

Penn 'Holy Experiment' worthy goal

William Penn stands atop City Hall, seemingly surveying a "Holy Experiment" he nurtured out of the ideals of his Quaker faith. In a 17th century world conditioned by violence, religious intolerance and arbitrary authority, Penn founded a colony dedicated to pacifism, religious toleration, and participatory government. Nowhere else in the Western world had such ideals come to fruition as they did in his capital city of Philadelphia. The success of Penn's experiment lay not so much in the constitutional framework or benevolent institutions that still endure today, but rather in its attempt to foster a spirit of mutual respect and brotherly love among all people, regardless of their backgrounds.

Early Philadelphians had the passion and courage to make that experiment work, to transform abstract political theory into reality. They understood that to experiment is to be willing to try, possibly fail, and try again. That it involves willingness to listen to the ideas of others. And that it requires an openness to admit mistakes as well as to accept responsibility for them.



WILLIAM KASHATUS

THE PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1994

PAGE 30

Today, Philadelphia is plagued by problems. But there is still the promise of a better future if we only rededicate ourselves to the noble vision William Penn held for us so long ago.

On this, the 350th anniversary of his birth, it is well to recall the prayer Penn wrote for his City of Brotherly Love before his return to England:

"And thou Philadelphia, the virgin settlement of this province, named before thou wert born, what love, what care, what service and what travail have there been to bring thee forth and preserve thee from such as would abuse and defile thee. Oh that thou may be kept from the evil that would overwhelm thee; that faithful to the God of thy mercies, in the life of righteousness, thou may be preserved to the end. My soul prays to God for thee that thou may stand in the day of trial, that thy children may be blessed of the Lord, and thy people saved by his power."

If Philadelphians can transcend the cynicism that often frustrates constructive political and social reform, we can fulfill William Penn's vision of a just society. Ours is a story that began as a dream, and of that dream there are two things above all others to be said: that only a visionary like Penn could have dreamed it — or would have dared to — and that Philadelphians have in the past demonstrated the potential for making that dream come true. ■

William C. Kashatus is chair of religious studies and director of community service at William Penn Charter School.