

## **Penn's Sylvania: "A Holy Experiment"**

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In 1681, King Charles II of England granted land in the New World to William Penn. The colony which Penn established, Pennsylvania, was a unique social experiment in religious liberty that lasted for seventy-five years. In order to understand Penn's experiment, and its impact, it is necessary to look at two factors. The first is Penn's conviction to Quakerism, in the face of societal and parental opposition.<sup>1</sup> The second is the unique friendship he enjoyed with the Stuart monarchs--his radical religious views notwithstanding. Penn's ideologies shaped the character of the colony which later became the center of the fledgling government of the United States of America. Penn's "holy experiment", as he called it, became the proving ground for religious tolerance and individual liberty.

Penn's grandfather, Giles Penn, came from a long line of wealthy country gentlemen. Giles, however, chose to spend his life at sea and traded with the Spaniards and Moors, establishing a flourishing shipping business. Giles' son William, Penn's father, joined the Royal Navy and served, in one capacity or another, for the remainder of his life.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>People are not converted to Quakerism, they are "convinced." "Quakers" was a derisive nickname for the Religious Society of Friends. Edwin B. Bronner, William Penn's "Holy Experiment": The Founding of Pennsylvania 1681-1701 (New York: Temple University Publications, 1962), 6. I have used the terms "Quaker" and "Quakerism" because they are the terms which occur most often in the literature and they are the ones with which people are most familiar.

<sup>2</sup>It is difficult to trace William Penn's ancestry. He said that his ancestors were Welsh; the name Penn is derived from a Welsh or Cornish word meaning "hill". He also claimed to be descended from a Norman knight, de la Penne, who came to England with William the Conqueror and was granted an estate in Buckinghamshire. Harry Emerson Wildes, William Penn (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 7-8.

The elder Penn's life was spent advancing his fortunes. While on shore leave in London in 1643, Penn met and fell in love with the widowed Margaret Jasper Vanderscure. They were married June 6, 1643, and took up residence on Tower Hill, a fashionable London neighborhood where they came into contact with influential people. It was acquaintances such as Algernon Percy, Earl of Northumberland and Sir Harry Vane, treasurer of the Navy, who enabled William to rise to the rank of captain when he was only twenty-two. At this point, he faced a dilemma as he tried to reconcile his convictions with his loyalties. Personally, William was pro-Anglican and a royalist but his allegiance as a naval officer was given to Cromwell's Commonwealth. Rather than resigning or deserting, as some officers chose to do, William placed his country's safety ahead of all other considerations. During the Civil War, he helped protect England from marauding French and Spanish privateers. By the age of thirty-one he was Vice-Admiral of England.<sup>3</sup>

In 1654 Cromwell appointed Admiral Penn to head an expedition to the Spanish West Indies to capture the Spanish treasure fleet. He did not accomplish this, but he did seize and garrison Jamaica, a Spanish possession, laying the foundation of the British Empire in the Caribbean. Due to the failure of his campaign, upon his return to England he was imprisoned by Cromwell on a spurious charge of treason and stripped of his rank and his claim to any land in Jamaica. He was released, however, after only five weeks and allowed to keep his estates, including the Irish estates granted to him just before he left for the West Indies. He took his family and retired to his Irish estates. Several years after Cromwell's death, he returned to England as a member of the Convention Parliament and he was chosen as one of the representatives sent to Holland to bring Charles II back from exile. Charles II knighted Admiral Penn and appointed him Commissioner for the Navy, Vice-Admiral of Munster, Governor of Kinsale and proprietor of Shangarry Castle and its lands.<sup>4</sup>

Admiral Penn was a favorite with Charles II as well as with the Duke of York, Lord High Admiral of England (later James II). Admiral Penn and the Duke of York became friends, and although the Duke was his

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 10; Augustus C. Buell, William Penn as the Founder of Two Commonwealths (New York: D. Appleton, 1904), 18.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 18-21.

superior officer he was also Penn's pupil. In 1665, after a decisive victory over the Dutch fleet, the admiral retired from active service.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Admiral Penn was preparing his eldest son, William for the life of a courtier. He sent him to carefully selected schools and groomed him to run their estates. When the time was right, Admiral Penn brought William to Court. The later intimacy of William Penn (the son) and James II was the direct result of James' close friendship with Admiral Penn. Admiral Penn spent his life advancing his and attempting to advance his son's fortunes. Around 1669 his efforts appeared to promise realization when Charles II offered him a peerage, the hereditary title of Viscount of Weymouth. Unfortunately, this was around the time when William the younger, by this time a devout Quaker, published "No Cross, No Crown" which, among other things, condemned honorific titles as meaningless. Admiral Penn was shattered by his son's stance and felt compelled to refuse the King's offer, concluding there was no use obtaining a peerage when his heir wanted nothing to do with it.<sup>6</sup>

In order to better understand Admiral Penn's frustrations, it is helpful to take a closer look at his headstrong son's developmental years. William Penn was born in London on October 14, 1644. Penn's family moved to Chigwell two or three years later, a far healthier place to live than London. Aside from removing the child from the unhealthy air of the city, Admiral Penn had another reason for changing residences. There was a Free Grammar School there which was already famous, despite being only twenty-five years old, and it was here that Penn received his basic education. He attended the school until he was twelve, when his father was imprisoned by Cromwell and it was necessary for the family to return to London. It is believed that he had already completed the curriculum which was intended to educate boys through the age of sixteen.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 20-22.

<sup>6</sup>Vincent Buranelli, The King & the Quaker: A Study of William Penn and James II (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), 24, 42-43.

<sup>7</sup>William, I. Hull, William Penn: A Topical Biography (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1937, 1971), 65-69. Chigwell school was divided into two parts; a lower English school and a higher Latin school designed to prepare students to attend a university. The English school taught reading, writing, ciphering, and accounting. The Latin school taught Greek, Latin, and mathematics. Though founded by an archbishop of the Anglican church, the Chigwell School was subject to strong Puritan influences. Cromwell and his Puritan Commonwealth set the tone for the nation during Penn's schooldays and this shaped Penn's spiritual development.

It was while Penn was at Chigwell that he had his first recorded mystical experience. He was eleven years old and alone in his room when he felt "[T]he strongest conviction of the being of a God, and that the soul of man was capable of communication with him. He believed also that the seal of Divinity had been put upon him at this moment, or that he had been awakened or called upon to a holy life."<sup>8</sup> This experience had a profound impact on his life and was a contributing factor to his later conviction to Quakerism.

Penn was called home from Chigwell and the family moved to London. His father had just returned from the West Indies and had been imprisoned by Cromwell. When Admiral Penn was released, five weeks after his arrest, he took his family and retired to Ireland for the duration of Cromwell's Commonwealth. During the four year period of his family's self-imposed exile in Ireland, Penn was tutored at home and little is known about his studies. Penn's first exposure to Quakerism took place during this time. When he was thirteen he heard an itinerant Quaker preacher Thomas Loe, and was swept away by the emotional appeal of Loe's message. Loe introduced Penn to the doctrine of the Inner Light adhered to by the Society of Friends. Quakerism has been described as, "[T]hat quickening of a man's soul by direct mystical communication with God; the right of the individual to wait upon the Lord alone or with a group unaided by any kind of priest; the simplicity of plain, honest living devoid of plumes and laces and deception; the pacifism; the dignified humility."<sup>9</sup> This was not yet the time of Penn's conviction but this encounter with Quakerism left a deep impression on him.

In 1660, when Admiral Penn returned from exile, Cromwell was dead, his Commonwealth crumbled, and the delegation which included Admiral Penn was sent to bring the king, Charles II, home. The younger Penn, now sixteen, was old enough to be in his father's confidence and he was able to learn about the political workings of administration from his father, who was accepted at Court as a hero and as a friend of the King. It was Admiral Penn's intention to bring his son to the royal attention as soon as possible and to continue educating his son for life as a courtier. Penn was enrolled at Christ Church, Oxford and was matriculated as the son of a knight.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Clarkson, Memoirs of the Private and Public Life of William Penn, (London, 1813), quoted in *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>9</sup>Catherine Owens Peare, William Penn: A Biography, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1957), 20-4.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*, 24-26.

Penn entered Oxford with all the advantages possible for a young man of his time. His time at Chigwell and with his tutors had more than adequately prepared him academically. His social success was assured by his father's personal friendship with the ruling family. He had sufficient financial resources for whatever he needed. It was true that he had been essentially in seclusion in Ireland, but he soon adjusted to life at Oxford despite his later description of university life as "hellish darkness and debauchery."<sup>11</sup> Penn enrolled at Oxford when Dr. John Fell, the newly appointed Dean, was trying to cleanse the university of Puritanism and reestablish the orthodoxy of the Church of England. Students were required to attend chapel services, wear a surplice, and observe all the rituals of the Church. Students who refused to comply were punished or expelled. These reforms were a reflection of what was happening all over England. During Penn's second year at Oxford, which coincided with the second year of the Restoration, anti-Puritan reforms were sweeping the country. Dr. John Owen, who had been Dean of Christ Church until the Restoration removed him from the position, was a widely known Puritan preacher and some students defiantly continued to attend his lectures. This group of students held their own worship meetings, and an interested Penn, who had begun to question Fell's about religious services, followed them. Penn was gravitating toward the students who maintained their Puritan traditions of being serious, less cruel and less vain, and away from the quick-tempered cruelty of the Royalist Oxford men. He was taking his place with the non-conformists at a time when piety and decency were radical tendencies. The norm, as is often the case after a serious social upheaval, was vicious persecution of the old ways. In this case it meant chasing down and abusing anyone with Puritan leanings, with Quakers bearing the worst of it.

Penn put aside the surplice, absented himself from chapel services, and began to spend time at the home of Dr. Owen. He had quietly joined the conscientious objectors. Christ Church imposed a fine and Penn faced unofficially sanctioned persecutions from students and faculty, but there were limits to what they could do. Penn was, after all, the son of Admiral William Penn, a close personal friend of the Duke of York and, by extension, of the King. By March 1662, the administration of Christ Church reached the end of its patience and expelled Penn.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Penn, in *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-36. There is a possibility that Penn left Oxford of his own volition. See Wildes, 27-28.

Penn returned home to a strained relationship with his father, who no longer understood how his son thought. The admiral did not realize that Penn's questioning of religious ritual and established norms of behavior were anything more than youthful rebelliousness. Penn spent five months at home, withdrawing further into his religious investigations, communicating with Dr. Owen, and becoming more distant from his father. Finally, in an effort to prevent any further contact between his son and the corrupting influence of Dr. Owen, Admiral Penn sent William to France to round off his education. He thought that the gaiety and pleasures of French society would be just the thing to remind Penn of his social status and prospects.

Penn went to France, but he did not stay in Paris for very long. He went, instead, to a Protestant seminary at Saumur, in Touraine, to study highly unorthodox views under Moïse Amyraut which closely resembled the Quaker doctrines of the Inner Light. From Amyraut, Penn learned new interpretations of old teachings and to question what he had been taught. He learned that men were predestined to happiness if they had faith in God, that God's grace brought freedom to all who truly believed in Him, and that the Sabbath, far from the onerous duty the Puritans had made it into, was truly a day of rest. Above all, Penn learned that the injunction to fear God, which had been stressed repeatedly down through the ages, was a command to revere God rather than to expect His wrath at some inadvertent sin. The lessons at Saumur drew upon all of Penn's classical training and opened him to new ideas. Everything that he had been taught by and about the Church was turned on its ear. At the same time, his questions and doubts which had troubled him during his days at Oxford were reinforced. In 1664, when Amyraut died, Penn returned to Paris before journeying to Provence with Robert Spencer. Penn was deeply impressed by the region, especially its tradition of religious liberty.<sup>13</sup>

Admiral Penn, finally having heard that his son was at Saumur, and having been informed of the nature of the school by a friend of Lady Penn's, wrote and ordered Penn to return home immediately. On his way home, Penn fell in with Algernon Sidney, a man whom Admiral Penn would most likely have considered an even worse influence than the teachings of Saumur. Sidney was a strong believer in equality, freedom, and the social contract.<sup>14</sup> Rejecting both the Commonwealth's military dictatorship and the Stuart doctrine of divine

<sup>13</sup>Wildes, 28-32.

<sup>14</sup>This was a century before Rousseau formalized the idea of a Social Contract.

right of kings, Sidney argued that England's strength and welfare was dependent upon the maintenance of the ancient rights of its people. Popular consent was the only valid authority for power and a ruler who did not follow the known and accepted laws should be overthrown. These views coincided with the convictions Penn had acquired over the course of his studies and his time with men such as Dr. Owen. As a result, he and Sidney developed a lasting friendship. Penn arrived at home, outwardly a fashionable young man of the world, but inwardly brimming with unorthodox ideals and ideas.

To add the final polish to Penn's education, his father sent him to study law at Lincoln's Inn. Between a plague epidemic and war with Holland breaking out, Penn never finished a full term. He did, however, avail himself of their extensive library and spent as much time as he could over the next year or so reading law.<sup>15</sup> This proved invaluable twenty years later, when he composed the laws to govern his new colony.

After Penn's interlude reading law, and a brief involvement in the war with Holland,<sup>16</sup> he was sent to Ireland to manage his family's lands. While in Cork on business in 1667, he attended a Quaker meeting. He continued to attend these meetings, feeling that the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light represented the culmination of his questioning and searching.

The first that Penn's father heard of his conviction was that he had been arrested at a Quaker meeting. When Admiral Penn understood that his son was going to stand fast in his new religion, he also realized that his hopes for advancing his son's position were ended. His plans and expectations were destroyed, but the admiral reconciled with his son before dying in 1670. Shortly before he died, he sent messages to King Charles and the Duke of York, begging them to remember his son and not to hold Penn's religion against him.<sup>17</sup>

Over the next decade, Penn became close friends with the Duke of York. He spent the years following his conviction as an active proponent for the Quakers, through prolific preaching and writing. He became known as an advocate for fellow Quakers who had been

<sup>15</sup>Wildes, 32-34.

<sup>16</sup>He carried a message to the King for his father and the Duke of York, thus coming directly to the King's attention.

<sup>17</sup>Buranelli, 35-36, 45.

imprisoned for their beliefs and was arrested more than once. His relationship with the Stuarts gave him an avenue of appeal which was closed to most. He also married and started a family.

The idea of establishing a Quaker colony in America did not originate with Penn. As early as 1658, when the persecution and execution of Quakers in New England began, the Quakers started looking for a place to colonize. The Puritan colony of Massachusetts, and Roman Catholic Maryland, set the precedent for colonies to be established as havens for persecuted religious groups.

In 1660 Josiah Coale, a Quaker, traveled in the region between New England and Maryland, exploring the possibility of settling among the natives living on the Susquehanna River. Ten years later George Fox, the founder of Quakerism traveled through the same territory, pondering on its potential as a Quaker refuge. It is very probable that Fox discussed this area with Penn when he returned to England, although it would be ten years before the Pennsylvania charter was granted.<sup>18</sup>

There was a chance to establish a haven for Quakers before the Pennsylvania colony was founded. In the late 1670s Penn became a co-trustee of West Jersey and, in 1677, he began preparing the framework for a new government which was based on freedom of conscience. The basic rules which he set down were very simple and provided for the freedom of conscience and the basic liberties of everyone in the colony. The constitution for the Colony of West Jersey called for: "Universal and unqualified suffrage; perfect freedom of conscience and complete religious equality before the law; a governing assembly to be chosen by ballot, any voter being eligible; an executive commission of ten members to be appointed by the assembly; magistrates and constables to be elected by the people; no sentence in criminal cases without trial by jury; no judgment in civil cases involving over five shillings, without verdict of a jury." In sum, "[a]ll and every person in the province shall, by the help of the Lord and these fundamentals, be forever free from oppression and slavery."<sup>19</sup> This form of government lasted in West Jersey from 1677 until 1702, when the outbreak of Queen Anne's War made it necessary to declare the colony a Crown colony, combine it with East Jersey and appoint a royal governor, nullifying the existing government. When Penn founded

<sup>18</sup>Hull, 218; Sydney George Fisher, The True William Penn, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1899), 197, 218-19.

<sup>19</sup>Buell, 92-99.



Pennsylvania in 1681, he was able to take these basic ideas and refine them, making them more practical.<sup>20</sup>

In all of his writings, Penn never explained why he asked the King for another province in America<sup>21</sup> but, on June 1, 1680, he formally filed a petition asking for a grant of the land west of the Delaware River as far as Maryland ran and northward from Maryland "as far as plantable."<sup>22</sup> On March 4, 1681, the charter was granted by Charles II.

There are many possible explanations for why Charles II felt inclined to grant the charter. The explanation most commonly given is that he was discharging a debt of approximately £16,000 owed to Penn's father by the Crown.<sup>23</sup> At the same time he was honoring the admiral as a hero by granting his son, the only Quaker the king did not view as an outright nuisance, a valuable piece of land.<sup>24</sup> While these are valid explanations, there are several other underlying reasons. For the Catholic king of a Protestant country, granting land to a non-conformist sect was a way to show his Protestant subjects that he was not a religious bigot. This was also a chance to expel a sect of people, which Protestants and Catholics both found annoying, in a peaceful manner by shipping them to another continent. As Penn wrote, "The government was anxious to be rid of us at so cheap a price."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 101-2.

<sup>21</sup>Jean R. Soderlund, ed., William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania 1680-1684: A Documentary History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 5. Perhaps he wanted a place where he had full control to enact his ideas.

<sup>22</sup>William Penn, in Wildes, 118.

<sup>23</sup>This is the story which Penn himself told. Mary Maples Dunn, William Penn: Politics and Conscience (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 73.

<sup>24</sup>The King gave three official reasons: Admiral Penn's "discretion with our dearest brother James," an oblique reference to the Admiral's taking the blame for the Duke's naval blunder; Penn's "commendable desire to enlarge the British Empire, and to promote such useful commodities as may be beneficial to the King and his dominions"; and the suggestion that Penn's influence would "reduce the savage nations by just and gentle manners to the love of civil society and the Christian religion." From the Preamble to the Patent for Pennsylvania in Wildes, 119-20.

<sup>25</sup>Penn in a letter to Lord Romney, September 6, 1701, in Ibid., 119. There were rumors that the Quakers were secret papists or that they were plotting to overthrow the monarchy, but neither Charles II nor his brother credited these stories. They knew that the Quakers were patriotic, loyal and, due to their radical pacifism, impossible to incite to violent rebellion. At the same time, the Quakers were eccentric malcontents and everyone would be happier if they were not around. Ibid., 119.

Penn also had motives beyond collecting an old debt. He articulated these in 1682, in a letter to the two officials at Whitehall who had the most to do with the passage of his charter, written after he arrived in America. His aims were, "The service of God first, the honor and advantage of the king, with our own profit, shall I hope be [the result of] all our endeavors." He established Pennsylvania as "a holy experiment"<sup>26</sup> for other nations to follow. Penn wanted to found a tolerant, moral, self-governing society which was free from persecution.<sup>27</sup> It was a chance to prove that Quaker doctrines were a sound basis for a strong, functional government.

Whatever the motives behind the land grant, it was generous. The king granted Penn a charter to territory which roughly corresponds to the present Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Penn was the proprietor--virtually a sovereign ruler--answerable only to the King. Penn was required to pay the King two beaver skins, delivered to Windsor every January first, plus one-fifth of all gold and silver mined in the province. In return, Penn was free to divide the land into towns and counties, establish laws, create harbors, and rent and sell the land. The only thing he was not allowed to do was to declare war. The charter made Penn the world's largest private landowner of his day.<sup>28</sup>

After the charter was granted, the next issue was the naming of the new colony. Penn was not entirely pleased with the name the King approved, writing:

[T]his day my country was confirm'd to me . . . by the name of Pennsylvania, a name the King would give it in honour to my Father, I chose New-Wales, being as this a pritty hilly country but Penn being Welch for head . . . called this Pennsylvania [which] is the high or head woodlands; for I proposed when the secretary a Welchman refused to have it called New-Wales, Silvania & they added Penn to it & tho I much opposed it & went to the King to have it struck out & alter'd, he said twas past & he would take it upon him . . . I feared lest it should be lookt on as

<sup>26</sup>Penn to William Blathwayt and Francis Gwyn, November 21, 1682 and to James Harrison (one of his land agents in America), August 25, 1681, in Soderlund, 190, 77.

<sup>27</sup> Bronner, 6. Bronner writes that, to William Penn, when talking about the "holy experiment" the word "holy" was the more important of the two. Penn expected his experiment to be permeated with the spirit of God and he hoped that, by operating his colony in accordance with the highest Christian ethic, it would be an example to mankind of what men could achieve if they entrusted themselves to God.

<sup>28</sup>Hans Fantel, William Penn: Apostle of Dissent (New York: William Morrow, 1974), 147-8.

a vanity in me & not as a respect in the King as it truly was to my Father whom he often mentions with praise.<sup>29</sup>

Penn had reason to be concerned. Among the Quakers, who did not believe in honorific titles or setting one man above another, vanity was a serious sin. He did not want the name of the colony to be a cause of dissent among his colonists. When the King said it was in honor of his father, however, there was no graceful way to object to such a gesture of royal gratitude.<sup>30</sup>

Penn already had practice in establishing a new government through his co-trusteeship of West Jersey. Now he had an opportunity to refine his original ideas and bridge the gaps between the spiritual and material worlds in which he lived.<sup>31</sup> With the help of his friends, John Locke and Algernon Sidney, he devoted himself to writing a Frame of Government which would preserve the liberty of the people against future tyranny. He even wanted to prevent tyranny at the hands of himself and his descendants. The five basic principles of government upon which Pennsylvania was founded were perfect democracy, perfect religious liberty, perfect justice and fairness in dealing with aborigines and neighbors, the absence of all military and naval provision for attack and defense, and the abolition of Oaths. Fifteen laws were added to Penn's Frame of Government by the first sessions of the Pennsylvania Assembly. From 1683 to 1701, there were several major revisions. From 1701 to 1776 the constitution of Pennsylvania remained the same and it served as one of the models when the founding fathers met in Philadelphia to draw up a constitution for the United States.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Penn to Robert Turner, March 5, 1681, in Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn, eds., The Papers of William Penn, Volume Two, 1680-1684 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 83.

<sup>30</sup>Fantel, 149. Penn had a point; how many people today realize that the commonwealth was named for his father?

<sup>31</sup>Fantel writes that, for Penn, there were no boundaries between World and Spirit and that he was equally at home in both. The ultimate purpose of his holy experiment was to bring the two together. *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Hope Bacon, The Quiet Rebels: The Story of the Quakers in America (Philadelphia: New Society, 1985), 54-55; Isaac Sharpless, A Quaker Experiment in Government (Philadelphia: A. J. Ferris, 1898), 1-2.

In preparing a place for the Quakers to establish a home free from prejudice and persecution, Penn did not ignore the people already living in his proprietorship. Penn's relations with the Lenni Lenape (the English called them the Delawares) were unique in that he truly respected them and cared about their spiritual well-being. In addition, he spent time with them and learned their language. The idea of purchasing the lands of the Lenni Lenape was not a new one, but Penn was the only one to be consistent about it. He paid them fair value for their land, without coercing them to sell, sometimes paying twice when there were rival claims to an area. He did not try to deceive the Lenni Lenape with false maps or other trickery, and he dealt with them openly and honorably. The Lenni Lenape, in return, respected and admired Penn.<sup>33</sup>

The later part of Penn's life passed in a tangle of legal problems and personal sadness but, while Penn was deeply affected by his circumstances, the long term adverse affects on Pennsylvania were minimal. Penn was unable to spend much time in the colony for which he worked so hard. He was there from 1682 to 1684, getting the colony in good working order, establishing relations with the Lenni Lenape and overseeing the construction of his new home. He established Philadelphia, the cultural center of the colony, which he named for the biblical city in Asia Minor.<sup>34</sup> He was looking forward to having his wife join him so they could settle down to a new life in America. Unfortunately, she became ill and could not leave England. In 1684, in order to deal with a legal dispute, he returned to England and, between one thing and another, it was fifteen years before Penn could return to Pennsylvania. In the interim, he had numerous financial difficulties, exacerbated by the agent who handled his affairs and regularly cheated him. In 1694 his wife died, an event from which he never quite recovered, his subsequent remarriage notwithstanding. He was able to visit Pennsylvania briefly between 1699 and 1701, but had to return to London to defend his position as Proprietor of the colony. His defense was successful, but he never again lived in Pennsylvania. In 1708, he was declared bankrupt and, in 1712, he suffered a stroke and loss of memory. From then until his death in

<sup>33</sup>Bacon, 59. Sharpless, 159-161.

<sup>34</sup>Michael J. O'Malley, III, "Philadelphia, First," *Pennsylvania Heritage* 18 (1992): 17. Philadelphia means "City of Brotherly Love."

1718, he was not capable of having anything more to do with his colony. His oldest surviving son inherited the proprietorship.<sup>35</sup>

Pennsylvania was different from the other colonies. No other colony had such a mixture of languages, nationalities, and religions. The Quakers, who were the earliest settlers and purchasers of land, emigrated to the colony for religious liberty. They were, for the most part, well-to-do people who sold their properties in England and left to escape persecution. Although they were radicals, they were peaceful, careful people and their colony soon prospered. The absolute freedom of conscience which Penn guaranteed soon attracted people from Germany and Wales, including Baptists and Churchmen as well as Quakers, who were fleeing religious persecution. Followers of German Pietism, seeking a place of religious freedom, founded the Ephrata Cloister in 1732 and the Amish and the Mennonites dedicated to recapturing the spirit of the original biblical church, found homes in Pennsylvania as well. These are just a few examples of the many non-English groups who were able to settle in Pennsylvania when no one else would have them.<sup>36</sup>

Parallels can be drawn between Philadelphia, the capital of colonial Pennsylvania, and Boston, the center of the Puritan colony in Massachusetts. The Puritans were despotic in matters of faith and doctrine to a degree rarely seen before. They insisted on religious liberty, not on the grounds that compulsion in religious matters is wrong, but because they felt that the services of the Church of England were unscriptural. They wanted to subjugate the state to the church, relegating civil authority to enforcing the decrees of the ministers. The Puritans brought these ideas to America and were able to give them free reign in Massachusetts. Boston was founded on hierarchical and authoritarian principles which governed it at least until the close of the nineteenth century. They established a tradition of class authority and leadership which their descendants emulated. Philadelphia, by contrast, had no such class structure. The egalitarian and anti-authoritarian principles of the Quakers led to a confusion of class authority. Considering the ideals upon which Penn established the structure of his colony, this lack of class structure was probably the

<sup>35</sup>Bacon, 55-58. Peare, 380.

<sup>36</sup>Horace Mather Lippincott, Philadelphia (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1926), 1, 8; Sylvester K. Stevens, Portrait of Pennsylvania (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 50, 93-94.

result for which he aimed. Blurring the lines between the classes would lead to a greater sense of equality and freedom for everyone.<sup>37</sup>

In the end, the holy experiment was not a complete success, but it left a lasting mark on the character of Pennsylvania. There were financial difficulties and legal problems with the colonists. They did not always live up to the ideals Penn had set out for them. Penn's long absences were detrimental to the colony. He administered the colony better and things ran more smoothly when he was actually there. The holy experiment eventually ran its course and came to an end. As succeeding generations grew up free from religious persecution, the impulse to be guided by religious principles waned. The new leaders were cautious and respectable, and religious fervor no longer had a place in politics. Secular concerns began to override those of the spirit. This does not mean that the experiment was a failure. It shaped the laws and institutions of Pennsylvania, and the notions of private and political decency. It laid the groundwork for the thinking which inspired the American Revolution.<sup>38</sup>

Penn's holy experiment could be said to have been a failure in form, but the influence it had on its population and the evolution of American thought was profound. On balance, it must be said that the experiment was a success because, without Penn, American history clearly would have been written with a different pen. Without Pennsylvania acting as a proving ground for individual liberty and religious tolerance, the contents of the United States constitution might be different.

William Penn was a wealthy and influential man who chose to use his position for the furtherance of justice and freedom for all men. Many of the Quakers in England were also wealthy, and had made the same choice to follow the doctrine of the Inner Light, even at the cost of persecution and prejudice. They sold their properties in England and followed Penn to a new land where they could practice their religion and their ideals in peace, inviting other oppressed people to join them. Penn did not always make the best administrative or political choices, but he remained true to his ideals and he gave the colonists of Pennsylvania a vision of equality and freedom to follow.

Pennsylvania and America owe a debt to William Penn. He established a tradition of respect for human dignity and human rights and his holy experiment was the first fully implemented attempt to fuse

<sup>37</sup>Henry Ferguson, Essays in American History (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1894), 10-11; E. Digby Baltzell, Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia: Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class Authority and Leadership (New York: Free Press, 1979), 20.

<sup>38</sup>Bronner, 250-3; Fantel, 263-4.

human freedom and benevolent government. Penn articulated and acted upon ideas which would help America's quest for freedom in the eighteenth century. "[Thomas] Jefferson may have been the perfect product of that evolution [of thought], but Penn was its herald angel." Penn was the pioneer of the idea of government "of the people, by the people, and for the people."<sup>39</sup>

William Penn was the amazing product of a time of incredible religious intolerance. Although he was raised to be part of that culture, he was able to overcome his background and ties to the things of the world to become a shining light of religious freedom. He could easily have followed the path of courtier and nobleman that his father laid out for him, but he chose, instead, to follow his heart and his spirit and, in so doing, he left a legacy of equality, tolerance, and freedom.

<sup>39</sup> Frederick B. Tolles and E. Gordon Alderfer, eds., The Witness of William Penn (New York: Macmillan, 1957), x; Buell, 97-98.