Daniel Coxe and The New Mediterranean Sea Company

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw speculators with ready money turning their eyes toward the Americas. Some made profits, but in most cases the conception surpassed the accomplishment, either because of an unwillingness to pursue the venture tenaciously over the long period of time necessary to make it fruitful, or because the dream was beyond the resources of its authors.

One of the most active of the schemers who dreamed of wealth and empire in the New World was Daniel Coxe (1640–1730), doctor of physic, member of the Royal Society in London, and physician to Charles II and Queen Anne. His landed interests in America extended from the Merrimac River to the mouth of the Mississippi. As early as 1684 he had become financially interested in the Quaker colony of West New Jersey and three years later had purchased the rights of the late Governor Edward Byllynge. For five years Coxe was the nominal governor of the colony, but failing to get royal confirmation of his title, sold his rights to the West New Jersey Society in 1692. In 1698 he turned his interests southward, making investments in Virginia and Carolina and seeking a proprietary grant of the Gulf and Lower Mississippi regions.¹

As a complement to his New Jersey investment, the Doctor had dreamed of a great trade empire, one arm of which was to reach across the settled portions of Pennsylvania far out into the wilderness to tap the fur wealth of the heart of the continent. To implement his program he sought land grants in the province of Pennsylvania. The

first grant was a tract of some thirty thousand acres on the west bank of the Schuylkill near present-day Spring City, made in the form of three separate deeds to Dr. Daniel Coxe, and his partners Sir Matthias Vincent and Major Robert Thompson. It was on this tract that Coxe attempted to found a settlement and to establish a trade with the Indians, an attempt which proved a failure apparently because the settlers he sent out refused to live “so far up in the Country.”

Daniel Coxe’s “Account of New Jersey” gives further details of the extent of his original scheme:

I have made great discoveries towards ye great Lake whence come about 100,000 Bevers every year to ye French Canada and English at New Yorke, Jersey, pensilvania. I have contracted friendship with diverse petty Kings in ye way to and upon ye great Lake and doubt not to bring ye greatest parte of ye Traffick for furs into ye part of ye Country where I am settled and by my patent I am intituled to ye said Trade Exclusive.

I can Exclude ye Inhabitants of Pensilvania from this fur trade by a grant I with diverse others have from Mr. Penn of one hundred fifty thousand acres wth I will procure to be transferred to ye purchasers of my land, paying five hundred pounds downe & 100£ per annum quitt rent.

At first glance, Coxe’s reference to the hundred and fifty thousand acres seems fantastic, especially when one remembers that Penn had

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2 On Apr. 20, 1686, William Penn granted 10,000 acres to Daniel Coxe, and on the same day two other grants were made, one of 10,000 acres to Maj. Robert Thompson and one of 10,116 acres to Joseph Pike to be held by him in the name of Sir Matthias Vincent. The exact disposition of the tract is unknown, but Thomas Holm on his map of the province lists the owners of the plot as Sir Matthias Vincent, Adrian Vrouzen, Burgomester of Rotterdam, Benjamin Furley and Dr. Daniel Coxe. The plot took the name of Vincent and corresponds to modern East and West Vincent Townships, Chester County. J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope, History of Chester County, Pennsylsaxa (Philadelphia, 1881), 259; chart drawn by Wilmer W. MacElree in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa., Markham to the Gov. of Maryland, June 25, 1696, Maryland Archives, XX, 470-471, Pennsylvania Cash Accounts, 1701-1778, Penn Manuscripts, Folio 234, HSP.

3 “Dr. Daniel Coxe his Account of New Jersey” (about 1688), printed in PMHB, VII (1883), 327-335.

4 The credibility of Coxe has often been questioned. Gov. Francis Nicholson of Virginia wrote of Coxe “I had some acquaintance with him and I believe he is an honest gentleman and a very good doctor, but by what he told me concerning his ill success of his Jersey proprietorship, I thought he had done with all such projects, but I am afraid several people have abased the Doctor’s good nature and generosity by telling him of strange countries and giving him maps thereof.” Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1700 (London, 1910), 497 (#739).
refused £6,000 for a monopoly of the trade in 1681 because of his dislike of monopolies.\(^5\) Recently, however, a bundle of unexecuted deeds of William Penn was deposited in the Bedford County Archives in England, and one entitled *Grant by Wm. Penn of land for formation of a company to be called the New Mediterranean Sea Co.*\(^6\) reveals that the dreams had progressed well into the planning stage. An abstract of this deed, furnished The Historical Society of Pennsylvania by the Bedford County Archivist, reads as follows:

*Grant by Wm. Penn of land for formation of a company, to be called the New Mediterranean Sea Co.*

Grant of land for formation of a company.
Wm. Penn esq., proprietor and governor of Penns.


\(^6\) Called to the author's attention by Nicholas B. Wainwright of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

\(^7\) Random identifications reveal such personages as Ralph Montagu, third Baron Montagu of Boughton, later active in the Glorious Revolution; Henry Hare, second Baron Coleraine (1636–1708); Hon. Robert Boyle, chemist and scholar and Fellow of the Royal Society; Sir John Hotham, whose father and grandfather were executed by the Puritans in 1645; Sir Philip Skippon, knighted on Apr. 19, 1674, son of Philip Skippon, a Cromwellian soldier; John Blackwell, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1688–1689; Henry Ashurst, Esq., whose father had been interested in Eliot's missionary efforts and who was a trustee of Boyle's lectures; Thomas Hunt, a lawyer who fled England in 1688 before William of Orange. *Dictionary of National Biography* and *Burke's Peerage.*
and a great tract of land adjoyning to the said Lake abounding with a certain Crook Backt Wilde Kine called Sibolas or Pesikious [buffaloes] both supposed to be within the northerly bounds of Pennsylvania . . . and are desirous to settle a plantation or colony upon some part of the land near the said Lake In the settling of which they must be at great expenses and undergo great hazards and the advantages that may arise thereby will not redound to themselves alone But be likewise a great benefit to me my heirs and assigns and all the inhabitants of the said province. . . ."

Grants therefore to Lord Mountague and the others:
—5,000 ac. in Penns., to be situated on or nr. the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers, whereof 500 ac. shall front the rivers, to be chosen by Lord Mountague, etc.;
95,000 ac. situated on or nr. the said Gt. Lake.

Grants to them also rights of mining, fishing, killing the “kine,” 6 markets; appoints them the Governors and Company of the New Mediterranean Sea, Penns., with the rights; there is to be 1 governor, 1 deputy governor and 24 assistants; Lord Montague, first gov., Sir Math. Vincent dep. gov., and first 24 of the others, the assistants; rules for assemblies given, etc.

Wtns. Phil. Ford, J. Darnall, John Richardson, John Brewster, John Miles.

7 June 1686.

Thus it appears that a good representation of the leaders of English arts, society, and government of every political complexion were joining together in this venture. The “New Mediterranean Sea” undoubtedly referred to Lake Erie, an effective base from which to monopolize the Pennsylvania Indian trade. In addition, the proposed scheme would just as surely draw trade from the neighboring colonies, especially New York. The plan, however, was too difficult to bring into operation, and even the deed of the New Mediterranean Sea Company appears never to have been formally completed.

That Governor Dongan of New York was worried is apparent from his report in 1687 which states that during the year two hundred packs of beaver went to the Pennsylvanians by way of “. . . the Schonshill [Schuylkill] & [they] will have more this [year, 1688], as I
have reason to believe. . . .” It is possible that Dongan had a hint of the wider scheme when he wrote that

. . . If Pennsylvania bee continued as by charter running five degrees to the westward it will take in most of the five nations that lye to the westward of Albany & the whole Beaver & Peltry trade of that place the consequence whereof will be the depopulation of this Govern^ for people must follow the trade.  

It is possible that the traders feared so much by the New Yorkers came from Coxe's tract on the Schuylkill, and it is also a real possibility that these are the explorers the doctor refers to in his so often sneeringly dismissed Memorial. In that document he also notes a report of Colonel Dudley that an expedition was made from New York to the Ohio and Mississippi valleys and adds:

. . . I Encourag'd severall to attempt further discoveries whereupon three of my Tenants in a birchen Canoa went up School Kill (a River comes into Delaware River at philadelphia) above one hundred Miles then a Branch of the same River to its head & Carrying their Canoa over some small Hills entred the Great River Hohio which after a great Course of Six hundred Miles Joynes the Mischacebe and going up that River went up the great yellow River [Missouri?] three days Voyage which River Comes from y® Hills which separate New Mexico from Carolana. They went & Returned Through above forty Nations of Indians who all treated them very kindly & gave them many furs for Indian Trade they Carried with them. I had from them a Large Journall written & a Large Mapp very Exact abating the want of Latitudes which [they] had not skill nor Instruments to Take which Chart & Journall about twenty Six Years agoe I lend Mr Penn but could never recover Though I was inform’d he kept it for the Instruction of the People of his own Colony who were chiefly employed in the Indian trade.  

Coxe's efforts to establish a great fur-trading company have been lost to sight, and the name "The New Mediterranean Sea Company" is not to be found in history books. The deed in the Bedford County

8 E. B. O'Callaghan, The Documentary History of the State of New-York (Albany, 1849), I, 188, 154. Dongan added that “. . . Endeavors have been used (tho to noe purpose) to p'suade some of our Traders who speak the language to goe and live upon the Susquehanna river tho I cannot yet find out by whom this has been made.” Ibid., 154.

9 The version of the Memorial in Alvord and Bidgood, 245-246, reads: “. . . then by a branch into a Branch of the great Tasquehana River thence by a branch of the same river to its head, and Carrying. . . .”

10 “Mem' from Dr Cox relating to his Grant of Land call'd Carolana Florida,” (August, 1719), Board of Trade Proprieties, 1697-1776, X, Part II, #Q186 (transcript in HSP); Alvord and Bidgood, 245 ff.
Archives, however, establishes the fact that it was contemplated, and the following documents, recently uncovered in the Cadwalader Collection at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, bear references to this great scheme as well as to Coxe’s fur-trading interests in general.\textsuperscript{11}

\[\text{[Letter addressed: "This For Mr. David Lloyd\textsuperscript{12} Att Philadelphia In Pensilvania," and docketed: "To be delivered with my own hand, Wm. Hall."\]}\]

Sr

I had ordrd a Cargoe of Sortable Commodities together with two or three passengers to goe in the Ship which brings young Whitpane w\textsuperscript{ch} Cargoe Cost here in England att best hand above six hundred pounds. I had agreed for the passengers but when hee understood I was to send goods hee refused to receive them apprehending they would abate the prices hee promises himself for his own w\textsuperscript{ch} I am informed hee hopes to sell for att least double profit.

Sr I desire you would lett M\textsuperscript{t} LeTort\textsuperscript{13} and those on my Plantation know that they need not buy of Whitpane or any other. I have sent all necessaries both for themselves \& Indian Trafick and I have ordrd my Agent to intrust Mr Le Tort with goods to a considerable value the master hath promised mee to bee at sea a fortnight after Whitpane.

Sr Mathias Vincent died suddainly: and his Lady will not further concerne her selfe in the plantation. I am about to purchase her

\textsuperscript{11} Phineas Bond Papers, West New Jersey Society, Cadwalader Collection.

\textsuperscript{12} David Lloyd (c. 1656-1731 O.S.) received a commission as Attorney General from William Penn on Apr. 24, 1686, and on Apr. 30, 1686 was appointed agent for Coxe, Thompson, and Vincent to care for their lands in Pennsylvania.\textit{Ibid.} He arrived in Philadelphia on July 11, and afterwards served as clerk of the County Court of Pennsylvania.

\textsuperscript{13} Jacques LeTort was the father of the more famous James, also an Indian trader. Gov. Markham wrote of him in 1696: "But as to LeTort he is a Protestant, was sent over in the year 1686: with a Considerable Cargo and Sev\textsuperscript{all french protestants (of whom he had the charge)} by Doct\textsuperscript{r} Cox, Sr mathias Vincent, and a Third Gentl. I cannot Call to mind at this time to Settle Thirty Thousand acres of Land up the Skoolkill. . . ." Markham to Gov. of Maryland, June 25, 1696, \textit{Maryland Archives}, XX, 470-471. In 1704 his son James testified that he had been brought "into this Country in his Childhood [j] has been an Inhabitant here about Seventeen years, was broad [bred] a Protestant and has two Uncles Ministers of the Protestant Reformed Church in the City of London." Documents of the Provincial Council, Logan Papers, Folio 16, HSP.
concerne therein. Major Thompson\textsuperscript{14} hath likewise relinquished his Interest. But I doubt not but I shall procure some considerable person to take it upon the same terms it was granted him if I can procure Mr Pens consent: But he not having been two days in London these two months I have not had an opportunity to discourse him. Your Bill if payd it must bee by mee solely both ye other parties having refused: I intend to gratify you herein & hope you will have regard unto my Interest your care & Concerne Shall bee fully requited by mee.

About Thirty persons considerable for Estate have subscribed between Ten and Twelve thousand pounds in order to the settling upon the great Lake & carrying a trade as far as New Mexico wee have most certaine intelligence of all the Country between Pensylvania & that knowledge of great advantages will redound thereby unto particulars & your Province in generall. I desire you would give mee an account by the next of all that may concerne mee to know & you will greatly oblige

Worthy Sr
Your Assured freind
Dan Coxe

Sept ye 10\textsuperscript{th} 1687

Next Spring wee begin our settlement on ye Lake.

Let Mr Tort know yt the Lady Vincent having refused his Bill I have accepted itt So that the servants are mine & hee being on my Land as I am assured I shall send him a lease\textsuperscript{15} for so much land as hee desires and shall supply him wth whatsoever hee shall want from England Expecting returns according unto his promise and so doing hee shall find I will never fail his Expectation.

[This document bears an affidavit sworn to before Thomas Willing, August 25, 1773, by William Coxe, grandson of Dr. Coxe, that this paper is in the Doctor's hand.]

\textsuperscript{14} Maj. Robert Thompson of Newington Green in Middlesex, England, by a will dated Apr. 14, 1691, entailed his 10,000 acres. On June 29 and 30, 1775, deeds of lease and release for the 10,000 acres were given by Robert Thompson, of Elsham in Lincolnshire, only brother of William Thompson (who died without issue), eldest son of William Thompson, late of Hackney in Middlesex, eldest son of Maj. Robert Thompson aforesaid to Joseph Reed, Thomas Willing, and Robert Morris, all of Philadelphia. The price was £5,500. On Dec. 10, 1783, Joseph Reed sold his interest for £2,000 and on June 28, 1787, a patent was granted to Willing for 10,698 acres in Vincent Township called "Westover." On Dec. 1, 1789, Morris sold out to Willing for £12,000. Futhey and Cope, 209.

\textsuperscript{15} Most of the land was disposed of on a lease with an option-to-buy basis. \textit{Ibid.}
II

[Letter addressed: "This For Mr David Lloyde Att Philadelphia In Pensilvania."]

London Oct ye 15. 1687

S:

I have accepted your Bill meerily upon your earnest request & because I am informed if it had been protested it might have proved very prejudicial unto you altho I know not whether I shall Ever receive any part thereof from Sr Matthias Vincent's Lady and sole Executor (for hee died suddainly 4 months since) for shee denies she will any ways further bee concerned and Major Thompson from some misunderstanding hath long since between him and your Governour hath abandoned his share So that all the burthen will by upon mee and I am dealing wth the Governour for ye Majors Interest and I doubt not but wee Shall Agree. I have likewise proferred ye Lady Vincent to purchase Sr Matthias his Share But wee Cannot yet find a way legally to accomplish itt the Land descending to his son who is not of Age & Cannot Concur wth the Executors. Howsoever I question not but I shall procure from her Ladyship some gratuity for you And should shee deny had I a particular from you what money you have Expended and what time imployed I would by legall process oblige her to pay proportionably to the Land shee possesses. ffor my own particular you may bee assured I shall not bee ingratefull but fully answer your Expectations for any care of or trouble about my Concerns. Sr I have sent one Mr Bowde father unto him who lodges wth you to look after some concerns of mine in Jarsey. I desire you would fully acquaint him wth the State of my affairs in your Province. Mr Le Tort hath desired mee to intrust him wth some goods & hath faithfully promised returne of furrs to a good vallue in ye Spring. I have ordred Mr Bowde to Lett him have the Commodities if you apprehend I may wth any shaddow of Reason intrust him and then bee a witnesse of the Agreement. I desire you would advise and Assist Mr Bowde wthsoever kindnesse you shew him I shall account rendered unto my selfe. The Governour was pleased a few days since to Honour mee wth a visitt you must not Expect him untill summer come twelvemonth hee is Engaged in great affaires att Court and there one of his Majesties greatest favorites and confidents
so that tho hee cannot Encourage you by his presence you may Expect great Advantage by the Interest hee hath wth the [Ki]ng And the Influence hee may have in Conce[l]e relating to Plantations. I am very happy in his ffreindship and hee hath given mee all the Assurance I cann desire of assisting mee in pro[met]ing the Interest of my Province in West Jersey. I having bought Byli[nge's] Interest in land & Government & 12 or 14 Proprieties of others And Intend God willing So soon as I can settle my affairs to Repaire thither and make [it] the place of my usuall Aboard tho Pensilvania shall not be forgotten my heart being Engaged in the Designe of settling on the Lake or Sea to ye N. W. of you wee have subscribed 120000 sterling. I shall by the next Send you an account of what wee have hitherto transacted & doe hereafter designe. If itt proceed as wee have reason to believe itt will Itt will make your Country very considerable & bee beneficial to ye Undertakers & Inhabitants. I have but one halfe howr allowed mee to trace this scrible otherwise would have written more largely & particularly wth I must defer till the next opportunity having Scarcely time to add that I am

Worthy S' Your most Affectionate ffriend & ffaithfull servant
Dan Coxe

Your Governour is highly incensed att the Refusall of the Well & Smith to goe uppon my Plan[tation] according unto contract & profred mee an order to have them pr[occeeded] against according unto the Utmost Severity of your Laws whereunto [he] accounts himselfe the rather obliged because uppon his Earnest [im]portunity I accepted them & hee Engaged for their Industry & ffaithfulness Therefore give them notice that if they doe not immediately settle according to agreem they must blame themselves only for all the inconveniences may hereafter befall ym. Mr Le Tort I understand is

16 In 1674, Lord John Berkeley sold his interest in New Jersey to John Fenwick in trust for Edward Byllynge, a brewer of Westminster, Middlesex. Byllynge held title to West New Jersey until his death on Jan. 16, 1687, although during most of the period it was actually administered by trustees because of Byllynge's financial difficulties. PMHB, LXXV (1951), 117-146.

17 Coxe never came to the New World, although his son Daniel did and was prominent in the affairs of New Jersey for many years.
settled uppon my Land & if hee deserve well wth I promise my selfe from him hee shall want no Encouragement & assistance nor Any others that become my Tenants. I shall by the next according unto his desire send him a lease for four hundred Acres. his & Pickerings\textsuperscript{18} mine have been tryed & they prove but poor lead oar if our Essay masters rightly informe us. I intend very speedily to try them my selfe having a Competent insight into Such operations. I desire you would wth all convenient speed either send me directly or Give unto Mr Bowde a List of such high persons or families of English Dutch Sweedes or ffrench as are willing to settle uppon my Plantation and uppon what termes.

[David Lloyd has added the following notation to the letter:]

Copy of pt of my Ltr to D\textsuperscript{n} Coxe & his answer couverying a 40£ bill I drew on him for Bowman.

Sir

I make bold to trouble you with a Bill of 40£ sterl to one Thos Bow[man]. It is due in Company with Sr M\textsuperscript{s} Vincent & Maj. Tomson tho' I draw it [on you] for the poor man's convenience. The surveyr Generals Bi[l]l for the] first runing of the Line comes to £90:15:9 besides Chainmen & [for] the subdivisions not yet finished.

[This document bears an affidavit sworn to before Thomas Willing, August 23, 1773, by William Coxe, that the letter is in Daniel Coxe's hand.]

III

Contract made Between Mr. Daniel Coxe doctor in phisick of the City of London of one part and Anthony delaire\textsuperscript{19} of the City of Rochelle being now in the said City of London of the other part, as followeth To wit, that The sd anthony delaire having Received The sum of fifteen pounds sling of the sd. doctor Coxe In money & in cloaths to his Content & satisfaction beside The passage That the sd doctor Coxe will advance to the sd delaire, doe promise to ship him-self in the first that shall present or be Ready for pensilvania, where

\textsuperscript{18} Charles Pickering conducted mining operations along the creek which bears his name.

\textsuperscript{19} Anthony Delaire was probably a Huguenot, since the city of La Rochelle was the home of that religious group.
being arrived, he oblige himself to go & make some discoverys of the Country & to trade & hold a Trade with the Indians & wild, The goods that the Commis[sioners] or factors of the sd doctor Coxe shall deliver to him, for the time & space of four years after his arrival in pensilvania, & the sd Anthony delaire promises Beside to follow The orders and Instructions of the sd doctor Coxe & the advice of his agents and factors and The sd doctor Coxe doe promise on his part to furnish the sd anthony delaire the marchandises or Goods that shall be or that are fitt for the sd Trade, and To Run the hazards or Loss of his goods, as well in Going out and Coming in again, and if there be some Loss at his Return of the sd Trade, that shall be for the sd doctor Coxe, & that the goods shall be delivered to him at the Real Cost that they him in London in augmenting The fraight and the dutye & the Insurance money and the Ron of the Charges of shipping abord and Every Cost for The said Goods shall be added to the Real price & that the peltrys pelterys that shall Come of the sd Cargo and goods The sd delaire do promise to deliver the To the agent or factors of the sd doctor Coxe at the Courrant price of The Country and The sd doctor Coxe Consent that the sd Anthony delaire shall have and Injoinent of all the profits That he can Gett in The sd Trade with the Indians. The sd doctor Coxe being first Reimboursed or payd For his goods or marchandises and to be Reenboursed of the fifteen pounds and the passage advanced To the sd delaire as upon and the sd anthony Delaire Is To find himself meat and drink and house and Cloaths and Every Thing having so Agreed Between them upon the pains of Damages and intrest at London ye 25th of June 1688.

Philadelphia

Albright G. Zimmerman