

The Plantation of William Penn's "Sylvania"

Introduction

In August 2019, as one of our special summer programs, members and guests of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society visited Philadelphia's American Swedish Historical Museum to learn more about the early Swedish colonization of the Delaware Valley. During that visit, I first met Mr. Larry Ward, an accomplished local historian who represents the Mouns Jones (or Old Swede's) House, built in 1716, and its custodial owner, the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County, Pa. Larry's superb presentation on the earliest cultural and economic interchanges between Swedish, Dutch and English colonists, and with the Native American inhabitants, was very informative, and nicely set the stage for our tour of the museum that followed.

Thoroughly impressed, I invited Larry to write an article on early European colonization for publication in the *History Quarterly*, and was delighted when he agreed. You will find his article, *The Plantation of William Penn's "Sylvania,"* both scholarly and highly readable, with perspectives almost assuredly new to us all. — Roger Thorne



The **Mouns Jones House**, also known as the Old Swede's House, is an historic home located in Douglassville, Amity Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania. Dating from 1716, the 2½-story, three bay, sandstone structure is the oldest documented dwelling in Berks County, and one of the few remaining examples of a Swedish settler's house. In the 1950s, the roof collapsed after an accidental fire and subsequent heavy snowfall. The house was restored by the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County starting in 1965, and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. It is open to the public periodically during the year as part of the Morlatton Village historic site.



It was built by Mans Mouce Jonasson (1663–1754) and his wife Ingeborg Petersdottir (1665–1749) in Douglassville, Pennsylvania. Mans Mouce Jonasson was the son of the first Governor of New Sweden, Jonas Nilsson (1620–1693).

(ABOVE) The 1716 Anglo-Pennsylvania hall-parlor type Mouns Jones House, with its arched-entry root cellar, prior to the structure's 1964–70 restoration by the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County, PA. *Photo courtesy of the Historical Society of the Cocalico Valley, Ephrata, Pa.* (BELOW) The beautifully restored Mouns Jones House, located in Douglassville, Berks County, Pennsylvania, as it stands today after roof replacement and masonry stabilization. *Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County.* <http://www.historicpreservationtrust.org>

The Plantation of William Penn's "Sylvania"

Larry Ward

assisted by Roger D. Thorne



Penn's Treaty with the Indians by Benjamin West: oil on canvas, painted 1771–72. Commissioned by Thomas Penn, son of Pennsylvania's founder, this painting depicts a legendary meeting in 1682 between William Penn and members of the Lenni Lenape tribe at Shackamaxon on the Delaware River. West employed a Neoclassical style to suggest both visual and political harmony. By depicting the three factions that shaped Pennsylvania for most of the eighteenth century—Native Americans, Quakers, and merchants—united in the act of settlement, West created a powerful symbol of peace. Although the scene is allegorical rather than historical, the image has become an icon of American history. *Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.* <https://www.pafa.org/museum/collection/item/penns-treaty-indians>

In his 1681 pamphlet entitled "Some Account of the Province Of Pennsilvania [sic],"¹ and other published works planning and promoting his fledgling American enterprise, William Penn repeatedly used "plantation" as synonymous with "colony."² Considering contemporary usage³, both terms designated the settled and occupied areas of the New World to which European immigrants would "transplant" themselves, their languages, religions, and other cultural traditions. Hoping for God's blessing on his "Holy Experiment," Penn believed that "... an extraordinary Providence seems to favour [America's] *plantation*, and an open door to Europeans to pass thither." He prophetically called Pennsylvania and other colonies the "seeds of nations."⁴

Admiral Penn's Legacy

The Royal grant to Penn had been afforded as a tangible tribute to his father, Admiral Sir William Penn, for his loyal service to the Crown in the Royal Navy and for his support for the Restoration of Charles II to the throne. The obligation to Admiral Penn had been monetized as a debt of about 16,000 pounds sterling, which was deemed to be discharged by conveyance of the 45,000-square-mile "Sylvania" tract to William Penn "and his heirs forever," according to language in Penn's Charter dated 4 March 1681.⁵ William Penn and his heirs would govern the Province for nearly a century, but not *forever*. In 1776, a politico-cultural transition to a new Pennsylvania

Constitution took effect, joining the colony to twelve others, forming the United Colonies of America. Pennsylvania and its “ancient” and “planted” inhabitants who embraced the Patriot cause were soon to be relieved of both British subjugation and the Penn family Proprietorship.

In a letter dated 23 June 1680, commenting on Penn’s Petition for the land grant and Charter creating his Proprietorship, John Werden noted that the region had been “planted promiscuously by Swedes, Finlanders, Dutch and English.” Werden’s letter favored the claims of the Duke of York as an Appendix of New York, but he later supported Penn’s Petition.⁶ The “Minute” (a written record of a meeting or resolution) of the Committee of Trade in London encouraged “planters” to settle in “Penn’s Woods.”⁷

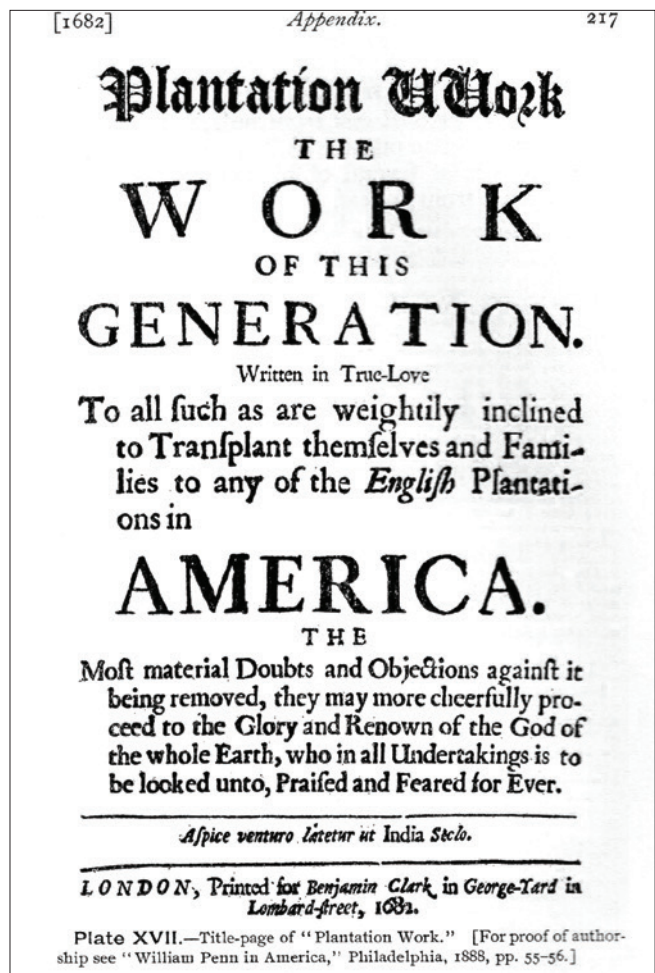
Penn’s 1683 “Letter...To The Committee of the Free Society of Traders,”⁸ included in its summary of contents: “Of the *First Planters*, the Dutch, &c. ...,” thus recognizing the Dutch as prior settlers on his vast holdings, but asserting the supremacy of his title under the grant and Charter from King Charles II, which both parties considered unimpeachable. Years of litigation in England, which delayed immigration and impeded collection of “quitrents” by Penn’s agents from “planters,” would finally settle title in Penn’s favor. Now, having secured preemptive rights under the Royal Charter, his strategic challenge became to secure and market his holdings to settlers, while paying fair compensation to the “original people” (Lenni Lenapes).

A contemporary chronicle of the settlement of Pennsylvania and West Jersey acknowledged long-standing Native American habitation, but nevertheless characterized European settlers in “Pensylvania” preceding Penn’s Proprietorship as “the first planters.”⁹

Penn’s boundary dispute with Lord Baltimore was resolved by the Lords of the Committee for *Plantation*, a clear indication of the significance of the term in an official context involving the promotion, promulgation, and regulation of provincial immigration and settlement policy.

“Most Fitted” Planters

Penn’s invitation to prospective settlers in his vast wooded and “well-watered” (by rivers and streams) Plantation was extended to Quaker Friends, Palatine Germans, Scots-Irish, and others of diverse religious beliefs and ethnic ancestry.¹⁰ In a 1682 publication ascribed to Penn and entitled “Plantation Work...of this Generation...,”¹¹ the newly endowed Proprietor exhorted “...all such as are weightily inclined to Transplant themselves to any of the *English Plantations* in America”¹² to emigrate to the New World and settle on his neo-feudal “Sylvania.” Within



The title page from “Plantation Work” ascribed to William Penn, from *The Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings...*, Vol. VII, Philadelphia (1897), p. 217.

Penn’s vision, First Purchasers and other immigrant settlers would be figuratively “taking root” in the piedmont communities and valley farmsteads they occupied and tilled. He was quite aware of the famous successes and infamous failed outcomes, sometimes catastrophic, of earlier settlements at Plymouth Plantation, Jamestown, Roanoke, New Netherlands, New Sweden, and other 16th and 17th century attempts at establishing European colonies along the Atlantic coast of the New World. Demographic, political, and financial success for his Province would depend on Divine Providence and the resources, skill-sets, and industry of his “Planters, Adventurers and Purchasers” and their families. Civic and social stability would depend on the “Frame of Government” he promulgated and its diligent administration by his delegates and elected officials.¹³

Penn realized that successful “peopling”¹⁴ of his colony would require immigrants who met a set of criteria “fitting” them for emigration and plantation in Pennsylvania. In Section IV of “Some Account...”[cited above]¹⁵ Penn listed

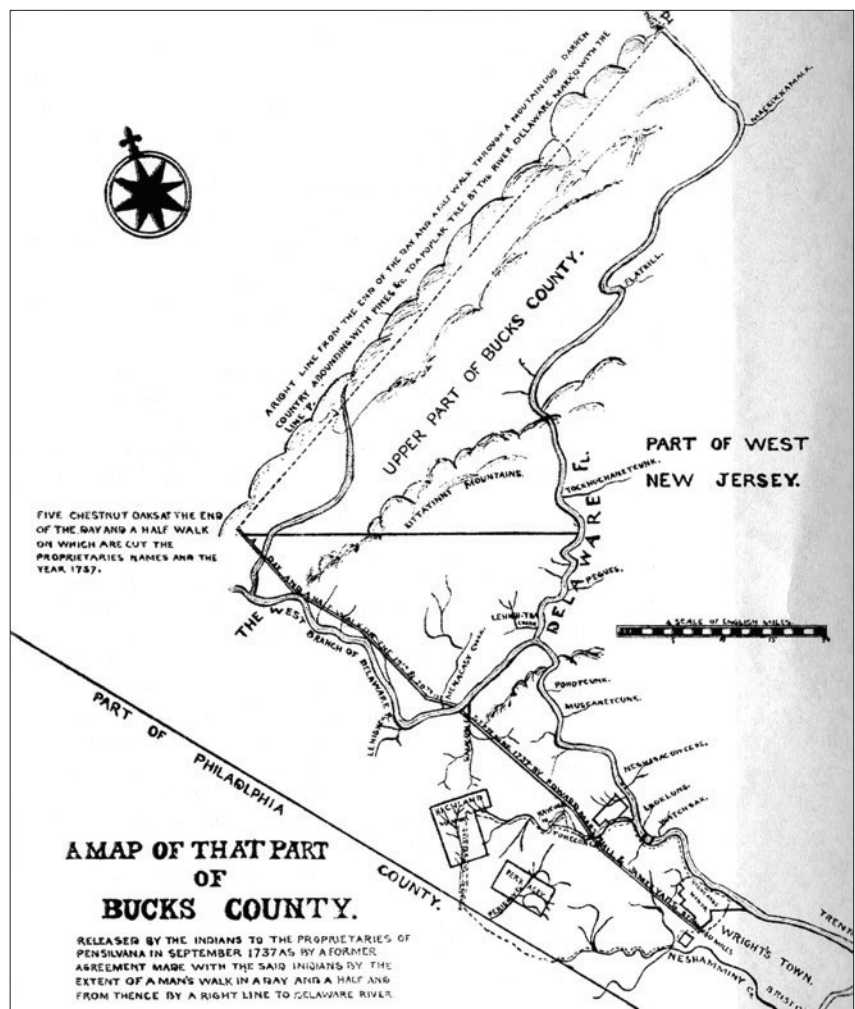
precluded peaceful cohabitation. Thus, negotiated or forced displacement was inevitable from the outset.

With respect to the aboriginal inhabitants, Penn presumed the validity of his Charter and Title by reason of the self-serving “Rights” conferred by “Discovery” of “waste” lands not yet settled and “cultivated and planted” by (Christian) Europeans.¹⁸ Rather than assert the corollary “right” to secure his dominion by “conquest,” Penn recognized the semblance of “title” arising from the Indians’ ancient occupancy and far-ranging use of his chartered provincial territory. Accordingly, he charged his agents and provincial officials with paying fair compensation to the Indians for the un-surveyed and un-bounded lands they occupied, and the hunting-ranges they depended on. He warranted that the title of his purchasers would be “free from any *Indian* encumbrances.”²⁰

Traditional English documentation of the conveyances to the Europeans by Indian Sachems (prominent chiefs) purported to extinguish all rights in the land previously taken for granted by the Natives. The documents, however, failed to convey a clear and unambiguous message that the Natives would be inexorably uprooted from their villages and hunting camps, dis-entitled by the European “planters,” and displaced by the series of land treaties systematically negotiated (or, more precisely, imposed) by the Proprietors and their agents and provincial officials.

The grant documents also ceded land in greater quantities and with more nebulous boundaries than was envisioned by the native inhabitants. The most egregious instance of exploitation of the disparity of perception regarding the nature of title and quantity of land transferred by a “treaty” is the infamous “Walking Purchase” or “Indian Walk”²¹ of 1737.

Penn’s operatives and a few native companions were to delineate the land area by “walking” a certain northwesterly course from Wright’s Town for a day and a half, then turning and striking a course to the Delaware River. The Indians understood that the bearing to the river would be due east (the solid horizontal line on the accompanying map); however, Penn’s men headed northeasterly (the dotted line delineating the “Upper Part of Bucks County”). This diagonal closing-course resulted



Walking Purchase map from *A Collection of Papers Read Before The Bucks County Historical Society*, Vol. VI, 1932, between pp. 20 and 21.

in encompassing vastly more land area than was expected by the Indians. The “walk” by Penn’s agents (apparently at an Olympian pace) traversed a trail blazed days earlier by selected woodsmen. According to Indian oral tradition, the “walkers” never stopped to rest and smoke a pipe, or to shoot and cook game for a meal, as was customary for a hunting and foraging party. They had innocently assumed that a “day’s walk” was a traditional and purposeful “Indian walk”, at a pace that could be sustained for all the days typically expended in a hunting and gathering sojourn. Some of the uprooted and displaced Natives undoubtedly hadn’t forgotten such deception when choosing sides in the Seven Years War a short generation later.

As Europeans populated Penn’s Province, the forced diaspora (officially called “Removal” in the 19th century) of Native Americans westward from their ancestral homeland continued relentlessly for over a century. A poignant notation on an 1856 Colton map of the state of *Indiana* identifies a County in the east-central ranges of the state as “Delaware,” over 400 miles from Pennsylvania’s Delaware Valley. The Lenni-Lenape Indians had been renamed the

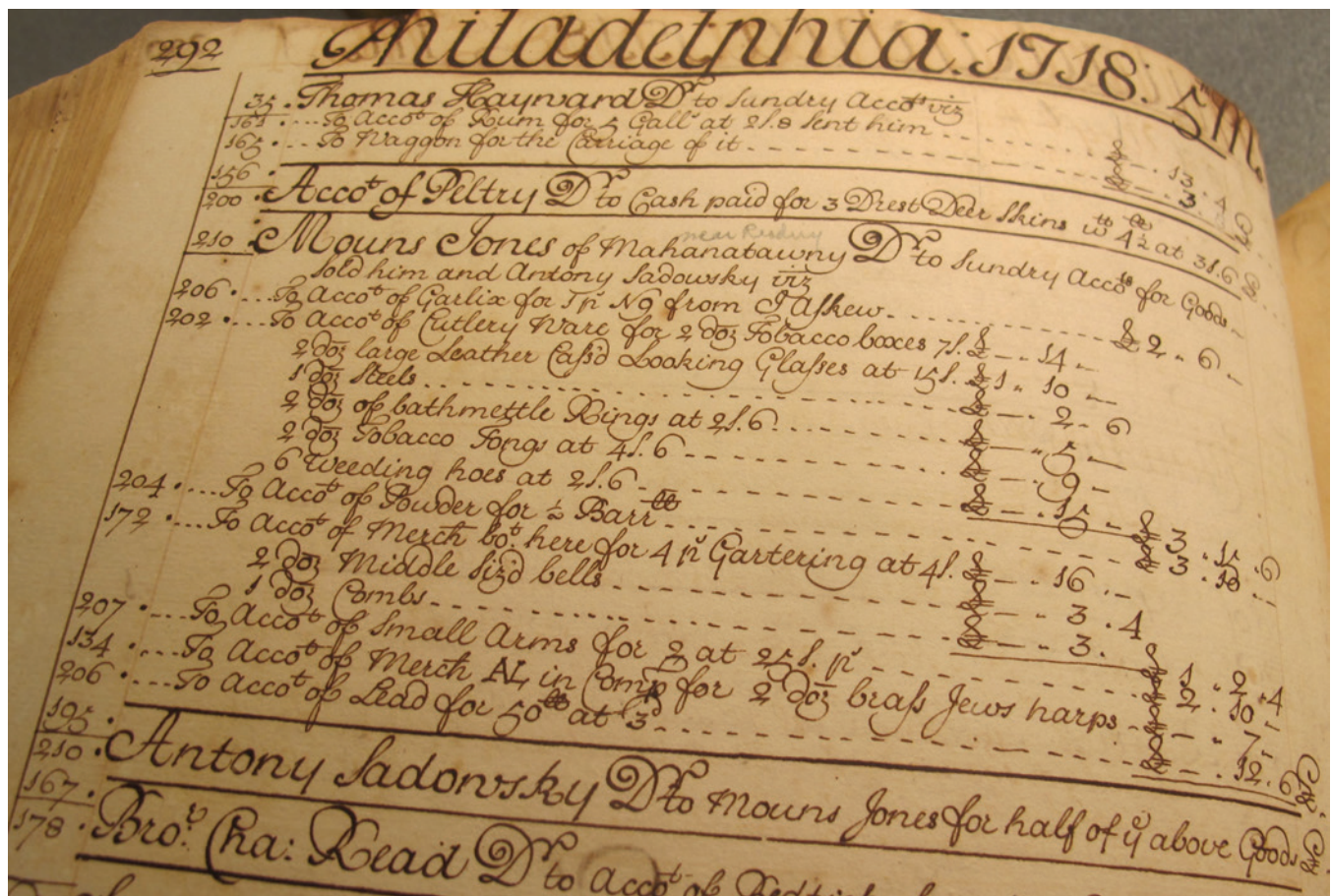


Map of Delaware County, Indiana, from Colton's General Atlas, J.H. Colton and Co., New York, 1857, page 43.

"Delawares" by English colonists as a territorial designation derived from the Bay and River named after Jamestown, Virginia's early Governor, Lord de La Warr. Segments of the "Delawares," including an affiliated band known as Munsees from northern New Jersey and southern New York, had migrated through western Pennsylvania and Ohio to eastern Indiana by the Revolutionary period, establishing several villages along the White River. One of these communities was "Muncietown," later Muncie, the modern county seat of Delaware County, Indiana. In 1818, the Delawares (which included both "Unami" Lenapes and Munsees under English and Indian nomenclature)²² ceded their Indiana lands to the United States and moved farther westward.

The Delaware Valley receded into the mists of time in the collective memory of the beleaguered, and now unavoidably migratory, remnants of the early Native populations expelled, by pen and ink and force of arms, from their ancient home and hunting grounds. The "Indian" culture faded, and the only traces of Delaware habitation in the eastern colonies were reminiscent place-names for a river and bay, a Delaware colony under English rule consisting of the three "Lower Counties," and a County in Indiana.

Penn's benevolent but intensely acquisitive objectives were tempered somewhat by two admonitions to his land agents. Firstly, they were to "treat speedily" with the Indians in land treaties and transactions in order to preclude possible interlopers who might offer the original inhabitants more "things that please them" for desirable land.²³ The second caution proffered by Penn was to be wary of Indians attempting to sell the same land more than once. This concern may have been based on a misapprehension by the Proprietors of the traditional concept held by the Indians, which considered land ownership to be predicated on an amicable and equitable sharing of territory and its resources. This perspective was quite inconsistent with the British view that land ownership granted "in fee simple" under English Common Law was absolute and inheritable, conferring exclusive and perpetual rights on the owner and his "heirs and assigns." This British legal framework precluded any third party (even cohabitants) from enjoying rights of possession or benefit of resources from the tract delineated in the grant documents by "metes and bounds," which could legally be fenced and defended against intrusion by others. This concept was alien to the Native Americans, the only exception being tribal conflicts related to amorphous boundaries based on the subsistence needs of the various Indian populations living, hunting and foraging in the region.



A ledger page, c. 1718, from the *Logan Ledgers*, records some of Mouns Jones transactions as an Indian Trader under license from the Penn Proprietors and agents. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Penn's venture as Proprietor was clearly contingent on good outcomes in acquiring the shared possessory rights and title of the Native Americans, and in securing and maintaining peaceful relations between the Indians and the European arrivals, even as his acquisition program and methods resulted in a gradual forced emigration from their ancestral homes, hunting-camps, fishing streams, and foraging grounds. Influenced by a charitable but also self-serving vision of establishing "Amity" between the Indians and his "planters," the Proprietor could not have foreseen the devastating consequences from the effects of "transplanting" incubating microbes exposing the Indians to communicable European diseases to which the Natives had little or no immune response. Unscientific and typically anecdotal data suggest mortality rates in the 25% to 50% range, depending on the region and demographics of the village, tribe, clan, or other Native population infected by one or more of the imported "plagues" (tuberculosis, small pox, influenza, measles, among others).

Transplanting Swedes to the Backcountry

The *Annals of Swedes on the Delaware*²⁴ chronicles the "manner in which a colony from Sweden was first planted here [the lower Delaware valley]..." in the mid-17th

century, beginning in about 1638. Besides enriching the Swedish nation and emigrants by means of trade, "... the Christian religion would...be planted amongst the heathen," presumably converting the Natives to Christian doctrine and practices. This missionary aspiration met with extremely limited success.

Numerous other 17th century publications discussing migration to Pennsylvania also used the term "plantation" and its derivatives to describe the trans-Atlantic settlement of the North American coastal provinces under various competing claims of entitlement and priority. William Penn optimistically contemplated expansion of settlement under his family's chartered Proprietorship outward from Philadelphia and up the river valleys. One of these re-settlement programs would involve the transplantation of second- and third-generation Swedes and Finns from the lower Schuylkill Valley to the Manatawny [also referred to as "Mahanatawny"] "backcountry," some 50 miles to the northwest, including the lower courses of the Menakesy (currently, "Monocacy") Creek and its confluence with the Schuylkill River. This aggregated grant of about 10,000 acres was divided into 17 tracts with river frontage and extending several miles northward. The entirety was

set aside as the “Swede’s Tract” nearly 20 years after the surveying of the German Town, c. 1683²⁵, and the Welsh Tract in 1684, the two earliest ethnic enclaves “planted” in the Province. The distribution of “patents” to prospective Swedish-Pennsylvanians would be coordinated and executed by Swedish Lutheran Pastor Andreas Rudman. Very few families of Swedish [most genetically Finnish] ancestry would actually settle on the “Swede’s Tract.”

Once the Manatawny [later “Molattton” or “Morlatton”] backcountry region became populated and settled in the first few decades of the 18th century, the term “Plantation” referred primarily to farmsteads with cultivated acreage and livestock. Within five years of first settling on the banks of the Schuylkill River and the contiguous uplands, Mouns Jones and his neighbors petitioned the Royal Governor in 1709 for a road to and from their “plantations,” which described both their individual farms *and*, implicitly, the settlement they had “planted” on the Swedes’ Tract, then in Philadelphia County, and since 1719 comprising Amity Township, becoming, as of 1752, part of the newly-formed Berks County.

A 1751 advertisement for the sale of the White Horse Tavern, then located in the riverfront house formerly occupied by Marcus Huling a short distance down-river from Mouns Jones’s house, included the Tavern-owner’s entire “*plantation*, which lies on the road by the Swedes.” In this context, the term designated the owner’s entire holdings, a tavern originally known as “Hulings” [and from about 1754 to the present time, the “White Horse”], and other buildings, not merely an agricultural setting comprising domestic and farm structures, their immediate “curtilage,”²⁶ and the surrounding cultivated acreage.

Jones and Huling were among the few “Swedes” to actually settle on the “Swede’s Tract,” most other patentees having sold parcels or their entire holdings to third parties or other patent-holders. Mouns Jones, having removed himself and his family from his small Kingessing riverside house and farm [now Bartram’s Gardens], became an active Indian Trade agent, licensed by the Penn Proprietorship for the Manatawny backcountry. He and his partners and sons “waggoned” many loads of pelts acquired from Native trappers to the warehouses of James Logan in Philadelphia from about 1715 to the early 1720s.

Epilogue

The term “plantation” eventually evoked almost exclusively the now more familiar image of a tract of land with a significant portion of its tillable acreage seasonally planted by indentured servants, hired hands, and/or slaves with subsistence produce, cash crops, and barter-goods. In *The Pennsylvania German Family Farm*,²⁶ Amos Long observed that “Large farmsteads were frequently referred to as a *plantation* [sic] on early legal descriptions and deeds.”

It is manifest from those sources cited here and other contemporary English and Colonial historical records that the term “plantation” conveyed two distinct meanings during the first century of settlement in the region, designating both (1) the populated communities and cultural traditions “planted,” and often reciprocally assimilated, within Penn’s proprietary domain, *and* (2) the prospering family farmsteads abounding throughout its rolling and fertile countryside.

About the author

Larry Ward has enjoyed nearly 50 years as a volunteer for the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County, PA. He is the current chairman of its Sites and Structures Committee, having overseen the structural and architectural restoration of four of its eighteenth-century buildings since 2008. Larry is also a frequent contributor to the Trust’s on-line historical records and photography archives. Photo taken after his presentation at the American Swedish Historical Museum in August 2019. *Courtesy of © John O. Senior*



Endnotes

1. *Some Account of the Province Of Pennsylvania in America; Lately Granted Under the Great Seal of England To William Penn. &c. Together with Priviledges and Powers necessary to the well-governing thereof. Made Publick for the Information of such as are or may be disposed to Transport themselves or Servants into those Parts*; London, Benjamin Clark (1681). Reproduced as Document #15 on pp. 58 et seq. of *William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania, 1680-1684*, Edited by Jean R. Soderlund et al, Philadelphia, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press (1983), hereinafter cited as: “Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #..., p. ...,” where many other primary-source documents pertaining to Penn’s acquisition and “planting” of Pennsylvania are reproduced.
2. Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #15, pp. 58–66.
3. See Lederer, Richard M., Jr., *Colonial American English*, Essex, Connecticut, Verbatim Books (1985), pp. 174 (“Plantation”) and 175 (“Planter”).
4. “A Further Account of the Province of Pennsylvania, and its Improvements. For the Satisfaction of those that are Adventurers (1685),” published in part in *Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings*, Volume VII, on p. 226.
5. Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #11, p. 41–50.
6. Werden’s letter appears at Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #4, p. 26
7. Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #8, p. 33.
8. “A Letter From William Penn Proprietary and Governour of Pennsylvania in America, To The Committee of the Free Society of Traders of that Province...,” London, Andrew Sowle (1683); Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #76, pp. 308–324.
9. Thomas, Gabriel, *An Historical and Geographical Account of The Province and Country of Pensilvania [sic], and of West-New-Jersey in America*. “The Richness of the Soil, ...Wholesomness of the Air, the Navigable rivers...Encrease of Corn, flourishing...of Philadelphia, ...stately buildings... The Natives...The first Planters, the Dutch, Sweeds [sic], and English...” (from contents summary on the title page), London, A. Baldwin (1698); title-page reproduced in *Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings*... Volume VII, Reading (1897), p. 246.
10. Schwartz, Sally, “A Mixed Multitude” – *The Struggle for Toleration in Colonial Pennsylvania*, New York, New York University Press (1987), Chapter 4, Immigration, pp. 81 et seq.
11. *Plantation Work, The Work of This Generation...* London, Benjamin Clark (1682); ascribed to William Penn and published in Vol. VII of the *Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings*, Philadelphia (1897), pp. 217 et seq.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
13. In Soderlund, *Founding*. Foundation documents, essentially forming a framework for a Constitution for Penn’s Province, are reprinted as Docs. 26 et. seq., under the “Frame of Government of Pennsylvania,” on pp. 95 et. seq. Based upon these documents, Thomas Jefferson considered Penn to be the “greatest law giver the world [had] produced”, a commendation often noted by historians, most recently by James Fritz in his book, *The Pennsylvania Dutch Experience, 1681-1783*, Ephrata, The Pennsylvania German Society (2019), at p. 9, quoting from Smolenski, John, *Friends and Strangers: The Making of a Creole Culture in Colonial Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press (2010), p. 2.
14. Cfr. Bailyn, Bernard, *The Peopling of British North America-An Introduction*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf (1986).
15. Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #15, pp. 63–64.
16. Penn’s view of the history of colonizing and its genesis extended in retrospect to the ancient Greeks, who, Penn observed, “planted parts of Asia,” motivated in part by the greater resources and enterprise-wealth considered to be available in the remote Plantation than in the homeland of the planters. The “Plantation” metaphor is serially extrapolated with much detail on the Penn family’s political and financial strategies and challenges in Chapters entitled...”Planting,” “First Shoots,” “Early Growth,” “Transplants,” “Grafting,” “New Sprouts,” etc. in Joseph E. Illick’s book, *Colonial Pennsylvania, A History*, New York, Chas. Scribner’s Sons (1976).
17. Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #15, pp. 64–65.
18. From “Whereas” paragraph of the Charter’s “Greeting” introduction on p. 41 of Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #11.
19. Lewis Evans (c.1700–1756) was a Welsh-born surveyor and geographer who immigrated to Philadelphia in the 1730s, became a friend of Benjamin Franklin, and published a number of noted maps and books.
20. Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #15, p. 63.
21. *A Collection of Papers Read Before The Bucks County Historical Society*, Vol. VI (1932), pp. 15, et seq.
22. Soderlund, Jean, *Lenape Country, Delaware Valley Before William Penn*, Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press (2015), pp. 6–7.
23. Soderlund, *Founding*, Doc. #24, p. 89.
24. Clay, Jehu Curtis, *Annals of Swedes on the Delaware*, Chicago: Swedish Historical Society of America (1914), pp. 18, et seq.
25. Pennnypacker, Hon. Samuel Whitaker, LL. D., “The Settlement of Germantown, Pennsylvania and the Beginning of German Immigration to North America,” published in Vol. IX of the *Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings and Addresses*, Allentown (1899), pp. 51, et seq.
26. In the Pennsylvania German dialect, the clustered farmstead buildings and surrounding yards and gardens were called “die Bauerei”: Long, Amos, *The Pennsylvania German Family Farm*, Breiningsville, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Society (1972), p. 7; “Messuage”, from Anglo-French/Middle English, is a common equivalent for these terms in English, and often found in colonial American deeds and related land documents.