THE ROMANCE OF LOCAL HISTORY*

By Joseph H. Bausman

On this anniversary, celebrating alike the birth of the "Father of his Country", and of your worthy society, I esteem it an honor to be of your company, and a privilege to congratulate you upon the splendid work you are doing in your efforts to preserve "'gainst the tooth of time and razure of oblivion" the remains of the past.

Let me preface my remarks by emphasizing the need of just such a work as your society is doing. Western Pennsylvania has had a great history of which all its people should be proud; but, in general, little pride is taken in that history even by the direct descendants of men of renown; everywhere letters and documents of great historical value have been permitted to moulder into dust in attics and smokehouses, or have been cast into the flames by careless housewives in their annual or semi-annual attacks of the house-cleaning fever; few historical societies exist in this section of the state, and the interest taken in those which have been formed is fitful and languid, and in the teaching of history in our educational institutions but little attention is paid to the events and figures of local history. This defect in our educational method is radical. In school and at college our eyes are turned toward "the brooding East"; we are told of "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome"; of the great events of the Renaissance and of the Reformation; and of the spacious times of England’s kings and queens; and in the annals of our own country we find writ large for us the achievements of the Puritans of New England, and of the Cavaliers of the South;—but all the

*Paper read before the Washington County Historical Society February 22, 1905. This old but very interesting paper is based on notes gathered by its author in the compilation of his scholarly History of Beaver County (2 vols. New York, 1904). The statements in the earlier paragraphs are no longer fully valid. Something has been done to remedy the defects mentioned. It is possible to cite in footnotes the documents upon which this paper is based, but they are well known, easily accessible and quickly located by reference to the index and bibliography of the author's History of Beaver County. (The Editor).
while we are left uninformed upon subjects of human and historic interest hardly less important. Throughout these Western Pennsylvania counties there are spots which ought to be shrines of patriotism which have as yet no monument or tablet to mark them; they lie within sight of the windows of schoolhouses, but the children pass and repass them every day with no knowledge of their existence, ignorant of the fact that men who were the makers of the Nation have left their footprints on our soil, and that events which were of world-wide influence had their inception here.

Our region is sadly lacking in civic pride. Pittsburgh, one of the richest and most enterprising cities of the Union, has no monument to the "Great Commoner" for whom it was named; none to Washington, who first pointed out the strategic character of its site; none to Wayne, who gathered in it an ever victorious army; none to Bouquet, who saved the garrison of Fort Pitt from destruction in the Pontiac war (even his redoubt, sole remaining relic of the colonial period in the city, is threatened by the commercialism of its citizens); none to Forbes who wrested its site from the French; none to Colonel John Gibson, Colonel Daniel Brodhead, General William Irvine, General Josiah Harmar, the Nevilles and a dozen other men of colonial and Revolutionary fame. Has it redeemed itself by putting up a monument to a city boss at the entrance to its greatest park?

In that great city no stone or monument marks the site of the historic structure, Fort Duquesne, which was erected by the French, or of Fort Pitt, which the English built on its ruins, or of Fort La Fayette, which was purely an American work, of which perhaps not a tithe of its citizens ever heard; in Allegheny County nothing marks the site of Braddock's defeat; in Fayette County, nothing the site of Fort Necessity; in Beaver County, nothing the sites of Fort McIntosh, or of the Block-house on the Big Beaver or of Wayne's encampment. It would be easy to point out a dozen other instances of neglect which prove the lack of a proper civic patriotism in the citizens of this great portion of our great Commonwealth, and which
show the need of an awakened interest in all matters of local historic importance on the part of teachers and of all intelligent men and women. It is well to know and study the history of "kings and queens, and wars and things" in other lands, and the annals of our own Nation in general, but no matter how far and wide the circle of our vision may extend we ought to keep our perspective true enough to enable us to discern the objects of interest that lie thick upon our foreground.

It is the point of this paper to point out some of these objects,—to show what real human, and, in a good sense of the word, romantic, interest belongs to much of the history of this region. My illustrations are all taken from the history of one country of the region, namely, Beaver County as it was originally constituted, but I need not apologize for that as they are all a part of the history of Western Pennsylvania itself. No page in the annals of the Western part of the State is richer with the spoils of time than this, and I shall be happy if I shall be able to bring out with any clearness its claim to your attention.

I may say, first, that the territory in question is interesting because it is full of memorials of the vanished red man. On the stream which (by translation) gave its name to the county of Beaver were two large settlements of the aborigines, mainly of the Delaware and Shawanese tribes. One of these settlements was called Kuskuskee (with some score of variants in its English orthography). This was a town, or group of towns, at the forks of the Big Beaver, about twenty miles from its mouth. The other was known as Sawkunk (also with many varieties of English spelling). It lay around the mouth of the Big Beaver, principally on the site of the present county-seat. Sawkunk is a Delaware word meaning an "outlet." There were many Sawkunks in the country, but this was the most important of them all. Heckewelder, the Moravian missionary, who wrote a lexicon of the Delaware language, describes this place as "the outlet of the Big Beaver into the Ohio, a point well known to all Indians; to warriors of different and most distant tribes; their rendezvous in
the French wars; their thoroughfare and place of transit; a point of observation, and the scene of frequent contests and bloodshed.” Little do the inhabitants of the quiet town of Beaver—“Saints’ Rest”, as it is jokingly called—think today of what strange scenes were once to have been witnessed on the ground they tread!

Logstown, to which reference will later be made in connection with the accounts of the visits of Washington to it, was a Shawanese village, of great importance during the colonial period, situated on the north or right-hand bank of the Ohio about seven miles above the mouth of the Beaver and nineteen below where the town of Pittsburgh now stands. There was an “Old Logstown”, lying on the level ground just below the present village of Economy, and a later addition, built by the French for the Indians, which probably stood a little farther down on the same side of the river, on the bluff which was afterwards the site of General Wayne’s encampment.

In these villages many of the most noted Indian chiefs had their lodges. Tanacharison, the Half King of the Six Nations, the friend and counsellor of Washington in his early military experiences; Monakatoocha or the “Great Arrow”, and Guyasutha, famous as Pontiac’s able fellow-conspirator, were all for some time at Logstown. At Sawkunk was Captain White Eyes (Koquethagachton), the faithful friend of the Americans in the bitter days of the Revolution; and here also, were the three Delaware brothers, King Beaver, Pisquetumen, and Shingo. Shingo, or Shingiss, was the most formidable of the Delaware warriors. After Braddock’s defeat he fought with the French and raided the country as far east as the Delaware River, striking Reading and Bethlehem, and threatening Easton. At Sawkunk was also the “Belt of Wampum” who fought bravely under Braddock.

On the present site of the town of Rochester was a Mingo village where lived the great chief Logan, with whose speech every schoolboy is, or ought to be, familiar. Of this chief, Judge William Brown of Mifflin County said: “Logan was the finest specimen of humanity I ever met with, either white or red.” In his Diary, the Rev.
David McClure, a Congregational missionary who visited the Beaver valley in 1770, relates a most interesting interview which he had with this unfortunate Indian, and he tells us that the village referred to was then known as “Logan’s Town,” from the fact that it was the chief’s residence.

I will not further call the roll of the celebrated aborigines which Beaver County may claim as having been for a longer or shorter period resident within her territory, but I wonder if it will surprise you, Sir, if I tell you, on the authority of the Colonial Records, that the old Indian chief who is almost to be considered the patron saint of this town of Washington, namely, Tingooqua, or Catfish, had set up his lodge-pole at Kuskuskee on the Big Beaver before he settled here on the banks of the classic Wissameking?

Another romantic feature of the history of Beaver County is found in its connection with the early movements of the French into the Ohio valley. We know that here, as elsewhere, the French preceded the English in the work of exploration, whither they came as trappers in search of the much-prized fur of the animal which gave its name to two streams of this region, the Big Beaver and the Little Beaver, whose waters abounded with it, or as missionaries seeking the conversion of the natives or following their lighthearted parishioners into the wilderness for the care and cure of their souls. Doubtless years before the period when names of individuals and definite dates emerge in history

“---Merry Jean Baptiste
Paddled his pirogue on La Belle Riviere,
While from its banks some lone Loyola priest
Echoed the night-song of the voyageur.”

We have, it is true, no authentic data for the statement that the French were in the Beaver valley before 1749, when Louis Bienville de Celeron came down the Ohio, burying his leaden plates and tacking up on the trees his notices to the English to quit the premises; but the language of his journals and the tenor of all his acts seem to me to pre-suppose a familiarity with the region
and to intimate that he was not the first of his countrymen to have visited it. On this expedition De Celeron stopped at Logstown and perhaps at the mouth of the Big Beaver. Possibly, I should say probably, he buried a plate at the latter point, but if he did it has never been found, or if found was lost again or destroyed by some one ignorant of its value. His chaplain on this expedition was the Jesuit Father, Rev. Joseph Peter Bonne camps, who probably said Mass at these stopping places. Eight years later, another Jesuit Father, the Rev. Claude Francis Virot, came to the mouth of the Beaver, where he set up his mission cross and sought to convert the Wolf tribe of the Delawares. His work was soon ended by the violent opposition of Pakanke, the chief of that tribe, and two years later, in July, 1759, he was killed while acting as chaplain to Aubrey's force in the attempt to relieve Fort Niagara.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the French possessions in Canada and in Louisianna had been connected by a chain of settlements and forts dotted along the St. Lawrence, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi, while the settlements of the English were still confined to the region east of the Appalachian Mountains. Hitherto the English colonies, devoting their attention almost wholly to agricultural pursuits, had been remarkably indifferent to the vast possibilities of the country that lay beyond this barrier, and their only knowledge of it was gained from the reports of the few adventurous traders who had visited it. But now that the bold challenge of the French as masters of the Ohio valley had been issued, and the English traders warned off the ground, the colonial authorities were aroused to an appreciation of the gravity of the situation, and began to take steps toward asserting and maintaining the claims of England to the territory west of the mountains. There is no time and no need for me to repeat the story of the great contest which now began and which resulted in a war the end of which left France despoiled of all her fair holdings in America. It is more than a twice-told tale. But there is one initial incident to that contest which this occasion
and my subject will not allow me to pass by—an incident which introduced upon the stage of public affairs a young man who was destined to play the greatest role ever allotted to an American, and to become “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

Alarmed by the encroachments of the French (so considered by the English), and acting under the instructions of the home Government, Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia sent Captain William Trent on a mission to the nearest station of the French to find out what was the full purpose of their movements, but Trent neglected his duty, and went no farther than Logstown. In a letter to the Lords of Trade, Dinwiddie said of him: “He reports the French were then one hundred and fifty miles farther up the river, and, I believe, was afraid to go to them.”

George Washington was at this time a youth arrived at his majority, six feet two inches, in height, sage beyond his years, beloved by his companions and respected and trusted by his elders, leading the life of a Virginia gentleman, in which his duties as public surveyor and major of militia were enlivened by the pleasures of the chase and of the drawing-room. He was already, though so young, a man of mark in the community. To him the Governor now turned as a fitting person to undertake the delicate and dangerous task of carrying his message to the French commandment, and Washington eagerly accepted the commission.

He was ordered to proceed to Logstown, where he was to address himself to the Half King, to Monakatoocha, and other sachems of the Six Nations, and procure from them a safeguard to the French post, and his further instructions read, in part as follows:

“You are diligently to inquire into the numbers and force of the French on the Ohio, and the adjacent country; how they are likely to be assisted from Canada; and what are the difficulties and conveniencies of that communication and the time required for it.

“You are to take care to be truly informed what forts the French have erected, and where; how they are garrisoned and appointed, and what is their distance from each other, and from Logstown; and from the best intelli-
gence you can procure, you are to learn what gave occasion to this expedition of the French; how they are likely to be supported and what their pretensions are."

Following out his instructions, the young envoy proceeded to Logstown, and thence, after several days delay, he, with the Half King, Jesakake, White Thunder, and the Hunter, set out on the thirtieth of November, and on the eleventh of the month following reached the French post, Fort Le Boeuf, which was on the site of what is now Waterford, Erie County, Pennsylvania. Having accomplished the purpose of his mission, and obtained full information of the strength and plans of the French, and an answer to the letter which he had carried from Governor Dinwiddie to the French commandant, he returned with much hardship to Virginia, reaching Williamsburg, the Capital, on the sixteenth of January, 1754, where he made his report to the Governor. The journal which he kept on this expedition was immediately published by Dinwiddie at Williamsburg, copied by the newspapers of the other colonies, and reprinted in the same year by the Government in London. The information thus gained led at once to military measures on the part of the English for the defense of the Ohio, and the struggle which was finally to place the banner of St. George above the lilies of France on this continent was begun in earnest.

These are the dry facts of history which I am epitomizing for you tonight, friends; but let us call to our aid the historic imagination, and we shall see shining through them the beautiful light of poetry and romance.

Together we look back tonight across a hundred and fifty years, and we see a youthful giant striding along a narrow trail through the dark forests, over mountains and marshes, in snow and rain, with a few Irish servants and dusky Indians for companions on a doubtful and dangerous quest, which may end, for aught he knows, in his leaving his bones to whiten the wilderness. We can almost feel the gloom and mystery of his surroundings striking a chill to our hearts,—and then we recover ourselves and realize the present scene. We see ourselves gathered together in this noble temple of justice whose
The dome is topped with the heroic offigy of that man. We remember that his name is now become a rallying word among the races, through which the lovers of liberty in all lands may fraternize. WASHINGTON!—then a name unspoken by the tongue of fame, now blazoned on a thousand banners, graven on the hearts of patriots, and proudly borne by colleges and universities, by towns and counties, by a great State of the Union, and by the Capital of the Nation which, under God, owes its existenoe in large measure to his valor and wisdom.

It is not an ardent American writer, it is a cool, even somewhat cynical English novelist (Thackeray, in The Virginians), who says of him:

“...He little knew of the fate in store for him. A simple gentleman, anxious to serve his king and do his duty, he volunteered for the first service, and executed it with admirable fidelity. In the ensuing year he took command of the small body of provincial troops, with which he marched to repel the Frenchmen. He came up with their advanced guard, killing Jumonville, their leader . . . . .

“It was strange,” continues Thackeray, “that in a savage forest of Pennsylvania, a young Virginia officer should fire a shot and waken up a war which was to last for sixty years, which was to cover his own country and pass into Europe, to cost France her American colonies, to sever ours from us, and create the great western Republic; to rage over the Old World when extinguished in the New! and, of all the myriads engaged in the vast contest to leave the prize of the greatest fame with him who struck the first blow.”

A point in passing. I do not wish to dispute the judgment which dates the beginning of the French and Indian War with Washington’s fight with Jumonville, to which Thackeray here refers. Parkman says: “This obscure skirmish began the war which set the world on fire.” But I call attention to the fact that within the limits of Beaver County the hostile forces had already clashed five years before that skirmish occurred. On the eighth of August, 1749, namely, when De Celeron arrived at Logstown, he ordered, in the name of the French King, the English flag to be hauled down, and drove from the
town under threat of death the English traders who had displayed it over their trading-post. This would certainly seem like an act of war, and I might be justified in trying to reverse the decision of historians and in claiming for Beaver County the honor of having been the scene of the opening act of this great world drama. But as the first actual bloodshed of the contest was in connection with the Jumonville incident, I shall not seek to deprive Fayette County of her laurels.

(Washington was again at Logstown in 1770 on his tour down the Ohio River. He stopped there for breakfast, as his journal informs us. There were no Indians there at that date, so his host must have been a white man, in all probability Colonel John Gibson, who had a trading store there then.)

Seventeen years after Major Washington passed through the territory of what is now Beaver County as the messenger of King George to the French authorities, there came to the Beaver valley an ambassador of a higher Power than earthly kings, bearing, not a message of defiance, but a proclamation of peace and goodwill. This was David Zeisberger, the Moravian missionary. Father Virot's attempt to found a Roman Catholic mission at Sawkunk was, as I have said, unsuccessful. Zeisberger's mission was for a time more encouraging, but its end was even more tragical. Its story is as nobly romantic as any in the annals of Christian missions, but I must compress my account of it into a few paragraphs.

Hitherto the western Indians had come to know of Christianity and European civilization through Frenchmen alone, trappers, priests, and chevaliers; all of Roman faith, often devout men anxious for God's glory and the welfare of the natives, but too often seeking only to win gold or empire. They were now to come into contact with Germans and Protestant Christianity.

(To be continued)