

HOW THEY WERE NAMED

NOMENCLATURE OF OUR TOWNSHIPS.

The township is the unit of Teutonic society. As such it is more ancient than the county, the kingdom, or the empire. In its earliest form it was established by a group of families, holding together for mutual protection and cultivating the soil in accordance with a common system. Among the Germans, as described by the Roman author Tacitus, it existed long before the establishment of settled government. The Romans named it *vicus*, or village community ; but the Germans themselves termed it *mark*, because it was surrounded by a mark, or boundary, which was originally a strip of land on which no one was allowed to settle. The earliest laws were determined by the township meeting, and ages passed before a central government appeared which claimed to do more than to settle difficulties between adjacent townships. When the Angles and Saxons migrated to Britain they bore with them their Teutonic ideas of local government ; and by whatever name it may have been known—whether mark, *vicus*, wapentake, hundred, township or parish—this was this fundamental organization that constituted the foundation of the State. By the introduction of the feudal system, it is true, social conditions were greatly obscured; but the people, at any rate, continued to believe that the township had a right to protest against any injustice on the part of the general government ; and the township meeting became the foundation of civil liberty.

In America the historical process was somewhat different. The earliest settlements were, indeed, in many instances compelled by the exigencies of their situation to adopt some form of local government before the boundaries of the colonies and counties had been fully determined ; but more generally it was the colonial government that established the

counties, at the **same** time granting to the district Courts authority to organize the townships.

In the foundation of our own county of Lancaster these two processes may be said to have been in some sense united. There were a few early settlements which had been named by the piun eers, and several of them had been recognized as townships by the county of Chester, which claimed jurisdiction over all this region; but when the county of Lancaster was established by the colonial legislature, it was one of the first acts of the Court to divide its territory into townships and to give them names. Though it is not our purpose to relate the history of the townships, nor cven to enumerate them, it may be well to recall a few of the recorded particulars of this interesting event.

Lancaster county was founded by Act of Assembly on May 10, 1729; and is said to have been named by its first chief magistrate, John Wright, after his native county of Lancaster, in England. Ho was a man of great ability and personal worth, and our county has no reason to he ashamed of its sponsor. According to the original Act the new county was to include all of Chester lying west of the Octoraro creek and "north and west of a line of marked trees extending from the north branch of the Octoraro to the Schuylkill river." It was no doubt a great relief to the people of Chester county to be freed from the responsibility of caring for the vast, untrodden wilderness that stretched indefinitely towards the west; and whatever may be said of their peace principles, they do not seem to have at any time objected to the stretching of a barrier of Scotch Irishmen and Germans between them and the red men of the forest.

As it was impssible to conceive of a county without townships, the newly-a Ppointed magistrates called a meeting to determine names and boundaries. This meeting was held at John Postlethwait's tavern in Conestoga township, on the 9th of June, 1729. Its report was confirmed by the Magistrates' Court which met at the same place, August 5, 1729.

Lancaster county as then organized extended from the Susquehanna and

Octoraro to the Blue Mountains and the Schuylkill river. It included twenty townships, of which four have since been separated. Peshtank (or Paxton) and Derry are now in Dauphin, Lebanon is in Lebanon county, and Tulpehocken is divided between Lebanon and Berks. The original townships included in the present territory of Lancaster county were Donegal, Warwick, Cocalico, Hempfield, Manheim, Caernarvon, Conestoga, Lampeter, Leacock, Lancaster, Earl, Marti; Salisbury, Sadsbury and Drumore. "The Manor" was recognized as a reserved possession of the proprietors, and was therefore not immediately organized as a township. Cocalico is not mentioned in the earliest list, but there is evidence to prove that it was organized in the same year.

It is sometimes said that there is nothing in a name; but the man who originated that saying was no historian. Every name has a meaning, and it may generally teach us something concerning the people by whom it was first uttered. In the present paper we do not propose to consider the origin of the names of the forty-one townships into which Lancaster county is now divided—not to speak of the city of Lancaster and thirteen boroughs—but merely to show by a familiar process how the social history of the county, and the racial character of its earliest settlers, may be determined by the names of its original townships. It will be found that, like the rings of a tree, these names mark the passing of successive periods, and by carefully removing them we may at last discover traces of the original sapling.

A single glance is enough to show that the names of our townships consist of several distinct classes; and *by* discovering which of these have been longest in use, we are naturally led to what may be termed the substratum of our history. We have, therefore,

1. The Indian Names.

Conestoga is, no doubt, our earliest township. Though greatly shorn of its original dimensions, its name, in one of its many forms, goes back to a period long anterior to the earliest European settlement; and as the chosen designation of a tribe and of a stream it very

properly records the fact that the Indians first occupied the land. "Conestogo" is said to signify "the great magic land," which we understand to indicate that the region was even then recognized as possessing extraordinary fertility. It was a name which was readily adopted by the European pioneers, and was by them applied to an extensive region. Long after the organization of Lancaster county, German emigrants are said, in records preserved in the fatherland, to have "sailed to Conestogo."

Tulpehocken is another Indian name that was loosely applied to the great northern region as far as the Blue Mountains. It is said to mean "the land of the turtles," and if we are to judge by the experiences of the early settlers it was not a land of turtle-doves but of genuine "snappers."

Peshtank (now Paxton) in Dauphin county is derived from a word which means "stagnant water"—possibly referring to a stretch of the Susquehanna where the water did not flow swiftly. Cocalico (Koch-hale-kung) means "the serpents' den," and according to the "Chronicon Ephratense" the stream was named after a place not far from Ephrata where serpents abounded.

There are several comparatively recent townships—such as Pequea and Conoy whose names are remotely of Indian origin, but the above are all that are included in the original list.

2. The English Names.

The earliest officials of our county were almost without exception natives of England, and we are, therefore, not surprised to find that a considerable number of our earliest townships were named after places in the mother country. In some instances they chose the names of cities or counties; in others they were satisfied to commemorate obscure parishes. The contrast thus presented is sometimes remarkable. Salisbury and Sadsbury are close neighbors, but the first commemorates a city whose name appears on almost every page of English history, while the original of the second is so obscure that its name is not even mentioned in the British postoffice list. The comparison appears to suggest a little playful irony, which may be unintentional; as though

the pioneers of Sadsbury, whether in Chester or Lancaster county, bad intentionally chosen an obscure village as a toil to the historic splendor of Salisbury. Martic township was originally named Martock, from a town of some importance in the county of Somerset, in the west of England, which may have been one of the last places beheld by the settlers before they started on their adventurous voyage to the new world. Hempfield is said to be so named "because much hemp was raised there" ; but this may possibly be an afterthought. The name is certainly that of a parish in England. Lancaster township, like the county, is named after the city and county of Lancaster, in England. The name goes back to the time when the Roman legions founded camps in England, and signifies Long Camp. Warwick is said to have been named by Richard Carter after his native county of Warwick. The name was well chosen ; for it will be remembered that Warwick is the central county of England, situated where the two great Roman roads crossed. In a somewhat similar way our township of Warwick was situated as nearly as possible at the centre of the county as originally constituted, at the crossing of the western and northern trails. Richard Carter certainly manifested good taste in choosing the name of Warwick for this important township.

Among the more recent place-names of our county there are several whose origin it is not easy to determine. "Bart," as the name of a township, is said by local historians to be an abbreviation of baronet, the title of Governor Sir Wm. Keith; but such an interpretation is hardly credible, and the subject deserves more careful investigation. Tradition must not in such cases be taken too seriously. Elizabeth township is, for instance, declared to have derived its name from a furnace which had been "named in honor of Queen Elizabeth." That the township derived its name from the furnace we do not doubt, but the tradition that the furnace was named in honor of "the virgin queen." one hundred and fifty years after her death, is, to say the least, somewhat romantic.

3. The Irish Names.

At the settlement of Lancaster county

the Scotch-Irish— more properly termed " Ulster Scots "—occupied the post of danger in the northwest. They were a bold and vigorous race, which permanently influenced the history of the State and Nation. Naturally enough they named the settlements after the places in the old country, which they most affectionately remembered. Donegal, for instance, was known to every one as a great maritime county of Ireland, from which, for reasons which we cannot now relate, the greater number of our early immigrants had gone forth. Adjoining it is the county of Londonderry, more generally known as Derry. These names came to occupy a prominent place in the early annals of our county. The township of Donegal has been divided and subdivided, and Derry now belongs to Dauphin county ; but both names remain to commemorate the heroic people from whom they are derived.

In this connection it may be proper to note that the earliest township to be separated from Donegal was appropriately named Rapho. The town of Raphoe in Ireland is the ecclesiastical centre of the county of Donegal. The Roman Catholic bishop of Raphoe is practically bishop of Donegal ; and the Episcopal bishop of Raphoe is also bishop of Derry. It will be seen, therefore, that these names were not given to our townships by mere chance, but rather in accordance with a settled purpose to reproduce as nearly as possible the geographical conditions of the ancient home beyond the sea.

In other parts of the county there are townships whose names are evidently derived from places in the north of Ireland. Coleraine township was organized as early as 1738, and was named after Coleraine in Ireland, a seaport town in the county of Londonderry. Leacock is said by our local historians to have been called after a place in Ireland ; but the exact spot we have been unable to identify. Drumore—more properly written Dromore—is a town of some importance in the county of Down. It will be remembered that the great theologian Jeremy Taylor was, in the seventeenth century, bishop of Dromore.

4. The Welsh Names.

The Welsh settlers of Lancaster county were intelligent and influential. They were early in the field and took a prominent part in public affairs. In some instances, we presume, the Welshmen whose names appear on our early records actually resided in Chester county, or possibly in Montgomery, but held lands in this region which they gradually sold as they became more valuable. Those who actually settled here were most numerous in the eastern and northeastern townships where they left many traces of their occupancy.

Following the example of other nationalities, the Welsh applied familiar names to the places where they dwelt. This was more frequently done in other counties than in our own ; but at least three of our original townships bear Welsh names. These are Caernarvon, Brecknock and Lampeter. Caernarvon, in Wales—now generally written Cartiarvon—is one of the most important counties in the principality, and the town of the same name is large and flourishing. Brecknock, or Brecon, is also the name of a county and town in South Wales. Lampeter seems to have given our local antiquarians some trouble ; but there was actually no occasion for it. About fifty years ago some person, with a vivid imagination, wrote a local novel which he called "The Man with Two Heads." In this extraordinary book the author boldly asserted that Lampeter township was at first called "Lamepeter," in honor of a certain "Lame Peter," who once kept tavern there. The suggestion is so absurd as hardly to deserve serious refutation. There may have been a "lame Peter" in Lampeter ; but for all that, it remains true that the name of the township is derived from Lampeter, in Wales, which is a place of some importance and the seat of an Episcopal Theological Seminary. In the Welsh language the name signifies " Peter's Church."

There is a suggestion of Welsh origin in such a name as "Little Britain " ; but as this belongs to a somewhat later period we must leave it unconsidered. More important for our present purpose it is to cast a glance at the names which remind us of another nationality which has contributed the largest quota to our popula-

tion, and has most deeply impressed its characteristics on our community.

5. The German Names.

At the time of the naming of the townships the German population of the county was small. There were, indeed, a few settlements—locally known by such names as "Graaf's Thal" and "Weberland," but the people were of retiring disposition, and were not acquainted with the language of their rulers. It is not surprising, we think, that the number of German place-names is not large; it is rather a ground for astonishment that such names are found in the earliest records of our county.

Manheim is the name of one of our original townships. The name calls to mind the Palatinate city of that name whose misfortunes must have been still fresh in the memory of our earliest German immigrants. It will be remembered that the German city of Manheim was destroyed during the invasion of 1689. On that occasion the French invaders cast the very stones of which the city was built into the river Neckar; but wherever they went the exiled Palatines bore the memory of the ill-fated city in their hearts. It would be interesting to know which of the German immigrants was the first to suggest the name in connection with one of our original townships. Certainly it was not Baron Stiegel who founded the present borough of Manhelm, and is said to have named it after his birthplace; for the township of Manhelm was named long before the eccentric baron crossed the ocean.

Another township which may claim a place in the German series is Earl, which was named in honor of Hans Graaf (or Graf), a German pioneer whose surname is an equivalent for the English "Earl." To us it may seem to have been a left-handed compliment to translate a name before attempting to render it illustrious; but this was the usual fashion in colonial days. It would have been in better taste, we think, to have left the name unaltered; and we do not doubt that if this had been done "Graaf" would by this time have sounded as euphonious as "Earl;" but it is pleasant to recognize the tact that, even at this early date, there was a disposition to do honor to a German pioneer.

At a later period other townships were honored with names that suggest reminiscences of the Fatherland. Strasburg, for instance, is said to have been named by Matthias Schleiermacher (Slaymaker) in honor of the beautiful city which "France had seized but Germany has won." It is, however, certain that, to use the words of Bancroft, "the Germans have not claimed the position to which they are honorably entitled;" and in the history of our county this fact is fully exemplified. Ancient customs are giving place to new forms of culture. In the city of Lancaster we no longer recognize our environs by such names as "Bettels-tadt" anti "Wolfebuckel," and in a few more generations the German language will probably have disappeared, except as a subject of literary study. We hope, however, that the peculiar Anglo-German character of our county will never be changed, and that to the latest generation our people may be characterized by German truth and honesty.

6. The Scriptural Names.

In our local nomenclature the religious character of the people is plainly apparent. In our earliest list of townships, it is true, the only name which is plainly of Scriptural origin is Lebanon—a township which has become the nucleus of an adjacent county. Lebanon, we remember, is a Hebrew word, signifying "white," or "snowy," and may have been properly applied to the range of mountains to which this township originally extended. Not long after its organization it was divided and for the separated portion the name of "Bethel" was chosen. Bethel signifies "the house of God," and the name itself was an acknowledgment of earnest, Christian faith. Within our present limits we have "Ephrata"—a beautiful scriptural name, signifying "fertility." As the chosen designation of a religious society it was known soon after the organization of the county, but it was not until 1833 that it became the name of a township. Other portions of our county are not without religious suggestions. It is a subject of congratulation that "Paradise" and "Eden" are near at hand, and that "Providence" is always with us.

In discussing our early nomenclature

we have but traced the outlines of the subject. If time permitted it would be easy to show that every place-name is a milestone in our history. Coming down to more recent times, we should have to show that even those townships which have been pleased to be known by the names of great men have not chosen their appellations at random. The townships which are thus designated are "Penn," "Fulton" and "Clay." Could any names more completely illustrate the historic origin, the intellectual development and the political preferences of our county?

In studying our theme we have been interested by the fact that every national element in our population, with perhaps a single exception, has left its traces upon our nomenclature. Our townships have no names suggestive of the French traders — the Chartieres, Bizailions and LeTorts — who were once so prominent in our local history. These people came and went, leaving no impression on our subsequent annals. We have, indeed, many families with French surnames, but we believe most of these to be descended from French Huguenots, who had sought refuge in Germany and had become pretty thoroughly Germanized before they crossed the ocean.

A French origin might, indeed, be suggested for the name of one of our townships and towns, though we are not aware that this has ever been done. Mount Joy is a name which appears to be thoroughly English, and in its present form is suggestive of perfect happiness. It may, however, be remembered that "Mont-Joie" was the ancient battle cry of the French nation; and that many an army rushed into the conflict shouting: "*Mont-Joie et Saint Denis.*" If a French pioneer had been given an opportunity of naming his dwelling place in America, he might readily have called it "Mont-Joie," and it would not have taken long to reduce it to its present form. This, however, is a mere suggestion, which is not seriously presented.

The township is, indeed, declared on excellent authority to have been named in honor of General Robert Stewart, Viscount Mount Joy, of the county of Londonderry, in Ireland.

The history of Lancaster county is an

extensive field, which hitherto has not been extensively cultivated. It suggests many themes that deserve minute consideration. To the earnest student it offers many encouragements ; but the successful accomplishment of our task demands faithful and unremitting labor.

Author: Dubbs, J. H. (Joseph Henry), 1838-1910.

Title: The names of the townships : how they were named:
nomenclature of our townships / by Joseph H. Dubbs, D.D.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Names, Geographical--Pennsylvania--Lancaster County.
Lancaster County (Pa.)--Names.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society,
1896-97

Description: [3]-13 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. a,
no. 1

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.1

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

=====

+++++

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