

THE GRAYSBURYS.

IN the year 1692, James, Joseph and Benjamin Graysbury, brothers and ship carpenters, came from the island of Bermuda, to Philadelphia.¹ It does not appear whether they were Friends, banished from England, or whether they were natives of the said island. The opportunity for getting ship timber to carry on their business was certainly an attraction in these parts, and may have been the secret of their settlement here. They had their place of business in Philadelphia, and probably, Joseph and Benjamin there remained during their lives. The next year after their arrival, they joined in a purchase of five hundred acres of land, of Robert Turner, which land was situated in Newton township, and on the south side of the main branch of Newton creek.²

At that time, Robert Turner was a merchant in the city of Philadelphia, but owned much land in New Jersey, and particularly in the neighborhood of the above named tract. From a map made by Thomas Sharp, showing his lands lying on Newton and Cooper creeks, the amount appears to have exceeded two thousand five hundred acres within the township; he therefore was much the largest owner of real estate in this region. This map also indicates that Robert Philips, planter, had already settled thereon; but where his habitation was, does not appear. After this man, James Graysbury made the first

¹ Lib. G2, 174.

² Lib. G3, 426.

improvement on this purchase; but where his cabin stood, is also in doubt. He probably cleared considerable land, looking somewhat to agriculture for the maintenance of his family. This man was the son of James, so far as the records can be digested; yet the vague manner of expression used in many conveyances and wills, renders a proper understanding of them almost impossible.

James (one of the brothers) died in 1700, leaving one son, James, his two other children being born after his decease. In anticipation of this, he made provision in his will that his share of said tract of land should belong "to his child or children yet to be born," and it proved that the issue was twins, named by the mother, Elizabeth and Annie.³ In the progress of time the second daughter here named married Daniel Martin, a resident of Philadelphia. In 1722, the sisters conveyed the said land to James, upon which he resided until his death.

Benjamin (another brother) died, seized of his share of said five hundred acres, leaving two children, Margaret, and Mary, who married Richard Kelley, also a resident of Philadelphia. They conveyed their interest to James, their cousin, in 1720.⁴

Joseph (the last brother) died intestate and without children. His undivided interest of said land descended to his nephew, James, he being the eldest son of James, who was the eldest brother of Joseph.⁵

The law regulating the descent of real estates in force at that time, deprived the children of Benjamin and the sisters of James, of all right in the property of their uncle Joseph, although standing in the same blood relationship as James. The rule of "the oldest male heir" is in this case clearly exemplified, and shows how unjust was the application of the law of primogeniture,—a law that has long since, in the State of New Jersey, given way to a more rational, just and equitable distribution of real estate. For many years the English code obtained, contrary to the progress and spirit of the age, and at variance with the liberality and intentions of our law makers.

³ Sharp's Book, 03, O. S. G.

⁴ Lib. D, 253.

⁵ Lib. M, 110, O. S. G.

The infringements on this were gradual, but always in favor of the female heirs, until every barrier was swept away, and the daughters of an intestate had the same rights of inheritance.

Immediately upon obtaining the title to his property, James Graysbury proceeded to perfect the same and to establish the boundaries by a re-survey; which was accomplished in 1721.⁶

It will be noticed, that, after the death of the three brothers, there was but one person to represent the family name; thus became centered in James, the son of James, the genealogy of future generations, as well as the title to most of the original estate, as by them purchased of Robert Turner.

The only severance from the first purchase was that of fifty acres sold to John Willis, a ship carpenter of Philadelphia, in 1696: which land fronted on the creek. There John Willis erected a house.⁷ This, however, after several conveyances, became the property of Caleb Atmore, and in his name it remained for many years.

James Graysbury conveyed said estates to two of his sons (James and Joseph), and they immediately after conveyed the same to their brother Benjamin, who then resided on the premises. In 1783, Benjamin bought of Caleb Atmore the fifty acres that had been sold to John Willis in 1696, by his grandfather and great uncles, and became therefore owner of the original tract. This now includes the farm lately Joseph FewSmith's; deceased, on the east, and that of Edward Bettle, on the west, and all the intermediate property, showing it to have been one of the best locations made in the township, whether soil or situation be regarded.

On the farm first named is the old family graveyard, where rest the bones of the earliest generations of the Graysburys, and of some of their descendants. In the same neighborhood lived Simeon Breach, Joseph Low,⁷ Caleb Sprague, John Hinchman, and others, who, in all probability, were also there interred, with many of their descendants. Nearly all were slave-holders, as appears by the wills of several; this part of their personal property found a final resting place in Hinchman's, now gener-

⁶ Lib. M, 110, O. S. G.

⁷ Lib. A, 189.

ally known as Hurley's graveyard. For many years the memory of the forefathers was held in respect, but the presence of strangers has left no trace of the immediate locality of the old Graysbury graveyard.

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire,
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre."

It is unfortunate that the genealogy of the three brothers who originated the family in New Jersey, cannot be traced with more accuracy, the greatest difficulty being that the female branches so largely predominated, the name thus soon disappearing in subsequent marriages. The will of James Graysbury was executed in 1760, but he lived for some years after that time. His wife, Mary, survived him; also the following children: James; Joseph;⁸ Mary, who married John Franklin; Ann, who married ——— Warner; and Benjamin. The number of Benjamin's marriages involves the maternal line of his progeny in much doubt. His first wife was Elizabeth, a daughter of Samuel Sharp, and granddaughter of Thomas Sharp (the first surveyor in Newton).⁹ His second was Lydia Matlack, daughter of John; next he married Letitia Shivers, and, after her death, he married Ann Morton. Ann survived him and married Jonathan Morgan.

In 1783, it will be seen that Benjamin Graysbury was the owner of the original estate, and was the only one of the family that remained in the neighborhood. He probably built the house, part of which is still standing on the farm lately owned by Joseph FewSmith, deceased, now by William Bettle; and there he resided during his life. He acquired much other real estate, and was classed among the wealthy men of his day. A shade of romance connected with the third wife of Benjamin may not prove uninteresting here.

By the will of John Tomlinson, who died a single man, in 1760, he devised to Letitia Shivers nearly all of his estate,— "out of regard to her."¹⁰ These are significant words, when

⁸ Lib. No. 12, 282.

⁹ Lib. AR, 359.

¹⁰ Lib. No. 10, 387.

used in the connection in which they here stand, and the most rational conclusion must be that marriage was contemplated between them, but that death prevented its consummation. Fifteen years after that time she became the wife of one of the most respectable citizens of Gloucester county, and, perhaps, the mother of some of his children. Doubtless many of the grandmothers of the last century could tell over the sad romance connected with this affair; having knowledge of the particulars, and always remembering it as one of the incidents of their younger days.

Benjamin Graysbury died in 1747.¹¹ His children were Benjamin; James, who married Beulah Warrick; Mary, who married Isaac Kay; and Abigail, who married John Branson. Whether these were the children of one mother or of more than one, does not appear, and may never be disclosed, unless some enthusiast indulge in a waste of time and labor never repaid and seldom appreciated. Although the collateral branches of the family have become extensive in West Jersey, yet the name has never been much known except in the neighborhood of the first settler.

On the south side of Newton creek and near the end of Atmore's dam, not many years since, stood a small antiquated house, built partly of brick and partly of frame, one and a half stories high, with hipped roof, small windows and low, narrow doors. In early times this was kept as a tavern, and stood beside the public road leading from Philadelphia to the seashore. It was probably built by John Willis, the ship carpenter before noticed, as it was on the land which he purchased of the Graysburys. The dam being the easiest means of crossing the stream, all the travel passing between the points before named was centred here, making this "hostelry" a desirable stopping place, since here the greatest number of folks could be seen in a given time. It was enlarged until its ancient form was entirely lost to the later generations, who did not know it as a resting place for travelers.

Being the head of navigation, all the trade carried on with Philadelphia by water in that neighborhood started from that

¹¹ Lib. No. 38, 40.

point, and, perchance, a packet left every day for the city to accommodate the people, being a much easier means of communication than travel over the circuitous and, no doubt, bad roads that led to the ferries. If the owners of the property were the keepers of the inn, then Joseph Kirlee succeeded John Willis, and John, the son of Joseph Kirlee, followed, who, in 1718, sold to Thomas Atmore. About the year 1773, Thomas died, and his son Caleb took possession, and by this name it has been known among the people of later times. The situation being near the middle of the township, it was a suitable place for business meetings, and there the politicians of that day "most did congregate," to discuss the affairs of the colony. Here, for many years the few inhabitants elected the various officers to carry on the machinery of their little municipality, and, here, personal rivalry and political prejudice cropped out, just as in these days of ambition and greed for office. Before the days of mails, this was the place where news from the city or county could be gathered, and whence correspondence could be forwarded to various parts of Gloucester and Salem counties by the few travelers going to and from their several homes. The name of this inn has passed into oblivion. No doubt, some high sounding title from the mother country was emblazoned on the sign that hung before the door, and informed strangers that they approached the Bull and Mouth, the King and Cross, or some other names that, in these days, are not attached to such public resorts, but are regarded as antiquated and out of date.

Inside, the low ceilings and ill arranged rooms told that ventilation and convenience were not regarded; yet the well sanded floor and the bright pewter dishes betrayed the good house-wife and thrifty matron. The bar-room opened by a double door, cut horizontally, and within might be seen the crib which screened the liquors and protected the dealer.

The immense open fire-place, arranged with a bench on each side, made sitting-room for guests by day, and beds for dogs at night,—to say nothing of the straight-backed slat-bottomed chairs that stood around the walls. The visitors were mostly rude, uneducated people, unused to the refine-

ments of society, and contending with adversity in its many ugly shapes. The means of comfort, as now understood, were not at hand, and several decades passed away after the first adventurers arrived, before anything beyond the necessity of their conditions was attempted.

At this old tavern might occasionally be seen a party of hunters, pledging their good opinion of each other in a bowl of whiskey-punch, or "stone-fence," and enjoying in their peculiar way the last of a successful chase. Wrestling, running and jumping were indulged in, when a few of the neighbors met; and every man that participated, was soon graded as to his ability in each. The fare was abundant, and such as epicures of the present day would revel in. It was dried venison, bear's meat, fresh fish, and wild fowl, with corn bread or hoe cake, well prepared, and made inviting by the tidy appearance of the surroundings. The liquors, also, though drawn from wooden casks, and drunk from horn tumblers, imparted an invigorating, healthy effect; and, when evaporated by a good night's sleep, left no suspicious feelings after them.

Of this ancient house, not one stone rests upon another, as it stood in the days of our forefathers; and nothing but a slight depression in the ground shows its place. In the midst of a quiet, agricultural neighborhood, the visitor now cannot appreciate the busy scenes that formerly surrounded it. The creek, once a beautiful, living stream, from being dammed at the mouth, was, for many years, only a muddy ditch; and, where once spread the sails of the graceful water-craft, nothing remained save a miasmatic bog, affecting the health of the neighborhood, and the value of adjacent land as well. Of late years, however, the tide is allowed to flow, and the many advantages incident thereto will follow in due time.

The highway that took its tortuous course through the grand old forests, passing around the heads of streams, avoiding the hilly places, and extending for miles into the country without a habitation near it,—this road, that brought the few travelers past the door, is scarcely known and is, in many places, entirely obliterated.

Wealth, enterprise, and the increase of population, have changed these routes into straight, well cared-for thoroughfares, while the Indian trails at this day cannot be remembered by the oldest inhabitant. When this tavern at Atmore's dam opened its doors to the public, or when ended the days of its usefulness, no record can be found; but, like many other places of interest to the seeker after ancient things, enough has been gathered through tradition, that deserves a faithful search the more thoroughly to know its history.

Around the broad, open fire of the bar-room, the legends, the arguments or the songs, will never be renewed; nor, upon the green before the door, will the wrestlers ever again join hands.

"Thither no more the peasant shall repair
To sweet oblivion of his daily care;
No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,
No more the woodsman's ballad shall prevail:
No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear,
Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear;
The host himself no longer shall be found,
Careful to see the mantling bliss go round;
Nor the coy maid, half willing to be prest,
Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest."