

# Christopher Gist, pioneer; and Sequoyah

*by Rev. Richard W. Davies*

Historical research can trace back the origins and developments of a building, such as we have done concerning Old St. Luke's Church. However, there is a real delight in tracing the genealogy, from early American pioneers to someone who has lived among us and has known our present 1852 building.

This past September Howard Gist Jones died at the age of 92. He resided with his wife Fran at Friendship Village, Upper St. Clair, Pa. They have been longtime friends of Old St. Luke's Church and Howard's middle name, Gist, points to a local pioneer, Christopher Gist. Fran Jones has graciously shared a copy of his genealogical research with us.

The elder Christopher Gist and his wife Edith Cromwell came to Maryland in 1679. Christopher was a member of the Church of England, and a surveyor. Edith was the daughter of Sir Oliver Cromwell, a cousin of "Lord Protector" Cromwell.

They had one son, Richard, who married Zipporah Murray. Richard was one of the Commissioners who laid out the town of Baltimore, a Captain of the County Militia, and a leader of the Maryland Militia. They had nine children, and the oldest son was Christopher, born about 1705, who became a successful business man, especially with native Americans.

Colonial Virginia was eager to establish settlements west of the Allegheny Mountains. In 1747 the Ohio Company was formed and they petitioned the King of England for a land grant close to the Allegheny River. The area had to be surveyed, and Christopher was employed in 1750 for that purpose. He then was paid 150 pounds to search the Ohio River area. Another journey was commissioned in 1751-1752. His journals from both trips have been published.

In 1752 Christopher started a settlement between the Youghiogheny and Monongahela Rivers for 150 families on the Ohio Company's land. Christopher, his wife Sarah, and sons and daughters were the first settlers. When the French in Canada learned about the Ohio Company's actions, they also moved toward the confluence of the three rivers. What was about to begin we now call the British, French and Indian War. George Washington approached the French Commander, requesting the withdrawal of the French troops from what the British considered Virginia (later western Pennsylvania) and their domain. Washington needed a guide, and Christopher Gist was chosen, and thus began a lifetime friendship between Washington and Gist.

In 1755, Christopher served as a guide for Gen. Edward Braddock in his attack on the French Ft. Duquesne. He was commissioned Lieutenant in the Virginia forces in October 1755 and was later made Captain of scouts. In 1756 he was nominated by Washington to be named Deputy of Indian Affairs in Virginia, and he was so appointed by Gov. Dinwiddie.

Washington's wrote that "he knew of no person so well qualified for the undertaking as Capt. Gist. He has extensive dealings with the Indians, is in great esteem with them, and well acquainted with their manners and customs. He is indefatigable, patient, most excellent qualities where the Indians are concerned. And for his capacity and zeal I dare venture to engage."

Christopher died of smallpox on July 25, 1759 as he returned from scouting the frontier.

Christopher's son Nathaniel was a scout for Gen. Braddock and was present when the General was killed in 1755. Nathaniel and a Cherokee maiden, Wut-teh, gave birth to Sequoyah, whose English name was George Guess, or Gist. Sequoyah went on to develop the Cherokee alphabet in 1821, and he represented the western tribes in Washington. The Sequoia tree is named for him.

We thank the Jones family for Howard Gist Jones' resume of his history and wonderful heritage.



Sequoyah's  
syllabary