

The Colonists' Attitudes Toward The Land

by James A. Jolly

At sunset, on October 27, 1682, William Penn arrived on the ship "Welcome," landing at New Castle in what became northern Delaware. There he was presented with water, soil and a twig, symbolizing his control of water, earth and woods.

Penn had inherited his father's estate and with it claim on King Charles II's debt owed his father, Admiral Sir William Penn. Penn asked the king to discharge the obligation by granting him land in America. Penn suggested naming this province "Sylvania," meaning woodland. The king accepted this, but attached the prefix "Penn" in honor of Admiral Penn; thus "Pennsylvania." Pennsylvania was chartered in 1681. The following year, the Duke of York, the future King James II, deeded to Penn the claim to the three lower counties on the Delaware River, which is now the state of Delaware. These grants meant that Penn, next to the Crown, was the largest landowner in the British Empire.

Penn advocated principles then considered radical: he welcomed people of all backgrounds; he promoted popular government; and he insisted on a great degree of religious freedom. He thought of Pennsylvania as a "holy experiment." Penn, however, advertised his province more in terms of economic opportunity; religious freedom received secondary emphasis. Compared to other places, Pennsylvania was remarkably tolerant. Only non-Christians were disqualified from voting; trial by jury was guaranteed; and capital crimes were limited to murder and treason. Philadelphia was founded. Penn interpreted "Philadelphia" as meaning "city of brotherly love." Being a Quaker pacifist, Penn did not build a garrison city, and therefore it was not surrounded by a wall. We ordinarily think of rural areas coming sequentially before towns; but Penn envisioned a colony of



Quakers were numerous as settlers in rural southern and southeastern Lancaster County. The Sadsbury Meeting was established in 1724. This 1924 view shows the Meetinghouse, near Christiana, which is still used today. LCHS Photo.

market towns located first, and then subsequent farming areas would have convenient trading centers.

Penn's province was nearly 98 percent covered by forests. In his Charter of Privileges published on October 28, 1701, Penn stipulated that one acre should be left in trees for every five acres cleared. He especially recommended that oak and mulberry

trees be preserved. According to the U.S. Forest Service, 58 percent of Pennsylvania is now wooded; .03 percent of that is virgin forest. The national government controls 3 percent of Pennsylvania woodland; the state, 20 percent; counties and other municipalities, 2 percent; and private persons and businesses, 75 percent. Pennsylvania has 2.3 percent of the woodland in the United States.

Pennsylvania was not a "natural" region, but rather a rectangular area created by royal charter in 1681. Its boundaries were to be determined; and the only natural boundaries are the Delaware River in the east and some 40 miles of Lake Erie in the northwest.

Into the eighteenth century, buffalo and turkey were abundant in Pennsylvania and so were flocks of pigeons and large rattlesnakes. Traders paid Indians for beaver pelts, which were in demand by fashionable Europeans. This was a cause of competition and warfare between tribes. Prior to the "Beaver Wars," the animals most sought by the Delaware Indians were the deer and bear, useful for food and clothing. The hare, wildcat, groundhog, rattlesnake, and wolf were protected by taboos. The Swedes began farming in Pennsylvania as early as 1643; and they imported the first cattle, horses, and sheep. The main importation of sheep was from England and Holland. The Dutch were more interested in trading than in settling down and farming. The Indians raised no livestock and had no other animals except dogs. Corn was their primary food, with women doing much of the field labor.

Though Penn had a clear grant from the king, he also purchased most of southeastern Pennsylvania, piece by piece, from the Indians, principally the Delawares. The Delawares called themselves "Lenni Lenape," that is, the

Original People. Penn treated them with dignity, respect, and fairness. He said, "We meet on the broad pathway of good faith and good will. No advantage shall be taken of either side, but all sides shall be openness and love. . . We are the same, as if one man's body were divided into two parts; we are all one flesh and blood." The Indians affectionately referred to Penn as "Brother Onas." "Onas" was the Indian word for quill (pen). Penn believed the Indians were descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel.

The number of Indians in Pennsylvania at the time of William Penn did not exceed 15,000. By 1790, there were only about 1300 Pennsylvania Indians; they were located near the north branch of the Susquehanna River. Wars between tribes and with the whites, and diseases brought by the whites, such as smallpox and measles, took their toll. The Indians hunted for food, not for sport. The whites tended to think of nature as something to be mastered and exploited. In contrast, the Indians regarded themselves as part of nature. The whites were interested in private ownership of property, not common use of the land. The Indians became dependent upon the white man's technology. Guns were attractive and novel and had shock effect. The Indians were handicapped because they could not repair or reproduce guns or make ammunition.

The first major crack between the settlers and the Indians came in 1737 with the notorious "Walking Purchase" hoax. This occurred when William Penn's son, Thomas, was dominant. The Penns produced a forged document indicating that in 1686 the Delaware chiefs agreed that the Penns were to receive land north of Bucks county. The Indians reluctantly said that the whites could take the land between the line of a northward walk and the Delaware River. The walk was to be one and one-half days. The Indians assumed that it would be a leisurely walk and cover some 30 miles. Provincial authorities carefully laid out the route and employed three runners who covered some 60 miles. They ran northwestwardly from Wrightstown to Lehigh; then instead of drawing the northern boundary line straight east, it was drawn northwest to Lackawaxen; which meant that the Delaware and Shawnees lost all of their lands, tricked out of 1,200 square miles, along the Delaware River. The humiliated Delawares and Shawnees moved to the frontier, nursed bitterness toward the colonists, and were later to join forces with the French.

Originally, Pennsylvania had only four miles of frontage on Lake Erie; so Pennsylvania bought from the Indians (1789) and from the United States government (1792) over 200,000 acres to expand the frontage. The Iroquois were not anxious to deed away their claims; but Chief Cornplanter talked 23 other chiefs into compliance to avoid trouble. He also helped to keep the Iroquois from battling with white settlers for the Northwest Territory. The whites rewarded Cornplanter with a grant of 1,500 acres. The last of that grant was flooded for the Kinzua Dam in Warren County; and the Indians there were forced

to move in 1965. This is a typical and final chapter in the white man's dealings with the Pennsylvania Indians.

With respect to population concentrations: In the period 1680 to 1710, Pennsylvania was primarily settled by English immigrants, many of whom were Quakers, settling inland from Philadelphia some 25 miles; this included the three original counties (Philadelphia, Bucks, and Chester). From 1708 to the 1750s, Germans extensively settled the next 50 miles; and, beginning around 1771, the Scots-Irish settled westward the next 75 miles. In 1790, about 35 percent of Pennsylvania's population were of English background, 33 percent were of German background, and the Scots-Irish accounted for 23 percent of the population; 9 percent consisted of French Huguenots, Welsh, Scots, Dutch, Swiss, and others. The Lancaster Plain was the most culturally mixed area in rural Pennsylvania.

When Penn first arrived, there were about 500 white settlers within the area of present Pennsylvania. The Swedes had developed the foundation of prosperous agriculture and good relations with the Indians. Some of the English migration into Pennsylvania, in the last half of the 18th century, came from Maryland in the south and Virginia in the southwest, and from Connecticut in the north. Significant German immigration occurred, 1708-1754. The Germans preferred countryside resembling the fertile rolling land of the upper Rhine



After the Germans, the Scottish Ulstermen who founded Donegal Presbyterian Church in the 1720s were the second most numerous of the early colonists in Lancaster County. LCHS Photo by Martin J. Heisey.

region. They came mainly in two waves; first, the "sect" people, such as the Mennonites and then the Amish; later came the "church" people, for instance the Lutheran and Reformed Germans. A sect is a small distinctive community within the larger general community. Many of the Germans came from the Germanic part of Switzerland and that part of the German Rhineland called the Palatinate. Some German states were a multi-national battlefield during the Thirty Years' War and the wars of Louis XIV. This reinforced the pacifist convictions of the Mennonites and other Anabaptists.

By 1750, the Cumberland Valley population was over 90 percent Scots-Irish. They had been lowland Presbyterian Scots relocated to the area of northern Ireland known as Ulster. In Pennsylvania, most of

them went to the frontier, to areas not yet purchased from the Indians. Most of these frontiersmen were squatters. Hostility intensified between them and the Indians. The Scots-Irish equated the Indians with the Amalekites in the Bible, and found a Scriptural text to justify slaying them and taking their land. Of course, one of the reasons the Scots-Irish clashed with the Indians was that the Scots-Irish were the frontier pioneers, and therefore were the ones to have initial contact with the Indians. People with status and economic security are less likely to move away; and the Quakers and Mennonites were comparatively prosperous and therefore not as inclined to move to the frontier.

The Scots-Irish believed that the provincial government was insensitive to the problems on the frontier, especially the Indian menace. The Conestoga Indians living in the Lancaster County area probably composed the last of the Susquehannocks. On December 14, 1763, more than fifty frontiersmen, chiefly Scots-Irish from Paxtang or Paxton, near Harrisburg, murdered six of the Conestoga Indians found in the little Conestoga Indiantown settlement in Manor township. The remainder of the Indians were away peddling produce and baskets. The local authorities immediately rounded up the remaining Indians and placed them in protective custody in the Lancaster County jail. On December 27, the Paxton gang rode into Lancaster, battered down the prison gate, and massacred the remaining 14 Indians. The back wall of the Fulton Opera House is what remains of the enclosure where the Conestoga Indians were killed.

The Scots-Irish also sought out land reminding them of their homeland. They were particularly interested in locating near springs; and, in contrast to the Germans, were more inclined to accept foothills with shale soil, in preference to the "dry" limestone valleys which were sometimes heavily wooded and where frost was more prevalent.

Colonial pioneers used two methods to clear the land. The English and Scots-Irish adopted the Indian technique of girdling the trees, causing them eventually to die, while cultivating the ground nearby. Like New Englanders, the Germans cut down the trees and cleaned out the underbrush and stumps. The latter method allowed more land for cropping; and burned logs provided potash for use as fertilizer and cash income from its sale.

In judging the quality of Pennsylvania farming during the eighteenth century, it is significant that American farmers generally did not take good care of soils, crops, and livestock. Usually, animals roamed the woods, foraging for themselves. They were not provided adequate shelter or balanced rations. The settlers' spirit of individualism and quest for material gain, combined with seemingly limitless land, contributed to indifference toward enlightened husbandry. Old world scarcity and limited space were in the past, and misuse and waste became American habits.

Pennsylvania soil was fertile and the climate moderate, and Pennsylvania

farmers were as competent and arguably better than farmers elsewhere. The result was that Pennsylvania was known as “the breadbasket of the nation,” and, from 1725 to 1740, was foremost among the colonies and states in the production of food.



This idyllic scene was the westerward view along the Columbia Pike where it passed over the Little Conestoga Creek (present day Maple Grove). First requested by colonists in 1729, this road from Lancaster to Wright's Ferry became a toll road, or turnpike, in 1794.

Though not particularly innovative nor given to “book farming,” the background and attitudes of the Germans served them well as farmers in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and elsewhere. Small holdings in Germany encouraged the habit of intense work and frugality. Particularly among the sects there was a community sense of spiritual commitment to the soil and being part of the creative process with God. They emphasized that work was the appropriate lot of humankind; they believed that farming was a preferred way of life as well as a means of providing life’s basic essentials. They eagerly accumulated land and held their farms as legacies to pass to their sons. This may have encouraged stewardship and care for the land, which would have been less prevalent had they thought of their holdings as merely transitional stepping stones to something or somewhere else. Large families were desired; and children as well as adults and females as well as males worked the fields in a cooperative family enterprise.

There has been some question as to whether the Germans perceptively sought limestone soil, or if their locating was circumstantial. In any case, crops grew well; and clover, which supplies the soil with nitrogen, grows better on limestone. The connection between clover and restoring fertility was recognized by 1800.

In contrast to the general practice of allowing livestock to roam, the Pennsylvania German farmers were likely to provide shelter for their animals in the winter. Large barns were built with stables; and sometimes quarters were provided for their horses and cattle before they built any but the crudest accommodations for themselves. Cold animals are apt to eat more than warm ones, and, by sheltering their animals in the winter, these farmers realized a

savings in hay and grain. Also, by concentrating their livestock, farmers could more easily collect manure useful as fertilizer. By the times of the Revolution, fences were frequently used to restrict animals.

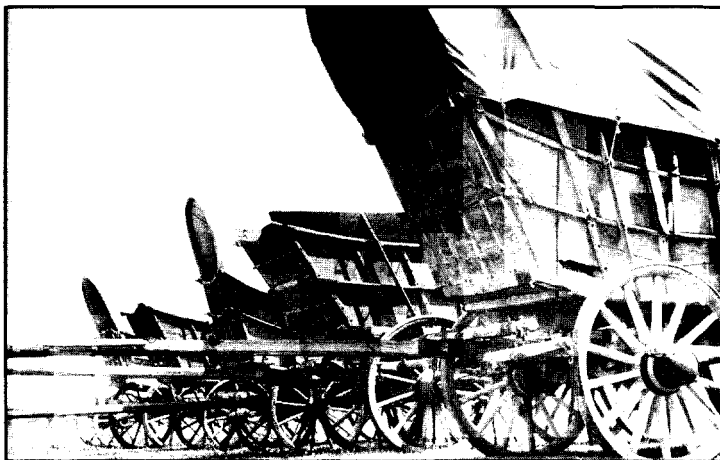
Pork was eaten twice as often as beef. Horses received the most care. They were important for hauling and plowing; and careful breeding was emphasized even during the early years. On German farms in Lancaster County, cattle were more numerous than sheep; on non-German farms, sheep were more numerous.

James T. Lemon has written about eighteenth century settlement in southeastern Pennsylvania. He has suggested that religious identification was more an influence on successful husbandry than ethnic background or land quality. Strong sectarian identity and cohesiveness provided a sense of community identity, mutual support, and a tradition of the work ethic. Lemon believes that that factor might be important in explaining why the Quakers and Mennonites prospered. In contrast, the Scots-Irish did not belong to a strong sectarian group, and maybe that contributed to their reputation for restlessness. John A. Hostetler, an authority on traditional Amish and Mennonite beliefs and practices, has written that moderation rather than display has distinguished Amish and Mennonite lifestyles; and the Bible, the plow, and the community have been the most meaningful entities in their relationships.

The connection between ruralism and character was noted by the founder. William Penn stated, "The country life is to be preferred; for there we see the works of God; but in the cities we see little else but the works of men: And the one makes a better subject for contemplation than the other."

The Pennsylvania "Swiss" barns are architecturally interesting. They have also been called "bank" barns because a packed earth "bank" allows wagons to be driven right up into the second floor storage area. But the most uniquely Pennsylvania German contribution was the "forebay," a projection of the upper storage level that overhangs the barnyard. Pennsylvania eighteenth century forebays varied in depth from about four feet to infrequently over nine feet. The depth of the "classic" forebay was 6-9 feet. Some modern farmers have enclosed the forebays with concrete blocks to provide more ground floor enclosure for livestock and equipment. The barns with forebays appeared early in Pennsylvania and had direct European prototypes in areas such as central and eastern Switzerland. The first scholarly inquiry into the location and extent of Pennsylvania barns was done by Joseph W. Glass in 1971. Whether originally there was a functional reason for the forebay is unclear. Dr. Glass has suggested that the purpose of the forebay may have been to protect the stable doors from snow accumulation in the winter and to also keep them unencumbered when straw was pitched from the second floor during threshing season. If the land permitted, the forebay, which is at the front of the barn, faces south or southeast.

Alfred L. Shoemaker (1955) listed available dimensions on the length of early Pennsylvania barns, based on 1798 tax records. My analysis of Shoemaker's data indicates that nearly 13 percent were no more than 30 feet long; nearly 79 percent were between 30 and 70 feet long; 8 percent were between 70 and 100 feet; less than 1 percent were between 100 and 150 feet long. The more prosperous farmers built their barns with stone walls. In the mid-nineteenth century, brick became popular, especially in southcentral Pennsylvania. Likewise, mills were constructed of stone in the eighteenth century and often of brick in the nineteenth century. Waterwheels were located inside most Pennsylvania mills.



The Conestoga Wagon had its origins in the Valley of the Conestoga River in Lancaster County. It was the "18-wheeler" of the early settlers. Its unique, boat-shaped body was designed to prevent freight from shifting on hills. LCHS Photo.

Few hired laborers engaged in colonial farming. Why should a man work for someone else when productive land was so easily acquired? Consequently, hired labor was scarce and wages were high. Benjamin Franklin explained the situation, "...so vast is the territory of North America, that it will require many ages to settle it fully, and, till it is fully settled, labor will never be cheap here, where no man continues long a laborer for others, but gets a plantation (farm) of his own; no man continues long a journeyman to a trade, but goes among those new settlers and sets up for himself." Indentured servants, many of whom were Germans and Scots-Irish, constituted a source of labor. Little embarrassment was connected to having been an indentured servant. There were a large number of them, and they were obligated to work only about three to five years to pay the cost of their passage to America.

By the eve of the Revolution there were about 10,000 slaves in Pennsylvania; that was around three percent of the colony's population. A majority of slaves were domestic servants, and probably less than ten percent were involved with farm labor. The majority of Quakers and most Germans

opposed slave labor. By 1810 there were 795 slaves in the Commonwealth's population of 810,091.

The average Pennsylvania farm ranged in size from 75 to 300 acres. Pennsylvania farms were smaller than farms in the Southern colonies but larger than in New England. Generally, the size of the farm increased and its cost decreased the farther one went from Philadelphia.

Colonial farmers in Pennsylvania did not ordinarily engage in one-crop farming; they diversified. Tobacco was an early commercial crop in Pennsylvania; but Virginia led in tobacco growing, and thereafter wheat became Pennsylvania's most commonly cultivated crop. By 1800, Pennsylvania was the most important wheat-growing state in the Union. It was not until after 1840, when the Midwest was settled, that Pennsylvania lost its position of grain leadership.

Though there was little systematic cultivation of fruit before 1800, most Pennsylvania German farms had orchards; and apple trees could be found on almost every farm. Cider (which was to be well-fermented) and brandy were made. Dried apples and peaches were prepared for the winter months.

Stable manure was the most common fertilizer; the artificial fertilizers, lime and gypsum, were not extensively used until after 1800. Fallowing, that is plowing but not seeding a field and allowing it to rest, was sometimes used by the Germans. Crop rotation did not become a general practice until about 1820. However, the Pennsylvania Germans employed irrigation before 1750.

Postscript

We should be able to learn from history and not repeat past mistakes. Of course, there may be safe satisfaction in judging people remote in time or place for examples of ignorance and avarice. We can be critical if there has been some plundering and blundering of natural resources or exploitative treatment of a minority. We may say that we are for a sense of place and community identity, for peace and feeding the hungry, and are concerned for the environment. We may feel that it was wrong to pressure indigenous peoples from their ancestral homes, and to extinguish or crassly commercialize their culture. We are acquainted with the Genesis story of Adam and Eve being beguiled and willful, and forfeiting their garden paradise.

Today, agribusiness is the remaining major industry in Pennsylvania. Despite the tremendous pressure from development, much of the Commonwealth's prosperity and employment is directly and indirectly dependent on ruralism. People have to have nourishment, and agribusiness remains the most essential industry. Blessed with some of the richest soil in the world and

industrious farmers, Lancaster County is still the number one unirrigated food-producing county in the nation. Lancaster County is also home to a notable ethnic-religious minority, the Plain People ("The Gentle People"), most of whom live on 20 percent of the county's 4,900 farms. But in recent years we have been at a crossroads. The possibility is very real that, in the name of "progress," the area could become just another example of urban-suburban sprawl and part of the Eastern megalopolis, with the attendant attitudes, problems, and expenses. When there is unbounded development with a "country view" the less country there is to view. We have the advantage of hindsight and knowledge not available 200 years ago. Therefore, we should be actively involved in effectively salvaging the Garden Spot for future generations, and be grateful stewards of the good land.

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