

"Historical Sketch of the Village of Hopewell from its Settlement to Present Days"

Centennial speech, presented in Hopewell Borough, July 4, 1876

The original handwritten document, entitled "The Historical Sketch of the Village of Hopewell", was found in the cornerstone of the Presbyterian Chapel when it was opened in 1923.

The speech was prepared by a committee consisting of: Ralph Ege, James Ewing, William A. Weart, R.M. Rankin, G.M. Fetter, J.N. Golden, R. Slack, Mrs. Sarah Weart and Miss E.H. Boggs, for presentation on July 4, 1876. The speech was delivered by Ross Slack, the editor of the Hopewell Herald.

From the diary of Ralph Ege: "July 4, 1876 -- The day was clear and warm, with a slight wind. Sunrise: salute 13 guns fired, ringing of bells, etc., etc. Soon after 9 o'clock, a procession formed and marched through the streets" ... parade with horses, carriages, cars, and wagons; music and orations, ... "Crowd dispersed about 6 o'clock... highly pleased with the day's entertainment."

- From "Hopewell's Past" by Betty Gantz, 1987

Historical Sketch of the Village of Hopewell

In preparing this sketch of the village of Hopewell your committee has endeavored to gather the facts, which can be proved rather than traditional history.

Two hundred years ago (1676) where now stands the peaceful village of Hopewell, with its quiet residences, happy homes and fertile valleys, the untutored savage roamed at will and enjoyed in the chase, or war, as best suited his savage inclination. The tribe of Indians which inhabited this portion of the county were a small division of or branch of the Leni Lenapes, themselves a branch of the Great Delawares. They had their camping grounds in many places in this vicinity, and the smoke from the wigwams curled heavenward in peaceful security. They were not so noble and commanding type of the red man as some other tribes, but were noted for their thieving propensities, which led them to steal alike from friend or foe.

At this time the face of the white man was comparatively unknown among them, and no hardy settlers had as yet forced their way through almost unsurmountable obstacles, to plant for themselves homes, and for their posterity an inheritance.

SETTLEMENT

The first settlement of which we have an authentic record as having been made in the northern portion of what is now known as Hopewell Township, was made on lands purchased by Edward Burroughs, of Long Island, and settled in 1694, by his son Thomas Burroughs. The place is now owned by Stephen B. Smith.

The next settlement was made by one Roger Parkes in a tract of land of which a portion is now occupied by Messrs. Andrew and Ralph Ege. The land was purchased in 1697. Roger

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Parkes and his son Roger Parkes, Jr. who was also an Indian Doctor, lived on this tract for many years and both lie buried on the farm.

The next settlement was made in 1706, by Jonathan Stout, from Middletown N.J. on the farm where Spencer A. Weart now resides, and from what we can gather, the land through here, with the exception of those named, had not been taken up at the last mentioned date.

We have now accounted for the first settlement of the territory embraced in this immediate neighborhood. From the time the first settlement was made by Thomas Burroughs in 1694, to 1706-10, the country was rapidly settled up.

As to when the township derived its name it is not known. Barbour's Historical Collections of New Jersey states that as early as 1699, the tract was known by the name Hopewell.

The territory known as Hopewell was at that time included in Hunterdon County and the courts previous to 1719 were held at Maidenhead, now Lawrenceville, and at Hopewell. In 1719, they were removed to Trenton.

Quoting from one above mentioned authority, we find that the first court held in the county was at Maidenhead. The magistrates present at that time were John Banbridge, Jacob Billerjean, Philip Smith, William Green, John Holcombe, Samuel Green, and Samuel Fitch. William Green and John Reading were first assessors of Hunterdon, and Ralph Hunt, the first collector.

The first Grand Jurors were: William Hixon, Samuel Howell, Robert Lanning, Henry Mershon, Richard Compton, George Woolsey, Joseph Reeder Jr., Thomas Standling, Richard Scudder, Timothy Baker, John Burroughs, John Titus, Samuel Everitt, John Ely, and Richard Lanning. John Muirhead, of Hopewell, was the first sheriff of Hunterdon Co. The first Jail for the county was built of logs, and was located at the fork of the road leading from Trenton to Pennington, and from Pennington to the eight mile ferry, or Washington's Crossing as it is now called. Of the first prisoners confined in this jail, one was for stealing a cow bell, and the other for stealing a book called the new testament.

Hopewell continued a portion of Hunterdon Co. until 1838, when Mercer County was formed from Hunterdon, Middlesex, and Burlington counties, and the northern boundary of Hopewell Township was made the northern boundary of Mercer County. The township of Hopewell was incorporated as a township in 1798.

LANDOWNERS -- 1776

In order to make this more particularly a Centennial History we will now give the names of the land owners one hundred years ago:

The farm where Messrs. Ralph and Andrew Ege now reside was occupied one hundred years ago by James Larison.

The next farm east was owned by David Hunt, now occupied by J. S. Hoagland and John Moore.

The next farm was owned by Abraham Golden, now occupied by J. Golden, A. L. Holcombe, and J. V. Blackwell.

The next farm south was then as now, the parsonage farm, purchased partly from Moses Hart, and James Madison, January 9th 1773, and still owned by the church, and occupied by the pastor.

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The next farm east was owned at that time by John Hart, one of those sterling patriots, whose name will ring in the pages of history for all time. The farm on which he lived is now owned by Joseph M. Phillips, Esq.

The next farm south was owned by Nathan Hixson, now owned and occupied by Mr. Charles Drake.

The next farm was owned by Stephen Blackwell, and a portion of it still remains in the family, being owned by Stephen Blackwell, a grandson of the first-mentioned.

The next farm was owned by Ebenezer Stout, now owned by Reuben McPherson, and William VanBuskirk, and a part of the farm occupied by Jonathan VanDyke.

The next farm east was owned by Andrew Stout, B. S. Hill, and D. W. Stout.

The next farm east was owned by David Stout, now occupied by Randolph Stout and Mrs. Doctor Baldwin.

The next farm now occupied by Spencer S. Weart, was one of the original three first settled in Hopewell.

At the time of which we write there were but six houses in the village of Hopewell:

The first house stood on the west side of the first Baptist Church within a few feet of where the E. M. Phillip's hotel now stands. It was owned by one Hepburn and occupied by Nethemiah Stout and Joseph Hough, and was used as a cake and beer shop.

The next house of which we can get any account was on the site of the one now occupied by Dr. J. A. Miller, and will be remembered by many as a long one-story house.

The next was the corner house now occupied by Mrs. Titus and Mrs. Dalrymple, was occupied by Priest John Blackwell, who kept a small store there about 1780.

The next house was the one now occupied by Daniel Housel, and was occupied at that time by one Obediah Seeley, a manufacturer of spinning wheels, then as a hat shop, a still house, and then as a private residence.

The next was the one now occupied by Charles Drake, occupied at that time we believe, by Nathan Hixson.

The first school building was where Mr. J. N. Golden now lives. In after years one was located near the east side of the First Baptist Church. The present school building was erected in 1855.

REVOLUTION

During the war of the Revolution the citizens took a deep interest in public affairs, and were very steadfast in their desires for Liberty. Many are the incidents and anecdotes related by the older citizens in reference to that time, but we have not space to record them here. We give here-with a list of the officers and soldiers who went from this portion of the township, kindly furnished us by Rev. Dr. Hale, of Pennington:

Company 1st: Captain Henry Phillips, Lieutenant Nathaniel Hunt, Lieutenant Daniel Howell, Ensign Timothy Titus.

Soldiers: John Hunt, Hilliam Larrison, Daniel Campbell, Elias Golden, Jacob Moore, John Muirhead, Jonathan Muirhead, Godfrey Chamberlain, Henry Burroughs (owes), Joseph Smith,

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Andrew Smith, Joseph Smith, Jonathan Smith, Abram Golden, Col. John VanCleve, Moore Scott, Peter Scott, Edmund Phillips, Scott Phillips, John Knowls, Levi Atchley, Jonathan Stout, Andrew Stout, George Muirhead, Levi Hart, Roger Larison, Zepulon Burroughs, John Field, William Moore, Nathaniel Hart, Titus Hart, Noah Chamberlain, John Cornell, Samuel Ege, Jacob Ege, Andrew Hough, Jacob Hough, Jonathan Bunn, Ezekiel Rose, Uriel Titus, William Smith, Andrew Phillips, Thomas Atchley.

Company 2: Captain Joab Houghton, 1st lieutenant Joseph Guild, 2nd lieutenant William Parks, Ensign Timothy Brush.

Soldiers: John Herin, Gershon Herin, William Stout, Francis Vannoy, Samuel Stout, James Hart, William Jewell, Jesse Stout, Andrew Morgan, Thomas Gates, Jacob Blackwell, Andrew Blackwell, Benjamin Blackwell, William Golden, Daniel (David?) Hunt, Johnson Titus, Solomon Titus, Enoch Armitage, John Van Kirk, Josiah Van Kirk, John Hunt, Stephen Hunt.

Company 3: Captain John Hunt, 1st lieutenant Ralph Leming, 1st. lieutenant Henry Mershon, Ensign Stephen Burroughs (owes).

Soldiers: Ralph Hunt:, Elijah Moore, Edward Temple, Joseph Insley, Abram Hart, Edward Atchley, Moses Moore, Joseph Burroughs, Amos Leming, Nathaniel Temple, Timothy Mershon, Edmund Roberts, Levi Ketcham, Samuel Beakes, John Hunt, William Moore, Ephraim Woolsey, Philip Hart, Jesse Moore, Ely Moore.

General Washington's army occupied the heights north of the village two nights before the battle of Monmouth. The battle was fought June 28, 1778, and the army encamped here on Friday night, June 26. General Washington had his headquarters at the house occupied by the late Spencer S. Weart, and General Lee's headquarters were at the house now occupied by Mr. Randolph Stout.

The two armies occupied this vicinity by foraging parties alternately, and many are the tales of ruthless acts, of ferocity perpetrated by the British soldiery.

POST-REVOLUTION

We will now come down to a more recent period. The country enjoyed a season of tranquility at the close of the war, and no events of importance occurred that we can ascertain. The people returned to their peaceful avocations, and pursued the even tenor of their way.

The patriotic spark was however alive, as we find that a large and enthusiastic celebration of the "day we celebrate" was held on July 4, 1810 at the public house of Benj. Blackwell, where Chas. Drake now lives, and the account before us states that there was present more than a common assemblage of people.

The morning was ushered in by the firing of cannon. At 12 o'clock the procession was formed in front of the tavern.

At this time James Madison was President of the United States and Joseph Bloomfield, Governor of New Jersey.

The first public improvement of which we have any record, was the laying of the turnpike through the village by the Franklin and Georgetown Turnpike Company in 1820. This turnpike extended from Lambertville to New Brunswick, and was extensively traveled for some time, but finally failed.

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We have an account of a Fourth of July celebration in 1825, on which occasion the oration was delivered by S. R. Hamilton, and the Declaration of Independence read by Newton N. Boggs.

We have no particular items of interest to record until the breaking out of the late rebellion. The people were as ready to defend their liberties in 1861 as they were to achieve them in 1776. It is believed that to one of Hopewell's sons belongs the honor of being the first to respond to the call for troops from New Jersey. We refer to the late James Manners Weart, Esq. He was studying law in Jersey City and when the call for three-months men was made, a meeting was held in that city, and Mr. Weart was the first to volunteer. Foster's History of New Jersey, in the rebellion gives his name as the first from Jersey City, and it is believed that this was the first opportunity offered in the State. The record of Hopewell for devotion to her country and her country's interest is clear.

The most important event in a patriotic point of view that has taken place since the Revolution, was the dedication of the monument to John Hart, on July 4, 1865. This monument was the first erected by the State of New Jersey to commemorate any of her sons. The legislature appropriated \$800 and the balance was made up by subscriptions. The commissioners appointed to superintend the work were: Jacob Weart, Esq., Chas. A. Skillman, Esq., and Zephaniah Stout. Governor Joel Parker delivered the oration on the occasion.

The first post office was established in 1825 and George Blackwell was appointed postmaster. The office was kept in the building now occupied by Mr. E. M. Phillips as a hotel. The village at that time was called Columbia, but soon after took the name of Hopewell again. Previous to this time people living here, obtained their mail from Trenton. From the time the post office was established until the spring of 1875, the mail was delivered by carrier. At that time (spring 1875) delivery was changed to the Mercer and Somerset Railroad.

The means of public conveyance was very limited until February 1873 when the Mercer and Somerset Railroad was opened for travel, which opened direct communications with the great commercial centers, and improvements and enterprise seemed to spring up simultaneously with its opening.

From 1800 to 1840 there was but one building erected in the village, and that was a blacksmith shop where Mr. Philomen Waters' house now stands.

There is but one person now living in the village who lived here in 1800.

The national airline RR was located about the same time as the Mercer and Somerset RR. It was, as its name implies, to be an airline between New York and Philadelphia, but owing to the legal technicality it was abandoned after a portion of the work of grading had been done. It was finally sold to the Delaware and Bound Brook RR Co. who pushed the matter through to its final completion. Some difficulty was experienced in getting across the

track of the Mercer and Somerset RR, about one mile west of the village, and on January 5, 1876 the Delaware and Bound Brook Co. quietly took possession of the ground and commenced operations for the laying of 'the crossing' or 'frog' as it was called; their intentions were speedily devined and the Pennsylvania RR Co., who operated the Mercer and Somerset RR, endeavored to stop the proceedings and sent in train load after train load of men, and the authorities fearing an outbreak, called on the Governor for assistance, and he ordered out a portion of the Seventh Regt., N.G.S.N.J. who were soon on the grounds, but all was amicably adjusted. On the first day

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of May 1876. The road was opened for travel, thus giving the citizens abundant railroad facilities.

Messers. Finney and Fetter located a steam saw mill in the village in the summer of 1874, from which lumber is shipped to all parts of the world.

In the fall of 1874 the Hopewell Herald Printing office was established by organizing a stock company of the citizens.

The Western Union Telegraph Co. established an office here in June, 1875. In reference to the mercantile interest, Hopewell has long been quite a business center, especially since railroad communication was opened with the outside world.

The store now occupied by Mr. Nelson D. Blackwell was established over one hundred years ago by one Gordon. He sold it to Mr. Stephen Blackwell's grandfather, since which time it has been in possession of the family. The store occupied by Mr. J.Q. McPherson was established in 1865 by J.V. Blackwell.

At the time of the Revolution there were some five or six houses, with a population of about thirty. Barbour says that in 1842 the village contained a Baptist Church, and about a dozen dwellings. Today (1876) we have a population of 400 and eighty three families, and fifty-one houses, a good portion of them double. The spirit of Enterprise has become awakened and the village has fair prospect of becoming a thriving town.

Hopewell has been a place of learning from a very remote period. Rev. Issac Eaton had a classical school for young men during his pastorate of the Baptist Church. He lived where Mr. Charles Drake now does and his school house was located about the spot where Mrs. Monroe Stout's house now stands. The old schoolhouse stood a few steps from where we now stand.

About eleven years ago, Misses E.H. and M.J. Boggs established a seminary for the instruction of young ladies, in which they have met flattering success. The public school of the village is well managed, and is taking rank with the best.

Your Committee therefore submits this as their report, and while they regret its incompleteness, yet they assure you that every effort has been made to get what we have correct.

Ralph Ege, James Ewing, Wm. A. Weart, R.M. Rankin, G.M. Fetter, J.N. Golden,
R. Slack, Mrs. Sarah Weart, Miss E.H. Boggs - -- Committee 1876.

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Editorial Notes

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[Note: "The national airline RR " is an unusual description of the 1983 (AMTRAK) RR; the Reading RR for so many years. At the time, 1876, of the writing of this speech, the authors were not aware that the Mercer and Somerset RR was about to die. Betty Gantz. J

[Ed. Note : The HVN has a copy of the 1825 Fourth of July speech should anyone wish to see it, as has the library.]

[Ed. Note: A paper has been printed in the Hopewell Herald Printing office for 102 years.]

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[Jacob Weart's museum copy had "where Susan A Weart now (1876) resides". Susan crossed the name out and wrote Algernon Weart. In the soldier's names: John Hunt, Cot, was identified as innkeeper in Pennington; J & A Smith were Timothy's sons; Joseph Stout, Jonathan's son; Francis Vannoy, also John Vannoy; Samuel Stout, weaver; John Hunt, Co2, Nathan's son; Ralph Hunt, son of Ed Hunt, died on a prison ship; Joseph Burroughs died of camp fever. J

George Washington occupied J.N. Golden's land, which is in 1986 north of Rt.518.

The one person of 1800 may have been Mr Charles Ewing.

The first H. Herald was printed on the second floor of F.F. Holcombes' store, 47 W. Broad St. The H.V. News office is in 1986 on Railroad Ave.

The stores of David, Stephen, and Nelson Blackwell were at 46 & 42 E Broad St.

The Hopewell Herald began in 1874. In 1/10/1881, VanDoren Taylor took possession of the Herald office, published only one paper, "The Astonisher" on 1/21/1881. Miss Susan Weart claimed that the H.H. editor, H.G. Carter never did any proofreading! The first H.H. under J.M. Leigh was issued 3/2/1831. The H.H. moved into its new office on Railroad Ave. on 1/25/1882.