

DATE ON STATE HIGHWAY SIGNS CORRECTED

By William Frederic Worner

Students of our local history know that on May 2nd, 1729, the county of Lancaster, in Pennsylvania, was created by the Lieutenant Governor, Patrick Gordon, and his council. By an Act of Assembly, passed May 10th, 1729, it was organized. The name Lancaster was given to the new county by John Wright, who was born in Lancashire, England.

On May 16th, 1730 Andrew Hamilton conveyed, in trust, "three several lots of land in the town of Lancaster" upon which were subsequently erected a court house, city hall, public market and county prison. The official founding of Lancaster actually took place when Andrew Hamilton donated these lots for public use. There may have been a small settlement in this vicinity before Lancaster county was created, and there probably was; or the land may have been occupied by renters or squatters, sometimes called settlers. It is certain, however, that the name Lancaster was not applied to the county before 1729, nor to the town before 1730, when these pieces of land were conveyed for public use.

Recently, the Pennsylvania Department of Highways marked with signs the state routes entering Lancaster, on which signs it is stated that the town was founded in 1721. This is nine years earlier than the date on which Lancaster is known, according to official records, to have had its beginnings. Confident that a mistake had been made, the attention of the Highway Department was called to the date, with the suggestion that correction be made, in the interest of historical accuracy.

LETTER OF WILLIAM F. WORNER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS

Lancaster, Pa., March 2nd, 1927.

To the Secretary of Highways,
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Dear Sir:

I am taking the liberty of writing to you upon a subject of much interest to our Lancaster County Historical Society.

On the Lincoln Highway, a few feet beyond western boundary of Lancaster city, is an iron marker, painted blue and gold, erected by the State, on which is inscribed:

"Lancaster
named for
Town and Shire in England.
Founded
1721."

Our Lancaster County Historical Society would be interested to learn the source from which this information was obtained. We have no records to show that Lancaster was founded in 1721. All the facts we have state that the county was erected in 1729, and the town laid out in 1730. There was, of course, a settlement of people here before the town was officially plotted, and squatters may have been on the site prior to 1721. Before 1730, when the name "Lancaster" was given to the town, the settlement was known as "Hickory Town" and "Gibson's Pasture." According to the records in our Historical Society and those of our local court house, 1730 was the year in which Lancaster was officially founded, and the name Lancaster bestowed upon it.

If you have records proving that Lancaster was founded in 1721, we shall be very glad, for the sake of historical accuracy, to preserve the information

in our Society; if not, should not the date on the sign be corrected? I shall be very glad to hear from you relative to this matter.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM F. WORNER.

LETTER OF W. H. CONNELL TO WILLIAM F. WORNER

Harrisburg, Pa., March 15th, 1927.

Mr. William F. Worner, Librarian,
Lancaster County Historical Society,
Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Dear Sir:

In response to your letter of March 2nd, concerning the date of founding of Lancaster as shown on our signs, the authority for all our historical inscriptions has been Colonel Shoemaker, of the State Historical Commission.

We are referring your inquiry to him and we are quite willing to make correction if the date should be shown as 1730, or some other year, in place of 1721.

Very truly yours,

W. H. CONNELL,

Engineering Executive and Deputy Secretary of Highways.

LETTER OF WILLIAM F. WORNER TO COLONEL HENRY W. SHOEMAKER

Lancaster, Pa., March 21st, 1927.

Colonel Henry W. Shoemaker,
Pennsylvania Historical Commission,
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

My Dear Col. Shoemaker:

I wish to call your attention to a matter of some historical importance to us.

I am inclosing a copy of a letter sent to the Department of Highways, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, on March 2nd, which is self-explanatory. The members of our Lancaster County Historical Society feel certain that the date on the signs erected outside the corporate limits of Lancaster is incorrect. We took this matter up with the Department of Highways. Mr. W. H. Connell, Engineering Executive and Deputy Secretary of Highway, in his reply, dated March 15th, a copy of which I am also inclosing, states that he got his authority for this date from you.

The members of our Historical Society are, naturally, very much interested in this matter, and will be glad to know if you feel quite sure that Lancaster was founded in 1721. Should you be unable find proof for this position, we hope that the date on the signs will be changed. Mr. Connell, in his letter of March 15th, says that he will be quite willing to make the correction.

Trusting that you will be good enough to favor us with a reply, I remain,

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM F. WORNER.

LETTER OF COLONEL HENRY W. SHOEMAKER TO WILLIAM F. WORNER

71 Broadway, New York, March 30th, 1927.

Mr. William F. Worner, Librarian,
Lancaster County Historical Society,
Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Dear Mr. Worner:

I was glad to get your letter of March 21st with enclosures. Mr. Connell promptly took up your criticism of the Lancaster sign with me and I visited Lancaster personally and inspected the sign, and suggested to Mr. Van Duzer, who has charge of the erection of State Highway signs, that the change be made.

While it is perfectly true that Lancaster was not founded until 1730, there was a considerable settlement on the site in 1721 and in the majority of cases, towns which bore earlier names and later had them changed, have insisted that the date of the original settlement be used on the signs. However, since it is the wish of your Society to have the date correspond with the actual laying out of the town, orders have been given to change the sign to 1730. I trust that this will be done in the near future. I am writing to Harrisburg today in order to have this change expedited.

I am always glad to hear from you and appreciate your calling this matter to my attention. With best wishes, I remain,

Very sincerely yours,

HENRY W. SHOEMAKER,
Chairman, Pennsylvania Historical Commission.

LETTER OF W. H. CONNELL TO WILLIAM F. WORNER

Harrisburg, Pa., March 24th, 1927.

Mr. William F. Worner, Librarian,
Lancaster County Historical Society,
Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Reference is made to your letter of March 18th in connection with the historical signs on the state routes entering Lancaster.

Colonel Shoemaker agrees with you that the date on the sign should be 1730. At the time when the information was gathered for these signs there was some question as to whether we would show the date of founding or the date of earliest settlement.

According, we are making arrangements to have the signs changed.

Very truly yours,

W. H. CONNELL,
Engineering Executive and Deputy Secretary of Highways.

NOTE: There was not even the smallest nucleus of a town, where Lancaster City now stands, in 1721. When Hamilton secured the site for the town seat in 1730, it was found that the title of what is now the central part of the city, was still in the province, not even warranted to any one. This "vacant" tract was surrounded by farm warranted about 1718. The ancient records and original maps disclose this fact very clearly. Witham Marshe, who says (in his diary, written on the spot) in 1744, that the town was not begun more than 16 years prior thereto, to wit about 1728, was no doubt accurate and correct about the matter. There is no record anywhere of the sale of lots prior to the laying out of the town.

H. F. E.