

CANAWLERS AT REST

Colonel SIMPSON TORBERT

Find-A-Grave # 141573918

b. March 27, 1802

d. February 23, 1838

By Bob & Carolyn Schmidt

thony Teate, a Provincial soldier and officer, who was one of the largest land owners about Newtown, and one of the most prominent men of his day; and Jane, wife of John Henderson, who removed to the west.

“James Torbert, son of Samuel and Elizabeth (Lamb) Torbert, was born at Carrickfergns, Ireland. Tradition relates that he did not accompany his parents to America, but remained in Ireland with his grandmother until ten years of age, and then accompanied relatives to Bucks county. These relatives were probably the Polks of Warrick, Bucks county, as an old paper filed in the common pleas court of Bucks county in 1752 shows that there were business dealings between his father, then of Carrickfergns, Ireland, and the Polks, in 1725. James Torbert married Hannah Burleigh (or Burley), daughter of John Burleigh, another Ulster-Scot, who settled in Upper Makefield at about the same date as the McNairs and Torberts, and died there in 1748. James Torbert became a considerable land owner in Upper Makefield, and died there in 1813. He and his wife Hanna were the parents of nine children, as follows: 1. Samuel, married Elizabeth Keith; 2. James, married Margaret McNair; 3. Abner, married Jane Gibson, and removed to Ohio; 4. Lamb, born May 9, 1769, and died in Lower Makefield August 23, 1849, his first wife and the mother of his nine children was Jane Slack, daughter of Cornelius, of Makefield; 5. Elizabeth, married Abraham Slack; 6. Alice, married James Slack; 7. Ann, married John Hare; 8. Amelia, married Christopher Search; and 9. Anthony.” Anthony Burleigh Torbert married Margaret Simpson in Bucks county.

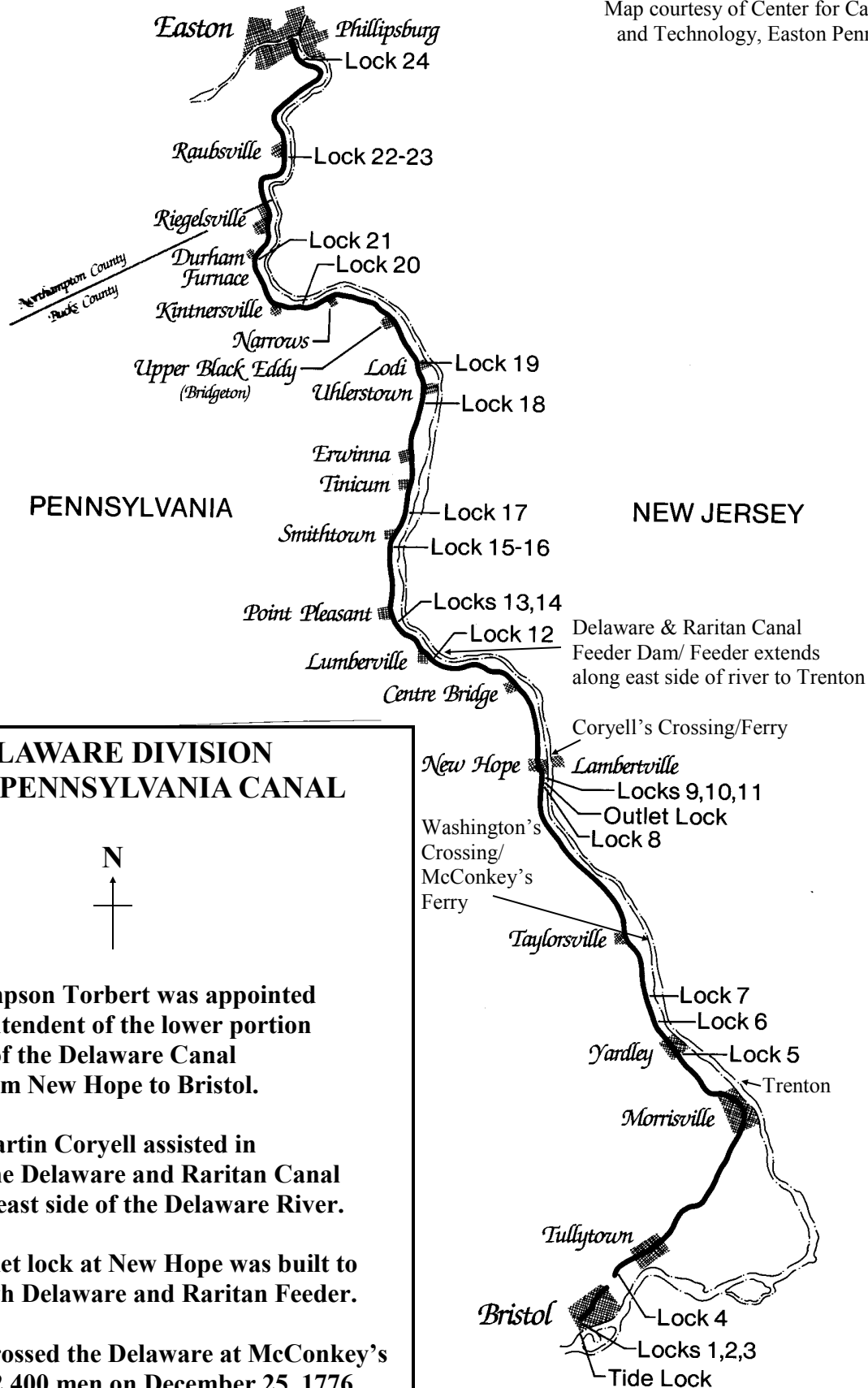
Simpson Torbert, our subject, was born in Bucks county, Pennsylvania to Anthony and Margaret Torbert on March 27, 1802. Few details are available for Simpson’s early years, education or his training in engineering, but there was considerable canal building activity in Pennsylvania during the 1820s at the time he was seeking a future career.

The War of 1812–1815 with England necessitated the creation of local militia units to fight the war. After the war additional local militia units became popular with young men and by 1821 there were 19 companies formed in Bucks County alone. In October

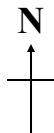
William W. H. Davis in his *History of Bucks County Pennsylvania From The Discovery Of The Delaware To The Present Time* gives a brief biography of our subject’s great-grandparents and grandparents as follows:

“The Torbert family of Bucks county, Pennsylvania, is descended from Samuel Torbert, who came to Pennsylvania in 1726 from Carrickfergns, Ireland, and located at Newtown, Bucks county. His family sought refuge in Ireland during the religious persecutions in Scotland and, when the same contest of argument and arms that had wasted Scotland sprang up in Ireland, he joined the many Ulster-Scots who poured into this country after the period of Antrim evictions in Ireland. He was for some years associated in the tanning business at Newtown with John Harris, Anthony Teate (Tate) and David Lawell, all compatriots of his, and purchased of the London Land Company a tract of land in Upper Makefield township, which he named Silvan Retreat, and which remained the property of his descendants until 1873, being owned by his son James Torbert, his grandson James Torbert, and his great grandson John Keith Torbert. He married Elizabeth Lamb in Ireland, and his children were six sons and two daughters: William, James, Lamb, Thomas, [?] and Benjamin; Elizabeth, who became the wife of An-

Map courtesy of Center for Canal History and Technology, Easton Pennsylvania.



DELAWARE DIVISION OF THE PENNSYLVANIA CANAL



Col. Simpson Torbert was appointed Superintendent of the lower portion of the Delaware Canal from New Hope to Bristol.

Martin Coryell assisted in locating the Delaware and Raritan Canal along the east side of the Delaware River.

In 1847 outlet lock at New Hope was built to connect with Delaware and Raritan Feeder.

Washington crossed the Delaware at McConkey's Ferry with 2,400 men on December 25, 1776.

1821 some of these were formed into battalions and regiments. The 600-man, 1st Regiment Bucks County, 142nd of the Line was commanded by Colonel John Davis and became the pride of the community. Hundreds turned out to see them drill or watch their parades. In September 1824 the unit received General Lafayette at the Pennsylvania end of the Trenton Bridge, and, with other troops, escorted him to the Philadelphia county line.

Simpson Torbert followed Davis as the Commander of the First Regiment. It is here that he received the title of Colonel. His future father-in-law, Lewis S. Coryell, was the Adjutant. Coryell was a practical engineer and became a contractor on the Delaware Canal in Pennsylvania. He was a prominent businessman in New Hope, Pennsylvania and had been an early advocate for internal improvements. He had two sons, Martin and Miers, who also followed engineering careers.

By October 1825 the Erie Canal in New York, which was started in 1817, was now operational for 363 miles between Buffalo and the Hudson River. On October 27, 1827 groundbreaking took place in Bristol, Pennsylvania just 17 miles northeast of Philadelphia for the Delaware Canal. This canal was to proceed north from Bristol for 60 miles along the west side of the Delaware river to Easton, Pennsylvania, where it would connect with the Lehigh Canal.

The Lehigh Canal stretched another 46 miles to the anthracite coal fields of Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania. Canvass White was the chief engineer for the Lehigh Canal, which was completed in 1829. Two industrialists, Erskine Hazard and Josiah White, began utilizing these canals to bring coal into Easton and develop their anthracite coal shipments to seaboard markets.

Canvass White, who is known for his development of the use of hydraulic cement, also came up with the idea of segmented canal boats that could be used on inclined planes such as those on New Jersey's Morris Canal completed in 1831. He made this concept known in 1826 when he said, "I would suggest the idea of making the canal boats in three or four pieces, to be

divided transversely, and transported over the Portage without changing the Cargo."

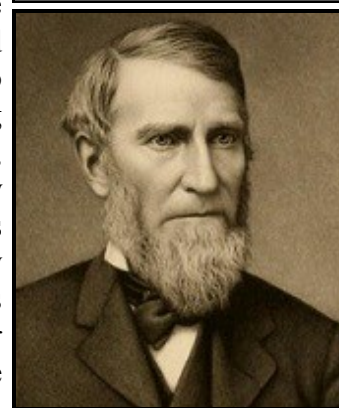
At about the same time Lewis Coryell, who was not only involved in establishing military units but was also a prominent local businessman in New Hope, became very interested in internal improvements along the Delaware river. In the late 1820s he became a Canal Commissioner for the Delaware Canal. Simpson Torbert, perhaps due to his association with Coryell, became the Superintendent for the 25-mile-long lower portion of the Delaware Canal from Bristol to New Hope. Both of these men were closely associated with Canvass White.

The tax records for Upper Makefield, Bucks county, Pennsylvania show Simpson owning property there from 1824-1836. They also show this property under his name in 1846-47 after his death. At that time Cornelius Slack is living on the property.

In November 1830 Canvass White was appointed Chief Engineer on the Delaware & Raritan Canal, another canal venture from the Delaware river into middle New Jersey. This canal was to run from Bordertown just south of Trenton on the Delaware Bay for 43 miles to New Brunswick on the Raritan river. The feeder for this canal was to begin somewhere to the north on the east side of the Delaware river. Many people wanted the feeder to begin at their town. Well's Falls near New Hope was one of the suggested sites.

"In the fall of 1831, and before the feeder of the Delaware and Raritan Canal was located, the water of the Delaware river was lower than it had been for many years. Canvass White, at that time engineer of the canal company, requested Col. Simpson Torbert to make permanent recording marks along the river shore, which he did, assisted by Martin Coryell." Martin was Lewis Coryell's son. Finally a location for the feeder was chosen. It was to extend for 22 miles along the east side

Martin Coryell



of the Delaware river and be fed by a V-dam on the river .7 of a mile north of Lumberville, Pennsylvania, which is 6 miles north of New Hope. Canvass White was so impressed with the work of Martin Coryell that he gave the 16-year-old a job as rodman on the Delaware & Raritan Canal. (Later in 1847 an outlet lock was built at New Hope, which allowed boats to enter the Delaware river for transfer between the Delaware Canal and the Delaware & Raritan Feeder Canal via a similar outlet lock on the other side of the river.)

Earlier on March 16, 1831, Superintendent Simpson Torbert wrote a letter to the Board of Commissioners of the Delaware Canal stating, "This portion of the canal is now in navigable order from Bristol to New Hope. A daily line of Packet boats have been established to run upon it and all the boats engaged in the river trade will ascend by way of the canal." Although the Delaware Canal was begun in 1827, much to the chagrin of Philadelphia industrialists, it wasn't completed to Easton until 1832.

The Pennsylvania Senate passed a law on August 29, 1832 stating that, "the supervisors upon the Delaware division, be required to furnish the accountant department with the precise nature and amount of the expenditures upon the dams and water works in the river Delaware at New Hope, the dam and feeder at Durham creek, the feeder at Lumberville....with a view of enabling that department to judge of the proper fund out of which those several works should be paid.Provided, that the said supervisors shall furnish the superintendent with legal vouchers for the amount of the work so done. And provided further, that the said supervisors shall refund the money so received to the treasurer of the canal commission, to be by him restored to the fund for repairs..."

It appears that Simpson continued in the role of Canal Superintendent for several years. The *Journal of the Pennsylvania General Assembly* has a statement of funds distributed for new work, upon the Delaware division of the Pennsylvania canal from February 8 to October 31, 1833. It lists Simpson Torbert as superintendent, who was paid and for what purpose. Very few packet boats were ever used on this canal.

Like Lewis Coryell, Simpson Torbert was a Democrat in politics. One of the issues in 1832 was the role of states rights. In November 1832 South Carolina passed a resolution declaring that tariffs of the Federal Government would be null and void in their state after February 1, 1833. Congress rescinded most of the tariffs and the crisis was averted. Democrats rallied in support of South Carolina.

On April 14, 1834 a States Rights Rally to coincide with Thomas Jefferson's birthday was planned to meet in Philadelphia. Both Coryell and Torbert wrote letters to the organizers in support but expressed regrets that they would be unable to attend. Lewis Coryell wrote: "Nullification, - A freeman's Rights- That immortal Jefferson' "rightful remedy" which overcame the Alien and Sedition laws of 1798 - May his disciples remain true to those principles, and practice his "remedies" wherever there is attempted an unlawful or unconstitutional exercise of power."

On December 1, 1835 Colonel Simpson Torbert served as a groomsman for Gideon Burton who married Catherine Martha Torbert, the daughter of a William Torbert, who we think was Simpson's cousin. The Burtons went on to live in Cincinnati. He wrote *Reminiscences of Gideon Burton*, which can be read on the internet.

A month later on January 1, 1836 Simpson Torbert, then age 33, married 19 year old Mary Ellen Coryell, the daughter of Lewis Slate Coryell. The Coryell family was an extremely prominent family in the New Hope area. Lewis' great-grandfather Emanuel Coryell was granted a ferry permit on the Delaware river by the English Crown. The major "York" road between Philadelphia and New York crossed the Delaware river at Coryell's Ferry. When settlements developed on both sides of the river at this point, both were called Coryell's Ferry. After a major fire on the Pennsylvania side in 1790 the town was renamed New Hope. In 1814 the New Jersey side later was renamed Lambertville after a prominent local resident and one term U.S. Senator, John Lambert.

During the Revolution, as General Washington fled New York in the Fall of 1776, he crossed the Del-

aware river at Coryell's Ferry and removed all the boats for miles along the eastern bank of the Delaware so that British General Cornwallis could not pursue. On Christmas day of 1776, Coryell's Ferry became part of Washington's plan to attack the Hessian garrison at Trenton.

Future U.S. President Lt. James Monroe and Captain William Washington, a cousin of the General, were assigned the responsibility of crossing the Delaware here and stopping any British messengers traveling between Trenton and the forces of Cornwallis. These two men along with 57 privates carried out their mission while Washington's major force crossed the Delaware at McConkey's Ferry (Washington's Crossing, Pennsylvania) about 6 miles further south closer to Trenton. After completing this assignment, James Monroe and William Washington proceeded to Trenton along with a patriot physician, Dr. John Riker, who agreed to assist with any medical needs. When the battle of Trenton ended there were two men who had frozen to death on Washington's march and two serious American injuries at the battle, Lt. Monroe and Captain Washington. Dr. Riker took them both back to Coryell's Ferry and saved their lives. James Monroe carried a bullet in his shoulder until his death in 1831.

Lewis Coryell was a great friend of President Monroe and visited with him in Washington City while he was President. Simpson Torbert had married well into this prominent family.

In the spring of 1836 the Legislature of Pennsylvania appointed Lewis Coryell and Simpson Torbert as Commissioners with others to incorporate the New Hope, Doylestown and Norristown Railroad Company. But this was not to end Simpson's involvement with canals.

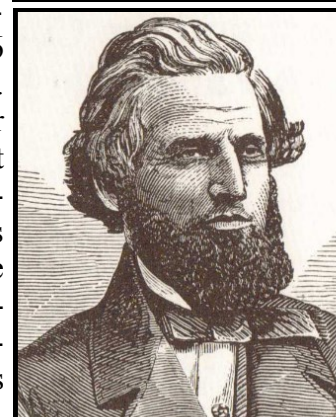
While canal building in southeastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey had been largely completed, Indiana had just passed its Mammoth Internal Improvement Bill in January 1836. One of the canals planned was the Whitewater Canal that was authorized from Lawrenceburg on the Ohio river to the mouth of Nettle Creek near Hagerstown, Indiana. News of this event soon swept east as Indiana began seeking funds to im-

plement its grand infrastructure plan of canals, railroads, roads and river improvements. In July of 1836 Dr. Isaac Coe negotiated, on credit and with a kick-back to him, a \$440,000 loan with the Morris Canal & Banking Company of New Jersey.

Simpson Torbert may have heard about the plans to develop the Whitewater Canal in southeastern Indiana through Coe's negotiations. He also might have heard about it from his uncle, Abner Torbert (1781-1855), a veteran of the War of 1812, who had moved to Cincinnati, Hamilton county, Ohio before 1820.

Groundbreaking for the Whitewater Canal occurred September 13, 1836 at Brookville, Indiana. Sometime in the 4th quarter of 1836, Simpson Torbert was hired and came to Harrison, Ohio in early 1837 as the Chief Engineer of the Whitewater Canal. This position in other sources is given as Resident Engineer. His assistant was Erasmus Gest,

Erasmus Gest



a 17 year old youth from Cincinnati, who went on to write about his experiences on the canals. The Gest papers are stored in Columbus, Ohio by the Ohio Historical Society.

Gest writes, "On the 12th day of April 1837 (my 17th birthday) I left Cincinnati, and reached Harrison about noon, reported at once to Col Simpson Torbert the Chief Engineer of the White Water Canal, where also was the principal office of the Line. Mr. Martin Coryell, the principal assistant to whom I was detailed, being absent. The Col. set me to work copying some paper. In a short time I had it done. He gave me more work, in half an hour I reported it done and he gave me a plan of a Culvert to copy, which I completed about 3 o'clock, and showed him and asking him for more to do, he looked up at me and remarked 'Hell, I can't keep you busy, you will have to wait until day after tomorrow for Mr. Coryell's return;' in the mean time amuse myself the best I could."

Apparently his brother-in-law, Martin Coryell, single, age 22, also came with Simpson to Ohio/Indiana. Mary Ellen (Coryell) Torbert, Simpson's wife, stayed in Pennsylvania since she was pregnant with her first and their only child.

Canal work from Brookville to Lawrenceburg was in full swing. The engineers used Harrison OH/IN at the middle of their works as their headquarters. One of the earlier recommendations by some was for an aqueduct to cross the Whitewater river south of Harrison. Resident Engineer Torbert favored building a dam and a slackwater crossing, which was the method finally adopted. The pool created by this dam supplied feeder water for both the Whitewater Canal and the planned Cincinnati & Whitewater Canal, which was later completed in 1843.

On January 27, 1837, the legislature of Indiana directed the Board of Internal Improvement to survey and locate early the ensuing summer a canal from Richmond, Indiana to Brookville, to intersect the Whitewater Canal at or near Brookville. The Board was to use local engineers then employed on the Whitewater Canal and not to be funded by the state. Simpson Torbert was employed as Engineer-in-Chief and Colonel John H. Farquhar, Thomas Noell, Elisha Long, J.C. Moore and M. Dewey were to assist and be part of the corps of engineers for the Richmond and Brookville Canal. (This was to be a privately funded canal and not part of the state funded improvements.)

Colonel Torbert completed the task and reported to the Board of Internal Improvements on December 2, 1837. The canal proposed would be 33¼ miles long, 40 feet wide and 4 feet deep. It would begin at Richmond and follow the east branch of the Whitewater river alternating sides until it reached the Whitewater Canal Basin south of Brookville. There was an elevation fall of 273½ feet, requiring the following mechanical structures: 2 guard locks, 2 aqueducts, 7 culverts, 2 water weirs with gates, 16 road bridges 2 tow-path bridges over the East Fork, 5 dams, and 31 lift locks. The locks were to be the standard Erie dimensions of 90 feet long and 15 feet wide. The entire cost to be privately funded was estimated at \$507,966. (In 1839 a stock company was formed and some work for

4 miles was completed south of Richmond. With the financial collapse of the economy in 1839 the plans for this canal were terminated.)

Simpson Torbert's report to the Board of Internal Improvements in December 1837 were very optimistic, "There would be many advantages growing out of its construction, the benefits of which can scarcely be anticipated. It would be the channel through which all the trade of one of the most populous, fertile and wealthy regions of the western country would pass. Richmond, situated at the head of navigation, with its vast water-power, extensive capital, and enterprising inhabitants, might become the PITTSBURG of INDIANA. In short, the whole country within its reach would be invigorated—new sources of trade, which are now unknown, or lying dormant for the want of an outlet, would be developed; among which may be enumerated pine, and mineral coal from the Ohio river—the former for building, and the latter for fuel. As a natural consequence, large tracts of fertile lands, now an unproductive forest, would soon be brought into profitable cultivation, and thereby contribute towards the general wealth and prosperity."

Unfortunately, a few months later Simpson Torbert, died prematurely at age 35 of bilious fever on the 23rd of February 1838 at John Godley's home near Harrison, Ohio. This probably is where he boarded while working on the Whitewater Canal. He was then replaced as Resident Engineer by Solomon Holman. The initial phase of the Whitewater Canal was opened between Lawrenceburg and Brookville in June 1839 when the "Ben Franklin" became the 1st boat to make the trip.

The Cincinnati *Daily Gazette* of February 27, 1838 reads, "DIED. On the 23d inst. At the residence of John Godley esq. Harrison, Ind. Of bilious fever, Col. SIMPSON TORBERT, from New Hope, Pennsylvania, resident Engineer of the White Water Canal. He left a wife and young child to deplore his early departure from this world of trouble."

Simpson Torbert was buried in the Glen Haven Cemetery at Harrison, Ohio. His brother-in-law Martin Coryell returned to Pennsylvania to become a promi-

ment coal mining engineer. Simpson's wife Mary Ellen was now a widow at age 20. Just before his death they had one daughter, Mary Francis, who was born in October 1837 at Lambertville, never married and is buried with her mother and other Coryell family members in the New Hope Cemetery in New Hope, Pennsylvania.

Mary Ellen (Coryell) Torbert, at age 32 then married a physician, Dr. Samuel Lilly, age 44, of Lambertville, New Jersey on February 12, 1850. They had one son, John, born in July 1851. He and his family are buried with his father in Mount Hope Cemetery in Lambertville. Dr Lilly's first wife Mary Ann Titus died in 1847 and is also buried there. They had no children. Dr. Lilly served one term as U.S. Congressman from the 3rd New Jersey Congressional District from

1853-1855.

Simpson Torbert, like so many canal engineers and workers, began working in the east on the canals and railroads and then migrated west as construction opened up to new markets. John Minesinger, chief engineer on the Hagerstown Canal, also of Pennsylvania came west bringing his family. He died in St. Louis and then was buried in New Castle, Indiana. (The Hoosier Packet September 2015)

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Simpson Torbert's family

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Glen Haven Cemetery
Harrison, Harrison County, Ohio
Photo by Seth Musselman

SIMPSON TORBERT
Resident Engineer of the White Water Canal
Native of Bucks Co. Pen
Photo by Julia Saylor



SIMPSON TORBERT'S FAMILY

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Death</u>	<u>Cemetery</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Marriage</u>	<u>Place</u>
Torbert, Samuel	1695	Antrim Ireland	7-28-1778				
m. Lamb, Elizabeth	1695	Tarbet Claire Ire	1778				
Torbert, James	@1729	Ireland					
m. Burleigh, Hanna	9-02-1734	Bucks Co PA	9-21-1813	Presbyterian	Newtown PA		
Torbert, Anthony Burleigh	2-13-1766	Bucks Co PA	10-29-1799	Presbyterian	Newtown PA		
m. Simpson, Margaret	10-10-1772		4-04-1829	Presbyterian	Newtown PA	3-27-1802	Bucks Co PA
Torbert, James Anthony	8-09-1794	Bucks Co PA	3-23-1852	Presbyterian	Newtown PA	3-27-1802	Bucks Co PA
m. Cunningham, Ann R	12-25-1795	London England	12-09-1835	Torbert	Marengo Co AL		
Torbert, Rebecca Simpson	11-17-1796		5-22-1877	Torbert	Marengo Co AL		
m. VanSant, Amos			4-24-1864				
Torbert, Cyrus	9-17-1798		6-29-1823				
m. Henly, Sarah Parmelia							
Torbert, Simpson	3-27-1802	Bucks Co PA	2-23-1838	Glen Haven	Harrison IN/OH	1-01-1836	Philadelphia PA
m1 Titus, Mary Ann	8-31-1818		3-16-1847	Mt Hope	Lambertville NJ		
m2 Coryell, Mary Ellen	12-04-1817	New Hope PA	8-04-1867	New Hope	New Hope PA	1-01-1836	Philadelphia PA
Torbert, Mary Frances	10-28-1837	Lambertville NJ	2-05-1910	New Hope	New Hope PA		
m. Lilly, Samuel						2-12-1850	Trenton NJ
Lilly, John	7-20-1851	Lambertville NJ	4-25-1916	Mt Hope	Lambertville NJ		
m. Smith, Livilla	5-03-1851	Lambertville NJ	5-28-1921	Mt Hope	Lambertville NJ		
Lilly, William	11-25-1880	Lambertville NJ	1-29-1944	Mt Hope	Lambertville NJ		

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