

2016 George Richardson Lecture

Speaking from the Centre or the Margins? Conversations between Quaker and non-Quaker Historical Narratives

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Abstract

This essay surveys some of the changes in Quaker history over the past twenty years, specifically focussing on the conversations between the centres and margins within Quaker history and between Quaker and non-Quaker historical narratives. It points to spaces for greater inclusion of voices from the edges of Quaker history, whether geographic peripheries or subsidiary periods, and argues for even more dynamic exchanges between Quaker and mainstream histories, noting the contribution each makes to the other. The essay also explores the unique and important contribution of Quaker archivists to the work of Quaker historians.

Keywords

Atlantic history, Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives, pacifism, peace testimony, Quaker historiography, Quakers in Canada.

Italian poet and novelist Cesare Pavese once said, ‘we do not remember days, we remember moments.’¹ I have a very distinct memory of the moment I encountered the first volume of *Quaker Studies*, which included the first George Richardson Lecture by Grigor McClelland. It was late on a cold, dark January night in 1998. I was sitting in the kitchen of the Pickering College home of Canadian Yearly

1 Pavese, Cesare, *This Business of Living: Diaries, 1935–1950*, London: Transaction Publishers, 2009, p. 172.

Meeting Archivist Jane Zavitz-Bond. I had arrived at Pickering College earlier that day for a month-long research trip that had been approximately a year in the planning. Jane, who had recently retired from her position as Pickering College librarian, continued to serve as archivist for the Canadian Yearly Meeting, a position she holds to this day, even as she is in her late eighties. Retired as she was from her position with Pickering College, she travelled back and forth between her home in St. Thomas and Newmarket, a distance of 235 kilometres, roughly 150 miles. Because the college house had not been occupied since her departure before Christmas the heat had been turned down to a level that only kept the pipes from freezing. We'd come from the Dorland Room, which itself is kept cooler than room temperature on account of the Rendall Rhodes Quaker Collection, 'geographically and chronologically the most complete discipline collection in the world'.² It was late, well past eleven; I do have to say that Jane's habit of staying in the archives until night on midnight was very conducive to productivity. Nonetheless I was tired, having been up very early for the transcontinental flight. All of this only seemed to exaggerate what felt like quite a frigid temperature in the house. I had my hands wrapped around a cup of hot tea and reached for a journal called *Quaker Studies* that Jane had sitting on the kitchen table. What had caught my eye was the title of the first article in the journal: 'What is Quaker Studies?' If *anyone* at that moment wanted to know the answer to that question, it was me.

In January 1998, when I first encountered McClelland's article, I knew almost nothing about Quaker history or Quaker studies. My first encounter with Quaker records of any sort had occurred in the summer of 1996 when, as freshly minted PhD candidate, I arrived at the Provincial Archives of Ontario to begin in earnest research for my dissertation on gendered views of loyalty. Interested in the intersection between intellectual and social history, I was particularly keen on exploring the contested interpretations of loyalty in the British North American colony now known as Ontario. What had begun as western Quebec, then became Upper Canada (in 1791), then Canada West (in 1841), and finally Ontario (in 1867) was, in my opinion, the perfect social laboratory for this study. Unlike other British North American colonies that were founded by a single religious or ethnic group and then peopled, voluntarily or by force, with immigrants from around the Atlantic world, the seeds of Upper Canada were planted when the colonial office settled a very diverse group of war refugees in the western reaches of Quebec. Not only was its initial settlement unique, but the colony experienced distinct waves of immigration as it grew; these distinct waves coloured colonial identity and politics. After Quebec was divided into Upper and Lower Canada, Upper Canada's Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, believing that there were thousands of 'loyalists' remaining in the newly formed American states desperate to live once again within the embrace of the empire, offered free land

2 Zavitz, Jane, 'The Canadian Quaker Archives at Pickering College', *Archivaria* 30 (Summer 1990), p. 194.

to those who would declare allegiance to the Crown. The addition of many 'late Loyalists', motivated more by the carrot of free land than the stick of republicanism, brought a distinctly American group of immigrants to the colony. When American immigration was halted during the War of 1812 and when Upper Canada became the refuge for Britain's economically challenged fleeing the economic ravages of a post-Napoleonic Britain, a more distinctive Britishness was added to the mix. There was much to contest in this colony. Moreover, there was much to contest in its history.

The Loyalist Myth was alive and well in Canadian history in the 1990s, despite the best efforts of some scholars, including my doctoral supervisors, to offer more nuanced and complex interpretations of the Loyalists in Upper Canada. The Loyalist Myth, begun by the Loyalists themselves, argues that the Loyalists were comprised of the best and brightest colonists. While a handful returned to England, and some made their way to the Caribbean, the colonies that eventually became Canada got the cream of the colonial crop, while the United States was left with the dregs. Having lost their property and place in their colonial homeland, they had been cast into the wilderness where strength of character alone accounted for their success in re-establishing successful colonies. And the Loyalists, especially those in Upper Canada, were vindicated—their literal wandering in the wilderness justified—when Britain won the War of 1812.³ Anglican bishop John Strachan proudly adopted a theme for his sermons about the British as 'God's peculiar peoples', a people chosen by God to shine light on the evils of American republicanism.⁴ Strachan's sermons solidified his rising position in the ruling oligarchy, known derisively as The Family Compact; he would go on to become one of the most powerful men in the colony.⁵ Strachan also gave

3 The recent bicentennial of the War of 1812 saw conferences and new scholarship dedicated to a re-examination of the war and surrounding events. Despite American claims to having won the war, even American historians who specialise in the War of 1812 agree that Britain the war. <http://news.wypr.org/post/who-won-war-1812#stream/0>, accessed 2/06/2016.

4 Strachan was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1778. He lost his father when he was fourteen years old, then entered the University of Aberdeen at only sixteen. He tutored students to support his widowed mother and to finance his education. Toward the end of the century he was offered a lucrative position in Kingston, Upper Canada, tutoring the children of the colony's elite and running a new academy. However, when he arrived in the colony in 1799 he found that the scheme had died and he was jobless in a new country. Strachan soon established himself as a tutor and educator in Kingston and then, with few clergymen in Upper Canada, Strachan chose to take the orders of the Anglican Church. He was ordained by the first bishop of Québec in 1803 and served in Cornwall, where he established a first-class grammar school. In 1811, the year before the war began, he was appointed as Rector of York (now Toronto). Craig, G. M., 'STRACHAN, JOHN', in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/strachan_john_9E.html, accessed 15/06/2016.

5 Rawlyk, George A., 'Politics, Religion, and the Canadian Experience: A Preliminary Probe', in Noll, Mark (ed.), *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s*,

rise to two other myths in Canadian history: first, that Canadians are necessarily anti-American and pro-British; and, second, ‘that it was Canada’s militia, not its expensive professional soldiers, who won the War of 1812. It was a popular, and false, sentiment.’⁶ The tenacity of these myths outside academia is evident in both the way some covet ‘UE’ (United Empire Loyalist) status in their genealogical searches and the way Heritage Minutes have portrayed the War of 1812, whether of white colonists or First Nations.

In search of documents written by women, or documents that might provide insight into alternative non-elite narratives about Upper Canadian history, I stumbled upon the records of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). As I said earlier, I really knew very little about Quakers at the time. The collection of microfilmed meeting minutes, which included material written by women in my time period, was voluminous. There were multiple reels of film; as I began to read through the first set of minutes I realised I would never be able to get through even a single reel of film in the archives with the time I had available to me. I decided to see if I could get copies of a number of the reels of film so that I could continue my research at home. The finding aid for the collection contained a note that said copying of microfilm had to be approved by the Quaker archivist. Jane’s name and phone number at the library at Pickering College had been written into the front of the finding aid and so I went out to the pay phone in the adjoining corridor (this predated the era of personal mobile—or cellular—phones), dug through my change, and made a phone call that, while I didn’t know it at the time, changed my academic career. When I got Jane on the line, I explained who I was and my interest in making copies of the microfilm. Jane responded, ‘You need to visit our archives’, to which I naively responded, ‘I didn’t know you had an archive.’ After enlightening me on the holdings of the Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives, Jane went out of her way to ensure that I had her contact information and would explore a visit to the archives, and had promised to purchase a copy of Arthur Garrett Dorland’s *The Quakers in Canada: A History*.⁷ I, in turn, promised to donate the copies of microfilm to the archives when I was through with them so that they could be a lending resource to other researchers.

I’d like to say that things progressed directly and smoothly from there. I did receive the Dorland book and began to read it with great interest, but even by the mid-1990s the book had become dated. Originally published in 1927 from his revised doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto and reprinted in 1968, in the wake of the 1955 (re)union of the three branches of Canadian

New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 260–64. See also Wise, S. F., *God’s Peculiar Peoples: Essays on Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century Canada*, Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993.

6 War of 1812. Strachan, John, <http://www.eighteentwelve.ca/?q=eng/Topic/96>, accessed 2/06/2016.

7 Dorland, Arthur G., *The Quakers in Canada: A History*, 1927, rpt. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1968.

Friends, Dorland's book was insightful and based on extensive primary sources that Dorland himself had collected and housed at University of Western Ontario, where he chaired the History Department. It was those sources that became the heart of the Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives collection when it was moved to Pickering College and the Dorland Room opened in 1983.⁸ As much as I learned from Dorland's book, the first major work in Canadian Quaker history, it was clear that it had been written from an insider's perspective and, while written with a larger audience in mind, it didn't engage the larger literature or scholarship in a way that suggested interactions between Quakers and those around whom they lived.

The field of religious history in Canada had begun to grow in the 1970s and 1980s, especially at the incredibly productive hand of George Rawlyk, a scholar of the colonial Maritimes and evangelical religion. Rawlyk made many important contributions to religious history in Canada, but two of the most important, in my opinion, are, first, his insistence on the importance of what we now call transnational, transatlantic or regional studies and, second, the establishment of the McGill-Queen's University Press Studies in the History of Religion series in 1988. There are currently 104 titles in that series. Even with the strength of the field in the mid-1990s, however, the focus of that scholarship was the mainstream denominations. Certainly, there had been two books, one by Albert Schrauwers (1993) and one by John McIntyre (1994), exploring the unusual Quaker breakaway sect the Children of Peace and their most uncommon temple in Sharon/Hope.⁹ This focus on the Children of Peace was enabled by the incredible discovery in 1990 of David Willson's (the sect's founder) time-capsule collection of documents in the false bottom of the ark at the centre of the temple.¹⁰ The 'real' work, however, at least in English-language Canadian history, was at the centre in the mainstream denominations of the Anglicans and Methodists. The Baptists and Presbyterians were well-enough known, and sufficiently numerous in a contemporary context, to get a nod, but what was there to say about Quakers in Canadian history that Arthur Dorland had not already said in 1927 or 1968? They might add a bit of contrast in a larger study on ideas of loyalty, but they certainly weren't going to be the focus of anything. Quakers were on the margins. Yet, in January of 1998, when I finally managed to arrange with Jane an extended visit to the Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives in Newmarket, Ontario, the moment I walked into the Dorland Room and got a sense of the collection [it was not catalogued in the same way other collections are], I distinctly remember thinking

8 Zavitz, 'The Canadian Quaker Archives', pp. 193–95.

9 Schrauwers, Albert, *Awaiting the Millennium: The Children of Peace and the Village of Hope, 1812–1889*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993; and McIntyre, W. John, *The Children of Peace*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.

10 *The Ark Papers: an account of the discovery of a secret compartment in the ark of the covenant in the Sharon Temple and a discussion of its contents*, East Gwillimbury, ON: Sharon Temple Museum, 1992.

‘there’s a career’s worth of work here’. And this brings me back to Jane’s kitchen and Grigor McClelland’s article ‘What is Quaker Studies?’

My view of religious history has always been through the intersecting lenses of intellectual and social history. This fitted well with the directions religious history was taking at the time: generally there had been a distinct shift away from confessional histories to those that considered religious belief as the expression of ideas that influenced the behaviour of historical actors. Even so, Quaker history or Quaker studies seemed a very daunting subject for me. I had spent the day in an archives where the primary sources were voluminous. Finding sufficient sources for a study seemed to be the least of my concerns. My problem was understanding the sources and the people who produced them. (I very quickly learned, despite their volume, how frustratingly silent the sources, especially minutes, were on things I really, really wanted to know about Friends and their communities.) For those of you unfamiliar with the Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives, there are two parts: the Dorland Room, which houses a reference library and one of the most complete set of Disciplines in the world, and the vault, which holds most of the documents. I started with the Disciplines, which began as a series of Advices and Queries. Throughout the day Jane answered my questions about all manner of Quaker inquiry; she was a patient teacher, fed my growing curiosity, and helped me to understand, as best she could, an entire dialect of terms unique to Friends. That, then, is the framing context in which I read McClelland’s words, early in the article:

In the light of this development I regard Quaker studies as the objective study of Quakerism and Quakers, and not Quaker apologetics. The stance must be that of the scholar, not of the committed Quaker. There should be no expectation, still less a requirement, that the scholar in Quaker studies should be a Quaker. One may hope that the field may attract Quakers and non-Quakers alike. Indeed the non-Quaker student of Quakerism should be able to bring an objectivity and freshness of outlook which it may be almost impossible for the practising Quaker to attain.¹¹

Those who are familiar with the article will know that McClelland went on to outline the multi-disciplinary possibilities for fruitful scholarship in Quaker studies. For me, as an aspiring historian, McClelland’s article had a significant impact in terms of painting the possibilities for the legitimacy of Quaker studies. Looking back, eighteen or twenty years hence, one might say that ‘the way opened’ as a result of those—and many subsequent—moments with an archives and its archivist. Over time, Jane gave me full and complete access to the archives (she let me loose in the vault), she took me for behind-the-scenes visits to the Temple of the Children of Peace and other Quaker sites in Ontario, introduced me to the Canadian Friends Historical Association and the Conference for Quaker Historians and Archivists and welcomed me into her homes, both in Newmarket,

11 McClelland, Grigor, ‘What is Quaker Studies?’ *Quaker Studies* 1 (1996), pp. 3–4.

where the archives are located, as well as in St. Thomas, where she lived. And, after she no longer had a home in Newmarket, she arranged dormitory housing, or housing in the infirmary, for me on various visits. Jane was not alone. I can honestly say that I have had the most surprising and amazing encounters as a result of my work in Quaker history, but without the access she provided to me to the primary sources my work in Canadian Quaker history would never have begun.

Looking back at McClelland's lecture and the incredible amount of scholarship in Quaker studies over the past two decades, the landscape has shifted significantly. As an outsider, someone on the margins studying Quakers who were themselves on the margins, I quickly learned that much, though certainly not all, pre-1990s scholarship in Quaker studies was confessional or sectarian. For the most part, it was written by Quakers for Quakers, rather than for a broader audience. This is not to say that the scholarship was not strong, but much of it did not engage a broader scholarly discussion. Early on, my goal was to encourage a conversation in which Quaker voices were more broadly woven into the fabric of mainstream history, especially Canadian history, where it seemed to be non-existent except in the most caricatured way. Equally, I hoped to see more of a Canadian voice accounted for in Quaker history.

A lot of the confessional scholarship also reinforced a number of unquestioned conclusions in Quaker history. For me four of them stand out as having undergone significant analysis and re-examination in the last two decades. There are, no doubt, many others, but these are the four that have intersected with my own work, and with which I am most familiar: the position of women as equals in the Society of Friends; the enduring commitment of Friends to abolitionism; the Society's undeniably pacifistic position from 1660; and the interpretation of the long eighteenth century as one of uninspiring faith and sectarian withdrawal from the world. Each of these speaks to spaces for greater inclusion of voices from the edges of Quaker history, whether geographic peripheries or subsidiary periods, and argues for even more dynamic exchanges between Quaker and mainstream histories, noting the contribution each makes to the other. I think that it is important to note that at least the first three of these unquestioned conclusions (the equality of women, abolitionism and pacifism) were good for the image Quakers wanted to project about themselves and the Religious Society of Friends, especially in the twentieth century. The willingness of Quaker scholars who are themselves Quakers to challenge traditional interpretations is a testament to the growing strength of the field and the possibilities for its future.

The long eighteenth century, roughly from the death of George Fox in 1691 to the early nineteenth century, has long been referred to as the 'Quietist period' in Quaker history. It is a period known for its greater exclusivity and sectarianism, and has been variously interpreted as an era of decline or deterioration between the more exciting Quakerism of the early and later periods. A number of us have questioned this interpretation of a strict withdrawal from society, and there is some very exciting work being done on the period. After all, despite the

increased silence during worship, this was not a period of stagnation or regression. Throughout this century Quakers expanded their geographical influence, made important contributions to commerce and industry and clarified long-lasting positions, or testimonies, on war and humanitarianism. This was a period in which the physical expansion of the Quaker world was marked by the growing settlement and establishment of Friends throughout the British Atlantic world. We know that Quakerism was well-suited to frontier expansionism. Its needs were few. Ministry and business relied on laity, not formally educated clergy; there were neither tithes to collect nor sacraments to administer; there was no music, making instruments and musical training unnecessary; and meeting houses were simple. Many frontier meetings began in a member's rustic dwelling.

The physical expansion of the Society of Friends necessitated the creation of more Yearly Meetings, creating shifting, overlapping centres and peripheries that pushed and pulled against one another.¹² Scholars have done an excellent job of exploring the religious, mercantile and kinship bonds that connected Friends throughout the expanding Quaker world.¹³ These bonds functioned within the transatlantic Quaker network to create what can be called a Quaker Atlantic, in the same way that there is a Catholic Atlantic, a French Atlantic and a British Atlantic. Even so, Quakerism was lived in its local contexts and these local expressions shaped transatlantic Quakerism as much as the expressions from the centre(s) with which we are much more familiar. A greater understanding of the interactions between local and transatlantic or global will deepen our understanding of the complexities of the peace testimony, gender and race.

Local or community studies were all the rage in the 1970s and 1980s. North American colonial history was revolutionised by these studies, although, alongside the proliferation of community histories, historians commented on the need to weave this patchwork of local histories into larger narratives. In the Canadian context, in the wake of the 1967 centenary celebrations with their nationalistic, hagiographic messaging, J. M. S. Careless, building on the work of Ramsay Cook, called Canadian historians to the study of the 'limited identities of region, culture and class' in which the 'Canadian experience' could be 'discerned and defined'.¹⁴ This created a flood of regional or community studies sufficient that

12 As Friends spread across North America in this period, two more Yearly Meetings were added to the existent New England, Baltimore, Virginia and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings. The New York Yearly Meeting was created in 1695 and the North Carolina Yearly Meeting in 1698.

13 A small sample includes Tolles, Frederick, *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture*, New York: Macmillan, 1960; Larson, Rebecca, *Daughters of Light: Quaker women preaching and prophesying in the colonies and abroad, 1700–1775*, New York: Knopf, 1999; Gerona, Carla, *Night Journeys: the power of dreams in transatlantic Quaker culture*, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004; Landes, Jordan, *London Quakers in a Trans-Atlantic World: The creation of an early modern community*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

14 Careless, J. M. S., "Limited Identities" in Canada', *Canadian Historical Review* 50, no. 1 (1969), pp. 1–10.

Careless wrote 'Limited Identity – Ten Years Later' to comment on the abundance of regional scholarship.¹⁵ As the pendulum swung to the focus on limited, rather than national, identities, Careless expressed concern about the 'over-simple dichotomy' between what was customarily painted as an acquisitive, calculating 'metropolitan' central Canada and the 'honest good guys of "the hinterland"'. This approach ignored the many interconnections between the metropole and the periphery.¹⁶ Careless, with other Canadian historians, argued that limited identities did not negate a larger Canadian identity; rather, they were a manifestation of Canadian identity itself. I see this approach as an apt one for Quaker history. To use a particularly Canadian metaphor, we need to maintain the difficult balance of being able to understand both the forest *and* the trees, both within the field itself and also in considering the way in which Quaker studies can enter into a dialogue with mainstream narratives. What influence did local circumstances have on creating unique Quaker communities? What role did faith have on distinguishing Friends from others in local communities? It is a multi-directional conversation.

Certainly, Quaker historians have long recognised the importance of integrating the particular and the global. In fact, Quaker history seems naturally suited to the Atlantic and global approaches that have recently emerged. Well before transnational or trans-Atlantic perspectives were popular, Rufus Jones's (*Quakers in the American Colonies*) and Frederick Tolles's (*Quakers and the Atlantic Culture*) desire to understand British and American Friends as parts of a single Society of Friends, rather than as distinct entities, pointed to Quaker connections with the larger world.¹⁷ Mainstream American historians, especially, have built on the contribution of Quakers to American society, showing the influence of Friends on feminist, abolitionist and peace movements. But much of this work presents Quakers as flat, uncomplicated historical actors, conformed to a homogeneous religious identity. The growth of Atlantic history in the late 1990s and early 2000s and the possibilities within that field for Quaker studies has yielded fruitful discussions between those who specialise in Quaker studies and those who do not. This work will continue to yield rich results. I have noticed in the most recent scholarship that there is an increased awareness of the need to keep local as well as transatlantic contexts at the front of the interpretive framework in our examination of the shaded variations that made up the canvas of the Quaker world. For all the incredible scholarship that has been produced using the lens of Atlantic history, there remain significant challenges with its framing. For instance, American historians who have embraced Atlantic history routinely continue to

15 Careless, J. M. S., 'Limited Identities – Ten Years Later', *Manitoba History* 1 (1981), http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/01/limitedidentities.shtml, accessed 27/03/2017.

16 Careless, 'Limited Identities – Ten Years Later'.

17 Jones, Rufus M., *Quakers in the American Colonies*, London: Macmillan, 1911; Tolles, Frederick, *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture*, New York: Macmillan, 1960.

function within a distinctly nationalist framework in which the British Atlantic ceased to exist in 1776, with the Declaration of Independence, or 1783, with the Treaty of Paris. But the British Atlantic did not cease to exist after the American Revolution, especially for the Religious Society of Friends, for whom ongoing connections to other Quakers remained important. Families and communities were divided, as we have heard in papers given at this conference. And the stories from the centres (usually the Yearly Meetings) tell us a great deal about the ways in which the Society addressed political and social concerns at different times. Conversations between the margins and centres will provide us with a far more complex view of Quakers themselves and the Society of which they were, or considered themselves, members. To this end, there is some very interesting work in cross-border conversations happening on blogs such as Borealia (Early Canadian History), SHEAR (Society for Historians of the Early American Republic) and OIEAHC (Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture), to name just a few.

Consider the ‘testimony against war’ or what has come to be known, in the twentieth century, as the Peace Testimony. The past twenty years has produced excellent work that has nuanced the way we understand this testimony as one that might seem simple to articulate but is complicated to practise. The peace testimony underwent significant clarification in the long eighteenth century through a multidirectional dialectic process between the centre and the margins.¹⁸ Meredith Weddle’s work on the seventeenth-century peace testimony reminds us of the character of early Quaker pacifism. As she remarks, ‘[p]acifism is complicated, because violence itself is complicated’.¹⁹ Moreover, despite Quakers’ declaration of peaceable principles to Charles II in 1660, Quaker behaviour did not always translate directly from a statement of belief. Rather, the consequences of the peace testimony were ‘developed through daily decisions confronting particular Quakers or groups of Quakers undergoing specific challenges to their witness against fighting, the use of weapons, and war.’²⁰ Initially, peace was viewed as the product of a holy life. Consider the 1693 epistle that took issue with ship masters who armed their ships defensively. Here the Yearly Meeting directed Monthly and Quarterly Meetings to ‘stir up’ and ‘awaken the consciences’ of offenders ‘that they may seriously consider how they injure their own souls’ and damage the reputation of Friends by this behaviour.²¹ It was not until the middle

18 The section on the eighteenth century is based on a forthcoming chapter ‘Into the Eighteenth Century’ in Allen, Richard C. and Moore, Rosemary (eds), *The Quakers, 1656–1723: The evolution of an alternative community*, Philadelphia, PA: Penn State University Press, forthcoming.

19 Weddle, Meredith, *Walking in the Way of Peace: Quaker Pacifism in the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 4.

20 Weddle, *Walking in the Way*, p. 40.

21 1693 Epistle, in London Yearly Meeting, *A collection of the epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends in London to the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings in Great-Britain, Ireland, and elsewhere*

of the eighteenth century that violence was explicitly equated with ‘injustice, barbarity, and bloodshed’.²² The participation of New England Quakers at various levels in King Philip’s War (1675–6) demonstrates how unresolved the peace testimony was in the seventeenth century. Even for those to whom it was very important, inconsistencies in its application reveal diverse interpretations.²³ Weddle’s assertion that an aggregate of individual Quakers’ actions presents the testimony’s parameters in a particular time and place applies to the eighteenth century and beyond as well.

In the eighteenth century the peace testimony shifted over time; it was not consistently interpreted or applied throughout the Quaker world, and it did not attain a form that denied connection to any war-associated activity until late into the period. This was an era of ever-increasing overseas trade and a century of wars of empire in the Atlantic world. Certainly circumstances and location played a role in the interpretation of the testimony, wherever one lived. Friends often responded individually, not collectively, to this testimony. Barbados is a case in point. When Richard Ford produced his 1675 map of Barbados, he did not identify any forts because of his religious principles.²⁴ In 1696 Barbadian Friends reported that they suffered under the ‘severe Militia Act, being still in force’.²⁵ Still, Larry Gragg’s examination of the Quaker community on Barbados shows that, between 1689 and 1691, individual Quakers assisted with the construction or maintenance of the island’s fortifications by providing labour or materials. Some Friends supplied ships for defensive purposes, others for an offensive expedition against Martinique in 1694. And when Thomas Story visited the island in 1709 and 1714, and learned that Friends in and around Speightstown had volunteered to serve in the militia, he felt obligated to testify against those who ‘appear in Arms on training Days’.²⁶ Bermuda Friends also had mixed results with the testimony. In 1700 they reported, ‘As for bearing Arms and paying of Priests our Testimony is against and hath long been, except some of our sons [that] are grown to age, that we cannot well dissuade.’²⁷

Armed conflict around the Atlantic world and within Britain itself presented Friends with circumstances that could not always be avoided. As Sylvia Stevens’s study of Norfolk Friends concludes, ‘the witness against fighting exposed the

from 1675 to 1805: being from the first establishment of that Meeting to the present time, Baltimore, MD: printed and published by Cole and Hewes, 1806, p. 56.

22 1744 Advice, in London Yearly Meeting. *Extracts from the Minutes and Advices of the Yearly Meeting of Friends Held in London, from its first institution*, London: Printed by James Phillips, 1783, p. 254.

23 Weddle, *Walking in the Way of Peace*, pp. 190–95.

24 Gragg, Larry D., *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class*, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009, p. 71.

25 Epistles Received, Barbados Quarterly Meeting to London Yearly Meeting, 24 December 1696. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

26 Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, p. 151.

27 Epistles Received, Bermudas Epistle, 1700.

interface between the state and popular culture on the one hand and the individual Friend's conscience in matters of religion on the other'.²⁸ The long eighteenth century witnessed the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745, four Atlantic wars of empire (the War of the League of Augsburg, 1688–97; the War of the Spanish Succession, 1702–13; the War of Austrian Succession, including the War of Jenkin's Ear, 1739–48; and the Seven Years War, 1754–63), and two democratic revolutions, one a civil war between British subjects, the other a prelude to wars that extended into the nineteenth century. Quakers in the west Atlantic could easily be caught in the crossfire of battles between European soldiers and their indigenous allies. The finer details of the peace testimony in times of war, beyond refusing to bear arms, is lost in epistolary correspondence that largely recounts relief for moments of peace in a bellicose era. Reflect on the 1713 Rhode Island epistle:

as we have some times past acquainted of ye deep sufferings the inhabitants of ye eastern parts of our country have been under on account of the barbarous Heathen, and that our Friends in some sense have suffered with them, we may now acquaint that that exercise seems much abated if not over since a peace is concluded between the nations.²⁹

What was the 'sense' in which Friends suffered? Were they attacked? Did they offer refuge to those who were? Did they tend to any wounded? It is not possible to say, but the wording suggests that Friends were neither entirely uninvolved nor unaffected. Stevens relates the story of George Watson of Norfolk, who had been a Quaker for seven years after 1675. After leaving the Society he eventually joined the King's Guards and fought in Flanders during the War of the League of Augsburg. His experience there brought about a change of heart; he laid down his arms, was imprisoned, although not executed, and subsequently rejoined Friends.³⁰ How does this experience reflect the way Quakers thought about the relationship between their faith and violence?

Quaker merchants active in the Atlantic trade are also illuminating in this regard. Jacob Price has shown that the Quaker share of British commerce in the eighteenth century outpaced its proportion of the population.³¹ Significantly, trade expanded at the same time that Atlantic wars were commonplace. Beyond

28 Stevens, Sylvia, *Quakers in Northeast Norfolk, England, 1690–1800*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012, p. 233.

29 Epistles Received, Rhode Island Epistle, 1713.

30 Stevens, *Quakers in Northeast Norfolk*, pp. 234–35.

31 Price, Jacob M., 'The Great Quaker Business Families of Eighteenth-Century London: The Rise and Fall of a Sectarian Patriciate', in Dunn, Richard and Dunn, Mary (eds), *The World of William Penn*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, pp. 363–99 and Price, Jacob M., 'English Quaker Merchants and War at Sea' in McDonald, Roderick A. and Sheridan, Richard B. (eds), *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy in Honour of Richard Sheridan*, Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1996, pp. 64–86.

peacetime piracy or privateering, these wars opened the season on the seizure of ships and their goods as a profitable casualty of war at sea. How did Quaker merchants align their need to protect their ships with a testimony against war? Could Quakers profit from appropriating others' goods and vessels on the seas? Price tells us that admiralty court records indicate that letters of marque were issued to Quaker merchants between 1692 and 1712, especially Friends from Bristol, an Atlantic port city.³² Some of these Quakers did arm their vessels defensively (and in some cases offensively), but it was not until the mid-century wars that the local meeting in Bristol began to disown offenders for such behaviour. Similarly, it was mid-century before the London meeting cracked down on offenders.³³ Both meetings distinguished between the defensive arming of vessels and privateering, with privateering rarely being a problem in London.³⁴

These activities indicate how orthodoxy became increasingly expected in Quaker culture. As the peace testimony was clarified, local meetings amplified the disciplinary process. The 1693 London Yearly Meeting epistle identified the defensive arming of ships as contrary to Friends' 'former principle and practice'.³⁵ It requested Quarterly and Monthly Meetings to deal with their meetings' shipmasters to warn them that fighting damned their souls and damaged the Society's reputation. Other than expressing a desire for the recovery of these wayward souls, however, the epistle offered no further corrective advice. Until 1730, when the Yearly Meeting epistle stated its 'weighty concern' that the 'ancient and honourable testimony against Friends being concerned in the bearing of arms, or fighting, may be maintained', there is no mention of the peace testimony in the epistles or advices.³⁶ It was not until 1744 that the London Yearly Meeting issued a stern epistle that clearly articulated both the Society's position on arming ships or privateering and the consequences for those who disobeyed.³⁷ And London Friends, such as John Hanbury, a member of the Meeting for Sufferings, who had invested in a privateering venture that departed London in April 1744, were in need of correction as much as those on the margins. These stories are suggestive of the multiple ways individuals, within a collective community, acted on a testimony that was not as clearly defined after 1660 as historians have suggested.³⁸

32 Price, 'English Quaker Merchants', p. 68.

33 Price, 'English Quaker Merchants,' p. 74.

34 Price, 'English Quaker Merchants,' pp. 71–74.

35 1693 Epistle, in LYM, *Collection of the Epistles*, p. 56.

36 1730 Epistle, in LYM, *Collection of Epistles*, p. 154.

37 LYM, *Extracts from the Minutes and Advices of the Yearly Meeting of Friends ...*, p. 254.

38 In Appendix 4 of her book, Weddle outlines the influence of the scholarship of W. Alan Cole, Barry Reay and Christopher Hill, who identified pacifism as a post-1660 expression of Quakerism. While Cole, Reay and Hill recognised anomalies in their studies, Weddle contends that subsequent work 'exaggerated what was only an unfolding trend into fixed doctrine'. See Weddle, *Walking in the Way of Peace*, pp. 245–53 (p. 247).

In some of the papers presented at this conference we have heard ways in which application of the Peace Testimony in eighteenth-century Atlantic conflicts was complex. The nineteenth century seems to continue this trend. In the Canadian context I have noted Quaker involvement in the 1837 Rebellion.³⁹ Alongside the acrimonious Hicksite–Orthodox schism of 1828, the non-Quaker population north of York (current Toronto) grew as the townships in southern Upper Canada filled up. Friends found themselves surrounded by non-Quakers, interacting with them through their businesses, work bees and neighbourly assistance. Quaker children had moved into local schools when the separation resulted in the closure of the local Quaker school. And a higher incidence of marriage between Friends and non-Friends from the local community occurred in the 1820s. There were also plenty of opportunities for mixing in religious settings. We know from the journals of travelling ministers that non-Friends attended their meetings and commented on the content. Similarly, Quakers attended the Methodist meetings and theological conversation went back and forth as each side sought the support of their non-Quaker neighbours in their doctrinal debates. None of this is significantly different from what happened on the North American frontier, north and south of the border between the British colonies and the United States. Unique to the Upper Canadian context were the Clergy Reserves. When the colony was formed in 1791 one seventh of the land had been set aside as Crown Reserves and one seventh as Clergy Reserves, ‘for the support and maintenance of the Protestant clergy’. These reserved lands were scattered throughout the province, and at the 1810 Canada Half-Year’s Meeting Upper Canadian Quakers had firmly established that no Quaker could lease Clergy Reserves.⁴⁰ During the early years of settlement this was not a hardship, but it became so as the townships filled up or as speculators (of which the government was the largest) held back lands until improvements in surrounding areas drove up the prices.

An additional aggravation were the roads fronting Clergy Reserve or speculator-held land; these remained primitive and underdeveloped (and a developed road was a corduroy road). For farmers trying to get their product to market on unimproved roads, these lands were not just a literal source of frustration but a symbolic reminder of the inequality entrenched in colonial Upper Canada. For young adults who were trying to make a living as farmers, this was also a personal issue. They could either lease the Clergy Reserves or they could go deeper into the woods to the newly opened townships. Some Friends compromised their

39 The section on the 1837 is drawn from Healey, Robynne Rogers, *From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community Among Yonge Street Friends, 1801–1850*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006. Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, located in Newmarket and surrounding area, was roughly fifty-five kilometres or just over thirty miles from York.

40 Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, 1806–1818, 18 October 1810. Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives, Newmarket, Ontario.

principles and leased the Reserves rather than move away from family; others moved further west and north to take up land.

Added to the land concern was the even-more contentious situation with military fines. Friends had done their best to ensure that the colonial administration recognised the Quaker testimony on pacifism. Their refusal to pay fines in lieu of service had cost them dearly, both financially and in jail terms, in the years around the War of 1812. Although the situation calmed down after the war, it did not go away. In 1830 it was reported in the Yonge Street Monthly Meeting that two bills were pending before the Assembly: one to enforce military fines, the other to force members of peace societies (who had been exempted from military requisitions) to labour on the public highways above their required time in order to meet the amount of the military exemption.⁴¹ Friends outright refused to comply, and two Friends were appointed to notify the lieutenant governor of their decision. In 1835, however, the meeting was again addressing the issue of statutes passed in the Assembly requiring Quakers to pay a fine in lieu of service.⁴² Increasingly, it appeared that faith-influenced decisions to live a particular way of life were more frequently putting Friends at odds with what they saw as an unresponsive and immoral government.

By the 1830s Newmarket and the surrounding area, part of the Home District, had become a hotbed of political dissent. Quakers and non-Quakers alike saw the unresponsiveness of the colonial government as confirmation of its corruption. The lack of improvements was a festering sore. Political debates surrounding the Alien Question and the Naturalization Act in the 1820s had pushed the issue of the legitimacy of dissent to the fore and had forced colonial leaders to articulate their idea of loyalty. These debates were of direct importance to Quakers because, as 'Americans', the majority of the Quaker community could be dispossessed and disenfranchised.

The political rallies of the 1830s fuelled the discontent. William Lyon Mackenzie spewed his vitriol around the Home District. David Willson, the leader of the Children of Peace, and Samuel Lount, a Quaker blacksmith from Holland Landing, supported him. It was Samuel Lount who rallied the young men of York County and led them down Yonge Street towards Montgomery's Tavern in December 1837. His troops were a rather disordered group: Quakers, members of the Children of Peace, Selkirk Scots who had come to Upper Canada from their ill-fated experience in the Red River settlement, and various other settlers. Few had military training.

What drove Friends to armed rebellion? Since peace was central to their worldview, the high rate of involvement in the rebellion (Thomas Socknat cites

41 Yonge Street Preparative Meeting of Ministers and Elders, 1828–1835, 18 February 1830.

42 Yonge Street Preparative Meeting of Ministers and Elders, 1828–1835, 12 February 1835.

40 per cent of the known rebels and supporters in areas where they formed 4.2 per cent of the population⁴³) requires some attempt at explanation. First, those who took up arms were birthright members who may not have been as attached to Friends' testimonies as their older brethren. These young men would also have been influenced by the increased contact with non-Quakers who lived in their vicinity and with whom they had attended school. Their reform-minded parents had probably never encouraged revolt and, when their young sons took up arms and marched down Yonge Street, they, like parents across generations and cultures, were troubled and dismayed. Yet they rallied to support their children, who faced the consequences of their behaviour, and continued to press for reform of the government through appropriate channels.

Friends' behaviour as rebels is not inconsistent with precedent when one considers, for instance, the Free Quakers or Fighting Quakers in Philadelphia at the time of the American Revolution. They believed that they had exhausted all other solutions. It is important to remember, too, that, as with all faiths, there is a spectrum of identity from the devout to the barely adherent. Not all Quakers were devout, despite our desire to see them that way. In the wake of the acrimonious doctrinal battle of the 1820s in which Friends located across the spectrum had behaved in a most 'unquakerly' fashion, young men in their early twenties in 1837 would have been children and young teens during the fractious years of the schism. They had witnessed and been drawn into fights over meeting property and had seen the fabric of their faith community torn apart. It is not so impossible to see why so many Friends—driven by their belief in equality, affected by enthusiastic evangelicalism and convinced that the corruption of the colonial government had to be stopped—chose to support the uprising. This band of rebels believed they would march easily into the capital and take control. When they confronted the militia on Yonge Street their complete lack of military training was evident. As willing as they might have been to take up arms against the colonial authorities, they were quite unprepared to do so. This was more than contravening the Discipline; this was treason.

Faith and politics collided on Yonge Street in 1837. A large number of Quakers and members of the Children of Peace were arrested and jailed. Many absconded to the United States. Samuel Lount was hanged, as was Joshua Gillam Doan, from the London area; some men were transported to Van Diemen's Land. Many of those arrested languished in York jails, where some carved 'Rebellion boxes', small wooden boxes often inlaid with political messages. The inscription on one of these, carved by Jesse Cleaver as a gift to Merab Armitage, is revealing of the reasons behind Quaker involvement in the Rebellion: 'O when will tyrants cease to reign, the priests no longer preach for gain, and kings and emperors [sic] quit

43 Socknat, Thomas, 'Talk Given to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Friends Historical Association, 1984', *Tillsonburg News* (November 1984): p. 9, rpt. *Canadian Quaker History Newsletter* 36 (December 1984).

the throne and let the church of God alone.⁴⁴ The inscription is telling of the centrality of the Clergy Reserve dispute to the involvement in rebellious activities.

A similar tale could be told about Quaker involvement in the American Civil War, where the evils of slavery and war did battle in Quakers' hearts and minds. This was made more complex by the theological disputes and disagreements over the appropriate approaches to achieve abolition. And World War One also saw many Quakers involved in armed conflict. While accurate and reliable statistics on Quaker enlistment in the First World War are not readily available, it is generally accepted that 50 per cent of eligible American Quakers performed military service.⁴⁵ Some studies suggest even higher rates of participation.⁴⁶ Figures for American Quaker military service are higher than those reported in England, where roughly 30 per cent of Quakers enlisted.⁴⁷ All of this suggests that, even though yearly meetings consistently expressed a corporate commitment to and belief in pacifism, the manner in which what we call the Peace Testimony was lived out by individuals within the Society of Friends was a complex matter indeed. The same can be said for the other testimonies that have defined the Religious Society of Friends throughout its history. It is insufficient to explain away or ignore these contradictions between Quaker behaviour and statements of belief. Rather, they should become part of a more complex understanding of the Quaker experience and the ways in which boundaries within and around Quaker culture were navigated.

We must understand these complexities not just as aspects within the history of the Religious Society of Friends, as a series of conversations between centres and margins, but also as conversations between Quaker and non-Quaker narratives. Those in Quaker studies have much to offer mainstream narratives that would benefit from a richer awareness of the complexities of who and what Quakers were and their contributions to the world. Deeper awareness of the connections between Quakers and non-Quakers and their deeply interwoven histories will move us ever closer to the criteria Grigor McClelland posited should be used to assess research results in Quaker studies: first, the 'value to Friends in understanding themselves better'; and, second, the value to non-Friends 'in understanding better what Quakerism has to offer'.

44 Armitage Family File, CYMA. The top of the box is inscribed, 'A Present to Merib Armitage from Jesse Cleaver while confined in Toronto Gaol under Charge of H. Treatson. June 20th 1838'. The ends were inlaid with 'UC' and 'LC'.

45 Valentine, Lonnie, 'Quakers, War, and Peacemaking', in Angell, Stephen W. and Dandelion, Pink (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 372.

46 Hamm, Thomas et al., 'Decline of Quaker Pacifism in the Twentieth Century: Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends as a Case Study', *Indiana Magazine of History* 96, no. 3 (2000). p. 54.

47 Hirst, Margaret E., *Quakers in Peace and War: An Account of their Peace Principles and Practice*, London: Swarthmore Press Ltd., 1923, p. 538.

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