

HISTORY OF REV. BENJAMIN MENDENHALL

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Source: Mendenhall Family Association, www.mendenhall.org*

Benjamin was one of the original Mendenhall immigrants to America, having arrived in Chester Co, PA about 1682. Benjamin sold 100 acres of the Harding tract to his brother, Moses, on 27 Nov 1686 (the acreage and timing intentionally matched that of brother John's sale to Thomas Martin). This transfer was nullified on 5 Feb 1688, almost certainly because, by then, Moses had returned to England. Benjamin bought 250 acres in Concord Township from William Hitchcock (who bought the land from William Penn in England) on 8 Feb 1702. Benjamin bought 500 acres west of the Brandywine in Kennett (now Pennsbury) Township from Isaac Few on 23 Mar 1703 with financial assistance from his father-in-law, Robert Pennell. They jointly received title on 15 Jun 1703 and quickly sold off 100 acres to Thomas Hope on 20 Aug 1703.

Benjamin was trained as a wheelwright and made his living in that trade until he accumulated enough land to farm. A money box that he made shortly after his arrival is carved with the initials, B.M. and the date 1684 on the front and has wire hinges. Benjamin, who served one term in the Assembly, primarily devoted his energies to the service of his religion rather than to local or provincial politics and government. His older brother, John, had settled in Pennsylvania by Feb 1683, when he had 300 acres surveyed in Concord Township, Chester County. Benjamin had arrived in the colony by 17 Apr 1685, when he was present at his sister Mary's marriage to Nathaniel Newlin.

Apparently incomplete records of Mendenhall's real estate transactions, combined with the inexactness of late 17th and early 18th century surveying techniques, preclude a complete picture of Benjamin as a Chester County landholder. However, he acquired substantial holdings in Concord, Thornbury and Bradford townships. Slightly over a year after his arrival in Pennsylvania, Benjamin secured his first land in the colony, 250 acres in Concord Township conveyed to him by his brother John. Along with his father-in-law, Robert Pennell, Benjamin obtained 650 acres on Brandywine Creek in two separate acquisitions in 1702 and 1703. They sold 100 acres of the tract later in 1703, and in 1711, Pennell sold his share to Benjamin. Benjamin also acquired tracts in Chester County of 125 acres (which he sold in 1699), 250 acres and 325 acres. He conveyed a tract of undetermined size to his brother Moses.

Benjamin purchased from Nicholas Pile in 1711 a one-seventh share in Pile's Concord Mills. Benjamin became one of the highest taxpayers in Concord Township. From 1715 to 1732 he consistency ranked in the upper 10 percent of taxpayers in the township, and in six years he had the second highest tax assessment, outranked in four of those years only by his brother-in-law, Nathaniel Newlin, and once by Henry Oburn. Benjamin received his highest assessment in 1720 but by the mid-1730's they had declined precipitously and by 1739 he had vanished from the tax rolls altogether. When combined with the lack of bequests of real estate in his will, however, his disappearance from the tax rolls suggests that he had conveyed his lands to his children rather than that his circumstances had declined.

Benjamin's fairly limited participation in the public life of Chester County began a little over a year after his immigration, when he was appointed viewer of fences for Concord Township, along with Nathaniel Newlin. In 1693 and 1694, he was constable of Concord, in the latter year as a substitute for Godwin Walter, who was subsequently ordered by the county court to pay Benjamin 10 shillings for his time and trouble in serving as constable.

At various times Benjamin served as either a grand or petty juror in the Chester County court. In 1693, he presented the court with a petition from the inhabitants of Concord and Thornbury townships for a cart road to Chester, and a decade later he helped to lay out a county road. In 1701, Benjamin and 112 fellow Chester County residents petitioned the proprietor for a fair to be held at Chichester twice annually, and in 1712 he joined in another broadly supported petition requesting that Chester be made a port of entry for the colony.

In 1717, he was elected a Chester County tax assessor. Benjamin's rather minimal service to Chester County was vastly overshadowed by his commitment to the Quakers of Concord Monthly Meeting. An overseer of Concord Meeting as early as 1706, Benjamin was an elder of the meeting at the time of his death. For over 25 years, beginning in 1711, he regularly represented Concord Friends at Chester Quarterly Meeting. In 1723, he undertook a religious visit to Friends at Conestoga and Octoraro as part of a group that included Daniel Williamson, Ephraim Jackson and John Wright.

Benjamin was also a delegate to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting five times between 1711 and 1729. His son, Benjamin, was accredited to the meeting of Quaker ministers in 1725, and Benjamin himself attended Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders three times, in 1729, 1730 and 1735.

The 1714 Assembly was Benjamin's only foray into provincial office, representing Chester County. As a leading Quaker, he favored the use of an affirmation rather than an oath in Pennsylvania's courts, but his view on the enactment of two separate affirmation laws by the 1714 Assembly has not been found. His attitude toward the best method for the province to raise money for government expenses remains equally obscure; ultimately, the 1714 Assembly enacted a penny per pound property tax and excises on imported liquors and slaves. In fact, Benjamin's role in the business of the Assembly seems to have been fairly minor, a reflection of his slight local office holding. In Feb 1715, he was one of six members, including his brother-in-law, Nathaniel Newlin, appointed to examine the clerk's transcription of six bills that had passed the House; the committee was further ordered to present those bills and four others, related to establishing a court system in the province, to Governor Charles Gookin. The next month Benjamin and John Swift were delegated to return four bills, including those for creating a supreme court and courts of common pleas, to Governor Gookin, along with the Assembly's response to the governor's amendments. They were further ordered to advise the governor that the House was willing to meet with him in conference over the bills if its answers did not give "ample satisfaction." Toward the end of his term Benjamin was somewhat laggard in attendance; on four occasions, when the Assembly reconvened following adjournments, he was absent.

Possibly the closing years of Benjamin's life were marred by ill health. When he made his will, on 20 Sep 1736, he described himself as "indisposed and weak in body." Nevertheless, the document was not probated until 14 Apr 1740. Benjamin had probably distributed his land among his children before drafting his will, for he did not bequeath any real estate. Instead, after granting his wife, Ann, the customary third part of his personal property, Benjamin made bequests of personal property and cash totaling almost £170 to his children and his sons-in-law, together with a promise of 20 shillings to each grandchild alive at his death. His son, Robert, also received a servant lad named King Roberts. As joint executors Benjamin appointed his wife and his son-in-law Thomas Marshall. An inventory of Benjamin's personal property, taken on 15 Apr 1740, revealed an estate worth over £760, including bonds, mortgages and book debts of about £592 and such standard Quaker books as George Fox's *Journal*, William Sewel's *History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of . . . Quakers* and Edward Burrough's *Works*.

Following is the marriage certificate of Benjamin and his wife:

We whose names are hereunder written being called and concerned as witnesses present at the solemnization and confirmation of a marriage for some time intended and pending between Benjamin Mendenhall of Concord in the county of Chester in the province of Pennsylvania, wheelwright, and Ann Pennell, daughter of Robert Pennell of Chester Creek in the county aforesaid and well knowing that the consideration and performance hereof ought to be observed and asserted in the fear of the Lord with a great deal of sobriety and clearness and also with full consent of friends and relations in all, we are satisfied that these friends now concerned are not wanting on the behalf but with their proceedings therein they have acted in such plainness and openness and at several monthly meetings of friends have proposed the matter and inquiry hath been made and also for the fulfilling a law of the province in the case provided, did the 12th day of the 12th month last before the date hereof did post or set up a paper upon a certain noted public place in the aforesaid county where they lived showing their intentions of taking each other as husband and wife and nothing being since objected to the contrary so it is evident that a clearness of freedom as becometh truth has been discovered and the consent and allowance of friends and relations has been obtained.

Now for the completion and consummation of these their intentions and for the full asserting and solemnizing of a marriage proposed between the said Benjamin Mendenhall and Ann Pennell as aforesaid,

We whose names are hereunto subscribed called together and desired to be as witnesses on that behalf do hereby certify all whom it may concern the said Benjamin Mendenhall on the 17th day of the second month in the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred eighty nine in the presence of us did take the said Ann Pennell to be his wife and did also in such sobriety and in the fear of the Lord, promise to live, abide and be unto her a loving husband while the Lord should lend him life.

And at the same time the said Ann Pennell in the presence of us did accept and take the aforesaid Benjamin Mendenhall to be her husband and promising also in much sobriety before the Lord to live reverent and abide and be unto him a loving wife all her appointed time.

And as testimony unto all whom this may come, the said Benjamin Mendenhall and Ann Pennell on the day of the date hereof, before us did thus publish their marriage and solemnly and in much sincerity thus did covenant and engage each with other. We have hereunto set our hands the day and year above written.

Benjamin Mendenhall (signed)
Ann Mendenhall (her mark).

In 1713 Benjamin and his wife built a substantial home on the western end of the 250 acres he had bought. The home is still standing and contains a date stone in the gable in the shape of a half circle which reads, "1713 Mendenhall, Ben & Ann." Benjamin had a big walnut table made to fit the house between the door and the steps. The table had a bench built along the wall behind it and another made to slip under the table. It was used when entertaining the Quarterly Meeting of the Quakers.