

THOMAS GARDINER.

THOMAS GARDINER came to Burlington in 1678 with his wife and children, bringing also considerable estate. His house was the first dwelling erected within the limits of the town. Although of logs, it was of larger dimensions than any other among his neighbors, and was finished with more care and expense; in it was held the first Yearly Meeting of Friends in New Jersey. He probably came from the city of London, as some real estate owned by him there became the property of his grandchildren, who were, at the time, residents of Burlington. This is an inference only, and may prove erroneous.

James Bowden, in his History of Friends, says: "At Burlington Monthly Meeting in the third month, 1681, it was concluded to establish a Yearly Meeting, the first to be held in the sixth month following. A notice of this conclusion was circulated among Friends of the provinces of East and West Jersey, and on the 28th of the sixth month, 1681, the meeting assembled at the house of Thomas Gardiner, of Burlington. But very little information of the proceedings of this Yearly Meeting, which occupied four days, has been preserved."

In one of the manuscripts of Samuel Smith, the historian, has been found the following passage: "1685. This year erected a large and commodious meeting house. Samuel Jennings, Thomas Budd, John Gosling, Richard Guy, William Brighton and Thomas Gardiner were the principal promoters and con-

tributors." The authority from which this is derived cannot be questioned, and is conclusive as to the building of the "great meeting-house at Burlington."

The Monthly Meeting, as above named, was regularly established three years previous to this time, the original records of which have been preserved, and from which the first minute there entered is here copied, as follows:

"Since, by the good Providence of God, many Friends with their families have transported themselves into this province of West Jersey, the said Friends in the upper parts have found it needful, according to the practice in the place we come from, to settle monthly meetings for the well ordering of the affairs of the church. It was agreed that accordingly it should be done the 15th of the fifth month, 1678."

This Monthly Meeting consisted of Friends settled about the Falls (now Trenton), and of the particular meetings of Ranco-cas, in New Jersey; Shackomaxon, and Chester in Pennsylvania. From all of these places, Burlington could be reached by water; and of this easy mode of transportation those attending the Monthly Meeting, no doubt, took advantage. It also shows that the Friends who had settled on the west side of the river had not as yet organized their meetings, and were not yet in a position to assume the business relations necessary to a proper intercourse with kindred associations. In fact, the yearly meetings were, for several years, alternately held at Burlington and Philadelphia, which included all the meetings in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

The history above referred to also contains a copy of the first epistle of Friends at Burlington to the Yearly Meeting of London, written in 1680, and signed by the most prominent Quakers then resident in the province. It alludes to their present prosperous and hopeful condition, shows their attachment to the doctrines which they had espoused, and the zeal with which they adhered to their religious belief. To such as are interested in the early history of this religious denomination, the work above quoted is especially attractive, the author having had access to much of the correspondence of the first emigrants, and free use of the books of records of Friends in England,

and in America, from which he has collated a reliable and interesting history of Friends in America.

Among the records of the Salem Friends' Meeting are several entries in regard to William Bradford, the first printer in West New Jersey, which may prove interesting in this connection. At the Yearly Meeting held at Burlington in 1690, several Friends agreed to raise a sum of money, if he would continue his press there, and publish Friends' books as heretofore. Each particular meeting belonging to that Yearly Meeting was solicited to assist in raising money, and the request was responded to accordingly. This shows how well the new comers understood the free circulation of the doctrines and opinions held by them, in the shape of printed pamphlets; and, as William Bradford was the only artisan of that kind in these parts at that time, it was necessary to hold out certain pecuniary advantages to have him remain. In England, this policy had been pursued with much advantage, and there was no reason why an equal benefit should not be derived here. As showing who was the first printer in West New Jersey, his name and residence, this particular record has much interest and is worth preservation.

The first meetings of Friends in Burlington were held in a tent made of the sails taken from the vessels in which they crossed the ocean; in it they assembled for the first year after their arrival, and until Thomas Gardiner's house was finished: thus proving that they allowed no difficulties or hindrances to prevent them from discharging their duty, as sincere and consistent Christians. In all the doings of this little colony, both religious and political, Thomas Gardiner took an active and prominent part, and appears to have commanded the confidence and respect of the community around him. He was a tailor, and the chances are that he had the whole business to himself, free from competition and with no one to differ with him about the fashions, as, with singular tenacity, the society of Friends, for nearly two hundred years, has adhered to the same form of dress.

He was a member of the first provincial legislature of West New Jersey, that sat at Burlington in 1682; was one of the first commissioners for dividing and regulating land; and was one

of the committee of ways and means, who represented the London tenth, to provide money to defray the expenses of the government, appointed at that sitting of the assembly.¹ At the same time, he was appointed one of the judges of the courts of Burlington county. As such he served the people acceptably for several years.² The next year he was appointed one of the governor's council, and made one of the treasurers of the province. Some of these appointments were continued through several years, and until refused. This shows in what estimation he was held by the people of his county and province.³ He deceased in 1694, leaving a widow and several children,⁴ namely: John, who deceased the same year as his father, unmarried;⁵ Mathew, who settled at Raritan previous to 1716, but died without children;⁶ Esther, who married John Wills; and Thomas, who married Hannah Mathews.⁷

Without any certain data to prove it, the probability is that Thomas Gardiner was a brother to Peter Gardiner, a public Friend, who resided near Castle Hedingham, in Essex, England. Peter Gardiner was an active man in the ministry during the persecutions of Friends in England, and suffered in person and estate, as did the most of those who dared to preach and practise the doctrines of George Fox and Robert Barclay in those times. Upon his return from a gospel mission to Scotland, he was taken ill of small-pox at Carlisle, in Cumberland, and there died in 1695. Although Thomas Gardiner was the first of the name that came to New Jersey, yet he was not the first in America.

In 1658, there resided at Newport, Rhode Island, a woman named Hored Gardiner, who left her family of several children to go on a religious visit to Weymouth, in the province of Massachusetts, distant some sixty miles, mostly through the wilderness. She carried with her an infant, and was accompanied by a small white girl only. At that time Governor Endicott was much embittered against the Quakers, who deemed it proper to make religious visits among the colonists, and whom he punished severely for so doing. Upon this female's arrival at

¹ Leaming & Spicer's Laws.

² Leaming & Spicer's Laws.

³ Lib. BBR, 87.

⁴ Smith's History of New Jersey.

⁵ Lib. 2, 717.

⁶ Burlington Files of Wills.

⁷ Baase's Book, 164, 280.

Weymouth, she was arrested and taken before the Governor, who used abusive language to her, and ordered that she and her young attendant should receive ten lashes each upon their naked bodies. This punishment was inflicted upon the woman while she held her infant, which was only protected from the lash by the arms of the mother. As repulsive as this kind of punishment was to the more conservative class of citizens, yet the authorities indulged their malice and bigotry in many instances toward the people, and continued so to do until at last restrained by the home government, before which many complaints were laid by those of like persuasion in England. Imprisonment in loathsome and filthy dungeons, dragging at the cart's tail, and sitting in the pillory, were some of the inflictions visited upon the Quakers in New England in the first colonizing of that part of America.

In examining and reviewing the actions of the first English settlers in West Jersey, it is often inquired why they passed so far up the river in selecting a site for a town, leaving behind them so many suitable places, where greater depth of water could have been had, and the settlement would have been many miles nearer the sea. The Swedish settlements did not extend far above the mouth of Raccoon creek, with the exception of a small number of colonists at Woodbury creek; and the next point at which they found any inhabitants besides the natives, was where a few Hollanders had settled, and where one kept a tavern for the accommodation of travelers, on the river's shore above the mouth of the Assiscunk creek, and near where these adventurers selected their site for "Bridlington." The records of Upland Court as held at Chester, Pa., at the date heretofore given, will prove conclusively that such a tavern was there kept; at which place a ferry was also maintained for the use of the few persons' passing from New York to Virginia by the way of land, it being the only place below the falls where persons could cross with horses in going from the one point to the other. The record runs as follows:

all the papers) are of opinion that since Mr. Peter Yegou had Governor Carteret's grant, and was in quiet possession of ye land before the said land was sold by John Lord Berkley unto Edward Byllinge, and that he, ye said Peter Yegou, hath also bought the land and payed ye Indians for ye same,—that therefore Mr. Peter Yegou ought peaceably and quietly, to enjoy ye same land and appurtenances according to grant and purchase."⁸

The Legislature of the province in 1683 made restitution to Thomas Wright on account of the difficulty which he had thus fallen into, by giving him one hundred acres of land in another place, to be surveyed according to the rules. In 1697, another act was passed in relation to this piece of land, to confirm the title to John Joosten and John Hamel, who held, after several conveyances, under Peter Yegou; this settled the possession and estate of said land, so that, after eighteen years of litigation, the purchaser could hold it in peace. It is easy to discover by this how the name of Yegou, or Cheygou, attached to the island, which is really that part of the fast land surrounded by the creek where the city of Burlington now stands, the name being of Dutch origin, and not that of an Indian chief, as generally considered. The truth of history often destroys the romance and beauty that surround an object, yet a faithful adherence to facts ought not to be disregarded.

George Fox, in traveling from Middletown harbor to New Castle, lodged at this place in 1672, and at this point he crossed the river. He says it had been deserted from fear of the Indians. This statement is confirmed by the before-copied record, and also explains why the first emigrants sailed so far up the river, before they landed; for, at this place, the only inhabitants above Raccoon creek were found.

An extract from his journal may not prove uninteresting upon this point; it will show how well the history of this place is corroborated. "Next day we traveled fifty miles as we computed, and, at night, finding an old house which the Indians had forced the people to leave, we made a fire and lay there at the head of Delaware Bay. The next day we swam our horses

⁸ Publications of the Historical Society of Panna.

over the river, about a mile, twice, first to an island called Upper Dinidock and then to the main land, having hired Indians to help us over in their canoes."

During the first ten years that elapsed between the marriage of Thomas Gardiner, Jr., and the death of his father, he resided on part of the estate owned by his wife at Woodbury creek, where also her brother lived on part of the same property. At that time he was one of the trustees of the Friends' Meeting at that place, and participated somewhat in the political affairs of the province. He was a practical surveyor, and acted as one of the judges of the court of Gloucester county, when they were held at Red Bank.⁹ After the death of his father, he removed to Burlington, and, in a short time, was appointed surveyor-general of the western division of New Jersey, by the council of proprietors, which office he appears to have filled with satisfaction for several years.¹⁰ The duties of this position at this time were onerous and responsible; he was required to review all the maps and locations of land made by the several deputy surveyors, to examine the calculations as to the quantity of acres named, to test the several bearings as marked upon the maps, and to certify to the council that they were correct in all these particulars. If any disputes occurred among the claimants (which often happened), he became the executive officer, and went upon the land, so that he could report where the real difficulty existed. During the term of his office, which extended from 1701 to 1717, (in which last year he died,) there was much trouble among the proprietors in the taking up of land where the Indian title had not been extinguished.¹¹ In this particular, the council was careful to prevent surveys from passing this board beyond the bounds of any "purchase" already consummated with this simple-minded people. It may not be uninteresting to copy here an advertisement published by the council touching one of these purchases; it shows the manner in which the assessments were made, so that from such funds all the contracts should be faithfully carried out.

⁹ Leaming & Spicer's Laws.

¹⁰ Basse's Book

¹¹ Minutes of the Council of Proprietors, O. S. O.

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“These are to give notice to the proprietors of the Western Division of New Jersey, that, the Council chosen to negotiate the affairs of the said division having resolved to proceed to a fourth dividend, in order thereunto, have treated with the Indians and bargained with them for a very large quantity of land for which divers payments are to be made them in a short time. All persons that have rights to take up on a fourth dividend, or any part or parts of their first, second or third dividend are desired to meet the council of proprietors on the 20th day of October next, at Burlington, to enter the quantities which they have a right to, as also to provide, as speedy as may be, their proportion of the purchase money, which will amount by computation to six shillings of the currency of New York per hundred; for the collection of which money with the least loss of time that may be (and converting it into goods to be paid to the natives), Peter Fretwell at Burlington, Richard Bull at Gloucester and John Budd at Philadelphia, are appointed to receive the same, and the agents of such proprietors as are abroad, are desired to take notice hereof that due care may be taken of their constituents’ interests.—May, 1717.”¹²

This paper explains the manner in which the title of the natives to the soil was extinguished, and proves that the council of proprietors would not consent to the occupation of their lands until a contract had been made and carried out. Many of these “Indian” deeds are still in existence; some among the owners of the estate conveyed, and many on file in the office of the secretary of state at Trenton, with all sorts of hieroglyphics attached as the signatures of the grantors, which are quite as unexplainable as the names which they stand to represent. Under these grants no attempt was made by the settlers to interfere with the privileges of the Indians, or to remove them from their places of abode; and, only as they deceased, and from time to time abandoned their towns, were these places occupied by the whites. Through West Jersey there are still many places remembered as Indian settlements,

¹² Minute Book of the Council of Proprietors, O. S. G.

and some of their burial grounds are known; but the gradual falling off in numbers, and the collecting of families into the more thickly settled neighborhoods, which ended at Shamong, or Brotherton, in Burlington county, gave the purchasers, under the rules of the proprietors, full and complete possession, without any dispute or difficulty: thus were avoided the bloodshed and murders that attended the advance of civilization in the Western States at a subsequent period.

With the framing of these titles fixing the boundaries of the sections of land to be conveyed, the surveyor-general had much to do. It was afterward his duty to watch the progress of the locations, and see that they were kept within the limits of the purchase. During the term of Thomas Gardiner, the greatest of these troubles existed; and, having to contend with avarice and unjust dealing in opposition to what was his sworn and palpable duty towards those whom he represented, he was often the subject of complaint to the council, and of misrepresentation and abuse among the people. Under his administration, new and more rigid rules were established in defining the boundaries of locations, making them plainer and more definite; and thus much contention and trouble were avoided in the future. In one instance, he found it necessary to prevent his deputies from making locations in the new Indian purchase until some existing dispute should be arranged; again, in making surveys, he ordered that they should be laid adjoining each other, and as near as possible in parallel lines. These, with other like regulations, were necessary and useful, and showed him to be a man that understood and looked after the interests of those whom he represented.¹³ In 1710, Thomas Gardiner sold part of his real estate at Woodbury creek to James Whitall, and subsequently disposed of all the land owned by his wife at that place.¹⁴ He died, seized of considerable landed property about Burlington, some of which he previously conveyed in trust for the use of his children.¹⁵ His family consisted of two sons, Thomas and Matthew, and of two daughters,—

¹³ Lib. A, 194.

¹⁴ Lib. E, 418.

¹⁵ Lib. GH, 51, 53.

Elizabeth, who married Abraham Bickley, and Hannah, who married Isaac Pearson.¹⁶⁻¹⁷⁻¹⁸

Abraham Bickley was a distiller; he lived in Philadelphia, and died about 1747. Ten years before his death, he located a tract of land in Gloucester county, N. J., generally known as the Blue Anchor tract; whereon was the tavern that bore the same name, so long and favorably known by the traveling public in this section of the State. The old house stood upon the Indian trail that went from the coast to the Delaware river, and at about an equal distance from each. This location made it, for more than a century, a place of rest for persons crossing this part of the State. The building of the Camden and Atlantic railroad has destroyed its usefulness, and the next generation will have no remembrance of it.

Isaac Pearson was a silversmith, and resided in the city of Burlington, where some of his descendants still remain. The male branch of the Gardiners being limited, the name is not very extensive in West New Jersey, although the collateral connection is numerous.

¹⁶ Lib. BBB, 195, 318. ¹⁷ Lib. B2, 717. ¹⁸ Lib. BB, 318.