

only public building in London Britain, it also was the center of the community's political and social life.

The earliest grave in its cemetery is said to date from 1729, but the oldest legible gravestone is that of John Devonald, who died in 1735/36 (the year is given in both Julian and Gregorian calendars). There are graves and headstones of many of the earliest local settlers, including the John Evans, Sr. and Jr., and of several veterans of the American Revolution. The grave markers range from small limestone tombstones of the 1700s to larger ones with arched heads and scrollwork from the 1800s. The cemetery also is the site of the legendary Ticking Tomb, said to hold the body of a man who as boy swallowed Charles Mason's chronometer, and of the grave of Gwen Cramer, one of several women who rallied to save the White Clay Creek valley from being flooded for a reservoir.

The Sexton's House was built in 1830. Its construction indicates that the population had grown enough to require the hiring and housing of a sexton, who maintains the meeting-house and cemetery and buries the dead. The 2½-story brick building has two rooms on the first level, arranged front to back; the rooms' fireplaces share one chimney. A spiral stair leads to the upper levels. Final payment for its construction was made in 1832. Behind the house is the foundation of an 1800s barn. In the grassy triangle between the house and meeting house is a stone colonial mounting block, used to mount horses and to enter and exit carriages.

The Sexton's House was the last building in this settlement constructed by and for the Welsh Baptists. In 1829, John Yeatman, a Quaker, acquired the Evans' mills. In 1834, a meeting house was built by the growing Quaker population on what is now Route 896. Its construction signaled the end of Welsh Baptist dominance in London Britain.

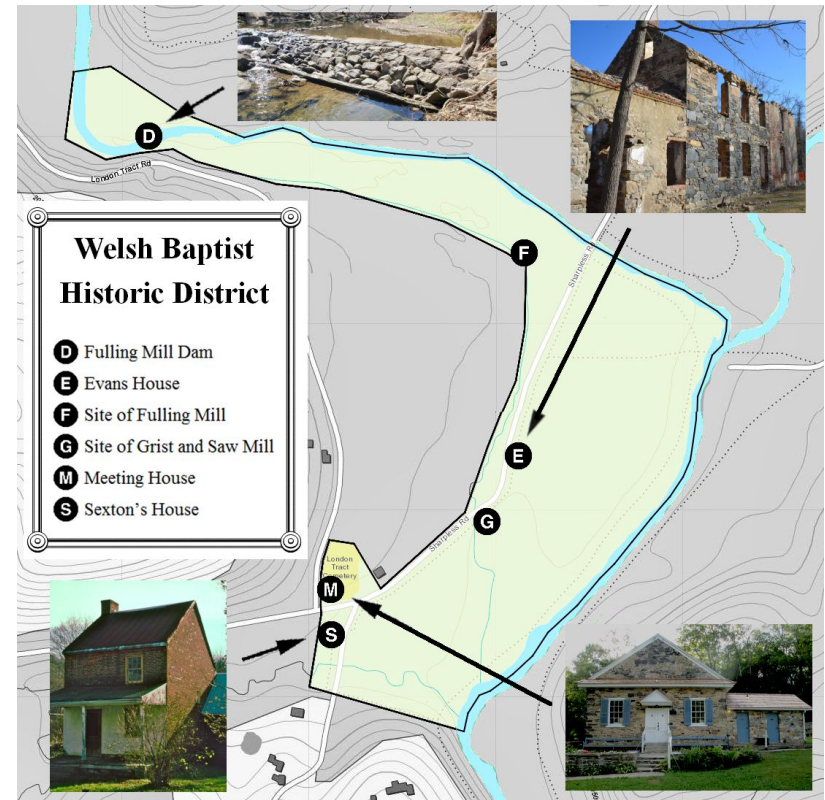
Yeatman and his descendants operated the mills for almost a century. The remnants of the mill are largely underground, but the mill pond, parts of the mill foundation and the spillway are still visible during the winter months. The dam originally built for the fulling mill (located upstream), and the race from it to the mill pond also survive.

*London Britain Township Historical Commission, 2025,
with thanks to Paul Lagassé and David Hawk*



The Welsh Baptist Historic District

London Britain's early history is intimately tied to the settlement of Welsh Baptists here. The Welsh Baptist Historic District, which has been recognized by Pennsylvania Museum and Historical Commission as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, includes the Evans House and mill ruins, London Tract Meeting House, the Sexton's House, and other sites in the White Clay Creek Preserve, and pays tribute the role Welsh Baptists, particularly the Evans family, played in early Pennsylvania.



William Penn, Pennsylvania's first proprietor and a Quaker, envisioned a colony that embraced religious tolerance as well as agricultural and commercial enterprise. The Welsh Baptists, who had experienced persecution and limited freedom in Wales, had already settled in nearby Delaware, and proved industrious, building a prosperous community and living peacefully with other religious "dissenters." Penn gave them a welcomed opportunity to settle here, practice their faith, and preserve their heritage. And he ensured that the border area contested with Maryland would be defended until the Calvert-Penn boundary dispute was

settled and Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon marked the boundary in the 1760s: Welsh Baptists, unlike Quakers, were not pacifists.

In 1714, John Evans, Sr., who had 300 acres in what is now SW London Britain, purchased 100 acres along the White Clay Creek, and built a grist mill (c.1715), with a mill dam as far upstream as possible, near his land's western edge, to create a head of water sufficient to power the mill. In 1723, John Evans, Jr. bought 200 acres that adjoined his father's 100 acres. Land was acquired by other Welsh Baptist families, and as the community developed, the need for roads for access and transport of goods, and the need for political organization to support the growing Welsh Baptist population became paramount.

Most of what is now London Britain was organized as part of New London in 1723. The Welsh Baptists' desire for greater control led them in 1725 to petition for their own township. They were successful, and later that year John Evans, Sr. and Jr. granted land to the elders of the Welsh Baptist meeting at Iron Hill for a house of



The Evans House (left) with the mill pond (front, left and center) and the mills (right), c.1880. Detail from an illustration of the residence and mills of John C. Yeatman in Futhey & Cope's History of Chester County, 1881.

worship in London Britain. Welsh Baptists became London Britain's first officeholders, and they successfully petitioned in 1726, 1728, and 1733 for public roads that would reach the Evans' grist mill. Such roads were often already in use but needed to be laid out officially to guarantee freedom of travel. These roads would enable the community and the Evans to thrive. Around 1730, on the land John, Jr. had acquired in 1723, a second dam and mill race and a fulling mill (in which woolen cloth is cleaned and thickened) were built.

These mills became the economic nucleus of the community, and the Evans became wealthy and prominent. John Evans, Sr. was an overseer of the poor for New London Township and London Britain Township. John, Jr. was a London Britain supervisor in 1728 and was elected to the provincial assembly several times. Quakers dominated county politics, and such an honor was unusual for a Welsh Baptist.

As the mills prospered, the need for labor increased. In 1738 John Evans, Jr. had four slaves and two indentured servants. In 1780, John Evans, Esq. registered

five men as his slaves: Ireland, Benjamin, Rago, Caesar and Bob. They may have operated his mill while he was in Philadelphia, perhaps assisted by the enslaved women Nanny and Sal and two enslaved girls. John Evans, Esq. and his brother Evan were among the largest slaveholders in the county, where non-Quaker townships in the south and west had most of the slaves.

John Evans, Jr. died in 1738 at the age of 38; his father died two years later. The Evans estate and mills were left to John, Jr.'s sons. His wife, Jane Howell Evans, managed them until the children came of age. She played a prominent role in the Welsh Baptist community, running the family's estate and mill, raising and educating her children to serve as prominent citizens, and acquiring land in her own right in 1741. Of her children, John Evans, Esq., was the most notable. A lawyer, he inherited the Evans House and grist mill, acquired mill properties in New Castle County, increased his land holdings in London Britain, and served as a state supreme court justice.

The Evans "Mansion" House lost its roof and most of its interior in a fire in 2017, but the brick and stone ruins remain a significant repository of colonial architectural technology, displaying the hallmarks of skilled artisans. The house has a complex construction history that is poorly documented and hard to date precisely, but it was built in stages between about 1715 and the early 1800s. There is evidence that a lost log house, possibly built by 1715, existed first, joined on its end by the west side of the brick section. The brick section is thought to be from the mid-1720s, when John Evans, Jr. and his wife moved here from Newark to manage the mill. The middle, stone section was probably built after John, Jr.'s death in 1738 and prior to 1760, possibly by John Evans, Esq., grandson of John Evans, Sr. The stone used for its façade, matches that of the meeting house. The third, northernmost stone section likely began as an early outdoor kitchen. It has some curious surviving details, however, such as the saw-toothed, corbeled brick cornice that was more common in the 1800s. A springhouse foundation and well extend from the northeast corner of the house.

A meeting house, where the Welsh Baptists worshiped in their own language, was constructed by 1731. It may have been a log structure that later was replaced by the current stone building. A simple symmetrical colonial meeting house, the London Tract Meeting House was built according to the Cottage Plan, a Puritan and nonconformist architectural form common in early America. It remains much as it was when it was completed. The



The London Tract Meeting House, courtesy John Starzmann.

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