AN EARLY CANAL PROJECT

The writer's interest in the early waterways and inland navigation of Lancaster county was somewhat quickened recently by reading an unpublished letter, written at Harrisburg, August 12, 1824, to Richard B. McCabe, of Huntingdon, by Persifor Frazer, of the notable family whose name he bore, conspicuous aforetime in Delaware and Chester counties, and later in Philadelphia. In one paragraph of local personal interest he said:

"George B. Porter, Esq., passed through this place two or three days since on his way to Lancaster. Previous to his arrival here he had been appointed Adjutant General, to succeed Col. Carr. He will, I think,make an excellent officer; and his appointment, in this section of the country, appears to be highly approved of. The Goddess of fortune, or rather of office, appears to bestow her favors with a liberal hand on descendants of the brave General Porter."

It will be remembered this was the Porter who married a daughter of Samuel Humes, and became the father of Rose Porter, later Shissler, of Galena, Ill., and of Humes Porter. He was made territorial Governor of Michigan, and after his death his widow built an edifice on North Duke street, now the Iris Club house. About the same time his brother, David Rittenhouse Porter, was Governor of Pennsylvania from January 15, 1839, to January 21, 1845. Meantime another brother, James Madison Porter,

of Easton, Pa., was Secretary of War under President Tyler. A son of Gov. Porter is the General Horace A. Porter, of military and diplomatic fame, Gen. Grant's chief of staff and one-time Ambassador to France; he resides in New York. Another was the famous Judge William A. Porter, of the Philadelphia Bench and Bar; his son, William W. Porter, was one of the first Judges of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania. Verily, as Fraser wrote, "Fortune favored the family."

Another and more significant paragraph in the same epistle reads as follows:

"As respects the canal commissioners, I think you will not have the pleasure of seeing them before the latter part of next summer. We had almost concluded here that they had been drowned in some of the rivulets of Chester county; for it was more than a month before we heard anything of them. Within a few days past we have ascertained that they are in the neighborhood of Churchtown, Lancaster county, progressing in their surveys. They have found an abundance of water on the summit level, and believe that a canal can be made the whole way from Philadelphia to the Susquehanna in the neighborhood of Harrisburg, at an average expense of $1,500 per mile. The summit level proves to be no less than sixty-five miles in extent. All that is now wanting to ensure canals in every direction through the State is—money.

"Political—Nearly all for Jackson here—A few for Adams—and three for Crawford!"

The idea of a canal on the ridge lands about Churchtown reads a trifle ludicrous now; and if an estimated cost of $1,500 per mile was calculated to stagger the financiers of the Commonwealth, what would have hap-

pened had a project been started that would to the infant State of that day been relatively commensurate with the Federal scheme at Panama?

And yet there is extended historic justification for the survey then apparently making in the region of Churchtown, Honeybrook and Morgantown, for a canal to connect the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers with a the waters of the Susquehanna, at a point the line of which would traverse the Churchtown country. Swank, in his "Progressive Pennsylvania," traces the conception back to William Penn, and pays tribute to one of our indefatigable members when he says: "In the 'Proposals for a Second Settlement' on the Susquehanna river William Penn, in 1690, says that a 'way' by land had been 'laid out' between the Delaware and the Susquehanna rivers 'at least three years ago,' and that communication between this proposed settlement and the settlements already made on the Delaware would 'not be hard to do by water by the benefit of the river Schuylkill, for a branch of that river lies near a branch that runs into the Susquehanna river and is the common course of the Indians with their skins and furs into our parts.' In these words Penn certainly indicates French creek and Conestoga creek as the branches which could be utilized in uniting the Susquehanna and Schuylkill rivers. His 'way' was undoubtedly a road from the mouth of French creek to a point near the mouth of the Conestoga. H. Frank Eshleman, of Lancaster, has made this matter clear. To Penn belongs the credit for first suggesting, as early as 1690, the project for continuous water transportation from the Delaware to the Susquehanna, but he did not specifically suggest the building of a canal."

Henry S. Tanner,in his "Description of the Canals and Railroads of the United States" (1840), says that "application was made to the Provincial Legislature for authority to open a water communication between the Schuylkill and the Susquehanna rivers, and in the year 1762 a survey with a view to this object was effected, by which its practicability was satisfactorily demonstrated." Tanner gives no further particulars of the alleged "survey," but other writers, without submitting any proof, say that it was made by David Rittenhouse and Dr. William Smith in 1762.

This survey was likely made about 1769; and ran further to the north, passing through what is now Lebanon county. Philadelphia, jealous of the trade which Baltimore drew from Pennsylvania, as the Susquehanna drained toward the Chesapeake, was ever alert to the advantage of joining the waters of the State in some scheme of transportation which led to the metropolis and entry port of our Commonwealth. Bolles, in his "Pennsylvania, Province and State," says:

"In those days transportation under the most favorable conditions was expensive, and the carriage of goods around the peninsula and up the bay to Philadelphia was a costly charge. To overcome Baltimore's advantage, it was proposed to build a canal from the Susquehanna to the Schuylkill, and to improve 'the navigation of all rivers so far as they led towards our capital city.' This was just before the Revolution; and many were desirous of building a canal through the heart of the country. The contest with Great Britain soon overshadowed every other, and business rivalry was forgotten."

Later there were revivals of the scheme; surveys and plans and legislative movements toward its actualization were authorized in 1825. The incoming of the railway superseded all thought of a canal on the Churchtown plateau; but generations later witnessed the locomotive climb the slopes of the Welsh Mountain, and the route from Lancaster to Philadelphia, via New Holland, Beartown, Honeybrook and Downingtown.is very little longer than the main line. Even if the large conception of 1825 had been realized, it would have been of brief local advantage, as the packet and barge, the towpath and mule power, lasted only a little while longer as elements of modern transportation.

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