In the Manuscript Department of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania is preserved a letter from Thomas Penn to Governor Hamilton, dated September 8, 1751, in which he states: “Sometime since, I wrote to Dr. Graeme and Mr. Peters to lay out some ground in the Forks of the Delaware for a town, which I suppose they have done, or begun to do so. I desire it may be called Easton, from my Lord Pompfret’s house, and whenever there is a new county, that shall be called Northampton.” William Parsons was selected to lay out the projected town, on the wedge of land between the Lehigh River, Bushkill Creek, and Delaware River, and on May 9, 1750, Surveyor General Nicholas Scull joined him on the site, and with a corps of assistants the survey was soon completed. The county of Northampton was erected under Act of Assembly approved March 11, 1752.

William Parsons was born in England, May 6, 1701, where he learned the trade of shoemaking, and before attaining his majority, came to Pennsylvania. While carrying on his trade in Philadelphia, he devoted all his spare time to study, so that in the course of time, he became acquainted with persons of education, and gained the reputation of “a man having a profound knowledge of mathematics.” He became a member of the famous “Junto,” the club formed by Franklin, soon after his return from England in 1726, to discuss ethics, politics, and natural philosophy. Franklin mentions Parsons as a Geographer, in a letter of April, 1744. From 1734–1746 he served as librarian of the City Library.

On August 21, 1741, Parsons was appointed Surveyor General of the Province, to succeed Benjamin Eastburn, a
position which called his peculiar qualifications into exercise, but the physical hardships connected with it caused him to present his resignation to the Provincial Council, which was accepted June 10, 1748, and Nicholas Scull was appointed in his place. He then became a resident of Lancaster, was commissioned a Justice of the Peace, April 22, 1749, and also filled the offices of Prothonotary, Register, and Recorder, and continued to survey at intervals.

After the erection of Northampton County out of the upper part of Bucks County, Parsons wrote to Secretary Peters, in December of 1752, that he had removed with part of his family, servants, and household effects, and established themselves at the "Point of the Forks"; and here the most eventful years of his life were passed. The first County Court was held at Easton, June 16, 1752, and the first County election for Assemblyman, Sheriff, and three County Commissioners, October 1, of the same year. Parsons served three terms as Justice of the Peace between 1752 and 1757; one term as an Assemblyman, 1758; and filled the offices of Prothonotary, Clerk of the Court, Recorder, and Clerk of the Commissioners. He also acted as the agent of the Proprietaries, looking after their interests, and promoting the sale and settlement of lands. Through his personal efforts, the first building for school and worship was erected by subscription. Parsons contributed £5 and was a Trustee.

During the Indian troubles, Parsons was appointed Major in the Provincial service, in 1755, and the following year assigned to the First Battalion, commanded by Lieut. Col. Conrad Weiser. On December 29, 1755, he was appointed Major in command of all the troops raised in Northampton County, and for a time supervised the defences of that region. At all the Conferences held at Easton prior to 1758, between the Provincial authorities and the Indians, Major Parsons attended in his military capacity, and Governors Morris and Denny were his guests, the last named, however, found that the Major was at the seashore for the benefit of
his health. Parsons died at Easton, December 17, 1757, and is justly entitled to the honor given him, “The Father of Easton.”

William Parsons, in many respects, was a man of perverse disposition, that marred his relations with people without real occasion. His anti-German position, which he thought the Proprietary interests he represented demanded, was intensified by being outvoted at several elections in the new county, and his prejudices against the Moravian settlements—a prejudice which he tried unsuccessfully to impart to the Proprietors—all injured his popularity. His old associate Nicholas Scull said of him: “Parsons is a man that is not apt to forget any old differences.” The first election held in the new county, October 1, 1752, resulted in the election of James Burnside as first Assemblyman, he being a Moravian living near Bethlehem, and representing the elements which Parsons spoke of as the Quaker Party at variance with the Proprietary interests. At the election of 1753, he was successful, but in 1754 and 1755, two Moravians, James Burnside and William Edmonds, were again elected.

Later his prejudices against the Moravians changed, and his attitude became friendly; he embraced the evangelical faith; and as his end drew near, he desired to have all his family gathered around him, but in that pathetic hour, it was too late for his wife to come from Philadelphia. He died December 17, 1757, and at his request a simple funeral service was conducted by his son-in-law, the Rev. Jacob Rogers, of the Moravian Church.

The substantial stone house which Parsons built as his second residence in Easton, is still standing at the northeast corner of Fourth and Ferry streets. After his death it was occupied by George Taylor, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, who died there in 1781. It is now the property of the George Taylor Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, who have restored it and placed a memorial tablet on its wall.
It so happened, that the year and month—May, 1901—which marked the bi-centennial anniversary of Parsons' birth, brought the announcement that the spot where his remains rested on Mount Jefferson was to be sold for a site of a free library, a more pretentious undertaking than the first institution in the interest of popular education which he succeeded in erecting at Easton. His remains were not disturbed, and are marked by an appropriate memorial.

The will of William Parsons is dated December 15, 1757 (two days prior to his death), in which he bequeaths to the children of his sisters Mary and Sarah £50 each; to his son-in-law James Worrell his watch and £40, with which he is "to make up and decorate the graves and tombs of my late dear mother," and his own children, Robert, Susannah, and Hannah; to his nephew, Dr. Stephen Woolley, £100; to his niece, Rebecca Woolley, £20, for the great care and attention shown him; to his niece Elizabeth Cummins, £50; to a servant girl, Elizabeth Kristman, £20; to the "Poor Scholars of the Academy of Philadelphia," £200; and the residue of his estate to his wife during her life, and after her death to their three children. His executors were his "very good friends" William Coleman, and Evan Morgan of Philadelphia, and Timothy Horsfield of Bethlehem.

William Parsons was married at Philadelphia in 1722, to Johanna Christina Zeidig, born May, 1699, a daughter of John Julius Zeidig and Salome Margaret Sprogel, a daughter of the Rev. John Henry Sprogel, a widely known clergyman and educator of Quedlinburg, in the Saxon province of Prussia. A sister was the wife of the Rev. Gottfried Arnold, church historian, a professor at the University of Giessen, and a man of great learning. Two of her brothers were John Henry Sprogel and Ludwig Christian Sprogel, names familiar to the students of early Pennsylvania history, with one of whom Miss Zeidig came to Philadelphia, where she first affiliated with the Dunkards under Alexander Mack. Parsons, about the date of his
marriage, was in nominal connection with the Lutheran Church, but was so absorbed in studies and plans in the direction of his personal inclinations and ambitions, that he had no sympathy with the fervent piety of his German wife, and at times was indifferent and harsh towards her. She withdrew from all religious associations and became a Separatist, and next found satisfaction in a kind of Agnosticism. She next came in contact with certain "French Prophets," who gave her books to read, in which she thought that she had found light. These enthusiasts are not commonly mentioned among the sects which presented such a motley array in Pennsylvania in those days. When Whitefield visited Philadelphia she attended his preaching, and when the Moravian evangelists came, she was constantly at their services. To this her husband objected, and forbade his children to attend their meetings; and when his wife seemed disposed to do so nevertheless, he threatened to forsake her, if she did not follow his wishes. In 1745, Parsons really carried his threat into execution and the couple were never re-united. Leaving his wife in Philadelphia, he took his two youngest daughters to the Swatara, where he owned a tract of land, but later he yielded to their wishes and permitted them to return for awhile to their mother. In 1751 she was admitted to membership in the Moravian Church, and in 1769, removed to Bethlehem, where she died March 10, 1773. Six children were born to them:

Susanna, who died unmarried, Oct. 17, 1746.
Robert, who died April 27, 1746.
Hannah, who married James Worral, and died Jan. 20, 1753.
Ann Mary, married, March 31, 1756, the Rev. Jacob Rogers. He had been a clergyman of the Church of England, but joined the Moravian Church at Bedford o. z. in 1741. She died at Dobbs' Parish, North Carolina, where her husband was stationed, July 19, 1759. They had issue:
Johanna Salome, born Dec. 10, 1759; died Sept. 14, 1769.

Johanna Grace, born Nov. 28, 1736, was named after her grandmother, Grace Parsons. She married at Bethlehem, July 29, 1758, Nicholas Garrison, Jr., son of Capt. Nicholas Garrison, of Staten Island, New York, who possessed some skill in drawing and sketching, and executed several noted views of the Moravian settlements, which are much sought after by collectors. In 1762 they removed to Philadelphia, where Garrison engaged in business on Race Street. Just before the occupation of the city by Howe's army, they fled to Oldman's Creek, New Jersey, where they remained until the following summer. After 1780, they became residents of Berks County. They had issue:


Frederick.

Juliana Sarah, born at Philadelphia, Nov. 19, 1738; married, Oct. 14, 1766, Timothy Horsfield, Jr., son of Justice Timothy Horsfield, of Bethlehem. He died April 11, 1789, and she, Jan. 17, 1808. They had issue:

Timothy, died young.

William, born 1770; died Feb. 8, 1845. Married Rebecca Weiss, daughter of Col. Jacob Weiss, the founder of Weissport, Carbon County; and died Feb. 14, 1845. Descendants living.

Thomas, born May 12, 1773; died in London, England, July 24, 1859. He received his early education in the Moravian schools at Bethlehem and Nazareth; pursued a course in pharmacy with Dr. Otto of Bethlehem, devoting special attention also to botany; and later attended lectures at the University of Pennsylvania, where he took his degree of M.D. in 1798. Some years afterwards he went to England, and thence to the East Indies
in the service of the East India Company. He attained a reputation in scientific circles, both as a practitioner and as an author. His extensive researches as a naturalist, particularly on the island of Java, are known through his *Zoological Researches in Java, 1821-1824; Lepidopterous Insects; and Planta Javanica Bariores*.

He was the first librarian of the East India House in London. He had issue; a son, *Charles Cooper Horsfield*, and a daughter.

The "Parson Papers" in the Manuscript Department of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania comprise a large and valuable correspondence, and surveys; his Day Book, 1723–1727 (shoe and slipper making); Index to Surveys made in 1730; Field Book, 1734; Receipt Book, 1738–1749; Common Place Book, 1741.