

VIII. THE “ELUSIVE” KERSTETTERS

Most of the research on the Kerstetter family has presumed that all the early Kerstetters in North America could trace their lineage back to the Martin Kerstetter who immigrated from Germany in 1727.

It now appears that there were other Kerstetter families in Pennsylvania by the latter half of the 18th century. Members of these families appear in reliable, but very spotty records. Where they came from, when they arrived, and what happened to some of the family members and their descendants are all questions yet to be answered.

Collectively, the number of Kerstetters from “elusive” families living in the United States through the year 1850 was very small, compared to the large number of descendants from Martin.

The lineage records are also confounded by the early arrival of Kiersteds from The Netherlands to New Amsterdam (now New York City) and nearby areas. Some family members could have moved to Pennsylvania and points west in the 18th and 19th centuries. On the other hand, there is no evidence that their name morphed from Kiersted into Kerstetter as the years went by.

Castator or Castetter were also fairly common spellings of the family name outside Pennsylvania. However, there are Castators and Castetters in the records who were of Irish or English rather than German extraction.

Early Eluders

- A Christopher Kirchsettin is listed in the records of immigrants who swore an oath of allegiance to Pennsylvania upon their arrival. He arrived on the ship *Neptune* or *Betsy* from Rotterdam on Oct. 26, 1768. There are no known later records that would identify him positively as a Kerstetter.¹
- One group of eluders was made up of four Castaters who appeared in early Pennsylvania land records. George, Frederick, Joseph and Harmon each received land warrants on April 27, 1792, for 400 acres of land on or near Towanda Creek in what later became Bradford County. The area was disputed territory in the early years and later became the object of widespread land speculation. Apparently, none of the purchases was ever completed, and the land passed into the hands of speculators by 1795.²

The relationship of the four Castaters to each other is not known. All would have had to be 21 years old or older at the time the land warrants were issued. That meant all of them would have been born in 1771 or earlier. If the four were a father and three sons, the father would probably have been born no later than 1745.

Three of the four do not appear in later known records. George may be the same person as the George Castater who was one of the early settlers of Wayne County, Indiana. George was living with his son Elijah and his family at the time of the 1870 census and was listed as 100 years old.³

- Another eluder was also named George. This George appears in federal census records in 1820 and 1830 in Lebanon Township of Lebanon County. The records show a male born between 1775 and 1780, a female born between 1780 and 1790, a female born between 1800 and 1804, and four males born between 1810 and 1820.

This family may be the one that reappeared in Noble County, Indiana. There were three Castetter families living in Perry Township of Noble County in 1850 with roots going back to Pennsylvania. They included George, born in Pennsylvania about 1776, and his wife Elizabeth, born in Pennsylvania about 1780. Living nearby were Levi and Jeremiah and their families. Levi was born in Pennsylvania about 1822, and his wife Elizabeth was born in Ohio about 1827. Jeremiah married Rebecca Ann Crocket on Oct. 14, 1841 in Henry County, Indiana. Jeremiah was born about 1820 in Pennsylvania, and his wife was born about 1823 in Pennsylvania.⁴

- A George Kerstetter born in Germany is mentioned briefly in the *Genealogical and Biographical Annals of Northumberland County, Pennsylvania*. The genealogical connections in the article are clearly incorrect, but the entry is intriguing nonetheless. It reads: "One George Kerstetter came to this country from Germany, and settled near Shamokin, in Northumberland county, where he owned 250 acres of valuable land at what is now Ferndale, where he died. The old Nelson and Last Chance collieries were located upon this land, which at one time was valued at six million dollars."⁵

- The 1850 census in Stark County, Ohio, has a listing for a John Kerstetter born in Pennsylvania about 1760 and his wife Lydia, born in Pennsylvania about 1763. They were living in a household with two teenage girls. The family has no known links to any of the many other Kerstetters living in Stark County at the time.

- In the 1850 census in Indiana are several Kerstetter families listed under the Jonesborough Post Office in Center Township of Greene County. John Kerstetter was born in Pennsylvania about 1765, and his wife Catharine was born in Pennsylvania about 1775. They were living at the time with John Kerstetter, born about 1801 in Pennsylvania, his wife Magdalena, and children born in Ohio or Indiana. Nearby were Jacob Kerstetter, born about 1807 in Pennsylvania, and his family; another Jacob Kerstetter, born about 1826 in Ohio and his family; George Kerstetter, born about 1804 in Pennsylvania, and his family; and Samuel Kerstetter, born about 1827 in Ohio, and his family. The families apparently moved to Ohio before 1826 and on to Indiana before 1845.⁶

- Finally, there was a brief record in the Germantown, Pennsylvania, German language press on June 19, 1761, regarding a Martin Kersteter from Hanover Township in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, now Lebanon County. The transcription includes the name and address only. The compiler of the data said that names which appeared in his text without

elaboration most often had to do with stray cattle or other items of no genealogical interest.⁷

Perhaps this elusive Martin was also the father of yet another Martin born about 1788 and married about 1813 to Anna Mary Emerick in Berks County.⁸

Later Eluders

There were a few other elusive Kerstetters born in the late 18th or early 19th centuries. These included known descendants of Martin who were counted but not named in early federal census reports. Family members other than heads of families were not named until the 1850 census. The list also includes descendants of earlier eluders.

One group of later eluders included the family of John and Barbara Doyssey Karstetter, who moved to Randolph County, Illinois, about 1840. They had previously lived in Crawford County, Ohio, but their previous connections with other Kerstetters in Ohio or Pennsylvania are not known.⁹

Tombstone Inscriptions of Centre County, Pennsylvania, lists a tombstone in the Aaronsburg cemetery for a Leonard Kerstetter Jr., who died at age 68 on Sept. 13, 1875. His relationship to the rest of the family in Centre County is not known.

Here is a short list of other unnamed eluders and their range of birth years. The list is grouped by known family lines for easier reference. It seems unlikely that all of the sons lived to adulthood and had families of their own.

The family of Sebastian and Magdalena. Martin and Elizabeth's son Simon (1789-1859) and his wife Elizabeth (1789-1880) had three sons born between 1810 and 1820 in what is now Snyder County, Pennsylvania. Christian Kerstetter (born in 1806) and Isabel Clapper had a son born in Ohio prior to Christian's death in 1846.

The family of Michael and Dorothea. John, the son of Martin and Appolonia, had a son born between 1802 and 1804 who could have grown up in Ohio or Indiana. George (born in 1783) and his wife Elizabeth had two sons born between 1810 and 1830 who could have grown up in Ohio. Philip (1795-1880) and Rebecca had a son born between 1815 and 1825 in what is now Snyder County. Johannes (1761-1843) had a son born in what is now Snyder County between 1804 and 1810. Also in the same area, Leonhardt and Catharine Richter had one son born between 1790 and 1800 and another between 1810 and 1820.

The family of Martin and Elisabetha. Adam (born in 1757) and Catarina had three sons born between 1790 and 1800. Their son John had a son born between 1800 and 1810. John (1791-1860) and Appolonia had two sons born between 1820 and 1830. Jacob (1805-1874) and Mary Friedley had a son in Clinton County, Pennsylvania, between 1820 and 1825.

The family of Leonard and Elisabetha. No unnamed entries.

ENDNOTES

1. Pennsylvania Foreign Oaths of Allegiance searched on Ancestry.com. The original records in the Pennsylvania State Archives were reprinted by Genealogical Publishing Co. in 1967. See William Henry Egle, editor, *Names of Foreigners Who Took the Oath of Allegiance to the Province and State of Pennsylvania, 1727-1775, with the Foreign Arrivals, 1786-1808*.
2. Frederick's land "Copenhagen" was patented to Samuel and Lydia Wallis of Northumberland County on March 10, 1795, along with a number of other tracts. Wallis subsequently flipped two sets of tracts totalling about 40,000 acres to a John Vaughan of Philadelphia on April 7, 1795.

Records of land transactions from this period can be found at the Luzerne County Courthouse in Wilkes-Barre. Luzerne County was created in 1786. Bradford County was created in 1810 as Ontario County and renamed in 1812.

3. Andrew W. Young, *History of Wayne County, Indiana*, page 273. Elijah died March 24, 1904, according to Indiana deaths that were searched on Ancestry.com.
4. Jeremiah's marriage is from Indiana marriages on Ancestry.com.
5. *Annals*, page 601. The author has found no land records in Northumberland County that show George owned the site of the two collieries. And there are no known records of family members becoming fabulously wealthy as a result of owning the collieries. Most Kerstetters in Northumberland County were farmers.
6. Copy of a 1965 letter from Ruth Galon to Dr. Greg Castetter.
7. Edward W. Hocker, *Genealogical Data Relating to the German Settlers of Pennsylvania and Adjacent Territory*. The item appeared in the newspaper of Christopher Sower or Sauers, the *Pennsylvanische Geschicht-Schreiber*. A similar entry retrieved on Ancestry.com was mistakenly described as information from passenger and immigration lists.
8. IGI Family Group Record. The marriage most likely took place in the part of Berks County that later became Schuylkill County in 1811.
9. Carol Happel Grennan of Green Lake, Wisconsin, and Barbara McDonald Facius of Flagler Beach, Florida.