

## ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

A true story of life on a Land Survey crew  
As remembered by Philip Tome, Chain Bearer

### Foreword

*The excellent land surveyor (and my friend) Gordon Conner will recall the name of Philip Tome from the autobiography entitled Pioneer Life; or Thirty Years a Hunter. Philip's hunting experiences and adventures during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century are hugely interesting (as are Meshach Browning's in Forty-four Years of the Life of a Hunter).*

*But it was Mr. Tome's recounting of his work as a land surveyor's chain bearer that caught and held my attention. I've excerpted and paraphrased his surveying experiences for you. I hope that you find them appealing as well.*

*If you haven't already been doing so, the more insightful among you may actually be stimulated to record your everyday land surveying experiences, in the hope that some future person will discover them. We have been blessed with an endlessly interesting profession. Those who do not think so simply do not know enough about land surveying.*

*R. Wayne Twigg, Secretary  
Appalachian Chapter, MSS  
Wolfsville, MD March 2019*

### Getting Started

Philip Tome was born in the Year of Our Lord 1782 and lived with his family of five along Pine Creek, a tributary of the Allegheny River. His autobiography, written about

1850, credits

land surveying with enabling him to first explore and discover features of lands that, in all likelihood, he would not have otherwise seen.

In 1799, when Philip was seventeen years old, a group of land surveyors were dispatched by land buyers William Ellis, Samuel Wallace and Henry Drinker of Philadelphia to perform original land surveys. Philip probably was never informed as to the source of authority to survey the lands. If the chief of surveys actually did tell him, Philip didn't mention it in his memoirs.

### Authority to Survey?

It seems reasonable therefore to offer the thought that Messrs. Ellis, Wallace and Drinker did what others were doing at the time, i.e., taking advantage of an unprecedented opportunity. It is entirely possible that they may have obtained a warrant (the authority to survey) and ultimately the patent (title by deed or indenture) to lands that had been titled to British loyalists before the war for American independence. Many of these lands had been

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confiscated from the  
loyalists after the British  
surrendered in 1776, lands  
the title to which was now  
claimed by the new  
American  
government by virtue of the  
Principle of Escheat, for the  
purpose of re-titling them to  
loyal American citizens.

An interesting first page  
of a British  
indenture document,  
dating to before America  
was born, is shown reduced  
in size herein a little farther  
on for your  
magnifying-glass-enhanced  
study. *(Author's Note 1: at  
some point during early chain-  
of-title searches, a researcher  
may encounter ancient  
title terms and wonder  
about the differences between  
them, in this case, "deed" and  
"indenture". In essence, a deed  
conveyed title when the full  
amount of money and  
all other requirements  
was received by the grantee  
prior to the date of the deed,  
whereas an indenture conveyed  
full title at a specified future  
date, such as a year, when  
all monies or other  
remunerations were paid in full  
by that time,  
somewhat reminiscent of  
a mortgage. By this definition,  
an "indentured" servant  
literally mortgaged him- or-  
her-self for a  
specified amount of time,  
until the agreed- upon debt was  
satisfied).*

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This sample indenture document begins on the lower part of the displayed page. (Author's Note 2: Notice that, coincidentally, just above the beginning of this indenture document is a small paragraph in which Benjamin Chew, Esquire, Register General for the Probate of Wills, appoints a Deputy Register. It is this same Benjamin Chew who, then in the role of Commissioner, was one of the signers of the survey plat prepared by Jeremiah Dixon and Charles Mason, just a few years earlier in 1768.)

Our indenture is dated November 29 in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy (1770). The first "Whereas" [word underlined] clause names the prior deed in the chain-of-title in which Johonorissa, Scarayadia and Coswantinicea, three of the Chiefs or Sachems of the Six United Nations of Indians [Author's Note 3: Quick! Pop Quiz: Name the six tribes who formed the confederation known as the Six United Nations of Indians. See answer at end of this article] sold, by a deed dated August 2, 1749 and recorded in Book I, Volume 5, Page 239, a tract of land to a British citizen named George Croghan. The deed neglects to list the purchase

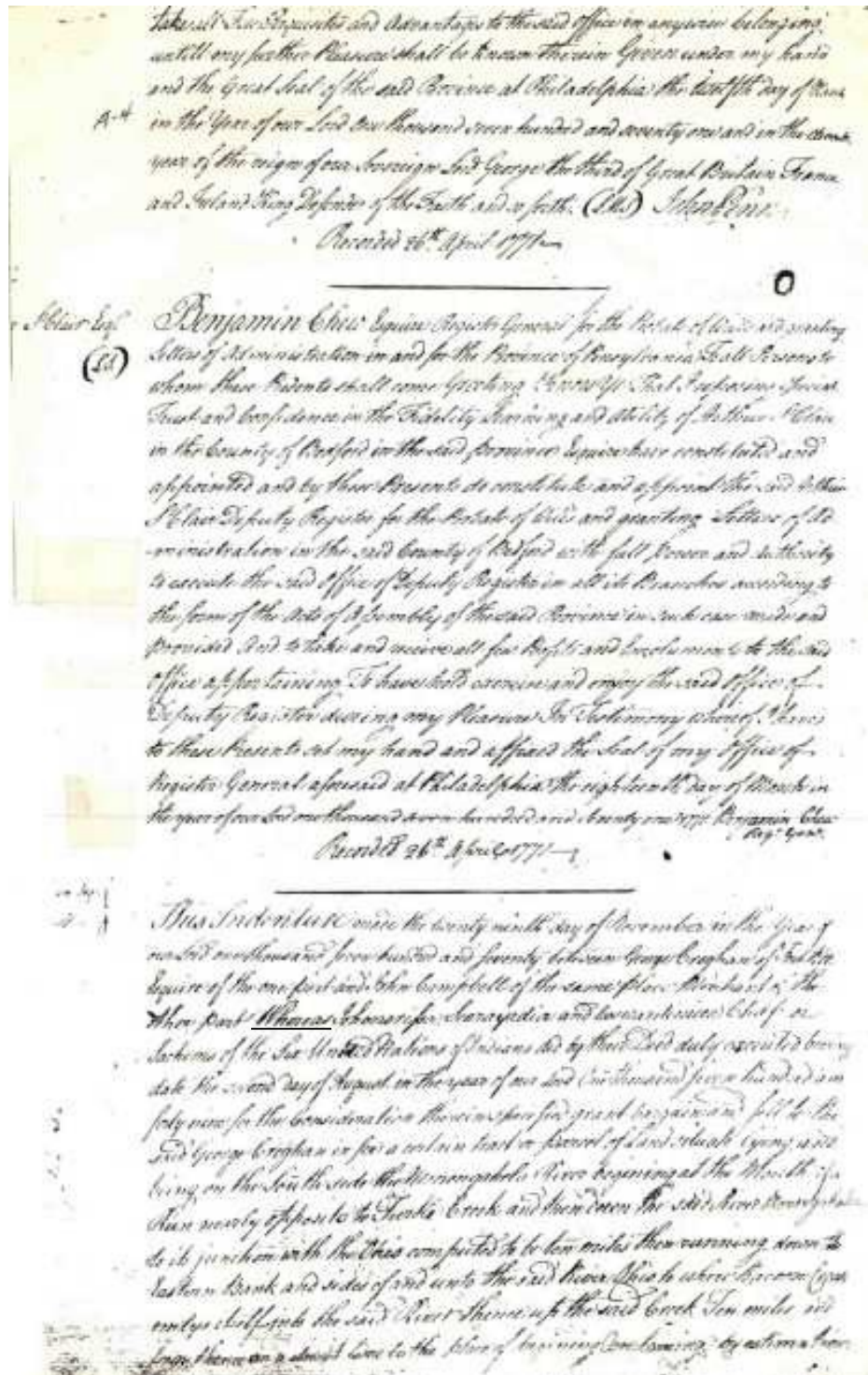


Figure 1: Deed Book A, Page 4, dated November 29, 1770

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price. Although you can read for yourself, the cursive style of penmanship and the language of the period may be somewhat difficult for you to recognize. Therefore the parent property description is transcribed from the indenture as follows: "Beginning at the mouth of a Run nearly opposite Turkey Creek and then down the River Monongahela to its junction with the Ohio, computed to be ten miles; thence running down the eastern bank and sides of and unto the said River Ohio to where Raccoon Creek empties itself into the said River; thence up the Creek ten miles; and from thence on a straight line to the place of beginning; containing by estimation one hundred thousand acres."

The "Witnesseth" clause on Page A-5 (not shown) describes the transference of title to three parcels of land to John Campbell totaling 1,161.5 acres (less 6% for road and highways) for 116 pounds 3 shillings lawful money of Great Britain (approximately \$13,549 *[depending on which conversion source you use]* or thirteen and a half dollars per acre), all three parcels being parts of the 100,000 acres that said George

Croghan obtained from the Six Nations' representatives.

The construction of primary roads and highways (the 6% allowance) was very important to settlers who used them to get as close as possible to lands that had been designated for them by their sponsors. For the most part, at least initially, the British built roads without regard to properties or property lines along the most convenient natural alignments between seaports or harbors, and various destinations, usually major settlements or forts. Also, other settlers used the roads or continuations of them to pass through one province (eventually, state) to reach available or designated lands to be settled in another province or state.

### **GIS (Get It Surveyed) First**

Sixteen land surveyors (eighteen, if you count the packhorse men) laboriously worked their way by keel boats up Pine Creek to the Tome homestead, bringing horses and enough supplies with them to sustain themselves for some months of original surveying. These initial expeditionary supplies

included flour, pork, sugar, chocolate, tea and working clothes.

One of the surveyors had gotten sick by the time the boats arrived at the Tome's and could not continue on, thus leaving the crew of John Harris, the chief of surveys, one person short. Mr. Harris asked Philip's father if he knew of anyone who could replace his missing assistant. Mr. Tome offered his youngest son.

### **"Original Footsteps" Begin**

Next morning, the surveyors, with Philip on-board, started out again. Muscling their keel boats up-creek for 21 miles to a place near their subject lands, they unloaded and made camp. For so many men and supplies, a large house-type frame was constructed and covered with bark. Everyone worked on it for two days.

Leaving the two packhorse men behind to finish off the camp-house and make it the center of their operations, the surveyors divided into four crews. Each crew consisted of two chain bearers to measure, an axman to blaze trees and mark line and one land surveyor or deputy surveyor

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to use the compass, keep notes, make calculations and direct the work. Philip was assigned to John Harris' crew as chain bearer.

On the morning of the third day, as the other survey crews were beginning their assignments, Harris' crew began on the east side of Pine Creek and surveyed back for sixteen miles. Next day they surveyed fifteen more miles. One of the packhorse men they'd left to finish the camp-house found them (somehow) and brought them another week's worth of provisions.

Having given the supply man directions as to where they next could be found, they surveyed in a northerly direction for two days and then turned westerly to intersect Big Pine Creek. So far, Philip and his surveying companions had been in the woods for twelve days.

The supply man brought more provisions there, and he found them once again a day or so later at a new overnight camp fifteen miles westerly. Surveying easterly from there brought the surveyors back to very near the camp-house, the place of beginning. Their closed survey, all in forest and

rugged terrain, had taken them about a month to complete.

The three other survey crews returned to the camp-house, having completed their surveying assignments, one at a time, shortly after the arrival of Philip's crew. Every land surveyor knows that when he's surveying accurately and keeping good notes, he can't get lost. (That ain't braggin'; it just comes with the job description).

### Surveyors Get Hungry Too.

The packhorse men could boast a little of their ability to find hungry land surveyors in terrain like this, especially when they decided to strike across country to save time, away from the blazed Line of survey. However, a packhorse man had no easy job of it, what with loading and securing supplies and delivering them, all alone, to each of the survey crews, at locations miles apart from the others. But they weren't *exactly* alone in the woods: wolves, panthers, bears and other critters were in there too. One of the packhorse men had seen wolves and some unmistakable evidence of other undesirables, and the

experiences had dampened his enthusiasm a bit. He decided that he'd like to be a chain bearer for a while and let someone else deal with nature's livestock.

Everyone except Philip, including the new packhorse-man-turned-chain-bearer, flatly stated that they weren't interested in any other job description than the one they already had.

### "Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My!"

Next day (Monday), without Philip, each survey crew headed out to measure and mark the remaining tracts of land, two crews on the east side and two crews on the west side of the creek.

On Tuesday morning, Philip loaded two horses with selected provisions and headed west. He headed nine miles up the meanders of the creek before deciding to cut due west. Stopping to unload and make an overnight camp in a place where there was sufficient browse for the horses, he spotted several dozen elk, drinking water and eating moss in the stream. Philip made a fire, ate his supper, looked to the horses and



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passed an uneventful night, alone in nature's front yard.

Following the elk's trail north until he came to a recognized survey line, he turned and went along the line for sixteen miles, where he camped again at a place good for the horses. As night came on, wolves found him.

Building up a good fire, he and his horses, which he tied close and securely, spent the first part of the night listening to the howls of the wolfpack and occasionally seeing their eyes glow in the light cast by the flickering fire.

The wolves, seeking prey who did not know how to build fires, moved on. Setting out again after breakfast, Philip found the rendezvous where he was to meet the two survey crews, just six or seven miles away. Making camp before noon, he searched again for browse but found none close by.

Just before dark, the first of the crews came in. Next day near noon, the second arrived. The two crews and Philip relaxed that June afternoon and spent the night there in camp.

Another one of the chain bearers had not been feeling well and by now was unable

to continue on in his duties. Philip and he exchanged places. The sick man took the two packhorses back to the camp-house.

Both survey crews completed all of their survey assignments in the next two weeks. Finishing a few days earlier than anticipated, they explored the area for several miles around and supplemented their provisions with trout from nearby streams.

### [Back to the Place of Beginning](#)

For some reason which Philip does not share, the eight men decided not to return to their final destination together but in pairs.

Philip and a man named John Strawbridge started off in the general direction of the camp-house but soon their way was blocked by steep, rugged bluffs. Exploring for quite a distance out of their way along the rims, they finally found a sort of gully eroded into the face of a 50-foot-high bluff. Carefully crawling 30-feet or so down through rocks and roots brought them to a small ledge at the top of a 15-foot high sheer rock cliff.

Unable to retrace their descent, the two men selected two tall saplings within reach and, cutting the ironwood (a.k.a. hop hornbeam) down and trimming all its branches but one, turned it upside down and hooked it on the beech sapling.

### [Who Goes First?](#)

"Ladder" accomplished, John proposed the equivalent of "drawing straws" for the privilege of risking life and limb and invited Philip to choose one of two sticks hidden in his hands. Philip selected the longest one and lost.

John held the "hook" on the trunk of the other sapling so that it would bend enough to give Philip a few less feet to drop at the bottom.

Strawbridge, while straining to hold the pole in place, managed to glance over the rim to check Philip's progress and spotted a rattlesnake coiled up right where Philip would land. Still more than 9-feet from the bottom and holding on with difficulty, Philip called for John to throw his belt-axe at the snake. His throw was good, thank God; the snake was knocked out of the way.

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Trouble sometimes comes in pairs however. All this activity and a bit of falling debris had aroused a nest of yellow wasps that went for Philip's face and chest. He had to drop. Landing within 3-feet of the snake, he dodged it and the bees. Taking stock of himself, he decided that he wasn't really hurt all that much. In a few minutes, he called back up to Strawbridge and invited him to come on down the same way. John declined.

Philip found a tall sycamore sapling and, cutting it down, leaned it against the rock cliff a short distance away. Strawbridge made this descent without mishap.

Arriving at the camp-house, the two men found the other surveyors already there. Next morning, since all land surveys were now completed, Philip was discharged and returned the 21 miles to his home by himself, having been gone nearly two months. He doesn't say what his wages were or if he got paid at all. Perhaps Harris paid Philip's wages to his father.

[By Taste and By Choice](#)

Cities and towns are not attractive to those who are rural by taste and by choice. Such a man was Philip Tome. Some land surveyors share with him a special interest in the land itself and all that does not smack of the hustle-bustle, fumes and other contaminations of urban development. Some experience feelings of awe when they are fortunate enough to find themselves in a special rural place and become conscious of our Great Creator's work.

Such a land surveyor can be grateful to this great profession (and to the Great Creator) when he or she is given a chance to survey lands that somehow still have a lingering flavor of the original landscape and its ancient aspects. Some land surveyors discover that they, like a few others before them, have a powerful inner, but rarely-acknowledged, attachment to the land itself. To folks like Philip Tome, the true value of the land lies not in a house and its appurtenances, so falsely valued by the dollar-visions of realtors, but in the piece of the planet the appurtenances sit on. Right, Gordon?

Grateful for hollows and hills that yet seem barely touched, a diligent Land Surveyor can still to this day discover long "hidden" original patent markers and occasionally original witness trees or objects, established by the original surveyor, whose footsteps can seem, to the inexperienced, concealed. *We can be assured that the original land surveyors who made those footsteps worked far harder in making them than we do in following them.* Even though we land surveyors are charged, in our retracement surveys, with the responsibility of following in those footsteps, scarcely anyone talks about that anymore.

*(Answer to Pop Quiz: The tribes which composed the Six United Nations of Indians were: Mohawk; Cayuga; Onondaga; Oneida; Seneca and Tuscarora. The Iroquois and the Delaware, some of whom had accompanied Mason and Dixon on part of their historic Boundary Survey, were not part of the Confederation).*