



First family coming home

By CHRIS SHOLLY Staff Writer

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Members of one of the first and oldest families of Campbelltown will gather in the village for a reunion this weekend.

Descendents of Philip Wolfersberger will tour Campbelltown and central Pennsylvania to learn more about their family and its ancestors.

The Wolfersberger family's ties to the village began in 1785, when members bought the 352-acre Campbelltown Tract from Robert Coleman and began the expansion of the town, according to Campbelltown historian Don Rhoads.

"They owned some properties in town, including the Rising Sun, the old portion of the Twin Oaks Nursing Care Facility and the Alger Farmhouse across from the Londonderry Inn," he said. "They sold the property where the first school was established and where Salem UCC Church now stands and where Philip Wolfersberger is buried."

Campbelltown, which celebrated its 250th anniversary last year, was founded by Scots-Irishman John Campbell in 1759. It was his land that eventually ended up in the Coleman family.

Philip Wolfersberger, meanwhile, was born in Heidelberg Township in 1739. His father, Johannes, emigrated from Switzerland in 1730 and settled in the Schaefferstown area. Philip served in the Revolutionary War as a first lieutenant in the 5th Company, 2nd Battalion, of the Lancaster County

Militia, participating in the Flying Camp and Long Island campaign of 1776 as well as campaigns in and around Philadelphia, said Jon Rahn, spokesman for the family group.

Philip had seven sons with his first

wife, Margaret, then remarried at age 77 and had one son with his second wife, Charlotte, according to Rhoads' history of Campbelltown. The Wolfersbergers built homes, barns and stables on their property. Philip died in 1824 and is buried in the Salem United Church of Christ cemetery. His son, Philip Jr., became a county commissioner in 1820 and a state representative in 1826. He established the town of Union Deposit in Dauphin County in 1845.

Rhoads said it was called Union Deposit because it was a deposit for all the grain and produce that was shipped on the canal by Philip Wolfersberger, who owned several boats. He died in 1846 and is buried in the same cemetery with his father.

Rahn, Philip Wolfersberger's fifth great-grandson, said the gathering was proposed about a year ago by one of the family's board members, Wendell O'Reilly, who thought it would be a great idea to have it in honor of the 280th anniversary of Wolfersberger in America.

"All of the Wolfensbergers, at that time, went by Wolfersberger. That was how the English spelled it, and it stuck," Rahn said. "Johannes and Anna Margaretha Ensminger Wolfersberger arrived on the (ship) Thistle of Glasgow in Philadelphia harbor on Aug. 29, 1730, with three children. They had recently hailed from the Alsace region of Europe."

The group plans to tour the Landis Valley Museum in Lancaster County and will meet on Saturday at

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Salem in Campbelltown, which sits on land, including the graveyard, donated by Philip Wolfersberger.

Rahn said the meeting at the church will start at 10 a.m. Rhoads will speak about the town and the Wolfersbergers' role in its expansion.

The family will have lunch at the Campbelltown Volunteer Fire Co. fairgrounds Saturday and then tour the area for other Wolfersberger haunts, such as Bindnagles Lutheran Church in North Londonderry Township, Union Deposit and Schaefferstown, Rahn said. On Saturday night, there will be a talk about the origins of the family in Switzerland following a Pennsylvania Dutch dinner at the Lantern Lodge in Myerstown.

About 50 people are expected to attend the gathering this weekend, he said.

"We have folks in from Switzerland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Tennessee, Kentucky, Texas and Washington states," he said.

On Sunday morning, the Rev. Dwight Hein, Salem's pastor, will hold a 9:30 a.m. service at Salem in honor of the family by performing an old German Reformed service.

Rahn himself is no stranger to Campbelltown.

"I've been there quite a few times recently with my research on the family," he said. "I have taken photographs of the entire old section of the cemetery. ... I think Campbelltown is a nice, quaint Pennsylvania town, smaller than Mechanicsburg, where I grew up. It has some very nice history, but sprawl is taking its toll."

Rahn said he feels proud of his heritage and what his ancestors accomplished in America.

"I believe it speaks highly of my historical Swiss roots, the nature of their mettle," he said. "They were not lazy people. It's good to know that some of your heritage and ancestry did some real good in the world."

Rahn said he thinks his ancestors would be amazed at the progress of the town but would be disappointed the Wolfersberger line has mostly died out in the area.

"My own line is down to three living Wolfersbergers, by name," he said. "(Nevertheless,) two people who made the arduous journey across the Atlantic in July and August of 1730 have quite a legacy living to this day in the U.S.A. I think they would be proud of that."

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