Kulp Reunion Newsletter 2025-12 – "Pennsylvania German Passenger Lists" 24 December 2025

Hi KKC Extended Family,

I want to thank Gail Kulp Kogut for this month's newsletter topic. A few weeks ago, she had sent me a video link about the Pennsylvania German Passenger Lists 1727-1808: A Users Guide https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBIXlvmLBwI made by the Allen County Public Library (ACPL) in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Even if you have researched your ancestor in these lists, it is an excellent video, well worth the 45 minutes of your time to look at it. To quickly summarize:

It describes the founding of Pennsylvania by William Penn, and how he recruited those in the greater German region to settle there. The narrator describes the Palatinate and some of the conditions that drove them to leave, such as famine, overpopulation, war, religious persecution, high taxes and compulsory military service. Pennsylvania offered them cheap and fertile land, religious toleration, low taxes and freedom from conscription or military service. But to uproot their lives and homes and restart again in an unsettled frontier was a daunting task.

There were many challenges and hazards faced during the journey, which would take months and be very expensive. Groups would often be guided by someone who had made the journey before (Newlanders). It would take several weeks just to sail down the Rhine, because there were at least 27 tolls controlled by the many different German states between the Swiss border and Rotterdam. From there, they might have to wait weeks for a small British ship to carry them, first to land in Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, by British law, and then make to 7 to 8-week ocean voyage to Philadelphia.

Between 1683 and 1775, between 84,000 and 130,000 German and German-speakers would come to America. Germantown was founded in 1683 and served as an anchor for these immigrants, before they moved to other parts of the region. These large numbers concerned authorities, fearing the colony would become de-facto German, and by 1750, nearly 40% of Pennsylvania was German.

Between 1727 and 1808, the Province and later Commonwealth of Pennsylvania created lists of all foreign settlers who landed at the port of Philadelphia. These lists are the finest collection of passenger records in existence for Colonial America. Other colonies had similar requirements, but they were only halfheartedly fulfilled or just ignored.

In 1727, it was required that ship captains keep a record of all foreigners arriving in Philadelphia. These Captain's Lists are also known as "A lists", and might include all names in a family. They were also required to swear an oath of loyalty and fidelity to the British Crown and the Proprietor of Pennsylvania. These Oaths of Allegiance are known as "B lists".

In 1729, an additional law required all male passengers, over the age of sixteen, to take the oath and an additional oath forswearing the authority of the Pope and the Stuarts (an exiled family of former British rulers). These Oaths of Abjuration are known as "C Lists". After the Revolution, the oaths were to Pennsylvania or the United States. The lists ended in 1808 when new Federal control over naturalization took over and there was a decrease in immigration, due to wars in Europe. B and C lists may not include the names of women and children.

While these lists have been published in many places, the definitive version is the book series by Ralph Beaver Strassburger. The series has three volumes: Volume One contains lists from 1727-1775; Volume Two contains lists from 1776 to 1808 and the Handwriting Facsimiles; Volume Three is the Index Book.

These volumes can be accessed online through the Internet Archive.

Pennsylvania German pioneers: a publication of the original lists of arrivals in the port of Philadelphia from 1727 to 1808 by Strassburger:

•   Volume One https://archive.org/details/pennsylvaniagerm42stra/mode/2up

•   Volume Two https://archive.org/details/pennsylvaniagerm43stra

•   Volume Three: https://archive.org/details/pennsylvaniagerm44stra/mode/2up

However, these immigration records should be considered far from complete.

The narrator also gave some examples of how to search for an ancestor and used handwriting comparison to find a specific person. He mentioned looking at others on the ship and neighbors upon settlement was also important, as many traveled in groups that stayed together after their arrival.

There is also a downloadable handout with an extensive bibliography. The Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center also has many other videos and genealogical resources https://www.acpl.lib.in.us/genealogy.

I hope you find the video helpful in understanding the journey and finding genealogical information. In our modern era 300 years hence, it is often difficult to imagine just how everyday life was, let alone taking everything with you to another foreign land and the difficulties it entailed.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Jack Oberholtzer
Secretary, Kolb, Kulp, Culp Family Association

P.S. Be sure to follow the website (http://kolb-kulp-culp.org) and on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/Kolb-Kulp-Culp-Family-Reunion-111440337655136)