

THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

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Carman Family Burial Ground

By John Varoli

At the end of summer, good fortune and decisive action by local preservation activists smiled on yet another endangered historic cemetery in Hunterdon County, ensuring that it will be spared from any possible real estate development in the future.

The 48-acre of land surrounding the Carman Family Burying Ground finally received protected status and was added to the inventory of Open Space in Raritan Township at the end of August. This move follows nearly three years of hard work led by **Ray Simonds**, who is a retired geologist for the State of New Jersey, a member of the Open Space committee (Raritan Township) and a trustee of the Hunterdon County Historical Society, as well as the head of its cemetery committee.

The small, quarter-acre Carman family plot is well to the north of the family's original farmstead. In addition to generations of Carman family members, the cemetery holds the remains of two Revolutionary War soldiers. Only five legible headstones remain, but Mr. Simonds said there's reason to believe that the site might hold over a dozen graves.

"This isn't just an old cemetery; it's also very important because it has graves of two Revolutionary War soldiers — that was a major factor why the Raritan Township authorities decided to grant the protected status," said Mr Simonds.

The website MyCentralJersey reported that the 48 acres was sold to the township for \$875,000 by Eden Holdings. The application was prepared by Hunterdon Land Trust, and funding was



Figure 1 *Elijah Carman d. 1841.*
Photo: *Marfy Goodspeed*

provided by the Hunterdon County Open Space Assistance Fund, the NJ Green Acres Program via the Raritan Township Planning Incentive Grant, and Raritan Township Open Space.

Located close to the corner of Bonetown Road and Sergeantsville Road (Rt 523), the parcel of land contains the headwaters of the First Neshanic River. The overall goal of the Open Space status is to reduce the impacts of flooding along the Neshanic River system.

Detailed information about the Carman family and cemetery can be found on Marfy Goodspeed's website, "Goodspeed Histories: New Jersey History and Genealogy", which was very helpful in writing this article.

What do we know about the Carman family? For starters, the family counts among the earliest European settlers in North America. John

Carman was born in 1606 at Hemel-Hempstead, Hertfordshire, England. In 1632, John and Florence (Fordham) Carman arrived in Boston on the ship Lion.

In 1643 Carman and Robert Fordham signed a treaty for 120,000 acres of land on Long Island with the Rockaway and Massapequa tribes. In 1649, John Carman is listed as one of the “patentees” of Hempstead, under the control of the New Netherland colony.

Are the Carmans of Central New Jersey related to the Carmans of Long Island? While historians have not established a direct connection, it’s known that Elijah Carman was born in 1756 to Samuel and Mary Carman. Researchers say that Samuel Carman was the son of Caleb Carman of New York and Abigail King from Hopewell. That could be the connection that brought the family to the Raritan Valley region.

Oddly enough, one of the most intriguing graves doesn’t belong to the Carman family at all. Jesse Pettit, a Revolutionary War veteran, was married to Anna Mary Johnson. How did Jesse end up in the Carman family cemetery? Apparently, he was a close friend of Elijah Carman, also believed to be a Revolutionary War veteran and whose remains lie in the family burial ground.

In 1918, Hiram Deats made a record of the surviving gravestones. Many are unreadable, but the gravestones of Elijah Carman and his wife Jane were visible.

Deats made a list that was found by **Bob Leith** in the Deats Collection in the Hunterdon County Historical Society. The burials he mentioned include the following:

- Lucy Coates, Aug. 30, 1878 in 84th yr.
- Mary James, mother of Jane Carman, Sept. 1804
- John James, 1787
- Aaron Carman, son of Elijah and Jane, no date
- Jane Carman, widow of Elijah, July 4, 1854

- Elijah Carman Nov. 8, 1841
- Jesse Pettit, April 5, 1814, In 64th year
- Amos Pettit, son of Jesse Pettit, b. Nov. 7, 1805, d. 1810
- Hannah Philips, wife of David Rockafellow [sic]

Also, of particular interest and worthy of brief mention is Hannah Philips Rockafellow (born 1760), who also lies in the Carman cemetery. She was the first wife of David Rockafellar [sic], (1759-1833), son of John Peter Rockafellar and Mary Bellis and who is now buried in the historic cemetery in nearby Lebanon Twp.

That’s intriguing because in 1723, Johann Peter Rockenfeller was the very first ancestor of the prominent Rockefeller family to emigrate (from Rhineland, Germany) to America; he became a landowner in Somerville and Amwell Township, where he died in 1787.

Slacktown Cemetery

Significant improvements have been made at the Slacktown cemetery in Kingwood Township. The remains of the large fallen tree have been removed and two deliveries of topsoil from **Tim Alley** of Windtryst Nursery, Stockton have filled several burial depressions. **Bob Wilson**, immediate neighbor, lent a hand (and machine) to spread the topsoil. The topsoil was then raked and seeded.

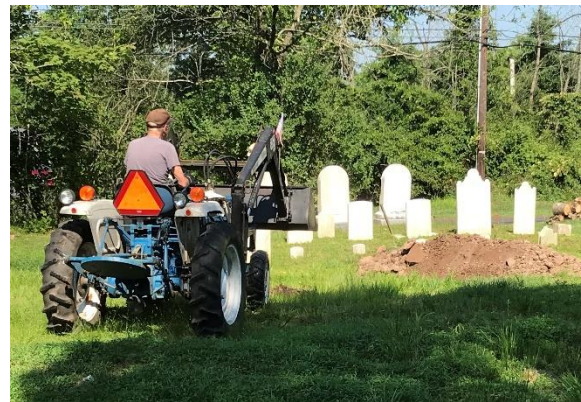


Figure 2 Neighbor Bob Wilson spread topsoil.

Castner Family Donation

By Beverly Kirby-McDonough

In October, The Mount Amwell Project received a generous donation of \$5,000 from the Castner Family Foundation of Vero Beach, Florida. The purpose of the contribution is to support the ongoing care and maintenance of the Swackhammer Lutheran Churchyard in Lebanon Township. It is the single largest gift ever received by The Mount Amwell Project.

The origin of this unexpected donation was a serendipitous meeting between Mrs. **Pat Barber**, MTAP Site Steward of the Swackhammer Cemetery, and Mr. Allen G. Castner, President of the Castner Family Foundation. While Pat was engaged in some light landscaping at the churchyard, Mr. Castner arrived with his wife and daughter to research his family tree. Pat graciously welcomed them, shared the history of the church and guided them to the Castner graves. Then, Pat followed up by providing Mr. Castner with her own research, based on historical deeds related to her ownership of the Moore Castner house. In addition, Pat provided a copy of the Castner genealogy book covering eleven generations of the family from 1710 to 1963. We are sincerely grateful to Pat. She is an excellent ambassador of The Mount Amwell Project.

The original ancestor of the Castner family was John Peter Kassener, who came from Germany about 1710. Moore Castner (1802-1872) donated the land on which the Old Swack Church was built in 1844. The founder and first pastor was Rev. Lambert Swackhammer. Moore and his wife, Susan Force Castner, are buried in the church cemetery and share one headstone. Two of their sons, Mahlon and Nathan, are also buried there. Nathan Castner was the last documented interment at the churchyard in 1915.

The Castners were numerous in Lebanon Township. An extended family member, Edson Nunn Castner (1881-1967), was born in Changewater. He married Cora R. Vosler in 1908.

Edson was the postmaster and a merchant. He owned and operated a general store in Changewater for 42 years. His store was usually open seven days a week, Sunday being the busiest day. After his death, Edson's country store and the remaining contents - including furnishings and old store ledgers - were finally sold at a public auction in 1972. The final resting place of Edson and Cora Castner is Washington Cemetery in Warren County.



Figure 3 Mahlon Castner - April 17, 1818



Figure 4 Moore Castner 1802-1875, Susan Force Castner 1804-1887

From the President

We are just about to complete another successful year. We started out in April with a cleanup at the HayPress Cemetery in Whitehouse Station with the assistance of the Interact Club from Hunterdon Central Regional High School. Interact is a Rotary-sponsored community service club that organizes various events towards meeting community needs and improving the school. Ten students with their advisor **Tracy Axmann** worked about 3 hours on April 7 cleaning leaves and other debris from the Hay Press in preparation for mowing by our contractor Whole 9 Yards.

On June 27th we presented a lecture on our efforts to save at risk abandoned cemeteries in Hunterdon County at the Readington Museums Bouman-Stickney Farmstead near Stanton. The event was well attended with about 35 guests. Program Director **Margaret Smith** said she greatly appreciated our donated time and knowledge to her visitors.



Figure 5 Lecture at Readington Museum, June 27th, 2022. Photo: Readington Museum

On November 5th, we held out 16th annual luncheon at the Harvest Moon restaurant in Ringoes. Paul Muir, Executive Director of the Red Mill Village in Clinton gave us an in-depth lecture on the Mill past and present.

The Genealogy Society of New Jersey has published my article entitled *Abraham Dubois of Somerset County and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, GMNJ Volume 97 (2022) 85-93*. The article makes the case that the silver chalices bequeathed to the Amwell Presbyterian Church in 1767 by Gov. John Reading were in fact created by Abraham Dubois (1751-1807) or his father Abraham (1725-1792).

Dave Reading



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