Randolph Mitchell was born July 11, 1796 in Rockingham County, Virginia and earned the rank of Colonel in the War of 1812. His mother, Sarah Alexander, had emigrated from London in 1765 as an infant. Mitchell settled in present day New Reading in 1819 with his bride Lydia Witmer of Pennsylvania. In that same year he purchases seven lots in New Reading for a total of $100 (figure 3). The 1820 census indicates that he, Lydia and their infant daughter are living together and that he is engaged in manufacturing (figure 1). In 1825 the New Reading Methodist Church was organized in Randolph’s house. According to the 1828 tax duplicate Randolph then owned 16 lots in New Reading and a single lot in Somerset (figures 3 and 6). In the same year, according to the date stone located in the east gable wall, Randolph completes construction of the house.

Between 1840 to the time of his death in 1847 Randolph serves three terms as Reading Township Justice of the Peace (see figure 2). In 1843 William Wright “W.W.” Arnold and Randolph’s daughter Caroline are married in the house. The 1846 tax duplicate shows that Randolph them owned 19 lots in New Reading and an additional 42 acres adjacent these lots north of town (figures 7 and 8). On May 8, 1847 Randolph Mitchell dies and is buried in New Reading Cemetery.

New Reading played an important role in the establishment of Perry County in its frontier of settlement days. From 1796 to 1879 Zane’s Trace was constructed, running from Wheeling, Virginia, now Wheeling, West Virginia, to Maysville, Kentucky passing through Zanesville and Lancaster, Ohio. The trace effectively opened the heart of what would eventually become the State of Ohio. In 1801 a George Arnold entered some land in present day section seven of what was to become Reading Township. He sold this land to Christian Binckley who had just migrated from Washington County, Maryland with his family in the same year. In 1802 Peter Overmeyer and his family of Northumberland, Pennsylvania settled in near present day New Reading. In 1803 Ohio became a state in the Union and so began a steady increase in westward movement into the region. In 1808 New Reading was platted as Overmeyertown or Overmeyersettle, named for the Peter Overmeyer family, and became the first town in what would become Perry County. In that same year the first congregation in the county and the first Lutheran Church in the state were organized in New Reading. In the winter of 1808 a three month subscription school was held in New Reading, being only the second school in the county and the first to teach in English. The area served as an agricultural production center in which produce was raised and brought to market in the nearby cities of Zanesville and Lancaster. In 1819 Somerset was founded just three miles east of New Reading by Jacob Miller and John Finck as a stopping point along Zane’s Trace. Somerset grew rapidly and quickly became the center of local agricultural trade eventually surpassing New Reading as the region’s chief agricultural market town. In 1877 Perry County was officially organized from portions of Muskingum and Fairfield Counties. New Reading bid for county seat and convinced Fairfield County to award Reading Township 12 sections (12 square miles) of Richland Township in order to secure a more central position for the town in the newly forming county. Unfortunately their efforts were for not and they lost the bid to Somerset.

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SO WHO WAS RANDOLPH MITCHELL?

RANDOLPH MITCHELL AND THE TOWN OF NEW READING, PERRY COUNTY, OHIO

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