

Early Items of Lancaster County History

A great deal of interest naturally attaches to the primitive affairs in our county and that is at present very rare—that is, because items have already been written up. It is only by gathering up certain items that we can eventually expect to put together the whole of the history of those early times. The following items from the first two newspapers of Pennsylvania give us certain phases of the life and times of our remote ancestors here in Lancaster county:

The character of the commerce between Lancaster and Pennsylvania in the infancy of the county can only be understood by the different fragments of information that are picked up from time to time. In the American Weekly Mercury of April 15, 1731, appears the following item:

“Last Monday (April 12) about noon a wagon coming from Conestoga to this city (Philadelphia) laden with hemp, flour, skins, etc., was set on fire by the bushes which were burning near the road. The hemp burned with such violence that it was with great difficulty that they saved the horses and wagon. They lost all their hemp, four bags of flour and six bags of provender.”

The returns of the Lancaster County election of 1731 are stated as follows in the Mercury of October 7 of that year. No figures show the number of votes that were given. For the Assembly, John Koyle, John Musgrove, Andrew Galbraith and Thomas Edwards; for Sheriff, John Galbraith;

for Coroner, Joshua Lowe; for Commissioner, Andrew Cornish; Assessors, William Demmy, Thomas Wilkins, Emanuel Carpenter, Gabriel Davis, Daniel Ferree and Thomas Baldwin, were elected. This note gives us the first glimpse of Emanuel Carpenter's political career, which through a course of thirty years became very notable and important.

The issue of the Mercury of October 5, 1732, gives an account of the election that fall. The Assemblymen were George Stuart, Thomas Edwards, Samuel Blunston and Andrew Galbraith; and the Commissioner elected was James Patterson.

In the issue of December 26 of the same year, we have an item which shows the extreme hardship and poverty under which the latter immigrants of Lancaster county Germans arrived. We remember that in 1710 the first ones who came had some means. But afterwards the poorer class began to come. The item we refer to is as follows:

"This is to give notice to all Palatines who came passengers in the ship, Mary, John Gray commander, who have neither paid their passage nor given security for the same that they are hereby required to come to said John Gray or Benjamin Shoemaker in Philadelphia and either pay the passage money or give security, or else they will be prosecuted and proceeded against according to law."

There is also a similar notice as to a shipload of Palatines who came in the ship Pleasant.

In the issue of October 4, 1733, the the Lancaster county election returns for that year are given. They are as follows: Assemblymen, Andrew Galbraith, Thomas Edwards, John Wright and John Coyle (Koyle). While their

votes do not appear, those receiving the highest vote can be ascertained from the fact that in the records the one receiving the highest vote stood first, and so on down to the lowest, who stood last. Thus we see that while Galbraith stood last in 1732, having the lowest vote then, he received the highest vote in 1733. John Wright was defeated in 1732, but stood third in 1733. We do not have the name of the Sheriff and Coroner.

We are also given a glimpse of Lancaster county's belief in witchcraft in these early days in the next item which I shall cite, from the issue of January 22, 1733-4, of the Mercury, which, while it does not directly speak of supernatural happenings, plainly insinuates that the old lady who met her death as there stated was a witch. The item is as follows:

"The following letter was sent us by a correspondent with a desire it might be published just as it is, viz : 'James Swafort or Swarfort of Lancaster county at Octarara (Octoraro) the 29th December, 1733, had some hands helping him dress flax in one end of his dwelling house. By some means the flax or tow took fire and there being some quantity above stairs which soon took fire so that in an instant it was past putting out. In the company there was an old woman that had been spinning, and was helping to get some things out or from the fire before they were burnt, and bethinking herself of some of her own clothes that were above stairs said hastily, I'll go save my clothes if I lose my life for it, so running up stairs she threw them out and they were saved but the fire was so vehement that she could not return but fell upon a bed and was there burnt. It is somewhat surprising, the fire be-

ginning at night there was such a violent whir-wind about the place where she lay burning that it raised the flame to such a height that it gave light above a mile. Another thing which added to the surprise of the spectators was that there suddenly gathered out of the darkness a company of dogs, some thought near 20 about the fire who were so fierce about the place where she lay burning that it was thought they would have leaped into the fire had they not been hindered.' ”

This item also gives us light on the manner of flax culture and preparation for market. Swafort, it would seem, had several spinners and other hands employed, working up his flax for manufacture and market.

The next item of interest in the Mercury is the Lancaster county election returns for 1734. The Assemblymen were James Hamilton, John Emerson, Andrew Galbraith and John Wright. The commissioner, Tobias Hendricks; the assessors, Sam. Ewing, Conrad Weiser, Thomas Rinish, Andrew Douglass and James Swafort. The last named is the same person concerning whom the preceding item was written. No figures of the votes cast in the county for these early years can be found anywhere at all. There are no records at Harrisburg, nor in Lancaster, nor anywhere else. The above is found in the issue of October 10.

The issue of October 9, 1735, contains the returns for that year in our county, but the lists of successful candidates are not now at hand. The vote of New Castle County for that year is given as follows: The dominant party, 564 votes, to 520 for the opposition. The election returns for 1736 are found in the October 7 issue of that year.

Then come the election returns of 1737 in Pennsylvania, in the Mercury of October 6, of that year. These returns give the number of votes cast for the different candidates, and are the first election figures now extant in Pennsylvania. The Lancaster county figures are as follows: For Assembly, James Hamilton received 753 votes, Andrew Galbraith 540 votes, John Wright 394 votes, and Samuel Smith 388 votes. The assessors elected for the county received: James Maxwell 673 votes, Gerard Graham 553 votes, John Morrison 402 votes, James Evans 346 votes, William Allison 383 votes, and Thomas Eastland 228 votes. The Commissioner elected was Gowan Howard. His vote is not given.

The James Hamilton vote of 753 was the combined English and German vote before the Germans broke off from the Scotch-Irish and Episcopal and Presbyterian English subjects, and voted with the Quakers, as they did later.

It is curious to note that at this time, when Lancaster county's leading candidate received 753 votes, the highest vote of Philadelphia county was 904 votes, of the city of Philadelphia was 207 votes, and the highest vote of Chester county was 724 votes.

In the Mercury of February 28, 1738, we are reminded that Lancaster county was vexed by the proprietary quit-rents. James Steel, the register general, gives notice to all who are indebted to the Hon. Proprietor for quit-rents on lands they hold in Pennsylvania, that for the collection of the same he has appointed to attend for the county of Lancaster at his office in the town of Lancaster the first four days of the month of April.

Again in the issue of March 23, of the last mentioned year, notice is

given that the ship Charming Nancy—John Stedman commander—is about to sail for London, and all Palatines indebted to him are desired to pay him for bringing them here, before he leaves, to avoid trouble.

The runaway servant notices are generally not very profitable, but there is a certain amount of history in the one I shall now give and also a certain accuracy of description of dress that it may be of interest to hear this one as it appears in the May 18, 1738, issue of that paper. It is as follows:

“Ran away about the beginning of April, from Stephen Cole, of Pequea, Lancaster County, a servant named Neil Quinn, about 22 years of age. He is an Irishman, and has a great brogue; he is a lusty fellow, very lazy, loves strong drink, and is a great glutton. He had on, when he went away, an Oznabrigs fly-coat, a green jacket and brown trousers. He has curled black hair; but we hear he has it cut off and wears a cap.

“N. B. He had liberty to work out and was last at William Bronson’s Iron Works; and was to return home once a month, or oftener, to settle with his master; but not appearing he is judged to be run away. Whoever brings home the said servant or secures him so that he may be had again will have 3 pounds reward and reasonable charges, paid.

“By STEPHEN COLE.”

The election figures of Lancaster County, of the fall of 1738, are very rare and very interesting. I do not know of them existing anywhere except in the Mercury of October 5 of that year. They are not in the Gazette, nor in any records at Harrisburg or at Lancaster.

They are as follows: For Assembly James Hamilton received 1,019 votes, Andrew Galbraith 933 votes, Samuel Smith 795 votes and John Wright 758 votes. The votes for the Commissioner-elect and for the Assessors are not given. Those elected were: For Commissioner, Andrew Douglass; for Assessors, George Gibson, Andrew Work, Christian Stoneman, John Powell and Emanuel Carpenter. Those for Sheriff, Robert Buchanan and James Galbraith were returned, and for Coroner, Joshua Low and William Caldwell, out of whom the Governor selected one for Sheriff and one for Coroner.

It is instructive to note the vote of the other counties of the province this year. In Philadelphia County the votes for Assemblymen were: 1,277, 1,301, 1,306, 1,115, 835, 760, 742, 736. In Chester County, for Assembly, the votes were: 936, 947, 988, 885, 655, 644, 631, 392. In Bucks County the votes for Assembly were: 522, 521, 397, 360, 354, 336, 316, 298. And the vote for Coroner in Philadelphia County was 1,232.

We may observe here that Lancaster County's vote was only 250 less than Philadelphia County's; that it was greater than Chester County's by fifty per cent., and over twice Bucks County's vote. At least the successful candidate in Lancaster County received those votes compared to the successful candidates in the other counties. Taking the highest successful candidate's vote in each county and adding them together we have 3,750 votes cast in the Province for those who were successful. The composition vote in Lancaster County was not over 500 votes, and perhaps about the same in Philadelphia and Chester counties; and perhaps about

250 votes in Bucks county. These would make the total minority vote in the Province about 2,000 votes, showing that about 6,000 subjects voted in the Province in those times. This was not more than one-half of the number who had the right to vote.

In Lancaster County this year the Germans threw their strength in with the Quakers against the Scotch-Irish. And though they were willing to help to elect Galbraith, yet their great favorite was James Hamilton.

The only apology for taking so much time and space on the vote of the Province in 1738 is that the vote of that year is the first completely recorded and preserved vote of Pennsylvania known anywhere. And in this light, it is of vast importance, for the purposes of comparison, etc.; and for helping to calculate the probable population of the Province at that time.

Author: Eshleman, Henry Frank, 1869-1953.

Title: Early items of Lancaster County history / by H. Frank
Eshleman, Esq.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): American weekly mercury.
Newspapers--Pennsylvania.
Lancaster County (Pa.)--Social life and customs.
Lancaster County (Pa.)--History--17th century.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1910

Description: 293-300 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 14,
no. 10

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.14

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

=====

+++++

Institution Name
Institution Address
Institution Phone Number
Institution E-mail Address