

Wright's Ferry: A Glimpse into the Susquehanna Backcountry

THE HISTORY OF THE EARLIEST YEARS of settlement at Wright's Ferry, and the subsequent founding of the town of Columbia, provides fascinating insights for understanding the evolution of other Pennsylvania backcountry communities during the colonial and early national periods. Located seventy miles west of Philadelphia, on the eastern shore of the Susquehanna River, Wright's Ferry was one among dozens of backcountry communities that emerged during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. This narrative account will illuminate the complex political, ethnic, and social currents that emerged at Wright's Ferry as William Penn's secretary, James Logan, moved to ensure the orderly settlement of Pennsylvania's backcountry.

Though Logan was charged with handling Penn's business affairs in Pennsylvania, he also clearly pursued his own agenda in carrying out his assigned tasks. Despite Penn's policies inviting German and Irish immigration to the colony, Logan grew increasingly uncomfortable with the rising influx of "foreigners" into the colony. Upon Penn's death, he found his task further hampered by estate litigation that temporarily prevented Logan from granting new land titles, resulting in widespread squatting by immigrants arriving during the 1720s. As a result, Wright's Ferry became a focal point for the political, ethnic, and social rivalries that characterized the emergence of Pennsylvania's backcountry from primeval wilderness. Though not laid out into a formal town for more than sixty-two years after its original settlement in 1726, a unique agrarian community ruled by a Quaker oligarchy took root with the arrival of the first English Quaker families. By the time a portion of the settlement was laid out as the town of Columbia in 1788, the settlement already possessed a stratified and culturally conservative community identity that set it apart from the German and Scots-Irish farmsteads which filled the surrounding territory.

During his travels through America in 1783-84, Johann D. Schoepf observed:

There are in America a number of such places called towns where one must look for the houses, either not built, or scattered a good distance apart, that is to say, certain districts are set off as Townships (market or town districts) the residents of which live apart on their farms, a particular spot being called the town, where the church and the tavern stand and the smiths have their shops—because in one or another of these community buildings the neighbors are accustomed to meet.¹

In Wright's Ferry, the public buildings were the hostelry, meetinghouse, gristmill, and sawmill, which stood on the land of the original English Quaker families, while most of the labor was provided by German indentured servants and African slaves. For most of the eighteenth century, this community was a mere hamlet, without stores, where services were provided by trained craftsmen living as tenants on the farms of the Quaker elite.

The first three Quaker families to settle at Wright's Ferry in 1726 were close personal friends of James Logan, agent for the Penn family and one of

¹ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784*, trans. and ed. by Alfred J. Morrison (2 vols., New York, 1968), 1:46. Although the settlement of Wright's Ferry was not organized into a formal town for more than six decades after it first came into existence, and although its residents long remained dependent on Lancaster for the purchase of luxuries, the settlement nonetheless developed a distinctive community identity from an early date. For additional background on eighteenth-century communities in southeastern Pennsylvania, see Lucy Simler, "Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Chester County," *William & Mary Quarterly* 43 (1986), 542-69; Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* (Princeton, 1986); Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family, British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York and Oxford, 1988); Rodger C. Henderson, "Demographic Patterns and Family Structure in Eighteenth-Century Lancaster County, Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter, *PMHB*) 114 (1990), 349-83; Jerome H. Wood, Jr., *Conestoga Crossroads: Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1730-1790* (Harrisburg, 1979); and James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1972). Also important to this discussion are the arguments in Robert J. Gough, "The Myth of the 'Middle Colonies' Reconsidered: The Process of Regionalization in Early America," *PMHB* 113 (1989), 527-48.

the most powerful figures in Pennsylvania politics.² As the chief representative of the proprietary interests in Pennsylvania for more than a quarter of a century, by 1726 Logan had already spent fifteen years feuding with Deputy Governor William Keith, who consistently sided with the colonial assembly in opposition to both the council and the proprietary interests of the Penn family. When Keith was finally superseded by sixty-two-year-old Patrick Gordon in 1726, Logan's political power increased dramatically. In a letter to John Penn, Logan expressed great pleasure in reporting that he was now in a position to write all the speeches for the aging and decrepit deputy governor who was, in any case, more than willing to cooperate with Logan.³ It is precisely in this year, 1726, that Logan's friends established the settlement of Wright's Ferry.

Logan had long been concerned about the continuing influx of non-English immigrants into the colony, particularly the backcountry that lay toward the Susquehanna River where he had a personal stake in Pennsylvania's lucrative Indian fur trade. Land surveyor Jacob Taylor first surveyed land for German Anabaptists within the present boundaries of Lancaster County in 1710, while Logan was away in England defending himself against allegations made to the Penn family stemming from his handling of colonial affairs. Upon his return to Pennsylvania, Logan was shocked to discover that "in my absence . . . warrants were directed to [Jacob Taylor] to lay out lands for the Palatines, whom he settled without any knowledge of mine, to the utmost of his power to their advantage, and for the time he spent with them, they will say to this day that they paid him

² For the historical and political background, see *Pennsylvania Archives*, ser. 1, vol. 1, and ser. 2, vol. 9; *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia, 1849). For a general background on James Logan, see Frederick B. Tolles, *James Logan and the Culture of Colonial America* (Boston, 1957); Craig W. Horle, "William Penn's Proprietorship in Danger: The View from James Logan in 1705," *PMHB* 113 (1989), 419-37. Forty-nine Penn-Logan letters are in vol. 4, *The Papers of William Penn* (Philadelphia, 1987), edited by Craig W. Horle, Alison Duncan Hirsch, Marianne S. Wokeck, and Joy Wittenberg. Recent work on the Pennsylvania-Maryland border dispute, Indian relations, and class structure include Charles Desmond Dutrizac, "Local Identity and Authority in a Disputed Hinterland: The Pennsylvania-Maryland Border in the 1730s," *PMHB* 115 (1991), 35-61; Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Peopling and Depeopling of Early Pennsylvania: Indians and Colonists, 1680-1720," *PMHB* 116 (1992), 3-31; and Lucy Simler, "The Landless Worker: An Index of Economic and Social Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1820," *PMHB* 114 (1990), 163-99.

³ James Logan to John Penn, Oct. 20, 1726, Logan Papers, Correspondence 1, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter, HSP).

largely.⁴ Logan promptly directed Taylor to lay out 500 acres in the Conestoga Manor adjacent to a 16,000-acre tract that was reserved for the proprietors.⁵ This parcel was reserved for Logan and one John Cartlidge, a local fur trader. Having an eye to his own interests as well as those of his employers, Logan established a store for trading with the Indians at Conestoga and placed Cartlidge in charge of the operation.⁶ Logan was also in a position to decide which fur traders in the region to license, thereby excluding those who held trading licenses from Maryland.

In 1717, Logan wrote of the increasing number of German immigrants who continued to flood into the backcountry:

There are diverse hundreds arrived here who have not one word of English and bring no credentials with them, a method we conceive no way safe for any colony. Tho we hope these may be honest men, yet by the same routes & methods a like number of Swedes might be poured in among us . . . The Palatines that come next spring must expect to pay 10 (pounds) per head here to the government for we are resolved to receive no more of them . . . our country people are inflamed against them and we are to sell them no more land.⁷

These sentiments were clearly at odds with William Penn's original invitation welcoming German sectarians from the Rhine valley to Pennsylvania. Logan's sense of alarm was not diminished by time. In September 1727 Logan wrote: "Last year mention was made of a large number of Palatines that were expected here this summer. Just now one large ship brought up above 400 of them & we are assured there are no less than three more at sea whose arrival is daily expected. At this rate you shall soon have a German colony here & perhaps such a one as Britain received from Saxony in the 5th century."⁸ Though Logan ranted about the continuing influx of Germans into the backcountry and refused to sell them more land, there was

⁴ *Pa. Archives*, ser. 2., 7:81, 126.

⁵ Jacob Taylor Survey Map for Conestoga Manor, 1718, HSP. Copy also on file at the Lancaster County Historical Society (hereafter, LCHS).

⁶ James Logan's Account Book, 1712-1719, 107; James Logan's Parchment Letter Book, 1717-1731, 137, HSP.

⁷ Logan Letter Book 4, 81 (Sept. 25, 1717), HSP.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

little he could do about those who had already purchased legal titles to vast tracts of land in the Conestoga district by 1710.

After William Penn's death, the proprietary estate was tied up in litigation for many years and Penn's trustees were prevented from either selling or conveying legal titles to land in Pennsylvania. The litigation coincided with the arrival of a new wave of Scots-Irish immigrants who applied to Logan for grants. He directed some of them to Donegal, to the north of the future settlement of Wright's Ferry, in the present Lancaster County, with the promise that they might eventually be permitted to purchase titles to some of this land after the Penn estate litigation was settled and if they had exhibited good behavior.⁹ Logan settled the Scots-Irish far out on the edge of the backcountry where, he believed, these hot-blooded Presbyterians could be relied upon to provide the first line of defense against Indian incursions on the frontier—unlike the pacifist German Anabaptists at Conestoga. As the Penn litigation dragged on through the 1720s, however, a succession of bad harvests in northern Ireland brought increasing numbers of Scots-Irish to Pennsylvania. The new immigrants grew increasingly impatient with the rate at which Logan was opening the backcountry to settlement, and they began to take up land without seeking permission to do so. The widespread squatting by Irish on lands along the Susquehanna River prompted Logan to write: "I doubt not that there are at this time near a hundred thousand acres possessed by persons who resolutely sit down & improve without any manner of right or pretense of it. Some tis true have had a permission to prevent worse coming into the place."¹⁰ In 1727 Logan again wrote to William Penn's grandson, Springett Penn: "There is very little vacant land left untaken up . . . or invaded by those shoals of foreigners the Palatines and strangers from the north of Ireland that crowd in upon us, and for want of grants which we have not power to make, sit down anywhere with or without leave."¹¹ Logan's ever-present concern about illegal occupation of land by foreigners on the Susquehanna frontier prompted him to take decisive action in 1726, when his political power in the colony was at its height. On April 20, James Logan requested that 622 acres along the Susquehanna River, located south of the Scots-Irish settlements at Donegal,

⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰ Logan Letter Book 1, 289 (1726), HSP.

¹¹ Logan Letter Book 4, 168, HSP.

be surveyed for himself.¹² A few months later, Logan sold 300 acres from this tract to his close friend Samuel Blunston while three other Friends, Robert Barber and John Wright and his daughter Susanna, purchased land adjoining Blunston's tract.

The land upon which these three English Quaker families settled in the autumn of 1726 was strategically located for keeping an eye on the backcountry as well as profiting from the opportunities likely to attend future rapid population growth. The Susquehanna was at this place very shallow with a gentle current, a fact that local Indians had long taken advantage of for fording the river. Soon after his arrival, John Wright erected the first log ferry house on the eastern shore, and in 1728 he joined Samuel Blunston in purchasing additional land on the western side of the river where John Wright, Jr., erected a second log ferry house.¹³ The settlement was located three miles north of the fortieth parallel. At this time, both Maryland and Pennsylvania claimed the land between the fortieth parallel and the present Mason-Dixon line (43° 19' 91"). Logan's friends knew that their new homes would be safe regardless of the outcome of the long-standing Maryland-Pennsylvania border dispute, even as they helped orchestrate activities designed to ensure that Pennsylvania's interests would prevail in that dispute. Their primary concern was to see a formal government apparatus brought into existence that would, in the future, ensure the kind of orderly settlement Logan so greatly desired for the backcountry.¹⁴

James Logan's friends on the Susquehanna were indeed able to exercise some control over illegal occupation of land in the backcountry. In 1730 several landless Scots-Irish families from Derry Township illegally took possession of 15,000 acres in Conestoga Manor belonging to the proprietary government. Logan masterfully orchestrated a plan that successfully evicted these squatters by employing a Scots-Irish militia from nearby Donegal Township. First, Logan wrote a letter to James Anderson, minister of the Donegal Presbyterian Church, arguing that it was in the interest of the long-

¹² Connected Warrantee Map for Hempfield Township 40-5-1, Archives, Lancaster County Courthouse. For other land draft information about early Wright's Ferry, see land draft illustrated in Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans, *History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1883), 539, and copy of Land Warrant to John Wright and Samuel Blunston, Chester County Historical Society (hereafter, CCHS).

¹³ Land warrant to John Wright and Samuel Blunston. See also Rhoda Barber, "Journal of the Settlement of Wright's Ferry," 1830, unpaginated MS, HSP.

¹⁴ *Minutes of the Provincial Council*, 3:505; *Pa. Archives*, ser. 1, 1:312-13, 323, 330-31; Logan Letter Book 3, April 15, 1729, HSP.

settled Scots-Irish, who had received his permission to settle in Donegal, to band together and enforce the rule of law against their recalcitrant countrymen from Derry.¹⁵ Logan then requested Andrew Cornish, one of the original petitioners for erecting Lancaster County, to deliver the letter to James Anderson and to coordinate the eviction of the Scots-Irish squatters using a Scots-Irish militia. Logan placed the entire operation under the close supervision of his friends John Postlewaite, Robert Barber, John Wright, and Andrew Galbraith. Fearing they might lose the long-promised legal titles to their own land, the Scots-Irish settlers of Donegal were anxious to uphold the orderly rule of law against their fellow countrymen from Ireland.

About the time Samuel Blunston was elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly, in 1732, the boundary dispute with Maryland began to escalate. Acting at Logan's behest, Blunston surveyed land on the western side of the Susquehanna, which he laid out as Hellam Township. He hoped to strengthen Pennsylvania's claims over that region. In 1731 a Maryland carpenter named Thomas Cresap erected a blockhouse on the western shore of the Susquehanna about three miles below Wright's Ferry.¹⁶ Lord Baltimore commissioned Cresap as a justice of the peace for Maryland in 1732 and simultaneously granted him a patent for a group of islands in the Susquehanna River at Blue Rock, about three miles below Wright's Ferry. Over the following two years, Cresap participated in a number of skirmishes with settlers on both sides of the river who held Pennsylvania land patents. During one of these confrontations, Cresap killed Knowles Daunt, a member of a posse sent to assist the Lancaster sheriff in arresting Cresap for violating the king's peace.¹⁷ Proclaiming Cresap to be innocent of the resulting murder charge, Maryland's governor Samuel Ogle proceeded to reward Cresap with an additional grant of 500 acres in the disputed region.¹⁸ At the same time, Governor Ogle moved to strengthen Maryland's claim to the territory west of the Susquehanna River by offering land to other Maryland residents at the rate of ten shillings per hundred acres, with the promise that no rents would be collected until a permanent boundary was established between the two colonies.¹⁹

¹⁵ Logan Letter Book 4, 213-14, HSP.

¹⁶ *Pa. Archives*, ser. 1, 1:31. *Archives of Md.*, 28:20-21.

¹⁷ *Pa. Archives*, ser., 1, 1:410-12. *Archives of Md.*, 28:62.

¹⁸ *Archives of Md.*, 18:507.

¹⁹ *Archives of Md.*, 18:507.

In 1736 Cresap and his men expelled several Pennsylvanians from their farms in the western lands, claiming to have sold the same tracts to Marylanders. German settlers who were coerced by Cresap into paying for their land a second time petitioned the Pennsylvania Assembly for relief through Samuel Blunston.²⁰ The situation quickly escalated when Pennsylvania's legislature repudiated Governor Ogle's tactics. Governor Ogle responded by dispatching 300 Maryland militia, under Col. Nathaniel Rigby, to assist Cresap's men in dispossessing German farmers holding Pennsylvania patents from all the land located between the Susquehanna River and Codorus Creek. The militia was also instructed to proceed to Wright's Ferry and arrest John Wright, who was largely responsible for enforcing Pennsylvania's interests in the region.²¹ As news of the plot spread, 150 Pennsylvanians were assembled at Wright's Ferry to repel a possible assault from Maryland.²² Although ostensibly members of the Religious Society of Friends, neither John Wright nor Samuel Blunston were above enlisting the services of local Scots-Irish settlers to defend both Pennsylvania and their own property interests when necessary. On November 13, 1736, a small contingent of Pennsylvanians finally succeeded in capturing Thomas Cresap at his cabin on the western side of the river and returned him to Philadelphia to stand trial for the murder of Knowles Daunt.²³ Governor Ogle enlisted Charles Higgenbotham, who recruited an Irish militia to expel by force any German farmers found living west of the Susquehanna River.

After the death of Pennsylvania's deputy governor Gordon in 1736, James Logan became acting governor and publicly denounced Governor Ogle for his violent expulsion of six German families from their homes on the western side of the Susquehanna. Samuel Blunston called on Pennsylvania's legislature to create immediately a standing military force to defend the western settlements as the only alternative to abandoning them entirely to Maryland.²⁴ Though Pennsylvania's Quaker-controlled legislature failed to sanction an official Pennsylvania militia, it did dispatch additional justices of the peace to the western shore and asked the Lancaster County sheriff to

²⁰ *Minutes of the Provincial Council*, 4:56-58. *Archives of Md.*, 28:101-3.

²¹ *Minutes of the Provincial Council*, 4:62. *Pa. Archives*, ser. 1, 1:526-27. *Archives of Md.*, 28:99-100.

²² *Minutes of the Provincial Council*, 4:69.

²³ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁴ *Pa. Archives*, ser. 1, 1:530-33.

assemble a force of local volunteers to repel future assaults from Maryland.²⁵ Over the succeeding months, Higgenbotham's raids declined as a result of diplomatic negotiations between the two colonies. King George II finally intervened in 1738, ordering the respective governors of Pennsylvania and Maryland to suppress further violence until a final adjustment of the boundary line could be made.

In addition to Logan's concern over German and Scots-Irish squatters and the prolonged border dispute with Maryland, his representatives on the Susquehanna also faced delicate problems with Indians. The governor of Virginia frequently complained that Shawnee warriors from Pennsylvania journeyed deep into the South on raiding expeditions and sometimes incited slaves to escape from their masters.²⁶ The Susquehannocks were held responsible by Pennsylvania authorities for the good behavior of the Shawnee, but when the Susquehannocks tried to persuade the Shawnee to suspend such raids, the resulting friction caused a large number of Shawnee to move abruptly to the Allegheny River valley.²⁷ Having these troublesome Shawnee so far away caused even more concern within the Pennsylvania Assembly, who worried that the Shawnee might be plotting with French agents, but all efforts to persuade them to return or to prevent traders from doing business with them failed. In 1732 John Wright and Samuel Blunston went so far as to survey land for them in the Cumberland Valley, but even this failed to move them. The only Indians remaining in the vicinity of Wright's Ferry were a few families of Shawnee who were encamped along Shawnee Run when the Quakers arrived in 1726. These few remnants of the tribe were gradually Christianized and eventually joined the remains of the Susquehannocks and Seneca who were living at Conestoga Indian Town, about nine miles away in Conestoga Manor. By the time of the Treaty of Lancaster in 1744, these Conestoga Indians had been reduced to a state of abject poverty and were wholly dependent on the largesse of their European neighbors.²⁸

As the years passed and the German-speaking indentured servants living at Wright's Ferry completed their service, they were not permitted to buy land within the community. They were instead granted the privilege of

²⁵ *Minutes of the Provincial Council*, 4:154, 158.

²⁶ Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 6-14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ Witham Marshe, *Journal of the Treaty of Lancaster in 1744*, annotated by William H. Egle (Lancaster, 1884), 12, 15.

building small squatter cabins to live as tenants on the plantations of their former masters who paid for their services in harvest grain.

Although passionate defenders of the rights of rank and privilege, it must nonetheless be admitted that these Quaker families were really products of the middling classes. Robert Barber was a cordwainer by trade who had unsuccessfully run for the office of sheriff of Chester County in 1719 but was subsequently elected Chester County coroner.²⁹ He probably first visited the site of his future home on the Susquehanna after he was elected to the board of assessors for Conestoga and Donegal townships in 1724.³⁰ Barber constructed a log sawmill on a small run on his land at Wright's Ferry and later built a log jail there, after he was appointed, and then elected, sheriff of Lancaster County. Gravely disappointed when Wright's Ferry was not chosen as the county seat, he withdrew from public life entirely in 1731 to tend to his farm and sawmill. Upon his death in 1749, his estate was valued at £496 (English) and included four Negro slaves.³¹ Although the Barbers were probably the least privileged of Wright's Ferry's original settlers, they nonetheless established a pattern of slave ownership that lasted for at least another generation. Nathaniel Barber, Robert's son, took over his father's sawmill and is listed in local tax records as owning five slaves in 1756 and one slave as late as 1770.³²

The modest number of possessions in Robert Barber's estate suggests that ownership of slaves at Wright's Ferry did not necessarily translate into a luxurious lifestyle. Nonetheless, Robert's widow was able to pay off the outstanding mortgage to the General Loan Office in 1750, thereby preserving their 250-acre plantation for their children.³³ The 1751 tax assessment records for Hempfield Township list Widow Barber as being taxed at the rate of twelve pounds in that year, placing her in the upper 18.8 percent of all ratepayers for the township.³⁴ This group of ratepayers controlled roughly forty-three percent of all of the property in the vast expanse of land then encompassed by Hempfield Township. Although Robert Barber's family could not claim aristocratic lineage, the opportunities afforded by their

²⁹ Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 582.

³⁰ Rhoda Barber, "Journal." Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 538. Wright MS containing a brief outline of the early history of Columbia, donated by Hanna and Margaret Wright, CCHS.

³¹ Inventory of Robert Barber, CCHS.

³² Tax Assessment for Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, 1756, 1770, LCHS.

³³ Deed, Hannah Barber to Robert Barber, Jr., June 5, 1760, microfilm at LCHS.

³⁴ Tax Assessment for Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, 1751, microfilm at LCHS.

precedence on the land and the possession of a few African slaves ensured social and economic advantages that, in England, would have been restricted to the upper classes.

After his arrival at the Susquehanna in 1726, John Wright erected a two-story house composed of white oak logs, which at first contained a single room on each floor.³⁵ Greatly enlarged with log and frame additions in succeeding years, by 1798 it enclosed more than 3,000 square feet.³⁶ Elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly for many consecutive years, John Wright managed his farm and ferry operation with the assistance of a number of German indentured servants. The rather modest 1749 valuation of his estate at £168 probably reflects the fact that his children had taken over the farm and ferry operations prior to his death.³⁷ His estate included several luxury items, such as a clock, a silver pint can, two beds, and a quantity of books, all of which suggest a simple but refined life. Born in Lancashire, England, John Wright and his family arrived in America in 1714 carrying a letter of recommendation from the Hartshaw Monthly Meeting.³⁸ He took up residence at Chaddishead, near Chester, worked as a merchant, and was appointed justice of the peace for Chester County in 1714.³⁹ Later he was elected to the assembly and became the first justice of the peace and president judge of Lancaster County Court.

Although John Wright originally possessed fairly modest financial resources, his roles as assemblyman and judge raised his status to the upper end of the prevailing colonial social hierarchy. His years of service in the assembly earned him respect even from his political enemies, and two of his sons were also elected to that body for many years.⁴⁰ He was particularly vocal in his defense of the rights of power and privilege, as revealed in the following passage from his final speech to the grand jury in 1741: "I was always a Friend to Power, well knowing that good and wholesome Laws duly

³⁵ Rhoda Barber, "Journal." See also Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 539, 583.

³⁶ Federal Direct Tax for Hempfield Township 1798, microfilm at LCHS. Then known as the old Wright mansion, this house served as a school for the community and was demolished in 1874 and replaced by two brick Italianate duplexes, now numbered 140-154 South Second Street.

³⁷ Inventory of John Wright, Oct. 31, 1749, LCHS.

³⁸ Letter of Recommendation from Hartshaw Monthly Meeting, Lancashire, March 16, 1714, CCHS.

³⁹ Alexander Harris, *A Biographical History of Lancaster County* (Lancaster, 1872); *The Friend* 31 (Philadelphia, 1832), 67-68; Rhoda Barber, "Journal."

⁴⁰ H. Frank Eshleman, "The Public Career of John Wright, Esq." *Papers Read Before the Lancaster County Historical Society* (hereafter, *Papers*) 14 (1910), 251-82.

executed are so far from being a Restraint upon true Liberty, that they are only as regulating Springs to the Passions, and productive of it: And our worthy Founder and first Proprietor tells us, 'That he composed his Frame of Government with a View to support Power in Reverence with the People and to secure the People from the Abuse of Power.'⁴¹ The occasion of this speech was John Wright's removal from the list of county magistrates by Deputy Governor Thomas because of Wright's opposition to the governor's recent decision to release indentured servants from service to their masters if they enlisted as soldiers. John Wright vehemently opposed this measure as being contrary to ancient usage and destructive of traditional English property rights. Since he and his family relied on indentured servants to provide essential labor on his own land, his support for this theoretical legal principle was undoubtedly augmented by his desire to preserve the personal privilege of his own station as well.

One of James Logan's most frequent correspondents was John Wright's eldest daughter, Susanna Wright, who purchased the 100-acre tract upon which her brother, James, erected a stone house about 1738.⁴² Having enjoyed the benefit of a fine formal education in England, Susanna exhibited her polished prose in an early letter to William Croudson, Jr., of Warrington, England, in which she describes her 1714 ocean crossing from Liverpool.⁴³ Her sharp intellect and wide-ranging interests were nurtured in America by her intercourse with members of Pennsylvania's educated elite. Susanna Wright's warm friendship with Logan, who was reputed to own colonial America's largest library, is apparent in a letter Logan wrote to the bookish young Susanna in 1718.⁴⁴ Ten years later Logan acknowledged receipt of some of Susanna's poetry and chastised her for failing to return several books he had lent to her.⁴⁵ From a 1735 letter it appears that Susanna may have visited Stenton, Logan's new country house near Germantown,

⁴¹ *Speech of John Wright, Esq.: One of the Magistrates of Lancaster County, to the Court and Grand Jury, on his Removal from the Commission of the Peace and the Quarter Sessions held at Lancaster for the said county in May, 1741* (Lancaster, 1741), CCHS.

⁴² Elizabeth F. G. Hiestand, "The Unveiling of the Tablet Commemorating the Bicentennial of the James Wright House," *Papers* 42 (1938), 125-36.

⁴³ Susanna Wright to William Croudson, 1 Fifth Month, 1714, port. 14, no. 88, Friends House, London; a copy is on deposit at CCHS.

⁴⁴ James Logan to Susanna Wright, 28 Tenth Month, 1718, printed in "Susanna Wright," *Colonial Dames Pamphlet* 2 (1906), 9.

⁴⁵ James Logan to Susanna Wright, Dec. 19, 1735, in "Susanna Wright," 10-11.

where she was able to view his entire library.⁴⁶ In some of her later letters and poetry, Susanna reveals that she had not been very enthusiastic about exchanging the comparatively civilized environs of Chester and Philadelphia for the rural employments of the Susquehanna backcountry. Comparatively few of her own letters have survived, but a large amount of correspondence sent to her by Hannah Griffets, Sarah Logan, Charles Norris, Sally Armit, Charles Thompson, Benjamin Franklin, and Anthony Benezet reveals her broad range of interests. She especially enjoyed exchanging poetry with Hannah Griffets, the daughter of Philadelphia mayor Thomas Griffets and a granddaughter of Isaac Norris.⁴⁷ Joshua Francis Fisher praised the poetry of both women in 1831, noting that Susanna Wright wrote poems dated in virtually every year of her long life.⁴⁸ An untitled poem by Susanna that was posthumously published in *The Literary Magazine and American Register* expresses her deep ambivalence over the toil of backcountry life but concludes by praising the dramatic Susquehanna River sunsets, rocks, and waterfalls as those "scenes that never pall."⁴⁹

The survival of such an extensive body of correspondence suggests the extent to which the English Quakers living at Wright's Ferry constituted an island of genteel English culture and pretension on the edge of a primitive wilderness. Susanna Wright obviously expended considerable time and thought on both her prose and her poetry. Although her poetry possesses a decidedly religious cast, her letters are wholly devoted to secular affairs. Books, family illnesses, medicinal prescriptions, political events, Indian affairs, horticulture, and poetry define the range of her interests. She was especially interested in cultivating medicinal herbs in her garden and apparently experimented with a variety of native plants. In a letter to Charles Norris, she expressed an interest in procuring seeds to grow a new fruit of which she had recently heard: "which when sliced and fried is vulgarly called pork steak [eggplant] . . . if it is propagated by seed we must entreat you to send us some, if any other way pray advise us wherewithal to get the precious animal plant into our garden where at present, we have nothing but mere

⁴⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁷ Frederick B. Tolles, ed., *Notable American Women, 1607-1950* (Cambridge, 1971), 688-90.

⁴⁸ Joshua Francis Fisher, "Some Accounts of Early Poets and Poetry of Pennsylvania," *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania*, Sept. 17, 1831, 177-78.

⁴⁹ Susanna Wright, untitled poem, *The Literary Magazine and American Register* 2 (1804), 191-92.

vegetables.”⁵⁰ Susanna went on to express a great desire to “endeavor by some means or other, to get some of the Myrtle wax plants brought up, and try if we can propagate some in any soyl we have, or could make, and added to what our garden already furnishes us with, if we could have something resembling animal food and candles, I think I would be easy—as to garden affairs.”⁵¹ From these and other letters Susanna Wright emerges as a highly educated and cultured woman possessed of a penetrating curiosity and a wide range of sophisticated interests that set her apart from the common lot of women living in the backcountry. She apparently acted as scrivener for the community, and her neighbors relied on her for both legal and medical advice.

The 1751 tax assessment list for Hempfield Township shows that Susanna Wright and her brother James were each taxed at a rate slightly above that for Hannah Barber.⁵² Extensive intermarriage between the Wright and Barber families during the eighteenth century helped to preserve the relative economic station of their children and ensured that English Quakers remained the sole land owners within the settlement.

Samuel Blunston was by far the wealthiest of the original Quaker settlers at Wright's Ferry. His own family estate was greatly augmented when he married Sarah Bilton, a wealthy widow whose first husband had operated a ferry across the Schuylkill.⁵³ Blunston's training as a land surveyor made him particularly useful to James Logan in establishing legal control over land in the Susquehanna backcountry. He collaborated with John Wright's son, James Wright, in building a stone gristmill near the mouth of Shawnee Run, during the 1730s. Along with Robert Barber's sawmill and John Wright's ferry house, the gristmill constituted the third public building in the settlement.⁵⁴ It helped feed both Braddock's troops and Conestoga Indian Town during the Seven Years' War.

Samuel Blunston erected the first stone house at Wright's Ferry in 1727 and was apparently in the process of enlarging it at the time of his death in 1746. His estate was valued in excess of £4,200, of which he designated £558

⁵⁰ Susanna Wright to Charles Norris, prob. 1763, in “Susanna Wright,” 27–28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

⁵² Tax Assessment for Hempfield Township, 1751, LCHS.

⁵³ Mrs. Henry Hiestand, “Samuel Blunston, The Man and the Family,” *Papers* 26 (1922), 192–93.

⁵⁴ Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 548.

in specific legacies in his will.⁵⁵ Since his wife predeceased him without bearing any children, Blunston's primary heirs were his nieces Sarah Worrall and Hannah Pearson and his nephew Samuel Bethel. As a practical matter, however, Blunston bequeathed to his friend Susanna Wright "the sum of fifty pounds to be paid to her yearly and Every Year of her Natural Life" as well as all of his "books, vessels of plate called Silver and also . . . full Power and Liberty to live on his Plantation and take and receive full benefit—of such part of the Buildings, Land, and Plantation as she shall think fit during her Natural Life."⁵⁶ He also directed that Susanna receive his chaise, escritoire, any of his household goods she might need for her rooms, the services of Negro Sal for one year, as well as a separate bequest of a Negro boy named Toby until he reached the age of thirty and a second Negro boy named Vertulas until he reached the age of twenty-six. Part of the document listing Samuel Blunston's slaves is missing, but the incomplete sheet shows at least fifteen slaves in his estate and instructions for their gradual manumission. Counting the four slaves known to have been owned by Robert Barber at the same period, there were, apparently, more than nineteen blacks living at Wright's Ferry during the 1740s.

James Lemon notes that as late as the 1750s the population density of Hempfield Township was between forty and forty-nine persons per square mile.⁵⁷ The settlement of Wright's Ferry was more densely populated as a result of the presence of African slaves, German indentured servants, and a fluctuating population of transients of varying ethnic backgrounds passing across the ferry. The landless dependent laborers and artisans in the settlement relied on the Quaker gristmill to grind their grain, the Quaker sawmill to provide their lumber, and the Quaker ferryboats to cross the river. Further, although the surrounding territory was populated by German and Scots-Irish yeoman farmers, all local legal affairs were conducted through the graces of the educated Quaker elite, school was held in a Quaker home, and the political interests of the region were represented by local Quaker representatives in the assembly.

A new phase of community development may be dated roughly from the close of the Seven Years' War when the early concerns with squatting, the border dispute, and Indian relations had receded into the background.

⁵⁵ Inventory of Samuel Blunston, May 4, 1746, Griffiths-Pashell Collection, HSP.

⁵⁶ Will of Samuel Blunston, Philadelphia Will Book H, no. 38, 61-63, microfilm at HSP.

⁵⁷ Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country*, 62.

Taking advantage of improved roads and a rising population, German farmers began erecting distilleries along the road to Lancaster Town. As traffic on the ferry increased, travelers frequently had to wait several days for their turn to cross and thus temporarily increased the population of the community. After 1737 a rival ferry operated by James Anderson, about three miles north of Wright's Ferry, provided both economic competition and a certain amount of ethnic rivalry.⁵⁸ There were just 177 taxables listed in the 1758 assessment records for Hempfield Township. Of these, most were listed as being farmers, though seventeen individuals (9.6%) were listed as being poor and nine (5.1%) were listed as tradesmen. Among the tradesmen, there were five shoemakers, two weavers, one wagon maker, and one carpenter. Fifteen of the Hempfield taxables can definitely be located in or adjacent to the settlement of Wright's Ferry, and one of these, John Barber, was identified as a shoemaker. Only five of the individuals known to be living at Wright's Ferry were identified as Negro, and all of these belonged to the household of Nathaniel Barber. The apparent decline of the black population, from at least nineteen in the 1740s to just five by 1758, suggests that freed blacks found few opportunities in this community. By 1758 there were only two indentured servants living at Wright's Ferry, while an additional four servants lived in the households of three nearby Scots-Irish families. Clearly, after the initial period of clearing land and erecting homes, the institutions of slavery and indentured servitude played a declining role in the community as the increased availability of landless laborers and larger-size families among the Quakers eventually rendered bound labor unnecessary. For the second generation of English Quaker proprietors, a shortage of land rather than a shortage of labor emerged as the overriding concern.

By 1758 the average acreage of farms in and around Wright's Ferry was 201.5 acres. If the 600 acres that Susanna Wright managed for the Blunston estate are excluded from the calculation, that average drops to just 171.8 acres.⁵⁹ Despite the declining size of average land holdings in the area, however, the primitive character of the landscape at this period is suggested by the fact that most of these farms contained just 45.5 acres of cleared land and 12.5 acres of sown land. Again, Susanna Wright's control of the late Samuel Blunston's very large plantation, combined with her superior

⁵⁸ George R. Prowell, "Rival Ferries Over the Susquehanna in 1787—Wright's and Anderson's," *Papers* 27 (1923), 143-44.

⁵⁹ These averages encompass privately held property located within a three-mile radius of Wright's Ferry.

education and ongoing intercourse with Pennsylvania's elites, clearly set her apart from the other Quaker proprietors at Wright's Ferry.

The average farm at Wright's Ferry in 1758 contained 3.6 horses, 9.1 sheep, and 6.9 cows, and the major cash crops were hemp, for making rope, and grain, for distilling into easily transported whiskey by local German distillers. As the second generation of Quaker families came into their estates, after 1760, they adopted the latest Philadelphia fashions in architecture and domestic furnishings. Such genteel pretensions had already found expression in the fine paneled end walls of James Wright's 1738 stone house and in the 1745 brick addition to Samuel Blunston's stone mansion. In 1760 Robert Barber, Jr., became the first person to construct a house entirely of brick at Wright's Ferry. At 2,100 square feet, the house was the smallest of the English Quaker great houses, but this eight-room house made a bold statement with its balanced five-bay facade, formal Georgian center-hall floor plan, and eight handsome corner fireplaces. It stood in marked contrast to the dozens of humble log and frame squatter cabins that dominated the landscape.

During their stay in Philadelphia in 1756, Robert and Sarah Barber may have been influenced by prevailing urban architectural tastes.⁶⁰ The couple's sixth child was born in Philadelphia, during the French and Indian War, when several local families were evacuated from Wright's Ferry. Barber's mother transferred sixty-two acres of the original Barber tract to her eldest son in 1760, and by 1769 he succeeded in increasing his holdings to 154 acres. Nonetheless, this was far less than the 250 acres his father had owned. His sons faced little prospect of replicating their father's success unless they adopted either nonfarming occupations or migrated farther west.

Susanna Wright attempted to increase the economic potential of her land by experimenting with silk production. Previously, most successful efforts in producing silk in North America had been limited to the southern colonies. Georgia, for example, was exporting 459 pounds of silk annually by 1741.⁶¹ In 1759 Susanna Wright's efforts to establish viable silk production at Wright's Ferry resulted in a pair of silk stockings made by her that were presented to Gen. Jeffrey Amherst, the commander of Britain's forces in

⁶⁰ Willis L. Shirk, Jr., "Relic of Quaker Oligarchy: The Robert Barber, Jr. House," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* (hereafter, *JLCHS*) 96 (1995), 79-98.

⁶¹ R. G. Walther, "Silk Culture," in David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, 1979), 1104.

America during the French and Indian War.⁶² Susanna's efforts seem to have constituted more than a purely amateur operation. In 1771 she received a prize of ten pounds from the Philadelphia Silk Society for the largest number of cocoons raised by a single individual. A court dress made from this silk was later presented to Queen Charlotte by Benjamin Franklin.⁶³

In an article published many years after her death, Susanna Wright detailed the laborious procedure she used in raising silk worms and getting them to spin in specially prepared paper cones.⁶⁴ The relative coolness of the climate at this latitude made handling silkworms especially tedious and required careful temperature control once they began to emerge from their cocoons. Such difficulties prevented silk culture from becoming a viable industry in Pennsylvania.

The loss of power by the Quaker faction in the Pennsylvania Assembly, as a result of the turmoil of the French and Indian War, tended to undermine the status of the local Quaker oligarchy at Wright's Ferry. When Pontiac's Rebellion again brought unrest to the western frontier, in 1763, local Quaker families found themselves the object of derision from their Scots-Irish neighbors who were fed up with Quaker inaction over Indian depredations in the back settlements. When reports surfaced that one of the Conestoga Indians had committed murders on the frontier, a group of Scots-Irish vigilantes decided to remedy what they perceived to be Quaker neglect.⁶⁵

Captain Lazarus Stewart led a band known to history as the "Paxton Boys" on a mission to destroy Conestoga Indian Town.⁶⁶ At daybreak on December 14, 1763, the Paxton Boys surrounded the Conestoga Indian Town, killed and scalped all six of the Indians they found there—two men, three women, and a child—and burned all the Indian cabins to the ground. The rest of the Conestoga Indians escaped slaughter for the moment, because they were away selling willow baskets at Smith's Iron Works in Martic Township.⁶⁷ While en route back to Paxton, the vigilantes passed by

⁶² Charles Norris to Susanna Wright, April 19, 1759, in "Susanna Wright," 22.

⁶³ Henry D. Biddle, "Owen Biddle," *PMHB* 16 (1892), 306.

⁶⁴ Susanna Wright, "Directions for the Management of Silk Worms," *Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal* 1 (1804), 103-7.

⁶⁵ Frank J. Cavaoli, "A Profile of the Paxton Boys, Murderers of the Conestoga Indians," *JLCHS* 87 (1983), 89.

⁶⁶ Alden T. Vaughn, "Frontier Banditti and the Indians: The Paxton Boy's Legacy, 1763-1775," *Pennsylvania History* 511 (1984), 1-29.

⁶⁷ Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 13-14.

Robert Barber, Jr.,'s new brick house and he invited them in to warm themselves by his hearth. Upon their departure, his children reported having seen bloody tomahawks tied to the men's horses and a gun that they recognized as belonging to an Indian playmate.⁶⁸ Suddenly realizing what had probably occurred, Barber organized a rescue party and rode to the scene of the massacre.

Local authorities gathered the remaining fourteen Conestoga Indians together and placed them in the workhouse adjacent to the Lancaster jail for their own protection. Two weeks later the Paxton Boys abruptly descended on Lancaster, broke into the workhouse, and slaughtered all the Indians they found there. Mathew Smith, one of the leaders of the Paxton band, would later assert that two of the Indians they found there were definitely among those who had committed murders on the frontier.⁶⁹ Susanna Wright and Benjamin Franklin wrote to the assembly and the governor deploring the actions of the Paxton vigilantes. Although their identities were well known throughout the region, none of those responsible were ever brought to justice.⁷⁰

Lazarus Stewart later wrote in defense of the Paxton vigilantes:

Were the counties of Lancaster, York, Cumberland, Berks and Northampton protected by government? Did not John Harris ask advice of Col. Croghan, and did not the colonel advise him to raise a company of scouters, and was this not confirmed by Benjamin Franklin? And yet when Harris asked the Assembly to pay for the scouting party, he was told that "he might pay them himself." Did not the counties . . . keep up the rangers to watch the motions of the Indians; and when a murder was committed by an Indian a runner with the intelligence was sent to each scouting party, that the murderer or murderers might be punished? Did we not brave the summer's heat and the winter's cold, the savage tomahawk, while the inhabitants of Philadelphia County, Bucks, and Chester ate, drank, and were merry? If a white man kill an Indian it is a murder far exceeding any crime upon record . . . if an Indian kill a white man, it is an act of an ignorant heathen. Alas! poor innocent! he is sent to the friendly Indians that he may be made a Christian!⁷¹

⁶⁸ Rhoda Barber, "Journal."

⁶⁹ Cavaoli, "Profile of the Paxton Boys," 88-89.

⁷⁰ George Heiges, "Benjamin Franklin in Lancaster County," *JLCHS* 61 (1957) 18-19.

⁷¹ Cavaoli, "Profile of the Paxton Boys," 89.

The Paxton vigilantes must have enjoyed the irony of being invited to warm themselves by the hearth in Robert Barber, Jr.'s new brick mansion after carrying out their grisly mission. The handsome Georgian dwelling would have symbolized to these Scots-Irish borderers what they perceived to be the affluence and arrogant indifference exhibited by the remote urban Quakers who had long run the colony from their comfortable homes in Philadelphia and Chester.

In a letter to Lancaster merchant Isaac Whitlock, Susanna Wright expressed great anxiety that the Paxton band was still roaming freely, threatening to wreak further vengeance against other Indians, against Israel Pemberton, the leader of the Quaker faction in the assembly, and against her own brother, James Wright, under whose care the Conestoga Indians had been placed by the governor.⁷² For the children of Robert Barber, Jr., the affair was particularly devastating. Rhoda Barber, who was born three years after the massacre, recalled that her older brother and sister were unwilling to speak of the affair even in old age. She wrote that the Conestoga Indians "often had their cabins here by the little mill, my older brother and sister used to be whole days with them. They were great beggars and the children were so attached to them they could not bear to hear them refused anything."⁷³

Of her own childhood growing up at Wright's Ferry she wrote:

The first proprietors being connected and related to each other, there was a harmony and friendship among them beautiful to behold. At my father's house on first day afternoon their entertainment was apples and cider, bread, butter, and smoked beef. The women had tea but it was looked upon as effeminate for men. Their clothing was chiefly homespun, there was no stores or carver except in Lancaster, the breweries which all partake of now were little known then. I well remember the difficulties of getting shoes, especially for children . . . the first umbrella . . . the first rag carpet made by S. Wright.⁷⁴

Despite this portrayal of a spare rural lifestyle, by the second half of the eighteenth century, estate inventories show a marked increase in the quantity and quality of items found in homes at Wright's Ferry. The room-by-room

⁷² Susanna Wright to Isaac Whitlock, Jan. 16, 1764, Pemberton Papers, Parrish Collection, HSP.

⁷³ Rhoda Barber, "Journal."

⁷⁴ Rhoda Barber, "Journal." The S. Wright referred to here is the niece of Susanna Wright.

inventory of Nathaniel Barber, who died in 1782, reveals that his "front parlor" was equipped with a large dining table, a tea table, an arm chair, six smaller chairs, a looking glass, a map, china, and plate totaling more than forty-eight pounds.⁷⁵ Other rooms contained a stove (commonly found in local German households), five bedsteads including one with curtains, three expensive walnut tables, a chest of drawers, a dozen chairs, a second looking glass, as well as such usual domestic items as spinning wheels, flax seed, steelyards, and kitchen paraphernalia. The total inventory was valued at just over £180 pounds.

Curiously, the surviving personal records that are so rich in material about backcountry squatters, Cresap's War, and the Paxton massacre have little to say about the Revolutionary War and its aftermath. One of the few references to the war years is found in a single paragraph in Rhoda Barber's journal:

I remember the first burst of the revolution war and the great excitement in all ranks of society. It seemed entirely to change the peaceable quiet state of the place, all was military, there was meetings in every corner preparing for war... going through a kind of exercise with brooms and sticks of any kind, there was few arms among them. So patriotic were the people that tea was excluded by many, or used by stealth. The name of Tory was as opprobrious as rogue or any other name of derision [or] scorn. Then there came peace and luxuries of all kinds flowed in.⁷⁶

Though some of the British prisoners of war who were evacuated from the barracks in Lancaster to the west may have been taken through Wright's Ferry, in 1777, no battles took place nearby. A single surviving letter reveals that one of the Barber children fought for the American cause at the Battle of Long Island. Not a single word has survived to provide any clue as to what Susanna Wright thought about the war, and there is a deafening silence in all of the records with regard to the war years in this community. A more ethnically and religiously diverse community emerges from this period of relative silence, as the daughters of Wright's Ferry's old Quaker elite married Revolutionary War veterans during the closing decades of the eighteenth century.

⁷⁵ Inventory of Nathaniel Barber, 1782, LCHS.

⁷⁶ Rhoda Barber, "Journal."

By 1785 the landscape of Wright's Ferry remained sparsely settled. The only public buildings were a single stone gristmill, a log tavern at the ferry where public business was conducted, a log Quaker meetinghouse, and a log sawmill. There was by then also at least one still house on the land of Widow Bethel, and there were eleven other still houses operated by local German farmers within a three-mile radius of Wright's Ferry. Dispersed family farms continued to define the geography of Hempfield Township, though the average size of such farms had declined from the 1769 average of 177 acres to just 146 acres.

The economic chaos that attended the Revolutionary War favored the emergence of a more personally competitive ethos among the Quaker proprietors at Wright's Ferry, one that radically undermined the older notion of community stewardship by a landed elite. One example of how perceptions were changing can perhaps be read in the tone of local rumors regarding Susanna Wright's management of the late Samuel Blunston's vast estate. In her will, dated January 18, 1782, Susanna acknowledged the existence of such rumors in the community:

I think it is necessary to add a few words to prevent any reflection on my executor hereafter. It has been surmised and reported that I have amassed considerable sums from the bequest of Saml. Blunston when they first came into my hands and I delivered the whole to my brother and he supplied me with whatever I had occasion to, etc. I declare I never laid by the value of 5 shillings nor have cash or specialtys to that amount in my own or any hands whatsoever.⁷⁷

It is only natural that questions might arise in a situation where a single individual not related by blood to the deceased was given total control of the largest estate in the neighborhood for her natural life. During the period that Susanna Wright managed Blunston's vast estate, Blunston's nearest blood kin lived as tenants on Susanna Wright's land in the house erected by Susanna's brother, James Wright. The defensive tone of the will would have been unnecessary if she had been addressing the late Samuel Blunston, for they had a common understanding. He chose Susanna Wright—his close and trusted friend, the most educated person in the community, and the individual who had already managed his legal and business affairs for many

⁷⁷ Will of Susanna Wright, Jan. 28, 1782, LCHS.

years—to be the steward of his estate and fully expected that she ought to personally benefit from that sinecure. By 1782, however, Susanna found it necessary to defend herself and her executor from whispered slanders circulating among a population that no longer held to the old assumptions about the control of property in a society ordered by privilege. As the concept of proprietary stewardship of land by a natural ruling elite came to be replaced by an aggressive market-oriented ethos, Susanna Wright's management of Blunston's estate came under disapproving scrutiny by some of her neighbors.

In 1788 Susanna Wright's nephew, Samuel Wright, laid out the town of Columbia on a portion of her original 100-acre farm. He created 160 building lots that averaged between one-third and one-half acre each.⁷⁸ For the first time in its sixty-two-year existence a Quaker landowner divided the land and offered it for sale to outsiders. In the process Samuel Wright stood to profit from the rapid inflation in real estate prices then affecting all of southeastern Pennsylvania, but he did so at the cost of relinquishing the degree of paternal control over the community that his parents and grandparents had enjoyed. Samuel Wright's decision was motivated, in part, by concurrent discussions in the federal Congress concerning the possibility of locating the new nation's permanent capital along the Susquehanna River.⁷⁹ Following a widespread contemporary practice used in erecting towns on speculation, the original lots were chanced off by lottery on July 25, 1788, at fifteen shillings currency for each ticket. In keeping with the communal spirit that had characterized the early days of the community, Samuel Wright set aside the land between the front street and the river as a common ground upon which all residents of the town could dry their lumber free of charge.⁸⁰

Most of those who purchased lots in 1788 did so on speculation and, as a result, few homes were constructed at first. Col. Thomas Boude, a Revolutionary War officer from Lancaster who was the son of Dr. Samuel Boude of Lancaster and Mary Bethel of Wright's Ferry, was among the first to build a home in the new town.⁸¹ A lumber merchant and slave owner, Col.

⁷⁸ Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 540-42. A copy of the draft for the original town plan is on deposit at LCHS.

⁷⁹ Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 541.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 543-45.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 584-85.

Boude married Elizabeth Wright, a daughter of John Wright, Jr., and is listed in local tax records as owning one servant and 122 acres of land in 1792.

The first federal census was taken in 1790, near the beginning of this period of feverish speculation. Although the 1790 census does not distinguish the new town of Columbia from the rest of Hempfield Township, at least ten heads of households can be identified from earlier tax records as being in the immediate vicinity of Wright's Ferry.⁸² These ten households establish a minimum population of eighty-five individuals who lived in homes averaging 8.5 persons per household. Evidence that these were extended families is given by the fact that there was only an average of 3.6 children under sixteen years of age in each household. Further, we learn that slavery had ceased to exist in these large households, since no slaves and only two free blacks are listed for them in the census.

The actual population was certainly much higher than is suggested by numbers derived from these long-established households. The names of some long-settled residents who had lived as tenants in small cabins on the lands of the Quaker proprietors, and of newcomers who had recently purchased lots and erected homes, can be identified by carefully examining the order in which the names of heads of households appear in the census. While over 92.4 percent of all the surnames appearing in the census for Hempfield Township are German, there is an interesting consecutive sequence of fifty names, commencing with James Watt and ending with John Wright, in which forty-eight percent of the surnames are either English or Scots-Irish. This consecutive sequence contains all the names of the English Quaker families known to have lived at Wright's Ferry during the period. Further, the names of the German farm families known to have lived just outside Wright's Ferry occur immediately next to this consecutive sequence on the list. This suggests that all the names that appear in close proximity to one another on the list represent families who lived in close proximity to one another on the landscape. This pattern is precisely what one would expect to find as census takers moved over the landscape in a systematic attempt to record every household they could find.

If this reasoning is correct, then there was a total of fifty households at Wright's Ferry in 1790, with a total population of 320 individuals. These households contained an average of 6.5 persons, roughly half of whom were

⁸² First Federal Census for Hempfield Township, microfilm at LCHS.

children under sixteen years of age. Recalling that the ten long-established households (having 8.5 persons per household) are included within the group of fifty, the average size of new households was even smaller and the relative percentage of children even higher than these raw figures suggest. Among all of the households, fifty-two percent of the surnames were German, thirty percent were English, and eighteen percent were Scots-Irish, providing for the first time a crude comparative ethnic distribution for the community.

In 1798, when the enumeration for the Federal Direct Tax was made for Hempfield Township, forty-two dwellings could be identified within the town of Columbia.⁸³ Of these, only thirty-three were listed as having glass windows; most of the rest were described as "old, small, and possessing relatively little value." On average, these dwellings without glass windows contained less than 360 square feet and were generally assigned valuations under \$300. It is likely that some of these were surviving tenant cabins built prior to the creation of the town of Columbia, since Rhoda Barber reported that a few such early squatter cabins were still in existence as late as 1830.⁸⁴ In contrast to these modest cabins, the thirty-three more substantial dwellings averaged 1,487.6 square feet, and eleven of these contained more than 2,000 square feet. Of these larger homes, 27.7 percent had separate kitchen buildings.

Among the better homes, 26.2 percent were built entirely of brick, 11.9 percent were stone, 54.8 percent were log, and 7.1 percent were wood frame. Only 45.2 percent of the homes were more than a single story in height, though seventy-five percent of the brick dwellings and eighty percent of the stone dwellings had two floors. Among the log and wood frame dwellings, fully seventy-six percent had only one story. Although the average valuations for all dwelling houses at Wright's Ferry was \$648.23, all eight dwellings valued at less than \$400 were occupied by families having German surnames, while all the "great houses," valued at more than \$900, were occupied by English Quaker families or families having French surnames who had married into families of the old Quaker elite. While the values of estate inventories of German farmers in Hempfield Township had often rivaled, or even surpassed, the estate valuations for Quaker families of Wright's Ferry, many of the German families residing within the new town of

⁸³ Federal Direct Tax for Hempfield Township, 1798, microfilm at LCHS.

⁸⁴ Rhoda Barber, "Journal."

Columbia appear to have been confined to the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder during this period. Presumably, some of the Germans who had lived as landless tenants at Wright's Ferry were only now beginning to acquire property and improve their economic station.

Seventeen buildings can be identified from the Federal Direct Tax as being used for business purposes in 1798. These include one smith shop, four stone still houses, a log storehouse, a log granary, a stone gristmill, three stone barns, a stone stable, and four log barns. Three of the four stone still houses were operated by prosperous German farmers living near Wright's Ferry; the fourth was located about a mile north of the town and was operated by a Scots-Irish family. All of the granaries, barns, and stables appear to have been outbuildings belonging to the earlier Quaker farmsteads.

The rapidity of population growth that overtook Columbia at the close of the eighteenth century is apparent in the second federal census of 1800. This census lists thirty-five heads of household in Columbia whose names do not appear on the Federal Direct Tax lists for 1798.⁸⁵ Further, in 1800 Columbia is enumerated separately from the rest of Hempfield Township for the first time. In doing so, however, the census takers regarded the boundaries of the town as being confined to the lot plan and continued to treat the outlying portions of the old Wright's Ferry settlement as being part of Hempfield Township. By 1800 there were 314 individuals living within the boundaries of Columbia proper. Within this group, seven percent of the population were of African descent and 3.2 percent were listed as slaves. Though four of the ten slaves were owned by newcomers, it appears that at least some of the descendents of the old Quaker elite also owned slaves, more than twenty years after the passage of Pennsylvania's Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. The increase in the number of free blacks is probably due to the success of the gradual abolition law across the state, combined with the arrival of fugitive slaves from nearby Maryland and Virginia. As the traffic across the ferry continued to increase and outsiders were able to purchase land, Columbia's population increased in size and became more ethnically diverse. One consequence of this diversity is that it became easier for a stable free black community to come into existence as several hundred freed slaves from Maryland and northern Virginia took up residence after 1819.

⁸⁵ Second Federal Census of Hempfield Township, 1800, microfilm at LCHS.

The large number of new households in Columbia in just two years was a harbinger of the very rapid urban growth rates the town was to experience during the nineteenth century. Fully ten of the thirty-five new households were headed by women. The number of children under sixteen years of age composed 45.2 percent of the population. Further, only 3.9 of the seventy-six property owners listed in the 1805 tax assessment records for Columbia were women. By 1805 Columbia contained thirteen storehouses and seventy-two dwellings, nearly double the number of dwelling houses that were standing just seven years before.⁸⁶ Despite being surrounded by a predominantly Germanic township, only three of the new households listed in the census of 1800 carried German surnames; the rest were equally divided between English and Irish surnames. The newcomers also constituted a more diverse mixture of religious affiliations than had been present in the past.

Located at one of the most important crossings on the Susquehanna River, the settlement of Wright's Ferry remained an island of genteel English pretension for more than three score years. By the time of Susanna Wright's passing in 1784, however, a new federal republic had won its independence from the mother country. After Samuel Wright laid out the town of Columbia on his aunt's farm in 1788, fashionable brick townhouses quickly rose amid the old Quaker "great houses" and crowded out rude squatter cabins. With the dawning of a new century, this rural Quaker enclave was all but obliterated by a burgeoning urban industrial center that reflected both the bright prospects and dark underside of Pennsylvania's dawning industrial age.

Ephrata Cloister

WILLIS L. SHIRK, JR.

⁸⁶ Tax Assessment for Columbia, 1805, microfilm at LCHS.

