

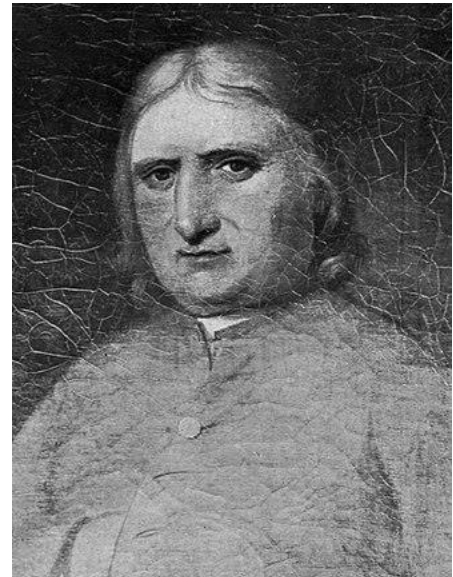
Quakers in US History and in our Family

As I work my way through my father's (Lewis Sharp/Aunt Mary/Aunt Jeri/Aunt Shirley's) family, I am running across a few families of Quakers once we get into the 1700s. As I think about it, it's probably good to try and put the Quakers in their historical context and then our ancestors within their context in the Quakers, also known as "Friends". With the caveat that I am the farthest from a real historian, I will try to do this. In the text below, I am not going to put a footnote in for every quote that I make, unless it is an extremely important quote. I am just writing this mostly for my own edification, and for any others who may suffer from insomnia. This is a LONG post, so don't try to read this without some sort of chemical support (coffee, tea, whatever)! It's so long, I will take the majority of our family Quakers out and put them in another shorter post later (in a week or so).

Quakers Foundations

The movement was founded by George Fox (July 1624 – 13 January 1691) in England (portrait to the right). It is not clear at what time the Society of Friends was formed, but there was certainly a group of people who often travelled together. At first, they called themselves "Children of the Light" or "Friends of the Truth", and later simply "Friends".

Fox was imprisoned several times, the first at Nottingham in 1649. At Derby in 1650 he was imprisoned for blasphemy; a judge mocked Fox's exhortation to "tremble at the word of the Lord", calling him and his followers "Quakers". After he refused to fight against the return of the monarchy (or to take up arms for any reason), his sentence was doubled. The refusal to swear oaths or take up arms came to be much more important in his public statements. Refusal to take oaths meant that Quakers could be prosecuted under laws compelling subjects to pledge allegiance and made testifying in court problematic.



Principle is one thing, and money is another, and from the authorities' point of view, failure of the Quakers to pay tithes was the last straw. "Tithes", nominally a tenth of income, can be thought of as a church tax, and were the main source of income for the Established Church. As non-Anglicans, Quakers regarded tithing as a rank injustice, and by refusing to pay up, laid themselves open to prosecution. Because of inertia, folk tend to resign themselves to this sort of injustice, but when pushed beyond a certain point, like the Israelites departing the land of Egypt, they decide to vote with their feet. Those offenders lucky enough to escape jail had crops or property forcibly seized in lieu of payment, and opposition to tithing was undoubtedly explains why many early Quakers pulled up stakes and headed for greener pastures. This process sometimes involved a series of such removes, and the Hollingsworths and the Harlan brothers' [our ancestors] peregrinations fit this pattern. As it happens in their case, we can back this up with a contemporary news item:

"In 1680, George Harland, of County Down had taken from him in Tithe, by Daniel MacConnell, twelve stooks [John Note: see an example of a "stook" to the right] and a half of oats, three stooks and a half of barley, and five loads of hay, all worth ten shillings and ten pence"[William Stockdale: A Great Cry of Oppression, [cited by A. C. Myers: Immigration of the Irish Quakers into Pennsylvania 1682-1750, p. 321]].



Quakers believed in plain speech and plain dress; titles were not used nor hats doffed as a token of respect; they addressed each other as "thee" and "thou" instead of "you"; and the Quaker gray of their clothing, unadorned by lapels or fancy buttons, together with the flat hat, made the Quaker recognizable from afar. Denied careers in the military, academic or professional world, they gravitated into business and manufacturing, where because of abstemious life style, willingness to work long hours, refusal to haggle, and punctiliousness about keeping their word and meeting their obligations, many achieved considerable financial success.

Parliament enacted laws which forbade non-Anglican religious meetings of more than five people, essentially making Quaker meetings illegal. Quakers were the target of a series of oppressive legislative measures passed between 1662 and 1665, including the Quaker Act, the Five-Mile Act, the Test Act, and the Conventicle Acts, and it is said that more than 300 Friends died in jail, and 200 were transported as slaves to the West Indies. Fox counseled his followers to violate openly laws that attempted to suppress the movement, and many Friends, including women and children, were jailed over the next quarter-century. Nor was persecution limited to England. In America, the Puritan authorities of Massachusetts found their beliefs and practices were particularly objectionable, and in 1659 they went so far as to hang four Quakers on Boston Common. King Charles of England was advised by his councilors to issue a mandamus condemning this practice and allowing them to return.

In the last years of his life, Fox continued to participate in the London Meetings, and still made representations to Parliament about the sufferings of Friends. The new King, James II, pardoned religious dissenters jailed for failure to attend the established church, leading to the release of about 1,500 Friends. Though the Quakers lost influence after the Glorious Revolution, which deposed James II, the Act of Toleration 1689 put an end to the uniformity laws under which Quakers had been persecuted, permitting them to assemble freely.

Two days after preaching as usual at the Gracechurch Street Meeting House in London, George Fox died between 9 and 10 p.m. on 13 January 1690 O.S. (23 January 1691 N.S.). He was interred three days later in the Quaker Burying Ground, in the presence of thousands of mourners.

John Note: Incidentally, just south of Portland, OR in Newberg, OR is George Fox University, which started out as "Friends Pacific Academy" in 1885.

Quakers Outside of England

Although it never numbered a huge number of adherents, Quakerism influenced society and events in 17th and 18th centuries in Britain and in the early history of the American colonies, far out of proportion to the size of the denomination. A period of very active proselytizing followed the movement's foundation in 1647, with preachers spreading the word in England and Ireland, and traveling to Germany, the Netherlands and the American Colonies. William Edmundson convened the very first Quaker meeting in Lurgan [John Note: located in today's Northern Ireland] in 1655. He was known as "The Great Hammer of Ireland," a remarkably muscular nickname for a peace-loving Quaker, but one which reflected his temperament and military background. Edmundson had served in the Cromwellian army, and went on to achieve fame in Ireland and beyond, as a preacher in his own right, and had much to do with the establishment of Quakerism in North Carolina. It is reasonable to ascribe, at least in part, the Harlans' specific choice of the Lurgan area as the place to settle, to their awareness of a significant Quaker presence there.

In America, the story of the Friends is inextricably bound with the foundation of Pennsylvania and the career of Sir William Penn, the Younger (portrait on the right). His father Admiral Sir William Penn (1621-1670) was a professional naval officer, who not only contrived to survive the political pitfalls which beset his Navy colleagues during the Commonwealth period, but became involved with the Restoration of 1660, and the return of Charles II to the throne of England. While superintending the family estates in Ireland, his son William Penn (1644-1718) became a Quaker. He proselytized actively there, and it is not inconceivable that the Harlans would have heard him preach in Lurgan.



Admiral Penn had loaned 12,000 pounds to King Charles at a juncture when the latter was in financial straits, and in 1681 to settle this obligation, Penn's son persuaded the King to grant him a tract of land west of the Delaware River, 40,000 square-miles in extent, roughly speaking, modern Pennsylvania and Delaware. The grant abutted lands granted to the Duke of York (now New York and New Jersey), and those granted to Lord Baltimore (now Maryland). George Fox followed with interest the foundation of the colony of Pennsylvania, where William Penn had given him over 1,000 acres (4.0 km²) of land.

Penn's plan was to found a colony based on Quaker principles, a "Holy Experiment" as he called it, and starting in 1681 broadsheets promoting the venture were distributed widely at Quaker meetings in Ireland, prompting a trickle of pioneers set off to the New World. A.C. Myers {18}, suggests that in the next few years there was considerable interaction between the Colony and Ireland, people going back and forth, and letters from the pioneers, describing their life in America, being passed from hand to hand at the Quaker Meetings. Thus the members of the Lurgan Meeting all knew of the Colony, and it is not difficult to see how George and Michael Harlan became persuaded that their future lay across the ocean. Some Irish Quakers went out to the Colony as indentured servants, but the Brothers had enough

money to purchase land before they left Ireland. As relatively early arrivals, they settled in the eastern part of the territory, near where New Castle, Delaware, now stands, ultimately purchasing land on Brandywine Creek. Quaker dominance in the affairs of Pennsylvania was to continue until the latter half of the 18th Century, when during the Indian Wars and the subsequent War of Independence, their unwillingness to bear arms brought them into conflict with the spirit of the times. As a footnote, James Logan (1674-1751), a giant figure in the history of Pennsylvania Quakerism, was born and brought up in Lurgan, and would have been 13 years of age at the time when the Brothers sailed for America. Logan looked back with little pleasure to his days in Lurgan, but we can be sure he, both in Ireland and America, would have known the Brothers.

Sources:

1. "George and Michael Harlan: The Irish Interlude", John H. Harland, <http://www.harlanfamily.org/irish-interlude.html>, reviewed 22-Feb 2023.
2. "George Fox", Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Fox, reviewed 22-Feb-2023.
3. Immigration of the Irish Quakers into Pennsylvania 1682-1750, A. C. Myers.