

# PROPOSALS TO ERECT CONESTOGA AND OTHER COUNTIES FROM LANCASTER

By C. H. MARTIN

WITH the erection of Lebanon county, in 1813, the last modification of the boundaries of Lancaster county was made. Starting shortly thereafter, and extending over a period of twenty years, numerous attempts were made for the formation of new counties from areas including parts of the present county, any one of which, if successful, would have resulted in Lancaster county having very irregular boundary lines compared with those with which we are now familiar. In spite of several movements for new counties, all of which, apparently, fell by the legislative wayside excepting the persistent efforts for the erection of Conestoga county for which its sponsors, after having one petition after another laid on the table, presented a new petition to a subsequent Legislature hopeful of favorable action until the large committee named at the Blue Ball meeting, in 1833, evidently definitely killed the proposal; and those objecting to longer trips to the county seat hoping to have the seat of justice of a new county nearer to hand, persons of political ambitions answerable by offices in a new county, were definitely disappointed.

Little action was taken by the State Senate in respect to these proposals, but the journal of the House shows frequent proposals for new counties of parts of Lancaster, and the remonstrances thereto presented.

On January 14th, 1824, a petition was presented to the Legislature for the erection of a county in the northwestern section of Lancaster county, to be called Donegal.

On February 28th, 1824, a petition was presented by residents of Mount Joy, Donegal and Rapho townships, for the erection of a new county to be called Mount Joy, with the seat of justice to be at Mount Joy. This proposal being prior to the organization of Conoy and the division of Donegal, would have resulted in having included therein the entire northwestern portion of the county as now constituted.

Another petition, proposing a new county from parts of Lancaster, Dauphin and Lebanon, to be called Conewago, with the seat of justice at Elizabethtown, was presented to the Legislature; and upon still another occasion, the new county to be formed from the three above named, was to be known as Monroe, doubtless in honor of President Monroe, whose term was being completed about the time this petition was presented. Neither of these proposals in northwestern Lancaster county, I believe we are all glad to say, was successful.

A petition was presented for the erection of a new county from southern Lancaster and Chester counties, to be called Octoraro. On January 16th, 1826, a remonstrance from citizens of Little Britain township against the formation of the proposed new county, was presented to the Legislature, which remonstrance was laid on the table. Upon another occasion, there was a petition proposing a new county from parts of Lancaster and Chester, to be named Penn. Another proposal for a new county to be called Hand, in honor of Major-General Edward Hand, of Washington's army, was, under date of March 28th, 1826, reported by the committee to which it was referred, and was ordered laid on the table.

On January 28th, 1829, Mr. Caldwell, a member of the Legislature, presented a petition from inhabitants of Lancaster county praying that that part of the county which lies south and east of the Big Conestoga, from its mouth to Witmer's bridge, and south of the Lancaster turnpike from Witmer's bridge to the Chester county line, be erected into a county to be called Conestoga. This petition was referred to a committee where it evidently was successfully "pocketed."

The proposed Conestoga county, for which erection the most persistent efforts were made, was to be formed from eastern Lancaster, western Chester and southern Berks counties. The first effort to organize this area into a separate county was in 1819, but it met with an indefinite postponement by the Legislature the same year. Another petition, praying for the said Conestoga county, being house bill No. 162 of the session of 1823, was reported out of committee January 13th, 1823, and laid on the table. Several years later, in answer to another effort, Mr. Potts, member of the Legislature, presented, under date of January 3rd, 1826, the proceedings

of a public meeting of the inhabitants of Chester county remonstrating against a division of the said county, and shortly later sixteen additional remonstrances were offered.

Again on December 3rd, 1829, fourteen petitions from sundry inhabitants of Chester, Berks and Lancaster counties, praying for the erection of a new county out of parts of the said three counties, to be called Conestoga, was presented to the Legislature and referred to the proper committee. On December 16th, of the same year, it was reported out of committee and laid on the table. Remonstrances to this effort were filed on January 8th, 9th, 16th and 18th, 1830. These intermittent efforts to organize Conestoga county, and the protests made, continued until 1833, when on Saturday, November 23rd, of that year, a large meeting was held at the public house of Amos S. Kinzer, Blue Ball, where, in view of the action taken, further efforts in this direction were evidently killed. It was pointed out at this meeting that the portion to be taken from Lancaster county included the townships of Caernarvon, Brecknock, Cocalico, part of Strasburg, Salisbury, Sadsbury and Earl, which was a larger area than to be taken from either Chester or Berks. *The approximate population and assessed value of real estate from each of the three counties to be taken, was as follows:*

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Assessed valuation</i>
Lancaster .....	13,000	\$4,500,000
Chester .....	10,000	3,000,000
Berks .....	6,000	2,500,000
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Total .....	29,000	\$10,000,000

The population of Lancaster county, including the city, was 76,000 by the 1830 census.

At the Blue Ball meeting, Edward Davies, Esq., was called to the chair, and George Kinzer and Solomon Diller were requested to act as secretaries. John Lightner, Esq., stated the purpose of the meeting, and the following committee was named to prepare resolutions expressing the sense of the meeting: John Lightner, Esq., Henry Shirk, Jr., George Ellmaker, Christian Weaver and John Oberholtzer. Resolutions were adopted as follows:

"Resolved, It is the unanimous opinion of persons composing this meeting, so far as the citizens of Lancaster county included within the bounds of the proposed new county of Conestoga are concerned, that there is no reason, necessity nor inducement whatever for the erection of the said new county.

"Resolved, That from the number and frequency of our courts, justice is administrated with as little delay as could be expected under the new county; that for most of the citizens of the said included parts of Lancaster county, the distance to courts and records of the new county would be little shortened if at all, compared with the distance to Lancaster city, and the roads much worse.

"Resolved, That from the superior value of fertile soil, and density of population, the included county taxes would exceed that of any other section in the new county. Expenses of necessary public buildings would be highly burdensome. We have no wish nor desire to be separated from good old Lancaster county; and, above all, deprecate becoming citizens of Conestoga county.

"Resolved, That full and free intercourse of sentiment by many persons attending this meeting be had to oppose the formation of the new county.

"Resolved, That the formation of Conestoga county, so far as the citizens of Lancaster county therein included, they think it unnecessary, impolitic, and against their interest and convenience.

"Resolved, That a committee be appointed to procure and distribute for signatures suitable remonstrances to the Legislature against the erection of the said Conestoga county, and forward the same to our members of the Legislature.

"Resolved, That the delegation from Lancaster county are hereby respectfully requested to use their best efforts to prevent enactment of law for the formation of the said new county.

"Resolved, That the secretaries of this meeting forward copies of these proceedings to each of our senators and representatives at the meeting of the Legislature."

The Committees to distribute and forward remonstrances are:

Earl Township: Henry Roland, John Wallace, George Kinzer, John Lightner, Esq., George Ellmaker, John Galt, Peter Ronk, Col. Samuel Ringwalt, Dr. Isaac Winters, Davies Wallace, Anthony E. Roberts, Roland Diller, Christian Weaver, John Meyers, Michael Hildebrand, John Martin, Peter Good.

Caernarvon Township: Edward Davies, Esq., Robert Jenkins, Esq., William Shirk, Esq., Henry Hoffman, Jacob Ringwalt, Thomas H. Davies.

Brecknock Township: Samuel Bowman, Esq., John Good (Miller), Philip Voneida, Capt. John Sneader.

Cocalico Township: Nathaniel F. Lightner, Esq., Dr. Esaias Kinzer, Thomas Himes, William Caldwell.

Strasburg Township: Judge Lightner.

Salisbury Township: Samuel Houston, Esq., Maxwell Kennedy, Elias Baker, Benjamin Linville, Christian Hess, Nathaniel Rutter, Amos S. Henderson.

Sadsbury Township: James Henderson.

Following this meeting I have not found account of any further effort to erect either Conestoga or any other county at the expense of part of the fertile lands of Lancaster county; and unless we forget the easy means of communication, daily mail, speedy travel of to-day, and the too numerous political subdivisions for most economical administration of public affairs, we do not fully understand the motives that prompted these many efforts to erect new counties.