



William Penn was a friend of King Charles II of England. In 1681, to satisfy a rather large debt which he owed to Penn's father (Admiral Sir William Penn), the King gave the younger Penn a large land grant in Britain's American Colonies.

This grant of land—which the King gave to Penn on March 4, 1681—would become the Province of Pennsylvania (which means "Penn's Woods").

Despite the King's belief that he owned the American Colonies—thereby allowing him to give away land however he chose—the land was actually occupied by Native Americans. William Penn was known for the respect he showed to Native Americans. The Native Americans, with whom Penn would need to negotiate land purchases, were the Lenni Lenape (also known as the Delaware).

History is unclear about the actual dates, and times, when Penn negotiated with the Native Americans. One image, [maintained by the Library of Congress](#), depicts an artist's impression of an event in 1681. Based on a 1771 painting by Benjamin West, [the 1775 engraving is entitled William Penn's treaty with the Indians when he founded the province of Pennsylvania in 1681](#).

Despite the title of this work, the facts seem to be that Penn did not personally arrive in Pennsylvania—for the first time—until the autumn of 1682. He stayed until August of 1684.

It was during this visit that he reportedly signed his famous treaty with [the Lenni Lenape](#) (which literally means "Men of Men") at Shackamaxon (where Native American chiefs, of various tribes, reportedly met for Council) on, or about, June 23, 1683.

A copy of that treaty, if it ever existed at all, exists no-longer. What did survive, however, is a [wampum belt which the Native Americans reportedly gave to Penn](#).

Colonial Williamsburg tells us [more about the painting](#), by Benjamin West, on which this engraving is based. Penn's son, Thomas, commissioned Benjamin West to produce the original work around 1771. The engraving was released in 1775:

The engraving tells a story that has been often interpreted as one of peace and welcome. One Native man in the foreground holds a lowered peace pipe. A bow and quiver of arrows lay on the ground nearby. Behind him, a woman nurses her child; one Native boy holds a bow, while in the background another boy practices with his bow.

The Lenape seem focused on the moment and the exchange, as are Penn and his men.

However, there is another unspoken story: the ships in the harbor and the European buildings under construction behind the gathering. As European settlement rapidly advanced in Pennsylvania and the other American colonies, the Lenape and all Eastern Woodland Indian peoples experienced conflicts far removed from this iconic image.

Historians estimate that there were approximately 20,000 Lenape in 1600. Intertribal wars and epidemics resulting from European contact may have diminished their numbers to about 4,000 by the time Penn arrived. Today, an estimated 20,000 Lenape [whose [tribal laws forbid casino-gaming](#)] live in the United States, mainly in Oklahoma.

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Illustration based on a 1771 painting by Benjamin West (which was commissioned by Thomas Penn), engraved by John Hall and published by John Boydell (in London) on June 12, 1775. [Image online](#), courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

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