



*A map of Pennsylvania, from 1681.*

## **Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Eastern New Jersey**

### **Quakers from the Midlands**

In 1675, another large group of immigrants left England for the New World. They were mainly from the Midlands region of England, and most were members of the Society of Friends, called the Quakers. From 1675 to 1725, over 23,000 of them settled what would become Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Eastern New Jersey.

### **Religious Beliefs**

The Quakers were members of a faith called the Society of Friends. Their religious beliefs were very different from the Anglicans, Pilgrims, and Puritans. Their faith was centered on a “God of

Love and Light.” They believed that each person was capable of being saved by “the inner light.” For them, this light was represented in Jesus.

The Quakers didn’t believe in the authority of clergy. They also didn’t believe that God should be worshiped in churches. Instead, they created an organization based on the equality of individuals. They held meetings in meeting houses rather than religious services in churches.

The Quakers believed that war was wrong. They refused to support a military, unlike many other colonists. Also, they were one of the first American colonial groups to condemn slavery. They believed in the natural equality of all people under God.

Like the Puritans, the Quakers had suffered from persecution because of their faith, in both England and America. The ruling Anglicans in England imprisoned Quakers because they didn’t believe in paying taxes. In Virginia, they banished them. The Puritans of Massachusetts banished Quakers, and, in some cases, burned them as witches.

The Quakers themselves developed a different approach to those who didn’t share their beliefs. In their own colony in the New World, they promoted religious freedom. People in Quaker settlements were allowed to worship according to their own Christian beliefs. However, Quakers didn’t allow people who did not believe in God to settle in their colonies.

### **Other Immigrants**

In this spirit, the Quakers welcomed several different immigrant groups to share their settlements. William Penn, founder of

the colony, actually recruited many of these people from their native lands. There were German, French, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish settlers in the Delaware Valley. Some of them were Quakers, and some were from other religious backgrounds. The Germans especially found the area welcoming. In fact, the term “Pennsylvania Dutch” refers to the German word for “German”: “Deutsche.”

### **Who Were the Quakers?**

Most of the Quaker settlers had come from the northern Midlands area of England. There were also some that immigrated from Ireland and Wales. About half of them came as family groups.

Their economic and social backgrounds were very different from the Pilgrims, Puritans, and Anglicans. Most of them were poor to middle class. Very few came from the upper classes. Most made their living as craftsmen, farmers, and manual laborers.

Although many were poor, they found the means to come to the New World. Some had been given the money for their passage by Quakers in England. That means they came to this country without a large debt to pay off.

They brought their manner of speech from the Midlands, too. The colonial Quakers used the forms of speech “thee” and “thou” for “you,” as did their English relatives. This form of speech is still used among the Amish people of Pennsylvania. They are descendants of the early German settlers.

### **The Delaware Valley**

The Delaware River Valley was an area full of promise for the Quaker colonists. The Delaware and the river systems around it



*William Penn making a treaty with Native Americans in Pennsylvania.*

were good settings for mills and commercial trading by boat. There were many natural resources in the area, too, with coal, iron, and copper. The fertile soil was good for farming.

The climate of the area was temperate. This was good for farming, and for the health of the colonists. They did have malaria and yellow fever epidemics, but not to the extent the Virginians did.

### **The Delaware Indians**

The Native American tribes in the Delaware Valley were friendly to the new settlers. They were very different from the warring tribes who had threatened the Jamestown settlers in

Virginia. The Lenni Lenape (called the Delaware Indians by the Quakers) did not fight the new colonists. Also, the Quakers *bought* land from the Delaware; they did not claim it as their own. Founder William Penn learned the language of the tribes so he could communicate with them.

### **William Penn**

William Penn (1644-1718) was one of the most important colonists of the era. He was an English Quaker who received the land that became Pennsylvania from the English king, Charles II. It was in payment of a debt owed Penn's late father. It was Charles II who named the new area "Pennsylvania," for the man who was its most important early leader. Penn developed its laws, society, and commerce, and also oversaw its growth. He established a colony built on the idea of harmony and love among the people.



*William Penn.*

### **Their Homes**

Most Quakers made their homes of fieldstone, with slate roofs and windows and doors made of wood. They came in two styles. One was a two-story house with rooms on each floor and fireplaces on one side. The other was called a "Four-over-Four" house. This was a two-story house with four large rooms on each floor. They were simply furnished and full of light. The simple lines of this furniture are still popular today. It is the style of



*An example of a Quaker house,  
from Quakertown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.*

Shaker furniture, named after a 19<sup>th</sup> century religious group related to the Quakers.

### **Family Life**

As in other colonial cultures, family was the center of life for the Quakers. They thought that the family was the center of love. For them, that love included both the traditional family and the “family” of all members of their faith.

The Quakers encouraged marriage within their community. But they discouraged Quakers from marrying non-Quakers. People who did that were often banished from the community.

Raising children was of great importance to Quaker family life. Their upbringing was a serious responsibility for parents and the

whole community. Children were taught to obey their parents. But the Quakers didn't agree with the Puritan's harsh punishment of children. Instead, they used reason to reinforce good behavior. Nor did they agree with the Puritan idea of "sending out." They encouraged their children to stay at home among family. They were very strict in certain areas, however. For example, they didn't allow dancing, which they thought was wicked.

The Quaker idea of equality was part of their understanding of family. Children were considered to be equal to adults in many ways. In the home, children sat at the dinner table with their parents. In the meeting house, children as well as adults preached to the members.

The Quakers's idea of equality extended to women, too. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most cultures and religions considered women inferior to men. But the Quakers celebrated equal roles for women and men, especially in practicing their faith.

### **Quaker Meetings**

The Quakers held meetings several times a week in a meeting house. Like their homes, the Quakers' meeting houses were simple buildings. In them, they held worship services, as well as the community's business meetings. Women and men held separate meetings. They worshiped together, in separate areas.

The Quaker services were very different from other Christian services. They quietly gathered together in the meeting house. Then they each "turned their mind to the light." There was no altar or pulpit. They didn't have a minister to lead them in worship,



*A painting showing a Quaker meeting, with a woman preaching.*

because they didn't believe it was necessary. They didn't have a set of rituals to follow, either.

Often individuals, young and old, male and female, would rise and begin to preach. Their belief in the equality of Friends led them to believe that anyone could be inspired to preach.

### **Childhood: School**

While the Quakers were great believers in the power of reason, they had many different approaches to education. Children were encouraged to learn to read by reading the Bible. But they weren't encouraged to spend years in school, as the children of the Puritans were.



*The interior of the Plymouth Quaker Meeting House in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, built in 1708.*

Still, literacy was encouraged, and about one-half of adult colonists could sign their names. There were laws establishing schools, and requiring that children learn to read and write by the age of 12. Many schools were part of local Quaker meeting houses, and were run by them.

The Quakers favored “natural knowledge,” and learning by doing. They also encouraged children to learn a trade. Boys and girls were encouraged to learn, in the classroom and in the world around them.

### **Their Food**

As in so much of their life, the Quakers stressed that food should be simple. Like the Puritans, they didn’t believe in indulging their appetites, so feasting was discouraged.

The Quakers liked simple food, prepared simply. They usually boiled their food, and made different kinds of puddings and dumplings. Through boiling, they created a food we still eat today: Philadelphia cream cheese. They made it by boiling cream, then drying it in cloth. They also made foods like apple butter in a similar way.

In keeping with their religious beliefs, the Quakers avoided foods that were created with slave labor. At that time, sugar came from sugar plantations, worked by slaves. Many Quakers refused to buy it. Also, salt was taxed, and the taxes used to pay for the military. The Quakers were pacifists—they did not believe in war—so many did without salt, too.

### **Their Clothing**

The Quakers dressed plainly. They believed that clothing should be as simple as possible, in cut and color. Even hats and hairstyles were discouraged. Most clothes were made of gray homespun fabric. Men wore leather breeches or simple trousers, shirts, and aprons to protect them while working.

Women's clothing was also extremely simple. Their clothing didn't have buttons, pockets, or decorations of any kind. Women wore simple homespun dresses, with aprons and a simple shawl. Their clothing was grey or another dark color. Children dressed like their parents, in very simple clothing.

### **Games and Sports**

The Quakers didn't like sports. They thought they corrupted the natural order of life. They had laws that forbade them. They

especially condemned the “blood sports” and gambling favored in Virginia. They believed that killing for sport was evil, and that an animal’s life should be taken only to provide food.

The Quakers also condemned ball games enjoyed by the Puritans of New England. But they did believe that exercise was good for people, especially children. They encouraged activities like swimming and ice-skating, which they found “useful.” They also liked to garden, which they considered useful, too.

### **Celebrating Holidays**

Like the Puritans, the Quakers didn’t believe in celebrating religious holidays. They believed that all days should be devoted to God. They also believed that gaudy displays on Christian holy days was wrong. The Quakers also refused to celebrate old folk holidays, like May Day. Instead, they treated all days equally, dedicating them to hard work, simple living, and faith.

### **Organization**

The Quaker ideals of equality are seen in the way their colony was organized, including the division of land, and the structure of society and government. William Penn was in charge of selling the land to raise money. Then, he oversaw the dividing up of the land into independent family farms. This he did in a manner that land, and the wealth that land brought, would be evenly distributed. This ensured that there would not be a small number of very wealthy landowners.

Most Quakers lived on a family farm, with other Quaker farms nearby. This encouraged neighborhoods. Quakers often helped out

their neighbors, including non-Quaker families, in building homes and barns.

The Quakers elected officials, like sheriffs, judges, and peace makers, to enforce laws and keep order in the settlements. The Quakers encouraged political activity among the settlers of all backgrounds. They held elections, and elected an Assembly in Pennsylvania.

The Quakers also believed in a minimal government, because that allowed greater individual freedom. And, significantly, they believed that a person was free to follow one's own conscience. Even those who disagreed with Quaker ideals were allowed that important freedom within their communities. The first law passed in Pennsylvania established freedom of conscience, and of worship to all.

William Penn outlined three major freedoms: (1) the right to one's life, liberty, and estate, (2) the right to representative government, and (3) the right to trial by jury. Also, taxes could not be imposed without the approval of the people.

**Slavery:** It is important to note the difference among the colonists on the issue of slavery. While many Quakers owned slaves at the founding of the colony, by the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, colonial Quakers were fighting for its abolition. In 1758, the Philadelphia Quaker Meeting issued the first anti-slavery document in history.

One of the great symbols of freedom in the U.S. is the Liberty Bell. It was created by the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1751 to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of William Penn's "Charter of Privileges." That list of laws and rules outlined the goals of the Quaker colony.

The inscription is taken from the Bible. It states, simply and profoundly, the beliefs of the Quakers: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.” The great bell was rung on July 8, 1776, to celebrate the birth of a new nation. The Quaker ideal of liberty for all would inspire the colonists as they waged war against those who would deny them their liberties.

**WORLD WIDE WEB SITES:**

<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cg-bin/page.cgi/jb/colonial/penn>

<http://www.chaddsfordhistory.org/history/quaker.htm>

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/>

<http://www.quakerinfo.org/history>

Note: There is a complete copy of William Penn’s Charter of Privileges in the Appendix.