

Gottlieb Mittelberger, Journey to Pennsylvania (1750).

[Gottlieb Mittelberger traveled to Pennsylvania from Germany in 1750 on a ship primarily filled with poorer immigrants who would become indentured servants upon arriving in Philadelphia. Mittelberger was not a servant, and worked as a school master and organist for three years before returning to Germany in 1754.]

[The Journey On Board Ship]

When the ships have for the last time weighed their anchors near the city of [Cowes] in Old England, the real misery begins with the long voyage. For from there the ships, unless they have good wind, must often sail 8, 9, 10 to 12 weeks before they reach Philadelphia. But even with the best wind the voyage lasts 7 weeks.

But during the voyage there is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of sea-sickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth-rot, and the like all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water, so that many die miserably.

Add to this want of provisions, hunger, thirst, frost, heat, dampness, anxiety, want, afflictions and lamentations, together with other trouble, as *c. v.* the lice abound so frightfully, especially on sick people, that they can be scraped off the body. The misery reaches the climax when a gale rages for 2 or 3 nights and days, so that every one believes that the ship will go to 'the bottom with all human beings on board. In such a-visitation the people cry and pray most piteously. . . .

I myself had to pass through a severe illness at sea, and I best know how I felt at the time. These poor people often long for consolation, and I often entertained and comforted them with singing, praying and exhorting; and whenever it was possible and the winds and waves permitted it, I kept daily prayer-meetings with them on deck. Besides, I baptized five children in distress, because we had no ordained minister on board. I also held divine service every Sunday by reading sermons to the people; and when the dead were sunk in the water, I commended them and our souls to the mercy of God.

Among the healthy, impatience sometimes grows so great and cruel that one curses the other, or himself and the day of his birth, and sometimes come near killing each other. Misery and malice join each other, so that they cheat and rob one another. One always reproaches the other with having persuaded him to undertake the journey. Frequently children cry out against their parents, husbands against their wives and wives against their husbands, brothers and sisters, friends and acquaintances against each other. But most against the soul-traffickers.

Many sigh and cry: "Oh, that I were at home again, and if I had to lie in my pig-sty!" Or they say: "O God, if I only had a piece of good bread, or a good fresh drop of water." Many people whimper, sigh and cry piteously for their homes; most of them get home-sick. Many hundred people necessarily die and perish in such misery, and must be cast into the sea, which drives their relatives, or those who persuaded them to undertake the journey, to such despair that it is almost impossible to pacify and console them. In a word, the sighing and crying and lamenting on board the ship continues night and day, so as to cause the hearts even of the most hardened to bleed when they hear it. . . .

[Arriving in Philadelphia]

When the ships have landed at Philadelphia after their long voyage, no one is permitted to leave them except those who pay for their passage or can give good security; the others, who cannot pay, must remain on board the ships till they are purchased, and are released from the ships by their purchasers. The sick always fare the worst, for the healthy are naturally preferred and purchased first; and so the sick and wretched must often remain on board in front of the city for 2 or 3 weeks, and frequently die, whereas many a one, if he could pay his debt and were permitted to leave the ship immediately, might recover and remain alive. . . .

The sale of human beings in the market on board the ship is carried on thus: Every day Englishmen, Dutchmen and High-German people come from the city of Philadelphia and other places, in part from a great distance, say 20, 30, or 40 hours away, and go on board the newly arrived ship that has brought and offers for sale passengers from Europe, and select among the healthy persons such as they deem suitable for their business, and bargain with them how long they will serve for their passage-money, which most most of them are still in debt

for. When they have come to an agreement, it happens that adult persons bind themselves in writing to serve 3, 4, 5 or 6 years for the amount due by them, according to their age and strength. But very young people, from 10 to 15 years, must serve till they are 21 years old.

Many parents must sell and trade away their children like so many head of cattle; for if their children take the debt upon themselves, the parents can leave the ship free and unrestrained; but as the parents often do not know where and to what people their children are going, it often happens that such parents and children, after leaving the ship, do not see each other again for many years, perhaps no more in all their lives.

. . .

A woman must stand for her husband if he arrives sick, and in like manner a man for his sick wife, and take the debt upon herself or himself, and thus serve 5 to 6 years not alone for his or her own debt, but also for that of the sick husband or wife. But if both are sick, such persons are sent from the ship to the sick-house [hospital], but not until it appears probable that they will find no purchasers. As soon as they are well again they must serve for their passage, or pay if they have means.

It often happens that whole families, husband, wife, and children, are separated by being sold to different purchasers, especially when they have not paid any part of their passage money.

When a husband or wife has died at sea, when the ship has made more than half of her trip, the survivor must pay or serve not only for himself or herself, but also for the deceased. . . .

[Immigration to Pennsylvania]

I cannot possibly pass over in silence what was reported to me by a reliable person in Pennsylvania, in a package of letters which left Philadelphia Dec. 10, 1754, and came to my hands Sept. 1, 1755. These letters lament the fact that last autumn, A. D. 1754, to the very great burden of the country, more than 22,000 souls (there was a great emigration from Wurtemberg at that time) had arrived in Philadelphia alone, mostly Wurtembergers, Palatines, Durlachers and Swiss, who had been so wretchedly sick and poor that most of these people had been obliged to sell their children on account of their great poverty. The country, so the letters state, had been seriously molested by this great

mass of people, especially by the many sick people, many of whom were still daily filling the graves.

So long as I was there, from 20 to 24 ships with passengers arrived at Philadelphia alone every autumn, which amounted in 4 years to more than 25,000 souls, exclusive of those who died at sea or since they left home, and without counting those ships which sailed with their passengers to other English colonies, as New York, Boston, Maryland, Nova Scotia and Carolina, whereby these colonies were filled, and the immigrants became very unwelcome, especially in the city of Philadelphia. But that so many people emigrate to America, and particularly to Pennsylvania, is due to the deceptions and persuasions practised by the so-called newlanders.

These men-thieves inveigle people of every rank and profession, among them many soldiers, scholars, artists and mechanics. They rob the princes and lords of their subjects and take them to Rotterdam or Amsterdam to be sold there. They receive there from their merchants for every person of 10 years and over, 3 florins or a ducat; whereas the merchants get in Philadelphia 60, 70 or 80 florins for such a person, in proportion as said person has incurred more or less debts during the voyage. . . .

[Religion in Pennsylvania]

For there are many doctrines of faith and sects in Pennsylvania which cannot all be enumerated, because many a one will not confess to what faith he belongs.

Besides, there are many hundreds of adult persons who have not been and do not even wish to be baptized. There are many who think nothing of the sacraments and the Holy Bible, nor even of God and his word. Many do not even believe that there is a true God and devil, a heaven and a hell, salvation and damnation, a resurrection of the dead, a judgment and an eternal life; they believe that all one can see is natural. For in Pennsylvania every one may not only believe what he will, but he may even say it freely and openly.

Consequently, when young persons, not yet grounded in religion, come to serve for many years with such free-thinkers and infidels, and are not sent to any church or school by such people, especially when they live far from any school or church. Thus it happens that such innocent souls

come to no true divine recognition, and grow up like heathens and Indians. . . .

Coming to speak of Pennsylvania again, that colony possesses great liberties above all other English colonies, inasmuch as all religious sects are tolerated there. We find there Lutherans, Reformed, Catholics, Quakers, Mennonists or Anabaptists, Herrnhuters or Moravian Brethren, Pietists, Seventh Day Baptists, Dunkers, Presbyterians, Newborn, Freemasons, Separatists, Freethinkers, Jews, Mohammedans, Pagans, Negroes and Indians. The Evangelicals and Reformed, however, are in the majority. But there are many hundred unbaptized souls

[A Description of Pennsylvania]

Liberty in Pennsylvania extends so far that every one is free from all molestation and taxation on his property, business, house and estates. On a hundred acres of land a tax of no more than an English shilling is paid annually, which is called ground-rent or quit-rent; . . .

This country was granted by the King of England to a distinguished Quaker named PENN, from whom the land of Pennsylvania takes its name. Even now there are some young Lords Von PENN who, however, do not reside in the country, but in London, in Old England. A. D. 1754, a young Lord Von PENN was in the country. He renewed and confirmed all the former liberties with his signature, and made many presents to the Indians or savages.

No trade or profession in Pennsylvania is bound by guilds; every one may carry on whatever business he will or can, and if any one could or would carry on ten trades, no one would have a right to prevent him; and if, for instance, a lad as an apprentice, or through his own unaided exertions, learns his art or trade in six months, he can pass for a master, and may marry whenever he chooses. It is a surprising fact that young people who were born in this new land, are very clever, docile and skilful; for many a one looks at a work of skill or art only a few times, and imitates it immediately

The land of Pennsylvania is a healthy land; it has for the most part good soil, good air and water, many high mountains, and also much flat land; it is very rich in wood; where it is not inhabited a pure forest in which many small and large waters flow. The land is also very fertile, and all sorts of grain grow well. It is quite populous, too, inhabited far and wide,

and several new towns have been founded here and there, as Philadelphia, Germantown, Lancaster, Rittengstaun [Reading], Bethlehem, and NewFrankfurt [Frankford]. There are also many churches built in the country; but many people have to go a journey of 2, 3, 4, 5 to 10 hours to get to church; but all- people, men and women, ride to church on horseback, though they had only half an hour to walk, which is customary also at funerals and weddings. . . .

[Indians in Pennsylvania]

Of the savages, or Indians, who hold intercourse with the English, there is a great multitude; they live even beyond the Ohio, and the Hudson River on which Albany lies; therefore on both sides to the right and left of Pennsylvania. These two waters, which are very large, are about 100 hours' journey from Philadelphia. These savages live in the bush in huts, away from said waters, and so far inland that no one is able to find the end of the habitations of these savages. The farther we get into the country, the more savages we see. They support themselves in various ways; some shoot game, others dig roots, some raise tobacco and Indian corn or maize, which they eat raw or boiled; besides, they deal also in all sort s of hides, in beaver-skins and costly furs.

The savages that live on the borders of the Europeans are frequently seen; some of them understand a little English. . . . These Indians, who walk about amid other people, wear instead of clothes, blankets, such as are usually used as covers for the horses; these they have hanging uncut and unsewed about their bare bodies. They wear no coverings on their heads or on their feet. The form of their bodies does not differ from ours, except that they look dark yellow, which, however, is not their natural color, for they besmear and stain themselves thus; but at their birth they are born as white as we are. Both men and women have long, smooth hair on their heads; the men do not tolerate beards; and when in their youth, the hairs begin to grow, they pull them out immediately; they have, therefore, smooth faces like the women. On account of the lacking beard and the sameness in dressing, it is not easy to distinguish the men from the women. When these savages wish to be goodlooking, they paint their cheeks and foreheads red, hang their ears with strings of false beads of an ell's length. They wear neither shirts, nor breeches, nor coats beneath their blankets. In their wilderness where they live the young and old go about naked in the summer time. Every autumn they come in large crowds to the city of Philadelphia, bringing with them all sorts of little baskets which they make quite neatly and beautifully, many

skins and costly furs. Besides these things they trade off to the Governor, when they are assembled, a tract of land Of more than a thousand acres, which is yet all forest. In the name of the country and the city they are annually presented with many things, such as blankets, guns, rum or brandy and the like; on which occasion they make merry with their own strange Indian songs, especially when they are drunk. No one understands their language; some of them who come much in contact with the English, can speak a little English. There are very strong, tall and courageous people among them. In their language they thou and *thee* everybody, even the Governor, and they can run as fast as the deer. When you speak to them of the true and everlasting God, the Creator of heaven and earth, they do not understand it, but answer simply: They believe that there are two men, a good one and a bad one; that the good one had made everything good, and the bad one had made everything bad; that it was not necessary, therefore, to pray to the good one, as he was doing no one any harm; but the bad one should be prayed to that he might do no one any harm. Of a resurrection of the dead, a salvation, heaven or hell, they know and understand nothing. They bury their dead where they die. I have often been told by truthful people that very old savages that can hardly move any longer, or break down on the way, are simply killed and buried. But if a savage kills another, unless it be in war or on account of old age, whether the murdered was one of our or one of their own people, the murderer must surely die. They take him first to their Indian King to be tried, and thence to the place where the murder was committed, slay him suddenly, bury him on the spot, and cover his grave with much wood and stones. On the other hand, they must likewise be given satisfaction in similar cases, otherwise they would treat an innocent person of our people in like manner.

When the savages come to the city of Philadelphia and see the handsome and magnificent buildings there, they wonder and laugh at the Europeans for expending so much toil and cost on houses. They say that it is quite unnecessary, as one can live without such houses. Still more they wonder at the garments of the Europeans and their costly finery; they will even spit out when they see it. . . .

Old savages have often been questioned about their descent and origin, and they have answered that all they knew or could say was this; that their great-grandparents had lived in these same wildernesses, and that it was not right that the Europeans came and took their lands away from

them. For this reason they must move farther and farther back in the wilderness to find game for their food. . . .

[Customs]

If a man in Pennsylvania is betrothed to a woman, and does not care to be married by an ordained preacher, he may be married by any Justice, wherever he will, without having the banns published, on payment of 6 florins. It is a very common custom among the newly married, when the priest has blessed them, to kiss each other in presence of the whole church assemblage, or wherever the marriage ceremony takes place. Again, when a couple have been published from the pulpit, even if this has done for the second or third time, they are still at liberty to give each other up without the least cost. Even when such a couple have come to the church with their wedding guests, nay, when they already stand before the altar, and one party repents the engagement, he or she may yet walk away. This has frequently been done; but it occurs oftener that a bride leaves her bridegroom together with the wedding guests in the church, which causes a cruel laughter among said wedding guests; these may then freely partake of the meal that has been prepared.

If a couple in this province want to marry each other, and the parents and relatives on one or both sides will not permit it, especially when a woman will not renounce her lover, they ride off and away together on one horse. And because women have greater privileges than men, the man must sit on the horse behind his beloved. In this position they ride to a justice, and say they had stolen each other, and request him to marry them for their money. When this is done, no one, neither parents nor friends, can afterward separate them. . . .

If any one has lost a wife or husband in Germany, and if such loss was not caused by the death of either of them, he or she can find such lost treasure, if the same be still alive, in America, for Pennsylvania is the gathering place of all runaways and good-for-nothings. Many women and men are there who have deserted their spouses and their children, and have married again, but in doing so have generally made a worse bargain than before. . . .

On the first and second days of the month of May there is general merry-making in Pennsylvania, in which the unmarried persons of both sexes chiefly take part. All amuse themselves with playing, dancing, shooting, hunting, and the like. Such unmarried persons as are born in

the country adorn their heads with a piece of the fur of some wild animal, together with any painted animal they may choose. With these the young men walk about the city, crying, " Hurrah! Hurrah!" But no one may put such a token in his hat except those born in the country, and these are called Indians.

In Pennsylvania the following custom prevails among all people, high and low, in the city and in the country. When any one enters a house, or meets another, he first presses the hand of the father and mother of the family; then he salutes in the same manner with his hand all other persons, as many as there may be, and it happens sometimes that he will find a whole room full. Such salutation and handshaking is customary with strangers as well as among the most intimate friends, and the mode of addressing each other is among the English as well as the Germans: " How are you, good friend?" And the answer is: "So middling." This pleasant custom springs in part from the many English Quakers in Philadelphia, and in part from the Indians themselves, who were the first among whom this custom prevailed. To speak the truth, one seldom hears or sees a quarrel among them. Even strangers trust each other more than acquaintances in Europe. People are far more sincere and generous than in Germany; therefore our Americans live more quietly and peacefully together than the Europeans; and all this is the result of the liberty which they enjoy and which makes them all equal.

Source: *Gottlieb Mittelberger's Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 and Return to Germany in the Year 1754* (Philadelphia, 1898), 20-23, 25-28, 31-32, 37-38, 54-59, 82-86, 91-93, 112-13.