QUAKER PACIFISM IN EARLY COLONIAL PENNSYLVANIA'S INDIAN POLICY

Second Interpretive Paper

Clay Alexander Howarth
History 431-01: Colonial America
March 30, 2015

From its conception, the "holy experiment" of Pennsylvania contrasted remarkably with its colonial counterparts in the New World. Though the nascent Pennsylvanian community featured a cultural diversity unknown to New England or the Chesapeake colonies, English Quakers accounted for the majority of its early emigrants.[1] Consequently, Quaker religious beliefs fashioned Pennsylvania into a uniquely, albeit not perfectly, egalitarian society. First developed in mid-seventeenth century England, these beliefs were transmitted to the New World with the Quaker settlers, where they were free to act out their faith without the Anglican interference they encountered in England. One such way Quakers exhibited their religious convictions in this new environment was in their interactions with Native American societies. Indeed, as regards their more benevolent treatment of Indians, William Penn and the other Quaker founders of the Pennsylvania colony provided an exception to Donald Meinig's "expulsion" model of colonization, which so fittingly characterizes the other English colonies.[2] An examination of several primary sources from this period further substantiates this claim.

In 1682, William Penn, accompanied by another two thousand colonists, arrived on the western shores of the Delaware River, carrying in his hands a royal charter for the creation of a "Free Colony for all Mankind that should go hither."[3] At that time, eastern Pennsylvania served as the home of the Lenni Lenape Indians, organized into autonomous bands and numbering roughly five thousand. Rather than capitalize on the Delaware Indians' decentralization and feeble numbers, William Penn instead inculcated the early Pennsylvanians with Quaker

---

1. Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settlement of North America* (New York: Penguin Books), 266-267.

2. Scott Philyaw, "Historical Geographers," Class Notes, *History 431: Colonial America* (January 23).

3. William Penn quoted in Taylor, *The American Colonies*, 266-267; Daniel Richter, *Trade, Land, and Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 136.

passivism, extending his hand in friendship to the Indians. Penn respected the land rights of the Indians, and purchased their land for settlement at prices above those offered, if at all, by other colonial governments.[4] Penn's thought process is captured in a number of his writings. In his first letter to the Lenape, written from England in 1681, Penn conveys how his religious beliefs inspired him to embrace Indian equality. As Penn states, "God…and the king of the Countrey where I live, hath given me a great province therein, but I desire to enjoy it with your Love and Consent, that we may always live together as Neighbours and friends, else what would the great God say to us, who hath made us not to devoure and destroy one an other but live Soberly and kindly together in the world [sic]."[5]

Pennsylvania's early leaders acquiesced with and attempted to implement Penn's Quaker-inspired benevolence towards the Indians. In the early eighteenth-century, Penn's colonial secretary, James Logan, was one such official. Though he would later adopt less benevolent tactics, at the time Logan played a considerable role in the formulation of colonial Pennsylvania's early Indian policy.[6] Following in the footsteps of Penn, Logan opted for fair trade and respect for native lands in order to avoid conflict, a policy that in 1717 diametrically opposed the methods by which Virginia's Governor Spottswood, a former soldier, sought to intimidate the Indians.[7] In the early 1700s, Logan wrote a letter to two Iroquoian leaders in

---

4. Taylor, *The American Colonies*, 267-269.

5. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, **"**Letter from William Penn to the Kings of the Indians in Pennsylvania (1682)," *Penn Family Papers*, found online at http://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/Object /Show/object_id /75339.

6. Benjamin Franklin, with introduction by Carl van Doren and historical and bibliographical notes by Julian P. Boyd, *Indian Treaties 1736-1762*, (Philadelphia: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1938), xix-xx, found online at https://archive.org/details/indiantreatiespr00vand. In 1737 Logan participated in the infamous "'Walking Purchase,' perhaps the most notorious land swindle in colonial history." Taylor, *The American Colonies*, 323.

7. U.S. History.org, "William Penn," found under section "The Life of James Logan," http://www. ushistory.org /penn/jameslogan.htm (accessed March 2015).

which he refers to the Indians as "brethren" and how the "province of Pennsylvania has at all times with great affection… made divers[e] laws to prevent their being abused."[8]

Given only these excerpts, one might inquire as to the sincerity of Penn and Logan. Perhaps both men were politically shrewd, and remembered the devastation wreaked upon the other colonies by more indiscriminate and aggressive approaches towards the Indians, such as that of Nathaniel Bacon, who in 1676 called upon Virginian settlers to kill "all Indians in generall for… they were all Enemies [sic]."[9] Fortunately, records exist showing just how closely the early Pennsylvanian government's actions followed the Quaker community's pacifist convictions. A treaty signed in 1728 between the Governor of Pennsylvania and the chiefs of various Indian groups, including the Conestoga and Delaware, echoes the sentiments expressed in Penn's letters. The treaty recalls how "the Great William Penn… took all the Indians by the Hand… because he found them [to] be a sincere honest People…. He… agreed that the Indians and the English… be as one people." Acting in accordance with Penn's wishes, the treaty stipulates nine agreements between the Pennsylvanian colonists and Indians involved. These include the opening of all paths to both Indians and Christians, respect for each other's livestock, the confirmation of rumors before actions are taken against one another, mutual assistance in capturing outlaws from one side who commit violence against the other, and perhaps most remarkably, that "the doors of Christians' houses be opened to the Indians, and the houses of Indians open to the Christians."[10] Whether the treaty was realized in the manner indicated

8. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, "James Logan letter to Shekallamy [Shikellamy] and Allummapes [Alumapees]," *Logan Family Papers*, found online at http://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/Object/ Show/ object_id/12069.

9. Nathaniel Bacon quoted in Taylor, *The American Colonies*, 149.

10. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, "Two Indian treaties the one held at Conestogoe in May 1728. And the other at Philadelphia in June following, between the Honourable Patrick ..." (Philadelphia: 1728), found online at http://0-find.galegroup.com.wncln.wncln.org/ecco/retrieve.do?scale=0.33 &docLevel=FASCIMILE & pro dId=ECCO&tabID=T001&searchId=&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&callistoContentSet=ECSS&currentPosition

certainly necessitates further investigation; nonetheless, it illustrates the desire of Pennsylvania's Quaker community to advocate their belief in egalitarianism.

In its early years Pennsylvania, in part because of its devotion to Quaker pacifism, avoided the Indian conflicts that scarred the New England and Chesapeake colonies. Indiscriminate killings of Indians of the sort that contributed to King Philips War were either absent or, as the treaty above suggests, defused through cooperation by both sides.[11] Leaders of colonial Pennsylvania were conscious of the racial prejudices upon which other English colonists had previously predicated their interactions with the Indians. As Penn writes to the Lenape, "I am very Sensible of the unkindness and Injustice that hath been too much exersised towards you by the People of thes Parts of the world, who have sought themselvs, and to make great Advantages by you, rather then be examples of Justice and Goodness unto you [sic]."[12]

Indian sources most often verify the Pennsylvania Quakers' proclivity towards goodwill in contrast to their colonial neighbors. In a 1683 letter to his fellow Englishmen, William Penn related the signing of a peace treaty with the Indians. He noted that an interpreter and member of the Indian king's council first reiterated the details of the treaty, and then proceeded to advise his fellow councilors and king to "love the Christians, and particularly live in Peace with [William Penn], and the People under [his] Government: That many Governours had been in the River, but that no Governour… had treated them well, [therefore] they should never do him or his any

---

=1&forRelevantNavigation=false&pageIndex=3&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&inPS=true&userGroupName=cull73600&docPage=article&workId=0655800600&docId=CW3305054752&contentSet=ECCOArticles&showLOI=&relevancePageBatch=CW105054750, 1-4.

11. Taylor, *The American Colonies*, 199.

12. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, "Letter from William Penn to the Kings of the Indians in Pennsylvania (1682)," *Penn Family Papers*.

wrong [sic]."[13] The Pennsylvania government further displayed its Quaker principles by accepting native refugees fleeing the persecution of other colonies and Indians in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, transforming the western part of the province into a heterogeneous mix of various Indian diasporas from across the region. This prompted one such refugee to make the distinction between the Quakers and their neighbors, in this case, Maryland. "[They] do not treat the Indians as you and others do," the refugee reasoned, "for they make slaves of them and sell their Children for Money."[14]

While it can be effectively argued that almost all European colonists harbored varying notions of cultural superiority, the writings of William Penn testify to the extent in which the Quakers sought to extinguish, or at the least moderate, the flame of racial imperialism. William Penn clearly articulated the Quaker belief that "there is one great God and Power," who "hath been pleased" to supply the Christians land in the New World.[15] The Indians, it seemed to Penn, were a "poor People under a dark Night in things relating to *Religion*."[16] In this conviction, the Quakers seem no different than the Puritans or French Jesuits who came before them. However, while the Puritan John Winthrop argued that the Indians "have noe other but a Naturall right to those Countries, soe as if we leave them sufficient for their use, we may lawfully take the rest

13. Early English Books Online, "A letter from William Penn, poprietary and governour of Pennsylvania in America, to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders of that province residing in…" (London, 1683). Benjamin West's 1771 painting, *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians*, memorializes this event. See *The Valiant Hero: Benjamin West and Grand-Style History Painting*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985). An image of the painting may be found online at the Lehigh University Digital Library, *History on Trial*, "The Literature of Justification," Pennsylvania Image Gallery, http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/justification/pennsylvania/image/5/.

14. Taylor, *The American Colonies*, 269.

15. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, "Letter from William Penn to the Kings of the Indians in Pennsylvania (1682)," *Penn Family Papers*.

16. Early English Books Online, "A letter from William Penn, poprietary and governour of Pennsylvania in America, to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders of that province residing in…" (London, 1683), found under illustration six, http://0-eebo.chadwyck.com.wncln.wncln.org/search/full_rec?SOURCE= pg images.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=8189440&FILE=&SEARCHSCREEN=param%28SEARCHSCREEN%29&VID=41054&PAGENO=6&ZOOM=100&VIEWPORT=&SEARCHCONFIG=param%28SEARCHCONFIG%29&DISPLAY=param%28DISPLAY%29&HIGHLIGHT_KEYWORD=undefined.

[sic]," Penn expressed a resolution to "live Justly, peaceably, and friendly with [the Indians]."[17] Winthrop's indifferent declaration embodies Meinig's model of "expulsion," while Penn's far more reverent Indian policy conveys how Quaker Pennsylvania was a rare exception to the archetypal English colony.[18] Although still interested in obtaining land, the Quaker community of early Pennsylvania was at least determined to do so in a far more compensatory way than other New World colonies had previously attempted, a reflection, no doubt, of Quaker beliefs in the equality of all people before God.

17. John Winthrop quoted in Taylor, *The American Colonies*, 192; Historical Society of Pennsylvania, "Letter from William Penn to the Kings of the Indians in Pennsylvania (1682)," *Penn Family Papers*.

18. For more analysis of William Penn's letters and how the Pennsylvanian Quakers' Indian policies contrasted with those of other colonies (as well as how they were similarly influenced by worldly ambitions), see Daniel Richter, *Trade, Land, Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 135-154.