

THE LOST WILL OF GEORGE TAYLOR, THE SIGNER.

BY JAMES B. LAUX.

The shameful looting of precious Colonial and Revolutionary letters and manuscripts from the State archives at Harrisburg, which took place during the regimes of complaisant, easy-going officials in other generations, is evidenced at almost every auction sale at Philadelphia, New York and Boston. Some idea of the vast extent of this speculation may also be had by looking through the catalogues of autograph dealers in these cities and by an examination of the manuscript collections in the public libraries and historical societies, as well as those of private collectors.

Much of this looting was due to the criminal carelessness and neglect of State officials who afforded autograph hunters free access to the priceless collections in their departments. Happily the watchfulness of the State Historians in recent years has put a stop to such piratical incursions and what remain of the collections are now jealously safeguarded.

What has been said here of the State archives can also be said of the records in many of the County Court houses. The crass stupidity of County Commissioners in ordering the destruction of books and documents of great historical value was matched often by highhanded and unauthorized destruction of records in other County offices. A notable instance of this wanton vandalism is had in the destruction of the early records of the County treasurer of Lehigh County a few years ago. The Treasurer needed a little more shelf room and acquired it by the burning of the earliest records covering a period of more than fifty years. The writer made this discovery when he sought access

to these records for the purpose of obtaining data for a school history he was writing. Disappointed here he turned with confidence to the School records at Harrisburg only to learn that they too had been destroyed by fire when the State Capitol was burned, thus wiping out of existence most important historical matter, the only sources from which the data desired could be obtained.

One of the most flagrant examples of the looting of County records was recently discovered by the writer when he found the lost will of George Taylor, Signer of the Declaration of Independence, in a famous collection of autographs now in the possession of a great library in New York City.

The will was no doubt stolen by an outsider from the Court House at Easton, the County Seat of Northampton County, Penn^a. or by an employee of the Register of Wills and sold by him for a good round sum to some collector.

Not only has the destruction of public documents in many counties been deliberate, but much of it is going on at the present moment through the carelessness and disregard for safety shown in their storage in damp cellars, basements, in lumber rooms, and in garrets where the elements, rats and mice have full play with them. The Judges of the County Courts should call the attention of County officials to this criminal neglect of property belonging to the public. Some ignoramus holding office for a brief space can work incalculable harm to these collections. The Lost Books of Livy would be used by officials of this stamp in the lighting of the furnace fires. What possible chance for escape would writings of more recent date and less value, though priceless have at their hands?

The writer succeeded in securing a photostat copy of the George Taylor will, which he presented to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

84 *The Lost Will of George Taylor, the Signer.*

WILL OF GEORGE TAYLOR.

Be it Remembered that I George Taylor of the Town of Easton in the County of Northampton and State of Pennsylvania Esquire being mindful of my Mortality and willing & desirous, whilst I am of sound Mind & Memory to settle and dispose of my Worldly Estate in such manner as to render it most beneficial to the Legatees thereof, have thought it requisite & convenient to make this my Testament & Last Will, as follows, that is to say, *First*, it is my Will that all my just Debts and Funeral Expenses be duly paid off & discharged *And* I do nominate & appoint my trusty & much esteemed Friends Robert Levers of the Town of Northampton in the said County of Northampton Esquire Robert Lettis Hooper Jun^r. of the State of New Jersey Esquire and Robert Traill of the said Town of Easton Esquire to be Executors of this my said Testament & Last Will *And* I do hereby give & bequeath unto such one of them my said Executors as shall take upon him the Burthen of the Executorship or unto them conjointly acting the Sum of One Hundred Pounds Lawful Money of Pennsylvania over & besides what is usually allowed to Executors in the Register's Office *And* I do also give & bequeath unto the said Robert Levers my Silver mounted Double Barrel Gun, to be engraved thus, The Gift of George Taylor Esquire *And* I do likewise give and bequeath unto the said Robert Lettis Hooper Jun^r. a neat Silver mounted Small Sword to be thus engraved, In Memory of George Taylor Esquire *And* unto the said Robert Traill I do give & bequeath One Pair of Pistols *And* the better to enable my said Executors to pay off & discharge my Debts and Legacies I do hereby will & ordain that my said Executors and the Survivors & Survivor of them & the Executors or Administrators of the Survivor of them shall as soon as conveniently may be after my decease bargain sell & convey in Fee Simple all my Lots Lands Tenements & Hereditaments whatsoever or wheresoever For the doing executing & perfect finishing whereof I do by these Presents give grant & transfer to them my said Executors & the Survivors and Survivor of them & the Executors or Administrators of the Survivor of them full Power & Authority to grant bargain sell & convey the same & any & every Part thereof to any Person or Persons whomsoever & their Heirs & assigns for ever for such Price & Consideration as can be reasonably got *And* I do give unto my Housekeeper Naomi Smith in Consideration of her great Care & Attendance on me for a Number of Years past the Sum of Five Hundred Pounds Lawful Money aforesaid to be paid her within Six Months after my Decease *And* I do also give unto the said Naomi Smith One Bed & Bedstead together with such Household Goods & Furniture as my Executors in their Discretion shall judge most meet and convenient for her accommodation in her future Dwelling Place *And* I do give & bequeath unto my Grandson George Taylor the Sum of Five Hundred Pounds Like Money aforesaid in Right of his Primogeniture *And* as for & concerning all the Rest & Residue of my Goods Chattles Monies Effects and Estate Real &

The Lost Will of George Taylor, the Signer. 85

Personal whatsoever not herein before disposed of It is my Will that the same shall be indifferently appraised & at the Discretion of my Executors divided, or sold for the best Prices that can be gotten therefor, and being so divided or sold, the same, or the Moneys arising from the Sale thereof shall be distributed into Two equal Parts One equal Moiety or Half Part whereof I give devise & bequeath unto my Five Grand Children viz^t. George, Thomas, James, Ann & Mary, to be equally parted and divided amongst them Share & Share alike & to be paid & delivered unto my said Five Grand Children at their several respective Ages of Twenty One Years And my Will & Meaning is that in case of the Death of either of my said Grand Children George, Thomas, James, Ann & Mary, under Age & without Lawful Issue the Part or Portion of him her or them so dying shall go & be equally divided amongst the Survivors & Survivor of them Share & Share alike if more than One & to be paid to such Survivors or Survivor at the Time aforesaid And as to the Other remaining equal moiety or Half Part thereof I will give & bequeath the Same unto Sarah Smith, Rebecca Smith, Naomi Smith, Elizabeth Smith, & Edward Smith, the Children of my said Housekeeper Naomi Smith & who now live and remain with her to be equally parted & divided amongst them Share & Share alike & to be paid & delivered unto Each of them the said Sarah, Rebecca, Naomi, Elizabeth & Edward, the Children of my said Housekeeper Naomi Smith as they & Each of them shall or may respectively attain to the Age of Twenty One Years And in case of the Death of either of the said Children to wit, Sarah, Rebecca, Naomi, Elizabeth & Edward, under Age & without Lawful Issue I do will and direct that the Portion or Share of him her or them so dying shall go & be equally divided amongst the Survivors & Survivor of them Share & Share alike if more than One & be paid to such Survivors or Survivor at the Time aforesaid And should it so happen that they the said Sarah, Rebecca, Naomi, Elizabeth, & Edward, the said Children of the said Naomi Smith all of them depart this Life under the Age of Twenty One Years and without Lawful Issue then and in that case I do will & give their Shares or Portions to be equally divided between my said Five Grand Children George, Thomas, James, Ann & Mary, Share and Share alike & to be paid & delivered unto my said Grand Children and in case of the Death of either of my said Grand Children under Age and without Lawful Issue to descend unto the Survivors & Survivor of them in like manner as the Moiety of the Residuum of my Estate in this my Will above devised & bequeathed unto them my Grand Children is directed to be paid & delivered & to descend And in regard to the Portions of my said Five Grand Children & the Five Children of the said Naomi Smith in this my Will given & bequeathed to them I do hereby will authorize & direct my said Executors, whom I do likewise hereby nominate to be their Guardians, to put the same at Interest on good & sufficient Securities from Time to Time until they shall respectively attain their Age of Twenty One Years And in the mean time I would have my Executors apply the annual Interest thereof in the best & most judicious

86 *The Lost Will of George Taylor, the Signer.*

manner for & towards their due Maintenance & Education They my Executors on whose Fidelity in that Respect I greatly rely knowing my Mind therein *And* it is my Will & I do order that the said Naomi Smith may at the Discretion of my Executors be permitted to keep her said Five Children with her until they arrive at the Age of Ten Years but not longer During which Time my Executors shall pay her such Proportion of the Interest Money arising from their Dividends as they my Executors shall judge necessary and proper But after the said Five Children of the said Naomi Smith severally attain to the aforesaid Age of Ten Years my said Executors shall place them out at their Discretion *And Whereas* I have, in company with the late Louis Gordon Esquire, some Years ago, for a Valuable Consideration, purchased of a certain John Atkins a Certain Plantation and Tract or Tracts of Land situate on Marshall's Creek in Lower Smithfield Township in the said County of Northampton containing about Five Hundred Acres more or less which Plantation & Tract or Tracts of Land were afterwards sold by Us for the Sum of Seven Hundred & Fifty Pounds to Thomas Adams who has since bargained & sold the Premises to Isaiah Jennings *Now* it is my Will & I do hereby direct that upon the Payment of my Share of the said Sum of Seven Hundred & Fifty Pounds to my said Executors They and the Survivors or Survivor of them & the Executors or Administrators of the Survivor of them do & they are hereby empowered to make a good and sufficient Title for the Conveyance & assurance of my Proportion Share or Purport of the said Premise's to such Person or Persons as may be Legally entitled to the same *And* I do further order & direct that in case any or all of my Copartners in the Durham Iron Works should chuse to take my Share of the same into their Hands as Purchasers that they pay unto my Estate the several Sums advanced by me into the said Partnership together with my Share of the Profits that may have arisen thereon *And* in case of their and every of their Refusal that my Executors sell & dispose of the same to any Person or Persons for the best Price that can be gotten *And Lastly* Hereby Revoking all former & other Wills by me heretofore made, I do declare this only to be my Testament and Last Will *In Witness* whereof, I the said George Taylor the Testator have hereunto set my Hand & Seal the Sixth . . . Day of January in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty One.

Signed Sealed Published & Declared by the said George Taylor the Testator as and for his Testament & Last Will in the Presence of Us the Subscribers who in his Presence and at his Request have signed our names as
 Witnessto—

Abraham berlin, Jacob Berlin,
 Abraham Berlin Ju^r.

Northampton County Ss.

On the tenth day of March A.D. 1781 Before me John Arndt Esq^r.
 Register for the probate of Wills and granting Letters of Administration

The Lost Will of George Taylor, the Signer. 87

in and for the said County of Northampton Personally came, Abraham Berlin, Jacob Berlin and Abraham Berlin Junior, the Witnesses to the within Last Will and Testament of George Taylor Esquire deceased who being duly sworn on the Holy Evangelist of Almighty God, did declare and say (each speaking for himself) that they were present, and saw and heard, George Taylor the Testator sign seal Publish pronounce and declare the same as and for his Last Will & Testament, and that at the doing thereof he the said Testator was of sound mind memory and understanding to the Best of their Knowledge & Belief And also that they these deponants subscribed their names to the same as Witnesses in the presence and at the request of the said Testator and in the presence of one another. In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand the day aforesaid

John Arndt
Regr.