

The Kerr Clan Of New Jersey

Beginning with
Walter Ker of Freehold
and including
Other Related Lines

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JAMES KERR OF BRANDYWINE AND VALLEY FORGE

By Miss M. M. Nickum

Many years ago at a family reunion at Monongahela, Pa., a paper was read by Rev. Dr. Greer M. Kerr; the opening paragraphs of the sketch herewith presented are taken from the Rev. Mr. Kerr's account but greatly condensed:

"Our ancestors have been people of whom we have no reason to be ashamed. While we would not worship them as the Chinese, we are justified in honoring them, and preserving and perpetuating the memory of their names and history.

The first of the name mentioned in history of Scotland was a herald of Sir William Wallace about 1200 A. D. He was killed by the English while acting as an ambassador. I think this incident gives the key to the meaning of our name. It is the same as our word "courier."

The original home of the clan was in the southern part of Scotland near the English border. It is said that the reason our men are so strong and large is that living so near the border the conflicts with those on the other side are so frequent and fierce that the small and weak were all killed and only the large and strong survived. The Cumberland and Northumberland English who live on the other side of the border are also large. The Queen's Guards, all over six feet, two inches, are all Cumberland and Northumberland men. In our raids upon them, and their raids upon us, fighting with the primitive weapons then in use, all the small and weak men on both sides were exterminated and only the strong and stalwart survived.

One of the legends of our clan is that on a certain occasion the chief gathered in his relatives for a feast. They were all seated in their places around the banquet table; but when the cover was lifted from what was thought a smoking roast, lo and behold! a pair of spurs in the dish. It was a gentle hint from the gude wife that the larder was empty and that they must go riding again over the border before there could be another feast. The clansmen smiled grimly at each other and that very night they started out to lay in supplies.

It is claimed by some that all the Scottish Clans came from Ireland. There is a County Kerry in Ireland. It was ruled by an ancient chief called Ciar or Kiar, and his descendants.

One of this clan named James Kerr was brought to America in 1736, when he was three years old. We have thus far not been able to learn anything about his father and mother, not even the names they bore; but it is probable these parents brought him from Ireland to America.

James had a brother Joseph who never married, and a sister Hannah. This James Kerr was born January, 1733, and died February 25, 1825. He lived in Brandywine in Chester County, Pa., near a Presbyterian church, the pastor of which was named Carmichael, who baptised all his children. He married Elizabeth Porter, Dec. 10, 1766, who was born in 1746, and died Feb. 14, 1828; to them were born three sons and four daughters. With his wife and six children (little Rebekah had died) he came west and settled near Monongahela, Pa., arriving in the latter part of December, 1793. He was a mechanic and made plows, which at that time had wooden

mould boards. He helped hew the logs for the first Mingo meeting house.

We have reason to believe that he was a pretty fair scholar. We know that he was a good penman as we still have his autograph well preserved, written by him in a text-book in mathematics that belonged to him, dated 1753, when he would be 20 years old. He served in the Revolutionary War; he has told of the Battle of Brandywine, how the soldiers swore and how his pastor, Rev. Mr. Carmichael, who was present, was shocked and distressed at their profanity at such a time of death and carnage. While he was absent in the army, his wife managed to put in the crops. They had a German neighbor, Hanish; she neighbored with them. Their women did the plowing, and our Grandmother Kerr sowed the grain for them in return."

Corroborating the above records, written years ago, the following interesting letter of October 1, 1929, has been received from Rev. H. H. Kurtz of Glen Moore, Pa.:

"The Forks of Brandywine Church, of which I am the present pastor, was organized in 1735, by men of the Scotch-Irish immigration, and has maintained continuous services from that time until now. It has been served by eleven pastors, the third of whom was the Rev. John Carmichael. Mr. Carmichael entered upon his pastoral work in 1761, and died in 1785. He was an ardent patriot, a personal friend of Washington, and was so earnest in his efforts in behalf of the colonies that the British authorities offered a reward for his capture. There is a tradition that he and his family had to escape to the wooded hills beyond

the Brandywine, to avoid capture at the hand of a troop of cavalry.

He was present on the field of Brandywine during the battle, or was with the army on its retreat. He was greatly helpful during the terrible winter at Valley Forge. He died at an early age and is buried in the shadow of the church. His memory is greatly revered in the community.

As to the ancestor, James Kerr, all of whose children Mr. Carmichael baptised, I can find no trace. The old records have been destroyed, some in the fire which consumed the church shortly after the death of Mr. Carmichael, and some through carelessness in later days."