Benjamin Franklin & the Pennsylvania Assembly in the Seven Years’ War (Continued from Page 3)

Despite General Braddock’s defeat and the suits that were brought against Franklin, members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly praised Franklin for his aid in the wagon affair and historians believe it “…demonstrated Franklin’s political mastery of the Pennsylvania back-country and which, second only to his published Experiments and Observations on Electricity, established his reputation among the English,” which became crucial in the Revolutionary era. (Bell, Jr., Whiffield J., and Leonard W. Labaree. “Franklin and the Wagon Affair, 1755,” 1957.)

Unfortunately, Franklin’s work was undermined by the now-infamous fall of General Braddock and his campaign at Great Meadows later that summer. The financial records were lost during the ambush and without them payments to farmers could not officially be made. Still, back-country farmers knew that they were legally owed payment and brought suits against Franklin. However, by the spring of 1756, all who provided Braddock’s fallen brigade with wagons were paid for their services. By the end of Franklin’s involvement in outfitting Braddock’s campaign, he was nearly £20,000 in debt, which he was later reimbursed by the military.

Map of Braddock’s western route, on which the wagons were to be transported, from A History of Pittsburgh, Neville B. Craig, 1851. (Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission)

With summer drawing to a close, thoughts of the coming harvest occupy the minds of many Pennsylvanians. In this issue, we will feature highlights from the state’s history on these topics. Pennsylvania claims about 60,000 farms on 7.7 million acres of farmland. Its annual production of over 425 million pounds of mushrooms makes it the top mushroom-producing state in the country. With the second most dairy farms in the nation, 585,000 cows, and production of 10.6 billion pounds of milk per year, Pennsylvania ranks as the fifth largest dairy producing state. The Commonwealth ranks third in the nation for apple production, and fourth for both corn and strawberries. It is known for its unique, German-influenced pretzels, and other snack foods it produces in the abundance of potato chips, pretzels, and other snack foods it generates, earning it the moniker “Snack Food Capital of the World.”

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230 years ago this year, in 1785, the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture was founded by Benjamin Rush and Robert Morris. Rush and fellow member George Clymer were both signatories of the Declaration of Independence, and George Washington was an honorary member.

Franklin’s original advertisement for wagons (American Philosophical Society)
The Agricultural Roots of the Pennsylvania House (Continued from Page 1)

Benjamin Franklin & the Pennsylvania Assembly in the Seven Years’ War

Benjamin Franklin was an inventor, businessman, writer, and an important member of the Pennsylvania Colonial Assembly, serving as Speaker of the House in 1764. During the Seven Years’ War (1754-1763), also known as the French and Indian War, the Pennsylvania Assembly used Franklin’s reputation and skills as a diplomatic communicator to guide the colony’s defensive efforts against French and allied Native aggression. His recommendation to the Assembly that wagons be acquired to aid the strategic western advance of General Edward Braddock’s Army in the spring of 1755 had significant implications.

General Braddock and two regiments of English troops were sent by the British Government to assist the colonies in their defense against the French and Indians. Braddock and his troops were scheduled to meet up in Frederick, Maryland to gather their supplies and begin their march. Franklin, in turn was sent to meet with Braddock under the guise of transporting the general’s dispatches, when in actuality he was directed by the Assembly to persuade Braddock into supporting the Quaker-dominated Pennsylvania Colonial Assembly.

Franklin stayed with Braddock for some time, and while there, saw that the supplies that had been promised to Braddock by the governors of Virginia and Maryland were insufficient; especially needed were wagons and horses. Franklin stated “...it was a pity they had not been landed rather in Pennsylvania, as in that country almost every farmer had his wagon,” which Braddock quickly replied, “then you, sir, who are a man of interest there, can probably procure them for us, and I beg you will undertake it.” Having reached an agreement, Franklin and Braddock sat down to discuss the wagons and Franklin was commissioned to acquire as many as possible.

The wagons that Franklin referred to were Pennsylvania Dutch adaption of the common English Wagons, dubbed “Conestoga Wagons” for the Conestoga Valley near Lancaster County, where they were manufactured. Franklin, a reputable writer and printer, quickly composed a broadside, a form of advertisement similar to a newspaper article printed on a large piece of paper, for the collection of these wagons. The first side contained the statement and terms that he and Braddock agreed to, and the second side was Franklin’s personal address to the citizens that greatly stressed the job to be undertaken. With this advertisement, Franklin was able to procure 150 wagons and 262 horses in five days, with the promise of more to come.

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