

Biography of George Peter Zellner, Sr.

by Shirley Gall

GEORGE PETER ZELLNER SR.; Born circa 1760 in Hanover, Germany. Died circa 1822 in Lincoln County, Georgia. About 1786 George Peter Sr. married 1st Elizabeth Nicholls (Nichols). Elizabeth was born circa 1758 and died circa 1786. George Peter Sr. married 2nd, Mar-17-1789 in Bertie County, North Carolina to Mary Capehart. Mary was born Jun-27-1761 in Bertie County, North Carolina and died Nov-01-1847 in Forsythe, Monroe County, Georgia. Mary was the daughter of Michael Capehart (from Germany) and Frances Nicholls.

All information which has been examined supports the concept that George Peter Zellner Sr. came from Germany in the late 1700s and settled in North Carolina and finally Georgia. Records from the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association, INC in Lyndhurst, OH state that he came to America in September of 1778 during the Revolutionary War. White Zellners are presumed to have descended directly from George Peter or to have acquired their Zellner name by marriage. Black Zellners are presumed to have acquired their family name because of their close relationship with white Zellners. Although there are many discrepancies, the broad premise that all Zellners who have lived in America since at least the 1780s are related in one way or another appears sound. However, no connection has been found with the Pennsylvania Zellners at this time.

The exact birth date and birthplace of George Peter are unknown, but many researchers seem to indicate 1760 as his year of birth and Hannover, Germany as his birthplace. He is listed in the index of Mercenaries From Ansbach/Bayreuth, Germany, Who Remained in America After the Revolution (Westland Publishers: McNeal, AZ, 1979) and Passengers & Immigration Index, Vo1.#3 lists: Georg Peter Zoellner, no age, America, 1783. A Johann Zoellner was also reported on the same muster rolls of the Ansbach/Bayreuth regiment. No relationship between the two men is known at this time and Johann may have returned to Germany after the Revolution, as many of the German mercenaries did.

German mercenaries, in American history, were the troops hired by Great Britain to fight the rebelling American colonies. In this crisis, the British government turned to Catherine II of Russia for a loan of 20,000 men, but, persuaded by Frederick the Great, she refused to help. The next potential source of recruits was Germany, and, as Elector of Hanover, George III was first made himself a loan of five Hanoverian

battalions, which were sent to Gibraltar and Minorca to relieve the same number of British battalions. On hearing the news of Bunker Hill, three of the 300 or so petty German princes offered military aid to Britain. (Source: Directory of American History, Vol.3, 1976.)

In the course of the Revolutionary War a total of 29,875 such German officers and men were sent to America. The Ansbach/ Bayreuth regiment numbered 2,353. For the services of these troops England paid 1,770,000 sterling in levy money and subsidies to the princes alone, a small sum when one considers that many of the officers had received excellent training in the Seven Years' War, that the men were well-disciplined-for the princes maintained relatively large standing armies, partly for the purpose of hiring out troops - and that the Germans constituted about one-third of all the land forces fighting for the king in North America.

These auxiliaries were organized much like the British army, the small regiments having an unusually large number of officers and surgeons, chaplains, drummers and musicians. They fought under three successive commanders, Leopold Philip von Heister, Baron Wilhelm von Knyphausen, and Frederich Wilhelm von Lossberg, all Hessians, each with his own staff and the same rank as the British commanders. Though under British high command, they sometimes made independent excursions. Usually they operated as brigades, regiments, or corps in conjunction with British troops and under British commanders. North of the Floridas, no major operation took place in which Germans did not take part.

The typical musketeer, or private, wore a black hat with white bindings and a colored pompon on it. His waistcoat and breeches were either light yellow or white, depending on the regiment. He wore a long pair of black linen gaiters over his breeches, stockings and shoe tops. The Germans wore their bayonet belts around their waists. They also carried short swords. The German coat was of blue wool, often colorless, with short lapels, cuff and a shoulder strap on the left shoulder of a facing color. The coat was usually lined in red, and the buttons were of plain pewter or brass.

The German regiments, for the most part, had two regimental colours each. The field of the Ansbach/Bayreuth colour was white damask. The reverse of this colour bore the red eagle with ribbon and motto PRO PRINCIPE ET PATRIA. Apart from fluttering bravely at the heads of regiments, the colours served several useful purposes. They marked the position of the regiment in the field, provided a rallying point, and, when several regiments were formed in line, could be used to dress the line, each man looking from colour to colour to get his alignment. (Source:

Uniforms of the American Revolution. John Mollo, Macmillian Publishing Co., NY: 1975.)

The following data is from Encyclopedia of British, Provincial and German Army Units, 1775-1783 (Katcher, Philip R.N., Harrisburg, PA: The Stackpole Co., 1973, pp.108-9).

1st Regiment: Anspach-Beyreuth, 1777-1779: Regiment von Voit, 1779-1783: 1st Anspach Battalion, 1783. Arrived New York, June 1777. Sent to Philadelphia November, 1777, and returned to New York with the Army, 1778. Sent to the relief of Newport, July, 1778 and returned to New York, October, 1779. Sent to Virginia, May 1781, and interned at Yorktown. Returned to Germany, May, 1783. Strength: 27 officers, 543 other ranks. Uniform: Red facings, white small clothes.

COMMANDERS: Col. F. L. A. von Eby, to May, 1778. Col. F. A. V. Voit von Salsburg, May 1778 through war's end.

2nd Regiment Anspach-Beyreuth, 1777-1779: Regiment Seybothen, 1779-1782: 2nd Anspach Battalion, 1783. Regimental history and strength same as 1st Regiment Anspach-Beyreuth. Uniform: Black facings, white small clothes.

COMMANDERS: Col. F. A. V. Voit von Salsburg, to May 1778 Col. F.J.H.W.C. von Seybothen, May 1778 to war's end.

Anpach Artillery arrived with the Anpach infantry regiments and served with them. Strength, two field guns, one officer, 43 other ranks. Uniform: Red facings, yellow button, white small clothes.

COMMANDER: Captain N.F. Hofmann

The Germans brought with them neither a loyalty for England nor a dislike of America. Neither officers nor men knew much about the causes of the Revolutionary War, and to them the Americans were rebels who refused to obey their lawful king. Having sworn allegiance to this same king they were bound to fight these rebels for him. Their innate discipline made them good soldiers and as such they fought for a cause in which they had no concern.

At first they were generally feared by the Americans, but soon they were respected as soldiers and treated kindly as prisoners. Congress issued several proclamations urging them to desert. Of the 1,170 of the Ansbach-Bayreuth troops who did not

return to Germany, many had either deserted or received permission to remain in America after the war. Others had been bought out of prisons by farmers, tradesmen, and even by prospective wives.

After the Revolutionary War, about 1783, George Peter Zoellner went south to Bertie County, North Carolina, where he first married Elizabeth Nicholls and had at least one daughter, Barbara, (Note: One source indicates that they were married in King and Queen County, Virginia instead of Bertie County, North Carolina and this may be a possibility since according to a letter from Jane Z. Gladney: "The Nicholls and Garretts came over to King & Queen Co., VA on the heels of Columbus - were soldiers in Armies of Oliver Cromwell. After he was beheaded, they fled England for the New Lands and have been in King & Queen Co., VA ever since.")

Records show that George Peter was a land owner in Bertie County as early as 1788. His occupation during this time was thought to have been running tar kilns, blacksmithing, and making leather goods and saddlery which, according to one researcher, he would transport by wagon and mules to New Orleans to send and then ride mules back to North Carolina.

His first wife died before 1789 and on 17 Mar of that year, he married Mary Capehart (a cousin to his first wife), daughter of Michael and Frances (Nicholls) Capehart. Mary Capehart was born 27 Jun 1761 in Bertie County, North Carolina. By this wife George Peter had another daughter, Sarah, and four sons: Arnold, John William, Andrew and George Peter Jr.

Soon after her marriage, George Peter's second wife joined the Baptist Church. Her husband's religious prejudices being very strong, and his mind thoroughly imbued with the mode of worship practiced in his own country (he was believed to be of the Lutheran faith), that he would not see his wife baptized into the faith and doctrine of the Baptist Church. But the circumstances put him to reading and studying the Scriptures, which he continued almost incessantly for four weeks, when at their next meeting, he himself joined and was baptized into the Baptist Church with his wife. From then until the day of their deaths, they were remarkable for their piety and strict obedience of Christian duties. (Source: Taken from minutes of Sharon Primitive Baptist Church at Strouds, GA)

In 1799, George Peter and his family moved from Bertie Co., N.C. to Lincoln Co., GA. Records show him on various tax and land records as well as land lottery lists.

George Peter made his will on 2 Nov 1821 and it was recorded in Lincoln Co. on 6

Jan 1823, placing his date of death between these two years, possibly in late 1822. No gravesite has ever been found. One researcher states "he was not a robust man, his constitution having been impaired in consequence of medicine having been carelessly administered in his youth, leading to his death at a comparatively early age."

His widow, Mary, was listed on the 1832 Harris Co., GA land lottery for Cherokee lands. She died in Monroe Co., GA on 1 Nov 1847 at the age of 86 and is buried in the Zellner Cemetery, located one mile north of Smarr, Georgia in Monroe County.

George Peter Zellner's motto through life was: "Open and fair dealing," never to deceive or take advantage of anyone's want of information. All this was handed down to those who were well acquainted with the parties and facts.

His eldest son, Arnold, married Margaret Holmes in Wilkes Co., GA on 25 Aug 1811. He later moved to Giles and Maury Counties, Tennessee, was married 3 more times and had a total of 12 children. Sarah, his second daughter, married Elisha McCord on 1 Jul 1813 and remained in Georgia. Andrew married Rebecca Holmes, a half-sister to Margaret, on 7 Jun 1819 and stayed in Monroe Co, GA.. John William (b 1794) married Martha Moncrief (b 1797) on 7 Mar 1819 and lived in Harris Co., GA. George Peter Jr. married at least twice (?) and died about the same time as his father. It is believed that he was killed by a runaway slave. Nothing further is known about Barbara, George Peter's first child by his first marriage, at this time.