

SIMEON ELLIS.

SAMUEL SMITH, in his History of New Jersey, says, "Thomas Ellis came to Burlington, New Jersey, in 1677." He came from Burlington, in Yorkshire, England, as one of the servants of George Hutchinson, who was a distiller. In reference to this class of persons, a note is appended, which says: "Many that came servants succeeded better than some that bought estates. The first, inured to industry and the ways of the country, became wealthy, while others were obliged to spend what they had in the difficulties of the improvements. And others, living too much on their original stock, for want of sufficient care to improve their estates, have in many instances dwindled to indigency and want." Thomas Gordon, in his history of this State, copied after Smith, and mentions another Thomas Ellis, who arrived a few years later; but the same person is probably meant, as, by some oversight, the name may have been repeated.

He settled on a town lot located to him in Burlington, in 1680, and died two years after, leaving a daughter Elizabeth, who was apprenticed to John Brown the same year. This was done by the judges of the court, and appears among its proceedings.¹

William Ellis also came to Burlington county in 1683, and made a location of a considerable tract of land in Springfield

¹ Revel's Book, 04.

township. He was from Tunstall, in Holderness, Yorkshire, England, and, in all probability, was of the same family as Thomas.²

Of the nativity, or of the arrival of Simeon Ellis in New Jersey, nothing is known; and it may, perhaps, always remain a doubtful question, for the reason that very many of the emigrants of that day had no entry made of their names upon the ship's books, and also because many of these books have been destroyed through the carelessness of the owners, or of those into whose possession they may have fallen.

It is probable, however, that he was not among the first that landed here, as he did not purchase any real estate until 1691; at which date many settlements had been made in Burlington and Gloucester counties, and the city of Philadelphia had come to be quite a thrifty village.³ This purchase consisted of two hundred acres of land conveyed to him by Francis Collins, and was part of a survey of eight hundred acres made by him, bounded by the north side of the north branch of Cooper's creek.⁴ The two hundred acres lay on both sides of the King's highway, as the same had been but a short time before laid out by the commissioners appointed for that purpose.

Simeon built his log cabin near the stream, and but a short distance from the road; here he always after lived, and here were all his children born. As was the custom in those days, his place had to be designated by some title, and he adopted that of "Springwell;" but, like the position of the first habitation, it has long since been forgotten. This practice was brought by our forefathers from England, where every gentleman's "seat" had a particular name, which name is tenaciously adhered to from generation to generation by the family. The constant change of the title to land in New Jersey, and the disposition of many families to remove from the ancestral acres, are reasons why so few estates at the present day retain the names by which they were christened at the first settlement. Some, however, may so be found; also, in possession of the owners, may be seen the original title to the estate, coming

² Lib. B1, 121.

³ Lib. G2, 127.

⁴ Lib. P, 238.

down through the same blood, with the pride of family always apparent.

In 1695, Simeon bought four hundred acres of land of Elias and Margaret Hugg, adjoining his first purchase. This Margaret was a daughter of Francis Collins, who had conveyed the said four hundred acres to Samuel Jennings and Robert Dimsdale, as trustees, in 1687—part of the eight hundred acres survey before named.⁵

These first purchases of Simeon Ellis, as described by present localities, include the village of Ellisburg, in Delaware township; they are almost equally divided by the Camden and Marlton turnpike, and the Moorestown and Haddonfield road. But few of the original boundaries are left, excepting the water course, as the purchase, sale and division of land, in the space of one hundred years, obliterate very many ancient land marks.

Several other purchases were made, some of which lay on the south side of the north branch, now included in the farms of John Ballinger and of others adjoining.⁶ A part of this estate is now owned by Joseph Ellis and the heirs of Josiah Ellis, deceased, lineal descendants of the first settlers. All the remainder has passed out of the name many years since.

Simeon Ellis was not a participant in the political troubles of the times in which he lived, and does not appear as an office holder upon any of the records. He was a member of the Society of Friends, and among those who made up the little assemblage at John Kay's house, a short distance from his own; where he met the few of the same sect that came from Evesham.

Simeon Ellis died in 1715, dividing his property by will among his children.⁷ His personal effects, by appraisement, amounted to two hundred and fifty-three pounds, sterling, and he, doubtless, was considered a "well-to-do" farmer by his neighbors, for his estate ranged much above the average of that time. His wife, who survived him, was Sarah, a daughter of William Bates, to whom he was married, according to the order of Friends, in 1692, at the old Newton meeting house, then a short distance from the home of the bride.

⁵ Lib. G3, 71.

⁶ Basse's Book, 28.

⁷ Lib. No. 2, 05.

Sarah, the widow of Simeon Ellis, dealt somewhat in real estate after the death of her husband, as, in 1717, she bought some four hundred acres in Newton township, fronting on Cooper's creek, and extending to the main branch of Newton creek.⁸ This she purchased of Isaac Hollingsham, and, the next year, her son Thomas conveyed her an adjoining tract, making her at that time one of the largest land holders in the township.

Portions of this property remained in the family and name for many years after the death of the widow, following the collateral branches to the present generation; but they are now divided into lots and farms, parts being owned by Edward C. Knight, William P. Tatem, John C. De Costa, and others.

The landed estate of Simeon Ellis and of his widow Sarah, in her own right, was therefore large; and, lying as it mostly does, in the improved sections of Camden county, if taken as a whole, it would now be of much value.

In disposing of his property by his will, Simeon Ellis mentioned seven children, namely: Thomas, who married Catharine Collins, daughter of Joseph, in 1722; Joseph, who married ———; William, who married Sarah Collins, daughter of Joseph; Simeon, who married ———; Jonathan, who married Mary Hollingshead (the latter surviving him, and afterwards marrying Robert Stiles); Mary, who married ———; and Sarah, who married John Kay, in 1730.

The homestead estate, which was devised to Thomas, William and Simeon, was held by them, as given by their father, until 1754, when, owing to some trouble in regard to the boundaries, they joined in a re-survey of the same, which settled all matters in dispute with adjoining owners.⁹ This proceeding also showed in what manner the three sons held the paternal estate, and on what part of which each lived at that time.

Thomas had three hundred and nineteen acres of the western part, fronting on the creek and extending north. His residence was on what is generally known as the Lewallen farm (a short distance from Stevenson's mill). The Ogden estate, being for-

⁸ Lib. A, 56, 151.

⁹ Lib. S, 338, O. S. G.

merly the farm of Charles Collins, deceased, was part of Thomas's share; and also much other adjoining land; all this is now divided and sub-divided into plantations, the primitive forests being gone and most of the ancient boundaries obliterated. In 1766, he sold the larger part of the same to Joseph Collins, who, by his will, divided it among his sons.¹⁰

This Joseph Collins was, perhaps, the son of Benjamin and nephew of Catharine, the wife of Thomas Ellis, and the only person of that branch of the family who carried the name to the present generations.

William had two hundred and thirty-three acres in the most northerly part of the original tract, lying, as it now does, on both sides of the Haddonfield and Moorestown road, and mostly absorbed in the farms of William Morris Cooper and the heirs at law of Batheuel Heulings, deceased. In 1757, he lived in Newton township, at which time his occupation was that of a carpenter; but he afterwards removed to his part of his father's estate, and there died intestate, in 1759.¹¹ His wife Catharine became his administrator. He had but two children, namely:¹² Abigail, who married John Cox in 1744; and Ann, who married Peter Champion in 1746, John Stokes in 1751, and Samuel Murrell.¹³

The landed property was divided between the two daughters; it has many years since passed out of the name and blood.¹⁴

The daughter Ann, by her several husbands, had the following issue: By Peter Champion, one child, Joseph, who married Rachel Collins; by John Stokes, none; by Samuel Murrell, a son Samuel, who married — Hubbs.

The children of John and Abigail Cox, were William, who married Phoebe Duffield; John, who married — Tallman and Ann Dylwin; and Samuel, who married Sarah Emlen.

A short distance east of the Haddonfield and Moorestown road, and on the Heulings farm, is the spot where were buried the slaves of the Ellis family, a spot scarcely known to the present generation, but not as yet used for farming purposes. Occasionally a member of the owner's family would be interred

¹⁰ Lib. L, 109, Woodbury.

¹¹ Lib. P, 479.

¹² Lib. No. 9, 213.

¹³ Book of Licenses of Marriages, Trenton.

¹⁴ Lib. AH, 385.

at such place, and consequently be lost sight of among the after generations of the proprietor.

Simeon had the larger share in acres, as well as the homestead improvements, for his portion of the paternal property, it being three hundred and sixty-six acres, with an extensive front on the creek. He occupied the house built by his father and tilled the land, from which the latter had cleared the timber, when he made his settlement at that place. He was an intelligent man for his day, and the ancestor of the family that still retain parts of the original estate. As a tiller of the soil and one who sought to develop agriculture, he was a public benefactor; as a dispenser of the law in the guise of a country squire, he commanded that deference which in years gone by was paid to such individuals, maintaining the dignity of the realm and respect for the King.

His docket is a curious volume, interspersed with the entries of actions at law, charges for grain, credit for money paid for labor on his farm, and much other matter, foreign entirely to the purpose for which the book was intended. In the year 1742, Sarah Norris, who kept a store in Haddonfield, being out of patience with many of her delinquent customers, applied to Squire Ellis, to try *his* remedy; upon whose record her name frequently appears as plaintiff in suits there entered. To show that she was in earnest, the execution soon followed the judgment; which meant that the claim must be discharged, or the defendant be sent to jail. That a man could more easily pay his debt when fast in prison than at liberty, was one of the absurdities of English jurisprudence, brought to New Jersey by our ancestors; but the notion has been exploded, having given way to common sense and a more liberal sentiment.

The quarter sessions court, in fashion then, consisting of two justices of the peace, with authority to try petty crimes, sometimes sat at Simeon's house. Perchance some scamp, without the fear of law before his eyes, had robbed his neighbor's hen-roost, and he, while in the enjoyment of a meal therefrom, had been pounced upon by a constable and taken at once to trial.

The court, with all gravity, and, in consideration of the importance of the crime, would listen to the evidence; hear

the story of the defendant; and, after much judicial hesitation, declare the criminal guilty. If an old offender, twenty lashes on the bare back would only be sufficient to vindicate the dignity of the law; which sentence would be passed with a hint of more, if again convicted.

To a tree near by, in the most public manner, would the culprit be taken; and there, in the presence of the crowd, tied, stripped and beaten,—a proceeding which degraded alike the victim of the law, and those whose morbid tastes could induce them to witness the sentence carried into effect.

Like the court, these scenes have become obsolete. Elements of Christianity have been infused into the corrective systems of our government, more charitable in their operation, and less humiliating to the unfortunate.

By the gracious favor of his Majesty, the peace officers of the realm were clothed with authority to solemnize marriages. Although much the larger portion of the inhabitants in West Jersey were Quakers, and careful that the young folks should adhere to their form in this regard, yet it sometimes happened that an alliance would be made in which the “beau or belle” was outside the pale of the church. In these cases, Simeon Ellis was often called upon; and he, without the presence of any one except the parties themselves, would join them in the bonds of holy wedlock. This breach of discipline was frequently overlooked; and, if a proper explanation was made, and an acknowledgment forwarded to the meeting, the erring one was retained in membership.

From the year 1727 to 1791 inclusive, a law was in force requiring a man who contemplated marriage, to file a bond under his hand and seal, with the Governor of the State, with sufficient security; the condition of which was that he had no lawful let, impediment of pre-contract, affinity or consanguinity, to hinder the same. A copy of one of these is here given, which may prove of interest to the reader. It is as follows:—

“KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, That We, James Mulock of the County of Gloucester, in the Province of New Jersey, Practitioner of Physick, and Robert Friend Price, of the same Place, Esq., are holden and do stand justly indebted

unto His Excellency, Jonathan Belcher, Esq., Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of New-Jersey, &c., in the sum of Five Hundred Pounds of current lawful Money of New-Jersey; to be paid to His said Excellency the Governor, his Successors or Assigns. For the which Payment well and truly to be made and done, We do bind ourselves, our Heirs, Executors and Administrators, and every of them, firmly by these Presents. Sealed with our Seals, Dated this Sixteenth day of April Anno Domini One Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty-Seven, [1757].

“THE CONDITION OF THIS OBLIGATION IS SUCH, That whereas the above Bounden James Mulock hath obtained License of Marriage for himself of the one Party, and for Priscilla Collins of Gloucester County of the other Party, Now, if it shall not hereafter appear, that they the said James Mulock and Priscilla Collins have any lawful Let or Impediment of Pre-contract, Affinity, or Consanguinity, to hinder their being joined in the Holy Bands of Matrimony, and afterwards their living together as Man and Wife: then this Obligation to be void, or else to stand and remain in full Force and Virtue.

“JAMES MULOCK, [SEAL.]

“ROBT. FR'D PRICE. [SEAL.]

“*Sealed and Delivered in
the Presence of
“JOS. HARRISON.”*

If no other good was accomplished, the great value of the papers arising from the operation of the law is sufficient. These bonds and certificates arranged in chronological order, are well cared for in the office of the Secretary of State at Trenton; and they contain an amount of information that otherwise would have been lost. Occasionally the records show that the parties were from another state, by reason, no doubt, of an inexorable parent or stubborn guardian, whose consent to the marriage could not be had.

Weddings, in those times, frequently extended through days of hilarity and frolic. Dancing, blind-man's buff, and pawns

were the usual means of enjoyment, and were entered upon with a zest that proved that every one was in search of pleasure. Like many others, these customs have passed away, and time has interposed so many generations that the present has no remembrance of them. Our sturdy ancestors on these occasions seemed boisterous and rude, but it should be considered that they had other occupations than the study of refinement and polish. Those who remove the timber and conquer the soil of a new country, seldom have time to indulge in education or luxury.

Simeon Ellis died in 1773, leaving a will. Parts of his land he conveyed to his sons, but much passed to them by devise.¹⁵ He survived his wife, and left the following children: Isaac, who married Mary Shivers (daughter of Samuel); Benjamin, who married Sarah Bates; William, who married Amy Matlack; John, who married Priscilla Peterson (widow); Sarah, who married William Duyre; and Simeon, who married ——— Bates (sister to Benjamin's wife.)

Isaac settled on that part of the homestead now included in Ellisburg, and built part of the present tavern house.

Benjamin erected a home on a few acres given to him by his father, on that side of the road opposite the late residence of David D. Burrough, deceased, and there he lived and died.

William removed to the landed estate of his wife, near Glendale, part of which is still owned by Joseph H. Ellis; he here occupied himself as a farmer. His fondness for hunting and field sports drew around him, during the winter months, men of like tastes, and his house was generally the starting point for such as enjoyed those manly pastimes. These traits of character have not been lost in the latter generations, and only lack full development from want of deer and foxes, so plenty in days of yore.

Simeon remained on part of the original purchase, leaving but few immediate descendants.

Joseph settled on his mother's property in Newton township, and probably had his home on the north side of the main branch of Newton creek, generally known as the former resi-

¹⁵ Lib. No. 16, 144.

dence of Jacob Stokes, deceased. He became the owner of all, or the largest part of the maternal estate, and so held it during his life. His occupation was that of a farmer, and he does not appear to have participated in the political matters that occasionally agitated the community around him.

He died in 1757, intestate.¹⁶ Having no sons, the estate, upon his demise, soon passed out of the name, and, except by the examination of the old titles, no trace of it can be discovered. His immediate descendants consisted of four daughters, namely: Priscilla, who married Jacob Stokes; Sarah, who married John Buzby and Isaac Mickle; Abigail, who married Caleb Hughes; and Kesiah, who married Benjamin Vanleer, M. D.¹⁷ Excepting the descendants of Jacob Stokes, none of the family are known in this region at the present day.¹⁸

Jonathan lived in Haddonfield, but what his occupation was does not appear. In 1733, John Gill sold him a lot on the west side of the main street, where he built himself a house. Three years after, he sold the property to John Kaighn. He died a young man and intestate.¹⁹

¹⁶ Lib. C, 241, Woodbury.

¹⁷ Lib. O, 368.

¹⁸ Lib. T, 398.

¹⁹ Lib. Q, 460, 475.