

Hist. Mss. Collection 1-321

Documents relating to immigrant Johannes Roth (d. 1740) of Vincent, Chester County.

Edited by Joel D. Alderfer (originally published in *MHEP Quarterly*, 1999)

A small but significant group of early 18th century documents has survived from the family of Mennonite immigrants Johannes and Barbara Roth (a.k.a. Rothe-Rhodes), who settled at Vincent, Chester County in 1719. As a group, they provide a glimpse into the emigration and settlement of one of the early Mennonite settlers in the eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite community. Most of these documents were published already in 1909 in *The Pennsylvania German* magazine, and were translated and edited by Dr. William Brower of Spring City, PA. The translations we use here are mostly from that article.¹ The original documents are now in the possession of the Muddy Creek Farm Library, Denver, PA, which gives permission for their publication here.

Johannes Roth was from Heppenheim and Dirmstein in the Palatinate, married Barbara Müller in 1712, and immigrated to Pennsylvania in the summer of 1719. They settled along the Schuylkill River in what would become East Vincent Township, Chester County, probably by the fall of 1719. Their land included the future site of the Vincent Mennonite Meetinghouse and graveyard, along present-day Route 724, just west of Spring City, PA.

First, are the marriage “licenses” or announcements of Johannes Roth and Barbara Müller:

In all sincerity the esteemed bachelor Johannes Roth, worthy son of Peter and Susanna Roth of Heppenheim has entered into an honorable engagement with Miss Barbara Müller, daughter of the late Hans and Catharine Müller of Wachenheim on the Haardt. The same in conformity to custom is announced in this fitting manner. Therefore if they are in their usual good health, they will be proclaimed, and no objections being made, subsequently married.

*Dirmstein, June 10, 1712.
High Wormsian Magistrate,
P. Trauer. [seal]*

Whereas Miss Barbara Müller, surviving and legitimate daughter of Hans Müller has been betrothed to the honorable Johannes Roth, a legitimate son of Peter Roth, a resident of Heppenheim. The same is hereby announced according to the custom of Holland and also of the Menonists. Nothing interfering they will be proclaimed and no objections being made, will be subsequently married.

*Pfaltz – June 12, 1712.
J. W. Schmitiehle, [?Y.G.R?]*

Seven years later, Johannes and Barbara Roth obtained a passport for their journey to Pennsylvania, dated June 1719:

Whereas the bearer of this, Johannes Roth, hitherto an assessor and Menonist, has resolved to go from this to another place and applied to this office for a pass and certified attest as to his behaviour in this community. Therefore it is attested to him herewith upon his due request, that he did conduct himself during his stay at this place as becomes a good subject, and we request each and every one to give not only full credit to this certificate, but also to let him pass with wife and children everywhere free and unmolested and to treat him in other respects with a kind intention under an offer of reciprocal service. 4th of June 1719.

J. W. Astorff
High princely Bishop
Wormsian Bailiff

At the same time, the Roth's were given a church letter of recommendation, written and signed by the "servants and elders" of the Mennonite congregations in the Palatinate. They carried this letter with them to Pennsylvania as a confirmation of their membership in good standing and as a recommendation to the elders of the Mennonite communities wherever they might travel to and settle.²

We the servants and elders of the Taufsgesinnten [baptism-minded] in the Palatinate, wish all preachers, servants and elders in Holland and in Pennsylvania much grace and mercy from God our heavenly Father, and the love of Jesus Christ in the co-working of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Since Johannes Roth of Dirmstein with his wife Barbara and two children of their union wish and have in mind to travel to Pennsylvania, they desired us to grant them a certificate regarding their conduct. We therefore can say nothing other than that we hold them as a dear brother and sister, and are well satisfied with their conduct. For this reason we desire that all and everyone to whom they come may also receive and accept [them], and to hear of their being given all good advice will be heartily dear to us. Once more a heart-friendly greeting to all, and we remain as before your affectionate friends in Christ Jesus. Written in the Palatinate on the 30th of May, 1719.

*Jonas Lohrer at Offstein
Peter Kolb [Mannheim]
Valentine Heatwole [Kriegsheim]
Hans Burkholder [Gerolsheim]*

Johannes and Barbara Roth, with their children, were probably in Pennsylvania by early September, 1719. They apparently soon settled along the Schuylkill River in Chester County. Less than a year after their arrival, they received a letter from his brother Christian Roth, back home in the Palatinate. The brother is eager to hear of their voyage to Pennsylvania, and to know of their well-being. The letter:

*Heppenheim, on the Meadows
May 6, 1720.*

A friendly greeting with feelings of love and tenderness to you my loving brother Johannes Roth and family, and all known friends and all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. I Christian Roth of Heppenheim, on the Meadows, cannot rest well, but must write you my beloved John Roth, with this good opportunity, how it is with me. And therefore I let you know that my wife died and the two youngest children. The little one a week before mother and the other one a week after, which made me many sorrows. Yet through all this I praised God that he took them out of this wicked world.

In all this, mother fell asleep peacefully. Else otherwise, I and the rest of the family are all well. Praise the Lord! To see you again would be very pleasing to me. Further, I let you know that a child of Peter Roth, died also, and his other circumstances are about the same as before. All well, praise the Lord! His wife is still as weak as she always has been. They also send friendly greetings to you, and to tell known friends. And hereby tell us how you got along on your journey and what it cost you, and tell us how you like it in that country and also whether you could advise me to come, or would you rather be with us again? Write us and tell us the condition of the land and place. And when you write we hope you will tell us the truth. Further, I do not see any necessity for writing any

more. Furthermore, I and the children send you happy greetings and commend you to the protection of Almighty God – and He will keep you and us to a happy end. So keep us in memory in your prayers as you know it ought to be. I hope not to forget you, God helping me.

[On the outside of the letter, the following address:]

This letter to be delivered to, Johannes Roth, on The Schuylkill, in Pennsylvania.

One year later, the Roth's received another letter from his brother Christian Roth, who apparently still had not heard from Johannes:

Beloved brother Johannes Roth. It is impossible for me to leave the time go by without writing to you. If this letter will reach you and your dear friends all alive and well the Almighty alone knows. I have wondered why I did not hear anything from you as yet. If you wrote me a letter and I did not get it, I do not know but it may have been so. But write as soon as possible so I may know how you and your beloved in a foreign land are getting along. I am well, but it was the will of the Almighty to take away my beloved wife from me and I am now, a widower over a year and a quarter – and have not made up my mind yet to get married again. At the same time, I do not know of any yet either. I will now put you and your relations under God's care and I will be your dear brother Christian Roth. With best regards to you and your relations. I hope and pray that we may meet again, but if it is not in this world, it will be in heaven.

June, 1721

*Christian Roth,
Miller and a citizen of Heppenheim.*

[Address on outside of letter:]

This letter to be delivered to my hearts-beloved brother, Johannes Roth, in Pennsylvania.

And finally, five years later, another letter (the last surviving one in this group) was received by Johannes from his family back in the Palatinate. This seems to be the end of the communication. The economic and political situation of Mennonites in the Palatinate is briefly described here:

Hessen, May 12, 1726.

Peter Roth, of Hessen will report briefly how we are getting along. I am still well as are also my children. My son Johannes is married to the daughter of Caspar Kramer, Anna Kramer by name, at Heppenheim. Our brother Christian Roth at Heppenheim on the Meadows, is dead. His children are all well. He left a wife and child, to her is bequeathed the widowhood. The Mill besides all appurtenances is transferred to Peter Roth for the sum of twenty-three hundred florins to be paid out by him to his brothers and sisters. Peter Roth is married to a daughter of Christian ?Bike?, Catharine ?Bike? by name.

Johannes Roth of Hessen. How I wish to be with you, besides my wife and children. We would have come to you if we only had the traveling money. We are burdened very heavy. We must pay militia tax, palace tax, building tax, and monthly tax and an order has been issued by the civil authorities to sequester the property of all Menonists for their earnest money

I have not any further news to write. Be greeted by us all with the peace of the All Highest. We beseech likewise the Lord, that He may lend us His aid, as we are your partners in baptism.

Peter Roth.

[Address on outside of letter:]

Deliver this letter to Johannes Roth on the Schuylkill. A. D. 1726.

There is reason to believe that this last letter may have personally been carried across the Atlantic by immigrant Hubert Brower in 1726 and delivered to Johannes Roth on the Schuylkill. Brower settled near Roth in what is now East Coventry Township, Chester County. After Brower died, some years after immigration, his widow Annie Brower married Johannes Roth, whose first wife Barbara had also died.³

By April of 1740, Johannes Roth had died. Here follows a transcription of Roth's estate inventory and will summary, as found in the papers of his estate at the Philadelphia Register of Will Archives.

Roth's estate inventory, 1740:

A true and Perfect Inventory of the Goods and Chattles, Rights and Credits of Johannes Rodes of Vinsent Township, Diseased. Taken By the undernamed ye 9 Day of ye 3 m[on]th 1740.

	L	S	d
<i>First,</i>			
<i>Horses and mares</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>Horned Cattles</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>Wagen</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>Winde mill</i>	<i>01</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>Beding and Clothing</i>	<i>06</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>Chests and Table</i>	<i>04</i>	<i>07</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>Big Bible</i>	<i>01</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>For Household Goods.....</i>	<i>05</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>For Pewter and c[?]lumber.....</i>	<i>04</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>In Money in the Chest at his Discese.....</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>The Whole Improvements [on the land] [a]praised.....</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>00</i>
<i>Apraised by us,</i>			

Jacob Engers [signed]

Caspar Acker [signed]

Here follows a summary of Johannes Roth's will, from 1740, as found in his estate papers. The original will was lost prior to Roth's death, as is explained below in this document:

Johannes Rothe his Testament which he made at the time of his second marriage is in the main substance as followes, which we hereunder written attest and affirm by our good Conscience in place of an o[a]th.

After all his Debts are paid, the five children of the first Marriage, which was at that time of his second Marriage all a Life [alive], should have after his the sd. John Rothe decease Fifty pound, to share amongst them first in forehead.

Then the widow, with her Children of her first husband, as J. Rothe his step-children, and the Children of this second marriage by John Rothe, if any, as also the Children of the first marriage: shall all have Share & Share a like, of the Estate goods & chattels and what remains after all his debts are paid..

Dan'l Longacre

Caspar Acker

Michael Zeigler

Philad'a. April 23rd, 1740. Then personally appeared Daniel Longanager, Caspar Acker and Michael Zeigler, Witnesses to the herein before writing & on their Solemn affirmation did declare they saw and Read the Last Will and Testament of Johannes Rothe dec'd and that the whole contents or substance thereof is contained in the above writing, Save that Hans Jacob Beichtel [Bechtel] was therein named Executor in whose custody the original Will was Left, and that the said Hans Jacob Dyed before the said Johannes Rothe and the said original Will was lost or mislaid so that the same cannot be found as these Deponents are well informed and do believe –

Unfortunately, we know very little about the family of Johannes and Barbara Roth. His will indicates he had five children from his first marriage and possibly some from the second marriage. But it does not name them, and little other evidence has been found to identify them. There is (or was) a gravestone for a “P. Rhodes, 1771” in the old Vincent Mennonite Cemetery (established on a part of the Roth-Rhodes homestead) along Rt. 724 in Chester County. This may have been a Peter Rhodes, son of Johannes Rothe. In the same cemetery is also buried John Roads (1745-1822), with his wife Catharine (1750-1832), probably a grandson of the immigrant Johannes Rothe. In June 1798, this John and Catharine conveyed two acres of their farm to the trustees of the Vincent Mennonite Congregation, for the land on which the Vincent Meetinghouse had already been built some years before. This meetinghouse was long known as the Rhoades’ meetinghouse.⁴ And in the former Sprogel’s Graveyard (abandoned in 1905), near the Schuylkill River in what is now Pottstown, there was buried a Joseph Rhodes, died 1781.⁵ He may have been a son or grandson of Johannes and Barbara Rothe.

This set of correspondence and papers represents what is probably the most extensive (even though it is only seven items) surviving collection of early 18th century documents from a Mennonite immigrant family in eastern Pennsylvania. If any of our readers have or know of other documentation on this Roth-Rhodes-Rhoades Family, please contact us at MHEP.

¹ Dr. Wm. Brower, “Johannes Roth (Rhodes), or Gleanings from the Life of a Pioneer Settler on the Schuylkill”, *The Pennsylvania German* (Jan.-Dec., 1909), Vol. X, pp. 119-122.

² This single document was translated by John L. Ruth, Harleysville, PA, in 1995.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁴ John C. Wenger, *History of the Mennonite of the Franconia Conference*. (Telford, PA, 1937), p. 112.

⁵ Transcription of the Sprogel’s Burial Ground, Pottstown, PA, copied by Rev. N. B. Grubb, November 12, 1905, shortly before the gravestones were removed and the graveyard abandoned. Copies at Schwenkfelder Library, Pennsburg, PA, and Mennonite Heritage Center, Harleysville, PA.