

## *From William Penn's arrival to Limerick Township*

(We refer to several historic references to compile this article)

### *First Purchasers of Pennsylvania*

By Matthew A. Zimmerman

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<https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/first-purchasers-of-pennsylvania/>

William Penn received a generous land charter from King Charles II of England to create a Quaker settlement in North America. Upon receiving his grant for Pennsylvania in March 1681, William Penn (1644-1718) immediately set about attracting investors and settlers. To pay expenses and realize a profit from his enterprise, Penn had to sell land. The "First Purchasers" who responded to his promotional tracts provided essential economic support for Penn's "Holy Experiment."



Penn sought to attract individuals who would settle the colony, or send servants or tenants to do so, and who had the capital or expertise to establish commercial and agricultural foundations for the province. Penn's first promotional tract, *Some Account of the Province of Pennsylvania*, set out the terms for obtaining land and promised to clear all Indian titles. In July 1681, he refined these terms in the document titled "Conditions or Concessions," issued during a meeting with several First Purchasers.

### *Three Hundred Purchasers*

Within four months of issuing the "Conditions or Concessions," Penn sold more than 300,000 acres to about 300 purchasers, and sales continued assiduously. Although Penn did not earn as much as he expected from these First Purchasers, they provided the project with a solid foundation.

In this agreement, Penn promised to reserve ten acres of land in Philadelphia for each 500 acres purchased, planning a "greene country towne" that would extend for miles along the Delaware River. In order to promote the settlement of the colony and hinder speculation, Penn stipulated that purchasers seeking 1,000 acres or more would have to settle a family on each 1,000 acre lot within three years. He also encouraged purchasers to bring servants by offering a bonus of fifty acres, with an annual quitrent (rent due to Penn) of four shillings, for each servant settled in the colony. Upon completion of the term of service, each servant would receive fifty acres at an annual quitrent of two shillings.

This agreement proved quite effective. Three key groups of investors immediately involved themselves in the project. In 1681, a group of Welsh Quakers purchased a 30,000-acre tract in the hopes of ensuring their religious freedom and preserving their language, customs, and laws. Settling in the area of Merion, Bryn Mawr, and Haverford, these settlers began arriving in advance of the proprietor. Penn granted the Free Society of Traders 20,000 acres and three seats on the Provincial Council in exchange for its investment in developing the province's economy. Composed of Quakers and other wealthy merchants, landowners, and Penn's personal contacts, this group fell into bankruptcy within a couple of years. In 1683, the Frankfort Land Company, a group of German investors represented by Daniel Francis Pastorius (1651-c. 1720), received 15,000 acres. Since the members of this group did not emigrate, thirteen Quaker families acquired its acreage and settled under the guidance of Pastorius.

### *Penn and the Leni Lenape*

<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/essays/william-penn-and-the-founding-of-pennsylvania>

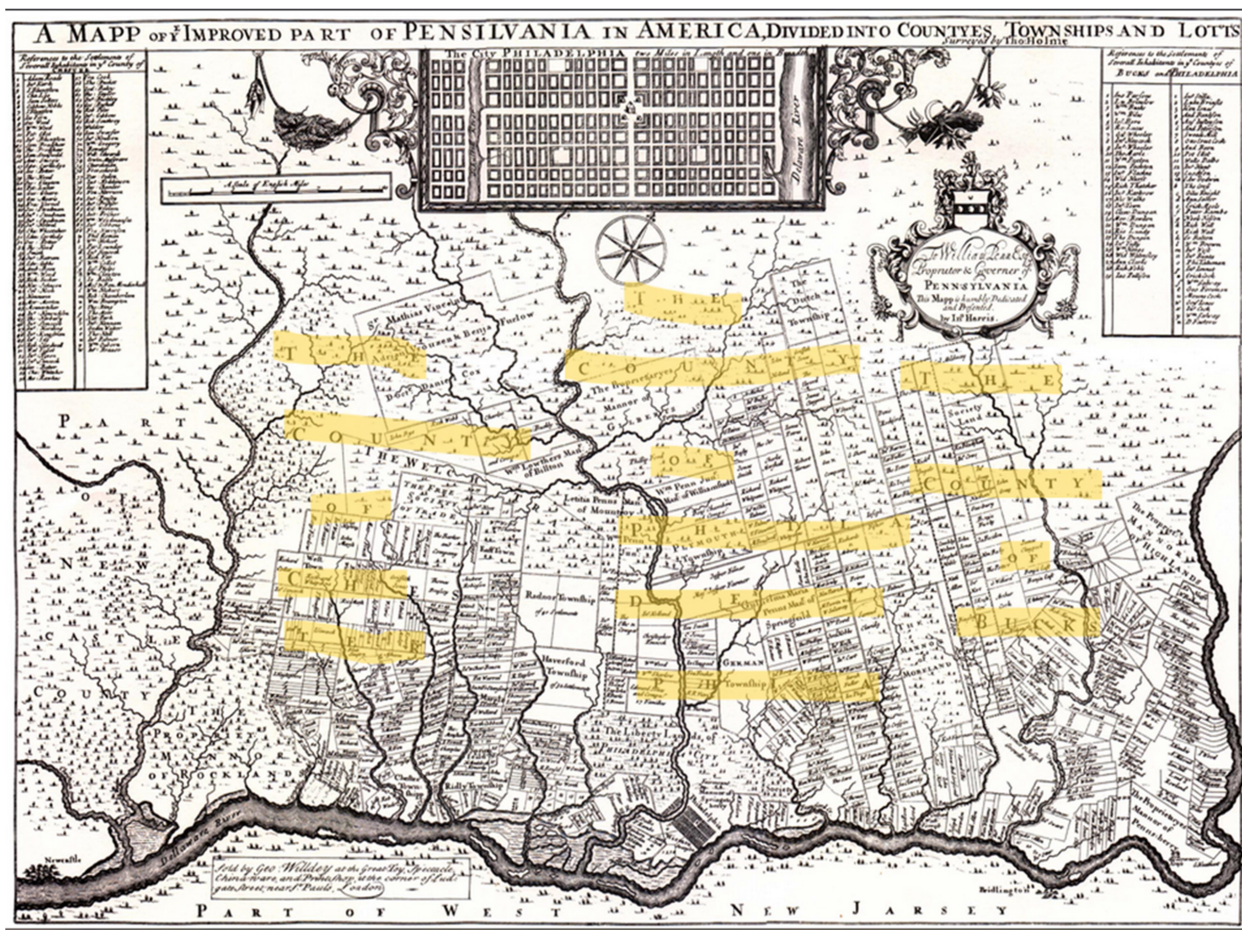
As he disembarked from his ship onto the western shore of the Delaware River in 1682, William Penn surveyed the green country in front of him. The thirty-eight-year-old Englishman could not help

contrasting this strange, expansive land with memories of the cramped prison cell he had occupied twenty years earlier back in England.

Penn was part of a religious sect known as the Society of Friends. Its members were called “Quakers” by their enemies because their intense meetings sometimes led members to shake in fits of spiritual fervor. During the 1660s, Englishmen harshly persecuted the Quakers, whom they considered to be dangerous radicals because of their teachings on social and religious equality. Even though he was an English aristocrat, the young Penn had been imprisoned for his illegal preaching and publication of Quaker doctrines. As a result, he became an ardent activist for religious freedom. During the 1670s, he began to dream of a colony where Quakers – and all kinds of Christians – would be free to worship as they saw fit. This dream became a reality when King Charles II offered him title to a large expanse of land in the New World to pay off a substantial debt the crown owed to Penn’s family. Now, in 1682, Penn finally stood on the shores of the colony of Pennsylvania.

*Map of the Improved Part of the Province of Pennsylvania in America (1687)*  
Thomas Holme (1624-95),

Penn’s surveyor general, in his delineated lands taken up by First Purchasers during the first years after settlement in the region that became Philadelphia, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and southern Bucks Counties.



**Thomas Holme’s 1687 map of Pennsylvania shows the tracts of land acquired by the First Purchasers. (Library Company of Philadelphia)**

While Penn’s fellow Englishmen comprised most of the First Purchasers, his advertising efforts in continental Europe also attracted individual investors from Germany, Holland, and France. Within England, most of the First Purchasers resided in the areas around London and Bristol, where the Society of Friends had met with considerable missionary success and Penn was well known. Quakers of various economic backgrounds took advantage of the opportunity that he created to worship free of the persecution persistent in England. While those purchasing larger tracts hailed from the Quaker mercantile elite, Penn’s offerings to sell plots as small as 125 acres attracted people of more humble circumstances.

The majority of the First Purchasers came from the urban middling ranks of English society, primarily artisans and shopkeepers. These individuals, with entrepreneurial ambitions, played a vital role in developing Philadelphia as a major commercial center. That at least one-half of the First Purchasers eventually settled in Pennsylvania also contributed significantly to the speedy establishment and

development of the colony. Although Penn would face multiple financial challenges, from nonpayment by some purchasers and refusal of settlers to pay quitrents, to inflated demands by his business agent Philip Ford (c. 1631-1702) for payment of debts, the First Purchasers supplied the impetus needed to get the "Holy Experiment" started.

### *Religious Freedom*

<https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/first-purchasers-of-pennsylvania/>

Penn had high hopes that the colony would enjoy religious freedom, as well as peace with the Lenni Lenapes and other American Indians who had lived in this land for centuries. Like all Quakers, he was a pacifist, and he was adamant that his new colony would avoid the bloodshed and war between Indians and other English colonists that had occurred in New England and Virginia. One year before his trip across the Atlantic Ocean, Penn had written a letter to the "Kings of the Indians," explaining that he was coming to settle in their land. He regretted the "unkindness and injustice" that Indians had experienced from other Europeans and promised that Pennsylvania would be different. Because God commanded his people to love others, his colony would treat the Indians with honesty, fairness, and peace. Having arrived, Penn worked on bringing his plans to fruition. The Quakers refused to take any land unless the Indians agreed to it. During the first couple of years, Penn purchased land from the Lenape and Susquehannock leaders, including large areas along the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers. As he stood side by side with the Indian leaders and signed the purchase contracts, he may have felt a measure of pride that his land was being honestly bought rather than stolen from the Indians. However, he did not realize that these peaceful transactions were being aided by forces beyond his control. Since Europeans had arrived in the New World, disease and war had reduced the Lenni Lenapes to a mere five thousand people. Their alliance with the English thus provided much-needed protection from their rivals, the Iroquois League, the most powerful Indian alliance in the region, and contributed to their willingness to sell their land.

### *William Penn Method of Townships*

"The Township: The Community of the Rural Pennsylvanian." Lucy Stimler

<https://journals.psu.edu/pmhb/article/view/43792/43513>

*The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*. Simler, Lucy. 106 (January 1982): 41-68.

Participation in the English mercantile system required an efficient organization of resources, a good highway system, and a large compactly settled population. Orderly settlement by townships would facilitate the creation of such conditions.

Penn instructed the surveyor general's office to lay out the acres acquired by settlers according to the method of townships. That is, he wanted the acres taken up by purchase, rent, or gift laid out and surveyed in a series of regular contiguous townships, beginning at the Delaware River and progressing along the boundaries of Philadelphia and its environs and then outward until all the area available for settlement was allotted. Each township supposedly contained approximately five thousand acres, distributed among at least ten families. For every five hundred acres in the township at least one family was to be seated, although families could take up less than the five hundred acres. Settlers who purchased a full five thousand acres could have them surveyed as a township but within one of the township blocks in line for settlement.

(Limerick Township is 22.8 square miles to acres or 14,592 acres)

In his directives, William Penn adhered firmly to this method of townships or, as he referred to it on occasion, to "the regulation of the Country": one family for every five hundred acres surveyed, five thousand acres to a township. The rule applied to individual purchasers of two hundred acres or of one thousand acres, to adventurers or to ethnic groups who hoped to establish semi-autonomous units within the colony. The person who purchased and then requested the survey of a tract committed himself to the seating and improvement of that land at the rate of five hundred acres per family. Assuming the buyer intended to settle on part of his tract, this meant that for every acre over five hundred he was obliged to provide additional settlers according to the regulation of the province.

There was an effort to survey and lay out the land of the early purchasers in accordance with Penn's directives. If the three original counties (Chester, Philadelphia, and Bucks) were settled at approximately the same rate, Penn's estimate that by August, 1684, at least fifty townships had been laid out can be

confirmed for Chester County by the court records (references to the early townships in these records), and by the 1693 tax schedules.

By 1700, Penn had largely abandoned the method of townships. Debts, a lack of control over the growing population, and the Assembly's pressure made him willing to sell on the buyer's terms.

### *Purchasing Land*

#### ***John Boone (1638-1699) and Frances Morton of Hullock & Hagg, Yorkshire***

William Brooke Fetters

For his money, the purchaser of land from William Penn received a warrant confirming his right to a specific number of acres. The purchaser, upon arrival in America, had to select a place of settlement on land that was not already owned (or "taken up") by earlier settlers. Once the desired location had been identified, a warrant would be issued by Penn to the Surveyor-General to survey the set quantity of acres. The survey then would be made and returned to Penn's land office. Upon the receipt of this survey return, the purchaser could apply to obtain a patent when he could afford to pay the fee.

Even though the land was sold it was still subject to an annual fee to be paid to Penn.

### *The Township Grows*

#### ***Limerick Township: A Journey Through Time 1699-1987***

by Muriel E. Lichtenwalner

The earliest known office holder in Limerick Township was Matthew Brooke, appointed by the county commissioners in February, 1718 as tax collector for "Manatawny." He covered a wide area of sparsely settled territory extending much farther than the Township of Limerick, not yet in existence.

"Manatawny" was not the name of a township, but a designation given to northwestern section of what would later become Montgomery County and the southeastern part of Berks County, prior to the division of the area into townships.

Until 1784, when Montgomery County was established, all its territory was included in Philadelphia County, with the City of Philadelphia as the county seat. Residents of Limerick had to travel to Philadelphia to record their deeds, probate wills, take out letters of administration, file petitions in the Court of Quarter Sessions, open roads, obtain tavern licenses, and all other purposes.

Limerick appears to have been considered unofficially as a township some years before the designation went on record. Surveys made by David Powell in 1700 in connection with land purchases referred to the land as "situate in the Township of Limerick."

Of the several original land purchasers, only John Brooke intended to establish his home here. The others appear to have been land speculators. Brooke purchased a rectangular tract of land containing 750 acres from William Penn by "lease and release" dated March 17 and 18, 1698. This land was in the central part of the present Limerick Township on both sides of the "Great Road." About 200 acres of this tract probably were in area surrounding the township. Brooke did not live to see his new property. The land went to his five children in 1700.

Though it may have been considered a township, it was necessary to have the boundaries made a matter of record. A petition was filed in Philadelphia in March of 1726, addressed to the Justices of the Peace of the Court of Quarter Sessions for the City and County of Philadelphia. It cited "Lymmerick Township as "not yet Regularly Limited upon Record" and prayed "that our Township may be Recorded within such Bounds of Limits or according to a scheme as your Petitioners are Ready to Produce in Court By the name of Limerick Township."

The original petition is in City Hall, Philadelphia and a copy is in the Limerick township Municipal Building, along with a sketch of the new township's territory.

The petition was filed by eleven inhabitants of the new township, including John Kendall, Owen Evans, Jonathan Brooke, William Evans (2nd), and Henerich Piettes. The last-named signer was also known as Hendrick Peters, who advertised himself as a maker and dealer in blue dyes.

A formal application was made at the June 1726 Sessions of Court to have the name of the township recorded, since it had been "duly formed" several years before.

The survey of boundaries prepared for the petition reads: "beginning at a certain white oake on Scullkill running thence along Furler Lind (land) northeast to a certain black oake four miles and half; thence south east along Limerick to a corner line thence George Burson head Lind thence along Burson upper land southeast down to Scullkill to a hickori tree by Scullkill five and a half; and on the southwest by the River Scullkill."

When Limerick Township was formally established in 1726, none of the townships which later formed its boundaries were yet in existence. On June 4, 1879 "Royer's Ford" was incorporated as a borough and taken out of Limerick Township. With this one change, the boundaries were listed in Bean's *History of Montgomery County*, 1884, as: "northeast by Frederick, southeast by Perkiomen and Upper Providence south by the borough of Royer's Ford, Southwest by the river Schuylkill, west by Pottsgrove and northwest by New Hanover." The township was described as having an area of about fourteen thousand acres, with a breadth of four and a half miles and its greatest length nearly five miles.

*Montgomery County the First hundred years*

Chapter LIX.

By Wm. J. Buck.

Limerick Township

At March Sessions, 1709, a petition was sent from John Henry Sprogell, who then resided below the present Pottstown, and also signed by Mounce Jones and others, for the laying out of a road from Edward Lane's to Manatawny. The court accordingly ordered it to be speedily opened, and it is the same known as the Reading road, commencing, at the Perkiomen Creek.

Limerick -so called after a city and county in Ireland- was formed into a township at least as early as 1722. Matthew Brooke, who evidently then resided here, was appointed by the county commissioner, in February, 1718, collector of taxes for "Manatawny," then embracing a considerable extent of thinly-settled territory. **Application was made at June Sessions of court, 1726**, to have the same recorded on account of its having been duly formed several years before as "the township of Limerick."

Compiled by Martin Witte April 8, 2024