NOTES AND QUERIES

THE STORY OF A REVOLUTIONARY CANNON FOUND UNDER MARKET STREET, PHILADELPHIA, WEST OF THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER.* BY NORMAN M. ROLSTON.

On April 28, 1932, during excavation for a subway, a mechanical shovel, removing the core of earth between previously-installed, supporting columns for Market street, uncovered an old cannon at an approximate depth of forty feet below the present grade. The position of the cannon was ten feet north of the south curb line of Market street, approximately 300 feet west of the present pier-head line. The gun lay with the muzzle toward the east, indicating that it was being moved westward when abandoned. The rust-encrusted gun, when cleaned, proved to be remarkably preserved and the discovery that it had been spiked furnished an interesting clue, however faint, as to its history.

Fortunately, a test boring sunk within two feet of the location determined the exact condition of the soil prior to any disturbance by the excavators. Samples from this boring proved, beyond question, that the gun lay on the silt of an old marsh and that it had been covered by two distinct layers of river sand carried upon it by extensive floods. Above these sand deposits was the clay and earth fill for the approach to the first permanent bridge over the Schuylkill river at Market street. This first fill had subsequently been covered by others as the grade was raised for each bridge superseding the original structure. Beginning with the earliest fill for the bridge, completed in 1805, as a point to retrace the story of the soil, it was found that two large floods had preceded that date; one of tremendous proportions, in 1784, and another in 1795. These two inundations were responsible for the separate layers of sand directly covering the gun and absolutely fixed the time of its abandonment as prior to the earlier date. In making an examination of the sand it was borne in mind that the Schuylkill river was a swift stream at that time and, when in flood, carried quantities of coarse sand instead of mud, as it now does, due to the many dams creating settling basins. The silt in which the gun lay partially buried was impregnated with unmistakable signs of swamp vegetation and marked the level of the old marsh that bounded the western river bank but a few inches above normal water level. The soil having definitely fixed the date of abandonment as prior to 1784, the gun itself was carefully measured and a pattern made from the rings, muzzle and other identifying points. With this information it was possible to locate another piece cast from the same pattern and now in the rear of the Chapel at Valley Forge. As this latter cannon, a condemned and discarded specimen, was brought directly from the site of the old Warwick Furnace, the place of casting for both pieces was established as being identical. It is a matter of record that the Warwick Furnace cast many cannon and much ball ammunition, during 1776, for the Continental Army. Thus, the time of abandonment narrows down to some moment between 1776 and 1784.

* After the exercises in Independence Hall on Independence Day, July 4, 1932, this cannon was unveiled in Independence Square, at the rear of the Hall. Editor.
Cannon in subway excavation west of the Schuylkill River under Market Street, found April 28, 1832, and mounted in Independence Square for public view, July 4, 1832.
To complete the story, it is necessary to examine the geography and history of the region during that period. Several maps, still extant, show practically the same features, all agreeing as to the marshland on the west bank of the Schuylkill and the causeway crossing it from the higher ground on the west to the ferry operating on the river where the Market Street bridge crosses today. It was at the bottom of the tailings from this causeway slope that the gun was found. The ferry, known as the Middle Ferry and operated by Joseph Ogden during the Revolution, was replaced by floating bridges at various times. It is so shown on the map prepared by the engineers under command of Sir William Howe, during the British occupation of Philadelphia. The western limit of the city was then at Eighth street and a dirt road, on the line of the present Market street, connected the city with the ferry on the east side of the river. West of the Schuylkill, the causeway crossed the marsh to the higher ground and, in the vicinity of what is now Thirty-second street, divided into three roadways. The southern branch was Derby road; the middle, Marshall road; the northern, Lancaster road. A small dirt road branched to the north near the present Thirty-first street and, following the higher ground, served the Penn estates on the west bank of the Schuylkill, terminating at the ford near the Falls of the Schuylkill.

Turning from the geographical features to the study of events between 1776 and 1784, it is found that there was but one time when the spiking and abandonment of a cannon by the Continentals would be necessary in this vicinity. This was following the defeat at Brandywine and just prior to the evacuation of Philadelphia by the Congress and governmental agencies. A brief résumé of historical events at that time permits an accurate deduction as to the actual date the cannon was abandoned and the reason therefore.

General Washington's army had moved through Philadelphia and crossed the Schuylkill upon a floating bridge at the Middle Ferry, constructed upon ship-carpenter stages by General Israel Putnam and Captain Richard Peters, officers charged with the defense of the City. On September 11, 1777, the army met defeat at Chadds Ford on the Brandywine and most of the American units fled in confusion, some as far north as the Falls of the Schuylkill. Washington, together with several of his command, were at the Buck Tavern on Lancaster road and, from this place near Haverford, the Commanding General forwarded a letter to Congress, apprising them of the situation, requesting supplies and advising evacuation of Philadelphia. The courier bringing the letter to Philadelphia, on the night of September 15, found that the floating bridge had been removed by orders of Major Casdorp and, of necessity, must have used the ferry. News of the lost battle had reached the city and utter confusion prevailed. The government prepared to flee, the State House bell and many church bells were being removed, families packed their household goods and many citizens had vacated their homes. It was expedient to immediately move whatever guns were available across the ferry and out the Lancaster road to the demoralized army, sorely in need of artillery to replace the pieces captured at the Brandywine.

In the meantime, Washington had marched westward to prevent the turning of his flank and the British forces from reaching the depot of supplies at the Warwick Furnace. General Howe, moving northward from Dilworth Church, came into contact with the American forces on the Lancaster road in the vicinity of White Horse Tavern. A battle was impending when the entire region was swept by a violent storm.
This intervention of the elements was so terrific as to wet the powder of both contestants, change the roads and fields into quagmires and to effectually disperse the contending forces. Washington's troops, in deplorable condition, reached the vicinity of Chester Springs, then Yellow Springs, and the British forces rested across the Lancaster road, near Goshen, blocking that approach from Philadelphia. This great storm of September 16th and 17th is noted in every journal of that period and Washington, writing to Congress from Warwick, states that it separated the troops from their tents and baggage. The condition of those early roads under the effects of the violent rain can easily be pictured, and certainly the causeway across the marsh at the ferry must have been a quagmire, if not inundated.

Returning to the story of the old cannon, it can be safely stated that on September 16th it crossed the Middle Ferry and, probably at night, in the lashing rain and under threat of a rising river, it became hopelessly mired on the old causeway over the swamp. Word must have arrived concerning the British movements across the Lancaster road and the struggling artillery detail, realizing the gun would fall into enemy hands, spiked the piece and rolled it into the marsh, forever preventing capture. It is to be hoped that the soldiers, engaged in this enterprise, escaped, and if so, it was probably by way of the old dirt road along the high ground to the Falls of the Schuylkill.

Thus, on the 16th of September, 1777, the cannon came to rest on the bed of the marsh, to remain there one hundred and fifty-five years until the march of progress, burrowing a subway tunnel, brought to light this relic of a dark hour in American history when freedom hung in the balance.

**APPENDIX**

After completely cleaning the cannon by sandblast, it was found that the letter "G" had been cast into the trunnion. This discovery lead to an investigation of the history of the Warwick Furnace, where it had been ascertained the gun was cast, to determine the reason for the use of the letter.

Warwick Furnace, founded in 1737, as directed in the will of Samuel Nutt, who operated the Coventry Furnace, was owned by Anne Nutt, his widow. The name of the concern doing business with the products of this furnace was "Anne Nutt and Company," and Samuel Nutt, Jr., carried on the business. He died in 1740 and in 1742 his widow married Robert Grace, a very close friend of Benjamin Franklin, and the name of Nutt became extinct in connection with Warwick.

Robert Grace was a successful business man and it was he who loaned Franklin the money with which to start his printing enterprise, subsequently refusing to accept repayment. For this generous action, Franklin gave to Grace his model of the famous Franklin Stove and it was cast in great quantities at Warwick Furnace. The popularity of this great heating innovation proved tremendous in both this country and Europe and many tons were cast and sold. Robert Grace insisted Franklin should share in his stove transactions and it was from gratitude to Grace that Franklin willed two thousand pounds to the City of Philadelphia for assisting apprentice workmen who displayed talent.

It was from the initial letter of Robert Grace's last name that the "G" was taken as a foundry mark of Warwick Furnace, and its appearance on the old cannon furnishes further connection with the place of casting, in addition to the pattern design as noted in the foregoing article.

This is a book of exceptional interest to the layman as well as to the Navy. It is the story of a man unknown to the general public, but who in the early days of the Revolution was the coequal of John Paul Jones and Gustavus Conyngham. He preceded Jones in Europe by a year. He was the first American Sea raider; the first to fly the new colors of the United States in foreign waters. His one definite object was to effect a break between England and France; and, "what Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga made possible in February, 1778, Wickes' raid in the Irish Sea came within a hair's breadth of effecting in August, 1777."

The record of Lambert Wickes should be imperishable, but it is virtually unknown for reasons clearly set forth by the author.

Lambert Wickes was born, about 1742, in Kent County on the Eastern Shore, and came of good old Maryland stock. His home, Wickliffe, was on Chester River in sight of the broad waters of the Chesapeake; there are no records of his childhood or youth, but it is fair to assume that from the beginning he had a love for the sea, and early entered the merchant service. When the Navy was authorized, in 1775, he was given a commission, and when the vexing question of seniority was settled by a resolution passed October 10, 1776, Wickes was placed number eleven, lineally, on the list of Captains; four numbers below John Barry, and seven above John Paul Jones. He was assigned to the command of the Ship *Reprisal*, 18 guns, with a complement of 130 officers and men, including a company of marines.

The ship was fitted out in Philadelphia at a time when the British were blockading the entrance to the Delaware Bay. Eventually, two frigates came up the river to Chester and an attack on Philadelphia seemed imminent; when a collision occurred between the boats of the English, and the American Galleys, the *Reprisal* dropped down the river to reinforce the Provincial forces. Wickes sent his armed boats to join against the British in a so called "battle," which was a minor affair, and the ships later withdrew.

In June, the armed brig *Nancy* arrived at the Capes with munitions. The British attempted to cut her out, and in the engagement that followed between the American and British boats, Wickes' brother, an officer of the *Reprisal* was killed.

The day before the Declaration was adopted, Wickes got to sea, and under orders from the Marine Committee proceeded to Martinique, having on board as a passenger Mr. Bingham of Philadelphia who bore instructions from Robert Morris to establish a commercial and diplomatic post in the French Island. "The significance of the voyage," says Mr. Clark, "has never been understood." Its real object was to cement French friendship there, which was to be the basis of the whole subsequent naval effort out of French ports.

On the run down to the West Indies the *Reprisal* made three captures, and when off St. Pierre she had a smart fight with H. M. S. *Shark*. Both sides claimed the victory, and Mr. Bingham, not perhaps an unprejudiced witness wrote that the *Reprisal* got the better of it. The success of Mr. Bingham's mission in which Wickes had a notable share increased the high standing of the latter with Robert Morris and the Congress, so that when the *Reprisal* returned to Philadelphia in September, Wickes received secret orders to prepare his ship for sea immediately to take Dr. Franklin to Europe. Most congenial orders,
for if sanctuary could be obtained in France for our men of war and prizes, our ships could cripple English commerce at its source, and Wickes as well as Dr. Franklin had the vision to see if this could be accomplished it meant war between England and France, and this was the aim and goal of Wickes' ambition.

In the latter part of October, 1776, the Reprisal sailed for Nantes, and after a rough passage arrived thirty days later in Quiberon Bay. Dr. Franklin and his two grandsons who accompanied him got ashore in a fishing boat, but Wickes was delayed many days by unfavorable winds.

At Paimboeuf he disposed of his cargo of indigo, which was to be sold to defray the expenses of the Commissioners in Paris, and turned his prizes over to Robert Morris' brother who was to give him no end of trouble in every business transaction he had with him, as did the ship-brokers, prize agents and even several accredited agents of his own Country. Much space is given in the book to the intrigues and machinations of these Americans who were constantly with Silas Deane and Dr. Franklin. It is a story of deception, betrayal and espionage which is related in detail.

In January, 1777, Wickes sailed from St. Nazaire for the English Channel. The author points out that a letter written by Deane naming the coast of Spain as the cruising ground has done Wickes grave injustice. "Instead of cruising to the southwestward where British war vessels were few, he sailed the little Reprisal in a glorious venture to the very shores of England." Off Land's End he made five prizes including the Lisbon packet, the King's ship, out of Falmouth. After a broadside fight, she was carried by boarding, Wickes leading the boarders. He then put into L'Orient with his captures, and his real troubles began with his English prisoners and French officials.

No sooner had he anchored, than he was ordered to leave port within twenty-four hours, but by resorting to every possible subterfuge and excuse, and backed by Deane and Franklin he evaded the repeated orders of the port officials.

Ever since the arrival of the Reprisal in the Loire, the British Ambassador to Paris had vigorously protected against the violation of neutrality, but Louis XVI. and his Ministers were complaisant, and Wickes remained in port an unwelcome guest. During the delay he was quietly fitting out at St. Nazaire, the Lexington, recently arrived from Cape Francois, and the Dolphin which had been obtained at Dunkirk. Wickes joined them there in April or May and on the 21st of May he sailed with the three vessels on his great cruise in the Irish Sea which resulted in the capture of eighteen vessels.

On the 25th of June, he turned to the south'd to return to France, and the next day narrowly escaped capture by an English 74 which chased him all day. The Reprisal and Dolphin made St. Malo; the Lexington got into Morlaix.

The Bretons received the Americans with hearty courtesy and acclaimed them new heroes of the sea. On the other hand the English Government was roused to the point of threatening war if the "pirates" were not denied the French ports, and as a last resort demanded that the vessels be sequestered. Neither the Commissioners nor the French Government could hold out any longer against the protests of England, and Wickes was compelled to leave France.

He sailed for home September 14, 1777. To quote Carlyle's reference to La Perouse, "the bold Navigator goes and returns not." The Reprisal was lost off the Banks of Newfoundland in October, 1777, with all hands except the cook whose name and nationality are unknown. The news of the tragedy was not received by the Commissioners for months afterwards. The author remarks that "it was the end of a cycle"; the
victory at Saratoga completely swept Wickes from the public mind. Burgoyne's surrender made possible the alliance with France, and rendered undesirable a continuation of naval operations on the English coast. Wickes had achieved his object and ambition.

The Navy Department has perpetuated his name by bestowing it upon one of our finest destroyers.

ALBERT GLEAVES.


These first three volumes of documents of this Connecticut Company, which was the leader in attempting to enforce that colony's claim to northern Pennsylvania, covers only the period from 1750 to 1769 inclusive. They show the basis of the claim from the days when the Atlantic Colonies, through ignorance of geography, were supposed to extend to the "South Sea," or Pacific Ocean; and bring it down to the days—1769—when nearly twenty years of complicated struggle began to convince both colonies that they should take their dispute to the judiciary. Each volume has a scholarly Introduction by Editor Boyd, that gives the background and movements of which the dispute was a part; and throws much light on the nature of both colonies and imperial relations to them. They furnish new evidence of the importance of our colonial history, and the results of its neglect upon our national history. Mr. Boyd is one of the first writers and editors to grasp the fact of colonial Pennsylvania being proprietary in form but almost as republican as Canada is today.

The cause of it, namely, the leadership of David Lloyd and his successors in securing to the legislative body the power of the purse, as Parliament did in 1688, is not made so clear.

Volume one covers Connecticut's organized efforts to effect claims to western extension through New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, 1750–1755, inclusive. The second volume, 1756–1767, inclusive, treats of aroused opposition among the Indians, and Pennsylvania and Connecticut governments; while volume three is devoted to the contests of both sides while awaiting quiet in the Indian affairs and the decision of imperial authorities concerning it, 1768–1769, inclusive. Mr. Boyd, however, takes the broad modern view of it as colonial and national migration, modified by changes in the power of the Indian tribes and confederations and legal decisions on boundaries and the varying successes of settlement, rather than as a controversy. It was only a phase of the great movement to expand and conquer the West, like the contest of the middle states against Virginia's northwestern claim or land companies' against Georgia's western claim. Indeed, the people interested in the Susquehannah and Delaware Companies were trying to do just what was being attempted by such companies as the Vandalia, Indiana, Oubache, Illinois, Virginia Yazoo, and other southern ones. And their methods were not so different from that of almost every Atlantic colony in taking territory already granted to another, from Virginia down to the latest colony charters. For the possession of territory in those colonial days was called right under vague and changeable charters.

The author, Editor Boyd, basing his work on the John Franklin papers, has extended his research far beyond them to all possible related papers everywhere, and to their historical setting. His introductions, therefore, to each volume become historical papers that would be of good service if published by themselves, separate from the volumes.
It is not often that one is a good writer and also a good editor, but Mr. Boyd has the good fortune to be both. His studies of the institutions and character of the two colonies concerned, are excellent, and throw much light on the permanent influence of the Yankees on the southern part of the Quaker state's "melting pot" of heterogeneous elements. They also illuminate the causes for the Yankees wanting to go elsewhere, on account of the provincial religious attitude in Connecticut and the greater material prospects to the westward. His maps of the three companies' territory clarify many vague conceptions of it also; it is quite startling to see the claim covering all between the 41st and 42nd degree lines—nearly the northern half of the colony—and the Susquehannah, with the two smaller Delaware companies, covering almost the eastern half of that! Or that there were seventeen towns in which their settlers' Connecticut titles were finally recognized by Pennsylvania, five of these, Newport, Hanover, Wilkes-Barre, Plymouth and Kingston in the Wyoming Valley, being the region of greatest conflict.

The first petition to the Connecticut Assembly was dated May 10, 1750, and was followed by others, until in May, 1753, was formed the Susquehannah Company, which ultimately in 1754, secured a tract from a line ten miles east of and parallel to the east branch of the Susquehannah, westward two degrees of longitude and covering a whole degree of latitude. The first Delaware Company and the second one received, in 1754, all between that and the Delaware river; while others were trying to settle in New Jersey and New York lands under a similar impulse within a year; and others, like Samuel Hazard, were proposing a new colony west of Pennsylvania. The Penns' reaction to all this, while prompt, was confident of their own title before London authorities, although it was not to be settled in the two decades more of their proprietorship, or even a half-dozen more of the years of statehood—a contest of nearly thirty years! In this long "thirty years war," Governor Jonathan Trumbull led the expansionists finally to secure Connecticut's cooperation, while Lawyer Eliphalet Dyer was their chief legal defender, with Sir William Johnson, representing the Crown, attempting to preserve a judicial attitude between all concerned.

It is impossible in limited space to give an idea of the mass of documentary material in these three large volumes, which require from fifteen to forty pages each for index alone. It is evident, however, that when the series is finished it will be a final historical authority on that great movement, so productive, heretofore, of mere controversy, and will elevate it to a purely historico-judicial plane.

Needless to say a very great proportion of the material comes from the great collection on that subject of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Mr. Boyd and the Wyoming Society are to be congratulated on so scholarly a product, and that congratulation may be extended to Drs. Andrews of Yale, Gras of Harvard and Sioussat of Pennsylvania, who serve as an advisory committee.

BURTON ALVA KONKLE.