IN attempting to present a portrait of William Allen, who played a great rôle in provincial Pennsylvania as chief justice, legislator, political controversalist, merchant prince, land speculator and patron of the arts and sciences, one is confronted by the fact that in the letters to and from him, and in other manuscript and printed material, scarcely any mention is made of his personal appearance. However, looking at the original painting of him by Benjamin West in the Independence Hall Collection, one would judge him to have been a well-built man of medium height. He is portrayed in all the finery of his time. With his three-cornered hat under his left arm, one notices his curly light-colored periwig surmounting his high forehead. He is possessed of broad temples, eyes of unusual brightness, a pointed nose, a long full face with pronounced lips, and a heavy round chin. His whole figure and attitude are that of self-possession, shrewdness, energy, as well as boundless determination.

The grandfather of the illustrious man, the subject of this study, was among the group of sectaries who fled from Sterlingshire to escape the persecutions of James II. It is very likely that he emigrated to Ireland. At least it is recorded that his son, William Allen, the father of the chief justice, had a sister Catherine Cally and an uncle William Craige, who lived at Dunganon, Ireland. Although Allen's grandfather apparently did not reach America, his father was among the Scotch-Irish who came to Pennsylvania. Here he engaged in the mercantile business in Philadelphia and was regarded as a "considerable promoter of the trade of the province, and a man of good character and estate."  

1 This paper, read at the First Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association held at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, April 29, 1933, is part of a somewhat detailed life of William Allen, prepared by the author.  
William, one of four children of the merchant and his wife, Margaret Budd Allen, was born in Philadelphia on August 5, 1704, and was baptized later in the month at the First Presbyterian Church. Two of his brothers, Thomas and James, died either in infancy or in early youth, for in his father's will, only John and William are mentioned as heirs.

The greater part of Allen's youth and young manhood was spent in England. Little, however, is known of his activities there. On August 24, 1720, he was admitted to the Middle Temple in London and on September 9, 1720, he became a pensioner at Clare Hall, later Clare College, Cambridge. In all, he remained abroad for six years. As his life work he chose the legal profession and in preparation for this he pursued his studies, although he was not called to the bar in England. That he was financially well taken care of is evidenced by a provision made in his father's will, that he was "to have five hundred pounds sterling money of Great Britain paid to him on his order or to be remitted to him in London as he should direct." His father also, "gave and bequeathed unto him sufficient to maintain him for one year in moderate expenses and ordered that it be remitted to him if he continued at London." College life seems to have had its charms for him and it appears that he enjoyed all the luxuries, gaieties and attractions it had to offer. In one of his letters relating to this period he said: "I lived handsomely and never left any tradesmen's bills unpaid."

Upon the death of his father in the summer of 1725, young Allen was destined to neglect his chosen profession for some years. Family loyalty, as well as sound business judgment impelled him to carry on his father's Philadelphia mercantile interests. His activities in trade will be dealt with subsequently in the course of this study.

On February 16, 1733-34 he married Margaret Hamilton, a daughter of Andrew Hamilton, speaker of the Assembly and one of the most eminent lawyers of his time in Pennsylvania. To this union was born six children: four boys and two girls, namely,
John, Andrew, James, William, Anne and Margaret. As a husband and father he was devoted to his wife and family. Being one of the wealthiest men, if not the wealthiest man in the province, he was able to give his children all the advantages and opportunities available at that time.

Characteristic of the wealthier class, Allen had two homes, one in the city, the other in the country. His city residence was located “in King's Street on Water Street,” where were also his wharf and warehouses, while his stables and coach house were on the east side of Front Street. His country or summer home, known as the “Mansion House,” with forty-seven acres of land, was in Creesham Township near Germantown. According to an early description “the home was small, built of stone and stood close to a large, much frequented road, which often occasioned the dust to be very troublesome. The spot appeared very naked, much exposed to the sun and the bleak winds.” In the course of years the estate was no doubt greatly improved. It was customary for Allen to be driven to the country in a coach, with four black horses. His English coachman, “was an accomplished whip.”

As a host Allen was very genial and entertained lavishly. He was known for the excellency of the wines he served. He was also considered a connoisseur of food and was especially fond, it appears, of rich and mild Parmesan cheese and Gorgona anchovies. This love for good food may have brought on the gout, from which he was a constant sufferer up to the time of his death. As a remedy for this affliction he drank a tea made of pine buds, which he gathered every year between February 20th and March 20th. Before he used this tea it seems that he had two or three fits of gout every year, but afterwards he declared that he was subject to but one attack in eighteen months and that only a mild one. He said with reference to the remedy: “It will not cure the gout, but will render it less frequent and the fits easy. I never knew it to fail rendering service to such persons as have used it for any time. It helps digestion, promotes an appetite and inclines greatly to sleep. In order to

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receive immediate benefit it would be best for a few months to take about one pint of the tea twice a day, afterwards once a day will be sufficient. However, the tea may be omitted now and then for a week or two. But I rarely miss having it for my breakfast, as by long use it is pleasant to me than any other kind of tea.’’ He found great pleasure in supplying his friends in England, including Thomas Penn, Lord Ellenbank, and other gentlemen at the club at Saunders with large quantities of the buds. Among the hobbies and relaxations that Allen indulged in during his spare time were attendance at horse races, horseback riding, yachting, reading and gardening. Indeed in the eighteenth century a man would not have been considered a typical Englishman if he were not fond of horses. Allen often attended the races in Maryland, and his interest in horsemanship is attested to by the fact that upon the death of Jeremiah Langhorne, he was bequeathed Langhorne’s “stallion riding horse.” His daughters too, were fond of riding and, incidentally, their riding habits were made in England so that they “would be in style when they rode.” Yachting, on the Delaware, was another favorite pastime of Allen and on several occasions with Richard Peters as his guest, he left Philadelphia in his yacht to attend the meetings with the Maryland Boundary Commissioners. It may also be suggested that these meetings were not lacking in conviviality, for among the necessaries for use of the Commissioners was port wine, which according to Allen’s accounts invoiced at £16.12

As to his cultural interests, among the types of literature which Allen ordered from England for reading were such books as, Warner’s Ecclesiastical History, and The Chronology and History of the World from the Creation of the World to 1753, by the Rev. John Blair. On June 20, 1766, he wrote the following letter to Robert Davis, bookseller, Piccadilly: ‘I should be glad if you would continue to send me yearly any curious books, or pamphlets that may be published, leaving it to your judgment, not doubting but they will be of such sort as will amuse me and not be trash or the common catch-penny publications.’’ That

11 Ibid., p. 60.
he was really interested in the advancement of knowledge is evidenced by the fact that in 1768 he became a member of the American Philosophical Society.

The chief diversion, however, that Allen engaged in, to soothe his brain wearied with judicial matters, was farming. He had at his summer home "a kitchen garden," as he termed it, in which he took great pride. Among the seeds ordered from D. Barclay and Son, on November 26, 1753, to be used in his garden the following spring, it may be interesting to note, were: "One gallon each of the three best sorts of early Hotspur Peas; One peck of the best early Readings; Two ounces of early Battersea Cabbage; One ounce of the Russia, and One ounce of every sort of Cabbage that is esteemed to be very good, and One ounce of each of the Savory kind, with Two ounces of Cauliflower." This commission leaves the impression that the good man had a decided weakness for cabbage.

Allen was apparently interested in farming in a scientific way. In a letter to a correspondent in England, he stated: "I have perused the several Tracts of Husbandry and some letters from Mr. Baldwin, which gave me pleasure; he describes some instruments or Ploughs, in the Drillway and directs where they may be had. I beg you would procure for me his Drill, Horse Hoe and Horse Plough and send them to the care of Messrs. Barclay to be forwarded to me, with some directions how to use them if that would be necessary. Very few people, even in this country have made more experiments in the farming way than I have." 14

As to his fraternal relations, Allen belonged to the Masonic Lodge. He was elected Grand Master of Pennsylvania in 1732. In the Pennsylvania Gazette is found this item concerning his election: "Saturday last, being St. John's Day, a Grand Lodge of the Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons, was held at the Sun Tavern in Water Street, when, after a handsome entertainment, the Worshipful William Allen, Esquire, was unanimously chosen Grand Master of this Province for the year ensuing." 15 In 1750 he was appointed Provincial Grand Master by the Grand Master of England.

14 Ibid., pp. 78-79.
15 June 26, 1732.
As Merchant

It has been previously stated that William Allen upon leaving the Inner Temple turned his immediate attention to commerce rather than to the practice of law. Engaged with him in business was Joseph Turner who was both a merchant and a sea captain. Their signatures appear on the agreement of merchants and chief citizens, signed September 21, 1726, in which they covenanted to take the bills of credit of the Lower Counties at their face value. The partnership of Allen and Turner lasted approximately forty years and their establishment has been considered, "the most important commercial house in the colony for a long time prior to the Revolution." It seems that the buying and selling of negroes was one of the chief types of trade in which the firm was engaged. In the newspapers in which they advertised rather irregularly, are found advertisements of the sale of negroes brought from St. Christopher, Barbadoes and elsewhere.

Allen and Turner were also engaged in the buying and selling of horses and coaches. Don Bernado Ruiz de Morriega of Carthagena desired on one occasion to secure several large, white horses, but as Allen could not find any of that color that were suitable in other respects, he apparently supplied the Spaniard with some of another color. Later on, in the year 1753, Allen sent him a large black coach which met with his approval. Evidently Don Bernado Ruiz was one of the regular customers of the firm. On March 18, 1755, the following order was sent to him: "One dozen Saltpetre Hams; One fitch of Bacon; One hundred pounds of Dried Beef; One dozen Tongues; One English Cheese; One dozen of Claret; One dozen White Wine."

Allen was also interested in a "still house in Philadelphia that he imagined made much better Rum than New England did."

Joseph Turner was born in Andover, Hampshire, England, on May 2, 1701. He came to America in January, 1713-14. He became a sea captain. In 1729 he was elected a common councilman of Philadelphia, and an alderman in 1741. He declined the mayoralty in 1745 and was therefore fined £30. On May 14, 1747, he was admitted to the Provincial Council. He was one of the trustees of the College of Philadelphia and died on July 25, 1763.


Pennsylvania Gazette, August 28, 1732, May 13, 1736, September 2, 1736.

Some of his actions in connection with this business seem to have been quite irregular. From a letter written by Admiral Charles Knowles as Governor of Jamaica to the Board of Trade in England, on September 6, 1752, it appears that Allen was charged with being the leader of a rum and molasses smuggling ring, formed by a group of Philadelphia merchants, including Abraham Taylor, the Collector of the Customs, “which carried on a very considerable trade to Leogan and Statia, and always undersold the traders who imported the same commodities from the English Sugar Colonies.” The agent engaged to transact their questionable affairs was William Humphreys who “undersold every other dealer in sugar, rum, and molasses,” so that Knowles feared that in a short time the whole Pennsylvania trade would be entirely engrossed by them. All of which, if true, fills one with no little amazement, especially in the light of Allen’s indictment of smuggling some twenty years later.

AS IRONMASTER

It has been previously pointed out that Allen’s mercantile interests did not prevent him from engaging in the manufacture of iron, also with Joseph Turner as a partner. They were among the group who became the owners of the Durham tract, in Bucks county. On March 4, 1727, this group formed a company for the purpose of making iron. As soon as they had erected the furnace, thirty by forty feet and twenty feet high, the first blast was begun. After running about one hundred tons of the metal they were obliged to blow out. The second blast was begun late in 1729 with a stock of five hundred tons. In November 1728 James Logan shipped three tons of this pig iron to England as a sample. On March 27, 1744 the stockholders of the Durham Furnace made an agreement with William Bird, an ironmaster, of Amity Township in the city of Philadelphia, to lease to him the ironworks for a period of eight years.

In New Jersey, Allen was also interested in both the Union Iron Works in Hunterdon County and the Andover Iron Works. The former he held in partnership with Joseph Turner, a prop-

91Streper Papers (Bucks County), 1682-1772 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania), p. 173.
property consisting of 11,000 acres. Allen held the Andover Iron Works with Joseph Turner, Lynford Lardner and Benjamin Chew. That Allen and his associates met with difficulties in carrying on their iron works in New Jersey is clear from the fact that on February 8, 1754, a large number of Germans who had apparently settled in the neighborhood, armed with axes and clubs drove away the men employed to cut wood for the use of the works. The rioters began to pull down the furnace and to burn the adjacent buildings. These Germans declared that the men did not have the right to cut down the trees as they were growing on the king’s lands. Hackett, the manager, replied that “the land was purchased from the Attorneys of the West Jersey Society for a large sum of money.”

In a letter written to John Griffiths, March 25, 1761, Allen makes some interesting statements in regard to the early furnaces and forges: “Since we have written you, we have finished our small Blast and from the first Day of September to the first of December our Furnace produced 332 tons of Pig Metal, which was beyond our most sanguine expectations. Water and wood we can never want, indeed we want nothing but good workmen, though we reckon we have some of the best this Country affords; who say that Three Tons of Ankonys a week may be made. Our workers have for a trial made more than that Quantity, but it remains a Mystery to them how nine tons can be drawn at a chafery. We are content that you bring with you a pair of Forge Bellows, but believe those we have, being made of Wood, answer as well, if not better, and will last twenty years. No other than Wood Bellows are now used among us either at our Furnaces or Forges, and by experience we find the Blast from them is much better than those made of Leather, for which reason they are universally disused. A German introduced the Wooden Bellows among us; and by constructing them at different Iron Works, has made a pretty good Fortune; we may call it such for he has now a Forge of his own and rents a Furnace.”

Just as the manufacture of iron in America was a well established and profitable industry employing many people, Parliament in 1764 placed additional restrictions on its export which made

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it, at least according to Allen, unprofitable to operate the furnaces. Concerning this matter, in a letter written October 8, 1767, to Thomas Penn he said: "The enumerating of iron by one of the late acts of Parliament has in a manner knocked that branch of business in the head, or, at least made it unprofitable. Most of the forges in this and the neighboring provinces are converted into bloomeries, which will make but trifling quantities of iron, and that of but an ordinary quality. I fear Mr. Turner and I who were as deeply concerned as any two persons in America, shall think it advisable to drop our iron works, or at least one of them, perhaps we may retain the other for a year or two to see if times will mend, which is not a little mortifying as we have an inexhaustible bank of ore and the iron not exceeded in quality by any in America, and I might venture to say, not even in Europe."  

Almost one year later in again writing to Penn, Allen reiterated that "the making of iron an enumerative commodity is very grievous as it has in a manner destroyed our iron works and reduced their number already nearly one half, and those that are still carried on sink money to the owner every year, and they will shortly be reduced to only as many as can manufacture for ourselves and that will be the case with almost every article of our consumption. If we are rendered so poor that we can not buy necessaries we must make ourselves, or go without them." He further declared in a letter to the Proprietor dated October 12, 1768: "Our iron works . . . are at the lowest ebb, . . . it was a strange mistake to enumerate that article—first to take off the duty and thereby encourage us to erect many new works, and then to prevent us to ship it off to help pay our debts in England, where it must center, at least the produce of it. Every act of Parliament of late, though made, as it is said, for the benefit of the colonies, is attended with so many provisions and restrictions that trade is rather impaired by them than otherwise. The people in England seem to have forgotten the Christian manner of doing to others what they would have done to them: if they would but consider our hardships in that light,
they would deal more tenderly with us and not stigmatize us as rebels for not timely giving up all the rights of Englishmen." It may be added that the importance of this statement coming from such an individual as the writer can hardly be over-estimated. Nevertheless evidence points to the continued development of the American iron industry in spite of these disturbing restrictions.