

CELEBRATING WILLIAM PENN'S VISION  
AND THE FIRST WELSH SETTLEMENT IN  
LOWER MERION AND NARBERTH  
1682-2007

In August 1682, the Welsh Quakers arrived in what is now Lower Merion and Narberth. They were seeking a home in the New World, which they had christened *The Welsh Tract*. These *Merioneth Adventurers* from the County of Merionethshire in the North of Wales, were part of William Penn's vision of the *Holy Experiment* in which the persecuted peoples of the Old World could find refuge in a land of promise and new beginnings.

# Dear Fellow Residents of Lower Merion and Narberth,

There are many reasons to be proud of our community, but there is one aspect which is paramount: We together with those from the adjoining lands of William Penn's Pennsylvania, live in the part of the world which has dwelt longest in religious freedom. The fruits of this gift, along with the other personal freedoms conferred by Penn upon the inhabitants of newly-born Pennsylvania, should be prized by every generation in the face of the unfortunate recurrent evidence of human discord elsewhere in the world. Penn's lands are much more populous and Pennsylvanians are more diverse than in Penn's day. But the ideals which formed our community are as essential and dear, 325 years later, to ourselves as they were to our forebearers, whether their path to Pennsylvania came in Penn's day or just the recent past.

*Bruce D. Reed*

Bruce D. Reed, President  
Township of Lower Merion  
Board of Commissioners

*Mary Jo Pauxtis*

Mary Jo Pauxtis, President  
Narberth Borough Council



# William Penn (1644-1718)

In 1681, William Penn, an English Quaker; namely, a member of the non-conformist religion called *The Religious Society of Friends*, received a charter from Charles II of England for *Penn Sylvania* or *Penn's Woods*. He had a vision for his new colony that he referred to as the *Holy Experiment*, a secure and peaceable haven for all people of Europe who were persecuted for their religious beliefs.



Above: This portrait of William Penn, c. 1696, was drawn in London by the English artist Francis Place around the time of Penn's marriage to his second wife, Hannah Callowhill.

Below: *Penn's Vision* is one of thirteen murals painted by Violet Oakley as part of the frieze *The Founding of the State of Liberty Spiritual* in the Governor's Reception Room of the Pennsylvania State Capitol. According to Oakley, Penn's desire was to "bring out of captivity all those who were oppressed for conscience sake, whatever their creed or belief."



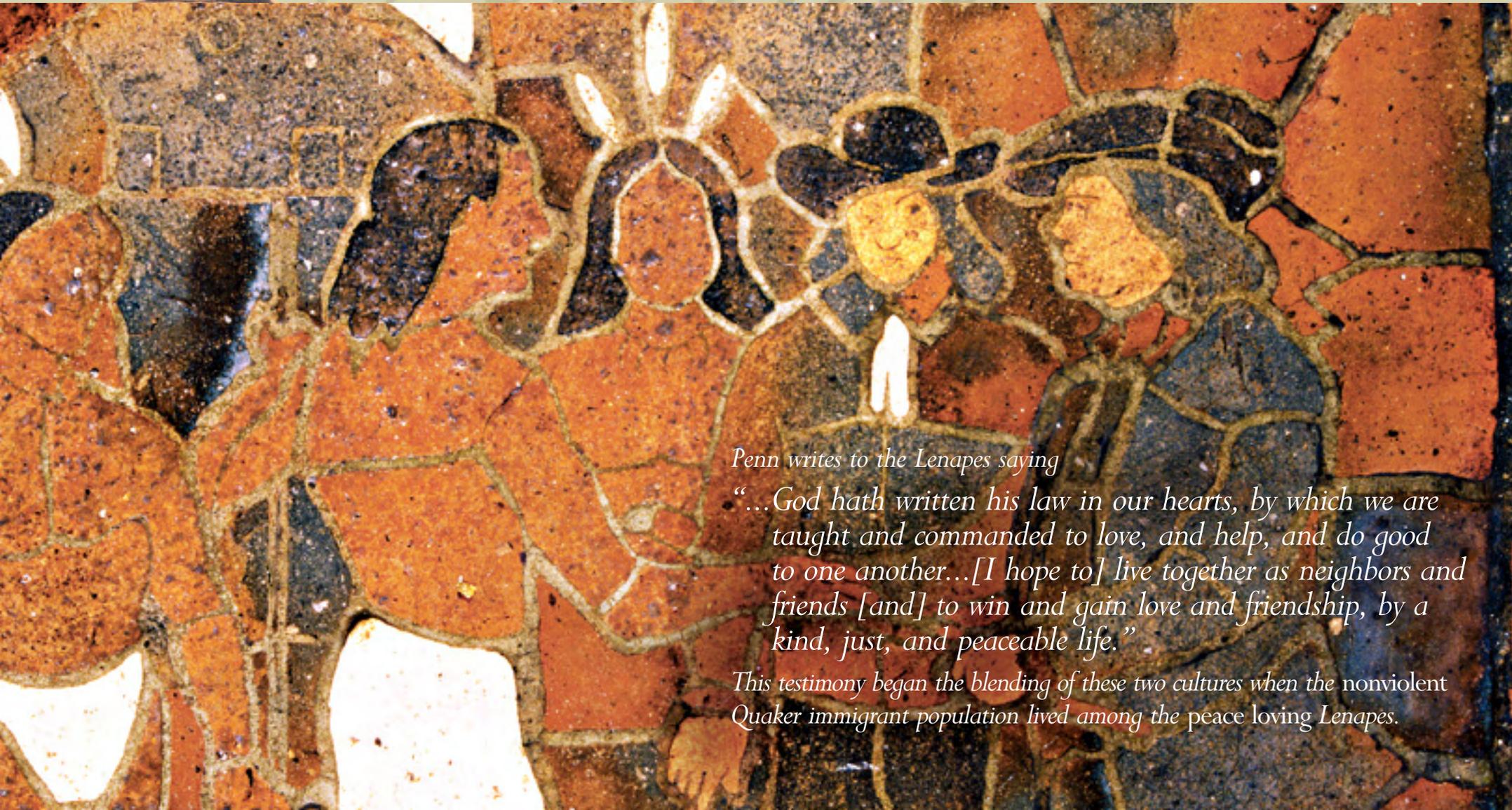
In October 1682, on the ship *Welcome*, William Penn arrived at Upland (now Chester) which was then occupied by Swedish colonists. Penn traveled up the Delaware River, identified a piece of land between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers and commenced building his new colony's chief city: *Philadelphia*. The name *Philadelphia* has a double meaning: from the Greek meaning *city of brotherly love*, and a scriptural reference to *New Jerusalem*. In the third chapter of the Book of Revelation "...the angel of the church in Philadelphia" (which was located in modern-day southwestern Turkey) writes "I know your work" and prophesied that Philadelphia will become "the City of God, the New Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven."



Left: The Wampum Belt that the Lenapes gave to William Penn at the Great Treaty ceremony. This fabled meeting took place in November 1682 under a spreading elm at the village of Shackamaxon (now Kensington in Philadelphia). The center design depicts a Native American and a Quaker (with the characteristic hat) with hands clasped in friendship.

Below: Although Penn owned the land according to British law, he made sure to purchase the land from the Lenape people who lived there. Penn also made several treaties of peace and friendship. In 1903, Henry Chapman Mercer was commissioned to provide floor tiles for the new Pennsylvania State Capitol Building. This tile mosaic is entitled *Penn's Treaty* and is located in the rotunda.

Far Left: William Penn's statue on Philadelphia's City Hall Tower. This bronze sculpture is over 36 feet tall and was completed by Alexander Milne Calder in 1894.



*Penn writes to the Lenapes saying*

*"...God hath written his law in our hearts, by which we are taught and commanded to love, and help, and do good to one another...[I hope to] live together as neighbors and friends [and] to win and gain love and friendship, by a kind, just, and peaceable life."*

*This testimony began the blending of these two cultures when the nonviolent Quaker immigrant population lived among the peace loving Lenapes.*

William Penn, Proprietor, writes to the settlers of his colony, saying “You shall be governed by laws of your own making and live a free people.” In 1682 there were twenty-three ships that brought some two-thousand colonists to settle in Pennsylvania. Over the next three years, more than ninety ships filled with Quakers and Quaker sympathizers arrived in the region.

In general, those of English ancestry settled in the immediate Philadelphia area, while the Irish settled in the Wilmington area, and the Dutch and the Germans, which included Quakers, Baptists and Moravians, settled in the Germantown area. The Townships of Merion, Haverford and Radnor became the home of the Welsh Quakers who had the dream of establishing a *Welsh Tract* as a *Barony*, or *State*, as it were, within the Province, “within which all causes, quarrels, crimes and disputes might be tried and wholly determined by officers, magistrates, and juries of our language.”

In August 1684, Penn returned to England to protect his interests, to defend his Pennsylvania Charter, and to address a border dispute with Lord Baltimore who controlled the territory south of Pennsylvania. In November 1699, Penn returned to his colony, but in November 1701, Penn again had to travel back to England because of political trouble in England.



Below: One of America’s most recognized folk painters, Edward Hicks, painted *Peaceable Kingdom* (c. 1826). A devout Quaker, Hicks admired William Penn’s *Holy Experiment* that resulted in the establishment of religious freedom and self-government in the colony of Pennsylvania. It seemed to be a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy from the Old Testament: “The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” Hicks combined the Biblical menagerie from Isaiah with a scene of Penn purchasing Pennsylvania from the Lenape Indians. Hicks admired Penn’s treaty; the only one between Europeans and Indians that was never broken. The artist saw the civil and religious liberties agreed to between the Lenape and the early English and Welsh colonists as a practical realization of the peaceable kingdom on earth.



Before his departure, on October 28, 1701, Penn signed the *Charter of Privileges for the Province of Pennsylvania and its Territories*, formally establishing a stable frame of government that, for its day, was remarkably liberal. In this document, Penn granted a set of individual rights to the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, codifying the freedom of conscience, specifying that the inhabitants were never to be “molested or prejudiced” for their religious beliefs or practices.

This document planted his *idealistic seed of a nation*: a New World form of democracy. It can be said that his *Charter of Privileges* is the root of America’s free type of government. Among its provisions were: separation of church and state, representative self government, and independent religious choice. This new frame of government remained as the basic law of Pennsylvania until the American Revolution.

Unfortunately, Penn did not have an opportunity to return to Pennsylvania, and ended up functioning as an absentee Governor. He died in July 1718 and is buried in the graveyard adjacent to Jordan’s Friends Meeting House in Buckinghamshire, England.



Below: This wax insignia was used to seal the *Charter of Privileges*. The design is the coat-of-arms of Admiral Sir William Penn, which is three raised cannon-balls on a bar within a shield.



### *Did You Know?*

In 1751, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Penn’s *Charter of Privileges*, the Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly ordered a new bell for the State House. The bell was cast with the inscription “Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof” (Leviticus 25:10). As the official bell of the Pennsylvania House (today called Independence Hall) it rang many times for public announcements, most notably July 8, 1776 when it rang to announce the first public reading of the *Declaration of Independence*.



# The Merioneth Adventurers

Two months before William Penn's arrival, in August 1682, the first Welsh immigrants arrived from the County of Merionethshire in the North of Wales. These *Merioneth Adventurers* came to Pennsylvania on the ship *Lyon*. It came up the Schuylkill River as far as possible, at which point the passengers left the vessel and walked to Pencoyd, on the west bank of the river between present day City Avenue and Righters Ferry Road in Bala Cynwyd.

These early settlers wrote home to their friends expounding on the natural resources of their new homeland. In a letter from Dr. Edward Jones to John ap Thomas, Dr. Jones described their 5,000 acre purchase from Penn in these words. "I hope it will please thee, and the rest who are concerned, for it hath most rare timber. I have not seen the like in all these parts, there is water enough besides. The end of each lot will be on a river, as large or larger than the Dye at Bala, it is called Skool Kill River."

Again, from the early records of our ancestors they described their new homeland in the wilderness as having a *Garden of Eden quality*: "...good land as any of Adam's progeny need ask for. Its surface is undulating but not so much so as to make it undesirable for agricultural purposes... Over its surface, and through its miniature valleys, meander quite a number of streams of good soft water. So numerous are the rivulets that there is not a single farm of any magnitude without one or more fountains of the living crystal as Rebecca went to procure when she met Isaac."

Other chronicles state: "...and the Welsh Friends were hardly forerunners even in the land, for the way had long been made clear for their peaceful entrance into their purchased lands and many were able to be seated at the very first on old 'Indian Fields'..."



A typical sale of land by William Penn was in lots of 5,000 acres. Therefore, Welsh investors or patentees assigned each block of land to a *Company*. There were 7 *Companies* that comprised the *Welsh Tract* and are listed as follows:

Company Number 1: 5,000 acres

John ap Thomas of Llaithgwm of Merionethshire, and Dr. Edward Jones of Bala of Merionethshire

Company Number 2: 5,000 acres

Charles Lloyd of Dolobran of Montgomeryshire, and Margaret Davies, widow of Dolobran

Company Number 3: 2,000 acres

John Bevan of Treverigg of Glamorganshire

Company Number 4: 5,000 acres

John ap John of Ruabon of Denbighshire, and Dr. Thomas Wynne of Caerwys of Flintshire

Company Number 5: 3,000 acres

Lewis ap David of Llandewy Velfry of Pembrokeshire

Company Number 6: 5,000 acres

Richard ap Thomas of Whitford Garne of Flintshire

Company Number 7: 5,000 acres

Richard Davies of Welshpool of Montgomeryshire

N.B. "ap" is Welsh for "son of"

Another 10,000 acres were disposed of by Penn, or his agents, in small lots to actual settlers, and another 10,000 acres were acquired a few years later by Welshmen, making the total purchase of 50,000 acres, the extent of the *Welsh Tract*. The patentee of each *Company* acted as trustee who then re-distributed the appropriate number of acres to each investor.

Map of Welsh Family Origins. These Welsh family names have been arranged according to the area in which they predominate. It has not been feasible to include all Welsh names, but the map is as complete as space permits.



The portion of the map that is shaded bright green identifies the boundaries of Lower Merion. The two shaded areas show the extent of the Welsh Tract as of 1687.

Members of Edward Jones and Company 17 Families from Company Number 1 (bright green portion of the map) were some of the first Celtic speaking Welsh settlers to arrive in this region. The purchase of this land was made on September 16, 1681, and the members of the group were named in the personal papers of John ap Thomas as follows:

- 1,250 acres to John Thomas of Llaithgwm, yeoman
- 625 acres to Hugh Roberts of Kiltalgarth, yeoman
- 312 ½ acres to Edward Jones of Bala, chyrurgeon
- 312 ½ acres to Robert ap Davis of Gwern Evel Ismynydd, yeoman
- 312 ½ acres to Evan Rees of Penmaen, grocer
- 312 ½ acres to John ap Edwards of Nant Leidiog, yeoman
- 312 ½ acres to Edward ap Owen, 'late of Doleyserre', gentleman
- 156 ½ acres to William ap Edward of Ucheldre or Ueneldri, yeoman
- 156 ¼ acres to Edward ap Rees of Kiltalgarth, yeoman
- 156 ¼ acres to William ap John (also known as Jones) of Bettws, yeoman
- 156 ¼ acres to Thomas ap Richard (also known as Prichard) of Nant Leidiog, yeoman
- 156 ¼ acres to Rees ap John ap William (also known as Rees Jones) of Llanglynin, yeoman
- 156 ¼ acres to Thomas Lloyd of Llangower, yeoman
- 156 ¼ acres to Cadwalader Morgan of Gwernevel, yeoman
- 156 ¼ acres to John Watkins of Gwernevel, bathilor
- 156 ¼ acres to Hugh ap John (also known as Jones) of Nant Leidiog, yeoman
- 156 ¼ acres to Gainor Roberts of Kiltalgarth, spinster

#### Glossary of Terms:

*bathilor [sic] bachelor* - a junior member of a trade guild

*chyrurgeon* - a surgeon

*gentleman* - a man of gentle birth, attached to the household of a person of high rank

*grocer* - a wholesale dealer or merchant

*spinster* - one who practices spinning as a regular occupation

*yeoman* - holding a small landed estate, a freeholder of respectable standing

A portion of A Mapp of Ye Improved Part of Pennsylvania in America, Divided into Countyes, Townships and Lotts. Surveyed by Thomas Holme, 1687 with names of the 1681 original purchasers of land from William Penn.



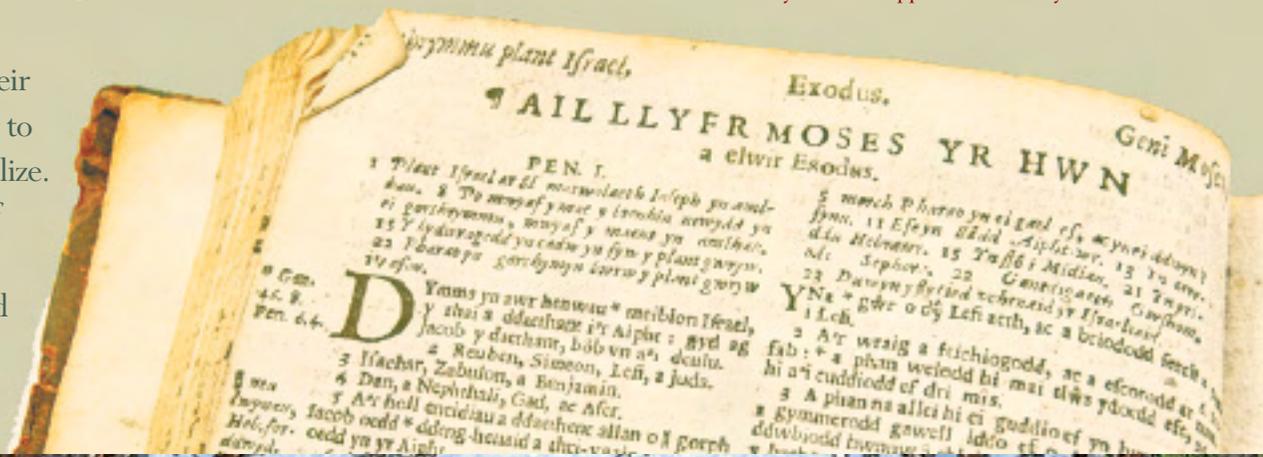
As in many other areas of southeastern Pennsylvania, early settlers in Merion did not group their homesites; rather, Merion's farmhouses were widely scattered on large open tracts. This dispersed pattern found in much of Pennsylvania showed that settlers had little to fear from the Indians.

After getting settled on their new land, the Religious Society of Friends' first priority was to establish a place of worship. They met in private homes in the immediate area until a log cabin was built, some 200 feet east of the present Merion Friends Meetinghouse. Next, to establish homesteads, these Welsh Quakers built plantations, clearing forests and preparing the fields for farming.

The dream of an independent *Welsh Barony*, where their plantations were laid out adjacent to each other so as to constitute a separate settlement, did not fully materialize. Instead, the Welsh settlers became an integral part of the general community, and in 1700, the municipal boundaries were re-drawn and the area was identified as Merion, Haverford and Radnor Townships.

Below: The family bible belonging to John Roberts c. 1680's. Printed in Welsh, it is shown open to the *Book of Exodus*. John Roberts was from the parish of Llangian in the County of Caernarvonshire, Wales. He was a member of Richard Davies' Land Patent (Company Number 7) and arrived here in November, 1683 on the ship *Morning Star*. His 150 acres, a relatively long narrow strip of land, ran from the Schuylkill River along what became City Avenue to Conshohocken State Road. By trade, John was a Maltster who grew barley to make malt which was used to brew beer. From this original parcel of land grew *Pencoyd Farms*, the first foothold of what is today Lower Merion.

Bottom: Upon their arrival, the early settlers constructed temporary shelters. This sketch depicts a sod house located on the banks of the Schuylkill River opposite the Manayunk area.



# *Three Lower Merion Landmarks*

The Merion Friends Meetinghouse is located at 615 Montgomery Avenue in Merion. It stands at the corner of Montgomery Avenue and Meetinghouse Lane, reminding all who pass that religious freedom and tolerance remain at the foundation of our Commonwealth. It was located beside a well traveled Indian path that the colonists also used to link the Welsh farms to Philadelphia. Construction of the Meetinghouse began in 1695 and was completed by 1714. Considering the primitive environment of the colony and the limited availability of skilled craftsmen, the Meetinghouse's sturdy stone construction and refined architectural elements surely must have set it apart.

The Meetinghouse and the adjacent Burial Grounds are registered on the U.S. Department of Interior's *National Register of Historic Places* as a National Landmark and are also part of a local Historic District. This historic site has been in continuous use for over 300 years and has served as the center of religious and social life for the Religious Society of Friends. They remain an active member of the community and open their doors to visitors, conduct tours and offer educational programs to the general public.



## *Merion Meetinghouse*



Charter of Privileges for the Province of Pennsylvania and its Territories, 1701, Article I declares our religious freedom.

*"Because no People can be truly happy, though under the greatest Enjoyment of Civil Liberties, if abridged of the Freedom of their Consciences, as to their Religious Profession and Worship.... I do hereby grant and declare That no Person or Persons, inhabiting in this Province or Territories, who shall confess and acknowledge One almighty God, the Creator, Upholder and Ruler of the World; and profess him or themselves obliged to live quietly under the Civil Government, shall be in any Case molested or prejudiced, in his or their Person or Estate, because of his or their conscientious Persuasion or Practice, nor be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious Worship, Place or Ministry, contrary to his or their Mind, or to do or suffer any other Act or Thing, contrary to their religious Persuasion."*

*W. Penn*

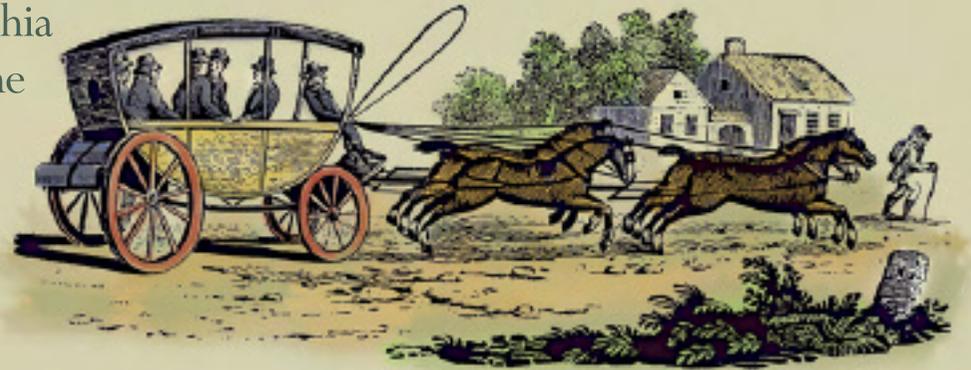


Above: View showing the Burial Grounds. Since 1684, this site has been the final resting place of Quakers, and for all people who were in need, including Native Americans. Friends have traditionally expressed their commitment to simplicity and the equality of all persons by discouraging the use of elaborate grave markers. Graves are usually marked with plain stones bearing only the name and the birth and death dates of the deceased. The site is still an active burial ground and a beautiful and historic place of respite.

Below: Interior view showing the Principle Meeting Room. Based on a culture and architecture of simplicity, Quakers meet in silent expectancy of shared stillness. If someone feels compelled to speak, the silence will be broken. From the tiered facing benches, two of the members will shake hands, signaling the end of worship. In the loft above, school was held for boys and girls including Lenape children. William Penn attended meeting at Merion as did many other noted men from the colony. The interior reflects few changes since the last major renovation in 1829.



The General Wayne Inn, originally named the *The William Penn Inn*, is another landmark building. Nestled next to the Merion Friends Meetinghouse, it is located at 625 Montgomery Avenue in Merion. For more than 300 years, it has served as a gathering spot for the community, a passenger stop for travelers on stage coaches and later, on the Philadelphia and Columbia Railway. It served Lower Merion as the place where the township supervisors held their business meetings, where in 1834, community leaders met and established our public school system, and the community came to vote. It also was a hotel and Post Office.



It has a double distinction of being listed on the U.S. Department of Interior's *National Register of Historic Places* and is part of a local Historic District. In 2006, the Inn went through a remarkable transition from a public restaurant to the new home of *Chabad Lubavitch of the Main Line*, an innovative and creative resource for the entire Jewish community. This 300 year old structure of American tradition is another example of the *Holy Experiment*, by housing a dynamic expression of the 3300 year old Jewish tradition.

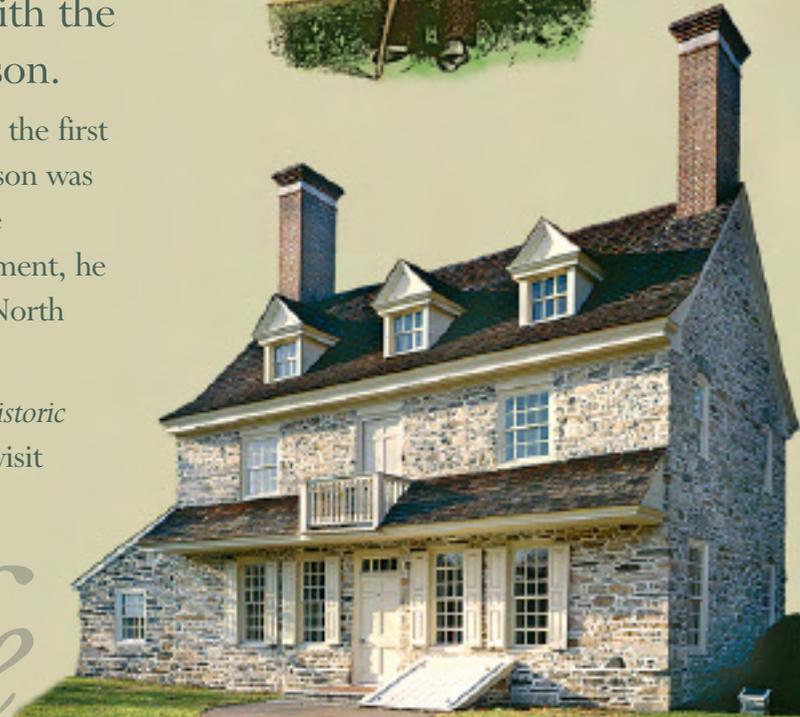
## General Wayne Inn



Harriton House is located at 500 Harriton Road in Bryn Mawr and was originally a 700 acre plantation. Construction began in 1704 by Welsh Quaker Rowland Ellis who named it *Bryn Mawr*, meaning *High Hill*. The name change of the house and estate came in 1719 with the sale of the property to Maryland tobacco planter Richard Harrison.

The next owner was Charles Thomson, Harriton's most famous occupant. Thomson was the first and only Secretary to the Continental and Confederation Congresses. In addition, Thomson was the designer of the Great Seal of the United States as well as the man who attested to the Declaration of Independence as an official resolution of Congress. Also, during his retirement, he provided the first translation of the Bible from Greek to English to be published on the North American continent.

Harriton House is registered on the U.S. Department of Interior's *National Register of Historic Places*. Today it is administered by the Harriton Association and is open to the public to visit and to learn about our local and national heritage.



# Harriton House



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Gerald A. Francis	Author
Denise H. Francis	Researcher
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The Lower Merion Academy  
506 Bryn Mawr Avenue  
P.O. Box 2602  
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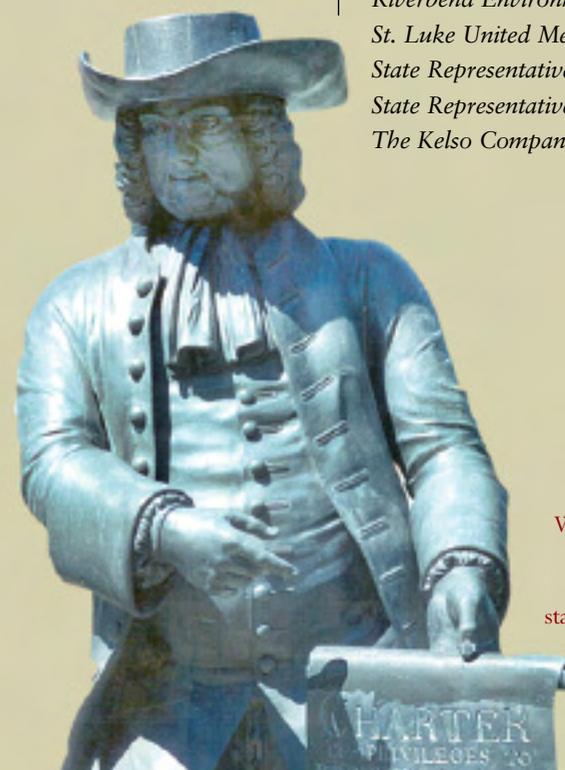
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100 Conway Avenue  
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*William Penn holding the Charter of Privileges.*  
The artist is unknown. John Penn, William Penn's grandson discovered this statue in a London antique shop and donated it to the Pennsylvania Hospital in 1804. It's located on the front lawn of the Pine Building at 8th and Spruce Streets.

# Art Credits

Francis Place, *Portrait of William Penn*  
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



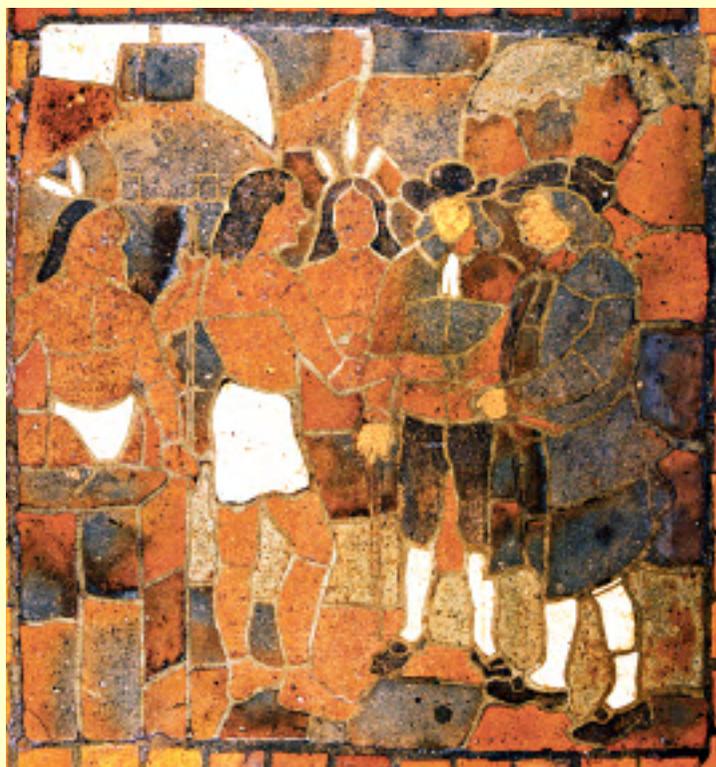
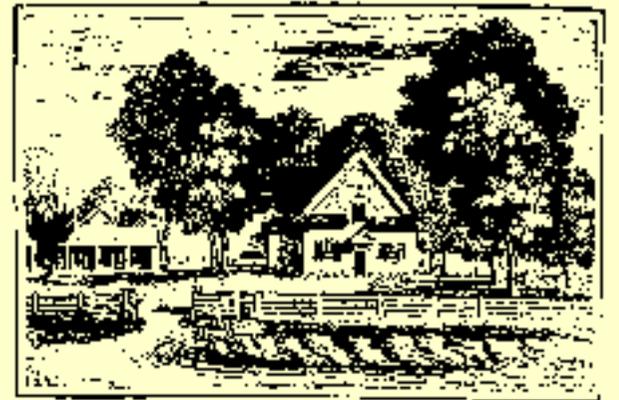
CELEBRATING WILLIAM PENN'S VISION AND THE FIRST WELSH SETTLEMENT IN LOWER MERION AND NARBERTH 🍀 1682-2007

**A Note from the Editorial Staff** Since this community is blessed with an amazing and rich heritage, we wanted to share with you those events that shaped the foundation of this area of Pennsylvania and our new nation as we celebrate our 325th anniversary. To accomplish this task, we decided to publish this booklet that employed a dual editorial perspective of the events. As you read through the text, we tell the story by many quotes from William Penn and from our own Welsh Quaker immigrants. Parallel to the story, their words and thoughts have been brought to life by presenting illustrations drawn by some of our local and regional artists that are displayed in many of our public buildings. The result is this beautiful and colorful visual history that chronicles the early settlers to Lower Merion and Narberth. We hope that you enjoyed our tribute and that we have re-affirmed the fact that we live in a special place *not only then but also now*.

The *Red Dragon* has been recognized as the emblem of Wales for well over a thousand years.



Etching of the *Merion Meetinghouse*, c. 1830,  
The Lower Merion Historical Society



Henry Chapman Mercer, *Penn's Treaty*  
Brian Hunt & Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee.

*William Penn's Seal* The Lower Merion Historical Society, photograph by Max Buten, Penn Valley.



*Welsh Bible*  
The Lower Merion Historical Society, Photograph by Jesse Spacco, Philadelphia.



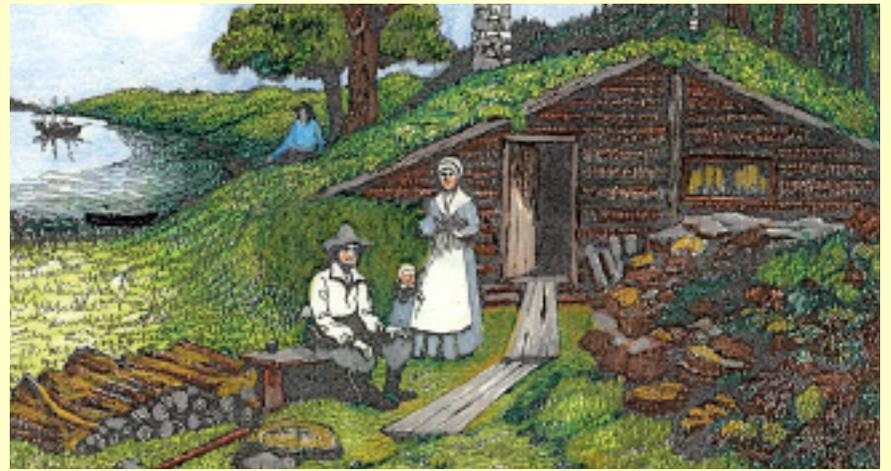
*Wampum Belt* The Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection, Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia.



Edward Hicks, *Peaceable Kingdom*  
Philadelphia Museum of Art: Bequest of Charles C. Willis, 1956.



*William Penn Statue on Philadelphia City Hall  
photograph by Joseph S. Gracie, Bala Cynwyd.*



*Sod House sketch by John B. Satterthwaite, Narberth.*



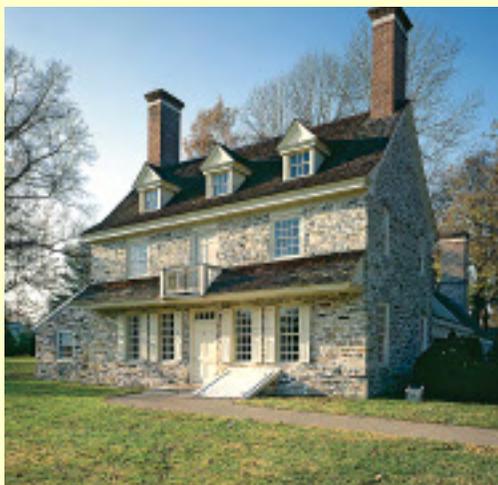
*Merion Meeting's Burial Grounds  
photographs by John Maki, Penn Valley.*



*Holmes Map Showing the Boundaries of the Welsh Tract The Lower Merion Historical Society, scanned by Andrew Amsterdam, Merion Park.*

*Map of Wales  
The Lower Merion Historical Society,  
scanned by Andrew Amsterdam, Merion Park.*

*Violet Oakley, Penn's Vision Brian Hunt & Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee.*



*Harriton House  
photographs by Tom Crane Photography, Inc., Bryn Mawr.*

*Photograph of General Wayne Inn, c. 1904 Drew Johnson, Narberth.*

*William Penn's Signature Merion Meeting's Religious Society of Friends.*



*Merion Meeting's Principle Meeting Room  
photograph by John Maki, Penn Valley.*

