



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 115

Name: Rufner, Barbara (Leininger)

Dates: (c. 1743- bef. Sep 1824)

Colonial Society: PA

Date added to ROA: 3-3-2024

Service: Woman of Distinction: Abducted and held captive by Indians in 1755 until her successfully planned escape 3 1/2 years later

Authority: Linn, John B. and Wm. H. Egle, M.D., ed. by. "Narrative of Marie Le Roy and Barbara Leininger." Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, Vol. VII (Harrisburg: E.K. Meyers, State Printer, 1890), 429-438

Biography:

Barbara Leininger was born about 1743 in Reutlingen, Wurttemberg, (now Germany). Her parents were Sebastian and Regina, who emigrated to Pennsylvania with their three children, Barbara, Regina and an elder brother. The family settled in the Pennsylvania frontier that later became known as Berks County in 1745.

The family, promised religious freedom and opportunity, experienced a tragic reality just 10 years later. Barbara, her younger sister, Regina, and several neighbors were captured by "Alleghany" Indians when Barbara was about 12 years old during the Penn's Creek massacre of October 16, 1755. The Swiss/German settlers were caught in the midst of a complex tangle of Indigenous relationships, in which they were forced to take sides between the French and British, as part of the French and Indian War. Barbara watched as her father and brother were killed, among other brutal murders. Held captive for nearly three-and-one-half years, Barbara made it to Philadelphia, where she gave her distressing account of her captivity, which included years of forced labor among the Indigenous and French, and her chilling escape.

A German language account of Barbara's ordeal, along with that of Maria Le Roy's, a fellow captive, was first printed in 1759 and later republished in 1909. It became a warning to any who would consider settling the Pennsylvania frontier, at least until the war settled the matter in 1763.

Barbara married Peter Rufner on February 1, 1761, and together they raised three children, Regina, George, and Conrad, in Berks County.

Barbara died September 6, 1805, age 61/62, in Bucks County and is buried at the Allegheny Union Cemetery Old in Mohnton.

Her story of bravery in the face of such adversity serves to remind us of the complicated history of frontier settlers, and those who made sacrifices based on the promise of a better life.