

PASTEUR PIERRE ROBERT'S SWISS ANCESTRY

THOMAS O. LAWTON, JR.*

Pasteur Pierre Robert, the revered first minister of the Huguenot Church at St. James Parish, Santee, South Carolina, for almost a quarter of a century from its founding until just prior to January 1, 1710, was a native of St. Imier, Switzerland, where he was baptized on February 3, 1656, according to records in the Reformed Evangelical Parish of St. Imier.¹

Pierre, in information given on his petition for naturalization in South Carolina in 1696, named Daniel and Marie Robert as his parents, with St. Imier as his place of birth.² According to long-standing family tradition among many of his descendants in this country, his family were of Welsh origin, and left the British Isles to settle in France, before refugeeing in Switzerland,³ which Pierre left in 1685, when he came to South Carolina.⁴

Pierre Robert was ordained to the ministry at the French Church in Bâle on February 19, 1682.⁵ According to *Histoire de L'Église Française de Bâle*, "This church, formed by French Refugees, attached itself to the Reformed Churches of France, whose confession of faith and discipline it adopted. Its constitution was presbyterian. The consistory, composed of pastors, elders, and dependent on the times, the deacons, had charge of the administration of the church."⁶

A tribute to Pasteur Robert in the three hundredth anniversary year of his ordination to the ministry was delivered to this Society at its 1982 annual meeting and subsequently published in the 1982 *Transactions* of the Society.⁷ Following publication, Dr. Leo Schelbert, professor of History at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, and an authority on Swiss immigration, advised the author that the Robert name has been documented in the Canton of Fribourg since the 14th Century and in the Canton of Neuchâtel since the 15th Century.

* Allendale, South Carolina. Mr Lawton's address for the Ninety-seventh Annual Anniversary Meeting of this Society entitled "A Tribute to Pasteur Pierre Robert in the 300th Anniversary Year of his Ordination to the Ministry," will be found in *Transactions*, Number 87 (1982).

¹ Records of the Evangelical Reformed Parish of St. Imier, Switzerland.

² "Des François et Suisses Refugiez en Caroline qui souhaitent d'être Naturalizes Anglois" in *Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina* #68, pp. 33-34.

³ George Mason Graham Stafford, *Three Pioneer Rapides Families* (Alexandria, La., 1968 Edition), p. 3.

⁴ Charles A. Simon, *Le Jura protestant de la Réforme jusqu'à nos jours* (Bâle, Editions Jurassiennes de la Vie protestante, 1951), p. 351.

⁵ Basel Staatsarchiv, Basel Manuscript. Records of the French Church of Bale, February 19 1682.

⁶ L. Junod, *Histoire de L'Église Française de Bâle* (Lausanne, Switzerland, 1868), pp. 13-14.

⁷ Thomas O. Lawton, Jr., "A Tribute to Pasteur Pierre Robert in the 300th Anniversary Year of his Ordination to the Ministry," in *Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina*, #87, pp. 1-13.

that "the families are 'refugees' from France."

Afterwards, the Director of the Archives of Switzerland. Through extremely good fortune of the Reformed Pastoral genealogist as well as

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There were certainly Erguël. Only the core ecclesiastical and secular communion were those had bought the right from elsewhere and

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⁹ Personal letter from Chicago Circle, August 8

¹⁰ Personal letter from Thomas O. Lawton, Jr.

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that "the families are widely dispersed, and it seems uncertain the Roberts were 'refugees' from France."⁸

Afterwards, the writer corresponded with Monsieur Philippe Froideveaux, Director of the Archives of L'Ancien Évêché de Bâle at Porrentruy, Switzerland. Through the kindness of Monsieur Froideveaux, the writer had the extremely good fortune to be directed to Pasteur Jean-Philippe Gobat, minister of the Reformed Parish at Orvin. Pasteur Gobat is also a highly qualified genealogist as well as a Robert descendant.

Pasteur Gobat wrote: "From the start I hasten to tell you that the Robert family is not of Huguenot origin (Huguenot equal to French Protestant) — this being true even if Pasteur Robert was pastor in Carolina of a community composed predominantly of Huguenots. This family is originally from the ancient principality of Neufchâtel, from the region called 'the Neufchâtel Mountains,' the name dating from the 15th Century. It is in this epoch that one finds, in the legal records, the most ancient mention of the names of the non-noble families. The Robert family has its source in the present-day town of Le Locle, one of the branches known for the dynasty of painters [artists] that it produced."⁹

There were certain precise categories or classes among the population of the Erguël. Only the communicants or the bourgeoisie enjoyed all of the civil and ecclesiastical and scholastic rights, but not political rights. Those who received communion were the descendants of the founders of the village (or of those who had bought the right to be); the parishoners were the inhabitants who came from elsewhere and who were accepted for residence.

Pasteur Gobat's research reveals that the ancestor common to most of the Roberts of Le Locle, a town a few kilometers west of St. Imier, was Jehan Robert, who died in the 1400s. Jehan Robert had a son, also of Le Locle, Humbert Robert, who died before 1506, according to the archival records at Porrentruy. Jehan Robert had a son Guillaume (William) Robert of Le Locle, from whom Pasteur Pierre Robert descends.

Among the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Jehan Robert, a number of them established themselves before the end of the 15th Century on the mountains lying in the Parish of St. Imier. One of Jehan's grandsons was Humbert Robert's son Guillaume (William) Robert, who was the great-great-grandfather of Pasteur Pierre Robert. Guillaume Robert's precise dates of birth and death have yet to be determined, as has the name of his wife.

Guillaume Robert fathered, among other children, Daniel Robert, who lived on the Mountain du Droit de Sonvilier, and died there between December 19, 1634, and May 2, 1636. He was first received as Parishoner of St. Imier on June 4, 1616. His wife's name is yet unknown, but records reveal that Daniel Robert had at least three children:

⁸ Personal letter from Professor Leo Schelbert, Department of History, University of Illinois, at Chicago Circle, August 8, 1982, to Thomas O. Lawton, Jr.

⁹ Personal letter from Pasteur Jean-Philippe Gobat, Orvin, Switzerland, October 23, 1984, to Thomas O. Lawton, Jr.

1. Pierre Robert, the first of three by that name (see below).
2. Marie Robert, who married three times, each husband being a "commu-
nicant" of Courtelary:
 - a. Estevenin Belrichard (marriage agreement dated January 5, 1623,
and notarized by Jacob Beynon);
 - b. Adam Béguelin (between 1627 and 1632).
 - c. Jean Fête (after 1642).
3. Madeleine Robert, who married David Calame, a Parishioner of St. Imier
— this couple being the ancestors of Monsieur Gobat.

Daniel Robert's two sons-in-law, Estevenin Belrichard and David Calame, on May 2, 1636, owed their brother-in-law Pierre Robert a debt of 430 crowns for their part of the inheritance of their father-in-law. This record of debt was signed by Notary Jacob Beynon.

Daniel Robert's only known son, Pierre Robert (number 1 above, and Pasteur Pierre Robert's grandfather), was a Parishioner of St. Imier, and lived on the Mountain du Droit of Sonvilier, where he died between August 27, 1671, and November 12, 1676. Pierre Robert entered into a marriage agreement on May 9, 1622 (notarized by Abraham Pétremand), with Judith Sagne, daughter of Abraham Sagne, also a Parishioner of St. Imier. Judith brought to her husband as dowry 1,600 crowns, a heifer, and her trousseau.

Pierre Robert [I] and Judith Sagne Robert's only known child was Daniel Robert [II] who was named for his paternal grandfather. Daniel Robert [II] entered into a marriage agreement on April 1, 1651 (notarized by Abraham Pétremand), with Marie Pétremand, daughter of Pierre Pétremand de Sonvilier. Marie brought as her dowry 900 crowns, a heifer, and her trousseau. Daniel Robert [II] lived on the Mountain du Droit (in the Parish of St. Imier, but not in the city proper), and died there between November 16, 1679, and May 11, 1698. Daniel Robert [II] and Marie Pétremand Robert are the parents of Pasteur Pierre Robert, who was named for both his paternal and maternal grandfathers.¹⁰

Thus, the Swiss ancestry dating from the 15th Century of Pasteur Pierre

¹⁰ Documentation for all data between Footnote 9 *supra* and this point is contained in the above letter, *supra*, and the following documents from the Archives de L'Ancien Evêché de Bâle, at Porrentruy.

notaire Jacob Beynon, de St.-Imier, N° 615: Acte de réception en paroisse de Saint-Imier de Daniel, fils de feu Guillaume Robert, du 14 juin 1616;

notaire Jacob Beynon, de St.-Imier, N° 621: Acte concernant Pierre, fils de feu Daniel Robert, du 2 mai 1636;

notaire Abraham Pétremand fils, de Sonvilier, N° 713: Traité de mariage de Pierre Robert, fils de Daniel, du 9 mai 1622;

notaire Abraham Pétremand fils, de Sonvilier, N° 717: Traite de mariage de Daniel Robert, fils de Pierre, du 1 avril 1651.

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Robert, has been clearly established, by the works of Pasteur Gobat. Future researchers may wish to prove the old Welsh-French-Swiss tradition, which, if it is true, would have to begin before the 15th Century.

The true story behind Robert's decision to leave his native Switzerland and how, where, and exactly when he joined others in the St. James' Santee group remains undocumented. Perhaps Robert left Switzerland by the Rhine, rallying with others of his group at Amsterdam or Rotterdam, rather than the Isle de Ré, off the coast of France, as has previously been surmised.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the article on Pasteur Pierre Robert in *Transactions*, #87, at p. 2, this writer erroneously concluded that Guillaume Robert was the grandfather of the minister, rather than his great-grandfather.

Following publication of the article, the Mayor of Porrentruy, Switzerland, directed letters to Monsieur Philippe Froideveaux, Director of the Archives d'Ancien Evêché de Bâle at Porrentruy. Monsieur Froideveaux graciously put the writer in touch with Pasteur Gobat and has otherwise been most considerate.

Pasteur Jean-Philippe Gobat of Orvin, Switzerland, is due great appreciation for his excellent work and his constant kindness in making it possible to complete the correct record of Pasteur Pierre Robert's Swiss ancestry.

Miss Jeanne Gramling of Allendale and Paul Smith Lawton, Jr., of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, have been extremely helpful with their expertise in the French language.

