

Benjamin West's family: the American President of the Royal Academy of Arts ... By Charles Henry Hart

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"In the instance of the **West** family the usual traditional three brothers did come to America. William, Thomas and **John West**, sons of Thomas and Rachel* (Gilpin) **West**, emigrated from England to Pennsylvania, soon after its settlement, and located in Chester County. They were birthright members of the Society of Friends, but **John**, the father of Benjamin, the brother in whom we are interested, came to this country *without a certificate of transfer*, which shows that he was not in good standing with Friends when he left England.

William **West** married Deborah Coppock and died, in 1720, without issue.

Thomas **West** married Mary Dean and had eight children, with whom he removed, in 1736, to what is now Wilmington, in the State of Delaware, where he died, in 1743, leaving many descendants.

John West, born in 1690, arrived in Pennsylvania *circa* 1715, leaving a wife in England, who soon after gave birth to a son,—named for his grandfather, Thomas,—and died in childhood. As we have noted, **John West** was not a Quaker when he settled in Pennsylvania,' as he is represented to have been by Gait and his followers, and he did not become a member of that sect until late in life. He married, in Chester County, Sarah, daughter of Thomas Pearson who came from England with William Penn. She, too, was a birthright member of the Society of Friends, but for some indiscretions, prejudicial to the well-being of Friends, was "disowned," or read out of meeting, so that "this marriage was not accomplished according to the good order of the Society of Friends"¹ and the children of **John** and Sarah **West**, credited to number ten, were therefore *not Quakers*. This is the reason we do not know their names; otherwise they would be upon the records of meeting.

It is both important and interesting to know that **Benjamin West** *the painter was not a Quaker*, either by birth or by adoption, after all these years and with the many stories that have been told of his struggles with Friends, in and out of meeting, to follow his bent for art. This fact alone shows the multitudinous errors of Gait, as he hangs so much upon West's being a Quaker.

Sarah **West**, the mother, died in 1756, aged fifty-nine, and it was not until three years later that **John West**, the father, who had kept, for many years, a public house of entertainment, in Chester County, joined meeting.

¹ Buell'B *Paul Jones* will doubtless hold in the present century the unique position that Gait's *Weit* held in the last century.

'In all printed accounts her name is given as "Ann" ; but Mr. Albert Cook Myers, who has made special investigations into the Gilpin family, says this is an error; that her name was *Rachel*.

* Smith's *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania*, p. 512."