

PANNEBAKKER FAMILY NEWS



NEWSLETTER OF THE PANNEBAKKER FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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Cahokia America's Lost City



In 1811, a young lawyer and journalist named Henry Brackenridge found the ruins of an ancient city near St. Louis. At the time, St. Louis was a small, young city that served as the gateway to the land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase. Americans knew little about the new territory, and Brackenridge was struck by the size of the ruins. "If the city of Philadelphia and its environs were deserted," he wrote, "there would not be more numerous traces of human existence."

Brackenridge was looking at the site of what was once the Grand Plaza of Cahokia, a city inhabited in 1250 by some ten to twenty thousand Native Americans. Brackenridge believed he'd made a great discovery. He did not see ancient monuments, stone walls or worn foundations. Instead, he saw a pattern of raised earth that resembled an urban grid, human bones, and mounds of soil formed into dozens of grassy pyramids up to 100 feet tall. "I was struck with a degree of astonishment," Brackenridge recalled, "not unlike that which is experienced in contemplating the Egyptian pyramids."

But the world ignored Brackenridge's discovery, and Americans have not treated this great ancient city on the Mississippi with reverence. Four-lane roads and highways surround and bisect Cahokia, the sprawl of East St. Louis covers more of the ancient site, and many of the earthen pyramids have been scraped away to use as landfill.

Cahokia has since been dignified with a state park and visitor's center, but it's not well known outside of Illinois and Missouri. It hardly attracts the number of visitors you'd expect for America's version of the pyramids and the ruins of the country's greatest, ancient city. The same is true of impressive and important American Indian sites like the pueblos of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, and the pre-historic earthworks of Poverty Point in Louisiana. Americans travel to Machu Picchu, Petra, Troy, and the Pyramids, but few visit America's own ruins?

The idea of tourists flocking to American Indian archeological sites may seem strange since most of us were taught that America was a sparsely inhabited wilderness before Europeans arrived. Through the 1950s, this was the consensus in academia. As journalist Charles C. Mann eloquently explains in *1491*, a sweeping history of the Americas up to the arrival of Christopher Columbus, the most commonly cited estimate of North America's population in 1491 was 1.15 million. That's about the population of modern-day Rhode Island.

Yet early European colonists discovered that the areas they intended to settle were densely populated. When colonists like John Smith established Jamestown, they became the neighbors of 14,000 Native Americans. As Mann writes, "The English were like the last people moving into a subdivision—they ended up with the least desirable property. Their chosen site was marshy, mosquito-ridden, and without fresh water."

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Similarly, Mann notes that a French soldier exploring Cape Cod in 1605 decided that the area was too well settled to build a French base. And when Hernando de Soto pillaged his way through the American Southeast in 1539, his Spanish force regularly encountered thousands of Indian warriors and saw areas “very well peopled with large towns.”

The reason that Europeans could, decades later, settle unoccupied lands was that their predecessors had unleashed smallpox, bubonic plague, and the measles in the Americas. By living in close contact with domesticated animals like pigs and cows, residents of the Old World had incubated all sorts of diseases, which they then developed resistances to. The New World had few domesticated animals and no resistance to the dozens of diseases that appeared at once. When colonization began in earnest, European settlers found skeletons and abandoned villages.

This is part of the common understanding of American history. (Although in the 1600s and 1700s, many Europeans looked at the deaths as divine providence rather than tragedy.) But in the 1960s and 1970s, revisionist historians argued that the death toll—and therefore America’s pre-Columbian population—had been severely underestimated. Some believed that up to 18 million people lived in North America in 1491; a more conservative figure was seven million. Once you add in revised estimates of the population of South America, the idea that Christopher Columbus “discovered” a “New World” appears absurd.

The views held by European colonists of Native Americans as small, simple groups of people influenced interpretations of North American history. When Americans did notice Cahokia’s ruins, most of them assumed that Indians could not have made them. They theorized that Vikings, Greeks, or Egyptians built the mounds; Thomas Jefferson advised Lewis and Clark to look for white, Welsh-speaking Indians who raised the pyramids. Even later archeologists struggled to imagine an Indian city.

That’s no longer the case. Some archeologists believe the city was home to over 10,000 people in 1250, with more Cahokians living on the surrounding farmland. If that’s the case, Cahokia was larger than London.

Cahokia is a mystery to historians because North America did not have writing systems, and Cahokia’s population disappeared suddenly and mysteriously in the late 1300s. By the time Europeans found the site, even Native Americans knew little about it. What is known is that a village was razed in 1050 to rebuild Cahokia on a grid, with a grand plaza and ceremonial structures built on two hundred huge, earthen pyramids. The population increased so rapidly that walking from the edge of Cahokia’s territory to the city center would have taken two days at its peak, and that Cahokia must have drawn thousands of immigrants inspired by its religion, culture, or politics. That culture included human sacrifices, which took place when Cahokia’s leaders were buried on its pyramids. The idea that cruel leadership may have driven away Cahokia’s immigrants is one of many theories for its demise.

We know what we know about Cahokia because Americans built a highway through it. The law that created the interstate highway system in the 1960s included funding to investigate archaeological sites that would be damaged, which meant scholars had funding and a mandate to study Cahokia. Discovering that the mounds were actually the remains of the greatest city in North American history didn’t stop the construction of the highway or the expansion of the suburbs, which destroyed many of the pyramids and left roads crossing and surrounding Cahokia. But what remained of Cahokia was already a state park, which UNESCO named a World Heritage Site in 1982, and the state built a visitors center dedicated to Cahokia’s history.

“Cahokia doesn’t mesh with the narrative of what the U.S. was like,” explains Dr. Adrienne Keene, a Native scholar and activist. “We are taught that nothing was here, so Native people deserved to have their land taken away.” Sites like Cahokia and Chaco Canyon are underappreciated, but North America *does* have fewer ancient ruins than many parts of the world. This is because the largest cities in the Americas were in Mexico and South America—the home of the Incas, Mayans, and the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan. But in North America, Cahokia was the lone great city. Why?

There are many opinions on that question. One theory is that North America never developed the intensive agriculture to support permanent farms and dense cities. But judging the natives of North America by the number of large cities, ancient, stone towers, and permanent farms is making the same mistake as the early Europeans.

In 1491, Charles Mann writes that, "Europeans tended to manage land by breaking it into fragments for farmers and herders. Indians often worked on such a grand scale that the scope of their ambition can be hard to grasp." Indians primary tool for reshaping their environment was fire. During the Civil War, American troops in Virginia's woods could barely see each other through the dense underbrush. But when Europeans first arrived, they marveled that they could ride a horse straight through a forest. The difference was that Indians had once cleared out the underbrush with fires so large that the earliest colonists watched the burns like they were fireworks.

Not every part of North America was transformed in this way, but in many areas, Mann writes, "Indians retooled whole ecosystems to grow bumper crops of elk, deer, and bison.... Millennia of exuberant burning shaped the plains into vast buffalo farms."

Much of what European explorers saw as rich, untamed wilderness was actually what Mann calls "the world's largest garden." "It was an altered landscape," Dr. George Milner explains. "But Europeans didn't recognize it as such."

This is the irony of Americans' indifference to the country's archeological sites. By 1492, American Indians had created a giant park whose beauty and riches inspired thousands and thousands of Europeans to cross a continent. They just failed to realize what they were seeing. And now it's gone.

Message From The President

As we approach what seems to be an unending political season, we may want to look back to see what past elections were like. Is it just this political period that seems so contentious? Our past elections offer many occasions of bad behavior, and the election process has gone through many complicated and confusing changes.

During the gubernatorial election of 1902, which occurred on November 4, Republican candidate, Samuel W. Pennypacker, defeated Democratic candidate and former Governor, Robert E. Pattison. In addition to the Republican and Democratic candidates, others representing the Prohibition, Socialist, Socialist Labor, and Independent parties received votes totaling over one million. As far as nastiness is concerned this election followed the rule rather than the exception. In fact, electoral politics has always been a down-and-dirty business.

Starting in the early 1800's our founding fathers proved themselves adept at bitter battles. Other elections have featured nasty accusations and even the death of one of the candidates.

The first presidential election was like no other as it was literally, no contest. No parties had yet formed and George Washington ran unopposed. The real question in the election of 1788 was who would serve as vice-president. At this time the office was awarded to the runner-up. Eleven candidates received votes with John Adams being elected.

In the election of 1800, Thomas Jefferson ran as the Democratic-Republican candidate with John Adams as the Federalist. At this time, states got to pick their own election days, so voting ran from April to October. Because of the "pick two" rule followed by the electoral college, the election ended as a tie between Jefferson and his Vice-Presidential pick, Aaron Burr. This sent the tie breaking vote to the House of Representatives where there was opposition to both. Jefferson eventually prevailed and the drama resulted in passage of the 12th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, requiring each elector to cast distinct votes for president and vice president.

In the election of 1828. John Quincy Adams was accused of pimping out an American woman to the Russian Czar, while serving as Minister to Russia. Andrew Jackson's wife, Rachel, was called a "convicted adulteress" because she had years earlier married Jackson before finalizing her divorce to her previous husband. Rachel died after Jackson won the election, but before the inauguration. At her funeral, Jackson blamed his opponents bigamy accusations for her death. "May God Almighty forgive the murderers, as I know she forgave them," Jackson said. "I never can."

In 1872, incumbent Ulysses S. Grant had an easy run for his second term because his opponent died before the votes were cast. Horace Greeley died and his votes were split among other candidates. Greeley remains the only candidate to die before the election was finalized.

The 2016 presidential debates are upon us, and the race looks fairly even. Our process of free elections, secured by our forefathers will undoubtedly prevail, but there is assuredly more nastiness to come!

Ron Pennypacker
God Bless America
Army Strong

The Envelopes Bruce Pennypacker

The following entries are the accounts of our search for the men and women who were serving in the Armed Forces during the general election of 1944. These brave people took the time to mail in their votes, and I'm certain that they had "encouragement" from their superiors. The envelopes for those ballots have survived, and it has been our task to return them to the families of these soldiers and sailors.

DELBERT RALPH BAKER, b. 17 Oct 1913, d. 14 May 1991. m/sgt USArmy Signal Corps.
Address on the envelope from 1944 is 341 Church Street, Royersford.

It appears that Delbert was a boarder at the Church Street address and was working as an auto mechanic. His wife-to-be was from Royersford.

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I found information on Delbert through a search on Ancestry. There is a family tree submitted by his daughter, Kyle. I sent a message to Kyle and waited three months for a reply. I never thought I would hear from her. Finally, a return message appeared asking what information I had on Delbert. I emailed Kyle and gave her my phone number. She called me and we had a nice chat. She seemed eager to see the envelope, so I mailed it to her.

Return email from Kyle:

You were so prompt at sending my father's envelope and I should have replied immediately.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for doing what you are doing. My father passed away in 1991 so to have something from him 24 years later was a God-send. I am sure the others that you contacted are equally as thrilled.

My Mother grew up at 341 Church St. in Royersford and graduated from RHS in 1933. Her maiden name was Greenawalt and my grandfather worked at Cann & Saul. My Father also lived in Royersford. In fact, he was a boarder in my Mother's home and that is where they met.

When I was born in 1949 my family lived at 671 Church St. My father built our house in Hatfield and we moved there in 1954.

My cousins, Bruce and Lester lived on 7th Ave. and I cannot remember the address of my other aunt and uncle. The entire family attended the Royersford Bible Fellowship Church. Lester graduated from RHS but Bruce graduated from Spring Ford HS. They were both active in sports. Bruce is 71 and Les is 78.

My parents were married Nov. 15, 1941. The attack on Pearl Harbor was Dec. 7 and my Dad was drafted. He left for the Army on my mother's birthday, Jan. 6, 1942. He served his time in Newfoundland.

Again, may God richly bless you for sending our envelope. I am making copies for my brother and his and my children. You are giving the families a gift and, even though the veteran's are gone, it is a powerful gift from them.

Blessings,
Kyle

Pannebakker Family Association Web Site

If you would like a user name and password, you must contact Bruce Pennypacker at, throwcoach@gmail.com and the necessary information will be sent to you.

Below is the URL for the web site:

<http://www.pannebakkerfamilyassociation.com>

Officers

President: Ron Pennypacker
520 Loch Alsh Ave.
Ambler, PA 19002
(484) 302-6842
r.pennypacker@yahoo.com

Vice President: Linda Millerick
751 Monterey Salinas Hwy.
Salinas, CA 93908-8953
(831) 484-2834
lmcnealmillerick@yahoo.com

Secretary: Marcea P. Kligman
4170 Summit Way
Marietta, GA 30066-2346
(770) 928-9055
mpklig@bellsouth.net

Treasurer: Bill McNeary
601 East Cypress Street
Charleston, MO 63834
(573) 683-1998
bmcneary@ldd.net

Membership: Sandie Miller
255 Shoreline Drive
Columbia, SC 29212-8024
(803) 749-0206
smil1025@sc.rr.com

Newsletter/WebMaster:

Bruce Pennypacker
201 Shady Brook Drive
Langhorne, PA 19047
(215) 380-1748
throwcoach@gmail.com

Board of Directors

Susan Costantini, Royersford, PA
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Pannebakker Family Association



The Pannebakker Family Association is an outgrowth of the family reunion held at Pennypacker Mills, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania on July 2-4, 1999. The reunion celebrated the 300th year wedding anniversary of Hendrick Pannebecker and Eve Umstat, in Germantown, Pennsylvania in the year 1699. In the words of the Steering Committee of the reunion, "We hope that the 1999 Pfannebecker-Umstat Reunion will lead to the growth of a family association, which will provide a forum for conversation, collection and preservation of information, and a sense of lasting community among the heirs of this rich cultural heritage."