

Hunterdon Historical Newsletter

Volume 47
No. 2
Spring 2011



Hunterdon County Historical Society

UPCOMING EVENTS

Now thru June 14 - Exhibit

"The Stars and Stripes: Fabric of
the American Spirit"

Featuring sixty-nine American
parade flags
The Red Mill, Clinton

June 5 - Society Gala

"River Road Ramble"

See lead article for more info

June 18 - Auction/Flea Market

Antiques, collectibles and more
Holcombe Jimison Farmstead
Lambertville

July 17 - Barn Tour

Sponsored by the Tewksbury
Historical Society and
Tewksbury Trail Association

Aug 6 - Civil War Re-Enactment

Holcombe Jimison Farmstead

Aug 26 - Lecture

"Post Offices of
Hunterdon County"

Bouman Stickney Farmstead
Stanton

Sep 24 - Farmstead Festival

Tour the museum, enjoy the
crafts and demonstrations
Holcombe Jimison Farmstead

OPEN HOUSES

Bouman-Stickney Farmstead

Stanton
First Sunday of each month

Marshall House Museum

Lambertville Historical Society
Weekends thru Oct 16

A FIRST! Governor Reading House Open for Society's Gala Tours on June 5, 2011



Built in 1760 by Governor John Reading, Jr., the handsome Georgian style mansion sits along the South Branch of the Raritan River. The house, a private residence for 251 years, has never been opened to the public.

A rare opportunity exists to tour the 251-year-old, privately-owned Georgian style mansion Gov. John Reading, Jr. built along the South Branch of the Raritan River in 1760 when it is opened for the Hunterdon County Historical Society's annual gala, the "River Road Ramble", Sunday, June 5 from 3 to 6pm.

Raritan Township Police are closing River Road from Junction to Pennsylvania Avenue between 2:30 and 6:15pm to assure the safety of guests. Parking and registration will be at 67 River Road. Flat heel shoes are suggested to protect the antique flooring and for one's own comfort.

The Ramble also includes six other properties in the South Branch Historic District. Three houses on the tour are short strolls from the Reading mansion and include that property's c.1775 Reading English-style barn with a two-story 1995 apartment, the c.1750s Barber Farmstead, and the Society's 2009 state-of-the-art Archive Building. Although the c.1770-1810 Shippen House will afford only exterior views, guests can walk a path from the Gov. Reading house to see the surprising 40-foot drop to the Raritan River there. An eight-passenger van will shuttle guests to the other two houses at the intersection of Junction and River Roads where the c.1760 Daniel Reading House and c.1840 Cherryville

Store, relocated from Franklin Township, are under restoration for commercial use. Parking is available there, so guests have the option of stopping to see these two houses before or after seeing the other five.

Attendance at Society galas, usually limited by invitation, is open to the public this year because of the unique opportunity to tour the Reading Mansion and other historic buildings. A donation of \$75 includes the tours, hors d'oeuvres from *Max's Trattoria* in Flemington, wine, and music by harpist Mary Elizabeth Young. Guests also may have a 5 by 7-inch profile cut by silhouette artist Ruth Grabner of Washington, NJ for \$25.

Reservations may be secured online at www.hunterdonhistory.org or by mail to HCHS, 114 Main Street, Flemington, NJ 08822. Make checks payable to the Hunterdon County Historical Society. Attendance by pre-orders only by May 30.

Tours will be ongoing during the gala so guests can see the houses in their order of choice and still have time to visit and enjoy the food. Vignettes of historical artifacts and documents, two of the Society's many Hunterdon quilts, and a room-size hooked rug of Sergeantsville will be displayed on the first floor of the Society's "smart," state-of-the-art archival storage building.

Brief descriptions of the historical tour houses follow on page 1109.

WILLIAMS TALL-CASE CLOCK INHERITED BY THE SOCIETY

**Grandfather’s clock, made by Thomas Williams,
Hunterdon County’s first clockmaker, now among
the Historical Society’s collections**

by Fred Sisser III

What is undoubtedly among the first clocks ever made in Hunterdon County has been inherited by the Hunterdon County Historical Society, who accessioned the timepiece on 14 March 2011. Coming from the estate of Society member, Lester V. Rockafellow - who died on 16 February 2010 at the age of 71 - the tall-case clock was made by Thomas Williams of Flemington *circa* 1803. Generally known at that time as an eight-day clock, but also called a tall-case clock, or simply tall clock, it is now usually referred to as a grandfather’s clock.

Made of fruitwood, probably cherry, the clock’s overall height measures ninety-six inches. On the dial is painted “Thomas Williams” underneath of which is “Flemingtown.”¹ Regretfully, the provenance of the clock is not known, but it is assumed that it descended to Mr. Rockafellow either through his father’s family, or his mother, who was Grace Van Dyke.²

So far as is known, there are only four other existing tall-case clocks made by Thomas Williams, who flourished at Flemington in the period of from the 1790s to 1809.³ One of Williams’ clocks is owned by the family of Historical Society member Juli A. (Langerak) Wilson of Minden, Nevada. This clock, now in the home of her brother who resides in Idaho, was originally purchased by a member of the Thompson



Detail of the dial of the Williams tall-case clock

family of Readington Township, from whom Mrs. Wilson descends. The purchaser was probably Mrs. Wilson’s ancestor, John Thompson, Sr., whose 1847 inventory lists an “eight day clock,” appraised at \$20.00.⁴

Another tall-case clock made by Thomas Williams was bought by John W. Thatcher of Clinton (New Jersey) in 1985. Subsequent research by Mr. Thatcher revealed that, in addition to Mrs.

Wilson’s clock, a couple

now William Street, Flemington. The foundation of his place of work was unearthed during an excavation in 1922, and this discovery resulted in an article in the local newspaper.⁶ Giving details on Thomas Williams at that time was renowned Hunterdon County historian Theodore Bellis (1849-1927)⁷ and this account may have been the first published on Hunterdon County’s original clockmaker. Williams’ apprentice, Joakim Hill (1783-1869), proved to be more famous than his mentor, and a number of his tall-case clocks have survived to this day.⁸

Thomas Williams was the son of Jonathan Williams (c.1730-1788), and his wife Joanna (c.1730-1768), of Elizabeth Town, Essex (now Union) County, New Jersey.⁹ Thomas was born 13 September 1763, at Elizabeth Town.¹⁰ He is first of record in May 1786 when Thomas and his father, “Jonathan Williams the older,” and his brother, “Jonathan Williams the younger,” borrowed £811 from Robert Kennedy, at which time they were all described as of “the Township of Grinwitch [Greenwich] County of Sussicks [Sussex].” When the Williams’ failed to return this money, they were sued by Kennedy in the New Jersey Supreme Court in April 1788, by which time Thomas senior was dead and his sons were living in Lebanon Township, Hunterdon County.¹¹

The case was not resolved until October 1788 when the Sheriff of Hunterdon County sold “three different lotts of Land” in Lebanon Township belong to the Williams’ “on the North side of the Brook called Beaver Dam” and the “road that leads from Potterstown to the South branch of Rariton... [near] a bridge over Beaver Dam brook.”¹²

Jonathan Williams senior died intestate about January 1788 at which time “Jonathan Williams & Tho^s Williams both of the County of Hunterdon” were appointed his administrators in Essex County, from where their father originally came.¹³ As the appointed administrators of the “Goods & Chattles, Land and Tenements which were of Jonathan Williams deceased & at the time of his death in the Hands and Possession” of his sons, they were sued in the Hunterdon County Court of Common Pleas for a debt not paid by their father.¹⁴ This case was still active in May 1788.¹⁵

By 1789 Thomas Williams was living in Alexandria Township, Hunterdon County, at which time he was recorded as a “Householder” and assessed on 40 acres of land.¹⁶ The “Householder” appellation would indicate that by this time Thomas was married. In August 1790 he continued to be



Tall-case clock, made by Thomas Williams, c.1803, now in the Society’s possession.

taxed on 40 acres of land in Alexandria Township.¹⁷

On 26 March 1795 Thomas Williams is recorded as “of the Township of Amwell” when he purchased two lots there, one consisting of nine acres, and the other, located on the east side “of the road leading to Trenton,” containing two acres.¹⁸ This property was located in what is now the town of Flemington, which in the eighteenth century was part of Amwell Township. “Thomas Williams of the Township of Amwell” purchased eleven more acres in Amwell Township in April 1799.¹⁹ The account book of Jacob Anderson of Amwell Township, who died *circa* May 1799, makes reference to “Thomas Williams (Clockmaker).”²⁰ This is the first known instance in which Thomas is referred to as a clockmaker.

In the ensuing years Thomas held several responsible positions, including that of an auditor²¹ as well as a Juror in the Hunterdon County Court of Common Pleas.²² As “Thomas Williams of Flemingtown in the Township of Amwell” he bought several more acres in that Township in 1802 “on the public Highway . . . leading to Trenton.”²³ The Amwell Township tax list for 1802 describes Thomas as being in possession of 37 acres, one horse and two cows.²⁴

“Thomas Williams of the County of Hunterdon” was among those who signed the administration bond of “John Sutphin (son of Jacob) late of Amwell” who died in the summer of 1802. Among the items listed in Sutphin’s inventory was a “Clock and Case,” appraised at \$60.00, which was most likely made by Thomas.²⁵

By this time Joakim Hill was Thomas’ apprentice as attested by a will which they jointly witnessed and signed in Amwell Township on 30 August 1802.²⁶ In October 1803 “Thomas Williams of Flemington in the township of Amwell” borrowed \$500.00 from “Joseph Capner of the same place.”²⁷

At the time of the sale of some of Thomas’ property “on the public highway formerly called the Kings Road leading to Trenton,” in December 1802, the deed described the grantors as “Thomas Williams of Flemington in the Township of Amwell County of Hunterdon and Rhoda his wife.”²⁸ This is the first known instance in which Thomas’ wife is named. They were married some time before the birth of their oldest known child, Betsy, who was born in June 1793.¹⁰ When they sold more of their land in Amwell Township, in March 1803, Thomas’ wife is called “Rhody.”²⁹

The 1803 ratable for Amwell Township records Thomas as owning 20 acres of land and lists him as a “Merchant.”³⁰ When “The Flemington Aqueduct Company” was established in December 1807, Thomas owned one share.³¹ He added fourteen acres to his property when he purchased a lot aside his own “in the Township of Amwell” in May 1808.³²

By the latter half of 1808 Thomas began to experience considerable financial difficulties, and at one point (apparently in an effort to keep himself solvent) sued a person indebted to him in the trivial amount of \$8.33.³³ More often than not he was indebted to others, and was listed as the defendant in several court cases in the Hunterdon County Court of Common Pleas, all on the charge of debt. One of the

longest litigations involved the allegations made by “Harry Peters and Thomas Gedney . . . partners in trade under the name . . . of Peters and Gedney at New York,” which was initiated in August 1808 and not resolved until a year later. Accordingly Thomas owed the firm \$375.00.³⁴ New York City directories from 1805 until 1808 describe “Peters & Gedney” as merchants of a “china and glass store” located at 204 Pearl Street.³⁵ Perhaps Thomas bought glass and other items from this establishment for his clocks.

Other creditors who brought charges against Thomas in the Hunterdon County Court of Common Pleas were Nathan Hutchins, seeking a return of \$300.00 in May 1808; Jonathan Hutchins demanding \$192.00 in October 1808, May 1809 and August 1809; and Joseph Capner in August 1809,³⁶ suing for the return of the money he loaned Thomas in October 1803.²⁷ In an apparent attempt to gain some financial stability, Thomas resorted to suing Francis Besson in December 1809 for the sum of \$1.64.³⁷

It is significant to note that, in trying to compensate his creditors, the Sheriff of Hunterdon County levied on certain assets of Thomas’ in order to satisfy his respective debts. The



Thomas Williams and his apprentice, Joakim Hill, jointly witnessed a Hunterdon County will made in August 1802.

Sheriff noted, for instance, in the case of Jonathan Hutchins in April 1809, that he seized “A Lott of Land said to contain thirty acres more or less with the appurtinances Situate by the village of Flemington,” as well as “2 Beds . . . Clock case & other house furniture.”³⁸ In another document concerning the same

charge, the Sheriff noted that he had confiscated “one clock, case, &c.” from Thomas’ effects.³⁹ When the Sheriff took Thomas’ goods in July 1809 to compensate the charge made by Joseph Capner, he listed, among the possessions, “Clock tools.”⁴⁰ And in August 1809, concerning the charges made by Peters and Gedney, the Sheriff seized “one clock case.”⁴¹

The final misfortune came in December 1809 when, in order to satisfy Thomas’ creditors, the Sheriff auctioned off the land of “Thomas Williams . . . situate in the village of Flemington . . . on the road or street running through Flemington” consisting of 36 acres.⁴² On 30 December 1809 Thomas submitted a petition to the Hunterdon County Court “for the benefit of the Insolvent Laws,” which the judiciary allowed.⁴³ Hunterdon County’s earliest known clockmaker was reduced to insolvency, and nothing further is known of him in Flemington and/or Amwell Township.

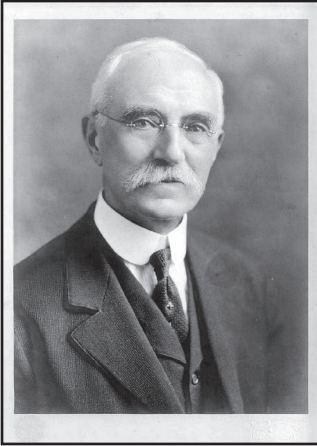
Apparently Thomas and his family removed to the area of New Germantown (Oldwick) in Tewksbury Township, Hunterdon County, where he and Rhoda, along with five of their children, were baptized at the Zion Lutheran Church of New Germantown in 1816.¹⁰ The Williams’ died the same year, Thomas first, on 21 October 1816, at the age of 53 years, 1 month and 8 days, and Rhoda on 21 December 1816, aged 53 years and 2 months. They were buried in the Zion Lutheran Churchyard at New Germantown.⁴⁴

Editor’s Note: Forty-four footnotes are cited in Mr. Sisser’s article. These have been compiled into a book which has been deposited in the Society’s Deats Memorial Library.

HCHS Releases Four New Manuscript Collections

by Donald Cornelius

The Hunterdon County Historical Society is pleased to announce the release of four new and significant manuscript collections. These collections are now available for research by Society members and visitors during open reference hours at the Hiram E. Deats Memorial Library. Credit for the arrangement, description, and production of finding guides for the collections is entirely due to the dedicated volunteer archival staff members who serve our Society so selflessly.



Egbert T. Bush, portrait, 1924. Hunterdon County Historical Society, Manuscript Collection No. 83, PX5063.

The Egbert T. Bush Papers

arranged by Erin Brennan

Egbert Trimmer Bush was born on June 21, 1848 to Sidney L. and Elizabeth (McPherson) Bush on a farm about a mile above Croton. Largely self-taught, Mr. Bush earned his teaching certificate, then served many schools in the area, including Croton, Klinesville, Cherryville, Mount Pleasant, and Van Dolah's. In addition to teaching, Mr. Bush owned a peach farm during the late 1880s until the early 1900s. He was a published author and poet; in addition to a regular

column in the *Hunterdon County Democrat*, his stories and essays appeared in many periodicals and his book of poetry, *When Leaves Grow Old*, was published in 1916. Mr. Bush married Sarah Eleanor Willson in 1871. They were married for 51 years until Mrs. Bush died in 1922. They had two children: Percy W. and Evelyn B. (Bush) Johnson. Mr. Bush died on November 12, 1937 at the age of 89.

This collection is comprised of personal papers of Mr. Bush, a Stockton resident who was a prominent educator, author, columnist, and peach farmer in Hunterdon County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The collection includes his diaries, manuscripts of his fiction and essays, research notes, correspondence, financial records, and some photographs. In particular, Mr. Bush's articles and research notes provide valuable insights into the history of southern Hunterdon County and many of the families who lived there.

The Bartles II Collection

arranged by Diane Kinney

Charles Bartels was undoubtedly one of the most influential citizens of Hunterdon County in the eighteenth century; the Society is very pleased to have the ability to arrange and make available to the public a second collection of his personal and business papers. Charles Bartels was

born in New Germantown (now Oldwick), NJ on March 18, 1801. After graduating from Union College in Schenectady, NY, he began his prosperous career as a lawyer at the office of Nathaniel Saxton in 1822. Bartles married Eliza Hart of Flemington in 1833 and had four children, Mary, William H., Charles Jr., and George. From his second marriage to Eliza E. Randall in 1846, following his first wife's death the previous year, he had two more children: Joseph and Margaret. In addition to his law practice, Bartles was successful in real estate operations, was integral to the construction of the Flemington Railroad as well as its first president, and was also President of the Hunterdon County Bank in 1858. He died on June 19, 1883.

This collection, an amalgamation of sources and materials spanning nearly two centuries, consists largely of court dockets, deeds, articles of agreement, account information, and correspondence related to the family, business, and personal records of Charles Bartles and his descendants. Charles Bartles was a prominent Flemington attorney during the nineteenth century, and the principal attraction of this collection is the group of court dockets from his practice.

There are four docket books that cover the work of Bartles and affiliated attorneys in the Court of Common Pleas of Hunterdon County from 1807 to 1845; a time period that is not well represented by official docket books within the records of the county court or clerk. Other items of note include documents discussing the treatment and sale of slaves in the area, the construction of the Flemington Railroad, and the Civil War as it relates to Hunterdon County. There is no doubt that this rich collection of local historical materials will be heavily referenced by local historians and genealogists alike.

Survey of Hunterdon County Historic Sites

arranged by Linda Hahola

This survey of historic sites in Hunterdon County was carried out primarily by Dr. Edward Johnson. Edward Johnson, Ph.D. (English) was a member of the Hunterdon County Historical Society. From 1960 to 1961 he was the Chairman of the Hunterdon County Committee on Historic Sites and Structures, and conducted this survey as a private endeavor paid for by D. Howard Moreau, solely for the good of the county. Dr. Johnson established his own criteria for site selection, which may help to explain the absence of several prominent historic structures. Johnson's survey was used in the 1970s as a source for the more formally funded historical survey conducted by the State and County.

The collection contains NJ State Historical Site Evaluation Worksheets and their supporting material. Forty-one sites have been evaluated, and each includes the worksheet, a map, and commentary. Photographs are included for many of the sites, as well as attendant negatives. All of the sites are in Hunterdon County. Dr. Johnson provided an index that divides the sites by category. There are twenty-seven possible categories; fourteen of which are represented. Interestingly, three have notes that they will be sent at a later date, but are not present in the collection.

The Records of the Kingwood Grange, No. 106

arranged by John Matsen

This collection contains the records and papers of the Kingwood Grange (No. 106) of Hunterdon County, NJ from its formation in 1882 to 1987. The Grange played an important role in the life of rural communities; it was a fraternal, social, professional and lobbying organization in grand combination. These materials as preserved are important for a variety of reasons. They are a resource for general historical research in Kingwood and Hunterdon County; they provide a record of individuals in the Kingwood area for genealogical purposes; and they are a window into the sociology of rural America during the covered time frame.

Probably the most useful aspect of this collection from an organizational



Sergeantsville Degree Team, April 1961. Hunterdon County Historical Society, Manuscript Collection No. 81, PX5894.

standpoint is the minute books of the Kingwood Grange. They are fairly complete from its founding in 1882 until the last entry in 1987 that noted the grange building was to be sold. The organization continued for perhaps a dozen more years, but with no home, records were not kept in a central location and were apparently scattered.

Also of interest to local genealogists

FROM THE DESK OF DONALD CORNELIUS, HCHS MANUSCRIPT CURATOR

Spring has arrived, and things could not possibly be any busier here at the HCHS Archives! I am sure that the members of the Society will be very happy and impressed to see the release of four new manuscript collections in the past few months (see related article for details). As impressive as this is, I am happy to report that it is only the beginning! My happy (I think) volunteers are still busily involved in the preservation of our County's history; and I know that by next newsletter we will have at least two or three more collections to release. Actually, I think the increase in production may have something to do with our new coffee machine that one of the volunteers provided....

Shirley Wydner has finished arranging a collection of glass plate negatives (an older photographic image technique) that came to the Society from the Deats family. Many of them are family images, and most are poorly identified, but they are a valuable documentary of the county and its people and places nonetheless. For all of our Civil War Buffs out there, the Society should, barring any problems, be

able to celebrate the sesquicentennial of that conflict with a release of interesting material. Linda Hahola is arranging the records of the G.A.R. Post #20 (Major C. A. Angel) from Lambertville. There is a wealth of information regarding the civil war vets of that post in this collection. Look for both of the above by summer!

In addition to these, many folks may interested to know that the film "Money at Work" has returned from the preservation house. If you recall, last year the Society obtained a grant to restore this interesting and unique film that was partially shot in Flemington in the 1930s. Now that the film is back, I have had a chance to view it for the first time, and it contains a few surprises. Although I won't spoil anything, I will say that there is a segment of the film that is particularly interesting, and after a public viewing to be determined by the Trustees, I hope to post at least a portion of the film as a clip to our website.

Dealing with multimedia archival items like the film is something that your curator is finding more on my mind lately. Not only have I had the experience of handling the preservation of this film, but I have also run across

and historians will be the Secretary's Quarterly Reports, the Membership Applications, and the Dimit lists. The grange family compilation may be of interest as well. Those interested in the history of grange activities may wish to consult the incoming and outgoing correspondence, as well as the reports of various levels of the grange hierarchy. The collection concludes with a small group of photographic images.

All of these collections may be accessed for research purposes during the open hours of the Hunterdon County Historical Society. The Hiram E. Deats Memorial Library is located at 114 Main Street, Flemington, NJ, 08822, and is open from 12pm to 4pm every Thursday; 10am to 4pm every 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month; and by appointment. Inquiries to the Society may be made at 908-782-1091 or hunterdonhistory@embarqmail.com.

some multimedia in the collection I am currently arranging (the records of the Flemington Children's Choir). Nestled in the middle of this collection of photographs (lots and lots), scrapbooks, and programs were two recorded CDs of Choir School performances. One is clearly labeled the Graduation Performance of 1954. The other has no label at all. It is clearly a different performance, but I am left guessing as to where or when. When this collection is finished and released I will put a selection of the choir up on the web for all to hear. As time goes by, I am sure that there will be more and more of this type of material coming to the Society in the donations we receive.

Speaking of our website, if you have not had a chance to view it yet, by all means, please do so! I will, of course, continue to write a column for our *Newsletter*, but in the future there will be updates and posts concerning new releases, archival happenings, and other news posted to our website and its attendant Facebook page. I am not entirely sure what Facebook is, but my daughter says it is the "bean." I hope that is a good thing.... Happy Spring!

Images from the Past



New acquisition, gift of Les Hoffman. Hunterdon County Historical Society.

The Flemington Cornet Band, photographed in 1888 by Sunderlin. Standing, left to right, [unidentified], Al Fisher, [unidentified], Will Fisher, [three unidentified], John Kunsman. Seated, left to right, ---- Smith, [unidentified], Howard Barass, [two unidentified], Chas. Rittenhouse, Harry Green.

