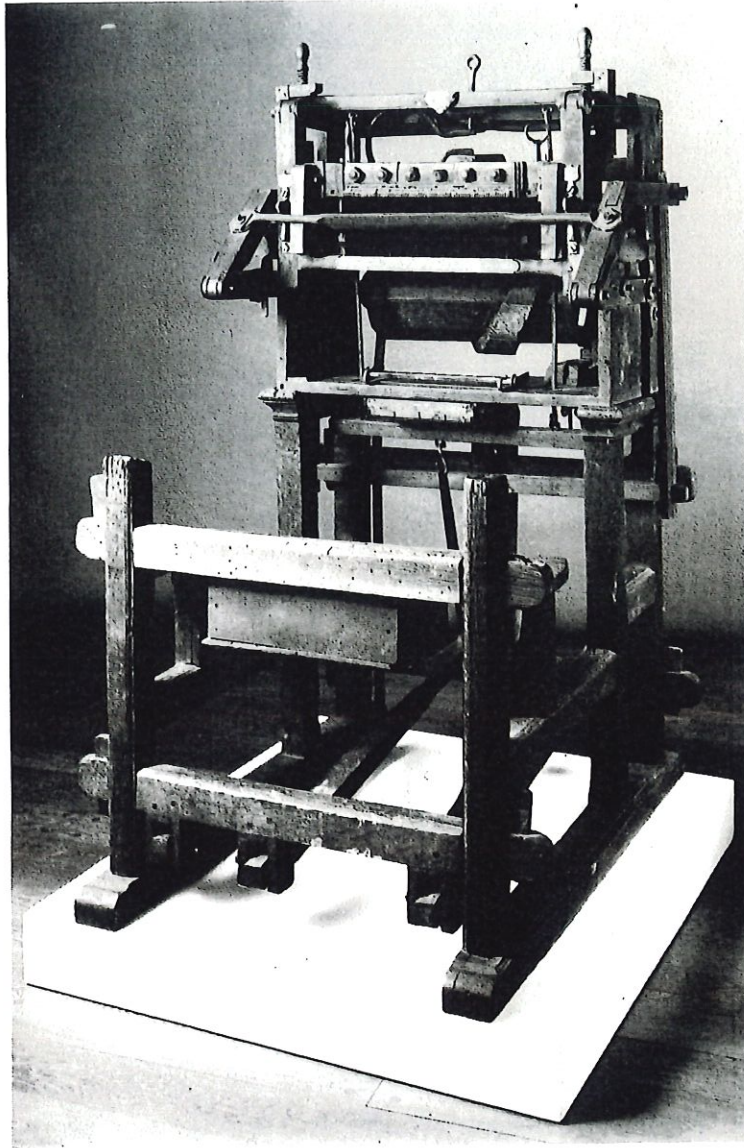


GERMANTOWN *CRIER*



Made in France before 1752, this hand-operated stocking-frame was brought to Germantown in 1763 by a German hosiery-knitter, Godfrey Miller. It remained in the Miller family till 1950. Loaned by Goldie Paley Design Center, Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science; reproduced with permission.

THE MONTIER FAMILY OF GERMANTOWN:

A Chapter in African-American History

by Reginald H. Pitts

African-Americans have been a part of Germantown's history for all its three-hundred-plus years. What follows is an account of one early family. The Montier family had long been resident in nearby Cheltenham Township in Montgomery County. In 1746, Richard Morrey, a wealthy landowner (and the son of the first mayor of Philadelphia, Humphrey Morrey), deeded to "His Negro woman Mooney otherwise known as Cremona Morrey" 198 acres of land in the far northwestern corner of the township, in what is now the Edge Hill section of Glenside. This was done in recognition of "the good and faithful service unto him performed," which included bearing five children.¹

One of their daughters, who was also named Cremona,² married, about 1765, a man named John Montier, who may have been a refugee from the French West Indies. They would have four sons: Joseph (c.1768-1842); Solomon (1770-c.1855); Robert (c.1773-1815); and Hiram (1780-1861). The Montiers lived on a portion of the original grant; their house, although enlarged, remodeled and modernized, still stands at 312 Limekiln Pike in Glenside.³

Hiram Montier, the youngest son, was apprenticed to a shoemaker, but turned his hand to a number of endeavors during his long life. He married his first cousin Susan Lewis (c.1782-c.1855)⁴ in the early years of the 19th century. They would have five children: Eliza (1808-94, m. the Reverend Henry Davis of Burlington, N.J.); Solomon S. (1810-66, m. Susanna G. Highgate); Charles (1811-65, unmarried); Rachel (1813-45?) m.[?] William Lewis); and Jane (1814-83, unmarried). Hiram owned 28 acres located across from his parents' farm on Limekiln Pike near the present Montier Road.⁵ After the death of his uncle Joseph, Solomon S. Montier, the residuary legatee, lived in the original family homestead.⁶

Meanwhile, other members of the family were moving to Germantown. Solomon Fry (1772-c.1845), who married Susan Lewis Montier's sister Tamar, was enumerated in the 1800 Federal Census as the head of a household of four living in Germantown.⁷ William Fisher (1805-57), who married Hannah Montier (b.1811), the youngest daughter of Hiram Montier's brother Robert, operated an "eating house" and oyster Cellar" in Germantown from about 1840. When Centre Street (now East Rittenhouse Street) was opened in 1847,⁸ Fisher purchased ground on the "lower" corner of Centre and Main Streets (Germantown Avenue) and erected a two-story building where he re-established his restaurant.⁹

A cousin-in-law, David Knight, of Upper Dublin Township in Montgomery County, operated a barber shop in the basement of this building.¹⁰

It was about this time that Hiram Montier and his children started their association with Germantown. On May 17, 1850, Hiram's daughter Jane purchased building lot number 39 on "the southeast side" of Centre Street from one Jacob Reger, a Germantown painter and glazier.¹¹ Four years later, Jane sold the lot, now improved with a "certain two-story messuage or tenement and lot" to her brother Charles for \$710.¹² Charles, who apparently stayed a bachelor, was the owner and operator of a freight-hauling business. In the 1857 Philadelphia City Directory, he appears as "teamster, Centre St. above Main, Germantown."¹³ On August 6 of that year, Charles purchased, for \$10, a lot on Hancock Street (later Baynton Street) adjacent to his Centre Street home, from neighbor John Goodfellow. Charles subsequently established a livery stable on that lot.¹⁴

The Montiers were communicants of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.). As the neighborhood grew, more and more members of that denomination came together to have prayer meetings in their homes. Subsequently they organized into what would later become New Bethel A.M.E. Church of Germantown.¹⁵ The leaders of the congregation included Hiram and Charles Montier, who, along with George Henry of Norristown, were instrumental in purchasing the ground where the church first stood.

On February 21, 1854, William Lewis, Hiram's nephew and probable son-in-law, purchased building lot number 71 on Centre Street for \$210.¹⁶ William Lewis, described as "farmer," was in truth a farm laborer, tramping from farm to farm looking for a day's work. It is doubtful that the money used to purchase the lot was actually his, since he never bought or owned any other property either in Philadelphia or Montgomery Counties. The money may have come from the members of the congregation or from Hiram or Charles Montier. However, why the need would arise to use William Lewis as the purchaser of record is not clear.

The possibility that Lewis was acting as the "straw man" in the purchase of the lot is bolstered by the fact that on April 18, 1857, Lewis conveyed the lot to Charles and Hiram Montier and George Henry, acting as trustees of New Bethel A.M.E. Church of Germantown, for \$300¹⁷ in order to erect a church building. Five years later, on October 9, 1862,

William Lewis and Charles Montier sold the church building and the lot to the congregation for \$1.¹⁸ On the deed, George Henry is described as "Having left the United States of America (and)... if still living, not a member of the church..."¹⁹ and Hiram Montier is noted as "having died."

Hiram Montier died July 8, 1861, aged about eighty²⁰ and was buried in the family plot in Cheltenham Township. Son Charles and a Cheltenham neighbor, Joseph Ottinger, served as the executors of his estate. Sometime in June of 1865, Charles Montier suddenly died, and his sister Jane bought out the estates of both Hiram and Charles, gaining ownership of the family holdings in Cheltenham and Germantown. She sold Charles' business at public auction, took in washing and boarders at her Centre Street home, while collecting rents on her Cheltenham property.²¹

Jane Montier died of breast cancer on September 30, 1883, aged sixty-eight years and ten months. She was buried in the family plot in Cheltenham.²² She was survived by her elder sister, Mrs. Eliza Davis, and four daughters of her deceased brother Solomon: Mary Elizabeth, widow of Edward E. Irvin, and long resident at 102 West Duval Street²³; Anna Matilda, widow of George Hilton, who had lived with her aunt Jane at the house on Centre Street (renumbered 302 East Rittenhouse Street)²⁴; Amanda Susanna, a seamstress and schoolteacher in the Philadelphia school system; and Clarissa C., also a seamstress. They appointed the pastor of Bethel, the Reverend Amos Wilson, as administrator of Jane Montier's estate on the day of her burial.²⁵

Reverend Wilson,²⁶ acting on behalf of the estate, sold the Cheltenham land to George D. Heist in 1886, and arranged for the sale of the Germantown house to Anna Matilda Hilton. After Mrs. Hilton's death around 1891, her son Edward F. Hilton, a barber with a shop on Germantown Avenue near Haines Street, moved into the house with his family -- his wife Anna J., sons George R. and Harrison H., and a daughter Florence M. After Edward Hilton's death about 1895, his family lived in the house for about another thirty years, taking in boarders to make ends meet.²⁷

Harrison Hilton and his family seem to have subsequently owned the house; the last owners of the house before it was condemned and demolished by the City of Philadelphia to make way for public housing in 1960 were listed as William E. Wilson and his wife Florence E., who may have been Harrison Hilton's daughter.

The Montiers, their relatives, descendants and friends were part of Germantown life for over a hundred and fifty years. In a time when the dissolution of the family structure of the urban African-American has been described as of long standing, the continuity of the Montier family of Germantown is a pertinent counterpoint to that argument.

Notes.

¹ Deed of Bargain and Sale, Richard Morrey to His Negro Woman Mooney, known as Cremona Morrey, Philadelphia County Deed Book G-7:539-543, dated January 6, 1746 (Old Style), registered May 27, 1746, recorded August 19, 1747; Josiah Granville Leach, "Colonial Mayors of Philadelphia, Humphrey Morrey, First Mayor 1691-1692," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 18:419-425 (1894).

² The children of Richard Morrey and Cremona were:

- a. Robert Lewis, b.ca. 1735, farmer of Cheltenham, m. Jane ---, 11 children, d. April 1799
- b. Caesar Murray (Cezar Murry), b.ca. 1737, shoemaker and cord-wainer of Burlington, N.J., m. Elizabeth (Mapps?) (d. September 1810), 2 children, d. 1799
- c. Elizabeth Murray, b.ca. 1739, operated "beer house" in Philadelphia after husband's death; m. Cyrus Bustill (1732-1806), 6 children, d. 1834
- d. Rachael Murray, b.ca. 1742, m. Andrew Hickey (later Hicks), lived in Swedesboro and near Gouldtown, N.J., 7 or more children, d. after 1810
- e. Cremona Murray, b.ca. 1744, m. John Montier (d. 1822), lived in Cheltenham, 4 sons, d. August 31, 1825

³ Elaine W. Rothschild: *A History of Cheltenham Township* (Elkins Park, Pa., Cheltenham Township Historical Commission, 1975), p.7

⁴ 1850 Federal Census, Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, p.117; Will of Robert Lewis the Elder, Montgomery County Will Book 2, p.113, dated September 15, 1798, filed for probate April 16, 1799; Heirs of John Montier to Joseph Montier, yeoman of Cheltenham Township, for land in Cheltenham, Montgomery County Deed Book 116, p.433, dated May 12, 1827, recorded January 12, 1860.

⁵ Amos Lewis and wife and David Lewis and wife, laborers of Cheltenham to Hiram Montier, shoemaker of Cheltenham, Montgomery County Deed Book 38, p.220, dated May 7, 1822, recorded May 14, 1822; Joseph Montier, farmer of Cheltenham, to Hiram Montier, shoemaker of Cheltenham, Montgomery County Deed Book 42, p.353, dated December 26, 1825, recorded October 20, 1826.

⁶ Solomon S. Montier to Seth Stout, Montgomery County Deed Book 116, p.428, dated January 11, 1860, recorded Jan. 12, 1860.

⁷ 1800 Federal Census, Philadelphia County, p. 7. Solomon afterwards moved to Southampton and Warminster Townships in Bucks County (1820 Federal Census, Warminster, Bucks County, Pa., p. 45).

⁸ "Plan of Germantown Town Lots -- surveyed and laid out for Robert H. Thomas and Samuel S. Richie, drafted by Joseph King, Jr., 1847." Philadelphia Deed Book AWM 85, p. 327.

- ⁹ *Germantown Guide*, Saturday, April 29, 1893, p.2.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*; William E. Corson, "The Montieth [sic] Graveyard," *Norristown Herald*, October 20, 1897, in Scrapbook A-7, Library, Montgomery County Historical Society, Norristown, Pa.
- ¹¹ Jacob Reger, painter and glazier of Germantown, to Jane Montier of Cheltenham, Philadelphia County Deed Book GWC 94, p.466, dated May 17, 1850. Witnesses: W.R. Reger, Williams Ogle, Alderman.
- ¹² Jane Montier to Charles Montier, Philadelphia Deed Book ACH 42, p.485, dated July 15, 1854, recorded April 8, 1863. Witnesses: James G. Gibson, Alderman; Henry Dooley.
- ¹³ Philadelphia City Directory of 1857.
- ¹⁴ John Goodfellow, farmer of the Twenty-second Ward of the City of Philadelphia, and Rachel his wife to Charles Montier, livery owner of same, Philadelphia County Deed Book RDW 148, p. 512, dated August 6, 1857, recorded October 5, 1857. Witnesses: James G. Gibson, Alderman; Emma Goodfellow.
- ¹⁵ *Philadelphia Tribune* (?), April 12, 1908, in Campbell Scrapbook, Library, Germantown Historical Society.
- ¹⁶ George N. Keel, hatter, of the Twenty-second Ward of Philadelphia, and Hannah his wife to William Lewis, farmer, of Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Philadelphia County Deed Book TH 130, p.378, dated February 21, 1854, recorded March 10, 1854.
- ¹⁷ William Lewis, farmer of Springfield Township, Montgomery County to Charles Montier, Hiram Montier and George Henry of Philadelphia, Philadelphia County Deed Book AWM 85, p.327, dated April 18, 1857, recorded June 8, 1862.
- ¹⁸ William Lewis, farmer of Abington Township, Montgomery County and Charles Montier, laborer, of the Twenty-second Ward of Philadelphia, to Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Germantown, Philadelphia County Deed Book GDH 401, dated October 9, 1862. The site of that edifice is the present Mount Vernon Baptist Church at 346 East Rittenhouse Street at Magnolia Street.
- ¹⁹ George Henry, who lived in Norristown before 1850 (1850 Federal Census for Borough of Norristown, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania) eventually returned to the United States, living in what later became the village of LaMott in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County (1870 Federal Census for Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania).
- ²⁰ Philadelphia Book of Deaths -- 1861, 2:142. Philadelphia City Archives.
- ²¹ Administration of the Estate of Charles Montier, deceased, Jane Montier, testatrix, for property in Philadelphia County, June 12, 1865. Philadelphia City Register of Wills; Joseph Ottinger, executor of the estate of Hiram Montier, deceased, to Jane Montier of Philadelphia, Montgomery County Deed Book 127, p.135, dated May 23, 1865; Jane Montier of Philadelphia to Kline Van Winkle, merchant, of Cheltenham, Montgomery County Deed Book 274, p. 497, dated August 18, 1883, recorded September 7, 1883; 1880 Federal Census for First District, Twenty-second Ward of Philadelphia, p.75.
- ²² Death certificate of Jane Montier, No. 263 for 1883. Philadelphia City Archives.
- ²³ Death certificate of Mary E. Irvin, No. 11109 for 1909. Philadelphia City Archives.
- ²⁴ The street was renamed and renumbered in 1893. (*Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory* -- 1893).
- ²⁵ Administration of the estate of Jane Montier, deceased, for Philadelphia property, dated September 30, 1883. Philadelphia City Register of Wills; Administration of the estate of Jane Montier, deceased, for property in Montgomery County, April 30, 1886. Orphans' Court, Montgomery County Court House, Norristown, Pa.
- ²⁶ Amos Wilson, born in slavery in Virginia, arrived in Germantown after the end of the Civil War. He would serve many churches in the Pennsylvania - South Jersey area, including Reading, Pa., LaMott, Pa.; Lawnside, N.J., and Norristown, Pa., where he led an ultimately successful fight to desegregate the public schools. (Charles L. Blockson, "Blacks in Montgomery County," in *Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years 1884-1984* (Norristown, Pa.: Montgomery County Historical Society, 1985) 1:1178).
- ²⁷ *Gopsill's City Directories* for 1887-88 through 1896-97; 1900 Federal Census for First District, Twenty-Second Ward, City of Philadelphia. See also Heirs of Jane Montier to George D. Heist, Montgomery County Deed Book 313, p.26, dated February 8, 1886, recorded May 13, 1887.

