

# The Origin of Daniel Oesch

by Tom Esch\*

Amish Mennonite Daniel Oesch lived on the Kirschbacherhof estate near Zweibrücken, Germany, in 1742. Daniel had married Barbara Leyenberger and was known to have at least three children: Joseph, Christian, and Susanna. Hermann Guth presumed that Daniel was related to the Swiss Oesches of Oberlangenegg and born about 1705.<sup>1</sup>

There were many questions about Daniel Oesch: Was he really from Oberlangenegg? Who were his parents and siblings? How did he arrive at the Kirschbacherhof estate? How is he related to the Swiss Anabaptists and the Amish Mennonite Esch/Oesch families in the region?

The search for answers involved reviewing church records and checking family lists and relationships. Y-DNA testing became a critical accessory to the research effort. An old geography book that recently became available on the internet also aided the search.

The good news: With the assistance of our Swiss colleagues, we have confirmed that Daniel Oesch was born 1704 in Oberlangenegg near Thun, Switzerland. We now know the names of his parents and siblings. This information, and the circumstances that led to these findings, are presented in this article.

## Initial Pieces of Information

There are two known entries in Swiss archives for the Anabaptist Oesches. A June 15, 1684, baptismal entry in Steffisburg for Christen Oesch, states that his father was Uli Oesch and that he is now at Salm in Alsace, as is his brother Christen Oesch. Uli, or Ulrich, is described as “the escaped, disobedient Anabaptist”.<sup>2</sup> It is presumed that Christen, the brother of Uli, was also Anabaptist.

The second entry in Swiss archives is dated 1767 and refers, by name, to Anabaptist siblings living abroad. The entry centers around a “frail” woman

named Elsbeth Oesch from the community of Oberlangenegg. Elsbeth specifically requested “that she might receive the goods still left in the homeland by her brothers, Hans Oesch, and the children of her deceased brothers Daniel and Christian Oesch, all of whom were Anabaptists moved to Girschhausen.” The entry continues, and confirms that she did communicate and receive the “consent of the relatives who were living at Girschhausen.”<sup>3</sup>

In the April 1989 *Mennonite Family History* article about the Oesches, Hermann Guth stated that the Amish Oesch (also spelled Esch or Eash) came from the village of Oberlangenegg near Thun, Switzerland. In this article, Hermann Guth attempted to

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Guth, “The Oesch From Wahlerhof,” April 1989 *MFH*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Baechler, “From Steffisburg to Ste. Marie-aux-Mines: The Exodus of Those Who Would Become Amish, Part II,” April 2004 *MFH*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Guth in the April 1989 *MFH* states the 1767 record regarding Elsbeth Oesch was in the Bernese State Archives. A 1992 letter from Larry Kinsinger to Vera Esch Heitz includes research by Delbert Gratz that includes a full English interpretation of the 1767 entry.



*Swiss Oesch researchers meticulously kept track of Oesch family lines on large prints in a basement workshop. The prints included “unknown whereabouts” for some Oesches, one of which would later be found to be linked to Daniel.*

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relate Daniel as a brother to two other Anabaptist Oesches, Christian and Hans, who were likely born about the same time as Daniel. In defining this relationship, clearly Guth implied Daniel, Christian, and Hans were progenitors of a fair amount of the Amish Mennonite Oesches and Esches in Germany and France.

My sister and I travelled to Switzerland in 2006 to seek additional information. We were fortunate to meet an Oesch family researcher in Thun, where we learned of another Oesch researcher in Bern. Together, they were doing quite well at tracing several descendants of the Oesches of Oberlangenegg beginning with Hans Oesch born ca1535. When we presented our initial research, they agreed to assist us in our search, and thus began a friendship across the seas.

At that time, we could not find a conclusive link between their findings and our Daniel Oesch: after all their searching, they had no entry for a Daniel Oesch. We had to travel north toward Strasbourg, so we were unable to make time for a visit to the Swiss Archives in Bern. Yet we realized we hit the proverbial “brick wall.” And we had to ask . . . were we looking in the right place?

### Y-DNA Test

With no known paper trail of “our” Daniel Oesch back to the Swiss Oesches, I started the Esch/Oesch/Eash Y-DNA Project in 2007 through FamilyTreeDNA.com. The goal was simple: Through an initial Y-DNA test, either confirm or disprove that we are related to the Swiss Oesch family of Oberlangenegg. The initial test group included two American Esches descended from Daniel Oesch and separated by four generations, an American Eash descendant with no known relationship to our family, and three Swiss Oesches (including our Swiss Oesch friends) who had heimats, or town origin, of Oberlangenegg, Switzerland. These three Swiss Oesches could all trace their family line to the 1500s.

As a result of the Y-DNA testing, we confirmed that the Esches of central Illinois have a 90% probability of sharing a common ancestor with the Swiss Oesch families in the past eight to ten generations—so we are considered “tightly related.” From me to Daniel Oesch, there existed eight generations. This was good news—we were looking in the right place!<sup>4</sup>



*The church at Schwarzenegg as it exists today.*

### Information Found at the Archives

Yet there was another interesting and unexpected outcome of the Y-DNA project. The project generated positive interest from our Swiss Oesch friends. A deeper search into the Swiss Archives (Staatsarchiv Bern) took place making use of archived data now available on CD. The churchbook from Schwarzenegg (town adjacent to Oberlangenegg) revealed a 1704 baptismal entry for Daniel Oesch, and much more!<sup>5</sup>

So how can we conclude that this Daniel, found in the archives, is “our” Daniel? First, a thorough review of the archives confirmed that there was no other Daniel Oesch to be found. The fact that Daniel is a somewhat uncommon name, as compared to a common name like Christian or Hans, has helped in this search. Second, the entry for Daniel shows he was born in a time period where we expected to find him. Third, he comes from a Swiss Anabaptist family (as further presented below). Finally, consider the Y-DNA results to further substantiate this conclusion—that “our” Daniel Oesch was, indeed, this same Daniel Oesch from Oberlangenegg, Switzerland.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Esch, “Esch/Oesch/Eash DNA Project: The Process and Positive Results,” Summer 2009 *Illinois Mennonite Heritage Quarterly*, pp. 43-45.

<sup>5</sup> Churchbooks of Canton Bern, Switzerland; Picton Press. Churchbooks included: 1) Schwarzenegg, Canton Bern, Switzerland, Churchbooks 1693-1875, 2) Mühlethurnen, Canton Bern, Switzerland, Churchbooks 1549-1875, 3) Steffisburg, Canton Bern, Switzerland, Churchbooks 1557-1876.

## Swiss Family Line of Daniel Oesch— Siblings and Parents

The parents of Daniel Oesch are Christian (bapt. 1657) Oesch and Elsbeth (bapt. ?) Stutzman. Christian (1657) was first married to Verena Roschi, who died about 1695. In 1697, Christian Oesch and Elsbeth Stutzman married. They are known to have had eight children (the baptismal record location is noted in parenthesis):

- Michel, bapt. 1697 (Steffisburg)
- Christian, bapt. 1699 (Riggisberg)<sup>6</sup>
- Anna, bapt. 1702 (Schwarzenegg)<sup>7</sup>
- Daniel, bapt. 1704 (Schwarzenegg)
- Petrus, bapt. 1707 (Schwarzenegg)
- Elisabetha, bapt. 1710 (Schwarzenegg)
- Hans, bapt. 1715 (Schwarzenegg)

We do not know if Daniel's father, Christian (1657), was an Anabaptist; yet it is clear that he faithfully had the baptisms recorded. Daniel's grandfather was Christen Oesch (bapt. 1631), and likely an Anabaptist—he is the brother of Ulrich, described as “the escaped, disobedient Anabaptist,” and resided with Ulrich in Salm as noted earlier.

### The Elsbeth Story

We know that Daniel was born in Oberlangenegg, Switzerland, in 1704, and then later appeared at the Kirschbacherhof (near Zweibrücken) in 1742. How did he come to that part of Germany? After checking multiple lists in various publications, Daniel is not on any of those lists. Therefore, we cannot make any assumptions at this time regarding the time and conditions when he left Oberlangenegg.

But there remains a curious item . . . the 1767 archive entry mentioned at the beginning of this article. We know that Daniel is not a common name, and that Daniel had brothers named Christian and Hans, and a sister Elisabetha. Elsbeth Oesch could in fact be Elisabetha.

There are several components about the Elsbeth Oesch archive entry that will now be discussed:

- 1) Elsbeth reports her Anabaptist relatives are in Girschhausen in 1767. Where is Girschhausen?
- 2) She refers to her relatives: Hans Oesch, and the children of her deceased brothers Daniel and Chris-



*Map of Germany with locations of townships or hofs mentioned in this article.*

tian Oesch. Who is this Hans Oesch, and could Daniel and Christian, both who apparently had died by this time, have children still in Girschhausen?

- 3) Also, she asks “that she might receive the goods still left in the homeland,” somewhat implying that her siblings left as adults.

### Girschhausen

Where is Girschhausen? Hermann Guth presumed that Girschhausen may instead have been Girkhausen or even the Kirschgartshäuserhof.<sup>8</sup> A 1747 German geography book, recently available on Googlebooks, identified Girschhausen as a village in the western forest in the county of Wittgenstein

<sup>6</sup> The actual spelling is Elsbeth Stutz, not Stutzman, in the Civil Records of Riggisberg.

<sup>7</sup> Baptism records commence at Schwarzenegg in 1693—when the church was built in Schwarzenegg.

<sup>8</sup> Hermann Guth, “The Oeschs From Wahlerhof,” Apr. 1989 *MFH*, pp. 44-45.

Berlenburg<sup>9</sup> (now the present day district of Siegen-Wittgenstein in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia).

Girkhausen is indeed in this county at the exact location mentioned, and therefore is likely Girschhausen. A check of two 18<sup>th</sup> century German maps available at the Library of Congress did not include a location for either Girshhausen or Girkhausen. Yet since the 1747 German geography book did not include Girkhausen, it is presumed that Girkhausen was formerly called Girshhausen.

### **Hans Oesch and Children of Deceased Brothers Daniel and Christian**

Girschhausen/Girkhausen is located 25 miles west of Waldeck, Germany. Therefore, the relatives she communicated with were likely members of the Waldeck congregation, and there were known Amish-Mennonite Oesches in this area.<sup>10</sup> But were they the children of Daniel or Christian, or was there a Hans Oesch at Girkhausen/Girshhausen?

The Elsbeth entry refers to the children of Daniel Oesch, so where were they in 1767? Daniel's sons Christian (b. 1734) and Joseph (b. 1740) married the daughters of Nikolaus Schertz and Barbara Birki of Lorenzen (Lorentzen), France, a town near Saar-Union. They are believed to have lived in that area around the time of 1767. So while Elsbeth implied Daniel had children at Girschhausen, we are not so certain.

Hermann Guth implied that Christian Oesch, Daniel's brother, was the same Christian Oesch that was a representative of the Durlach congregation at the 1759 meeting of the Amish ministers at Essingen, Germany.<sup>11</sup> Guth also considered Christian's son to be Samuel Oesch, born in 1751 in the Palatinate. Samuel lived near Römerberg near Durlach and had a son Daniel born 1781. Possibly Samuel named his son after his uncle. But there is no information for any children of Christian living in Girkhausen/Girshhausen in 1767.

So what about Elsbeth's brother Hans? We are not aware of any Hans Oesch in 1767 who was in Girkhausen/Girschhausen or possibly part of the Waldeck congregation. In the April 1989 *Mennonite Family History*, Hermann Guth implies that the Hans Oesch that is the brother of Daniel actually remained in France.<sup>12</sup> Yet Hermann Guth later suggested that the Hans Oesch who in 1742 is a co-leaseholder on the estate Steinisch near Langensteinbach (five miles

south of Durlach), was the brother of Daniel.<sup>13</sup>

Could it be that Daniel's brother Hans, and the children of Christian or Daniel, once resided in Girschhausen/Girkhausen? We do not know, and now begins a new search in this specific area for relatives of Daniel Oesch that may have been there around 1767.

### **Oesch Relationships and the Ongoing Search**

A known family genealogy list of the Oberlangenegg Oesches is included at the end of this article. While we have confirmed that Daniel and his brothers, Christian and Hans, were Anabaptists, it is highly likely that a few of their Oesch cousins were also Anabaptists. Check the following website for additional information about the Swiss Oesch lines: <http://www.oesch-history.ch/>

My sister, Susan Esch Lees, travelled to Germany and France in 2008 and gathered new information about Daniel and his children. We continue to receive updated information from European friends and colleagues, for which we are grateful. There will come a time to finally publish all of this information into a family book. If anyone has any new information to share, or is interested in participating in the ongoing Esch/Oesch/Eash Y-DNA project, please contact me.

### **Genealogy**

The earliest known Oesch is Hans Oesch born ca1535 and married to Ursula Sieber. They had four children:

1. Michel, ca1560-ca1585
2. Niklaus, b. ca1569
3. Hans, b. ca1575
4. Urs, b. ca1581

<sup>9</sup> Geographus, publish 1747. The original is in the Bavarian State Library, and Google Books scanned and published it for the internet on Aug 27, 2008. Go to <http://books.google.com/>, then search on Geographus 1747.

<sup>10</sup> Hermann Guth, *Amish Mennonites in Germany* (Masthof Press 1995), pp. 103-148.

<sup>11</sup> Hermann Guth, "The Oesch From Wahlerhof," Apr. 1989 *MFH*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 44

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Ingold and Hermann Guth, "The Oesch From Hanfeld and Forsthof," July 1991 *MFH*, pp. 44-45.

Michel with his unknown wife had the following children:

1. Margret, b. ca1585; m. 1607 Hans Bichsel
2. Michel, b. ca1586: m. twice with family line extended below
3. Schluchta, b. ca1588; m. 1619 Hans Varni

Michel (b. ca1586) was married twice. His first marriage was to Margareta Ruffiner. Only one son survived: Hans, bapt. 1615, and it is believed the other children and his wife died from a plague. Michel remarried ca1629 to Anna Müller. The descendants of Michel are listed below. Unless otherwise indicated, all dates are baptismal dates.

- 1 Hans Oesch, 1615-ca1671
  - m. Oct 1645 Catharina Berger
    - 11 Catharina Oesch, b. 1644
      - m. 1678 Peter Gerber
    - 12 Anna Oesch, b. 1649
    - 13 Barbara Oesch, b. 1654
    - 14 Hans Oesch, 1659-bef. 1668
    - 15 Michel Oesch, b. 1661
    - 16 Catharina Oesch, b. 1664
    - 17 Margreth Oesch, b. 1666
    - 18 Hans Oesch, b. 1668
- 2 Anna Oesch, b. 1630
  - m. 1658 Hans Kaufmann
- 3 Christen Oesch, b. 1631 (likely Anabaptist)
  - m. 1656 Elsbeth Murry/Murri/Murer
    - 31 Christian Oesch, b. 1657
      - m. Elsbeth Stutzman (alt. Stutz)
        - 311 Michel, b. 1693, d. as infant
        - 312 Michel Oesch, b. 1697
        - 313 Christian Oesch, b. 1699
        - 314 Anna Oesch, b. 1702
        - 315 Daniel Oesch, 1704-ca1765
          - m. Barbara Leyenberger
        - 316 Petrus Oesch, b. 1707
        - 317 Elisabetha, b. 1710
        - 318 Hans, b. 1715
    - 32 Anna Oesch, b. 1660
    - 33 Michel, b. 1662, d. as infant
    - 34 Michel Oesch, b. 1663
    - 35 Barbli Oesch, b. 1666
    - 36 Elsbeth Oesch, b. 1668
    - 37 Hans Oesch, b. 1671
      - m. Christina Linder
        - 371 Hans Oesch, b. 1703
        - 372 Peter Oesch, b. 1706
        - 373 Christian Oesch, b. 1707
        - 374 Anna K. Oesch, b. 1714
- 38 Magdalena Oesch, b. 1673
- 39 Cathrine, b. 1677
- 4 Michel Oesch, b. 1633
  - m 1) 1665, Anna Moser, ved. Stegmann
  - m 2) 1686, Margret D'Allenbach (presumed here)
    - 41 Ulrich Oesch, b. 1673
      - m. Anna Berger
        - 411 Mattys Oesch, b. 1703
    - 42 Nicolaus Oesch, b. 1676
      - m. Catharina Oschsenbein
        - 421 Anna, b. 1702
        - 422 Nicolaus, b. 1705
        - 423 Magdalena, b. 1712
    - 43 Casper Oesch, b. 1680
      - m. ? unable to decipher
        - 431 \_\_\_\_\_, b. 1710 (unable to decipher)
        - 432 Nicolaus Oesch, b. 1705
    - 44 Hans Oesch, b. 1687
  - 5 Barbli Oesch, b. 1637
    - m. 1675 Michel Stägmann
  - 6 Ulrich Oesch, b. 1638 ("disobedient Anabaptist")
    - m 1) 16\_\_, Barbara Ritschard
    - m 2) 1675, Elsbeth Bichsel
      - 61 Hans Oesch, b. 1664
      - 62 Babi Oesch, b. 1667
      - 63 Anna Oesch, b. 1670
      - 64 Elsbeth Oesch, b. 1673
      - 65 Magdalena Oesch, b. 1677
      - 66 Cathrina Oesch, b. 1679
      - 67 Ulrich Oesch, b. 1680
      - 68 Christian Oesch, b. 1684
        - m 1) 1713, Cathy Wenger
        - m 2) 1749, Madle Farnie
        - m 3) 1769, Catharina Moschberger, widow of Christian Bichsel
          - 681 Ulrich Oesch, b. 1716
            - Built the Oesch house that exists today. This Oesch line resides in Schwarzenegg today.
          - 682 Barbara Oesch, b. 1718
          - 683 Cathrina Oesch, b. 1723
    - 7 Elsbeth Oesch, 1639-1640
    - 8 Peter Oesch, b. 1640
      - m. 1665, Anni Stägmann
        - 81 Anna Oesch, b. 1665
        - 82 Hans Oesch, b. 1667
        - 83 Elsbeth, b. 1669-d. as infant
        - 84 Michel Oesch, b. 1669
        - 85 Cathrin Oesch, b. 1672
        - 86 Peter Oesch, b. 1674
        - 87 Barbara Oesch, b. 1680
        - 88 Elsbeth Oesch, b. 1680
    - 9 Elsbeth Oesch, b. 1642
      - m. 1675, Hans Stägmann