

THE WIDENERS IN AMERICA

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The Wideners in America by Howard H. Widener

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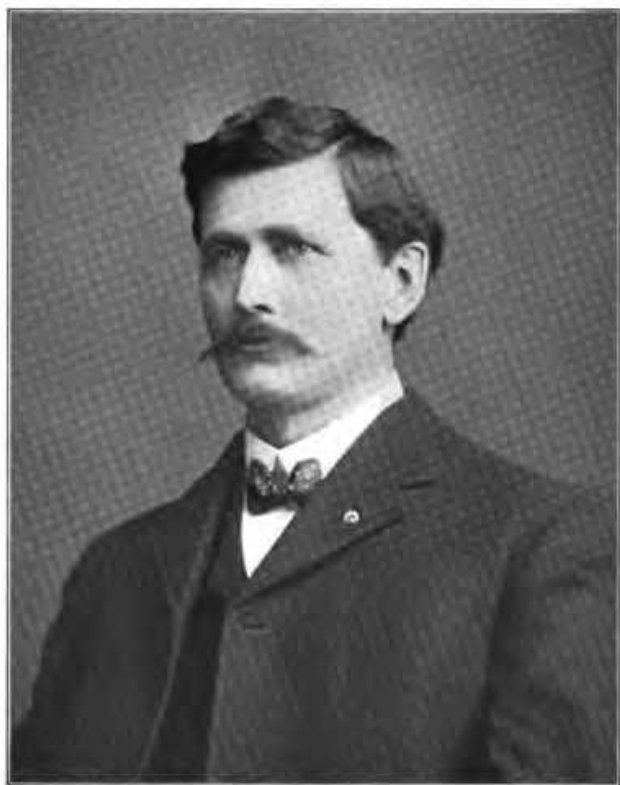
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HOWARD H. WIDENER

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—IN AMERICA—

By

HOWARD H. WIDENER,

Rochester,

N. Y.



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GREAT men die and are forgotten,
Wise men speak ; their words of wisdom
Perish in the ears that hear them,
Do not reach the generations
That, as yet unborn, are waiting
In the great, mysterious darkness
Of the speechless days that shall be!

On the grave posts of our fathers
Are no signs, no figures painted ;
Who are in those graves we know not,
Only know they are our fathers.

LONGFELLOW.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Widener family is of very ancient origin, and may be discovered in very old genealogical and historical works. The beginning, no doubt, was among the early German tribes, but correct and authentic information is lost in the mists of centuries past. The name at the present time is quite common in the Palatinate and Wurtemberg, Germany. A search among the old church records shows the familiar names of John, Jacob, William and Henri, though in the German, but the relationship is only a matter of conjecture. The original and correct spelling is "Weidner," and now is found in the United States and Canada, spelled Widner, Widener, Weidener and Widenor. The better spelling in English to retain the original pronunciation would seem to be "Wide-ner," as in the German the *ei* is pronounced *i*. The spelling, "Wid-ner" is liable to be pronounced with the first syllable short and change the name entirely. This spelling and pronunciation is used by some branches of the family.

There are Armorial Bearings recorded of the following families :

Weidner, of Nurnberg, Weidner of Rothenburg (Bavaria), Weidner Von Billerburg (Austria). Also of the following similar names : Widmar, Germany, Widmer of Bale, Widmer of Winterthur, Wiedmer of Saleure, Wiedner of Prussia. (Mr. Leo Culleton, 92 Piccadilly, London, W., can furnish Armorial Bearings of anyone of the above families in the correct Heraldic colors.)

One branch, at least, is known to have settled in Holland ; concerning this branch I have been able to obtain only a limited amount of information. I quote from a letter, which explains it-

self, "The letter addressed to my brother-in-law Jan William Weidner, 12 Amsdel, Amsterdam, was delivered to me as I am married to his sister Maria Elizabeth and Mr. J. W. Weidner died Feb'y. 8, 1900. He was the son of Wigbold Bathasar Weidner who died at the age of 87 years, and his father was called Jan Weidner and was born in the year 1787. Jan Weidner began his musical career when eleven years of age, was a band master in the army and served under Napoleon and took part in the Russian campaign. Later on he was a music teacher in Haarlen and married Maria Elizabeth Von Harlen. There was born four children, three sons and one daughter. He was a Knight in the order of "Eikenkroon", was very respectable and had a very interesting career." This letter was written in Holland Dutch and was translated with some difficulty, and further stated that the Jan Weidner may have been an uncle to the names I sent, and was signed by Jozna VedElst, Jr., Dealer in wines, 11 Kinderhinsrest, Haarlen, Holland.

The Wideners appear to have been German Baptists and Lutherans and were no doubt persecuted in the fatherland as many of the followers of Luther were, and suffered from the continued state of war that followed the Reformation. The emigration to this country appears to have commenced about 1730, when Penn's Colony was made a retreat for religious toleration. Weidners have continued to emigrate to the present time. The old families whose descendants appear hereafter came at or about the same time, landed at Philadelphia and settled in the same neighborhood, in one of the original counties laid out by Penn. From the fact that they were neighbors, and in some instances, their land adjoining, it is only reasonable to infer that they were related, but I have been unable to discover what that relationship was, and where there is any tradition or record to show any, it is given.

Many of the Weidners in Germany were men of learning, not a few professors and preachers in the Universities, and many of the Americans still cling to the Lutheran faith, and some are preachers in that church. In only rare instances have any been found, who have changed to the Roman Catholic.

In fraternal societies, many are Masons, Odd Fellows and Knights of Pythias.

They have served their adopted country in all its wars, and have been truly patriotic ; they were with Washington at Valley Forge, they fought on the frontier in 1812, some went to Mexico in the contest with that country, and died or were killed and went down to unknown graves ; they fought in nearly every battle of the Rebellion on the side of the north, struggling in the Wilderness, wounded upon Lookout Mountain, stood unflinchingly behind the guns at Gettysburg and marched with Sherman to the sea.

In compiling this Genealogy all available sources of information have been consulted for records and facts. All records of Deeds, Administrations and Wills are given in full as far as they throw any light on the subject of inquiry, as they are the only sources of information when the memory and traditions of the living are exhausted. The information contained in this book has been obtained entirely from members of the family and where records are referred to, the records themselves are given. No attempt has been made to establish relationship beyond the memory of the living, except where positive proof appears. The records are given with such remarks and explanations as seem relevant and the reader is left to draw his own conclusions.

But few of the kindred have been able to trace their ancestry beyond their grandfather, and some by their correspondence, seem to assume that he was the ONLY Widener, and that I must know all about him, when the ancestor would be John, Peter, Jacob or William, and nearly all the old families had a son by that name, and I would be given the choice from several of the same name, with no facts to indicate which one. I have deemed it best to give such facts and traditions as I have been able to find and leave the kindred to choose their own ancestor.

The search for these facts have occupied some years and have been collected at odd times during a busy professional life under many disadvantages. All the records have been obtained from professional searchers at considerable expense, and I regret that I am unable to pursue the inquiry further.

I regret the incomplete condition of this book, many of the kindred have failed to respond after repeated solicitations, others have furnished incomplete records and others have not been found and lines of descent have been lost entirely. The records furnished have been copied and compared carefully, but no doubt mistakes will be found. Many of the sketches fail to do justice to the subject, due to the fact that proper information was not at hand. While a majority of the kindred have been uniformly kind and courteous in assisting, some have remained silent and deprived others of their history and acquaintance. The ladies of the family have done very much, and without their aid this book would never have reached its present dimensions, and to them we owe a debt of gratitude. This book is intended to restore the lost links of relationship and make the descendants again acquainted, and as far as possible to advise them of their ancestors, the present residence and address of the living and the last resting place of the dead. The writer has despaired of making this book complete in detail as that would require unlimited time and funds and has determined to publish what has been collected, before it may be lost, and live in hopes that some one may take the subject up and do it better justice. Many have contributed a subscription to aid in the publication, and to each the undersigned wishes to extend his sincere thanks. Nevertheless if this book shall accomplish the design of restoring lost relationship and making the kindred again acquainted, and proving that the Weidners are of good old German stock, typical Americans, loyal to their adopted country and holding their own in all branches of learning, occupations and professions, the labor spent in its preparation will not have been in vain.

Rochester, N. Y., Jan. 1, 1904.

HOWARD H. WIDENER.