

# 44 Finding John Blaw

## INTRODUCTION

**By David Cochran**

In Blog 31, *Cemeteries*, I told the story of the early burial grounds that the Dutch settlers used. Among these is the Blaw-Nevius Burial Grounds, which is now on Cherry Valley Country Club property. Among those buried there are Michael Blaw, whose mill gave name recognition to the area, and his brother, Frederick Blaw. Missing from that cemetery are the patriarch of the Blaw-settlers, John Blaw, Sr. and his son, John Blaw, Jr. So where are they buried, I wondered.

Help came from distant places. Ted Blew, 5th generation great grandson of Michael Blaw/Blew, who lives in Bucks County, PA, also wondered where John Sr. was buried. Another distant great grandson, Gael Rodriguez, who lives near Mexico City, Mexico, also wondered where his ancestors were buried, so he contacted Rev. Jeff Knol of Blawenburg Church for some leads. I got involved and checked records from late Montgomery historian, Walter Baker, as well as records from the late Tom Skillman. All these conversations resulted in a the search to the Beagle Club property on Servis Road just off Hollow Road in Montgomery Township.

Ted arranged a tour of the property in hopes of identifying the Blaw grave and perhaps other graves nearby. The following account of the visit in May, 2020 is written by Ted Blew and was first published in a blog on the National Blue Family Association website. It is republished here with permission.

## HERE LYS THE BODY OF JOHN BLAW

**by Ted Blew**

*for Gael Rodriguez, Sunny Yoder and Anna Blue Bailey*

On Saturday May 16, 2020 I visited the burial site of John Blaw near Blawenburg, NJ. It was quite an adventure and here's how it all started.



*Ted Blew at John Blaw [d.1777] burial site: May 16, 2020*

For years I intended to pursue a visit to this final resting place of one of my 18th century Blaw relatives, prompted by the very detailed description in Walter C. Baker's 'Family Burying Grounds, Montgomery Township, Somerset County, New Jersey [Revised 1993]', which reads, in part: "The grave site of John Blaw is located on his former farm that later became the property of two generations of Skillmans and one generation of Garrisons. It is presently in the ownership of the New Jersey Beagle Club. . . The marker reads: HERE LYS BODY OF JOH N BLAW HOW DEPARDED THIS LIF APRIL THE 08, 1777 AGED 84 YER And I was further intrigued by this photo, probably taken in 1976, of Thomas S. Skillman [no doubt of the Skillman Family who farmed this land after John Blaw] kneeling by the grave marker:



Tom Skillman at John Blaw's grave on Servis Road off Hollow Road.

*Photo provided by David Cochran, Blawenburg historian*

During many Blaw/Blew/Blue/Blau Family Reunions held over the years in nearby Blawenburg, where many generations of Blaw's lived and prospered, I had never met anyone who had located or visited this burial site, in spite of an ongoing, keen interest in this John Blaw. So, supplied with plenty of free time given my recent retirement and motivated by conversations with Gael Rodriguez and Sunny Yoder, all of us direct descendants of John Blaw Sr. [1677-1757], I managed to contact the Beagle Club representative, Chuck Mente, and he graciously agreed to guide me to the site.

In case you are wondering 'What's a Beagle Club'?, here's a brief explanation from the club's brochure: "The first club organized in the United States to further the advancement of the beagle was formed before the turn of the century actually held its first field trial under natural field conditions at Hyannis, Massachusetts on November 4th, 1890. This club was known as the National Beagle Club. The New Jersey Beagle Club, a member of the American Kennel Club, was organized in 1912. Members of the club have taken a very active part in shows and field trials for beagles and many famous show and field champions have been bred, owned and developed by its members."

Early on a sunny Saturday afternoon, I drove from my home in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, through Hopewell, NJ, east to the edge of Blawenburg, turning left and following Hollow Road into the foothills of central Jersey's Sourland Mountain. In a 1934 essay, Tom Skillman's father Frederick described this area: "As one emerges from the woods that cover Mt. Lucas, just north of

Princeton and looks to the northward, his eyes fall upon a scene of rare beauty. He looks out over a wide basin flanked on every side by a ridge of mountains over which there always hovers a blue haze, part of the 'Blue' mountains. He feels that the village of Blawenburg is rightly named when he considers its setting. The village is located on a rise in the center of this basin. But, tradition tells us the name originated, not from the blue hills, but from one of the early eighteenth century settlers in this fertile valley. His name was John Blaw. Tradition also tells us that there were two sisters of the same name, Blaw, who lived in Blawenburg. Little is known of him except that he died in April, 1777, and is buried in a lonesome little valley in the foothills of the Sourland mountains, off of the pass to the mountain top known as the 'Hollow' . . .".

Per Chuck's directions, I drove through the opened Beagle Club entrance gate, up a gently sloping hill, parked my car, and met him near the club house. Chuck, a very likable and easy-going man in his 70s, was sitting in the Club's John Deere 'Gator', a two-seater utility vehicle that would transport us to John Blaw's final resting place. Chuck said, "Hop in" and off we went.



*Nearby Rock Brook*

John Blaw's final resting place sits in a peaceful grove of trees, near the edge of a tributary of Rock Brook. A large tree has fallen from banks of the brook to just within 15 feet of John's grave stone, its roots perhaps weakened by rushing water during heavy rains. Luckily, there is not much underbrush so the



stone is clearly visible from a distance, as are several other stones lying flat on the ground. This location is actually quite near the fence along Servis Road, at the edge of the Beagle Club property, but Chuck chose to take us there via a longer route to avoid having to cross the Rock Brook.



*A narrow miss*



*Stones as I found them*

- John Blaw's stone: a small section of the front upper left corner seems in danger of falling off, otherwise the stone is in remarkably good shape after 243 years; based on my closer inspection of the carving, I would add 'THE' after 'LYS' in Walter Baker's version of the inscription, so it reads

HERE LYS THE  
BODY OF JOH  
N BLAW HOW  
DEPARDED  
THIS LIF APRIL  
THE 08, 1777  
AGED 84 YER

- the 'HOW' in the inscription is clearly a transposition of 'WHO' - please remember the author and carver of these words was almost certainly a native Dutch writer; there are three tiny, clearly-visible, evenly-spaced holes between each word in the first two lines and part of the third, presumably used as an aid to the carver in aligning the text; the top edge of the stone has a very thin crack across the middle of the longer dimension; a smooth stone is embedded in the ground at the front of the base of the marker, presumably to stabilize it.
- The rectangular stone lying flat on the ground to the right of John Blaw's marker: I could find no evidence of any markings on either side of this stone.
- The broken, rectangular stone lying flat on the ground between the tree and the previous stone: I lifted the top part of this stone and set it on the base stone that is embedded in the ground - the two parts fit perfectly; I could find no evidence of any markings on either side of this stone.
- The irregular-shaped stones at the base of the tree and at the right edge of the photo above: I could find no evidence of any markings on either side of these stones.



*Top section close up - note word separation marks*



*Crack along the top*

Chuck sat on the fallen tree trunk while I stood before John Blaw's grave and processed the many questions that raced through my brain: Which John Blaw is buried here? How many people are buried here? Are the 'two sisters' buried



here? Who carved this marker? It is almost certain that this John Blaw is related to Michael and Frederick Blaw who are buried a short distance away in the Blaw-Nevius-Vorhees burial grounds. Is he their older brother, the first son and namesake of the John Blaw Sr. [baptised 1677-1757] who came from Brooklyn, Kings County, New York prior to 1742 and purchased almost 500 acres of land in this area? If so, why don't the dates on his grave stone [died 1777] match the dates in the family history [1691?-1770]? Is John Blaw Sr. himself buried here, next to his son?

The birds warbled softly in the woods but offered no answers. Before leaving, I paid my respects: "Rest in Peace, John Blaw, and know that your family is still here with you".

We hopped back in the Gator and Chuck drove us back through the peaceful grove, across the field and over the little streams, back to the beginning and the present day.

### Sources

References: #1-3 may be found in the 'Documents' section of the Blue Family website: [www.bluefamily.org](http://www.bluefamily.org). Accessing these documents will require signing up and logging in to the site.

1. Family Burying Grounds, Montgomery Township, Somerset County, New Jersey [Revised 1993], by Walter C. Baker.
2. John Blaw [d.1777] Essay, by Frederick Thomas Skillman, March 1934.
3. Analyzing the Identity of the Buried John Blaw, by Gael Rodriguez, May 2020.
4. Descendants of John Blaw (BLUE), d.1757 Somerset Co., NJ, 5th Edition. Compiled by William H. Blue, April 2003. In 'Genealogy/Dutch/1st Generation' section of this website.

### Photos

Unless otherwise cited, all photos were taken by Ted Blew.

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