

THE  
QUAKER COLONIES,  
A CHRONICLE OF THE  
PROPRIETORS OF THE  
DELAWARE

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## The Birth Of Pennsylvania

In 1661, the year after Charles II was restored to the throne of England, William Penn was a seventeen-year-old student at Christ Church, Oxford. His father, a distinguished admiral in high favor at Court, had abandoned his erstwhile friends and had aided in restoring King Charlie to his own again. Young William was associating with the sons of the aristocracy and was receiving an education which would fit him to obtain preferment at Court. But there was a serious vein in him, and while at a high church Oxford College he was surreptitiously attending the meetings and listening to the preaching of the despised and outlawed Quakers. There he first began to hear of the plans of a group of Quakers to found colonies on the Delaware in America. Forty years afterwards he wrote, "I had an opening of joy as to these parts in the year 1661 at Oxford." And with America and the Quakers, in spite of a brief youthful experience as a soldier and a courtier, William Penn's life, as well as his fame, is indissolubly linked.

Quakerism was one of the many religious sects born in the seventeenth century under the influence

of Puritan thought. The foundation principle of the Reformation, the right of private judgment, the Quakers carried out to its logical conclusion; but they were people whose minds had so long been suppressed and terrorized that, once free, they rushed to extremes. They shocked and horrified even the most advanced Reformation sects by rejecting Baptism, the doctrine of the Trinity, and all sacraments, forms, and ceremonies. They represented, on their best side, the most vigorous effort of the Reformation to return to the spirituality and the simplicity of the early Christians. But their intense spirituality, pathetic often in its extreme manifestations, was not wholly concerned with another world. Their humane ideas and philanthropic methods, such as the abolition of slavery, and the reform of prisons and of charitable institutions, came in time to be accepted as fundamental practical social principles.

The tendencies of which Quakerism formed only one manifestation appeared outside of England, in Italy, in France, and especially in Germany. The fundamental Quaker idea of "quietism," as it was called, or peaceful, silent contemplation as a spiritual form of worship and as a development of moral consciousness, was very widespread at the close of the Reformation and even began to be practiced in the Roman Catholic Church until it was stopped by the Jesuits. The most extreme of the English Quakers, however, gave way to such extravagances of conduct as trembling when they preached (whence their name), preaching openly

in the streets and fields—a horrible thing at that time—interrupting other congregations, and appearing naked as a sign and warning. They gave offense by refusing to remove their hats in public and by applying to all alike the words “thee” and “thou,” a form of address hitherto used only to servants and inferiors. Worst of all, the Quakers refused to pay tithes or taxes to support the Church of England. As a result, the loathsome jails of the day were soon filled with these objectors, and their property melted away in fines. This contumacy and their street meetings, regarded at that time as riotous breaches of the peace, gave the Government at first a legal excuse to hunt them down; but as they grew in numbers and influence, laws were enacted to suppress them. Some of them, though not the wildest extremists, escaped to the colonies in America. There, however, they were made welcome to conditions no less severe.

The first law against the Quakers in Massachusetts was passed in 1656, and between that date and 1660 four of the sect were hanged, one of them a woman, Mary Dyer. Though there were no other hangings, many Quakers were punished by whipping and banishment. In other colonies, notably New York, fines and banishment were not uncommon. Such treatment forced the Quakers, against the will of many of them, to seek a tract of land and found a colony of their own. To such a course there appeared no alternative, unless they were determined to establish their religion solely by martyrdom.

About the time when the Massachusetts laws were enforced, the principal Quaker leader and organizer, George Fox (1624-1691), began to consider the possibility of making a settlement among the great forests and mountains said to lie north of Maryland in the region drained by the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers. In this region lay practically the only good land on the Atlantic seaboard not already occupied. The Puritans and Dutch were on the north, and there were Catholic and Church of England colonies on the south in Maryland and Virginia. The middle ground was unoccupied because heretofore a difficult coast had prevented easy access by sea. Fox consulted Josiah Coale, a Quaker who had traveled in America and had seen a good deal of the Indian tribes, with the result that on his second visit to America Coale was commissioned to treat with the Susquehanna Indians, who were supposed to have rights in the desired land. In November, 1660, Coale reported to Fox the result of his inquiries: "As concerning Friends buying a piece of land of the Susquehanna Indians I have spoken of it to them and told them what thou said concerning it; but their answer was, that there is no land that is habitable or fit for situation beyond Baltimore's liberty till they come to or near the Susquehanna's Fort."\* Nothing could be done immediately, the

\* James Bowden's *"History of the Friends in America,"* vol. I, p. 389

letter went on to say, because the Indians were at war with one another, and William Fuller, a Maryland Quaker, whose cooperation was deemed essential, was absent.

This seems to have been the first definite movement towards a Quaker colony. Reports of it reached the ears of young Penn at Oxford and set his imagination aflame. He never forgot the project, for seventeen is an age when grand thoughts strike home. The adventurousness of the plan was irresistible—a home for the new faith in the primeval forest, far from imprisonment, tithes, and persecution, and to be won by effort worthy of a man. It was, however, a dream destined not to be realized for many a long year. More was needed than the mere consent of the Indians. In the meantime, however, a temporary refuge for the sect was found in the province of West Jersey on the Delaware, which two Quakers had bought from Lord Berkeley for the comparatively small sum of 1000 pounds. Of this grant William Penn became one of the trustees and thus gained his first experience in the business of colonizing the region of his youthful dreams. But there was never a sufficient governmental control of West Jersey to make it an ideal Quaker colony. What little control the Quakers exercised disappeared after 1702; and the land and situation were not all that could be desired. Penn, though also one of the owners of East Jersey, made no attempt to turn that region into a Quaker colony.

Besides West Jersey the Quakers found a temporary asylum in Aquidneck, now Rhode Island.\* For many years the governors and magistrates were Quakers, and the affairs of this island colony were largely in their hands. Quakers were also prominent in the politics of North Carolina, and John Archdale, a Quaker, was Governor for several years. They formed a considerable element of the population in the towns of Long Island and Westchester County but they could not hope to convert these communities into real Quaker commonwealths.

The experience in the Jerseys and elsewhere very soon proved that if there was to be a real Quaker colony, the British Crown must give not only a title to the land but a strong charter guaranteeing self-government and protection of the Quaker faith from outside interference. But that the British Government would grant such valued privileges to a sect of schismatics which it was hunting down in England seemed a most unlikely event. Nothing but unusual influence at Court could bring it about, and in that quarter the Quakers had no influence.

Penn never forgot the boyhood ideal which he had developed at college. For twenty years he led a varied life—driven from home and whipped by his father for consorting with the schismatic; sometimes

\* *This Rhode Island colony should be distinguished from the settlement at Providence founded by Roger Williams with which it was later united. See Jones, "The Quakers in the American Colonies," p. 21, note.*

in deference to his father's wishes taking his place in the gay world at Court; even, for a time, becoming a soldier, and again traveling in France with some of the people of the Court. In the end, as he grew older, religious feeling completely absorbed him. He became one of the leading Quaker theologians, and his very earnest religious writings fill several volumes. He became a preacher at the meetings and went to prison for his heretical doctrines and pamphlets. At last he found himself at the age of thirty-six with his father dead, and a debt due from the Crown of 16,000 pounds for services which his distinguished father, the admiral, had rendered the Government.

Here was the accident that brought into being the great Quaker colony, by a combination of circumstances which could hardly have happened twice. Young Penn was popular at Court. He had inherited a valuable friendship with Charles II and his heir, the Duke of York. This friendship rested on the solid fact that Penn's father, the admiral, had rendered such signal assistance in restoring Charles and the whole Stuart line to the throne. But still 16,000 pounds or \$80,000, the accumulation of many deferred payments, was a goodly sum in those days, and that the Crown would pay it in money, of which it had none too much, was unlikely. Why not therefore suggest paying it instead in wild land in America, of which the Crown had abundance? That was the fruitful thought which visited Penn. Lord Berkeley and Lord Carteret had been given New Jer-

sey because they had signally helped to restore the Strait family to the throne. All the more therefore should the Stuart family give a tract of land, and even a larger tract, to Penn, whose father had not only assisted the family to the throne but had refrained so long from pressing his just claim for money due.

So the Crown, knowing little of the value of it, granted him the most magnificent domain of mountains; lakes, rivers, and forests, fertile soil, coal, petroleum, and iron that ever was given to a single proprietor. In addition to giving Penn the control of Delaware and, with certain other Quakers, that of New Jersey as well, the Crown placed at the disposal of the Quakers 55,000 square miles of most valuable, fertile territory, lacking only about three thousand square miles of being as large as England and Wales. Even when cut down to 45,000 square miles by a boundary dispute with Maryland, it was larger than Ireland. Kings themselves have possessed such dominions, but never before a private citizen who scorned all titles and belonged to a hunted sect that exalted peace and spiritual contemplation above all the wealth and power of the world. Whether the obtaining of this enormous tract of the best land in America was due to what may be called the eternal thriftiness of the Quaker mind or to the intense desire of the British Government to get rid of these people—at any cost might be hard to determine.

Penn received his charter in 1681, and in it he was very careful to avoid all the mistakes of the Jer-

sey proprietary grants. Instead of numerous proprietors, Penn was to be the sole proprietor. Instead of giving title to the land and remaining silent about the political government, Penn's charter not only gave him title to the land but a clearly defined position as its political head, and described the principles of the government so clearly that there was little room for doubt or dispute.

It was a decidedly feudal charter, very much like the one granted to Lord Baltimore fifty years before, and yet at the same time it secured civil liberty and representative government to the people. Penn owned all the land and the colonists were to be his tenants. He was compelled, however, to give his people free government. The laws were to be made by him with the assent of the people or their delegates. In practice this of course meant that the people were to elect a legislature and Penn would have a veto, as we now call it, on such acts as the legislature should pass. He had power to appoint magistrates, judges, and some other officers, and to grant pardons. Though, by the charter, proprietor of the province, he usually remained in England and appointed a deputy governor to exercise authority in the colony. In modern phrase, he controlled the executive part of the government and his people controlled the legislative part.

Pennsylvania, besides being the largest in area of the proprietary colonies, was also the most successful, not only from the proprietor's point of view but also from the point of view of the inhabitants.

The proprietorships in Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and the Carolinas were largely failures. Maryland was only partially successful; it was not particularly remunerative to its owner, and the Crown deprived him of his control of it for twenty years. Penn, too, was deprived of the control of Pennsylvania by William III but for only about two years. Except for this brief interval (1692-1694), Penn and his sons after him held their province down to the time of the American Revolution in 1776, a period of ninety-four years.

A feudal proprietorship, collecting rents from all the people, seems to modern minds grievously wrong in theory, and yet it would be very difficult to show that it proved onerous in practice. Under it the people of Pennsylvania flourished in wealth, peace, and happiness. Penn won undying fame for the liberal principles of his feudal enterprise. His expenses in England were so great and his quitrents always so much in arrears that he was seldom out of debt. But his children grew rich from the province. As in other provinces that were not feudal there were disputes between the people and the proprietors; but there was not so much general dissatisfaction as might have been expected. The proprietors were on the whole not altogether disliked. In the American Revolution, when the people could have confiscated everything in Pennsylvania belonging to the proprietary family, they not only left them in possession of a large part of their land, but paid them handsomely for the part that was taken.

After Penn had secured his charter in 1681, he obtained from the Duke of York the land now included in the State of Delaware. He advertised for colonists, and began selling land at 100 pounds for five thousand acres and annually thereafter a shilling quitrent for every hundred acres. He drew up a constitution or frame of government, as he called it, after wide and earnest consultation with many, including the famous Algernon Sydney. Among the Penn papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania is a collection of about twenty preliminary drafts. Beginning with one which erected a government by a landed aristocracy, they became more and more liberal, until in the end his frame was very much like the most liberal government of the other English colonies in America. He had a council and an assembly, both elected by the people. The council, however, was very large, had seventy-two members, and was more like an upper house of the Legislature than the usual colonial governor's council. The council also had the sole right of proposing legislation, and the assembly could merely accept or reject its proposals. This was a new idea, and it worked so badly in practice that in the end the province went to the opposite extreme and had no council or upper house of the Legislature at all.

Penn's frame of government contained, however, a provision for its own amendment. This was a new idea and proved to be so happy that it is now found in all American constitutions. His method of impeachment by which the lower house was to bring

in the charge and the upper house was to try it has also been universally adopted. His view that an unconstitutional law is void was a step towards our modern system. The next step, giving the courts power to declare a law unconstitutional, was not taken until one hundred years after his time. With the advice and assistance of some of those who were going out to his colony he prepared a code of laws which contained many of the advanced ideas of the Quakers. Capital punishment was to be confined to murder and treason, instead of being applied as in England to a host of minor offenses. The property of murderers, instead of being forfeited to the State, was to be divided among the next of kin of the victim and of the criminal. Religious liberty was established as it had been in Rhode Island and the Jerseys. All children were to be taught a useful trade. Oaths in judicial proceedings were not required. All prisons were to be workhouses and places of reformation instead of dungeons of dirt, idleness, and disease. This attempt to improve the prisons inaugurated a movement of great importance in the modern world in which the part played by the Quakers is too often forgotten.

Penn had now started his "Holy Experiment," as he called his enterprise in Pennsylvania, by which he intended to prove that religious liberty was not only right, but that agriculture, commerce, and all arts and refinements of life would flourish under it. He would break the delusion that prosperity and morals were possible only under some one particu-

lar faith established by law. He, would prove that government could be carried on without war and without oaths, and that primitive Christianity could be maintained without a hireling ministry, without persecution, without ridiculous dogmas or ritual, sustained only by its own innate power and the inward light.

## **Penn Sails For The Delaware**

The framing of the constitution and other preparations consumed the year following Penn's receipt of his charter in 1681. But at last, on August 30, 1682, he set sail in the ship *Welcome*, with about a hundred colonists. After a voyage of about six weeks, and the loss of thirty of their number by smallpox, they arrived in the Delaware. June would have been a somewhat better month in which to see the rich luxuriance of the green meadows and forests of this beautiful river. But the autumn foliage and bracing air of October must have been inspiring enough. The ship slowly beat her way for three days up the bay and river in the silence and romantic loneliness of its shores. Everything indicated richness and fertility. At some points the lofty trees of the primeval forest grew down to the water's edge. The river at every high tide overflowed great meadows grown up in reeds and grasses and red and yellow flowers, stretching back to the borders of the forest and full of water birds and wild fowl of every variety. Penn, now in the prime of life, must surely have been aroused by this scene and by the reflection that the noble river