

# History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania.

By

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Philadelphia:

L. H. Everts & Co.

1884

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## Chapter XIX

### Manners And Customs.

Near these poles were great kettles containing melted tallow, which floated on the top of hot water, and into the kettles the women would dip the strands of tow and hang them, each in its place, on the stick to dry. Before the proper amount of tallow was deposited by this slow process on the wick - for the thicker the candle the more brilliant the light - the weary dipper would walk many a mile before her work was finished. After the candles were made they had to be carried on the poles to a dry, sunny spot in the garret, where they could harden and become thoroughly dry. The good wife, however, had to see that the best room was sprinkled with clean white sand, and it was a matter of pride to draw various figures thereupon with the broom. The high-backed walnut, and (after the introduction of the wood as appropriate for furniture during Queen Anne's reign) mahogany chair and tables were waxed and polished till they reflected like a mirror. In every house there were the warming-pans of brass, which must be kept scoured and hung in easy reach, so that they could be used to take the chill off the sheets in bedrooms that were as cold "as Greenland's icy mountains." And when flax was prepared for spinning the matron sat early and late; particularly during the long winter evenings the humming noise of the big wheel was constantly heard.

To be sure, the lads and lasses of that day had their merry-making, although their sports to us seem somewhat like hard work. Flax-pulling, when the boys and girls pulled along together and bound it into small sheaves, was regarded as fun, while the "husking" parties at night were looked forward to with great expectations and much preparations; quilting and carpet-ball sociables - the latter after the Revolution, when people discovered that from rags a strong, serviceable covering for floors could be made - were much in vogue, and were concluded usually with dancing and boisterous games.

**Evening Amusements.** - Usually at night, when the winter evening meal was ended and the room had been put to rights, the family would assemble round the open-mouthed fireplace in the kitchen, where on the hearth the massive andirons sustained a crackling mass of hickory-wood, lapped by the flaming tongues as the blaze "went roaring up the chimney wide." Along the

heavy, unplastered joists of the floor above, darkened with age and smoke, from iron hooks were suspended a goodly number of portly hams, dried beef, long ropes of onions, and dried apples. On the deal table; without a cover, a tallow candle shed a dim, uncertain light around the apartment, and often the black and crisped wick required to be snuffed, while not unfrequently a thief would get in the candle, and the tallow on one side would run to the base of the stick in a rivulet of melted grease. In one of the angles of the room a large corner cupboard afforded through its glass doors glimpses of an array of blue china which at this day would have been the idol of the collection craze, and an eight-day clock in a tall mahogany case ticked in the chilly hall, while the moon moving along the opening in the dial, represented usually by a cherub's face, plump and florid-cheeked, told the farmer when and when not to plant his crops. Around the cheery fire the family, seated on hard, uncushioned chairs, gathered, the females spinning, or perchance Miss-in-her-teens, who had paid a visit to her relatives in the city, would be busily employed working in crewel geometrical figures of a dog, sheep, or other fabulous animal or plant, the like of which never existed "in the heavens above, the earth below, or the waters under the earth." The hunting- or watch-dog, curled close to the fire, dozed as his owner smoked, talked of the weather, the crops, the state of the market, his or others' stock, or laid out the next day's work.

Perchance, when a neighbor dropped in, the conversation would relate to the social happenings of the vicinity, or at intervals of that great world, the city, but it usually drifted into recollections of the old people, narrations of hunting adventures, and marvelous tales of witches, goblins, and haunted places. The old people would relate traditionary stories of Margaret Mattson, the witch of Ridley Creek, and her divers ill-doings; they would tell how it was recorded by Hesselius, the Swedish priest, that in the early time of the settlement rain fell on a particular black oak for fifteen days, while not a drop of moisture touched the other trees in the neighborhood; and how a captain of a certain ship, noted for his profanity and crimes, while sailing up the Delaware, was seized bodily by the devil, who hurled him into the river, where he was drowned, in full sight of many lookers-on.<sup>1</sup> But, strange as it may seem, no stories of men suddenly and mysteriously changed into wolves, the were-wolf of Swedish folk-lore, seem ever to have taken root in this soil. There would be, however, narration of the terrible and supernatural. **It would be told how Blackbeard, the pirate, used to anchor his vessel off Marcus Hook, where, at the house of a Swedish woman whose name, Margaret, he transformed into Marcus, because of the locality of her dwelling, he and his crew held mad revels there, and the expression "Discord Lane" became so connected with the town's story that it has ever since been preserved as the title of one of its streets.** So, too, would they describe the Bloody Tree, near Chester, on the King's Highway, whose leaves were spotted with gore, and from whose branches, if a twig was cut or broken off, oozed a sap-like blood,<sup>2</sup> - the indelible mark of a brutal, ...

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If tradition be accepted as authority, at the conclusion of the seventeenth and the first and second decades of the eighteenth century the pirates which then infested the Atlantic coast from New England to Georgia would frequently stop at Marcus Hook, where they would revel, and when deep in their cups would indulge in noisy disputation and broils, until one of the streets in that ancient borough from that fact was known as Discord Lane, which name the same thoroughfare has retained for nearly two centuries. **Blackbeard, who for many years kept the coast in alarm,**

with his crew it is said often visited Marcus Hook, where at the house of a Swedish woman there, to whom he gave the title of Marcus, although her name was really Margaret, he was accustomed to indulge in the wildest disorder and drunken debauches.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trench, or Drummond, let his family name be what it may, was as grotesquely conspicuous a villain as can be found in the annals of crime. Blackbeard, for that was his piratical name, in person tall, of swarthy complexion, and with an exuberant black beard of extraordinary length covering his whole face, from which his sobriquet was derived, and which he used to twist into numberless small tails, the ends tied with bows of brightly-colored ribbons, was a picture sufficiently repulsive, one would think, without calling in, as additional decoration when in battle, three braces of huge pistols dangling across his shoulders, and lighted matches protruding from beneath his hat to illuminate his dusky face and savage eyes with a supernatural glare. His was, indeed, when prepared for action, a figure to be gazed upon with fear and apprehension. Socially he was a sensual polygamist, whose harem of fourteen wives was the scene of brutalities such as even his hardened crew could not witness unmoved with pity, and yet which no one dared to reprove. To reader his power over his lawless men absolute, he announced that he had entered into a compact with hell, and once, when at sea, a mysterious personage appeared on the ship, sometimes aloft, sometimes on deck, sometimes below, who spoke to no one but Blackbeard, and who disappeared as secretly as he had come among them. The crew firmly believed that this was the veritable devil himself, and that this was but one of many dark communications their chieftain held with the powers of evil. At another time when afloat, it is recorded he said, maddened with drink, "Come, let us make a hell of our own, and try how long we can bear it." Going below with some of his crew, he caused the hatches to be closed, and had several large tubs filled with sulphur and other combustible articles, to which he set fire; then while the thick choking vapors rolled in dense columns throughout the ship, he danced and filled the sickening air with his profanity, until those above released the half-suffocated and fainting men from their perilous situation, which, apparently, gave the piratical chieftain no respiratory uneasiness. His convivial pleasantries were also of a similar hideous character; for once when drunk, seated at the head of his cabin table, he blew out the candles, cocked his pistols, and crossing his hands fired on each side at his associates, one of whom was wounded so desperately that he never recovered. This incident Blackbeard often himself related in gleeful moments, stating in conclusion, "If I did not now and then kill one of my men, they would forget who I am." In the fall of the year 1718 the Governor of Virginia sent Lieut. Maynard with two vessels to cruise for Trench, and on the 21st of November he encountered the pirate, who, fortunately, then had but a small crew on board his ship. A bloody fight resulted, - Maynard and Blackbeard contested hand to hand, - and it is related that the corsair received over twenty wounds with swords, and almost as many bullets struck him, before he was slain. Maynard cut off the dreaded pirate's head and affixed it to the bowsprit of his vessel, and then he entered Hampton Roads with the ghastly, grinning token of his success exposed to public view.

At the meeting of the Provincial Council in Philadelphia, Aug. 11, 1716, Governor William Keith called I the attention of Council to "the great losses which this colony has already sustained beyond any of its neighbors by our Trade being blocked up and infested with pirates at the Capes of this river and bay," and further informed them "that one Trench, a noted pirate, who has done the greatest mischief of any to this place has been lurking for some days in and about this town."<sup>2</sup> We know that on Friday, Sept. 1, 1698, a pirate ship and tender landed fifty armed men and plundered Lewistown.<sup>3</sup> In May, 1701, a French pirate appeared above Bombay Hook,<sup>4</sup> and for many years thereafter the colonial records show the constant alarms the province was subjected to by fears of piratical demonstration on the settlements on the river.