THE PASSING OF OLD DARBY

WRITTEN BY MARY LLOYD SERRILL GGGRANDAUGHTER OF HENRY PASCHALL IN 1919

FROM: COLEMAN HEADLEY

SOURCE: DARBY LIBRARY

THE PREACHER TELLS US “THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN”, BUT SURELY IF HE HAD KNOWN THE OLD VILLAGE OF DARBY, AND COULD COMPARE THE PRESENT TOWN, HE WOULD SAY, “THIS PLACE IS VERY, VERY NEW.”

ANYONE WHO HAS LOVE AND REVERENCE FOR THE EARLY HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY, ITS NOTED MEN AND WOMEN, INSTITUTIONS, HOUSES, ETC. FEELS A KEEN PANG OF REGRET AT THE PASSING OF THESE LINKS WITH THE PAST, WHEN THE MARCH OF MODERN PROGRESS BRUSHES THEM INTO OBLIVION. PHILADELPHIA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MINE OF RICHES FOR THE HISTORIAN, AND MANY OF HER SUBURBS HAVE THEIR FULL QUOTA OF INTERESTING TREASURES, AND OF THESE, DARBY HAS HER SHARE. BEFORE THE MEMORIES OF COLONIAL TIMES HAVE GONE BEYOND RECALL, AND BEFORE ALL THE OLD INSTITUTIONS HAVE CLOSED THEIR DOORS, LET US TURN FROM THE PRESENT HUM OF THE BUSY MILLS, THE CLANG OF THE TROLLEY CAR, AND THE HORNS OF THE AUTOMOBILE TO THE OLD QUAINT DARBY AND TO THE MODEST PART IT PLAYED IN THE MAKING OF THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY. THE DISTRICT HEREABOUTS WAS SPARSELY SETTLED BY THE SWEDES IN 1643, WHO AFTER A TEMPESTOUS VOYAGE FROM STOCKHOLM ON THE SHIP FAME, ARRIVED IN CHRISTIANA. JOHN PRINTZ, A NATIVE OF SWEDEN WAS APPOINTED GOVERNOR, AND AFTER SEARCHING FOR A LOCATION FOR HIS COLONY OF EMIGRANTS, SELECTED A SPOT NEAR THE PRESENT CITY OF CHESTER, CALLED BY THE INDIANS, TEAACONG, TWICE MODIFIED INTO TINICUM, THE STREAM OF WATER RUNNING BY THIS LAND THEY CALLED TENECONS KILEN NOW CALLED DARBY CREEK; IT IS SUPPOSED A FEW DWELLINGS WERE BUILT HERE IN DARBY AT THAT TIME. ON THE BANKS OF THIS CREEK WE BELIEVE WAS BUILT THE FIRST GRIST MILL IN PENNSYLVANIA, SOME HISTORIANS CLAIM COBBS CREEK AS ITS LOCATION, BUT HUDDE SAYS, “THE MILL STOOD ABOUT HALF A MILE FURTHER IN THE WOODS FROM KINGSESSING, WHICH WAS A SETTLEMENT ON COBBS CREEK, SO NAMED BY A TRIBE OF MINGUAS INDIANS, WHO CAMPED THERE. FERRIS IN HIS HISTORY OF THE ORIGINAL SETTLEMENTS ON THE DELAWARE, QUOTE CAMPANIUS, THE MISSIONARY AS FOLLOWS, “IT WAS A FINE MILL WHICH GROUND BOTH FINE AND COURSE FLOUR, AND WAS GOING EARLY AND LATE, AND WAS THE FIRST THAT WAS SEEN IN THAT COUNTRY. THE ORIGINAL BUILDING IS STILL STANDING BUT IT IS NO LONGER USED AS A GRIST MILL. AT THE TIME OF THE REVOLUTION, WASHINGTON IN ONE OF HIS DISPATCHES WRITES “GETS THE MILL STONES FROM STEEL’S GRIST MILL IN DARBY.”

IN 1643 DARBY CREEK WAS NAVIGABLE INTO THE HEART OF AN INDIAN SETTLEMENT.

THE PRESENT TOWN OF DARBY WAS SETTLED BY THE QUAKERS IN 1682 OR THE EARLY PART OF 1683 BY MEN WHO CAME BEFORE OR WITH PENN: AMONG THESE EARLY SETTLERS WERE JOHN AND MICHAEL BLUNSTON, JOHN BARTRAM, SAMUEL SELLERS AND OTHERS. IT IS CLAIMED THE NAME DARBY WAS GIVEN TO THE SETTLEMENT BY JOHN BLUNSTON WHO CAME FROM DERBY, ENGLAND.

JOHN BLUNSTON WAS DESTINED TO TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN THE COUNTRY; A COPY OF THE CERTIFICATE OF HIS REMOVAL FROM HIS MONTHLY MEETING IN ENGLAND IS PRESERVED IN THE ORIGINAL MINUTES OF DARBY MONTHLY MEETING. OLD DEEDS SHOW HE OFTEN ACTED AS ATTORNEY FOR OWNERS IN ENGLAND FOR THE SALE AND TRANSFER OF THEIR LANDS IN PENNSYLVANIA. HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE SECOND ASSEMBLY WHICH MET IN PHILADELPHIA ON MARCH 12 1683, ALSO IN 1684-86, 87-88, 95-96 AND 1701.

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WHEN IN 1701 IT WAS NECESSARY FOR WILLIAM PENN TO RETURN TO ENGLAND, HE APPOINTED A COUNCIL OF STATE TO ASSIST HIM AND HIS DEPUTIES IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVENCE. JOHN BLUNSTON WAS ONE OF THIS COUNCIL – THAT HE WAS A CLOSE FRIEND OF PENNS IS SHOWN IN ONE OF PENN’S LETTERS FROM ENGLAND TO JAMES LOGAN, DATED JULY 14, 1705, “LET JOHN BLUNSTON OF DARBY HAVE MY OLD LOVE, AND THAT I AM THE SAME THAT EVER I WAS TOWARDS HIM AND HOPE THE SAME FROM HIM”.

JOHN BLUNSTON’S HOME WAS IN DARBY SITUATED ON THE BANKS OF THE OLD MILL RACE, NEARLY OPPOSITE THE PRESENT MEETING HOUSE.

THE OLD MILL RACE WAS DUG IN THE TIME OF PENN TO SUPPLY WATER TO THE OLD GRIST MILL FROM THE CREEK. IN 1696 THERE WAS DEEDED THE RIGHT OF WAY BY JOHN BLUNSTON, A NOMINAL VERBAL SHILL BEING PAID YEARLY TO MEMBERS OF THE BUNTING FAMILY IN DARBY, AS THE OLD RACE IS STILL USED BY A PRESENT MILL. THE HISTORY OF DARBY MONTHLY MEETING IS CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH JOHN BLUNSTON, AS THE FIRST MEETINGS WERE HELD IN HIS HOUSE IN 1682 THOUGH THE FIRST RECORDED MINUTES ARE MAY 2, 1684. THE FIRST MEETING HOUSE WAS BUILT ON THE HILL OF THE PRESENT PEACEFUL BURIAL GROUNDS IN 1688. THE FIRST RECODED MARRIAGE IN DARBY MEETING OCCURRED IN 1684 SAMUEL SELLERS AND ANN GIBBONS; ASHMEADE IN HIS HISTOR OF DELAWARE COUNTY SAYS “THE FAIR BRIDE RODE TO HER NEW HOME ON A PILLOW BEHIND HER HUSBAND.” MANY COLONIAL MARRIAGES ARE RECORDED IN THE MINUTES OF DARBY MONTHLY MEETING: THE BLUNSTONS, HUMPHREYS, GARRETTS, HURDS, PENNELLS, GIBBONS, SELLERS, PEARSONS, LLOYDS, ETC.

STANDING ON THE NORTH BANK OF THE DARBY CREEK, JUST ABOUT THE BRIDGE OVER THE OLD KING’S HIGHWAY, STOOD THE TRUNK OF A NOBLE OLD OAK TREE THAT IS WORTHY OF MENTION IN 1682 IN A SURVEY OF 500 ACRES OF LAND PATENTED BY WM PENN TO JOHN BLUNSTON, IT WAS REFERRED TO AS “AN ANCIENT OAK” 236 YEARS AGO CALLED AN ANCIENT OAK!! WHAT CHANGES IS HAS WITNESSED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS COUNTRY.

ANOTHER LINK WITH THE PAST IS THE OLD DARBY LIBRARY, WHICH WAS FOUNDED AT THE EARLY DATE OF MARCH 10,1743 IN THE FACE OF MANY DIFFICULTIES AND HAS BEEN PERPETRATED UNTIL THIS YEAR OF 1919 WITHOUT THE OMISSION OF A SINGLE STATED MEETING OF DIRECTORS THIS YEAR BEING THE 176TH ANNUAL MEETING. UNSCATHED THROUGH THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR, THE WAR OF 1812 AND THE REBELLION. IT WAS FOUNDED 33 YEARS BEFORE WE WERE A NATION, WHEN GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS 11 YEARS OLD. THE POPULATION SCANTY, WITH MONEY VERY SCARCE. 29 OF THE CITIZENS OF DARBY AND VICINITY MET AND FORMED A COMPANY TO ESTABLISH A LIBRARY. THE FIRST MINUTES RECORDING “WHEREAS WE THE SUBSCRIBERS BEING DESIROUS TO PROPOGATE USEFUL KNOWLEDGE, BOTH RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL”. IT WAS FOUDED THE SAME YEAR AS THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AND ONLY 12 YEARS AFTER BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FOUNDED THE PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY ABOUT 1730, THUS MAKING THE DARBY LIBRARY THE SECOND OLDEST IN PENNSYLVANIA. PERHAPS IT MAY BE OF INTEREST TO HEAR A PARTIAL LIST OF THE FIRST 43 VOLUMES WHICH THOSE EARLY QUAKERS OF DARBY ASSAYED IN ENGLAND HE FORWARDED TO THERE THE SPECTATOR, ADDISSON’S TRAVELS, BARCLAY’S APOLOGY, LOCKE ON EDUCATION, MILTON’S PARADISE LOST AND REPAIRED, RALEIGHS HISTORY OF THE WORLD, THE TURKISH SPY, ETC. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF 4

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VOLUMES. THESE ORIGINAL BOOKS ARE STILL PRESERVED IN THE DARBY LIBRARY. ALL OF THESE FIRST BOOKS AND OTHERS LATER WERE PURCHASED IN ENGLAND THROUGH THE SERVICES OF JOHN BARTRAM, WHO WAS BORN IN DARBY AND WHO WAS MUCH INTERESTED IN THE NEW LIBRARY. HE WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST BOTANISTS OF ANY COUNTRY. IN 1761 THERE WERE 230 VOLUMES IN THE COLLECTION, MOST OF THEM COMING DIRECT FROM ENGLAND, BUT AFTER THAT DATE OBTAINED IN PART FROM DAVID HALL, A BOOKSELLER IN PHILADELPHIA AND FOR SOME TIME A PARTNER OF FRANKLIN. IN 1753 THE NAME OF A DISTINGUISHED MAN IN OUR NATIONAL HISTORY WAS ADDED TO THE LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE LIBRARY, THE SHARE OF JOHN SKETCHLEY ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE LIBRARY WAS INHERITED AT HIS DEATH BY HIS STEPSON JOHN MORTON, DISTINGUISHED FOR HIS SERVICES IN THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY, AS SPEAKER OF THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS IN 1775 AND IMMORTAL BY HIS ROLE FOR THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. ANOTHER EARLY SUBSCRIBER WAS PASCHALL, FRIEND OF FRANKLIN, HE REMARKED TO FRANKLIN JUST PREVIOUS TO THE REVOLUTION, BENJAMIN “THERE CAN NOT BE WAR, WE HAVE NO CANNON BALLS” IT IS SAID FRANKLIN TURNED TO HIM AND SAID “WELL STEPHEN WHY NOT MAKE SOME? WHICH HE AT ONCE DID AND SO MADE THE FIRST CANNON BALLS IN THIS COUNTRY. THE SAME STEPHEN PASCHALL WAS ASKED BY FRANKLIN IF HE COULD NOT MAKE SCALES TO WEIGHT HEAVY LOADS, “YES WAS THE REPLY “I CAN BUILD SCALES TO WEIGH ALL PHILDELPHIA” AND HE AT ONCE MADE AND PUT UP AT THE DRAWBRIDGE AT FRONT AND DOCK STREETS, THE FIRST HAY SCALES EVER ERECTED IN THIS COUNTRY.

ANOTHER VERY OLD INSTITUTION IS THE DARBY FRIENDS SCHOOL, THIS SCHOOL WAS STARTED UDER THE CARE AND DIRECTION OF THE DARBY MONTHLY MEETING AS EARLY AS 1684 AND FROM THE FREQUENT MENTION OF EDUCATIONAL MATTERS IN THE MINUTES IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN OPEN ALMOST CONTINUOUSLY UNTIL THIS YEAR, WHEN THE DOORS HAVE BEEN CLOSED. AS EARLY AS 1692 UNDER DATE 9 MONTH WE FIND A RECORD, AGREED AT THIS MEETING THAT BENJAMIN CLIFT IS TO TEACH THE SCHOOL BEGININNG JULY 12 AND TO CONTINUE ONE WHOLE YEAR EXCEPT TWO WEEKS. IN LATER YEARS THIS SCHOOL WAS CALLED BUTTONWOOD HALL, AS THE BUILDING STOOD SURROUNDED BY LARGE OLD BUTTONWOOD TREES. THIS SCHOOL STARTED IN 1684 IS ONE OF THE OLDEST IN THIS COUNTRY, OUTDATING ALMOST ALL THE COLLEGES EXCEPTING HARVARD AND WILLIAM AND MARY.

THREE WELL KNOWN ROADS DIVURGE FROM A POINT IN THE OLD VILLAGE OF DARBY, ONE OF THEM RUNNING TO RADNOR AND HAVERFORD LAID OUT IN 1687, ANOTHER CALLED THE KINGS HIGHWAY TO CHESTER AND THE SOUTH AND SAID TO BE THE EARLIEST HIGHWAY LAID OUT BY AUTHORITY IN PENNSYLVANIA. THE THIRD RUNNING TO PHILADELPHIA AND CROSSING SCHUYLKILL RIVER AT GRAY’S FERRY. ALONG THESE OLD ROADS VERY DISTINGUISHED MEN PASSED THROUGH DARBY. GEORGE FOX IS REPORTED TO HAVE SPENT A NIGHT HERE IN 1672. IN 1739 GEORGE WHITFIELD PASSED THROUGH DARBY ON HIS WAY TO CHESTER ACCOMPANED BY ABOUT 150 PERSONS. ACCORDING TO CAREW, THE NOTED ENGLISH MEADICAREF?? WHO WAS ALSO PASSING THROUGH AT THE TIME. WHITFIELD PREACHED HERE TO SEVERAL HUNDRED PERSONS WHO HAD ASSEMBLED TO HEAR THE NOTED PREACHER.

IN 1776 AND 1777 GENERAL WASHINGTON WAS ENTERTAINED AT DINNER HERE BY DR. HENRY PASCHALL, THE GGGRANDFATHER OF THE WRITER. FOUR OF THE HOST’S DAUGHTERS WERE IN AN ADJOINING ROOM AND ONE

REMARKED SHE WOULD LIKE TO KISS GEN. WASHINTON, WHO OVER HEARING THE REMARK, WALKED INTO THE

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ROOM, ASKING WHICH ONE WANTED TO KISS HIM, BEING VERY YOUNG AND OVERCOME BY CONFUSION THEY COULD NOT REPLY, SO HE VERY GALLANTLY KISSED EACH ONE.

SEVERAL TIMES THE CONTINENTAL ARMY PASSED THROUGH DARBY. ONCE ON A SUNDAY IN AUGUST IN 1777 ON ITS WAY TO GIVE BATTLE TO HOWE AT BRANDYWINE AND AGAIN ON A FRIDAY 19 DAYS LATER IT POURED THROUGH THE LITTLE VILLAGE TOWARD PHILADELPHIA BEARING WITH IT DEJECTION OF DEFEAT. IN DECEMBER OF 1777 GEN. HOWE WITH HIS ARMY OF 7000 MEN WAS ENCAMPED ON THE HEIGHTS OF THE TOWN. GEN. LAFEYETTE ALSO SPENT SEVERAL NIGHTS IN DARBY ON VARIOUS OCASSIONS.

DARBY CAN ALSO BOAST OF A FAMOUS OLD BLACKSMITH’S SHOP DOUBTLESS RUN BY WILLIAM TAYLOR WHO SETTLED THERE AND WHO WATSON IN HIS ANNUALS TELLS US WAS THE FIRST PERSON TO MAKE A PAIR OF SMITH’S BELLOWS IN THE ENGLISH COLONIES IF NOT IN NORTH AMERICA.

THE DARBY FIRE COMPANY IS ONE OF THE OLDEST IN PENNSYLVANIA, FOUNDED IN 1775. THE ORIGINAL FIRE ENGINE, CALLED THE DARBY RAM IS AN ANTIQUATED MACHINE BUT IN GOOD PRESERVATION AND CAREFULLY GUARDED BY THE PRESENT FIRE COMPANY NO 1.

ONLY NINE OF THE OLD COLONIAL STONE HOUSES ARE STILL STANDING, GUARDED BY OLD PINE TREES, WHICH ALONE ALWAYS LEAD AN AIR OF RESPECTABILITY TO A PLACE BUT AT THE PRESENT TIME ONLY TWO FAMILIES DESCENDED FROM JOHN BLUNSTON ARE LIVING IN THESE OLD HOMES. THE WRITER’S HOME WAS DEED TO HER FAMILY IN 1711 AND HAS ALWAYS BEEN OCCUPIED BY MEMBERS OF THE LLOYD AND SERRILL FAMILIES TO THIS DAY. IN THIS HOUSE LIVED JUDGE HUGH LLOYD BORN IN 1741, HE TOOK AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE COUNTRY LEADING UP TO THE REVOLUTION, BEING A MEMBER OF SEVERAL COMMITTEES FROM WHICH THE CONTINENTAL COUPERS HAD ITS ORIGIN. JUST PREVIOUS TO THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE HE WAS ONE OF THE 13 DELEGATES FROM THIS COUNTY TO THE PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE HELD IN CARPENTERS HALL IN PHILADELPHIA IN 1776 WHICH MEETING RESOLVED “THAT A CONVENTION SHOULD BE CALLED FOR THE PURPOSE OF FORMING A NEW GOVERNMENT IN THIS PROVINCE ON THE AUTHORITY OF THE PEOPLE ALONE.”

COMING DOWN TO THE 1860 AND 1870 PERIODS WE FIND DARBY A QUIET COUNTRY VILLAGE, WHERE THE INHABITANTS LIVED THE EVER TENOR OF THEIR WAYS, CLEAN SHADY STREETS, QUAINT SHOPS. THE OLD HOUSES PEOPLED BY HOSPITABLE QUAKER NEIGHBORS TRIED AND TRUE, A PLEASANT SOCIAL, INTELLECTUAL LIFE, THE WRITER REMEMBERS AS A CHILD GOING WITH HER MOTHER TO CALL ON THE COUSINS PUSEYS. WHEN COUSIN NANCY WOULD REQUEST THE LITTLE SERVING MAID TO BRING IN “A REFRESHING DRINK FROM THE TEA KETTLE.”

SUCH WAS THE OLD DARBY; AT THE PRESENT TIME IT IS A FLOURISHING TOWN OF 9000 INHABITANTS, SEVERAL LARGE WOOLEN MILLS, WITH ROWS OF HOUSES TO ACCOMMODATE THE WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES. SEVEN TROLLEY LINES CONVEGE FROM A CENTRAL STATION. THE OLD SCHOOL IS CLOSED FOR LACK OF PUPILS.

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THROUGH THE GENEROSITY OF A CITIZEN, THE LIBRARY FOR SOME YEARS HAS BEEN A PUBLIC LIBRARY, ALTHOUGH STILL UNDER THE CONTROL OF A BOARD OF DIRECTORS, AS THAT GENTLEMAN HAS RECENTLY DIED IT IS NOW FINANCED BY THE DARBY HOME PROTECTION SOCIETY. THERE IS A RUMOR THAT THE OLD MILL RACE IS TO BE DISCONTINUED. THE DEAD TRUNK OF THE ANCIENT OAK IS ALL THAT IS STANDING AND THE DARBY ? OUR FOREFATHERS FOUNDED IS RAPIDLY PASSING AWAY. TO A FEW OF US STILL LIVING HERE AND LOVING THESE LOVELY AND VENERABLE PARTS OF THE PAST IT IS INDEED SAD AND WE FEEL A SENSE OF GREAT LOSS, BUT WITH THE CLOSING OF THE INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN ACTIVE SINCE THE COLONIAL DAYS DOES IT ALL PASS AWAY? NO, THE INFLUENCE FOR GOOD OF THOSE EARLY STURDY SETTLERS IS STILL FELT, IT CAN NEVER DIE. THE FLAME OF PATRIOTISM IS FANNING AS FIERCELY IN 1919 AS IN 1776. SO WE MUST ACCEPT WITH COURAGE THE CHANGES AND THE PRESENT CONDITIONS, TAKING COMFORT IN THE WORDS OF THE POET

“ALL THAT IS AT ALL

LASTS EVER – PAST RECALL.

EARTH CHANGED, BUT MY SOUL AND GOD STAND SURE.”

TYPED BY PAT SMITH 1/20/15