

The Reading Communion Chalice

By David R. Reading

Gov. John Reading, twice temporary Governor of colonial New Jersey, was a major influence in the founding of the First English Presbyterian Church in Amwell Township, Hunterdon County. Indeed, Rev. George Mott, pastor of the Flemington Presbyterian Church wrote in 1894, "The history of the Presbyterian Church in the Amwell Valley may be said to begin with Governor John Reading."¹



Photo by Craig A. Reading

The first pastor of the Reaville church was Eliab Byram. An entry in John Reading's Diary, dated June 27th, 1751, reads "Signed an Instrument to pay to Mr. Biram [Byram] 5£ per Annum to be paid quarterly or by the half year for his support in the Ministry." John

Reading would continue to support the church financially for the rest of life. He paid the salaries of both Byram's successor Rev. Benjamin Hait, and Hait's successor Rev. William Kirkpatrick. His diary shows 35 entries of support to the church from 1751 until his death in 1767. The final entry made the November 4th, the day before he died, reads, "Paid one years sallery for Mr. Kirkpatrick."²

John Reading offered a final gift to the Church in his last will and testament: "I give also the Sum of Ten pounds of Proclamation money, towards the making of a Silver Chalice or much other needful Church Utensil, for the use of the eastern part of the Presbyterian Congregation in the Township of Amwell in the Administration of the Lords Supper."³

The estate of Gov. Reading was managed by the executor of the will, his son, Judge Joseph Reading who was one of the original founding members of the First English Presbyterian Church of Amwell. Accordingly, the Judge commissioned the making of two chalices to a silversmith.

The chalices presumedly delivered to the church sometime after 1768 and were still in the possession of the church in 1911 when they appeared in an Exhibition of Silver held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. An entry in the catalog of that event describes the chalices (figure 1):⁴

A. D.

37. CHALICES (2). Cup-shaped bowl; flaring lip; rounded knob; moulded foot. H. 8¾ inches. Mark: A.D., in oval.

Inscription: A GIFT | OF THE HONR^{BLE} | JOHN READING Esq | DECEAS'D | TO THE EASTERN PRESBI | TERIAN CONGREGATION | IN AMWELL 1767 (script), in cartouche.

Lent by the Amwell First Presbyterian Church, Reaville, N. J.

The Amwell First Presbyterian Church of Reaville, N. J., was organized between 1715 and 1733.

Figure 1: 1911 Exhibition catalog entry.

¹ Rev. George S. Mott, DD, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Flemington, New Jersey for a Century* (New York, 1894), 21.

² David R. Reading, editor, *John Reading's Diary* (Mt. Amwell Project, Inc. 2010), 180.

³ Josiah G. Leach, *Memorials Genealogical and Biographical Memorials of the Reading, Howell, Yerkes, Latham, and Elkins Families* (Philadelphia, 1898)

⁴ *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Silver used in New York, New Jersey and the South*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Introduction by R. T. Haines Halsey. Published in conjunction with exhibition shown at Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1911. P. 20 of Part III.

It's interesting that only the initials of the artist were listed suggesting that the church did not know the identity of the silversmith. However, based on an abundance of circumstantial evidence, I believe that the chalices were made by Abraham DuBois (3) who resided in Somerset County and was a contemporary of Joseph Reading.

Abraham DuBois (3) was born 16 Nov 1725 in Hillsborough Township, New Jersey. His father was Abraham Dubois (2) (1685-1758) born in New Paltz, New York and his grandfather was Abraham DuBois (1) born in Manheim, Germany to Louis DuBois, a Huguenot refugee from France.⁵

Sometime before 1715, Abraham (2) migrated to New Jersey, married Maria Lazelere in 1717 and started a family. Their first child, Francoise, was baptized in the newly created Dutch Reformed Church in Raritan in 1718. Next came Margaret (1720) and Marie (1721), both baptized in the Readington Reformed Church.

The original congregation of this church listed as members before 1723 included Abraham DuBois (2) and John Reading (Gov.) (1686-1767).⁶ Apparently, DuBois left this church and joined the congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church of Harlingen (Hillsborough Township, Somerset County) as the next six children were baptized there. Including the aforementioned Abraham (3), born in 1725 who would marry Jane Van Dyck, daughter of Hendrick and Margaret Van Dyck, in 1747. Records of the Readington Church show that Jane Van Dyck and Joseph Reading, fourth son of John Reading were baptized on the same day - 1 Jan 1729 in the same church.⁷ The fact that the John Reading and Abraham DuBois (2) knew each other is without question.

Abraham DuBois (3) and Jane Van Dyck living in Hillsborough Township had six children including yet another Abraham (4) born in 1751/52.⁸ This Abraham would become a highly successful silversmith, a trader and ship owner doing business in the Caribbean, and even was involved the design and creation of the first experimental coins in the United States in 1783 known as the "Nova Constellatio" coin set.⁹ He also had large land holdings in Pennsylvania,

North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, and 219,000 acres in Montgomery County, Georgia. As Ralph Le Favre wrote in *History of New Paltz New York*, "Abraham was more than ordinary ability."

He probably apprenticed with his father and at the age of 26 went on his own to Philadelphia in 1777. An example of his early work done in New Jersey is a tankard on exhibition at the Newark Museum of Art which describes the work as "marked Dubois in a rectangle, ciphered L M VDU for Louis and Mary Van Der Veer, neighbors of Dubois before he went to Philadelphia." See figure 2 for a published example of this mark.

His will was proved in Philadelphia, 7 Nov 1807, in which he bequeathed all his silversmith tools to son Abraham (5) (b. 1780).



Figure 2: Published mark Abraham (4)

John Reading died in November of 1767, making 1768 the earliest date of the chalices. Young Abraham would have been 16 years old in 1768 and still an apprentice. His father would have been 43 and at the height of his craft.

According to Martha Gandy Fales, the actual date of the piece could lag by several years the inscribed bequest date, especially for church pieces. Assuming the chalices they were created between 1768 and 1776 they could have been created by Abraham (3) or his son Abraham (4) who would have ended his apprenticeship *ca.* 1773.

Lacking documentation, which is the most reliable method for identifying the artist, we are left with comparing the maker's mark on the chalices with a published mark attributable Abraham DuBois.

⁵ Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator. Abraham Du Bois House, Frankfort, Somerset County, NJ. Frankfort New Jersey Somerset County, 1933. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/nj0803/>.

⁶ Lorena Cole Vincent, *Readington Reformed Church 1719-1769* (Somerville, NJ, 1969), 12.

⁷ Rev. B.V. D. Wychoff, "Readington Church Baptisms from 1710", (Somerset County Historical Quarterly, IV, 1915), 212.

⁸ Ralph Le Favre, *History of New Paltz New York and Its Old Families (From 1678 to 1820)*, 2nd Ed. (Albany NY: Fort Orange Press, 1909), 131-132.

⁹ <https://www.coinworld.com/news/precious-metals/nova-constellatio-patterns-among-earliest-us-coins.html>



Figure 3: Published mark of Abraham DuBois

The entry in the catalog of the 1911 Silver Exhibition in New York describes the mark as “A.D., in oval.” Research has discovered a mark matching that description –

figure 3., which has just initials enclosed by an oval, and according to Fales this style was popular in the early 18th century, suggesting that the elder Abraham was the artist.¹⁰



Figure 4: Photographed mark 5/29/20.

The chalices were examined on June 29th 2020 at the Mt. Airy church by the author and observed by Rev. Bradford Morgan, pastor. On the first chalice there are 4 identical makers marks along the rim of the cup one of which is shown in figure 4. The photograph on the chalices matches the published mark and provides direct evidence that the maker was Abraham DuBois. Unfortunately we don't know if it was the mark of Abraham(3) or Abraham(4).

The chalices were deeply appreciated by the congregation of the Church expressed by Rev. John Kugler writing in his book, *The History of the First English Presbyterian Church in Amwell*, published in 1912, he speaks passionately to his respect for the chalices:¹¹

“There are, I am sure, few objects of deeper and more sacred interest, or more venerable with age, in the whole Presbyterian Church in America, than are these consecrated vessels of the Sanctuary. They have

passed through the hands of fifteen pastors of this Church, besides many who have supplied the pulpit, when the Church was without a pastor. Among these, was the venerable John Witherspoon, D.D, President of Princeton College (Signer of the Declaration of Independence) who administered the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the Church, June 21, 1789. And now 1910 at the revision seventeen pastors and 145 years. Your parents and grandparents to the third and fourth generation who now “asleep in Christ,” have pressed them to their lips, and taken from them the consecrated wine. What a chain of tender associations between the living and the dead, do they suggest! How blessed to feel, as “we receive” from these sacred vessels that we are communing with our Lord, and with those who have gone to commune with Him in his Father's Kingdom.”

Supposedly, the chalices were moved to the Presbyterian Historical Society Museum in Philadelphia sometime after 1912, where they were kept until they were returned to the Reaville Church in 1996 when the museum closed. Unfortunately, the author been able to verify this supposition. The New Brunswick Presbytery officially closed Reaville church in 2006 and the Presbytery gave them to the Mt. Airy Presbyterian Church (Second English Presbyterian Church of Amwell) in 2012.

The Mt. Airy Church located in West Amwell Township, Hunterdon County lies approximately 6 miles west of the Reaville church and according to Rev. Mott “was formed in 1754 when the Presbytery was petitioned , ‘by the people bordering on the Delaware ,’ to give them the privilege of building a meeting house for their own convenience.”¹²

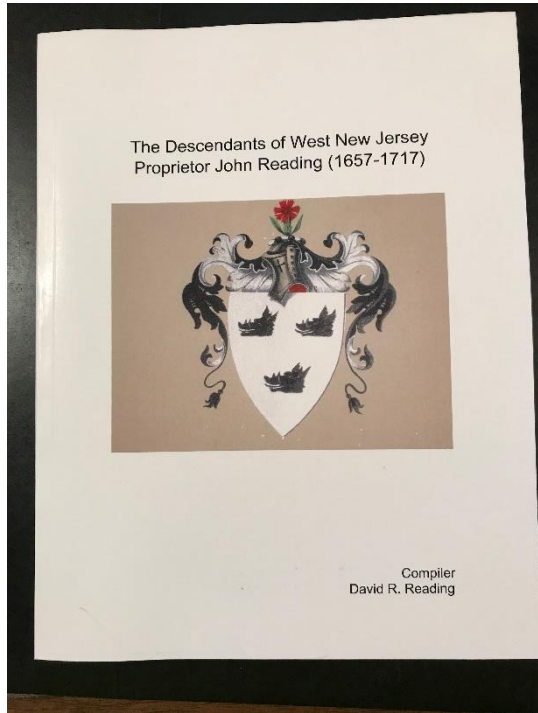
In 2016, Craig A. Reading, Deacon/Historian of the 1st Presbyterian Church of Lambertville used the “Reading Chalices” at the Lambertville Presbyterian Church for their Communion Service in their 200th Year anniversary celebration. The chalices currently (2020) remain in the possession of the Second English Presbyterian Church in Mt. Airy, West Amwell Township, Hunterdon County, New Jersey; Bradford Morgan, Pastor. ***

Note: Many thanks to Craig Reading for his help with this article.

¹⁰ Martha Gandy Fales, *Early American Silver* (Funk and Wagnalls, 1970), 266, 273.

¹¹ Rev. John Kugler, A.M. *The History of the First English Presbyterian Church in Amwell* (Somerville, NJ, The Unionist -Gazette, 1912), 43.

¹² Mott, 1894, 29.



The Descendants of West New Jersey Proprietor John Reading (1657-1717), compiled by David R. Reading, soft cover published by the Mount Amwell Project, Inc., 2020. 238 pages.

This genealogy is in large part an update of the Reading family portion of the remarkable work by Josiah Granville Leach's Biographical Memorials of the Reading, Howell, Yerkes, Watts, Latham, and Elkins Families. Leach was a Philadelphia attorney and prepared many genealogies of families in the United States including the Memorials. The work was commissioned by William L. Elkins of Philadelphia and published in 1898. The Memorials has been the authoritative genealogical source for Reading descendants for over 118 years. Updates include four additional generations, newly discovered material and other Reading history, several errors have been corrected, and substantial source citations have been added. Indexed.

To order: Send \$48 (postage included) check written to the Mount Amwell Project, Inc., P.O. Box 226, Lebanon, NJ 08833.

Announcements

Betsy Clark, daughter of Eugenia Klein, has informed us that her children were going to spread her ashes at the Reading Burial Ground on July 11, but have cancelled the trip as it just isn't safe to travel yet, but hope to do it next year. Eugenia Williams Klein passed away in May 2018 at the age of 90. Her name will be engraved on the existing stone erected in the late 80's by Lloyd Wescott who owned the property at the time. His name appears on the stone as well as his parent's, spouse Barbara Harrison, and several of his siblings including author Glenway Wescott. Eugenia was Lloyd's niece.



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