

Big Wheels in Philadelphia: Du Simitière's List of Carriage Owners

ON THE EVE of the American Revolution, Philadelphia had attained a position of wealth and commercial power greater than that of any other city in British North America. In less than one hundred years she had experienced a phenomenal growth and had developed a highly complex and sophisticated society. At the top, this society was controlled by a wealthy aristocracy which, despite the Quaker origins of the city, maintained itself in the trappings and style exhibited elsewhere in the colonies and in England. One sign that a man had "arrived" in eighteenth-century society was possession of a coach or carriage. Philadelphians were no exception in this custom, and even the Quakers were tempted to engage in this form of "conspicuous consumption."¹

The fact that there were only eighty-four carriage owners in a city of more than 20,000 in 1772 emphasizes the importance of the carriage as a status symbol. The list of carriage owners provides the eighteenth-century equivalent of a Social Register. Conveniently for the historian, such a list for Philadelphia was compiled in 1772 by Pierre Eugène Du Simitière.²

This Swiss immigrant left Geneva for the West Indies around 1750. For the next ten years he traveled from island to island making water color drawings, collecting coins, shells and botanical specimens, and learning the English language. In 1764 or 1765 he went to New York, then moved to Burlington, and finally, in 1766, landed in Philadelphia, where within two years he was elected to the American Philosophical Society. Supporting himself by painting miniatures of prominent Philadelphians, he began collecting materials pertaining

¹ Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill, 1948), 130-132; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York, 1955), 340-342.

² For population estimates, see Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 225.

to the Revolutionary movement. His hobby culminated in 1782 when he opened his American Museum, the first such institution in the United States.³

In 1772, either because of his interest in collecting information on Philadelphia society or, perhaps, because he was looking for potential customers for his portrait paintings, Du Simitière drew up a list of the people who owned carriages. This list offers insights into Philadelphia which have apparently been overlooked by previous students. One exception is Frederick B. Tolles who observed that Du Simitière listed the Quaker carriage owners at the end of his list, apparently considering them a separate element in Philadelphia society. This consideration would not have been unusual in eighteenth-century Philadelphia where Quakers and non-Quakers each had distinct social circles, separate charities, and separate social organizations. It is also possible that Du Simitière listed Friends separately because they were less likely to avail themselves of his portraits.⁴

Du Simitière's list was published in 1873 in the *American Historical Record*, and, in condensed form, by Scharf and Westcott in their 1884 *History of Philadelphia*. Although Tolles concluded that "Quaker grandees differed little from their aristocratic Anglican or Presbyterian neighbors in the outward trappings of wealth,"⁵ when one considers the type of carriage these people owned it is apparent that Quaker grandees did indeed differ from their Anglican and Presbyterian counterparts in at least one significant aspect—they purchased cheaper, less ostentatious carriages.

Du Simitière grouped the carriages into three distinct types and then noted the kind each man or woman owned. The most pres-

³ William John Potts, "Du Simitière, Artist, Antiquary, and Naturalist, Projector of the First American Museum," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB)*, XIII (1889), 341-343; Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia* (Harrisburg, 1931-1933), II, 612; Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York, 1942), 130, 216.

⁴ Tolles, 131n. The list of Philadelphia carriage owners and similar lists for Boston and New York are in the Du Simitière Papers. For Philadelphia see 1413 Q, 23 p-s, Library Company of Philadelphia, on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵ W. J. P., "Private Carriages in Philadelphia, A Hundred Years Ago," *American Historical Record*, II (1873), 54-55; J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia 1609-1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), II, 880-881n.; Tolles, 132.

tigious and expensive carriage was a "coach." Of the total of eighty-four carriage owners, only ten possessed a coach. They included Governor Richard Penn and former merchant John Cadwalader, both of whom were listed as having "all sorts" of carriages.⁶ Only two coach owners—Joseph Pemberton and Samuel Pleasants—were Quakers, though this surely did not indicate that Quakers were unable to afford such luxury. By far the largest number of coach owners were Anglicans. Besides Penn and Cadwalader, the Anglican coach owners included Thomas Willing, Mrs. William Masters, Tench Francis, and Benjamin Chew. Chief Justice William Allen was the only Presbyterian who indulged himself with a coach (the religion of Captain Edward Stiles could not be determined).

The second type of carriage represented in Philadelphia was the "chariot" or "post-chaise" (Du Simitière grouped these two types). A post-chaise was a closed carriage with seats for three persons in addition to the driver who sat on one of the horses. The chariot was similar to the post-chaise except that it had a coach-box for the driver. Forty-seven Philadelphians owned this type of conveyance in 1772 (excluding those men who also owned the more expensive coach). Like the coach, the chariot was preferred by Anglicans. There were thirteen Quaker owners, twenty-four Anglicans, two Presbyterians, a Lutheran and a Jew (besides five others whose

⁶ Men owning more than one carriage are classified according to the most elaborate one. There has been some question as to whether the total number should be 84 or 85. The manuscript has the name of Tench Francis written in a different hand with the notation "inserted by J. F. F." written in the margin. John F. Watson in his *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time* (Philadelphia, 1889), I, 208, says there were 84 owners. Since Francis would make 85 names, "W. J. P.," who published the list in the *American Historical Record*, concluded that Francis' name was added after 1830 (the year of Watson's first edition). Furthermore, since Francis is listed as owning a "coach," a vehicle of such distinction that Du Simitière would not have overlooked it, "W. J. P." concludes that Francis' name was added falsely for reasons of family prestige (the initials of the unknown culprit do end in an "F."). What "W. J. P." did not know, however, is that the handwriting is that of Tench Francis' grandson, Joshua Francis Fisher, a man who was in a position to know about his grandfather's carriage. Fisher was an officer in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania from 1828 to 1865. In all likelihood he came across Du Simitière's list and simply corrected what he knew to be an oversight. Tench Francis certainly had the means to own a carriage, and since an earlier list of 1761 shows his mother with a chariot, it is probable that he owned some sort of carriage even if it was not a coach. And since Daniel Benezet is listed in two places, the addition of Francis still leaves the total at 84. See "Joshua Francis Fisher," in Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1928-1937), VI, 409-410.

religion could not be determined, but, because of their position on Du Simitière's list, were probably non-Quakers).

The third type of carriage was the "coach-wagon." This term was apparently not widely used, but Du Simitière evidently meant it to include a variety of smaller less expensive vehicles which in the nineteenth century would probably have been termed "buggies." In a similar list drawn up in 1770 for New York, Du Simitière used the term "phaeton" to describe this type of carriage. Significantly, the coach-wagon was generally preferred by Quakers. Of the thirty-six Friends who owned carriages, twenty-one of them had this type. Furthermore, only two Anglicans, one Presbyterian, and one Lutheran (along with two whose religion was not identified) owned coach-wagons.

The tendency of Quakers to prefer the cheaper carriage probably reflects their religious predilections against ostentatious display, though it may indicate a certain smugness over their long-established position in Philadelphia society. Men like William Logan, Abel James, Henry Drinker, and Thomas Wharton did not have to prove that they had "arrived." Even so, the mere fact that thirty-six Quakers owned carriages may reflect a certain amount of "falling away" from the tenets of their religion. A similar list of carriage owners in 1761 reveals that of the twenty-nine people who were included only four can be identified as Quakers (William Logan, Dr. Samuel Preston Moore, Charles Norris, and Israel Pemberton).⁷ The greatly increased total number of carriage owners during the 1760's undoubtedly reflects the growing population and prosperity of the city. The even greater increase in the proportion of Quaker owners, however, may also indicate a weakening of their standards during the same period. Joseph Pemberton, for instance, one of the two Quakers who owned a coach, reportedly had given up the plain style of his sect.⁸

Carriages were extremely rare in the early years of the eighteenth century. Timothy Matlock, whose memory stretched far back into that period, told John Fanning Watson that the earliest coach he

⁷ "An Account of Coaches, Landaus, Chariots, and Four-Wheel Chaises in Philadelphia, 1761," *PMHB*, XXVII (1903), 375.

⁸ John W. Jordan, *Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania* (New York, 1911), I, 293.

could remember was Judge Allen's. That worthy gentleman had imported from England a landau pulled by four black horses. Allen's coachman, also imported from England, demonstrated his skill as a driver with "such dashing science" that it gave concern both to the Judge and to spectators. Another aged Philadelphian told Watson that her grandfather had owned a coach, but in the early years of the century he had been "almost ashamed" to be seen in it lest he should be considered "effeminate and proud."⁹

By the middle of the century, however, carriages were becoming a common sight. By 1746, Abram Cooper was advertising "Two handsome chairs," which were available to rent, and by 1759, George Sharpless, who described himself as a "Coach and Coach-Harness Maker," offered to make and repair "all Sorts of Coaches, Chariots, Landaus, Phaetons, four and two wheeled Chaises . . . according to the newest Fashions."¹⁰

These new carriages came both from English and local manufacturers. Carriage building in Philadelphia went back as far as 1729; by the time of the Revolution there were about a dozen artisans making carriages and exporting them to other colonies, particularly to those in the South.¹¹ Watson, in his *Annals of Philadelphia*, said that the trade began with William Ashmead, a smith, who upon observing the ponderous carriages being imported from England, decided that he could make a better and lighter model of his own. He then built a carriage which he rented out to wealthy patrons by the day. A gentleman from Maryland offered Ashmead £120 for it. So attractive was this offer that Ashmead not only built its replacement but others for a growing market. By the time of the Revolution, carriage makers were selling coaches and chariots for £200 and lesser vehicles for £100.¹² William Allen's carriage reputedly cost £400.¹³

John Cadwalader, the only person besides Governor Penn who owned "all sorts" of carriages, paid handsomely for the honor. In 1770, Cadwalader had two phaetons (coach-wagons) and a coach.

⁹ Watson, I, 208.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 209; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Nov. 29, 1759.

¹¹ Harrold E. Gillingham, "The Philadelphia Windsor Chair and its Journeyings," *PMHB*, LV (1931), 320n.

¹² Watson, II, 65-66.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, 33.

The more elaborate of the phaetons was "lined with superfine light colored cloth, painted a good light colour with the mouldings festoons & carved work fully gilt." The initials "J. C." were painted on the back and sides. Cadwalader bought it for £117 in 1769 from William Tod, a London coachmaker who had come to Philadelphia three years earlier. The other coach-wagon was a green two-wheeled vehicle which he bought from John Bringhurst in 1770 for £50.¹⁴

Cadwalader's coach, however, was apparently not grand enough for his tastes. He complained that it was "but mean" and ordered a better one in 1771. This new vehicle was described by its London maker as:

A new neat light coach of the best materials, the body neatly carved and painted a light green color with arms shields & crests on the panels & a handsome border of proper coloured flowers round the panels and the framework all gilt. The leather jappand and the body lined with super-fine white cloth and the best worsted lace the same color, plate glasses and mahogany shutters, two glasses to slide in the fore end and a oval light in the back, two wainscot boxes under the seat with locks & hinges—duble folding inside steps & silverd glass dowers, iron axeltrees & steel springs & wheel hoops gilt, harness & bridles for six horses, two postilion saddles—£136.16.6.

With a coachman, two Negro postilion riders, and six horses, this coach must have satisfied even Cadwalader's vanity.¹⁵

From the prices paid for these vehicles, not to mention the necessity of providing horses and drivers as well, only the very wealthy could afford them. The men and women on Du Simitière's list were indeed among the people who had the highest assessed valuations on the tax list of 1774. Tax assessments are difficult to evaluate on an individual basis as an indication of wealth since they included primarily only real property and neglected important items such as stock on hand and money out on loan.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the assessments of these people were far above average. As a group, coach owners in 1774 had a mean assessed valuation of £345; chariot own-

¹⁴ Nicholas B. Wainwright, *Colonial Grandeur in Philadelphia: The House and Furniture of General John Cadwalader* (Philadelphia, 1964), 57-58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁶ The figures were obtained from the original tax lists located in the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg. The published version (*Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd ser., XIV) is replete with inaccuracies and confusion and should be used only with caution.

ers had a mean of £266, and coach-wagon owners £205. Another indication that Quakers were buying cheaper carriages than they needed to is shown by the fact that Quaker owners of coach-wagons had a mean assessed valuation of £231, while non-Quaker owners had a mean of only £137.

The social standing of carriage owners is also affirmed by the positions they held. Governor Penn, Chief Justice Allen, Attorney General Benjamin Chew, Speaker Joseph Galloway, former Governor James Hamilton, and the Reverend Richard Peters all owned carriages. So did the great merchants of the city: Robert Morris, William Logan, the Pembertons, the Whartons, Thomas Willing and many others. Half of the people on the list held political office at one time or another. Of the seventeen men who sat on the Governor's Council from 1745 until the Revolution, nine owned carriages, four were the fathers, sons, or brothers of carriage owners, and at least two more married into carriage owners' families.

The list of carriage owners reveals the power and position of Quakers and Anglicans in Philadelphia society and politics; their influence far outweighed their relative numbers in the population. The eighteenth-century Quaker historian Robert Proud, using burial statistics, estimated that Quakers made up approximately one-seventh of Philadelphia's population. Yet they comprised nearly 40 per cent of the carriage owners. Anglicans, who comprised a slightly larger proportion of the population than the Quakers, owned more than one-third of the carriages.

Two of the carriages included by Du Simitière were to see service during and after the Revolution. Israel Pemberton's chariot was used by General Howe during his occupation of Philadelphia.¹⁷ Pemberton was in exile in Virginia. Governor Penn's coach was destined for great service and fame. This "White Coach," which had been imported from England, was later used by George Washington on his presidential "swing around the circle" from March 21 to June 6, 1791. The 1,889-mile journey took the President through Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia on what was the longest continuous ride taken by an American in a private vehicle to that time. When one considers the state of the roads, it was indeed a remark-

¹⁷ Jordan, I, 288-289.

able journey. The President was only able to endure his ordeal because he took along a horse to ride when he was tired of jolting in the coach.¹⁸

The coach was seen by Watson in his youth. He recalled that it had "a greater air of stately grandeur" than he had seen since.

It was very large, so much so, as to make four horses an indispensable appendage. . . . It was of a cream colour, with much more of gilded carvings in the frame than is since used. Its strongest attractions were the relief ornaments on the pannels, they being painted medallion pictures of playing cupids or naked children.¹⁹

The children on the side of the President's coach were apparently inoffensive to eighteenth-century minds. Watson later saw the coach in New Orleans where it had been taken by some speculator who was then unable to sell it. "It became in time," wrote Watson, "a kind of outhouse, in which fowls roosted; and in the great battle of New Orleans it stood between the combatants, and was greatly shot-ridden!"²⁰

Du Simitière's list of carriage owners does not, of course, give the complete picture of Philadelphia's elite. It would be difficult, for instance, to exclude Benjamin Franklin from any such enumeration. He did not own a carriage, perhaps because it would have ruined his "image." Also, several wealthy Quakers, with traditional piety, refrained from this luxury. George Emlen, Sr., did without a carriage (though his son was not so scrupulous) as did Nicholas Waln. Even so, the carriage list does provide a cross section of Philadelphia's elite on the eve of the Revolution.

It is reproduced below, altered to bring the owners' names into alphabetical order and to add information about them.

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¹⁸ Labert St. Clair, *Transportation* (New York, 1933), 55-56.

¹⁹ Watson, I, 209.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 209, 209n.

LIST OF CARRIAGE OWNERS 1772

Assessment figures are taken from the original tax list in the custody of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Figures marked with an asterisk are from the 1769 list.

Name	Occupation or position	Religion	Type of Carriage	Assessment, 1774, in pounds
William Allen	Chief Justice	Presbyterian	Coach & Chariot	782
Daniel Benezet	Merchant	Anglican	Coach-wagon	196
Dr. Phineas Bond	Physician	Anglican	Chariot	36
Dr. Thomas Bond	Physician	Anglican	Chariot	124
James Bringhurst	Carpenter	Quaker	Coach-wagon	63
John Cadwalader	Gentleman	Anglican	All sorts	143
Benjamin Chew	Recorder	Anglican	Coach & Chariot	359
Thomas Clifford	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	240
Capt. Isaac Cox	Sea Captain		Chariot	113
James Craig	Merchant	Presbyterian	Coach-wagon	117
John Dickinson	Lawyer	non-Quaker	Chariot	711
Henry Drinker	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	134
Andrew Duché		Anglican	Chariot	12
Geo. Emlen, Jr.	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot	51
Samuel Emlen, Jr.	Preacher	Quaker	Coach-wagon	458
Joshua Fisher	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	325
Joseph Fox	Carpenter	Quaker	Coach-wagon	608
		(disowned)		
Tench Francis	Merchant	Anglican	Coach & Chariot	196
David Franks	Merchant	Jew	Chariot	98
Joseph Galloway	Speaker	Anglican	Chariot	197
Dr. Thomas Graeme	Physician	Anglican	Chariot	301*

Name	Occupation or position	Religion	Type of Carriage	Assessment, 1774, in pounds
Widow [Mrs Isaac] Greenleaf		Quaker	Coach-wagon	241
James Hamilton	Gentleman	Anglican	Chariot	768
Widow [Mrs. Henry] Harrison		Anglican	Chariot	230
Henry Hill	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot	157
Andrew Hodge	Merchant		Coach-wagon	104
Joshua Howell	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	220
Abel James	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	239
Reynold Keen	Merchant	Anglican	Chariot	318
Henry Keppelle	Merchant	Lutheran	Coach-wagon	147
Henry Keppelle, Jr.	Merchant	Lutheran	Chariot	107
Lynford Lardner	Uncle to the Governor	Anglican	Chariot	380
John Lawrence	Judge	Anglican	Chariot	381
Thomas Lawrence	Vendue Master	Anglican	Chariot	327
Jacob Lewis	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	209
James Logan	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot	183
William Logan	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot	258
Archibald McCall	Merchant	Anglican	Chariot	69
Widow [Mrs. William] Masters	Mother to the Governor's Lady	Anglican	Coach	683
Reese Meredith	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot & Coach-wagon	558
John Mifflin	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	196
Capt. Samuel Mifflin	Merchant	non-Quaker	Chariot	229
Widow [Mrs. Robert] Montgomery			Chariot	72
Dr. Samuel Preston Moore	Physician	Quaker	Chariot	441
William Moore	Merchant	Anglican	Chariot	500
Anthony Morris	Brewer	Quaker	Coach-wagon	891

Christian Sam Morris	Gentleman	Quaker	Coach-wagon	
Robert Morris	Merchant	Anglican	Chariot	115
Samuel Morton	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot	176
Samuel Neave	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot	167
Samuel Noble	Tanner	Quaker	Coach-wagon	96
Elizabeth Norris		Quaker	Chariot	272
Peggy Oswald		Anglican	Chariot	
Israel Pemberton	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot	950
James Pemberton	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot & Coach-wagon	352
John Pemberton	Preacher	Quaker	Chariot	433
Joseph Pemberton	Merchant	Quaker	Coach	179
Richard Penn	Governor	Anglican	All sorts	105
Richard Peters, D.D.	Rector of	Anglican	Chariot	62
	Christ Church			
Samuel Pleasants	Merchant	Quaker	Coach	79
Samuel Powel	Common Council	Anglican	Chariot	1207
Samuel Purviance	Merchant		Coach-wagon	48*
Dr. John Redman	Physician	Presbyterian	Chariot	99
Joseph Reed	Lawyer	Presbyterian	Chariot	5
John Reynell	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	138
Thomas Riche	Merchant	Anglican	Chariot	165
Hugh Roberts	Ironmonger	Quaker	Coach-wagon	213
John Ross	Lawyer	Anglican	Chariot	208
Daniel Rundle	Merchant	Anglican	Chariot	139
Edw. Shippen, Jr.	Lawyer	Anglican	Chariot	225
Samuel Shoemaker	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	136
Joseph Sims	Merchant	Anglican	Coach-wagon	211
Samuel Smith	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	21
John Steinmetz	Grocer		Chariot	78

Name	Occupation or position	Religion	Type of Carriage	Assessment, 1774, in pounds
Capt. Edward Stiles			Coach & Coach-wagon	404*
William Straker	Merchant		Chariot	
Peter Turner, Jr.	Merchant	Anglican	Chariot	222
William West	Merchant	non-Quaker	Chariot	143
Joseph Wharton, commonly called Duke Wharton	Merchant	Quaker	Chariot & Coach-wagon	450
Joseph Wharton, Jr.	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	114
Thomas Wharton	Merchant	Quaker	Coach-wagon	165
Capt. Williams of the Ingeneers	Army Officer	Anglican	Chariot	9
Thomas Willing	Merchant	Anglican	Coach	534
Richard Wister	Glass & button maker	Quaker	Coach-wagon	186