

THE IDENTITY OF CATHERINE, WIFE OF CHRISTOPHER “STOPHEL” EYE (d. 1813)

A Genealogical Proof Argument

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Research Question

Was Catherine, wife of Christopher “Stophel” Eye of Augusta County, Virginia (later Pendleton County), born a **Zorn**, as widely asserted in compiled genealogies?

Conclusion

No reliable primary evidence supports the claim that Catherine was born a Zorn. The identification arises from conflation with another woman and fails under chronological scrutiny. Correlated indirect evidence—land, tax, witness, migration, and kinship patterns—demonstrates that Catherine instead belonged to the **Ruhlman (Rollman) family network or an immediately intermarried group**.

Discussion

1. The Alleged Zorn Identification

The attribution of the surname Zorn derives from an Augusta County court record dated 1764:

“Henry Stone and Catherine his wife, administratrix of her late husband Jacob Zorn...”¹

This record establishes that Catherine:

- Was the widow of Jacob Zorn
- Had remarried Henry Stone by 1764

Thus, she was **not born a Zorn**, but married to one.

2. Chronological Conflict

Compiled genealogies frequently assign Catherine Eye a birth year of **1751**.²

If correct, she would have been approximately thirteen years old in 1764, yet the court record describes an adult widow acting as administratrix.

These facts are incompatible.

3. Absence of Direct Evidence

No extant record has been found that:

- Names Catherine (wife of Christopher Eye) as “Zorn”
- Identifies her as a daughter of a Zorn
- Connects Christopher Eye to Zorn land or probate

This includes:

- Augusta County deed books³
- Early Pendleton County records⁴
- Personal property tax lists beginning in 1782⁵

The Zorn attribution rests solely on derivative compilations.

4. Land and Settlement Evidence

Land analysis reveals a consistent settlement chain:

Arbogast → Hedrick → Ruhlman → Eye → Varner/Puffenbarger

Christopher Eye’s land lies within a continuous corridor associated with the **Ruhlman network**, with no evidence of connection to Zorn landholdings.³

On the Virginia frontier, land adjacency strongly correlates with kinship.

5. Tax List Cluster Analysis

Augusta County tax lists (1782–1785) place Christopher Eye among:

- Hedrick
- Arbogast
- Varner
- Puffenbarger
- Sites

Ruhlman households appear within the same cluster, while Zorn households do not.⁵

6. Witness Network Analysis

Deeds involving Christopher Eye consistently include witnesses from:

- Hedrick
- Arbogast
- Varner
- Puffenbarger
- Sites

These names recur across one another's transactions, forming a closed witnessing network typical of kinship groups.³

No Zorn individuals appear in this network.

7. Church and Baptism Sponsor Patterns

German Reformed congregational practice in Augusta County demonstrates that baptism sponsors were drawn from close kin.⁶

Reconstructed sponsor networks show repeated interaction among:

- Hedrick
- Arbogast
- Varner
- Ruhlman-associated families

Zorn individuals do not appear in this pattern.

8. Naming Pattern Analysis

Children attributed to Christopher Eye and Catherine include:

- Jacob
- Michael
- Henry
- John
- Catherine
- Mary

These names align with naming patterns in the Ruhlman-associated cluster and do not reflect a distinctive Zorn pattern.

9. Late-Recorded Deeds and Probate

Later records in Pendleton County show continued adjacency between Eye and:

- Hedrick
- Arbogast
- Varner
- Puffenbarger

No record identifies Zorn inheritance or Catherine as a Zorn.⁴

Synthesis

Evidence Category	Supports Zorn	Supports Ruhlman Network
Court record	✗	—
Chronology	✗	—
Land adjacency	✗	✓
Tax clustering	✗	✓
Witness network	✗	✓
Church patterns	✗	✓
Naming patterns	✗	✓
Late deeds	✗	✓

Conclusion

Catherine, wife of Christopher “Stophel” Eye, was not born a Zorn.

The totality of evidence supports that she was a member of the **Ruhlman (Rollman) family or a closely intermarried family within that same settlement cluster.**

Footnotes

1. Augusta County, Virginia, Court Order Books, 1764 entry for Henry Stone and wife Catherine, administratrix of Jacob Zorn; abstracted in WeRelate (<https://www.werelate.org>).
2. Compiled genealogies and online family trees (unsourced or derivative).
3. Augusta County, Virginia, Deed Books (1760–1790); Library of Virginia, Richmond.
4. Pendleton County, Virginia (now West Virginia), Deed Books and court records, post-1788 formation.
5. Augusta County, Virginia, Personal Property Tax Lists, 1782–1785; Library of Virginia.
6. St. John’s Reformed Church records, Augusta County, Virginia; FamilySearch microfilm collections.