

“Life of Jacob Rasnake”

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Highway Marker Dedication and Unveiling

Glade Hollow, Lebanon, Virginia

Once upon a time long, long ago in a tiny village called Irsingen in the district known as Ansbach in Bavaria (now part of Germany), there lived a young couple named George and Anna. They married in the year 1750 when George was 25 years old. George worked as a peasant farmhand and Anna worked as a maidservant. A year later a little girl was born whom they named Anna Catharina. The following year, in 1752, Anna gave birth to a son. He was born at home. Although we do not know the reasons for it, it was feared that he would not live. So the pastor of the church from the nearby village of Aufkirchen brought water from the church spring and baptized (or christened) him at home the very same day that he was born. His birth record says he was “weakly”. They named his Johann Jacob and he was called Jacob.

We know nothing about his childhood or teenage years but in Germany in those days, life was hard for those who were not of noble birth. When he was about 25 years old, the family legend tells us that he was threshing wheat when the men of his prince came and took him away to be put into military life.

In those days, Germany was not one cohesive country, but rather, a collection of more than 300 little principalities. Each had its own ruler which in the district of Anspach was called a Markgrav. Jacob’s Markgrav was Carl Frederick Alexander. He had inherited vast debts from his father who had lived way beyond what the small principality could support. England had entered into a war with the upstart colonies in America and needed troops to fight. The king of England, George III, was actually German. In a desperate act, George III contacted his various ruling cousins in Germany and six of them rented (in reality sold) their soldiers to him. Our Jacob’s prince sent 2,500 men to fight for the King of England.

Jacob entered the service of his prince as a private and trained as a musketeer (which means that he was a rank and file infantry soldier who fired a musket). Family legend is that Jacob’s mother tried desperately to secure his release but failed. Recognizing the inevitable, she supposedly gave him a Bible to carry with him into battle. Jacob and his fellow soldiers were marched to the Main River where they were placed on small boats and sailed down the Rhine River to Holland. Here they were sworn into service and had to take an oath of allegiance to the English king. They were then placed on large boats and sailed to America. They were on a ship for 12 weeks and 3 days before landing in New York. They were there for 5 months when they were marched to battle in Philadelphia. After only 2 months, they traveled back north to Rhode Island where they stayed for 15 months participating in battles at Newport. They marched back to New York in Oct. 1779 where they stayed for 19 months. At that point, they were marched to Yorktown where their company hooked up with General Cornwallis. Jacob and his company participated in the battle of Yorktown and surrendered their flag as part of the overall surrender of Cornwallis. Jacob and his fellow Ansbachers were marched as prisoners of war from Yorktown to Winchester, Va., a distance of 240 miles in 16 days.

Because the Winchester officials were ill-equipped to house and feed almost 2,000 prisoners, many were furloughed out into the countryside where they lived and worked with local farmers, many of whom spoke German. We speculate that Jacob may have been one who was allowed to work and that he may have met the Koontz (or Counts) family during that time. In late January (3 months later) in the dead of winter, the German prisoners were marched from Winchester to another barracks in Frederick,

Md. Sometime, however, between the semi-annual review of the prisoners between Dec 1782 and Jun 1783, Jacob is noted as "missing again". The last of the Yorktown prisoners left Frederick the middle of May for Long Island to board the ships to go back to Germany. Jacob may have escaped during this march. Once free, he began to make his way back to the Shenandoah Valley.

Eleven 11 months after the records note that he was missing, on Feb 25, 1784 he married Mary Mollie Counts (Koontz) in Shenandoah County. The next year, Mollie's brother Philip married Anna Kiser.

Jacob and Mollie remained in Shenandoah County until 1789 when they joined Mollie's family and her brother's family and migrated south through the Shenandoah Valley into Glade Hollow where Jacob bought the land where we stand today.

By all accounts Jacob was a solid and respected citizen. Between 1790 and 1804, he purchased approximately 450 acres of land. Between 1793 and 1807, he served on grand juries at least eleven times. He was a surveyor of roads. He served the county to appraise estates. And he was paid a bounty for killing one old wolf.

Jacob may have been born "weakly" but when he died in 1826, he was the father of nine children with 63 grandchildren.

We have wondered through the years how and why he made the decision to stay in America, knowing he would never see his family again. If he had gone home, he would have gone back to a culture where he could probably have never owned land. He had been a soldier for 4 years so he was experienced. Had he gone home, with that experience, his prince could have easily "rented" him out again to the highest bidding king. On the other hand, with serving 4 years alongside his fellow soldiers, it would be highly likely that he would have had friends in his company who could have gotten word to his parents that he had survived the war.

So he chose to stay America. He gained freedom. He gained respect. He began a family in America that has grown to more the 3,000 documented descendants. With this marker and your attention, we honor him today and we thank you for your presence and your attention.