My Recollections of Olden Times in Murderkill Neck

by Joseph Burchenal

(Taken from page 2 of the July 12, 1901, edition of the *Milford Chronicle*, Milford, Delaware)

MR. EDITOR:--

I have sometimes thought that it might be interesting to those still living to read in the local papers some of the events and incidents that took place, as well as the history that was made by the people who lived in the first half of the Nineteenth Century in that part of Kent County, Delaware, known as Murderkill Neck. I feel my inability to do justice to the memory of as true men and as true women as ever lived and wrought to advance the interest of their children and help raise the standard of the society in which they lived to more exalted ethics. Having considerable leisure on my hands, I have concluded to occupy a portion of it in trying to interest your readers (at least a portion of them) in telling through the columns of your paper my recollections of the different families who lived in that section in my boyhood days, now more than a half century past. They have all passed to their long home "beyond the river," and many who were prominent fractors [*sic*] in all that was of interest to the community, even their names are no longer known in that locality.

I shall confine myself to the territory beginning at Bowers Beach and lying between St. Jones Creek and Murderkill Creek and extending up the Neck as far as the road leading from Frederica to Magnolia.

Beginning at the bay shore my mind goes back to the time when John Bowers, Sr., kept the hotel; it is presumable he was the first to keep a hotel along the Bay shore as a place of resort, as the place took his name in a three-fold sense, for I have heard it called Bowers Bay, Bowers Beach, and Bowers Hotel. The site upon which the old hotel stood is now far out in the Bay. How well I remember seeing him passing by our road gate on his way to and from Frederica smoking his short clay pipe! I also recollect hearing him tell on one occasion what impressed my boyish mind as being a marvelous story, of how he cut off the head of a snapping turtle then going away to do something, and on his return he could not find the snapper. About a year after, while engaged in repairing the porch he found it, and the place where the head had been cut off had all healed over and the turtle was still alive. I have never forgotten that story, as it appeared to me so strange that anything could live without a head.

Bowers Beach has been a popular resort for the people for miles around, especially on what was known as Big Thursdays, which included all the Thursdays in August. People came from Dover, Camden, Milford, and from Maryland and the western part of Kent county known as the forest. Those were very enjoyable occasions, for Bowers Beach was really the only place along the Delaware shore known as a watering place. Woodland Beach, Kitts Hummock, and Slaughter Beach were not then known as places for pleasure and recreation. There was no law prohibiting the catching of oysters, and they were abundant, and there was also an abundance of fish. The broad expanse of the Delaware Bay with its cool and refreshing southeast wind from the bay and ocean made it a most desirable pleasure resort. Consequently the month of August was almost entirely devoted by the people of the surrounding country to the enjoyments to be derived by a trip to Bowers Beach on Big Thursdays. Covered wagons and

carts were the conveyances by which they visited the beach. They spent their time in bathing at high water and talking, rollicking, drinking, dancing, and wading in the mud when the tide was out, and gathering shells. The young people spent considerable time in walking along the shore and casting sheeps eyes at one another, and many a match has been the outcome of a Big Thursday. All shades of society were represented at Bowers Beach on those occasions. Merchants and well-to-do families would ride down to enjoy the delightful breeze from the bay. Sixty years ago the beach was the mecca for the people of the surrounding country during the month of August.

I shall now proceed to speak of the different families according to my recollections of them as a boy, more than sixty years ago.

At that time the most widely known and wealthiest family was the Warren family—Samuel Warren, Sr., who lived and owned a large tract of land lying on Murderkill Creek. The vessels going to and from Frederica passed close by his house. Well do I remember the old gentleman with his broad-brimmed hat, his coat patterned after the olden style, walking out cane in hand to view his crops, look after his cattle, attend to his colored people, and watch for the bad boys of the neighborhood and see that they did not steal his fine pears and magnum bonum plums. He was noted as having the largest and finest selection of fruit in the Neck. There was no curculio to destroy the delicious plum or mar and scar all kinds of fruit as in these days. As a boy I have often tested the good qualities of his fruit, as I frequently sampled it. In those days it was not considered a great breach of propriety for anyone to help themselves to fruit, and a boy especially could help himself carte blane [*sic*]. Mr. Warren was a large land owner, and had more slaves than all the men in the Neck. He might in the true sense be denominated a gentleman of ye olden times. His large tract of land on Murderkill creek was divided, and the youngest son, Solomon T., lived on one part while he occupied the other. His son Samuel, almost universally called "Young Sammy," was a substantial farmer and lived on a large marsh farm on the other side of the Neck along St. Jones creek. Sammy was an enterprising young man, and among the first in that vicinity to introduce the burning of lime for the improvement of the land. He was noted for raising large crops of grain. He was the father of the wife of the late Gov. John W. Hall, of Frederica. Well do I remember when Caroline Warren (afterward Mrs. Hall) came home from what was called in those days "boarding school." She was young, rather tall, very stylish in appearance, and dressed in the most fashionable style: with easy manners acquired by contact with people of fashion. She was the belle of the neighborhood. Her father bought her a "forte piano," as they were called in those days. I remember how the boys would talk and wonder what kind of music it made, as none of us had ever seen anything of the kind. Old William Legg's fiddle and the Jew's harp was the extent of our knowledge of musical instruments. I remember Samuel Warren, Jr., with the most kindly feeling. He always had a pleasant word for a boy. He has often walked his horse and talked to me along the road, and when he invited me to come and hear "Caddy" (as he always called his daughter) play on the "forte piano," I felt very grateful, for what I thought was a great privilege to hear and see a piano. Shortly after her return from school it was noticed that John W. Hall, of Frederica, a young merchant of acknowledged business ability was often seen with his new carriage visiting in the Neck, especially on Sunday. The neighborhood was not long kept in doubt; a big wedding was the result, and Caroline Warren became the wife of John W.

Hall, afterward Governor of the State of Delaware. They have both passed to the silence than cannot be broken. Samuel Warren, Jr., in after years retired from his large farm and settled in Frederica. His representatives are Samuel Warren Hall, of Dover, Del. Having inherited his father's business qualities he was among the first to start the canning of tomatoes on a large scale and made money rapidly, and today ranks among the successful men of Kent county. His brother, John W. Hall, of Frederica, has by steadily adhering to the vessel business and the improvement of his large landed estate become the wealthiest man in Kent county below Dover. Their sister, Mrs. Charles C. Lister, with her son Charles has recently completed the circuit of the globe. Mrs. Lister is among the great travelers, having visited Europe several times, as well as all the important places in this country. She is an interesting conversationalist, a lady of much literary ability, which combined with the knowledge derived from extensive travel makes her description of events and circumstances incident thereto intensely interesting. When I look back over more than 60 years and remember the harmony that existed in the family of Samuel Warren, Sr., and the reverence, respect and affection which the children displayed toward their parents, and the manner in which it was reciprocated by kind parental acts and expressions, the remembrance fills me with pleasure. No better exhibition of family devotion was ever displayed in Murderkill Neck.

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(Taken from page 2 of the July 19, 1901, edition of the *Milford Chronicle*, Milford, Delaware)

My father owned and lived on the farm known as the Lime Kiln farm situated on the road leading from the home of Samuel Warren, Sr., to that of his son Samuel. There was scarcely a day when the weather permitted that one or the other failed to pass that way to visit each other. The old gentleman passed away at a ripe old age, having passed his eightieth milestone.

Samuel Warren, Jr., married Sarah Sipple, who belonged to one of the old and highly respecled [*sic*] families of Murderkill Neck. She was the sister of the late Captain Waitman Sipple, of Frederica.

Solomon T. Warren, who lived on a part of the homestead tract, was a well-informed man, having read extensively, and being blessed with a good memory. His voice was somewhat peculiar, being rather harsh at times, and was sufficient to impress his servants with the belief that his commands were the end of all controversy. He conceived the idea of building a good-sized sloop in the woods in front of the house nearly a mile from the creek; she was to draw but little water, so as not to be detained by the low tides at the mouth of the creek. This enterprise was for the purpose of carrying away truck, peaches, pears and other fruits to Philadelphia, as there were no railroads to transport the products of the farms. It was considered a venture that might be profitable to both the farmers and the owner. As a neighborly act my father sent me for two days to help roll this sloop across the field to the creek. She was christened "The Paragon." All the neighbors lent their assistance, and we all took our meals at the home of the old gentleman, Samuel, Sr.

Solomon married Catherine Maria Clements, daughter of Joel Clements, who lived in the western part of Kent county close to the Maryland line. He was a large land holder and a great Methodist. He was, I think, a local preacher. He lived to a ripe old age, passing away about the close of the late war. I remained all night with him at his old homestead shortly before his death. He was co-temporary with my father, and both being great Methodists in the olden times when the circuit took in nearly all of Kent county, they often met at the Quarterly Conference to transact the business of the circuit. Seldom in my life have I spent a more interesting evening than I did when listening to this old patriarch as he related to me the events and circumstances in which he and my father had taken part—they were about the same age. He was acquainted with many of the Methodist preachers that I had so often heard my father talk about; such men as Lawrence Lawrenson, Lawrence MeComb, Ezekiel Cooper, Joseph Ridgeway, Henry White, Solomon Sharp, William Bishop, Thomas Ware, John Hersey, and William Barnes, (the witting Irishman). The old gentleman had a fund of anecdotes; many were in relation to the old preachers, especially William Bishop, and "Billy" Barnes, as he was called, who were proverbial for their witty sayings. I shall never forget the last time I saw Joel Clements. He died at a good old age. His daughter, the wife of Solomon T. Warren, had a cheerful, pleasant, face, and was universally known in the Neck as Kitty Maria. Solomon T. and Kitty Maria had quite a large family of daughters, and moved west to Missouri before the late war. Samuel Warren, Sr. had two daughters. Eliza Ann, the oldest, married Samuel Virden, of Frederica. She was considered a remarkable bible student, and lived to an advanced age. She told me a short time before her death that she had read the Bible through every year for many years, and so familiar had she become with it that she was able to quote from any part of it passages to suit all circumstances and occasions. Mary W. married John C. Darby, of Milford. She lived to be quite aged and was also a great Bible reader. She left three children. The oldest is Samuel Warren Darby, of Frederica. Having had more than forty years' acquaintance with him I am glad to call him my friend. He has for years conducted a large lumber business, as well as general farming, and has employed more labor than any man in or around Frederica. I have known him to do many kindly acts toward the poor, which indicated a heart in the right place. The sister, Mrs. Moore, lives in Philadelphia. The last time I saw her I thought the resemblance between her and her mother most striking. The third child is Col. John Clayton Darby, who, I am glad to believe is enjoying life as he advances along the road that leads to the great beyond. The Colonel is always pleasant and agreeable, and reminds me very much of his uncle Samuel Warren, Jr., in appearance and manner. He is friendly to boys, for whom he always has a pleasant word of encouragement, which, in my judgment, is a sure evidence that he possesses a kind heart. I sincerely hope that the Colonel will enjoy as many years of peace and contentment in Frederica, as "Omer, the son of Hasson," who lived in honor and prosperity for four-score years under the walls of Bagdad [*sic*].

The next family of whom I shall speak is that of Peter Lindale, who owned a large tract of upland and marsh not far from Bowers Beach, who married a Miss Fisher. I heard it said when a boy that Mr. Lindale drove up to the house of Mr. Fisher one Sunday morning while the old folks were at church and took her to a preacher's and were married. Her father lived in a house that stood almost opposite old Banning's church, two or three miles from Camden. They had two sons and two daughters. After the death of his wife, Mr. Lindale remained a widower.

He was known as an honorable upright man, and was loved and respected by all who knew him. His word was as good as his bond, as all who knew him could testify. He was slow of speech, and in accordance with the old maxim, always thought twice before speaking once. Mr. Lindale and my father were near the same age, and for nearly half a century were fast friends. They were both old Jeffersonian Democrats, both having voted for his second term. [My father was born in 1781.] Many times have I listened to them discussing the various political issues of the times in which they lived. Among my first recollection of politics was in hearing them talk about Andrew Jackson, nullification, the United States bank, sound money, and Nicholas Beddle, president of the United States bank; tariff for revenue, self-government by the right of the States, and no privileged classes. Upon these principles were laid the foundation stones of their political faith. They had no sympathy with the doctrine taught by Henry Clay of high protective tariffs, the expenditure of the public money on internal improvements, or with Alexander Hamilton's theory of a strong government settled at the capitol of the Nation as against the rights of the States. They were just as conscientious in their politics as they were in their religion.

My father took the "Christian Advocate" for his religious reading, and "Buell's Cuttwater" for his agricultural reading. Uncle Peter (as he was universally known in the Neck), took the "Wilmington Gazette," edited and published by Samuel Harker, a sound advocate of all that Jefferson and Jackson ever said or did. Every fall he would come down the State on horseback with his big saddle-bags filled with papers, stop at the towns, and with the farmers, secure new subscribers and collect from old ones, and talk politics. From the three papers above named, and their hard common sense, they drew their inspiration, both religious and political, as well as agricultural.

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(Taken from page 2 of the July 26, 1901, edition of the *Milford Chronicle*, Milford, Delaware)

Among the pleasant recollections of my boyhood days is the interest I felt in listening to the substantial fatmers [*sic*] of the Neck discuss the various political issues of the day.

I will now come to Mr. Lindale. He was a tower of strength in the Neck for upholding faith, honor and correct manhood among the people. He died, I think, about 1850, respected by the community. His eldest son, John Fisher Lindale, was married twice, his first wife being the daughter of Captain James Grier, of whom I shall speak farther on. His second wife was the daughter of the late John B. Conner, of Magnolia. John F. Lindal [*sic*], Jr., also of Magnolia, is his only representative. Uncle Peter's oldest daughter, Elmina, married Lowder T. Layton, and left several children, the oldest is now the wife of Dr. Ashcroft, of Smyrna, and the mother by a former marriage of Dr. Wharton, celebrated as one of the best foot-ball players in this country. His other daughter, Margaret Ann, in her young days was considered pretty, and possessed a voice of marvelous sweetness. She married John Warren, who died early leaving her with two children, with whose history I am not acquainted. She now lives in Camden and is the widow of the late James Knight. The last and the youngest was Peter Morris Lindale, who was two

years my senior. He married a Miss Stanton; both have passed to the great beyond. Their daughter is the wife of the late State Treasurer and ex-member of the Legislature, Wilbur H. Burnite.

Among the many worthy members of society in Murderkill Neck was William Hirons, who came from near Smyrna, into the Neck somewhere about 1826 or 1827, and married Elizabeth Warren, a close relation (a niece, I think) of Samuel Warren, Sr., of whom I have made mention. He was a very impulsive man, acted quickly and upon the spur of the moment, and many thought too hastily, but he was a man of moral integrity and great worth, and did more to keep up a state of religious enthusiasm in the community than any other man. He was a great advocate of temperance, and would ride far and near to lecture on that subject. He was among the first in the neighborhood to oppose indiscriminate gunning, and put up notices warning gunners to keep off his land. It aroused great opposition among the sporting fraternity. In after years he became a local preacher. He was the father of the late Dr. Robert Samuel Warren Hirons, of Smyrna. It used to be said that he did all his day's work before breakfast. He was an early riser and liked to get the boys out to work in time.

William Hirons was married four times. His second wife was my sister, who left one one who now resides in town. He was a good man and true, and died in Wilmington, Del., in 1859. At the reckoning day I have no doubt but that he will receive the righteous man's reward for true fidelity for what he believed to be his duty.

Another of the old families who lived in the Neck in the first half of the 19th century was William Wilson, who lived on what was known as the large Roland farm on St. Jones Creek. The farm is now the property of Mrs. Barnett. Mrs. Barnett is the daughter of John B. Conner mentioned above, and was formerly the widow of John F. Lindale. William Wilson was one of the old time gentleman [*sic*] who wore the broad-brimmed fur hat and dressed as became gentlemen of his day and time. The smile upon his countenance inspired confidence, and a boy felt no reluctance in approaching Uncle Billy. A pleasant twinkle in his eye indicated a heart in the right place. My recollections of him and his wife, Aunt Ruth, are among the most pleasant reminiscences of my boyhood days. They moved from the Neck to Thomas' Chapel in what was called the forest. They both reached a ripe old age, Uncle Billy dying first. Aunt Ruth in after years loved to remind me that she had dressed me in the first clothes I ever wore. Their daughter was the wife of the late Thomas B. Coursey, of Spring Mills, of whom I would like to bear testimony as to his worth as a citizen and a good man, but I must desist as he is outside of Murderkill Neck.

One of Mr. Wilson's daughters was the first wife of McIlroy McIlvain, who resided near Magnolia. He is now very far advanced in years. Mr. McIlvain was from Sussex county, and moved into Kent in the early forties. In early life he was one of the most industrious men that ever lived. It used to be said that he was one of the men that would pry up the sun in order to get to work early. He is still living, honored and respected by all who know him. Uncle Billy and Aunt Ruth left a son, John C. Wilson, who married for the first wife the daughter of James Hopkins who lived west of Felton and nar what was known as Wallace's Corner's. One son was the result of that marriage, Dr. James Hopkins Wilson, now of Dover, Del. John C. Wilson was an honor to his family and to the community in which he lived, as well as the State. He was trustworthy and diligent, and lived according to the rules of right. I served with him a

term in the Legislature in 1873. As a lawmaker, he was conscientious, and worked faithfully in the interests of the people. I shall never forget him. He had a peculiar twinkle in his eye that seemed to penetrate into the very recesses of a man's mind and define the motives to action. In opposing or advocating any measure, he would sometimes illustrate his reasons by relating some interesting story, and then wind up by saying, "It won't do, boys." I always felt that to be a finality. It was never my privilege to associate with a man in whom I had more confidence than in John C. Wilson. He died about 1875. In the great beyond when honesty, integrity and fidelity to principle is rewarded, I believe he will secure the just man's portion.

Among others, I wish to name is Henry Williams. He lived and owned the farm opposite where I was born, about half way between Frederica and Bowers Beach. He was industrious and prosperous, and a man of staunch integrity. He had a vein of genuine kindness running all through his composition. I have often heard the colored people say they were never afraid of being turned away by Uncle Henry (as we used to call him) when they wanted a favor. The old gentleman had at times a rather gruff manner of expressing himself when approached for favors. He would say, "No, no: you won't work in the summer and you need not come begging to me in the winter; you won't get anything!" And while he would be talking, he would be going toward the barn, perhaps, half quarreling, but when there he would soon measure up some corn or wheat, then he would ask: "Have you any meat? No, I know you haven't [*sic*]; come to the smokehouse and get a piece"; and in his peculiar way which indicated a good heart he would perhaps let fly some expression that would have something of the odor of sulphur about them, and send the parties away with the inquiry: "Have you and wood? If you haven't, come and get the cart and oxen and haul yourself a load out of the woods." He had many good qualities and a kind heart, and never pretended to be what he was not. I remember old Uncle Henry with a good deal of satisfaction. His son, Caleb B. Williams, owns the old homestead and has it in a fine state of cultivation. For solidity, integrity, and honesty of porpose [*sic*], commend me to those old men of Murderkill Neck, who fulfilled literally the Divine command to eat their bread by the sweat of their brows.

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(Taken from page 2 of the August 2, 1901, edition of the *Milford Chronicle*, Milford, Delaware)

In order to give something of the history of the old residents of Murderkill Neck as I remember them, it will be necessary to refer again to the Warren family. By the death of Mrs. Susan Luff Warren, George R. Warren came into possession of a large tract of land fronting on St. Jones creek, known in the first quarter of the nineteenth century as the Andrew Gray farm. (I shall have more to say about this farm in connection with the Gray family.) George Warren in some respects was a remarkable man. As the saying goes, "he was a whole team and a horse to let." He had strong lungs and a voice that over-leaped all obstacles. A loud, and at times an unnatural laugh, made it useless to hold any controversy with him; for his loud voice and louder laugh, coupled with his original sayings and keen ready wit, enabled him to carry his point in all controversies. Though peculiar in many respects, he had an analytical mind, and

could, as it were, by instinct, detect any attempt at fraud or deception, and woe be to the man who fell under the avalanche of his wit and sarcasm. He attended church regularly on Sunday mornings, riding three miles to church and three miles home, often through quite inclement weather, to the shame of many who lived close by. He had many good traits of character, and lived out the time allotted to man. He was the father of the Rev. Benjamin C. Warren, who has attained considerable celebrity as a Methodist preacher, and resides, I think, somewhere in New England. Nathanial Luff Warren, John Warren, and Elizabeth Harrington were his brothers and sister, and all at times lived in Murderkill Neck, and were more or less factors in shaping the social order in that community. They have all gone to that bourne from whence no traveler returns.

Mr. Editor, if time and space would permit, I could give much history of the many families that lived in Murderkill Neck, but my object in writing is to present (now that I am old) my views and impressions of those who lived in the long ago in that locality. Therefore, I shall not follow (with one or two exceptions) the families who moved into the Neck as tenants and was there only a short time, or follow out of the Neck many of the children born there but moved elsewhere. As stated about, I now propose to give some history of the farm on St. Jones creek, known as the Gray farm, but more recently as the George Warren farm. It was a large tract and contained some eight hundred acres. It belonged to Andrew Gray, grandfather of Andrew C. Gray, the father of the late Senator Gray of Delaware. Andrew, the second, lived on this farm during the Revolutionary War, and continued to live there until 1809, when he moved to New Castle county, and rented the farm to my father, Joseph Burchenal. This year marks my father's first appearance in the Neck as a resident. He lived on the Gray farm until 1818, when he purchased what was then known as the Crammer farm, but more recently the Dime Kiln farm, which was close by, but not adjoining the Gray farm. When Mr. Gray moved away he left Drummer (an old colored servant) a house and lot to be his during his lifetime for his fidelity and faithful service, and for doing an act which I remember hearing old Uncle Drummer tell. I was but a little boy, but it made a lasting impression on my mind, and to this day I recollect with what veneration and respect I listened to that old man's story. He had lived in the time of the Revolution and had seen the British, which appeared to me a wonderful fact. His story was this: "During the war the British fleet landed a foraging party near Bowers Beach. They had planned to take the cattle (of rebels as we were called) and drive them up to New Castle and meet the fleet and supply them with fresh meat. This foraging party visited Mr. Gray's and drove away a lot of cattle, and forced Drummer, then a young man, to go along and help drive the cattle. They also visited the residence of Parson Huston (now known as the John Saxton farm) and broke into the house while the family were at church and stole some valuable silverware and drove away some of his cattle. Parson Huston, as he was called, as a sturdy, determined old patriot, and gave his undivided support to the cause of the colonies and against Great Britain. He was a Presbyterian elder, a man of decided convictions and great worth. He was the father of the late Mrs. Hester Ann Townsend, wife of Solomon Townsend, of Philadelphia, but formerly of Frederica, Del. A descendant of this worthy old preacher and patriot is Huston A. Cuthbert, who is a great-grandson, and resides in Dover; he is a gentleman whom I am pleased to class among my friends. Let me go back and continue the story as related by old Uncle Drummer. As said before, he was taken along with his British to help

drive the cattle. The way up the State was by the old King's highway, which went through Canterbury—at which place they stopped for the night. When all was quiet and the foraging party was asleep, Drummer thought it was a propitious time to quietly let down the bars, turn out the cattle and run them back safely to his master, Andrew Gray. For this act, in connection with the faithfulness as a servant, he was left the house and lot as above stated, for his use during his lifetime. He died about 1832 or 1833. I remember him well, and his wife, known as old Aunt Sarah. They were highly respectable old people. He was a tall, gray-headed old man and walked with a cane and wore a tall hat. The house stood, as near as I can remember, on the land afterward owned by Mr. Bradley. The Grays, by inter-marriage with the Caldwells, of near Canterbury, became large land owners, and had many colored people as servants; they were not held as slaves. To use the old-time colored people's expression, they were "manumitted at 28." There are a great many families among the colored people named Gray. I call to mind some of the older names, after old Uncle Drummer, who, I think, left no children. Rodger Gray, who was about twenty-six years of age when my father moved to the Gray farm, and bought his time. Rodger has married Catherine Bowman (Aunt Caty, as we called her), a woman of kindly disposition, with pleasant and agreeable manners. They both lived with my father until Rodger was free. In after years he owned a house and lot near where the road forks going from Frederica to Bowers Beach. The lot has been absorbed in the Vickery farm, now the property of Dr. Thomas V. Cahall. I remember Rodger so well. He was always jubilant; the road head was always paved with better things for him. He spent most of his time on the marshes along the creek, fishing, ditching and cutting salt hay. He always carried a basket on his arm, and to meet him on his return from fishing (if his luck had been good) was an inspiration. He wanted to tell to all, great and small, on all occasions, how thankful he was. He had a fashion of using the expression: "Blessed by God!" not profanely, but as an expression of gratitude for his success. He would say, "I just put my net in at the mouth of Lindale's or Heron's big ditch (as the case might be) and blessed be God, I took them out by the dozen!" Or, "I sat down on the bank and as fast as I could bait my hook I hauled them in. Blessed by God; see how pretty they look!" A prouder, happier, more thankful man could not be found than old Uncle Rodger Gray returning with his basket of fish. He left a large family of children. I remember Abraham, Benjamin, Joshua, Daniel, Edmond and four or five girls. Cato Gray, who lived on the "Sand Tavern Lane" farm (afterward owned by Thomas James), was a very respectable colored man, and left quite a family of children. Among them that I knew was William and Andrew, who became land owners and maintained a respectable position in the community in which they lived. The colored people by the name of Gray who lived in Murderkill Neck (in the long ago) bore good characters for peace and good order. I think they are all gone now.

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(Taken from page 2 of the August 9, 1901, edition of the *Milford Chronicle*, Milford, Delaware)

My father owned and occupied the farm now the property of Eugene Grier. I was born in the old house, now gone, on the 28th day of March, 1827. My father moved into the Neck as before said, in 1809; he was appointed class leader and elected trustee at Barratt's Chapel in 1810, which positions he held for more than a half century. He became a subscriber to the "Christian Advocate" from the first number, which was issued in 1827. He took the paper until he died in 1866, and I being named for him have continued the paper in the same name; so it has come in one name for 74 years without a break.

My father was a very industrious man, as a boy I used to think he was entirely too much so. He was fully up with the times in almost everything that pertained to farming and fruit growing. About 1835 and 1836 he built a lime kiln and was among the first in the Neck to use lime for the improvement of the land. He kept a nursery in which he raised apples, peaches, pears, plums, etc., for sale. He also burned bricks for sale. I think he was the first to introduce budded peach trees in Kent county. I remember old Eliphalet Clark who came from Maryland in 1836 or 1837, and father employed him in the fall to bud quite a nursery of young peach trees on shares. Father considered it an experiment and did not wish to assume the expense, so he contracted with Mr. Clark to do the budding. Mr. Clark was a great talker; his boundless store of information was wonderful to me as a boy. He was the first man I ever saw bud a peach tree. I remember the venture was not very successful, as but few of the buds lived. He also budded a number of young trees for Jehu Reed, who was beginning to set out large peach orchards. Mr. Reed might truly be called the pioneer in peach growing on a large scale in Delaware. Henry Todd, of Dover, followed close after him. The Reed family, beginning a way back with James Reed, Sr., who lived on the Roland farm near Bowers Beach. I remember him as being overseer of the road. I used to see him with his men giving directions as to what should be done. His oldest son Thomas afterward bought the farm, lived and died there at a good old age. He was a man of decided convictions, and a somewhat peculiar personality. Although he lived six miles from Frederica, he would often walk that distance there and back, when perhaps he had three or four nice fat horses doing nothing. Though living where mosquitoes were abundant, in their season, he never tried to kill them, but would gently brush them away with his little brush. He was a good neighbor, kind to the poor, and provided bountifully for his family. He married late in life, and died leaving no children. Jehu Reed, brother of Thomas and son of James, Sr., was one of the most enterprising and energetic of men. He allowed nothing new to escape his observation. A love for reading, with his natural disposition to investigate, kept him in the foreground as an advocate of new ideas in farming, and new methods of advancing the public weal. As said before, he was the pioneer in setting out large peach orchards. Notwithstanding there was no railroad to transport the fruit, all communication with the Philadelphia markets was by sailing boats, and of necessity tedious and uncertain; yet in the face of such difficulties he set out large orchards of the best varieties of fruits then in existence and made money rapidly, and by the time the railroad came down through Delaware in 1856, he was ready to take advantage of the quicker and more certain transporation. Many persons noting the evidence of his success followed his example, until the State became known everywhere as the great peach-growing State; and Murderkill Neck can well claim the palm

through Mr. Reed as the forerunner of this great industry that was once such a source of wealth to our little State. He was engaged in the Morus Multicaulis enterprise which was somewhat akin to the South Sea Islands humbug; yet it was said at the time that Mr. Reed by his enterprise being early in the business made money. His farm was well supplied with all the modern improvements in farm machinery. But the crowning act of his life was the enforcement of that old common law principal [*sic*] that every man is bound to take care of his own stock. His theory that there was no "Commons" upon which people had any right to allow their cattle to roam, has long since been accepted as correct. While I remember the very hard things that were said about Mr. Reed for enforcing this wise, just and equitable provision of the law, everyone must see now the wisdom of his advanced ideas and acknowledge that he was right. He lived to be an old man, and died near where his father and brother had lived so long—Bowers Beach. His son Jehu M. Reed now owns the original tract, and has bought other lands adjoining until he has the largest farm in Murderkill Neck. He has greatly enlarged the dwelling, and has a large barn and commodious outbuildings. The whole farm is under a fine state of cultivation. Indeed, it is a great pleasure to ride over the road which runs through this beautiful farm and note the skill and neatness and thorough culture in all departments, while general farming is carried on extensively. Fruits of all kinds are grown by the best methods known to the horticulturist. The cultivation of the aesthetic crops out in the surroundings. The artistic skill displayed in the training of vines, plants and flowers, all indicate the study of the beautiful. Such an example of good farming is an object less; and like the light along the shore to guide the mariner aright, so is a good farmer. He holds up to view in the neighborhood a light to the careless, indolent and slipshod farmer.

One of the old residents of the Neck was Thomas Vickery, and one of the most industrious men I ever knew. He married Elizabeth Sipple, and bought out the heirs in the Sipple farm, which lay on the road from Frederica to the Bay. It was a very poor farm when he took it in hand. After the introduction of Peruvian Guano in 1848, or thereabout, he made it one of the best farms in the neighborhood; and put up good and substantial buildings. From this farm as a nucleus he added other lands and tenements until he was known as on of the wealthiest farmers of Kent county. He was a standard authority on growing wheat and corn. He was not much given to new ideas about farming, but chose rather to hold fast to that which his experience had taught him was certain and profitable. While he was industrious and expected from labor a full quid-pro-quo for his money, yet it was proverbially known that Mr. Vickery, through his most excellent wife, always provided his table with good food and an abundance of it. He was kind to the poor and a good neighbor, and was a member of Barratt's Chapel, a trustee, and treasurer of the board for many years. The community was poorer when Thomas Vickery died. He was a just and upright man, and was called to receive the just man's reward about 1868. His only living representative is Dr. Thomas Vickery Cahall, of Frederica, who is following in the footsteps of his honored grandfather by keeping his land in a good state of cultivation and adding farm to farm, until all admit that if his landed pospossions [*sic*] should sink it would make an awful hole in the ground. As I grow old, and the remembrance of the past comes to my mind, I cannot but feel a warm attachment for Dr. Thomas V. Cahall. His grandfather was much younger than my father, yet they were fast friends. Their farms joined; they both belonged to the same church, and to the same political party; were interested in all

that pertained to the public weal, and are buried in the same cemetery. The doctor's mother was several years younger than myself. I remember her sitting at the table in a high chair. She was the only child, and what a wealth of love and affection was bestowed on her by her parents! Every want supplied, every luxury cheerfully bestowed.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

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(Taken from page 2 of the August 16, 1901, edition of the *Milford Chronicle*, Milford, Delaware)

In the long ago there appeared in Murderkill Neck a young man who had run away from a ship in Philadelphia, an Englishman, and hired himself to Samuel Warren, Sr. The story goes that he was sent out to haul wood with a yoke of oxen and a horse ahead. While in the woods the oxen became unmanageable and turned in the yoke; he ran to the house in a great state of excitement, and in sailor phraseology tried to explain the situation by saying the larboard ox was on the starboard side and the starboard ox was on the larboard side, and that Jennie was all tangled up in the rigging. This young man was James Grier, destined to become a substantial citizen, a large land and vessel owner, and an important factor in all that pertained to the general welfare of the people of Murderkill Neck. He soon left the employ of Mr. Warren for other fields of industry. To use a local saying of the times, "he went to following the water," and soon became master of a vessel running from the creek along the western shore of the Delaware Bay. His integrity and industry coupled with his strong personality, and with the various signs and evidences of prosperity, soon brought him to the front in the community. Those who possessed capital were willing to intrust it to the management of this young Englishman, and it was an open secret that he would be acceptable suitor for the hand of any young lady in the land, and his offer of marriage to a young lady of one of the best families was not refused, and Tabitha Sipple became the wife of Captain James Grier. There was a little romance connected with the marriage—which took place before I was born. I remember hearing my mother tell it. (My mother died when I was ten years old.) Richard Norris had married an older sister, and she (Tabitha lived with them on the farm opposite my father's, known in after years as the Henry William farm. It was common in those days for farmers to turn their cattle out on what was known as the "Commons," and often the cows would be milked at the road-gate and left out all night. It seems Tabitha went to milk the cows under a big tree on the main road which stood at my father's road-gate. Mrs. Norris said she thought Tabitha dressed mighty well to go milking, but did not suspect anything. However, she took the milk bucket, and when she reached the road, instead of milking the cows she set the milk bucket on top of our gate post; and it has never been known whether it was mere chance, a combination of circumstances, or by special arrangement, but Captain Grier did come along in what would now be called an old-fashioned two-wheeled gig, and Tabitha disappeared, presumably "liberum-arbitrium." He bought the old Barratt farm, near Barratt's Chapel, carried on farming, sailed a vessel, bought and cut the wood from large tracts of timber, kept store at what was known as "Grier's Corners," and attained to wealth and position in the community. I remember Tabitha Grier with a great deal of satisfaction. She was the best of

mothers, and the best of women. Her smiling face was a benediction; her salutations used to make my boyish heart leap for joy, they were so hearty, and seemed to proceed from a nature overflowing with kindness. It was her delight to see her children and their associates happy. Her pleasant disposition made her home desirable, life a joy, and her household an earthly paradise. This estimable lady passed to her reward more than a half century ago. The captain sent to England for his old father and stepmother, and brought them to this country, cared for them, and saw them laid away in the cemetery at Barratt's Chapel. A tombstone marks their last resting place and tells something of their history. The Captain lived to the full time allotted to man and was gathered with the innumerable company beyond the conflues of time, honored and respected by the community that had known him so long. James W. and J. Eugene Grier are his male representatives. His daughter Wilhelmina, who married Dr. James Stanton is, I believe, still living—at least I hope so. As a boy of 15 or 16, I thought she was most beautiful, and I loved her with all the ardor of a boy desperately in love. Mrs. Isabel Baker, another sister, is I think, still living.

About 1842 or 1843 there came to Murderkill Neck a man from New Jersey who purchased a large tract of land lying on both sides of what was then known as Sand Tavern Lane, called the Mifflin farm. The land was known throughout the country as being the "standard for poor land;" so poor that even the proverbial pea refused to sprout. The people of the neighborhood thought Thomas James a foolish Jersey man when he invested five thousand dollars for over eight hundred acres of land, with perhaps two hundred acres of the same well set in good timber. But five thousand dollars in those days looked like a large sum of money, and Peruvian guano and commercial fertilizer was unknown. The land was literally worthless because of the poverty of the soil, which had been reduced by long and continuous cropping. The discovery of guano made this large tract of land valuable. It made Mr. James one of the ablest men financially in the community. In truth, guano put new life into the land, also the land-owner [*sic*]. The fact began to dawn upon the people that there was real value in their old worn out land. The change was like magic. To take a handful of this brown dust and put on the poorest of land, produced amazing results, and when harvest came the blade, the stock, and the full ear bearing a hundred-fold, came forth to gladden the heart of the husbandman, the country went through a transformation. Old methods were abandoned. From sowing the wheat by hand and ploughing it in, came the fallow field and the modern drill. The old scythe and cradle, now obsolete, were superceded [*sic*] by the cutter and self-binder. Mr. James was a careful man in all his dealings; was a good farmer, kept everything neat and nice about his place, and had one of the very best of women for a wife. (She was also from New Jersey.) He was "greater than he who taketh a city," for he made many blades of grass grow where none grew before. They had no children. Mr. James died at Ocean Grove I think, in 1896, where he and his wife usually spent from two to three months at their cottage, enjoying the feast of marrow and fat things at that seaside resort. Mrs. James is still living at Smyrna, Del., and the big farm has passed into other hands. I believe the reward of the faithful will be theirs when character is investigated and true fidelity receives its just recompense.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

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(Taken from page 2 of the August 23, 1901, edition of the *Milford Chronicle*, Milford, Delaware)

About 1880 or thereabouts William Purnell moved into the Neck and on the farm now owned by Caled B. Williams. Mrs. Purnell for integrity, moral worth, and devotion to duty, ought not to be left out of these memoirs. He was our nearest neighbor, and the outlet from his farm came out to the main road exactly opposite our road-gate. His wife was originally Rachael Dounham, and her first husband was a Mr. Saxton. When they moved into the Neck they brought with them two young men, Thomas and John Saxton, of whom I shall say something farther on. Mr. Purnell was a good man, and shortly after moving into the Neck was appointed class leader by the preacher in charge for the colored people at Barratt's Chapel. That was in the days before there was any colored church in Delaware, and the colored people had the gallery of the white peoples' churches assigned to them. They held their class meeting generally before the regular service on Sunday mornings. As a little boy I was delighted to get to the Chapel before preaching, go up into the gallery and hear Uncle Billy lead the class, listen to their testimony and singing, and hear their responses. Sometimes it would be something like a grunt, and then a louder grunt, and then "yes, yes;" and as the fire of their enthusiasm would begin to burn, shouting loud hallelujahs and amens could be heard afar off; then someone would start to sing, and such singing, language is all too poor to begin to describe the melody of the old-time colored camp-meeting songs. While writing, there comes to my mind one of their songs. I will give one verse:

"When Israel came to Jericho,
Glory Hallelujah!
Began to shout, and sing, and blow,
Glory Hallelujah!
The towering walls came tumbling down,
Glory Hallelujah"
Like thunder fat upon the ground,
Glory Hallelujah!

In those days the ability of the colored people to supply words to their singing or adapt singing to their words, was marvelous. Many of them were sincerely good and pions people with a steady purpose to do right. Uncle Billy discharged his duty as a good shepherd. At the close of the meeting he would take out his book and carefully call over the names, marking each one present, and if anyone was absent he would inquire the reason of those presnt. If the reason was not satisfactory, you would see him during the week going on horseback in search of the delinquent members, and if in his estimation the excuse was not sufficient, the old gentleman would then and there proceed out of his ready accumulation of scriptural denunciations to consign the poor fellow to the regions where a cotton overcoat would be superfluous clothing. Uncle Billy Purnell was a useful man, with limited education and little opportunity to improve his mind by travel or otherwise; yet he was an interesting talker, though a little deaf. He had good common sense, and a keen sense of humor, and could tell a good joke. He was devoted to duty, adhered strictly to principle, and faithfully discharged his duty. His honest desire to be a true Christian will, I have no doubt, be his passport to "the

house not made with hands." His wife, Aunt Rachel, was one of the best of women, and many a good slice of bread and butter with honey or preserves, have I enjoyed from her hand. Their daughter Rachel was near my age, and when I was about four or five years old, I would steal away from home, cross the branch on two poles laid side by side for a bridge, and go play with Rachel. I somehow conceived the idea that the proper thing for me to do would be to have Rachel for a wife, so I walked boldly in one day and asked Mrs. Purnell if I could have Rachel. The old lady told me yes, but that I must ask all the family, and forthwith I proceeded to carry out her instructions by going to each one and asking their permission. The last one told me it was necessary that I should ask the colored man, Ben Lowber, which I did, and received his sanction, which he laughed about and told me of for forty years afterward. How vividly do these little events come up before the mind, though 65 or 70 years have passed and gone!

Mr. Purnell's moving into Murderkill Neck was instrumental in causing his stepson John Saxton, to seek a home and a wife and settle in the Neck and become one of its substantial citizens. He married Miss Sipple, one of four sisters who married the following gentlemen: Richard Norris, Jehu Reed, Captain James Grier, and John Saxton. Four better women never lived in Murderkill Neck. They were recognized all over the Neck as models, for I have heard their good qualities spoken about by the old folks in ye olden times.

John Saxton purchased the old Parson Huston farm. He put up new buildings and greatly improved the land. His long residence in the Neck, his industry, integrity, and strict devotion to right and fair play, placed him among the first citizens of the county, and when the neighborhood decided to build a new church for the accommodation of the people of that part of the Neck, it was by unanimous consent named the "Saxton Chapel." I knew him for years, and also his brother Thomas, who settled near Camden, Delaware. For sterling integrity, sound moral worth, and true devotion to the bedrock principles of justice and fair dealing, I call to mind none that surpassed the two sons of old Aunt Rachel Purnell. When such men die a vacuum is made in the moral atmosphere that may take a long time to fill.

I think, Mr. Editor, I have pretty well covered the ground which I had intended when I commenced these memoirs, and now must bring them to a close. While quite a number of good people came to reside in the Neck as tenants, and afterwards moved out, some of whom were most worthy people about whom much could be said to their credit, I have adhered to my original purpose and confined myself with few exceptions to those who were land-owners, and therefore identified with the social order and the improvements necessary to well organized society. Many of them wrought well for future generations by clearing and draining the branches, swamps and lowlands, cutting down the forests, and bringing the land into a state of cultivation. More than half the land from Barratt's Chapel to Bowers Beach, a distance of five miles, has been brought into cultivation within my recollection of sixty-five years. Marvelous, indeed, is it to one who has lived to see the change. But they have all passed "beyond the river to their long home." They have acted well their part, and the community in which they lived is richer and better for their having lived. They marked the road and laid broad the foundations of integrity and moral rectitude, and paved the way for the generations to come to reach greater heights in all that goes to make life more pleasant and more desirable.

Thanks to the bountiful giver of all good, the road of industry, which our fathers trod so faithfully, is still open to all. Along this road lies success, progress, contentment and happiness,

if sought for in the right way. The present and future generations need not fear. He that ruleth in the heavens still sends the sunshine and the showers, the seed-time and the harvest; orders by his own immutable law the earth on its diurnal and annual revolutions; operates the great law of gravitation that holds this planet within its orbit, and the more than eighty millions of systems with their suns and satellites are kept with unerring precision within their prescribed limits; holds in his hand Pleiades and the Milky Way; wraps the ocean around the earth; makes the mountains and high places, and covers the earth with beauty; hangs in the heavens the emblems of His majesty and power, and in His goodness sends the rains on the just and the unjust.

For the blessings that have come to us because our fathers wrought let us be thankful, and hope that the present generation may as faithfully do their part in pushing forward the car of progress and the upbuilding of a better civilization for those to follow as the old fathers of Murderkill Neck did in the long ago.

(THE END)

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NOTE: The following appeared in the July 19, 1901, edition of the *Milford Chronicle*, Milford, Delaware, on page 2, column 3, in the "Milton News" column: "'My Recollections of Olden Times in Murderkill Neck,' by Mr. Joseph Burchenal, which commenced in the last issue of the CHRONICLE, possesses quite an interest for me. Not only on account of the personal acquaintance I have had with the writer in the days that are gone, but because one family mentioned in the latter part of his first communication was known by myself, and doubtless others that he will write of may come under the memory of my recollection."

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