



1681. With a land-holding second only in size to the British Empire, William Penn set forth to fulfill what he deemed a holy experiment. This place was Philadelphia.

Beyond a refuge for his fellow Quakers, this city would have loftier pursuits. Under the direction of Penn, Philadelphia would implement the fundamental, building blocks of American urban design, upon which much of this country is built. Unlike other cities of the New World that were growing without direction, Philadelphia would have a plan.

Penn envisioned streets straight and wide unlike the narrow winding streets of their European siblings. They were intended to lead from the city to other cities yet unbuilt. Houses were to be centered on their lots *'...so there may be ground on each side for gardens or orchards or fields, that it may be a green country town which will never be burnt and will always be wholesome'* (Harris 8). Reinforcing this idea, a series of parks became integrated into the landscape. Today, the five original parks of Penn's plan still embellish and characterize downtown living. With population growth came the acquisition of surrounding lands, including this country's largest urban park, Fairmount Park. Straddling the Schuylkill River its natural beauty encompasses a tract of land 2 miles wide and 10 miles long. When asked for his thoughts on the design, Fredrick Law Olmstead stated, 'nature herself has so

adorned the space that little remains for art to do' (Harris 12).

Penn made sure his centerpiece of this Pennsylvania colony would be domestically and visually enticing, but its geography provided the necessary tools to become an economic force. Although 90 miles from the Atlantic, its status as the dominant shipping port continued for the next 150 years. Still today it ranks as the fourth largest port and the fourth largest city in the country.

It was indeed Philadelphia's role as a port that would contribute greatly to its prosperity. But growth could not be limited to mere economics. Learning and building from the mistakes of neighboring, New World counterparts, the city soon became a meeting ground for political commerce. It was here in 1776 that a document known as the Declaration of Independence would sever all ties to British rule and later in 1787, a new Constitution would lay the groundwork for the future United States government.

One might say that Philadelphia has always played a key role in the shaping of this country. The ideal 'green country town' of Penn's vision may hardly be visible, but the spirit of those gestures live on in the City of Brotherly Love.

