OLE BULL

From a portrait made in 1878. Reproduced from Ole Bull
See the article on “New Norway,” page 120.
WHEN your president very kindly invited me to speak to you on this occasion, and when I told him the subject I had chosen, he said: "Don't pull your punches. Tell us exactly what you think of us, bad as well as good." And so, with this kind permission, I have felt free to approach the history of your state with no sense of restraint or limitation, but rather, I trust, with an open mind and in a sincere effort to visualize and interpret the central theme of that history.

Most state history, it seems to me, is conceived and written too narrowly. It presents the facts about the development of a particular state, but fails to make comparisons between that state and other states of the Union. And it fails to give that state its setting on the national and international scene. Thus, while a great deal of information may be presented, the broad significance of that information is largely lost.

This shortcoming is due primarily, it appears, to the fact that in nearly every case the history of one of our states has been written by a resident of that state itself, and it has been difficult for such a person to acquire a broad perspective in dealing with his subject. It would seem that if the history of a particular state could be written or interpreted by a historian of another state, preferably in a different part of the country, there would be the advantage that such a historian could see the subject in a wider setting. He might lack detailed factual information, but he could nevertheless present a broad interpretation of the state's past.

It is from this point of view that, as a native and citizen of a southern state, I approach the history of Pennsylvania. I make no pretense of carrying in my head a mass of factual data; rather, what I have tried to do has been to paint with very broad strokes of the brush, to interpret as I see it the history of your state. I can merely hope that the detailed facts, known better to you than to me, will substantiate the interpretation.

In searching for the central theme, it has appeared to me that the story of Pennsylvania is the story of the second state of the Union. It is the story of the state that almost became first, that tried repeatedly to be first and yet did not quite succeed. During the late colonial, revolutionary, and early national periods of American history, Pennsylvania was second to Virginia. Since that time she has been second to New York. Always the second state.¹

Until the Revolution, of course, Pennsylvania was a part of the British colonial system. According to the accepted mercantilist theory, the mother country was to produce finished goods, the colonies were to produce those raw products for which each was best suited, the mother country was to trade with the colonies, the colonies were to trade among themselves, and so everyone was to prosper. That was the ideal, and ideals, by definition, are unattainable. But on the whole the system worked reasonably well. The mother country grew wealthy and powerful while the colonies developed rapidly. Indeed, the speed with which they developed is indicated by the early readiness of thirteen of them to cut the tie with the mother country.

In so far as the British colonies on the continent of North America were concerned, in terms of geography and resources, four major factors were needed to bring prosperity and progress: (1) an adequate area, (2) sufficient natural resources, (3) one or more good ports, and (4) access to the immediate interior from the port or ports of the colony.

(1) As for area, Pennsylvania was fortunate. She was far larger than any of the New England colonies, was second only to New York among the middle colonies, and was exceeded by Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia among the southern colonies. That

¹ In 1810 Pennsylvania was surpassed in population by both Virginia (first) and New York (second), and in 1820 by New York (first) and Virginia (second).
Pennsylvania's land area was adequate for that period is indicated by the fact that, when the Declaration of Independence was signed, a large part of the state's hinterland was still unoccupied and that for several decades thereafter there yet remained unsettled regions.

(2) In resources, Pennsylvania was likewise fortunate. Just as all the other thirteen colonies, she had an abundant supply of forests, and just as all the others except parts of New England, she possessed a bountiful soil. In mineral resources she was far richer than most of the other colonies—though little use was made of these resources during the colonial period.

(3) Her port, Philadelphia, while not directly on the Atlantic Ocean, nevertheless ranked as one of the six best on the Atlantic coast. The other five were Boston, New York, Baltimore, Norfolk, and Charleston.

(4) In the first three factors, therefore (area, resources, and port facilities), Pennsylvania was favorably situated, but in the fourth, the accessibility of the port to the immediate interior, she was not quite so fortunate. The best transportation of that day was by water, and, while from Philadelphia the Delaware River offered a route to the north and the Schuylkill to the northwest, neither stream was suitable for commerce on a large scale. On the other hand, the fact that the chief river of central Pennsylvania, the Susquehanna, flowed southeastward to Chesapeake Bay meant that there was a constant threat that the trade of this interior area would be drawn down the river to Baltimore rather than overland to Philadelphia. In the matter of access to the immediate interior, Philadelphia was similar to Boston and Charleston, neither of which had good connections with the hinterland, but the city was less fortunate than New York, which possessed the Hudson River, than Baltimore, with the Susquehanna, or than Norfolk, with Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

On the whole Pennsylvania was favorably endowed by Nature, and although founded late the colony progressed very rapidly. Indeed, the very lateness of her founding was in a sense an advantage, since she could profit by the experience, and especially the mistakes, of the older colonies. Settlers poured in by the tens of thousands, so that almost from the beginning there was present a variety of racial and religious groups (though all were white and of European extraction). Fortunately the colony never had to contend with the blighting influence of slavery on a large scale.
Trade quickly developed to major proportions, up and down the coast, with the West Indies, and with the mother country. When the first census was taken in 1790, Pennsylvania, though next to the last of the colonies to be settled, outranked all of them except Virginia, which had had its beginnings three-quarters of a century earlier.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century the movement for unity of action and for a united government of the colonies had great significance for Pennsylvania. The congress of 1754, to discuss measures to be taken against the French and the Indians, had met at Albany on the Hudson. And the Stamp Act Congress had convened in New York City, on the same river. But the First Continental Congress held its sessions in Philadelphia, as did likewise the Second Continental Congress (except when driven out by the British during the Revolution), the Congress of the Confederation, and the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Thus by the middle 1780's the City of Brotherly Love had become in fact the capital of the United States of America.

As long as the central government was weak, with no executive and judicial branches and with only a feeble legislative arm, the prize of being the capital did not mean so much to a state or to a city. But with the movement for a strong central government, the prize came to amount to much more. For the central government would now bring to whatever city should become the capital a large number of new inhabitants (though at the time probably no one foresaw that eventually the Federal government would come to employ literally millions of persons). The leading statesmen of the nation would reside there, diplomats from all over the globe would represent their governments there, the city would acquire glamor and prestige. And as the nation increased in wealth and power, so likewise would the city grow until it would come to rank alongside London, Paris, and the other great capitals of the world. All of this would happen, even though the capital city might be laid off where there was then no city at all and thus had to start from nothing. But how much more rapidly would the capital progress if an existing city, already well established, were made the seat of government! That city, in fact, might well expect thus to receive an impetus which would make it the metropolis of the nation. And the state in which the city was located (even
though a Federal district might be set up to include the city itself), might expect to become the greatest of all the states of the Union.

Of all the cities of the new nation, Philadelphia might have appeared to have the best chance of becoming the permanent capital of the United States. It was obvious that the capital would need to be located somewhere near the center of the Union—it could hardly be farther north and east than the Hudson and hardly farther south than the Potomac. And Philadelphia's great advantage was that she was situated near the north-south center of this central area. Furthermore, for the city to be selected as the seat of government under the new Constitution would mean merely that she would continue to hold the position she had already held for many years.

Had Philadelphia been chosen, she might have gotten such a head start on her rivals that they would never have caught up. She might quickly have forged so far ahead of Boston, Baltimore, New York, and the others that they would have been out of the race. And the state of Pennsylvania might have become the empire state of the nation.

We all remember what happened. We recall that the question of the assumption of the state debts was combined with that of the location of the capital and that, in the resulting compromise, in return for Southern support of assumption (there were no "reactionary Southern Democrats" then), it was agreed that the capital should be located for two years in New York, for ten years in Philadelphia, and then permanently in an entirely new city on the banks of the Potomac. Thus the seat of government was placed at the most southerly point where it might reasonably have been located.

This meant, of course, that Philadelphia had lost her chance to become the permanent seat of government of the nation and one of the great capitals of the world. And yet, during the last decade of the eighteenth century she was temporarily the capital, and this was in some ways the golden age of the city's history. She was the largest city in all the nation, and probably the most wealthy. She was recognized as the cultural center of the United States, "the Athens of America." And now, for a brief ten years, she was also the nation's political capital. Here the new government was placed upon a firm foundation. Here the "Father of his Country" served for most of the years of his presidency. Here Hamilton
planned and put through most of his financial measures, and here Jefferson served as the first secretary of state. Looking back at these years, one can dream of what might have been. What if the White House had been located on Market Street and if the Capitol had been constructed in the City of Brotherly Love? Think of Senators swaggering down its avenues; flags of all foreign nations flying along a Philadelphia counterpart of Embassy Row; swarms of bureaucrats stumbling over one another in a rush to find the latest vacant apartment. Picture Philadelphia as one of the leading capitals of the world, with a population many times that of the present city of Washington and considerably larger than her own population today. Picture her as the center of the nation in every phase of life—New York, Washington, Philadelphia all combined into one great city. It is something to dream about. And the state of Pennsylvania might have been the greatest state of the nation, unrivalled by any other. That might have happened, too.

But it was not to be. At the end of the century Congress and the President and the Supreme Court, together with all the bureaucrats and clerks and political hacks, picked up bag and baggage and moved to the banks of the Potomac. Never again was Philadelphia to be the nation’s capital. An era had drawn to a close.

But having lost this political contest, there was still the chance for Pennsylvania and Philadelphia to win another one in the economic realm, perhaps even more significant, which was about to begin. After the Revolution and especially after the second war with Great Britain, as population poured westward in an ever swelling stream and as one new state after another was admitted to the Union, there developed among the older states and cities on the Atlantic seaboard a keen rivalry for trade with the newly developing West, for it was realized that therein lay a source of great profit and untold wealth.

The contest was to be settled largely in terms of geography. More specifically the question was that of where were to be found the easiest and cheapest passages across the chain of Appalachian Mountains that stretches from Maine to Georgia. The New England states were ruled out because they were too far away. The southern states could not compete because the mountain barrier there was too high. This left only the middle states, to which should be added Maryland. Take out New Jersey and Delaware, small states with no hinterland connecting with the west, and there re-
main only New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. And the real contest was between Pennsylvania and New York, between Philadelphia and New York City.

Looking backward, we can see that the fruits of victory were to be almost unlimited. It was not merely a question of which state and which city would obtain the lion's share of the western trade and thus become more populous and more wealthy than the other. The issue was far more fundamental than that. For it was to be the destiny of one of these two cities to become the leading city not only of the United States but also of the entire New World. Once having gotten a head start, that city would grow by leaps and bounds, almost by arithmetical progression. She would become the financial center of the nation. She would establish the stock exchange which would dwarf all other stock exchanges in the nation. Like a magnet she would draw to herself the ablest and most ambitious youth of all the other states of the Union and of every foreign country in the world. She would become the center of the theatre, and many millions of persons from everywhere in the nation would pour in to see her plays. This horde of visitors would further add to her wealth and power. She would become the center of publishing. Her magazines and newspapers would circulate throughout the nation and would be more influential than those of any other city. She would become the point of departure for the millions of American tourists who would travel abroad and the entrepot for the tens of millions of European immigrants who would migrate to the land of opportunity. With the coming of the airplane, she would become the taking-off point for overseas routes. The city would become, in fact, the great cosmopolitan center of the Western Hemisphere, the city of romance and adventure.

And the state which won the contest would become the most populous and most wealthy state of the nation. She would gain the largest number of representatives in Congress and therefore the most electoral votes. With this predominant weight in the Electoral College, the state would give the nation the largest number of presidents, and in general she would wield the most influence in national political affairs. Once one of the two states had gotten head and shoulders above the rest, it would be a case of "to him that hath it shall be given." That state would become indeed the empire state of the nation.
Looking backward, we can see all this more clearly than could the men of the early nineteenth century, who could not possibly foretell all that the future might hold. Their interest was mainly in the western trade, though some of them visualized to a degree the larger implications of the contest.

Pennsylvania had certain advantages. There were two vast areas to be tapped—the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes region. Pennsylvania was the only state except Virginia (which then, of course, also included what is now West Virginia) that possessed an eastern seaport and at the same time touched the Ohio Valley. And Pennsylvania not only touched this valley; she possessed within her borders the most strategic point anywhere in the valley, the point where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to form the Ohio, the site of the city of Pittsburgh. New York, on the other hand, had no direct contact whatsoever with the Ohio Valley. In addition, Pennsylvania touched Lake Erie, and thus was the only eastern seaboard state that bordered both the Great Lakes area and the Ohio Valley. But the mountains in Pennsylvania were more difficult to cross than those in New York.

New York, while she did not touch the Ohio, did lie directly on Lake Erie. And New York possessed the Hudson-Mohawk Valley, with its easy route across the mountain barrier and so on to the West.

Pennsylvania was first in the game. Beginning in the 1790's she constructed a large number of turnpikes, providing better overland routes than had existed before that time. But, while these new roads did draw a good deal of trade to Philadelphia, especially from the Susquehanna Valley, they were more in the nature of local routes and could not solve the fundamental problem of transportation to and from the West.

New York did not construct turnpikes on a large scale, but a little more than two years after the end of the War of 1812 she made a surperlatively bold move. At what for that day was an enormous cost, she undertook to link the Hudson River with Lake Erie, thus opening up an all-water route to the West along the valley of the Mohawk. We all know the story of the Erie Canal, and I am not going to repeat it in the present connection. Completed in 1825, the canal immediately brought a golden flood to New York State and New York City. The canal's success was so apparent that Pennsylvania, realizing that unless something were done quickly the game was up, embarked upon a remarkable and
heroic series of efforts to obtain her share of the western trade. A system of canals was constructed throughout the state, and through these an effort was made to provide a direct water connection with Lake Erie which would compete with New York's Erie Canal. Even more ambitious was the construction of a route to tap the Ohio Valley trade, that amazing system of railroads, canals, inclined planes, and more canals, from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. Built at great expense, the system actually operated for a number of years and brought a considerable amount of trade to Philadelphia.

But once the Erie Canal had been completed, the contest was all over but the shouting. Already in 1810, New York State had surpassed Pennsylvania in population, and this more rapid growth of the former state continued decade after decade. By 1860 New York's population exceeded that of Pennsylvania by almost a full million.

Even more striking are the relative figures for New York City and Philadelphia. In 1790 the former had had a population of 33,131, and the latter 42,520; but by 1860 New York could boast no less than 805,658, while Philadelphia had only 565,529. By that date the former had moved so far ahead that there was little chance that she would be overtaken. Barring a miracle, she had shaped her destiny to become the metropolis of the New World, if not eventually of all the world.

Following the canal era came the period of railroad building on a major scale. In both Pennsylvania and New York, as elsewhere in the nation, the first lines were merely local, connecting one community with another one nearby, but by the 1850's the time of the trunk line had arrived and from both states such lines were constructed into the trans-Appalachian region. In the Keystone State the leading system was the Pennsylvania, which was to become one of the great railroads of the world, and in New York it was the New York Central. These two systems, supplemented by others, quickly made connections with important centers of the West and soon were pouring the products of that area into their respective eastern termini, Philadelphia and New York City. Since the railroad could go practically anywhere on land, the natural advantage of the Hudson-Mohawk Valley, along which the New York Central ran, did not make so much difference, and the mountain barrier of Pennsylvania was not so difficult to cross. But by this time the die had been cast, for New York had profited by the Erie Canal for a quarter of a century and New York City had
forged so far ahead of all her rivals that it was well nigh hopeless for them to try to catch up with her. One can merely speculate as to what would have happened had the era of the railroad come before that of the canal.

Much later still came the era of the automobile, the motor truck, and the hard-surfaced highway. And, within very recent years, we have had the airplane. Just as the railroad, both the automobile and the airplane can go anywhere, so that mountain barriers and river valleys are no longer important factors. But by the time these new means of transportation had come into use it was too late for them to make material difference in the rivalry of the two states and the two cities. New York was too far ahead.

And so, for a century and more, Pennsylvania has been sandwiched between two centers. To the south, only an hour or two distant by train or automobile and only a few minutes by plane, has been the Nation’s Capital, the center of government, constantly tending to draw away from the Keystone State her ablest leaders in the realm of politics and statesmanship. And her next-door neighbor to the north has been none other than the Empire State, with its fabulous metropolis of the New World, constantly pulling at the wealth, the population, and the brains of the Keystone State. From Market Street to Broadway is today a matter of less than two hours—and there have been many Pennsylvanians who have made that trip, never permanently to return.

The remarkable thing to me is that, despite these external forces that have ceaselessly pulled at her, Pennsylvania has been able to preserve those essential qualities that go to make up a great state. In industry she has steadily maintained her position near the top, in mining she has remained one of the leading states, and in total wealth she has continued to rank very high. Within recent decades the influx of immigrants into her borders, especially into the coal-mining areas, though temporarily creating something of a racial problem, has added greatly to her wealth. A Southerner notes especially that the standard of living in your state is materially higher than in his own.

In her economic advancement, Pennsylvania has maintained a balance between industry and agriculture on the one hand and between the various industries on the other. No one interest or economic group has been able to dominate, but rather the different elements have served to counterbalance one another, a kind of unplanned and unwritten system of checks and balances that has
tended to keep the state in the middle of the road and to prevent her going off at a tangent.

Pennsylvanians have kept their roots, and have clung to the heritage that is theirs. They have not forgotten the tradition of freedom, tolerance, and fair play left them by the great Penn, nor the far-sighted vision and at the same time the never-failing common sense of the “manysided” Franklin. Their strength is that of many racial groups—the quiet and sober English Quakers, the methodical and dependable Germans, the fighting Scotch-Irish, and all the others that, fused, make up the state’s populace today.

Pennsylvania has preserved her unity as a cultural whole. Though one of her two great urban centers is at her eastern boundary and the other across the mountains in the extreme west, the people of the state have maintained a feeling of oneness that has held them together. They have developed and preserved a state consciousness that, while not exaggerated as in the case of certain commonwealths I could mention, has made them proud to be Pennsylvanians.

To be surpassed by one state in the Union—what of it? For that state is so populous, so wealthy, and so powerful that she is practically an empire in herself. Of the other forty-seven states of the Union, does not Pennsylvania exceed no less than forty-six? And if the nation’s capital is on the banks of the Potomac rather than on those of the Delaware, perhaps after all the City of Brotherly Love is just as well off without the bureaucrats. Certainly with them she could hardly have maintained her own distinctiveness.

As the second state, indeed, Pennsylvania has preserved something that she could hardly have kept had she become the first. She has maintained her solidarity, her strength, and her sanity. She has preserved her sense of proportion. She has kept her feet on the ground. She has refused to listen to siren songs.

In these troublous times, with the nation seeking the way out of a perplexing maze of postwar problems and with the world knocked groggy and trying to find its balance after the most devastating conflict in history, it seems that above all there are needed the qualities of common sense, an appreciation of the heritage of the past, the ability to stay in the middle of the road, and strength of character. These qualities, I feel, if they exist anywhere on the globe today, are to be found in Pennsylvania, the second state in the Union.