



The Weidner Family

The Weidner family had only a brief relationship with the Historic Ephrata Cloister, but their association helped to shape the community's history.¹

Not much remains to document the Weidner family's early history at Ephrata. Questions begin with the father, Peter. He may have come from Switzerland sometime prior to 1725. In that year, his father-in-law, Heinrich Schneider, mentions his daughter Catharina and her husband Peter Weidner in his will. By late February 1736, Peter had died, and Catharina sold their home and land in Oley Township (now Pike Township), Berks County, Pennsylvania. Widow Catharina moved to Ephrata with her children Barbara, Peter Jr., Jacob, and Isaac. Her oldest son, Heinrich, may not have joined his family's move, or he only stayed in Ephrata briefly.

In 1736, Andreas Stroop sold Catharina one hundred acres of land west of the Historic Ephrata Cloister along the Cocalico Creek.² Five years later, Stroop sold his remaining seventy-five acres directly across the Cocalico Creek from Catharina Weidner to the Ephrata Community. With the seventy-five acres came a grain mill that the community wished to develop to include a paper mill, an oil mill for producing linseed oil, and a fulling mill to clean woolen cloth. To enlarge the mill required more power from the creek and a more substantial mill dam. To create the larger dam, the community needed to gain permission from their neighbor, Catharina Weidner, to flood part of her property. In October 1741, Catharina and her son Peter Jr. granted permission to Israel Ecklerlin and Peter Miller, representatives of the Ephrata Brotherhood, to build the dam. The granting of these water rights permitted Ephrata to expand the community's industrial efforts and keep the grain mill operating for most of the next century under the control of the celibates and later the German Seventh Day Baptist Church.

Catharina Weidner died in 1742, having only been part of the Ephrata community for six years. Only her daughter Barbara seems to have continued membership in the congregation at the Cloister. Catharina's will offers interesting information about her son Heinrich.

“I gif [give] my son Henry Weidner twelve pounds for all [although] I have reason to give him lease [less] because he was disobedient after his father's death, by his own will, he went from me and made himself his own master, several years before the Law giveth to be free.”

Heinrich was about nineteen when he left his mother, short of the legal age of twenty-one. In the same will, Catharina notes:

“Peter Weidner, as the ealtest [eldest/oldest] of my sons living with me at the present time is to have the new house as his own for his help to me as a father to his junger [younger] brothers and sisters.”

Peter, although receiving the land, did not remain in Ephrata but moved to Berks County, Pennsylvania.

Barbara Weidner first married Christian Mossman. Following Christian's death in 1755, Barbara married Christian Rohrbach. Rohrbach operated a tavern in the Ephrata neighborhood but did not attend worship at the Cloister. Barbara appears alone on a 1770 list of Householders, suggesting that while not a member, Christian accepted his wife's religious affiliation.

Heinrich Weidner settled in North Carolina, where descendants still remain. One of his sons, Abram, died fighting against Loyalists during the Revolutionary War at the Battle of King's Mountain.

Although the Weidner family's relationship with Ephrata was short, the granting of water rights permitting the society's expansion left a lasting legacy on the history of the community.

¹ Anne Williams McAllister, *Through Four Generations: Heinrich Weidner and Catharina Mull Weider*. Patterson, NC: A. W. McAllister, 1992, pp. 27-32. Vol. II, 1996, pp. 21-28.

² John A. Palmer, “Notes on the Geography of the Cloister Lower Mill Tract,” *Journal of The Historical Society of the Cocalico Valley*, vol. 27, (2002): 14-18. Palmer suggest the deeds did not accurately reflect the acreage and that Weider received 126 acres and the Ephrata community only received 49 acres.