

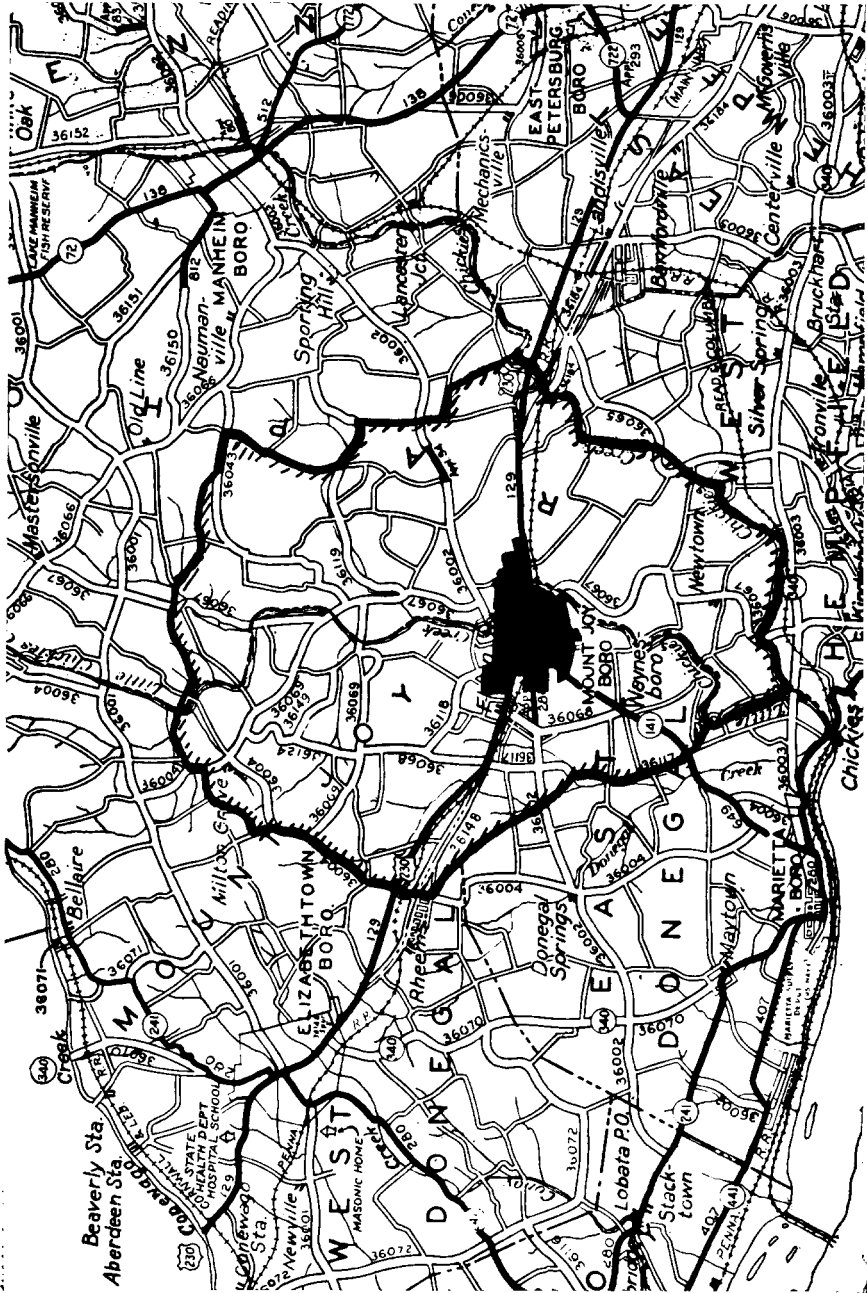
HARRISON TOWNSHIP RETRACED

Fifty-eight years ago, H. E. Steinmetz prepared for the Lancaster County Historical Society a paper entitled "Political Divisions of Lancaster County" which later was published in Volume 5 of the Society's *Papers*. Among the election districts of the county Mr. Steinmetz made a passing reference to a Harrison Township, a township which existed but for several years. Other than to state the new township had been carved out of Rapho, Mount Joy and East Donegal townships, the author did not describe the boundaries or extent of Harrison Township.

Reference to old dockets and papers in the office of the Clerk of Quarter Sessions Court for Lancaster County revealed that petitions had been presented to the court beginning in the mid-1830's by numerous citizens of West Donegal, East Donegal, Mount Joy and Rapho townships, all seeking divisions of their townships into smaller election districts. All the petitions were in agreement on one aspect of the problem: the polls were too far away and the roads were impassable in bad weather. Beyond that point nearly all the petitioners had their own favorite ideas on where the divisions should occur. In those days the Court, after a proper number of petitions were received, would appoint a commission of three prominent persons to go out and investigate the extent of inconvenience, the sincerity of the petitioners, and then make their report to the Court.

In 1840 one hundred and thirty citizens of East Donegal Township petitioned the Court to show "that your petitioners labour under great inconvenience from the present size of the township as well as from the manner that it is divided into election districts. Your petitioners therefore conceive it quite necessary that the said township should be divided into two separate townships. The division line to commence where the northern line of the township crosses the Colebrook Road, and from thence along the Colebrook Road in a southern direction until to where it intersects with the Marietta and Mount Joy Turnpike, and from thence in a straight line to the East End of the Borough of Marietta." Only two years before the Court had separated West Donegal Township from the original Donegal Township; in 1842 the Court would cut Conoy Township from West Donegal Township.

Boundary of Harrison Township superimposed on modern map of northwestern Lancaster County.



Apparently the Court was hesitant about dividing East Donegal Township in 1840, but the sub-division of West Donegal Township in 1842 increased the clamor for dividing East Donegal. Finally, on 19th April 1844, the Court appointed Christian Rauch, Esq., Henry M. Reigert, Esq., and Thomas Lloyd, Esq. to view the township, hear the petitioners and report back to the Court. Reigart and Lloyd met without Rauch, and reported their recommendations to the Court 3rd February 1845. The report was accompanied by a survey draught showing course and distances of the new township proposed. However, the Court set aside the report because two viewers instead of the three appointed conducted the enquiry. Another viewing was granted, with Abraham Peters, Henry Shreiner and Jacob Reist appointed to conduct the viewing. They met on 15th August 1845 at James Laird's tavern at Mount Joy, and on 19th August 1845 they submitted their report to which had been attached the draught prepared previously by Reigart and Lloyd. The Court held under consideration the report for the next session of Court.

Meanwhile, the citizens who were opposed to the creation of the new township were busily obtaining names on petitions of remonstrance. The opponents in Mount Joy Township petitioned, ". . . that said division (Harrison Township), if granted would operate injuriously and harshly on the citizens of the Upper part or portion of the Township of Mountjoy, leaving them (to say) the poor, broken and Rocky portion of Land in said Township; and also nearly all the BAD Roads to make and Keep in Repair &c."

In East Donegal Township the citizens who did not favor the division were as much concerned that the school funds would suffer as they were about the inequality of the road tax. Their petition stated, ". . . the township is not inconveniently large, being as near as may be four miles square, it would throw the larger part of the Road Tax on the remaining portion, whilst that cut off would in a great measure be free, and the School funds are in such a situation that they cannot be equally divided without causing us to suffer by the division, and making the School Tax as also the Road Tax very oppressive on us."

These protests were filed with the Court on 19th November 1845, but one month later the Court overruled the exceptions, and declared the Township of Harrison be erected according to the draught.

Harrison Township was described in the court records only by a series of 130 courses and distances.

The new township got down to the business of acquiring township officers and creating a school district at once. In 1846 Mount Joy's election returns were made under the heading "Harrison Township."

To those from East Donegal, Rapho and Mount Joy townships who protested "we are now sufficiently burdened by taxes already without increasing new burdens and multiplying township Officers," their fears were being realized more rapidly than they had imagined. There was only one course to take: take the matter before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court

and hire a good lawyer. With Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Penrose, both new members of the Lancaster Bar, presenting their case, the opponents were able to have the Lancaster County Court overruled. The higher Court was of the opinion the county Court should have instructed the three men appointed as viewers in a most "explicit and express direction . . . to inquire into the propriety of granting the prayer of the petitioners." The court records failed to mention an "explicit and express direction" being made. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court found also that the draught of Harrison Township did not show the remaining portions of Rapho, Mount Joy and East Donegal townships, a requirement of the Pennsylvania Statutes.

With this sudden reversal a large number of citizens who had signed the petitions for dividing the townships now signed new petitions, stating: "we . . . are now satisfied that the erection of said township would increase public burden, without any corresponding advantage to the people, who are now well and conveniently accomodated in the existing townships." From the repentant petitioners we can assume any attempts to re-create Harrison Township in an acceptable legal way came to an end immediately.

In order to determine the exact boundaries of Harrison Township from the courses and distances, we have plotted on graph paper all 130 courses, using a scale of one inch to 400 feet. The point of beginning we knew to be near the mouth of Strickler's Run along Big Chikiswalungo Creek, a few hundred yards north of the Harrisburg Pike (Route 230). After drawing the entire boundary of the township from the courses the plot was compared with Geodetic Survey Quadrangles, which revealed at once the original lines of the ill-fated township. With the exception of the courses between Rheems and the Marietta-Mount Joy road (Route 649-141) at its intersection with Route 36117, most of the courses follow country roads and creeks. The line dividing East Donegal Township runs across farm lands. Starting at Rheems, the boundary runs southeast to the place where the East Branch of Donegal Creek crosses Route 36002, between Donegal Springs and Florin; then the line continues south to Route 36117 which it parallels closely until the latter road intersects with the Marietta-Mount Joy road; then the boundary cuts across the farm lands to the Little Chikiswalungo Creek which it follows to the confluence of the Big and Little Chikiswalungo creeks.