

A Visit to Jehu Curtis in New Castle, Delaware

George Curtis

It was a beautiful November 2011 fall day in New Castle, Delaware with the sun blinking through the swaying trees and the wind swirling the fallen leaves. The occasion was to visit my wife's cousin whose house is on the Historical Register. Arriving early, we walked around the quaint town, lunch at Jessop's Tavern, doing a house tour and learning much about the colonial period. As the clouds moved in, we found ourselves at the old graveyard surrounding the Immanuel Episcopal Church on The Green looking down at the vault and final resting place of Jehu Curtis (1692-1753). We were surprised and pleased at the relatively good condition of the tombstones, markers and marble slabs from the 1700's.



Immanuel Episcopal Church on The Green in New Castle, DE

During his lifetime, Jehu was a prominent legal and political figure in the lower three counties on the Delaware (River). These three counties were once part of lower Pennsylvania. Born on Oct 19, 1692, Jehu was the son of Winlock Curtis (1668-1693/94) and Elizabeth Ann Bowers (1668-1723/24). He was also the grandson of John Curtis (c.1642-1698), the immigrant ancestor born to the prominent Curteis family of Appledore/Tenterden, Kent County, England.

Jehu's vault is next to that of his daughter, Mary (Curtis) McWilliams (d.1751) and his only grandchild, Elizabeth (b.1749-d.1749). And Jehu rests in esteemed company. Across from his vault is the monument for George Read (1722-1798) who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of the

convention that framed the Constitution. Jehu's epitaph was written by Benjamin Franklin and is inscribed on the slab of marble covering his vault.

*To the memory of Jehu Curtis, Esquire, Late Speaker of
The Assembly; A Judge of the Supreme Court;
Treasurer and
Trustee of the Loan Office, who departed this Life, November
18, 1753, aged 61 years.
If to be Prudent in Council
Upright in Judgment,
Faithful in Trust,
Give value to the Publick Man;
If to be Sincere in Friendship,
Affectionate to Relations,
And Kind to all around him,
Makes the Private Man amiable*

*Thy death, O Curtis,
As a general Loss
Long shall be lamented.*



Shortly after the death of his father in 1693/94, Jehu, his mother Elizabeth Ann and his sister Ann went to live with Grandfather John Curtis, a Quaker, at the Aberdeen family plantation in Kent County, Delaware. Jehu's sister Ann, in her autobiography, wrote a scathing description of life with her grandfather and step-grandmother.

Jehu married Mary Brinckley, his first cousin on Jan 1, 1722 and had a daughter Mary. In addition to his civil duties, Jehu was also an Immanuel Church warden in 1730 and 1752. From his sister Ann's autobiography, their father Winlock was apparently not a practicing Quaker so it is not surprising Jehu joined the Episcopal Church.

The male line of this Curtis family appears to have ended with Jehu's death on Nov 18, 1753. Jehu's uncle, Caleb Curtis, had a son John who apparently died about 1740 with no heirs mentioned. And, by the way, Jehu is an Old Testament Biblical name.



Sources:

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- First Families of Delaware, Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine, Vol. 1, 1982
- Colonial Families of Delaware, Edward Wright 1998
- Register of Baptisms & Burials in Immanuel Church & Churchyard at New Castle, DE
- Calendar of Kent County Delaware Probate Records 1680-1800