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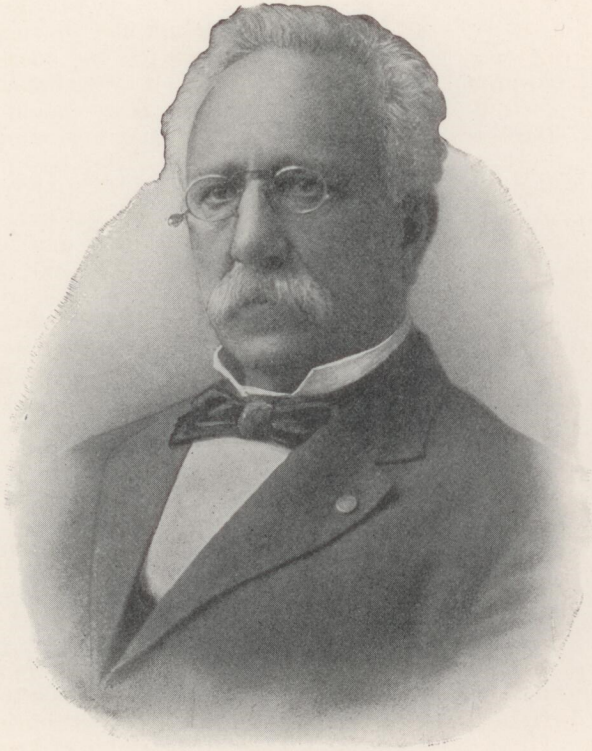
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HENRY J. STAGER

1842-1919

VALLEY FORGE AND THE SCHWENKFELDERS

(Delivered at Valley Forge Chapel, June 4, 1927.)

By SAMUEL K. BRECHT, Litt.D.

TO me it seems very appropriate that the Society of the Descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles should meet in these historic surroundings. Some people may question the advisability of a group known as "non-resistant" during the Revolutionary War, to hold a meeting at Valley Forge. Perhaps if we should study the history of the wonderful institution which has grown up in these hills and ascertain the part that the original Exiles had in assisting to make this ground historic, and if we should also study the history of the organizations formed and the steps taken that were necessary to make these grounds a state park, and a place of meeting open to the public, we would not question the wisdom of the decision to gather here. Although the proposition to hold a meeting of the Exile Society at Valley Forge had been discussed several times in the earlier history of the Society, this is the first time that the Board of Governors thought it desirable to hold a meeting at Valley Forge. The weather man, however, did not agree with this idea sufficiently to give us pleasant weather; nevertheless, those of you who are here, can go back and reminisce and perhaps learn a few things that I have learned from my study of this subject.

Let me pause to say that I regret very much that our good friend, the late Ethel Righter, is not with us today. Mrs. Righter took a great interest in the history of Valley Forge because of her ancestors who participated in the Revolutionary War, and she made a study of the part some of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles played in making Valley Forge famous.

At the outset, let me state that when our ancestors arrived in this country they subscribed to the Oath of Allegiance to the King of Great Britain and promised to be faithful to the Proprietor of the Province. The Schwenkfeldians were in the habit of keeping their word; they did not believe in the taking of oaths, but when they gave their word, they were in duty bound to keep it.

When the Revolutionary War broke out no member who adhered to the Schwenkfeldian beliefs entered the army; that is, they did not bear arms in the battles, but there were a number of our ancestors who did contribute in a very material sense to its success, just as in the last war a great many of our people, although they did not bear arms, contributed in many ways to help the Allies gain victory over Germany.

As has been stated before, the small body of Schwenkfelders who came over were—shall we say—the cream of their country. Only those who were "true blue" were strong enough to stand the journey,

—were willing to sacrifice their friends, relatives and property for their beliefs. Hence, those who landed here were a superior group compared with the general body of immigrants who came to settle this country. The majority of our group remained true to their beliefs and would not carry arms. No one who was a member of the religious body of the early Schwenkfelders took up arms during the Revolution. No one refused to pay the fines imposed for the non-performance of military service. None was suspected of treason or toryism, nor were they treated as suspects. Although they suffered, they were loyal subjects of Great Britain and the King.

But, there were a few members of the immigrant Schwenkfelder families who did bear arms in the war.

We have a pretty complete history of our people during this period, as letters were sent back and forth during that time, between this country and Europe, and some of our people kept diaries of the progress of the war, and also kept a record of the progress of the denomination. We know that Melchior Wagner and Rev. Christopher Schultz attended the Provincial Convention for the Province of Pennsylvania in January, 1775, at which time a series of strong resolutions was adopted. One of them contained the following words:

“Resolved unanimously that it is the most earnest desire and wish of this Convention to see harmony restored between Great Britain and the Colonies—but if the British administration should attempt to force a submission to the arbitrary acts of British Parliament, in such a situation we hold it our indispensable duty to resist such force, and at every hazard, to defend the rights and liberties of America.”

Messrs. Schultz and Wagner undoubtedly represented the mind of the Schwenkfelders on the issues at stake in voting for this and other resolutions.

On June 17, 1779, Christopher Schultz wrote a letter to friends in Germany, in which he said—(*translation*):

“To the glory of God we must say that his protecting hand has been over us in such a fatherly way that, notwithstanding frequent fearful prospects, urgent wants, severe threats and even extortions by those in authority, it is customary for our people to say, as they meet in conversation, ‘no one has any reason for complaint. He ought to thank God, who has always had ways and means of escape for us, even if at times punishment befell us.’”

“The war party has thus far not succeeded in forcing any of our people to enter the military lines, although all males between eighteen and fifty-three were enrolled in the militia classes, but exorbitant sums must be paid to escape such service.”

In 1783, the same thoughts were expressed in a letter signed by a number of leading church members.

This was true of the denomination as a whole, but as I said before, a number of families did not adhere to the tenets of the Church in this respect, and did take part in the war. Although I do not intend to mention the names of all who did active military service, I am listing a few of whom we have positive evidence of having performed military service during the progress of the Revolutionary War.

CAPTAIN BALTHASAR HEYDRICK—born December 29, 1750; died December 19, 1831, buried in the Union Cemetery, Flourtown, Pa.

CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER WIEGNER—born February 9, 1744; died November 7, 1783. (He was sometimes called "Christian" Wiegner, and was captain in the army as shown by the returns from Springfield Twp., Bucks County, Pa.

GEORGE HEYDRICK—son of Balthasar Heydrick, Sr. Born 1737; died 1824.

MELCHIOR HEYDRICK—born Oct. 23, 1747; died Oct. 13, 1777. He was a wagoner in Washington's Army, and is buried in the private cemetery on the farm of John K. Heebner, Worcester, Pa.

DANIEL WIEGNER—Born 1755. He served in what was called "The Flying Camp."; also in several other enlistments, including that of teamster. Was discharged November 27, 1781, after having been drafted for a two months' tour under Captain Jacob Peterman, principally in the Jerseys. He was last heard from in 1832, in Gallia County, Ohio.

ABRAHAM ANDERS. At the age of eighteen, he was a teamster in the Revolutionary War. Because he had the confidence of his superior officers, he was frequently sent on long trips, and in one instance, became lost. He was making his way towards Old Goshenhoppen, where his uncle, George Kriebel, lived, when he was overtaken, arrested, and taken to headquarters. His story of having become lost was believed, on account of his tender age and inexperience, and he was ordered back without punishment.

A common tradition handed down from generation to generation is that the barns of the Exiles furnished straw and fodder for the soldiers at Valley Forge. While Washington's Army was encamped at Pennypacker's Mills, a troop of cavalry marched down the Skip-pack Road and upon arriving at the hotel, known as Wentz' Hotel—just above the present village of Center Point, they asked the landlord to direct them to a farmer who had plenty of oats and forage. Christopher Wagner happened to be in the hotel and heard the

inquiry, and also heard the landlord say that Mr. Wagner had what they wanted. Wagner hurried to his home, a quarter of a mile away, and had barely arrived there when the sound of horses' hoofs on the bridge crossing the Zacharias Creek, near his home, were heard, and the troop rode into the barnyard, dismounted, unbridled the horses, and entered the barns, and threw down from the mows, hay and grain, and strewed a plentiful supply in the barnyard for the horses.

Now may I say that we have a member of one Schwenkfelder family who made the supreme sacrifice at Valley Forge? This was Peter Supplee, the sixth child of Hance and Magdalene Supplee, who was born in Upper Merion Township. He married Susanna Wagner, daughter of Melchior Wagner, one of the immigrant Exiles, and I think we can claim him as a member of one of the exiled families. He died at Valley Forge in 1778, but his resting place was not marked until 125 years later. The monument, with inscription, quoted below, was erected by his descendants in Bethel Cemetery, Worcester Township, on November 28, 1903:

"In memory of Peter Supplee,
A Revolutionary Soldier,
Born Sept. 2, 1745, Enlisted Sept. 12, 1777,
Died whilst encamped at Valley Forge,
January 24, 1778.
A MARTYR TO LIBERTY."

Time does not permit, nor am I prepared, to go into a complete history of the Schwenkfelders who participated, in one way or another, in the Revolutionary War. I am simply trying to point out some steps which should make us think more seriously that we have a vital interest in the history and preservation of Valley Forge Park.

As a boy I frequently came to Valley Forge when we had picnics on these grounds. These hills were at that time a regular wilderness. I can not understand why the historic hills of Valley Forge were left in such a deplorable state for such a long time and why the National Government did not take as much interest in the preservation of this historic spot as it did in the preservation of some other battlefields of later wars.

There is a great deal of interest evidenced in its history today, for which our good friend, Dr. Burke, is largely responsible. Many of us do not recall that before 1876, Washington's Headquarters at Valley Forge, and the surrounding hills where the remains of redoubts and camp sites are located, were private property.

We used to read in our school histories of the trials and tribulations of both officers and soldiers of the Revolutionary Army when encamped here in 1777-1778; the amount of suffering on account of lack of clothing and shelter, and also of the terrific

slaughter at the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War, and although the Gettysburg Battlefield was made a National Park, why was the Camping Ground of Valley Forge neglected for such a long time? It seems strange that we did not have enough patriotism to have these grounds made into a public park, or purchased by the State, and that we did not regard it as one of the sacred historic sites of the American Revolution.

The story of the first efforts to preserve this historic landmark dates from the time plans were made to commemorate the Centennial anniversary of the occupation and evacuation of the hills of Valley Forge by the Continental Army, and to secure to the nation Washington's Headquarters at Valley Forge, as a memorial for all time. This step was taken in 1877.

In December of that year, a group of people interested in the preservation of the Headquarter's House of General Washington at Valley Forge met at the residence of Mr. Isaac W. Smith, at Valley Forge, and the outgrowth of this meeting was the formation of an organization which came to be known as the "Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge." Some of the leaders in this organization as well as in the later efforts to secure permanent possession of these Headquarters were descendants of the early Schwenkfelder group, who were opposed to War, and it is the work done by these people that gives us today the justification for this organization to hold meetings on these grounds.

One of the leading lights at this meeting was Col. Theodore Weber Bean, a descendant of the immigrant, David Heebner, and it is in order that we give a brief account of the activities of Col. Bean, to show why he was so much interested in the Valley Forge movement. Col. Bean was born in Norriton Township, Montgomery County, in 1833, and at the age of 17, he was an apprentice to a blacksmith. Following that occupation until 1862, he was mustered into the service of the United States as a private in Company L, 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry, and served throughout the War. He became Captain of the Company on May 30, 1863, and was brevetted Lt.-Colonel on March 13, 1865.

Upon his return to civil life, Col. Bean resumed his business and studied law. He was admitted to the bar of Montgomery County on February 24, 1869, and continued in active practice until his death on January 20, 1891.

In 1887, he was appointed by Gov. Beaver a member of the State Commission on Industrial Education. In 1889, he was elected to the State legislature, and made chairman of the Committee in Education, and was the leading member of that body. He was the author of "Roll of Honor of the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry," "Footprints of the Revolution, or, Washington at Valley Forge," "Annals of the War," "Buford at Gettysburg," "Custer's Charge

at Yellow Tavern," and other pamphlets describing some phases of the Civil War.

His monumental work was the history of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, which he compiled in connection with the Centennial Celebration of the organization of Montgomery as a separate county in 1884. In the compilation of this book, he was ably assisted by his talented daughter, Mary Bean Jones (Mrs. A. Conrad Jones).

Col. Bean was also instrumental in organizing the Historical Society of Montgomery County, in 1881, and was its first President, and held this office until 1889, when he declined re-election. His services as an orator were repeatedly sought by his comrades, and he delivered the oration at Gettysburg upon the dedication of the Monument to General Zook.

Thus, we see that Col. Bean was active in the preservation of history, dealing not only with the Civil War, but with other historical events, and to him is due the inception of the plan to secure to the nation Washington's Headquarters at Valley Forge. With others, he labored long and earnestly to the end that Valley Forge might be preserved as sacred ground, worthy to be visited, and remembered for all time to come.

He was most active in arranging for the Centennial Anniversary in 1878 of the Evacuation by Washington and his Army from Valley Forge, and was the historian upon that occasion. At a meeting of this Memorial Association, held in February, 1878, the matter of purchasing the Headquarters of Washington at Valley Forge was left in the hands of the Ladies of the Association, and the Headquarters were later purchased for \$6,000, the first payment of \$500 being advanced by Mr. Isaac W. Smith. This Association was chartered in July, 1878, and shares of stock were sold at \$1.00 each.

Then followed a hard struggle, because the public was not interested. The Association could not raise even the interest money on the mortgage, which had, of necessity, been placed on the property. Those in charge were very earnest in their efforts; they did many things to raise money. For a time, visitors to the Headquarters paid ten cents admission. The Association tried to interest the legislature at Harrisburg, but failed. An earnest effort was made to have the United States Congress establish a National Park of the grounds and make a sufficient appropriation for this purpose, but this plan also failed. Things were in a pretty bad state. Radical means would have to be taken in order to save Valley Forge.

During the year, 1885, the Patriotic order, "Sons of America," held a Convention at Norristown.

Fortunately, Col. Bean was a member of this organization. When this convention met in Norristown, an official excursion was made to Valley Forge to visit the Headquarters and examine the Camping Grounds. Henry J. Stager became State President of the organization at this time, and he called together the State Executive Committee and they resolved to attempt to raise money to pay the interest and to cancel the mortgage on the Headquarters, and they pledged themselves to give their fullest aid, support, and official influence toward preserving Washington's Headquarters.

This Committee appealed to each Camp in the State within its jurisdiction, and asked the cooperation of all members of the Order within the State, and throughout the Union. Meanwhile, in each issue of "Camp News," the official paper of the Order, which was founded, edited, and controlled by Mr. Stager, there appeared a detailed list of the subscribers and amounts contributed, and it also gave a great deal of publicity to the movement. As a result of this canvas, inside of six months, the sum of more than \$3,000 was raised, and the mortgage and interest and other debts of the Centennial Memorial Association were paid.

The Patriotic Order "Sons of America" organization co-operated with the Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge, and with Mr. Stager at their head, prevailed upon the State Legislature at Harrisburg, to appropriate \$5,000.00 in order that the famous spring near Valley Forge with the stone barn could be purchased.

I must also note that Hon. William D. Heebner, of Heebner & Sons, Lansdale, Pa., who was then a member of the legislature, and is a descendant of the Schwenkfelders, introduced the bill for this appropriation, and secured its passage through the legislature.

Time does not permit a detailed account of the various vicissitudes and trials that these two organizations, the Patriotic Order "Sons of America" and the Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge experienced in their earnest efforts to make Valley Forge a public park. In brief, I wish to state that eventually the State of Pennsylvania became so interested that the legislature appropriated \$300,000.00 to make Valley Forge a true national park, and since that time, more than 1000 acres have been purchased, and the hills of Valley Forge have been reproduced as nearly like the original Camping Grounds that it is possible to do, and it is today the mecca of hundreds of thousands of tourists from all parts of the world who visit the park every year.

In 1910, Mr. Stager compiled and published a book containing the history of the Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge, and the chapter on the "Origin of this Association" was written by Col. Bean's daughter, Mrs. A. Conrad Jones, now a member of the Board of Governors of the Exile Society. Mrs. Jones is an active member of the Historical Society of Montgomery

County, Pennsylvania, and held the office of Corresponding Secretary for many years. In recognition of her deep interest in Valley Forge, and her father's service in the Centennial and Memorial Association, she was made a director of that Association in 1895, and Second Vice Regent in June, 1901.

It is in order at this time to give some account of Henry J. Stager, to whose enthusiasm and activity are due the impetus that not only kept the Centennial and Memorial Association from complete failure at a critical moment, but aroused the further interest of the State and the Union.

Henry John Stager was a descendant of the immigrant Schwenkfelder, Hans Heebner, and was born at Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania, August 27, 1842, his ancestors having located near Valley Forge in 1737. Very early in life, he joined the Patriotic Order "Sons of America" and throughout his entire life was a leader in this organization. In 1860, he started in the printing trade; then in 1866, he was the principal in the founding of "Camp News," which he published until 1904, a period of 38 years, and for 27 of these, he was the sole publisher of the magazine.

In the Civil War, he served the full enlistment with the 124th Pennsylvania Volunteers, participating in several hard marches and skirmishes, as well as in several of the heaviest battles of the War.

For many years, he served as Treasurer of the Second Dutch Reformed Church in Philadelphia, and for more than 40 years, he was official treasurer of Camp 7 in the Patriotic Order "Sons of America" in Pennsylvania.

In this organization, he held many offices. He was the first National President, elected at the organization of the National Camp. He was also Ex-Commander General of the Commandery. During his term as State President, he became identified with the organization which purchased Valley Forge Headquarters, and he took an active part until its dissolution at the time the State Historical Commission took over the management of Valley Forge completely.

I claim that through Mr. Stager and Colonel Bean the Descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles have played an important part in the preservation of Valley Forge. Some members of our Society are represented in the Valley Forge Association, also. Have we not the right to say that we have a vital interest here? I think we have.

I also wish to state that the following descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles are members of the Valley Forge chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution:

MRS. B. BROOKE BARRETT (Laura S. Anders)—a direct descendant of Abraham Anders. She is Chairman of the Committee on Conservation and Preservation of Forests and Wild Flowers.

MRS. EDWARD O. CRAWFORD (Martha Heebner Dresher)—a direct descendant of George Dresher.

MRS. SOLOMON KURTZ (Florence Crawford)—daughter of Martha Dresher Crawford, a descendant of George Dresher.

MISS ETHEL MAY MATHIAS—a descendant of Tobias Hartranft. She obtained her membership through Leonard Hartranft.

MRS. JOHN FABER MILLER (Emma B. Yeakel)—a descendant of Rev. Christopher Schultz. Mrs. Miller also has two additional Revolutionary ancestors—Andrew Schultz and Abraham Yeakel. She has served her Chapter as Recording Secretary and Treasurer.

MRS. WILLIAM H. SLINGLUFF and her daughter, MRS. F. B. LITTLE (Eleanor Slingluff) are descendants of John Richards and George Heebner.

We could find many others who are not members of the D. A. R. but who have a vital interest in building up and preserving, for all time, Valley Forge Park and also the Gettysburg Battlefields. I think these are the two leading memorials the United States will ever have; let us hope, at least, that we will never have another war which will cause as much suffering and sorrow.

Immigrant Schwenkfeldian Exiles who lived through the Revolutionary War and the Valley Forge Encampment:

ROSINA SCHULTZ.....	Died	1800
CHRISTOPHER YEAKLE.....	“	1800
CHRISTOPHER KRIEBEL.....	“	1800
ANNA MARIA BEYER GERHARD...	“	1802
GEORGE ANDERS.....	“	1803
HANS CHRISTOPHER HEEBNER...	“	1804
CHRISTOPHER HOFFMAN.....	“	1804
GEORGE KRIEBEL.....	“	1805
MARIA YEAKEL.....	“	1807
SUSANNA WIEGNER.....	“	1812
ROSINA SEIPT.....	“	1820
CHRISTOPHER HEEBNER.....	“	1817

**LIST OF THE MEMBERS
OF THE
DESCENDANTS OF THE SCHWENKFELDIAN
EXILES**

JANUARY 1, 1936

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