

THOMAS SHARP.

OF the few colonists who settled in Newton in 1681, Thomas Sharp was the master spirit. He infused his energy and good judgment into the whole company; was their adviser and guide, and was, no doubt, as he deserved to be, their leader in all important undertakings. He was an Irishman, and by occupation a "woolstead comber,"¹ but appears to have had better opportunities for education than most persons at that time, or, certainly, than those with whom he was associated.

Although, as he says, a young man, he had the entire confidence of his companions, and the end shows that this confidence was not misplaced or abused. He was a nephew of Anthony Sharp, a wealthy merchant of Dublin, who became the owner of several shares of propriety; part of which he conveyed to Thomas, who also acted as his agent in the sale of the remainder. Under this conveyance he made all his locations, and took part in the government of the Province.

A faithful sketch of the life of this man, from the time of his arrival in New Jersey until his death, would be a history of Gloucester county for that period, and would be the most reliable basis upon which the writer could found his statements. His thorough knowledge of the country, his acquaintance with the settlers, and his truthful accounts of the progress of the colony, as by himself recorded, have made him an authority not to be questioned.

¹ Lib. G-3, 36.

Touching the first settlement at Newton, no better account can be given than his own, so that future generations may have the evidence of a participant therein. Although written thirty-seven years after that event, yet it contains an exact statement of facts, and embodies everything necessary to an accurate knowledge of that undertaking. Every reader will peruse it with interest, and may thank Friend Sharp for doing so good a work for those coming after him. It is here presented entire, as copied from Liber A, of Gloucester county deeds, page 98, in the office of the Secretary of State, at Trenton, New Jersey :—

“Let it be remembered yt upon ye nineteenth day of September, in ye year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and eighty-one, Mark Newby, William Bates, Thomas Thackara, George Goldsmith and Thomas Sharp, set saile from ye Harbor belonging to ye city of Dublin, in ye Kingdom of Ireland, in a pink called ‘*Ye owners adventure,*’ whereof Thomas Lurtin, of London, was commander, and being taken sick in ye city, his mate, John Dagger, officiated in his place; in order to transport us, and yt we might settle ourselves in West Jersey, in America. And by ye good providence of God we arrived in ye Capes of Delaware ye eighteenth day of November following, and so up ye bay until we came to Elsinburg, and were landed with our goods and families at Salem, where we abode ye winter. But it being very favourable weather and purchasing a boat amongst us, we had an opportunity to make search up and down in yt which was called ye Third tenth, which had been reserved for ye proprietors dwelling in Ireland, where we might find a place suitable for so many of us to settle down together, being in these early times somewhat doubtfull of ye Indians, and at last pitched down by yt which is now called Newton creek, as ye most invitingist place to settle down by, and then we went to Burlington, and made application to ye commissioners yt we might have warrants directed to Daniel Leeds, ye Surveyor General, to survey unto every of us, so much land as by ye constitution at yt time was allotted for a settlement being five hundred acres, or yt we had a right to, for a taking up it under, which accordingly we obtained.

“At which time also Robert Zane, who came from ye city of Dublin, and had been settled in Salem, four years before, joined in with us who had a right to a tenth. Mark Newby to a twentieth, William Bates to a twentieth, Thomas Thackara to a twentieth, Thomas Sharp (out of his uncle Anthony Sharp’s right) a twentieth, and George Goldsmith (under ye notion of Thomas Starkey’s right) a tenth; all which of us, excepting William Bates who took his on ye southerly side of Newton creek, we took our land in one tract together for one thousand seven hundred and fifty acres, bounding in ye forks of Newton creek and so over to Cooper’s creek, and by a line of marked trees to a small branch of ye fork creek and so down ye same as by ye certificate of it standing upon record in ye Secretary office it doth appear. And after some time finding some inconveniency in having our land in common together being at ye time settled at ye place now called Newton in ye manner of a town for fear as aforesaid at which being removed we came to an agreement to divide. George Goldsmith he choose the head of the creek, Thomas Sharp the forks or lower end of the land next towards the river, by which means the rest kept to their settlements without any disadvantage to themselves.

“And so ye land was divided according to every man’s right. But it is to be understood as I have so much hinted before, that by ye constitution of ye country at yt time, no person, let his right be never so great, should survey and take up above five hundred acres in one tract to make one settlement of, and yt within six months, or otherwise, it was free for any other person that had rights to land to survey it to himself as if it had never been taken up for any other person. Whereupon many were obliged in order to secure good places to themselves to give one hundred acres to secure the rest; and many were deterred from taking up their land yt could not find means to secure it leaste they should spend money to no profit. Now ye state of ye case touching George Goldsmith (having a full and certain knowledge thereof) is this wise. Thomas Starkey did desire and order George Goldsmith to take up some land for him in West Jersey; when it is reasonable to suppose he had a right, but brought nothing with him to make it appear, and ye com-

missioners at yt time gave way by ye credit of the report of ye rest concerned that he might take up five hundred acres, but it never was returned in Starkey's name.

“George Goldsmith being uneasy under ye circumstance he lay, writ séveral times to Thomas Starkey, giving him to understand he had taken up five hundred acres of land for him provided he would allow him one hundred acres of it for settling the same as ye general custom then was. The letters either miscarried or otherwise the demand being ungrateful to him he answered them in silence. Supposing as it may be supposed yt ye land being taken up for him could not be taken from him, it could not be allowed.

“Now this put George upon further thought what to do to secure himself, whereupon he made application to Robert Turner and layeth his case before him, signifying if he would allow him one hundred acres of yt land whereon he had made his improvements, he would suffer him to take up yt five hundred acres in his own right. Robert taking the matter in due consideration and searching the records at Burlington about it, and finding it so to be recorded in George Goldsmith's name, who had no right at any time to take up any land in yt province, agrees to survey it to himself, and accordingly did, and records it as such in ye Secretary's office; conveys one hundred acres of ye same, according to agreement, to George Goldsmith, and unto his heirs and assigns forever. The other four hundred acres he sold unto Isaac Hollingsham.

“The foregoing is a true relation of yt settlement of Newton, as also a true and impartial account of ye foregoing tract of land, settled by George Goldsmith. Given under my hand the 3rd month, 3rd, 1718.

“THOMAS SHARP.

“Allowed by John Kay, the 3rd month, 4th, 1718.”

In addition to the one thousand seven hundred and fifty acres located as before named, there were also one hundred acres of meadow land taken up at the mouth of Kaighn's run, and fronting on the Delaware river. This was done for the purpose of procuring hay for their cattle through the winters; and it shows how careful they were in obtaining lawful posses-

sion of the soil before they applied its products to their own purposes.

In many of the old papers this stream is called Little Newton creek, but, like others, this title has been lost and that of an adjacent owner substituted.

Like the larger tracts, the meadow was soon divided into lots, showing that their being held in common led to trouble among the owners.² The map here given is the only history of that transaction, but is sufficient to show the manner in which it was accomplished.

For some reason not explained, the bounds of the county of Gloucester were not defined by Legislative enactment until the year 1694, although the judicial limits thereof seem to have been recognized as early as 1682, in which year Thomas Sharp was appointed constable of the third tenth,³ which same became part of the said bailiwick. This executive office, although defined as that of constable, must have extended to that of sheriff, since, in the same year, Burlington and Salem counties each had a sheriff appointed under the same authority, yet no such action was taken in regard to the third and the fourth tenth. As suggested by Isaac Mickle, Esq., in his notice of this matter, the confusion caused by Edward Byllynge in the colony, and the long adjournment of seven years of the Legislature, may be accepted as the reasons, but nothing satisfactory appears of record in regard to the matter. The inhabitants of that region of country, however, did not wait the tardy movements of their law makers, but proceeded with all due solemnity to establish a county for themselves—a faithful record of which action, made by Thomas Sharp at the time, is still preserved in the Clerk's office, of Gloucester county, at Woodbury. It runs as follows:—

“Gloucester, ye 28th of May, 1686. By ye propyetors, freeholders and inhabitants of the third and fourth tenths, (alias, County of Gloucester,) then agreed as followeth: Imprimis—That a courte be held for the jurisdiction and limits of the aforesaid tenths or county, one tyme at Axwamus, (alias, Gloucester,) and another tyme at Red Bank.

² Revel's Book, 50-59.

³ Learning & Spicer's Laws.

Item:—That the four courts for ye jurisdiction aforesaid, be held in one year at ye days and times hereafter mentioned, viz: Upon ye first day of ye first month, upon ye first day of ye fourth month, upon ye first day of ye seventh month, and upon ye first day of ye tenth month.

Item:—That ye first courte shall be held at Gloucester aforesaid, on ye first day of September next.

Item:—That all warrants and summons shall be drawn by ye Clerk of ye courte, and signed by ye Justice, and soe delivered to ye Sheriff or his Deputy to execute.

Item:—The body of each warrant, &c., shall contayne or intimate the nature of ye action.

Item:—That a copy of the declaration be given along with ye warrant by ye Clerk of ye courte, that soe ye defendants may have the longest tyme to consider ye same and prepare his answer.

Item:—That all summons, warrants, &c., shall be served, and declarations given at least ten days before ye courte.

Item:—That ye Sheriff shall give ye jury summons six days before ye courte be held on which they are to appear.

Item:—That all persons within ye jurisdiction aforesaid, bring into ye next courte ye mark of their hoggs and other cattell, in order to be approved and recorded."⁴

With these novel proceedings, clerk Sharp had much to do, and, in all probability, prepared the paper as recorded; which in after years was received as legitimate, and so recognized by the Legislature of the colony. After that time the records were regular, and, all such as had occasion to appear at courts, either voluntarily or otherwise, submitted to the action thereof without protest. Isaac Mickle, Esq., author of "The Reminiscences of Old Gloucester," has copied many interesting things from these ancient books into his valuable work, which show Thomas Sharp to have been an efficient recorder and master of his duties. In view of the much labor and the poor pay, our clerk facetiously gets off the following lines, doubtless after a hard day's work:

"The clerks of this county I think I may proclaim,
Will not at present the owner of it load with much gain.
T. S."

⁴ Lib. A, Court Minutes, Woodbury.

More truth than poetry is certainly here contained, yet nothing appears to prove that any duty was neglected, or further complaint made by that worthy man. After the machinery of the new county was fairly adjusted and found to run smoothly, Thomas Sharp withdrew from the duties of clerk, and was succeeded by John Reading, who served the people for many years after.

Being the only surveyor in these parts, his time was much occupied in that kind of business. In addition to the recording of deeds for the county, he kept a private book of all his proceedings, in which he placed maps and memoranda, showing his great care in such matters and his ability as a practical man. He also made other books containing plans of houses, calculations of the movements of the sun and moon, and many other things in accordance with his taste and leisure. One of these volumes was left in the hands of Hannah Ladd, after his decease, and was deemed so valuable, that an act of the Legislature was passed to have the same placed in the office of the Surveyor-General at Burlington, N. J.; thus it was made a lawful record, and has been so recognized to the present time. His money accounts, settlements and charges, will be found scattered through them. An occasional extract from them may prove interesting. In the year 1720, he paid several subscriptions for John Estaugh, towards the building of the meeting house at Haddonsfield, of fifteen pounds each; he, at that time, having charge of much of that person's estate, in the collections of rents, &c. In the discharge of these duties, he traveled to Amboy in one direction, and to Cohansey in another, at each of which places John Estaugh had landed estate. In 1686, he appears to have paid the expenses of transporting Isaac Gooden and family from England, which he itemized in the following manner :

	£	s.	d.
Passage for self and wife,	11	00	00
Lost,	2	03	00
For carrying goods,	00	15	00
For burial of his wife,	1	16	00
For nursing child,	00	06	00
Expenses from home to ship,	2	00	00
In shors, [chores ?] -	00	05	06
	18	05	06

These charges are light when compared with like expenses of the present day, and show about the average cost of removal from the one country to the other at that time.

Perhaps the most curious part of these books is the poetry therein. Among the multifarious duties of this man as Surveyor, County Clerk, as Judge of the Court, weaver, dyer, and others not known, he found time to woo the muse, and has left in rhyme somewhat of the history of his times, of the trials that vexed the church, and of other things to be gathered by the reader.

Part only is here given—not to be criticised too severely—but to show the character of the man, and the various occupations in which he engaged. Like many of the old records, much has been defaced, and parts entirely obliterated by damp, but, perhaps, enough has been secured to show the meaning of the author.

“By way of introduction—

The settlement of Newton and its state,
As then it was, and now, I do relate,
Because my knowledge thereof was most true;
As by what follows here doth plainly shew.
An introduction doth this work begin
Like silken clew for guide of strangers in,
That in time to come it may plainly be,
And they that know not, may be made to see.
The matters here contained, as thou may find,
Have been with pressure some years on my mind;
But now, at last, I have thought it well,
And to Posterity, its good to tell.

1681.

In eighty-one, in Salem we did arrive,
At which time then the People began to thrive;
And had in store for to supply our want,
Which, otherwise, would have been rather scant.
If to Burlington had gone, as we were bound,
We should be lost and disadvantage found
It would have been most surely unto us,
And must have pinched and punished ye purse,
Now being settled on this wise, I say,
The winter mild, and nothing in the way,
We had ye advantage for to try and find
A place that was agreeing to our mind.
After some time and labor spent, we agreed on
The Creek, ye seat and place now called Newton.
The persons yt thus had ye care to fix,
Did, in ye whole, amount to number six.
So in ye Spring we made our settlement,

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And lived so as that we were content;
 Although sometimes we were hard bestead,
 Yet the Lord in kindness did afford us bread.
 In Newton then there did shine
 Some yt were zealous and divine;
 They largely did with care provide
 For those yt come from ye true guide,
 To direct their minds to stand in truth,
 They had received in they er youth:
 Yet in a while some youth did show
 That they in goodness did not grow.
 But now poor Newton is decayed;
 The youth not zealous, I am afraid,
 Nor don't endeavor with ye care
 Their forfathers took a larger share.
 I shall be glad I live to see
 Their zeal increased and better be,
 And the, endeavour to remove
 By real action in true love;
 Then I am in hopes ye case will mend,
 And be far better in ye end;
 But, if they careless do remain,
 Then will ensue both loss and pain.
 The love I have yt they may come,
 And with true drawings really won
 And settle in ye lasting truth
 Their forfathers set in their youth,
 That in ye end they may obtain
 That which will be their lasting gain,
 And leave yt odour unto theirs,
 As did their fathers who are in their.

—By T. S., the 14th of ye 12th mo., 1718.”

To return to the practical regarding the subject of our sketch,—he may be again found in the discharge of a good work, the keeping of a town book, commenced in 1723. This contains the record of the proceedings of the town meetings of the people of Newton, the entries being made in his quaint, odd manner, with a style of penmanship peculiar to himself. This duty he continued until 1728, inclusive, when his son Samuel succeeded him. Thus, in every new undertaking, he was the pioneer, laying down the general outlines of proceedings, and giving up the duties when the same went forward properly.

His map of the land in Newton township, made in 1700, and here given, is a paper that must interest every resident within its bounds, not only for the information therein contained, but also as showing the labor which he was willing to bestow upon a subject purely for the public good. This

is but part of the valuable records of that nature which he has left,—records, extending over a large amount of territory in West New Jersey, in which he was commissioned as a deputy surveyor. The compass and protracting instruments used by him were of rude construction, compared with those of our day, now so nicely and accurately adjusted by machinery; yet, laboring as he did under these disadvantages, his field work and maps are not behind the best of the present time. In 1689, he laid out the city of Gloucester, designed, no doubt, as a rival to Salem and Burlington, which were already villages of some pretension. These towns had even start with Philadelphia, but they have, many years since, lost all comparison in present or prospective importance.

By appointment of the Legislature in 1684, with Henry Wood, Francis Collins and William Bates, he became one of the commission to lay out highways, which same appointment was continued the next year.

In 1685, he was returned as a member of the Assembly, the session of which commenced May 12th, and sat for one day.⁵ At the November session in the same year, his name does not appear, which would seem to imply that two elections, preceding each sitting of that body, were had in each year.

The trouble among the people settled about the Penisaukin creek, concerning the line between the counties of Burlington and Gloucester, appears to have existed for several years, and led to many wordy combats and considerable legislation. The Grand Jury of each county took action in the premises, and assumed a belligerent attitude toward each other, seeming to lay aside, for the time, the element of forbearance and non-resistance so prominent in the early days of Quakerism. In 1689, the courts of Gloucester county appointed a Commission to run and mark the said boundary line, and Thomas Sharp was the Surveyor.⁶ The people of Burlington county were notified, and, if they chose, could have appeared and seen the work performed. Three years after the Legislature appointed four of its number to report upon this difficulty, but, their decision being unsatisfactory, the law was repealed

⁵ Leaming & Spicer's Laws.

⁶ Minute Book, Woodbury.

at the next session. In 1694, an act was again passed, defining the boundaries of Gloucester county, but still leaving the cause of the difficulty an open question, by not fixing upon which branch of Cropwell river, or Penisaukin creek, the said boundary was to run. In 1709, however, an end was put to these differences by a law clearly naming the south branch; and this has remained as then fixed to the present time.⁷

In 1700, Thomas Sharp was appointed one of the judges of the several courts of Gloucester county, and, if practical knowledge has any merit, he was eminently qualified for that position. That he took an interest in the advancement and prosperity of the religious denomination of which he was a member, may be seen from the frequency with which his name occurs among the proceedings of that society. He was one of the trustees of the Newton Meeting, and, no doubt, assisted in the erection of the first house that was set apart for religious worship. With Elizabeth Estaugh he selected the site for the meeting house at Haddonfield, surveyed the lot, wrote the deed, and put the same on record in his private book, after she returned from England with it, having the signature of her father thereunto attached. In this paper he has again shown his odd style of description. It reads thus:


“As they shall see convenient to lay out from the tract of land settled by John Estaugh, lying in ye township of Newton, any where on ye north side of ye road yt leads out of ye King's road to Newton, as far from ye west corner of John Gill's fence as where ye said road intersects the same.”

Upon the deed he placed a map of the lot conveyed, by which all vagueness and uncertainty of description are corrected. This remarkable man has left other interesting memorials and writings—generally of a religious character—not here copied for want of room. He participated in every political movement in and about the colony, and his name will be oftener found among the records at Burlington, Trenton or Woodbury, than that of any other man of those early times.

⁷ Leaming & Spicer's Laws.

In the division of the original survey as jointly held under the location, he says: "I took the forks or lower end of the land next toward the river."⁸ There he settled, cleared a farm and improved some meadow. He owned property in other parts of the county, although not the holder of much real estate.

Thomas Sharp was also appointed ranger for Gloucester county. The duties of this office cannot be better understood than by copying in full the commission and instructions to the appointee.

"PROVINCE OF
NEW JERSEY,  To Thomas Sharp, of ye county of Gloucester, greeting:
Thou art hereby authorized by ye
WESTERN DIVISION. power and order of ye Council of Proprietors to be Ranger for Gloucester County. In all things well and faithfully discharging thy said office, and ye trust in thee reposed, according to ye instructions herewith sent. And from time to time and at all times, to give an account of thy proceedings in ye said office to ye President of ye Council for ye time being, when, and so often as thou shalt by him be thereunto required, and make good to him ye effects due to ye Proprietors forth of ye Royalty of rangeing.

"Given under my hand and seal, ye fifth day of November, Anno Dom., 1708."

Attached to the commission is a copy of instructions to rangers, explaining at once the purposes of the office, their duties and authority. These instructions are as follows:

"INSTRUCTIONS FOR RANGERS.

"1st. All unmarked horses and mares above ye age of thirty months shall be accounted wild, and none others.

"2nd. It shall be lawful for ye several rangers within their respective limmits to take up such horses and mares, and shall give notice thereof, by fixing of papers ffor discovery of ye same in three of ye most publick places in ye County where they shall happen to be taken up.

⁸ Revel's Book, 50.

“3rd. After such publication ye same not being owned within ye space of four weeks, they shall be appraised by two honest men, indifferently to be appointed by ye Constable of that jurisdiction, and after that exposed to sale by public vendue, ye one half part of ye price thereof to be paid into ye hands of ye President of ye said Councill for ye time being, and ye other halfe to ye ranger.

“4th. Any such horses, mares or other cattle which shall be found unmarked and taken up, being claimed by any person, and its appearing by ye oaths or affirmations of two witnesses taken before one justice of ye peace within ye time above limited, that ye said creatures do belong to ye persons claiming ye same, and it happening yt ye owners and ranger cannot agree about ye reward, they shall choose, each of them, one indifferent and substantial man of ye same County to allot and award ye said ranger his fees and reward, ffor taking up ye same.”

His first wife and the mother of his children was Elizabeth Winn, whom he married in 1701. In 1729, he departed this life, and was, no doubt, buried in the old Newton grave yard. He left a will, executed in the year of his death, in which he named his children and disposed of his property.⁹

Five years before his death, he probably married Judith Potts, the widow of Thomas, and daughter of ———, Smith. From this marriage there was no issue. His children were Thomas, who married Catharine Hollingham; Isaac, who married Margaret Brathwill; Samuel, who married Martha Hall; Joseph, an idiot; John, who married Elizabeth Paine; Elizabeth, who married John Hallowell; Mary, who married ——— Smith; and Sarah, who married ——— Pearce.

In 1723, Thomas Sharp gave by deed part of the homestead property to his son Samuel, who settled thereon; and in the same year, he conveyed another part to his son John, who, in 1731, sold to his brother Samuel. At that time John resided in the parish of Christ's Church, London, and carried on the business of a weaver.¹⁰ He was the youngest son; but why he

⁹ Lib. No. 3, 56.

¹⁰ Lib. DD, 338, O. S. G.

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took up his home in the mother country does not appear. Seven years after the death of his father, Samuel sold his land to Tobias Halloway, and probably removed from the neighborhood. In these latter days this estate is known as the "Burrough Farm," now part of the property of Samuel C. Champion, deceased.¹¹ As the holders of any land, none of the name have been residents hereabout for many years. John Hallowell, who married Elizabeth, was a resident of Darby, Pennsylvania, and the ancestor of a large and respectable family in that section of the state. Mary and Sarah may also have left this part of the country after their marriages, as they cannot be traced with any certainty at this date. It is remarkable that the descendants of a man who played so prominent a part in the first settlement of Gloucester county, and who, more than any other, was careful to have the history of his time preserved to coming generations, should so soon be lost sight of, and not known among the families of the present day.

¹¹ John Burrough's Re-survey, 1810, O. S. G.