

Notes on Thomas Pierson

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Source: Mendenhall Family Association (MFA), www.mendenhall.org

Thomas served his apprenticeship as a surveyor under J. S. Kippin in Bristol, England in 1675 and journeyed to London late that year. In September, he sailed for Maryland on the ship, Joseph & Benjamin, in company with William Dixon. In April, 1681, he returned to England aboard the ship, Comfort, arriving 20 May 1681. On 25 Jul 1683 he sailed for New Castle County, DE, aboard the Comfort, arriving 28 Sep 1683.

Following is a document dated the 24 Oct 1675 in Bristol, England:

To all people to whom this presents shall come this I signify and certify that the bearer hereof, Thomas Pierson, has served me the full term of seven years according to his indenture recorded in the ___ of this ___. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand the day and year above written.
Joseph Kippin (signed).

That which follows is in the neat handwriting of Thomas himself:

On the 12th day of the 8th month in the year 1675, I had served my apprenticeship on the 2nd day of the 12th month in the year aforesaid. I went from Bristol to London on the 14th day of the 7th month in the year 1676. I sailed from the Downes intending for Maryland in company with William Dixon on the 9th day of the 9th month in the year 1676. I arrived in Great Wicka Comma Coe River in the ship called the Joseph and Benjamin, Mathew Paine, commander of the same. On the 14th day of the 12th month in the year 1682, I sailed from without the capes of Cheasapeak Bay in Maryland for England in the ship called the Comfort, Thomas Whitop, master. On or about the 20th day of March 1682, I arrived in Kingroad. On the 25th day of July in the year 1683, I set sail from Kingroad on the Comfort, John Reed, master, and arrived at Upland in Pennsylvania the 28th of September 1683. Thomas was a young unmarried man when he came over and he went back to England in 1682-83. When he said he arrived "at Upland," he meant New Castle. The luggage listed for Thomas on the Comfort was 5 dozen wool stockings; 6 cwt wrought iron; 28 lbs. brass manufactured; 14 lbs. wrought pewter; 40 yds. frieze; 12 lbs. serges; 50 lbs. shoes; 1/2 chest window glass; 1 cwt. cheese; 5 pcs. English fustian; 3 parcels of wares valued at £3 1s and 5 pence.

Thomas was deputy surveyor for William Penn from 1684 to about 1709. He helped do the first survey of what is now the northern arc of Delaware. Following is the official warrant from William Penn to Isaac Taylor of Chester Co, PA and Thomas Pierson of New Castle County:

At the request of the inhabitants of the county of Chester and county of New Castle that I would grant them a warrant for the running a dividing line between the two said counties, that the inhabitants of the respective counties which are in question may know to what jurisdiction they belong. I hereby nominate, appoint and authorize you, Isaac Tayler of the county of Chester in the province of Pennsylvania, and you, Thomas Pierson of the county of New Castle in the territories, to accompany the magistrates of each county or any three of them within the space of forty days after the date hereof to measure and survey from the town of New Castle the distance of twelve miles on a right line by the river, Delaware, upwards and from the said distance to divide between the said counties by a circular line

extending according to the Kings letters, patents and deeds of enforcement from the Duke for the same and the said circular line to be well marked two third parts of the semicircle and make a true return hereof into my secretary's office to remain upon record and for so doing this shall be your warrant given under my hand and seal this 28th day of the 8th month, 1701.

William Penn (signed).

This document was executed on the same day as the signing of the famous charter of Philadelphia, sometimes called the Charter of Privileges, which was law in Philadelphia until the Revolution. The Charter says that four persons from each county may be elected to the Provincial Assembly. However, at that time there was no clear boundary between Chester and New Castle Counties. So it was necessary to know the exact boundary, so the people could know to which jurisdiction they belong. So in effect, Thomas was helping to carry out the Charter of Philadelphia. In fact, by 1704, the lower counties or the territories formed their own legislature, so that county boundaries became even more important. Eventually it became a state boundary.

Pierson and Taylor finished the survey on the 4 Dec 1701. There were five witnesses, including Cornelius Empson and Caleb Pusey. There is a sign where the survey began in New Castle, near the "horse dyke." The sign reads "surveyed by Empson and Pusey." These were the witnesses, not the surveyors. The original document is signed by Pierson and Taylor and then witnessed by Empson and Pusey. There is an old letter that strongly implies that Thomas did not get along with Cornelius Empson.

Much has been written about the Taylor-Pierson survey. It was imperfect, but it held for almost 200 years before it was re-surveyed with only a few adjustments being made. Thomas died intestate. His estate was administered by John Mendenhall and inventoried by John Earl and Joseph Cloud. It totaled £74 15s and 10 pence. The surveying instruments and what belonged with them were valued at £1.