



Central to the Quaker way of life was the Meeting House. Here, Quakers would come together to worship. The above image depicts one of London's Quaker Meeting Houses.

QUAKERS IN PENNSYLVANIA AND NEW JERSEY

WILLIAM PENN was a dreamer. He also had the king over a barrel. Charles II owed his father a huge debt. To repay the Penns, William was awarded an enormous tract of land in the New World. Immediately he saw possibilities. People of his faith, the Quakers, had suffered serious persecution in England. With some good advertising, he might be able to establish a religious refuge. He might even be able to turn a profit. Slowly, the wheels began to spin. In, 1681, his dream became a reality.

QUAKERS, or the Society of Friends, had suffered greatly in England. As religious dissenters of the Church of England, they were targets much like the Separatists and the Puritans. But Friends were also devout pacifists. They would not fight in any of England's wars, nor would they pay their taxes if they believed the proceeds would assist a military venture. They believed in total equality. Therefore, Quakers would not bow down to nobles. Even the king would not receive the courtesy of a tipped hat. They refused to take oaths, so their allegiance to the Crown was always in question. Of all the Quaker families that came to the New World, over three quarters of the male heads of household had spent time in an English jail.

The Quakers of Penn's colony, like their counterparts across the Delaware River in New Jersey, established an extremely liberal government for the seventeenth century. Religious freedom was granted and there was no tax-supported church. Penn insisted on developing good relations with the Native Americans. Women saw greater freedom in Quaker society than elsewhere, as they were allowed to participate fully in Quaker meetings.

PENNSYLVANIA, or "Penn's Woods," benefited from the vision of its founder. Well advertised throughout Europe, skilled artisans and farmers flocked to the new colony. With Philadelphia as its capital, Pennsylvania soon became the **KEYSTONE** of the English colonies. New Jersey was owned by Quakers even before Penn's experiment, and the remnants of **NEW SWEDEN**, now called Delaware, also fell under the Friends' sphere of influence. William Penn's dream had come true.



William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania ("Penn's Woods") and planner of Philadelphia, established a very liberal government by 17th century standards. Religious freedom and good relations with Native Americans were two keystones of Penn's style.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN COLONIAL AMERICA

Many people came to America to search for religious freedom. Their hope was to escape the religious persecution they were facing in their countries. The one thing they did not want to do was to establish a church like the Church of England. The colonists wanted a chance to worship freely and have an opportunity to choose which religion they wanted to take part in. Upon arriving in America (the Pilgrims being the first to arrive in 1620), the journey began for the search of the "perfect" religion that could satisfy the needs of the people.

Many religious groups (such as the Quakers and Puritans) formed the first 13 colonies on the basis of their religious beliefs. Although the plan was to escape persecution, there was actually some amount of persecution happening in the colonies. One example of this persecution would be with the Puritans. The Puritans wanted everyone to worship in the Puritan way. In order to ensure that Puritanism dominated the colonies, **nonconformists** were fined, banished, whipped, and even imprisoned for not conforming to the way of the Puritans. Eventually this persecution was ended and other religions began to appear.



The Anglicans (members of the Church of England) were already established in most of the colonies and were even part of the group of people that were "persecuted" by the Puritans. However, after the **dispersement** of the Puritans, the number of other religions in the colonies began to increase. Baptists appeared in a majority of the colonies, Roman Catholics and Protestants organized in Maryland and even some German religions surfaced in a few of the colonies. Later came the Lutherans, who formed in the German communities in Pennsylvania, and the Presbyterians, who even had an appearance in the Massachusetts.

Religious diversity had become a dominant part of colonial life. The colonies were a **patchwork** of religiously diverse communities and, as a result, the population of America increased quickly. People from all over the world wanted the freedom that was found in America and they began to move their homelands to America. Groups such as the Scotch-Irish were among the first to begin that emigration to America. As a result, religious persecution was beginning to diminish and religious freedom began to replace it.

Eventually, the issue of church and state became a topic of debate and was widely discussed in the colonies. There were numerous groups of people who disagreed with the separation and feared it would lead to the **deterioration** of religion in the colonies. However, most were in favor of keeping the government and religion as two separate entities. The separation of church and state was completed by the US Constitution in 1777, and then protected with the 1st Amendment.

Overall, religion was an important aspect in the colonization of America. It became a dominant part of the lives of the colonists and continued to grow over the years. Events such as the Salem Witchcraft Trials of the 1690's and the Great Awakening of the 1730's only increased the influence of religion in America. America had become a refuge for those who wanted religious freedom, however it took time for the colonies to truly respect the differing beliefs of others. While colonial communities became comfortable with different branches of Christianity, many then (and still today) had difficulty accepting those of completely different belief systems.