

HISTORY OF FORT FREELAND

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History of Fort Freeland by Frederic A. Godcharles

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FREDERIC A. GODCHARLES

**HISTORY OF
FORT FREELAND**

Lycoming Historical Society

PROCEEDINGS AND
PAPERS

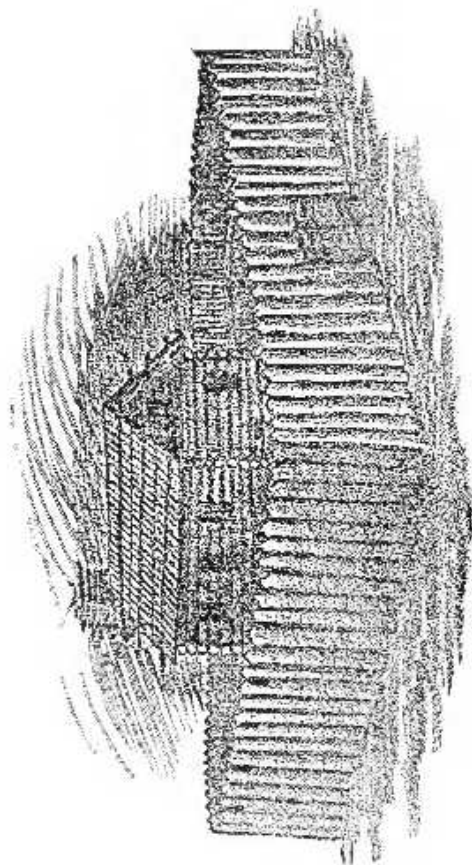
No. 4

History of Fort Freeland

By HON. FREDERIC A. GODCHARLES

RECORD OF THE SOCIETY
1920-1922

WILLIAMSPORT
1922



From "Otzinachson" (Revised Edition) by J. F. Meginness
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Fort Freeland¹

Address delivered before the Lycoming Historical Society,
February 27th, 1920

By HON. FREDERIC A. GODCHARLES

On the occasion of the unveiling of a marker on the site of Fort Freeland provided and erected by the Warrior Run Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, an historical address was delivered which elicited much attention and more surprise. For strange as it may seem, many descendants of the very pioneers who lived in and about that blood-stained stockade, were on that day for the first time made acquainted with the story of its long struggle and final destruction in July, 1779. I am sure there were few present who had ever realized that a siege had there taken place during which more were killed and taken prisoners than in many well-known battles of the Revolution, or of the Civil War—nearly as many indeed as our army lost altogether in battle in the Spanish-American War.

The spot has just claim to be regarded as one of the most important, historically, in the beautiful and picturesque Valley of the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. It was the one refuge of terrified settlers in early days when the Indians ravaged the Valley; it was the scene of an invasion by the Connecticut forces who claimed the northern part of the State; and it was the ground of a battle in the Revolution, which, so far from being a skirmish of little importance, was a very definite part of strategy of the British forces which operating against General Sullivan endeavored to restrict and destroy the Continental Army, and did succeed in entirely destroying this stockade.

From our earliest known history, this part of the Valley had been one of the most coveted of the homes and

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hunting grounds of the Indians. It was occupied by the Andastes, a branch of the great Algonquin family. Like the Hurons of Canada, and the Iroquois of New York, the Andastes fortified their towns, and gave a limited degree of attention to agriculture; while in number and prowess they enjoyed a superiority over the surrounding tribes of the East and South. Captain John Smith, exploring the Chesapeake Bay in 1608, first brought them in contact with the English, from whom they received the tribal designation of Susquehannocks. After many years of warfare, they were finally conquered by the Iroquois in 1675, but not before disease, misfortune and merciless warfare had almost decimated them.

By 1725 this part of Pennsylvania was occupied by the Confederacy known as the Six Nations, and the great Shikellimy was the resident viceroy. For a quarter of a century his name was associated with every important transaction affecting the Indians of the Valley. Early historians establish his residence at Shamokin, now Sunbury, but it is known that he lived also eight miles up the West Branch. One historian has endeavored to prove this Indian town to have been on the west bank; others, that it was at, or near, the mouth of Chillisquaque Creek, on the east bank; while still other authorities place it at the mouth of Limestone Run, now in the very heart of Milton.

Conrad Weiser is authority for the following statement, taken from his diary:—

"Bishop Spangenberg and his party passed over the same route, June 7, 1745, and after passing Chillisquaque Creek, and the site of the Indian town which formerly stood there, they next came to the place where Shikellimy formerly lived, but which was then deserted."

The "place" to which they next came, noted in this trip, was "Warriors Camp," near the present site of Watsonstown. In 1753 John, son of Shikellimy, had a hunting lodge at the mouth of Warrior Run, and resided near that place.

FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR

The original peaceful intercourse of the trader, the interpreter, and the missionary with the Indians of Sha-

mokin and the adjacent region was abruptly terminated. The latter's dissatisfaction with treaties, and their alliance with the French against the settlers, was followed by the terrible attacks and savageries of the French and Indian war lasting from 1754 to 1760. One of its first consequences to the pioneers of the Valley was the massacre at Penns Creek, October 15, 1755¹. This, and other attacks during the treacherous and almost constant warfare of the Indians against the settlers, caused petitions to be sent to the Provincial Government for fortifications, in which protection might be secured from the assaults of the savages.

These petitions were for a long time disregarded; but as one massacre followed another, the Quakers in authority were finally brought to a realization of the urgent necessity for this protection. Fort Augusta was therefore built in 1756, and equipped with quite a formidable armament². Other forts along the North and West Branches were also ordered to be built and manned, and were named as follows: Fort Jenkins, at a point midway between the present site of Bloomsburg and Berwick; Fort Wheeler, along the banks of Fishing Creek, about three miles from Bloomsburg; Fort McClure, on the bank at Bloomsburg; Fort Bostley, at the forks of the Chillisquaque at Washingtonville; Fort Montgomery, sometimes erroneously called Fort Rice, at Montgomery's, in Paradise Valley, about five miles from Milton; Fort Freedom, on the north side of Warrior Run about six miles north of Milton; Fort Boone, on Muddy Run, one mile above Milton; Fort Swartz, on the east bank of the West Branch, one mile above Milton; Fort Meininger, on the opposite bank, at White Deer Mills; Fort Brady, at Muncy; Fort Muncy, at Halls Station; Fort Antes, opposite Jersey Shore; and Fort Horn, between Pine and McElhattan.

(1) The petition to the Governor following the massacre gives the number of "killed, scalped and carried away" as twenty-five. The settlement was at the mouth of the creek. [Ed.]

(2) Meginness states that in 1758 "it mounted twelve to sixteen pieces of artillery, ranging from six to twelve pounders." "Otzinachson," rev. ed., p. 307. [Ed.]

THE CONNECTICUT INVASION

Hardly had Pennsylvania's troubles in the French and Indian war ceased, than the claims of the Connecticut settlers threatened further bloodshed.

These Connecticut people claimed territory as far south as the 41st degree of latitude, which is just below the town of Milton. Between the 3d and 7th of July, 1772, a large body of the Yankees had come down from Wyoming, and reached the West Branch where Milton now stands. They called the place Judea. Thereupon Colonel Plunkett¹ summoned the Pennamites² to arms, marched to Milton, and drove the invaders away. They retreated towards the Muncy Valley, and made another settlement, where the borough of Muncy is now located³.

(1) William Plunkett, by profession a physician, served in the French Indian war as lieutenant and surgeon near Carlisle. He settled near Chillisquaque Creek on land granted in reward for such services, about 1772, and in the same year was appointed Justice. Fearing his Irish estates would be forfeited he is said to have remained "neutral" during the Revolution. He appears in records of the time as "Doctor," "Justice," and "Colonel." [Ed.]

(2) "Pennamites"—those whose claims were based on grants or patents derived from the Penns. The Connecticut claimants were termed "Yankees." Historians recognize two or three "Yankee-Pennamite Wars." [Ed.]

(3) The Battle of Judea:—"In the early part of May, 1772, a company of New Englanders proceeded from Wyoming down the Susquehanna to Fort Augusta, intending to journey thence up the West Branch to their townships of Charleston and Judea. The object of their journey becoming known to the authorities of the new county of Northumberland, the latter proceeded, by force, to prevent the New Englanders from continuing their journey. In the melee which ensued there were several casualties and some taken as prisoners and detained at Fort Augusta.

Soon as those who escaped from the Provincial forces had returned to Wyoming, a much larger company was immediately organized, and about the middle of June they set out for the West Branch.

By order of the Northumberland County Court early in July, 1772, the posse comitatus was raised and proceeding up the West Branch to the tract of land occupied by Marcus Huling in what is now the very center of Milton, dispersed the Yankees who were collected there. Huling was the agent of the Susquehanna Company on the West Branch, and for his services was given one quarter share of the Company's land which was on Limestone Run, where it empties into the river.

That this battle actually took place, and at the time stated is evidenced from a court record, found in Penna. Archives, Second series, XVIII, 698, which is from the account of Robert King

The Connecticut settlers had been so sure of their ground, that before this one Zebulon Butler¹ had issued a proclamation, and distributed it through Northumberland County, announcing that he had been appointed a justice by Connecticut authorities. This had been met by a proclamation from Governor Penn. strictly forbidding the people to pay any attention to this usurper.

Yet it must be admitted that the Connecticut claimants were not without local support. For it seems that the Vincents, Freelands and other settlers from New Jersey who came to the West Branch Valley about a year after the "Battle of Judea" were attracted by the Connecticut people and manifested sympathy towards their claims. They themselves had settled on their arrival in that part of the County included within the limits of the Susquehanna Company. Freeland's mill was built shortly after his arrival and, as told later, his house was stockaded in 1778.

The armed clash of 1772 by no means settled the dispute; and the continued and determined efforts of the Connecticut claimants to enter and to settle permanently along the West Branch, resulting as it did in the threat of actual armed invasion, so terrified the earlier Pennsylvanians, that a petition, numerously signed, was laid, December, 1773, before the Board of Council, then meeting in Philadelphia. The Council considered the petition of such importance that it was laid before the Assembly, accompanied by a message from Governor John Penn².

The Governor, though a Quaker, recommended that the invaders be repelled by force, and appealed to the

and is in part as follows: "1772—July 3. To myself and horse five days, viz: from 3d to 7th, both days included, collecting the inhabitants of Northumberland County in order to apprehend a party from Wyoming (then Assembled at Marcus Huling's on the West Branch of Susquehanna River), by order of Doc. William Plunket, Esq. £ 1. 17 s. 6d." (From the manuscript, not yet published, "History of Fort Augusta," by Frederic A. Godcharles. The authorities are the Penna. Archives and Harvey's "History of Wilkes-Barre.")

(1) Colonel Butler, whose services in the Revolution and whose narrow escape during the Wyoming massacre made him one of the best known of Pennsylvania's soldiers, died in 1795. [Ed.]

(2) Col. Records, vol. X, p. 117.