

Colonial Heroes: William Penn (1644-1718)

William Penn's family had high hopes for him that had almost nothing to do with the New World. Born in London, Penn attended some of the most prestigious schools in the country. His father believed his son would go on to serve an important role in the court of King Charles II. Instead, Penn ended up traveling for work in England. In 1677 he climbed aboard a ship, his eyes set on a large piece of land that would later be called Pennsylvania.

Like many of the early colonists, Penn had a reason for leaving the country of his birth to live an unknown future. Back in England, he and his friends were faced religious persecution for being Quakers, a branch of Christianity that was looked down upon at the time. When he reached the New World, Penn set about creating a colony that would serve both as a refuge for Quakers and a haven for anyone who faced religious persecution. He believed all people deserved the right to worship in any way they pleased. That belief would go on to impact many of the founding fathers of the United States.

While his life was never easy, defying his often unpopular values, Penn made an indelible and remarkably valuable mark on the landscape of colonial America.

Why did Penn decide to sail to the New World?

Do you think Penn's family was happy with the life he made for himself?

Why do you think Penn's values were often so unpopular both in England and colonial America?

