

History of Springettsbury Township

Chapter 1 Origin

Springettsbury Township extends north and south across almost the entire width of Springettsbury Manor. This manor was named in honor of Springett Penn, the favorite grandson of William Penn. William Penn was born in 1644, and died in England in 1718, four years before the manor was surveyed west of the Susquehanna River. William Penn was the founder of Pennsylvania. The area that is now Springettsbury Township belonged to Hellam Township from 1739 until Spring Garden Township was formed out of Hellam Township in 1822. Springettsbury Township was part of Spring Garden Township from 1822 to 1891. Many citizens in the eastern part of Spring Garden Township had a desire to petition for a division of the Township. It was growing rapidly, and diversified interests led to the pursuit of the division. John S. Hiestand led this movement. The taxable inhabitants of Freytown, and others from Spring Garden, opposed this. Still, there were only a few dissenting votes when the Spring election was held in 1891.

A petition was presented to the county courts, and a study was made by these three commissioners: Colonel Frank J. Magee, of Wrightsville; Adam F. Geesey, of York; and Milton Sultzbach, of Hellam. They reported “in favor” of the division, and official sanction was given to the proceeding by the court on April 20, 1891. By 1900, the population of Springettsbury Township was 1,783.

William Penn was born in 1644, the son of a naval captain. The first year of his life was spent in cheap lodgings on England’s Tower Hill. In 1648 the young lad developed smallpox and, to aid his recovery, the family moved into the countryside at Wanstead in Essex. Penn’s first formal education was in a school at Chiswell. In 1654 Penn’s father was sent on an expedition to San Domingo, which prove to be a failure, and he was dismissed from all his commands.



At age 11, William had a religious experience, which he never forgot, that left him convinced he was “dedicated to a holy life.” His family moved to Macroom, Ireland, in 1656, where they first met the Quakers. Thomas Loe, a noted Quaker preacher, was invited to Macroom by Sir William, and impressed the whole family with his preaching, although none of them was then converted.

At the Restoration, Penn was sent to Oxford, where he soon got into trouble with the college authorities for attending private religious meetings rather than going to the elaborate ceremonies in the chapel. In 1661 he was reprimanded, “for writing a book which the

priests and master of the college did not like,” and his father sent him to “Grand Town” to complete his education. In that French setting, he was taught by the theologian Molsse Amyraut, whose sentence “The laws of God are everywhere printed on this heart of mine, who is Himself their true commentary,” must have appealed to Penn.

In 1664 Amyraut died, and Penn went to Italy, but was recalled by his father, to study law in London, and to act occasionally as courier to his father, who was now Grand Captain Commander of the Fleet.

After the Plague of 1665, William was sent to manage his father’s Irish estate, and there again heard Thomas Loe preach, and attended meetings of the Society of Friends (Quakers) regularly, being once sent to prison for it. As a result of such “indiscretions,” he was called to London by his father and, when he refused to give up the Friends, he was disinherited.

William Penn’s father, Admiral William Penn, had every reason to expect his son to take the easy road to success. In fact, he turned him out of doors when William refused to doff his hat in the company of the king! William was placed in the Pennington household at Bury Farm, where Squire Elwood had taken Pennington’s family during that worthy’s stay in Aylesbury jail. Here William Penn was given a glimpse of Quaker philosophy in its domestic setting, and introduced to Isaac’s stepdaughter, Gulielma Maria Springett. He grasped her hand, in the manner of the Friends. As she returned the penetrating gaze without a trace of self-consciousness, he glimpsed some of her rare feminine qualities. She was twenty-four years of age, a few months older than William, and had seen many suitors come and go. Squire Elwood was her protector. He recognized William Penn as the one “for whom she was reserved,” and saw at once how Gulielma’s quiet spiritual strength would respond to and complement Penn’s restless searching intellect and idealism. William had remained detached from women while at court. Now he looked into Gulielma’s wide thoughtful eyes; beautiful-not with paint and beauty spots-but with a gentle disposition and cultural background.

During the next few years William Penn came and went, but each time he entered her presence, he was confirmed of his attraction. Gulielma’s unspoiled character held his heart through his travels for the cause, despite the horrors of his confinements in the Tower and Newgate prison.

William was born at Tower Hill, and it was almost like “home away from home” when he was committed there December 12, 1668, for publishing without a license. His father’s intervention, through the Duke of York, secured his release after six months. William said “The Tower is the worst argument in the world. My prison shall be my grave before I budge a jot.” His disappointed father sent him away to Ireland to administer his estates. The young rebel made a detour over Hertfordshire border to see his supporters. He had qualities for leadership but he chose to fight for “liberty and conscience” and democracy and he was destined to marry his unselfish, modest Gulielma. A slight delay in his journey to Bristol gave him the opportunity to be near Isaac’s stepdaughter. He hoped to speak to her alone.

In the mid 1670s, prosecution of all non-conformists began again, and many Friends thought of emigrating to America to seek religious tolerance. Penn gave much thought to this, verbally as well as in his writings. (One American writer has called Rickmansworth,

“the cradle of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.”) The Elwoods continued to live at Hunger Hill and to hold meetings there.

Isaac Pennington was imprisoned for a long time. The Quaker beliefs were banned, and their preachers were imprisoned. Pennington inherited Chalfont Grange. Already a focal point of Quaker life, it became a center for exchanging ideas and solving problems; a resting point for great leaders on their journeys; and a Meeting House.

Isaac (Gulielma’s stepfather) courageously remained part of the Quaker movement. He and other Friends suffered most severely from the series of acts known as Clarendon Code, passed soon after the restoration of the monarchy. The Quakers were exposed to viciousness from society and abuse from relations. During his years at Rickmansworth, Penn continued preaching, and his home was used to accommodate many other famous preachers on their travels. Chief among these was George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends.

From August 1670 until August 1671, William was in and out of Newgate’s overcrowded and foul prison. In spite of such degradations, he retained his positive faith and his desire to share the future with Gulielma Springett. He wrote a short essay on “Right marriage as it stands in the light and council of the Lord God.” Meanwhile, his father had forgiven him on his deathbed, and William Penn became a wealthy gentleman, well able to maintain a wife and family. The practice of that day was that the couple intending to marry would seek the approval of the Friends, which these two did on February 7, 1672, at Thomas Elwood’s house in Hunger Hill. The following banns were published and posted: “William Penn of Walthamstow in the County of Essex and Gulielma Maria Springett of Tilers End Green in the parish of Penn in the County of Bucks propose their intention of taking each other in marriage.” He spent the next months among the Friends in Buckinghamshire preaching and writing.

In 1670, Penn was imprisoned in Newgate for “preaching Quakerism.” While he was in prison his father fell ill and died before William was released. During his father’s illness he had written a new will, making William his chief heir, and thus William Penn was now a rich man. Shortly afterwards, William was again imprisoned for six months, and spent his lonely hours writing religious pamphlets. On his release, he continued preaching until in 1671 made a missionary tour to Germany and Holland. On his return he went again into Buckinghamshire where things were made ready for his marriage to Gulielma. Just a month after Penn’s brief visit, the marriage took place at Hunger Hill, in the village of Coleshill.

William Penn’s first wife was Gulielma Springett, daughter of Sir William Springett, of Darling, Sussex, (born 1643, died 1693.) William met Gulielma Marie Springett at a friend’s farmhouse in Buckinghamshire, married her at Charleswood, and spent his honeymoon in Rickmansworth. Gulielma’s mother, Mary, married Isaac Pennington after the death of Gulielma’s father, William Springett.

A house was taken at Rickmansworth, and on April 4, 1672, they took each other in marriage at Charleswood in the living room of farmhouse called King’s. (This was King John’s farm, and Penn’s Rickmansworth home was Basing House, now the Council Offices.) The marriage took place, after the necessary interval. In the simplest language, they

promised to be loving and faithful to one another. There was no ritual or ring and no vows of obedience, thus this form of matrimony was quite unacceptable to the Church of England.

In 1677, the Penns moved to Workinghurst in Sussex, where Gulielma Springett had inherited an estate. William Penn spent the next few years preaching and writing, and in taking another missionary journey to the Continent. Meanwhile, the idea of establishing a settlement in America was nurtured, and in 1681 Penn obtained a grant from the English King of a territory in America called Pennsylvania. Penn himself had wished the name to be Sylvania, but the King insisted on adding Penn's name.

As the owner and governor of this new estate, Penn had the power to make laws and draft its constitution. He made it one of the best and most reasonable ever known. Its first provision was for complete religious freedom to all men believing in one god, and throughout, the liberties of man were stressed, the Indians and the settlers being treated as equals. The constitution of Pennsylvania attracted many to "Penn's Woods," and, of course, it especially appealed to the Friends seeking religious tolerance. Throughout his life, Penn was a friend of the Indians and was liked and respected by them. In 1683, he signed a treaty with the Indians of the Lenni Lenape tribe.



In 1684, after seeing Pennsylvania well established, Penn returned to England, from which he heard stories of the savage persecution of the Friends. Five months after his return, Charles II died, and with his successor, James II, Penn had considerable influence. He secured the release of 1,200 Friends from prison, and did what he could to lessen the severity of the trials following the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth, once Penn's neighbor at Rickmansworth.

In 1686, Penn again traveled in Holland and Germany. After the accession to the throne by William and Mary, he was regarded by many at the court as a traitor, because of his loyal friendship to James II. Fortunately, he was able to continue living quietly in London, and went on with his writing of religious tracts and treaties.

At this time there was trouble in Pennsylvania, since the principles of Penn's Governorship did not always suit the merchants who had gone there to trade, and who did not always acknowledge his authority. Further difficulties arose over the necessity of arming the colony,

for although the times were troubled, it was against Quaker principles to carry arms or use violence. In 1692, Penn was dismissed from the Governship, probably due to the intrigues against him at the court in London. In December of that year, however, he insisted on a hearing of these charges in full court before leaving the King, and was publicly cleared. Two years later, in 1693, Penn's wife died, leaving him two sons and a daughter.

Gulielma Penn was, according to her husband, "a woman of ten thousand." When Penn sailed for America in 1682, he wrote to his wife, "My dear wife, Remember thou wert the love of my youth and much joy of my life—the most beloved as well as the most worthy of my earthly comforts. God knows and thou knowest it was a match of His making." Gulielma died in 1693 in her fiftieth year. "About three hours before her end," wrote Penn, she said, "My dear love to all Friends," and prayed the Lord to preserve and bless them. Opposite her grave lie four of her children who died in infancy.

The burial ground of Chalfont Meeting is a field called Well Close. According to the Meeting House records, nearly four hundred early Friends are buried here. Among the Penn's interred there are: William; his first wife Gulielma; his second wife, Hannah; Hannah's year old daughter; John Penn, the first child of William by Hannah; Margaret Freame and her only son Thomas; Margaret, daughter of William and Hannah; Springett Penn, second son by Gulielma, who died at age twenty; Lititia, William and Gulielma's daughter, her father's favorite child; Chrissie Penn; and Mary Penn, widow of Penn's son, William.

In August 1694, the Governorship of Pennsylvania was restored to Penn, but he did not at once return to America, spending the next two years writing and preaching, especially in the West Country. And in March 1696, he married again, this time to Hannah Callowhill, daughter of a wealthy Bristol merchant, Thomas Callowhill, and his sole heiress (born 1670, died 1726). Twenty-four years younger than William, Hannah caused comment in Philadelphia by wearing white satin petticoats and gold chains around her neck. When Penn's health broke down, she stepped into the position of absolute proprietor of Pennsylvania, becoming, so to speak, the first woman governor of an American state.

Penn spent much of 1698 preaching in Ireland and, in 1699, returned to Pennsylvania. In America, Penn had to settle a dispute between Colonel Robert Quarry and Deputy Markham: one wishing Pennsylvania to become a Crown colony, the other opposing this violently. In the meantime, piracy had increased alarmingly, and Quarry accused Markham of encouraging it. On piracy, at least, Penn found no difficulty in coming to terms with Quarry and it was vigorously and successfully put down.

Over the years, some weaknesses in the Constitution of the Penn's colony had been found, and he revised it at the request of the assembly responsible for administering it. The Pennsylvania Constitution was given its final form in 1701, after which Penn set sail for England to deal with difficulties over raising of money for defense of the private colonies. The remainder of Penn's life was spent in this country, although he had much trouble from America, where a number of colonists rejected his authority, and did their best to hinder the work of his colony's assembly.



In 1710, Penn wrote to the assembly, appealing the unfair treatment that he had received at the hands of the colonists. His letter so favorably affected the assembly that affairs in the colony improved immediately. The rents, which Penn had been unable to collect from his tenants, were paid promptly, and criticism and complaint ceased. By 1712, Penn's health was failing and he offered to surrender his powers to the Crown, making only the condition that the Friends should be under the protection of the Queen. Before these arrangements could be completed, Penn was seized by apoplexy, which weakened his mind, and led to his complete retirement. In 1718, he died, was buried at Jordan's Meeting House beside his two wives.

John Penn, the first child of William by Hannah, was born in Philadelphia and is often called "the American." He spent only a year or two in Pennsylvania and made his bachelor home near Maidenhead.

William Penn's son William (born 1680, died 1720) married Mary James (born 1676), when just in her teens. They were the parents of *Springett Penn* (who died 1731, the grandson of William Penn, and the person that *Springettsbury Township* was named after).

Springett Penn was born February 10, 1700, at Worminghurst. He was the "Saracen" described in his father letters. He did not marry. He probably spent much of his time in Ireland. There are few letters from or relating to him in the collections of the Pennsylvania Historical Society. One from John Penn to him, dated London, August 3, 1727, on a business topic, is freezingly severe in tone. Springett, however, was evidently not one to permit lectures from his half uncle (a man of nearly his own age) to disturb his equanimity. There is a letter from him to John some time later; it is dated "Stoke, March 13, 1728," and begins "Dear Jack;" it ends thus; "Perhaps Alderman Tom knows more of ye matter than either of us, for it seems he was pleased to receive ye Gentleman's Request very favorably, turned his Quidd with great Gravity, & gave an assenting nod. Now if you have fed ye poor Gentlemen with hopes and at ye same time cautioned me, ye Devil take you & his Worship ye Ald'n; if otherwise, be free in communicating yo'r thoughts to my Bro Will & he'll save you ye trouble of writing them to; Yo'r aff Nephew & hum Servt: Springett Penn."

Springett joined with Hannah Penn (his step-grandmother), in 1725, in appointing Patrick Gordon as Lieutenant-Governor of Pennsylvania. The chancery suit over the Founder's will was not then settled. At the meeting of the Council, at Philadelphia, June 22, 1726, the commission of Major Gordon "from Springett Penn, Esquire, with the assent of Mrs. Hannah Penn, and his Majesty's royal approbation thereof," was produced and read, and "was forthwith published at the court-house." Springett Penn died in Dublin, Ireland, 8th of February, 1731.

Springettsbury Manor

Springettsbury Manor's boundaries were first marked on York County maps in 1898. The land office was closed from 1718 to 1732. The warrant for this land was not issued but instead passed under the private seal of Governor Keith of Conestoga, PA. The land had not been purchased from the Indians, the office was not open for the sale of acreage, and it was not proper procedure to grant warrants for unpurchased lands.

The grant to William Penn of March 4, 1681, contained several powers to erect manors. William Penn, on his last visit, gave a paper agreeing to give land on a quit rent "holding of the said manor, and under regulations of the court thereof when erected."

Controversy with Maryland was settled by final agreement between the proprietaries. James Hamilton, Governor of Pennsylvania, issued a warrant on May 21, 1762, for re-survey of the Manor of Springettsbury which resurvey then was duly given to the land office of Pennsylvania on July 12, 1768, where it remained and is on record at Harrisburg. In this new survey the manor was found to contain 64,250 acres. It extended westward from the Susquehanna nearly fifteen miles, bounded by a north and south line west of the dwelling plantation of Christian Eyster, and east and west lines about four miles distant north and south of York. At the conclusion of the Indian Treaty in 1736, the limits of Lancaster County were extended westward and included York County. *On August 19, 1749, York County was formed out of Lancaster County.*

The Indians traveled a route through hunting grounds lying along the York Valley, from Wrightsville to the South Mountains. York County land then had no large Indian villages distant from the river, but there is evidence the Indians dwelt by larger streams and springs. Small groups often branched out from tribal fellowship, and every tribe had a number of out dwellers. Crude stone tools were to be found near springs along with other examples of Indian night camps at favored halting spots. The makers of such items as stone implements, arrows, spears, knives, pelts, totems, hoes, axes, skinners, mortars and pestles, in Springettsbury Manor were Susquehannocks, Conestogas, Shawnee, and Conoy Indians.

The "Keiths Newberry Tract" contained 500 acres of the 2,000 acres survey of Newberry tract. It appears in a preliminary draft in the Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs, made June 1722, for the Governor, when he was planning the Springettsbury Manor survey.

William Penn and his heirs purchased rights from the Indians before they settled on the Pennsylvania frontier. Penn's "Treaty of 1736" with the Indians, procured for the heirs of William Penn a clear title to the region west of the Susquehanna. Governor Keith had authority from the heirs of William Penn to lay off a Manor, west of the river, for the benefit of Springett Penn, favorite grandson of the founder of Pennsylvania.

Governor Keith addressed the Indians. His speech and the response by the Indian Chief indicate that William Penn followed peaceable ways with the Indians, who had proudly showed Governor Keith a parchment they had received from William Penn. It contained many references to the friendship between Penn and the Indians, and declared the Indians consent to his purchase of the rights to the lands on both sides of the Susquehanna. Thus

the grounds were laid for taking up the tract of land on the west side of the Susquehanna for Springett Penn.

The land was marked with Springett's name blazed upon the trees, to keep off "Marylanders and other disturbing persons." Governor Keith promised that Springett Penn was kind of heart, like his grandfather was, and that he would be glad to give any part of his land for the Indians own use and convenience. This council with the Indians was held at Conestoga June 16, 1722. It contained 70,000 acres in the name and for the use of Springett Penn, Esq., which shall bear the name and be called, "The Manor of Springettsbury," beginning the survey as near as can be, upon the southwest bank of the Susquehanna River, to the mouth of the Conestoga Creek; a distance ten miles west southwest; a distance of twelve miles northwest by north; until you meet with the uppermost corner tree of Newberry settlement; thence southeast by south to a southern corner tree in the woods; thence down east-northeast to River Susquehanna and along the river side to the place where they began.

William Penn received his grant March 4, 1681.

The land contained dense forests of oak, chestnut, walnut, hickory, poplar, and ash timber. White men cut the timbers and cleared the land to sow their crops. Some trees were hewn into logs to build cabins, oak and chestnut used to build fences, walnut for household furniture.

The first white settlers who crossed the river found but a few patches of land cultivated by Indians.

As has been noted, many founding families lived in the Springettsbury Manor area long before *we became incorporated as Springettsbury Township, on April 20, 1891.*

We have always been a progressive group, and today, as in days of old, are looked up to with admiration.

Delawares

William Penn described the Delawares in a letter to the Free Society of Traders in 1683. His account was enthusiastic, but discriminating.

He stated that they were generally tall and well built. "They tread strong, and mostly walk with a lofty chin," said Penn. "Their complexion is black. They grease themselves with clarified bear fat. Their eye is little and black."

Impressed by two contrasting things: their revengefulness and their open-hearted generosity, Penn described these Indians as being "Liberal, light of heart with strong affections. Merry creatures who feasted and danced a lot." The Delawares never had much nor wanted much. Their pleasures were what fed them: hunting, fishing, and fowling. They ate twice a day, morning and evening, using for both their seats and table, the ground.

Penn Wampum Belt

After the white man brought steel awls into our area, Indians then used them to perforate small beads, and the art of making wampum belts became developed. Wampum quickly became a medium of exchange.

Wampum was sacred. For a speaker in council to hold a wampum belt in his hand was like a white man laying his hand on the Bible and taking an oath.

White wampum was a symbol of peace; black wampum, of grief or death.

The most famous wampum belt in Pennsylvania is the Penn Wampum Belt, of eighteen rows containing some three thousand beads. According to an unverified tradition, it records a treaty held in late 1682 under an elm at Philadelphia between Delaware Chief Tamanend and William Penn. It promised peace between their peoples "as long as grass grows and water runs." This belt shows an Indian as host and a white man, with their hands clasped.



The Penn Wampum Belt was in the possession of the Penn family in England until 1857. It was then given to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, at Philadelphia, where it can now be seen.