

# Benjamin Griffith of Baltimore

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## Benjamin Griffith, Baltimore Merchant

Benjamin left many land records and a will. His widow, Catherine, and his children sold their bequest and these deeds reveal the names and locations of his family. Local Baltimore histories claim that the family came from Delaware and owned property in downtown Baltimore before the Revolution (known as Cole's Harbor). They owned an interest in a tract at Jones Falls called "Hanson's Improvement." Benjamin was possibly the brother of Nathan Griffith who owned "Griffith Tavern" in Baltimore town.

A Benjamin Griffith also owned land at "Hailes Folly" west of the city which possibly included the historic "Hampton" estate. Another Benjamin in this region was the son of John Griffith who owned Christmas Eve. **It is not proven that Benjamin the merchant is the same man as the Benjamin who owned land in Hailes Folly.**

## Details of the land records:

1804 deeds from Benjamin Griffith's decedents, to one John Smith Jr . convey their interest in the tract named, "Hanson's Improvement." originally owned by Benjamin Griffith, Philip Hall and Richard Lemon. The estate was conveyed to the decedents in the Will of Benjamin Griffith (Balto. Will Bk. 6:181 proved in 1799).

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The deeds name Benjamin's decedents: wife, Catherine; sons: John B., Joseph, Benjamin, Thomas W., George, Anne and Catherine. John B. Griffith is shown as "absent". George and Catherine are listed as minors. The other four children were present to sign the deeds.

Benjamin may have been a prominent government official during the Revolution in Baltimore. Property deeds in different areas of Baltimore County, as well as descriptions in local histories, suggest that several men named "Benjamin" Griffith lived in the same time period in Baltimore. [\(There is another, apparently unrelated Benjamin Griffith—son of John Griffith of "Christmas Eve."\)<sup>1</sup>](#)

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## Benjamin Griffith Origins

The Thomas W. Griffith named in the above 1804 deed is "Thomas Waters Griffith," author of *Annals of Baltimore*, published in 1838. On page 41 he states that Benjamin

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<sup>1</sup> See William Griffith at my website: [www.westerly-journeys.com/genealogy/famGriffith/WilliamGriffith-MD-WVA.pdf](http://www.westerly-journeys.com/genealogy/famGriffith/WilliamGriffith-MD-WVA.pdf)

Griffith came from New Castle Co., Delaware in 1763. (Thomas W. Griffith was born in 1767 in St. Paul's Parish, Baltimore.)<sup>2</sup> Benjamin bought a lot for the Baptist Church on Front Street in Baltimore. As a freeholder he was appointed to the County Commission and played a prominent civic role during the Revolution. He purchased property confiscated from Tories in Baltimore (part of the Hanson's Improvement/Colis Harbor)—in other words, land in what is now downtown Baltimore.

## Transcript of will

*[Viewed and photocopied at Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, November 2010]*

Baltimore County to wit on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of May 1799 came John Thomas subscribing Evidence to the foregoing last will and Testament of Benjamin Griffith late of Balto County and made oath viz that he did \_\_\_ Testator Sign and seal this will that he heard him publish pronounce and \_\_\_\_\_ same to be his last Will and Testament that at the

\_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin Griffith Will Book 6, page 181, proved 1799:

In the name of God Amen I Benjamin Griffith of Baltimore County in the State of Maryland being in perfect health (blessed is God) do this sixth day of October in the year of our Lord one Thousand seven hundred and Eighty four make this my last will and Testament in manner following (that is to say First I will that all my just debts and funeral charges be paid and discharged Secondly that my beloved wife Catharine Griffith have the third part of my Estate according as the Law directs And also I give and bequeath all the remaining part of my Estate both real and personal to be equally divided between all my children Male and female whether born or unborn at the time of my decease to be divided by my Executors hereinafter named as they shall think best agreeable to the app\_\_\_\_\_ment and if it shall appear to them that my Estate will not admit of being thus divided they are to sell all or such part thereof so shall enable them to pay the legacies as they become due, my children to have their respective shares divided off or paid to them as they come to age and if any of them die under age their shares to be Equally divided between my surviving children until they are of age and I make and ordain my said wife and my loving friend David McMechin Executors of this my last will In witness whereof I have hereto set my hand and seal the day and year above written. Signed, Sealed Published and delivered by Benj<sup>n</sup> Griffith [seal] the said Benjamin Griffith \_\_\_\_\_for his last will and Testament in the presence of Rich<sup>d</sup> Lemmon Robert Lemmon J<sup>n</sup>o Thomas Jac<sup>s</sup> Lemmon

*[The following are related but separate documents]*

Disposition of property and names of devisees (children). Baltimore County Deeds, Liber WG 82 pages 445-447: 20 Aug 1804, "Catherine Griffith, widow and devisee of Benjamin Griffith deceased of Baltimore County..." Names children: "John B. Griffith now of full age and absent," and "George Griffith and Catharine Griffith now minor children and devisees..." Also 21 Aug 1804, Liber 82, pages 447-448: "Thomas Waters Griffith, Joseph Griffith, Benjamin Griffith and Ann Griffith some of the children and devisees of Benjamin Griffith deceased..." . Both deeds grant devisees' interest in tract called "Hanson's Improvement" to John Smith. Viewed online at Maryland Land Records. [Note that Thomas Waters Griffith authored *Annals of Baltimore*, published in 1838. On page 41 he states that Benjamin Griffith came from New Castle Co., Delaware in 1763. Thomas W. Griffith was born in 1767 in St. Paul's Parish, Baltimore. ]

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<sup>2</sup> [St. Pauls birth records, p. 104, Thomas W. Griffith b. 4/15/1767 to Benjamin and Rachel Griffith](#). It seems likely that Rachel was Benjamin's first wife and the mother of Thomas and perhaps the other children Therefore Catherine would be his second wife and mother to the younger children—such as the minors mentioned in the 1804 deed.

## Sources

*The History of Baltimore. City and County* by John Thomas Scharf states on p. 884  
“Settlers from New Castle, DE originated with Matthews of North of England. They  
came to *Gunpowder Monthly Meeting* in 1745. This suggests a migration from  
Delaware of Quakers—but Benjamin was a Baptist.

Henry C. Peden, *Inhabitants of Baltimore Co., 1763-1774: St. Pauls 1774 Baltimore E  
Hundred*: John Griffith, Benjamin Griffith –perhaps unrelated Griffiths.

Joseph Griffith Ancestors  
Marilou West Ficklin  
15 March 2011

