldest male, presumed to be Martin, was over 45 years old in 1820. So, it doesn't seem that Jacob-Moreland could have been referring to any of Martin-Freistett's grandsons.

- But I had forgotten one brother! It has recently been proved that the [oldest Freistett brother, Mathias](#), came to PHL before the other three brothers.² Mathias had a German-born son named [Martin, born 1737 in Freistett](#). If this son, Martin-1737, came to PHL with his father or later

1 I refer to Martin Sommer of Oxford as Martin-Oxford in this article. Similarly I refer to other characters by appending either the place they lived or their year of birth.

2 Schaefer, Mary Ann, [Establishing the German Origins Of Mathias Sommer, Settler of Monckton Township](#) (2017, yesteryours.net)

with his uncles, he would have been under 16 at the time of arrival, and thus not mentioned in the passenger lists. And if Martin-1737 survived to have a family, the possibility exists that he had a son named Martin, possibly Martin-Oxford.

So, if we look at the choices as just stated, Martin-Oxford would have been related to Jacob-Moreland:

- in some way through the oldest Freistett Sommer brother, Matthias, or
- through some other Freistett Sommer relation we don't know about, or
- not at all.

Since it appears that some possibility does exist that Martin-Oxford had Freistett family ties, the rest of this article focuses on the evidence that pertains to Martin-Oxford himself. A different article (in progress) focuses more on Martin-Oxford's possible parents.

Direct Evidence

[A] Census Records

The US Federal census of 1810 and 1820 enumerate a man named Martin Sommer in Oxford Twp:

- There were seven children enumerated in the household of Martin Sommer in 1810, all under 10, so presumably he was married between 1800-1805.
- In 1810, this Martin was 36-44, and in 1820, he was over 45. I calculate he was born from 1766-1774, giving an age range to search for any Martin Sommer whose baptism appears in the church records.
- The household for a Martin Summers in Moreland in 1800 does not match the household we see in 1810. I thought maybe 1800-Moreland-Martin moved to Oxford by 1810, but I think the individual enumerated in Moreland applies to a different Martin Sommer.

When looking for related names³ in 1790 census:

- Moreland: Henry Capehart, John Summers, Jacob Overturf
- Lower Dublin: Richard White, Robert Hunter, Jonathan White, Jacob Hall, Shallcross, Northrop, Ashton
- Oxford: 0

1800 census:

Oxford: Robert Hunter, two named Jacob Merkle, Joseph Hughes (so far, not sure any relation to the Hughes involved in the Nova Scotia story)

³ See *Associated Names/Families* section later in this article.

[B] Church Records

Speculating that Martin-Oxford might have been the son of Martin-1737, I checked the church records for St. Michael's and Zion Lutheran church where many records for the Sommer brothers can be found. Sure enough, there was a Martin Sommer with a wife Maria who had the following children:

- Joh. Matthaeus, b 1762
- Maria Margaretha, b 1766
- Maria Eva, b 1770
- Joh. Martin, b 1772
- Eva Catherine, b 1777

Of note:

1. The birth dates for the children of this Martin and Maria are appropriate for a father born in 1737. If this Martin Sommer was Mathias' son, this Martin would have been 25 years old when he first started having children in 1762.
2. The oldest son being given the name of Matthaeus could be clue that this Martin was indeed the son of Mathias Sommer of Freistett.
3. A second son named Martin, if he survived to adulthood, might be Martin-Oxford and the Martin Sommer mentioned in Jacob Sommer's will? The possibility is at least there.
4. The birth year for the second son named Martin in 1772 matches the age range for the individual named Martin Sommer found in 1810 and 1820 census of Oxford twp.

From the records of St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Germantown, here are some additional relevant records:

- On 30 Oct 1808, Jacob Oberdorf⁴ widower married Maria Schneidern, *both of Oxford*.
- On May 15, 1811, two children were baptized whose parents were Martin Sommer and his frau Catharina. The sponsors for both children were Jacob Oberdorf and his frau Maria.

[C] Deed Records

- Sep. 1815 from John Quce of Oxford, farmer to Martin Summers of same twp, farmer, \$325 for 2 acres
- 4 Dec 1824, a sheriff's deed from Edward Duffield Sr. vs. John Overturf adm to estate of Martin Sommer decd to Jesse Shallcross, same 2 acres previously described

[D] Probate Records

1. Philadelphia Probate, Administration File #259, Book M, pg 469 (images on ancestry, Pennsylvania, Wills and Probate Records, 1683-1993):
 - Administrator was **John Overturf**, farmer, took the administration of the estate at the request of two of the nearest of kin to the deceased on 17 Aug 1824. Those kin were identified as daughters and their husbands, namely Mary and her husband John **Hunter**, and Sarah and her husband John James Hunter.

⁴ See *Associated Names/Families* section later in this article.

- Identified Martin Sommer, late of Oxford Twp, farmer
 - Jonathan Bavington and Benjamin Shallcross performed the inventory
 - Recd of E. D. Ingraham Esq. Atty for Ed. **Duffield**, surplus real estate of dec'd (30 Sep 1824)
 - Recd of Ed. D. Carfield Esq. Am of judgment obtained against Dr. Joseph Wilson (7 Feb 1826)
2. An Orphan's Court record in Sept. 1824 where **George Rudolph** was assigned as guardian to the orphans of Martin Summers, deceased. The orphans were named **Elizabeth**, **Edward**, and **George**, and apparently they were all over 14 in 1824 (making them born before 1810).

BUT HOLD THE PHONE ON THIS ONE! The date of this record being just a month after the apparent death of Martin-Oxford made me think these orphans were Martin-Oxford's. But thanks to some astute observations by N. Ettensperger, we come to realize this record applies to Martin Summers, the blacksmith who died in 1811. As his younger children were coming of age, they were due part of the rents still coming from Martin-Blacksmith's property on Waggoner's Alley. But there ensued some kind of law suit (I'm still trying to figure out where to locate court records), resulting in the sale of the Waggoner's Alley property in an 1833 sheriff's deed:

Peter Smith vs. Edward Somers, Wm Somers, George Somers, deed to John Ely

The bottom line is that these orphans who were assigned George Rudolph as guardian belonged to Martin-Blacksmith and not Martin-Oxford.

3. PHL Orphan's Court Estate Files:
- Date: 16 Jun 1826
 - petition of Jacob Shallcross, assigned of Joseph Wilson
 - for estate Martin Summers, late of Oxford Twp
 - John Overturf assigned administrator of Martin Summers estate in Aug. 1824

Indirect Evidence

Authored Works

Now I want to turn to an undocumented source which is widely cited, but which does not contain reliable information, in my opinion:⁵

A history of George Summers of Douglass and Lower Dublin townships, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania by G. Byron Summers, privately published, 1918, 34 pages.

5 It is never my intention to discredit or disrespect the work of other genealogists. Mistakes happen, and the availability of information changes (sometimes it gets destroyed, sometimes it gets found). We're all doing it with good intention. With that said, see my article "[Correcting the Genealogy of William Summers of Conshohocken, PA](#)" and my bibliography of [mistaken sources](#).

Note: I will refer to this book in this article using the author's initials, the GBS book.

Specifically, refer to page 33 for information that apparently applies to Martin-Oxford.

I love and hate this source because it is completely unsourced, is full of proved mistakes, and yet because of the sheer force of good intentions, it must be overflowing with legitimate clues. With regard to Martin-Oxford, what about this account can be matched to existing evidence?

- Married Sarah Copart. I've done a lot of searching on this point. The best I can come up with is that one Henry Capehart lived in Moreland Twp in 1790 census. Moreover, in looking at other family trees for this person, the original spelling of this surname could have been German: Gebhardt.
- Had a daughter named Sarah, whose first husband was unknown, but whose second husband was James Hunter. Bingo match with the probate evidence. The name Hunter is tough, however. So far I've not been able to find much other information about this family group.
- Had a daughter named Catherine who married Joseph Merkins. It is worth noting that online genealogies for Henry Capehart, b 1750 in Bristol, PHL, PA, show he had a daughter named Elisabeth who married John James Murkins. This seems like a little more than coincidence....

There are a number of other children mentioned in the GBS account: George, David, Hannah, Henry, Susanna, John, William T., and Louisa. Altogether, the number of names equals the number of children seen in 1810 census for Martin Sommer of Oxford, but not all the names match the evidence.

It finally occurred to me that this GBS account, like several others in this book, is a combination of information as it pertains to multiple individuals of that name! In this case, this GBS account could be information combined with another of my Freistett relations:

Martin Sommer 1770-1811, a blacksmith, lived in PHL, m. in 1792 to Maria Sommer known children were Margareta, *Maria*, *Sarah*, *John H.*, and *Elisabeth*.

Perhaps some of these children got incorporated in this GBS account?

Associated Names/Families

Oberdorf/Overturf

This surname appears as the executor of Martin-Oxford's estate. Executors are very often related in some way to the deceased. Additionally, remember the church records showing the children of a Martin and Catharina Sommer being sponsored for baptism by Jacob Oberdorf.

- If indeed the church baptism records belong with Martin-Oxford, then Martin-Oxford was either NOT married to Sarah Copart (per GBS book), or he had two wives, Catharina shown in these records, *and* Sarah Copart – and who knows in what order. We know in 1811, he (or some Martin Sommers) was married to Catharina.
- We also know from the church records that Jacob Oberdorf was of Oxford twp.

- Perhaps Catharina, wife of Martin Sommers, was originally an Oberdorf? See the following Oberdorf family group I have pieced together which might have some bearing on this discussion.

Jacob Oberdorf 1700-1758, arrived on the ship Phoenix from Wertheim, 1752⁶
 ch: apparently with him on arrival: Caspar, Margareta, Christoph, Catharina
 mentioned in 1758 will: Jacob, George, Margaret (step-daughter)⁷

Jacob⁸, m 1st Anna Maria Seidner 1775 (Andreas Oberdorf wit),
 m 2nd Maria Schneidern 30 Oct 1808, *both of Oxford*
 ch: John, b 1792 --- this was perhaps the administrator of
 Martin Sommer's estate

But how does Martin-Oxford's wife, Catharina, fit in if she was an Oberdorf? Research is ongoing.

Finally, we know of at least one other child of Jacob Oberdorf of Oxford, a daughter who was mentioned in an 1815 deed (see Deeds, p. 8). She was Mary, wife of Mahlon Hibbs. Here is an [abstract](#) of the will of Mahlon Hibbs Sr.:

HIBBS, MAHLON. Lower Dublin Township. Phila. Co.
 September 13, 1817. October 13, 1817. 6.519.

Estate to son, Mahlon Hibbs, except what Agnes Hibbs brought here.

To Agnes Hibbs, for support of my son. If said son dies under age, Executors to pay his estate to John Overderff and Livinah Hibbs, when 21 years. Execs: *Jonathan Thomas, Daniel Knight*. Wit: Brian Wilkinson, Thomas Gilbert.

All very, very interesting.

PHL Tax Lists:

- 1779-1787: In Roxborough, we find Jacob Oberdorf (JO) who was a cordwainer. By 1782, he was doing well enough that he was also leasing a dwelling and 38 acres from Jacob Shitz (also spelled Sheets and Shites over various years). Of course, Roxborough is significant because this is the township where Mathias Sommer was living in the years before leaving for Moncton.
- 1793-1800, a second Jacob Oberdorf appears, living in Montgomery County and leasing from Andreas Hoffman. I tend to think this was a different JO, as in 1798 tax lists, there were two men of the same name in different locations, one in MontCo, and one in Moreland Twp.
- 1798 Moreland. Moreland is significant because it is where one of the Freistett brothers chose to settle, namely John Summers, and then where his only son, Jacob Sommer, continued to live. The 1798 taxation for JO is for about a ½ acre, a dwelling with 3-4 out-buildings where JO was the occupier and *Edward Duffield was the owner!* The list also shows that John Swift was an adjoining proprietor, so this tells us JO was operating some kind of business. In one of the four lists found for 1798 Moreland, one states the location was Byberry Twp; the rest all say

6 Also on 1752 Phoenix were Michael Lutz, Martin Noll (latter could have some relation to NULL). Along with Mathias Sommer and others, Michael Lutz took his family to settle in Nova Scotia in 1766.

7 I have not yet located this will, info come from an abstract found in *Pennsylvania German Pioneers 1709-1786* edited by Don Yoder, p. 230.

8 It is not verified if this Jacob was the son of the man who died in 1758.

Moreland. And finally, it's also noticeable to me that for the JO in MontCo, the tax assessor spelled the name Oberdorf. For the JO in Moreland, the name was spelled Overdurf or Overturf (note the "v" rather the "b" as second letter in surname, the spelling seen in the probate of Martin-Oxford).

Deeds:

- 1796, Henry Fraley of Germantown, a carpenter and Susanna his wife to Jacob Oberdorf of Moreland, sold him two lots on the south side of Green Street between Third and what is today N. American in NL.
- 1802, Jacob Oberdorf, shopkeeper in NL bought a property on the east side of 7th St. from the north side of Poplar, from William Lee, had 18-month agreement to build a dwelling of sufficient value to secure a yearly rent.
- 1803, Jacob Oberdorf, store keeper in NL sold the previous property to Joseph Miller.
- 1815, the administrators of JO's estate, *Jonathan Thomas and Daniel Knight*, sold both lots purchased by JO in 1796 to John Rudolph.

The 1796 deed catches my attention because in 1785 a Martin Sommer was taxed in NL-E including for the estate of Henry Fraley. .

Finally, it appears that JO died on or around 1 Sep 1812.⁹ There was a Jacob Oberdorf who was an Ensign in the War of 1812 – it's not yet known if these two individuals were the same person. The name of Jacob Overdorf does, however, appear in the probate index of Bucks county in 1812, and some administration records were located identifying JO as having been of Bensalem (he must have moved there some time after selling his NL property?). The administrators were noted as having been *Jonathan Thomas and Daniel Knight*, the same administrators noted in the 1815 deed.

Duffield

The name of Edward Duffield, appearing in the probate records for Martin-Oxford is, I think, significant. Why?

- Because Edward Duffield was the friend and sole trustee named by Jacob Sommer of Moreland in his will to keep an eye on his son, Dr. John, and manage the Sommer properties if Dr. John didn't behave.
- Because the name of Edward Duffield of Moreland shows up in connection with Jacob Oberdorf, who may have had a family connection with Martin-Sommer of Oxford.
- Because Edward Duffield was also involved in the Sheriff's deed where Martin-Oxford's property was sold to Jesse Shallcross.
- Even more interesting, there was a sheriff's deed in 1774 involving Edward Duffield vs. Matthew Clarkson and Stephen Cormick. Matthew Clarkson, along with Duffield and two others were one of the proprietor companies involved in arranging to send settlers to Nova Scotia in 1766.

Note: I've been assuming that the Edward Duffield we're talking about in the first three bullets of the previous list is probably the Junior, 1764-1836, the son of Edward Duffield Sr. and Catherine Parry, and

⁹ PHL Deeds, MR-5-172.

the grandson of Joseph Duffield and Hannah Armitage.¹⁰ This Edward Duffield was apparently unmarried and had no children.¹¹ However, the 1824 sheriff's deed describing the sale of Martin-Oxford's property named Edward Duffield *Senior*, but the father Edward Jr. died in 1803! So, we might still be talking about Edward Jr. in all these cases, but by 1824, he was the older Edward Duffield in the area.

The real question here has been What Is "Surplus Real Estate of Dec'd"?², which seems to have been Edward Duffield's involvement in the estate of Martin-Oxford. Here is the explanation:

“Whenever the proceeds of a sale upon execution as aforesaid, shall be more than sufficient to satisfy the liens upon the property sold, the officer making such sale, or receiving such proceeds, shall pay the surplus to the debtor unless the fund shall have been paid into court, etc....”¹²

The problem is timing. Edward Duffield paid the Martin-Oxford estate in Sept. 1824, and Martin's real estate was not sold until Dec. 1824. This might have been a matter of convenience between all the parties who knew each other. Still, it would be helpful to find the court case that generated the sheriff's sale of Martin Sommer's property.

Copart/Capehart/Kephart/Gebhardt

I include this surname because of its mention in the GBS book, but honestly, we have no documentation yet to indicate that Martin-Oxford was married to any Sarah Copart. However, I did notice there was a Henry Capehart in the 1790 census of Moreland twp as well as the 1800 census of Byberry.

There are a few public family trees which show that Henry Capehart was born around 1750, probably in PA, and his death was reported to be 1822 in Doylestown. What's interesting, however, is that one tree reports that Henry had a daughter, Elizabeth (1778-1829) who married John James Murkins and they had 12 children from 1800-1822. The name Murkins is significant because, according to the GBS book, Martin-Oxford and wife Sarah Copart had a daughter Catherine, b. 1799 in Bucks county who married in 1820 to Joseph or Josiah Merkins of Frankford! Catherine Sommer Merkins died in 1861 in Byberry (same place Elizabeth Murkins died).

None of this helps establish any more facts about Martin-Oxford, unfortunately. However, it does point out how the GBS book is seemingly full of a strange mixture of half-truths.....

10 The Parry and Armitage names are associated with the Hall genealogy, which I have studied to some degree at this point. There are a lot of connections, but at the moment, there is nothing concrete to help connect Martin-Oxford to the Freistett Sommer family.

11 This [tree](#) appears to have a fair amount of source documentation on this family.

12 [A Digest of the Laws of Pennsylvania: From the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred to the Twenty-eighth Day of May, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty-three, Together with the Annual Digests for 1854, 1855, 1856, and 1857, Kay & Brother, 1857.](#)

Hunter

This surname appears in both the probate records of Martin-Oxford as well as the GBS book, so at last a link exists between the direct and indirect evidence! The probate records indicate that Martin-Oxford had two daughters, both of whom married a Hunter: Sarah married James Hunter (he signed John James Hunter), and Mary married John Hunter. These are the kin who nominated John Overturf as executor of their father's estate.

The only other clue we have is the enumeration of a Robert Hunter in the 1790 and 1800 censuses of Lower Dublin. The GBS book mentioned the children of James and Sarah Hunter, one having been named Robert. So one might speculate that the child was named for a grandparent of that name. Was that the same person enumerated in Lower Dublin?

Analysis and Discussion

The question that started all this research appeared in the will of Jacob Sommer of Moreland, written in 1823. The first person to whom he left a bequest was Barbara White “who lives with Martin Sommer.” Obviously we can wonder who was Barbara White. But the bigger question arose for me when I could find no Martin Summers who might have been related to Jacob-Moreland and was still living in 1823. While it's absolutely true that the Mystery Martin Summers might not be a Freistett relation at all, I am taking the leap of faith and proceeding as if he was. I may regret that choice, but the evidence has shown that a Freistett family connection is at least possible.

Was Jacob-Moreland referring to Martin-Oxford when he wrote his will? Well, this scenario seems plausible to me. The names of Overturf/Oberdorf as well as Edward Duffield, both names found in Moreland, appear in the probate files of Martin-Oxford. Unfortunately, while there are many almost-connections, there are still too many questions and not enough evidence.

The question of Martin-Oxford's family remains open. The direct evidence points to a wife named Catherine with a probable Oberdorf connection. The indirect evidence points to a wife named Sarah with a surname that might approximate Capehart, a name which does appear in the 1790 Moreland census. More to the point, the indirect evidence points to a daughter Sarah who married James Hunter, and that point is confirmed in the direct evidence. So what does this mean? Either

- a) There were two separate individuals named Martin Sommer's represented in this evidence, one married Sarah Capehart, the other married Catharina Oberdorf, or
- b) There was one individual named Martin Sommer who married (at least) twice.

Either way, according to Jacob Sommer of Moreland, Barbara White, whoever she was, was also living with Martin, whoever he was, in 1823.

Source Notes

Here are references I used besides those available at ancestry.com and familysearch.org.

Church Records

- Robert L. Hess and F. Edward Wright, 18th Century Records of the German Lutheran Church of Philadelphia (St. Michaels and Zion), Volumes 1-5 (1745-1800), Lewes, DE, 2008
- St. Michael's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Germantown, 1741-1841 by Frederick S. Weiser and Debra D. Smith
- Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Church and Town Records, 1669-1999, ancestry.com, original data, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Collection Name: *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records*

Probate Records

Source info:

Orphans' Court dockets, v. 30-32, 1824-1832, film 21852

Orphans' Court estate papers, v. 30 (p.486-end) - v. 31 (p.1-26), 1826, film 1294552

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Orphans' Court records 1719-1856 ; Index 1719-1938

Authors: Pennsylvania. Orphans' Court (Philadelphia County) (Main Author)

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Source Reference: 31-13-67 (vol/pg/case) [note, NOT case 68 as noted in docket]

My references:

Notebook 2015-4, pgs. 29, 32, *36, 37, 38, 66, 83

Additional source reference (not all scanned):

31-101-26, 19 Jan 1827; film 1294554

31-291-21, 15 Feb 1828; film 1294559 [scanned separately; can provide on request]

31-306-60 & 61; same film [scanned separately; can provide on request]

31-359-3; 14 Jun 1828; film 1294560

31-371-66, 20 Jun 1828