

## Tredyffrin in 1710

In 1710, Tredyffrin was a young settlement that had only been designated as a township three years earlier, in 1707. The earliest settler, Lewis Walker, did not move into the township until after 1700. The early history is to a great extent that of the landowners, and thereby nearly exclusively male.

Some land in Tredyffrin was sold by William Penn in the first few years of Pennsylvania's existence in the 1680s. Then, for unknown reasons, a moratorium was placed on selling land in the area until 1700. No land was sold at all in the 1690s. After 1700 land sales proceeded briskly.

What was the state of the land when the first European settlers arrived? Was it primeval forest? The Native Americans certainly manipulated the land, mainly through burning, but by 1700 the number of Indians in the area was small. So the land was probably all wooded, though it may not have returned to old-growth forest. Either way, the first settlers had a big job clearing the land for agriculture. They probably initially did not fell many trees, but just girdled trees and then planted crops around their bases in the native fashion. It would have just taken too much time to cut down and dispose of the trees. Obtaining enough food and shelter to survive the first winters would have been the top priority.

Some of the early landholders in Tredyffrin, such as Lewis Walker and John Havard, had the luxury of already owning other land in the colony, so they could be more leisurely in the preparation of their local property. The houses in 1710 were probably almost exclusively of log construction. In 1798, half of the houses in the area were still of log construction.

Were there many squatters on the land? This is an issue with hardly any available evidence, but you have to wonder how many people would be willing to put in the effort to start farming and build a simple house knowing they could be thrown off the land at any time. One pointer that there were squatters in the vicinity is correspondence from 1703 referring to a settlement near the current location of St. Peter's Church in the Great Valley. At that time neither Tredyffrin (1707) nor Whiteland (1704) Townships were in existence.

The first taxes were imposed on Tredyffrin landowners in 1715. The tax list shows 22 resident landowners (including one woman) and four non-resident landowners. Later in the century, the average household size was between seven and eight people. That produces an estimate of there being 150 to 180 people living in the township in 1710.

### Roads

In 1710 Tredyffrin had the beginnings of a road system. The roads were not anything like what we consider a road these days, probably just a track through the forest with diversions for fallen trees and other obstacles. The first Tredyffrin road was officially laid out by order of the courts in 1710. This was a road from Jarman's Mill (the predecessor of the present Great Valley Mill) to Radnor via what is now Berwyn. It followed for part of its path Howellville Road and then Cassatt Road. Having a mill in the township was important for the viability of the area, as farmers needed a mill to grind their grain.

Two other major roads existed in some form: the Conestoga and Swedes Ford Roads. The Conestoga Road was based on an Indian trail which went between the Philadelphia area and the Indian town of Conestoga, located in what is now Lancaster County. The Conestoga Road was not officially laid out until 1741, but it is mentioned in earlier road papers.

The origin of Swede's Ford is somewhat mysterious. It linked Bridgeport and Norristown areas and was probably an Indian river crossing. The name does not seem to have originated during the period of Swedish

control of the Delaware River in the 1600s, but from the much later settling of the area near the ford by Matts Holstein, a Swede, in 1712. Swedes Ford Road was laid out in 1725.

Another road that existed from around 1705 was from Lewis Walker's house to the Conestoga Road. It is mentioned in the laying out of Old Eagle School Road in 1719.

The last path or road that existed in those early days had a route which is now followed by North Valley Road. It was an Indian path from a town near Media to Pawling's Ford on the Schuylkill River. North of the river the trail split into two branches. There are no papers for the official laying out of North Valley Road.

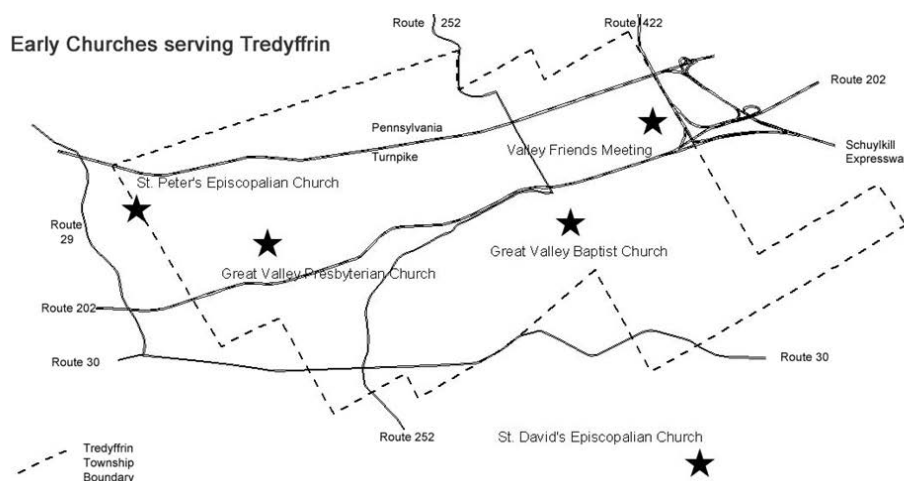
The first road plan in existence for Tredyffrin is from 1724. It was an unsuccessful attempt to change the route of Swedes Ford Road even though the road had not been officially laid out at the time. It is also the first document showing the Presbyterian Church as well as the properties of some of the early settlers.

## Churches

The first local gatherings of Friends took place at Lewis Walker's house under the auspices of Radnor Meeting. In 1713 there was a request for a separate meeting. The first Valley Friends meeting house was built in 1731 on land donated by Walker, next to his house.

St. Peter's Church in the Great Valley was established by 1703, and the first burial may have been in that year. The sister Episcopal congregation that became St. David's Church - Radnor was also established in the early 1700s.

The Baptist Church in the Great Valley was founded in 1711. The Great Valley Presbyterian Church was established in 1710 and thereby was probably the first church to be founded in Tredyffrin Township. [The St. Peter's church building is just across the township line in East Whiteland. - Ed.]



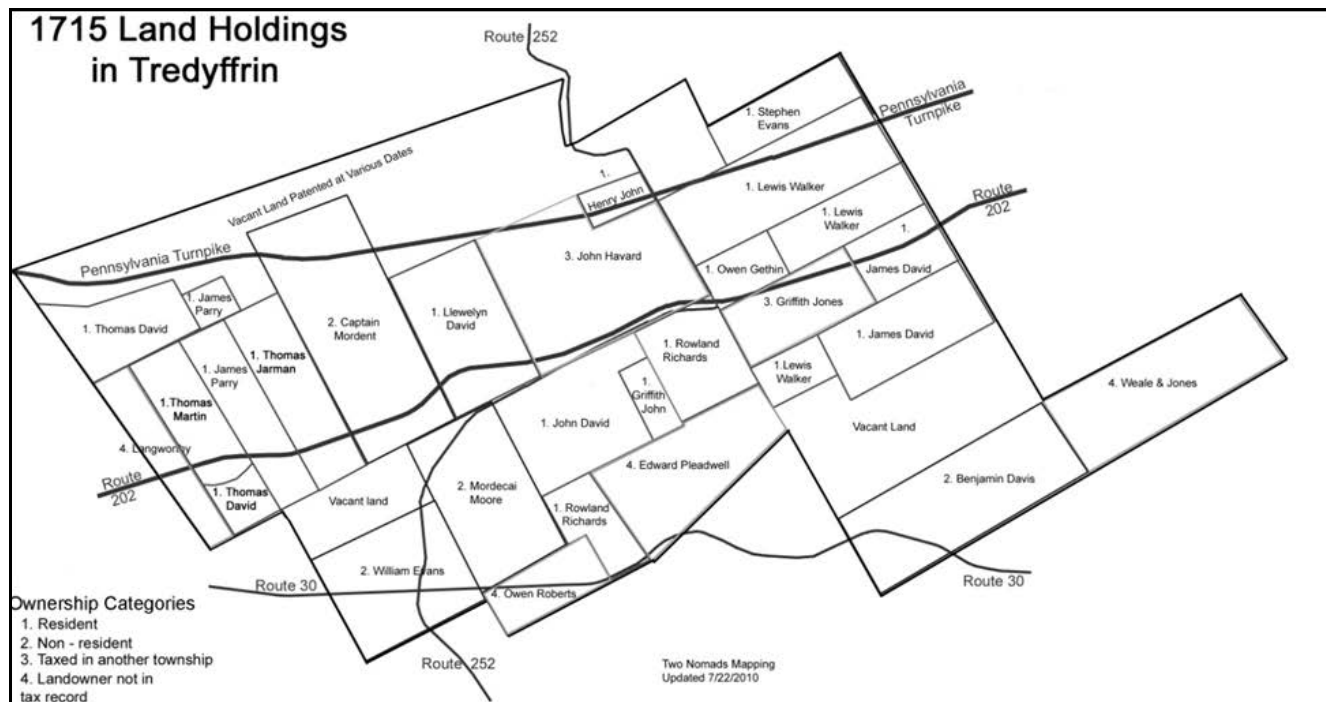
## Land Ownership

The township is comprised of three geological zones – the North Valley Hills, the Great Valley, and the South Valley Hills. The underlying rocks determine the base fertility of the land. The Great Valley is the most fertile, then the South Valley Hills, and the North Valley Hills had the least fertility. Only the more attractive parts of Tredyffrin had been purchased by 1715 – the Great Valley, and parts of the South Valley Hills. The North Valley Hills were vacant land.

The land ownership shown on the map on the following page has been divided into four categories. Category 1 is landowners who lived in the township in 1715. Category 2 is those landowners who are specifically mentioned in the 1715 tax return as being non-residents. Category 3 is those who by the deed history owned land in Tredyffrin in 1715, were not in the tax returns, but are known to be taxed in another township. Category 4 is those who by the deed history owned land in Tredyffrin in 1715, were not in the tax returns, and are not known to be taxed in another township.

## Early Families of Tredyffrin

Tredyffrin was in the Welsh Tract and the land was initially reserved for Welsh settlers. Duplicated surnames cause great difficulty in understanding the early family relations. There were two David/Davis families and two John/Jones families living in the township.



Six David brothers immigrated to Pennsylvania with their father. Four out of six brothers – Thomas, Llewellyn, James, and John—were all early settlers in the valley. Thomas was Tredyffrin’s first constable in 1708. His son, Methuselah, donated the land on which St Peter’s Church had been built. James married Llewellyn’s widow.

The two David brothers who were not resident in Tredyffrin also had an impact on the local community. William of Radnor helped set up St. David’s Church, while Joseph of Goshen was a Quaker minister. It is said that the family was originally Quaker.

The number of those living in the township was small enough that intermarriage was inevitable. The Walker family intermarried with the Evans, Jarman, and Richards families. The David family intermarried with the Abraham, Parry, and John families. In 1724, John David, James David, and the latter’s son-in-law, James Abraham, were the three yeoman (landowners) from Tredyffrin who were part of the group that purchased land for the Presbyterian Church.

## Summary

In 1710 Tredyffrin was a sparsely populated region of woodland with a few small areas being used for farmland. The township had one mill and a few roads and churches. The Great Valley Presbyterian Church was the first church actually to be located in the township.

*Mike Bertram*

## References

- Mike Bertram, “The Old Roads of Tredyffrin,” *Tredyffrin Easttown History Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Summer 2008).  
Mike Bertram, “The 1724 Road Plan,” *Tredyffrin Easttown History Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Fall 2009).