

# The World of Bishop Isaac Hochstettler

*By J. Virgil Miller, DJH 5684*



Isaac Hochstettler was the nephew of the American immigrant Jacob Hochstetler (see DJH 9000). Unlike his uncle, Isaac stayed in Europe. He was born at Weinberg, also called Climont, in Val de Ville, a valley perhaps fifty miles north of Ste. Marie-aux-Mines, Alsace. His father, Johannes Hochstettler, was probably born at Ste. Marie, since the family first came there from Switzerland around 1700. His mother was Anna Wagler, who came from Muesbach near Colmar. Her family was also Swiss. The family had to leave Ste. Marie after about 1715, when an order from the French King Louis XIV decreed that no Protestants could remain on French territory. This also affected the Anabaptists who lived near Ste. Marie. So after being expelled from Switzerland for the same reason,

they found themselves unwelcome in their new haven after only fifteen years. The Hochstettlers were Anabaptists, known in America as Amish-Mennonites. Johannes and other members of his family were reluctant to leave Alsace, so they, with some of their fellow church-members, moved further up into the Vosges Mountains, looking for some estate-owner who would allow them to stay there and work, keeping quiet so as not to alert the authorities.

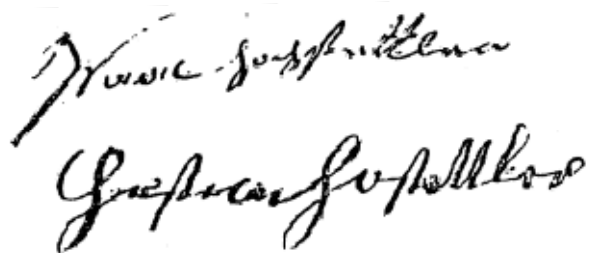
Isaac was born into this situation in 1740, two years after his uncle Jacob arrived in America. He had a brother Christian two years older than he was, and a sister Anna, four years younger. When the children were still young, around 1750, the family moved even further into the mountainous area called Strut, near the village of Assweiler. Christian then was married to Barbara Nafziger, and after her death to Madeleine Nafziger. They were probably sisters, daughters of Christian Nafziger of Steinbacherhof, a large hof near Strut.

Isaac's first marriage was to Maria Siegel, whose family lived in the Saar region of Germany. That must have been a few years after 1760, for his brother Christian moved north to Gumbrechtshofen near the German border in 1768, while Isaac moved to nearby Lauterbacherhof; both were near the town of Reichshofen. Isaac's son Jacob was born in 1765, probably shortly after moving there. Jacob was the only child from Isaac's first marriage. Isaac's wife died about 1770 and he then married Anna Rupp, the widow of Hans Ringenberg. Ringenberg had been the lease-holder of the farm connected with the castle Bärbelstein across the border in the Palatinate in Germany. By this time Isaac had been chosen as a minister in the Amish-Mennonite church in Frönschburgerhof in Alsace. So from about 1770 to 1784 he lived in Germany and was a minister in a church that had members who lived in both France and Germany. At the Essingen Conference in 1779 called by Elder Hans Nafziger of Essingen, Isaac was named as a minister in the Frönschburg church, though he was living at Bärbelsteinerhof. His brother Christian may have lived at Lauterbacherhof during that period.

After Isaac's second wife Anna died around 1784, he returned to Alsace and married Catherine Schantz. He may have been living again at Lauterbacherhof, since a record from Reichshofen has a

notice of the marriage of "Jean Hochstettler and Anna Hollin" on 1799. Erwin Hochstättler of Cologne, Germany, a descendant of Isaac and a historian, pointed out that the signatures to the marriage contract say "Isaak Hochstettler and Anner Hollin." Jean or Johannes was the father of Isaac, and somehow the names got mixed up. So we conclude that this was a record of Isaac's fourth marriage and that his wife Catherine Schantz had died after a marriage from 1784 to sometime before 1799. Isaac lived for the last period of this life at Neuhof near Niederlauterbacherhof until his death in 1817. No doubt he continued his duties as a minister until the age of 77, when he died. By that time his uncle Jacob in America had been dead since 1776, and all of his children had also died. There is no record that indicates that the families had contact with each other after Jacob's emigration to America. At Isaac's fourth marriage, he was 56 and Anna was 47. She was the widow of Christian Güngerich of Steinseltz. Isaac had eight children, as follows:

Isaac's oldest son JACOB (1765-1857) was an Amish bishop at Münsterhof in the Palatinate. He was the only son of Isaac's wife Maria Siegel. He was born at Lauterbacherhof in Alsace. The second son PETER was born at Bärbelstein in 1771, married Magdalena Unsicker and lived first at Lauterbacherhof and then at Neuhof in Alsace. He later moved to near Augsburg in Bavaria. Peter died in 1822. His widow was the person said to have received a letter from Pennsylvania telling about the Hochstetler massacre. But she would not have been born yet in 1757. Her son Joseph emigrated around 1820 or after his father's death in 1822 and settled in Illinois, where he died in 1854. It is possible that the authors of DJH somehow had contact with this grandson of Isaac Hochstettler or his children, and either they did had such a letter or could verify the fact that there was one, or they might have remembered their grandmother telling about it. Some of these descendants now live near Pekin, Illinois.



*Signatures of Isaac Hochstettler (DJH 9000) and his brother Christian, from the birth notice of Isaac Hochstettler's daughter Magdalena 10.2.1776, in the civil records at Reichshofen, Alsace. Note the spelling of Isaac, not "Isaak" as in DJH.*