

Lancaster in 1776

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

AMONG the rare books in the private library of the Hon. Charles I. Landis, President Judge of the Courts of Lancaster county and a former president of the Lancaster County Historical Society, is one entitled, "The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1777." The book was published in New York in 1924 by Lincoln Macveagh and the Dial Press; and in 1925, in London, by Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

Nicholas Cresswell, the diarist, was born in Crowden-le-Booth, Edale, England, in December, 1750. Before reaching the early age of 24, Nicholas, who had been assisting his father in the management of his Edale estate, determined to emigrate to America. He planned to engage in farming in the new world, believing that a man of his resources and accomplishments could live better and make greater advancements in America than in England. In view of the fact that land in America was good and the price low, Mr. Cresswell reasoned that agriculture, being in its infant state there, could be greatly improved.

Obtaining the consent of his parents to leave England, Nicholas went to Liverpool. He kept a diary from the time he left his parental home in Edale on Thursday, March 1st, 1774, until his return in 1777.

On Saturday, April 9th, 1774, he sailed, in the ship "Molly," from Liverpool, and, after a voyage of more than five weeks, landed at Urbanna, Rappahannock river, Virginia, on Tuesday, May 17th, 1774. Two months after arriving in America, he sailed in a schooner for the Barbadoes, returning on August 31st. He traveled extensively during his stay in this country, which was then in the throes of rebellion against England.

On August 23rd, 1776, Cresswell left Leesburg, Virginia, for Philadelphia. That night he lodged in York, Pa. Under date of Saturday, August 24th, 1776, he entered in his diary:

"Left Bentley's Tavern. Crossed Little Pipe Creek at a Bridge. Breakfasted at Tanny Town, [Maryland] small place, inhabitants chiefly Dutch. Crossed the Pennsylvania line. Puter [Peter] Littlis, town very small. Dined at Mr. Callister's, in Hannover town, which is a smart little town with a Church, chiefly Dutch people. Lodged at York Town, [Pa.] the sign of The Brew-house. The Landlord is a Dutchman, with a confounded hard name and a d—m dirty house. This is a pretty large town. Some manufactories of Iron. Pleasant and well laid out, the Inhabitants Dutch and Irish. Droll adventure this evening."

On the following day, Sunday, August 25th, 1776, Mr. Cresswell entered in his diary:

"Left York Town. Breakfasted at The Sign of the Plough, a Dutch house about 3 miles from Y. T. Crossed Susquehanna River at Wright's Ferry. River about 1¼ miles broad. Dined at Lancaster, The Sign of the Two Highlandmen. Landlord's name Ross."

Judge Landis, in a letter to me relative to the location of this ancient hostelry, writes:

"I never heard of a tavern called The Sign of the Two Highlandmen. Did you? The Ross Cresswell speaks of was William Ross. He had a license in 1775, '76, '77 and '78. His name then disappears as a tavernkeeper. On August 22nd, 1779, Thomas Poultney deeded to William Ross the property on the north-east corner of Penn square and East King street, which had before that been owned by Robert Fulton's father. A portion of it is the Eshleman prop-

erty. The inquiry arises whether this was the location of The Sign of the Two Highlandmen? Very likely it was, though Ross is named in 1779 as a merchant."

Mr. Cresswell writes: "This [Lancaster] is a large town, but the situation is disagreeable between two hills, several good buildings and some manufactories of Guns and Woolen, but no navigation. Four hundred English prisoners here. Crossed Conistogo Creek. Lodged at The Sign of the Duke of Cumberland, the Landlord is a Scotch-Irish Rebel Colonial and his house is dirty as a Hog's sty."

The Duke of Cumberland tavern was located on the old road from Philadelphia to Lancaster, about one-fourth of a mile to the east of Old Leacock Presbyterian church. The house which was used as a tavern, is still standing, and, in 1916, was owned and occupied by Samuel P. Smoker. (See Proceedings of the Lancaster County Historical Society, Vol. 20, pages 215-216.)

Mr. Cresswell described the land in Lancaster county as being "good in general. Farmers rich and industrious. Irish and Dutch inhabitants."

Under date of Monday, August 26th, 1776, the young English traveler made this entry in his diary:

"Left the Duke of Cumberland, which is one of the dirtiest houses I have ever put my foot in. Breakfasted at The Waggon, the Landlord a rigid Irish Presbyterian. Dined at The Cross Keys. Lodged at The Spread Eagle, a clean Dutchman's house. Land broken and hilly, but the Farmers seem rich, good stock, and their land well cultivated. Passed 5 companies [of soldiers (?)] going to camp."

The following day Mr. Cresswell wrote:

"Left The Spread Eagle. Crossed Schuylkill Ferry, got to Philadelphia to breakfast. In our journey from Leesburg [Virginia] I have seen only 3 signs hanging, the rest pulled down by Soldiers. Making my observations. Lodged at The Black Horse in Market Street."

In September, 1776, Cresswell was in New York city, where he tried to join the British army. He was, however, unsuccessful, and returned to Virginia.

In the spring of 1777 he decided to return to his native land. On April 30th he was received by the governor at Yorktown. Permission was given him to leave the country provided he did not sail on a British warship. May 6th found him on board the "Bell and Mary." Eight days later, he entered New York harbor. On August 21st, 1777, he arrived at Portsmouth, England.

On April 21st, 1781, he was married to Mary Mellor. He died July 14th, 1804, in the fifty-fourth year of his age, at Idridgehay, and was buried in Wirksworth Parish church, Derbyshire.

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IN the early autumn of 1777 the borough of Lancaster was visited by a clever Yankee, who had undertaken a journey on horseback from Providence, R. I., to Charleston, S. C. He kept a diary of the trip. This diary was published in New York in 1856, under the title of "Men and Times of the Revolution, or Memoirs of Elkanah Watson." The book was edited by Winslow C. Watson.

Elkanah Watson, who made the memorable journey, was born in Plymouth, Mass., January 22nd, 1758. At the early age of fifteen, he left the place of his birth for Providence, R. I., to become an apprentice to John Brown, one of the most enterprising merchants of his day and benefactor of Brown University. The commerce of Providence was prostrated by the Revolutionary war. In August, 1777, John Brown, and his brother, Nicholas, proposed to Mr. Watson to take charge of about fifty thousand dollars, a