

PENN'S TREATY TREE

From time immemorial the tree has played a conspicuous part in the history of the world.

From the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, the innocent cause of the fall of our first ancestors, down to the mythical political plum tree of the present day, a number of trees may be cited as having become famous. England has her "Royal Oak," of King Charles fame, while in our own country we can lay claim to Boston's "Great Liberty Tree," Hartford's "Charter Oak," the "Great Elm Tree" of Providence, Donegal's "Witness Tree," and the subject of our sketch, "The Treaty Tree."

The Treaty Tree, under whose wide-spreading branches was formed a treaty of peace between William Penn and the Indians, stood in the Indian town of Shackamaxon, on the west bank of the Delaware river, about half a mile from Philadelphia. It was a tree of magnificent proportions, and was said to be so large that goats ran among its branches. It was blown down during a severe storm on the 3d of March, 1810. The root was wrenched, and the trunk broken off. It fell on Saturday night, and on Sunday many hundreds of people visited it. In its form it was remarkably widespread, but not lofty. Its main branch inclining toward the river measured 150 feet in length; its girth at the base of the trunk was 24 feet; and its age, as indicated by the number of circles of annual growth, was 283 years. As the treaty was supposed to have been formed in 1682, the age of the tree at that time must have been 155 years.

The tree as it was in 1801 was very accurately drawn on the spot by the marine painter, Thomas Birch, who was the son of William Birch, who published the print. Birch said that he drew every branch and twig as he saw it there, and his son, Thomas Birch, of Philadelphia, said that he told him that he bestowed on the drawing the same care that he would have given to a portrait. The large engraving executed by Seymour gives the true appearance of every visible limb.

While it stood, this old Elm formed a canopy for many religious gatherings. Under its shade the Quakers, Methodists, and Baptists often held their summer meetings. When it fell, people vied with each other in their efforts to obtain some of its wood. An armchair was made of it and presented to Doctor Rush. A part of it was constructed into something memorable at Penn's Park in England. Mr. Birch, son of the painter, preserved a frame made of its wood. An inkstand made of its wood was sent to Doctor Roscoe, of Liverpool. On the occasion of Lafayette's visit (1824-25), he was presented by John F. Watson, the historian, with a box composed of pieces of wood, among which was a piece of the Treaty Elm. At the Anniversary of the Landing in 1824, two armchairs made of the historic Elm Tree were presented to John F. Watson. The Commissioners of Kensington constructed for their Town Hall a great armchair of the relic wood. A few branches of the tree were preserved and planted in Philadelphia, and grew to fine proportions. One stood at the center of Clinton street, near Ninth, another on the premises of the Pennsylvania Hospital, since turned into Linden street, while still another stood on the original spot, amid the lumber of the shipyard.

The district of Kensington now occupies the place known as Shackamaxon, an Indian word, meaning "Field of Blood," from a famous fight which once took place there. It forms the thirty-first ward of Philadelphia, bounded east by the Delaware river, south by Norris street, west by Franklin Road as far northwest as Oxford street, then along Oxford to Sixth, Sixth to Lehigh Avenue, along the latter to Frankford Road, and then by that road to Westmoreland street, thence to the Point Road, and thence substantially in the same direction as Westmoreland street to the Delaware river. Here was an Indian town, perhaps a council seat, called Shackamaxon. Here was Fairman's mansion, in front of which was the famous tree under whose branches, it is alleged, William Penn held his famous Indian treaty.

The following extracts are taken from Scharf and Westcott's History of Philadelphia: "We are at a loss when we attempt to assign a particular date to Penn's treaty with the Indians under the great elm tree at Shackamaxon, if such a treaty was ever made. Those who are most familiar with the subject, and have most laboriously studied it in all its bearings, are convinced that the council must have taken place before the meeting of the Legislature at Upland, December, 1682. This seems to have been assumed because no such interview could have occurred before that date in 1682; every day of Penn's time seems to have been otherwise occupied. There is nothing on record to show that there was such a treaty. Penn, always frank in the recital of his affairs, both public and private, seems to have kept an absolute silence in regard to the treaty, both in his correspondence with the

Lords of the Committee of Plantations, and in his letters to his friends at home."

There are, however, many arguments in favor of the supposed treaty, a few of which are as follows:

"First—In Penn's letter to the Indians, sent them through the hands of his commissioners, he expounds to them his principles of universal justice, and of the common brotherhood of mankind, adding that 'I have sent my commissioners to treat with you about land and a firm league of peace,' and that 'I shall shortly come to you myself, at which time we may more largely and freely confer and discourse of these matters.'"

About the same time Penn sent to the Indians by Thomas Holmes, his Surveyor General, another letter containing practically the same sentiments. Holmes indorsed the letter as having been read to the Indians by an interpreter, August, 1682. The place of the meeting was not mentioned, but Holmes was at that time living with Thomas Fairman at his house at Shackamaxon, where the Quaker meetings were held, and it is not unlikely that it was in this Indian village that the meeting took place.

"Second—In 1835, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania appointed a committee, consisting of Peter S. Duponceau, Joshua F. Fisher, and Roberts Vaux, to report a communication of John S. Watson, of Bucks Co., in reference to 'the Indian treaty for the lands now the site of Philadelphia, and the adjacent country.' Their conclusion was that, while no treaty was ever negotiated at Shackamaxon for the purchase of lands, there was a solemn council held there for the purpose of sealing friendship between the Indians and the proprietary. They

founded their opinion upon certain expressions in speeches of Lieutenant Governor Keith to the Susquehanna Indians in 1717 and 1722, and by Governor Gordon in 1728-29. They are firm in their belief that such a treaty or conference did take place, probably in November, 1682, at Shackamaxon, under the great elm tree which was blown down in 1810.

“Third—Tradition has found the place of the treaty, named those present, tells us that Penn came there in a barge, and wore a blue sash. A belt of wampum has come from the Penn family, which, it is claimed, was presented to the proprietary on that occasion. The great Tamanend, or Tamany, was chief spokesman on that day, and his dress and emblems of kingly power are accurately described.”

Tradition assures us that on the occasion of the Great Treaty, the Founder was accompanied by the following persons: His cousin and secretary, Sir William Markham, in the rich costume of the English Service; Holmes, his Surveyor General; the Swedish interpreter, Lawrence, or Lasse Cock, and Symcoe, Haigee, Taylor and Pierson, of the Council. Three nations of the aborigines had their representatives in this group: The Lenni Lenape, or Delawares; the Mengwe, or Six Nations; and the Gawanese and the Conestogas. There were, besides, a few Dutch and Swedish traders.

Watson's "Annals of Philadelphia" says, "James Read, Esquire (a great observer of passing events), a nephew of James Logan's wife, and who died at the age of seventy-one years, used to say of West's painting of the Treaty that the English characters severally present were all intended to be resemblances, and were so far true that he (Mr. Reed) could name

them all. He fully believed the treaty was held at the Elm, and Mrs. Logan has heard him express his regret that Benjamin West should have neglected truth so far as to have omitted the river scenery."

The picture that was painted by West in England contained no appearance of the tree, but we may rest assured that, although Mr. West did not use the image of the tree in his picture, he, nevertheless, regarded it as the true locality, for he afterwards related what he heard from Colonel Symcoe regarding the protection of the tree during the Revolutionary War, and while the British were stationed at and near Philadelphia. This tree was in danger of being cut down by parties sent out in search of firewood, but Colonel Symcoe, who had command of the district in which it grew (from a regard for William Penn and the interest he took in the history connected with the tree), ordered a guard of British soldiers to protect it.

In 1882 the Penn Society erected near the site of the original tree, to protect its memory, a marble monument with the following four inscriptions on its sides:

William Penn
and the
Indian Nations
1682
Unbroken Faith

Pennsylvania
founded
1681
By Deeds of Peace

William Penn
Born 1644
Died 1718

Raised by the
Penn Society
A. D. 1827
to mark the
site of the
Great Elm Tree

Although we are not able to find an exact picture of the Great Treaty, we, nevertheless, can form our own mental picture from the description of a treaty which Penn wrote to the Free Society of Traders. He says: "Their order is this—the King sits

in the middle of an half moon and hath his council, the old and wise on each hand. Behind them, or at a little distance, sit the younger fry in the same figure. Having consulted and resolved their business, the King ordered one of them to speak to me; he stood up, came to me, and, in the name of his King, saluted me; then took me by the hand, and told me he was ordered by his King to speak to me, and that what he should say was the King's mind, etc. While he spoke, not a man of them was observed to whisper or smile. When the purchase was made, great promises passed between us of friendship and good neighborhood, and that we should live in love so long as the sun gave light. This done, another made a speech to the Indians, in the name of all the Sachamachers, or kings, first, to tell what was done; next to charge and command them to love the Christians, and particularly to live in peace with me and my people. At every sentence they shouted, and in their own way said, 'Amen.' "

With this much in our minds it will not be a very difficult task to complete the mental picture. For the foreground we have the beautiful river, dotted here and there with boats, glistening in the autumn sunlight; for the background, the Fairman Mansion, the sloping green banks, and the Treaty Tree, its leaves already painted by Jack Frost, and looking in its red and yellow like an Indian princess. More color is given to the picture by the historic blue sash of William Penn and the gay red coat of William Markham. The homely, well-worn clothes of the Dutch and Swedes are offset by the gayly-painted savages in their beads and feathers. Let us not forget to add the graceful column of smoke as it winds its way upward from the pipe of peace.

This treaty formed between the going and the coming race was, according to Voltaire, "the only treaty which has not been sworn to, and which has not been broken."

"How beautiful the scene portrayed
above,
A treaty framed in Justice, Truth and
Love!
Our City's Founder and the peaceful
Friends
Stoop to no subterfuge to gain their
ends;
While with unswerving confidence,
around
Their Indian brethren occupy the
ground.
This incident a maxim may afford,
And prove our Penn was mightier than
the sword."

THE FAIRMAN MANSION.

The imposing and venerable-looking brick edifice known as the Fairman Mansion stood on the banks of the Delaware in what is now Kensington in Philadelphia, and was constructed in 1702 for the use of Thomas Fairman, the deputy of Thomas Holmes, the Surveyor General. It was taken down in April, 1825, chiefly because it encroached on the range of the present street. A brick was found in the wall, on which was marked,

"Thomas Fairman, September, 1702."

This house has become famous from the fact that it was on its grounds that the famous Treaty of Peace between William Penn and the Indians was negotiated. It has been the home of many notable families, and was once desired as the country seat of William Penn himself, a place highly appropriate for him who made his treaty there. Governor Evans, after leaving his office as Governor, lived there for some time. Afterwards it became the residence of Governor Palmer, and for this reason it is sometimes called the "Governor's House,"

a name which it long retained. Mr. Thomas Hopkins, a noted Philadelphian, occupied the mansion for fifty years.

Penn's conception of this beautiful place is well expressed in his letter of 1708 to James Logan, saying: "If John Evans (the late Governor) leaves your place, then try to secure his plantation; for I think from above Shackamaxon to the town is one of the pleasantest situations upon the river for a Governor; where one sees and hears what one will and where one will, and yet have a good deal of the sweetness and quiet of the country. And I do assure thee if the country would settle upon me six hundred pounds per annum I would hasten over the following summer. Cultivate this among the best Friends." From this we see that Penn was not averse to returning to Pennsylvania to live, especially if the six hundred pounds were forthcoming.

The Fairman Mansion was once a favorite meeting place of the Friends, or Quakers, as the minutes of the Friends' Meeting at Abington prove. Penn himself spent his first winter in Philadelphia in this house.

Thomas Fairman is mentioned in history in connection with Penn's arrival in Philadelphia. There is no positive information which shows at what time Penn arrived in that city. The record of the Society of Friends says: "At a Monthly Meeting the 8th of the 9th month, 1682: At this time Governor William Penn and a multitude of Friends arrived here and erected a city called Philadelphia, about half a mile from Shackamaxon, where meetings, etc., were established. Thomas Fairman, at the request of the Governor, removed himself and family to Tacony, where there was also a

meeting appointed to be kept, and the ancient meeting of Shackamaxon removed to Philadelphia, from which also other meetings were appointed in the Province of Pennsylvania." It has been construed to mean that Penn arrived in Philadelphia on the 8th of September. If that is correct, he must have gone to Fairman's Mansion on the same day, although it appears from letters of Penn from Upland that he did not go to Fairman's house until February or March, 1683.

Robert Fairman, of London, a brother of Thomas Fairman, the surveyor, in a letter in 1711 speaks of the house at the Treaty Tree built of brick in 1702 as the locality of the said Thomas Fairman's former house, he having been dead some time, and his widow being then (1711) on the premises.

The present Treaty Island, which belongs to New Jersey, and lies in the bed of the Delaware river opposite Kensington, was patented as early as 1684 by Thomas Fairman under the name of Shackamaxon Island. It was afterwards sold to a man named Petty and took the name of Petty's Island.

That Fairman was a surveyor of some note may be inferred from a number of warrants to him and directing him to lay out certain lands. William Penn, by warrant of the 14th of the 12th month, 1683, directed 200 acres of land to be laid out in German-township, and a city lot where he (the Proprietary) should direct; 7th of the 2d month, 1688, Thomas Fairman was ordered to lay it out, as appears by note on the warrant.

At the council held at Philadelphia, October 28, 1696, it was ordered that a warrant be directed from the Governor to Thomas Fairman, Surveyor, to lay out the King's road from William's Landing into the King's great road that leads to Philadelphia.

If we consult the early Colonial records of Pennsylvania we will find that Thomas Fairman, although a member of the peaceable Society of Friends, or Quakers, was aggressive and belligerent, for in several instances we find him figuring in cases before the Council. On one occasion we find that a petition of one Robert Jeffs was read, requesting relief against Thomas Fairman's forcible entry into his house, and on another occasion the petition of Thomas Fairman against Captain Thomas Holmes, Surveyor General, was presented to the Council. On March 16, 1708, Thomas Fairman presented to the Board a petition complaining against one John Morris, of the county of Bucks, about the payment for a parcel of land.

That Fairman was in the wrong in the first instance was shown by the fact that the Council decided against him, at a meeting one month later, when it was unanimously ordered that Robt. Jeffs should have peaceable admission and possession into his premises.

However, in Fairman's case there might have been extenuating circumstances, for in his capacity of surveyor it is not unlikely that he would sometimes meet with opposition. But whatever may have been the character of Thomas Fairman, he was a notable and forceful figure in the early history of Pennsylvania, and has preserved his name to posterity by giving it to the famous Fairman mansion.

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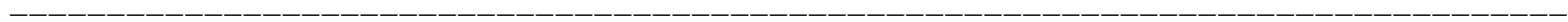
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