

An Introduction to Daniel and Catherine Royer

Renfrew Museum and Park and the Renfrew Institute occupy what used to be a thriving early nineteenth-century farmstead. The farmstead included a large stone house, a barn, a smokehouse, a milk house, fields, a gristmill, a tannery, a large-scale kiln, and an assortment of outbuildings. This sprawling farm was owned and operated by Daniel Royer, his wife Catherine, and their ten children.

The Royers were members of a much larger faction of early German settlers, a group known as “Pennsylvania Germans.” This term may conjure up images of the Amish or similar plain religious sects. Although these groups were Pennsylvania Germans or Pennsylvania Dutch, they were in fact in the minority. In his book, *Pennsylvania German: Farms, Gardens, and Seeds*, Irwin Richman notes that, “the vast majority of these pre-1800 [German] immigrants were Lutherans and members of the German Reformed Church (now the United Church of Christ).”¹

Donald F. Durnbaugh, in his article entitled, “Pennsylvania’s Crazy Quilt of German Religious Groups,” makes the same point. Durnbaugh writes that, “It is a curious fact that although the ‘church people’—Lutherans and Reformed—made up the bulk of German immigration in colonial America ... public attention has tended to focus on the ‘plain people’—those groups largely of Anabaptist and Pietist background.”²

So, why is any of this relevant to what goes on at Renfrew? Why is there any value in determining the spiritual heritage of the Royer family?

The short answer is that worldviews are shaped by ideas, beliefs and deeply held convictions. Religion motivates people, influences behavior, and promotes a certain lifestyle. Understanding something so personal gives breadth to and resurrects in some way, a group of people long gone. My aim is to bring to light the religious heritage of Daniel Royer. His

¹ Richman, Irwin. 2007. *Pennsylvania German: Farms, Gardens and Seeds*. Atglen, Pennsylvania: Shiffer Publishing Ltd. p.15.

² Durnbaugh, Donald J. 2001. “Pennsylvania's Crazy Quilt of German Religious Groups.” Penn State University. [accessed last on November 27, 2017]. <https://journals.psu.edu/phj/article/download/25670/25439>.

Protestant faith molded him, persuaded him to carry himself in a certain way, influenced decisions he made that impacted his entire family and the quality of life for his descendants.

I hope the answers that I have found will aid Renfrew Institute in portraying the cultural world of the Royer family as accurately as possible.

A person learns, adapts and grows from experiences—successes and failures, personal achievements and disappointing setbacks. Daniel Royer lived his life in a context that is entirely foreign to us and abided to a faith that some of us cannot identify with. In order to understand the man, it is prudent to explore what shaped him, what encouraged him to live life as a community-minded man.

Unmasking the religion practiced by Daniel will provide us with a fuller, more robust portrait of someone who left us very little material from which we can draw. The lack of primary source material (material generated at the time such as journals, diaries, letters, newspapers, etc.) is a frustrating reality. However, there is enough evidence available to those of us living in the twenty-first century that reveals to us what kind of Protestant faith Daniel and the Royer clan practiced.

Defining “Heritage”

Some have described the Royer family’s faith as following that of the German Baptists. Others have categorized them as belonging to the German Reformed Church. I approached this question as a student of history. I believe there has been discrepancy regarding the spiritual heritage of the Royers due to, as previously mentioned, a lack of primary source material. It is a great misfortune that Renfrew Museum has so little in its collections that relate directly with Daniel, his wife Catherine, or their ten children.

I scoured sources at the local Waynesboro library, made trips to the Cumberland County Historical Society, the Blair County Historical Society, and the Blair County Genealogical Library, and consulted with a series of local historians in hopes of finding conclusive evidence that would enable me to say the Royers were of a specific religious sect.

I believe I have found evidence that places the Royer clan in neither the German Baptist camp or the Reformed Church. This may come as a bit of a surprise, but I will walk you through the process—take you on a journey so that you too might discover what I did, and draw your own conclusions.

My ideas and conclusions are based on the evidence I found, and are open for discussion, especially if more evidence comes to light. Interpretation follows examination of evidence. Primary sources lead the way and secondary sources arrange that evidence in a particular way, according to the interpretation of the researcher or writer.

An automobile accident can serve as an example of how evidence may be interpreted. An accident happened, that is a fact. However, where witnesses were standing and for how long influences their interpretation of the event. A police officer collects evidence and writes a report based on his findings. Historians do much the same. They develop a cohesive narrative from the evidence available to them.

I hope this project sparks a series of history-based research projects that aid the Renfrew Institute in portraying the cultural world of the Royer family as accurately as possible.

So, let us go back, and discover where the Royer heritage began. The term “heritage” implies a need to look back to previous generations. Merriam-Webster defines “heritage” as “something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor.”³ The question then becomes—What did Daniel’s ancestors transmit to him in terms of a religious faith? Tracing the Royer lineage back takes us to Sebastian (Reyer) Royer.

Sebastian Royer – The First Royer

Sebastian Mathias Royer (1676–1758) emigrated from the Palatinate region, which was located between France and Germany. This land was fraught with discord and violence. An event known as “The Revocation” prompted Sebastian’s departure. This event in French history

³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Updated November 24, 2017, “heritage” [accessed November 27, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heritage>].

transpired under the rule of King Louis XIV with his issuance of the Edict of Fontainebleau. This edict rescinded a previous edict, The Edict of Nantes, issued under a predecessor.

King Louis XIV sought to unify the populace by declaring the state a Catholic one and to expunge the presence of Protestants (Huguenots). His decree “forbade religious practice for the Protestant Reformed Church and stipulated that all their church buildings should be pulled down. Pastors had to recant or go into exile. The faithful lost their identity as Protestants were declared Catholics. Many chose to emigrate, even though it was forbidden, rather than to submit.”⁴

Sebastian, rooted in the Protestant faith, sought to emigrate to the New World as opposed to converting or enduring persecution. He set out on his own, arriving in Pennsylvania in 1718. He did not remain there for long, but returned home to gather his four sons. His first wife died in the Palatinate in an undesignated year. In 1726, Sebastian and his sons, Emig (Amos), George, Samuel and Henry, arrived in the Philadelphia area and eventually settled in what is now Brickerville, Pennsylvania in Warwick Township of Lancaster County.⁵ At some point, Sebastian remarried, to an Agnes Flockirth/ Flockerth, and together they had three daughters.

Sebastian was a strict Lutheran, as noted by Reverend J.G. Francis in his tome concerning Sebastian Royer and his descendants. Agnes, on the other hand, was a member of the Reformed Church. Reverend Francis discloses a story in which Sebastian is confronted by his older boys. Upon reaching Pennsylvania, a commonwealth founded upon the principle of religious freedom, the boys informed their father of a decision they had made. Who instigated this decision is presumably lost to history, but the young men explained to their father their intent to practice their faith as they saw fit, attending church service where and when they chose.

⁴ “The Period of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1661-1700).” Virtual Museum of Protestantism. [accessed last on November 28, 2017]. <https://www.museeprotestant.org/en/notice/the-period-of-the-revocation-of-the-edict-of-nantes-1661-1700/>.

⁵ W. Ray. Metz and Floyd G. Hoenstine, 1951, *The Royer Family – Ironmasters of Blair County: Historical Sketch of Springfield Furnace, Cove Forge, and Franklin Forge*, p. 10.

Sebastian, according to the story, was heartbroken at this turn of events and wished he had never set sail for Pennsylvania.⁶

If taken as fact, the consequences of the sons' decision to attend church when they pleased has particular implications to this research project. I believe this second generation sowed unintended seeds that caused a ripple effect down through the generations. It would appear that these sons set a particular tone, developing their inherited Protestant faith in such a way as to make it their own. Separating themselves from their strict father enabled the young men to forge a faith they were passionate about, rather than embracing a dogma that was handed to them. Young people continue to do this, weighing ideas and beliefs inherited from their parents and sifting through them to discover what they consider important and valid.

Sebastian's character is revealed in another story shared by Reverend Francis. According to this tale, the Brickerville congregation thought it a good investment to present their young minister with a horse. The minister had a series of congregations under his care, and having no other means of transportation, warmly received this thoughtful gift.

However, the congregants had not considered the young man's riding skills. His horsemanship was amateurish at best, and he managed to climb up on the horse, only to fall off. At this, Sebastian Royer blurted out in a hurtful tone, "Du dummer Ochs," ("You stupid ox"). This comment had a crushing effect on the young man, and when he arrived at White Oak, the next congregation, the people noticed his downcast countenance. He shared with them what had caused him to look so dejected.⁷

It would seem from this incident that Sebastian Royer was a man who did not mince his words, and perhaps that characteristic played a part in prompting his sons to break away from his religious creed and adopt something more to their liking, and more in sync with their own worldview.

⁶ Francis, Reverend J.G.1928. *Genealogical Records of the Royer Family or more especially those of Sebastian Royer's Family*. Lebanon, Pennsylvania: J.G. Francis, p.8.

⁷ Ibid. p. 9.

When Sebastian died in 1758 he was buried in the cemetery adjoining the Brickerville Lutheran Church. His son, Samuel is also buried there, so apparently not all of the boys abandoned the ideology of their father. Agnes, however, as previously mentioned, was a member of the Reformed Church. Sebastian had donated land for the erection of a Lutheran church and also land for a Reformed church. This demonstrates a positive trait in Sebastian's character—that of a generous nature—and this characteristic was evidently passed down through the generations, as will be noted later.

Samuel Royer – Daniel's Father Comes to Franklin County

This is where the timeline becomes a bit skewed. Samuel's son, Samuel was born in 1738 in Warwick Township. (There were many Samuels in my research. Apparently, it was a German tradition to reuse names, which plays havoc with the historian.) This Samuel migrated to the area of Five Forks in then Cumberland County, Pennsylvania in 1768.⁸ He married Catharine [Laubsher/Lampshear] in 1761 in Lancaster County. He later served as a captain in the Cumberland County Militia during the American Revolution.

Following the war Samuel fell on hard times. A notice in The Carlisle Gazette, June 13, 1787, read, "Sheriff's sale of horses, cows, sheep, hogs, stils, wagons, &c., property of Samuel Royer." A notice in the June 20, 1787, issue of the same newspaper read, "Samuel Royer, Franklin Co., states he has paid his account with the sheriff which will appear on the docket of Cumberland co."⁹

So it would seem that Samuel suffered financially in the years following the war. This may have left an impression upon his oldest son, Daniel, who later accumulated a great degree of wealth in business ventures upon his Waynesboro farmstead and in his involvement with the charcoal and iron industry in Huntingdon, now Blair County. Samuel and Catharine had six children: Daniel, Samuel, John, Jacob, Elizabeth, and Catharine.

⁸ Franklin County was not formed until September 1784.

⁹8) Abraham, Barbara Bittner. "Royers: Past and Present." Ancestry.com. [accessed last on November 29, 2017] <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~royer/roypastp.htm>.

Upon his death in 1823, Samuel was buried in what is locally recognized as the Mack or Mack-Royer Cemetery. It is referred to as the Mack Cemetery because it contains the remains of Johannes Mack, son of Alexander Mack, the founder of the Church of the Brethren in 1708.

The question of why Samuel and members of the Royer clan are buried in the Mack Cemetery is unknown. Daniel's brother, Samuel (Samuel Jr.), married Susannah Mack, thereby cementing a connection between the Royers and the Macks. Samuel Jr. and Susannah suffered the loss of a 5-year-old child, a boy named David. David and his grandfather, Samuel, both died in 1823, and both were buried in the Mack Cemetery.

It may be because of those deaths that later, in 1838, when Daniel and his brother, Samuel Jr. died, they were also buried in the Mack Cemetery. Aside from this familial connection, another possible reason for the Royers being buried here is that they, along with the Macks and the Stoners (Catherine Royer's family), all belonged to the same Brethren congregation, locally recognized as Price's Church.

Defining the Church of the Brethren

In 1708, Alexander Mack founded the Church of the Brethren. They were cast as radicals in Europe and fled from persecution by both Catholics and Protestants associated with established or state-sponsored churches, primarily the Lutheran and the Reformed churches.

They were radicals as they were influenced by Anabaptist theology and "radical pietism." The Reformation established the Protestant Church and ushered in a tumultuous, violent, deadly span of time in human history. Catholics and Protestants waged war against one another that crisscrossed all of Europe.

In the shadow of the Reformation were spiritual leaders that believed it had not gone far enough in establishing a church that honored Christ. Anabaptists "didn't want to merely reform the church; they wanted to wholly restore it to its initial purity and simplicity. Such a church, they held, consists only of people who present themselves to be baptized."¹⁰ Their ideas

¹⁰"1525 The Anabaptist Movement Begins." Christianity Today.com. [accessed last November 28, 2017]. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-28/1525-anabaptist-movement-begins.html>.

concerning baptism earned them intense persecution. Unlike the Catholic Church and the aforementioned Protestant denominations, which practiced infant baptism, the Anabaptists only baptized adults.

An adult who sought to be baptized had to first deliver a confession of sin and then a profession or acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The term “Anabaptist” literally means to be baptized again. “Ana – again” and “Baptist – baptize.”

The Brethren formed just one denomination under the umbrella of Anabaptists. The Brethren practiced triune immersion in their baptismal services. The candidate would kneel in shallow water and be dunked three times in a forward position, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each one a respective component of the triune God.

The Anabaptists also supported the idea of separation of church and state, so that the church would operate without governmental interference. As noted by *Christianity Today*, “Another central teaching [of the Anabaptists] was the separation of church and state. The church, they said, is to be composed of free, ‘uncompelled’ people. The state is not to use coercion on people’s consciences.”¹¹

Anabaptists also stood in opposition to church hierarchy and preferred the idea of congregationalism, meaning that each congregation operated on its own in a democratic style. These teachings separated the Anabaptists from their fellow Protestants and earned them much scorn and derision.

Alexander Mack was also influenced by “radical pietism.” In particular, he was a follower and friend of Ernest Christopher Hochmann. Pietists “stressed a personal experience of salvation and a continuous openness to new spiritual illumination. They also taught that personal holiness (piety), spiritual maturity, Bible study and prayer were essential towards ‘feeling the effects’ of grace.”

¹¹ Ibid.

These teachings stressed the importance of the individual strengthening his or her faith and not depending on ministers or teachers to do the work for them.

Mack's teachings eventually became rooted in South-Central Pennsylvania in what became known as the Antietam Congregation. Eventually, five churches would compose this congregation, and at one point it essentially spanned the width of the Cumberland Valley.

In 1752, a man named John Price settled outside of what is now Waynesboro. He became a minister of one of the Antietam Congregation churches, which in time would bear the name of Price. The church existed decades before a church building was constructed. As reported by J. Linwood Eichelberger in *A History of the Church of the Brethren in Southern District of Pennsylvania*, the congregants, "were willing to open their homes in a hospitable manner in accord with the teachings of the New Testament. They not only 'entertained strangers' but opened their homes to the community where all who would could meet and worship God and study His Word together."¹²

This was a community-minded church family that took pride in fellowship with one another, and offered hospitality to outsiders. Eichelberger reports that, "During the first 47 years of the existence of the Antietam congregation, all of the public worship and funeral services were held in the homes of the people."¹³

It may seem foreign to us now, to imagine churches meeting anywhere other than inside a steeple-topped building adorned with stained-glass windows, but Price's Church congregated often in the setting of a home.

The Antietam Congregation & the Royers

Reverend Eichelberger's edited volume contains a key piece of evidence for my claim that the Royers were in fact Brethren, and it is succinctly spelled out. It states that, "Among the more prominent families in the church before 1800, were the Bonebrakes, Foremans, Friedleys,

¹² 7) Eisenberg, J. Linwood, ed.1941. *A History of the Church of the Brethren in Southern District of Pennsylvania*, Quincy, Pennsylvania: Quincy Orphanage Press, p.9.

¹³ Ibid.

Holsingers, Kneppers, Macks, Prices, Royers, Stovers, Snivelys, Stoners, and Snowbergers.”¹⁴ This brief passage reveals that there was a common thread that ran between the Royers, Macks, Stoners, and Snowbergers, and may explain how the families were joined together via marriages.

These families were neighbors, but beyond that it would seem that they also got acquainted through their shared faith. The cemetery at Price’s Church contains fifteen Royer internments, according to the website, www.findagrave.com.¹⁵ The overwhelming majority of Royer burials are located in Green Hill Cemetery, according to the previously-mentioned website. Hence, the information from Eichelberger’s history, coupled with where Daniel and Catherine are buried, points to the realization that the Royers were practitioners of the Brethren faith.

Some may find it difficult to reconcile the Brethren’s pacifist stance with the military service of both Daniel and his father, Samuel. However, an article from the Conestoga Area Historical Society reveals that unlike the Quakers, members belonging to the Church of the Brethren had more latitude in making a personal choice in whether to serve in the militia or not.¹⁶

This seems to fit the nature of the Church, which permitted the congregation to govern itself. It promoted the idea of each member following their conscience in strengthening their own faith. Although the Church may have preferred a pacifist attitude, the ultimate decision fell to the individual. Daniel may also have calculated the repercussions of not serving in the militia, given his prominence in the community—choosing not to serve may have stifled his fruitful business ventures.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.25

¹⁵ 2017. “Find A Grave.” findagrave.com. [accessed last on Monday, December 4, 2017]. <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/1753915/memorial-search?firstName=&lastName=Royer&cemeteryname=Antietam+Church+Cemetery>

¹⁶ The Conestoga Historical Society. “The Pennsylvania Militia” Ancestry.com. [accessed last on November 28, 2017]. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pacahs/revback.htm>

¹⁷ The Brethren Family Tree Image courtesy of the Waynesboro Church of the Brethren website. Waynesboro Church of the Brethren. “A History of The Waynesboro Church of the Brethren,” Waynesboro Church of the Brethren. [accessed last on November 28, 2017]. <http://www.cobwaypa.org/history.html>.

The Royer Legacy

The Church of the Brethren, like many denominations and organizations, endured a series of schisms. (See illustration, courtesy of the Waynesboro Church of the Brethren website– <http://www.cobwaypa.org/history.html>.) The illustration helps explain the divisions that took place in the Church beginning in 1832 and continuing into the 1880s.

The more liberal-minded members formed the Brethren Church in 1883, while the ultra-conservative members founded the Old German Baptist Brethren in 1881. The majority of members walked the middle of the road and remained involved in the Brethren Church, which formally adopted the name of Church of the Brethren in 1908.

To label the Royers German Baptists or Dunkers would be inaccurate. Their lifestyle did not reflect an ultra-conservative doctrine. The fact that Daniel also served in public office casts doubt that they embraced an extreme conservative theology.

Instead, they could be classified as moderate to progressive. I believe this to be true because when you examine the lives of the Royer children, Samuel in particular, you see a fluidity regarding personal faith. In his early 20s, Samuel moved to the town of Williamsburg, near Altoona, Pennsylvania. There he attended a Methodist-Episcopal Church.

Had the Royers adhered to a strict conservative faith, Samuel's move to a Methodist-Episcopal church would have reflected an enormous change in theological beliefs and practices. Not an impossible move, but a highly unlikely one. The name Royer is attached to this church, and the building is on Royer Road. It appears that the Royers developed a good reputation in Blair County and were generous in giving land and money to their communities. A church and a school were established because of the Royers in Blair County.

Moreover, their success in the charcoal iron industry generated jobs and livelihoods. Apart from assigning them to a certain faith or denomination, they lived life according to Christian principles. Daniel's farmstead in Waynesboro and Samuel's iron operations in Blair County showcased that the Royers were committed to their communities, and worked to provide goods and services to their neighbors.

Conclusion

To measure the vibrancy of the Royers' faith, one need only to read a letter written to son Samuel from his second wife, Martha. This letter from the Blair County Historical Society is one of the only primary sources I found over the course of this research project. The letter is dated March 29, 1844. Martha recounts for Samuel some of the events unfolding in Hollidaysburg, about local ministers and about the death of a local man.

Towards the middle of her letter she writes:

“My dear Samuel, my soul this morning is filled with love and gratitude to God since commencing to write looking out of the window thinking what I should write at the same time viewing the works of creation and providence and also brought to reflect on what the Lord has done for my soul. I am constraint to magnify my great Creator Preserver, and Redeemer and exclaim of the length, breadth, height, and depth of the love of God. Glory be to God for such provision wrought out for poor, sinful man.”¹⁷

The language is striking because it reveals a depth of character in Martha Royer. Surely, her husband shared some of her ideas or beliefs about God and what it meant to live as a Christian. It seems certain that Samuel learned the basic tenets of the Christian faith from his parents.

Although I write with certainty that the Royers were indeed members of the local Church of the Brethren, there is no evidence available that reveals how dutiful they were in practicing their faith. There are no personal Bibles, no church attendance sheets, no records that indicate how “religious” they were. Hopefully, more evidence will be collected in the future that can reinforce my conclusion.

As I stated at the beginning, my conclusion is based on the evidence I found. Should something be found to contradict my interpretation, I am open to discussion.

¹⁷ Letter from Martha (McNamera) Royer to her husband, Samuel. Dated March 29, 1844. Courtesy of Cindy Rajala, Curator at the Blair County Historical Society located in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

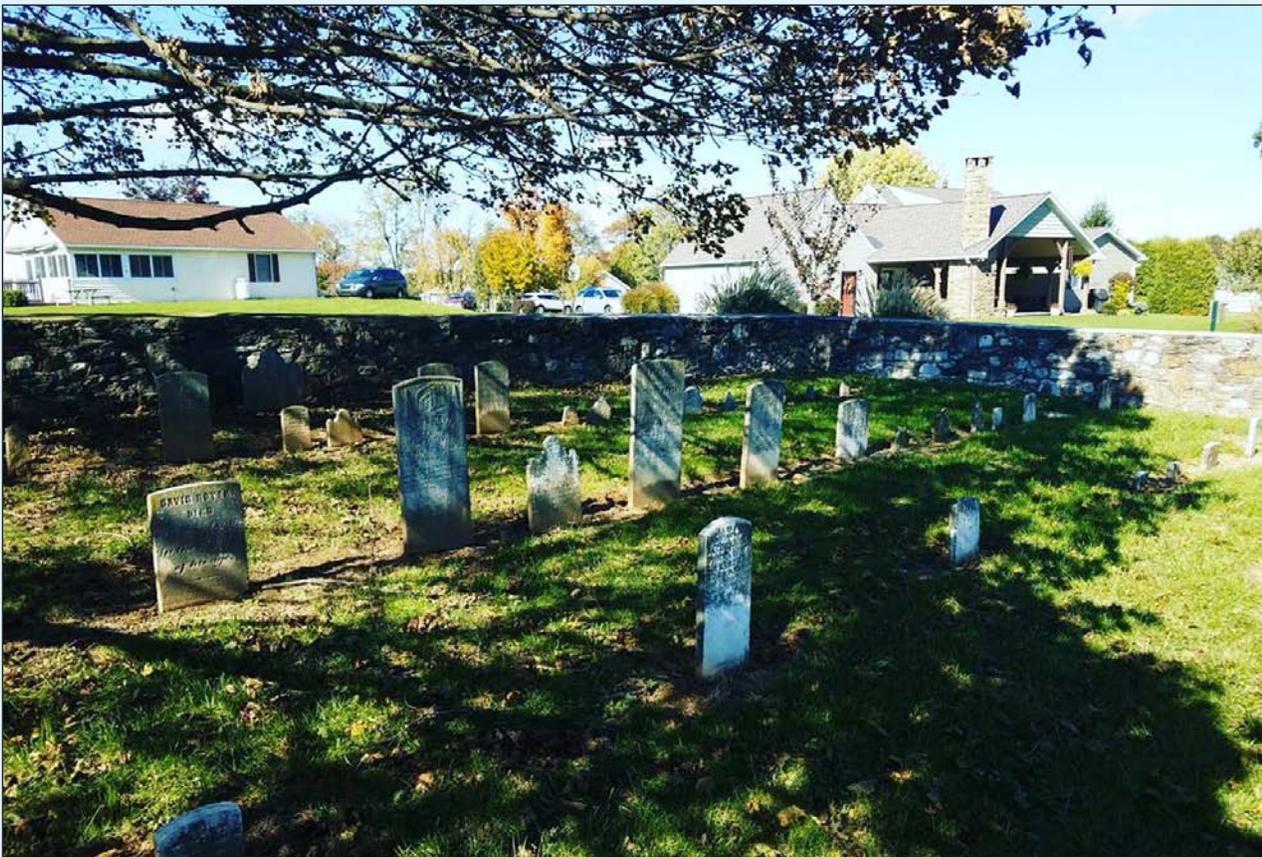
This project developed out of collaboration with local historians and experts and historical societies and libraries. Sharing knowledge and resources is a good practice and allows many people to benefit from joint effort. I hope more projects like this will come about. I am grateful for the support given me by Renfrew Institute and Renfrew Museum & Park, and appreciate the opportunity to have this article published.

—Marty Zimmerman

“Spiritual Heritage of the Royer Family” by Marty Zimmerman PHOTOS



Alexander Mack, who founded the Church of the Brethren. His son Johannes Mack is buried in the Mack-Royer Cemetery near Waynesboro, Pa. (see below)



The Mack Cemetery near Waynesboro, Pa. Some prominent figures in local history are buried here, including several Royers, as well as Johannes Mack, the son of Alexander Mack, who founded the Church of the Brethren.

Photo by Marty Zimmerman

“Spiritual Heritage of the Royer Family” by Marty Zimmerman PHOTOS



The Samuel Royer Mansion in Blair County, Pa. was built by Daniel and Catherine Royer's son, Samuel, who was prominent in the iron and coal industry.

Photo by
Marty Zimmerman



The Royer United Methodist Church on Royer Road in Williamsburg, Pa. (Blair County) bears the name of Samuel Royer, Daniel's son. The author states that Samuel showed a certain fluidity regarding personal faith, demonstrated by his move to a (then) Methodist-Episcopal church upon relocating to Williamsburg. The Royers enjoyed a good reputation in Blair County and were generous in giving land and money to their community. A church and a school were established because of the Royers in Blair County.

Photo by Marty Zimmerman