

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY
by Rembrandt Peale

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From a Portrait in the American Philosophical Society

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

VOL. XX

APRIL, 1953

NO. 2

MR. DAVY'S DIARY 1794

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INTRODUCTION

LETTERS of many kinds come to the desk of the Chief Executive of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Most of them are on government business but occasionally an item of historical interest proves a refreshing exception. This was the case one morning in March, 1948, when then Governor James H. Duff received from D. F. S. Filliter of Dorset, England, a diary kept by a visitor to Pennsylvania in 1794. The diarist was a Mr. W. Davy of Devonshire, who made the journey out of curiosity about America, and to visit his friend Dr. Joseph Priestley, recently settled at Northumberland.

With Priestley, Joseph Priestley, Junior, Thomas Cooper, John Vaughan, and others, Davy was interested in looking at lands in northern Pennsylvania with a view to their purchase and settling a number of English families upon them. Whether Davy was involved in Priestley's Pantisocracy, a contemplated settlement made up of English "friends of liberty" on the upper Susquehanna, his diary does not reveal. Nor do Priestley's writings carry any mention of Davy except the observation that he was back in Germantown in December, 1794, following the journey narrated in the diary, complaining about the high price of firewood.¹

Bringing a fair-sized family and a number of servants with him on this visit indicates that Davy was a man of means. His diary comments are practical; his attention centered on crops,

¹ John T. Rutt, *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, v. 1. pt. 2, p. 285.

livestock, prices, land values, etc., with a few observations upon our political behavior and social democracy that stood in sharp contrast to those of his own country. He appears more promoter than poet, the advance agent for a planned migration, if his preliminary impressions of Pennsylvania are favorable. The diary conveys no impression that he was leaving England for the reasons of persecution and intimidation that had compelled the Priestleys and Thomas Cooper to migrate. Nor can he be definitely linked with Coleridge, Southey, Godwin, and the other romantic poets who dreamed of fleeing England to make their abodes

In Freedom's Undivided dell,
Where Toil and Health with mellowed Love shall dwell,
Far from Folly, far from men
In the rude romantic glen

Davy may have learned of the opportunities in Pennsylvania from the Priestleys. Joseph Priestley, Junior, had arrived here in 1793, and the elder Priestley had docked at New York in June, 1794, only a few weeks before Davy sailed from England. More than likely there had come into Davy's hands some of the brochures and prospectuses put out by speculators and companies dealing in Pennsylvania lands. Brissot de Warville's *New Travels in the United States of America*, and Jedidiah Morse's *The American Geography* were descriptive works then circulating in England. How effectively such publicizing literature was arousing foreign interest in this State is shown in a letter from William Jackson, formerly private secretary to George Washington, to his employer, William Bingham, financier and land speculator, dated London, September 27, 1793:

The lands in Pennsylvania are preferred . . . more pains having been taken to impress favorable sentiments of that State than of any other. And the opinions of its climate, soil, productions, situation, and even its state of society are higher in Europe than I was aware they could have been in relation to the other parts of the United States.²

Many agents had gone to Europe in the early 1790's trying to

² Bingham Papers, Correspondence, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

sell American lands. It may have been the result of meeting one of them, or of reading their glowing accounts of American lands as profitable investments, that had led Davy to make the trip. His own conclusions after seeing Pennsylvania are found in the last paragraph of his diary. Suffice it to say his only known venture was a half-interest in a 200-acre farm near Northumberland that he and Priestley purchased for £300. Northumberland County records show that Davy, and his wife Susannah, conveyed their interest to Joseph Priestley the younger in August, 1795, for a consideration of £200 "lawful money of Pennsylvania."

Who was Mr. Davy? He came from Devonshire, but in that region of England the name of Davy is a very common one and its progeny numerous. No clues to his identity are found in the diary except that his first name began with a "W" and that one of his children was named Sophia. In the available writings of his associates who were interested in settlement on the upper Susquehanna, the only reference is that of Priestley's, previously noted, wherein he is spoken of as "Mr. Davy." Priestley writes that Davy was in Germantown during December, 1794, but whether he made a prolonged stay, or decided to settle permanently in Pennsylvania, remains a question.

Aided by D. F. S. Filliter, owner of the diary, and Constance M. Davy, a descendant of W. Davy, a tentative identification has been attempted. One Davy genealogy shows that a William Davy was born at Fordton, in the parish of Crediton, Devon, in 1757. In 1780 he married a Susanna Broom, and of this union there were born fourteen children. Only the names of five of the children are known, none of which is Sophia, mentioned in the diary, but she could have been one of the nine children whose names are not given in the genealogy. If the father is the diarist, he would have been 37 years of age when he visited Pennsylvania in 1794, and he could have been the sire of a young but growing family.

Another Davy family tree begins with a "William Davy of Pennsylvania." No dates or parentage are given. It seems fairly certain that this individual resided in Philadelphia in the 1790's, for in 1804 one of his sons, "John B. Davy of Philadelphia," was married at Christ Church, and in 1810 he was appointed United States consul at Rangoon. On Christ Church records his

middle name is given as Broome, the maiden name of Susanna Broom[e] who had married William Davy of Fordton in 1780. It would seem she was the mother of this "John B. Davy of Philadelphia." A second son, also listed as "William Davy of Pennsylvania," was named United States consul at Hull, England, in 1816. This source also omits mention of other offspring of the senior William Davy. Listed among Philadelphia merchants in the late 1790's were William Davy and Joseph Roberts, shipping merchants, 141 South Front Street. The Philadelphia directory for 1810 also lists a Davy and Son, merchants, 32 Dock Street, and a William Davy, merchant, 356 High Street.

From such incomplete data we venture to identify William Davy, born at Fordton in Devon, 1757, as the writer of the 1794 diary. The diary reflects the interests and observations of a business-like, mature person whose bent is trade and investment; William Davy of Fordton was 37 years of age in 1794. He could have been the father of young sons in that year, who, by 1810 and 1816, would have been in their late twenties or early thirties, appropriate ages for entering the consular service. Such service would also have a special attraction for merchants and the sons of merchants. The coincidence of the name Broom, or Broome, being Mrs. Davy's maiden name, and also the middle name of John B. Davy, strengthens the connection. The occurrence of her Christian name, Susannah, on the deed transferring her husband's half-interest in the Northumberland property to Priestley, Junior, is confirming evidence. That both the father and the sons are described as "of Pennsylvania" in English genealogical sources further strengthens our surmise that William Davy of Fordton is the W. Davy of the diary, and that, after visiting this State, he decided to make it his permanent home, thus becoming William Davy, merchant. Our deduction is based on fragments, and it is anticipated some of our readers will be able to furnish corrective or supplemental information. If forthcoming, a more accurate identification of W. Davy will appear with Part 2 of the diary in the July issue of PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY.

But who wrote the diary is secondary to what he wrote. Approximately a fourth of the Davy diary is an account of the weeks at sea crossing the Atlantic. It is a lively narrative worth recount-

ing in full, but considerations of space require that it be summarized under an editor-supplied title, "Summer Days at Sea." Mr. Davy's own account begins with his departure from Germantown, Friday, September 26, 1794, on his "Journey to Northumberland."

SUMMER DAYS AT SEA

Mr. Davy departed from Falmouth aboard the *Active*, Captain William Blair, Sunday evening, June 29, 1794, accompanied by Mrs. Davy, several sisters, an unenumerated number of children, and a few servants. A month and a half later, Friday, August 15, they landed in Philadelphia "in perfect health." His account of the days at sea begins with anxiety over the rumor that the vessel does not have a full crew, and that insufficient provisions are aboard. But he loses all interest in provisions when suddenly assailed by *mal de mer*. He discovers that toasted bread soaked in cider, with a little water added, is "the most comfortable refreshment that could be taken & even grateful to the Stomach when everything else was nauseous—take care to keep it out of the way of the Sailors—they drank deep of mine." This last came under "advice to future Voyagers."

Independence Day at sea was appropriately observed by the American crew, but Mr. Davy had a heated argument with Captain Blair over the provisions given his servants; the Captain declared that as steerage passengers they were entitled only to salt meat, biscuit, and water, while Mr. Davy insisted they should be furnished brandy. He was somewhat mollified the following day when Captain Blair sent Mrs. Davy a canister of excellent tea, but he still considered him, like all ships' captains, an ungracious fellow. To friends who might follow him across the Atlantic, Mr. Davy advised that a positive, detailed understanding should be had with the captain at the outset, specifying what items and services would be furnished from the ship's stores and by the crew. In addition, travelers should bring along their own private stores of pure water, cider, cordials, port and white wine, gin and brandy. Rum, tea, or coffee "may be acceptable at times when the Ship's Breakfast is not convenient to a person indisposed."

Saturday 27th June. Matthews (son of Wm.), met the ship. Wm. (son of Capt. H. Thompson of London) from a Guinean voyage he paid a good to bring note, we had strong fears of being & more was a more awful silence than when he came a long side to speak us, for to the moment we suspected it to be a French Armed ship which she strongly resembled. But we were soon relieved, after being told by the Captain in a very authoritative tone of voice some words under my Lee & Swift came on board & you are obliged implicitly for he had 80 guns to support his Orders & he came on board with a very acceptable present of Limes, we then exchanged a Barrel of Beef & 20 Gallons of Rum, a Barrel of Sugar & Chocolate which was very acceptable to us, he was very civil, attentive, & even courteous, the a Guineaman in the habit of overhauling such bric-a-brac according to his own account) ^{as} gratified only, for his civilities to us on Limes we to cast ^{at} but over, he remained with us on board & took letters from us, informed of the American Embargo being taken off & of the sick men in the islands. We enjoyed this day in a manner not to be described, the pleasure of wintering in the tropics.

The weather and conditions of the sea are regularly noted, interspersed by recording the striking of a whale by the ship, wreckage from a vessel floating by, and the bad night suffered by his young daughter Sophia, who was cutting a tooth. On hot days Mr. Davy found himself afflicted with dizziness and loss of memory. When the seas ran high and the vessel rolled he preferred to be on deck, on one occasion remaining there for sixteen hours. With an observing eye for nautical superstitions, during a long calm he saw the mate throw a pack of cards overboard "that a good Wind might not be prevented by them." According to one sailor an effective way to raise a wind was to put three lice in the mizzen sail. When a number of new-born kittens were drowned, Captain Blair was exceedingly angry, for this was inviting bad luck.

With no major mishap, the days wore on, and despite the skipper's moodiness and sullen disposition Mr. Davy felt compelled to compliment him upon his skill as a navigator. This grudging admiration was somewhat clouded by the discovery of a barrel of stinking tripe near the Davy cabin. Only after bitter words did the captain consent to put the malodorous stuff in the hold. His dislike for the English, who had earlier seized his vessel and kept him a prisoner for a year at Falmouth, was shown when he refused to hoist his colors in response to a salute from a passing English brig. Mr. Davy was shocked by the strong oaths sworn by some of the American passengers.

As the *Active* drew near to Newfoundland there were anxious moments one Saturday morning when a 20-gun vessel fired a shot across her bow. Fears were expressed it was an Algerine corsair or a French armed vessel, but it turned out to be the English ship *Union*, Captain Thomson, out of London, returning from a Guinea voyage. Captain Thomson came on board with a very acceptable gift of limes; he exchanged rum, sugar, and chocolate for some barrels of beef. In spite of his being a Guineaman "in the habit of exercising such Cruelties," Mr. Davy found the Captain very civil, attentive, and courteous. News of the lifting of the American embargo was passed on, and the Captain took with him the *Active's* mail for England.

Difficulties with a very dirty and insolent cook, sailors nearing mutiny, bespeaking a Dutch vessel that had been at sea eleven weeks, passing through masses of "Gulph Weed," and watching

the crew go over the side and paint the vessel—"a Custom peculiar to Phila. Captains when they approach their Harbour,"—were other happenings that broke the monotony of long summer days at sea.

At last Henlopen light was passed on the evening of August 13, and after a delightful sail up the Delaware River, the vessel came to anchor off Fort Mifflin. Here Doctor James Mease, the port physician, came aboard to check the health of passengers and crew. The remembrance of the fearful yellow fever epidemic of 1793 was still horribly fresh, and it had returned in lesser intensity in 1794. No contagious ailments being found, the *Active* continued on its way and docked at Philadelphia, 2 p.m., Friday, August 15. In concluding this portion of his diary Mr. Davy again offers the advice to future travelers that they should bring good English servants with them if they wish comfortable accommodations at sea. In America, said Mr. Davy, there were no servants except slaves.

From the day of the arrival in Philadelphia until September 26, nearly six weeks, the diary is blank. We are not told what Mr. Davy did in the capital city, whom he met, nor his observations upon the manners and behavior of Americans. A few notations bearing no date refer to wages currently being paid, the cost and scarcity of good furniture, and the prices of fuel, meat, liquors, and flour, all of which the visitor from England thought excessively high.

On board ship Mr. Davy had had ample time and leisure to make daily entries in his diary. It is doubtful, however, if he maintained such regularity in keeping the diary up to date during his trip to Sunbury, Northumberland, and the Muncy Valley. This portion of the diary is prefaced with an itinerary showing the stopping places and distances between each, and a summary of expenses for three persons journeying from Philadelphia to Sunbury. The expenses for the five days spent in traveling 168 miles amounted to £6.12.9, Pennsylvania currency. Some days are crowded with so many incidents and miles covered, that one is inclined to believe Mr. Davy wrote up his diary at a later date from memory, possibly refreshed by rough notes he may have kept. The interest of the diary suffers little from this, for he was

an observing, inquiring gentleman, keenly aware of the topography and scenery of the country through which he was passing, and wanting to know more about its inhabitants, particularly their means of earning a livelihood and the resources of the region. With Joseph Priestley, Junior, son of the illustrious Doctor Joseph Priestley, as guide and companion on the journey into interior Pennsylvania, he was in excellent company for acquiring informed and intelligent impressions.

JOURNEY TO NORTHUMBERLAND

Friday Sept. 26th at 4 o'Clock P.M. I left German Town in a one Horse Chair accompanied by Mr. Joseph Priestley Junr.³ & Mr. Madge⁴ on Mr. Priestley's Horse & proceeded over Chesnut Hill to Norristown, the Roads⁵ very rough & in consequence of heavy rains having fallen yesterday are washed & cut into deep Gulleys. Some part of the Country we pass'd through is wild and uncultivated, the Hills are yet covered with Woods & in a state of Nature, but the Valleys are rich & fertile producing heavy Crops of Grass & Clover, & have improved Farms & Settlements on them. Norristown is the County town of Montgomeryshire (but by no means corresponds with the English Idea of town) consisting of about 30 or 40 Dwelling Houses of decent appearance, Brick & Stone, a handsome Townhouse & Offices & a County Jail—the whole on a commanding situation on an eminence over the River Schulkyl⁶—The Inn (the rising Sun)⁷ very comfortably accommodated at. Our Supper was Coffee, Beef Stakes, Pickles, Veal Cutlets & Potatoes, with Bread & Butter. At the Jail we were informed that since solitary Confinement &

³ The oldest son of Doctor Priestley, who, with the youngest son, Henry, had come to America at the urging of his father. He was associated with Thomas Cooper, John Vaughan, and others in establishing a settlement made up of "friends of liberty"—the Pantisocracy—on the upper Susquehanna River. English romantic poets, principally Coleridge and Southey, were briefly enamored by the project and contemplated coming to America to escape the spreading intolerance instigated by the "Church and King" party.

⁴ A member of Davy's party from England. On board ship Davy had given him medicine to overcome an "indisposition."

⁵ The Ridge Pike running from Philadelphia to Norristown.

⁶ Scott's Gazetteer of 1795 describes Norristown as having twenty houses in addition to the county buildings. The courthouse and jail were new stone buildings, construction on them having begun in 1787. The county office building had been erected in 1791.

⁷ The "Rising Sun," kept by Jesse Roberts, was one of three taverns in the town.

hard Labour have been the punishment instead of publick Whipping, they have had scarce a Prisoner in Confinement, & this had been for near five years.⁸ The Farm of the Town⁹ is 550 Acres (the Township¹⁰ is 10 Acres to be built on for Gardens) about 100 only are cleared & in Cultivation, or Pasture exclusive of two Islands of about 100 Acres the whole is now let to a Swedish Farmer for £150 Curry. pr. ann. The Wood Land is very valuable, he has the right of rangg. it,¹¹ but not of cutting any Timber. This I conclude is preserved until the Canal now executing to Philadelphia¹² is compleated when the Wood will be of very great Value. There is here a Grist Mill with 3 pair of Stones on a never failing supply of Water which lets for £100 Cry. pr. ann.¹³ The Town Lots sell for £50 each & are not more than half an Acre. The general run of Land is worth about £10 an Acre, all this place is to be sold in one Bargain.¹⁴ Large Quantities of excellent Brick are made here, a gang consisting of 3 Men & 1 Boy, make 2000 Brick pr. Day. The Wages paid them are the Moulder £11. 5 the temperer £8 the Wheeler £7. 10 & the Boy £ 3. 15 pr. month. The Fuel is 2 Dollars pr. Cord & it requires 50 Cord to burn 100,000 Brick which are sold on the Spot for one Guinea Sterling pr. Mil.

Saturday Sept. 27 proceeded to Trap¹⁵ to Breakfast (the second for in this Country I do not think it prudent to Travel on an empty Stomach). There is here more Land cleared, it is good & there are many substantial stone Farm houses & Barns built, which is a proof of the third Stage of Improvement. To Pots-

⁸ Evidently evildoers feared less to embrace "Red Hannah" than to be placed in solitary. Pennsylvania had revised its penal code in April, 1790.

⁹ The out-lots, lands some distance from the settled area, part of which was cultivated and part in pasture.

¹⁰ Possibly common land, used jointly by all residents.

¹¹ To allow livestock to browse on the young tender twigs of trees and shrubs.

¹² The Delaware and Schuylkill Navigation Company, headed by Robert Morris, was digging the waterway to link the two rivers. This was one of the first canal ventures in Pennsylvania.

¹³ Presumably the mill erected by Charles Norris prior to 1771 which became the property of the Reverend Doctor William Smith, former provost of the University of Pennsylvania, in the early 1790's.

¹⁴ Much of the land was owned by the trustees of the University of Pennsylvania to whom it had been transferred by Provost Smith.

¹⁵ Trappe, formerly Landau, a village 9 miles northwest of Norristown. The home of the Reverend Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America and pastor of Augustus Lutheran Church at Trappe. Davy is traveling on the Perkiomen Road from Norristown to Reading.

grove¹⁶ to Dinner at Barrs Inn,¹⁷ a good House. This is a handsome place & fast improving but the Roads after rain are excessively bad & many deep ravines & rapid Creeks of Water to pass. The Soil is of a loose red Slate but sandy surface. The bottom Lands look verdant & beautiful, but the high Lands which are cleared, are shamefully neglected after being rack'd out,¹⁸ & produce only luxuriant Crops of strong Weed. The River Schuylkyl waters the Meadows of this place.¹⁹ An excellent Grist Mill near the Town is now standing still for want of Corn of which there is a Scarcity. There are more handsome Houses built in tastely style, and with better Gardens & pleasure Grounds than I have any where else seen but the Inhabitants indulge much in Gaming & are said to be in quarrelsome Parties. Went on to Nicolas Hoerners in Exeter township where we were much entertained by the old Landlord whose House²⁰ is nearly on the Summit of an high Mountain²¹ where he has lived 33 Years & with his Wife is healthy, chearful & civil. He came from Landeau in Germany in the year 1745, was bred a Taylor. On his arrival at Philadelphia he was bought out of the Ship by a respectable Quaker whom he served 2 years,²² then worked some at a Glass House, saved some Money, Married, bought 250 Acres of Land in the Woods (where he now lives) to be paid for by instalments at two Dollars pr. Acre. The whole has been paid some Years, & he has cleared 150 Acres of the Land without any assistance but that of his own Family, which has consisted of 10 Children. 7 of them are provided for in various places, and the others are now assisting him. He has very excellent Peach & Apple Orchards, Meadows & Corn Land, & keeps a good Inn. We find that if a Man dies leaving a Widow with young Children which she has no prospect of Employment for, she sells them to her Neighbouring Farmers who receive them (not as Slaves or parish Apprentices but) as their own Children until they attain the Age of 21 years. We saw one of these Children about 10 Years old at Hoerners so that the Children are at once a Profit to the Widow, & well provided for themselves.

¹⁶ Davy is using the earlier name for Pottstown which was erected as a borough out of Pottsgrove Township in 1815. "Pottsgrove" is the name of the stone mansion built in 1752 by ironmaster John Potts and used as headquarters by Washington in September, 1777.

¹⁷ Another "Rising Sun," kept by Jacob Barr, local postmaster. Rochefoucauld, traveling through Pennsylvania in 1795, had a similar commendation for host Barr.

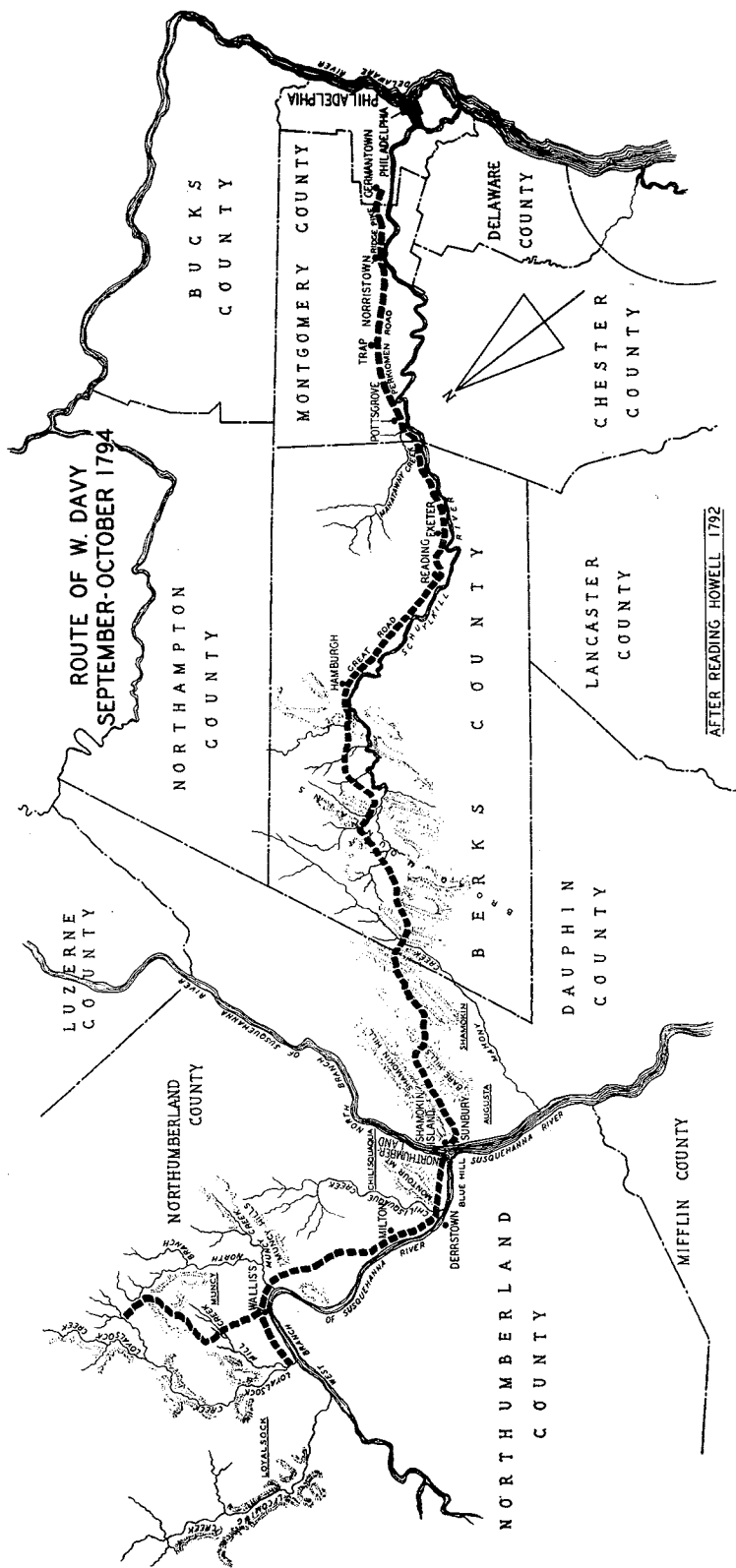
¹⁸ Intensely cultivated without replenishing by fertilizer or allowing to lie fallow.

¹⁹ Manatawny Creek flows into the Schuylkill River at Pottstown.

²⁰ The "Red Lion Hotel," established by Hoerner in 1760, was on the north side of the route of the Perkiomen Turnpike, one mile above Baumstown. The adjacent property was owned by Squire Boone, father of Daniel Boone.

²¹ Baumstown Hill.

²² A redemptioner who paid off the cost of his passage to America by working a stipulated number of years for the person who had paid his fare.



AFTER READING HOWELL 1792

Sunday 28th Sept. reached Reading early. Here we saw the Jersey Troop of Horse commanded by General White²³ & a sett of very fine Officers. They are in Camp but proceed tomorrow to Carlisle.²⁴ Met here my Friend Major Burrows²⁵ who introduced me to the General & I spent a very pleasant Hour with them. I learn that Coln. McPherson's Troop of Volunteers from Philadelphia²⁶ consists of 120 Men (of which the greater part are Quakers) who possess Property to the Amount of at least One Million Sterling. These are not Hirelings of Despotism, but free agents in the Support of Law & good Order. Reading is a large Town,²⁷ has considerable Manufactories of Hats, Clocks & Watches, are principally Germans. It is situated over the River Schulkyl. The Lands around (except one barren Mountain too near the Town)²⁸ are very good, fertile & worth £15 to £20 pr. Acre. The best Inn is the General Washington kept by Jno. Witman, Esqr.²⁹ Inspector of Excise (or Supervisor). Inspector's Office is the term instead of Excise Office, the word Excise is used as seldom as possible.³⁰ An Innkeeper is as respectable a profession as any whatever & the first offices are frequently fill'd by them. They are generally intelligent sensible Men but full of the pride of office when they hold any. Proceeded to Carters Town³¹ over better Roads but rather less improved Country, which is not Mountainous but very undulated. This is a new little Town over the Schulkyl & at the foot of the blue or broad Mountains

²³ General Andrew White of the New Jersey militia, who was dubbed "Blackbeard" for his rough handling of the "Whiskey Boys" at the Mingo Creek settlement.

²⁴ Mobilization point for troops moving into western Pennsylvania to quell the Whiskey Rebellion. Washington arrived in Reading on his way to Carlisle three days after Davy had departed. Reading contributed about 80 volunteers to crush the rebellion.

²⁵ The census of 1790 lists a Captain John Burrowes in the Northern Liberties of Philadelphia.

²⁶ Colonel William McPherson commanded the infantry unit of the First Troop, Philadelphia City Cavalry. Captain John Dunlap commanded the mounted unit.

²⁷ The county seat of Berks, founded in 1748, had about 500 houses and 2,500 people. The manufacture of hats, leather, and boats is mentioned by other travelers of the time as the principal industries.

²⁸ Mount Penn.

²⁹ "The Federal Inn at the Sign of President Washington," also known as "Witman's," and later, "Wood's Inn." Michael Wood leased it from John Witman, and in 1799 became its owner.

³⁰ Davy had been in this country long enough to become conscious of the widespread resentment against the excise taxes.

³¹ Hamburg, about 17 miles north of Reading. Surveyed in 1772 for Martin Kaercher and for a time known as "Kaerchertown." Davy is traveling the "Great Road from Reading to Sunbury," first surveyed in 1770 to facilitate travel between Philadelphia and Sunbury at the forks of the Susquehanna River. This became the route of the Centre Turnpike, 1811-1885.

which here have a awful solemn appearance & Nature appears in her first rude Dress, but the land round the Town is rich fertile & well watered. The People throughout this Country are well Dressed, even where the Cloathing is plain. Rags & dirt are never seen, there is a great simplicity in their Manners.³² The People at the Inn were surprised that some Ladies who were at the same Inn (Mrs. Darch & Daughters) objected to sleep in a Bed (& all of them without Curtains) in the same Room in which were 3 others, designed for Priestley, a Mr. Foster, Madge & Myself,³³ notwithstanding this the Women appear as modest & reserv'd as in any Country I ever travell'd through. In this Inn was a Harpsichord played very correctly by the Landlord's Daughters, he is a Capt'n. in the Army.

Monday 29th went to Nebbles³⁴ where heartily fatigued with walking nearly all the Way over bad Roads, on the Sides of Steep Mountains, over dangerous precipices & the rapid Schuylkyl we were glad of some refreshment, & proceeded to the Indian Cornplanter Inn (kept by young Read).³⁵ This is good Road (except through a Pine Swamp where the only Road that can be made is by throwing whole Trees across & close as they can lay & as they sink, new ones are laid on tier after tier). The Lands appear good but little cultivated in the last 10 Miles. Here Read is carrying considerable improvements. He has lived here Seven Years, at first in a small Log Hovel & began without any Property. He has now 50 Acres of good Land cleared round his House & an Estate of 400 Acres mostly woodland about 3 Miles off. I am pleased to see that they avail themselves of the same improved Machines in this distant Country as are known near the large Cities. The Winnowing Machine & the most expeditious Chopping Engines for Straw are universally adopted. Young Read has had spirit enough to build here & is now finishing a good House with three Parlours & a Bar & plenty of Bed Rooms in this Desert. It is built with Logs, framed with Pine Boards & colonated outside, Sash'd & well plaister'd. On the inside the Joyners Work too heavy is well executed. The House is 36 Feet in Front & 32 deep. The Log work is the Shell of the whole House. The Roof were raised compleatly in one Day. 40 of his Neighbours (most of them

³² An oft reiterated impression of the Pennsylvania Germans expressed by travelers passing through the "Dutch" country.

³³ Limited accommodations compelled limited sacrifices of propriety.

³⁴ Unidentified; possibly a settler who provided refreshment for passersby, a custom not uncommon in sparsely settled regions.

³⁵ John and Leonard Reed, or Read, brothers from the Tulpehocken region, had settled some miles apart in Pinegrove Township, present Schuylkill County, in the 1780's. The younger brother, John, had built his dwelling and inn on the site of what is now the Pottsville Hospital.

from 10 or 15 miles) came to assist him & finish'd $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours before Sun Set. This is the general practice when a new Settler makes his Log House.³⁶ The Pine Board of which he used 26,000 Feet cost him £3 pr. Thousand & the whole House something more than £400 cy. The Situation is healthy in general but this year the Flux has prevail'd, all America has indeed been sickly from the Wetness of the Summer. Fevers and Agues are heard of every where.³⁷ However fast People get Money here (in the Country) they persevere in hard Labour & Economy. They travel with their Teams (nothing is carried on Animals Backs on Saddle Horses only excepted) provided with every Necessary for Man & Beast. Every Waggon has a Manger. The Horses feed in it & repose themselves either in the Streets or by the Roads, without any Bedding (which is never used in this Country even for Saddle Horses, their Stables having all boarded Floors are clean & dry). The Farmer & Waggoner eats his own Provisions & sleeps in his cover'd Waggon.³⁸ Many travel a hundred Miles without spending sixpence on the Road & on Market Days & Nights the Streets of Philadelphia are crowded with these economical Germans. It is however very extraordinary that amidst this System the Farmers are so very inattentive to the making or saving of Manure & instead of a regular Court yard their Stables & Barns are plac'd in a Waste where the Dirt & Dung collect until the Building is almost buried.³⁹ They know very little of watering their Meadows.⁴⁰ Their Cattle are turned into the Woods with Bells on their Necks. Oxen, Cows, Horses, Hogs & Sheep, are induced very regularly to return to their Homes by being fed with Salt which they are all so fond of that they may be effectually tamed with small Quantities frequently given to them and given once a Week is wholesome & consider'd absolutely necessary to their Health. The Wild Red Deer are entrap'd by putting Salt into large Pits & Holes & they will even eat the Earth on which it has been strew'd & in these decoys they are shot by the Huntsmen. They are now fine & fat & sell for 4 d cy. pr pound. We this day met three Waggons with Families removing with their All—old People & young Children, Cattle, Utensils from Connecticut to Kentucky a Distance of about 1500 Miles. The People of this Country take little notice or make little difficulty in re-

³⁶ A custom of mutual aid that persists in parts of rural Pennsylvania, usually in raising a new barn.

³⁷ 1793 and 1794 were years of the yellow fever epidemic.

³⁸ The Conestoga wagon of roomy interior, topped with a homespun covering over high arching hoops.

³⁹ With few exceptions, Pennsylvania farmers did not use manure as fertilizer until the early 1800's.

⁴⁰ Davy errs here, for in 1799 John Beale Bordley commented, "In Pennsylvania, watered or irrigated meadows have long been in common use. . . ."

moving to these distant places provided they can procure a large & good Settlement for a little Money.

Tuesday 30th Sept. proceeded over the Summit of the blue or broad Mountains to old Reads⁴¹ 13 Miles of which we walk'd a great part over Rocky, Craggy Precipices, deep Swamps, rapid ascents, & in the best places very stony Roads & truly dangerous to a Carriage. The whole is a perfect Wilderness, & the Eye neither charmed with a view of Civilization or Variety as it cannot penetrate many yards into the Woods, nor is the Ear pleased with the melody of Birds. We saw but three small ones in the whole of this desolate Mountain. It abounds however with Iron Ore & a Bed of apparently good Coal is cut through by the Road on the very Summit.⁴² Old Reads is the merest Log & Clay Hut we have seen but we got some excellent Coffee & boil'd Fowls after which we dragg'd on 12 Miles farther to old Cherries⁴³ over the most shocking Roads for a Carriage that can be conceived of. The new Roads are merely Avenues cut through the Woods leaving the Stumps of all the Trees from 1 to 2 Feet above the Ground as also the Roots & Stocks of the underwood, so that at every step it requires the utmost possible care to avoid being over-set. Panthers, Bears, Pole Cats, Squirrels & Deer are the principal Inhabitants of these Regions, none of them ever attack Men unless wounded by him & in danger. The Spott old Cherry lives on was only six years ago a compleat Desert. He sett'd on it without a Farthing & with 10 Children. He began by cutting down & selling at a distance Rail fencing. He took 250 Acres of the Land on a Lease of 9 Years to pay no rent on Condition of clearing & improving at least 30 Acres, building a Log house, Barn, Stable & he has already in six Years cleared 50 Acres. Has excellent Wheat, Buck Wheat, Indian Corn, Flax, Turnips, Potatoes, Clover & Timothy Grass & takes in Cattle to keep in his Woodland in the Summer (securing them as before stated with Salt) & in all this he has no assistance but from his own Family. His present Stock consists of one Horse, two plowing Oxen, 10 Cows & Heifers, large numbers of Hogs, Geese, Ducks, Fowls, Turkeys & Bees. His produce is chiefly taken off his Hands by the Waggoners who go into the back Country with Families on their return to Philadelphia. He has now 7/ pr Bushel for his Wheat. He has property enough to buy an Estate & build a Farm House. This is the point they all aspire to. The Hovel he now lives in is

⁴¹ Possibly the home of Leonard Reed, older brother of John. See note 35.

⁴² The digging of anthracite coal in this region had begun as early as 1784.

⁴³ Possibly James Cherry, who is said to have been the first settler in Shamokin Township. Another of the same surname, either Joseph or Abraham Cherry, had located on Eagle Run near present Shamokin.

truly a miserable one built entirely by himself. It is however an Inn & though a bad House contains very good Provisions. The Beds for so they call them are worse than any in Spain^{43a} & every traveller uses his own Blanket.

Wednesday Octr. 1st went on to Titsworths⁴⁴ through the same kind of wild Country & bad Roads as yesterday. Here we Breakfasted very well & found the same kind of improvements going on as at Cherries (the old Man's Son is a Capt'n. in the Militia). We met here a Farmer's Wife from Bald Eagle Valley on the Susquehanna, who speaks of that as the most delightful Spot on Earth. She is going on Horseback a Journey of 400 miles with her Son, after which she hopes never more to leave her delightful home. From Titsworth to Sunbury⁴⁵ through a Country more Cultivated, less Mountainous & better Roads. This Town is situated on a plain at a small distance from the Banks of the Susquehanna River which is here more than half a Mile wide with a high, bold & Rocky Mountain⁴⁶ directly over the opposite Shore extending nearly two Miles in a strait Line at the Termination of which & on the Forks of the River the small Town of Northumberland is open to the View. It stands on rising Ground with a gentle Ascent to the Woody Mountains behind.⁴⁷ The River is here divided into three Branches but two of them being separated by an Island of only 2½ Mile in length⁴⁸ these are united & form beyond it the North East Branch. The Situation is highly beautiful affording as finely varied a Prospect as can be enjoyed. Sunbury having a bad Swamp⁴⁹ behind it is generally unhealthy, while Northumberland standing high & dry is as generally healthy. The Island is peculiarly delightful. This River is just now very low & of difficult Navigation but is generally navigable for Barges to Harristown & Middleburgh⁵⁰ downwards & to a very great Dis-

^{43a} The Spanish Embassy in London issued a travel permit, June 8, 1777, to a William Davy for travel in Spain. A brother of Davy's was located in Madrid.

⁴⁴ John and William Titsworth, of Teitsworth, kept a tavern at a place that is now Paxinos, Northumberland County.

⁴⁵ At the junction of the West and North branches of the Susquehanna River, it was earlier the important Indian town of Shamokin, from which place Shickellamy, vice-regent of the Iroquois, kept watchful eye on the doings of tribes subordinate to the Six Nations. Fort Augusta was erected here during the French and Indian War. In 1772 the name of Sunbury was given to the community.

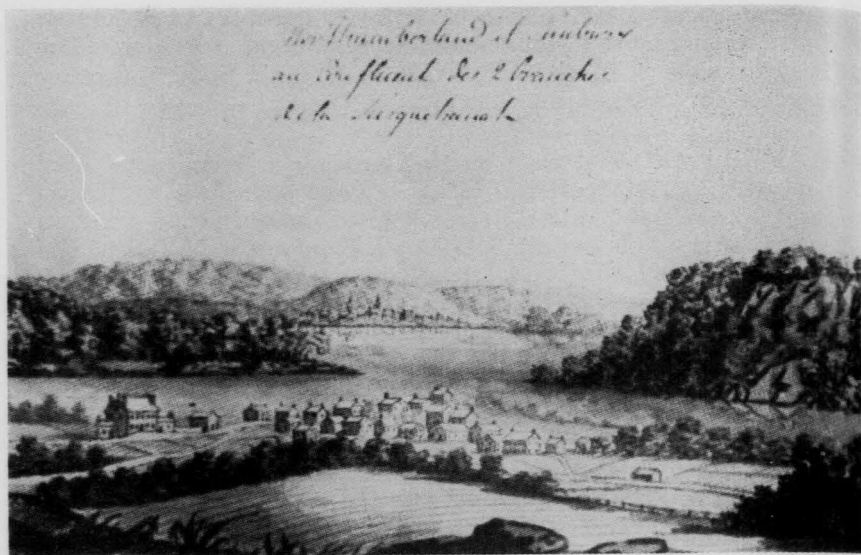
⁴⁶ Blue Hill.

⁴⁷ Montour Mountain.

⁴⁸ Shamokin Island, Scott's Island, or Packer's Island. At one time it was known as the Isle of Corcyra.

⁴⁹ Adjacent to Spring Run; currently referred to as "The Gut."

⁵⁰ A confusion of names; Davy meant Harrisburg and Middletown.



NORTHUMBERLAND (Foreground), SUNBURY (in the distance), and SHAMOKIN ISLAND (left center).

From Comte Colbert de Maulevrier's Sketchbook.

Courtesy Northumberland County Historical Society

tance in the back Country. The West Branch is the best. The North is very rapid for Rafts. The River is navigable down [close] to Baltimore. A Canal⁵¹ is now executing to connect this River with the Schuylkyl by the Swetara Creek to the Tulpehawkin Creek, so that if ever the Schuylkyl Canal is executed there will be a communication direct to Philadelphia when Northumberland will become a great Depot for Produce & Merchandise.

Thursday Octr. 2d. Doctor Priestley visited us at Sunbury looks healthy & Chearful. Has left off his Perriwig & Combs his short grey locks in the true Style of the simplicity of the Country. He is on the whole so well pleased that he is preparing to build a

⁵¹ The Schuylkill and Susquehanna Navigation Company, another canal development headed by Robert Morris. When completed in 1828, the waterway connections between the Delaware and the Susquehanna rivers were the Schuylkill Navigation Canal running from Philadelphia to Reading, and the Union Canal from Reading to the Susquehanna River at a point where Swatara Creek flows into it a few miles below Harrisburg.



NORTHUMBERLAND, 1798

From Comte Colbert de Maulevrier's Sketchbook.

Courtesy Northumberland County Historical Society

very good Brick House the Foundation of which & a Well he has already dug.⁵²

(To Be Continued)

⁵² The Priestley home, on Priestley Way overlooking the Susquehanna River at Northumberland, is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. George Neff.