

The Wetherill Family's Influence on the Dayton Area of South Brunswick



John and George Wetherill came to Cross Roads sometime in the mid-1700s. Each in his own way contributed to the development of this area. Their father, Capt. Thomas Wetherill of Piscataway, had given John about 620 acres he'd acquired north of Cranbury Brook by the time of his death, about 1735, and George received 215 acres at Drinking Brook Hollow. Both sons married young and began their families. How they enlarged their holdings is not yet known, but both men built upon their inheritance and left considerable legacies.

John Wetherill is most noted for his accumulation of a 1700 acre plantation in the general area of southeastern South Brunswick with land extending south of Haypress Road along Georges Road to Miller Road and then back to Haypress Road. An additional section extended east to the Forsgate Farms area where his estate house was located. These lands were divided up among the heirs of his youngest son, Vincent.

The Wetherill-Mount House we see today began as a small shed, with later additions creating the present farmhouse. Additional properties went to John's other children and grandchildren by his will of 1784. His three daughters married into the well-known Longstreet, Dye, and Reid families.

Aside from his land holdings in the Dayton area, John Wetherill is known for his activities as a member of the New Jersey Colonial Assembly from Middlesex County. First elected in 1749, he served in all sessions until 1776. Most members of the Assembly had personal wealth either in land, money or both. Wetherill with his land holdings and money was ranked in the colony's wealthiest 2 percent. Politically he sided against the Proprietor, supporting instead the interests of rural landowners for lower taxes and more control over local courts. He served the Patriot cause in 1774 as a member of the Standing Committee of Correspondence and Inquiry to correspond with other Colonists. He was a member of the Provincial Congress, which met in the summer of 1775 and January 1776. He was also commissioned as a Colonel in the 2nd Battalion of the Militia of Middlesex County for part of 1776. One of his last important acts was to petition the Legislature, along with others, to empower the landowners of Pigeon Swamp to keep this area drained for better land use. Both he and his brother George owned land in the Pigeon Swamp area and this might have influenced this petition.

George Wetherill, the first of 2 freeholders to represent the South Ward in 1773 was seen as a political-minded member of his community. As a landholder he passed various properties on to his children and grandchildren. About 1770, his son Thomas built the inn later known as Wines Hotel (on the current site of the WAWA). It was here in June of 1778 that some of George Washington's entourage made purchases on their way to the Battle of Monmouth. When Thomas died in 1817, his estate was valued at about \$8000, a huge sum for that time. His only son, George, died in childhood; his daughters married into the McDowell, VanPelt, and Schenck families. His daughter, Abigail VanPelt, was famous for the store she ran in the area. Another daughter married into the Schenck family which managed the first inn at Cross Roads, the Whitlock-Barricklo Tavern (now Dayton Diner) across the street from the Wines Hotel.

This brief recounting of one of Dayton's early families is an indication of the area's rich history with much more to be learned about the life and times of South Brunswick's communities.