

THOMAS THACKARA.

THIS man was probably a native of Yorkshire, England, where the family suffered much religious persecution, by reason of their adherence to the opinions and practices of George Fox. In 1656, Thomas Thackara was taken from a religious meeting at Leeds, and confined for several weeks in York Castle. In the same year, Daniel and Christopher Thackara were sent to the Wakefield prison in Yorkshire, and, in 1660, Thomas and Daniel were again confined in the same jail.¹ At a later date, in 1683, Hannah Thackara with several others was taken from the meeting at Leeds, and confined in the Moothall prison at that place, during cold weather without fire, and there kept for nine weeks. From this kind of records it can be safely concluded that in and about Leeds in Yorkshire, the family of this name may claim their nativity, and from the records thereabout may trace their origin.

The first information that can be discovered of the subject of this sketch, is traced to Dublin, Ireland, where he was engaged as a "stuff weaver," in the year 1677, and became one of the grantees of the deed made to Robert Turner, William Bates, and others, for real estate in West New Jersey.² It may be too broad an assertion to say that he was the same Thomas Thackara who was imprisoned in York Castle, in 1656, although the lapse of time between that occurrence and the

¹ Besse's Sufferings, Vol. 2, 1.

² Lib. B1, 52.

date of the conveyance may be reconciled, supposing him to be but a middle-aged man, when a resident of that city. This is a question that can only be settled by access to private family correspondence, very little of which has been preserved through the several generations that have lived since the coming of the first adventurers; being considered as worthless material by most of tidy housekeepers, and therefore committed to the flames.

The deed before named calls him a "stuff weaver," one having something to do with the manufacture of flax; large quantities of which were cultivated in Ireland at that time, and made into the linen material so useful and so much admired, even at the present day.

Robert Turner was the merchant who sold the manufactured article; being a man of large estate, he was in intercourse with traders in other localities. This gave him the opportunity of knowing the inclinations and purposes of Friends in other parts, and by this means, those in his neighborhood were also advised in regard to their removal to America. Of these were the persons joined with him in the deed aforesaid, and thence their intentions may well be inferred. Thomas Thackara was a man of some estate; this is evidenced by the original purchase, as well as by the many surveys made after his coming; he was also a married man with family before he left the shores of his native land to make his home in the wilds of America. Whether he was a creditor of Edward Byllynge, or had made the purchase for the purpose before named only, and, like many of the same religious persuasion, had determined that no change could be for the worse, does not appear.

Enough has been left on record, and enough therefrom written, to show where and how originated the settlement of Newton in 1681. Thomas Sharp, then a person just coming to manhood, and filled with the spirit of adventure, gives much by his memoranda, and the various writings left behind him. Imagination may readily carry us back to some humble dwelling in the city of Dublin, in which these persons would meet from time to time, to consult as to the best means to

carry out their purpose, as well as to know how many were bold enough to follow their example. Anthony Sharp and Robert Turner, both Quakers, and both men of fortune, were the guides in this, and not only gave their advice as to the detail of the movement, but also covered the doubtful points by contributions of their means. Friends all, thus there was but a single channel wherein ran their opinions, as to the necessity of the thing, and, as the sequel proved, all other difficulties were forced to give way to the object before them. These meetings of business, like many of their religious sittings, were secret, and the conclusions arrived at were known only among their own sect. Robert Zane was the pioneer, and came with the Fenwick colonists to accomplish the necessary explorations, and to fix upon some place where to make their homes. The difficulties existing between Byllynge and Fenwick, and the period occupied in their arrangement, gave Robert Zane ample time to examine the country and write home to inform those of his partners who were to follow him, of his opinions and success therein.

By some agreement among the Proprietors, and for reasons not known, the third tenth was set apart for such of the emigrants as came from Ireland, and within the limits of this tenth it is apparent that the searchings for a site for a town were made. These limits were Penisaukin creek on the north, and Timber creek on the south, extending back into the woods an indefinite distance; and the point was not finally settled until 1765, when Samuel Clement first ran and fixed the head lines of the townships within the bounds of old Gloucester.

To return with our sketch to Dublin, where the receipt of letters from Robert Zane was looked for with much anxiety, and where these were read before the little meeting of such as were closing up their affairs to take a final leave of home and friends,—it can be well understood what attention was given to their import, their advice and their direction. What arguments arose out of their different constructions, and how the hopes and the fears of those present predominated as conclusions were reached! How the sanguine temperaments were

checked by the more prudent and older heads, and how the opinions and suggestions of some were modified and directed by those of more experience, but of no less decision of character! How wives, mothers and daughters attentively listened to the expressions of opinion, made on such occasions, and now and then participated, when *their* comforts were made part of the conversation! How they encouraged the doubtful, and restrained the impulsive, smoothing over the rough points of the stronger sex, and healing the differences of opinion by soft words! How prolific a subject, and how beautiful a theme for the pen of the novelist, who desires to have his story based upon fact, and conform to the truths of history!

"It was on the nineteenth day of September, 1681, from the harbor belonging to the city of Dublin, in the kingdom of Ireland, that Thomas Thackara with his family set sail in the pink "Ye Owners Adventure," with other persons of like intent for the capes of the Delaware; where they arrived on the eighteenth day of November following, and so up the bay until they came to Elsinburg, and were landed with their goods and families at Salem, where they abode the winter."³ Their arrival was anticipated by Robert Zane, who had come four years in advance, and who in that time was familiar with the country and the difficulties that surrounded them. The condition of these was not so desolate as that of many others, for, upon their landing, they were welcomed by friends and provided with shelter at once. Although not at the end of their journey, yet the exposure to an American winter was avoided by this arrangement, and opportunity given for the men to pass judgment upon the action of Robert Zane, and to decide where to fix their permanent abode. The winter, however, was mild, and their traveling about was done in a boat which they purchased at Wickaco, of the Swansons, and with which the several creeks within the third tenth were explored before a conclusion was reached.

This done, and they having submitted their title deeds to the commissioners at Burlington, Daniels Leeds, the surveyor-general, came in person to set apart their lands by metes

³ Lib. A, 98.

and bounds, in accordance with the requirements as laid down by the Proprietors. In all these operations Thomas Thackara doubtless took a leading part, and was familiar with every step made to secure a clear estate and to have the boundaries well defined. The survey bears date March tenth, 1681, and appears to have a discrepancy when compared with the time at which they set sail from Dublin, (September nineteenth), in the same year, which, according to the present chronology, would make the taking up of the land some six months before their departure from home.⁴ This trouble is reconciled when it is understood that, under the old style, March was the last month in the year, and that the last day of the year was the twenty-fourth of that month, thus making the twenty-fifth of March under the old system correspond with the first day of January under the present.

The first survey of 1,600 acres Mark Newbie, Thomas Thackara, Thomas Sharp, Robert Zane and George Goldsmith held in common; but it was soon found that this kind of estate would lead to difficulty, and Thomas Thackara was the first to separate his interest by taking two hundred and fifty acres as his share, and receiving a title therefor from the other owners.⁵ In 1695, he purchased an adjoining tract of two hundred acres of Isaac Hollingsham, and this purchase extended his landed estate from Newton to Cooper's creek. These tracts lay between Robert Zane's share above, and Mark Newbie's below, including the farm, now the property of John Campbell, the old Newton grave yard and some other adjoining lands. He erected his first house near where the present farm buildings of John Campbell stand, and there he continued during the remainder of his life. Excepting sixty acres that he gave to his son-in-law John Whitall, Thomas Thackara retained the whole until his death; all then descended to his oldest son Benjamin.

Benjamin conveyed fifty acres to his brother-in-law, John Eastlack, and by his will gave the remainder to his son Joseph, who re-surveyed the same in 1760. Stephen, the son of Joseph,

⁴ Revel's Book, 25.

⁵ Revel's Book, 59.

inherited this estate under the will of his father, and, by his own, gave parts of it to his sons Joseph, James and Thomas. In connection with this, Stephen held considerable land in Newton township, coming to him through his mother; but this, like the other property, passed out of the name many years since. The election of Thomas Thackara as a member of the first Legislature that sat at Burlington to frame and adopt laws for the province of West New Jersey, shows him to have been a leading man, and one on whose good judgment his neighbors relied. It was a responsible position; for these new comers found themselves the inhabitants of a land without law, except so far as generally promulgated through the original concessions which did not enter into detail, or through the practical application of the principles therein embodied. This had to be done to put the government in operation and make it what was promised by the owners of the soil. It is needless to write of their success in this regard, for they gave to the world the evidence of sound morality, unflinching justice and a faithful regard for right, that has been the admiration of all lovers of liberty from that time to the present.

Together with Mark Newbie and William Cooper, he was appointed one of the judges of the court for the third tenth in the year 1682, and was continued in that place until 1685, inclusive.⁶ The authority, in all probability, only extended to that of Orphans' Court, Quarter Sessions and Common Pleas, and was held for the judicial division as named in the law, until the year 1686, when the third and the fourth tenth were made one bailiwick by the inhabitants, and thereafter so recognized by the Legislature of the province. It does not appear that any records of their proceedings were kept; if they were, some careless person has long since committed them to the flames. How great the pity, that such valuable memoranda as these are not appreciated by every one into whose hands they may fall; so that all like papers might be saved to coming generations! Where these courts were held; what the business; who the litigants, and whence the advocates; tradition does not give any knowledge, and we are left to surmise and speculation

⁶ Leaming & Spicer's Laws.

upon a point of much interest in the early history of our neighborhood. The records commence, however, in 1686, and are carefully preserved in the clerk's office of Gloucester county; curious and instructive documents, to such as care to be familiar with the doings of our ancestors.

Thomas Thackara was also one of the land commissioners, the discharge of which duty was important and responsible; he had to examine titles, direct the deputy surveyors in locating land, and prevent the interference of adjoining surveys, which duty required discretion, good judgment and firmness, but withal very often was liable to censure, and frequently to personal abuse.

Perhaps there was no one thing that proved the regard in which this person was held, in the religious denomination of which he was a member, and of the community at large, so much as his selection to sign the address of the Newton meeting to the yearly meeting of London, protesting against the conduct of George Keith, in his differences with the Society of Friends. To defend the opinions and practices of the society against the subtle reasoning, and ingenious arguments of such a man, required a thorough knowledge of the tenets upon which it stood, and much talent, coupled with forbearance, to successfully guard them against overthrow. William Cooper was his associate in this, and the paper forwarded to the Friends in London, proves them to have been equal to the occasion.

The first Friends' meeting house built at Newton, stood upon lands conveyed by him to the trustees of the society, and doubtless without compensation. The original deed for this has been lost, nor is it of record, but enough remains of memoranda and recitals, to settle any doubt in this matter.

In the year 1702, administration was granted upon his estate, which is evidence of the time of his decease.⁷ His first wife probably died after his settlement here, as in 1689 he married Hepzibah Eastlack, a daughter of Francis, also a resident in these parts.

⁷ Gloucester Files.

His children were Benjamin, who married Mary Cooper, a daughter of William, and a grand-daughter of the first William; Thomas, who married Ann Parker, and Abigail Bates; Hannah, who married John Whittall; Sarah, who married John Eastlack, and Hepzibah (perhaps a child by the last wife), who died single. Benjamin married Mary Cooper in 1707, according to the order of Friends, and, the record says, at John Kay's house.⁸ This may appear strange, but there is reliable information for asserting that a meeting was held there for several years, for the convenience of Friends at Evesham and Penisaukin, alternating each first-day with one held at Penisaukin for the same purpose. John Kay's house stood on a farm now owned by the heirs of Joseph W. Cooper, deceased, near Ellisburg; but no vestige of it can be discovered at this day. He, Benjamin, settled on the property where his father deceased, and, being the oldest male heir, inherited the whole estate; but, with that fairness so commendable in all like cases, he gave his brother and sisters a proportionate share of their parents' property. He died in 1727, leaving his widow and three children,—Joseph, Hannah and Mary.

Joseph married Hannah Albertson in 1731, and Hannah Newbie, a daughter of Stephen and grand-daughter of Mark Newbie, the first of the name hereabouts.⁹⁻¹⁰ Hannah married Peter Champion in 1740; Mary married Thomas Wright. It is through this branch of the family that the present generation must trace their connection with Thomas Thackara, the emigrant from Ireland.

In 1699, at the Newton Meeting, Thomas Thackara and Ann Parker were united in the bonds of matrimony. She was a resident of Philadelphia, where she probably lived with her parents. Jeremiah Bates, in his will, dated 1728, mentions that his daughter Abigail is the wife of Thomas Thackara.¹¹ By these records, the matrimonial affairs of this son can be understood with some certainty, and they show in what line the descendants may look for their pedigree. Thomas Thackara, perhaps a son of the second Thomas, who married Elizabeth

⁸ Lib. No. 1, 479.

⁹ Lib. No. 2, 462.

¹⁰ Lib. No. 4, 129.

¹¹ Gloucester Files.

———, removed within the limits of the Salem Meeting in the year 1759, where that branch of the family still remain. Their children were Hannah, born 1754; William, born 1756, and dying in 1776; Stephen, born 1760; Jacob, born 1763; Joseph, born 1765; and Thomas, born 1771.

John Whitall and Hannah Thackara were married according to Friends' rules, in 1696, at the house of the bride's father in Newton township; and, on the first day of March in the same year, (perhaps at the time of the marriage,) Thomas Thackara presented his son-in-law a deed for sixty acres of land, the same being part of his homestead estate. This piece of property lay in the northern part of his survey, and is now included in the estate of the late John C. Decosta, deceased. On this John Whitall made his home, and there he resided until his death in 1718. The immediate position of the house cannot at this time be discovered, but, probably, it stood near the residence of the present owner, an unpretending, comfortless habitation.¹² The issue of this marriage, so far as can be discovered, was three children: Mary, who married John Wood; Hannah, who married Henry Wood; and Job, who married Jane Siddon. Job settled at Red Bank, in Gloucester county, and from him the name may be traced, which at this time is spread through every State in the Union. He deceased in 1722. John Eastlack, who married Sarah, another daughter of Thomas Thackara, also settled on part of his father-in-law's estate.¹³ This was fifty acres, conveyed to his wife by her brother Benjamin, in 1706; it lay adjoining the land owned by John Whitall, but no vestige of the house can be traced at this time.¹⁴ Thomas Sharp, on his map made in 1700, marks one hundred acres as owned by John Eastlack, which had been previously held by George Goldsmith. Part of this tract is now owned by John Stoy, whereon he now resides. It was taken from the northwest portion of Richard Mathews' survey, which afterwards became the estate of John Haddon. Whether this was the land mentioned by Thomas Sharp, as given to George Goldsmith, to settle the difficulty

¹² Lib. No. 2, 257.

¹³ Lib. No. 2, 202.

¹⁴ Lib. A, 107.

about his locating Thomas Starkey's rights, does not appear; yet its situation on Newton creek, about "as high as the tide flows," would seem to answer the calls of the deed, and fix the place of his first settlement.

By an agreement with the widow of John Whittall, John Eastlack became the owner of this property in 1724, and so continued until his death in 1736, at which time his son John was seized of both tracts by the will of his father; and upon this estate he lived and died.¹⁵

In 1760, he made a re-survey of the said two tracts of land, thereby settling the boundaries and showing the antecedent title. This may, at some future day, prove to be a very important record, now spread out in the books of the Surveyor-General's office of West New Jersey. In 1718, he purchased a farm of John Wright, in Newton township, lying on the south side of the main branch of Newton creek, which estate remained in the family for many years after.¹⁶ John and Sarah Eastlack had six children: Sarah, who married James Mickle, in 1732; Samuel, who married Ann Breach, in 1733; John, who married Mary Bolton, in 1737, and Patience Hugg, in 1741; Daniel, who married Mary Cheesman, in 1740; and Esther, Elizabeth and Hannah.

In the immediate neighborhood in which Thomas Thackara made his first home, none of the name have lived for many years; and the land which he selected as his choice of the estate, having been held in common, passed into the ownership of strangers before the third generation from himself had died.

As in some other families, the female branches have predominated, and the day may soon come when the blood must be traced among other names.

¹⁵ Lib. No. 5, 131.

¹⁶ Lib. A, 100, 111.