

## Fatal attack by Delawares at root of Berks family's heritage

An Upper Bern Township resident lives on ground that was the scene of an Indian raid that left three family members dead.

By Ron Devlin  
*Reading Eagle*

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- When Kevin Schlappich is alone in the woods, perched in a tree stand awaiting the arrival of a wayward whitetail, his mind wanders back to when the first settlers ventured into northern Berks County.

Through the mist along Northkill Creek, Schlappich envisions an Indian war party. They're marching three captive settlers north toward Blue Mountain.

In the distance, flames leap skyward from a burning log cabin.

Schlappich's fantasy, it turns out, is rooted in reality.

On Sept. 19, 1757 — 250 years ago today — Indians attacked and burned a log cabin along the Northkill Creek near Shartlesville.

Hired by the French during the French and Indian War, the Delaware Indians killed three members of the Jacob Hochstetler family and took three others captive.

It would go down in history as the Hochstetler Massacre.

Schlappich, 48, a CarTech steelworker, has more than a passing interest in the historic event.

He lives in a house on the very spot where the massacre occurred, a secluded tract off Old Route 22 west of Shartlesville.

Schlappich believes that a stone addition to his house was part of the original Hochstetler cabin.

"I feel a special connection to this place," confessed Schlappich, who's lived on the site with his family since 1985. "When I'm hunting or working in the field, I like to picture what this place was like 250 years ago."



*Reading Eagle: Jeremy Drey*

Kevin Schlappich, who lives in a house near Shartlesville on the site where three members of the Hochstetler family were killed in an Indian attack, recounts Indian lore.

### **Jacob Hochstetler**

Born of German lineage in Switzerland, Jacob Hochstetler was 26 in 1738 when he arrived aboard the ship Charming Nancy in Philadelphia. With him were his wife and two small children.

Like many Anabaptists, Hochstetler hoped to find religious freedom in William Penn's colony, known for its spiritual tolerance.

The young family settled along the Northkill Creek with others, then referred to as Amish Mennonites, in the "mother" of Amish settlements in America.

Three children were born in Berks County.

The mother, a daughter and a son, Jacob Jr., were killed in the Indian raid on Sept. 19 and 20, 1757. Jacob Sr., and sons Joseph and Christian were taken captive.

The eldest Hochstetler child, John, lived on a nearby farm and was not involved in the attack.

The Northkill Amish settlement disbanded and its members moved to Lancaster County and beyond to western Pennsylvania, Ohio and Kentucky.

Source: Jacob Hochstetler Family Association

## The massacre

Tourists exiting the Roadside America parking lot might have difficulty seeing the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker in an overgrown area across Old Route 22.

Though its carefully worded message lacks details, the marker hints at a fascinating chapter in Berks County's history.

In 1740, Amish immigrants organized a settlement along the Northkill Creek, the marker says. It calls them the Northkill Amish, and notes theirs was the first Amish Mennonite congregation in America.

The congregation disbanded, the marker says, after three members of the Jacob Hochstetler family were killed in an Indian attack on Sept. 29, 1757.

Actually, Hochstetler family members say the attack took place on Sept. 19, 1757, 10 days earlier. The date is inscribed on a plaque the family placed near Schlappich's house, and it appears in numerous family histories.

There have been various accounts over the years, some of which differ slightly. The account of the Jacob Hochstetler Family Association, which has members all over the world, tells this story.

On the night of Sept. 19, the Hochstetler family was in bed when their dog barked loud enough to awaken Jacob Jr.

He opened the cabin door and was immediately shot in the leg, but managed to close the door before the Indian raiding party could rush inside.

Aroused, the Hochstetlers were able to make out a party of seven Indians and three French scouts, who took refuge behind an outdoor bake oven.

Two of the Hochstetler boys, Joseph and Christian, wanted to take up arms. They were excellent shots, having hunted game in the wilderness.

But, in accordance with his pacifist beliefs, Jacob Sr. refused to let his sons fight back.

The siege lasted throughout the night and, at dawn, the Indians set the cabin afire using embers from the bake oven.

The Hochstetlers sought refuge in a stone building attached to the cabin, escaping the flames and smoke. When it appeared the Indians had left, the Hochstetlers emerged.

A local Indian with the English name Tom Lions spotted the family and called to the raiding party to return.

The raiders did, and quickly tomahawked and scalped Jacob Jr., his sister and mother, whose first names are not listed in the history.

Jacob Sr., Joseph and Christian were taken captive and held prisoner at a village somewhere northwest of Harrisburg.

The Hochstetlers were treated kindly as captives.

Jacob Sr. was considered a "safe" prisoner and was given a gun to hunt game when the warriors were away from the village. He was required to give an account of each shot he fired, but managed to squirrel away gunpowder for his eventual escape.

He fled, floating down the Susquehanna to Harrisburg on a makeshift raft. He had been with the Indians three years.

Jacob Sr. filed a petition asking Lt. Gov. James Hamilton to help recover his sons, according to documents in the Pennsylvania Archives.

Christian had become a full-fledged member of the tribe, adopting their language and customs. After seven years, though, he returned. In his Indian garb, he was not immediately recognized by his father.

Only when he said in German, "My name is Christian Hochstetler" did the elder man recognize his son.

Another version says Jacob Sr. recognized his son when he recited "The Lord's Prayer" in German. Realizing that they were adopting Indian ways, the father told his sons when they were in captivity, "Never forget The Lord's Prayer."

Joseph was returned when the Indians released captives as part of the treaty, signed May 8, 1765, that ended the war.

The Hochstetlers would leave Berks County.

Jacob Sr. died in nearby Lebanon County. Christian and Joseph moved west to Amish communities in Somerset and Juniata counties.

### **Across the centuries**

Jim McMahon, an eighth-generation direct descendant of Jacob Hochstetler, has a deep sense of history.

So much so, the 63-year-old retired lawyer from Macungie will lead a delegation of his family to the site of the Hochstetler massacre.

McMahon's sister from Maryland, his children and two grandchildren — the eighth, ninth and 10th generations — will pay tribute to their ancestors on Saturday.

"We'll have a 45-minute commemorative ceremony at the site," McMahon said. "We will read from the Hochstetler genealogy."

While few will make the pilgrimage to Upper Bern Township, the Jacob Hochstetler Family Association estimates there are 500,000 to 1 million of the immigrant's progeny living in the U.S. and abroad.

One of them, the Rev. A. Dale Stewart, 76, a retired pastor, will speak on the massacre today at the Marion County Genealogical Society in Ocala, Fla.

His maternal grandfather was a Yoder, a family connected to the Hochstetlers.

He discovered his Hochstetler connection while a member of a Mennonite prayer group in Cincinnati, where he had been a pastor before retiring.

It was a revelation of sorts.

"Finally, I understood what caused me to lean toward peace instead of war," Stewart said, referring to Hochstetler's pacifist leanings.

Stewart is a founder of the Interfaith Alliance of Northern Florida, a group that includes Christians, Jews and Muslims.

### **Bound to the land**

Kevin Schlappich's ancestors came to northern Berks County in the late 18th century, a few decades after Jacob Hochstetler.

In more than 200 years, the family hasn't gone very far.

Kevin's never lived more than five miles from where he grew up around Centerport.

In his spare time, he grows hay, corn and vegetables on 32 acres. He also raises turkeys, chickens and ducks.

With a barn and an 1800 farmhouse set well off the highway, Schlappich's place is a throwback to another era.

Standing at the spring from which the Hochstetlers drew their water, Schlappich marveled at the ingenuity of the early settlers.

"The Amish cut the first trees here, and they must have been massive," he says. "Imagine them pulling out those huge stumps to clear the land. It's amazing."

Pausing for a moment, he added:

"Yes, I'm privileged. Very much so."

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A mural at the Pennsylvania Dutch Campground in Upper Tulpehocken Township.