

Lancaster County Observes Pennsylvania's Tercentenary

By John Ward Willson Loose

Governor Richard Thornburgh encouraged the counties of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to plan and stage events to celebrate in appropriate manner the 300th anniversary of the founding of Pennsylvania by William Penn. Accordingly, most of the counties prepared some form of observance. The three original counties — Philadelphia, Bucks and Chester — obviously would have much to celebrate, for they were as old as the Commonwealth itself.

But what about the fourth oldest county, the first county to be created under the auspices of the provincial government? Lancaster County was not 300 years old — it was a mere 253 years old! Nevertheless, the importance of Lancaster County's founding in the history of Pennsylvania cannot be underestimated. The first three counties were established — on paper, at least — in England, and the governmental institutions and functions were transplanted to the New World, much as one might erect a prefabricated house or a modular mobile home. A bit of Merrie Olde England was planted along the Delaware River.

Nearly a half century later — in 1729 — the establishment of Lancaster County presented challenges unknown or unthought of in 1682. The wilderness and all that the frontier suggested between the Octorara Creek and the Susquehanna River, not to mention the wild lands of the central and western portions of Pennsylvania, hardly was appropriate

for English local government. Moreover, the Susquehanna Valley was populated heavily by Scot Presbyterians who viewed the Quaker-dominated provincial government with rebellious contempt. Clearly, any new county would have to be fitted with a local government and political structure that would accomplish two objectives: (1) it would be adapted to the frontier conditions and their special requirements, and (2) governance would have to be a subtle compromise between the Philadelphia Quaker Establishment and the diverse ethnic frontier elements, many of which either were indifferent or hostile to the provincial government. In the creation of Lancaster County both goals were realized successfully, thanks in large part to the wisdom and political realism of three local Quakers, John Wright, Robert Barber, and Samuel Blunston, all settlers at Wright's Ferry, now known as Columbia.

As a consequence Lancaster County became the "first county in the West of Pennsylvania" and it served as a model for the others to follow. Indeed, it became the mother county of York, Cumberland, Berks (part), Northumberland (part), and Dauphin counties. We are used to seeing Lebanon County included among our "daughters," but that is stretching matters a bit thin, for only a tiny sliver of Lebanon County was taken from our county in 1813 when it was erected out of Dauphin County. From 1729 until 1749 Lancaster County occupied the lands as far west as the present Ohio border, and as far to the northwest as the western branches of the Susquehanna River.

Taking note of all this the Commissioners of Lancaster County appointed a committee to plan and carry out an observance of the 300th anniversary of Pennsylvania. The Commissioners — Robert C. Boyer, chairman; James E. Huber; and Jean D. Mowery; and County Administrator John M. Hooper, Jr. — served as *ex officio* members. The committee was comprised of John W. Aungst, Jr., staff administrator of the Lancaster County Historical Society; Stella V. Caldwell, district justice for the Penn Manor area; Edward C. Goodhart, III, Manor Township supervisor; Kenneth M. Hoak, art teacher and coordinator, Solanco School District; Norene K. Lahr, public relations director, Pennsylvania Dutch Visitors Bureau; John W. W. Loose, president and editor of the Lancaster County Historical Society, and teacher-department chairman of history and social sciences, Donegal High School; G. Terry Madonna, professor of American history, Millersville State College; John B. Rengier, retired attorney and sometime playwright; and R. Jeanne Sonntag, who served as coordinator and executive director. It will be noted many of these persons served in 1979 on the 250th anniversary of the founding of Lancaster County committee.

Much the same philosophy guided the present committee as was evidenced during the 250th celebration of our county's birth: (1) encourage

as much local participation as possible, (2) keep the activities family-oriented, (3) stress the heritage of our communities and the strong ties to accepted social and religious values, and (4) operate effectively with maximum economy — preferably with donations from the “private sector” rather than public funds. Another factor that influenced the decisions of the committee was a determined effort to be certain all activities were wholesome fun instead of imposing a wearisome burden on the participants, all of whom were volunteers.

The committee decided on two major activities. The first was to re-issue the booklet that was published during the 1979 celebration of the county’s 250th birthday. Slight revisions were made to take out material applicable only to the 1979 events, and insert information pertinent to the 1982 observance. A page was available, and your author prepared for this space a list of Lancaster County Boroughs and townships, dates of founding or incorporation, and origins of names. These booklets are available at cost from the historical society and the County Commissioners office. (\$1.00 excluding postage)

The “big event” was to occur on Saturday, 12 June 1982. In the morning a large marker provided by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission was unveiled along North Duke Street at the historic Lancaster County Courthouse. The blue and gold plaque states:

LANCASTER COUNTY

Formed on May 10, 1729 out of Chester County. Named for Lancashire in England. County seat, Lancaster, was chartered a borough in 1742; a city in 1818. It was the State Capital 1799-1812. County is noted for its rich farmland and ethnic diversity.

Opening and closing remarks were made by J. W. W. Loose. The invocation was given by the Reverend Elwood C. Mehle, minister of Salem-Hellers Reformed Church (United Church of Christ), one of the oldest congregations in Lancaster County. Speaking for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission on which he serves as a legislative member, State Senator Richard A. Snyder of Lancaster remarked on the long and rewarding relationship between the Commission and Lancaster County’s vast heritage. County Commissioner Robert C. Boyer and Senator Snyder “unveiled” the marker, the accuracy of the inscription thereon being vouchsafed by the historical society which approved the text prior to casting. (We do not wish to suffer more embarrassment such as that

caused by the misinformation on the Martin Meylin Gun Shop and Lancaster — the “oldest” inland town — markers. The former did not make guns and the latter is not the “oldest” inland town — it was the *largest* inland town during the last half of the eighteenth century.)

Meanwhile, the county’s observance at Lancaster County Central Park was getting into gear despite heavy dark clouds. At 8:15 a.m. an event was happening at Penn’s Landing Monument in the city of Chester in Delaware County. The committee decided an unusual feature would be a relay run from Penn’s Landing to Lancaster during which run a specially-designed and crafted leather pouch in the form of a “chart case” would be carried to Lancaster and the contents read by the Commissioners to the assembled multitude.

While Jack Loose composed the text of the document, Kenneth Hoak arranged for the crafting of the handsome case. Professor Robert Hostetter, Lancaster County’s unofficial chief calligrapher, engrossed the text with his remarkable artistry. Other papers for the occasion also were engrossed by Professor Hostetter. Harry Breneman, McCaskey High School teacher and leather crafts specialist at the Pennsylvania Farm Museum at Landis Valley, created the leather pouch, a magnificent piece of craftsmanship.

PROCLAMATION

Whereas William Penn, Founder of Pennsylvania, believing devoutly in the goodness of humankind and religious freedom, encouraged persons of diverse origins, religious beliefs and social position to settle in his proprietary colony, and

Whereas, that western portion of Chester County that became Lancaster County was settled by Swiss Mennonites, French Huguenots, Scottish Presbyterians, English and Welsh Quakers and Anglicans, and German Anabaptists as well as members of German Reformed, Moravian and Lutheran churches, representing the most pluralistic society in the New World, and all living together in a spirit of toleration rarely experienced in the early eighteenth century, and

Whereas, the enlightened social, political and religious principles of William Penn contributed greatly in the development of the Lancaster County Tradition which continues to undergird and characterize the quality of life in Lancaster County, therefore,

We, the undersigned descendants of William Penn join with the Commissioners of Lancaster County to reaffirm and recognize the principles of William Penn as the cornerstone of human liberties, religious freedom and mutual respect among all persons of good will, whatever their origins, creeds or social position, and further, we commend to our posterity the continued application of these principles as having meaning in the lives of free persons for all time.

By our hands and seals, we hereby do affirm this twelfth day of June, 1982 — the 300th Year of Pennsylvania's founding — our dedication to the ideals espoused and practiced by William Penn.

For the descendants of
William Penn:

/s/ Amy Penn-Gaskell Schrode
/s/ Christina Schrode
/s/ Phillip Schrode

For the Board of Commissioners
of Lancaster County:

/s/ Robert C. Boyer, Chairman
/s/ James E. Huber
/s/ Jean D. Mowery

Edward Goodhart, III, a fleetfooted runner himself and member of the Lancaster Roadrunners Club, arranged for the relay runners. A route had been suggested by Jack Loose that used the earliest roads of Chester County: from Chester, over Concord Road, Birmingham Church Road, and the Strasburg Road into Lancaster County. Chester Mayor Joseph Battle, and Deputy Director of City Planning, Stephen A. Merriken, were most helpful in facilitating the relay movement through Chester along Concord Avenue, 7th Street, and Engle Street.

The relay runners ran in pairs for approximately five-mile stretches. They were:

William H. Allen, William R. Almond, Donald E. Coble, Richard J. Eisenhart, Cecelia English, John English, James H. Kalinoski, Benjamin L. Lagarde, William McManus, Arthur Morris, Robert Murr, Lloyd Peters, Robin Peters, David Radcliff, Fran Rudy, Harvey H. Seiple, Jr., Richard A. Shoup, Cindy Shuman, William Smith, Fred Steele, Robert Vasile, and Scott Wagner. His Honor, Mayor Art Morris, was in the final relay that brought the document pouch through a heavy downpour to the broadcasting pavilion.

Protecting 22 relay runners sprinting along relatively busy country highways was no mean feat. But Judge Stella Caldwell had arranged for an escort of Lancaster County constabulary to accompany the runners

the entire distance, and thanks to their invaluable assistance there were no mishaps. The Lancaster County constables participating were:

Paul O. Henry, Jr., Joseph J. Knable, Clarence Ober, Donald Ober, Harvey Ravegum, and George Stekervetz, Jr. Deputy constables were: James M. Conners, Paul O. Henry, III, Ronald L. Mattia, and Mary Ober.

A historic fact that might be overlooked easily is that the participation of the constables in itself commemorates the earliest law enforcement in Lancaster County when each township's constable was charged with conserving the peace on the frontier.

When the last relay arrived at the park about 3:30 p.m. the document case was opened, and Commissioners Boyer and Huber read the contents aloud. In addition to the Lancaster County Proclamation, there were expressions of commendation and affirmation from the counties of Chester and Delaware, the City of Chester, and from the British government through the offices of Sir Nicholas Henderson, British Ambassador to the United States. On hand to greet the relay runners and share in the presentation of the documents were Mrs. Amy Penn-Gaskell Schrode, her husband and children. Mrs. Schrode is a direct descendant of William Penn. The Schrode family were guests of the County for the day-long observance. The Commissioners presented Mrs. Schrode with a plaque that expressed the county's gratitude.

Arriving from Germany were the official congratulations of Lancaster County's "sister" municipality, Kaiserslautern County which took the form of a magnificently engrossed and illuminated proclamation bearing in beautiful colors the seal of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the coats-of-arms of Kaiserslautern County and Rhineland-Pfalz. This handsome work of art and warm expression from our German friends has been framed and occupies a place of honor in the County Commissioners' lobby. The text follows:

GREETING ADDRESS

The parliament and the citizens of the County of Kaiserslautern convey greetings and congratulations on occasion of the 300th anniversary of the founding of the State of Pennsylvania.

Our regards emphasize the bonds of friendship between the counties of Lancaster and Kaiserslautern. The 1976 and 1979 meetings at Lancaster served to deepen the numerous contacts

The citizens and the boards of the County of Kaiserslautern wish the State of Pennsylvania and, in particular, our friend, County of Lancaster, a successful growth, prosperity and flourishing for the future.

County of Kaiserslautern
/s/ Rudolf Tartter
County Commissioner

During the noon hour the nationally-recognized New Holland Band of Lancaster County played stirring music. At 1:00 p.m. the crowd gathered by the Conestoga River to welcome William Penn who arrived by barge from upstream. The authentically-costumed Penn — impersonated by Wilbur “Bill” Stark — was “poled” along the swiftly flowing river to a safe landing by Ronald Thomas, also attired in appropriate costume. Penn’s costume was made by Ellen Sheeler, and his hat and the bargeman’s costume were furnished by the Loeb Theatrical Costume Collection at Millersville State College. Bill Stark, who made dozens of appearances as Ben Franklin during the 1976 Bicentennial years, greeted his “descendant,” (Mrs. Schrode) affectionately, and then spent the rest of the afternoon debating a Mennonite settler, dispensing Penn/Franklin wisdom, and trying to dispel the gloom caused by the ominous rain clouds.

After Penn’s landing in the park, an original sketch by John B. Rengier was presented. The play was in the form of a dialogue between Penn and a Mennonite settler, skillfully portrayed by Stark and John Miller in a thoroughly convincing manner.

At 2:00 p.m. the Lititz Moravian Trombone Choir entertained the crowd with its distinctive music which is so much a rich part of Lancaster County’s cultural heritage. Following the classical sonorities of the brass choir, the Lancaster “Pops” Orchestra made its debut to an appreciative audience. Before the conclusion of the “Pops” concert a sudden downpour sent the string players scurrying for cover, followed by their colleagues.

Other features of the program included the Lancaster County Community Chorus, the Telephone Pioneers in “Sound of Roses,” and the Kinnard Clowns. Positioned around the park’s amphitheatre enclosed by the River, the Garden of Five Senses, and the swimming pool, were numerous food stands and displays by cultural, historical and industrial organizations. Penn Dairies, Inc. had its handsomely-preserved horse-drawn milk wagon on hand, and wagon rides were provided for the children. Scheduled to climax the day’s activities were fireworks, the cost of which was contributed by Victor F. Weaver, Inc. Owing to the

heavy rain, the fireworks were postponed until Wednesday evening, 16 June.

Despite the unpleasant weather, the day's activities can be called successful, and the objects of the Tercentenary Committee were met as planned — with the true spirit of Lancaster County, a celebration of, by and for Lancaster Countians.

Many persons were involved in addition to those mentioned in this account. Edward Schwar, executive director of the Lancaster County Park Board, and his staff were responsible for the physical arrangements in the Central Park. Penn's barge was provided by Conestoga Marine Sales, Inc. — not a Philadelphia shipbuilder. The temporary band shell was furnished by the Manheim Township School District. Each member of the committee had his assignments, and all were carried out with skill and dispatch. Members of the committee even took to the air waves to present radio and television announcements and participate in interviews. The major credit for the observance must go to Jeanne Sonntag who coordinated the whole program, fit all the pieces together, and made most of the contacts, assisted by the staff of the County Commissioners' office.