

The Question of the Eisenhowers Country of Origin

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THE QUESTION OF THE EISENHOWERS COUNTRY OF ORIGIN.

BY ALBERT BARTHOLDI.

Recent developments on the political horizon in America have brought the name of Eisenhower again into prominence.

At the time, during the second World War, when Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in Europe, he emerged from the relative unknown into the glaring lights of international prominence. Up to that time his renown was limited. He was known but in American military circles, where he was recognised as a brilliant officer with the rank of colonel.

With his advance to the supreme command of the Western Armies, his ancestral background became a question of general interest and the rumor began to circulate that he was of Swiss origin. These reports naturally attracted my attention and I immediately started to investigate the basis of these startling news. In the course of time a lively correspondence developed with members of the Eisenhower family and with the Historical Society of York County, Pa., where the early Eisenhowers had settled. I was advised that the family records were in the hands of Mrs. C. Eisenhower, widow of the late Dr. Charles Eisenhower who, I was told had compiled a family history of their American clan. Upon my request for a copy of the Doctor's story, I was informed that owing to Mrs. C. Eisenhower's advanced age she was unable to search through the mass of papers which her husband had left behind and I was asked to come to York and undertake the investigation of the documents myself. Gladly complying with the suggestion I left for York, Pa. and I was cordially received in the home of the old lady by several members of the family.

During my visit, Mrs. C. Eisenhower, in the presence of the assembled guests, all her close relatives, including Mr. Paul Bear-Eisenhower, the present family historian, related from memory: "My husband made a study of their family background and I well remember his words: Now I know definitely that our first American ancestors came to the New World from Switzerland via Holland." Many circumstantial evidences seemed to substantiate the assertions and I was inclined to be safe in having the story published in the Swiss press. This was in 1944. From another source I heard that the original home of the Eisenhowers was situated in Suhl, Thuringen, Germany, from where they moved into Switzerland and a century later they sailed for America. I had researches made in Suhl but without the desired results. Also the investigations instituted in Switzerland turned out to the negative and at the end of my searching efforts, there remained but the oral narrative of old Mrs. C. Eisenhower. Her statements were confirmed by Mr. Paul Bear in a letter to me dated May 23, 1945 to the effect that this is their tradition.

When, lately, I prepared all the various materials on "Prominent Americans of Swiss Origin" for publication in book form, and I pressed again for documentary evidence of the Eisenhower story, Mr. Paul Bear-Eisenhower, the family historian, admitted in a letter that the basis for the genealogy concerning

their Swiss phase was weak and that I should not have too much credence in the old lady's related story. Under the circumstances, considering that it is intended to be published in book form which is a more permanent work than just a newspaper article, and in the absence of any documentary proof, I had, reluctantly come to the decision to omit the Eisenhower biography from the second volume of "Prominent Americans of Swiss Origin."

A similar situation, though finally with unmistakably positive results, presented itself at the time when Mr. *Herbert C. Hoover* was nominated Candidate for the Presidency of the United States, and I prepared articles reviewing his career and family background.

Herbert C. Hoover was generally believed to be of Dutch origin, because his ancestors in Pennsylvania spoke the Pennsylvania-Dutch tongue (which, however is not identical with the Holland Dutch language). It was a traditional policy in this country to select the Presidential timber from the two old settler groups — the British and the Dutch. — Up to Hoover's time, twenty-eight Presidents were of British origin and two — Martin Van Buren and Theodore Roosevelt — of Dutch descent. The President's original nationality was a question of public interest. After Hoover's American family tree had been established, it was found out that his first American progenitor was Andreas Huber who had emigrated from the old world to America via Holland and settled near York, Pa., where many Swiss had made their home. Considering all the pertinent data, I came to the conclusion that this Andreas Huber might be of Swiss origin, of the element who had first settled in the German Rhine country and finally emigrated to the New World. I conveyed my assumption to Mr. Hoover and to my agreeable surprise I receive the following letter:

Washington, June 17, 1929
The White House

"My dear Mr. Bartholdi:

"Within the last month or two additional information has been obtained on the ancestry of the President and it has been established without doubt that the father of Andreas Hoover (who was the first ancestor in this country), Jonas, who lived at Ellers-tadt, District of Durkheim in the Palatinate, was a



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son of a citizen, 'a linen weaver, Johann Heinrich Huber of the Swiss Canton of Bern.' It is therefore, established that the country of origin of the President's ancestors is Switzerland.

Sincerely yours,

sig : R. Fessler, Secretary "

After receipt of this interesting letter, additional searches were made in Switzerland and it was found that the ancestral home still stands and as the Gasthaus zum Bären in Oberkulm, Canton Aargau (at that time an Untertanenland of Bern) it is still inhabited by the Huber family, as present owners. The Swiss Federal Railroads in Bern had a series of photographs made of the house, the members of the Huber family, the Church in Oberkulm and the Churchyard with the last resting places of several ancestral members of the Huber family. The pictures were presented to the President by this writer with the courtesy of the Swiss Federal Railroads.

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