

THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

For Love or Loyalty:

Richard Reading sides with the British
by David R. Reading

Richard Reading, the fifth son of Gov. John Reading, was the only Reading son to remain loyal to the British during the Revolutionary War. The question is: why? Was it because he held some deep seated belief in the wisdom of British colonial rule? After all, his father had been a member of the Governors council for 27 years and twice acting Governor. Or, was he loyal to his wife Catherine and her family, who were Anglicans and British loyalists?

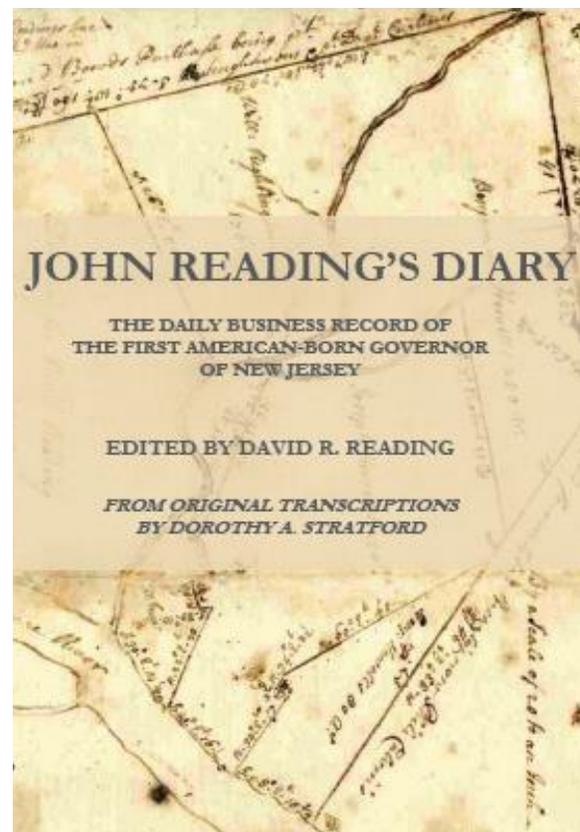
By 1775, three of his seven brothers were dead. John had predeceased their father dying in 1766. Daniel had died of a hunting accident in 1768, and Samuel died at age 7 in 1749. Of The remaining three, Thomas and George were officers in the Continental Army, and Joseph became a member of Governor's Livingston council in 1781. Richards's nephews Charles, John, and Joseph were also patriot soldiers.

According to Kevin Phillips from his book, *The Cousins War*, Loyalties in the American Revolution were dominated by religion, culture, and ethnicity.¹ In New Jersey, High Church Anglicans, concentrated primarily in the east, tended to support the British government. After all, they were members of the official Church of England. Presbyterians and other so-called dissenter sects tended to support the Patriots side. The Anglican Reid family of Monmouth County and the Presbyterian Reading family of Hunterdon perfectly fit this Loyalist and Patriot template. When Richard married Catherine Reid and subsequently left for Monmouth County, he had unequivocally chosen British loyalty.

Catherine was the daughter of Col. John Reid and the grand-daughter of John Reid, the East New Jersey surveyor and map maker. John Reid, the grandfather, was a contemporary of Gov. John Reading's father Col. John Reading, the former born in Scotland in 1656 and the latter in England in 1657. Reid, a Quaker, married Margaret Miller in 1678. He and his family had come to America at the request of

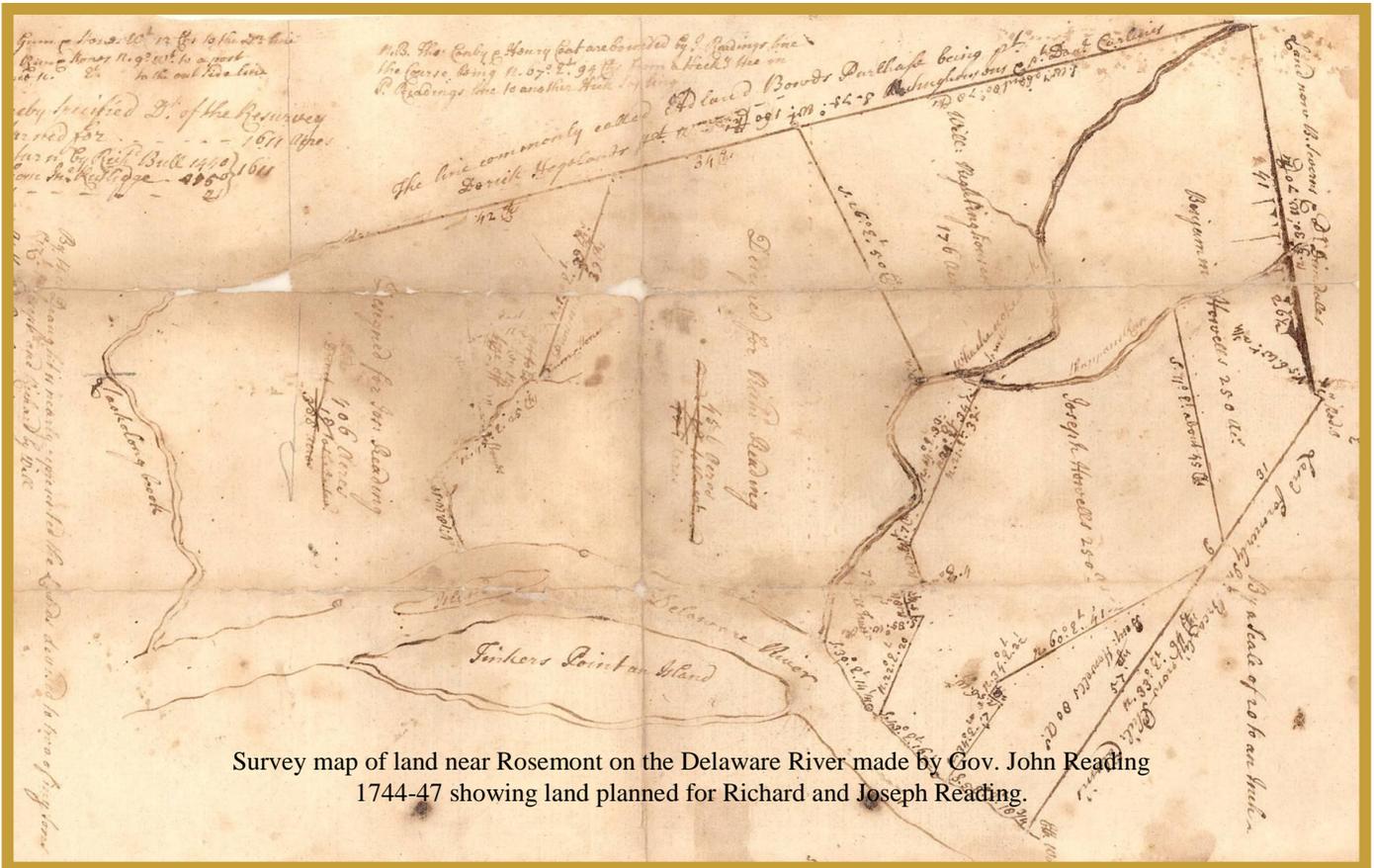
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John's Reading Diary is in the final stages of publication. The review copies have been ordered and the target date for public availability of 3 December 2010 looks very real. The sale price \$39.95 plus shipping, but members are entitled to a 10% discount. If you wish to pre-order, please send a check for \$38.00 to Mt.. Amwell Project, 1673 Hunting Creek Dr., Alexandria, VA 22314. Make sure to include your address.

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Survey map of land near Rosemont on the Delaware River made by Gov. John Reading 1744-47 showing land planned for Richard and Joseph Reading.

the East New Jersey proprietors in 1684 and soon was selected by the proprietors as the Deputy Surveyor General of East New Jersey. He received a grant for land from the proprietors in Monmouth County in 1686 and in 1687; he was one of the commissioners with John Emley to settle the boundary between East and West Jersey. George Keith, another Quaker, was selected as the surveyor. Reid later became Surveyor General, a member of the East Jersey assembly, a Judge, and a member of the East Jersey Proprietors council. According to his own writings, he took the sacrament of the Church of England and became an Anglican in 1703.² He could have been influenced by George Keith, who had fomented a schism among the Quakers in 1690 and became an Anglican minister in 1702.³

Col. John Reid was a child when his father rejected Quakerism and joined the Church of England and was certainly raised as an Anglican. Col. John Reid married Mary Sands on December 17, 1721 and they had eleven children including three who married children of Gov. John Reading: Augustine Reid married Sarah Reading, Euphemia Reid married Daniel Reading, and Catherine Reid married Richard Reading in 1757.⁴

Richard was 15 when his father surveyed the land near the Delaware River (close to present day Rosemont) in order to divide it for his brother Joseph and him (see map). According to Josiah Leach in his Memorials, Richard was elected town clerk of Amwell in 1761, witnessed the will of Charles Woolverton same year, was administrator of the estate of John Peters dated June 5, 1763 and in 1768 was plaintiff⁵ in a suit against John Ely.

In September 1767, Richard advertised⁶ his plantation for sale together with other land in Sussex County and sold his plantation to Asher Mott for £1566 6s on January 4, 1768. It is not certain that Richard ever had clear title to the plantation. The indenture of sale to Asher Mott refers to James Pryor and James Coxe, Jr. as assignees of Richard Reading who show that their power to sell comes from John & Mary Reading, his parents.⁷ His father, Gov. John Reading, had died the previous November and it is interesting that his will specifically mentioned Joseph's plantation but not Richard's. Richard's son James must have been in poor health around the time of the sale, because he died sometime in 1768. Whatever the reasons for leaving Hunterdon County, Richard purchased a homestead in Middletown, Monmouth County with the proceeds from the sale and relocated

there with his wife Catherine and children. Once in their new homestead, they had five more children.

It is indisputable that Richard Reading was an active Loyalist. He left Middletown and went to New York City in December 1776 and “joined his majesties Army in December 1776 and by the direction of Lord Cornwallis went into several points of the Provinces and prevailed on many of the inhabitants to lay down their arms and submit to his Majesties Government. On his return to the Army he received a deputation from Sir William Erskine by virtue of which he assisted the Officers of the Quartermaster Generals Department, to get large quantities of stores from New Jersey to New York.”⁸

In the spring of 1777, while living in New York, he attempted to visit his family in Middletown and was captured and imprisoned for 6 months. In the fall of 1777, Richard Reading was freed by “some Loyalists” and “brought within the Lines”. On September 2, 1779, Monmouth County Judges John Anderson and Joseph Lawrence issued a warrant for Richard, Catherine, and Ferdinand Reading to return to Hunterdon County and remain there until “lawfully discharged.”⁹ In October 1779, Richard and one son (Ferdinand?) were captured at Phineas Bay near Staten Island, taken to Morristown, New Jersey and imprisoned there for ten months. Richard then petitioned Col. Roger Morris, Esq. in a letter dated October 6, 1779 where he requests subsistence for his wife and children who are now destitute and under threat of arrest. The letter is endorsed by New Jersey Governor William Franklin, son of Benjamin Franklin and a loyalist.¹⁰

Richard Reading and his son escape from Morristown and return to New York City. He his wife and children were living in New York having been brought there by Richard’s friends in order to escape the arrest warrant in the fall of 1779. At this point all his property that he left behind in Middletown has been plundered and confiscated. On 2 May 1780, Catherine, now in New York, petitions Col. Morris for a continece of her support. Again, the letter is endorsed by Gov. Franklin.

In June 1781, Richard and three sons, probably Reid, Ferdinand, and Samuel, were captured by a patriot ship near Sandy Hook. They were then imprisoned in Philadelphia for two months. Richard and presumably his sons were released in a prisoner exchange in August 1781. Following his release, he took his family to Long Island. At some time soon thereafter, he was killed. It is believed by many that he was murdered.

In July 1783 Richard Reading’s widow Catherine moved to Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia with her four youngest children Augustine (15), Thomas

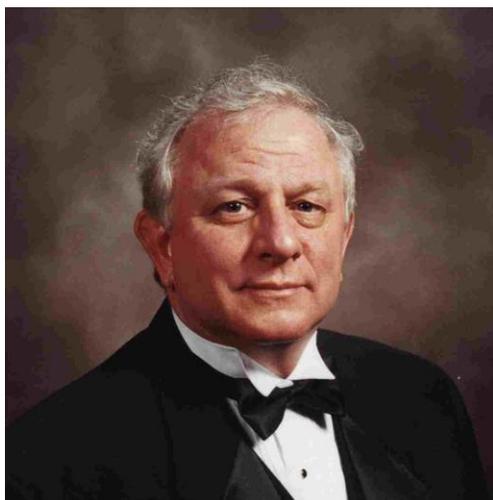
(13), Katherine (11), & Richard (8). Catherine resided in Nova Scotia until March 1784. During this time she was not receiving support, having lost the £60 a year she was getting as a result of the successful petition to Col. Roger Morris in New York City. In a letter dated 16 March 1786, Catherine petitions authorities in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia for support under an act of parliament to provide support for her as a result of her husband’s loyalty to the Crown. She claims she didn’t know about the Act which gave her the right to obtain compensation. One of the witnesses is Ferdinand Reading who is shown as a resident of Annapolis. Catherine is now 53. The date of her death is not known.

In summary, the tragedy that was Richard Reading’s life was a consequence of the violent upheaval of the Revolutionary War is reminiscent of the oft repeated phase that characterizes the American Civil War as a war that pitted “brother against brother.” The Revolutionary War is less often so characterized, but as we have seen, nonetheless appropriate. But did Richard choose the losing side because he came to a rational conclusion that British rule was the best option for a government of the American colonies or was he influenced by his wife and her loyalist family? Unfortunately, Richard Reading does not tell us. We know that he was not a reluctant loyalist; he enthusiastically participated on the British side. Richard was a Revolutionary war loyalist for both love of his wife and a sense that the Reid family offered him what he regrettably thought was the best and safest place for his family. Perhaps Richard Reading was loyal to the British inspired by love.

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- 1 Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins’ War*, (Basic books. A member of the Perseus Books Group, 1999) 169.
 - 2 Josiah Granville leach, *Genealogical And Biographical Memorials of the Reading, Howell, Yerkes, Watts, Latham and Elkins Families*, (Lippincott, 1898) 53.
 - 3 John E. Pomfret, *The Province of West New Jersey 1609-1702*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956) 255.
 - 4 Rev. Evelyn Bartow, *Bartow Genealogical Supplement*, Baltimore, 1879.
 - 5 Files 31.950 of the Supreme Court of New Jersey.
 - 6 Pennsylvania Gazette, 24 September 1767.
 - 7 Edgar T. Bush, “Woolverton Farm Near Stockton In Family Since 1799”, Hunterdon County Democrat, Nov. 5, 1936.
 - 8 Public Record Office, Granville County of Annapolis, Nova Scotia, 16 Mar 1786, Catherine Reading’s statement.
 - 9 Guy Carlton papers Vol. 29, no. 58, Warrant issued by Judge John Anderson and Joseph Lawrence.
 - 10 Guy Carlton papers Vol. 29, no. 55, letter to Col. Roger Morris, Esq. from Richard Reading & William Franklin.

A special thank you to Carol-Jo (Reading) Morris for her research concerning the Guy Carlton papers.

In Memoriam



Allan T. Reading 1947-2010

Announcements

New Member

We welcome new life member Steve Case. Steve is a retired attorney and Hunterdon county native.

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

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