

BENJAMIN WEST



DISAMBIGUATION: This is [Benjamin West](#) (1738-1820) the painter. There was also a [Benjamin West](#) (1730-1813) born in Rehoboth, Massachusetts who was for some years a bookseller in Providence, Rhode Island, and for many years published an almanac, before becoming in 1786 Brown University's Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, and then in 1812 the Postmaster of Providence.

1738

October 10: [Benjamin West](#) was born to [Quaker](#) parents in Springfield (now Swarthmore) in the Pennsylvania colony.

1754

The Quaker community of which 16-year-old [Benjamin West](#) was a part approved art training. The young [Quaker](#) of noticeable artistic talent was to study both in Philadelphia and in New-York.



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1756

[Benjamin West](#) at the age of 18 removed to Philadelphia and set up as a portrait-painter.



1757

[Benjamin West](#), no longer a [Quaker](#), served as a militia captain in Indian campaigns in Pennsylvania.



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1758

The painter [Benjamin West](#), formerly a [Quaker](#), relocated his portrait studio from Philadelphia to New-York.



1760

[Benjamin West](#) went to Italy to study art.



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1763

[Benjamin West](#) traveled from Italy to England. He would be in England for the remainder of his life. His large Biblical and classical themes would win great favor among prelates of the Anglican church.



1768

[Benjamin West](#)'s "Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus."



BENJAMIN WEST**BENJAMIN WEST****1771**

Almost four generations after the putative fact, the famous painting, by [Benjamin West](#), formerly an American Quaker but by this point no longer either a Quaker or an American, of [William “Onas” Penn](#), James Logan, Thomas Lloyd, and Thomas Story allegedly negotiating with the headman Tamanend and the elders of the Lenape tribe near Philadelphia in the early 1680s. We note that Logan, Lloyd, and Story were not present on this continent during that period — and that early biographers make no mention whatever of Friend William having entered into any such negotiation.¹



1. Although this painting is in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, it would not arrive in this nation until 1852.

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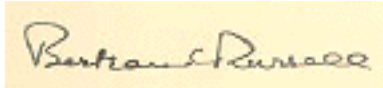
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"...The conflicts of Europeans with American-Indians, Maoris and other aborigines in temperate regions ... if we judge by the results we cannot regret that such wars have taken place ... the process by which the American continent has been acquired for European civilization [was entirely justified because] there is a very great and undeniable difference between the civilization of the colonizers and that of the dispossessed natives...."



— [Bertrand Russell](#),
THE ETHICS OF WAR, January 1915



In this year, also, West's unabashed celebration of the romance of warfare, "The Death of General Wolfe."





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1772

Robert Jones, a British lieutenant of artillery, issued the first [skating](#) textbook, A TREATISE ON SKATING: FOUNDED ON CERTAIN PRINCIPLES DEDUCED FROM MANY YEARS EXPERIENCE BY WHICH THAT NOBLE EXERCISE IS NOW REDUCED TO AN ART, AND MAY BE TAUGHT AND LEARNED BY A REGULAR METHOD, WITH BOTH EASE AND SAFETY, making first mention of the serpentine or change of edge, the outer backward roll, and the inside and outside spread-eagles. (American skaters already did these moves, and our painter [Benjamin West](#) was performing them in London to the praise of onlookers.) Although Jones considered skating backward neither necessary nor pleasant, he sorrowed that skating in England was exclusively for males. He introduced the Salutation, which marks the beginning of combined figures and paired or coupled skating. He described the *Herzel*, a heart on one leg, which by 1795 would be known as the “three.” While Dutch speed and distance skaters had developed the sort of long, low, flat blades that enabled them to cover a great distance with each stroke, British skaters were shortening and curving the blade to create a “figuring” skate, extending the runner beyond the heel plate. No more than two inches of this iron touched the ice at any time. With this the British could turn in a close radius in order to experiment with various forms of movement on ice.

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King George III appointed [Benjamin West](#) as historical painter to the monarch, with an annual allowance of 1,000 pounds.



When [Paul Revere](#) went to create an image of King Phillip in this year for use in [Ezra Stiles](#)'s edition of Benjamin Church's ENTERTAINING HISTORY, he displayed no more originality than was usual for him. It is likely that he created this depiction of a man who had died in the previous century well before he was born on the basis of a series of mezzotints that had been published in London in 1710 which purported to depict not this [Wampanoag](#) leader but instead a couple of his *Mohawk* enemies, named Ho Nee Yeath and Sa Ga Yeath (and also, a group of Ohio natives that [Benjamin West](#) had painted in 1764). We note that neither of [Metacom](#)'s hands appear crippled in this famous Revere engraving, when the one salient fact that we have about his appearance is that a hand had been maimed, evidently when a pistol he was firing split in his gun hand (not knowing whether he was right-handed or left-handed, and the records not telling us which hand was in Alderman's bucket of rum, we don't know which hand Phillip had maimed).





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This crude and derivative engraving would subsequently be used by New England whites to demonstrate that the sachem Metacom had indeed been in his person quite as hideous and malformed and dwarfish as his white enemies in his generation had been pleased to suppose.

1775

John Hall's engraving of [William Penn](#) supposed negotiating session with the headman Tamanend and the elders of the Lenape tribe, based upon the 1771 painting by [Benjamin West](#) now in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, was published by John Boydell in London. As a result of the engraving process, of course, West's composition is reversed. This would become the basis for Friend Edward Hicks's multiple renderings of the scene in the PEACEABLE KINGDOM series. We note that the rowboat full of standing Quakers typically in the background to the right of the Hicks versions is not in the engraving; it is from another engraving, made in 1830 by T.H. Mumford, entitled "Penn Landing at the Blue Anchor Inn."²

THE QUAKER PEACE TESTIMONY

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

2. We should bear in mind that in all likelihood there never was a single event anything like what has been portrayed in this art. Had there been any actual purchases, there would obviously be written documents. Nothing like this appears in biographies of [William Penn](#), nor is there any contemporary written documentation. The story presented by [Benjamin West](#) is uncharacteristic of treaty proceedings of the 17th century. Three of the personages depicted in this group, James Logan, Thomas Lloyd, and Thomas Story, were not on this continent during the period of this alleged negotiation process. Penn was still holding various "friendship conferences" such as had occurred in 1681, in 1682, and even into 1683. The story told by Voltaire, published in English in 1773, that "The first step he took was to enter into an alliance with his *American* neighbors; and this is the only treaty between those people and the Christians that was not ratified by an oath and was never infring'd," is evidently a concoction, and it would appear that the reason why this is the only white treaty **never infringed upon** is, actually, that it is the only white treaty **never entered into**. We simply needed to invent at least one context of fidelity, in order to better be able by contrast to depict all our other contexts of infidelity!

1778

More of former [Quaker Benjamin West](#)'s pornography of violence, in "Battle of La Hogue":



1779

The King of England commissioned a series of works to be collectively entitled “History of Revealed Religion” for his private chapel at Windsor Castle. [Benjamin West](#) would be involved in this project between this year and 1801 — by which time the chapel project would have become an irrelevancy due to war and the king’s mental health.



1782

[Benjamin West](#)'s "The Sepulchre":



1783

April: [Benjamin West](#) was in the process of preparing a commemorative painting for the Treaty of Paris, and had worked up the figures of the American negotiators, [John Jay](#), John Adams, [Benjamin Franklin](#), [Henry Laurens](#), and [William Temple Franklin](#), when the British commissioners refused to pose. The painting would never be completed:



READ THE FULL TEXT

During the peace negotiations between the United States and Great Britain, [Jay](#) would propose that “the subjects of his Britannic Majesty shall not have any right or claim under the convention, to carry or import, into the said States any [slaves](#) from any part of the world; it being the intention of the said States entirely to prohibit the importation thereof.” The response of the British negotiator, Fox, would be to point out that “If that be their policy, it never can be competent to us to dispute with them their own regulations.” No such proviso would appear in the final treaty, presumably because it was considered unnecessary.

INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: During the peace negotiations between the United States and Great Britain in 1783, it was proposed by Jay, in June, that there be a proviso inserted as follows: “Provided that the subjects of his Britannic Majesty shall not have any right or claim under the convention, to carry or import, into the said States any slaves from any part of the world; it being the intention of the said States entirely to prohibit the importation thereof.”³ Fox promptly replied: “If that be their policy, it never can be competent to us to dispute with them their own regulations.”⁴ No mention of this was, however, made in the final treaty, probably because it was thought unnecessary.

In the proposed treaty of 1806, signed at London December 31, Article 24 provided that “The high contracting parties engage to communicate to each other, without delay, all such laws as

3. Sparks, DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENCE, X. 154.

4. Fox to Hartley, June 10, 1783, as quoted in Bancroft, HISTORY OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, I. 61. Cf. Sparks, DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENCE, X. 154, June 1783.



have been or shall be hereafter enacted by their respective Legislatures, as also all measures which shall have been taken for the abolition or limitation of the African slave trade; and they further agree to use their best endeavors to procure the co-operation of other Powers for the final and complete abolition of a trade so repugnant to the principles of justice and humanity."⁵

This marks the beginning of a long series of treaties between England and other powers looking toward the prohibition of the traffic by international agreement. During the years 1810-1814 she signed treaties relating to the subject with Portugal, Denmark, and Sweden.⁶ May 30, 1814, an additional article to the Treaty of Paris, between France and Great Britain, engaged these powers to endeavor to induce the approaching Congress at Vienna "to decree the abolition of the Slave Trade, so that the said Trade shall cease universally, as it shall cease definitively, under any circumstances, on the part of the French Government, in the course of 5 years; and that during the said period no Slave Merchant shall import or sell Slaves, except in the Colonies of the State of which he is a Subject."⁷ In addition to this, the next day a circular letter was despatched by Castlereagh to Austria, Russia, and Prussia, expressing the hope "that the Powers of Europe, when restoring Peace to Europe, with one common interest, will crown this great work by interposing their benign offices in favour of those Regions of the Globe, which yet continue to be desolated by this unnatural and inhuman traffic."⁸ Meantime additional treaties were secured: in 1814 by royal decree Netherlands agreed to abolish the trade;⁹ Spain was induced by her necessities to restrain her trade to her own colonies, and to endeavor to prevent the fraudulent use of her flag by foreigners;¹⁰ and in 1815 Portugal agreed to abolish the slave-trade north of the equator.¹¹

5. AMERICAN STATE PAPERS, FOREIGN, III. No. 214, page 151.

6. BRITISH AND FOREIGN STATE PAPERS, 1815-6, pages 886, 937 (quotation).

7. BRITISH AND FOREIGN STATE PAPERS, 1815-6, pages 890-1.

8. BRITISH AND FOREIGN STATE PAPERS, 1815-6, page 887. Russia, Austria, and Prussia returned favorable replies: BRITISH AND FOREIGN STATE PAPERS, 1815-6, pages 887-8.

9. BRITISH AND FOREIGN STATE PAPERS, 1815-6, page 889.

10. She desired a loan, which England made on this condition: BRITISH AND FOREIGN STATE PAPERS, 1815-6, pages 921-2.

11. BRITISH AND FOREIGN STATE PAPERS, 1815-6, pages 937-9. Certain financial arrangements secured this concession.

BENJAMIN WEST**BENJAMIN WEST****1784**

John Trumbull was back in London, studying with the painter [Benjamin West](#). At West's suggestion and with [Thomas Jefferson](#)'s encouragement, he began the celebrated series of historical paintings and engravings that at which he would labor sporadically for the remainder of his life.

JOHN TRUMBULL

The more alterations Congress made on his draft, the more miserable Jefferson became. He had forgotten, as has posterity, that a draftsman is not an author.

1788

More of former [Quaker Benjamin West](#)'s pornography of violence, in "Edward III crossing the Somme":



[Benjamin West](#)'s "King Lear":



1789

[Benjamin West](#)'s "Genius Calling Forth the Fine Arts to Adorn Manufactures and Commerce":



1791

[Benjamin West](#)'s "Expulsion from the garden of Eden":



1792

[Benjamin West](#)'s "Pharaoh and his Host Lost in the Red Sea":



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West succeeded Reynolds as president of the Royal Academy.

1794

Benjamin West's "Christ Healing the Sick":



His "The Baptism of Our Saviour," or "Christ Receiving the Holy Ghost, When Baptized by John at the River Jordan."



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1800

→ James Wadsworth sold land in the Genesee Valley of New York to the painter [Benjamin West](#).




1801

→ By this point the king's project for a private royal chapel at Windsor Castle had begun to dissolve under the pressures of war and insanity. The painter, [Benjamin West](#), was outa luck.



→ September: [Washington Allston](#) was admitted to the Royal Academy in London ([Benjamin West](#) was then president of that academy).

1802

 [Benjamin West](#)'s "Cupid Stung by a Bee":



1804

 Benjamin West's "Destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet":



1805

➡ Benjamin West's "[Benjamin Franklin](#) Drawing Electricity from the Sky":



In 1767, fifteen years after the alleged incident, Joseph Priestly described, in HISTORY AND PRESENT STATE OF ELECTRICITY, what [Franklin](#) had actually claimed about his alleged kite experiment of 1752:

The Doctor, having published his method of verifying his hypothesis concerning the sameness of electricity with the matter of lightning, was waiting for the erection of a spire in Philadelphia to carry his views into execution, not imagining that a pointed rod of a moderate height could answer the purpose, when it occurred to him that by means of a common kite he could




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have better access to the regions of thunder than by any spire whatever. Preparing, therefore, a large silk handkerchief and two cross-sticks of a proper length on which to extend it, he took opportunity of the first approaching thunderstorm to take a walk in the fields, in which there was a shed convenient for his purpose. But, dreading the ridicule which too commonly attends unsuccessful attempts in science, he communicated his intended experiments to nobody but his son who assisted him in raising the kite.

The kite being raised, a considerable time elapsed before there was any appearance of its being electrified. One very promising cloud had passed over it without any effect, when, at length, just as he was beginning to despair of his contrivance, he observed some loose threads of the hempen string to stand erect and to avoid one another, just as if they had been suspended on a common conductor. Struck with this promising appearance, he immediately presented his knuckle to the key, and (let the reader judge of the exquisite pleasure he must have felt at that very moment) the discovery was complete. He perceived a very evident electric spark. Others succeeded, even before the string was wet, so as to put the matter past all dispute, and when the rain had wet the string he collected electric fire very copiously. This happened in June 1752, a month after the electricians in France had verified the same theory, but before he heard of anything they had done.

The evidentiary value of the above account in demonstrating that Franklin really did conduct such an experiment—since it is a mere relaying of an uncorroborated story once told by Franklin about himself, and since we know that the man sometimes made stuff up, and since we know that had such an experiment been conducted its outcome would likely have been unfortunate—is of course nil.

 October 21, Monday: At a naval battle against a combined French and Spanish force off Cape Trafalgar between Cadiz and the entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar, the ships of Lord Horatio Nelson established British naval supremacy for the next century by sinking or capturing 22 ships while only 11 escaped. This engagement would be considered to have balanced Napoleon's defeat of the Austrians at Ulm in the same month, and of both the Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz in December. [John Franklin](#) served in this naval engagement.



When at 11:15AM the admiral ordered that his flagship HMS *Victory* put up the semaphores that signalled “Nelson Expects That Every Man Will Do His Duty,” the signal crew wasn’t able to get together enough flags to spell out both N-E-L-S-O-N and D-U-T-Y and resorted to the flagset for “England” instead of the admiral’s name. The signal was according to a telegraphic code originated by Sir Home Riggs Popham in 1800 that had been adopted in 1803. The sequence required twelve “lifts” from the poop deck and took some four minutes to complete. Starting with the stand-by flag to indicate that a telegraph-type message was to follow,



they hauled up the flagset for “England” (which consisted of the #2, #5, and #3 flags),



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followed by the #2, #6, and #9 flags for “expects,”



followed by the #8, #6, and #3 flags for “that,”



followed by the #2, #6, and #1 flags for “every,”



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followed by the #4, #7, and #1 flags for “man,”



followed by the #9, #5, and #8 flags for “will,”



followed by the #2, the ditto (indicating a repeat of the #2), and #0 flags for “do,”



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followed by the #3, #7, and #0 flags for “his,”



followed by the #4 flag and then the #2 and #1, and concluding with the #1 and #9 followed by the #2 and #4, to complete the conceit “D-U-T-Y”:



Since this was to be the final order before the battle leaving the “T” and the “Y” of D-U-T-Y still flying, there would not have been occasion to haul up an “end-of-message” flag.

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At some later point, [Benjamin West](#) would paint his “The Death of Nelson”:



If this isn't sentimental enough to make your eyes roll, also, on a following screen, West's “The Immortality of Nelson,” in which the inscription on the scroll at the center of the painting, held by Britannia, is legible enough to be read as “The Royal Assent to Earl Nelson's Annuity Bill of five thousand pounds — one hundred and twenty thousand for the purchase of a splendid domain for the family.” (The really fascinating thing is that we have no basis at all to infer that any of this painting was done in mockery.)

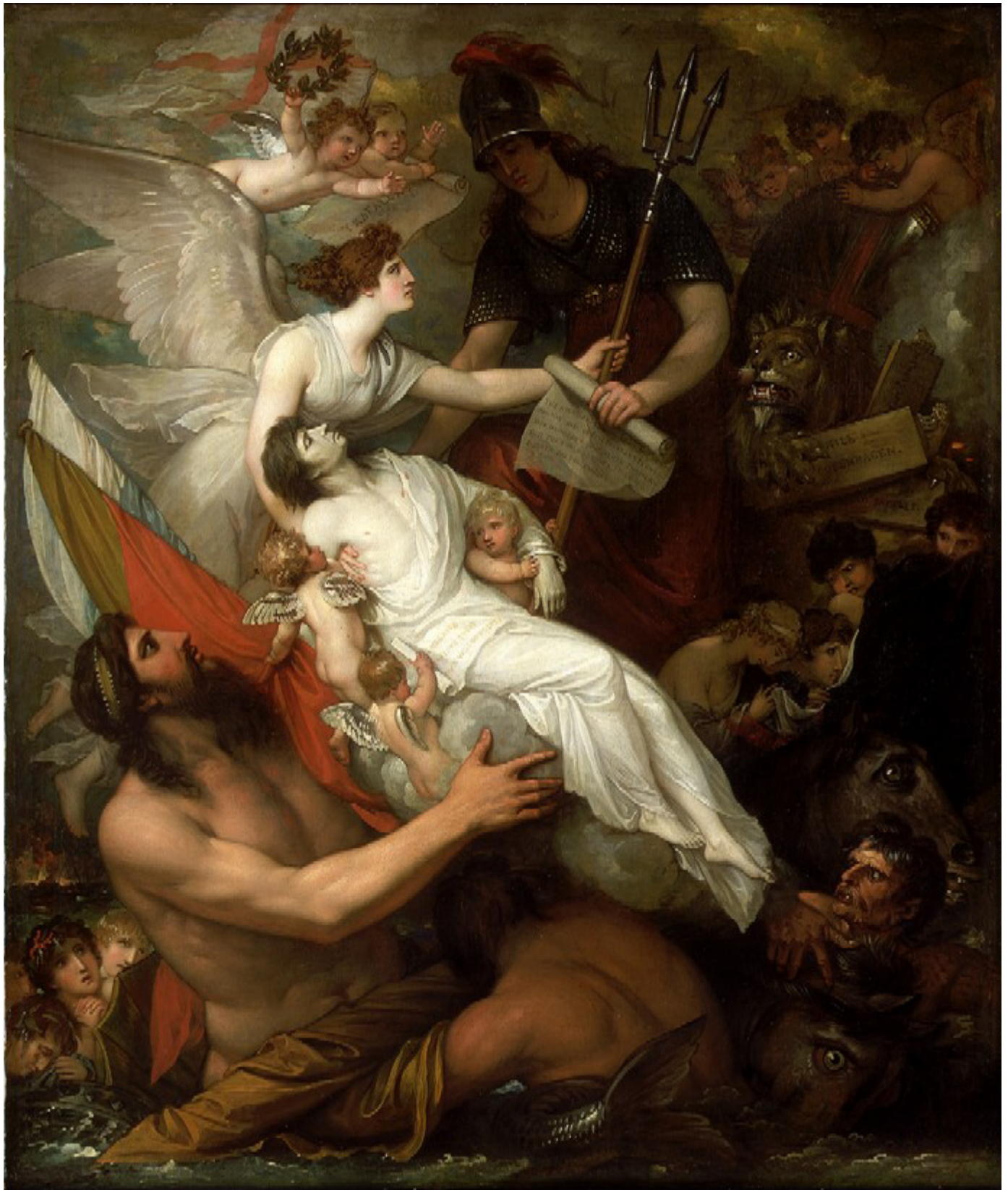
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WHAT?

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1810

➡ In Kensington near Philadelphia, the famous Shakamaxon Elm,¹² beneath which allegedly Friend [William "Onas" Penn](#) had transacted his famous entirely undocumented "Treaty with the Indians in 1682," fell during a storm. *Sic transit gloria mundi*:



12. Since this painting and engraving were not created until 1827, by George Lehman, when the branches and trunk of this tree had been entirely consumed as firewood not fewer than sixteen winters earlier, it is rather as unlikely that the famed tree on the bank looked like this before falling in not less than the 150th year of its life, as it is that this famed treaty-that-was-never-broken actually had been transacted. It is true that Friend William did offer the Delawares (Leni Lenapi) wampum and other gifts (totalling about £1,000) and did presume unilaterally that their acceptance of his gift had entirely extinguished their claim to land in Bucks, Chester, and Philadelphia Counties. Contrary to the [Benjamin West](#) painting, however, it is untrue that there was one single salient treaty associated with Shakamaxon (which is an English corruption of Sachemaxon, "Place of the chiefs"), and we have no idea whatever what the headmen of the tribe presumed to have been going on during the shady get-togethers at which these presents were being handed out by the white people.

1817

→ Benjamin West's "Death on a Pale Horse."



1820

→ March 11, Saturday: Benjamin West died in London.

In Boston, the Mercantile Library Association formalized itself at a large meeting of merchants' clerks, and others, held at the Commercial Coffee House at the corner of Batterymarch and Milk Streets (this is not to suggest that there had not been previous meetings of such a group). Mr. Theodore Lyman, jun., afterwards mayor of Boston, presided. The terms of subscription were two dollars annually, with each subscriber being required to present to the Mercantile Library "one or more volumes, either in biography, history, voyages, travels, or works relative to mercantile subjects" (this condition would afterward be abolished, since the books actually provided in this manner were generally considered of a worthless character; in this library, Henry David Thoreau's A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS would be book #3374 and WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS would be book #6166).¹³

BOSTON MERCANTILE LIBRARY

The Thaddeus again crossed the Equator and some of the tightly packed cargo of Christian missionaries swam/ bathed in the ocean (it goes without saying that these were the male missionaries, and it goes without saying that none of the female missionaries peeked):



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Lat. North 2° Long. West 115°. Again we have entered our own hemisphere. We have this day special occasion to acknowledge the kind providence of God. About one o'clock P.M. there was a calm and several of the brethren, and some others, having been denied the privilege many weeks, allowed themselves to enjoy the pleasant and healthful exercise of bathing in the Ocean. Not long after they were safely out, while one of the sailors was employed in painting the bowsprit, with his feet in the water, a common sized shark was seen to approach him. Had he not been seasonably warned to avoid the monster, he might have lost a limb, if not his life. The shark then played or rather raved around the brig with the boldness and fierceness of a hungry tiger. By the dexterity of George P. Tamoree and one of the mates a snare was fixed upon him. Then flouncing like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke he seized, with violence the end of a strong pole and tho it broke many of his pointed teeth he held fast until by the pole and ropes he was drawn on board. The mingled emotions of our company, arising from a sense of danger escaped by the gracious interposition of our divine and strong deliverer, evinced by tears and congratulations, cannot easily be described. On opening the shark, there were found a porcupine fish and a large beef bone which had been thrown overboard by the cook at the time the brethren were bathing, so that he could not have been far distant at that time. But while we acknowledge this deliverance from unknown and unexpected danger, we regard it as an admonition to be always watchful and guarded when surrounded with dangers and enemies, and as a kind intimation that the same hand that shut the mouth of this Lion will also shut the mouth of the roaring Lion and so far as his cause requires it will mercyfully deliver us from the power of ungodly men and all that rise up against us.

13. On April 24th the Library would formally open in a room at the Merchants' Hall at the corner of Congress and Water Streets. This would be the initial mercantile library in America, the one in New-York opening soon, on November 2d.

1852

[Benjamin West](#)'s famous 1771 painting of [William Penn](#), James Logan, Thomas Lloyd, and Thomas Story, depicting them as having been negotiating with the headman Tamanend and the elders of the Lenape tribe just outside Philadelphia in the early 1680s, arrived in the USA.¹⁴



Actually I kind of **like** the idea of that series of “friendship meetings” that Friend [William Penn](#) had with various groups of the Lenapes, which, as interracial contact goes, was probably much superior to the usual “treaty negotiations” and “land purchases” lubricated by booze. The only difficulty I have is with this **later** being characterized by the whites, in an entirely self-serving manner, as having constituted treaty negotiations (in the absence of any evidence that it had actually resulted in a formal treaty) and as having constituted land purchases (in the absence of any evidence that land purchases were negotiated).



Were we simply characterizing these contacts as exemplary or even unique race relations, there would be no problem of any kind.

I think I can grasp that Hicks, in those paintings, was in effect praising the good white folk of later Pennsylvania for being descended from the good white folk of earlier Pennsylvania, in order to encourage them to “continue” to behave decently toward the remaining Native Americans. But praising people for their excellence happens to be a two-edged sword, for in some cases this may result in appropriate conduct on the part of people who take such a self-conceit to heart, while in other cases this may result in inappropriate conduct on the part of people who were thus enabled to take the interracial attitude “We bought you out fair and square and then you failed to go away, you damned Indian givers.”

The difficult thing, in creating a mythology, is to create one which is so unambiguous that it may only be used for the good while lending itself not at all to furtherance of the schemes of the wicked. I take it to be clear at this point that Hicks did not succeed in creating such an unambiguous mythology.

Perhaps I should moderate myself by confessing that my primary concern is with later generations having assimilated the f/Friendly interracial meetings and discussions in which Friend [William Penn](#) participated both to a model of “treaty negotiations” and to a model of “property transactions.” I really do believe that the sort of thing in which Penn engaged was then and is now the right and righteous mode of conduct. What I fear, however, is that by assimilating that sort of historic meeting of minds and hearts and souls to the idea white people have of treaties and contracts, later generations created a racial situation in which the white descendants could say “We bought you out, so why didn’t you go and get lost? Why are you red people still around here bothering us?” What the painter/preacher Hicks was up to, it seems, was the creation of a mythology of righteousness by which we can believe in ourselves and congratulate ourselves, and according to which we will be inclined to behave ourselves because we so respect ourselves by way of respect for our illustrious forbears — but it is a most exceedingly difficult thing, to create a mythology which is so unambiguous that it can cut only one way, and, it seems to me, Hicks failed in this, creating instead a simplistic mythology which it is now as easy for the evil one to use for purposes of evil, as by decent people for the good.

In this year Friend Samuel M. Janney offered, in his *THE LIFE OF WILLIAM PENN; WITH SELECTIONS FROM HIS CORRESPONDENCE AND AUTO-BIOGRAPHY* (Philadelphia: Hogan, Perkins, and Company), an utterly spurious but long-enduring fable of a conversation between Friends George Fox and [William Penn](#) over the wearing of the sword of nobility:

When William Penn was convinced of the principles of Friends, and became a frequent attendant at their meetings, he did not immediately relinquish his gay apparel; it is even said that he wore a sword, as was then customary among men of rank and fashion. Being one day in company with George Fox, he asked his advice concerning it, saying that he might, perhaps, appear singular among Friends, but his sword had once been the means of saving his life without injuring his antagonist, and moreover, that Christ has said, “he that hath no sword, let him

14. This artifact amounts to the only material record which the purchasers have retained, of the supposed or alleged cross-racial acquisition. The artifact is now at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. The sources I have been consulting suggest that we should bear in mind that in all likelihood there never was a single event anything like what has been portrayed in this art and artifice. Had there been actual purchases, they point out, there would obviously be written documents, and there are no records alleging that there ever were any documents. In fact, nothing like this appears in early biographies of Penn nor is there any other contemporary written description. The story as presented by [Benjamin West](#) is said to be quite uncharacteristic of treaty proceedings of the late 17th century, although it is true that Penn was still holding various “friendship conferences” such as had occurred in 1681, in 1682, and even into 1683. The story told by Voltaire is evidently an entire concoction, the reason why this is the only little white treaty **never infringed upon** being that it is the only little white treaty **never entered into**. To all appearances Voltaire had been simply prefabricating a context of fidelity in order by contrast more effectively to disdain our contexts of infidelity, which is to say, in our desire to congratulate ourselves we have failed to notice his tongue in his cheek. For a somewhat less self-flattering view of Quaker settlement from its beginnings in the Delaware Valley, consult Ralph K. Turp’s *WEST JERSEY UNDER FOUR FLAGS* (Dorrance, 1975).



sell his garment and buy one." George Fox answered, "I advise thee to wear it as long as thou canst." Not long after this they met again, when William had no sword, and George said to him, "William, where is thy sword?" "Oh!" said he, I have taken thy advice; I wore it as long as I could." This anecdote, derived from reliable tradition,¹⁵ seems to be characteristic of the men and the times. It shows that the primitive Friends preferred that their proselytes should be led by the principle of divine truth in their own minds, rather than follow the opinions of others without sufficient evidence.

It must have been manifest to George Fox that his young friend, while expressing his uneasiness about the sword, was under the influence of religious impressions that would, if attended to, lead him, not only into purity of life, but likewise into that simplicity of apparel which becomes the disciples of a self-denying Saviour.

According to the footnote this was related to him by J.P. of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, who had it from James Simpson? Pray tell, what sort of historical provenancing is that for an anecdote? An incident from approximately the 1650s timeframe, that first gets written down some eight generations of human life later, with its only provenancing being that somebody told it to somebody who told it to somebody who told it to somebody who wrote it down? Please.

Europe in the 1650s was a dangerous place. Both [William Penn](#) and Friend Thomas Ellwood had used their swords to defend their persons and perhaps save their own lives. Friend [James Nayler](#), whose dying words are often quoted, was set upon by robbers who left him for dead in a ditch. Not wearing a sword was a big deal.

We lack evidence that Friend [William Penn](#) ever did actually renounce the wearing of the symbolic weapon — until, that is, his advancing obesity made such a symbol utterly ludicrous. Indeed, this opportunistic fakelore may have been invented, in part, to distance Friends from the public embarrassment caused by wearing of arms by an eminent, well-connected, immensely wealthy, and therefore unrepachable Friend. In addition, the historical fact is that rather than adding to one's security on the public street as one might suppose, the wearing of the sword probably subtracted from it. Young Penn had been assaulted once "on a point of honor" by a fellow swordwearer in the French street, a fellow swordwearer who suspected that Penn had "dissed" him as he passed, and had been obliged valiantly to "defend" himself, when we may notice that, had young Penn **not** been armed as a gentleman, this *soi-disant* gentleman would neither have taken such notice, nor have taken such offense.

Even beyond the manner in which this story has functioned as an excuse for those needing an excuse, after it was fabricated, it seems likely that the belated Janney story **originated** as an excuse for an embarrassment. My sense of it is that William Penn the younger was not **quite** so benign and benevolent as he postured as being, not **quite** so benign and benevolent as he would have liked to have been — but that, like most of us a mere mortal, he sometimes used his religiosity to put a good face on his own needs for his own life prospering. My sense of the situation is that Friend William, one of our best Quakers but an exceedingly rich and well situated man, wore the ceremonial sword for his entire life — or, at least, wore it until he became so portly that such a sword and sword-sash became a comment upon the size of his belly. So we Quakers had the embarrassment of having our most well-situated member of our most peaceful society going around with a weapon of killing attached to his body!

15. Related to me by J.P. of Montgomery County, Pa., who had it from James Simpson.



My sense of it is that we needed a face-saving explanation, in the face of **no** preserved evidence that [William Penn](#) ever in his life renounced that sword. In this situation we resorted to a self-congratulatory fabrication. My sense of it is that we created this story, originally, because we could not face the embarrassment of the truth. We were not so embarrassed at creating a lie about this historical instance, as we were at the truth of this historical instance. So, originally, toward the middle of the nineteenth century, we went for the self-congratulatory fabrication, and swallowed deeply and provenanced it as something that somebody told to somebody who told it to somebody who told it to somebody who wrote it down. And, repeatedly, we now again choose the face-saving fabrication over the simple truth. But, aren't we **entitled** to feel good about ourselves? Don't we **need** to feel good about ourselves? How can we have the energies we must summon to set this world to rights, if we have to be critiquing ourselves all over the place alla time? :-}



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: October 26, 2013

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, upon someone's request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a button.



BENJAMIN WEST

BENJAMIN WEST

Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process which you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place your requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.
Arrgh.