

Scotland with the object of drumming-up financial subscriptions to aid Princeton. In 1785 he accepted LLD from Yale University. Afflicted with blindness during the last two years of his life, he died 15 November 1794 at his farm *Tusculum* and buried in the Presidents' Plot, Witherspoon Street Cemetery, Princeton.

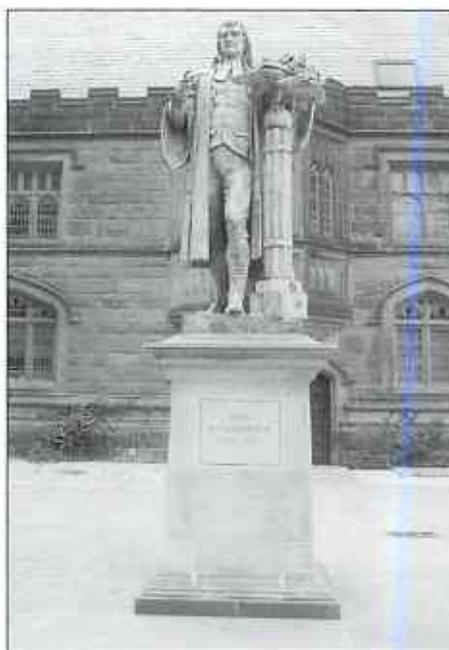
Woodrow Wilson described John Witherspoon as "A man so compounded of statesman and scholar, Calvinist Scotsman and orator that it must be a sore puzzle where to place or rank him: whether among the great divines, great teachers, or great statesmen".

A statue was erected to his memory in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia on 20 October 1876. A short stroll along the walkways in the university grounds, and the Witherspoon statue was located at East Pyne. I was struck by its towering, indeed iconic, presence (10 feet 2 inches tall), standing on a granite plinth (height 7 feet 7 inches), the plinth designed by the Princeton architect Jeffrey Clarke.

The statue is one of twin sculptures, cast in bronze, and designed by the Scottish sculptor, Alexander Stoddart: one placed at the campus entrance of the University of Paisley, and the other, within the grounds of Princeton University. Representatives of both universities, and other dignitaries, attended the unveilings, with Princess Anne doing the honours at Paisley on 22 June 2001. The statues are depicted in the *heroic realist* form. [In contrast, John Witherspoon is found, in contemplative mood, in his portrait by Charles Willson Peale.] Appropriately, the statue faces on to the university chapel.

Recently, I stood in the Main Street of the delightful East Lothian village of Gifford. At the southern end the *Old Mercat Cross* (1780); next to it the village well, long since redundant. At the opposite end lay the 300 year-old Gifford Kirk. (The original Yester Kirk still stands close to Yester House, but in the early 18th century it was resited within the new (c1710) Kirk at Gifford. The parish, however, continued to be called Yester). I entered the church by a side door. There was that stillness in the air, despite the muted sounds of village life outside. Sitting down, I visualised James Witherspoon preaching from the pulpit (said to have been removed here from Yester Kirk), and the baptism of his son John in 1723. Inspecting the Visitors' Book-there are names from all over the world-I noted, *James Douglas and family, Grangemouth*, with comments, *the Douglas's came from here. We are following in our ancestors' footsteps*. Outside, the graveyard is beautifully kept by the local council; although that day some ladies were watering flowers and tidying up around gravestones. I stumbled across a tablestone for James Witherspoon and Ann Walker, with a plaque inserted into the bottom half, and dedicated to their celebrated son, John Witherspoon. The inscriptions are virtually indecipherable [for supplemental information see *East Lothian Monumental Inscriptions, Yester, p 105*]. I noted underneath: *Restored by the St Andrew's Society of San Francisco-1969*. Across the road, on the garden wall, by the Manse, is a commemorative mural to John Witherspoon, born in the Manse of Yester on the 5 February 1723: *Erected by the St Andrew's Society of the State of New York-1955*.

Witherspoon later took charge at Laigh Kirk parish, Paisley. During this time, he not only attended to his pastoral duties but became involved in politics. He opposed patronage, and supported a return to basics of scripture rather than following the moderates. A caring pastor and stirring leader, Witherspoon was also a gifted scholar. His reputation led to calls from Dublin and the still extant Scots Kirk, Rotterdam. He declined an offer to become President of the Presbyterian College of New Jersey in Princeton in 1766, but their persistence was rewarded two years later, when he accepted a second offer. On 18 May 1768; Captain Robert Spier of the brigantine *Peggy* welcomed John Witherspoon and Elizabeth followed by Ann (19) James (16) John (10) Frances (8) and David (7) on board. Rev. Witherspoon married on 2 September 1748 Elizabeth daughter of

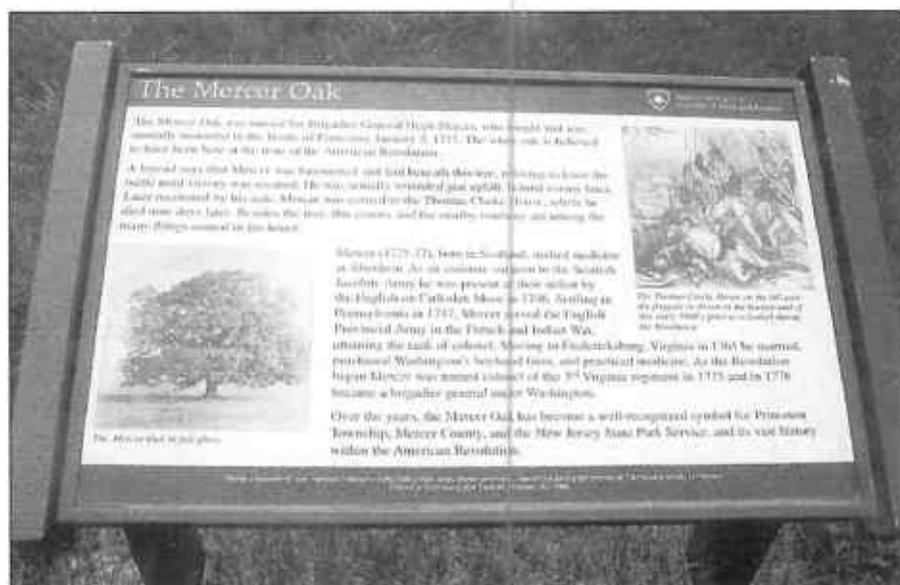


John Witherspoon 1723-1794

Robert Montgomery of Craighouse, and had issue: Anne born 3 July 1749 (married Samuel S Smith DD LLD, President of Princeton College 1794-1812), Christian 1750-1756, James (Major in US Army) born 17 November 1751-killed at Brandywine in 1777, Robert 1753-1754, Barbara 1756-1763, John (Army Surgeon) born 29 July 1757, Frances born 16 August 1759, David MD born 27 September 1760, George born and died 1762: married (2) Anne (widow of Dr Dill of York County, New York) with issue: Frances and Mary Ann.

Interestingly, Witherspoon claimed direct lineage from John Knox, through the Reformer's daughter Elizabeth who married John Welsh of Ayr: this ancestral link coming through his mother Anne Walker daughter of David Walker, Minister of Temple Parish.

He quickly settled down to his duties as 6th President of Princeton College and gave generous access to a personal library of some 300 volumes. The curriculum expanded dramatically through his own lectures on eloquence, and he stimulated debating societies for which Princeton became famous. Prominent in Presbyterian Church affairs, he moderated the 1st Generally Assembly and preached its first sermon. As a representative of New Jersey in the Continental Congress, he was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence on the 4 July 1776. After some years in politics, Witherspoon resumed his academic obligations, and subsequently returned to



Hugh Mercer 1726-1777

Mercer engaged the British forces in Trenton and Princeton. At the battlefield two miles outside Princeton, he dismounted his horse when it was wounded, in the midst of a bayonet attack, refused offers of surrender, and fought with his sword until severely wounded, and left for dead. Taken to a nearby house, he lay there suffering for nine days, and died on 12 January 1777. He was buried at Christ Church, Philadelphia, but later his remains were laid to rest at Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia.

Hugh Mercer's father and great-grandfather, were Presbyterian ministers in Aberdeenshire. He led a very interesting life. On the losing side at Culloden, he fled to America, fought for the British Provincial Army during the French and Indian War, and regarded by Americans as a great hero of the American Revolution, and a good friend of George Washington. The name Mercer is frequently to be seen in New Jersey, called the *Garden State*, and Mercer County is named after him.

John Witherspoon 1723-1794

Obtained from Yester Parish Records County Haddington:

10 February 1723 Mr James Witherspoon, Minister of the Gospel in this Parish and Anne Walker his wife had a son baptised named John. Witnesses Sir Richard Newton, George Logan of Burncasslie and Mr Da: Walker,

John was born in Gifford, educated at Haddington Grammar School, and graduated MA from Edinburgh University in 1739. Licensed by the Presbytery of Haddington in 1743, he firstly acted as assistant to his father. Ordained to Beith in Ayrshire, John

Mercer Family

THE PRINCETON CONNECTION

By David G C Burns

Hugh Mercer 1726-1777

Alerted by my son that he had located a plaque, in a field, near Princeton, New Jersey, relating to a Scot named Hugh Mercer; we visited the site during the summer vacation. This was the battlefield of Princeton in 1777, when the American revolutionary army surprised and defeated the British forces. We discovered four plaques, placed at various points, but I extract from *The Mercer Oak* the following:

Mercer (1725-77) born in Scotland, studied medicine at Aberdeen. As an Assistant Surgeon to the Scottish Jacobite Army he was present at their defeat by the English [sic] on Culloden Moor in 1746. Settling in Pennsylvania in 1747, Mercer served the English Provincial Army in the French and Indian War, attaining the rank of Colonel. Moving to Fredericksburg, Virginia in 1761, he married, purchased Washington's boyhood farm, and practiced medicine. As the Revolution began, Mercer was named Colonel of the 3rd Virginia Regiment in 1775, and in 1776 became a brigadier general under Washington.

Extracted from Pitsligo Parish Records, County Aberdeen:

17 January 1726 the Reverend Master William Mercer, Minister of the Gospel at Pitsligo and Mistress Anne Munro had a son baptised named Hugh by the Reverend Master John Mercer, Minister of the Gospel at Tyrie. Witnesses Master John Cook, Schoolmaster at Pitsligo and William Mores.

Hugh studied Medicine at Aberdeen University, but despite pleadings from his family of serious consequences to his career, Mercer joined the Jacobite army as an assistant surgeon, and served in the disaster at Culloden Moor in 1746. He avoided capture, escaped to Leith, and took passage bound for Philadelphia.

His skills as a doctor and pharmacist served him well in his adopted country. He then moved to the Pennsylvania frontier and joined the local militia as a volunteer. He achieved the rank of colonel by the end of the French and Indian War. In 1761 he moved to Fredericksburg, Virginia, and later married Isabella Gordon (of Scottish ancestry) with whom he had issue: (1) Anna Gordon who married Robert Patton; direct ancestors of General George S Patton of World War II fame (2) John 1772-1817 (3) William (4) George Weedon (5) Colonel Hugh Tenant Weedon 1776-1853. Mercer's grandson, also named Hugh Mercer, served as a general in the Confederate Army in the American Civil War.

On the 14 June 1776 Hugh Mercer received a letter from John Hancock, President of the Revolutionary Congress appointing him Brigadier-General in the Continental Army.

ORANGE COUNTY CALIFORNIA
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

