

QUAKERS AND THEIR ALLIES IN THE ABOLITIONIST CAUSE, 1754–1808

Maurice Jackson and Susan Kozel (eds.)
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The Quaker contribution is often mentioned in the study of the abolition of slavery but here we have a volume dedicated to it in its entirety, focussed on the USA during a period of intense social, political and economic transformation. This is a collection of essays by international and emerging scholars based on the contribution of a group of diverse Quakers, some of whom are better known than others, whose abolitionist commitment was derived from their charitable and benevolent approach to life. They are Anthony Benezet, John Woolman, Sarah Woolman, Warner Mifflin, Nicholas and Richard Waln. The former Quaker Samuel Meredith is included along with two non-Quakers, Elizabeth Fortune and Benjamin Franklin. Together, these demonstrate the conflicts and strategies employed in order to promote the abolitionist cause, leadership, Quaker values, and charitable actions.

Quakers in the USA were implicated in the slave trade from 1684 and here Quakers were as active as anyone, but with the increasing flow of people and ideas across the Atlantic from Europe a complex religious, racial, ethnic and national community emerged. However, this community was far from democratic. The situation began to change in 1688 when the ‘Germanstown Protest’ declared that slavery violated the ‘golden rule of Christianity, Quaker values and the humane treatment of slaves, which caused the

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Quakers to react violently. 1754 was a definitive year in the adoption of an anti-slavery policy among Philadelphia Quakers and the movement towards African freedom proceeded inexorably towards the outlawing of the international slave trade in the USA in which Quakers played a significant role.

The chapters included here reveal various important aspects of the work of Quakers emanating from their faith perspective. Nash's essay provides valuable insight into the role of petitions, pamphlets and lobbying in the abolition campaign and the precedent created by Warner Mifflin by paying compensation to those who had been manumitted. Plank's contribution emphasises the role of the family in Quaker life and witness through a study of Sarah Woolman. Winch argues, using a case study of a freed African, Elizabeth Fortune, that freedom still resulted in a conflicted life. Focussing on Anthony Benezet, Jackson explains the formation of trans-Atlantic anti-slavery networks and Benezet's contribution to the promotion of education and self-agency as well as land programmes as a form of reparation. Kershner makes an original contribution to studies on John Woolman through an investigation into his anti-slavery stance derived from a combination of his apocalyptic theology and his social perspective. The Quakers were perhaps the initiators of boycotts according to Holcomb in the period of the consumer revolution in an effort to bring about changes in the developing economy in a parallel context of racial tension. Koziel investigates individual efforts in the abolitionist movement by examining the roles of brothers Richard and Nicholas Waln. Finally, Ferlier discusses the work of Benjamin Franklin through public discourse and sensitive political action in promoting the abolition of slavery.

There is one minor irritation for a Scotsman. Where it reads: 'Like the celebrated [William] Knox, the Scotch reformer ...' (p.27), it should read: 'Like the celebrated [John] Knox, the Scottish reformer...'

Here we have an excellent attempt to understand the relationship between Quakers and slavery and to offer insight into the role of traders, abolitionists, African Americans and problematic others who worked towards ending slavery and the slave trade. It has proved a successful venture as it makes a significant contribution to the historiography of studies in the abolition of slavery and Quaker history in the USA and its influence beyond.