

---

**Just the facts: Let me know more about William Penn and the Quakers**

**William Penn** was born in England in 1644 to a wealthy Protestant family. As a young man, Penn became friends with members of a religious group called the **Quakers**, also known as the **Society of Friends**. The Quakers suffered persecution for their beliefs. This persecution included laws that prevented them from meeting and promoting their beliefs.

Quakers believe all human beings are equal in the eyes of God. This idea, called **egalitarianism**, made the Quakers hated by the English nobility. **Nobility** are people who had title and rank in English society due to their birth. Quakers refused to bow or take off their hats to the nobles. They also refused to swear allegiance to the King of England since they believed the only oath they could make was to God. The Quakers were also **pacifists**, meaning they did not believe in using violence and participating in wars.

William Penn joined the Quakers and became a **dissenter** -- someone who speaks out for unpopular beliefs. He wrote essays or tracts in favor of Quaker beliefs. As a result, he was arrested many times and spent time in prison. Fortunately for Penn, King Charles the Second owed a debt to Penn's father. He agreed to give William a charter and a tract of land for a new colony in America. Penn became the proprietor or owner of a large colonial settlement that was eventually called Pennsylvania (meaning Penn's woods).

In keeping with Quaker beliefs, William Penn treated the local Lenape tribe with respect and fairness. He negotiated a peace treaty that helped the colony avoid conflict with Native Americans. The Quaker colony also welcomed people of all religious beliefs or creeds.



William Penn's colony became very successful. Its main city, **Philadelphia**, became an important trading outlet. Since most goods in the 17th century were transported by ship, the port at Philadelphia was constantly bustling with business and trade.

Penn's acceptance of people of all religions and origins, also made Pennsylvania very attractive to immigrants from many different countries. People from Scotland, Sweden and Germany soon arrived. Penn's Quaker colony had a **Charter of Liberties** that guaranteed all colonists freedom to practice their religion, trials by jury, and free elections of officials.

Penn thought of his colony as a "Holy Experiment" where society would be run democratically, with people resolving their problems in typical Quaker fashion: with a Meeting of citizens who would discuss their problems without fear of persecution.



Illustration of a Quaker meeting.