

THE WOODS.

THERE were more persons of this name among the first English emigrants who came to New Jersey than of any other. They must have been pleased with the scheme of settlement as laid down by the commissioners and proprietors, and must have considered its success as certain from the beginning. They were men of some estate, for they purchased their proprieties before they left their native land; and men of education, for they at once participated in the management and control of the new government, as novel in its operations as were the people and the scenery that surrounded them in their adopted country. Men of decided characteristics, they were well calculated to develop any new system; and, acting from a proper motive, they would soon draw around them those who naturally sought such guides in this adventure. They were all Quakers, and a perusal of Besse's History of that sect will show the reason why the members of this family were so ready to break up their homes in England and seek others in the wilds of America, regardless of the privations and troubles that attend such an undertaking. From 1654 to 1683, persons of this name were imprisoned in the Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Durham, or Cumberland jails, for attending the meetings of Friends, no matter how quietly or secretly the same were held. Frequently some of these were kept for two years in these loathsome places, without any means of redress or opportunity to attend to the wants of their families. The acts against conventicles, as passed by the parliament, and the little reliance to be placed in the

promises of the king, left no hope for an end of the persecutions which this religious body suffered. As late as in 1681, the House of Commons rejected the following resolution :

“That in the opinion of the House, the persecutions of the Protestant dissenters upon the penal laws, is at this time grievous to the subject, a weakening of the Protestant interest, an encouragement to Popery and dangerous to the peace of the Kingdom.”

Those who observed this reflex of public sentiment could not be mistaken in regard to the rigorous enforcement of the laws; and such as suffered thereby were forced to look to some other place where this kind of intolerance could not reach them.

William Wood arrived at Burlington in the “Willing Mind,” John Newcomb, commander, in November, 1677; and, in the records of the first court held at that place in 1680, William and Thomas Wood appear as grand jurymen, when that part of the government was put in motion.¹ William was the first to change his place of settlement and take up his abode in New Jersey. In the year last named, he located thirty-six acres within the town bounds of Burlington, where he, no doubt, built himself a log cabin, perhaps emulating his neighbors in its style and finish. He married Mary Parnell in 1682.²

In the year 1677, John Wood of Attercliffe in the parish of Sheffield, Yorkshire, purchased of George Hutchinson a quantity of proprietary rights, to be used by him on his arrival in West New Jersey;³ and the ship book of the “Shield” has an entry which says, “that John Wood of Attercliffe, in the parish of Sheffield, Yorkshire, was a passenger in that vessel, and arrived in the Delaware in the tenth month, 1678.”⁴ His family consisted of five children, who came with him, and whose names also appear on the said book.⁵ They were John, Joseph, Esther, Mary, who married Thomas Coleman, and Sarah.⁶ Thomas Wood, a brother of John, came in the same ship; he located a lot of land in Burlington and built a house

¹ Smith's History of New Jersey, 102.

² Revel's Book, 12

³ Lib. Br., 98.

⁴ Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵ Smith's History of New Jersey, 109.

⁶ Revel's Book, 79.

thereon.⁷ He married Mary Howle in 1685, but of his family nothing is known.⁸

This was the first English vessel that passed up the river as far as Burlington.⁹ It was moored to a tree, and the next morning the passengers went ashore on the ice. A "godlie companie" of Friends came in this boat, and doubtless were well received by those who had preceded them.

In 1682, John, Constantine and Jeremiah were residents of the town of Bury in Lancashire, and in that year they each bought of the trustees of Edward Byllynge proprietary rights in anticipation of their removal to America.¹⁰ This town lies about forty miles northeast of Liverpool, and has, since their departure therefrom, become a place of considerable proportions.

It may be safely concluded that the first John herein named is not the John herein secondly mentioned; but, when spoken of in other connections, the distinction does not appear so clear.

Jonathan Wood (husbandman), a resident of the parish of Maltby in Yorkshire, England, also became the owner of rights about the same time; but he abandoned the idea of moving to the "Plantations in America," and sold his acres to Christopher Snowdon in 1684, who came over and settled in Burlington county about the time of his purchase.¹¹

John, Constantine and Jeremiah Wood came to New Jersey the same year in which they made their purchases. On September 4th, 1682, Henry Wood bought of Samuel Cole a tract of land on the north side of Cooper's creek, bounded by the land which Samuel Cole subsequently sold to Samuel Spicer and extending to the river Delaware.¹² This appears from maps of the Woods' and Spicers' lands in the office of the Surveyor-General at Burlington, N. J., as re-surveyed in 1723 and 1728. The deed says: "situate at Arwawmosse, in West Jersey, also the dwelling house or tenement which he, the said Samuel inhabiteth, with the folds, yards, &c., excepting one cow house, &c." This farm fronted on both streams, and was part of the survey returned to Samuel Cole a few months before this sale, upon which the improvements were all new. The

⁷ Revel's Book, 27.

⁸ Lib. Bt, 123

⁹ Smith's History of New Jersey, 108.

¹⁰ Lib. Gt, 01, 03, 05.

¹¹ Lib. Bt, 248.

¹² Lib. Bt, 66.

Indian name of this plantation does not appear to have been retained through many generations, as no mention of it is made in any of the papers after that time.¹³

The Henry Wood last named was not of the family first noticed. He with his wife and children came from Newport, Rhode Island, as appears by the records of the Friends' Meeting of Newton; but not until a year or so after the purchase, as his certificate of removal is dated twelfth month 5th, 1687. He was probably a son of William Wood, author of a much read Quaker pamphlet, called "New England's Prospect," published in 1634; he returned to England in 1635 with his brother John in the ship Hopewell, from which Henry named his homestead property.

John, Constantine and Jeremiah selected their land at the mouth of Woodbury creek, also in Gloucester county, where had already settled a few Swedes. In 1683, John Wood located three hundred acres at that place, within the bounds of which these persons erected their habitations.¹⁴ This hamlet is deserving of more than a passing notice, for from it radiated all the settlements in that part of Gloucester county, as well in the unexplored forests as along the river shore. In John Wood's house a meeting was established after the order of Friends, to which place those in that section resorted for religious worship.¹⁵ It was known among the people at that day as "The Shelter," although the name does not often occur, neither does it appear to have any significance. This meeting was so kept until 1696, in which year John Wood conveyed to Thomas Gardiner, William Warner and Joshua Lord, a lot of land for a graveyard, and upon this a meeting house was erected the same year.¹⁶ No vestige of the old building remains, but the spot in which were laid the bodies of those hardy pioneers is still held sacred. So may it always be.

Those who were contemporary with John, Constantine and Jeremiah Wood in this little colony, and who joined in the meeting at John's house, were Joshua Lord, Henry Trédway, Thomas Gardner, Thomas Mathews, John Ladd, George Ward, William Warner and others. The several locations of these

¹³ Revel's Book, 63.

¹⁴ Revel's Book, 43.

¹⁵ The Friend, Vol. 4, 206.

¹⁶ Lib. G3, 214.

persons extended along the river shore as far as Eagle Point, up the creek to about where Woodbury now stands, and also on Mathew's branch, a tributary of the last named stream. Previously to the settlement by the English, these localities were called "Long Harris's creek" and "Batchelor's bank;" but these names were soon lost sight of after their coming.¹⁷ In what way they were derived does not appear.

There were a few Swedish families about the mouth of Woodbury creek previously to the coming of these colonists. This may have been an inducement for stopping at that place.¹⁸ The Dalboos had land thereabout, and Walla Swanson of Wickaco was likewise an owner of two hundred acres.¹⁹ In his will dated in 1692, he gave these to his children, John, Peter, Swan, Mary, wife of William Warner, Lydia, wife of Josiah Harper, Bridget, Catharine, wife of James Laconey, and Judith.²⁰ They divided the same in 1729.²¹

In 1715 John Swanson conveyed to John Ladd, Henry Wood and John Cooper, one acre of land on the west side of the creek and on the south side of the King's road, no doubt to be used for a burial place, and thereon to erect a meeting house.²²

John Wood sat as a member of the Legislature in the year 1685, was appointed one of the commissioners for dividing land in the same year, and, in 1687, one of the judges of the courts of Gloucester county. From 1695 to 1700, he was continuously appointed one of the coroners, and in 1701 made king's attorney. In 1687, he was, with William Warner, presented by the grand jury for assisting two "notorious criminals" to go out of the county. John Wood appeared at the bar of the court, made proper explanation of the matter and acknowledged his error; and the case was abandoned.²³ It was, perhaps, through his influence that the courts were held at Red Bank for a few years; but this was soon found to be an out-of-the-way, inconvenient place, and accordingly abandoned.

John Wood deceased in 1705, having a large landed estate,

¹⁷ Revel's Book, 68.

¹⁸ Lib. Z, 454.

¹⁹ Lib. E, 423.

²⁰ Lib. X 177.

²¹ Revel's Book, 61.

²² Lib. A, 145.

²³ Minute Book of Gloucester County Courts, Woodbury.

which he disposed of by his will.²⁴ The homestead property fronting on the creek and the river, he gave to his son John. In this devise he excepted the graveyard and meeting house property, doubtless to avoid any trouble after his death in regard to the boundaries and rights of the society to the same. His wife Sarah and the following named children survived him: John, Joseph, Esther, Constantine, who married Alice — and died in 1734. Mary, Henry, Sarah, who married Joshua Lord, and Alice.

It is probable that the daughter Sarah died before her father, as mention is made of her four children in his will. Portions of this estate remained in the name and family for many years after his decease.

Henry Wood remained on the premises which he purchased of Samuel Cole, and there died in 1691, having been a member and constant attendant of the Newton meeting. He was somewhat of a public man, as he was a member of the Assembly in 1683 and 1684; but in the last year did not attend.²⁵ In 1684, he was appointed one of the commissioners for laying out land and purchasing from the Indians; and, in 1685, he acted as a commissioner for opening highways and keeping the same in repair. He rendered service in many other minor positions, and was a useful man in his time. All his traveling was done by water, and the daughters as well as the sons were experts in managing a boat. No fishing excursion was defeated for want of a man to work the skiff, nor sailing party put off because the beaux were not there to manage the helm. To be equal to every emergency in this means of locomotion, was part of an education not to be neglected; and no little table talk originated in the rivalry of those who prided themselves upon their nautical ability, and who were always ready to test their knowledge by a race on the water.

Newton creek (perchance, before the tide was checked by dam, or the stream narrowed by banks,) has been the scene of many such trials. The merits of every new craft must needs be tested, and, with a good breeze, the temptation was too great not to know the strong and the weak points thereof. Some

²⁴ Lib. No. 1, 173.

²⁵ Leaming and Spicer's Laws.

public friend, upon his return from meeting, may have unwillingly found himself in the midst of one of these contests, and, while having fast hold of his hat, may have yielded for the moment to the excitement that surrounded him, forgetting that the force of example always strengthened precept. In our day, horse flesh supplies this means of travel, and the followers of George Fox have now as keen an eye for the good points of a roadster as our ancestors had for the sailing qualities of their water craft.

Early and constant training will control the bent of our nature, yet its latent propensities may occasionally crop out in a direction not consistent with our education, or with the examples that sometimes surround us. The line that separates a commendable purpose from that which leads to error, may, in our zeal, be overlooked, and, unless experience and ripe judgment be regarded, the dangers of a wrong direction are much increased.

In 1683, Henry Wood located three hundred and fifty acres of land on the north side of and fronting Cooper's creek; this he afterward sold to Matthew Burden in 1686, who probably settled on the same.²⁶ This grantee was a resident of Portsmouth in Rhode Island at the time of the purchase, and in some way connected with the grantor.²⁷ The name of Burden does not often occur among the early settlers hereabout. Richard, a son of Matthew Burden, conveyed this land to John Cox in 1711; much of it is now included in the Browning estate, and divided into various farms. He was the owner of much other land in West New Jersey, but he disposed of the greater part before his death.²⁸

Henry Wood's will bears date April 2d, 1691, and was admitted to probate in June of the same year.²⁹ Samuel Carpenter of Philadelphia and George Smith of West New Jersey were made trustees, and Walter Clark and Benjamin Newberry of Rhode Island were appointed executors. In this writing, he says that he was a resident of Hopewell, in Gloucester county, West New Jersey, which name has, however, been lost to the estate for many years. Although much

²⁶ Basse's Book, 150.

²⁷ Lib. BB, 67.

²⁸ Lib. BBB, 68.

²⁹ Lib. No. 13, 518.

real estate passed under this document, yet it does not appear of record for more than half a century after its probate,—an occurrence that but seldom happens, and that remains unexplained. The appointment of persons residing in Rhode Island as executors, is accounted for by his having left friends and, perhaps, relatives in that colony upon his removal hither. His children were Henry, James (a shipwright, who lived in Philadelphia and married Mary Pellor in 1715); Richard; Judith, who married Thomas Willard in 1689; Abigail, who married Daniel Cooper in 1693; Hannah, who married Joseph Nicholson in 1695; Elizabeth, who married Stephen Newbie in 1703; and Benjamin, who married Mary Kay, daughter of John, in 1707.

His widow Hannah survived him several years. In 1754, the son Henry died a single man, and by his will disposed of the real estate given to him by his father among his brothers and sisters.³⁰ Thomas and Judith Willard settled on a plantation near that of her father's. Thomas died there in 1734, intestate, leaving three sons, James, Henry and Thomas.³¹

Abigail, the wife of Daniel Cooper, died in a short time after her marriage, and without children. Joseph Nicholson, a son of Samuel, and the first of the name that settled in Gloucester county, became the owner of the homestead in 1699, by deed from James Nicholson, and with his wife made that his home.³² Joseph deceased in 1702, intestate, leaving but two children, George, who married Alice Lord in 1717, and Samuel, who married Sarah Burrough in 1722, Rebecca Saint in 1744, and Jane Albertson, widow of William and daughter of John Engle, in 1749.³³

Stephen and Elizabeth Newbie settled in Newton township on part of the land taken up by Mark, the father of Stephen. He died in 1706; his widow and two children survived him. Of these, Mark died single in 1735, and Hannah married Joseph Thackara.

After the decease of Joseph Nicholson, Benjamin Wood purchased the homestead estate, and thereon he resided until

³⁰ Gloucester Files.
³¹ Lib. W, 386.

³² Lib. G3, 214.
³³ Gloucester Files.

his death in 1738. Like his father, he called the old place Hopewell, the original Indian name of Arwawmosse, as mentioned by Samuel Cole when he conveyed to Henry Wood, having been abandoned at an early date in their ownership. Benjamin Wood's plantation fronted on the river. His wife Mary survived him, and the following children: Mary, who married Joseph Cole and Richard Matlack; Elizabeth, who married Elias Toy; Hannah, who married Joseph Heulings; Abigail, who married Robert Hunt; Benjamin, who married ———, the latter dying in 1750; John, Judith and Jane.³⁴ By his will, the real estate of which he died seized, passed to his children; but in that generation much thereof was alienated, and, at this writing, no part of the soil is held in the name.³⁵

The graveyard commenced by the Woods and Spicers, which stands upon the original tract of land as surveyed to Samuel Cole, is still in existence. Some of those in whose veins flows the blood of the first English settlers, have with commendable care preserved its boundaries, and saved it from encroachment. In later years memorials have been raised to show where lie the remains of some of the younger branches of the families; but, of the first there interred, no tradition or record has been left to point out their particular resting place.

The majestic oaks that stood around, and upon whose bark had been rudely traced the names of many of the occupants, are gone. These marks, which, to the heedless axeman, were without meaning, bore in themselves a history, full of interest to the descendants of those whose memory they were designed to preserve. No trace of these old, living monuments is left, and with them passed away the only remembrance of the first settlers in that part of the colony. Where stood the primitive forests, as owned by Henry Wood one hundred and eighty years since, the soil is now divided into valuable farms, and, before another like lapse of time, will be included in the city of Camden and be covered with the dwellings of its inhabitants.

³⁴ Lib. No. 7, 367.

³⁵ Lib. No. 4, 135.