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The Man Who Set Our Boundaries

**The Life, Family, Character and Work of Thomas Fairman,
Quaker and Surveyor**

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BEING an in-depth researcher into the early history of our beloved state and in particular that of the first three counties and the lower territories (now the state of Delaware), allow me to share with you some facets of my findings.

The arrival to our shores of the first "adventurers," as Penn was pleased to call them, was inextricably tied in with the land. Where was a particular purchaser to be located in such a vast wilderness?

Penn's land promotion schemes, his agents and his success in bringing thousands of diverse peoples to the "green country towne" and the areas about it, is a story that must be put together from the patchwork that is available to us.

Again we seek to take a part of this remarkable story into which our research has been done and endeavor to show the contribution of one man, Thomas Fairman, especially in his relation to our land and its layout to those who were first purchasers. One cannot deal with the history of our early land owners, especially of Philadelphia and Bucks County (and to some degree Chester County), without confronting the remarkable work of this early surveyor. To develop in much more detail the, as yet untold, story of this man and his work is the purpose of this present paper. His energy and efforts were unbounded in setting new people on their new land during the first thirty-five years of the Penns' ownership of the Province of Pennsylvania.

Let us not forget that William Penn, total Quaker as he became, had been brought up in a wealthy, aristocratic, military family. His overall plans for the "Holy Experiment," as he was prone to call it,

E. Paul Dilg, well-known local historian, presented this paper before a meeting of the Old York Road Historical Society on Nov. 9, 1976.

had still within its structure of operations some feudal aspects. He himself never objected (and in fact was pleased) to be called "The Absolute Proprietor" of his Province.

It becomes needful to narrow down this interesting story of our beginnings on the land. The question of who and how and where and why the newcomers were settled on the particular plots to fulfill their purchase or rental rights is a challenging one.

In order to accomplish this work, Penn pressed for the preparation of a map on which those who bought from him might see their land located upon it. He appointed commissioners to deal with land matters and a Surveyor-General, Thomas Holme of Dublin. He was assisted by a number of Deputies, each of whom was familiar with certain areas for in some cases they were already residents for a number of years prior to Penn's Charter to the Province in 1681. One of this group was Thomas Fairman of Shackamaxon (spelled in many ways).

Thomas Holme produced the map which Penn wanted about 1687 with the then assigned purchasers' names set out upon it. We know now that it was a progressive work—some of the names of ownership dating from as late as 1735. It therefore must have had a series of printings and the form in which we now know it was its final issue of a continuing series. The history of this map has been dealt with by a number of historians who have enriched the knowledge of our early land matters by their efforts.¹

Thomas Holme and his family came over into the Province in June, 1682. He had been preceded by a number of the appointed commissioners and mainly by the work of Captain William Markham, one of them. One of the principal assistants was Thomas Fairman, already here since at least 1679. The placement of the great city and its immediate environs, the so-called Liberty Lands,² and beyond these, the plantations themselves, comprising the basic part of the lands purchased by those so-called one hundred shareholders in England.

How the particular purchaser was so placed upon the map poses an intriguing question. Did Thomas Holme do it alone? Did Penn play

¹ See "Thomas Holme, Surveyor General and City Planner" by Frederic Swing Crispin, Volume XII of OYRHS Bulletin.

² Both Northern Liberties, east of the Schuylkill, and the Western Liberties, to become Blockley Township, west of the Schuylkill.

a part? Did the purchaser—once a map was available—have a say? We do know that the grid pattern on the map—particularly that area east of the Schuylkill River through which the great Susquehanna Street Road was to run from the Delaware to the Susquehanna River—was Thomas Holme's brainchild. The implementation of the idea was mainly in the hands of Thomas Fairman as Holme's Deputy in this area. Hence arises the story of "The Man Who Set Our Borders." What now comprises Montgomery County became his primary field of work, but considerable land portions in Bucks and Chester counties show the imprint of his early hand.

Whenever the great, majestic, Holme's map is shown, we capture the vision which Holme had in laying out in the wilderness of his day, assisted by his Deputies, that which has become a reality in our day in the form of many of the great highways whose layout are, even now, as he planned them.

Not too much can be found about Thomas Fairman and his family. From many scattered sources, we gain some view of him, his wife, and children. Recently I discovered a paper in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, compiled in 1928 by Miss Mame Ellison Wood, entitled "The Fairman Family." A copy was made available to me for which I render public thanks to the Society. The paper does give much data on the family, but nothing on his life, character or work—this is the void our paper attempts to fill.

Thomas's father was William Fairman from Hertford (Hartford). The Friends' records, deposited in Devonshire House, London (Genealogical Society of Pa., Vol. VIII, p. 306) show that he had two sons, Robert and Thomas, both Friends. A third son, Francis, came to America by 1701. He knew the Indian language, as we learn from the Penn-Logan correspondence (Vol. I, p. 70). No exact dates are available for the father or the three sons as far as births are concerned. Robert, a brewer, remained in England where he lived and died in the Parish of St. Olave's, Southwark, County of Surrey. He was probably born between 1655-1660, married Mary Wilkins twelfth month, third day, 1680, and died before 1718. He was a purchaser at an early date of a number of tracts of land and became entwined with his brother Thomas, the surveyor, in many land deals. It appears that his money and his holdings, as a result of investment through the hands of Thomas, became somewhat involved—even to the point where Robert would say of his brother, using a pun on the family name, that

Thomas's handling was found to be not very "Fair-man-like" when it came to Robert's interests. More on Robert will unfold.

Thomas, the first-born son, was born between 1650 and 1660. There is no record of his mother's name. His arrival date in America can be fixed at about 1677-1679. He was not likely a planter and came first to the colony at Burlington, West Jersey.

One of the Proprietors of West Jersey was John Kinsey, Sr., a resident there. He had come from Herfordshire, England, the family seat of the Fairman family. Very likely his daughter, Elizabeth Kinsey, knew Thomas Fairman. Kinsey died in 1677, leaving Elizabeth his heir. With her inheritance, she purchased a fine tract of about 300 acres from one of the early Swedes who had settled on the west bank of the Delaware. Whether the large home later occupied by Thomas and his wife, had been built by Laurence Cock, the original Swedish owner, cannot be accurately determined. Elizabeth made her purchase March 30, 1678. Laurence Cock had himself held the land as an inheritance from his father, Peter Cock. This had formed a $\frac{1}{8}$ th share of 1,800 acres of Shackamaxon lands, or as 300 acres for Peter Cock's share. (Penn'a Archives 2, Vol. XIX 73, 477). On July 12, 1678, Elizabeth Kinsey also acquired by an Indian deed, a large island in the Delaware, off the 300 acres of Shackamaxon lands. It contained some 300 acres and was later known as Petty's Island.

Thomas Fairman had been busy acquiring land himself. Under date of March 12, 1678, he obtained a patent from the court at Upland on 260 acres in what is now Bensalem Township, Bucks County. On June 8, 1680, he obtained a patent on 200 acres in what was to become Oxford Township, County of Phila.

After these land purchases, we find in the Friends' records at Burlington, West Jersey, the marriage of Thomas Fairman of Shackamaxon "on ye River Delaware" and Elizabeth Kinsey on Dec. 24, 1680 at John Woolston's house, Burlington, before twenty witnesses.

The large house which stood upon the 300 acre purchase of Elizabeth Kinsey has a very interesting history. When and by whom it was originally built, remains a mystery. The Fairman family moved out of it when Penn first arrived and granted Penn its use as a home during his first winter in the Province. It is often referred to as stately and of large size for that early day. When it was demolished in 1825, a corner stone was found bearing the date of 1702 with the initials "T.F." It might have been associated with an addition to an existing

structure. This house and the grounds fronting it along the Delaware River are perhaps best known as the actual, or perhaps legendary, site of Penn's famous treaty with the Indians. This has been immortalized in the painting depicting the event by Benjamin West. The great elm tree, the wampum belt, are vividly portrayed in the picture, now hanging in the entrance of the Pennsylvania Hospital.

An interesting document rendered William Penn by Thomas Fairman, dated December 10, 1713, gives many interesting facts. Perhaps the surveyor felt the approaching time of his death (which took place about August to December, 1714) and desired to have his outstanding debts paid. This "release" as it was called was found and recorded in 1785 in Philadelphia Deed Book D-13-474. Its title is "A Release of Thomas Fairman for all demands in his old accounts and in accounts of survey to the Proprietor, 10^d-10^{mo}, 1713." Many interesting items relate to Fairman renting his home to various commissioners of the governor, of travels with the governor himself to look out desirable land, especially the location of Springfield Manor. This document has often been quoted and deserves to be printed in full.

It was not only as a surveyor and a Deputy to Thomas Holme, the Surveyor-General, that Fairman served the Proprietor and the Province. His first service in an official capacity is his appointment on August 3, 1681, as the 5th listed member of the First Provincial Council at Upland. He affixed a firm and clear signature to the document, a facsimile of which can be seen in the Scharf & Westcott History of Philadelphia, Vol. I, p. 94. His release for services due to governor also mentions his officiating as clerk to the Council, for which a charge was rendered. He also appears as a Justice at the second court held at Upland on November 30, 1681. He was mentioned as the High Sheriff of the County of Philadelphia under the date of Jan. 18, 1702/3, but his election to that office cannot be verified. He is known to have been an attorney for the Penn's Land Company in London in 1699. In addition to these areas of public service in which he served, Fairman was also a surveyor, the Deputy to Thomas Holme, and even the supposed holder of the office of Surveyor-General after the death of Edward Pennington. This important post, which he had so much desired, is supposed to have been made Oct. 17, 1702, but again, there is no verification. Because of his early knowledge of the land, his many travels back into more remote sections, and his work with the early Swedes and the actual setting out of the city itself, would have

recommended him as the one to fill the vacancy upon the death of Thomas Holme.

Penn seemed to have a question about Fairman and James Logan, Penn's secretary of the Province, had little in the way of good words for him. Edward Pennington was given the appointment at Holme's death and again after Pennington's death in 1702, the vacancy was held open and not given to Fairman. The Penn-Logan correspondence has many references to this matter. Both Penn and Logan speak of Fairman with doubt and suspicion.

Holme's vision of a great road from the Delaware to the Susquehanna was worked on by Fairman. No one knew the territory east of the Schuylkill better than he. When the idea of the Dublins Three was designed by Holmes (Lower Dublin, Second Dublin or Abington, and Upper Dublin), Fairman got to work and all of these townships readily took shape at a very early date. This presents us with the question as to where and how much of the early work was done by Thomas Fairman—not only in what is now Montgomery County, but in other areas as well, including the actual city with its lots assigned to the first purchasers.

In a most interesting article entitled "The Planting of a City" by Hannah Benner Roach,³ she discusses the matter but brings little factual light on who the actual surveyors were. We do know that Richard Noble had been given the task of surveying the Liberties and died before completing that work. It was finished by Thomas Fairman. The earliest work on the city lots was most likely done by Richard Noble and Thomas Fairman. We do know the town of Frankford was set out from a part of his own Shackamaxon land, now held by him in right of his wife's purchase from Laurence Cock. Lots in the town of Frankford were set out as early as 1684. A lease for 28 years for one of them was made to Robert Jeffs on 10^d—10^{mo}, 1684, by Fairman himself.

Before further detail of his surveying work is presented, it might be well with somewhat more exactness to cull from the records certain facets which will convey a better picture of the character of the man. We turn to the Penn-Logan correspondence and draw some direct excerpts from a few of these letters:

³ published in the Pa. Mag. of Hist & Biog, January & April 1968, Vol. XCII, No. 1 & 2.

William Penn to James Logan, 8^{da} 7^{mo} 1701:

“The present Welsh from England are divers of them rich and will want quantities (of land) and Thomas Fairman undertakes to accommodate them handsomely.” (Vol. I, L73) (Perhaps a reference to North Wales or Gwynedd as Fairman did not survey in the Welsh tract of Chester County.)

Logan writing to Penn, 11^{da} 3^{mo} 1702:

“I know not what to do with T.F. Had he any truth in him he would show it to thee!” (Vol. I-103).

The question in the minds of Penn and Logan about the filling of the Surveyor-General's office after Edward Pennington's death, already has been mentioned and these samples from their letters throw additional light on this matter.

Penn to Logan, 24^{da} 12^{mo} 1702:

“If T. Fairman were of credit with people, he might help thee: he has capacity, but not what he thinks. I must refer the management of him to thee. He most basely injured me when here, by his suggestions to the purchasers, as he confessed at parting, though he denied it on board the Canterbury, and in righteousness owes me reparation which he has promised me and I have no scruple of conscience that it be made me at their cost, that made him their tool for my abuse and hardship . . . T.F.'s brother's wife (his brother Robert, from whom he held a power of attorney to handle land transactions) is a large sharp upon him to me.”

Some authorities give the date of 3^{da} 2^{mo} 1703 as the date for Fairman's actual commission to the office of Surveyor-General. The 1957-8 Penn'a Manual (p. 958) under the Land Office, lists the Surveyors-General. The third holder of the office, following Edward Pennington, is Thomas Fairman, with his date of commission being October 29, 1702. This would precede by about two months the letter of Penn to Logan above-quoted which hardly conveys the impression that he had been given the position of such high trust as Surveyor-General of the Province! That the October 29, 1702 date for such a commission is surely incorrect is sustained by a letter of James Logan

to H. Hollingsworth (Surveyor of Chester County), dated 14^{da} 2^{mo} 1703 in which we find these words:

“to Thomas Fairman and Alan Powell, surveyors . . .”

These two men were surveyors only.

The strongest statement made by Logan with reference to the work of Fairman is found in his letter to Penn dated 10^{da} 6^{mo} 1706:

“T.F. seldom fails of disappointing those who depend on him . . . as for overplus (that is surveys made whereby large excess acreage was given) it has been T.F.’s chief walk, and therefore where he has set his foot a second time, there is nothing to be expected, though no man leaves better slices at first, but it was always to go for them again, which he scarce ever failed to do, and therefore the over measure of this County (Phila.) will prove very inconsiderable.” (Vol. II 151/2)

We turn to another series of letters to Penn wherein the correspondent was none other than Thomas Holme, Penn’s appointed Surveyor-General and maker of the great map of the Province. In a letter from Holme dated “Wellspring” (his home on the Delaware River) 24^{da} 1^{mo} 1688, wherein he discussed with Penn the progress of land surveyed to that date, he singles out Springfield (Manor, later Township) and says:

“Though Thomas Fairman hath dealt falsely with thee therein . . .” Fairman had altered the lines of the Manor as we see them in the map of the Province so as to accommodate land in Cheltenham Township for himself and his brother Robert. (Pa. Mag. of Hist. & Biog. Vol XC, p. 502)

As a careful balance to all of these foregoing excerpts, most of which place him in a questionable light with relation to the best interests of the Proprietor, we should look at what Thomas himself has to say to Penn in an undated letter:

“Governor I have about six thousand acres of land of my own yet to take up, and much more for my friends.”

Being here on the land for at least ten years previous to this writing, he had been able to take up in his own right and in right of his brother Robert, choice plots of land and waited for the exact time, to his ad-

vantage to set them out as to particular locations. Continuing the quote, Fairman says:

“I can say, since I came from England, I have never had in all the value of forty shillings for any surveys or other business done whatsoever . . . I laid out many manors for the Proprietor and never had a penny consideration. And also, besides all that, the Proprietor may remember how I have been as his boy as I may say at a whistle . . . and my unprofitable travels with Thomas Holme, beside my business, who at last died my debtor as per account one hundred and forty seven pounds of which I never had a penny . . . I have neither house or lot in town. Governor, accept my endeavors in computing and valuing those lands. I am sure I am not under for quantity, nor over for intrinsic value . . . So with my service I take leave, who am thy friend . . . Tho. Fairman”

Here we have Fairman's rebuttal to the criticisms brought against him. Penn had been very lax in properly allowing remuneration to his faithful servants. Always pressed for money due to the dishonest handling of his funds in London, he was at a loss to be able to offer even minimal salaries to those who did the most for him and this included Thomas Fairman. So Logan, Fairman, Powell and many others were charged with handling Penn's interests so as to allow gains to themselves. Perhaps this was necessary.

We now deal with the work that Fairman did — the ultimate result of which was to enhance the development of the Province to the good of Penn and his heirs thereafter and giving, at the same time, opportunities to make profit on the land to his own advantage as well as for his brother Robert.

It has been ascertained that Thomas held land as owner in his own right by some 32 deeds or patents, giving him ownership of some 20,300 acres! In addition, his brother Robert for whom Thomas acted as attorney held by deed or patent some 4,350 acres more—a total of 24,650 acres over which Thomas exercised control. The vast total would equal the areas of the townships of Abington, Cheltenham, and Upper Dublin. These holdings were widely spread, mostly being in the county of Philadelphia, with some in Bucks County. They were constantly purchased and sold, latched onto at times with questions at-

tached, delivered to new owners with clouds upon their titles—many such cases are on record in the minutes of the Land Commissioners in Pa. Archives Second Series, Vol. XIX.

The intertwining of the interests of Thomas and his brother Robert, (which would appear to make Robert the silent partner) enabled the surveyor “in the know” to accomplish much to their mutual profit.

Our final considerations will narrow to the actual work as a surveyor which Thomas performed in his lifetime. This covered a period of about 31 years. My research can support 254 actual surveys, covering the dates Feb. 28, 1682 to the last of record, Nov. 4, 1713. A partial record is to be seen in the Warrant and Survey Book I-372 in City Archives of Philadelphia. Some 368,785 acres were surveyed by this remarkable man! Over the period of 2½ years from August 1682 to January 1685/6, some 161 surveys are shown which total 119,147 acres. It would prove interesting to chronologically and geographically develop these figures. Much of the present Montgomery County area, east of the Schuylkill bears the imprint of his work. A partial listing by date and area would look like this—with large parts of these townships covered:

1682	August	Lower Dublin, Oxford & Cheltenham Twps.
	Sept.	Byberry Twp.
	Nov.	Bristol, Roxborough & Abington Twps.
1683	March	Bensalem Twp. (Bucks Co.), parts only
	May	Moreland Manor
	Aug.	Upper Dublin Twp.
	Oct.	Germantown Township
	Nov.	Montgomery Twp., Phila. Co., Warminster (Bucks Co.)
1683/4	Feb.	Southampton Twp., Bucks Co.
1684	Apr.	Gwynedd or North Wales Twp.
	Jun.	Horsham Twp.
1684/5	Feb.	Whitpain Twp.
1685	Aug.	Warrington Twp., Bucks Co.
	Oct.	Worcester Twp. (2nd Bristol Twp.)
	Dec.	part of Providence Twp.

1685/6	Jan.	Manor of Highlands & Makefield Twp. (Bucks Co.)
1688	Jul.	Tinicum Twp. (Bucks Co.)
1692/3	Feb.	Providence Twp.
1698/9	Jan.	Skippack & Perkiomen Twps.
1701	Oct.	Newcastle County, parts
1701/2	Feb.	Hanover Twp., Springfield Manor
1704	Mar.	Hatfield Twp.
@1708		Manor of Perkasio, Bucks Co.
1709	Mar.	Limerick Twp.

It appears that much of the work which he did shows plainly on the Holme map of the Province. While Holme had the vision of what he wanted done, Fairman got out and did it. The facts prove that. A question does arise as to how large a part was done out in the field and what was done on the drawing board in the Surveyor General's office.

Many survey dates are for winter months and these could likely have been made in an office as additions to field work already done in a given area. Suffice to say, many of our roads and actual property lines are the continuing direct result of this man's work.

A few important extracts from the Land Commissioners Minute Books, now recorded in Penn'a Archives, Second Series, Vol. XIX, might be mentioned:

T.F. is charged with neglect on survey work for Walter King.
(p. 14)

T.F. is charged with a Resurvey of Joseph Ashton's land without order. (p. 19)

T.F. requests the right to take up the overplus of the Manor of Moreland on its being resurveyed. He was granted thereby some 1,600 acres. (He often requested and was granted such surplus land, for which he paid the demanded price.)

The Shackamaxon Land, with its large house sometimes called "The Half Way House"—being equidistant between the City of Phila. and Frankford—and the lands of Thomas Fairman and Elizabeth Kinsey are mentioned pages 73, 321, 399, 477.

Several disputes over his ownership are seen in the problem of 200 acres in Whitpain Twp. with Job Goodson. (Pp. 278, 303, 368, 380)

James Atkinson entered a caveat against him in a tract adjoining Fuller & Barnes (p. 342).

Land held by Fairman in Whitemarsh Twp. (some of which is mentioned in his will) is referred to on p. 433.

He had difficulties over a 500 acre tract of Richard Worrell's in Dublin Twp. as part of it was purchased. (p. 447)

He is said to have concealed 300 acres sold to John Rool. (p. 601)

He is said to have made a pretended sale of 300 acres to Marcus Overholts. (p. 652)

We conclude with a look at the family of Thomas Fairman and his wife, Elizabeth Kinsey, and a discussion of his will. A copy of the will was made for me by the Register of Wills in Philadelphia and sent to my home addressed to "L. Paul Fairman," thus seemingly to tie me into the family of the man whom I have sought to present to you. The will is recorded in Phila. Will Book D, p. 17.

The children mentioned are Thomas, Benjamin and William (who died young), Abigail and Ruth. His wife Elizabeth was named sole executrix. The will was dated 27^{da} 7^{mo} 1711 and probated Dec. 22, 1714. He divided his Shackamaxon land, after the death of his wife, between his two sons Thomas and Benjamin. The island in the Delaware, despite it being by patent made over to him, was originally his wife's and he willed it to remain hers, for her to sell or distribute. To his daughter Abigail (who had married Jeremiah Hopton), he willed 300 acres of land adjoining his daughter Ruth's plantation of 300 acres at the White Marsh. He also gave Abigail and her husband 500 acres of land adjoining William Palmer. Daughter Ruth had married Nicholas Steiglitz. He entreated his friend David Powel (the deputy surveyor of Phila. Co.) to assist his wife in her duties. The lands directly mentioned totaled about 1,700 acres, not much of a remainder out of the 20,300 acres he is known to have purchased in his lifetime.

The son Thomas, to whom he had willed $\frac{1}{2}$ his Shackamaxon homestead, had served in the Army of the Duke of Marlborough. He died in 1718, on board a ship of war on a voyage from London to the South Sea. He was buried at sea, according to Naval form and no will was known to exist. An Administration is recorded in Administration Book C, p. 30.

The youngest son, Benjamin, having inherited from his father one half of the homestead at Shackamaxon, also acquired the half share willed his brother Thomas. Benjamin was a member of the Philadelphia monthly meeting. He married Susannah Field, daughter of Benjamin and Experience Field of Burlington County, New Jersey. Benjamin's will, dated August 20, 1737 and proved February 27, 1739, is in Philadelphia Will Book F, p. 149. Benjamin and Susannah had six children: a son William and five daughters. This son William had two daughters so that the direct line of Thomas Fairman now became extinct.

Elizabeth, as executrix of Thomas Fairman's will, had an inventory of the goods made with an appraisal amounting to about £310. Besides those items of a usual household nature, we find this item: "to sundry surveyor's instruments £5." From this appraised value the widow paid out for debt on bonds due some £190 within one year after Thomas's death and by July 1717, she had accounted for the whole value of the appraisement being paid for debts.

The closing picture as to Thomas Fairman's worth in accumulated wealth was not great. There had been compressed into his life span of not over 64 years, a lot of living and doing that greatly aided the growth and expansion of the early Province of Pennsylvania. In many ways, the interests of Penn were enhanced, the new adventurers settled on land that continued to grow in value to them and their heirs. Down to our day, we find our borders and our roads living memorials of his work and thus doing for these early people and ourselves a service that deserves to be better known here and now.