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Quaker History, Volume 93, Number 2, Fall 2004, pp. 28-46 (Article)

Published by Friends Historical Association

DOI: [10.1353/qkh.2004.0006](https://doi.org/10.1353/qkh.2004.0006)



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Be Ye Therefore Perfect: Anti-Slavery and the Origins of the Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends in Chester County, Pennsylvania

Christopher Densmore*

Introduction

The 1806 and later editions of the *Rules of Discipline* of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends included a clear statement of the long-standing Quaker position on human slavery. Members were exhorted “to be no means accessory to this enormous national evil, but to discourage it by all the justifiable means in their power.”¹ Despite the long-standing agreement on the evil of slavery, Friends in the three decades prior to the Civil War were divided on the wisdom of joining with non-Friends in the organized anti-slavery movement. The division of sentiment on participation in the anti-slavery movement, and related questions of church polity, led to a division among Hicksite Quakers of Western Quarterly Meeting in Chester County, Pennsylvania in 1851, and two years later, in 1853, to the establishment of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, also known as Longwood Yearly Meeting. The separation in Western Quarter was the last of a series of divisions that began with splits in Indiana Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) and Green Plain Quarterly Meeting (Hicksite) in Ohio in the early 1840s and continued in the separations of Genesee Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) in Upstate New York and Michigan in 1848.² Reform-minded Friends in Western Quarterly Meeting were well aware of these earlier splits in Indiana, Ohio, Michigan and New York. In the context of radical Quaker reform activities, the question of why Western Quarterly Meeting split in 1851 is perhaps less interesting than the question of why it did not do so in 1845.³

Perfectionism and Progress

To understand the issues troubling Quakers in the 1840s and 1850s, it is useful to consider the issues within the context of Quaker religious thought. George Fox and the early Quakers held that it was possible for those who attended to the light of Christ within to obey the promptings of the spirit. Fox decried those preachers of his day as preaching sin who denied that people could follow the will of God. Fox took literally the closing statement of the Sermon on the Mount, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48 KJV). As Robert Barclay stated in the

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Apology for True Christian Divinity (1676), those whose hearts were obedient to the truth could “be free from actual sinning and transgressing of the law of God, and in that respect perfect; yet doth this perfection still admit of a growth. . . .” (Prop. 8).

Friends were well aware that they had gone beyond their predecessors in the work of reformation. Fox’s prophetic “openings” had led him and other Friends into practices that were distinct from the teachings of their day. In the years between the 1640s and the 1840s, Friends had further, by their own lights, perfected their forms of expected individual behavior and church discipline. Perhaps nowhere was the sense of progress better demonstrated than in the growth of the Quaker testimony against human slavery. Friends of the 1830s and 1840s were aware that earlier Quakers had held slaves and that John Woolman’s leadings on the subject were at first rejected by many considered at the time to be weighty Friends. In the context of the 1830s and 1840s, some Friends saw Quaker perfectionism as best expressed in a Society of Friends as a “peculiar people,” withdrawn and guarded from “the world.” Others were equally convinced that the Quaker heritage required active involvement in efforts to reform the world.

Where do perfectionism, reformation and progress reside? For Friends, it resided both in the individual, as each he and she understood themselves to be morally accountable and to have access to divine guidance, and it existed in the corporate institution of the Religious Society of Friends, in its meeting houses, its schools, its practices, and its book of discipline. But what happened when individual Friends believed that they had seen farther than the society at large?

The Literature of Schism

The separation in Western Quarterly Meeting was only one of a series of separations and divisions which split North American Quakerism in the 19th century. In the past four decades, scholars, beginning with Robert Doherty’s *The Hicksite Separation* (1967) have tried to place the fragmentation of friends in historical, sociological, anthropological and economic perspective. H. Larry Ingle revisited the Hicksite separation in his *Quakers in Conflict* (1986). David Holden’s *Friends Divided: Conflict and Division in the Society of Friends* (1988) took a broader view of the North American divisions and the factors that caused Friends to factionalize. Albert Schrauwers’ work, *Awaiting the Millennium: the Children of Peace and the Village of Hope* (1993), used anthropological perspectives to understand the 1812 separation among the Friends of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting in Upper Canada (modern Ontario).⁴

This study of the Quaker conflict among the Hicksite Friends of Chester

County, Pennsylvania, that ultimately led to schism and to the creation of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, differs from much of the work described above in being centered in the theological perspectives of Quakerism and in the ideological debates of the anti-slavery movement. This should not be seen as discounting the intellectual frameworks for understanding schism supplied by Doherty, Holden, Ingle, Schrauwers and others. This work has been greatly useful to me in understanding the social tensions that underlie religious and ideological conflict. However, in my assessment of the separation of Friends in Chester County, I see the leading figures on both sides of the division as deeply committed to the core principles of Quakerism, but conflicted about the proper response to the organized abolitionist movement. Absent the external strain of the abolitionist debate, and there would have been no separation.

The Times: The Present Crisis

The root cause of the disputation among Chester County Friends at this period was slavery, or rather the abolitionist movement as expressed in the “Garrisonian” wing of the anti-slavery movement. Slavery had been a problem for ages past, but now there was a solution: immediate, unconditional and uncompensated emancipation. The temper of the time, or at least of the abolitionists, is well expressed in James Russell Lowell’s poem, “The Present Crisis” written in December 1844:

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
 In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
 Some great cause, God’s new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
 Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
 And the choice goes by forever ‘twixt that darkness and that light.

Hast thou chosen, O my people, on whose party thou shalt stand,
 Ere the Doom from its worn sandals shakes the dust against our land?

The words of Lowell’s poem appear today in the Friends General Conference hymn book, *Worship in Song*, as “Once to Every Soul and Nation.”⁵

Quakers and Popular Reform

In 1837 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) addressed its members, asking them “To embrace every right opportunity to maintain and exalt our religious testimony against slavery.”⁶ For some Friends in Chester County, this meant involvement in the revitalized anti-slavery movement in the 1830s. The first of the new local organizations was the Clarkson Anti-Slavery Society, formed in December 1832, and by the mid 1830s, local

anti-slavery societies dotted Chester County. Virtually all of the active members of these anti-slavery societies in Chester County were Quakers, usually Hicksites.⁷

The problem was that Friends did not agree on what constituted “right openings.” In 1881, a local Friend recalled the times in an article in the *West Chester Local News*:

Many years ago . . . [Lucretia Mott] addressed a number of Friends’ meetings in the townships of Marlborough, Kennett, Londongrove [sic] and others. The chief purpose of her discourses appeared to be a desire to arouse the members of that body to a livelier appreciation of duty in connection with their religious profession respecting the anti-slavery cause—urging that the open, active affiliation with abolitionists and their society, was an important part of their obligations as professing Christians.

At that time a considerable number of prominent Friends earnestly opposed active cooperation and union with anti-slavery associations, believing that a consistent adherence to their testimonies as a religious body [and those included anti-slavery] was all that was required of them in relation to the practice of slaveholding. . . .

George F. White, a resident of New York, and a prominent speaker in the society, was earnestly opposed to Lucretia Mott’s views. . . . He followed her through the townships spoken of, and sought to infuse among Friends a disinclination to join the anti-slavery crusade, largely on the grounds that by such action they would, in his opinion, find themselves associated with infidels, freethinkers and those who regarded active opposition to slavery as a religion in itself. . . .

In the abolitionist press, George Fox White was described as “pro-slavery” because of his objections to Friends joining with the world’s people. However, White considered himself as anti-slavery. The writer just quoted recalled, apparently from memory, White’s words delivered at London Grove Friends Meeting House:

The rapacious and heartless dealer in the bodies of human beings repairs to the coasts of Africa; here he seizes his helpless victims . . . he binds and carries off the strong, forces them between the narrow decks of his vessel. . . . Arrived at the shores of our own native land, the hapless victims, manacled together, are driven under the lash to the block of the auctioneer, whose voice is heard, “Going, Going, Gone!” Forced to the plantation of the cruel task-master, the soil on which they stand is fattened by their blood and watered by their tears. . . .⁸

The Society of Friends was becoming increasingly divided on the wisdom of Quakers joining societies for “popular reform”—not just abolitionist societies but also temperance organizations. The testimony against

slavery was only one of many that separated Friends from the world. Friends also objected to oaths, to wars, the hireling ministry, and music and adhered to the plain language and the plain dress. The primary objection by some Friends to opening up their meeting houses for abolitionist or temperance lectures was not the subject matter, but that a paid lecturer was going to deliver a prepared address. This, those Friends maintained, was speaking according to human wisdom rather than relying exclusively on the leadings of the Spirit. At the same time, abolitionist-minded Friends were increasingly seeing slavery as *the* defining issue. Those Friends judged other Friends not by standards of plainness but on how consistently they pleaded the cause of the slave, and increasingly saw their opponents as being for all intents and purposes, pro-slavery.

The Conservative Response

In 1840, Jesse Kersey, a venerable Chester County, Pennsylvania Friend wrote in his journal that “I have seen there is a disposition to be doing something by taking an active part with those who are not of us; and who, instead of waiting for the Divine Guide to put them forth, are always ready: and as these run unsent, they cannot prosper the work. . . .” In 1845, he wrote that if the abolitionist and temperance lecturers were acting from a sense of religious duty, some good might come of their efforts, but “there is some reason to believe that many of them are acting from no higher or better motive than to have an employment of some degree of respectability, and to acquire applause.”⁹

We need not accept the radicals’ rhetoric that those who questioned the abolitionists were pro-slavery. Jesse Kersey had traveled to visit the President of the United States in 1814 to advocate the abolition of slavery, followed by a visit to Virginia to confront slave owners in person. Sunderland P. Gardner, whose *Address to the Youth and Children of the Society of Friends* was published by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1846, clearly understood that slavery and intemperance were great evils. Friends needed to bear a full and efficient testimony against all evil. Yet, Gardner cautioned, “wrong may be wrongfully opposed, and war opposed in a warlike spirit.”

It may be asked then, shall we be idle, fold our hands, and remain indifferent to the evils which threaten to overwhelm and stamp a blight on our nation? I answer, no: But there are things which should be first put in order, and they should be perfected in their proper course; and that which is first in the order of Truth, appears to be a subjection on our part, without reserve, to the refining power of Divine Love. . . .¹⁰

The radicals, then, felt that it was the manifest duty of every Friend to lose

no opportunity to speak and act against slavery, and to make common cause with others who acted similarly, both within and outside the Society of Friends. They were impatient with the quietism of a Sunderland P. Gardner who asked for assurance that right motives preceded right actions.

Impatience, 1844

By 1844, the abolitionist-minded Friends in Western Quarterly Meeting were growing increasingly impatient with the leadership of the Society of Friends. One such person wrote with disgust about the Quarterly Meeting held at London Grove in Fourth Month. While Western Quarterly Meeting, the writer claimed, had “more known friends of the slave than any other” attempts to deal with the practical considerations of the abolitionist and temperance movements were being ignored by its leadership. Rather than address the burning question of slavery, the Quarterly Meeting was instead concerning itself with questions of outward sectarian behavior in maintaining the plain speech, and by expressing grave concern about “who forget the orderly cut of the coat” and so far deviate from proper Quaker behavior to call 4th month by its “heathenish name” of April. The writer ended by expressing his loathing for the “canting of sect” and his intention to search for truth elsewhere.¹¹

In August 1844, Fallowfield Monthly Meeting received a “paper” from Esther Coates stating that she could “no longer consistently or conscientiously remain a member of the Society of Friends” and requested to be released from membership. After this communication was “read and weightedly considered” Coates was released from membership. Over the next two years, several other Friends withdrew from East Fallowfield and Pennsgrove Monthly Meetings. While the minutes are vague about the causes of these defections, most, if not all, were probably linked to abolitionism.¹²

The paradox is that Quakers continued to be the backbone of the Garrisonian abolitionist movement in Chester County. In August 1844, the Chester County Anti-Slavery Society held its annual meeting in the Marlborough Friends Meeting House. William Jackson was President of the Chester County Anti-Slavery Society and the officers and board of managers had names like Coates, Cox, Fulton, Kimball, Fussell, Kimber, Lewis and Pennypacker. If the Chester County Anti-Slavery Society was not an exclusively Quaker organization, it came close. This meeting, led by Quakers, and held in a Quaker meeting house considered, among other topics “the pro-slavery character of the Society of Friends” and whether it was the duty of reformers to come out of the tainted churches.¹³

East Fallowfield Riot of 1845

The largely Quaker East Fallowfield Anti-Slavery Society had been founded in 1835, and since its establishment had been in the practice of holding its meetings in the Friends Meeting House at Ercildoun, three miles south of Coatesville. The Chester County Anti-Slavery Society met there in November 1844 to debate whether abolitionists should engage in electoral politics to reform the government, or whether the United States Constitution was a compact with slavery.

A meeting held two months later, in January 1845, had a different result. Three visiting anti-slavery lecturers, including the well known Abby Kelley from Massachusetts, came to the Friends Meeting House at East Fallowfield. On the first day, the topic was politics. On the second day, the subject was the position of the churches on slavery. The meeting house was packed for the evening session, and while the audience awaited Abby Kelley, Dr. Edward Fussell commenced speaking. Joseph Pennock of Philadelphia, who was present, described what happened next:

Edwin Fussell had just commenced speaking... when a mobocrat, in the back part of the house, cried out, "There, you have talked enough, you talk as if you were going to talk all night." Then came the din of war. Whistling, shrieks, cries of "drag him out, clear the house," resounded on all sides. The stove-pipe was knocked down: brimstone was flung on the stove; panes of glass were knocked out; the women rushed from the house. . . . Some others leapt out of the windows; and all was in delightful confusion... One mobocrat seized Edwin by the collar, crying "drag him out" . . . Benjamin Jones stood up on a bench in the midst of the disturbers, and asserted to good purpose the right of every human being to utter his free thoughts upon any question.¹⁴

Slowly, order was restored. Despite the sulfur thrown on the stove, and the attempt to shove Fussell out the door, most of the exchange was verbal, with the leader of the rioters declaring that he had come to defend "the sanctity of the house, the cause of religion, and the bible, which had been defamed." A local magistrate, probably Enoch Harlan, was present and spoke to the rioters who then left the meetinghouse. Abby Kelley was then able to deliver her address. The abolitionists ended the meeting with the decision to meet again at the same location in the coming month.

On January 23, Magistrate Harlan issued a warrant for the arrest of eight of the rioters, based on a complaint against them under by one James B. Mode. However, only one of the rioters could be located to face trial at West Chester on February 8, 1845. That individual, William Lukens, told the court that he was himself a Quaker, and that the meeting had never given its official sanction to the opening of the meeting house and that at the meeting treason against both church and state was advocated. The judge ruled both

of these assertions irrelevant and no justification for a riot. According to court records, seventeen witnesses were called, though we have no details about what was said apart from an account written by abolitionist James Fulton Jr. for the *Pennsylvania Freeman*.¹⁵ On February 12, the jury found the defendant not guilty. James Mode was charged with the costs of prosecution—a substantial sum of \$180.¹⁶ The local anti-abolitionist newspaper, the West Chester *Jeffersonian*, called Abby Kelley “an enraged woman with a flippant tongue” and endorsed the actions of both the rioters and the jury that freed them.¹⁷

The conduct of riot leader William Lukens, described as “acting in a disorderly and unbecoming manner,” was brought to the attention of Fallowfield Monthly Meeting in 4th Month, 1845. After visitation and consideration in the meeting, Luken’s acknowledgment for his misconduct was accepted by the Monthly Meeting in 6th Month. This is one of many occasions when one wishes that nineteenth century Quaker meeting minutes were more revealing about the reasoning behind the meeting’s actions.

In March, Fallowfield Preparative Meeting addressed the question of whether the meeting house should be opened to any meetings other than those of worship and discipline of the Society of Friends. The meeting was unable to find unity. In April, the Preparative Meeting again discussed the issue. Failing again to resolve the question, the Preparative Meeting decided to call a special meeting to thoroughly consider the matter. The special meeting opened at ten a.m. and continued to five p.m. The majority of those present were in favor of keeping the meeting house open for anti-slavery lectures, but considering the feelings of the minority, and not wishing to further divide the meeting, gave up their claim to the use of the meeting house.¹⁸

The radicals moved quickly to provide an alternative meeting space. “People’s Hall” opened in late July or early August of 1845 as a “Free Hall wherein to discuss any and every subject of Interest in Religion, Morals, Physics, Politics, or any subject of interest to the family of man irrespective of clime, class, cast, sex, sects, or party.” The land was deeded to the trustees (Nathan Walton, Mary Coates, Lukens Pierce and James Fulton Jr.) for a consideration of fifty cents by Margaret Coates.¹⁹ Over the speaker’s platform at People’s Hall was the inscription, “Let Truth and Error Grapple.” People’s Hall, next to Fallowfield Friends Meeting in Ercildoun, now houses the local historical society. A similar structure, “Abolition Hall,” was built next to Plymouth Meeting in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, in the 1850s.

The Marlborough Conferences, 1845

The *Pennsylvania Freeman* of May 8, 1845 carried an announcement for a conference of members of Western Quarterly Meeting “who have doubts

about the propriety and honesty of continuing further in religious fellowship with such a body” to be held at the Marlborough Friends Meeting House.²⁰ In a series of meetings held from May to September, the “Marlborough Conference” considered the propriety of remaining within or leaving behind the Society of Friends. Some participants felt that the Society of Friends was clinging to the traditions of the past rather than “attending to the revelations of the present.” This sectarian prejudice would “crucify all that is new, and condemn unheard all that our fathers did not teach.” Others felt that the Society of Friends could be reformed. Still others held that it was in the nature of organizations to eventually stray from their first principles.²¹

While the radicals at the Marlborough Conferences eventually decided to remain with the Society of Friends for the present, their very public actions, reported at length in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, put Marlborough Preparative Meeting, Kennett Monthly Meeting, and Western Quarterly Meeting on notice that a separation was possible. The Marlborough Conferences and the erection of People’s Hall in Ercildoun represent a distancing of radical abolitionist Quakers from the “quietism” of Hicksite Quakerism. From this perspective, People’s Hall as a space for open and wide-ranging discussion, unlimited by the “guarded care” of elders or Quaker discipline and traditions, is a predecessor to the Longwood Progressive Friends Meetinghouse.

Radical Questioning of the Quaker Polity

The events in Chester County are part of a larger series of separations among Hicksite Quakers beginning with Green Plain in Ohio in 1843, and continuing with the separations in Genesee and New York Yearly Meetings in 1848. The issue quickly moved beyond the question of tactics in opposing slavery, to a critique of the polity of the Society of Friends. What right had one Friend, or one group of Friends, to judge the leadings of others? In September 1848, Elijah Pennypacker of Chester County visited Green Street Meeting in Philadelphia, and was moved to speak on evils of slavery. In doing so, he said no more than was said there by Lucretia Mott, George Truman, or George Fox White. But then, Pennypacker moved to other issues, saying that Quakers, rather than trusting divine leadings and in the inward light,

have fettered and limited themselves with disciplines and conventional rules, and have begun to venerate established forms above the revealing of truth in the soul, and we see the results. Are we not now putting our organic law above the light of truth? If we regard truth as our all sufficient guide, and mankind as an equal brotherhood, why these partitions? Why these high seats? Why our select meetings and privileged officers?

It was at this point that one elder (Clement Biddle) requested Pennypacker

to sit down, and another elder (James Mott, Lucretia's husband) said that he should speak on, and the meeting degenerated into disorder. The issue had moved beyond slavery to include Quaker organization— why the partitions between men's and women's meetings? Why acknowledge some members as elders and others as ministers and thus give more weight to one person's understanding of the light of truth than another's? This was radical rejection of the authority of the meeting and meeting elders over the individual conscience and actions of its members. While the *Pennsylvania Freeman* suggested that the opposition to Pennypacker was to his outspokenness on slavery, a more likely interpretation is that Biddle and other more conservative Friends, fully aware of the issues involved in the separation then going on in Genesee Yearly Meeting, were more worried about Pennypacker's criticisms of Quaker polity than his strictures against slavery.²²

Religious Association

After several years of relative quiet, the question of breaking with the Society of Friends was again raised at Marlborough. In September 1850 the *Pennsylvania Freeman* carried the announcement of a forthcoming meeting of the Chester County Anti-Slavery Society to be held at the Marlborough Friends Meeting House on Saturday, September 21st to be followed at the same place on Sunday afternoon by a Conference on the subject or reform and religious liberty, to which all were invited to attend. A large attendance was expected at both meetings.²³ A participant at the meeting, probably James Miller McKim, described the event in a subsequent issue of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*. The question before the Conference was how to supply spiritual wants and promote spiritual growth. Was there, in fact, a need for a religious organization? These questions were debated by "a large number of speakers, male and female, old and young, in a spirit of seriousness and with a seriousness and depth of feeling alike gratifying and impressive. Every heart seemed to feel a hunger unfed by religious bodies, and a conviction that we must look to other means for religious culture."²⁴

The Quaker "Friends of Order" in Western Quarterly Meeting, who could read the signs, or perhaps the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, as well as the radicals, called a meeting of their own at the London Grove Meeting House on October 28th, to discuss, in a select group, the "troubled state" of Kennett Monthly Meeting.²⁵

Disagreement Widens into Division, 1851–1852

In effect, Western Quarterly Meeting had been fragmented since 1844, and perhaps the noteworthy part of the story is that it did not divide in 1845, the year of the Fallowfield Riot and the Marlborough Conferences, or in

1848, the year of the Progressive separations in New York, Michigan and Ohio. The division in sentiment widened into separation on a Quaker technicality. In 1851, Joseph and Ruth Dugdale, leading figures in Green Plain Meeting in Ohio, which had split away from Indiana Yearly Meeting in 1843, moved to Chester County, and claimed their right of membership in Kennett Monthly Meeting. One side recognized him as a legitimate Friend, and the other maintained that he was a member of a separate and distinct organization. In May 1851, Western Quarterly Meeting, unable to resolve the issue, ended in confusion. By the end of the summer, there were two bodies claiming to be Kennett Monthly Meeting. The radicals were known variously as Dugdaleites, Come-Outers or Progressive Friends. Both sides kept minutes and used the same meeting houses, the radicals waiting until after the old party finished with their meeting.²⁶

The minutes of Kennett Monthly Meeting for August 1851 reported that a portion of its members had held “an irregular meeting under the assumed name of ‘Kennett Monthly Meeting’ [and have] taken upon themselves to transact business as such. . . .” The following month, Kennett heard a complaint from Marlborough Preparative Meeting against William Barnard for “disorderly conduct in having associated with others in holding a meeting out of the order and in subversion of the discipline of the society....” William Barnard was disowned in November. Six more were disowned in 1852, and three in 1853. In all, thirty-four people were disowned from Kennett Monthly Meeting between 1851 and 1858, most of them well after the establishment of the Progressive Monthly Meeting.²⁷

Many of those who affiliated with the Progressive Friends were among the most active abolitionists and Underground Railroad agents in Chester County. As the final separation occurred subsequent to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, some people have interpreted the disownments of the Progressive Friends by Kennett Monthly Meeting as resulting from their involvement with abolitionism and the Underground Railroad. This misunderstands the issue. While Friends disagreed over joining with organizations for “popular reform” and whether meetinghouses should be open to temperance and abolitionist lecturers, and these disagreements were a major factor in the decision of the radicals to break with their more conservative brethren, no Friend in Chester County appears to have been either disciplined or disowned for anti-slavery activity, and those disowned by Kennett Monthly Meeting (Hicksite) were disowned for setting up new meetings “out of the order” of the Society of Friends. In plain terms, the Hicksite Kennett Monthly Meeting did not disown anyone who had not already rejected its authority by active affiliation with the new Progressive Friends meeting.²⁸

In May 1852, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting received two reports from Western Quarterly Meeting, but declined to read that sent by the “Dugdallites,” thus de-facto recognizing the legitimacy of the other party. This action was reported in the Chester County newspapers. The split was all but permanent.²⁹

The Marlborough Riot, 1852

On Wednesday, June 2 and Thursday, June 3, 1852, a Woman’s Rights Convention was held at the Horticultural Hall in West Chester. The chair of the Convention was Mary Ann Johnson, wife of Oliver Johnson. Oliver Johnson was the editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* and was a very public supporter of the Progressive Friends, having joined Junius Monthly Meeting of the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends at Waterloo, New York, in 1849.³⁰ The early woman’s rights movement and the anti-slavery movement in Chester County and elsewhere were closely connected, and many, probably most of the local participants at the convention were long-time anti-slavery activists. At the close of the Convention, it was announced, possibly by Joseph Dugdale, that Oliver Johnson intended to speak at Marlborough Friends Meeting on First Day, June 6th. Word of this reached the weighty members of Marlborough Friends Meeting (non-Dugdallite), perhaps because one or more of them was at the Convention to hear the announcement, and they determined to prevent Johnson from speaking, using the law of 1847 to prevent disturbances at religious meetings to do so. The conservatives invited a local policeman, Constable McNutt, to attend the meeting on First-day.

Two groups claimed to be Marlborough Meeting—the Progressive Friends (the Dugdallites) and the Hicksite Meeting. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting had just acknowledged the Hicksite Meeting, and that information had been published in the local papers. Now the Progressives were announcing, in effect, a public lecture at the time of meeting for worship. The issue was more than whether Johnson could or should speak, but, at least to the Hicksite mind, the question of the ownership of the meeting house and the legitimacy of the meeting.

On Sunday, June 6th, Oliver Johnson sat on the facing bench, between Eusebius Barnard and Joseph Dugdale. After two others had spoken, Johnson was moved to speak, arose and began “It was the promise of Jesus to his. . .” but got no further before he was interrupted by Humphrey Marshall, an elder, who asked if that was Oliver Johnson who was attempting to speak. Someone replied in the affirmative, and Marshall told Johnson to sit down and not disturb the harmony of the meeting. Johnson stood a moment, and then in his words, “obeyed the impression which impelled

me to speak” but got no further in his message when Marshall and others arose and told Johnson to sit down or leave. Two men laid hands on Johnson to remove him, but when Johnson sat down, they relinquished their hold. Elder Marshall then called on Constable McNutt to remove Johnson, but Eusebius Barnard and others protested the action, crying “shame, shame.” The party opposed to Johnson shook hands and left the meeting, while the others, claimed to be more than half of the audience, remained to listen to messages from Johnson and Joseph Dugdale. This was the end of the disturbance—sometimes called the “Marlborough Riot”—but not the end of the case.

Johnson and five others were arrested on Monday and charged with disrupting a meeting under the 1847 law. Johnson, apparently needing to return to Philadelphia, paid his \$5.00 fine—the lowest fine allowed by the law—with an additional 50 cents for court costs and left to write up the affair in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*. The others—Eusebius, William and Vincent Barnard, and Dr. Bartholomew Fussell—were tried the following Saturday and convicted of disturbing the peace of a religious gathering. The defendants declared that they would not pay the fine, and that they were being persecuted for religious and civil rights that had always previously been accorded to them in Marlborough Meeting. While Dr. Fussell was speaking, a constable entered the courtroom and announced that the fines and fees had been paid. It was suspected by the radicals that their fines had been paid by the prosecuting party. Whether the prosecutors were embarrassed at having made recourse to the law to settle their dispute (going to courts to resolve disputes is frowned upon among Friends) or because they wanted to end the matter quickly is unknown. Several of the women who participated in the Woman’s Rights Convention at West Chester lectured at the Kennett Meeting house on the afternoon of First Day, June 6th with no evident controversy, probably because their lectures did not interfere with meeting for worship.

The testimony presented by Johnson and the others in West Chester included statements about Quaker practice in allowing non-Quakers to speak in meetings for worship (generally allowed if orderly) and even Quaker dress. Johnson’s comment on this line of testimony, printed in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, was sarcastic:

No doubt these people honestly consider themselves Friends... for do they not wear coats with but one row of buttons instead of two, and a standing instead of a rolling collar? And are not their hats of the canonical width of rim, even to the sixteenth of an inch? And do they not say always thee and thou, and never Sir or Madam, always farewell, and never good bye? And if that is all of Quakerism, truly they are right. . . .

The Division Becomes Final, October 1852

The split in Kennett Monthly Meeting and Marlborough Preparative Meeting that had been de-facto since May 1851 became permanent after the events at Marlborough. The next meeting of Western Quarterly Meeting of Progressive Friends, held at Kennett Meeting House on the 24th of 7th Month, was publicly announced and open to all that would come. Lucretia Mott was in attendance and the following day attended Friends Meeting at Marlborough, where, according to the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, delivered an impressive and powerful discourse, commenting on Scripture:

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint, they shall mount up with wings as eagles." [Isaiah 40:31] She corrected the false construction put upon this text by those who would use it to justify a merely passive waiting for a special call to works of charity and mercy, and showed that "waiting on the Lord" was synonymous with serving the Lord by active discharge of duty.³¹

At their next quarterly meeting, held in October, the Progressives of Western Quarterly Meeting, noting that their attempt to be recognized by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting had failed, considered the organization of a new Yearly Meeting, and prepared a call for a General Religious Conference to be held at the Kennett Meeting House on May 22, 1853. The call was addressed to all who were interested in a new religious association free of sectarian strictures and dedicated to the cause of human progress. The Yearly Meetings of Progressive Friends in New York, Ohio, and Michigan were held up as models.³²

The Establishment of the Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends

The meeting at Kennett in 1853 organized itself at the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends. The Yearly Meeting adopted testimonies on temperance, slavery, the rights, wrongs and duties of women, tobacco and capital punishment, and a lengthy "Exposition of Sentiments" addressed "to the Friends of Pure and undefiled Religion, and all Seekers after Truth, of whatever name or denomination." Their doors were open "to all who recognize the Equal Brotherhood of the Human Family, without regard to sex, color or condition, and who acknowledge the duty of defining and illustrating their faith in God, not by assent to a creed, but lives of personal purity, and works of beneficence and charity to mankind."³³

The Yearly Meeting did have trustees and others who saw to the business of maintaining Longwood Meeting House and other business details of the organization, but anyone who felt called to attend and participate in the annual meetings could consider him or herself as a "Progressive Friend."

Those attending included a core group of the Progressive Friends from Marlborough and elsewhere in Kennett Monthly Meeting. Others, like Lucretia and James Mott, participated in the sessions of the Progressive Yearly Meeting at Longwood, but remained members of Hicksite meetings. The annual meetings drew Friends from near and far and many non-Quaker reformers of note, including William Lloyd Garrison, Sojourner Truth (who was closely associated with Progressive Friends in Michigan, and likely should be considered at least a fellow traveler), Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Theodore Parker. In 1854, denied the further use of the Kennett Meeting House, the Progressives built a new meeting house at Longwood, which was the site of the annual meetings from 1855 until the last of the Longwood Meetings in 1940. This is the building that stands today near the entrance of Longwood Gardens and houses the Chester County Visitors Center.

It is unclear how long Progressive Friends kept up a weekly meeting at Marlborough or at Kennett. William Barnard quietly rejoined the Hicksite Meeting in 1863. There is no mention in the minutes of Barnard having apologized for his earlier conduct or that the meeting asked him to do so.³⁴ In 1864, the Progressives returned the minute books of Marlborough Preparative Meeting, which they had retained at the time of the split in 1851, to the Hicksite meeting. Joseph Dugdale and his wife Ruth, whose move to Chester County had created such commotion in Western Quarterly Meeting in 1851, moved to Mount Pleasant, Iowa, in 1862 and there were accepted as members of Prairie Grove Monthly Meeting. In applying for membership in Prairie Grove, Dugdale composed a letter unapologetically explaining the division in Green Plain Quarterly Meeting in 1843 and his subsequent connection with the Progressive Friends whom he described as a body “who have no record of membership, but simply meet as did the ancient friends and invited all who love the truth to cooperate with them.”³⁵ Within months of joining Prairie Grove, Joseph Dugdale was again “traveling in the ministry” on behalf of Friends serving as a representative of his monthly and quarterly meetings.

Finally, in 1874, Kennett Monthly Meeting (Hicksite) invited all who had been “released or disowned on the charge of joining with others in forming a religious society distinct from us” and their children could be restored to membership by simply expressing their desire to do so.³⁶ A number of the surviving Progressive Friends did rejoin Kennett Monthly Meeting over the next several years. Perhaps the only dissenting voice to the return to membership in the Hicksite Monthly Meeting came from the long-time Clerk of Longwood Yearly Meeting, Oliver Johnson.³⁷ One Friend, writing in 1879, summed up the fate of the Progressives in the following words:

“This Debating Society . . . professing and expecting boundless love from unregenerate men, found its ‘bond of union,’ but a rope of sand, it fell apart of its own weight. . . .”³⁸

As a distinct religious body, separate from the Hicksite branch of the Society of Friends, the Progressive Friends meetings of Western Quarter may have fallen apart by 1874, but as an open forum for discussion of religion and reform, Longwood Yearly Meeting continued to hold annual meetings until 1940. Longwood was the last of the Progressive Meetings.³⁹ While it may have failed initially as an organizational alternative to Hicksite Quakerism, it may also be seen as a harbinger of the liberal Quakerism that developed in the later 19th and in the 20th century, particularly in its insistence that the perfectionist beliefs of Quakerism required an active involvement with the world.⁴⁰

Notes

¹ *The Old Discipline: Nineteenth-Century Friends' Disciplines in America* (Glenside, PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 1999), 91.

² For Progressive Friends outside of Pennsylvania, see A. Day Bradley, “Progressive Friends in Michigan and New York,” *Quaker History* 52 (1963), 95-103; Alfred J. Wahl’s dissertation, *The Congregational or Progressive Friends in the pre-Civil War Reform Movement* (Thesis, Ed.D., Temple University, 1951), focuses primarily on Longwood Yearly Meeting.

³ The standard accounts of the origins of “Longwood” are Albert J. Wahl’s dissertation, noted above, and his articles, “The Progressive Friends of Longwood,” *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association* 42.1 (Spring 1953), 13-23 and “Longwood Meeting: Public Forum for the American Democratic Faith,” *Pennsylvania History* 42 (1975), 43-69.

⁴ In addition to the works cited, see also Albert Schrauwers’ essay, “Consensus Seeking, Factionalism and Schism in Yonge Street Monthly Meeting,” *Canadian Quaker History Journal* 55 (Summer 1995), 3-7, and Ben Dandelion, “Schism as Collective Disaffiliation: A Quaker Typology,” *Quaker Studies* 8 (September 2003), 89-97.

⁵ *Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal* (Philadelphia: Friends General Conference, 1996), 273. The hymn first appeared in *Hymns and Songs* (Philadelphia: Friends General Conference, 1924), 109.

⁶ Ezra Michener, *Retrospect of Early Quakerism* (Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Zell, 1860), 357.

⁷ Chester County had a reputation for active anti-slavery and participation in the Underground Railroad, and most of known participants were members of the Society of Friends. See Robert Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster: The

Journal, 1883) and William C. Kashatus, *Just Over the Line: Chester County and the Underground Railroad* (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Chester County Historical Society, 2002). Kashatus, 92-96, includes a list of 132 Underground Railroad agents associated with Chester County. Of the 107 who can be identified by religion, 82 are Friends.

- ⁸ West Chester *Daily Local News*, March 17, 1881, and reprinted as "A Few Reminiscences of Lucretia Mott," in *The Journal* (Lancaster, PA), 3 Mo. 23, 1881. It was criticism of White in "A Rare Specimen of a Quaker Preacher," probably written by Oliver Johnson, in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in 1841 that led to the disownment of Isaac T. Hopper, James Gibbons and Charles Marriott by New York Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) in 1842; for White as anti-slavery, see the memorial to him published by New York Yearly Meeting in 1859, and an article by J.M.T. in *The Journal*, 2 Mo. 24, 1875.
- ⁹ Jesse Kersey, *A Narrative of the Early Life, Travels, and Gospel Labors of Jesse Kersey* (Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Chapman, 1851), 144-5, 175.
- ¹⁰ Sunderland P. Gardner, *An address to the youth and children of the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Chapman, 1846), 9-10.
- ¹¹ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 23, 1844.
- ¹² Fallowfield Monthly Meeting. Minutes, 8 Mo. 10, 1844, 6 Mo. 7, 1845; Pennsgrove Monthly Meeting. Minutes, 2 Mo. 6, 1846, 3 Mo. 5, 1846, 7 Mo. 9, 1847 (Friends Historical Library); Patten, 22-23. Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.
- ¹³ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, October 10, 1844.
- ¹⁴ Letter from Mr. Pennock, Philadelphia, 1st mo. 19, 1845, in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 6, 1845, 142.
- ¹⁵ J. Whittier Fulton, James Fulton Jr's son, spoke about the riot on the occasion of the centennial celebration of Fallowfield meeting in 1911, related how an African-American informed on the rioters and had to be hidden from the mob by a white woman. No contemporary reference to this aspect of the case has been located. J. Whittier Fulton was two or three years old at the time and cannot be counted as an eye-witness. *1811-1911. Fallowfield Meeting House, Ercildoun, Pennsylvania, One Hundredth Anniversary* [n.p., 1911?], 9.
- ¹⁶ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, February 27, 1845, 4; March 13, 1845, 3. The records of the Chester County Court of Quarter Sessions, Indictments, Com. vs. William Lukens, et. al., February 1845, are in the Chester County Archives, West Chester, Pennsylvania. Those indicted included William Lukens, Charles Lukens, John Pine, John McFarlan, Charles Scholfield, Daniel Clark, Jr., John Carlise, George Williams and David Beck. The *Jeffersonian*, usually harsh in its criticisms of abolitionists, did not mention the trial; the *Village Record* made brief references to the trial and the verdict, along with other court news, on February 11 and 18, 1845, but without comment on the testimony. The author thanks Laurie Rofini, Chester County Archives, for locating the trial records.
- ¹⁷ For a hostile account of Abby Kelley's later appearance in West Chester, see the *Jeffersonian*, March 11, 1845, referring to "the Fallowfield folks who mobbed her and the jury who cleared them" and describing Kelley as "an enraged woman with a flippant tongue."

- ¹⁸ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 24, 1845, 1.
- ¹⁹ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, August 14, 1845, 3; information on the deed is from Margaret S. Young, *The Memories and History of Ercildown 1976* (n.p., 1976), 16-17; an account of the decision to build People's Hall provided by Gertrude W. Nields during the Fallowfield Meeting Centennial in 1911, states that the majority were against holding anti-slavery meetings (1811-1911, Fallowfield Meeting House, 17-18). The records of Fallowfield Monthly Meeting (Hicksite), Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, make no reference to the riot or discussion of closing the meeting house to lectures; the minutes of Fallowfield Preparative Meeting which may have recorded that discussion are incomplete before 1848.
- ²⁰ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 8, 1845, 3.
- ²¹ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 8, 1845, 1. The *Pennsylvania Freeman* published articles on the Conference throughout the summer and fall; see also Lucretia Mott to Sarah Dugdale, 10 Mo. 7, 1845, in Beverly Palmer, ed. *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 135-7.
- ²² *Pennsylvania Freeman*, September 28, 1848; Williams Adams, "Reminiscences," *The Journal* (Lancaster, PA), 11 Mo. 21, 1877, 347-8; See also Robert C. Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, PA: The Journal, 1883), 213-4. All of these sources suggest that the opposition to Pennypacker was for his anti-slavery statements, but the interruption comes only after Pennypacker turns to a criticism of Quaker organization.
- ²³ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, September 5, 1850.
- ²⁴ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, October 3, 1850.
- ²⁵ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, October 31, 1850.
- ²⁶ For Hicksite accounts of the separation, see comments in the *Friends Weekly Intelligencer*, 8 Mo. 30, 1851, 80; 9 Mo. 20, 1851, 201-2; see also *A Statement of the Difficulties in Kennett Monthly Meeting of Friends, in Chester County, Pennsylvania* (n.p.: s.n., 1851?).
- ²⁷ Kennett Monthly Meeting (Hicksite). Minutes, 9 Mo. 8, 1851 and following, Friends Historical Library; see also *Friends Weekly Intelligencer* 8:26 (9 Mo. 20, 1851), 205, that states about fifteen members withdrew from Kennett Monthly Meeting in 9 Month 1851.
- ²⁸ Two local studies of the Underground Railroad in Chester County by Frances Cloud Taylor, *The Trackless Trail* (Kennett Square, PA: Author, 1976), 16-18, and *The Trackless Trail Leads On* (Kennett Square, PA: Author, 1995), 10-12, connect the disownments of individual members of the Progressive Friends to their anti-slavery activities and their participation in the Underground Railroad. While differences over involvement in anti-slavery activities were at the root of the disagreements in Western Quarterly Meeting, I found no evidence to suggest that any of the meetings ever considered disciplinary action for involvement in either anti-slavery organizations or the Underground Railroad.
- ²⁹ *Jeffersonian* (West Chester), June 1, 1852; *Village Record* (West Chester), June 1, 1852.

- ³⁰ Following the “Marlborough Riot,” the exact status of Oliver Johnson’s membership was detailed in an “Extra” number of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, August 7, 1852. Johnson, and Junius Meeting, maintained that his membership in Junius Meeting meant that he was legitimately a member of the Society of Friends and thus entitled to recognition as a Friend by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.
- ³¹ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, July 24, 1852; see also Lucretia Mott to John and Rebecca Ketcham, 8 Mo. 30, 1852, in Beverly Palmer, ed. *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 221-4.
- ³² Western Quarterly Meeting (Progressive). Minutes, 10 Mo. 3-31, 1852, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College; The Call for a “General Religious Conference” was published in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 25, 1853, and in other papers.
- ³³ The Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, later popularly known as “Longwood Meeting” published printed proceedings from 1853 to 1905; these proceedings and other records of Longwood are available at the Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.
- ³⁴ Kennett Monthly Meeting (Hicksite), 5 Mo. 5, 1863. Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.
- ³⁵ Prairie Grove Monthly Meeting (Hicksite). Men’s Minutes, 8 Mo. 30 and 9 Mo. 27, 1862. Microfilm, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College; original minutes at the Iowa Historical Society.
- ³⁶ Kennett Monthly Meeting, 3 Mo. 3, 1874.
- ³⁷ Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends. *Proceedings... 1874* (Philadelphia: John Craig and Sons, 1874), 29-35.
- ³⁸ John J. White, “Divisions in the Society of Friends,” *The Journal* (Lancaster, PA), 2 Mo. 5, 1879, 22.
- ³⁹ The Friends of Human Progress, founded as the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends in 1849, following a separation in Genesee Yearly Meeting continued to hold annual meetings at Waterloo, New York, until 1884. The Collins Annual Meeting of the Friends of Human Progress, a group that had a decidedly Spiritualist orientation, continued to hold annual meetings near North Collins, New York, until after World War II.
- ⁴⁰ Chuck Fager, “Beyond the Age of Amnesia: Charting the Course of 20th Century Liberal Quaker Theology,” *Quaker Theology* 2:2 (Autumn 2000): 131-158; see also Nancy A. Hewitt, “The Fragmentation of Friends: The Consequences for Quaker Women in Antebellum America,” in *Witness for Change: Quaker Women Over Three Centuries*, edited by Elisabeth Potts Brown and Susan Mosher Stuard, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 92-108.