

CHRISTIAN LESNETT

Genealogy by Daniel M. Bennett, Bridgeville, PA.

Not every grave in the Burial Ground Old St. Luke's can be identified today. One such grave is that of Christian Lesnett who was buried on 1807 outside the 1790 frame church. His story can be told in part, thanks to Bennett's notes on the family.

Christian was born in 1728 at Hessen Castle, Germany. Nothing is recorded of his childhood. In 1752, when he was 24 years old, a group left Germany for the new world called America. Christian was one of the emigrants. Also among the group was a young married couple. The husband died en route, and Christiana, the wife, gave birth to a girl. The group arrived in Baltimore, then to Frederick, Maryland, where they all settled. In 1757, five years after arriving, Christian married the widow Christiana.

Christian was a woodworker and cabinet maker. His shop in Frederick burned down. He relocated to Hagerstown, Maryland. The French and Indian War began in 1754. Col. Henry Bouquet called for increased military strength. Christian joined the rangers in Maryland in 1758 (as Old St. Luke's William Lea joined from the Chartiers Valley). Christian was assigned to repair and defend the wagons, first at Wills Creek (Cumberland) and then at Raystown (Bedford, Pa.). After a futile battle, Ft. Duquesne was deserted by the French. Gen. Forbes and Col. Bouquet occupied the site, ready to build the new Ft. Pitt. In August, 1763, Ottawa's Chief Pontiac led the Indian charge, only to be defeated by Bouquet at nearby Bushy Run to end the French and Indian War.

Christian was impressed with the land around the three rivers. When the sale of land was initiated by William Penn, Christian and many others filed their claims. It was still in dispute as to who owned this area - Pennsylvania or Virginia. It is said that because the land could be purchased at a fraction of the cost charged by the Penns, settlers favored Virginia's Ohio Company. After filing a claim, the settlers had to quickly build a log house and raise a crop of grain. An inferior kind of land title was called a tomahawk right. A pioneer could deaden a few trees, make a mark on the bark, and cut in his initials.

Christian took out a tomahawk claim of 1000 acres in Fiette (South Fayette Township). Under his 1800 Pennsylvania patent, he retained only 414 acres, 20 perches, which he named "Berlin." He paid 30 pounds, 15 shillings, 3 pence for ft. (His son Francis (Frank) would later claim 213 acres, 15 perches, beside his father's tract.) Christian and his two eldest sons, Frederick 14, and Frank 12, came to the site. They built a cabin, cleared and planted the land with rye, turnips and corn. Christian left his sons there in the fall of 1769, while-, he returned to Hagerstown to bring the rest of his family before winter hit. They were detained in Hagerstown, and early snow prevented them from coming to their new homestead until the spring of 1770. Frederick and Frank survived the winter, alone. When the family reunited there was Christian and Christiana, Frederick, Frank, Sophia, Christopher, Margaret, Christian, and Nancy Agness, the step-daughter born on shipboard. Frederick did not endure that hard winter without rheumatism, which stayed with him all of his life.

Isabell, wife of Frederick, described how they had to flee, because of Indian attack, to the blockhouse at Morgan's place (Morganza, Pa.) where George Morgan lived. The men shot the muskets the women loaded until relief arrived from Elizabethtown.

Travel was hard. In Doddridge's Notes, 1824, there were only two trails - one made by Forbes via Bedford, Greensburg and Irwin; the other made by Braddock, through Cumberland and Uniontown. It was this trail that was generally used by Maryland people. Travel was by horse, or by walking.

Christian did not get involved in the 1791-1794 Whiskey Rebellion. Christian said that John Neville was a good and fair neighbor.

Christian died in 1807 and Christiana died in 1813. Both are buried somewhere at Old St. Luke's. In his will, he began by leaving his beloved wife one bed, 20 pounds money yearly. He left 50 pounds each to his four daughters and all his land to his four sons. His estate totaled \$660.45.

Agness, better known as Nancy, married John Vance in 1752. Their farm is where Mayview Hospital now stands. John Vance was a member of the Bethel Presbyterian Church, a justice of the peace, and an executor of Christian Lesnett's will. Agness' second husband was James Morrow. Their burial is in Bethel Church cemetery.

Frederick, the eldest son, married Isabel Wilson in 1796. She was the daughter of an Episcopal minister, reputed to have served at St. Luke's, Woodville. Frederick died in 1830; Isabel in 1867. They are buried in Bethany Cemetery, Bridgeville.

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