

**From MY LAND: AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF MILAN**  
**By the Milan, Tennessee High School English Classes**  
**under The Direction of Tina Huey and Verna Massey**  
**In 1976**

**Interview With Charles Penn, Sr.**  
**(Born April 18, 1902)**

WE UNDERSTAND YOU HAVE SOME MEMBERS IN YOUR FAMILY WHO ARE OF HISTORICAL INTEREST, AND WE WERE WONDERING IF YOU WOULD TELL US ABOUT THEM.

"Abram Penn, my great, great grandfather, fought in the Revolutionary War. He also fought against the Indians in '74-'75. As a matter of fact, Abram was in command of the company at the battle of Point Pleasant, which resulted in the defeat of the Shawnee Indians. But Abram didn't spend all of his time fighting; he was also the father of twelve children."

(AT THIS POINT MR. PENN GAVE US A SUMMARY OF ABRAM PENN'S MILITARY AND POLITICAL RECORD WHICH WE HAVE INCLUDED HERE.)

- (A) In 1777, Abram Penn entered the service of the Continental Army in Virginia.
- (B) In April, 1778, the first court for Henry County, Virginia, was composed by Edmund Tine, Abram Penn, and George Waller. At this meeting, 630 men took the oath of allegiance to the United States.
- (C) In August, 1779, Patrick Henry, Abram Penn, and John Dillard were appointed by the governor as commissioners of peace.
- (D) March, 1780, Abram Penn was advanced to the office of

Colonel of the Henry County Militia and served there until the close of the war.

- (E) In 1781, Abram Penn organized and commanded the only regiment from the counties of Henry, Patrick, and Franklin. They participated in many battles during the Revolutionary War, including the final battle of Yorktown.
- (F) For his military services in the Revolutionary War, Abram Penn was granted an extensive tract of land by the state of Virginia.

Abram Penn is not the only one in his family with a historical background. He had a first cousin by the name of John Granville Penn, of North Carolina, who has the honor and the glory of being one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Quoting Mr. Penn:

"John Granville Penn was the son of Moses and Catherine Penn. He was born in Virginia on May 6, 1740. When John was 18 years old, his father died, so he went to live with his uncle. He studied law in Bowling Green, Virginia. He was admitted to the bar in 1762 and became widely known as a defense lawyer. On July 28, 1763, he married Susanna Lyme and a year later moved his family to Granville County, North Carolina.

"In 1775, John Penn was sent to Congress to succeed Richard Caswell, who had just died. He remained in Congress until the latter part of 1777, when the affairs of his own state demanded his presence.

"On September 14, 1788, John Penn died and was buried at Lancy Creek, North Carolina. In 1894, his remains were interred in Gillford Burial Grounds, a few miles from Greensboro, North Carolina, where a monument, 20 feet high, crowned with an orator holding a scroll in his right hand, marks the grave. On the front of the monument is the following inscription:

'In memorial to William Hooker and John Penn, delegates of North Carolina. In 1775, sent to the Continental Congress and signers of the Declaration of Independence.'"

#### HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR FAMILY'S PAST?

"About 100 years ago, Mary Penn decided to write a Penn geneology [sic]. No telling how many weeks and months she worked on this trying to find out when the first came to Virginia. The geneology [sic] was copied by Elizabeth Penn."

#### IS THERE ANY PARTICULAR REASON SHE DID THIS?

"Well, most everybody don't think too much about their family anymore when they're young, but as they get older, they begin to wonder who they were and about their family in the early days."

#### WHEN DID THE PENNS FIRST COME TO TENNESSEE?

"In the early 1800's my great grandfather, Edmund Penn, moved to Murfreesboro or Fayetteville in Middle Tennessee and there he stayed until 1825, when he moved to Gibson County in West Tennessee."

#### DO YOU KNOW WHY THEY MOVED TO GIBSON COUNTY?

"Well, I'll just put it this way. After the Jackson Purchase of about 1818, they began to open up all this country and people moved in and began to settle the country, and it seemed most of my relatives came from Virginia or Maryland and settled at Murfreesboro or Fayetteville, and then in just a few years they came on to Gibson County and counties in the western part of the state."

Interested in Mr. Penn's family story, we checked sources for further accounts of his famous ancestor, John Penn. In the *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 14, we found the following information:

Having an attractive personality and ability as a speaker, he became a leader and in 1775, was sent to the provincial congress, where he served on numerous committees and won a reputation for tireless industry. Within a month he was elected to the Continental Congress. He soon lost hope of any adjustment with England and declared: "My first wish is that America be free; the second that she may be restored to Great Britain in peace and harmony and upon just terms." His service in Congress was performed at great personal sacrifice. Others retired but he held on, writing to his friend, Thomas Person, "For God's sake, my good Sir, encourage our People, animate them to dare even to die for their country." As a member of the provincial congress at Halifax in April 1776, he favored the instruction to vote for independence, and returned to Philadelphia in time to vote for and sign the Declaration of Independence.

Some light is thrown upon his character by his conduct in a certain affair of honor. Henry Laurens, president of Congress, challenged him to a duel, but since they boarded at the same place, they took breakfast on the morning of the day set for the meeting and then started out together for the meeting place. After Penn had assisted his elderly opponent across an almost impassable street, he suggested that they abandon their foolish proceeding, to which Laurens agreed.