

2021

## William Penn's Imperial Georgic and the Vernacular Landscapes of Pennsylvania in Eighteenth-Century Quaker Journals

Jay David Miller

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/eng\\_fac](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/eng_fac)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

# *William Penn's Imperial Georgic and the Vernacular Landscapes of Pennsylvania in Eighteenth-Century Quaker Journals*

**ABSTRACT:** This essay analyzes changes in the way Quaker writers represented the landscape of Pennsylvania, particularly the economic features of its built environment, over time. I argue that the promotional writing of William Penn constituted an “official” representation of the landscape, using the genre of imperial georgic to highlight the colony’s productive and lucrative potential for an audience of investors while minimizing the role of indentured servitude, African enslavement, and Indigenous dispossession in the process of economic development. Eighteenth-century Quaker reformers, however, developed a more “vernacular” portrayal of the landscape that was attentive to the privations of those who inhabited its built environment. In reading the journals of Elizabeth Ashbridge, John Churchman, Jane Hoskens, Daniel Stanton, and John Woolman, I show how Quaker reformers ironically moved beyond the limits of Penn’s vision because of the degree to which they took his articulated ideals seriously.

**W**illiam Penn’s vision of Philadelphia as “a greene Country Towne” emerged early in his correspondence about Pennsylvania and would inform his official portrayal of the colony in promotional literature.<sup>1</sup> Despite efforts to modulate the enthusiasm characteristic of the promotional genre, his descriptions of Pennsylvania ranged

<sup>1</sup> William Penn to William Crispin, John Bezar, and Nathaniel Allen, Sept. 30, 1681, in *The Papers of William Penn*, vol. 2, 1680–1684, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn (Philadelphia, PA, 1982), 118.

from pastoral celebration of the beauty of the natural world to georgic evaluation of the land's productive potential. In a 1683 tract written to investors after his first visit to the colony, he observed how "the *Woods* are adorned with lovely *Flowers*, for *colour*, *greatness*, *figure*, and *variety*: I have seen the *Gardens of London* best stored with that sort of Beauty, but think they may be improved by our *Woods*."<sup>2</sup> Penn's preoccupation with improvement was characteristic, and it comes through clearly in his later description of Philadelphia in the same text. "Of all the many Places I have seen in the World," he wrote, "I remember not one better seated; so that to me it seems to have been appointed for a Town, whether we regard the *Rivers*, or the conveniency of the *Coves*, *Docks*, *Springs*, the loftiness and soundness of the *Land* and the *Air*, held by the People of these parts to be very good. It is advanced within less than a Year to about *four Score Houses* and *Cottages* . . . where *Merchants* and *Handicrafts* are following their *Vocations* as fast as they can, while the *Country-men* are close at their *Farms*."<sup>3</sup> Penn may have been taken with the pastoral scene of "lovely *Flowers*" filling the woods, but it was the economy and the emerging built environment of the city and the surrounding countryside—"advanced within less than a Year"—that truly captured his imagination and to which he dedicated most of his representational energies.

This official landscape promulgated in the literature Penn used to recruit settlers was attractive, but it also fostered a false set of expectations for what life in the new colony would be like, contributing to the acrimony that soon emerged between the proprietor and his putative subjects. Nonetheless, Penn had cast a powerful vision, and it lingered with particular strength among his coreligionists. Eighteenth-century Quaker reformers especially looked explicitly and tacitly to Penn as a precedent for their own work. However, as the Quaker ministers Jane Hoskens, Daniel Stanton, John Woolman, Elizabeth Ashbridge, and John Churchman traveled throughout Pennsylvania and beyond, they confronted vernacular landscapes that contrasted with the official image of the colony Penn had projected and that they had to a certain extent internalized. Each of their journals reckons with these landscapes to various degrees. Collec-

<sup>2</sup> William Penn, *A Letter from William Penn, Proprietary and Governour of Pennsylvania in America, to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders of that Province Residing in London* (London, 1683), 4. Note that the pagination in this edition skips from page one to four, omitting two and three.

<sup>3</sup> Penn, *A Letter*, 8.

tively, these texts, all published in the 1770s, offer a far different portrayal of Pennsylvania than anything encountered in Penn's work, and they illustrate how Quakers reevaluated their place in the colony's history as they confronted the realities of its built environment.

The distinction I develop in this essay between Penn's landscape and the landscapes found in the journals of Quaker reformers draws on the work of the geographer John Brickerhoff Jackson, who observes that "there is invariably tension between the two points of view" he terms *official* and *vernacular*.<sup>4</sup> This tension arises from differences in what features of a landscape matter and for whom. Vernacular landscapes, for example, are those experienced and known by local inhabitants embedded in immediate, concrete contexts. Official landscapes, on the other hand, tend to be rendered with the expectations of external audiences in mind, with a narrower set of interests that can often be characterized as instrumental. In the analysis that follows, I pay special attention to the specifically *economic* cast of the official and vernacular landscapes of Pennsylvania, as described by Penn and subsequent Quaker reformers. Briefly, in writing promotional literature for prospective settlers and investors, Penn's overviews of Pennsylvania's landscape focused on its productive and lucrative potential at the expense of reflecting on how such economic development would adversely affect various inhabitants of the colony. The Quaker reformers considered here, however, paid closer and more holistic attention to the ways the economy of Pennsylvania shaped the colony's built environment and the lives lived within it.

"No group sets out to create a landscape," Jackson writes, but "what it sets out to do is create a community, and the landscape as its visible manifestation is simply the by-product of people working and living, sometimes coming together, sometimes staying apart."<sup>5</sup> I argue that as Quaker reformers began to assess as "visible manifestation[s]" of their own religious community the landscapes they traversed on their itinerant travels, they grew in awareness of the broader consequences of Pennsylvania's economy of "working and living," as well as the way this economy depended on particular people "staying apart." Where Penn wrote straightforwardly about building an agrarian capitalist paradise in Pennsylvania, Quaker reformers

<sup>4</sup> John Brickerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, CT, 1984). My understanding of Jackson is shaped by Rob Nixon's postcolonial application of his work in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 12.

recognized the extent to which this paradise depended on the exploitation of indentured servants and tenant farmers, the enslavement of Africans, and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Ironically, it was the idealism of Quaker reformers about Penn's project that made them so sensitive to its shortcomings. Because of their internalization of Penn's broad ideals, such Quakers as Stanton, Churchman, Hoskens, Ashbridge, and Woolman understood reform efforts as extensions or even restorations of Pennsylvania's "holy experiment."<sup>6</sup>

This essay surveys changes in the way the landscape of Pennsylvania is represented in the seventeenth-century writings of Penn and the eighteenth-century writings of Quaker reformers, giving particular attention to the interplay between official and vernacular visions of the landscape's economic features. While I will generally characterize the landscape Penn evoked in *Some Account of the Province of Pennsylvania* (1681) and *A Letter from William Penn, Proprietary Governour of Pennsylvania in America, to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders for that Province Residing in London* (1683) as "official," I also note the appearance of vernacular economic landscapes in his preceding work, *No Cross, No Crown* (1669), in which Penn at certain points was very concerned with the privations experienced by agrarian laborers in England. This earlier vision, along with Penn's general ideals for Pennsylvania, informed the sensibilities of Quaker reformers writing about the landscapes they encountered. In an incredible outpouring of journals by American Quakers in the 1770s, Hoskens, Stanton, Woolman, Ashbridge, and Churchman focused on the vernacular features of Pennsylvania's landscape that Penn had largely overlooked, foregrounding the exploitation of indentured servants and tenant farmers, the enslavement of Africans, and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. The discovery of the vernacular landscape of Pennsylvania and surrounding colonies by Quaker reformers illustrates the complexity of Penn's legacy and of the interaction between official and vernacular landscapes in Quaker literature about Pennsylvania over time.

<sup>6</sup> Penn only used the term "holy experiment" once, writing in a letter to a fellow Quaker that he hoped "an example may be Sett up to the nations" in Pennsylvania, "an holy experiment." William Penn to James Harrison, Aug. 25, 1681, in *The Papers of William Penn*, 2:108. For an assessment of the term, see Andrew R. Murphy, *William Penn: A Life* (New York, 2018), 362–66. While it may not be correct to think of the broad founding of Pennsylvania as a holy experiment, Quakers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seemed to think of it this way, as my analysis will show.

A specific aesthetic informed the official landscape of Pennsylvania that Penn evoked in his promotional writing. Scholars sometimes comment on the aesthetic dimensions of tracts like *Some Account of the Province of Pennsylvania*, but Penn's political ideas usually receive more attention.<sup>7</sup> In my own reading of Penn's promotional literature, including *Some Account* and *A Letter from William Penn, Proprietary Governour of Pennsylvania in America, to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders for that Province Residing in London*, I focus on how his landscapes conform to the genre Karen O'Brien has termed "imperial georgic," celebrating the colony's potential to become an agrarian capitalist paradise that contributed to the flourishing of England's empire.<sup>8</sup> Imperial georgic valorized the individual yeoman farmer while relegating other participants in the agrarian capitalist economy—tenants, enslaved Africans, and displaced Indigenous peoples—to the margins of representation, to the extent that they were represented at all. This was true in Penn's promotional work and characteristic of the official landscape of Pennsylvania he developed. Yet Penn was not unfamiliar with other genres of writing focused on vernacular agrarian landscapes and the laborers that inhabited them. This section will therefore begin with a reading of Penn's earlier work of religious polemic, *No Cross, No Crown*, in order to reveal a more radical strain of thought that was later written over in his promotional writings. It was this strain, rather than his official vision of imperial georgic, that reappeared

<sup>7</sup> Gary B. Nash wrote that Penn offered readers "nostalgic visions of an agrarian utopia." Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681–1726* (Princeton, NJ, 1968), 14. Simon Finger observes that while Penn's "promotional literature painted a quintessentially pastoral landscape," its "emphasis on cultivation marked Penn's plan . . . as georgic." Finger, *The Contagious City: The Politics of Public Health in Early Philadelphia* (Ithaca, NY, 2012), 13. For a thorough analysis of the aesthetic backgrounds of Penn's city planning for Philadelphia, see Elizabeth Milroy, *The Grid and the River: Philadelphia's Green Places* (University Park, PA, 2016), 11–61. For analyses of Penn's promotional literature focused on political ideas, see John Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers: The Making of a Creole Culture in Colonial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, PA, 2010), 63–65; and Andrew R. Murphy, *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration: The Political Thought of William Penn* (New York, 2016), 134–35.

<sup>8</sup> Karen O'Brien, "Imperial Georgic, 1660–1789," in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850*, ed. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge, 2006), 160–79. Shuichi Wanibuchi touches on Penn's promotional writing in his analysis of the proprietor's imperial ideology but does not discuss these texts in aesthetic terms. Wanibuchi, "William Penn's Imperial Landscape: Improvement, Political Economy, and Colonial Agriculture in the Pennsylvania Project," in *The Worlds of William Penn*, ed. Andrew R. Murphy and John Smolenski (New Brunswick, NJ, 2019), 378–402.

in the work of later Quaker reformers who described the Pennsylvania landscape in starkly different terms.

Penn wrote *No Cross, No Crown* in 1669 while imprisoned in the Tower of London due to his Quaker pamphleteering. The book includes an extended critique of luxury, and Penn's sensitivity to the vernacular landscapes experienced by agrarian laborers can be seen in this critique. This awareness originated in the principle that "tis the vanity of the few *great ones*, that makes so much toyle fo the *many small*; and the great *excess* of the *one*, occasions the great *labour* of the *other*." Therefore, "if the Landlords had less lust to satisfie, the Tennants might have less Rent to pay."<sup>9</sup> Positing a causal relationship between the wealth of landlords and the suffering of tenants, Penn expounded on various forms of agrarian deprivation. Anticipating counterarguments from those who would try to justify their luxurious lifestyles, Penn wrote:

When People have first learned to fear and obey their Creator, to pay their numerous Debts, to redeem their Mortgages, to clear their Estates of all Incumbrances, to alleviate and abate their oppressed Tennants; but above all outward regard, when the pale faces are more commiserated, the grip'd bellies reliev'd, and naked backs cloath'd; when the famish'd Poor, the distressed Widdow, and helpless Orphant (God's Works, and your fellow Creatures) are provided for; then I say, (if then) it will be early enough for you to plead the Indifferency of your pleasures: But that the sweat and tedious labour of the Husband-man, be it early or late, cold or hot, wet or dry, should be converted into the pleasure, ease, and pastime of a small number of men, that the Cart, the Plow, the Thrash, should be in that continual severity laid upon nineteen parts of the Land, to feed the inordinate lusts and delicious appetites of the twentieth, is so far from the appointment of the Great Governor of the World, and God of the Spirits of all men, that to imagine such horrible injustice as the effect of his determinations, and not the intemperance of men, were wretched and blasphemous (61–62).

In contrast to the georgic landscapes in Penn's later promotional writings, here we find a vernacular agrarian landscape with numerous details of economic hardship. This landscape was marked by oppression, hunger, and "tedious labour" in all kinds of weather, driven by the incessant activity of "the Cart, the Plow, the Thrash." Given the knowledge Penn

<sup>9</sup> William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown* (London, 1669), 50. Subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

demonstrated of the afflictions borne by those who labored to build agrarian landscapes, we must ask how he later became a promoter of Pennsylvania as an agrarian capitalist paradise.

The answer to this question can be found in *No Cross, No Crown* itself, for the solution Penn proposed to agrarian suffering was capitalist enterprise. In order to turn tenants “from poor to rich,” Penn advocated for increased agricultural productivity and commerce. “If the Report of the more intelligent *Husbandry* be credible,” Penn speculated, “Lands are generally improvable, ten in twenty,” and “were there more hands about more lawful and servicable manufactures, they would be cheaper, and greater vent might be made of them, by which a benefit would redound the world.” Penn envisioned increased agricultural production paying global dividends, relieving the “burden [that] lyes the heavier-upon the laborious Country” (50). Furthermore, such a program of improvement would be in England’s national interest. Renunciation of luxury would serve as “good expedient towards the *enrichment* of the *land*; for by how much less there were of that great Superfluity in all these vanities, by so much more should the Commodities of our own Country be in repute; the great vent of foreign Goods, being that which indebts the Land to foreigners whereas otherwise they would become debtors to us for our Native Manufactures” (60). While Penn began his critique of luxury with a concern for the suffering encountered in vernacular agrarian landscapes, this concern was absorbed in official landscapes of international commerce, debt, and, paradoxically, the production of wealth.

These passages advance in miniature arguments Penn would elaborate on in his promotional literature for Pennsylvania, illustrating the way imperial georgic made its way into religious polemic. Evidence of direct georgic influence in *No Cross, No Crown* appears in a brief but telling citation. Next to one of the passages analyzed above, Penn inserted a terse marginal note: “See Blith’s *Husbandry*” (50). In a text crammed with citations of biblical, classical, and patristic literature, it is one of only a few references to a book by one of Penn’s contemporaries. Walter Blith, author of *The English Improver Improved or the Survey of Husbandry Surveyed*, was a self-professed “lover of ingenuity” whose work was typical of late seventeenth-century zeal for georgic improvement.<sup>10</sup> Penn came of age at

<sup>10</sup> Walter Blith, *The English Improver Improved or the Survey of Husbandry Surveyed* (London, 1652), frontispiece. On Blith, see Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plow: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 1996), 226–28.



a time when discourses such as Blith's were being put to use for imperial purposes. The resulting genre of imperial georgic, O'Brien argues, "subsumed the binary opposition of country and city within the larger imaginative structure of universal, peaceful empire. It was georgic, more than any other literary mode or genre, which assumed the burden of securing the aesthetic and moral links between country, city, and empire."<sup>11</sup>

While my reading of Penn's *Some Account* and *A Letter* will underscore how the proprietor used imperial georgic to evoke an official landscape for Pennsylvania, Penn's promotional work was not entirely unqualified celebration. In his earlier colonization efforts related to West Jersey, Penn and his associates wrote an epistle to caution prospective Quaker settlers, observing that "lest any . . . should go out of a curious and unsettled mind . . . It is truly laid hard upon us, to let friends know how the matter stands; which we shall endeavor to do with all clearness and fidelity." In the concluding passage of the epistle, a switch from the use of first person plural to first person singular emphasizes Penn's aspiration for forthrightness, proclaiming, "This am I, William Penn, moved of the Lord, to write unto you, lest any bring temptation upon themselves or others."<sup>12</sup> Penn was likely aware of the temptations to exaggeration inherent in the promotional genre, but the demands of crafting an official landscape no doubt put efforts at "clearness and fidelity" under pressure.

Soon after being granted his charter request by Charles II in March 1681, Penn published *Some Account*, his initial attempt at promulgating an official Pennsylvania landscape. Penn began with a defense "of the benefit of *Plantations* or *Colonies* in general," elaborating on ideas adumbrated in *No Cross, No Crown*.<sup>13</sup> While colonial promoters from the late sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth centuries had framed overseas expansion as an outlet for population growth and unemployed labor, by the late seventeenth century economic writers such as Roger Coke argued that this strategy was in fact detrimental to the development of England's work-

<sup>11</sup> O'Brien, "Imperial Georgic," 161. While O'Brien looks to John Dryden's 1697 translation of Virgil's *Georgics* as the work that "precipitated a major reorientation of georgic toward imperial concerns," she points to colonial promotional writing, including Penn's *Some Account*, as an important precedent. O'Brien, 163–67.

<sup>12</sup> William Penn, Gawn Lawrie, and Nicholas Lucas, "To Prospective Settlers in West New Jersey," in *The Papers of William Penn*, vol. 1, 1644–1679, ed. Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn (Philadelphia, 1981), 419–20.

<sup>13</sup> William Penn, *Some Account of the Province of Pennsylvania in America* (London, 1681), 1. Subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

force.<sup>14</sup> Penn countered such objections with the claim that colonies “are the Seeds of Nations . . . best for the increase of Humane Stock and, and beneficial for Commerce” (1). He supported this claim by pointing out that labor on “a Foreign Plantation . . . is worth more than . . . at home,” because better commodities would be produced. To prove the point, Penn posed a revealing rhetorical question: “What is an improved Acre in *Jamaica* or *Barbados* worth to an improved Acre in England? We know,” he continued, “’tis threetimes the value” (2). His question made an important gesture to merchants in the Caribbean, suggesting that Pennsylvania would be the next area of Atlantic settlement where georgic improvement would lead to profit.

The profit gained by importing colonial goods to England and then exporting them to the continent would, according to Penn, benefit all sorts of people: not only the English but also those they subjugated. In this aspect of Penn’s argument, we see his neglect in representing marginalized but essential participants in the transatlantic economy. Increasing colonial trade was desirable “especially if we consider how many thousand *Blacks* and *Indians* are also accommodated with *Cloths* and many sorts of *Tools* and *Utensils* from England, and that their *Labour* is mostly brought hither, which adds *Wealth* and *People* to the *English Dominions*” (3). Seeing the clothing and outfitting of Africans and North American Indigenous peoples as an act of benevolence, Penn glossed over the realities of enslavement and dispossession with the innocuous phrase “that their *Labour* is mostly brought hither.” Like many of his fellow Quakers during this era, Penn saw enslavement as a practice with little to no moral ambiguity: according to Andrew Murphy, he “displayed no sign of a troubled conscience over it.”<sup>15</sup> I will address Penn’s relationship with Indigenous peoples below, but here it is sufficient to note Penn’s assumption of the benefit provided to Native Americans via their integration into the transatlantic economy.

The final aspect of Penn’s defense of colonization was his most characteristically georgic. Working in an elegiac mode, he lamented that in England “*Husbandry is neglected*” and that people were becoming “unfitted for the Labour of a *Farming Life*.” Penn mused on how “of old time

<sup>14</sup> On these debates, see Murphy, *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration*, 134; and Abigail L. Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire* (New Haven, CT, 2015), 12–14, 104–6.

<sup>15</sup> Murphy, *William Penn*, 185–86.

the *Nobility* and *Gentry* spent their Estates in the Country, and that kept the people in it; and their Servants married and sate at easie Rents under their Masters favour” (3). Depending on the georgic topos of a lost golden age—“old time”—Penn looked back to an idealized economy and its particular built environment, an official landscape where landowners lived on their estates and charged only “easie Rents.”<sup>16</sup> Penn then addressed the contemporary situation in ways that recall *No Cross, No Crown*: “The Country being thus neglected, and no due Ballance kept between Trade and Husbandry, City and Country, the poor Country-man takes double toil, and cannot (for want of hands) dress and manure his Land to the Advantage it formerly yielded him, yet must he pay the old Rents” (3). Despite Penn’s sympathy for “the poor Country-man,” however, his emphasis was on the agrarian capitalist need for “due Ballance kept between Trade and Husbandry.” Such appeals to “balance,” according to Raymond Williams, depend on “a set of decisions about capital investment made by the minority which controls capital and which determines its use by calculations of profit.”<sup>17</sup> In this case, Penn hoped to reinvigorate labor in England through capital investments in his colony that would transform the landscape to match his vision.

After a restrained description of some of Pennsylvania’s natural features—“I shall say little in its praise, to excite desires in any, whatever I could truly write as to the Soil, Air, and Water”—Penn delineated the types of people he wished to recruit and the conditions on which they would come to the new colony (4). “*My Conditions will relate to three sorts of people,*” Penn wrote: “*1st Those that will buy: 2ndly. Those that take up Land upon Rent: 3rdly. Servants.*” Here Penn sketched a conventional agricultural class structure consisting of landowners, tenants, and laborers. Penn did not dwell on the potential problems inherent in such a structure, emphasizing instead that immigration to Pennsylvania would bring relief to various forms of “extreme Labour,” because “Labour is worth more,” “subsisting . . . [is] easy,” and “moderate Labour produces plenty.” Yet he sensed a need to qualify some of his claims before concluding the tract. “*Because I know how much People are apt to fancy things beyond what they are, and that Imaginations [sic] are great flatteres of the minds of Men,*” he wrote, “*To the end that none may delude with an expectation of an Imme-*

<sup>16</sup> On the golden age topos, especially as embodied in Virgil’s *Georgics*, see Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1985), 17–19.

<sup>17</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York, 1973), 295.

diat *Amendment of their Conditions . . . I would have them understand, That they must look for a Winter before a Summer comes, and they must be willing to be two or three years without some of the conveniences they enjoy at home*" (7). After emphasizing the ease of life in Pennsylvania, Penn reprised a concern from the West Jersey epistle and reformulated the maxim "no cross, no crown" to caution settlers "that they must look for a Winter before a Summer." But almost immediately, Penn returned to his emphasis on ease, writing, "*and yet I must needs say that America is another thing then it was at the first . . . For there is better Accommodation . . . to be had at easier rates*" (7). Extending his equivocation, he reiterated that readers must "consider seriously the premises, *as well as the present inconveniences, as future ease and Plenty*" (10). While Penn's first promotional tract generally adhered to the conventions of imperial georgic by focusing on how agricultural development would profit the nation, it retained a delicate thread of awareness, or perhaps a nagging prick of conscience, that alongside this official landscape of plenty, a vernacular landscape of "inconveniences" could—and likely would—exist.

*A Letter*, Penn's next promotional tract, would rely on the knowledge he acquired after his arrival in his new colony during the fall of 1682. Published in 1683, *A Letter* is often deemed his most significant pamphlet due to its extensive detail.<sup>18</sup> Whereas *Some Account* had been aimed at attracting settlers to Pennsylvania, *A Letter* directed itself to the investors of the Free Society of Traders in Pennsylvania, a joint-stock company that comprised mainly Quaker merchants and that Penn had chartered to oversee the economic development of the colony.<sup>19</sup> Penn informed this audience that he had received "universal kind *Welcome*" in Pennsylvania, including from its Native peoples, to whom he would devote much attention in *A Letter*.<sup>20</sup> He began, however, with an expanded account of "the Country it self," whose "*Soyl, Air, Water, Seasons and Produce . . . is not to be despised*" (1).

<sup>18</sup> Albert Cook Myers, ed., *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey, and Delaware, 1630–1707* (New York, 1912), 221; Jean R. Soderlund, ed., *William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania, 1680–1684: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia, 1983), 308; Edwin B. Bronner and David Fraser, eds., *The Papers of William Penn*, vol. 5, *William Penn's Published Writings, 1660–1726: An Interpretive Bibliography* (Philadelphia, 1986), 298.

<sup>19</sup> Gary Nash gave a detailed account of the "small circle of Quaker merchants, joined by Penn's relatives and close associates, and a handful of prosperous landowners" who made up the Free Society. Nash, "The Free Society of Traders and the Early Politics of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 89 (1965): 156.

<sup>20</sup> Penn, *A Letter*, 1. Subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

When evoking Pennsylvania official landscape for the merchants of the Free Society, Penn turned to Europe as a point of reference. Pennsylvania's soil was "in some place a *fast fat Earth*, like to our best *Vales in England*, especially by *Inland Brooks and Rivers*, [and] God in his Wisdom having ordered it so, that the *Advantages* of the *Country* are divided, the *Back-Lands* being generally *three to one Richer* than those that lie by *Navigable Waters* (1). Here Penn stressed not only the similarity of Pennsylvania's "*fast fat Earth*" to soil in England but also indicated the providential potential of the colony's "*Back-Lands*" to be developed. Beyond the soil and the sea, Pennsylvania's "*Air is sweet and clear, the Heavens serene, like the South-parts of France, rarely Overcast; and as the Woods come . . . to be more clear'd, that itself will Refine*" (1). Again, along with the comparison to Europe, Penn indicated that development would only improve the climate of his colony.<sup>21</sup>

Yet when Penn looked upon "*Inland Brooks and Rivers*" and wrote of "*Navigable Waters*" conducive for the georgic improvement of "*Back-Lands*," he considered territory that was primarily Native space, specifically Lenape country, where Indigenous people had developed kin relationships and knowledge of the local waterways and seasonal patterns that sustained their life in that place for generations.<sup>22</sup> Penn took great interest in the Lenape, and *A Letter* is notable for what Jean Soderlund judges to be "probably the best contemporary description we have of the Delaware Indians and their culture."<sup>23</sup> He wrote glowingly of the perceived simplicity of Lenape society in general, claiming that "in *Liberality* they excell, nothing is too good for their friend." Due to this, "*Wealth* circulateth like the *Blood*, all parts partake; and though none shall want what another hath, yet exact Observers of *Property*." This account of the Lenape as generous while also aware of the concept of property dovetailed well with Penn's hopes for buying and developing land in Pennsylvania. Indeed, just after this account, Penn mentioned that "Some *Kings* have sold, others presented me with several *parcels of Land*." Here the Lenape emerge as simultaneously interested in selling land to Penn but also generous enough to simply give it to him. Penn would on the whole be quite content

<sup>21</sup> Penn also compared Pennsylvania to Europe in *Some Account*, writing that it lay "nearer the Sun than *England . . . about the Latitude of Naples, in Italy, or Mompellier [sic], in France*" (4).

<sup>22</sup> Jean R. Soderlund, *Lenape Country: Delaware Valley before William Penn* (Philadelphia, 2015). On Native space generally, see Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis, MN, 2008), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Soderlund, *William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania*, 308.

to receive Indian land by means of negotiation, “gift,” and what Murphy summarizes as “dispossession by purchase.”<sup>24</sup>

The mythos that surrounds Penn’s relationship with Native peoples makes it difficult to evaluate his intent and actions.<sup>25</sup> As Daniel Richter has noted in his analysis of the proprietor’s initial “Letter to the Kings of the Indians,” before Penn, no “previous English proprietor, representative of a chartered trading company, or royal governor . . . found it necessary to try to communicate in advance, in writing, with Native people,” and his letter “placed an extraordinary emphasis on voluntary negotiation and an extraordinary lack of emphasis on Native submission.”<sup>26</sup> At the same time, Penn’s letter, like his promotional writings, was “aimed at persuading a European, not an Indian, audience of the legitimacy of the acts they described.”<sup>27</sup> This reality encapsulates Penn’s ultimate focus on official landscapes rather than vernacular ones and their inhabitants. Yet, while undoubtably imbricated in an English project of imperial georgic, Penn’s broader vision for Pennsylvania as a holy experiment was regularly appropriated by Native peoples negotiating for their rights and sovereignty, and it was evoked by Quaker reformers generations later.<sup>28</sup>

The official landscape of Pennsylvania Penn rendered in *Some Account* and *A Letter*, despite notes of caution about settlement and efforts to respect Indigenous peoples, was intended to recruit settlers and investors to transform the landscape of the new colony into a productive agrarian capitalist paradise. He was perhaps more successful than he would have wished. Penn desired to curtail land speculation by planning “contiguous tiers of townships” over which he would have oversight as proprietor, but

<sup>24</sup> Murphy, *William Penn*, 146.

<sup>25</sup> For analysis of Penn’s relationship with Native peoples and its mythos, see Francis Jennings, “Brother Miquon: Good Lord!” in *The World of William Penn*, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn (Philadelphia, 1986); Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 28–30, 122–23; Daniel K. Richter and William A. Pencak, “Introduction,” in *Friends and Enemies in Penn’s Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*, ed. Richter and Pencak (University Park, PA, 2004); Andrew Newman, “The Most Valuable Record,” *On Records: Delaware Indians, Colonists, and the Media of History and Memory* (Lincoln, NE, 2012) chap. 3; Daniel K. Richter, “Land and Words: William Penn’s Letter to the Kings of the Indians,” in Richter, *Trade, Land, Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America* (Philadelphia, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Richter, “Land and Words,” 137, 141.

<sup>27</sup> Richter, 153.

<sup>28</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 122–23; Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 38–39, 268–69. Andrew Newman’s discussion of Penn in Indian memory includes a recent twentieth-century Delaware dismissal of him. Newman, *On Records*, 130–31.

his own designation of large manorial tracts of land outside surveyed areas undid this vision, as did the exceptions he made for certain speculative enterprises. Colonists soon became disgruntled, and, as James Lemon succinctly states, “settlement now preceded survey.”<sup>29</sup> This trend was accelerated by the disintegration of the Free Society of Traders in the face of resentment toward Penn’s land policy and the rise of ambitious individual merchants.<sup>30</sup> Rather than viewing Penn as a benevolent founder, settlers came to see him as an “absentee landlord.”<sup>31</sup> The vision of prosperous georgic improvement cast by Penn in his promotional writing had left settlers unprepared for the conflicts and challenges that would arrive during the actual task of settlement, and the landscape of Pennsylvania would be riven with conflict for decades.<sup>32</sup> Yet when Quaker reformers would write about this vernacular landscape during the eighteenth century, they would look to some of Penn’s ideals even as they revised his account of Pennsylvania.

*Pennsylvania’s Vernacular Landscape  
in the Quaker Literature of Reform*

The eighteenth century witnessed a reformation of Quakerism in British North America that entailed the production of what I call a literature of reform, which represented the landscapes of Pennsylvania—and the American colonies more broadly—in starkly different ways than did Penn.<sup>33</sup> In this section, I examine the most exceptional series of texts from this body of literature, five journals by Quakers from the middle colonies published in the 1770s. As J. William Frost observes in a founda-

<sup>29</sup> James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man’s Country: Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1972), 50–51, 55.

<sup>30</sup> On the collapse of the Free Society of Traders, see Nash, “The Free Society of Traders,” 158–73.

<sup>31</sup> Murphy, *William Penn*, 202, 262.

<sup>32</sup> Nash attributed Pennsylvania’s factionalism to “promotional literature” that had the effect of “raising expectations of immigrants to a height that probably never could have been realized,” suggesting such texts were “utopian propaganda.” Nash, *Quakers and Politics*, 161, 175. Similarly, when writing on the Keithian schism, Patrick M. Erben observes that “suddenly, the cultural and linguistic diversity of early Pennsylvania touted in early promotional tracts seemed to cause or at least fan the dissolution of community.” Erben, *A Harmony of Spirits: Translation and the Language of Community in Early Pennsylvania* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012), 128.

<sup>33</sup> Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783* (Philadelphia, 1984). On Quaker women and reform, see Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700–1775* (New York, 1999), 198–212.



tional overview of Quaker print culture in the region, journals written by Friends from British North America were rare, approaching nonexistent: “Except for Thomas Chalkley, who left a subsidy for publication expenses, no American Quaker had a published journal before 1770.”<sup>34</sup> Then Quakers in Philadelphia published four journals, by Jane Hoskens (1771), Daniel Stanton (1772), John Woolman (1773), and John Churchman (1779). Elizabeth Ashbridge’s journal was published in England at the same time (1774).<sup>35</sup> Collectively, these journals develop a picture of Pennsylvania’s built environment attuned to precisely what Penn overlooked—the actual shape of the agrarian capitalist economy in the colony and the lives of the people it marginalized. Ironically, this picture was inspired by ideals that these Quaker reformers attributed to Penn and associated with the founding of Pennsylvania. “The object of the Quaker reformers,” Jack D. Marietta writes, “was as much the restoration of an Arcadian past as it was the creation of a utopian future.”<sup>36</sup> In order to restore the imagined Arcadian past Penn had projected in his promotional works, Quaker reformers had to reckon with the suffering of indentured servants and tenant farmers, enslaved Africans, and dispossessed Indigenous peoples.

I proceed topically through the journals of Hoskens, Stanton, Woolman, Ashbridge, and Churchman, giving examples of the ways they represented the vernacular landscape of Pennsylvania and the surrounding colonies through which they traveled in itinerant ministry. I begin with the journals of Stanton and Churchman and show how they drew on the memory of Penn as they described the vernacular landscapes they encountered. I then turn to Hoskens and Ashbridge, who were both born in England and came to Pennsylvania via indentured servitude. While they did not explicitly evoke Penn in their writings, Hoskens and Ashbridge both developed an affinity for Pennsylvania as a holy experiment, while also offering first-person perspectives on bound labor that complicate a feature of the colony’s economic landscape that Penn took for granted. I conclude with Woolman, who, as the youngest of these reformers, benefited

<sup>34</sup> J. William Frost, “Quaker Books in Colonial Pennsylvania,” *Quaker History* 80 (1991): 4.

<sup>35</sup> Frost, 4. The first edition of Ashbridge’s journal was published in 1774 in England, and the first American edition was published in Philadelphia in 1807. Daniel B. Shea, “Elizabeth Ashbridge and the Voice Within,” in *Journeys in New Worlds: Early American Women’s Narratives*, ed. William L. Andrews (Madison, WI, 1990), 142, 144. While its publication history puts Ashbridge’s journal in a different category from the others considered here, its similar content and time of composition justify its inclusion in my analysis.

<sup>36</sup> Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism*, 93.



from their insights and gave the fullest picture of Pennsylvania's vernacular landscape.

Early in his journal, Daniel Stanton, a Philadelphia joiner by trade, wrote, "I wanted to know the work of reformation effectually carried on, according to the mind and will of the blessed truth, and the nearer I kept to what it made manifest, the greater strength and dominion was given me to overcome the defilements of the world."<sup>37</sup> Here the "work of reformation" is shown to have both spiritual and social implications. The "nearer" Stanton could stay to what "the mind and will of the blessed truth" revealed, the more "strength" he would be given. While eighteenth-century Quakers have sometimes been labeled "quietist" for their focus on purity and asceticism, this unfairly characterizes them as otherworldly. In fact, their desire to "overcome the defilements of the world" caused them to scrutinize the landscapes through which they moved with particular intensity. In a way, they embodied an aphorism Penn added to an expanded edition of *No Cross, No Crown*, published in 1682 as he was preparing to embark for Pennsylvania: "True *Godliness* don't turn men out of the *World*, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavors to mend it."<sup>38</sup>

Like the other reformers under consideration here, Stanton wanted to mend the world, although his account of vernacular landscape was not as fine-grained as others. For example, while visiting the Caribbean en route to England—a region Penn had gestured to as a comparison for Pennsylvania's potential economic profitability—Stanton wrote "but oh! the islands hereaway, how great and many are the sins of the people" (40). Stanton was an antislavery Quaker, and it is possible enslavement was the sin of which he spoke here, but one cannot be certain given the general nature of his exclamation. Later in his journal, however, Stanton grew more specific. Following Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's 1758 decision that Quakers who enslaved people should be disowned, Stanton reported that he was one of several, including Churchman and Woolman, appointed "to visit those members of our society, who held them [slaves] in bondage, in order to advise for their liberty, it being believed by the truly conscientious, to be a great iniquity to keep them or their children, and

<sup>37</sup>Daniel Stanton, *A Journal of the Life, Travels, and Gospel Labours of a Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ*, Daniel Stanton (Philadelphia, 1772), 9. Subsequent citations are given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>38</sup>William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown* (London, 1682), 57.

children's children in perpetual captivity" (111). Unlike Penn, Stanton and other reform-minded Quakers did not overlook the generational "bondage" that undergirded the economy of Pennsylvania and the rest of the colonies, and they sought to redress it by crisscrossing the region "in order to advise for . . . liberty" so that "perpetual captivity" would no longer be a feature of the landscape.<sup>39</sup>

Stanton looked to Penn, however, when writing about his interactions with Lenape Indians as an attendant at the Easton treaty negotiations in 1756, 1757, and 1758. These gatherings in the midst of the Seven Years' War began as an attempt by the eastern Lenape leader Teedyuscung to redress the wrongs of the infamous Walking Purchase of 1737, which had taken place under the leadership of Penn's sons. The negotiations ended with a peace agreement that reestablished the primacy of the Iroquois over Native groups like Teedyuscung's, who would ultimately receive no redress for the misdeeds of Pennsylvania's proprietary government.<sup>40</sup> Quakers aspired to broker these negotiations, and Stanton believed his coreligionists were "instrumental in the Lord's hand to appease the revengeful nature of so barbarous and cruel an enemy, the heart of the Indians retaining a great love for the memory of our first worthy proprietor William Penn, terming Friends his children" (106–7). Calling the Lenape "barbarous and cruel," Stanton saw good in them largely due to the fact that they had, like Quakers themselves, internalized "a great love for the memory . . . of William Penn." While Stanton understood, more than Penn could have, the depth of the conflict between Indigenous peoples and European settlers, he still viewed the former largely through Penn's paternalist lens, which failed to fully appreciate their place in the vernacular landscape of Pennsylvania.

The journal of John Churchman, however, went beyond Stanton's regarding enslavement and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Like Stanton, Churchman also invoked Penn's legacy. In 1748, Churchman, a farmer from Nottingham, Pennsylvania, felt spiritually convicted to speak to the colony's assembly in Philadelphia about the governor's request that "the house . . . grant a sum of money to station a ship of force

<sup>39</sup> See Geoffrey Plank, *John Woolman's Path to the Peaceable Kingdom: A Quaker in the British Empire* (Philadelphia, 2012), 116–18.

<sup>40</sup> My gloss on the Easton treaties of the late 1750s is taken from Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, 2000), 164–66, 205–7, 268–80.

at Delaware capes, [and] also to encourage the building a battery below the city.”<sup>41</sup> His request to do so was granted. In his exhortation that the assembly refuse to rely on “carnal weapons and fortifications,” Churchman reminded his listeners, “how remarkably we have been preserved in peace and tranquility for more than fifty years! no invasion by foreign enemies, and the treaties of peace with the natives, wisely began by our worthy proprietor William Penn, preserved inviolate to this day” (72). Churchman’s representation of “treaties of peace with the natives . . . preserved inviolate” was naive given the Walking Purchase that had occurred only a decade earlier, but his invocation of Penn was nonetheless used to question the militarization of the region’s built environment, an agenda Churchman would pursue further a decade later, during the Seven Years’ War.

The Seven Years’ War radicalized Churchman and other reform Quakers.<sup>42</sup> In 1756, Churchman was in Philadelphia again and witnessed the consequences of frontier violence. He wrote of how “dead bodies were brought to Philadelphia in a waggon [*sic*], with an intent as was supposed to animate the people to unite in preparations of war to take vengeance on the Indians, and destroy them.”<sup>43</sup> Immediately discerning the purpose of this display, Churchman registered how people were “cursing the Indians, and also the Quakers because they would not join in war for destruction of the Indians.” This experience destabilized Churchman’s sense of Pennsylvania’s exceptionalism: “my mind was humbled and turned much inward when I was made secretly to cry; *What will become of Pennsylvania?* for it felt to me that many did not consider, that the sins of the inhabitants, pride, profane swearing, drunkenness with other wickedness were the cause, that the Lord had suffered this calamity and scourge to come upon them; the weight of my exercise increasing as I walked along the street; at length it was said in my soul, *This Land is polluted with blood*” (175). More radically than Stanton, Churchman assigned the cause of war and suffering not to Indigenous peoples but to the “sins of the inhabitants” of Pennsylvania. While “sins,” especially the ones listed by Church-

<sup>41</sup> John Churchman, *Account of the Gospel Labours and Christian Experiences of a Faithful Minister of Christ, John Churchman* (Philadelphia, 1779), 69. Subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>42</sup> Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism*, 103, 114, 150, 168.

<sup>43</sup> On the “minor vogue for the display of scalped bodies” during the Seven Years’ War, see Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York, 2008), 77–79.

man, may not seem like a compelling contextualization of the violence caused by the war, for the reformers these matters of personal conduct were related to the overarching reason for proclaiming “*This Land is polluted with blood*”: the trade in enslaved persons. Churchman wrote of how “mine eyes turned to the case of the poor enslaved Negroes: And however light a matter they who have been concerned with them may look upon purchasing, selling, or keeping those oppressed people in slavery, it then appeared plain to me, that such were partakers in iniquity, encouragers of war and the shedding of innocent blood” (176). For Churchman, the bloodshed of the Seven Years’ War provoked the insight that various forms of violence in Pennsylvania, whether frontier conflict between Indigenous peoples and settlers or the trade in enslaved persons, were all connected. Rather than Penn’s benevolent vision of commerce benefiting enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples, Churchman discovered a vernacular landscape in which the economy severely marginalized and oppressed both.

While Churchman grew quite sensitive to the violence against Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans through which Pennsylvania was constituted, he did not express a similar concern for another feature of the Pennsylvania economy: indentured servitude or tenant labor. This brings us to the work of Jane Hoskens and Elizabeth Ashbridge, both of whom came to North America as bound laborers. Their journals are unique in the Quaker literature of reform because of their participation in the broader genre Matthew Pethers calls “transportation narrative.”<sup>44</sup> Dealing with the lives and experiences of indentured servants, transportation narratives “underline the existence of a perpetually dislocated laboring class” more overtly than a journal such as Stanton’s or Churchman’s.<sup>45</sup> Hoskens’s and Ashbridge’s journals differ significantly in their representations of servitude, but they each undoubtedly offer narratives of dislocation. Both women were born in England, immigrated to Pennsylvania alone as teenagers, and were manipulated into becoming indentured servants. Both also eventually found spiritual homes among Quakers. For Hoskens, her labor as a servant provided a positive antecedent for her later work as a Quaker minister, whereas Ashbridge wrote about servitude mainly

<sup>44</sup> Matthew Pethers, “Transportation Narratives: Servants, Convicts, and the Literature of Colonization in British America,” in *A History of American Working-Class Literature*, ed. Nicholas Coles and Paul Lauter (Cambridge, 2017), 9.

<sup>45</sup> Pethers, 23. Pethers briefly discusses Ashbridge’s *Some Account* as an example of the genre.

as an experience of privation. Neither explicitly invoked Penn, but by joining the community of Friends in Pennsylvania they tacitly engaged with his vision of the colony as a holy experiment even as they shifted toward a more vernacular representation of the colony.

Born to an Anglican family in London in 1693, Hoskens promised to serve God after experiencing a grave illness at the age of sixteen. She then heard, “as though it had been spoken to me,” the words “go to *Pennsylvania*.”<sup>46</sup> After recovering, Hoskens forgot about the episode for a time, but when it came to mind again, she wrote, “it was said in my soul, ‘Go, there shalt thou meet with such of my people as will be to thee in the place of all those near connections, and if thou wilt be faithful, I will be with thee’” (4). Hoskens did not reference Penn here, or anywhere else in her journal, but we can sense here the aura his colony evoked as a place where she might be a part of the faithful community being built there. Her father, when informed of her resolve to go, was suspicious, responding that “the girl has a mind to turn Quaker” (5). Pennsylvania appears, implicitly and explicitly, as a place of particular Quaker destiny, although for Hoskens it would initially be a place not of refuge but of peril.

One of the distinctive aspects of Hoskens’s journal is the extent to which she strove to control her own labor, giving a concrete sense of the challenges indentured servants faced in navigating a challenging economic landscape. When she reached Pennsylvania in 1712, a passenger who had agreed to pay for her journey demanded she sign an indenture he would control. When Hoskens refused, she was put “under confinement” (6). Hoskens continued to resist indenturing herself to this man, and she eventually gained release by agreeing instead to sign a three-year indenture to teach the children of four families from Plymouth, a town north of Philadelphia founded by Friends. Hoskens came to love the Quakers to whom she was indentured, and she “served them a quarter of a year longer” after her indenture was completed, “in consideration of the tender regard they had shown to me, when it was in their power to have conducted otherwise, and for granting me the liberty of going to week-day meetings” (15). Of course, not all indentured servants had the ability to choose their masters. Nevertheless, Hoskens herself refused to be taken into a potentially exploitive situation and instead chose an advantageous one, which placed her squarely within the Pennsylvania Quaker commu-

<sup>46</sup> Jane Hoskens, *The Life and Spiritual Sufferings of that Faithful Servant of Christ Jane Hoskens* (Philadelphia, 1771), 4. Subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

nity that would eventually recognize her spiritual gifts. Rebecca Larson argues that Hoskens's "independence of thought in determining her life choices despite her menial position apparently stemmed from her belief that she received direct divine communications." Servitude, for Hoskens, had paradoxically been a path to freedom, not only economically but also spiritually, resulting in the positive assessment of the condition throughout her narrative. But in terms of indenture, Hoskens's life stood "in marked contrast to the experiences of many young women who immigrated to Pennsylvania as indentured servants."<sup>47</sup> While her journal may have depicted a vernacular landscape of indentured servitude, this narrative is exceptional and not attuned to the suffering more commonplace of the experience.

Elizabeth Ashbridge's journal offers a far different representation of servitude than does Hoskens's. Born in 1713 in Middlewich, Cheshire, in northwest England, she was also a religiously inclined child raised in the Church of England. Along with "an awful regard for religion & a great love for religious people," Ashbridge possessed "a great Love for the Poor."<sup>48</sup> She continued: "I had read that they [the poor] were blessed of the Lord; this I took to mean such as were poor in this World. I often went to their poor Cottages to see them, and used to think they were better off than me, and if I had any money or any thing else I would give it to them, remembering that those that gave to such, lent to the Lord" (148). Viewing the poor as "blessed of the Lord" and "better off" was consistent with Hoskens's view. Yet this is something that Ashbridge "used to think." After she became poor herself, she did not make these kinds of statements, which were replaced by more immediate accounts of her experience of poverty.

While Ashbridge soon found her way to Pennsylvania, it was not under a sense of divine calling, as with Hoskens, but as a victim of circumstance. Estranged from her parents after marrying without their consent "the Darling of my Soul" who was nonetheless "poor, [and] had nothing but his Trade, which was a Stocking Weaver," her husband's unexpected death five months later left Ashbridge to live for a time among relatives in Dublin and western Ireland (148). She met a "Gentle woman

<sup>47</sup> Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 347n12.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel B. Shea, ed., "Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge," in Andrews, *Journeys in New Worlds*, 148. Subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

that then lately came from Pensilvania (& was going back again),” where Ashbridge also had relatives who happened to be Quaker. She “soon agreed with her for my passage & being ignorant of the Nature of an Indenture soon became bound, tho’ in a private manner” (150). Tricked by the woman to board a ship, Ashbridge was then held there three weeks until local authorities came to release her due to the illegality of the proceedings. Despite this initial experience, Ashbridge “was so filled with the thought of coming to America” that she returned to the ship and arranged passage with the captain, this time without an indenture. She sensed at the time a “Providential hand in it.” After arriving in New York in 1732, however, the captain demanded she sign an indenture and threatened jail if she would not. After some protestation, she “in a fright Signed . . . tho’ there was no Magistrate present, I being Ignorant In such Cases, it Did well enough to Make me a Servant four Years” (151). In a reversal of Hoskens’s experiences, Ashbridge fell prey to the coercions of the indentured servitude system. After her indenture was sold to a master, Ashbridge wrote, “Were it Possible to Convey in Characters a sense of the Sufferings of my Servitude, it would make the most strong heart pity the Misfortunes of a young creature as I was.” The man she was indentured to would provide her with “no Clothes to be Decent in,” and she was required “to go barefoot in his Service in Snowey Weather & the Meanest Drudgery” (151). In this regard, she lived out the maxim Penn had offered to settlers in *Some Account* to “look for a Winter before Summer.” Ashbridge’s experience of being forced to walk barefoot in the snow, however, was a far more radical and concrete rendering of Pennsylvania’s landscape than Penn’s platitude, vividly encapsulating the general shift we see occurring in eighteenth-century Quaker journals.

Ashbridge eventually gained her freedom, survived an abusive marriage, and became, like Hoskens, a prominent traveling minister. As with Stanton and Churchman, Hoskens and Ashbridge associated with each other and with the younger John Woolman—all three of their signatures appear, for example, on a 1752 epistle from the General Spring Meeting of ministers and elders for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.<sup>49</sup> All of these

<sup>49</sup> Shea, “Elizabeth Ashbridge and the Voice Within,” 124–25. In his journal, Woolman briefly mentioned meeting with Ashbridge. Both lived in Mount Holly for a few years while Woolman was in his early twenties, and he likely read the manuscript of her journal while he was composing his own narrative. Phillips P. Moulton, ed., “The Journal of John Woolman,” in *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman* (New York, 1971), 40; Shea, “Elizabeth Ashbridge and the Voice Within,” 125; Levenduski, *Peculiar Power*, 90.



reformers influenced Woolman's own representation of the vernacular landscape of Pennsylvania. However, "Woolman distinguished himself among the reformers," Geoffrey Plank observes, not by taking unique moral stances "but rather by discussing his decision[s] in the way that he did."<sup>50</sup> That is, Woolman not only took part, like many Friends, in the eighteenth-century reformation of American Quakerism, but he *wrote* about it in such a way that makes him particularly compelling for understanding the discovery of Pennsylvania's vernacular landscape in eighteenth-century Quaker journals.

Like other reformers examined thus far, Woolman's sensitivity to the vernacular landscape grew out of his travels as an itinerant minister, which complicated his understanding of the colony Penn had founded. Generally, we can assume that Woolman's associations with the proprietor were positive. The only reference to Penn in Woolman's journal comes in a long passage Woolman excerpted from the journal of his fellow minister John Churchman, quoting the above-cited speech Churchman made to the Pennsylvania Assembly during the Seven Years' War, including its invocation of Penn's noble legacy.<sup>51</sup> At other places in his journal, Woolman reinforced this narrative of a benevolent founding, writing that "Pennsylvania and New Jersey were settled by many Friends who were convinced of our principles in England in times of suffering, and coming over, bought lands of the natives and applied themselves to husbandry in a peaceable way" (146). But as his travels increased, the built environment that this history of settlement had brought about became more troubling to him.

In 1746, he took a particularly significant journey "to visit Friends in the back settlements" of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina. He and his companion "crossed the River Susquehanna and had several meetings" in a settlement named "Red Lands," a frontier community where Woolman witnessed the privation of agricultural tenant labor. He reflected that "it is the poorer sort of people that commonly begin to improve remote deserts. With a small stock they have houses to build, lands to clear and fence, corn to raise, clothes to provide, and children to educate" (36). Woolman represented the lives of settlers in Red Lands in terms of their hard labor and furthermore recognized that it was the poor who were left to

<sup>50</sup> Plank, *John Woolman's Path*, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Moulton, "The Journal of John Woolman," 80. Subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.



improve marginal lands on the edges of English colonies. At this point, Woolman did not connect settlements like Red Lands to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, but it did provide him with insight regarding the fringe of the agrarian capitalist economy. Later, he would associate this knowledge more explicitly with dispossession.

Woolman would gain further knowledge of another form of labor in the agrarian capitalist economy as he turned south to Virginia and North Carolina and visited Friends who depended on the enslavement of Africans to run their plantations. He recalled that “two things were remarkable to me on this journey.” The first was the “uneasiness” he felt receiving hospitality from “people who lived in ease on the hard labor of their slaves.” Second and more systematically, he observed, “this trade of importing them from their native country . . . and the white people and their children so generally living without much labour” led to “so many vices and corruptions increased by this trade and this way of life that it appeared to me as a dark gloominess hanging over the land; and though now many willingly run into it, yet in future the consequence will be grievous to posterity!” (38). Woolman saw how the structure of the broader economy, which enabled some to live “without much labor,” depended on the transatlantic trade in enslaved people. Perceiving “a dark gloominess hanging over the land,” Woolman, like Penn, used his imagination to evoke the feeling of the colonial landscape. Unlike Penn, however, this invocation was based on concrete observation of the brutal realities of an economy built on enslaved labor.

Later in his journal, Woolman extended his ideas beyond enslavement to critique the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. This critique originated in his visit to the Indian town of Wyalusing, located on the North branch of the Susquehanna River, during Pontiac’s War in 1763. On this journey, Woolman made his first explicit connection between frontier settler communities like Red Lands and the westward dispossession of Indigenous peoples. After speaking with an Indian trader about the way “white people do often sell rum to the Indians,” which Woolman thought to be an act of greed and “a great evil,” he “remembered that the people on the frontier, among whom this evil is too common, are often poor people, who venture to the outside of a colony that they may live more independent [rather than depend] on such who are wealthy, who often sell high rents on their land” (125). Woolman laid the blame for Indigenous economic dependencies not on frontier traders but on the agrarian capitalist problem that was the root cause, the way the “wealthy” set “high

rents on their land.” As the journey to Wyalusing continued, Woolman would deepen this basic insight into the way the economy of agrarian capitalism adversely affected Indigenous communities.

Days later, as Woolman “rode over the barren hills,” he wrote, “my meditations were on the alterations of the circumstances of the natives of this land since the coming of the English”:

The lands near the sea are conveniently situated for fishing. The lands near the rivers, where the tides flow, and some above, are in many places fertile and not mountainous, while the running of the tides makes passing up and down easy with any kind of traffic. Those natives have in some places, for trifling considerations, sold their inheritance so favourably situated, and in other places been driven back by superior force, so that in many places, as their way of clothing themselves is now altered from what it was and they far remote from us, [they] have to pass over mountains, swamps, and barren deserts, where travelling is very troublesome, in bringing their skins and furs to trade with us (128).

While Woolman did not explicitly name agrarian capitalism here, he had its characteristic economic arrangements in mind when describing the landscape at the outset of this passage. The “lands near the sea” were good for fishing, a fundamental Indigenous subsistence practice, and “lands near the rivers,” where “fertile” soil and “running tides” were conducive to agriculture and “any kind of traffic,” that is, commerce. Recognizing that Native removal from these lands has been unfairly compensated at best and “driven back by superior force” at worst, Woolman reflected an increased appreciation for the problems of Native dependence on British trade. “By the extending of English settlements and partly by English hunters,” Woolman continued, “those wild beasts they chiefly depend on for subsistence are not so plenty as they were, and people too often, for the sake of gain, open a door for them to waste their skins and furs in purchasing liquor which tends to the ruin of them and their families” (128). Here Woolman perceived a double injustice caused by settler expansion: the undermining of the Indigenous subsistence economy and the replacement of it with trade that was, crucially, narrower in scope than what had previously existed and that worked against the interests of Native communities. This insight completed his representation of the vernacular landscape of Pennsylvania, brought into being by the exploitation of tenants and indentured servants, the enslavement of Africans, and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

## Conclusion

In Woolman's journal, all of the elements of Pennsylvania's vernacular landscape encountered disparately in the journals of Stanton, Churchman, Hoskens, and Ashbridge came together to give a starkly different picture of the colony, and of colonization more generally, than Penn did. But ironically, along with being influenced by other reformers, Woolman was likely influenced by Penn himself in developing this picture. According to our knowledge of Woolman's library, he owned none of Penn's promotional tracts, but he did possess *No Cross, No Crown*.<sup>52</sup> While Penn's own sense for the suffering experienced in vernacular agrarian landscapes was written over in an effort to promote his colony, in the literature of reform, and in Woolman most of all, this attentiveness to the vernacular experiences of those marginalized within the built environment of Pennsylvania's economy prevailed over the official landscape Penn had projected as an agrarian capitalist paradise. Quaker reformers hoped, like Penn, that Pennsylvania would be a holy experiment built around a "greene Country towne." This aspiration, however, forced them to reckon with how far short their experiment had come and intensified their efforts to build a more just economic landscape.

JAY DAVID MILLER

<sup>52</sup> According to a list Woolman kept in one of his account books, *No Cross, No Crown* was one of his most lent volumes. Frederick B. Tolles, "John Woolman's List of 'Books Lent,'" *Quaker History: Bulletin of Friends Historical Association* 31 (1942): 78–81.