

A Letter from
William Penn

On August 18, 1681, William Penn wrote to the Lenni Lenape tribe, offering to treat them and the other Iroquois tribes fairly. As a Quaker, Penn was opposed to war and was enthusiastic about peacefully coexisting with the Native Americans in Pennsylvania. Here is part of the letter.

My Friends, There is one great God and power that hath made the world and all things therein, to whom you and I, and all people owe their being and well-being, and to whom you and I must one day give an account for all that we do in the world; this great God hath written his law in our hearts, by which we are taught and commanded to love and help, and do good to one another, and not to do harm and mischief one to another. Now this great God hath been pleased to make me concerned in your parts of the world, and the king of the country where I live hath given me a great province, but I desire to enjoy it with your love and consent, that we may always live together as neighbors and friends, else what would the great God say to us, who hath made us not to devour and destroy one another, but live soberly and kindly together in the world? Now I would have you well observe, that I am very sensible of the unkindness and injustice that hath been too much exercised toward you by the people of these parts of the world, who sought themselves, and to make great advantage by you, rather than be examples of justice and goodness unto you, which I hear hath been matter of trouble to you, and caused great grudgings and animosities, sometimes to the shedding of blood, which hath made the great God angry; but I am not such a man, as is well known in my own country; I have great love and regard towards you, and I desire to win and gain your love and friendship, by a kind, just, and peaceable life, and the people I send are of the same mind, and shall in all things behave themselves accordingly.

province: an administrative division of a country

animosities: strong dislikes, ill will



Discussion Questions

1. Do you find evidence of William Penn's Quaker beliefs in this letter? Explain.
2. How do you think the Lenni Lenape reacted to this letter?