

Our Cloak of Yesteryears

Threads of three hundred historic years have woven a complex and colorful pattern of our "brave, pleasant plain at the foot of the first mountain." That is the description one of the first Scot settlers, Thomas Gordon, gave to our town.

His words and the invaluable letters of others who settled here in 1683-4 are preserved in a work of George Scot of Pitlochrie, Scotland, entitled "The Model of the Government of the Province of East Jersey, in America."

Through the words of Peter Watson, servant to David Barclay, we learn of the Indians who fished and hunted here. "They are a very kind and loving people," he wrote of the Unami (the Turtlebacks), a sub-tribe of the Lenni-Lenape nation, a small branch of the Delawares, whose totem to the turtle was in the heart of the Ash Brook area.

Scot's "Model" was published in 1684 after the author visited London and talked with John Drummond and possibly William Penn. The work with Governor Lawrie's words that "Here wants nothing but people" encouraged Scotsmen to come over by the shiploads. Scot himself embarked from Leith after receiving 500 acres from the East Jersey Proprietors on July 28, 1685. He never reached his land of "the large plain under the blew hills." Death struck Scot, his wife and nearly half of the 200 passengers on the ill-fated Henry and Francis. A son and daughter survived. The latter, named Euphemia, married in 1686 to John Johnstone, and to him the Proprietors issued Scot's grant.

Scotch Plains, originally known as "Scotsplain" is believed by some historians to have been named after the famous leader. The first recorded use of the name "Scotch Plains" was in the will of Nathaniel Bonnell in 1736. However, in a survey taken in 1769 and a map published in 1778, which is on display in the South Side Firehouse, the name "Scotsplain" still appears.

Scot was the only son of the illustrious Sir John Scot of Scotstarvet, Scotland, and was of the Scott clan. It is quite possible that as he set sail in 1685 he wore his cloak of "dress red" in defiance of the Scottish rule.

George and John Alexander are reported to have come in 1685 with the Scottish emigration and had a large allotment of land in Scotch Plains.

Among the New Englanders recorded to be at the East side of Ash Swamp in November of 1685 were William Pardon, Robert Morse, William Trotter and George Pack adjoining newly acquired property of William Broadwell.

The land, and the question of who owned it, was the warp on which our town-history was made. Matters were complicated by the fact that this same area of East New Jersey was owned simultaneously by two groups. The first group was the East Jersey Proprietors who based their claim on a grant given by the Duke of York in 1664 to Lord Berkeley and Sir George Carteret.