PLEASANT MILLS
NEW JERSEY
LAKE NESCOCHAGUE
A PLACE OF OLDEN DAYS

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

By CHARLES F. GREEN

THIRD EDITION

TO ONE

who in social, professional and religious life

measures up to

THE FULL STATURE OF A MAN

DR. JOHN BROWN

this historical sketch is respectfully inscribed.

Also to the

Sons and Daughters of the Pilgrims and D. A. R.

FOREWORD

Time-honored village, relic of the days
Long noted in the annals of our land,
When far within the sombre woodland maze,
The Indian Chief arrayed his painted band,
And the old settlers with sturdy hand,
Carved out their homes from the primeval glooms;
What thoughts crowd on us, as to-day we stand
Above the spot made sacred by their tombs,
Which memory still with holy light illumes.

Upon the west bank of Atsion Creek in the Township of Mullica, County of Atlantic, and State of New Jersey, stands the time-honored village of Pleasant Mills.

A church, a mansion house dating from Colonial days, a paper mill and eight frame dwellings compose the place, which with its setting of woodland scenery forms an attractive picture.

Few, however, would guess that this quiet community which from year to year,

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife
Pursues the even tenor of its way,"

was once the central point of a region full of historic interest and abounding with romantic incidents which had their place in the great drama of our national life, incidents often ignored by history, but preserved thru the more reliable medium of "tradition's simple tongue."

Chapter One

The Leni Lenape

Of ancient days, tradition tells the story,
When all this region was a trackless wild,
When nature sat enthroned in rugged glory,
And summer suns on scenes primeval smiled;
Where dusky hunters through the deep woods roved,
Pursuing day by day the sport they loved.

The Lenape, a noble Indian nation,
Renowned for valor and for wisdom, too,
Once fixed within those woods a pleasant station,
To which at certain seasons they withdrew;
And gathering at eve around their fires,
Retold the legends of their warrior sires.

They bowed in worship to Great Manitou,
And thanked him for the blessings that he gave,
Practiced such simple virtues as they knew;
Few were their needs and little did they crave,
But hoped that when they reached this earth life's bound,
To waken in the Happy Hunting Ground.

Pity it is, that the historic page,
Tells us so little of those far off years
Which formed in truth the Red Man's golden age.
And even now a tinge of romance bears,
Whene'er we speak of that departed race,
Valiant in war and skillful in the chase.

But they are gone, and may no more be seen,
Stalking so stately in their feathered pride
Beneath the shadow of the forest green,
Or gazing o'er Atsion's rippling tide.
Nations and men make but a little stay,
They fill their destiny and pass away.

Nescochague

Ere the white man's foot had pressed the shores of the western world, all South Jersey from the Delaware to the sea was held by an Indian nation calling itself the Leni Lenape, "Original People." In general character they were superior to most of the aboriginal tribes. From some point beyond the Mississippi* they had migrated Eastward to the valleys of the Delaware and Schuylkill and there made their home.

Between the Delaware and the Atlantic, upon a stream now known as Jackson's Creek, stood their summer village, Nescochague, where they were accustomed to spend several weeks in each year and from which they made frequent trips to the seashore to procure supplies of fish and clams and for the more important purpose of making money, for the sewan, or wampum, which served the red men as a medium of exchange was wrought from "shells of the ocean."

This wampum was of two kinds, the black and more valuable being made from the inner shell of the quahaug or hard clam, while the white, constituting the native small change, was made from the stem of the periwinkle. The pieces were circular in form and uniform in weight and thickness, they were perforated and strung like beads on thongs of deerskin. Not only did the wampum serve the Indians as currency, but was also used frequently in lieu of coin by the early colonists and was commonly valued at its weight in silver. The vast heaps of broken shells found to-day on our beaches and along the water courses leading thereto are remains of the old time Indian mints.

In the early part of the Seventeenth Century, the Lenape were governed by a Sachem called Tenatos, a man of mature years and profound wisdom. In his youth he had won renown as a warrior, but now was a man of peace, with a spirit worthy of a christian. He called an assembly of all his people and persuaded them to abandon war and use their best efforts to promote amity among their neighbors. The views of the good Sachem, however, were not in accordance with those of his race and time and his benevolent plan was doomed to failure. The peace proposition was not favored by the surrounding tribes who regarded war as the only road to glory and the Lenape were denounced as women who dared not fight.

The Iroquois in particular were outspoken in their contempt. From abusive words they soon proceeded to injurious acts, invading the hunting grounds of the Lenape and ravaging their corn fields. Observing that forebearance only invited oppression, Tanatos reluctantly accepted the situation and bade his people arm themselves, that their traducers might know they were still men.

Soon afterward a hunting party of the Lenape encountered a band of marauding Iroquois near the Mineola (Mullica) river. A bloody and desperate fight ensued and was waged for hours with all the cunning and ferocity characteristic of Indian warfare. At nightfall but two of the Lenape remained alive, while the force of the Iroquois was reduced to a solitary warrior, who with a scornful glance at his foes gave a yell of defiance and plunged into the stream. The arrows of the Lenape whistled after him, but without effect. He escaped and bore to his nation the tidings that the Lenape women had become warriors as of yore. The lesson proved effectual and from that day the Iroquois raided Southward no more.

The Lenape occupied their old homes for many years after the coming of the first white settlers to whom they proved peaceful, friendly and altogether desirable neighbors. Between 1742 and 1745 most of them were converted to Christianity through the ministrations of a young missionary, David Brainerd, whose life and work will be noted more fully further on.

*Some authorities assert that they came from the North, but the best evidence obtainable favors their original home as being in the West.

Years rolled on and this once mighty people became fewer in number till only a small company remained. These, with thier chief, a faithful Christian who bore the name of Isaac Still, moved west to the banks of the Wabash, leaving the lodges of Nescochague tenantless and desolate. It is said of the Leni Lenape that their word was never broken and that in all their dealings with other people, white or red,

"Their faith was kept inviolate,
Their honor still unstained."

The last surviving member of the tribe in the state was a woman named Ann Roberts, and known as "Injun Ann," who died at an advanced age about thirty years ago. An interesting account of this woman is found in Frank R. Stockton's History of New Jersey. So passed the noblest of all the native tribes. Should some bard of Indian blood in future days essay to preserve in song the lives and loves of his people, he will find in their legends and traditions, material sufficient to form an epic of greater interest than the master works of ancient Greece and Rome.

Note: The Indian has been the theme of songs and tales without number, but the epic of his life has never been written and only an Indian can write it.

Chapter Two

Sweetwater

Hail fair Sweetwater noted long
As favored theme of tale and song
We love thee well;
Thou of romance the chosen home
May song and tale for years to come
Thy beauties tell.

Around thy shores from end to end,
The lakelet's crystal currents bend
With graceful sweep,
Or picturing the Summer sky
Thy waters like a mirror lie
Tranquil and deep.

Here once, with manly beauty graced,
The gallant Gordon often paced
Thy verdant sward;
Here wooed and won his peerless bride,
Dearer than all the world beside—
Kate Aylesford.

Pulaski, thunderbolt of war,
Whose fame was like a blazing star,
Of noble race;
With his undaunted company,
In all their martial panoply,
Paused here a space.

But all who knew thee in the past,
Old time, who hurries on so fast,
Has borne away;
But streams as clear and skies as blue,
Faces as fair and hearts as true
Are here to-day.

Settlement and Growth of Sweetwater

Students of history will recall the attempt made by the Stuart kings to subvert the Kirk of Scotland and plant the English Church in its place and that the attempt was sternly resisted by the brave Covenanters, whose fortitude was tested to the uttermost by an ordeal of persecution known as the "killing time," in which hundreds sealed their faith with their blood, while hundreds were driven to seek in other lands, that which they prized more than aught else, the blessings of religious liberty.

In 1685 two hundred of these exiles led by George Scott came to New Jersey, then under the proprietary government of the Friends or Quakers, who gave the wanderers a cordial welcome and assisted them in making new homes. Here they found surcease of persecution and a pleasant land to abide in, for New Jersey at that time was a sort of terrestrial paradise to judge from the following description by a writer of the period.

> Nature gave them the harbors of Scotland, the fertility of England and the climate of France, with the forests, the game, the fish, the fruits and freedom of America, beside the curious clear water which flowed in abundant brooks and runlets along the healthful vales of New Jersey.

In 1707 several families from the company that had come over with Scott twenty-two years before removed to South Jersey and formed a settlement near the Indian town of Nescochague. They brought with them the staunch faith that had kept them steadfast amid scenes of persecution and death and the first building erected by their hands was a chapel for public worship. Tradition tells us that it was completed between the sunrise and sunset of a Summer day. The walls were of unhewn logs, the floor of clay and it was covered, first, with a thatch of dried grass and afterward with a roof of clapboards. This primitive structure served the villagers as a meeting place for half a century.

Merrily through the woodlands sounded the woodsman's axe as it brought the tall trees crashing to earth. Here and there appeared the cabins of the pioneers, each in the midst of its little clearing, and in due time a village of respectable size stood upon the shore of Atsion Creek What name the place bore then or if it had a name, I have never learned, but here, as in a hundred similar settlements, was fostered a spirit of sturdy independence to be gloriously manifested in future years.

The settlers at first gained their livelihood by hunting, fishing and tillage of the soil. The furniture of their cabins was fashioned by their own hands from material which the forest supplied in abundance; such things as they could not produce for themselves; cloth, sugar, gunpowder, etc., were brought by boat from Philadelphia to the Jersey shore and thence carried by pack horses along the Indian trail to the settlement. Later when trading vessels from New York visited the Mullica river with cargoes of household stores to barter for peltries and hand-riven lumber, transportation became less costly and the conveniences of life more abundant.

Some time in the seventeen fifties an enterprising individual, named Jack Mullin, erected a saw mill at Nescochague and for a long time was kept busy preparing lumber for the frame cottages that replaced the log cabins of the pioneers, many of whom had passed away and were sleeping in the cemetery beside the rustic chapel. It is said that in Revolutionary days the saws were taken from Mullin's Mill and forged into broadswords for American cavalry.

Note: Four family names of the first white settlers were: Baxxter, MacGillam, Peck and Campbell. The writer's great grandmother, Elizabeth Beebe, nee Campbell, was a granddaughter of John or "Jack" Campbell, one of the pioneers.

In 1762 an English gentleman of fortune, purchased a tract of land on Jackson Creek and built a stately mansion which is still standing, an ideal country home, surrounded with spacious lawns and partly encircled by the waters of Nescochague pond. In colonial days the house was furnished in the massively elegant style of the period. It was long famed as the abode of culture and hospitality and had its walls the power of speech, they could tell many a pleasing tale of fair dames and courtly gentlemen in the romantic days of old. Here occurred many of the scenes made famous in the once popular novel "Kate Aylesford". Here the lovely heroine of the story was wooed by brave Major Gordon and here were exchanged the tender vows that had their happy culmination when the twain were made one in 1780. The estate was called Sweetwater, a name afterward given to the whole village.

The historic mansion is now the home of Mr. A. J. McKeone, a former superintendent of the paper mill here. Mr. McKeone is well known as a worthy and public spirited citizen. In social life his genial disposition and open handed generosity equal those of the first proprietor of Sweetwater.*

As years rolled on, Sweetwater grew and prospered. Changes were made from time to time and all in the line of progress. The old Indian trail no longer wound its sinuous way through the forest. In its place was a broad highway, which joined the Philadelphia stage road at a point near the present Hammonton lake.

The old chapel built by the first settlers had served its purpose well and was still regarded with affection, but more room was needed and in 1760, a larger building was erected and presented to the congregation by Captain Elijah Clark, an officer in the French and Indian war and a member of the Presbyterian communion. This edifice known as Clark's Meeting House was famous in its day, for within its walls was often heard with no uncertain sound the message of Eternal truth delivered by mighty champions of the cross. "There were giants in those days." The Meeting House was constructed of logs, with bark removed and neatly squared, the floor was of clapboards and the roof of hand-made shingles. A wainscoat of red cedar gave the interior a pleasing touch of color. The furnishings were plain in accord with the taste of the people.

At the beginning of the Revolutionary War Captain Clark was commissioned an officer in the American Army. After two years service in the field he resigned to take a seat in the Provincial Assembly.

Chapter Three

Sweetwater in '76

The thunders of war were heard in the land. After years of vain petitioning for their rights as British subjects the inhabitants of the thirteen provinces had flung their gage of battle to the Mistress of the seas and begun the long and arduous struggle that eventually was to give them a place among the nations of the earth.

The fires of patriotism burned bright and strong and nowhere were they more in evidence than at Sweetwater. It was only natural that those whose remote ancestors had fought with Wallace and Bruce, for Scottish independence, and whose nearer forbears had died for their faith, should love the very name of liberty. At the beginning of hostilities most of the young men of Sweetwater entered the army as volunteers and the rest held themselves in readiness for their country's call.

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*Among the frequent visitors to the old mansion are Dr. D. J. McCarthy, of international fame, as physician and author, and Wm. Hofstetter, a noted artist of Philadelphia, who has painted many exquisite bits of local scenery.

In 1777 a military post was established at the Forks of the Mullica. A battalion of infantry and a battery of field pieces with their crews and equipment composed the garrison which was commanded by a Major. For two years the people of Sweetwater knew of war only by tidings from afar, but in the spring of 1778 the reality was brought nearer home. The busy river port of Chestnut Neck was a favorite resort for the privateers which as auxiliaries of the navy prowled along the coast and inflicted not a little damage on the shipping of his royal Majesty George III.

The typical privateer of that time was schooner rigged, of light draught and built for swift sailing. Her armament usually consisted of from four to six light cannons and her crew were expert seamen trained in the use of small arms and afraid of nothing. Their ventures were usually successful and many a richly laden store ship intended for the royal garrison of New York was captured and taken to the Neck where their cargoes were transferred to barges and taken up the river to High Banks, whence they were distributed through the surrounding country.

The British Commander Sir Henry Clinton was an easy-going individual somewhat slow of action, but repeated losses finally aroused his ire and he dispatched an expedition down the Jersey coast to stop the pestilential activities of the rebels. Some months before, the neck had been fortified by a line of earth works along the bank facing the river. These were manned by four companies of militia, mostly farmers and baymen none of whom had ever faced an enemy in battle.

One fine day in October, 1778, a sloop of war convoying two transports with 800 British regulars on board and accompanied by a number of small craft called "gondolas" entered Little Egg Harbor, where the warship came to anchor while the transports and gondolas proceeded to Chestnut Neck and landed the troops. From their defenses the Americans looked out and realized that they were now due for their first experience in actual war and possibly their hearts beat a little quicker at the sight of that formidable array of scarlet and steel.

No time was lost by the Britons in preparing for their work; a few minutes after landing they had formed and were moving forward. The Americans delivered a scattering fire and a few red coats fell, but a moment later their line in a swift bayonet charge swept over the breastwork from end to end. Outnumbered and forced backward, the patriots still fought gamely, several had fallen, and their commander perceiving that continued resistance would result in the capture or slaughter of his entire force, ordered a retreat. The Americans retreated to the shelter of a nearby wood from which they fired a few parting shots at the enemy and then dispersed to seek their families who had left the place earlier in the day.

The British followed up their victory by plundering the village and setting it on fire. The vessels in the river were seized as prizes with the exception of one, which being fast aground was burned to the water's edge. The charred timbers of this craft were visible at low water until quite recently.

And so came the finale of Chestnut Neck, once an abode of happiness and rural thrift, now a scene of smouldering ruins to which might be applied the lines by Colonel Humphreys:

"But there the voice of mirth was heard no more,
A silent sadness through the place prevails,
The distant main alone is heard to roar
And hollow chimneys hum with sullen gales."

The punitive expedition thus far had been highly successful, but it was to be a clean sweep and more remained to be done; a detachment comprising nearly half the force was formed with orders to proceed against the post at the Forks, which was to be taken and dismantled. They were then to cross Atsion Creek and destroy the Iron works at Batsto which were filling an important munition contract for the American government. The detachment marched a few miles up the shore and encamped for the night in an abandoned clearing whence they were to march at dawn on the following morning.

A youth named Bake, who had taken part in the battle and retreated with his comrades, was led by a spirit of adventure to return at nightfall and do a bit of scouting around the British camp. He saw the detachment leave Chestnut Neck, and followed it until camp was made for the night. The object of the movement was quite clear to him and making a detour through the woods he hurried to the Forks and communicated his tidings to the officer in command there. The commander acted promptly. Selecting several trusty messengers he sent them out to seek for volunteers. The response was quick and satisfactory and shortly after midnight ninety men, farmers, woodsmen and iron workers, assembled at the post.

Of soldiering they knew little or nothing, but most of them were good marksmen and all were willing to fight. The commander of the post in a brief address made known the service required of them, which was, to find a favorable place on the shore road, place themselves in ambush, await the enemy's advance and check it if possible.

The needed preparations being made, the improvised soldiery accompanied by fifty regulars from the post moved blithely on their way. A march of two hours brought them so near the British camp that the hail of the sentries could be plainly heard and here they halted. The shore road at that time was bordered for miles on either side with a thick growth of shrubbery excellent for purposes of concealment and at the place where the patriots had stopped was a covert wide and dense enough to have hidden the legions of Caesar. Behind their leafy screen, with rifles ready, they grimly waited for the morning, then near at hand.

At daybreak a blare of bugles announced that the British were on the move and soon their leading files appeared dim and ghostly in the light of early dawn. On they moved with rhythmic tread never dreaming of danger till they were in the very jaws of the ambuscade. The silence was shattered by a sharp command, "Fire!" and then—in the words of one of the patriots, "we just cut loose and gave 'em hell." This demonstration by untrained woodsmen probably saved the Forks and Batsto iron works from destruction.

From the roadside thickets flashed points of flame followed by the spiteful rattle of seven score guns fired by men who rarely missed their mark. The effect was deadly and the surprise complete. The British fell back in confusion without an attempt to rally, their officers apparently not caring to take further chances against an unseen enemy whose number they did not know. And so the victors of the preceding day retired in haste while shouts of exultation arose from the †"Johnny Raws," who had struck so effectively. In the meantime Count Pulaski, on a hasty order from the Commander in Chief, was speeding towards the scene of action at the head of his famous "Legion."

A brief description of the Chief and his command may be in place here—

Casimer Pulaski, Polish noble and patriot, was outlawed and condemned to death for his activity against the Russian invaders of his country. Escaping from his foes, he came to America and cast in his lot with struggling colonists. He distinguished himself at the battle of Brandywine and was made a Brigadier General of Cavalry. In 1778 he was commissioned by Congress to raise an independent corps of cavalry and light infantry to be known as "The Legion." It was composed of picked men and seven nations were represented on its muster roll. Many of the members, like their Commander, had learned the martial tread overseas. Their valor and discipline made the Legion one of the most efficient bodies in the American service. The battle-flag of the Legion was presented by the Moravian Sisterhood of Bethlehem, Pa. It

†"Johnny Raw" was a name once given to an untrained soldier or sailor.