

## Early History of the Town of Dillwyn in Buckingham County, VA

The origin of the name of the town has intrigued many for years. Historical sources cite the following explanations:

-In Eugene Maloney's book titled "A History of Buckingham", he writes...."the name Whitehall was used for the town while Dillwyn was the name of the post office only.

-Joshua Davis, the first Postmaster of Dillwyn, named the post office after his ancestral estate in England, and the town adopted it.

-Another widely held supposition is that Dillwyn was named after the 1882 Postmaster "Dillwyn" Smith.

-Another word of mouth explanation passed down was that "Dillwyn" originated from the Indians who inhabited the area prior to English settlement of the area.

The first post office was established November 11, 1881, on farm property owned by Joshua Davis. Robert B. Allen was appointed as the first Postmaster (U.S. Appointments of Postmasters, 1832-1971). Joshua Davis was born in Cornwall County, England on June 13, 1828, and migrated to the United States in 1848. He died May 18, 1898, and is buried in the Davis Family Cemetery located near Emerson & Clements Wood Yard on Route 15 just south of the town limits.

"Dillwyn" Smith was appointed Postmaster on February 7, 1882. The name Dillwyn is no doubt Welsh in origin, and from the word "Dilys" meaning "genuine" combined with "gwyn" meaning "white, fair, and blessed". Gwilyn or Dillwyn is also the Welsh version of the English name William. Searching through the US Census listings for Buckingham County for the time period, I could find no one with the given first or last name "Dillwyn". Information found on indicates William Arnold Smith (1845-1923) and his wife Ann Isabelle Reese Smith (1844-1920) interred in the Dillwyn Cemetery.

In 1865, William Smith enlists as a private in the CSA 4 Virginia Regiment Company K, commanded by future Virginia Governor Honest Phil McKinney of New Store, VA. Approximately 1883, William Arnold Smith marries Ann Isabelle Reese on July 6, 1884, that have a son, Robert Garrett Smith (also buried in the Dillwyn Town Cemetery). On June 24, 1897, the Richmond newspaper reports James L. Anderson was appointed Postmaster with William Arnold Smith as his assistant. Ann Reese was the granddaughter of William Parker Reese, a Welshman, who migrated to the United States in the years preceding 1810 to mine for gold. According to Mrs. Garnett 1937 VHI survey of the home called "Big Oak" (historically known as "Timber Tree", William Reese acquired the home in 1835, which is now the site of the Buckingham Industrial Park. Mrs. Williams reported that Reese owned the original tract of land where the Town of Dillwyn now stands. The "Big Oak" home and property was passed down to Ann Reese Smith in 1865.

It is interesting to note that William Parker Reese left Buckingham County in 1838, and headed west to Brazoria County, Texas. He and his brother, Washington Perry, were killed in a Comanche Indian attack called "Webster's Massacre" on August 27, 1839, in Williamson County, Texas where he is buried.

It is believed the "Dillwyn" Smith who was appointed Dillwyn Postmaster in 1882, was none other than William Arnold Smith. "Dillwyn" may have been his nickname based on his Welsh ancestry

(William=Dillwyn) or the name was to pay homage to his wife's grandfather, William Parker Reese. Either seems to be a plausible explanation.

Around 1897, the post office was relocated to the "Rich Bottom" in Dillwyn (many locals referred to it as White Hall Post Office, but efforts to change the name officially failed, some believed it was because the confusion that would most likely ensue with an existing White Hall Postal Office in Western Albemarle County. I was unable to find records of a White Hall Post office at that location before 1830.

#### TIMETABLE OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF DILLWYN (1835-1912)

1835 – William Reese, a Welshman, moves to Buckingham County to mine for gold, builds a home called "Timber Tree" (later known as "Big Oak") on a tract of land that becomes known as Dillwyn (site of the Buckingham County Industrial Park). The Welsh word "Dillwyn" translates to William in English.

1839 – Reese moves west and is killed in an Indian attack

1840 – Reese's son Edward and his wife Lucy, inherit his "Timber Tree" property.

October 11, 1844 – A daughter, Ann Isabelle Reese is born

February 10, 1845 – William Arnold Smith is born

1863 – William enlists as a private in the CSA 4<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment Company K, commanded by future Governor Honest Phil McKinney of New Store, VA.

November 11, 1881 – The first post office in Dillwyn is established on Joshua Davis Farm to serve the needs of goldminers. The site was a relay station for stagecoaches that traveled Bell Road and is northeast of the present Town of Dillwyn near the location of the Town water supply and nearby creeks where panning was used to locate gold. Robert S. Allen was appointed the first Postmaster.

February 7, 1882 – "Dillwyn" Smith was appointed Postmaster, listed by the General Services Administration as "Dillwyn". I believe this was a nickname for William Arnold Smith to honor his Welsh heritage (Dillwyn means William in Welsh) and to pay homage to Ann Reese's grandfather, William Reese.

February 15, 1883 – Joshua Davis is appointed Postmaster

1883 – The Virginia General Assembly passes a second bill focused on Buckingham Railroad that it must start building in one year and complete the project within 5 years.

July 6, 1884 – William and Ann have a son, Robert Garrett (buried in the Dillwyn Town Cemetery)

1884 – Buckingham Branch Railroad, having sold stock to raise funds for its building project, discovers its largest shareholder is a rival, C & O Railroad, this makes continuing impossible and the Buckingham Railroad declares bankruptcy.

August 27, 1885 – George W. Garrett is appointed Postmaster

1886 – William and Ann have another son, William Moses, who eventually inherits “Timber Tree” (“Big Oak”)

September 16, 1889 – Joshua Davis is once again appointed Postmaster

May 31, 1892 – The first train rolls into the C&O Dillwyn Station. – The original building burned down, the Buckingham Branch extended from Bremo Bluff to Dillwyn, approximately 15 miles. Stations along the way included Arvonias, Penlan, Dutch Gap, Alpha, and Johnson’s Station. Wood and slate were the main products hauled by rail.

August 1, 1893 – H. M. White is appointed Postmaster

1895 – S.B. Pearson store opens, selling groceries and hardware

June 24, 1897 – James L. Anderson is appointed Postmaster with William Arnold Smith as assistant; post office was relocated to the “Rich Bottom” in Dillwyn. Many locals referred to it as White Hall Post Office, but efforts to change the name officially failed, some believed it was because the confusion that may ensue with an existing White Hall Postal Office in Western Albemarle County. (unable to find records of a post office at that location before 1930)

May 5, 1902 – Emmet D. Gregory is appointed Postmaster

October 10, 1906 – Lisa L. Gregory is appointed Postmistress

1910 U.S. Census – William and Ann Smith are living in Curdsville with their two sons, R. Garrett and William Moses, both having the occupation of mail carriers.

August 1, 1911 – William R. Connor is appointed Postmaster

March 12, 1912 – The Virginia General Assembly grants a full charter for the new Town of Dillwyn (thus permanently changing the name from White Hall)

1920 U. S. Census – William and Ann are still living in Curdsville, VA. William is listed as a substitute mail carrier and his son Moses is listed as mail carrier.

April 12, 1920 – Ann Isabelle Reese dies and is buried in the Dillwyn Town Cemetery

December 20, 1923 – William Arnold Smith dies and is buried in the Dillwyn Town Cemetery.

Sources: A Pictorial History of the Town of Dillwyn, Virginia, May 1993 (Stinson), “The Courthouse Burned...” Book II, Pennington & Scott, FamilySearch.com, US Census 1910, 1920, Findagrave.com, U.S., Appointments of U.S. Postmasters 1832-1971