THE COLONISTS OF WILLIAM PENN

By

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Like Massachusetts and Virginia, Pennsylvania originated in England. Penn was comparatively late, however, and at his coming Swedes had been on the Delaware for forty years, nominally controlled by a few Dutch from Manhattan, in forts. The Welsh had bought land from Penn while both parties were still on the other side of the water, and were in possession on the Schuylkill two months before he landed at the Swedish town of Uplands, now Chester. From them he bought the site of Philadelphia. At Penn's invitation, many Germans and Swiss from the Upper Rhine followed him the next year, 1683, accompanied by some Hollanders and some Huguenots. Scotch in great numbers came from Ulster County, Ireland, where King James I. had placed them, as their hundred year leases expired.

This was reproduced in an area smaller than one quarter of Ireland, a diminutive Europe of the North. Persecution sent these colonists, and liberty of worship bound them together. William and John Penn furnished the government, together with their provincial council, and where the majority were Quakers, there was little friction. Therefore in the seventy-four years between the grant to Penn and the French and Indian War, there was wonderful development of agriculture, commerce, manufacture and scientific research.

William Penn, who had brought this miscellaneous population into union rather than unity, was a man in whom also "the elements were mixed". His father had been an admiral whose service to Cromwell and Charles II. had been equally good. He inclined toward royalty, however, and foreseeing the Restoration, offered his fleet, after taking Jamaica, to the King, then in exile. Having no place to keep a fleet, Charles declined but remained grateful. The admiral,
ambitious for his son, was shocked to find William affected by Quaker preaching, while at Oxford. A tour in France was prescribed and recalled worldly taste, especially in clothes. On again hearing preaching, William's religious feeling returned. This time, he was sent to the Irish court, and helped subdue a disturbance. Here the only portrait of the great Quaker was painted. He wore armor and the long hair of a Cavalier. Exposed to preaching once more, he joined the sect, and the admiral disowned him for the last time.

Penn alternately preached and attended court. He was that difficult combination, a Quaker courtier. Often cast into jail, he nevertheless obtained, because of a debt to his father, the great gift of Pennsylvania. Religious liberty was with him a principle, and his laws were mild. Only two crimes were capital and graded punishments were then first introduced.

Penn's colonists were Quakers, but many Church of England people came. Together they built up the "green country town" like those in England. English life in more republican form was reproduced, for the Philadelphia grandfathers were then in the making. Prosperity begot vast extravagance in dress and entertainment. A lady wore brocade or taffeta with hair piled mountain high. A gentleman in a gold laced cocked hat, pointed shoes and with cuffs leaded, took up half the side-walk, as he swung his cane and scraped his foot in bowing. Markets were so abundant that gourmandizing was inevitable at the dinners given in leisurely fashion at any hour of the afternoon, and at suppers in public houses. Needless to say, Madeira flowed copiously. In English fashion, the Philadelphians built summer homes in the suburbs. Four of these still remain, Woodland, Mount Pleasant, Stenton and Cliveden. Twenty-seven of them were destroyed in the Revolutionary War.

The Welsh Barony lay just west of Philadelphia. Its oldest church is eight miles from the City Hall. Seventeen families came in the Mayflower of the Welsh, and the monthly meetings made their laws. Soon county lines were carried through their tract, bringing a sharp protest. They had schools as well as churches and preserved their language for fifty years when they were absorbed into the English.
curious Welsh pedigree of one hundred and ten generations carries their leader, John ap Thomas through Prince Medoe, ap Owain, Merion, Brute discoverer of Britain, Aeneas the Trojan, Jupiter, Saturn, Javan, Japhath, Noah, Lamach, Methusalah, Enos, Seth and Adam to God.

The first comers were a clan, had no surnames and were descendents of kings and bards. They thought medicine and agriculture the most honorable employments, and the phrase “a Welsh cousin” carried even to the famous forty-second degree, shows their warmth of heart toward kindred. Thomas Buchanan Read’s “The Wagoner of the Alleganies” does justice to these Welsh of the Schuykill and Chester valleys.

Penn himself called the attention of Germans to his “Holy Experiment” as he called Pennsylvania when he preached on the Rhine. His pamphlets on it in Dutch and German, were freely scattered in South Germany. At Crefeld and Kriegsheim, his friendship secured the highly cultured Pastorius as a colonist in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Kelpius with his forty mystics followed, and from their tower on Wissahicken Ridge watched through the telescope for the Last Day. Ephrata in Lancaster County was the outcome of these monks. Back in Switzerland, the Zwinglian was the state church, and when the followers of Memo Simon would not bear arms, they were put across the border into Germany. There Menonite Quakers became the second large company from that region to enter Pennsylvania.

The story of the Palatine appeals. The Palatinate on the Upper Rhine was a garden spot of earth, but the successive desolations of the Thirty Years’ War, and the burning of the Province by order of Louis XIV, together with religious discrimination, fairly drove these farmers of thirty generations to cross the sea. So many of them came that by the time of the Revolution, they were one third of the population, a proportion they still hold. Vessels left Rotterdam. The fare was five pounds to eight pounds, but the Frankfort Company sold transportation for two pounds, and peas, oatmeal and beer for one pound. Dried beef, cheese and butter were added at Holland. The quantity indicated the long voyage, but the standard was seldom reached. Sometimes months instead of weeks were taken in the passage,
and winds were to be waited for. Food often ran short; one ship was at sea twenty-two weeks and one hundred out of one hundred and fifty died of hunger. Penn's own ship had thirty-six fatal cases of smallpox, and after arrival, mortality was not far behind that at Plymouth. Hard hearted captains who found much profit in the trade overcrowded ships, and separated passengers from their sea-chests! Spanish privateers were feared, but the Germans sang their grand hymns! Count Zinzendorf of Saxony and his Moravians started community life in Bethlehem and Nazareth, and Christianized Indians in the Wyoming Valley, before Connecticut made her claim.

All these Germans took the unbroken forests, grubbed the stumps the first year and ploughed the second. By unceasing labor, they were soon prosperous. English county officials ruled them while they built their great barns, called "Swissens" from the overhanging second story, a story strong enough for a team to drive into. In Spring or Fall, five hundred of their famed Conestoga wagons, red of running gear, blue of body, with white cover might be seen on the road from Bedford or from Reading, carrying two or three thousand pounds each, of provisions. Four or six horses drew a wagon, and arranged on each horse's collar was an arch of bells that chimed, small trebles on the leaders, big basses on the wheel horses.

To their own tongue the Germans clung, and they formed a dialect of the Frankish and Allemanic sources whence they sprang. They had several printing presses and prepared their Bibles, hymn books and almanacs. Christopher Sauer and Peter Miller were their great publishers. To commit hymns to memory was their chief literary effort, and the almanac was their periodical. Two newspapers supplied such needs. A list of titles of almanacs in a Congressional Library publication shows how many more were printed in Pennsylvania than elsewhere, since she had seven hundred and fifty titles, New York three hundred, and Massachusetts five hundred and twenty-five.

In twenty-five years Lancaster became larger than inland cities of England. Here a Switzer invented a novelty of irrigation. Spring water was conducted into many small troughs on a hillside; stopping the water at the end would
cause it to overflow each trough, wetting the ground between it and the next. They loved flowers and their dooryards bloomed then, as now and in the old Palatinate. More important practically was their success with vegetables which soon supplied the tables of the Province. About their agriculture gathered all the superstitions of their ancient ancestors. Belief in the influence of stars on a new born child and of the moon on cereals and vegetables was a part of their being. The almanac marked the lucky or unlucky day for birth, for engagements and weddings. There too, it was learned that no planting must be done in the waning of the moon, but in the waxing. Onions must be planted when the horns of the moon were down, but beans and potatoes when the horns were up. Omens were abundant for death and for weather. Witches might interfere with butter-making. Horseshoes at the door might keep them out. Amulets, incantations and pow wows were in use. At a funeral a procession of one hundred or one hundred and fifty horseback riders followed. At the house, cake with hot rum punch and cider was offered. The marker for a grave was twelve by eighteen inches and laid flat upon the grave.

Of the Scotch Irish we learn somewhat from their travelling ministers, Presbyterians, of course, and the historian counts them by congregations, formed first in the three ports of landing, Lewes, Newcastle and Philadelphia. Near the Maryland line, and in the three lower counties, as Delaware was known, more churches were formed, and as thousand upon thousand came, many more congregations grew up in the West, across the Susquehanna. James Logan, secretary of the Province called them “bold and indigent strangers”, who gave as an excuse when challenged for a title to land, that “we had solicited for colonists and they had come accordingly.” Hanna says, however, that they were a tolerated class, exempt from quit-rents, by an ordinance of 1720, in consideration of their being a frontier people, as forming a cordon of defence around the non-fighting Quakers.

While in Ulster, the Scotch had grown very proud and self assertive; they were the favorites of the King, and they lorded it over “the mere Irish”. But these haughty strangers were hated and harried by the wild Irish. Coming from such a quarrelsome state, the Scotch were bold and their
great number gave much alarm. They pushed their way into Manors reserved by the Penns, and they were rough to the Indians. A happy condition, however, is depicted in letters to Ulster. "It is an extraordinarily healthy country; land is worth only $3.50 an acre (be it noted that James Logan wrote that he had more trouble to settle five Irish families than fifty others!) The best ploughs in the world are here and the ground is soft. The country yields extraordinary increase: the summer is so warm that a shirt and linen drawer trousers, which are breeches and stockings in one, are enough. There are two fairs yearly, at Chester and Newcastle; and two markets weekly where merchants' goods are sold, and where all young men and women that want husbands and wives may be supplied."

Also, "I desire thee to send or bring me a hundred choice quills for my own use, and Sister Rachel desires thee to bring her some bits of silk for trash bags."

Pennsylvania began with those pietists who were disappointed in formal worship, and whose sufferings from war called for some emotional outlet, such as they found in the adult Bible classes. It embraced some vigorous colonists who objected to control by bishops and arch-bishops. There was some mingling of the blood of these groups, Teuton, Anglo-Saxon, Scot and Cambrian, but for the most part the English were in the eastern counties with the Welsh, the Germans next, while westward Germans and Scotch Irish divided the Province till they overflowed into Ohio and the Allegheny valley. The Wyoming tragedy belongs to the Revolutionary period, when as a whole Pennsylvania was second only to Virginia and Massachusetts in loyal devotion, even its old Cambrian blood of the Welsh stirring till Quakers formed themselves into "Associations."