

Cautionary Notes About Lillian Hull's 1945 Book on the Stahl Family

In 1945 Lillian Elder Hull published *Genealogy of the Family of William Stahl and His Wife Elizabeth Boyer Stahl*. The first few pages of the book contain several serious errors, particularly regarding Henry Stahl who lived in what is now Franklin County, Pennsylvania and who died in 1790. Over the course of the past thirty three years, I have visited county courthouses, historical societies and local archives in several Pennsylvania counties, tramped through most of the cemeteries that have Stahl descendants, consulted printed sources and have yet to find any documents that support her statements about Henry and his family.

She cited no sources but relied on second-hand information. Most of her material on the pre-1800 Stahls evidently came from John Meloy Stahl (1860 – 1944). John's great-great-grandfather would have been the Henry who died in 1790. However, since this John Stahl was four generations (and more than 150 years) removed from the original ancestor, and since Hull cites no documentation, it is impossible to know how much of her information might have been garbled or embellished.

It might be useful to tackle some of the major issues raised by her book, one at a time.

What's up with Eugene?

She claims that the earliest Henrys had the middle name Eugene, but this is simply not true. Neither the Henry who died in 1790 nor his son who died in 1816 used that middle name (or even had a middle name). In the numerous numerous records relating to Henry and his son Henry there is not a single deed, will or probate record, naturalization record, church record, tax record, child's birth record, or court record that refers to anyone named Henry *Eugene* Stahl.

Specifically, for the elder Henry (died 1790):

Naturalization record, Maryland (1764): listed as "Heinrich Stahl"

Land records, Frederick Co., MD (1756, 1761, 1764, 1770): listed as "Henry Stahl"

Original land patents from the Penns (1765, 1772, 1785): listed as "Henry Stahl"

Land records, Cumberland Co., PA (1767, 1770, 1772, 1777, 1779, 1780, 1782): listed as "Henry Stahl"

Land records, Bedford Co., PA (1777, 1780, 1782, 1783): listed as "Henry Stahl"

Witness to baptisms in Salem Reformed Church, MD (1772, 1773, 1774): listed as "Henrich Stahl"

Tax records, Cumberland County (1751, 1753, 1762, 1764 – 1770): listed as "Henry Stahl"

Tax records, Franklin Co., PA (1786, 1788, 1789): listed as "Henry Stahl"

Probate and estate inventory, Franklin Co, PA (1790): listed as "Henry Stahl"

..for the younger Henry (died 1816):

U.S. census, 1790: listed as "Hendry Stall"

U.S. census (1800, 1810): listed as "Henry Stall"

Birth records for his children: listed as "Henry Stahl"

Probate and cemetery records, Somerset Co, PA (1816): listed as "Henry Stahl"

... and for both Henrys:

John Meloy Stahl's application to the Sons of the American Revolution (1909) lists

his ancestors as simply “Henry Stahl.”

As it can be seen, Henry Stahl is always just Henry. Nor does the name “Eugene” ever appear in any of the Stahl family members down through the generations even though Germans were well known for recycling the names of parents and grandparents. Simply put, Henry Eugene Stahl never existed. The name was Hull’s own invention with no proof of any kind to back it up.

The first immigrant

In attempting to trace the earliest Stahls her book begins:

History tells us that the first Stahls that came to America were Mennonites. They came from Berne, Switzerland, by way of the Rhine—as all did—to their brethren in Holland, and because they came from Holland, they were called Pennsylvania Dutch.

In 1711 Switzerland expelled all the Mennonites from within its border.... Among those expelled was Henry Eugene Stahl. He arrived in Rotterdam and sailed from there for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which he reached in March 1712.

These Mennonites settled on Pequa (sic) Creek, Conestoga, in what was organized in 1729 into Lancaster county.

Henry Eugene Stahl died and is buried in the oldest cemetery at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the exact location of which is in dispute.

The Stahl family can be traced through the proceedings of the Colonial Council.

First, her explanation of the term “Pennsylvania Dutch” is incorrect. Early German settlers to Pennsylvania spoke “Deutsch,” or German, and were ultimately labeled Pennsylvania Dutch due to their own language, not any connection with Holland.

Mennonites did found a settlement at Pequea Creek in about 1710, but no archival or published source lists anyone named Stahl among the earliest settlers. *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* describes the original settlement of that area as comprising settlers who came directly from Switzerland, not Holland (p.136). Mombert’s *Authentic History of Lancaster County* (1869) lists them as Swiss Mennonites named “Hans Meylin, his son Martin, and John Hans Herr, John Rudolph Bundely, Martin Kendig, Jacob Miller, Martin Oborholtz, Hans Funk, Michael Oborholtz, and Wendell Bowman” (p. 413).

An original warrant from 5 July 1712 lists the individuals to whom lots of land were subsequently sold as:

Henry Shank	Ulrich Brackbill	Augustine Widower	Alexander Fridley	Martin Miller
George Snavely	Christian Musser	Andrew Shultz	John Fouts	Jacob Stein
John Hickman	John Bowman	Valentine Miller	Jacob Hain	John Herr
Henry Carpenter	Daniel Ferree	Isaac Lefevre	Christian Stoner	John Beiers
Hans Lein	Abraham Smith	John Jacob Hoover	Septimus Robinson	Samuel Hess
Samuel Boyer	John Musgrove.			

The list obviously contains nobody with the surname of Stahl. In fact, neither Mombert’s book nor the earlier history of the county by I. Daniel Rupp (*History of Lancaster County*, 1844) contains any reference to a single Stahl as one of the early settlers anywhere in the county.

In addition, there seems to be no reference to a ship arriving in 1712, either in terms of published lists of Mennonites or in terms of general migration from Germany or Switzerland. In fact, Richard Warren Davis, in *Emigrants, Refugees, and Prisoners*, notes that the years between 1711 and 1717 had almost no Mennonite immigration to Pennsylvania at all.

The earliest Henry

There should be three Henrys if Hull's account is correct: 1) the father Henry (#1 - the original immigrant, buried in Lancaster county), 2) Henry (#2) the son who died in 1790 and is buried in Antrim township, and 3) his son Henry (#3) who died in Somerset, Pennsylvania in 1816. In fact, the earliest Henry for which any documentation exists is the Henry #2 who died in 1790, but there are no real records for him until about 1750, in Antrim township (now part of Franklin County).

Originally the area around Antrim township (which stayed in the same place even as county boundaries were changed through the years) would have been part of Chester county (1680s through 1729), but there are no land records, wills, estate, or tax records for anyone named Stahl for that time period in Chester county records.

The township passed to Lancaster county in 1729. Those county archives have estate records for Anna Mary Stahl (1753), John Stahl (1765), and Sarah Stahl (1783). In addition, a Jacob Stahl purchased a house lot in Lancaster town in 1740. However, no records exist for anyone named Henry Stahl. After 1750 Antrim township became part of Cumberland county, and many land records start to appear there that mention a Henry Stahl, but they are for Henry #2 rather than his father.

Hull also states that the Stahl family can be traced through the proceedings of the "Colonial Council," yet a search of the *Colonial Records of Pennsylvania* and the various volumes of the Pennsylvania Archives series has failed to produce any reference to a Henry Stahl prior to 1750.

Thus, there are no records available that shed any light at all on who the Henry #1 might have been, if indeed he was the father of Henry #2, or if he even existed. Nothing connects the later, well documented, Henry #2 to any parent of that same name. Since no records have been found for a Henry #1 the most logical conclusion is that there are only really two of them (#2 and #3), not three.

In fact, evidence suggests that Henry #2 was actually the first immigrant to North America. The book *Pennsylvania German Pioneers* (1934) records a Henrich Stahl as arriving at Philadelphia from Rotterdam on 26 September 1741 aboard the ship St. Mark. Evidence suggesting that this might be him comes from the fact that some fellow passengers on the ship who appear next to him on the passenger list -- Johannes Flender (or Flenner) and Christian Ohrendorf -- also ended up living close to Henry near Hagerstown, Maryland. Flenner was a member of the Salem Reformed Church in Maryland, the same church where fellow members Henry and "his housewife Anna" witnessed the baptisms of other parishioners' children in 1772, 1773, and 1774. Flenner was also a companion of Henry when both were naturalized in 1764 in Maryland. Prior to immigrating, Flenner was a member of the Krombach Reformed Church, near Siegen, Germany, so the circumstantial evidence suggests that Henry and the others migrated together from that part of Germany, settled in the same general area, and continued to

affiliate with the Reformed Church. This whole pattern of affiliations seems to point to the best possibility for identifying him prior to about 1750.

The family religion

As to the supposed Mennonite ties, Henry #2 (d. 1790) had nine children, but there is no evidence that any of them was a Mennonite. As noted, all available records and cemetery sites tie the family to the German Reformed Church or other Protestant denominations, sometimes Lutheran.

Furthermore, many of Henry #2's sons served in the army during the American Revolution and his son Henry #3 (d. 1816) was probably a captain during the War of 1812. If this was a pacifist Mennonite family, this is not what one would expect, especially if they had been expelled from Europe because of their pacifism. Mennonite background? It doesn't square logically and existing records don't back it up.

Was Henry Stahl even in her line of descent?

Hull begins to trace her own ancestral line with William Stahl whom she assumes is a descendant of Henry (d. 1790), but this is a huge error.

The records surrounding Henry's probate proceedings and the distribution of his lands make it very clear that he had six sons – 1) Michael, 2) Leonard, 3) John, 4) Jacob, 5) Henry, and 6) Daniel – as well as three daughters - 7) Susannah, 8) Barbara, and 9) Magdalene, the last deceased prior to 1790. He did not have a son named William.

Later work done by other researchers has shown that, in fact, the William claimed by Hull actually was the son of Louisa Catherine (Otz) and Johann George Stahl. Hence, there is no connection between William and Henry at all and she made a serious mistake in terms of the origins of her branch of the family.

Final thoughts on relying on Hull's statements

It is unfortunate that many Stahl researchers seem to repeat Hull's mistakes when attempting to fill in the pre-1750 portion of the family history. Most researchers have probably not even seen her publication firsthand, but rather simply pass on what others have written or posted, especially on sites like Ancestry.com. The ability of false information to be replicated quickly via the Internet has made the problem especially troublesome. It would be unwise to spread her errors even further. Other research on this line of the Stahl family exists and is more reliable than her flawed book.