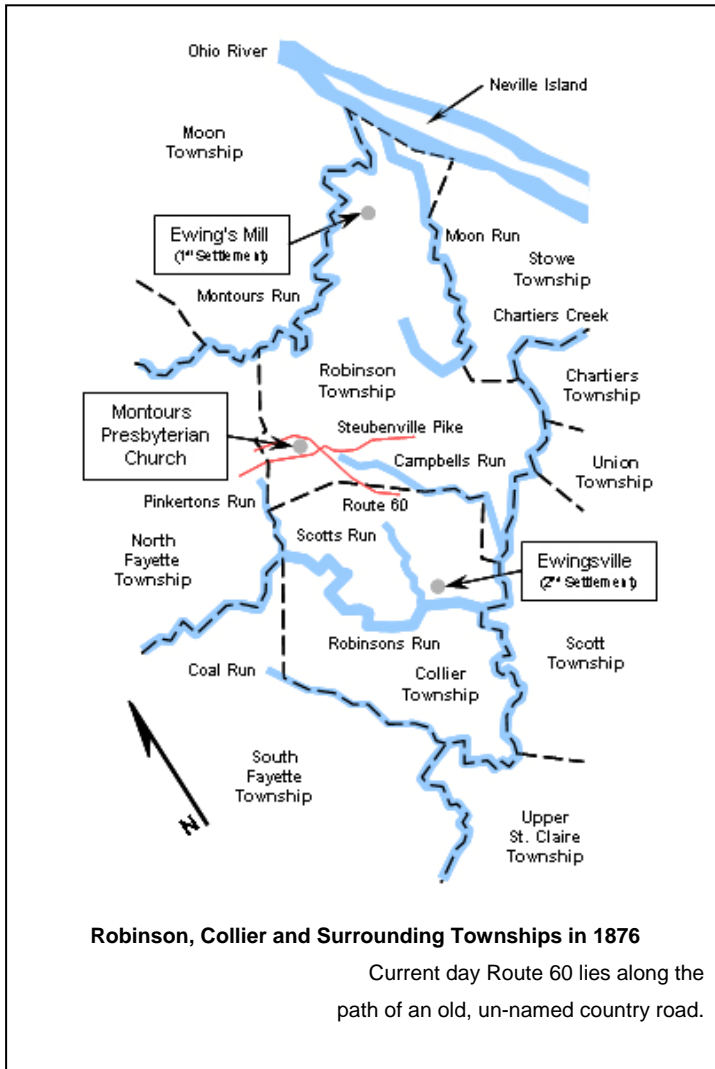


Ewing Settlers of Southwestern Pennsylvania Part 3: James Ewing and the Founding of the Montours Presbyterian Church

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Previous articles in this series have identified a variety of Ewing brothers, cousins and nephews who settled Robinson and Collier Township in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, in the late 1700s and



discussed the genealogy of William Ewing (c1810-c1875), a grandson of one of the area's original settlers, Squire James Ewing (1733-1825).

This article discusses Squire James' settlement of the area and his influences on the area's development, particularly on the founding of the Montours Presbyterian Church.

Church Location

Montours Presbyterian Church lies near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, just west of the confluence of the Ohio, Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers. As shown on the map to the left, the church is near Montours Run, a creek that runs northeast to the Ohio River, establishing part of the northwestern boundary of Robinson Township, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.

Montours Run is named after Andrew Montour, an Oneida Indian whose Native American name was Satteliu. He was an interpreter and negotiator in the Virginia and Pennsylvania back-country in the middle of the eighteenth century. The son of Carondawanna (an Oneida Indian war chief) and his French

wife (Elizabeth Catherine Montour), Andrew was one of a small number of Native Americans who sided with the British during the French and Indian War. As part of his support for the British, he fought with Braddock at Turtle Creek during the Battle of the Monongahela. The British recognized his allegiance by granting him an island—originally known as Montours Island and now known as Neville Island—lying in the Ohio River across from the mouth of Montours Run.¹

Montours Run is in the large region, stretching from the Allegheny and Appalachia Mountains to the Mississippi River, that was awarded to the British in February, 1763, as part of the Treaty of Paris marking the end of the French and Indian War (the North American part of the Seven Year's War in Europe). Having supported the British during the war, the colonists felt they had won the right to settle this land. Native Americans, however, felt the land was theirs and violently and gruesomely attacked settlers. Because of the dangers of these attacks, the British proclaimed that the land west of the Allegheny Mountains was Indian Land and could not be settled by the Colonists.

The land east of the Alleghenies, however, was becoming rather crowded. By the end of the 1760s, it was rather difficult for males interested in farming to find parcels large enough to support their families when they came of age and married. Also by this time, the number of Indian attacks had noticeably decreased. Many of the males trying to start lives as married farmers therefore ignored the British settlement ban and migrated across the Alleghenies. Squire James Ewing (1733-1825), a son of Alexander Ewing (c1694-b1752) and a grandson of James Ewing of Inch, was one of them.

James Ewing's Settlement Near the Church

Squire James was one of "seventeen or more families [that] came from Nottingham parish (Presbyterian) around Colora, Cecil Country, Maryland"² to establish their new-family homesteads in the forests at the confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers. The reasons for picking this location were not recorded.³ It can be presumed they heard about the virtues of this region from trappers and traders. The attractions included readily available timber for their log cabins and farm buildings, the fertility of the land available for farming once the timber had been cleared, and good transportation routes to the trade markets to the east (via Braddock's Road) and to the west and south (via the Ohio River).

Squire James came to Allegheny County in 1770, accompanied by his wife Mary (McKown), first son William, brother Moses, and (first) cousin Samuel.⁴ Squire James initially settled a parcel of land near the mouth of Montours Run,⁵ approximately three miles northeast of where the Montours Presbyterian

¹ For more information about Andrew Montour visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Montour.

² Milton M. Allison. Robinson Run Sketches: Pioneers John and Martha McDonald, *Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, Vol. 36, p. 39. This short article describes the settlement of the Robinson Township area in the late eighteenth century.

³ The early Scots-Irish settlers of southwestern Pennsylvania, while excellent in accomplishing the settlement of the area, wasted none of their time in recording their activities. In the words of one researcher, the Scots-Irish settlers "were more familiar with the axe, the mattock, the plough, and the rifle than with the pen."

⁴ Other relatives who settled this area are identified in Part 1 of this series: Ewing Settlers of Southwestern Pennsylvania (Part 1: Some James Ewing of Inch Descendants), *J. Clan Ewing*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (February 2007).

⁵ The *History of Allegheny Country*, published in 1889 says that it was Squire James' son William who "... came to what is ... Ewing's Mill ... and purchased six hundred acres on both sides of Montour Creek." However, in his will,

Church was later erected. He constructed a grist and saw mill on this land.⁶ By the mid-1870s, the area was known as Ewing's Mill, shown on the map on page 44. At that time, the families of at least four of Squire James' descendants lived there. Today, the Ewing settlement of this area is acknowledged by the names of several country roads.

After returning from the Revolutionary War, Squire James moved his family from Robinson Township about six miles south to join his brother Moses⁷ in Collier Township and establish a "plantation" on a parcel of Chartiers-watershed land between Scotts Run and Chartiers Creek.⁸ This area was eventually known as Ewingsville (shown on the map on page 44), and it continues to be known by that name today. From the beginning, his plantation, encompassing some 600 acres, was much larger than the average 300-acre homestead for the area. It eventually comprised about a thousand acres.⁹ He built both a grist and saw mill on this land.¹⁰ By the standards of the times, his home was a grandiose mansion:¹¹ a 22-by-24 log dwelling having two stories, four windows, and 42 lights.¹² Adjacent to his home was a separate 20-by-22 log kitchen, and the "mammoth kitchen fireplace ... burned 10-foot logs which were hauled into the room through a door especially constructed to permit passage of a horse."¹³ These buildings and the two acres on which they stood were valued at \$200 by the Assistant Assessor in 1798. Near the home and kitchen buildings were two farm buildings, valued at \$24. These additional

Squire James claimed that he owned this land by patent and left it to William. Patent maps for the area do not attribute any patents along Montours Run to a James Ewing. However, they do show a William Ewing holding land on Montours Run as Executor. The confusion surrounding Squire James' land on Montours Run is possibly clarified by considering an April 20, 1835, Ewing-memorabilia letter. It is unknown who the letter was addressed to because the upper-left quarter of the letter is missing and this is the part that indicates its addressee. The letter was written by J. Mitchell, Esq., and says "...[text missing] ... is not recorded ... [text missing] ... accident it should be lost or mislaid & would ... [text missing] ... title for thy farm and I know where said deed is ... [text missing] ... think it would be best to come forward and settle thy accounts with me and get the deed in thy own possession as soon as possible."

⁶ James Ewing (1733-1825) Will, Allegheny County Will Book, Vol. 3, p. 125, No. 69, prepared September 23, 1814, filed March 11, 1826.

⁷ Squire James inherited his brother's land when Moses died. This land was part of Squire James' plantation when Squire James wrote his will in 1814.

⁸ It is not really certain when this move to the south was made. The dates for various warrants, surveys and patents imply that it was after Squire James ended his military service in the Continental Army.

⁹ Squire James' 1814 will cites Collier-Township land that totals approximately a thousand acres. Some sources report that his plantation was as large as two thousand acres at some point.

¹⁰ *History of Allegheny County Pennsylvania*. Originally published 1889, and reprinted in 1993 by Heritage Books, Inc., 1540E Pointer Ridge Place, Bowie, Maryland. This is one of the many compilations of family histories published at the end of the nineteenth century.

¹¹ John Colerick, Tax Commissioner. *General List of Lands, Lots, and Building owned, possessed or occupied on the First Day of October, 1798*, Office of the Western Telegraphe, 1799. This is a census of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, land owners in late 1798. It identifies dwellings and associated buildings, their sizes, the number of windows for each, their values, and the taxes that were levied at the rate of 19¢ per \$100 evaluation. It also identifies slaves.

¹² "Lights" were isinglass panes in the windows. These panes were expensive and were used as one measure of the taxable person's wealth.

¹³ William A. White. *Ewing Plantation*, unknown newspaper, unknown date. This is a short article describing Squire James Ewing's settlement of his land on Robinson Run. The author cites Charles M. Ewing as the source for the information about Squire James' mansion.

structures were situated on 898 acres. The value of these farm buildings and the 898 acres was set at \$3247 by the Tax Commissioner.

Squire James' lands were cleared and cultivated, and his mansion and farm buildings (and possibly his mills) were constructed, with the help of slaves he brought with him from the East. The number of slaves that accompanied Squire James is unknown. He had one taxable slave in 1798¹¹ and in 1814 he had four slaves:¹⁴ Rose David, sixteen year old; Beatty, age not specified (possibly Rose David's child); Hagar, forty years old; and Benjamin, seventeen years old (possibly Hagar's son). In his will, Squire James describes himself as a "Yeoman"¹⁵ being perfect [sic] in health of Body and of Sound mind memory and understanding" and says "my Widow shall have my Black girl Hage her natural life and I leave it to my Executors Discretion [sic] if she behaves well to set her free" and "my two Black boys Benn and Bill there [sic] time to be Sold and Divided between my above named Children". In addition, "one of [Squire James'] slaves, known as Botswain, was because of his fidelity freed from bondage and established a comfortable home at what became Camp Hill".^{16, 17}

In summary: Squire James brought slaves with him when he emigrated to the area; these slaves helped him "settle in;" he subsequently liberated many of these slaves; he may have helped these liberated slaves establish themselves as freed persons; he retained some slaves to serve as servants and farm hands; and he made arrangements for handling his slaves at his death in a way that served the needs and interests of his family.

Squire James was truly a landed-gentry squire. He was master of a large country estate and a principal landowner in the area. In keeping with this status, he made several contributions to the community. For one, he operated a still not only to provide "daemon liquor" to himself but also to his thirsty, mostly Scots-Irish, neighbors.¹⁸ For two, he erected Fort Ewing on his land to provide the community a refuge to escape the Indian attacks that continued to be a risk of frontier life until the early 1780s.

¹⁴ William E. Riddle. Robinson Township, Allegheny County Pa. Tax List 1814. *Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (Fall 1999), pp. 30-33. This is a transcription of "A list of all the Taxable persons of the age of Twenty-one years and upwards Residing within the Township of Robinson in the county of Allegheny with their respective occupations." The original Tax List is in the Special Collections Room at the Carnegie Library in Schenley Park, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The transcription is augmented with a simple percentage analysis of the occupations.

¹⁵ In the parlance of the time and location, "Yeoman" meant "a person who owns and cultivates a small farm."

¹⁶ William A. White. *Ewing Plantation*.

¹⁷ Camp Hill is a mile or so east of Ewingsville and within the bounds of Squire James' plantation.

¹⁸ Squire James and the other settlers were fiercely individualistic and self-reliant. They helped each other erect their homes and farm buildings. And they helped each other in times of illness and other hardships. Other than that, however, each family grew and harvested their food, butchered their pigs, sheared their sheep, hunted down their deer and bear meats, tanned their buckskin, doctored themselves in times of illness, wove their cloth, made their garments, educated their children, and policed their families and communities. It was not until the early 1810s that the population was large enough for there to be viable markets for skill-based service providers. In 1814, for example, 131 of the 193 taxable persons in Robinson Township were identified as Farmers and the rest had the following occupations, in decreasing order of frequency: Weaver, Carpenter, Shoemaker, Blacksmith, Inn Keeper, Butcher, Jobber, Mason, Miller, Stiller, Tailor, Constable, Doctor, Spinster, Tanner and Teacher. Before 1810, however, there were only four occupations other than Farmer: Miller, Stiller, Inn Keeper and Blacksmith. All of these pre-1810 occupations provided services based not only on skills but, more importantly, on the need for a considerable investment in facilities and equipment.

Establishing the Church

As another contribution, Squire James helped establish Presbyterianism in Robinson and Collier Townships. He and his neighbors were deeply religious. On the frontier, however, they were many miles away from the traditional support—churches, ministers, etc.—for this extremely important part of their lives. They banded together to establish congregations—and eventually a house of worship, the Montours Presbyterian Church—to assure Sabbath and Communion services conducted by properly trained and ordained ministers. It is probable, but unproven, that Squire James was a leader in establishing the congregations and church.

Before establishing the Montours Presbyterian Church in 1788, the settlers practiced their religion with the leadership of one or two of the community's elder statesmen recognized as knowledgeable about the Bible and religious ceremonies.¹⁹ Squire James was an elder statesmen in his community and undoubtedly led the community's religious activities.

Self-leadership was, however, inadequate. In particular, there was the need to properly sanctify marriages, baptize children and conduct communions. According to the doctrines of their Presbyterian religion, marriages and baptisms could be conducted by a community-elected Elder if a minister was unavailable. But these Elder declarations had to be subsequently confirmed by an ordained minister. And an ordained minister was certainly required to lead communions. Squire James' community first relied on itinerant ministers and later petitioned the Redstone Presbytery for *supplies*—periodic visitations by ordained ministers who could officially sanctify marriages, baptize children, preach sermons and conduct communions.

The first visit to the area by an itinerant minister was in 1775, a year before the Declaration of Independence.²⁰ John McMillan—"a slender, dark-complexioned, none too handsome man of twenty-three"²¹—delivered a sermon on August 22, 1775, to a small congregation on the banks of Chartiers Creek. This was about a mile from Squire James' Collier Township homestead, and it is highly likely that Squire James attended. McMillan returned in February 1776 and delivered a sermon in the same location. He married and was ordained to the ministry shortly after this. Because of the dangers of frontier life, he delayed moving with his wife to the Robinson Township area until November 1778. When the Redstone Presbytery was established in 1781, McMillan was one of its first four ministers. This Presbytery administered the area's Presbyterian activities, not only responding to supply requests but also sorting out the financial obligations between the congregations and the ministers. More often than not the congregations were in arrears in paying the ministers in goods or hard cash.

Establishment of the Redstone Presbytery led to ordained ministers providing religious services in the area, but there was no church in which to hold them. Communion services were held outdoors: "a speaker's stand called the 'tent' was used by the minister. It was elevated about four feet above the

¹⁹ This description of religious practices and activities prior to establishing the Montours Presbyterian Church is supported by only a small number of contemporary documents and records. It is, however, reasonable based on various genealogical and historical analyses.

²⁰ Much of this recounting of events leading up to establishing the Montours Presbyterian Church is taken from a pamphlet, *The Story of Old Montour*, prepared (by an unknown author) for the 1923 celebration of the laying of the current church building's cornerstone.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

ground, had a breastwork in front and a log seat in the rear. Far out from this 'tent,' amid the forest trees, seats were built of round logs. These were on gently ascending ground which enabled the audience to command a view of 'the tent.' ... [L]ong logs, hewn only on the upper side, extended from near the pulpit directly up through the area of the seats. These [long logs] were elevated about the common height of a table, supported sometimes by straddling legs, but most generally by blocks of wood. ... These log tables were occupied exclusively by communicants during the process of that solemn service. ... The seats were, of course, without backs, except where the trees furnished that luxury; and such choice seats were reserved for aged ladies and the infirm. These long tables were filled and vacated four, five, six and sometimes seven times by the approaching and retreating crowd of communicants.²²

Communion services were lengthy. They generally began on Thursday. Long, fiery sermons were delivered by the minister, and people in the congregation often fainted under the emotions of the moment, particularly during the hot and humid summer months. Candidates for communion were received on Saturday and given tokens—bits of lead bearing the initials of the congregation—admitting them to the communion service held the next day.

Communion participation was important enough to the settlers that it superseded all other events, even harvests, and warranted whatever effort was needed to attend. Communicants came by horseback and wagon as well as by foot, often from many miles away. Women who walked, usually barefoot but sometimes wearing moccasins, would change, once they reached the communion site, into the "good shoes" they had carried with them.

The first Montour Presbyterian Church building was erected in 1789, coincident with the inauguration of George Washington as America's first President. The first building "was not a primitive log cabin 'meeting house' ... [with] the stump of a large tree ... selected as the pulpit, and the church built around it."²³ Rather, "It was cruciform in shape, and was built of hewn logs. One arm of the cross was on the north side about the middle of the wall and in that offset was the pulpit which was reached by several steps from the floor. Just in front of the pulpit, on a platform raised a few steps from the floor and inclosed [sic] in front and on one side, stood the choir. The choir consisted of two persons, one to line out the Psalms or Hymns, and the other to 'pitch the tune.' Opposite the pulpit in the other arm of the cross or offset, was [the church's] door."²³ The church was not heated in Winter; several of the more strict congregants felt that this would be an innovation bordering on the heretical.

Joseph Patterson, the church's first Pastor, came to the church in response to the *First Call to the Raccoon and Montours Churches, Presented April 21, 1789*.²⁴ These two congregations consolidated their call in order to enhance its attractiveness in terms of the number of congregants and the offered salary.

²² Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²³ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

²⁴ The text of this call appears in a pamphlet, *Montours Presbyterian Church*, prepared for the church's 157th Anniversary Ceremony held September 1-2, 1935. It has been transcribed verbatim except for alphabetizing the list of subscribers to make this list easier to search.

"To Mr. Joseph Patterson, Preacher of the Gospel.

"We, the subscribers, members of the united congregations of Montours Run and Upper Raccoon, being on sufficient grounds well satisfied with your ministerial qualifications, and having good hopes from our past experiences of your labors, that your ministrations in the Gospel will be profitable to our spiritual interests, do earnestly call and desire you to undertake the pastoral office in said congregation, promising you, in the discharge of your duty, all proper support, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord.

"And that you may be free from worldly cares and avocations, we hereby promise and oblige ourselves to pay you the sum of one hundred and twenty pounds, in regular annual payments, which sum is to be paid in the way and manner specified in our subscription papers accompanying this call; which sum we oblige ourselves to pay annually during the time of your being, and continuing the regular pastor of these united churches and congregations.

"In testimony thereof, we have respectfully subscribed our names this 9th day of April, 1789.

"John Abercrombie, John Allen, William Anderson, Alexander Bailey, James Bailey, John Bailey, Matthew Bailey, Wm. Bailey, John Bavington, George Beil, James Bell, John Benny, Thomas Biggert, Robert Boyd, Roly Boyd, Alex. Burns, Ehraim Burrell, John Cardike, John Carlyle, Mary Cherry, John Clark, Robert Clark, Thomas Craft, Joseph Cresswell, James Criswell, Robert Crooks, John Donaldson, John McA. Dow, John Dunbar, John Dunlap, John Elkins, George Elliott, James Ewing, Samuel Ewing, William Flannaghen, William Forbes, John Forbits, James Gaston, John Glen, William Gordan, Robert Greenlies, Alexander Grey, Wm. Grey, Wm. Guy Jr., Benjamin Hall, Robert Hall, Thomas Hanna, Andrew Harvat, David Hays, Moses Hays, Thomas Hays, Joseph Henry, John Holmes, Robert Holmes, Samuel Hunter, John Hutchinson, Samuel Jeffrey, Samuel Johnson, John Kelso, Alexander Kidd Jr., Peter Kidd, John Kilbreth, William Kilbreth, Andrew Kinnely, Wm. Kirkpatric, Abraham Kird, W. Lee, George Long, William Loury, Robert Marquis, Henry McBride, Alexander McCandlass, Hugh McCandlass, Wm. McCandlass, James McCoy, Nathaniel McCoy, Wm. McCullough, John McDonald, William McGee, William McLaughlin, Robert McMean, Isaac McMichael, John McMichael, John McNare, James Miller, Samuel Miller, James Montgomery, Peter Murphy, John Neal, Samuel Neely, John Nesbit, Henry Noble, James Peterson, Torrence Phefil, Samuel Phillips, Robert Potter, Henry Rankin, Henry Rankin, Jessie Rankin, Matthew Rankin, William Rankin, James Ravencraft, James Reagh, Wm. Reddick, Alexander Reed, John Reed, Philip Richard, James Robbin, Moses Rose, Wm. Roseberry, Isaac Rudawing, Abraham Russell, William Russel, Alex. H. Scott, James Scott, John Scott, Jos. Scott Esq., Samuel Scott, Thomas Scott, Nehemiah Sharp, Hugh Shearer, James Sheers, John Short, John Singer, Christopher Smith, John Smith, John Smith, Thomas Sprout, Wm. Stephenson, John Stevenson, James Stewart, Samuel Strain, Daniel Stuart, John Miller Taylor, Benjamin Thompson, Wm. Thompson, Wm. Tucker Sr., Wm. Turner, Robert Vance, Gabriel Walker, Wm. Walker, William Wallace, James White, Tho. White, John Wills, James Wilson, John Wilson, Mary Wilson, William Wilson, Alex. Wright, John Wright, Jeremiah Write."

Ewings in the Montours Cemetery

The Montours Presbyterian Church sits atop a hill that overlooks the local terrain in all directions. This location was undoubtedly chosen as the church site because of its elevation. It was also probably chosen because it had been used as a burial site prior to establishing the church itself in 1789. Use as a burial site prior to 1798, the date of the oldest stone in the cemetery, is implied by cemetery maps identifying a stone-less section as containing "old graves." No records survive concerning the burials in this "old graves" section. It undoubtedly contains the graves of several Ewings who are known to have died in the area before 1798, but whose graves have not been located.

By the late 1990s, some two thousand people had been interred in the cemetery.²⁵ This count includes burial sites with only partially readable markers as well as sites that have no markers but are obviously used. The Montours Presbyterian Church Cemetery is therefore not only the area's first cemetery but also one of its largest.

Some sixty Ewings are buried in the Montours Presbyterian Church Cemetery. Ewing graves are, by far, the most numerous. This reflects the long-term influence of these families upon the church's beginnings and evolution. The Ewing graves are grouped into nine lots.²⁶ The primary lot is large and centrally located. This lot has the graves for Squire James, his Wife Mary (McKown), his brother Moses, and many of his descendants and relatives and their spouses. The other lots have the graves of other relatives and descendants of Squire James.

William Ewing Riddle is a great-great-great-grandson of Squire James Ewing (son of Alexander who was son of James Ewing of Inch Island). Bill is Web Master for Clan Ewing's web site and Editor of the Journal of Clan Ewing. Outside his genealogical work, he helps organizations certify that their software development procedures satisfy regulatory requirements and lead to high-quality products. He holds advanced degrees from Cornell and Stanford and has worked in academia, industry and government.

²⁵ William E. Riddle. *Montours Presbyterian Church: Cemetery Census Compilation*, June 1998. A compilation of cemetery readings and genealogical records for the Montours Presbyterian Church Cemetery. The primary source is the lot-by-lot records prepared by Jane McCandless in the 1950s. Additional sources are: Montour Cemetery Maps, Fife & Weaver's 1937 Records, Churchill & Thomas' record of soldiers, and Powelson's Records. It provides information sufficient to locate graves in the cemetery. It also contains birth/marriage/death date information. Finally, it contains information about inconsistencies among the data from the various sources.

²⁶ The online version of this article, to appear in the Ewing Reading Room on the Clan Ewing web site, will be accompanied by schematics for each of the Ewing lots showing the relative locations of Ewing graves and giving the text of maker inscriptions.