

THOMAS LIVEZEY

1723 – 1790

FROM THE LIVEZEY FAMILY HISTORY

4-11 THOMAS LIVEZEY, fifth child of Thomas Livezey (3-2) and Elizabeth Heath, was born in Lower Dublin township 1 mo. 25, 1723-4; died at Glen Fern in Roxboro township 9 mo. 11, 1790; and was buried at Germantown Meeting. He married at Abington Meeting 4 mo. 2, 1748 Martha Knowles, b. 4 mo. 24, 1723, d. 10 mo. 29, 1797, bur. Gtn. Meeting, daughter of John and Ann (Paul) Knowles of Oxford township.²

Thomas Livezey's career began as a miller's apprentice in Cheltenham township, where he was resident on October 10, 1747, when he purchased for £416 the property on the Wissahickon Creek, Roxboro township which was to be his future home. This property was bought from Thomas Shoemaker, also a miller of Cheltenham township, who had acquired it on Feb. 5, 1745-6 and had erected "a water grist mill with two pair of stones."

The premises included the mill building and the house and two parcels of land: one containing 3 acres across the creek, to protect that end of the dam; and the other a long narrow strip of 20 acres on the east side, beginning a few rods above the house and extending for more than 60 rods down stream.³

This land had had many owners since it was first patented in 1685 by James Claypoole, one of Penn's resident land commissioners. It was then a part of 500 acres extending from the line of Germantown township across Roxboro to the Schuylkill River. Claypoole's executor sold it to Hugh Roberts of Merion in 1696, and his heirs sold 400 acres, including this tract, to George Evan in 1706.

²Susannah Hinkson was a daughter of Abel and Elizabeth Hinkson of Bensalem township and a sister of Rebecca (Hinkson) Livezey, wife of David Livezey (3-6).

³John Knowles was born at West Challow, Berkshire, England 9 mo. 23, 1682, the son of John and Elizabeth (Newman) Knowles. He emigrated to Pennsylvania with his widowed mother in 1695 and married Ann Paul, sister of John Paul whose wife was Mary Livezey (3-1). John Knowles was a carpenter and lived in Philadelphia until about 1720 and then moved to Oxford township. Martha had a brother John and four sisters: Ann, wife of Nathan Garrett of Darby; Margaret, wife of Robert Jones of Merion (see 5-30); Sarah Buckingham; and Hannah Lewis.

⁴Much of the material in this account of Thomas Livezey and his Wissahickon mill is obtained from the collection of family documents belonging to Thomas T. Firth (8-163), and made available to the Editor by its owner.

Evan sold 82 acres of his land, including these 23, to John Cunrads on July 7, 1709 and Cunrads sold to Johannes Gumree, a tailor, 10 years later. Available records do not show to what use the land was put during this period, but sites where water power could be developed were in demand, even in that early day, and it is not improbable that some sort of mill, run by the waters of the Wissahickon, was in operation during these years on the site where Thomas Shoemaker later built his grist-mill. In this connection, it is interesting to note that a stone dated 1717 stands in the north wall of the ruined Livezey mill. Until about 1905 this stone was a part of the east abutment of the red bridge which spanned the creek just below the mill. Since this bridge was not built until 1839, it is possible that the dated stone comes from a demolished building of much earlier date.

In 1733 Gumree sold 44½ acres of his holdings to Henry Sellen, who then operated the oil-mill on Cresheim Creek which was afterwards known as the Peter Bechtel mill. There is a tradition among the descendants of Thomas Livezey that his mill had been used to extract linseed oil from flax-seed before it became a grist-mill. Perhaps Henry Sellen had a branch of his linseed oil factory here.

From 1739 to 1746 John Hammer, a "maltster," was in possession. On the east side of the creek, some distance below the mill, is a large cup-like depression in the ground. Excavations at the rear of this depression some years ago brought to light rectangular chambers cut into the solid rock of the hillside. Such chambers provide ideal conditions for the storage and aging of beer, and were so used by the Colonial brewers of Philadelphia, whenever circumstances permitted. Hammer may have had a small brewery on this spot. It is Livezey tradition that Thomas used this depression as a bear pit, to catch the occasional bear which wandered into the valley.

Twenty days after obtaining title to the mill, Thomas sold a quarter interest to each of three friends: his cousin Jonathan Paul, who owned the mill at Bell's Mill Road; Jacob Leech, a miller of Cheltenham;¹ and Walter Moore, a miller of Moreland. Moore's interest was bought back July 29, 1757; Leech's quarter Jan. 14, 1758; and Paul's share was traded for an equal interest in the Paul mill Oct. 3, 1780.

During his ownership, Thomas Shoemaker had caused the Court to confirm the lines of a public road from Roxboro to Germantown through the property. This road zig-zagged down the steep slope on the west side of the creek, crossed the Wissahickon by a ford, ran diagonally up the hill on the east side to the line of Germantown

¹Sixth child of Tobv and Esther (Ashmead) Leech. He was a captain of the Philadelphia regiment, Provincial troops, recruited for the French and Indian War.

township and out to Cresheim Road along Allen's Lane. It is evident, however, that some of the landowners were unwilling to dedicate land for this purpose, and Thomas Livezey was forced to pay the Rittenhouse and other estates for a right-of-way through their property. Allen's Lane was called Livezey's Mill Road for generations. It is worthy of note that the original road made a bend just before it joined Cresheim Road in order to avoid the saddle shop of John Johnson.¹

Thomas soon began to buy up small tracts of land in the Wissahickon valley near his property. The first lot was in Germantown township on both sides of Cresheim Creek immediately below Sellen's mill and contained 20 acres. It was bought in 1749. Three years later he bought the tract along the east bank of the creek from his line to the mouth of Cresheim Creek. Other purchases were made from time to time, including the Fairview property on Allen's Lane at the top of the hill. This was acquired in 1770. His assessments in the years for which records have been kept were:²

1769	106 acres, 3 horses, 2 cows.
1774	85 acres, 4 horses, 1 cow, 1 servant.
1783	110 acres, 2 horses, 2 cows.

In addition to his properties in this vicinity, Thomas inherited his father's plantation of 282 acres in Lower Dublin township. No record of his system of management of this farm has been found, but since he cultivated such portions of his Roxboro estate as were arable, there is little doubt that he had a tenant on the Lower Dublin place. Possibly his tenant was his cousin Nathan Livezey (4-21), to whom he sold the tract in 1783. His investments in other milling properties were limited to a quarter interest in the Jonathan Paul mill, acquired from the heirs of Jacob Leech in 1758 and the half interest in Spring mill, bought from Joseph Paul in 1770. In connection with the latter purchase, he and his brother-in-law in partnership bought additional acreage in the vicinity of Spring Mill from time to time, and in 1776 Thomas bought individually another tract of 158 acres in White-marsh township.³

During the period in which Thomas was acquiring nearby properties, he leased 5 acres of his original purchase under circumstances that were worthy of mention. Shortly after 1760 a rumor spread about the community that gold underlay the portion of "Livezey's Woods" which lay on the east bank of the creek some distance below

¹Father of John Johnson Jr., husband of Rachel Livezey (5-41).

²Archives, Third, Vols. XIV & XVI. These lists are evidently incomplete. He is known to have owned a larger acreage in Roxboro and Germantown.

³Deed book D 8, p. 60.

the mill, and lights were frequently seen at night near the large rock which overlooks the gorge at that point. Finally a company of six residents of Germantown was formed to exploit this supposed vein of ore, and on Jan. 2, 1764 Thomas granted this company a 99-year lease on 5 acres of ground "with all the mines and minerals thereon, and the free right, liberty and privilege to dig and search for mines, minerals and ores." After working for several months, the mine was abandoned and all trace of it was lost until about 1845, when the entrance to the old shaft was rediscovered. It may still be seen at the foot of a buttonball tree not far from the rock sometimes known as "Lovers Leap."

It may be assumed, from the size and frequency of Thomas' investments in real estate, that his milling business was profitable from the beginning. Nothing is known of the capacity of the mill in 1747 except that it contained two pairs of stones, but a pen and ink draught of the property made in 1760 contains a drawing of the mill building which gives a general idea of its dimensions. It was then a tall narrow building located on the site of the present ruin, apparently three stories in height and only wide enough on the creek side to accommodate two windows on each floor. It was covered with a single-pitch roof, sloped toward the creek. The dam, at that time, was a short distance up-stream from its present location, with the ford across the creek immediately below it.

Additions were made to the building from time to time until it is said to have been one of the largest in the Colony. The present ruin was four stories high and filled the entire space between the hill and the stream, the rear wall being sunk into the hill-side so that only the gable projected. Since the building which Thomas built was destroyed by fire in 1793, its similarity to the present ruin cannot be determined.

From an early period, the grinding capacity of the flouring mills near Philadelphia exceeded the local supply of grain, and it was necessary to import wheat from other colonies. At the same time, a great part of the flour was exported to the West Indies and other foreign countries. Thus it was necessary for the mills to have teams constantly in service, hauling wheat from the docks to the mill and barreled flour back to the port. Thomas is said to have had an extra team always harnessed to assist in pulling the loaded wagons to the top of the hill. In the competition for local grain, he is said to have sent his sons out to the Lancaster Pike and other roads leading out of Philadelphia, to bargain for incoming loads of wheat and divert them to his mill. There the drivers were paid in Spanish or

Portuguese milled coins, which Thomas kept in a chain bag securely fastened to the outside wall of the house.

The mill account book for 1784 shows that a large part of the output was delivered to ship captains whose vessels were in the port of Philadelphia. Numerous other entries record the custom grinding of pepper, ginger and other spices. Thomas is said to have been a direct importer of foreign goods in exchange for flour, and on one passage of the sloop "Pacific" brought in silk and tea from Canton, China valued at 4000 Spanish dollars. A set of willow-ware still in the family is also said to have been imported direct from Canton.

Thomas' activities as a wine-grower have been given much publicity, but appear to have been exaggerated. There is no record that he ever sold wine commercially, and one of his letters contains the statement that he had no vineyard, but only gathered the wild grapes which grew in abundance on the slopes of the Wissahickon. His wine was locally famous, however, and was presented to his friends by the dozen bottles. One such shipment to Benjamin Franklin, then in London, was sampled by an English wine-merchant who immediately wrote Thomas asking what quantity he could supply and at what price.

Thomas' skill as a vintner has given rise to the most wide-spread tradition in the Livezey family. This is the story that he sunk several barrels of wine behind his mill-dam during the Revolution, to prevent its confiscation, and retrieved it after the danger had passed. Some of his descendants still have small quantities of wine which are believed to be samples of this vintage.

There is probably some truth in this tradition. One of Thomas' letters, written in 1789, contains the statement that he then had wine on tap which was more than 30 years old, and two half-barrels of ancient wine were in the cellar of Glen Fern shortly before the property was taken over by the city of Philadelphia. One barrel fell to staves and the wine was lost, but the other was bottled to escape a similar fate, and it is a part of this wine which is still preserved. It is family tradition, however, that the wine in these barrels was made from honey.

There is no record of the size or appearance of the dwelling which was a part of the property in 1747, and which Thomas named Glen Fern.¹ The drawing of 1760 shows the middle section of the house in substantially its present form, and the two-story section of the main block. At some later date, a third story was added to the main part of the house by building a series of rooms at the rear and bring-

¹The deed from Sellen to Hammer in 1739 mentions a house and garden.

ing a new roof-line forward over the roof of the two-story building. This line of jointure can still be plainly seen in the house-wall overlooking the creek. The one-story section at the rear was not shown in the drawing of 1760, and this omission apparently disposes of the local belief that this was the original portion of the house and was built in 1696.

Aside from its beautiful and romantic setting in the gorge of the Wissahickon, Glen Fern possesses architectural lines which make it one of the best-known and best-advertised Colonial residences in or near Philadelphia. Its most striking interior feature is the huge fireplace in the lower room of the middle section, so long and wide that a low seat was placed in one end and a small window set in the wall beside it, to provide a cozy nook for reading or sewing.

An inventory of the contents of the several rooms, taken after Thomas' death, shows that the entire house was very completely and richly furnished. Indeed, one wonders how so many articles of furniture and bric-a-brac could have been crowded into the second-story bedrooms as were listed in this inventory. Among the articles still preserved by the family are the clock and the set of willow-ware already mentioned; an elaborately carved, high-back chair, said to have been brought from England; a large assortment of pewter plates and mugs; and a wrought-iron treasure chest of unusual size and design, in which Thomas probably kept the Spanish and Portuguese coins which were the common medium of exchange in his day.

The first evidence of Thomas' interest in public affairs was recorded in 1759, when he made a cash contribution toward the founding of the Germantown Academy, and was elected a member of its first board of trustees.¹ Six years later he was Provincial Commissioner for Philadelphia county² and an active member of the political party opposed to the policies of John Penn, the contemporary Lieutenant-Governor. Benjamin Franklin was also a member of the same political faction, and in a letter written to Dr. Franklin in London under date of 11 mo. 18, 1769, Thomas announced the despatch of a dozen bottles of wine and added:

"I heartily wish it may arrive safe and warm the hearts of everyone who tastes it with a love of America, and would it bring about a change in government but one month sooner, I would gladly send all I have.

However, I do not despair of the change yet, it will take place at the death of Thomas Penn.³

¹Deed book H 15, p. 493.

²Penna. Colonial Records, Vol. IX, p. 237.

³Thomas Penn was Proprietor of the Province. John Penn was the resident Lieutenant-Governor.

I do not know whether some people in this province will not be in the same condition as a German wife in my neighborhood lately was, who said 'nobody could say she wished her husband dead' but said she wished she could see 'how he would look when he was dead.'"

Thomas was a member of the Provincial Assembly for Philadelphia county during the years 1768 to 1771 inclusive, and escaped further service only by advertising in the public prints his desire to retire to private life. During this period he also became a member of the American Philosophical Society, founded by Benjamin Franklin, and won the friendship of many of the prominent citizens of Philadelphia. Dr. Franklin presented him an autographed copy of his *Elements of Electricity*, published in London in 1769, and kept up a correspondence with him for a number of years.

The outbreak of the Revolution brought with it a complete change in the tranquil course of Thomas' daily life and in his standing in the community. As a steadfast member of the Society of Friends, he was opposed to all forms of militarism, and for this reason shared the unpopularity of all conscientious objectors in wartime. In addition, he shared with many others in Philadelphia the sincere belief that the revolt against the mother country was a mistaken and unjustified movement. To his own great injury, he seems to have made no attempt to conceal his sentiments. Some of his opinions were expressed in a curiously-worded, versified polemic "Made for the Hon. Governor Franklin," from which the following extracts are taken:

"Independence of Old
 As in History we are told
 Ware the Cause of Old England's undoing
 And our Newengland Breed
 Would most gladly Succeed
 To envolve Church and State in one Ruin.
 But who Cares a fig
 For an a Merican Whig
 Or any such Double faced fellow
 Who to subvent the Laws
 Cries tis Liberties Caus
 When tis only the fears of the Gallows.
 Then him lets Commend
 Who dares to Defend
 Both the Church & the State in their glory
 Yet Scorns to oppose
 The Just rights of those
 Who bore hatred to Each Loyal Tory.

Who Dirt Never Flings
At Bishops nor Kings
Nor Treason will Speak tho he is Mellow"

During the British occupation of Philadelphia, Thomas and his family had to contend not only with social ostracism, but with the physical dangers of their secluded location. The wild valley of the Wissahickon was a favorite hiding place for deserters from both armies and other outlaws, as well as a safe hunting ground for roving bands of soldiers looking for plunder. A broken flintlock still in the family, is said to have been bent over the head of one of a band of brigands in a personal encounter a short distance up the valley from the mill. According to another family tradition, a straggling band of soldiers came to the Livezey house one day while the cook was baking bread in an outside oven. The soldiers demanded the bread but the cook refused to give it to them, saying that it had just been put in and was not yet baked. At that, one of the soldiers became enraged, drew his knife, and cut off her ear. At that moment an officer appeared, discovered the severed ear still clutched in the hand of the guilty soldier, and struck him down with his sword.

A more pleasant tradition says that Thomas Livezey became aware of the battle of Germantown by hearing the roar of the cannonade which preceded the engagement. Wishing to see as well as hear what was going on, he climbed the hill behind his house and perched himself on a fence under a tree. Not long afterward, however, a stray bullet clipped a branch from the tree under which Thomas was sitting, and he suddenly remembered that his presence was needed at the mill below.

Now it is probable that plenty of musket balls flew over the Livezey property that eventful morning. General Armstrong, commanding the right wing of the Continental army, led his Pennsylvania militia across Bell's Mill Road to the Ridge Road, and forward to the mouth of the Wissahickon, where he engaged and held in check the Hessian Jägers who made up the British left wing. In the middle of the morning, he received orders to fall back and apparently sent his rear guard up the valley of the creek. When they reached Cresheim Creek, they followed it back to Germantown Road and thus rejoined Washington's central command. Tradition says that they encountered a squad of 14 Hessians on the Livezey property, and executed them before the garden wall in front of Glen Fern.

But Thomas neither saw nor heard the battle of Germantown. On the night of Oct. 2, 1777, some 36 hours before the battle, a squad of armed men in command of an officer entered Thomas' house and,

to use his own words, "my sons were taken prisoner & myself Drove from home." The charge on which this arrest was made is no longer known, but Thomas' statement continues "the Officer who came to take me Swore in a great Rage that he would take me and that he had an Order for So Doing." Since Thomas and his family were evidently already under suspicion of disloyalty, it is probable that this arrest was part of a move to evacuate all suspected persons from the terrain over which it was expected the battle would be fought.¹

Thomas' statement makes a distinction between the treatment accorded his sons and himself, and implies that he was forced to leave home but was not arrested. He adds, however, that he was not permitted to return until June 1st, 1778; but his whereabouts during the intervening eight months is not disclosed. It may be suspected that he was sent to the concentration camp near Winchester, Virginia, but none of the extant records of that group of Quaker exiles contains his name. It would be a mistake to conclude that the harsh treatment which Thomas received was unusual, or that it is evidence of any overt act against the American cause. So many of the prominent Quakers of Philadelphia were seized without charge or trial and sent into exile in Virginia during the year 1777 that the Quarterly Meeting held that autumn was moved to make vigorous protest to both Washington and Howe against such outrages.² But the public hysteria was so intense that when General Howe evacuated the city during the following year, 3000 of the 25,000 inhabitants of Philadelphia went with him rather than risk their lives by remaining in their homes.

During Howe's occupation of Philadelphia, the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania sat in Lancaster. It left behind a spy system, however, and industriously issued proclamations accusing Philadelphians of treason on hearsay evidence. It would appear that the informers did not know where Thomas Livezey was and, noting his continued absence from home, concluded that he had joined the British army. Accordingly, on May 8, 1778 the Council issued a proclamation against "Thomas Livezey late of Roxborough, miller"

¹Our knowledge of Thomas Livezey's difficulties with the authorities has come to us in a most peculiar way. He was apparently a firm believer in the theory that evil dreams are portents of approaching disaster. To prove this theory, in his old age he wrote a long account of various nightmares that had visited him during the Revolutionary period, and described the misfortunes which had befallen him after each occasion. In this way he left an incidental but fairly complete record of his persecutions at the hands of his former friends. As for the dreams themselves, the most unusual was one in which he and a friend were riding up Germantown Road when they saw a horseman some distance ahead suddenly fall off his horse dead. When Thomas and his friend reached the same spot, his companion also fell off his horse dead, and Thomas was in the same act when he awoke.

²*Penna. Magazine*, Vol. 1, p. 402.

and 22 other residents of Philadelphia on the ground that they had "severally adhered to & knowingly & willingly aided & abetted the Enemies of the State by having joined their armies at Philadelphia," and demanded that they surrender and stand trial for high treason.¹

The absurdity of this charge must have been realized as soon as Thomas was allowed to return home, for he was permitted to remain there under his own recognizance to appear at the next General Court for trial. This Court began its hearings on Sept. 21st and Thomas went to the city and waited a week for his case to be called. He then appointed a person to notify him of the imminence of his trial and returned home. His case was not brought up until April 23, 1779; then he was acquitted of high treason without examination or hearing, but was bound over to the next sitting of the Court of Quarter Sessions to stand trial for mesprision of treason. Thomas was not called for appearance at this trial but in his absence a bill was found against him "on the evidence of Joseph Reed and Jacob Wood." His account fails to name the penalty, but it is evident that it did not involve the sacrifice of either his personal liberty or his landed estate.²

By 1784 Thomas had divested himself of his business and the greater part of his real estate, either by sale or by turning his interests over to his sons. Ostracised by his former friends, he seems to have lived a retired life, interested chiefly in his family and in his religion. He maintained a large establishment to the last; in the year of his death his household consisted of 7 males and 4 females besides his wife and himself.³ Martha survived him and died in 1797, an honored elder of Germantown Meeting.

Family tradition states that Thomas was an austere man who permitted no familiarity on the part of other members of his family. It is difficult to reconcile this estimate of his character with several known facts about his life. His will provides for Martha's comfort and happiness with meticulous care, and each of his children was provided for abundantly and impartially.

In addition, there was a poetic strain in his nature that scarcely seems compatible with austerity. Granting that versification was an art much more commonly practiced then than now, Thomas left an unusually large collection of poems, and many of them, notably the

¹*Penna. Colonial Records*, Vol. XI, pp. 482-3.

²Neither is it known whether the bill charged him with "positive mesprision," the personal commission of a treasonable act of minor gravity; or "negative mesprision," unrevealed knowledge of a treasonable act committed by another.

³First Federal Census, 1790.