Lancaster County: Elizabethtown

Lancaster County Pennsylvania contains the most concentrated record of Native American habitation in all of Pennsylvania. Every river valley; every tributary of the Swatara, Conoy, Chickies, Conestoga, Pequea, and Octorara Creeks has evidence of human habitation prior to European contact. These tributaries empty into the Susquehanna River. Along these creeks and streams there has been continuous human settlement, flourishing agriculture, and complex trade routes expanding throughout the continent. Two tributaries run through the Elizabethtown area: The Conoy Creek and the Conewago Creek (east) both have made this location along the Susquehanna River strategic for human habitation. Two waterways converge creating Conoy Creek, named Conejoholo (Anglicized Conoy) by the Piscataway Nation (referred to as Conoy Indians) the headwaters for the first begin at a spring on the present farm of Kenneth Myer and the second waterway, Negly Run, starts at a spring on the former Leonard Negly farm. The Conewago Creek, named by the Lenape Indians means “at the rapids.” This tributary begins at Mount Gretna Heights in Lebanon County and enters the Susquehanna River at Conewago Falls across from Conewago Creek (west) which begins in Caledonia State Park in Adams County. The creek enters the Susquehanna River at York Haven in York County. Human settlement between the Conoy and Conewago Creeks along the Susquehanna River established the foundation for Elizabethtown. Measuring four hundred and sixty-five miles, the Susquehanna is the longest river on the east coast flowing from New York and Pennsylvania through Maryland into Chesapeake Bay. In 1534 French King Francis, I colonized North America establishing New France with Jacques Cartier as Viceroy in Quebec. The Conoy and Conewago Creeks through the Susquehanna River facilitated French trade connecting the Allegheny, Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri Rivers joining the colonies of New France and Louisiana. As the Swedes, Dutch, and British established the port cities of Philadelphia and Baltimore trade along the Susquehanna River flourished and these water trade routes led to westward expansion across the continent. While the Swedes and Dutch were competing for control of the fur trade funneled through the Delaware Bay, the French had extended their fur trade into the Susquehanna watershed, shipping to Montreal. The British secured control of New York City and New Jersey from the Dutch in 1664. King Charles, II owed Admiral William Penn an unpaid debt. At his death, his son William Penn asked the king to repay the debt with land in North America. In 1681 a charter was granted giving Penn territory west of the Delaware River between New York and Maryland. In 1682 William Penn visited Pennsylvania, he returned to England in 1684, returned to America in 1699, and then went back to England in 1701 leaving James Logan as governor of the colony. In 1707 Governor Logan granted French explorer and fur trader Martin Chartier 600 acres along the Susquehanna River; presently Washington Boro. In 1708 Governor Logan invited the French explorer and fur trader Jacques LeTort’s widow, Anne, and son James to establish a trading post in present day village of Letort in Manor Township. In 1708 Governor Logan invited French explorer and fur trader Peter Bezaillion to establish a trading post where the Conoy Creek joins the Susquehanna River presently Bainbridge. From these outposts, Pennsylvania challenged France’s control of the Ohio territory which helped precipitate the French and Indian War (1754-1763). By 1717 roughly 100,000 Germans from the Palatinate immigrated to Pennsylvania. Competition for claims to land in the west was fierce and Palatine farmers paid Governor Logan four times more than the asking price; often times constructing buildings and improving the land in order to claim it before legally acquiring it. In 1719 Peter Bezaillion invited the Piscataway Indians to move from Maryland and settle with him along the Cony Creek and Susquehanna River. While the pacifist Mennonites purchased and developed
the prime agricultural land in the region, Governor Logan positioned immigrating non-pacifist Scots-Irish families in the far north in Paxtang and to the south in Octorara as a type of buffer zone between the Iroquois to the north and the contentious Maryland border to the south. Beginning in 1719 Scotch-Irish Presbyterians from County Donegal, Ireland began purchasing land from the French LeTort and Bezaillion families along the Susquehanna at Conoy and Conewago Creeks. Thomas Harris and Samuel Smith, Presbyterian members of Donegal Church established gristmills and sawmills along the creeks. In 1801 Mennonite Henry Bates Grubb purchased these mills building Mount Vernon Furnace producing iron in Elizabethtown on Zeager Road. Grubb cleared several acres of woods in Elizabethtown as well as purchased wood and charcoal from lumber sources across northern Pennsylvania shipped on the Susquehanna. Along Conoy Creek and Conewago Creek a pattern of development emerged: farmers built iron furnaces, mills and distilleries, they obtained licenses from the courts in Lancaster to sell Applejack Hard Cider turning their farmhouses into public houses. Trade routes developed past these public houses and the proprietors subdivided their farmland into lots leased or sold; thus establishing residential hamlets on roads linking the larger cities. The present site of Falmouth was a town created on Conewago Creek as a transfer point for shipping on the Susquehanna. The towns of Newhaven and Waterford along the Susquehanna were merged into contemporary Marietta. In 1726 John Galbraith raised and malted barley where Mount Joy Turnpike crosses Donegal Run. At his gristmill and distillery he made whiskey and operated a public house. Samuel Smith built Bossler Road connecting his homestead on Conoy Creek to his grist and sawmills on Conewago Creek. In 1732 Lancaster courts licensed Smith to sell New England rum. In 1735 he was elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly and chosen as Sheriff of Lancaster. In 1811 Thomas and Margaret Shiel Wilson established the town of Wilsonburgh on Conewago Creek operating a public house and leasing lots in 1812. Charles O’Donnell established O’Donnellburg operating a hotel along Harrisburg Turnpike. In 1813 James Duffy, contractor for the Lancaster, Elizabethtown, Middletown Turnpike established Irishtown. Duffy and his wife Catherine Sheridan named the streets in Irishtown after naval heroes and ships of the War of 1812. Eventually Irishtown was incorporated into Marietta. Paul Yeuts established the town of Newville or Yeutstown with a tavern on the Falmouth and Elizabethtown Turnpike along the Susquehanna River linking Marietta and Columbia to furnaces and rolling mills manufacturing iron. In 1738 the Commonwealth built a road linking Lancaster to Harrisburg presently known as Harrisburg Pike in Lancaster, Market Street in Elizabethtown, and PA Route 230. The road passed the Sign of the Bear Tavern on Conoy Creek. In 1736 the Lancaster courts licensed Thomas and Mary McKinney Harris to sell hard cider and beer at their public house; Sign of the Bear. In 1751 Harris sold the Bear Tavern to Lazarus Lowrey who leased it to Barnabus and Elizabeth Waters Hughes. In 1753 Hughes purchased the Bear Tavern before moving to Baltimore in 1761. In 1763, while living in Baltimore, Hughes divided 300 acres surrounding the Bear Tavern on Conoy Creek into lots measuring 60 feet wide by 165 feet deep. Hughes named Elizabeth Towne, (presently Elizabethtown) to honor his wife. Hughes laid out a village around a central diamond, naming the streets Market and High while inserting Cherry, Peach, and Rose alleys. You will notice in Elizabethtown, as is the case in most Pennsylvania villages, many of the streets are named in the William Penn tradition of honoring the Quaker love of botany. Philadelphia and most Pennsylvania cities and towns have streets named for “things which spontaneously grow in the country.” The word street means the measured distance between two rows of houses. The Dutch in New Amsterdam were the first to name streets on
Manhattan Island. Because early Americans were familiar with Latin and with the scientific names of plants, Elizabethtown has botanically named streets and alleys.