

ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE UNVEILING OF A BRONZE TABLET TO JOHN WRIGHT, PIONEER FERRYMAN

By PROF. HERBERT H. BECK

MADAME PRESIDENT, MEMBERS AND FRIENDS
OF THE COLONIAL DAMES OF AMERICA:

I consider it a distinct privilege to represent the older of the two counties, Lancaster and York, at this well conceived and well planned inter-county event. And as the official representative of The Lancaster County Historical Society, I cannot too strongly commend the Lancaster and York County Branches of the Colonial Dames of America for erecting this fine bronze tablet to commemorate the first important ferry site along the Susquehanna.

Of many marker events in which I have taken part in Lancaster and neighboring counties, there has been none whose purpose appeals to my personal appetite for local historical facts as much as does this one marking Wright's Ferry.

All of us interested in history have selective appetites for historical data. Certain facts are easier to feed upon and more readily digested than others. Minds differ, individualities enter here. Quite typically, in my own case, I confess that it has always been more difficult for me to remember that Washington had two generals, Gates and Greene, than that he had two foxhounds, Music and Vulcan. To me, personally, this part of Hempfield township is the most picturesque and colorful, and, in many ways, the most important historical region in Lancaster county. It is that, chiefly, because it was the home of John Wright and his ferry.

Incidentally, whenever I come to Columbia I remember much else. I remember Columbia as a center, for a long century, of another picturesque interest,—rafting; I remember the town as the center of a great canal system; then as an early railroad center; I remember it happily for its past memories of shad fishing and wildfowl shooting. And always when I come here I visualize Columbia as the capital of the United States. Picking up one of the mysterious "ifs" of history (and the history of the individual as well as of the nation is deeply indented with "ifs") I visualize this river incline, and more particularly the rolling plateau a mile eastward, a beautiful city of executive mansions and embassies, of stately congressional and departmental edifices, a city of international eminence. For I cannot but remember a resolution brought before Congress, September 3, 1789, by Mr. Goodhue, "That the permanent seat of the General Government ought to be in some convenient place on the east bank of the Susquehanna in the State of Pennsylvania." I remember that Thomas Hartley, of Quaker ancestry, strongly

advocated Wright's Ferry, pointing out its many merits and possibilities. But he did this only to have this great local project submerged and defeated by a resolution by Mr. Stone advocating the Potomac. The very name Columbia, deemed by its originators most fitting for the national capital, reveals the purpose as well as the time (1789) of the change of Wright's Ferry to Columbia.

Wright's Ferry was an outstanding point in colonial America. It was the most important crossroad of the eighteenth century—a crossroad of the expanding current of human affairs and the great current of nature, the formidable Susquehanna, which blocked or retarded travel and traffic into the budding South and the unopened West. All emigration from Port Philadelphia and Port New York headed into the South and West had to come this way.

We know Wright's Ferry first when John Wright, Quaker pioneer, procured from the Crown a patent for his ferry project in 1730. He built his ferry house on the north side of Locust street, near Front street, with Shawanese Indians as his neighbors. The rising tide of travel and traffic focussed toward Wright's Ferry.

We can lend our imaginations to-day to these travel lines of man and beast. We can see herds of cattle wading and swimming after their lead-ox led from a canoe across Wright's Ferry in shallow seasons. We can see crude dugouts, sometimes lashed together in pairs, carrying passengers and freight. Then we can see large flats, big enough to carry the Conestoga wagons, which were rumbling along the Wright's Ferry road in increasing numbers. Our records show that these picturesque freight vehicles often gathered in lines of two or three hundred to be chalked numerically—await their turn—sometimes two or three days—to be ferried across the Susquehanna.

The music we can hear, if we lend our ears to the local past, is the tinkling chimes of the Conestoga bell teams.

Even with a fertile imagination, it is difficult properly to estimate the importance of Wright's Ferry in eighteenth century affairs. Its note spread beyond the boundaries of the American colonies. It is frequently mentioned in the official papers of the Crown of England. By fair estimate, two-thirds of the territory of the United States is occupied by people whose ancestors crossed Wright's Ferry.

Wright's Ferry, of four major ferries along the Susquehanna, was the first important one. In 1730, Thomas Cresap received a ferry patent from Lord Baltimore for Blue Rock—a bluish ledge along the banks of the river, about a mile below Washington Boro. This was the river termination of the famous Long Lane, which passed westward from Chester county through Strasburg. That Blue Rock was used by the white man as the crossing point of this old trail for many years earlier than 1730, was discovered by Albert Cook Myers, in his research of the Penn Annals in London.

Adventurous invader into Penn's disputed territory that he was, Cresap built a fort to help protect his ferry rights, which were being bitterly opposed by John Wright. Thus followed a skirmish known as the Cresap war,¹ which left John Wright with almost exclusive local ferry control.

Wright's leading competitor in ferry trade was James Anderson, at the ferry point three miles above. Sometime after 1730, but before 1740, though not without long delays caused by objections filed by John Wright, a ferry patent was granted James Anderson. Anderson's Ferry did not have the convenient highway connections of Wright's and never seems to have drawn the mass of trade that came to the point three miles farther south. However that there was intense competition between the two ferries, there can be no doubt. One of the interesting records of the long line of hostelries between Philadelphia and Lancaster tells of hand bills handed to their guests or hanging to their walls,—one kind, advertising the advantages of crossing the Susquehanna by Wright's Ferry; the other, making even more promising offers for Anderson's Ferry.

Thirty-four miles up the river, though not until 1753, rights were granted for Harris's Ferry.

That Wright's Ferry was the first important crossing point of the Susquehanna, is an established historical fact.

We, of Lancaster county, recognize John Wright as a leading figure in the county's history. He was a fitting, resourceful pioneer. He had a fortunate combination of qualities: Religious zeal, business enterprise and energy, administrative judgment and leadership. We like to think of John Wright, who named the county, started its first great business enterprise, governed its people and took active measures against encroachments into Penn's domain, as potentially, at least, an empire builder. We like to think of John Wright as the Cecil Rhodes of Lancaster county. It is most fitting that his name should be placed in bronze on the Columbia-Wrightsville bridge. More than any man in history, John Wright opened up, virtually founded, this leading transcontinental road, the Lincoln Highway.

Once more, let me heartily commend the Lancaster and York County Branches of the Colonial Dames of America for what they have done here to-day.

¹ For an account of Cresap's War, the reader is referred to Vol. XIII, pp. 237-254, of the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society.

HOME SITE OF
COL WILLIAM HENRY

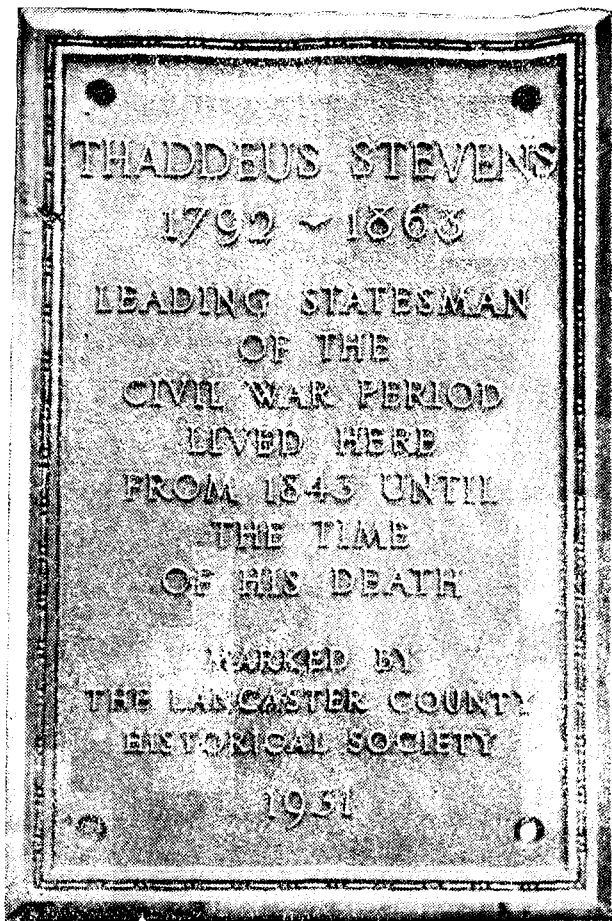
1729 — 1786

PROMINENT PATRIOT
MASTER RIFLE MAKER
ENTERPRISING AND
SUCCESSFUL
EXPERIMENTER IN
STEAM NAVIGATION

MARKED BY
THE LANCASTER COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1931

Bronze tablet erected, June 30th, 1931, on the south wall, near the south-east corner, of the Central Market House, which is located at the north-west angle in Penn Square, Lancaster, by The Lancaster County Historical Society. It marks the site of William Henry's home. For a brief biography of Col. Henry, the reader is referred to Vol. 11, pp. 303-27, of the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society.



Bronze tablet erected July 17th, 1931, on the building at No. 47-49 South Queen street, Lancaster, by The Lancaster County Historical Society, marking the site of the residence of Thaddeus Stevens. John Ehlers, sheriff sold the property, which belonged to George Kleiss, to Thaddeus Stevens, for \$4000.00, on April 17th, 1843. (Recorded in Sheriff Deed Book No. 1, page 317). It is described, briefly, as follows: Lot of ground, fronting on the east side of South Queen street, with two two-story brick dwelling houses; a brick brew house, part one story and part two stories high; a brick shop, frame blacksmith shop, stable, a pump of water and other improvements. It was bounded on the south by East Vine street, on the north by property of Emanuel Reigart, on the east by an alley, and on the west by South Queen street. There was a private alley between the two dwelling houses. Mr. Stevens resided in the second building from East Vine street, now numbered 47-49 South Queen. It was here that he had his office, and it was here that his funeral was held on Monday, August 17th, 1868.