



# Haverford Township Historical Society



## WELSH QUAKER SETTLERS IN HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP

By Richard D. Kerr

In 1681 William Penn was granted, by King Charles II of England, control of a New World territory in North America. The British Crown owed a debt to Admiral Penn, Penn's late father. William had also joined the Society of Friends, becoming a "Quaker" and adopting the principles espoused by George Fox. At this time state and religion were strongly aligned in England and European countries alike. The growing number of Protestant sects created an increase in religious diversity, which served to undermine the existing patterns of church and state. People who practiced "unconforming" faiths were easily seen as not being loyal to their country and its royalty.

The Quakers in particular were seen as troublesome. Under their principles, they would not swear an oath of loyalty to anyone but God. Thus, in many eyes they seemed disloyal to the King. They could be, and were, easily persecuted by demanding such an oath, and upon refusal imprisoning them and taking their possessions or burning their homes. This was an especially common situation in the Quaker "hotbed" of Wales, which was already viewed as an unsubmitive region. The Welsh Quakers, believing in non-violence and tolerance, took the punishment but kept meticulous written records of the "sufferings" which were imposed on them.

Despite being a Quaker himself, William Penn was a friend of King Charles II. Unlike his predecessors, Charles believed in, and tried to advocate for, religious tolerance in England, but the idea faced stiff opposition in Parliament. His friend Penn was articulate and charming, and had mastered the art of diplomacy. He agreed to the granting of a "proprietaryship" to Penn for a colony in America as a positive solution for both parties. The Quakers, along with many other groups, were willing to give up all that they knew and sail across an ocean to an unknown wilderness, rather than continue to endure the continuing persecution. For the King, this action settled the outstanding debt to Penn's family, gave religious dissidents a new opportunity an ocean away, and yet kept them within his kingdom at the same time.

Penn's plan for this new colony, which he termed a "Holy Experiment," was a quirky mix of entrepreneurial practicality and philosophical experiment, adhering to Quaker tenets. He proposed to offer a place where all could practice their own religious beliefs, living side-by-side and exercising tolerance of each other. In this regard his plan was different than earlier ones, such as the Puritans at Plymouth. They wanted religious freedom, but only for them to practice their own religion, and those whom the elders decided were not adhering to their strict principles were banished. Penn's championing of coexistence and tolerance added a critical pillar to the principles that came to define the ideals of the later "American" nation. King Charles II dubbed his new colony "Pennsylvania," meaning Penn's Woods. Penn, practicing Quaker humility and being uncomfortable with the name, deftly transformed it into a tribute to his father, the admiral, rather than himself.

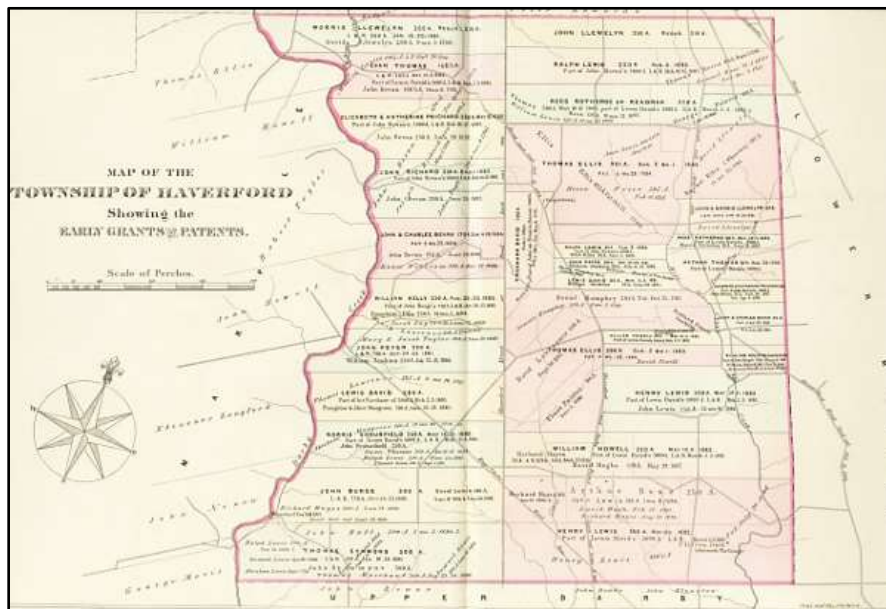
To give his concept the best chance of succeeding, Penn had to "market" his plan, which he did in a number of countries and languages. He needed to sell prodigious amounts of real estate to ensure the

financial stability of his “Experiment” as well as to be personally successful himself. At the same time, he needed to convince enough people to make the voyage to Pennsylvania to establish a critical mass which would help ensure the sustainability and ultimate success of the colony.

Early Pennsylvania was divided into six counties. North to south they were Bucks, Philadelphia, Chester, New Castle, Kent, and Sussex. (The latter three “Southern Counties” were eventually spun off to become the colony of Delaware.) William Penn established the city of Philadelphia north of the then-existing Swedish-founded colony at Upland (now the city of Chester) and bounded by the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers for availability of water and port facilities.

Penn’s suffering Welsh Quaker acquaintances were quick to sign on to the scheme. To avoid being bogged down too much in administration, Penn sold land in minimum lots of 5,000 acres. He encouraged “companies of adventurers” to group together to make purchases. One person, sometimes more, would take the lead and handle the purchase; then each group would divide the land up among themselves. The Welsh Quakers ended up forming eight such “companies” buying a total of 40,000 acres. Their plan, on which they believed they had Penn’s approval and cooperation, was to purchase and own a contiguous body of land that size. It would be run by the Welsh as a sub-government under Penn’s overall governance, using their language, cultural traditions and beliefs as a basis. Their plan became known as the “Welsh Tract” or “Welsh Barony.” It included all of the “townships” of Haverford and Radnor that Penn created, plus portions of other Chester County townships (Delaware County was carved out of Chester County in 1789, about a century later), as well as part of the Merion township (not yet split into Upper Merion and Lower Merion).

In 1682 and 1683, 23 ship voyages carried the original Welsh Settlers, and Penn himself, to Pennsylvania. The large properties in Haverford Township were cleverly and practically laid out. The township was essentially a rectangular shape, with Darby Creek being the western edge and Cobb’s Creek being within, and generally parallel to, the eastern boundary. A “Haverford Road” was laid out (but ultimately not built) straight down the center, with large properties layered in horizontal slabs on the map and generally extending from the road westward to Darby or eastward to Cobb’s. In this way, most property owners were provided with access to a road and to water.



Map of Haverford Township by Thomas Hunter, published by Benjamin H. Smith in 1882. (HTHS collection)

So began the Township of Haverford. The initial priorities of the settlers were offloading from the ships, getting from the river edges back into the township, finding sustenance, creating shelter, and gathering at Quaker meetings for worship. These had to be achieved with just the few critical things they could bring with them on the crowded ships: some cooking pots and implements, tool heads for farming and construction (the handles could be fashioned from native timber and attached once here), basic clothing, and perhaps a Bible or treasured memento from back home. Nothing supplementary could be bought in Philadelphia, since that settlement, too, was largely just a plan on paper. Today, one can only imagine how hard a period this must have been, especially making it through the initial winter seasons.

Exact details of the early Welsh Quaker settlement of Pennsylvania are not available in any complete form; instead, scattered records and insights exist, leading to the possibility of misinterpretation. Close examination will show that not everyone who bought land from Penn made the voyage to America to be a “settler.” In addition, the manifest lists for Penn’s ships are far from complete, despite much subsequent research by historians. Likewise, some of the early written source records from that time, incompletely referenced by George Smith in his pioneering 1862 history of Delaware County, seem to have vanished since his time, so Smith’s mentions are the most complete record that we now have. One such possible misinterpretation is the commonly repeated statement that the first three settlers of Haverford Township were Lewis David, Henry Lewis and William Howell. This has been repeated since Smith wrote, (page 148) “But three settlements were made in Haverford in 1682 -- Lewis David, Henry Lewis and William Howell.” Yet in the same book (page 564) he also wrote, “Humphrey, Daniel ... came in 1862 and settled in Haverford Township.” A more careful reading reveals that the three “first settler” names came from a list, compiled retrospectively, of early settlers who had served as township officials. Since it can be presumed that not everyone served as an official, and it is known that more than these three men were present in 1682, a better statement is that “Lewis David, Henry Lewis and William Howell *are known to be among* the first settlers” of Haverford Township.



*The Lawrence Cabin, shown as preserved today, stood along Darby Creek by at least 1709. (HTHS Collection)*



As lands were cleared, houses were built, and new arrivals added to the small population during those early years, the Welsh Quakers suffered a great disappointment in the erosion of their concept of a self-contained “Welsh Tract.” A land survey to define the border between Philadelphia and Chester County split Merion apart from Haverford and Radnor, dividing the governance of their desired “barony.” The cohesiveness they sought was further damaged by the settlement of non-Quakers, English and others within their territory among them. Their protests against these developments went unanswered. Early on, America’s enduring philosophical tension between “a place just like the old country, but better” and “a melting pot, open to all” emerged at this local level. The Friends had to eventually concede to the evolving reality and assume roles within a larger and more diverse governmental construct.

The early settlers in Haverford Township continued the hard work of building a new life for themselves over the following decades. Crops and livestock became more numerous, stone houses started to replace log cabins, rudimentary roads – rough paths, really, for walking or using a horse – took shape, as did water-powered grist- and saw-mills to support the growing rural agricultural economy. While there were the usual trials and tribulations of daily life, the course of progress was generally positive and even-keeled, until successive monarchs and changing policies in England eventually brought forth a growing level of dissatisfaction in the American colonies.

### ***Explore for More...* Welsh Quaker Settlers in Haverford**

Scan the list of Penn’s ships and known early settlers “approved” by the Welcome Society of Pennsylvania (named for the ship on which William Penn came to America) as ancestors for membership eligibility:

<https://www.welcomesociety.org/ancestors.html>

Read Charles Henry Browning’s 1912 book *Welsh Settlement of Pennsylvania*:

[https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=i\\_cMAAAAYAAJ](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=i_cMAAAAYAAJ)

If you wish, check the details of Haverford Township’s early settlement in local historian George Smith’s 1862 work, *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania*:

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/History\\_of\\_Delaware\\_County\\_Pennsylvania/99G\\_XONW654C](https://www.google.com/books/edition/History_of_Delaware_County_Pennsylvania/99G_XONW654C)

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