Plan of Philadelphia

HE Cadwalader Collection at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania contains many valuable documents once owned by the Penn family. Most of the papers relate to the proprietors' landed interests, such as the "Missing Evidence" printed in this issue. Included among these land papers is a manuscript volume antiquely bound in faded marbled covers. A paper label identifies it as the "Plan of Philadelphia."

On the volume's title page an eighteenth-century hand has hand-somely inscribed "Draughts or several Squares of Ground within the City of Philadelphia, being those that have been either wholly or in part Surveyed and laid out in Lots to the Purchasers." Forty-nine leaves follow, on each of which a city block is diagramed. The dimensions of the lots into which the blocks are divided are given in nearly all cases, and the lots bear their owners' names. The plan covers an area fronting on the Delaware River, bounded on the south by Cedar Street, on the north by Vine Street, and extending irregularly back from the river as far as Ninth Street. Thus, the "Plan of Philadelphia" shows the oldest section of the city.

William Penn hoped that Philadelphia would cover ten thousand acres, and that the First Purchasers of lands in Pennsylvania would be given large lots in the town. A purchaser of as few as five hundred acres was promised a grant of ten acres in the city so that the urban homes of even the small landholders could be amply surrounded by orchards and meadows. It was on this basis that Penn visualized Philadelphia as a green country town.

Like many dreams, Penn's concept of Philadelphia failed to come true. His city, as first laid out, contained only one eighth the necessary acreage, and the size of town lots had to be drastically reduced from what he had contemplated. Instead of generously calculating them by the acre, it became necessary to measure them to the half foot. Despite this, Penn's basic plan was followed, and rights to town

lots varying in size and attractiveness of location with the size of the First Purchasers' country holdings were granted.

Many of the First Purchasers went through the steps of obtaining warrants for their lots, of having them surveyed, and, lastly, of having them patented by William Penn or his commissioners of property. Other original purchasers sold or neglected their rights. Still others occupied their lots, but did not bother to obtain patents. A patented lot, however, enjoyed a more attractive title; the records show frequent cases of lots long occupied but unpatented finally being patented only to be sold on the following day. The system of allotting land in Philadelphia, stemming from rights due to First Purchasers, may have been sound enough, but circumstances often made it difficult to administer. A century after William Penn had formulated his plan for the distribution of city lots, a Penn agent wrote: "It appears that very large Quantities of Land were Surveyed for the first Purchasers between the years 1682 and 1700, and that other Surveys have been made for them at different times ever since. Some of these purchasers have not got their Land Surveyed, and some probably never will." Such carelessness resulted in many vexing title claims which plagued the proprietarial land office.

To no one was the situation more disturbing than to the Founder's precise and businesslike son, Thomas Penn. During the 1740's, Penn devoted much attention to Philadelphia titles. Writing from England to the diligent Richard Peters, secretary of the land office, Penn ordered Peters "to make your self acquainted with the affair of the City Lots, for we shal be exceedingly exact in granting out the remainder of them, and in preserving every foot we have a right."

The best way for Peters to comply with this mandate was by applying to William Parsons, surveyor general of the province. Parsons studied the titles and drew up two copies of the "Plan of Philadelphia," retaining one copy for his office and giving the other to Richard Peters. Peters sent his copy to Thomas Penn. It does not seem possible to establish the year when Parsons completed this work, although it was sometime between 1741 and 1748, the term of his service as surveyor general.³

¹ Penn-Physick Accounts (1701-1779), 250, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

² Penn Letter Book, II, 156, HSP.

³ Ibid., IX, 241.

On occasion in the years that followed, Thomas Penn referred to Parsons' book as his authority on Philadelphia titles. In 1768 it was of special help to him in a controversy involving a city lot granted in the 1680's to William Penn, Jr. The location of this lot was clearly shown in the volume, and Penn instructed his Pennsylvania agent "to get (if it is not in the Office) Mr. Parsons's Book, from whence this I have is drawn, else I will send you the Book, or a copy of it."

The agent, Richard Hockley, slightly inept or even more lazy than usual, failed to find Parsons' book, although he claimed to have searched the land office and the surveyor general's office. Parsons himself could not be appealed to because he had died in 1757. On learning of Hockley's fruitless search, Penn sent his copy of the plan, the same one he had received from Peters, back to Philadelphia in 1769. The plan seems to have remained in Philadelphia ever since. How highly Thomas Penn valued this book may be seen in his instructions to his relative who brought it over: deliver "the book of the Squares of Philadelphia & the other single surveys you received from me, this I desire you will do to my nephew [Governor John Penn] at his Board of Property when he has our officers with him that they may all have an opportunity of seeing them."

Whether or not the Pennsylvania officials examined the "Plan of Philadelphia" with interest or leafed through it in a perfunctory way, Thomas Penn had sent them a remarkable document, for it displayed the basic land titles of the most valuable part of the city. Although many exceptions can be found in Parsons' method of establishing titles, his principle was to record lots under their original surveys. For example, on page 183 James Claypoole is designated as the owner of a large lot on the southwest corner of Front and Walnut streets. This lot was patented to Claypoole on January 17, 1684/5, by right of the five thousand acres he owned as a First Purchaser. Claypoole had had a house built for him before his arrival in Philadelphia in October, 1683. Not too pleased with his house, Claypoole did think highly of the ground, for in February, 1683/4, he wrote: "My lott proves to be one of the best in the Town, having 102 foot to the River & 396 long. . . . there is a swamp runs by the side of

⁴ Ibid., V, 293; IX, 163, 227-228.

⁵ Penn Papers, Official Correspondence, IX, 146, HSP; Penn Letter Book, VII, 274; X, 44, 69.

my lott, that with a small charge might be made navigable." As early as 1700 the lot had been subdivided and had passed through several hands, yet Parsons recorded it under James Claypoole's name because he was its first owner and all subsequent titles to any part of the lot stemmed from him.⁶

To cite another similar example, page 207 shows a sizable lot fronting on Second Street and owned by Lasse Cock (Cook), one of the old Swedish settlers. Three days after Cock patented this lot on December 1, 1688, he sold it to Griffith Jones. On November 15, 1695, Jones conveyed a large part of the property to Joshua Carpenter, a trustee for Christ Church. It is on this lot that most of the present edifice of Christ Church stands. Although Christ Church had been in possession for half a century by the time Parsons made his charts, Parsons adhered to his principle and recorded its ownership under the name of Lasse Cock.⁷

Among other original ownerships of interest is that shown on page 217 in the name of John Key, who was presumably born in his parents' cave in the bank of the Delaware River near Sassafras Street. On May 26, 1683, William Penn granted this lot as a gift to John Key, "then an Infant being the first born in the said Citty of Philadelphia." The lot on page 183 which bears Samuel Carpenter's name was patented to Carpenter by Penn on June 24, 1684. On this property Carpenter built the famous Slate Roof House which served as William Penn's residence during his second visit to America. The architect or builder of this celebrated mansion was James Porteus, whose property is shown elsewhere. Adjoining Carpenter's mansion lot is a lot patented to another First Purchaser, Robert Greenway, captain of the *Welcome* on which William Penn made his first voyage to his province.8

On page 193 is found the square where Independence Hall now stands, the State House of old, or "Stadt House" of the draftsman. The area pertaining to the State House represents the amount of ground acquired for it in the 1730's. Part, if not all, of this land had

⁶ Exemplification Book, I, 307-308, City Hall, Phila.; James Claypoole Letter Book, 439-440, HSP.

⁷ Lewis C. Washburn, Christ Church, Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1925), 19.

⁸ Carpenter patent in Penn Collection, HSP. Key's patent to his lot, dated Nov. 10, 1713, is also at the HSP.

been surveyed to early settlers before it was purchased by the Pennsylvania Assembly. In this case, Parsons was not interested in the original surveys.9

Although all the lots shown by Parsons had been surveyed, not all had been patented as in the examples mentioned. Edward Shippen, who came to Philadelphia from Boston in 1693, built a great house on his large lot which is shown on page 184. He also acquired the grant of an entire city block from the commissioners of property. Evidently, Penn did not like this grant and persuaded Shippen to surrender it. In recognition of the surrender, and for an annual rent, Penn then leased him more than half a city block for fifty-one years (page 185). Such leases were common practice. Shippen's leased land, which lay just across Third Street from his home, was needed "for the better accomodating his present mansion house in the said city with a pasture." 10

Joseph Shippen, son of Edward, is found in possession of unpatented land on page 186. The large open area in this square is shown as in his tenure through his "right" to it. Shippen had acquired this type of ownership from the commissioners of property and from First Purchasers who had never taken up their rights. When Shippen died in 1741, he bequeathed the land to his three sons, who patented it four years later. The fact that Parsons records the ground as in "right of Joseph Shippen" could argue that Parsons completed his book before the land was patented in 1745. However, it is probable that the book was not finished quite that early."

Parsons records the names of three hundred eighty-one individuals and nine corporate bodies as the owners of the forty-nine Philadelphia squares. Many of the owners, like the Shippens, Andrew Hamilton, Isaac Norris, and James Logan, came to the city after Penn's concession of lots to First Purchasers ceased to apply to new purchasers. Logan and his contemporaries established their titles by buying up the rights of First Purchasers. Despite the inclu-

⁹ Charles H. Browning, "The State House Yard, and Who Owned It First after William Penn," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XL (1916), 85-103.

¹⁰ Exemplification Book, I, 400-401, City Hall.

¹¹ On the other hand, Peters did send Penn a plan of the city lots in 1745 or earlier. This plan could have been the one by Parsons now under discussion. Penn Letter Book, II, 138; Exemplification Book, II, 665; John Frederick Lewis, *The History of an Old Philadelphia Land Title* (Philadelphia, 1934), 98–101.

sion of names of a few relatively late comers, the great majority of the owners in Parsons' plan gained their titles before 1700.

The earliest names on the list are those of Swedes who held land in the vicinity before Penn was granted his province. The next group consists of those who preceded Penn to Pennsylvania. These pioneers are well represented, for they numbered among them those responsible for selecting the site of the city and laying it out—Deputy Governor William Markham, Surveyor General Thomas Holme, and two of the three commissioners, John Bezar and Nathaniel Allen. In 1682 these leaders held a lottery for the distribution of town lots to fifty-two First Purchasers. This lottery was later disallowed and titles do not descend from it, but it is of interest to note that properties owned by twenty-four who participated in the lottery are found in Parsons' plan. A few months after this lottery, William Penn arrived on the *Welcome*. Seventeen of his fellow passengers perfected their Philadelphia titles, according to Parsons' book.¹²

By the summer of the following year, Penn had designated the distribution of city lots to First Purchasers, and Thomas Holme had drawn up a map of the city to show where the individual lots were located. A comparison of this map with Parsons' plan shows a wide divergence in titles to lots. Thompson Westcott in 1867, while studying the distribution on the Holme map, pointed out: "These allotments, it must be understood, do not give the names of the patentees of the lots in every instance. There were considerable land speculations and purchases and sales of lots in the early days of the city, and the rights of the persons named under the allotments were frequently parted with, so that when surveys were made for the lots and patents granted they were made out frequently to different persons than those named" in the list which accompanied Holme's map.

A few years after Holme had made his map, many of the changes in rights to town lots, the "allotments" mentioned by Westcott, had taken place. Early in 1690, Receiver General John Blackwell listed the property owners by streets in Philadelphia, and recorded the size of their lots and the approximate time they had been in the possession

12 Samuel Hazard, Annals of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1850), 642-643. The names of those found on Parsons' plan who came on the Welcome, based on Thompson Westcott's study (Philadelphia, 1867), are Barber, Carver, Benjamin Chambers, Crosedale, John Fisher, Fitzwater, Greenway, Herriot, Ingelo, Rochfort, John Rowland, Thomas Rowland, Sharpless, Songhurst, Richard Townsend, William Wade, Wynne.

of the then owners. According to Blackwell's listings, entire blocks whose ownership had not changed since 1685 correspond exactly with Parsons' diagrams.¹³

For a previously discussed block on Front Street, Blackwell gives the following owners, all of whom he identifies as First Purchasers:

Griffith Jones	frontage in feet	71 1/2
Robert Greenway	do	301/2
Samuel Carpenter	do	102
Christopher Taylor	do	102
Wm. Shardlow & Wm. Wood	do	102
Dan [Nathaniel] Allen	do	40
John Love	do	20
Humphrey Murry	do	42

If one overlooks the fact that Blackwell skimped Allen's lot by nine inches and gave Murry an extra foot and a quarter, Blackwell's block corresponds exactly to Parsons' block on page 189.

Like subsequent Penn agents, Blackwell was careful to differentiate First Purchasers from later purchasers. For present purposes, titles which descend from First Purchasers are of special interest since they represent the oldest titles to real estate in Philadelphia. Despite the difficulty of determining absolutely all those entitled to city lots through the concessions granted them as First Purchasers, it is possible to establish that nearly half the property owners whose names are shown by Parsons were First Purchasers. Considering how many bargained away their rights, this is a tremendously high percentage. Many property owners not identifiable as First Purchasers were their children and inheritors of their rights.

Parsons' "Plan of Philadelphia" thus shows the oldest part of the city's real estate substantially under its seventeenth-century ownership. For the convenience of those interested, the names set down on the plan now follow in alphabetical order, accompanied by the page numbers on which their lots may be found. The plan itself is reproduced in facsimile.

NICHOLAS B. WAINWRIGHT

¹³ Quit Rents, Governor John Blackwell, Logan Papers, HSP.

¹⁴ The following lists of First Purchasers were consulted: Hazard, 637-642; Penn-Physick Manuscripts, Extracts from Patent Books and Book of Old Rights, 107-115, HSP; John Reed, Map of the City and Liberties of Philadelphia, With the Catalogue of Purchasers . . . (1774); Penn-Physick Accounts (1701-1779), 242-250.

List of Names on Parsons' Plan of Philadelphia¹⁵

Adams, Robt., 207 Allen, Nathaniel, 189, 200 Alsop, John, 200, 214 Ambler, John, 200 Anthony, Capt. Richd., 182 Appleton, Jos., 198 Atkinson, James, 215, 222 Austin, John, 199 Austin, Thos., 221

Badcock, Henry, 183 Barber, John, 203, 207, 214 Barker, Thomas, 199 Barnes, John, 190, 223 Batchelor, Jane, 223 Baynton, Peter, 205 Beakes, William, 206 Bennet, Samuel, 184 Berry, Thomas, 216 Bezer, John, 201 Bingham, Jas., 198 Bingley, Wm., 215 Birchal, John, 215 Bird, Valentine, 186 Blake, Edwd., 203 Blardman, Edward, 197 Bond, Thomas, 199 Boom, Cornelius, 190 Boult, John, 198 Bowman, Thomas, 206 Boyden, James, 183 Brandt, Alb[ertus], 188

Brassey, Thomas, 222
Breintnal, David, 191
Bristow, Johomas, 222
Bristow, Margt., 225
Bristow, Thos., 225
Brittain, Lionel, 201
Bromley, Nath., 203
Brooks, J., 214
Bryant, William, 212
Buckley, John, 218
Budd, Thos., 183
Busby, John, 185
Bye, Thomas, 209

Callowhill, Thomas, 206, 207 Cantrel, Richd., 207 Carpenter, Abr., 182 Carpenter, Josha., 198 Carpenter, Samuel, 182, 188, 189, 202, 209 Carter, William, 190, 205 Carven, John, 190 Chambers, Benjamin, 212, 213, 214 Chambers, John, 215 Chandler, John, 209 Child, Amy, 217 Child, Edwd., 188 Child, Jno., 184 [Christ] Church Burying Ground, Clark, Wm., 207 Claypoole, James, 183

15 The spellings of the names on the plan have not been corrected, but are given as recorded by Parsons.

Claypoole, John, 198 Clayton, William, 216 Clowes, John, 199, 206 Cole, Sabian, 199 Coleman, Joseph, 218 Collet, J[ohn], 196 Colley, J[ohn], 196 Cook, Arthur, 207 Cook, Francis, 207 Cook, John, 226 Cook, Lasse, 207 Cook, Richard, 192 Cooper, James, 200 Cope, Oliver, 218 Coppock, Bartho., 184 Cordy, Hugh, 182, 183 Corker, William, 222 Corporation, 182, 183 Corsley, Richard, 197, 201 Countis, John, 200 Crapp, Jno., 196 Crews, Edward, 209 Crews, William, 201 Crispin, Silas, 198 Crosedale, Thomas, 207 Cross, Thomas, 185

Davis, Richard, 199, 207, 214 Day, John, 208 Denzie, Jno., 198 Dickenson, Jonathan, 182, 183 Dinning, John, 220 Dove, Francis, 184 Dunstan, Robert, 226

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Fisher, William, 222
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Flower, Enoch, 201
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Forrest, Joan, 217
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Ingelo, Richard, 190 Ireton, John, 187

Jackson, George, 223 James, David, 193 James, Es., 196 Jefferson, Edward, 212 Jenner, Thos., 199 Jennet, John, 215 Jennings, John, 207 Jobson, Mich., 182 Jobson, Samuel, 183, 199 John, John ap, 197 Jones, Cad[walader], 207 Jones, Daniel, 192 Jones, Griffith, 182, 183, 189, 205, 206, 208, 221, 222 Jones, Henry, 198 Jones, John, 178, 196, 207 Jones, Joseph, 219 Jones, Rachel, 200 Jones, R[obert], 188 Jones, Thos., 192, 207

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Langshore, Robert, 184, 205
Lee, Charles, 191
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Lieusley, Thomas, 192
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Quaker's Burrying Ground, 208

¹⁶ This lot is marked "now sold to William Allen."

Rakestraw, Wm., 198, 201 Randal, George, 216 Randal, Nicholas, 216 Ransted, Jos., 198 Rawle, Fra[ncis], 207, 221 Redman, Richard, 222 Reynolds, John, 203 Rich, Phil., 182, 188 Richardson, Frans., 184 Richardson, Saml., 205, 206 Risley, Marg., 226 Roberts, Benja., 200 Robinson, Andw., 221 Robinson, Patrick, 178 Robinson, Samuel, 217 Robinson, Wid., 182 Robinson, Wm., 196 Rochford, Dennis, 209 Roman, Phillip, 218 Rowland, John, 185, 214 Rowland, Thomas, 199 Rutter, Thomas, 216, 218

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Woolrich, Thomas, 214
Worrel, Richard, 215
Wright, Benja., 225
Wyer, Charles, 178
Wynne, Thomas, 197, 200

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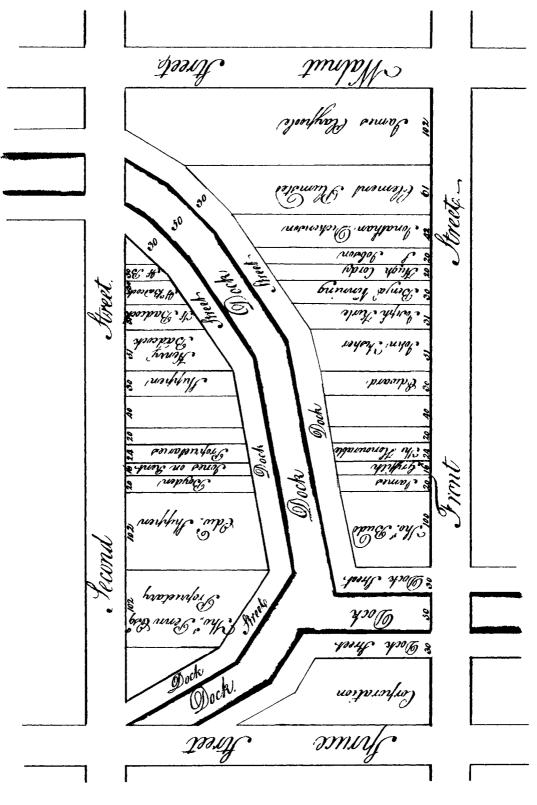
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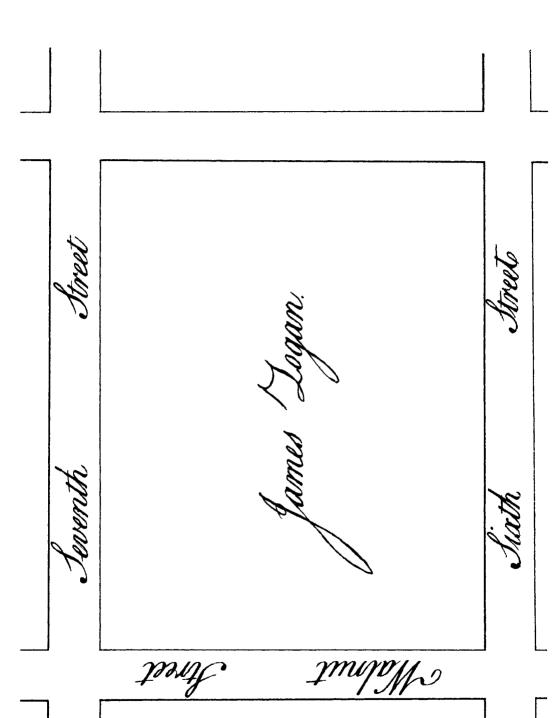
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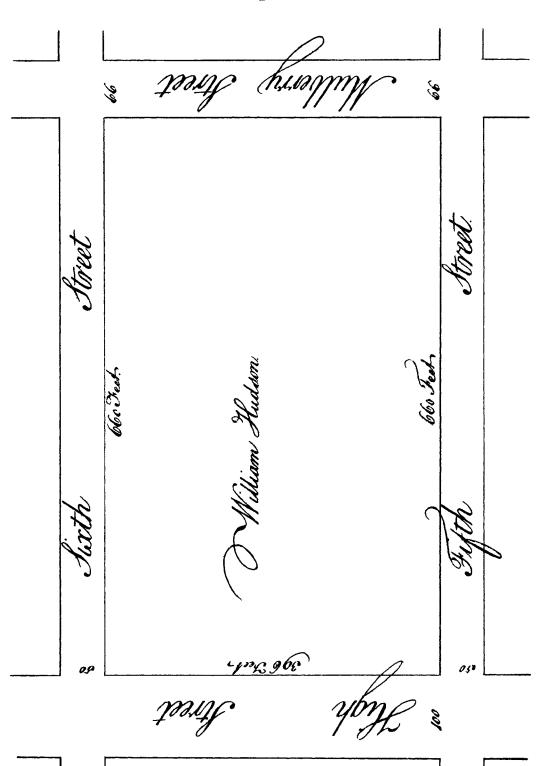
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