



William Penn was born in 1644 in London, England. Penn was about fifteen when he met Thomas Loe, a Quaker missionary. He became a Quaker at the age of 22. While at his family estate in Ireland Penn had begun to attend Quaker meetings. A chance re-meeting with Thomas Loe confirmed Penn's rising attraction to Quakerism. King Charles had tightened restrictions against all religious sects other than the Anglican Church. Quakers were especially targeted and their meetings were deemed undesirable. The penalty for unauthorized worship imprisonment or deportation.

In 1677 a group of prominent Quakers that included Penn purchased the colonial province of West Jersey (half of the current state of New Jersey). In 1682 East Jersey was also purchased by Quakers. With the New Jersey foothold in place, Penn pressed his case to extend the Quaker region. In 1681, King Charles II handed over a large piece of his American land holdings to Penn to pay the debts the king owed to Penn's father. Whether from personal sympathy or political expediency the King granted an extraordinarily generous charter which made Penn the world's largest private (non-royal) landowner, with over 45,000 square miles. Penn first called the area "New Wales", then "Sylvania" (Latin for "forests" or "woods"), which King Charles II changed to "Pennsylvania" in honor of the Penn's Father. On March 4, 1681, the King signed the charter and the following day Penn jubilantly wrote, "It is a clear and just thing, and my God who has given it to me through many difficulties, will, I believe, bless and make it the seed of a nation. This land included the present-day states of Pennsylvania and Delaware. Penn immediately set sail and took his first step on American soil in New Castle (now in Delaware) in 1682.

He negotiated Pennsylvania's first land-purchase survey with the Lenape Indian tribe. Penn purchased the first tract of land on July 15, 1682. Penn drafted a charter of liberties for the settlement creating a political utopia guaranteeing free and fair trial by jury, freedom of religion, freedom from unjust imprisonment and free elections.

To attract settlers in large numbers, he wrote a glowing prospectus, considered honest and well-researched for the time, promising religious freedom as well as material advantage, which he marketed throughout Europe in various languages. Within six months he had parcelled out 300,000 acres (1,200 km²) to over 250 prospective settlers, mostly rich London Quakers. Eventually he attracted other persecuted minorities including Huguenots, Mennonites, Amish, Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews from England, France, Holland, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Ireland, and Wales.