

Chapter 5

So Wise a Ruler

"My prison shall be my grave before I will budge one bit. I owe my conscience to no man."

These words were written in 1668 by a "born fighter" named William Penn. He wrote them while he was in jail in the Tower of London. His cell was a tiny, bare room under the roof. It was icy cold in the winter. It was steaming hot in the summer. Bad prison food made him thin and weak.

Penn didn't have to be in prison. He could have had a soft life. His father was a British navy hero and a rich man. His home was a castle with servants and many acres of land. His father had sent him to a famous English college, Oxford University. Many of the students there were the sons of noblemen. Penn was friendly and good at sports, and he had soon become popular.

But after a while, Penn began to question an English law. The law said that all English people had to belong to the Church of England. Puritans and people who belonged to other churches were often beaten. Sometimes they were put in prison, and even hanged. Penn saw many college students beat up Puritans, Separatists, and Quakers in the streets. He tried to defend the people who were beaten, and was called a "troublemaker." Penn and some of the other college students stopped going to the Church of England as a protest. Then

Penn was forced to leave college.

Penn's father was very angry with him. At first he threw his son out of the house. Later he felt sorry and took him

The portrait below is the only one known to have been drawn of William Penn in his own lifetime.



back. Then he sent the young man on a trip to France and Italy to make him a "gentleman."

Penn did become a gentleman. He wore fine silk clothes and a sword. In London he met the king and many great noblemen. Then in 1665 a terrible disease hit London — the plague, or "black death." Many thousands of people became sick and died. Others ran away from London to save themselves. But the Quakers stayed to take care of the sick and the dying. Penn liked these brave people. Before long, he became a Quaker himself.

Quaker beliefs. What were the Quakers like? They lived simply and wore plain clothes. They did not have churches or regular ministers. They met in plain buildings called "meeting houses." Any member could speak at meeting when he — or she — felt moved by the spirit of God. The Quakers believed in strict honesty in business. They were against violence and war. They would not serve in the king's army. They were against any kind of unfair treatment of one person by another. They also believed in helping the sick and people in jail. They called themselves "Friends."

William Penn became a leading Quaker. He was thrown into jail in the Tower of London for nine months. He was told to give up his Quaker beliefs. His answer was to refuse to budge. Later Penn was sent to prison two more times.

Penn began to feel that freedom of religion was impossible in England. More and more, he thought of starting a colony in America. In this colony, men and women would be free to worship in whatever way they wished. Men would

also be free to vote as they pleased.

The king owed Penn's father a lot of money. Penn's father was now dead. So Penn asked the king to give him, instead of money, a grant of land in America. The king was glad to give Penn some land — anything to get rid of this Quaker troublemaker. He gave Penn the land that is now Pennsylvania. The name means "Penn's woods."

Charter of Liberties. In 1681 Quakers from England and other countries set sail for Pennsylvania. Penn wrote a *Charter of Liberties* for the new colony. Many years later it became a model for the U.S. Constitution. The Charter said: The lawmakers of the colony would be elected by the citizens of the colony. Every male citizen of the colony could vote. There would be freedom of religion for all. There would be freedom of speech for all. There would be trial by jury for anyone accused of a crime.

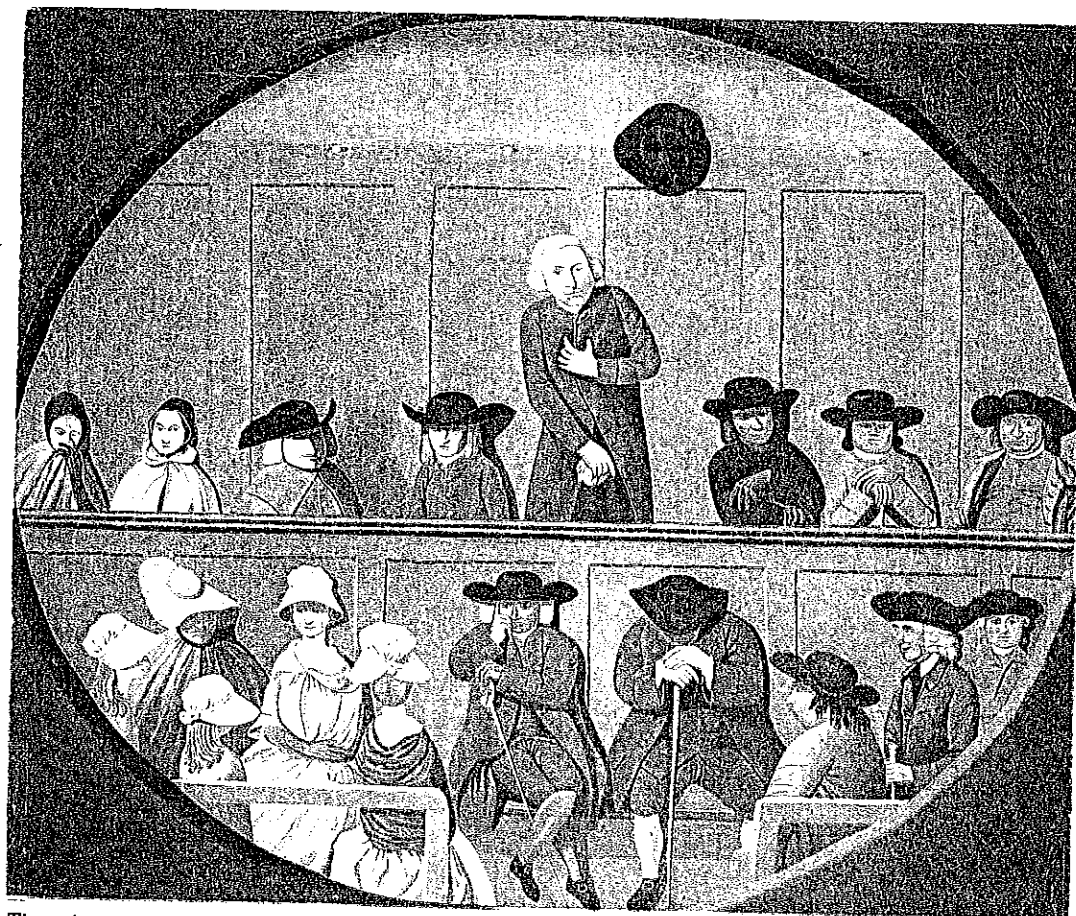
Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1776, called Penn "the greatest lawgiver the world has produced."

Penn was also a good friend to the Indians of Pennsylvania. He was honest and fair, and the Indians respected him for it. Penn once told a group of Indians: "All will be brotherhood and love. I consider us all the same flesh and blood, joined by one heart."

Penn agreed to several treaties with the Indians. At these times, the Indians replied that they and the colonists "must live in love as long as the sun and moon give light." The treaties were not broken in Penn's lifetime.

Penn made Pennsylvania "a free colony for all mankind." It was free not just

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There is no minister at a Quaker meeting. Each person who attends a meeting is free to remain alone with his or her thoughts. An American artist recorded this meeting-house scene in the 1700's.

for English people or Quakers, but for people of all nations and religious beliefs. One colonist said this about Penn: "He is loved and praised by all. The people have never seen so wise a ruler."

A Second Look. . . .

1. Why did William Penn want to start a colony in America?
2. William Penn treated the Indians of Pennsylvania with great goodwill. How

did Penn's attitude help Pennsylvania in his lifetime? If Penn had been cooler toward Indians, do you think they would have reacted the same way to him? Give reasons for your answers.

3. Imagine that you have been asked to write a charter of liberties for your community. Look very carefully at the five points Penn included in his charter. Then make a list of the liberties you would want to include in yours. In what ways do the two lists differ?

What background did William Penn Come from?	
Why was Penn put into jail?	
What religious group became known as the Quakers?	
What do Quakers believe?	
What was Penn's Charter of Liberties?	
List four rights guaranteed in the Charter of Liberties	

Summary- Include 4 – 6 important details from the notes above

Essential Questions-

How were Quaker beliefs reflected in Penn's Charter of Liberties?

What historical legacy was established by Penn's Charter of Liberty?