

4-2015

Quakers and Slavery: The Development of an Anti-Slavery Society

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**Quakers and Slavery:
The Development of an Anti-Slavery Society**

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Honors Program Undergraduate Thesis

April 1, 2015

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Introduction

In the late 1640s and early 1650s, in the midst of the English Civil War, a British shoemaker brought together some fellow dissenters to create the Religious Society of Friends. This sect of Christianity formed itself on the basis that any person could know and communicate with God because of an “Inner Light” that dwelt within all people. In 1668, a young aristocrat named William Penn joined the Society which had become known collectively as the Quakers. In 1682, King Charles II gave Penn a massive tract of land and named it after Penn's father: Pennsylvania. This land was to be a home for the Quakers, who were being persecuted by the state church of Anglicanism.

Friends were an integral part of Colonial American culture and contributed much to the early United States. Among the contributions and accomplishments of the Quakers were: Penn's *Frame of Government*, the first Pennsylvania constitution; religious toleration, an ideal still prized today among Americans; a degree of equality for women, which was rare in those days; prison reform; and abolitionist movements. Of these early accomplishments, one of the most well-known and the most important was the Quaker stance against slavery.

Quaker protests against slavery started as early as 1682, in Germantown, Pennsylvania, and continued on through their work with the Underground Railroad and numerous other anti-slavery movements. But in those days of Christianity supported slavery, why is this group known as being against slavery? History reveals that early Quakers were just as involved in slavery as others during that time. The questions then are: why are the Quakers remembered most for their contributions to abolition when they too had kept slaves? And, was their anti-slavery work so effective that it causes history to forget their early support of the practice? This study seeks to answer these questions, to make the case that Quakers were the first anti-slavery society, and to

show that it was Quaker influence that directed America toward greater abolitionist efforts in the nineteenth century. In addition, this study is guided by these questions: Why were the Quakers against slavery, and what did they do to help bring it to an end?

Quaker history will be examined in three major stages: the early days of supporting slavery, the middle years of changing that position, and the later period which linked the terms “Quaker” and “abolitionist” together, even to this day.

Review of Literature

Research conducted within this field of American history relies much on the documents of the period. This study uses these documents to understand the beliefs of men and women on the topic of slavery. Further inquiry has been made into the previous research surrounding Quakers and slavery as well.

The Quaker religion—also known as the Religious Society of Friends—in America is generally remembered as one that was firmly aligned with the abolitionists in the 1800s. At this time in history, there seemed to be no end to all of the anti-slavery associations that were Quaker in nature, or were at least affiliated with them. Some of these associations were even formed prior to the nineteenth century, and there are records of high numbers of manumissions of Quaker slave-holders in the latter part of the 1700s. The tendency of Friends to be against slavery was not always the case though—they were just as involved in slave-holding as any other early in their history. There were some who appeared early on in the religion calling for an end to slavery, but they were far from the majority. So when did anti-slavery sentiments become the norm, which would later on become the society’s rule? The trend found in Quaker writings is a gradual change in their thinking on the subject. The trend can be traced in a few eras: a pro-

slavery era, an anti-slavery development era, an era of the spread of anti-slavery sentiments, and a vocal anti-slavery era.

The convergence of Quakers and slavery in the New World started in the West Indies in the mid-to-late 1600s. At this stage, most Quakers were pro-slavery, or at least they did not oppose it. Dr. Kristen Block, a cultural historian of the Atlantic and Americas, studied this convergence on Barbados. She highlighted the wealthy Quaker, Colonel Morris, and his lack of qualms about the keeping of slaves. She also noted that many Friends at this time did not connect the practice of slave keeping with their “Inner Light” theology; a doctrine stating that the presence of God is within all people.¹

George Fox founded the Religious Society of Friends in the 1650s and acted as its de facto leader until his death in 1691. After a visit to Barbados in 1671, Fox wrote an address to the people there telling them to treat their slaves better. He told them to live good Christian lives, which involved teaching their slaves in the ways of Christ so that one day they might be able to be freed.² Penned a few decades after Fox's address, George Grey wrote to Quaker families stating much of the same thing. They were to teach their black servants in the ways of Christianity so that they could reject their “heathen nature” and could be allowed to be free. Servants were also, Grey said, to be brought to official functions so they could learn to be civilized.³

¹ Block, Kristen, “Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slaver in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,” *Early American Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 3 (Fall 2010), accessed March 22, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ofm&AN=510027258&site=ehost-live>.

² George Fox, *Gospel Family-Order: Being A Short Discourse Concerning the Ordering of Families, both of Whites, Blacks and Indians* (London, 1676), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/595.

³ George Gray, “A Testimony for Family Meeting and keeping Nigro as Servants until they are in Some Measure brought into a Christian Life which is the Duty of every Master & Mistress of families to Endeavor to bring them so that they may be free Men indeed,” Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/12049.

In *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers*, Joseph Besse wrote that some friends followed the advice of Fox and Grey; and the leadership of the island did not like that. He stated that a law was enacted in 1676 on Barbados that was supposed to prevent slaves from attending Quaker meetings. Some Friends, such as Ralph Fretwell, chose to continue to bring his slaves to meetings and accept the inevitable fines. Besse even described a second law to create harsher penalties in response to some Quakers' disregard of the first one.⁴

The majority-view that slavery was acceptable continued for many decades into the mid-1700s. Friend John Bell wrote a letter in 1741 to Quakers in Maryland, Barbados, and other colonies that continued the trend of allowing slavery in order to civilize and Christianize the “heathen.” Bell's advice was for Quakers to be good examples for the slaves and to be kind masters, not punishing excessively. Bell also stated that to do otherwise would bring down God's anger.⁵

Prior to the growth of abolitionism, there were some anti-slavery Quakers. In 1688, four Quaker men penned a protest of slavery in Germantown, Pennsylvania. This was the first anti-slavery protest in the New World. One of their chief reasons for condemning slavery was Jesus' command to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This line of reasoning would continue and not be limited to Quaker reasoning.⁶

Beyond the Germantown protest and the discouragement of slavery was Benjamin Lay. Lay was something of a radical who would eventually be put out of Monthly Meeting of Philadelphia. Lay used strong language to condemn slavery, calling it a “hellish practice.” He

⁴ Joseph Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers*, vol. 2, (London: Luke Hinde, 1753) accessed March 12, 2014, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/3669.

⁵ John Bell, *An Epistle to Friends in Maryland, Barbados, and the other Colonies, and Islands in the West-Indies, where any Friends are* (1741), Quaker Broadside Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SC_Broad/id/128.

⁶ Gerret Hendricks, Derick up de Graeff, Francis Daniell Pastorius, and Abraham up den Graef, “Quaker Protest Against Slavery in the New World, Gemanttown (pa.)” (1688), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/5837.

grew his own food and made his own clothes.⁷ He did much to get the word out about the injustices of slavery, but he was not the great exacter of change that later abolitionists with more influence would become. This is likely in part to his radical methods, but also probably because the setting was not ready for him.

In 1737, Benjamin Lay wrote *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates*. Lay wrote some of the earliest anti-slavery literature in America. In this work, he wrote of the outright sin of slavery and proposed its abolishment. This book shows a start of the gradual change in Quaker perspective in regards to slavery. Lay's unstable relationship with the Society also shows that many were not yet ready for his point of view. Lay certainly helped pave the way for later abolitionists such as John Woolman and Anthony Benezet, but he did not have their success.

A record of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) shows that the anti-slavery position was becoming more widespread. Unlike Lay's writings, which were looked at scornfully by many, the PYM was listened to respectfully. In 1730, a record of the PYM minutes shows that several smaller, local meetings had discussed slavery and decided that different events surrounding it, such as the purchase of slaves, was wrong, but they did not condemn the practice itself. This decision was left for the PYM, the primary governing body of the Quakers in America. They decided to officially caution those that practiced slavery, but they did not prohibit it.⁸ In 1754, the PYM issued another opinion on slavery. In this epistle, they stated they did not support the practice of slavery at all, but they again stopped short of saying it was prohibited for

⁷ Benjamin Lay, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates...* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1937), 6, Quakers and Slavery Project, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/7019/rec/10.

⁸ Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, "Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1730" (1730), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/936.

Quakers. This document was written in response to the news that a greater number of Quakers were taking part in slavery. They would now have to keep their slaves knowing that they were going against the wishes of the PYM.⁹ This was far from condemning the practice however, and not all Quakers followed the leadership of Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting.¹⁰

The documents outlined so far serve to show historians that the conversion of the Quakers to an abolitionist society was a slow one. It was also a conversion that included many people and took much effort. Likely born out of the remnants of the First Great Awakening, itinerant preachers like John Woolman travelled the colonies to speak to family, crowds, churches, and legislatures about the place of slavery in colonial society. Woolman was the most successful of these ministers and will be examined in detail below, along with his contemporary Anthony Benezet, who is actually one of those responsible for compiling Woolman's writings into the first publication of his journal.¹¹

Woolman is a recognized character in American history because of his influence and the writings he left behind. His journal has been published continually since 1774, often published alongside the works of Benjamin Franklin and William Penn. This journal has been, and will continue to be, essential to any research being done concerning Woolman and the early abolitionist movement.

⁹ Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, "An Epistle of Caution and Advice, concerning the Buying and Keeping of Slaves" (1754), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/1547.

¹⁰ Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1730 [extracts]* (1730), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/936.

¹¹ *The Journal of John Woolman* is a work that is drawn heavily from for this project. Its value far exceeds its uses here though, it provides an in depth view into the life of a mid-1700s Quaker mind. Careful readers of *The Journal* are shown the great difficulties that Woolman encountered as he travelled and preaches. He primarily spoke to families, and often went away not knowing what good his preaching had done, but there were also times when he left feeling satisfied. Woolman's journal has been an invaluable document for this project, and Anthony Benezet can be thanked for citing the need to compile the late Woolman's writing so they can be preserved and read by all.

Woolman began writing his journal when he was thirty-six years old. He wrote retroactively about his childhood and early years in ministry. After that, the bulk of the book deals with his religious journeys. The journal is full of the Christian references and imagery that one would expect from a deeply religious man like Woolman.

The journal has been the chief resource for anyone writing about Woolman, along with his other writings. One notable work written about Woolman in recent years is *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman, Apostle of Abolition*, by Thomas P. Slaughter. This is a biography that seeks to get to the core of who Woolman was as a man. It analyzes different facets of his life and builds the case for his goodness and importance to American history. This work is valuable because it provides an in-depth interpretation of Woolman, and the documents referenced in the bibliography allow for further research.

Other works consulted in this study are: *John Woolman, 1720-1772: Quintessential Quaker*, by David Sox; and *The Tendering Presence: Essays on John Woolman*, a compilation edited by Mike Heller.

Included in most of the editions of Woolman's journal is a short biography. Each of these is slightly different and allows researchers to examine what some of his other biographers have thought. Some of these authors are Amelia Gummere Mott (*The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 1922), John Greenleaf Whittier (*The Journal of John Woolman*, 1884), and Phillips P. Moulton (*The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 1989). The history provided by these biographies are mostly the same, but each author provides a different perspective.

Anthony Benezet also left a written legacy. He left behind many letters and essays that outline his designs to bring about an end to slavery. Where Woolman was a preacher, Benezet

was teacher, and just as their two occupations were simultaneously similar and different, so too were the methods of these men—and their methods prove this. One thing that is evident in Benezet’s letters, is that he was more willing to petition governments for help on the slavery issue. He even went so far as to write a letter to the Queen of England.

Other works important to this project’s study of Benezet besides his letters are: *Anthony Benezet: From the Original Memoir*, by Wilson Armistead; *Let His Voice Be Heard*, by Maurice Jackson; and *The Complete Antislavery Writings of Anthony Benezet*, edited by David L. Crosby.

The independent and team efforts of Woolman and Benezet will serve as examples for what other Quaker men and women were doing at the time on behalf of abolition. Thanks to the work of these men and women, the spread of anti-slavery sentiments among Quakers is evident in a few ways, one of which was the number of manumissions, or freeing of one's slaves. The Black Water manumissions (1776-1779) stated that the former slaver-holders released their slaves because freedom was the right of all men, and because Jesus commanded all men to do to others as you would have them do to you.¹² The Chesterfield Manumissions (1774) said much the same, but also mentioned a committee designed to “Advise and Assist those Negroes and their Children who have been Restored to Freedom.”¹³

After nearly a century-long effort—from the time of the Germantown Protest— Quakers in America were on their way to becoming almost wholly an anti-slavery society when, in 1780, the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery formed. Their constitution states the belief that blacks were no different in the eyes of God than anyone else. In an effort to

¹² Yearly Meeting of Friends, “Black Water Monthly Meetings, Manumissions 1776-1779” (1766-1779) Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/10301.

¹³ Chesterfield Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, “Chesterfield Manumissions” (1774-1848), Quakers and Slavery Project, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/5123.

make slavery more difficult to practice in Pennsylvania, the society implemented a rule which stated that all slave-holders must register their slaves in order to keep them. Though they could not ban slavery altogether, the society discouraged it in hopes that it would gradually go disappear.¹⁴ It is worth noting at this point that “gradual abolition,” though not the speedy process modern moralists wish it would have been, is actually the process that worked for the Friends. Quakers committed injustices toward their slaves, true, but they ultimately came to have a presence at nearly every turn of the abolition movements in the 1800s.

As the Society of Friends became generally opposed to slavery, they seem to have begun a crusade to end it. Around the year 1842, a report from the Baltimore Yearly Meeting stated that the Friends' place as an anti-slavery organization was well known; and they likened slavery to injustice and stressed the need for reformation. In the document can be found a short history of Quakers and slavery, and a report of how much more still needed to be done.¹⁵

Among the actions of the Quakers as anti-slavery advocates was the Free Produce Movement. Though meant to grow beyond the Society of Friends, this attempt to produce and sell goods to compete with slave labor goods was largely a Quaker movement. In 1838, the American Free Produce Association held a convention to name delegates and discuss the direction of the organization. In the proceedings of the convention can be found the creation of a committee meant to find out how and where to obtain freely produced goods, and another to find locations to sell the competition goods.¹⁶

¹⁴ Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, “The Constitution of the Pennsylvania Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, &c, Quakers and Slavery Project” (1780-1781), Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/1059.

¹⁵ Baltimore Yearly Meeting of Friends, “Report of the committee of the yearly meeting of Friends, held in Baltimore, on the 10th and 11th months, in the year of our Lord, 1842, on the subject of slavery, touching the participation of some members of Society connecting themselves with hired lecturers, associations, etc. apart from the testimonies of life, light of truth,” Quaker BroadSides Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SC_Broad/id/92.

¹⁶ Requisite Labor Convention, “Requisite Labor Convention Proceedings” (1838), Quakers and Slavery Project,

In the report of the Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends, the Manufacturing Committee gave an update on its search for free cotton. The committee stated that some Indiana Friends had found a possible source and several more were probable. They also said they were looking for manufacturers who could turn the cotton into finished products.¹⁷ In 1745, another Free Produce organization published a circular explaining the reasoning behind the manufacture of free goods. They reasoned that if the goods produced by slaves were not bought, the practice of slavery would become too expensive and then end. To achieve this end, the Friends proposed an association that would produce the same goods that slaves produced, but the goods would be made using free labor instead of slave labor.¹⁸

Prior to the emancipation of all slaves in 1863—by means of the Emancipation Proclamation—some Quakers were saying that some among them were only supporting the abolition movement because it was winning them recognition.¹⁹ However, many Quakers were sincere in their care for black slaves. This is evident in the creation of the Friends Association of Philadelphia for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen. As is shown in their minutes from 1864-1865, this association concerned itself with the betterment of former slaves. Among their actions was the collection of funds, the donation of clothes and shoes, and the commissioning of schools and teachers.²⁰

Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/11806.

¹⁷ Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends, “Report of the Manufacturing Committee of the Free Produce Association of Friends,” Quakers Broad­sides Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/997.

¹⁸ Free Produce Association of Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, “To our fellow members of the Religious Society of Friends” (1845), Quaker Broad­sides Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SC_Broad/id/1950.

¹⁹ Daniel E. Gereau, *Some thoughts on slavery, addressed to the professors of Christianity, and more particularly to those of the Society of Friends*, (New York: Baker and Crane, 1844), Quakers and Slavery Project, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/11694.

²⁰ Friends Association of Philadelphia for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen, “Friends Association of

This last organization shows the full circle of Quakers in regard to slavery. We saw from the first documents written to Quakers in Barbados how slavery was accepted; but then the hypocrisy was noted by some, such as Benjamin Lay in the early 1700s. The PYM also involved itself in the discussion of slaves by officially withdrawing its support from any who practiced slave-keeping. We then saw how the work of John Woolman and Anthony Benezet was important to spreading anti-slavery sentiments among Quakers to the point that some Friends organizations were wholly against slavery. Then we saw one of the many attempts of anti-slavery Quakers to bring an end to the practice through the means of the Free Produce Movement. And as stated above, this last document brings us to the other side of emancipation, when newly freed blacks were in need of help to learn how to live outside of being a slave, and how many Quakers were there to help.

Chapter 1: The Pro-Slavery Era and The Later Development of Anti-Slavery Sentiments

When one thinks historically of the Quaker religion, a few things come to mind, two of them being: pacifism and simple living. Those more knowledgeable of the religion may also point out silent meetings and the Inner Light theology that set early Quakers apart from other Christians. Others still might point out the anti-slavery perspective of Quakers. All of these have been important parts to Quaker history.

Most relevant to the following study are the strong ties between the Friends and the abolitionist movement. In this, some may be familiar with the works of Quakers: John Greenleaf Whittier, a prominent poet and abolitionist; Levi Coffin, a man heavily involved in the Underground Railroad; or Lucretia Mott, a women's rights advocate, social reformer, and

Philadelphia for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen, Executive Minutes” (1864-1865), Quakers and Slavery Project, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/7104.

abolitionist. These three were just a few among many Quakers who were outspoken about the injustice and immorality of slavery during the nineteenth century. Another link between them is that they all cited the earlier reformer John Woolman—who also, in part, continued the legacy of Benjamin Lay.

Despite the current link between the terms Quaker and abolition, Friends did not always hold to the belief that slavery was wrong. This speaks to the reason why groups of men and women would even preach on the matter. If they had not seen slave-keeping Quakers, they likely would not have come to feel so strongly about the injustice of the practice. That being said, there were slave-keeping Quakers, but also those who came to feel that change was needed.

The question can then be asked: why did Quakers keep slaves? From the first generations, Quakers had believed in an Inner Light, the presence of God within all people. How were they able to reconcile this belief with the keeping of slaves? This answer varied greatly. Perhaps though, it happened as it did with a man that Woolman came in contact with. The man said that “keeping slaves was not altogether agreeable to his mind, but that the slave being a gift made... he had accepted her.”²¹ The fact is, that despite a belief that all men shared the presence of God, early Quakers did keep slaves. The extent of the practice among the Society of Friends, as well as its first protesters, will be examined next to set the stage for the coming of Anthony Benezet and John Woolman.

From the point of their inception in England, early Quakers did not differ greatly from non-Quakers on this matter. Slaves were used to mark station and economic status by Quaker and others. When the Quakers began moving to the New World like other Englishmen, they needed slaves to work their plantations. The first of these plantations were in the Caribbean Islands. In

²¹ John Woolman, *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1989), 33.

the islands, natives were used as slaves first. They proved to be insufficient though, as millions died across the whole of the Americas due to Old World diseases. Because of the unreliability, plantation owners turned to African slaves, who had become conditioned to their roles as slaves, as well as conditioned to the health standards needed, over hundreds of years.²²

On these Caribbean Islands, slavery became a common part of life. Dr. Kristen Block, of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, wrote an article analyzing the motivation behind slave-keeping Quakers in Barbados. She asserts that the plantation life of the island was one reason they kept slaves. To own a plantation and become wealthy, slaves were needed to grow and pick crops. Some Quakers, like Lewis Morris, eventually became prominent and wealthy members of society.²³ Morris presents historians with another seeming oxymoron besides that of the slave-keeping Quakers. This new oxymoron is that of the prominent and wealthy Quaker. This bears recognition because Woolman was once faced with the decision to become a successful and wealthy man, but he instead chose a more simple life that fits the idea of a common Quaker far better. Benezet likewise was a prominent and successful school teacher, but placed his livelihood and reputation in jeopardy when he opened his school to blacks. What is most important to take from this article and the documents to follow, is that there were slave-keeping Quakers—otherwise there would be no need to write to them telling them to treat their slaves in a certain manner, as George Fox did.

A notable document on this topic is George Fox's *Gospel Family Order*. Fox—who was the founder of the Religious Society of Friends—wrote this to Quakers living in Barbados after he returned to England from a visit to the island. In this document, Fox admonished Quakers to

²² Alan Gally, “Indian Slavery in the Americas,” Gilderlehrman.org, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/origins-slavery/essays/indian-slavery-america>.

²³ Kristen Block, “Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World.”

raise up their families in righteousness with faith in Jesus Christ. He also told them to teach their “Ethiopians” (black slaves) the ways of Christ. He then said that it would be good of them to free their slaves, “whom they have bought with their Money,” if they had served faithfully for a number of years. Included in this was that the slaves should be Christians before they were freed. Perhaps the most informative section of this document was Fox's request for a “black boy” to be sent to him, so he could then see the fruits of his Friends' labor. He would then free the boy, or send him back to his owners to obtain further instruction.²⁴ This document reveals the thoughts of the founder; though he would ask his people to place themselves figuratively in the place of the slaves, and to work for their gradual freedom, he did not condemn the practice of slavery. This is another example of slavery by Quakers.

Another prominent Quaker who offered his endorsement of slavery was William Penn. Penn became a Quaker as a young man and quickly became one of the religion's top proponents. He later offered to take a huge tract of land in America to settle the debt owed to his family by the English king, Charles II. Pennsylvania, named for Penn's father, was to be a place where men and women of differing beliefs could live together peacefully. Penn's equality did not extend to his slaves. Penn was a supporter of slavery, using them to work the land around his Pennsbury mansion. He wrote to James Harrison in 1685 stating that he wanted his gardener to train two men and a boy to work his craft, preferring that they be black, “for then a man has them while they live.”²⁵ He also wrote soon after this, that some blacks he had “as good as bought.”²⁶ In

²⁴ George Fox, *Gospel Family-Order: Being a Short Discourse Concerning the Ordering of Families, Both of Whites, Blacks and Indians* (London, 1676), 14-22, Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/595/rec/1.

²⁵ William Penn to James Harrison, August 25, 1665, in Samuel Janney, *The Life of William Penn: With Selections from His Correspondence and Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Hogan, Perkins & Co., 1852), 421-422, accessed March 22, 2015, http://books.google.com/books?id=fwxvAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²⁶ William Penn, October 4, 1685, in Samuel Janney, *The Life of William Penn: With Selections from His*

William Penn, there is example of a prominent Quaker theologian and colonial proprietor, who was also a slave-keeper.

Outside of the examples provided thus far, there are numerous records to show the habit of Quakers to keep slaves. What these records show, is that in the face of the early opposition to slavery (to be examined below), many Friends continued the practice of slavery. In 1717, James Hunt left his Negro woman to his wife and son in his will.²⁷ John Woolman spoke in his journal of several accounts of other Friends seeking to pass down their slaves in wills.²⁸ Research shows that up to eighty-eight percent of representatives to yearly meetings owned slaves during the years 1706 to 1730.²⁹ And records from Chester County, Monmouth County, and Burlington County in New Jersey reveal the names of men, their property, and their slaves.³⁰

It has been briefly mentioned that during these early years, there were some who spoke out against the practice of slavery. The first of these in America is the Germantown Protest of 1688. In this document, a group of men from the Germantown Monthly Meeting joined together to condemn the practice of slavery. They listed the reasons why they were “against the traffick of men-body,” one of which was the teaching of Jesus to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”³¹ George Keith wrote a more in depth protest to slavery in 1693. In it, he said that Jesus had come to earth and died not to oppress men into bondage, but to bring all men “into Liberty both inward and outward.” He went on to make his case with five specific reasons for

Correspondence and Autobiography (Philadelphia: Hogan, Perkins & Co., 1852), 422, accessed March 22, 2015, http://books.google.com/books?id=fwxvAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²⁷ James Hunt, “James Hunt’s Will,” Ancestry.com, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://freepages.family.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mygermanfamilies/HuntJames.html>. This source is located on a website where individuals and families can upload information about historical figures. The will used here is accompanied by family history including marriages, children, births, deaths, and stories of individuals.

²⁸ *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 51.

²⁹ Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

³¹ “Quaker Protest Against Slavery in the New World, Gemantown (pa.).”

“being against keeping of Negroes for Term of Life.”³² And in 1718, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting stated that “selling and keeping negroes, men or women slaves, for term of life hath been tenderly spoken to in much love and condescension for the Truth[’s] sake...” and that the “practice was not right.” This rather weak protest came only after they had consented to allow those who owned slaves to keep them.³³ There were more early protests, but they were sporadic and did not lead to any major changes.

What came after these first protests were some of the first truly anti-slavery Quakers who began to connect their names with their ideals. One of these men was William Southerby. Southerby began speaking against slavery in 1696, and continued until 1712 when he gave the Pennsylvania Assembly a petition proposing the end of slavery. His petition was rejected. Southerby then found himself in trouble with the Friends in Pennsylvania because he had published an anti-slavery tract without permission. He was denounced for this tract and others by his fellows Quakers, who went so far as to threaten him with disownment from his local meetinghouse. John Farmer was another like Southerby. Farmer wrote an “Epistle Concerning Negroes.” This tract led to his disownment in New England, and after they read the tract themselves, from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Southerby died a few years after he was threatened with disownment and Farmer fell out of the public view after his actual disownment.³⁴

These radicals’ views were not welcomed by leading Quakers, and though they were received by some Friends, the men were ultimately insignificant. The next man to take up the helm was Benjamin Lay. Lay was more successful than his predecessors, but ultimately failed to

³² George Keith, “*An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes*,” 1693, Qhpress.org, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qwhp/gk-as1693.htm>.

³³ Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 238.

³⁴ Brian Temple, *Philadelphia Quakers and the Antislavery Movement* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2014), 27-28, Google Books, accessed December 3, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=dAGhAwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

exact great change. It is only many years after his death that Quakers looked back and saw the value of Benjamin Lay. Lay was a Quaker who—or not a Quaker, as is claimed he had never been one when he was disowned—came to feel strongly about the subject of slavery after he lived ten years in Barbados. Lay was considered an eccentric because he was a vegetarian, wore plain, shabby clothes, and refused to use anything created with the aid of slave labor.³⁵ These same ideas were employed after Lay's death: Woolman included a few variants of some of these things and the Free Produce Movement was based solely around the idea of boycotting anything produced by slave-labor.

One of the reasons for Lay's disownment, and later veneration, was his publishing of *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates...* (1737). The first problem with this book was that it was published without permission from the Overseers of the Press—the body that approved or disapproved manuscripts for publication within the Society of Friends. Lay's book indicted individual Friends and castigated the whole Society for complying with slavery.³⁶ He wrote:

We pretend not to love fighting with carnal Weapons... but carry a worse thing in the heart... what... can be greater hypocrisy, and plainer contradiction, than for us as a people, to refuse to bear arms... and yet purchase the Plunder, the captives... thereby justifying their selling of them, & the war, by which they were or are obtained; nor doth this satisfy, but their children also are kept in Slavery...; is not this plainly & substantially trampling the most blessed & glorious Testimony that ever was or ever will be in the World...?³⁷

This accusation of hypocrisy did not sit well with many members of the Society of Friends.

Space was taken out in newspapers to inform people of Lay's "false charges" against upstanding members of the society.³⁸

³⁵ Mark Kaharas, "Benjamin Lay," Quakers and Slavery Project, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://trilogy.brynmawr.edu/speccoll/quakersandslavery/commentary/people/lay.php>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Lay, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates...*, 10-11.

³⁸ Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, "Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1738

Lay was not resigned to let his writing be the only part of him that spoke. He frequently spoke in religious gatherings where he was described as “a disorderly & Obstinate Person, one who Slights the advice of Friends, Imposes on them in his Preaching & that he disregards the Peace of the Church.”³⁹ One account describes him as entering a meeting wearing a soldier’s uniform and a sword—an act in direct opposition to the Quaker message of pacifism. He then preached against slavery, ending his sermon when he stuck his Bible with his sword. When he did this, the bladder filled with red juice hidden in the Bible burst, spraying nearby Friends. This was meant to symbolize “the blood on Quakers’ hands for not standing firm against slavery.”⁴⁰ Soon after this, Lay was formally disowned from the Society of Friends. This was done on a technicality; it was claimed that he had never obtained any certification from his home meeting in England, therefore there was no proof that he was a Quaker.⁴¹

The men described so far were radicals. Actually, the men who will be examined next were also radicals, and so were the numerous abolitionist organizations of the early nineteenth century. But the men described immediately above represented a far less popular idea than their

[extracts]” (1738), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/938/rec/1.

³⁹ Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia, “Philadelphia Monthly Meeting Minutes 1737-09-26 [extracts]” (1737) Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/394/rec/7.

⁴⁰ Kaharas, “Benjamin Lay.”

⁴¹ Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia, “Philadelphia Monthly Meeting Minutes 1737-09-26 [extracts].” In this document, Lay was accused of pretending to be Quaker while attending meetings. The accusations leveled against Lay were based on technicalities, and would never have been entertained had Lay not been such an abrasive and confrontational person. According to his accuser, officially John Kinsey, the certificate that Lay produced upon his arrival to the American colonies was “Irregularly Obtained.” The certificate had apparently been given to Lay by his Colchester, England meeting when his membership was in question and he was under investigation for disorderly conduct. Lay was instructed to go back to England and obtain a proper certificate to transfer membership and preach in American meetings—and absurd request. Lay declined to do this and preached anyway. Because of this, he was not a formally recognized Quaker, but he still considered himself one. For further reading on this subject, consult: Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia, 1737, “Philadelphia Monthly Meeting Minutes 1737-06-24 [extracts],” Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed December 3, 2014, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/8101/rec/8; “Early Anti-Slavery Advocates,” *The Friend: A Religious and Literary Journal*, vol. 29 (Philadelphia: Printed by Robb, Pile & McElroy, 1956), 220, Google Books, accessed December 3, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=7kIrAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

followers would. They preached a message that few were receptive too and was directly against the popular views of the time. They may have not been the most successful abolitionists, but they were among the first, and they started a movement with the pro-slavery Quakers that would take the whole society to a place where being against slavery was the rule.

They stood in opposition to slavery and made their feelings known. Ultimately though, despite their efforts, they made no immediately significant changes to the situation. They were certainly popular among some communities, as were others like them, but not among the leaders or the majority. What has been observed at this time though, is the beginning of a trend toward opposition to slavery. This culminated in an event like the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of 1730. At this meeting, representatives found that the Glouster and Salem Meeting, the Shrewsbury Meeting, and the Chester Meeting, had come to some sort of negative view of slavery (this took various forms). Because of these views, it was upon them at the yearly meeting to vaguely “caution” purchasers of slaves.⁴²

This cautioning came seven years before Lay's book, but most of the changes regarding thought towards slavery did not come until decades later. The anti-slavery development era had done its job though, it shortened the life of the pro-slavery era, and hastened the approach of the period when anti-slavery sentiments would spread among all of the Friends.

Chapter Two: The Spread of Anti-Slavery Sentiments, John Woolman

Thanks to the work of early Quaker abolitionists, the seed was sown for the next generation to change the hearts of the society on the matter of slavery. The next period to be examined can be roughly assigned to 1740-1800. These are not formal dates, but generally

⁴² Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, “Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1730 [extracts]” (1730), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/936/rec/1.

represent the period when Quaker ministers and meetings began to speak against slavery in a more unanimous voice. By the end of this period, the majority of Friends held the view that slavery was wrong and all should do what was necessary to end it.

There were many men and women who helped spread this anti-slavery idea among Quakers, but John Woolman and Anthony Benezet were two of the most prominent. Because of this, they will be treated as representations of the numerous other abolitionists. Some of these others were John Churchman, Israel Pemberton, and Joseph Nichols. Each of these men also worked against slavery in their own ways, as did a growing number of men and women. Many of these abolitionists worked together—Woolman and Benezet were actually good friends—and when they were not travelling alone, travelled with one another to preach about the end of slavery. Using these two men as representations of their fellows allows this study to examine the minds of the abolitionists more closely, as well as give more specific depictions of what they did to bring the Society of Friends into its anti-slavery years.

John Woolman was born in 1720 to a typical Quaker family. It was about the time of Lay's book being published when a seventeen year old John Woolman began to concern himself with spiritual things. He credits his early learning and spiritual insights to his parents, who taught him and his siblings to read the Holy Scriptures and other religious books, to sit in contemplative silence, and to respect Sundays and Sunday Meetings.⁴³ These early lessons would follow Woolman the rest of his life, and they will be evident at times during this study. He wrote that it was at this time that he came to some of the conclusions that would follow him for years to come—such as the exercise of justice and goodness to all creatures, and an acceptance of different sects' ways of loving God.⁴⁴

⁴³ *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 23-24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25-28.

After a couple years of a reclusive lifestyle, in which he concerned himself only with spirituality and farming his father's land, Woolman was asked to confront the outside world. At age twenty-one, he was asked by a local shopkeeper to “tend shop and keep books.” After deliberating with his father, Woolman agreed that it was time to try something new.⁴⁵

One Sunday after he had been in his new surroundings for a while, Woolman arrived at his local meeting. While there, he sought the guidance of the “True Shepherd,” and “being under a strong exercise of spirit,” he stood up and began to preach. Woolman states that during his first attempt at spontaneous preaching he went beyond the message that God had given him, and was thus “afflicted in mind.” He did not speak for some weeks, but he did speak again, and this became the beginning of Woolman's preaching career.⁴⁶

Shortly after his decision to minister, Woolman encountered his first real dealing with slavery. He had thought on the subject many times and had come to the conclusion that it was a terrible practice. He expressed the view that all people were equal under God, and to keep some in bondage was an abomination. Woolman's first stand against slavery came when his employer instructed him to write a bill of sale for a Negro woman he had just sold. If Woolman had been like Benjamin Lay, it would be easy to assume that he would have refused in the loudest of ways to aid in the propagation of the buying and selling of humans; but young Woolman, faced with the suddenness of the request, wrote the bill of sale. He reasoned that he was only doing it because he had been asked by his employer, and the slave woman was going to an elderly Friend (Woolman's journal provides numerous examples of Quakers keeping slaves, as he primarily dealt with those in his own Society. These dealings will also reveal the theology of different people on the practice of slavery and how Woolman handled each new argument. He

⁴⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

also revealed to his employer that he was uneasy about the whole affair and generally thought little of the practice of slavery. Nevertheless, this instance deeply afflicted Woolman.⁴⁷

Most of Woolman's first dealings with slaves happened in much this same way. One of the next occurrences came when a young Friend asked Woolman to write another document (an “instrument of slavery”) because he had recently acquired a slave. Woolman declined, stating that “the practice was not right.” In their conversation, the young man revealed that he felt some uneasiness as well, but he would still accept the slave because she had been a gift.⁴⁸

This seems strange, that a man would accept a slave, even though he had misgivings about the practice, simply because she was a gift. Woolman ran into cases similar to this many times throughout his lifetime. As has been shown above, Woolman was not the first abolitionist, nor was he the first Quaker abolitionist. Men had been speaking against slavery or advocating for lenience toward slaves for over a half-century before Woolman had even been born. So when it came time for Woolman to start making his religious journeys, he encountered people who had already decided they would not keep slaves, others who had no need for slaves, and still others who kept slaves with no religious or ethical qualms nagging at them—but some who kept slaves did feel some sort of uneasiness. This position of uneasiness was quite large, and many of these people would be Woolman's targets. These became those that were ultimately the most affected by his message. Woolman spoke to anyone and everyone though, regardless of their feelings on the matter, and even when he journeyed deep into slave territory, he often left with what he thought were favorable results.

Before moving on, it bears mentioning why Woolman was even approached to write documents concerning slaves. It was explained above that Woolman was employed to be a shop

⁴⁷ Ibid., 32-33.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 33.

and book-keeper. He had grown proficient at both of these—mostly because of his parents' early emphasis on reading and learning numbers. Later, Woolman decided to take up tailoring as well (his employer was a tailor as well as retailer who taught Woolman some of the business).⁴⁹ Eventually, he became a successful businessman. It is important to note that, in his role as a book-keeper, Woolman wrote out documents such as bills of sale and wills. Sales of slaves and passing slaves along after death was a fact of life, and a man like Woolman who wrote out these documents was highly sought after.

Shortly after his first encounters between his work and his beliefs about slavery, Woolman went on his first ministerial journey. This took place when he was twenty-three years old in 1743. He and other Friends obtained certificates to travel and preach from their meeting and spent two weeks walking around New Jersey. Woolman was mostly a student on this trip—learning from other abolitionists. He spoke little in meetings, but he watched and learned. He wrote in his journal that during this first trip his “mind was often tender,” and he “learned some profitable lessons.”⁵⁰ This is an example of the quiet spirit that Woolman would hold on to throughout his life. By no means was Woolman a man who could not argue, but he always tried to be sensitive to the situation. He would not march into a meeting dressed in military dress to bombard slave-keepers like Benjamin Lay did, he would sit quietly and wait for his moment when his voice would be most effective. In this way, Woolman was something of a tactician. Even though he would attribute most of this to awareness to the Spirit of God, Woolman knew the harm rash speeches could do to his cause, and he tried to avoid them.

Woolman's second journey was more productive than his first (he would ultimately make between twenty and thirty religious journeys, ranging from days to months, through most of the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 34.

English colonies in North America). Once again, he and his companions attained certificates from their meeting. This point bears mentioning because it once again points back to his predecessors like Benjamin Lay. Woolman became something of a radical like they did, but he was a respectable one. He always obtained permission from his meeting and followed the proper channels to do things. Remember, it was an issue of certification that was used to dismiss Lay. This willingness to do things the right way paid off for Woolman, and was again important when he wrote his anti-slavery essay.

After returning from his second journey, Woolman noted two particular things in his journal: (1) his uneasiness of lodging freely with slave-keepers, and (2) what the slave trade did to the traders and keepers. Concerning the first point, it was customary for those traveling with certification to be given food, drink, and lodging for free by the members of the visited meeting. What bothered Woolman was that he was given these things by “people who lived in ease on the hard labour of their slaves....” This discomfort visited Woolman during his entire trip. His second observation was that the actual practice of importing slaves increased the extent of “many vices and corruptions,” and that “in the future the consequence will be grievous to posterity!” These early journeys showed Woolman the extent of slavery in the colonies, and helped him form goals for his ministry.⁵¹

Over the next few years, Woolman made several more preaching expeditions and began to write. His first essay was called: “Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes.” It was not published until 1754, several years after its first draft. The delay is attributed to Woolman's lack of being in a rush, as well as his respect for the proper methods of publication. He edited the work a few times, and at the urging of his dying father, submitted it to the Publications Committee in Philadelphia. The essay was revised and published with the approval of the

⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. It is important here to take another look at previous abolitionists such as William Southerby, John Farmer, and Benjamin Lay. Each of these men got into trouble for various reasons, one of which was publishing anti-slavery works without the permission of the Yearly Meeting. These writings would not have been received so poorly had they not seemed to reflect on the whole Society of Friends. One reason Woolman and his contemporaries were more successful and respected was their willingness to go through the proper channels of publication.⁵²

“Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes” is probably Woolman's most well-known essay. In it, he did not lay out a list of condemnations of the practice of slavery, nor did he issue orders to cease the practice immediately. What he did was lay out his thoughts—his considerations. Woolman was not a man to condemn and order others about; he was a man who proposed questions and helped lead people to what he saw as the right answers. In this essay, he started by writing that he felt it was his duty to offer his thoughts “with divine aid.” He then made his case for the equality of all mankind: “we remember that all nations are of one blood (Gen. 3:20)... that we are subject to the like afflictions and infirmities of body... the like temptations, the same death and the same judgment....” Later, he reminds his readers that even the patriarchs came from negative situations and were several times in bondage, yet they eventually proved to be godly men—so too could the Negroes being kept as slaves be godly if only given the opportunity.—but they were not being given opportunities. Their property, along with their liberty, had been taken from them. So off course they became disconsolate—so would any of the slave-keepers if they had been put in the same situation. The admonition to figuratively placing oneself in the shoes of a slave was a method used by Woolman and many other abolitionists. Woolman continued by stating the contradiction that existed when a person

⁵² “Introduction to the Essays,” in *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 195-196.

who had become a Christian then refused the same opportunity to attain spiritual freedom from another. Woolman's essay is full of imagery meant to provoke thought about the subject of slavery, where people could then seek the truth of God. Woolman's stressing of equality, rather than berating those who kept slaves, made this essay more effective than previous writings.⁵³

While Woolman was busy revising this essay, ministering, and making religious journeys, he was also busy being a businessman. As stated earlier, many of his first contacts with slavery came when he was approached to write bills of sale and wills. As the years progressed, he was still approached for this purpose. In 1753, a man asked Woolman on behalf of his sick brother to write a will. Woolman, knowing that the sick man had slaves, found himself battling with his conscience and the fact that “writing [legal documents] is a profitable employ....” He “looked to the Lord” though, and informed the man that he felt slavery was wrong and would not do any writings concerning it. Woolman reported that the man left without making a reply. After this incident, Woolman decided to act in accordance with “divine love... thereby incurring the resentments of people.” He knew that he was doing the righteous thing even though it was a hard thing. This realization that he was working for God and not the approval of men would come in handy for Woolman when he decided slave-produced goods were something he should stay away from.”⁵⁴

Staying on the topic of what Woolman wrote, it is now important to mention how he eventually handled his small profession of writing legal documents—where he so often encountered the conflicts that existed between his occupation, slavery, and his conscience. Having decided that keeping the truth of God was more important than making other people happy, Woolman decided he would not “be the scribe where... some children are made absolute

⁵³ John Woolman, “Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes: Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of Every Denomination,” in *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 198-209.

⁵⁴ *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 45-46.

masters over others....”⁵⁵ This is representative of the life-changes the abolitionists needed to make in order to practice what they believed in. At a time when they were in the minority position, it was often difficult to continue on in life as others did; at some point, they needed to make decision about whether or not they would live in accordance with their anti-slavery ideas, or compromise their beliefs for payment or some other reason. Soon after making his decision, Woolman was approached by “an ancient man” to write his will. Because he intended to pass on his Negroes, Woolman informed the man that he could not write the will without breaking his own peace. They discussed this for a while, but the man ended up going to a lesser scribe. Some years later, the ancient man returned to have his will re-written and hoped that Woolman had changed his mind and would write the will (bear in mind that this man is also a Quaker). Woolman reported that they “had much friendly talk on the subject,” and the man left again. He returned a few days later and directed the freedom of his slaves. Woolman then wrote his will. This is the first success that Woolman reported in his journal concerning the freedom of slaves.⁵⁶

This instance was directly followed up in the journal by another success. A neighbor of Woolman's was injured and as Woolman was bleeding him, he asked him to write his will. Woolman wrote everything except when he came to the man's slave. He read the will to the man and told him he could not finish it though, and charged him no money. They then discussed the subject of slavery at length. The man agreed to set his slave free and Woolman finished his will.⁵⁷

During these years, Woolman continued his religious journeys. In 1756, he traveled to meet with Friends on Long Island. While there, he observed at several places the keeping of slaves. He spoke privately with these people and sought to, “in a friendly way,” show the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

“inconsistency of that practice with the purity of the Christian religion and the ill effects of it manifested amongst us.” Woolman does not reveal whether or not he made any differences at the times of those discussions, but he likely would not have known if anything came of them—after all, it took the ancient man mention above a number of years and two lengthy discussions with Woolman to free his slaves. During this journey, Woolman also encountered another of his frequent problems—his age. He was constantly plagued in his early years by the fact that he was a young and inexperienced minister in the presence of elders. He firmly believed that he was correct on the topic of slavery, but he wrestled with when and how to question the elders. Ultimately, he spoke little in the meetings of this journey, but he was humbled and continued to learn.⁵⁸

After returning from his Long Island travels, Woolman encountered another business problem. This time, the problem was his success. His business as a tailor had grown yearly and “the road to large business appeared open....” Many men would have been excited by the success of their business, but not Woolman. He had been brought up in the manner of plain living and he had a small family (only his wife and a young daughter), and his business was growing too cumbersome for him. Besides this, he had grown uneasy that he was providing items that “served chiefly to please the vain mind.” Woolman wrote that he was well-suited for the life of a businessman, but he believed God required him to live unencumbered by worldly things. He resigned himself to this and cut back his business.⁵⁹ Abolitionists like Woolman had to make real sacrifices in order to keep up with their beliefs. Their willingness to take financial setback rather than preach less is odd, but in a way that one would commend that person for making the hard choice.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 52-53.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 53.

This decision also gave Woolman more time to minister. During his following travels, he continued to encounter the customary practice of being provided for freely. His answer to this was to simply pay for his food and lodging whenever payment would be accepted. As always, he did this simple thing with tact. He spoke privately with his host and asked them to give the money to their slaves, or when given the chance he would pay the slaves directly. Along with this, Woolman also continued his practice of discussing the matter of slavery. He never berated his hosts for what he saw as a foul practice, but he spoke plainly and his words were often taken kindly. He never demanded an immediate result either. In fact, he often left those he spoke with to think over the discussion and for their own consciences to affect them.⁶⁰

One of Woolman's many discussions that was typical of other abolitionists came in 1757 during his second journey through Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. At this particular time, he mentioned to a militia colonel the strange disparity between men who labored freely, making their own living, and those who labored as slaves. The colonel attributed the disparity to the laziness of Negroes. Woolman then countered, stating that men who work freely on their own business find satisfaction in improving it and providing for their families, but the work of the slave is taken from them and given to others, therefore they have not the motivation "to be industrious." After some more discussion, the man defended the practice of slavery by stating that the lives of slaves were far better in America than they were in Africa. Woolman concluded the discussion by instructing the colonel that this was a poor principle to base enslavement on. Soon after, another man said much the same thing, citing the prevalent wars in Africa. Woolman boldly stated that if that were the case—if compassion had been the motivation for purchasing Africans—then "a spirit of tenderness... would incite us to use them kindly," and teach them the Holy Scriptures, not to purchase them in order to advance oneself and therein support the wars

⁶⁰ Ibid., 60-61.

by making the purchases: “to say they live unhappy in Africa is far from being an argument in our favour.” These discussions offer insight into the kind of arguments early abolitionists heard and how they dealt with them.⁶¹

Woolman continued, and would continue to speak with individuals publicly and privately on the matter of slavery, but he also took his arguments to the meetinghouse. Slavery was a tenuous issue at this time within the Society of Friends. As it was mentioned above, there were abolitionists before Woolman and his contemporaries, but Quakers were far from uniform on the issue. Some meetings had taken to asking their members to stop keeping slaves, others told their members to think about it, yet many more were silent. It had become a big enough issue by the year 1757 however, that the Virginia Yearly Meeting decided to examine the issue. They took the side of the slow-growing trend that frowned on slavery. Woolman found himself engaged in one of those debates in that year in which he condemned the practice of slavery and urged the upper rank of Quakers to take a strong stand for equality. After the meeting, Woolman wrote that he thought “Truth... gained some ground.”⁶²

Woolman's travels took him to many different meetings, and eventually to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1758. At that meeting, Friends were concerned by other Friends who had recently bought slaves. Woolman sat in on a couple of committee meetings in which the issue was discussed. He reported that he was overcome with nervousness because he knew his conscience would call him to speak before the Yearly Meeting on the subject. After some others had spoken on the matter, it was Woolman's turn. He stated before the meeting that though the way was difficult, the way of Truth must be followed and that with hard work, a way would open up to help them “steer through those difficulties.” Some were moved by his words, but as the

⁶¹ Ibid., 61-62.

⁶² Ibid., 66-67.

meeting progressed, Woolman noted that “though none openly justified [slavery],” some were concerned the meeting would take measures that would displease those members that kept slaves. Woolman found a greater voice as the discussion continued, he said: “In infinite love and goodness [God] hath opened our understandings... and it is not a time for delay. Should we be sensible of what he requires of us, and through a respect to the private interest of some persons... neglect to do our duty [?]” Woolman wrote in his journal that much discussion and debate was encountered in this meeting, but that truth prevailed. The results were: the decision to make a rule for those who bought slaves in the future (this become the rule that led to one's exclusion from the meeting), the creation of a body to discover the motives of keeping slaves, and the desire to visit Friends who kept slaves and talk with them about liberty.⁶³ More was done in this meeting than ever before within the Society of Friends pertaining to slavery.

Woolman continued his habit of making religious journeys after this. As he had before, and would continue to do, his main method of speaking against slavery was face to face in people's homes. He did not recall leaving any of these houses with a firm change of heart on the matter, but these changes did come. As owners died, their slaves were freed according to a will, or their children freed them. On a number of occasions though, Woolman reported that “tenderness of heart prevailed,” and minds were either changed or softened.⁶⁴

It is arguable that Woolman's “grassroots” approach was more successful than lobbying yearly meetings. This is because the standards set down by the yearly meetings tended to reflect the decisions local meetings had already come too. This is evident from a 1759 yearly meeting in which Woolman recalled the epistles sent from local meeting to the yearly that recommended to Friends “to labour against the buying and selling of slaves.” Woolman wrote that he was

⁶³ Ibid., 91-93.

⁶⁴ *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 96 and 102,

humbled to see that God's work was gaining favorable results because of his efforts and of others like him.⁶⁵

That being the case, Woolman was still willing to try any method to help end slavery. In 1759, Woolman found himself in Pennsylvania while the legislature was in session. Not wanting to let the opportunity escape him, Woolman wrote an essay dealing with the importation of slaves and the harm that keeping slaves can do to a society. He read his essay among several high ranking Friends where it was received warmly. They kept the essay to expand it and present it before the legislature as a petition to end to the importation of slaves into Pennsylvania. This was one of the times Woolman was close to petitioning a government, but that was rare for him, his grassroots approach was probably more successful than his limited work with government. Anthony Benezet was one of those other abolitionists that lobbied government and meeting more than Woolman. It aided in their cause that they had men and women who worked in all spheres of life.⁶⁶

One strategy employed by Woolman, if not others, was strategic silence. As he traveled, he constantly sought the will and strength of God. One of Woolman's great fears was to do something contrary to God's will, and that far outweighed his sometimes reluctance to speak his mind before others. The other side of this was keeping quiet. Silence was not something that was necessarily difficult for a man who spent years in solitude as a young man and many days and weeks alone while traveling. It might be proposed that some holy strength had begun to infect Woolman though, and sometimes he wanted to speak up, but his fear of saying the wrong thing made him think twice. He did this because he did not want anyone to be obedient to the wrong

⁶⁵ Ibid., 97.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 109-110.

version of Christ. Woolman's concern with spreading the full truth was the main reason for his quiet nature and the reason he preached in such a personal way—speaking in people's homes.⁶⁷

One specific method Woolman employed to help bring slavery to an end was to organize a meeting among Quaker elders. He brought these men and women together to confer about the practice and to offer reasons for why it should be ended. Woolman left the meeting satisfied, stating that a number of hearts were softened and several there decided to free their slaves after their own deaths.⁶⁸

In 1762, Woolman's essay, "Considerations on Keeping Negroes: Part Second," was published. This essay reiterated and clarified some of the arguments made in the first essay, as well as presenting new material and evidence learned over the previous decade. Woolman's motives and much of his reasons for wanting to end slavery have been explored in this study, and will not be examined here again. What can be newly gained from studying the publishing of this book, is a better understanding of Woolman's mind. The Overseers of the Press offered to print and distribute Woolman's essay free of charge, and to give them away instead of selling them. Woolman declined this and paid for the publication and printing himself. He reasoned that if the books were given away freely, some of the slaves owned by Friends might then obtain copies and conceal them, angering their owners. Instead, Woolman believed that people generally read more carefully what they purchased than what they obtained for free. Since Woolman's goal was honest thought, he believed this would result in more widespread reading of his essay. This was a rather stealthy attempt by Woolman to spread his ideas. He only sold the books to cover the cost of having them printed and bound, and he kept several to give away on his travels.⁶⁹ At a time

⁶⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 111-112.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 117-118.

when there were many still hostile to what they believed, abolitionists needed to employ all kinds of creative ideas in order to spread their ideas.

It is about this time in Woolman's life when he began to wrestle with some of his habits, one of which was wearing clothes and hats produced by the labor of slaves. He wrestled with the knowledge that his clothes were dyed certain colors because of slaves also. One of his chief reasons for not wanting to stop wearing his normal clothes was that he would be singled out among his peers. Woolman was not immune to wanting to please his peers, but he eventually came to the conclusion that he could not morally support slavery in any way. So in 1762, he started wearing undyed clothing. This trend of avoiding slave-made goods would be resurrected over a half century later by the Free Produce Movement in the Second Great Awakening. In their attempt to boycott slave-produced goods, they pointed back to Woolman as one of the men first responsible for starting their movement. They reported that besides his choice of clothing, Woolman also abstained from many sweets, most sugar, and even medicine that might have saved his life—all because they would have come at the expense of slave labor.⁷⁰

In 1772, Woolman decided to travel to England to continue his fight against slavery. While at sea, he held several meetings with the sailors. Upon his arrival to England, Woolman concerned himself with the routine he was used to: moving from meeting to meeting and house to house. In his journal, Woolman listed a number of indictments of British life, including the expense of certain goods, the cruelty to certain animals, the plight of the poor, the filthiness of the country, and the willingness of Quakers to engage in the slave trade.⁷¹

⁷⁰ *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 120-121; Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends, *An Address to the Members of the Religious Society of Friends on the Subject of Slavery and the Slave-Trade* (Philadelphia: 1849), 9, Quakers and Slavery Project, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed December 3, 2014, http://trptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/11664/rec/1.

⁷¹ *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 182-183 and 190.

After continuing his work for as long as he could, Woolman was forced to be confined to a bed. After recovering from a life-threatening bout of pleurisy two years prior, Woolman was once again sick, this time with small pox. He spent his last days communing with God until he died on October 7, 1772.⁷²

John Woolman's life represented a group of preachers and laypeople who worked to change the society's view of slavery. Not only does his life represent the movement, but he was a primary mover of it. As it was discussed above, Woolman was not the first Quaker abolitionist, but he was among the first to be effective. Men like Benjamin Lay were outspoken in their abolition, they said many of the same things that Woolman did, but his methods were the chief reason why he was successful and they were not. Woolman was a quiet soul who was respectful as much as possible. His goal of respect did not stop him from being bold when he needed to be or from questioning the long-held beliefs of others. Woolman was one of the most prominent Quaker abolitionists of his day, but he still represents the efforts of many other preachers and those whose names are not even known.

Chapter Three: The Spread of Anti-Slavery Sentiments, Anthony Benezet

Perhaps the only man that could equal the lasting influence of John Woolman, if not surpass it, was Anthony Benezet. Both men were active during the middle of the eighteenth century, but due to Woolman's death in 1772 at age 51, Benezet was left to take up the informal leadership of the campaign for abolition.

One difference between Woolman and Benezet was the audience to whom each spoke. Woolman was a travelling preacher who spoke at meetings and people's homes. Benezet was a

⁷² "Appendix H: Woolman's Final Illness and Death," in *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Moulton, 301-306. Woolman spent his last days at the home of Thomas and Sarah Priestman. Thomas Priestman and William Tuke, one of his caretakers, kept the record of what Woolman did during this last period of his life.

school teacher who also spoke in meeting and one-on-one, but he also found himself speaking with more of the upper-class than Woolman. Benezet's writings were popular among all classes though, and he was always willing to speak to anyone. Benezet's character can be well summed up in a story recounted in one of his biographies: during Philadelphia's occupation by the British during the Revolutionary War, Benezet did what he could to alleviate the harsh situations of the inhabitants. At one instance, he met and talked with a poor washerwoman who could not perform her job duties and provide for her family because six Hessian soldiers had been quartered in her home. Determined to aid the woman, Benezet promptly went to the home of the occupying general and, without a pass, ceremony, or proper etiquette, he took a seat, moving it right next to that of the general, and promptly informed him of the poor washerwoman's problem. This story informs readers of Benezet's care for the lowly as well as his boldness in any situation. The last piece that can be gleaned from this story is that Benezet was so eloquent, that he left the general's house with the request to call on the general whenever it was convenient for further conversation.⁷³

Benezet was born in France on January 31, 1713 to an old and wealthy Huguenot family. When he was an infant, the family was forced to leave France for religious reasons. They went first to Holland, then to London. It was in London that a fourteen year old Benezet joined the Society of Friends. At age eighteen, the family moved again, this time to Philadelphia. His first few years in America were spent in small business ventures that proved not to be among Benezet's talents.⁷⁴

Benezet's next profession was that of a schoolteacher. He started this in 1742 at the William Penn Seminary in Germantown where he taught for twelve years. His following venture

⁷³ Wilson Armistead, *Anthony Benezet: From the Original Memoir (1859)* (London: A. W. Bennet, Bishopsgate-Street, 1859), 133-134.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-5.

was to start a school of his own in 1755. This was an all-girls school, where Benezet found himself in charge of the daughters of Philadelphia's most affluent families. At this school, Benezet reformed education by tailoring the curriculum to individual students. This was especially the case when he was given a deaf-mute girl as a charge. Some good strides were made at the time for the education of deaf-mutes (Abbe De L'Eppee and Abbe Sicard), and though Benezet did not leave the lasting impact in deaf education that these two did, this is still another area of his accomplishments.⁷⁵

Benezet's first abolitionist work was the establishment of another school. This started in his home in 1750, where he taught young blacks in the evenings. This was a natural first step for Benezet. As a teacher, all he did differently was teach different students. Teaching black students was also at the root of who Benezet was as an abolitionist. He was against slavery because of his belief in equality among the races. If black students could learn just as well as white students, they could demonstrate their intellectual equality, thus combatting one of the primary defenses of slavery: the inferiority of the black mind.⁷⁶

Black education was expanded in 1770. The Philadelphia Monthly Meeting in January of that year proposed a school be created for black students—it is likely Benezet was behind the proposal. The African Free School officially opened on June 28, 1770, and taught at least 250 black boys and girls between 1770 and 1775. Because of his previous experience teaching black children, Benezet was relied on as an aid to the overseers. He helped gauge student and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6-10.

⁷⁶ Emma Jones Lapansky, "Philadelphia Friends and African Americans 1680-1900: An Introduction," in *For Emancipation and Education: Some Black and Quaker Efforts, 1680-1900*, ed. Elia Cope Harrison (Germantown, PA: Awbury Arboretum Association, 1997), 10.

curriculum development. He remained a major part of the running of the school until 1782, when he became its headmaster. Benezet retained this position until his death in 1784.⁷⁷

When he died, Benezet left money to a few families and charities, but upon the death of his wife (who died soon after), the bulk of his funds were to be left to the school and the further education of black youth.⁷⁸ It is characteristic of Benezet the teacher that upon his death he would still want to see education expanded. At the end of his life, Benezet believed that “the education of black youth was his signal achievement.”⁷⁹

For Benezet, there seems not to be one great instance where he decided that he needed to make a stand against slavery. Where Woolman had a few of these moments and they can be read in his journal, documents concerning Benezet are written assuming his anti-slavery beliefs, but not a first cause. Though a defining moment is not easily found in the life of Benezet, his works and why he did them are a different matter. His correspondence, pamphlets, and essays reveal what he thought, and there are numerous accounts of what he did on behalf of slaves and free blacks.

Taking the step to abolition was not a big one for Benezet, he was always a man who cared for the lowly and did what he could for them. Throughout his life, Benezet collected charitable donations and put them to use. When the school for black children was still young, it got by solely on donations, most of which were solicited by Benezet himself.⁸⁰ And after it was seen how much he left the school upon his death, several others left considerable donations so that its debts were met and more.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 22-24.

⁷⁸ Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 138.

⁷⁹ Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 23.

⁸⁰ Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 17.

⁸¹ Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, *Brief Sketch of the Schools for Black People and Their Descendants Established by the Society of Friends in 1770* (Philadelphia, PA: Friends Books Store, 1867), 18.

Yet more of Benezet's financial contributions went to his good friend Benjamin Franklin. He helped fund the almanacs that Franklin published in his attempt to spread the word of the injustices of slavery to everyone that he possibly could. He included his own pieces in the almanacs and every other medium that was available. This included keeping tracts on his person at all times for convenient distribution.⁸²

Whereas John Woolman's journal exists to detail his day-to-day accounts of his efforts to end slavery, no such journal exists for Benezet. Because of this, historians must rely on his correspondence, records that mention him, and the earliest biographies for information about Benezet's doings. These things will be examined later, for it is necessary now to understand what Benezet thought. This is significantly easier because of the numerous essays, tracts, and correspondence that have survived. Three of Benezet's essays will be examined next with a discussion of his correspondence, especially with the British Abolitionist Granville Sharp.

The first essay that requires discussion is *A Short Account of that Part of Africa Inhabited by Negroes*. This was written in 1762 while Benezet was teaching at the girls' school. Benezet wrote that the goal of the essay was to: (1) to demonstrate the evil of slavery—it causes practitioners to disregard relationships with God and other men; (2) to “invalidate the false arguments” defending slavery—thus stopping others from practicing; and (3) to list the dangers that the men already engaged in the practice face. Benezet recounted the assumption that Negroes are a stupid and savage people. His school for black children was used to refute this assumption. Not only did he prove that blacks could learn just as well as whites, but his classes that taught craftsmanship, trade, and house work proved blacks could become successful contributing members to civilization. One of the arguments for slavery that is cited states that slaves were taken from Africa in order to save them from the fate of their enemies if they were to

⁸² Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 58.

lose in one of the endless wars fought on the continent. Benezet asserts that though wars were the first cause for slavery, it was only the demand for slaves that then caused a great increase in war. This, he says, blatantly ignores “the Gospel, the Feelings of Humanity, [and] the common Dictates of Reason and Equity.”⁸³ This essay continues as it attempts to support the three points noted above.

Some Historical Account of Guinea is another lengthy essay that re-addressed some of the same aspects as the above work and the tracts that had been written preceding 1771, when this essay was published. In this work, Benezet wrote more on the history of slavery. One notable accusation was that the ancient mode of slavery was much preferable to the way it was practiced in the colonies. It was in Christianity’s older days, when its adherents were often just as barbarous as the slaves themselves, that the practice was less deplorable. In those days, there was even a greater chance for freedom says Benezet. It was a terrible side-effect of the human condition that, as Christianity and society developed, men became more violent and slavery a more prevalent problem. In this essay, as he does in his other works, Benezet cites other writers, philosophers, and theologians. He cites Montesquieu who said that slavery was beneficial neither for the slave, for “he can do nothing through principle,” nor for the master, for “he contracts with his slave all sorts of bad habits, insensibility accustoms himself to want all moral virtues; becomes haughty, hasty, hard-hearted... and cruel.”⁸⁴

Benezet’s writings were instrumental in turning the Society of Friends into an anti-slavery society, but he did not want to restrict himself only to the Friends. At different times he wrote letters to the queens of England, France, and Spain; he wanted to have as much influence

⁸³ Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account of that Part of Africa Inhabited by Negroes* (Philadelphia, PA: W. Dunlap, 1762), 4-9, accessed March 12, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/shortaccountofth00benerich#page/n3/mode/2up>.

⁸⁴ Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (London: J. Phillips, George Yard, Lombard-street, 1771), 54-71, accessed March 12, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/somehistoricalac1788bene#page/n9/mode/2up>.

as possible. It is no surprise then when one of England's most well-known abolitionists points to Benezet as the man who set him on his path. Thomas Clarkson was born in England in 1760 and helped pass the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which ended Britain's slave trade.

It was Benezet's above-described *Account of Guinea* that a young Clarkson picked up when he was researching the lawfulness of slavery for a dissertation. Clarkson later wrote of the coadjutors, Woolman and Benezet, who were each prepared by God in a different way to labor for the end of slavery. Woolman was more of a laborer who attacked slavery; Benezet was a laborer who attacked the trade and let his influence spread beyond America. In his recount of his own story he cites Benezet's "precious book" as one that led him to other authors and nearly all of the answers sought.⁸⁵

One reason that Benezet's book made its way into the hands of Clarkson was because of the collaboration between the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the London Yearly Meeting of Quakers. These bodies exchanged works with each other to reach wider audiences.⁸⁶ This is a good example of the correspondence that went on between Benezet and his fellows. Letters between Benezet and English abolitionist Granville Sharp, not nearly extensive enough for their valuable contents, have survived to show historians how ideas were spread among these anti-slavery advocates and how they worked together.

Coincidentally, both Benezet and Sharp came to learn of each other in the same way. Both men came to possess one of the written works of the other and proceeded to use it to help their own position in the anti-slavery debate. Benezet's letter to Sharp in 1772 states his republishing of Sharp's work and of his intention to send some books to be edited in England. He

⁸⁵ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, vol. 1, (London, 1808), 166-209, accessed March 12, 2015, http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/clarkson-the-history-of-the-abolition-of-the-african-slave-trade-vol-1#lf0591-01_head_008.

⁸⁶ Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 59.

also wrote in this letter of some of his efforts: writing to leaders of the Friends to announce their abhorrence of slavery, his desire to place a letter before the English king, and his belief that nearly twenty thousand people would “freely join a petition to Parliament against any further import” of slaves to the colonies.⁸⁷

Sharp replied to this letter by first informing Benezet that he too had republished the other man’s work and had it distributed to several important men. The discussion recorded in these letters, as well as others, are conversational—each man informing the other of what is going on in their home and the efforts being made against slavery. In this way, Sharp informed Benezet that his new tract argued against slavery using scripture, instead of English law, like his previous tract. This informs readers of the necessity of abolitionists adapt their arguments to combat different points of view, including those who used the Bible to defend their keeping of slaves. An interesting note from this letter is Sharp’s response to the news of the twenty thousand petitioners that Benezet could produce. He wrote that it was good news, and that it would garner some respect for the colonies, as well as lay a possible foundation for the end of the slave trade. Providing an example of how abolitionists worked together, Sharp then suggested to Benezet that the petition would need to be of a general nature, stating that the colonists would like to see an end to the slave trade, not just the importation of slaves into the colonies. This was because it was within the power of the colonial assemblies to restrict the importation of slaves already, so if petitioned in that way, it would likely see no results.⁸⁸ In addition to Sharp, Benezet also kept correspondence with other notables of the times: Robert Shackleton, Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, Israel Pemberton, and others.

⁸⁷ Anthony Benezet to Granville Sharp, May 14, 1772, in Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 28-32.

⁸⁸ Granville Sharp to Anthony Benezet, in Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 32-36.

Benezet's desire to work with the British Parliament expresses that he believed government aid was necessary in abolishing the slave trade. Where both he and Woolman wrote tracts and essays and spoke to individuals and in meetings to try to change their minds, Benezet understood that even if all the Quakers emancipated their slaves, there would still be others who kept up the practice unless it was illegal. Armed with this knowledge, Benezet wrote to Parliament, he wrote to queens, and he spoke before assemblies.

In 1783, Benezet penned a letter to Queen Charlotte of Great Britain. With it, he sent a number of tracts about slavery to her. In his letter, he wrote of how he had spent the last forty years of his life laboring against slavery, considering it his duty. In order to address the problem of slavery, he insinuates that so long as Britain continues in its current support of slavery, the nation will continue to be the subject of "Divine displeasure." Benezet may have been referring to Britain's loss of the American colonies only a few weeks prior. He goes on to request that Queen Charlotte join him in his work on behalf of the oppressed slaves. For in doing so, she would not only be an instrument of God, but she would also gain the praise of all those she would be aiding.⁸⁹ Benezet rather slyly linked Britain's political authority in the world with its support of slavery, and applied flattery with the possibility of becoming a savior in this letter. After a lifetime of working with all sorts of people, he had learned how to converse and act. Benezet was already known to the queen, and upon reading the letter she reported that she would accept and read the tracts sent with it.⁹⁰

In addition to the Queen of Great Britain, Benezet also wrote to the queens of France and Portugal, other nobles, and the Archbishop of Canterbury—the head priest of the Church of England. A simple reading of his letter to the Archbishop reveals what has already been learned

⁸⁹ Anthony Benezet to Queen Charlotte of Great Britain, August 25, 1783, accessed March 17, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/9705.

⁹⁰ Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 50.

about Benezet from studying his letters above: he was concerned about the plight of slaves and wanted to bring slavery to an end, therefore he sent the reader some tracts and books and was seeking their help. A deeper reading of the letter reveals scathing accusation. Benezet recounted to the Archbishop that it was strange how slavery had persisted under the rule of law. In his letter to Queen Charlotte he wrote of how beloved she would be if she aided in the demise of slavery, but to the Archbishop, a man of God like himself, he all but accuses him of wickedness and corruption. After commenting on how strange it was that slavery's support under the law, Benezet stated that it was because the laity and the clergy "have been unacquainted with the horrible wickedness with which the trade is carried on, the corrupt motives which give life to it, and the groans, the numberless dying groans, which daily ascend to God, the Common Father of mankind, from the broken hearts of these our deeply oppressed fellow-creatures."⁹¹ Benezet did not come right out and accuse the Archbishop of any crimes, but he was under no illusions that the priesthood had no idea what kind of lives slaves lived. This is a critical letter that accuses the Church of England and men of God for allowing the enslavement of men, women, and children, an abominable practice in the sight of God, whom they claimed to serve.

By 1780, the Society of Friends had been greatly influenced by many great anti-slavery advocates. Just as the Quakers had gradually been turning into an anti-slavery society, the efforts of those early abolitionists were about to start reaping gains. Benezet was in Philadelphia at the time of the sitting of the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1780. It is reported that he met privately with every member of Pennsylvania's government and therefore provided further aid to the cause of abolition. What resulted from the Assembly that year was An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery.⁹² Gradual abolition was the first step in universal emancipation. Even Great Britain,

⁹¹ Anthony Benezet to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 1758, in Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 23-24.

⁹² Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 104-105.

which ended slavery thirty years before the United States, acted gradually by first eliminating the slave trade twenty years earlier. This was done for tactical reasons; it was far more likely to end slavery slowly than all at once. There are many who look back to this time of history and are angered by the length of time it took to free an enslaved people, and from humanitarian standpoint their anger is vindicated, but that is not the way it worked in history for many of the reasons noted in this study. What history reveals though, is that there were men and women who knew the enslavement of their fellow humans needed to end, and they did all they could when they could. Men such as Woolman and Benezet were limited by their time and lack of support, but that is what it meant to be pioneers of the abolitionist movement. Woolman did not live long enough to see that slavery ended, neither did Benezet; but Benezet did live long enough to see Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York pass gradual abolition laws—all led by Pennsylvania, where he personally met with the men who voted to enact the law.⁹³ Benezet did not spend most of his time soliciting government, rather he continued his efforts while still teaching, but as stated above, he left no avenue untried.

Where Benezet was not always involved with government, he was often involved with the governing bodies of the Society of Friends. He frequented meetinghouses and spoke on the matter of slavery, though he was not a minister. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of 1754 was one meeting where Benezet was quite influential, and was when the Society of Friends began to make some real changes concerning slavery.

This story actually started with a letter written by Woolman about the buying and keeping of slaves. Benezet then persuaded the 1754 yearly meeting to use the letter as a basis, then he

⁹³ Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 249.

edited it into *An Epistle of Caution and Advice, Concerning the Buying and Keeping of Slaves*—the product of the yearly meeting and a benchmark in Quaker abolitionist history.⁹⁴

The *Epistle of Caution and Advice* starts by recognizing that yearly meetings have recently been a place for Quakers to voice their uneasiness with slavery, yet they also recognize that the number of slaves has increased in the Society of Friends. It then declares its purpose: to make the opinion of the meeting formal so that “none may plead Ignorance” that they desire none of their members to make slaves of their fellow human beings. “How,” they ask, “...can we who have been concerned to publish the Gospel of universal Love and Peace among mankind, be so inconsistent... as to purchase such who are Prisoners... and thereby encourage this antichristian Practice?” The document continues this line of reasoning and ends with an admonishment for Friends to seriously consider why they keep slaves and if those gains are worth it.⁹⁵

Benezet frequented meetings like these which only served to add to his influence with the Friends. One result of this was the establishment of more black schools and committees to run them. Another was to make it easier for blacks to worship and conduct religious gatherings.⁹⁶ In addition to his aid in these, Benezet also helped form the first American abolitionist society in 1775: The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage (later known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society—PAS). This society was formed as a byproduct of his efforts to aid several blacks as they were being trafficked through Philadelphia from New Jersey to one

⁹⁴ Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 52-55. See also this copy of an excerpt from the 1754 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting: “A proposal of making that Rule of our Discipline respecting the Importation of Negroes or the Purchasing of them after imported, more publick, together with some reasons to discourage that practice being laid before this Meeting by Anthony Benezet, it was read, and Michael Lightfoot, and others together with Anthony Benezet are desired to consider it, and prepare it, to be laid before our next Meeting, in order for Publication.” In George S. Brooks, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 80-81.

⁹⁵ Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, *An Epistle of Caution and Advice, Concerning the Buying and Keeping of Slaves* (1754), accessed March 17, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/1547.

⁹⁶ Armistead, *From the Original Memoir*, 68-72.

of the southern states. Benezet helped prove their freedom and then formed the society to assist others in similar situations. The society did not last long because of the interference of the Revolutionary War, but it was reorganized in 1784 as the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and for the Relief of Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage. Quakers formed a majority in both organizations, but the organizations themselves considered themselves secular; secular in that members need not be tied to a specific religious group.⁹⁷

Due to the increased efforts of Quaker abolitionists like Benezet and the PAS, the Society of Friends met its next benchmark in 1774. Having accepted a report that specified the still large number of slaves kept by Quakers, the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting made its boldest move to date: all members were to emancipate their slaves or cease to be recognized as members of the church. This example was followed by Quaker meetings in other states as well.⁹⁸ The yearly meeting knew there would be many who would ignore the new ruling, so it began to send out officials to local meetings to record mass manumissions and note those who held on to their slaves.⁹⁹ “Benezet served on the manumissions committee and added to his already enormous tasks of teaching, writing, petitioning, and lobbying,” in addition to his duties as an elder in the Society of Friends, which he had been named in 1770.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid., 105.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁹ Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in Virginia, “Black Water Monthly Meeting Manumissions, 1776 – 1779” (1776-1779), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/10301/rec/1; Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in Virginia, “Virginia Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1779 [extracts]” (1779), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/11439/rec/1; Chesterfield Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, “Chesterfield Manumissions,” (1774-1848) Quakers and Slavery Project, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/5123/rec/12; Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, “The Original Papers of Manumission by the Monthly Meetings Composing the Quarterly Meeting of Philadelphia” (1772-1790), Quakers and Slavery Project, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, accessed December 3, 2014, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/9585/rec/1.

¹⁰⁰ Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 217-219.

This is how Benezet spent his last decade, doing the same things he had done his entire life: teaching, which he loved, and working to end the enslavement of blacks, whom he loved. Benezet died on May 3, 1784 at age 81.

These abolitionist Friends that have been examined were the turning point in the Society's history. The eighteenth century began with a pro-slavery society and a few who spoke out against it, but when led by men like Woolman and Benezet, the century closed with a nearly unanimous society against slavery. The sheer amount of change that occurred as a result of their work points to their legacies. The work of these men truly came to fruition when the younger generation who had listened to the arguments against slavery had grown up. This generation emancipated the slaves of their elders and neither bought slaves nor supported the practice in any way.

It is obvious that anti-slavery Friends did not single-handedly end the practice of slavery in America. It continued until January 1, 1863 when Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. What they did do though, was make great strides within the Society of Friends as a whole, and effect numerous outsiders. They spoke to hundreds of thousands of individuals during the eighteenth century and influenced many others with their writings. The great number slave manumissions in the last decades of the century prove their success thus far, and foretold of much to come from the next generation. If a relative few could make so much progress against slavery within the Society of Friends, then how much more progress could a united Society of Friends make?

Chapter Four: The Anti-slavery Era

The Anti-slavery Era among the Society of Friends is also the last era. When the Society of Friends was formed, its members kept slaves just as others did. But next came one hundred years of slowly building animosity toward the practice until suddenly it declared itself opposed. There is no other group that has more right to say that the abolitionist movement was started within its ranks. Not only was the abolitionist movement started by Quakers, but they also boasted of significant progress before most other organizations decided to declare themselves against slavery.

The beginning of this last era within Quaker history might be said to have started in 1774. As previously discussed, this was when mass emancipations began in Pennsylvania and the yearly meeting made its strongest stand against slavery: all Friends were to free their slaves, or cease to be members of the Quaker church. By 1787, nearly one hundred years after the first anti-slavery petition was penned in Germantown, PA, it was reported that no acknowledged Quaker in Pennsylvania owned a slave.¹⁰¹

The closing decades of the eighteenth century saw a flurry of laws enacted in the northern United States that either ended the slave trade in a particular state, outlawed the practice of slavery, or both. The Quaker abolitionists had been successful in converting their society to one free of slavery, but the continued enslavement of their fellow humans caused them to continue their crusade. As Benezet's first anti-slavery organization was revived, others were being created; this was to be the new medium that abolition took in America.

The number of abolitionists rose dramatically in the nineteenth century as groups outside of the Quakers took a stronger stance. One reason for this was the Second Great Awakening

¹⁰¹ Clarkson, *The History of the Rise*, 179, http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/clarkson-the-history-of-the-abolition-of-the-african-slave-trade-vol-1#lf0591-01_head_008.

(SGA), a period of intense religious revival. After nearly one hundred years of pioneering the anti-slavery movement, the Quakers became one of many. Most new organizations had members from various religious sects working together. Some of the new organizations that featured a majority of Quakers were: the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (1833), the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (1837), and the New York Association of Friends for the Relief of Those Held in Slavery and the Improvement of the Free People of Color (1839).

Just as Benjamin Lay, John Woolman, and Anthony Benezet have served as representatives of their fellows in the abolitionist movement, so too did the Free Produce Movement serve to represent the many Quaker abolitionist organizations of this period.

In the midst of the SGA began the Free Produce Movement. This movement worked to bring about the end of slavery by economic means. In this way, it was an early predecessor of modern fair labor movements. Terms like fair labor and free labor are becoming increasingly popular and important in the modern age, but they found their origin over two hundred years ago. At the height of the SGA there were several free produce societies. These operated on the basis that if goods could be produced without slave labor, they could then be sold to offer an alternative to goods provided by slave owners. This would then make the keeping of slaves too expensive, thus resulting in the freeing of slaves and the end of the institution.

Before exploring the free produce organizations themselves, it is prudent to study the men who pioneered the idea. Three men who were important prior to the movement are familiar: Lay, Woolman, and Benezet.

In the biographical work, *The Annual Monitor*, Lay is credited as having been the first Quaker to really sow the seeds of abolition within the society. It also records Lay's peculiar dressing habits: "All his clothes were of his own manufactory." This was part of Lay's fight; he

refused to use the garments that they produced. He also kept a strange diet, living mostly on vegetables and water—this was likely also a way to keep from using goods produced by slave labor.¹⁰²

After Lay was Woolman. His part in the Free Produce Movement's history also revolved around clothing: he wore clothing and hats that had not been dyed. He decided to do this upon reflection on the harmful conditions of slaves.¹⁰³ Even before he decided not to wear slave produced garments, Woolman had made it a habit to try to pay slaves for their services. The custom of the day was to provide food and lodging for traveling ministers, but Woolman was uneasy about living off of the labor of slaves. He asked his hosts to accept money and give it to their slaves, or he would pay the slaves without their masters' knowledge.¹⁰⁴ Early in his life, Woolman boycotted slave goods because he reasoned that it was immoral to buy them, but he later came to the realization that boycotting could economically hurt slave holders, the basis on which the Free Produce Movement rested on: "Was the trade to this continent from the West Indies to be quite stopped at once, I believe many there would suffer for want of bread."¹⁰⁵

Benezet also recognized the logic of undermining the economic support for slavery. In one of his works, he wrote: "Without purchasers there would be no trade, and consequently every purchaser as he encourages the trade, becomes partaker in the guilt of it."¹⁰⁶

These three men are some who the creators of the Free Produce Movement pointed back to in order to support their movement. But free labor and free goods did not amount to anything

¹⁰² Benjamin Rush, *The Annual Monitor [extracts]* (Thomas Wilson and Sons; W. Alexander, 1813), 5-8, Quakers and Slavery Project, accessed November 21, 2014, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/11125.

¹⁰³ John Woolman, *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton (1971; repr., Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1994), 120-121.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

¹⁰⁶ Anthony Benezet, "Observations on the Inslaving, Importing and Purchasing of Negroes," (Germantown, PA: C. Sower, 1760), quoted in "Anthony Benezet," Chilterns Quaker Programme, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/60>.

beyond a few individuals until 1826 and 1827, when free produce societies were created and their constitutions written. In an address to the Society of Friends, the Philadelphia Free Produce Association stated that the religious basis for the nature of free produce societies: “We believe that slaveholding is diametrically opposed to the whole spirit and tenor of the Christian religion.”¹⁰⁷

The SGA was a period of protestant revivals and theological development in the United States. A characteristic of the Second Great Awakening was an emphasis on personal salvation and the nurturing of a holy life. Many organizations were created to aid people on their way to this holy life—to help people eradicate sin from lives and get to heaven. Some of these organizations dealt in the areas of temperance, international missions, education, formation of new religious sects, and—most important to this study—abolition. As an outgrowth of the Quakers and the SGA, the Free Produce Movement was based on the Christian belief of equality. To deal with the social ill of slavery, it took its Christian principles and attempted to apply them by placing economic pressure on slave-keepers and other proponents of the practice.

Besides the contributions of Lay, Woolman, and Benezet, there were other men and women important to the creation of the Free Produce Movement. Benjamin Lundy (1789-1839) was one of these. He was a Quaker abolitionist who started several anti-slavery societies and newspapers, including a newspaper titled: *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Lundy is also considered one of the chief influencers in the life of William Lloyd Garrison, one of the most

¹⁰⁷ Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends, “Constitution of the Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends,” in *An Address to the Members of the Religious Society of Friends on the Subject of Slavery and the Slave-Trade* (Philadelphia: 1849), 15, Quakers and Slavery Project, accessed December 3, 2014, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/11664.

well-known abolitionist writers.¹⁰⁸ In 1826, Lundy opened a store in Baltimore which sold “goods [that were] solely the product of free labor.”¹⁰⁹

The Free Produce Movement was not solely an American one. Just as American Quakers in the time of Benezet worked with their brothers and sisters in Britain, there existed a number of British organizations that worked within the free produce framework. One of the women who contributed to this movement was Elizabeth Heyrick. In 1836, she wrote a pamphlet that attacked the hypocrisy of condemning slavery yet partaking of its fruits. She lamented that England had ended its slave trade, but continued to support the practice. Heyrick wrote that there was one thing that her countrymen needed to do: abstain “from the use of West Indian productions, especially sugar,” which was the chief export.¹¹⁰ Joined by several women's societies, Heyrick produced more “boycott sugar” pamphlets and recorded the names of those who took up their call. Approximately 400,000 people gave up sugar as part of this boycott at its height.¹¹¹

Decades prior to Lundy and Heyrick and the Free Produce Movement a whole, Quaker Elias Hicks called for a general boycott of slave-produced goods. In an 1814 revision of an earlier pamphlet, Hicks reiterated his observations of slavery—what it did to the slaves, what it did to the society around the slaves, and what the society could do to put an end to the practice. As part of this, he asked the question: what would be the effect on slave holders and slaves if everyone refused to purchase or use goods produced by slavery? He went on to answer this question: the slave holders would hopefully be convinced of their unrighteousness and cruelty,

¹⁰⁸ “Benjamin Lundy,” Ohio History Connection, accessed November 21, 2014, http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Benjamin_Lundy.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin Lundy, *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy*, ed. Thomas Earl (Philadelphia: William D. Parrish, 1847), 204, accessed November 21, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=K6-0mL5c_PMC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia A. S. Society, 1837), 15, accessed November 21, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/immediatenotgrad00heyri>.

¹¹¹ “Boycotting Goods Produced by Slaves,” Chilterns Quakers Programme, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/153>.

and alleviate the wretched condition of the slaves. Hicks's call for a general boycott would not catch on for over a decade, but his voice helped lay the groundwork for the movement to come.¹¹²

The Free Produce Movement saw some of its first major steps in 1827 when Thomas M'Clintock and other Friends formed the Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania. This was the group that brought the movement to the start of its most notable decades. In 1838, this and other groups that had formed joined together to form the American Free Produce Society. Like most of the other organizations created at this time, Free Produce societies functioned like something of a business. They first established a constitution or a set of bylaws, then they elected a board of directors, and then these directors appointed members to committees. Most of the work was conducted by the committee members, many who traveled to find suppliers of non-slave produced goods or to establish stores to sell the goods.¹¹³

One of the first things that free produce societies needed to figure out was how to obtain freely-produced goods. This proved to be a tedious process that involved sending Friends from one farm to another to another in search of suppliers. In one document, a Manufacturing Committee reported that its agents had located a possible source of free cotton, and this had led them to several other possible sources.¹¹⁴ The obtaining of goods proved to be one of the biggest challenges for the movement. There were many who were willing to support the Free Produce Movement by boycotting slave-produced goods, but not many of those were willing to pay the extra price. When agents of the free produce societies found suppliers, they often had to pay

¹¹² Elias Hicks, "Observations on the Slavery of the Africans and Their Descendants, and on the Use of the Produce of Their Labour," (1814; Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Chapman, 1861), accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qwhp/hickslave.htm>.

¹¹³ "Boycotting Goods Produced by Slaves."

¹¹⁴ Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends, "Report of the Manufacturing Committee of the Free Produce Association of Friends," Quakes and Slavery Project, accessed March 22, 2015, http://triptych.brynmaur.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/997.

more than they would need to pay slave-holders for their goods. This raised the end price of free goods, and was one reason why the movement eventually ended.

While it lasted, the movement made notable progress. After the Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania made some gains, a number of other organizations cropped up—several of them made up of primarily women or free blacks. In 1830, the Pennsylvania Free Produce Association extended membership to blacks. From there, a detachment of black members helped form the Colored Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania—it boasted five hundred members at its inception. It was reported within a matter of months that support had far exceeded expectations, with “some members buying 25- and 50-pound bags of free sugar at one time.” A black female society was then created in 1831, and some black newspapers took up the call and supported the movement as well.¹¹⁵

Free produce stores stocked primarily cotton products, but they strove to supply many other goods as well. One list of goods shows that tea, coffee, sugar, molasses, cocoa, and various spices were also kept in stock.¹¹⁶ Besides groceries and dry goods, these shops also provided abolitionist literature and pamphlets supporting their movement. These declare: “If there were no consumers of slave-produce there would be no slaves,” followed by vibrant imagery to plead their case.¹¹⁷ Tracts such as these made free produce shops hubs for abolitionists, both leadership and laity.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (1969; repr., Da Capo Press, 1991), 74-75, accessed November 21, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=kuPIMkxPLOkC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹¹⁶ Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends, “List of Free Labor Dry Goods and Groceries,” in *An Address to the Members of the Religious Society of Friends on the Subject of Slavery and the Slave-Trade* (Philadelphia: 1849), 17, Quakers and Slavery Project, accessed December 3, 2014, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/11664/rec/1.

¹¹⁷ “If There Were No Consumers of Slave-Produce There Would Be No Slaves,” (Printed by E. Harris), Quakers and Slavery Project, accessed November 21, 2014, http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/989.

Several organizations and individuals saw the benefits of working with their fellow abolitionists across the Atlantic. This was most noticeable within the Quaker branches of the movement. The correspondence between American George Washington Taylor and English Elihu Burritt show concern for the state of the other's progress, as well as advice for the future. In order to help with finding free goods, Burritt sent one of his men to America in order to build up a free produce farm. This tendency to work with others allowed free produce organization to make the gains they did.¹¹⁸

The movement wrote many tracts, pamphlets, correspondence, and newspaper articles. The records list locations of stores, names of owners and organization members, and what goods were in stock. They recount motives, meeting minutes, and bylaws. But they all come to a slow end during the 1840s. This is because the Free Produce Movement enjoyed about three decades of success, but ultimately proved to be an unsustainable venture. “The American Free Produce Association disbanded in 1847, as there was insufficient support for the Boycott.” Other free produce organizations followed this example and found themselves disbanding over the next decade.¹¹⁹

There are a few reasons why the boycott of slave-produced goods was not successful. The chief reason is that it proved to be too expensive. Basic economics show that if it costs more on one plantation to plant, grow, and pick crops, than it does on another plantation, then those crops must be sold at higher prices in order to obtain a sufficient return and profits to continue the venture. In addition, if it costs more for one facility to manufacture cotton textiles—for example—it must be assumed they too must charge more for their finished product. This is the problem that free produce societies encountered. Since slaves were not paid, slave-holders could

¹¹⁸ Elihu Burritt to George Washington Taylor, November 21 1854, Quakers and Slavery Project, accessed November 21, 2014, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/1004.

¹¹⁹ “Boycotting Goods Produced By Slaves.”

sell their goods at prices free produce farmers could not match. This difference in cost followed free goods all the way to the general store level. Though supporters of the movement stated that they would pay a little extra for free goods, the majority of the population simply went to where they could purchase goods for the best price. Their inability to compete with the prices of slave-produced goods led to a lack of support from the general population, and thus the movement proved unworkable.

The Free Produce Movement found its basis within the Christian idea of equality. It was born out of radical Quakerism which can trace its roots back to a belief in an Inner Light that allowed all of mankind to have a connection to God. Men and woman applied this belief in equality to the practice of slavery; they observed that no man should be owned by another and sought ways to bring about the end of the practice. The moral and religious argument for equality had been applied to the slave situation, and the Society of Friends eliminated slavery from its ranks, but this was not so among other organizations—especially those in the southern United States. Some decided that an economic argument might work better since slaver-holders had ignored the moral and religious arguments that were growing more numerous by the year. The idea of attacking the slave-owner's purse came from those men who had tried the religious argument—men like Lay, Woolman, and Benezet—but in the fervor of the SGA, it found its first great push. Men and women who desired to apply their understanding of the Gospel to fix social ills—slavery in this case—created various organizations to combat them. The Free Produce Movement was an economic solution to a religious and moral problem.

Even though the movement proved to be ineffective at ending slavery, it was a creative solution that joined with many others to make up the abolitionist movement. This was just one of

many movements during the first half of the nineteenth century. Quakers continued to be found in all areas of the abolitionist movement as it spread beyond their society.

It ultimately fell upon the federal government to end slavery completely, just as Benezet thought it would. The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, formally freeing all slaves in the United States.

The Quaker dedication to eliminating slavery has been explored in detail, but even upon hearing news that slaves were finally free, they knew that their work was not yet done. Their work after the Emancipation Proclamation with newly-freed blacks speaks of how far their dedication went in obtaining equality for that downtrodden people. Quakers recognized the need to help free blacks acclimate to society. Recognizing this nearly a century before the end of slavery, it was the objective of the Benezet's school was to teach black boys and girls trades and how to be valuable members of a community. The Chesterfield Manumissions spoke of the intention to "Advise and Assist those Negroes and their Children who have been Restored to Freedom."¹²⁰ And the Friends Association of Philadelphia for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen reveals how the Quaker abolitionist movement had come full circle: they kept slaves, worked to end slavery, saw slavery ended, and now they desired to help those who had been freed. This association concerned itself with the betterment of former slaves. Among their actions was the collection of funds, the donation of clothes and shoes, and the commissioning of schools and teachers.¹²¹ This organization was not one of a kind though, there were others (Friends' Freedmen' Association) that also sought to give whatever aid they could to now free black

¹²⁰ "Chesterfield Manumissions."

¹²¹ Friends Association of Philadelphia for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen, "Friends Association of Philadelphia for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen, Executive Minutes" (1864-1865), Quakers and Slavery Project, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed March 22, 2015, http://trptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/7104.

Americans, and most abolitionist organizations did not disband for many years after the Emancipation Proclamation, recognizing that their help was still needed.

Conclusion

Why were the Quakers against slavery, and what did they do to help bring it to an end? These were the guiding questions throughout this study. All of the men and women studied have helped answer these questions: Quakers were against slavery because all of mankind was recognized as equal in the sight of God; and they helped bring it to an end in many ways. Among their accomplishments on behalf of the end of slavery were the widespread distribution of anti-slavery literature, travelling ministers who preached against it, petitions to the governments of states and foreign powers, the organization of societies that worked in specific ways, the creation of schools for blacks, and many more not mentioned here and those that have not made it into the content of this study.

Since the days of John Fox, the founder of the Religious Society of Friends, Quakers had been on a road toward abolition. It was not a swift road, but it was quicker than any other body. Quakers were not always those who implemented the changes, but they were the first guiding forces behind them. Quaker history shows that even as a greater consensus was being reached, there were some among them that did not want to give up their slaves. What did Elder Friends do to combat this? They declared that any who does not emancipate his slave is no longer permitted to be a member of the Society of Friends.

Quakers led the abolitionist movement before an acknowledged abolitionist movement even existed. In this endeavor they followed men like Benjamin Lay, John Woolman, Anthony Benezet, and many other Quakers that stood alone even among their own sect. The Quakers were

a people that prized simplicity, but they were also stubborn. This dedication to the cause of abolition was strong enough to see the movement expand outside their ranks until it was ultimately successful and men, women, and children were no longer enslaved in America.

This success is why history attributes the title of abolitionist society to the Society of Friends. When Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, and the other sects of Christianity were split over the question of slavery in the decades prior to the Civil War, Quakers presented a united front. They had encountered the ethical and biblical questions the others were struggling with in the previous century.

It is for this reason that Quakers deserve recognition as America's first anti-slavery Society. They endeavored alone for the better part of a century and helped lead other groups to the same conclusions. They all then worked together to see slavery end, and because of the dedication and perseverance of early Friends, they were successful.

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