**William Penn**

Religious beliefs

Although born into a distinguished Anglican family and the son of Admiral Sir William Penn, Penn joined the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers at the age of 22. The Quakers obeyed their "inner light", which they believed to come directly from God, refused to bow or take off their hats to any man, and refused to take up arms. Penn was a close friend of George Fox, the founder of the Quakers. These were times of turmoil, just after Cromwell's death, and the Quakers were suspect, because of their principles which differed from the state imposed religion and because of their refusal to swear an oath of loyalty to Cromwell or the King (Quakers obeyed the command of Christ to not swear, Matthew 5:34).

Penn's religious views were extremely distressing to his father, Admiral Sir William Penn, who had through naval service earned an estate in Ireland and hoped that Penn's charisma and intelligence would be able to win him favor at the court of Charles II. In 1668 he was imprisoned for writing a critical essay.

"If thou wouldst rule well, thou must rule for God, and to do that, thou must be ruled by him....Those who will not be governed by God will be ruled by tyrants." –William Penn

Penn was a frequent companion of George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, traveling in Europe and England with him in their ministry. He also wrote a comprehensive, detailed explanation of Quakerism along with a testimony to the character of George Fox.

**Persecutions**

Penn was educated at Chigwell School, Essex where he had his earliest religious experience. Thereafter, young Penn's religious views effectively exiled him from English society — he was expelled from Oxford for being a Quaker, and was arrested several times. Among the most famous of these was the trial following his arrest with William Meade for preaching before a Quaker gathering. Penn pleaded for his right to see a copy of the charges laid against him and the laws he had supposedly broken, but the judge refused — even though this right was guaranteed by the law. Despite heavy pressure from the judge to convict the men, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty".

The judge then not only had Penn sent to jail again (on a charge of contempt of court), but also the full jury. The members of the jury, fighting their case from prison, managed to win the right for all English juries to be free from the control of judges. The persecution of Quakers became so fierce that Penn decided that it would be better to try to found a new, free, Quaker settlement in North America. Some Quakers had already moved to North America, but the New England Puritans, especially, were as negative towards Quakers as the people back home, and some of them had been banished to the Caribbean.

**The founding of Pennsylvania**

In 1677, Penn's chance came, as a group of prominent Quakers, among them Penn, received the colonial province of West New Jersey (half of the current state of New Jersey). That same year, two hundred settlers arrived, and founded the town of Burlington. Penn, who was involved in the project but himself remained in England, drafted a charter of liberties for the settlement. He guaranteed free and fair trial by jury, freedom of religion, freedom from unjust imprisonment and free elections.

King Charles II of England had a large loan with Penn's father, after whose death, King Charles settled by granting Penn a large area west and south of New Jersey on March 4, 1681. Penn called the area Sylvania (Latin for woods), which Charles changed to Pennsylvania in honor of the elder Penn. Perhaps the king was glad to have a place where religious and political outsiders (like the Quakers, or the Whigs, who wanted more influence for the people's representatives) could have their own place, far away from England. One of the first counties of Pennsylvania was called Bucks County, named after Buckinghamshire (Bucks) in England, where the Penn's family seat was, and from whence many of the first settlers came.

Although Penn's authority over the colony was officially subject only to that of the king, through his Frame of Government he implemented a democratic system with full freedom of religion, fair trials, elected representatives of the people in power, and a separation of powers — again ideas that would later form the basis of the American constitution. The freedom of religion in Pennsylvania (complete freedom of religion for everybody who believed in God) brought not only English, Welsh, German and Dutch Quakers to the colony, but also Huguenots (French Protestants), Mennonites, Amish, and Lutherans from Catholic German states.

Penn had hoped that Pennsylvania would be a profitable venture for himself and his family. Penn marketed the colony throughout Europe in various languages and, as a result, settlers flocked to Pennsylvania. Despite Pennsylvania's rapid growth and diversity, the colony never turned a profit for Penn or his family. In fact, Penn would later be imprisoned in England for debt and, at the time of his death in 1718, he was penniless.

**Running Pennsylvania**

From 1682 to 1684 Penn was, himself, in the Province of Pennsylvania. After the building plans for Philadelphia ("Brotherly Love") had been completed, and Penn's political ideas had been put into a workable form, Penn explored the interior. He befriended the local Indians, primarily of the Lenni-Lenape (Delaware) tribe , and ensured that they were paid fairly for their lands. Penn even learned several different Indian dialects in order to communicate in negiotiations without interpreters. Penn introduced laws saying that if a European did an Indian wrong, there would be a fair trial, with an equal number of people from both groups deciding the matter. His measures in this matter proved successful: even though later colonists did not treat the Indians as fairly as Penn and his first group of colonists had done, colonists and Indians remained at peace in Pennsylvania much longer than in the other English colonies.

Penn also made a treaty with the Indians at Shackamaxon under an elm tree. Penn chose to acquire lands for his colony through business rather than conquest. He paid the Indians 1200 pounds for their land under the treaty, an amount considered fair. Voltaire praised this "Great Treaty" as "the only treaty between those people [Indians and Europeans] that was not ratified by an oath, and that was never infringed." Many regard the Great Treaty as a myth that sprung up around Penn. However, the story has had enduring power. The event has taken iconic status and is commemorated in a frieze on the United States Capitol.

Penn visited America once more, in 1699. In those years he put forward a plan to make a federation of all English colonies in America. There have been claims that he also fought slavery, but that seems unlikely, as he owned and even traded slaves himself. However, he did promote good treatment for slaves, and other Pennsylvania Quakers were among the earliest fighters against slavery.

Penn had wished to settle in Philadelphia himself, but financial problems forced him back to England in 1701. His financial advisor, Philip Ford, had cheated him out of thousands of pounds, and he had nearly lost Pennsylvania through Ford's machinations. The next decade of Penn's life was mainly filled with various court cases against Ford. He tried to sell Pennsylvania back to the state, but while the deal was still being discussed, he was hit by a stroke in 1712, after which he was unable to speak or take care of himself.

Penn died in 1718 at his home in England, and was buried next to his first wife in the cemetery of the local Quaker meeting house. His family retained ownership of the colony of Pennsylvania until the American Revolution.