A Variant of William Penn's
"Frame of Government."

Supplement to Vol. XLIX, No. 104, April, 1925, issue

THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY
AND BIOGRAPHY
The FRAME of the
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OF THE
Province of Pennsylvania
IN AMERICA:
Together with certain
LAW S
Agreed upon in England
BY THE
GOVERNOUR
AND
Divers FREE-MEN of the aforesaid
PROVINCE.
To be further Explained and Confirmed there by the first
Provincial Council and General Assembly that shall
be holden, if they so meet.
Printed in the Year MDCLXXXII.

Title page of the copy in the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan.

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A VARIANT TITLE TO WILLIAM PENN'S
"FRAME OF GOVERNMENT."

By RANDOLPH G. ADAMS, Custodian of the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

While examining recently a number of rare books on Pennsylvania, sent to the William L. Clements Library by Mr. Lathrop C. Harper, of New York, I was struck with the fact that there was something wrong with the title page of the "Frame of Government" which was in the lot. On comparing it with the facsimile given in the Church Catalogue (Americana No. 676) it became apparent that the sixteenth line of the title read "To be further Explained and Confirmed there by the first Provincial Council, that shall be held if they see meet," whereas the Church copy reads "To be further Explained and Confirmed there by the first Provincial Council and General Assembly that shall be held, if they see meet." In the process of printing someone evidently objected that the General Assembly as well as the Provincial Council should be consulted.

This kind of difference is always of supreme interest to the bibliographer, as it puts him on notice that he is dealing with at least a variant issue, if not, a variant edition of a book. As a matter of course a census was taken of the other known copies of the original edition of Penn's "Frame," and to our surprise it was discovered that the issue listed in the Church catalogue agreed exactly with all other known copies whereas the William L. Clements Library copy seems to be unique. John Carter Brown Library, Henry E. Huntington's Library, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the New York Historical Society, the Library of Congress,
William Penn’s "Frame of Government."

Harvard University Library, and the British Museum have copies like the Church. Yale, the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Philadelphia Library Company report no copies. From the nature of the variation, possibly the William L. Clements copy is an earlier issue than any hitherto described.

It would seem, however, that somewhere other copies must be in existence. In Appendix No. II of Proud’s History of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia 1797), the “Frame of Government” is reprinted, without the words General Assembly, and so Proud entitles the document in the text of his book (vol. I, p. 196). Further in the Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania (“Colonial Records,” Harrisburg, 1838, vol. I, p. xxi) the document is again reprinted without the words General Assembly. Evidently Proud saw a copy like the Clements variant, and possibly the editors of the Colonial Records, unless, indeed, the editors merely copied Proud. In any case it is possible that other copies exist of this interesting variant.

In the Grolier Club’s Exhibition of the imprints of William Bradford, Pennsylvania’s first printer, in 1893, the work was shown as the very first example of Bradford’s work. The following note was appended to the description of the book: “On the occasion of his examination before the Governor and Council of Pennsylvania in 1689, in reply to the question ‘By whose order did you print it [the Frame of Government or Charter] in England?’ Bradford answered, ‘By Governor Penn’s.’ Wallace’s Address, p. 52. As this is the only edition of the first charter printed in England before 1689, it must have been printed privately by Bradford on one of his master’s (Sowle) presses.’

As to the propriety of calling this document the “first constitution of Pennsylvania,” I shall be only too glad

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to leave the discussion to abler writers. Mr. Fisher so called it, in remarking that it carried out that portion of the charter granted by Charles II, giving Penn the privilege of joining with him the Freemen of the province in creating political institutions. Mr. Carson has rated Penn high as a law-giver because of this document and the "Fundamental Constitutions of Pennsilvania." Mr. Eshleman’s article insists that hereby Penn gave the people a great deal more power than he was called upon to do. Prof. Channing minimizes the practical importance of the document, which was in fact amended in 1683 and finally superseded in 1696. All of these are readily accessible to anyone who wants to look further into the matter. Moreover the original charter granted by Charles II, and the First Charter to the people of Pennsylvania, by William Penn, which has recently been acquired for the State, are all other claimants to the title of the First Constitution of Pennsylvania.

As far as its contribution to political science is concerned, Penn’s Frame of Government certainly was of greater practical importance than the ideal States, such as More’s Utopia, Campenella’s City of the Sun, Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis, Harrington’s Oceana and the other contributions to the literature of theoretical commonwealths, because some effort was made to carry out the Penn idea. At the same time, constitutions are the result rather of experience than of individual intellects. As far as any permanent values are

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William Penn's "Frame of Government."

concerned, the bibliographer need not subscribe to the flippancy of Alexander Pope if he would call attention to Penn's comment

“There is hardly one Frame of Government in the world so ill designed by its first founders, that in good hands it will not do well enough; and Story tells us that the Best in Ill Ones can do nothing that is great or good; witness the Jewish and Roman States. Governments, like clocks, go from the motion men give them; and as governments are made and moved by Men, so by them are they ruined, too: wherefore Governments rather depend on Men, then (sic) Men upon Governments. Let Men be good, and the Government can't be bad; if it be ill, they will cure it; but if Men be bad, let the Government be never so good, they will endeavor to warp and spoil it to their turn.

However, the only point which I desire to make is of purely bibliographical interest. The title of the William L. Clements Library copy differs from other known copies, although the rest of the text seems to be exactly the same.