

**SOME HISTORICAL SPOTS IN
LOWER MERION
TOWNSHIP, MONTGOMERY
COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

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Some Historical Spots in Lower Merion Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania by
Dora Harvey Develin (Mrs. John F.)

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(Mrs. John F.)



Some Historical Spots
IN
Lower Merion Township

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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LOWER MERION FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE.

The oldest church edifice in Pennsylvania, built in 1695 (on the site of a still older log meeting-house built in 1683).

Lower Merion Friends' Meeting House.

*Built 1695—The Oldest Church Edifice in the
State of Pennsylvania.*

Lower Merion Friends' Meeting House stands on the Old Lancaster Road (now called Montgomery Pike), just beyond Merionville, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. This is the oldest church edifice in the State, and was erected in 1695, on the site of a still older log meeting-house, built in 1683. This quaint, picturesque structure is in the form of a cross. Its walls are made of jointed stone, two feet thick, and its window-panes are of the small leaded type. The coating of plaster (which really disfigures it) was added in 1829, when, as a little tablet in the side of the wall tells us, it was "repaired."

Inside, above the elders' seats, two pegs are pointed out as those upon which William Penn hung his hat when he preached to a Welsh congregation (many of whom could not understand him). One of these pegs was stolen by a relic-hunter during the Centennial, but another was made from a piece of the original floor to replace it. Since that time the relic-hunter became conscience-stricken and returned the original peg and it now may be seen in its former place.

The name Merion, given to this township by the early Welsh colonists, is derived from that of Merionethshire, Wales. (We are told that Merionethshire, itself, was

named after an ancient Welsh hero, Merion, sometimes spelled Meriawn, who lived early in the Christian era.) The first settlers were a company of Welsh colonists, from Bala, Merionethshire, Wales, who landed on the banks of the Schuylkill River, near Pencoyd, August 14, 1682, two months before William Penn landed. The first recorded burial at Merion is that of a little child, Catharine, daughter of Edward and Mabby Rees, October 23, 1682, only two months after the landing of the ship "Lyon" at Pencoyd.

It is known that, for some time after the landing, "meeting" was held at the house of Hugh Roberts, at Pencoyd. The ground where the log meeting-house first stood belonged to Edward Rees, the same who buried the little child. The land was sold to the congregation of Friends, in 1695, for \$2,50. Descendants of Edward Rees assert that, previous to this year, ground was leased, or loaned, and that, if the meeting-house should ever be disturbed, they could lay claim to it.

Just across a field stands the old Price (or Rees) homestead, used by Lord Cornwallis as his headquarters during the Revolution while he was in this part of the country. Edward Rees had children, some of whom were known as Ap Rees—then Prees. (The Welsh prefix Ap means son of, or child of.) In a few generations the spelling had changed to Price. In the early records of Merion Meeting we see "Jane Prees, daughter of Edward and Mabby Rees."

On the opposite side of the road stands another Price mansion, a beautiful example of the old-time Pennsylvania architecture.

The original 10,000 acres included in what is now Lower Merion was granted to John Ap Thomas, a noble Friend or Quaker, whose royal pedigree is recorded all

the way back to Adam. The document (a copy of which may be seen in the Library of the Philadelphia Historical Society) goes a long way to carry out the belief of Welsh historians that the Welsh are the oldest civilized people in the world, and are descended from the Phœnicians, Phrygians, and Trojans, through Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas, who landed in Britain 1136 B. C.

John Ap Thomas died in the spring of 1682, before he had the opportunity of seeing his vast possessions in Merion, but his kinsman, Dr. Edward Jones, who settled at Wynnewood, brought the colonists over. Wynnewood was named after Dr. Thomas Wynne, who was father-in-law to Edward Jones, and who was physician to William Penn. (Dr. Thomas Wynne was the first Speaker of the first Pennsylvania Assembly.)

William Penn and Dr. Wynne came over in the ship "Welcome," two months after the ship "Lyon" landed. He, Dr. Wynne, settled in Blockley Township and built "Wynnstay," which still stands. In Scharf and Westcott's "History of Philadelphia" may be seen a copy of Holme's map, dated 1681. Lower Merion appears as "Edward Jones and 17 families." "Merion Meeting" is shown on Scull and Heap's map, 1750.

(The writer has in her possession the old "Brief of Title" showing the terms of the land grant to Dr. Edward Jones, 1681—from whom she is descended.)

Merion Meeting is mentioned in the Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, Vol. XV, page 221, in the journal of Lieutenant James McMichael:

"Sept. 14, 9 A. M., we marched from camp near Germantown, N. N. W. for a few miles up the great road from Philadelphia to Reading, then turning W. S. W. we crossed the Schuylkill in the centre, between Philadel-

phia and Swedes' Ford, 8 miles from each. We reached the great road to Lancaster at Merion Meeting House, and proceeded up that road, then we camped in an open field, being denied every desirable refreshment." (This was in 1777, a few days before the massacre of Paoli. On this spot a granite memorial stone was erected by Merion Chapter, D. A. R., September 14, 1896.)

On October 5 and 6, 1895, Merion Meeting held its Bi-Centennial Anniversary. Between two and three thousand people came from all parts of the country to be present at this most interesting celebration. A great tent was erected on the green sward, under the tall buttonwood trees, with seating capacity for about 1000 persons, but this accommodated less than half who were present. They came early, they came by train, and by wagon—they rode on horses, on wheels, and they walked, until as someone remarked, the fields adjoining the old "General Wayne Tavern" looked like a big day at a county fair. (The old horse-block, where the maidens of yore used to dismount, stands as it did more than two centuries ago.)

The visitors were welcomed to the quaint old house of worship and many interesting relics, such as the original deed of ground, dated 1695, and an old marriage certificate bearing the date of 1783 were displayed. Behind the meeting-house, running across the back of the "General Wayne," is the grave-yard where many of the early settlers of Merion peacefully sleep. (Jesse George, who died in 1873, aged 88 years, is buried here. He left to the city of Philadelphia and Fairmount Park, 80 acres of ground. The Centennial Exposition was held upon a portion of this land, and George's Hill, the magnificent hill which crowns the western end of Fairmount Park, bears his name.)