

# The Reading Burial Ground

By David R. Reading

In September 1967, J.W. Reading Johnson wrote the Hunterdon County Historical Society pleading for help in restoring “the old Reading Burial Ground on the Wescott property.” He was appalled at the condition of the plot and was willing to assist in its restoration. In the 38 years since little has been done. He was correct in implying that The “Reading burial ground”<sup>1</sup> is one of Hunterdon County’s important historic cemeteries. It is also one of its most neglected and deteriorated with large trees, undergrowth, fallen tombstones, and parts of the stone wall enclosure in disarray. While the condition of the plot is deplorable, the peaceful surroundings remain much as they must have been when the site was chosen more than 100



The Reading Burial Ground, Sept. 2005.

years ago. It lies just off the Raven Rock - Rosemont Road at the top of the ridge of land that slopes up from the Delaware River and overlooks the farm that has been there for over 250 years. This important piece of Hunterdon’s history, situated among the natural beauty of the Delaware Valley, has been neglected too long. It needs to be restored. The first step in the restoration is to understand the history of the land and learn a little bit about the people buried on it.

The burial ground is located on land originally surveyed and purchased from the Lenni-Lenape Indians by Col. John Reading in 1704. Col. John was one of the original Proprietors of the Province of West Jersey, a member of the Governor’s council for the Colony of New Jersey in 1713, and generally considered the father of Hunterdon County.<sup>2</sup> He relocated to the homestead named Mt. Amwell above what is now Stockton in 1709 from Gloucester, Burlington County. Col. John’s son John was born in 1686 and his daughter Elsie born c. 1688. John inherited his father’s lands in Hunterdon and Sussex counties when he died in 1717 including Mt. Amwell and environs.

Gov. John Reading is, without doubt, Hunterdon’s most prominent early historic figure surpassing even the stature of his father; educated in England, a surveyor, a member of the Governors council for 37 years, twice acting governor of the colony, and one of the founding trustees of Princeton University. Gov. John married Mary Ryerson in 1720 and had eleven children. He resided at Mt. Amwell until c.1748 when he relocated to a plantation on the banks of the South Branch of the Raritan River near Flemington after a fire destroyed his home. Gov. John’s fifth son Richard built a new house on the property and continued to live there until he sold it to Asher Mott in 1768 soon after his father’s death.<sup>3</sup> His fourth son Joseph occupied a 406 acre farm contiguous with Richard’s.<sup>4</sup> Gov. John’s will written just before his death in 1767 granted Joseph the ownership of the tract; “...I give and Devise unto my Executor... all that Tract of land Farm and plantation situate in Township of Amwell now in possession of my son Joseph...shall be taken and received by the said Joseph and Amey [sic] his wife...” (Leach 124).

<sup>1</sup> The plot has also been known as “The Reading Burying Ground”, “The Johnson Cemetery”, and the “Reading graveyard”.

<sup>2</sup> In 1713 as a member of Governor Hunter’s council, John Reading. presented a bill for the organization of Hunterdon County. It is not known whether he wrote the bill, but it is assumed so (Leach 21).

<sup>3</sup> The is the farm later known as “The Wolverton Farm” (Bush).

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent account of the history of these properties see (Shuster).

Joseph was born in Old Amwell Township (now Delaware Township), presumably at Mt. Amwell, Hunterdon County on November 23, 1730. He was a commissioned as justice of the peace in 1762, became a judge on the court of common pleas, was one of the first president judges of the Orphan's court, and served on the governor's council from 1781 to 1783. Because of Joseph's service as a judge he is known as the "Honorable" Joseph Reading. In 1854 Hon. Joseph married Amy Pierson born in Rosemont, Hunterdon County. They had twelve children: William, John, Elizabeth (died young), Joseph, Samuel, Pierson, Amy, Sarah, Elizabeth, Nancy, Rebecca and Mary. Hon. Joseph died in 1806 and left the farm to his grandson Elisha Emley Reading who was William's son. It is believed that Elisha E. Reading died in 1824 and his administrators deeded the land to William Johnson in 1826. In 1871 Gardner B. Johnson was deeded the land and he kept it for forty years. It passed through two more owners until Charles Fackelman bought it 1921 and sold it to Paul Whiteman in 1938. Lloyd Wescott acquired the farm in the sixties and sold in it 1982 (Bush). Today the original farm size has been reduced to 206 acres but still remains in private hands.

The burials in the cemetery were inventoried in 1917 by Egbert T. Bush ("Johnson Family"). His inventory is the basis for the chart showing the descendants of Hon. Joseph Reading Birth. General information such birth, death, and marriage dates added by the author are drawn primarily from Leach. Individuals cited in the text are cross referenced to the descendant chart by a number appearing within brackets [ ] following the name.

## Joseph Reading

The oldest date of burial is that Joseph Reading [5] son of Hon. Joseph. He died March 11, 1810 at was fifty years of age. Joseph married Lucy Emley [6]<sup>5</sup> and had eight children: Ann, Amy, John, Sarah, Hannah, Maria, Theodosia, and Lucy Emley (Leach 63).



**Joseph Reading's Tombstone**

## Amy Reading and the Opdyckes

Joseph's daughter Amy Reading, married George Opdycke, Jr. [9] in 1807 (Leach 63). George Opdycke, Jr. (1735-1831) was the son of George Opdycke (1743-1795) of Kingwood and grandson of John Opdycke Esq. (1710-1777) of Hunterdon County. The Opdyckes were an old New Jersey family descended from the Dutchman Louris Jansen Op Dyck of New York who died in 1659. John Opdycke's father and grandfather settled in Hopewell, Hunterdon County. George, Jr. died in 1831 at the age of fifty-six. George and Amy Opdycke [8] had seven children; Nancy [10] b.1809, Sophia B. b. 1811 , Lucy E. b. 1813, Joseph R. b. 1815, Theodosia R. [13] b. 1818, John B. b.1824, and George W. b.1826 (Opdycke 331). Joseph Reading Opdycke married Sarah Wolverton Reading, daughter of Asher and Margaret (Wolverton) Reading in 1835. Joseph R. and Sarah had six children; Asher R b. 1843, Emma Jane b. 1845, George H. b. 1847, Manning F. b. 1852, Margaret [11] and Amy [12]. Margaret and Amy both died within two weeks of each other at the age of two years in July 1843. Joseph R. moved the family to Grundy Co., Illinois in 1855 and eventually became a wealthy farmer and successful politician. He died in 1870 (Leach 101).

## John Reading, the Sergeants, the Johnsons, and the Romines

Joseph's third child and first son was John Reading [14], born in 1789 in Kingwood, Hunterdon County. He married Martha Sergeant [24], daughter of Lohman Sergeant, in 1808. John and Martha's first daughter Mary Ann Reading [16] married Asher Johnson [17]. Four of their thirteen children are buried in the cemetery: Mary Hannah Johnson [18], I.F. Johnson [20], Charles Johnson [21], and Joseph Johnson

<sup>5</sup> Both Ann Emley and Lucy Emley were the granddaughters of John Emley, Esq. an assemblyman for Hunterdon County and son of William Emley, Esq. , member of the assembly of West Jersey and governor's council of the province. William Emley undoubtedly knew Col. John Reading (Leach 62).

**1-Hon. Joseph Reading b. 23 Nov 1730, d. 15 Nov 1806**

- +Amy Pierson
  - 2-William Reading d. Apr 1788
  - +Ann Emley b. 4 Apr 1757, d. 18 Apr 1847
- 1.
  - 3-Elisha Emley Reading b. 22 Jan 1776, d. 18 Aug 1824 (m. 1<sup>st</sup> cousin)
  - +Ann Reading b. 10 May 1785, d. 28 Mar 1843 (see 7)
  - 4-George Jackson Reading b. 23 Nov 1815, d. 13 Nov 1885
  - +Eliza Case b. 15 Jan 1815
- 2.
  - 5-Elisha Emley Reading c. 1847
  - 3-Asher Reading b. 19 Oct 1784, d. 18 Jan 1864
  - +Margaret Wolverton
    - 4-Sarah Wolverton Reading b. 5 Jun 1820
- 3.
  - 3-William Reading b. 20 Feb 1787, d. 22 Apr 1831
- 4.
  - +Elizabeth Sergeant b. 8 Jan 1793, d. 18 Feb 1873
  - 4-Charles Sergeant Reading b. 11 Jul 1814, d. 5 Jun 1890(m. 2<sup>nd</sup> cou.)
  - +Hannah Sergeant Reading b. 4 Jun 1819, d. 2 Mar 1845 (see 24)
- 5.
  - 2-Joseph Reading b. 28 Jan 1760, d. 11 Mar 1810
- 6.
  - +Lucy Emley b. 1 Jan 1762, d. 5 Aug 1831
- 7.
  - 3-Ann Reading b. 10 May 1785, d. 28 Mar 1843
- 8.
  - 3-Amy Reading b. 2 Mar 1787, d. 3 Sep 1858
- 9.
  - +George Opdycke Jr. b. 1775, d. 3 Dec 1831
- 10.
  - 4-Nancy Opdycke b. Jan 1809, d. 1 Jun 1828
  - 4-Joseph Reading Opdycke b. 1815, d. 1870 (m. 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin)
  - +Sarah Wolverton Reading
    - 5-Margaret Opdycke b. 1 Jan 1841, d. 13 Jul 1843
    - 5-Amy Opdycke b. 1 Jan 1841, d. 27 Jul 1843
- 11.
  - 4-Theodosia Reading Opdycke b. 1818, d. 1901
- 12.
  - 3-John Reading b. 8 Oct 1789, d. 12 Nov 1871
- 13.
  - +Martha Sergeant b. 2 Jun 1790, d. 25 Apr 1883
- 14.
  - 4-Mary Ann Reading b. 22 Oct 1809, d. 6 Apr 1881
- 15.
  - +Asher Johnson b. 15 Jun 1803, d. 27 Jul 1884
- 16.
  - 5-Mary Hannah Johnson b. 12 Mar 1842, d. 16 Jul 1843
- 17.
  - 5-Joseph Johnson b. 15 Jan 1844, d. 8 Dec 1864
- 18.
  - 5-I. F. Johnson b. 1 Jan 1846
- 19.
  - 5-Charles Johnson b. 17 Mar 1847, d. 5 Apr 1848
- 20.
  - 4-Lucy Reading b. Dec 1801, d. 14 Feb 1845
- 21.
  - +John Romine b. 27 Mar 1806, d. 24 Mar 1892
- 22.
  - 5-George Holcombe Romine b. Nov 1836, d. 17 Jan 1857
- 23.
  - 4-Hannah Sergeant Reading b. 4 Jun 1819, d. 2 Mar 1845
- 24.
  - 3-Hannah Reading b. 19 May 1794, d. 11 Sep 1854
- 25.
  - +Edmund Rittenhouse
- 26.
  - 3-Lucy Emley Reading b. 12 Jan 1803, d. 27 Sep 1847
  - +William Kugler

**Descendents of William and Joseph Reading, sons of the Hon. Joseph Reading**

[19] (Leach 104). Joseph Johnson served in the Union Army during the civil war and died of typhoid fever in the Baltimore Hospital on December 8, 1864 (Haines 383). He was just twenty when he enlisted as a Private in Company A of the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment New Jersey Volunteer Infantry on September 5, 1864.<sup>6</sup> John Reading's second daughter Lucy Reading [22], born in 1810, married John Romine, son of Furman

<sup>6</sup> The regiment had been mustered into service on August 27, 1862 in Flemington and assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, 6<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, as part of the Army of the Potomac and later, the Army of the Shenandoah. The unit fought at Fredericksburg, Wilderness, Spotsylvania Courthouse, Cold Harbor, and several other smaller battles. During September and October 1864, the unit saw action in the Shenandoah Valley at Opequan, Fisher's Hill, and Cedar Creek.<sup>6</sup>

Romaine and his wife Ana Holcombe. They had three children; Martha Romine, George Holcombe Romine [23], and Mary Hannah Romine (Leach 77). John's sixth daughter, Hannah Sergeant Reading [24] married her cousin Charles Sergeant Reading, son of William and Elizabeth (Leach 75, 77, 102).

### **Hannah and Lucy Emley Reading**

Joseph's fourth daughter Hannah Reading [25] married Edmund Rittenhouse. Joseph's youngest daughter, Lucy Emley Reading [26] was born in 1803 and married William Kugler (Leach 63)..

### **William Reading**

Joseph's brother, William lived nearby in Kingwood and married Ann Emley<sup>7</sup> in 1775 and had five children. His oldest son, Elisha Emley Reading [1] married his cousin, Ann Reading [7] who was Joseph's first daughter (Leach 74). Elisha and Ann had five children including George Jackson Reading who was the father of the second Elisha Emley Reading [2] buried in 1847 at three years of age (Leach 77). William's fourth son Asher Reading married Margaret Wolverton whose daughter Sarah Wolverton Reading married Joseph R. Opdycke. His fifth son William Reading [3] married Elizabeth Sergeant [4] (Leach 75). Their first son, Charles Sergeant Reading married his cousin, Hannah Sergeant Reading [24], on July 20, 1839 He died June 5, 1890. (Leach 102).

Four burials from Bush's list are not included in the descendant chart: 1) the infant son of Elisha and Sarah (Wolverton) Johnson. I have located a marriage record indicating they were married in 1835, but I could not determine the identity of Elisha Johnson's father or mother; 2) The unnamed infant son of Lucy and Asher Johnson; 3) the father of Margaret Sergeant, Lohman; and 4) an incomplete name recorded by Bush as CHR\_\_\_\_, Ann April 17, 1847, 90 years.

### **Closing comments**

The dates of burials encompass most of the nineteenth century from Joseph Reading in 1810 to Theodosia Opdycke in 1901. They and all the people in between were real people who lived real lives. One can only imagine the grief of a mother burying her son on cold December day in 1864 after bidding him Godspeed on his way off to war on a late summer day only three months earlier. The scene of such human experience is a precious reminder of our own heritage and should not be permitted to wither away. The restoration of this historic plot is morally unavoidable. It is a responsibility that we should accept to ensure the legacy of succeeding generations of Readings, Opdyckes, and Johnsons. J.W. Reading Johnson would expect nothing less.

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5.

## References:

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