



William Penn was upset that England's government denied religious freedom to the country's inhabitants. Thinking he could make a better life in America, Penn petitioned King Charles II for a land charter (in 1680).

When the King agreed, Penn resolved to make his North-American colony a place where people of all faiths could live in harmony. His approach would be very different from the Puritans who'd settled in New England around fifty years earlier.

For the Puritans, religious toleration was not a way of life. They did not want people of different faiths living among them. For a Puritan, conformity was the key to a successful society.

Although Penn disagreed with the Puritans on religious conformity—particularly given the trial he had endured in London when he was a young man—he also did not think about religious freedom in a 21st-century context. He was a man of his time.

Religious freedom, for Penn, meant toleration of other faiths, but representative government meant something else. People living in his colony would have the vote, but ... not all people. Not Jews, for example, and not Catholics. (Penn worried that Catholics would defer to the dictates of the Pope, whom Penn considered to be a foreign power).

Then ... there was the issue of land ownership:

- Who actually owned the land in the Charter which the King granted to Penn? Was it the King?
- If it was the King, how did he obtain ownership of the land in a colony thousands of miles distant to Britain?
- Was the land owned by Native Americans? *They* were living in the land called America for thousands of years before any European settlers arrived.
- If Native Americans owned the land, that meant the King did not—even *if* he granted Penn a Royal Charter.

So ... how did Penn himself view all of these issues?



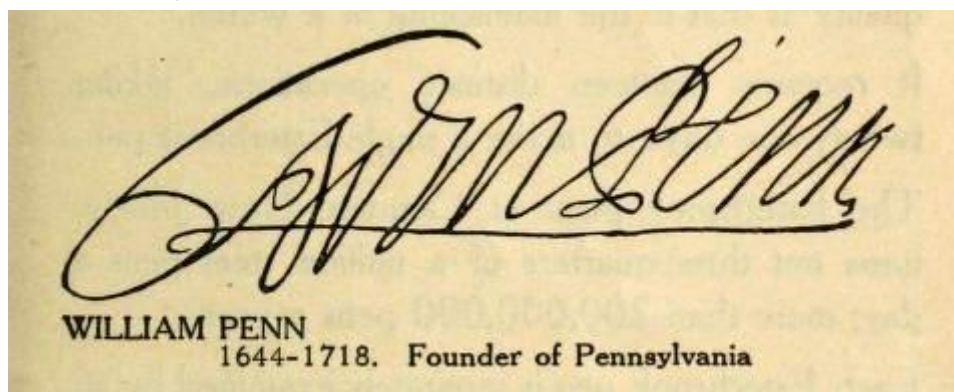
He was mindful of the need to be sure that Native Americans were compensated. We learn more about the specifics from the [Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission](#):

Native Americans also presented a dilemma for Penn...he was determined to treat the Indians as friends...Penn expressed these intentions to the Indians in a letter before sailing to his new province. "The king of the country where I live has given me a great province," he wrote. "But I desire to enjoy it with your love and consent that we may always live together as neighbors and friends."

While Penn recognized the Indians' right as legal owners of the land granted to him by King Charles II, he did insist that they give their consent to his occupation of it. He also made an official policy of his government to purchase the land from the Indians, thereby extinguishing native title before any land was patented to white settlers.

Knowing that many of his predecessors had warred with the Indians, Penn promised them fair treatment, an opportunity for a redress of their grievances and, above all, peace. To this end, he established a list of conditions for both the colonists and Quaker officials for their conduct in dealing with the Indians. Among these concessions were sharing the land, trading goods of the same quality sold in the marketplace, and trial by jury. Although the latter provision was not practical because the Indians did not understand it, the concept did indicate Penn's sincerity in dealing with them. (Excerpt from "William Penn's Legacy: Religious and Spiritual Diversity," by William C. Kashatus, online via the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission.)

From all accounts, William Penn proved to be a man of his word.



In fact, his ideas about religious diversity worked so well that, in 1751, the Pennsylvania Assembly

commissioned a special artifact—the Liberty Bell—to commemorate his ideas:

...the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1751 ordered the casting of a 2,080-pound copper bell to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Penn's Charter of Privileges, which granted religious toleration to all the inhabitants of the colony. Placed inside the tower atop Pennsylvania's State House (now Independence Hall), the object would eventually be known to history as the Liberty Bell and serves as an enduring reminder of the religious freedom Americans enjoy today. And all thanks are due to William Penn. (See "William Penn's Legacy: Religious and Spiritual Diversity," by William C. Kashatus, online via the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission.)

At the top of this page, we see an image of Violet Oakley's mural, called "Penn's Vision." It is part of a series of thirteen murals which Oakley created for the Governor's Reception Room in Pennsylvania's State Capitol. Click on it for a great view.

Credits:

Image of Violet Oakley's mural, described above, online via Wikimedia Commons.

In-text images:

"The Treaty of Penn with the Indians," by Benjamin West 1738-1820—a 74.8 × 107.9 inches (190 × 274 cm) oil-on-canvas painted between 1771-1772—is currently maintained by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Thomas Penn commissioned this painting to commemorate his father's actions.

William Penn's signature.

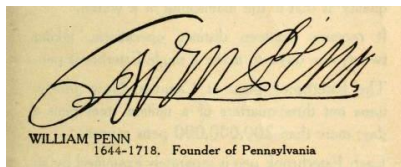
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/William-Penn-Founder-of-Pennsylvania>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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William Penn Signature

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Treaty of Penn with the Indians

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William Penn - Founder of Pennsylvania

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