

MARK BIRD

Author: James E. Brewer

When Mark Bird was born on February 4, 1739, in Douglassville, Pennsylvania, his father, William, was 36 and his mother, Brigitta, was 23. He married Mary Ross on January 6, 1763, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They had eight children during their marriage.

Pennsylvania
Colonel Pa Militia
Revolutionary War

Family links:

Parents:

William Bird (1706 - 1761)

Bridgetta Hulings Bird (1716 - 1792)

Children:

George Bird (1774 - 1847)*

Edward Bird (1781 - 1856)*

William

Charlotte

John

Ross

Catherine

Henry

Siblings:

Mark Bird (1739 - 1812)

William Bird (1746 - 1748)*

Rachel Bird Wilson (1750 - 1786)*

William Bird (1757 - 1812)*

*Calculated relationship

Burial:

Concord Baptist Church Cemetery

Rutherfordton

Rutherford County

North Carolina, USA

Created by: Delma Ingram

Record added: Jan 06, 2007

Find A Grave Memorial# 17326911

Source: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/hh/8/hh8e.htm

Mark Bird, the enterprising son of William Bird, took charge of the family business upon his father's death in 1761, and soon expanded it. The next year, he went into partnership with George Ross, a prominent Lancaster lawyer, and together they built Mary Ann Furnace. This was the first blast furnace west of the Susquehanna River. Eight or nine years later, apparently abandoning or dismantling his father's earlier Hopewell Forge, Mark Bird

erected Hopewell Furnace on French Creek, 5 miles from Birdsboro. The date 1770—71 is cut into a huge block of stone at one of the corners near the base of the Hopewell Furnace stack. At the same time, he built Gibraltar (Seyfert) Forge, also in Berks County. All the Birdsboro forges eventually came under his control, and to these works he added a slitting mill before 1779. An inventory of his properties lists for that year: 10,883 acres of land, 1 furnace, 2 forges and two-thirds interest in Spring Forge, 1 slitting mill, 1 saw mill, 2 pleasure carriages, 28 horses, 30 working oxen, 18 horned cattle, 12 negroes, 1 servant, and £3,767 cash. Bird also seems to have built a nailery about this time, although the tax lists do not mention it. Even after the Revolutionary War, when mounting debts fastened themselves on his investments, he continued to expand, building a forge and slitting mill in 1783 at the Falls of the Delaware River, opposite Trenton, in partnership with his brother-in-law, James Wilson. The Boarding House, so named because many of the workers obtained their meals there. Photo by Hallman. Few details are available regarding the Hopewell of these years, for most of the original records are gone. In appearance, no doubt, it was not too different from the village of later years, with the furnace and adjoining structures as its center, and the office, Big House, barn, and tenant houses clustered about it. The inhabitants were mostly of Anglo-Saxon stock, in part original settlers and in part recent arrivals from the Old World. Very few of the early names reflect the German element, which predominated in this section. Most numerous perhaps were the Welsh (with names like Williams, Lewes, Davis, and Welsh), followed by the English. Among the English was Joseph Whitaker, a woodchopper who came to America with the British Army during the Revolution and settled near the furnace about 1782. Three of his many children who worked for the furnace in time became wealthy ironmasters, establishing ironworks in several States; and one of his great-grandsons—Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker—became Governor of Pennsylvania in 1903. These early workmen labored hard for Mark Bird, with whom they got along quite well. That Mark Bird was prosperous, we may judge from the fact that in 1772 he became the highest taxpayer in the county, supplanting John Leshner, of Oley Furnace, and in 1774 the county increased the assessment on Hopewell Furnace sixfold. This expansion continued through the early years of the war. By 1778, members of Bird's family were living in the Big House at Hopewell, which was enlarged, probably, in 1774. There is some doubt as to the years when Bird lived at Hopewell, but available evidence would seem to indicate from 1778, at least, to 1788. The furnace had a production capacity of 700 tons per year before 1789, according to one contemporary authority, making it second only to Warwick Furnace with 1,200 tons. This estimate is probably correct, for in the blast of 1783, for which there is record, Hopewell produced 749-1/2 tons of pig iron and finished castings. Pig iron was its principal product, of course, with pots and kettles, stoves, hammers and anvils, and forge castings following in that order. The number of men employed is not known, but it was probably less than 50, including woodchoppers and colliers. The workmen were both freemen and indentured servants. An interesting entry in a surviving daybook for 1784 gives the names of five indentured workmen, two English and three Irish, and states that they were paid 14 pounds 8 shillings each—"as per Indenture"—upon the expiration of their terms of servitude. Negroes were also employed at Hopewell throughout its history, mostly as carters, but there is no indication that any of them were slaves. Bird did possess slaves and three of the four extant county assessment returns show that among his properties assessed for tax purposes there were 12 Negroes in 1779, 12 in 1781, and 2 in 1786, but it is not known whether any of them were employed at Hopewell or at one of Bird's forges. Mark Bird's Services in the Revolutionary War Many of these ironworks figured prominently in the Revolutionary War, for Mark Bird, like many other Pennsylvania ironmasters, was an ardent patriot. In 1775, when the war finally came, he served as lieutenant colonel of the Second Battalion, Berks County militia. Later, in August 1776, as Colonel Bird, he fitted out 300 men of the battalion with uniforms, tents, and provisions—all at his own expense. This force marched under his command to Washington's relief after the Battle of Brandywine in late 1777. He was a member of the Provincial Conference of 1776, and was elected to the Provincial Assembly. Mark Bird's chief services to the American cause, however, were those of a patriotic philanthropist and munitions-maker, rather than of a soldier. Many of his ironworks, gristmills, and sawmills supplied the Continental Congress with the sinews of war. A report to the executive council of the Continental Congress, dated February 19, 1778, shows that he sent 1,000 barrels of flour to Philadelphia. The minutes of the Continental Congress for June 24, 1777, March 11, 1778, April 8, 1780, and September 10, 1783, refer to large quantities of iron supplies received from him. An interesting order of 1777 discharged 11 men from the militia so that they might be continued in employment "By Colonel Mark Bird, in the cannon foundry and nail works in Berks County in Pennsylvania, carried on by him for the use of the United States." Orders of \$50,000 and \$125,691 were issued, or recommended to be issued, in 1778 and 1780, respectively, in Bird's favor by the

Continental Congress. It seems very doubtful, however, that the ironmaster ever collected on the large amounts owed to him by the United States. On September 15, 1783, he addressed a memorial to the Continental Congress, requesting that the Great Chain which had been stretched across the Hudson River at West Point to obstruct British navigation be delivered to him in part payment on his account. This plea was denied "on the ground that he was a creditor of the United States along with the others, and no particular order should be given in his behalf". The Postwar Years The fortunes of Mark Bird slid rapidly downhill after that. There was a flood on Hay Creek which ruined much of his property, and then came those postwar depression days when two or three Continental dollars would hardly buy a crust of bread. The furnace seems to have been out of operation in 1780 or 1781, for in the latter year Bird complained to the county that his "tax is too high, part of his iron work having not gone a long time;" and the tax records show that from 1782 through 1784, he paid only about one-fourth as much in taxes on his Hopewell properties as during the years immediately preceding and following. While 1783 appears to have been a good year from the standpoint of production, the years following were not. Between April 8 and September 14, 1784, only 196 tons of pig iron and 14-1/2 tons of finished castings were produced, and in 1785 there is record of only 134 tons of pig iron and 30-1/2 tons of finished castings. In 1784, making a desperate effort to avoid the shoals of complete financial shipwreck, he borrowed 200,000 Spanish milled silver dollars from John Nixon, a wealthy Philadelphia merchant. The following year, through his brother-in-law, James Wilson, he tried to obtain from a group of financiers in Holland a long-term loan of 500,000 florin, indicating the value of his vast properties at 750,000 florin. Unsuccessful, his fate was sealed. Two years later, obliged to satisfy his debt, he assigned all his interests to Nixon. The Hopewell and Birdsboro properties were advertised for sheriff's sale in April 1788, and Bird moved to North Carolina. A letter written by him from there in 1807 to the celebrated Dr. Benjamin Rush, of Philadelphia, asking for financial assistance of friends (and medical advice from Dr. Rush for his rheumatism and sciatica) shows to what pathetic straits the once-powerful ironmaster was reduced. "There is no doubt my principle ruin was by the War Depreciation," he wrote, and "I promise myself they [i. e., his friends] will not let me suffer, when they come to know of my Situation." Dr. Rush noted on the back of the letter: "Declined Soliciting relief for him as all his friends of 1776 were dead or reduced." Mark Bird died in comparative poverty. Thus he joined the long list of other once-powerful Pennsylvania ironmasters who went bankrupt, a list which, besides his own, included such names as Matthias Slough, Frederick Delaplank, John Truckenmiller, and Henry

William

Stiegel.

Mark Bird inherited an iron foundry at Hopewell Village in Pennsylvania from his father, William Bird, who founded it. During the Revolutionary War he outfitted 800 men of the 2nd Battalion, Berks County Militia, with uniforms and provisions. This force-marched under his command as Colonel to Washington's relief at the battle of Brandywine in May 1777. At the end of the war when Colonel Bird saw that he was not to be paid for the vast supplies he had furnished, he petitioned Congress that he might be awarded the great chain that had been stretched across the Hudson to prevent small units of the British navy from conducting operations upriver. He was told that, as one of many creditors, he could expect no special award. He went broke, moved to North Carolina to try to establish another iron foundry, went broke again, and died a poor man. His wife was Mary Ross, whose brother George was a signer of both the Declaration and the Constitution. Mark's sister Rachel's husband, James Wilson, and Mary's sister Gertrude's husband, George Read, each were signers of the Declaration and the Constitution. There were only six who signed both. George Ross was a very close friend of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris and Thomas Jefferson. His pew in the old Christ Church in Philadelphia is very near Washington's pew. With Washington and Morris, George Ross formed the Flag Committee, which engaged his niece, Betsy Ross, to make the first flag. Hopewell Village National Historic Site is five miles southeast of Birdsboro, Pennsylvania.

Did you ever hear the expression, "Not worth a Continental!?" It used to be very common. Mark Bird found out how much a continental was worth. It was paper money issued by the Continental Congress.

He died in 1812 in Rutherford County, North Carolina, at the age of 73, and was buried in Rutherfordton, North Carolina. He is buried in the Concord Cemetery, Bostic, central Rutherford Count, NC. Grave was marked by the Benjamin Cleveland Chapter, DAR



MARK BIRD
PENNSYLVANIA
COLONEL PA MILITIA
REVOLUTIONARY WAR

1739

1812

A Patriot's Legacy
As proven in DAR records

Patriot Name: Mark Bird

Patriot # A001141

Service: CIVIL SERVICE, PATRIOTIC SERVICE, COL-PA

Residence: BERKS CO, PENNSYLVANIA

Born: 1--1739 / PENNSYLVANIA

Died: POST 1812 / RUTHERFORD CO NORTH CAROLINA

Service Source: COMMITTEE OF OBSERVATION;

PA ARCH, 5TH SER, VOL 5, PP 22, 138, 175;
MONTGOMERY, HIST OF BERKS CO PA IN THE REV, PP
152, 194, 197; 2ND BATT, MILITIA; ALSO LCOL; JUDGE;
DELEGATE TO PROVINCIAL CONGRESS

Spouse #1: MARY ROSS

Spouse #2:

Spouse #3:

Proven Children:

John, Edward, George



Mark Bird
Pennsylvania
Colonel PA Militia Rev War
1739 1812

Photo made January 20, 2004 at Concord Baptist Cemetery in
Rutherford County, NC by W. D. Floyd
GPS Reading N35 20 58.9 W81 49 26.1

House



Founder

Taken from his personal Pamphlet at Hopewell Furnace - contemporary portrait i guess