



# Our Townships

To inaugurate a new series of features on the townships of Lancaster County to appear regularly in the **Journal** we present a brief background of the development of Lancaster County.

When William Penn, Proprietor of the Colony of Pennsylvania, commenced the organization of his new settlement in 1682 he erected three counties, Bucks, Philadelphia and Chester. Although boundary lines were far from precise it is known these three counties extended inland on a perpendicular line to the Delaware River to the foothills of the Blue Mountain. As settlers took up land farther inland from the Delaware River additional purchases of land from the Indians were made by William Penn. Chester County was the largest of the three counties. Its county seat was located at Upland, or Chester, along the Delaware.

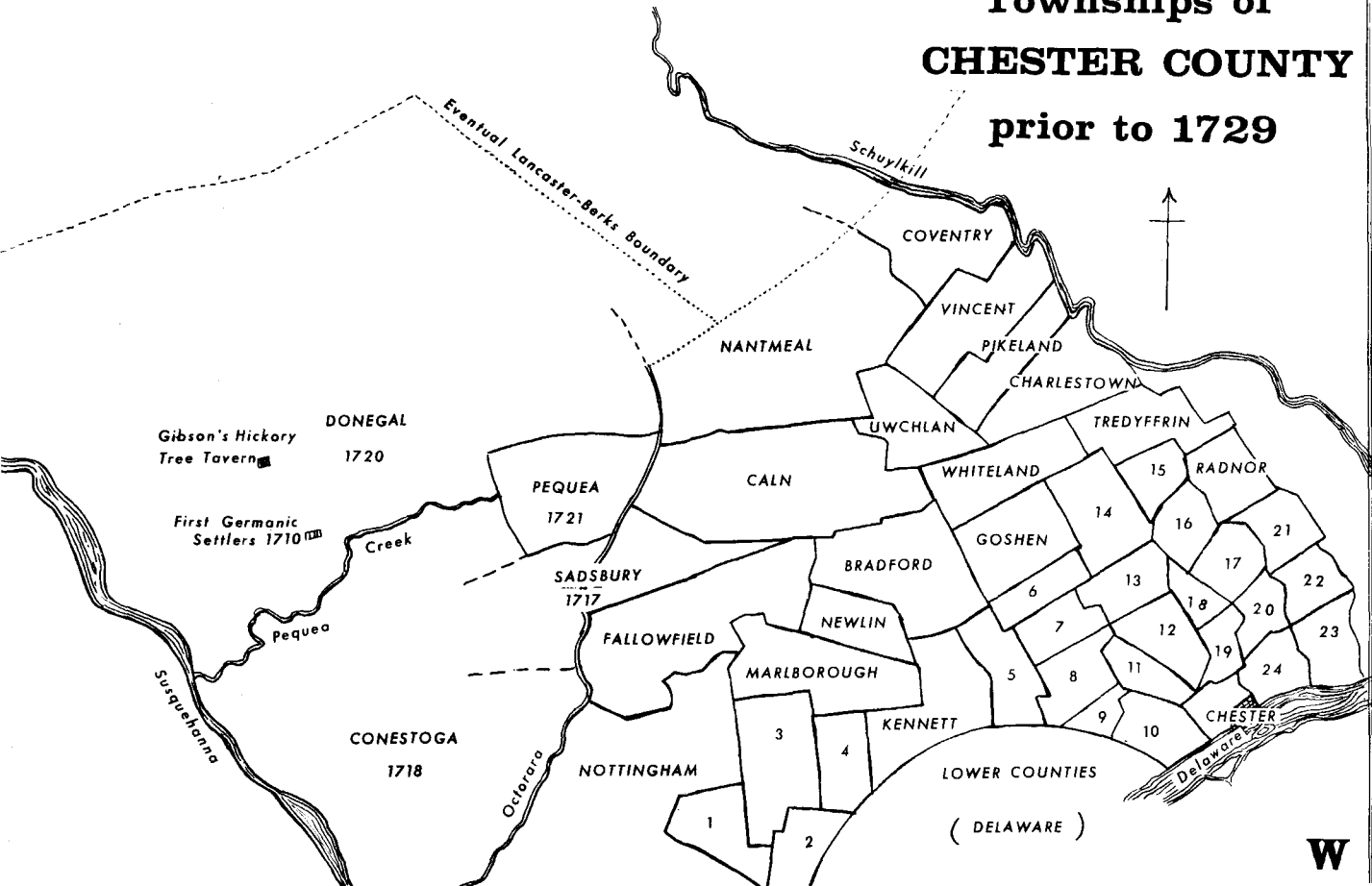
Penn desired to organize his counties into townships, each containing a more or less symmetrical arrangement of lots and tracts through which was to be laid a public road. Ideally, his township would appear as a large country village strung along a main street. But Penn was an Englishman — an Anglo-Saxon — to whom consistency was a matter to be praised more than practiced. Before long the southeastern section of Chester County was congested with numerous townships of diverse shapes. Eventually this area became Delaware County. Back-country settlements increased, particularly along the Schuylkill River and along the tributaries of the Susquehanna River: Octorara Creek, Conestoga Creek, Mill Creek, Pequea Creek and Chiquesalunga Creek. To accommodate the growing settlements Chester County organized more townships. Sadsbury was formed in 1717, and it extended from near Coatesville to the present Quarryville. In 1718 the township of Conestoga was erected and it included all the area south of the Pequea Creek and northwest of the Octorara Creek but excluding the westernmost part of Sadsbury. Two years later the land north of the Pequea Creek was formed into West Conestoga or Donegal Township. Pequea Township was organized in 1721, and it included the settlements along the upper Pequea Creek and in the vicinity of the Welsh Mountain. Its boundary lines were not recorded for posterity.

By 1721 the new western townships were filling up rapidly with Swiss and German Mennonite, French Huguenot, Scotch-Irish, Welsh and English settlers. The trip to Chester on the Delaware for taking care of legal matters, suits, deeds, prosecutions, &c. was burdensome for those pioneers living on the Susquehanna frontier. Accordingly on 6 February 1729, a petition was presented to the Provincial Council at Philadelphia which requested a new county be erected out of western Chester County. The Governor, with the concurrence of the House of Representatives, appointed a Commission of twelve men to set the boundaries and run the lines. On 2 May 1729 the commissioners presented their report, and eight days later the General Assembly enacted into law the report creating Lancaster County. It was named to honor John Wright's birthplace. The Act set the western and northern limits of Lancaster County at the extreme limits of the Province, which extended to the Ohio line, and north to Tioga County. From 1729 until 1749 the West Branch of the Susquehanna River, the present county of Indiana, the Allegheny River and the Ohio River were the northwestern boundaries of Lancaster County. This was the fourth county of Pennsylvania, and from it have come all the counties west of an imaginary diagonal line drawn from Schuylkill County to Tioga County. None of the western area of Pennsylvania was developed or organized formally until the middle of the 18th century; and then the Virginia colony claimed the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania. Maryland claimed that part of Pennsylvania which lay south of the 40th degree of latitude. Lord Baltimore's charter of 1632 gave to Maryland that land "under that part of Delaware Bay in the North which lies under the fortieth degree of northern latitude," and His Lordship assumed, apparently, that "under the fortieth degree" meant the area between the 39th and 40th degrees of latitude. This would have placed York in Maryland, and the Pennsylvania - Maryland boundary would have run through Washington Borough, a bit south of Millersville and bisected Lampeter. After lengthy litigation the English surveyors Mason and Dixon were engaged to run the line. Had the dispute been settled with evidence now available Maryland would have had a rightful claim to lower Pennsylvania and the lower townships of Lancaster County.

On the 9th of June, 1729, a group of prominent people of Lancaster County, including the new justices of the peace, met at John Postlethwait's tavern near Rock Hill along the lower Conestoga River. These men set township boundaries and decided on names for the new townships. Unlike Chester County which used tracts of land as township lines, Lancaster

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1. New London
  2. London Britain
  3. London Grove
  4. New Garden
  5. Birmingham
  6. West Town
  7. Thornbury
  8. Concord
  9. Bethel
  10. Chichester
  11. Aston
  12. Middletown
  13. Edgmtown
  14. Willistown
  15. East Town
  16. New Town
  17. Marple
  18. Upper Providence
  19. Nether Providence
  20. Springfield
  21. Haverford
  22. Upper Darby
  23. Darby
  24. Ridley

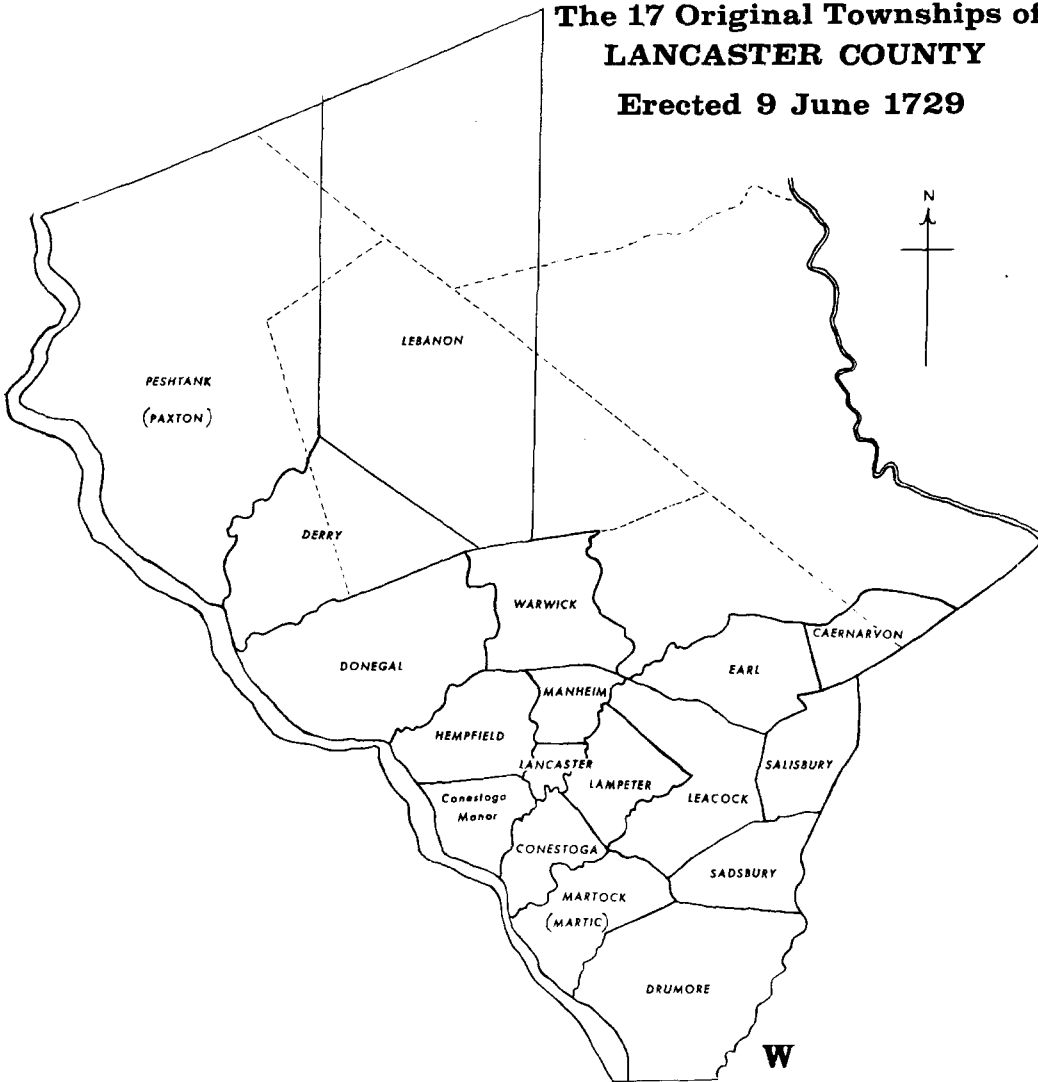
# Townships of CHESTER COUNTY prior to 1729



# The 17 Original Townships of

## LANCASTER COUNTY

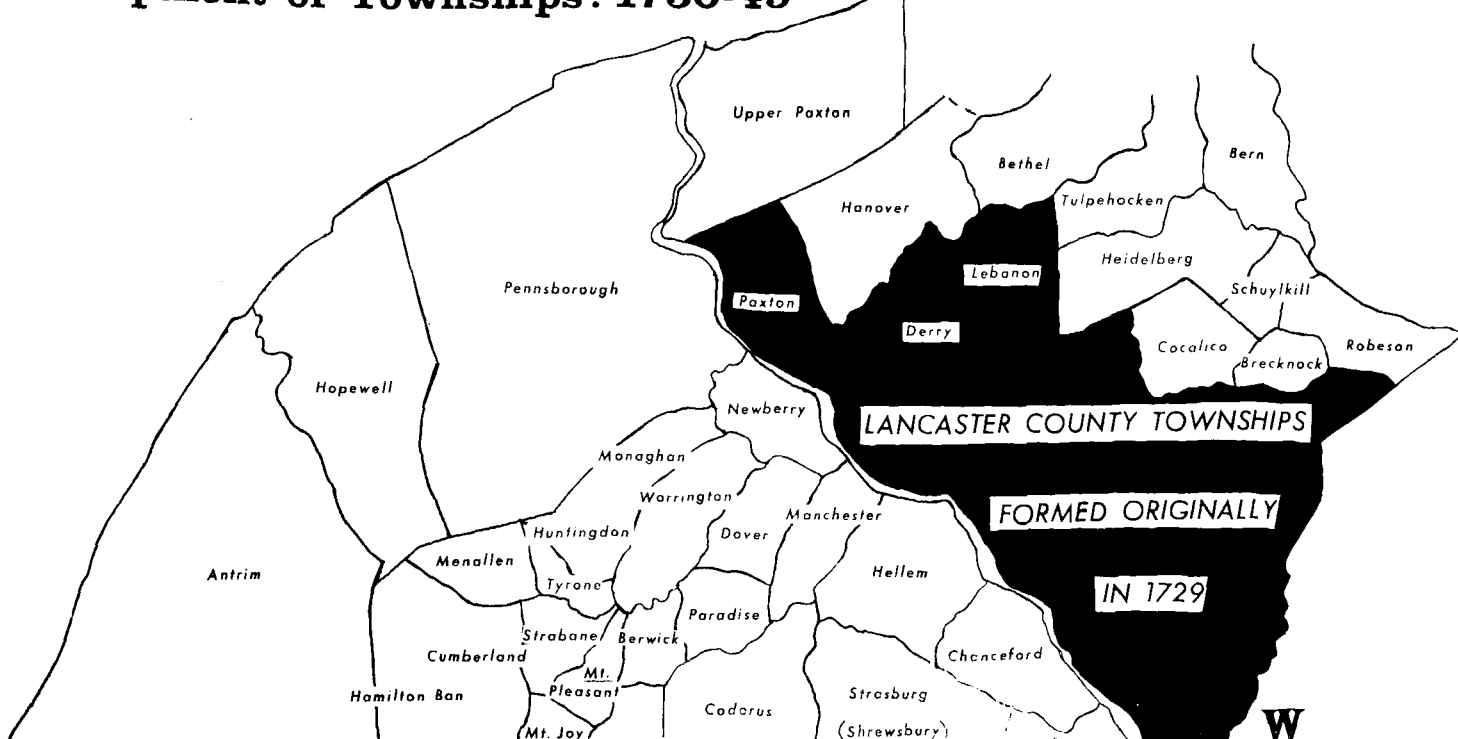
Erected 9 June 1729



County townships were set off, for the most part, by natural features such as creeks, rivers and ranges of hills. Meeting again at Postlethwait's on 5 August 1729 the magistrates properly confirmed the actions and report of the earlier meeting, and thereby created seventeen townships. Three of the original townships are now in Dauphin County (Derry and Peshtank or Paxton) and Lebanon County (Lebanon). Only one township preserved its original lines and area: Salisbury; Lancaster and Manheim townships are intact excepting the area taken for Lancaster borough. Caernarvon lost the eastern portion of its area to Berks County.

Reference to the accompanying map will show the location of the original townships. Late in 1729 Cocalico Township began appearing on

# Development of Townships: 1730-49



records but there is no evidence of when or how it became a township. Hempfield Township originally included all of present Manor Township. Townships along the Susquehanna River had the river as their western boundaries, but constables and justices of the peace for those townships enforced the law and upheld justice in unorganized areas west of the river and opposite the townships. Because the troubles with Maryland were fought along the river, leaders of the Lancaster County settlers in that area soared into prominence and political position as they battled with the Marylanders. Thus, western Lancaster County men were the political leaders of the county.

In 1736 the lands west of the Susquehanna River and extending to the mountains (Adams and Cumberland counties) were purchased from the Indians. Settlements increased and stretched westward from the river. During the twenty-year period from 1729 to 1749, a large number of townships were organized under the jurisdiction of and by the Lancaster County Court of Quarter Sessions. Many of the boundaries were never defined clearly, some of the descriptions were vague, and not all of the names were recorded officially. Settlements north of present Lancaster County grew as well, and eventually Paxton, Derry and Lebanon townships were carved into many smaller units. The unorganized land southwest of the Schuylkill River was regarded as "districts" and its gradual organization into townships was accompanied by much confusion over boundaries.

Increasing population prompted settlers west and north of our present county area to petition for new counties. In 1749 York County was created, and in 1750 Cumberland County was erected. Berks County came next, and was formed from Lancaster, Bucks and Philadelphia counties in 1752. The creation of Northumberland County in 1772 removed the northern tip of Lancaster County. In 1785 Dauphin County further reduced the size of our county, and in 1813 when Lebanon County was formed from Lancaster and Dauphin counties the present area of Lancaster County was established. The Susquehanna River is in our county, the western shore line being the boundary. The Maryland counties of Cecil and Harford abut Lancaster County on the south.