

# Citizens of Lancaster Petition Legislature for a City Charter in 1798

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

**T**HE Lancaster Intelligencer and Journal of Tuesday, June 15th, 1841, announced that an old document—a petition for a charter to change Lancaster's form of government from that of a borough into a city—had been called to the attention of the editor. It was stated that the ancient paper was written and signed not less than forty-three years before. As this statement was made by one of the surviving signers in June, 1841, we assume that the petition was prepared and signed in the year 1798.

This document was signed by the judicial officers of the county courts, the justices of the peace, county officers and leading men of the town. Among the names we recognize the ancient fathers of the town who petitioned the Legislature of the Commonwealth for a city charter for Lancaster borough and for the establishment of a court, invested with powers similar to the mayor's court, which functioned in 1841.

The petition is as follows:

"To The Honorable The Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in General Assembly met.

"The petition of the subscribers, freeholders and inhabitants of the borough of Lancaster, respectfully sheweth: That the Borough of Lancaster was incorporated by letters patent, on the first day of May, in the year 1742. That in the said letters patent is contained a clause, in these words. 'It shall and may be lawful for the burgesses, high constable and assistants for the time being, to assemble town meetings, as often as they shall find occasion; at which meetings they may make such ordinances and rules, not repugnant to, or inconsistent with, the laws of the said province, as to the greatest part of the inhabitants shall seem necessary and convenient for the good government of the said borough'.

"That the said charter, by an act passed on the 19th of June, 1777, has been revived, and is the existing charter of the said borough.

"That at the time when the said charter was first granted, the inhabitants of the said borough were comparatively few, and the inconvenience of assembling town meetings, and procuring the concurrence of the greater part of the inhabitants, might not have been so sensibly felt, but the same has now become impracticable — and your petitioners are not tenacious of a right, from which no benefits can result — and they are of opinion that the essential liberty of the citizens will not be endangered, as long as the right to remove their officers at stated periods, is reserved to them.

"That an assembly, consisting of a whole city or town, cannot deliberate; and laws cannot be ordained and established therein for the benefit of the community. The peaceable and the prudent will generally wish to decline a public controversy, and experience has taught that in assemblies of the people, when the number is great, order cannot be sustained; and the will of a majority is too often controlled or defeated.

"That the Borough of Lancaster has increased and still daily increases in extent and population, and ought to be able to provide for the order, safety and happiness of its citizens. But the administration of government therein, under its present charter, is inadequate to the advancement of public health and order, to the suppression of vice and immorality, and to the promotion of trade, industry, and happiness. Your petitioners, therefore, are desirous that the inhabitants thereof may be invested with more speedy, vigorous and effective powers of government, than are at present established.

"And, whereas, in all large towns,—owing to frequent emigrations, and the coming in and the going out of transient persons,—offences against the criminal laws, become more frequent than in the country. By reason whereof the time of the Court of Quarter Sessions is consumed in the trial and punishment of petty offences, to the great detriment of the interests of the county at large in more important and weighty concerns. Your petitioners, therefore, conceive it would be of great benefit to the town and county at large, if a court was erected in the said borough, of concurrent jurisdiction with the sessions, respecting the lesser offences against the laws of society; and that it would also be of benefit to the inhabitants of the said borough, if a power was invested in another court of civil jurisdiction to hear and decide upon all pleas which by the laws of this Commonwealth, come under the cognizance of a single justice.

"Your petitioners, therefore, pray that the honorable House of Representatives would grant them leave to bring in a Bill, to be passed into a Law, to change the charter of incorporation of the Borough of Lancaster, and to erect the same into a city corporate with adequate powers for the good government thereof.

"And your petitioners, as in duty beyond, will ever pray."

The petition was signed by John Hubley, Jacob Slough, Andrew Graff, Jacob Graeff, John W. Kittera, Abraham Witmer, Paul Zantzinger, Daniel Witmer, John Joseph Henry, Jeremiah Mosher, Charles Smith, George Musser, George Slough, George Graeff, Frederick Kuhn, Ludwig Lauman, Adam Weaver, D. Lauman, Jr., Mathias Slough, Christ Mayer, G. Ross, David R. Barton, John Burg, Jacob Krug, John Graeff, Peter Getz, Wm. Crawford, Jno. Norris, John Kerr, Abm. Brenneman, Jacob Stahl, Geo. Kleiss, Abram. Henry, Christopher Demuth, Fred. Steinman, Conrad Shwartz, Michael Mosser, John Gundacker, Nicholas Nagle, Leonard Eichholtz, Henry Willcocks, Christopher Hager, Christ Demvalt, James Jacks, Adam Reigart, Jr., Will Hamilton, John Bausman, Caleb Cope, Jacob Carpenter, Jacob Dickert, John Jordan, Henry Stauffer, Godlieb Nauman, W. F. Martin, Benjamin Schaum, Philip Deane, Adam Gast, Henry Dehuff, Jacob Lahn, Joseph Habacker, Jacob Hoff, George Cronolls, Henry Lechler, Christ. Reigart, Lenhart Bubach, John Young, Samuel Humes, Wm. Glatz, Robert Hays, Christopher Brunner, Wm. Michael, John Cunningham, Peter Miller, P. Hoofnagle, John Ewing, John Moore, William Michael, Samuel Moore, Amos Brumfield, Jacob Lindy, Christ. Leonard, Daniel Riblet, Wm. Ross, Peter Gonter, Jacob Gross, Geo. Brungord, Andrew Keiss, Thomas Bailey.

The editor of the Lancaster Intelligencer and Journal stated that William Michael and Adam Reigart, and perhaps one or two more, were all that remained in 1841 of that goodly company, and were the only witnesses left.

The petition, if presented to the Legislature, was not acted on favorably at that time as Lancaster was not incorporated as a city until March 20th, 1818.

## **Mennonites of Donegal and Manor Townships Address Letter to Governor McKean**

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

**O**N March 11th, 1800, a number of Mennonites who resided in Donegal and Manor townships, Lancaster county, Pa., addressed a communication to Thomas McKean, governor of Pennsylvania, which was as follows:

"It is not our custom, on any occasion, to write letters of civility; nor do we wish that this present address should be considered as such. As a plain people, we like to speak the language of our hearts with a simplicity conformable thereto.

"You have been elected to the supreme magistracy of this state, by the freemen of Pennsylvania. In this situation you can claim our respect, with that of our fellow citizens of other denominations. This is due to you on account of your office; yet we take the liberty to declare that we think yourself also to be particularly entitled thereto on account of the integrity of your private character and of your many services rendered to our country; and we are, therefore, fully convinced that those have given you a just claim to the entire confidence of your fellow-citizens. Respecting, therefore, your former conduct, we trust you will, in fulfilling the duties of the high office with which you have been honored, show yourself a firm defender of their political and religious rights. Our excellent constitution has granted unto us, and to others of similar religious sentiments, some particular privileges which are accommodated to the well-known principles of our several societies. As to our conscientious scruples against bearing arms, we are exempted from this duty when we make compensation for it; and it is with great satisfaction that we acknowledge in the present governor of Pennsylvania a principal supporter of this benevolent provision in our constitution. For our principles command us to manifest benevolence towards everybody. We profess ourselves to be friends of peace; and hope not to be backward in our duties as citizens of a free state.

"Trusting in your justice, wisdom and experience, we will, with all our hearts and abilities, support your administration; earnestly hoping that your exertions to promote the public welfare will perfectly succeed; and we pray you to accept our sincere wishes for a long enjoyment of your life, your health and every temporal blessing."<sup>1</sup>

On June 10th, 1800, Thomas McKean, sent the following reply:

"A pressure of public business at the close of the last session of the Legislature, and a visit since paid to my family in Philadelphia, have deprived

<sup>1</sup> The Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser, Wednesday, July 30th, 1800.