

Michael Lightfoot

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Michael Lightfoot was born in Ireland in 1683, the first son of Thomas and Mary Lightfoot. Michael followed in his father's footsteps and became an esteemed minister of the Society of Friends. Michael was the first member of the Lightfoot family to emigrate to this country, and he settled here in 1712 with his wife Mary (Newby) Lightfoot and their three daughters, Sarah, Elinor and Mary. Later, Michael and Mary had another daughter Katherine, and two sons Thomas and William.¹

Michael and his family were among the early settlers of a 5413-acre manor which they named New Garden in remembrance of New Garden Meeting in County Carlow, Ireland. This manor was subdivided into 32 tracts, twenty of which were purchased by Friends of the Society.² Michael purchased 300 acres in the upper central part of the manor for £60,³ which would be approximately \$27 per acre in current (2016) value.

Early on, the Friends met at Kennett Monthly Meeting, and later petitioned these Friends for permission to meet at the home of John Miller in New Garden. John owned the largest tract of land, 1013 acres, and built the first gristmill in the area. Later, they decided to build a permanent meeting house: "6 Mo. 3, 1713. __Also the said Meeting Requests that the ffriends of the meeting kept at John Miller's may have Liberty to Build a meeting house near Michel Lightfoot's, which this meeting, takeing into Consideration, do allow the same ffriends of that meeting so to do, and not to Exceed half a mile from the said Michel's." ⁴ This attests to Michael's status among the Friends.

Michael was appointed elder in 1725 and began preaching in that same year at age 42. He traveled extensively for the church in this country, Great Britain and Ireland, and had a reputation for being remarkably clear and "intelligible" in delivery. He was recommended for minister in 1728.^{5,6}

In 1742, Michael was commissioned by Richard Pike of London to be his agent in this country to lease lands owned by him in Pikeland. He was empowered to establish lease agreements for periods of 7 years, 11 years, or 21 years, and to collect rents accordingly. Further, he was to remove anyone without title from any of Pike's lands by whatever means necessary, and to collect rents in arrears.⁷

Michael moved to Philadelphia in 1743 to take the position of Treasurer of the Province of Pennsylvania. He lived with his son William. His duties he "discharged with much honor and integrity, for eleven years, until his death, at the age of 70, 12mo. 3, 1754."⁸

It has been mentioned that several people from the New Garden area acquired land in Pikeland and were among the first settlers there. One was Samuel Lightfoot who came from Chester in 1747 and built the first mill in Pikeland, and another was Thomas Milhaus who came from New Garden in 1744.⁹ It is quite likely that both leased land from Michael, possibly at favorable rates, because all three were related. Samuel was Michael's half-brother, and Thomas' wife Sarah was Michael's niece. (Sarah's mother was Catherine Lightfoot Miller, Michael's sister.) It is unlikely that Michael himself settled in Pikeland because, as stated above, he took up residence in Philadelphia in 1743.

Interestingly, when Richard Pike died in 1752, ownership of Pikeland passed to Samuel Hoare in England, who commissioned Michael's sons Thomas and William as his agents. They were empowered to sell the property, draft and execute deeds, and accept payment for the land.¹⁰

Footnotes

1. Albert Cook Myers, Immegration of the Irish Quakers into Pennsylvania 1682-1750, pages 135, 339.
2. Myers, pages 130-135.
3. Chester County Historical Society Archives, Deed Book D, page 27.
4. Myers, pages 135-137.
5. Myers, page 339.
6. John Woolman, The Journal and Essays of John Woolman, Appendix, page 77.
7. CCHS archives, Deed Book F, page 273.
8. Woolman, Appendix, page 77.
9. Myers, page 152.
10. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Pike v. Hoare, Section L.