

An Overholtzer teamster with the Braddock Expedition, 1755

The most complete account of the Pennsylvania German teamsters which were recruited by Benjamin Franklin for the support of the Braddock Expedition is given by Arthur D Graeff in "The Relations between the Pennsylvania Germans and the British Authorities (1750-1776)" published by the Pennsylvania German Society in Volume 47 of their proceedings in 1939. The paper was read in Hershey PA in 1934 and contains 271 pages. The Braddock expedition is described in Chapter IV, pp 77-94. The same event is described by Douglas Southall Freeman in "George Washington", Volume II, chapters II through VII, and contains a good account of the preparation of the campaign and the battle.

When Braddock's troops reached Frederick, Maryland from Williamsburg, he found only 15 wagons and less than 100 horses had been collected of the 1100 beeve___?, 2500 horses and 250 wagons promised by Virginia and Maryland. Upon unloading the wagons, the provisions were spoiled so that they were condemned by camp physicians and were buried. The Quarter-Master General of the Army, Sir John St Clair, suggested that wagons be obtained from the "Dutch settlers at the foot of the Blue Ridge" and that he would invade Pennsylvania to impress men, horses and wagons.

A conference of governors from five colonies met in Alexandria, Virginia on April 14th, with Benjamin Franklin attending at the request of the Pennsylvania Assembly, as postmaster-general of all the colonies. He pointed out that the choice of the route through Virginia was longer and more difficult than if the choice had been through Pennsylvania. Franklin was asked whether he could obtain support to which he replied that he would contract to supply the wagons and horses on the conditions that he might do it in his own way. He was commissioned to hire 150 wagons and a number of horses, after he reached Frederick, Maryland. He continued to Lancaster where court was in session and prevailed on the Judge Allen to address the assembled farmers on their duty to support the King and furnish horses and wagons, and send him an exact list of the horses and vehicles they could furnish. The same procedure was used in the York County Courts. Franklin published a handbill in both German and English, addressed "To the inhabitants of the Counties of Lancaster, York, and Cumberland." He urged support voluntarily to avoid intervention by St Clair and a body of soldiers. The conditions for hire were:

"WHEREAS 150 Wagons with 4 horses to each wagon, and 1500 Saddle or Pack-Horses are wanted for the service of his Majesty's Forces now about to rendezvous at Wills's Creek; and his Excellency General Braddock, hath been pressed to empower me to contract for the hire of the same. I hereby give Notice, that I shall attend for that purpose at Lancaster from this time till next Wednesday Evening. And at York from next Thursday Morning till Friday evening; where I shall be ready to agree for wagons and teams, or single horses, on the following terms, viz:

1st. That there shall be paid for each wagon with 4 good horses and a driver, Fifteen shillings per diem: And for each able horse with a pack saddle and furniture, two shillings per diem. And for each able horse without a saddle, eighteen pence per diem.

2nd. That the Pay commence from the Time of their joining the Forces at Will's Creek, (which must be on or before the twentieth of May ensuing) and that a reasonable allowance be made over and above for the Time necessary for their traveling to Will's Creek and home again after their Discharge.

3rdly. Each Wagon and Team, and every Saddle or Packhorse is to be valued by indifferent persons, chosen between me and the owner, and in case of the loss of any wagon, team or other horse

in the service, the price according to such valuation, is to be allowed and paid.

4thly. Seven days pay is to be advanced and paid in hand by me to the owner of each wagon and team, or horse, at the time of contracting, if required; and the Remainder to be paid by General Braddock, or by the Paymaster of the Army, at the Army, at the time of their Discharge, or from time to time as it shall be demanded.

5thly. No Drivers of Wagons, or Persons taking care of the hired horses, are on any account to be called upon to do the Duty of Soldiers, or be other-wise employed than in conducting or taking care of their carriage and horses.

6thly. All Oats, Indian corn or other forage, that wagons or horses bring to the camp more than is necessary for the subsistence of the horses, is to be taken for the Use of the Army, and a reasonable price paid for it.

Note. My son William Franklin is empowered to enter into like Contracts with any person in Cumberland County.

B. Franklin (see Penna. Arch. II, 294)

Within three days after the announcement 50 more teams were offered than were needed. The new road constructed by the province of Pennsylvania from York to the Potomac was covered with huge, linen covered wagons drawn by four horse teams. The wagons were laden with supplies for the army -- meat, flour and grain from the farms -- while live sheep and oxen trotted alongside the wagons. They started on 15 May and 100 wagons reached Fort Cumberland (on Will's Creek) on the 27th and the remainder by 1 June.

Supplies were collected: Thirty wagons were sent to "in Chester over 60 miles of rocky country and 300 pack horses were sent eastward to "Conestogee", a distance of 90 miles for flour. Many of the horses were lost after they had joined the camp and some were "carried home by their owners." The pasture was poor and the underfed beasts which were not lost "grew very weak". Wagon masters in charge of 40 wagons and horse masters in charge of 7 horses were appointed which alleviated the situation but the rough country between Cumberland, Maryland and Uniontown, PA. was traversed slowly due to climbing to 3000 feet over ridges and traversing swamps in the ravines.

When disaster overtook the expedition, the wagons were pressed into service of carrying the wounded on retreat. Only 23 officers and 364 men survived out of a force of 1459. When Braddock was hit he was starting to withdraw the wagons and supplies. As men fell, the others fell back toward the wagons but as sunset approached and the Indian cries and heavier enemy fire was more than could be endured by wagoners who had held their teams for hours. Most of the men in charge of the vehicles cut loose the horses, mounted and made off as fast as they could for the ford. Fortunately for the survivors, the Indians remained to loot the wagons, scalp the wounded and dead and rob the bodies. Washington was sent back to meet a column commanded by Col Dunbar to obtain wagons and supplies for the survivors. The survivors reached Dunbar's camp where the wounded Braddock ordered a retreat for the 12th but so many stragglers arrived that the destruction of 150 wagons, and the power, guns and provisions was not completed until the 13th when the force withdrew to Will's Creek.

The payment for the lost wagons and horses and services was delayed. Some farmers sold their vouchers to speculators for less than face value. In late February 1756, Robert Leake, a

commissioner from the King, brought money to pay for the teams. A commission appointed by Governor Morris sat for 10 days in Lancaster to receive the claims of voucher holders. Of the 196 names listed in the settlement of the wagoner's accounts, 113 are German in origin. The record is in Lewis Burd Walker "Settlement of the Wagoner Accounts". The German names cited by Graeff were Overholtzer, Graff, Schank, Hartmann, Brenhar, Huffman, Rohrer, Willheim, Bricker, Mummau, Meyer, Schnavley, Bauer, Schulz, etc. In October 1978, I found that the British Public Record office at Kew has the account of payment for the Braddock expedition on file in Treasury papers (T/1) and the payment for horses and wagons are in file 370/17.