

THE GREAT PROGENITOR

Compiled by Abraham Thompson Secrest a great-great-grandson of George Nicholas Spaid

This is the story of a German schoolboy, who with a bundle of books under his arm, one fine morning in April, 1776, was on his way to the High School of Cassell, the small capital city of the Grand Duchy of Hesse, when he was kidnapped by two soldiers of the Grand Duke Friedrich II, to be sold to King George III of England for service in the rebellious colonies of America. He was quickly taken by the soldiers to their barracks and so closely was prisoner that he never again saw his parents nor brother and sister. Nor would they let him go to bid his family farewell before he was shipped out by way of England to America.

This seventeen year old schoolboy was George Nicholas Spaht, the elder son of Michael and Cunegunda Spaht. He had one brother, Mathias, and one sister, Charity. Why did not his parents protest against such tyranny? Autocracy is not a new development in Germany. History tells us that if a mother protested in a case like this she was thrown into prison; if the father protested, he was flogged. And they were not alone in their suffering. This same Grand Duke furnished 22,000 soldiers to the English King and many of them were obtained in the same way. The finances of the Grand Duchy were considerably augmented at the expense of the welfare and morality of the people, and the dissolute ruler kept up a splendid court on the proceeds of the pay.

"The Hessians were the victims of the tyranny of their rulers, who sold the lives and services of their subjects to the highest bidder. The English government was at that time the best customer. Large profits were realized by the petty princes who were willing to sell mercenaries for the war in the American colonies, as can be seen by examination of the contracts between the parties on either side, contracts which were not kept secret.---All told, the expense to England for the German mercenary troops was at least seven million pounds sterling, the equivalent at present of one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty million dollars.---The greatest of the German princes did not allow his subjects to be sold. Frederick the Great used his influence against the sale of recruits in other German states and refused to allow mercenaries who were intended for the American service to pass through his domains," says Prof. Faust in his great work, "The German Element in America."

Dr. Holmes very tritely observes that "There are but two biographers who can tell the story of a man's life - the person himself and the recording angel. The first cannot be trusted to tell the whole truth, and the second never lets his book go out of his own hands." Now since our great ancestor did not leave the story of his life, and I have not access to the recording angel's book, it is our intention to set down here only a few glimpses, as it were, of the Great Progenitor.

We do not know how long he remained in England, nor how long the voyage lasted, but history tells us that on Christmas eve 1776, the Hessians under Col. Rahl were keeping the vigil of the Nativity in their customary manner at Trenton, N. J., when Gen. Washington with a handful of troops crossed the Delaware river amidst floating ice, surprised the hilarious Hessians, killed a few and captured more than a thousand and fled back to Philadelphia. Blessed, blessed Night that gave a Redeemer to a sin-sick world! And if we had not been a temperance man for half a hundred years, we would add blessed be that booze that gave a thousand German prisoners to the Father of our Country!

That the American Colonists despised the German troops is not surprising and if the prison camps had been located among purely English settlers it is probable that at the first reverses the American troops suffered, all the prisoners would have been massacred. So

with a wisdom almost divine the prison camps for the Germans were established in German settlements, the chief camps being at Germantown, near Philadelphia, and at Winchester, Va. Young Spaid was sent to the latter camp.

According to the records imprisonment in these camps was only nominal, at least after the first few months. Whether the community was held responsible for so many prisoners and was permitted to enforce prison rules to suit themselves, we cannot tell at this date. The German settlers living at both Winchester and Germantown were, for the most part, from the Palatine, a state adjoining Hesse, from whence these soldiers came, and are invariably considered to have been high class colonists, having fled from Germany during the religious wars. The best understanding between the Palatinate settlers and the Hessian soldiers would exist as a matter of course. They used the same language and most of them were of the same religion-Lutheran. Seeing their countrymen enjoying such liberty and comfort on the frontier of America, with a climate so salubrious as the Shenandoah valley, with the forests full of game and the streams full of fish, and where land might be had for the asking, the great wonder is that any of the Hessian soldiers elected to be exchanged and returned to the home land, unless they had left families there.

Well, George Spaid elected to stay in America. Thanks be to God!

*The Hessian soldiers had been sent to these prison camps early in '77 and the war ended with the siege of Yorktown in October, 1781, so that the exchange of prisoners did not take place before the spring of '82, and in those five years the German soldiers had ample time to learn of the advantages and disadvantages of frontier life. We are led to think their imprisonment was only nominal because in 1782 George Spaid married Elizabeth Cale (Kale), the daughter of a pioneer German whose home was on the west bank of Capon River about thirty miles west of Winchester.

*The most celebrated person of Hessian descent in American history is General Custer (Kuster in German spelling) who was massacred with all his forces in the Indian War.

When and where these young people met cannot now be ascertained, and the date of their marriage is unknown. During the Civil war the Union soldiers destroyed all the records of Hampshire County. (We thought the county office at Romney, the county seat of Hampshire county, took a malicious pleasure in telling us this when he learned we were from Ohio.) Most of those of Frederick County (Winchester) were also destroyed; the marriage licenses there starting with the date 1789. The first entry in the Hebron Lutheran church record is also dated 1789, so there is little hope of ever having any definite date on this marriage. It is certain the Cales lived on Capon River before the outbreak of the Revolutionary war because many of the old gravestones bear dates of death so early as 1770, or even earlier, of the Cales buried there.

We may take it for granted that the first home of the young people was a log hut in the wilderness, but whether on what is now known as the Spaid farm, adjoining James Creswell's farm, we cannot now tell. Certain it is that he soon after marriage had a pretentious home here that was still standing in 1900 when the venerable Luther Spaid visited his relatives in Hampshire county and was taken to see the old home of his grandfather, a ten-room weather boarded house-part of it a log house weather boarded, and then used for a sheep shed. Luther brought away a door-latch and part of a log as a relic of the first Spaid home in America.

It is not much of a guess to say that the Spaid's lived on this farm from their marriage in 1782 till their removal to Ohio in 1819, a period of thirty-seven years. Here then were born to them all their nine children, four daughters and five sons, in the order named: John, Frederick, Elizabeth, Mary, Michael, Christina, William, Nancy, Richard. The last named is a guess. Richard died a little boy about eleven years old, and doubtless is buried in the Cale cemetery-the Cale farm was only about two miles away on the same bank (the west bank) of Capon river. We could find no gravestone carved for him, but the cemetery has been thrown into a pasture field so long, and nearly all the stones are knocked down and broken into many pieces, for all were flag stones. We never did find any family Bible of George Spaid containing a record, but he and his wife and each of his eight children have gravestone with date of birth and death carved on it, and each of the eight children that lived to marry has left a family record in some branch of the descendants, and in every case but one the dates in the Bible record agree with the dates on the gravestone. Uncle John's Bible record is undoubtedly correct and the date on the gravestone incorrect. The Bible record was filled out by the careful Meredith Capper.

In some parts of the family the opinion prevails that George Nicholas was not over fond of work, but it is inconceivable that a robust young fellow could locate in the woods, hew out a farm and provide for a large family without doing considerable work. The two oldest in the family were boys, and there can be no doubt that they were taught to work, the other children were also taught to work; but there can be no question

of the father's working when he was a young man. Beside the children all married and established homes of their own as soon as they came of age. Six of the children married in Virginia and three of them (John, Fred, and Christina) made their homes there all their lives. Three (Elizabeth, Mary, and Michael) married in Virginia but removed to Ohio when they had only one or two children. William was nineteen and Nancy twelve when they went to Ohio, but both married partners that had been born and reared in Virginia, and they had probably first known them there.

The campaigns of St. Claire and Harrison (a Virginian) in, the Northwest territory during the war of 1812 had brought back an intimate knowledge of that country to every section of Virginia, and

fear of the Indians had been reduced to a negative quantity by the terrible drubbing St. Clair had given them at Vincennes. Every family in western Virginia were talking about the fertile valleys of Ohio and the beautiful prairies of Indiana, and certainly half of them resolved to go to that new country. People inured to the frontier life are always the first to move on when the community begins to fill up with settlers. They want elbow room. Newly wedded farmer folks can get a start easier in a new country where land is cheap, so the younger half of the Spaid family resolved to go to Ohio. What induced the aged parents (Both were then sixty years old.) to go with these children we cannot tell, for they had a good farm, a large house, and three of their children were married and lived in the community.

The four Spaid families (William married in a year or two.) established their homes at the junction of the Seneca and Buffalo forks of Wills creek. They owned four farms in a row: Mary Hellyer's was the easternmost; then Elizabeth Secrest's; then Michael Spaid's; and William's farm adjoined Michael's on the west. We had forgotten to say that Elizabeth had married Henry Secrest, Mary married George Hellyer, and Christina married Captain James Anderson, before this migration to Ohio. A few years after coming to Ohio, Nancy, the youngest daughter, married William Frye and they located up the Buffalo fork about three miles from the brothers and sisters. It seems that the parents did not locate on a farm to themselves but lived in a log hut on Michael's farm. Luther Spaid says his grandfather bought all this land and gave each child a farm. Each family lived in a log house in the woods; and all of them had to work like the mischief to clear *out* fields to raise gardens and crops. The oak timber was the best in the world, and to split enough rails to fence in their "clearings" was not so big a task. Game was plentiful at that time, and the streams were full of fish.

The year of the Hegira was 1819, in the autumn, and in June, 1821, the mother of these Spaid's died and was buried at Hopewell, a little cemetery on a hill less than a mile west of William's farm. It was the only cemetery in that section at that date, for Mt. Zion cemetery was started in 1828, and Buffalo still later. She was sixty-two years old at the time of her death, but we never heard what caused her death. Nor can we tell anything definite about her, though the writer well knew Aunt Nancy and Uncle William and could have gotten all sorts of information from them, but at that time was less interested in family history.

Sometime after the wife's death George Spaid married Barbara Albin, the widow of James Albin, a Revolutionary soldier who had gone from Hampshire County to Ohio many years before the Spaid's. They continued to live in a cabin on the farm of Michael Spaid. One day in the summer of 1833 Barbara and Margaret (Michael's wife) went to a neighbor's for an all-day quilting party, leaving Christina Michael's oldest daughter, to care for the children and prepare dinner. She was to call her grandfather when dinner was ready to come eat with them. He lived down over a bank from Michael's home in a sheltered cove only a short distance away. When dinner was prepared Christina went to tell her grandsire dinner was ready. A rail fence with bars separated the two cabins, and when the sixteen year old girl reached the bars she found the old man lying dead with his cane lying across his chest. Knowing that it was nearly dinner time, he had evidently started for the son's home and was stricken with heart failure on the way. Everything indicated that he had died without a struggle. He was buried by the side of his first wife at Hopewell and excellent dressed sandstone monuments mark their graves. His is proving the better stone and every word is discernible, as may be seen in the picture. The Grandmother's gravestone is now scaled off so that part of the epitaph cannot be read. Fortunately the writer copied it thirty years ago. Barbara, his widow, went to live with her daughter, Mrs. Peter Jordan, about ten miles away, and lived to a great age, but when she died was brought and buried by the side of her first husband, James Albin, at Hopewell.

The original Spaid family in America, then, consisted of parents and children as follows:

- (1) George Nicholas Spaid, born in Germany, Dec. 22, 1759- died in Ohio, June 15, 1833.
- (2) Elizabeth Cale, born in Virginia, in 1759-died in Ohio in June, 1821.
 - (3) John Spaid Aug. 19, 1783-March 2, 1862.
 - (4) Frederick Spaid Dec. 3, 1785-Jan. 28, 1872.
 - (5) Elizabeth Spaid (1957), July 23, 1790-May 22, 1862.
 - (6) Mary Spaid Dec. 6, 1793-April 7, 1870.
 - (7) Michael Spaid Oct. 1, 1795-May 26, 1872.
 - (8) Christina Spaid Oct. 11, 1797-Oct. 10, 1881.
 - (9) William Spaid Jan. 7, 1800-March 28, 1890.
 - (10) Nancy Spaid Feb. 10, 1806-Dec. 9, 1884.
 - (11) Richard Spaid, died in early youth.