

AFTERWORD

JAMES H. MERRELL

Twenty-five years ago Douglas Greenberg, surveying scholarship on the Middle Colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, reported that the Native peoples of that region were forgotten folk. In colonial times, “Indians prompted far more curiosity among their white contemporaries,” Greenberg observed, “than they have among later historians.” Concluding that “there is much yet to be done in this field,” he hoped that “perhaps . . . the next generation of Middle Colonies specialists” would “pursue the Indian response to European colonization more systematically than their predecessors have.”¹

It has taken more than one scholarly generation, but the essays in this volume herald the arrival of that hoped-for flock of historians, hard at work on the Native experience in and around “Penn’s Woods.” Given the riches they have found, it is surprising that it has taken so long for scholars in any numbers to start poking around those parts. True, they are not the first to have a look. In the early twentieth century, Charles A. Hanna and C. Hale Sipe compiled a wealth of information on area Natives, albeit information suffused with the prejudices and myopia of that time.² Around midcentury, Paul A. W. Wallace and his son Anthony F. C. Wallace wrote more sophisticated, more sensitive studies of the Pennsylvania frontier.³ In more recent times, Francis Jennings published classic accounts of diplo-



macy between Natives and colonists, accounts in which Pennsylvania-Indian relations figured largely.⁴ Nonetheless, it seems fair to say that Penn's Woods has remained relatively unexplored. Over the past thirty years, students of the Indian experience during the colonial era have ranged far and wide, from Canada through New England to Iroquoia, from the Chesapeake through Carolina to Florida, even leaping the Appalachians to explore the Great Lakes, Louisiana, and the Southwest. Yet this omnivorous scholarly curiosity somehow passed right by Pennsylvania. It is necessary, and instructive, to ask why.

Some of the neglect is a matter of what might be called historical timing. Pennsylvania, founded in 1682, was second to last of the English provinces planted in North America. (That colonies of Finns, Swedes, and Dutch were living beside the Delaware River well before William Penn showed up are not likely to catch the eye or kindle the imagination of a collective American memory that is Anglocentric to a fault.) Coming near the end is inherently less interesting: who remembers what baseball team finished next to last? Moreover, as latecomers, Penn's people could learn from their colonial predecessors' mistakes. Hence no lost colony to add an aura of mystery to Penn's Woods, no starving time that would have the desperation and death guaranteed to fascinate subsequent generations. And if no starving time, then no Native coming to the rescue: Virginia had its Pocahontas, New England its Squanto; and Pennsylvania . . . ?⁵

Similarly, New England had its Pequots and Wampanoags, New York its Iroquois, Virginia its Powhatans, Carolina its Cherokees and Creeks, and Pennsylvania . . . its scattered, battered bands of Lenapes (Delawares). This very lack of powerful Natives in the vicinity has also helped deflect scholarly attention away from Penn's Woods.⁶ Moreover, because Penn's Lenape neighbors—few in number, already well versed in the boisterous, sometimes brutal ways of European colonists—were welcoming rather than threatening, and because their approach matched his own, the Proprietor and his heirs long managed to avoid the frontier warfare that so devastated many English colonies and has so entranced scholars since. Historians are an intellectually bloodthirsty bunch: war is not only more compelling and more dramatic; its causes, course, and consequences also seem to demand more study. And Indian raids, long a staple of American lore, exert a particularly powerful magnetic attraction. With scalping knives sheathed and muskets aimed at deer rather than people, Pennsylvanians and their Native neighbors offer too little gore until after 1750, leav-

ing scholars' attention to wander toward colonial combat with Powhatan and Opechancanough, Pequots and King Philip, Tuscaroras and Yamasees.

Nor can someone who, against the odds and against the grain, becomes interested in Pennsylvania's relations with its Indian neighbors find ready to hand great colonial chroniclers of that chapter in American history. Once again a look at other English colonies reveals the disparity: New England has Roger Williams and William Wood, Virginia John Smith and William Strachey, Carolina John Lawson and James Adair; and Pennsylvania . . . ? The richest sources on Natives of this region, compiled by the Swedish naturalist Pehr Lindeström in the 1650s and the German missionaries John Heckewelder and David Zeisberger more than a century later, are not nearly as famous, perhaps (again) because of our Anglocentric mind set.

Whatever the cause of this neglect, the effect is a striking lacuna in our rapidly growing knowledge of the confluence and collision of cultures in early America. Many today will have heard of William Penn's friendship with Indians, at least as refracted by Benjamin West's famous 1771 painting and one hundred more by Edward Hicks fifty years later. Some will know of the Walking Purchase, one more link in that tarnished chain of Euro-American chicanery against North America's Natives. A few might have vague notions about the Paxton Boys' slaughter of peaceful Conestogas in December 1763. Beyond these impressions, however, Pennsylvania's Indian history is largely *terra incognita*.

This is unfortunate, but not because there is a crying need to color in this empty spot on the colonial canvas. History is not (or should not be) some vast fill-in-the-blanks form, and scholars do not (or should not) scurry about plugging "gaps" in our knowledge. Rather, the experience of Indians and colonists in Penn's Woods merits scrutiny because it has much to teach about early America—and indeed about America as a whole.

Take the very lack of frontier wars there before 1755: all of the scholarly (and colonial) attention to such hostilities tends to obscure the fact that, while friction was common as peoples from different worlds bumped and jostled one another, all-out combat was in fact occasional and isolated. Examining how Indians and Pennsylvanians worked out ways to live together, without the distraction of looking for the causes of this war or the aftershocks of that one, enables scholars better to attend to those more frequent, everyday, forgotten threads of the American encounter.

Or consider the lack of powerful Native groups in or near Penn's



Woods. Here again, the colony's experience was more typical than might be thought. Despite the European colonial (and modern scholarly) tendency to lump Indians together into Cherokees, Iroquois, and the like, most Natives in eastern North America—including Cherokees and Iroquois—thought more in terms of town or kin than nation or empire.⁷ Hence Pennsylvania's contacts with Natives—first with Lenape bands along the Delaware, later with Shawnees, Conoys, Tuscaroras, Tutelos, and other small refugee groups in the Susquehanna River valley as well as various Iroquois peoples in the Susquehanna's upper reaches—properly direct our gaze toward the small-scale, intimate encounters between Indian and colonial settlers.

Think, finally, about the dearth of big-name colonial authorities on this corner of early America. In fact, this can be a benefit rather than a burden. Scholars of early Virginia or early Carolina, by necessity and by choice, rely heavily on one or two men for the bulk of their information about Indians. Such texts yield a wealth of evidence, but they are also colored (and, yes, tainted) by that colonist's own particular experience and point of view. The very lack of such a colossus commanding (and, yes, obscuring) our view of Pennsylvania compels scholars to cast their nets widely, to glean bits and pieces from a wide array of texts. The opportunity is therefore greater for what Daniel K. Richter calls "triangulation": the use of various sources to fix a particular point or theme in Native history.⁸ Who would not wish for a Pennsylvania version of Roger Williams, John Smith, or John Lawson? Yet there are dangers here, too. The light cast by these chroniclers is so bright that it can blind us to the pitfalls of relying too heavily on one man's opinion.

No single volume—not even one with two editors and thirteen authors—can hope to cure the case of historical amnesia afflicting Pennsylvania's frontier. But what these authors have done, by fanning out into what was made into Penn's Woods, is to offer fascinating glimpses of the historical bounty there. They do so by willfully, creatively, and productively defying convention in any number of ways, thereby opening up new vistas while also placing the familiar in a new light. Against the conventional celebration of William Penn, James Spady paints a portrait of the Founder in darker hues.⁹ Against the standard scrutiny of the Walking Purchase itself, Steven Harper follows its aftermath among disgruntled Delawares. Against the usual, almost casual condemnations of the Paxton Boys, Krista Camen-

zind insists upon exploring the forces that set these men on the road to infamy.

As these essays deepen and complicate understanding of the legendary high (and low) points of Pennsylvania's Indian past, so they also defy conventional geographical and chronological limits. Recognizing that provincial boundaries were ill defined (if defined at all), and that in any case neither Natives nor colonists confined themselves to one colony, the chapters range far beyond Pennsylvania, from Massachusetts and Pine Plains, New York, through Iroquoia to the Ohio country. Replacing the usual opening scene (Penn's arrival) and the standard closing act (the frontier wars of 1755–65), the authors here insist that, from the Native point of view at least, William Penn's arrival was nothing new; he was only the latest in a long line of uninvited guests from faraway lands to show up on the banks of the Delaware. Similarly, for Natives neither 1765 nor 1776 marked a terminus. If few Indians remained within Pennsylvania's borders except as visitors, Paul Moyer and Gregory Knouff reveal that the Native continued to exert a powerful grip on White Pennsylvanians' behavior and their thought, their imagination and their memory.

Even as these essays expand the chronological and geographical horizons, they also explore beyond the well-trodden precincts of the treaty council ground. Those congresses at Philadelphia and Easton, Logstown and Lancaster, Onondaga and Albany have drawn a great deal of scholarly attention, and no wonder. Not only are the minutes of council speeches abundant and accessible (that bright evidential light again), but these diplomatic encounters, often involving hundreds of people, were compelling dramas vital to the continent's transfer from Native to European hands.¹⁰ Yet just as too much devotion to the study of frontier wars can distort understanding of frontier life, so lingering too long at these treaty councils can hinder appreciation of the American encounter's full richness. Like wars, treaties punctuated everyday intercourse between Native and newcomer; they did not dominate it. Just as no study of modern America would be complete if it only examined World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, only visited summit meetings, SALT talks, and Camp David accords, so no study of the Pennsylvania borderlands can confine itself to the Seven Years' War and the treaty councils.

Adopting this line of sight, examining what Alison Duncan Hirsch terms "more personal frontiers," brings to light a host of startling scenes, scenes evocative of that powerful, overlooked current of contact. An imagi-



nary tour of Penn's Woods, with these chapters as guide, offers glimpses of that larger confluence and concordance across the cultural divide. In one town, a *métis* woman gives a German man a prescription to cure what ails him. In another, German women tend their Indian sisters during childbirth or sit with them to compare the state of their souls. And in a third, a Conestoga woman regales Quakers and Natives with her recent dream about visiting William Penn in London. One day on the Pennsylvania frontier a Seneca man and an English colonist sit down beside a campfire to trade. Another, Pennsylvanians invite two Nanticokes to Sunday dinner. And yet another, an Iroquois sits drinking with some Irishmen. Here Natives celebrate the Christmas season with colonists. There, a Native helps Europeans at harvest time or rents land to them. Over there, an Indian and a Swede are strolling along a path, chatting. And still farther along, White Pennsylvanians are donning leggings, breech cloths, and moccasins, then tanning their legs and painting their faces. The great Pennsylvania naturalist John Bartram captured this dimension of frontier life—the permeable boundaries, the casual borrowing and sharing—when he reported that many Natives were “almost daily familiars at their [colonists’] houses[,] eat drank cursed and swore together[,] were even intimate play-mates.”¹¹

These and the many other remarkable moments in this volume would seem to make Penn's Woods a candidate for inclusion in the growing list of sites that can be termed “a middle ground,” a physical place (and cultural space) where different peoples somehow managed to forget or overlook their differences in order to get along. During the past decade or so, scholars inspired by Richard White's brilliant study of Indian-colonial relations in the Great Lakes region have scoured the early American countryside, searching for similar configurations of contact.¹² Since no all-out warfare bloodied Pennsylvania for so long, and since scenes of concord and easy interaction are so thick on the ground there, Penn's Woods might seem a likely spot.

In fact, however, the authors in this volume are careful not to go too far toward the end of the contact spectrum awash in light, peace, and understanding.¹³ It was, as Carla Gerona concludes, at best “a troubled middle ground.” That Seneca swap session and that Nanticoke invitation to dinner found their way into the records, after all, because shortly after trading began the colonist killed the Seneca, and shortly after the Nanti-

cokes showed up to dine, their hosts hauled one of them off to jail for molesting a Pennsylvania girl. Similarly, that chat the Swede and Native were having as they ambled along actually ends badly: they come upon a snake and, despite (or, rather, because of) the Indian's insistence that they leave the creature alone because it "was sacred to him," his fellow traveler beats it to death with a stick. So, too, with the war that came in 1755: Natives often targeted the very people who once had been their neighbors and "playmates."

Distance, strangeness, and misunderstanding were particularly prominent at the beginning of colonization, of course. Michael Mackintosh, noting the "visible congruences" between Lenape and Finnish or Swedish ways—woodcraft and hunting, huts and boats, even sweat lodges—nonetheless suggests that these "probably seemed much more like ephemera" compared with their views on snakes, land, and other elements of the natural world. The English arrival, both Mackintosh and James Spady argue, did nothing to improve the situation. All of the treaty talk between Natives and the Founder about understanding and unity, brotherhood and friendship, might have been "keenly felt," Spady notes. However, it was "also tactical," divided as these peoples were by profoundly different notions about land, leadership, and gender. Friendship there might be, but for Europeans it was, in the long run, friendship on colonial terms.

Nor did things get better when newcomers and Natives had spent more time together. Gerona's fascinating sketch of the resemblance between Quaker and Indian dream cultures nonetheless makes clear that dreams, like trade or treaties, could contain deep misunderstandings, could be a handy tool of empire. Even the close, intimate correspondence Amy Schutt finds between Native and German women of the Moravian faith was short-lived, as after 1760 fewer colonial women went into mission work. Equally brief were the rental agreements David Preston treats. Colonial tenants on Indian land were heirs to the Finns, Swedes, and early English colonists Mackintosh and Spady brought to light. Glad as they were to lease farms from Natives, these tenants considered the arrangement temporary, a means to the ultimate end: ownership of the soil. Small wonder that, when war came, their Indian landlords, feeling betrayed, often singled out these farms for attack. Reciprocity, a balance of power, remained the Native goal, subordination the European aim. Gregory Knouff's Revolutionary War soldiers as well as Paul Moyer's Susquehanna settlers carried on this tradi-



tion: even as they borrowed dress and tactics from their Delaware or Iroquois neighbors, they were not “going native,” but rather further driving the Indian not only from Penn’s Woods but from American memory.

Plotting the trajectory of how Native America became Penn’s Woods, from “Peoples in Conversation” through “Fragile Structures of Coexistence” and on “Toward a White Pennsylvania,” it is hard not to wind up in a dark, bleak place, with Indian-haters in full cry and Indians themselves in full retreat. Whatever the ignorance and arrogance in William Penn’s hopes and plans, whatever the stresses and strains in competing, clashing ways of seeing justice done, whatever the fate of peacemakers, nonetheless we should not let an unhappy ending ruin the pageant of Penn’s Woods. If this volume closes with the demolition of that colonial place and time, its other theme, the “cultural construction” that went on there, bears keeping in mind. Especially in our own dark, bleak times, it is worth remembering that there was a day when alien peoples found ways to get past their fundamental differences in order to carry on a conversation about any number of topics, to swap dreams and goods, to share a confidence or a bottle.

It is worth remembering, too, that while no paragon of modern multiculturalism, William Penn was comparatively flexible in his dealings with Natives. Of England’s other colony founders in the seventeenth century, only Roger Williams in Rhode Island comes close to matching Penn’s fascination with (and respect for) Indian ways, his interest in forging friendships, his vision of an America that might contain Natives as well as newcomers. John Smith? An English conquistador, full of bluff and bluster, threats and warnings. William Bradford or John Winthrop? No Smith, to be sure, but in their eagerness to keep Indians at arm’s length (if not rule them outright), no Penn or Williams either. The faceless, forgotten founders of other provinces in that era—in Carolina and Maryland, New Netherland and New Jersey—were closer to Smith, Winthrop, and Bradford than to Williams and Penn.

Or compare Pennsylvania’s Indian relations with other corners of the frontier on the eve of Penn’s arrival. A quick tour reveals that eastern America in those times was a dark and bloody ground indeed. Forget the terrible clashes that almost annihilated Virginia in 1622 and then, in 1644, almost annihilated Virginia’s Native neighbors.¹⁴ Set aside New England’s brutal (and nearly successful) campaign to exterminate Pequots in the

1630s as well as the ferocious wars between Dutch and Indians in the 1640s and 1650s.¹⁵ Merely surveying the scene from the mid-1670s forward reveals a frontier awash in carnage. In New England, a pan-Indian uprising since called “King Philip’s War” devastated colonial and Native settlements alike.¹⁶ The Chesapeake, meanwhile, was rocked by Indian raids after Virginia and Maryland troops in 1675 killed Susquehannock headmen who had come to parley under a flag of truce.¹⁷ Farther south in Carolina, a decade’s strife culminated in the Westo War of 1680, an operation so efficient that by 1683, it was said, only fifty Westoes survived.¹⁸ Those fifty, like defeated Natives up and down the East Coast, were prey for victorious Englishmen hunting fresh slaves.

Given these dark passages, perhaps William Penn was not engaging in hyperbolic self-promotion when he promised a new, brighter day. Writing from England in 1681, he told his soon-to-be Indian neighbors that “I am very sensible of the unkindness and Injustice that hath been too much exercised towards you by the People of thes[e] Parts off the world, who have sought . . . to make great Advantages by you, rather then by examples of Justice and Goodness unto you, which I hear, hath been [a] matter of trouble to you, and caused great Grudgeings and Animositities. . . . [B]ut,” Penn concluded, “I am not such a Man.” Perhaps he was not being duplicitous, conniving, or hypocritical when he went on to say that he wanted to “enjoy it [this land on the Delaware] with your Love and Consent, that we may always live together as Neighbours and freinds.” Maybe he really did look forward to his arrival, when he and the Indians “may more largely and freely confer and discourse of thes[e] matters.”¹⁹

If it pays to be skeptical about Penn’s warm words, to keep in mind the imperial enterprise beneath them, it pays not to be too cynical about them, either. It pays, too, to remember them. Certainly the Indians did. As Jane Merriitt and others have shown, soon after Penn left his province for the last time in 1701, Native diplomats from many nations began talking up (and embellishing) their memories of him.²⁰ At treaty after treaty through the eighteenth century, Conestogas and Conoys, Iroquois and Delawares fondly recalled for their colonial audience how the Founder “had at his first Coming amongst them made an agreement with them that they should always Live as friends and Brothers, and be as one Body, one heart, one mind, and as one Eye and Ear; . . . and that there should be nothing but Love and friendship between them and us forever.”²¹ Keeping the bright flame of Penn’s words alive, Natives shrewdly used the Proprietor



as a tool for insisting that his literal and figurative descendants (his sons, Quakers, and Pennsylvanians in general) live up to the high hopes, the shining ideals of the Indians' "old friend and brother," William Penn.

Natives, forgetting neither Penn's words nor the promise that was Penn's Woods, were also insisting that they, too, be remembered, and respected, "from Generation to Generation" for "as long as the Sun it self."²² Somewhere between their day and our own, amnesia arrived: Natives, out of sight in Pennsylvania, were also out of mind. The essays here, and the larger scholarly projects each represents, hold out the hope that Pennsylvania's Native friends and foes, landlords and trading partners, neighbors and "playmates," will be forgotten folk no more.