

MORRIS FAMILY RESEARCH from the LAURA ELMS MORRIS COLLECTION

**Laura Elms Morris (1893-1972) was a teacher and librarian with an avid interest in the family history of Greene County. Much of her research and correspondence is collected in the CGS Library. Among these papers is a hand-written manuscript of some 200 pages that is a narrative of Laura's inquiries, travels and discoveries, discursive in tone, a genealogist's diary. Kathy Morris Miller, whose mother was a friend of Laura's, has undertaken to type Laura's journal. Below is a lightly edited excerpt from its opening pages, which probably dates from the 1940s. (Laura's own story is told in the *Cornerstone Clues* of May 2019, pages 47-50).**

### *The Morris Family of Greene County Pennsylvania*

The following information is the result of several years of research concerning the Morris Family of Greene County and the Tri-State area. When I first began to inquire into the activities of the family, I was told that there were five entirely different families of Morris who had originally settled this county. I do not agree with this statement. There may have been two different families. If I could establish the eastern connection of the original Morris families, the truth of such a statement could be proven.

I was born at Fordyce near Frosty Run, Greene County, and this community and its vicinity seem to have been the center of the Morris settlement. Even as late as my girlhood I can remember three of the so-called different "sets" of Morris and the fact that they disclaimed any relationship to each other. For some reason I was always fascinated in the history and the relationship of the family. My mother [Elizabeth Alice Gordon, 1871-1925] was the granddaughter of Sarah Morris Whitlatch and she used to tell me about family when I was a child. Even though the facts were insignificant they were important enough to have given me several valuable leads.

Mother never said that these three families were not related, but that the relationship of those on Frosty Run and Garards Fort were closer than they were with those at Morris Corners in Whiteley Township or the Robert Morris descendants. Search of deeds, tax lists and archives reveal that the family was numerous. Many served in the Revolutionary War, but they moved on to Ohio and Kentucky, or back into Virginia, and left no records here.

They owned much land. One attorney told me that if abstracting a deed in Greene County he did not find a Morris an owner at one time, he went back to find his mistake. They were outstanding in crafts as cabinet makers, carpenters, weavers and mechanics. They were doctors, ministers, traders and politicians. I remember one remark my mother made of the family: "A Morris will always work and he will always find a way to make a living".

Genealogy is not the work of one person but a collection of records of many peoples and their memories and I state now that I want anybody who will find these records useful to thank, not me, but the many people who have given so generously of their time and knowledge. Space will not permit me to tell all the intimate things I have acquired about the different individuals. I will try to give the most important.

### *Robert Morris and his Descendants*

I have chosen to give first the history and descendants of Robert Morris. I do this for two reasons. He, no doubt, has more living descendants in Greene County than any other of those first Morris and

second, through correspondence and stories I have found that many have confused this Robert with Robert Morris, the "Signer" [of the Declaration of Independence] and "Financier" [of the American Revolution].

From a scrap here and a scrap there I believe that this Robert Morris was a man who was held in high esteem by his associates and that he played a prominent part in the development of Greene County, Pa. A newspaper clipping of 1798 lists "Prominent Morris'es" walking the streets of Waynesburg : Solomon Morris, John Morris, Robert Morris, Asa Morris and James Morris. Then, too, it was Robert who remained, died and is buried on the original tract of land, which included Fort Morris. The location of the Fort can easily be seen today [ca. 1945] and the people who own the farm say that nearly all the stone in the foundation of their bank barn and in their house were secured from this old Fort, which had been made of stone.

Around this Fort the Morris Family built their cabins. The location of some can still be seen by a close observer. Stories of my Grandfather Henry Morris mentioned these cabins. Above the old Fort to the left was the family burying ground. Morris'es were still buried in it after the Civil War, nearly to the Twentieth Century. All traces of it are now gone. It is only visible to the most discerning eyes. No doubt there are at least six Revolutionary War veterans buried there and also here lies the remains of Sarah, the wife of Robert. In the last year of his life Robert went on the hill above his cabin. Here in an orchard he left his cane stuck into the ground. He came back to his cabin and told his son Henry he had not long to live and that he wished to be buried where he had left his cane. He was asked why he didn't want to be buried over in the cemetery with the others and his reply was, "I want to be where I can see the devil git Sarie". Evidently his married life hadn't been so pleasant.

My father-in-law, A.J. Morris, verifies this story as do others. Some of the family say the old gentleman was very independent and always lived in his cabin alone. His daughter-in-law, Edie Morris, would look after his needs the best she could. We have no record of his birth, marriage or death. We know he dies in 1829 in his eighties.

I have never been able to establish just how much property Robert Morris had but an attorney told me that in abstracting for coal he had found Robert Morris one of the earliest owners of lands of a considerable amount in Greene County. I have never been able to find documentation as to the original plot. The Patent Maps of Greene Co. Pa. gives the tract LIBERTY HALL, containing 402 acres [and allowance] located on the waters of Coal lick and Muddy Creek [in the SW corner of Jefferson Township] and patented in 1808 to Robert Morris. This must have been all they secured from their original claims after the boundary settlement between Pennsylvania and Virginia. A study of the tax lists and deeds shows Robert sold or gave to his sons John, Henry and Benjamin parts of this tract until he had remaining only eighteen acres.

In Deed Book III p. 387, dated March 20, 1816, Robert Morris deeded 120 acres "to beloved son Henry," this property being part of Liberty Hall, the said 120 acres bounded by land of John Morris, Benjamin Morris and Robert Morris. The remaining years we find on the Jefferson Tax List: Robert Morris 18 A(cres) or "15 A". Different assessors seemed to vary on the amount of land.

In Appearance Docket IX p. 164 for Court 1829-30, we find where heirs of Robert Morris go to court over the land deeded to son Henry in 1816, thus proving Robert Morris must have died in 1829 or there about. Those who sued Henry Morris were John Morris, Benjamin Morris, Isaac Morris, Wm Stiles and

wife Nancy, and Mary Stillwell. Since the husband of Mary Stillwell was not mentioned one would judge she was a widow.

Rumor says that the family Bible was taken to Noble County Ohio by son Henry and that some of his children took it further West. No deed gives the name of Robert Morris's wife but the story told has Sarah as her given name, and I have heard several times she was Sarah Rinehart. I judge this to be true.

I have every reason to believe the Stiles of Wana, W.Va. are descendants of Wm & Nancy Morris Stiles. I do know a Stiles daughter married a Lowry and lived in the Davistown district. I have found nothing on the Mary Stillwell line, or on Isaac Morris. Benjamin Morris seemed to have had a great deal of trouble keeping his land. One year he would have 140 A, the next 12 A. He was taxed as a shoemaker. In the year of 1828 Benjamin Morris transferred his property (140 A) to Richard Long. After that, he appears no more on the Jefferson Township Tax List.

John Morris continued to live on this old Morris site until his death. His will is in Book II, p. 100. It was filed May 4, 1844. He speaks of his wife Rebecca and nine children, namely: John, Robert, James, Lewis, Elizabeth (married Jesse Eagon), Mary (married Barnet Eagon), Rebecca (married Isaac Wisecarver), Charlotte (married Henry Morris), and Elinor (married Barnet Eagon Jr.).

Thus far this is the only record I have of the children of Robert Morris. From things I have heard and found I believe there were others.