

Brief History of Richland Township in Bucks County, Pennsylvania and of Quakertown, Pennsylvania

William Penn acquired land from the local Indians in an area of Pennsylvania now known as Bucks County in the late 1600s. The agreements did not measure the area of the land by specific measurements like we use today, but by terms such as the distance that a man could travel by foot or by horse in one or two days.

In 1703, William Penn directed surveyors to lay out a tract of 10,000 acres to be called the Manor of Richland. The land in the area had previously been cultivated by the Indians and was found to be very fertile and was called "Rich Lands," hence the name of Richland. In 1735, the Manor of Richland was resurveyed and was found to contain 16,749 acres. After the area was settled, it was observed that surface water appeared in some places during certain seasons of the year. The early settlers called the area the "Great Swamp" and it was marked as such on early maps. Later it became known as the "Quakertown Swamp." About 1723, the first Friends (or Quaker) Meeting House was built in Richland in what is now Quakertown Borough.



In 1734, Richland was incorporated as a Township. It is the only Township in Bucks County that corresponds with the cardinal points of a compass. The first Post Office was established in 1803. Before that time the closest post office was located in Bethlehem.



During the American Revolutionary War, the Liberty Bell was evacuated from Philadelphia to be hidden from the British who sought to melt it down for bullets. The wagon convoy carrying bells from Philadelphia, under the command of Colonel Thomas Polk from North Carolina, stopped overnight in Quakertown on their way to Allentown. The Liberty Bell was stored overnight behind the home of Evan Foulke and the entourage stayed at the Red Lion Inn.

The Red Lion Inn was also where the John Fries Rebellion began in 1799 to protest taxes imposed the previous year by Congress to finance the raising of an army and enlarging the navy. The taxes were imposed on real estate based on the number of windows rather than by population, as required by the Constitution. Fries led a small militia which threatened the tax assessors. Fries and 30 other men were arrested and tried for treason. They were convicted and sentenced to be hanged, but President John Adams issued a general amnesty for everyone involved in 1800.

Much of the early growth in Richland occurred in the village known as Quakertown. In 1854, the unincorporated village of Quakertown separated from Richland Township and became a Borough. That same year, the North Pennsylvania Railroad began purchasing land for a railroad that would run through the area to Bethlehem. During the Civil War, Richland Township and Quakertown Borough became thriving commercial centers. Industries during that period included the manufacture of cigars, boots, shoes, tools, harnesses, wheel spokes and stoves.

During the next century, until the Pennsylvania Legislature limited annexation in the 1960s, Quakertown Borough continued to expand by moving the municipal boundaries to include newly developed areas that were in Richland Township. The area around Quakertown has continued to grow and today Richland Township has a larger population and a larger commercial area than Quakertown.