



County of Lancaster
Pennsylvania

Commissioner Minutes Document the Early History of Lancaster County

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In 1728, residents living in the backwoods of Chester County complained that “thieves, vagabonds, and ill people” had infested the rural areas of what is now Lancaster County and petitioned for the creation of a new county. Lancaster County was formed May 10, 1729 to address these concerns and bring a new seat of government to local residents that had only recently settled in this vast wilderness. As the following examples show, Commissioner Minutes (1729-1967) within the Lancaster County Archives collection record the everyday and momentous details in the early history of Lancaster County government.

The first Lancaster County Commissioners enlisted the services of many individuals to establish its early government. They didn't have a courthouse so the first court sessions were held in a tavern owned by John Postelwaite near the Susquehanna River at Wright's Ferry ([Image #1](#)). Since Lancaster County was also without a jail, Sheriff Robert Barber built the first “goal” in 1730 at his home ([Image #2](#)). The jail was built of logs also near Wright's Ferry in hopes that it would attract the new location of the County seat. Lancaster County still needed to be divided from Chester County so a surveyor named John Taylor was paid the sum of three pounds and ten shillings for “running the division line” ([Image #3](#)).

As the new County prospered, the area now known as Penn Square (where the Soldiers & Sailors monument is located) was chosen as the spot for the first Courthouse. It was finished in 1738 and ten years later Commissioners agreed to procure a bell to place in the cupola of the Courthouse ([Image #4](#)). Still very much under the influence of England, in 1750 the Commissioners decided that Michael Stump should carve, paint, and affix the British King's Coat of Arms in the Courthouse ([Image #5](#)). More improvements were gradually added to the Courthouse. In 1788, clockmaker John Eberman Jr. was paid the sum of 550 pounds for building a new clock which was placed in the cupola tower of the Courthouse ([Image #6](#)). The Eberman clock was moved to the next courthouse in the 1850s where it kept time for residents until it was replaced in 1898.

Not lost to history, but forever recorded within the Commissioner Minutes are fascinating details which reveal how Lancaster grew from a fledgling County to a thriving destination. Uncover more pieces of Lancaster County's history within these records.

Ordered that Jo^h Sorllekwait be allowed the Sum
of Seven pounds Nineteen Shillings & ten pence
being for his Attendance & provisions. On the
Commissioners appointed by Govern^r & Council for
the Running the Division Line, betwixt the County
of Chester, and the County afores^d.

11..19..10

And Likewise the sum of Seven pound^s
to be paid him Out of the next Assessment
being the full Allowance for building a Court^{house} for
the County's service. And till such time a Mother
shall be built, by the Commissioners appointed for
that use

7..~..~

Ordered that Robert Barber be allowed the sum
of three pounds towards the building of the County
Goal at his house. - - - - - £ - 3.

Ordered that John Taylor be allowed the Sum of Three
pounds ten Shillings for Raising the Division line between
the Counties of Lancaster & Chester And likewise allow. £ 5.00.00
the Sum of One pound ten Shilling to the said J^r Taylor
for two Carriages for Raising the said line.

1100⁶
4

The Com^{rs} and Ass^{ts} mett according to adjournment and it was agreed by if approbation
of if Court and Grand Jury that a Bell be Procured for if Court house then if Com^{rs}
Agreed with Michael Sheiyok to make and Put a Pump into if well in if Prison Lot
for which he is to be Paid four Pounds then if Com^{rs} Signed sundry Precepts Directed to
if Sheriff of if County Against Divers Delinquent Collectors and after allowing orders
n^o 26 & 27 Page 88 they adjourned untill to morrow morning

To Page 87

June

2

The Com^{rs} and A/s^{rs} mett according to Adjournment and agreed with Michal
Stump to Carve Paint and affix in of Court house in of Borough of Lancaster
over of Presidents Chair of Effige of of Kings Coat of Arms of Great Britain
Then after allowing order n^o 52 page 95 they Adjourned until 9th day of
August Next

50.

John Sherman for making the black
in the front House 550.