

THE KING'S HIGHWAY.

“At a Provincial Council, held in Philadelphia, January 29, 1730-1, the Hon. Patrick Gordon, Esq., Lieutenant Governor, presiding:

The prayers of Petition being granted, it is ordered that Thomas Edwards, Edward Smout, Robert Barber, Hans Graaff, Caleb Pierce, Samuel Jones and Andrew Cornish, of the County of Lancaster, or any five of them, view and lay out, by Course and Distance, a convenient high Road from the said town of Lancaster to the Division Line between the Counties of Chester and Lancaster.”

On October 4, 1733, with Lieutenant Governor Patrick Gordon, with the Council, the above-named men came to certify that, pursuant to the said petition and orders, they had met at the town of Lancaster, on the 4th day of this instant, and from thence viewed and laid out a road from the Court House in the said town, along the course of the street to the Conestoga creek, to the division line, near the English Church. The Board, after due consideration, approved and confirmed the road laid out, and declared it to be the King's Highway, or Publick Road. The King's Highways were always ordered to be laid out by the Government and Council. “Thus the colonial highways leading from the interior of the Province, and from their importance and value the great Pennsylvania railroad system was evolved.”

“The confirmation of the King's Road, leading from Lancaster to Philadelphia, being confirmed by the Government in Council, and certified to this Court, with order that the same be

forthwith cleared and rendered commodious, in pursuance thereof, it is therefore ordered (P. Cur.) that precept issue, under the clerk's hand and the seal of the county, to the respective Supervisors to open and clear the same, on the north side of the marked trees, at least thirty feet wide, and grub the underwood at least fifteen feet of the said space on the side next the marked trees, and make necessary bridges, rain swamps, etc., so as to make the same passable for horse and wagon."

Copied from Road Docket, No. 1, page 84. From 1729 to 1742.

This old provincial road passes through the townships of Lancaster, East Lampeter, Leacock and Salisbury, and was originally an Indian trail; then it became a bridle path, and, finally, necessity compelled wagons hauling produce to Philadelphia to pass over this road. For many months in the year it was impassable, and the inhabitants of Lancaster county felt the need of a better road to Philadelphia, which was then the seat of government.

In the petition put before the Government and Council, in Philadelphia, the people state that, not having the convenience of water navigation, they were compelled, at great expense, to transport their products by land carriage, which burthen became heavier through the want of suitable roads for carriages to pass; that there are no public roads leading to Philadelphia yet laid out through their county, and those in Chester county, through which they now pass, are in many places incommodious; and, therefore, praying that proper persons may be appointed to view and lay out a road for public service from the town of Lancaster till it falls in with the high road in the county of Chester, leading to the Ferry of Schuylkill, at High street; and that a review may be had

of the said public road in the county of Chester.

The days of stage travel in England had many pleasures, and we are told the roads were kept in thorough repair, and with the public and private coaches traveling constantly upon them; with the inns dotting along the road, and the characteristics of each landlord to suit the tastes of the grave and the gay. For our new country we could not boast of the same comfort or the same agreeable company; but, no doubt, the enjoyment was the same for those who took advantage of their opportunities, with sixty-two inns between Philadelphia and Lancaster, an average of one to each mile. Can we doubt that in this new country were enacted many scenes to recall to our esteemed grandsires the pleasures of traveling in a stage-coach before they came to the Colonies? These roads were called King's Highways when ordered to be laid out by the Governor and his Council. The counties in Colonial times had control only over by-roads and private roads. On this King's Highway the soldiers traveled on their march to protect the inhabitants of the Colonies from the invasion of the French and the cruelty of the Indians. During the Revolution again were run soldiers, making this road the scene of life and bustle, on their way to fight for liberty and defeat the mother country for the cause of oppression and taxation. Often the sixty-two inns between Lancaster and Philadelphia could not accommodate all of their guests.

It will be my pleasure to tell you of some of the places of interest on this historic road, and I trust you will not think of this article as Artemus Ward used to say in one of his lectures: "One of the principal features of my entertainment is that it contains so many things that don't have anything to do with it."

James Webb.

Soon after leaving Lancaster we come to the residence of James Webb, on the north side of the road, and now known as Knapp's Villa. James Webb was a prominent man in his day. He belonged to and was active in the Society of Friends. He was a member of the General Assembly for thirty years, from 1747 to 1777. He was defeated on account of his opposition to the new Government, as he was classed among the Tories. After his defeat he declared the present Assembly was not regularly chosen, as they were voted for by a parcel of soldiers and apprentice boys; so their laws were not worth regarding. He told a strange story about a snake he had seen in the heavens without a head. When it shook its tail it made the earth tremble; at the same time fiery balls were seen flying about Germantown. This, he interpreted, was our present war, and, being carried on without a head, it must come to naught, and we must expect nothing but defeat. Time has shown how sadly he was mistaken.

Such stories of prodigies were at that time circulated by the Tory party in various parts of New England to terrify the superstitious. The following lines from Trumbull's "McFingal" will show that Webb was not alone in his warnings:

"Hath not Heaven warned you what
 must ensue,
And Providence declared against you;
Hung forth its dire portents of war,
By signs and beacons in the air;
Alarmed old women all around,
By fearful noises underground—
While earth for many dozen leagues
Groaned with dismal load of Whigs?"

An act was passed March 5, 1756, by which Calvin Cooper, James Webb and Samuel LeFevre were appointed to carry its several provisions into execution, and also to look after the interests of the French neutrals, who were

transported from Nova Scotia into Lancaster county. Many, being destitute of means, became a charge to the people of the county.

The name of James Webb appears on the assessment list for the year 1751. He was Barrack Master for Lancaster county in 1769, and declined serving any longer, and asked that the Governor should be pleased to appoint a Barrack Master in his room. His son, James Webb, Jr., was elected Sheriff for 1767 to 1769.

The present Conestoga Inn, on the bank of the stream, was built by Abraham Witmer, after the Revolution.

Henry Dering.

On the south side of the road on the banks of the Conestoga Creek we come to the old stone ferry house of Henry Dering, who lived there in Revolutionary times. The house was built by Samuel Bethel in 1762, who kept the "Cross Keys," a prominent Inn of Colonial times, in Lancaster. He came to this section of the country before the county was organized. He married Sarah Bhenston. In the year 1777 Henry Dering moved from Crooked Hill, Montgomery county, and purchased the property, keeping a public house and managing the ferry. The stream was at that time crossed by a ferry and travelers were continually passing and also troops on their way to the army. The lawless state of the country and condition of national affairs rendered it unsafe to live so far from town and military protection. Often the family were obliged to flee to the cellar or barn to escape from the intoxicated soldiers and ruffians. Many sad scenes were enacted in this house. At the time of the Paoli massacre many of the wounded soldiers were sent to Lancaster, and Mrs. Dering filled her house, as they passed, and this patriotic and heroic wife of Henry Dering

ministered to their comfort, tearing up her linen for bandages to bind their broken limbs and bleeding wounds, and with loving sympathy and tender words she cheered them in their suffering and lauded them for their patriotism. Captain Vanhorn, a Virginian, was confined with a shattered limb and lay for a long time at the house of Mrs. Dering. He endeared himself to the family by his gentleness and refinement. As he lay in his helpless condition, slowly recovering, a band of ruffians came to the house under the influence of liquor and attacked him. Too weak to defend himself from their brutality, this poor soldier, to avoid death from their hands, leaped out of the window and was killed by the fall. Mr. Dering moved his family to Lancaster. He contracted with Robert Morris to furnish the army with cattle, which he bought in Virginia. In 1778 he was made Chief Burgess of the Borough. Henry Dering was a member of the Assembly for Lancaster county from 1789 to 1790.

Bernard Wolf.

A very interesting account of the thrilling adventure of the post boy of Revolutionary times is given in the Wolf Memorial, and it shows the spirit of '76, and the familiar scenes on the King's Highway.

During the summer of 1777 Bernard Wolf, having made arrangements with the government to carry the mail between Philadelphia and Lancaster, it devolved upon his son, Christian, a boy fourteen years old, to perform this service. It was, at times, a duty requiring the utmost adroitness and caution to avoid falling into the hands of the British. Along the route were many Tories, who seized every opportunity of affording information to the enemy. Upon more than one occasion the youthful post boy narrowly escaped capture. Fully alive to his peril,

he was always on the alert, and happily eluded the snares of the foe.

In those days the post boy was an important personage. As he passed through the country covered with dust, or bespattered with mud, as the case might be, the patriot farmer by the wayside accosted him for a hurried word of news from the seat of war. As he urged his steed through the storm, the good dames waved him an encouraging God-speed from their cottage doors. Everybody knew the post boy and his horse. His gait portended good or evil tidings. When he dashed rapidly onward, the gallant steed reeking with foam, men held their breath until they heard the news. As he rattled over the streets, the workmen arose from their toil and the women paused in their daily avocations. A gaping crowd, eager for the news, collected at the postoffice, anxiously awaiting his arrival.

Darwin's prophetic apostrophe,

"Soon shall thy power, unconquered
steam, afar,
Drag the huge barge, or drive the rapid
car,"

had not yet assumed a definite realization, and the neigh of the iron horse had never resounded through the forest of the American continent. Of those who awaited the advent of the post boy with his mail bag, none, perhaps, were more deeply interested than the paroled British officers. Every reverse to their arms depressed their spirits, whilst it created a corresponding rejoicing among the good people of Lancaster. That those were times to try men's souls we who live in 1898 can most fully appreciate. On the night of the 20th of September, 1777, Christian, on his post route, slept at the Warren Tavern, near Paoli. Being within a mile of the battle field he heard:

"The din
That raged around the Warren Inn,
And on Paoli's fearful plain,
When massacre the sword had drawn."

He heard the sharp reports of musketry in that short and bloody engagement. From November, 1777, until May, 1778, Philadelphia was occupied by the British, and, during that period, Christian was released from postal duty. The people of Lancaster were active in promoting the success of the Colonies.

After the evacuation of Philadelphia by the British Christian resumed his old position with its pleasures and hardships. He was of a cheerful disposition, and possessed a hardy constitution. He was in Philadelphia when news was received of the surrender of Cornwallis, at Yorktown, on the 19th of October, 1781. It was night when the message arrived with the joyful tidings. The watchman announced it at one o'clock in the morning; and Christian often spoke of the sensation produced through the city in that still hour of the night. Windows went up, many a night cap was protruded, lights flashed along the streets as if by magic, neighbors congratulated each other, and the whole city was in a tumult. Christian conveyed the intelligence to Lancaster. Everywhere along the way the news was received with rejoicing. In Lancaster the whole population was moved. With one accord every man rushed out to assure himself of the fact. The bells were rung, bonfires and illuminations lighted up the town, and a spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm was everywhere apparent. Many brave hearts that had heretofore borne up through all the trials and gloom of the war now brimmed over. They saw before them a bright augury of its speedy and successful termination, and strong men sat down and wept like children. The young people ran from house to house and street to street, half wild with joy. Some country folk, who happened to be in town, joined in the carnival. Hurrah for Donegal! Hurrah for Chest-

nut Level! shouted their respective representatives. "Aye," rejoined a little Irishman, "and Swate-arry (Swatara), too." Old Mr. L., an honest German, in the exuberance of his patriotism, harnessed his horses to his sleigh (although the summer days yet lingered), and with his burly spouse drove excitedly through the streets, exclaiming in German to his wife, who sat beside him: "Hurrah now wife! Hurrah! I'll swing my hat, and you do the yelling."

Christian Wolf married Kitty Dering, a daughter of Henry Dering, who died in 1800, and is buried in the First Reformed grave yard, this city.

Witmer's Bridge.

During the administration of Governor Patrick Gordon great internal improvements were made in Pennsylvania, and it is said by some writers that the Keystone was the first State to engage in that laudable work. Going down the old road, and crossing the meandering Conestoga River, we find the most beautiful and oldest span bridge in the country, and the following inscription in the centre of its wall tells its history:

Erected by Abraham Witmer
1799—1800.

A Law of an Enlightened
Commonwealth passed
April 4, 1798—Sanctioned by
Thomas Mifflin, Governor—
This Monument of the Public Spirit of
an Individual.

This bridge is and will be for ages to come a fitting memorial to the enterprising man who built it.

The late Governor Russel, of Massachusetts, was a descendant of Mr. Witmer.

An Old Inscription.

A strange inscription was found about two years ago in a house belonging to John Loyman, just east of the

old bridge, and which, when built, was on the King's Highway. It was in the structure of the building on a white pine log, squared, and contained the following words:

“Wer will bauen an die Strassen,
Mus Boesen Mauler plaudernlassen.”
1747—H. D.

Interpretation:

“He who would build on this street
Must let ill-tempered busy-bodies talk.”

Leacock Church.

About two miles from Lancaster, and prominent on the King's Highway, is Leacock Church, one of the landmarks of Presbyterianism, and of the sect that so distinguished itself in the Revolution, where more than one-half of the officers and soldiers were of that faith. The first Protestant worship on the shores of America was by the French Presbyterians, Huguenots, in 1552, fifty-eight years before the landing of the Mayflower on Plymouth Rock. Horace Walpole, in addressing the English Parliament during the Revolution, said: “There is no use crying about it. Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson, and that is the end of it.”

In July, 1724, the Presbytery of Newcastle sent Mr. Adam Boyd, who was commissioned to collect a congregation at Pequea and Leacock and take the preliminary steps toward its organization. On September 14, 1724, he was called to Octorara and Pequea, and he gave one-sixth of his time to Donegal. Leacock at that time was a part of Pequea and called the West End. The regular place of preaching was at Pequea, with occasional preaching at the West End. There was at that time no public road between West End and Pequea, and before the building of the King's Highway that portion of the congregation residing at the West End attended divine service on horseback, through bridle paths, as they were

called, an almost unbroken forest. On June 29, 1737, at a meeting of Presbytery, Leacock presented a petition asking leave to build a place of worship. Nothing was done. They referred to Synod and erected a building of logs on the site of the present one. In 1741 the church was organized with the consent of Presbytery and Synod. The land on which this meeting house was built was purchased from John Verner and wife, Martha, on the 9th of February, 1741, by John Brown, John Cooper, William McCausland and John Rees, all of Leacock township. Trustees were chosen by and for the congregation of the church of Leacock. The lot contained one acre and fifty-seven perches, with allowance for the provincial road, if the same belaid upon it. The price for the land was five shillings current money of the Province of Pennsylvania. The lot was taken from a tract of land of 310 acres purchased about the same time from Thomas Penn, Esq., son of William Penn, by John Verner.

The next clergyman, Rev. Adam Boyd, came from County Antrim, Ireland. He first went to New England, where he met Cotton Mather. With a letter in his favor from that distinguished divine, and also credentials from his home in Ireland, he was received as pastor of the church. He died in 1768.

On September 5, 1733, Rev. Thomas Craighead was called to Pequea, but only remained a short time, until September 14, 1736. Rev. Craighead was from Scotland, was educated for a physician, but studied divinity, went to Ireland and the Rev. Adam Boyd married his daughter. He collected, organized and built up seven of the Presbyterian churches of Lancaster county, besides securing the building of their houses of worships. Rev. Craighead also stood high in the esteem of Cotton Mather.

On October 9, 1750, Pequea and Leacock united in a call to Rev. Robert Smith. He was ordained and installed over these churches on March 25, 1751. While Dr. Smith was pastor of this church the present building was erected on the site of the other church, and was completed and opened for use in the year 1754. Rev. Smith was born in Londonderry, Ireland, in 1722, and was converted under the preaching of Whitefield at the age of fifteen on his first visit to this country, on September 5, 1733. Dr. Smith was distinguished both as a divine and the teacher of a classical and theological school. Many men of note were benefited by his instructions. He died on April 15, 1793, in the seventy-first year of his age, and his remains lay in the Pequea churchyard, near the building where he preached for forty-two years.

Beginning with 1769, the Rev. John Woodhull for ten years presided over the spiritual affairs of this church. John Woodhull was born in Suffolk county, Long Island, N. Y., January 20, 1744. After leaving Pequea and Leacock he went to Freehold, N. J., as successor of the celebrated Rev. Wm. Tennant. Rev. John Woodhull was a man of illustrious ancestry, the head of the family being a nobleman of the time of William the Conqueror.

On October 30, 1780, Leacock, Octorama and Lancaster united in a call to Mr. Nath. Sample, which was accepted. He continued pastor of these churches for a period of forty years. It is with regret that I say he did not keep a record of his ministerial work in all this time, and necessarily much important information is lost. Mr. Sample was born at Peach Bottom, York county, and his grandparents came from Ireland. He was a student under Dr. Smith, and graduated at Princeton in 1776.

The graveyard in which the old

church stands must not be forgotten, as it contains many names of historic note and familiar to us all. Time will not permit me to mention more than a few inscribed on some of the old tombs. Many of these families lived along the route of the old road; all were familiar with it. They are: Irwin, Watson, Porter, McIlvane, Parker, Crawford, Whitehill, McCausland, Wood, Scott, Lyon, Steele, Redick, Quigley, Barefoot, McGlaughlin, Skiles, Rea, Kerr, Wallace, Tepley, Slaymaker and Hamilton.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

MARTHA B. CLARK.

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