

2000

Book Review of Reed and Miller, Leach and Gow, and Mekeel

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Recommended Citation

Louis, Jeanne-Henriette (2000) "Book Review of Reed and Miller, Leach and Gow, and Mekeel," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 8.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol5/iss2/8>

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H. Clay Reed and George J. Miller (eds.), *The Burlington Court Book of West New Jersey: A Record of Quaker Jurisprudence in West New Jersey, 1680-1709* (repr., Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1998). ISBN 0-8063-1558-X.

Robert Leach and Peter Gow, *Quaker Nantucket: The Religious Community behind the Whaling Empire* (Nantucket: Mill Hill Press, 1997), pp. xv + 224. ISBN 0-9612984-0-5.

Arthur J. Mekeel, *The Quakers and the American Revolution* (York: Sessions, 1996), pp. ix + 420. ISBN 1-85072-176-9.

This is a most important trilogy. H. Clay Reed and George J. Miller's *The Burlington Court Book of West New Jersey: A Record of Quaker Jurisprudence in West New Jersey, 1680-1709* was first published by the American Historical Association in Washington, DC, in 1944. It goes back to the Quaker settlement in New Jersey, shortly before the beginning of the Holy Experiment in Pennsylvania. The settlement started in 1677, and the period covered opens in 1680. Although Friends are usually discouraged from going to court, the problems of territory and borders were very acute since there had been Swedish, Dutch and English predecessors. Relations with the Duke of York were not easy either. The book is extremely well documented, and rather technical. There

are not so many records available about Quaker settlements in the American colonial period, and this one is a precious testimony of the time when William Penn was getting ready for the Holy Experiment, and encouraged Quaker settlement near Pennsylvania. West New Jersey was a rehearsal for what was to follow in Pennsylvania. However, the litigation was far worse in West New Jersey, the outcome in Philadelphia a relief in comparison.

As the owner of Mill Hill Press explains at the beginning of *Quaker Nantucket: The Religious Community behind the Whaling Empire*, the company was established to preserve and record the history of Nantucket island and the people who live by the sea. The publication of Robert Leach and Peter Gow's work is to be welcomed as it is a unique research work based on the Minutes of Nantucket Friends' Meeting from its beginning in 1708. It illuminates the relationship between Quakerism and whaling on Nantucket, and adds to the impression drawn from Nathaniel Philbrick's *Away Offshore*. The present book is a necessary complement: it reveals the inner, intimate history of Quakerism on the island. But is this just regional history, or even micro-history? What makes this book particularly helpful and meaningful, to my mind, is revelation about the role of Peter Folger, grandfather to Benjamin Franklin, as spiritual guide to Mary Starbuck, the founding mother of Nantucket Quakerism. At the time of the American revolution as covered by the book, it is obvious that Nantucket was adopting a neutral course, separate from cousin Benjamin Franklin's own view of the revolution. Besides, if one takes into account the respective influence of Benjamin Franklin and the Nantucket Quakers on the French Revolution, one is permanently driven back to Nantucket, for therein lies, as Albert Egan writes, the story of America.

The revised reprint of Arthur J. Mekeel's *The Quakers and the American Revolution* is long overdue, and fills a gap in the published Quaker history. Originally a PhD thesis supervised by Arthur Schlesinger and defended in Harvard in 1940, Meekel's work was first published in revised form by the Ebor Press, York, in 1979, in a limited number, under the title *The Relations of the Quakers to the American Revolution*. The book sold quickly and remained out of print for many years. It served as a key book for research on North American Friends at the end of the eighteenth century. This reprint benefits from the author's revision and updating, with the active help of the historical centers of Swarthmore College, Haverford College, Guilford College in the United States, and

Friends' House in London. The foreword is by Edwin Bronner, Emeritus Professor of History at Haverford College. The front cover depicts the Philadelphia Liberty Bell, the Quaker origin of which is often forgotten. We are told in the caption that it was used to celebrate the half century of peace enjoyed by the then colony under the Charter of Liberties granted by William Penn in 1701.

Indeed, although the book deals with Friends in all British colonies before and after the American Revolution, Pennsylvania is given privileged attention in this work, as it was founded as a Quaker colony and was governed by Friends until 1756. Two of the 18 chapters deal with this colony, and the other chapters often refer to this colony and future state. Indeed, Pennsylvania Friends were often admired for the attitude they adopted towards the revolution and the birth of the new nation. The book underlines the fact that Friends were in favor of the American Revolution in its beginning, during its non-violent period, but showed opposition to its military and violent sides. The peace testimony adopted by Friends in 1660 emerged strengthened by this ordeal: it was recognized as an essential part of Quaker identity. This was made obvious by the policy adopted by all monthly meetings in English-speaking America at this time: the Quaker men who took part in this revolution were disowned by their group. The most spectacular case was that of Free Quakers who paid the price of exclusion for fighting in the War of Independence, but whose group did not survive the end of the war for long. Quaker men aged between 16 and 50 years were confronted by a real dilemma: on the one hand patriots asked them to fight, and on the other their Meeting asked them not to. If they followed their Meeting's request, they were punished by the patriots. The book is rich in figures about the number of those who fought in the independence war and on the number of disownments that followed. One chapter is devoted to the help brought to victims from both sides, which is still another permanent feature of Quaker identity.

Meekel's book makes it obvious that Philadelphia and Pennsylvania stood at the heart of the dilemma. The first and only Quaker Province was at the heart of the American Revolution since General Washington's headquarters were in Philadelphia, and the Continental Congress, which brought the United States to life, met in Philadelphia on consecutive years. There is a perverse relationship between Pennsylvania and the American Revolution, as though the American Revolution was a caricature of the Holy Experiment of Pennsylvania. First published

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before Jack Marietta's book *The Reformation of American Quakerism 1748-1783* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), but reprinted after the appearance of Marietta's work, Meekel's contribution provides valuable insight not only into Quaker history in the eighteenth century but also into the double identity of the United States at the time when the Union came into being. The missing piece of the book is the history of Nantucket in the American revolution, a desideratum that, fortunately, is filled by the work of Leach and Gow reviewed above.

From the Quaker settlement in West New Jersey to the Quakers in Nantucket and colonial Quakers in the American revolution, therefore, these three books provide us with rich information on an often forgotten side of colonial America that did not disappear after the American revolution.

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