

MORDECAI II

Mem. Freehold, N.J. Aug. 11-12, 1922

I went to Freehold with the mistaken notion that it was here that the Salters had lived, that is, that Freehold was a town at the beginning of the 18th century.

I began my work in the Court House - an old and attractive building, in tip-top shape, the centre of a commonplace and almost vulgar town. Nobody knew anything about a Salter - nobody had ever heard of Mordecai Lincoln. The marriage records were in Trenton, the deeds of land were in Trenton - everything was somewhere else. I plead that there must be Salters and Lincolns in the town who must know something. No, they said, there was no one of their name, a fact which I afterwards verified by the telephone book and a 40-year old taxi driver who knew everybody.

The court house failing me, I went to the library - a nice little place, with a typical old maid librarian, who, I found afterwards, was only a supply, and a very up-to-date young woman in charge. She pulled out Ellis and Salter - poor picking. The Salter evidently knew nothing about Lincoln and very little about his own family. And the Ellis, though it has much that is interesting, was made to sell, with bad sketches and pictures of modern lights in Monmouth County. But what I did find was that all this time I had been laboring under the impression that Freehold, N.J., at the beginning of the 18th century was a town. On the contrary, it was, at the start, one of the three big townships into which Monmouth County was divided. There was no town of Freehold. When Monmouth County was pared down and Middlesex and Ocean counties made, a court house was built about the centre - Monmouth Court House - and later, as a town gathered around it, it was called Freehold. All of this wild goose

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chase I might have been spared if I had read with care the history of the county before I started. However, I would have missed some very interesting human documents.

The librarian not being able to do much to help me, sent me to the Inquirer office, to see Maxim Applegate, of whom I would like to write a sketch - a battered human being, well towards the 70's, snapping black eyes, much stained with tobacco juice. His office is up a narrow and rickety pair of stairs, piled high with newspapers, the accumulations of at least 50 years, rusty old safe - to this good human material has come.

But he does know something about what I am after. It is funny to see his cupidity and his hospitality struggle. He thinks he may get a dollar out of me, but he don't want to ask direct for it. But he tells me what little he knows - cannot be definite - something of which I never heard before, that Mordecai Lincoln had a child, a little girl, buried near here, at a place called Covell's Hill.

He said it is on a hill behind an old church, that 20 years ago he dug it up, that on the tomb stone was the initials, M.L. How he knows this means Mordecai Lincoln I do not know. He also tells me that at the time of this search, he found an old forge which was run by Mordecai Lincoln. He cannot give me precise indications for this, thinks he might go there. Tells me that all that he knows was published by the New York Genealogical Society. He claims he made a picture of the head stone. He is so indefinite that I conclude I must go myself and look for both.

Applegate also tells me that the records in the court house at Freehold show that a suit was brought by somebody

against Mordecai Lincoln, -he cannot remember by whom or in what way. At least I have found something.

Another name has been given me, that of a lawyer, Mr. Cowart. I go back to the court house, but get no indication of records of a suit. Look up Mr. Cowart. Good, businesslike office, very much of a gentleman, immaculate, antiquarian; but his chief interest is in the Battle of Monmouth.

I find that history for Freehold is the Battle of Monmouth and Molly Pitcher. What I had not realized was that the battle field was right here at the gates. Cowart seems to know nothing about Richard Salter, but looks up the records and finds what I have already found, that they must have lived in Burlington, Middletown or Perth Amboy. But he is in a hurry. His stenographer is going on a vacation, and it is five o'clock. The court house shuts. I go back to the library, that closes, too, so I look up a taxi and go out to Old Tennant Church. And thank the Lord I did.

It is the quaintest church I have ever seen in America. I would give a good deal if somebody would take the stoves and kerosene lamps out. On the way back my driver points out Molly Pitcher's well. Most of the placards that had been put on the battle field - it was a wonderful place for a battle - are down. Disgusted, I ate my supper and go to bed.

Make the rounds the next morning of the newspaper offices - find nothing, except a good deal of contempt at the Transcript for Applegate. This is an up-to-date office with a well kept man at the head, and I can fancy how he feels about Applegate and his plant.

Consult Yard of the Monmouth Democrat. Nothing but Molly Pitcher there, though Yard was interested in county history.

Look up my taxi driver. Take him to Applegate and get directions about how to find Covell's Hill and the forge. We drive out through Clarksburg, looking for a church. On top of a hill I see some little white grave stones but no church in sight. A house nearby tells how to get in. It is drizzling rain. I am not dressed for such a tramp, but took it. Find the graves are grown up with high grass, poison ivy, huckleberries and all sorts of low stuff. Here are many old grave stones such as I never saw before, the natural red sand stones, as flat as they could get them but quite unworked, jagged and rough, no initials that I could find. If there is a M.I. anywhere I did not find it or anything else that Applegate had promised, such as many tomb stones of Jemisons.

He said that Jemison was a school teacher who lived in New York, died at 90, had known the whole countryside, that this cemetery is sometimes called the Jay cemetery.

A woman tells of a church ahead. We drive on a couple of miles, find an old Quaker meeting house and graveyard, but no M.I. Scrap acquaintance with a woman across the road - common, good natured person, curious and garrulous - great help in this kind of work. She shows me the meeting house, which she covets as a possible good house for herself. Likes the trees around, took care of the grave yard. Luckily we have a flat tire so she talks, and in her effort to tell me everything she knows, suddenly mentions the "Yellow Meeting House" and the fact that a man named Salter gave the ground and that his is the oldest headstone in these parts. I jump at this, and ask more.

She tells me that they hold a meeting there once a year now, and that a great many first families are buried there. Her mother is there, but no head stone. That's because of the

meanness of her sister, who got \$1400. while the rest only got \$2200., and who promised to put up the head stone but never did. And she is going to get after her soon.

Since the tire is repaired, we start for the Yellow Meeting House, the driver and woman having a long conversation, very bewildering to me, on how to get there.

We go back to Clarksburg, and just on the other side my driver whoops a call to a man sitting on the side of the road. We stop. He tells me this man has taught school here for 40 years and knows every one. He can tell me. The school teacher knows how to get to the Yellow Meeting House, but nothing about a Salter, never heard of him. The Doctor passes, and he stops him, and they call in a man who is making roads at the side and who has a fractious horse that he calls Woodrow. We hold a long conclave, and the result is a map showing how to get to the Yellow Meeting House and beyond to a place called Filmore's Corners, where they think the forge might have been, and beyond that to Joseph Holme's place, who had the records which might have something.

We find the meeting house, with the most interesting lot of head stones I have seen in many a day - Lawrences, Holmes, Bruere - but no Salter. One corner of the place is grown up to young locust, 10 feet high and full of thorns. It is wet and miserable, but I plough around in this thicket until finally I go and look up the neighboring house, which I should have done in the first place.

There is a good natured man here. He kept the place for 12 years, and kept it fine, no such thicket. They thought he charged too much, and now see how it looks! But he knows where Salter's grave is and find it. The driver and the man make a

path for me, and there I am - the only slate head stone, I think, in the cemetery - John Salter, who died August 29, 1723.

I am warm indeed for this is the brother of Hannah who married Mordecai. He gave the land on which the church and the cemetery lie, and owned many farms in this neighborhood. What more natural than that Mordecai Lincoln, even if his land didn't join John Salter's farms - and I am not sure about this - should have come here with Hannah and established a forge. Probably just the thing that he would do. At all events, John Salter was fond of his sister ^{for} in his will, dated 1714, he leaves her ¹⁷⁵ £ 250 (p. 95 Lea)

We drive on for Filmore's Corners. Nothing that looks like a forge left there, but a mile or so before we get to Joseph Holme's, there is an old, old stone blacksmith shop - it must have been a blacksmith shop - red sand stone full of pebbles. I am immediately set on having this Mordecai Lincoln's shop, and drive on to Joseph Holmes.

Here we come to a real country gentleman, fine big farms, fine old brick house, part of it very old but kept up to date. Rather pretentious landscape gardening, and a beautiful old character who come to the door. Hospitality itself. Takes me in. There are books all round. Genealogy is one of his hobbies, you know, and the only thing I get from him and from his daughter who is called in is that the genealogy of the Holmes family, written by Col. J. T. Holmes, is published in Columbus, O. The title is "The American Family of the Rev. Obediah Holmes." What interests these Holmes is that they are connected with the family of President Lincoln. It is through the Bownes.

I talk to them about the blacksmith shop at the corner. They know nothing of it, only that it must be 200 years old, and send me to Mrs. Rue, Mr. Holmes' sister, who, they say, knows

a great deal of the country.

My driver knows where this is - an old, old house. (See picture in Holmes Family) What a wonderful thing is hospitality. It was as if they were expecting me, which I know they were not. A fine looking man, whose name seems to be Mears, the son-in-law of Mrs. Rue, comes to the door, urges me to come in, takes me to a back sitting room - rooms full of all kinds of comfortable things from the 17th century down. In comes his mother - fine looking old lady. I gave them my name, they seem to have heard of it. Tell them what I want. In comes Mrs. Mears. It is lunch time - I must stay. As it is nearly two o'clock and I am famished, I consent.

Mrs. Rua has a great deal. The definite thing is that she has an inscription in her manuscript genealogy of the Holmes family, given her either by this Col. J.T.Holmes or by Judge Beekman, a genealogist of Freehold, now dead. This inscription, which she says is in the Robbins' cemetery (possibly Covell's Hill) - she doesn't know) reads:

Deborah Lincoln

3 years 4 months 1720

This is something to work on, and the only real thing, although she calls my attention to Stilwell's Genealogy on the Salter family in this part of the world; and there one finds the records of the suit.

What it amounts to was that Obediah Bowne, who was a brother-in-law or nephew-in-law of Mordecai Lincoln, thought that money was due him, and he brought suit three times. He seems to have lost it every time, though it looks as if the third time Mordecai had left the country, moving into Pennsylvania.

What an impression of genuine American family life of the comfortable, dignified, conventional type! And the impression is very strong that there were four generations in Mrs. Rue's household - the last an infant. This is all I carry away, but it was worth the trip.

You find such families as hers all over the country, I take it; and that, after all, is what holds us together. This land that the Salters, Holmes, Lawrences settled is enormously rich today as farms. I saw a bean farm a mile long. The manager or owner drove up and down the road in a Ford car to see the condition of the crop, direct the men where to spray and pick, etc. Market gardens everywhere, the finest of green corn. This is what Mordecai Lincoln helped start.

But nobody knows anything about the forge. Mrs. Rue and her son-in-law Mr. Mears have a funny little tilt at the table. They are sure my old stone building cannot have been Mordecai Lincoln's blacksmith shop, not did they ever hear anything about Filmore's. Mr. Mears says that on a branch road, half a mile or so from the Yellow Meeting House there has long been the remains - nothing but foundation stones, I take it - of an old forge, that evidently the bog iron in the neighborhood was used. Seems to be at the head of a pond. This strikes me as quite possible, for it is not far from the land of John Salter - on it, I should say. But Mrs. Rue is very contemptuous - never heard of it. Evidently there is a continual feud between these two about genealogical and historical matters.

Rush for Freehold in order to make train to New York. Ungracious town. \$12. taxi bill.