A SHORT HISTORY OF BEVERLY, NEW JERSEY

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The following Sketch was read before the Paragraph Club of Beverly and is published by them for circulation.

Beverly, September, 1905.

Last winter the Paragraph Club took a trip abroad—abroad, through the length and breadth of its own State. It was no "personally conducted" on a "Penna. Limited," but a leisurely journey after the manner of our forefathers. We jogged along comfortably over old roads historic and otherwise ; some of which long before either English or Dutch set foot on our shores, were but Indian trails. We rested at wayside inns so quaint and and queer, that, had the good man of the house appeared in knee breeches and wig, it would scarcely have caused surprise.

We called at stately halls and colonial homes where the very atmosphere was redolent of memories, dear to our patriotic hearts. We lingered long by the sea-shore for the restless, never-tiring waves stayed us. What tales they could tell, had we the ears to hear ! What scenes depict, had we the eyes to see ! Hope, ambition, bitter disappointment, greed of gain and sweet charity, all had sailed that sea, yea, will sail, so long as joy and sorrow are the heritage of human hearts.

The pebbles at our feet and the sand we trod upon

escaped not in our eager search after knowledge. Mother earth revealed some of her secrets, and we learned, that underneath this shifting, unstable Jersey sand, there is a good solid foundation so that we have every reason to feel sure, that when the rains descend and the floods come, the little bit of ground we call our State will stand firm and secure, for it is founded on the rocks.

Now that we journeyed homeward, we will have failed in gaining much that such a trip offers us, did we not look upon our own town and its surroundings with deeper interest.

On the highway between the two cities which played such an important part during colonial times ; but three miles from a town which has celebrated more birthdays than the City of Brotherly Love itself, it would be strange indeed if it could not offer something historic, if not heroic.

Beverly as a town, is of too tender an age to bear much research, but the township and surrounding country are rich in material.

In the summer of 1677 the good ship Kent left her moorings in the Thames and started on her long voyage across the Atlantic.

Many, indeed, most of those on board were friends and had suffered persecutions for conscience sake, so that regret, as the shores of their native land faded in the distance, had small place in their hearts.

In August, their ship sailed up the Delaware and

landed near New Castle. "The voyage had been fair, but the ocean was wide and full of perils," and the sight of land was hailed with joy by the weary company.

After a few weeks of rest, they re-embarked in small boats and proceeded up the river passing the Rancocas, our own beautiful shore, that of Edgewater beyond, and finally landed at what was then known as "Chygoes island" named from an Indian chief who lived there. Henry Armitt Brown in his oration, at the Burlington Bi-Centinnial gives the following beautiful description of their landing: "It is already late in October, and the wild landscape lies bathed in the yellow glory of the Indian summer. No sound breaks the stillness, save the splash of the oars in the water, or the whistling of the wings of the wild fowl that rise in countless numbers from the marshes. The air is full of the perfume of grapes, that hang in clusters on the banks and climb from tree to tree. The startled deer stands motionless on the beach; and hidden in the tangled thicket the Indian gazes in silent wonder at the strangers who have come to take his peace in the land of his fathers.

Presently the river seems suddenly to come to a stop. On the left is a gravel beach; in the distance, in front, an island. To the right, a bit of marsh, the mouth of a silvery creek, a meadow sloping to the shore, and then a high bank lined with mulberries and sycamores, and unutterably green. For the first time, and after so many days the eyes of its founders have rested upon Burlington." Historians say that it was first called New Beverly, and afterwards changed to Burlington. As several of its earliest settlers came from both of those towns in England, it seems probable that such was the case.

At once a road was surveyed leading directly from the river, which is the present High street. On each side of this street the land was divided into lots of about ten acres, which was for a house, garden and orchard, the corn and pasture ground being laid out in large tracts, beyond the town. It was late in the year and the colonists hasted to prepare for winter. As they had bought their land fairly and honestly from the Indians, these last proved their friends. One of the new comers writes of them in this manner, "The Indians are very loving to us, except when they have gotten strong liquor in their heads; they have taught us to build wigwams and sell us venison, beans, perae, and corn." And so, hopeful and undaunted, the Quakers spent their first winter in the new world.

A year later another ship arrived, called the "Shield." This enjoyed the distinction of being the first ship that came up the river as far as Burlington. At the present site of Philadelphia, whose Indian name was Craquanock, she went so near the shore in turning the part of the tackling struck the trees, and some of those on board are said to have remarked, that it was "a brave site for a town." The breeze freshened and the vessel was borne

up the stream to Burlington, where she was moored to a tree, which tradition has it, was the enormous sycamore yet standing on the riverbank near the residence of Mr. Ross Grubb. Moreover, it is said, that during the night it turned suddenly cold and the river was frozen over so that in the morning the people came ashore on the ice.

Among the passengers on these vessels, we find such names as Wills, Perkins, Jennings, Satterthwaite, Grubb, and Higgins, with a Smith or two. Most of these are familiar names among us to-day.

As the settlers continued coming, the surrounding country was gradually cut up into large farms. These Quakers as most of them were, spread out in the direction of Mount Holly, along the Rancocas and the streams emptying into it.

William Penn's interest in these, his persecuted countrymen who had settled in and around Burlington, was doubtless, one of the reasons which determined him to accept the territory of Pennsylvania in place of his father's claim against the crown.

The "Grants and Concessions" arranged by him in England for the government of this new colony at Burlington was so generous and 'iberal, that it alarmed the Puritan leaders in New England, who endeavored to put a stop to further proceedings. The following letter, written by Cotton Mather and brought to light some years ago at Boston, shows how bitter was the feeling against this sect, and at the same time lays bare a plan,

devised by his enemies, for the undoing of the unsuspecting Quakers:

"To ye aged and beloved John Higginson,

There bee now at sea a shippe, called ye Welcome, R. Greenway, master, which has aboard a hundred or more of ye hereties and malignants called Quakers, with William Penn, who is ye chief scamp at ye head of them. Ye General Court has accordingly given secret orders to Master Malachi Huxett of ye brig Porpoise to way lay ye said Welcome and make capture of ye said Penn and his ungodly crew, so that ye Lord may be glorified and not mocked on ye soil of this new countre with ye heathen worship of these people. Much spoil may be made by selling ye lot to Barbadoes; these slaves fetch good prices in rum and sugar, and we shall not only do ye Lord great service by punishing ye wicked, but shall make great gain for his ministry and people. Master Huxett feels hopeful, and I will set down ye news he brings when his shippe comes back.

Yours in ye bowels of Christ,

Cotton Mather.

Whether Friend William held Calvinistic doctrines or not, it certainly was foreordained that "ye shippe Welcome and its rascally crew" should escape Master Malachi Huxett, for five years after the first settlers reached Burlington, he landed safely at New Castle.

Now that we have taken a general view of the colony as it first appeared, our own little corner is waiting to be explored. But before doing so it might be interesting to read some extracts from letters written to friends and

relatives, describing the new country. The first is by a young woman who was one of the passengers on the Shield. She says: "I must not forget that these valiant subjects, both of God and their King, did submit themselves to mean living, taking with it thankfulness, as pounding Indian corn one day for the next, for there was no mill, and we thought so well of this kind of living that I never heard them say—"I would that I had never come," which is worth observing, considering how plentifully they lived in England.

Another was written by Mahlon Stacy, who built a mill where Trenton now stands. This letter was sent to his brother in 1680, two years after his arrival. "I have traveled through most of the places that are settled and in some that are not, and in every place I find the country very apt to answer the expectation of the diligent. I have seen orchards laden with fruit to admiration, their very limbs torn to pieces with the weight, and most delicious to the taste and lovely to behold. Peaches in such plenty that some people took their carts a peach gathering. There are cranberries with which an excellent sauce is made for vension, turkey and other great fowl; and which make better tarts than either gooseberries or cherries. As this letter was written but a couple of years after their arrival, these orchards must have been planted by the Indians or some of the few Swedes and Dutch who were here prior to the English.

And again. Indeed the country, take it as a wilderness, is a brave country, though no place will please all. But some will be ready to say, he writes, of convenience, but not of inconvenience. In answer to these, I honestly declare there is some barren lands as there is in most parts of the world, neither will the country produce corn without labor, nor bread with idleness, else it would be a brave country indeed. I like it so well I never had the least thought of returning to England, and I know not one among the people who desires to be in England again.

Of the original owners of the land extending from the Rancocas, northward along the Delaware, and which included the present Delanco, Beverly and Edgewater, there are no descendants within the neighborhood except those of Richard Fenimore.

The Perkins family which had come over in the Kent, settled originally in the vicinity of Mount Holly, but later purchased from time to time, a greater part of the land lying between Beverly and Delanco. Some of which is owned by various members of the family to-day. Ex-Senator Perkins occupies what was the old homestead, though the house was built long before it came into their possession. Old it must be, for our "old inhabitant" from whom we have obtained so many of our "recollections" remembers perfectly hearing his mother speak of the slaves that were used on this farm, and by the "quarters" on which they lived. "Strawberry Mansion" on Bridge Street which was burned down some years ago, is said

to have been originally one of these quarters and moved from the farm above mentioned, when slave labor, being no longer profitable, was done away with.

Perhaps it may interest us to know, that on the farm of Mr. John Stuart, there is also a relic of those far away times. Long before the present house was built, a large log structure adorned the brow of the hill, while at a respectful distance stood a slave cabin or two. Let us hope that each one had its little garden patch, where "Uncle and Auntie" could cultivate the luscious melon, and toothsome sweet potato, so dear to their heart and palate. One of these little cabins is still standing and is used as a store house for farm produce.

Retracing our steps down the Delanco road, we find in Mrs. Raley's house an old friend. Its air of repose and quiet dignity mark it as "one of our old residences." We will not pry into its age, though on good authority, we have it, that about 1820, it was purchased by the father of Mr. Frank Perkins, and even then was not of very recent build.

This entire district, of which we have been speaking, was then called Willingboro, and Dunks Ferry was included within its bounds. We learn that the ferry was established prior to 1745, and that its earliest owner, on the Jersey side, was John Wills. In 1752, seven years later, this tract contained 350 acres, and belonged to Joseph Fenimore. It soon passed into the hands of the VanSciver family, who held it till 1848, when it was

sold to a company for building lots.

The ferry with its sloping banks and hard, pebbly beach, enjoyed the reputation of being the best on the Delaware. The ferrying was done in row boats open at one end, with a platform or door hung on hinges, so that when the wagons were taken on or off, this platform was let down and served as a plank from the gravel shore to the boat. While crossing it would be fastened to prevent the water from splashing into the boat when the river was rough. Two oarsmen were all that were required to propel this craft. When horse ferry boats were introduced at Philadelphia the better accommodations ruined the business here, and the ferry was abandoned.

Before leaving Willingboro township it might be worth while to visit one or two places, which if not exactly historic are at least interesting. The one is on the Mount Holly road about three miles from Beverly. William Franklin, the son of Dr. Franklin bought this land from the original owners. He was a proud aristocrat, after the English type and the last Colonial Governor of New Jersey. Unlike his father, at the time of the Revolution he remained loyal to his King. He was arrested by order of the Revolutionary party at Burlington and banished in 1776 to one of the New England states, from whence he sailed to England and never returned.

He deeded his property to his son Temple, who oc-

cupied it as a farmer. At one time after it had passed out of the hands of the Franklin family, it was owned by Mayberry MacVeigh who erected the brick building now standing and established a boarding school for boys, which was quite celebrated at that time. Many of the first men of the older generation were educated there. It was known as the "Franklin Park Boarding School." The place is still known as Franklin Park. Perhaps those of us who are served with cream from the Franklin Park Dairy are not aware that the cows graze on the broad acres, and rest at noon-tide in the shade of trees which once belonged to the aristocratic Franklin. Surely one cup of coffee o' mornings will, henceforth, have a finer flavor and more delicious fragrance.

When one takes that delightful little trip up the Rancocas to Centreton, we sail by woodland and meadow which more than two hundred years ago was bought by the passengers on the Kent and Shield from the Indians. Midway on our voyage, we spy on the left bank of the stream, a beautiful home, imposing in appearance and finely situated. It is the home of the Stokes family and by them is given the name, Stokingham. Thomas Harding bought this piece of land from the Indians, and at his death it came into the hands of John Stokes, and has been handed down from father to son until the present time; thus being in the same family for more than two hundred years.

As during the Revolution there was not even the faint-

less suggestion of a town, where Beverly now stands, it is nothing to our discredit that we can boast no scars or wounds. However, the old Dunks house by the ferry bore marks of the fray, for a hole of no mean size in the immense beam over the door bore testimony to the efficiency of the enemies guns. The solid shot passed entirely through the house, going quietly out of the kitchen door, which, fortunately was open for its accommodation.

At the time of the battle of Trenton, the Hessians were quartered in Mount Holly and Burlington and surrounding country, and though there is no mention of there having been here, it is very probable that while the old Dunk house had entertained a Washington, it had also sheltered his enemy; besides, the neighboring farms would offer rich prizes in the way of food and provender to these not over scrupulaus foreigners.

It must have been about this time that George Weigand a bugler in the Hessian army, wearying of the camp and strife, "stole away one fine day," and when the sounds of war had died in the distance, and gentle peace bounded over the land, he hung his bugle over the chimney piece of the house he built at Wood Lane, and to a good old age sowed and reaped and filled his barns with the fruits of his toil, until he was gathered to his fathers. He lies in the Friends' burying ground at Burlington. The little brick house on Warren street next to Mr. Sinex was the home of his son for many years.

His widow living there till her death some few years since at the age of ninety (90). The house itself is fully 118 years old. The original home on Wood Lane is still standing and occupied. The family has now reached the fifth generation.

On the vacent lot between Mr. Perkins' coal yard and the present Steamboat Hotel, stood the old Dunk house, the most historic spot in our little city. The main part of this building was of bricks, these had been brought over from England, and each one was stamped with the English crown. When the building was torn down, not so very many years ago ihese were carted away and now form the foundation of some of our modern dwellings.

It was here, that, during the latter part of the Revolution and long after, Uncle Billy 'Sciver, as he was called kept "refreshments for man and beast" also stimulants, which latter were duly, and oft no doubt, unduly patronized.

It was still used as a tavern or inn as late as the boyhood days of some of our older residents, from one of whom, the following description of the place, was obtained: It was a two and a half story building, facing the river, surrounded on all sides by a wide porch, part of it being paved. In one corner of the immense room, which opened out on the porch, was the bar. For some reason, which could be anyone of several that might be advanced, this was fenced off by a high railing, which

kept the would-be indulgers at a respectful distance from the source of supply. A glass, and a huge decanter, which was minutely described as having a glass stopper fastened by a chain to the neck of the bottle, were placed on a ledge or counter inside. The customer reached through the bars and received his drink, slipping his empty glass back again.

It was in this house, that Washington, more than once is said to have met his officers and held counsel with them; meditated upon and matured plans for the movement of his troops in and out of the Jerseys. And we know not how much the hours he spent there in deep thought and careful planning may have aided in shaping our country's destiny.

A half century or more ago, the old place was abandoned and the boys of that generation played within its deserted walls. The rooms which had sheltered a Washington, and were hallowed because of words of lofty patriotism and sublime courage, uttered long ago, now echoed the shouts and merry laughter of joyous boyhood.

The hand of time added to that of vandals has destroyed every vestage of the old house, even the foundation stones or most of them having been carried away.

The old ferry which was where the present wharf is built, was the termius of a road, which followed Cooper street through Woodpecker lane to the settlements on and beyond the Rancocas.

Cooper street or Dunk's Ferry lane, as part of it was called, was the divtding line between the VanSciver property, which extended back from the river toward the railroad, and the Perkins farm, which was in the opposite direction, towards Delanco.

The old house on the river bank near VanKirk street is the original farm house and is still occupied by some of the VanSciver family. This, with a small brick house, where Mr. Neff's residence now is, and the house lately purchased by Mr. George D. McIlvaine were all that adorned our river bank in those early years.

The latter also belonged to a VanSciver and is the original farm house remodeled. The old willow which was a landmark on its bank until a year or two ago, tradition says had weathered the storms of almost a century and a half.

In the early history of the place, when it was scarcely more than a hamlet, the part on the lower side of Cooper street retained the name of Dunk's ferry, while the upper part or VanSciver land was called Churchville, from the fact of a church and a few houses having been built there. The church referred to, is the Episcopal the oldest church organization in Beverly, the corner stone of the first building having been laid in 1837. This building still stands on Cooper street opposite Church. Its candlestick have long since been removed, and it requires no little faith to believe that this plain, unsightly bit of architecture could ever have been the home of two

of our churches; the other being the Presbyterian. Never pretentious, patched and ofttimes paintless, it still is for many the center of holy memories and sweet associations. At present, it is occupied by the Free Library.

St. Stephen's Protestant Episcopal Church of Beverly, was originally organized as St. Stephens of Willingboro, with Rev. John Jones as rector.

More than a century had lapsed since Thomas Olive had settled and named Willingboro township, and during all this time no house of worship had been erected within its boundaries; the school house near the center of the township, being used for gospel meetings.

In 1802, however, land was purchased and the Coopertown Church built. A clause in the charter stated that "whenever thirty families of any one denomination of Christians take upon themselves a corporate name agreeably to law, the ground and building should revert to them and their successors forever." The Methodists first claimed it under this provision, but were met with such a storm of protests that they abondoned it and erected a church of their own not far distant. This building is still standing on the farm of Mr. Charles K. Vansciver.

A few years later St. Stephen's Church of Willingboro, organized with the requisite number of families and laid claim to it, but like its sister church was compelled to yield to public opinion, and so withdrew to the then,

little village of Beverly, and erected the building which we have just described.

In consequence of these attempts to gain possession of the church under the "thirty family" clause, a request was presented to the legislature about 1835, asking that the unsectarian character of the property be secured, as this was undoubtedly the wish of the majority of the people and the intention of the original contributors. The legislature passed the act, and now all Protestant denominations hold services in the church.

Odd Fellows' Hall is also historic for in it the Methodist Church had its beginning and home until 1867 when it was sold and afterwards enlarged by its present owners.

The building at the corner of Broad and Warren streats has had a varied experience. In the early 40's as a little one story building, it was used for a school, long before the advent of public schools, when each pupil had to pay for his introduction to, and continued acquaintance with, the three R's, Before that, if any of the youth of Dunk's ferry or vicinity had a thirst for knowledge, they could have it satisfied by trudging to an old school house, which stood not very far from the Coopertown church.

In this school house on the corner mentioned, the Baptists organized a congregation in 1851. Leaving this for their new church, it was sold to the Catholics and later to the G. A. R. Post who are the present owners.

About this date 1850, we rose to the dignity of having

a post office. Mr. Charles McElroy, uncle of Mr. Edward McElroy was the pioneer postmaster. Dr. Jacob Perkins, then a boy and a descendant in direct line of Samuel Perkins who came to Burlington in the Kent, was the mail carrier. His duties were not very arduous, as the mail came but once a week, and a ride to Burlington to fetch it was rather a lark, to a boy in his teens.

The post office was in the building on Cooper street opposite the large building erected by Mr. Butler. It has been considerably modernized, but a few years ago it looked quaint enough to attract the attention of those not particularly interested in "relics".

We now come to the time when our little village has become a full fledged town, with a name of its own. This took place in 1850, when the town was incorporated and given the name of Beverly. Some say after the first name of Burlington, others, after Beverly in Massachusetts from which place some of our residents had come. The latter accounts seems the more reasonable. Up to this time the greater number of the inhabitants had been engaged in agriculture, but when the old VanSciver farm was sold and divided into building lots, a new dynasty arose.

We are told, that now, Philadelphians and other strangers formed a majority of the population and manifested a disposition to control township matters agreeably to their desires and conveniences. The old inhabitants of the township were compelled to submit to indignities

and injustice. The polls were removed within the limits of Beverly, and the plain and unostentatious citizens. who had lived here all their lives and their fathers before them were challenged at the polls by upstarts, as they called them, who had lived here but a year or two. These conditions brought about a desire for separation which was effected in 1859, by which, part of Willingboro township became Beverly township, which besides Beverly includes Delanco and Coopertown.

The history of the town since then, is modern and and familiar to most of us, so we will leave the present for those that come after us, hoping that they may find us and ours as interesting relics and antiquities as we have found our ancestors.