THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

BY CHARLES H. GLATFELTER

THE thirty-seventh annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association was held on October 11 and 12, 1968, at Pottstown, Pennsylvania. The hosts were the Pottstown Historical Society and the Hill School.

The opening luncheon session was held in The Potts Room of the Holiday Inn, with Robert L. Bloom, a vice-president of the association, presiding. Following the luncheon, Richard H. Scheffey, president of the Pottstown Historical Society, greeted those in attendance. Mrs. James I. Wendell, president of the National Society of The Colonial Dames of America and a member of the local arrangements committee, also spoke briefly. Professor Bloom then introduced Herbert G. Gutman, University of Rochester, who spoke on “Industrial Violence in Gilded Age Pennsylvania: Another Look at the 1875 Buena Vista ‘Riot’ and Related Events.” Referring to his article, entitled “The Buena Vista Affair, 1874-1875,” published in the July 1964 issue of the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXXVIII, 251-293, he declared that new evidence, especially the letters and other writings of coal miners and their spokesmen, makes it possible to view that event in greater depth. It is now possible to study aspects of the culture of the Westmoreland coal miners so that the violence against coal operator Charles Armstrong and his 200-odd armed Italian strike-breakers is more understandable. The miners were whole men and did not view their deteriorating circumstances in simple economic terms so that the violence was shaped by patterns of belief and aspiration. Their life-style and world-view caused them to quarrel with employers over more than the price paid for a bushel of coal. The miners bitterly resented the shattering of their particular dream of America as a society essentially different
from Europe. Industrial expansion and centralization threatened their self-esteem and status as citizen-workers. These developments seemed to betray promises explicit in traditional, pre-industrial American ideology and culture. And the tension between these promises and aspirations as opposed to new industrial realities created a wide range of feelings and beliefs: resentment, depression, anxiety, and so forth. Responses varied: collective organization sometimes and, under certain conditions, a violent outburst. In this instance, as in all others, the culture of the working people must be studied in detail before their behavior can be understood.

"Violence in the City" was the theme of the Friday afternoon session at which Lawrence O. Ealy, Rider College, presided. The first paper, by Elizabeth M. Geffen, Lebanon Valley College, dealt with "Violence in Philadelphia in the 1840's and 1850's." The widely accepted image of Philadelphia as a Quaker city characterized by all-pervasive quiet, declared Professor Gaffen, bears little relationship to the facts. The city has erupted repeatedly into bloody violence, which reached a climax in the pre-Civil War decades. Its abolitionist tradition, together with its well-known benevolent organizations, as well as its location, made it a mecca for Negroes escaping from Southern bondage. Poverty-stricken, ignorant, unused to urban living, they diluted the effectiveness of social controls and produced a high rate of vice, crime, and social misery, intensified as they were forced into a narrow area centering at Sixth and Lombard streets. Here, beginning in the late 1820's, Negroes became a target for white violence. Many factors, including economic depression and immigration, encouraged the growth of irresponsible social action. Endemic anti-Catholicism, sanctioned by the clergy in the American Protestant Association and organized by the Native American Party, culminated in the burning of Roman Catholic churches, a convent, a school, and the homes of hundreds of Irishmen. A general failure to solve the administrative problems posed by rapid industrialization, especially the growing urban needs for police and fire protection, permitted the terrorization of the city by organized gangs. The technological upheaval of the Industrial Revolution demanded social reorganization, which was not accomplished either promptly or thoroughly enough. The violence
of the 1840's and 1850's testifies to the destructive force of that era's ignorance of social dynamics.

The second paper at this session, entitled "The Wilkes-Barre Strike of 1915: A Study in the Theory and Practice of Strike-breaking," was read by Harold E. Cox, Wilkes College. This dispute, with the Wilkes-Barre Railway Company, occurred in an area of intense labor activity where every advantage initially seemed to lay with the union, yet the company eventually emerged as the victor insofar as breaking the strike was concerned. It was a strike which dragged on for fourteen months without a solution and with a minimum of violence for such a protracted and bitter conflict. The extensive corporate records and personal correspondence which survive enable an analysis of both the technique used by the company and the extent of damage which was done to its business by the strike. The Wilkes-Barre Railway Company had several problems to resolve during the course of the conflict. These included the restoration and maintenance of service, the elimination of jitney bus competition, the improvement of its public image, and the maintenance of fiscal solvency. It successfully accomplished all but the last of these. As a result of the strike the company was forced to borrow heavily to continue operation and after eight years of attempting to recoup its losses was finally forced into a financial reorganization. While the company made no noticeable error in its tactics in the entire fourteen months of the strike and succeeded in eroding away the entire union position, the cost of the campaign was prohibitive and the victory was Pyrrhic.

"Papers" was the theme of the second Friday afternoon session, chaired by Donald H. Kent, a vice-president of the association. Mr. W. M. Christman, III, Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, spoke on "The Stephen Girard Papers." He described the work begun on these papers in 1964 under the auspices of the American Philosophical Society. During a long and financially rewarding business career Girard had kept meticulous records, and there were thousands of separate items to be arranged and catalogued. Nearly 700 reels of microfilm were the fruit of the project. Still to be completed is a comprehensive guide to the collection. Mr. Christman stated that several dozen scholars have already begun working in the wide variety of source materials available in
the papers. They have been interested in such topics as the history of the French in the United States, Girard's attitude toward the Negro, the arts, and public finance during the War of 1812. But the greatest value of the papers, he believes, will be for the economic historian. Already they have been used for a dissertation on the subject of wage rates in Philadelphia between 1790 and 1830. The student interested in any aspect of the significant changes in Philadelphia's economic status after 1815 will do well to consult the Girard collection.

The second speaker at this session was Arthur P. Dudden, Bryn Mawr College. He discussed Joseph Fels, a Philadelphia businessman who was converted tardily in his life into a crusader, becoming an energetic zealot who attempted a variety of unique and unusual approaches to philanthropy and social reform at home and in England. Although so wealthy that he could be characterized a millionaire either in United States dollars or British pounds sterling, Fels turned away from his business affairs to attempt fundamental transformations of the social structure. Then, as a man who sought to abolish poverty and its attendant train of woes, he made his mark for the second time, "Fels-Naptha Soap" having been the first. His life affords a window into the turbulence of industrialism, and also into those ideas and remedies which arose in response to the savageries of competition, monopoly, unemployment, poverty, and urban degradation. Exemplifying the significance of land reform as an escape from the harshnesses of his times and of Henry George as the most provocative thinker along such lines, he stands revealed as George's chief disciple, his St. Paul as it were. The Fels papers, which Professor Dudden brought together, are now deposited at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Following the afternoon sessions many persons visited Pottsgrove, the house begun in 1752 by John Potts, iron manufacturer and founder of Pottstown. This historic mansion, since 1941 owned by the Commonwealth, was restored and refurnished largely through the efforts of the Pottstown Historical Society. Hostesses were present to explain the purpose and furnishings of the various rooms.

The annual dinner meeting of the association occurred in the Sunnybrook Ballroom, Pottstown, with President Homer T.
Rosenberger presiding. Appropriate music ably performed by The Pottsgrove Ensemble was enjoyed by one of the largest groups to attend the annual dinner in recent years. In his banquet paper, Robert K. Murray, The Pennsylvania State University, attempted to use the career of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and his activities during the Great Red Scare of 1919-1920 as a case study in revealing the nature and pattern of repression in modern American society. Capitalizing on the conditions of unrest and fear in the United States following World War I, Palmer, a Pennsylvania Quaker and aspirant for the White House, led a crusade for curbing radicalism and suppressing civil liberties. His success was at first applauded, but later was condemned as public hysteria waned. In the final analysis, his own political career and his chances for the presidency were destroyed by his excesses during the Red Scare period. Professor Murray's conclusions were that although American history, and Pennsylvania history, has been filled with incidents like the Red Scare and marked by repressive actions such as Palmer's, the inner light of freedom still continues to burn and illuminate the dark outer world of disorder and confusion.

The formal, planned activities for Friday concluded with a meeting of the Council in The Hill Room of the Holiday Inn. The customary Phi Alpha Theta breakfast began the activities for Saturday, October 12. About two dozen members attended. Donald B. Hoffman talked briefly about the affairs of the fraternity. Meanwhile, cars left the motel for tours to one of three places: Hopewell Village, Daniel Boone homestead, or the historic churches at New Hanover and Trappe.

The annual business meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association convened in Memorial Hall, the Hill School, with about thirty persons in attendance and with President Homer T. Rosenberger in charge. The recording secretary read the minutes of the preceding annual meeting. John B. Frantz, business secretary, gave his report of a record high membership of 1,787. Recruiting efforts of Richard H. Scheffey in Montgomery County and of Richard P. Wright in Erie County were singled out for special praise. The secretary commented on the steady flow of correspondence from high school teachers and students.

Treasurer Richard P. Wright described as adequate the overall
financial position of the association, but said that it was less than desirable at the moment. A major reason is that the cost of an average issue of *Pennsylvania History* has risen from $1,600 to more than $1,900 in the past two years. To relieve the situation, he presented an amendment to the constitution increasing the annual dues, effective January 1, 1969, from $5 to $6. Since all of the constitutional requirements had been met, action on the amendment was in order. It passed unanimously.

Editor William G. Shade reported that the January 1969 issue of *Pennsylvania History* would be devoted to a recognition of Lawrence Henry Gipson.

J. Cutler Andrews, for the Nominating Committee, announced that the Council had appointed Philip E. Stebbins to fill the unexpired term of John B. Frantz, the business secretary, who resigned. He also presented the following nominees to fill vacancies on the Council: Wallace E. Davies, Loring B. Priest, Ralph S. Shay, and George D. Wolf. They were elected for three-year terms.

There were reports from other committees. Robert L. Bloom, chairman of the Publications Committee, told the members that the Council had authorized two new pamphlets: one on Pennsylvania architecture and one on the Negro in Pennsylvania. Speaking for the Membership Committee, Ralph S. Shay told of plans for continuing efforts to increase association membership. Donald H. Kent of the Research Committee declared that the association’s third research conference last spring was most successful and that a fourth effort was being planned.

President Rosenberger announced the following places of future meetings: 1969, Wilson College, Chambersburg; 1970, Indiana University, Indiana; 1971, Lycoming College, Williamsport; and 1972, West Chester State College, West Chester. He said that the Council of the association has recommended to the Governor that at least one professional historian be among those appointed to the Bicentennial Commission of Pennsylvania.

Hugh R. Gibb, chairman of the Resolutions Committee, presented resolutions of thanks to the Pottstown Historical Society, the Hill School, the program committee (Robert E. Carlson, chairman) and the local arrangements committee (Richard H.
These resolutions were unanimously adopted. The meeting adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Jackson Turner Main, State University of New York at Stony Brook, presided at one of three Saturday morning sessions in the library of the science building at the Hill School. The theme was "Violence in Colonial Pennsylvania." William T. Parsons, Ursinus College, reported on "The Bloody Election of 1742." Among the hotly contested elections in our area, few have witnessed the violence of this one in Philadelphia. Quaker and Proprietary factions continued a struggle for leadership in the Assembly. Each faction employed tactics calculated to strengthen its own position or to limit advantages of the opposition. Reform election laws failed of legislative renewal. Late in September 1742, rumors of imminent violence spread through the city. On early morning of election day crowds of voters gathered at the Courthouse. Unruly sailors appeared, armed with clubs, seemingly intent upon preventing the election. Violence erupted; there were numerous injuries. Citizens retaliated, driving the seamen from the square. Voting continued as numerous pro-Quaker Germans handed in their first election ticket. Voters blamed William Allen and his friends for the violence and rejected them at the ballot box. Courts disputed jurisdiction over the sailors as the Assembly initiated hearings to fix responsibility. Legal challenges ensued, producing no decision. Although Allen had not hired waterfront toughs, documentary evidence shows one of his business partners had contracted for sailors to interfere. Pennsylvania citizens declared themselves generally opposed to the use of violence in politics.

George W. Franz, The Pennsylvania State University (Delaware County Campus), read a paper on "The Paxton Boys and the Frontier." In February 1764 a group of frontiersmen called the Paxton Boys marched on Philadelphia in an attempt to have the Assembly redress their grievances. A lively pamphlet warfare resulted, which most historians have used as a basis for analyzing the march. They see these actions as an attempt by the Paxton Boys to emphasize their demands for equal representation for the backcountry counties that were denied equal status with the older counties. Mr. Franz attempted to show that the actions of the men who marched on Philadelphia were based entirely on their
demands for more adequate frontier defense measures and that
the idea of agitating for equal representation did not develop until
after the frontier’s spokesmen met in Philadelphia with the Presby-
terian politicians who were looking for an issue to use in their
attack on the proprietary government.

Norman B. Wilkinson, Hagley Museum, was chairman for the
session which met in the Little Theatre of the science building.
Seth M. Scheiner, Rutgers University, and Walter Fisher, Morgan
State College, led a lively and stimulating session on the teaching
of Negro history.

Mrs. James I. Wendell was chairman for the third morning
session, devoted to local history and meeting in Memorial Field,
the Hill School. Linda McCabe McCurdy, The Pennsylvania State
University, read a paper on “John Potts, Colonial Ironmaster.”
She described him as an outstanding Pennsylvania ironmaster
during the mid-eighteenth century when Pennsylvania led the
colonies in iron production. With the training received from his
father, who managed the first blast furnace in Pennsylvania, he
was able to take part in the management of Pine Forge, a major
refinery, and Warwick Furnace, one of the primary sources of
pig iron in the colony. In time he expanded his ownership of a
chain of Schuylkill valley refinery forges to include Pine,
Coventry, Valley, and Pottsgrove forges. A company formed by
three of his sons served as his supplier and marketing agent.
Pottsgrove became the seat of his enterprises; there instead of
setting up a traditional plantation, he established a company town.
He employed the residents on his estate, owned the local busi-
nesses, served as justice of the peace, and represented the top of
the town’s social structure. As his wealth and position increased,
and as his sons took over management of his iron interests, John
Potts turned to real estate investment, owning by the time of his
death in 1768 valuable properties from Philadelphia to the
Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Ironmaster, merchant, judge, and
landowner, John Potts was part of a small and historically
neglected northern aristocracy whose wealth was based on manu-
facture.

Following tours of the campus, the Saturday luncheon session
was held with students and faculty in the Hill School Dining
Room with John W. Huston, United States Naval Academy, pre-
siding. Archibald M. Montgomery, III, headmaster, and A. Pierce Saunders, the Hill School, both spoke briefly. After the meal was served, the session adjourned to Memorial Hall, where Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., Shippensburg State College, read a paper on the topic, "The Reading Socialists and World War I: A Question of Loyalty." This paper was intended to show that the antiwar appeal of the Socialist Party during World War I met with a favorable response in many localities. In Reading the Socialist organization had grown so large by 1917 that it held the balance of power politically. It was a well-financed, closely knit movement, ably led by James H. Maurer, President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor. The American Socialists opposed the war by a very large majority and were disillusioned that their comrades abroad supported their respective governments. They began almost at once to campaign against American participation. In Reading James H. Maurer led an anti-preparedness crusade. The Socialist program evoked a hostile response from the majority, but nevertheless it continued. After the National Emergency Convention of the party passed resolutions refusing to support the American war effort, the Readingites organized a local anti-conscription league and helped organize a pacifist propaganda organization aimed at labor. In spite of great hostility against them, the Socialists if anything slightly increased their power in 1917. Four Socialists survived the primary in the councilmanic elections and forced the Democrats and Republicans to fuse in order to win the general election in November. The Socialists were so well-established in Reading that no important efforts were made by federal authorities to disrupt their organization. In 1918-1919 they supported labor in disputes with major employers and secured even tighter control of the labor movement. By the end of 1919 the unions in Reading were solidly Socialist. The Socialist experience in Reading demonstrates that in certain localities the appeal to class-consciousness was very effective. Even during the war, when pressures to conform and exhibit patriotism were very strong, the appeal to workers on this basis succeeded.