

THE PENNSYLVANIA HOAXES

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

Almost with annual regularity, we come across hoaxes which are considered to be the real McCoy, and which for a long time have been around to hoodwink the unsuspecting reader or listener. Only recently, the novel "Naked Came the Stranger" found an avid public--one which wanted to believe the authenticity of this novel by "Penelope Ashe." Turned out, if you'll recall that Penelope was twenty-four different writers--each devoting his talent to one chapter of trash, they admitted, not literature. The book, a hoax, was on the best seller list for a number of weeks. Pranks of this sort have been going on for years--some of them with Pennsylvania backgrounds, which historians treated as genuine for generations. There was a letter, signed by the noted Puritan leader, Cotton Mather. It blistered the "heretics and malignants called Quakers, with William Penn, who is the chief scamp, at the head." The letter was never written--at least by the Reverend Mather, but it stood as genuine for years, to the embarrassment of both the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania religious groups. It appeared in the Easton Argus in 1870. Researchers pounced on it delightedly, putting it into the history books. Eventually it appeared in Robert Phillips' textbook "American Government and its Problems." In 1939 the spurious Pennsylvania letter was taken from this volume and given world-wide circulation by the Reader's Digest. As a result, no retractions or corrections can stop transmission of the venerable hoax. It has been

circulating now for years. Another really good hoax was perpetrated by that lovable scamp Benjamin Franklin. Old Ben, using Biblical language, penned "A Parable on Brotherly Love." So many accepted it as an unfamiliar passage of Scripture--Ben had purposely written it in the classic language of the King James version--that he decided to go a bit further. He wrote and printed a story about tolerance, then bound it into his Bible as Genesis, Chapter 51. He intended to play a mild prank, but did such a good job that his confession actually failed to bury the incident. Copies of "the lost chapter of Genesis" are still circulating. I have in my library the lost books of "Moses"--the 6th and 7th books they call them--and I know old timers who swear that these books are genuine. About as genuine as Ben Franklin's hoax! Watch yourself! There is sure to be a Pennsylvania prankster around the corner. And when he confesses to his prank, it's a good bet you won't believe it--even if he's Ben Franklin.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.