

The following is copied from:

MEDICAL HISTORY OF  
ATLANTIC COUNTY, N.J.

By  
J.B. Somers, M.D.

An address read before the Atlantic County Medical Association, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1881.

Original given by (Dr.) H.L. Harley to Dr. Walter B. Stewart, who gave it to Ada Thomas Rickard (one of Dr. Richard Collins' descendants).

\* \* \* \* \*

Lying contiguous to the earlier settled counties of Cape May and Cumberland on our southern border, the physicians of these counties have ridden over this territory from the earliest colonial times. "In January, 1775," says Dr. Wickes, in his History of New Jersey Medicine, "Dr. Ebenezer Elmer, of Bridgeton, and Dr. Lewis Howel, a fellow-student, made a tour to Great Egg Harbor to inoculate for smallpox and, in March, they went there again, being absent several weeks." A Dr. Drake, who lived in Cape May County, I have been informed, made frequent incursions through this sparsely settled region.

RICHARD COLLINS, as far as I am able to discover, was the pioneer resident physician in what is now known as Atlantic County. He was a native of Ireland, and his émigré to this country must have been as early as 1765. He was married prior to his coming, but thought it expedient to leave his wife at home until such times as he could make provision for her comfort. Once here, he purchased a tract of land in Galloway Township and settled there; the location has since been known as Collins' Mills. His wife was then sent for to share with him the fortunes of the New World; but, alas! No tidings came. After repeated efforts to communicate with her had failed, supposing her to be dead, he was married to a Miss Griffin, of Pennsylvania, a lady said to have been either of Welsh or Swedish descent. This occurrence did not, however, bring the doctor unalloyed happiness, as he soon afterward learned that his earlier choice was still living, the mother of a daughter, the fruit of

their union; and the circumstances were rendered still more painful from the fact that the child was hopelessly blind.

The doctor made what reparation he could. He sent for them, and ever afterward provided for their comfort. The daughter (Elizabeth) grew to womanhood and married John Holmes, and subsequently Christopher Ludlum, both of Cape May County, and her posterity has ever been included among the respectability of that section. By the wife of the second marriage he had three sons and two daughters. The eldest, John Collins, was born November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1769, and became the apostle of Methodism through the Northwestern Territory, or what is now known as Ohio – being the founder of that sect in the city of Cincinnati, in Dayton, and in many adjacent places. His second son, Levi, was born in 1772, and died of typhus in 1813, and has numerous posterity throughout the county; as has also Matthew, the youngest son. The latter was the collector of customs for the District of Great Egg Harbor from 1807 to 1809.

Dr. Collins' religious proclivities were Roman Catholic. A copy of the Douay Version of the Scriptures has been transmitted to his grandson, Daniel L. Collins. Settling as he did in the midst of Quakers, he assumed their mode of dress and speech. Speaking of his sons, he was wont to say, "that he had raised one Methodist, one Quaker, and one Universalist; but that one of these days he would take a short cut, and beat the whole of them to heaven." It would seem, however, from the life of the Rev. John Collins that the doctor, after a tour through Catholicism and Quakerism ended in Methodism." After being some time in the West, the said divine became solicitous for the spiritual welfare of his father and came home on a religious mission. "He talked much of religion, and prayed with the family. Some days after his return, his father observed to him, 'John, we are all glad to see thee; but I don't like thy religion.' This was unexpected, and greatly depressed him. After some reflection he resolved to spend the whole of the ensuing night in prayer for his father. Accordingly, at nightfall after supper, he retired to the barn, that he might not be interrupted. Here he engaged in fervent prayer until near ten o'clock. Some one knocked at the barn door; but he made no answer. In a short time another messenger came, and opening the door discovered him. This messenger was his sister, who had experienced religion, and who informed him that he had been sought for in his room, at his brother's, near by, and at other places, and that he was supposed to be in the barn. She told him that their father was suffering the greatest mental agony, and wished to see him. With joyful heart Mr. Collins hurried to the room of his father, and, embracing him, wept and prayed with him. The struggle continued until near daylight, when deliverance came. His father was filled with peace, with joy, and triumph." (1)

Not long before the doctor's death he invited home all his accessible children and grandchildren. Andrew Scull, Sr., one of the latter, then aged about ten years, says of him, that "he had provided immense quantities of bread and honey for the children;" and he remembers him as alternately laughing to see them make way with it, and weeping because that in all probability he should see their faces no more. Even though great age burdened the pioneer, his form was erect, and his step was quick and elastic. One of his daughters married and lived at Upper English Creek. One day in the year 1800, whilst the two eldest sons were in the woods, where a slave was chopping, a tree fell upon one of them, and his femur was broken. A messenger was at once dispatched for Grandfather Collins, then the nearest doctor, a distance of forty-four miles to and fro. The weariness of waiting was enhanced by the messenger stopping, when about half-way there, and spending the night with his ladylove before proceeding to his destination.

Dr. Collins died in 1808, and was buried on his farm at Collins' Mills.

(1) – Life of John Collins.

*[Transcribed by Patty Luthy ( pattyluthy-at-yahoo.com) 2004].*