About the Author
William Morris Meredith
(1799-1873)

William Morris Meredith, Secretary of the Treasury and Pennsylvania Attorney General, was born June 8, 1799 in Philadelphia, Pa. He was one of eleven children born to William Meredith, lawyer and president of Schuylkill Bank, and Gertrude Gouverneur Meredith (née Ogden). In 1812, at the age of thirteen, William Morris Meredith graduated from the University of Pennsylvania as valedictorian and went on to earn a Master’s degree four years later. He was admitted to the bar in 1817, but he could not establish a successful practice until 1820, due partly to his youth.

He was a highly successful man in society, business, and politics. From 1824-1828, Meredith represented Philadelphia in the Pennsylvania State Legislature and quickly became an important member of the Pennsylvania Whig party. In 1837, the same year he was chosen a member of the American Philosophical Society, Meredith began to serve as a member of the University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees; he held this position for seventeen years.

In March 1849, then-president Zachary Taylor appointed Meredith to the post of Secretary of the Treasury. He served in this post until a couple months into the Millard Fillmore administration, leaving office in July 1850. As Secretary of the Treasury, he took an active role in the political positioning of Whigs in the country, using his power to oust many Democrats and replace them with Whigs. He was instrumental in the Galphin scandal, in which the government assumed the Georgia Cherokee tribe's debts to Mr. George Galphin. A scandal ensued as a friend of Meredith’s was the lawyer for Galphin, who would receive interest off of this deal from the government.

In 1857, Meredith returned to the political spotlight, becoming chancellor of the bar association in Philadelphia. Under Andrew Curtin, Meredith spent 1861-1867 as attorney Attorney General of Pennsylvania. Meredith strongly opposed the succession of the South and became a delegate to the Peace Conference of 1861. After war started, Meredith served as the first president of the newly-founded Union League Club in Philadelphia as a support to Lincoln’s policies.

Meredith married Catherine Keppele, the daughter of a former Philadelphia mayor, on June 17, 1834. Together they had five kids: William Meredith (1835-1903), Elizabeth Caldwell (1837-1883), Gertrude Gouverneur (b. 1839), Catherine Keppele, and Euphemia Ogden (1842-1891). His only son also became lawyer, though he achieved less success than his
father. Meredith's wife passed away in 1853. William Morris Meredith followed her twenty years later, dying Sunday morning, August 17, 1873.

Researched, authored, and edited by Margaret Browndorf.