

MY U.E.L. ANCESTOR. HENRY MERKLEY (1754-1836)

by Audrey Merkley Bailey, UE

Audrey's first story of "The Merkle Family" appeared in *Cataraqui Loyalist Town Crier* (April, 1983), 2(2):4-5. Her continuing research has enabled her to offer a much more detailed history [below] which was published in Vol. 24(2): 4-7 (March 2005)

Background - From the German Palatinate to America:

In 1752, three Merckle brothers, Hans Michael, Christopher Friedrich and Joseph Friedrich, left their family in Wurttemberg, Germany, to emigrate to America. Two of them, Christopher Friedrich and Hans Michael, are listed among the first four settlers of the town of New Durlach, New York (c. 1760). The story of the family of Joseph Friedrich, the youngest brother, seems to typify the divided loyalties existing within many families at the time of the Revolutionary War. It seems that of his five sons, three served on the side of the rebels and two remained loyal to the Crown. In 1780, his only daughter, Catharine, 17 years of age and engaged to be married, was killed in an Indian raid along with a friend and her Uncle (Hans) Michael, the oldest of the three brothers who had come to America in 1752. After his farm buildings were burned, Joseph Friedrich and his family stayed with friends but at the end of hostilities they returned to the Mohawk Valley and today the farm remains in the possession of a direct descendant.

As for Christopher Friedrich, the other brother and father of my U.E.L. ancestor, burial records of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Schoharie, indicate that he died in Durlach, September 14, 1772, after "he was struch (sic) down by a tree".

The Loyalist Sons of Christopher Friedrich Merckle:

As in the 1750s three Merckle brothers left Germany to establish a new home in America, so twenty years later, did the three sons of the middle brother, Christopher Friedrich Merckle, leave this new homeland out of loyalty to the British Crown. Their names were Jacob, the eldest, Michael, the youngest, and my ancestor, Henry, born 24 March, 1756. Sixteen years of age at the time of his father's death, he and his brothers remained with their mother who had been left in charge of the farm after Christopher Friedrich's death. However, after they left to fight on the side of the British, she was "driven from the land", according to her son's claim for land in 1788.

Henry's name is mentioned several times in the *State of New York Minutes of Commissioners for Conspiracies*. For example, in 1777: "Henrick Merkle appeared before the Board according to our order to enter into a new Recognizance - Resolved that he enter into the same for his good behaviour during his duty and appearing before any three of the Commissioners for Conspiracies when thereunto required during the continuance of the present war with Great Britain." It states that "he is a farmer of Tryon County, New York and that his bail was set at 100 pounds." His name also appears several times in the Minutes of the Tryon County Committee of Safety. On 20 May, 1777, he was ordered "to pay a fine of five pounds within eight days time...for the public use, and his oath of allegiance shall be accepted". The fine is recorded as paid, but the allegiance must be suspect as shortly thereafter, 15 August 1777, Henry joined the King's Royal Regiment of New York at Fort Stanwix.

Another reference to Henry is found in *The Loyalist Settlement* (F.A. Cruikshank) in the form of a letter from Sir John Johnson to Major Mathew dated 1 March 1784. The last paragraph reads: "Mr. Henry Merkle, formerly a Neighbour of mine, has lately arrived from Schenectady, to which place he has been Banished from his Home, a great part of the War on Account of his Loyalty and Attachment to the Kings Government, and Suffered Imprisonment and great loss of Effects." The letter goes on to state that Henry Merkle has asked for him to "Solicit the General for permission to take down with him three or four Slay loads of Mr. Ellice's goods from St. Johns for which he is to partake of the Advantages, and to be Well paid." Sir John continues that he knew Henry to be, "a Man of a very fair and honest Character" who had been "reduced from easy Circumstances to Indigence".

At the close of hostilities, Henry's name appears on the Muster Roll, KRRNY, 1st Battalion dated Montreal, 31 December, 1783. On June 20, 1784, he was among those Loyalists who landed on the banks of the St. Lawrence River at New Johnstown (Cornwall). He and his brothers Jacob and Michael were granted lots along the river in what is now the village of Morrisburg (Williamsburg Township, Concession 1, Lots 30 and 32).

The name "Henry Marcle" appears again on the Loyalist Victualling List of July 1-31, 1786 with two dependants, a "wife" and a "male under 10 years of age". These dates seem to fit for, although a record of Henry's marriage to Elizabeth Laux (Loucks) has never been located, it is thought to have taken place about 1785 as their first child, George, was born in 1786.

In 1788, Henry witnessed the land claim of his older brother Jacob (#325): "Henry Markly, Brother to Claimant, says he is well-satisfied that his Brother should receive the amount of their claim. Witness came to Canada in 1777 and served. He was wounded and kept three years in prison." Younger brother Michael, also a witness for this claim: "says he himself was a soldier in Sir John Johnson's Regt. And is entitled to a share of the Property claimed, but he is satisfied that his Brother Jacob should receive the whole."

This claim adds that, "Their Mother will be well satisfied that her son, Jacob, do receive the whole. " This is the only indication I have found that Christopher Friedrich's wife, Maria Catharine (maiden name possibly Hoellrigel), came to live in Williamsburg Township with her sons after being "forced from the land" near Durlach. Henry was also a witness for the claim (#1074) of his cousin, another Henry Merkley, son of the Michael who was killed by Indians¹ in 1780; and in 1788, for that of George Loucks (Laux), formerly of Tryon County, whom I believe (but have not proven) is the father of his wife, Elizabeth. In 1797, Henry made a further claim of his own and was "recommended for 200 acres, if not granted before."

Henry Merkley is mentioned in several early histories of Dundas County such as Pringle's *Lunenburg or the Old Eastern District* and James Croll's *Story of Dundas County* (1861). The following story is related in both and although one may be a little skeptical about the details of

¹Information about the Merkley family in Germany and details of their emigration to America come from Mrs. Ejvor Merkley's well-researched book, *The American Sons of Hans Michael Merckle* (published privately, 2001)

such stories, I believe there is sufficient proof to verify the essentials of this one.

"One day when Henry, still a young unmarried man, was harvesting in his father's field, a rebel-supporter named Young and his son, John, attacked Henry and shot him in the side. When the attacker attempted to finish the job with the butt of his gun, the father prevented it but Henry was put in the Schoharie jail."

(The statement in his land claim of 1788 that "he was wounded and kept 3 years in prison" probably relates to this incident.)

Henry is listed as a lieutenant in the Dundas Militia in 1803. He served as a field officer during the war of 1812 and fought at the battle of Crysler's Farm, attaining the rank of Major. The following story is told in J. Smythe Carter's book, *The Story of Dundas* (1906): "Major Merkley, of the Dundas militia, while being hotly pursued by a party of Americans had the misfortune to be thrown from his horse. He soon took leg bail and reached the house of a Mrs. Roberts, who proved his salvation by concealing him in the cellar, while the soldiers passed the place in vain pursuit. The Major's horse was afterwards found grazing in the woods nearby."

Henry represented the County of Dundas in the Fourth Parliament of Upper Canada (1804-08). J. Smythe Carter describes him as:

"A German of the Lutheran creed, and a blunt, honest farmer: possessed of limited education and speaking broken English. His homespun suit of Canadian gray, and his oftentimes ludicrous pronunciation of the English language, added to the energetic and, at times, vehement style of his delivery, frequently elicited bursts of mingled laughter and applause from the House. He was one, however, neither to be laughed down, nor easily intimidated. He knew nothing of the art of "chiseling", but in his own honest and independent way, he spoke just as he thought. His sentiments were always plainly expressed, and to the point. Respected by all parties as a man of sterling integrity, he was also of jovial as well as humorous disposition, and was a frequent guest at the Governor's table."

This description warms my heart for it could as well be applied to Henry's gt-gt-grandson, my father, who remained a superb story teller and keenly interested in politics until his death in 1987 at age 90.

Records indicate that Henry was loyal to his faith as well. In the early 1800s, pressure was brought to bear on the St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran congregation at Riverside (just east of Morrisburg) to join the "official" Episcopalian Church. The Lutheran minister at the time, Rev. J.G. Weagant, had even been reordained by Bishop Mountain in 1811, although he continued to preach at St. Paul's. However, when the congregation became uneasy with this arrangement, he refused to give up the parsonage and the Lutherans, over time, lost the use of their own church. The property was disputed for several years until an act of parliament (c.1825) divided the land between the Episcopalians and the Lutherans, with the latter receiving only the unimproved land at the back of the lot. Records indicate that about 1830, a Widow Frymire donated three acres of land not far from the old church so that the Lutherans could rebuild and that on July 14th, 1833, the Rev. Hayunga consecrated the new St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Throughout the

many years of this dispute, records show that Henry Merkley remained staunchly Lutheran. In records, he is listed as the "master builder" of the new church and a generous contributor. In minutes of a meeting which he chaired on 25th Jan. 1833, his contribution of "12 pounds, 10 shillings, paid in full" is noted. One can only speculate what family tensions existed over this matter of affiliation when, in 1824, Henry's son, Christopher, married Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. J.G. Weagant.

Understandably, land must be valued highly by those who have had it confiscated. When Henry died in 1836, in addition to providing for his "dear wife Elizabeth", he willed parcels of land (or noted that such had already been given during his lifetime) to each of his eleven children, including several daughters. Later, as they came of age, each one also claimed land as "sons and daughters" of a Loyalist. Henry willed to his "fourth son, Henry" 200 acres of land in the second concession of Matilda Township. This Henry (my gt-gt-grandfather) later moved one concession north and about 1850, his son, Simon Henry, cleared land there to build the house in which the next three generations of Merkleys were born, myself included.

At the time of the flooding for the St. Lawrence Seaway, many gravestones of the Loyalists, including that of Henry Merkley, were embedded in the wall of the Loyalist Memorial Cemetery at Upper Canada Village. According to the inscription, at the time of his death Henry held the rank of Colonel. For me, this remains a mystery and I hope research will reveal details regarding this change in rank.

I would be most grateful for any further information, or corrections, readers might offer pertaining to what I have written.

Note: There are at least 15 variations in the spelling of the Merkley surname and no doubt this has led to some inaccuracies in the recorded genealogy of this family. The most common are Mercklen, Merckle, Merklen, Marckley, Merckley, Markley or Merkley.