

# THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

## Locktown Presbyterian Church Cemetery



*Ralph Finelli and Dave Reading inspect broken headstone.*

The Mount Amwell Project signed an agreement with Raph Finell, owner of the former Locktown Presbyterian Church Property in Delaware Twp. to repair headstones and aid in preserving the cemetery Gov. Several repairs have already been made.



*Dave Voorhees positions headstone for reset.*

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## Wealth, Law, and Politics: The Saga of Squires Point Forge (Part II, By David R. Reading)

John Reading was dead (1767), John Hackett dead (1767), and Martin Ryerson was dead (1767), Daniel Reading was dead (1768), and Georger Reading had settled his part of the debt. Allen and Turner attempt to recover debts from the Squire Point Forge founders was over. They had gotten some land and some money, but the financial turmoil involving the remaining Squires Point Forge investors would continue.

As reported in part I, Ebenezer Cowell (1716-1799) was hired as the manager at Squires Point probably around 1762 or 1763 and that he was a black smith by trade, but he was much more. He was also a gunsmith, surveyor, and owned large tracts of land in West Jersey. He owned a proprietary share and was deputy to Council of the West Jersey Proprietors Surveyor General Daniel Smith between 1770 and 1799. He had a successful blacksmithing business in Trenton between 1765 and 1775, and was a patriot during the Revolutionary War. His brother David Cowell was the first pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton and ironically, Joseph Reeds' father, Andrew Reed, had been a member of the congregation that called for his appointment in 1736.<sup>1</sup>

Cowell filed a complaint with the Hunterdon County Court of Common Pleas in Trenton on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1768 against Daniel Reading for £86 in a suit of "Trespass on the Case," dated 1 Sept 1767.<sup>2</sup> This case involved nonpayment on goods purchased by Daniel. But Daniel Reading had died October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1768 so Cowell sued his estate.<sup>3</sup> I found no record of the outcome of this suit.

Apparently still needing funds, Martin Ryerson, Daniel Reading, and Thomas Reading sign a bond with Garret Rapalje for £778.10.3. on August 3, 1767. [Case 32852]. He was a distant cousin of Ryerson.

To add to their problems, Garret Rapalje files a complaint to collect the bond obligation now £1557.0.6 in September 1769. Probably feeling a little desperate, the pair again try and to sell the Forge property for the third time on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1769<sup>4</sup> and apparently the Forge is sold to Garrett Rapalje, to settle the bond debt.<sup>5</sup>

In 1771, 1773, and 1774 Garret Rapalje attempted to sell The Squires Point Forge property he had bought in 1769. I found no other information except that apparently, Ebenezer Cowell had sold some interest in the property. In 1771 Ebenezer Cowell and brother David Cowell sued Garret Rapalje for 500 pounds<sup>6</sup>. But Ebenezer is not done with Thomas Reading

In 1769 he sues Thomas Reading for payment on a Bond for £600 dated January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1768 signed in Newton, Sussex County. Although Thomas Reading is the only person named in the suit, the bond was also signed by George and Daniel Reading. Thomas responds with a deed to 1/6 ownership of the Squires Point Forge for Cowell to pay the penalty amount of £1200.<sup>7</sup> Apparently, the attempt to pay the debt fails as the Supreme Court rules in favor of Ebenezer Cowell. The court issues a Writ of Fieri Facias to collect the debt. And, this time the attempt to collect the debt results in violence. Armed resistance!

On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1773 John Anderson, under Sheriff to Issac Decow of Hunterdon County was commanded to levy and seize sundry goods and chattels of Thomas Reading to recover the debt

(in Amwell, his home) under a Writ of Fieri Facis dated Sept 10, 1773. However, Thomas Reading's wife Rebecca had seen enough of hostile actions by the courts against her husband and family. What happened that day and the next is described in the record of a Grand Inquest [grand jury] held October 1773 in Trenton. It describes what may have been the first action against King's court in Hunterdon County just prior to Revolutionary War.

*"That Rebekah Reading, James Gregg, Mary O'Neal, Frederick Lance, Nathaniel Lowery, Daniel Teratt, Amos Gregg, Lawrence Coombs, Nathan Coombs, Charles Reading, and Jasper Smith Attorney at Law, on the twenty second day of October at Amwell with force and arms, did unlawfully riotously and routously assemble to disturb the peace, and hinder and obstruct John Anderson, and together were armed with guns, swords, sticks, and other instruments with an intent to disturb and hinder John Anderson from doing his duty, and that afterwards the same day the same Rebekah Reading, et al., unlawfully being assembled, did attack, and with force and arms upon John Anderson, and others aiding and assisting him an assault, and did shoot off one or more gun or guns against John Anderson and others aiding and assisting him, hinder and the intent to forcibly rescue the goods and chattels taken."<sup>8</sup>*

Note that Jasper Smith, Thomas's attorney, Charles Reading, Thomas's nephew, and Revolutionary War soldier, and James and Amos Gregg, John Gregg's sons were participants. There is no record of their fate.

Two months after the Rebecca Rebellion, the Sons of Liberty staged a protest in Boston against a tax on tea on December 16, 1773, nine months later in August, 1774 the 13 colonies held the first continental congress in Philadelphia. The war is on the horizon. William Allen, a Loyalist, sensing the coming conflict went to England. He stayed there throughout most of the American Revolution, not returning to Philadelphia until 1779. He died at Mount Airy, his mansion outside Philadelphia before the end of the war in 1781.

Joseph Turner remained in New Jersey, a staunch loyalist during the War. He died in 1783.

Jospeh Reed, George Reading, and Thomas Reading would all go on to participate in the evolutionary War on the patriot side. The war starts with the skirmish at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. The 2<sup>nd</sup> continental congress appoints George Washington as the American commander and Washington appoints Joseph Reed his secretary on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1775. Reed joins George Washington in Cambridge, Massachusetts on June 15, and stays until to October 1775. Washington had known Reed socially in Philadelphia where he had continued to practice law after relocating there after his marriage to Ester De Berdt in 1770. A year later Congress appointed Reed Adjutant-General on June 5, 1776. The Pennsylvania Assembly elected him a delegate to Congress on 14 September 1777.

The British occupied Philadelphia on September 26, 1777 and Joseph Reed anticipating this had moved his wife Ester and child out of Philadelphia to various locations in New Jersey. On April 11, 1778 she was in Flemington, the same place Edward Shippen had sent his daughter Peggy two years earlier for the same reason - fear of the British.<sup>9</sup>

The British leave Philadelphia in June 1778 and Washington assigns Benedict Arnold as military commander of the city. Joseph Reed decides that he can better serve the new nation as a civilian and is elected to as President of the Pennsylvania Council on December 2, 1778 effectively becoming the highest authority in the state.

A few months later in February 1779 Reed issues eight charges against Benedict Arnold for war profiteering. Congress ruled to court martial Arnold instead in December 1779 and he was convicted on reduced charges in January 1780.

In April Arnold property is confiscated and a letter between Peggy Shippen and British Major John Andre is discovered leading to the charge of treason levied on Benedict Arnold. Some historians believe that Joesph Reed's aggressive

pursuit of Arnold had a major effect on his and Peggy's decision to betray the patriot cause.<sup>10</sup>

The extraordinary actions by Reed to protect his Ester were for naught as she died on September 18, 1780 of small pox. Joseph Reed would also die young at the age of 43 in Philadelphia on March 5, 1785.

George Reading's wife Rebecca died along with her unnamed child in childbirth on July 15, 1770. By 1775, suffering loss of family and funds, George obtained a warrant for 300 acres of land in Westmoreland Co., and was commissioned the sub-lieutenant of Westmoreland County with rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Pennsylvania Militia on April 2, 1778. After an attack on Ft. Ligonier Colonel Reading forwards a letter requesting assistance to General Joseph Reed, Now President of Pennsylvania, whom he reminded that they had known each other when both were residents of Hunterdon County.<sup>11</sup> Reed provides no help and George decides to abandon Pennsylvania. The following March, he traveled down the Ohio River into the interior of western Virginia and settles near John Crow's station (near present day Danville, Kentucky). Finding that the war was still active, he is re-commissioned on June 2, 1780. His son John Mullan is captured by the British and not returned until 1783 in NY. He remains in Kentucky and dies there in 1792.

42-year-old Thomas Reading is chosen by congress as Captain of the sixth Company, Third New Jersey Regiment, "First Establishment," commanded by Colonel Elias Dayton in February 1776, and was in service with his command in Mohawk Valley, New York until the discharge of his regiment, 23 March, 1777. In June 1778, he was appointed one of the agents (contractor) of the state for procuring provisions for the use of the army which he did during 1780 by providing forage to Washington at Morristown.<sup>12</sup> He was commissioned a justice of the peace for Hunterdon County as early as 1783, and was for many years one of the judges of the Court of Common Pleas. Thomas Reading was one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church in Flemington, and a member of its board of

trustees, and on 16 July, 1797, he and Jasper Smith were appointed as churches first elders. Thomas Reading died 5 July 1815. The land protected for his grandsons to keep out of the hands of Allen and Turner was partitioned on July 25, 1815 after his death to his grandsons Thomas W. Reading and Thomas H. Reading.<sup>13</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The financial collapse of the Squires Point Forge and the subsequent law suits, arrests, and acts of the assembly in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War were the result of many factors. William Allen, blaming the British and his debtors for demise of the Iron Industry, he echoes Thomas Reading when he writes to David and John Barkley November 7, 1769,<sup>14</sup>

“Since I left England the many restrictions on trade have greatly afflicted us. Our debtors prove often insolvent; and if we sell the estates of such as have any, there appears to be few or

no buyers, and if they are sold it is often at a third of what used to be thought valued in most, if not all North America; particularly Iron Works.”

My own interpretation of the demise of Squires Point Forge is that it was probably undercapitalized and trying to operate without a financial infrastructure proved disastrous. Add British government interference in the iron market and probably incompetent management and the result was failure.

The forge is apparently abandoned by 1780 and in succeeding years becomes home to various owners as a saw mill and grist mill. The Squire Point Forge site today is part of the Point Mountain Reservation under management of the Hunterdon County Division of Parks and Recreation near Washington, New Jersey.

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Roche, *Joseph Reed, A moderate in the American Revolution*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, 4.

<sup>2</sup> New Jersey, Supreme Court Case Files, 1704-1844, Case No. 8354, Ebenezer Cowell vs. Daniel Reading, Trespass on the Case; and Inquisition for Damages, Hunterdon 1767-1768, New Jersey State Archives, Trenton. Trespass on the case is an action brought to recover damages from a person whose actions have resulted indirectly in injury or loss.

<sup>3</sup> New Jersey, Supreme Court Case Files, 1704-1844, Case No. 7002, Ebenezer Cowell vs. John Gregg and Gershom Lee (Administrators of Daniel Reading deceased), Hunterdon 1768-1769.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 582.

<sup>5</sup> “Survey of Old furnaces and Forges of Northern New Jersey,” Accession 1292, Taylor-Wharton Iron and Steel Company Collection, Boxes 1-5, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, 4.

<sup>6</sup> New Jersey, Supreme Court Case Files, 1704-1844, Case No. 8299, Ebenezer Cowell and David Cowell v. Garret Rapalje Debt (£500 Proclamation money).

<sup>7</sup> New Jersey, Supreme Court Case Files, 1704-1844, Case No. 8355, Ebenezer Cowell v. Thomas Reading, Debt on Bond, Hunterdon and Sussex: 1769-1773.

<sup>8</sup> New Jersey, Supreme Court Case Files, 1704-1844, Case No. 21157: King v. Rebecca Reading *et. al.* Appeal on Indictment for Riot, Hunterdon 1773-1774.

<sup>9</sup> William B. Reed, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, (London, Forgotten Books, 2018) Vol II.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed history of Joseph Reed and Benedict Arnold, see Mark Jacob and Stephen H. Case, *Treacherous Beauty*, Lyons Press, Guilford Connecticut, 2012, Chapters 6 & 7.

<sup>11</sup> MTAP Newsletter. George Reading

<sup>12</sup> David R. Reading, editor, *The Papers of Thomas Reading*, Mount Amwell Project, March 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Partition of Lands of late John Reading, Esq, deceased, 9 Feb 1816, Inferior Court of Common Pleas. Hunterdon County Hall of Records.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Oscar M. Voorhees, “The Iron Industry at Union Forge Furnace and Union Forge,” Accession 1292, Taylor-Wharton Iron and Steel Company Collection, Boxes 1-5, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.