

FRANCIS COLLINS

An extract from
*Sketches of the First Emigrant Settlers in
Newton Township, Old Gloucester County, West New Jersey, pp 71-84*

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FRANCIS COLLINS was a son of Edward and Mary Collins of Oxfordshire, England; he was born January 6, 1635. His father was the owner of considerable landed and personal property in that country, which, after his decease, passed to the control of his widow. Francis was apprenticed to a bricklayer, and subsequently removed to London, where he was convinced of the correctness of the religious principles of George Fox, and at once became one of his followers. In 1663, he was married to Sarah Mayham, at the Bull and Mouth Meeting of Friends, and settled at Ratliff, in the parish of Stepney, county of Middlesex, which parish was, at that time, within the built up portion of the city of London. In an account book of his, still in existence, he made the following entry: "Francis Collins, his book, this 25th day of the first month, 1675, now living at Ratliff Cross, next door to the Ship Tavern;"—fixing his place of residence at that time beyond a question.

His adherence to the Quakers was obnoxious to his family, as is shown by the will of his mother and also by that of his sister Elizabeth.

In the book before named are many curious things, written in a style hard to decipher at this late day. Among these are the names and dates of the births of his children by the first marriage; the names of many persons with whom he had business relations; also the account of moneys paid to him for rebuilding the Friends' meeting house at Stepney [p 72] that had been destroyed by a mob a few years previous to that time. This book also shows that he was a bricklayer and builder, and kept a store, evidently seeking for gain in various ways, yet adhering strictly to his religious opinions and example.

After rebuilding the meeting house in 1675, no other disturbance appears of record in that section, much to the credit of authorities and much to the peace of Friends. That parish of Stepney, like many other ancient places in and around London, has its own legends—told to this day among the superstitious, as no less wonderful than true. This parish being by the side of the river Thames and a resort for seafaring men, a tradition still exists among the English sailors, that all who are born upon the ocean belong to Stepney parish, and must be relieved in case of distress by the authorities thereof.

Francis Collins was among those who were imprisoned and fined for their adherence to their religious principles; and this doubtless had much to do with his coming to America, where his opinions could be enjoyed in peace.

For the first two years after his arrival, his movements are somewhat uncertain; he was employed, perhaps, in searching to and fro through the primitive forests for a suitable location for himself and family.

In 1682, he erected the first Friends' meeting house in Burlington, and, in the next year, he received two hundred pounds, and one thousand acres of land from the Legislature for building a market house and court room at the same place.

There may be another reason for his coming to New Jersey, disclosed in a deed from the trustees of Edward Byllynge, made in 1677, to Francis Collins, of Ratliff, of the parish of Stepney, in the county of Middlesex, bricklayer, Richard Mew, of Ratliff, aforesaid, merchant, and John Bull, of London, merchant,¹ for certain shares or parts of shares of

¹ Lib. B2, 68s.

propriety. The deed says that Edward Byllynge was indebted to Francis Collins in the sum of two hundred pounds, to Richard Mew one hundred pounds, and to John Bull fifty pounds; to [p 73] discharge which this conveyance of real estate in New Jersey was made.

The first taking up of any land by him was on the 23rd day of October, 1682, when he located five hundred acres in Newton township, bounded on the west side by the King's road; upon which land part of the village of Haddonfield now stands.² Two days after, he made another and adjoining survey of four hundred and fifty acres, lying on the southwest side of the first and extending to the south branch of Newton creek.³ Perhaps no better selection for soil and situation could have been made, showing that he had acted deliberately and understandingly in this the first step towards a settlement in a new and unknown country.

"To secure a landing," he made a survey of one hundred and seventeen acres, bounded on the south side by Cooper's creek; most of which now owned by John E. Hopkins and Joseph C. Stoy.⁴ Francis Collins sold this survey to Richard Gray, whose son John conveyed the same to Ebenezer Hopkins in 1746.

Francis Collins built his house on the hill south of the village, where formerly resided John Gill, perhaps where he found a few acres cleared of the timber, and ready for him to cultivate his summer crop.

He styled his new place "Mountwell," that being according to the English custom of having some particular name for each person's estate; which name often follows through the various conveyances from one generation to another for many years. The frequent changes in the ownership of land in New Jersey may be the cause of the disappearance of these names, yet the examination of old deeds and dilapidated records often discovers curious things in this regard. The Mountwell estate, at this day, is divided among many owners, and, if each were tenacious of the old title, much confusion would ensue.

Being here some years before Thomas Sharp and his companions, he, in connection with others, did something by way of advice in their selection of a place "to settle down by;" [p 74] giving them his experience in the wild woods, and his intercourse with the aborigines, a subject of much interest to these new comers.

His residence was isolated, some five miles from the little village at Newton, and without any intermediate settlements; for, in 1700, Thomas Sharp places but five houses on his map between Mountwell and Newton, thus showing how slowly the country filled up in the intervening eighteen years.

The Salem road marked out as passing near where the village of Haddonfield now stands, could have been nothing more than a bridle path, and but seldom used except by the Indians.

His dwelling, in all probability, was only a rude wigwam surrounded by many other like habitations, the homes of those who were becoming more and more familiar with the pale faced intruders, in whom they could discover nothing but peaceful intentions. Although of slow growth, the confidence once established was never impaired by any act of emigrant, or of aborigines.

With the political affairs of the colony Francis Collins had much to do. In 1683, he was returned as a member of the Assembly to represent the interests of the third tenth, and at that session was appointed one of the commissioners for dividing and regulating land. In the difficulty between the proprietors and Edward Byllynge about the government having passed with the fee to the soil, he was one of the committee to adjust the matter among those interested.⁵ A long epistle was prepared, in which several queries were submitted to

² Revel's Book, 39.

³ Lib. G2, 25.

⁴ Lib. GH, 360.

⁵ Leaming & Spicer's Laws.

some Friends in London touching this important question; but no conclusion was arrived at until the surrender in 1701, when all the rights of the government were given to the Queen.

On the eleventh day of the third month, 1683, Samuel Jennings was elected Governor, and named Francis Collins as one of his council, showing that his Excellency, considered him worthy of that honorable and responsible position.

In 1684, he was again elected to represent the third tenth, and, at that session, was made one of the judges of the several courts of that division of the territory of West Jersey, it being [p 75] before the bounds of Gloucester county were defined and settled. In 1685, he was appointed to the duty of laying out highways, a task which seemed to have been easily discharged, since the Indian trails were generally adopted for roads, and so remained for many years after that time.

May 28th, 1686, the "Proprietors, Freeholders and inhabitants" of the third and fourth tenth, agreed to call that territory the county of Gloucester, and they established all the political and judicial machinery necessary to set the bailiwick in motion. In September following, the first court was held at Arwamus, *alias* Gloucester, at which Francis Collins acted as one of the judges. In this position he continued for several years, discharging his various duties acceptably to the people. Some mystery surrounds this, as he had removed into Burlington county soon after his second marriage; yet his name appears as one of the judges of Gloucester county, and as participating in all the business thereof. He was a public man in many other positions, as the ancient records conclusively show.

In religious matters he doubtless took much interest. He was one of the leading member of the Newton meeting, then the only place of public worship in this region of the country. Among the few marriage certificates preserved from those early times, is one stating that Thomas Shable, of Compton house, in ye province of West Jersey, was married to Alice Stalles, of Newton township, in ye same province, twelfth month, twenty-third, 1686, in Newton meeting. The autographs to this, prove that all the daughters of Francis Collins were present, thus displaying the curiosity of the sex, and leaving evidence that this characteristic is not of modern growth.

Their hand writing shows them to have been young ladies of more than ordinary education, which was procured while they were residents of the mother country, since no opportunities for learning existed here at that time. Glad of any excitement about their quiet forest home, it was most natural that they should take advantage of such an interesting event, to break the monotony that surrounded them. Their dress, made to conform to the plainness of the sect, did not destroy their [p 76] graceful movements, or the comeliness of their persons. The only means of travel, except by water, being on horseback, they doubtless from long practice were admirable equestrians, which exercise detracted neither from health nor from beauty.

They drew around them many admirers, and, in the progress of time, left the parental home, and became the heads of families, and the maternal ancestors to long lines of descendants.

Mary, the wife of Francis Collins, died soon after his settlement here, leaving him six children,—Joseph, who married Catharine Huddleston of Mansfield, Burlington county, N. J., in 1698;⁶ Sarah, who married Robert Dimsdale, M. D., of Chatteris in Cambridgeshire, England, in 1713; Rebecca, who married Thomas Briant, in 1698; Priscilla, who married John Hugg; Margaret, who married Elias Hugg; and Elizabeth, who married Josiah Southwick.

Doctor Dimsdale was a prominent man in his day, and deserves notice here. He was confined in the prison in Hertfordshire, for practicing medicine without a bishop's license; whether he refused or neglected to obtain one, does not appear. He was a man of much

⁶ Friends' Records.

talent in his profession, and was the inventor of some popular nostrums that brought money to his purse and notoriety to his name.⁷

He came with William Penn to Pennsylvania, but, in 1683, surveyed a large tract of land, south of Mount Holly, in Burlington county, lying on both sides of a stream that falls into Rancocas creek at Lumberton, called Dimsdale's run.⁸ He was owner of one-third of a whole share of propriety, bought of Nicholas Lucas, in 1682.⁹ On this tract he erected a brick house, and, being a man of wealth, dispensed a liberal hospitality to his friends and visitors. He was somewhat interested in the political questions of the day, and sat as one of the judges of the courts of the county, wherein he lived.¹⁰ In preparing for his return to England in 1688, he appointed John Tathen and others, his attorneys to manage his estate in America. In 1699, he revoked this, and made Francis Davenport, John Shinn and John Scott, his agents, [p 77] with like powers.¹¹ His property here increased in value, but he did not return to look after it. The records show many of the transactions concerning his land in New Jersey, but may never get beyond the iron doors of the building where now preserved, except as some enthusiast be curious enough to disentomb them. In 1688, he returned to England, and settled at Theydon Garnon, near Epping, in Essex, where he died in 1718. By a previous marriage, he had two sons, John and William, neither of whom came to this country. Their estate in West New Jersey passed, in 1746, to Richard Smith (the younger), and Ebenezer Large.¹²

His widow, Sarah, by whom there was no issue, returned to New Jersey, and resided at Haddonfield during the remainder of her life, taking an active part in the religious society of which she was a member, and being frequently associated with Elizabeth Estaugh in her christian labors. In these persons, the intimacy of the families, as it existed in England, was here represented, keeping alive the kindly feeling there so closely united, by reason of the trials and persecutions passed through in the early days of their religious profession. The name of Elizabeth Estaugh as a witness to her will, proves that their friendship, ended only by her death. She died in 1739, distributing her estate among the children of her brothers and sisters, by her last will and testament.¹³ By a deed from her father in 1714,¹⁴ she became the owner of a tract of four hundred and sixty acres of land in Newton township, being the second survey made by him—now owned in part by the Hinchmans, Samuel Nicholson, Jeremiah Willits and others—extending from near Haddonfield, southwesterly to the south branch of Newton creek. Upon the first day of April, 1725, Sarah Dimsdale sold the whole tract to Simeon Breach and Caleb Sprague, who held it in common until April 30th, 1726, at which date they made division thereof. By this deed of partition, Caleb Sprague took two hundred and fifteen acres in the northerly part of the tract, Simeon Breach took two hundred and forty-five acres next to King's run. None of the [p 78] papers touching this transaction are of record; a circumstance which may lead to much trouble in days to come, should some sharp-scented lawyer insist on knowing the titles to these lands from the first taking up. Such difficulties must often occur in relation to the land in West New Jersey, by reason of the frequent neglect of owners in this regard.

Joseph Collins, the only son of Francis by the first marriage, settled on the homestead farm, and there remained during his life. Upon the second marriage of his father, this estate was involved in a trust to Robert Dimsdale and John Budd, for the use of

⁷ Burlington County files, 1720.

⁸ Revel's Book, 33. Basse's Book, 231;

⁹ Lib. GH, 333.

¹⁰ Leaming & Spicer's Laws.

¹¹ Lib. B2, 487, 546, 669.

¹² Lib. GH, 542.

¹³ Lib. No. 4, 208.

¹⁴ Lib. A, 11.

such children as might be the issue of that connection.¹⁵ This was done to guard against the operation of the law of descents in force at that day, which gave the oldest male child of all the real estate of which the parent died seized. This trust was defeated in 1716,¹⁶ as the father and his second wife, in connection with the trustees, conveyed Mountwell to Joseph in fee, and, in 1717, the children by the second marriage released all their right in the same to their eldest brother.¹⁷

Joseph died in 1741,¹⁸ leaving the following children,—Benjamin, who married Ann Hedger; Sarah, who married Simeon Ellis; Catharine, who married Thomas Ellis; and Rebecca, who married Samuel Clement.¹⁹

Benjamin was a carpenter, and lived in Haddonfield. Joseph Collins and his wife Catharine executed to Benjamin a deed for a portion of the Mountwell tract fronting on the south side of the main street of the village, retaining to themselves a life estate therein. Part of this was sold by the parties interested, in 1734. Benjamin died in 1756, leaving two children, Joseph and Priscilla, both minors at that time.²⁰ It will be noticed that the name in this branch of the family is only perpetuated by two persons, Benjamin, the son, and Joseph, the grandson.

Previously to his death in 1735, Joseph Collins and Catherine, his wife, conveyed to Samuel and Rebecca Clement a part [p 79] of the Mountwell tract, for considerations which showed them to be in favor with the parents. These were the sums of one hundred pounds, and sixteen pounds, annually, during the life of the said Joseph and Catharine and the survivors of them.²¹

Rebecca, who married Thomas Briant, lived with her husband on his estate near Mount Holly, Burlington county, where he owned a large tract of land. In an affidavit made by this man in 1733, in relation to the identity of George Elkington, who came to New Jersey as a servant of Daniel Wills, he says that he was born at Shippen Warden, Northampshire, England, and in that sixty-eight years of age, and married Rebecca Collins. He was, in all probability, a servant of Daniel Wills, as Daniel appears to have brought several persons with him in that capacity, the most of whom became valuable and influential citizens.

In the year 1704, Francis Collins conveyed to Thomas Briant and his wife Rebecca, a tract of land containing four hundred acres situate in the "forks" of Timber creek, a short distance west from Chew's Landing. Rebecca survived her husband and died in 1743.

Her children were Elizabeth, wife of Daniel Haines; Sarah, wife of John Fennimore; Ann, John, Abraham and Benjamin. The descendants of this woman are, at this day, connected with some of the most respectable families in West New Jersey, who, with little care, may trace their lineage to one of the first settlers of the colony.

John Hugg, who married Priscilla, had considerable estate and resided at Gloucester, (now Gloucester city,) to whom the family now scattered over the country may trace their ancestry. His death is thus noticed by Smith in his History of New Jersey:

"In this year (1730) died John Hugg, Esq., of Gloucester county. He was about ten years one of the council. Riding from home in the morning he was supposed to be taken ill about a mile from his house; when getting off his horse he spread his cloak on the ground to lie down on—and having [p 80] put his gloves under the saddle and hung up his whip through one of the rings, he turned the horse

¹⁵ Lib. A, 76.

¹⁶ Lib. B2, 572.

¹⁷ Basse's Book, 138.

¹⁸ Lib. No. 4, 294.

¹⁹ Lib. No. 8, 395.

²⁰ Lib. No. 8, 395, 544. Lib. No. 4, 294.

²¹ Liber EF, 65.

loose, which going home put the people upon searching, who found him in this circumstance speechless; they carried him to his house and he died that evening."

In 1695, Francis Collins conveyed to John Hugg and his wife Priscilla a tract of land lying south of Haddonfield, and bounding on Little Timber creek, which they in a few years afterward sold to John Hinchman.²²

It is to be regretted that nothing conclusive can be discovered in regard to the children of Priscilla, as she had deceased, and John Hugg had married a second wife, by whom there was issue also. His children numerous, but he made no distinction as to their mother. In regard to the children of Margaret, a like difficulty occurs, which may never be solved, except by some persevering genealogist interested in tracing his own blood.

Josiah Southwick, who married Elizabeth, the youngest daughter by the first marriage, was a resident of Mount Holly, and interested in an iron foundry established at that place. He was a man of considerable estate and left some descendants, who still reside in New Jersey.

The children of Josiah and Elizabeth were Josiah, James, Ruth and Maham.²³ This family name never became extensive in New Jersey, and now is confined to but few persons.

The marriage settlement, as before named, between Francis Collins and Mary, his second wife, bears date December 21st, 1686,²⁴ about which time this marriage took place at Burlington meeting. She was the widow of John Goslin, a practising physician and merchant of the town of Burlington, and the daughter of Thomas Budd, one of the largest proprietors and earliest settlers in the colony, who became a prominent man in the religious and political troubles of that day.

The one son by her first marriage is the ancestor of the name in New Jersey. Upon the consummation of this marriage, [p 81] Francis Collins removed to Northampton township, Burlington county, where he resided during the remainder of his life. Perhaps no more reliable information of this man and his family can be had from a copy of the census of Northampton township, made in 1709, and preserved by the Historical Society of New Jersey. Among those there noticed are these:

Francis Collins, age 74; Mary Collins, aged 44; John Collins, aged 17; Francis Collins, aged 15; Mary Collins, aged 11, Samuel Collins, aged 9.

John died in 1761.²⁵ His wife was Elizabeth, a daughter of Benjamin Moore of Burlington county. They had a numerous family, of whom, according to the best data to be obtained, the following are the names and marriages: Sybilla, who married Samuel Gaskill; Susanna, who married Daniel Garwood in 1737; John, who married Patience -----; Francis, who married Ann Haines (widow), and Elizabeth ----- (he dying, the latter afterwards married Ishmael Kent); Joseph, who married Diana Pritchett; Charity, who married Charles Kain; Sarah, who married Samuel Bates; Lizzie, who married Samuel Hugg, Robert Friend Price and Daniel Smith; Mary, who married James Budd, and Priscilla, who married Joshua Evans (his second wife). Joshua Evans (his second wife). Joshua Evans was a preacher among Friends, and of that society there was no more exemplary or self-denying member. He adhered strictly to the spirit and letter of his belief, yet was not intrusive or objectionable in so doing. He saw the evils of intemperance, and, by his example and precept, induced many members of the same society to abandon the use of liquor, even at that early day. He resided on part of the estate now owned by Joseph O. Cuthbert, near the centre of old Newton township. A history of his labors as a public Friend, published several

²² Liber A, 183.

²³ Census of Northampton Township, 1709.

²⁴ Liber B2, 572.

²⁵ Lib. No. 10, 346.

years after his decease, shows him to have been an acceptable member of his church, faithful in his duties and a consistent Christian.

It may be seen that the blood of John Collins is distributed among so many collateral lines, that its tracing would be almost impossible. [p 82]

Francis settled on land (which his father conveyed to him by deed or gift,) on the north side of Cooper's creek, lately Aaron Moore's.²⁶ The house, a brick one, was burned in 1866. It had some pretension to size and style in its day, but was both small and unsightly, when compared with those of the present time. He sold part of this land to Jacob Horner in 1718. His children were Joshua, who married -----; Job, who married ----- Haines and Elizabeth Ballinger; John, who married Ruth Borradale; Priscilla, who married James Mulock, M. D.; Charles, who married Ruth Starkey, and Sarah, who married Ephraim Haines.

Mary, the only daughter by his last wife, married Thomas Kendall, and settled in Burlington county.

Samuel, the youngest child of Francis and Mary Collins, married Abigail Ward in 1721. Their children were Samuel, who married Rosanna Stokes; Mercy, who married Samuel Thomas and Solomon Haines.

Samuel and Rosanna settled at Colestown where his business was that of a blacksmith. He purchased land of Thomas Cole on the west side of Penisaukin creek, and built a house and resided there during his life. This property was since owned and occupied by George T. Risdon, now deceased.

Their children were Abigail, who married John Lippincott; Rachel, who married Joseph Champion, and Hannah, who married Enoch Allen.

The children of Samuel and Mercy Thomas were Samuel, who married Hannah Bishop, and Hannah, who married ----- Clyne. Mercy's child by the last marriage was Elizabeth, who married Isaac Mullen.

Much speculation has arisen in regard to the first Samuel here named, as to his being a son of Francis and Mary Collins. That they had a son of that name is beyond cavil, and his marriage appears in the proper order of time. In 1728, Mary Collins, as executrix of Francis Collins, deceased, conveyed to this person a lot of land at Gloucester and a portion of a share of propriety, part of which share of propriety Samuel conveyed to his son Samuel, the blacksmith. This, in connection with [p 83] other like data, seems to identify this person with Francis and Mary Collins in a manner sufficiently conclusive as to such relationship.

John (the son of John) settled in Waterford township, near Glendale. His residence, a large brick house, not now remaining, stood upon the farm now owned by John Stafford. He had considerable real estate in that region, and deceased in 1768. His wife survived him, and his child Mary, who was then the wife of Samuel Hugg of Gloucester.²⁷

He gave his land to his daughter during life, and to her children (if any she left), in fee after her death; and, in default of such issue, the same was to pass absolutely to John and Job Collins, sons of his brother Francis.

The daughter Mary died without children "her surviving," and the land became the property of John and Job, who occupied it for several years; but, at this present time, none of it is held in the name or blood of the family.²⁸

In 1720, and but a short time before his death, Francis Collins executed his will (which remains on file in the proper office), expressing his desire in regard to the remainder of his property.²⁹ To his children, as they arrived at their majority, he conveyed portions of his land,—a circumstance which decreased the amount of property that passed by his will.

²⁶ Lib. H, 52. Lib. BB, 104.

²⁷ Lib. No. 13, 297.

²⁸ Gloucester County Records, 1805.

²⁹ Burlington County Files, 1720.

He was probably a man of wealth and active business capacity. Much known through the colony, he commanded the respect of all. He lived to see his descendants increase in a remarkable degree, and occupy much space in the land of his adoption. He took part in all the changes and troubles of the colony, from the beginning until the government was fixed upon a solid basis, and the people contented and prosperous.

He could not but notice its advancement in all material interests, beyond the expectations of the most hopeful, and, in his declining years, observe the many changes that had been wrought since he set his foot upon the soil. Where had been but a few Indian huts, towns and cities were coming into existence; and, where miles of forests once extended, the [p 84] plantations of the settlers now gave evidence of progress and prosperity. The doctrines of George Fox had spread abroad in the land, and the fruit thereof was a religious, moral, and law-abiding community.

In his visits to his son Joseph at Mountwell, where he first broke the virgin soil to test its productiveness, he could see how rapidly the country was filling up, and that already an embryo village had made its appearance, on the King's road near his place.

A site for Elizabeth Estaugh's meeting house had been selected. John Gill had fenced the land near the same, and a few mechanics had settled hard by, each extending his business as the folk increased in the neighborhood.

At Gloucester also, where his daughters then lived, a marked change was observable since his first passage up the river to Burlington; and Philadelphia was already a place of growing importance, the centre of trade for West New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Nearly two hundred years have passed away; generation after generation has followed since that time, each increasing in numbers, and each augmenting the breadth of cultivated acres, until the primeval forests have disappeared before a teeming population, and the aggressive spirit of the age.

The little companies who settled at Salem, Philadelphia, Burlington and Newton, formed but the centres from which have radiated those energies, that till the soil, fill the workshops and crowd the cities.

From these have gone out the multitudes that have made the waste places to bloom, and the generous land to yield its increase; that have changed our rivers into great highways of commerce, and forced the mountains to give up their treasure; that have founded a government, which has become the pride of its citizens and the admiration of the world.