

Name _____



William Penn

1644-1718

William Penn was born in London, England in 1644. His parents were Sir William Penn, an admiral in the English navy, and Margaret Jasper. Though his family was a member of the Church of England, Penn became interested in the Quaker religion at a young age. By the age of 16, Penn was attending Oxford University, but was expelled for attending Quaker prayer meetings. He then attended college in France, and studied law at the Inn of Court in London.

When Penn was 23 years old he met Thomas Loe, a Quaker minister. Soon after their meeting Penn became a member of the Religious Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers. The Quakers believe that every person's soul contains the spirit of God. Because of this every person is special, regardless of their gender, religion, ethnicity or race. The Quakers believe that every person has a direct relationship with God, so the rituals of a church service are not necessary. Though the Quakers attend meetings, most are held in silence unless someone chooses to speak. The Quakers do not believe in war, and they live a life of simplicity, honesty and kindness.

Their beliefs carried over into politics because they believed that all people are equal in the eyes of God. They followed through on that by refusing to acknowledge social distinctions such as addressing members of the nobility by their proper titles, bowing to them, etc. This made them suspected as radicals or revolutionaries.

Penn's decision to become a Quaker upset his father greatly. In England, Quakers were being persecuted for their religious beliefs. In 1668 Penn wrote *Sandy Foundations Shaken*, an essay which attacked the religious beliefs of the Church of England. Because of his essay Penn was imprisoned in the Tower of London for eight months. While in prison he wrote two more essays, *No Cross, No Crown*, his most famous work, and *Innocency with Her Open Face*, which he wrote to clear himself of guilt regarding his religious views in order to be released. In 1670, Penn's father, Admiral Penn, died. He left his son a portion of his estate, which included a claim upon the crown of England in the amount of 16,000 pounds (dollars). Penn was imprisoned again for six months in 1671 for preaching illegally. In 1672 Penn married a young Quaker woman named Gulielma Maria Springett.

The Quakers looked to America in order to escape religious persecution. Penn got the King of England to grant him territory in America in exchange for the money he was owed. Penn

named this territory Pennsylvania, which means Penn's woods, in honor of his father. Delaware was included as a part of the colony. In 1682 Penn and the Quakers purchased East Jersey.

Penn established a government in the colony of Pennsylvania that he called a "Holy Experiment." Penn granted both political and religious tolerance to all, not only the Quakers. Penn's government provided jury trials for those accused of a crime. Education was available to all children. Quakers did not believe in slavery and spoke up against the practice. (However, slavery was still legal and practiced in Pennsylvania). Penn used a grid pattern to structure



Philadelphia's streets. This was done to create space between homes which helped curb disease and maintain fire safety. The Quakers, and Penn, believed in a peaceful society. Penn signed a peace treaty with the Leni Lenape tribe of Native Americans who lived in the area. Unlike other peace treaties signed between the colonists and the natives, Penn treated the natives with respect and paid fairly for the use of the land. He even learned the native's language so he could negotiate with them directly. Penn was also the first proprietor of a colony to advertise for settlers to immigrate to Pennsylvania. He wrote pamphlets and sent them to England, Germany, Holland, and other countries abroad. Because of Penn's efforts Pennsylvania became one of the more diverse and successful colonies.

The new colony of Pennsylvania also had its share of problems. Penn had to deal with challenges as to the ownership of parts of Pennsylvania. The charter, or legal deed, to the colony did not fully describe who owned the land in the southern part of the colony. This caused disputes between Penn and Lord Baltimore of the colony of Maryland. Baltimore claimed he was the rightful owner of the southern portion of the colony. This area included the city Penn named Philadelphia, the capital of the colony. There were also political problems in the colony. Penn established self-government, by and for the people, where all citizens had guaranteed rights. However, Penn placed himself in control of all government affairs. This ensured that Penn would always have political control. There were also financial problems, especially regarding taxes.

Penn's later life was filled with financial and personal problems. He was again imprisoned in England for his ties to the King. He also served time in debtors' prison. Penn's wife Gulielma died in 1694, but he remarried Hannah Callowhill in 1696. Penn left Pennsylvania in 1701 after establishing a new charter for the colony, and he never returned. In 1712 Penn attempted to sell the colony to the King of England, but he suffered a stroke. Penn died in Berkshire, England on July 30, 1718. William Penn will always be remembered as the founding father of Pennsylvania.

10. Penn granted political freedom to the colonists by experimenting with self-government, by and for the people. However, he placed himself in control of all government affairs in Pennsylvania. Why do you think this caused political problems in the new colony?

Answer Key

William Penn
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Discussion Questions:

1. What is the name of the church Penn's family belonged to?

The Church of England

2. What was the name of the minister who influenced Penn into joining the Quakers? By what other name is the Quaker religion known as?

Thomas Loe, a Quaker minister. Religious Society of Friends.

3. What does it mean to be persecuted for your religious beliefs?

To be treated cruelly, or unfairly for what you believe. This could mean being put in prison, teased, or any kind of unfair treatment about your religious beliefs.

4. What was the name of Penn's first essay, and why would writing such an essay be viewed as a crime punishable by time spent in prison?

"Sandy Foundations Shaken". Penn criticized the Church of England and what the church believed in. The Church of England did not allow anyone to criticize it at this time in history. Everyone in England had to believe as the Church of England believed.

5. Penn called the colony of Pennsylvania a "Holy Experiment." What were some of the differences in Penn's government that would cause him to give the colony such a title?

Unlike in England, Penn offered those who lived in the colony tolerance as to their religious beliefs. They were allowed freedom to worship as they saw fit. Also, Penn's government was a self-government, by and for the people. The King was the government in England and all had to do as the King saw fit. Penn was also kind and decent to the Native Americans who lived in Pennsylvania. Quakers were also peaceful people and did not believe in slavery (though slavery was practiced in Pennsylvania).

6. Penn was the first colonial proprietor to advertise for settlers to immigrate to his colony. Why do you think Penn advertised for settlers?

Penn wanted many different kinds of people to live in his colony. Also, many from England were not emigrating to the colonies at this time due to stories they heard about how difficult life was once they got to the new world. The rates of immigrants were low, so Penn felt he needed to advertise in new regions to bring people with different skills to his colony.

Answer Key

7. What do you think Penn wrote in his advertising pamphlets that would make settlers want to come to Pennsylvania?

Penn wrote of the freedoms he offered, the land for farming, the need for immigrants with certain skills (farming, carpentry, etc.) and about all the “good” details of the colony that would make an immigrant want to come to the new world.

8. Imagine living in colonial Pennsylvania for one day. Describe the types of people you would meet. Explain how it would be different living in the new colony versus living in England.

You could meet Quakers, Native Americans, people who were considered indentured servants and slaves, those from England, Holland, Germany, and other countries. You could meet farmers, merchants, politicians, blacksmiths, etc. Life would be different because you could worship as you pleased and be free of religious persecution. The government would put you on trial for crimes and not just sentence you to prison.

9. The charter of Pennsylvania was not clear as to the location of the southern border of the colony. This caused disputes between Penn and other colonial proprietors. How would you have written the charter so that there would be no disputes as to the colony’s borders?

You would explain in the charter exactly where the land you were purchasing began and ended in the north, south, east and west. You would be very specific about the borders so everyone would know where the land they purchased began and ended.

10. Penn granted political freedom to the colonists by experimenting with self-government, by and for the people. However, he placed himself in control of all government affairs in Pennsylvania. Why do you think this caused political problems in the new colony?

Even though the government was by and for the people Penn was in control of the final result, which could be different than what the majority of people/politicians in the colony wanted. In England the King was the one who made all the decisions for the country. Penn was the one who made the final decisions for the colony. People were concerned that there would be problems as to what Penn wanted and what the people wanted, and that Penn would get what he wanted because he was in control, like the King.