

***Quakers and their Allies in the Abolitionist Cause, 1754-1808*****Maurice Jackson and Susan Kozel, eds.****Routledge: London and New York, 2015****206 pages****Hardcover, \$150.00****ISBN: 9781848935419****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v2i2.55>**

As anyone acquainted with the history of the early abolitionist movement surely knows, the Society of Friends played a critical role in the fight against slavery and the slave trade. Some Quaker abolitionists sought primarily to purify their religious communities of the taint of slavery, but many also turned their attentions to the world around them: fighting to end the Atlantic slave trade, pushing for gradual abolition, defending the legal claims of ostensibly free African Americans, and searching for ways to improve the lives of former slaves. This collection brings together an able group of scholars seeking to expand and deepen our understanding of early Quaker abolition. Geographically, it explores what the editors term the greater Philadelphia region, stretching from Delaware to New Jersey. Chronologically it takes as its starting point the publication in 1754 of John Woolman's influential *Some Considerations on Keeping Negroes* and the issuing in the same year of *An Epistle of Caution and Advice*, by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, labelling slave ownership an "antichristian practice." These texts marked a new stage in the fight against slavery among Quakers. The collection's endpoint is the outlawing of the Atlantic slave trade, first in the British Empire and then in the United States. This was, to say the least, an important period in the fight against slavery.

The essays in the collection resist easy categorization, but the general focus is biographical. Included are chapters on relatively well-known Quakers, such as Woolman and Anthony Benezet, as well as ones on more obscure Friends, such as Samuel Meredith and the Waln brothers: Richard and Nicholas. Other chapters focus on individuals who were not Friends

themselves, but who had significant connections with Quaker antislavery. These non-Quakers include both the little-known (Ann Elizabeth Fortune) and the famous (Benjamin Franklin).

All of the chapters merit careful reading, but there are a few standouts. Julie Winch examines perhaps the most obscure figure in this collection, a free black woman and slave-owner named Ann Elizabeth Fortune. Through careful detective work Winch illuminates an individual who left us far less evidence than her better known neighbors, but whose life helps us understand both the Quaker influence on non-Quakers and the difficulties free African Americans faced in negotiating a precarious freedom. Geoffrey Plank's chapter considers Sarah Woolman, and in doing so helps us to see the importance of family in Quaker abolition, in particular its role in the abolitionist vision of her husband, John. Maurice Jackson looks at the work of Anthony Benezet and its influence on free African Americans. Jackson sees Benezet's pioneering efforts on behalf of black education as a critical influence on subsequent black life in the United States and beyond. James Gigantino offers perhaps the least biographical selection here, a chapter that shows the efforts of Quakers in West New Jersey to abolish slavery in their state. Unlike many of the other chapters, Gigantino's story is ultimately one of failure, as Quakers in New Jersey were thwarted in many of their efforts by the continuing strength of wealthy slaveholders in other parts of the state.

There is much to be learned here for those interested in Quaker history or in the history of abolition, but the biographical approach of so many of these essays is both a strength and a limitation. In the introduction the editors suggest that in part they are seeking to answer contributor Gary Nash's call to raise the public's consciousness of the contributions of Quakers to the fight against slavery. This is surely an admirable goal, but at times the collection can get lost in the weeds of biographical detail. Those who are well-versed in the history of Quaker

abolitionism will generally understand the role that these individuals played in the larger story of abolition. The editors and the authors, however, might have done more to make explicit the broader historical context of these contributions and in particular to lay out the historiographic contributions of each chapter. The best of these essays reach out beyond the specifics of an individual life and allow us to see how these men and women, through their struggles and their activism, can help illuminate not just Quaker history, but the larger story of slavery and abolition.

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