CHRISTENOT FAMILY HISTORY

A Compilation of Stories by Family Members

Swiss Connection Story

By Sharon and Larry Morris
March 4, 2016

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Purpose: This dissertation is written to answer the following question: **How was a stronger Christenot understanding of our Swiss Heritage established?**

After we retired from our jobs as a Teacher (Sharon) and an Aerospace Engineer (Larry), we began to work part time in evangelical missionary endeavors. Our missions focus was in Europe and the Europe headquarters of the organization was in Kandern in the area of the Black Forest in extreme Southwest Germany. We continued to live in California and traveled several times a year to various European locations. Often in traveling to our headquarters, we flew in and out of nearby Basel, Switzerland.

Sharon is a Christenot. Her maternal grandmother was Clemma Christenot. We attended our first Christenot reunion in Astoria, Oregon in 1998. (Note: This was the second Christenot reunion as the first was held in Bozeman, Montana in 1995.) We had become aware of the connection of the Christenot Family to Switzerland during attendance at the Christenot reunion. We continued to learn more and more about Switzerland and even made some side trips into the country.

We had a copy of a document which we didn't really understand. It was entitled "*Constantine Church Records, Vaud County Switzerland, Marriages.*" It made reference to the marriage of Louis Christinat and Salome Thegnier in the year 1802. (Note: It has subsequently been learned that Salome was a Regnier and not a Thegnier. Also we later learned that they were married by her brother in a church in Seon, Switzerland. Marriage records were sent to the family church in Constantine.) So, on one of our trips to Germany in August 2001, we decided to take another side trip and travel to the area indicated in the document and see what we could learn. We managed to find the little village and the church referred to in the document. We parked near the church and found that the church was not open. This was a bit disappointing and we were not sure what to do next. At that time we saw a gentleman walking out of a nearby home which we later learned was the home of the church pastor. We got his attention and asked if he spoke English. He indicated that yes, he speaks English. We explained that we were from the US and in the village at the church seeking to explore our family connection. (He had been visiting the church leader.) The man immediately graciously invited us to follow him to his home located in another part of the village.

That is how we met Frederic and Janine Zeller. We became acquainted over coffee/tea and delicious pastries. That was the start of a wonderful relationship with the Zellers. Frederic is a retired school teacher and an avid outdoors person. While in their home on that day, he called people in Chabrey, Switzerland. Frederic indicated that we had many relatives living there. It was learned that the village central offices of Chabrey were closed at that time since it was the month of August which is traditionally vacation month in Europe. We also learned that the family name in Switzerland is Christinat as opposed to the family name in North America being Christenot. It is important to add that the Zellers are not Christenot/Christinat relatives.

Where is Chabrey?

Chabrey is a very small village in Switzerland. It is located near the southeast shore of Lake Neuchatel not a great distance from the Swiss Capitol city of Bern. The population of Chabrey is approximately 213 people. The village is primarily comprised of homes and has only one or two business structures. (Note: In 2011 Chabrey and several other villages were incorporated into a newly named community called Vully-les-Lacs.) Chabrey is in the French speaking region of Switzerland. The main languages of Switzerland are German, Italian, French and Romansh.

The First Joint Christenot/Christinat Meeting

It became our goal to lead a group of members of the Christenot family to Chabrey. Subsequently we corresponded with Frederic via email and we journeyed once again to his village where we met with him and planned for a future joint Christenot/Christinat meeting in Chabrey. Prior to the meeting Frederic spent many hours doing family research on our behalf. Because of a fire in the year 1870 that destroyed many records, Frederic journeyed to Lausanne to conduct family ancestry investigation. Our family is deeply indebted to Frederic for all of his research and associated efforts in organizing the first joint Christenot/Christinat meeting. The meeting was announced in the Christenot Chronicle and at the Christenot Reunion that was held in 2004. Sharon and Larry led a group of Christenot cousins to Switzerland for the initial joint meeting of the two families. That meeting was held in August 2006. In attendance from the USA were Al and Cande Recke, Marion Graves, Orville and Bev Orr, George Christenot, and Sharon and Larry Morris. It was a wonderful meeting which included introductions, gift exchanging, entertainment, family history presentations and a fine Swiss meal. We were welcomed by the Chabrey mayor and other village dignitaries. We met many Christinats that were residents in the Chabrey Village. We had the initial meeting in the Chabrey Community Center and then followed up the next day with a joint outing in the Village Park. We were also treated with tours of Chabrey and surroundings. Of particular interest was the Chabrey Cemetery. Many places in the village and especially the Village Park offered spectacular vistas of nearby Lake Neuchatel. The USA cousins stayed in a hotel in Portalban near the Lake while in the Chabrey Area. This first joint meeting was a giant step forward in connecting the two families. Additionally, at that first meeting an invitation was given for the Swiss cousins to attend the next Christenot Reunion which was scheduled to be held in Astoria, Oregon in 2007.

Some Christinats Came to a Reunion in Oregon

When the Morrises learned that Georges and Andrée Nydegger were planning to attend that next Christenot Reunion they arranged to meet the Nydeggers at the Portland airport and journey together to Astoria. Andrée is a Christinat. She and Georges lived in a suburb of Geneva, Switzerland. They also have a family home in Chabrey. At that Astoria Reunion the Nydeggers graciously extended an invitation for the Christenot cousins to attend a second joint Christenot/Christinat meeting in Chabrey, Switzerland.

A Bit of Genealogy

Though we are not genealogists, this would be a good place for us to insert an overview of the Luis Christinat family history generated by others in the family. This overview is taken from the February 2006 issue of the Christenot Chronicle. (Note: The Chronicle is a wonderful informative product of Christenot cousins Jack and Georgie Thurber. If you wish to be added to the mailings, please contact the Thurbers.)

> *Switzerland Ancestor Connection.*
> *Luis Christinat (son of David and Marie Christinat of Chabrey) and his wife Salome, plus four of their children arrived in Philadelphia, PA on 7 January 1818 aboard the REBECCA ANN, a 93-passenger brig.They settled in Wellsboro, PA, a community on the New York/Pennsylvania border.*
>
> *Their children were:* ***Anna Marguerite, Rudolph, Samuel, and Frederick. Frederick and Asenath*** *begat* ***Benjamin Franklin, Margaret, and Charles Frederick****. After Asenath's death, Frederick, Margaret and Benjamin moved to Montana. Charles and his second wife, our Martha and her daughter from her first marriage, Alice Wilton, accompanied a train of freight wagons to Spring Gulch . . .*

They came to help build a gold ore mill. Nick Shrauger, a Christenot Cousin and a Family Historian, adds the following: "Benjamin Franklin (aka Frank, aka BFC) was the person responsible for the mill; father Frederick and brother Charles came as workers. BFC is thus the person responsible for bringing the family to Montana."

A Second Joint Reunion

There was indeed a second joint Christenot/Christinat meeting. The following USA cousins journeyed to Chabrey in June of 2009: Nick Shrauger and Betty McCoy, Al and Cande Recke. This contingent was again led by Sharon and Larry Morris. On this journey the USA cousins stayed in homes in Chabrey. In addition to meeting in the Community Center and the park, the visitors went to Seon and Leibegg Castle. Of particular interest was touring of the castle in which our Christinat cousin, Luis Christinat, worked for a time as administrator. Mr. Ueli Niklaus led us on this tour. Another highlight was touring in the town of Seon where Luis was at one time the community mayor. Mr. Willy Wyrsch led us on this extensive tour. The planning and coordination of this second joint meeting was wonderfully led primarily by Georges and Andrée Nydegger. In support of this second joint meeting Georges Nydegger related an interesting overview of the life of Luis Christinat.

Additional Visits

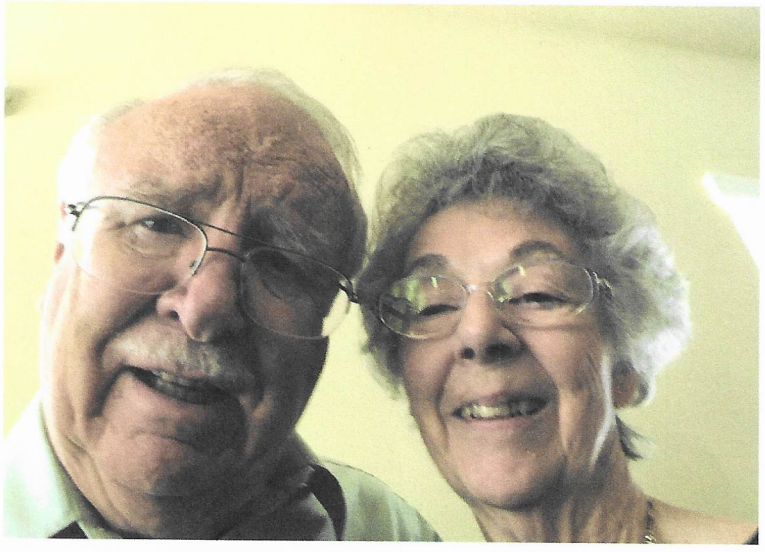
In addition to the above journeys by Christenot Cousins to Switzerland, it should be added that Jeremiah Christenot independently journeyed to Switzerland in association with MBA studies in May 2009 and visited with Christinat Cousins. Perhaps there have been visits by others of which we are not aware.

Future Meetings

It is of interest that the Nydeggers attended a total of three Christenot Reunions in the U.S. (Note: When they attended the reunion in Virginia City in 2010, they were presented with a wonderful French Language Edition of Sharyn Pinkstaff's Christenot Family History book.) They developed a very close relationship with several of the USA cousins. We do not expect attendees from Switzerland at the next Christenot Reunion. It is of note that Georges Nydegger passed away recently at the age of 83. Further, most of our Swiss cousins are involved in agriculture. Some are vintners. It is therefore difficult for them to attend our USA Christenot Reunions which typically are held in the summer months, those months being critical for crop growing, harvesting, etc.

There are no pending joint Christenot/Christinat meetings.

Larry and Sharon Morris



Larry and Sharon (Pinkstaff) Morris