

## Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers

From 1629 to 1640, King Charles I ruled without Parliament, denying its involvement in passing laws and authorizing taxes. England, then, was largely a Protestant country. There was widespread fear of Roman Catholicism, which was associated with oppression and with England's traditional enemies, France and Spain.

Charles I's marriage to a Catholic, Princess Henrietta Maria of France, and his introduction of what were considered 'popish' practices into the English Church, aroused mistrust. (British National Army Museum)

In 1637, Charles attempted to impose religious changes in Scotland. This was met with immediate resistance. In 1639 and 1640, the King conducted two campaigns (known as the Bishops' Wars) to enforce his authority. He was twice defeated by a Scottish army, which then occupied northern England. (BNAM)

In January 1642, Charles was foiled in his attempt to arrest five Members of Parliament who led the opposition to his policies. He left London for York, and both sides prepared for war. (BNAM)

The English Civil Wars (Great Rebellion (1642-1651)) involved fighting on the British Isles between supporters of the monarchy of Charles I (and his son and successor, Charles II) and opposing groups in each of Charles's kingdoms, including Parliamentarians in England, Covenanters in Scotland, and Confederates in Ireland. It was a time when many people were interested in radically reshaping religion, politics and society. (Britannica)

The wars were primarily due to disputes between the Crown and Parliament about how England, Scotland and Ireland should be governed. But they also had religious and social dimensions as people sought answers in a time of turmoil. The wars witnessed the creation of the first national standing army, which had important implications for domestic politics. (British National Army Museum)

The first war was settled with Oliver Cromwell's victory for Parliamentary forces at the 1645 Battle of Naseby. The second phase ended with Charles I's defeat at the Battle of Preston and his subsequent execution in 1649. Charles' son, Charles II, then formed an army of English and Scottish Royalists, which prompted Cromwell to invade Scotland in 1650.

The following year, Cromwell shattered the remaining Royalist forces and ended the "wars of the three kingdoms." Cromwell, a devout Puritan, was particularly intolerant of Catholics and Quakers, though he is also credited by others for helping to lead Great Britain toward a constitutional government.

By the time the Irish surrendered in 1652, the practice of Catholicism was banned in Ireland and all Catholic-owned land was confiscated and given to Protestant Scottish and English settlers, beginning a long period of suffering and poverty for the Irish people.

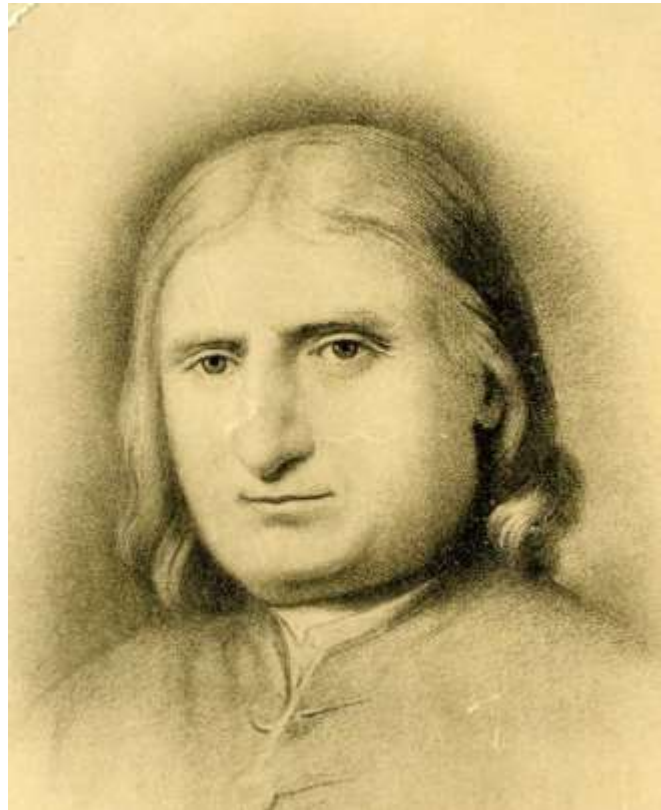
Cromwell died in 1658 at age 59 while still serving as Lord Protector. His son Richard Cromwell assumed the post, but was forced to resign due to a lack of support within Parliament or the military. In the leadership vacuum that ensued, George Monck assumed control of the New Model Army and spearheaded the formation of a new Parliament, which proceeded to pass constitutional reforms that re-established the monarchy. In 1660, Charles II, who had been living in exile, returned to England to assume the throne, thereby beginning the English Restoration. (History-com)

## The Beginning of the Quakers

In the aftermath of the war, in 1647, 23-year-old George Fox was already a discerning critic of his culture. When human counselors could not fill his spiritual void, he turned to Bible reading and prayer, often in the sanctuary of “hollow trees and lonesome places.”

On some of these occasions he received “openings,” e.g., that attending a university does not make a minister, that “the people, not the steeple, is the church,” and that the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is their true interpreter.

Even as a child Fox was unusually sensitive to God, having been well taught by godly parents. He remembered experiencing the “pureness” of divine presence at the age of 11. This vision of the world as God wants it contrasted starkly with the world of political violence and ecclesiastical hypocrisy that he experienced as a youth.



Fox worked first as a cobbler and then as a partner with a wool and cattle dealer. His integrity brought him commercial success. But the spiritual conflict raged furiously within him until his experience of Christ brought peace. (George Fox University)

One day Fox climbed up desolate Pendle Hill (believed to be a haunt of demons) and saw “a people in white raiment, coming to the Lord.” The vision signified that proclaiming Christ’s power over sin would gather people to the kingdom.

From his spiritual epiphany until 1652, Fox engaged in itinerant ministry, preaching at the close of Puritan meetings, or outdoors before crowds. He exhorted seekers to heed the voice of Christ within, to be honest in business, compassionate to the needy, and to share in the free ministry of the true church. Large numbers of people were “convinced” (converted) through his preaching, and opposition intensified. (George Fox University)

Historians mark 1652 as the beginning of the Quaker movement. Zealous young men and women (“the Valiant Sixty”) joined Fox in preaching at fairs, marketplaces, in the fields, in the jails, in the courts, and through the printing press. The Valiant Sixty were a group of early leaders and activists in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

These Quaker missionaries were unusual in their time. Most other preaching was done by well-educated ordained male clergymen, but most of the Valiant Sixty were ordinary farmers and tradesmen, and several of them were women. Although the number of these missionaries is given as 60 the actual number was likely a little higher.

At first these fired-up Christians called themselves "children of the Light," "publishers of Truth," or "the camp of the Lord." (George Fox University)

This was the beginning of the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers.

One story about where the name comes from says that the founder, George Fox, once told a magistrate to tremble (quake) at the name of God and the name 'Quakers' stuck. Other people suggest that the name derives from the physical shaking that sometimes went with Quaker religious experiences. The name 'Friends' comes from Jesus' remark "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14). (BBC)



Quakers believe that there is something of God in everybody and that each human being is of unique worth. This is why Quakers value all people equally, and oppose anything that may harm or threaten them.

- Quakers seek religious truth in inner experience, and place great reliance on conscience as the basis of morality.
- They emphasize direct experience of God rather than ritual and ceremony. They believe that priests and rituals are an unnecessary obstruction between the believer and God.
- Quakers integrate religion and everyday life. They believe God can be found in the middle of everyday life and human relationships, as much as during a meeting for worship. (BBC)

Although outsiders usually regard the movement as a Christian denomination, not all Quakers see themselves as Christians; some regard themselves as members of a universal religion that (for historical reasons) has many Christian elements. Tolerance is part of the Quaker approach to life, so Quakers are willing to learn from all other faiths and churches. (BBC)

John Evelyn (1620-1706) was a close contemporary of George Fox (1624-1691), who perhaps expressed the general public's opinion of Quakers in the early days when he described them in a diary entry:

"July 8, 1656. At Ipswich - one of the sweetest, most pleasant, well-built towns in England. I had the curiosity to visit some Quakers here in prison - a new fanatic sect, of dangerous principles, who show no respect to any man, magistrate or other, and seem a melancholy, proud sort of people, and exceedingly ignorant." (World's Greatest Books, Lives and Letters, Lord Norcliffe)

### **Persecution of Quakers in England**

Persecution in England was severe and swift.

Fox was thrown down church steps, beaten with sticks and once with a brass-bound Bible! He refused to be intimidated, and his courage and physical stamina gave credibility to a central theme of his preaching: the power through Christ to live a holy life. For such preaching, Fox spent six months in Derby jail. Offered release if he would accept a commission in Cromwell's army, Fox refused, saying Christ had brought him into the "covenant of peace." For this he was jailed another six months.

Quakers were jailed frequently during the Society's first forty years. Some historians estimate that 15,000 had been imprisoned by 1689, when the Act of Toleration finally was passed.

If prison were not enough, Quakers would be whipped publicly or have to endure tongue borings and brandings in the government's efforts to rid England of this sect. (Gritz, Reading Area Community College) Mutilation of religious rebels was commonplace in England, including cutting off of body parts.

### **Quakers Coming to the New World**

The Quaker movement originated in England, but soon afterwards, the Quakers found their way to America where they were not at first welcomed. In spite of persecution, however, they stood fast and became firmly established during the last quarter of the century. Around 1700 there were already fifty to sixty thousand Quakers in America and about the same number in England. (Nobel Prize)

In 1656, members of the Religious Society of Friends first arrived in Boston from England. While springing from the same religious turmoil that gave rise to the Separatist movement, the Quakers lack respect for hierarchy and believe in man's ability to achieve his own salvation. Tenets so contrary to orthodox Puritanism quickly turn most New Englanders against them.

Although they were victims of religious persecution in Europe, the Puritans supported the Old World theory that sanctioned it, the need for uniformity of religion in the state. Once in control in New England, they sought to break "the very neck of Schism and vile opinions." (LOC)

The first known Quakers to arrive in Boston were two women, Ann Austin and Mary Fisher who landed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Quakers believed in the equality of men and women, and they believed that women had a right to preach.

Fisher and Austin were arrested as “blasphemous heretics.” The two were strip searched, accused of witchcraft, jailed, deprived of food, and were forced to leave Boston on the Swallow when it next left Boston eight weeks later. Almost immediately after their arrival, Fisher and Austin’s belongings were confiscated, and the Puritan executioner burned their trunk full of Quaker pamphlets and other writings. They would have died of starvation in jail if sympathetic people bearing food had not bribed the guards.

Shortly after they arrived in Boston, eight more Quakers arrived on a ship from England. This group of eight was imprisoned and beaten. While they were in prison, an edict was passed in Boston that any ship’s captain who carried Quakers into Boston would be fined heavily. The Puritan establishment forced the captain, who had brought the group of eight Quakers to Boston, to take them back to England, under a bond of £500. (Swathmore College)

Quakers placed the demands of their conscience above the dictates of human authority. In the eyes of colonial officials, this “contempt of the magistracy” made Quakers “instruments of the devil” who sowed seeds of social discord, sedition, and anarchy. The authorities took immediate steps to suppress Quakerism.

To the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, Quaker teachings were not just heretical but a direct threat to the authority of the magistrates who governed the colony.

Meanwhile, Quakers had also made their way to neighboring Plymouth Colony. Lawmakers there responded by prohibiting the transporting of Quakers into the colony and authorizing punishment for residents who provided shelter to a Quaker or attended a Quaker meeting.

In spite of these harsh measures, two Quakers began teaching in Sandwich; about 18 families joined what became the first Friends’ Meeting in America. As word spread, Sandwich became a gathering place for Quakers. Colonial authorities responded by seizing any vessel that was headed for Sandwich with Quakers aboard.

As the Quaker presence grew, the governors of Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth both took legal steps to prevent Quakers from entering their colonies. Under the Massachusetts Bay charter, the governor had no authority to imprison Quakers.

In late 1656 and 1657, the General Court rectified this situation when it passed a series of laws that outlawed “the cursed sect of heretics commonly called Quakers.”

Captains of ships that brought Quakers to Massachusetts Bay were subject to heavy fines; so was anyone who owned books by Quakers or dared to defend the Quakers’ “devilish opinions.”

As the movement continued to gain adherents, Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth passed even harsher laws. Quakers who persisted in entering the colony were imprisoned, publicly whipped till they bled, and had ears chopped off. Finally, in October of 1658, the Massachusetts General Court passed a law that barred Quakers from the colony “under pain of death.” (MassMoments)

Beginning in 1659 Virginia enacted anti-Quaker laws, including the death penalty for refractory Quakers. Jefferson surmised that “if no capital execution took place here, as did in New England, it was not owing to the moderation of the church, or the spirit of the legislature.” (Library of Congress)

When whipping, mutilation, and sentences of banishment failed to contain the Quaker threat, the authorities threatened to execute any banished sectaries who returned to the colony. Numerous missionaries defied the law, and four died for their transgression.

In 1659 the court sentenced to death Marmaduke Stephenson, a Yorkshire farmer, William Robinson, a young London resident, and Rhode Islander Mary Dyer, a former Boston resident. On the intercession of her merchant husband and son, Dyer was reprieved, although she was made to accompany her companions to the place of execution and to stand with a halter around her neck as they were hanged.



Dyer then left the colony but, continuing to feel called to witness there, returned to meet her death in 1660. William Leddra of Barbados became the last Quaker to be hung in 1661.

By then the colonial authorities may have suspected that the newly restored English monarchy would not approve of their policy of executing its subjects. In addition, they were aware that the threat of death was not having the desired effect, a point brought home when another Quaker banished on pain of death risked execution (Pestana)

### **William Penn’s Colony**

William Penn, born in 1644, was the son of a wealthy Admiral in the Royal Navy. As a young man he joined the Quaker religion, which was illegal since any person who was not a part of the Church of England, the official religion of England, was persecuted as a religious dissenter. This caused Penn to be jailed several times and fight for the right to religious toleration.

After his father’s death, Penn took over the family estate. In May of 1680, Penn petitioned King Charles II for land in the New World. Persecuted in England for his Quaker faith, Penn wanted to establish a place where people could enjoy freedom of religion. It was a “holy experiment” - intended for Quakers but open to everyone. (LOC)



The crown owed William's late father, Admiral Sir William Penn, for using his own wealth to outfit and feed the British Navy.

Penn approached the King with an offer: Penn would forgive the debt in exchange for land in America. King Charles agreed and granted Penn a Charter on March 4, 1681. Penn wished to call the land "New Wales," or simply "Sylvania," Latin for "woods."

King Charles II insisted that "Penn" precede the word "Sylvania", in honor of William's late father to create "Pennsylvania", or "Penn's Woods."



This is where the dream of a colony where Quakers could practice their religion freely became a reality with the founding of Pennsylvania. (Historical Society of Pennsylvania)

Early arrivals who prospered were largely farmers from northwestern England, an area of scattered farms, along with urban artisans and workmen, many of them from Germany and Holland. Settlers also came from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and London and its environs.

By 1690, the population of the colony numbered about 11,500, that of the principal city, Philadelphia, about 2,000. Ten years later, the colony had close to 18,000 inhabitants, and Philadelphia over 3,000.

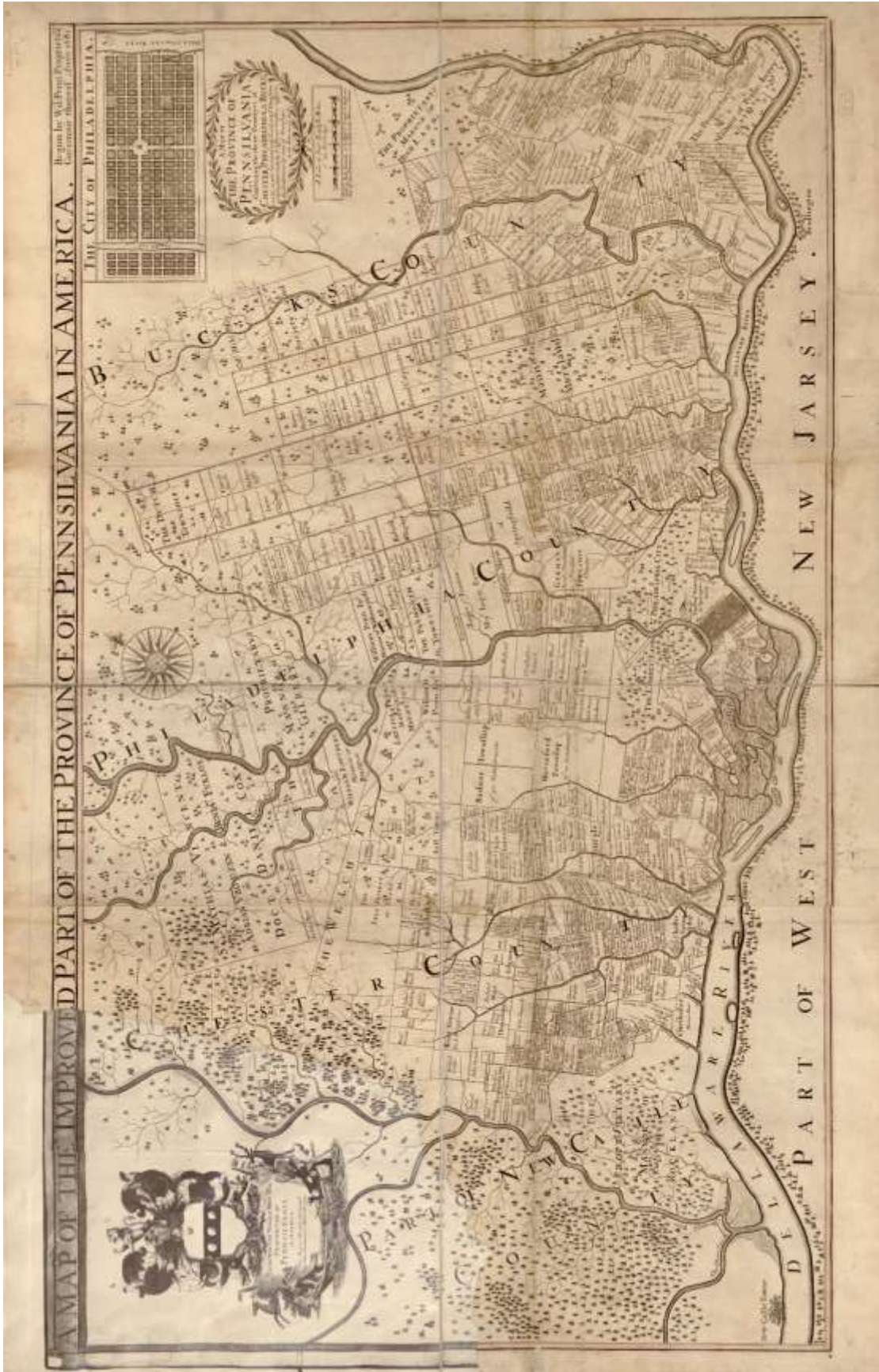
The Society of Friends was never established as the official religion of the colony and Quakers were always a minority, although their influence was predominant in both the government and the early society.

Penn's hope for a "Holy Experiment" - where Pennsylvanians did well economically while doing good morally and religiously - failed to materialize. Landed gentleman investors did not, in general, emigrate, and their investments went badly. The Society of Free Traders was bankrupt within a few years. Penn, himself, never achieved the profits he expected.

The colony was taken away from Penn in 1693 on suspicion of treasonable association with James II, but returned to him in 1695, initiating yet another charter in 1696.

The final Charter of Privileges was granted in 1701 since the older frames had all been found "not so suitable to the Present circumstances of the Inhabitants," and remained in force until the American Revolution.

Each frame had gradually increased the powers of the elected assembly and it now received more privileges than any other legislative body in the English colonies, undoubtedly more than Penn, himself, had originally intended. A unicameral legislature with its Assembly elected annually could initiate legislation and conduct its own affairs, but the proprietor or his governor retained the right to veto legislation.





Most significantly, the first clause of the Charter of Privileges reiterated Pennsylvania's commitment to religious liberty - freedom of worship to all who "acknowledge one almighty God" without attending or belonging to a religious body, and the ability to serve in office by all who believed in Jesus Christ and were willing to affirm, if not swear, allegiance to the government.

The affirmation was important to Quakers who refused to swear oaths. Along with Rhode Island and several other colonies, Pennsylvania was a pioneer of the separation of religion and government in the American colonies.

Although Penn lived until 1718, he only spent four years in Pennsylvania (1682-84 and 1699-1701).

He was bedeviled by personal and financial problems and had to remain in England to attempt to resolve them. He actually spent time in debtors prison. (Philadelphia Encyclopedia)

Information here is primarily from Library of Congress; History-com; Philadelphia Encyclopedia; Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Pestana; British National Army Museum; Britannica; George Fox University; BBC; World's Greatest Books, Lives and Letters, Lord Norcliffe; Gritz, Reading Area Community College; Mass Moments; Swathmore College; Records of Plymouth Colony, Court and Laws; Gier, University of Idaho

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the Mayflower, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young