

THE CONWELL FAMILY

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The Conwell family, represented in Vineland by your fellow townsman, Ex-Mayor and President or your Historical Society, Dr. Joseph A. Conwell, is numbered among the old families of America, its first settlers having come over in the early Colonial days.

The pioneers of the family in America consisted of Yeates Conwell and Rebekah his wife. The vessel on which they came from Europe entered Delaware Bay on April 15th, 1699 and anchored at Reedy Island. They landed in Delaware, a few miles west of the town of Lewes, and settled in Broadkiln Neck, Sussex County. These facts are recorded in an old family bible by George Conwell, a son of Elias and a grandson of Yeates Conwell.

Tradition says that their second son John was born on the vessel in the bay the day before they landed. This son is the ancestor of Ex-Mayor Conwell of Vineland. An older son, William who accompanied them across is the ancestor of the writer. They later had a third son, Elias, and a daughter Hannah. All four of these children married and had families. The daughter, Hannah, married Abraham Gum. Mrs. Yeates Conwell's father, William Fisher, lived at Lewes and in 1705 deeded them one thousand acres of land in Broadkiln Hundred, the deed for the same being on record at Georgetown, Delaware. This land was subsequently divided up into several farms and was occupied by their descendants for many generations.

One of the descendants, George Conwell, married Eunice Spencer, the daughter of Dr. John Spencer of Milton, and at one time owned most of the land now forming the western portion of the town. In early days what is now Milton was known as Conwell's Landing. The firm of Coulter and Conwell built the first grist mill which was for over a century a leading industry of the town.

No records have so far been found stating where Yeates Conwell and his wife lived prior to their leaving Europe, although there are a number of Conwell families scattered throughout both Ireland and England. As there are more Conwells in Ireland than in England it seems reasonable to hazard the guess that our original ancestor came from there. But it is only a guess although numerous and extensive efforts have been made to settle this point positively.

The Conwell family of Colonial days was closely connected with the Claypoole family of England, descendants of John Claypoole, Knighted by King James I in 1604. His

descendants, James Claypoole, of the fifth generation, landed in Philadelphia in 1683 and Norton Claypoole in Lewes, Delaware in 1678. Three of Norton Claypoole's granddaughters were connected by marriage with Yeates Conwell's three sons. Comfort Claypoole married John Conwell, Rachel married Elias Conwell and Elizabeth married William Conwell's eldest son Thomas.

Betsy Ross, the famous widow, after making the first American flag, married a John Claypoole and four of their daughter grew up and married. Although there seemed to be a strong attraction for each other between the Conwell boys and the Claypoole girls, resulting in several weddings, it does not appear that any Conwell, so far, has courted and married a descendant of Betsy Ross Claypoole, the maker of the first flag.

William, the oldest son of Yeates Conwell, left two sons, Thomas and Yeates. Thomas left two sons, William and John. These two sons sold their Delaware farms and settled in Fayette County, Pennsylvania in 1767 and cleared land in the virgin forests, depending upon hunting wild game for food. In 1774 the two brothers built a fort or blockhouse on Dunlap's Creek to shield themselves from the Indians. This was known as "Fort Conwell" and for years was a retreat for safety, and each brother is said to have had a daughter born within this fort. They took part in the Revolutionary war, William serving as a Captain of Rangers on the frontier. His three sons, Thomas, William and Prettyman moved to the Ohio wilderness in October 1827, locating in Tuscarawas County. From one of these Ohio pioneers the writer traces his descent.

Elias, the youngest son of Yeates Conwell, married Rachel Claypoole and they had ten children. Their descendants are found throughout Delaware, in Southern Indiana and Ohio and other parts of the West. The late John T. and Asa F. Conwell of Milton, Dr. L. S. and Prof. Chas. S. Conwell of near Dover, Delaware, William C. Conwell, Esq. of Baltimore and the late John A. Conwell of Indiana, belong to this branch. John, the second son of Yeates, was married twice and left six children, three by each wife, five being sons. He seems to have more descendants than either of his brothers, William and Elias. They are found, not only in Delaware, but in various localities both east and west as far as California.

One of them wandered from his native town in Delaware and like the immortal Washington, "crossed the Delaware" settled in Vineland, New Jersey, where he is probably as well known as anyone in town. The town has honored him by electing him Mayor twice and he is President of the Historical Society. In fact he is better known to the people of Vineland than he is to the writer, who has known him only for the past four years, having located him through Genealogical researches. He has been found to be a gentleman in every respect, courteous, obliging, well posted and scholarly.

Ex-mayor Conwell's descent from Yeates and Rebekah Conwell is as follow:

John I, born April 14, 1699

John II, born about 1740

William, born Oct. 12, 1778. Married Lydia Stevenson

William Alex. born March 7, 1816. Married Ann Cord Robbins

Joseph Alfred, born April 18, 1855. Married Lillie Primr

Dr. Conwell is one of eight children. Two, Lydia and Anna died in infancy.
Elizabeth R. the oldest married Capt. William Russell and died in 1866. Mary J.
became the second wife of Captain Russell. Hannah F. married David A. Wiltbank.
David M. and William A. are both married; the former lives in Delaware, the latter in
Missouri.

Among the numerous members of the family are to be found Professors, Lawyers,
Preachers, Doctors and men of affairs. Their names are found among the Alumni of
Yale, Princeton, University of Pittsburgh, Vassar and other institutions of learning.

Nearly all the Conwells in America can be traced as the descendants of Yeates
and Rebekah, although there are several families of the name scattered over the
country, mostly of more recent arrival, which we have never been able to connect up
with the original. One such branch is traced to the vicinity of Xenia, Ohio, where one
John Conwell was born in 1740 and who has numerous descendants. Another John
Conwell lived at Zanesville, Ohio, and has several descendants, and a third family
located at Cadiz, Ohio, are apparently descended from one Hiram Conwell.

Bishop Conwell, one of the most influential leaders of the Catholic faith, resided in
Philadelphia for many years prior to the civil war. He came direct from Ireland,
accompanied by relatives of the same name and their descendants are found chiefly in
eastern Pennsylvania.

Rev. Russell H. Conwell, the eminent author, lecturer, preacher and educator, is of
the New England ancestry.

Several families of Conwells live in Virginia and the south and some of these, there
are reasons to believe, belong to the Delaware pioneer settlers.

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It has been a hobby or the writer for the past five years to endeavor to trace the numerous descendants
of Yeates Conwell, through all three sons, and ascertain their various wanderings, births, marriages,
deaths, etc. The data collected covers thousands of descendants and at the present time there are
hundreds, if not thousands of living descendants scattered all over the United States. Yet the name is a
rare one and seldom met, but wherever found it almost invariably means honesty, industry and good
citizenship.