

WILLIAM PENN

Just here we deem it appropriate to give a brief narrative of some the leading events in the earlier life of William Penn, which will prove most interesting in this connection. They are taken from *Lempriere's Biographical Dictionary*:

"William Penn, the celebrated Quaker, was born in London, 1644. From a private school at Chigwell, Essex, he entered, in 1660, a gentleman commoner, at Christ Church, Oxford; but as he withdrew from the national forms of worship with other students, who, like himself, had listened to the preaching of Thomas Loe, a Quaker of eminence, he was fined for non-conformity, and the next year, as he pertinaciously adhered to his opinions, he was expelled from the college. This disgrace did not promote his comfort. His father considered his singularly sober and serious conduct as tending to impede his elevation to the favors of the licentious court, and, therefore, after being, as he says, whipped and beaten, he was turned out the doors, in 1662.

"His father, however, sent him to France, and on his return he entered at Lincoln's Inn as a law student.

"In 1666, he was sent to manage an estate in Ireland, and during his residence there, he renewed his acquaintance with Loe, and showed such partiality to the Quakers, that he was, in those days of persecution, taken up at a meeting at Cork, and imprisoned by the Mayor, who at last restored him to liberty at the request of Lord Orreroey.

"His return to England produced a violent altercation with his father, who wished him to abandon those singular habits so offensive to decorum and established forms; and when he refused to appear uncovered before him, and before the king, he a second time dismissed him from his protection and favor.

"In 1668, he first appeared as a preacher and as an author among the Quakers, and in consequence of some controversial dispute, he was sent to the Tower, where he remained in confinement for seven months.

"The passing of the Conventical Act, soon after, sent him to prison in Newgate – from which he was released by the interest of his father, who, about this time, was reconciled to him, and left him, on his decease, some time after, a valuable estate of about fifteen hundred pounds per annum."

The obloquy and persecution under which the Quakers suffered, continually increased, and finally became intensified to such a degree that they were even subjected to the torture and ignominy of the *branding iron*, and this, too, almost under the shadow of Plymouth Rock, and at the hands of those same Puritans who had so recently escaped the fangs of proscriptive intolerance in lands across the sea.

Penn, however, although he had cast his lot with the despised sect, had no longer any need to fear personal persecution, for he had become a favorite with his sovereign, mainly, perhaps, on account of the brilliant naval service which his father, the Admiral Penn, had rendered to the 'merry monarch,' in the great sea fight against the Dutch, June 3d, 1664. But his personal immunity from persecution did not cause him to forget others, whose hearts were aching for some peaceful place – among the islands of the sea, or in the wilderness of America – where they might worship the Almighty Ruler as their Conscience should move them, without dictation of hindrance from the hand of power.

He resolved that, if practicable, he would found such an asylum, and as he cast about him in the prosecution of his benevolent design, what was more natural than that his eyes should turn towards the new country across the ocean, whose lands were known to be virgin fertility, and almost boundless in extent?

He had recently acted in the capacity of trustee for Edward Byllinge, a Quaker who had a heavy pecuniary disaster in an attempt to establish settlements in New Jersey, upon lands which were purchased there from Lord Berkeley, and while so acting as trustee, Penn had become acquainted with the existence and eligibility of the great expanse of country lying west of the Delaware and north of the grant made to Lord Baltimore, these lands still being in possession of the crown. He remembered, too, that the government was yet indebted to the estate of his father, in the sum of sixteen thousand pounds, for services as admiral, an amount which in those days of kingly extravagance and slender revenue, we suppose it was not entirely convenient for the royal treasury to pay. So, in the year 1681, he made an humble petition the King Charles the Second, praying that, instead of the large sum due his father, he might receive a grant of lands upon the river Delaware in America.

His request was acceded to. The king granted him lands, which were described and bounded, in the Royal Charter (dated March 4th, 1681), as follows:

"On the east by the Delaware river, from twelve miles distance northwards of Newcastle Town, unto the three-and-fortieth degree of the northern latitude, if the said river doth extend so far northward, but is the said river shall not extend so far northward, then by the said river so far as it doth extend, and from the

head of the said river the eastern bounds are to be determined by a meridian line drawn from the head of the said river unto the said forty-third degree. The said land to extend westward five degrees of longitude to be computed from the eastern bounds, and the said lands to be bounded on the north by the three-and-fortieth degree of northern latitude, and on the south by a circle drawn at twelve miles distance from Newcastle, northward and westward unto the fortieth degree of north latitude, and then by a straight line westward to the limits of longitude above mentioned.”

The reasons moving the king to grant the charter were declared in that instrument to be the merits of Admiral Penn, the extension of the British Empire and the conversion of the savage nations to civilized life and the Christian religion.

This vast territory the king named *Pennsylvania* (Penn’s forest land), in opposition to the wishes of the great Quaker, who did not desire the complimentary name, but preferred rather that the province should be called New Wales.

So broad and comprehensive was his spirit of philanthropy, that he designed this as an asylum, not only for his own people, the English Quakers, but as one to which all Christians, of whatever country, might flee from religious oppression. And so firmly was he resolved that no injustice should strain his enterprise, that when he himself came over to the new land, it was one of his first and chief acts to call together the red men – they who had owned the soil long before Charles Stuart laid claim to it – and the repurchase from them the same lands which he has already brought (and paid for) of the Crown of England.

Nineteen nations of Indians thus met,* and extended to him the hand of friendship. Always after, they spoke of him as the *Miquon*, their elder brother, their good and just friend; and so long as he lived they never broke their faith with him.

It seemed incredible how rapidly and how widely the knowledge of Penn’s benevolent project was spread abroad, for in less than two years, more than fifty ships entered the Delaware freighted with eager emigrants; not only Quakers from different points in England and Wales, but from Holland, and from many other places on the continent; among them a large number of Germans – some of them Quakers – from Cresheim, in the Palatinate. So rapid was the influx that says Proud (page 220, voll. II, History of Pennsylvania), “the banks of the Delaware were one bustling scene – some lodged in the woods, in hollow trees, some in caves, which were easily dug on the high banks of the Wissahickon and the Delaware, and others, in haste, erected huts.”

During the very first year there were eighty dwellings erected in the town of Philadelphia. It seems as if those swarming refugees from oppression were endured with the spirit of prophecy, and that they foresaw the worldly advantages which did afterwards accrue to them and their children, as a result of the humane, just, and pacific policy pursued by Penn, towards the Indian proprietors of the land. Very many of those immigrants who came then, in too deep poverty to provide their families so much as a shelter, lived to find themselves in positions of comfort and competence; and of many more, it may be truly said, that their descendants are to-day among the most cultured, wealthy and influential people in the state.

The grant to Penn was declared to the inhabitants within its borders by the King’s proclamation, April 2, 1681, in which he commanded them to pay due obedience to the proprietary, his heirs, assigns, and agents.

Penn soon after published an account of his province, with the charter and other documents, and invited purchasers at the rate of forty shillings the hundred acres, subject to a quit rent of one shilling per annum forever.

Two ships from London and one from Bristol, with emigrants, soon after sailed to America. One

* It was at this famous treaty that we first hear of the great *Tamanend*; the most renowned of all Indian sachems. At that council he, with another chief, *Metamequan*, on the 23d of April, 1683, affixed their marks to an instrument by which they conveyed to the Proprietary the tract of land on Neshaminy Creek, in the county of Bucks.

His correct name, *Tamanene*, came, in the course of time, to be written *Tammany*, and a society was founded in his honor, during the Revolution, by which society he was recognized as the Patron Saint of America. At the present day he is still regarded as holding the same relation to a powerful political party in this country.

The name *Tamanend* is said to signify, in the Indian tongue, “The *Urbane*.”

of the London ships, the “Amity,” was driven by adverse winds to the West Indies, and did not reach Delaware until the following spring. The others arrived safely, and landed their passengers towards the close of the year.

At this time, December, 1681, the population was about two thousand, principally Quakers and Swedes, each of whom had three houses of public worship.

This magnificent domain comprised the present State of Pennsylvania, containing about forty-six thousand square miles, and having, by the United States census of 1870, a population of 3,521,791.

Penn left England, in company with many friends, in September, and landed at Newcastle on the 24 of October, 1682, where he was received with every demonstration of pleasure and respect.

He convened the Assembly on the 4th of December, during whose session three important laws were passed, to-wit: 1. An act for a union of the province and territories; 2. A naturalization act; 3. A general system of jurisprudence. Religious toleration was secured to all who believed in a deity, but a belief in Christianity was made a prerequisite to holding office. The people were commanded to observe the first day of the week as Lord’s Day. Swearing and blasphemy were punished by fine and imprisonment. Personal liberty was respected.

The Judiciary power was vested in a supreme court, sitting quarterly, a court of common pleas, held monthly, and a court of quarter sessions and jail delivery.

The mischievous English law of promogeniture was rejected. Property was made devisible by the will with two witnesses, and in case of intestacy was distributed among the children. In case of issue, only one-half the property was subject to execution. A property qualification was required for the exercise of the rights of franchise. Crimes were severely punished. Assault of parents and disrespect of persons in authority were punished by fine and imprisonment. Marriage was made a civil contract. Plays and games were prohibited, and made punishable by fine and imprisonment.

The laws were to be printed and published, and taught in the schools.

The celebrated council with the Indians was held under the spreading branches of a great elm, in what is now Kensington, a northeastern suburb of Philadelphia, on the 14th of December, 1682. The treaty which the contracting parties entered into was a just and equitable one, remarkable for the spirit of conciliation which is taught, and equality of all men which it acknowledged.

The celebrated Voltaire said, “This was the only treaty entered into between these people and the Christians which was not ratified by an oath, and which was never broken.”

The Indian name for the location where the city of Philadelphia stands was *Coaquannock*, of *Coaquenaki*.

Penn remained in the colony until June 12, 1684, when he sailed for England. At the time of his departure the province and territories contained a population of seven thousand, two thousand five hundred of whom resided in Philadelphia.

Charles the Second, of England, died February 6, 1684, and was succeeded by the Duke of York, under the title of James the Second. In 1688, a revolution drove him from the throne. This change in the government destroyed all Penn’s influence at court. He fell under suspicion, and was brought before the Privy Council at three different times to answer a charge of conspiring to restore James to the Throne, but was finally discharged.

Heartily tired of these difficulties, he resolved to return to America. He was granted a convoy by the government, and, at the head of about five hundred emigrants, was preparing to sail, when new troubles overtook him.

One George Keith, a native of Scotland, for many years a zealous member of the Society of Friends, had rendered himself obnoxious to them, and had been expelled from their body. A schism followed, and Keith’s adherents became quite numerous and stirred up dissension and discord. Keith eventually abandoned the Friends, took orders in the Established Church, and came to America as a missionary, where he died some years afterwards.

Out of this sedition grew many difficulties, which, in the end, had nearly cost Penn his province. In fact, William and Mary, who had Succeeded James, stripped him of his authority, and placed Benjamin Fletcher, Governor-General of New York, over Pennsylvania on the 19th of April, 1693. War was then raging between England and France, and had extended to the colonies. Schenectady, in New York, Salmon Falls, in New Hampshire, and the settlements at Casco Bay, were taken by bodies of French and Indians, in 1690, and their inhabitants killed or carried into captivity. Desolation and ruin stared the Colonies in the face from St. Lawrence to the Carolinas.

At this juncture a strong effort was made to unite the Colonies in a general system of defense, and Governor Fletcher called upon Pennsylvania for her proportion of subsidy which was being raised to propitiate the Six Nations, and thereby attach them to the English interest.

A long discussion, producing serious complications, ensued between the Assembly and Governor Fletcher, ending in a dissolution of that body. Penn was finally restored to all his rights by letters patent issued in August, 1694. The war ended by the treaty of Ryswick, in 1697.

Penn having finally surmounted all difficulties, sailed from England with his wife and family, in August, 1699, and arrived in the Delaware on the last day of November following, with the intention of spending the remainder of his years in America. But in the midst of his labors he received intelligence which compelled his return to England.

He again departed on the 1st of November, 1701, arriving at Portsmouth in December. An attempt had been made to influence the King and Parliament to purchase the proprietary rights in America, but the presence of Penn was sufficient to arrest the moment, and he and his successors remained in peaceable possession until the occurrence of the American Revolution, when all their rights and property were confiscated, excepting in cases of manors granted or sold and occupied by other parties.

William Penn died at Rushcomb, in Buckinghamshire, England, on the 30th of July, 1718, aged seventy-four years.

The city of Philadelphia was laid out by Penn late in 1682. The original plat was one mile wide on the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers, and two miles long from river to river. During the first year about eighty buildings were erected, various mechanical arts established, and a profitable trade opened with the Indians. Penn chose for his residence or manor a spot about twenty five miles above the city, on the Delaware, where he built a large brick mansion, having an extensive hall for holding conferences with his Indian friends. This place he named Pennsbury.

When Penn finally left his colony it was in a highly prosperous condition. Philadelphia contained three hundred houses, and had a population of two thousand five hundred. Quite an extensive trade had been opened with the West Indies, with South America, and even with the nations along the Mediterranean Sea, but the profits of this trade were largely monopolized in England.

The first sub-division of the province of Pennsylvania was made by Penn in 1682, forming the three counties of Philadelphia, Chester and Bucks. From these have been formed all the counties of the great commonwealth.