



The gravestones marking the final resting places of Dr. Isaac James (1777-1874) and his wife Henrietta (1781-1832), in the cemetery adjoining Radnor United Methodist Church.

The Autobiography of Rev. Isaac James, M.D.

Isaac James (1869)

Editor's note: This handwritten account, evidently composed in 1869, is in the archive of Old St. George's Church, Philadelphia. A note on the cover says it was donated in May 1871 to the Philadelphia Conference Historical Society, at whose request it was written. Isaac James (1777-1874) was a licensed local preacher and physician. He and his wife Henrietta (1781-1832) are buried in the cemetery adjoining Radnor United Methodist Church, which his family helped found in the 1700s. Newly rediscovered, the text was known to Radnor historians only by excerpts and references to Isaac's "little biography." It was transcribed by the editor, who has made minor rearrangements of the material to aid readability.

I was born in Radnor Township in what was then Chester County, since Delaware, in what was then called the "Mansion House" on the 28th of January 1777. My great-grandfather, David James, came over from Wales. He purchased a tract of land of 253 acres from David Meredith and Rees Price (see deed dated April 14th, 1718). He died 1738 or 39, leaving a will dated March 10th, 1738 and proved June 2nd, 1739.¹

This plantation was bequeathed of Evan James (who is said to have been born on the passage to America from Wales), who married Margaret Jones of Tredyffrin [Township], Chester County, Pennsylvania, on June 8th, 1739. He, Evan James, bequeathed to his son, Griffith James, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres and the "Mansion House," which house is located on the Old Lancaster Road, on the east side of the valley on the west hill of which the Methodist Episcopal Church of Radnor Township, Delaware County, now stands.

¹David James died June 27, 1739 at age 70; see Katherine Hewitt Cummins, *A Rare and Pleasing Thing: Radnor Demography and Development* (Philadelphia: Owlsick Press, 1977), 374, which also confirms the date of his will as March 10, 1738.

My father Griffith James married Mary, the daughter of Jessele or Jesse Gyger, by whom he had five children, three sons and two daughters. Mary, the eldest, died of consumption about the age of 22. Rachel married Jesse Burrows (one of the class leaders of St. George's Church, Philadelphia) by whom she had two children. Her eldest son, J. Wesley, died some years ago, leaving a widow and five children. Her daughter Mary Ann married Charles Humphreys; they had nine children and who at this date, 1869, still lives at Radnor.

David, my eldest brother, entered the itinerancy in 1799 and was ordained deacon by Francis Asbury June 3rd, 1801. He married Elizabeth Boehm (a niece of old "Father Boehm") by whom he had five children. He located and finally settled in Trenton where he died in [blank space]. His children still reside there.²

Moses died aged about 23.

I married Henrietta, daughter of Thomas and Anna Potts and granddaughter of Rebecca Grace, of Coventry, Chester County, March 26th, 1801. She was convicted under the preaching of Rev. Benjamin Abbott. I took charge of my father's farm, he beginning to feel the infirmities of old age.

ORIGINS OF RADNOR METHODISM

I well remember the first Methodists who came about Radnor. They were two local preachers by the names of Adam Cloud and Matthew Greentree. They preached on Sunday afternoons in "Harford" (Haverford) alternately at Hughes' and Effinger's. Effinger's became one of the regular preaching places for traveling preachers. My father went over to "Harford" one Sunday afternoon to preaching, and invited the above named local preachers to come over to our house to preach, which invitation was accepted. From that time it became one of the regular preaching places. I think this was about the year 1780.³

²Conference minutes show David James admitted on trial in 1799, ordained deacon in 1801, elder in 1804, and as having located (left the itinerancy) in 1806.

³This recollection is hard to square with Radnor historical accounts, which say the church was founded in 1780 by George Mair, assistant preacher on the Philadelphia Circuit that year. Adam Cloud first appears in the minutes in 1781 on the Roanoke (Virginia) Circuit; Greentree's name first appears in 1783 on the Caroline (Maryland) Circuit. The two men were appointed together in 1785 to the East Jersey Circuit, and were never on the circuit that included Radnor, which erected its first church in 1783. It is hard to doubt that James remembered hearing the two men preach as a child; however, it was not uncommon at the time for preachers to trade appointments with those on

Soon after they organized a society and appointed George Gyger leader. The class met at his house, he being lame from a blow he received on his head as he was running upstairs in pursuit of a cat. It injured his spine, so that he gradually lost the use of his lower limbs. He had a chair on wheels by which means he moved about and attended to business, he being a wheelwright by trade.⁴

Among the early members of his class were my sister Mary and his daughter Mary. They being young, I suppose about thirteen years of age, they asked the preacher "if children could be permitted to join class." He told them "Yes." According to a note now in possession of Daniel Gyger in the handwriting of this Mary Gyger, who afterwards became the wife of Jacob White, this event occurred February 27th, 1782.

A HORSE THIEF AT QUARTERLY CONFERENCE

Soon after my father's house became a preaching place, the first quarterly meeting ever held in that section was held in our house. People came from a great distance around the country to attend. The house was so full that accommodations for lodging had to be made on the floor or any available place. Among others was Mrs. Ann Potts of Coventry, who patted me and called me her little white-headed son; which after her death was fulfilled by marriage to her youngest daughter.

I now remember a circumstance that occurred during the time of this quarterly meeting, which for a long time I had entirely forgotten. It helps to illustrate those early times. The visitors, and confusion in consequence, caused things to be put out of the ordinary domestic routine. I, a little fellow, was allowed to go to sleep in the kitchen on Saturday

another circuit after six months. James may simply remember them out of date, as he was quite young. Other sources suggest that Cloud and Greentree preached in the area before entering the itinerant ranks; James refers to them (twice, see below) as "local preachers," which in 1869 clearly meant non-itinerants. This is asserted in Henry Ashmead's *History of Delaware County* (Philadelphia: L.H. Evarts & Co., 1884), 688, which says that the two preached in Radnor before it became a regular preaching place in 1780. The same claim is found in Francis Tees, et. al., *Pioneering in Penns Woods: Philadelphia Methodist Episcopal Annual Conference Through One Hundred Fifty Years* (Philadelphia: Conference Tract Society, 1937), 38-39, which says the two began preaching in the area "about 1778."

⁴George Gyger (c.1743-1803) was given several acres of land in eastern Radnor Township by his parents in 1769. He married Margaret Pechin in 1767 in Philadelphia's Old Swedes Church, and is listed among a company of soldiers during the Revolution under command of John Spears; Cummins, 357. Richard Allen visited George Gyger, whom he calls "a man of God," in 1785. See pages 103-105 for Allen's account.

evening; on being aroused preparatory to being properly put to bed, I went out of doors and, coming in, I asked why they put the horses in the lane. This called attention to the fact, and father was aroused to inquire into the cause. The horses in the stable, those of visitors and all, were put loose among the stalls, except a favorite young bay mare that was at the far end of the stable, where some bars had been put across the stall. She was found missing.

Being late in autumn, a slight fall of snow had occurred. Father was enabled to track the thief around the barn and along the fence and towards the dam, where he had taken some rails out of the fence and thus got into the road. Father took another horse and followed on up the road till he came to the "Unicorn," the second tavern above, where he noticed a light in the barn. He dismounted and went into the barn and inquired of the man, what he was doing there so late at night. He replied [that] a traveler had arrived and ordered a mess of oats to be given to his horse and he had to winnow some for it. He asked the man where the stranger was.

"Asleep in the bar-room."

"Show me the beast;" which he did.

Father immediately recognized the animal as his mare. He told the man it was his, and had been stolen from his barn during the evening. They went to the house and seized the sleeping thief, tied him and took him farther up the road to the justice of the peace to get a warrant, in order to commit him to prison. He took him home for the remainder of the night. I remember Mrs. Potts was very kind to him in the morning saying, "I always like to treat such persons kindly, for fear they may take revenge."

Father could not attend the quarterly meeting that Sunday, as he had to take the thief down to Chester. He valued his mare at only £60, so as not to make the sentence too severe, so he was only pilloried and publicly whipped. If he had valued him at more than £60, he would have been docked or branded.

RADNOR CHURCH IS BUILT

My grandfather Evan James offered the Methodist society a lot of ground on which to build a meeting house. They had their choice: either on the top of the hill on the Lancaster Road; or on the county line at what was called the junction of Gyger's lane. They selected the first



Radnor's original Methodist church, built in 1783, and replaced in 1833.

////////////////////////////////////

named location. The turnpike was not laid out at that time.⁵

It appears by a deed, now in possession of Daniel Gyger, that on the 20th of October 1783, Evan James and his wife Margaret appeared before Justice Thomas Lewis and sold for seven shillings a half acre of ground, on which to build a meeting house for Francis Asbury and his assistants, in which the doctrines of John Wesley as contained in his four volumes of sermons and *Notes on the New Testament* were to be preached and none other.⁶ The names of the trustees were Isaac Hughes,

⁵The turnpike is today's Route 30 (Lancaster Avenue in Radnor) built in 1794, the first toll road in the nation. The road James calls Lancaster is today's Conestoga Road, then the main route west from Philadelphia, along which, in 1778, members of the Continental Congress escaped to Lancaster as British troops seized Philadelphia.

⁶As indicated, Evan and Margaret conveyed a half acre to the congregation in 1783; additional land was acquired in 1825 and 1848, which together comprise the present grounds of the Radnor Church and cemetery. Evan James and his wife Margaret were both baptized at the Great Valley Baptist Church in 1733, and married June 8, 1739. Margaret John (whom the manuscript calls Jones) was the daughter of Griffith John of Treddyfrin Township, after whom Margaret and Evan named their son, the father of Isaac James. By 1783, Griffith James owned some 50 acres of property on the eastern edge of Radnor Township. His property was so badly "plundered" by British troops in 1777 that he paid reduced taxes for a year. Cummins, 374, 383.

Sr., Edward Hughes, Michael Cline, Griffith James, Abraham Hughes, John Smith, Mark Evans, Jesse Yeokam, William Jennings. Witnesses to the deed, John Jones and Aquila McVeigh.

Jacob Gyger, brother David and I helped to haul the water from the creek, by means of a barrel on a sled, with which to mix the mortar for the new meeting house. One day as Uncle Aquila McVeigh was at work hauling stone for the new meeting house, one of his acquaintances passed along and called to him, "What are you doing there, Aquila?"

He replied, "I am helping to build a meeting house for the Methodists."

"Well, there is no use of you doing that; for they will all soon be as cold as cucumbers. There will soon be no more Methodists."

SOME PERSONALITIES

Matthew Greentree, one of the first Methodist local preachers in that section, was a shoemaker by trade. He joined the conference and was sent south, where he married a widow lady with property.⁷

Adam Cloud was a weaver by trade; he also joined the conference and was sent into Jersey. By improper conduct he lost his connection with the conference, but afterward was restored.⁸

I remember a visit he paid to Radnor and preached during a woods meeting. The Baptist preacher took offense at such a man preach-

⁷Greentree was a native of Talbot County, Maryland, from which he "probably was the first that entered the itinerancy." Greentree is listed as a deacon in 1788, and as locating, or leaving the itinerant ranks, in 1790. "At one time he lived at Federalsburg, in Caroline County - at another time in Chestertown; and in 1809, it appears from Mr. Garrettson's life, p. 214, he was in Washington City, or Georgetown on the Potomac." J. Lednum, *A History of the Rise of Methodism in America* (Philadelphia, 1859), 381, 383-384.

⁸Adam Cloud was from a Delaware family that gave land near the Pennsylvania border for a log church, built about 1780, and known as Cloud's Chapel; this is today's Chester-Bethel United Methodist Church. Adam began traveling in 1781 and, according to Asbury's journal, was baptized in Virginia by Rev. Devereaux Jarrett in January 1782. Asbury also says on November 30, 1787: "I have heard of the conduct of Adam Cloud; he is gone from us at last." Though the minutes of 1788 list him as having desisted from traveling, both Lee and Lednum make it clear he was expelled. Despite James' assertion, Cloud was never restored to the itineracy, but Lednum says, "he afterwards joined the Episcopalians, and became a settled minister in one of the West India Islands." Adam's brother Robert also traveled for a time. See Lednum, 57-58, 323; Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists* (Baltimore: Magill & Clime, 1810), 137; and Elmer T. Clark, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*. 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), I:418, 554, 602.

ing and left the ground.

Hughes, who opened their house for the first Methodist preachers, not liking this section of the country, returned to Virginia.

Effingers became one of the established preaching places. One of their daughters married a traveling preacher and removed to Philadelphia, where soon after she died of consumption. My brother David was present at her death and said it was one of the most solemn scenes he ever witnessed. It seemed as if heaven was all around them. She was buried at the burying-ground at Radnor. As illustrative of those early times, her grave was dug by the father



Rev. Thomas Vasey

of Jonathan Wiley, one of the early members. The old gentleman did the work barefooted – not that he was so very poor, for he owned a house with some land and a nice piece of timber attached to it.

Thomas Vasey⁹ came over with Rev. Thomas Coke, Rev. Richard Whatcoat and others, who were sent to ordain Rev. Francis Asbury. He was appointed our presiding elder. One day while he was stopping at Uncle George Gyger's, mother took Mary, David, Rachel, myself and Moses, the baby, all up there and Mr. Vasey baptized us. This was in the year 1785.

⁹Rev. Thomas Vasey (c. 1736-1826) was ordained and sent to America in 1784 by John Wesley (with Thomas Coke and Richard Whatcoat) to explain Wesley's plan for American Methodism, and ordain American preachers. A participant in the Christmas Conference of 1784 that established the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vasey served as presiding elder in charge of the circuits of the Philadelphia area, 1785-1786. See Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and Susan E. Warwick, *Historical Dictionary of Methodism*. Second Edition (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 308-309.

RICHARD WHATCOAT

When I was quite a boy, twelve or thirteen years old, there was a meeting at our house. I think it was a quarterly meeting. Richard Whatcoat¹⁰ was present, and there was quite a revival. A bench was assigned for those who were seekers. I knelt among the rest. Rev. Whatcoat came to me and said, "Child, what do you want?" I told him "peace." He said, "Seek on and you will get it."

He came to me again and said, "Have you found it?"

I said, "No."

"Why, the Lord has blessed you!"

I thought that strange. He afterward said he has blessed you in giving you a sight of yourself.

On the following Thursday, at a prayer meeting, I found the peace I sought. I joined society in 1790. The society gave me license to exhort about the year 1798. I was ordained a local deacon by Francis Asbury, April 16th, 1806 and local elder by Bishop Morris, April 1st, 1849.

I remember one Sunday, Rev. Thomas Vasey was preaching in a very discouraging manner, as if the church had become very cold in religion. The elder, Richard Whatcoat, followed him in an exhortation. He commenced by saying, "Why, Brother Vasey, we have not all back-slidden yet." In a little while, he had the congregation shouting and rejoicing. His manner of speaking was slow and deliberate, but when warmed with his subject, he had a great deal of animation.

When I was seeking religion, my cousin Jacob Gyger was also serious. We talked about our feelings, but he concluded he could not seek religion publicly for if he got it, he was afraid the Methodists would call on him to pray in public. I told him I did not care about that. I would try and get religion, if here was any for me. My cousin did not get religion till the death of his eldest son George, who died of consumption in his sixteenth year and was instrumental in the conversion of his parents. Having joined the church so late in life, he had no gift for prayer or speaking. I have heard [him] ask a blessing at the table in an undertone.

¹⁰Rev. Richard Whatcoat (1773-1806) was ordained by John Wesley along with Thomas Vasey in 1784, and came to the United States with Vasey and Thomas Coke to ordain American preachers and establish the Methodist Episcopal Church. Whatcoat was elected a bishop in 1800, and traveled extensively with Bishop Asbury; see Yrigoyen, 329. Whatcoat was Presiding Elder in charge of the circuits of the Philadelphia area, which included Radnor, from 1788 to 1789, and again from 1790 to 1791.



Richard Whatcoat



Francis Asbury

FRANCIS ASBURY

Rev. Francis Asbury was a very frequent visitor at my house.¹¹ He always called my wife “daughter” from the long and intimate friendship existing between himself and her mother and grandmother.

He never for a moment seemed to forget his great commission. One day as he entered the house by one door, as they met and shook hands, he said, “Son, do you pray three times a day?”

I remember at one time having an appointment at Germantown. After I entered the pulpit, he came to the church in company with Brother Samuel Harvey. He would not enter the church till Brother Harvey had informed me of his unexpected arrival.

On the occasion of a visit, Brother Asbury put his horse in Gyger’s field to pasture, which was occupied by a cow; she, not being pleased with such company, ran her horn between the rib and thigh of the horse, being thus lamed by the cow. He brought it down to my house and wanted to know of me where he could get another beast. I told him

¹¹Francis Asbury (1745-1816), was sent to America by John Wesley in 1771, and became the pioneer bishop and shaper of early American Methodism. It has been estimated that he traveled some 270,000 miles on horseback or by carriage, preached about 16,500 sermons, and ordained more than 4,000 men.



"Black Harry" Hosier

where I thought he could get one that very much resembled his. He said he noticed it the day before, and liked its appearance very much, and would like me to get it for him, which I did. He told me he wanted me to keep the [first] horse for him till it got well, and then give it to "Black Harry" as he thought he could make a better living with the horse than with the wheelbarrow. I attended to it till it recovered and Harry came out to my house one day and got it.

The last time Bishop Asbury was at my house, he was on his way to Virginia. He was then [feeling] very poorly, and soon after died. When about to leave, he said to my

wife, "Daughter, bring in your children that they may have the old man's blessing before he dies." After prayer, he put his hand upon the head of each one and blessed them.

He took great interest in the colored race, especially the slaves of the South. Somewhere he met with an excellent colored man who had some ability as an exhorter and preacher. He took Black Harry with him sometimes on his rounds.¹² At one time, he was exhorting after Brother Asbury had done preaching. An old lady in the congregation, not watching their movements very closely, seemed to think somehow the preacher's voice had changed. On looking, she became exceedingly alarmed, for she was sure that Asbury had turned black from the effect of his preaching.

¹²Harry Hosier (c. 1750-1806) was present at the Christmas Conference of 1784 which created the Methodist Episcopal Church, and traveled with Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke and Freeborn Garrettson. Hosier was said to be one of the most spellbinding preachers of his age, often outshining Bishop Asbury, who said that he'd rather hear Harry preach than listen to himself. See Yrigoyen, 163.

Bishop Asbury and his Horse

Asbury's own account of the incident James describes is recorded in his journal for Sunday, June 3, 1804, where he writes:

On the Sabbath day I reached Radnor. Here my little Jane was horned by a cow, and lamed; she is done, perhaps, forever for me; but it may be all for the best. I am unwell, and the weather is bad, but, except my feelings for the poor beast, I am peaceful and resigned. I was able to write, but not to preach on the Sabbath day. On Monday morning I desired Isaac James to ride thirty miles, going and coming, and purchase for me another little Jane, at eighty dollars; he did so, with great good will. I came to Philadelphia, and found that Richard Allen had bought me a horse for ninety dollars; so I had two, one to sell for sixty dollars: so much for my haste.

Asbury later sent a letter to Isaac, now in the archive at St. George's, directing him to sell Jane to "Mr. Cooper." This doesn't square with James' recollection of giving the horse to Hosier. Asbury may have changed his instructions in a later communication, or perhaps he means the replacement horse, which he refers to above as "another little Jane." Clark III:297 includes this letter, but says the recipient is unknown; however on the back of the letter, the words, "Mr. James, Radnor, Pennsylvania," though obscured by a pasted-on piece of paper, can be read when held up to light. This text also includes a sentence in the original missed in the published version.

August 10, 1804

My Dear Brother:

May grace and peace (attend) you and the family. You will be pleased to deliver my mare Jane to Mr. Cooper. I have desired him to sell her at the price of fifty dollars. I am inclined to keep the mare I bought of Mr. Konagee. You have been attentive to my horse; you ought at least to have what is reasonable for the keep of her. This I have desired Mr. Cooper to settle with you. Had Jane been within my reach I might have taken her along, but I am just returned from a 1250 miles journey, to meet the New York and New England Conferences, and I am now on a 900 or 1000 miles route to Kentucky Conference; therefore what is not ready, I must go without. I cannot settle my own little matters unless I am just at the moment. I am with Christian salutations to you and all friends,

F. Asbury

I do not know how long Harry was employed by Brother Asbury. At one time something was forgotten; he sent him back for the article, having to pass a tavern. He could not resist the temptation of treating himself. Asbury was so much displeased with him for the offense, that he dismissed him from his service and the church. He went to Philadelphia to live and maintained himself by doing errands and using a wheelbarrow to transport his goods from one place to another.

He was afterward reclaimed and became a very acceptable preacher. He visited Radnor at one time and preached from the text, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God."¹³ His discourse gave great satisfaction.

SOME PERSONALITIES

Bishop Coke was never at my house but once. He was a small man with a clear distinct voice. I heard him preach at the Academy in Philadelphia. During the sermon he made this remark: "Some people's souls are so little that a thousand of them could dance on the point of a cambric needle."¹⁴

Valentine Cook was presiding elder, [and] he put up at Gyger's. One day he said he would go down to James' to see "if the Son of Peace" was there. He preached at Radnor meetinghouse. He began his sermon by saying, "I see a spirit." With this remark, the people looked up to the ceiling and all around the house, and manifested considerable curiosity about the spirit. After a while he said in a quiet tone, "It is a wandering spirit. Look only at me, not at the door or anywhere else, only at me." It was said of him that he set the country on fire through which he passed.¹⁵

Dr. William Penn Chandler came to my house at one time very sick, [and] prevailed on me to go with him around his circuit. His head being so bad, he preferred traveling at night to avoid the bright sun and

¹³Hebrews 4:9.

¹⁴Rev. Thomas Coke (1747-1814) was ordained priest in the Church of England in 1772, but associated with the Methodists and became a valued lieutenant of John Wesley. In 1784, Wesley sent Coke to the United States with Vasey and Whatcoat to guide the organization of the American Church. At the Christmas Conference, Coke and Francis Asbury became the first two bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

¹⁵Rev. Valentine Cook (1765-1820) was a native of Virginia and a student at the short-lived Cokesbury College. He became famous on the frontier for his public debates with Calvinists, and was said to have introduced the use of the mourners' bench at revivals. He was presiding elder in the Philadelphia area, 1794-1795. See Matthew Simpson, *Cyclopaedia of Methodism*, 5th Edition (Philadelphia: Louis H. Evarts, 1882), 253.

heat of the day. Near Strasburg, we came to an acquaintance of his. The family not having yet risen, he concluded not to disturb them. He found a cullender about the pump. We procured some water and proceeded to the barn. He directed me to go to the hay mow while he was to stand below while I poured the water over his head. "Now," said he, "you must not stop pouring no matter how loud I hallow." I did as he directed me, and he assured me he felt much better for his shower bath.¹⁶

At Strasburg he was unable to travel farther, so Henry Boehm went with me to the preaching places. One appointment was at a farmhouse. Brother Boehm wanted me to open the meeting for he felt as though he could not. In the meantime, a southern preacher came in and Brother Boehm prevailed on him to preach. The people were not satisfied and said we must stay and preach for them the next night. We had a gracious meeting.

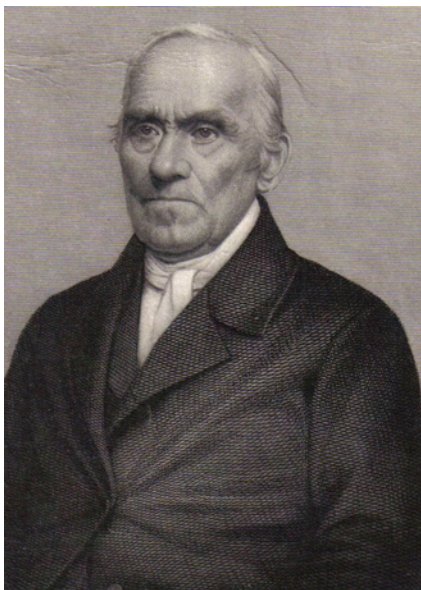
I remember a man at this meeting that was hard of hearing. He had a speaking trumpet which he would put to his ear, and take it away and smile, and hold it up again with great apparent satisfaction.

I was at a meeting at [blank space]. Henry Boehm was there, then quite a young man. He was in the gallery, I think. Among those who went forward to seek for pardon was a favorite niece of his, which had so powerful an effect upon [him] that he went and knelt by her side and sought till he found peace. He said afterwards that if one so good as she felt she was a sinner, he knew he was a much greater one.¹⁷

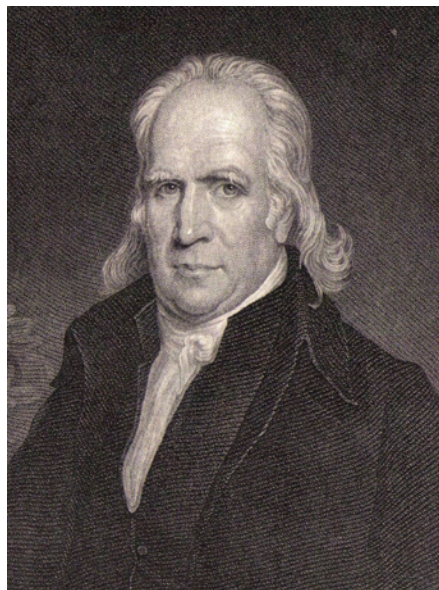
Rev. Robert Roberts came very unexpectedly to my house one Sunday. Though it was my appointment at the meetinghouse in the evening, I insisted on him preaching in my place. After meeting, a young man from Lower Merion asked me if I would marry him. I told him, as

¹⁶Rev. William Penn Chandler (1764-1822) originally studied dentistry under Philadelphia's celebrated Dr. Benjamin Rush. Persuaded by Rev. Thomas Ware to enter the ministry, Chandler joined the Philadelphia Conference in 1797, and became a leading preacher. Henry Boehm says that Chandler introduced the altar call to Methodism, and he may have invented the evangelistic technique. See Kirk Mariner, "William Penn Chandler and Revivalism in the East," in *Methodist History* 25 (April, 1987), 135-146.

¹⁷Rev. Henry Boehm (1775-1875) was the son of Martin and Eve Boehm, whose Lancaster County home hosted many early preachers. Boehm's Chapel, built on their land in 1791, is a United Methodist Heritage Landmark. While Martin became a founder of the United Brethren Church, Henry joined the Methodists and traveled with Bishop Asbury for five years. In 1813, he was appointed presiding elder of the Schuylkill District, which included Radnor. In 1865, Henry published his *Reminiscences*, which is filled with valuable descriptions of preachers, churches and historic events in early Methodism.



Henry Boehm



Robert R. Roberts

Brother Roberts was staying with me, I would get him to perform the ceremony, and he consented. I hastened on before the company to open and light the house. When we arrived at home Brother Roberts objected, but I finally prevailed upon him.

I asked him afterwards why he objected. He said that as he came down the hill in front of the parties, he overheard one say to the other, "Why, I did not think of getting married tonight. Did you?"

"Why, no! No such thought entered my head when I left home."

He concluded there must be something wrong about such a marriage. The way it happened, they were to have been married on the following Thursday evening. The parties who were to have stood up with them (the bridesmaids, groomsmen and all) being with them, dared them to be married on that evening, and they concluded they would.¹⁸

¹⁸Bishop Robert R. Roberts (1778-1843) joined the Baltimore Conference in 1802, and in 1815 was appointed presiding elder of the Schuylkill District, which included the Philadelphia area. After Asbury's death in 1816, Roberts presided over the Philadelphia Conference, and at the General Conference that year was elected bishop, the first married man to fill that office in America. Simpson, 760-761.

REBECCA GRACE

Mrs. Rebecca Grace of Coventry, Chester County, was among the earliest Methodists. She was the daughter of Anna Rutter and Samuel Savage. Mrs. Savage, being left a widow, married a gentleman by the name of Samuel Nutt. The stepfather admired his beautiful and accomplished stepdaughter Rebecca so much, that he did not think any of the young gentlemen of their acquaintance in this country suitable for a husband for her. So he sent to England for his nephew, Sir Samuel Nutt.

The marriage was celebrated with a great deal of ceremony. The shoes and parts of the wedding dress are still in possession of the writer, being handed down as heirlooms. The coat of arms which bears the motto, "*Sola Boa qua intus Bona*," viz, "the only good is that which is the good within," is now (1869) in possession of Miss Anna Grace Potts of Reading, Pennsylvania. Anna Nutt was the only child by this marriage. Both the Mrs. Nutts, mother and daughter, were left widows, and during their widowhood, built the far-famed Warwick Furnace.

Mrs. Rebecca Nutt, after remaining a widow a short time, married Robert Grace, who was an intimate friend of Benjamin Franklin; it was in his house in Market Street near 2nd Street, Philadelphia, where the meetings of the "junto" were held. Benjamin Franklin afterward rented this house of Robert Grace and long occupied it as a dwelling and printing office. He also in connection with Franklin and others founded the Philadelphia Library Company. He gave many valuable books to the company. His house was the resort of the men of note of his times. He died in 1766.¹⁹

It is a tradition in the family that Mrs. Grace was converted by the preaching of George Whitefield. In one of his visits to Chester County, he had given notice that he would preach at Warwick Furnace, and when the workmen heard of it, they threatened to kill him if he

¹⁹Franklin founded the "junto" in 1727 as a self-improvement club, consisting of a group of rising young men who met weekly to debate ideas and spur one another on to personal and professional growth. Robert Grace (1709-1766), a Philadelphia native, was remembered by Franklin as "a young gentleman, of some fortune, generous, lively, and witty, a lover of punning and of his friends." Franklin's landlord for 37 years, Grace once loaned Franklin money when he was pressed by creditors, and was the manufacturer of the famous "Franklin Stove." It was in Grace's house that the junto collected volumes for a library that became the Library Company of Philadelphia. See J. A. Leo LeMay and P. M. Zall, eds., *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticisms* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 48, 52-53, 57, 97, 184.

attempted it. Mrs. Grace, although having no particular interest in the subject, said no preacher should be molested on her estate, and she accompanied him on horseback to prevent the premeditated attack. The dignified presence of this lady, and the profound respect in which she was held, frustrated the outbreak.

Being thus providentially brought under the influence of this eloquent minister of the gospel, the Word of God pierced her heart and she became a zealous and ardent Methodist. She adopted Mr. Wesley's views on reading his sermon on "Falling from Grace." Her house was always a welcome home for the itinerant from 1774 till her death. Bishop Asbury cherished her as among his dearest friends, and in his journal laments sadly her death, and longs to be like her in spirit and anticipates a joyous reunion in heaven.²⁰

Mrs. Grace liberated all her slaves. The writer has a copy of a manumission paper, No. 5, in which "Rose," a mulatto woman, is set free; Simon Meredith and Benjamin Jacobs witnesses. Even after their freedom, they always looked upon her as their best friend.²¹

She devoted the latter part of her life to the care of her grandchildren or to such as needed her attention. She died in 1800 in her eighty-second year, and is buried in the family ground [in] Coventry. She bequeathed a lot of ground on which to build a meeting house. It is said Mr. Asbury furnished the plan. It was called Grace Chapel in honor of her. Mr. Jonah Stephens wrote to me February 19th, 1816, desiring me to cooperate with Rev. Thomas Haskins in procuring a deed for said Grace Chapel. The following are the names of the trustees: Griffith Griffiths, John Martin, Sarah Rutter, Grace Ann Rutter, and J. Stephens.

Mrs. Grace's only daughter Anna Nutt married Mr. Thomas Potts of Pottsgrove, now Pottstown. *The Life of Benjamin Abbot* page 112

²⁰Rebecca Grace (1718-1800), lay founder of today's Coventryville United Methodist Church, inherited from her first husband the iron forge nearby, which supplied the Continental Army during the Revolution. Rebecca entertained Washington and his officers during the Valley Forge encampment, and Ben Franklin reportedly proposed to her, but was rejected because of his religious views. See *Coventryville United Methodist Church, 1774-1999* (1999); and *Annals of Eastern Pennsylvania* #2 (2005), 81.

²¹After the state of Pennsylvania passed its Act of Emancipation in 1780, which provided for the gradual elimination of slavery throughout the Commonwealth, all slave-owners were required to register their slaves. In the *Chester County Slave Register*, under date of November 1, 1780, page 2, Rebecca Grace of Coventry Township is recorded as owning three slaves. Rose is listed with the notation "aged fifty years a slave for life." Similar notations were made for Nelly, age twenty, and Phillis, age fourteen.

says, "Her daughter was under conviction. Next morning in family prayer, we had a precious time. The Lord opened the windows of heaven, and the Spirit of God came as in the day of Pentecost; her daughter found peace, and one of the granddaughters was under soul distress, while the old lady was on the wing for glory." [pencil note: "was this in 1780"]

I have in my possession a Methodist Prayer Book, the title page of which reads *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America, with Other Occasional Services, London: printed in the year 1784*; on the flyleaf of which reads, "Anna Potts, her book. Mar. 5th, 1787."²²

Thomas Potts discovered the coal of the Pottsville region in 1782, and in connection with his brother and some others, bought a large tract of land where Pottsville now stands. But their efforts to bring the coal into use were frustrated by his death.

It may be of interest to know something of the grandchildren of this "Mother in Israel." There were eight of them.

First, Rebecca, who married Robert May, Esquire.

Second, Elizabeth or Betty, who joined the Society of Friends and married Benjamin Jacobs.

Third, Ruth, who after the death of her sister Rebecca, married her brother-in-law, R. May.

Fourth, Martha, who married Thomas Haskins.²³ He was from Caroline County, Maryland. When studying law with his cousin Governor Bassett, he became a convert to Methodism, having gone to a meeting with other gay young men to scoff, but remained to pray. He was very active in the formation of the Union Methodist Episcopal Church, in the yard of which he was interred, but recently his remains were removed to Batsto, New Jersey.

²²This was John Wesley's revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England, which he sent to American Methodists as they organized their new church. It contained a scaled-back Psalter, "Occasional Services" and 24 Articles of Religion, pared down from 39, to which the Americans added a 25th, and made the basis of their doctrinal statement in the *Book of Discipline*. American Methodists soon set aside Father John's liturgical advice, substituting 37 pages of "ritual" in the 1792 *Discipline* for Wesley's 314-page *Sunday Service*.

²³Thomas Haskins (1760-1816) was an itinerant Methodist preacher for several years before he located (left the itineracy) in 1786 and settled in Philadelphia, where he later helped found the first retirement fund for preachers in Methodist Episcopal Church. See also Tees, *Pioneering in Penns Woods*, 186-189. Haskins' manuscript journal, a copy of which is in the archive at Old St. George's, offers a fascinating glimpse into itinerant life in the 1780s.

Fifth, Julianna, who embraced religion at Ennals Spring and died of consumption, aged 21.

Sixth, Samuel, who married Mary Welsh.

Seventh, Henrietta, whom I married March 26th, 1801.

CHESTER AND STRASBURG CIRCUIT

I was appointed treasurer of Chester and Strasburg Circuits in 1802. The following are the names of the classes as reported August 7th: Mattson's Class, \$5.24; Cloud's, \$7; Hart's, \$2.49; Nelson's, \$2; Bethel Church, \$4.97; Kagey's, \$4; New Holland, \$6.50; Swartzwelder's, \$3.14; Manor, \$6.53; Strasburg, \$4.52; Coventry, \$8.17; Buckwalter's, \$6; Forrest Church, \$8.17; Souder's \$6.26; Ballon's, \$4.61; Yarde's, \$2.44; Vandike's, \$3; Valley Church, \$1.98. Chester, \$4.28; Miller's, \$5.50; Radnor Church, \$12.90; Anderson's \$2.

CAMP MEETING

Camp meeting was held in the woods on the hill in front of the church. I think it was in 1804, if I remember rightly. Rev. William Colbert was presiding elder. He was middling-sized man, rather slender with dark hair and eyes, with a very clear and musical voice. Often when he commenced to preach, he would say to some brother the farthest off from him, "Did you hear that?" If the person nodded assent, he would not allow his voice to descend below that key. He preached one evening during this camp meeting; as my wife sat on the piazza with one of the children, she heard nearly all of the discourse, although he stood with his back towards the valley. The wind was in that direction.

Camp meeting was held in my woods on the opposite side of the valley from the church, along what is now called the New Road, in 1808. Rev. William Penn Chandler was presiding elder. In this camp meeting, there came a party of young men of some respectability from the lower part of the circuit. They concluded they would have some fun at this Methodist camp. The presiding elder and some others remonstrated with them and ordered them off the ground. They questioned their authority and said no one had a right except the owner of the ground. So they sent over home for me. When I told them I was the owner and one of the managers, and that they must leave, they quietly left. The next time I went to Chester, some of these young men were very shy of me.

Isaac's son, Dr. David James, (1805-1873) followed in his father's footsteps as a doctor and a local preacher. An 1828 graduate of Jefferson Medical College, David became a noted Philadelphia physician. Two of his children, Bushrod and John, also became doctors. See Egbert Cleave, *Biographical Cyclopaedia of Homoeopathic Physicians and Surgeons*. (Philadelphia: Galaxy Publishing Co., 1873), 136-137; and *The Christian Advocate*, (New York), July 26, 1873.



TAKING UP MEDICINE

I moved from Radnor in the spring of 1816 to Bloonsburg (now South Trenton), New Jersey. I joined society on Trenton Circuit. A class met at our house, and it was a preaching place for many years. During the winter of 1822 and 1823, I attended medical lectures at the University in Philadelphia, and graduated the spring of 1825 at New York, Dr. Hosick, Dean. The spring of 1826, I removed to Philadelphia. I connected myself with St. George's Church. The principal places were connected in one circuit. I had my regular appointment on the Local Preachers' plan. I practiced medicine in Philadelphia till after my son David graduated, when I left the practice in the city to him, and removed part of my family back to Radnor, where I continued to practice medicine.

My wife Henrietta died there, April 18th, 1832. My daughter Henrietta in her sixteenth year died on the previous February.

The old Radnor Meeting House, being wholly inadequate to protection from inclement seasons, the trustees resolved to rebuild their place of worship. Accordingly, subscriptions were started. My paper was dated February 21st, 1833. Mr. Esra was the contractor. I do not remember the exact time when it was finished.

In the spring of 1834, I removed to Feasterville, Bucks County. There being no Methodist Society at Smithfield or Somerton, I obtained permission to preach in the school house, and formed a class. My son, Dr. D. James, my daughter Anna, Anna Rhodes, Abby Knox, Phoebe Vanastradlen, Betty Dyer, William Davey and one or two others constituted the first class.²⁴

William Colbert's Account of A Camp Meeting in Radnor, 1805

Rev. William Colbert (1764-1833) began his ministry in 1790, and served in the Philadelphia and Baltimore Conferences, including several stints as a presiding elder. The camp meeting described below is probably the one James recalls on page 55 as occurring "about 1804." Colbert was not the presiding elder in 1805, but preacher in charge of the Philadelphia Circuit, which included Radnor. He had served as PE of all the circuits in the Philadelphia area the previous year. A typescript copy of Colbert's manuscript journal is part of the collection at old St. George's. The following account is found in volume 5, pages 110-111.

Tuesday, Sept. 17, 1805: I walked a great part of the way from Philadelphia to John Guyger's in Radnor after a shower of rain. I found it very warm.

Wednesday, Sept. 18: I spent [time] at Radnor viewing the ground for the Camp Meeting. Lodged at John Guyger's.

Thursday, Sept. 19: The camp meeting began at Radnor, open[ed] by Solomon Sharp, the presiding elder. He preached a sermon applicable to the time from Joshua 3:5. He spoke an hour and 38 minutes; Joseph Stephens exhorted after him – he spoke 22 minutes, and Solomon Sharp concluded the meeting for the forenoon. At 3 o'clock Asa Smith preached 38 minutes from Daniel 2:34-35. James Moore spoke after him with life for about 25 minutes. At night the trees were illuminated, and I preached

²⁴This is the origin of today's Somerton United Methodist Church. Isaac James chaired the committee that purchased land and erected a chapel, which was dedicated in the fall of 1836. This was expanded in 1848 into a structure that still stands on the property. An education building was erected in 1939 and a new sanctuary in 1959. See "Celebrating 150 Years of Ministry" in *Somerton United Methodist Church Directory* (1983).

from 2 Timothy 4:2. Asa Smith and Solomon Sharp exhorted after me. The prospect of great good being done was glorious.²⁵

Friday, Sept. 20: Morning prayer at 8 o'clock at the sound of the trumpets. It was opened by John Woolsen who gave an exhortation the length of 10 minutes – James Moore, Harry Hosure (an African) and William Hunter prayed after him. Solomon Sharp concluded the meeting, and Joseph Stephen preached at 10 o'clock from Isaiah 60:1. He spoke 40 minutes, and was succeeded by William Fisher and Asa Smith. Fisher spoke for 13 minutes, and



Rev. Solomon Sharp

Smith, 32. Solomon Sharp concluded the meeting. At 3 o'clock Matthew Greentree preached an animating discourse from John 14:11; he spoke an hour and 8 minutes. James Moore spoke 20 minutes after him. The displays of the divine power was [sic] glorious. At night the camp was illuminated, and Solomon Sharp preached an hour and 12 minutes from John 1:29. As Smith spoke 10 minutes after him, I was called on to conclude the meeting, but felt an impression to speak, and invite any that might be mourning to come forward, and I suppose more than a dozen came up, and the display of the Divine power was glorious. I left the ground between 9 & 10 o'clock. Some were crying "Mercy!" and some shouting and praising God.

²⁵Rev. Solomon Sharp (1771-1836) was a colorful and legendary figure among Methodists of the region. "He was fully six feet high, with a massive head, broad shoulders and large hands and feet, and white hair, at least a foot long, hanging far below his shoulders... he was said to be the best everyday preacher of that time. He was no scholar, and no man ever better deserved the title of DD, for which he had a perfect contempt, saying it stood for the Devil and Damnation. He came as near to being a prophet as any man of modern times." Pennell Coombe, *A Fifty Years' Review of the Philadelphia Conference* (Philadelphia: 1883), 18. On the Eastern Shore there was a saying that "if Dr. Chandler were placed on one end of a stand at a camp meeting and Solomon Sharp at the other, they could preach the devil out of hell." Mariner, 140.



A camp meeting image from the early 19th century

Saturday Sept. 21: Isaac Anderson exhorted at the prayer meeting at 8 o'clock. William Hunter preached from 1 John 1:8-9. He spoke an hour and 3 minutes, and Richard Sneath spoke after him 25 minutes.

Sunday, Sept. 22. The trumpets blew for prayer and exhortation. Richard Sneath preached in the forenoon from Philippians 3:3. William Hunter and Solomon Sharp spoke after him, then Michael Coate preached to a very large and attentive congregation one hour and ten minutes from Revelation 20:12. Solomon Sharp spoke after [for] 20 minutes, and Asa Smith 15 minutes. In the afternoon, James Smith preached 15 minutes from Zachariah 14:6-8. Solomon Sharp then gave them a farewell address, prayed, shook hands and concluded the meeting, which I trust will be remembered in the morning of the resurrection by many.

Monday, Sept. 23: I spent at Radnor in company with Richard Sneath, William Hunter, James Smith, and William Ross, at John Guyger's and Isaac James'. We had some critical conversation on certain [matters] of divinity and it was edifying; it was not very animating.

Tuesday, Sept. 24: With reluctance, I set my face toward Philadelphia. I walked in part and rode part of the way, and preached at night at St. George's...