

The First European Settlers in the Great Valley?

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The following obituary appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on February 1, 1770:

On Sunday, the 14th of January last, died Sarah Meredith aged 90 years. She was born in a little log house where the city of Philadelphia now stands (her maiden name was Rush) and there lived until she arrived to woman's state, when she was married to

David Meredith, and soon after settled in the Great Valley, Chester County, about 28 miles from Philadelphia, then the westernmost settlement in the Province, being six Miles beyond any Neighbour, except Indians, who were very numerous, kind, and inoffensive; on which Place she spent the remainder of her Days, and retained her Senses perfectly to the very last.¹ She was

Mother of 11 Children, Grand-mother of 66, and Great Grand-mother of 31, in all 108, and what is remarkable, the Chief of them are now living.

David & Sarah Meredith lived in (West) Whiteland Township (see map) but when did they move there? From the obituary it seems as if they may have



Image courtesy of Google Maps, with annotations by Mike Bertram, 2009.

moved there before 1700, which was very early in the settlement of the area, and they could easily have been the first European settlers in the Great Valley.

Lewis Walker, by oral tradition, was the first settler in the Tredyffrin portion of the Great Valley. He purchased land in 1702 and certainly settled there by 1705, when a road was created from his house to the Conestoga Road. 1704 is the date of the founding of Whiteland Township so there were certainly other settlers in the area by that year. It is unclear when these settlers arrived in the township. No candidates as challengers to the Merediths as possible first settlers are apparent.

No record has been found of David Meredith purchasing land in the township, although the location of the Meredith tract is known, as shown on the map on p. 57. He first appears in the records as a witness to a marriage in Whiteland in 1711. David wrote his will and died in 1754. In his will he provides for his wife and names eight children as benefactors.

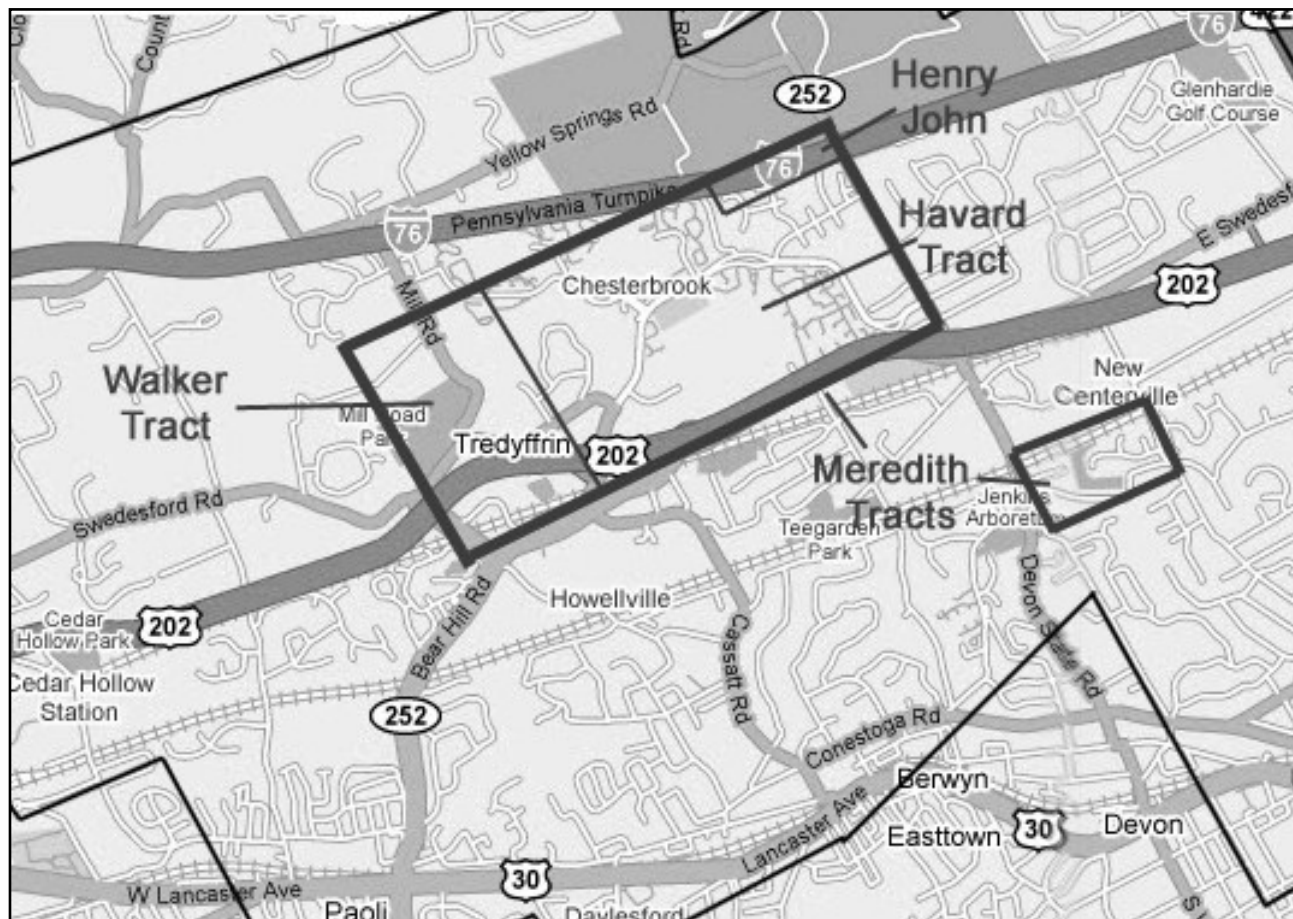
There is an advertisement for a sale of the West Whiteland property on January 13, 1784 by David Meredith Jr. (the original David's grandson) in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of December 24, 1783:

200 acres, half cleared and half well timbered. 2 dwellings (a stone mansion) and a barn; 15 acres of meadow with a stream; 2 orchards; Limestone quarry and lime kilns; Well-limed fields. Title indisputable.

Unfortunately, the deed of sale does not recite the deed history so the date of the Merediths' move to Whiteland is not clarified.

A Major Land Transaction in Tredyffrin

David Meredith was involved in an interesting Tredyffrin land transaction in 1706 with some strange twists. On the April 4, 1706 he obtained a warrant for 1500 acres, which was a huge amount of land and



Map showing the tract locations. Google Maps, with Mike Bertram.

would have cost him £75, i.e. 1 shilling per acre. The grant was split into two unconnected tracts of 1340 and 160 acres in Tredyffrin Township.* On November 15 of the same year, David and Sarah sold the two tracts to David Powell, a deputy surveyor for Chester County for £150, i.e. 2 shillings per acre. One of the witnesses to this deed was a John Havard. This seemingly was a huge profit made in a very short period of time. One must ask whether David Powell, who was a land dealer, as well as a surveyor, was involved in financing the investment.

David Powell then sold 800 acres of the 1340 acre tract to John Havard in April 1707 for £200, i.e. 4 shillings per acre. On July 16, 1707 David Powell married Mary Havard, John Havard's widowed mother. In 1708 he sold the 160 acre tract and 400 acres at the west end of the 1340 acre tract to Lewis Walker for £161, i.e. 5s 9d per acre. The remaining 140 acres of the 1340 acre tract seems to have been acquired by Henry John, but no deed exists. Even ignoring this last lot, Powell made a profit of £211 in 2 years (and a lot of this profit was made by selling land to his soon to be step-son)! The profit was an amazing amount of money for the time.

David Meredith's Ancestry

A different David Meredith patented 250 acres in Radnor in 1687. He was born in Llandegley, Radnorshire, Wales in 1637 and came to Pennsylvania with four brothers, one who settled in the Great Valley.² The following Merediths appear in a passenger list from 1683: David Meredith, John Meredith, Kathe-

rine Meredith, Mary Meredith, Meredith Meredith, Richard Meredith, Sarah Meredith.³ So David Meredith of Whiteland was probably a descendant of some of these passengers.

David Meredith of Radnor was a well known Quaker. He was one of the 21 signatories of a letter to William Penn in 1688 asking him to preserve the Welsh tract for the Welsh.⁴

He later moved to Plymouth Township where he was instrumental in setting up the Quaker Meeting. David Meredith's will was dated 28th day 9th month 1723. His son Meredith David received a majority of the estate in the will but had also died. His grandson, Ellis Meredith, obtained letters of administration. Ellis had a brother named David Meredith but he had also died young.

So this branch of the family is unlikely to have provided the David Meredith who lived in Whiteland.

Summing Up

Unfortunately no evidence has been uncovered that supports the implication in Sarah Meredith's obituary that the Merediths were the first European family to settle in the Great Valley. The history of the Great Valley before the first tax return of 1715 is likely to be always shrouded in mystery due to the lack of documents from the time.

Thanks to Clarrisa Dillon for pointing out the articles in the Pennsylvania Gazette.

* The reason for this split is an interesting question. The land north of the 1340 acre plot was vacant at the time of the patent. Why was that not used to provide a contiguous tract? The reason seems to be some confusion about the boundary of the Welsh tract and Bilton Manor (which was approximately the area now covered by Schuylkill Township). The boundary between these tracts is normally placed along the ridge of the North Valley Hills. The northern boundary of the original surveyor's plan for the 1340 acre plot (redrawn in 1909) has the annotation 'the adjusted Welsh line dividing it from the manor of Bilton' moving the boundary much further south. This boundary change did not survive for long as no other deed has been found that mentions it.

NOTES

¹ An Indian village existed near the junctions of Routes 100 and 30 in Exton.

² *Plymouth Meeting* by Ellwood Roberts, Roberts Publishing, 1900.

³ The 1683 passenger list by Helen Campbell. http://www.melungeons.com/articles/apr2006.htm#*; Source: Broderbund Family Archive #354, Ed. 1.

⁴ http://www.delcohistory.org/ashmead/ashmead_pg565.htm.