

Story of
Greenwich

CUMBERLAND COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

The Tea Burning Town



FRIENDS MEETING

STORY OF GREENWICH as told in 1957

In a paper printed in Edinburgh in 1683 could be found "A Brief Account of the Province of East New Jersey in America - published by the Scots Proprietors Having Interest There." The following is quoted:

"The voyage is Judged lesse Sea Hazard than either to Holland or London and if there be any tolerable minds, it is easily made in six weeks. They went a ship last harvest to West Jersey from the Road to Aberdeen; and they came to Delaware River Mouth in 8 weeks, though they had great Calmes, and if betwixt 30 and 40 passengers that out of Aberdeen several women and children, not above 4, of them had been at Sea before, not one dyed nor was sick by the way. The charge of transportation is for every man and woman 5 lbs.-sterling, passage and entertainment, for children under 10 years of age 50 shillings and Sucking children nothing, 40 shillings for a runne of goods and often under. To show how Fruit Trees do advance in that Country it is credibly reported that about Burlington in New Jersey which is more Northernly in West Jersey, from an Apple-tree seed in four years (without grafting there spring up a tree, that in the fourth year bore such a quantitie of Apples as yielded a barrell of Syder"

While the people in 'Edinburgh were reading the above account of the wonderful things found across the turbulent Atlantic Ocean, a very sick man in Salem, West New Jersey, was dictating his will. According to the date on the parchment, it was in October, 1683. John Fenwick had reached the shores of this new land in 1675. He had spent a hectic eight years and now he was putting on paper his last wishes. His will Alls Seven lengthy pages, each signed by the man upon his death bed. Each signature growing weaker and weaker until the last was almost illegible. Regardless of the fact that Fenwick knew he was about to enter the land from which there is no return, he did not fail to express his wishes for the town he desired built upon the bank of the Cohanse river. He evidently had intended it to be his Manor town.

Fenwick also refers to Bacon's Creek. The year before his will was written Samuel Bacon Mariner had bought land from the Indians and called it "Bacon's Adventure." In 1957, some of these acres, after nearly three hundred years are still in the possession of those in whose veins flows Bacon blood.

Following the wishes of Fenwick, his Executors, in 1684, laid out the Greate Street that stretches for two and a half miles from the Cohanse river to the brook that flows from Pine Mount to the sea. It was along this brook of fresh water that the Indians had their village. Today after nearly three centuries evidence of their dwelling place is visible. The land now belongs to Charles Riggins.

As the home sites became available, the settlers bought them. Most of these men were escaping the religious intolerance that not only surrounded them in England but had followed them to this new world. The Puritans were cutting off the ears of the Quakers and boring holes in the tongues of those who told of the Inner Light.

This new town planned by John Fenwick and laid out by his executors in 1684 was to be a friendly town. Mark Reeve, a Quaker, bought the lot on the corner near the Wharf. Thomas Watson, a Baptist, purchased a home site on the opposite corner. Further up the Great Street lived the Gibbons, who were Episcopallians. They gave ground for the Presbyterians to build a parsonage. Benjamin Bacon, a Quaker, gave the ground that the Presbyterians could have a place to build their church and lay their loved ones to rest. All these things meant religious tolerance and brotherly love.

There is something in the human breast that thrills to the word "First." The little old village of Greenwich, sleeping for centuries under the soothing touch of Father Time, may boast of many "Firsts." -- We cannot enlarge upon them here but only enumerate them.

It was the first town laid out in what is now Cumberland County. According to Sheppard and Cushing "The Greate Street" is the only street in the county that traverses the same ground where it was first laid out.

The first Friends Meeting House in the County was built near the creek for the accommodation of the Friends, who lived on the other side of the creek. In the record of Salem Deeds may be found the following: --

1693 Dec. 25 - Deed - Joseph Browne of the Town of Greenwich upon Ceasarial alias Cohansey River, Salem Co., yeoman, to Charles Bagley for a lot 50 feet wide on the street and 55 feet long between grantors dwelling house and his barn, for a meeting house and graveyard of the "people in scorn called Quakers who worship God in Spirit and in Truth"

The first Presbyterian Church in the county was built at the head of the village about 1707, probably of logs. The second building of brick was erected in 1735.

St. Stephen's the first Episcopal Church in the county was built in 1729. The rectory is near by. It was built in 1730 and is still standing. It is constructed of brown field stone undoubtedly quarried from the fields of Lenard Gibbon, who owned many acres in what is now, Stow Creek Township. The oldest school house in the county is also built of brown field stone and stands opposite "The Town Place." This was the farm that belonged to Zachariah Barrow, who left all he possessed in 1725, that the poor children in the locality might have a free school forever.

The first Fair in the county was held October 16 and 17, 1695. These Fairs were public markets. They were held where the Tea Burning Monument now stands. It was called the Market Place. The road to Greenwich Piers was Market Lane. The Fairs were discontinued in 1765. For seventy years the people had gathered for a two day outing to purchase needed supplies, chat with neighbors and learn what was happening beyond their door.

Folks must have attended the Fairs from Philadelphia for we learn from newspaper extracts in 1736, the Fair was not held because of a severe epidemic of small pox in that city.

The oldest Tavern in the county where one could obtain "Bedde and Board" for "Man and Beast" faces the road that leads to Bacon's Neck. It has recently been restored and is worth a visit.

The first license for a ferry in Cumberland County was granted to William Watson in 1733. The boat to run between Greenwich Wharf and Fairton. No one but Watson could carry anything for hire, two miles above the Wharf or two miles below. Watson and his wife also kept a tavern near the Wharf.

The first Courts of Cumberland County were held in Greenwich, May 31st, 1748, and sat two days. The first Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of the County received their commission at this time. There has been a question as to the exact building where the court was held. Some said the old Tavern and some the Friends Meeting House while the suggestion was made that the Court might have been held in the Presbyterian Church at the Head of Greenwich. Personally, I believe the old Quaker Meeting House was the place.

The first minutes states "Court was held in the Meeting House." In addition to this statement, Richard Wood was a Quaker and also most of the other men who served at those first sessions. In one minute, we find that Court adjourned for two hours to go to Sarah Watson's Tavern for refreshments. Sarah Watson's Tavern was almost opposite the Quaker Meeting House.

The first election held in the county was held in Greenwich in 1749 at the Tavern of John Butler. The majority of votes decided where the Court House and Jail should be built and authorized money to be raised with which to build them. Bridgetown won. The village that tucks its feet in the old Cohansey river went quietly to sleep.

The first jail in Cumberland County was built near the Wharf. It was to be "twelve foot square." The first Sheriff of the County, Ananias Sayre, lived in Greenwich. The jail was placed here for his convenience..

The first account of any provision for the poor of the County is found in the Court records of Salem County in 1715 - "When on petition of Mary Hix of Grinedge, she being very poor" the court ordered John Brick and Noah Moore overseers of the Poor of Grinedge to maintain her at the charge of the precinct.

The first white female child born in Cohansey, Deborah Swinney, lies buried in the ancient cemetery at Sheppard's Mill. She departed this life the "4 of April, 1760 in the 77th year of her age."

The only monument to an Indian Chief in the county was erected by Dr.

George B. Wood in the "Park" that he carefully cherished as long as he lived. The supposition that Dr. Wood had placed valuable relics in the grave evidently led vandals to excavate the grave. The monument is still standing but the marble tomahawk had been broken off.

The only monument in the State to commemorate the patriotism of its Citizens for destroying the despised English tea, stands on the site of this event. The "Tea Party" was held in Greenwich on Dec. 21st, 1774, on the Market Place. The men and women born in the early part of 1800 were told by their parents and grandparents where the tea was stored.

Charles Ewing, born in 1849, gave the writer the following statement:

Home - April 18, 1930

"I have been asked several times as to where the tea was stored before being burned by the Patriots in Greenwich. My Grandfather, William Belford Ewing said, it was stored in the cellar of the David Sutton house. He got his information from his father Thomas Ewing, who was one of the participants. It was taken out in the field opposite where burned. This whole statement is as good and true as can be made. The house in which the tea was stored has been tom down.

Signed - Charles Ewing."

Two women, one born in 1811 and another born in 1814 told the writer the same story. David Sutton was a shoemaker. The house in which he did his work stood right on the street on Market Lane. The house had a high and low art. Under the high part of the house was the cellar. This was close to the road.

Mr. Sutton lived in a house near by. Both his home and the dwelling where he worked have been torn down. It is said a portion of the shop was moved and is now being used as a garage by Frank Craig. The garage is built of hand hewed logs and hand made nails are visible.

Many old houses, undated, are still standing. According to an old deed, Mark Reeve house stood on the corner by the wharf in 1696. It is said two hip roofed houses in the township were built about that time. The fine old Gibbon house was built in 1730. The Pirate house in 1734 and the Rectory for St. Stephen's church in 1730.

From the Journal of Ebenezer Elmer, we infer the first general meeting of the patriots of Cumberland County was held in Greenwich, May 3rd, 1775. Quote: "People met at E'sqr. Fithians" (at the edge of Springtown) "to choose officers for a militia." "May 12th, mustering at Dr. Ewing's in Greenwich, where officers were chosen." "Daniel Maskell Major."

These were exciting days in Greenwich. The following is an extract from a letter written by an Officer in Cumberland County. It is taken from The Pennsylvania Gazette, West New Jersey, May 6, 1776:

"This serves to inform you of an alarm we had about 11 o'clock this day of a party of regulars landing on Tindall's Island in Bacon's Neck, about four miles from Greenwich, supposed to be about 30 in number, shooting down cattle, taking them on board etc., where upon I called the militia together as soon as possible, and upon our appearance a gun was fired from on board one of the vessels for them to repair on board, which they did with the greatest precipitation. Our men pursued so closely that we were near taking three of them prisoners, one of whom left an excellent musket behind, which we got with some cartridges. They hollowed to our men to go on board the King Fisher and they would pay for the beef. It is supposed they took off between 20 and 30 cattle. Five they left dead on the shore and wounded many others, which, with many others we drove from the water side."

After Bridgeton became the County Seat in 1749, this little village of "Firsts" curled itself into the blanket of memory and went to sleep. It is fitting that the Cumberland County Historical Society should find its home in a place teeming with memories of the days long past. We linger in the twilight in the beautiful old Wood Mansion as we listen for the voices of the men and women who made our village, a village of "Firsts." Cohanzick, the dreamtown of John Fenwick.

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Cumberland County Historical Society