

# Henry Sylvester Jacoby

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As an immigrant from the Palatinate, Germany, in September 1741, Peter Jacoby, the Pioneer, landed in Philadelphia and settled in nearby Bucks Co., Pa. Between the landing of the pioneer and the birth of his great, great, great grandson Henry Sylvester Jacoby four generations of farmers intervened, two skilled as blacksmiths, one as a mason, and all of them residing in Bucks Co., Pa. or nearby. This background of farming and trades in the lives of his paternal ancestors led Professor Jacoby, in the preface of the Jacoby Family Genealogy published in 1930, to say, “The author will never cease to be grateful to God that he was born in the open country and spent his childhood and early youth on a farm with all its opportunities for unhurried observation of plants (including weeds), flowers, and fruit; of insects and birds; of domestic animals as well as a few wild ones; and which instilled a love of nature which has been a constant joy in life.” “If the advantages of present day Agricultural education” (1930), “had then been available the author’s life work might have been quite different.”

The life activities of Henry Sylvester Jacoby centered around his family, his chosen vocation of technical education, and his avocations of genealogy, and church service.

His formal education began in 1861 when he entered public school, and he continued in the public school until 1870. During the summers of 1864-1868 he attended a private summer school under David W. Hess. From 1870-1872 he attended the Excelsior Normal Institute (an Academy) ; for the school year 1872-73 he was enrolled in the preparatory department of Lehigh University; and from 1873-77 he attended Lehigh University. He pursued a course in civil engineering and upon graduation received the degree of civil engineer, C. E. Throughout his life, while health permitted, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the educational work carried on at Lake Chautauqua, N. Y. Beginning in 1878 he completed the four-year course of study of the pioneer class of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. During the next four years he completed a number of supplementary reading courses, and the Chautauqua Normal Course as an aid in conducting Teacher Training Classes.

His technical engagements, beginning at the age of 16, included a summer in an architect’s office in Allentown, Pa.; another summer on surveys for the location of the Allentown and Coopersburg turnpike; research in the Recorder’s office of Bucks Co. and the necessary drawing to trace the history of certain lands in Durham and Springfield Townships. He worked seven months as a stadia rodman on the Lehigh Topographical Corps, Second Geological Survey of Pa.; a year as transitman on gauging the Red River in Louisiana; six years as chief draughtsman

in the U. S. Engineer office in Memphis, Tenn.; and four years as an Instructor in Civil Engineering at Lehigh University. From 1890 to 1922 he served successively as Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor of Bridge Engineering and Graphics in the College (later School) of Civil Engineering at Cornell University. He was Professor in charge of the Department from 1890 until his retirement in 1922.

While teaching he was also busily engaged in writing textbooks to be used in the courses he was teaching. He was the joint author with Mansfield Merriman of "Roofs and Bridges, Parts I, II, III, and IV," a college text widely used and frequently revised; and a joint author with Roland P. Davis of "Foundations of Bridges and Buildings". He also was the author of "Plain Lettering", and of "Structural Details", as well as smaller texts in pamphlet form, and articles on technical subjects which from time to time appeared in engineering periodicals.

Professor Jacoby was a member of many professional and educational societies, and served actively in the work of some of those organizations. As a long-time member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, he was elected in 1939 to Honorary membership in that Society. He entered into the activities of the Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education (now known as the American Society for Engineering Education), serving as Secretary from 1900-1902, and as President for the year 1915-1916. From 1906 to 1911 he served as Chairman of the Committee on Wooden Bridges and Trestles of the American Railway Engineering Association. For a year, 1894-1895, he served as Secretary, and during the year 1900-1901, as Chairman of the Section on Mechanical Science and Engineering of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Other Society affiliations included the American Society of Testing Materials, Washington Academy of Sciences, American Association of University Professors, Pennsylvania-German Society, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Lehigh Co. (Pa.) Historical Society, National Genealogical Society, Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, Cosmos Club of Washington, D. C, the Cornell Society of Engineers, and the Cornell University Club. In recognition of his technical and research abilities he was elected to the honorary societies of Sigma Xi, and Tau Beta Pi. In 1931 he was elected to Honorary membership in the Washington Society of Engineers. During the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of Lehigh University, he was awarded the Honorary degree of Doctor of Engineering by that University.

Most of his paternal ancestors were members of the Reformed Church or of the Mennonite Church, and a family background of church loyalty and support characterized Professor Jacoby throughout life. From early years he was active in the work of the local Methodist Church to which he belonged. He gave much time and energy to the field of religious education in the leadership of Bible classes, both in his church and at Cornell University. He also

served as a Director on the Board of Directors of the Cornell University Christian Association, and of the Ithaca Young Men's Christian Association.

His efforts in the interest of interdenominational Sunday School work included service as Secretary of the Northampton County (Pa.) Sunday School Association for the year 1899-1900; President of the Tompkins County (N.Y.) Sunday School Association from 1899 to 1915; and as a member of the Executive Committee of the New York State Sunday School Association from 1900 to 1921, the last four years of which he was chairman of this committee. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the International Sunday School Association from 1914 to 1925, and Chairman of its Committee on Field Work for four years. Other service included the position of Director of the Community Training School of Religious Education, Ithaca, 1915-1917.

As an avocation, Professor Jacoby began the collection of genealogical data concerning his near relatives during the summers of 1875 and 1876. The death of his father in July of the latter year increased his desire to collect more data of this nature. From 1875 to 1914 his work in the field of genealogy was more or less regular but in the latter year he began to devote much more time to correspondence with members of the family. In a few years he came to the conviction that it might be possible to trace practically every descendant of the pioneer, Peter Jacoby. After his retirement from active service at Cornell University, Professor Jacoby devoted most of his time to continuing the correspondence, visiting members of the family, especially the older members. He carried on research in the Library of Congress; in the records of the Geographic Division of the U. S. Census Bureau; and in the U. S. Pension Bureau. To enable him to devote more time to the work, he took up residence in Washington, D. C. In 1930, at the age of 73, he submitted for publication the wealth of information contained in the "Jacoby Family Genealogy, Henry S. Jacoby", a volume of nearly 700 pages. Eleven years later he published the "Supplement to the Jacoby Family Genealogy". This latter volume contained additional family history that he had accumulated. The Council of the Institute of American Genealogy, in recognition of his work in this field, awarded him a "Certificate of Merit in Genealogy".

On May 18, 1880, he married Laura Louise Saylor of Bethlehem, Pa. Their three sons were graduated from Cornell University; John Vincent in 1908 with the degree of B.S. in Agriculture; Hurlbut Smith in 1908 with the degree of A.B., and C. E. in 1910; and Freeman Steel in 1910 with the degree of B.S. in Agriculture.

Professor Jacoby was a student and a scholar throughout life. As a teacher he had a keen and analytical mind, high educational standards, and a vast accumulated storehouse of pertinent matter as an aid in his teaching. His was a master-mind in collecting, codifying and correlating information in various fields. He was an outstanding

example of patience and perseverance; a man of deep religious convictions and loyalty to his church affiliations; and an educator who became nationally and professionally known and respected in his fields of endeavor. Professor Jacoby was a man who brought fame and recognition to Cornell University as well as to himself.

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