THE 150TH BIRTHDAY OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

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It is appropriate that a celebration of the founding of Montgomery county should recognize the earliest religious gathering within its confines. A year ago we fittingly observed here the 250th Anniversary of the origin of this Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, which was established at the home of Richard Wall in the adjacent township of Cheltenham. Since the province was founded through religious inspiration and on account of religious persecution, and as the Quakers were the chief factors in these, it is well that we who are their descendants and sharers in a goodly heritage should have some part in the observance of the county’s birthday.

William Penn most concisely stated the origin of our settlement in these words: “For my country I eyed the Lord in the obtaining of it, and more was I drawn inward to look to Him and to owe it to His hand and power, than to any other way. I have so obtained it and desire that I may not be unworthy of His love and do that which may answer His kind providence and serve His truth and people; that an example may be set up to the nations; there may be room there, though not here, for such a holy experiment.”

He remarked wisely that almost any frame of government would do, provided it was in the hands of the right men, and the people were a party to their choice. He said: “Though good laws do well, good men do better, for good laws may want [lack] good men, and be abolished or evaded by ill men; but good men will never want good laws nor suffer ill ones. Good men are rather to be preferred above good laws. Governments go like clocks from the motion given them. Therefore governments rather depend on men, than men on governments. Let men be good and governments cannot be bad; for if they be ill they will cure them.”

For nearly 100 years, Friends controlled the government of the province and sought to base it upon perfect democracy, religious.
liberty, justice and fairness to aborigines and neighbors, absence of all military provision and the abolition of oaths. These were the legitimate fruits of the religious principles of the Society of Friends and of the best thought and experience of William Penn, the greatest of American colonizers.

The Monthly Meeting was the original unit in the organization of the Society of Friends and undertook to see that justice was done between man and man, that disputes were settled, that the poor were supported, that delinquents whether as to the Society's own rules or those of the state, were reformed, and that all children were educated, that certificates of good standing were granted to members changing their abodes, that marriages and burials were simply and properly performed and that records were fully and accurately kept. Thus the Meeting was the religious, social and economic center of the community and where all were Friends, as in this particular locality, no other government was necessary. The Meetings were named after the townships in which they were located, as these were the smallest sub-divisions of early times before villages or towns appeared. The first roads were between Meetings of Friends, particularly the Quarterly Meeting centers.

There is no occasion nor time to describe even briefly the history of Montgomery county but it may be well to mention a few of its distinctions. One of these is the presence of George Washington and the Continental Army here. On July 31, 1777, the Continental army coming from its winter quarters at Morristown, New Jersey, set out from Coryell's Ferry, now called New Hope, over the Old York Road towards Philadelphia. It halted and made camp at Hartsville near the Little Neshaminy Creek, above Hatboro, and here Lafayette joined the army. General Washington and his aides pressed on to Philadelphia through Jenkin's Town and Shoemakertown, now called Elkins Park.

On August 1st, 1777, the army left Hartsville and marched down Old York Road to Luken's Mill Road, now called Church Lane, at Branchtown. The troops turned west here and marched to Germantown Road continuing over School House Lane to "Carlton" the estate of Henry Hill on Indian Queen Lane, where they camped. They returned by the same route on August 8th to Hartsville. On the 23rd they again marched down Old York Road encamping that night at Nicetown with Washington at "Stenton" the home of the Logans, near the present Wayne Junc-
tion. From thence they marched to Philadelphia and to the Battle of the Brandywine.

After the battle and the unsuccessful attempt to engage the enemy at Warren Tavern on the Lancaster Pike in the Chester Valley, General Washington moved his army of 8,000 Continentals and 2,000 militia by way of the ford at Fatlands to the head of the Skippack Road at Pennypacker's Mills, now called Schwenksville, and fixed his headquarters in the house of Samuel Pennypacker. Taking down his great Bible with its brass clasps Pennypacker wrote in it in German: "On the 26th day of September, 1777, an army of thirty thousand men encamped in Skippack Township, burned all the fences, carried away all the fodder, hay, oats and wheat, and took their departure the 8th day of October, 1777. Written for those who come after me, by Samuel Pennypacker."

Here was received the news of the defeat of General Burgoyne at Benn's Heights, New York, and a great parade was held with a salute of thirteen guns from the artillery. Here, too, occurred the famous incident of General Howe's pet dog which strayed into the officers' mess seeking dinner and was graciously returned to its owner by General Washington with a courteous note to which he received a warm letter of thanks from his adversary. Here the Battle of Germantown was decided upon, supported by Wayne, Smallwood, Potter, Irvine and Scott and opposed by Stephen, Nash, McDougal, Sullivan, Knox, Greene, Muhlenberg, Sterling, Conway and Armstrong. Cadwalader and Reed did not vote. These are great names to be remembered as visitors to our county in the nation's birth pains.

On the march down the Skippack Road to engage the enemy on October 3rd, 1777, the left under General Greene, the Rhode Island Quaker, with Stephen and McDougal, proceeded from Whitemarsh over Church Road to Limekiln Pike and were halted by the British at Abington Road, now called Washington Lane. General Smallwood and Forman, marching over Church Road with the New Jersey and Maryland militia, continued to the Old York Road planning to turn west over Lukens' Mill Road at Branchtown and get into the rear of the British right. The recall came before they reached their objective and they returned with the rest of the army after the Battle of Germantown to Pennypacker's Mills.

Lieutenant James McMichael of the Pennsylvanian Line kept a sprightly diary and after the battle he wrote: "We then marched
up the Skippack Road to Pennypacker's Mills, where we betook ourselves to rest at 9 p. m. Thus happened the memorable event of the Battle of Germantown, in which great numbers were killed on both sides and which lasted from five until ten o'clock. That of Brandywine was not in any measure such a general attack, neither was the loss at that place any way equivalent. I had previously undergone many fatigues but never any that so much overdone me as this. Had it not been for the fear of being taken prisoner, I should have remained on the road all night. I had marched in twenty-four hours forty-five miles, and in that time fought four hours, during which we advanced so furiously through buckwheat fields that it was almost an unspeakable fatigue.”

On October 8, 1777, the army moved from Pennypacker's Mills to Towamencin and Worcester, Washington establishing his headquarters at the Wentz house in Worcester, just off Skippack Pike, on the present road to Lansdale. On the 23rd he fixed his headquarters at “Dawesfield,” the home of James Morris in Whitpain township between the Skippack and Morris Roads, about a mile west of the present town of Ambler. This was a critical and depressing time and Washington wrote sad letters from here. In one to Thomas Wharton he says: “It is a matter of astonishment to every part of the Continent to hear that Pennsylvania, the most opulent and populous of all the States, has but 1200 militia in the field at a time when the enemy is endeavoring to make themselves completely masters of, and to fix their winter quarters in, her capital.” In a letter to Langdon Carter he speaks of “the disaffection of a greater part of the Inhabitants of this State—the languor of others and the internal distraction of the whole, have been among the great and insuperable difficulties I have met with, and have contributed not a little to my embarrassments this Campaign.” Only a few days before this a committee of “weighty Friends” had waited upon him to express the Society's utter disapproval of warfare and to offer protest against hostilities past or future.

At “Dawesfield” was held the court martial of General Wayne, which acquitted him of blame for the “Paoli Massacre” and paid signal honor to his bravery. Here the future movements of the army were decided upon in council, which included Washington, Sullivan, Greene, Stephen, McDougal, Lafayette, Maxwell, Knox, Varnum, Wayne, Muhlenberg, Weedon, Huntingdon, Conway and Pulaski.
On November 2, 1777, the army moved to Whitemarsh, and Washington made the George Emlen house his headquarters. This is at Camp Hill about half a mile east of the railroad and is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Radcliffe Cheston. During this encampment the vivacious Sally Wister wrote her entertaining diary at the Foulke house in Penlyn and at Whitemarsh Washington received the timely warning from Lydia Darrach which saved his army from surprise. The British marched out to Chestnut Hill to find themselves expected and after a skirmish at Edge Hill and Shoemakertown, returned to the city.

The army left Whitemarsh by way of the Skippack Road to Broadaxe, thence westward to Matson's Ford, now Conshohocken, and so to Valley Forge, on December 11, 1777. Washington wrote that the road was stained "by the blood from the feet of the men in the snow." The well-known epic of Valley Forge need not be recounted except to acknowledge the example of bravery and sacrifice in our county which makes this place a national shrine. President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 and President Hoover in 1931 spoke there. Such distinguished figures in the nation's history as Colonel Alexander Hamilton, later financier and brains of the new government, Lieutenant James Monroe, the fifth President of the United States, and Lieutenant John Marshall, afterwards the great Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and interpreter of the Constitution, were with the army in Montgomery county.

On the night of May 19, 1778, the British moved three columns to entrap Lafayette at Barren Hill. One under General Gray marched north to Frankford and over Church Road to Whitemarsh, but Lafayette skillfully eluded them and they returned to Philadelphia much chagrined.

The last appearance of the army in Montgomery county during the Revolution was on June 20, 1778, when it left Valley Forge by way of Swedes Ford, now Norristown, and over the Swedesford Road to Old York Road and Coryell's Ferry, now New Hope, and so reached New Jersey. Sally Wister says that at six in the morning they passed by Swedesford Road across the North Wales Road, now the Sumneytown Pike, at Gwynedd. "Our brave, our heroic General Washington was escorted by fifty of the Life Guard with drawn swords. Each day he acquires an addition to his goodness," she exclaims. On August 19, 1787, while presiding over the sessions of the Constitutional Convention, Washington
rode through Germantown, in company with Samuel Powell, to the scene of the old encampment at Whitemarsh. Washington again passed through the county on his visit to Lancaster, Reading and Lebanon during the week of November 11, 1793, but we have no details of this trip. He was then President and residing in Germantown on account of the yellow fever in the city.

On September 2, 1794, the militia were called out to suppress an insurrection against the whiskey tax in the western part of the state. Their rendezvous was at Carlisle and on the 30th of the month President Washington set out to join them with his "single-seated phaeton, drawn by four gray horses," accompanied by Alexander Hamilton, riding on horseback, on his left and his private secretary, Bartholomew Dandridge riding on his right. Their route took them through Germantown by way of School House Lane and up the Township Line, now called Wissahickon Avenue. They dined at Norristown, slept at Trappe, and reached Carlisle on October 4th. Washington remained with the troops about three weeks, returning to Philadelphia on October 28th. This was his last recorded visit to Montgomery county.

What later became Montgomery county was the first place of considerable settlement of the Welsh and Germans in America. The Welsh established what they called their "Barony" on the west bank of the Schuylkill River in Merion, Radnor and Haverford and on the east in Gwynedd and Montgomery townships. The Germans pushed out from Germantown along the eastern side of the Schuylkill to the northern part of the county where the Schwenkfelders are now celebrating their Bicentennial.

In this county there are three great colleges, Ursinus, Bryn Mawr and Haverford. Woodrow Wilson taught at Bryn Mawr and visited Haverford when he was President as did President Hoover. President Taft frequently visited Bryn Mawr and his daughter is its Dean. We Friends are of course familiar with the last two mentioned colleges and with their great educators, Miss M. Carey Thomas, Dr. Isaac Sharpless and Dr. William W. Comfort. Perhaps it may be well at this time to name some of the early distinguished figures in the county’s history in addition to these notable contributors to education.

Thomas Rutter, William Penn’s smith and member of this Monthly Meeting, built a furnace in 1716 on the Manatawny at Colebrookdale near the present Pottstown and was the first iron-
master in the province. John James Audubon, famous ornithologist, lived near the mouth of the Perkiomen at the village which now bears his name. David Rittenhouse, the greatest American astronomer, Vice-Provost of the University of Pennsylvania and the first Director of the Mint was a resident of Norriton Township where he had an observatory that was visited by Benjamin Franklin and other scientists of the day. Charles Thomson, the accomplished Secretary of the Continental Congress for fourteen years lived at "Harriton," near Bryn Mawr. The Rev. Henry Muhlenberg, Apostle of the Lutheran Church, settled at Trappe where was born his son, Rev. Peter Muhlenberg, whose classic remark: "There is a time to pray and a time to fight" is often quoted. He became a major general in the Revolution, a member of Congress, and a Senator of the United States. In the Civil War, John F. Hartramft of Norristown, and Winfield Scott Hancock of Montgomery Square became generals. The former was governor of the state and the latter received nearly one-half of the votes of the American people for President of the United States. Judge Samuel W. Pennypacker of Schwenksville, became governor of Pennsylvania and was a sage and historian. David Rittenhouse Porter of Norristown and Francis Shunk of Trappe were also governors of Pennsylvania.

Most of us can remember four great men of business in later days—Alexander J. Cassatt, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad and a famous horseman, John Wanamaker, Postmaster General and merchant, Jay Cooke and Edward T. Stotesbury, bankers, who have been greatly distinguished. When John Wanamaker was in the cabinet President Benjamin Harrison visited him at his home. They drove together up the old York Road to stop at the Presbyterian Church at Abington, then called Mooretown. So seven men who were Presidents of the United States—Washington, Monroe, Harrison, Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson and Hoover—visited Montgomery County.

One can hardly leave this enticing subject of our county without some mention of its attractive aspects. No portion of America is blessed with rarer natural beauty or more agreeable diversity of surface than eastern Pennsylvania. "Thy God bringeth thee into a good land," William Penn exclaimed, "of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig
brass." The vales and hills of the Schuylkill, the Perkiomen, the Pennypack, the Tacony and the Wissahickon with their wooded slopes have lured many of us to a step aside from the immediate present to invite our souls. The famous farm houses and bounteous barns which are characteristic of our countryside are a joy to architects and to all lovers of homes. The mansion, "Hope Lodge" at Whitemarsh built by Samuel Morris, who was a member of this Meeting, is the finest example of early Georgian architecture in this part of the country, while "Graeme Park," the house of Sir William Keith at Horsham, and "The Highlands," the home of Anthony Morris, near Fort Washington, are gems.

We see in all this that the Quakers were not the stiff-necked ascetics which some named them, but people who loved simple, beautiful things of exquisite proportion, culture and refinement and a lavish hospitality. They practiced moderation according to the admonition of William Penn: "Choose thy cloak as by thine own eyes, not anothers. The more simple and plain they are, the better. Neither unshapely, nor fantastical, and for use and decency, not for pride."