

Quakers in Brooklyn

Lecture by Michael L. Black, April 19, 2008, Brooklyn Historical Society

In my forty years of teaching American literature at Bernard M. Baruch College, one of my favorite writers was the Quaker John Woolman (1720–1792), whom I always introduced in the following manner: “Quakers are *not* those people in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania who drive horse-drawn wagons, dress in old-fashioned clothes, and try as much as possible to keep to themselves.”

I might also have added that the Quakers *are* not the Shakers, and that there is little connection between the groups. The Shakers are an eighteenth-century group founded by the British woman “Mother” Ann Lee (1736–1784). They lived communally, apart from society, were famous for the enthusiasm of their religious services (which often involved dancing in circles), practiced celibacy (husband and wife converts restrained from marital relations), and were famous for their innovative farming methods as well as their modernistic furniture. The sect has now disappeared, although there are several Shaker museums in the United States.

Nor are the Quakers the same as the smiling man, in old-fashioned Quaker garb, on the box of Quaker Oats.

Now that you know who we are *not*, it is time to explain who we *are*.

We are the sole survivors of the religious frenzy in seventeenth-century Great Britain that included, among others, the Anabaptists, the Brownists, the Diggers, the Familists, the Fifth-Monarchy Men, the Levellers, the Millenarians, the Muggletonians, the Ranters, and the Seekers, the left wing of British Protestantism. These groups opposed not only the Church of England, the established church, but also the Puritans.

We are also the people who founded the colony of Pennsylvania, which was given to William Penn for the simple reason that King Charles II owed his father a very large debt which he could not repay. We controlled the Pennsylvania legislature until the French and Indian Wars (1755–1763), when, unable to resist the non-Quaker demands that we support the war effort by raising money and by swearing an oath, we ceded control to non-Quakers, one of the few instances in human history when those in power, more concerned about their beliefs than their earmarks, gave up that power.

We were also the first Christian anti-slavery religious group, moving from,

- in 1696, forbidding the importation of slaves;
- to 1754, advising against buying any blacks (although slaves could be inherited);
- to 1758, visiting Friends who held slaves to persuade them to set them free;
- to 1778, disowning anyone who owned slaves.¹

Quakers were also the most active white supporters of the Abolitionist movement in the nineteenth century, which most Americans of the day regarded as a threat to society. And Quakers, among them the Tappan brothers of New York, sometimes suffered from mob attacks.

After the Civil War, many Quakers ventured south to work for the Freedmen's Bureau, formed schools for blacks, and did what they could to continue aiding blacks, quite in contrast to the victorious North, which, in 1876, in order to elect a Republican president, agreed to remove Federal soldiers from the former Confederate States of America.

In addition to their anti-slavery activities, Quakers were and have been active in prison reform, in opposition to all wars, in opposition to the death penalty, and in education. These are some of the things we have done and which have made us an often-admired (but not always the best-understood) religious group in America, a group that keeps to its principles. When those principles agree with those of other Americans, we are admired; when they do not, we are chastised or ignored.

What Quakers believe in is, at first sight, rather simple. Not only do we have no formal creed, in the fashion of "The Apostles' Creed," for example, we have strongly resisted codifying our beliefs into a formal statement of beliefs which all our members are supposed to follow. As one prominent Quaker writer says, "The deepest difficulty with a fixed creed is that it inevitably becomes formal, and, consequently, can be repeated *without* conviction. Even with the best of intentions, the formula is artificial and external, and therefore something for which the sincere Christian dare not settle."²

We believe in the following:

1. the presence of that of God in every person;
2. the possibility of God speaking to us directly; and
3. continuing revelation.

In other words, one might argue that Quakers are not really "Christian" in the common understanding of the term. Although we take the Bible very seriously, we do not believe it is *the* only book one needs to read, study, and follow on the way to salvation.

And we do *not* believe in these aspects of Christianity: in the Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost); in the external sacraments of baptism, Holy Communion, and others; in the need for ministers (whom we used to call "hireling priests"); in a liturgy or a program for worship, which leads to the exclusion of hymns; a confession of faith; or an offertory.

We also call our places of worship "meeting houses," not "churches," to distinguish local places of worship from a universal body. Every Sunday at 11:00 am, we gather there, on the second floor, of our meeting house and sit in silence, waiting for God to speak to our Inner Lights.

Because we do not want or need a clergy, learned or not, we ought to have little interest in education, but, instead, we have long been interested in education, not so that children

can learn useless information (what we call “notions”) but so children can become better members of society as a whole. We have also realized that good basic education is necessary to defend our beliefs and our faith.

Therefore, although in many respects Quakerism is a religion of the heart and not of the head, we have founded three of the nation’s finest liberal-arts colleges—Haverford, Swarthmore, and Bryn Mawr—as well as other colleges, not to mention almost seventy schools and adult study centers under the care of Friends.³

One nineteenth-century Quaker, the British merchant and banker Joseph Gurney (1788–1847) tried to distill the essence of Quakerism: “the religion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, without diminution, without addition, and without compromise.”⁴ The reference to the second person of the Trinity would not upset (or should not upset) anyone who has been raised as a Christian, but it would be of concern to a number of Quakers, who, as much as possible, eschew the “C” word, believing that their faith is universal. They believe that since the “Inner Light” of “the Seed of God” is in everyone, the use of standard Christian terminology might limit that universalism. After all, it was our founder, George Fox (1624–1691), who contended that non-Christians could enter the kingdom of heaven without the trappings of Christianity.

Another important aspect of Quakerism is the prominence of women. Since Quakers do not have ministers, we have been spared the theological and Biblical debates about the desirability of women speaking in meeting, let alone from the pulpit. Only thirty years after the birth of George Fox, Quaker women had their own meetings, and by the end of the seventeenth century, a kind of parallel membership had begun. In 1784, the Society of Friends established Women’s Yearly Meetings and thus empowered women.⁵

The contribution of Quaker women to the women’s rights movement and also to women’s suffrage is well-known, especially their leadership at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. For example, Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906) devoted her long life to the cause of suffrage, refusing in 1872, to pay a \$100 fine for voting illegally, and introduced the so-called “Susan B. Anthony” amendment to the Constitution.

Lucretia Mott (1793–1880) was active in the abolitionist movement, although she and other American Quaker women were not allowed to participate in the British Anti-Slavery Society. Furthermore, women Friends often compared their struggle for the right to vote with the rights of African-Americans to become first-class citizens, a comparison that was, for its day, radical and not popular.

In the United States, Quakers, often women, adopted the cause of prison reform. Mary Waln Wister organized the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia in 1823. In Baltimore and in New York, Quaker women established associations for visiting women in prison and ameliorating their conditions. Eliza Farnham was made matron of the women’s branch of Sing Sing in 1844 and brought in a piano, so that the women could sing and read together—and, in the process, broke the “silent code” which allowed

prisoners to work and eat together but not talk to one another. For this and other improvements, she was fired in 1848.⁶

In the twentieth century, Quaker women such as Alice Paul (1885–1977) and other “Suffragettes” agitated during World War I—one of their methods was to picket the White House silently--to compel President Woodrow Wilson to support a woman’s right to vote. Women in the Society of Friends were also active in several peace movements in the United States, during both World Wars I and II and later.⁷

In Brooklyn, we had our own Quaker female activist, Mariana Wright Chapman (1843–1907), who was born in New York City, married Noah H. Chapman, of Cincinnati in 1864, and then moved to Brooklyn in 1880 to a house on Hicks Street.

She is memorialized in the room named after her at Friends Seminary in Manhattan (dedicated in 1983). Her papers, including correspondence with many of the most important suffrage leaders of her era, are part of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

She is best remembered for her work in women’s suffrage (finally granted by the 19th amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920), as President of the Women’s Suffrage Association of Brooklyn, then as President of the New York State Suffrage Association from 1897 to 1902, and her work in prison reform.

Her obituary praised her as a devoted wife, “working always in co-operation with her husband,” and declared that

her life [was] a direct refutation of the statement often made, that women who engage in public affairs, neglect their private duties. She made a happy home. She was a loving wife, a good mother, a delightful hostess, an indefatigable worker, a judicious philanthropist, a consecrated woman.⁸

Mariana Wright Chapman is a fine example of a Quaker woman who devoted her life to both her family and to Friends’ causes, as if the two were seamless.

Mention of this Brooklyn woman brings me directly to the heart of today’s lecture: the presence of Quakers in Brooklyn. My research began as part of Brooklyn Monthly Meeting’s celebration of 150 years since the erection of its building on the corner of Schermerhorn Street and Boerum Place in 1857. Most of you here, both Quaker and non-Quaker, will be familiar with the sight of this landmark in downtown Brooklyn.

However, in the nineteenth century, Brooklyn had a *second* meeting house, one that, until recently, many Quakers were unaware of. Located at the corner of Lafayette and Washington avenues, it was built eleven years after the meeting house at Schermerhorn Street and Boerum Place. It was “laid down” (i. e., abandoned) in 1959, sold to a Protestant denomination, which in turn sold it, in 1964, to the Apostolic Faith congregation, which now uses it as its place of worship.

This *other* meeting house is the by-product of the great “Separation” in Quakerism of the early to mid-nineteenth century, that between Orthodox and Hicksite. The Lafayette Avenue meeting house was Orthodox; the Schermerhorn Street meeting house was Hicksite.

When, at the start of today’s lecture, I explained some of the peculiar beliefs of Quakerism *in general*, I was describing *Hicksite* beliefs, i.e., those of our branch of Quakerism. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, many *urban* Quakers began to move more and more in the direction of evangelical Christianity, especially after the so-called second “Great Awakening” of 1800. City Quakers, unlike their rural cousins, found themselves not only in close contact with vigorous Christianity, but they also began to find similarities, not differences, between Quaker beliefs and practices and beliefs and practices of Methodists and Baptists, for example.⁹ This explains in part the split between Orthodox and Hicksite and the existence of two meeting houses in Brooklyn. Because only the Hicksite Quakers continue to worship in Brooklyn and because of a paucity of historical data about the Orthodox Brooklyn congregation, the remainder of this lecture will focus on the Hicksite or “universalist” Friends.

Perhaps the best glimpse into nineteenth-century Hicksite Friends in Brooklyn comes through our local literary giant, Walt Whitman. In November, 1829, the ten-year-old Walt Whitman, whose family had moved to Brooklyn in 1823 from rural Long Island, was taken by his father to Morrison’s Hotel to hear the 81-year-old Elias Hicks preach:

Hicks made an imposing presence as he stood on a raised platform in the hotel’s handsome ballroom. He and a small group of nearby Quakers, with their characteristically drab garb, looked incongruous in the elegant hall amid the fashionable folk who had flocked to hear him. His blazing eyes swept the crowd, and he began, “*What is the chief end of man? I was told in my early youth, it was to glorify God, and seek and enjoy him forever.*”¹⁰

Hicks (1748–1830), a farmer from Jericho, Long Island, spent much of his life going, on horseback, to Quaker meetings throughout the United States from Indiana to Maine, to preach what he regarded as old-fashioned Quakerism. Often attacked by Quakers for his deviations from standard Christianity (he was hounded by British Quaker evangelists who came to the former colonies to “correct” his theological weaknesses), Hicks was, among other things, a mystic.

So taken with Hicks was Whitman (who regarded him as the equal of Henry Ward Beecher as an orator)¹¹ that traces of Hicks’s oratorical style can be found in Whitman’s poems. In his later life in Camden, New Jersey, “the good gray poet” kept a bust of Hicks near the door of his home, and he talked about Hicks with Horace Traubel (who rowed across the Delaware River every week to record in five printed volumes, Whitman’s conversations). On several occasions, Whitman even considered writing a biography of the Quaker leader. Hicks appealed to Whitman for several reasons: he was truly a man of the people (he had no college education); he was very much anti-slavery; and he was very

much a sort of champion of the people, unconcerned about the “right” way to worship God.

The Whitman family had close connections with Quakers on Long Island, although none of them, so far as we know, ever attended Quaker meeting.¹² Nor did Whitman attend Quaker meeting, preferring, in Brooklyn and elsewhere, the city’s large Protestant churches, with their spell-binding pulpit oratory and their eager crowds.

Nevertheless, Whitman found in Quakerism many beliefs that appealed to him. In fact, as the poet aged, he became (or, rather, sounded) more and more Quaker in his poems, for instance, using the Quaker form of days of the week (First Day) and months (First Month) in much of his poetry.

Perhaps the most important and most noticeable physical evidence of Quakers in Brooklyn is Brooklyn Friends School, which opened in 1867, just ten years after our meeting house on Schermerhorn Street was constructed. Increased enrollment led, in 1885, to the construction of another building next to the meeting house and joined to it (a bricked-up window is noticeable on the second floor of our meeting room). In 1888, planning ahead, two more lots on Schermerhorn St. were purchased, “to guard against [their] being used for purposes that might interfere with the Satisfactory use of our property for meeting or School purposes.”¹³

In 1902, a larger, two-story building, with a basement, replaced the 1885 building, and in 1917, a gymnasium was added. In 1920, a high-school building known as the Phoebe Anna Thorne High School replaced the brownstone building adjoining the school, and in 1926, a third floor was added to the main building. Students then, as they continue to do today, used the Meeting Room for “Quaker Meeting.”

Another Quaker property associated with the school is Friends Field. Located at McDonald Avenue and Avenue I and extending to E. 4th St., it was purchased in 1923 from Poly Prep.¹⁴ In 1935, a field house (which still exists with “Friends” prominently displayed) was built.

But the school was not to remain at the complex on Schermerhorn Street. In 1957, the Middle States Association encouraged BFS to find a “more desirable site” for the school, in part because enrollment had grown to 300 students, which taxed the older facilities and in part because the school wanted to experiment with the then-new open-classroom format. In 1969, the former Brooklyn Law School at 375 Pearl Street was purchased, and after extensive renovations, the new Brooklyn Friends School opened in October, 1972. As part of the financing, Friends Field was sold to New York City. Now celebrating its 140th year, Brooklyn Friends School’s enrollment is at an all-time high, at over 600 students, and space on Willoughby Street has been rented for the Upper School.

Brooklyn Friends School is today much different from the “commodious apartments” of 1857 in the Meeting House on Schermerhorn Street. However, even with the recent addition of the International Baccalaureate program, not to mention the many changes in

and additions to the curriculum over more than a century, BFS is perhaps the most important example of Friends' outreach in Brooklyn.

Brooklyn Friends School was a physical part of the Meeting House for more than a century, from 1867 to 1972. In the more than three decades since the move, BMM and BFS, although they are a short walk from one another, seemed to have grown more and more distant from each other. Over these years, both School and Meeting have, from time to time, struggled with their relationship to each other. In this anniversary year, it seems fitting, therefore, to observe that relations between the two communities are improving: the Meeting now has a very active Care Relations Committee which seeks to strengthen the ties between the two Quaker communities. In addition, in this anniversary year, in another sign of development, BFS has petitioned New York Quarterly Meeting to go its own fiscal way, that is, to own 375 Pearl Street for itself, and to form a 501 (c) 3 corporation.

As important as the physical presence of both Brooklyn Meeting and Brooklyn Friends School was—in downtown Brooklyn for ninety and eighty years respectively—their survival was once threatened. In 1947 the city proposed to demolish both Brooklyn Friends School and Brooklyn Monthly Meeting, in order to erect a modern jail that would be connected to the Kings County Criminal Courthouse at the corner of Smith and Schermerhorn streets.

The jail would have replaced the infamous Raymond Street jail, which, in one form or another, had been around since 1838 (indeed, the name “Raymond Street” was so notorious that the name of the street was changed to “Ashland Place”).

In 1947, Friends learned they had a year to stop the City juggernaut and had to organize quickly. Olney M. Raymond, a BFS graduate, clerk of the school committee at the time, testified at public hearings in November, 1947. One of his points was that Friends needed at least \$1,000,000 to build a new school at another location; since the jail was to cost \$6,000,000, the City's costs would be significantly higher than projected.

On Jan. 10, 1948, the Citizens Union of Brooklyn was the first civic association to declare its opposition, and others quickly joined. One citizen sent 1,000 letters suggesting that the City build a jail on a parking lot across the street from the courthouse. Petitions from other Protestant denominations followed.

On Jan. 16, 1948, some 200 protesters besieged Borough Hall, and the Borough President, John Cashmere, agreed to meet with a group of Quakers the next week. In under two hours, the plan to demolish BFS and BMM collapsed, and Cashmere and Mayor William O'Dwyer quickly agreed to a new location on Atlantic Avenue, and in 1950, the Brooklyn House of Detention opened.

In the meantime, Friends held a reception at the meeting house to thank those who had rushed to their assistance. Concerted civic action saved the 80-year-old school and the 90-year-old meeting house, in a successful campaign.

I am happy to report that, just in time for today's lecture, an article by John M. Martin and Susan Price has appeared in the Brooklyn Friends School *Newsletter*, copies of which are available at the end of today's lecture.¹⁵

Another Quaker presence in Brooklyn is the Friends' Burial Ground in Prospect Park, the only private land in this borough's version of Central Park. It is a little-known bit of Friends' property in Brooklyn; it is certainly the least-visited. Located near the western side of the park along the ridge known as "Quaker Hill," accessible from the Central Drive through the park, and almost bordering West Drive, it is surrounded by a chain link fence. Measuring approximately 9–10 acres,¹⁶ it is bordered on the north by the Long Meadow, and on the south by Central Drive and Lookout Hill. It is not accessible to the public, although tours can sometimes be arranged through the Prospect Park Alliance or the Park Rangers.

Approximately 9–10 acres in size, it was purchased in 1851, more than a decade before the development of Prospect Park, by Hicksite Quakers¹⁷ (who then had a wooden meeting house at Henry and Cranberry streets in Brooklyn Heights).¹⁸ The City of Brooklyn planned to close a cemetery in Fort Greene Park, which had been divided into plots for various denominations, including blacks, and the Quakers purchased land in what was then an undeveloped area of the City of Brooklyn.

Although Friends "were assured direct passage through the reserve from the 16th Street entrance at all times,"¹⁹ there have been incidents with the police, who, unaware of this law, have prohibited Friends from driving to the cemetery via the 16th St. road. In several instances, earnest young policemen have been told by our sexton, Robert Wilber, to contact their superiors to learn of the legislature's "assurance."

The current chain link fence, from the 1970s, replaced the original lower iron fence, in part because of vandalism, unwelcome intruders, and even wild dogs.

There is a shed to the left of the driveway, set back about 100 feet, for the sexton's tools and some records of the cemetery

In November, 1860, the Hicksites sold part of their cemetery to another "Society" (i. e., the Orthodox Friends, the branch that later built the meeting house at Lafayette and Washington).²⁰ However, the bitterness of the two Quaker groups carried over to the cemetery: Each branch of Quakerism had its separate entrance and waiting-room. A fence ran north-south through the cemetery to keep the two factions apart (traces of the Orthodox entrance can still be seen). On the screen is an 1867 diagram of the cemetery, with a 60-foot barrier between the two sides.²¹

Over the years, Friends have taken great care to maintain their property, especially the trees, and recently, we have contracted with the Prospect Park Alliance to do some of the maintenance work.

Today, Friends use the cemetery for burials, and, in the Quaker fashion, there are no large tombstones. In fact, there are graves with no tombstones on them at all, and the names of these Friends are memorialized on a large stone easily visible as one enters the cemetery. Friends also use the cemetery for First-Day (i. e., Sunday) events, our July Quarterly Meeting, and for occasional work-days. The Cemetery Committee of New York Quarterly Meeting is very active in documenting graves and also in planning a new entrance.

Now that I have explored the presence of Quakers in Brooklyn through the evidence of extant property, and suggested that “education” has been a major social activity, let me describe two other ways that Brooklyn Quakers have lived out their testimonies in the twentieth century: first, through prison reform; and, second, through pacificism.

In the lobby of Brooklyn Meeting House is a nineteenth-century print of one of our distinguished ancestors, the first systematic prison reformer, Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845). In 1813 she discovered, in one of the worst London prisons—Newgate, a “hell on earth”—that, after more than a century, living conditions in jail had not improved, although there was at least a women’s section. Her work, and that of her association, helped make prisons peaceable and industrious, and children were even clothed and schooled.²²

She was an inspiration for local Brooklyn Quakers, who began the Newgate Project at the Brooklyn House of Detention in May, 1973. The impetus for this project came from Mary Holliday, the only female correctional officer at the House of Detention, who challenged Quakers to live up to their testimony about the treatment of prisoners, especially when those prisoners were only a block or two away.

The Newgate Project provided childcare four days a week during visiting hours at the jail. At the time, children who visited relatives at the facility had no place to play and no one to look after them while they awaited visits to their fathers.

Two of our members described the “Dickensian scene” at the House of Detention:

Visiting mothers were only allowed to bring one child at a time to visit their fathers. Some fathers did not want their children to see them under these conditions. One way or another, the waiting room always seemed full of children from babes in arms to young teen-agers. The atmosphere, charged with sorrow, fear, despair, was the worst conceivable for any child to endure even for a little while. Some children were left unattended in the street outside, no matter the weather or the danger of the traffic.²³

In contrast to this street scene was the loving care offered in the childcare rooms at the Meeting House.

One new member of Brooklyn Monthly Meeting served on the Newgate Committee as one of her first committees, since the Meeting House was near her place of work. She often picked up her daughter from Brooklyn Friends School and took her there. For this new Friend, the most important person at Newgate, the “guiding light,” was Tarna Infante, whom she describes as

. . . another young woman in meeting with a young child. She was my exact opposite: she was what I thought of as a “hippy”: she was poor, she dressed in second-hand clothes; she rode a bike; she smoked pot. She also had a deep faith and leading toward prison work and attempted to awaken the conscience of the meeting about its next-door neighbors at the jail. First, there were efforts to establish a bail bond fund; then the idea of providing hospitality for families of inmates during visiting hours arose. We had the space; we were nearby; we had enough people interested in volunteering.²⁴

If you had the typical, 40-hours-a-week job, you could not do much to help Newgate, so Brooklyn Friends relied on parents (usually female) who had flexible working schedules or were the old-fashioned, stay-at-home moms. These women often brought their children, in part to introduce them to the world of service and in part because they could not leave them at home.

One important activity at Newgate was taking photos of children and placing them on a bulletin board in the social room. The activity, entitled “Family Fotos for Prisoners,” under the direction of Ruth Pressman, resulted in a large collection of color photographs of Newgate visitors which are now in the Meeting’s archives on the third floor. Some of the photographs were used by inmates in their dealings with prison and parole officials to indicate their family ties, in one case assisting an inmate who earned parole and, in another case, helping a distressed mother. Ruth Pressman also produced a videotape about Newgate, with poetry, lyrics, and music by inmates.

The Newgate Project was laid down in November, 1979, for several reasons: first, a new Federal law permitted contact visits (previously, the House of Detention had fifty-two booths with Plexiglass and a telephone for each booth), which made Newgate’s child care more difficult, especially by requiring full dinners (not just snacks), increased security procedures, and changes in procedures for visiting; second, the City’s financial troubles during the 1970s meant that funds for the Department of Corrections were often in danger of being reduced; and third, Friends’ resources proved inadequate. Staffing a child-care center for four different days a week, which included City permissions for this and that and which included hiring a co-ordinator, was not easy. Friends found the world of fund-raising, especially for an organization with a small budget, no easy task. The largest grants that Newgate received were \$15,000 and \$10,000, and too often grants of more than \$1000 arrived for only one year and were not renewed. As the budget rose from an initial \$4900 to \$20,000 in the final year, fund-raising became more and more burdensome.

Relations with the Department of Corrections were sometimes strained, although the Newgate contact, Mary Holliday, did her best to persuade her superiors of the value of the project. Newgate seemed, in fact, to get along better with the correction guards than prison officials, who, Newgate charged, fought the implementation of contact visits as hard as and as long as possible.

The log books and the annual Newgate reports give details of some of the small victories for humanity that Newgate scored: a prisoner just released stops at Newgate to see Tarna Infante “to express to her his feeling of gratitude for removing one burden from his mind,” a thank-you card signed by 106 inmates; children in our playground shouting to their father, who shouts back; mothers and children staying around so their father can watch them from a window of the House of Detention; the Newgate staff sending birthday cards to children; and the Christmas parties.

Newgate succeeded in its ultimate goal: the “complete transferral of children to the waiting room at the Brooklyn House of Detention.” Later, the Department of Corrections took over child care at the House of Detention, Quakers laid down the Newgate Project, and one aspect of Friends’ service closed. So, eventually, did the House of Detention close, although the edifice is still there, a hulking reminder of an unpleasant past.

Today, since New York State has populated much of upstate with correctional facilities, in part to give much-needed employment to depressed economic areas and in part to make it difficult to visit those incarcerated, other reminders of New York’s prisons are harder to find. Parents must now make hours-long journeys by bus, often with their children in tow, to visit with their partners. Newgate, in its small way, helped to relieve some of the pressures of time and distance.

The nearest New York State correctional facility is at Arthur Kill on Staten Island, where there is a small Quaker worship group, but for a variety of reasons, Quakers are not as active there as we would like them to be.

John McWhorter, an African-American linguist and columnist for the *New York Sun*, is convinced that recidivism is one of the most serious problems for released prisoners. The percentage of those who return to prison is high, and, as he contends, little is done about recidivism. Released prisoners often get only a new suit, a bit of money, and they are on their own.

In Newark, the American Friends Service Committee has for several years run an anti-recidivism program, with some success, but post-prison projects are not very much in favor, nor, for that matter, are in-prison projects run by the government. Once in America, many people believed that prisons should try as much as possible to rehabilitate prisoners. Today, however, many Americans seem to want prisons to rid the populace of undesirables, in the hope that ignoring them will make them go away. Yet even though prisoners pay their debt to society, society continues to ignore or avoid them.

The Newgate Project received respectful press attention, there was a New York City award, and perhaps the project served as an example for the many current Newgate projects listed on the Internet, almost all of them free of government control.

Newgate probably did little to solve many of the pressing issues of incarceration, but it was successful on a much different level: it brought the love and care of Friends to a near-by jail, just as our current Community Dinner Committee brings the love and care of Friends to those in our surrounding community who are hungry. It was a small project, a micro-effort, but it was indicative of some of the things that Friends do well: think creatively about solutions to problems, make effective use of limited resources, organize activities, find outside funding, and work together harmoniously.

Mariana Wright Chapman, in addition to her interest in women's suffrage, was also involved in prison reform, as chair of the New York Monthly Meeting on Prison Reform, advocating "the need for women to care for women in the police station houses of the city."²⁵ Today, Brooklyn Friends remain concerned about prisons and also about those released from prison and attempting to rejoin society, for instance, the Redemption Center in Ocean Hill–Brownville.²⁶

The final section of today's lecture concerns the traditional Friends' "peace testimony," which is clearly expressed in the "Declaration of Friends to Charles II" in 1660 by the Elders of Balby:

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatever, and this is our testimony to the whole world. The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.²⁷

Over the years, Brooklyn Friends have been consistent in their opposition to war, to all wars. For instance, Mariana Wright Chapman opposed the "sad conflict and carnage in the Philippines" after the Spanish-American War (which has gone down in American history as "that splendid little war"), but the Meeting did not agree with her and, in an unusual move, supported that conflict.²⁸

We opposed the draft during the Civil War, during World War I, during World II, during the Korean War, and during the Vietnam War. At the start of the Iraqi conflict, worried that a draft would be imposed, we began to ready our members for another round of draft counseling, but that was not necessary.

We have, during the five years of the conflict in that Middle Eastern country, demonstrated at rallies and taken buses to our nation's capital to protest the war. We have

joined with Brooklyn Parents for Peace and other groups to oppose the war, and our Peace and Social Action Committee has been assiduous in our anti-war efforts. We hope that our efforts have not been in vain, but the war, now in its sixth year, continues—continues to maim and kill young Americans, to depopulate and/or devastate a people and a nation who, we were assured, would greet the invading Americans with open arms.

This seemingly endless and inglorious war, both the human and the financial costs of which will be felt for years, is a vivid demonstration, Friends believe, of the folly and madness of war. As we begin to contemplate the true costs of the war, we realize the truth and value of our testimony against war.

However, like the rest of the country, Friends have not sacrificed for the war. That is, unlike in so many other conflicts, they have not been marginalized, thrown into prison, or lost their jobs. If the war has been *neither* “splendid” nor “little,” it has at least been long, arduous, and, it now seems, will be with us, draining our nation’s resources, for many more years.

An earlier Quaker, Brooklyn’s own Mary McDowell (1876–1955), was not so fortunate; not only did she devote her entire life to the Quaker peace testimony, she paid a penalty.

A birthright Quaker born in Jersey City, she and her family moved to New York and Brooklyn. A graduate of Friends Seminary and Swarthmore College, a Lucretia Mott scholar at Oxford University, she earned an M. A. from Columbia in 1900 in Classics.

She taught Latin, Greek, and English first at Friends’ Academy in Locust Valley, N.Y.; Jersey City High School; Richmond Hill High School in Queens, and from 1908 to 1917 and 1923 to 1931 at Manual Training School in Brooklyn, at Seventh Avenue and Fourth Street (now John Jay High School). She spent the last twelve years of her career at Abraham Lincoln High School in this borough and retired in 1943.

In 1918, more than a year after the United States entered World War I against the Triple Alliance, she was tried and dismissed by the Board of Education for “conduct unbecoming to a teacher,” one of the many casualties of this nation’s suppression of the liberty of conscience during the First World War. In 1923, in part as a reaction against some of the excessive nationalism of World War I, she was restored to her position as a teacher, receiving five years of credit for her pension, although no salary for the five years she had been kept from the classroom.

She was dismissed not so much for being a Quaker but for acting like one. Let me explain.

Although World War I began in August, 1914, for several reasons the United States did not enter “the war to end all wars” until almost three years later, in April, 1917 (the same pattern occurred during World War II: the United States entered the war more than two years after it broke out in September, 1939).

One important reason was that two large ethnic groups opposed entering the war on the side of the Allies: (1) the Irish, who disliked pretty much anything their British overlords advocated; and (2) the Germans, who remained loyal to the Fatherland and to German culture.

For the first time in its history, the United States, forced to confront a large foreign war, was torn apart by two opposing views. So prevalent was anti-German sentiment that just about anything German was questioned or actively opposed. For instance, with unusual patriotic fervor, many orchestras dropped the three B's (Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms) from their concerts, things Teutonic were renamed ("frankfurter" became "hot dog," and "sauerkraut" became "liberty cabbage," for example), and here in Brooklyn, two streets were renamed (Vienna Avenue in Red Hook became Lorraine Street, and Dresden Street in Bushwick became Highland Place).²⁹

In addition, Americans were urged, even encouraged, to spy on their fellow-citizens, Congress passed laws forbidding anti-government language, and the Post Office stripped the mailing privileges of many antiwar publications, which then ceased publication. Disagreement and dissent were simply not tolerated.

In this inflammatory atmosphere, Mary McDowell was accused of "Conduct Unbecoming to a Teacher." What had she done to persuade the Board of Education to this step, which included two hearings in January and May, 1918? The seven specifications of the Board of Superintendents include not *urging* (the word "urging" is used, in italics, in three of the seven charges) her students to support the war (by performing Red Cross work and buying Thrift Stamps). In addition, she stated (apparently in front of her impressionable students) that "a *teacher* [was not] under a *special* obligation to train his or her pupils to support the United States Government in its measures for carrying on the war" and that she was opposed to the war.³⁰

At her "trial," which is depicted in the 1964 television program in the *Profiles in Courage* series, she answered questions with humility and kindness. For example, she maintained that her students had their own "their own personal liberty and personal reasons."³¹

For her refusal to support the war and kow-tow to the rabid frenzy of the day, as well as her refusal to act as a new-model teacher and follow orders, she was relieved of her post. In 1923, in part because of post-war concern over the harsh treatment of some opponents of World War I (Eugene B. Debs, the Socialist leader, was pardoned by President Warren G. Harding, for instance), the Board reinstated her, remarking that "the punishment inflicted on Miss McDowell was too severe, or at least *in the light of present circumstances*, too severe. The case of Miss McDowell is entirely different from that of the *disloyal* teacher."³² She returned to the Manual Training High School in 1923, with her five years of pension credit, until 1931, when she transferred to Abraham Lincoln High School, retiring in 1943.

She continued her work for peace as long as she could, joining the War Resisters' League (founded in 1923) and other pacifist groups (often paying for pamphlets which she distributed on the subway), supporting them as best she could financially and practically,

and earning the praise of Bayard Rustin, among others. She spent her last years opposing the Korean War. She has been honored in the naming of the Mary McDowell Center for Learning on Bergen Street in Brooklyn, partly through the efforts of her friend Violet Longobardi, late of this Meeting.

I have discussed the beliefs that make Quakers different, as well as several aspects of Friends in Brooklyn: the influence of Elias Hicks on Walt Whitman, Brooklyn Friends School, the Quaker Burial Ground in Prospect Park, our work for prison reform, and, finally, our work for peace.

Other examples of Friends' presence in Brooklyn which remain to be investigated in future research are the following:

- the Quakers in Gravesend who greeted Lady Deborah Moody when she moved there from Rhode Island in the seventeenth century;
- the four Quaker young men who, from 1818 to 1820, rowed across the East River to Brooklyn every Sunday, walked eight miles to Flatbush, and taught slaves;³³
- the Quaker involvement in abolitionist activities, especially the Underground Railroad;
- and the possible involvement of Brooklyn Quakers in the aftermath of the Draft Riots in New York City of July, 1863;
- Brooklyn Friends and the first American draft of 1863;
- and, finally, Brooklyn Quakers who joined the American Friends Service Committee during and after World War I.

Today, Brooklyn Monthly Meeting is a vibrant faith community of some two hundred members. We are still located at 110 Schermerhorn Street, meeting every First Day (Sunday) at 11:00 a.m., and we are still making history.

¹ Howard Brinton, *Friends for 350 Years*. Historical Update and Notes by Margaret Hope Bacon (Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill Publications, 2002), 127n.

² D. Elton Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers* (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 2002), 65.

³ Leonard S. Kenworthy, *Quaker Education: A Source Book* (Kennett Square, Pa.: Quaker Publications, [1987]), 339-42.

⁴ Quoted in Trueblood, 64.

⁵ Howard Brinton, *Friends for 350 Years*, 124; John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 2001), 92.

⁶ Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America*. ([Place]: Quaker Publications of Friends General Conference, 1995), 141-42, 143.

⁷ Bacon, 191-92.

⁸ *Friends Intelligencer*, December 14, 1907 (page unknown).

⁹ The standard work on this subject is H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation* (Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill Publications, 1998), originally published in 1986 by the University of Tennessee Press).

¹⁰ David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 37. A good analysis of Whitman's indebtedness to Hicks is Glenn N. Cummings, "Placing the Implacable: Walt Whitman and Elias Hicks," *Modern Language Studies*, 28.2 (Spring, 1998): 69-86. For other Hicksite connections to Whitman, see Cummings, 73 n6.

The sermon at Morrison's Hotel has been commented on by at least four Whitman biographers: Reynolds; Gay Wilson Allen, *The Solitary Singer* (New York, 1955), 11-13); Justin Kaplan, *Walt Whitman: A Life* (New York, 1980), 68-70; and Paul Zweig, *Walt Whitman: The Making of a Poet* (New York, 1984), 36—Cummings, 73, n7.

¹¹ In addition to Beecher as a great orator, Whitman also praised Edward Thompson Taylor (1793-1871), whom Herman Melville immortalizes as Father Mapple in *Moby-Dick*. Reynolds, 38.

¹² Whitman's grandfather, Jesse W. Whitman, of West Hills, Long Island, was a boyhood companion of Elias Hicks. See Bliss Forbush, *Elias Hicks: Quaker Liberal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 9; Reynolds, 10-11.

¹³ Minutes, Brooklyn Monthly Meeting, Jan. 1, 1888 (Swarthmore Library).

¹⁴ Edgerton Grant North, *Seventy-Five Years of Brooklyn Friends School* [n.p.:] 1942), notes that the property had been an unfenced vegetable garden and "had the remains of a cinder track formerly used by the Polytechnic Preparatory School." (38). He also notes that the property is now (i. e., in 1942) known as Erasmus Field. Friends Field was sold in the 1960s, and the proceeds were used in the rehabilitation of 375 Pearl Street.

¹⁵ John R. Martin and Susan Price, "Sixty Years Ago at BFS: How Good Citizenship Saved Brooklyn Friends School," *Brooklyn Friends School Newsletter* 4:4 (March/April 2008), 1, 3. The author wishes to express his sincere thanks to Ms. Price and her research on this aspect of Brooklyn Friends School.

¹⁶ The property was originally larger, perhaps twenty-five acres. In 1873, Friends ceded some of their property to the Commissioners of Prospect Park; a diagram of the property (on the last page of the agreement) indicates certain areas of land, but the copy which the author has read is in black and white only. The author wishes to express his sincere thanks to Robert Wilber, the sexton of the Prospect Park Quaker Cemetery, for his assistance in research for this lecture.

¹⁷ Indenture, Feb. 1, 1851 (files, New York Quarterly Meeting). Two earlier indentures (October 10 and October 22, 1849, files, New York Quarterly Meeting) both have a price of \$2348.75, but neither seems to have been completed.

¹⁸ Quakers originally met in a rented room at the corner of Henry and Clark streets on December 5, 1835. Minutes, Brooklyn Preparative Meeting, December 1, 1887 (Swarthmore Library). For more details, see Mary G. Cook, "History of a Quaker Meeting," *Long Island Forum* [vol. no] (September and October, 1972), 196-200, 222-24.

¹⁹ Clay Lancaster, *Prospect Park Handbook* (New York: Greensward Foundation, 1988), 52.

²⁰ The sale, of 1/3 of the property, was for \$5000. Nine years earlier, in 1851, the Hicksites had paid \$1200 for the land in what is now Prospect Park. (Legal document in files of New York Quarterly Meeting). The cemetery was originally named "Greenhill."

²¹ There was also a "Rustic Arch," as can be seen in a large drawing on the third floor of our meeting house. Such an arch was in keeping with one of the early features of Prospect Park: a number of Adirondack-type "rustic" structures (Lancaster, 53-54). Was this rustic arch somehow used for both Hicksites and Orthodox?

²² Brinton, 186.

²³ Jeanne and Stanley Ellin, "The Newgate Project." *Friends Journal*, February 1, 1977: 82.

²⁴ Nancy B. Black, "Witness and Newgate Discussion Group," November 14, 2004. BMM archives.

²⁵ "Mariana Wright Chapman," *Friends Intelligencer*, Dec. 14th, 1907.

²⁶ David Gonzalez, "With an Inmate's Help, Returning to Life Outside," *New York Times*, April 7, 2008, B1 and B6.

²⁷ *Faith and Practice* (New York: New York Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1998), 38-39.

²⁸ Editorial, *Friends Intelligencer*, December 14, 1907.

²⁹ Leonard Benardo and Jennifer Weis, *Brooklyn by Name: How the Neighborhoods, Streets, Parks, Bridges and More Got Their Names* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

³⁰ Quoted in Anna L. Curtis, *Mary S. McDowell: A Biographical Sketch* (New York: New York Monthly Meeting, 1960), 7. Emphasis is added by the author of this lecture. This section of the lecture is derived in large part from this pamphlet.

³¹ Curtis, 32.

³² Curtis, 7. Emphasis added.

³³ The only reference I have been able to find is the following: “In 1818 a school under the care of young men of this city, all Friends, was established at Flatbush on Long Island, for the benefit of negroes. About fifty to seventy-five scholars attended the sessions, which were held of Sundays. The teachers crossed the river in rowboats or sailboats, and then footed it four miles to Flatbush, and back. It was continued for two and one-half years, and then stopped.” William H. S. Wood, *Friends of the City of New York in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: [Privately printed], 1904), 34. Like a number of other works, Wood’s has no bibliography and no footnotes.