

John A. Moretta. *William Penn and the Quaker Legacy*. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007. Pp. xx, 269, bibliographical references, index. Paper, \$20.67.)

John A. Moretta's stirring biography of William Penn is a welcome addition to the historiography of colonial Pennsylvania. A volume in Longman's Library of American Biography series, *William Penn and the Quaker Legacy* complements two earlier biographies in this series (Edmund S. Morgan's *Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* and Alden T. Vaughan's *American Genesis: Captain John Smith and the Founding of Virginia*) by focusing on the life and career of Pennsylvania's founder.

The first third of this volume focuses upon Penn's spiritual life, from his conversion to Quakerism while a student at Oxford to his desire to spread the faith in the British Isles and on the continent. Much to his father's chagrin, Penn chose to pursue a career as a religious leader, despite Admiral Penn's efforts to supply his eldest son with all of the benefits that a man with the Admiral's connections could provide. For instance, when the Admiral sent William to Ireland to oversee the family's Irish estates, William chose to proselytize and was arrested for preaching. Young Penn did not spend his time in jail pondering the error of his ways; instead, he wrote several religious tracts explaining the Quaker faith and criticizing laws designed to punish dissenters for their beliefs and actions.

William Penn, according to Moretta, also was inconsistent. Penn might have been a devout Quaker, but he behaved more like the elitist his father wanted him to be than a typical Friend. In particular, Penn's connections at Court, mostly as a result of Admiral Penn's friendship with Charles II and the Duke of York, enabled him to move in circles that were atypical of a religious nonconformist. These connections proved to be beneficial to Penn as he sought to create a safe haven for dissenters in the North American colonies. One problem that Penn faced, however, was that some political and religious leaders in England thought his pleas for toleration of Quakers and other nonconformists included toleration for Roman Catholics, an assumption that was certainly strengthened by his close personal relationship with the Stuart monarchs (particularly James II).

Moretta contends that Penn's purpose in establishing Pennsylvania was not merely to create a haven for the oppressed religious groups of Europe, but an opportunity for Penn to redeem the family name that he believed had been damaged by Admiral Penn's devotion to warfare. Indeed, Penn's goal

of a “holy experiment” relied upon the participation of “weighty Friends” (wealthy Quaker merchants) who could provide venture capital for the colony. In fact, Penn’s promotional tracts focused upon the economic advantages of the colony. Later, his Quaker beliefs did contribute to positive interactions with the Native populations, leading to the establishment of commercial relations and peaceful land acquisition.

Penn’s colony, however, was not the peaceable kingdom that he envisioned, but one with constant political quarrels. Penn spent less than three years in the colony, becoming an absentee landlord when he had to return to England to defend the colony against boundary disputes (particularly with Lord Baltimore) and imperial reorganization. The *Frames of Government* that served as the constitution for the province concentrated power in a few hands and severely limited the power of the provincial assembly. With his absence, the Assembly asserted its authority over the administration of the colony, and anti-proprietary factions emerged. Part of the conflict developed because Penn wanted Pennsylvania to be populated, but he wanted to determine where the settlements would occur. He also expected the settlers to contribute toward the cost of administering the colony through the payment of quitrents, but he never implemented an effective means of collecting the revenue that did not alienate the settlers. As a result of his absence, few colonists knew Penn personally, and those who did generally resented Penn’s cavalier attitude.

Penn finally returned to Pennsylvania in 1699, and he found a different colony than the one he had left fifteen years earlier. He hoped to renew the holy experiment, but instead found a prosperous and populous Philadelphia that really did not want his meddling. Quakers could not understand why he did not favor them with political appointments, not realizing that royal pressure forced Penn to appoint Anglicans to office. Once again, Penn found it difficult to adapt to colonial realities, and he formally relinquished power to the Assembly in the *Charter of Privileges* prior to his return to England. Penn anticipated that his stay in England would be brief and encouraged his wife Hannah to remain at *Pennsbury Manor*, but his wife refused and returned with him.

Penn’s relationship with the Stuart monarchs was both a blessing and a curse, according to Moretta. He benefited from his father’s connections when he acquired the colony, but his friendship with James II led to Pennsylvania becoming a royal colony briefly following the Glorious Revolution. Penn reacquired the title by providing assistance to the Royal Army during the

War of the League of Augsburg in the 1690s, compromising his Quaker beliefs with political reality. When he returned to England in 1701, he arrived in England right before the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession and the ascension of Queen Anne to the throne. Penn regained his influence at Court and was well-connected with the Whig Party that had gained prominence. He was, however, disillusioned with his province and offered to sell it back to the Crown for £30,000. The sum was enough to pay his debts—mostly to his personal accountant, Philip Ford, who had defrauded Penn—but more than the government could afford during wartime. A few years later, upon realizing that his son Billy was not fit to succeed him as proprietor, he began to make arrangements to return the colony to the Crown following his death. Penn suffered two strokes before the transfer was complete, and the province remained in the family until the Revolution.

Overall, *William Penn and the Quaker Legacy* is an outstanding biography of Pennsylvania's founder and Quaker leader. Each chapter includes a summary at the end that provides evidence of Penn's evolution from a Quaker minister to a colonial leader. The book also includes a series of discussion questions for each chapter to help students understand the material. Moretta provides a balanced approach to Penn, viewing the proprietor as both a religious and a political leader and explaining the conflict between the two. The William Penn of this volume is a man who had difficulty in personal relationships with his father and his children and saw himself as a quasi-feudal lord over his province. At the same time, however, Penn was a visionary who wanted his colony to "reflect not only the best of the English liberal (Whig) tradition in politics but be unswervingly committed as well to religious liberty" (241). John A. Moretta succeeds in this highly-readable biography that helps readers understand what drove William Penn to create the most diverse colony in British North America.

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