

The Colony of Pennsylvania

28 William the Wise



"I have led the greatest colony into America that ever any man did upon a private credit."

William Penn was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and servants at his feet. His father was an important admiral: rich, Anglican, and a friend of King Charles II.

What did William Penn do when he grew up? He became a member of a radical, hated, outcast sect, the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers.

What did being a Quaker do for William Penn? It got him kicked out of college when he refused to attend Anglican prayers. It got him a beating from his father, who wanted him to belong to the Church of England. It led him to jail for his beliefs—more than once. It gave him a faith that he carried through his life. And it also gave him a reason for founding an American colony.

King Charles II liked William Penn in spite of his religion. Everyone, it seems, was charmed by his sweet ways. But when Penn came before the king and refused to take off his hat—Quakers defer only to God—some people gasped and wondered if Penn's head, along with his hat, might be removed. But Charles, the "merry monarch," must have been in a good mood. As the story goes, he laughed and doffed his own hat, saying, "Only one head can be covered in the presence of a king."

Now King Charles had borrowed money from Admiral Penn, and a goodly sum it must have been, because, after the admiral died, when William asked that the debt be paid with land in America, he was given a tract of land larger than all of England. King Charles named it Pennsylvania, which means "Penn's woods."

Pennsylvania was situated midway between the pious Puritans in

You've probably noticed that the spelling of the documents quoted in this book isn't always the same as the spelling you've learned. Until Noah Webster wrote a speller (in 1783) and an American dictionary (in 1828), there was no standard spelling. People just wrote words the way that seemed right to them. Sometimes the same word could be spelled two different ways in a single sentence.

An Historical and Geographical Account
OF THE
PROVINCE and COUNTRY
OF
PENSILVANIA;
AND OF
West-New-Jersey
IN
AMERICA.

The Richness of the Soil, the Sweetness of the Situation, the Wholeforness of the Air, the Navigable Rivers, and others, the prodigious Increase of Corn, the flourishing Condition of the City of Philadelphia, with the Rattly Buildings, and other Improvements there. The Strange Creatures, as Birds, Beasts, Fishes, and Fowls, with the several Sorts of Minerals, Purging Waters, and Spas, lately discovered. The Natives, Aborigines, their Language, Religion, Laws, and Customs; The First Planters, the Dutch, Swedes, and English, with the number of its Inhabitants; As also a Touch upon George Keith's New Religion, in his second Charge since he left the QUAKERS.

With a Map of both Countries.

By GABRIEL THOMAS, who resided there about Fifteen Years.

London, Printed for, and Sold by A. Baldwin, at the Oxon Arms in Warwick-Lane, 1698.

Gabriel Thomas, one of the earliest settlers in Pennsylvania, wrote a pamphlet in praise of its charms—you can read his words on page 108.



Charles II died a Catholic at heart, but he admired William Penn enough to let him practice his religion in America.

Your conscience is your sense of right and wrong. It's something that tells you when you're doing right and warns you when you're doing wrong. Conscientious means being careful to do what you know is right.

New England and the convivial Anglicans in the South. Quakers weren't wanted in either region.

Thanks to William Penn, Quakers now had their own colony. But he made it different from most of the other colonies. Penn really believed in brotherly love. He said that

Pennsylvania was not just for Quakers but for everyone.

The king had picked a good man to lead a colony—perhaps the best of all who tried it. Penn was an educated man, a philosopher, a town planner, and a lawyer. He wanted Pennsylvania to be a colony where Quaker ideas about peace and goodness would prevail.

In England, Quakers seemed a threat to everyone who felt comfortable with the old, established ways of thinking. The country had beheaded a king, and that didn't work out. New ideas seemed dangerous, as they often do. Quakers had notions that would change Old England. Wealthy citizens didn't want things to change, so was poor people, mostly, who were Quakers.

In Penn's day, some people—ministers, kings, lords, and dukes—were considered superior to the average person. They expected others to bow to them, but Quakers wouldn't. They wouldn't bow to anyone. They even refused to pay taxes to support the Church of England. Can you see a problem? The Anglicans did.

England had lords and ladies in the rich upper class, merchants and farmers in the middle class, and peasants and poor people in the lower class. It was almost impossible to rise from the lower class to the upper. The upper-class lords and earls often acted as if they were better than anyone else. It was that class system that made many ambitious people come to the New World. In America, with hard work, many poor people would rise to the top.

Because the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill," Quakers believe all war is wrong. They won't fight even when drafted into the army. They are called "conscientious objectors," because their conscience tells them not to fight.

And they won't swear allegiance to a king or government or flag or anyone but God. That was another real problem in England, where people were expected to swear their loyalty to the king.

William Penn wanted to practice Quaker ideas in America. That

The South East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia By Peter Cooper 1720

THE SOUTH EAST PROSPECT OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA BY PETER COOPER 1720

meant treating all people as equals and respecting all religions. Those new ideas of "toleration" and "natural rights" were confusing. It was difficult for good people to know what was right.

Do you understand the difference between toleration and equality? Some colonies offered freedom of religion but not equality. You could practice any religion but you couldn't vote or hold office (be a mayor or sheriff) unless you belonged to the majority's church. That wasn't true in Penn's colony. While he was in charge, all religions were equal.

When Penn said all people, he meant *all* people. Quakers were among the first to object to Negro slavery and, more than anyone else, to treat Indians as equals. In 1681, William Penn wrote a letter to the Native Americans of Pennsylvania. He said:

may [we] always live together as neighbors and friends, else what would the great God say to us, who hath made us not to devour and destroy one another, but live soberly and kindly together in the world?

Penn proposed a "firm league of peace." He continued:

I am very sensible of the unkindness and injustice that hath been too much exercised toward you by the people of these parts of the world...but I am not such a man...I desire to win and gain your love and friendship by a kind, just, and peaceable life.

Penn was generous as well as fair. He offered land on easy terms to those who came to his colony.

On his first visit to America, he sailed up the Delaware River and picked the site of Pennsylvania's first capital, Philadelphia. Then he helped plan the city by using a pattern of crossing streets, called a "grid," that would be copied throughout the new land. He gave numbers to all the streets that went in one direction; the streets that went the other way he gave tree names, like Pine and Chestnut and Walnut. Philadelphia is still thought of as a fine example of town planning.

Penn wrote a Charter of Liberties for Pennsylvania. Penn said the charter set up a government "free to the people under it, where the

This view of Philadelphia, painted by Peter Cooper in about 1720, is the oldest surviving canvas of any American city.

William Penn planned his city, Philadelphia, without walls or fortifications, because he expected its citizens to be peaceful.

Today the capital of Pennsylvania is Harrisburg.

**No Statute for
Slaves**

Your people (both Men and Women) of all Ages are here at three times the wages for their Labour they are in England or Wales. Slaves, what I have here written is not for them, Whom of any stature, Obedience, or any other Duty and Care (Compassion) to the Number of poor labouring Men, Women, and Children in England, half starv'd, visible to their meagre looks, that are continually wandering up and down looking for Employment without finding any. Here are no Beggars to be seen. Jealousie among Men is here very rare, nor are old Maids to be met with, for all commonly marry before they are 20 Years of Age and seldom any young Married Woman but hath a Child in her Belly, or one upon her Lap.

What I have deliver'd concerning this Province, is indisputably true, I was an Eye-Witness to it all, for I went in the first Ship that was bound from England for that Countrey, since it received the name of Pensilvania, which was in the Year 1681.

—FROM GABRIEL THOMAS'S HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF PENSILVANIA (1698).

laws rule, and the people are a party to those laws."

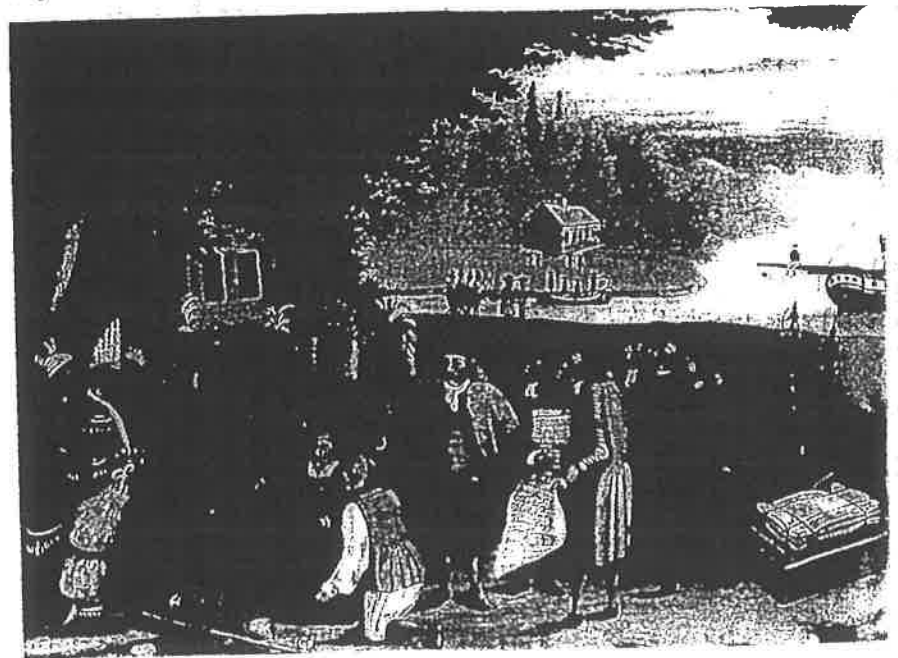
The southeastern part of Pennsylvania was called the "Three Lower Counties." In 1704 those counties asked for their own assembly and William Penn gave it to them. In 1776 they became an independent state named Delaware.

William Penn didn't stay in America for long. He had business to attend to in England, and so he chose rulers for Pennsylvania. Since he owned the place, he had a right to do that.

Penn did not believe in democracy. (Hardly anyone did at the beginning of the 18th century.) He was an aristocrat. In those days, ordinary people were not thought to be capable of picking their own leaders. William Penn thought he was choosing good people to lead his colony. But, as it turned out, he was too trusting.

The men he picked to run his colony fought among themselves and cheated him. (He would have been better off if he had believed in democracy.) William Penn lost most of his fortune developing Pennsylvania.

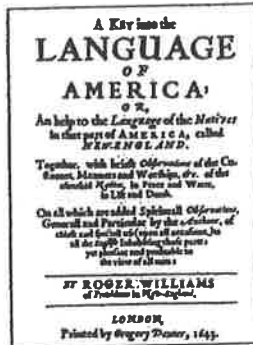
But Penn did prove that freedom and fairness work. Philadelphia was soon the largest, most prosperous city in the colonies. People came from Germany, France, Scotland, and Wales—as well as England—looking for religious freedom and a good place to live. One, a boy named Benjamin Franklin, came from Boston.



William Penn and the Indians make peace, in this painting by Edward Hicks.

The Colony of Rhode Island

17 Roger Williams



The first words Williams translated in his guide to the Narraganset language were *I love you*.

The Puritans, who were victims of intolerance in England, were not tolerant themselves. Although they preached the Golden Rule—do unto others as you would have them do unto you—most never understood that they were breaking that rule. Roger Williams did.

Williams was a Puritan minister who came to Massachusetts seeking a “pure” religious community. Like the other Puritans, he was a serious Christian. Like the others, he disapproved of Catholic and Quaker ideas. Like the others, he thought the Indian religions were pagan.

But that’s where “like the others” stops.

He didn’t believe in forcing anyone to believe as he did. He believed that killing or punishing in the name of Christianity was sinful. He thought that church members—not general taxes—should pay the bills at each church. He respected the beliefs of others. Those were strange ideas in 17th-century Massachusetts.

The Puritans didn’t know what to do with Roger Williams. He was a Puritan, he was brilliant, he was a minister, and he was so nice that even his opponents had a hard time disliking him.

But what an ungrateful young man he seemed! The Puritans had offered him good jobs, as teacher and minister, and he thanked them by criticizing their practices.

Governor Winthrop was shocked. So was John Cotton, the minister who took a job that Williams refused. They were especially shocked when Williams wrote a book saying it was wrong to persecute people for their beliefs. Williams called his book *The Bloody Tenet*. (The blood was from those killed because of their religious ideas.) John Cotton wrote his own book. He called it *The Bloody*

Catholics, Quakers, and Puritans were all Christians, but they each interpreted Christianity in a different way. To the Puritans—and to most Christians—pagan religions were not “real” religions, as Christianity was.

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MAKING THIRTEEN COLONIES

Tenet Washed and Made White. Of course that didn't end it. Williams's next book was *The Bloody Tenet Made Yet More Bloody by Mr. Cotton's Endeavor to Wash It White in the Blood of the Lamb.*

When Roger Williams started preaching that land shouldn't be taken from the Indians—that the king had no right to charter land that didn't belong to him—that was too much. The officers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony made arrangements to ship Williams back to England. They sent armed men to put him on a boat.

Roger Williams's wife heard the verdict of the court—that he was to be arrested and banished—and began to cry. Williams told her, "Fifty good men did what they thought was just." Roger Williams didn't hold grudges.

But he wasn't about to let himself get shipped back to England, and so he fled from Massachusetts. It was January 1636, he was sick, and the weather was freezing. Later, when he was an old man, Roger Williams would still remember that terrible winter. He was always thankful to the Narraganset Indians, who helped him survive the cold. He learned to love them as they loved him.

He bought land from the Indians and started a colony called Providence. It became the capital of Rhode Island and soon attracted many of those who were not wanted elsewhere. Someone described Providence as the place where "all the cranks of New England" go.

There were plenty of cranks in Providence. But there were also many who were searching for what Williams called "freedom of conscience."

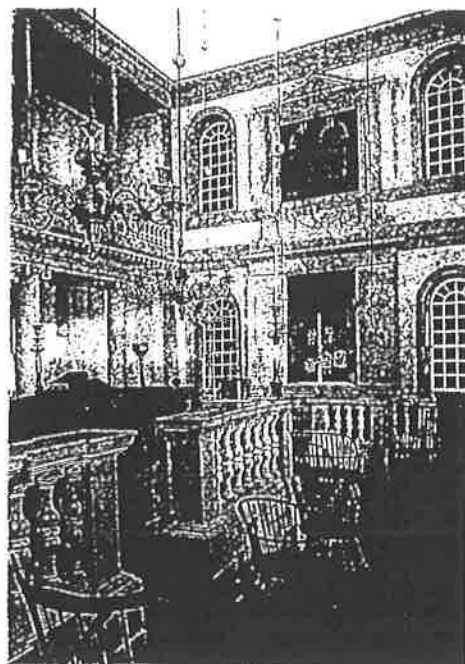


John Cotton (above) and most Puritans thought Williams's ideas of toleration were wrong. Maybe they thought he was crazy, too.

When Roger Williams said *freedom of conscience*, he meant the freedom of each person to follow his own mind and heart and choose his own religion. That was to become an important right in America.

Roger Williams welcomed everyone who wished to come to Rhode Island, including Quakers and Catholics. And, while he continued to disagree with those religions, he never let that stop him from liking some of the people who practiced them. Jews, who were often persecuted elsewhere, were welcome in Rhode Island. Atheists were welcome, too.

Williams believed that state governments should not have any connection with a church. We call that



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In 1763, thanks to the atmosphere of tolerance that Roger Williams fostered, Rhode Island became the home of the first permanent Jewish house of worship in America, the Touro Synagogue.

A *tenet* (TEN-it) is a basic idea, a fundamental concept. **Atheists** believe there is no God.

The poet means "meat" when he says *flesh*. When he says *they part to friends*, he means "they share with friends." He means "to lack humanity" when he says *to want humanity*. Languages keep changing, and some English words were different in the 17th century.



Roger Williams

Church and State

The Puritans forced some Indians to become Christians. Roger Williams wrote a letter to the Massachusetts governor. "Are not the English of this land generally a persecuted people from their native land?" he asked. How could those who had been persecuted persecute others, he wondered? He said that the Indians should "not be

separation of church and state. It was a very new idea at the time.

He knew that people could be forced to go to church, but that no one's mind could be forced to believe. "Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils," said Roger Williams.

He learned the language of the Narraganset Indians and wrote a book so that others could learn it, too. In it he included these rhymes about the Indians:

*Sometimes God gives them fish or flesh,
Yet they're content without.
And what comes in, they part to friends
And strangers round about.
If nature's sons both wild and tame
Humane and courteous be,
How ill becomes its sons of God
To want humanity!*

When the great Narraganset chief Canonicus (kuh-NON-ih-kuss) was dying, he called for Roger Williams to be with him. White men had destroyed the Indian chief's kingdom, and he hated most of them. But Williams and Canonicus had something in common. Each was able to judge people by their character, not by their skin color or religion. They loved and respected each other.

Edmund S. Morgan, who wrote a book about Roger Williams, said "We may praise him...for his defense of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. He deserves the tribute...but it falls short of the man. His greatness was simpler. He dared to think."

forced from their religions."

Roger Williams didn't think anyone should be compelled to follow a religion. Besides, he knew it never works to try that. You can make people do things, but you can't make them believe what they don't want to believe.

Williams said that it was "against the testimony of Christ Jesus for the civil state to impose [force] upon the souls of the people a religion."

Most Puritans didn't agree with Roger Williams. They thought it was the job of the

government leaders to tell people what to believe.

But Roger Williams's ideas won out. They helped bring about the separation of church and state that is one of the most important of all of America's governing ideas. In Europe and the rest of the world, millions of people have died in wars over religion, but that has not happened in this country.

Roger Williams, a devout Puritan, wrote, "Jesus never called for the sword of steel to help the sword of spirit."