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Ann C. Whitall, the Heroine
of Red Bank. ¶ The Battle of
Gloucester. ¶ Lost Towns and
Hamlets in Old Gloucester
County

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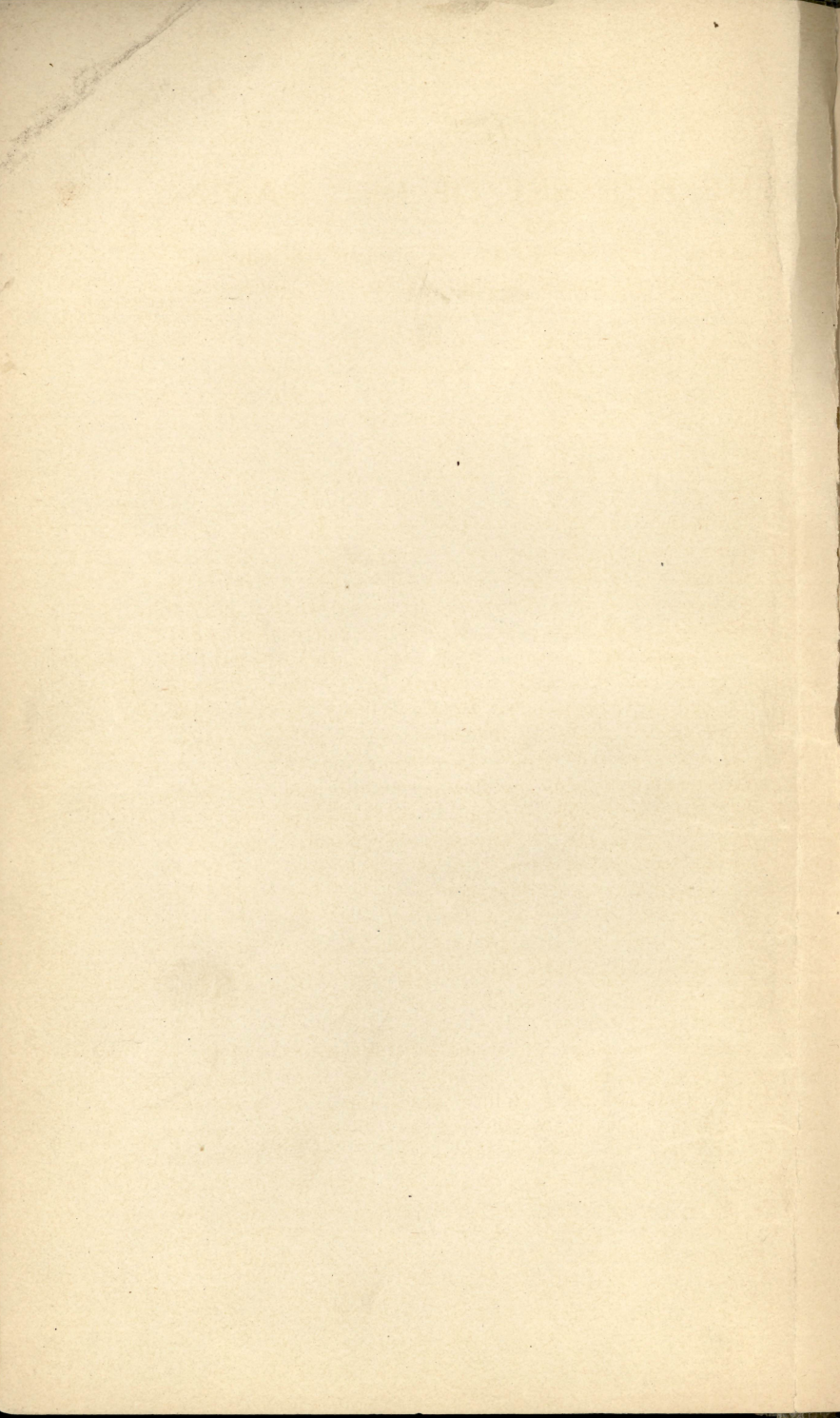
Prepared for and read before the
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THE HEROINE OF RED BANK

By Isabella C. McGeorge, as read before the Gloucester
County Historical Society, January 11, 1904

"Not alone when life flows still do truth
And power emerge, but also when strange chance
Affects its current * * * * * Oftenest
at death's approach—
Peril, deep joy, or woe."

—ROBERT BROWNING.

IN the early spring time, a field of wheat on a distant hillside seems a beautiful green carpet of unbroken color; the nearer we approach it, the more distinctly the wavy outlines of the seed rows appear—the rough brown earth shows between and bare patches where the grain has been winter killed mar its uniformity; so with us to-day—the patriotic duty of our predecessors looks a lovely green field that bore a perfect harvest—but closer inspection, aided by fragments of preserved data, clearly reveals the discouragements, trials and difficulties that beset our ancestors in their attempt to do their duty to their homes and country.

While energy is definable as Power efficiently and forcibly exerted, the capacity for the performance of work, life, spirit and vigor;" yet its correlative, its necessary completion, is endurance. By some, this has been rated as high as is courage; while others consider that it outranks courage and gives to it the higher position, since it requires a continuance of spirit and vigor, the evocation of the noblest attributes of man, which, if necessary, enable one to go unflinchingly into the dark, deep waters that lap the Valley of the Shadow on this side, and on the other, lave the shores of Life Eternal.

In your memory are scintillating numerous examples of brave men and women, as we well know many of the latter have equal capacity to heroically meet sudden death—some of world-wide fame many of a more restricted area, but the one in whom we claim local interest and whose intrepidity we honor, is an unassuming Friend, or Quakeress of the 18th century, Ann Cooper Whitall. She, strongly imbued with the courage of her convictions, feared no man, nor the Evil One, but fearfully loved her Creator, and tried to live a strenuously ideal life with energy and endurance.

When, on the banks of Woodbury creek, in 1716, 4 mo. 23d, O. S.—there came to the home of John and Ann Clark Cooper, a second daughter, it was decided that the babe was to bear the ancestral name of Ann, as had her mother and grandmother before her.

In accordance with the teachings of Friends, of which society the Coopers and Clarks had for generations been active and prominent members, little Ann was reared to be obedient to parents; to eschew vanity; to be industrious, as occupation was a safeguard from mischief; to be cheerful and civil, avoiding idle discourse, and "to walk answerably to the purity of her profession."

Early her active mind fathomed nature's secrets; none knew better than she where to find the useful simples for the brewing of healing teas; the spring beauties smiled at her first, as she was the soonest to see them; the jacks-in-the-pulpit nodded to her as she examined their tongues to hunt out the rare dark ones; the kalmias swung their bells in her face, bew powdering her with their pollen; she made swings under the cedars by pulling down the Virginia creeper; ampelopsis quinquefolia, and gloried in their autumnal beauty. This was permissible, for it was God's handiwork and not men's base imitation. She learned to love her books for was she not the grandchild of Benjamin Clark, the publisher of Friends' books, London, England, and from whom she inherited a facility with the quill? Later, she indulged in a diary and interjections—a safety valve. Oh! how else could she have controlled herself?

She became proficient in housekeeping and spinning and at the age of 23 was married to the stalwart James Whitall, only son of Job and Jane Sidon Whitall, before Haddonfield meeting, 9th month, 23d, 1739, O. S. They were well-to-do, having a fair share of this world's goods, and owned a ninety acre farm on the east bank of the Delaware river, seven miles below the then town of Philadelphia. Six sons and three daughters blessed their union.

Nine years after their marriage the brick mansion was completed and

I. A. W.

1748

were cut in the north gable, meaning that James and Ann Whitall had built this house at that date. The brick was imported; to-day the building is in a fair state of preservation and is the property of the United States Government.

In her meditations, as she termed her diary, she states that she scarcely had time to sit down, much less to write, for the household cares, the "passel of children" with their fevers and casualties, the week-day meetings, which she rarely missed, once

going to a quarterly at Haddonfield, "riding horseback through the rain, the water ran down my skin," the storms that threatened the house and the accident when her husband barely escaped with his life—but then she took time to write of her gratitude: "O what a great favor he is still living! O how wonderful indeed; it is one of the greatest blessings that his children and I can have him with us! Oh, how often I think what would become of me if he were taken away!"

Her sons, while obedient and industrious, would not attend the week-day meeting of the Society of Friends as frequently as the mother deemed necessary; she bemoans the father's bad example and the fact that her sons sometimes skated after meeting on First-day. Her troubled spirit finds expression in her diary thus:

"7 mo. 3d, 1768. Hannah and I went to meeting alone, and her father would not go with us. But it is my lot to go alone, or none must go. Oh, it is my mind that any may contrive their business so as to go to meeting constantly, if they will. But, oh! this going when he has a mind, or once a month. Once a month! When 6th day meeting comes then more earnest at work than ere a day in the whole, whole week! It makes me sick sometimes to see such doings, year after year. Now, we have been married about thirty years and he so cold about religion and the children grown men. This is the greatest trouble I meet with. I go with a heavy heart if my children don't go to meeting nor their father. But I must drink these bitters! Oh! the bitters that I have to drink! Oh! the wormwood and the gall and am overwhelmed in sorrow every day I live. Oh! this wicked world! To go skating after meeting! How can the Lord's day be spent at such work?"

With sly humor, James, her husband, would sometimes question if she were any better than he and the boys, or as good; that she had not escaped being thrown and "kicked by the mare even when she was on her way to meeting." However, the meetings were not always satisfactory, for she beheld there that which troubled her as recorded on "10th mo. 1st Sixth-day, 1771. Oh! the concern I was in! To think of so many that can sit and sleep, meeting after meeting, year after year!"

She mentions also a "hard, laborious meeting" that "Joshua Lord spoke a long while and he did rattle us agoing" and of the non-successful issue of her remonstrance with a drowsy widow, who, being refreshed by her nap, did not accept Ann's reproof in submissive spirit.

She vigorously denounced the "doddry fashions"—that the gaudy calico was unfit garb for plain Quakers and shrewdly divined that the giddiness of youth was traceable to laxity of their

elders. "The old people had not done their duty, and that was the reason the young were no better."

In her disapproval of the excessive use or the abuse of tea and tobacco, she caustically classified the users as being irresponsible as the "negors, all one as bad as another."

The negroes of New Jersey, as per the provincial statutes, bore the reputation of being "an idle, slothful people, and free negroes proved very often a charge to the place where they lived."

Dame Whitall seemed equal to all exigencies. Nothing unnerved her, nothing appalled nor dismayed. Her encounter with a thief is characteristic. While the location of the home was very lovely, yet its proximity to Philadelphia brought annoyances; the henroosts were depleted, the cows were milked by stealth, fruit stolen—for the cove was very handy for sneak thieves.

One evening when her husband had been belated at Woodbury, the help absent and the children upstairs asleep, Ann Whitall sat in the living room knitting by candle light. A slight sound attracted her attention to the open stairway. To her surprise she saw a pair of ankles and shoeless feet disappear on the landing. Hastily laying her knitting on the table, she sprang up the stairs and collared a man, who, upon his hands and knees, was about to crawl under the bed of the northwest room. Taken at such a disadvantage his bravado oozed out of his skin in great beads of perspiration.

"What is thee after?"

"Nothin'," was the sullen answer.

"This is a likely place for thee to be hunting it," and slapping him in the face, she marched him downstairs, lecturing him the while on the wickedness of theft. She turned him out of the house, bidding him be thankful that she had been in time to prevent his sin.

In her diary she reproves herself for levity, and earnestly resolves to endeavor to give at least half of her time to serious and woeful consideration, for she was very good company and often found herself really enjoying things that might possibly not be approved by meeting "I often think if I could be so fixed as to never laugh nor smile I should be one step better. Our Lord pronounces a woe against them that laugh. Solomon said of laughter, "it is madness." Then she wonders if it be her duty to cry, day and night, or at least, twelve hours of the twenty-four in order to render herself worthy of heavenly consideration.

But when the woeful time finally came, Ann had no leisure for tears nor meditations, but proved her efficiency and capacity in emergency, realizing that home duty outweighed all other considerations. Upon her own hearth-stone she, in her energetic and

practical way, became a heroine whose fame has outlived that of those dolorous and saintly Friends whom she had ofttimes hoped to emulate.

Then came rumors of war, followed by active preparation at her threshold for just opposite, at the mouth of the Schuylkill river, on Mud Island, Fort Mifflin was built, and Fort Mercer was thrown up in Whitall's apple orchard on the bluff. Their log barn was torn out to furnish timber for the stockade that was constructed within three hundred feet of their door-sill. For had not General Washington said that "without the free navigation of the Delaware I am confident that General Howe will never remain in Philadelphia," hence, in order to hasten his departure, the Americans were contriving to make Lord Howe's stay as unpleasant as possible. To quote a Quaker historian's quaint version written in scriptural style:

"Now, the people of the provinces had laid impediments in the way of the ships of the King of Britain, so that they could not get to the city, and the hosts of Britain were sore troubled because of these things.

"And the victuals and all the implements of war that were wanted in the host, they brought in carriages to the city, and the charge thereof was great and the arrival of the carriages uncertain.

* * * * *

"Now the implements that were put into the river to keep the ships of the King from coming to the city were strong and many.

"They were made of the large fir trees of Columbia, and they were put one upon another, and large pieces of barbed iron were fastened thereto; and when they were fashioned together they were let down into the waters of the river.

"And the machines with the barbed iron pointed towards the ships, and lo, when the ships came upon the point of the barbed iron, they were marred, and the waters of the river rushed into the ships and they were filled with the waters of the rivers."

Ann Whitall's brother, the fearless John Cooper, who openly espoused the cause, being a member of both Provincial and Continental Congress, had the better of the argument when she called his attention to his duty as a Friend to guard against approving or showing the least connivance at war for he reminded her that she was protected by two forts and a chain across the river.

Some years prior to the Revolution, John Cooper built the brick house on the east side of Broad street, Woodbury, opposite the County Monument. There he lived and died. During the winter of 1777-78 Lord Cornwallis seized the property and oc-

cupied it during his stay in this neighborhood, hence it has been known as the British headquarters, and later as the Amos Campbell home, it has been said that this same John Cooper builded better when he drafted the Constitution of the State of New Jersey—the State that recorded herself as third star in that brilliant constellation that illumes the whole world—the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Barber's History records that this Fort Mercer was nothing more than "a good earthen rampart raised to the cordon a fosse and an abattis in front. This constituted the whole strength of the fort—in which were 300 men and fourteen pieces of cannon. This corps was from Rhode Island, and mainly negroes and mulattoes, who were in a ragged, destitute condition."

As first arranged, Fort Mercer was larger than could be manned by Colonel Green's small force, so when Manduit du Plessis arrived at the fort he convinced Colonel Green of the necessity of strengthening the fortifications by intersection, which transformed Fort Mercer to a large redoubt of Pentagonal form.

A fence was built across the south end of the redoubt with 2,000 feet of Whitall's boards and strengthened with 3,000 of his oaken staves; the cannons were concealed with apple-tree brush, hay, etc., giving the appearance of a farm brush heap.

1777, 9th mo., 22d was "a pleasant and fair day"—the English were reported to be near"—so James Whitall and his son Job "drove twenty-one head of cattle to uncle David Cooper's, at Woodbury." This was another brother of Ann's; he was known as the "wise David, to whom all applied for advice in cases of difficulty."

After dinner, Job's wife, Sarah Gill Whitall, and the three children, David, Job, Jr., and Hannah, the babe, with a load of goods, were taken to the same place. "The men in the fort took charge (?) of forty-seven sheep." The next day Ann C. Whitall, then sixty-one years of age, went over to her daughter's, Sarah, wife of John Matlock, near Woodbury, with another load of goods, while her husband and son "stored as much grain and wheat" as was possible to secure. Colonel Green impressed a valuable horse and advised the Whitall's to take themselves out of danger while yet there was opportunity. Then they filled four rooms of the house with goods, stores, etc., and locked the doors, leaving the house in possession of the American officers stationed at the fort.

On Monday, October 20, 1777, word came of the advance of 1,500 Hessians, under guidance of the Tory McIlvaine and two negroes, Dick and "Old Mitch."

In their zeal, the Tory and Dick went too near and fell into

the hands of the Americans and were promptly hanged within the stockade; but "Old Mitch" was too wary. He reasoned that neutrality was the safest plan for him to adopt, so he flattened himself beside a hay rick, where he lay in mortal terror, and never recovered his ebony color which that October day was blued with fright. "But lordy, massy," he used to exclaim, when in after days he was asked to relate his experience of that dreadful time, "ah guess ah shuch as de canum ball cum ploughin' long de groun' and flingin' de sand in mah face; an' after dat canum blowed up ah thought fer half an hour ah was dead, weder or no!" He referred to the bursting of a gun within Fort Mercer, which did more harm to the Americans than did the combined force of the Hessians on shore and British vessels in the river; and the American casualty being fourteen killed and twenty-six wounded; that of the British was 300 killed, of whom fifteen were officers and many wounded, 100 dying within three days. Some were interred on the Whitall place, south of the stockade, and many were buried in the Strangers' Ground, on Delaware street, Woodbury, New Jersey.

After repeated repulses the Hessians retreated in wild confusion, dropping their wounded along the route to Haddonfield. They left their disabled leader, Count Donop, in the trenches; he who so insolently had demanded surrender, with the warning that if the Americans "stood battle they could expect no quarter." That night when Manduit du Plessis found him nearly smothered, and with broken hip, he called to those Rhode Island negroes, who tenderly lifted him out from the encumbering carcasses. Donop expected no quarter then, and he was so overcome by their kind treatment that he exclaimed: "I die content; I die in the hands of honor itself."

They carried him to the Whitall house, but Ann Whitall advised his removal to Gibbs, three-quarters of a mile down the river, where there would be more room and less confusion.

When Colonel Greene moved out of the Whitall house in to the fort on October 21, Ann Whitall went over with her son Job she at once decided to stay and put things to rights. Job insisted that she ought at least go to the nearest neighbor's for safety. But she was obdurate and allowed that if the Lord called her, He would find her at home; and with beautiful faith reminded her son that "the Lord is strong and mighty and He will protect me."

On that fateful Wednesday, October 22, 1777, after setting her house in as good order as possible, and that she might protect herself for whatever God ordained, Ann Cooper Whitall took her spinning wheel to the southeast room. As that wheel whirled

round, the guns of the British frigates *Augusta* and *Merlin* boomed a gamut of threats—those of the nearby fort roared defiant answers and the musketry of besiegers and besieged, mingled with the screams of the wounded, kept up an incessantly horrible racket. It was terrible. She resisted the impulse to even look northward, fortifying herself with the thought that by abstaining she was bearing testimony to Friends' abhorrence of war.

Then one of the balls went wide of its aim and entered the north gable just below I. A. W. and as if seeking the old lady, it crossed the northeast room, then the hall, and into the southeast room in which Ann Whitall sat spinning, where it fell inert. What if more should follow? She remembered that Providence favors those who aid themselves, so she carried her wheel out into the hall!—oh-h— what an ugly hole that ball made!—down the open stairway, speedily reaching the cellar door and made quick descent to the cool depth of the southeast corner. Here she continued to spin until the tumult ceased and the battle was over.

“And the battle continued about half an hour, and the residue made their escape and fled.”

“Now the bellowings of the destroying engines were heard afar off, and the shouting of the men of war resounded from shore to shore and from province to province.”

“The flocks and the herds were driven from the pastures they sought the thick shade of the forest! the hair of their flesh stood up at the sound of the battle of the warriors.”

“The knees of the ancient smote together! the terrors of death encompassed them round about; they ate their bread; fear and their drink was mingled with their tears.”

Ann was on hand with bandages that evening when the injured were brought in; the house was filled, even the attic was crowded. That night she was an angel of mercy to the wounded and dying, but when some of them fretted because of the noise, she reminded them that they “must not complain, who had brought it on themselves.” She administered to their needs, this being clearly within the line of duty—“to care for the ill and dying and direct their minds to a solemn commemoration of the approaching period of life.”

Colonel Green then took possession of the house—the dead were interred on the banks south of the stockade and Ann Whitall returned to her daughter's, Sarah Matlock.

After the evacuation of the fort on November 20, 1777, the British came and laid waste to everything, but the Whitall house. Although it was not deemed safe for the family to return to their home on the bluff until Monday, April 20, 1778—the record

in James Whitall's diary states "after an absence and precarious living for upward of six months."

1781. When General Lafayette brought the Marquis de Chastellux over from Philadelphia to ramble about the battle ground of Red Bank—uninvited, they entered the Whitall house. Ann, not trusting that she could control herself from showing her resentment to the intrusion, withdrew from sight, leaving James to manage the case. He calmly ignored the invaders. After ineffectual attempts to induce his notice, the Frenchman became incensed by the rudeness (?) (save the mark) "of the old Tory Quaker," departed making uncomplimentary record of the visit, as is preserved in Chastellux's Travels in North America.

In later years, after a severe winter during which the river banks became frost cracked, the graves of the Hessians opened and the bones were exposed, some falling out upon the river shore. At night fun loving rovers would come over from Babylon, as Ann termed Philadelphia, arm themselves with bones, race swiftly around the house muttering weird cries—supposedly Hessian maledictions, and if an open shutter permitted, would rap upon the window glass. This was demoralizing to the farm help, and the place acquired the reputation of being haunted. Ann Whitall was very much annoyed, but her keen judgment soon ferreting the origin of the vexation, she persuaded her sons to collect and rebury all visible relics of the battle. When this was accomplished, the ghostly revels ceased, the "haunt was laid" and peace ensued.

In 1797, when yellow fever appeared in Philadelphia, a quarantine station was established just opposite the Whitall residence, on the Delaware, near the former location of Fort Mifflin. Despite all precautions taken for safety a discarded bed from an infected ship floated into the Whitall cove and the family was seized with the dreaded Yellow Jack. There were six victims: Ann's sons, Job and Benjamin, and grandchildren, Sarah and Aaron, died within the days intervening between September 11-19. Ann C. Whitall was in her eighty-second year; her strong will had borne severe tests; her nerve, rigid tension, and heretofore she had undauntedly faced all emergencies; but weakened by advanced age and this last sorrow she succumbed to the fever, Sunday, September 23, 1797.

Entering the higher life where energy fatigueth not and the burden of endurance melteth into misty nebula.

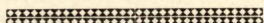
On the summit of Woodbury Hill is the Friends' burial ground; on the south is a school house, and under the trees of its play ground happy children curl dandelion stems and weave daisy chains; two hundred feet to the north is a blacksmith's forge.

whence comes the sound of ding-ding-ding-dick; and west, within twenty feet the trolley groans its remonstrance to the steep grade, whose passengers may note at the edge of the embankment a small marble slab, eight inches by two, and showing but six inches above the sward. That marks the final resting place of Ann Cooper Whitall. Three miles to the westward is the Whitall house, and the same beam of the setting sun that glints upon the bosom of the Delaware at her former home, is reflected on the corner of that little monument.

Now the sun in all his state, illumes the western skies;
But she has passed thro' Glory's gate, and walks in Paradise.

"The sun is but a spark of fire,
A transient meteor in the sky;
The soul, immortal as its Sire,
Can never die."

—James Montgomery.



THE BATTLE OF GLOUCESTER

Read before the Gloucester County Historical Society by
Wallace McGeorge, M. D., January 9, 1906

THE Battle of Gloucester, as people living in this part of the State in the Eighteenth Century, called it, was of more importance to the American cause than most readers of history are willing to ascribe to it.

From history we learn that after the fall of Fort Mifflin on November 10, 1777, and the evacuation of Fort Mercer, by Col. Greene, on November 20, 1777, Lord Cornwallis marched a portion of his troops to Red Bank, November 21, destroyed the fortifications and magazine, and then went up the river to Gloucester Point, and established his headquarters there, where his force of five thousand men would be under the protection of the guns on the British frigates lying in the river, and secure from an attack by the Continental troops. Foraging parties were immediately sent out and large quantities of cattle, provision and stores were secured by Cornwallis' men, and ferried over the river to be used by the British army, then in possession of Philadelphia (a).

At that time, all the region of country south of Newton Creek (then called New Town Creek) and north of Timber Creek (then called Big Timber Creek), was called Gloucester, the village