

FOREWORD

By Robert L. Cable, Esquire

The laws adopted between 1682 and October 1700 were first published by Lane S. Hart, State Printer, in 1879 in the book entitled *Charter to William Penn, and Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania, Passed between the Years 1682 and 1700*, compiled and edited by Staughton George, Benjamin M. Nead, and Thomas McCamant. Four years later the Legislature authorized the publication of the laws between 1700 and 1800. Their Joint Resolution of January 23, 1883 (P.L.225, No.3) provided for a Commission “. . . to examine, collate, and report to the Legislature what acts of Assembly, if any, have, through inadvertence or other cause, not been printed and published.”

The report of the Commission of December 15, 1886, led to the passage of the act of May 19, 1887 (P.L.129, No.70) which in section 1 authorized the Commissioners “. . . to prepare for publication the text of the statutes passed, general and special, from the year one thousand seven hundred to the year eighteen hundred, with such of the opinions of the Attorneys General of Great Britain, orders of the Privy Council in relation to the repeal of acts passed by the Colonial Assembly, and such other illustrative matter, as to the said commissioners may seem appropriate.”

In 1896, with the publication of Volume II (1700-1710) of the *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, the Commissioners James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders wrote the Prefatory Note stating on page that in order to meet the requirements of the Legislature “. . . it is deemed necessary to reprint the charters and laws enacted prior to the period mentioned, together with the action of the Crown upon those

laws; the unpublished commissions and secret instructions to the several deputy governors, which explain many of the difficulties they labored under in assenting to the enactments of the assembly; and the various essential documents on which our colonial legislation was fundamentally based.”

At this point, the Commissioners saw the limitations of the 1879 publication of the laws before October, 1700, and designated the future Volume I of the *Statutes at Large* as the successor to the 1879 Staughton George edition of the laws from 1682 to 1700.

By 1913, 15 volumes of the *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania* had been published and the 16th volume was ready for printing. They were numbered II through XVII, which encompassed laws passed from 1700 to 1805. In the same year a second Commission was created by the act of July 25, 1913 (P.L.1273, No.782) to prepare four additional volumes and complete the compilation of the *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*. The compilation was now expanded to include legislation through the year 1815, but no laws after 1805 were published as part of the *Statutes at Large* project.

In 1929, by the act of May 15, 1929 (P.L.1763, No.571), the State Legislature expressly authorized the collection and editing of “. . . material to be included in a volume, numbered one, of the *Statutes-at-Large* of the Commonwealth, which shall consist of a reprint of the charters and laws of Pennsylvania enacted prior to seventeen hundred, together with the action of the Crown upon these laws, the unpublished commissions, and secret instructions to the several deputy governors, which explain many of the difficulties they labored under in assenting to the enactments of the assembly, and various essential documents on which the colonial legislation was fundamentally based; said volume to be substantially in accordance with the plan announced by the commissioners who compiled the existing volumes of *Statutes-at-Large*.”

After the deaths of several of the Commission members, work on the *Statutes at Large* project largely ceased. Interest in Volume I was maintained by Dr. Roy F. Nichols of the American Philosophical Society and members of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission who enlisted Judge Gerald F. Flood to compile the laws

before 1700. However, upon the untimely death of Judge Flood on December 26, 1965, work on the project was again suspended.

In 1967 Dr. Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., Librarian of the American Philosophical Society, and Dr. Donald Kent of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission recruited Dr. Gail McKnight Beckman, Esquire, to continue the project. Their efforts resulted in the act of March 2, 1970 (P.L.77, No.35), which authorized the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission “. . . to edit and publish a volume, numbered one, of the Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania, which includes the charters and laws of Pennsylvania enacted prior to the year 1700 as well as introductory and explanatory materials necessary to an understanding of this early body of statutes; said volume to be substantially in accordance with the plan announced by the commissioners who compiled the later volumes of the Statutes at Large.” The editorial process was quite extensive and, before Dr. Kent of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission was prepared to authorize the printing of the volume, Dr. Beckman privately printed her manuscript for Volume I in 1976 without the supplementary material envisioned by the original Commissioners. Thereafter, no further editorial work was done by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the act authorizing the publication of Volume I was repealed by the act of May 26, 1988 (P.L.414, No.72). Thus the “official” version of Volume I still remained to be done.

Work on the present volume was undertaken by the Legislative Reference Bureau in 1986 to complete the project begun in 1883. Unfortunately, all the material had to be re-verified and the research begun by Dr. Donald Kent of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission had to be completed.

Very little has changed during the intervening century since the Commission began its work - Patrick Robinson's handwriting is still illegible. Only the efforts of a series of people who recorded their ideas of what he and the other scribes wrote has made this copy possible. Even now, the next person who compares this work with the original may well interpret a word or phrase differently. The notes to each act include a reference to the source of the document so the original source document can be consulted.

With the publication of this volume, the task first assigned to the 1883 Commission is finally complete.