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# Healey's "From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community among Yonge Street Friends" - Book Review

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HEALEY, Robynne Rogers, *From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community among Yonge Street Friends, 1801–1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), pp. xxvi + 292, including maps, charts, tables and illustrations. ISBN 9-78077-35313-69, Hardback, \$75, £56.

Robynne Rogers Healey has written one of the most useful and important studies of the evolution of a Quaker community ever published. Several historians, myself included, have ventured broad overviews of how and why Quakerism changed in the nineteenth century. But now we have a careful, incisive analysis of those changes at the local level.

Healey's subject is Yonge Street Monthly Meeting in Ontario. Shortly after 1800, Friends from Vermont and Pennsylvania took advantage of generous land grants to settle north of what would become Toronto. By 1812, in spite of an epidemic that carried off numerous founders, they had become a flourishing new community under New York Yearly Meeting.

Yonge Street Friends, however, would prove to be as fractious as other American Quakers in the next two decades, perhaps more so. First came a unique movement, coinciding with the War of 1812, in which a charismatic convinced Friend, David Willson, led away a significant number of Friends to form a sect that called itself the Children of Peace. Some returned to the larger body later, as Willson showed increasingly erratic behavior and disavowed some Quaker testimonies, particularly pacifism. Then in the 1820s, Yonge Street Friends faced the Hicksite Separation. Healey's analysis finds that Hicksites were a minority here, in contrast to the rest of New York Yearly Meeting, perhaps reflecting the origins of settlers. Friends with Pennsylvania roots were far more likely to become Hicksites than those who had come from New England, where no Hicksite Separation took place.

Women and the family are central to Healey's study. Healey finds that kinship ties were vital to Yonge Street's community life: the decision to migrate, adherence to the exactions of the Discipline, whether to identify with the Orthodox or the Hicksites or the Children of Peace. One of Healey's most interesting findings is that most Friends who married in meeting married outside of their preparative meetings. She makes a convincing case that this reflects communication among preparative meetings and made for the construction of new communities. Healey rightly emphasizes the central role of women in sustaining the identity of Friends as a community separated from 'the world'. The continuation of Friends as a distinctive sect would largely depend on the success of mothers in inculcating a commitment to the peculiarities of Friends. Healey concludes, moreover, that at Yonge Street Quaker women had a sense of themselves as part of a larger community of Quaker women, reinforced through publications, epistles and visiting ministers.

One of Healey's most important findings involves acculturation, the breakdown of a sense of separateness and peculiarity—what she labels 'The Movement away from Sectarianism'. Population growth was one factor. As Yonge Street Friends acquired more and more non-Quaker neighbours, contacts through business and politics grew. The most impressive evidence of this adjustment to 'the world' came in 1837,

when William Lyon Mackenzie, one of the area's representatives to the provincial assembly, led an armed rebellion against a reactionary Upper Canadian oligarchy. David Willson was one of Mackenzie's staunchest supporters, and Samuel Lount, a Quaker blacksmith and another member of the assembly, led the armed rebellion against the provincial government in the Yonge Street community. Quaker participation was striking—in an area where they made up only 4 percent of the population, they were 40 percent of the rebels, and Lount was hanged for his pains. Healey's conclusion is justified: 'It is here that one begins to see most clearly the evolution of the Yonge Street Quakers' identity. Their identity as a people separated and withdrawn from the world had changed enough that they were able to identify with their non-Quaker neighbours who shared similar concerns. Friends had become part of the mainstream community' (p. 148).

*From Quaker to Upper Canadian* is arguably the best work on Canadian Quaker history ever published. It is an admirable counterpart to the growing body of work on Quakerism in the nineteenth century in the United States and the British Isles.

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