Devotees of genealogy are always beset with problems. Theirs is a job never completed, because even he who feels he has discovered all of his ancestors of whom there is record—rare though such a person be—invariably works on collateral lines or climbs the family tree of a friend out of courtesy. This is no less true of Pennsylvania Dutch genealogists than of others. Those whose ancestors filed into Pennsylvania from Germany in the colonial era of American history have a set of peculiar problems to haunt them, as well as many common to all who search for their ancestors. From these problems we have selected some that are explicable by an examination of history, in the hope that discussion of them will lead to an understanding of the techniques and sources which one exploring Pennsylvania Dutch ancestry must employ in his research.

Historians would like to believe that only the very naive still think that the Pennsylvania Dutch came from Holland, and this may well be the case. Whether called Pennsylvania Germans or Pennsylvania Dutch (“Dutch” here being a derivative of the word Deutsch by which Germans identify themselves), many people see a bearded Amishman in his buggy or behind his plow whenever the phrase “Pennsylvania Dutch” enters their minds. And this is wrong. All Germans who had emigrated and settled in Pennsylvania by 1790 or 1800 are entitled to be called Pennsylvania Dutchmen, whether they went there via New York, North Carolina, or Maryland—or whether they were Amish, Mennonites, or even Roman Catholics.

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The first of several problems confronting the Pennsylvania Dutch genealogist which history can explain and make logical is related to traditional religious convictions among the various groups of Pennsylvania Dutch. At the time of the Reformation, the Western Christian Church split into five major strands: the Roman, the Anglican, the Lutheran, the Calvinist, and the Anabaptist. It is interesting to note that all but the Anglican faith had adherents among Pennsylvania's German settlers. What is significant for the genealogist is the type of church doctrine held by these bodies.

To the Roman Catholic, the organized church was essential for salvation; to the Lutheran and Calvinist, while not essential, it was important when available, although among the Calvinists there was slightly less emphasis on the formal organization. The Anabaptist, who represented the left wing of the Reformation, repudiated an organized church completely. The attitude toward the church was reflected in the value the respective groups attached to keeping records. Thus, we find that the Anabaptist kept no record of sacraments, rites, or pastoral acts. The German Calvinists, known as the Evangelical Reformed, and the Lutherans were more conscientious in preserving registers of pastoral activities; and the Roman Catholics, of course, were scrupulously careful in this regard.

As a result, anyone having the good fortune—or misfortune, depending upon the point of view—to be descended from a Lutheran or a Reformed Dutchman stands a fairly good chance of following him from cradle to grave through the records of the congregation to which he belonged. On the other hand, the Mennonites and Amish, as Anabaptists, did not record marriages, births, or burials on paper for their churches, and their descendants must search elsewhere. Of course, not all pastors were careful in keeping their records, and some concerned themselves only with the sacraments (lists of the baptized and communicants), whereas others recorded confirmations, marriages, and burials as well. Many of the old records were lost or have been inadvertently destroyed over the years, but generally these parochial registers constitute excellent source materials.
Doctrines formulated at the time of the Reformation also affect the possibility of the existence of private, family records. The value attached to the present life and the attitude toward it influenced the maintaining of such records. Anabaptists emphasized a life dedicated to Christian service to the point of exclusion of other activity. Other groups tended to believe that various forms of human experience offered avenues for the Christian life and frowned less upon them. The practical application, as far as the genealogist is concerned, was that the Mennonite would be less likely to own a family Bible, to have baptismal certificates (taufscheins) drawn for his children or to erect a monument over his grave. But his Lutheran or Reformed neighbor would do all these freely.

The attitude of the religious groups toward the state or civil government also presents a problem to the genealogist, though not so great a one as might have been the case had the state not insisted on certain functions. Again the Anabaptist frowned on participation in anything connected with the state, be it as major a matter as military service or as seemingly innocuous a one as entering court to settle estates. Fortunately, the civil government of Pennsylvania required its citizens to record wills and deeds and settle estates in which there was no will according to the law. In time marriage, as a civil act at least, had to be performed and recorded by a regularly recognized clergyman or justice. Even so, there is often a greater amount of information to be gleaned from the civil records pertaining to the Lutheran or Reformed ancestor than from those regarding the Anabaptist Pennsylvania Dutchman.

A second major problem facing Pennsylvania Dutch genealogists is identifying the immigrant ancestor. Most persons are interested in—or can afford—delving no further into genealogy than to this point, but determining who that man was can sometimes pose quite a challenge. The influential factors in tracing the immigrant who first settled in Pennsylvania might be summarized by touching upon three points: first, some Germans moved about after they settled in Pennsylvania, frequently leaving records wherever they settled, but not always recording in each place the location
of their immediate past home. Determining whether the Jacob Stauffer who appears in Adams County in 1809 is the same one who had resided in Berks County until about that time cannot always be done on the basis of documentary evidence.

Secondly, some Germans moved into Pennsylvania from other colonies. Perhaps the most famous—though by no means the only—such group was the one that migrated from Schoharie County, New York, into the Tulpehocken Valley in Berks County in the 1720's. Another example is the migration up and down the Shenandoah Valley between Pennsylvania and Virginia and the Carolinas. Records of the first American home of such people are generally lacking, and the likelihood of finding out anything about them prior to their residence in Pennsylvania is therefore slight.

In the third and most important case, there is the fact that keeping records of the names of immigrants at Philadelphia was not required until 1727, when it became evident that so many Germans were entering the colony that an oath of allegiance to the government should be required for the colony's own good. The lists thus begun—and a few existing from earlier years—have been printed in three carefully edited volumes and constitute an important aid to the researcher. (See R. B. Strassburger and W. J. Hinke, Pennsylvania German Pioneers [3 vols., Norristown, Penn., 1934.])

But despite these lists the earliest German settlers, many of them Anabaptists, were not recorded on arrival. Many of those whose names did get on record could not write and recited their names to a clerk, whose English ears often as not were unaccustomed to German sounds. Hence, spellings vary, and the genealogist is justified in giving up only after his imagination has run rampant through all possibilities. Given the ordinary duplication of common German surnames—Schaffer, Schmidt, or Schnebly, not to mention Müller and Metzger, among many possibilities—a genealogist has real sleuth's work before him.

History offers a genealogist a number of reasons for the movements of peoples. For instance, the majority of Germans who migrated to Pennsylvania prior to the 1720's were mem-
bers of religious sects (the Anabaptists) who came to escape religious persecution. After that period, economic conditions caused the Lutheran and Reformed “church people” to leave their homeland in favor of the New World. Economic conditions also dictated the movement of peoples after settlement in America. For instance, the original Mennonite settlements in Conestoga and Lampeter townships, Lancaster County, south and west of the city of Lancaster, expanded into northwestern Lancaster County, York, and Cumberland counties as the old areas filled. Northumberland, Snyder, Union, and Centre counties, among others, filled with descendants of the pioneers of Berks County. The western part of the state received the overflow from the eastern. And new states were settled by colonies of Pennsylvania Dutchmen. In addition to those in Indiana, there were groups at Dayton and Delaware, Ohio, at Sterling, Illinois, and elsewhere across the continent. Group migrations to Kansas and California were not uncommon. One of the contributions of Pennsylvanians to American life was filling new areas on the frontier as they were opened to expansion. Changes in the economic cycle also explain the movements of men. Depressions in the 1830’s, 1850’s, and 1870’s jarred people loose. Times of prosperity occasioned improvements on property and helped to stabilize settlements.

If the movement of ancestors causes confusion for the genealogist, then the shifting county and township lines compound his problem. One man could live a lifetime in one spot and yet pass under the jurisdiction of several counties and townships. Pennsylvania politics in the colonial era involved a struggle between the Philadelphia Quakers and the Scotch-Irish in the backlands, which sometimes meant the formation of new counties and the resulting admission of new members to the assembly. Since our Pennsylvania Dutch ancestors lived in a belt between the two groups, they straddled the political line. When the Scotch-Irish gained control, a set of new counties was suddenly formed. Hence, a handy device for the Pennsylvania genealogist is a list of counties with the dates of their formation and a corresponding list of the townships in each and the dates of their formation.
It is of value also to note that the same township name may be used in more than one county in Pennsylvania. Knowledge of history, then, can be an important aid to the genealogist, providing him with specific information and insights into the difficulties of his task. There are times when the genealogist must work on intuition, but realization that historical fact is elemental in the activities of ancestors is intuition's invaluable supplement.