

# Gov. John Reading (1686-1767)

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A lecture presented to the Hunterdon County Historical Society



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## Preface

Gov. John Reading is easily the most famous of colonial residents of Hunterdon County. He was a member of the colonial governor's council from 1721 until 1758. He was twice acting Governor and the first American born person to hold that position. But much of John Reading's impact on the County beyond those facts is not widely known. As the county approaches its tri-centennial in 2014, it is important to reintroduce this important historical figure to the county.

I am one of the 5<sup>th</sup> great-grandsons of the Gov. John and grew up in Hunterdon County, graduating from Hunterdon Central High School in 1960. My interest in family history was sparked by the research started by my mother, Roberta T. Reading, in 1959. Mrs. Reading had many long discussions with the Society's Hiram E. Deats regarding the Reading Family. I am continuing this interest in what my mother called, "This fantastic family heritage".

The lecture provides a brief chronology of West New Jersey history and the role played by Gov. John and his father Col. John Reading, and the Governor's eleven children. Of particular interest is Col. John's long history with the Council of West New Jersey Proprietors and the founding of Hunterdon County, Gov. John's contribution to the Presbyterian Church, his influence in the founding of Princeton University, and his role during the French and Indian War. It closes with a brief summary of the lives of the Governor's children, particularly their involvement in the Revolutionary War (loyalists or patriots).

I would like to thank my brother Allan Reading and my friend Meredith Eldridge for their proof reading and editorial suggestions, but any errors or misstatements of fact are entirely mine.

David R. Reading

## Introduction

Gov. John Reading was *first* and foremost, a long serving member of the British colonial government of New Jersey. He was a member of the Royal Governor's Council for thirty-seven years. At various times he was Speaker, President of the Council, and twice acting Governor (hence the title), the first American born person to hold the office. He demonstrated extraordinary courage & leadership in his second term as Governor during the French & Indian War when he was more than 70 years old.

*Second*, he was a Presbyterian and as such a considered a religious dissenter by the Anglican Church. He was a supporter of the New Light religious revival movement that led to the establishment of Princeton University.

*Third*, Gov. John was one of the very early settlers of Hunterdon County and the wealthiest. He inherited both his substantial wealth and his many important political connections from his father, Col. John Reading who was an influential West New Jersey Proprietor. Today I'll talk first about Col. John and the settlement of West New Jersey, including Hunterdon County and we'll see how some of this land wealth was acquired.

As a footnote, let me explain Col. John's title. The title comes from the fact that Gov. Hunter awarded him the rank of Lt Col in the Amwell militia late in his life.<sup>1</sup> As far as we know, he never participated in any military actions beyond local militia.

What do we know about the Reading family in England? Josiah Granville Leach in his extraordinary *Memorials* published in 1898, describes Col. John Reading as being of "gentle birth."<sup>2</sup> We know a little more of the family thanks to Dr. Joseph M. Beatty, a Reading descendant, who visited England in 1963 and discovered they were of the yeoman class<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately, the family had been loyal to the crown during the Civil War (1642-48) and had had their property seized by Cromwell's Puritans.<sup>4</sup>

We know that the family had adopted the Reading coat of arms first described in 1609. It had been used by many Readings including John Reading of London in 1639. You can see on the coat-of arms three boars' heads. The Saxons believed that the power and strength of the boar would protect the warrior in times of war. Reading is a Saxon surname meaning "people of Reada." Reada was a Saxon King who settled in the Thames Valley ca. 550 A.D. The oldest use of name Reading I have found is for the town on the border of Wessex and Mercia of kingdoms of the Saxon in 871 which is present day Reading, England.

Col. John was born July 14, 1657 in Pipe Hill village in Litchfield, Herefordshire, England.<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt that John's family was Quaker. There are Friends meeting records from Herefordshire circa 1668 that list a John & Mary Reading and their children John, Daniel, Job, and Jonah.

The Quakers, a Christian sect of Independents, were persecuted and jailed as early as the end of the English Civil War in 1648.<sup>6</sup> After the restoration of Charles II in 1660 Parliament passed several official acts known as The Clarendon Code criminalizing religious dissent. These acts were designed to reestablish the supremacy of the Anglican Church.<sup>7</sup> The Quaker Act of 1662 was aimed directly at suppressing the Quakers. However, King Charles himself was sympathetic to the Quakers. William Penn, a prominent Quaker, had a warm relationship with both the King and the King's brother James. This relationship certainly provided political cover for the Quaker settlements in West New Jersey, the settlements that would draw John, his wife, and brother to America.

### **Establishing West New Jersey: 1660-1674**

The settlement of West New Jersey by the Quakers begins with the restoration of King Charles II in 1660. At the time there were many English settlements along the coast in North America, but the Dutch had established a colony in New York and King Charles wanted to bring that colony under English rule as well.

King Charles issued a patent bestowing upon his brother James, Duke of York, the land extending from the St. Lawrence River to the Delaware on March 12, 1664.<sup>8</sup> The Duke in turn granted lands between the Hudson and Delaware rivers to friends John, Lord Berkeley, and Sir George Carteret on June 23-24, 1664.

On August 18, 1664 the Dutch surrender to the British. Col. Richard Nicolls is established as governor of the Duke's territories, and New Amsterdam was renamed New York. The Dutch recaptured the former New Netherland area on August 1, 1673, but New York and New Jersey returned to the English on February 9, 1674.

### **Quaker Settlements: 1675-1686**

New Jersey was now in the hands of Carteret and Berkley. On March 18, 1674 Lord Berkley sold his half of New Jersey to the Quaker John Fenwick in trust for Quaker Edward Byllynge (Billings). Immediately Fenwick and Byllynge had a dispute over shares of ownership and William Penn was brought in to resolve it. The ownership of the West New Jersey finally went to Fenwick, Byllynge, and some additional trustees including Penn. Fenwick ended up with ten percent of the ownership. The trustees sold the remaining shares from Feb 1675 through September 1683 to their Quaker friends at £350 per share. One share was equal to one percent of the land (approx 20,000 acres). Fractional shares are also sold. These 100 shares were to be allocated and settled in tenths.<sup>9</sup>

In 1675, there was no agreement on what constituted the boundary between the Eastern and Western parts of the province, nor was there any governing document. John Fenwick however ignored these details and settled Salem in November 1675. His settlement became known as the "Salem tenth."

On July 1, 1676 the Quintite, also known as the Quintipartite, deed was signed by Carteret of East NEW JERSEY and the trustees of West New Jersey (Penn, Lawie, Lucas, Byllynge). they divided New Jersey by agreeing that the boundary will be a line extending from Little Egg Harbor to 41 degrees, 40 minutes latitude on the upper Delaware River.

On 23 March 1677 West New Jersey's Concessions and Agreements were drafted by Byllynge and Penn and signed by the proprietors and inhabitants. The Concessions and Agreements enumerated the structure of government, guaranteed civil rights of the inhabitants, and proscribed punishments for civil offences.

I want to emphasize that West New Jersey was now an autonomous English province: it had its own land owners, *the proprietors* and its own law, the *Concessions & Agreements*. The proprietors had rights to the *government* and to the *soil* granted by the Crown through the Duke of York and Lord Berkley.

Having a constitution and an agreement on the dividing line, John Reading (or his father)<sup>10</sup> purchased one quarter share of a proprietary on the 28th & 29th of August 1677. According to Budd's *True Account*, his partners who purchased the remaining three-quarters are Thomas Rudyard (W. Penn's lawyer) one-half, Thomas Bull one-eighth, and Henry Beale one-eighth. The quarter of a proprietary share entitled Col. John to approximately 5,000 acres of land in West New Jersey. However, it would not be for another six or seven years that he would avail himself of this proprietary right and settle in America.

### **John Reading Comes to America (circa 1684)**

Col. John married Elizabeth (surname unknown) on 22 Feb 1682 in England<sup>11</sup> and arrived in New Jersey prior to 1684, presumably with his wife and brother Daniel. He would have been 26 or 27 years old.

As I mentioned previously, The Quaker settlements in West New Jersey were settled in tenths as shown below:<sup>12</sup>

- Salem, 1675
- 1<sup>st</sup> Yorkshire, (Trenton) 1677
- 2<sup>nd</sup> London, (Burlington) 1677
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Irish, (Camden) 1682
- 4<sup>th</sup> (Gloucester) 1685

The system of tenths was abandoned after 1685.

The new arrivals settled on land near Big Timber Creek in the fourth tenth. Gloucester courts were established separately from Burlington on May 26, 1686 and Col. John was elected clerk and recorder. It is from the Gloucester court records that we find evidence of Col. John's education. He is credited in the records as having written a bond and several other documents in Latin.<sup>13</sup>

We also know from the court records that Daniel Reading was Gloucester sheriff in 1690, but Daniel apparently returned to England. Daniel's will (1704), registered in the Litchfield court, was discovered and transcribed by Carol (Reading) Morris in 2008 and clearly establishes Daniel's relationship to John and authenticates Daniel's death in England in 1704.<sup>14</sup>

By 1687 events were unfolding that would bring Col. John into a powerful position regarding land distribution in the new province.

### **West New Jersey 1687-1703: Council of West NJ Proprietors**

Edward Byllynge died in January 1687. Dr. Daniel Coxe (not a Quaker) purchased his interest in West New Jersey and assumed the Governorship. Coxe's purchase would eventually create many problems and disputes concerning land distribution in the province.

In April & May of 1687, eleven years after the Quinpartite deed, George Keith, another Quaker, under an agreement between William Emley (West New Jersey) and John Reid (East New Jersey) finally laid out a partial East-West boundary known as the Keith line. The line was not continued above the South Branch of Raritan River at Three Bridges near Flemington.

A little over a year later, on Sept 5, 1688 the boundary from the end of Keith line to Hudson River was agreed to by Daniel Coxe and East Jersey Gov. Robert Barkley. This became known as the Coxe-Barkley line. The very next day, on September 6, 1688 the Council of West New Jersey Proprietors was formed to relieve Governor Coxe's commissioners of their land management responsibilities.

Fifty-nine proprietors, each owning at least 1/32 share, organized the council to "record all proprietary rights, supervise the distribution of dividends, issue warrants of survey and have charge of un-appropriated lands." The council would have a President, a Vice-President, a Treasurer, a Secretary/Clerk, and a Surveyor General. The council would initially have nine members, five from Burlington and four from Gloucester.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Olive was President, John Reading Secretary/Clerk, a position he would hold until 1711.<sup>16</sup>

The power vested in the Secretary/clerk position and bestowed on John Reading can best be illustrated by examining the land distribution process and the part played by the Clerk.<sup>17</sup>

1. Land surveyed and purchased from Indians. Referred to as a "taking"
2. Dividend declared by Council; shares of acreage rights apportioned to shareholders.
3. Shareholder applies for warrant to Council; warrant issued by *Clerk* if claim accepted.

4. Surveyor General or Deputy Surveyor General lays out tract in location of shareholder's choosing; survey produced.
5. Return of survey approved by Council and recorded by *Clerk*. Recorded return serves as documentation of the severance of title
6. Deed may be granted to proprietary shareholder. Prepared by *Clerk*

John Reading not only is trusted with recording deeds, warrants, returns of survey, but he also serves as deputy surveyor. The fact that he was selected as Clerk for over 20 years speaks to the trust placed in him by his contemporaries in the crucial process of granting and owning land in the new world.

Almost immediately after Coxe becomes the majority proprietor, the proprietors of both East and West agree to give up their right to govern and surrender the government to the Crown. However, it wasn't accepted until 1702 because of the "Glorious Revolution" in 1688 which saw the exit of James II and the ascension of William & Mary to the throne. Col. John, who was still Clerk of the Gloucester Court, enters at the end of the minutes of the court held in Gloucester June 1, 1703: "Here ends the Proprietary Government of the Province of West New Jersey in America."<sup>18</sup>

Col. John was recommended for the new governor's council under Lord Cornbury, but was not accepted by the Lords of Trade & Plantations. This may have been due to Dr. Coxe, whose son Col. Daniel Coxe, comes to New Jersey in 1702 or 1703 to look after his father's interests. He was aligned with Cornbury who had tried to take the authority over the land from the Council of Proprietors. This initiated a controversy between future Governor Robert Hunter and the "Coxe faction" over land distribution that eventually involved both Col. John and his son.

### **The Move from Gloucester**

Early in the new century, Col. John made the move from Gloucester to upper Burlington County which was to become Hunterdon County. It is not known why he decided to "remove", but we do know that a fire destroyed a house located in Gloucester belonging to John and his partner in 1698. They sued the caretaker for £1000. This house contained 600 bushels of barley, brewing utensils, malt, deeds, books, exhibits, rolls, and writings.<sup>19</sup> There is no record of any recovery of damages. This incident must have had a devastating effect on his spirit and his finances.

Col. John acquired land in and north of present day Lambertville as early as 1700. This land was acquired as part of the dividend under the "second taking" in 1683. Between 1701 and 1703 he acquired several hundred acres on the Delaware in Stockton and Prallsville. He established a ferry across the Delaware River in Stockton known as John Reading's Landing.

With William Biddle and John Mills, Col. John surveyed 150,000 acres "above the falls" between the South Branch of Raritan and the Delaware River for the "third"

taking in 1703. They then made the purchase for the council from Lenepe sachems Copnnockous and Himmhammoe, they signed the deed and marked the land boundary on November 2, 1703. This tract is in the heart of present day Hunterdon County and includes Flemington.<sup>20</sup>

Col. John acquired 1440 acres along the Delaware River adjoining his previous purchase above Stockton (believed to be the site of Mount Amwell) in 1709. He later gifted a large portion (one sq. mile) to his daughter Elsie and her husband Capt Daniel Howell around the time of their marriage (circa. 1710). Also, in 1709, he acquired 432 acres on the east side of the South Branch (Readington). In 1712 he acquired 662 acres on the west side of the south branch (Walnut Grove) adjoining Col. Coxe's land.<sup>21</sup>

Col John having been rejected by the Board of Trades as council member in the new Government was commissioned by Gov. Hunter as one of the Supreme Court judges of the Province in 1711.<sup>22</sup>

John is again recommended for the Council to Lords of Trade in 1712 and approved by Queen Anne on June 13, 1713. He and three others replace Col. Coxe and his supporters. Col. John introduces a bill in the council to create Hunterdon County in 1714. It is not known if he actually wrote the bill. But, because he presented it he "should" be considered "the father of Hunterdon County".

Daniel Coxe was installed as President of the proprietor's council as compensation for being removed from Gov. Hunter's council.<sup>23</sup> As a result, Col. John was removed as the proprietor's clerk. In return, Gov. John was made Surveyor General for the proprietors.

Col. John Reading died in 1717 at age 60, and is believed to be buried in Buckingham Quaker cemetery. He left a considerable legacy of land wealth as we have seen. He also left many social and political ties for his son, the future Governor.

### **Gov. John Reading's Early Life**

Gov. John Reading was born June 6, 1686 in Gloucester. It is believed that Gov. John, his sister Mary (Elsie), his mother Elizabeth, (and possibly his uncle Daniel) left Gloucester for England sometime after 1691 for his and his sister's education. It is almost certain that their destination was Litchfield when they left America.

Legend has it that John Reading came back from England a Presbyterian. There certainly was a Presbyterian presence in Litchfield at the time. There were five houses in Lichfield licensed for Presbyterian worship in 1672. They included Thomas Minors's house. An English school in Bore Street had been established under Minors's will in 1674.<sup>24</sup> We have no direct evidence of his Presbyterian schooling but it is very likely that John Reading did in fact go to a Presbyterian School and return to America a Presbyterian.

Little is known about his life in the years immediately following his return to America. It is very probable that he worked with his father surveying and performing other plantation duties. As previously mentioned, he was appointed to succeed Thomas Gardiner II as the Council of Proprietors' Surveyor General in 1712 at the age of 25.<sup>25</sup> Remember, his father had been appointed to the provincial council that year and had been removed as clerk of proprietary council. Gov. John was possibly installed as SG as a gesture of conciliation after his father's removal as clerk.

He then accompanied his father on surveying trips in 1715 into what are now Hunterdon, Warren, Somerset, Sussex, and Morris counties. They were surveying for the proprietors and their clients. It is on this trip that Gov. John probably met 19 year old Mary (Maritje) Ryerson for the first time at the home of her father. He mentions visiting the home of George Ryerson several times in the journal he wrote on the trip.<sup>26</sup>

On November 3, 1718, at the age of 31, John Reading was nominated to a seat on the Governor's council by Robert Hunter. He would replace his father, who had died the previous year.

Before he took his seat, Gov. John was appointed by Gov. Hunter one of the commissioners from West New Jersey, to establish the northern station point on the Delaware River in preparation for yet another survey. The Legislature had passed an act on March 27, 1719 to reestablish the division of East and West New Jersey back to the original line of 1676. The station point would also provide the basis for determining the boundary line between New Jersey and New York. The surveying party consisted of three groups of representatives: East New Jersey, West New Jersey and New York. A question that one might ask at this point is: Why they were still referring to East and West New Jersey after the crown had unified the colony in 1702? The crown had only unified the *government* of the colony not the rights to the soil. The proprietors still had the legal authority over land in both East and West New Jersey, and they still had separate proprietary councils to manage and distribute that land.

The various commissioners met on the upper Delaware and completed the survey in July. It is on this trip that he meets and works with James Alexander, a Scottish born aristocrat, commissioned in 1715 as Surveyor General for both East and West Jersey by King George I. Alexander will eventually serve many years on the provincial council with Gov. John. A Tripartite Deed formally documenting this survey was written and signed on July 15, 1719 by the commissioners including James Alexander and John Reading.<sup>27</sup>

On June 24, 1720 Gov. John was appointed to his Majesty's Council by the Crown.<sup>28</sup> Although he did not take his seat on the Council until March 1721, *he then held it for the next 37 years.*<sup>29</sup>

In 1720, he was selected by the Council of Proprietors of West New Jersey as surveyor to assist James Alexander in surveying the boundary between East and West New Jersey based on the northern station point described in the tripartite deed previously

mentioned.<sup>30</sup> This was in response to the unfairness of the 1688 Coxe-Barclay agreement. Apparently the survey didn't take place due to lack of funds caused by opposition by the Coxe faction.<sup>31</sup> It wasn't until 1743 that the boundary was finally established by John Lawrence of East Jersey. The line essentially restored the original boundary of the Quintipartite agreement. This created a problem for older surveys. According to Snell's *History of Sussex and Warren County*, Gov. John in his capacity as Deputy Surveyor General settled claims in 1745, 1749, and 1752 for land boundary disputes arising from the re-surveyed line.<sup>32</sup>

### **John Reading Marries and Starts A Family (1720-1744)**

The early 1720s must have been an exciting time in the life of Gov. John He had just been appointed to provincial council, and married Mary (Maritje) Ryerson, a third generation Dutch-American on Nov. 30, 1720. On March 30, 1722 John and Mary had their first child, John III. Over the next 19 years they would have ten more children, all of them baptized in the Readington Reformed Church.<sup>33</sup>

There is some uncertainty regarding when Gov. John moved from Stockton (Mount Amwell) to Raritan (Walnut Grove), his home near Flemington Junction. This was a subject of discussion between Roberta Reading and Hiram Deats in the late 1950's. I believe John and Mary lived at Walnut Grove from the time they were married; but we don't really know. What we do know is John met Mary Ryerson in 1715. The first house at Walnut Grove has been estimated to have been built in 1716, and the Dutch Reformed Church in Readington was founded in 1719.

After his marriage, Gov. John's working life consisted of managing his plantations, performing surveys, and buying and selling land in Hunterdon and other counties in north-western New Jersey.

### **On the Provincial Council (1721-1745)**

He was a member of the provincial council under several Governors including Lewis Morris and John Hamilton. Lewis Morris (b.1671-d.1746) had been on the council of Proprietors with Col. John (1707-1711, 1716). John Hamilton was the son of Col. Andrew Hamilton, Governor (1692-1697) and (1699-1702) who was also on the proprietor's council with Col. John (1700-1701).

Gov. John was Speaker of the Council from 1741-1744. He would become President of the Council on the death of Lewis Morris in 1746 when John Hamilton assumed the Governorship. While he was on the provincial Council he had many other official positions. He was a Justice from 1724 to 1750. He was appointed President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas Feb. 10, 1727 and commissioned Surrogate for Hunterdon and Somerset Counties on August 14, 1727.

On July 15, 1730, Reading Township (present Readington, N.J.) was named in his honor. In 1735 he acted as Agent for the family of William Penn for their N.J. lands. He was appointed as one of the enlistment officers for Hunterdon County in the War against Spain on April 18, 1740. Also, in 1740, he was appointed again as a Commissioner of Boundaries, this time to define the boundary between Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

### **First term: Presbyterian & the College of New Jersey (1745-1748)**

In 1745 a group of Presbyterian ministers from the New Brunswick Presbytery was preparing to ask Gov. Lewis Morris to charter a new college in New Jersey for the education of ministers. The history behind this petition for a charter, the subsequent charter, and John Reading's role in them deserves a closer look.

The first Presbyterian Church in America was established in Philadelphia in 1698. It was soon to be swept up in dissention and controversy generated by the religious movement known as "the Great Awakening" (a religious revival movement started by Methodist founders John and Charles Wesley in England) which emerged in America in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Great Awakening came to Hunterdon when George Whitefield, a prominent and powerful evangelist, preached at Amwell in 1739.<sup>34</sup>

Presbyterian Congregations forming in East Jersey and New York were influenced by the Great Awakening and their members became known as New Lights. The more traditional Presbyterians who opposed the New Lights were termed the Old Side. One of the leaders of the New Lights was William Tennent. Tennent was a Presbyterian who came from the Philadelphia Synod in 1726. He established the "Log College" in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, to educate his sons in the ministry. Log College graduates included New Light preachers John Rowland, Charles Beatty and William's son Gilbert Tennent.

The Presbytery of New Brunswick which had been created in 1737, consisted of predominately New Lights. It also included the Amwell congregation. The New Brunswick Presbytery ordained John Rowland, a Log College graduate, in defiance of the Old Side and the New Brunswick presbytery was expelled from the Philadelphia Synod in 1741. After the expulsion, New Jersey and New York ministers "concoct idea" to found a college, as reported by Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker in his book, *Princeton 1746-1896*.<sup>35</sup>

The first charter for "The College of New Jersey" was presented to Gov. Lewis Morris in late 1745 or early 1746 with the trustees all liberally educated, in other words, no "log college" graduates. This was probably an attempt to ameliorate the fear of a church college controlled by "Dissenters." Morris was not persuaded. He rejected the charter on the grounds that it was not legal per his Royal instructions. In fact, it was legal. However, he was an Anglican and disliked "Dissenters". Then, serendipitously for the trustees, Gov. Morris died on May 21, 1746. John Hamilton, as President of the Council, succeeded Morris and signed the charter on October 22, 1746.

John McClean (tenth college President) in his *History of the College of New Jersey* (1877) gives us one of the reasons why Hamilton signed the Charter: several members of the council were Presbyterian; he mentioned John Reading first.<sup>36</sup> The college had only just started when the charter and its validity began to be questioned by many influential Anglicans. In any event, classes began at Newark in May 1747. The following month, John Hamilton died and John Reading assumed his position as Governor and Commander in Chief of the Colony of New Jersey. This was the *first American born person* to hold that position, although Gov. John would hold it for only a little more than a month.

In August 1747, the college trustees elected five New Lights to their board. Jonathon Belcher was selected by King George II to replace Hamilton and he became Governor on August 8, 1747. Belcher, a graduate of Harvard and a Congregationalist, was nevertheless a supporter of the ideals of the Great Awakening. He took the attack on the legal status of the college seriously and began consultation with the founders and other friends of the project to draft a new charter.

Belcher thought the college should have a closer affiliation to the government to protect it from further assault. It is virtually certain that he consulted with John Reading, as he was the President of the Council and had been acting Governor as well as an important Presbyterian with close connections to the New Lights. His son-in-law Rev. Charles Beatty was highly regarded by the original trustees, as evidenced by his later fund-raising efforts on behalf of the college.

The second charter created a board of trustees that included representatives of the provincial government: the governor and four council members including John Reading. The charter dated September 14, 1748 was signed by the 23 trustees with John Reading's name first.<sup>37</sup>

John Reading was a senior member of the provincial council when both charters were written. He had a close spiritual and family connection (his eldest daughter Ann married Charles Beatty, a New Light preacher, in June 1746) to the people who founded the College of New Jersey and his influence in its founding deserves to be recognized.

Gov. John's association with Presbyterianism and The College of New Jersey (Princeton University) continued for the remainder of his life. He and his sons pledged to the creation of a Hunterdon church in 1753. Charles Beatty became a trustee of Princeton in 1763. Gov. John's daughter Mary married William Mills, a Presbyterian minister and 1765 graduate of Princeton. Gov. John left silver communion cups to the Amwell Church in 1767. Thomas, John Reading's youngest son, was ordained as one of first two Elders (age 63) in the Flemington Presbyterian Church in 1797.<sup>38</sup>

John Reading died on the eve of the American Revolution, three years before the Boston Massacre. The historical question forever unanswered is: Where did John Reading's sympathies lie, loyalist or patriot? We don't know if he would have been an ardent patriot, but we do know he was an ardent Presbyterian. How his Presbyterianism

might have determined his loyalties is suggested in the following passage from *The Cousins War* by Kevin Phillips:

...The excitement of the religious Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s, and its indirect encouragement of a kindred democratic and anti-establishment *politics*, have been widely invoked as a cause of the Revolution by the twentieth-century scholars...one American historian concluded that the “religious strife between the church of England and the Dissenters [Presbyterians] furnished the mountain of combustible material for the great conflagration, while the dispute over stamp, tea, and other taxes and regulations acted merely as the matches of ignition.”<sup>39</sup>

Remember, John Reading was a senior member of the British government of New Jersey and he was, like many others, dissenting against the officially sanctioned church of the Crown which, of course, was dangerous.

#### **President of the Council under Belcher (1748-1757)**

After his brief time in office as Governor, John Reading supported Belcher’s Council for the next ten years. When Gov. Belcher died on 31 Aug, 1757, John Reading as President of the Council and the most senior member was required to replace him. But he refused, citing age and infirmities. However, Gov. Thomas Pownall of Massachusetts who was also Lt Gov. of New Jersey could not assume the leadership in New Jersey due to his responsibilities in Massachusetts. He and Lord Loudoun, who was Commander in Chief of North America, were concerned about the leadership problem caused by John Reading’s refusal, and they took action to resolve it.

Why didn’t they just accept his refusal? Pownall explains in a letter to Lords of Trade & Plantations on Sep 26, 1757.<sup>40</sup> He says that he is worried that if he had left it up to the Council and they accepted John Reading’s refusal and qualified the next in line, Robert Hunter Morris, which would be “improper given the present state of the province”. There was still “trouble in Province betwixt the Proprietors and the land owners” resulting from the surrender to the crown in 1702. Robert Hunter Morris was one of the principal managers of the East New Jersey Council of Proprietors. Moreover, Pownall wrote, “The Governor is always the Chancellor...There is a Chancery<sup>41</sup> suit of great importance & great interest now depending, in which, as one of the East New Jersey Proprietors, Mr. Morris is interested.”

Pownall made a time consuming and difficult trip to visit John Reading in person to make a judgment on John Reading’s intent. He qualified for the New Jersey Governor’s office himself for one day, and then convinced John Reading to take the

position and was satisfied that his prior reluctance was sincere. John Reading was sworn in as Gov. September 23, 1757, at his home. He was 71 years old and infirmed.

This is significant because the refusal of John Reading to serve was viewed rather seriously by the King's officials. In the middle of a war, for a well connected important figure (Pownall was brother to the secretary of Lords of Trade & Plantations) to make a difficult trip to visit a native born colonial says a lot about the seriousness of the situation in which John Reading found himself.

### **Second term: Commander in Chief (1757-1758)**

John Reading assumed the Governorship for the second time at the height of the French & Indian War (1754-1763). The French & Indian War, or Seven Years War, is considered the First World War by many historians including Winston Churchill.<sup>42</sup> England would eventually defeat France in Germany and India as well as North America and become the leading world power. However, in 1757 the war was not going well in North America for the British.

William Pitt was appointed Secretary of State for the southern division to salvage the war in June 1757. On Dec 20<sup>th</sup>, 1757 Pitt sent letters to the Colonial Governors instructing them to raise troops. John Reading forwarded letters received from Delaney of New York to Denny of Pennsylvania with instructions to forward to Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina & Georgia. In March 1758, John Reading summoned the assembly and traveled to Burlington to respond for New Jersey. It is not known how he traveled from Walnut Grove to Burlington, but it must have been a great exertion. On March 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> he made three addresses to both houses: the council and general assembly.<sup>43</sup>

In the *first* address he summarized the letter from Pitt which announced that King George had agreed to fund colonial troops. The lack of financial support by the colonial governments had been a major problem in raising troops to support the War in North America. In the *second* address he cited a letter from Thomas Pownall that stated Massachusetts has raised 7,000 men, and a letter from James Delaney of NY that he has raised 3,680 men. This was intended to spur the assembly to support the raising of troops by showing other colonies support. In the *third* address he cited a letter from General Abercrombie, who had replaced the Earl of Loudoun as Commander in Chief for North America and was also requesting troops.

John Reading also asked for a Draft Law if the troops could not be raised voluntarily. He also asked for funds to support the Frontier Guard created by Gov. Belcher in 1756. The Frontier Guard occupied a chain of thirteen forts along the Delaware in upper Hunterdon (now Warren & Sussex Counties) as protection against Indian raids across the Delaware River. One of the forts was named Fort Reading, presumably after him. He argued that the inhabitants had been protected and, had not been attacked through the winter and therefore the Guard deserved funds.

He also asked for compensation for Col. Peter Schuyler and Captain Shaw for their leadership in returning men from captivity after the disaster the previous year at Fort William Henry when many New Jersey militia were killed and captured. The council later authorized £6,000 for Schuyler. Peter Schuyler is the uncle of Phillip Schuyler who would become a General during the Revolutionary War. The council later authorized funds for 1,000 troops.

In March & April of 1758, he commissioned many officers of the New Jersey regiment lead by Col. John Johnson. Unfortunately the unit would participate in the disastrous defeat by the French later in the year on July 8th at Fort Ticonderoga. One of the officers commissioned was Elias Dayton, future Colonel, who would go on to lead the 3<sup>rd</sup> New Jersey Reg. in the Revolutionary War. John Reading's youngest son Thomas would serve as a Captain in that unit and his grandson John as an Ensign. In the summer of 1776 the 3<sup>rd</sup> New Jersey Reg would go into the Mohawk Valley in New York State under Gen. Phillip Schuyler to ensure that the British were unable to mobilize the Mohawks against the Americans.<sup>44</sup>

John Reading's duties as Governor and Commander-in-chief of the Colony of New Jersey came to an end when Francis Bernard was appointed Governor in June 1758. His service is warmly described by Leach:

Reluctant, on account of his weight of years and the inflictions of disease, to burden himself with the responsibilities and anxieties of state, yet, having, from a sense of duty taken upon the same, he gave to the work his best efforts, and exhibited a degree of patriotism, and fitness for executive service unsurpassed by his predecessors or successors in office.<sup>45</sup>

John Reading resigned from His Majesty's Council on July 28, 1758. He was nearly 72 years old. He retired and built a Georgian style house along the South Branch of the Raritan River.

### **Death & Will (1767)**

Gov. John died on November 5, 1767 age 81 at his home. His hand-written will is dated October 1, 1767, with a codicil added on October 29<sup>th</sup>. In it he "styles" himself as a yeoman.

In the original will he leaves various land holdings to his children and the widow of his son John. For one property in particular (1250 acres) in Oxford Township (Washington, New Jersey), he leaves one sixth to each. He leaves the Georgian house to his son.

He leaves many personal possessions to various children including a silver tankard to his grandson John, his son John having predeceased him. The tankard is

described by Leach as a family heirloom brought from England by his father, but we have since identified it as being made in America for the Gov. and his wife Mary by Charles Le Roux, a French Huguenot silversmith working in New York City in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is currently in the possession of a Reading descendant in Sacramento, California.<sup>46</sup>

He leaves his books to his sons to be divided as they see fit. He leaves instructions to divide the books on church history, religion and divinity equally. He leaves a book on the New Testament in two volumes to Messrs. Beatty and Mills, his preacher sons-in-law.

He also leaves three slaves to his son Thomas: “One man Slave, his wife and a Negro woman well Stricken in years, and subject to be disordered with Rheumatick Pains, when past labour, to be maintained by my Executors, but at the joynt Cost of all my Children their Executors and Administrators...”

In the Codicil of October 29th he leaves land in trust to grandsons.

- Daniel for grandsons John Read and Daniel, farm near Flemington
- Joseph for grandsons William and John, farm in Rosemont<sup>47</sup>
- Thomas for grandsons Joseph and Thomas Jr., farm near Flemington
- George for grandsons John Mullen and George Jr., land near Newton

This may have been done on the advice of his son Joseph to protect the land from creditors of George and Thomas who had lost fortunes in the Musconetcong Valley iron industry. Thomas died in 1814, and the distribution (see below) was completed in 1815.<sup>48</sup>

- Daniel – to his sons Daniel (52) and John Read (61)
- Thomas – to his grandsons Thomas H. (22) and Thomas W. (23)

By 1850, the land left to John Read Reading was in the hands of his son Robert K. Reading. Robert K. died in 1853. The Reading family, probably his son Franklin, sold “Greenwood” in 1865 and Edmund Deats purchased the farm in 1871.<sup>49</sup>

An interesting provision in the will specifies that his sons are to share costs if any one of them is sued for the title to their homesteads in Amwell. This provision is straight out of Saxon social law which provided for the protection of kindred or blood relatives.<sup>50</sup>

Mary Ryerson Reading died on April 11, 1774 at Walnut Grove. Both Gov. Reading and his wife are buried in the burying-ground of the old Amwell Presbyterian Church (now Pleasant Ridge Cemetery near Reaville). His monument was erected in 1882 by John G. Reading of Philadelphia, and Franklin Reading of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, descendants of the deceased Governor.

### **Interesting Additional Legacies**

Library Company of Burlington - Gov. John signed a charter by King George II for the establishment of the Library Company of Burlington dated January 1, 1758. The Library

Company of Burlington is the second oldest public library in New Jersey, and the seventh oldest in the nation. It has operated continuously since 1758.

Payment to Robert Hunter Morris - One of the duties of Gov. John was authorizing the Treasurer to pay Government officials and members of the council. We have an original copy of the warrant issued for payment to Robert Hunter Morris. The text of the warrant follows: “By the Hon John Reading Esq. President of His Majestys Council & Commander in Chief of the Colony of New Jersey etc. Pay to the Hon. Robert Hunter Morris Esq. an order Twenty five pounds for a Quarter Salary as Chief Justice of the Colony of New Jersey due the twenty first day of February last for which this shall be your sufficient warrant. Given under my hand in Council at Burlington, The 18th day of April 1758.”

Diary 1747-1757 - An important original source is the diary that John Reading kept in the years 1647-57. It is a daily record of his activities, travel, and financial transactions including debts incurred and payments made. The diary contains valuable information on not only John Reading’s life but daily colonial life in general. This diary is currently held by the Special Collection Department (Alexander Library) at Rutgers University.<sup>51</sup>

## **Children**

John and Mary had eleven children, seven sons and four daughters.

John, III (1722-1766) predeceased his father. Father of Valiant John, a revolutionary war soldier, who was father of Joseph who was father of Hon. James Newell, John Grandin, Joseph Hankinson and Phillip Grandin Reading.

Ann (1723-1768) married Rev. Charles Beatty, graduate of the Log College and frontier minister during the French and Indian war. He died in Barbados in 1778. She died of breast cancer in Scotland.

George (1725-1792) was a Revolutionary War officer at Ft. Ligonier, PA and KY. His son John Mullin Reading was captured at Ruddell’s station, KY in 1780, and taken to Canada and released in 1783 at Ticonderoga, NY. George and sons settled in Bourbon County, KY. They later moved to Missouri and their descendants fought on the Confederate side in the Civil War.

Daniel (1727-1768). Great grandson Daniel K. Reading left funds to establish Reading Academy on Bonnell Street in Flemington.

Joseph (Hon. Joseph) (1728-1806) was a Hunterdon County Judge and patriot. He served in Gov. Livingston’s (the first United States New Jersey Governor) council from 1781 to 1783. Joseph was the great-grandfather of Pierson Barton Reading, pioneer of Northern California and very nearly that state’s first Governor in 1850.<sup>52</sup>

Elizabeth (1730-1781) married John Hackett, Justice of the Peace in Hunterdon and Justice in Sussex County. He was a manager for Allen & Turner iron works. Hackettstown is named after him.

Richard (1732-1781) married Catherine Reid, granddaughter of John Reid (Quaker turned Anglican) an East Jersey surveyor and proprietor. He sold his inheritance in Rosemont to Asher Mott in 1768, and moved to Monmouth County. He was a Loyalist, volunteered in NY in 1776 was captured and released with sons. His property in Monmouth was confiscated. It is thought that he was murdered in 1781 on Long Island. Richard's wife Catherine and her four youngest children went to Nova Scotia and applied for relief under an Act of Parliament that provided aid to families of loyalists.

Thomas (1734-1814). May have been involved with Paraquarry Mines (copper mine venture) 1756-1760 attributed to Gov. John. His father would have been 69 years old in 1756, Thomas would have been 22.<sup>53</sup> Thomas was definitely involved with the Squires Point Forge venture on the Musconetcong River in the years between 1760 and 1770. He lost a fortune with his brothers George, Daniel, and his uncle Martin Ryerson. On August 1, 1770 land is sold by sheriff to William Allen & Joseph Turner for hundreds on the thousands. Thomas advertises on August 30, 1770 that he is petitioning the legislature for relief of debt as he was imprisoned.<sup>54</sup> He was a Captain in 3<sup>rd</sup> Reg. Mohawk valley 1776 when he was 42 years old.<sup>55</sup> Later in Revolutionary War, he assisted the Quartermaster. As I mentioned earlier, he was one of two original elders of the Flemington Presbyterian Church.

Mary (1736-1794) married William Mills, Presbyterian minister and 1765 graduate of Princeton.

Sarah (1738-1809) married Augustine Reid, grandson of the East Jersey surveyor and proprietor John Reid.

Samuel (1741-1749) died young.

### **Concluding Remarks**

What did Gov. John Reading accomplish and what were his lasting contributions to the County, State, and Country?

- He built upon his father's work, laying out the land by surveying not only proprietors and settlers parcels, but also in helping establish the very borders and boundaries of the state.
- He served as an important member of the colonial government for 37 years. In that capacity he influenced the establishment of a major university.
- He served as a Judge and Administrator of Justice.
- He provided the influence, and direction for the establishment of the Presbyterian Church in Hunterdon County.
- He contributed to the agricultural economy of Hunterdon County.

His character is described in a letter to the Pennsylvania Gazette in 1768:

...a genius above the common level, a strictly honest man; one of unshaken integrity and uprightness, he had a strict regard to truth. He behaved with meekness and gentleness, evenness and agreeableness that happily marked his whole character. He was eminently faithful. He was temperate in his enjoyments and charitable to the poor. He was a quiet and peaceable member of society.<sup>56</sup>

We should all be so fortunate to have such an honorable epitaph.

Gov. John and his father made lasting contributions to the cultural fabric of the Country, the State and especially to Hunterdon County. For that, they should be admired and *well remembered*.

END

## End notes

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<sup>1</sup> Leach, Josiah Granville, *Genealogical and Biographical Memorials of the Reading, Howell, Yerkes, Watts, Latham, and Elkins Families*, Philadelphia, 1898. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Leach 11.

<sup>3</sup> Yeoman denotes a social/economic class defined as one of lesser freeholders, below the landed gentry, and who cultivated their own land. They were a powerful political class in late 17<sup>th</sup> century England.

<sup>4</sup> Beatty, Joseph M., "English Ancestry of the Reading Family of New Jersey," *The American Genealogist* 39 (July 1963). 141-148

<sup>5</sup> Reading, John Gov., Reading Bible Record, 1682-1741. *A Course of Sermons for All Sundays of the Year* by Jeremy Taylor: J. Maock for R. Royston, Booksellers to the King, 1678. Photocopy made by Hiram E. Deats, Hunterdon County Historical Society, Flemington, New Jersey, 1929.

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, John H., *Politics Quaker Style: A history of the Quakers from 1624 to 1718*, San Bernardino, California: Borgo Press, 1995. 127.

<sup>7</sup> Fraser, Rebecca, *the Story of Britain*, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2003. 363.

<sup>8</sup> Klett, Joseph R., *Using the Records of the East and West Jersey Proprietors*, New Jersey State Archives, revised 2008. 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Pomfret, John E., *The Province of West New Jersey 1609-1702*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956. 67-79.

<sup>10</sup> There is some speculation that Col. John did not purchase the original proprietorship because he would not have been of age. It may have been his father, also named John Reading.

<sup>11</sup> Reading Bible Record.

<sup>12</sup> Klett 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart, Frank H., compiler, *Gloucester County under the Proprietors*, reprinted from "The Constitution" April 9, 1941 to November 26, 1941, Gloucester County Historical Society, 2000. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Morris, Carol, "Daniel Reading's Will," *The Mount Amwell News*, Vol 2-No. 1 (Spring 2008). 2.

<sup>15</sup> Pomfret, John E., *The New Jersey Proprietors and Their Lands: 1664-1776*, Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1956. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Pomfret, *Province* 157.

<sup>17</sup> Klett 19.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart 46.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart 38.

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- <sup>20</sup> Snell, James P., compiler, *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey*, Philadelphia, Everts & Peck, 1881, Part I. 182.
- <sup>21</sup> Hammond, Stanton D., *Hunterdon County Maps*, Genealogical Society of New Jersey, 1965.
- <sup>22</sup> Whitehead, William A., editor, *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of New Jersey, Vols. II-IX*, Newark, NEW JERSEY, 1881-1885. Vol. IV. 139.
- <sup>23</sup> Whitehead, Vol. IV. 169-171.
- <sup>24</sup> Mathews, A.G., *the Congregational Churches of Staffordshire*, 1924. 72. Provides a description of the Presbyterian Church presence in Litchfield during the time when John would have been there for his education.
- <sup>25</sup> Pomfret *Proprietors* 101.
- <sup>26</sup> "Journal of John Reading," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society 10 (January-October 1915)* 35-46, 90-110, 128-133. Surveying trips in 1715 and 1719. The original journal is held by the New Jersey Historical Society.
- <sup>27</sup> Snell, James P., compiler, *History of Sussex and Warren Counties, New Jersey*, Philadelphia, Everts & Peck, 1881. 41.
- <sup>28</sup> Whitehead, William A., editor, *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of New Jersey, Vols. II-IX*, Newark, NEW JERSEY, 1881-1885. 2-3.
- <sup>29</sup> Members of the council are appointed by the Lords of Trade and Plantations. When a new governor is appointed his instructions contain the appointments of his council.
- <sup>30</sup> Whitehead, Vol. IV, 452-453.
- <sup>31</sup> Pomfret *Proprietors*, 105.
- <sup>32</sup> Snell, *Sussex and Warren* 45.
- <sup>33</sup> "Baptisms Readington Church from 1720-1837". *From the collection of Beulah Gangaware*, <http://raub-and-more/readingtonbap>. Lists all the Reading children with dates of baptisms.
- <sup>34</sup> Mott, Rev. George S., D.D., *History of the Presbyterian Church in Flemington New Jersey, for a Century*, New York, 1894. 27-28.
- <sup>35</sup> Wertenbaker, Thomas J., *Princeton 1746-1896*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956. 15.
- <sup>36</sup> Maclean, John, *History of the College of New Jersey*, Vol. I, J.B. Lippincott, 1877. 47.
- <sup>37</sup> Wertenbaker 15.
- <sup>38</sup> Mott 21-25.
- <sup>39</sup> Phillips, Kevin, *The Cousins War*, Perseus Books, 1999. 91. This is an excellent read on the Religion, Politics of Anglo-America spanning the English Civil War and the American Civil War.
- <sup>40</sup> Whitehead, Vol. VIII, 374-377.

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<sup>41</sup> The chancery was an “equity” court as opposed to Law court. The Chancellor was last word in suits brought before the court. In the New Jersey colony the chancery court was the council and the Chancellor the Governor.

<sup>42</sup> Churchill, Winston S., *The Age of Revolution, The History of the English-Speaking Peoples, Vol. III*, Barnes and Noble Books, New York, 2005. 137-150. Fowler, William M., *Empires at War*, New York, Walker & Company, 2005. 1-10.

<sup>43</sup> Whitehead, Vol. IX, 127-129.

<sup>44</sup> Lender, Mark E. and James Kirby Martin, editors, *Citizen Soldier: the Revolutionary War Journal of Joseph Bloomfield*, Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1982. The journal documents Captain Thomas and Ensigh John’s service in the 3<sup>rd</sup> NEW JERSEY Regiment.

<sup>45</sup> Leach 36.

<sup>46</sup> Reading, David R., “Gov. John’s Silver Tankard,” *The Mount Amwell News*, Vol 1-No. 1 (Fall 2007): 1., Fales, Martha Gandy, *Early American Silver*, Funk & Wagnalls Publishing Co., 1970.

<sup>47</sup> Hunterdon County Land Drafts, MSC 163 F1, Spruance Library, Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, Pennsylvania. 1744 map of Rosemont farms.

<sup>48</sup> Deats, Hiram E. copy of MSS of J.A. Kline showing John Reading land distribution of 1815, map, 1896, MSS 0032 oversize folder 204, Hunterdon County Historical Society, Flemington, New Jersey.

<sup>49</sup> Deats, Hiram E., Hunterdon County Historical Society, to Mr. Street, letter, January 21, 1924, describing the history of “Greenwood”.

<sup>50</sup> Campbell, James, editor, *The Anglo-Saxons*, Penguin Books, 1982, 1991. 168.

<sup>51</sup> Stratford, Dorothy A., “John Reading’s Diary,” *The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* 62 (January 1987). 1-45.

<sup>52</sup> Giffen, Helen S., *Man of Destiny: Pierson Barton Reading Pioneer of Shasta County, California*, Redding, California: Shasta Historical Society, 1985.

<sup>53</sup> Kraft, Herbert C., *the Dutch, the Indians, and the Quest for Copper: Pahaquarry and the Old Mine Road*, South Orange, New Jersey: Seton Hall University Museum, 1996. Kraft concludes that Gov. John Reading was responsible for the mines, not the Dutch.

<sup>54</sup> Wacker, Peter O., *The Musconetcong Valley of New Jersey*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1968. 104.

<sup>55</sup> Lender 60.

<sup>56</sup> Leach 38.