

and  
and  
port  
ing  
lled  
lem  
ntly  
heir  
m-  
ury  
em.  
ave  
ere  
hed  
the  
ing  
own  
92  
er a  
she  
y at  
ohn  
ody  
&  
aid  
the

**“PENNSYLVANIA, THE POOR MAN’S PARADISE” (1698)**

*In 1681, in order to pay a large debt owed to William Penn’s father, Charles II appointed Penn the sole proprietor of a large tract of American land. A Quaker, Penn founded a colony based on religious freedom and economic opportunity.*

*Penn publicized his venture throughout Western Europe and drew scores of Quakers and other religious groups to Pennsylvania. Fertile lands and lengthy growing seasons attracted many others. With a reputation for tolerance and organization, Pennsylvania flourished.*

*In this excerpt, Gabriel Thomas, a Quaker who lived in Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1697, describes conditions in the new settlement. (Some spelling has been modernized.)*

### FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What does Thomas claim draws people to Pennsylvania? How did conditions in Pennsylvania differ from much of Europe?
2. Do you agree that Pennsylvania was a "poor man's paradise"? Explain your answer.

**A**nd now for their Lots and Lands in City and Country, in their great Advancement since they were first laid out, which was within the compass of about Twelve Years, that which might have been bought for Fifteen or Eighteen Shillings, is now sold for Fourscore Pounds in ready Silver; and some other Lots, that might have been then Purchased for Three Pounds, within the space of Two Years, were sold for a Hundred Pounds a piece....

Now the true Reason why this Fruitful Country and Flourishing City [Philadelphia] advance so considerably in the Purchase of Lands both in the one and the other, is their great and extended Traffic and Commerce both by Sea and Land, viz. to New-York, New-England, Virginia, Maryland, Carolina, Jamaica, Barbadoes, Nevis, Monsserat, Antigua, St. Christophers, Bermuda, New-Foundland, Madeiras, Saltetudeous, and Old-England; besides several other places. Their Merchandize chiefly consists in Horses, Pipe-Staves, Pork and Beef Salted and Barreled up, Bread, and Flour, all sorts of Grain, Peas, Beans, Skins, Furs, Tobacco, or Pot-Ashes, Wax, &c. which are Barter'd for Rum, Sugar, Molasses, Silver, Negroes, Wine, Linen, Household-Goods, &c....

...The Country at the first, laying out, was void of Inhabitants (except the Heathens, or very few Christians worth naming) and not many People caring to abandon a quiet and easy (at least tolerable) Life in their Native Country (usually the most agreeable to all Mankind) to seek out a new hazardous, and careful one in a Foreign Wilderness or Desert Country, wholly destitute of Christian Inhabitants, and even to arrive at which, they must pass over a vast Ocean, exposed to some Dangers, and not a few Inconveniences: But now all those Cares, Fears and Hazards are vanished, for the Country is pretty well Peopled, and very much Improved, and will be more every Day, now the Dove is returned with the Olive-branch of Peace in her Mouth.

I must needs say, even the Present Encouragements are very great and inviting, for Poor People (both Men and Women) of all kinds, can here get three times the Wages for their Labor they can in England or Wales....

Corn and Flesh, and what else serves Man for Drink, Food and Rayment, is much cheaper here than in England, or elsewhere; but the chief reason why Wages of Servants of all sorts is much higher here than there, arises from the great Fertility and Produce of the Place; besides, if these larger Stipends were refused them, they would quickly set up for themselves, for they can have Provision very cheap, and Land for a very small matter, or next to nothing in comparison of the Purchase of Lands in England; and the Farmers there, can better afford to give that great Wages than the Farmers in England can, for several Reasons very obvious.

As first, their Land costs them (as I said but just now) little or nothing in comparison, of which the Farmers commonly will get twice the increase of Corn for every Bushel they sow, that the Farmers in England can from the richest Land they have.

In the Second place, they have constantly good price for their Corn, by reason of the great and quick vent into Barbados and other Islands; through which means Silver is become more plentiful than here in England, considering the Number of People, and that causes a quick Trade for both Corn and Cattle; and that is the reason that Corn differs now from the Price formerly, else it would be at half the Price it was at then; for a Brother of mine (to my own particular knowledge) sold within the compass of one Week, about One Hundred and Twenty fat Beasts, most of them good handsome large Oxen.

Thirdly, They pay no Tithes, and their Taxes are inconsiderable; the Place is free for all Persuasions, in a Sober and Civil way; for the Church of England and the Quakers bear equal Share in the Government. They live Friendly and Well together; there is no Persecution for Religion, nor ever like to be; 'tis this that knocks all Commerce on the Head, together with high Imposts, strict Laws, and cramping Orders. Before I end this Paragraph, I shall add another Reason why Women's Wages are so exorbitant; they are not yet very numerous, which makes them stand upon high Terms for their several Services, in Sempstering, Washing, Spinning, Knitting, Sewing, and in all the other parts of their Employments; for they have for Spinning either Worsted of Linen, Two Shillings a Pound, and commonly for Knitting a very Coarse pair of Yarn Stockings, they have half a Crown a pair; moreover, they are usually Married before they are Twenty Years of Age, and when once in that Noose, are for the most part a little uneasy, and make their Husbands so too, till they procure them a Maid Servant to bear the burden of the Work, as also in some measure to wait on them too....

What I have here written, is not a Fiction, Flam, Whim, or any sinister Design, either to impose upon the Ignorant, or credulous, or to curry Favor with the Rich and Mighty, but in mere Pity and Pure Compassion to the Numbers of Poor Laboring Men, Women, and Children in England, half starve'd, visible in their meager looks, that are continually wandering up and down looking for Employment without finding any, who here need not lie idle a moment.... Here are no Beggars to be seen (it is a shame and Disgrace to the State that there are so many in England) not indeed have any here at least Occasion or Temptation to take up that Scandalous Lazy Life...

Gabriel Thomas, *An Historical and Geographical Account of the Province and Country of Pennsylvania*. (London, 1698), 23-45.