

## Chapter Four

### *Jacob and Josephine Riddlesberger—the German Baptist Connection*

We now turn our attention to Jacob Riddlesberger, a third son of John and Catherine, and the immediate ancestor of my line. But in order to understand the history of our family line as it descends from John Riddelsperger, it is necessary to know something about the “German Baptist Brethren.”

The “Dunkards” or “Dunkers” as they are derisively called by outsiders—or as they called

themselves, the “*Taufer*”—are but one of those countless religious reform movements which spring up overnight and flourish rapidly because of a charismatic founder or a distinctive theology, only to become so marginalized over time *because* of these distinctive beliefs that they simply fade away or are otherwise absorbed wholesale by later reforming impulses. At one time the German Baptist Brethren boasted of some 100,000 members in the United States, though the greatly mutated church body which still remains—the pacifist “*Church of the Brethren*”—has grown to about 140,000.

The German Baptist Brethren are an interesting lot and it appears that our family line’s abiding commitment to the “Brethren Church” for at least four generations, is one of the key factors in understanding much of our family history in America. Family pictures dating from the late 1800’s show the distinctive Brethren attire for men—a full beard, a modest black coat, shirt and pants, as well as that worn by Brethren ladies—the plain black dress and apron. Brethren attire was intended to be modest and functional, and was not specifically designed to avoid the supposed “worldliness” of modern contrivances such as buttons and zippers as seen in the clothing



Family historians, Kim, Mark and David Riddlebarger at the Maryland-Pennsylvania border, during the summer of 1998.

worn by the Amish. The choice of simple black clothing actually had more to do with non-conformity and a

German disdain for all things British in those years immediately before the Revolutionary War, when bright colored clothing was almost always the exclusive domain of English merchants, whose merchandise became an unwelcome symbol of English suppression of the freedom of the colonies.<sup>1</sup>

The German Baptist Brethren Church was founded by Alexander Mack in 1708.<sup>2</sup> Mack was a charismatic figure who hailed from Schwarzenau, in the Province of Wittgenstein in Hesse-Cassel, though the Brethren movement was made up of German-speaking peoples from throughout Germany and Switzerland. The origins of the Brethren church are certainly typical of such sects. In the words of Brethren historian Martin Brumbaugh,

Eight pious souls, after careful prayer and prolonged study, relying only on God and the Bible to guide them. . . walked . . . from the house of Alexander Mack to the river Eder . . . . Here the pious eight, in the early morning, surrounded by many curious witnesses, knelt in prayer, and these eight, perhaps the first to receive triune immersion in the history of the Protestant Church, then organized a new congregation . . . . Thus began the *Taufers* or German Baptist church as a separate organization.<sup>3</sup>

Though most of the charter members of the Brethren sect were born and bred Reformed or Lutheran, they had become convinced that the major Protestant groups of the day were in grievous doctrinal error. The German Baptists took exception to the both the Anabaptists—whom they felt depreciated the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper—as well as the historic Protestants (Lutheran and Reformed)—whom the *Täufer* felt distorted the biblical teaching by practicing infant baptism and by placing too much confidence in man-made creeds. Hence Mack felt that the time had come to found a new church, a church based not in creeds, confessions or the current pietistic distinctives, but a church founded solely upon the New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

Because of Mack's rather novel theological proclivities, it was not long before the German Baptist Brethren began to experience great persecution, even in Schwarzenau, where there was much liberty for similar Anabaptist groups. Even though a few small congregations had been established in the region, in addition to one in Switzerland, the Brethren soon came under tremendous persecution both from the state and from other religious groups, especially the Reformed and Lutherans who were now losing members to the rapidly growing sect. Learning of William Penn's colonial charter granting groups such as the Quakers religious freedom, a number of the original group of Brethren set sail from Rotterdam for the new world in 1719, under the leadership of elder Peter Becker. This was followed by a much larger group under the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ronald J. Gordon, "The Acculturation of the Brethren in the Nineteenth Century," p. 3; Martin G. Brumbaugh, *A History of the Brethren* (Mount Morris, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1899), pp. 546-548.

<sup>2</sup> According to an article in the *Newsletter* of the Fellowship of Brethren Genealogists [Fall 1997], Vol. 29., No. 3, pp. 41-48, sixteen Riddlesbergers are listed among the descendants of Alexander Mack. These come through the Secrist line and are the children and grandchildren of John Riddlesberger II and Elizabeth Secrist.

<sup>3</sup> Brumbaugh, *A History of the Brethren*, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Brumbaugh, *A History of the Brethren*, pp. 5-6; 555-559.

founder Mack himself, in 1729. As a result of this attempt to remove the persecuted church to the new world, few “Dunkers” remained in Germany and the sect was virtually transplanted *en toto* to Pennsylvania. Two of our ancestors through Josephine Foreman—Wilhelmus Knepper and his wife Veronica Bloem, were among the first followers of Alexander Mack and were members of the Kreyfelt congregation in Germany—are listed among the ship *Allen*'s passenger manifest of these emigrants, who as Germans, willingly became subjects of the British Crown in exchange for the right to freely practice their faith. The *Allen* departed Rotterdam in July of 1729, with 59 of the Brethren and their families and arrived in Philadelphia in September of 1729.<sup>5</sup>

Settling first at Germantown, Pennsylvania, and establishing a thriving church, the Dunkard sect grew rapidly and congregations were soon found throughout Eastern Pennsylvania. Other churches were established in Maryland (the most noted was the church at Antietam, founded in 1752, where the Dunkard church was in the very center of the infamous Civil War battle that took place there in 1862) as well as throughout the Cumberland Valley by the late 1700's—an area that included what is now Franklin County, PA.<sup>6</sup> Congregations were also established in Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Missouri, Indiana and Illinois, throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century, apparently attracting a large number of recent German immigrants into their fellowship, and even converting a few of English descent as well. The German Baptist Brethren followed a very distinct pattern of westward movement, following church planters and evangelists into the Ohio River Valley and then on into the rapidly expanding territories of Missouri, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.<sup>7</sup> This was a journey that our own forebears undertook in the 1840's, either traveling along the Ohio River by boat, or else by wagon along the National Pike which had been established by Congress in 1806 at the behest of Thomas Jefferson. The Pike ran west from Cumberland, Maryland (which is just to the southeast of Franklin County), all the way to Vandalia, Illinois, which was then the state capitol.

But it is the Brethren theological distinctives, which, while responsible for rapid frontier growth, also sowed the seeds for the sect's eventual disappearance. The Brethren distinctives of hard work and simple pious living were quite attractive to German-speaking first and second generation immigrants from Germany and Switzerland and who settled in rural farming communities, but did not fare as well in urban areas. The Brethren largely kept to themselves, practiced their distinctive “foot-washing” ritual as prelude to a semi-annual fellowship meal (the Brethren equivalent of the Lord's Supper), sang from a distinctive song-book used by no other groups, called only their own members to preach in local congregations, and practiced their distinctive “triple-immersion” baptism. They had little contact with other Evangelical groups

---

<sup>5</sup> Brumbaugh, *A History of the Brethren*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Brethren Encyclopedia* (Ambler, PA: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1980), III.1339-1340.

<sup>7</sup> Durnbaugh, *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, II.827 ff.

early on, but as its German-speaking members began to Americanize, the German Baptist Brethren Church americanized along with them.

Nor were the Brethren ever able to shake off their biggest public relations problem. As committed pacifists, the Brethren were greatly stigmatized by their refusal to fight in the Revolutionary War—their actions were seen as unpatriotic—and even worse, they were German immigrants who were unpatriotic!<sup>8</sup> We will look in vain for Riddlebarger war heroes from our immediate line in the Civil War, even though at least seven of our Virginia cousins served in the Confederate Army. David H. Riddelsbarger was 23 years old when the “war between the states” broke out, but he did not serve the Union cause, remaining on the family farm in Lee County, Illinois, even though two of his future brothers-in-law fought for the Union army—Peter and John Garrison, as did his future daughter-in-law’s father, Levi M. Hickey. Over the years the German Baptist Brethren, evolved from the Evangelical-Pietist-Anabaptist sect of rural German immigrants, into one of the four so-called historic “peace churches,” the Church of the Brethren, which, while retaining the foot-washing and pacificism has largely given up other *Taufer* and Evangelical distinctives.

### ***The Kneppers and the Fuhrmans***

There is no evidence that John Riddelsperger had any direct involvement with the Brethren, although at least two of his sons certainly did. As we have seen, John’s two oldest sons, John and Samuel, were baptized as Lutherans. As evidenced by his presence as a witness to a Reformed baptism in Lancaster in 1736, Jacob’s grandfather, Christian Riddlespurger, was a member of St. John’s Helvetic Reformed Church, and then attended St. John’s Lutheran in Charleston. Both of these churches were confessional and known for being somewhat anti-pietist. John Riddlesberger II married into the Secrist family, who were prominent members of the German Baptist community (very pietist), and their son, The Rev. John Riddlesberger III, was a Brethren minister.

But our own line’s long-standing connection to the German Baptist Brethren Church must be seen in relationship to the Foreman/Fuhrman family, specifically through **Josephine FOREMAN** [b. August 20, 1793, d. February 7, 1875], who married **Jacob Riddlesberger**, younger brother of John Riddlesberger II, in the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the very least, our family connection to the Dunkards is certainly solidified through Jacob Riddlesberger’s marriage to Josephine, one of the descendants of the Frederick FUHRMAN [Foreman] family. Her roots on both maternal and paternal sides go all the way back to very origins of the Brethren Church.

Josephine Foreman Riddlesberger’s maternal grandfather, John HORN, was a close associate of a certain George Adam Martin, a noted Brethren dissenter and one of the so-called “Seventh-Day

---

<sup>8</sup> Brumbaugh, *A History of the Brethren*, pp. 414 ff.

Baptists.<sup>9</sup> In 1762, the two men, Horn and Martin, became followers of Conrad Biessel, began keeping the Sabbath and joined the Ephrata Society, a radical Brethren cloistered community. As we have seen, the Seventh-Day Baptist Society of Snow Hill was an institution modeled after the Ephrata Society and was founded about 1795. The Rev. John Riddlesberger III [1813-1887], nephew of Jacob Riddlesberger, served as preacher here later and also at "Price's Church of the Brethren," in Quincy Township.<sup>10</sup>

Brethren historian, Martin Brumbaugh, mentions that other Brethren, including Frederick Fuhrman, Peter and Abraham KNIPPER/KNEPPER [the sons of Wilhelmus Knepper and granduncles of Josephine Foreman] were opposed to Martin's excommunication, although, according to Brumbaugh, Frederick Fuhrman was eventually ordained as an elder in the Brethren Church by Peter Miller and "some of Frederick's descendants embraced that religion, while others were leaders in the Church of the Brethren."<sup>11</sup> There is no evidence that Fuhrman ever preached, however. But Horn and Martin married sisters, Catherine and Mary Knepper, who were also daughters of Wilhelmus Knepper. According to Brumbaugh, Horn actually participated in the first Brethren "foot-washing" ritual, while Frederick Fuhrman, Josephine's grandfather, actually hosted the first Brethren "love feast" in his home. This discovery would have thrilled my grandmother [Dine] who thought that the Brethren foot-washing ceremony was one of the highlights of her Christian faith.

John Horn's fate is presently unknown to us. A "John Horn," is buried in the Knauertown Cemetery in French Creek, near Morgantown in Chester County, PA. Nearly all of those buried in the cemetery were Seventh-Day Baptists, as was Mr. Horn. According to the headstone, Horn died January 30, 1809, at the age of 72. A "Margaret Horn" and son John who died at age 19, are also buried here.<sup>12</sup> If this "John Horn," is the former husband of Catherine Knepper, he subsequently remarried and would have been about 25 when he joined the Ephrata society. Josephine Foreman's maternal great-grandfather was Wilhelmus Knepper [Knipper], who was born in Germany in 1706 and as detailed above, is listed among male passengers onboard the *Allen*, which carried Alexander Mack and 59 German Baptists and their families to William Penn's colony from Rotterdam. Wilhelmus Knepper was one of the first followers of Mack, and a member of the Kreyfelt Brethren congregation in Germany. Mr. Knepper was subsequently imprisoned in his late teens by German authorities for his religious beliefs and ended up spending nearly four years in prison before coming to America.<sup>13</sup> Knepper is believed to have died about

---

<sup>9</sup> Brumbaugh, [A History of the Brethren](#) p. 311

<sup>10</sup> [The History of Franklin County](#) p. 614; Donald Durnbaugh, [The Brethren Encyclopedia](#) III.1194 ff.

<sup>11</sup> [Antietam Ancestors](#) ,Vol. VI, 1991, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> "PA Friends to Keithians to 7<sup>th</sup> Day Baptists" web-page.

<sup>13</sup> Brumbaugh [A History of the Brethren](#) p. 63. See also Donald F. Durnbaugh, [The Brethren Encyclopedia](#) II.703.

1749, in Cumberland County, PA. His wife, Veronica Bloem [Bloom], listed with him as one of the original German Brethren, is also mentioned in a Pennsylvania State warrant for 100 acres of land dated August 2, 1765. Little if anything else is known of her.

Josephine Foreman's paternal grandfather, Frederick Foreman [Fuhrman], is known to have first purchased land in what is now Franklin County in September of 1760. As early as March 6, 1749, Frederick is mentioned as a neighbor of John Marley, whose farm was near present-day Waynesboro.<sup>14</sup> At the time of his death [some time after 1798] Foreman owned 380 acres which, were still in the possession of his descendants for generations to come. Frederick and wife Nancy—about whom we also know very little—lie buried in the family graveyard on Foreman land.

Incidentally, the volume American Revolutionary Soldiers of Franklin County mentions that Frederick Foreman served under Captains William Findley and Samuel Royer in the Eighth PA. Regiment, from 1779-80-81.<sup>15</sup> This was the same unit in which John Riddelsperger served as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. This is quite interesting, given the German Baptist Brethren's avowed pacificism. Perhaps the Foremans—as German immigrants—hated the British Crown and good King George II more than they loved God!

Josephine's father is Daniel Foreman (b. Unknown, d. before 1838] who may be the 70-80 year old male listed in the 1830 Pennsylvania Census, living in the home of his son Jonathan Foreman. According to American Revolutionary Soldiers of Franklin County, Daniel also served as a private under Capt. Samuel Royer in the years 1779-1782 in the same unit in which his father served.<sup>16</sup> Little is known about Daniel Foreman, though his older brother Frederick inherited his father's land and had many descendants.

### ***Jacob and Josephine Riddlesberger***

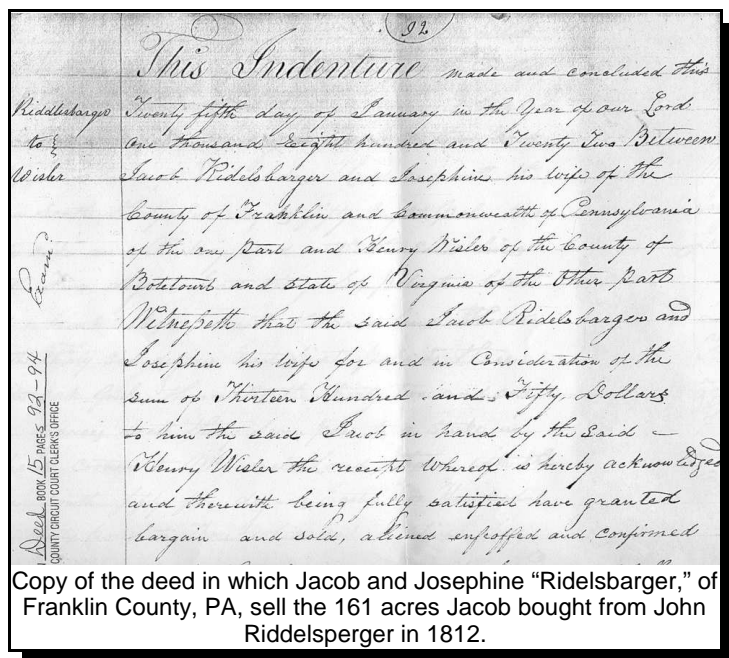
The Foreman family and the Riddlesbergers were frequently and thoroughly connected. Jonathan

---

<sup>14</sup> Antietam Ancestors, Vol. VI, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Virginia Shannon Fendrick, American Revolutionary War Soldiers of Franklin County, Pennsylvania (Chambersburg, PA: Historical Works Committee of the Franklin County Daughters of the American Revolution, 1944), p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> Fendrick, American Revolutionary War Soldiers of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, p. 98.



Copy of the deed in which Jacob and Josephine "Riddelsbarger," of Franklin County, PA, sell the 161 acres Jacob bought from John Riddelsperger in 1812.

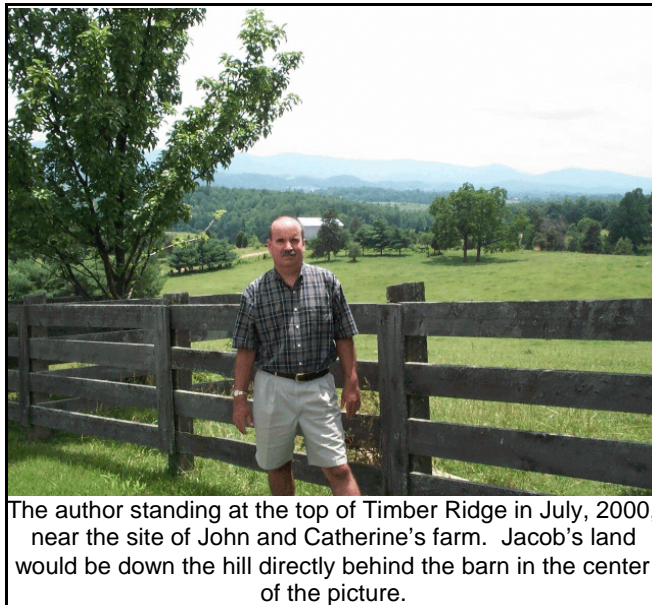
Foreman (Josephine's younger brother), married Elizabeth Riddlesberger, daughter of John and Elizabeth [Secrist] Riddlesberger, and a niece of her husband, Jacob. Two of Josephine's sons, Jacob and Samuel married Foreman cousins, Hannah and Mary Ann, both daughters of Abraham Foreman, son of David, and grandson of Frederick. This practice of marrying cousins might explain, in part, some of the odder family traits.

One of the great frustrations about genealogical research is coming across an ancestor who left very little information behind. At this point, very

little is known about **Jacob Riddlesberger**. He is identified in Henry Riddlesberger's "Notes" as the third son of John and Catherine Riddelsperger, as well as the husband of Josephine Foreman. There are only three places known to me where his name appears in any official document, and even one of these is a bit questionable.

The first and most questionable of these references to Jacob is found in the 1820 Federal Census for Franklin County. A Jacob "LITTLESBARGER" is listed in Washington Township. It is highly likely that this is a misspelling of "Riddlesbarger." According to the census, there are two males in the home under ten years of age (corresponding to the known ages Jacob's two oldest sons, **Daniel** and **Jacob**). There is one male between sixteen and twenty-six years of age (possibly Jacob, but perhaps a cousin), and another male between twenty-six and forty-five (probably Jacob). Both adult males are described as "engaged in agriculture." If latter male is our Jacob Riddlesberger—and, given the way the surname is repeatedly misspelled in the various federal censuses for Franklin County, coupled with the fact that there is no known "LITTLESBARGER" family in the area—this would make the date of Jacob's birth some time between 1770 and 1794. Assuming that Jacob was born after the family moved to Botetourt County in 1787, this would put Jacob among the youngest of the children of John and Catherine Riddelsperger. In the 1880 Census, Jacob's son Daniel reported that Jacob's place of birth was Virginia. John Riddelsperger did not move to Botetourt until 1787. If this chronology is correct, this would also mean that John was in his early forties when he fathered Jacob—John's father Christian had four children while in his fifties—and that John's wife Catherine was quite younger than her husband. This would also mean that Jacob was at least seventeen years younger than his oldest brother, John Riddlesberger II (b. 1770), who

to a Mr. Henry Mislser. Jacob did not make out too well in the deal, selling the land for only \$1350.00, an amount significantly less than the original purchase price. This particular deed is important to family historians for several reasons. For one thing, the deed places Jacob in Franklin County, PA, and indicates that Josephine, his wife, was privately interviewed by the sitting judge to ensure that she concurred with the sale, and that it was not done without her knowledge. To indicate this, she made her mark on the final document.<sup>18</sup> This proves the marital connection between Jacob and Josephine.



The author standing at the top of Timber Ridge in July, 2000, near the site of John and Catherine's farm. Jacob's land would be down the hill directly behind the barn in the center of the picture.

But there are other reasons why this deed is of interest in tracing our families' roots back to John Riddelsperger. From the 1820 census record, it is clear that Jacob was living in Franklin County as a young man, probably in his early 40's. Since many Franklin County documents were destroyed when Confederate raiders burned the county courthouse in Chambersburg, some records from this period may be lost to us altogether. Perhaps Jacob was living on land that his father still owned, and this may, in part, explain why our family had no memory of the Virginia connection. By 1822, Jacob had cut all ties to Virginia, and Jacob was removed from his father by death, and from his brother Samuel and his sons by distance. That Jacob and John Jr. were both members of the German Baptist Church—which opposed slavery—and whose members moved frequently between Franklin County in PA and Botetourt County in VA, would provide an explanation as to why Jacob and John Jr. did not stay in Virginia. In any case, our line eventually lost all connections with our Virginian cousins.

Jacob Riddlesberger's place of burial is unknown to us, though there are a number of unmarked graves in the Snow Hill Cemetery, where John Riddlesberger II's family is buried. Eschewing the very thought of calling undue attention to oneself, it was a common Brethren practice to leave only the deceased's initials on the headstone, which was often carved from common fieldstone. These stones

<sup>17</sup> Botetourt County, VA., Deed Book 11, dated November 24, 1812, pp. 79-80 [certified copy].

<sup>18</sup> Botetourt County, VA., Deed Book 15, dated January 25, 1822, pp. 92-94 [certified copy]. A Foreman researcher, Julia Wells, found little trace of Jacob either, noting only that Josephine Foreman married an "unknown" Riddlesberger, who was a descendent of John Riddlesberger of Franklin County. See Mrs. Cecil Wells, "Frederick Foreman and His Descendants," Antietam Ancestors, Volume VI, 1991, p. 23.

eventually melted away with the cold, rain and heat of summer.<sup>19</sup> Since Jacob is not listed in the 1830 Census for Franklin County—wife Josephine is listed as the head of the house—he likely died before that date. His youngest son, Samuel, was born in 1823, and is listed in the 1830 census. Assuming he was born about 1782, and died in the late 1820's, he would have been in his late forties, leaving behind a wife, and three sons, **Daniel, Jacob and Samuel**, and three daughters, **Mary, Susan and Sarah**.

We know a bit more about Jacob's wife and children. **Josephine Foreman Riddlesberger's** name appears in several Pennsylvania State Records. On January 6, 1828, she released to her brother Jonathan, her share of the land belonging to their father, Daniel Foreman. According to a deed notation in the Chambersburg Courthouse, "Josephine Riddlesberger of Washington Township has received \$1509.66 from brother Jonathan Foreman in payment for father Daniel Foreman's land, purchased by Jonathan November 4, 1823."<sup>20</sup> She is also listed in the work American Revolutionary Soldiers, under the entry for 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. "John Riddlesberger," where mention is made that in 1830 both she and Jonathan Foreman, were heirs to the estate of Sally Foreman Horn—an estate which in turn had left to her by her father John Horn. This same volume mentions her son Jacob Riddlesberger, his wife Hannah, both of "Quincy" Township.<sup>21</sup>

As mentioned above, Josephine, apparently, was widowed by 1830, as she is listed in that year's census as the head of a household. She would have been 37. Along with her two youngest sons and their wives, Jacob and Hannah, Samuel and Mary, she moved to Franklin Grove, Illinois, in 1845. This was the same year that a number of Brethren families left Pennsylvania for Ogle and Lee counties in Illinois. She lived some thirty years as a widow in her new home, and is buried in the German Baptist Cemetery (the "Emmert" cemetery) near Franklin Grove. Born in 1792, She died on February 7, 1875, at age 82 years, six months and 18 days.



Josephine Foreman Riddlesberger's headstone in the Emmert Cemetery, near Franklin Grove, Ill. Her husband Jacob, had died many years before, leaving her a widow for nearly 45 years

It is believed that **Mary** Riddlesberger was born in 1820, and married a man whose last name was **Larue**, since she appears in the 1870 census for Franklin County, Ill. Mary was born in Pennsylvania, is

<sup>19</sup> Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Early History, The Church of the Brethren Past and Present (Elgin, Il: The Brethren Press, nd), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Franklin County, PA., Deed Book 20, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Fendrick, American Revolutionary War Soldiers of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, p. 226.

listed as being 50 years of age and the head of the house, in which her mother Josephine was also living—she is age 77, was born in Pennsylvania, with no real property. This probably means that Mary had been widowed by this time. **Sarah Riddlesberger** is believed to have married John M. Hinkle on September 28, 1845 in Ogle County, Ill, which is adjacent to Lee County. She is believed to have been born before 1820, although marriage records for the State of Illinois, list her date of birth as 1825 in Pennsylvania. Sarah died in December of 1854 at about thirty years of age. Given the fact that she married Mr. Hinkle in 1845, she must have met and then married him shortly after her arrival in Illinois. Nothing, presently, is known of **Susan Riddlesberger**.

Josephine's oldest son, and our immediate ancestor, Daniel, arrived in the Franklin Grove area in 1857, twelve years after his mother and brothers and sisters. It is to his story that we now turn.