

Unpublished Manuscripts of the
Scots East Jersey Proprietors

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Scots East Jersey Proprietors Manuscripts

AMONG the documents in the recently acquired collection of MSS. respecting the Scots East Jersey Proprietors, there is a letter from John Barclay, brother to Governor Barclay, dated at Perth Amboy in 1686, on his second visit to East Jersey.¹ It is a letter to Robert Burnet, of Lethenty, Scotland:

"Amboy Perth, 20th March, 1686.

"When John Laing came first ashore I got him what accommodation I could, for him and his servants, but, the winter coming on suddenly after his landing, he was not willing to go into the woods to settle upon land I had taken up for thee and my Uncle before he came here; so he takes two acre lots here in the town, one for thee and another for my Uncle, which he cleared and fenced this winter. After that he went into the woods, where I got him a hous and some ground already cleared within half a mile to my own plantation, which I bought for 15 lib in this country - money from Thomas Gordon, he and his wife not willing to dwell there. So I take up that for thee and my Uncle, which I did for the best, because I can the better assist John Laing, he living so near me.

"There is about 3,000 acres of land taken up for thee and my Uncle and 2 lotts at New Perth. As for the land at Wickington [Wickatunk], it is divided in 24 parts and there there falls to thee and my Uncle 500 acres."

There is also the copy of a letter from George Keith to the same Robert Burnet:

"Amboy, 29th March, 1686.

"I have surveyed for thee and thy partner, Robert Gordon of Cluny, 1,000 acres near John Barclay's plantation; the whole tract by order being divided in 24 shares for the 24 Proprietors, to each a share, amounting to about 500 acres. What other land I receive order to lay out for thee I shall be carefull to do it well and to best advantage. After some time I may give thee a particular account of all thy land I have surveyed for thee and what I reckon dew for it. John Laing and his family are well and lyke to do well, and so John Sym and his family. Also thou hast thy share laid out at Wickington [Wickatunk]."

Present Wickatunk, as our readers know, is a brief distance east of Freehold, in Monmouth county. George Keith was of an Aberdeen family, "an eminent Quaker, although originally a Scotch Presbyterian," who arrived in East Jersey in 1685. He located and found Freehold, and, as Surveyor-General, did much excellent work in his line of duty for four years, when he went to Pennsylvania. Thereafter he led a curious life of religious propagations and dissensions as our readers, doubtless, well know.

One of the interesting memoranda among the documents referred to is the following, undated and unsigned, but which is evidently of the same period as the foregoing letters. It indicates just what the Scots Proprietors wished to know

¹ See, as to him, Whitehead's "East Jersey," p. 42.

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concerning East Jersey, before coming over themselves or sending too many settlers:

"MEMORANDUM FOR EAST JERSEY

"Item. To inquire of the breadth and length of that Province and what number of acres may be estimated to be in the whole Province, and what quantity of meadow ground is in it.

"Item. To enquire if there be ground not covered with wood, and what nature it is and for what use, and what barrens are in the Province, and whether they be for pasturage of sheep, or any other use, and what store of sheep is in the country.

"Item. To inquire how many towns in the Province, how their houses are built and streets paved, and what greatnes they are off by the number of families in a town.

"Item. To inquire into Ambo where they intend a town, what a place, how convenient for shipping, and what the land is from Sandy Hook to Little Egg harbor, and what the nature of the sandy land is, and the place called "Burning Hole."

"Item. To inquire if store of fish there, sea or river fish, and if there be boats and fishermen.

"Item. To inquire what rivers are in the country, either faling on the sea, or Hudson River, and if navigable and how many.

"Item. To inquire what they reckon an acre there and how much English wheat it will sow.

"Item. To inquire what wild beasts are there, hurtfull or for food or otherwise.

"Item. What corn grows in the Province, whether store of English wheat, barley, rye, peas, hemp and flax.

"Item. What is the chief food and drink in the country, and what servants are entertained with, and what fire they make use of.

"Item. What Summer, Spring harvest and winter is there, and about what time they begin.

"Item. Inquire whether there be any geese, hens, capons, cocks, eggs, dark turkies, and what wild fowl.

"Item. What vines for grapes, peaches, apricots, apples, plums, peas, cherries, gins, mulberries with silk worms, and quinces, or others.

"Item. Whether oxen, horses, cows, hogs, store of milk, butter, chess.

"Item. Inquire how they bring in ground, how easily or soon, how its plowed and manured when brought in, when sowed and reaped.

"Item. To inquire about a deed of mine sent over to be registrat.

"Item. Whether tenants may be gotten there to take unmanured ground on leases for yiers, or on deeds for ever, upon quit-rent."