

# THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

The Mt. Amwell Project, 1673 Hunting Creek Dr., Alexandria, VA 22314  
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## Col. John Reading's Proprietorship By David Reading

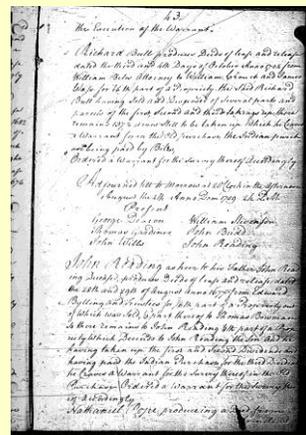
It has long been suspected that Col. John Reading was not the original purchaser of a partial West New Jersey proprietorship but that it was in fact his father. Col. John was born on 14 July 1657. He would have been only 20 years old and not of legal age on the date of purchase: August 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> 1677. We now have evidence that Col. John's father was indeed the original proprietor and that Col. John inherited his proprietorship from him. This evidence was discovered by Marfy Goodspeed when researching Hunterdon County deeds in the records of the West New Jersey Council of Proprietors. She found two references in the years 1700 and 1709.

The record in Book 2 on page 1, dated Sept. 3, 1700, mentions two separate proprietary shares, one from Reading Sr. and one from Andrew Robeson: "**John Reading in right of John Reading his father** one 6th of a Propriety purchased of Edward Byllinge and Trustees who purchased with Thomas Rudyard, Thomas Bull &c. by lease & release this 28th of August 1677. John Reading one propriety Except the First Taking up by lease & release the first and second days of September 1696 from Samuel Robeson son & heir to Andrew Robeson who purchased the same of Edward Byllinge &c by lease and release the last of February and first of March 1676."

The language in the second warrant (shown in the photo) of August 4, 1709, in Book 2 pg 43, is interesting in its description of how the proprietary shares were divided: "**John Reading as heir to his Father John Reading Deceased** produces Deeds of lease and release dated the 28th and 29th of August Anno 1677 from Edward Bylling and Trustees for 1/6th part of a Propriety out of which was sold 1/3d part thereof to Thomas Bowman so there remains to John Reading 1/8th part of a Propriety which Descends to John Reading the Son and he having taken up the first and Second Dividends and having paid the Indian Purchase for the third Dividend he Craves a Warrant for the Survey thereof in the Old Purchase Ordered a Warrant for the Survey thereof Accordingly. Purchase for the

### Inside This Issue

Col. John Reading's Proprietorship	1
Dart's Mills	1
Cemetery Database Update	4
Announcements	4



Photocopy of minutes of the Council of Proprietors 1709 showing Col. John's father was the original proprietor.

Photo - Marfy Goodspeed

third Dividend he Craves a Warrant for the Survey thereof in the Old Purchase Ordered a Warrant for the Survey thereof Accordingly."

This is direct evidence that Col. John Reading's father was the original proprietor.

*Note: A special thank you to Marfy Goodspeed for providing this information to the MTAP.*

### Dart's Mills: Hunterdon Landmark

Submitted by Richard B. Reading IV from *Application to the National Register of Historic Places, 1980*; Richard L. Porter compiler. (pt 1 of 2)

Dart's Mills is a fine example of a late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century milling village that continued to serve its function well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is located on the South Branch of the Raritan River in what are today Readington and Raritan Townships, Hunterdon County. Originally this vicinity was part of Amwell Township in Burlington County. Amwell was included in the new county of Hunterdon when it broke away from Burlington in 1714 (Snyder, 1969). In 1730, the section of Amwell Township northeast of the South Branch was set off and became Reading Township (this became Readington Township in 1798)

(Snyder, 1969). That same year Gov. John Reading purchased a tract of 127.5 acres on the South Branch, adding that to his holdings in the area (Hunterdon Co. deed 13/542). Secondary source material dealing with this region notes that in addition to his large landholdings, Reading also had three mills on the South Branch. The present location of Dart's Mills is indicated as the most upstream of the three (Wittwer, 1976, 38). However, when Reading died in 1767, neither his will, codicil, nor inventory bore any mention of mills (Trenton wills 751J).

The land Reading had purchased in 1730 passed to his youngest son Thomas in 1767 (Hunterdon Co deed 13/542). Thomas Reading later served as a captain in both the New Jersey Line and the Quartermaster Department during the Revolutionary War and held a number of local political offices (Nelson, 1916, 207n). In 1769 he sold 64 acres of this parcel to Gershom Lee. This deed contained no mention of a mill being attached to this property (Hunterdon Co. deed 13/539). In 1778, Lee sold 3.5 acres of this tract back in to the Reading family. Ellis and James Reading, sons of Thomas purchased the tract from Lee, and once again there was no mention of a mill connected with it (Hunterdon Co. deed 13/542).

In 1778, John Hills drew a military map that included the vicinity of the village of Flemington. He noted the presence of 'Readings Mill' a short distance away, on the South Branch. It is difficult to say from the map exactly where this mill was or which member of the Reading family owned it. The fact that Hills showed only one Reading mill in a stretch where there were allegedly three casts some doubt on that claim. Further research is needed to determine which South Branch mill this is, but the evidence so far encountered argues against its being at the location now known as Dart's Mill.

The first concrete evidence of a mill at this location comes from the road returns of Hunterdon County. In 1786 a new road was ordered built over the South Branch at 'Readings Mill', through and along the lands of Thomas Reading and John Huffman (Hunterdon Co. road return 1/149). A new bridge was ordered to be built at this point. This road became known as the Flemington-Whitehouse Road (later still as County Road 19, and, finally as Route 523). This evidence places the probable time of construction for the first mill at Dart's Mills as between 1778 and 1786. The name Readings Mill came either from the owners (Ellis and James) or perhaps from their father, who owned much of the surrounding land.

In 1805, the Reading brothers began to lose control of their mill. James sold his half share of Reading's Mills

to Nathaniel Saxton for \$800 (Hunterdon Co. deed 12/200). In the meantime, Ellis was sued and his share of the mill was put up for sale by the Hunterdon County sheriff. The sale was advertised in the 'True American', a Trenton paper, in June, 1805. In 1806, Ellis' share of the 'Grist Mill saw mill fulling mill' was purchased for \$152 by Saxton (Hunterdon Co. deed 12/343). This seems a low price for a milling complex with such varied capabilities. The following year, Saxton paid Thomas Reading \$40 to give up any rights he might have to the property. This agreement noted that the mills were owned by Saxton and occupied by George Hall. Thomas retained the right to remove sand from the island in the mill pond above the bridge (Hunterdon Co. deed 14/96).

After fully securing title, Saxton quickly sold the mills and made a fine profit, getting \$3200 for the same 3 .5 acre tract. The new buyer was Samuel Taylor, and the complexity of the mill's hydrosystem was reflected in the deed, which mentioned such landmarks as forebays, gates, dams, banks, causeways, and races (Hunterdon Co. deed 14/98).

In April, 1810, a petition was filed requesting the vacation of the road that was laid out in 1786. For reasons not given, the petitioners wanted the river crossing moved about 1000' south of its original location near Taylor's mill. This request was approved in May and ordered implemented. A map was drawn up detailing the courses the new road would take (Hunterdon Co. road return file # 20-5-30). But in July of that same year, another petition was filed, this one bearing, among others, the familiar names of Samuel Taylor, Thomas Reading, and John Huffman. This petition requested yet another road be laid out that essentially duplicated the road originally laid out in 1786. Hunterdon County changed their minds, voided the May decision and approved the latest petition in September (Hunterdon Co. road return file # 19-3-8). The end result of this, besides the decision on how the Flemington-Whitehouse Road would run, was a fine manuscript map by Thomas Gordon which shows Taylor's mills in 1810. The mill structure appeared directly below the bridge. Across the street and to the north were two small structures in the area of the present 'Dart House', and further to the north was a larger structure close to where the 'Hicks House' is located today.

In 1812 the lands of John Huffman were partitioned and divided among his heirs (Hunterdon Co. partitions vol. 1). This resulted in another manuscript map that included Samuel Taylor's mill seat. This map showed only the mill and its, dam, with the mill

now depicted as having two large sections. In 1815 the lands of John Reading were partitioned, and yet another manuscript map resulted (Hunterdon Co. partitions vol 1). Here, in addition to the two sections of the mill and the dam, the three structures across the road appeared in the same configuration as they had on the 1810 map. During the first quarter of the 19th century the mill complex had already grown to include various milling operations and a number of structures.

Taylor also expanded his landholdings during his tenure. When he sold the property in 1816, he sold not only the 3.5 acre mill lot, but also 17 acres of cleared land and 4 acres of woodlot adjoining the mill. The buyer was Mindert Wilson Jr., and he paid Taylor \$12,000 (Hunterdon Co. deed 26/455). This price may reflect not only the increased acreage but also improvements made to the mill seat since 1807. Wilson sold the property in 1818, adding a fourth tract in Amwell Township across the river from the other three tracts. (This area of Amwell Township was set off as Raritan Township in 1838). This fourth tract was for 6 acres of land and 25 acres of river bed across from the 'grist mill or fulling mill'. Williams S. Conover paid \$13,000 for the property (Hunterdon Co. deed 29/169).

In 1820 Conover was sued and his property was put up for sale. The 'True American' of October, 1820, carried the sheriff's sale notice announcing the sale of Conover's grist and saw mill. The property was purchased for only \$3,350 by William Covenhoven (Hunterdon Co. deed 31/604). Covenhoven died in 1823, with his will mentioning that he owned a mill in Hunterdon County (Covenhoven was from Montgomery Township, Somerset County) (Trenton will 1964R). The November 17, 1825 issue of the Hunterdon Gazette and Farmer's Advertiser (Vol. 1, # 35) has an advertisement offering the mill seat for sale by Covenhoven's heirs. It was described as including a 'Grist mill and Fulling-Mill, with a Carding Machine'. The next year the heirs sold the four tracts to Levi M. Mettler for \$2,706 (Hunterdon Co. deed 40/276). The comparatively low prices of the last two transactions may indicate an amount of deterioration to the-property.

Whatever the condition of the mills, Mettler apparently knew the potential of the property. During his 50 year tenure as owner the area known as 'Mettler's Mills' grew in size and complexity. The map of Raritan Township in 1850 showed this expansion. Mettler was listed as owning a grist and saw mill on the Readington side of the South Branch and he also had a flax mill on the Raritan side. In Readington, at least seven separate structures are shown in the complex, with structures in the areas of the 'Dart House', the 'Hicks House', and the 'Millhouse'.

Since this map was detailing Raritan Township, the structures on the Readington side of the river are not individually described. (This map was not reproduced because; a suitable copy could not be made).

In 1850, an Industrial Census was taken for New Jersey, providing detailed information on many industrial activities, including milling. There is no flax mill listed in Raritan Township for that year, perhaps indicating it was under construction, or perhaps simply not operating. There is also no listing under Mettler in Readington, indicating that he was renting the property. Examination of these operating grain mills in Readington yielded the partnership of Biggs and Huffman. Two men of these names lived very close to Mettler's Mills and operated the only unaccounted for combination grist and saw mill in the township. From earlier evidence it is known that Levi Mettler's mill had this dual capability. The census recorded that their grain mill had 2 run of stone and 1 employee, and manufactured 1,000 barrels of flour from 4,000 bushels of wheat, 1,000 barrels of flour from 5,000 bushels of rye, 360 tons of feed from 17,000 bushels of corn and oats, and 50 tons of flour from 4,000 bushels of buckwheat. The saw mill had 1 saw and 1 employee and converted logs into 45,000' of board and stud and 20,000' of lath.

In 1852 a large map detailing all of Hunterdon County was published. Perhaps due to the greater extent in area covered, there was less detail shown at Mettler's Mills than was shown on the 1850 map of Raritan Township. However, it did show Mettler's 'mill & store', with a flax mill across the river. Other structures appeared in the vicinity, notably in the areas where the 'Dart House' and 'Hicks House' are today.

*Ed. note: The second part of this article will appear in the next newsletter.*

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<sup>1</sup> The tax ratables for Readington and Amwell Townships for the period 1778-1803, which often enumerated mill owners, were checked. No mill ownership was recorded for Thomas, Ellis, or James Reading or Gershom Lee. Please note, however, that these records failed to record ownership of a mill by Ellis and James during periods when they certainly did own one at what later became Dart's Mill.

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Snyder, John P. *The Story of New Jersey's Civil Boundaries 1606-1968*, Trenton: Bureau of Geology and Topography, 1969.

Vermeule, Cornelius C. "Report on Water Supply", *Geologic Survey of New Jersey* Vol. 3, Trenton: The John L. Murphy Publishing Co., 1894.

Wittwer, Norman C. "The-Reading Family" In *Raritan Township*, by the Raritan Township Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

## Project Progress

### Reading Burial Ground

A stone has been purchased delivered and installed with the plaque acquired last year. Much thanks to Jen Ellsworth and Allan Reading.

### Lathrop Cemetery Data Base

Fred Lathrop has completed his submission of over 38,000 names in 143 cemeteries. We are now loading them into the data base which we hope will be accessible from the MTAP web site by early spring.

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**Board of Directors**

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## Announcements

### Books

A revised edition of *The Journal of Pierson Barton Reading, Overland to California, 1843* is now available for \$20.00 from Madge R. Walsh, 1397 Edgewood Drive, Redding, CA 96003.

### Web site Members Access

Reminder - The MTAP web site now includes a member's only page. Content includes current newsletters. To access simply click on the members page and enter user: Member, password: mtap2008.

### Fall meeting

The fall meeting will be held on November 7, 2009 at the Sergeantsville Inn, 11:45 AM. If you don't have a registration form, please call 703-549- 2738.

## Members

Carl Shuster, Ph.D. - life	John & Marielle Reading
Brian & Cindy Murphy - life	Romy Reading-Leo
Jen Ellsworth- life	Sybil Albrecht Lewis-life
Bill & Marjorie Luken, PhD. - life	Joan Phoenix
Rick Hayes-Roth, Ph.D. - life	John G. & Susan Reading- life
Ruth Meeker - life	Leigh Braun-life
Wiley L. Reading - life	Eugenia Klein-life
David & Jan Reading - life	Shawn & Theresa Reading
Chris Solliday - life	Jerry Rosco
Albert Reading -life	Dr. Ed Tindall
Rick Reading – life	George Muller
Allan Reading -life	Bruce Hotchiss
Audrey R. McAbee – life	Nancy Herman
Fred Lathrop-life	John Stevenson

### Membership

Help grow the Mt. Amwell Project. Show this newsletter to your friend and acquaintances with an interest in historical preservation. Tell them becoming a member is easy. Send \$10 for annual membership or \$125 for a lifetime membership to the Mount Amwell Project, 1673 Hunting Creek Drive, Alexandria, VA, 22314. Remember all membership dues and donations are tax deductible. The Mt. Amwell Project is a 501 (c) (3) charity. Members receive all MTAP communications including this newsletter.

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