

Louisiana, or Virginia, or Pennsylvania?

..an article by Canon Rev. Richard W. Davies

In 1682, a Frenchman named Robert Cavalier passed through the region of today's Pittsburgh on his way to the Mississippi River. To honor Louis XIV, he names this area Louisiana. William Penn also came to his new colony for the first time in 1682. In a 1731 English map, the boundary between Pennsylvania and Louisiana was the Susquehanna River. A 1755 French map ("Atlas Universal," W&J College), shows the boundary to be the western ridge of the Allegheny Mountains. The future Pittsburgh could have been in Louisiana!

In 1748, the colony of Virginia took the initiative to form the Ohio Company for business reasons. Only then did seaboard Pennsylvanians show any interest in the three rivers and a western boundary of Penn's province. A King's grant of some 500,000 acres south of the Ohio River was given to the Ohio Company to develop the area for settlers' housing. Christopher Gist was sent from Virginia in 1751 to explore this area. Gist made a treaty at Logstown (Ambridge, Pa.) with the local Shawanese Indians in 1752, to win their favor supporting English settlements around the three rivers.

In 1753, Governor Dinwiddie sent 21 year old George Washington to tell the French commandant at Venango to leave the entire area. Dinwiddie in 1754 ordered Fort Prince George to be built at the point of the three rivers. (See a painting of this scene, in our Bride's Room.) On April 17, 700 French troops led by Capt. Contrecoeur came down the Allegheny river and occupied the unfinished English fort. It became Ft. Duquesne. Thus began the French and Indian

Adding to the confusion over boundaries, King Charles had also granted the province of Maryland to Lord Baltimore in 1632, 49 years before the King favored William Penn. To settle their boundary dispute, Mason and Dixon ran a line in 1767, stopping some 36 miles short of today's western end. Now add the province of Virginia into the mix. Queen Elizabeth earmarked that land in 1583, without any boundaries. King James in 1602 perfected her grant, which then allowed Virginia to claim all of the Monongahela and Ohio valleys (Ft. Pitt) and all of the Northwest Territory. No colony or post-Revolutionary War state recognized Virginia's claim. Pennsylvania was a province, controlled by the Penn family as proprietors, while a Crown colony of Virginia could be changed at the whim of the King of England.

In 1772, John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, became governor of Virginia. He came to Ft. Pitt in 1773, and noted that Pennsylvania courts met at Hannastown (Ligonier) and Virginia courts met at Pittsburgh. What followed were disputes and riots over the counter-claims of the courts of the two colonies. In May, 1774 the Pennsylvania commissioners wanted the Mason & Dixon line extended westward, with the north-south line on the west to match the irregular shoreline of the Delaware River on the east. Dunmore renamed Ft. Pitt as Ft. Dunmore, claiming all of the land from the Laurel Ridge westward. In December, he moved the Augusta County court from Staunton to Ft. Dunmore. This area was now the District of West Augusta. When the Revolutionary War began, Virginia and Pennsylvania united to write the Monongahela Declaration of

(and Virginia) War. Pennsylvania was yet not involved. What followed included the surrender of Washington at Ft. Necessity on July 4 and the defeat of Gen. Braddock's army on July 9, 1755.

The French next prompted local Indians to attack settlers east of Ft. DuQuesne. When Britain sent Gen. John Forbes to dislodge the French here in 1758, the found Ft. DuQuesne deserted. Ft. Pitt was erected by Gen. Stanwix in 1759. The Treaty of 1763 ended all French occupation east of the Mississippi and in Canada.

Pennsylvania was awakened to the fact that Virginia claimed land in what should have been Penn's province, if the southwest boundary line had been completed.

Independence from Britain, on May 16, 1775, one year before the July 4, 1776 Declaration of Independence. In 1776, the District of West Augusta was divided into three counties - Ohio, Yohogania and Monongalia - with the court at Augusta Town, just west of Catfish Camp (Washington, Pa). An August 1779 proposal was made to extend the Mason and Dixon line westward 5 degrees, with the meridian line straight up to Lake Erie. Virginia and Pennsylvania accepted the proposal in 1780. Washington County was formed on March 28, 1781. The lines were completed on August 23, 1785. The boundary controversy was ended.

Reference: "*The Boundary Controversy*" by Boyd Crumrine, *The Annals of Carnegie Museum*, pp.505-525

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