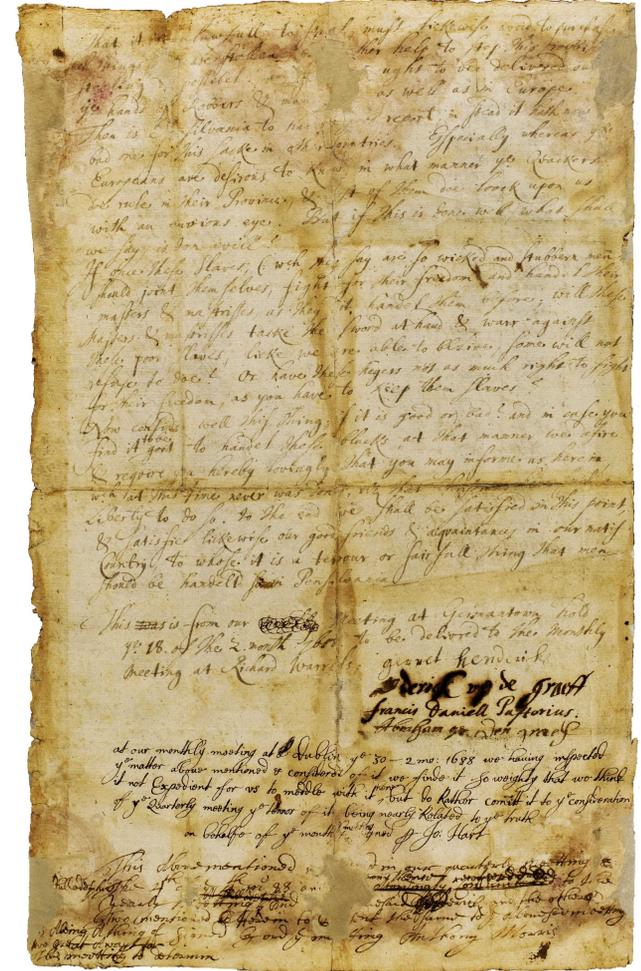


The Germantown Quaker Petition Against Slavery in 1688

The document after conservation, full-size 9"x14".



Enlarged contrast-enhanced view of the document.



Thones Kunders' house (stood at 5109 Germantown Ave), where the 1688 Petition against Slavery was written.



The table on which the 1688 Petition was written, sitting today in the Germantown Mennonite Meetinghouse (6133 Germantown Ave).

Introduction

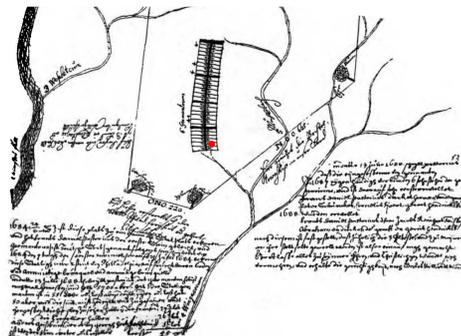
Pennsylvania was founded in 1682 by William Penn as an English colony where people from any country and faith could settle, free from religious persecution. Penn invited people from his native England and from other European countries to the new colony, where he profited by selling the land. He organized Philadelphia as a welcoming town with many green spaces. Soon, many different churches were established. The town and surrounding countryside prospered.

In 1683 Francis Daniel Pastorius, a German, and thirteen German-Dutch families from Krefeld in the Rhine valley came to Pennsylvania and founded Germantown along a Lenape Indian trail four miles north of Philadelphia. By trade they were craftsmen, including weavers, dyers, tailors, and shoemakers, and they worked hard to clear the forest and plant crops for food and flax for weaving. They set up looms and soon were producing cloth which sold throughout the colonies. The Krefelders were Quakers who had been persecuted in their own land because of their beliefs, and therefore understood the value of a community founded on religious toleration.

Many of the early British settlers of Philadelphia and its surrounding towns were wealthy and purchased slaves to work on their farms. Although they had come to the new land to be free from persecution, they saw no contradiction in owning slaves, because the idea of human rights had not been widely discussed in Europe or America, and was not in the public awareness. At that time, women could not vote or speak in public gatherings, and slaves were bought and sold like farm animals. Slaves were widely owned in the colonies and local slave markets made purchasing slaves easy. The slave trade was protected by the British crown and some thought it necessary for economic growth in the colonies. It was justified by racism and intolerance towards what many British saw as "uncivilized" cultures.

The first settlers of Germantown were soon joined by several more Quaker and Mennonite families from Krisheim, also in the Rhine valley. Many of the Germantown settlers attended local Quaker Meetings and became involved in the Philadelphia Quaker community. The town prospered and grew, and soon a Quaker Meeting was established at Thones Kunders' house (5109 Germantown Ave), which was overseen by Dublin (Abington) Meeting.

The German-Dutch settlers were unaccustomed to slaves, although from the shortage of labor they understood why their British neighbors relied on slaves for prosperity. Some people in the new land were indentured servants, working for several years in exchange for being carried on a boat to the new colony. Slaves and indentured servants were a valuable asset for a farmer because they were not paid. Yet the German-Dutch settlers refused to buy slaves themselves and quickly saw the contradiction in the slave trade and in farmers who forced people to work. Although in their native Germany and Holland the Krefelders had been persecuted because of their beliefs, people who had not been convicted of a crime could not be sold or forced to work against their will.



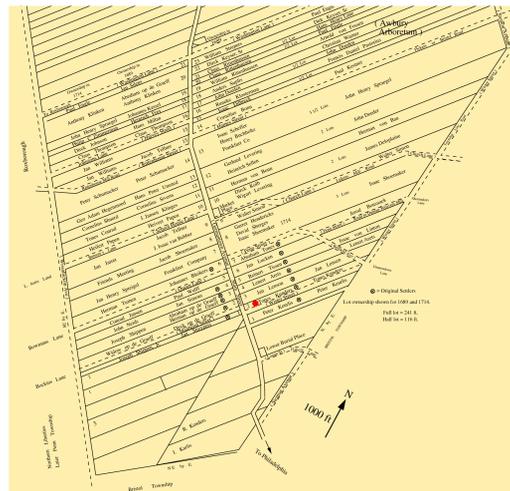
Original plan for Germantown. The lots were narrow, 115' frontage on Main St.

In 1688, five years after Germantown was founded, Pastorius and three other men decided to raise the issue of slavery with the local Quaker Meeting which they attended. The men gathered at Thones Kunders' house and wrote a petition urging the Meeting to abolish slavery based upon the Golden Rule in the Bible. The petition argues that every human, regardless of belief, color, or ethnicity, has rights that should not be violated. The four men also assert that inviting more people to the new land would be difficult if prospective settlers felt that they could be persecuted without good reason, and that a slave revolt would be justifiable. The petition's grammar seems unusual today but reflects the Krefelders' incomplete knowledge of English as well as typical pre-modern use of variable spelling.

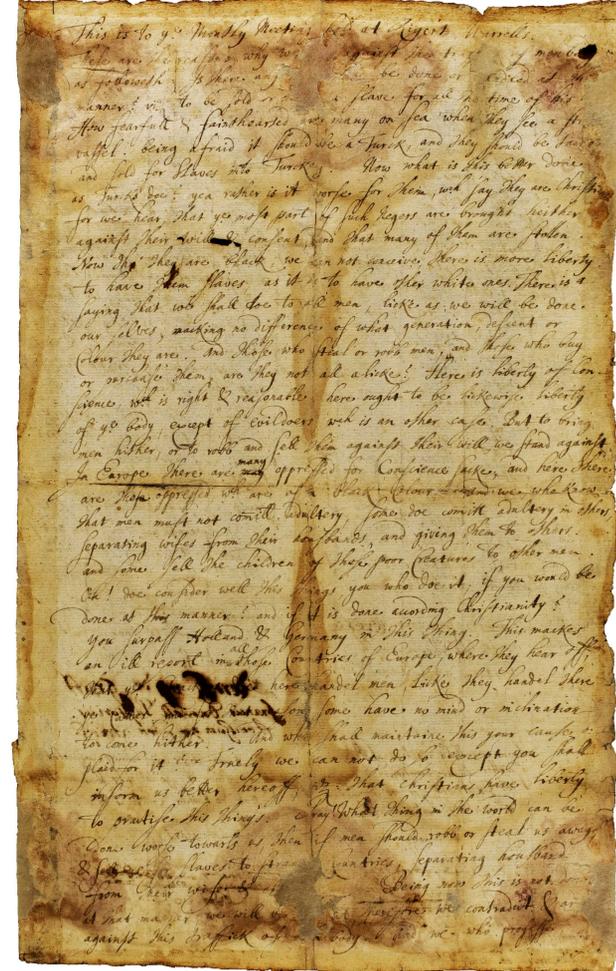
The men presented their petition at the local Monthly Meeting at Dublin (Abington), but it is not clear what they expected to happen. The Meeting decided that although the issue was fundamental and just, it would need to be considered further and in the usual manner sent the petition on to the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, where it was again considered and sent on to the Burlington Yearly Meeting. Realizing that the abolition of slavery would have a wide and overreaching impact on the entire colony, none of the Meetings wanted to pass judgement on such a "weighty matter."

The practice of slavery continued and was tolerated in Quaker society in the years immediately following the 1688 petition. Some of the authors continued to protest against slavery, but for a decade their efforts were rejected. Gradually, due to the efforts of many dedicated people, sometimes in racist or practical arguments, Quakers became aware of the essential wrongness of the institution of slavery. In 1776 a proclamation was written by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting that banned the owning of slaves.

The 1688 petition was the first document of its kind that made a plea for equal human rights for everyone. It compelled a higher standard of reasoning about fairness and equality that continued in Pennsylvania and the other colonies with the American Revolution and the abolitionist and suffrage movements. Lost and forgotten for 150 years until 1844 when it was re-discovered, it soon became a focus of the burgeoning abolitionist movement. After a century of public exposure, it was misplaced again, and once more re-discovered in March 2005 in the vault at Arch Street Meeting. It has since been conserved and currently resides at Haverford College Library. Today the 1688 petition is a powerful reminder about the basis for freedom and equality for all.



Germantown lots in 1689. Thones Kunders' house marked in red.



Petition Text

This is to the monthly meeting hold at Rigert Warrells. These are the reasons why we are against the traffick of men-body, as followeth:

Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? How fearful & fainthearted are many on sea when they see a strange vessel - being afraid it should be a Turk, and they should be taken, and sold for slaves into Turkey. Now what is this better done, as Turcks doe? yea, rather is it worse for them wch say they are Christians, for we hear that the most part of such negroes are brought heither against their will & consent and that many of them are stollen.

Now tho they are black, we can not conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones. There is a saying that we shall doe to all men licke as we will be done ourselves; macking no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are. and those who steal or robb men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not alike? Here is liberty of Conscience wch is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of the body, except of evildoers, wch is an other case. But to bring men hither, or to robb and sell them against their will, we stand against. In Europe there are many oppressed for Conscience sake; and here there are those oppressed wch are of a Black Colour.

and we who know that men must not comitt adultery, some doe comitt adultery in others, separating wives from their husbands and giving them to others, and some sell the children of those poor Creatures to other men.

Ah! doe consider well this things, you who doe it, if you would be done at this manner? and if it is done according Christianity? You surpass Holland and Germany in this thing. This mackes an ill report in all those Countries of Europe, where they hear off, that the Quackers doe here handel men licke they handel there the Cattle, and for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither. And who shall maintaine this your cause, or plaide for it? Truly we can not do so, except you shall inform us better hereoff, viz: that christians have liberty to practise this things.

Pray, what thing in the world can be done worse towards us, then if men should robb or steal us away, & sell us for slaves to strange Countries, separating husband from their wife and children. Being now this is not done at that manner we will be done at, therefore we contradict & are against this traffick of men body.

And we who profess that it is unlawfull to steal, must likewise avoid to purchase such things as are stollen, but rather help to stop this robbing and stealing if possibel, and such men ought to be delivered out of the hands of the Robbers, & made free as well as in Europe. Then is Pennsylvania to have a good report, in stead it hath now a bad one for this sake in other Countries. Especially whereas the Europeans are desirous to know in what manner the Quackers doe rule in their Province, & most of them doe loock upon us with an envious eye. But if this is done well, what shall we say is done evil?

If once these slaves (wch they say are so wicked and stubborn men) should joint themselves, fight for their freedom and handel their masters & mastrisses, as they did handel them before; will these masters & mastrisses tacke the sword at hand and warr against these poor slaves, licke we are able to helive, some will not refuse to doe? or have these negroes not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?

References

- Gerbner, Katharine, "We are against the traffick of mens-body: The Germantown Quaker Protest of 1688 and the Origins of American Abolitionism", *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* (Spring 2007).
- Jenkins, Charles F., "The Guide Book To Historic Germantown", Site and Relic Society, Germantown, 1915.
- Learned, Marion Dexter, "The Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius, the Founder of Germantown", Philadelphia, William J Campbell, 1908.
- Pennypacker, Samuel W., "The Settlement of Germantown and the Beginning of the German Emigration to North America", Philadelphia, William Campbell, 1899.
- Ruth, John L., "The Emigration From Krefeld to Pennsylvania 1683," an article in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol LVII, #4, October 1983.
- Ward, Townsend, "The Germantown Road and its Associations," in "Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography", 1881, Vol V, No. 1.
- Wolf, Stephanie G., "Urban Village: Population, Community and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800. Princeton Univ. Press, 1976.
- Prepared by the GMM Working Group on the 1688 Petition, copyright (C) 2008 by Germantown Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends, printed Nov 2008. Full size 60"x40".

"Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner, to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life?"

"There is a saying that we shall do to all men licke as we will be done ourselves; macking no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are."

"Here is liberty of Conscience wch is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of the body . . ."

"In Europe there are many oppressed for Conscience sake; and here there are those oppressed wch are of a Black Colour."

"Now consider well this thing, if it is good or bad?"

"And in case you find it to be good to handel these blacks in that manner, we require you hereby lovingly to informe us herein, that Christians have such a liberty to do so."