

*Typed by Robert Krier Lewis
grave nephew of Ella L. Williams*

Written by Ella M. L. Williams to commemorate the building of the first meeting house in Rancocas, N.J. 250 years ago.

REMINISCENCES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD IN RANCOCAS, N.J. UP TO 1900.

I was born in the Tomlinson house, corner of Main Street and Lundys Lane, subsequently lived on opposite corner in the Dannie Wills house. I had an older brother, James Hansell Lippincott, and a sister 10 months older, Jessie Huggins Lippincott. We were like twins. Mother dressed us alike with the exception that she wore red, being of dark complexion with drak brown hair and eys, and I wore blue, being of light complexion with light hair and blue eyes.

We had a happy time together. In the morning we played mud pies, or were down in the meadow trying to entice tiny fish in the brook to bite on a bent pin we used for a hook. Strange to say, we did catch a few which mother actually cooked for us. Never did fish taste so good.

After dinner we were dressed clean for the afternoon and played dolls, etc. We took a nap for the sum of two cents, one to put in the bank and the other to spend; proudly we took our penny and walked down the street to a little candy shop with a bell over the door which heralded our entrance for someone to come and wait on us. The room back of the shop was used in summer to serve homemade ice cream made by Ben Bishop, the proprietor and his wife. The other side of the shop was a harness shop where Mr. Bishop made and mended harnesses; this was three diversified businesses in one.

Our grandparents, James S. Hansell and wife Hannah Heaton (who was the daughter of Richard Heaton who owned the land where Delanco now stands; he dug a waterway connection the Rancocas and Delaware rivers known by the name of "Dickys Cut." The Hansells lived about a mile from the village on Beverly Turnpike. We often walked to their home. I distinctly remember stopping at Buzby's on the old Franklin Park farm and watching Deborah Buzby making dipped candles. She had a large tin washboiler partly filled with tallow over hot coals. The wicks were laid over a board so as to make two rows of candles; this long board with its wicks across was lowered into the tallow and pulled up again and suspended above until the tallow was set, then dipped again and again until the candle was formed. This method, with the grease going to the bottom of the candle when drying, is why dipped candles are always larger at the bottom. The old lady in her Quaker garb, out in the open, made a picture I will never forget

James Stiner Hansell was a wood turner by trade, in Philadelphia. Because of the dust from the wood turning, his lungs filled with dust to the extent that the doctor ordered him South. He refused to go, saying he had six boys and would not bring them up in a land of slavery.

He bought a part of the Franklin Park plantation and started a fruit and berry farm. He perfected the first cultivated raspberry and planted the whole acreage in fruit trees. His market was Philadelphia. A steamboat, the Barclay, plied from Hainesport down the Rancocas river every day to carry the farmers' produce to market. It also carried a few passengers and stopped at Irish Wharf. Being a part of the Kings Highway and a short distance from the fruit farm, Hansells had a sizeable business making large turned wood mallets that were used to tamp down the cobble stones that paved the streets of Philadelphia at that time. They also had large hogsheads housed in long sheds in which the cider from the fruit was aged and turned into vinegar. I remember sitting on his lap watching a large pullbone saved from the Thanksgiving goose, an elastic fastened to it in such a manner that when he pulled the elastic, it went jumping across the table.

Turkey was had at Christmas but goose was the Thanksgiving dinner. It was by the goose pullbone that the country folks would determine the kind of winter to expect. An old saying was "at the first spits of snow that the old woman is picking her goose for Thanksgiving."

My mother told how Grandfather was hoeing his berries when he heard a cryer on horseback coming down the road, and as he galloped he shouted "Abraham Lincoln assassinated." He dropped his hoe and went to the house in tears crying, "Hannah, Hannah, they have killed Abraham Lincoln" and wept like a baby. His interest in the community was wide and Lincoln's death was deeply mourned.

At the age of about ten, my dearly loved sister contracted black scarlet fever and died in three days. This was my first tragedy and I have suffered her loss all my life. It seemed everyone tried to console and be nice to me which is a pleasant memory.

Next door to us lived the Bishops, a blind brother, a deaf sister, and Isaac, the younger, who did the chores and the garden. He had several cords of wood brought from the farm every day and he would saw wood just so lone for exercise. Each stick was measured and neatly piled up for winter use. Martha kept house. She would often pass a pan of delicious cinnamon buns over the fence to me which pleased me very much. Rain water was caught in a large hogshead, covered and dipped out with a hollowed out gourd, for washing. Occasionally I was invited to take dinner with them. We sat down to a table of which the whole service was pewter - plates of different sizes, vegetable dishes, platters, gravy boats, tea set, etc. They did not ask many to meals but I was the little girl next door.

There was the Friends little brick school which we attended whenever school was held there; a public school that we went to otherwise . To raise money to get a large Webster dictionary, also a big bell to ring to call children to school, entertainments were given in the Town Hall - dialogues, tableaux, singing recitations, etc., were given. There was a Methodist church, an Episcopal church and three branches of Friends. At times I played the organ in both churches. The little butchershop slaughtered their own animals. It was at the end of the village surrounded by a high fence. The animal was driven into a narrow stall where he could not turn. At the head end there was a door that opened into the slaughter place. A large rope cable was on a windlass and the rope was brought to the door, fastened to a ring in the nose of the steer and then he was dragged out by the head. Being low when the steer reached the end, the butcher hit a hard blow with an axehead on the forehead which stunned the beast. He weakened at the knees and the butcher quickly cut his throat through the jugular vein, the blood going into a trough that led outside the building. He died at once. They hung him up and the work of taking off the hide, etc., was done at once. The quarters were then taken to the shop, where, after hanging a few days, they were cut up for distribution. This was accomplished by two wagons having routes in the village and surrounding country. The wagons had hooks on the sides where meat was hung. Practically all sales were from the wagons. If you wanted a special cut you must order it, then someone might have been ahead of you.

I remember the butcher wagon came to our house and mother wanted to get sausage. It was quite red in color, contrary to pork color and mother objected. The reply was "That is because it was made from Will Winners' red pigs." But we did get fresh meat. The children sometimes watched the slaughtering from the fence. I watched once, which was enough!

The Methodist church had seasonal festivals in the town hall to help pay the minister. I was eight and sister near ten years of age when we made our first cake under mother's instructions. We proudly went, all dressed up, to the festival carrying our cakes. We were given money to buy the cake of our choice to bring home. This was truly and event in our lives.

I was very fond of one of our horses. One was a part Shetland pony, small and fat. We named him "Butterball." When they were put in the meadow to pasture back of our barn, I would take an apple to the gate and when he came up to the gate I would climb on his back and ride around the meadow on him. When my mother took friends out for a ride and we had left the town, I would climb out on the shafts and on to the horse's back, thus we would travel through the country.

At an early age I began to drive and ride horseback. The old side saddle was brought down from the attic; it was the one my mother used during the Civil War, collecting old linen that the ladies picked apart to be used for packing the wounds of the soldiers. My riding dress was long, almost sweeping the ground, and I rode side saddle.

Milk was served from a wagon by Hudson B. Taylor, starting with cans of milk brought in fresh from early morning milking. Everything was immaculately clean. The milkman sat before huge cans of milk and started on the town route ringing his hand bell to notify all who wanted milk to be waiting with pitcher at the curb. One by one, the quart or pint dipper was let down into the can and milk served to you. When we made ice cream (which was only when there was ice on the pond or for those who had ice stored on the property) to get cream I would take a container over the the Dennis farm. I was allowed to go down into the cold cellar and watch the skimming of the rich rolls taken from the shallow pans. It was so rich that it had to be used with milk or it would turn to butter. Milk from this farm was sent every morning to the Hotel Dennis at Atlantic City.

Emlin Martin had a drug store which soon left town. Travelling entertaining troops would come, some giving a performance from wagons, others of a higher plane would give their show in the Town Hall. They gave all kinds of entertainment, sold all kinds of medicines for all kinds of ailments. Marionettes were quite popular in those days and I loved them. Other acts were bell ringers, musical glasses, etc. The Charcoal man with his high wheeled, wedge shaped wagon filled with charcoal drove through the village about once a month, getting charcoal from the burnt over Jersey pines. He call "Charcoal, charcoal" could be heard at a distance. Many used the fuel, mostly in laundry stoves.

Coasting on the Meeting House hill was a much enjoyed sport. Moonlight nights the boys would carry water from the blacksmith town pump and pour it on the snowy hill which made it slippery. Much to Farmer Dennis' disgust, the fence was torn down to let the sleds through. Skating on Lundy's Pond, also on William Stokes old brickyard pond, was enjoyed by those who could skate. Sleigh riding was also very popular. My father and mother, with others, were active members of the Lyseum Literary Society, meeting in Town Hall. My mother, Ella Hansell Lippincott, was Mrs. Jarley in the famed Waxworks. They gave such a splendid performance that they were asked to go to Beverly, Burlington and Mt. Holly. We children were taken to early meeting by our maid. I spoke "pieces" as they were called, then we were brought home.

The last pages of Aunt Ella's remembrances are missing. Fortunately, the Westampton Township Historical Society has posted a copy here:
http://rancocasvillagenj.org/wths_reference/reminiscences-of-early-childhood-in-rancocas/

After the separation of Friends, the Orthodox left the old Meeting House and worshipped in a small hall over the blacksmith shop. The story goes that one day the noise of the pounding on the anvil making horseshoes and new fellies for wheels was so intense that one of the men said they must find another meeting place or he would not come anymore. Subsequently, the Elias Hicks followers offered them an end of the Meeting House which they used as long as their Meetings were in session.

Spencer Haines had a large framing implement place. A large bell, hung on a sort of scaffold, being rung when customers wanted him. Phoebe Leeds lived across the street, and when she married, Spencer tolled the bell all during the ceremony. As a child, I witnessed from the summer house in Annie Haines' yard, the outside activities. One incident I remember was someone asked Annie (a primitive) how could her niece be bridesmaid to a Hicksite wedding? The answer was, "That she could go to a Hicksite, but not an Orthodox."

The children, as did grownups, wore plain bonnets. Firstdays (Sundays), when they went to meeting in Spencer Haines' home, although we children played together during the week, Phoebe was not allowed to speak to me when we met going to meeting. She was also not allowed to come to my house because we had a piano, but we could sing songs in the hammock in her yard.

On midweek meeting days as well as the end of the week, the town was a busy place. Errands to the mill to grind grain, harness mending, blacksmith work, farm implements, barber, shoemaker, tailor, milliner and dressmaker. Two general stores supplying drygoods, notions, groceries and everything that would be needed. Ladies brought in homemade butter and cheese and eggs to trade for their wants. On election day, a good supply of gumboots, overalls, etc., were stocked for those whose votes seemed to put them in a buying need.

After my father's store burned, he built the brick building on the corner of Bridge and Mill street. My parents built the grey stone house on Bridge street. The first bathroom in town was installed there; also stem heat. George Hansell bought the Uriah Haines house opposite. His family used it for a summer home. They installed acetylene gas for lights, also had the first automobile in town. The beautiful and restful spot on the hill where those repose whom I knew during the time that this writing depicts, reminds on that the Indians also were here and gone. Infrequently bones of Indians were uncovered in a sitting position and facing to the East. The big elm has lost its top but its spreading branches mark the spot the first meeting house was built.

The Texas factory employed all who worked at day labor. The first stick of phosphorus in this country was made there. It was given to my father, Richard Roberts Lippincott, descendant of Restore Lippincott, who placed it in the Museum of Science in Philadelphia. The Diamond Match Company bought the business and subsequently moved away, leaving the men employed there without jobs. A fertilizer concern afterwards started, but that also folded up, leaving the village practically deserted except for the old retired people.

The Annie Vanschiver (steamboat) replaced the former Vanschiver which took the place of the old Barclay, which finally plied from Tuckerton to Beach Haven. Tugs hauled moulding sand every day; this business has also gone. When the river was used commercially, the Government regularly dredged the channel.

William Heulings had a large coal and lumber yard at Centerton bridge. I remember large sailing vessels landing there, coming from Maine via the Delaware river with cargoes of lumber. Nets were drawn for shad below Centerton and I remember the fish being brought to the village in wheelbarrows, fish shaking tails, and could be bought for a quarter. The dikes along the meadows made pasture for the cattle to graze.

Dr. Martin, a tall, thin man wearing a wig and a high stove pipe hat, a Primitive Friend, was a valued doctor, serving the community for miles around, an excellent physician who brought everyone into the world who lived within reach of him. He drove a carriage that was about the size and shape of a telephone booth, holding only one person.

He was a much respected doctor although we jokingly called him, "Pill Garlic." He dispensed his own medicine and seldom lost a case. One Halloween about eight of us young folks dressed up and had a pillow dressed like a baby. We went over to his office with our sick baby. The doctor thoroughly enjoyed our fun and brought his wife and daughters who really smiled at our frivolous antics.

Thus I remember my growing years. I was married in 1899 when I left the village of my birth, with oil lamps, no electricity, no telephones. Except for the old board fence and more carriage sheds now gone, the Meeting House looks about the same as it did when, all dressed up, I went to meeting with my Grandmother sitting on the facing bench with my feet dangling. As I grew up I took part in the exercises of the Firstday School. My teacher was Lizzie Leeds, of whom I was fond. Subsequently, I was superintendent. It was the custom for children to recite verses. This experience helped me in later years to take part in the Meeting and in other activities. I feel grateful for my early contact with Friends of that time. I salute Friends of this generation who are carrying on in the tradition of those sincere early Friends.