

THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

George Reading's Search for Peace

By David R. Reading

Although he was the born to wealth and prominence, George Reading's life would not be without sorrow and disappointment. Born the second son of Gov. John Reading and Mary Ryerson in 1725, his fortunate birth would afford him many opportunities in the colonial society of Hunterdon County. He would be commissioned one of his Majesties Justices of the Peace in 1755, elected as a representative to the New Jersey Colonial Assembly between 1762 and 1765, and following in the footsteps of his Father and Grandfather a member of the Council of Proprietors of West New Jersey.

He married Rebecca Mullen in 1751 and their first child, Samuel, was born in November 1752. But their second and third child died young or at birth in 1754 and 1755. The tragic events of his life had begun. Between 1754 and 1766 Rebecca would give birth nine times, but four of the children would die young or at birth.

In 1764, George's father deeded several pieces of land to him including the land along the south branch of the Raritan River near present day Flemington Junction. This tract of 260 acres contained the brick house built by Gov. John in 1760 and a fully functional grist mill. Approximately a year and a half later George advertised this property and several other pieces of real estate granted by his father for sale at public auction. He held his last "Vendue" on March 31, 1767 and was apparently successful, selling the parcels to John Gregg, deed dated 29 April 1767.

The reason for the liquidation of the property is unknown. His father, Gov. John, was still alive (he would die in November 1767). Perhaps he feared the coming Revolutionary War or more likely the mill proved unprofitable. In August, George and their children relocated to Mansfield, Woodhouse Township, Sussex Co. (present day Washington, NJ). It was here that George suffered the greater tragedy.

Rebecca died along with her unnamed child in childbirth on July 15, 1770.

By 1775, George decided to move again and again we don't know why. Perhaps it was the looming war or the loneliness and sorrow of Rebecca's death still haunting him. He obtained a warrant for 300 acres of land in Westmoreland Co., Pennsylvania and settled on the land near Ft. Ligonier (east of Pittsburgh) with his sons John Mullen and George, Jr. sometime between 1775 and 1778. His other children were to remain in New Jersey.

If the move to Pennsylvania was to escape the war he was soon to be disabused of that notion. George Reading was commissioned the sub-lieutenant of Westmoreland County with rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Pennsylvania Militia replacing Col. James Pollock on April 2, 1778 and spent the rest of the year at Ft. Ligonier. The threat to the settlers of Western Pennsylvania was real. Writing to his younger brother, Captain Thomas Reading in January 1779, he reports that a Gen. McIntosh made an expedition out of Ft. Pitt the previous October to "Indian Country". The intent of the expedition was to subdue the British and Indians at Detroit. In the same letter George makes a plea for his daughters to join him, but to no avail – they do not come. Strangely, he also refers to his daughter Elizabeth as "Beckey" rather than Betsey.

By April the situation is worsening. After an attack on Ft. Ligonier now Colonel Reading forwards a letter requesting assistance to General Joseph Reed, President of Pennsylvania, whom he had known when



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both were residents of Hunterdon County. In the letter he writes that the fort is being defended by only eight men and boys. Reed provides no help and in light of the deteriorating situation and with no assistance forthcoming from the Continental Army, George decides to abandon the Ligonier Valley.

In July 1779 he sent his son John south down the Ohio River to the Falls of the Ohio (Cincinnati) "to take up and secure land, if he likes the country." The following March, Col. George traveled down the Ohio River on a craft he constructs and finds his way into the interior of what is western Virginia and settles near John Crow's station (near present day Danville, Kentucky). Finding that the war was still active, he is re-commissioned on June 2, 1780. But disaster soon strikes again for George Reading.

On June 15th 1780, John Mullen Reading was captured during a raid of Ruddle's Station. Maude Ward Lafferty describes the raid as: "One of the outstanding events of the Revolutionary War in the West was the invasion of Kentucky by the British officer, Captain Henry Bird, of the Eighth Regiment of his Majesty's forces, and the destruction of Ruddle's and Martin's Forts. He captured 470 men, women and children. They were divided among their captors and some of them were taken 800 miles farther to Mackinac and to Montreal."

John Mullen is released at Ticonderoga, New York on July 18, 1783 after being held with the other captives, men, women, and children in or near Montreal, Canada. During John's captivity, George Reading made plans to move north above the Licking Creek with George Jr. to what is now Bourbon County, Kentucky. He writes this to his brother Thomas in June 1783 and says that the move would take place the following spring (1784) *if there is peace* [italics mine]. He is hoping that the temporary lull in Indian raids caused by their having lost their British allies at the close of the war would last. It would not.

In 1784, the population of Kentucky explodes as many settlers follow the route of George and his sons had taken down the Ohio River. The British, the Spaniards on the Mississippi River and the Indian populations to the north (Ohio), the west (Illinois), and the south (Tennessee) were all opposed to this western expansion of the new United States and Indian raids worsened.

George's last known letter to his brother Thomas was dated May 22, 1787 from south fork Licking, Kentucky and written in three parts. In the first part, he describes his own security situation and reports on various military campaigns undertaken by the new United States government.

Our situation is critical in regard to the Indians. They are continually taking horses from us, last April they took 16 horses in a company Force including three of ours which was all we had. Within 7 or 8 years they have taken 10 head of horses from us; the Shawnee profess friendship to us at present and says the Indians that does the mischief at present are a collection of about 60 or 70 of different nations that are settled in the forks of one of the branches of Scioto [River, Ohio] and have offered if we will go against them to pilot us to their Town.

It is unknown if this offer was ever accepted. He then tells Thomas of an upcoming campaign against the southern Indians.

There is a Campaign going out of Valentun[?] from the two County's northward of the Kentucky [river] to start the fifth day of June my son George going with them the Indians that does mischief at the forts and so[uth] side of Kentucky are what they call the white river and Opost Indians.

George is referring to the campaign lead by Col. James Robertson. Marching south from Nashville with 130 men, he found the Indian village, at or near the mouth of Spring Creek, or Occocoposo, as it was then called. The Indians, and their French allies, retreated to a strong position, a short distance up the creek, where Robertson attacked, and defeated them with heavy loss.

George then goes on and recounts two campaigns that have already been completed.

We were out two campaigns [against] the Indians last fall both at once. The Campaign against Opost & white river Indians miscarried by near half of the Army mutinying and turning back when they were within days march of the their principle town which has given them [the Indians?] great Spirits.



Gen. George
Rogers Clark

On September 10, 1786 some 2,000 militia troops gathered in Louisville and General George Rogers Clark led them north into the upper Wabash River area in present-day Indiana. Clark's army progressed only part way to their destination before supply problems, desertion problems, discipline problems, and other problems forced the General to withdraw back to Louisville without making any attack.

Simultaneously, Clark ordered Colonel Benjamin Logan to collect another militia force and to lead his force into the upper Miami River valley in Ohio against the Shawnee villages as a diversionary strike. These thrusts into Indian lands were to take place at the same time.

George writes of Logan's campaign:

The Campaign against the Shawnees succeeded, they killed 13 of them and took upwards of 30 squaws and children prisoners, which has had a good effect and brought them to reason. Some of the prisoners they have returned but not all.

George closes the first section by a complaint regarding statehood for Kentucky.

...Congres and the State of Virginia by their conduct seems to think that we are not wanting their protection and yet we are called on to pay up our proportion of the National Debt and leave unto defend and shift for our [selves]. I hope, and it may be depended only certain that the next fall we shall declare our selves independent and be a Separate State when we shall have it in our power and be allowed a representation in Congress which will enable them to be informed of the importance and condition of the Western frontier.

In the second part of the letter he again begs his daughter Betsey to join him, just as he had eight years earlier, but now excuses Amelia who he knows has married Albert Joost Zabriskie in March 1787. The "more favorable times" are an obvious reference to the Indian unrest.

If times should be more favourable here against next fall. I shall expect Betsey to come out with her Brother John. I realy have undergone some unknown hardships and difficulties in keeping house for so

long as I have Still flattering myself with the pleasing expectation at having one or both of Daughters with me to be [assisting] and a comfort to me in my old age and infirmities, Amelia I must excuse as I am informed She is going to alter her condition...

In the third and final part, his mood is sober and somewhat fearful as he reflects on his approaching death. He laments that it is not in his power as a "meer mortal" to affect his salvation in the eyes of God, only that he has tried to live as a "righteous" man that, according to the Bible, it "availeth much" towards salvation.

Dear Brot^r I wish I had more clear views of Spiritual affairs than Temporal but it pleases the Lord of his own wise purposes it [will hold] the impulse of his divine Spirit from having that influence on my hand and [Illegible] heart so as to give me a Thorough feeling sense of my wretched fallen state, am sensible it is not in the power of my self as a meer mortal to do any thing pleasing to God toward[s] working out my own salvation, I own it my duty to be sound in the way of means and not [Illegible] in that but strive with all my might to obtain interest in God the Father [Illegible] suffering of his son Jesus Christ, but then I must have an inward motion or impulse to move me to it, which must freely [Illegible] from the Holy Spirit without any merit or defect of my own, must appeal to your former State if you as a[n] earnest man could work out your in^t your own salvation, or do any pleasing in the sight of God. St. James says the effectual fervent purpose of a righteous man avaieth much. My dear Brot^r pray for the conversion and salvation of your affectionate and loving Brother.

Kentucky became the 15th state on June 1st, 1792. George Reading found peace two months later on August 12 at the age of 67. He was buried in the Stoner Mouth Meeting house churchyard near Ruddles Mills, KY. He left large land holdings in Kentucky to his sons: George, John, William and Samuel. It is unknown whether he ever again saw his daughters Elizabeth and Amelia after he left New Jersey.

Sources

1. Leach, Josiah Granville, 1898. Genealogical and Biographical Memorials of the Reading, Howell, Yerkes, Watts, Latham, and Elkins Families. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott.
2. Roosevelt, Theodore, 1894, *The Winning of the West, Vol. IV, The Indian Wars*, G. P. Putnam's Sons.

3. Lafferty, Maude Ward, "Destruction of Ruddle's and Martin's Forts in the Revolutionary War", From *the Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 54, October, 1956, No. 189.
4. Busch, Clarence M., "The Frontier Forts of Western Pennsylvania. Fort Ligonier, Part II". *Report of the Commission to Locate the Site of the Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania, Volume Two*. State Printer of Pennsylvania. 1896), 345.
5. Letters from George Reading to Thomas Reading; 1779-1787; Reading Family of New Jersey Collection, Box 1, Folder 8; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Cemetery News

Slacktown - The American Baptist Church of New Jersey has signed the Quit-claim deed for the Slacktown Cemetery to Kingwood Township. This is great news! Once the deed is recorded the MTAP will sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) under a previous verbal agreement with the Township to maintain the plot.

HayPress - Dave Reading and Ann Rotunno met with Readington Township's Historic Preservation Commission at their regular meeting in January to present the MTAP's interest in preserving the abandoned cemetery known as HayPress. We were successful as they got approval from the full Readington Township Committee to sign an MOU with us. John O'Brian and Dave reading visited the site with Pat Fisher-Olsen and Alan Harwick in May. A draft MOU was agreed upon and is now awaiting Committee approval.

The Mount Amwell News
The newsletter of the Mount Amwell Project

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Published Spring and Fall

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Announcements

Second Annual Cemetery Seminar

The Hunterdon County Historical Society's Cemetery Committee, in partnership with Hunterdon County's Tri-centennial Committee and the **Mount Amwell Project**, is presenting a symposium in celebration of our agricultural heritage by talking about the burial grounds of our first farming settlers.

Lunch, keynote address with presentation by authors, a riveting panel discussion on "Meeting the Challenges of Preserving Old and Abandoned Cemeteries," finishing with tours and demonstrations in the church and adjoining cemetery.

The Symposium will be held at the Flemington Presbyterian Church, 10 E Main St, Flemington, NJ on Saturday Sept 19. It will run from 11AM until 4PM with lunch provided by Jersey Mike's. Registration fee: \$10. Space is limited to the first 75 paid registrants.

Mail Checks to: HCHS Cemetery Committee, 114
 Main Street, Flemington, NJ 08822
 Contact info: info@hunterdonhistory.org
 908-782-1091

New Board Member

Ann Rotunno was elected to the Board of director at the annual meeting in January. Ann is active in the DAR and will be a great asset to the MTAP.

Fall Meeting

The fall meeting will again be held at the Frenchtown Inn on Saturday **November 7th** at noon. Our speaker will Don Cornelius who will present a short lecture on the New Jersey State Archives Proprietor Records.

New Members

We welcome new life members Ann Rotunno and Patti & Dean Christie.

Web Site Access

The MTAP web site (www.mtamwell.org) includes a member's only page. Content includes current newsletters. To access simply click on the members page and enter user: member, password: mtap2008