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Accessing the Intimate in the Archive: Quaker Women's Meeting Minutes and the History of Emotions

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The earliest generations of Quakers existed primarily on the margins of early modern European society, and yet they produced an abundance of written material containing a wealth of information for social historians and scholars of Quakerism alike. This article explores in particular the minute books produced by Quaker Women's Meetings, demonstrating their especial value to researchers of gender, labour, faith and emotionality with the intention of encouraging greater scholarly engagement with a rich yet vastly underexplored corpus of primary material.

Introduction

Over its nearly 400-year history, Quakerism has commonly been regarded as a faith on the margins of European society. Aside from a brief moment in the early years of colonial Pennsylvania, Friends have hardly held the majority anywhere demographically, culturally, or politically.[1] The early generations of Friends, Quakers who practiced the faith from its conception in the 1640s until the mid-eighteenth century, were marginalised in part for their spiritually egalitarian beliefs, specifically the belief that all of humanity regardless of sex could access the internal light of Christ. This meant that women as well as men were able to travel in the ministry and partake in the administration of the faith. Certainly, a sizeable number of early converts to Quakerism were women, and as the faith continued to develop over the seventeenth century, women remained a numerically significant and highly visible proportion of the community's leadership.[2]

Despite the faith's relatively diminutive place within early modern British society, Friends produced an abundance of written material in a variety of forms documenting in meticulous detail not only the rapid development of the faith over the latter half of the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, but also observations of society outside of Quakerism as ministers of the faith moved through Europe, colonial North America and the Caribbean. Much of the historiography on the writings of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Quaker writings, and on the writings of female Friends in particular, has traditionally concentrated on the printed pamphlets and epistles they produced.[3] And while this scholarship has produced critical insights into the development of early Quakerism, there is more to be uncovered about the place of Friends in early modern European society that can be obtained from close examination of other records produced by Friends.[4] The writings of early Friends in what historians

[1] The one exception to this may be in colonial Pennsylvania, and especially colonial Philadelphia, where Quakers held what Frederick Barnes Tolles referred to as a 'hegemony' for the final two decades of the seventeenth century; see: Tolles, F. B., *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682–1763*, New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1948, p. 12; Larson, R., *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700–1775*, Chapel Hill; N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p. 8.

[2] Mack, P., *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*, Berkeley; Cal.: University of California Press, 1992, p. 4; Bouldin, E., *Women Prophets and Radical Protestantism in the British Atlantic World, 1640–1730*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 53, 57; Thomas, K. V., 'Women and the Civil War Sects', *Past & Present*, 13 (1958), pp. 47–48.

[3] Some particularly excellent examples of this work include: Peters, K., *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Baker, C., 'An Exploration of Quaker Women's Writing Between 1650 and 1700,' *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5/2 (2004), pp. 8–20; Wright, S.,"'Truly Dear Hearts": Family and Spirituality in Quaker Women's Writings 1680–1750,' in Brown, S., (ed.), *Women, Gender and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, pp. 97–116.

[4] Some notable exceptions of works published in recent years that analyse Quaker Meeting minutes include: Pullin, N., *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650–1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018;

have designated the 'second period' of Quakerism are especially enlightening as they came to include an additional medium: the minutes of Friends' Meetings for business.[5] Just as in ministry, the spiritual equality of the sexes in Quaker belief meant both men and women were allowed to participate in the Quaker Meetings for business. However, men and women met in separate Meetings for business, and it was customary for Men's and Women's Meetings to keep records of their proceedings in separate minute books. The records of these Meetings offer researchers rare insight into the gendered dynamics that influenced expressions of authority and structured early Friends' communal life.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the usefulness of Quaker Meeting minutes to social historians, particularly those researching the intersection of gender, faith, labour and emotions in early modern society through three critical interventions. The first illustrates how labour in the early Quaker Meeting system was gendered, paying particular attention to the labour ascribed to female Friends and the potential for this labour to become 'emotional'. The second examines instances of emotionality as recorded in Women's Meeting minutes, offering evidence of the kinds of qualitative detail found in these records and the value they add to modern understandings of the social contexts in which Quaker women deliberated their Meeting business. Finally, this article demonstrates what the records of female Friends' performance and interpretation of emotions may reveal about the principles and beliefs that informed early Quaker responses to business within their communities and outlines the specific considerations researchers must keep in mind when exploring Quaker Meeting minutes through this lens. These three interventions are offered with the intent of elevating the critical labour female Friends performed on behalf of their communities through the medium of their Meeting while also encouraging wider engagement with Women's Meeting minutes, which remain an underappreciated and underutilised corpus of primary material. As will be shown in the subsequent analysis, the records Quaker women kept of their labour offer glimpses not only at the lived experiences of individuals whose lives would otherwise only be known to researchers as names, dates or figures but also—and most critically for social historians—of the values, motivations, and even power dynamics that may have influenced Women's Meetings' responses to emotionally-laden business as keepers and caregivers of a particular spiritual (emotional) community.

Sahle, E., *Quakers in the British Atlantic World, c. 1660–1800*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021; and Landes, J., *London Quakers in the Trans-Atlantic World: The Creation of an Early Modern Community*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

[5] The transition from the 'first' and 'second' periods of Quakerism is characterised by the faith's movement from a radical sectarian movement to an organised church with an established institutional apparatus like the Meeting system; see: Braithwaite, W. C., *The Second Period of Quakerism*, Cadbury, H. J. (ed.), York: William Sessions Limited, 1979, 2nd edn., pp. 248–250.

Section 1: The Labour of Women's Meetings and Emotionality

Although Friends believed in the spiritual equality of men and women, Quaker Meeting minutes are often reflective of the gendered divisions that pervaded early modern European society. These gendered divisions were made especially visible in the written record following the creation of the first Quaker Meeting system in the latter half of the seventeenth century. From the 1670s, Quaker communities were encouraged by leaders like George Fox and Margaret Fell to establish hierarchical Meeting systems at the local, regional, and national levels that were designated as the monthly, quarterly, and yearly Meetings respectively.[6] These Meetings contained space for worship, followed by a period of business in which Friends were to discuss matters of concern facing the community.[7] A designated clerk would take the minutes of each Meeting, discerning the nature of the discourse held by Friends and the resolutions reached.[8] Unlike printed testimonies or epistles, which were intended to circulate among Quakers and non-Quakers alike, these minutes contain intimate knowledge of Friends' communal life; they commonly include quantitative demographic information like Meeting expenditure and dates of Quaker births, deaths, and marriages, as well as fundamental qualitative elements of early Quaker life including disputes between Friends, engagements and conflicts with those not of the faith, and the deliberations surrounding the discipline of errant community members. The establishment of a hierarchical Meeting system and the subsequent production of minutes as recorded by Meeting clerks has resulted in a rich body of primary material detailing the balance and management of community dynamics, the kinds of social challenges Meetings faced in their particular context and time, and the nature of labour carried out by Meeting Friends.

Critically, these records also reveal that the labour carried out in Quaker Meetings was heavily gendered. From the onset of the Meeting system, Quaker communities were advised by leaders like Fox and Fell to separate their Meetings for business into designated Men's and Women's Meetings.[9] Friends' belief in the universal, indwelling Christ meant that, from the faith's conception, women were active in the ministry and administration of Quakerism alongside men.[10] This also meant that, like Quaker men,

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[6] Martin, C. J. L.,'Tradition Versus Innovation: The Hat, Wilkinson-Story, and Keithian Controversies,' *Quaker Studies* 8 (2003), pp. 11–12.

[7] Vann, R. T., *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655–1755*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 102.

[8] Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650–1750*, p. 134.

[9] Not all Quakers immediately accepted the creation of Meetings explicitly for women; see Martin, C. J. L.; 'Tradition Versus Innovation: The Hat, Wilkinson-Story, and Keithian Controversies,' *Quaker Studies* 8, 2003, pp., 5–22.

[10] Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650–1750*, p. 4; Brailsford, M. R., *Quaker Women, 1650–1690*, London: Duckworth & Co., 1915, p. 9.

female Friends were encouraged to partake in Meetings for business. But equality of the sexes in spirit did not necessarily mean Quaker women were entirely free from the gendered expectations placed upon them while 'in the world' or whilst managing the business of their earthly communities.[11] Fox commonly employed scripture to further define the particular role he intended female Friends to play in their communities:

> 'And the [...] Apostle saith, I Tim. 5. That *the Elder women should be as Mothers*; and a Mother is a Nurser, and Teacher, and Instructer of her Children, and *the Younger women as sisters, with all purity*; and Sisters in Christ and Purity, all have but one Father [...] And *that these aged women teach the younger women, first, To be Sober;* secondly, *To love their Husbands;* thirdly, *To love their Children*; fourthly *To be discreet;* fifthly, *To be chast and Keeprs at Home, and Good, Obedient to their own Husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed*'[12]

As this passage from Fox indicates, female Friends were largely characterised by early Quaker leadership as wives, mothers, and sisters within their communities, roles which carried with them certain domestic responsibilities, most notably securing the spiritual and moral education of the family as well as physical care for all household members.[13] But crucially in the context of the wider Meeting system, this notion of care extended beyond the traditional familial household and often came to encompass the 'spiritual household' of the wider Quaker community; Quaker women of the Women's Meetings became mothers and sisters to Friends to whom they were not biologically related.[14] This meant that Quaker women played a critical, unique role in maintaining the social, physical, and spiritual wellbeing of the entire faith community. Indeed, Fox further posited that women 'many times know the Condition more of poor Families, and widows, and such as are in distress more then [*sic*] the men, because they are more conversant in their Families and about such things'.[15] Fox believed Quaker women were more likely to speak to one another about the affairs of their communities than

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[11] Chadwick, L. R., *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, Durham University, 2024, pp. 11, 13–14.

[12] Fox, *This is an Encuragement*, 76–77.

[13] Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650–1750*, pp. 35–36, 69, 101–102, 151, 254.

[14] For more on the concept of the 'spiritual family', see: Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism*, 1650–1750, 24, 36, 101–102, 127, 144, 150, 254; Jean R. Soderlund, 'Women's Authority in Pennsylvania and New Jersey Quaker Meetings 1680–1760,' *The William and Mary Quarterly 44*, no. 4 (October 1987): 723, 727; Su Fang Ng, 'Marriage and Discipline: The Place of Women in Early Quaker Controversies,' *The Seventeenth Century* 18, no. 1 (April 2003): 133; Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*, University of California Press, 1992, 238–239, 292, 336–337, 407.

[15] Fox, G., *This is an Encuragement*, pp. 79–80.

men, and they were therefore expected to carry out this labour at an institutional level independent of, at least in name, their male counterparts.[16] This is not to say Quaker men were entirely uninvolved in the business of communal care and poor relief, but rather that work of this kind was considered by Quaker leadership to be the especial domain of female Friends.[17] Quaker women were believed to be – by the supposed nature of their gender – more informed of and better suited to addressing these specific needs within their communities.[18]

It is in part due to this prescribed domain of labour that the work and attention of the Women's Meetings frequently centred around moments of high emotion or intense feeling in the lives of Friends, when individuals were at their most vulnerable or at significant periods of transition in their lives. Through the Meeting system, Quaker women managed some of the most intimate business of Friends' community life: providing care for those suffering from physical illness, vulnerability, or financial distress; protecting and guiding youth into adulthood; and serving as models of upstanding feminine behaviour to Quaker women of all ages as they navigated the challenges of courtship, marriage, motherhood, and widowhood. Quaker communities relied upon female Friends in their Meetings to witness what were often intensely sensitive moments in the lives of other Friends and, through the process of discernment, to interpret emotionally-fraught scenarios and determine a course of action in response. The labour performed through Women's Meetings was integral to the maintenance of social order and spiritual cohesion within local Quaker communities, labour which often carried with it the opportunity for deep emotional expression. It is imperative now to turn to some examples of this labour to illustrate this point more fully.

Section 2: Emotional Moments Preserved

A particularly rich source of these emotional moments preserved in the Meeting minutes are those of the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting, which was the home Meeting

[16] Naomi Pullin effectively argues that this 'elevation of the wife and mother' at an institutional level was unique to Quakerism among dissenting faiths; see Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism*, p. 151. This is potentially also an allusion to the early modern stereotype of women as 'gossips'; c.f., Capp, B, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

[17] Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 178, 218, 309.

[18] Early Quakers leaders like Fox wrote comparatively less about the appropriate domain of male labour within the Quaker Meeting system, likely because it was not immediately necessary to define the authoritative position of male leaders within the community. While Quaker Men's Meetings did address some of the same business as Quaker women, most notably some business of poor relief and investigations of marriages, male Friends in their Meetings dealt primarily with business pertaining to the management of finances and estates, the settlement of disputes between Friends, and the maintenance of community infrastructure; see Chadwick, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, pp. 11–13, 70, 82.

of Margaret Fell and her daughters of Swarthmoor Hall in northwestern England. The records of this Meeting contain some of the most descriptive examples of the kinds of labour female Friends carried out in their communities through their Meetings for business and, critically, the emotions which frequently accompanied such work. Of course, the opportunity to peek at these experiences is only as good as the records that preserve them, and despite Friends' propensity for record keeping, researchers of early Quakerism are often left to 'fill in the gaps' where documentation has either not survived over the centuries or was never produced in the first place. Perhaps unsurprisingly, records connected with particularly influential (and frequently wealthy) members of the faith like the Fells are often the best preserved. It is likely because this Meeting possessed a direct connection to prominent figures like Margaret and her daughters that the minutes from the women of Swarthmoor Meeting are some of the most detailed minutes available for this period.[19] The Swarthmoor Women's Meeting minutes, for example, are replete with challenging details of impoverished families, typically widows and children, applying to female Friends for poor relief in various forms, whether that be food, clothing, additional funds, or even covering the expenditure associated with nursing children, the ill, and the elderly. These details add qualitative depth to the Quaker archive, allowing for a glimpse at the intimate, emotionally-charged moments in the lives of individual Friends and the critical role Quaker women played in maintaining the social and spiritual order of their communities.

One example of this is the matter of Jane Strickland and her son, which was brought to the attention of the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting in 1679. As described in the minutes, Jane was a 'poore Widdow [...] who hath a Childe lieing in A sad Condition, not able to helpe himeselfe,' which Friends also noted 'tie[d] her much to tend' to the poor child.[20] Following discussion of Jane's plight, the Swarthmoor women agreed to send 'seaven pence' to Jane and appointed one of their members, Jennett Dixson, to inform the Meeting in the future if she should see Jane 'in want, for a farther supply'.[21] But of central relevance here is the emotionality conveyed by these minutes; the reader is presented with a sense of the distress, and perhaps of the grief and frustration, that Jane may have experienced, or was perceived by the Meeting to have experienced, at a moment of intense vulnerability. She is characterised as a 'poore Widdow',

[19] Two of Margaret Fell's daughters, Sarah Fell Meade and Rachel Fell Abraham, actually served as clerks of the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting for extended periods of time. See: Ross, I., *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949, pp. 271, 290.

[20] Society of Friends (Quakers): Swarthmore Monthly Meeting and constituent Preparative Meetings, Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, Cumbria Archive Centre, Barrow [henceforth CACB], minutes for 7 8mo 1679, BDFCF 1.3.1.

[21] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 8mo 1679.

impoverished and alone, and as the desperate mother of an ill young child whose care 'tie[d] her' to the home—a circumstance which likely diminished her ability to labour elsewhere and isolated her from alternative means of relief. Further stressing the severity of the situation, Jane's unnamed son is defined in these minutes as a youth in a 'sad condition', of such poor health that he is unable to 'help himself' or to assist his mother in supporting their household. Jane and her son are thus painted in the minutes of the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting as sympathetic figures, whose tragic condition elicits support and compassion from the reader.[22] Entries of Meeting business utilising emotionally-laden descriptors such as these appear commonly within the records of Quaker women's labour, during which female Friends frequently heard the sufferings of the most indigent members of their communities and responded on behalf of the wider faith community as the women discerned appropriate to the situation.

Quaker women in their Meetings were also often present at major life events like births and deaths within the community, and they were privy to many of the decision-making processes that commonly occurred over the span of an individual Friend's lifetime. For instance, female Friends played an essential role in the process through which early Friends became engaged in marriage. In the early modern period, when a couple wished to marry in the Church of England, they were typically required to publish 'banns' or a public notice of the impending marriage intended to give time for any potential objections to the union to come forward.[23] Early Quakers adopted a similar approach in their gendered Meeting system, wherein prospective couples were required to appear twice before their local Men's and Women's Meeting to make their intentions public to the community.[24] After the couple's first appearance, Friends from the Women's and Men's Meetings would investigate the 'clearness' of the proposed couple to marry to ensure that both partners were free from engagements to others and that both were upstanding members of their home Meetings; typically the Women's Meetings would investigate the prospective wife and Men's Meetings investigated the prospective husband. Critically, early Quakers also often recorded the details of this investigative process, the findings of which commonly reveal intimate elements of the relationships under scrutiny and the emotional impetus behind the pending marriage. For instance, the investigation of potential couples commonly involved asking the relatives of the couple if they had the consent of their family to marry, a process which

[22] There were certainly instances where the women of Swarthmoor Meeting denied relief to applicants who were deemed unworthy of the Meeting's assistance, see: Chadwick, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, pp. 158–180.

[23] Laurence, A., *Women in England 1500–1760: A Social History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994, p. 42.

[24] Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655–1755*, pp. 183–187; Martin, 'Tradition Versus Innovation: The Hat, Wilkinson-Story, and Keithian Controversies,' p. 14.

could at times reveal underlying tensions or competing desires that would hinder the successful accomplishment of the marriage. Once the investigation was carried out by Meeting representatives, the prospective couple were then expected to return before their Meetings a second time to hear the Meetings' decision of whether they could be wed or not.

Of greatest significance, however, is the expectation placed on Quaker couples to present themselves before the Women's Meeting first to initiate this process of investigation.[25] The prerogative of female Friends to hear of the engagement and conduct their investigation first often meant, in theory, that any objectionable findings might appear first in the Women's Meeting minutes before male Friends could become involved.[26] One such example appears in the Swarthmoor Women's minutes in 1674, when James and Bridget Hathornthwaite responded to having been disowned from the Meeting. Instead of marrying in the prescribed Quaker manner before the Meeting, the Hathornthwaites had 'married out' or married via a 'priest' and were subsequently rebuked and excluded from the Meeting. In response, James and Bridget sent a letter to the Women's Meeting begging forgiveness, claiming they had been: '[…] drawne by wicked people, & by the Preist' who had told them that unless they married under a priest they would not be eligible to inherit James' father's estate.[27] At this time, Quaker marriages were considered 'irregular' or not in accordance with the law and therefore not officially sanctioned, and it is likely that an ecclesiastical court would not have recognised any inheritance James and his wife wished to claim on the basis of their marriage, potentially leaving them destitute and without any way to make a living.[28] In response to their exclusion, James and Bridget wrote that they had been 'Tempted' by the Priest and being 'younge & easy to bee drawne,' they deviated from Quakers' practices which had 'been a sadd trouble' to them both.[29] Although mediated by the women of the Swarthmoor Meeting who transcribed this letter into their minutes, the reader is granted a sense of James

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[25] Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism*, p. 103.

[26] While Fox intended that the Women's Meetings be consulted on the matter of proposed marriages, some Quaker communities objected to this implementation, most notably followers of John Wilkinson and John Story; see: Martin, 'Tradition Versus Innovation,' pp. 13–14.

[27] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 5mo 1674.

[28] In seventeenth century England, marriages were required to be conducted publicly in churches in order to 'ensure the inheritance of property', see: Laurence, *Women in England 1500–1760*, p. 42. Because Quaker marriages did not comply with Anglican practices, they were not legally recognised until the passing of the Marriage Act in 1753, see: Johnson, R., 'Quakers and Marriage Legislation in England in the Long Eighteenth Century,' in *Quakerism in the Atlantic World, 1690–1830,'* Healey, R. R. (ed.), University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 2021, p. 146; also Booth, M., 'Quaker Marriage: A History of Celebrating a Spiritual Commitment,' https://quaker.org.uk, April 26, 2023.

[29] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 5mo 1674.

and Bridget's emotional response to their exclusion, which may be interpreted as remorse or even anxiety over their perceived error.[30] The explanation given for their transgression, that the two were young and easily persuaded, easily lends itself to a sense of shame at being perhaps perceived by the Meeting as naïve and foolish penitents. Indeed, the Hathornthwaite case exemplifies how the Women's Meeting could also serve as a site for Friends to express their emotions and to seek comfort, guidance, or even forgiveness from the spiritual mothers and sisters of their community. Because the Women's Meetings were often the first point of contact for Quaker couples seeking to marry, the minutes recorded by female Friends are often replete with emotionally contextualising details such as these surrounding Friends' marriages, especially when evidence of 'disorderly walking' or unsanctioned behaviour arose within the women's investigations.

And it is especially when acts of disorder were discovered within the community that researchers can find some of the more emotionally saturated testimonies or records. Both Men and Women's Meetings were tasked with addressing misconduct and settling conflict within their communities, but the nature of the disorder (and the sex of the complainants) each addressed differed between the two. Whereas male Friends heard disputes from other men surrounding financial agreements or the settlement of estates, Quaker Women's Meetings addressed occurrences of 'disorderly walking' amongst female Friends which typically involved resolving discord in relationships or the punishment of illicit sexual activity.[31] One such example was recorded in the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting minutes in 1676 detailing the case of a broken engagement between Hester Cooper and Thomas Wilson. In this instance, it was reported to the Meeting that the said Hester was engaged to marry Thomas, but that Thomas did 'not Regard the Ingagements yt hee had made to Hester [...]; and that hee is[was] in Ellection to bee married too another woman' which 'hath beene & is a great trouble & greife unto [Hester], soe yt shee hath been severall times ill, both in body and minde since [...]'.[32] The broken engagement between Hester and Thomas was evidently a source of extreme trauma for Hester, reportedly causing her significant physical and mental distress and prompting the Women's Meeting to write to Thomas' home Meeting in Kendal demanding an answer and apology for 'the wronge he hath done her'.[33]

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[30] James and Bridgett were ultimately granted permission to return to the Meeting if they publicly denounced their actions, but it is unclear if they ever actually did so; see: Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 5mo 1674 and 4 6mo 1674.

[31] Soderlund, J. R., 'Women's Authority in Pennsylvania and New Jersey Quaker Meetings 1680–1760,' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44/4 (1987), p. 734; Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*, p. 339.

[32] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 9mo 1676.

[33] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 9mo 1676.

This example is extraordinary not only for the manner in which these women utilised their standing as an institutional authority within the Quaker community to demand justice for one of their own but also for the incredible amount of detail regarding Hester and Thomas' relationship, including a testimony from Hester recounting the intimate details of their engagement:

> As Concerninge our familliarity; one time, when hee & I was in ye low Chamber beow ye Parlor, about Eleven of ye clock of ye night, beinge speakeing our minds one to the other I said, I doubt thou will prove deceitfull to mee, as thou has been to others; Hee said feare not, thou shall never bee hurt by mee; I will marry thee when thou will, if it bee within A fortnight[34]

According to Hester, Thomas promised to marry her in a midnight meeting and she evidently also trusted him to be faithful despite apparent deviations in his past. This passage also suggests Hester felt a degree of risk in becoming involved with Thomas in the first place and that she sought reassurance from him over the course of their relationship. Such intimate details concerning the couple's 'familliarity' with one another were relayed to the women of Swarthmoor Monthly Meeting in a semi-public forum, a feat which also likely presented emotional challenges for Hester.[35]

Certainly, the relationship itself is depicted in the Meeting minutes as rather emotionally tumultuous, with Hester conveying in her testimony feelings we might interpret today as suspicion or jealousy, as well as further fears that Thomas would not be faithful:

> 'And severall times when hee hath come in late, I asked him where hee had been; Hee would have said; Thou Thinkes I have been with some other woman now: I tell thee if thou cann beleeve; I am now In gaged to noe other woman but thee. I was afraid of him, because I knew how hee had done with Margarett Thwaites, who is now Henry Singleton wife, shee told mee of his dealeing not fairely with her: And hee hath severall times confessed to mee that hee wronged her and yt hee was troubled, when hee mett her; yett for all this, hee said I should never bee hurt by him'[36]

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[34] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 9mo 1676; Chadwick, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, p. 161.

[35] I refer here to Meetings as 'semi-public' because they were in many places restricted to members of the faith and only those Friends who were in good standing with the Meeting. Moreover, attendance at Meetings for business was largely separated by gender, with a few exceptions as business required (e.g. marriage proposals or settlements of estates). Meetings in this sense were 'public' only to a select demographic of Friends' community. See also: Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism*, p. 102.

[36] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 9mo 1676.

Here we are granted a glimpse at Hester and Thomas' relationship in the wider context of their community. Thomas evidently had a reputation, one for which he purportedly expressed remorse and made promises to never repeat in the future with Hester. But Hester's testimony also reveals that Thomas made a number of promises to her, ones that she recounted openly to the Meeting:

> At another time when hee[Thomas] was sicke, lieing in ye Parlor bed, hee desired mee to stay besi[de] him, and hee said: Poore thing, If I dye at this time, what will become of thee? And I wept, & hee wiped my face with his pockett hancerchiffe, and said, If I dye at this time, I will give thee yt wch shall doe thee good? I will give thee my Barkhouse[37]

This potential deathbed scene, filled with what might be interpreted as affection and tenderness, concluded with a bequest of property, a 'barkhouse' which may have been used to support a trade like leather manufacturing and thus as a potential source of income. It is possible this detail was included in Hester's testimony because she felt cheated by Thomas' departure, that she had potentially lost out on a source of future income or financial stability and was expressing her anger and resentment. Nevertheless, the exact reasons for the breakdown in Hester and Thomas' relationship remain unknown. What is clear is that shortly after disintegration of their relationship Hester approached the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting with her grievances, which has resulted in the production of this unusually detailed and emotional testimony delivered before the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting, all of which, Hester purportedly declared, she was willing to 'affirme to [Thomas'] face, or before any other' as she would 'not give him up, nor Release him to marry any other woman'.[38] Throughout her testimony, Hester is depicted as a loyal and devoted woman, scorned in love and abandoned by a deceitful suitor. Her indignation is perceived as justified, or at least worthy of further investigation as evidenced by the Women's Meeting's attempts to exact an explanation from Thomas and his Meeting. This narrative of events is, however, told through Hester's perspective and mediated through the recordings of the Swarthmoor women; we do not have a comparative account from Thomas, which may have painted a very different story.[39] Moreover, we do not know if Hester and the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting ever received an apology or even an explanation for the matter. Hester herself

[37] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 9mo 1676.

[38] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 7 9mo 1676.

[39] No comparative response from Thomas was ever recorded in the Swarthmoor Meeting minutes, if one was ever given. It may be that a response was given, and that the incident was recorded in the minutes of Thomas' home meeting in Kendal, but at the time of publication this remains unknown.

only appears a few more times in the Swarthmoor minutes for an unrelated matter of discipline before disappearing completely from the record.[40] But as the analysis in the next section will show, the greatest significance of these preserved moments of emotionality—and critically, of female Friends' reactions to them—is the insight they offer social historians into the principles, values, and authoritative structures that shaped early Friends' community life.

Section 3: Emotional Moments Interpreted

Moments of vulnerability and intense feeling like these encapsulated in the minutes of Quaker Women's Meetings offer invaluable contextual depth to the names, dates, and figures behind the pages; it is often too easy as historians and researchers to become caught up in the analysis of the material without fully appreciating the lived experiences the material represents. But it is also for this reason that we must probe deeper into the unique value Quaker Meeting minutes hold for researchers. Namely, we must ask: what should we do with these glimpses at the emotions behind the labour Quaker women carried out in their communities? What can these brief moments in the written record tell us about life in early modern contexts? And what can Quaker Meeting minutes contribute to the already extensive scholarship on the history of emotions?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to reimagine the early Quaker community as a type of 'emotional community'. First defined by historian Barbara Rosenwein, emotional communities are groups of actors that share 'particular values, modes of feeling, and manners of expressing those feelings'.[41] Rosenwein theorises that emotional communities are shaped by a common understanding of cultural norms and behaviours and that members of emotional communities will place similar values on certain emotions and their expression thereof.[42] While emotions are a universal human experience, the meanings associated with them and their expression may vary across time and be informed by different social, cultural, and political beliefs.[43] Members of an emotional community are united by a shared perspective of what feelings are appropriate in response to certain events as well as the proper expression of those sentiments in the moment. Imagining Quakers as an emotional community requires researchers to consider the particular values or belief structures that shaped Friends' responses to

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[40] BDFCF 1.3.1. Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 2 10mo 1679, 11mo 1679, 4 3mo 1679, 1 4mo 1680, 6 5mo 1680, 3 6mo 1680.

[41] Rosenwein, B. H., *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 3.

[42] Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, p. 3

[43] Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, p. 1.

Meeting business. Conversely, the manner in which emotions were recorded in Meeting minutes may also reveal the structures and beliefs that informed Friends' outlook on particular business. To frame the Quaker Meeting in this way therefore allows for a better understanding the emotionality of the labour performed by Quaker women in their Meetings, as well as the behaviours and beliefs they sought to regulate within their communities as established leaders of their faith.[44]

Critically, to recognise early Quakers as an emotional community also requires researchers to put aside their own emotional biases and endeavour to examine Friends' Meeting minutes within the sociocultural contexts and perspectives in which they were written. The necessity of this methodological approach is made clear in the examination of one particular example from the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting minute book. In 1678 the Swarthmoor women were made aware of a twelve-year-old girl named Isabel Colton, whose current employer had 'noe occasion' for her services any longer.[45] Isabel's mother, Jane, was a poor woman who had received sporadic relief from the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting for many years, and it was likely that Isabel was 'placed out' to labour in the local home of another Friend. This practice of 'placing out' was not uncommon among families in early modern England, but it was likely arranged in Isabel's particular case to alleviate the financial strain on the Colton household. Indeed, the Swarthmoor Meeting's involvement here closely resembles the parochial practice of placing 'pauper children' out as a way of reducing the perceived burden on parish coffers.[46] It was decided by the women of Swarthmoor Meeting that a new employer would be found for Isabel, and a few months later, another position was engaged for the young girl as a servant in the household of a local Friend.[47] As part of this agreement, the Women's Meeting stipulated that Isabel was to be taught the unspecified trade of her new mistress and cautioned that the girl should not be 'put [...] to any things, more then shee is able to performe, being shee is but younge'.[48] It was also not unusual for arrangements of this kind to contain some form of clause ensuring the education or training of the child concerned through which they might support themselves upon reaching adulthood.[49] But the inclusion of the Swarthmoor women's warning that

[44] C.f., Arlie Russsell Hochschild's definition of 'emotional labor'; see: Hochschild, A. R., *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 2012.

[45] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 2 2mo 1678.

[46] Hindle, S., *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550–1750*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 191–227; see also: Chadwick, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, pp. 51, 172–173, 222.

[47] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 6 6mo 1678.

[48] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 6 6mo 1678.

[49] Hindle, *On the Parish?*, pp. 204–205.

Isabel only perform labour suited to her age suggests they felt concern, and perhaps some responsibility, for her wellbeing and preservation.

Nevertheless, the arrangement was not to last; one month later, the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting minutes recorded that Isabel had run away from her new position, the details of which are worth citing in full:

> Alsoe wee are informed, that Jane Coltons daughter of Swarthmore Meetting, is returned home to her Mothers, in A stubborn unservant like state, from John Kirkbies, where shee was; notwithstanding friends trouble & care touching her at our last Meetting: Her mother receiveing her into her House being an others Servant, shee did wrong in, and friends Judge it, and its desired, that some Women friends speake to Jane Colton, and reprove her, for her stubborn ungrateful cariage to friends in this concerne, who tooke care of her and her Children, in a time of scarsity and distresse, when shee was like to starve for want[50]

From what can be gleaned from this entry, Isabel rejected this new arrangement and, as a young child, ran away to find comfort at home with her mother. Jane Colton accepted her young daughter back into her home, for which she was reproved and admonished by the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting. Many readers today would likely react to Isabel's flight with emotions of sympathy and compassion, taking into consideration the apparent distress of the young girl, her separation from her mother, and her status as a child servant. But the Women's Meeting interpreted it very differently and were quite incensed by the Coltons' conduct—a response which may seem incompatible with modern sentiments. There exists here a disconnect between emotional communities: what in the present may be anticipated as an appropriate emotional response versus the actual emotional response elicited by a particular community in the historical moment.

These incongruities bring into relief the values and social dynamics that shaped early Friends' understanding of and emotional reactions to their world. The words used by the Swarthmoor women in response to the matter are especially illuminating. In describing a mother whose actions concerning her young child contradicted the directives of the Women's Meeting, Jane Colton was denounced as 'stubborn' and 'ungrateful', adjectives which characterise her as one not only resistant to the will of the Meeting but also as one who failed to express appreciation to the Meeting for their labours on her behalf.[51] Moreover, the weight of the Swarthmoor women's response centred not around concern as to why Isabel ran away, but rather ire that

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[50] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 3 7mo 1678.

[51] Chadwick, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, pp. 172–173.

Jane had received one into her home who was 'an others Servant.'[52] In the eyes of the Swarthmoor Women's Meeting, it was no longer of primary importance that Jane was Isabel's mother; the women of Swarthmoor had contracted for Isabel to be employed as a servant in the household of another Friend where she was expected to be obedient to the will of her new master and, by proxy, the directives of the Women's Meeting. When Jane accepted her daughter into her home, she was perceived by female Friends to be flouting the parameters of social order established by the Meeting, resulting in their denunciation of her as 'stubborn' and 'ungrateful'. Friends' anger in this instance was an emotional response to Jane's supposed disobedience, her failure to submit to the directives of the Meeting's will, and irritation that the Meeting's labour had seemingly been disregarded.[53] This reaction heavily suggests that obedience and submission to the authority of the Meeting were behaviours that Swarthmoor Friends valued in their Meeting's membership, expectations that contradict central Quaker teachings which champion the spiritual equality of all people and reject social hierarchies of authority.[54] It is beyond the scope of this brief essay to offer a full analysis of factors which may have influenced Swarthmoor Friends' deviation from 'traditional' Quaker practices. But this example is significant nevertheless because it exemplifies clearly how this methodology — of isolating the recorded emotional responses of historical subjects and situating them within the emotional communities to whom they belonged — brings to the fore the social structures that informed the behaviours and perspectives of people in the past.

Moreover, this methodology prompts greater reflection as to the 'curation' of emotional communities within the written record. Professor Sasha Turner reminds us that records of emotionality can be recorded with intentionality, with the purpose of elevating a particular response and influencing others.[55] The examples of emotionality outlined above, for instance, were predominantly the expressions of women as perceived and mediated by other women.[56] Researchers must ask themselves: who is interpreting and translating emotional responses into the written record, and what social constructs may have influenced their expression or reception? For whom are these

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[52] Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1671–1700, *CACB*, minutes for 3 7mo 1678.

[53] Chadwick, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, pp. 172–173.

[54] Chadwick, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, pp. 146, 168–169, 171–172, 173, 176.

[55] The concept of 'curated' emotions and the intentions with which emotions are recorded in the archive was discussed by Professor Sasha Turner during a workshop on the history of emotions: Turner, S., 'PGR and ECR Masterclass: Researching the History of Emotions,' Early Modern and Eighteenth-Century Centre workshop, University of Warwick, 9 April 2025.

[56] I am deeply grateful to Ciarán Morris for his reflections and insight on this point.

records of emotionality recorded? What purpose are they intended to serve within this community? It is also critical to recognise that emotions are a form of communication that may be 'performed' at certain moments to convey a particular message.[57] What messages are being conveyed, what values promoted, by recording these moments of intense feeling in this way? The Quaker process of 'discernment' meant that Meeting business was not recorded verbatim, nor immediately, but rather that the clerk of the Meeting would take time to reflect on 'the spirit of the Meeting' before committing the business to writing.[58] It is entirely possible, even probable, that examples like those examined above were intended to impart a lesson in (gendered) morality to future readers or to preserve evidence that Friends had responded to business in a manner believed to be 'godly'. Perhaps the cases of Jane Strickland and Jane Colton were recorded with such intensive detail to emphasise appropriate and inappropriate conduct of those who sought poor relief from the Meeting.[59] Maybe the case of Hester Cooper was included in full as a warning to other women seeking to engage in marriage with deceitful figures. James and Bridget Hathornthwaite may have likewise been included as a testimony to the dangers of straying from Quaker practices and traditions. Above all, this methodology requires cognisance of how emotions are recorded in Quaker minute books; it requires acknowledgment that all entries included in the final record were intentionally selected and that the presentation of and interpretation of emotions may be reflective of different motivations and perspectives than may immediately meet the eye.[60]

Conclusion

Despite the faith's relatively diminutive status for most of its history, the writings and records of early Quakers carry tremendous value for researchers of the early modern period. This is in part due to the development of a gendered Meeting system among Friends from the 1670s which in some regions remained in place until the nineteenth century.[61] The records produced by these gendered Meetings offer invaluable insight into the development of early Quakerism but also the unique intersection of emotionality and labour as performed by Quaker women in their communities through the institutional medium of their Meetings. This is not to say, of course, that male

[57] Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, p. 5.

[58] Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650–1750*, p. 134.

[59] Chadwick, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British* Atlantic, pp. 167, 170–171, 172.

[60] I am again grateful for Professor Sasha Turner for this insight; Sasha Turner, 'PGR and ECR Masterclass: Researching the History of Emotions.'

[61] Brailsford, *Quaker Women, 1650–1690*, p. 15.

Friends did not also perform labour of an emotional nature in their own Meetings; they certainly were also involved in managing potentially emotive business. But the specific labour ascribed to the Women's Meetings has meant that these moments of intense emotionality appear more often than not in the records produced by Quaker women. And it is through Women's Meeting minutes that scholars gain access to some of the most significant moments in the lives of early Friends, including their marriages, the birth of their children, and care provided for them in old age, impoverishment or bereavement, and in sickness. Close analysis of these minutes enables researchers to glimpse moments of intense feeling–of feelings like grief, distress, and anger but also of love, sympathy, and compassion. The expression of these emotions and the manner in which they were received by the Meeting are further revealing of the values and principles that structured Friends' communities. The minutes of Quaker Meetings are invaluable tools for modern Friends and social historians alike, enabling them to see the life behind the names, to peek at the humanity behind the pages, and to probe further into the nature of sociability and authority within marginalised faith communities—all of which hold enormous potential for many new and exciting branches of Quaker scholarship.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.