



The Agricultural Roots of the Pennsylvania House

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, 535,000 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 Pennsylvania Bank Barns, as well as for the abundance of potato chips, pretzels, and other snack foods it generates, earning it the moniker "Snack Food Capital of the World." (Sources: National Agricultural Statistics Service, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Lancaster County Farmland Trust, Chesapeake Bay Program, and the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau)

With these close ties to agriculture, it is not surprising



Rep. Martha G. Thomas is pictured here with one of her award-winning cattle circa 1921. Thomas represented Chester County as a Republican from 1923-1926.

that the Pennsylvania House of Representatives has seen, and continues to see, its fair share of farmers. The following profiles are a sampling of Members whose roots were planted in rural Pennsylvania and who represented the Commonwealth's largest industry, agriculture, in addition to their legislative districts.

Martha Gibbons Thomas (above) graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 1889. She represented Chester County in the Pennsylvania House from 1923 to 1926. Thomas was active in farming, particularly in the breeding of Guernsey cattle, and civil affairs. She also chaired the Women's Committee of the Chester County Council of Defense during the First World War, and acting on the Board of Managers of the School

of Horticulture for Women.

A Snyder County 4-H alumnus, former Representative **Reno Thomas** graduated from Penn State University in 1943 with a degree in Agricultural Education. It was this strong background in agriculture that guided him to work as a vocational agriculture teacher, aiming to educate the next generation of farmers. At Brooks End Farm in Snyder County, Thomas raised a large herd of purebred swine, including Yorkshire and Landrace, from 1954 to 1998. In addition to hogs, Thomas worked with cattle, as well as producing ice cream through his brother's farm, Cara Farms Dairy. His farming practices earned him the title of Master Farmer in 1964. From 1969 to 1980, Thomas represented

(Continued on Page 2)

The Agricultural Roots of the Pennsylvania House *(Continued from Page 1)*



Reno Thomas being presented with the 4-H Alumni Award for Snyder County, 1973.

the people of Snyder and Union counties in the Pennsylvania House, where he also served as Vice Chairman of the Agriculture and Dairy Industries Committee and as Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

With a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture, a 150-acre farm in Tulpehocken Township, a long list of memberships to agricultural organizations, and numerous awards, former Representative **Sheila Miller** has spent her life involved with agriculture. Her farm, Deitschland, is the home of a nationally recognized soil conservation system and beef cattle. Miller has been an advocate of agriculture in numerous forums, both political and organizational. She has been a Soil Conservationist with the United States Department of Agriculture, the editor of the nationally circulated *Lancaster Farming* newspaper, the executive director of the state Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, and the Chairman of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. She represented Berks County in the House from 1993 to 2006, serving as Vice Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

Representative of Blair, Centre, and Huntingdon counties from 1971-1992, **Samuel E. Hayes**,

Jr., was raised on a farm, and in an interview as part of the House Archives Oral History Project in 2005, said he believes that it was “a good upbringing, being that close to the soil and that close to people.” During his time as Representative, the 4-H and Penn State University alumnus served as the Minority Caucus Chairman, Majority Whip, Majority Floor Leader, and Minority Whip. He also worked to enact legislation dealing with farmland preservation. After his time in the House, Hayes went on to be the Secretary of Pennsylvania’s Department of Agriculture for six years.

James Bergy, who represented Juniata County in the House from 1915 to 1916, was a farmer, a Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Orchard Inspector (1906 to 1914), and the author of numerous articles on horticulture.

W. Sharp Fullerton, who represented Lawrence County from 1939 to 1946, was a dairy farmer.

Arthur D. Hershey, who represented Chester County from 1983-1992 and 2003-2008, and Chester and Lancaster counties from 1993-2002, was a dairy and hog farmer.

Arthur Kromer, who represented Jefferson County from 1953 to 1956, was founder of Kromer’s Dairy in Punxsutawney.

Ralph McCreary, who represented Erie County from 1933 to 1936, was a farmer and the owner of a canning factory.

Jess M. Stairs, who represented Westmoreland and Fayette counties from 1977 to 2008, was a farmer, as well as Director of Westmoreland County’s 4-H program.

George B. M. Wischaupt, who represented Juniata County in the House from 1903 to 1904, was a

farmer and a butcher.

Paul Yahner, who represented Cambria County in the House from 1965 to 1980, was awarded the title of Pennsylvania Master Farmer in 1961.



Samuel E. Hayes, Jr. (right) and Sheila Miller (center) in Fox’s Supermarket in Harrisburg during the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture’s Produce Promotion Campaign, an effort to encourage the consumption of locally grown goods, 1998.

DID YOU KNOW?

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.



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.

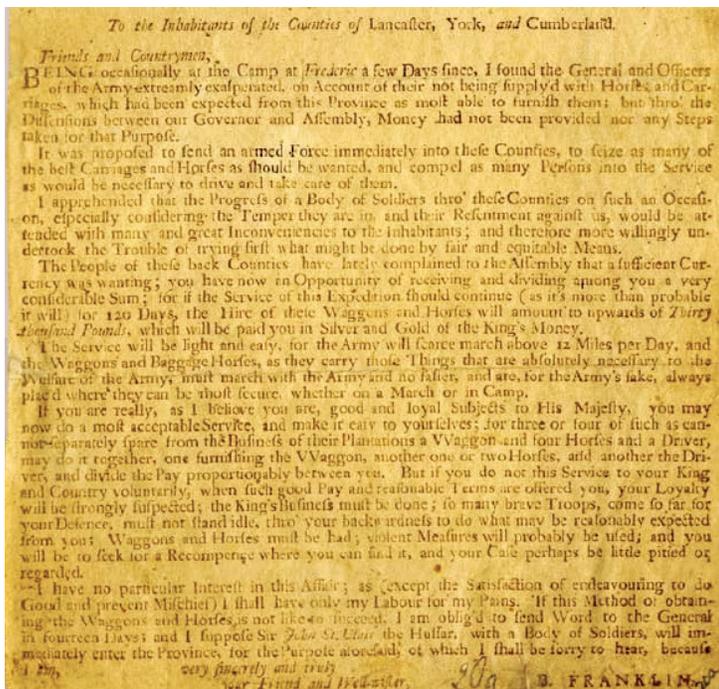
Franklin stayed with Braddock for some time, and while there, saw that the supplies that had been promised to Braddock by the governors of Virginia and Maryland were insufficient; especially needed were wagons and



Benjamin Franklin circa 1759, painted by Benjamin Wilson (White House Collection)

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 a 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 light and easy and an important act of patriotism. With this advertisement, Franklin was able to procure 150 wagons and 262 horses in five days, with the promise of more to come.



Franklin's original advertisement for wagons (American Philosophical Society)

(Continued on Page 4)

lpo.jil.0915

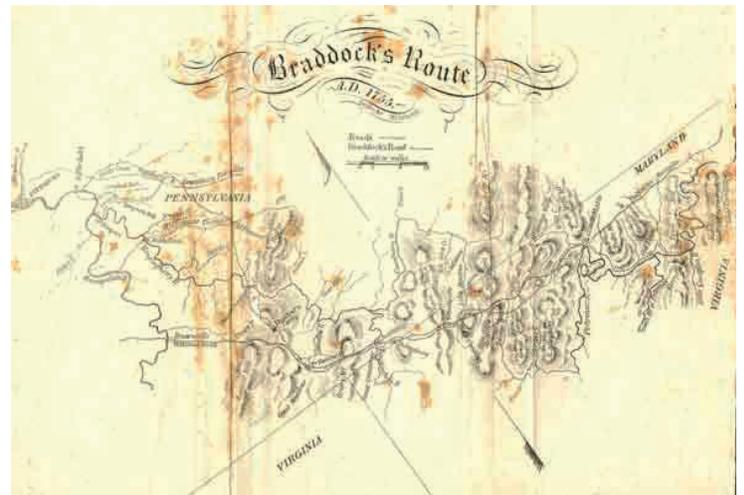
Benjamin Franklin & the Pennsylvania Assembly in the Seven Years' War *(Continued from Page 3)*



Braddock's defeat (Fairfax County Public Library, Virginia)

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.

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., Whitfield J., and Leonard W. Labaree. "Franklin and the Wagon Affair, 1755," 1957.)



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)