

ONLINE AUCTIONS

Chasing the Ghost of David Good

A Mennonite Hymnal

by David L. Good

It didn't look like much at first. Scuffed, worn and obviously well-used, though still tight and sturdy, the old hymnal was bound in a brown calf cover with torn leather clasps. The text, printed on yellowing pages, was in an archaic German script.

Despite its unimposing appearance, when the little book arrived by priority mail awhile back, it impacted my life almost immediately. The bedraggled little book sent me clambering down my family tree, looking back more than two centuries, toward roots I previously had acknowledged only vaguely.

And because of it, I now find myself chasing the ghost of David Good, a faceless man whose name I happen to share, a man who was born and raised in a place I've never visited, who lived during a time I can only imagine.

David Good was born in 1786 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a fact I'd never known or cared about until a 'chance encounter with him' by computer last April.

I was browsing through eBay, the giant online auction site I browse almost daily, as a retirement pastime, when I spotted a Mennonite hymnal that bore a few similarities to one I'd recently bought at my sister's request. We have Mennonite ancestors on my father's side. While my sister is a genealogy buff, I'd never been interested.

The eBay hymnal I had called up was described as a relatively rare one, published in 1804 in Lancaster by one Johann Albrecht. It was titled *Ein Unpartheyisches Gesang-Buch einhaltend Geistreiche Lieder und Psalmen*, (An Impartial Songbook offering Spiritual Songs and Psalms). The 432-page book, a first edition, carried a daunting opening bid of \$165, but I kept reading

The hymnal flyleaf inscription reads, "David Good was born the 4th day of December . . . 1786."





The scuffed and worn hymnal sent the author clambering down his family tree.

anyway. And all at once a sentence almost leaped off the page:

“There is a handwritten inscription on the front flyleaf in a graceful script that reads, ‘David Good was born the 4th day of December in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ 1786.’”

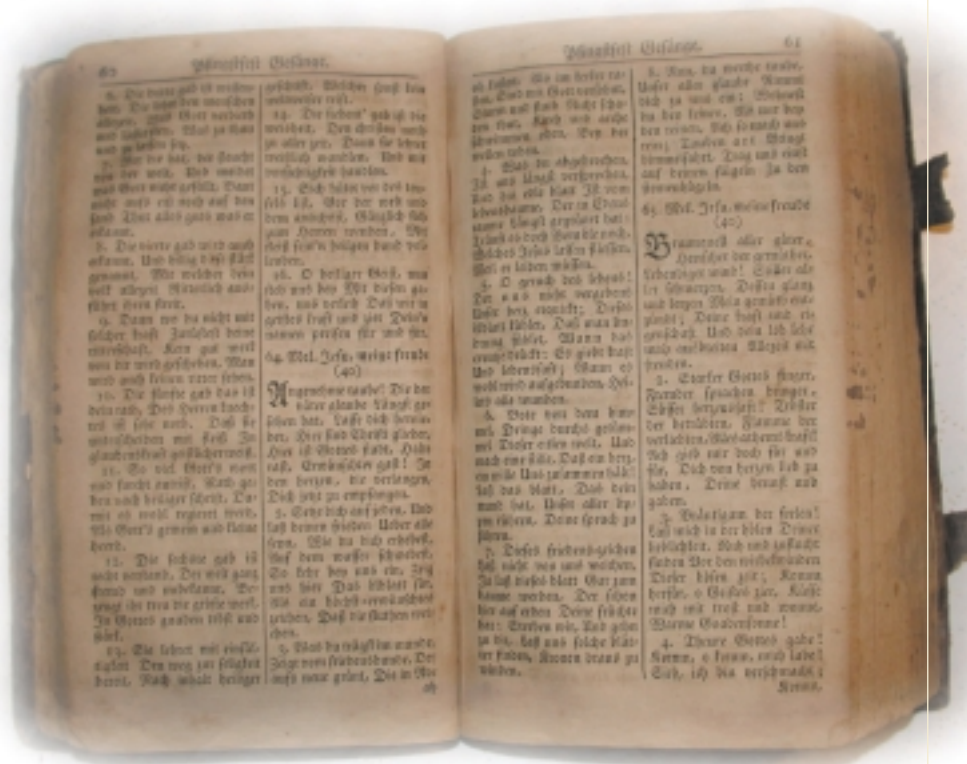
Other than the slight shock, and perhaps because of the shock of recognizing my name in such a strange context, its significance didn’t at first sink in. Then I remembered that our family’s genealogy guru, cousin Gene Ann Cordes of Wyoming, Ohio, had once given me a copy of a detailed family history she’d helped compile back in 1986. I’d glanced at it at the time, but only perfunctorily. I’m not quite sure what I was expecting to find, but now I pulled it out of a file folder, and skimmed through it, trying to make some sense of the dozens of names that appeared and reappeared over the nearly 50 pages.

Soon a reference stopped me

mid-read: a mention of a person, apparently my grandfather’s grandfather, a Mennonite bishop named Daniel Good, one of seven children of Jacob and Frances Grow (or Groh) Good of Lancaster. There were three other brothers, one of them named David Good, had been born December 4, 1786.

I could hardly believe it. Unless there had been multiples of “David Good, born December 4, 1786,” in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, this hymnal—an item I had stumbled upon through little more than sheer luck—once belonged to my 4th-great-uncle. And it may have once been a possession in the home of his parents—my 4th-great-grandparents—perhaps shared by them and their other children.

There was no getting around it. This appeared to be a family heirloom with as solid a bit of written documentation as I could imagine. I



The Mennonite hymnal once belonged to my 4th-great-uncle, David Good.



The German language songbook and Psalms added much interest to the author's family history.

sides. It certainly had belonged to David Good, all right. Burned into the top edge of the pages was his name, a neat DAVID GOOD, in all capitals except for a small “d” ending each name.

Then, turning to the flyleaf, there was the boldly written inscription with his birth date, along with a couple of faded subtraction computations that appeared to confirm his age as 39 in 1825 and 40 in 1826.

Did that mean that he had acquired the book well into adulthood? Or did he or his mother buy it shortly after its 1804 publication (his father died in 1803), a few years after moving from Lancaster to Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley? If the latter had been so, who wrote the inscription? David—either still in his teens, or as an adult?

As I wondered about these possibilities, continuing to examine this find, looking for clues, my eyes actually welled with tears. Now, I’m not usually a great sentimentalist—the only sure-fire way to get me to cry is to play the scene in “Casablanca” where smug Nazis sing “Die Faderland,” only to be drowned out as Paul Henreid’s resistance fighter and the rest of the patrons at Rick’s café launch into “La Marseillaise.”

But here I sat, crying, thumbing through the first tangible link I’d ever seen or heard about connecting to my family’s Mennonite roots in Pennsylvania. I let the tears run down my cheeks till my eyes stung.

After perusing every page, unable to read a single word on them, I set the book down. Letting my mind wander, how, I wondered, did the book get from Lancaster to Grand Rapids?

Again, I e-mailed Edith Bajema to ask if she could recall where she had gotten it. Fortunately, she had the name and phone number of the California store where she had

had to bid on it. Oh, I could hope that any other potential bidders would be scared away by the hefty price tag, that the book would go unsold, prompting the seller to re-list it at a lower price, or allowing me to save a few dollars in a private sale.

But what a risk: If somebody else “sniped” with a last-second bid and got it, I’d always have regrets, because this truly seemed, for my family and me, to be a once-in-several-lifetimes item.

So I went for it—placing the

minimum \$165 bid a few days before the auction was to end, then a couple of “just-in-case” higher bids in the final few minutes.

As it turned out, I was the only bidder, after all. It was mine for the \$165 starting bid.

The seller, a very accommodating woman named Edith Bajema, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, sent it out soon after receiving payment.

When I opened the box and discarded the bubble wrap surrounding the book, I held it a few moments, inspecting it from all

WEB SITES RELATED TO

LANCASTER COUNTY

Look for sites similar to the following for other areas you are researching:

www.pa-roots.com

Lancaster County Genealogy Project, including archives, biographies, cemetery records, census records, church records, courthouse records, queries and such source records as deeds, obituaries and wills.

www.interment.net/us/pa/lancaster.htm

Cemeteries of Lancaster County, plus a list of outside links and genealogy CD-ROMS for sale.

<http://library.fandm.edu/archives/Genealogy.html>

Lancaster area repositories having genealogical materials.

www.lanclio.org/home.htm

Lancaster County Historical Society, including a calendar of upcoming events, online exhibits, library and archival collections.

<http://genforum.genealogy.com/pa/lancaster>

Lancaster County Genealogy Forum, featuring queries and other messages about individual genealogy searches.

www.lineages.com/usa/state.asp?StateCode=PA

With links to Pennsylvania courthouses, cemeteries, libraries, archives, vital records centers, county estate indexes, passenger list indexes, books on county abstracts, land records, census indexes and other records.

<http://members.aol.com/rhin0/genealogy.html>

Mennonite genealogy links, including church archives, Mennonites on the web, Mennonite Heritage Center, OMII Genealogy Project, Kidron Heritage Center, and Pennsylvania Dutch family history.

www.ristenbatt.com/genealogy/lancnals.htm

First naturalization list in Lancaster County.

www.genealogylinks.net/usa/pennsylvania

Pennsylvania genealogy links, including cemeteries, census, military and ship lists.

<http://home.amaonline.com/genealogy/pennlink.htm>

A collection of Internet resources on Pennsylvania genealogy, including the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society.

www.rook.org/places/pa/pennsylvania.html

With links to Pennsylvania genealogy, geography and history, including books in personal libraries.

<http://maley.net/dauphin>

Dauphin County, formerly Lancaster, Genealogy Transcription Project, including migration information, land warrants, Social Security death index and various links.

bought it, for \$85, last year.

A few days later, I placed a call to Larry Dorman, the owner of Yesterday's Books, who said he couldn't remember where he'd gotten it—dead-end! It was, after all, a long shot. . . .

"Wait," he exclaimed, "It might have been from another local book dealer here. And he's in the store right now. Let me ask him."

Several minutes passed. Finally the other dealer came on the line. His name was Marvin Stanley. He recalled selling the hymnal to Dorman a year or two before, for \$10 or \$20.

And a bonus, besides: he remembered well, tracing the provenance of the book back more than three decades.

"I'm an Episcopal clergyman and I help support myself buying and selling books," said Rev. Stanley. "I remember a house in Berkeley where I bought a lot of items in 1969, maybe 1970. A man had been selling his grandparents possessions, I think, after they died."

"In the basement was a box of books in disarray, and there were half a dozen Mennonite hymnals and some theology books. Probably nobody else would have bought them, since the condition of the books was so poor. But that one book was in pretty good shape. Eventually, I got tired of hauling them around and sold the one. I still have the others."

"And, . . . what about the family?" I wondered aloud.

"I don't know if there was a Mennonite connection," he said. "I don't think there was any relationship between the books and the people in the house."

"Do you have a name of the family you bought them from?"

"Not a clue."

The story could have ended there,

but it didn't. I've contacted Rev. Stanley again for a price on the other Mennonite books from the Berkeley house, so I can check whether any of them might have a Good connection. I understand that some of the Goods did move to California years ago.

And meantime, I'm getting into genealogy. For starters, I've re-read my cousin's family history and roughed out a rudimentary family tree.

Gene Ann was properly impressed at the hymnal's return to the family.

incorporating data accumulated earlier by a late cousin, Dr. DeWitt R. Good.

I am currently trying to determine how extensive was Uncle Warren's use of original source documents. As a former newspaperman, even though a genealogy novice, I'm aware of how important it is to track down records—for births and deaths, weddings and divorces—from Bibles, county records, cemeteries, and census reports.

The subject of checking several original research sources to confirm

Carter apparently relied, not only on original source material, but also on books that may or may not have been accurate.

So, that's something else for me to review. I've begun with a list of online Web sites that I compiled, relating to Lancaster County. In the process, I was told that during the last century, as many as 40 percent of all Americans could trace at least one ancestor back to Lancaster.

The first Web site I tried, www.pa-roots.com, has been a winner. From it I downloaded information on the first U.S. Census of Pennsylvania in 1790. For Brecknock Township, it listed a Jacob Good, who appears to be the Jacob who was David Good's father—as head of household—with one other white male, age 16 and up, four white males, under 16, and four free white females.

As for David Good, what I learned from Gene Ann's family history: his siblings, besides Daniel, included Mary (Mariah), John W., Joseph C., Elizabeth (Lizzie), and Catherine (Caty). He married Barbara Neiswander, in 1812, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and settled in Fairfield County, Ohio. The couple had seven children: Christian, Jacob, Frances (Fanny), Annie, Abraham, Eli, and Mary.

According to Gene Ann's records, among his descendants were noted film actors, Wallace and Noah Beery. This ancestor, David Good, died Aug. 21, 1840.

When David Good's hymnal fell into my hands, it began a continuing interest in finding family mementos and documents. Edith Bajema told me that finding such a book would have been very difficult, that except for the eBay contact, rare, but not totally impossible.

"My brother-in-law has sold an 1800s 'Book of Mormon' via eBay to someone who had also descended



A page from the Mennonite songbook.

"To find that book on eBay is unreal," she agreed. "You almost wonder if the heavens are opening up. It's miraculous."

To help out, she's sending another 50-page history she has on David Good's line. And she'll unearth a box of file cards containing the original research done by our late uncle, Warren Good, a one-time University of Michigan statistics instructor. Uncle Warren based much of his family research on questionnaires he sent out to relatives in the early 1940s, also

findings came up in family discussion some years ago when my sister, Marilyn Brown, of Dearborn, Michigan, questioned Gene Ann's father, my uncle, the late Carter V. Good, about his contributions to the family research.

Uncle Cater, once the College of Education Dean at the University of Cincinnati, wrote books on educational research that are still used at the university level. But, in extending Uncle Warren's work on the family history project, reaching back another couple of generations,

from the original owner," she said. "Other than that I can't remember any other specific instances, though sometimes people write, asking me to scan in a signature at the front of the book, in case it might match one of their ancestor's."

A final footnote on the price of the hymnal: I searched the online site www.bookfinder.com for more copies for sale—and found one. From its description, it was in the same shape as mine and was being offered by yet another California dealer—for \$675—without David Good's price-less inscription. ■

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