

# Founding of Harrisburg Told in Song and Story Last Night

HARRIS' FERRY 1785-1815.

[Read before the Historical Society of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, to commemorate and record in the archives of the society the official marking of the site of the ferry by the State, September 24, 1915, by]

Benjamin Matthias Nead.

On the chart of the forest, the domain of Penn  
By a wide spreading river, the haunt of wild men,  
In the days when the white man was urging his quest  
To achieve him a place in the wilds of the West,  
Lay the site for a home, most richly endowed;  
Even Nature herself of this demesne was proud,  
For she turned all the pathways through mountain and glade  
To a meeting place there in the forest's dark shade.  
She set there the gateway to the far distant West,  
And she carved a sure fording through the river's bright crest.  
To the valleys beyond, where the bright streamlets run  
And flower bedecked lands trend to set of the sun.

Narrative.

Such was the spot which the Yorkshire farmer  
John Harris, the elder, of him we are speaking,  
Wearied of towns with their bustle and hurry  
Sought for his own. With soul of a prophet  
He builded his home and planted his ferry,  
Wrought for the future which came on apace.  
The spirit of commerce the East overbrooding  
Spoke to his soul in tones not uncertain  
And the sentinel hills, protecting the valleys  
To the west of the river, sent messages too.

Penn's hand of Free Traders in the land of the Quaker  
Held commerce with law on his far western river,  
By pack horse and wagon, to the gate of the ferry,  
Across the bright stream the sunlight reflecting,  
Thence mile upon mile, through the dense forest's shade  
By the "Three-Mountain-Road" to the Fork of the Rivers,  
On, on, to the westward, by river and trail  
Till the eye caught the gleam of the "Father of Waters."  
To the land of the peltry, keenly sought in exchange  
For the powder, the lead, and the stores from the Eastward.

When war with the savage broke out in dead earnest  
And troops of the Province were rushed to defend  
As never before the old ferry was busy—  
But in like case, more busy in the years yet to come,

When the Troops Continental in war with Great Britain  
Were carried by hundreds to join their comrades  
Then Washington came at the "Whisky Boys" fighting  
And crossed to the westward with all of his men.  
Then again against England our honor defending,  
The last service the ferry was destined to do  
Was to transport the troops for Britain's undoing  
To the Southland, to North Point, to the Gulf and its lowlands.

Old Ferry, four score were the years of thy serving,  
Pioneering the traffic and travel of old,  
No landmark, be sure, can be more deserving  
Nor richer in legend and story untold.  
"A shaft to thine honor," in truth 'tis becoming  
Old Ferry, forgotten, thy merits unsung;  
Then Scribes of the Now and the Future on-coming  
May tell all the story, with eloquent tongue.



BENJAMIN M. NEAD

### The Threatened Burning of John Harris at the Stake

John Harris, a native of Yorkshire, England, commenced a settlement on the present site of Harrisburg about the year 1718. His first house was erected on the lower bank of the river, and not far from that spot he is buried.

Some distance east of his house was erected a long range of sheds—a warehouse for storing peltry, and so forth, that he obtained in traffic with the Indian traders who brought them from the western country. From this point they were shipped to Philadelphia, in the early days on pack horses and later by the Conestoga wagon.

Near the sheds was the Ferry Lot, and the main terminus of the ferry which crossed the river to the western shore.

Mr. Harris' intercourse with the Indians was extensive, as he was surrounded by Indian villages situated on the neighboring islands and the adjacent shores of the river. It goes without saying that these Indian visitors were sometimes very troublesome. Their desire for strong drink frequently led them to violent and lawless action. On a certain day in the year 1720, a party of Indians consisting of members of the Mahanoy, Mahanago, or Shawanese tribe, who had been down the river either on a predatory or trading expedition stopped at the house of Mr. Harris on their return northward. A great many of them were under the influence of liquor, and consequently were very ugly, demanding of Mr. Harris more "tum-lum," meaning West India rum.

As a rule Mr. Harris was very wary in supplying the Indians with liquor, and it was his uniform custom not to trade with them in that commodity, and not to supply them with any drink when they were intoxicated. His refusal to grant them drink exasperated them, and without any warning they seized the old settler and manifested every intention of torturing and burning him alive.

An old mulberry tree which legend says was bearing blossoms when Penn landed, stood near at hand on the river bank, and furnished a convenient stake. To this tree he was tied, dry wood was gathered and piled around his feet, and torches prepared to kindle the pile, the savages meanwhile wildly dancing around him in their usual appalling manner.

Among Mr. Harris' retainers was a negro slave named Hercules, who seeing the dire extremity his master hastened across the river to the Indian village opposite, near the mouth of the Yellow Breeches, where dwelt a tribe of friendly Indians, the Paxton tribe, and summoned them to the rescue. Messengers were also sent to another friendly tribe at the mouth of the Conodoguinet. Before any damage was done, the rapid approach of the friendly Indians drove the marauders from their fiendish work, and put them to flight.

This scene is depicted in a famous oil painting, the original of which is now in the possession of the State. It represents the old settler, bound to a huge mulberry tree growing but a few rods from his mansion. Groups of fierce looking Indians, with their hideous painted faces and in warlike costume surround him, some piling the faggots about his tied feet; others looking on with an expression of fierce satisfaction; the victim standing like a martyr awaiting his doom. The

river stretches out in the foreground, while cutting through the flashing waters a canoe filled with friendly Indians is seen hastening to the rescue. The scenario for the picture was suggested to the artist Reader by a grandson of the old settler, Robert Harris. The grouping is supposed to be accurate, and is represented as delineating a fact in the history of the early settlement of Harrisburg.

Reference to the attempted burning, in rhyme. Adapted from Mr. Nead's Centennial Poem, 1885.

The dim old Forest Primeval  
Is in our thought to-night  
And scenes with the Forest coeval  
Our minds and fancies delight.  
Behold an inland River  
Wide sweeping to the sea  
On its bosom sunbeams quiver;  
Shadows fall from Forest tree.  
Glassy surface still unbroken  
By the keel of white winged ship  
Bearing name yet never spoken  
Save by swarthy Native lip;  
Nestling now by base of Mountain,  
Rippling now through flowery vale,  
Drinking in from shaded fountain  
Crystal springs which never fail.  
Flowing meads awaiting tillage  
At the coming white man's hands,  
Curling smoke from native village,  
Resting place of Indian bands.  
Where the sound of warrior's rifle  
Wakes a thousand friends to war  
If foe but dares to trifle  
With Shawanese or Delaware;  
Tribes which dwell by bright Swatara  
And by rippling Paxtang's side,  
Or whose waters swift as arrow  
In their birchen boats they glide.

Precious as the ancient manna  
Dropped on desert from on high  
Was the site of Susquehanna  
To the white man's hungry eye.  
From the hills he looked in wonder  
And there came to him a dream  
Of a city founded yonder.  
Looking out upon the stream,  
By no narrow limits bounded  
But embracing landscape fair  
Like the city which Penn founded  
On the sparkling Delaware,  
So he planted; so he founded  
Better far than he then knew  
By dangers thick surrounded  
This home for me and you.  
Savage natives kind but wary  
Brooked the white man's presence  
There.

Until the busy ferry was heard of  
Everywhere.  
Still the Old World knew oppression  
None in thought or act was free;  
If opinion found expression  
'Twas at risk of liberty.  
So men came from homes of childhood.  
From the land which gave them birth,  
And sought in the western wildwood  
For a garden spot on earth,  
And they settled round the ferry,  
Men from distant Donegal,  
From old Antrim and from Derry,  
And from spots beyond recall;  
Dwelt in peace with selves and neighbor,  
Placed their faith and trust in God;  
Spent their lives in honest labor;  
Slept at length beneath the sod.

Thus was founded, thus was builded  
City proud as regal Rome;  
City free as ancient Athens,  
Of thousands now the home.  
Stand now upon the hilltop,  
And gaze on yonder stream;  
Note well the grand fulfillment  
Of the settler's wildest dream.  
No sign of waving forest  
Where forest used to be  
Save one token, fragile, broken  
Trunk of ancient forest tree:  
Tree with age far past the noting  
Of any white man's ken,  
But the legends say it blossomed  
In the days of William Penn:  
The old trunk bare, it still stands  
There.

The object of the people's care,  
And marks the noted spot,  
Where settler seized by savage clan  
And bound to stake with fiendish plan  
Escaped by chance the plot.  
Gone is the busy ferry  
Linking river shore to shore,  
The boatman brave hath lain in grave  
A hundred years or more.  
Long bridges span the river  
Which bear on pier and arch  
The freighted wains, the lengthened  
Of trains  
Of traffic's onward march.  
Look now adown the river;  
Through smoke the red fires gleam  
And the furnace light, at dead of night  
Makes bright the silent stream.  
Turn to the noble city  
Spread out like picture grand  
Its towering spires, its spacious domes  
Its buildings tall, its "salace homes"  
Majestically stand.  
Prouder State boasts not the Union  
Than the Keystone of the Arch  
Note her grand achievements  
In Time's progressive march;  
And this her ruling city:  
What greater word of praise

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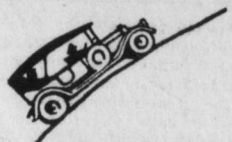
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Could advocate of action great  
Of sister city raise?  
Let all take part  
With gladsome heart  
In wishing her good cheer.  
God rule this rising city:  
A Ruler safe is He  
And grant that as her past has been  
So may her future be.

### HEAT CLOSES SCHOOLS

Special to The Telegraph

Columbia, Pa., Sept. 10.—Yesterday the public schools here closed soon after the noon session opened on account of the intense heat. The thermometer registered around the nineties in the shade. Some men and women in the factories were obliged to quit work for the same reason.

### POST OFFICE ABOLISHED

Special to The Telegraph

Waynesboro, Pa., Sept. 10.—The post office at Markes, several miles from Mercersburg, has been abolished. The patrons of that place will have their mail served them from Mercersburg.

### MULE KILLED IN ACCIDENT

Special to The Telegraph

East Donegal, Pa., Sept. 10.—While George Endslow was driving a valuable mule to the scene of a fire on the Fridy farm yesterday he scared, reared and the shafts on one side penetrated his neck, killing him instantly.

### YORK COUNTY JURORS DRAWN

Special to The Telegraph

Dillsburg, Pa., Sept. 10.—Of the 132 jurors drawn to serve at the October term of the York county courts those from Dillsburg and vicinity are as follows: Morrett Coover, Dillsburg; L. C. Wise, Fairview township, and M. E. Wiley, Dillsburg, for grand jurors; John Hoffman, Wellsville; Abram Williams, Dillsburg, and H. B. Emlig, Dover township, for common pleas jury; Emmet Eply, of Siddonsburg; V. D. Lenhart, Dillsburg; Eli Smith, Warrington township; John A. Grove, Dillsburg, and L. W. Cookson, Warrington township, for petit jury.

### PETER S. HEIKES BURIAL

Special to The Telegraph

Dillsburg, Pa., Sept. 10.—Funeral services of Peter S. Heikes, retired stock dealer, who died on Monday at his home in Franklintown, were held yesterday, conducted by the Rev. G. H. Eweler, pastor of the Dillsburg Lutheran church.

### ONIONS DRUG ON MARKET

Special to The Telegraph

Marietta, Pa., Sept. 10.—Onions are very plentiful in York and Lancaster counties this year and unless the farmers can find a market they will be a drug on the market. Last year they were scarce and this season more were raised than can be used. Prices are as low as 20 cents a bushel, compared with \$1.75 last year.

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