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FARE TO MIDLANDS

Forgotten Towns of Central New Jersey

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FROM HERBERTS TO HARBOURTS

in the Revolutionary War. There were some others in the army, too, some already lettering their name Harbert, probably because that was how friends said it when they bade good-morning.

South of Allenwood and west of Manasquan there's Herbertsville but Gordon doesn't list it with Herberton. As we followed branches of the family tree more toward the midlands, we found a notation that bore significance when we met at least one of the Lawrences for whom Lawrenceville was named when someone objected to Maidenhead, long after days when the Assunpink was the Sanpink. When the old name was dislodged for one honoring Captain James Lawrence, after his brilliant action in Massachusetts Bay in 1813, Obadiah, one of the nine children of Obadiah "and w. Hannah Lawrence"—the confusing abbreviation means a widow, no doubt—married, in 1765, Elizabeth, granddaughter of Thomas Warne, "and had three sons, John, William and Obadiah, and two daughters, Sarah and Elizabeth." And should you wonder who Thomas Warne was, you must never do so publicly in the New Jersey midlands, where, as they say in Crosswicks, everybody is related to everybody else, and some take their ancestry decidedly seriously. Thomas Warne bought lands in Monmouth in 1690 and the previous year—one of the twenty-four proprietors, he was a Dublin merchant who with his two sons, Thomas and Stephen "came to the province in 1683." Make a note of it, please.

Out near Ewingville, the real-estate signs talk about "Green Curve." Lest you are tempted to conclude that the name has something to do with the fields, or with such inquirers as we often appeared to be, remember that though Greens may sometimes seem as plentiful as Browns and Smiths, the Greens of East and West New Jersey were already on hand in the late 1600's. It was in 1684 that Sarah Reape sold "all her claim to land of Henry Green." There was a "Widow Green" named in a suit as early as 1705. But it seems the Greens came seeking greener fields toward the Delaware, and that there

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was an abundance of Henrys. So, when George Bennett chanced to remark that it was Henry Green and Henry's uncle, Reeder, who had first aroused his curiosity concerning the hills and valleys about them, we went to see Henry's uncle.

For the Greens to have had any association with Sarah Reape was distinguishing enough and we told Uncle Reeder so. Permission wasn't asked for such reference to him but his handshake proved so hearty and his manner so jovial, that afterward he was best remembered that way. Salter's notes revealed that "William Reape of Newport, Rhode Island, one of the twelve patentees, 1665, seems to have been among the foremost in founding the settlement of Monmouth," the Freehold of today. Moreover, "by reference to the rights claimed from the Proprietors for land by Mrs. Reape, she must have been one of the largest, if not the largest land proprietor in the county. Besides which, "she owned land in Rhode Island," and, "she also owned property in England."

For all that, Reeder Green admitted the implication that he would prefer to be remembered as the man who liked to wander the creeks with a fish pole and the fields with a gun in the neighborhood of old Ewing Township. "Better than raising corn, and that's the truth, I swan," laughed Uncle Reeder, when he was told.

Heavy-set and active in a way that belied his seventies, he smiled at his wife on the portico of the old house on Green Curve, beginning at once to talk of the vanished Federal City, of Lawrence Township, old Cap' Van Kirk's still house, old Hunt's Mill "where they had the sheep," and Greensburg, which became Wilburtha.

"No," he said, "I'm not one of the Greens from Greensburg, although that's a branch of the family, sure enough. It was Alex and Jimmie's father who went over and settled Greensburg." Uncle Reeder's branch of the family centers around the old house where he was born, not more than a mile or so from the venerable stone house in which we found him. "The old homestead was built by William Green," he said, "in 1712. It was the first brick house in the township.

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The brick was burned right there on the farm—it was burned so hard it was a deep blue—but now it's covered over with white, and you wouldn't know that. But I remember."

The memory of Amos Reeder Green, for that was the name he disclosed to us on improving acquaintance, proved exhaustive. He recalled that William Green's tombstone was the oldest found in the old Ewing graveyard and that it was his father who found it "and had it fixed up." He remembered the Ewingville that had been Cross Keys, Howell's mill on the Shabbicunk Creek, the still house that was Cap' Van Kirk's and "Natty Drake's Mill" all in short order. "There were mills everywhere, all going strong," he said, "but the creeks held more water in those days."

"There was another old mill," he said, "behind the old brick house." Then, as if to prove that the dissolution of the mills began long, long ago, he added: "But that was going down when I was a boy. I can remember the uprights being there, and the old up-and-down saw, but they've gone now." Asked how old the house was where we visited him, where he admitted "staying around for seventy-four years," he laughed. Mrs. Green supplemented the conversation by replying: "Older'n it ought to be!"

"It don't lick and it don't go down and that's all we want," declared Uncle Reeder.

He spoke of gunning back of the farm of Giles Hunt up at "the still house farm." "Never saw a stream there, as I can remember," he responded, as the location was more specifically sought, "although there must have been one to cool the apple whiskey." Persistently on the trail of added information and perhaps some persuasive explanation for the name of Honey Hollow, we gained nothing at all. "It's always been Honey Hollow," said Mr. Green. "Charlie Hunt and I used to gun there but we didn't ask questions like that. There were two Honey Hollows, you know. There was another one up behind where the asylum is now."

There was also a second Scrabbletown in the same vicinity, north of Trenton and along the Delaware, but there was no

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accounting for the name or disclosure of who or what did the scrabbling. Uncle Reeder had been so intent on seeking game, that he had missed the ruins of houses in the Hollow altogether. "You talk of crazy names," he spoke up, as if annoyed that he had missed something that would have interested him as much as the stone-mud-and-straw dwellings, perhaps a century old, had interested us, "where was Frog Pond? I know. Why, everybody called it that. It was at the first corner coming east from West Trenton. There was woods and swampy ground there, then, and a kind of a pond. Maybe the woodcock wasn't thick in there!"

Allowing her memory to trace the way up along the river, Mrs. Green recalled Painter's Bridge and Painter's Corner. "Painter had a slaughterhouse there," she said, "not far from the Somerset Road. George Painter was the butcher, with his son, Gus, to help him. There were four or five houses clustered around the corner. One of them, I remember, had a huge old-fashioned oven."

Uncle Reeder said that when he was a youngster, most of the boys called the road along which the Mercer & Somerset had been planned through to Hopewell "the Corkscrew Road. That was sixty-five or seventy years ago." His contention was that the railroad was never used, although we met a man later who said his father was a passenger on the end of the line that was finished for service. "The Reading wouldn't let 'em cross their tracks," he said. "No, they never used the river end of it. We used to hear stories of the conductors and firemen getting off to pick blackberries but that was all." That railroad became more of a mystery than ever.

Old Jake Blackwell lived in a house that was once a hotel at the corner of the Somerset Road, the Greens said. "There was a long porch in front in those days. Princessville?" they repeated thoughtfully, as the name on an old survey map of the area was mentioned. "It never was much but a place to change horses on the old stage lines. I remember thinking," said Mrs. Green, "that a place with a name like that ought to be something to look at. When I saw it to know where it was, it was a disappointment."

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The Greens hadn't seen George Bennett in many years and they laughed when his explanation for rediscovering them brought forth the story of his accuracy in going back to where he recalled millstones and other relics after the passing of decades. He explained, in his own way, the finding of the stones in the deep valley along the Somerset Road. "I saw a fox sittin' there," he said. "He had been winded and I got within a few feet of him before he moved. Then I saw he had been sittin' on those millstones. After I looked them over I went after him again. He climbed up the hill, waitin' each time till I could almost reach out and touch him—I saw that brush and figured it was a mighty nice one to take home, especially if I could catch him with my bare hands. But when we got to the top of the hill, I was winded as much as him and we couldn't do nothin' but sit and look at each other!"

"Ewingville," Uncle Reeder went on, when the laughter subsided, "was Cross Keys years ago. I can remember them sending me 'up to the Keys' to get the mail. There was an old race track there—George, even you should remember it. It was one of the best in the State and a big attraction in those days." The store at Ewingville today was a hotel when gentlemen sportsmen and others were vying with their best mounts on the track, now crisscrossed with streets and concealed by modern homes. "Why, it's come to not being able to go back to places you knew thirty years ago and finding anything or anybody you knew, I swan," objected Uncle Reeder.

The years are not so long ago when New Jersey knew its own witchcraft and much stranger things. Not so deep in Burlington County the story persisted through the past and into the present generation that a woman, on whose unborn child a curse had been placed in vengeance, gave birth to a snake which would disconcert those who called at the house by wriggling about the floor. And perhaps nearer Trenton there were those who placed pins in a pig's ear and then burned the ear with a hot iron despite the porker's squealing protests, all the while wishing ill fortune to a hated neighbor; later, making it their business to call to see the result of their "hex," they often returned home to recount gleefully the

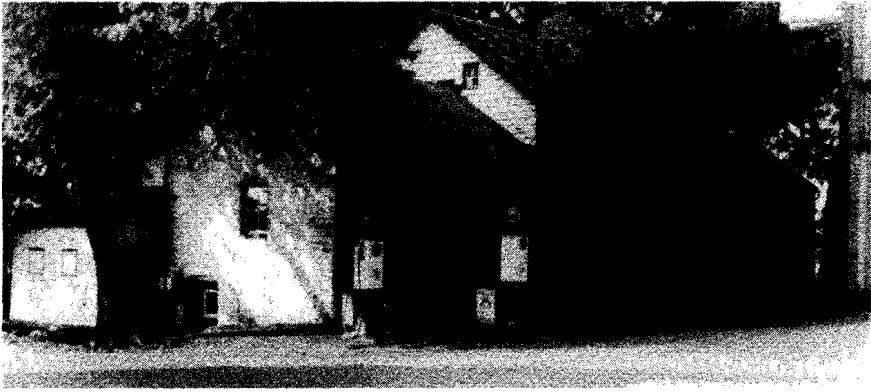
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agonies of someone in the "cursed" household. Yes, digging back into the years is disturbing, as well as delightful business.

Maidenhead, as a township, goes back to 1798, and was settled in the first 1700's. When Hunterdon County was set apart, the colonial assembly directed the court of common pleas to sit at Maidenhead, the village that today is Lawrenceville, alternating with Hopewell. This is by no means Maidenhead's story but merely by way of introduction of the fact that when the first courts of Hunterdon were held the second Tuesday of June, 1714, among the magistrates attending were William and Samuel Green. There are a couple of stories about the vicinity that you can't afford to pass up as long as you're in the neighborhood, however, even if they don't concern the Greens.

At the time of the Battle of Princeton, few persons had lingered in the vicinity of the Green Curve or Maidenhead. Most of the men were with Washington in Pennsylvania and the women had gone elsewhere with the plundering of their homes. Of course, there was no reason why a soldier or two couldn't come home to see what was left and if the family was safe, if they promised to be careful and be back by morning. That is what Elias Phillips did. He and two friends came across the river and when they found everything smashed and everybody gone, they were more than annoyed and decided to do something about it. They hid in an abandoned shop and when three enemy soldiers came along in a wagon, they jumped out and took the trio prisoner. Washington was so pleased with Mr. Phillips and his adventure that he gave him and his friends the wagon and its contents.

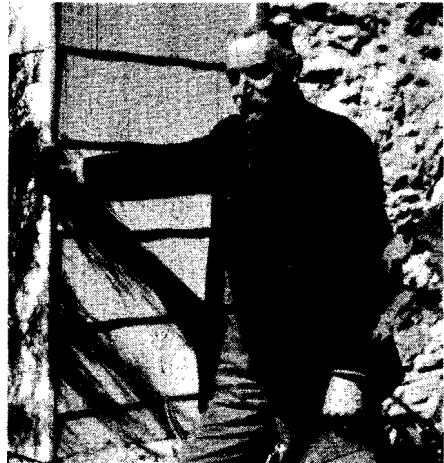
Jacob Keen, known to be a strong Whig, also lived down the road. After Washington's retreat, Mrs. Keen locked up all the family silver in a bureau and stood in front of it. Some Hessians invaded the house and demanded everything, even the silver. While Mrs. Keen made believe that she didn't know what was wanted because she couldn't speak Hessian, she sent one of her children for an officer, even one of the enemy if he were a man of rank. Just as the intruders were about to



Modern gadgets like gas tanks and signs proclaiming membership in grocery chains have little in common with all the rest in the old store at Harbourton, once Herberton, one of the oldest country stores in point of service in the State.



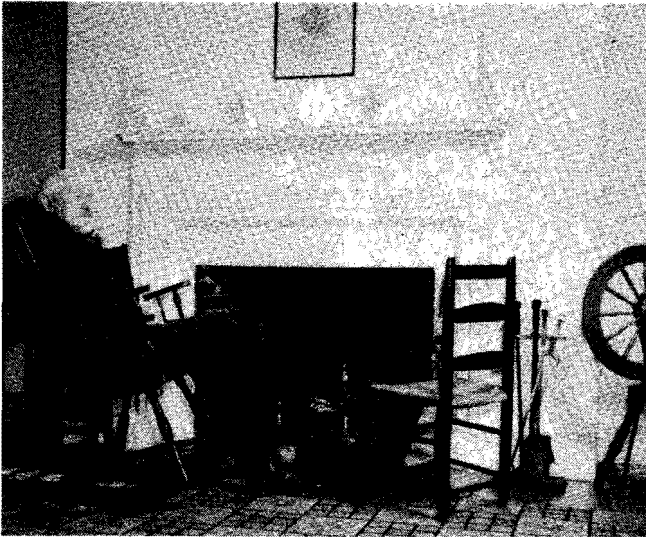
Out Ewing way, they call it the Green Curve. Here on the Curve live Reeder Green and his wife. Greens have been there since long before the battles at Trenton. Note the fireplace, peculiar to Midland Jersey.



Unassuming, jolly, his agility in the farmyard belieing his age, Reeder Green appeared and chatted about his ancestors who lived in the earliest houses above Trenton.



This house of logs near Ewing, once Cross Keys, may have been small but there was a fireplace large enough to conceal British officers. Madison Furman lived there and the Furmans were said to be Tories.



Beside an ancient hearth and among family treasures where his grandfather was the cobbler of Cross Keys, Alfred Lanning remembers the past and enjoys the present to the full.

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break open the bureau with the butts of their muskets, the officer appeared with the youngster and the marauders fled.

Among the first settlers of the land that became Ewing Township, split from Trenton in 1834, were two Reeders, Jacob and Isaac. As for the name of Ewing, well, the years that are many and long have done as many tricks as they have with Harbourton—Ewing was Washington's choice, Irvine Marshall's, Irvin Wilkinson's and Irwin Botta's. Gordon, as you've heard, went the whole hog to make it Irwing. But Ewing it is, and was, from the days of Braddock's defeat. When Benson J. Lossing wrote his monumental *Pictorial Field-Book* it was Dr. Francis Ewing who had in his possession the floral arch that was made for the reception given Washington on his way to the inauguration. It had become Dr. Ewing's rose arbor, remembering perhaps that it once bore other roses from the gardens of the whole Trenton area, with the inscription below it, "The Defender of the Mothers will be the Protector of the Daughters." The arch had been erected on Trenton Bridge and the President-to-Be rode a fine horse beneath it.

But Trenton's not a Forgotten Town. . . . However, in the consideration of those events, the externals stand out unduly. When the Commander handed a note to the Reverend J. F. Armstrong, thanking the women of a section that reached up the Pennington Road, around the Green Curve and on to Maidenhead, he recognized the contrasts that had come to the neighborhood. Women who had fled for their lives, women who had been victims of war-time indignities, the Gold Star mothers of the day and daughters who had seen family homesteads burned to the ground were there. "The astonishing contrast between his former and actual situation on the same spot," said Washington's thank-you note given Pastor Armstrong, "the elegant taste with which it was adorned for the present occasion, and the innocent appearance of the white-robed choir who met him with the congratulatory song, has made such an impression upon his remembrance as, he assures them, will never be effaced."