

JAMES ANNESLY'S (LORD ALTAMONT'S) TRADITIONAL
RESIDENCE IN LANCASTER COUNTY, FROM 1728 TO
1741 — NOT A FACT — ONLY UNFOUNDED
TRADITION.

By H. Frank Eshleman.

Rupp, in a foot note page 243 of his History of Lancaster County, says that "James, afterwards Lord Altham, was confined in the prison at Wright's Ferry."—that he "came to this country in 1728, when quite young, and served his time as James Annesly, with a farmer on the Lancaster Road. For some cause he ran away from his master; and was caught and confined in the jail at Columbia. He was a fine singer and the neighbors frequently visited the prison to hear him sing. . . . The facts concerning this singular case are taken from the evidence given on his trial and may be relied on as authentic."

Rupp also states that Arthur Annesly (Lord Altham) married Mary Sheffield natural daughter of the Earl of Buckingham. By her in 1715, he had a son, James, the subject of these remarks. . . . the year 1722 (his father formed an intimacy with Gregory. His wife died about this time. Miss Gregory, expecting to become his wife, exerted herself to alienate his affections from his son by insinuating that he was not his lawful child. . . . In November, 1727, Lord Altham died; and his brother, Richard, wishing to possess the estate and title took measures to get rid of his nephew, James, by having him entered on board an American vessel, which sailed from Dublin in April, 1728. He was landed at Philadelphia, then in his thirteenth year, and sold as a redemptioner; and actually served out twelve years of his time at rough labor, when a seeming accident, in the year 1740, brought him to such acquaintances as led, in the next year, to his return home. . . . Two Irishmen, John and William Broders, travelling the Lancaster Road in 1740, stopped at the house near the forty mile stone, where James was in service with an old German. . . . These countrymen, perceived that James Annesly was the son of Arthur. The two Broders volunteered to go back to Ireland and testify to the discovery and kept their word and appeared at the trial. . . . Robert Ellis, Esq., of Philadelphia, heard of his case and procured passage for him to Admiral Vernon in the West Indies by whom he was landed in England. . . . and action was brought against his uncle in 1743 and verdict was given in favor of James. This is quoted by Rupp from the Columbia Spy Vol. 2, No. 35.

There are both truth and error in this statement of the case. The writer, picked up, in London, during the summer of 1924, "**Memoirs** of an Unfortunate Young Nobleman, returned from a Thirteen Years Salvery in America, Where he had been sent by the wicked Contrivance of his Cruel Uncle," published in 1743, in London. These **Memoirs** consist of 510 pages, and detail Annesly's experience, though he is called Chevalier James Altamont, in them.

The **Memoirs** make no mention of Columbia, nor of Wright's Ferry, nor of Lancaster Town, nor of Lancaster County.

Let us cite the several passages, in these **Memoirs** which will show us where Annesly did spend his 13 years, here in America. By this means we shall be able to correct the errors in the foot note mentioned and partly quoted above.

Altamont gives no dates in this narration. He does state his age at different intervals. The **Memoirs** are divided into two books, of nearly equal number of pages. The first book details his experience in America, etc.; and the second is devoted to the struggle against his uncle to recover his estate.

Page 55 of the first book he says he was deceived by his uncle, who pretended he was sending him to a school and instead put him on a ship and

sent him to America; that very soon afterwards, the Chevalear's father died, (p. 56).

He further says that he was sold to a rich planter in New Castle and remained with him for seven years (p. 61). Here he says he was entered among this planter's slaves; that before parting with the captain who had brought him over he begged him not to forget letting his father know his condition.

Altamont says that here "a new world now openede to his view, in which everything was strange to him. The habits and odd manners of the Indians . . . various birds, and four-footed animals, so different from those in Europe."

He tells of his labors and states that among other acts he was set to cutting timber to make pipe staves, "which comomdity" he says "is a considerable branch of the traffic of that country."

Telling us about the condition of redemptioners, in this neighborhood so near Lancaster County he says, "the hardships of an American slavery. . . are infinitely more terrible than a Turkish one. . . . for besides incessant toil they are exposed to great heat and cold" in this climate so different from that of Ireland. He goes on and says, "then after being allowed no shelter from either of these extremes, all the refreshments afforded. . . is pone, a sort of bread made with Indian corn, heavy on the stomach, and insipid to the palate with a draught of water, or at best mingled with a little ginger and molasses they feast with a dish of hominy or mush. . . is set before them, moistened with the fat of bacon or hog's lard." He says also that among the servants was a woman over 60 years old whose husband shipped her to Pennsylvania to get rid of her, and that America formed a means for all kinds of riddance from European soil, which people in Europe could avail themselves of, if they had sufficient influence with ship captains. Those shipped abroad in that manner were helpless. He tells us that he was compelled to sleep in a little hammock (69).

After he had served his master Druman, over four years, he heard of a ship that was about to sail from Dover "a great seaport town in the next county" (p. 73).

The chevalear tells us that a fellow-slave ran away and was recaptured and that the master, "ordered him to be stripped down to the waist and tied to a post before the door, and then to receive twenty lashes from each of his fellow slaves; and after this he was put down into a dungeon and kept there four days, at the expiration of which he was resold to a planter in Philadelphia and never again appeared at New Castle." (p. 76).

These items on the customs of the masters, occupations, etc., are set down here for the purpose of giving facts concerning those times, by the mouth of a narrator, speaking of what he saw and experienced. The place being so close to Lancaster County, what is stated, no doubt, applies to our own neighborhood.

James says that after having served five years he had reached the age of seventeen (p. 77). At this time he says he ran away from his master (p. 78). He intended to reach the Delaware River and escape to Europe, but he says, "He mistook his way at first setting out, and without suspecting he had done so, kept running on till, instead of Delaware he came to SUSQUEHANNA, a large river that parts the province of Pennsylvania from that of the Five Nations of the Iroquois." (p. 79). He says he knew this was not the Delaware after arriving at the Susquehanna but was not dismayed, "for as he saw some shipping, though at a great distance, he hoped he should be able to find some means of getting near them, either by boat or travelling on by the coast." This would indicate that he was very far down the Susquehanna, at the place where he reached that river, and quite likely not in Pennsylvania or of course not in Lancaster County. (p. 79)

He says (p. 79) that he perceived "that he was not very far from a town," but he "chose not to venture to it" and slept in the woods that night.

Early the next morning he "renewed his course" but was ignorant of his direction for though he met people he feared to speak to them. And "he wandered thus for three days. . . and laid himself down at the foot of a tree. . . night has not yet drawn her curtain. . . when he was surprised by the trampling of horses." (p. 79)

At this point occurred the events which landed Annesly or Altamont in jail; but not in the jail at Columbia as the note in Rupp states. On the evening last mentioned, in the memoirs, Annesly found himself face to face with a married woman and her lover, and an attendant eloping from her husband and he fell in with them and travelled along. Pursuers came upon them very shortly, as they were journeying toward Apoquinemink, a seaport where a vessel was lying in which they intended to embark for Holland, and Annesly was to go also. Just where Apoquinemink is I do not know exactly but it is or was near New Castle (p. 82). It was also three days' journey from the mouth of the Susquehanna, according to the narrative. Annesly or Altamont, feared his former master would re-take him since (he says) Apoquinemink was "in the neighborhood of New Castle." Therefore later the same evening on which he chanced to meet the elopres, "after they had rested themselves a short space, they remounted and pursued their journey, the chevalear (Annestly or Altamont) following as fast as he could, imploring Heaven to give him strength to keep up with them." He says that after they travelled a few furlongs the pursuing husband and his associates overtook the elopers, and they were all made prisoners (p. 83). He says, "Her companion and his servant were bound on their own horses, and the unfortunate chevalear (Altamont) had both his hands ty'd and fastened to the tail of one of their horses, and in this wretched plight were they conducted to a little village, where they remained till morning; but in different rooms; and as soon as day broke, bound as before, and made to travel in the same manner, stopping no more till they arrived at CHESTER TOWN, where they were all immediately carried to the common jail, and lodged apart as they had been in the village." (p. 83). From the little town to Chester, he says they travelled all the next day. (p. 83).

Looking at the map one will see that the prisoners were taken up the Delaware River, from near New Castle to Chester, on the same river; and it may be the little town (little at that time and younger than New Castle) was Wilmington. From the place on the Susquehanna where he met the unfortunate party, to a point near New Castle is northeast about 32 miles. Thus in this journey from near the mouth of the Susquehanna to New Castle and from there to Chester, the party did not pass anywhere near Columbia or any other part of Lancaster County.

Altamont states that for "five weeks did he continue in this dreadful suspense," that is in the jail (p. 85); and that in that time he and those with whom he travelled were tried. In his case there was a "demur" and he was set at liberty; but that he saw the "spectacle of the two unhappy lovers' execution, than which nothing was ever more pity moving. . . . she swooned and half anticipated the work of the executioner, to see the only man she had ever loved suffer for her sake. They embraced and when separated broke from the arms that held them and embraced again." (p. 86).

From Chester jail, where his former master saw him, Altamont was taken back by his master to New Castle; and the two years he had to serve were doubled, "se he had now fours more to serve as a slave" he says. (p. 87). Page 85 he says that he had never been in Chester before.

His master now became more cruel to him and on complaint made to the justice of the peace the master was ordered to sell him to one who would be more human. By cruelty this master had forfeited his right. So he was sold to another, for four years in the same county and he remained until his time was nearly up and ran away. He says, "He bore it three years and perhaps twelve months more, and ran away" (p. 88).

He was recaptured and sentenced to four years more, or in his own words, "was mulcted no less than four years" and this made the 13 years (p. 88).

His master's daughter, Maria, and an Indian maid both fell violently in love with him, and after he left the place finally, the daughter became a low person and married a person of no repute and the Indian maid drowned herself. (p. 90).

His master learning of the love affair with his daughter sold him and made him believe that he was free, and pretended that he was taking him to Dover to take ship home, but conducted him through Dover to Chichester in Sussex County and sold him to another master to serve out his time (pp. 111 and 113).

His new master was kind to him and gave him books (115) and three years later died (p 116). He was then sold by the deceased master's estate to a new master in New Castle County in sight of the plantation of his first master and this master was kind and gentle (pp. 116 and 117). Maria, the former master's daughter became quite degraded (p. 117).

The new master's wife tried to poison him because he had discovered her making love to one of her husband's slaves and plotting to rob the husband and then flee to Europe (p. 122). He tells us that he remained in New Castle, with this last master, till his time was served out, in all serving 13 years. (p. 139). Soon afterwards he returned to Europe. (p. 165).

From all this it is obvious, that he was never in Lancaster County; and that the news article in the Spy which Rupp quoted, is in its main features incorrect and untrue. It is certain that he did not do very much singing; but spent most of his time in gloominess, especially when he was in Chester jail, in danger of the fate of an accomplice, helping criminals to escape.

He does not mention the years he was here; but his memoirs were published in 1743, right after the trial in which he secured his rightful estate from his covetous uncle.

In volume two, page 222 he says that persons who knew him in Pennsylvania were witnesses for him in his suit to recover his estate.

Taking his narrative as a whole, it is stranger than fiction. It is not at all surprising that "Roderick Random" and "Florence McCarty" were based upon his life by writers of fiction. When his memoirs of events, both here in America and in Great Britain, recovering his estate are read in full, one finds that the pages abound in material, which only the most imaginative minds could invent, if they did not have the real facts to furnish their scenes and situations. Then, too, a very complete description of life and manners here in our infant days, is shown in what Annesly details of conditions as he found them. And as an entrancing bit of personal history, weaving a life, or in fact weaving many lives into the times and situation here in the Susquehanna and Delaware Valleys, in the early part of the second quarter of the eighteenth century, these memoirs will furnish one who reads them completely, a most delightful entertainment, and an intimate visit with the peoples of those ancient days.

H. FRANK ESHLEMAN.

Author: Eshleman, Henry Frank, 1869-1953.

Title: James Annesly's (Lord Altamontis) traditional residence in Lancaster County : from 1728 to 1741--not a fact--only unfounded tradition / by H. Frank Eshleman.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Annesley, James, 1715-1760.
Lancaster County (Pa.)--History--17th century--Errors, inventions, etc.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1925

Description: 33-36 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 29, no. 3

Notes: Book entitled "Memoirs of an unfortunate young nobleman, returned from a thirteen years years slavery in America, where he had been sent by the wicked contrivance of his cruel uncle."

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.29

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

=====

+++++

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