

*Estates of Lancaster Countians
Confiscated During
the American Revolution*

*D*uring the American Revolution owners of property (real estate) had to be careful what they said or did, because any remark or action that might be construed as disloyal to the American cause or that might give aid and comfort to the British could result in their property being taken from them without due process. This would have been unthinkable *after* the adoption of the U. S. Constitution, but during revolutions feelings run high, and the legal heritage is ignored.

Not all property of persons so indiscreet as to make remarks favoring the British Crown was confiscated; occasionally excited mobs destroyed buildings belonging to such persons. And there were times when the safety of those persons was put in grave danger. The least that might happen was social ostracism extending even to business relationships.

A total of one hundred and twenty-one estates were confiscated. Excepting three of the estates, they were confiscated by action of bills of attainder. The usual procedure was for persons accused of siding with the British in word or deed to be given public notice by proclamation that they were to be tried for treason. They had a period of time to present themselves before a justice. If they did not appear, they were declared automatically guilty of treason. Their property, both personal and real, would be taken and sold by the sheriff at public sale.

If such persons decided later to surrender or were captured, they could not be tried for treason because they already were declared guilty. No

defense was allowed. After ascertaining their identity the justice could sentence them to be hanged. This happened only a few times.

In actual practice the property of accused persons who fled Pennsylvania, usually to Canada, was most likely to be seized and sold. Nearly five hundred Pennsylvanias were accused of treason, but records reveal that one hundred and thirteen appeared on time before justices to explain their actions.

Sales of confiscated land provided funds to operate the state government and to endow a college now known as the University of Pennsylvania. Soldiers were given certificates that enabled them to purchase confiscated estates to reimburse them partially for pay they were to receive or did receive in inflated currency. Speculators acquired many of these certificates, however.

The *Pennsylvania Archives*, Series VI, vols. 12-13, provides the data on the confiscated estates. Those of Lancaster County follow:

Jacob Boyer, Donegal Township, 87 acres, sold to Abraham Ream for 225 pounds in 1781.

Nicholas Houssecker (Hunsecker?), Lebanon Township, house and lot, sold to William Bailey on depreciated certificates in 1782. Bailey was a resident of York.

Nicholas Houssecker, Lebanon Township, Lebanon village, 5 acres, sold to Captain John Doyle, using in part depreciated certificates, in 1782.

George Rine, Earl Township, 150 acres, sold to Col. James Crawford of Lancaster borough in 1779.

John Rine, Earl Township, 167 acres, sold to Charles Syng, merchant of Philadelphia. Mr. Syng was a speculator, because he resold the property within a few months in 1779.

Christian Voight, Lancaster borough, house and lot on Queen Street, sold to George Graeff (Graff), Esq., for \$500 in 1782.

Michael Witman, Cocalico Township, four tracts totaling 231 acres and a tavern near Ephrata, sold to Michael Diffenderffer of Lancaster borough for 25,000 pounds in 1779.