

“Fat John.” It makes me wonder what her family looked like. Katherine and Nicolaus had seven children. Their eldest son was a man named Jakob, born in 1667, in Germany. It has been reported that he was a surgeon who died in 1717 at the age of 50, in Germany. It is with his wife and children that the American adventure of the Williard clan begins. Jakob’s wife was Mary Elizabeth Gordier (or Cordier), and she and Jakob had 3 children, Caspar, Dewalt (or Theobald), and Johann Peter (or Peter). Mary Elizabeth, as you probably have already guessed, was also of French descent, but she was born in Germany in 1682. That made her about 35 when her husband died.

For reasons we have yet to discover, Mary Elizabeth, her grown boys, their wives, their children, and a relative named Catherine packed up their belongings and left Germany for America. They did not all leave Germany together, but it seems reasonable that their journey was planned together, as they all reunited a couple of hours by car from where we are sitting tonight. This second migration of the family from their home came only about 100 years after Nicolaus was born in France. His daughter-in-law and grandchildren left Germany, and arrived at various times in the 1740s in Philadelphia. Even though the family was of French descent – and only one generation away from France on the Vieillard side, they were clearly very German by the time they arrived in Pennsylvania. They spoke German and were part of the German communities across the Mid-Atlantic.

We know quite a bit about Mary Elizabeth and her family, including where and when they entered into this country. I don’t know about you, but a list of ship names and passenger lists is about as riveting as the “begats.” Let’s just say that

Mary Elizabeth came here with her son Peter and the relative Catherine.

Catherine is a bit of an enigma. She is referred to in the records as the “sister” of Casper, Peter, and Dewalt, but she was born after Jakob died. We don’t know who Catherine Williard’s parents were. We do know she married first a man named Bender and then a man named George Harbaugh after the death of her first husband. We know this for sure because she is referred to in the church records as “the widow Bender”. Now, as I said a few moments ago, a grandson of Pierre also married into the Harbaugh family, as did other members of the Williard clan. In many cases, the Williards and the Harbaughs are interchangeable. Now, being a die hard football fan, I find this fascinating, because Jim Harbaugh is a rather prolific NFL quarterback, and I think this means he is my cousin.

Back to Mary Elizabeth and her children. Caspar was the oldest, and he came over first. He settled in York County. Several family records, including that of your own Major Simon Willard, claimed that Caspar never married. Although we cannot prove to scientific certainty that this is untrue, it seems very likely that Caspar did marry and had several children, and his descendants populated southern and southwestern PA. The reason we think that Caspar did marry is the children of Mary Elizabeth (including Catherine Bender Harbaugh), as witnesses to baptisms of children born to a Caspar Williard in York County, PA. Coincidence? I doubt it.

Mary Elizabeth came over with her son, Peter, and his family. They came through the port of Philadelphia and apparently went west to be with Caspar, as they joined him in York County for a time. Dewalt also came through Philadelphia, with his family, and

can briefly be found in York County. Eventually, everyone but Caspar and his family left York and went south to the Monacacy region of Maryland, where they became prominent members of the community and substantial landholders. The Monacacy region is due south of Gettysburg, along Route 15. If you go out the turnpike toward Gettysburg, and take Route 15 south, you will end up in Frederick in about an hour and a half. This is where the multiplying like rabbits part really begins. Pennsylvania was just a way-station on the road to populating the new continent.

The Monacacy region was another strong concentration of German peoples, and many of the old tombstones were written in German. Peter, his mother Mary Elizabeth, and his family settled north of Frederick near Thurmont. They, along with the Harbaughs, became members of the Graceham Moravian Church. Their tombstones can be found in Graceham Church Cemetery, and they are among the oldest found in Maryland. The original tombstones have been replaced by dedicated family members, but Mary Elizabeth’s stone once read “Our Mother” in German, a very fitting epitaph for her indeed, as we can number her descendants today in the several thousands – and those are only the ones we have found to count. She died in 1770 at the age of 88. At this point the original VIEILLARD name can still be found, although derivations are common, like “WILGAR”.

Peter’s first American-born son was Johann George, and he was a Moravian pioneer. He was one of the earliest members of the Moravian settlement in Salem, Carolina, now Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He, too, was a prolific ancestor, whose descendants number in the thousands, many, many of them in North Carolina. Like all children of