

EXPLORING THE CITY

BY JIM MURPHY

Welcome Park

From *The Society Hill Reporter*
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Considering all that William Penn did for Philadelphia and our nation — while living here less than four years — I think he's seriously unappreciated by the very city he founded.

In part, that's because the remarkable Benjamin Franklin overshadows just about everybody else in local history.

But when you start looking closely at what Penn really accomplished, you realize that we should be celebrating his birthday every October 14 at Welcome Park, just across from the City Tavern at Second Street above Walnut.

And we should be honoring him during Welcome America festivities each summer.

Why? Because Penn promoted tolerance and religious freedom in Pennsylvania, while other states were putting people to death for their beliefs. He set up a framework of government that allowed for trial by jury and other rights, plus peaceful change through amendments. And, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "he was the greatest law-giver the world has produced."

What's more, he treated the American Indians he met fairly and paid them for their land. He helped plan Philadelphia, one of America's most important cities. And he even established a Friends Public School in 1689 for all Philadelphia children.

A product of his time, Penn was not a perfect human being. He kept several slaves at Pennsbury Manor, his country estate, and only Protestants were permitted to vote and hold public office.

Yet people of all religions were free to worship and practice their faith here. And members of many different sects, who were previously persecuted for their beliefs, flocked to Pennsylvania.

5 Things You May Not Know About Penn

- Pennsylvania wasn't named for William Penn, but for his father, Admiral Sir William Penn, by King Charles II.
- Penn's first choice for his city was the present city of Chester (then called Upland). When that land was too expensive to buy, he set his sights on a rectangular space of 1,200 acres between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers that became Philadelphia.

- Major east-west streets in Penn's original plan for Philadelphia, aside from High Street (now Market), were named after trees Penn said "spontaneously grow in the country." Today's differences: Sassafras became Race Street, Mulberry became Arch, and Cedar was renamed South Street.
- While Quaker Oats still denies that William Penn was the person pictured on its cereal, an ad from *The Fra* magazine in 1909 disproves this claim. The ad says, "Here you see the picture of William Penn, standard-bearer of the Quarters, and of QUAKER OATS," and includes two illustrations of him.
- Lord Baltimore claimed that Philadelphia was actually located in Maryland. So Penn hurriedly returned to England in 1684 to try to resolve the boundary dispute in front of the King. The matter was not completely settled until 1760, when the Pennsylvania-Maryland border was defined as "the line of latitude 15 miles south of the southernmost house in Philadelphia."

Welcome Park features a replica of the William Penn statue atop City Hall and a large timeline that spells out the various roles Penn played during his lifetime.



Despite Penn's many accomplishments, he is rarely remembered in his own city. Even though his 37-foot statue sits atop City Hall, many Philadelphians, tourists and national sports broadcasters think it's Ben Franklin.

Moreover, many Philadelphia visitors' guides I reviewed don't mention Welcome Park, the site devoted to Penn's life and contributions, at all. Some don't even note it on maps.

And during about 20 minutes of looking, I couldn't find any books, t-shirts, photos or other items about William Penn at the Independence Visitors Center bookstore. If they're there, I missed them.

However, there were many displayed copies, of "Fart Proudly: Writings of Ben Franklin You Never Heard In School."

William Penn deserves better.

One of the only places in Philadelphia's historic area to honor William Penn — fierce protector of citizens' rights and founder of our city and state.



FAST FACTS

Place: Welcome Park
 Named for: Penn's ship, the Welcome
 Location: Second Street at Sansom Street Alley
 Open: 24 hours a day
 Built by: Friends of Independence National Historical Park in 1982
 Occasion: 300th anniversary of founding of Pennsylvania
 Designers: Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown