

## THOMAS STOKES.

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**T**HOMAS HOOTEN of the Parish of St. Ann, Black Friars, and John Stokes of Wentworth street, in the Parish of Stepney, both of which places are in London, in the county of Middlesex, England, became the owners, as tenants in common, of a certain amount of proprietary rights in West New Jersey. Thomas was a tallow chandler, and John a baker; by these avocations they respectively maintained their families, and gained some extra means to make a venture in the enterprise so much talked of among Friends at that time. The deed conveying this interest was made from William Penn and the other trustees of Edward Bylynge to Thomas Hooten in the year 1676, who immediately conveyed the undivided half-part thereof to John Stokes.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that they were creditors of Edward Bylynge, whose failure in business a short time before involved so many of his creditors in loss, and led to much trouble concerning his estate.

Thomas Hooten and John Stokes were relatives; perhaps their wives were sisters; both were members of the religious denomination of Friends, and were seeking some new place of abode, where their notions of right might be more freely indulged in, with some hope of promulgating their doctrines in peace. Thomas Hooten came immediately to New Jersey to look after their interests, leaving his family in London until he should be heard from, and some conclusion be reached in regard to a permanent removal to the new place. On the 29th day of the 8th month, 1677, he wrote to his wife as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Lib. BBB, 191.

"I am this present at the town of Burlington where our land is; it is ordered to be a town for the ten Yorkshire and ten London Proprietors. I like the place well; our lot is the second next the water side. It's like to be a healthful place and very pleasant to live in. I came hither yesterday, being the 28th of October, with some friends that were going to New York. I am to be at Thomas Olive's house until I can provide better for myself. I intend to build a house and get some corn into the ground. And I know not how to write concerning thy coming or not hither; the place I like very well, and believe that we may live here very well. But if it be not made free, I mean as to the customs and government, then it will not be so well, and may hinder many that have desires to come. But if these two things be cleared, thou may take thy opportunity of coming this summer.

THOMAS HOOTEN."<sup>2</sup>

The reference here made about the customs relates to those exacted at New Castle by direction of Governor Andros, they being a percentage upon all the goods brought by emigrants,—an impost which was so much complained of that it was in a short time abandoned. Thomas Hooten's wife soon closed up the affairs of her husband in London, and followed him to America. Thomas Hooten, the son, married Elizabeth Stanley of Philadelphia, in 1686, at which place he then resided, and continued to reside for many years after.<sup>3</sup>

John Stokes, however, remained in London, supplying the people with bread, and husbanding his means to develop his interests here through his brother Thomas. Of this there is undoubted evidence, for, as late as in 1719, in a conveyance of land in this State, he is called John Stokes of Wentworth street, London, biscuit baker, etc.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas married Mary Bernard of Stepney, in 1668, where he remained until the project of removing to America induced him to abandon his home and calling. He and his family came among the first, as they arrived at New Castle about

<sup>2</sup> Smith's History of New Jersey, 105.

<sup>3</sup> Friends' Records, Philadelphia.

<sup>4</sup> Lib. BBB, 191.

the middle of the 6th month, 1677, in the ship *Kent*,—the same that brought the commissioners appointed by William Penn and others—and went immediately to Burlington. He perhaps remained here until the next year, with the others, for mutual defence, and to view the country before he made selection of a place for settlement. This was, however, done in due time, and was chosen from among many on Northampton river, or, as it is now generally known, Rancocas creek. It is probable that three of his children were born in London, and three in New Jersey. They were as follows: Sarah, who married Benjamin Moore; Mary, who married John Hudson; John, who married Elizabeth Green; Thomas, who married Deliverance Horner and Rachel Wright; Joseph, who married Judith Lippincott and Ann Haines (widow); and one other son, who removed to North Carolina, but whose name and family have been lost sight of. Mary, the mother of these children, died in 1699, and Thomas, the father, in 1718, aged 78 years.<sup>5</sup> The obligations of the family are due to Charles Stokes of Rancocas, a descendant, for collecting and arranging much of the history of the same; who also has taken pains to save from loss many incidents that relate to the early history of West New Jersey. How much might yet be preserved, if more of our citizens would emulate his example. In this region, nothing is known of John Stokes, save what may be gathered from the records in the office of the secretary of state at Trenton. In 1716, an inventory of his estate was made, upon which is the following endorsement: "Came to his end by an unnatural death, in ye lower end of Gloucester county." Too many years have intervened to bring the story of his death to the present generation, however interesting it might now be to his descendants.

In the year 1709, the second Thomas herein referred to, purchased of John Kay of Springwell, three hundred acres of land in Waterford township, (now Delaware,) Camden county, the larger part of which tract is now owned Mark Ballinger, and by the heirs of Jacob Anderson, Nathan M. Lippincott, and Daniel Hillman, deceased. This land is bounded on the

<sup>5</sup> Lib. No. 2, 138.

south side by the north branch of Cooper's creek; it extends along both sides of a tributary of the same, and includes what is now some of the best soil in the neighborhood.<sup>6</sup> He settled on this tract, his house standing near the present residence of Mark Ballinger. By his first wife, Delieverance Horner, were the following children: Thomas, who married Abigail Matlack; Deliverance, who married Darling Conrow; Lydia, who married Samuel Haines; and Rachel, who married John Cowperthwaite. By the second wife, Rachel Wright, who was of Oyster Bay, Long Island, N. Y., to whom he was married 7th month, 1st, 1715,<sup>7</sup> were Joshua, who married Amy Hinchman; Hannah, who married Thomas Cole; Jacob, who married Priscilla Ellis; John, who married Ann Champion, (widow) in 1751; Rosanna, who married Samuel Collins and Joseph Browning; and Kesiah. Thomas deceased in 1736, and Rachel in 1747.<sup>8</sup>

This settlement, as made by Thomas Stokes in 1709, was in the midst of an Indian neighborhood, which extended from the north branch southerly to a tributary of the south branch of Cooper's creek, that formed what is generally known as Peterson's mill-pond. On a map left by Thomas Sharp, showing a large survey made to John Willis in 1686, he wrote beside the water course last named, "the stream the Indian King liveth on."<sup>9</sup> This was a survey of some thirteen hundred acres, and lay on both sides of the branch, the original boundaries of which have long since been obliterated.

Judging from the first settlement by the emigrants, the residence of the king referred to by Friend Sharp may be believed to have been on the farm owned by Joseph H. Ellis. Around his palace were collected a few other wigwams, in which lived the retainers of the royal household. This community of aborigines was within the bounds before mentioned, consisting of some families with a few acres of cleared land near the streams; but all were subordinate to the authority named by Friend Sharp. This authority was absolute, dispensing law and equity to the people, regardless of the precedent and without appeal. The wigwam of the king doubtless had

<sup>6</sup> Lib. BBB, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Friends' Records, Long Island.

<sup>8</sup> Lib. No. 4, 98.

<sup>9</sup> Sharp's Book, 11, O. S. O.

more pretension than others that surrounded it, and was distinguishable by its size and the more outlandish hieroglyphics seen upon the skins that made its covering.

It is unfortunate that our Quaker surveyor, in the multiplicity of his records, did not leave some account of this people who have so entirely passed away from the land; some history of their principal settlements, their form of government, their religion, habits, language and traditions. His intercourse with them in the purchase of land, and his frequent entertainment by them in their own manner of hospitality, while traveling through the country as deputy surveyor, gave him abundant opportunity to study all these peculiarities; and in his own quaint manner he might have saved to future generations that which has been entirely lost. There is evidence that this settlement extended northwesterly, and along Tindall's run, nearly to the main south branch, as the remains of one of their burial places may be seen near Tindall's run, east of the Haddonfield and Berlin road. Within the memory of some now living, a few of these people eked out a miserable existence on part of the land formerly owned by Thomas Stokes, near the residence of Aquilla Hillman and brothers; drunken, lazy, worthless beings, they were a hinderance to a progressive community, and the last of an unfortunate race.

Joshua Stokes occupied the homestead after the death of his father, and there he remained during his life; his brothers and sisters settling in other parts of Burlington and Gloucester counties, whose various descendants have multiplied so rapidly that no attempt to trace them would prove successful. Of the landed estate, as purchased by the second Thomas in 1709, only a small portion is held by his descendants in the direct line. One hundred and sixty years have wrought many changes in the ownership of this property, the beginning and end of several generations, and the gradual extinction of the many land marks by which it was identified. But a single branch of the family is left, that feels any attachment to, or has any knowledge of the localities familiar to the first settlers; that is able to tell where the natives had their wigwams, and where they buried their dead; where the medicine-man dispensed his nostrums,

and where the fortune-teller mumbled over her divinations, to the terror of children, the amusement of youth, and the wonderment of all. The descendants of those who were born upon the soil, have passed away; their places have been left to other occupants who, after a like lapse of time, will also be forgotten. A part of this family owned a tract of land in Newton township, lying on the north side of the middle branch of Newton creek, and resided there many years. These were the descendants of Jacob Stokes, who married Priscilla Ellis, a daughter of Joseph, and granddaughter of Simeon and Sarah Ellis of Springwell, the first of the name hereabout. The original estate was conveyed by Isaac Hollingsham to Sarah Ellis, aforesaid, then a widow, in 1717, which afterward became the property of her son Joseph, who deceased in 1757, leaving four daughters, one the wife of Jacob Stokes.<sup>10</sup> He died intestate; and, there being no male issue, the land descended to his children in equal parts, of which Jacob Stokes became the owner about the year 1760, by purchase, and there he deceased. The other daughters of Joseph Ellis were Abigail, who married Caleb Hughes; Sarah, who married John Bubzy and Isaac Mickle; and Kesiah, who married Benjamin Vanlear, M. D.<sup>11</sup>

Portions of the estate remained in the name until 1828, when George Lee, now deceased, became the owner of the homestead; and by his name it is more familiarly known among the people. Of the direct and collateral line of this family much the larger part remained in Burlington county, where they still represent a fair portion of the wealthy and influential inhabitants. The name, however, may be found in many of the states of the Union, and may be traced to John Stokes, biscuit baker, of Wentworth street, in the parish of Stepney, Middlesex, which, at this day, is within the limits of the city of London.

<sup>10</sup> Lib. A, 56.

<sup>11</sup> Lib. C, 242, Woodbury.