A Biographical Sketch of Revolutionary War Patriot 1st Lt. Jeremiah Leeds, 3rd Battalion Gloucester County, NJ Militia

By Norman Reeves Goos, Librarian

Patriotic Service Synopsis

1st Lt. Jeremiah Leeds served in the 3rd Battalion of the Gloucester County, NJ militia under Col. Richard Somers from 1776 through 1783, as stated in his 1832 approved Federal Pension Application¹. In his application he states that he served during the battles at Trenton (December 1776), Trenton and Princeton (January 1777), Red Bank on the Delaware River (November 1777), and Chestnut Neck (October 1778), as well as during many other skirmishes and defensive actions during his 7 years in the Gloucester County Militia. He served primarily in Capt. Joseph Covenover's 6th Company in Col. Richard Somers' Battalion², being commissioned as a 1st Lieutenant on 18 September 1777. There is a family story that this company was temporarily stationed with Gen. Maxwell's New Jersey Brigade in the Continental Army but this has not yet been proven³. On Thursday, 4 March 1954, the City of Atlantic City unveiled a monument at Park Place and the Boardwalk honoring Jeremiah Leeds as its first permanent settler4. Another park at Rhode Island and Pacific Avenues was named for Leeds as well⁵.

Basic Facts

The Egg Harbor Quaker Meeting record tells us that Jeremiah Leeds was born 4 March 17546 at Leeds Point, Gloucester County, NJ to John Leeds and Sarah Mathis. His father and mother were active lifelong Quakers, both parents being Quaker ministers serving through the meeting house located at Leeds. He had 9 siblings and was probably the tallest of the litter at about 6'2" in height weighing in at 250 pounds plus⁷. He married Judith Steelman on 8 December 1776 and produced 8 children; he later married 24-year old Millicent Steelman Ingersoll on 12 October 1817 when he was 63 years old and produced 4 more children. As an interesting aside, Judith and Millicent were 2nd cousins, twice sharing great-great-grandparents removed, both Andrew

¹ Atlantic County Historical Society (ACHS) Yearbook, vol. 2, No. 1. Somers Point, NJ: ACHS, (Oct 1952) p. 205-06

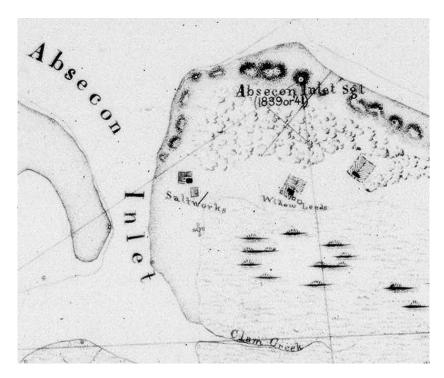
² Stryker, p. 438

³ Franklin Kemp article, undated clipping ⁴ Atlantic City Press, 5 March 1954

⁵ Atlantic City Press article, undated clipping

⁶ ACHS, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 79

⁷ Hall, John F. The Daily Union History of Atlantic City and County, NI. Atlantic City, NJ: The Daily Union Printing Co., 1900., p.411 (reporting unverifiable family tradition)



Detail of the 1841 U.S. Coast Survey map⁸ covering Absecon Inlet and environs, showing the location of the last dwelling of Jeremiah Leeds on Absecon Beach, afterward occupied by his widow, Millicent Ingersoll Leeds. The location is approximately at the intersection of Massachusetts and Baltic Avenues in Atlantic City, according to Hall.

and Judith Steelman. In addition to raising livestock, Jeremiah cleared a section of high land on Absecon Beach (the dunes were as high as 50' in those days) and started farming corn, rye, and other produce which he sold to passing ships⁹. The Leeds family also operated a guest house on the island for select guests desiring to hunt waterfowl. After struggling with lip cancer for 40 years¹⁰, Jeremiah died on October 10, 1838 at the 251 acre Leeds Plantation in present day Leeds Point and was buried in the Steelman family burial ground in Northfield.¹¹ His remains and headstone were later moved in the 1950's to

⁸ Accessible map at "The West Jersey History Project": http://www.westjerseyhistory.org/surveys/NJ-coastal-surveys/T-0142%20-%20Leeds%20Pint%20to%20Lakes%20Creek%20-%201841.jpg

⁹ Atlantic City Press, 26 Mar. 1961

¹⁰ Hall, op. cit., p. 412 (reporting unverifiable family tradition)

¹¹ ACHS Yearbook, vol. 2, No. 1 (Oct 1952) pp. 203-06



Oxford Circle in Northfield in order to make room for a housing development. He began, at least on 6 Mar. 1805, to acquire land on Absecon Beach per Gloucester and Atlantic County deeds (paying about 40 cents an acre) ¹², enough land that it became known as Leeds Beach. His son Chalkey Leeds, the first mayor of Atlantic City, stated that Jeremiah first acquired land on the island in 1783 but no deeds have as yet proven this, although he was living on the island at that time. It is estimated that he owned most of the land north of Dry Inlet¹³ in South Atlantic City (meaning north of Ventnor, Margate and Longport), other than the 131 acre inlet Chamberlain Tract.¹⁴ Today he is considered to be the first white settler on what is now Absecon Island and the first person to have built a house in what is now Atlantic City, NJ, located on the present Arctic Ave. between Missouri and Arkansas Aves. Leeds later built a bigger house at today's Baltic and Massachusetts Aves.

He died intestate (without a will) and the Orphan's Court dispersed his 1058 1/3 acres to his family. 15 The number of acres that each child inherited is

¹² Beach Haven Times, 15 Nov. 1978

¹³Dry Inlet was in the vicinity of present-day Jackson Avenue. ACHS, vol. 17, No. 2 (Dec 2013) p. 15

¹⁴ Atlantic County Historical Society, deed books

¹⁵ English, B.L. <u>History of Atlantic City, New Jersey</u>. Philadelphia: Dickson & Gilling Publishers, 1884. pp. 25-28, 33-34, 38

listed in the genealogy ¹⁶at the conclusion of this article. The Orphans' Court Records are found in the New Jersey Archives in Trenton at the following location: 1837-1860 Atlantic County Surrogate, Orphan Court Minutes, and Vol. A, pp. 32, 35, 38, 39, 45 and 47, Microfilm 2-3. The children later sold the inherited 40 cents per acre land in 1853-54 for \$5 to \$17 per acre when Atlantic City started to expand. The Massachusetts Avenue home was later turned into a small inn by Jeremiah's widow Millicent, "Aunt Millie." It was the only licensed inn on the island and its guests were oystermen, beach goers and waterfowl hunters. ¹⁷

Family History

Jeremiah Leeds came from a middle-class family of coopers (barrel makers) who immigrated directly to New Jersey before late 1676. When his great-great grandfather Thomas Leeds left Stansted, Mount Fichet, Essex, England, and after a possible stop in Long Island, he took residence at Little Silver Point in Shrewsbury, Middlesex County. He left England to avoid the religious persecution directed at the Quakers. His three sons probably followed soon after him, possibly in 1678. The Beach Haven Times reports an interesting piece of information but gives no source for the account: "Thomas had been thrown into prison because of his political opposition to Charles I. When Charles died, Thomas was released from the Tower of London a freeman, but when Charles II took the throne, he decided that England was not a safe place for the Leeds family and so Thomas made his way to America, leaving Daniel to settle the family's affairs." ¹⁸ (Based on English history, the account is credible but there is as vet no actual proof of its veracity.) Thomas signed the "Concessions & Agreements" and obtained 240 acres in Shrewsbury in March 1677, meaning that he was in Shrewsbury by that date. In the account in the British official death records, his wife, Mary Cartwright (listed as wife of Thomas), died 4 July 1677 of smallpox at her sibling John's home on Westbury Street in Stansted, England. The record says she was buried at Chequer Alley, London, England; the smallpox was possibly the reason she did not immigrate with Thomas. There is another family account, although without any proof, that says Thomas' wife immigrated with him and died in Shrewsbury on the same date in 1677, but there is no wife's name associated with this account and no proof of this burial in the Shrewsbury Friends records. The wife's Stansted, England death seems more probable. Nevertheless, Thomas and Mary had four children while in England, an unnamed child who was born and died in 1648, plus three sons: Daniel (1651-1720), William (1653-1753) and Thomas II (1654-?). There may have been a daughter born to this family as well, Mary (1665-1727); but this woman was more probably a cousin. Mary Leeds' New

¹⁶ ACHS Yearbook, vol. 2, No. 1 (Oct 1952) p. 205-06

¹⁷ Heston, Alfred M. <u>Absegami: Annals of Eyren Haven and Atlantic City</u>, <u>1609-1904</u>. Camden: Sinnickson Chew & Sons, 1904. P. 116

¹⁸ Beach Haven Times, 15 Nov. 1978, p. 6

Jersey will says that she died in Burlington in 1727 in a financially comfortable state¹⁹ and was probably the daughter of Thomas' son William. Thomas married Margaret Collier on 6 August 1678 in Burlington and resided at Shrewsbury until his death on 23 November 1687. His New Jersey will mentions only his sons Daniel and William 20, Thomas II presumably predeceasing his father. As said earlier, Thomas Leeds' family came to America as barrel-makers (coopers) with enough money in hand to buy property for both the father and two of the sons, plus enough to acquire extra land quickly. In his son Daniel's famous almanac there is both a family crest in the masthead as well as a mention that the family was related to a "gentleman" or nobleman from Leeds in Kent (Kent, Essex and London are adjacent counties). Daniel was criticized heavily by the Philadelphia Quaker hierarchy for his theology and his son Titan was likewise criticized by fierce almanac competitor Ben Franklin. It would seem that the claim to be a somewhat prestigious English family with a history and family crest would have been quickly and gleefully exposed as spurious if not true, especially in the case of the Quaker establishment who had easy access to the English peerage records. According to Leeds scholar Professor Brian Regal of Kean University, we should, therefore, assume this claim to peerage and the family crest to be valid.

Thomas' sons Daniel and William came to Burlington in 1678. The story that they came on the Shield or the Kent cannot be verified. Most likely they came to Shrewsbury first and then Daniel moved to Burlington and so the Shield story is probably later family fiction. William owned land in both Shrewsbury and Leeds Point, living in both places at various times. Daniel married Ann Stacey of Trenton on 21 February 1681 and she died in childbirth the same year on 3 Dec 1681. Daniel then married Dorothy Young of Burlington on 9 March 1683 and they had a "curiously premature" son Japeth. They went on to have 8 other children, all of which experienced the normal 9 month gestation period. Son Japeth was born 24 Oct 1683 in the family home in Jackson, Springfield Township, Burlington County. The house was on 1000 acres a half-mile from the current village, on the north side of the turnpike going toward Burlington. Father Daniel was the Surveyor General of West Jersey, a member of the Assembly in 169221, a member of the Governor's Council, a Judge and a shrewd businessman. He began publishing his almanac in 1687 and continued through 1716. Copies of his almanacs, tracts and Temple of Wisdom may be found on microfiche at the Princeton University Library. His son Japeth was born 24 Oct 1682, married Deborah Smith in 1703 and moved to a 1,000 acre tract in Leeds Point in Eastern Gloucester County. He and Deborah produced 13 children, the 3rd of which was John (1708-1785).

¹⁹ New Jersey, Abstract of Wills, 1670-1817, New Jersey State Archives, New Jersey, Published Archives Series, First Series, Trenton, New Jersey: John L Murphy Publishing Company; vol. I, p. 289

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Heston, op. cit., p. 122

There are three possibilities for finding Deborah's parents, the best being Robert Smith of Newark in Essex County. It is this Japeth and Deborah who reputedly parented the Jersey Devil, a story that has been shown to have been fabricated by competitor Ben Franklin in an attempt to demean Daniel's son Titan's successful almanac business, according to a forthcoming book by Prof. Brian Regal of Kean University. Japeth remained a devout Quaker while his father Daniel reverted to again become an Anglican. Quaker meetings were held at his home. Japeth died 15 December 1748 and listed all of his children in his will.²² His son John married Rebecca Cordery in 1737 and had four children; John then married Sarah Mathis about 1751 and had four more children. He resided the rest of his life in Leeds Point where he was a farmer producing castor oil, salt hay, corn and rye. John died 16 September 1785²³ and his New Jersey will lists his son Jeremiah, the subject of this essay.

Military History

Eastern Gloucester County (Atlantic County today) began gearing up for war on 1 Dec 1774 when six of the older, highly esteemed residents of the area were appointed to the Committee of Safety for Gloucester County: Elijah Clark, Richard Wescott, Richard Somers, Lemuel Sayres, Thomas Stites, Samuel Risley and John Somers. Jeremiah Leeds began the war as a Quaker pacifist, a farmer with land and a home at Leeds Point plus some salt hay land on Absecon Beach where he grazed cattle. After British forces landed at Leeds Point and took away some of his livestock, he and his brother Daniel angrily converted from pacifistic Quakers to fighting Quakers.²⁴ Hall recounts the story in full: "Jeremiah Leeds, in his old age, used to tell the story of the visit which his father, John Leeds, received one day from foraging redcoats, just before the Revolution. A British vessel entered Great Bay in full view from Leeds Point. Soldiers and sailors came ashore in barges for fresh meat. The captain ordered the Quaker farmer to drive up his cattle which were grazing in the Meadows nearby; this was done, whereupon two fat steers were selected from the herd and quickly knocked in the head, their bodies quartered, loaded on wagons and taken to the barges and to the ship. 'All right. That's all,' was the farewell greeting of the captain to the farmer, who considered himself lucky for losing so little to the uninvited visitors. The steers happened to be the personal property of Jeremiah and his brother Vincent, and were worth perhaps at that time six or eight dollars per head. This event had its effect in making a soldier of the Quaker boy Jeremiah in the War of the Revolution which soon followed. "25

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²² New Jersey . . . , op. cit., vol.II, p. 295

²³ ACHS Yearbook, vol. 1, No. 4 (Oct 1951) p. 161

²⁴ Hewlett, Joseph M. Jr. <u>The Leeds Family of South Jersey</u>. Privately printed, 1972. P. 54 (reporting unverifiable family tradition)

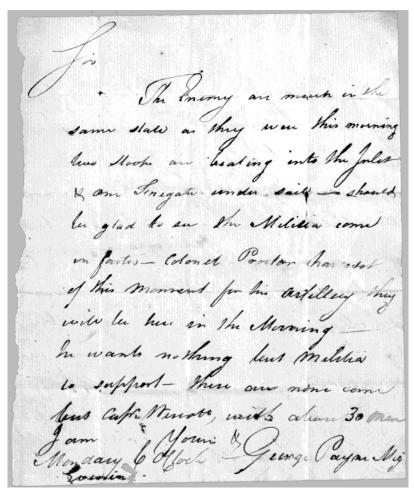
²⁵ Hall, op. cit., p. 412

Jeremiah Leeds entered Col. Somers' 3rd Gloucester County Militia Battalion in September 1776 in Capt. Nehemiah's Morse's company. agreed-upon service was one month on duty and one month off duty, unless the situation altered things. His first assignment was to help guard the "lookout fort" called Fox Burroughs to the rear of the Little Egg Harbor Inlet at present-day Holgate, watching for British and Loyalist intruders. He probably also served at the two small unnamed forts at Chestnut Neck itself, the one on the water and the one on the rise behind the village. It seems that Heston first erroneously called the Chestnut Neck fort by the name of Fox Burrows.²⁶ Jeremiah's next month of service was November 1776 under Capt. Zephaniah Steelman in Moorestown, but Washington's "day-after-Christmas" battle after crossing the Delaware extended this to a two-and-one-half-month tour of duty. Jeremiah's company, along with most of the rest of the Gloucester Battalion, was to act as bait, drawing off over 2,000 Hessian troops and crack British forces from Bordentown to Mt. Holly so they couldn't help the Hessians at Trenton when Washington attacked on December 26, 1776. Jeremiah also participated in the Trenton and Princeton battles in January 1777 where he saw his friend Forrest Bellangy killed when a cannon ball took off his leg at the knee. During the period after the battles, Jeremiah's company was wintering at Millstone, the place where the company may have been attached to Gen. Maxwell's New Jersey Brigade. This may be the source of the idea that Jeremiah served in the New Jersey Continentals, although such was not the case.

Jeremiah next served for the month of March 1777 under Capt. George Payne at Cooper's Ferry (Camden) guarding against British and loyalist marauders. He performed the same service in May 1777 under Capt. Samuel Snell and in July 1777 under Capt. Christopher Rape. Jeremiah's pension application also informs us that he served in the Fall of 1777 as part of the group of companies that did the "mop up" for the battle at Fort Mercer in Red Bank in Gloucester County on the Delaware. After this he was voted out of the Quaker Meeting for his military service and later became a Methodist. His brother Vincent "repented" and stayed in the Quaker movement.

Jeremiah was promoted to 1st Lt. in Capt. Joseph Covenover's 6th Company in the Somers Regiment and served the months of December 1777 and January 1778 in Haddonfield, NJ guarding Cooper's Ferry. We have no record of Jeremiah's "one month on/one month off" service from January through August 1778 but we can presume it involved guard duty near Cooper's Ferry since the British stayed in Philadelphia until then. Jeremiah was then called out in mid-September 1778 to prepare for the defense of Chestnut Neck. He first paraded at the Forks and then moved down to the Chestnut Neck forts to meet the British; the fort at Fox Burrows lay unarmed, at best a lookout post to watch the inlet per Capt. George Payne's 5 Oct. 1778 letter (above) to Col.

²⁶ Heston, op. cit., p. 138



"Sir, The Enemy are much in the same state as they were this morning two sloops are heading into the Inlet & one frigate under sail ~ should be glad to see the Militia come in faster ~ Colonel Proctor has sent of this moment for his artillery they will be here in the Morning ~ he wants nothing but militia to support ~ there are none come but Capt. Wescott with about 30 men I am yours & George Payne Maj Monday Evening 6 oclock"

Richard Somers. 27 The outnumbered militia completed an orderly tactical

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²⁷ Barry-Hayes Papers, Independence Seaport Museum, J. Welles Henderson Archives and Library; Series 52, b. 13, f. 3. (Digitized by the Falvey Memorial Library, Villanova University

http://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:262289)

retreat to Leeds while British burned the 13 buildings in the village. Thereafter the militia prevented the British from going upriver and destroying the cannon ball foundries at Batsto and the warehouses at The Forks. After this service Jeremiah seems to not have often served actively again. There was one mention of him being listed for call up on 28 Aug 1780, but he could not be located to receive said notice.²⁸ We do learn from his Pension Application that he hired himself out as a substitute once; however, he caught the measles and could not serve. His Pension Application also tells us that he was never wounded²⁹. He received a \$60 per year pension plus an arrears payment of \$330.00. He received this pension from 1832 until his death in October 1838. His 2nd wife Millicent received it thereafter until her death in 1873. This pension amount gives the reader the impression that Jeremiah did serve in the militia until the end of the war, but we have no record of what he did and where it occurred. We can only surmise that it was comprised of a combination of Delaware River guard duty plus inlet and beach guard service in what is now Atlantic County, as well as being a part of the team that dismantled and sold off beached British vessels. Lastly, we find him registered for call up the 1793 Gloucester County records in Capt. Richard Adams' company.³⁰

Family of Jeremiah Leeds

The following is a list of Jeremiah's children and their children provided for those who wish to join the New Jersey SAR, SR and DAR by using 1st Lt. Leeds as their patriot ancestor. Jeremiah's service can be proven via the Stryker text, as well as Jeremiah's 1832 Pension Application. Since Jeremiah left no written will, one's direct relationship to him must be proven via other documents. Known documents connecting the generations in this writing will be noted herein. As an aside, it might be interesting to acquire a copy of the distribution of the Orphans' Court in 1838 to further link Jeremiah with his children and determine who received the various tracts of land. This Orphan's Court verbatim in the New Jersey Archives proves the relationship between Jeremiah and all his surviving children. The 1853-54 deeds of sale for the land by the Leeds children are also available through the Atlantic County Clerk's Office. For SAR, SR and DAR applicants, the challenge, albeit an easy one, will be to document the relationship between Jeremiah's children and their children. Once one accomplishes that, the rest of the family can be proven via US Census information available on Ancestry.com.

²⁸ Stewart, Frank H. <u>Notes on Old Gloucester County, New Jersey</u>. The New Jersey Society of Pennsylvania, 1917. Vol. 3, p. 27

²⁹ Hall, op. cit., p. 412

³⁰ Stewart, op.cit., vol. 3, p. 64

Jeremiah Leeds m. Judith Steelman 8 Dec 1776

(NJ Marriages & Jeremiah Leeds Bible)

- James Leeds (26 Feb 1778 1798). Died young with no issue.
- Ruhanna Steelman Leeds (21 Jan 1779 30 Aug 1862) m. Joseph Conover 20 Feb 1801. Inherited 50 1/2 acres on Absecon Beach and 185 acres on the mainland.
- Rachel Leeds (4 Oct 1782 22 Apr 1845) m. Jesse Steelman, m. Mark Read. Inherited 34 acres on Absecon Beach and 66 acres on the mainland.
- Adah Leeds (25 Apr 1788 25 Oct 1792). Died young with no issue.
- Sarah Leeds (26 Mar 1790 18 Oct 1792). Died young with no issue.
- Andrew Leeds (30 Apr 1792 5 Sep 1865) m. Armenia Lake (1797-1853)
 1 June 1817 (NJ Marriages/Glou Cty Marriages) sonship proven by deed (in DocStar at ACHS); m. Ellen DeKurts-Bennett in 1852.
 Inherited 347 acres on Absecon Beach.
 - James L. Leeds (6 Aug 1818 10 Jan 1893) m. Abbigail S. Webb (1827-1907) 4 Sept 1847 (Indenture in DocStar at ACHS)
 - Armenia Lake Leeds (15 Aug 1848) m. Capt. Israel Nichols 10 Jul 1875
 - Sylvester Webb Leeds (5 Dec 1849) m. Ella Lee 8 Jun 1879
 - Lydia Corson Leeds (14 Mar 1851 -) m. Elmer P. Reeves 22
 Dec 1869 this is the line from which the article's author was later born.
 - Mary Elizabeth Leeds (26 Apr 1853) m. Thomas Oakley 2 Oct 1876
 - Benjamin Franklin Leeds (1 Apr 1855) m. Rejoice Treen 29 Mar 1878
 - Sarah Abigail Leeds (20 Apr 1857) never married
 - Ellen Joanna Leeds (31 Jan 1859) m. John Baker 1 Jul 1878
 - Hannah Rachel Leeds (? ?) m. Edward Shoultes 5 Sep 1888
 - Augusta Eveline Leeds (15 Nov 1862) m. Charles Hommer 4 Sep 1888
 - Somers Edwin Leeds (15 Jul 1864) m. Aura Garwood 22 Dec 1886
 - o John B. Leeds (1819-1867) m. Hannah Webb 14 Jan 1867

- Steelman Leeds (1821-1896) (1850 census) m. Rachel Miller 31
 Oct 1854 sonship by NJ will
- o Abigail Leeds (1831-1859) m. John Gill Avery abt 1857 daughtership by 1850 census

Jeremiah Leeds m. Millicent Steelman Ingersoll

- Judith Leeds (1819-1869) m. Richard Hackett 16 Jan 1840. Inherited 234 acres on Absecon Beach.
 - o Matilda Hackett (27 Jun 1842)
 - o Joseph Hackett (7 Dec 1848 4 Aug 1888) m. Tamar Oakley
 - o Josephine Hackett (13 Jan 1850) m. Samuel Reeve
 - o Aaron Leeds (1820-1820). Died young with no issue.
- Chalkey Steelman Leeds (3 Oct 1825 10 Sep 1908) m. Margaret Holland Gaskill 1 Apr 1847; m. Rose Young. He was the first mayor of Atlantic City. Inherited 217 acres on Absecon Beach.
 - o Amanda Elizabeth Leeds (14 Dec 1847) m. George C. Bryant 26 Jan 1870; m. Thomas J. Horner 12 Nov 1882
 - o Maria Leeds (23 Aug 1849) m. Lewis Evans 1 Oct 1868
 - o Millicent Leeds (8 Mar 1852 7 Sep 1873) m. William C. Heath
 - o Jeremiah Leeds (26 Jul 1854) m. Annie Cramer 11 Feb 1881
 - Mary Rebecca Leeds (29 Oct 1856) m. Charles Dougherty 30 Nov 1881
 - o Charles Gaskill Leeds (19 Sep 1857)
 - o Isaac Steelman Leeds (11 Nov 1862) m. Mary Parker
 - o Laura Leeds (27 Oct 1865) m. Fred Hogan 31 Dec 1890
 - Nettie Leeds (19 Aug 1876 22 Feb 1878) probably by wife Rose Young
- Robert Barclay Leeds (2 May 1828 16 Mar 1905) m. Caroline English 29 Apr 1852. Inherited 176 acres on Absecon Beach.
 - o Lurilda Leeds (15 Jun 1854 -) m. Oliver T. Nice 28 Feb 1878
 - o Honora Leeds (1 Aug 1856 25 Oct 1857)
 - O Neida Leeds (5 Jun 1858) m. Albert B. Richards
 - Harry Bellerjeau Leeds (9 Aug 1860) m. Harriet Somers Scull 24 Nov 1895
 - o Albert English Leeds (8 May 1862 25 Jul 1863)
 - o Alberta Leeds (1 Jan 1864 -) m. Fred P. Currie
 - O Horace Leeds (1 Nov 1865 -)
 - o Maynard Leeds (questionable)

Bibliography

Note: We acknowledge that there are family stories that have existed for generations but that have no hard proof. It is the author's decision to include these stories for the purpose of memorializing them hoping that proofs will be found some day. These family stories have been noted as such in the text or footnotes.

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