

BOOK REVIEWS

Margaret Hope Bacon, *Abby Hopper Gibbons: Prison Reformer and Social Activist* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. xvii + 217. Paperback. ISBN 0-7914-4498-8. \$19.95.

This book continues Margaret Hope Bacon's previous work on the lives of redoubtable Quaker women in the past, who pushed back the boundaries of what was considered acceptable feminine behaviour, thereby contributing to the expansion of women's roles beyond the domestic sphere. It also explores a tumultuous period in American Quakerism, when Friends' community and religious loyalties were tested by challenges from both within and beyond their community, notably the Hicksite Schism, upheavals in the Anti-Slavery movement, and the Civil War. Abby Hopper Gibbons' life almost entirely spanned the nineteenth century (1801–1893), and her activities in philanthropic and reform movements involved her intimately in these challenges.

Abby's leading role model was undeniably her father, Isaac Tatem Hopper, whose concerns for degraded humanity, particularly prisoners and slaves, she sought to emulate throughout her life. The biography traces the evolution of Abby's effectiveness as a social campaigner in the field of penal reform, through political lobbying and exploitation of influential contacts, whilst providing a fascinating, and at times, dramatic, glimpse into the conflicts of the period. For instance, her experiences as a Civil War nurse involved her in real physical danger, and her family home was ransacked during the Draft Riots of 1863 by an angry mob, from whom her daughters had to flee across the roofs of adjoining buildings.

The important contributions made by Quaker philanthropists to the development of legislation aimed at eliminating human rights abuses, and of social institutions which ameliorated the worst effects of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century, are well known. Most Quakers with whom we are familiar in this respect were moderately, or even extremely, wealthy—using the fruits of their business successes to help those less fortunate than themselves. This book, however, highlights the problems experienced by less affluent Friends in pursuing their reforming and philanthropic principles. The Hopper family teetered on the edge of financial difficulties throughout Abby's childhood, due at least in part to Isaac Hopper's support of causes which frequently drained his inadequate resources. Unfortunately, when this compromised his financial solvency in 1811, his co-religionists promptly disowned him, indicating that probity in business was valued more highly in the community than was humanitarian zeal.

Although he was reinstated in 1820, having discharged his debts, Isaac was disowned again after falling foul of influential 'orthodox' (although Hicksite) views on the inappropriateness of his public involvement in the radical Garrisonian wing of the Anti-Slavery movement.

Abby's husband, James, met the same fate; as a consequence, Abby herself resigned her membership of the Society. She never rejoined, and although Bacon finds that she retained many characteristics of Quakerism, she came to reject its peace testimony and Friends' opposition to capital punishment.

The book also addresses the question of why Abby was never prominent in the organized women's movement, despite her close association with many of its pioneering members. Lucretia Mott, for example, not only taught at the school Abby attended, but her daughter married Abby's brother. Abby was also involved in the anti-slavery movement at a time when many women were making the connection between the human rights of slaves and women's rights. An earlier biography by Abby's daughter implied that Abby was essentially conservative in her attitudes to this issue, but Bacon shows that both her letters and her activities indicate a more complex relationship with early feminism, illustrating, for example, her continuing loyalty to friends who were active in women's rights campaigns and her belief that women should not subsume all their interests and affection in their husbands. Perhaps more importantly, most of Abby's adult life was spent in New York, campaigning on behalf of female prisoners, bringing her into close contact with conservative, rather than radical, women. The Ladies New York Anti-Slavery Society also sided with the conservatives in the movement and did not admit black members, so Abby declined to join, and 'participated at a distance and did not form the bonds the others experienced'. It may therefore have been accident of geography, rather than personal inclination, which determined the focus for Abby's considerable energies.

The account of Abby's life is, however, fully alive to her flaws. Bacon recognises that her subject could be domineering, especially within the family. Her daughter Lucy, for example, appears to have been obliged to remove herself physically from her mother's influence, suffering a mental breakdown in the process, to establish her independence, and there are signs that, at times, James Gibbons felt overwhelmed and overshadowed by his formidable wife. Bacon also acknowledges that, as the Gibbons family became more affluent in the 1850s, some of Abby's youthful radicalism was abandoned, along with her rejection of the peace testimony. The manner in which female reformers like Abby interpreted their mission to purify and morally uplift their 'fallen' sisters is shown by Bacon to have had an ambivalent impact on the female prisoners whose cause Abby consistently championed. Believing that women offenders, by virtue of the special characteristics of their gender, were even more morally depraved than their male counterparts, she urged that they should receive a longer period of incarceration in reformatories to effect a complete rehabilitation of character.

Overall, this book provides a worthwhile and accessible account of an individual whose efforts in the field of penal reform and of widening the possibilities for women's public activities deserve wider recognition. It clearly charts the complexities of the shifting loyalties within American Quakerism in the nineteenth century, as well as describing the process by which female campaigners developed their organizational abilities to become a force to be reckoned with in the field of social reform. In these terms, it proves the applicability of its subject matter not only to those interested in its particular American context, but also to researchers of the role of women as nineteenth-century political strategists. Abby's skills in using the weight of influential friends to build institutions caused her to be much in demand by other groups of female philanthropists. Her approach to female prisoners also went beyond the amelioration of their desperately poor living conditions, but encompassed a new

approach to women offenders. Towards the end of the century, with the development of professional social services, she shifted the focus of her campaigning to urge the appointment of women to state regulatory bodies. This demonstrated a realism and flexibility which might be considered unusual in a woman half her age. She continued her involvement on public affairs until the end of her life, presiding at a board meeting of her beloved Isaac T. Hopper Home only days before her death at the age of ninety-two.

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Anthony Manousos (ed.), *A Western Quaker Reader: Writings by and About Independent Quakers in the Western United States, 1929-1999* (Whittier, CA: Friends Bulletin Corp., 2000), pp. 386. Paperback. ISBN 0-9700410-0-4. \$19.95.

As a Western Quaker who is not an 'Independent Quaker', I found this historical anthology of writings about the 'Unprogrammed' tradition as it developed in Western North America to be a source of insight and inspiration. The Independent unprogrammed tradition is rooted in a Liberal movement born out of protest against the emotional fervor of Western Quaker revivalism in the late 19th century.

The spirit and the values of Joel and Hannah Bean, the first Quaker Liberals to come West in 1882, are widely reflected throughout these essays. The brief introduction provides broad historical context, mentioning the Beans as spiritual heirs, but relegating details about the Bean legacy to the footnotes. Perhaps the editors decided that delving into the complexity of the Quaker quarrels and acrimony of this era would be an irrelevant distraction to the general audience to whom the book is directed. But since this 'Reader', will serve as the 'official' history of Western Unprogrammed Friends, one chapter devoted to a reflective and interpretive historical essay of the beginnings of the movement providing some theological, sociological and cultural analysis would have strengthened the book as a whole. Deeper probing into the causes of the animosity between Bean and more evangelically-minded Quakers might have yielded fresh insight into reasons for the perpetuation of distrust between the two branches of Western Friends mentioned in some of the essays in the latter chapters. One writer's reference to 'fearing chapel altar calls' (p. 273) is a good example of a reaction that stems from the long shadow of the Bean controversy over Western Quaker history.

The vast majority of Quakers to settle in the Western parts of the United States in the late 1900s were Friends who had experienced spiritual rebirth and renewal through revival meetings. These groups that formed the first Western Yearly Meetings, now called Evangelical Friends continue to comprise the majority of Western Friends (11,600 to 3,400 according to the text, p. 1). The brief introduction to *A Western Quaker Reader*, attempts to portray the early history in a balanced and unbiased manner, but as the tread of history is traced from Bean to Howard Brinton, the modernist view of Quaker history clearly emerges in which Bean carries the true vision Quakerism to the West. Thus, I would like to offer a slight revision, in reviewing what is otherwise a significant and valuable resource for understanding Western American Quaker history.

Bean did indeed resist popular trends in Western Quakerism by maintaining non-pastoral