

EXCERPT: From *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania, Volume One, 1682-1709*, pp. 381-383

For complete essay see *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania, Volume One, 1682-1709*, pp. 381-389

Joseph Growdon

(Grouden/Growden)

ASSEMBLY: Phila. Co. 1684, 1685; Bucks Co. 1686, 1690, 1693, 1700b, 1701, 1702, 1703, 1704, 1705, 1713, 1715, 1717, 1722

Speaker, 1690, 1693, 1700b, 1701, 1705, 1713, 1715, 1722

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL: Bucks Co. 1687-89, 1691-92, 1695, 1697, 1698, 1700

b. 17 Feb. 1652, St. Austell Parish, Corn., Eng. arr. Jan. 1684, from Corn., Eng. bur. 10 Nov. 1730. Father: Lawrence Growdon (d. 1708). Mother: Jennifer (Growdon) (d. 1699). m. (1) 1672 Elizabeth ___(?)___ (d. 1699); children: Grace, m. David Lloyd*; Jennifer; Elizabeth; Lawrence,* m. Sarah Biles, daughter of William Biles* (d. c. 1739). m. (2) 1705 Ann Jones (Bulkley) (d. 1736); children: Hannah, Joseph. Offices: Pa.: Provincial Court justice, 1690-91, 1693, 1698, 1705-6; chief justice, 1707, 1711-15; provincial councilor, 1708-30; Bucks Co.: tax assessor, 1693; JP, 1687-1714; Phila. Co.: JP, 1707, 1709; city of Phila.: alderman & JP, 1713-30.¹

Joseph Growdon, a wealthy English Quaker who settled in Bucks County and Philadelphia, served 15 terms in the Assembly (8 as speaker), 32 years in the Provincial Council, and 5 years as chief justice, making him one of the colony's leading political figures from 1684 until the early 1720s.

Growdon was born in the medieval Cornish parish of St. Austell in 1652 and resided at the family estate of Trevoise, which lay near Padstow along St. George's Channel. His father, a prosperous landowner and pewterer, was one the area's leading Quakers, who often hosted prominent traveling ministers, and who had helped establish Tregangeeves Monthly Meeting near St. Austell, Cornwall, in 1668. In 1679 Joseph Growdon signed, with others, a letter to London Friends about a Quaker imprisoned in Turkey, and two years later he served as a representative from Cornwall to London Yearly Meeting. In 1682 Growdon, his wife Elizabeth, and his father were arrested and fined for attending the Quaker funeral of Benjamin Growdon, perhaps his twin brother of the same name.²

In October 1681 Growdon, a pewterer and merchant, who may have subscribed 100 shares in the Free Society of Traders, joined his father in purchasing 10,000 acres from William Penn for £200. Eager to develop their investment, the two men sent their agent William Pickering to Pennsylvania in May 1682 to establish their claim. Pickering received at least 5000 acres in Bucks County on their behalf in the spring of 1683. Growdon left Cornwall in

September of that year, having the previous month authorized his father to settle his affairs at home, and "weary w[i]th nineteen Weeks Passage," arrived finally in New Castle, Delaware, in January 1684 aboard the *Mary of Fowey*.³

From the time of his arrival, and for the next 20 years, Growdon actively expanded and developed his Bucks County estate at Bensalem, located in the interfluvium of Neshaminy and Poquessing creeks. He sought to consolidate the 10,000 acres into one tract by entering a caveat in the surveyor's office against any individual who would "pr[e]tend to have any lands Surveyed" along the Neshaminy Creek towards the Delaware River. Apparently, he then quietly incorporated his father's 5000 acres into his tract, always claiming that his father had granted him the acreage. Moreover, Growdon gained access to the Delaware River from his estate through the acquisition of 1851 acres between 1684 and 1697, and he purchased an additional 850 acres that lay along Neshaminy Creek between 1697 and 1701. By 1687 Growdon had constructed a "very Noble and Fine House, very pleasantly Situated," near Neshaminy Creek, and by 1698 he had adjoining a "Famous Orchard" that contained over 1000 apple trees "of various sorts." He was undoubtedly the wealthiest man in Bucks County, as indicated by his 1693 tax assessment of £400, and by his own admission in 1695, that his estate was "very considerable." His landed interests extended beyond his properties in Bensalem Township; he also owned 414 acres in liberty lands, 1500 acres in Kent County, Delaware, 450 acres in Southampton Township, Bucks County, a half-acre lot in Bristol, two Philadelphia city lots on Front Street, and a half-share of the Schuylkill Mills in Philadelphia County. All of these possessions, however, he ultimately sold.⁴

The development of his Bensalem properties, which included his home, *Trevose*, was only part of his goal. Growdon desired that both his properties and those of others in Bensalem be granted manorial status, thereby obtaining the "Privelidges incident to a Court Barron in England w[i]thout incumberances to the Tennants." Believing he had been promised such status by Penn before he left England, Growdon in 1702 requested the Commissioners of Property to erect all the lands between the Delaware River, the two creeks, and the Southampton Township line, nearly 13,000 acres, into a manor under his jurisdiction, although he directly claimed only 9600 acres, that he also wished to have resurveyed. Growdon promoted his enhanced status by collecting a total of £5 4s in quitrents from the purchasers who were also obligated in all to provide 23 days labor annually at harvest time. The commissioners, however, refused Growdon's request, believing it might "overstrain" their directions from the proprietor. They agreed only to order the resurvey. In May 1702 James Logan warned Penn about Growdon's plan for Bensalem and asked the proprietor for instructions. Whether Penn decided to allow Growdon's manor is unclear; in 1704 and as late as 1714 Growdon's own land was referred to as the manor of Bensalem, but he did not appear to exercise any unique privileges.⁵

Growdon also encountered difficulties in other areas. Several days after his arrival in the colony, he was confronted with a protested bill of exchange drawn by his agent. Growdon appeared chagrined but agreed to settle the matter, which caused Penn to remark that a man of Growdon's "Ability, Understanding, Education & Morals" would not "step aside from his word." Growdon was challenged again in 1686, when Quaker merchants in Bristol, England, angrily returned a protested bill of exchange drawn by him on his father. Complaining of the "shuffling uncivill treatm[en]t" of Lawrence Growdon, the merchants advised their

agents, Andrew Robeson* and Patrick Robinson,* to "spare him not nor his reputac[i]on." Growdon was able to satisfy the £129 debt by mortgaging his Kent County property in 1688.⁶

One controversy that impacted greatly on Growdon was his dispute with his Bucks County neighbor, John Gray, alias Tatham, over a contested land title. At issue was 1000 acres of his Bensalem property that Growdon had sold to Gray for £250 in 1685. The tract consisted of portions of Growdon's original 5000 acres surveyed to his agent, William Pickering, in 1683 and portions of adjacent land that he and his agent had purchased from Francis Walker and Duncan Williams between 1683 and 1685. Growdon contended that the land he purchased from Walker and Williams contained 400 acres of overplus acreage that was specifically mentioned in the agreement of sale with Walker. Gray argued before the Commissioners of Property in 1686 that Growdon had sold him land that contained the overplus, and that consequently, Growdon lacked valid title or claim to that excess acreage. Gray then pressed for a resurvey and the right to purchase all the contested overplus for himself. The commissioners agreed with Gray and ordered the resurvey.⁷

Growdon was furious, but his attempts to reverse the decision proved fruitless. At an arbitration hearing in 1686 the dispute turned rancorous, becoming in Phineas Pemberton's* estimation "the most railing revileing business" that he ever witnessed, with the arbitrators watching only to see Growdon and Gray "befoole them selves." In any event, Penn apparently decided in favor of Gray, forcing Growdon in 1687 to demand from the proprietor a reversal of what he viewed as "this bitter pill." He sarcastically questioned Penn's "worldly pledge" of "GOOD and KIND intentions" in property matters stated in the 1683 Frame of Government, if Gray was able to procure 400 acres legally belonging to another. In 1688 Growdon warned William Markham,* one of the Commissioners of Property, that he would make a "Nationall business" of the case and impeach the commissioners for a breach of charter. Nothing came of his threats, however, and Penn dismissed the complaint, asking rhetorically whether Growdon believed he should receive "an equity to more then is due." Nonetheless, the dispute over the land was continued in the county court, and as late as 1713, Gray's heirs were still litigating with Growdon over the matter.⁸

Beginning almost immediately with his arrival, Growdon became one of the colony's leading figures, a status he maintained until the early 1720s. Undoubtedly, his wealth, Quaker affiliation, and social prestige contributed in large measure to his political popularity. Through the concentration of his large estate in Bensalem Township, and through the development and sale of portions of his lands in smaller tracts to farmers, Growdon established a sense of social stability for the county and a reliable political base for himself. From 1684 to 1702 he followed a consistent political course, outwardly loyal to the Quaker proprietor but usually pursuing the interests of the colony and himself, occasionally at Penn's expense. After 1702, however, Growdon appeared more supportive of proprietary interests.

Elected to the Assembly from Philadelphia County in 1684 and 1685, and from Bucks County in 1686, Growdon sided with his Quaker colleagues against both the encroachments of the Council and the imperiousness of the Anglican Nicholas More.* Although Growdon lost the 1684 House election for speaker to More, he chaired the committee of elections and served on a committee that sought the repeal of the law concerning provincial grand juries. During the succeeding two assemblies he was part of House delegations that demanded the Council promulgate bills according to charter (1685), and that drafted a letter informing Penn of the House's expulsion and impeachment of More (1685). He also served as chairman of

the committee of the whole that attempted to repeal two laws by means of the continuation bill (1686).⁹

Despite his previous service, however, Growdon barely won election to a three-year term on the Provincial Council in March 1687. Several Bucks County Quakers were appalled at Growdon's behavior in his controversy with Gray, and, led by Pemberton, Arthur Cook,* and James Harrison,* they supported Thomas Langhorne* instead. Within months after the election, however, Growdon appeared to gain increased support, as a petition, circulated by Robert Lucas,* Robert Hall,* William Beakes,* and William Biles,* and endorsed by, among others, Langhorne and Nicholas Waln,* sought to have Penn's decision in the Gray matter reversed. The petition praised Growdon for his "Courteous loving & kind" behavior, adding that no individual had "cultivated so much Land in the Province as he in two yeares time." Pemberton, however, complained that the petition hurt Penn's interest as it was addressed to the king, and further observed that as for Growdon's service, "he hath served himselfe more then any One." Nonetheless, Growdon emerged from the Gray controversy with an enhanced political stature, while the proprietor bore the antagonism of the petitioners. The change of sentiment, which included Cook, may have reflected Growdon's influence and friendship among his fellow Quakers and his threat to return to Cornwall, as well as mutual antagonism by Growdon and his neighbors towards Penn's land policies.¹⁰

Penn's decision, however, may have reduced Growdon's support for the proprietor's interest. In March 1688, for example, Growdon promoted in Council a ban on importation of rum in an effort to encourage local manufacturing, despite Markham's protest that such a ban would deprive the proprietor of an import duty. Growdon, whom Markham believed was opposed "all along" to "Raiseing money For Supply," responded that the Council should first debate matters that were "for the Good of The Province," before considering a supply. After the meeting, when approached by Markham, Growdon refused to discuss the import duty but chose instead to criticize Penn for giving his land away to Gray.¹¹

Like most Quaker politicians, Growdon did not support Penn's choice of John Blackwell as governor. Consequently, he appeared at only 32 percent (15 out of 47) of the Council meetings during Blackwell's tenure as opposed to 77 percent (48 out of 62) prior to his arrival. In early April 1689 Growdon challenged Blackwell's attempt to deny John Eckley,* Samuel Richardson,* and Thomas Lloyd* their places at the Council, and with Bartholomew Coppock,* John Simcock,* William Yardley,* William Stockdale,* John Curtis,* and Samuel Carpenter,* he signed a bitter letter to Penn that accused Blackwell of being "neither a Friend to us nor our Countrey." They further charged Blackwell with violating "Charter & laws" and with ignoring the advice of Thomas Lloyd, one of Penn's "truest & surest Friends," while consulting instead with Griffith Jones,* Patrick Robinson,* and Markham.¹²

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¹STAPR; PGM, 24:109; MMR; Growdon; DQR, Corn.; SOCC, Joseph Growdon; Hinshaw, 2:477, 537; BCWBk. 1:141; PMHB, 26:358; PHMMR; MB&B, 13-15, 30, 60; MPC, 1:320, 324, 2:239, 406, 596; GRSCP, box 2, case 13; CBC, 75-414 passim; BCTL; BCCR, 352-484 passim; Pennypacker, 162; MCC, 94.

²STAPR; FRPAPS; Growdon FN; Douch, 65-80; LEF, 252; BOC, 1:59; LYM, 1681; O.R.S., 129; Besse, 1:123.

³Douch, 65-80; SOCC, Joseph Growdon; PMHB, 11:177; PA., 2d ser., 19:403; Stillwell, 2:5; OR., D, 68:141, 157; PWP Micro., 4:720; PGM, 24:109.

⁴OR., B, 22:33, D, 68:130, 143; W&S, 1:410; 3:263-64; PA., 2d ser., 19:309, 395, 436, 446, 495; BCDBk. 2:16, 78, 97, 160-61, 233, 249, 281-82, 3:47, 81, 229, 243; PHDBk. E1, 5:635-37, E7, 8:442, 9:438, 456, F, 3:412-13, 8:179; KDBk, B, 1 (pt. 1):53; B, 1 (pt. 2):88, D, 1:73-74; PATBk. A, 1:223; PWP Micro., 5:951; Meyers, Narratives, 320; BCTL, 2; SOCC, Joseph Growdon.

⁵OR., B, 22:12, D, 68:142, 144, 146, 151-52, 154-56; BCDBk. 1:221-23, 225, 227, 307, 315, 2:135, 151, 153-56, 237, 264-66, 279, 287, 3:76, 183, 4:320; PA., 2d ser., 19:250-51; STRP, 49; PWP Micro., 10:141.

⁶PWP Micro., 4:720; ELB&P, 24, 40, 45; KDBk. B, 1 (pt. 2):88..

⁷BCDBk. 5:218; PWP Micro., 5:951; PWP, 3:104.

⁸PWP Micro., 5:648, 951, 10:782, 12:005; PWP, 3:189, 210; MPC, 2:179-81, 185; CBC, 151, 155-56, 159-60, 250, 253, 257-58, 351, 357, 360, 377, 382, 388, 402-13; PA, 2d ser., 19:559.

⁹Votes, 1 (pt. 1):24-25, 30-31, 35, 38.

¹⁰PWP, 3:185, 187; 5:648; ETPEQPF, 37:74.

¹¹PWP, 3:186-87.

¹²MPC, 1:268-70, 273; PWP, 3:237-38.