

# The Banfield Brothers of Oley

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## Overview

Analysis of Y-DNA from Yoder descendants has produced several unexpected patterns suggesting that Hans Joder may not have been the biological father of all his sons. Further investigation shows that descendants of Thomas Banfield share similar Y-DNA patterns with descendants of Hans Yoder. If descendants of Thomas Banfield's brother, John Banfield, were tested, they would likely share a similar Y-DNA profile with the Yoder descendants as well.

This paper examines the documentary record for the Banfield brothers to determine when and where they lived. Establishing this timing and their locations could help determine if either brother could reasonably have contributed the Y-DNA now found in descendants of Hans Yoder.

## Early Years

The first record for either brother appears in 1724, when John Longworthy of Oley sold 100 acres to John Banfield of Oley in Philadelphia County.<sup>1</sup>

This deed establishes that John Banfield was already living in Oley Township at the time of purchase. The location of his residence, however, is not stated. Since a person needed to be at least twenty-one years old to own land, John must have been born before 1704.

Fourteen months later, John purchased an additional 150 acres.<sup>2</sup> This tract adjoined the first parcel but lay mostly in present-day Earl Township.<sup>3</sup> The deed identifies John as a carpenter, an occupation he appears to have held throughout his life.

It is unknown whether John lived on either property or whether he purchased them as an investment. We know John Longworthy had financial difficulties, possibly explaining the sale of the initial 100-acre tract.<sup>4</sup> If John Banfield lived on either property, it was for only a short period because he sold both parcels, totaling 250 acres, in 1726.<sup>5</sup>

Since John's eldest child, also named John, was born in 1728, it is reasonable to infer that John married around 1726–27.

John appears to have been successful in both carpentry and real-estate activities.

<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. F2, P. 446

<sup>2</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. G1, P. 154

<sup>3</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, Tract 25, P. 192, 1994

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, Joseph, L., *The History of Oley Township, Berks County, Pa.*, P. 134, 2024

<sup>5</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. G1, P. 157

Beginning in 1727, he started lending money to at least ten individuals who purchased property. Significantly, these recorded transactions reveal where he was living at the time.

The earliest loan, made to Jonathan Brooks of Limerick Township, identifies John Banfield as a resident of Oley Township in 1727.<sup>6</sup>

A 1729 loan to George Henton of Oley shows that John Banfield was still living in Oley Township at that time.<sup>7</sup>

## Partnership

The brothers jointly participated in a land-related transaction in 1733. On August 14, Thomas Banfield sold 150 acres to Abyha Sands.<sup>8</sup> Three days later, John Banfield lent Sands the money to complete the purchase.<sup>9</sup> The property was in the northeastern section of Amity Township, Philadelphia County.<sup>10</sup>

The deed indicates that Thomas and his wife, Mary, had purchased the 150 acres in 1728. This places Thomas's birth prior to 1708. His eldest child was born in 1728, suggesting that he married around the same time as his brother, John.

## Oley Township

The cited records tell us that Thomas lived in Oley Township in 1733, while John moved from Oley Township to Amity Township between 1729 and 1733. Their

exact residential locations in Oley Township, however, remain unknown.

Oley Township was informally recognized in the early 1720s, but its boundaries were not formally defined until 1740. During this early period, many areas outside today's township limits were nonetheless referred to as "*Oley*." For example, the Exeter Meeting House was then known as the "*Oley Meeting House*."

We know that the Banfield brothers spent much of their adult lives in Amity Township, yet early records repeatedly describe them as residents of Oley. Could it be that they actually lived in Amity Township, and the area was simply referred to as Oley because of vague boundaries?

This seems unlikely. The 1733 deed explicitly states that Thomas Banfield lived in *Oley Township* while Abyha Sands lived in *Amity Township*. This indicates that the residents clearly understood the Amity boundary—which makes sense, since Amity Township's borders were defined in 1719.

Other than the 1724 deed, there is no surviving tax list, warrant, survey, or deed proving that either brother owned land within Oley Township. However, this does not prove they didn't live there. In the 1720s and 1730s, much land in Oley remained unclaimed. Families frequently settled first and secured warrants later. A familiar example is Jost Yoder, who lived in Oley as early as 1714 but did not purchase land until 1731.

<sup>6</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. F4, P. 329

<sup>7</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. F5, P. 12

<sup>8</sup> Berks County Deed, B. A3, P.80

<sup>9</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. F6, P. 357

<sup>10</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 188, Tract A27, 1994

## John Banfield Homestead

John Banfield purchased 200 acres in Coventry Township, Chester County in 1734.<sup>11</sup> The land lay just across the Schuylkill River from the ancient Morlatton settlement in Amity Township, Philadelphia County.<sup>12</sup>

The Chester County location is confusing if you don't consider the formation of Berks County in 1752. The new county was created by annexing parts of Philadelphia, Lancaster, and Chester Counties. The annexed section of Chester County included a portion of Coventry Township. This had the effect of creating a Coventry Township in Berks and Chester County. To avoid confusion, Coventry Township and part of Robeson Township were combined in 1753 and called Union Township. Today, the 200-acre property is in Union Township, Berks County.

John Banfield sold the 200-acre property to Philip John in 1737.<sup>13</sup> About a year later, Philip John borrowed money from him and used the 200 acres as collateral.<sup>14</sup>

Deeds documenting loans made by John Banfield in 1736, 1737, and 1739 all identify him as a resident of Amity Township.<sup>15</sup>

One of those loans was extended to Jacob Warren, owner of 315 acres that were 1.5 miles west of Morlatton.<sup>16</sup> The loan required Warren to repay £176 by April 1739.<sup>17</sup>

One month before repayment was due, Warren sold a 43-acre property that included a house on the Schuylkill River to John Banfield for £43.<sup>18</sup> This land was likely part of Warren's larger tract and may have served as payment to Banfield for an extension on the loan.<sup>19</sup> The loan was ultimately paid to John's son, Thomas Banfield, in 1751.<sup>20</sup>

Four additional loans made between 1739 and 1743 also list John as a resident of Amity Township.<sup>21</sup>

John Banfield died in Amity Township in 1748. His will provides indirect evidence that he lived in or near Morlatton, as three of the witnesses, Timothy Millard, George Boone,<sup>22</sup> and James Kemer,<sup>23</sup> all had strong ties to the Morlatton area.

John Banfield's son, Thomas Banfield, also lived in the vicinity of Morlatton. He bought 191 acres in 1746 that stood directly across from the Morlatton Church in Amity Township, Philadelphia County.<sup>24,25</sup>

About four years later, he entered into an agreement with Samuel Harris to buy his

<sup>11</sup> Berks County Deed, B.1 P.162

<sup>12</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 188, Tract A38, 1994

<sup>13</sup> Berks County Deed, B.1 P.165

<sup>14</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. F10, P. 387

<sup>15</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. F7 P. 334, P. 218; B. F10 P. 387

<sup>16</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 188, Tract A5, 1994

<sup>17</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. F7 P. 218

<sup>18</sup> Berks County Deed, B.48 P.113

<sup>19</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 194, Tract A11, 1994

<sup>20</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. F7 P. 218

<sup>21</sup> Philadelphia Deed, B. G2 P. 233; B.G1 P.287, P.289; B.G4 P.293

<sup>22</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 194, Tract A78, 1994

<sup>23</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 99, 1994

<sup>24</sup> Berks County Deed, B.10 P.162

<sup>25</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 194, Tract A53, 1994

177-acre homestead.<sup>26</sup> The property was about three miles south of Morlatton in Union Township, Berks County.<sup>27</sup> He officially took ownership of the property in 1757.<sup>28</sup>

That same year, he sold the 191-acre Amity Township property that stood across from the Morlatton Church.<sup>29</sup>

Tax lists in the 1750s confirm he owned properties in Amity and Union Townships.

In 1760, Thomas bought a 106-acre property in Union Township, Berks County that was about 2 miles south of Morlatton.<sup>30,31</sup>

Two years later, Thomas Banfield sold the 106- and 177-acre Union Township properties.<sup>32</sup>

## Thomas Banfield Homestead

Thomas Banfield received a warrant for 100 acres in 1734 described as located in “*Oley*.”<sup>33</sup> This area was often called the “*Oley Hills*.” This is a clear instance of early geographic imprecision: the tract today lies in District Township.

Because the naming is confusing, it is useful to outline the area’s jurisdictional evolution:

- In 1740, when Oley’s boundary was established, the tract lay in a hilly region

between Oley and Colebrookdale Townships.

- For administrative purposes, this area was called “*the district between Oley and Colebrookdale*.”
- Around 1762, the district was split for tax purposes:
  - The northern section was called the Eastern District,
  - The southern section became the Western District.
- In 1781, the Eastern District evolved into what is now District Township and the Western District became Earl Township.

Thomas Banfield added 52 acres to his homestead in “*the district between Oley and Colebrookdale*” in 1742.<sup>34</sup>

Thomas wrote his will in 1764 and stated he lived in the “*Oley Hills*.” He left the 52-acre tract he acquired in 1742 to his son, John. The remainder of his estate (100 acres acquired in 1734) went to his son, Samuel.

Tax lists in 1767 and 1768 for the Eastern District list Samuel Banfield, instead of his father.<sup>35</sup>

In 1770, Thomas Banfield sold the 52-acre tract to his son, John.<sup>36</sup>

Thomas Banfield died between February 3, 1770, when he sold his son the 52-acre tract and June 4, 1770. This is the date the

<sup>26</sup> Berks County Deed, B.2 P. 499

<sup>27</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 194, Tract A76, 1994

<sup>28</sup> Berks County Deed, B.2 P.503

<sup>29</sup> Berks County Deed, B.10 P.162

<sup>30</sup> Berks County Deed, B.A2 P.87

<sup>31</sup> Pendleton, Philip E., *Oley Valley Heritage, The Colonial Years*, P. 200, Tract A104, 1994

<sup>32</sup> Berks County Deed, B.2 P.501, P.503

<sup>33</sup> Pennsylvania State Archives, Patent, A12-149

<sup>34</sup> Pennsylvania State Archives, Patent, A12-149

<sup>35</sup> Proprietary & State Tax Lists 1767, 1768, 1779, 1780, 1781, 1784, 1785

<sup>36</sup> Berks County Deed, B.6 P.242

Register General Office in Reading, Pennsylvania confirmed the witness signatures on Thomas Banfield's will.

## Summary

Documentary and geographic evidence shows that both John Banfield and Thomas Banfield lived in or near Oley Township during the years when Hans Yoder was raising his young family at his homestead in the township's northeastern section.

The brothers were likely born around 1700, but we can only confirm that John Banfield was born before 1704, and Thomas Banfield before 1708. This means both men were of appropriate age to father a child in the mid-1720s to early-1730s—the period relevant to the Yoder family. Records show that both brothers were living in Oley Township during the 1720s, precisely when several Yoder children were born.

There is a deed that shows one of the brothers owned land in Oley Township. However, the property was four miles from the doorstep of Hans Yoder, and he only lived there for a short time. It is possible that one or both brothers lived even closer to Hans Yoder, but they did not leave a paper trail.

The early Oley region contained large areas of unclaimed land where families settled informally, much as Hans Yoder himself did. The Banfield brothers could have lived on unclaimed land near the Yoder homestead. Of course, they left Oley township and settled in another township.

By 1734, Thomas moved to District Township, while John had moved to Amity Township, near Morlatton. Both locations still placed them within a few miles of the Yoder property.

The Banfield men were active carpenters, landholders, and lenders whose work and transactions would have brought them into regular contact with neighboring families, including those living in northeastern Oley.

Taken together, these facts demonstrate that both John and Thomas Banfield were geographically close to the Yoders during the key years and were fully of age to have fathered a child later raised in the household of Hans Yoder. The Y-DNA similarities between Banfield descendants and Yoder descendants are therefore consistent with the historical record and the brothers' presence in the immediate region at the relevant time.