

William A. Hunter: In Memoriam

The recent death of William A. Hunter has deprived us of a good friend and one of the most important students of the Native Americans who were the original inhabitants of Pennsylvania. His careful scholarship, gentlemanly tact, and great linguistic talents were among the endless list of characteristics for which he was both loved and admired.

Bill was born and raised in northwestern Pennsylvania. He attended Allegheny College, where he began the study of modern German which later allowed him to study the part played by the Moravian colonists in the history of his native state. His interest in languages and in medieval Europe were nurtured at the University of California at Berkeley where facility in Latin, French, and Flemish was added to his skills in German. His M.A. thesis (*Robert the Frisian: Count of Flanders, 1335*) was an account of an 11th century noble, and continued Bill on the path toward Moravian and Native American studies in Pennsylvania.

In 1946, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission utilized Bill's considerable facility with documentary research with an appointment as Assistant Historian. By 1961 he had attained the rank of Chief of the History Division. There Bill applied his skills to various aspects of Pennsylvania's colonial history, including several important contributions to studies of Native Americans and their relations with the Moravians and other colonial people. Bill's study of the forts along the Pennsylvania frontier (1960) is a thorough, penetrating, and complete analysis of the reasons why this line of structures was built, and of the many factors involved in the colonial relations with the many Native Americans who lived in, or came to Pennsylvania in the 18th century. Among the many brilliant deductions derived from this study was Bill's recognition that Teedyuskung and his kin, who were erstwhile grantors of lands in the famous "Walking Purchase" confirmation treaty, actually did not have traditional rights to the lands which they sold in 1737.

In the course of reading and searching through the vast collections of historical documents in Pennsylvania, Bill had taken great care to note every original, contemporary and direct reference which he found made to any Native Americans. This search took Bill into the Moravian Archives, where his facility with the German script of the 18th century and his great linguistic talents enabled him to elicit in unequalled trove of data about the "Jerseys" and other Native Americans who were in the area later colonized by the Moravians. These studies have become fundamental to all subsequent work in the Forks of Delaware.

The data which Bill had retrieved from the Moravian Archives

forms the basis for all present studies concerned with the Moravians and their early relations with the people who were occupying this portion of Pennsylvania. No aspect of the Moravian missionary activity can be understood, from the Native point of view, without reference to the data bank which Bill Hunter assembled. Putting his data into an anthropological perspective has given us an entirely new understanding of these events and of this important part of the history of the effects of the Moravian missions on the history of Pennsylvania.

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