

## THE COVENANT OF BLOOD

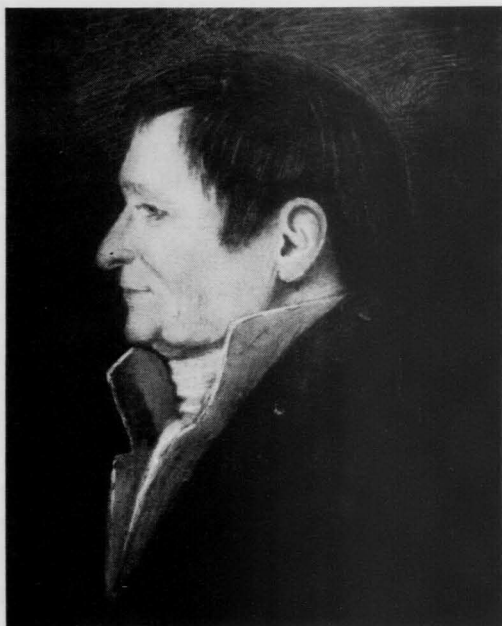
BY PAUL A. W. WALLACE

**W**HAT strikes the eye as one approaches the graves behind the Presbyterian Church of the Falling Spring at Chambersburg, is a huge walnut tree, so old that its upper limbs need the support of a heavy chain to hold them up. It stands at the



head of a ravine, watching like a sentinel over the graves of Benjamin Chambers and the Indians who share this burial ground with him. The tree was there when this ground was first consecrated, and it witnessed the "Covenant of Blood." A tradition in the Chambers family, transmitted by Lucy Chambers to her granddaughter, Mrs. Krebs Benchoff (*née* Lucy Chambers Foust) of Chambersburg, is authority for what follows.

From the day when Benjamin Chambers took his first bath under the Falling Spring (legend has it that it was this shower which first attracted him to the place that now bears his name), he was honest in his relations with the Indians. For this they re-



## BENJAMIN CHAMBERS

*This portrait, by an unknown artist, was used on an air mail stamp: "First official air mail out of Chambersburg, Pa., Air Mail Week, May 15-21, 1938."*

Courtesy Mrs. Krebs Benchoff

spected and befriended him. During the French and Indian War, even on this exposed frontier in the Conococheague Valley where the Delaware war chief, Shingas, earned his epithet of "the Terrible," no member of the Chambers family was hurt.

When, after the war, Colonel Chambers set aside a grove of cedars, white birches, sycamores, and walnuts for use as a family graveyard, he entered into an agreement with an Indian friend, a chief whose domain lay about there, that as long as heirs of the body remained to either of them this ground should serve as a burial place for white men and Indians alike.

"When the covenant was made," Mrs. Benchoff tells us, "the Indian and Benjamin Chambers cut their right wrists, and the blood of the two was allowed to fall together on a piece of white birch bark. This was some time after 1755 and before the Revolutionary War, probably about 1760 or a little later. For many years the Indians used to visit this graveyard. The last official

visit was made in 1834 (not in 1836 as recorded in Vol. I, No. 1, of the *Kittoctinny Historical Society Publications*). Unofficial visits have continued. A few years ago a Delaware girl from Oklahoma called on me at Hood College (Frederick, Maryland), where she was a student. She had heard that I came from Chambersburg, and wanted to know if I could show her the graves of her ancestors there. We made arrangements to come up here together, but she was taken ill before we set out, and never recovered."

The descendants of Benjamin Chambers loyally fulfill the terms of the covenant. They care for the bones of the Indians who lie here in unmarked graves, restoring them reverently to their Mother, the Earth, whenever by accident the sexton's shovel disturbs their rest.



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF THE FALLING SPRING

*Painted by Miss Susan Chambers, 1803.*

Courtesy Mrs. Krebs Benchoff